

## IN THE BEGINNING WAS AFFECT<sup>1</sup>

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### (Prelude)

An affect is what comes first in the works of Mapa Teatro: an affect that, at a particular moment, is especially pulsing in the bodies of its founders (the siblings Heidi and Rolf Abderhalden), making them tense. This is the trigger of their creating processes: a "map" that is charted in three movements.<sup>2</sup>

### First movement: Toward listening to the most troubling affect

The first movement consists in listening attentively to the intensive character of the affect, which makes claims on us to be enunciated in the lived experience of their/our present time; listening to its vibrational frequency. And if this practice of listening comes first it is not only because of its position on a chronological timeline, but first and foremost because it is the potential carrier of another temporality that suffuses the process from beginning to end: a becoming in which the affect triggering the creating process will be embodied in the work that results from it (if all goes well).

Viewed from outside, it seems like nothing, since affects do not have images, words, or gestures; they do not have a language. And yet they are real —or, more precisely, they are the emotions of the real, "vital emotions" (which have nothing to do with "psychological emotions"). They consist of the effects of the forces that agitate the living body of a particular world on the living bodies that constitute it. In sum, they are the presence of the other (a person, a landscape, a political atmosphere, a work of art, a text, etc.) in our bodies. They are a living presence that impregnates them: we are inhabited by a kind of foreign body that leaves us in an unsettled state. We are unable to access it in our experience as "subjects," but there is another sphere of subjective experience, proper to our living condition, in which this access is possible: an "out-of-subject."

For those of us pale faces who are structured in the anthropo-Euro-phallogocentric mode of subjectivation<sup>3</sup> proper to the colonial-capitalist regime, which reduces our subjective experience to the "subject," such a troubled state is frightening. Since we are deprived of access to the out-of-

subject, we know nothing about the unsettled state into which this foreign body thrusts us, nor about what prompted it, much less about what to do with it.

If we are disposed not to give up in the face of being dissociated from our out-of-subject subjective experience and we seek instead to activate it, we realize that this strange state of mind is telling us that the affects pulsing in our bodies harbor embryos of the future that presage the loss of meaning of some of the forms in which life expresses itself in the present. Asphyxiated in the prison of these forms that weaken its pulsation, life imposes itself on us with the demand to set it free so that it may resume its movement. Its liberation will require the germination of these embryos that inhabit us. But whether or not this depends on us: we must take action if we are to restore a vital equilibrium, and this is true for all living things. In the case of human beings, this equilibrium is also emotional and existential, and what takes action in us in order to restore it is desire. When it is successful, it fulfills the ethical destiny of the drive [*pulsión*], where life meets with responses to its will to persevere.

The response to this demand is not obvious. If, first and foremost, it implies disposing ourselves to listen to affects —as Mapa Teatro does— germination is only possible when, based on what we manage to hear, desire is capable of creating a place of body-and-speech that is not necessarily or scarcely verbal: a place that would contain in itself indices of gestational futures and which, because it contains them, would unveil our asphyxiation in our current modes of existence, bringing us to complete their germination by moving away from the agonizing forms and letting them finish dying.

### Second movement: In search of the catalytic element

The task of embodying this place is precisely what mobilizes Mapa Teatro's creating imagination —which has nothing to do with merely "creative" imagination, insofar as the latter can be dissociated from affects. In order to confront this task, the second movement involves Heidi and Rolf going out in search of an element, which they occasionally come across by chance, and which carries a vibrational frequency that resonates with the triggering affect of the piece in question. This element acts as a conductor of that affect, like a material that conduct electricity or heat: it can be an image, a body, a sound, a gesture, a texture, a poem, a fragment of a book or archive, a news item, a photograph, a certain sequence in a film, a specific detail from a memory or a dream. It can even be a text, but in such cases this will not be the work's only organizational element, nor its structuring element —as it functioned in dramatic theater— but rather a sort of *objet trouvé* like any of the other elements that will carry out the

montage of the piece (in the cinematic sense of the term). This sort of *objet trouvé*, whose importance resides in the affect it conveys, will be the matrix cell, the catalyst of other cells that will gradually come together to compose the artwork-body that will endow the affect in question with sensibility.

### **Third movement: Activating an ephemeral experimental community**

Once this element is found, the third movement gets under way with the activation of the experimental community that constitutes this "artists' laboratory" (as they themselves call it, and not by chance), getting the new project started. They present the group only with the aforementioned element that carries in itself a trace of the triggering affect, and along with it a question: "What effect does that generate in your bodies?" And each person answers at some point in the process, which requires not only the disposition to be attuned to such an affect in their own bodies and to feel around for what it tells them, but also to take it as a guide in the search for elements that, like the initial *objet trouvé*, will give this affect a body that participates in the composition of the work, assuming its responsibility in the collective creation.

