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The Art of the Future

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I

The memory of the Holocaust has practically become a civil religion. Today, the discourses about memory have taken a theological aspect. As Enzo Traverso explains, with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, but especially with the collapse of the World Trade Center in 2001, the turn of the century has taken place under the sign of a paradigm change: the passage from a "principle of hope" to a "principle of responsibility".

Traverso says, "The principle of hope [...] accompanied the fighting and riots of the last century. The 'principle of responsibility', on the other hand, has emerged when the future starts making us afraid, when we have discovered that revolutions can spawn totalitarian regimes". This situation would have led us to the decline of utopias, and, the historian continues, "A world without utopias [...] is a world that inevitably turns its gaze toward the past" (2012: 287–296).

Traverso quotes Françoise Hartog when he describes this moment as "presentist", one in which expectations would have disappeared and the present would have been virtually colonized by the past. Moreover, in contrast with that avant-garde art that had chosen to forget the past in order to intensify its links with progress and the future at the beginning of the Twentieth Century, we see how presentism emerges today as a cultural formation that runs in the opposite direction: while it finds certainties in memory with which it strengthens its ties, presentism also fosters a specific type of forgetting, which it dumps, in this case, on the future. Presentism fills up the present with the past, disconnecting it from the possibility of articulating alternative horizons. And, if so, if what was forgotten by the avant-garde was the past, we can propose that, almost in symmetry, presentism steers that forgetting toward the future.

However, does this mean that today it is not possible anymore an art capable to imagine alternative futures? Should this art be capable to show other horizons that still seem unacceptable without insisting on discredited avant-garde positions, or without surrendering either to a contemporary memorial culture?

II

Preventive Archaeology is the realization of an exhibition that has not yet come to exist. Its approach would be based on the assumption that there is a tendency in contemporary art that, aimed at treating aspects of collective memory, focuses its attention on questions related to forgetting. Increasingly, since the turn of the millennium, a number of artists from different backgrounds have moved away from the "duty to remember" that has marked much of the art of memory, and tried to understand, however, the mechanisms under which forgetting is produced historically. Memory appears in their works, as an object that, even though it receives an analytical treatment, does not buckle under it because these analytical treatments, having become basically suspicious, have to face their own grey areas.

The Fundació Joan Miró accepted to make possible this proposal under the framework of the Tricentenari. Its goal was to present this decision as an institutional contribution to the commemoration acts that were organized by Barcelona's City Council and the Generalitat de Catalunya although, for this purpose, they asked to adapt the project and give it the format of a program of exhibitions at Espai 13. That is: a program of individual exhibitions based on the production of five projects, the completion of which has been proposed to Oriol Vilanova, Lúa Coderch, Lola Lasurt, Antonio Gagliano and LaFundició art collective.

In this way, what was initially intended to be a group exhibition became something articulated as a set of circumstances allowing the production of new projects. In place of applying a predetermined curatorial thesis or a closed discourse, we thought it would be more fruitful, with this change in format, to invite the above mentioned artists to reach an agreement, establish some useful working references and unfold a number of research processes around a common object of interest, for instance: memorial culture.

The concept of "preventive archaeology" seemed useful for questioning its own status and, at the same time, the process that the artists were invited to complete through the program. As defined by historiography, preventive archaeology is "the set of research activities that take place before the completion of an urban planning project, a new construction, a reform, anything likely to produce an irreversible destruction of remains".

The feeling of suspicion toward historical objects, as well as, dealing with the past from negotiated and bias standpoints, coincides with the position manifested by the artists that make up the program. Meanwhile, their work echoes also another more familiar meaning of the concept "archaeology" in the field of contemporary art, the one launched in 1969 by Michael Foucault in *L'archéologie du savoir*. In this case, archaeology, being understood as a practice that takes place in the archive that configures human knowledge, would be left to pinpoint the historical causes, the rules and the potential conditions that a discourse requires to emerge in a particular historical moment.

Espai 13 has been also planned as a stage from where to research the conditions that affect the formation of discourse, although, in this occasion, this archaeology, as "preventive", has limited its scope to observe only the superficial layer of memory. Indeed, the archaeological description that the artists offer us encourages presentism as that prior condition on which the formation of contemporary discourse gets built. The artists do not survey the layers of the past anymore, instead, they tend to fix their attention on the conditions in which history appears on the layer of the present, the means at our disposal for its circulation, as well as, its impact at the moment of consolidating discourses and organizing temporal regimes.

