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ANTITHETICAL COMMENTARIES ON X, Y AND THE
DISRUPTION OF BEING

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University

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Master of Fine Arts, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2016

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I would like to thank,

Gregory Volk for constant and crucial presence and for never trying to change my language. Thank you Lisa Freiman and Semi Ryu for academic and emotional support; Pamela and Bill Royall [for support and friendship]; Pamela Turner [for welcoming me into the program]; Tom Papa [for warehouse 14]; Thank you Spencer Turner [for partnership and for reaching out to me when I fall in the corners of my self].

I dedicate this thesis in memoriam to Dr. Christina Turner, my undergrad advisor, whose spirit I still feel guiding me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Sections

	Abstract.....	1
1	Introduction / Not the Feather, but the Bird.....	2
2	Developmental Overview / A Transgressive Process.....	9
3	Thesis Exhibition / Tag	27
	A. Object /28	
	B. Projection /32	
	C. Grid: Towards a Transgressive Humanism /46	
	Notes.....	58
	Bibliography.....	62

Figures

1. Death Mask.....	9
2. Trigger::Oven.....	11
3. Double Self.....	14
4. Sin and the Original Bird.....	17
5. Triptych.....	19
6. I Am Not in the Business; I am the Business.....	22
7. Object Orientalis.....	24
8. Ode to the Object.....	26
9. Tag- installation view from the door.....	27
10. Object-concrete.....	28
11. Tag//Brace.....	30
12. Tag, Stills from projection.....	32:57

Abstract

Through discursive essays and poetic narrative, *Antithetical Commentaries on X, Y and the Disruption of Being* explores the tenuous relationship between modes of measurement and the struggle for human relevance in the post-contemporary digital age. In the introductory essay, “Not the Feather, but the Bird”, I give an overview of the inherent problems of object-oriented ontology, and how it relates to aesthetics and social issues of our times. In the Developmental Overview, I detail how I developed my installation approach and techniques, particularly with regard to the three-way dynamic of the artist:work:viewer relationship and how it can encourage a ‘transgression’ that leads to the possibility of a transformative awareness of being. Subsequently, I present a series of ‘antithetical’ commentaries that neither explain nor expand the installation, rather, they create a non-binary duality that, through an entirely non-linear anti-narrative, work to erode the overlay of personal, civic and collective grids present in the memory space/time referenced in the video, TAG. Finally, in “Grid: Towards a Transgressive Humanism.” I propose a path by which installation art might serve to create *transgressive* opportunities for viewers, rather than the *transcendence* sought through religious rituals, which often reinforce stigmas, fears and authoritarian social dynamics, or worse, the *reductive loop*, of many contemporary approaches to art which proclaim their detachment in wordy displays, essentially leading to a form of aesthetic nihilism. This *Transgressive Humanism* is not presented as a dogma, but rather a revitalization of the work as a vessel of possibilities, an agent of creative growth for the artist and the viewer.

I. Introduction

Not the Feather, but the Bird

We are at the door of a new millennium, and in a new epoch carved by human hands. We are now our own predators. Is the human to fade during the Anthropocene¹? As the time of the machine advances and our resources get scarce we witness, as scientists, through available data, the time of a landless exodus. There is a process of dehumanization taking place in our time. This dehumanization is establishing itself in many contemporary aspects: in media and the ways we are becoming data; in our spiritual loss; in our distance from death; and in our collective fight to see ourselves not as objects but as subjects. If we are to live and, perhaps, thrive in this new landless frontier, we need to cultivate the proper perspective, the right view, and this is the role of Art — an Art that takes seriously the implications of our relationship to the world of objects in which we construct our lives, our futures, an Art that considers the materiality of human experience and molds it in ways that considers the essential role of the viewer and the artist in this process of re-humanization.

Italo Calvino's book, Sei Proposte per il Proximo Millennio was translated from Italian to English as, "Six Memos for the New Millennium." The phrase may be alliterative, but it misrepresents Calvino's intent of creating actual aesthetic 'proposals':

ways of 'seeing' through literature and art—the first of which, is 'lightness'. If one is not careful with the philosophical implications of this term, he may understand it as weight and scales of light and color. Nevertheless, the term is more than that, soaked deeply into Greek philosophy and the question of Being. Calvino uses examples of literature that can easily be reformulated to visual arts to expound upon the philosophical aspect of 'lightness'. He writes, "We should remember that the idea of the world as composed of weightless atoms is striking due to the fact that we know the weight of things so well" and we can, deduce, from that, a critique of many contemporary theories in art, that imagine an object that is absolutely disassociated from anything else. In a sense, our exploration of objects in art, is an exploration of our selves, disguised as an empirical study. One cannot have moved in the contemporary art world without having heard the expression, "an object that has its own weight." As such, it suggests an object displayed for sensorial consumption alone and disconnected from any significance. Calvino does not investigate the existentialist connotation of the concept of 'lightness' relative to darkness or object weight, but looks deeply into the vulnerable nature of existence. He mentions Dante's use of visuality to establish the "the weight of things" in which "Paradise" offers some great metaphorical examples, *Come per aqua cupa cosa grave* - "Like some heavy thing in deep water" - Dante's *Paradiso* III. Calvino's appraisal of light is based on the fact that, for the author, "We would be unable to appreciate the 'lightness' of language if we could not appreciate language that has some weight to it". If we apply that proposal to the language of art, we would not be able to appreciate 'lightness' in art if we could not appreciate art that has some weight to it:

“...The lightness of the bird not the lightness of the feather,” proposed Paul Valery²

What will the art of this millennium be and how would one apply Calvino's proposal to that art? From the very first expressions of art to the abstractions of the end of the last millennium, artists searched for perfect forms, meanings, materials, ways to contain the message of a form with maximum and minimum effort. If art was about perfection, no one would have dared create art after Michelangelo, for instance. But the art of the last century was about much more than that — it was about unique expressions; it was about commenting on the world, it was about concept. Through concept, an artist explored ways to abstract significance. Abstract Art, for instance, as the name itself points out, searched to abstract colors, shapes, objects etc to see how much something can signify after everything is stripped from an image or an object. Surrealists have pleasure playing with that language of form abstracted from its perceived possibilities. And of course there was Duchamp who made a bold move by showing us how to see re-contextualized 'found objects' abstracted from their original form or purpose; as an object that would have a new potential significance depending on how it is experienced by the viewer. It is about the conceptual relationship between humans and objects. But that abstracted object has become such a revered point of reference for contemporary art that it has led some to praise it in pseudo-religious tones, “The hero is dead – Long live the thing”³ All of this object obsession has perpetuated the Confucius paradigm of finger and moon: “The finger is used to point to the moon, the wise look at the moon, the unwise looks at the finger.” Duchamp's object

was referring back to the human; to man-made; to cultural significance. Of course, yes there is a purpose to artists gazing at the object, abstracted from its cultural function as an artifact, an expression of pure form, conceptually removed from its present context or even from any notion of space/time. Its a valuable imaginative experience. But it is a product of the human imagination, “ ...time temporizes itself only as long as there are human beings” says Heidegger, philosopher who has sparked a great chapter in art history but also, one more time, lost in the analyses of the finger (the object) and not the moon (its reviewing of human experience).⁴ Heidegger’s dissertation on Van Gogh’s painting of a peasant’s shoes is referred to as a mark of the birth of the theory of the object but, it is mostly overlooked that Heidegger was, in fact, pointing to the relationship between the object and the search for the essence of being: “In the artwork, the truth of beings has set itself to work. Art is truth setting itself to work” he writes.⁵ As Heidegger demonstrates, making art is about revealing human states of mind not accessing some other dimension. Its about truth and truth is a human concept. The feather is the bird! To use Calvino’s counterweight, there is a core of transcendent ‘lightness’ in art that points Confucius - like to its ‘weight’ and, as such, explores both desirable or undesirable elements of human experience and that — in spite of momentary trends — has a deep connection with our own space and temporality.

Is there such a thing as “object-oriented art?”⁶ Perhaps that should be rephrased as, is there such a thing as non-object-oriented art? Can we imagine art without an object? No, its very difficult. Even new web-based art is created with ‘object-oriented’ programs which work with digital objects. Art has always been a creation and re-creation of objects. There are possibilities of an object with ‘its own materiality/

dimensionality/temporality', but you won't find this 'object' through the making or viewing of art. Which leads to the next question, "Can we imagine art without a viewer? The answer, again, is 'No'. Any object produced by a human for consumption by another human, is, by nature, a product of humanity and belongs to all the conceptual realities that go along with that. One can engage in philosophical speculations about that, but truthfully there is no such 'object' that is not a representation of man and time - even to evoke the name of an object - rock, dirt, feather - is to conjure, through language, the relationship between the subject and object, not the object itself. There are no galleries in nature. Once man intervenes in creating an object - lets say a flower - and places this object in the context of four walls, this object no longer "has its own dimensionality" rather, it is now imbued with the 'dimensionality' imposed upon it by the mind of the artist. An object of art is a representation even if it is referring to nihilism, chaos or the concept of the devaluing of the human. Once form is made, all its abstracted elements are again composed and signifying something. And yes, in spite of many who think that an object can be apolitical, we must recognize that art is inherently a form of messaging and messages are inherently political. "Even breathing is a political act"⁷. Once an object is created and placed in a new environment to be contemplated and evaluated it has become a political statement. Moreover, as it argues for its worth — its economic value — it becomes a commodity and so it is "human, all to human" as Nietzsche might say.⁸ We can imagine that an object signifies something else in the same ways that humans can be conceived of as objects, but both of them are misconceptions and come with potential adverse ramifications. If object-oriented art *promotes* an objectified view of things, it certainly must include the human being. In the equations of this philosophy

we must recognize the equality of our relationship to the object: we are objects too. As such, when we start to see ourselves as objects we begin the process of devaluing ourselves. The ramifications of seeing humans as mere objects can be seen in the growing trade in human beings. Everything in a capitalist society is a commodity — an object that can be priced and sold. We are selling ourselves to that materialistic value. Inversely, as we devalue the human, we overly value the object. This leads to the question, 'If a museum caught on fire, would you save the Mona Lisa or the night guard?' In order to move forward into a new millennium, we have to ask ourselves again what truth we are seeking through art. Or better what truths are available through art, as a way of knowing.

