

TRICKSTERS OF THE SPECTATORial

**The decolonial proposals of performance activism through the encounters with
La Pocha Nostra and Freddie Mercado**

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of Philosophy and Art History and Theory

University of Essex

2018

To the co-creation of other worlds...

Por la co-creación de mundos otros...

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To all my relations and to all I have loved...

To the animal spirits of the spider, the fox and the wild boar that have accompanied me throughout, and the common yet particular horizon of the ocean. I bear gratitude to the Sun/Moon and the river's stones, to my ancestors and those to come, to Epping Forest and the mountain-spine of Montserrat. To Isil Sol Vil, in eXtreme and subversive love in-becoming joint levitation and common tissue of our third eyes.

I am grateful to the strong women that surround me: to my mother's warrior-soul that has mentored my spirit, to the community of women that have traced wings of resistance in my back, to the protective spirit of Nagymama, and to the *hermagas* (wise sisters) that I always find doing/sharing magic: Luzmar Soneira, Christine Brault, Marta Lodola, Sofía Arredondo, Laura Burns, Ainoa Mela, Laura Corcuera, Graciela Contreras, Christina Laskaridis, Nádia Correia, Zuleyka Alejandro, Jimena Lloreda, Caro Ley, and others. I also acknowledge the emotion in my father's tearing eyes when facing the sunset's sublimity.

I am eternally thankful to recognise that we are a community and re-existence is growing in all of us, in different contexts and times. Among the many I hold profound admiration and love towards, I want to mention the alchemist and/or combatant artists: Aravind Adyanthaya, Alexandra Zierle & Paul Carter, and Awilda Rodriguez Lora.

To re-encounter the transformative movement of Freddie Mercado's art-life and the imagiNation of Guillermo Gómez-Peña has produced my ongoing inspiration and intriguing concern. Gracias por compartirse y sobre todo por el constante cuestionamiento de sus acciones durante todos estos años. Also a very special and warm recognition to the political-affective doings of Dani d'Emilia and Daniel B. Chávez which are weaved into this research.

This research was supported by the Institute for Studies on Latin American Art (ISLAA) and the Essex Collection of Art from Latin America (ESCALA). I thank Dr Joanne Harwood for making this possible. I would also like to thank my supervisor Dr Matt Lodder for always supporting my artistic work, understating its essential nature in my investigation and life.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	7
INTRODUCTION.....	8
CHAPTER 1: THE SPECTATOR AS SOMAPOLITIC METAPHOR.....	15
1.1 Positioning Body-Geographies.....	15
1.1.1 The body does not say ‘I’, but does ‘I’...and <i>who</i> is ‘I’?.....	15
1.1.2 To perform (in) the Liminal: The Colony and The Border.....	20
1.1.3 Early XXI Century ‘Other’: La Pocha Nostra and Freddie Mercado.....	28
1.2 Spectator’s Masquerade.....	32
1.2.1 Spectacle: Visions within and beyond the Specular.....	32
1.2.2 Liberation and Emancipatory models: Dussel and Rancière in conversation.....	37
1.2.3 Intersubjectivity: An-other Approach.....	47
1.2.4 Symbolic Sites for Spectatorial Deconstruction.....	52
CHAPTER 2: TRICKSTER’S NEW CARNIVAL.....	55
2.1 TRICKSTER <i>is</i> not. TRICKSTER does.....	55
2.1.1 Coyote: A Smuggler of Ways of Knowing and Sensing.....	59
2.2 Border Thought and Affectivity.....	63
2.3 The Paradigm of Community: <i>Reverse Anthropology</i> and <i>Radical Tenderness</i> in La Pocha Nostra.....	68
2.4 Pateco’s New Tricks: Freddie Mercado vaga-bonds Puerto Rico.....	79
2.5 Strategies of the Carnavalesque: Taking off the Face of Otherness.....	88
CHAPTER 3: FREDDIE MERCADO.....	91
3.1 Presenting Freddie Mercado.....	91
3.1.1 An Exercise of Embodied Remembrance.....	97
3.2 Trans-localities in the Androgynous Nation.....	99
3.2.1 To remain <i>in situ</i>	100
3.2.2 Animalities, Gendering and the Colonial Wound.....	107
3.2.3 Unheimliche Objects? : Disidentifications of Mother Doll.....	115
3.3 Experiencing the Encounter on an Equal Ground.....	134
3.3.1 Vaga-bonding with the Devil: A Pseudo-Fictional Account.....	134
3.3.2 A Two Sided Mirror: The Invitation of <i>Viaje...sé</i>	137
3.3.3 Gazing from and into Phantasmagoria.....	142
3.3.4 Anecdotes of becoming Agency in Spectacle.....	150
CHAPTER 4: LA POCHA NOSTRA.....	158
4.1 Entering a Pocha Show.....	159

4.2 Aesth/et(h)ics of Resistance: A Desirable Spectacle for the Spectator.	169
4.3 Zapatismo in La Pocha System: I am We and We are the Others.	182
4.3.1 The Icon: Hologram or Mother Diva.	186
4.3.2 Othering the <i>us</i>	194
4.4 Decolonial Pedagogy: Border Crossing Methodology in Three Skins.	203
4.4.1 In Pedagogy we Trust.	203
4.4.2 The Hypodermis, Dermis and Epidermis of a Communal Body. . . .	207
4.4.3 Embodiments produced by the Poetics and Politics of the Encounter.	213
CHAPTER 5: TACTICS OF RE-EXISTANCE.	219
5.1 Intersectionality: Weaving through Local and Global Possibilities.	220
5.2 Trans EroticA.	227
5.3 Perversion in the Art World: A Play-full Story.	237
5.4 Vaga-bonds of Radical Tenderness.	245
CONCLUSION.	252
EPILOGUE.	263
BIBLIOGRAPHY.	268

ABSTRACT

In this research I explore activist performance proposals that lead to an analysis of the spectator position intrinsic to the spectatorial, as a construction linked to colonial discourses of otherness. This investigation presents the encountering processes of the transnational troupe of La Pocha Nostra and the Puerto Rican persona of Freddie Mercado with their respective spectators, where local-global constructs of coloniality become unveiled, made and unmade spectacle through their re-reproduction of otherness. Side by side with performance art-life, I explore the deconstruction and de-linking possibilities of the spectatorial taking the work of these artists to build and develop the dilemmas and alternatives presented. From these complex hyper-othering performance practices I research the social implications on the spectatorial at a local and global level.

The artistic proposals discussed are focused under the decolonial lens and researched as practices that make possible the co-creation of decolonial relationalities. I focus in the trans-possibility these ‘other’ encounters produce and are produced by. This work inserts the issue of the spectator within broader social concerns and it is under this umbrella that the ‘question’ of the Other arises within the mechanisms of the modern spectacle. These artistic practices exert diverse tactics that directly imply the figure of the spectator within this social configuration.

INTRODUCTION

‘Can the subaltern speak without the mediation of the intellectual?’ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak asks (2010). From this, another question follows: can the intellectual listen to the cosmovision of the ‘subaltern’ and translate it into another (the dominant) discourse, methodology, and perspective without taking away its force and its essence? As the artist hands over the embodied, descriptive, theoretical, sensorial and analytic complexity of her work to another person (curator, historian, sociologist, critic), a translating process begins, where epistemic supremacy is easily perpetuated between the doer and the thinker, body and mind, flesh and word. It is equally a matter of colonising and colonised ways of being in the World.

This investigation has been conceived by the body-subject that writes this research and who takes the form of ‘I’ or ‘we’ depending on the particular moment and matter addressed. I write as an artist, theorist and researcher in the open field of performance art. I act as mediator, bridge, insider-outsider and contradiction, acknowledging the initial failure of translating the untranslatable. Living a transnational reality, I am a body-subject who comes from a colonial background, born and raised in the complexities of a modern colonial reality on the island of Puerto Rico. As a middle-class, white Puerto Rican woman I develop this research within a British Westernised university that is a site of institutionalised epistemic superiority. My female body-geography lives the privilege of my skin, the oppression of my uterus, and the ethos of colonialism and its resistance, in a constant process of decolonising the Self- through all my relations. Although my own body-based practice is only briefly mentioned in this research, this vital aspect of my being in the World has accompanied and nurtured this investigation in its direction and further concerns. The lived proximity with the topics, context and people addressed through art-life encounters has guided this research providing a perspective that allows nuances which hopefully reveal other views, aspects and sensitivities present in the ecology and exchange of knowledges. As artist-academic, colonised-privileged I engage in a third space of negotiation, understanding and experience.

In this research I explore activist performance proposals that lead to an analysis of the spectator position intrinsic to the spectatorial, as a construction linked to colonial discourses of otherness. This investigation presents the encountering processes of the transnational troupe of La Pocha Nostra and the Puerto Rican persona of Freddie Mercado with their respective spectators, where local-global constructs of coloniality become unveiled, made and unmade spectacle through their re-reproduction of otherness. Side by side with performance art-life, I explore the deconstruction and de-linking possibilities of the spectatorial taking the work of these artists to build and develop the dilemmas and alternatives presented. These two cases have been chosen for this research as complex hyper-othering performance practices that contain social implications on the spectatorial at a local and global level. I am considering performance art as a fundamentally social field inasmuch it is nested in the body-subjects who perform. This includes the biographies, memories, desires, cosmologies and fights that have been part of the upbringing of each body-subject, inserted in their particular histories and communities. Performance is understood as an ever changing and alive multidisciplinary expression that opens the path to cultural processes and struggles, unfixed but rooted in history and its bodies.

The spectatorial has been a recurrent issue of interest in the turn of the century art field with the Western contributions of philosopher Jacques Rancière, among others however, a decolonial perspective has not been approached to such concepts, experiences, ways of being and production. It is through decolonial / postcolonial and feminist thinkers that I approach a transdisciplinary understanding that moves within the fields of cultural and social studies, art history and theory, performance studies, and philosophy. This work inserts the issue of the spectator within broader social concerns that are not restricted to the 'art' field, or furthermore, understands the art field to be weaved and produced by such concerns. It is under this umbrella that the 'question' of the Other arises within the mechanisms of the modern spectacle. The cases presented in this research hyperbolise otherness understanding this concept to be a colonial worldview and experience where the naming and position of the

Other is produced by a particular civilisation (the ‘Same’) produced by particular body-subjects in order explain and control the many other civilisations and body-subjects. Those othered body-subjects have been performing these concerns.

A decolonial perspective understands the phenomenon of coloniality as inseparable from the modern capitalist world system. Rather than emerging from the British-Indian imperial relationship by the second half of the XIX century as the case of post-colonial understanding, decolonial theories came initially from Latin American experience.¹ These contextualise the colonial-modern relation in the XV and XVI centuries where ‘civilising’ enterprises began in the ‘Americas’ (Abya Yala), together with the transatlantic slave trade and the witch hunts occurring in the British settlements and in Europe. Although the concept, usage and theories of the decolonial are contemporary in resistance discourses, decolonial practices have existed ever since coloniality began.

The artistic proposals discussed are focused under the decolonial lens and researched as practices that make possible the co-creation of decolonial relationalities. In this study I have tried to show the implications of other experiences of the intersubjective that expand on the possibilities of conceiving the encounter (with ‘objects’, subjects, elements in nature, etc.) within and beyond the experience of imposed otherness that these artistic practices address.

¹ ‘[...]both postcolonialism and decoloniality are developments within the broader politics of knowledge production and both emerge out of political developments contesting the colonial world order established by European empires, albeit in relation to different time periods and different geographical orientations. The key issue to emerge from the work of decolonial scholars is to pull the time horizon of debates on modernity back to the late fifteenth century and extend them southwards to take into account both the activities of southern European countries such as Spain and Portugal, but also the southern half of the continent to be named the Americas.’(Bhambra, 2014: 119)
Postcolonialism emerged around the ideas of diasporic scholars from the Middle East and South Asia such as Edward W. Said, Homi K. Bhabha and Gayatri C. Spivak, and refers mainly to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The modernity/coloniality thought similarly develops from the work of diasporic scholars from Latin America with the works of Anibal Quijano, María Lugones, Walter D. Mignolo, Ramón Grosfoguel, and Arturo Escobar, among others. Decoloniality starts with the earlier European incursions upon the lands that came to be known as the Americas from the fifteenth century onwards. As Ramón Grosfoguel notes, to refer to a post-colonial reality becomes misleading: ‘One of the most powerful myths of the twentieth century was the notion that the elimination of colonial administrations amounted to the decolonization of the world. This led to the myth of a “postcolonial” world. [...]We continue to live under the same “colonial power matrix.” With juridical-political decolonization, we moved from a period of “global *colonialism*” to the current period of “global *coloniality*”.’(Grosfoguel, 2011: no pagination) For an account on the development of decolonial thought see the prologue in: Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel, 2007: 9-23.

The influences of Mayan cosmogony in the case of La Pocha Nostra and Afro-Caribbean spirituality in the case of Freddie Mercado have nurtured the relational experience while presenting the historical implications of oppression lived in both, the transnational border reality of the former and the local-colonial quotidian experience of the latter. From the experience of oppression, invisibility, neglect and exoticism these artistic-life practices have addressed experiences of social inequality. These inequalities are always in relation to the lives of the more ‘civilised’, ‘modern’, ‘progressive’ societies which perpetuate social, physical and symbolic violence towards the so-called Other while building an imaginary that creates the Other from the distant discourse of the Same. These artistic practices hyperbolise otherness and exert diverse tactics that directly imply the figure of the spectator within this social configuration.

The investigation of the artists’ work has included data collection of media coverage and reviews of their performances, the creation of an archive of photos and videos, and writings and publications by the artists themselves, critics and scholars. Furthermore, I have encountered and interviewed, witnessed, performed alongside or with, or/and been taught by the artists I discuss. More specifically, my research methodology includes an embodied practice alongside La Pocha Nostra’s pedagogy and the memories I carry from Freddie Mercado’s constant wanderings that date back to a first encounter with his personae when I was a child. In this research I am considering La Pocha Nostra as a system, addressing their performance spectacles since the early 2000s and their pedagogical work mainly during my own years of research and involvement (2014-2016). Alongside the numerous writings produced by La Pocha Nostra’s director, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, I have been especially interested in the theoretical, embodied and pedagogical contributions to La Pocha Nostra made by Dani d’Emilia, core member from 2011 until October 2016, and Daniel Brittany Chávez, core member from 2014 until October 2016. I engage with Freddie Mercado’s works throughout his career, beginning in the late 1980s. I pay special emphasis on his quotidian demeanours which were most persistent in the 1990-2010s while he was living in Old San

Juan and in Santurce. His current family residency in Carolina, painted with the cobalt blue of Frida Kahlo's house, has reduced the constant flux of his spontaneous outings.

These two cases have mainly developed since the early 1990s from within or in relation to the United States territory and history: Freddie Mercado in Puerto Rico and La Pocha Nostra mainly based in the U.S. with many members from the Latino and Mexican community including its Mexican-American co-founder and director, Guillermo Gómez-Peña. The nineties came after the Reagan era (1981-1989) during the Cold War that saw the Reagan Doctrine, an international policy focused mainly on Latin America where a systematic assault on socialist governments and support of military dictatorships took place in order to potentiate the establishment of political and economic systems oriented towards capitalism. While the end of the Cold War produced the physical and symbolic demolition of the Berlin Wall in 1991 Germany, the 1990s saw a significant build-up of the Mexican-U.S. border enforcement. Mexican-U.S. border is ultimately the Latin American border, from which migrants coming from South and Central America aim to cross and survive. The possibilities of the transmigrant worker that lived in Mexico and worked in the U.S. became extremely limited. The 1st January 1994 the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) is signed which triggers the Zapatista Army of National Liberation's (EZLN) uprising in Chiapas, Mexico. In Puerto Rico, the colonial reality has been constant. As a colony of the U.S. since 1898 (when it was ceded by Spain, its former ruler, after the Spanish-American War), the social, political and economic conditions of Puerto Rico are limited to the decisions made by the U.S. metropolis. After a period of economic and social prosperity, this unincorporated territory of the U.S. lived a characteristic rise of unemployment, high poverty rates, sustained social inequalities and increase in crime during the 1980s and early 1990s.² This Puerto Rican panorama has intensified over the years and most noticeably under the current debt crisis (publicly declared in June 2015). The overwhelming Puerto Rican exodus to the U.S. occurs as colonialism and citizenship allow the easy movement from colony to metropolis. Of the

² See: Santiago and Rivera-Batiz, 1996.

Latino communities in the U.S., Mexican-Americans (aka Chicanos) and Puerto Ricans are among the oldest and most numerous communities.

The experience of otherness presented by these artistic practices has developed principally but not exclusively in relation to contemporary U.S. mechanisms of segregation, violence, and invisibility. Like other performances developing in or in relation to U.S. politics during the 1980s and 1990s, these artists use tactics of appropriation, parody, and cross-cultural detournement. However, systemic otherness traces back to the violent ‘encounter of worlds’ in the late XV century giving rise to the modern idea of the World and the consequent construction of the Americas. Likewise, othering mechanisms have segregated communities by class, race, gender, belief, culture, episteme, etc. into categorical citizen and human status. Contemporary human world and its relations are based on hierarchies and dualities. Inspired by othering performances, this research addresses the spectator position as social position within a legacy constructed through the experience of a hierarchal society. Alongside the performance-life proposals of these artists, I am interested not only in the embodied contestation of duality in their performative selves and doings, questioned under the hybridity of the Other, but also the trans-possibility these ‘other’ encounters produce and are produced by.

The layers of meta-analysis found in the following text move within the social, historical and cultural context these performance practices address and are influenced by, the tactics and strategies they use, and the co-creation worked through them in their relational implications and connotations with and by the figure of the spectator, or perhaps, beyond it. Chapter 1 discusses the political and historical aspects of the social construction of the spectator relation as interdependent to the historical configuration of the Other. Notions of universality are researched under the lens of historical domination, while the performance practices presented are positioned from their embodied historical locus. As intertwined issues, notions of spectacle, spectator and the intersubjective are reviewed from Western and non-Western perspectives. Chapter 2 presents the trickster energy constitutive of glocal change. It explores

the tricksterish doings of the artists within their locality and/or beyond it which unveil cultural, racial, class and gender borders and discusses aspects of border-crossing, community building and affective possibilities. Chapter 3 is developed around the performance personae of Freddie Mercado as a metaphor of movement in a colonial context. It analyses the creation of Mercado's performative-citizen personas and their interrelation with the other citizens. Through a constant in-becoming of his performance-life, wanderer of the different social geographies and cultural complexities of the Puerto Rican identity and reality, Mercado's doings are researched in relation to coloniality. Chapter 4 focuses on La Pocha Nostra as a system that advocates a pluriverse of border-crossers. It discusses the collective's transnational practices of alliance, organisational inspirations and contradictions, pedagogical affective praxis, and spectacular aesthetics. The politics of the encounter are researched from the divergent angles proposed and produced. Chapter 5 analyses the common tactics of resistance weaved in Freddie Mercado and La Pocha Nostra, which react to the established experience of relationality.

The following research is driven by the discussion of the spectator as a social configuration investigating which possibilities of the encounter are being co-created within and beyond the modern (colonial, capitalist, patriarchal) experience of the relational through othering performance practices.

CHAPTER 1: THE SPECTATOR AS SOMAPOLITIC METAPHOR

1.1 Positioning Body-Geographies

*It is with our bodies, from our bodies,
and for our bodies that we fight and do politics.*
(Paredes and Guzmán, 2014: 94)

***We advocate for Somatology.** There is no epistemology without body.
We believe bodies in performance can be linguistic tools for new radical discourse,
somatic articulations, embodied concepts and struggles.*
(La Pocha Nostra, 2014. Original bolds)

1.1.1 The body does not say ‘I,’ but does ‘I’... and *who* is ‘I’?

The iconic ‘I think, therefore I am’ (Cogito ergo sum) formulated by René Descartes in the XVII century (1637, *Discours de la méthode*) which has influenced and directed the history of modern philosophy, is behind what Enrique Dussel (1995) has phrased as ‘I conquer, therefore I am’ (ego conquiro). That is, the birth of modernity came with the systemic colonisation as conjoint processes. The conquering of land/ bodies/ natural resources/ cultures/ ideologies/ sensitivities/ cosmogonies defined the ‘I’ by a matrix of domination, where its universalism was exclusive. An unprecedented division was created in the prior XVI century triggered by the colonising encounter: those in the ‘zone of being’ and those in the ‘zone of nonbeing’ (Fanon, 1952; Grosfoguel, 2012b). During the settlement of the Spanish colonisers in the ‘American’ continent (arriving in 1492), the Christian Church initiated a debate that questioned the soul of the natives (Grosfoguel, 2012b). At that time being soulless meant being an animal. A new divide was created between those who were in the range of existence and those who were outside of it.

Who is then this ‘I’ that thinks? The condition possibility of the universalism of this ‘I’ in Descartes, lacking any sort of placement or positionality, is the previous extermination in the late XV and XVI centuries of other epistemologies, knowledges and ways of being. We are referring to the mass physical and cultural genocides of women (Western and non-Western)

during the witch hunts in Europe and in U.S.; Indigenous peoples (and their codices) during the invention and exploitation of what the colonisers named the Americas; West Africans kidnapped and transported as slaves to the ‘New’ World (around 1.5 million already dying in the transatlantic voyage); and the expulsion of Muslims and Jews by the Christian Castilian monarchy from the Iberian Peninsula under the ‘purity of blood’ slogan during the conquest of Al-Andalus (Grosfoguel, 2013a; 2012b). These chronological coincidences of systemic destruction of people are historically occurring, triggering the mechanisms of modernity and proto-capitalism. The killings of people were also the destruction of the knowledge of those people; what Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014) has called epistemicides. Stemming from Dussel, Ramón Grosfoguel (2013a) goes further and proposes the historical contextualisation of Descartes’ statement with the phrase ‘I exterminate, therefore I am’ (ego extermino) as this Cartesian ‘I’ presents an ‘idolatric universalism’ that is inherently racist and sexist epistemologically; an epistemic inferiority is produced based on exclusions and previous erasure of knowledges and experiences. Only Western men from five countries (Italy, France, Germany, U.K. and U.S.) are within the range of rationality and production of knowledge (De Sousa Santos, 2014; Grosfoguel, 2013a). This ongoing epistemic inferiority is evident in terms of methodology and application of these Western men’s thoughts onto other realities, neglecting the ‘ecologies of knowledge’ (De Sousa Santos, 2007) that other experiences live, produce, and reproduce. As we are reminded by Silvia Federici (2004) history cannot be approached from the point of view of an abstract universalism especially the history of capitalism which has been a history of creation of differences and creation of hierarchies.

Walter Mignolo (2009) uses the term ‘locus of enunciation’ to situate the place from where the subject is speaking—as *humanitas* or *anthropos*, this latter defined and invented by the former. The ultimate or principal placing, or the ‘place of all places’ is the body. The situating of knowledge from the body (soma)-politics of knowledge (Anzaldúa, 2012; Fanon, 1952) and from the geopolitics of knowledge (Dussel, 1985; 1995) have unveiled the myth of universal unplaced Cartesian politics of knowledge, *from where* in order to be in the World,

one must be able to think from the mind of Western (white) men; therefore, be these men, or not be at all. It is no surprise that the body/mind divide was part of this Cartesian revolution from which later the capitalist mechanisation of the body could emerge—from the magical body into a body conceived from the point of view of the work that could be extracted from it (Federici, 2004).

It is from the bodies that we speak; bodies that have ancestral memory and bodies that feel the tracing of the dualistic divisions and borders. Borders are crucial in defining subjectivities, in making and remaking the world (Mezzandra and Neilson, 2013) and in this process privilege may be conceived as an energy-saving device: less effort is needed to be or to do (Ahmed, 2014). The body is especially relevant as political vessel when social relations have been defined by bodily traits such as race and gender. Such hierarchies were imported in the colonisation processes of the Americas and Africa. As some feminists explain (Federici, 2004; Lugones, 2008; Oyěwùmí, 1997) the invention of gender together with race (Fanon, 1952; Grosfoguel, 2012b; Quijano, 1991) was a Western colonial imposition inexistent before the colonisation processes that began to mark the body with social hierarchical implications. Therefore, the body as political site is heightened in the modern / capitalist / patriarchal / colonial world we live today, after a process of more than five centuries and many generations long.

Clearly the divides of nationality, gender, class and race are intertwined in the configuration of power relations (an intersectional matrix of domination), and the intersectional nature of these systemic and embodied oppressions is now part of the global structure. Likewise it becomes evident that to inhabit exteriority has its own ranges of invisibility and exploitation: the experience of being a working-class white woman in England is different from being a Black transgendered person in Mexico, a Syrian refugee child in Germany, a Mapuche man in Chile, or a Chicana poet in El Paso Texas during the Trump era, etc. We inhabit a world that is cut and crossed by borders and dualities, internal and external. However, there is no ontological outside (Mignolo, 2009a). Exteriority is created in the making of hierarchies,

conquest and dominance. Localities might be best conceived not only as spatial structures but as structures of feeling and affect (Mbembe, 2014). The divides North/South, Same/Other, mind/body, culture/nature are topologies-cartographies that atrophy the modern ways of relationality and the geography of affects.

The approach here is focused on relationality, from the encounter between body-geographies. The moment of the encounter conceived as the performance itself. By speaking of body-geographies, the body is reiterated as cartography of the social and as memory of the land. The body-positioning or acknowledgement of embodiment has also been expressed as home, the body as the home of all homes. The term home also re-informs aspects of relationality, gathering and community—this latter transformed into the modern family, a structure that reproduces patriarchal capitalist arrangements of labour and affect.

The home-land/body connection played an important role in the colonisation processes of Abya Yala (or the Americas).³ Mining the land and raping the women was part of the same conquering process. At present, Mexican identity and history, for example, is still embedded in the sense of the conquered land/body, as Mexicans consider themselves to be *hijos de la chingada*, ‘sons and daughters of the fucked one’. The land is embodied in the figure of the Nahua woman Malinali Tenepat popularly known as La Malinche who betrayed her people for her ‘lover’ the Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortez. This fucking of the female body is portrayed as the principal cause of Spanish success. Mexicans are thus the offspring of a fucked land and the imposition of a new culture. The process implied acculturation, changing cultures, and its consequence was assimilation, disappearing into the dominant cultural formation. The foundational story of betrayal has a (female) gender and a (Indigenous)

³ The colonial naming of the ‘Americas’, broadly accepted as a misspelling of the name of Italian ‘discoverer’ and ‘explorer’ Amerigo Vespuccio, has been contested by indigenous political organisms who prefer to use the term ‘Abya Yala’ meaning ‘land of vital blood’ or ‘land in its full maturity’ in the Kuna language from Panama and Western Colombia (López Hernández, 2004: 4). Bolivian Aymaran leader Takir Mamani (1986) argues for its use as a decolonial notion of continental unity. The vital blood of the land unifies its people as a first step of epistemic decolonisation: ‘placing foreign names on our villages, our cities, and our continents is equivalent to subjecting our identities to the will of our invaders and their heirs.’ (Arias, Cárcamo-Huechante, and del Valle Escalante, 2012: 10) Renaming the land through pre-colonial terminology becomes strategic in the process of expanding resistance and integral in a continental understanding of oppressions.

culture, a symbolic violence towards these populations perpetuated through Mexican history. This story is 're-enacted' a century later with the history of Matoaka, nicknamed Pocahontas who played the political symbol of woman-land in the story of conquest of the Native American lands by British settlers, more specifically on the region of the Powhatan, currently Virginia (U.S.). Both cases follow the idea of the gendered body-land raped, kidnaped or seduced, depending on the storyteller, but nonetheless, impregnated by colonisation. In Europe and its colonies the exploitation of the body for work or reproduction (the uterus owned by the state) came with the development of capitalism and the modern territorial state (Federici, 2004).

The body as a vessel of expression and history has been the primal tool for decolonisation, reconfiguration of memory and re-existence, understanding its materiality as placement from which and by which relationality is (re)generated. To claim the sovereignty of the body, as many Native Americans propose, is a process against the exclusions and violence that have socially condemned (racism, classism, sexism, homo or transphobia, xenophobia, etc.) and deprived people by attempting to disintegrate their existence. 'We were never meant to survive' Audre Lorde says.⁴ Or rather some people were meant to survive to be positioned as *Others* so that the *same* could exist. In the resistance of the sovereign body, artists of the body have joined this process.

This research investigates activist bodies positioned at the edges, as wounded bodies that question their wounds. These are othered bodies that reiterate their exoticising otherness in rebelling joy and pungent mock through the channel and extensive possibility that performance art allows. These artists, through their othering spectacle, create hyperbolic transitioning bodies in constant becoming that subvert imposed dualities and divisions (animal/human, object/subject, male/female, local/global, monoculture/pluriculture, native/hybrid). I am interested not only in this embodied contestation of duality in their

⁴ From Lorde's poem 'A Litany for Survival' published in 1978. See: Lorde, 1995.

performative selves but moreover in the encounters these othering selves produce and propose.

1.1.2 To perform (in) the Liminal: The Colony and The Border

Performance art proposes artworks which negotiate subjectivity in terms of the body (Jones, 1998).⁵ U.S. art historian Amelia Jones considers that the past century has seen the dislocation of the centred Cartesian modernist subject into an intersubjective model where the subject is ‘contingent of the other rather than complete within itself’ (1998: 10), a model ‘constitutive of post-modernism’ (1998: 1). Interestingly Jones dismisses the positioning of the bodies she discusses, assuming the Cartesian modernist subject is universal, and thus the intersubjective shift comes from this universal subject. Her subject ‘contingent of the other’ is unplaced.

British performance curator Adrian Heathfield states that the 1990s saw a ‘shift to the live’; a drive towards ‘the immediate, the immersive and the interactive’ (2004: 7). This shift also saw the rise of what has been coined as ‘participatory art’ which in South America traces back to the era of military dictatorships beginning in the mid-1960s with the proposals of sensorial manipulation from Brazilian Neo Concrete movement (1959-61, co-founded by Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica); the methods by Brazilian director Augusto Boal documented in his book *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1974)—in reference to Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968)—such as the ‘forum theatre’ and the ‘invisible theatre’ whereby the

⁵ I am using the term performance throughout this thesis. In Western narrative and definition performance art became an artistic medium in its own right in the 1970s (Goldberg, 2001). In a U.K. context the term ‘live art’ is at times interchangeable with the term ‘performance art’ in the U.S. In German the term *Leistung* is often used, which curator Harm Lux (Lux in Sebastian, 2010) notes should be better translated in terms of *communauté* (community). In Latin America, some artists consider the term ‘performance’ as a cultural imposition preferring to describe it as *arte acción* (action art), feminising its gender into *la performance*, or Spanishising it as *performa* or *performancia*. Other artists have created or prefer to use their own terms for naming what they do. Rocio Boliver (aka La Congelada de Uva) calls it *performear(se)*, alluding to the act of pissing on your spectators; Maris Bustamante uses the word *performantli*, connecting the practice to its indigenous traditions; whereas César Martínez chooses to call himself *artista inter-indisciplinado*, which evokes both *interdiscipline* and *untamable*. La Pocha Nostra at times calls their actions psychomagic, *acciones psicomágicas*, inspired by Alejandro Jodorowsky. Tania Bruguera uses the term *conducta* ‘behaviour’ as alternative.

spectators became active ‘spect-actors’; and in Argentina with the aggressive strategies of the *Ciclo de Arte Experimental* organised by the Grupo de Artistas de Vanguardia (Rosario city, May-October 1968).⁶ Art forms have historically accompanied movements for social change, and not only have they never been fully abstracted from the sensibility produced in their times but have been agents in the production, resistance, and/or re-existence of affectivities. This is especially relevant when the art form is a body based work where the encounter with ‘art’ becomes the body to body encounter re-presented while being coproduced. Consequently, from a Western European perspective, the 1989 fall of communism which collapsed the collectivist vision of society has been accompanied by the 1990s strong resurgence of performance, participatory forms and the social immersion of art (Bishop, 2012).

Diana Taylor (2003) has proposed the notion of a ‘repertoire’ of performance which refers to the corporeal or live memory that cannot be reproduced, nor housed in the archive and needs a spectator to coproduce and reproduce the transferred knowledge of the corporeal memory. Taylor’s structure includes the embodied memory into the ‘DNA of performance’, returning a notion of subjective and bodily experience to the transfer equation of the action which becomes iconised and fixated in the archival. The passing on of resistance is of special relevance in this exchange when the memory of oppression, invisibility and colonisation is scarred in the body. The subjects/bodies implied in the transfer of embodied knowledge engage on a passing on of their everyday resistance doings, relations, and creations, as well as the more symbolic ideas, philosophies, and cosmologies embedded in their lives and doings. This passing on is not independent to those (‘spectators’) coproducing the transferred

⁶ See Claire Bishop’s chapter 4 of her book *Artificial Hells* (2012), for an extensive review on the Argentinian participatory scene in the 1960s. In that same decade, Bishop describes other arts movements strongly focused on the concept of participation such as the Situationist International (Guy Debord) in France and the Happenings in the United States (Allan Kaprow). In synchronicity with audience participation, action art began to occur more frequently outside the institutionalisation and commercialisation of art, this latter a strong anti-capitalist ideal in the birth of performance art in the West. Whilst in the Euro-North American context of the 1960s and 1970s, taking art outside the institutionalised space aimed to shake and destabilise its commodified and normative structures, the Latin American artists used the public space for a symbolic confrontation with the State. See: Fusco, 2000.

knowledge of the corporeal memory. It may become an exchange that unveils and underlines the social divisions and oppressive mechanisms the embodied memory festers.

Those body artists who intentionally position themselves as othered by the systemic border-tracing machinery of colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy are bodies that bring into the ‘DNA of performance’ the *representation* of their ‘impurities’ as neglected subjects and citizens, and into the human interaction co-created in their unmediated encountering. Interested in the repertoire intended by some artists through their othering, I explore two contemporary cases: La Pocha Nostra (1993-current), a transnational collective working internationally in border issues (i.e. cultural, geographical and socially embodied), and Freddie Mercado (working since the late 1980s), artist of a constant performance that wanders the modern colony of Puerto Rico. Both are relevant in discussing and uncovering issues presented in the encountering of the Other and the Same, vis-à-vis what othering may imply in issues of spectatorship. Rather than focusing mainly on both of these cases from an art historian narrative of the development of their particular artworks, La Pocha Nostra and Freddie Mercado are used in this study as informants on how spectatorship is treated and conceived in relation to otherness. Foremost a localisation of their positioning is central for introducing othering.

Firstly, a specific social geography: the island of Puerto Rico. On issues of colonialism looking onto the current colony of the U.S. and oldest colony in the world is especially revealing. Historically the Caribbean island of Puerto Rico has served as ground for social, medical, scientific, agricultural, economic, political and military experimentation to one of the world principal contemporary potencies. The history of colonial links between Puerto Rico and the U.S. dates back to the 1898 Spanish-American War and the signing of the Treaty of Paris (10th Dec. 1898), where the island is *ceded* by its former ruler, Spain, to its current, the U.S. In 1917 the Jones-Shafroth Act declares Puerto Rico a territory of the U.S. and Puerto Ricans, U.S. citizens lacking voting rights on U.S. elections or any voting representation in Congress. Neither a state nor an independent nation, since 25th July 1952 the

Constitution of Puerto Rico came into effect providing a new status: *Estado Libre Asociado* (Free Associated State), which has been consequently presented with the misleading English translation of ‘Commonwealth’.

After the Spanish-American war, Puerto Rico became part of the ‘Insular Cases’ of 1901 which declared these islands (Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam and Northern Marianas) to be territories of the U.S. However, its citizens were not granted equal voting rights. The 1901 Supreme Court document declared Puerto Rico to be a territory belonging to the United States, but not part of the United States. This refers to being foreign to the U.S. in a domestic sense, although internationally a subject to U.S. sovereignty under the territorial clause. Still in force, the Insular Cases define Puerto Ricans as racially alien and domestically foreign.

Power relations, become evidenced throughout Puerto Rican history in its relation to the U.S.: the Jones-Shafroth Act (1917-ongoing) that established Puerto Rico as a territory of the U.S. and Puerto Ricans, U.S. citizens lacking voting rights in presidential elections; cabotage laws (since 1900, Foraker Act) that establish absolute control of commerce by U.S. Merchant Marine; the introduction and testing of the contraceptive pill in Puerto Rican women (1956)⁷; a program of population control with involuntary sterilisation (1930s-1970s)⁸; the *carpeteo* system of espionage and political harassment⁹; the Gag Law (1948, *Ley de la Mordaza* or Law 53) which criminalised the gathering and expression of national independence thought; the torturing, imprisonment, and violent death of political dissidents¹⁰; the testing of the Agent Orange in the Puerto Rican farms to be used during the Vietnam war; the use of Puerto

⁷ See: *The Pill*, 2003.

⁸ See: Alvarado and Tietze, 1947; Aviles and Azize-Vargas, 1997; Davila, 1990; *La Operación*, 1984; and Rodriguez-Trias, 1994.

⁹ See: Bosque-Pérez and Colón Morera, 2006; Denis, 2015; and Martinez-Valentín, 2001.

¹⁰ Some of the persecuted, arrested, and/or killed for their nationalists views and actions have been: Pedro Albizu Campos, Blanca Canales, Lolita Lebrón, Rafael Cancel Miranda, Francisco Matos Paoli, Carlos Soto Arriví, Arnaldo Darío Rosado Torres, Elizam Escobar, Ricardo Jiménez, Adolfo Matos, Dilia Noemí Pagán, Alicia Rodríguez, Ida Luz Rodríguez, Luis Rosa, Edwin Cortés, Carmen Valentín, Alberto Rodríguez, Alejandrina Torres, Juan Enrique Segarra-Palmer, Filiberto Ojeda, Avelino González Claudio, Norberto González Claudio, and the case of prisoner Oscar López Rivera convicted in 1981, whose sentence was commuted in the last days of Barack Obama’s presidency (2017). This is not an exhaustive list.