In this way, *Preventive Archaeology* sets up a kind of "inverted" archaeology that aims to describe the memories that the present foretells, the stories that, steeped in the past, are projected as a kind of futurology. This is an archaeology that we could call "preventive", although, in reality, it also "belongs to prevention", to that characteristic so typical of our time that leads, as a sign, to an almost pathological recovery of the past, even though, it fails to establish any future horizon beyond that of the disaster and the repetition of the present. Presentism, as defined by Hartog, is indeed an "*a priori* form of history"

(2007: 143).

The processes that have been carried out along the program could be equated also with the notion of “performative historiography” as raised by Andrew Pickering. The paradigm of performativity is clearly indebted to archaeology as Foucault proposes, and is based on understanding that knowing “does not come from standing at a distance and representing but rather from a direct material engagement with the world” (Barad, 2007: 49).

Reality and the understanding of reality are not two separate issues, but, from a performative perspective, they configure each other. According to Pickering, performative historiography is, therefore, that historical analysis that sees itself as part of the same subject that it explores, and thus the representations it organizes can no longer be understood as transcendental and universal but as a knowledge that depends on very precise technologies, media and discourses, as well as, adapted to networks that are as partial and variable as the world that they try to explain.

The production context of Espai 13 has encouraged work in a situated manner (Haraway, 1991), as well as, has tried to articulate its research findings with the conventions of the different contexts and means through which interactions are established. The historiographical research has been basically understood as a spatial shift, as a tour on the epidermis of history, and, in consequence, of Montjuïc and the surroundings of Fundació Joan Miró. The artist have agreed to treat it as that useful reference on which to locate their research. According to this, it is important to emphasize that the mountain, in any of the cases, has not been treated from the perspective of site-specific art. More than an object of representation, Montjuïc has been conceived as an opportunity to build different points of view and set positions from which to unfold a number of interactions with the world.

In the framework of *Preventive Archaeology,* Montjuïc has not been addressed properly in its historical dimension; it has been, instead, intersected with the historiographical dimension, which is also important for the site. With that research, we have begun to describe those elements that conform its landscape as those means that influence the organization of the historical discourse at a wide territorial scale, those like the museums that the mountain includes, as well as, among others, the archives, monuments and historical reenactments.

Lúa Coderch has made a description of those Montjuïc’s monuments that have required historical technology to be considered as memorials. The artist has launched an approach, largely phenomenological, of experiences of the present that stack on different layers, while Antonio Gagliano asked questions of epistemological relevance and proceeded to disseminate the information that the mountain encapsulates. Gagliano has traced against the grain the networks that historically had been used to carry information to Montjuïc, and has examined the processes with which historical facts are coupled with certain technologies and narratives.

On the other hand, Oriol Vilanova and Lola Lasurt have made their explorations more focused on particular cases. Vilanova has limited his scope to two elements in the mountain among which he articulated a game of reflections that he turned into a metonymy of different regimes of temporality. Lasurt, on the other hand, has also departed from two elements to prove that the type of representation that museums and monuments devise as transcendent becomes contingent and variable when their displacements are followed through the correspondent networks.

III

The Tricentenari was also considered as a second reference on which to base this research. In this case, we were not so much adapting ourselves thematically to the program that the Fundació Joan Miró had placed *Preventive Archaeology* into, but, once more, it was understood that the circumstances of this celebration remained an active historiographical landscape all along the exhibition program, and, therefore, it could become an occasion to generate space for a face-to-face dialogue.

Coderch hinted the question of the Tricentenari in her research, while LaFundició collective worked out the program at Espai 14–15 with the express intention of establishing a continuous exchange between the artists of the program and diverse historiographical and sociological sectors. By running the project through the space the collective has in Bellvitge, the Tricentenari has entered, at the same time, in relation with the preparations of a celebration that the neighborhood is organizing for its fiftieth anniversary in 2015.

Incorporating Bellvitge50 into *Preventive Archaeology* has allowed the comparison of two celebrations that are built on very different discourses, means and magnitudes, while providing new connections to link the historiographical sector with the artistic point of view. In this sense, we can say that the project launched by LaFundició has worked as an accelerator of the shifts that have been proposed by the different artists of the program. Espai 14–15 has become an opportunity to distance them from the artistic context and connect them more intensely with other social and historiographical facts, in such a way, that some parts of the research have crossbred to the point where they no longer could be identified as those conventional practices they started with.

