

# Addressing Residues and Relics

Puerto Rico, 2015–18

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1.

Traffic and a woman move against each other. November 2017. San Germán, Puerto Rico. Two months after Hurricane María. The cars are now accustomed to slowing down, to the obstacles – broken trees, electrical-power repair squads, fallen signposts, zinc roofs, which are quickly appropriated. A big black cloth with a monticule of salt pushes the woman back. Behind the path, salt touches the street, charcoal touches the salt, flame touches the charcoal: small *jachos* or lighted fires spring throughout. The woman pushes forwards, her body deformed by the cloth and by the mass of salt, which, in turn, is deformed. People follow them to an urban lot previously populated by bushes, now all blown down. There are also pieces of wood fallen from an adjacent skeletal house. Silently, the woman and the man who lit the fires guide the audience in putting branches together. We form a circular structure, a nest in the middle of the terrain. The piece is entitled *Semillero* (*Seedbed*), conducted by performance artists Marina Bary Janer x Isil Sol Vil.<sup>1</sup>

For some time after, neighbours still take care of the nest, maintaining its shape. In 2018, however, the circle is partially buried and reformed by plastic bags full of garbage. This year, the municipality of San Germán begins to charge neighbours for picking up their waste. Clandestine dumpsters proliferate especially in so called ‘empty lots’ around town.

After living the hurricane as an interval of noise, of enclosure, followed by months of precarious existence – more people died for lack of services, polluted water, absent medical care and other sequelae after the storm than by accidents during its passage – it is tempting to look at the performance in its aftermath, in its residues. A decayed wood window frame stands repositioned against a house. The remaining lighted fires on the street make drivers engage in

a kind of circumnavigation. The resulting piles of salt are eventually trampled, dissolved. The charcoal spots the pavement. The deconstructed nest. An interplay.

A note. I take the word *residue* (from the Latin *residuum*) to describe material that has lost its utility after having served, or not, its original function. The residue is at the same time undoing – in Spanish *desecho, des-hecho* – that is, the nature of a making that has been annulled or annihilated, and remnant, that is, something that remains as memory.

The memory of the residue is not properly the memory of loss, given that the residue is ultimately garbage, something abject, that no longer has the privilege of completely evoking (reconstructing) what it was. The residue is, thus, something for which loss is not accidental, but irrevocable in its own conception. True garbage is never nostalgic.

Residue is, in its more concrete aspect, useless matter: the instance in which the functional has been submitted, cheated and defeated by



<sup>1</sup> Composed of Puerto Rican artist Marina Sol Vil and Barcelonan artist Isil Sol Vil, the collective takes the name ‘Isil Sol Vil x Marina Bary Janer’, the ‘x’ denoting togetherness and interaction in performances that they characterize as ‘extreme affects’. The order of the names is alternated.

■ Marina Bary Janer (*front*) and Isil Sol Vil (*back*) in *Semillero*, San Germán, Puerto Rico, 2017. *Courtesy of Brumilda Rodríguez*

■ Isil Sol Vil in *Semillero*, San Germán, Puerto Rico, 2017. Courtesy of Brumilda Rodríguez



matter. And as such, its memory is a material memory. It *is* in its shredding, in its asymmetry, in its dirtiness. In its tracings and its traces. In the absence of other things that could have been still left in it: fragments and remembrances of fragments, of non-determinations. In the inconclusion of its own form, we begin to suspect that although eternity (as a limit or construct, rather than a faith) is never sustainable, something has escaped. Here we might think of imprints of processes, a certain perpetuity.

In his emblematic book *La Isla que Se Repite* (*The Repeating Island*, 1998), Cuban essayist Antonio Benítez Rojo proposes the Caribbean as a turbulent, continually inconclusive ambit that invites ‘the search not of results, but of processes, dynamics, rhythms that manifest themselves inside the marginal, the residual, the incoherent, the heterogeneous, or if you will, the unpredictable that coexists with us day to day’ (17). In this chaos, there are repeating ‘tropisms, series of tropisms of movements in an approximate direction, let’s say the unexpected relationship between a dance gesture and the baroque scroll in a colonial balustrade’ (18). Perhaps he is thinking of his native Cuba, but I remember the passage coming back to my mind when I saw the spontaneous movement of a teenager – the quick extension of the arm upwards followed by a sinuous wave from the hand to the shoulder – while walking down the street in front of the verticality of the wood pillars of a dilapidated house in my hometown, Lajas.