Rican lands by biotech corporations like Monsanto, Pioneer, Syngenta, and Bayer as transgenic laboratory for testing and propagating genetically modified crops¹¹; the bombarding and polluting of the Puerto Rican islands of Culebra (1909-1975) and Vieques (1941-2003) for U.S. navy military practice¹²; the chemical waste remaining from navy practices, principal cause for diseases and high cancer rates¹³; the expropriation of lands for U.S. investors and millionaires (2012, Acts 20 and 22 tax laws; 2018, cryptocurrency paradise)¹⁴; the recent implementation of a U.S. federal law (Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act a.k.a. PROMESA) that establishes a Fiscal Control Board (signed by Barack Obama on 30 June 2016) responding to the unpayable and possibly illegal 72\$ billion debt (publicly declared by 3rd August 2015), with seven unelected members appointed by congress, that provides sovereign powers that effectively overrule decisions by Puerto Rico's legislature and governor; and much more. Under the acknowledgement of these historical and current events I speak of violence in terms of colonised bodies and colonised lands. It is in this insular reality that encounters with the artist Freddie Mercado have been and continue to be developed.

Studies show that currently 59.2% of people from Puerto Rican origin (first and second generation) live in the United States, with an emigration of 218,137 people between 2010 and 2014 (Cohn, Patten, and Hugo Lopez, 2014; Duany, 2015). From 2015 onwards there has been an unprecedented emigration as an effect of the declared economic crisis that has led to rough austerity measures and unemployment, and the strike of two category five hurricanes on September 2017, with around 200,000 people migrating to the U.S. after hurricane Maria. The 2010s have seen the greatest wave since the 'Great Migration' of the 1950s and 1960s. In the Puerto Rican case, land plays a unique role in body politics. As evidenced in the 1922 case *Balzac v. People of Porto Rico*: 'It is locality that is determinative of the application of

¹¹ See the series "El experimento caribeño de Monsanto" by the *Centro de Periodismo Investigativo*.

¹² See: *Memorias de Culebra*, 2012; and *Vieques en el espejo de Panamá*, 2013.

¹³ See: Gonzalez and Goodman, 2013; Ortiz-Roque and López-Rivera, 2004; Sasha Davis, Hayes-Conroy and Jones, 2007.

¹⁴ On 20 and 22 tax laws, see: Grensler, 2015; Marino, 2013; 2014. On cryptocurrency investors in the Island after hurricane Maria, see: Klein, 2018.

the Constitution, in such matters as judicial procedure, and not the status of the people who live in it.’ (1922: 4) In other words, Puerto Ricans who move to the U.S. acquire the same constitutional rights as any other U.S. citizen from the ‘mainland’ and consequently, a U.S. citizen will lose his or her rights if to live in Puerto Rico. U.S. citizenship gives economic, legal, and territorial control over Puerto Rican land and its people. Metropolitan citizenship and welfare transfers, make Puerto Rico a ‘modern colony’.

A colonial situation more than five centuries long (1493-current) has produced a psychopathology of dependence, political infantilism, social fragmentation, and numbness. The colonial spaces were (and arguably remain) heterogeneous spaces, fragmented spaces, cut and crossed by borders, but by internal borders (Mezzandra and Neilson, 2013). Racial denial is led by the idea of a frozen folklore and the high levels of inequality are commonly unrecognised. Nonetheless, coloniality has not suppressed forms of resistance notably expressed in cultural independence and re-production that has prevented the total disappearance or assimilation into the dominant culture. Rather this liminal identity is a complex trans-Caribbean identity of multiplicities and complexities that has become a decolonising articulation of the corporeal memory. Liminality has become part of the passing on of resistance and its constant reconstruction. The complexity of liminality is what makes the upheavals of resistance more difficult to trace, study, and restrict. Puerto Rican scholar Juan Duchesne claims that ‘Puerto Rican culture articulates itself as an anti-colonial resistance characterized by strategies of simulation, opacity and invisibility (disappearance) that enact an “out-of-place” in which an autonomous national and social subject is constantly reformulated.’ (2011: 32) For Duchesne, disappearance is repeated as aggression, then as resistance, and finally abolished by being transformed into an ‘out of place’ of resistance towards the dominant order. In this ‘out of place’, dichotomies (e.g. real/fantastic) are annulled by the real-multiple, where nothing stops being real in the articulation of multiple realities. The Puerto Rican subject/body can be presented as liminal *persona*—defined by Victor Turner (1967) as one of structural invisibility: ‘at once no longer classified and not yet

classified', 'neither living nor dead, both living and dead'—as a transit through visibility and invisibility where an 'out of place' is enacted as resistance. Hence, the 'out of place' described by Duchesne makes possible the constant reformulation of the Puerto Rican culture. Similarly, the liminal period for Turner has a transitional nature, 'betwixt and between' all fixed points in time-space structural classification, where, the basic building blocks of a culture are exposed, and existing social structures could be transformed or rather reinforced. Performance, as an ever changing and alive multidisciplinary expression, opens the path to the understanding of cultural processes and struggles while providing an occurrence for the 'out of place' to be enacted, and constantly remade.

Moving from the particularities of the Puerto Rican geography of bodies/subjects, the violent imposition of geographical, cultural, national, linguistic, and gendered borders is contested by the existential liminal placing. Neither here nor there, neither one nor the other, border-crossers want and jointly intend to inhabit the liminalities of the borderlands interstices. The transnational artists of La Pocha Nostra (LPN) present themselves as border-crossers. LPN's foundation and direction is rooted in border dilemma, originally focused in the experience of Latinos living in the U.S. La Pocha Nostra's director Guillermo Gómez-Peña brings to the collective his own experience and work as Chicano/Mexican living in the U.S. who since the late 1970s has been working with 'border art' and issues of otherness. Throughout more than two decades, understanding the intersectional nature of oppressions has allowed LPN to be formed by international changing members, who bring about diverse experiences of domination. However, with its headquarters in San Francisco, the core of the collective has always been mainly produced from and by a U.S. scenario informed by the 150-year history of the Mexico-U.S. border: the Latin America-U.S. border.

In this sense, both cases to be discussed are situated, although not exclusively, on how issues of contemporary otherness have been experienced by body subjectivities that in one way or another are in relation to the U.S. machinery of otherness. Nonetheless, contemporary othering traces back further into histories of slavery, rape and animalisation during the

conquest of the Americas. Border and otherness are intertwined concepts, coming from circular definitions; the border is defined by the territory of otherness, which comes into being only through the tracing of the border. The border is presented here not simply as geopolitical site, but rather as a social inscription of the body/geography traced by cross generational experiences of exploitation. This notion of the border has been developing since the 1980s with artists, activists and writers engaged with the U.S.-Mexico border. Vital for this understanding of the borderlands is the ground-breaking work of Chicana queer theorist and writer Gloria Anzaldúa published in 1987. At the confluence of the border, a *mestiza* consciousness is presently in the making:

The work of *mestiza* consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended. The answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in **healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts**. A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle, but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, of violence, of war. (Anzaldúa, 2012: 102. Original italics, my bold)

As Chicana lesbian, Anzaldúa's work is founded in her embodied knowledge produced as a state of constant crossings, where the border is a wound, a language, a provocation. For her, more than duality or the synthesis of duality, a third perspective arises—of cultures, genders, cosmogonies, races. The border becomes a state of being of the liminal, of a border subject. This notion of border understands the contemporary world as built up by layers of borders and dichotomies. The portability of the border (Sheren, 2015) allows its extrapolation from the division of nations into wider issues of othering that have come to represent a space of performance beyond the site or theme-specificity of a geopolitical wall. 'For these artists, "the border" could be a state of mind as well as a boundary between nations; in the most extreme theorization, the border occurs wherever there are places of coexisting cultural or social difference.' (Sheren, 2015: 60) Consequently, the art of border-crossing implies a liminal state in action. An activity of reinvention delinking from the dualistic invention of

Other and the Same, against the configuration of oppression and privilege. In both cases to be discussed these artists perform (in) the liminal and through it they engage with a tricksterish energy—the doings and becomings of trickster elaborated in the next chapter.

1.1.3 Early XXI Century ‘Other’: La Pocha Nostra and Freddie Mercado

‘Us’ and ‘them’, the ‘one’ and the ‘other’ are linguistic signals of difference that unmark the performativity of identity through binary opposition. Such binaries are forged together and usually involve power relations in which one pair is empowered with a positive identity and the other side becomes the subordinated Other (Barker, 2004). To this account the unidirectional notion of otherness raises the claim and the refusal of the subject who is inscribed in such discourses by dominant colonialist, capitalist and patriarchal denomination.

The increasingly permeable polarities of local/international, contextual/global, centres/peripheries, and North/South have been the discourse presented by globalisation of the market and continuing migratory movements. Identities have been distorted, bought and sold by the intervention of global media. In this scenario heightening these exoticised body identities in correspondence to those taboos, fetishes, desires, and uncomfortable feelings produced by the ‘alien Other’, has been the work of many performance artists, especially those in exile or engaging with an international audience, but also for those experimenting alienation in their own oppressive national environment. Amelia Jones has argued that in contemporary art practices:

identifications are posed, interrogated, opened out, and performed as fluid and interrelational [...] Artists have, as it were, put bodies (theirs or others) inside, across, and at cross purposes with these structures to turn them upside down, to occupy an in-between position—opening the visual field, and the body of the exaggeratedly ‘other’, to potential identifications rather than simply or only positioning it as a site of objectification, albeit which the artist hopes to recuperate or reverse. (Jones, 2012: 88)

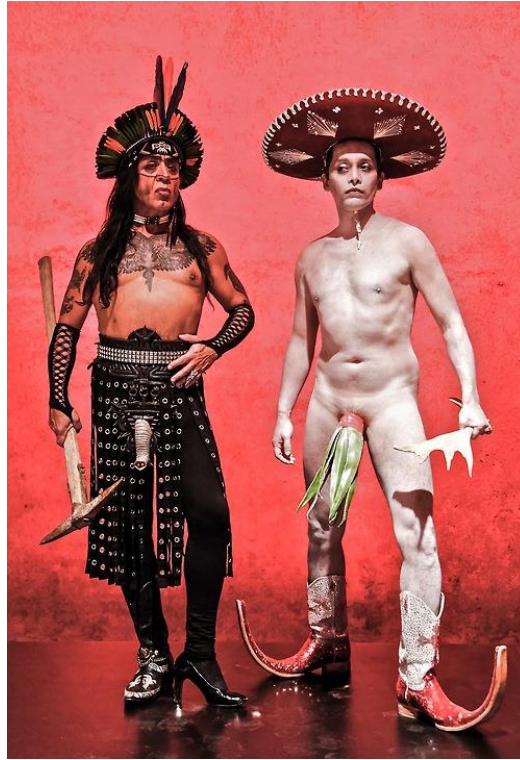


Image 1. 'Robo-Proletarian Warriors', Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Saúl García López.
Corpo Insurrecto, 2012, La Pocha Nostra.
 Steirischer Herbst Festival, Graz. Photo: Wolfgang Silveri.

Since 1993 under the direction of Mexican-American performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña, the international troupe of La Pocha Nostra (LPN) has performed eccentric identities of exaggerated ethnic and sexual characters which feed from the mediated stereotypes of otherness [Image 1]. The repertoire of the 'Other' goes from queer gangster or mariachi Chicano to an Arab prostitute-nun body with the head of a slaughtered pig. The Spanglish neologism Pocha Nostra translates as either 'our impurities' or 'the cartel of cultural bastards' (La Pocha Nostra, 2016a).¹⁵ The dominant representation of the body-identities is cross-identified as a 'hybrid performance personae', decorated and ornamented bodies that display various simultaneous sexual, national, gender, class, and ethnic identifiers. These displays, created in public places, galleries, museums and cabarets, aim to raise crucial issues by mimicking mainstream culture 'and when the mirror is standing between them and us, reflecting their fantasies and desires, *we break it in the audience's face*' (Gómez-Peña,

¹⁵ The name 'La Pocha Nostra' is a play on the Sicilian Mafia's La Cosa Nostra, substituting the word 'pocha', in reference to the term 'pocho' used pejoratively by the Mexicans to name those Mexicans that crossed the border to the U.S. and have 'lost' their culture. The Chicano community has re-appropriated this insult charging it as identity position (similarly to 'queer' in a different context). The use of the feminine 'pocha' is a queering of the term. See: d'Emilia, 2015b.

2005b: 251. My emphasis). In a refraction of the audience's projections these interventions occur in a multileveled change of positionality, where, now 'the other is you' (Gómez-Peña in Jones, 2012: 63). This 'you' is not a fixed determined self but rather an open-ended question (Jones, 2012). The polymorphous body display of La Pocha Nostra opens a possibility of fluctuating and mobile supra-identities which are projected onto and freely incorporated by the spectators.

In the exhibition of these hybrid personas the audience has a chance to alter and add up ingredients into the mixed identity portrait. The performers pose as 'artificial savages' making themselves completely available for the audience to 'explore' them, alter their identities through costumes, props or makeup, and choose from a 'menu of interactions' their engagement with the performers' body-identity. (Gómez-Peña, 2005b) The audience may even replace the performers for a short period of time and become the Other. The interchangeable performer-public roles trigger the outward gaze inwards enacting an identity game through exaggerated and ludicrous possibilities of consumable stereotyping. In these interaction of 'extreme performance games' violence and eroticism are heightened through props such as dildos or guns as well as through other resources such as the whipping or caressing of the body. The bodies are treated as geographies of cultural memory, assault, and desire. Working on the borders of identity, inhabiting the liminal, La Pocha Nostra wants to create places where the spectator is in the position of a 'foreigner' or a 'minority' creating a world where 'cultural borders have moved to centre stage while the alleged mainstream is pushed to the margins and treated as exotic and unfamiliar.' (Gómez-Peña, 2005b: 80) This world-order inversion aims to question the postcolonial structures of exclusion and marginality.

Puerto Rican performance artist Freddie Mercado (b. 1967, Santurce) has been working in body transformations since the late 1980s using female transvestism and transformations into hybrid animals and grotesque dolls as part of an exploration on the phenomena of transgender, trans-local, and trans-racial [Image 2]. Through foam prostheses, body paint, and

costume design the work of Mercado aims to transgress notions of public spectatorship, proposing a provocation to the citizens of the Island. Engaging in a carnival-like performative-self he disturbs the normal codes celebrating the animal and monstrous, the blurred boundaries between human/non-human animal-object/subject distinctions. Mercado may become a hybrid animalistic display, a national woman icon, or a voluptuous mother-doll of interracial babies. Mercado's body is the site of constant transformation and incarnation of the real and imaginary, the proper and the bad-mannered. His 'constant performance' life can be witnessed in the Puerto Rican streets, buses and bars, in academic symposia and cabarets, in rock shows and music videos, in theatre and dance presentations, in local or international galleries and art fairs. His transformative persona takes public transportation and wanders through the streets inhabiting the public space in his voluptuous hyper-sexualised animality, what Lawrence La Fountain has called a 'baroque surreal' (La Fountain-Stokes, 2011: 7). Mercado states that 'the only way I make people connect [with reality/ with each other] is when I present myself like this.' (Mercado et al., 2013) By making the 'absurd' a quotidian experience, Mercado's constant performance life proposes another way to establish social relationships.



Image 2. Freddie Mercado, 2002. ARCO Art Fair, Madrid. Photo: Marina Reyes.

Mercado's performance is a constant affective encountering with the multiplicities of society. This is his physical and symbolic working ground. He declares: 'The public is the one that teaches me. My work is basically in the streets. That involves taking risks. [...] I submit myself to anything that could happen.' (Mercado et al., 2013)

Both the case of the transnational troupe of La Pocha Nostra and Puerto Rican artist Freddie Mercado, present personae that embody unfixed sexual, gender, racial, cultural, human 'otherness'. The interrelatedness with the spectators allows a possibility of identifications to occur in the in-between space among people, aiming to break the mirror between us and them, where the social constructions of the bodies may be potentially shaken by the sudden physical encounter with hyper queer, anthropomorphic, transracial and inter-classed bodies. The 'baroque', 'hyper' or exaggerated bodies of sexual, monstrous, savage-exotic otherness—wounded and dangerous bodies—are the embodied hyperbole of subjectivities subjected to oblivion and abuse. Working at the margins of a body-identity that has been commercially globalised through the hegemonic discourse of patriarchal and 'centre' ('First' World) powers these uncanny performance encounters position the identity 'issue' as a construction propelled by the discourse positioning of otherness. Performer and spectator, the Other and the Same, are open-questions performing the 'I'. Proposing an encounter among bodies is proposing the mutual co-positioning of the bodies exposed to each other's emergent bodily sensations affected and affecting through such positioning.

1.2 Spectator's Masquerade

1.2.1 Spectacle: Visions within and beyond the Specular

Spectacle derives from the sense of sight: something to see, watch, behold. In its broadest sense, spectacle is an apparently transitory phenomenon. This display may be for modern citizens, police and leading politicians, specific communities, unfiltered observers, mediatised eyes, gods or ancestors. Spectacles may serve for domination, resistance, or re-

existence, tracing memory paths that envision other futures. For different cultures, generations, cosmogonies and political configurations 'spectacle' differs in its ways and production of relational arrangements. The concept itself is born from a Latin wording (*spectare*, *spectaculum*), thus localised in Western thought. Here, however, we explore Western and non-Western relational arrangements (embedded in the two artistic practices to be discussed) that trace, corrode or expand what spectacle becomes.

From a Yoruba (Nigeria and Benin) and pan-Yoruba (Sierra Leone, Cuba, Puerto Rico and Brazil) perspective, spectacle refers to revelation. The word for spectacle (*iron*) is the same word used to speak of a mystical vision (*ojùù iron*), also used to refer to a remembrance (*inûron*, 'mental recollection') (Drewal and Thompson Drewal, 1990). As vision or remembrance, spectacle in this sense, seems to imply the revealing of a dimension of reality inaccessible to the human eyesight. 'They are otherworldly phenomena whose worldly manifestations are temporarily and periodically reintroduced or regenerated.' (Drewal and Thompson Drewal, 1990: 1) The implied observation of the spectacle means also actual sights and mental images of ethereal beings. Spectacle in Yoruba cosmos has spiritual transcendence as it possesses the performative power of *ashe* or *àṣẹ* (life-force). Furthermore, 'the art forms that regulate spectacle become instruments for regulating society' (Drewal and Thompson Drewal, 1990: 16). As an otherworldly phenomenon, spectacle takes part of forces that makes it not only affecting but also efficacious, not only symbolic or metaphorical but instrumental (Drewal and Thompson Drewal, 1990). By connecting with the otherworld of the deities and ancestors, spectacle provides a social purpose of effective functionality.

Ritualistic spectacle has been used in other geographies as a social or individual healing technique. The Chilean performer, writer and filmmaker Alejandro Jodorowsky introduces the 'psychomagic acts', which rather than connecting to the otherworld propose a reconnecting with the collective memory and the hidden sides of the individual. For Jodorowsky these acts of shamanic psychotherapy are exercises where it is the task of 'the unconscious to decipher the information transmitted by the conscious.' (Jodorowsky, 2004:

61) As healing vessel, the psychomagic ‘finds in the delusional metaphor a path of healing the unconscious, and through poetic acts leads it to the symbolic realisation.’ (2004: 194) In the magic process, the individual can generate alterities that allow the magic act to occur offering the possibility of confronting that which was not done, in search for the psychic healing. These performative actions aim at destroying the individual’s pathological patterns but may also be held as operations of collective magic or ‘social psychomagic’.¹⁶ Following the collective magic of spectacle for Jodorowsky, the concept of the psychomagic action has been freely reintroduced by La Pocha Nostra to describe or name their performances.¹⁷ For LPN’s director, psychomagic is the fundamental force for the cathartic break and self-liberation of the performers (Gómez-Peña and Nemónico, 2015) while the performance spectacle becomes a process of ‘cultural and spiritual exorcism’ that aims at the ‘construction of symbolic systems to transform reality and to stage other parallel worlds’ (Gómez-Peña, 2013)—this latter is similar to shamanic procedures.

From the colonial project of the West (and global North) a different kind of spectacle has been producing and perpetuating world-making relational arrangements. In this spectacle social relations are mediated by images created by the colonisers over the colonised culture and its subjects. The colonial ‘regime of representation’ produces symbolic power through the representation and knowledge of the ‘Other’ in the hands of the ‘Same’ (Said, 1977). Representation through the discourse of power operates as hegemonic tool. Through this epistemic imposition these othered cultures are produced as such through a spectacle that translates things/people into a display of signs and symbols. The ‘spectacle of the Other’

¹⁶ Jodorowsky has conducted several social psychomagic acts of healing, e.g. October 2010, on national terror during the military dictatorship, Clandestine Centre for Detention, Torture and Extermination ESMA, Buenos Aires; and November 2011, on drug war, *March of the Skulls*, towards Garibaldi plaza, Mexico City.

¹⁷ Some of LPN performance titles directly allude to psychomagic: *10 acciones psicomágicas contra la violencia*, 2009; *Psycho-magic Actions for a World Gone Wrong*, 2011; *La Pocha Nostra Remix: Psycho-Magic Actions Against Violence*, 2012; *Ex-Machina 3.0: A Psychomagic Exorcism of the Tech Industry by La Pocha Nostra*, 2016. Recently other Mexican artists have also used the term ‘psychomagic’ to define their (shamanic) actions such as Felipe Osornio (aka Lechedevirgen Trimegisto) from Queretaro. Alejandro Jodorowsky’s residence in Mexico (1960-1972) had a strong influence on the history of Mexican performance art with his Ephemeral Panic actions he describes as ‘party-spectacle’ with ‘euphoria, humour, and terror’. See: Prieto, 2001.

functions through binary oppositions that capture the diversity of the world in a reductionist way of establishing meaning only under the veil of power relations. The eroticising and exoticising gaze of spectacle over the bodies of the ‘Others’ is a representational strategy of desire in the form of fetishism elaborated by imperial colonial machinery (Hall, 2003). The exotic bodies that are ‘discovered’ (colonised) are found fundamentally different from the constructed Western sense of ‘self’. Furthermore, the colonial process was sex-differentiated producing hierarchical categories rooted in race/gender relations. The creation of women, as a category defined by anatomy and subordinated to men in all situations, was one of the very first accomplishments of the colonial state (Oyěwùmí, 1997). The sexualised imagery towards the female colonised body has therefore been especially relevant in the construction of the imperial spectacle of the other.¹⁸

The spectacular representation of the ‘Other’ is fundamental in the making and production of modern capitalist society. For the past and current colonial project, the image representation (propaganda, advertisement, ethnographic documentary, etc.) of those othered bodies and cultures being vanished, ‘educated’ and oppressed plays a key role in consolidating discourses of progress, democracy and paternalistic aid produced by those perpetuating violence, conquest and domination. Following logics of fear and desire, historic and contemporary forms of colonial imagery have successfully created the sense/concept-ion of the Other as an engine that pierces all modern modes of social relation in contemporary society. As these images (appearances) of the Other have informed modern relations of domination, body imagery plays a fundamental role in the counter-strategies of resistance against these prevailing power structures.

The spectacle of the Other has been used by the so-called in revolutionary ways that have disengaged from dominant structures while virally inserting themselves in the regime of

¹⁸ Some thought provoking texts regarding the process of gynaecologic investigation with enslaved women: Cooper Owens, 2017; the conception of gender inseparable to invention of the notion of race: Rojas Miranda & Godoy Vega (eds.), 2017; and the imposition and creation of Western heteronormativity: Somerville, 2000.

representation. The ultimate example of this has been the Indigenous Zapatista movement (EZLN) born in the Lacandona jungle, Chiapas, Mexico on the 1st January 1994, currently active and with global support. Taking strategic advantage of the Internet and the news media, Zapatista images are displayed around the globe.

Beginning in the mid-1990s, these images, seen worldwide, have evoked global uprising against the state and corporate capitalism, corrupt bureaucracy, and power wielded by the few against the interests of the many. *Zapatismo*, aside from creating a new kind of social movement that seeks to build local alternatives to power rather than to take power of the state, has created an image and a mythic space that is unique among liberation movements, and that has allowed it to survive in the popular imagination, and therefore on the ground... (Conant, 2010: 40)

The ‘branding’ power of the ski-mask used by the Zapatistas becomes a poetic propaganda of radical otherness (Conant, 2010) that affects the perception of the (invisibilised) Indigenous population who cover their faces in order to be seen. Furthermore, as a symbol of resistance the ski-mask allows multiple wearers. As described by *Subcomandante Marcos*, EZLN spokesperson until 2014,

We conceive ourselves as a group that raises a series of demands, which has the fortune that these demands find coincidences, reflections, or mirrors in the demands of other parts of the country and other parts of the world. In any case, the merit of the EZLN is to have found the *frequency of communication for that multiple reflection* (...) We had the good fortune to have found the harmony to not only communicate with these groups but to make them feel called-upon and armed by this discourse. (Vázquez Montalbán, 1999: 142, 144. My emphasis)¹⁹

EZLN’s communication practices (EZLN communiques and news), as a form of guerrilla communication, allowed the local group to transform into a national and transnational movement of *Zapatismo*. Their politicisation of dialogue, through inter-epistemic dialogues, is a mode of revolutionary practice that has provided a theoretical and experiential critique of

¹⁹ My translation. Original reads: ‘*Nosotros nos concebimos como un grupo que plantea una serie de demandas, que tiene la fortuna que esas demandas encuentran coincidencias, reflejos, o espejos en las demandas de otras partes del país y de otras partes del mundo. En todo caso, el mérito del EZLN es el de haber encontrado la frecuencia de comunicación para que se produjera esa reflejo múltiple (...) La fortuna que tuvimos fue de haber encontrado la sintonía para no solo comunicarnos con esos grupos sino para que esos grupos se sintieran interpelados y armados por ese discurso.*’

globalisation (Jeffries, 2001) and Western notions of universalism (Grosfoguel, 2012a). Zapatistas spectacle has insurgently re-established connections, solidarities, and collective resistance. As Indigenous movement resisting the forces of modernity, neo-liberal globalisation and colonialism, Zapatismo has an international agenda linked to other Indigenous movements in the Americas, ecological and feminist movements, and the first and third world left. This new political mythology (local-global politics; decolonial pluriversalism) occupies spectacle's machinery fighting against the ideological subjugation produced by the society of spectacle (the 4th hydra) that predetermines our territory of the imaginary and collective doing (Almendra, 2016).

Inserted in Western modern capitalism and its world-making (colonial) project, spectacle becomes the representational imagery production that mediates social relations and shapes reality. This mediation works as a tool for segregation and has been strategic in the Western construction of the *image* (representation) of the colonial Other, as desirable and fearsome, infantile and savage. Decentralising spectacle from these constructions provides notions of relationality that account for mystical revelation with spiritual transcendence (Yoruba), and collective/individual healing and liberation (psycho-magic/ shamanic acts). Some so-called 'Others' have engaged with the 'spectacle of the Other' as a counter attack strategy on the colonial regime of representation. Furthermore, engaging with the imposition of Western representation over the colonised bodies does not necessarily imply that other modes of relational arrangements become dismissed or forgotten.

1.2.2 Liberation and Emancipatory models: Dussel and Rancière in conversation

When wondering how knowledge of the corporeal memory is (co)produced by the spectacle's proposals, cultural relativism is at play. Following this regard how is the notion of spectator constructed in relation to the notion of spectacle?

The spectator-spectacle appears to be mirrored in the historicity of what a particular civilian-society entails. In the construction of performance spectacle, a division has become

consistently clear for the viewers in relation to the society at play. The alienating logic is culturally and historically constructed. The notion of this division varies and shapes what spectacle becomes and with it, the question for the ontological nature of the spectator. The reiteration of positionalities is imbricated in specific cultural notions developed over centuries regarding intersubjectivity and art-life experienced understanding. Two philosophical-political models become useful for this discussion: the philosophy and ethics of liberation founded by Argentinean philosopher Enrique Dussel and the politics of emancipation presented by French philosopher Jacques Rancière. Initially, the nuances of ‘liberation’ for Dussel are discussed, followed by the Rancièrian proposal of ‘emancipation’.

Enrique Dussel explains how the ‘philosophy of liberation’ was born by the need to ‘reconstruct all philosophical discourse’ in order to ‘generate a *new discourse* from the *peculiarity of the excluded and oppressed*, the poor, the Latin-American people.’ (Dussel, 2007: 65. Original emphasis)

By mid-1970s this discourse moves beyond the Latin American horizon and it starts to unfold in other oppressed continents (Africa and Asia), within the popular movements, class struggles, ecologist, feminist (Feminist Philosophy of Liberation), in pedagogy (Philosophy of the Pedagogy of the Oppressed), in the struggle against racism, etc....and it is realised that it is a philosophy that must assume the pretensions of the ‘global’, because there are oppressed and excluded people in *all the systems* that exist. That is, it has slowly begun (with its own categories, principles and method) to construct a *new ‘resource’* of philosophical ‘*universality*’. (Dussel, 2007: 65. Original emphases)

Philosophies of liberation are not born from the ‘centre’ (‘core’) of power but rather from the ‘peripheries’. Although these ‘peripheries’ (geographical, gender, class) are united under a spectrum of oppressions (matrix of domination) it is rather the regional and experiential particularities from which this philosophy is built upon. ‘History’ of philosophy is based on a history of Eurocentric thought. Who has been the philosophising subject? Dussel’s focus reveals the geopolitics of the oppressed and the political space of philosophy. He argues that spatiality is central for the Cartesian *ego cogito* as it constitutes the periphery, and asks itself

‘Are the Amerindians human beings?’ (Fernandez de Oviedo in Dussel, 1985: 3) This ontology arises from the previous experience of domination over other persons.

From the "I conquer" applied to the Aztec and Inca world and all America, from the "I enslave" applied to Africans sold for the gold and silver acquired at the cost of the death of Amerindians working in the depths of the earth, from the "I vanquish" of the wars of India and China to the shameful "opium war"? from this "I" appears the Cartesian *ego cogito*. (Dussel, 1985: 8)

To interpret the periphery from the knowledge produced by the colonising centres becomes problematic. Against the classic ontology of the centre rises the philosophy of liberation. ‘Our thought sets out from non-Being, nothingness, otherness, exteriority, the mystery of no-sense. It is, then, a "barbarian" philosophy.’ (1985: 14)

The philosophy of liberation turns to reality as exteriority. The approach to exteriority becomes a fundamental category in this understanding.

The face of a person is revealed as other when it is extracted from our system of instruments as exterior, as someone, as a freedom that questions, provokes, and appears, as one who resists instrumental totalization. (1985: 40)

Constitutive of exteriority is the question of the Other. The Other is the basic and starting point for the philosophy of liberation, the question of alterity (e.g. the peripheral peoples, the oppressed classes, the woman, the child). ‘The other is the alterity of all possible systems, beyond "the same," which totality always is.’ (1985: 43) The Other is not different to the Same, in which the Other will still fall within what Dussel calls the *totality*—the totalisation of the system attempting to include all exteriority (historically Western Europe and U.S.). Rather he argues for a metaphysical ‘distinction’ (separation, always other) which indicates better the diversity and does not suppose previous unity.

The dominant totality is incapable of acknowledging the Other in its alterity. As something different, otherness threatens the unity of ‘the Same’. Therefore, the dominant praxis eliminates the distinct because distinctness denies the one-dimensionality of the system (totality). Either assassinated or totalised in the ‘Same’, the Other is *beyond* Being; other than

the system. In complete disrespect for the other's culture and history, 'the centre has not let the other be other.' (1985: 53) Alienated in a foreign totality the system has totalised exteriority to systematize alterity. Alienation entails epistemic re-location that displaces the Others into the imposed systemic centre.

The historical character of the Other in Dussel is central to Modernity's birth in 1492, in Europe's confrontation with the 'Other' in the territories named by the empire as the Americas.

By controlling, conquering, and violating the Other, Europe defined itself as discoverer, conquistador, and colonizer of an alterity likewise constitutive of modernity. Europe never discovered (*des-cubierto*) this Other as Other but covered over (*encubierto*) the Other as part of the Same: i.e., Europe. Modernity dawned in 1492 and with it the myth of a special kind of sacrificial violence which eventually eclipsed whatever was non-European. (1995: 12)

Covering diversity under the veil of unity entails a process of difference that chains the Other in a negative relational structure. We could then extrapolate this sense and say, the Other was part of the Eurocentric spectacle and mutually constitutive of its modern contemporaneity. Spain was the first to have the experience of constituting the Other, as dominated under the conquistador's control, the control of the centre over the periphery. Latin America was a constitutive moment of Modernity. 'The conquistador was the first modern, active, practical human being to impose his violent individuality on the Other.' (1995: 38) This dialectic inclusion, denies the Other as other, and becomes forced, alienated into the dominant totality as oppressed. America is not the appearance of the Other, but rather the projection of the Same, covered by alterity.

Dussel's political theories on the spectacle of power provide a geopolitical notion of the bodies displayed as Other, in the denial of their being in the World. He states that the dynamics of oppression maintain a denial to be other than within the 'totality' of the system imposed by the Same (Being *beyond*). The construction of the modern European subjectivity is born, following Dussel, on this fundamental conception of the Other. Western modernity,

and Westernised modernity, is coextensive and built from this asymmetrical *relationship* to otherness.²⁰

Various concerns arise from Dussel's proposal of liberation. Principal to this discussion is the fact that Dussel does not disengage (delink) from the discourse of otherness but expands on it re-inscribing a binomial relation. Focusing on the Other proves it, and by proving it, in the end is obliged to rediscover it again and again. The theory of liberation presents a clear divide of oppressed and oppressor, as well as a strict geopolitical positioning of cultures (nations and continents) at the 'core' (centre) and the 'periphery'. The complexity of power relations exceeds these dichotomies. The body-subject has a range of social relations connected to race, gender, class, age, profession, etc. where the oppressed can be simultaneously the oppressor. The Other is not an homogeneous concept but neither is the Same.

Furthermore, liberation theology as a current of thought has built its discourse *on* the Other instead of *by* the Other. These othered subjects do not participate in their very definition. From the perspective of the so-called Other, she or he is no Other. So most liberation thinkers advocate and reflect upon a community to which they do not directly belong (e.g. the poor). The structure of Dussel's theory and ethics locates the Other as oppressed, looking for aid, crying 'help me'. The gap between the philosopher and the Other is not bridged, or is it? Dussel argues for a critical location of the intellectual 'between' two cultures (their own culture and Modern culture) following Gloria Anzaldúa's exploration of the border as the locus for critical thought. Deconstructing the globalization/universalising project of the global North (U.S. / Europe) through the optical pluri-focality of each culture, becomes one path towards 'trans-modern' utopia (2012).²¹

²⁰ I use Westernised throughout this text as the epistemic imposition and learning of Western thought that is presented, thought and reproduced as hierarchically superior, following Ramón Grosfoguel's distinction of Western and Westernised (University). See: Grosfoguel, 2013a; 2013b.

²¹ "'Trans-modernity' points toward all of those aspects that are situated "beyond" (and also "prior to") the structures valorized by modern European/North American culture, and which are present in the great non-European cultures and have begun to move toward a *pluriversal* utopia.' (Dussel, 2012: 43)

In deconstructing the spectacle of spectatorship Other / others / otherness becomes a recurring sentiment presented by performance artists liminal to the 'centre' through their 'peripheral' and alienated bodies. Asymmetrical relationships are re-presented, reversed or blurred into 'totalisation'. The body-to-body relation allows a social presence to be present and reconstructed by the relationship of the bodies. Dussel's political proposals through the philosophy of liberation demand a shift of perspective towards the plurality of the 'others', denied by a totalising system that inscribes the Other as part of the Same, as theoretical property through epistemological imposition. The Other is a discourse produced by the geopolitical heteropatriarchal semantics.

The performance of the Other thus does only exist by and for the Same. This implicit spectatorship is intrinsic to the very spectacle of otherness. The statement 'I am not your Other' is nonetheless being directed to the violent imposition of a symbolic reality, engaging with it in a reactionary sense.²² It may be argued that this relationship is rectified as a claim outside the Same totalising machinery but nonetheless reinforced by its very addressing of the Same. Under this understanding of asymmetrical encounters we argue that the spectator is thus essential element in the configuration of the spectacle of power. In a bolder claim, spectator is the quintessential spectacle of power that creates the Other.

The alienation of the 'Other' is in relation to the denial of an-other world-life view under the veil of totalisation. If the spectatorial body incarnates the Same for the spectacle to occur, then the relation to this body is not only self-consuming but a call out to the spectators to perform sameness. The complexities of enunciating from a border-locus have exacerbated othering in the art context with strategies of hyperbole and ridicule used throughout the 1980s-2000s.

Jacques Rancière has provided a political discourse on spectatorship. His often cited writings of 'The Emancipated Spectator' (2007; 2009) follow an analysis on the equality of intelligence formulated years earlier in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in*

²² This claim was made by artist and activist, Jimmie Durham.

Intellectual Emancipation (1987). *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* develops from the revival of the story of Joseph Jacotot (1770-1840), French pedagogue and revolutionary exiled in Brussels after the restoration of the monarchy, creator of the method of ‘intellectual emancipation’. Rancière’s writing is focused on the subject of education, which through Jacotot story provides the enactment of philosophical mediation on equality (1991: ix). It is important to note that education was one of the crucial technologies of colonial rule and has been a key element in class (and world) structuration.