The inclusion of this element in the context of *Preventive Archaeology* has unleashed its greater spread and, at the same time, downplayed its origin. With LaFundició’s action, some of the sites of memory and commemoration that those displacements aim to steer would have been worked with the goal of becoming potential spaces for generating emergent situations. This situation has demonstrated, at the same time, that the museum of contemporary art, continuously emergent from the start, is equally resistant to being read also as a place of memory.

Brian O’Doherty’s critique is known, at the end of the sixties, for giving the white cube the museological typology on which great part of the activities of the museum of contemporary art rest today. With this typology, this artist observed how, modernity had found the stage on which to make possible the fiction of an autonomous and transcendent art at the same time that the museum became a place where time and space were suspended. Years later, O’Doherty observed how the white cube had also led a “radical forgetting” in relation to the exhibiting innovations that visionary artists had practiced at the beginning of the Twentieth Century (1999: 109). At the end of the nineties, Mary Anne Staniszewski recovered this last thought and considered that amnesia, in the context of mediation and the design of exhibitions, had been somehow generalized in western societies.

From the standpoint of the show, the deconstruction of the exhibition context has been one of the strategies that artists and curators have elaborated under the shelter of these thoughts. As for *Preventive Archaeology,* anyone can see how most of the artists have also played with the context, which they have related to aspects of their respective displacements. Oriol Vilanova has brought to Espai 13 an echo of his critique to the modern architecture of Mies van der Rohe’s Pavilion, while hiding, not the system of mediation, but his own oeuvre in the exhibition space. Lúa Coderch, on the other hand, has put her reflection in relationship with the perception context of the present as a temporal experience, huge in comparison with the time the viewer

could spend in the show. Meanwhile, Lola Lasurt articulated her project with the same policy as that of the institution, promoting, however, a tension between the different meanings and forms of mediation that coexist around Joan Miró's work.

In the case of Espai 14–15, the displacements that have taken place have not, however, been based on questioning the symbolic level of the exhibition space. LaFundició derives its practices from concrete possibilities of transformation and, this way, more than a deconstruction, Espai 14–15 has brought considerable pressure to the notion of the white cube and its culture. While the projects for *Preventive Archaeology* ended their displacements there, in Espai 13, largely stable and clean of controversy, by moving them to Bellvitge, the proposals were left at the mercy of leaving the processes under the unforeseen mediation of those surroundings.

IV

To summarize, which is then the art of the future? To what extent can art propose alternative futures?

The art of the future is an art based in performative historiography. To propose futures is to experiment with the conditions in which culture is produced in relation to schemes of temporality —the gears that articulate past, present and future. To propose futures is to generate comparisons between representations, discourses, technologies and the instruments with which memory is produced, as well as the means with which it spreads, the data selected and omitted. From a performative perspective, time is not irreversible but inflectable. Bruno Latour says, "We have never moved either forward or backward. We have always actively sorted out elements belonging to different times", and adds, "It is the sorting that makes the times, not the times that make the sorting" (Latour 1993: 76).

The question of the future, however, does not have much to do with the possibility of representing and anticipating it, but to articulate it physically, at present, by means of practice, and to "twist" it, to use the expression of Andrew Pickering. Hence, the importance of activating a *performative mediation* does not consider art as something autonomous or, simultaneously, a puppet at the service of specific social interactions.

It is a mediation that does not try to determine the representations of the art practice, or its subjects or discourses; it understands the need to involve the moorings art establishes with the world in order to make experimentation effective and multiply itself. The contours of that practice are established, in this case, by means of a dialectic established between the resistance that appears in the process and the attempts to overcome that resistance; and, thus, the more materials, means, meanings, conventions and contexts we can gather and twist together with that movement, the more likely will be that, through practice, emergent movements will take place.

To recognize the temporality and contingency of the white cube is something essential when trying to incorporate the museum of contemporary art to that movement. The museum must be recognized as a memorial place, as a node in a network, with exhibition galleries, collections and departments that are permeable, and that are, therefore, also likely to be articulated within practice and shift toward areas that cannot be, beforehand, foreseen. In contrast, the *tabula rasa* museum has de urge to press the reset button after each exhibition in order to begin at the presumption of its initial state, which is the white cube.

The art of the future will not be possible if its practice does not entangle itself with the world, its schemes of temporality, its means o production and its institutions. Or, at least, this has been the aim of *Preventive Archaeology.*

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