Here was a beholding of the coming together of the architectural residue and a physical action that partakes of the residual, a movement that does not really further the operation of walking; that might not be read as wholeness, nor as the formality of a dance; a skill that, in an adolescent, might be considered utterly impractical by his parents.

For it is against these ephemeral (useless) occurrences that we must begin to review the notion of residue in Puerto Rico. Something of a nuisance, of a minor obstacle, that despite its constitutive loss in the order of the pragmatic paradoxically generates ways of doing: from the constant reinvention of the functionality of objects during the crisis, to relentlessly trying to operate in the erosion (physical, financial, bureaucratic) of the island’s governmental structures in daily living. This transaction of greys, of half achievements and half compromises, many times of tacit rule-bending, is what Arcadio Díaz Quiñones describes as *El Arte de Bregar* (the art of ‘make-do’ or ‘make it work’) in the book of the same name (2000). It is a mode of contradiction in which the residue retains its nature of beaten matter while serving as site, agent and receptor in emerging relations involving elements of *fuga* (flight) – the term being understood here as subterfuge and escape, but also as reinterpreting and repurposing. It is also a mode of survival, of averting the violence of definitive things. In it, we find the echo of the anti-apocalyptic character ascribed by Benítez Rojo to the Caribbean when he saw two old black ladies walking ‘in a certain way’ on a Cuban street (1998: 25). Through the active observation, he realized that this ‘certain way’ was not one of dead ends, of finales but instead something that partook of the improvisatory and the atavistic: a game of temporalities and a conjuring away of the end.

In 2019 Puerto Rico, however, the anti-apocalyptic does not exclude the pessimistic. A Board of Fiscal Control (Junta de Control Fiscal) imposed by the United States government practically rules the island, enforcing payment of a debt incurred by past local administrations to capitalist investors. The debt has never been audited. The Junta has implemented a regimen of austerity that has resulted in a collapse of infrastructures, failing health care and public education, poverty, impasse and the loss of any

semblance that might have been left of political autonomy. It has also led to a series of flights, a new migration wave to mainland USA and other places, often involving (even brief) returns, a feeling of being there/here but never completely leaving/returning.

In the increasingly deserted panorama of the island towns – where gentrification by a wealthy foreign population is slowly beginning to take place – a series of residues are increasingly noted. Another island, a counter island, underground but at surface level. Against the teleology of progress embraced by the Puerto Rican population through most of last century, against mottoes of moving forwards and the pervasive desire to tear away the old and build the new (remodelled churches, concrete urbanizations, professional offices, apartment buildings over two stories high), there is now the dark resistance posed by the ruin. It is a ceasing in the panorama, an architectural resistance turned archaeological, nothing less than a baffling of the project of modernity.

Anselm Franke, curator of the Vienna Generali Foundation exhibit and co-editor of the 2011 book that share the name *Animism: Modernity through the looking glass*, places animism as ‘mirror and negative horizon’ of modernity (169). On the one hand, for him, animism has the capability to decentre the modern project; upset Cartesian splits and binaries (human/non-human, body/mind, organic/inorganic, inside/outside). One could also deduce the potential to disrupt the imperative of progress. On the other, he stresses how animism’s general conception is still rooted in traditional postulates, against which modernity showcases its objectivity.

Edward Burnett Tylor (1832–1917) in the canonical *Primitive Culture* (2016 [1871]) set the stage for a view of animism that still prevails. It is based on a well-known evolutionary anthropological framework: from beliefs in spirits of nature in primal societies, to representative polytheistic and monotheistic religious views, to a scientific understanding that relegates the notion of animism to the realm of the non-factual. Connections between the animistic and modes of thinking of small children and symptoms of psychotic disorders further consolidate ascribed qualities of immaturity, savagery, ignorance and pathology.