The essential move of Rancière’s political discourse presupposes the existence of equality. By understanding equality as a point of departure instead of a desired purpose, the possibility for conception of ignorance is dismantled. Rancière following Jacotot argues that all people are equally intelligent. The pedagogical myth ‘divides the world into two’ by dividing (categorising) intelligence: an inferior and a superior intelligence (Rancière, 1991: 7). This split divides the intelligent from the ignorant, the capable from the incapable, the mature from the immature, and the developed from the underdeveloped. Jacotot / Rancière believe equality is neither given nor claimed, it is practiced, it is verified.

The story that triggers Rancière’s analysis is the 1818 pedagogical account of Jacotot in Brussels, as appointed part-time French professor in the Catholic University of Leuven after the Bourbons forced him into exile. Not knowing Flemish himself, teaching students who did not know French, a linguistic border situation was at play. Jacotot established a ‘thing in common’ (Rancière, 1991: 2) as methodical source, the bilingual edition of *Telematique*, a novel by François Fénelon that narrated the untold stories of Homer’s *Odyssey*. To Jacotot’s surprise this intellectual experiment worked, and his students learned the French language. From this account a new understanding of the pedagogical experience was formulated.

The experience interpreted by Rancière in pedagogical and ultimately political terms, is especially interesting as intercultural phenomenon. The example is not taken from the perspective of any other subject of study (maths, science, history, arts, etc.) but from

language, the intrinsically cultural mode of communication. The story is situated in a European nation that is divided by language boundary—the official languages are Dutch, French, and German, with Flemish used by more than 60% of the population. The intellectual and cultural privilege Jacotot had in order to be occupying the position of University pedagogue is not mentioned in Rancière's discussion, although a symbolic power was already performing. Belgium had been invaded, annexed and controlled by France (1795-1814), a period where French became the official language and Dutch was noticeably suppressed. Jacotot's anecdote occurred four years after French rule had ended. Furthermore, interestingly for the issue of translation, the strategic element used for bridging the linguistic difference was cultural sameness—the source's reference to the epic tale of the *Odyssey* born in the cradle of Western civilisation.²³

Disregarding the political implications of learning the invader's language in the above-mentioned sociohistorical context, Rancière focuses in Jacotot's revolutionary theories on the equality of intelligences that proclaimed 'intellectual emancipation against the received wisdom concerning the instruction of lower classes' (Rancière, 2007: 271). Two decades later, his reflection of emancipation was introduced into the paradox of the spectator. Rather than proposing a different engagement with the spectators in relation to the dramatic action providing active, immersive or participatory interactions, Rancière dismantles the binary of viewing/known-active/passive in spectatorship by refocusing on the *ignoramus*' equality of knowledge. He deconstructs the opposition of active / passive in terms of spectatorship insisting upon the very presuppositions that underline such dualism. Existing distance is created by maintaining knowledge as a position, inasmuch reproducing separation between knowledge and ignorance amongst those 'ignorant of their ignorance' and those who have the 'knowledge of ignorance'. The emancipation is 'the blurring of the boundary between those who act and those who look; between individuals and members of a collective body.'

²³ Nonetheless Rancière's explanation of this pedagogical translation process misses this detail: 'If they had understood the language by learning Fénelon, it wasn't simply through the gymnastics of comparing the page on the left with the page on the right. It isn't the aptitude for changing columns that counts, but rather the capacity to say what one thinks in the words of others.' (Rancière, 1991:10)

(Rancière, 2009: 19) Breaking hierarchies of knowledge, Rancière brings forward art as an autonomous realm of experience redefining aesthetic in terms of political existence.

We do not have to transform spectators into actors, and ignoramus into scholars. We have to recognize the knowledge at work in the ignoramus and the activity peculiar to the spectator. Every spectator is already an actor in her story; every actor, every man of action, is the spectator of the same story. (Rancière, 2009: 17)

What these spectators or citizens share with one another is their equality, a common power of acquiring and translating, in their own way, what they experience. In this sense, understanding aesthetics as a specific mode of experience, art itself does not need to change its proposals of interaction but rather the change must come from the theorisation and perception of spectatorship; a re-conceptualisation of the public, the citizen, the self through the power of the equality of intelligences. Emancipation begins by abolishing the counter-posing categories (viewing/knowing, appearance/reality, activity/passivity) which define the *a priori* distribution of capacities and incapacities, allegories of inequality that Rancière calls '*le partage du sensible*' (2004).²⁴ These oppositions form the distribution of the visible which is part of the configuration of domination and subjection.

Emancipation for Rancière is a process of verification of the equality of intelligence in all its manifestations. Equality turns on division (dissensus) rather than consensus (ideal of homogeneity). The equal principle of acquiring and applying of knowledge means 'the awareness and the enactment of that equal power of translation and counter-translation.' (2007: 275) Although his examples come from the direction of the master (Jacotot, who does not in turn learn Flemish), in theory Rancière speaks of an equality of translation. In the conversion from one form into another, the appropriation of knowledge may transform its original meaning. While for Rancière emancipation is a practice of equality for modifying the

²⁴ In *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* (2004) Rancière understands the general distribution of the sensible to stand for a commonality that is, however, shared in exclusive parts. This commonality extends to the citizens' positioning in the distribution of spaces, activities and times. The distribution of the sensible is established by what he calls 'police', an order which regulates the division of communities in hierarchies of knowledge, modes of being, organisation and visibility. The 'political', understood as dissensus, is the disturbance of this order through the distribution of ideas, abilities and experiences. See: Rancière, 2004.

distribution of the sensible, Dussel's model of neo-colonial liberation provides a positioning of reality as exteriority, that is situated 'beyond' the frontiers of a world built from the perspective of the centre (of politic, economic or military power), from the reality of the others: 'Only the praxis of oppressed peoples of the periphery, of the woman violated by masculine ideology, of the subjugated child, can fully reveal it [liberation] to us.' (Dussel, 1985: 15) Rancière turns to emancipatory equality of knowledges from the discoveries of a revolutionary pedagogue, calling for an emancipation that blurs the dichotomies installed by the order that regulates social divisions. Dussel focuses on spatiality formulating liberation from the geopolitical and social reality of how modern knowledge-power-and subject-has been built by colonisation. He constructs liberation from this spatiality of exteriority, the oppressed, which is found in all existing systems as perspective towards the plurality of the 'others', against their inscription as part of the Same. For theorising this perspective of the oppressed in the 1980s, Dussel continued to name otherness to insist on the break with the totalising system. Emancipation under the base of equality is formulated from the geopolitical and epistemic power of French philosophy, while liberation under the base of others' perspectives is born from a Latin American reformulation that unveiled the historical modern understanding of intercultural epistemic subjugation. Each performance's repertoire is co-created by those present in order to transfer the knowledge of the embodied memory. The spectator (of the Same) is never outside the spectacle (of the Other). An equal spectacle would blur these dichotomies re-produced by the policing machine of the system, in a form of utopic scenario of translations. The intention of producing equality is not necessarily an aim shared by all artists especially if they aim to tension the inequalities lived in the everyday. Or perhaps other forms of performance invade the everyday as body-subjects of alterity triggering or shattering the assumption of social equality.

1.2.3 Intersubjectivity: An-other Approach

Intersubjectivity becomes a relevant focus to scrape off the spectator-performer/performance 'spectacle' interrelation. To problematise its understanding and history as a concept born from Western philosophy provokes the doubt of wondering if its universal application is even possible and how. The encounters coproduced in the performances interested on the mechanisms of othering appeal to the intersubjective, inasmuch as it is constantly reinvented under the radar of object-subject / subject-subject relation.

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, French philosopher and psychiatrist respectively, have framed the philosophical composition: 'The three figures of philosophy are objectality of contemplation, subject of reflection, and intersubjectivity of communication.' (1994: 92) This assumes intersubjectivity to be held in a context of object-subject relations. With the aim of affirming the perspective of the subject—that knowledge is possessed by subjects—and at the same time to keep the objective validity of knowledge, efforts have emerged to move from the subjective into the intersubjective, as bridging pure subjectivity and pure objectivity (Ferrater Mora, 1998). The 'problem of intersubjectivity' has been posed in almost every philosophy that has developed from the idea of the subject. One way to avoid solipsism, where the validity of the propositions is relative to one subject, has been to speak not of an empirical subject but of a 'transcendental' or 'pure' subject, characteristic of certain forms of idealism. Another way, developed by some positivists, has been to declare that nothing is properly subjective or objective, but that the 'subject' and 'object' are part of one 'reality' that is 'neutral' (Ferrater Mora, 1998). Intersubjectivity has been an issue concerning knowledge, but also concerning relationality, with the question of the Other. The Other has been an ancient concern which in contemporary philosophy has focused mainly on the constitution of the other within the intersubjective, and the reality of the other in the

‘encounter’, the latter discussed in close relation to issues of communication (Ferrater Mora, 1998).²⁵

Otherness as an epistemological position of discourse has created knowledge of the other (historical, sociological and ethnological). Although the question of the Other is posed since the ancient Greek civilizations, in the encounter of worlds (cultures, races, world-views) the politics of the Other expanded into a wider dimension that directly related colonial power to the idea of the other-object. As Kelly Oliver writes ‘Whether these theories celebrate the presence of an autonomous subject produced through intersubjective relations or mourn the loss of that presence produced through absence inherent in intersubjective relations, the subject—as presence or absence—still dominates its others.’ (Oliver, 2001: 6) Intersubjectivity is conceived by the un-othered subject and the ‘subject position’ is not at the other’s range. The radical asymmetry of power operating in colonial machinery posed symbolic otherness as a privilege of the self (Same). The binary or dialectic imposed by Western patriarchal culture hierarchically ordered dualisms of meaning and being implicated in the logic of colonialism.

Intersubjectivity, however, has been coined to explain philosophies outside the West. Carlos Lenkersdorf was a German philosopher and linguist residing in Chiapas, Mexico, for more than two decades before moving to Mexico City. His commitment to the Mayan cultures in Chiapas, especially with the Tojolabal communities led him to learn from them their language, culture and philosophy. He describes this transcultural exchange as an unprecedented dynamic for the Tojolabals who became the Western man’s masters

²⁵ Some contemporary ideas on the other through Western philosophical discourse should briefly be mentioned: Max Scheler concludes that the recognition of the others is not principally intellectual but emotional. Martin Heidegger understands that the other cannot be approached from one’s self to then pass onto the other; the analysis of one self includes the analysis of the ‘other’ (*Dasain* is essentially *Mitsein*). For Jean Paul Sartre the relationship between one self and the other is an essentially conflictive relation—to become object, to become alienated, to appropriate, to collaborate. Jose Ortega y Gasset conceives the other both in society (social) and in ‘coexistence’ (interpersonal). The authenticity of the other in coexistence separates from the falsification of the personal in society. For the above-mentioned, see: Ferrater Mora, 1998: 2669. Maurice Merleau-Ponty focuses on the body as a ‘meaningful core’ and ‘our general medium for having a world’ (Merleau-Ponty, 2005: 169-170). Through the body Merleau-Ponty moves from the co-presence of alter egos into the corporeal property belonging to all bodies (‘intercorporeality’).

(Lenkersdorf, 2003). Seeing the written possibility of their language through Lenkersdorf's learning, he was asked to create a Spanish-Tojolabal dictionary. As he states in the prologue of his book *Los hombres verdaderos: voces y testimonios tojolabales: lengua y sociedad, naturaleza y cultura, artes y comunidad cósmica*, 'with language we name reality; we name reality as we perceive it; because we belong to different cultures and nations, we do not have the same perception of reality; therefore we relate differently to the same reality.' (2005: 13). To his judgement the key to the linguistic and cultural particularity of the Tojolabals is *intersubjectivity*.

To describe a Mayan-Tojolabal worldview through a concept with implicit Western history is not unproblematic. Lenkersdorf describes that 'Intersubjectivity is not a term used by the Tojolabal but used to explain linguistic structures and furthermore a structure from which they focus and perceive reality.' (2008: 31) The Westernising translation is used, however, with a different connotation. Intersubjectivity for him works to describe what characterises the Tojolabal society and language in the sense that we are all subjects and there are no objects in language or in culture. This shifts the subject-object relation known to Western philosophical discourse to a subject-subject relation. Lenkersdorf supports his views initially through language to then develop a Tojolabal philosophical discourse from their societal structure and relations with themselves, nature and the cosmos.

Indo-European languages are characterised by their subject-object relationship. In Spanish to say something to someone, is conceived as only the action of one subject. 'I said' (*Le dije*). The other, to whom something is said, plays a subordinate role (grammatically, the indirect object). In Tojolabal there are two agentic subjects (I) and (you), one said, the other one listened. 'I said. You heard' (2005: 29). Linguistically there is a constant use of the 'us' (*-tik*) by all the members of the society. This use of the '*-tik*' is common to the Tojolabal but also to the Tzeltal, Tzotzil and Ch'ol. Each person speaks in the name of the 'us' without losing his or her individuality, but at the same time each one has transformed into a voice of the 'us.' (2002). 'Us' has the function of an organisational principle that does not erase the individual

but gives space to develop all its potentiality. This intersubjective 'us' denotes coexistence, communal living and a world view. '[B]oth the 'us' in Maya-Tzeltal as the Cartesian I, represent philosophical positions (...)' (2002: 10). The intersubjective community transcends the limits of the human society into nature. Living in a bio-cosmos in which we are all members of a cosmic community that corresponds to the intersubjective community. (2008: 31) With the intersubjective us, all its parts are found as subjects, and as such, equal. The epistemological act is equally intersubjective; there is no object to know against a knowing subject that holds the object. (2004: 86) All cognitive events occur between two subjects. Two subjects are in the process of knowing each other mutually.

Lenkersdorf's extraordinary task of intercultural philosophical translation evidenced a non-Western philosophical reality for the Westernised world, demystifying the Eurocentric narrative of philosophy and confronting learned schemes of Western thought. Evidently the Tojolabal and other Indigenous cultures have not gained respect from these philosophical translations but from their own forms of resistance. Most relevant to the question of intersubjectivity is that through the understanding of subject-subject relations 'the Tojolabal-Mayan culture questions the dominant culture that transforms the others into objects; a society divided socially, economically, politically, and culturally.' (2004: 148) It is precisely these sharp edges of intersubjectivity that the performers to be discussed are toying with and toyed with in their intersubjective spectacle/spectator relations.

To the extent spectacle is perceived, lived and produced as a vessel of relational arrangements, it is a platform where intersubjectivity is at play. That is, the specificity of a person's way of being in the World will create, use and understand 'spectacle' in terms of how that person lives and is lived by the relations with or without the others and how these are held (under which logic and sensitivity). Furthermore, the cultural references and constructions embedded in all aspects of human life produce certain types of relational arrangements that are specific to that culture's way of understanding existence. For example, objectification or 'becoming-object' in the Western sense carries the logic of the inanimate

materiality lacking agency and under the control of the ‘subject’. However ‘becoming-object’ within a worldview that understands all things to be possible vessels of *ashé* (life-force), the ‘object’ may carry the energetic power of an *orisha* (deity) or hold the ancestors’ force and wisdom. It is no surprise that ‘spectacle’ in Yoruba culture is an otherworldly phenomena where ancestors, deities, and energies are held present as in any other given occasion within this understanding of being in the World. The Pan-Yoruba / Spanish transculturation of certain objects, as the doll, carries both conceptions of the object into the Caribbean culture.

Individuality and the perception of the modern individual is also a way of being in the World, born under a specific logic, time and culture of capitalism that has aimed for global expansion. The Western ‘I’ used by Descartes in the 17th century has traced a mode of being, becoming and perceiving life, and of course, a way of understanding and feeling those outside this ‘I’, the Others we refer to throughout this thesis. Spectacle has been a device of separatist logic for the creation of the (western, modern) individual in fundamental distinction from the Other. The philosophical conception of the term ‘intersubjective’ is developed by white men under the geopolitical logic of the West. The object-subject philosophical dilemma of the West, that nests the very conception of the Other, is not a global sense of existence but rather a particular and specific sense of Being that has, nevertheless, expanded through colonisation. The ‘intersubjective’ subject-subject relationship of the Mayan Indigenous communities described by Lenkersdorf, is a way of being in the World where agency is communally held in all humans and nature in the cosmic community. The relational arrangements in this other worldview are prior and beyond imposed otherness. Spectacle within the logic of Western divisions and objectifications has implications over the figure of the ‘spectator’ that are trapped in binaries and divisions over the spectacular Other. As it will be discussed in the following chapters, the spectacle of the Other performed by the so-called is created in-between Western and non-Western relational understandings.

1.2.4 Symbolic Sites for Spectatorial Deconstruction

We can claim that spectatorship does not exist, and this would be a political claim. To the extent that spectatorship, constructed as a Western concept, relays on a configuration of intersubjectivity that predominates over a subject-object understanding of the world, it is embedded on a system of othering. To deny its existence would dismember a system where spectators are needed so far as their spectator-positioning is only prevailing by systemic alienation. Spectatorship is not a doing, is a concept-ion, and a world view. It is not modified by participation, as it is not an active-passive dichotomy but rather part of the configuration of hierarchical associations.

A bodily encounter is a reciprocal subject(s) producing arrangement of meaning-making relations. Beyond and within a cognitive process, the emotional, affective and embodied mechanisms of each body-subject are ex-posed to oneself, and even perhaps to the other self that has been encountered. This is extensive to any encounter. The inherent coproduction of the encounter is not only occurring in that chronological time between those bodies/subjects encountering, but simultaneously accesses other biographical and historical times, from which those bodies/subjects are constantly built-upon, that make the encounter occur the way it does. In *artistic practice*, while the bodies of the ‘performers’ are presented as somapolitic metaphor, the bodies of the ‘spectators’ are not just addressed but uncovered as somapolitic constructions. I specifically refer to artistic practices, an allusion to Rancière: “‘ways of doing and making’ that intervene in the general distribution of ways of doing and making as well as the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility’ (2004: 13).

In order to address this concept/mind/world position or positioning some artists have underlined the hierarchies at play through a ‘spectacle of distance’ of other-sameness. This unveils and critiques rather than de-links from such positioning. Other artists’ efforts have found the symbolic sites that have allowed the intervention to the spectatorial as the sameness-otherness dyad without abandoning their modes of being, which are Other to the

system. These symbolic sites allow the encounter to be felt by all, and perhaps coproduced differently from the norm.

Ultimately, the symbolic site par-excellence is the body as site of resistance. We address a communal approach that de-links from dichotomous-hierarchical interactions. There are several possibilities for these symbolic sites that allow radical practices of relational being in the World, and many more yet to appear. I will briefly discuss two that are directly related to the two cases to be discussed in further chapters, that is, the case of Freddie Mercado and the case of La Pocha Nostra. One of these sites of resistance summons the encounter under the pedagogical, while the other is a symbolic everywhere—*within* a colonial milieu.

The pedagogical is treated in La Pocha Nostra not as a teaching method but rather as a philosophy or a social theory that has several conscious aims which include: ‘To build transnational communities of rebel artists’, ‘to develop alternative modes of collaborating as acts of radical citizen diplomacy’, and ‘to contest any form of authority (aesthetic, religious, political, or sexual)’ (La Pocha Nostra, 2016b). They claim to be inspired by forms of social approach and organisation such as those presented by Augusto Boal and the Zapatistas—together with techniques found in dance, theatre, and shamanic ritual—and to be practicing a gathering of vertical (in terms of class) and horizontal (geographical) mobility. In these gatherings a transcultural, heterogeneous, polymorphic, and fragmented ephemeral community is created. LPN focuses on practices of ‘border-crossing’ that expand from the personal-political into the communal. In these ‘crossings’ sameness-otherness is deconstructed through what LPN calls ‘radical tenderness’. The radical tender is left to be explored only within the workshop symbolic site, and not in the performance ‘presentations’. It is not rare then, that the members conceive the pedagogical ground to be their political praxis and not the spectator-other encounter they trigger in spectacle. I enter into detail on the workshops’ procedure, effects and affects in chapter 4 and expand on radical tenderness in further chapters. By initially mentioning here LPN’s pedagogy as symbolic site I wish to emphasise its bond triggering process by which other-same are left without discourse. In

some cases, many others with multiplicity of knowledges freely arise, share, and unite. In this 'site' the Same-spectator does not exist. All the subject/bodies present are performing life in each one's unique complexity by and with the encounter with heterogeneous realities.

In Puerto Rico, Freddie Mercado constantly performs a symbolic site everywhere at any time desired. The symbolic everywhere in the colony allows the unfiltered spectator to become simultaneously placed and displaced in her colonial reality. The life-performance of Mercado introduced in the city scratches and tickles the metropolitan surface. Where is the party?, someone may ask. Mercado becomes the carnivalesque embodiment of resistance that navigates through and within colonial stratification (of race, gender, and class). His wanderings create what I call 'vaga-bonds', encounters created in the constant performative becoming, that are moving bonds coproduced and ever changing. Mercado is a metaphor of movement and the instability of his whereabouts allows multiple and heterogeneous relations to be built as performance, or as life, the difference here is irrelevant but also dangerous. Mercado devoted trans-formations within the colony speak directly to it demanding a constant dialogue. The social dialogue may be symbolic or worded, but his insertion into the Puerto Rican everyday social life is not only noticed or even expected but unsettling, admired or attacked. The reactionary implications of his movement, I argue, have been his political praxis. The uncertainty that his performance-life produces decentres the positionality of spectatorship. When Mercado is outside the frame of a performance spectacle (cabaret, theatre play, rock concert or symposia) people start to wonder, is he coming out of a show, is he a crazy neighbour, is he a touristic attraction? Befriended by many, familiarity is also created. His implicit othering is situated in the colony, the epitome of otherness. There is a hidden complicity from which his wandering otherness in the land of the Others cracks the spectatorial.

Either by Mercado's vaga-bonding a colonial everywhere or mediated by La Pocha Nostra's radical tender pedagogy the symbolic sites proposed are those that allow the in-betweenness to become the question—not in its distance or proximity but in its essential arrangement.

CHAPTER 2: TRICKSTER'S NEW CARNIVAL

The essentially carnivalesque act is not to don a mask but to take off one's face
(Machado, 2006: 7)²⁶

Performance is...an ontological 'attitude' toward the whole universe. Shamans, fakirs, coyotes, dervishes, and Mexican 'merolicos' understand this quite well.
(Gómez-Peña, 2005b: 38)

2.1 TRICKSTER *is not*. TRICKSTER *does*.

In this chapter we elaborate on the figure of trickster, its energy and doings. Tricksterism as a glocal doing, offers a series of antisystemic complexities and particularities within its apparently chaotic, careless, contradictory, chameleonic and playful forms. Each milieu offers trickster diverse needs and approaches. Discussing trickster's force allows us to construct further analysis on the performance-life proposals presented.

Writing about trickster is always a tricky task. Trickster refuses to be defined and shape-shifts constantly in order to escape being trapped or contained. It is better to write and do with or as trickster. It might be the only way. In a tricksterish fashion however, we will display the main points from where trickster has been spoken of. It is important to remember that trickster, although at times seen and analysed in theoretical/academic discourse, appears throughout in 'folk' and 'popular' thought—understanding these thoughts/practices to be alive, not paralysed in time.

Trickster has been understood as a *universal* psycho-anthropological figure, a metaphor of change (Bassil-Morozow, 2011; Jung, 1968).²⁷ An enemy of control, found in various mythologies and cultures, trickster belongs to the liminal, playing on the boundaries of civilization. Trickster does not believe in margins or taboos; in this sense its creative energy

²⁶ Original reads: '*Porque lo esencial carnavalesco no es ponerse careta, sino quitarse la cara.*'

²⁷ Some of the trickster figures found in mythology, literature and folklore include the North American spirits of Glooskap, Nanabojoh, Weesakejak, Napi, coyote, hare, and raven; Aztec Huehuecoyotl; Hermes and Prometheus in Greek mythology; Mercurius in Roman myth; Afro-Caribbean spider Anansi and Eleguá; Eshu-Elegba and the tortoise in West African Yoruba; the Vejigante in Puerto Rico; the fox in Russian fairytales; the monkey in some Chinese tales; the hare and badger in Japanese folktales; the Argentinian Tokwah, among others.

is shameless, a constant mockery to social order. Helena Bassil-Morozow writes: 'Trickster's therapy is the therapy of "facing the truth" based on the careless exposure of repressed material' (Bassil-Morozow, 2011: 56). Exposing what is repressed, often related to hyperactive sexuality, is trickster's source of latent instability. The tricksterish aim is to destabilise, not to soothe or protect. The creative productive chaos of the trickster is an ongoing exploration of otherness.

Trickster performs shock therapy, 'a slapstick attack on routine and/or verbal behaviours that is meant to open the mind and soul to other possible ways to act' (Ryan, 1999). Acting or enacting these possibilities is the trickster's task and force. Trickster is produced as *glocal* phenomenon through a performativity of change and shifting positionalities. Social and cultural context is essential for trickster's doings and force, and thus should not be understood as neutrally universal. While in a socialist Soviet system the trickster may unleash the individualist impulses constrained and neutralised for the sake of the imposed community structure, in a postmodern capitalist neoliberal society trickster's doings may become a transpossibility of solidarity and communal resources (trans-gendered, trans-cultural, trans-racial, and trans-generational). By unveiling the arbitrary nature of the accepted norms and structures, trickster partakes in a serious play where the most radical triggering would potentially shift the viewer's political perspective and relational experience by imagining new viewpoints of action for a determined oppression, which is presented under the radar of a wider matrix of domination.

Tricksterish actions are full of laughter, humour and irony. Trickster uses humour as a weapon for undermining the true value of dominant culture and for sustaining self-identity as tactics of survival and subversion. To defy the system is to laugh at it, and laughter is the trickster's main tool. It brings collective renewal opening the reinvention of social narratives. 'Motivated by social change, they [tricksters] use parodic guerrilla attacks on socio-political hierarchies, and what we might call a surrealist manipulation of the absurd encountered in

dream and fantasy as a means to accommodate experienced conflicts, death and renewal.’ (Fisher, 2004: 62).

The shape-shifting nature of the trickster prevents its death, because once you try to ‘kill’ trickster, trickster will change shape. Hermes, for example, was the god of the borderline between life and death, ego and other. Although frequently associated with specific animals such as the spider, coyote, hare, raven, monkey, fox, tortoise, these animals are only vessels for the trickster as it has no defined or fixed form. Trickster can shift into a dish to obtain food, into a tree to capture birds, or from male to female. Embodying indeterminacy, it belongs to a liminal state of becoming subject. This indeterminacy is at times portrayed in a multiple undefined embodiment where hybridisation, androgyny, deformity, conjoined, excess, doubling or repetition of body parts, come into play. He might be of ‘undetermined proportions, a figure shadowing the shape of man’ (Radin, 1956: x). However, human identity, to use Victor Turner’s expression, is forced to exist ‘betwixt and between’ the two opposites, and is therefore a volatile and fragile concept. As Helena Bassil-Morozow (2015) has noted ‘the liminal, as a concept and its enactment, falls under the jurisdiction of the trickster.’

Anthropologist Victor Turner coined the term liminal (similar to the Aztec philosophical idea of *Nepantla*²⁸) for situations where ‘new symbols, models, paradigms, etc. arise—as the seedbeds of cultural creativity in fact.’ (1979: 21) In the liminal period ‘the ritual subjects pass through... an area of ambiguity, a sort of social limbo which has few... of the attributes of either the preceding or the subsequent profane social statuses of cultural states.’ (1979: 16) Liminality from Latin *limen*, threshold, refers to ‘any condition outside or on the peripheries of everyday life.’ (1975: 47) Tricksters as creatures of the threshold are marginalised to the

²⁸ Similar to Turner’s description of the liminal is the Aztec philosophical idea of *Nepantla* meaning ‘in the middle’ and first recorded in the alphabetic script by Franciscan Friar Bernardino de Sahagun in his General History of the Things of New Spain/ Florentine Codex (1540-1585). *A Companion to Latin American Philosophy* describes *Nepantla* as ‘the middling, oscillating tension betwixt and between life and death, being and non-being, male and female, etc. That is, human existence takes place “in the crossroads”. As a result human existence is inescapably unstable, ambiguous, fragile, treacherous, evanescent and perilous.’ (Nuccetelli, Schutte and Bueno, 2010: 17-18)

borders of society. However, borders define and tricksters play hide-and-seek with definitions.

During his ethnographic research Turner (1967) notes that the liminal has a transformative capacity but it could also lead to the reinforcement of existing social structures.²⁹ Trickster's doings are at risk of falling under the same fate. The unfixed nature of trickster challenges logical coherence and does not offer explanation allowing the meaning of its actions and embodiment to be decoded and reflected upon by its public. The agency of the trickster is that it acts in the world articulating boundaries in the encounter with the other (Fisher, 2004). Lewis Hyde (1998) has noted that as a boundary-crosser the trickster at times creates or uncovers a boundary which had been previously hidden, in which case the creation and crossing of the boundary are related to one another.

Trickster remains the agent of ambiguity.³⁰ Inhabitant of the liminal period it is part of what Turner described as an 'interstructural situation', that of liminality as the margin (or *limen*) between the phase of separation and the phase of aggregation: 'during the intervening liminal period, the state of the ritual subject (the "passenger") is ambiguous; he passes through a realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state [...]' (Turner, 1975: 94). The phenomenon of liminality accounts for temporality and positionality, thus trickster *occurs*. Carrying 'lost identity cards and desert flowers' (Revard, 2001: 174), trickster happens in the anti-structure while taking different playful and unstable forms through strategies of metamorphosis.

Carl Jung (1968) presents the trickster as an archetype—i.e. an archaic, universal image regularly occurring in myth, folk tales and dreams—and creature of the unconscious. Jung mentions the strong link between the trickster figure and the tradition of carnival, where the Devil appeared as *simia dei*—the ape of God (CW9/I: paras. 465-472). Trickster inserted in the

²⁹ This aspect of liminality and the normative power of 'performance' (broadly including cultural, organisational and technological performance) are discussed in Jon McKenzie's *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance* (2001).

³⁰ See Pelton (1980) on Ananse and Radin (1956) on Winnebago.

carnavalesque plays seriously with the public engaging in a ‘metaplay’ of dissembling hierarchies and normalised rules of social behaviour. Trickster is the process not the final product of subjectification inhabiting the ongoing transformation.

According to Raul Radin in *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology*:

The symbol which Trickster embodies is not a static one. It contains within the promise of differentiation, the promise of god and man. For this reason every generation occupies itself with interpreting Trickster anew. No generation understands him fully but no generation can do without him. Each had to include him in all its theologies, in all its cosmogonies, despite the fact that it realized that he did not fit properly into any of them, for he represents not only the undifferentiated and distant past, but likewise undifferentiated present within each individual. [...] What happens to him happens to us. (1956: 168-69)

Throughout history tricksterism has been political, as trickster tests the limits of the imposed laws and social canons suggesting a possibility for their change. (Samuels, 1993) This challenge, questioning, and possibility of alteration are trickster’s political project. It is the personification of a ‘primary process activity, challenging and disregarding the laws of time, space and place’ (Samuels, 1993: 81). The politics of trickster take the form of chaotic order; organisation and fluidity are both present. The apparent chaos reveals an internal logic.

Most importantly to remember is that trickster is not an essence but a doing. This tricksterish energy and doing is what these performance artists attempt, give tributes to, conceive, and call upon. Looking for the ontology of trickster may lead to a dead end. Working alongside trickster for the purpose of this text, we might think of trickster as a form of activism produced by the so-called Other.

2.1.1 Coyote: A Smuggler of Ways of Knowing and Sensing

*Today, if there is a dominant culture, it is border culture.
And those who still haven't crossed a border will do so very soon.*
(Gómez-Peña, 1995a:184)

A mix of deity, fool, human, animal, all and none... The trickster is a transformer, risk taker, amoral, uncontrolled, and boundary crosser. The trickster is creating, as Guillermo Gómez-Peña notes in reference to his own work, 'imaginary technology for those without access to the real thing, cause when you don't have access to power, poetry replaces science and performance art becomes politics' (2011). Long-time member of La Pocha Nostra, Michele Ceballos Michot reveals her only and late tattoo of a coyote on her neck, the U.S.-Mexico border trickster par excellence. Coyote is the 'human smuggler' who facilitates the illegal border-crossing, used most commonly in the context of the Mexican-U.S. border.³¹ Broadly speaking, this migrant smuggling refers to a notion of entering a nation (geopolitical, cultural, epistemological notion) where you do not have the (legal) right to belong. Evidenced and displayed in the coyote's embodiment, although not exclusively, trickster is border crosser and funambulist of belongings, smuggler of ideas, cultural trespasser and transformer in many worlds.

In indigenous American cultures, it was the shaman, the coyote, the Nanabush who had permission from the community to cross the dangerous borders of dreams, gender, madness, and witchcraft. In Western culture this liminal space is occupied by the performance artist: the contemporary antihero and accepted provocateur. We know this place exists and we simply occupy it. (Guillermo Gómez-Peña, 2005b: 43)

Stating and recognising that the liminal 'space' exists, the Coyote trickster/ performance artist becomes the 'symbol of the liminal state itself' the reminder of the 'permanent accessibility of the liminal as a source of recreative power' (Pelton, 1980: 35).³² *Coyotl* from the Náhuatl language, Coyote is used in some Native American tribes as clan animals

³¹ Coyotes or *coyotaje* in present day Mexican migratory issues with both borders with the U.S. and with Central America, have been increasingly taken over by drug cartels. From being protected and cared for by the coyotes (through the old word-of-mouth system) in the smuggling process, immigrants are now treated as mere merchandise in the border crossing business. See: Frank-Vitale, 2013.

³² The famous Western culture performance art piece by German artist Joseph Beuys used a live coyote for his 1974 action in U.S., *I like America and America likes Me*. The artist did not touch the U.S. ground and is transported from the JFK Airport in N.Y. to the gallery where he spends three days with the 'wild beast' inside the space. Beuys adopts the figure of a Navajo shaman and declares to have had the objective of addressing the traumatic episode of U.S. history from which the coyote, from being a healing and totemic animal for the Navajo, became the hunted animal by the white man. This colonialist 'healing' ritual re-creates animal-human power structures while problematically incorporating a discourse that allegedly connects to the spiritual energy the coyote bears for the Navajo and other Native American communities. See: Tisdall, 1988.

including the Cahuilla tribe, the Mohave, the Hopi (coyote clan named Isngyam or Ishwungwa) the Zuni (coyote clan named Suski-kwe) and other Pueblo tribes of New Mexico. Polyamorous, Coyote does not repress its ongoing sexual, erotic, affective, tender and creative energy. It is also a carrion-eater, feeding from the recent dead as a psychopomp at the crossroads of this life and the next. Coyote was seen visiting the land of the dead and attempting to revive all the spirits there (Erodes and Ortiz, 1999: 15). Some Native American myths attribute Coyote trickster the bringing of fire to the peoples, and sharing the knowledge of how to create fire (Erodes and Ortiz, 1999). Historically and etymologically, fire is the basis of home.

By bringing fire to the people it has been described as 'Indian Prometheus' (Erodes and Ortiz, 1999), although Coyote trickster prefers to understand Prometheus as the 'Western Coyote'. In oral myths of Native Americans Coyote sometimes seems to be an animal while other times he looks like a human. Coyote is also found in the Aztec mythology where the 'very old' and wise coyote trickster Huehucóyotl symbolised worldly wisdom. Amy Elias (1999) coins the term 'coyote aesthetics' for a fragmentation of the trickster tale which recovers oral tradition and serves the Native American postcolonial agenda. The coyote aesthetics imply fluidity, multiplicity and de-centralisation. Elias notes that by allowing fragmentation—epistemological, moral, physical—coyote aesthetics attack colonial history allowing 'to counter Gayatri Spivak's claim that "There is no space from where the subaltern (sexed) subject can speak" [122]' as 'coyote lives in alternate dimensions that offer alternative models of space and time to western paradigms...' (Elias, 199: 195). As smuggler of borders and disrespectful of the imposed 'structure', Coyote's actions are multilingual and polyphonic, pluritemporal and epistemologically diverse, multicultural and polyamorous. The flux in Coyote does not impede the creation of bonds. Changeable and adaptable, Coyote's contemporary political force lies precisely in the creation of strong bonds we might name as 'sisterhoods' and/or 'communities.' It is from these bonds that Coyote continues to 'talk back' from the borderlands.

Christopher Vecsey believes that ‘by breaking the patterns of a culture the trickster helps define those patterns.’ Trickster ‘throws doubt on realities but helps concentrate attention on realities. He crosses supposedly unbreakable boundaries...and thereby draws attention to those boundaries’ (cited in Hynes and Doty, 1993: 106). A more embodied understanding of the same thought is that in order to heal the wound, we first have to open it. The concept of the wound and the opening of the wounds for their healing has been present in many decolonial and border-crossing discourses. Walter Mignolo, Gloria Anzaldúa and Guillermo Gómez-Peña quoting Arlene Raven, among others, have used this image in their writings and it has become a recurrent idea (embodied and metaphysical) among creative-intellectual-activist scenes since the 1980s in Latin America and the U.S. To open the wound is the process of making visible societal configurations founded on structural oppression and hierarchical segregation. The healing of the wound would become structurally transgressive.

The tricksterish energy is a crossroads not only for surviving the borderlands but for the creation and recreation of points of encounter that become vanishing points of fluid and diverse alliances where new epistemologies and new sensibilities can occur. The deconstruction of the hegemonic epistemology implied in coyote is well known and consciously applied by the members of La Pocha Nostra who stress the communal and eclectic construction of (embodied-intellectual) knowledge in their workshops, offering themselves as ‘pedagogical coyotes or DJs’ (Saul García López in LPN’s Summer School, Athens 2015) for the triggering of a care-taking community that is ‘fragmented’, ‘forever changing’, and ‘always temporary’ (Gómez-Peña, 2011).