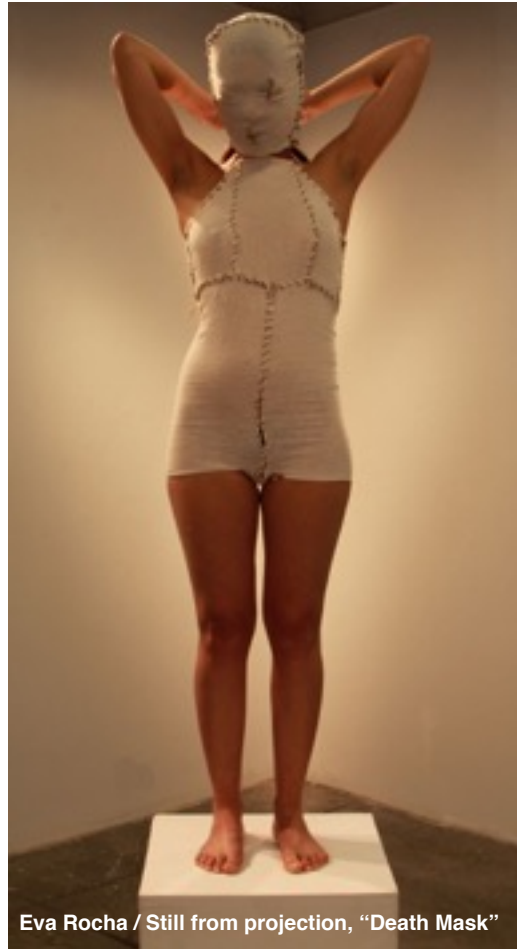
In any case, if we are to look at the materiality of things lets not forget that a feather is a reference to the bird. And before we lose ourselves in the inscrutable nature of objects, as we advance in this millennium in which human kind is being shaped by objects like smart phones that have been slowly transcending and replacing our capabilities (memory may be the first one to go) lets remember, while we can, this proposal for our millennium: Not the feather, but the bird; Not the object but the entire significance of being. How can we stay lost in abstraction, or investigating an objects as autonomous or imagining objects decontextualized from anything when we may be facing the possible collapse of our species? Now in this very time, this Anthropocenic time, we have to be conscious of the human more than ever. Not like times before, idealizing man as the center of the universe, or man in the image of God, but man as a species that can endanger the habitation of his species and of all other species, and bring it all to annihilation. Before we even review our art history books, lets review our

entire history — and for once our history may be necessarily linear: with a beginning and an end. Our objects are no longer examples of the layers of our history but a strip of it; no longer vessels to carry a message, as the message is being sublimated. We are no longer packing vessels of meaning or object-archives of our kind.

We are packing away the human, but the human is still turning its face to us. In the post-contemporary history that image will no longer be of an abstracted angel⁹ but of a concrete human. If we cannot see the human in anyway in our art, we have lost our humanity. We are lost as a species.

PART II

Developmental Overview / *A Transgressive Process*



Death Mask

Departing from my past work as a performer and actress in Brazil, I was interested in working on a way to continue that exploration and bring another element which was my previous use of textile, and in a performatic way, combine them, applying

to sculptures and video. I created a stitched body suit to refer in aesthetic to the garments and death masks used in many cultures for mummification. Ever since I lived in the Andes of Peru, I have been interested in the process through which mummification was used in rituals to convey messages for posterity and eternity. Cloth masks were used to wrap mummies, many were of young women that had being given in sacrifice. These textiles suggest for me the aspect of beauty underlying the rituals of death and the fact that the first manifestations of art in most cultures were concerned with death and the carrying of messages to the after world where a double self would live.

I used stills of about eighty photos that were done in a trigger timer and animated them in different movies. I intended for them to reference contemporary avatars that are made to represent an individual in a hyperreal context - a virtual reality. One cannot escape the correlation between a real human caught in time creating an avatar which could live eternally in a digital context. Perhaps this process of creating avatars in contemporary society can be seen as a type of “digital mummification.” I had been affected by some of the images living on line. One of it was of a man in the Abu Ghraib Prison —which caused me a trigger.

I wanted to suggest the possibility of the social context of the individual as an object in its own right — as the medium and the message. This dual, almost unsustainable sacrificial role, is both an opportunity for illumination and a threat to the sanity and wholeness of the artist, who, of course, is giving herself up as a metaphor for humanity — it is the act of sharing her own self — the artist’s vulnerability — as a primary material of art.



Trigger::Oven

The process of making art is inherently personal. The product is a different thing. It belongs to the world at large. When I began my studio work I was interested in exploring the emotional states associated with trauma. I had been researching traumatic memory and triggers and the concept seemed particularly relevant to video art. Sounds, visual information, lights etc trigger memories — painful time, frozen in static like a distorted still from an unedited film. I have my own triggers that bring me back to those day, three days, two nights that come flooding into one instant. I wanted to create a representation of a triggered memory that was not exactly mine and yet almost mine and also Sylvia Plath's. Her death has been immortalized like a collective traumatic memory — a reference for so many of us carrying around these flashes of lost purity. I

wanted to reenact¹ her death by filming myself entering my stove and play this on a loop. The stove, being the size it was, became that schizophrenic quadrant of the grid, the loop was the closed parameters and my body, exposed, vulnerable, was forced into it by the binary command of the digital information that insisted to return again and again and again and again to the same space and the same time. I thought a lot about Sylvia Plath - the control that her tight, clenched lines implied, the control that she played out over and over again against the close parameters imposed upon her by her femininity: she played the part of the mother, the wife, the lover, the poet, the visionary and the mad woman running feverishly between the two poles of her mental illness.² How has that changed? How has our progress improved that reality? Many told me that the theme of a woman in her kitchen was passé, or recalled the theme of “domesticity” from the films of the 1960s — and that aspect of feminist art was a product of another time.³ This comment amazed me, that it was just the fact of the artist being a woman that provoked that thought. Would Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* be seen differently had he been a woman? Would they refer to his brutal and existential narration of him becoming an insect as “domesticity” in the negative sense. And what if it is “domesticity”? Isn’t domesticity a deep, existential aspect of life?

Ultimately, I was interested in how these moments, these universal moments, of humans interacting or engaging — essentially communicating — through objects were intersections that might themselves be the visual grains of memories. I imagined that these memories might have their own topography so I explored different splintered grids in my composition. The sound of the gas and the electrical charge of the starter suggested the potential for explosion — the tension that the traumatized woman lived

with almost daily, The image was filmed with a hard central light to create the sense that the video was a fragment of a memory, a shard of a memory, an instant neither soft enough to fade nor strong enough to come into full relief. My only concern with the piece was that while it was universally suggestive, it was still, at least in how I was showing it, flat in relation to the viewer. It did encourage a dramatic possibility as it forced the role of witness on the viewer but the obscured face, the willful nature of the subject entering and leaving the stove, was not sufficiently challenging for the viewer. In fact, based on the responses from many who evaluated the work for me, it seemed the domestic nature of the scene allowed them to turn away from the work. I wondered whether it was the vulnerability that frightened or bothered them rather than the subject matter. Perhaps their discomfort was more related to their perception of the woman as a deserving victim and one who merited no engagements.

In any case, although I categorically disagreed with the assessment by some that a woman doing self-recording video with no clothes was somehow not permissible, I felt that the subject matter of the piece was in fact the discomfort of the viewer rather than the art or even the artist, and I wanted to film more videos of myself in these sorts of discomfiting domestic scenarios but with less reference to traditional female environments.



Eva Rocha / Still from projection, "Double Self"

Double Self

A cup is half full/half empty. We are half full/half empty. We are mind and no mind. We are form and no form. We are fullness and void— "void is not different than form; form is no different than void: form is void, void is form."¹

There is mind and no mind; mind is a construct. Our reality is a construct. A star is already dead by the time its light gets to us. We review its light after. We are here and not here. When we look ourselves in our childhood, that is us and not us. When we project ourselves into the future, that is us and not us. When we look ourselves in a mirror, that is us and not us. When we see ourselves in a dream, that is us and not us. We are and are not. If there is no linearity in time, our self is an illusion. From the

attachment to the non-real self comes all other illusions because that self, the one we think we are right now intends to control reality to its own self.

As I developed what would become several works of self-recorded performance exploring the naked emotional state of being alone and submerged in water in the bath, I was deeply concerned with the multiplicity of selves. I have always had a spiritual relationship to bathing. It seemed that it is my own purification process and given intensity of emotion this is necessary daily. Its said that children, because they do not truly understand the physical nature of the body in full, can develop a fear of being pulled down the drain with the water. There must be something in that, from my thinking, that connects with the fear a fetus has when the embryonic sac ruptures and they feel the womb working hard to expel them. I know I always take my complex emotions with me when I bathe. The strange embryonic state of suspension seemed so transitory and yet I was fascinated with the possibility of using a loop to maintain it. When I showed this video to different people there were mixed responses. Some found it captivating, and others seemed bothered and sought to dismiss it as feminist video art - as if that were a negative. But, in fact, I really wasn't thinking of this piece as primarily feminine. It seemed somehow universal. At the moment of exhaustion, when the theater of living has dropped its curtain, the exhausted actor removes the costume and retreats beyond the body into the universal surface of skin. The place where the skin touches the water is the place of the mind. And it seems formless, really. One of the many selves — the core self — is the volume. The other immaterial selves are unimagined for a brief moment.

In the highlands of Peru, where I studied painting in a school so little and poor, and learned from some gentile, old masters who had lived in relative poverty while teaching painting skills to mostly poor students from around the area, I came to love the natural dyes that were present in the soil. There were patina-colored stones in the bases of small waterfalls that would crumble into pigments in the small of your hand. I learned from the old professors of the Andes about perspective and I learned to create my own paint with egg and pigment. I used the dyes to color textiles and I brought some dyes back with me, as I feared I might not find them again. Many don't know that Paul Gauguin actually spent his childhood and adolescence there. He painted his famous "Contes Barbares; Two Young Women and a Fairytale-Devil"² with the same deep blues and vivid greens of those mountains. Like Gauguin, I felt that desire could be serene and maddening. The women sit like Buddhas with fixed eyes while he looks on hungrily restraining his desire for them to maintain their purity. That tension is one of the great moments of art.