In contrast, contemporary views tend to focus on animism as something that emerges through relationships, that is, in encounters. The task, then, for many, has been to reconceive animism as a practice that destabilizes its own original conception. In this fashion, it can be tightly linked to upsetting visions of society, religion or humanhood as constant, necessary progressions, as hierarchies or games of power-control that determine a priori the hegemonic. In the turbulence of the Caribbean where residues carry inherent subversive qualities of decay and resurfacing, where the alchemy of remains generates constant surprise and confusion, where the sea is often the echo of a quotidian epistemic murk, it is not rare for the upheaval of taxonomies to take the animated shape of hybrids and monsters.

11.

Experimental Theatre, Luis A. Ferré Fine Arts Center, Santurce, Puerto Rico, 2017. *Hagiographies*, a play I direct, produced by our company Casa Cruz de la Luna in collaboration with the group Kuniklo. The people, expecting a drama, enter into the formality of an exhibition. Three objects on stage. The audience circulate among them. One, a big crystal jar on a pedestal. Inside the



■ Saint Anthony and the Child from *Hagiographies*, Fine Arts Center, San Juan, Puerto Rico, 2017.

flask, a dead octopus with a plaster head of Saint Anthony and another dead octopus with the plaster head of the child Jesus. They are looking at each other. Saint Anthony is upside down. In front of the pedestal is a praying card, indicating the sites of which the saint is holy patron, and recounting his encounter with Jesus in the woods, as well as his attributes ‘that everything forgotten is remembered; that everything far is brought near; that everything lost is found’. There is a reference to the popular custom of placing statues of Saint Anthony on their heads until you obtain a sweetheart or whatever you seek. The public reads that they are to voice their petitions three times in front of this construction.

I pose animism in art as the materialization of rare, unforeseen connections, of relationships of dissonance that disrupt given orders, often playing with our understanding of a diversity of disciplines – the biological, the religious, the aesthetic, the typographical ... It translates into a disengagement from domestication emerging in presences that clash: apparent impossibilities that suggest the possible in other apparent impossibilities. In contemporary Puerto Rican society, it finds one of its substrata in all the anti-apocalyptic-apocalyptic paradoxes that surface as spiritualism, Santería, Christianity, popular and errant beliefs come together into super-syncretic, highly mixed practices: flower memorials commemorating accidental road deaths turned into burning shrines, spiritualist gatherings at UFO-burned circles calling forth

■ Luis Gabriel Sanabria (left) and José Luis Sanabria (right) of Kuniklo in entrance rite. *Hagiographies*, Fine Arts Center, San Juan, Puerto Rico, 2017.



patriarch Ramón Emeterio Betances, Santeros sacristans, political careers made by hunting mythical predator monsters.

The second installation at the beginning of *Hagiographies*. A mirror on the floor. Suspended over it, a sprouting coconut and a mask made of the skin of a different fruit. An audience member looks through the mask to the mirror on the floor. Over the mirror, overlapping the reflection of the mask (the face), there are ex-votos – cheap metal reproductions of promises (a body part, a symbol, a desired object). The audience member is given a new ex-voto. The person can drop it over the reflection (further adorning it or her or him), return it or keep it.

For Philippe Descola in *Beyond Nature and Culture* (2013 [2005]), animism is identified with the notion of a shared interiority between things that differ materially. The system is contrasted to other modes (totemism, naturalism, analogism) that propose different continuities and discontinuities in the realm of the material and the non-material. In the encounters described in *Hagiographies*, however, there was an intention of creating more tenuous schemas. Here, in looking at self and looking at self in relationship to others (objects, animals and plants), we attempted to confound social remnants of practices of the transcendental with the physicality of doing and perceiving on stage. Animism, therefore, does not particularly reside in asserting or believing in the interiority of matter (although this can be one of the aspects of the exchange) but in variable interplays. As artists, the goal then becomes to design live structures of encounter (play stagings, installations) that allow the audience to question boundaries between selves’ and others’ insides and outsides, that is, to look more than once.

The third instance. The carcass of a pig, its skin being tattooed by an instrument guided by a young thin naked man. A thigh of this man is being tattooed in turn by the electric pen of another naked man. Both men look alike. They are brothers. Audience members are instructed to select and tear away one page from a book of Catholic saints organized by the days of the saints’ celebrations (*las celebraciones del santoral*). Each audience member gives their paper to one of the tattooists, who uses it to wipe off the remains, to clean the skin (porcine or human) he

is drawing on. The marks on the skins delineate invented pop-art creatures.