2.2 Border Thought and Affectivity

A border divides, defines, frames, and positions people in relation to it. It inscribes people and objects into belonging or not to a certain community of certain characteristics. The border trespasses its own physicality. The line, fence, wall, road, ocean, lake, or mountain chain which geographically segregates one area of land from another, becomes a reference point of symbolic power of exclusion. It controls movement, forcing people to stay together or apart, imposing access or denial.

Consequently, the border is not only land. Borderlines divide the same from the other, the 'I' from the 'you'. They inform our embodied experience of the World, our biographical sensing, and the way we perceive life (intellectually, emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, physically, culturally, socially, etc.). We are performed by borders. The border alters the way people perform themselves; furthermore, it alters how people encounter one another. Nonetheless,

...the "other," however, doesn't exist ontologically. It is a discursive invention. Who invented "the other" if not *the same* in the process of constructing *the same*? Such an invention is the outcome of an enunciation. The enunciation doesn't name an existing entity, but invents it. (Mignolo, 2010)

In this invention of the *other* and the *same*, the border is traced. The dynamics of the border provide circuits and contact zones that differ from the out-of-the-border dynamics. Difference and sameness are contested and enacted in these zones.

Walter Mignolo in his paper 'Geopolitics of Sensing and Knowing: On (De)Coloniality, Border Thinking, and Epistemic Disobedience'(2010), writes:

...border thinking is the epistemic singularity of any decolonial project. Why? Because border epistemology is the epistemology of the *anthropoi*, who do not want to submit to *humanitas*, but at the same time cannot avoid it. Decoloniality and border thinking/sensing/doing are then strictly interconnected since decoloniality couldn't be Cartesian or Marxian. In other words, decoloniality's point of origination in the Third World connects to "immigrant consciousness" in Western Europe and

the US today. “Immigrant consciousness” is located in the routes of dispersion of decolonial and border thinking (Mignolo, 2010).

Border thought is a delinking from universality into the pluriverse of local histories, their biographical sensing and embodied knowledge; away from the illusion of a unique and sole way of doing, thinking and feeling. Mignolo claims border thinking and border epistemology as a third option that neither accepts the inferiority of the second class citizen nor goes through an assimilation process that makes the person resign to his or her inferiority and play the game that is not hers. Both cases, inferiority and assimilation, are expressions of internal colonialism which is manifested as the belief in one’s ‘smallness’ and dependence, respectively in regards to the dominant culture (Hau‘ofa , 1993). In the understanding that inferiority is a fiction that was created to control and dominate peoples, thoughts, cultures, lands and traditions a delinking process begins by not accepting the options available. The options available are part of an imperial and territorial epistemology that denies other body-politics of knowing, sensing and understanding; a different world-sensing. Border epistemology delinks form categories and rankings imposed by Western thoughts and experiences. This delinking and border thinking is only possible when the conditions are appropriate and there is awareness of coloniality.

How do bodies and skins think coloniality? The colonial subject is the contemporary subject. In this sense it is not only linked with geographical borders, but also with temporalities, the colonisation of time, for example.³³ Embodied colonialism is traced in race and gender, where discourses of inferiority and dependence have been embedded throughout history. As a delinking process Mignolo calls for ‘epistemic disobedience’. Thinking and doing decolonially is thinking in the borders of local histories, confronting global designs. To be disobedient with the episteme involves the integration of other epistemologies, an act of pluralising ways of being and sensing the World. Border is the ability to speak from more than one system of knowledge, without rejecting or favouring either one over the other/s. By

³³ See, for example: Grebe, 1987; Rivera Cusicanqui, 2014.

definition, border thinking is ‘thinking in exteriority, in the spaces and time that the self-narrative of modernity invented as its outside to legitimize its own logic of coloniality.’ (Mignolo, 2009b)

On 1987 Chicana, lesbian and feminist activist Gloria Anzaldúa writes her book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* where she describes the new mestiza as a way of thinking and being pluralistic that is formed through the movement across and within traditional borders. ‘The new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity.’ (2012: 101) Juggling cultures, the mestiza feminism is transnational and expands to a multiplicity of centres, displacing the concept in itself of the Centre. This movement is not only geographical, but psychological. ‘A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is a constant state of transition.’ (2012: 25) In this constant movement sexual behaviour, gender, skin colour, and culture become numerous grounds for embodied re-action. The plural ways of the mestiza claim other possibilities beyond duality. Anzaldúa reacts to that border’s wire that splits her up in two (*me raja*, 2012: 23) and disengages from the binary into a movement of pluralities and ambiguities. The new mestiza inhabits the borderlands. The borderland of the mestiza bridges experiences of the embodied and biographical thought. From the traditional physicality of the border defined as the ‘edge or boundary of something’ or the ‘line separating two countries or administrative divisions’ (Oxford Dictionaries) a re-action arises from this ‘open wound’ of the border into a new culture, what Anzaldúa calls *una cultura mestiza*.³⁴

As a *mestiza* I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman’s sister or potential lover. (As a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races.) I am cultureless because, as a feminist, I challenge the collective cultural/religious male-derived beliefs of Indo-Hispanics and Anglos; yet I am cultured because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture, a new story

³⁴ Anzaldúa takes from Mexican philosopher José Vasconcelos his vision of the ‘cosmic race’, *la raza cósmica*.

to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet. (2012: 102-103)

Anzaldúa's proposal of the mestiza culture is not localised on a specific land. It is localised 'in every woman's sister or potential lover' and in the queering of oneself in all races. Taking each of these separately but as part of a whole, we may begin to unravel the affectivity of the new mestiza culture. Firstly sisterhood is mentioned as a bond of familiarity or root among women. The roots that hold onto the sensibility of sisterhood do not exclusively imply origin; rather they refer to a system of support, a holding of the communal trunk. Associated to the subsoil, the water or the air, all roots are found to be joined to form a central core, or encounter structure which is from where the potential branches may arise. Sisterhood understands we are intertwined to hold onto a conjoined complex. Thus sisterhood is not localised in the origin but it is held in the present (actions and thoughts). That being said, memory–cognitive and embodied–becomes the present time through the remembering body and mind; history (social, cultural, biographical and ancestral) is alive and embodied in the present. In other words, sisterhood is principally the holding together of something rather than the coming from the same thing. Most importantly, sisterhood is ongoing, spreading recognition 'found' everywhere and in every woman.

Likewise is the 'potential lover'. The 'potentiality' of the loved one maintains movement and refers to a motor or engine. Anzaldúa statement is inclusive of difference as in each one there is the potential point of bond with the other one. The bond is not institutionalised; it is an open possibility of giving oneself in care and solidarity. How this is manifested rests in the particularity of each bond, thus is not tabulated into a way or specific practice of loving. Both sisterhood and the 'potential lover' are 'practices' that understand and feel the subversion of their existence, as they are both disregarded, and/or disdained from the established system (purposely or not) as counterhegemonic. Anzaldúa's non-patriarchal affectivity moves beyond restrictive labels of affection.

Furthermore, being part of the queering existing in all races is to belong to a mixing motor of alternative relations (social, affective, political). The queer is suffering from an 'absolute despot duality', but 'I am two in one body, both male and female... the coming together of opposites within.' (2012: 41) Anzaldúa understands this queering in reference to oneself and as a movable aspect as there is 'the queer of me in all races'. The queer body (the 'half and half', *mita' y mita'*) is the body inhabiting the gender border. As the author notes, being both female and male the queer has entry into both worlds. Both but neither at the same time, a new gender (2012: 216) is formed. Body, its sexual and racial aspects, may be the principal border; however, the mestiza culture understands this embodied experience as the entry to various worlds and furthermore, the formation of new ones. In the whole Anzaldúa proposes a new value system of connections among each other and our surroundings. This culture's land is the body and its homes are created in the interconnections created from within the Self in relation to others, proposed but not exclusive to the logistics found in sisterhood and the potential lover. In this interconnectivity, queering (as the *mestizaje* itself, the mix of races) becomes a point of entry and not a splitting point.

The new *mestiza* consciousness is the consciousness of the borders, understanding the border as a cultural, psychic and social terrain we all inhabit and inhabits us all. *Mestiza* consciousness rebuilds a sense of home through affective and epistemic disobedience; that is, revisiting and transforming the notion of the communal.

In 1984 John Berger wrote of home as a 'site of loss' as we have become 'twisted into the individual biographical circle which leads nowhere but only encloses'.

Originally home meant the center of the world--not in a geographical, but in an ontological sense. [...] In traditional societies, everything that made sense of the world was real; the surrounding chaos existed and was threatening, but it was threatening because it was *unreal*. [...] Without a home at the center of the real, one was not only shelterless, but also lost in nonbeing, in unreality. (Berger, 1991: 52)

Without this home an existential question of the being arises. Home, in Berger's sense is intrinsically linked to what we conceive as reality. To be homeless is to be lost, compromised

and affected by the search of the home. The *vaga-bond*, a concept I will later develop, is that ontological disposition to reconstruct and create those lines or forces leading to the pathways of relational affectivity.

Fluidity is understood by Epeli Hau'ofa (1993) as essential to the understanding of home. Hau'ofa declares the sea and its currents as home of all those islands of colonised people in the Pacific sea: 'We are the sea, we are the ocean... We must wake up to this ancient truth and together use it to overturn all hegemonic views that aim ultimately to confine us again, physically and psychologically.' (1993: 16) This sea of belongings is a notion of the unfixed. Home is not localisable but rather it becomes the relationality with the others and one's surroundings and biographies. At home a new communal sensibility is developed.

2.3 The Paradigm of Community:

Reverse Anthropology and Radical Tenderness in La Pocha Nostra

In this strange age of the 'mainstream bizarre', as Gómez-Peña likes to call it (2001; 2010), trickster chooses to be an 'insider-outsider', 'a performing contradiction' (Gómez-Peña, 2015a) creating or punctuating the borders to be crossed where ephemeral, heterogeneous, and wider communities are built. We might stress that this is the political task of the contemporary trickster: to orchestrate the building of temporary and fragmented communities where tensions of difference are pushed further seeking individual-collective alternatives against contemporary modes of oppression festered within all our relations. Quoting the Pueblo Nasa in Colombia: 'Words without action are empty; action without words is blind; words and action outside of the spirit of community are dead.' The notion of community is reappearing in diverse political-epistemic grounds. In Latin America the return to the communal includes the emergence of indigenous movements after 1992 with the particularities of the popular-indigenous uprisings in countries like Mexico, Bolivia, and Ecuador, and the political turn to the left (Escobar, 2016).

Founded in Los Angeles (U.S.) on 1993 by Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Roberto Sifuentes and Nola Mariano, La Pocha Nostra is a transdisciplinary and transnational artistic organisation. Since its foundation La Pocha Nostra:

[h]as operated in different configurations, serving as a base for a network (or spider's web) of rebel artists/activists coming from various disciplines that share the desire to cross and eradicate the dangerous borders that exist between art and politics, practice and theory, artist and spectator. La Pocha Nostra collaborates in between national, racial, aesthetic, spiritual, generational, and gender borders. The basic premise of these collaborations is founded on the ideal: *'If we learn to cross borders on stage [performance space], we will learn to do it on a greater scale in the social sphere.'* (d'Emilia, 2015b: 3)³⁵

This spider web entails a communication of singularities that share the common language of performance which translates into each particular struggle against the glocal order of capitalism/patriarchy/colonialism. This is an understanding from within La Pocha system. On a different context, an explanatory voice from outside La Pocha's network of artistic practice introduces the 'trouble making performance troupe' as 'a bunch of ethno-cyborgs [nervous laughter by the presenter], scarred monsters, deviant ballerinas, and trans-shamans [sounds of desire by the audience]'. These among many other performance-personas or alter egos are developed and described as such by the Pocha members themselves. In encountering this ever changing community one becomes sprayed, bathed, embraced, aroused, disturbed and shaken by tricksterish cross-border impulses. Trickster is contagious and builds desire. This desire works as a motor for institutional support (international invitations to museums, biennials, and academic events, etc.) received and sustaining LPN, but also for the weaving of a web of temporary collaborators, honorary members and associates from more than ten countries that form La Pocha system.

³⁵ Text written in Spanish. I provide all the translations. Original reads: *'ha operado en distintas configuraciones, sirviendo como base para una red de artistas/activistas rebeldes provenientes de varias disciplinas que comparten el deseo de cruzar y erradicar las peligrosas fronteras existentes entre el arte y la política, la práctica y la teoría, el artista y el espectador. La Pocha Nostra colabora a través de fronteras nacionales, raciales, estéticas, espirituales, generacionales y de género. La premisa básica de estas colaboraciones es fundada en el ideal: "Si aprendemos a cruzar fronteras en escena, aprenderemos a hacerlo a gran escala en la esfera social".'*

Discussing tricksters in liminality or at the borderlines of existence we firstly discuss the notion of *communitas* for Victor Turner: 'relationships which are undifferentiated, equalitarian, direct, extant, nonrational, existential...between definite and determinate human identities.'(1975: 21) Turner talks about the 'social antistructure of friendship' where relationships are 'spontaneously structured' and often developed among 'individuals in passage' or 'liminaries' (1975: 22) thus occur within the transitory, unstable, impermanent, and out-of-structure. Furthermore the *communitas*

would not represent the cosmos as hierarchically arrayed, but as possessing a common substratum beyond all categories of manifestation, transcending divisible time and space, beyond words, where persons, objects, and relationships are endlessly transformed into one another... (1975: 22)

This arrangement of a 'common substratum' is linked with the foundational creative process of all systems of thought (1975: 23), in other words, Turner conceives *communitas* as the 'primal ground' from where social structure is endlessly generated. For Turner this common substratum' is the 'other model' of human interrelatedness which differs to the differentiated and hierarchical model. It emerges as a 'relatively undifferentiated...community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders.'(1966: 96) Following this understanding of Turner's *communitas*, the ultimate potentiality of the border thought lays on a tricksterish play that blurs the borders of structure and anti-structure allowing for new and diverse modes of relationship to emerge. For the new modes of relationship to occur, a delinking from neo-colonial structures ingrained on internal colonialism also needs to occur. These new modes of relating bring about the ongoing construction of new sensibilities and epistemes. These processes feed onto one another as the colonial de-linking is nurtured from these 'anti-structured' interactions and in turn the *communitas* work intrinsically with the disengagement from the systemic structures. They are not in binary opposition but intrinsically conjoined.

The sense of community in LPN has been informed by the communal praxis developing in Latin America. In Indigenous systems, communal economy practices by rural and urban

groups are controlled collectively; the natural resources, the land and modes of work are collective property, although distributed and used privately. Rights and obligations are held by all in the community. The representative of the community rules by obeying (*manda porque obedece*) a fundamental principle for the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico also found in the Aymara communities in El Alto, Bolivia. The concept of the communal system developed by Aymara sociologist Felix Patzi Paco, takes as starting point the Indigenous societies understanding the communal system as opposed to the liberal system. He notes that ‘the communal system can appropriate the liberal context without this implying the transformation of the system [or vice versa].’ (Patzi Paco, 2004: 172)³⁶ The communal uses the knowledge and technological advancements of the liberal society but it subordinates them to a communal logic. The principal characteristics of these social relations where forms of work and organisation are non-capitalist and non-liberal include deliberative assemblies for decision taking, horizontality in the organisations and the rotation of responsibilities (Escobar, 2016). For the Aymara activist Julieta Paredes (2010) communitarian feminism is strategic for achieving the interrelated objectives of depatriarchalisation and decolonisation working as alternative to individualistic society. Understanding this thread that unites us communitarian feminism involves relations of reciprocities, complementarities, and autonomies among urban and rural, transnational and non-human. All these organisational characteristics have inspired La Pocha Nostra’s project, especially through the Zapatista (EZLN) ethos which we discuss in Chapter 4.

In terms of organisation, an ongoing cultivation and reaffirmation of a horizontal community is proposed by LPN. The horizontal-based practice within their composition is in friction, as Gómez-Peña is the head of the collective since its foundation. The practice of horizontality within LPN is aimed but covered in tensions. Frictions, tensions and contradictions are welcomed in these communities. Their fragmentation creates what Homi Bhabha called the

³⁶ Original reads: ‘*El sistema comunal es, por lo tanto, opuesto al sistema liberal. El sistema comunal puede apropiarse el entorno liberal sin que ello implique la transformación del sistema [y viceversa].*’

‘third space’, where cultures can meet in their differences (1997; 2010).³⁷ These encounter zones are producers of tensions where negotiations are constantly enacted. The ‘third space’ for Bhabha is not a place of discursive consensus but rather a space that incites tensions and within these tensions the ‘third space’ produces a new language of creation within the recognition of the cultural difference. Many negotiations occur through the performing body, although the verbal approach of forums and community meetings are also used by LPN. Likewise, whatever comes out of LPN’s fragmented relationships is declared as communal authorship, not as an understanding of sameness but in a branching out on diversity of knowledges and ways of sensing the world. In this sense the common-ity produces. In this reorientation of subjectivity the authorship belongs to the liminality of the relation where each and every one of the individuals brings about her/his ways (geo and body politically). The author is the process; a process where bodies are relating to each other sensing critically what is ‘difference’ and ‘sameness’.

Contemporary trickster, border Coyote, creates a community of difference, not confined by national, gendered, generational or ethnic boundaries. Through critical thought and embodied theory the creation of communities of difference does not only recognise and respect difference but furthermore creates communities where sameness and difference are dismembered and conjointly part of each other. In this sense ‘there is a place for both community spirit and ruthless selfishness. They do not have to be seen as cancelling each other out.’ (Samuels, 1993: 84) It is a fragmented (anti)structure that defies the notions of unity of the same.

³⁷ Bhabha proposes that nationalities, identities and ethnicities are fluid and characterised by hybridity; what ‘is new, neither the one nor the other but something else, which contests the terms and territories of both’ emerging from the ‘third space’. In hybridity processes translation and negotiation occur. The encounter zones do provoke tension. Within the notion of cultural diversity the dominant cultural values appear as universal values, which means shared, for all the agents encountered in a specific cultural space and doing that the notion of cultural diversity hides the tensions, conflicts and negotiations that the agents must do in order to produce and reproduce symbolic spaces. With the notion of negotiation Bhabha underlines the efforts or exercise of translation that subjects need to do in order to produce an understandable way of communication: a third space. The boundaries between the ‘I’ and the others disappear. This dual opposition are false oppositions which do not recognise the *space in between* where the social processes occur. That third space recognises cultural differences and does not make invisible the tensions produced such as the hegemonic approach within the cultural diversity.

All this seems very utopic. As Eduardo Galeano, quoting Fernando Birri, says ‘utopia lies at the horizon’ and this unreachability is what makes us move constantly towards it (Galeano in *Singulars*, 2011).³⁸ Nonetheless, La Pocha Nostra as a community proposal builds up from these previous notions: constantly changing, fragmented, and unfixed in chronological time or place—however it is cored in the body. Gómez-Peña acknowledges that ‘community is one of our obsessions. We all long to belong to a larger “we” because we are obsessed precisely with what we lack.’ (2012: 9) This ‘we’ is not of sameness nor does one belong to only one community, but when we get together ‘we lick each other’s wounds’. This collaborative ‘utopic impulse’ understands community building as a form of ‘citizen diplomacy’. In the formation of collectives and cross-contaminated collaborations he writes: ‘If a binational, multiracial, crossgenerational collective can in fact function in the real world, then maybe it’s possible on a larger scale to sort out our differences and cultural conflicts...’ (2005b: 260). The question of lacking a sense of community is the question of belongings. Who is outside, who is inside, who is expelled from which community? As described by Eleonora Fabião: ‘To belong *or* not to belong, that’s the question. To belong *and* not to belong, that’s the problem. To belong passively or actively, that’s the challenge.’ (2014: 36) Who is/are ‘we’ and what is common to this ‘we’? Community is not homogeneous and the communal is an open historical process.

In *A Declaration of Poetic Disobedience*, Gómez-Peña (2015a) fervently recites as a spokesperson for the ‘we’ he begins to call out (‘I say, ‘we’ say), addressing those who this ‘we’ is not: the ‘masterminds of paranoid nationalism’, ‘those up there who make dangerous decisions for mankind’ and ‘the lords of fear and intolerance’. He starts by naming the discourse of otherness: ‘we, the other people’ as a first clause to begin to disentangle this diverse and wide community of the denied and marginalised, ‘citizens of the outer limits’. As ‘subject matter of fringe documentaries’ this ‘we’ expands transnationally: from ‘Patagonia to

³⁸ ‘Utopia lies at the horizon. I know very well I will never reach it, that if I walk ten steps, it will be ten steps further away. It gets further away as I come closer. What is Utopia for? It is for this, for walking.’ (*Singulars*, 2011)

Alaska, from Juarez to Ramallah', from south to north extremes, from west to east border checkpoints, found throughout the four cardinal points as illegal immigrants at the 'crevices of Western civilisation'. 'Homeless', 'faceless', 'whores', invisibilised from statistics, laws and rights, and constantly 'under surveillance', 'we' are 'within your system, without your mercy'. From within, these phantoms join: 'like a pack of hungry wolves exploring the ruins of an empty mall we continue to be together'. These skins and bodies 'pierced, tattooed, martyred, scarred... covered with hieroglyphs and flaming questions' are the Other who 'continues to "talk back" and make art'. This 'we' still believes in community, 'a much stranger and wider community...of illness, madness and dissent' that 'barter and exchange favours and talismans'.

In this declaration Gómez-Peña uses otherness as a call out for new belongings among those neo-colonial subjects who 'still *shape* your desire'. However, in the name of the most othered LPN is not exactly formed by the most oppressed body-subjects. Is this an unbearable contradiction? As we have discussed, otherness is a concept engrained on colonialism and intrinsically linked to modernity (Dussel; Grosfoguel; Mignolo). The epistemic genocides of the XV-XVI centuries (Grosfoguel, 2013b) carried out on Muslims (Spanish Reconquista), women (Europe's witch hunts), natives from the 'Americas' ('conquest' and 'discovery' of these lands) and Africans (kidnapped to become slaves in the 'Americas') have left their traces in XXI century contemporaneity. Today the colonial project has developed and mutated in many forms. The complexities and particularities of colonialism now are still stained with the notion of otherness. Unfixed and unstable the majority is the Other: common as 'other'. Alliances require the creation of inter-knowledge and translation among movements and worlds. To 'continue talking back and making art' is resisting and actively responding to those operating systems of neo-colonialism in an ongoing creative exploration on ways of subversion and alternative societal construction. The non-capitalist care-taking 'barter and exchange of favours and talismans' alludes to solidarity and support, and the

collective sharing of power objects, an intimacy that links to local knowledges and ways of sensing the World. This exchange is what keeps this community alive and ever-changing.

‘Talking back’ to the concept of otherness is aware of foreign desires. Some border artists have purposely worn and still wear masquerades engaging in methods of deformation, exaggeration, and crude parody of a ‘radical otherness’. Cutting from the roots the support system (radical from the Late Latin *radicalis* ‘of having roots’) to the notion of otherness is not only a task of what Allan Ryan (1999) calls the ‘trickster shift’: the act of ‘representing cultural stereotypes in humorous and ironic fashion to reveal not only their ideological underpinnings but also the way in which historical misconceptions have hindered cross-cultural understanding and interaction.’(14). I do not deny this as one tricksterish way. Gómez-Peña’s 1980s and early 1990s works are based on this strategy (e.g. the iconic piece *The Couple in the Cage* with Coco Fusco touring on 1992-93). However, trickster once again defies being contained and continues shifting further and branching out. In the case of La Pocha Nostra, otherness is not only portrayed in a hyperbolic, satirically grotesque and critical fashion through embodiment and behaviour. It is also approached by techniques of ‘reverse anthropology’ during spectacle and the mutating understanding of what the Pochxs call ‘radical tenderness’ during their workshops.³⁹

On the strategy of ‘reverse anthropology’ Gómez-Peña writes:

One of our strategies is to occupy a fictional central space, fully knowing that is fictional, and to speak always from this fictional center, to push the dominant culture to the margins, treat it as exotic and unfamiliar. (...)

We operate in the realm of contingencies and inversions. The questions for us in this imaginary realm are: What if Latinos were in power and could decide the terms of the debate? What if the United States was Mexico? What if Spanish was the official lingua franca? What if imagination was a form of political praxis? What if Anglo-Americans were mere nomadic minorities? (2005b: 246)

³⁹ I use the term ‘Pochxs’ in reference to the members of La Pocha Nostra. The ‘x’ is placed instead of the feminine (Pochas) or masculine (Pochos) as a linguistic nonbinary gender resource common in Spanish to avoid the patriarchal use of language.

Relating to the above mentioned, Gomez-Peña's work and La Pocha's is described in their website:

...cultural borders have moved to the center, while the alleged mainstream is pushed to the margins and treated as exotic and unfamiliar, placing audience members and readers in the position of "foreigners" or "minorities". (La Pocha Nostra, 2001a)

This displacement of the spectators into the zone of the other is a way of addressing the gaps found between those marked by the discourse of 'otherness' and those who are not aware of its existence and the effect it has on them. In a Bakhtinian-like carnival inversion this reversal is a method of experiential translation, that is, through performance. Most effectively heightened in satire is the use of 'reverse anthropology' in museums, universities or mainstream galleries, especially those in countries where identity is traced by historical and contemporary colonialism, as the countries 'in power' (e.g. U.S., U.K., France, Germany, Spain). The symbolic institution of museums offers the 'experience of history', and history is always written or curated by specific interests (personal, institutional, political, and economical, etc.) The 'art world' continues to have the syndrome of 'Marco Polo' as coined by Gerardo Mosquera (2005) constantly regarding the non-Western art as either derivative of the West or as exotic creations of the 'Other'. Additionally, the audiences attending museums and universities are part of a particular social stratum. 'Reverse anthropology' does risk being misread or furthermore having an absolute 'lost-in-translation' outcome: pure shock and no reversal of positionality. This is difficult to trace as sometimes this experiential reversal may occur without it being grasped cognitively by the spectator. It is a risk the Pochxs continue to take. Some spectators in particular cases may vomit or get dizzy with some strong image, cry or reach a state of trance with the corporal displays of martyrdom. Despite these strong reactions the reversal and displacing mechanisms do not propose an erasure of dichotomous positioning. Becoming periphery or centre does not intend to practice a blurring of both, rather their acknowledgement. In this reversed experience spectator continues to exist as different from the performing bodies. Extreme carefulness needs to be taken if done on decentralised, 'marginal' spaces as the 'reversal' could be read as banality and/or disrespect

by those people that the artists might be precisely advocating for and working for/with. It is a risk the Pochxs continue to take. As tricksterish energy, LPN traces the border that produces the spectators. This reinforces social structures of segregation in their resisting parodic and pungent strategies of what has been called reverse anthropology.

In this neoliberal contemporaneity, how can we escape from reproducing autocratic and separatist behaviour? Already speaking of his previous collective experience of the legendary 1980s Border Arts Workshop (BAW/TAF), Gómez-Peña notes how by working on a collective devoted to creating a 'more enlightened model of racial and gender relations' you may 'end up hyperintensifying the problem' (2005b: 260). Ten years after this reflexion a new manifesto was created by Dani d'Emilia and Daniel Brittany Chávez, core members of La Pocha (2011-2016 and 2014-2016 respectively) on the notion of 'radical tenderness' found in the Pocha pedagogy. While reverse anthropology occurs in the relationship to the spectators during the performance spectacle, the radical tender is weaved into La Pocha Nostra's pedagogy, found only in the pedagogical, not in the spectacle context. Radical communities and the decolonisation of affects are developed through the radical tender, held in LPN's pedagogy.

The process of writing a manifesto of radical tenderness started on January 2015, as an initiative of d'Emilia and Chávez. This manifesto is 'alive' and 'will continue to be worked through and shared in the future in different incarnations and contexts.' (d'Emilia and Chávez, 2015) The term 'radical tenderness' 'has been a central part of the performance-pedagogy practice of La Pocha Nostra for the past 10 years'. While the tactics of reversal and hyperbole have accompanied LPN's performance spectacle of the Other since their early years, the shift towards the radical tender in their pedagogy has been developing in this last decade. Radical tenderness becomes 'a political-affective landscape for building ephemeral communities of rebel artists' (d'Emilia, 2015a). As a concept however, 'radical tenderness' is 'mutating' and 'can be appropriated' (d'Emilia and Chávez, 2015). Although d'Emilia and Chávez venture into a poetic-politic 'definition' of the term in the fashion of Pocha's poetic-

jam radical tenderness is...‘something that does not need to be defined’. In this era, they recognise that the radical tender carries the possibility of being a ‘political and affective base from which to engage in the decolonisation of the body as an artistic and activist practice’ (d’Emilia, 2015a).

Radical tenderness is...‘to embody In Lak’ech... because you are my other Self, and vice versa’. In Lak’ech is the Mayan understanding that ‘I am another you’ and Hala ken ‘you are another me’. Is not a mirroring but a kaleidoscopic view of oneself and of the surroundings. Mayan sensibilities and knowledge are cored on the understanding that we are all integral parts of an organism. The use of decentred knowledges from pre-Western ‘conquest’ is already a form of epistemic disobedience. Radical tenderness ‘is to invent other temporalities’ as decolonial project scratching capitalism and neo-liberal subsoil on the devastating modern concept of time. Radical tenderness ‘is taking leadership when your community asks you to, even if you don’t know what to do or how to do it.’ Leadership is constantly shifting and one must accept the challenge of it in active participation when called upon. This emphasises horizontality in the ‘orchestration’ of the community/ies which implies greater levels of responsibility. Radical tenderness ‘is to believe in the political effect of the internal movements’ and ‘to believe in the architecture of affects’, a transfeminist view of subjectivity and politics, on the everyday interrelations ‘tuning in at the same wavelength, not only empathising’. It is ‘encountering a galaxy in the eyes of others and not gazing away’ that is, entering into unknown universes of the self with commitment and presence. It is ‘making a trip with a stranger in the darkness’. How to be ‘critical and loving at the same time’ is the ongoing exploration in the current Pocha labs.

In the introductory remarks of the 2015 summer workshop of La Pocha Nostra, ‘process and pedagogy’ were set out as the ‘ultimate project itself of La Pocha Nostra’. Their pedagogical method is an ‘eclectic’, cross-cultural, and interdisciplinary combination which includes approaches from the Zapatista movement, ritual shamanism, experimental dance, Suzuki method, Jerzy Grotowsky, and Augusto Boal, among others. In their workshops an

environment of care is created alongside the pushing and tensioning of borders to be crossed—borders present at a personal level but also among the workshop community. Trust is built together triggering each other to take the risk of border-crossing. It becomes a safe place to push identities. These tensioning borders change each day and in this process the performance is created. When speaking of the ‘performance space’ during a Pocha workshop (Athens, 2015), member Saul García López reminds us: ‘spectators don’t exist. We are active civilians.’ It is thus in the context of pedagogy that the spectatorial is disrupted. New modes of relationship are triggered in these ever-changing communities where collaboration is treated as citizen cartography. How these can ‘translate’ to the performer-audience borderlines is a continuing exploration.

2.4 Pateco’s New Tricks: Freddie Mercado vaga-bonds Puerto Rico

*He is a vagabond, an intruder to proper society, and an unpredictable liar
who throws doubt on the concept of truth itself.
(Christopher Vecsey in Hynes and Doty, 1993: 106)*

On 1982 prominent Puerto Rican writer Ana Lydia Vega wrote her collection of stories *Encancaranublado y otros cuentos de naufragio*.⁴⁰ One of these stories is ‘Otra maldad de Pateco’ (Another Trick by Pateco).⁴¹ In the form of a folk tale, Pateco is presented by Vega as the trickster by excellence: playful and shameless, ‘always naughty and joker’. Like many other tricksters, Pateco is also associated to the animalesque with its goat legs, it is *patadecabro*. All of trickster’s *doings* are contextual and localised historically within the presented cultural structures in order to shake them from their foundations. Pateco is a local trickster energy that plays alongside the ethnic-class foundations of Puerto Rico, an island in

⁴⁰ The framing title is already a playful hint of the inside. The concept of ‘encancaranublado’ is used popularly in a famous tongue-twister and its meaning is the extreme condition of being cloudy; something like a ‘hyper-cloudiness’. Ripping this concept apart, *cara-nublado* literally translates to a ‘foggy face’, implying a blurring of the static ‘face’ among ‘others stories of shipwreck’ *otros cuentos de naufragio*.

⁴¹ The title has also been translated as ‘Another Evil by Pateco’. See: Puleo, 1996.

the Caribbean Sea that has lived two rounds of colonisation (1493-1898: Spain; 1898-ongoing: U.S.) and since its first round, a long history of racial-class inequality.⁴²

Vega's ethnic trickster story is set out in a sugar mill where enslaved Blacks work for the white Montero's family, a historical reality in Puerto Rico's pre-industrial times. Pateco wanted to mess around with the land-owners and played a trick on them in the form of an enchantment: dipped its goat legged hoofs in Chinese ink and sprinkled flour in its body while singing '...white and black, black and white.' A 'monster' was born. Mrs Montero gave birth to her first born: a white body with a black face, a 'bicoloured beast'.

As the story goes, he was rescued by Mother Ochú after being set out to be killed by the white wealthy family. The child believed he was white. His upbringing with Ochú had no mirrors so the character was unaware of having/being a black face. When he discovered the truth with his reflection in river the deity of Ogún appeared. Ordering him to stop crying Ogún stated: 'your colour is among your people. When you're one, you won't be two no more.' The short story develops and the bicoloured man becomes the rescuer of his 'people' after freeing all the enslaved people from the Montero house during a fire. In this incident the character needed to decide who to save between the enslaved and the Montero family. The story ends as this man 'recovers' his true black colour, which Pateco had 'hidden from' the Monteros in order 'to punish them'. Ogún's fire burned the entire sugar mill down.

All of Pateco's doings are 'blessed' or approved by the African Yoruba deities, thus its energy is drawn, allied and held by non-Western cosmogonies. The Yoruba deities of Ochú and Ogún are the caretakers of the 'bicolored beast' and know Pateco's deeds very well. In Vega's narrative, Pateco functions as the Blacks' trickster—it becomes clear who are those being punished and fooled, and who are those being respected, associated to, and finally redeemed. The saviour of the enslaved black people was the hero, who through trickster's intervention was 'two'. Trickster drew the border in order to make it visible and once it was

⁴² According to the U.S. Census Bureau for 2014-2015, Puerto Rico has the highest income inequality in the U.S. with a Gini coefficient of 0.559 in 2015 (Posey, 2016: Table 1).

embodied it passed through different phases: initial deceit or denial ('protection' which implies the lacking of mirrors), then a mourning and troublesome realisation of personal division (reflection in the river, a source of moving water), external intervention of empowerment through belonging (the taking part in other ways of sensing the world, in this case through Afro-Caribbean spirituality) and the final decision to 'save' this part and risk the other. This last decision follows a model of the impossible duality where in order to belong one of the parts must be sacrificed. However the part being sacrificed symbolised those who did not accept him and denied the integration of the 'inferior' other. The character basically follows those he feels accepted by.

Pateco as trickster not only creates the conflict of the monster but creates the birth of a whole story, through a new body a new narrative is set out. Trickster triggers a sexual union as it is implied that the 'creature' was product of Mrs Montero's betrayal with a black man. Pateco works as creative energy (does) not as character (is) and in such a way it functions as an alter ego of the writer herself. Pateco trickster propels an event, a happening that becomes inappropriate or directly conflictive.

Artist Freddie Mercado is a contemporary version of Vega's ethnic trickster Pateco. This artist goes further, drawing and blending the borders of race and ethnicity, gender, and the human condition—by stretching over the animal and the inanimate. Mercado is the embodiment of his own tricksterish creation. He creates and becomes himself ('itself') the monster of hybridities, playing with the dislocation or relocation of his embodiment in everyday life and in the art world, in intimacy and in public space. Similarly to Pateco, Mercado traces dualities he is seduced by and from them creates triples and multiples. Trickster's triggering process of becoming in Mercado however, is no longer the struggle of becoming one or the other but an integrative force of many 'kinds' of people and ways of becoming human. Deity Ogún in Vega's tale evokes 'oneness' as the way of not being two anymore. Rather than 'one' Mercado becomes an ecosystem, a tricksterish body-geography of fertilisation and contagion.

Mercado as Pateco, local trickster of race and class differentiation, becomes the body-canvas where integrative politics occur through a trickster fashion of sensuous and humorous depictions that create both discomfort and attraction. His use of the erotic is the pulling force towards the ‘blending’. Mercado is the creator and product of the union of the Puerto Rican fauna, all ethnicities, classes, genders, and animals welcomed. Through his embodiment he humorously defies notions of fragmentation and segregation within the island and furthermore within the Caribbean region.

Mercado becomes a body-geography of Puerto Rican multiplicity and complexity present in the whole Caribbean. His ‘performative Caribbean embodiment’ is the mastery of what Gina Athena Ulysse frames as *rasanblaj* (2015) and Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes (2015) expands in reference to Mercado. Freddie Mercado understood through the lens of *rasanblaj* (in Haitian Creole: an assembly, regrouping, compilation, enlisting) is the assemblage occurring locally and regionally that ‘dirty metropolitan models: to make them engage with the radical, communitarian, erotic, decolonial, utopian, profoundly historical present and future of the region.’ (La Fountain-Stokes, 2015) The disidentification methods of Mercado (Muñoz, 1999; La Fountain-Stokes, 2015) discussed in the following chapter, function as a terrorist guerrilla act through the artist’s monstrous androgyny of gender, race and class.⁴³ Mercado’s agency is that of the trickster energy that re-creates itself; Mercado is both Pateco and its monstrous creation—the mother doll.⁴⁴ The artist’s constant ‘in-becoming’, taken to the flesh by constant body trans-formations (daily and even several times a day), is the on-going reminder and punctuation of the regrouping and assembling in the multiple and complex reality of the nation.