In "Double-Self" I lay in two tubs of water - one red, one yellow — as they drain and fill, seeming to supply each other. The fluid is water but the primary colors of the dyes suggest a duality of urine/blood; sickness/vitality; cold/warm and whatever other associations available to a given viewer. When one viewer saw the work projected large he immediately was concerned with my art-body. There are those who imagined it was a woman who had experienced violence or had suicidal thoughts. Although I had not intentionally meant to reference such extreme mental states as suicide, I had hoped to render a visual sketch of the philosophical aspect of beauty as it relates to eroticism and death.



Eva Rocha / Still from projection, "Sin and the Original Bird"

Sin and the Original Bird

One can never underestimate the power of art to objectify woman. There are great personifications of Beauty and Truth, Liberty and Justice, great ideas, great civilizations, all personified by women's bodies. Saints and spiritual images, would little by little give way to other forms of objectification. It seems like women's bodies are the perfect vessels for all concepts, for all ideological inclinations, for all political ideologies and all sensorial views. I suppose a woman should be content to be the ultimate muse; to represent the highest ideals of men. I suppose women should be content to personify the mother of the God and be depicted carrying the Son, feeding the Son with her

breast exposed; spewing her milk over the souls in hell. As vessels for consumption, a woman should be content to be displayed as the ultimate object in 'its own materiality'.

The gaze of the "muse" is an easy catch, but what if the artist herself takes the place of the muse in relation to the gaze? The novel "A Portrait of the artist as a Young Man" by James Joyce has one of the most notorious and poetic scenes of objectification. Joyce, through his stream of consciousness leads the reader, the viewer, on a cerebral and sensorial trip near the waters where the character has an epiphany that leads him to an erotic convulsion, to become an artist: he feels an "outburst of profane joy" that opened "before him in an ecstasy the gated of all ways of error and glory."

Oh that view of the exotic bird:

"She was alone and still, gazing out to sea; and when she felt his presence and worship of his eyes her eyes turned to him in quiet sufferance or his gaze, without shame or wantonness. Long, long she suffered his gaze and then quietly withdrew her eyes from his and bent them towards the stream, gently moving the water with her foot hither and thither. The first faint noise of gently moving water broke the silence, low and faint and whispering, faint as the bells of sleep; hither and thither, hither and thither; and a faint flame trembled on her cheek."

If her gaze turned him into an artist; his gaze turned her into an objectified bird. Oh, to be the muse!! What an eternal role was given to women: "Long, long she suffered his gaze..."¹



Triptych

“Come per aqua cupa cosa grave” - Dante’s Paradiso III¹

Sacred art has always fascinated me. When I was a little girl I helped in the preparation of the mass. The saints, dressed in their holy clothes, seemed so close to real. Once, while waiting to go to the front of the cathedral, I became obsessed with the idea that they might be anatomically correct and my imagination couldn't let it go. I turned my head and twisted my neck to try to get a view of what was beneath the dresses. I held up the line and was scolded by the nun who worked with us. But her scolding wasn't enough to stop me from continuing to look for the sacred in the erotic and the erotic in the sacred. I had internalized the sacred art of the church long before I

knew what Art was. It was a type of messaging and it quickly became one with my desire such that I have trouble separating the two of them. After Double-Self I wanted to keep developing compositions that would change the visual syntax of the work, which, of course, changes what the *art-body* in the bathtub signifies. Adding an additional tub with a deep primary blue brought a stained glass quality to the piece and removed the dualistic nature. Three is a universally understood spiritual number, significant in the imagery of the sacred throughout the Christian world particularly.² I wondered if I could create a spiritual piece that had no obvious religious imagery but which signaled the transitional states encouraged in Byzantine Art³. The flatness of the piece and the vertical configuration which, when projected onto a 12' by 16' screen, created an impossibility which I hoped would inspire a suspension of disbelief in the viewer. Unlike the previous piece, the art-body is staring directly, and constant, at the viewer throughout the loop. I tried several iterations, but in this one the two women on either side seem to be directed at the central figure in a posture of reverence. In one iteration, installed at the Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art, I projected the video into an altar piece made from OSB particle board on a museum stand. I wanted the viewer to react to that composition of the artist above the viewer, the sacred displayed for consumption in a gallery, and especially of a nude woman in a religious composition of triangulation. Women were denied access to the Holy Trinity.

“For the Universe has three children, born at one time, which reappear, under different names, in every system of thought, whether they be called cause, operation, and effect; or, more poetically, Jove, Pluto, Neptune; or, theologically, the Father, the Spirit, and the Son; but which we will call here, the Knower, the Doer, and the Sayer. These stand respectively for the love of truth, for the love of good, and for the love of beauty. These three are equal. Each is that which he is essentially, so

that he cannot be surmounted or analyzed, and each of these three has the power of the others latent in him, and his own patent.”⁴

During the developmental stages of this work, while looking for a way to form an object on which to project the work, I visited the Chrysler Museum and spent time with the Greek and Russian Icons they had on display. I was amazed at the technical efficiency with which they created highly stylized techniques that posited the idea of the divine. I had before been in a lecture about Byzantine Art at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts and was fascinated by the techniques of that art in depicting the spiritual through imagery, through composition.

The composition I seek suggested that, because these works are being seen in a two dimensional plane, and are suspended in an ether, they are existing outside of time and space. These sorts of ideas are ridiculed today by a primarily atheist academia — especially in the Arts — but reality is actually in a transitional flux constantly. Perhaps the projections exist in a three dimensional plane somewhere else. I have always been fascinated by triangulations and “divine proportions” and the “Greek Divine Model”⁵. The Byzantine Icons were painted without perspective which created a sense of divinity:

The Self has no shadow!



I Am Not in the Business; I am the Business

[I am not here to entertain you. I am here to expose a human being, that happens to be me, as an object]

In the process of exploring different containers and while using a trunk for my performance, which I really refer to as a non-performance, I was intrigued by the fact that this container, the trunk, with its texture and warm colors had created a pleasurable aesthetic experience, much different, somehow, from what I was attempting to convey. I multiplied the video and mapped it onto four crates to as if referring to many women in containers, as I wish to refer to the objectification of women, intending to create a purely experience. I ended up diverge from this experiment in two different ways. On one hand, there was the social aspect of theme, related to the viewing of women as object and the social problem of women trafficking. On the other hand, this anti-performance¹ had created a pleasurable aesthetic experience that could be perceived by itself. This

caused me to consider the potential neutrality of an object and the way men allow themselves to experience women in situations of trafficking as if they were rarified objects, even though they must be aware of the inherent 'ugliness' of sexual slavery. There is something dangerous and demoralizing in viewing anything — even an object of art — in a purely abstract sense.

Something typically neuter, inexorably neuter,
stands between the thief and his victim.
This, likewise, can be noticed in the relation between
a surgeon and his patient.
A horrible half-moon, convex and solar, covers them all.
For the stolen object has also its indifferent weight,
and the operated on organ, also its sad fat.
— Cesar Vallejo²

If I am the object, you are the subject.
If I am the subject, are you the object?
No. I allow you to be the subject as well.



Object-Orientalis

In *Object-Orientalis*, I filmed fifteen women, plus me. [15 plus one is 16]¹. The number sixteen is very important to me. It relates to a personal experience that took place when I was sixteen, and when, had I not escaped, I would have been sold to the trafficking of women. I used that as a grid that would both invite and bother the viewer. The women were filmed in positions of constriction and were projected back into crates full of packing products. The viewer was invited to touch the work. To “appraise” the women that were displayed in a vulnerable way. The viewer was invited to objectify them by comparing them and deciding on which one they would buy; or tested by challenging them to touch the women, which some did in tender, caring ways while others chose aggressive or violent means. I, on purpose, searched for women that represent different body types, races, ages, etc that are used to objectify women. I also had this question: in what other times have we seen the human as objects in a very clear way? Among the possibilities I thought about the Nazi persecution and the slavery of Africans. I then chose women that could reference that imagery.

I wanted to challenge the viewers deeply in their unconscious mind.

That project was extremely gratifying for me. As I used my background in anthropology to analyze the way the viewer was processing their relationship to the women. I was amazed that they could feel and 'enjoy' the work for its aesthetics as well. The work was displayed on the grounds of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts during the 2016 Inlight Festival. The event was attended by eleven thousand people. I got the People's Choice Award. That was all I needed to strengthen my resolve to develop an approach to installation that encouraged the viewer to transgress contemporary expectations and reengage the human through the experience of art.

In what way does the art of our time relate to how we view the human? How does a work of art displayed as a pure object independent of its relation to humans inform how we can observe a human being in a detached way? How does the value of an object compare to the value of a human or human experience and what are the implications of this relationship? How do contemporary art trends relate to the dehumanization of the artist and consequently the viewer?

I believe that the initial fascination associated with an object collected and archived, and therefore decontextualized from its culture becoming, in this way merely an object for display or study display, is equivalent to the process in which a human being is seen in terms of her exoticness and/or utility — stripped of his emotional content and therefore just an object of consumption. In this vein, the dehumanization of the object in contemporary art which has been stripped of any meaning, evaluated purely in terms of its materiality, has created an art where any human element, therefore the human being itself, is devalorized.