With the element found by Heidi and Rolf and their question about its effects, they outline the contours of an immaterial space made of a diagram of forces, a ritual territory in which the process of collaborative creation shared by all will transpire, in a sort of collective dream. The established element will function as a catalyst for those other elements that, by way of resonances, the members of the group will bring, with the singular sensibility of each of them and the channel of expression that is proper to him/her/them. And thus the piece gets put together, only becoming visible at the end of the creating process. There is nothing in the piece whose presence is gratuitous.

### **An ethical compass conducts the outline of the map**

These three movements reveal the mode through which Heidi and Rolf take up their roles in the group. They do not propose a script, a libretto, a protocol of actions, characters, or even an idea, much less a message or an ideology such as might be expected from a playwright or director of traditional theater. But of itself this would not set them apart from other creators, since the fact of not starting off from predefined elements characterizes a whole branch of critical experimentation that has been displacing dramatic and psychological theater, a tendency that has been growing since the 1980s.

What makes the artists who direct Mapa so singular is what they propose in lieu of these predefined elements proper to the theater and to traditional artistic practice: the ethical responsibility of caring for the vital urgencies that present themselves in the moment, which they assume and call upon through the three moments described above —something invisible and inaudible, but nevertheless conducive of unusual effects, charged with poetic "potency."<sup>4</sup> In other words, they take charge of the affect that asks to be granted entry at that specific moment of collective life, creating a path toward expressing it as precisely as possible, and generating the mobilization of that same responsibility in all those who will participate in the experimental community that they activate toward that purpose.

Taking this stance to its most radical conclusion implies that the form the piece will acquire is not predetermined, either. The final form will be defined by the triggering affect, and by the sorts of *objets trouvés* that will be used to bring it to the surface. In principle, this form will extrapolate the limits of what we call "theater" and, beyond it, the limits of the officially delimited territories for other artistic practices. The ultimate fate of the work can be scenic, but also operatic, radiophonic, filmic or even a performance, an installation, a text, a workshop, urban interventions, exhibitions in museums, galleries or biennials, performance-based conferences, or a singular mix of several of these languages —in sum, those that would require the conducting affect to come into existence. All this forms Mapa Teatro's pluriverse.<sup>5</sup>

It was necessary to find as precise a name as possible to describe the artistic territory that Mapa instates, which moves without the limitation of borders: an artistic territory with no fixed residence, with no divisions or categories, with no previously defined delimitations, in which apparatuses, languages and formats of all kinds are valid for disclosing an affect. They christened it "living arts." The qualifier "living" does not refer in this case exclusively to a "live" performance —as in traditional categories of theater, performance art, the circus, dance, or musical performances— but rather to "the living" (*lo vivo*) properly so-called, in the sense of the active presence of a creating and transfiguring potency which defines life in its essence.

If subjectivities reduced to the subject need to confine themselves to categories that frame artistic production, only managing to move by having a cultural map with indications that trace out their steps, for the subjectivities that insist on reconnecting with out-of-subject experiences, allowing themselves to be conducted by affects and by their friction with established forms, such categories arise as obstacles interfering with the creating process. Such subjectivities need to move out into the open air in order to search for resonances anywhere they might be found, and to use them to delineate territories. Is this not what characterizes an artist-

subjectivity?

### A shared ethical-aesthetic-political responsibility

At this point, then, we can add the qualifiers ethical, aesthetic and political to the responsibility that drives the creating processes of this artists' laboratory, a responsibility called upon in the collective itself as well as in its publics: ethical, because it responds to an urgency of life and implies being at the level of that which it asks of us as a condition of affirming itself in its will to persevere as satisfactorily as possible; aesthetic because the success of this response depends on a creating process that gives rise to a body-expression for the affect that demands to come into existence; and political, because it promotes a displacement within the dominant mode of production of subjectivity in the colonial-capitalist regime. But what is political about this? A regime, however it might be, is not an abstraction but rather a mode of living and a type of subjectivity that corresponds to it and grants it existential consistency, without which it would not be sustained. The displacement that operates here therefore influences the kinds of micropolitical dynamics that sustain the colonial-capitalist regime. What gives this active deviation its combative character is the struggle to reappropriate the destiny of the drive (*pulsión*) that guides its poetics.

Is this not, in the end, the political potency proper to art? It is a question of a micropolitical potency that has nothing to do with so-called "committed art," a vehicle of macropolitical consciousness-building dissociated from the affects of the present, nor with the flip side of the same coin: the formalisms of all kinds that, although they may have completely different languages and strategies, are equally dissociated from those affects.

In summary, an ethical compass conducts the group's desire in their work, and guided by it, it conducts us, their public, if we are vulnerable to what they are proposing to us. In its will to persevere, life attracts the needle of this compass and orients it. The needle points in the directions we are to find the elements that carry the vibrational frequencies that resonate with the triggering affect, with which desire must connect. It also indicates which directions will need to be avoided if we are to create satisfactory conditions for germinating the embryo of the future carried by that affect —a germination on which life depends in order to resume its flow. The piece gets created thus, little by little: a sort of dream world with an enchanting power that clears a path for us to recognize in our own bodies the affect that unleashed it, the germs of the future carried by this affect that invites us, above all, to do our part in producing the conditions for this gestation to reach its conclusion.