Pateco-Mercado does as trickster, in the 1980s and nowadays, is tuned and merged with Afro-Caribbean spirituality and culture. In his works Mercado has used direct references to the *orisha* deities of Oshún (Mother Ochú in Vega’s story), the figure of the black nanny or

⁴³ La Fountain-Stokes uses José Esteban Muñoz’s concept of the ‘terrorist drag’ for the embodiments of Freddie Mercado.

⁴⁴ Refer to the following chapter 3 for this discussion, the sub-section entitled ‘Unheimliche Objects? : Disidentifications of Mother Doll’.

Madama, and allusions to ritual practices found in Santería and Espiritismo through his use of and becoming doll.⁴⁵ This ongoing reality (of historical-contemporary links and transmutations of the African culture in the region) is the national context—shared with the rest of the Caribbean—which is not to be misread as superfluous or frozen-in-time by the institutionalisation of folklore. Folklore is not static, as mentor and life-time collaborator of Mercado, renewed choreographer and performer Awilda Sterling-Duprey notes (Ritter and Sterling-Duprey, 2004-05: 71). Even though African culture in Puerto Rico might be a metaphor of disappearance, this discourse follows a colonial logic much more than a palpable reality in Puerto Rican sensibility. Racial aspects are commonly intertwined but not exclusive of these sensibilities (e.g. a white skinned person might be also a babalawo, a spiritual guide). On numerous occasions racial conflicts are presented in Mercado's 'light-skin' body, through the use of multiple skin colours (painted onto his skin) and racial features. Mercado uses and exaggerates his own curly hair, for example, as the popular notion of 'having "bad" hair' is indicative of negative cultural associations. Also racial issues are dealt by the artist in relation to his multiple use of the doll which may be carried, painted and/or joined to his body. In a decolonising queering fashion Mercado bonds the Caribbean through its shared racial, cosmological, spiritual, World understanding and sensibility linked to African influence.

In a country where the persistence of racism is denied the critical bodywork of Mercado stresses this reality. In a broader view, trickster's energy of Pateco-Mercado is nurtured and fuelled by its sense of bond in relation to ways that are considered 'minoritarian' (race-belief-customs-gender-class) thus race, among others comes to the fore as part of these. However bonding is not done as an ethical thing by trickster. This tuning-in is not to be confused with empathy. Mercado-trickster, creator of his own doll army, is not the hero or saviour of 'his people' contrary to the case of the bi-coloured monster produced by Vega's Pateco.

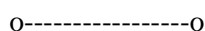
⁴⁵ These are discussed in the sub-section entitled 'Unheimliche Objects? : Disidentifications of Mother Doll' of the following chapter.

The tricksterish double device of creating and becoming (embodying) is the initial agency of the contemporary Pateco-Mercado trickster: becoming by creating and creating by becoming. The borders traced by Mercado are at first hand visible borders such as gender, race, and class. As regarded throughout tricksterish history, links with the animalesque are also very present in Mercado's work where the 'becoming animal' or 'unveiling' of the human animal is presented through the human-animal thin and blurred borderlines. All these tricks of trickster are part of the realm of (body) imagery—images which create a conflicting metanarrative of what 'race', 'gender', 'class', 'human' mean. The artist uses the body, the only one he possesses, and re-possesses it.

How does trickster re-possess the land/nation? Reading this artist's bodywork as body-geography in its locality, the multiplicity and assemblage of the *rasanblaj* is already 'visible' in the carnivalesque aesthetics and surrealist display he presents through a neobaroque combination of elements provided by the complexity of the region. Furthermore, and more relevant for this study is the affectivity produced in the transient demeanour of Mercado-trickster personae. This brings us to the concept of what I coin as 'vaga-bonding'.

The shared agency of the vagabond with his/her encounters demystifies the roles of art and artists and, most importantly, begins to actively discuss the distinctions between 'performer' and 'non-performer', 'art' and 'life' (or politics). It is not a blurring of the distinctions in carnival's traditional sense. Although the potentiality of the 'vaga-bonding' shares with Bakhtinian definition of the carnival act the sense that 'everyone communes' (Bakhtin, 1998: 250) and that a 'new mode of interrelationship between individuals' (1998: 251) is created, it does not dissolve or become 'counterposed to the all-powerful socio-hierarchical relationships of noncarnival life' (1998: 251). Actually, if these hierarchies were to be erased, they would be forgotten or ignored during the carnival act, as described by Bakhtin. Trickster's carnival does not dismiss power distinctions but allows and triggers bonds to be formed in the acknowledgment of *both* difference and similarity. The carnival concept described by Bakhtin, nowadays risks becoming apolitical.

The concept of the bond acknowledges two, three or multiple ends which are not the bond itself. The following visual might aid at this point:



It does not erase the ends but does transform them in relation to the bonding. How and in what multiple ways does this occur is particular to each bond. The agency is thus shared through the bond. As we acknowledge the particularity of each bond and its agency, we acknowledge the unknowing of what each of these bonds may trigger or destroy. Nevertheless, there are some qualities within the actual act of vaga-bonding to be uncovered. Unravelling the etymology of the concept vagabond we find the following: Vagabond comes from the Latin *vagari* meaning ‘wander’ in French is also ‘wandering unsteady’. Vaga comes from Catalan meaning ‘cessation of work’ and from Galician meaning ‘wave’, ‘undulation’. In Portuguese is also ‘open position’ ‘opportunity’ ‘opening’. In Servo-Croatian (borrowed from the German *Waage* meaning ‘a weighing’, but also in a figurative way ‘to balance one another or each other’) it signifies ‘balance’, ‘scale’ or ‘a weighing’.

The balance and weighing in vaga-bonding imply horizontality and substance, stressing interconnectivity and a support system of individuals. The unsteady wandering is a movement that is made for its own sake and with no other purpose than movement itself. Taken to the public space, vaga-bonding makes a home of (inhabits) the space that otherwise functions simply as transit space (from point A to B) though its process of weaving. However it is not only specific to the public space as these bonds may occur inside the institutional or the private and intimate realm—stressed in the wanderings of the bond. The practice of vaga-bonding entails something like bearing or carrying on a travelling bond, a weaving bond, an entangling bond, an opening travelling into the possibilities of weaving, of interlacing smoothly and in balance with others’ bondings. It is also an opportunity for travelling of questions (of wonderings) that destabilises the steady (vaga is unsteady) assumptions that ties (bond) us. Thus the bonds are alive; they are stretched and compressed, broken and

reconfigured. Vaga-bonding has become implied in contemporary notion of tricksterish energy.

In Mercado's vaga-bonding he utilises diverse strategies that trigger the weaving of bonds. In tricksterish understanding, Mercado's personae also wander through different social spaces from the art world to street life and vice versa. This artist's unsteady movement and opening of the potential bond occurs with all social strata of high, middle, or low class citizens, traveling through spaces of both the intimate and the institutional. We may find Mercado's persona at a house party, the pub next door, in Academia, at the bus, at a gallery opening, a friends' café, or in an art fair, for example. The territories wandered by the artist are those multiple geographies of the social space. Through the bonds created there is a sense of the democratic in the occupation of diverse territories.

Constant in his embodiments are the use of eyes and mirrors. He places or paints eyes of many shapes and sizes in different parts of his body, and uses mirrors as objects to look through and to replace the face with. His oversaturation of the seeing-visible body is a counterattack on national Puerto Rican invisibility. In the iconic Puerto Rican essay *Insularismo* (1934) by Antonio Pedreira, the author speaks about the question of 'how' and 'who are we? Puerto Ricans *globally* considered' followed immediately (and perhaps not unintentionally) by the mentioning of 'our collective psychology' (1934: 25. My emphasis). Mercado's use of the eyes and mirrors builds a mirroring back to the existential quest of the colonised ways of sensing the world for Puerto Ricans (subordinate citizens), discussed and reiterated by Pedreira on the 1930s and prevailing still. The global eyes through the lenses of the colonisers, first Spain and then U.S., have shaped the colony's collective psychology, engrained in every individual. The control of Puerto Rican visibility-invisibility is in the hands of the coloniser; however, Mercado pulls it literally into the local reflection and reflects back. Walking the streets, malls, pubs, galleries, and cultural institutions of the Island, Mercado's personae are the erotic Other that claim to be you, the Puerto Rican ('spectator'/ 'passer-by'/ civilian). The Other is not an 'other' anymore as you-Puerto Rican are invited to

step into the mirror and become with Mercado. What are Puerto Ricans globally considered becomes the question of what do Puerto Ricans consider themselves to be. Introspection is called upon.

Vagabonding Puerto Rico, the strategy of Mercado's erotics together with the use of the eyes and mirrors provide the possibility of self-erotization. In this process the possibility of desiring yourself is proposed—a self-arousal of the Puerto Rican citizen as mode of empowerment. In the era of massive migration (principally to the U.S.), inwards erotics becomes a building up of 'national self-desire', representing a local way of resistance when the 'land of opportunity' (U.S.) is a constant seduction while inland economic and social situation worsens. Self-erotics presented in Mercado's proposals of embodiment also work through the colonial issues of dependence and inferiority; a way to start taking off the face of subordination. The new modes of the carnivalesque in Mercado are set out by the vagabonding (heterogeneously diverse and ever-changing bonds) using a 'costuming' to unmask, strip and de-construct the colonial 'face/body'. Mercado's hybrid transformations are stressing and emphasising the historical problematics of the monstrous/desirable colonial other. The constant shape-shifting of these is presenting the multiplicity and diversification within this 'othering'. It is not Bakhtinian carnival's blurring of hierarchies but through carnival's aesthetics a decolonial defiance to the imposed face—core skin of Puerto Rican identity.

Displaced to an international scenario outside the Island, these erotic strategies lack this reading-sensibility, and in mocking hyperbole they (re)present the well-known ways of othering and the desire for the 'exotic'. When speaking of Mercado's vaga-bondings, it becomes clear that the affects occurring within the Island through these bonds differ from those of the 'global-U.S.' eye. How these affects have a political stand in local Puerto Rican reality is a discussion developed in the next chapter. In the island of Puerto Rico, where the first experiments of neo-liberalism were set out (*Operation Bootstrap*, 1948) Mercado's vaga-bonding is a guerrilla intervention.

2.5 Strategies of the Carnavalesque: Taking off the Face of Otherness

Antonio Machado in 1936 noted that the essential of the carnivalesque is not the action of putting the mask on but rather that of taking the face off. While heightening and hyperbolising the mask of otherness, these artistic proposals are simultaneously taking off the face of otherness understood as a de-linking process, an initial process of decolonisation. By stressing the hyper-Other as a masking imposition these artists disengage from the violent subordination to inferiority and assimilation from which the othering mechanisms are constructed following hierarchies of oppression. These artists' decolonial strategies however, are not held from the hyperbolic mask of otherness which they choose to engage with in order to stress and ridicule the idea of the 'other'. Rather, the decolonial aspects come to the fore in the other modes of relationality found in each proposal: Freddie Mercado's vaga-bonding and La Pocha Nostra's radical tenderness.

Following Machado's de-linking aspect of the carnivalesque, it understands that the carnivalesque does not vanish or disappear. The carnival life is evoked in La Pocha Nostra and in Freddie Mercado as a new understanding of it, where differences are not erased but searched and encountered in liminality (where this dual subordination-assimilation model is not the imposing structure), and where tensions and desires are creating constant (psychosomatic) friction. The agency lays in the bonds created and through them the action—the risk taking. Rather than the blurring out of the individual self, the encounter of the ephemeral collective, duet, community, etc. feeds from each individual's geo and body politics of sensing. Oneness is apolitical, whereas moments-spaces of democratic experiment are sparked in the understanding-living-sensing of the pluriverse. The 'many yeses and one no' of the pluriverse denies the notion of the 'universal' into a multiplicity of ways of sensing the world, that include epistemologies, spiritualities, biographical history of the soma (race, gender, age, disability, profession, class, etc.) and the local histories.

The carnivalesque enters the social space, a neo-liberal social space. Tricksterish energy triggers carnival or embodies it, understands its logistics and revises them. Humour and erotics are always present in laughing critique and sexual empowerment-transformation. In these encounterings one finds similarities with current social movements in Peru, Bolivia, and Guatemala echoing Mexican Zapatista Movement (Mexico, Chiapas; 1, January 1994), in the reclaim of historical memory and the redefining of human relationship through resistance. The *Ya Basta!* (Enough!) of the Zapatistas, repeated in many countries, is peeling off the face of long centuries of imperialism. This de-linking process is not a mask of neo-liberal control but furthermore the face of modernity; of (neo)colonialism. This is the face of us all. The act of masking otherness/ taking its face-off, in this sense, becomes the creative possibility of new alternatives that do not sustain the durability of this subordinate-dominant dichotomy. The 'subordinate' have decided to leave this game and begin the party, where the dance is contagious.

In this chapter I have argued how trickster energy is present and evoked in the creative doings and practices of the artists discussed. These disruptive doings develop within Westernised (post?) colonial capitalist societies cut and crossed by borders where issues of racial (and cultural) hybridisation and supremacy, individualist alienation and othering identity creation are permeating the fabric of social relations. Social modes of horizontalism, collective leadership and recovery of historical memory used in Latin American social movements are being echoed in collaboration and stretched into the understanding of the 'spectator'. How much of the ephemeral and fragmented communities created by La Pocha Nostra and the everyday encounters with Freddie Mercado become branches of these tricksterish resistance modes is what we argue here. I clarify that neither of these social-artistic proposals, the vagabonding and the radical tender, are experienced or conceived as participatory art.

The multiple activation of the symbolic-poetic is not understood as different from the activation of the political-affective. The action of washing the flag during the fraudulent presidential re-election of Fujimori (Peru, 2000) initiated by Colectivo Sociedad Civil and

appropriated throughout the country and beyond; the burning of the students debt documents of La Universidad del Mar by Francisco Tapias aka ‘Papas Fritas’ and their exhibition in the Gabriela Mistral Cultural Centre as an ‘act of love’ (Chile, 2014); the naked catwalk presenting the women’s bodies with poetry of resistance written on their skins in front of La Paz’ main cathedral (Bolivia, 2014) by the feminist collective Mujeres Creando (which includes prostitutes and indigenous among other women); or the cross-border sisterhood solidarity of more than 50 women from Texas and Mexico who gathered in the border between El Paso and Juarez to braid their hair together while president Donald Trump was sworn into office (2017) are some examples that do not follow or we might say, de-link, from these distinctions. The ongoing creation of an affective lexicon of resistance does not subscribe to specific structures. This is part of the tricksterish task in contemporaneity.

CHAPTER 3: FREDDIE MERCADO

The following chapter develops around the performance personae of Freddie Mercado as a metaphor of movement in a local colonial context. It analyses the creation of Mercado's performative-citizen personas and their interrelation with the other Puerto Rican citizens. Through a constant in-becoming of his performance-life, wanderer of the different social geographies and cultural complexities of the Puerto Rican identity and reality, Mercado's doings and personae are researched in relation to coloniality.

3.1 Presenting Freddie Mercado



Image 3. Mercado waiting for the bus, 2013. Loiza street, Santurce.

Puerto Rican visual and performance artist Freddie Mercado (b. 1967, Santurce) has been exploring the potentials of androgyny, hybridity, animism and the animalesque through his voluptuous embodiments. His body modifications use female transvestism to perform iconic female figures (national symbols, popular personifications, Victorian ladies or emblematic women in the arts), doll-like transformations that carry other offspring, and an animal repertoire (duck, elephant, swan, rooster, cow, etc.). His constant reformulation of the body is part of a guerrilla exploration on contemporary identity that inhabits the phenomena of the transgender, transnational (or trans-local), and trans-racial. His embodiment is transformed on a daily basis into performance personae that explore historical and contemporary notions of the feminine (and) animal frequently presenting Afro-Caribbean elements and symbolism in his work. Expanding throughout the animal kingdom as well as incorporating iconic female figures that range from the baroque European lady to the typical Puerto Rican woman with her long fake nails and hair rollers, Mercado's body becomes a monstrous hyperbolic body that renders a distortion of signifiers such as 'Afro-Caribbean', 'exotic', and 'feminine'. In his use of recycled or 'poor' materials such as foam, rags, plastic elements, makeup, cloth, and glitter he becomes the body of capitalist overproduction and colonial relation—wandering the Puerto Rican land (territory of the U.S. since 1898) and encountering its citizens, at an art event, in the bus, in a protest, in a pub or at the theatre [Image 3].

Through foam prostheses, body paint, and costume design, Mercado's creations wander the streets, inserting his personae into the everyday in the provocation of citizen encounters. Engaging in a carnival-like performance persona he-she-it disturbs the established codes of 'normality' celebrating the blurring of boundaries between the object-subject / animal-human / male-female established distinctions. From anthropomorphic animal displays like the *Black Swan*, elephant-headed Hindu god *Ganesh*, a 'low budget' Spanish looking she-cow *Vaca Maja* with coloured-condom udder or a U.S. eagle with a large black phallus and a crown of plastic soldiers to the display of national women icons such as singer Myrta Silva or first woman elected as capital city Mayor Felisa Rincón de Gautier, Mercado's body is the site of

constant transformation and incarnation of the real and imaginary, the alive and the inanimate, the proper and the bad mannered. His way with exaggeration teases the absurd and the hypocritical where his playful demeanour transgresses identity fixations while hyperbolising the exoticism of otherness.

As Mercado states (1999), he lives a ‘constant performance’ life which can be encountered in the Puerto Rican streets and pubs, in rock shows, theatre plays, cabarets or dance presentations, and in local or international galleries, art fairs, and symposia.⁴⁶ His transformative persona wanders the public realm, buys groceries, takes public transportation and walks the streets of Puerto Rico mocking the viewer with a hyper-sexualised animality. In this constant movement, his personae access different social spaces of Puerto Rican life and culture. He may wander from the CIRCA art fair in the Puerto Rico Convention Centre in the city centre to the bus that takes him back home to Carolina, notoriously known as *Cacolandia*, the land of ‘cacos’, site of low-life considered ‘ghettoised’ behaviour. Mercado’s performance is a constant affective encountering with the inhabitants of the multiplicities of social culture. This is his physical and symbolic working ground. His proposal unveils social dynamics of othering while allowing other possibilities. Art critic Manuel Álvarez Lezama acknowledges his own fear, initial wariness, suspicion, and nervousness experienced when confronting the figure of Freddie Mercado:

At first, I was somewhat uneasy with Mercado’s exuberance, but then I became accustomed to his presence, to his parodies, to his threats. Now if he does not appear in an important activity, I feel as if something is really missing. (Álvarez Lezama, 1995c: 16)

The threat of the monstrous ‘Other’ is the counter mirroring of a Christian morality of behaviour in a racist, sexist, conservative, classist, and colonised Puerto Rican context. What Álvarez Lezama seems to miss in Mercado’s absence from an ‘important’ cultural activity are

⁴⁶ In an article by Mercedes T. H. Ramírez he states, ‘mi work is a constant performance’ [*mi obra es un performance constante*’]. See: Ramírez, 1999.

those potential encounters with an open-ended flux of national, racial, sexual and animal identity.

Mercado's constant metamorphosis of personae may occur within a same appearance as layers of cloth, foam or other material are reversed, uncovered or covered creating another persona in situ, visually presenting the body as zone of transformation, variation and metamorphosis. Mercado is also a painter, sculptor, doll maker, costume and set designer, make-up artist, body painter, dancer, actor, art model and professor. Mercado's work can be metamorphosed within collaborations for other artists, as performer Mickey Negrón notes: 'Mercado has always been an artist to whom all the creators [filmmakers, musicians, theatre and dance directors, performers, etc.] of the country turn to for help in the visual elements of their pieces.' (Negrón, 2014) In Puerto Rico Mercado has worked in theatre productions as actor and/or set and costume designer for Zora Moreno⁴⁷, Baobabs (co-directed by Yaraní del Valle and Kisha Tikina), Carola García, and Sylvia Bofill; circus, theatre, commercial and burlesque shows with María de Azúa⁴⁸; and dance productions with Petra Bravo, and modern dance company Andanza.⁴⁹ He has collaborated with Awilda Sterling-Duprey⁵⁰, Eduardo Alegría, Ivy Andino, Ivette Román⁵¹, Dolores Pedro, Lola von Miramar (drag self of

⁴⁷ Mercado acted and collaborated with the staging of Moreno's *Con machete en mano* (2000, Flor de Cahillo, Inc.), acted in *Danza Majestad Negra* (2002, Flor de Cahillo, Inc.) and was the stage designer for *Juancho Cultiva en Puerto Rico* (2014, Flor de Cahillo, Inc.). For *Danza Majestad Negra*, see Ferrer, 2002.

⁴⁸ Mercado has been part of numerous shows produced by María de Azúa for commercial promotions (Heineken, Coors Light, RG Mortgage, etc.) and events (Monster's Ball, Halloween Parties); circus and cabarets such as the *Coors Light Dome*, *Boricua Burlesque* show and *Cabaret Subterráneo*, among others; and on-stage shows and music videos for their mutual friend, singer Jose Luis (Fofe) Abreu. Mercado also was actor for Azúa's theatre productions *Hacer el amor a una mujer triste* (1999, Del Cuerpo Danza Contemporánea, Inc.) and *Luna Maluca* (2005).

⁴⁹ For Andanza's premier *A son de Andanza/ Tres o cuatro jugadas* (1999) Freddie Mercado did the performance-installation and costume for Jose Luis (Fofe) Abreu, who improvised vocally for the dancers. In Mercado's collaboration with Andanza in Madrid for the First Performance Festival (2000) hosted by Casa de América, see: Juliá, 2000.

⁵⁰ Mercado considers Awilda Sterling-Duprey as one of his past and present influences. For his collaboration in the artistic design of Sterling-Duprey's *Noches de Cabaret* (1997), see: Aponte Ramos, 1997; and Anon, 2007. For a visual documentation of *El Rito* (2011) performed by Sterling-Duprey in collaboration with Mercado and recorded by Roberto G. Rivera Sanchez, see: Sterling Duprey and Mercado, 2011.

⁵¹ From 2000-2002 experimental vocalist Ivette Román, music composer Luis Amed Irizarry and Freddie Mercado presented *Círculo de Cabaret*, a political cabaret that reincorporated songs, images and characters from popular culture (national and international), weekly news and gossip through critical and socio-political commentary. This Cabaret, inspired by the Mexican tradition of the Political

Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes), José Luis Vargas (as Santo de Santurce)⁵², Aarón Salabarrías Valle⁵³, among others. He has also been seen on national TV in shows as ‘Cultura Viva’ (2002; 2005) and Antonio Pantojas’ ‘Estoy Aquí’ (2005), modelling his personae for life drawing courses, performing in rock concerts and music videos with José Luis (Fofe) Abreu’s band projects⁵⁴, doing a show with drag queen ‘La Kika’ in Rio Piedras, appearing in a music video of alternative *reggaetón* band Calle 13 (‘Tango del Pecado’, 2007), acting in Mayra Santos Febres’ video and poetry project (*Tercer Mundo*, 1995), performing as an ‘ugly body’ in the award-winning short film directed by Laura Isabel Cabrera (*Belleza*, 2009), or creating a large virgin mannequin used in José (Pepe) Álvarez Colón’s art film (*La Mamutcandungo*, 2014-2015). Mercado could also be found making a performance appearance in a friend’s book launch (e.g. Luis Negrón’s *Mundo Cruel*, Lawrence La-Fountain’s *Queer Ricans*, and Amado Martínez Lebrón’s *Libro Deshojado*), or exhibition opening (e.g. Fernando Páes⁵⁵, Santiago Flores Charneco, and Liliana Rivera) alone or together with his troupe of artists friends.

Working since the 1980s, Mercado has been included in Manuel Álvarez Lezama’s category of *los novísimos* (a wordplay that refers to ‘the newest ones’ and ‘from the nineties’; 1995b).

Cabaret, was shown in several places of Puerto Rico (theatres, foundations, and bars) and travelled to Lima, Peru in 2002 as part of the Hemispheric Institute’s *Encuentro* of Performance and Politics. See: Román, 2015.

⁵² The performance intervention of *El Santo de Santurce* (The Saint of Santurce) was a joint project by José Luis Vargas and Antonio González Walker where Vargas made street provocations dressed as a Mexican wrestler-superhero. The V Episode incorporated the participation of Ivette Román as the medium ‘Clarinestra’, and Freddie Mercado as both ‘Chiwanda Sánchez’ a beautician from Santurce, and ‘Gioconda Alien’. Vargas, Mercado and Román made an intervention at the Plaza Barceló in Barrio Obrero, Santurce and danced inside one of its bars while being filmed by González Walker. A multimedia exhibition of this film and the rest of the project were exhibited in 2002 at the Gallery Pintadera. See: Ballou Lausell, 2002.

⁵³ Aarón Salabarrías Valle’s *Paraíso terrenal* project (1999-2001) integrated Freddie Mercado. One of the photos taken with Mercado was used as promotion for the launch of the art fair CIRCA PR 06 (2006), where Mercado and Brenda Díaz performed in beachwear at the Convention Centre. For the ‘Paraíso terrenal’ photograph used as promo see: Anon, 2006.

⁵⁴ For Mercado’s concert presentation with the band *Manjar de los dioses*, see: González Rodríguez, 1999; 2000. Mercado also collaborated with his performance participations on the music videos for the band *Circo*, ‘Velocidades Luz’ and ‘La Sospecha’.

⁵⁵ Mercado performed for Páes’ openings on the exhibitions *Navigare Necesse* (1997, Museo Arsenal de la Puntilla), *Nautes*, (2001, Galería Raíces) and *Descriptio* (2004, Galería Raíces). Fernando Páes is also the first to invite Mercado to pose his performance personae for Páes’ art classes at the School of Fine Arts, which included excursions to El Yunque National Rain Forest and the Santa María Magdalena de Piazzis cemetery (Páes, 2014).

Mercado has presented internationally in U.S., Dominican Republic, Mexico, Peru, Spain and the Netherlands, however, the vast majority of his production is within and for national (Puerto Rican) ground. His work has been included in the anthologies *Saqueos* (Lugo, 2002), *Corpus Delecti* (Fusco, 2000), and *Arte ≠ Vida: Actions by Artists of the Americas 1960-2000* (Cullen, 2008). Mercado has been examined by art scholars such as visual art critics Manuel Álvarez Lezama (1995a; 1995b; 1995c), José Francisco Ramos (1998), Haydee Venegas (1998), Holland Cotter (2001), Walter Robinson (2002), Myrna Rodríguez Vega (2003), Roberta Smith (2008); curators Deborah Cullen (2001) and Marina Reyes Franco (2005); writer and literary critic Mayra Santos Febres (2003), and dance and cultural critic Lydia Platón (1999). Mercado has also been studied through the lens of gay and queer scholarship by Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes (2009a; 2009b; 2011; 2013; 2015) and Felix Jiménez (2004).

Although Mercado's performances have been presented as transgressive (especially through queer scholars), scholarship on Mercado has not developed a relationship between his performances and the colonial context in Puerto Rico, where most of his work is conceived. Furthermore, in-depth analysis on the encounters with Mercado is also lacking investigation. The performer uses the body as the site of construction and destruction of the public's projections embodying other aesthetic, political, and sexual possibilities through the transformation or enhancement of the performer's own physical features, allowing the possibility of (dis)identification to occur. The social constructions of the spectators' bodies may be potentially shaken by the sudden physical encounter with hyper queer, anthropomorphic-animalesque, interracial and inter-classed body that negotiates its place in social colonial terrain. Mercado explores the hyper-visible in response to the colonial invisibility and uses androgyny as metaphor of symptomatic colonial socio-political ambiguity that transcends into a performance of equality.

3.1.1 An Exercise of Embodied Remembrance



Image 4. *Las Campechadas*. 2011. La Campechada, Old San Juan.

I recall a childhood memory, in that way we remember such distanced moments, a bit blurred, and a bit heightened. I must have been eight years old. I was with my parents in an exhibition space of high ceilings, common of Old San Juan's colonial architecture. The sunshine entered dimly into the gallery. In the drowsiness of the Puerto Rican heat I remember noticing a voluptuous woman who had entered the space. She was dressed as a Victorian lady and had a calm, rather ostentatious demeanour, fanning herself rhythmically while admiring the paintings. She seemed different from the rest of the people and stood out in her peculiarity [Image 4]. I had never seen one of those ladies before, just in the cartoons on cable TV. I was mesmerised by this person and observed her, safeguarded behind my father's long skinny legs. I looked at her in awe altogether with having an uneasy feeling about looking. My parents told me 'that's Freddie'. I did not understand what this 'Freddie' meant or why was she-he-it dressed this way. I just wanted to get close in an immense curiosity flared with a glow of fear. Drawn to Freddie, I remember listening to his strong deep voice chatting with other gallery viewers while smiling and occasionally laughing

gracefully. The deep echo of his voice tone at once filled the gallery and as I, the people almost choreographically started to surround Freddie. Passing next to her, my child-like curiosity touched briefly her garments in a nervous movement, confirming to myself the existence of this strange figure. Moments later after leaving the gallery I looked back and saw the lady again walking downhill towards the bus station still fanning herself under the Caribbean sun.

Undoubtedly in my remembering I have re-constructed a narrative. To be sincere, what I viscerally have memory of is not a sequence of events but rather two vignettes as if images from a dream. These are better described as sensory imagery, feelings in my body of sensorial predominance. The first image is that of hiding from, while being totally drawn to, the figure of Freddie. In my loyal parental accompanying to an art exhibition, this occurrence was very exciting for me. In spite of my excitement I felt I needed to hide from the overwhelming power emanating from this Victorian lady with the deep voice. At that age I still believed that if I was not able to 'see' something, that something will not be able to 'see' me either. Thus in a hiding and revealing of my gaze I remained protected by the symbolic parental shield but exposed to the experience of the unknown gaze of this 'other'. Repulsive fear and absorbing novelty are the provocations of Freddie. This I felt at a young age can be extrapolated to the 'experience of encountering Freddie Mercado'.

Georg Simmel (1921: 358) wrote that 'Of the special sense-organs the eye has a uniquely sociological function. The union and interaction of individuals is based upon mutual glances.'

Simmel described this union as:

the most direct and purest reciprocity which exists anywhere [...] By the glance which reveals the other, one discloses himself. By the same act in which the observer seeks to know the observed, he surrenders himself to be understood by the observer. The eye cannot take unless at the same time it gives. The eye of a person discloses his own soul when he seeks to uncover that of another. (Simmel, 1921: 358)

Simmel understood the union of the glance as a form of interaction and relationship.

The second sensory image I have is a tactile memory of the stiffness of her Victorian dress. The impulse or desire to touch served as palpable recognition. It was a desire of connection. The stimulus of interaction surpassed the feared. I extended my nervous and excited fingers and touched her fabric, an extension of her body. Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1968) refers to touch as the sense that defies subject/object distinctions turning back on itself through divergence. Touch is the principal sense through which we assume and express the parameters of a bodily existence in relation to others. The touched body is at the same time a touching body. Merleau-Ponty speaks of intercorporeality extending further from the immediacy of the present sensorial experience of one's body into the other's bodily experience, because 'I' and the 'other' share the lived here and now. 'The reason why I have evidence of the other man's being-there when I shake his hand is that his hand is substituted for my left hand, and my body annexes the body of another person in that "sort of reflection" it is paradoxically the seat of.' (Merleau-Ponty, 1964: 168) This sort of reflection occurs through a coexisting extension of oneself creating a single intercorporeality with the other.

On this sensorial account in the effort of my personal embodied memory I wonder, how does the memory of this uncommon presence I have lived becomes captured by the cultural memory, a memory made by a national and colonial way of experience, from the experience of looking and sensing with others at others?

3.2 Trans-localities in the Androgynous Nation⁵⁶

In the geography of the colonial gaze, the ultimate landscape is the body, where any possibility of future domination is located, since the effective reproduction of that control depends on the body's conviction and understanding of its new situation.
(Jiménez, 2004: 25-26)⁵⁷

⁵⁶ I borrow this term from Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes' notion of the *transloca* (La Fountain-Stokes, 2011, 2013; von Miramar, 2011) and expand and converse with its implications.

⁵⁷ Original reads: '*En la geografía de la mirada colonial, el paisaje primario es el cuerpo, donde se localiza cualquier posibilidad de dominación futura, ya que del convencimiento y entendimiento del cuerpo de su nueva situación es que depende la reproducción efectiva de ese dominio.*'

3.2.1 To remain *in situ*

Freddie Mercado uses his body as plastic and spiritual medium. He becomes the body-geography of the Puerto Rican nation through the staging of androgyny, beyond its sexual understandings, and in conversation with indeterminacy and equality in a colonial context. Scholar Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes (2011) inserts the body art of Mercado in what he has coined ‘trans-locas’—male transvestite artists of Puerto Rican origin—that have approached this resource as working ground for their artistic production. *Loca* means ‘madwoman’, popularly used for male transvestites, stemming from carnival performance, as discussed later in this chapter. In La Fountain-Stokes words, *transloca*: ‘is a queer of color reflection on contemporary translocal Puerto Rican theater and performance, specifically of gay performance artists and actors that engage male-to-female transvestism’ (2011). La Fountain-Stokes’ study focuses primarily in the *Queer Ricans* (2009b) or queer Puerto Ricans that have emigrated to the U.S., thus opening the paradigms of the ‘local’ (Puerto Rican) issues into a more ‘global’ scenario (U.S.). He notes that in the history of Puerto Rican migration to the United States, sexuality is one of the less explored factors, especially in reference to the queer community. However, Freddie Mercado has never migrated to the U.S., living all of his life in Puerto Rico.

The history of colonial links between Puerto Rico and the United States has provided the grounds for Puerto Rican exodus to the ‘mainland’. A colonial history of imperialism, family relatives, linked economies, politics and citizenship (since 1917, Jones-Shafroth Act) facilitates the migration which is stirred by several factors such as economic instability, unemployment, sexuality (La Fountain-Stokes, 2009b), and a notion of greater liberty and opportunities in the cosmopolitan metropolis. Having the facility to work and reside in the ‘mainland’ due to their U.S. citizenship, as well as the existence of a well established community of Puerto Ricans from recent and past generations, making the jump to the United States—‘to cross the pond’ (*cruzar el charco*) as they say—becomes a feasible, tempting, and logic possibility for many Puerto Ricans in the Island. In this sense, ‘[r]esistance to migration

is often unacknowledged as an act of resistance to a specific dominant logic, which it is.’ (La Fountain-Stokes, 2009b: x)

On the Island, popular thinking celebrates and enacts a higher professional hierarchy for those who have lived, studied and worked outside the country. In the arts and academia this belief is particularly strong. By contrast, visual artist and performer Freddie Mercado is among those who have stayed home, not feeling compelled to study or work abroad:

Within the art world [in Puerto Rico] people are always looking forward to study abroad. Strangely, I never did. My staying has *marked my work*. In all the international exhibitions I have made, my work has been characterised for being Caribbean. I never contaminated that space and have always believed that in order to do something I could well do it here. (Mercado in Pérez Rivera, 2003: 79. My emphasis and translation)⁵⁸

Whether it is resistance or social conditioning, Mercado’s work has been imagined, created, produced, and cultivated inside the Island. The ‘Caribbean’ definition of his work by the international eye is charged with signifiers that are somewhat on the edge of the exotic stereotype. Mercado purposely engages with these identifiers of folklore and tradition to playfully yet disingenuously allude to the Caribbean imaginary using elements of the carnival, the hypersexual, the religious mixture, the Negritude and the interracial, the tropical flora, the voluptuous erotic body, and the paradisiacal, among others, in a process of re-defining and re-appropriating the culture from within, using his own ‘Caribbean’ body.

The famous essay by Virginia Pérez-Ratton, ‘Invisible Caribbean: A View from Central America’, starts with the following reflection: ‘The Caribbean is a space belonging to the imagination’ (2012: 137). Pérez-Ratton specifically refers to a discourse of invisibility in the recognition of the Afro-Caribbean culture in Central America and thus the black-Caribbean identity of Central America. On these grounds, that space belonging to the imagination is

⁵⁸ All of Freddie Mercado’s quotes I have translated from Spanish. Original reads: ‘*Dentro de todo el mundo del arte siempre se busca salir del país para estudiar y fue extraño que nunca lo traté. Eso marcó mi trabajo. En todas las exhibiciones que he hecho internacionalmente mi trabajo se caracteriza por ser caribeño. Nunca contaminé ese espacio y siempre creí que para hacer algo podía hacerlo aquí.*’

invisibilised. Furthermore 'space' in this sense refers to specific bodies. The Caribbean has no materiality, no physicality in the discourse. Within the Caribbean spectrum, Puerto Rico has specifically been referred to as the first invisible territory of the Americas (Lalo, 2014). I ask: Is this what has 'marked' the hyperbolic body art proposal of Mercado? And furthermore, is this embedded in its relations?

The geo-politics of the marked body are indeed traced by its race and marked by the geo-historical place from where it is localised. Descartes' 'I think therefore I am' is turned upside down by the questioning of where this 'self' is localised in order to think, and feel a certain way (Dussel, 1994; Mignolo, 2009a). The thinking-being 'I' in Descartes as well as the transcendental 'self' in Kant is inclusive only of the European Western self/I. Blacks, Muslims, women, and Indigenous are all excluded from this modernist view, as decolonial studies reveal. Decolonial theorist Walter Mignolo calls out for 'epistemic disobedience' 'because geo-historical and bio-graphic loci of enunciation have been *located* by and through the making and transformation of the colonial matrix of power.'(2009: 161. Original emphasis) For Mignolo (2009a; 2011), de-linking from colonial episteme has to recognise the colonial wound where regions and people have been classified as economically and mentally underdeveloped, and affirm the epistemic rights-geo and body politics of knowledge-of those devaluated.