Eva Rocha / multimedia installation: "Ode to the Object"

Ode to the Object

For instance, this situation: there are many people in an auditorium. They all have their attention directed towards a speaker. The speaker is suddenly told that there is a fire in the building. He is supposed to tell the audience. He starts: "..... There is a materiality to fire. It has a dimensionality in its color; ...one can perceive it in a unique way; ...it has an object-quality... ; it has its own atemporality... ;it deeply connects with the expression of the contemporary world because it is clean and elemental and yet it has its own superficiality and it is very tangible and has a disturbing quality - its own quality - with evokes a substantial presence..." By now the audience starts to smell some smoke and some of them are suffocating but not sure why and don't stand up and leave due to politeness or for fear that that it would imply that they were not intellectual enough to understand what the message was. They stay sitting still in spite of the smoke invading the building. Finally someone, God knows whom, the building's janitor or something, runs to the stage and, without a microphone, cries: "FIRE!!!" The audience gets a bit disturbed by that abrupt interruption but is ok with the lack of formality or politeness in the delivery of the message. After all, it doesn't matter who says it or how elaborate one can say it; what matters is what is actually being said!

**PART III.
THESIS
EXHIBITION//
TAG**



Eva Rocha / Multimedia Installation "Tag" - view from the entry



Object-Concrete

“No thing is where the word breaks off” - Stefan George
[in Heidegger’s On The Way to Language] ¹

We can reduce a narrative to a sentence, a sentence to a word a word to a letter and a letter to a sound but we cannot reduce sound to anything other than muteness. Silence is still a statement. But the refusal or incapacity to speak is muteness. We can reduce an image to color, or light; we can investigate its purity but from minimal color and images there is nothing else to which it can be reduced but darkness. Even black signifies; but darkness is just the impossibility of seeing. We can reduce figures to lines, and lines to a dot but after the dot there is only abstraction and the created abstraction is still a form. Even abstraction can signify. Abstraction is the opposite of concrete. We can reduce forms to materials, and even materials to matter but even matter signifies, after which it is only nothingness. A dot on a page is not a

discourse, a narrative or a dialogue. It is a final statement of non-significance: non-signifying. After that, only muteness.

We can philosophize about the nature of objects. We can explore that 'language'; we can abstract that language, but eventually, that becomes no longer a language of an object, but muteness. Objects are never abstractions. They are things in themselves and, yet, have the potential to signify. In fact, they inherently signify. Nothing is an abstraction since an abstraction is an idea — a mental object. Iron, concrete, its component parts, its rocks, the space it erases, the space we erase, and the space to which we return and the spaces we leave behind are not the quadrants of any grid. The quadrants of any grid are constructed mental objects — projections on the walls of pre-historic galleries. They are representations of memory and time.

The object is the human perspective. Its no other. A concrete block is absence. It is concrete-absence. The absence that is so palpable it takes up space, has hardness, has surface qualities, has emotive residues. All true viewers come to the space of an installation with this absence, this openness — that is, if they accept the role of the viewer. These are the viewers with which I wish to engage, share communion, break bread, spill wine and transgress. These are the viewers I value for they give my work its shape. When an artist works with chimeras like video and projections, they rely on the concrete presence of the engaged viewer.



CONCEPT

I can only comment on the world through my self, as I am all human-kind.

“I am nothing. I'll never be anything. I couldn't want to be something. Apart from that,
I have in me all the dreams in the world.”

Fernando Pessoa

A few years ago I was posting a photo of myself holding a photo of my parents on their wedding day, when a grid appeared over our faces. Underneath each one of us, of our squares, an empty field asked in mechanical letters: “Who is this?” I kept looking at that blank space asking over my face: “Who is this?” and “Tag any name.”

That fraction of time took a certain eternity as so many images of me flashed at once. That phrase echoed in my head. Who am I? ... Any name. That self in the picture was me, and yet not me. "Type any name"

It occurred to me, while looking at my parents faces framed with a square, where underneath I read, "Who is this?" that I was not sure who those individuals were, really. I kept looking at their photos on their wedding day, before I was conceived, when they were still individuals and not yet my parents. I reflected on the fact that, since they were separated, since their union did not succeed, they were, at all levels, incompatible. And if they were incompatible, the chemistry that created me is incompatible. I am formed of incompatible elements. Somehow, my self was, from the beginning, impossible.

In that photo I was using a neck brace I had used when I was 16. That was an object. That was an object I should not ever want to look at again, but I was not able to get rid of it, as that object contained memory. My memory! A memory-formation-object of what I am, not who I am.

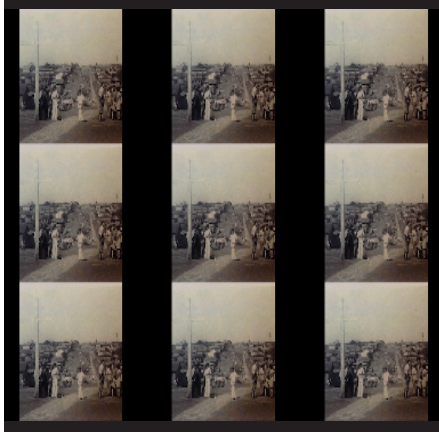
I thought, the only way I can tell that that self was me was through my memory.

And I then asked myself: Are we our memories? I have asked myself that many times. If we could extract some of our memories — any memory — would we still be us? If we have access to somebody else's memory, would we share their selves, even if for a fraction of time? Would we dissolve from our individuality to a universal self?

"As the end approaches there are non longer any images from memory — there are only words. Words, words, words taken out of place and mutilated"
The Immortal - Jorge Luis Borges

TAG//PROJECTION

“Photography is a kind of primitive theater, a kind of Tableau Vivant, a figuration of the motionless and made up faces, beneath which we see the dead.” Roland Barthes



<00:00> Opens with grid, black and white photo with coloration suggesting a tintype. The coloring suggests an age for the photos that is much older than they actually are which dates to the 1970s. One might say that the black and white photography itself is a form of grid in that it reduces visual information into dichotomies of light and dark. A large cross in the foreground stands as a monument.

If Leon Baptist Alberti could see what I was seeing, he would make a drawing with one point perspective, through a veil, from real to symbol to imagined. But I see my memory from two point perspective. Alone I see the intersecting streets and uneven blocks, all references of different forms and meanings and grids. I archived the people, their addresses, the shape of their yards, how they came from work in the farms and passed by my grandmother's house to tell the news. There was no newspaper in Itacolomy. There were many Itacolomies throughout Brazil but there was only one Itacolomy in my memory. The color of the sky, the silly rolling hills with green skin and orange scars. In black and white it has none of the blood or the barking of dogs or the laughter from the bar. In black and white its just some disembodied memory. Itacolomy

doesn't exist now. Novo Itacolomy grew from the bright green hills and spread its grid :in full color.



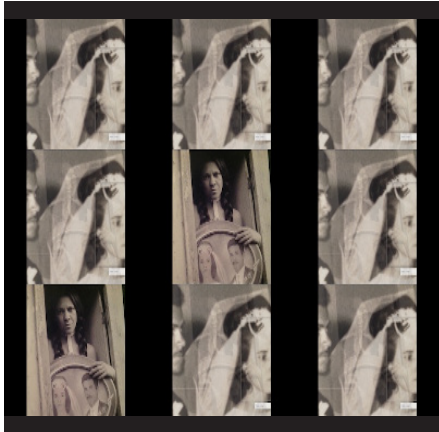
<01:08> “Frontier home” was no daguerreotype. In the bottom left corner a snapshot in front of my grandmother’s house showing me smiling at a very young age creates a connection between an external collective memory and an internal personal memory. As such, the photographer has captured the memory and the conflict between a memory produced by an

“other” and the content of the narrative which suggests a Lacanian alienation¹.



<01:48> At this moment the personal or internal image (mirror) of Lacan suggests a strengthening of the self in the frame of the mirror however, it is interrupted by the grid which draws my attention to the “Other” of my parents who are incompletely framed in the bottom right and looking away from me, which suggests a Lacanian alienation. They, like the photos, present the

viewer with a potential binary of “black and white” though in my country this “binary” would be perceived differently. I dont know how they experienced race exactly.



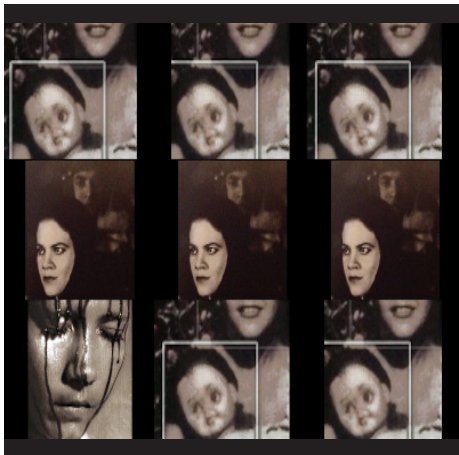
<02:10> While my obsession with my “Other” attempts to fill the grid one of my personal traumas is triggered - my scoliosis took me from my body axis. I never wanted to picture myself in that brace I wore with shame, and which shattered my “mirror image” while an adolescent. But I hold to that object. That is one of my object-identities. Binary of “black and white” That imposed constriction comforted me many times. I liked to be ‘held’ by that object, as I wish to be held by my absent father; or my mother; or a lover. I wish he, or them, or it embrace me very tight. I still identify myself with that object, or feel it as one feels a member of the body that was cut off. I can still feel that cold metal and its perfect Y axis from my chin to the edge of my pubic hair.

That photo where I see the gender binaries that created me, served as a cultural technique² for me as I developed my identity. The frame of the window of my house, then and now in a state of dilapidation, an allegory for the struggle of maintaining self or ego in a consistent affirmative state given the instability and fluidity of nature, of the tides of becoming and unbecoming. The grids themselves are human attempts to hold immaterial realities in place. And they leak.



<2:24> Facebook and facial recognition software is a highly specialized cultural technique which immediately requests the viewer to “tag” the faces with name identifications. As such it becomes a way of removing the complete autonomy of the individual over his or her identity. I was shocked the first time I was asked by a computer, “Who is this” over my own face,

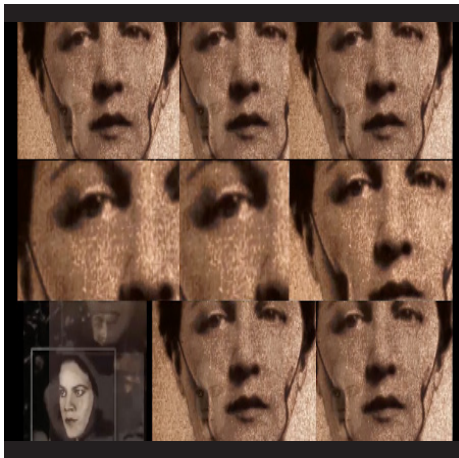
and felt almost as if, for an instant, I was put in the place of the “Other” or even had become the “mirror image” and was looking back at myself. This image is interrupted by found footage of a female face dripping with blood in a ritual of Candomblé², a religion from my country, where a hole is made in the top of the head to allow that body to serve as a vessel for the entity.