Thus far I have attempted to provide a conceptual description of the process of creating these dream worlds as they have been made present in my own body since I began bearing witness to the work of Mapa Teatro. But I have not yet mentioned even a single work that would illustrate some of the manifestations of this process. I now turn to doing so, privileging *Anatomía de la violencia en Colombia* since this is the only work by the group that I have followed closely from its beginnings. I will limit myself to pointing out some of the elements that constitute the four sections of this project, particularly some of its figures. In this essay I cannot elaborate on all of its richness, for the figuration of affects, of the woven and embroidered designs and the colorful costumes designed by Elizabeth Abderhalden; the luminous atmospheres created by Jean François Dubois; the soundscapes and musical compositions by Juan Ernesto Díaz; the images, films and videos processed live by Ximena Vargas; the little machines and unusual objects by José Ignacio Rincón; the delicate visual elaborations by Santiago Sepúlveda; the grace, vocal richness and performative potency of Agnes Brekke; the vitality and shamanic potency of Andrés Castañeda; or the moving presence of actor Julián Díaz. Together, these and so many other elements form the clay with which the enchanting worlds offered to us by this lab will be sculpted: a "trans-Latin-American neo-barroso"<sup>6</sup> mix out of which the affects of those worlds emanate.

### **Anatomy of the affects of violence**

One of the most frequent triggers in the creating process of this artists' laboratory has been the affect of the violence of the armed conflict in Colombia, in the countless facets in which it has presented itself and in its intense presence in the bodies that are living through this experience. Confronting this affect led the Abderhalden siblings and their artists' laboratory to construct a corpus of works they called *Anatomía de la violencia en Colombia*. They simultaneously produced a series of "variations" (films, installations, performances) over the course of the eight years that this creating process lasted (2010–2017).

## *The Holy Innocents: Vertigo between feast and violence*



In *The Holy Innocents*, the first work in this anatomy, the triggering affect is the presence of feast days so intense and eroticized, and as routine as the presence of the most extreme violence— but even more so there are the affects associated with the swiftness and ease with which one unexpectedly turns into the other, so abruptly that it produces confusion and terror. Truly, all the bodies that inhabit Latin America live through the excesses of this endemic madness, each with its own specific characteristics, as in the case of Colombia. This experience is expressed clearly by a popular saying in Guapi, a small town on Colombia's Pacific Coast that provides the setting of the catalyzing element for one of the triggering affects in the creation of *The Holy Innocents*: "The devil got into the party."<sup>7</sup>

There is another affect, intrinsically tied to the first, that also acts as a trigger for this work: the presence of slavery, which participated in the colonial foundation of the country and its mode of production of existence and, especially, its enduring permanence, more than five centuries later. The memory of slavery persists in the bodies of Colombians, and in those of all the former colonies in which there was slave labor. They still find themselves under the effect of the trauma that such cruelty produced and continues to produce, especially in the descendants of Africans and indigenous peoples; a trauma relatively little worked through until today, and which constantly generates symptoms of all kinds, like a ghost that never stops haunting us.

The catalyzing element in *The Holy Innocents* is a feast of the same name that is celebrated in Guapi every year on December 28. During this feast a

reversal of the violence of masters against slaves is staged in the streets, in which the latter are those who give the lash to the former. All the participants are men dressed in women's clothes, their faces covered by grotesque masks, running through the streets and arbitrarily whipping anyone who crosses their path. The majority of their victims are nevertheless also descendants of Africans, rather than whites, as might have been expected. It is part of this ritual feast that those who occupy the place of the victims (the "slaves") should try to escape punishment, but curiously many of them throw themselves to the ground and deliver themselves to the lash.

According to Mapa Teatro's own text, "This is a party, a celebration, but for those who have never been here before, it could very well seem like something else: a punishment? A collective catharsis? A nightmare? A paramilitary massacre?"<sup>8</sup> We might add that when a trauma is not worked through out of fear of disaggregation, one of the psyche's defense mechanisms is to identify with the aggressor. The roles are thus reversed: the place of the victim is projected outward, away from oneself, whether onto the aggressors or onto someone else who is chosen to occupy the place of the scapegoat, in this way freeing oneself for a brief moment from the unendurable agony of being confined to the position of the one being humiliated: a liberation that is more on the order of delirium but that, like all defenses, makes a pause from this agony viable.



One participant in the process of creating this work was the Afro-Latin American actor Julián Díaz, originally from the same part of Colombia where Guapi is located.<sup>9</sup> His presence was indispensable in that piece, which



addresses the permanence of slavery in the subjectivities structured by the racialization that extends, sustains and naturalizes the cruel inequality of rights in all contexts of social life in modern Western anthropo—Euro-phallo-ego-logocentric culture under the colonial-capitalist regime.