How is this de-linking approachable? Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014: 3-18) notes that radical thought and radical action has been divided in the last century. This claim sheds light onto an understanding of what radicalism nowadays could imply. Acknowledging as writers and academics that our works may never reach those who might find them most beneficial is at once a first humble insight. Returning to Mercado, his somatic approach is instead merged into the city, localised within the heart of the Puerto Rican citizen's landscape. Moreover his transformative ongoing movement entails a provocative demographic fluidity in his art proposal: strolling through cultural institutions; academia; visual arts, costume and set design, dance, theatre, and performance scenario; art market; public transportation; neighbourhood

community; nightlife; gay scene; commercial advertising; TV and film; and the education sector. His transit within the national plurality of social strata marks a de-linking process from segregation and marginality.

Mercado has appropriated the Caribbean definition and has become re-creator of it. The work of Mercado has been said to be a tribute or revival of carnival aesthetics (Álvarez Lezama, 1995c: 16). Although Mercado has participated in actual carnivals, like the Carnival Juan Ponce de León at Old San Juan (1990, 1997), where on 1997 he was the ‘incognita Venetian Dame’ (*la incognita dama veneciana*), or in a carnival-circus themed party in the movie ‘Runner Runner’ (2013) where his *Ganesh* persona (2001-present) was filmed, Mercado transits outside carnival’s traditional space and time. Most carnival traditions have the figure of the transvestite (Bakhtin, 1984) and in Puerto Rico this is no exception. One of Puerto Rico’s most celebrated carnivals is the religious tradition of the Festival of St. James Apostle in Loíza town, where the figure of the *loca* (the madwoman) appears as one of the traditional characters, together with the *viejo* (the old man), the *caballero* (the gentleman), the *vejigante* (the devilish trickster), and the Saint, Santiago Apóstol.⁵⁹ The aesthetic of the *loca* is a black-faced painted man wearing a woman’s dress and headscarf, with fake breasts and buttocks, carrying a broom and tin can.⁶⁰ Ricardo Alegría describes the character of the *loca*:

These are men who dress as woman and pretend to be mad. The *locas* pass along the streets of the town with brooms and cans, sweeping and cleaning the streets and porches of the houses and asking a recompense for their “work”. They wear costumes of clashing colors and fit themselves with artificial busts. They do not customarily wear masks, but usually paint their faces black (Alegría, 1956: 131).

Max Harris adds to the contemporary description of the madwomen’s whereabouts the offering ‘of their outrageous padded bums for sodomy’ (Harris, 2003: 33), an allusion to the

⁵⁹ Max Harris (2003) points out that the Saint must be considered as the fifth character.

⁶⁰ It does not come as a surprise to have a character with such ‘painted on’ racial allusions performed in Loiza’s carnival. In the 1950s Loiza village was described by Ricardo Alegría as ‘a relatively isolated Negro community’ where the ‘persistence of African beliefs and customs’ have survived. (1956: 124) Nowadays, even after the transformations and attempts to privatise the beaches of Loiza for touristic purposes, racially and religiously the strong presence of Afrodescendant community is still evident.

prostituted body. These *locas* represent gender (women), class (prostitutes), and racial (black) marginalisation. The public's response is laughter and mocking gestures putting into question carnival's potential of diminishing hierarchies.

The exaggerated breasts and buttocks and the performers' and audiences' focus on sexuality personify the maligning stereotype of women as primarily sex objects and transvestites as ridiculous gender travesties. [...] male transvestism in these performances is an "inversion" or "reversal" that does *not* undermine basic social hierarchies. (King, 2004-05: 34)

Similar to the character of the *loca*, Freddie Mercado paints half of his face black and adds to his body foam padding to form and sculpt his figure with ostentatious carnality which he allows and invites to be touched and felt. Mercado's body and its fluid localisation become provocative. The allure of having Mercado around is a homoerotic incitation that shakes the national building blocks of masculinity. In Puerto Rican political discourse, lack of masculinity has been alluded to as a lack of valour linked to our colonial status. Lack of virility has implied lack of power and autonomy. As Félix Jiménez (2004: 62) has pointed out, during the formulation of Puerto Rico's current-colonial-status as *Estado Libre Asociado* (its literal translation: 'Free Associated State') by Puerto Rican politician Luis Muñoz Marín, the coetaneous nationalist leader Pedro Albizu Campos publicly questioned Muñoz Marín's 'bullocks' on 1949. Therefore wounded virility has been related to a deficiency of masculine values such as bravery and self-determination in a nation that has never seen its independence.

In this context Mercado's moving body in national ground might seem to activate some of the already established chauvinist and homophobic tendencies. However, a further analysis is needed. *Boricua* (or Puerto Rican) masculinity during the early XX century came to be a new ground of colonisation.⁶¹ New authorised models of masculinity coming from the U.S. man-model reproduced colonisation and would homogenise the environment. (Jiménez, 2004: 19).

⁶¹ *Boricua* is the name Puerto Ricans, at times, chose to call ourselves, as 'Borikén' is the original Taíno (native Indigenous) name of the Island before the Spanish colonisers named it 'Puerto Rico' (meaning 'rich port').

Victor S. Clark, a public servant of the occupying U.S. regime had already in 1898 described the ‘colonial natives’ as extremely malleable.⁶² The notion of malleability has been a counter discursive ground for many artists in the Island including Mercado. Juan Duchesne (2011: 32) claims that due to this malleability, Puerto Rican culture is a way of being, but also a way of moving freely through absence and presence, through visibility and invisibility. For Duchesne, Puerto Rican identity is continuously reinventing itself in resistance to the colonising process. Taking Puerto Rican literature as his focus of study, he describes as *raros* (weird, bizarre) certain writers who challenge conventional modes of representation and create an ‘out of place’ that allows the anti-colonial tradition to survive.

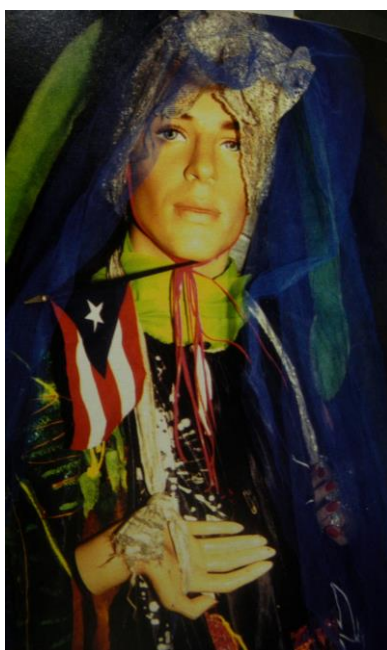


Image 5. *Sin Título*. Performance-Installation. 1998.
Taken from *100 años después...100 artistas contemporáneos: Reflexiones en torno a la presencia norteamericana*, p.102.

Mercado embodies malleability but takes it from the male coloniser’s hands into his own and beyond the dermis. Following Duchesne, the bizarreness allows the transfiguration of the locus, creating an alternative out-of-place from within allowing a reversal of the gaze. Apparent eccentricity questions the normative reality as bizarre. In reversal tactics on the masculine coloniser Mercado presents a Ken mannequin (*Sin título*, 1998) for the exhibition ‘100 años después...100 artistas contemporáneos: Reflexiones en torno a la presencia

⁶² See: Ayala and Bernabe, 2007: 76; and Jiménez, 2004: 20.

norteamericana'. Through a performance-installation Mercado engages in dressing the naked body of mannequin Ken with elements the artist has brought or takes from his own body. Undressing himself and dressing up Ken, Mercado engages in a ritualistic endeavour. He manipulates docile Ken into becoming adorned, almost like a Christmas tree with Puerto Rican elements [Image 5]. Nationality is stressed by the little Puerto Rican flag Mercado knots to Ken's chin. Tropical Ken has become a *Boricua*.

Masculinity in Mercado's own body is already ambiguously malleable. He has been confused with being a woman or a manly lesbian many times. Throughout his performance personae Mercado has explored androgyny and expanded from it and its embodiment. With androgyny Mercado's work is in the constant search of establishing a 'spiritual image' (Mercado, 1994: 1). He has integrated and combined models and deities from different religious traditions in exploration of the various energies linked to the feminine, the masculine, and in the hermaphrodite (child of Hermes and Aphrodite) fusion of these 'opposites'. Santiago Flores Charneco says: 'Freddie makes a feast out of the themes of the Island's androgyny, contradicting the tendencies of the opposite body as an archaic form of divinity.' (Flores Charneco in Zaya and Borràs, 1998: 177)⁶³ From the dual ambiguity to the integrative wholeness of the magical-religious forces of both sexes, Mercado explores androgyny's multiple spiritual and erotic possibilities.

His androgyny not only transcends gender binaries; it is also trans-racial, trans-religious, and consequently, trans-colonial. 'Trans' here is understood as 'going beyond' as Enrique Dussel (2002; 2012) understands it in his vision of a trans-modernity:

"Trans-modernity" points toward all of those aspects that are situated "beyond" (and also "prior to") the structures valorized by modern European/North American culture, and which are present in the great non-European cultures and have begun to move toward a *pluriversal* utopia. (Dussel, 2012: 43. Original emphases)

⁶³ Original reads: 'Freddie hace fiesta con los temas de la androginia isleña, contradiciendo las tendencias del cuerpo opuesto, como una forma arcaica de divinidad.'

Going beyond the colonial subjectivity is part of Mercado's endeavour. The marked body work of Mercado emerges from devaluated loci. It branches inwards from a wounded geopolitics of colonialism into a body of androgynous qualities and allusions, of unusual and borderline appearance, at times seen as freaky or outcast. Freaks are those with physical 'abnormalities' or bizarre bodies, treated as such for being outsiders of the normative body. Despite being pushed towards outside confinements of society the outcast or freak comes from within these social structures, which is the principal cause of the uncanny effect he produces on others. To be, to become, and to produce your Self as a freak, the Other as freak, becomes a political statement. As such a freak, Mercado decides to stay inside and work from within: 'If I left I would lose that element [...] that Caribbean fabric indispensable in my artwork' (Mercado in Toro, 2011: 12).⁶⁴ Mercado produces his Self within Caribbean national colonial confinements and territory, which charges his work as an insider-out.

3.2.2 Animalities, Gendering and the Colonial Wound

At the heart of politics lies a double wrong, a fundamental conflict, never conducted as such, over the relationship between the capacity of the speaking being who is without qualification and political capacity.
(Rancière, 1999: 22)

As monsters, can we demonstrate another order of signification?
(Haraway, 1991: 4)

The epistemic Other has been approached throughout post-colonial and decolonial studies. At the base of coloniality is the production and reproduction of otherness. The sustainability of the alien or the opposition of forces is marked by violence (Fanon, 1963) since the origin of the encountering to the very identity development of the parts. In Latin America the process of colonisation during XVI century was marked by turning the Other into the praxis of the coloniser, imposing language, culture, religion, politics, economy, and education. The imposition of such practices was a 'taming of the beasts', a power over the bodies through the

⁶⁴ Original reads: 'Al irme perdería ese elemento [...], ese tejido caribeño que es indispensable en mi obra.'

structures and institutions of the colonisers (Dussel, 1994). The bodies were tamed to adopt the behaviour of the master only to the extent of retaining the clear division between the parts.

As the majority of the Latin American countries fought and won their independence from the Spanish metropolis in the first part of the XIX century Puerto Rico remained a colony until the present day. In Franz Fanon's study of colonial forms of violence in Africa (1963), he refers to a perpetuated system of exploitation at the core of the very existence of coloniality. In current cases, such as Puerto Rico's, the violence is veiled by discourses of 'progress' and 'development'. Power relations however, become evidenced throughout Puerto Rican history. As described in Chapter 1, this historical and contemporary reality produces colonised bodies in a colonised land.

Decolonial scholars state that Western Modernity is founded not as an emancipation project but rather as a civilisation project. Modernity and colonialism are mutually constitutive, understanding the genealogy of colonialism as emerging in the XV century. In this civilisation process '[when] the coloniser seeks to describe the native fully in exact terms he constantly refers to the bestiary.' (Fanon, 1963: 42) The animal reference comes into the fore in colonisation as that which pertains to the uneducated, unmannered, wild, monstrous and evil, to the extent that it is related to instincts and desires opposing reason and social law. So far as the colonial law was socially imposed, communality, for example, was constantly treated as a sign of animality (Lugones, 2015). The dichotomies are marked by the Western modern colonial model. On the one hand the animal, colonised, non-Western, communal, instinct, and body; on the other hand the human, coloniser, Western, individual, culture, and mind. To these dichotomies the fe/male social division is produced through colonisation processes, as it has been researched by decolonial feminism (Lugones, 2008; Oyěwùmí, 1997).

As Joanne Bourke (2011) reminds us the distinction from our fellow mammals (female connotation of the breastfeeding) in the animal kingdom has been classified as *Homo sapiens* 'Man of wisdom', thus women's denial of their humanity lays in the affirmation of their animality. 'The male is defined by his humanity; the woman by her sexuality.' (2011: 5) Donna Haraway has noted animal sociology has been unusually important in building oppressive theories of body politics:

animal societies have been extensively employed in rationalization and naturalization of the oppressive orders of domination in the human body politics. They have provided the point of union of the physiological and political for modern liberal theorists while they continue to accept the ideology of the split between nature and culture. (Haraway, 1991: 11)

Furthermore, Haraway stresses how animal sociology has been central to the patriarchal naturalisation of the division of authority in body politics, in its reduction to sexual physiology. Sexual politics have been underlined in animal investigation.

Sexuality, animality, and femininity are constant thematic and identity deconstructions in Mercado, all closely linked with the side of the opposing forces belonging to the body, the animal, the woman...and the colonised. Woman and colonised have been historically linked to fragility. The feminine models of contemporary Western beauty are versions of sexualised fragility (strong or voluptuous body images are only seen for thematic purposes). The other side of the historical view on women has been the link to her erotic 'animal' side. The energetic channels of empowerment that may mystically open when triggered by sexuality have been haunting male traumas. The animal side also refers to the development of other senses and sensibilities that have been condemned as witchcraft, sorcery, and evil spirits. Such was the feeling of threat towards women that the great Witch Hunt took place in Europe, becoming one of the epistemic-genocides known to the birth of Modernity, as understood by Ramón Grosfoguel (2013b). During the witch hunts the unprecedented systematic persecution of a whole population was a central procedure linked to the evolution of capitalism that required population management by the state, to increase work production

(Federici, 2004). The practices of abortion were condemned and the uterus became property of the state. Reproduction has been central to the development of body-politics. Woman is portrayed as fertile land, for insemination. The conquest of lands has been marked by the violent sexual assault of its women, Latin America being one of the most evident and closest examples.

The body forms of Mercado hold a composition and decomposition of desire as embodied extension of it. Desire is related to territory and its defence. In describing the Puerto Rican women—the women he becomes—Mercado stresses her ‘viperous’ nature: ‘She has a viperous thing within her space therefore one must be very careful. [...] That woman [Mercado’s woman] makes use of that space to talk about men and to talk about herself...that erotic space...’ (Mercado in Forbes, 2014)⁶⁵ Animality and femininity are thought of having an untameable nature, thus becoming a threat to the cultural containment and social control of both. The concept of ‘taming’ in Spanish language is *domesticar*, which illustrates its derivative relation to the domestic, the closed-up and private space of the house or the cage, where the taming is acted out and femininity is restricted and (de)formed. Sexuality is socially tamed, regulated and repressed under biopolitics. Mercado’s allusion to the venomous phallic snake holds Biblical reference to the birth of shame in bodily desire and exposure. The snake in the Genesis speaks to the woman (Genesis, 3:1-3:5) rather than to the man and teases her into trying the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge. The woman is the one who is connected with the darker evil embodied by the snake, which speaks to her in conviction, seduced by the pleasure of devouring the delicious fruit from which Eva and Adam’s ‘eyes were opened’ and shame of the body introduced. From a Freudian perspective, the snake may be the phallus the woman does not have and could sexually desire; however, not for Mercado who associates the viperous with *his* woman’s nature.

⁶⁵ Original reads: ‘*Tiene también su cosa víbora dentro de su espacio, por la cual hay que tenerle mucho cuidado. [...] Esa mujer aprovecha ese espacio para hablar sobre los hombres y para hablar sobre ella misma también... ese espacio erótico...*’

Mercado's enlarged women accentuate and occasionally expose their sexual parts opening the prohibited zones, tempting the viewer to trespass and touch the exhibited body. Mercado puts the woman at centre stage. She is the heretic, the disobedient, the healer, the one that poisoned the master's food. This woman is the 'female subject capitalism had to destroy' (Federici; 2004:11). In other works Mercado inhabits the animal, adding complexity to the normative reading of gender by becoming duck, swan, pig, horse, rooster, eagle, cow, or elephant. The artist's personal bestiary responds to specific carnalities of both sexual natures: the phallic (necks, snouts, and beaks) and the mammary (udder, milk, and yogurt). The animal is sexually enhanced whilst blurring its gender identifications, managing the hyper-sexed rather than the hyper-gendered. Rather than male or female, the animal in Mercado is phallic, mammalian, or both, reinstating the actual organ over gender associations. The product of his cow's udder is potentially both the female's nourishment (breastfeeding) and the male's energetic climax (ejaculation). An overrepresentation of the erotic via the voluptuousness of the body in allusions or literal representations of the animal's sexual potential is only in relation to the spectator's gendered body identification which Mercado ironically dismisses. The hypersexualised nature of Mercado's women and bestiary embodies the politics of the erotic through figures that have been sexualised in relation, not to their own desires but from the spectator/ male/ coloniser/ gaze. An element of the grotesque provokes an uncomfortable distortion of the sexualised erotic. The erotic in Mercado is understood as a possibility of political and personal empowerment. It is the space of personal acknowledgement and the unleashing of desire, which he links to his woman personae. He continues speaking of his woman-self in reference to an 'erotic space' where 'she' can finally *speak* of men, herself and her aspirations and impulses. The animal-woman signifiers are undone, through an erotic space delinked from colonial masculinity.

Undefined vocalisations and animal sounds accompany some of Mercado's performing selves, inhabiting Aristotelian human-animal distinctions of language. The voice of the animal for Aristotle is used to indicate pain or pleasure. The Puerto Rican colonised animal

speaks in Spanish, not in the coloniser's English language. The animal noise is just a murmur without political power. The impotence of the animal's voicing out echoes another silenced voicing body in colonial Puerto Rican reality: Puerto Rico's Resident Commissioner to the U.S. House of Representatives, who has the right to 'speak' but not to vote. Furthermore, Puerto Ricans as legal citizens of the U.S. hold no voting rights over the President. Rephrasing Simone de Beauvoir's statement relating women, one is not born animal, but *made* animal. Mercado enacts the unrecognised voicing out; however, the erotic space in his work is used as a zone for speaking the unspeakable from a position of the unspoken of. The functional systematic machinery of what is possible to sense and by whom becomes disrupted and noise is made speech. This is by no means literal in Mercado's work as he does not usually include the speaking act. Mercado believes the body-image he transmits is so imposing and strong that language is not needed (Mercado et al., 2013; Toro, 2011), leaving body-action to speak over linguistic imposition. The animal's noise becomes a moving body producing speech in others through its images. This animal in-transit is an undetermined being that plays to dislocate and relocate itself in relation to its spectators, who in national ground are the colonised others. It is through the body that the will to bond as form of agency resides in Mercado's work, as further discussed in this chapter's following section.

In Mercado's erotic the nude body becomes a foam body, sculpted and altered. Neither references to the phallus nor the vagina are ever an exhibition of the artist's own flesh. Prostheses or pubic hair indications charge the zones with their sexual implications. His body as a whole may be thought of as a prosthetic body. An exception to this covering is the sporadic exposure of Mercado's own breasts. The discovery of the real-original body is at first a revelation of mesmerising effect. Bare and exposed, the vulnerability and sincerity of the artist is portrayed by his 'woman-like' breasts which lead to a sense of both nurture and arousal. It is the revealing mammal, the animal within and its breastfeeding female function. The most seductive piece of his prosthetic body is the true skin, warm, reacting flesh that escapes the other textures of the inanimate surfaces. The foamed voluptuousness of the

buttocks and hips is dimmed out when revealing the carnality of his breasts. Gradually the spectator realises that one has been exposed to the inner core of Mercado's body. Contrarily, phallic connotations are always mediated by the fake skin, with dildos and foam sculpted penises. As with his breasts, Mercado could potentially show his sexed flesh (presumably phallic); however, he has always chose to hide this vulnerability, creating an ongoing intrigue and curiosity over his 'true' gender by perpetuating an unclassified and undetermined nature which is at the core of his performance.

Mercado has found in androgyny a creative battleground. Androgyny in Mercado speaks beyond an integration of dualities. He explores representing androgyny as 'sexual ambiguity (...) where human sexuality is presented at an undetermined level. Man and woman intersect or unify creating a space open for imagination and to the senses of the spectator.' (Mercado; 1994: 1) The locus created from the indeterminacy of the indefinable emanates from the (gendered-sexed) embodiment into imagining other ways of being in the World that are contagious or resonating to the soma of the spectator (colonial) Other. Mercado continues writing: Androgyny 'projects a vision of *equality* and establishes a spiritual image where the soul comes to the fore and from or for which the *word* is triggered.' (1994: 1. My emphases)⁶⁶ The previous quote is an insight into the artist's personal conception of androgyny and its proposal. Mercado underlines a demonstration of equality. In the elaboration of the concept of equality I incorporate Jacques Rancière's vision of the term previously introduced in Chapter 1. Rancière understands equality as a dislocation of the social partitions (rich/poor, good/evil, male/female, worker/intellectual, etc.) where there is no epistemic supremacy. It interrupts order of hierarchies of functions (roles) and places. Equality is a universal value to the extent it becomes enacted: 'Equality is not a value to which one appeals; it is a universal that must be supposed, verified, and demonstrated in each

⁶⁶ Original reads: '*... parto a representar la Androginia como sexualidad ambigua presentada como el fenómeno natural en donde se muestra la sexualidad ambigua presentada en un plano indefinido, hombre y mujer se intersecan o se unifican creando un espacio abierto a la imaginación y a los sentidos de quien observa. Proyecta una visión de igualdad y establece una imagen de sentido espiritual donde el alma toma el primer plano y de donde o por la cual parte la palabra.*'

case.’ (Rancière, 1992: 60) Equality lacks an a priori, thus it is always in the present time; in this sense it is performed. Through androgyny Mercado performs and verifies equality. When speaking of equality Mercado also alludes to the ‘projection of a vision’. That vision is extensive from the self, projected beyond oneself. One is anyone. For Rancière the verification of equality is the enactment of any person or any community:

But the enactment of equality is not, for all that, the enactment of the self, of the attributes or properties of the community in question. The name of an injured community that invokes its rights is always the name of the anonym, the name of anyone. (1992: 60)

The rise of the word is finally triggered, as Mercado explains. Rancière furthermore states: ‘The process of emancipation is the verification of the equality of any speaking being with any other speaking being’ (1992: 59). However, word is not common in the formal presentation of Mercado’s work. The triggering of it is. As we understand Mercado’s work beyond the frame-time of the performance’s official presentation, conversation is produced with Mercado’s personae before, during and after as he inhabits these personae throughout the day or night, becoming them. ‘This is what I am’ as he says (Abreu, 2014). Most times his personae live independently from the idea of a formal presentation, becoming an ongoing event that wanders the streets or is found in the vibrancy of the night life. By inserting himself into public life the image he creates with his body allows and triggers the open informal conversation and questioning. Mercado denies the epistemic supremacy of the word over the body but uses the knowledge produced by and with his body as harbinger of the encounter with the others, ultimately opening a space of alternative thought, sensation, and emotion.

Mercado’s embodiments are immersions into the colonial body and wound. Expanding on his body interpretations of the male and the female in the context of the colony, the prosthetic phallus of this colonial body may be the replacement of what has been cut off. Furthermore, it is the subversive pleasure that reinvents itself from the wound which is evidenced, exaggerated, and toyed with. The big phallus is treated as seductive and powerful; however, it

remains dysfunctional, flaccid, and inanimate. It is there to seduce the spectator into arousing it. The revealing of the breasts works not in contradiction to the overexposure of the enlarged phallic masquerade. The erotic potential is a crevice on his prosthetics, a hole in the pantyhose of Mercado's chest. At times Mercado also hides his phallic prosthesis and reveals it with seductive enchantment. The embodied site presented by Mercado is the combination of the phallic toy and the breasted motherland. A personal empowerment is politically inserted in a gap of law over land and bodies. Erotic seduction is part of the freak show within encoded signifiers. The lure of Mercado's presence is the homeland bizarre, and the relation to it. Mercado uses his fleshly and animalistic identification with women as site for (un)conscious fantasies on the Caribbean body to be contested by 'true' mammal flesh and through his tricksterish phallus an embodied commentary on Puerto Rican coloniality. Mercado's androgyny is his own land-body; in performing an urge to enact, verify and demonstrate equality.

3.2.3 Unheimliche Objects? : Disidentifications of Mother Doll

Mercado presents himself as the animate doll: a rag doll, sex doll, spirit doll, or their combination. His doll-Self is transcultural, transracial and transgendered. He uses the doll-as-Self together with the pose (Cotter, 2001; Jiménez, 2004: 260) to come in and out of the inanimate and lifeless, at the flux of the breath of life. Inhabiting the stillness of the doll-object-Self however, does not impede the agency of the inanimate. Mercado's own house is full of personal shrines, which include a display of dolls and masks of many cultures, and his personal figurines. For Mercado the doll works as maquette of self-embodiment [Image 6]. It can be integrated to the artist's body by becoming either himself an embodiment of the doll or by having the doll/s attached, hanged, or carried by his body [Image 7]. Narrating his biography he mentions the doll as hidden part of his childhood games (*Espejo: Las caras de Freddie*, 2014; Toro, 2011: 11), a concealed play away from his father's scolding. He acknowledges that 'this doll with which I interacted as a child gained a body in life, through

my body' (*Espejo: Las caras de Freddie*, 2014).⁶⁷ As described by Mercado, the doll and his own body become mutually possessed. Mercado's proposal of the animate doll-Self is embedded with references and influences within and beyond the modern Westernised sense of the object-doll.



Image 6. [Left]. 2011. Mercado's Studio. Photo: Marina Barys Janer.

Image 7. [Right]. 2017. Figure attached to Freddie Mercado's garments for *Freddilicias* (2013-2016). Photo: Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes.

Mercado's interpersonal relation to the doll, its creation, use and becoming, might figure as uncanny. Austrian founder of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud analysed the uncanny (*unheimlich*, German) extensively in his 1919 paper on the subject, where he addresses the phenomenon of the uncanny not exclusively as subject to life experience but also within aesthetics (1955: 219). Related to a frightening or uneasy quality of feeling, Freud via Schelling presents the uncanny as especially involved to that which must be concealed and kept out of sight but has nonetheless been revealed. The uncanny must have been kept hidden. It has been linked to the wild animal (222) and to magical powers (225). The fear

⁶⁷ Original reads: 'Esa muñeca con la que yo interactué de pequeño tomó cuerpo en vida con mi cuerpo.'

towards the uncanny is rooted on the *heim*, familiarity or homey essence, through its reproduction and externalisation. More precisely this feeling is produced in blurring the limits of life and death; as the living inanimate ‘I’. A doubling occurs in the uncanny, as the double is both ‘preservation against extinction’ and ‘harbinger of death’ (235) where the ‘subject identifies himself with someone else, so that he is in doubt as to which his self is, or substitutes the extraneous self for his own’ (234). Both life and death drives are constitutive of the double. Mirrors, mannequins, dolls, and twins have been commonly described as uncanny—the reproductions of the ‘real’ and the ‘alive’ by the object(ified). These elements have been all used, not naïvely although very playfully, by Freddie Mercado. The fearsome essence of the uncanny is linked to its cultural context, from which the experience of life-death limits and the relationship to the object are lived and conceived in a certain way.

The doll plays an important role within the spirit world in Afro-Caribbean traditions that have developed and survived slavery in resistance to colonial education.⁶⁸ These traditions are Caribbean and trans-Caribbean spiritual practices born in the merging of the Afro descendent deities and spirits with the Catholic icons and saints resulting in a transculturation of the general culture.⁶⁹ From this spiritual resistance emerged various systems of belief such as Vodou in Haiti, Gagá in Dominican Republic, and Santería (Regla de Ocha) in Cuba, this latter to become most settled in Puerto Rico after the 1960s migration of Cubans to this island (Llorens Alicea, 2003) and the interaction of Puerto Rican espiritistas with practitioners of

⁶⁸ Enslaved Africans brought to the Americas where kidnapped from different communities and regions of Africa as a segregation strategy and procedure. From this dispersion some enslaved people in the Caribbean came from the old Yoruba kingdom situated between the eastern Dahomey and West Nigeria, which developed from the kingdoms of Oyó, Ilorí, Ixebá, Ibadán, Ifé, Yebú and Egbá. From these, a great cultural influence has survived in the Antilles. Words like *Ifá*, *Babalawos*, *ildefá*, *diloggun*, *babalochas* or *Iyalochas*, are terminologies that belong to the Yoruba religion that have survived more than five centuries of colonisation and are still common in Santería rituals in Cuba and Puerto Rico (Llorens Alicea, 2003). For a study of the enslaved Africans brought to Puerto Rico or those illegally migrating from other islands see: Álvarez Nazario, 1961; Baralt, 1985; Ribes Tovar, 1973.

⁶⁹ Some examples of the phenomenon of Yoruba-Catholic transculturation in the Caribbean are found in the merging of the *orisha*-saint: Changó-St. Barbara, Olodumare or Olofi-Catholic God, Orula-St. Francis of Assisi, Obatalá-Our Lady of Mercy, Yemayá-St. Mary of Regla, Elegguá-Holy Child of Atocha, Oshún-Our Lady of Charity, Oggún-St. Peter, and Ochosi-St. Norbert (this is not an exhaustive list). In the case of the male deities Changó and Obatalá, is interesting to note that these merge with female saints. We purposely speak here of a transculturation process rather than speaking of syncretism: ‘Syncretism is a model of analysis that denies the enslaved a consciousness of their predicament in the New World.’ (Pérez y Mena, 1998: 15)

Afro-Cuban Santería in the U.S. (Brandon, 1993: 108). In the late XIX century Espiritismo developed in Cuba and Puerto Rico—originally adopted from the French Spiritism to later incorporate other belief systems most noticeably, African elements. Used in all these spiritual practices, the doll is already an embodiment of transculturation, of the spirits held and honoured from the devotees’ cultural assemblage. These charged objects materialise multiple spiritual practices of European and African belief in a same embodiment.

In altars or shrines created for the saints and the ancestors, dolls are often found. In the abovementioned practices the doll bears the symbolic and spiritual power of a transcultured Catholic saint / pan-Yoruba *orisha* (deity), a material connection with the devotee’s spirit guides or ancestors from her personal spirit pantheon (*cuadro espiritual*), or represents a ‘living’ person related to the practitioner. The doll might be given as an offering to the spirits as toys for playing, literally and symbolically (Condon, 2013), or become the material vessel or helper for accessing these spirits. The doll is linked to the spiritual world as means of channelling communication.

In Afro-Cuban practices the spirit doll ‘represents a practitioner’s specific spirit guide that belongs only to them and at the same time embodies the ritual knowledge transmitted by these spiritual ancestors over generations.’ (Viarnes, 2010: 320) The doll acquires the extraordinary powers of the *orisha* (Yoruba and pan-Yoruba deity) but also holds some of the devotee’s own traits. These dolls are often ‘born from’ another doll thus bearers of a spiritual and ritual lineage that includes aesthetic traditions and spiritual continuity. Lineage is central to Afro-Caribbean religious practices which include bloodline but extend to the ritually adopted house where a *padrino* ‘godfather’ initiates and spiritually guides his ‘godchildren’. These dolls are material vessels for a historical memory that is both collective and personal. They embody ritual ancestors and priestess, black mothers and matriarchs. To prepare a doll is not only a creative action but a spiritual compromise of acknowledging and sustaining a bond with the spirit it inhabits.

The doll has been associated to Espiritismo, a spiritual belief developed from a negotiated hybridity between Santería or Palo Monte and Kardecian Spiritism (Bettelheim, 2010: 314).⁷⁰ An Espiritista altar will include figurines and dolls that represent African *orishas* merged into Catholic saints which are regarded as the spiritual guardians. The setting mainly consists of a white cloth over a table where water containers are placed. As described by a Puerto Rican devotee (2017), this is an energetic portal for the disembodied (*desencarnados*, ‘the dead’). The *bóveda* (shrine) to the personal spirit pantheon (*cuadro espiritual*) is the portal to other dimensions which provide further proximity to the *desencarnados*.⁷¹ Every person that has been initiated has hers. Seven or nine glasses of water are arranged in the shape of a horseshoe with a fishbowl-like glass pot in the centre filled with water bearing a quartz crystal inside or a metal cross. Dolls or figurines placed in this altar function as spirit helpers that assist the practitioner’s work in communicating with the *desencarnados*. Espiritismo has

⁷⁰ Espiritismo was initially influenced by the writings of the French philosopher Allan Kardec, published since 1857. In Puerto Rico the first community of espiritistas was founded in 1871 in Mayagüez (Rodríguez Escudero, 1978: 43). Initially practiced by the intellectual elite, these beliefs soon entered the popular sectors which incorporated African religious medical traditions, popular Catholicism from rural Spanish migrants and religious relics of the indigenous inhabitants of the island, the Taínos, and became what has been called Espiritismo popular (Schmidt, 2009: 182) or, not without controversy, Espiritismo criollo or Espiritismo cruzado. By the end of the XIX century Espiritismo in Puerto Rico was an alternative to the colonial Roman Catholicism and played a significant role in being a different belief from that of the Spanish ruling metropoli. After the Cuban revolution (1959) the arrival of Santería to Puerto Rico strengthened its African elements together with the encounter and combined practice in the U.S. of Puerto Rican espiritistas and Cuban practitioners of Santería. Ever since, the practices of Santería and Espiritismo have merged to the extent that currently both terms are found to be used indistinctively. In the U.S. it has been called Santerismo (Brandon, 1993: 108). From this merging Taíno words and elements are also found in Santería-Espiritismo. Some examples are the Taíno word *jimagua* meaning twins, used by the santeros to name the twins in the Yoruba pantheon (named *Ibeyis* in Yoruba); and the use of the fruit (known as *jícara*) of the Calabash Tree (*crescentia cujete*, known in P.R. as *higüera*) both by Taínos as a food plate and later in the Santería rituals as cult object (Llorens Alicea, 2003).

⁷¹ Your ancestors are not necessarily in your *cuadro espiritual*. Furthermore, you need to take into consideration your genealogy from seven past generations. The deceased are offered tobacco, fire, water with sugar, their favourite food and perfume. They speak through the *consulta* (spiritual consulting). In the *consulta* with the *babalawo* (spiritual title, the receiver of the secrets of Orula) an Odu is given, a letter from the 256 sacred Odu, which is really the combination of 16 letters. These letters have many *patakies*, which in Lucumí language means the oral stories of the things that can happen to the person with that symbol. However, not all of the letter’s stories can be read by humans and not all of these will be referring to that specific person in that specific time of the *consulta*. Ogbe Ate, for example, was the letter that came out for Puerto Rico in 2017. It is the first *Iré* (wellbeing, good luck) in years, a prophecy of prosperity. *Babalawos* gather on the 1st January and the first thing they read from the letter is who governs (which *orisha*). Oshún governs this year. Oshún represents prosperity, money, love, passion, sweetness. She represents the river (personal interview with practitioner, January 2017).

been used for solving problems and most noticeably as a healing system (Núñez Molina, 2009).

In Haitian Vodou the doll re-presents a person who is alive, to the extent the manipulation of the object is believed to affect directly the person represented and to alter his or her destiny. Far from Western-European perspectives on demoniac and threatening forces of African-based belief '[...] the dolls of Vodou are not meant to alter destiny by completely harnessing an individual's free will, but rather to manipulate the individuals (particularly the self) involved in the process of healing and protection from further disorder.' (Rich, 2009: 263) Contrary to this popular misconception, the Vodou dolls have a healing, life bringing force rather than a deadly and pain-inflicting nature.

In all these cosmovisions the creation, manipulation, and engagement with the doll are already bringing life to the inanimate idea of the object. More generally the alternative conception and relationality to the object is of our special interest, and will be broadened further on. In terms of the doll, its creation is a pact with the spirits and a recognition of spiritual lineage linked to the stories of survival in a context of slavery. The seemingly inanimate history becomes alive. In Afro-Cuban traditions the doll itself is the son or daughter of the doll of your spiritual godfather (*padrino*). Furthermore, having good communication with the spirits and walking alongside them is intrinsic to the spiritual development of the individual. The doll is not only an embodiment of transculturation but its making is the performativity of a resisting belief. In Puerto Rican Santería-Espiritista the dolls are helpers of the devotees and guardians of the spirits. The ambivalence of the life-dead essence of the doll responds to the intimate connection with the spirit world, which is lived as accompaniment to the carnal presence of the current generation. Following Haitian relation to the doll, the human-like figure may become the portal for healing those alive. The healing possibility is also a weapon of protection in defence.