The paper with the grease of the pig or with the traces of human blood constitutes a certain kind of residue: one that carries body fragments made special through an event. One could talk of relics engendered through ritualistic gestures, of a residual religiosity. One could think of holy materials (water, wood, ashes, bones), traditionally displayed in glass coffins, vials or carried by believers as amulets. The performance embraces this double way of relating to the relic: exhibition or meandering (as you look at the relic or take it with you, as you keep it near).

Beyond this entrance exhibition, *Hagiographies* follows a movement of residues/relics as objects to be seen, and objects that see within the structures of the *mise-en-scène*. It must be clarified that the use of the term 'object' here encompasses not only the biological (human as well as non-human) and the non-biological, but also composite mixtures.

When part of the public finishes their rounds among the objects on stage, they sit down watching the new audience entering and interacting with the constructs. The objects exposed at the beginning return as actants, apparitions and spectators at multiple moments in the play. One of the naked men sits down on a chair on stage, in front of the other, who is about to get a haircut (the men are hairless). The first man becomes a blatant spectator of the erotic scene that the second man and a barber enact. In a version of the play performed in New York City (Pregones Theatre, 2015), the Saint-Anthony and Child octopi monster stays on stage for the whole evening, a spectator-presence that becomes activated at selected times during the plot, like when the barber-vampire addresses it as one of the saints that he has defaced with graffiti. In the last scene of the play, people are asked to look at their paper-blood-fat relics and to come to the stage depending on the saint they selected.

Positionings generated in the theatrical sequence also play with dynamics of containing and being contained. Over a spoken narrative, entities that have appeared in the play come back. In addition to the initial objects, we find: an old man whose body comprehends the hands of other humans; a saint with the torso of a woman



■ Rafael Pagán and Kuniklo as the hybrid Gaspar Flores. *Hagiographies*, Fine Arts Center, San Juan, Puerto Rico, 2017.

whose lower body is made to appear, through a contraption, as a cage filled with little chickens; projected live video feed from a flying drone, a manifestation of the saint, which becomes part of the phantasmal panorama. The actor-barber-vampire carries a tablet. He asks the audience on stage: 'Where are you from? Where do you live? Where are you now?' He then enters the data on an internet locator search engine as maps, pictures and aerial views of the sites are projected over the space. The narrator tells a story about the effacing of his home, a dissolution of place following his complaint to the local Monsanto office for being awakened each morning by the noise of airplanes spreading chemicals over transgenic crops and adjacent communities. A cosmic tent, a shiny plastic structure is carried and assembled on stage. The narrator goes in. Objects begin to flow between the inside and the outside of the tent, as well as between the auditorium and the stage. People slip under the walls of the enclosure. Once inside, a haptic world of textures, shadows and scents isolates them from the outside. Another final gesture: the fruit mask from the beginning is cut and offered to the audience still sitting in the auditorium. Some ingest it.

Through *Hagiographies*, acts of being embraced (inside something bigger), and of embracing, were envisioned to provide an emotional drive, a sensual force. They evoke in my mind two discourses on the object, two references from disparate sources.



■ Tent enclosure with Kuniklo as creatures. *Hagiographies*, Fine Arts Center, San Juan, Puerto Rico, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> In her essay 'Religious Objects: Uncomfortable relations and an ontological turn to things' (2018), Amy Whitehead discusses the unease associated in Western thought when the materiality of an object (its original materials, its shape, its paraphernalia) becomes part of the web of practices of adoration, negotiation and kinship established with it. Related to the notion of the fetish, this stance opposes, for instance, official Catholic representational postures on religious objects that suggest that the object itself is not what is worshipped but stands for that which is.