<2:33> A photo of part of my face and me holding a doll, which Facebook recognizes as a face; a photo of me in theater in a classical Greek play in which I was the Corypheus; and also the face of the “daughter-of-the-saint” covered in blood - all different externalizations, expansions or repressions of the self being constructed. A Corypheus is the voice of

the chorus of women. But how can that voice be externalized collectively if civic society⁴ imposes over women a grid that is a violent castration of identity? In the chorus, a

woman has a collective voice that moves in and out of the collective voice to comment on her personal tragedy, which relates to all the characters' tragedies. Greek theater was a sophisticated cultural technique generating the individual / civic binary distinction; the doll and/or doll play as a cultural technique encouraging the binary roles of men and women; the self sacrifice through the opening of the body to an entity, which is genuine in some religion, was used by others as an ideological technique to weaken collective memory and to impose a civic control.



<2:57> This imposition becomes universalized as an advertisement from an old newspaper populates the grid and demonstrates the beauty/non-beauty binary. In this image we see a nuance of the imposition of ideals of physical but also social traits for women. The dimple machine creates a demarcation that often communicates a person of a likable, unchallenging

personality. The graininess of the image, which increases as the different quadrants zoom in and focus on the eye which is far from “joyful” or “fun” reflects a pointillistic, subjective perspective. Isabelle, that was her name, was using her invention to shape her own face. When I got that clip I stayed looking at her sad eyes and thinking, what would make her to want to create a dimple machine? Women have been subjected to the dictatorship of beauty for so long!



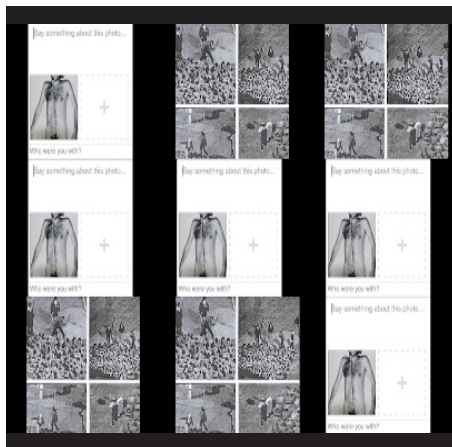
<4:04> Many columns with the faces of the disappeared... They seem to align, almost like DNA, in bands of four. The faces all seem very much alive but the reality is very different. Those individuals, at first, may have occupied a single sheet of paper stapled to a pole, until perhaps the government saw the powerful and perfect civic-technique implicit in

them. The whole campaign of “Los Desaparecidos” in the military regimes of Latin America was perfectly designed to equate leftist ideas with criminality. It was also perfect to promote fear of the government. We all have fears of disappearing. At this moment it is clear that the civic “Other” enters into dissonance with the personal “Other.” Suddenly my id photo which I am asked by the grid window algorithm to identify and “tag” is also part of the column of the disappeared. Am I a disappeared one? How are the two correlated? How are we being interrogated? What have the many government’s fascist techniques of control done to us?



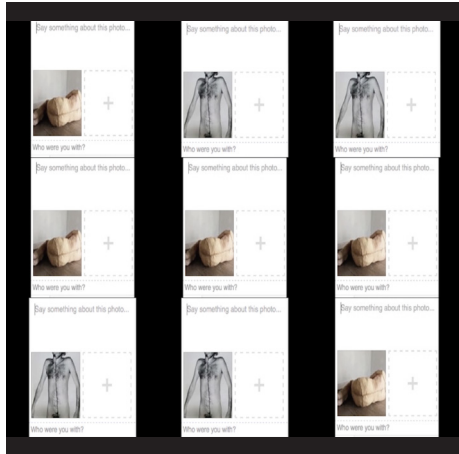
<4:52> Found footage from newspapers that show the brutality and massacre of street children populate the screen. In my early twenties, I experienced the police state of Brazil’s military dictatorship’s⁵ ‘heritage’ as a civic and personal memory - a street boy that came to the government shelter for street kids, where I worked, and that is not the one in the photo I now

borrowed as an outside memory, took me from the grid of age and professional status I was confined by provoking in me love. Civic society⁵ has no interest in love, or sexuality, as it makes it difficult to control an individual that has uncontrollable desires. Desire belongs to our bodies and is by nature subversive. It dissolves the strength of the necessity for consumerism. Desire contains the desire for humanization, and humanization is the grid's nightmare. In my nightmare I saw the bodies laid in rows but none were his. They never were his.



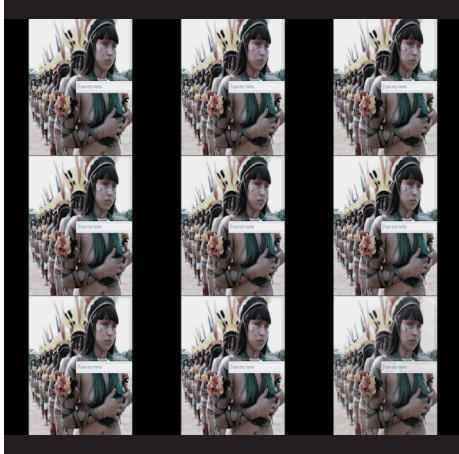
<5:20> Do we suffer from collective amnesia? There is an intersectionality in or bothered memory with an image we were not given. We were told Vladimir Herzog⁶ had committed suicide but when they opened the archives, they showed that he had actually been killed by the dictatorship. "Who were you with?" "What books have you read" "Whats in your mind?" That

same language of dictatorship is now appropriated by social media. We are being mapped. In this section the structure of the grid begins to fall apart. The capacity for the grid to order truth is overwhelmed by the sheer scale of the social forces it attempts to contain. Blood and screams of pain and the darkness of mind that arises from torture cannot be contained in a quadrant or a prison or square of a digital virtuality or even crystallized into concrete. It is just a brick of fascist architecture.



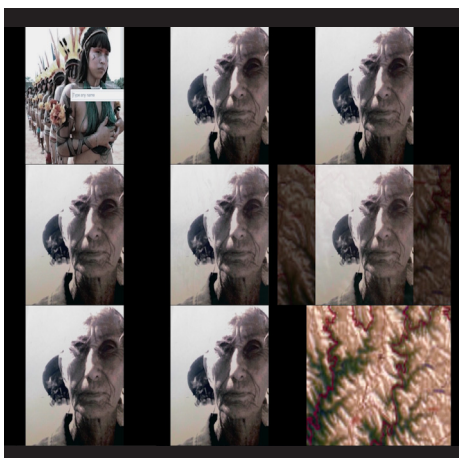
<5:37> How does collective memory coincide with civic memory? I have used nylon legging fabric and stitching as a motif for the skin that contains our tragic body, our memory body, the body we bury. The stitched body [My grandmother told me she had payed and “stitched my body closed” so no evil hands could touch me. They never touch me. But I

carried my grandmother’s prayers over my body - stitched closed until today. Stitched like Herzog’s body] The photos of Vladimir Herzog were released from the archives of the Military Police in Brazil thanks to the Worker’s Party president Lula da Silva. Those in the country who had come to terms with the truth of his death, that it was not a suicide, that he was tortured to death by his own countrymen, were not ready for the images of a tortured body. They may have come to represent our tortured civic memory. “Say something about this photo...” the ellipses a challenge, the stitching like a grapheme, the body like a testament, the square empty box challenging the viewer to add their traumatized memories. “Who were you with?” Because we were all there, we knew and we refused to know, we witnessed in the absence that grew in our cities, on the campus of our universities. Herzog’s body - Herzog’s naked body - Herzog’s truth ended the dictatorship like an antiviral drug that entered our consciousness and invaded the silences that had settled there.



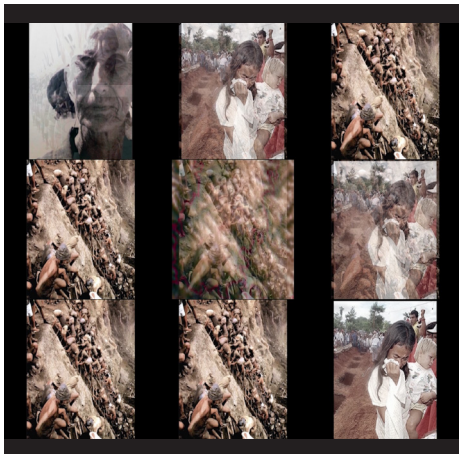
<5:57> Documentary footage is freely available to anyone with an internet connection. A search for Yanomami in Youtube brings up outtakes from classic anthropological footage from documentaries produced since the 1960s. In most videos women are presented entirely out of context dancing and singing nude. In the search of the videos sometimes, in the

still sometimes the women are captured in poses that are very eroticized. Even though the nature of the dance is ritualistic and natural, the camera, and later editing, expose them in perverted ways. Their bodies, objects of consumption, become forms of marketing for advertisers on YouTube. Their art becomes commodity, their unique cultural reality becomes commodity. Their bodies become commodities linking them to pornographic products for sale in the right column of the grid. Indigenous people are easy targets for human trafficking because their bodies are valued like one values stars and distant planets.