In the case of Mercado the doll is a weapon of destabilising factor. A detonator or ‘grenade’ that bothers codified categories of identity (Santos Febres, 2003: 39). Mercado is playing with dolls as the child would, as *orisha* warrior Elegguá would play with his toys, allowing for a fluidity of identity through his repertoire of dolls that responds from, within and beyond transculturation processes almost in a psychomagic fashion. Freud had already acknowledged the relationship of the uncanny with the magical on a footnote which noted that the English language uses canny as ‘cosy but also endowed with occult or magical powers’ (1955: 225). Cosy is nurture and protection as well as the magical in the sense of the spiritual traditions discussed. Healing is allowing the break of the continuous and integrative identity fiction imposed by colonisation processes. Influenced by Afro-Caribbean cultures Mercado is alchemist of his own doll-body-matter expanding into the fabric of the Puerto Rican Self. Where identity is understood as a site of struggle, Mercado’s doll is the threat of battle and the healing of the wounds from normative colonial citizenship, past and present. The doll’s manipulation and embodiment is a ritual on national ground.

Mercado’s performances play with identification mechanisms intrinsic to the nature of the uncanny. The uncanny event entails being trapped in the Other to the extent in which that Other is you (part of you, becoming you, devouring you), and the individual becomes doubled to a point where the ‘I’ is lost. A process of identification is thus implied in the doubling. Freud (1922) recognises identification to be one of the earliest forms of emotional tie with another person where its ambivalence fluctuates from an expression of tenderness into a wish for someone’s removal, as in a cannibalistic incorporation: ‘The cannibal, as we know, has remained at this standpoint; he has a devouring affection for his enemies and only devours people of whom he is fond.’ Cannibalism is not apolitical, especially in the Latin American context, as eloquently presented by the Brazilian artist Oswald de Andrade in his influential 1928 *Manifesto Antropófago*. In regards to cannibalism’s ambivalence in Freudian thought, desire emerges as the form of having the Other (incorporating) through becoming the Other (self-producing). The identification process in Mercado is both a creative process

and a becoming performativity—having by producing and incorporating by becoming the doll. ‘I became that same doll with whom I worked with for a long time within my secret child games.’ (*Cultura Viva Gay*, 2005) Dolls become a materialisation of the *heim* (home), as a constant re-production in his work, memories, and body. Furthermore the doll treatment and relation is woven and grounded in decolonial relations and spiritual beliefs inherited from the enslaved Africans that have survived the Spanish and U.S. colonisation processes. Mercado is the mother of all dolls in his universe, mirroring his self in the so-called inanimate, rendering it alive as a possibility of constant metamorphosis in tactics for survival. Becoming-doll in Mercado engages with the spiritual heritage of African descendance without disregarding the Western implications of the object-doll. Becoming a doll is also to address the objectification of these bodies: colonial bodies, Black bodies, female bodies.

Mercado’s transcultural, transracial and transgender doll-Self works through disidentification strategies in the sense presented by José Esteban Muñoz (1999) of ‘working on and against’ by constantly shifting, adapting and redefining alliances, sensibilities and meanings. Muñoz discusses the term as survival method where strategies of resistance are inserted from within identification.

Disidentification is the third mode of dealing with dominant ideology, one that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather, disidentification is a strategy that works on and against the dominant ideology. Instead of buckling under the pressures of dominant ideology (identification, assimilation) or attempting to break free of its inescapable sphere (counteridentification, utopianism), this “working on and against” is a strategy that tries to transform a cultural logic from within, always labouring to enact permanent structural change while at the same time valuing the importance of local everyday struggles of resistance. (1999: 11-12)

Resistance is not binary or fixed; disidentification’s force relies on its ability to adapt to power shifts. Among the inland colonial system Mercado presents a remoulding, multiple and unfinished embodiment among the ‘Puerto Rican subaltern’ (Grosfoguel, 2003). His identification to the doll works as strategy of de-codification of dominant hegemonic

positions. His performing disidentification is produced in the spectator through the identification with his constant use, production, reproduction, relation and reinvention of the doll-Self. The manipulation of the doll by the artist has become in Mercado's work the healing response of the body wounded by patriarchy, homophobia, misogyny, racism, classism, capitalism, and colonial restraints in relation to individual and national rights.

By becoming doll as a reaffirmation the reading of what this doubling object *is* in Mercado's context addresses interwoven realities, cosmovisions and interrelations that dialogue between the colonial body as modern capitalist object of consumption, desire, use and discard, and the body as the ritual object connected to the ancestral spirits that have survived rounds of oppression and charged with their energetic power. Interestingly in the case of Yoruba presentations and representations of the human 'the uniqueness of a person or thing is always positioned within an intersubjective framework that tempers absolute identity.' (Doris, 2005: 25) Similarly, when speaking broadly about objects in Yoruba and Pan-Yoruba conception, these become charged with energetic essence that is always 'in communication with'. A certain object could be created for protection (e.g. *àdàlè* in Nigeria) and it protects to the extent that this object is filled with *ashe*—the generative 'power to make things happen', the vital energy that can produce change. Every object can be extracted from its mundane ordinary context and be filled within a new one. *Ashe* can be embodied in objects, animals and humans but is not fixed to any of these. The *ashe* of the ancestors could be transmitted through objects. Each deity or *orisha* has her/his distinctive plant or necklace impregnated with her/his *ashe*.⁷²

From a Western phenomenological perspective, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1968) discusses the object and subject's 'flesh' as their common existential ground; the subjective lived body and the objective world are not opposed but inevitably intertwined and enfolded in each other by

⁷² To wear a beaded necklace that bears the essence of the *orisha* Changó, for example the red and white beaded necklace of this warrior energy, is not a representation of the *orisha* in the sense of what the Western mimesis understands representation to be, but a bearing of the deity's energy within the object. People initiated in Santería will wear on their left hand the green and yellow beaded bracelet of Orula, the master diviner and interpreter of the oracle of Ifá.

the common condition of materiality. Following Merleau-Ponty, Vivian Sobchack (2004) speaks of ‘interobjectivity’ within contemporary artworks as the body-subject phenomenon of being irreducibly both objective subjects and subjective objects; ‘the complementary co-constitutive experience we have of ourselves and others as material objects’ (296).

Posed as the other side of intersubjectivity, interobjectivity is thus a structure of relations with objects that cannot be reduced to a simple anthropomorphism in which we attribute our *own* egological subjectivity to nonsentient existence. Rather, it is a more complex structure of experiential relations that cannot comprehend absolute and complete objectivity or ‘in-itself-ness’ but, to varying degree, confers upon objects an *estranged*—and thus *transcendent*—subjectivity that seems uncanny in its *alterity* from our own. (313. Original emphases)

Regardless, Sobchack notes the asymmetrical relations forming interobjectivity as ‘a structure of engagement with the *materiality* of other body-objects on which we project our sense of *what it subjectively feels like to be objective*.’ (316. Original emphases) Framed as an inherently human phenomenon in conversation to Western-developed intersubjectivity, object-subject divide is held as mutually constitutive but never dismissed.⁷³ Furthermore the properties of the object (as being and treatment) do not delink from its agentic diminution. She emphasises the interobjective cannot be ‘reduced’ to ‘a simple anthropomorphism’ (including animism, fetishism, or reification) and indeed this understanding is distant from non-Western conceptions of the object. As we have discussed, beyond a common materiality, Yoruba thought understands a spiritual and energetic life force (*ashe*) common to/in all elements that allows a delinking from the subject-object reality held as a positive-negative construction of agency.

Freddie Mercado plays within these object-ified complexities. Divergent ways of being in the World converge in his body-doll-self. Each doll is engaged with different treatment and placement in relation to the artist’s body. To deepen the complexity of the disidentification

⁷³ In regards to a non-Western approach to the ‘intersubjective’ see the sub-section entitled ‘Intersubjectivity: An-other Approach’ in Chapter 1.

process through Mercado's doubling of the doll, I will continue by exemplifying its different positioning.



Image 8. *Madama*. 1996.
Santa María Magdalena de Pazzis Cemetery, Old San Juan. Photo: Fernando Páes.
Taken from *Caribe Insular*, p.50.

Mercado is simultaneously the doll's breeder and its offspring. The baby has been one of the manifestations of the doll. As breastfeeding babies one finds in the artist's repertoire two nude plastic dolls (boy and girl) sucking from the breasts of Mercado's eagle persona crowned with a tiara of plastic soldiers in direct reference to U.S. imperialistic force and global wars. This persona titled *Viaje...Sé* (2013-2014) was presented on museums and cultural institutions in San Juan and in Santo Domingo. Following a rather different connotation, Mercado is also a nurturing anthropomorphic black rooster with white skinny mannequin hands grabbing its bosom and holding affectively in its human arms a black plastic baby doll dressed in a white dress. This image retains allusions to Santería and Espiritismo traditions where white robes are commonly used in dolls and for ceremonies as well as the offering in sacrifice of the hen and rooster's blood. The rooster also presents

virility in Puerto Rico where cockfights are very popular still, especially among men. Mercado poses this persona of the rooster-mother in a classroom of the School of Fine Arts in Old San Juan. On a similar thematic ground, another of Mercado's personae in 1996 dresses identical to the black-skinned plastic doll he maternally holds in his hands and close to his own face, now in Santa María Magdalena de Pazzis Cemetery, the colonial-era cemetery where national patriots are buried [Image 8]. Both the artist and the doll are dressed in the traditional white dress and white turban associated in the collective imaginary to Afro-Caribbean traditions. Mercado evokes the figure of the *Madama* (or *Baiana* in Bahia, Brazil) known within the African Diaspora in the Caribbean and Latin America. Waleska Santiago (in Holland, 2011) notes the diverse meanings of the *Madama* within its different contexts, 'ranging from the cultural dignity of a religious shaman to racist stereotypes of domestic mummies.' Directly referring to the *Madama* dolls which embody the mammy, Santiago stresses their legacy to colonialism and racism. Moreover here the story is racially reversed as the black baby is taken care of by the white *Madama*. However, by wearing the same garments, through and beyond a doubling aesthetic, Mercado is both *madama* and mother of the black baby doll referring to a generational lineage that has survived beyond skin colour. In this range of Mercado's personae some interactions with the baby doll reinforce a motherly protection and healing of a wounded racial history of sabotage and silencing, while on other cases the doll is situated as the absolute colonial dependence on the big eagle. These different uses of the 'baby' doll propose different levels of identification or doubling, in ambivalent tenderness and destruction with an added complexity given by the situated environments, power relations, and interracial historical connotations.

Mercado also attaches the doll creating a conjoined twin effect, a marsupial addition or a freaky grotesque deformation that alters the integrative unity of the self-represented by the 'oneness' of the body-with its multiple antagonisms. Similar to the papier-mâché tradition of the big head *cabezudo*, Mercado has used big foam heads over his own (e.g. personae of *Marta Pérez*, *Ganesh*, and *La Fortuna*) sometimes picking his head out from underneath or

having his face completely exposed below.⁷⁴ In the former cases, which are the most frequent, he purposely chooses to become a multiple self rather than the one headed body of an Other (as in the case of the *cabezudos*). Identification here is an adding-up conjunctive symbiosis of the many and the different. Mercado's human body is given as the host or the mother doll for the other creatures, his doubles, to inhabit. For a version of *Freddilicias* (2014) a punk trans-woman doll of pink hair is wearing a photomontage of Mercado's faces in her corset and underwear [Image 7]. She is attached to the artist's back, who on this occasion is a big, respectable woman dressed in a long black dress with a multi-layered pearled accessory on her head that comes down to her six eyed face. Several self-portrait paintings of Mercado's multiple woman characters are clipped onto her dress and she plays to cover her face with a hand fan that has been drawn with other possible faces for the artist to wear.

With *Freddilicias*, Mercado becomes his own delicacy in an exhibition that saturates the artist's female body with the image reproduction of her explored multiple selves and their ways of seeing and being seen.⁷⁵ This extreme hyper-doubling symbiotically saturates both the doll and his body-geography with 'self' representations in a mirroring dialogue. At an event at the Liga de Arte (2014) Mercado appears with two full body movable foam dolls located on each of his legs. The 'three' of them are white girls dressed in bright coloured leotards and wigs as circus candy dolls. On his back rests a big brown foam face with many

⁷⁴ The papier-mâché big heads or *cabezudos* are part of popular culture inherited from the Spanish, still very common in Catalonia. In Puerto Rico the artist Pedro Adorno with his company *Agua, Sol y Sereno* (1993-current) explores the *cabezudos*' uses and potentialities within and outside their traditional context. Adorno together with Cathy Vigo, co-founder of the company, were trained in the late 1980s and early 1990s in the politics and aesthetics of the *Bread and Puppet Theatre* founded by puppeteer Peter Schumann. Since then *Bread and Puppet* has influenced many artists through its several visits to the Island and with artists travelling to attend the workshops given in Vermont, U.S. Other contemporary users of the *cabezudo* aesthetics are the activist theatre group *Papel Machete*. Object makers and puppeteers also working as Mercado on the exploration of foam and its embodied possibilities are the artist collective *Poncili Creación*, also influenced and trained at *Bread and Puppet*. See: Fiet, 2007-08; Fiet and Hernández, 2007-08; and Irizarry, 2004-05.

⁷⁵ The title *Freddilicias* plays with the artist's first name and the word *delicias*, Spanish for both delicacy and sensual, emotional and energetic pleasure. It is also a reference to the famous painting of Hieronymus Bosch *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1490-1500), known in Spanish as *El Jardín de las Delicias*.

eyes which at times substitutes the main body of the artist, creating a multiple self that fluctuates between a Siamese triplet of white and similar bodies into a monstrous self of multiracial and multiple visions. The abominable is brought to life. Also Mercado's dolls have been turned upside down, as in the case of the intervention made for the 2002 Hemispheric Institute *Encuentro* in Lima [Image 9].



Image 9. *Negra que te quiero*. 2004. III Encuentro Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics, Lima. Photo: Marlène Ramírez-Cancio.

Suddenly the unified body of the artist becomes vertically two sided as a foam head with wig and mannequin arms falls hanging from Mercado's crotch. Putting high heels on his hands, the artist extends his arms upward transforming his arms into the legs of the doll, allowing it to come alive. Even in her inverted position, the doll's possessing force engulfs Mercado's own upright body almost to a point of total cancellation, or transfiguration. During this performance the 'inverted' doll is 'born' from the transmutation of Mercado's previous embodiment as doña Fela, a public figure in national history I discuss further on. Spectators witness the becoming inverted doll of Mercado-doña Fela.

A series of sculpted foam busts of bald androgen dolls have been re-used in several of Mercado's personas. *La Virgen Madre* persona appeared in the music video 'La Sospecha' (2004) for the band *Circo*, a virgin with a tiara of plastic soldiers who had two of these dolls attached to each side of Mercado's waist, one was white-skinned the other one, *mulato*. The dolls hold each other's hands in a wrapping and embracing visual effect over the artist's virginal womb. Through the prosthetic effect created by the cut-off limbed bodies the Virgin becomes the protector and mother of the dismembered war bodies. The white virginal body of Mercado reproduces into *mulato*, a racial critique to the invisibility of the Black Other needed for the 'mix'. On another occasion in the ARCO' 02 Madrid Fair (2002) some of these bald *mulato* busts were used over the artist's head almost as a saints' halo in the post-imperial Spanish and commodified high art context.

Other dolls allude to popular culture and present specific feminine iconic or historical women in Puerto Rican imaginary. Such is the case with the figure of Felisa Rincón de Gautier, popularly known as doña Fela. She has been redone by Mercado on different occasions, embodying her, making her into a doll and portraying her in his paintings.⁷⁶ Felisa Rincón de Gautier (1897-1994) was the first woman to be elected Mayor of a city capital in the Americas, as mayor of San Juan for 22 years (1946-1968) during a time of vertiginous neoliberal industrialisation. Loved by many people, she was one of the faces of the Island's progress with her wigs and Spanish style hand fans. Her social figure represents women's empowerment in law, white upper class superiority, and neoliberal progress. Doña Fela is remembered by an emblematic anecdote. On several occasions she sent airplanes to bring snow to the Caribbean island during Christmas time so local children could play White

⁷⁶ Earlier than Mercado, in the 1960s Johnny Rodríguez had already performed an embodied version of doña Fela recorded in *Puerto Rico en Carnaval* (1965), a Mexican-Puerto Rican co-production. See endnote # 17 in Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes (2011). Mercado performed as doña Fela at the Luis Muñoz Marín Foundation Theatre as part of the Cabaret Show (2000-2002) he had in collaboration with musician Amed Irizarry and experimental vocalist performer Ivette Román, which followed the style of the Latin American political Cabaret. This Cabaret Show performed in several places of San Juan, such as the Nuyorican Café and also travelled to Lima, Perú in 2002. Recently, as an initiative of performer and curator Mickey Negrón for *Quiebre: International Performance Festival* (Rio Piedras, August, 2016) the Cabaret Show of Irizarry, Róman and Mercado was reincorporated as both historical and present performance.

Christmas, just like U.S. children, in a game of identification with the coloniser's reality and culture. Likewise, Mercado plays. He plays with her image and her public recognition. One of his dolls is doña Fela. For a doll contest in La Casa del Libro in Old San Juan (2003) Mercado presented the doña Fela doll holding hands with a black doll of the *orisha* goddess Oshún.⁷⁷ Oshún in Yoruba and Afro-Caribbean symbolism is the mother of sweet and fresh waters, also of beauty, sexuality and fertility.⁷⁸ Goddess of the river Oshún is next to her counterpart, the haute culture 'snow lady' doña Fela which in turn holds Western references to refined femininity. These two identifiers of Puerto Rican culture are put hand in hand by the artist, both as venerated women on different contexts of Puerto Rican society. For this occasion Mercado embodied doña Fela in complete assimilation to the exhibited doll, dressing the same way as it [Image 10].



Image 10. Mercado dressed as doña Fela posing in front of his *doña Fela* and *Oshún* dolls. 2003. Casa del Libro, Old San Juan. Photo courtesy of Freddie Mercado.

⁷⁷ On this year (2003) the doll contest was first opened to male participation. Freddie Mercado and his good friend and long time collaborator Hector Torres (known as 'La Jector') presented their dolls. Mercado's dolls did not win the prize. The prize was given to a woman who made the traditional *jibara* (mountain-dwelling peasant) doll. The organisers said to Mercado that the next time they will need to include a category for the 'artistic doll'. 'They missed the historical opportunity of having a male winner on the doll contest for the first time. Well... an androgen.' (Mercado, April 2015. Personal correspondence) His dolls were eventually bought to include in the collection.

⁷⁸ For an extensive study on the figure of Oshún, see: Murphy and Sanford, 2001.

The character of doña Fela is not merely doubled as figurine-body but she, as ghostly spirit (she died in 1994), becomes uncannily revived through the espiritista possession of her doll-self. It is almost as if by encountering the doll her spirit finds its materiality and through it the way back into the world of the living. Mercado's camp resemblance to doña Fela produces emotional reactions on the Puerto Rican spectator as a phenomenon of 'collective trance, of spiritual ecstasy, of *espiritista* channelling that leads people to confuse him with historical *grande dames*...' (La-Fountain Stokes, 2015)⁷⁹ Furthermore by being positioned together as part of the worship object of Oshún, doña Fela becomes consequently levelled with the black body and the African heritage. The connection between the two dolls adds a new level of meaning to the embodied mirroring of Mercado. Oshún has not been embodied by Mercado as she does not need to be. She has been already spiritually invoked through her bond to Mercado's self as doña Fela in the doll figurines that in turn echo the body. Both of these dolls signify the spirit associated to them, ghost and deity. Ancestry is expressed in the dead female icon of neoliberal progress and capitalism through a strong industrial scheme over the capital city (doña Fela), and a historically ancestral tradition in-becoming dating back to the first round of colonisation where Spanish colonisers brought the oppression and labour exploitation of the African bodies (Oshún). Both women in their respective positions on the nation's colonial register are perceived as empowering female figures.

The use and abuse of the uncanny is the motor and force of body-politics of interaction and intersubjectivity presented in Mercado. The grotesque in relation to the uncanny appears in these mutating deformations of the body. The body is portrayed as excessive, unbalanced and chaotic in the reproduction of its parts. Displacement and excessive reproduction of its organs (flesh, eyes, breasts, reproductive organs, extremities or whole new bodies working as limbs with some degree of agency) produce a repulsion/attraction on the spectator. The repulsion produced by the uncanny grotesque is magnetic as it works as a drive or force pulling towards

⁷⁹ The day of Felisa Rincón de Gautier's death, Mercado dressed 'modestly' as her. A family, perplexed by Mercado's likeness to doña Fela, approached him believing he was her relative, took pictures of him and quickly went away. The anecdote is narrated by Mercado in his interview with Antonio Pantojas for his TV talk-show 'Estoy Aquí', on TUTV, 16 September 2005.

this body enhanced through Mercado's uses of humour and erotic desire. The disidentification processes with the spectator are mediated by the grotesque and/or ambivalent possibilities in the doubling of the doll, understanding at this point that the doll is used by, inhabited and transfigured into what Mercado *is*. The doll-Self is an opening into transfiguration through the appropriation of another body-matter that grows out from the artist's own body, joined or as physically detached offspring. The creation of these dolls and their reproduction throughout Mercado's life are the numerous possibilities of becoming taken to the public sphere through his body. Appropriating traces of popular and traditional elements of Puerto Rican and Caribbean imaginary, Mercado's proposal identifies with these feminine, tropical, animal, Afro-Caribbean canons by positioning himself within and outside these images. The doll is a site of crossgendered, racial, and monstrous-object (dis)identifications.

The making of the doll is the agency of creating the double. Some of Mercado's dolls are created as miniatures or sketches of his future selves. These function as objects of study that are not used in the performing but in the conceiving. Engaging with the diorama of a future becoming, the object is co-dependent, interdependent and mirrors (traits of) the artist's body. After the self is performed, the doll remains. Other times these selves are never embodied but some of them hint at Mercado's physiognomy. Dolls may have his visage or his curly long hair which in his quotidian life has been charged with gender and racial identifications. In African Yoruba tradition, inherited in the Caribbean through transatlantic Black slavery, 'dolls for play and for magic have multiple and constantly changing meanings depending on the user' (Dagan, 1990: 24). To the transformative implications through re-presentation, we must add the intention and energy of the maker-artist. In the case of Mercado he is the producer and user of the doll, as self-production. The vast majority of Mercado's dolls are either women, androgynous or transvestites with multiple transracial and transcultural connotations. All his dolls are *in relation* to his own body-subject (matter and spirituality). As mother doll, I argue that Mercado is affirming a lineage, a generational and spiritual ancestry

and future descendance, similar to how the preparation of the doll in Santería entails a compromise to the ancestors, acknowledging the passing on of resistance—the production of the doll is the activity of producing resisting subjectivities.

Nevertheless, the creative process may be read as uncanny in itself. Although Freud spoke of the uncanny in aesthetics through literary texts he separates and contrasts it from its effects and manifestations in real life. This distinction does not take into account the process by which the artist creates, the production of doubles within that process, and the uncanny independence the work begins to have from its creator. In 1914, five years before Freud's paper on 'The Uncanny', Spanish writer Miguel de Unamuno had published his philosophical novel *Niebla* where the main character Augusto Pérez pays a visit to his very creator, Unamuno himself (Chapter XXXI), and questions the author's own existence.⁸⁰ Mercado plays to become by becoming his doll creation, allowing it to possess his whole body at times.

Mercado's doubling in the doll is a disidentifying constant performance that questions national history and 'reality'. His consistency works as an insistence on renewal, transformation, and metamorphosis through creative exploration that honours the beliefs weaved and resisting disappearance. By working with the doll Mercado unveils the inherited ways (brought by slavery) of being in the World 'prior to' and 'beyond' Western European and subsequent U.S. colonisation. As mother doll Mercado re-produces a troupe of dolls, his own community within the larger community. Mercado performs his constant becoming within the colonial Mother land, locating and re-locating his personae in it by building from it his troupe of selves. The constant changing possibility in Mercado's embodiment is the changing possibility within community. Change is not only possible but always happening.

⁸⁰ In *Niebla*, author and creation engage on a discussion of mutual denial of each other's existence referring to the Other as the fictionalisation (mimesis) created by each one. On this philosophical approach conventions of fiction and existence are broken. The 'literary character' of Augusto claims his right to suicide—autonomy as delinking process from the author's scope: the novel—and upon the author's denial the 'literary character' threatens to kill Unamuno, 'his author'. *Niebla* presents the uncanny in the writing process alluding to a form of petit mort or suicidal attempt, as the double becomes fearfully uncanny for its creator gaining agency in the questioning of his (non)existence as fictional being (Unamuno, 1914).

Working away from this locus would be ‘like abandoning the ship. Who is doing this necessary task in this island?’ (Mercado in Toro, 2011: 12)⁸¹ Leaving the Island would be like ‘abandoning ship’, Mercado says, using a popular saying which refers to the community as a vessel within a vast ocean, very much dependent on its crew.

3.3 Experiencing the Encounter on an Equal Ground

3.3.1 Vaga-bonding with the Devil: A Pseudo-Fictional Account

The literary style is used in this brief segment as a resource that aims the experiential immersion and re-positioning of the reader. We understand it is another way of engaging with theory. The accounts narrated here combine my intimate experience of the city of San Juan and Freddie Mercado’s anecdote of an uncomfortable encounter which occurred some years ago in a bus travelling to Old San Juan. The description of the incident found in this narrative is taken from Mercado’s own detailed narrative (October, 2014). The ending is ‘fictional’ in a humble tribute to Julio Cortázar’s (1982; 2016) virtuosity of counter-positioning otherness in stories such as ‘Lejana’ (1951, in *Bestiario*) and ‘Axolotl’ (1956, in *Final del juego*):

* * *

You are at Stop 22 on Juan Ponce de León Avenue in Santurce, Puerto Rico waiting for the bus in front of the Fine Arts Centre sweating under your clothes. The light is bright and strong in your eyes. You reach for your five dollar sunglasses and put them on. You have always suffered from having sensitive eyes. As you wait for the Metrobus to Old San Juan you see the usual beggars you always recognise. The young man in his wheelchair has a swollen leg eaten by gangrene. He has fought his way through and conquered his territory at a strategic traffic light. He is always in the same spot, the light at the intersection of Ponce de León Ave. when coming from the highway. Following straight onto De Diego Ave. there are the gay clubs and the Museum of Puerto Rico. Further ahead is the zone of El Condado,

⁸¹ Original reads: ‘*Es como abandonar el barco. ¿Quién está haciendo la labor en esta Isla?*’

which could be any place in the modern world with Gucci, Häagen Daz, and Starbucks Coffee shops. The beggar's apparently foggy gaze suddenly focuses and he looks directly into the eyes of a businessman in his Toyota. '*No papi, hoy no*, not today man' the businessman answers while turning away from the uncomfortable feeling of being watched by the eyes that demand being looked at. On the opposite corner a vagabond is walking slowly, wandering with the sole purpose of movement beyond a final destination. He is also a 'local' in this area. You have seen his dark wrinkled face and curly greyish hair for years now. He decides to wander up the street or sit at a close-by corner rather than moving back and forth along a line of cars asking for alms in demands of recognition. You remember being told that a junkie beggar has been threatening people with his syringe. The fear of infecting the body with the sickness of the abject works more efficiently than having a gun, you realise. 'You may become me'... what can be more terrifying? Now you see another less familiar vagabond in the distance, pushing a baby stroller that he uses to keep his physical balance as well as a nest for his found belongings. Walking a city is to discover its writing says one of our national writers.

You notice the many others who are waiting. All of you are waiting to be seized by motion. Most of us believe we have somewhere to go and we wait. The act of waiting becomes a condition. As you digress over this you wonder about those who wander the streets. Those we call beggars, junkies, homeless, or vagabonds. You become momentarily obsessed with this last word: Vaga-bond. You begin to play around this idea of vaga-bonding. Taking this concept by its parts you feel the 'undulation' and 'unsteady wandering' of the 'vaga' in conjunction with the bond. To vaga-bond would be like a constant wandering of the possibilities of being in the World while these are affected and affecting the relationalities created, produced and producing the self...the unsteady bonds.

As your thoughts wander away the bus arrives. A group of kids in their school uniforms are chatting and laughing incessantly. One of them has *reggaetón* music playing on his phone. An old lady struggles with her arthritis but finally is able to grasp the coins for the fare to

give the bus driver. At last you hop in and sit next to an old man who from time to time indistinctly makes comments about the effects of lifting the embargo on Cuba, his teenage granddaughter's boyfriend, or his intimate health problems. You look out the window at the crossroads. There is the 1916 brick building, which for many years used to be the Rafael M. Labra School and is now the Puerto Rico Museum of Contemporary Art. Some blocks further up is where the transvestites usually wait striking provocative poses on the sidewalk. You do not see them now. They come out at night to work and hide from the sun's blaze. Behind your sunglasses your eyes begin to close and you doze off...

In your dreams one of these voluptuous drags is calling you in a high pitched voice. You politely smile back uninterested. Her seducing invitation slowly turns into a shriek that smudges all her make-up. Without realising you had fallen asleep, you nervously wake up from the drag's shriek to the loud voices of an ongoing altercation inside the bus. Still disoriented by the disfigured face in your dream you notice a woman is screaming at another person. She screams at the top of her voice while pointing her finger at a person in front: 'YOU'RE THE DEVIL', she shouts... 'YOU'RE SATAN'.

The woman is very agitated and gets closer and closer until she is face to face with *her* Devil. The whole scene becomes very uncomfortable to watch. She starts to move her hands in repetitive and frenetic movements drawing the figure of the cross in the air. She truly sees Satan in this other body she is confronting. Then you realise who this sudden madness is directed to. *Satan* is covered in silver jewellery—rings on each finger, bracelets of different sizes and gemstone necklaces. Fingernails painted black, long curly hair covering the shoulders, a loose blouse, and large black sunglasses, which in the woman's offensive proximity reflect the face of the screaming lady. *Satan* is voluptuous and has an especially ambiguous androgynous presence. This arouses your curiosity and makes you wonder what might have triggered such aggressiveness. You notice the fleshy chest under the shirt.

The woman feels and believes she has discovered Satan under his masquerade. You think to yourself, 'Satan is male'. You feel the other people are getting more and more nervous with this woman (who seems to have some sort of mental problem) yet nobody dares to interfere with her violent outbursts, not even the bus driver. You notice your hands are sweating now. *Satan* stays still behind his sunglasses but you feel he is ready to defend himself if she dares to touch him. By law however, you know as well as *Satan* that he could not hit her back if she did. It is abusive for a man to hit a woman... in public.

You take off your sunglasses with a nervous movement and wipe them with the hem of your shirt, as to fool yourself into another activity where you may hide. You decide to cultivate your indifference as the others have done. Tucking your head down you put your sunglasses back on to feel your body's unrecognisable weight tensing up. As you rub your hands together you rejoice in the feel of the silver rings and jewellery on your fingers. Everything becomes *clear* now. You understand it is your turn. You gaze up to meet the eyes of the screaming lady facing you. Your sunglasses reflect her eyes, her face, her mouth screaming at the Devil.

Beyond her scream you recognise a Tego Calderón song the school kids are now intoning. You listen more intently and manage to catch the faint murmur of the old man telling about his recent surgery to a nearby passenger.

* * *

3.3.2 A Two Sided Mirror: The Invitation of *Viaje...sé*

In May 2013 I organised a performance symposium where Freddie Mercado participated in a panel discussion on contemporary Puerto Rican performance art. Mercado made his appearance at the Puerto Rico Museum of Contemporary Art with his piece *Viaje... sé*.⁸² In the challenge of translating the title of this performance-self I come across two notions:

⁸² *Viaje...Sé* had been previously performed for the exhibition *Equipaje compartido. Tres islas, un lenguaje...Arte* (2012) in Galería Nacional de Bellas Artes, Dominican Republic. On 20 November 2014 Mercado performed the piece in the University of Puerto Rico for the activity 'Actos Móviles' curated by Prof. Lowell Fiet.

firstly, an imperative statement directed to another person, ‘to travel yourself’. Then the hint of the accentuation proves this translation wrong, while ‘se’ is a possessive pronoun ‘sé’ accentuated on the ‘e’ is the conjugation of the third person ‘to know’ (*saber*); thus resulting in something close to ‘knowing or acknowledging the travel/voyage’. Dressed in black tights Mercado wore his usual foam prosthesis to enlarge and mould his body, this time into a seemingly female-eagle figure. Mercado wore the talons, beak and head of an eagle, crowned by a tiara of plastic soldiers. Beneath the eagle face we could see his human face wearing glitter makeup and long eyelashes. The apparent female body had uncovered breasts, four arms (two mannequin’s arms holding each other’s hands at the level of the waist and the performer’s biological arms) and two naked plastic babies (boy and girl) chained to Mercado’s wrists. The babies were occasionally rhythmically breastfed. On the back side of the body two large green eyes made of foam rested on his buttocks. With a bouncing movement of the hips these eyes’ eyelashes moved slightly up and down while between the legs a large black phallus appeared. Facing the public a mirror was shown as a two-sided object which revealed a painted face of a white Barbie-like woman on one side and the reflection of the mirror on the other. By facing the mirror the white woman replaced Mercado’s face while pointing at us and saying no with a nail polished finger. After his appearance and presentation Mercado in this hybrid transformation joined the panel in a discussion and exchange of ideas with other artists and curators present.

Viaje...sé like most of Mercado’s personas is charged with symbolism open to a multi-levelled reading. I will centre on the aspect of the mirror in the hands of a monstrous, animalesque-doll, hyper sexualised hybrid self; a seeing and visible body on national ground [Image 11]. This performance persona is presented with a heightened sense of a multiple corporality enhanced by the diversity of gazes: Mercado’s human eyes with make-up, the eagle’s eyes, the oversized green eyes placed on the buttocks, and finally the mirrored otherness with a reversed side of commodified femininity. Each gaze becomes a position within the same body. As Merleau-Ponty has pointed out ‘my mobile body makes a

difference in the visible world, being part of it; that is why I can steer it through the visible.’ (2000: 196) By the metaphor of the mirroring and the mirrored the multiple positionalities of Mercado are reflections reflected on us, and our seeing and visible bodies. Merleau-Ponty notes:

The mirror appears because I am seeing-visible [*voyant-visible*], because there is a reflexivity of the sensible; the mirror translates and reproduces that reflexivity. My outside completes itself and through the sensible. [...] The mirror itself is the instrument of a universal magic that changes things into a spectacle, spectacles into things, myself into another and another into myself. (2000: 196)



Image 11. *Viaje...Sé.* 2013. Contemporary Art Museum of Puerto Rico, Santurce.
Still from video by Luzmar Soneira.

The embodiment of the gaze is positioned and positioning by identity categories inscribed by the social and consolidating it played in the contextual time-place of the action. The Puerto Rican spectator is reflected on the embodiment presented by the interrelation between each layer of Mercado's body. Mercado's eyes are half covered by a colonising U.S. eagle crowned by the military that breastfeeds its children. The eagle face in turn covers itself with the features of a women's fetishisation through determined codes of contemporary Western beauty. In a double-sidedness finally we are *uncovered* through a glass reflection, a reflection which previously had been mirroring a beaked Mercado while Barbie looked at us.

Understanding the spatial as a set of arrangements and relationships the mirror allows me to see myself where I do not exist, as I become absent from the place I am and ‘see’ myself elsewhere, in the reflection. In the feeling of displacement the mirror suspends, neutralises, inverts or contradicts the set of relationships designed with oneself and one’s surroundings, what Michel Foucault (1997) has understood to be other sets of arrangements or *other* spaces—the utopias, fundamentally unreal or placed nowhere and the heterotopias, counter arrangements of society outside of all places but actually localisable. Foucault understands the mirror as having both qualities. As utopia ‘...I am down there where I am not, a sort of shadow that makes my appearance visible to myself...’ (1997: 332) The visibility of me for myself occurs through the no-place of the reflection, looking at a nowhere and relocating myself in that virtual space of the mirror. This utopian relocation is in turn rearranging the notion of my actual physicality and its location. As existing glass material the mirror is set in a real space and has a returning effect on the place I occupy. As heterotopia the mirror makes the place that I occupy real, as it is linked to my surroundings, and unreal, as I need to inhabit the virtual space of the reflection in order to perceive it. The notion of the real provided by the mirror however, presents my body as the constitution of a whole. Without the mirage I only see some parts of my body and exclude those spaces my eyes cannot reach (back, anus, vagina, neck, face, and eyes). The mirror sets different arrangements with the notion of my own embodiment providing the illusion of a utopian impossibility: gazing at my own gaze.

The place of Mercado’s mirror plays with identification. Placing the mirror in front of his face, we see ourselves looking but are also localised in this reflection as a substitution of his own face. This could be the body of any of us looking. To travel the trip of the mirage, this *viaje*, is to relocate the arrangements of oneself. At the end of the trip one finds oneself in the illusion of returning, of turning back to the same location. Mercado’s embodied proposal is a travelling body carrying a suitcase he has left behind. Is a migration story that Puerto Ricans have lived, with over 59.2% of people from Puerto Rican origin living in the U.S. The body is the U.S. eagle crowned by soldiers. In Puerto Rican history of U.S. military recruitment

‘...the total presence of Puerto Rican soldiers in US wars has been proportionally higher than that of any of the 50 states.’ (Avilés-Santiago, 2014: 5) The soldier that comes back has been transformed by war. Breastfeeding babies of citizenship, the same year Puerto Ricans were given U.S. citizenship (1917) they were called for U.S. military service for World War I. The body weight of this enlarged eagle is the weight of those colonial subjects mirrored back by its glass face. Colonies are also included by Foucault as heterotopias and it is no surprise as Thomas More’s 1516 *Utopia* was actually located in the Americas. ‘[E]ach heterotopia has a precise and well-defined function within society and the same heterotopia can, in accordance with the synchronicity of the culture in which it is located, have a different function.’ (Foucault, 1997: 333) While linked to the European utopian dream, colonies as heterotopias were more close to a dystopian nightmare for the inhabitants of the Americas.