The first one is ontological: Tristan Garcia's new materialism in which being is postulated, precisely, as the difference between what each thing comprehends (contains) and the thing as it is comprehended (contained) in other things. This tension between interior and exterior approximates the denomination of 'sainthood' in the play. In Garcia's thought, being and comprehension are mutually exclusive and non-reversible directionally, for example: the system comprehends (contains) the organ, but the system is not the organ; the organ is the system, but the organ does not comprehend the system. Another instance: as an actor, the staging of the play comprehends you, but the staging of the play is not you; you are the staging of the play, but you do not comprehend it – a good credo for theatrical practice. (Garcia 2018)

I look for scraps (residues) of threading between modes of thinking and making. In considering relics as something marked by having formed part of particular object/bodies and rituals, the passing of time comes to the fore. In Garcia's materialism, the past moment is proposed as something that keeps in itself its multiple future possibilities. Something of the miraculous is aroused in imagining the relic's pluripotential past. The premise that everything is composed of matter, according to Garcia, but everything is not (just) matter, could also make us think of an anima. Yet Garcia is emphatic to disavow in his materialism any justification of salvation (miracle, energy, spirit). In dealing with performative objects/

bodies that carry memory imprints of the religious in the terrain of philosophical theories, one is often brushed by that embarrassment associated with belief, with the fetish, that possible shame.<sup>2</sup>

Conversely, our second evoked reference holds embarrassment as an effective element – even stronger than shock – on stage, while leading us not into a formally flat ontology but into a distinctively human practice of memory and matter: the theatre of Polish director Tadeusz Kantor (1915–1990).

III.

Seminar on Tadeusz Kantor. University of Minnesota, 2001. CRICOT 2 actress Ludmila Ryba asks participants to present the history of an object (presupposed non-organic) that they have selected. On stage, in subsequent brief pieces, are the object and the actor. As the facilitator indicates the failures of the scenes, the understanding of the exercise progresses as trial and error. Sometimes the error resides in that the presentation is about the human – the human as manipulator of the object. Many times, the object falls into its common usage. At others, it is an exercise in pure fancy, in transformations ungrounded in the physicality of the object. None of these is the history of the object. Exercises that are most successful begin to proceed as explorations of the materiality of the object, the human actors exhibiting a passive-active quality, an openness of response.

December 2018. San Germán. Casa Cruz de la Luna's itinerant theatre lab. We try to approximate the exercise of the history of the object. But now, the object is a ruin: facades, empty shells, islands of brick and hydraulic tiles (the bathroom, the balcony) among vegetation. The bodies are moulded by the forms of the architecture; the houses respond to tapping with sounds, vibrations, with activation of animals inside; the remains become spatial arrangements, paths, boundaries, formed by the act of walking through; games of material resistance, of balance on fences; eroded structures, contorted and extended arms, torsos, legs.

In his essay 'Theatre of the Lowest Rank', Kantor urges:

ACCEPT THE REALITY THAT WAS WRENCHED OUT  
AND SEPARATED  
FROM THE EVERYDAY  
AS THE FIRST ELEMENT OF THE CREATIVE  
PROCESS ... A DISCARDED OBJECT WHICH IS AT  
THE THRESHOLD OF BEING THROWN  
OUT,  
WHICH IS USELESS, GARBAGE,  
HAS THE BIGGEST CHANCE TO BECOME THE  
OBJECT OF ART AND THE  
WORK OF ART. I CALLED IT THEN  
'A P O O R O B J E C T .' (Kantor 1993: 118)

Poor objects are, for instance, those that inhabited Kantor's production of *The Return of Odysseus* (1944), debris whose use had to be engendered differently, in a room ravaged by war. For him, the artistic object possesses this revolutionary potential of the residue, the capacity of a politically charged new operation (that of artistic emergence). It possesses a savagery and informality of matter associated with raw emotional states, with convulsion, while also entering in complex transactions with personal and collective memory. The *emballage* – that which is wrapped, contained – is for Kantor a special kind of poor object, intimately linked with affective acts: protection, sending (transmitting), but also hiding – the invisibility of the inner core of the artist that is suggested just in the covering. For Kantor's theatre is one that is undeniably human; one in which he places himself as an integral part of the encounter in performance, that is, as a properly active director. The power (in the archive, in the conceptions, in the tracings of memory, in his incomparable theory-praxis) is centred on this, his (Kantor's) inside-outside.