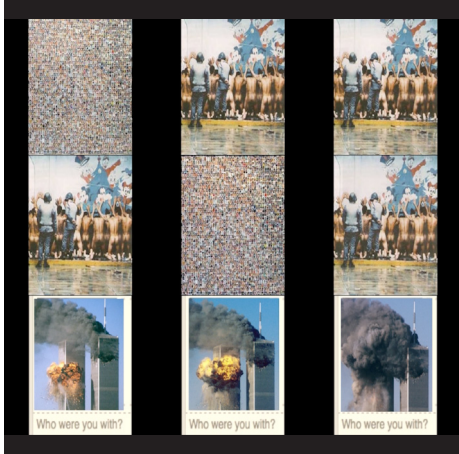


<6:37> Land is our first identity. We are born out of it and only later we learn that it carries a notion of belonging, that it can be owned and that, in fact, it is already owned by the state. We believe we are owners of the land but in truth we are owned by it. It defeats us ultimately and then consumes us. My grandmother had no illusions after a long life

watching the land and the battles between men it created. She was taken from her Yanomami village by my grandfather and became his, became the caretaker of his land, became a subject of Brazil. Her body split and reformed into my father and my aunts and uncles numbering fifteen. Some of them traveled the grid of Brazil and found their own quadrants. That was her sorrow. One of my uncles buried the dead, it was his job, and when death was slow he suffered. There was little for him to do. My grandmother never left but she still smoked her ceramic pipe and bathed nude in the Sao Francisco River. That body of water could have been all bodies of water. I don't know if she ever felt the need to find it on a map. Above a doorway in her simple house there was a picture of my father — young, with his characteristic mustache which identified him as an eager young member of a growing Brazil. He decided not to be categorized as a Yanomami but he proudly claimed Bahia, so many outspoken nationalists were born there. The topography of the land is the topography of my grandmother's skin is indistinct from the air without a map and a legend. My grandmother bathing, my grandmother in her water, no baptism to create her sanctity. The falling sun and the tall grass her witness. This photo was not a part of Tag. I took it when I was twenty-three.



<7:09> “Eyes cannot be bought” was given as a title of a book about Wim Wenders. How would it be to have Sebastiao Salgado's eyes for photo. He has captured the incessant paths of the Landless People of Brazil as they move in the edges of the grid of the land. That grid is formed with barbed wire and



stretched through the entire land of my country. All those latifundium where the 'cows' live better lives than the people. In Salgado's photo one witnesses the men going up and down in Serra Pelada, carrying heavy tools in search of gold and some more elusive things. My father, who left his mother's house when he was 16 to find work in the south and never went

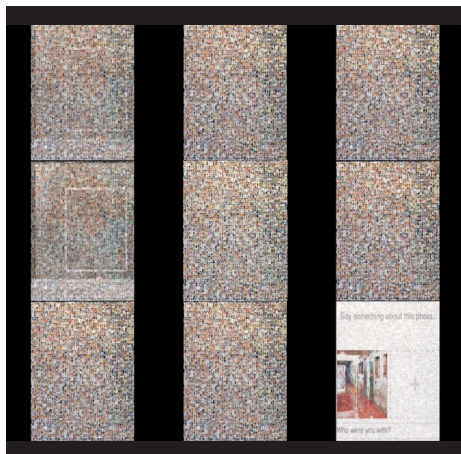
back, losing the place of his birth, once went to the Serra Pelada in search of gold. My father, who studied until 3rd grade, became on his own a great topographer. He learned the grid well and would draw his perfect maps with Xs and Ys, on tracing paper. He mapped many lands between Paraná and Mato Grosso and paid many times 50% of his profits for the signature of an engineer who had a diploma to make them official. My father carries landlessness in him, and I inherited from him that internal condition.



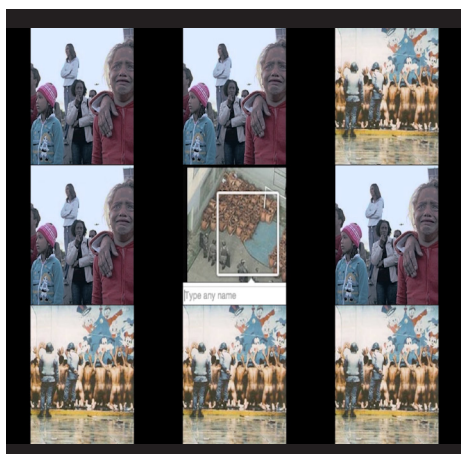
<7:24> There is a land in the North of my country called *Eldorado do Carajás*. I always thought that name to be poetic. Human kind has always been reaching for that El Dorado place, real or metaphorical. It has been the history of mankind to look for that land. There are many Bibles that could be written on this topic. And there was a mythological

time were the oceans would part in two for the chosen people to cross safely to their destination. In 1996, the Brazilian Government promised the Landless a piece of land.

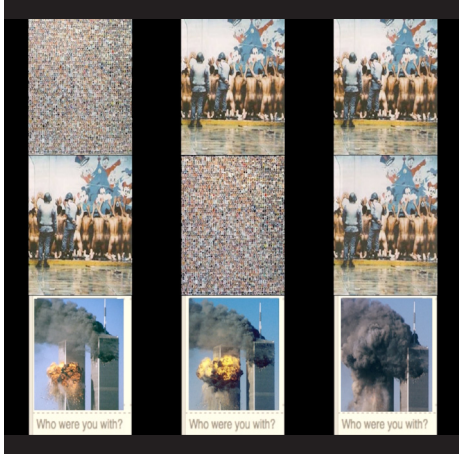
How beautiful were the holes on the ground; how beautiful the reddish color of the land. My mouth fills with water as I remember not resisting eating the dirt after the rain. “*Era inevitable: el olor de las almendras amargas le recordaba siempre el destino de los amores contrariados...*”⁷ Garcia Marques started his book *Love in the Time of Cholera* this way. For the Landless that was how it ended. If you entered the cemeteries of Carajás and were looking for your relative, your lover, your plot, the plots would not be easy to locate. They are not organized in a tight grid. The graves perforate the land. It is finally a home. The weeping of the landless still wandering falls silent and time turns away. They have finally found land.



<9:17> Were they maybe the pixels of the static? Was the white noise all their cries? At two or three in the morning, after the National Anthem, TV Globo would see them still half awake alone and dreamless.



<09:51> When I see her face I see the suffering of the tragic character in the Greek theater. I think of Iphigenia in Aulis awaiting her sacrifice⁷. I wonder if any country could deserve her.



<10:15> When I woke I realized I had dreamed it into being. I won't deny that while a student at a public university in my country I might have wished imperialistic towers would fall. Maybe it was my fault. Or maybe it was the stress of the grid that capitalism was forcing onto the entire world. Trade deals are grids. Economic systems are grids. Democracy is a

grid. Western Reason is a brutally violent grid and, "Posits an antecedent geometrical space in which objects are located and that submits the representation of objects to a theory of subjective vision."⁹ In that very contemporary moment at the beginning of the millennium, we saw civic and collective align with individual memory as iterated by Agnes Heller or perhaps it would be the symbolic, the imaginary and the real. For most of us, losing our lives without dignity to a repressive state agenda is purely imaginary. But we must imagine, we must use the full force of our symbols to imagine that for so many such conditions are very, very real.



<10:48 >Why couldn't we look our disgust in the face? Were we afraid of the mirror?



<11:02> A perfect object on a museum stand, surrounded by artifacts. An object with its own materiality, its own temporality, its own dimensionality, its own(ed). A thing-in-its self. If we cannot see our humanity in our art, we are lost as a species.



<11:45> The performatic body is where transgressive humanism happens. Deitic, non-deific, representational only in its lack of place, time or ontology the performatic body is aligned with its suffering, alienation, loss and longing. At once imaginary, symbolic and real, it is quantum in its possibilities. I performed the object, and lived the

reality of the window that symbolized the two ways of dreaming. We all lived with the performances, the civic drama that stood for nothing, the collective grief that stood for nothing, the personal memories that were all our selves could live with. When the grid is a measure of our moral uncertainty, when it posits binary impossibilities, there is no other action more human than to transgress.



X, Y AND THE DISRUPTION OF BEING

<12:45>

The grid is the final resting place of the idea of the human being. It is as if during life, we move along the axes like Zarathustra's man on the rope over the abyss¹, but eventually, exhausted from the infinitude of the line, we collapse into the spaces they create. And it is at that moment that we become defined. That from the rectangular space of the tomb, we can trace our lives in a defined pattern along the x's and y's to the point from which we appeared; from the intersection of two other lives and tell the full tale — end to beginning; beginning to end— we trace the boundaries of who we are in space. But of course this is not fully possible because the grid doesn't exist and our lives, with our multiple selves, do not simply rise vertically or flow horizontally. The grid is our own fascist fantasy, the artist's schizophrenic obsession with discrete limitations and the politician's utopian dream of binary order. For so many decades we have hungered for that cleanliness, that final algorithm, we have sought that perspective that will see us determinedly adapted to a reductive virtuality. But as we frantically grope, we

violently work to eradicate evidence of the contrary truths —we attempt to erase the archived imperfections that highlight the absurdity of these longings. The cultural manifestations that belie the regimes of reason. In doing so, we undermine our humanity, that humanity that is by nature transitional, transformational, that is ultimately and always at odds with the grid.

I got to the grid through my intuitive and childish mind. I thought of that game where 3 squares of the same sign wins the game; the game of Tic-Tac-Toe. I thought of this game in my memory. In my memory where I am trying to hold a precious personal memory in all quadrants but a collective memory attacks me suddenly. And later a civic image is dictated to me. I try to get rid of one or the other but they occupy a quadrant that cannot be used anymore, and then another and then another and my space gets constricted and my possibility of having my 3 quadrants in a line and win the game becomes impossible. That game plays itself out in my mind just before I fall asleep some nights. Could that be a mathematical trauma? 3 days, 2 nights... 1 more and the game would be over. I got to the grid in my childish mind when I would observe from a hill my city, its 9 blocks. I got to that grid observing my father, a land surveyor, making his maps with his 3 sided ruler and the 2 axes. I got to the grid while I worked picking cotton and coffee in the long furrows of the land. I got to the grid by looking through the pages of a notebook I use and where I obsessively draw blocks. I got to the grid in my nightmare of walking thought that huge city with many more squares than I could manage to retain in my memory — where I walked falling in the cracks. I got to the grid through my insignificance between the vertical lines of fascist architecture. I am not sure how I got to the grid. I have to be honest. I looked up the word 'grid' in Google after I

started to hear that word in English that I could not translate in my mind, as in Portuguese. I still don't know what that word is. The word we have — *grafico* or *quadriculado* as it relates to the notebook page — is not used as an art term except when referring to scaling up a painting. I read about the 'grid,' after that. I looked at the structure of the grid after I had created my grid, which was actually a topographical and subjective study of memory and not a form.

