

A conversation with Marina Garcés

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Pablo Martínez The first question is related to the frame within which this interview takes place. This is an academic journal that brings together research by various artists, academics and curators, who carry out image-based practice, plotting visual narratives that respond to the traditional ways of producing knowledge, or to be more precise, practice that deals with other ways of activating thought. Despite meeting several requirements imposed by academia and other such journals (i.e. that the articles are peer-reviewed, and follow the APA referencing guidelines, etc.), *Re-visiones* has not been recognised by the Complutense University within its own catalogue. In your work, you defend writing and dismiss its standardisation, but at times being outside of the academic circles only perpetuates the otherwise precarious situation. This brings about constant inside/outside-the-institution dynamics. How can we make these dynamics productive, instead of exhausting?

Marina Garcés What we have today is unsustainable. I'm increasingly convinced that the academic world's current direction is one that cannot be sustained for much longer without it all blowing up. This might come about in various different ways: either heading towards a radical and irreversible divorce between academic production and other cultural and epistemological activity; or perhaps towards the emergence of new hybrid and mixed ways of sharing ideas and knowledge, forming an inside and an outside of the university. That is, I don't think it will take long for the academic system's current inside/outside to be radicalised, or at least be radically questioned. More and more people are no longer willing to lead these double lives so often demanded of us: to keep on building up impossibly brilliant CVs at university, whilst we write, give talks and organise events in contexts that are not formally recognised. The breaking down, both of the model itself and of all of us, is there to be seen, it's in the very near future. You ask me how to change it: this question, with no simple solutions, no magic formula, is part of the challenge I face to maintain my teaching work in the public university.

PM On the other hand, leaving the university behind favours the de-institutionalising effect produced by neoliberalism and its project of cognitive capitalism. In this sense, to what extent should we help strengthen an institution that rejects and excludes unbridled forms of knowledge?

MG I don't think it's a question of strengthening it, but rather ensuring that it is not so easily expropriated. I think we

have to dig our heels in; we shouldn't leave it so quickly in the hands of privatised mercantile and productive interests. They're not just private interests, but rather they are valued in terms of the standards of the private economy. We need to be there because the public university is a collective creation, a common good belonging to all of society, and there are still many young and not-so-young students who go there to acquire more than just a profession or a qualification – they want to learn, and meet other people. If we keep discipline or the more rebellious forms of knowledge for ourselves, for those in small, informed circles, be they in the field of high culture or minority activist groups, we are not truly intervening in the social sphere, but rather creating self-referential bubbles of critical self-consumption. I think we know what we are talking about, because we all find ourselves, in some way, on the verge of being trapped inside these bubbles.

PM You often speak of how to make people think, as well as where this thinking is produced. You also speak of the role of education, and the creation of a collective “us” which goes beyond the individual. In this sense, what kind of educational model do you think is best for this creation of a collective “us”? To what extent is the Bologna Process, despite being a neoliberal project, related to ways of thinking that foster collective work as opposed to the previous model of the self-centred student?

MG I don't think there are models that work perfectly in all contexts. I think that, more than just models, we have to look at problems, tools and solutions. Starting there, we can transmit and transfer knowledge, but we cannot just clone it, regardless of its contents and consequences. The example you give, concerning Bologna, is in this sense paradigmatic. Of course, the Bologna Process channels and proposes changes for problems that really did exist and still exist in the universities. For example, rigidity, authoritarianism, unidirectionality, endogamy, etc. But another issue is the consequences of the solutions put forward by Bologna, within the proposed administrative-legal framework. We might find, as I believe the case to be, that they are polar opposites.

PM But what would the educational model of shared responsibility be? And related to this, how can we bring about an education that goes against professionalisation? What are the educational forms of experimentation?

MG We have to avoid reproducing the purist ideas of a certain bourgeoisie, given that in past decades you could set out a clean division between vocations and professions. We have to think about the material conditions of our vital, cultural, artistic, poetic and scientific commitments, etc. If we don't, we are doomed to live precariously. This doesn't mean seeing how they can be adapted to the market, but quite the opposite. It means thinking, in practice and in theory, how to link life and thought, production and creation, theory and practice, in such a way that the market and political system can be transformed via real learning practices, and not via implausible utopian models.

PM In a recent lecture, you spoke about the way in which, following on from Foucault and the post-structuralists, we have focussed on the relationship between knowledge and power, having sidelined the existing relationship between knowledge and emancipation. I understand that this distinction would not refer exclusively to the knowledge of accumulation, i.e. that which was most closely linked with power and sometimes with this same emancipation, understood as the breaking from certain chains, as proposed by modernity. However, what kind of knowledge could lead to processes

of emancipation today? And I use the term processes because I understand emancipation as something performative, and not as a fixed state.