And we now come to our impossibility, or, better yet, our embarrassment of doing theatre in times of planar ontologies and the turn to the object. How to negotiate human agency? How in an endeavour historically and essentially conceived, taught and performed as human, can a perception of equality among things emerge (that is, what are the points of these emergences, how do we create their conditions)? For Kantor, the suggestion of the actor as a figure of death, also a poor object in equal footing with other objects in the *mise-en-scène*, also bereft of its original function, is seminal.

Looking back at Garcia's materialism, the proposal that things are equal in a formal ontological plane when defined against the world; whereas they enter in relationships of inequality, of intensities, objectively, through their particular belongings – this double existence that sets equality as condition for inequality – must be kept in mind.

For the question, one might argue, is more one of power and perspectives; more of rethinking our positionings as humans, but also of practices of kindness. There is infinite kindness in the Kantorian protective emballage, as it also might be noted that it approximates what Artaud called cruelty, a feverish rigor linked with the artistic.

This necessity is what I take as a directive in trying to articulate a theatre that is not 'a theatre' in the way that it is not completion, nor about completion. Theatre as fragments – of ways of thought, of practice – animated in a maelstrom, in the contradiction between the desire for a horizontal world and the verticality of the human creator inherent in art. For such an indeterminacy, I appeal not to the purity of an ontology nor to the complexity of a historical theatrical practice linked to its lived and archival web; but to pieces of these. It is also tempting to conjure up again a term out of its discipline; puzzlingly moving between its anthropocentric past and new relational definitions; a term in which human agency becomes at the same time suspect and promising: animism.

In wondering, then, about what an animistic theatre (or a type of animistic theatre) could be



■ House on the corner of Victoria and Estrella Streets, San Germán, Puerto Rico and Ezequiel Díaz. Casa Cruz de la Luna's itinerant theatre lab, history of the house exercise, 2018.

like, this impossibility of completely understanding, achieving or even completely performing stands as we talk of fleeting encounters, of actants (encompassing now actors and audience, spectated and spectator objects, the organic and the inorganic), of communicating emotional residues, something that aspires (through its changeability) to become change-provoking.

#### IV.

The last section of this essay consists of partial reflections and descriptions of exercises. It turns to the practice of addressing and to the materiality of the text as we broach a proposal for a certain kind of animistic theatre.

■ A variation of the lane work exercise contained in contemporary theatre director Anne Bogart's *The Viewpoints Handbook* (Bogart and Landau 2005). Participants each move forwards and backwards on parallel lanes. The movement vocabulary is fixed to simple actions. Tempo is open. Dramatic rhythms and tensions emerge by virtue of kinaesthetic responses and space relations. In this variation, we added to the movement choices kneeling and writing on the floor with a small piece of eroded brick. We do the exercise in front of early twentieth-century ruins, facing each facade (or its remnants). In the enclosure of the rehearsal studio, where Bogart's lane work exercise is often performed, the dynamic is mainly one of communication between actors' bodies, that is, an enclosed

dynamic. Here, the Viewpoint practice of soft focus allows it to function in other ways. The actors, remaining at all times with the gaze forwards, expand their peripheral vision and hearing to respond not only to each other but also to the cars passing through their way – for their lineal paths towards the house transverse the street. They are also encouraged to react, within the movement vocabulary, to sound, olfactory and tactile stimuli (heat, rain, changes on the ground surface) that might reach them. The sustained forward gaze and orientation give passers-by the impression that the actions are directed towards the house.

■ At Old San Juan's Parque de las Palomas (Pigeon's Park), we select an old enormous ancient brick wall as focal point. The movement of the birds is added to the kinaesthetic response, as well as that of children running, of tourists and locals ambulating around. People ask, is it a ritual? A cult? Are we worshipping something there (maybe unseen) on the wall? The wall itself? A man, afterwards, questions if it is a form of meditation. And when I answer that it can be used that way, he further asks if it can be done with any wall or just that wall. Subsequently he approaches the wall, standing motionless extremely close to it – like some of the actors did during the exercise – for a while.

Contemporary anthropologist Nurit Bird-David (2019) notes that among the Nayaka hunter population in Southern India, there is kinship between humans (*avaru*) and 'superpersons' (*devaru*) in nature. Stones, elephants, ants, humans are all individuals whose personhood is not predetermined, but develops through relationships. Not every stone or elephant is a (super)person, just the ones who enter into certain rapports call for certain attention, become communicative actants.