The grid is composed of a severe structure. It is mathematical, it is precise. And being so precise it felt safe to use that structure. Its mechanical and precise numbers allowed me to use them over and over, the same x, the same y, I had learned in math classes, to create a video assembly of photos. I used them precisely some times and I perverted the grid in some other instances as my memory 'leaked', or extrapolated, the grid. The grid is infallible and can be organized precisely. Grids are good for people like me that are trying to find some kind of order. — any kind. The grid is stagnant, one might say. Its axes are determined and rigid. The grid is very materialistic. "The bottom line of the grid is a naked and determined materialism," I then read Rosalind Kraus (52). "...the grid has done its job with striking efficiency. The barrier it has lowered between the arts of vision and those of language has been almost totally successful in walling the visual arts into a realm of exclusive visuality and defending them against the intrusion of speech" (51) "the intrusion of speech" "... the intrusion of speech..." Had I read about the history of the grid, it would not have permitted the voice of Tag.

Dehumanization is in some ways built into the grid, I suppose. Where no language is allowed muteness will soon come. Silence can only be a political act for only a brief period of time.

Afterwards, I debated with Rosalind in my mind. “The non-objective world [...] that Mondrian and Malevich (note) are not discussing canvas or pigment [...] They are talking about Being or Mind or Spirit. From their point of view, the grid is a stair case to the universal [illustrations], and they are not interested in what happens below in the Concrete” (52), she wrote. And I argued with her in my mind: But the universal is both abstract and concrete! ... concrete. There is only one way to the universal and that is the *sui generis*; the Concrete-Human. It went through my mind again and again. She replied to me on the next page: “Although this condition could be discussed openly in the late nineteenth century, it is something that is inadmissible in the twentieth, so that by now we find it indescribably embarrassing to mention art and spirit in the same sentence.” (54) By that point, I decided, quietly, to write next to her words a quote I love dearly, by Antonin Artaud:

After romanticism, symbolism, dadaism, surrealism, lettrism, and marxism, i.e., a hundred ‘schools’ of political, philosophical, or literary subversion, there is one world, one thing that remains standing, one value that hasn’t budged, that’s kept its ancient pre-eminence through thick and thin, and that word and thing is ‘spirit.’ (106)

I am not sure what she mumbled about that, and I went my own way to search for the universal spirit inside the grid, since it was already done and I could not undo what was done.

The grid is a frame, a means of control — the colonizer’s tool; a building of concrete with fascist architecture and tall doors, welcoming the pedestrian to a place where he feels insignificant to enter but then sits quietly for centuries. The grid is constrictive. In Portuguese the word grid could be translated as grade - the same used for a ‘cage’ or prison of large bars. But the grid is not only the bars, it is the space

between them. The grid can be a door and a window and a hallway. The grid can be a passage, once your eyes stop seeing the lines and focus on the space —like in one of these illusion drawings where you see one or other thing by focusing on the form or in the negative space. The grid is not a solid wall. We are not hopeless! Our perception, being limited, faces the grid as fatal and immutable, but once another perception is perceived, another space is formed.

Yes, it may be true that there were no grids in art before the last century, (Kraus 50) I am not sure. That would sure make sense since not until the turn of that century had perspective started to move from one-point or two-point to no-point at all (the grid excludes point view). In the beginning of the last century, technologies were creating “visual languages” that were making the grid more perceptible. That moment made the grid much more perceptible. Modernity was the grid. But of course there were always grids, being perceived or not perceived. The constellations were a grid that was perceived through studying the sky, and from there our perception of not being the center of the universe was understood with Copernicus’ views. But the grid has its historical humanist aspects that are too abstracted to be seen. The grid used in the first half of the 20th century was different from the current one. It was the grid of the between/after wars. It was a psychological grid. I noticed it even without abstraction. I noticed it in the psychological frames of Francis Bacon, that stay abruptly hung and imposed over and around the character like the substitution of the aura of an angel.

It was the modern grid. The contemporary grid was the ultimate abstraction. It was the painting that was never painted. It was a grid-page of a painting that would be scaled up, but in the midst of the process the artist forgot what it was that was being

painted and decided to just have the grid signifying with a statement on the side to explain it. We have been disappearing inside the grid for a half century and we have not even noticed. But, we may have a window of time in the post-contemporary to perceive that we were not placed anywhere in the grid and move fast to be included again.

-We are all disappearing. It is as if we were between binary poles-

The grid is fatal and unsustainable. But we may have already broken it. That moment in time, was and still is happening in the beginning of this new millennium. We can see some of these facts but later, as we step further and look back on this moment in time, we may see it clearly and with events from many places and fields. We may see the broken aspect of this grid in more obvious events such as capitalism facing its own vulnerability — an understanding made possible through data: our resources are exhaustible! Individual, collective and ‘civic memory’ were aligned in the events of September 11, when almost the entire world could see, through live broadcast, that alignment: that cross, that intersection of event-cause-and-effect and the political relationship underlying all humans’ realities. That event was not more important than any other in history, not more important than the Hiroshima bombing or Guernica — the difference is that we saw it happening right before our eyes through mass media. The entire world saw it. And we were put in a loop of days where the media would show it again and again ‘creating’ and reinforcing a collective traumatized memory and well establishing it through the technologies of civic society. [“We exist in the midst of a preserved discourse” (Foucault, 129)] That time, through media, we had a concurrence of our individual memory and “extended memory” intertwined. Most of us can recall our

individual memories of what we were doing on that day (eating breakfast or working, or what ever) and the shared collective memory of having all phones ringing at the same time, all neighbors commenting or sharing a thought. We may or may not have noticed it but we were sharing that memory with all the people around us and even from very far distances — if not in the first attack of the towers, in the second attack when we turned on our TVs. Or again in that “looped week.” And yet the civic memory that was being imposed on us through the media, especially government related media, narrated the attack to us from the point of view of a particular side. The looped images of the dead being shown again and again made the number seem as big as any war. Metaphorically speaking, a Babel tower moment was experienced. That moment in time was also the moment when the internet was being established. That was an implantation of a different tower, and kind of Babel tower: all language - one language. [“The offer of another image identity is always on virus terms.” (Burroughs, 215)] That moment, in the beginning of this millennium will be perceived, in terms of change in perception, in all the decades to come and in the centuries to come. As it will other events globally of less notoriety but that will reinforce these same notions of our race. Our instantaneous access to those events will be felt as was felt the knowledge of the earth not being the center of the universe.

The transitioning to from Geocentrism to Heliocentrism affected man in all ways, from mathematics to art. And in the connection of both, mathematic perspectives changed the way we, literally, saw the world. We are changing our perceptions again, our point perspectives, our grid. Now there are no more one point perspectives, only “circularity of views.” If photo and video had been great tools of control through media

and if, before internet, an archive could be well controlled, now it is not possible as every individual is creating an archive. One event cannot be seen from one dictated camera any longer as all individuals have their own camera and capture the event from different perspectives and share a commentary from a different perspective. The collective memory is being bombed with new images every day. Their memory is our memory now. And if collective memory is being reinforced, so civic society has to formally regain control of it by creating stronger tools and grids to control the archive. [Our notions of power in every sense are also changing]. Of course ideologies find their way to controlling communication. Who controls communication controls the pyramid. No wonder scribes were the next in power to the pharaoh. Control finds its way through language assimilation: there are only “like buttons” not “dislike” buttons!! We are being conditioned to share our alienation. We don’t hold the mouse, we are the mouse. We are being conditioned as mice everyday to avoid the doors where no lights of acceptance turns on. We are conditioned to not comment; to not be political. There is a new colonialism taking place but it is not a colonialism of land but a colonialism of mind. And what when everyday we are faced with questions about who we are? [Who is this?] We are being mapped.

All that fictional world of Eisenstein, Kafka, George Orwell, all those fears of being observed, of being dehumanized underneath surveillance cameras and now, now, we are placed underneath them, in front of them. They are not in the corner of our house as writers had visionally described, they are everywhere: they are in our packets, in our hands... We point them to us and relate it through posts everyday, some every hour and some every minute of the day, what are we eating and where have we been

and with whom have we been and what were our thoughts? We live under media surveillance. “what is in our mind?” I see that every day. We live underneath the media dictatorship regime and we are under surveillance. Who is sitting on that chair?



Who are you?
With who have you been?
Who are your friends?
What books did you read?
What is in your mind?
Say something about this.
Tag any name.

The passage through the grid is small and we have to go through it fast before the implantation of the new regime. The dictatorship is no longer led by a recognizable general of a military but from a technological device — the technological almighty all omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent. We are being objectified. We are becoming data. Our lives are framed. We are under surveillance and we are surveilling others. We are actors and viewers. We are exhibitionists and voyeurs. We are empowered to pass our power. Our notion of the self is being confused with all of the other selves. The civic self is being imposed on us and we have to recognize the real collective self underlying it. It is somehow a schizophrenic process to reintegrate ourselves.

All grids are schizophrenically transitional because they are representations of time and space — and time and space are *skhizein* and transitional. Space cannot be perceived in a dimension. Time is not a dot but groups of dots. Time is not a line and it is therefore not traceable. If time is not a line, history cannot be linear. Life cannot be linear. Time is happening now and happening yesterday and tomorrow and decades ago or to come. Time is what distances us and what connects us. Our individual history

is also the collective history. Time is schizophrenic because it is in two different places. It is an axis. It is a vessel. It is an empty space in the grid. Time is the transitional space. It is in that transitional space that the artist exists. It is up to the artist, in his /hers capacity for a skhizein-phren-sanity to see a possible and impossible connection between time and space and hear what that is saying. It is in that skhizein-phren-sanity that the artist is the individual and the collective at the same time/space — in her transgressive humanism, the artist stands for all mankind.