But let it be clear that, like all the other actors, he plays no role other than himself —or, more precisely, he does not represent blackness and slavery, but rather "is" their very presence in his body, on stage. Mapa Teatro's actors never represent anything; they are rather what the Abderhalden siblings call "figures," made up of their own histories. In this sense, the people who act in their works are, according to them, "more performers than actors: a way of making collective history concrete as it inhabits a singular body."

### The affect of "race"

Racialization is so central to the shading of the affect of violence that *The Holy Innocents* pointed toward confronting that we must pause here to address this question.

As we know, based on the invention of the notion of "race" in the context of the colonial-capitalist regime, a scientific fiction was created according to which there were populational differences in the degree of biological complexity of the human body and its abilities. On the basis of this fiction, individuals are distributed according to a hierarchy of unequal access to rights, which comes to be naturalized, weakening the ability to question it. Although this hierarchy initially takes skin color as the sign of the destiny of a place of supposedly inferior human beings —the color of the enslaved populations' skin in the context of colonization— such a relational dynamic is actualized by adjudicating this same place on the basis of other signs situated on diverse instances of life in society; signs of ethnic group, gender, sex, age group, bodily aesthetic and, obviously, class, many of which are present in one and the same body. The result of this is that, at the limit, everyone is racialized —that is, evaluated in comparison to the "male, European, white, heteronormative, patriarchal, etc." pattern that occupies the apex of this hierarchy, which, despite being imaginary, has concrete effects in reality. Given this naturalized delirium, that pattern is imposed as an ideal model to which everyone should aspire.

Therefore, the invitation for Julián to act in this work was a political gesture. It did not simply involve a macropolitical need to include an actor of African heritage in a piece that "thematizes" black slaves, much less filling a quota of black people in a play. It was unquestionably important to move away from the tradition of blackface, which involved using white actors with their

faces painted black in order to portray characters of African heritage in film or theater. Likewise, it was unquestionably important to establish quotas, which, although they are still far from what would be minimally satisfactory for undoing this state of things, are being overturned in some of the former colonies, like Colombia, that have always excluded African-descended and indigenous peoples from the cultural and academic scenes. But doing so only to meet the criteria of a politically correct protocol turns artistic practices that opt into this practice into initiatives that are only there to placate their/our white guilt over the violence of racialization. It is not enough to become conscious of the violence of inequality and to resist it only in the macropolitical sphere, even though this is indispensable. Its naturalization requires us to investigate its presence in our own subjectivity, in our modes of living and relating to each other, in our actions and in our imaginaries so that we may try to undo it, creating other politics of subjectivation, other regimes of the unconscious and their respective formations in the social field. In sum, it is necessary to incorporate micropolitical work into macropolitical resistance in the face of inequality, to dissolve its naturalization and the idea of race that it upholds, without which nothing will be unseated in the colonial-capitalist scene —which, in light of this, it would be more precise to call "racializing-colonial-capitalist." This artists' laboratory's work seems deliberately to avoid this trap, into which it could easily have fallen.

### ***Discourse of a Decent Man: Ethnofiction of a War without End***



The trigger for the second section, *Discourse of a Decent Man*, is constituted by the affects of the war on drugs, which has spanned decades and decades, entailing a colossal expenditure on the part of the State and has always been lost. Here, the carrier of these affects will be a political discourse supposedly written by Pablo Escobar, which would have been found in his shirt pocket when he was assassinated. The discourse is actually an invention that the Abderhalden siblings based on a repeated gesture of Escobar's, which consisted in taking a piece of paper from his shirt pocket in all of his public acts. The discourse is a montage of several of the speeches and interviews that the drug trafficker had given.

This is an example of an "ethnofiction," a term that Mapa Teatro borrows from the French filmmaker and anthropologist Jean Rouch, and which they have resignified in order to characterize one of their procedures for fictionalizing the document and the archive.

In *Discourse of a Decent Man*, their ephemeral experimental community includes don Danilo Jiménez and his musical group, the Marco Fidel Suárez Band. Rolf and Heidi went in search of don Danilo after having read his name in a book about Pablo Escobar written by the journalist and former mayor of Medellín from 2008 to 2011, Alonso Salazar Jaramillo.<sup>10</sup> According to this story, don Danilo and his band ended up being the victims of an attack by Pablo Escobar on the police in the 1980s, when a bomb exploded in the Plaza de Toros La Macarena in Medellín, where his band was playing. In the attack, don Danilo lost several members of his band, his wife, and also his memory. As a result of the cerebral sequelae he suffered, don Danilo spent seven years wandering alone through the streets without knowing who he was. By the time Heidi and Rolf met him, he had already returned to himself and had reformed his band with a new generation of musicians.



While a projected text narrates don Danilo's story, in one scene of the work, he sings *Amapola* —a famous love song, popular throughout Latin America<sup>11</sup>— accompanying himself with a pair of *claves*.<sup>12</sup> He plays so delicately that it is almost inaudible. The rhythm of that firm/fragile percussion seems to dance with his tremulous, almost mute singing, in spite of which —or rather because of it— this subtle dance, irradiated by his presence center stage, seems to sustain the potency of the enchantment of everything before our eyes.