How to reconceive acting itself as an endeavour through which actants (non-human and human) enter into active (animistic) relationships? How can objects function as actants?

Given the conventions of the theatrical encounter, it is worth searching for possible answers in the act of addressing. Consider, for instance, how in Stanislavskian realistic acting, the 'magic if' – that condition of complicity

■ House on Estrella Street, San Germán, Puerto Rico and Nelly Orengo. Casa Cruz de la Luna's itinerant theatre lab, history of the house exercise, 2018.





between actors and audience – provides the bases of actors addressing each other as characters on stage. To take a stone and talk to it as if it were a character might not seem like an inordinate stretch of the magic if. Yet, an approach that poses a stone as stone, something that carries physical properties and material memory, redirects us to an animism not restricted by the representational. It also carries the potential of moving in political fields that directly reflect on hegemonic societal and political practices of the human over things around them. For instance, in beholding the ruin as residue, a variety of laws and ordinances at local and state levels centred on the notion of *estorbo público* (public nuisance) in Puerto Rico are brought to the fore. Some of these allow agencies and individuals to start processes of condemning properties for reasons as subjective as being offensive to the senses. The result is often a razing of the site. Against the teleology of progress that drives the production of parking lots in residual sites, our prerogative has become how to engage in encounters with the ruin that allow for other futures. How to propitiate performative interactions that engender other interactions (cleaning, harvesting, co-living). In an island of ruins – the inhabitants constantly driven to expenditure that increases personal and national debts – how to accept the ruin in its memory dimension, in its sparked imaginary, in its otherness, its rich poverty, in its economy, in its necessity? Performative addressing (drawing notice, acknowledging, relating) is posed as a beginning.

■ Another variation of Anne Bogart’s Viewpoints, a new suggested viewpoint: the ‘ambit-body’ (alternatively ‘body-ambit’). The term itself denotes the binary inherently present in the theatrical act, in its foundation on human will. However, the encounter is apprehended differently. In Viewpoint theory, ‘architecture’ is posited as a viewpoint in which human bodies respond to the physical environment; while ‘kinaesthetic response’ tends to focus more on humans responding to human movement. I propose to the Casa Cruz de la Luna theatre laboratory group to start our training with responses that encompass everything around us. Based on this (over these body-ambit responses),



■ House on Victoria Street, San Germán, Puerto Rico and Wandimar Matos. Casa Cruz de la Luna’s itinerant theatre lab, history of the house exercise, 2018.

explorations of other viewpoints are overlaid. The challenge is how to use a system centred on perspectives of human movement to question the moving human/non-moving object divide. The methodology yields itself to this, for Viewpoints is, above all, a developer of awareness. In ambit-body exercises, we start out by focusing on qualities easily perceived in both human and non-human objects, which blur perceptual categories between actants, for example: responding to textures and sound with eyes closed, to light and to light reflection on surfaces. Another strategy is purposely selecting spaces with moving non-human objects: animals, electrical mechanical household devices, digital screens, being in the sea. Yet another is catching minute movements, things in the wind, things that move when we watch them very closely, thinking that things move when we move. This latter scenario entails changing our frame of mind: trying to conceive our movement, not as our own but as a movement of objects in our perceptual frame – a relativization in perceived motion that recalls Einsteinian theories. As we attempt to circumvent the active human/inert object divide, another issue arises: the use of speech.

Attempting an enquiry on animism and speech, one is faced by the prevalence of the operation of language at a semantic level in the theatrical – that is, as a way of conveying character, plot, of handing over a fiction to the mind. Inevitably,

■ House on Manzanares Street, San Germán, Puerto Rico and José Rafael Colón Laboy. Casa Cruz de la Luna's itinerant theatre lab, history of the house exercise, 2018.



Antonin Artaud's 'signals through the flame' reverberate as answer and alternative mode: 'to change the role of speech in the theatre is to make use of it in a concrete and spatial sense, combining it with everything in the theatre that is spatial and significant in the concrete domain' (Artaud 1958: 72).

Artaud's proposal to explore physical qualities of language – vibration, energy, rhythm, sound de/reformations – appears linked to the notion of incantation: an operation bringing us to the magical attribution that has never left the animistic while at the same time posing words also as material actants whose relationship to other actants in the *mise-en-scène* should be extra-ordinary.