MG For me, the conditions for emancipation can no longer be found in certain kinds of knowledge, but rather in the way they can be related with their consequences. At other times in modern history, people trusted in the capacity of one sole scientific or artistic language to condense and offer all the tools for emancipation: physics/mathematics in the 17th century, biology or economics in the 18th and 19th centuries, an aesthetic education from more romantic concepts...But in reality, and far more intensely today, what we need is a new alliance between knowledge and practice that allows us to have a non-delegating or subordinating relationship with them. How much of what we supposedly know do we truly comprehend, and might affect the way we lead our lives? Less and less so... That's why I'm saying that knowledge and emancipation have split in two. What we know does not have any direct influence upon how we can transform our ways of living.

PM If we accept that it is impossible to be outside of capitalism, what room is there left for emancipation? Is it possible? On the other hand, if we just accept that there is no longer any thought about such a promise...Can emancipation exist tied to the present, without a future project?

MG Emancipation means, for me, being able to intervene collectively in the very conditions of life. And I don't think that depends on some external place we should be heading towards, or a tomorrow onto which we can project ourselves, but rather how we relate to our daily lives, both close and far from us. From there, the future does not matter so much as a kind of horizon to head towards, but instead the future is that which we already are. Of course we should care about the future. The presentism of the here and now has already been carried out by the society of consumption and its continuous destruction of our psyche, our lives and our relationship with the planet. We want a future, but the future is that which we already are, from the possibility of relating with it, with the ability of decision-making and evaluation, in both a personal and collective sense.

PM The 15M movement had a huge impact on all of us. That experience can be seen clearly reflected in many of your publications and articles. I remember a passage in *Un mundo común* in which, following the story of the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, you describe the dawn of an era in which the body has moved to centre stage, in the middle of it all. However, ever since then, other bodies have been imposed, or are imposing themselves, on the public space. Bodies that remind us more of the fascist mass than of the molecular mass of the people rising up in the streets and squares. Do you think we can consider that cycle closed, i.e. the one that started with that young man burning himself to death in front of parliament? Are we going back to a cooling of bodies, or a heating of distances? How can we defend this co-responsibility, in view of this distance?

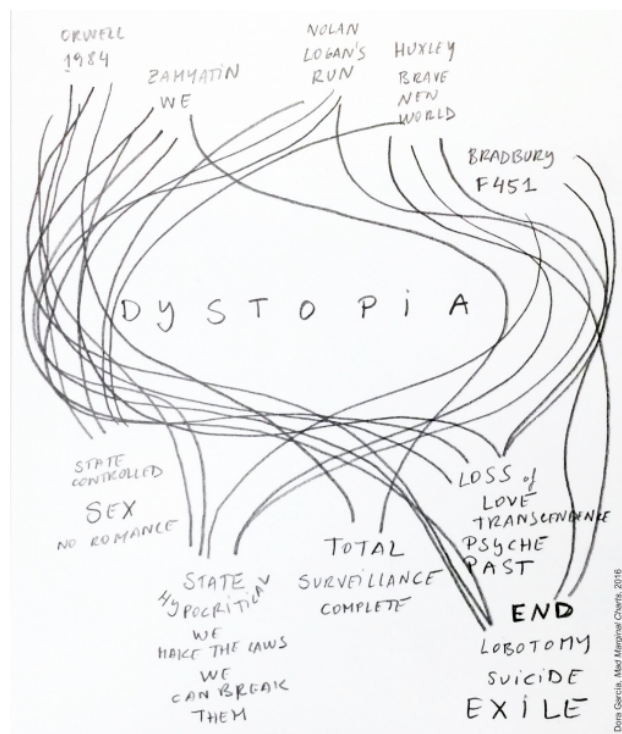
MG I recently showed some images from 15M at a primary school, to children about 11 years old, and they said they were photos of Black Friday in Madrid. More than fascist masses, what we still have are the consumerist masses who behave in the same way, as dictated by whatever absurd slogan with which they have no previous connection, but they soon form a raw, rapid identification with it. Regarding cycles, I believe we start thinking about these things too soon,

trying to divide them into discrete periods of time. Just before 15M, we were all immersed in what we were calling the *impasse*, without seeing what would blossom from our own political languages. Just after 15M, everybody was writing books about its shutting down and a bit later about its political translation into the new parties. And what if we learn to think in terms of longer time periods, from broader backgrounds, along paths which can bring together the visible and the invisible from all times, and all places? What is closest to us, today, can easily seem distant. We live in transit, in migration, in gentrified neighbourhoods, on social networks... But at the same time, the distant seems close: the melting of the polar ice caps, the financial bubbles that plunge us into debt, the bodies of refugees... Politics must be rethought with these variable geographies in mind.



PM This interview/questionnaire forms part of this journal's edition on the fictions of the common. When we were thinking about the theme for this edition last January, 2016, we were drawn to the new behaviour patterns and attitudes that brought about new scenarios of the possible, showing the importance of producing new symbols for what appeared to be a new era. In this sense, what is, in your opinion, the role of theatricality and images in the production of new forms of shared living?

MG Those of us who politicised ourselves in the 90s got straight into the politics of performativity: from the Zapatista balaclava to Reclaim the Streets, the mass protests of the anti-globalization movement, guerrilla communication... Even the black bloc were theatrical, performative groups. Every action, as with every word, is gauged by its effects on reality, and these effects have to happen, they have to take place, and the body must be used. The problem is when theatricality is measured in terms of targets, of audiences, of representational quotas and its representation effects. We have to tread carefully here, because otherwise this theatricality quickly becomes propaganda, or, to use a more contemporary word, marketing.