### ***The Unaccounted: The discontent of "non-existence"***

The third section is *The Unaccounted: A Triptych*. In it, the two first sections are brought together to form a third, separated into cubes that are successively unveiled, one after another, through light. In this unfolding of *Anatomy*, the catalyst is a dream that Vladimir Mayakovsky would have had repeatedly during the final years of his life, as imagined by Antonio Tabucchi in his book *Sogni di sogni*.<sup>13</sup> This dream —and it is unimportant whether it was indeed dreamt by Mayakovsky or by Tabucchi himself in the act of literary imagination upon encountering the writing of this poet or of any other author under the impact of a totalitarian system— stages the affect of a discontent of existing, by effect of Stalinism's forces of violence on the poet's body; an affect so devitalizing and inseparably silencing of his creating imagination that it leads him to suicide.



Presented to the group in the laboratory, the dream became the motor of the affect, catalyzing many other elements that amplified the conduction of its resonant frequency and made it more complex. The first of these involved making the dream into a performance by Julián Díaz himself, who was chosen to embody the affect of the violence that Mayakovsky had experienced, to the point that he felt trapped in the mirage of a "dead end street," which led him not to believe in life and ultimately to commit suicide.

With his presence, Julián made the group's body utterly vulnerable in order to let it be affected by a becoming-black on the basis of the violence of the place of the racialized person that he embodied. This affect, also present in *The Holy Innocents*, is called upon once again here and refined, broadening its complexity.

In his first attempt, Julián retold the dream with feelings of rage and a high dose of aggressiveness, with a tone of victimization in his voice. In that first moment he was thus able to respond to the social place to which he is assigned, indelibly marked by the memory of slavery. Spitting that hate out is more than legitimate, and even unavoidable: it is the least that can be expressed in the face of the racialization of bodies, ordinary violence of the racializing-colonial-capitalist regime.

### Ritual sublimation of hate

After a ritual of displacement in a raw state through embodying the affect that stages Mayakovsky's dream, the group indicated that it was necessary for Julián to go further. Julián knew that what he was looking for was not at all obvious, but that the synergy formed in that collective space would sustain him in his search. The challenge consisted in cleansing his voice of the sentimental layer of psychological emotions and ideological pathos that was mobilized by the violence of racialization on his first conscious approach, in order to arrive at his vital emotions, at his unconscious: the affects of racialization in his body. He knew that, as with all bodies that occupy this place, such affects poison him, weaken his vitality, installing him in such boundless impotence and discontent that he might reach the point of suicide —not necessarily the concrete suicide of Mayakovsky under the violence of Stalinism, but that of a life whose world-germinating destiny had committed suicide. Something in him knew that, without reaching these affects, there was no way to dissolve their effects, which structure the subjectivities and the type of society (our own) that derives from them.

## The voice of a vital emotion



Then Julián insisted. He performatized the dream in different ways until, from his body dressed in the white woman's costume he had used in *The Holy Innocents*, there unexpectedly arose an exhausted voice intoning Mayakovsky's dream in a blues cadence, subtly impregnated with a certain atmosphere characteristic of the Pacific Coast.

The timbre and cadence of that song brought with them the vibration of an affect of a discontent of existing —or rather, the discontent of not existing— that especially impregnates his body marked by blackness, by the high degree of cruelty with which the bodies that carry this mark on their skin have their existence made invisible and negated in Latin American societies. But, at the same time, this same discontent of not existing is also the vital emotion that propels the creation of an acoustic territory in which a re-enchantment of existence is produced, now far from confinement in the impossibility of existing. The same thing happens by wearing women's clothes, covering his/her/their bones and muscles so clumsily that it precludes any categorization of gender or sexuality, or of the binary pairs that organize and structure such categories and their relations — man/woman and heterosexual/homosexual— and their corollary, the damnation of inequality. Socially marked as masculine, his biological body is put in an unstable place —not quite man, not quite woman— a strange place that enchants by creating the possibility of moving along an infinite scale, based on the uneven dance that is created in the resonances between the singular erotic frequencies of each body and its encounters with the

singular erotic frequencies of other bodies, now distanced from those marked places. The reenchantment thus constitutes the reanimation of a life that had erstwhile been confined to the limbo of the living-dead, where not only black people but also women roam about in bewilderment, as do the dissidents of heteronormative patriarchal colonial sexuality, as well as the indigenous peoples of the former colonies, immigrants and refugees, precarized workers and so many others.

There is more. Here we are not only faced with the potency of the real presence of the affect of the racialization of color that unfolds here in the affect of the naturalized stigmatization of all forms of dissidence from the dominant sex/gender system. Something in these affects declares the possibility of freeing life from these forms of violence, making it resonate with other frequencies, acquiring other figures. This instability inhabited by a will to combative deviation is what matters most.