The grid is an axis of time. We can only comment in our own time as our discourse is composed of alphabet elements of our time. But our personal alphabet can create words with the extra alphabet of our time. To adapt our language to a stabilized alphabet, a formalistic and chronological alphabet to which we are confined, as in a grid, is very limiting. In the same way, we can only try to perceive the currents passing through us and to see the significance or insignificance of them. We can try to review history but actually the elements we have are not complete because they are already interpretations of other elements that were given to us in our life time. The material that are given to us is pre-selected by ideologies that came before us. In the same way, we can only create with our own material — a material that is intrinsically related to what we are expressing, and that, in source, comes from our perception or, lets call it, our own “subjective ethnographism.” That material, which presents itself to us, is an extension of our own thought. No decontextualized or mimicked material can signify as aesthetic. And no trends should be approached to signify because they are corrupted already. They arrived to us not from inside but from a reproducible search moved from its first initial significance and lost in its originality in each reproduced idea, and it arrives to the

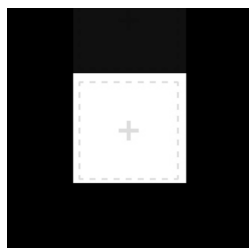
artist or to the student of art, in my view, without any significance. Only the study of the elemental composition, is significant because it holds the signifier of the art and artists of all time.

The fundamental elements in art are mythological, in a sense that the myth is a crystallization of the human's possibility. Each one of us, in one moment or another, go through a 'mythological situation' personal or collective and that experience is the essence of what is captured by the visual artist, or the poet or the musician or any great communicator. That is a form of transgressive humanism because it stands for the hyper-human, And that is the material and the form to be used and to be transmitted. It is that experience that is given — even if tremendously abstracted in form or color or language — to the viewer to access his own myth.

The myth of Prometheus, so used as a metaphor for that courage to create even if at the cost of being exposed to the eagles, can stand in many different ways. The body in Prometheus is a body that is loaded with eroticism and death. That body holds an element of exposure that the body of the artist holds. And I am not talking about the performance artist, but any. The nude state of Prometheus, as the nude body of the artist, doesn't stand for a naked body. That body holds a type of nudity that is dressed when naked and naked when dressed. It is a nudity that conceals the body, not reveals it. It is a distressed body that does not succumb to death and because of that is erotically resilient; death resilient. That body is a hyper-alive, hyper-erotic body. "Eroticism is the approval of life even in death" wrote Bataille (11). Mishima, acted in that body on his last performance, his poetical harakiri. It is in that body that the universal body takes place. That is a place where art signifies. That body of art is

mythological because it is the individual and the collective. It is in that body where the ultimate performance occurs. That body happens in a spectrum that points to us that we are as faraway as we are close to Hitler or Christ or any named extreme of the human. That body is the hyper-human.

But visual art has a different body than the theatrical and performatic body. Who is the protagonist in an art piece? Where is the body in the art work? That body is not necessarily a physical body. It may be a metaphorical body as it is Picasso's body as a woman or a bull in Guernica, or Munch's body crying through the bridge. Or it may be a mind-constructed-body like Louise Bourgeois as a spider of large proportion. That is the body in art. Now if we ask what is the performatic body in art, we may inquire next: "If there is no stage, where does art takes place?" Is it on a canvas? Is it in the middle of a gallery?" Art happens in the encounter of the artist and the viewer. That can be a powerful encounter. In the view of art there is no in-between, no interferences - not chairs or a comfortable position. It is a moment where expression can be experienced in its most powerful state. It is in the dichotomy of subject and object that art occurs; where language occurs: in the dichotomy of subject and subject. The space of art is a place reserved for the encounter of the artist with the viewer — an axis where the grid is transgressed.



NOTES

PART I. Not the Feather but the Bird

1. The Anthropocene is a proposed epoch that begins when human activities started to have a significant global impact on Earth's ecosystems. The biologist Eugene Stoermer originally coined the term, but Paul Crutzen independently re-invented and popularized it. From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. I got familiar with this term through my readings in science magazines.
2. Paul Valery, in Calvino, 16: "One should be be light like a bird, and not like a feather."
3. 'The hero is dead – Long live the thing' referential post, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/a-thing-like-you-and-me/>
4. In Time and Being. And in Being Man and Death (see Bibliography) pg. 121.
5. "In the artwork, the truth of beings has set itself to work. Art is truth setting itself to work"
6. During the first semester I went to a lecture given by Graham Harman about his theories related to Object-Oriented Philosophy and Speculative Realism. I was intrigued by the idea of an object having its own identity that was not completely available to us or any other object because of our limited frame of reference. It seemed that this implied that the whole area of study was sort of a dead end since we were forever locked out of this mysterious inner world of these objects. I thought about what this philosophy meant for our relationships to other humans.
7. I annotated this phrase by Bertold Brecht in the front page of his book, more than fifteen years ago. Now, having difficulty find it in that anthology of Brecht's work, I found it in the internet search attributed to African novelist African novelist, Teju Cole. It could be a line of one of Brecht's character that now is being used by that writer.
8. I am making an allegory to Walter Benjamin's comments on Paul Klee's painting "Angelus Novus" [...where we perceive a chain of event, he sees only one catastrophe... " (Benjamin 257) and "Its own past—and this always means the past of its 'generation'—is not something which follows along after Dasein, but something which already goes ahead of it. " (Heidegger, 41. *Being and Time*)

PART II. A transgressive Process

1. In note 18 of the first chapter of the book, *Performing Remains* the author Rebecca Schneider mentions the term "rememory" from Tony Morrison's *Beloved* "rememory" which stands "not only for the remembering of something forgotten, but the remembering of someone else's forgotten memory" (Morrison, *Beloved*, 2006, 47) Schneider refers to her own interest in the "theatricality of time" and "time as full of holes or gaps and art as capable of falling or crossing in and out of the spaces between live iterations" and mentions the notion that, "rather than unidirectional, art march toward an empiric future of preservation, time plays forward and backward and sideways across the community of an otherwise specialized national plot." [...] the warp and draw of one time in another" . She also refers to Gertrude Stein's "syncopated time." Schneider main focus is on reenactment. As "reenactment she sees [...] the practice of re-playing or re-doing a precedent event, artwork, or act..." (Schneider, 2011 pg 2)

2. Many fascinating comments on Sylvia Plath's poems and biography can be found in Steiner, Nancy Hunter. *A Closer Look at Ariel: A Memory of Sylvia Plath*.

Double Self

1. In Heart Sutra - a Buddhist text.
2. Gauguin lived for four years in Peru with his maternal uncle.

Sin and the Original Bird

1. In the book "Women, Art and Power" Linda Nochilin writes, "Assumptions about women's weakness and passivity and helplessness; her sexual availability for man's needs, her defining domestic and nurturing function, her identity with the realm of nature, her existence as object rather than creator of art..." . I see that perpetuated in our paternalistic societies and like to confront it.

Tryptic

1. *Translation*: "Like some heavy thing in deep water."
2. In 1505, a book by the mol Lucca pachouli "The Divine Proportion" influenced many people; as well did Nicômano's studies in Proporção Aurea (Aurea Proportion? not sure of the English term) $A + B = A/B$. (Motta, Edson. "Fundamentos para o Estudo da Pintura" 1979 Editora Civilização Brasileira. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

3. Byzantine art speculated many ways to depict an Omnipresent God. Not only it was a religious form of art but it was also a ways to create an idealistic God that could be totalitarian venerated. That was the art of the decline of the Roman Empire (Huyghe).

4. The Poet from Essays: Second Series (1844) by Ralph Waldo Emerson (3)..

5. In "PAIDEIA, the Ideals of Greek Culture, when commenting on "The Divine Model," Werner Jaeger writes, "Greek philosophers before Plato had usually described the highest principle in the universe —whether it was the material substratum —simply as God, or "the divine." From the very first, Greek philosophy has been concerned with nature, the nature (physis) or reality or 'being'. That is the origin of that we call science."
(Paideia , 285).

I am Not in the Business, I Am the Business

1. I was once a theater actress. I see a difference in making a performance and not making a performance. I wanted to maintain aspects of the artist, viewer experience but not with the representational nature of the actor.

2. Poem "Algo te indentifica" (Vallejo 412)

Object-Orinetalis

1. A phrase from my poem-script for Tag.

TAG

1. Lacanian alienation: refers to a sense of alienation derived from the disconnect between the fragmented self as experienced internally and the holistic self as perceived in the mirror. This was part of the structural theory of self developed by the psychologist - Jacque Lacan.

2. Cultural technique as discussed in the work of Berhard Siegert refers to an object or operation that produce binary conceptualizations.

3. Candomble is an Yoruba religion that was brought to Brazil with the African enslaved people.

4. Hungarian philosopher Ágnes Heller, in the article "Cultural Memory, Identity and Civic Society" discusses collective memory by immediately differentiating between the concept of cultural memory, that in a certain way was linked, in my opinion, to Carl Jung's "collective unconsciousness" concept, by saying: "When speaking on cultural memory I have not in mind traces of the past stored in a kind of collective consciousness ready for recall or hidden in a collective unconscious buried under the ruins of forgetting [...] Cultural memory is rather embodied in objectifications which store meanings in a concentrated manner, meanings shared by a group of people who take them for granted. These can be texts [...] They can also be monuments, such as buildings or statues, shared material signs, signals, symbols and allegories as storages of experience, memorabilia erected as reminders." She posits that these

objects, places, signs ceremonies etc, can be personal, collective or civic or a combination of the three. She also discourses about the machinery of “civic society” in playing a role in how we remember or not events. Ideological, a society has interest in creating a kind of collective amnesia.

5. The Brazilian Military regime was in power from 1964 until 1985.

6. Journalist Vladimir Herzog became a symbol of the excesses of the Military Regime in Brazil for our generation

7. “It was inevitable: the scent of bitter almonds always reminded him of the fate of unrequited love.” First line of Garcia Marquez book. A beautiful example of sense/object and memory.; as also in Proust.

8. A character in a play by Euripides - Eugenia was given in sacrifice by her father in exchange for the intervention of the Gods on the side of troy in the Trojan War.

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