PM To continue with the theme of fictions... following Trump's victory in the USA, it looks like we're entering a dystopian present. The migrant crises, the rise of the far right in Europe and the acceleration of ecological catastrophe – all signs point towards apocalypse if we don't do something about it. To what extent was this dystopia predicted in literature, and how much do fictions also foreshadow dystopian imaginaries? In this sense, I would like to discuss with you this graphic by Dora García, which is highly relevant to the present situation as well as the article by Bea Ballard in *The Guardian*, regarding her father and the way fictions anticipate reality.

MG Saint Augustine said in the 5th century that “the world is ageing”, and it wasn't until the 18th century that the spectators of the political and industrial revolutions got out of that framework, as we'd say today, and they invented the historical concept of progress. It would appear that we humans have only felt at home in this world in a handful of moments. Again, it appears that today we are on the outside, extinguished or projected onto new worlds, like the one that might be built for a privileged few on Mars or on the exoplanet discovered by Anglada, a Catalan scientist exiled in London. We have very little faith in our ability to build a world, in this world. It's easier for us to picture the many ways in which we are constantly taking it apart. However, we project ourselves onto constructions of other worlds, utopian or otherwise, in which we certainly would know how to turn our actions into the right conditions for building paradise.

PM Fictions offer predictions or *presentiments*... In the work that you do with *Espai en Blanc*, i.e. *Presentiments*, to what extent is the need to share these premonitions your starting point? Physical premonitions, like gut feelings that push us onwards to the future. Your use of images and text for these compositions is really striking. In this sense, are presentiments always in the form of an image, a fiction of what's to come?

MG The *Presentiments* are situated in the time of what's-going-on. They challenge the breaking down between the theory that represents what has already been, and the modelization that tries to summarise what ought to be. Between what has been, and what ought to be, what is there? The what's-going-on. This is the space-time of the *Presentiment* and its blank sheet as a field of play to make a mark upon. More than fictions, we search for clues, indications, signs that open up routes that will perhaps not be the same for everyone, but they will have shared their stake on a radical reading

of our burgeoning present. All the forces of order coincide today in disconnecting the present from the future. Even teachers speak today of how to educate for a future that we know nothing about, that is, for absolute adaptability. We predict that our futures will be whatever we are capable of thinking in our present.

PM In one recent intervention, you appealed to certain humanities in transition, and to the need for change in relation to the era-defining crisis. In many forums, there is constant reference to the thirties and the rise of fascism. However, it seems that's there is an overwhelming chance of ecological collapse. What is the link between discovering the material limits of the planet and the bodily turn you note in 21st century philosophy?

MG The turn towards the body in philosophy, the arts and activism has scaled up: we used to speak of the individual body and now we refer, inseparably, to the body of the planet. In a contaminated earth, at the breaking point of not only its energy resources but also its food resources, the body is no longer the organism that places all of us in a more or less autonomous relationship with life. Instead, it is a tight network of relationships, that includes the natural, the chemical, the artificial, the digital... I'm not thinking about an imaginary cyborg but rather something far more precarious, i.e. the simultaneous collapse of all of these words on our finite and highly limited capacity for life. Ever since the 18th century our thinking has pushed the limits of our bodily, mental and affective capacity for living lives beyond that which we are. We killed God but we wanted to become gods, and we call that freedom. Perhaps it is time to relearn the finiteness of our bodies, our lives, our species and our planet, not as a prison (of the soul) but rather as the condition for a fuller and fairer (or better adapted) life.

PM Recently you have spoken about Rameau, Diderot's nephew, and his invocation of the body and its material needs. Should philosophy return to those figures who demand the material conditions for existence? Is it more urgent now, due to the present precarity, to defend that implication?

MG Philosophy, in the singular, is nothing. It's an absurd subject going ever backwards in the educational system, a section in bookshops, or a summoning of the melancholic western identity. Philosophy is, if anything, a disputed terrain. It is, literally, the possibility to dispute ideas using arguments, and the search for common truths. In this sense, there is a philosophy that has successfully defended something beyond the body, the eternity of ideas compared to the expiry date of life. Others have done the exact opposite, taking their position in the finite and needy bodies we are, in order to think about ourselves from there and beyond. There is not an idealist past of philosophy against a materialist future. There is a tension between idealist and materialist positions that has never been resolved. The question is, what sense does it make today, in our capitalist society, for there to be a materialism that is neither restrictive nor economic. The philosophies that try and think of human nature starting from its very precarity and vulnerability are, for me, helping find an interesting place where we can find ourselves again as material and form, that is, as what we are and at the same time what we are remaking in ourselves. That's why precarity cannot just be thought as the capacity to suffer pain or loss, but rather as an incompleteness that is creative potential and continuity with other incomplete beings. From there, our fundamental precarity does not only need care, but also commitment and experimentation. The creation, always, of new possibilities.