A qualitative leap is produced: from the enraged vindication of a "place of speech," a more than legitimate affirmation of a right to exist, Julián moves toward the embodiment of a "place of voice," affirming the potency that makes him into a singular existence. The new scene instated by the figure recently embodied by Julián is an embryo of the future, on the basis of which the rest of the figures and all the elements of *The Unaccounted: A Triptych* will have to be resignified.

And an unavoidable question arises for us as spectators when the gestation of this embryo of the future appears before us: how to create possibilities for this embryo to gestate in our own existence? Is this sort of question not what we hope to invade us when we encounter a work of art?

### ***The Leaving Party: Violence transfers from the triptych and demands another scene***

This gestation has a temporality of its own that we can share with the artists of this laboratory. With respect to *Anatomy of Violence in Colombia*, the gestation of this corpus of works that make the affect of violence explicit emerges closer to its finale in *The Leaving Party*, the fourth and final installment of this project by the group.

The triggering affect of this final work is a personal experience that the Abderhalden siblings had with a guerrilla leader they had unwittingly met as a "family man," without suspecting his participation in the armed struggle, which they would only discover in 1995. This affect remained in their bodies, asking to be let through and was scarcely able to find its full expression two decades later, at which point accords signed in 2016

brought an end to fifty-two years of armed conflict with the FARC-EP in Colombia. This process of collective working-through made it possible to gain access to this affect and to search for the means to embody it.



In this piece, Mapa Teatro attempts to make sensible the affects of the farewell to the revolutionary project in its Latin American iterations, which spanned half a century in the life of Colombia, as well as across much of the region. The final scene of *The Leaving Party* announces the possibility of germinating the embryos of the future that inhabit our bodies. We are in the middle of the Amazon jungle, where we witness an encounter between Karl Marx and a Yanomami shaman,<sup>14</sup> seated atop a gold mine and chanting in his language.<sup>15</sup> (It is not by chance that the figure of the shaman is performed by Andrés Castañeda, whose shamanic practice lends him a particular affinity to this figure, while Marx is portrayed by a white woman wearing a mask of the revolutionary figure.)

The shaman's chant tells us that, prior to being occupied by so many forms of invasion (by the Spanish, rural elites, guerrilla fighters, military camps, etc.), this land had been a sacred territory to which his community had belonged. In truth, we hardly see them, wrapped as they are in the cloud of tobacco smoke leaving the shaman's lips as he intones his chants. Marx fans the smoke with palm leaves in a gesture that comes from a ritual practiced by several indigenous groups, the function of which consists in



coming into contact with the world of spirits —that is, with the life in their own bodies— or, more precisely, activating the eco-ethological knowing<sup>16</sup> characteristic of this contact. Witnessing this activation creates the conditions for the same to happen in our own bodies, and for us to take this knowing as our guide. It is a knowing involving a learning process that only ends when we die. It is obvious that this can only take place if we are prepared for the becoming of our own subjectivity, on which this contact with the living and the knowing inherent therein invite us to embark.

Would Marx's gesture here indicate that an out-of-subject experience was already beginning to inhabit his subjectivity during that encounter? In any event, it would not be surprising if it did happen in this encounter; it is not by chance that Marx is the figure conceived for this scene. He belongs to a lineage of white Europeans who learned to decipher better, theoretically or artistically, the logic that sustains the racializing-colonial-capitalist regime, as well as the strategies to combat it. Nevertheless, although the efforts of the white people in this special lineage won many victories, it is no less certain that they always stumbled precisely at the reduction of their subjective experiences to the subject, a mark of the dominant micropolitics that separated them from their living condition, as it does to us. This kept their vision from reaching the micropolitical sphere of the regime against which they so intelligently and courageously struggled in the macropolitical sphere. Does the encounter between Marx and the shaman dissolve this barrier?

### **The (un)expected encounter between Marx and the shaman: Rescuing an embryo of the future?**



For the time being it is impossible to answer this question. What we can say is that the encounter between Marx and the shaman is a beautiful image for the embryos of the future that inhabit us: "beautiful" here in the sense of *tekoporã*, a Guaraní word that tells us that "beautiful" is something that is good for life and vice versa. In this scene there are the signs of an opening, the beginning of a conversation, between European and indigene, in which there is a pulsing of the virtual affects that would be carried by their first encounter, which took place in the process of colonization; affects that, nevertheless, remained unconsciously suppressed as a result of this same process, in which, for the white man, the other —the indigenous peoples and their lands— had no existence of their own: they were mere objects to be abused for Europeans' own *jouissance*. In that unconscious suppression, the embryos of the future that this encounter announced remained buried, waiting to be rescued at some point so that they would be able to germinate.

And we are left with the clear sensation that the conversation we are witnessing between the European Marx and the indigenous shaman constitutes a sign that this moment seems to have arrived, despite the sinister state of things into which the racializing-colonial-capitalist project is currently putting us, a project whose horizon has succeeded in encompassing the entire planet. Are we indeed experiencing the initial germination of these future embryos that carry irreversible displacements from the sad human landscape generated by this regime?