■ Exercise: Theatrical speech as mantra. Hypermemorized texts are those that you know by rote, that you can speak or write automatically, while doing other actions. To hypermemorize a text is to integrate it into yourself, at the same level that you might have done with other textual fragments – prayers, pledges, song or poem strophes – which you can recall and repeat at any moment. Hypermemorization entails dwelling in your relationship with words, not confining them to strict semantic schemes

(which are eventually shed in the repetition). It is another path of turning words into objects-actants in animistic encounters – that is, words as something concrete, whose insides and outsides (relationships, for instance, between their signifiers and signifieds) are not fixed, but mutable in the theatrical event. Hypermemorize a short poem. Sit in front of an object, repeat it for a long time. First in your mind, then aloud. Keep your gaze on the object but your peripheral vision open. We performed the exercise for hours in front of an old balcony balustrade using the poem 'Self-portrait with Loose Hair' by Cuban writer Nara Mansur Cao. An option can be given to occasionally vary your distance to the object. After a while, the text begins to fluctuate in the mind. Sometimes it is in the foreground: you are thinking about its meanings, relating it to ambit-bodies. It might be working on your imaginary. At others, it is a background, running by itself, parallel to other thoughts, but still present as action, as sonority, bouncing off the object you have in front of you as something physical: an object interacting with another object. This slipping in and out of consciousness of the repeated text can lead to relaxation or sleeping states: the trance potential of the mantra. Meaning is just one of the many possible operations of words, sometimes just a residue.

In *The Spell of the Sensuous* (2017 [1997]), David Abram proposes yet another relational animism, a phenomenology, an existence through continuous sensorial contacts, a universe of eco-symbiosis and cross-communications. Abram wonders what has led humans to disrupt the balance of coexistence with the world. He suggests as inciting incident the development of the Semitic aleph-beth alphabet around 1,500 years before the Christian era – that is, of a phonetic system in which written signs connect directly to nothing but sounds. No longer a pictorial or conceptual representation, the phonetic alphabet for Abram effects a progressive detachment in the realm of perception of humans and their surroundings.

#### **An exercise in active spectatorship.**

The audience is given papers and instruments of writing. They are instructed that the pencils or pens should always be moving against the

paper while they watch the play. They can vary the speed of the action and use additional papers. The gaze should preferably be on the stage (not the paper). The traces produced can be motion marks, drawings, writing (automatic or intentional), semblances of writing (bordering the asemantic). Language gestures (residues) as something concrete.

Fluctuation is here again introduced as a generator and property of the encounter. For it is precisely as oscillation that theatre becomes something animated. These movements can be: in fluxes between drawing and writing; in shifts of attention between the stage and the simultaneous response actions; in possible streams of language encompassing stage and auditorium, written and spoken lines of communication – here a variety of other exercises like those pertaining to the modality of *escritura acto* or simultaneous projection of digital writing can be implemented (see Adyanthaya 2013: 77–85).

#### **An exercise in play text.**

Have all participants hypermemorize a complete script. This would include all the characters' lines and, depending on the vision for the particular staging, also stage directions and characters' names (to be spoken before their lines). Remember that hypermemorization involves a higher commitment and different relation to words than what actors identify as theatrical memorization. It can take time. Consolidate the memory with repetition and simultaneous action exercises. Have each actor individually do the addressing of the play text as mantra to an object. The objects should be resonant in personal and political fields; the objects can partake of the residual. Gather together the objects, the actors, the space (all of them actants) and, without assigning lines to persons, let the play run.

This matrix can be experimented with, guided. Its conditions can vary in the process, from the process. The notion of body-ambit should be kept present at all times, the actants (human and non-human) being affected by and affecting all actants around them.

In the matrix (in the setting of the conditions) is the equilibrium between the structured and the unstructured. What is constructed (predetermined) should be just a framework that, however loose or strict, always allows or

facilitates the play. The play is the relationships (material, emotional, visceral, puzzling, memory-shaking) between actants, which would also include audi-actants (auditorium and audience): an ever mutating line of *fuga*, of tending away from the a priori and towards the animism of the moment.

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