This question leads us to think that perhaps it is this irreversibility that, because it is extremely threatening to the subjectivities produced by this regime —uncritical lackeys of this mode of existence that is imposed on all because of its supposed superiority— has provoked with overwhelming fury the return of the racializing-colonial-capitalist repressed across the whole planet. Our ability to resist this fury will depend on our collective deciphering of these new deployments of the affect of violence proper to this regime. But what does Mapa Teatro's work have to do with this possibility of deciphering that imposes itself on us as an urgent demand?

In sum, the takeaway from what I have said thus far about the work of this artists' laboratory is that it stages sad affects that pass through our bodies in the present, and with that passage succeed in announcing futures that are already nestled within them. In this way, Mapa Teatro's work generates resonances that are capable of mobilizing us to recognize such affects in our own bodies, if we so desire.

## Poetic devices for micropolitical displacements

But this artists' laboratory offers us more than the possibility of accessing such affects: this is just what we capture in a first approach, and even so, nothing guarantees that it will in fact happen. As we saw, for it to happen depends on how, and how much, we allow ourselves to be affected.

Rather than this or that affect, what this work leads us to experience is the activation of the possibility of deciphering that which occurs to us through the power of evaluation that is carried by these affects, which is entirely different from the deciphering by way of feelings or rational understanding to which we are accustomed.

In synthesis, this artists' laboratory offers us the possibility of developing the eco-ethological knowing proper to our living condition; and further still, of becoming more skillful in activating thought as creating imagination at the service of what this knowing points out to us and demands of us. And this is no small thing.

Recuperating our experiential access to the affects of the present and using the ethical compass to orient ourselves in deciphering them constitute essential tasks if we are to be able to transfigure it effectively at the points where it does violence to life and demands creating actions from us. Now, is this not precisely what I have called the ethical-aesthetic-political function of artistic practice? And is it not crucial for life that this function be exercised in any human practice in general, and not just in artistic practice specifically? We have known for some time that Art as an institution is an invention of the modern colonial West. We can now add that confining the right to exercise such a function in the field of what came to be called Art is part of the dominant micropolitics. And the worst part is that with capitalism's newest fold, even in this field, the creating drive tends to be pimped, deviated from its ethical course, in order to be reduced to a creative capacity devoted to producing novelties for the art market, thereby promoting opportunities for financial speculation and a swift accumulation of economic and narcissistic capital, which colludes in our remaining dissociated from affects. Rare are the works that, in any of art's domains, are able to keep ethical-aesthetic-political potency active in the present. The work of Mapa Teatro is undoubtedly one of these rarities (in all senses of the word).

## Art as a territory in a permanent state of transfiguration (Coda)

The present volume about Mapa Teatro is part of a collection dedicated to the world of the visual arts in Colombia. Its presence in this art scene is more than welcome, as it affirms art's micropolitical potency, just as it is exercised in each of the group's pieces, problematizing the fate of art in our culture. With this publication, the borderline place of this artists' laboratory gets inscribed in the realm of art, thirty-five years after it put in motion a singular way of understanding artistic practice and operating in the art world, prior to as well as beyond the disciplines and categories that frame it. This stance has left its imprint on the region —not only on generations of artists from the visual arts, theater and performance, but especially on those artists who gravitate toward the edges of disciplinary territories, collaborating in order to feel capable of singularly inventing their place, without having to justify their creations in accordance with the dominant codes in those territories.

This publication is even more welcome at a time when we are living through one of those moments in the history of humankind during which good encounters —including those with books— are indispensable to forming fields of resonance between affects, where we might be able to gain potency in order to create forms of existence that would neutralize the poison impregnating our environment. May we make the most of this opportunity, then.

Suely Rolnik, July 2019

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> This text is a revised and expanded version of the essay published with the same title in: «En el principio era el afecto / In the Beginning Was Affect». In: Mapa Teatro. Artes Vivas. PP> 12-35. Bogotá: Colección de artistas colombianos. Editorial Direction of José Roca and Sylvia Suárez. Translated into Spanish by Damian Kraus and into English by Christopher Fraga. Seguros Bolívar, 2019. It is also the deployment of an article that Suely Rolnik wrote about Mapa Teatro's work: "Mapa Teatro: La creación a partir de un afecto" / "Mapa Teatro: Creating from an Affect," for the booklet accompanying their exhibition *De los dementes o faltos de juicio* (Programa Fisuras at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid, from October 31, 2018, to April 29, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> Many years ago I established a convention of translating *criador/a* as "creating" rather than "creative" (*criativo/a*) in my texts so as to mark a conceptual distinction between creation and creativity, which does not exist in vernacular English. The latter refers to a capacity that is the prerequisite for creation, the exercise of which is not necessarily moved by a will to embody an affect. The former, by contrast, refers to a specific way of using this ability, which consists in being moved by this will. This conceptual distinction has (micro)political implications: capitalism's strong use of "creativity" is no accident. Dissociating the potency of a drive from its ethical destiny (which consists in creating something that makes the affects of the present able to be sensed) lies at the very foundation of the capitalist regime's

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dominant micropolitics. This consists in causing the ethical course of creating potency to deviate from the drive in order to "creatively" produce new scenarios for investing capital and for mobilizing the will to consume.

<sup>3</sup> [This rendering of the Portuguese term *subjectivação* has been established in translations of the author's previous texts. Cf., e.g., Félix Guattari and Suely Rolnik, *Molecular Revolution in Brazil*, trans. Karel Clapshaw and Brian Holmes (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007), 43. —Trans.]

<sup>4</sup> [Throughout the text, the author draws on Spinoza's distinction between *potentia* (or *potência* in Portuguese), which I have rendered throughout as "potency," and *potestas* (*poder*), which is conventionally rendered as "power." For a concise summary of this distinction, see Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988), 97-104. —Trans.]

<sup>5</sup> Rolf's term, qualifying the singular artistic landscape of Mapa Teatro's work in his dissertation, *M a p a m u n d i: Plurivers poïétique (Mapa Teatro, 1984–2014)*, Ecole doctorale EDESTA, Esthétique, Sciences et Technologies des Arts, Théâtre — Ethnoscénologie from the Université Paris VIII — Saint Denis (Paris, December 8, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> [This neologism plays on the term "*neobarroso transplatino*," coined by the Argentine poet and anthropologist Néstor Perlongher. [The plays on words in Perlongher's term are difficult to replicate in English. "*Neobarroso*" merges the word *barro* (clay) with neo-baroque, while "*trans-platino*" refers to the estuary encompassing the confluence of the Plate, Paraná and Uruguay Rivers near the Atlantic Ocean, connecting Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and Brazil. Perlongher was referring specifically to a style of literature that associated the baroque locally with "clay" from the Río de la Plata. For the author of the present text, this association has a double meaning, suggesting first an irreverent mix of materials that includes supposedly less noble ones like clay, thus undoing the dominant hierarchy among them in Western culture; and secondly, an irreverent mix of languages that includes popular urban vernaculars, thus undoing the hierarchical colonial organization between them, thereby deposing scholarly and academic languages from their canonical status. Rolnik retains the association with clay, but substitutes *latinoamericano* for *platino*, as she regards this "style" of literature as extending to the entire region. —Trans.]

<sup>7</sup> Taken from Mapa Teatro's website, <<http://www.mapateatro.org/en/cartography/holy-innocents>>, consulted July 26, 2019.

<sup>8</sup> Taken from Mapa Teatro's website, consulted July 26, 2019. See previous note for the URL.

<sup>9</sup> Julián Díaz is now well known as an actor even outside Columbia thanks to his involvement in the Netflix series *Pablo Escobar, el patrón del mal*. His onscreen turn came by invitation from a director who had seen him performing a role in one of Mapa Teatro's pieces.

<sup>10</sup> Alonso J. Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo: Auge y caída del narcotraficante más famoso de todos los tiempos* (Medellin: Ediciones Península, 2001).

<sup>11</sup> *Amapola* is a love song composed in 1920 by the Spanish American composer José María Lacalle García (who later adopted the pseudonym Joseph Lacalle), the lyrics of which were subsequently rewritten in 1924 by Luis Roldán, an Argentine lyricist of popular songs, coloring it with a Caribbean rhythm. The second version of *Amapola* was a big success in all of Latin America, performed by singers from many different countries in the region.

<sup>12</sup> An instrument made out of a pair of cylindrical wooden rods, used to mark rhythm in popular Latin American music (e.g., boleros, rumbas, etc.), especially in Cuba.

<sup>13</sup> Antonio Tabucchi, *Sogni di sogni* (Palermo: Sellerio Editore, 1992).

<sup>14</sup> Heidi and Rolf's inspiration for staging this encounter between Marx and a Native American shaman came out of a conversation with the Brazilian thinker Laymert Garcia dos Santos, in which he told them about a book by the political scientist Jean Tible, *Marx selvagem*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Sao Paulo: Autonomia Literária, 2019 [2013]).

<sup>15</sup> The text intoned by the shaman consists of a montage of excerpts from Davi Kopenawa and Bruce Albert, *La chute du ciel: Paroles d'un chaman yanomami* (Paris: Plon, 2014).

<sup>16</sup> The English word "knowledge" often serves to translate two different terms in Romance languages, e.g., *saber* and *conhecimento* in Portuguese. In order to mark this conceptual distinction, *saber* has been rendered as "knowing" and *conhecimento* as "knowledge" in English-language translations of my texts since the 1980s. The former refers to deciphering affects, effects of the forces of the body of the world in its living condition on our bodies, also in that same condition (i.e., a mode of decipherment proper to the out-of-subject). The latter refers to cognition, deciphering forms, their codes, their representations (e.g., a mode of decipherment proper to the subject).