Mercado’s mirror presents the real space of society and through its mirage, an inverted analogy on the complexity of social body relations. It exerts a counteraction on the position I occupy. The no-place is here and you can be me. Covering his face with the mirror the body of Mercado remained within the palpable physicality of his body while the mirror-face captured the spectators taking us elsewhere. The existence of the mirror has physicality through Mercado’s embodiment at that time and place absorbing you to occupy this body through your own body reflection and acknowledging this voyage into the embodiment of *Viaje...sé*. Mercado dislocates notions of normality through a contestation of the Puerto Rican colonial space. He interrogates a national reality forcing both identification and disidentification with the abject, seeing yourself in something you reject but are seduced by: colonialism in a post-colonial era, the exoticised and eroticised other, gender stereotypes, misogyny, and violence. He allows an unleashing of the repressed by identification questioning the accepted reality of the notion of the Puerto Rican while opening the question to the possibility of becoming another space where the designed set of relationships are suspended and rearranged.

By looking at himself in the mirror Mercado allows his persona to inhabit the space of the reflection and in the turning of the mirror includes at one point his mirrored gaze and ours. This revealed inclusion is a compromising invitation. Mirror and gaze are looking at us now where we were previously signalled, indexed, and pointed out by the commodified face of beauty, the Westernised image of a woman. ‘You’, she had said with a gesture of her finger, ‘no, no, no’. In the reverse of her negation and exclusion came the integration of the other side; the mirror of ‘you’ reflected on ‘me’, a confrontation of the gaze serving as the invitation to inhabit the heterotopia or furthermore, the urge to do so. The invitation is an acknowledging of the voyage and flux of the self, a flux exemplified in his body’s constant transformation.

3.3.3 Gazing from and into Phantasmagoria

In the land of the invisible, what becomes of the phantom’s gaze in the mirror?

In his book *Los países invisibles* (2014) Eduardo Lalo notes the world is ‘moving towards the exclusion of the act of looking’ (20). The optic problem establishes the frontiers of reality, ‘the increasing tyranny of an exhausted gaze that finds, what the other imposes, everywhere.’ (21) The ‘geopolitics of blindness’ is a system of marginality in relation to the short-sighted field of the visible. To work creatively from within invisibility means to expand this vision engaging in a ‘counter-conquest’ (63) of the conceptual optics of Western geopolitics. Lalo writes from what he calls the ‘kingdom of the invisible’ (2014: 76), the city of San Juan, Puerto Rico. The city Lalo describes in his writing is the city that has been the principal residence for many years to Mercado and his work. Inside this phantasmagoria of the invisible a creature of many eyes is fixing its gazes on the other phantoms, recognising them as equals. The confrontation with Mercado’s multiple eyes becomes a sudden overexposure, not of the artist himself but of the one who is gazing back, a viewer suddenly ‘hyper’ viewed by so many gazes. The reproduction of the ocular works as a reaffirmation on the vision, the ways of seeing, of the ones who are invisible.

Lalo notes the invisible body holds a place of lucidity and privilege:

[...] invisibility is a form of neglect, but it may be useful and even constitute a privilege that of course has nothing to do with social, cultural or economic advantage. It is rather a privilege characterised by a certain capacity of vision, by the perspective of a gaze which is not reproducible in another place (*place*, which in reality is like a no-place determined by the hegemony of a discourse). (2014: 80. Original emphasis)⁸³



Image 12. 29 May 2013.
As part of the symbolic act for the liberation of political prisoner Oscar López Rivera, Old San Juan.
Photo: Oscar Grullón.



Image 13. *Freddilicias*, 2013.
XXVII Bienal Nacional de Artes Visuales, Santo Domingo. Photo: Oscar Grullón.

From the advantages of *ex-centric* Puerto Rico, alterations in the ways of seeing are presented aesthetically in Mercado through the reproduction and repositioning of the visual organ [Image 12]. The use of multiple eyes presents a wider scope of vision—a ‘seeing more’—and a different perspective of the visible. As sensorial organ within a body, the positioning, size and number of the organ alters the sensibility towards the surroundings. The capacity of

⁸³ Original reads: ‘[...] la invisibilidad es una forma de desamparo, pero éste puede ser útil e incluso construir un privilegio que por supuesto nada tiene que ver con ventajas sociales, culturales o económicas. Se trata aquí de un privilegio caracterizado por cierta capacidad de visión, por la perspectiva que produce una mirada que no es reproducible en otro lugar (lugar, que en realidad es una especie de no-lugar determinado por la hegemonía de un discurso).’

capture also varies as different biological eyes capture different wavelengths of light. When the eyes are placed in different parts of the body a certain independence is created by providing these parts with a vision (e.g. eyes in the hands, buttocks, or breasts conceive these parts as having particular ways of seeing different from the 'eyes of the face'). The way my hands view the world is different from how my breasts, my back or my face might see it. The body as a whole becomes the plurality of its living parts. The eyes also play the function of a protection method over the predator as vigilance over a possible attack. As used in the animal kingdom the size of the eyes also creates confusion over the size of the animal. Mercado also triplicates the zone of his human eyes presenting a face of six eyes [Image 13]. The eyes are tripled as a murmur, as the mistake of a photographic capture which has moved while taking the portrait picture. It is movement. It is the shift of the looking.

In national invisibility Mercado performs the hyperbolic seeing-visible body, comparable to what Lalo mentions as the 'overabundance of vision, equivalent perhaps to the lucidity of the moribund.' (2014: 122) The hegemonic, colonial, and normative gaze is the wound which Mercado counter-uses as weapon. Within the metaphysics of the phantasmagorical city (as Lalo refers to San Juan city) there are 'internal' categories of invisibility, the no-part within the no-place. These 'internal' invisibilities or no-parts (Rancière) are found in all countries. In Puerto Rico, the most invisible of the invisible are those abject subjects who may be seen inhabiting the public space—a space that has been displaced by the automobile, predominantly serving only as motorised transit space. The inhabitants found on the public spaces of the capital of San Juan are beggars (usually homeless) in search of drugs and at late hours, women prostitutes and more popularly male transvestites in the area of Santurce. The city's in-between spaces, those transit spaces are touched with the abandonment of the phantasmagorical. The people who take public transportation are also found waiting for the bus or walking to the bus stop. Public transportation is precarious in its schedules and routes and for many, the car becomes the vehicle which allows free movement, following a model imposed by the U.S. Consequently the social background of those taking the bus for example,

in contrast to many Latin American and European countries, is not the middle class citizen, except the occasional student, artist or intellectual.⁸⁴ Public policies and official procedures such as the practice of exporting drug addicts to the U.S. and the governors' proposal of paralysing the public transportation system (25 November 2014) puts under evidence who are the most invisible of the phantoms.⁸⁵

Mercado takes part of the no-part. Living for many years in Old San Juan and later in different parts of Santurce, his wanderings in the streets have become part of popular anecdote. He is also a wanderer of the public space and regular user of the public transport, taking the bus either 'dressed as civilian' (Mercado in Reyes Franco; 2007) or as his other multiple selves. In his multiple changes of personae within one same day Mercado may take the pillows and the duvet and wear them. As the homeless would with his or her moving shelter, Mercado carries the duvet in the streets covering himself with it in an integration of the object to the body. Many homeless in Puerto Rico and around the world are seen pushing a shopping trolley, almost an extension of their bodies, which is full of found objects that have been integrated to their lives as personal archaeology. The object of ruin is made possibility and built-in affection. In a city full of the ruins of globalisation, industrial investment and expansion, and successful model of capitalist consumerism, the ruin is forgotten excess and unwanted surplus. Mercado also uses the ruin, the debris and remains of discarded objects seemingly destined to be forgotten. Their re-location and re-appropriation brings these ruins into a second life. Mercado's essential working material is the 'poor object'

⁸⁴ The levels of marginality can be traced by the velocity of the transit within the public space. Junkies are without movement, begging at the traffic lights to those who own another speed. At times it may seem they are falling to the side in a slow-motion melting movement and suddenly regain upright position, an effect of what they consume. Prostitutes are at the corner of the sidewalk of the Ponce de León or Fernández Juncos avenues waiting to be taken away by another's speed. People taking public transport wait for the bus which could take fifteen minutes or an hour and a half, depending on the route. Finally those in their cars move 'freely' in the city and outside of it, not without escaping horrendous traffic jams.

⁸⁵ Investigation project of Adriana Cardona-Maguigad has followed the traces of Puerto Rican addicts who have been sent by the municipal government to Chicago with the promise of a rehab program, the unlicensed 'Segunda Vida' which does not meet the basic health standards (Cardona-Maguigad, 2015). On 14 January 2014 the ASSMCA (Administration of Services for Mental Health and Against Addiction) had sent a press release warning people about leaving the island to unlicensed groups for treatment in the mainland of the U.S. (ASSMCA, 2014).

in Tadeusz Kantor's sense (1993 [1964]), an object 'between eternity and garbage' (*entre éternité et poubelle*, 79). These objects are those of lowest rank marked by time, worn out by the fact of being used, 'marked by the symbols of fragility' and 'hierarchy' (80). These objects are 'doomed to oblivion' (79). The bodies of the homeless, the prostitute, the poor, the transvestite, the unwanted immigrant, the suffering bodies of systemic violence of capitalism and colonialism, have been treated as debris or objects of the lowest rank in their social dispensability. They too, as the 'poor object' embody the eternal.

Mercado's excessive body is built up by its temporal and material precariousness. The excess and over-abundance of elements is formed by a capitalist hyper efficiency of the consumed and discarded object, especially in an Island which has been the initial experiment of neoliberal capitalism (Carvalho, 2013). Traces of used cloth, foam, plastic, newspaper, etc., appear disguised, transformed, and incorporated into all of Mercado's selves. Several works and costume designs have stressed this relationship with the debris as fundamental or foundational such as the costume design for artist Awilda Sterling-Duprey's iconic *Vejigante Decrépito* (Decrepit *Vejigante*) where the folkloric carnival trickster figure of the *vejigante* wears trash—its reinvention—as costume.⁸⁶ Sterling-Duprey's work in collaboration with Mercado presents an analysis on the decadence and commodification of culture—via the national figure of the *vejigante*—and the undermining through spectacle of the protagonist role of African heritage in Puerto Rican history and society.⁸⁷ In Mercado's work, the ruin of

⁸⁶ Mercado encountered choreographer, dancer and visual artist Awilda Sterling-Duprey when he began to study in 1985 at the School of Fine Arts in Old San Juan. It is through Sterling-Duprey that Mercado begins 'to know the body and realise I can go back to my past with the dolls and incorporate it to my work' (Mercado in Reyes Franco, 2007). Mercado was Sterling-Duprey's student on her dance and performance workshop (1988-1991) and under her direction Mercado was part of the performances *Sancocho; al paso que vamos* (1990) and *Contradanzas* (1991). Ever since, he has collaborated with Sterling-Duprey on numerous occasions performing with her or working on designing costumes and other elements for her performances. Since her *Noches de Cabaret* project (1997) to *El Rito* (2011) and the costume design for several presentations of *Vejigante decrepito*, Mercado and Sterling-Duprey have worked together and influenced each other's work both having a special interest in Afro inherited traditions, aesthetics, and beliefs. Mercado wore the costume of *Vejigante decrepito* for an interview with Antonio Pantojas for TUTV in his show 'Estoy Aquí' on 16 September 2005. A mannequin of *Vejigante decrepito* was exhibited in *Cuerpo/Materia: performance 2000-2014* (August 2014) and it was last performed by Sterling-Duprey on 2 May 2013 in the Museum of Contemporary Art for *MIND THE GAP: performative-symposium*. See: Sterling Duprey, 2013.

⁸⁷ For the confection of Sterling-Duprey's costume Mercado explains he investigated the possibilities of the *vejigante*'s decadence through the conceptions of feminine beauty. Although the *vejigante* is a

overabundance in the globalised and commodified object is combined by its precarious and ephemeral ensemble as Mercado does not sew but generally makes knots that contain the garments and other elements of his work together and attached to the body. Some of the costumes are sewed by his uncle Rafael Mercado, who has worked in the confection of his nephew's costumes since the artist's early career. Nevertheless, the nature of the artwork's ensemble in-becoming his body has a dismembered and fragile nature. It is constructed and conceptualised as joined parts which may be reused in the future, dismantled and rearranged, given to a colleague friend, or stocked in a room of memories in the artist's home. As Michel Foucault (1972: 7-8) points out, history works with what remains today rather than what it was; document becomes monument. Foucault describes the archaeologist's work as with discontinuous series pointing towards a set of elements that must be regrouped and put in dialogue in order to display a certain heterogeneous totality far from the homogeneity of historiography. Mercado's display and demeanour are related to those archaeological ways in Foucaultian description. Rags used by Mercado are discontinuities in time of his own personal archaeology. Furthermore, these remains are traces of national history: glitter sex and the wounded queer, voluptuousness of the white high class female, Afro-Caribbean doll fabrication, homeless and beggars of their addiction, consumerist guinea pig of globalisation, cultural chauvinism, etc.

The knots in his body, the bonds he creates to build up his self, may be extrapolated to the social bonds he incites in his wanderings by attracting the gaze of others. Mercado's eyes demand being watched. They demand the equality of the gaze. The plural saturation and reproduced eye image understands the aggression of the gaze, in its overexposure as in its exclusion. Bodies that embody and/or perform difference outside the normative and hegemonic suffer either overexposure or exclusion from the others' gaze, or usually both. In their aggression both are forms of invisibility, 'victims of an illness of the gaze' (Lalo, 2014:

devilish trickster conceived as being male Mercado/Sterling-Duprey's *vejigante* is female. This *vejigante* steps outside the constraining blocks of what is supposed to be 'folkloric' culture. See: *Estoy Aquí*, 2005.

30). The bodies of the outcast are (mis)treated. Non-heteronormative bodies and behaviours for example are overlooked with anger, disgust, distrust, mockery or scandal. Some are treated as freaks and have their backs scarred by taunting laughter, *cicatrices de risas en la espalda*, as Pedro Lemebel publicly declares in his 1986 manifesto.⁸⁸

In Puerto Rico, as in other countries, transvestites and drags are usually associated with prostitution. Mercado's androgynous presence as great *Madamo Travestidor* (Mr. Madam Transvestite)—as he named himself in a 1995 performance at the San Juan Gallery—presents the erotic of the precarious, claiming the 'part of those who have no part' (Rancière, 1999), understanding vulnerability and fragility as possibilities from which to build empowerment. His flirtatious eyes, exuberant flesh and revealed prosthetic genitalia invite the spectator to look. From the 'transparency of the shadow' (Lalo, 2014: 131) Mercado exposes a transformation of the abject body into visibility, a chosen visibility. With great conviction he affirms he 'never goes unnoticed' (Mercado, 2014). In his 'civilian' attire Mercado has lived the name-calling threats and mockery which he exponentially provokes in his performance personae. The attacked one explores provocation in the exaggeration of being 'outside-the-norm' or the 'no-part'. The political occurs when these personae Mercado creates become citizen tricksters. Not legally accepted as such, these personae question the understanding of citizenship within a colony, where national citizenship does not legally exist. In a reversal of the chameleonic camouflage, Mercado's work becomes a constant reaffirmation of visibility, which through shape-shifting escapes being fixed, labelled, or completely defined. He has 'repeated' his performing self at times but within different contexts. Most commonly he interchanges or mixes elements of one performance persona with the other, almost creating the sense that amongst these personae some share 'traits' or belong to the same tribe. The constant shift from personae safeguards the threat of becoming into a hypervisibility that reproduces blindness. Mercado's art is the production of selves, of new and/or unwanted

⁸⁸ Chilean gay writer, performer and activist Pedro Lemebel read the manifesto 'Hablo por mi diferencia' as a political intervention of the left on September 1986 in Mapocho train station in Santiago, Chile. See Lemebel, 2000.

citizens, which affirm their presence as they transit the city. Their constant presence rejects the location of the invisible Other as fixed constitution. Mercado makes visible the limits of the ‘universal’ ‘dominant’ subject questioning his own fixed position of otherness.

Within the city Mercado’s personae have become part of an urban myth, as other mythical characters such as Saúl, the seller of tuberose flowers, the demonic Michael Jackson that rides his red old convertible decorated with skulls and pirate flags in the ongoing traffic jam of Old San Juan, or the man that has been for years travelling by foot the whole Island with a wooden cross on his back in a mysterious pilgrimage over vigilance and the upcoming end of the world. The former have been absorbed by touristic remarks or used for a fresh presentation of the Island on U.S. news while the latter figures as the unwanted vagabond.⁸⁹ Mercado’s wandering from the streets into the art circuit and vice-versa, allows his personae to filter through as the unwanted, the tourist spectacle, and the art piece. He utilises the liberty of the outsider seen in some eyes as ‘freak’, ‘demon’ ‘butch’, ‘faggot’, ‘whore’, or in other eyes as: ‘tropical’, ‘exotic’, ‘bizarre’. In his vaga-bonding Mercado may adopt a pose or allow others to take a picture with him figuring simultaneously as attraction of the tropical bizarre, flamboyant sex worker, and emblematic object of the (popular or high) culture. However, the iconic filters itself into the rhythm of the city where it becomes an equal with its surroundings, breaking the pose and living its difference. It is in this dislocation where one may speak of the subversive, in the visibility of the difference as performance of equality. As discussed in the previous section, Mercado’s proposal of androgyny is grounded on the principal of equality as a given that needs to be performed. His belief that ‘all human beings are androgen’ (Mercado in Forbes, 2014) is based on this supposition.

Some spectators adventure into speaking with him, with the person he is allowing himself to be at that moment, though he never responds as a ‘character’ understanding he *is* all of his embodied proposals—advocating for plurality; plurality of the epistemic and furthermore, plurality in the ways of being in the World. He inserts himself into ‘normality’. He goes to

⁸⁹ See: Lopez Torregrosa, 2015.

buy the morning coffee, takes the bus, visits gallery exhibitions, goes out with his friends to pubs and clubs, asks a friend to give him a lift back home, and all this in the attire/s chosen for the day. When Mercado is invited to ‘present’ at a ‘cultural event’ he performs within the given time-frame and proposed space of the gallery, theatre, museum, or university lecture hall but usually his performance persona remains afterwards, chatting and drinking with the art world or academia. After a few drinks people finally get loose and start asking the interesting questions and even venture to touch him (Mercado, 2014).

Mercado’s work plays with moving in and out from visibility, from illusion to materiality, from exotic spectacle into open interaction and conversation. Mercado gazes from the androgen gaze: the gaze of the feminine, the animal, the bizarre, the unwanted...the eyes of the phantom that appear and disappear performing a gaze of equality. His eyes are reflectors, mirrors to ‘those who look at me and those who have to look inside themselves’ (Mercado in Reyes Franco, 2007).⁹⁰ In proposing a gazing inwards, Mercado aims to produce in the Puerto Rican spectator-subject who looks at him the recognition in herself/ himself of the abject within. Beyond a reversal mechanism the work of Mercado acknowledges subject and abject as part of the same spectrum but directly points towards the blindness of those who are the ‘visible’ ones through a constant disidentification with the categories of invisible-Other in expressing and gazing at a possible world which escapes the two-eyed normative and ‘universal’ gaze.

3.3.4 Anecdotes of becoming Agency in Spectacle

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* speak of *agencement* in relation to what it ‘can do’ rather than what it ‘is’ (2005: 257). In its potentiality affects are transformed, which does not mean it is always for the optimal. *Agencement* in Deleuze and Guattari opens to another possibility where what is operating is not identification, imitation, sympathy or pity but a becoming-Other, ‘the becoming-horse of Hans’ (258). It is not resemblance or

⁹⁰ Original reads: ‘*Por los que me miran y los que tienen que mirar dentro de ellos mismos.*’

analogy but a dynamic re-composition of relations and rearrangement of affects. When vagabonding in the city the event of an unknown *agencement* of ‘becoming-Freddie of Spectator’ may occur or/and interchangeably a ‘becoming-Spectator of Freddie’. Who is this ‘spectator’ in-becoming? [Images 14-17]



Image 14. [Top left] *Viaje...Sé*, 2012. Galería Nacional de Bellas Artes, Santo Domingo. Still from video by Oscar Grullón. Image 15. [Top right] *Bodegonas*, 2013. Colegio Dominicano de Artistas Plásticos, CODAP, Santo Domingo. Photo: Oscar Grullón. Image 16. [Bottom right] *Freddilicias*, 2013. XXVII Bienal Nacional de Artes Visuales, Santo Domingo. Still from video by Oscar Grullón. Image 17. [Bottom left] *Tempestad: Un local sonoro e inestable*, 2013. La Campechada, Old San Juan.

On the event of having Mercado around, is it possible to speak of the change, break or interruption of other sets of relations, which may initiate new ones? The affective knowledge explored in Mercado is a study of the Other’s gaze and its power as potentiality to diminish or enhance socio-somatic possibilities. Mercado describes his work’s focus as directed towards the others’ gaze in relation to his embodied ambiguity, ‘studying how others see me’ (Mercado et al., 2013). The ways in which these others see Mercado is constitutive to their internal colonialism. Mercado, as ‘colonial subject’ performing for other ‘colonial subjects’ is necessarily appealing to (constructed by and from) an intersubjective colonial construction. In this context becoming-Other is a refocusing and re-entitlement of another vision, experience

and sense of being that overrides imposed (externally implanted) discourses that define otherness. In a pungently humorous move is the hyper-othering for the ‘others’ as self-reflexion, self-renewal and de-linking.

Understanding the polymorphic, heterogeneous, multidimensional character of social-spatial relations *agencement* functions as a territory that is moving all the time, made and unmade. Together with the surrounding changing elements—street, people, cars, trees, smog, etc.—the body of Mercado functions as a territory in itself being made and unmade in several of his personae, in a veiling and revealing, moving and removing, adding and reshaping his embodiment and its parts. Social differentiation is performed in the moments of encounter. The dynamism stressed by *agencement* privileges the connections and how these are arranged (Phillips, 2006).⁹¹ In this sense the encounter implies context and what connections are in process of formation. In this multiple co-functioning the liaisons affecting and affected by Mercado’s presence produce the performance event in the colonial landscape.

On the encounter, Deleuze writes: ‘Something in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of recognition but of a fundamental *encounter*.’ (2001: 139. Original emphasis) Encountering Mercado may produce a ‘mental short circuit’, as expressed by a person who has occasionally observed Mercado from a distance in the pubs of Old San Juan. The encountering subject is different from the recognised object, as the latter is a representation of the World we conceive and with it the reaffirmation of the established ways of being. Additionally recognising what an ‘object’ is and what the relation to it entails, is already bound to the particularities of each social system. The object of recognition consequently is a non-encounter as it hinders thought, and reproduces and is conditioned by unilateral feeling. ‘I speculated the guy is far off from reality’ says Mercado’s observer. In contrast, the encounter—with the Other—potentiates the multiple capacities to change and be affected (what Deleuze calls the virtual) unknown/ unsensed prior to the encounter. Of a same

⁹¹ In his paper John Phillips discusses the consequences of translating the original French use by Deleuze and Guattari of *agencement* as ‘assemblage’ by Brian Massumi and others. He stresses the privilege the word *agencement* gives to the connections. Following this debate from Phillips and other theorists and geographers I have chosen to use the original French word.

reality, or series of relations, the Other's being in the World expresses a possibility (2001: 260). Not a recognisable quality but a sign: 'It is not a sensible being but the being *of* the sensible' (2001: 140). The encounter is creative as it produces a crack from where another possibility is manifested.

The recognition process is unsettled. For the Puerto Rican spectator identification and counter-identification with the personae of Mercado occur simultaneously during the encounter. To recognise is to be trapped in prior identification or knowledge, in a process of categorising and objectifying the subject in presence. However to identify to someone's presence entails a solidarity weaved through histories, memories and biographies and brought into the present moment. The crack produced in the encounter destabilises the weighting prior to the encountering producing a new weighting that is unsteady, the 'vaga' of Mercado's vaga-bonding. The encounter is productive and produced. The unsteady might become unbearable, offensive, or directly repulsive or repelling attraction.

Teenagers from Mercado's neighbourhood have thrown bottles and mangos at him, tourists have surreptitiously taken pictures at a safe distance from his gaze, and people have screamed insults or provocative sexual remarks and 'requests'. Mercado creates a magnetic mirroring zone that waits to be cracked.

When I would see Freddie Mercado I felt that the demon [I had been feeling inside myself] had a face and a body [laughter]: that of this impressive woman who would take out her real breasts and stick them in my face, right there in some pub while she looked at me with those big and beautiful eyes of hers. (Negrón, 2014)⁹²

The previous description is the memory of a first time for performer Miguel 'Mickey' Negrón in what we may stress as 'encountering' Mercado in Deleuzian understanding.⁹³ Feeling the

⁹² Original reads: '*Cuando yo veía a Freddie Mercado yo sentía que el demonio tenía cara y cuerpo (risas) y era esta mujer impresionante que me sacaba unas tetas de verdad en la cara en medio de la barra y me miraba así con esos ojos grandotes y bellos que él tiene.*'

⁹³ Mickey Negrón has been Mercado's 'illegitimate daughter' (Negrón, 2014). Great admirer of Mercado's work, Mercado has been the most invited artist in Negrón's project of cabaret nights, *Asuntos Efímeros* (2010-2011). Negrón has collaborated with Mercado for *Las Campechanas* (2011), *Tempestad: Un local sonoro e inestable* (2013) and has always counted with Mercado's support for costume design and creation along with great solidarity and friendship.

interior ‘demon’ in exterior carnality triggered the ‘becoming-demon’ of Negrón, the opening of possibilities and ways of being ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ his art-life beyond models of theatrical re-presentation (Negrón, 2014). The up-front carnal invitation of Mercado was a gaze into the contagious touch of new belongings. Touch is presented as verification of the gazed and its transmission. The action of touching Mercado’s breasts produces the contagion of the Spectator-Other at the intersection between being a token of blessing from the holy (Mother), a moment of liberation from normative behaviours of the erotic, and/or the integration to a tribe of difference to whom to belong to might become a mode of empowerment or/and a curse. The Other is here, the Other is us, the Other does not exist, only for the non- ‘others’. The agency of the encounter is emergent as ongoing transformation of the world (sensations and perceptions).

Becoming Other is performed by Mercado in the tricksterish liminal movement of becoming-object, stressed by the state of being doll and by the intermittent act (in and out) of posing or becoming-pose. To become object entails an objectification of the body-subject, that is, being treated as an object to be used inasmuch this disregards the will, determination and (self)agency of the body-subject to the point of nonexistence. The process of objectification, understood in such terms, has especially targeted women (gendered power structures that are also reproduced in homo and trans bodies) and colonial bodies. These objectified bodies are and become Mercado’s personae that also include animals under this same logic of relational hierarchies. In this sense Mercado performs/is the *hyper-objectified* par excellence. Furthermore, as discussed in a previous section of this chapter regarding the doll, Mercado-as-object does not follow uniquely this monocultural understanding of the object. In Western modernity the materiality of the object, in comparison to the subject’s, lacks the essence of life—the soul, the spirit, the energetic power—thus serves as utility to the service of the subject’s needs and desires. As understood by Pan Yoruba cosmovision *ashe*—the divine power to make things happen—is also found in objects, and consequently these do possess agency. In Puerto Rican Espiritismo the object’s agency comes both from the spirits or

ancestors (who find a vessel in objects or people to express themselves) and from the inherited Pan Yoruba object-relation brought through Cuban Santería.

The connections produced and producing Mercado move from the object-subject Westernised division, from the spectacular to the affective intimacy flowing from a multidimensionality of the social. Relationality with regards to Mercado *poses* as spectacle, presenting his nature as such, framed for fixation by pictures taken of and with him. Captured by the mechanic eye of the camera the separation is enacted. The persistence of the photographic is produced by and producing the spectator as Mercado's presence becomes questioned by the production of representational images he encourages through his posing. When Mercado poses he becomes Westernised object and consequently, Westernised spectacle of relational division in modern capitalist society. At times he invites those others to pose with him, to become-pose with him for the camera [Images 16 and 17]. In this physical proximity however, Mercado becomes 'subject' to the other 'subject' posing next to him, in an instant that both frames the posing as a becoming-object in order to reveal the subjectivity of the Other (Mercado). In posing with Mercado he may offer a provocation for touching him [Image 15]. Suggesting or proposing another option of connection for the camera's eye, frames this connection. Are we posing with a long lost friend, a lover, or with a *spectacular* objectified body? Are we posing with the possibility of all? The representation of this connection proposes the presentation of it for the moment of the photographic exposure. By posing do we become equally a colonial spectacle?

Mediated by the mechanic or by the organic eye, sight is implied in the spectacular. To view, or *spectare* in Latin, is the stem for spectator and spectacle, where spectator is brought into being through the separation from the spectacle and vice versa. However we may speak of the multiplicity and therefore, differentiation of the gazing. The spectral demand in Mercado is seductive, penetrating and asking for penetration of the gaze. The invitation of Mercado is the mutual invitation—of himself and yourself—to break separation through a will to bond. The pose is not the only or the principal way for interacting with Mercado, but perhaps the one

that allows a greater access precisely because of its object-logic and popularised use of the self-photograph. Mercado uses the spectacular-pose as a fluid proposal from which he comes in and out of, as a coming in and out of otherness, invisibility, and exoticism. It is in this tricksterish in and out that resides the agentic power of his play. Mercado plays to become and deny spectacle treating his vaga-bonds as quotidian life encounters that simultaneously decide to pose. The doll-Self becomes inanimate, although it is not.

The vaga-bonding in his wanderings is present throughout, in the in-and-out of the pose. Bonding is triggered through seduction captured in his many gazes that make the spectator become hyper-seen and in this production of the *spectare* a possible relocation, rearrangement, interruption, or un-fixation of the separating specta-tor/ specta-cle gazing spectrum. Singer José Luis 'Fofé' Abreu narrates the first time he saw 'that character who was Freddie Mercado' in the late 1990s.⁹⁴

He had a gown he had made himself, with lots of eyes. It was a large blue outfit and he had eyes on the forehead and on his face. He had eyes everywhere. [...] Then I knew we were going to meet, just because of the pure *cabronería* (craziness). (Abreu, 2014)⁹⁵

Producing the crack in spectacle separation is firstly proposed through embodiment in Mercado which may or may not provoke conversation. First and principally comes the body, then the word may be produced. The initial encounter must be triggered somatically and this interaction is stressed in his work. Mercado privileges the unprivileged advocating for

⁹⁴ Abreu and Mercado have a long story of friendship, nightlife and mutual collaboration. Mercado has done the set design, props and costumes, and has participated and made performance-installations for some of Abreu's music videos with his previous bands *Manjar de los Dioses* and *Circo*, for the songs 'Déjame Vivir' of the former band, and 'La Sospecha' and 'Velocidades Luz' of the latter. Among other concert shows with Abreu, Mercado did an unforgettable opera performance *Ojos del Alma* (Eyes of the Soul) as the opening for the first live presentation of *Manjar de los Dioses* at the XXII Claridad Festival, 1996. In turn Abreu has participated of Mercado's performances such as those for Museo del Barrio, N.Y. (as hen and rooster couple) or in Old San Juan at a gallery opening, at the *Fiestas de la calle San Sebastián* or at *Noches de Galería*. In the late 1990s early 2000's Mercado with a troupe of artists friends invaded the streets of Old San Juan with their gowns. Abreu was part of this conspiracy together with María de Azúa, Brenda Díaz, Hector Torres, among others who were more erratic. Their friend Pablo Espada at times documented and created short films of these events. Mercado and Abreu have also worked together in circus or cabaret projects organised by María de Azúa and with the modern dance company Andanza with which they travelled to Spain together.

⁹⁵ Original reads: 'Yo creo que tenía un 'gown' que él se hacía. Él se hacía uno de ojos. Tenía como un 'outfit' azul bien grande con muchos ojos y tenía ojos en la frente y en la cara. Tenía ojos en todos lados. [...] Y ahí supe que nos íbamos a conocer. De la "cabronería" no más.'

another type of episteme; the knowledge produced by the bodies and through the bodies other worlds, other colours, and other ways... Abreu notes that ‘most of the times it is challenging for the public because there are ordinary [normative] people who feel that the *image is too strong*.’ (Abreu, 2014. My emphasis)⁹⁶

Nonetheless the somatic impulse may lead to the verbal. When engaging in conversation separation may stretch or dilute although usually those who come to speak to Mercado are captured by the intrigue, seduction or/and immediate connection to his personae. ‘People talked to us’, Abreu recalls of the times he has gone out with Mercado. ‘People like getting close to Freddie because he has this “thing” which does not intimidate but rather invites one to get close and meet him.’ (Abreu, 2014)⁹⁷

Mercado produces and is produced by the gaze, touch, conversation, and/or belonging with local kids, adults, old people, men, women, queer, transsexuals, rich, poor, and of course the occasional U.S. tourist. Mercado engages in conversation, laughter and curiosity with these who are ‘spectators’ that are willing to cross the line of colonial segregation between themselves. Beyond entertainment the line Mercado highlights is an invitation for trespassing, belonging and becoming. Spectatorship is deconstructed where the spectator is seen by the spectacle of otherness in an equal ground where decolonial relations may emerge.

Freddie Mercado inserts himself in the colonial context as a metaphor of movement that gives visibility to those Puerto Rican others. His making and playing to become object-doll relates to spiritual and cultural legacies oppressed but resisting colonial history. This chapter has presented his constant performance as a persistent insistence on citizenship equality. Working within the local site of colonial oppression, Mercado’s performance-life is directed to the bonds created with the others through their reactions and desires towards his interracial androgynous doll-self.

⁹⁶ Original reads: ‘...te presenta otros mundos, otros colores, otras maneras... A veces, la mayoría de las veces, es retante para el público, porque hay gente común que de momento siente que es muy fuerte la imagen.’

⁹⁷ Original reads: ‘La gente nos hablaba. Les gustaba acercarse a Freddie porque Freddie tiene como esa cosa que no intimida sino que invita a conocerlo.’

CHAPTER 4: LA POCHA NOSTRA

The transnational border art actions of La Pocha Nostra (LPN) originated in 1993 California, between the 1992 Columbus Quincentennial and the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).⁹⁸ Ever since, this hybrid collective, under the direction of Guillermo Gómez-Peña, has reformulated border issues from the regional U.S. politics and immigration debates into a large-scale international and historical conflict based on the creation of ‘difference’ and ‘otherness’ in a so-called postcolonial globalized world. Ultimately, border-crossing becomes the anti-systemic practice of encountering in the aims of decolonising our relations—which is impossible without a process of de-patriarchalising and de-commercialising life (De Sousa Santos, 2014). The following chapter discusses the proposal for the ‘trans’ and plural ways of affects, culture, knowledge and beliefs which have been ongoing and evolving in La Pocha’s embodied theory of activist action/thinking/sensing through their soma-politics of the encounter. La Pocha Nostra has been inserted in the struggles against the machinery of colonial exclusion producing and experimenting alternatives and enacting tensions through the open possibilities of performance.

The extended alliances created by La Pocha Nostra’s project respond to the necessity of interconnecting struggles and looking for points of convergence. Performance becomes the pretext to encounter and create other worlds (Gómez-Peña and Pérez Llosa, 2016). A body-map or *Mapa Corpo* is wounded and is to be healed and reinvented by all, while the ‘I’, as Gómez-Peña states, is an ‘orphan of all nation states’ (2016). The advocacy for an-other emotional and sensorial atmosphere is part of this decolonial experimentation, (re)imagined and lived in multiplicity during the workshops and performances of La Pocha, although with very different procedures, affects and effects. The differences between the politics of

⁹⁸ These two major events, the 1992 Columbus Quincentennial and the 1994 NAFTA agreement, led to the expansion of border art in 1990s. Previously, border art during the 1980s had been confined to the physicality of the U.S.-Mexico border. As discussed by Ila Nicole Sheren: ‘These events brought intense focus on the contact zone of the border while epistemic shifts contributed to border art on a broader scale. [...] Given a powerful impetus by the economies of NAFTA and the politics of Columbus Day, U.S.-Mexico border art and its constituent ideas became portable through a shift in thinking about international borders and their place in the postcolonial world.’ (Sheren, 2015: 60)

encounter presented in LPN's performance spectacles and those proposed in their pedagogy are discussed and analysed in light of the complexities and alliances each unveils in terms of otherness and spectatorship.

4.1 Entering a Pocha Show

To enter is to become part of. La Pocha Nostra creates a universe of multiple realities of multiple layers of reality. We may rather call it a pluriverse of diverse identities in constant transition. La Pocha Nostra's projects range from performance solos and duets to large-scale performance installations using video, photography, audio, and cyber-art. In their overarching practice La Pocha Nostra uses a mixture of references to the sites that have exoticised the body of the different: circus shows, zoos, anthropological museums, cabarets, or catwalks of the bizarre. A mix of loud and stereotypically sentimental Mexican music together with diverse languages (some invented) is heard. A nightclub lighting and smoky atmosphere might fill the air together with images projected on the architecture. Or perhaps a white and rigid light might fall on the specimens to be discovered. There are no chairs for the spectators to relax and see the show. The 'show' happens everywhere. Sexual, violent, poetic, historical stimuli are occurring at the same time. It appears to be a chaos of bodies changing their props to the visibility of everyone, walking and looking alongside the spectators, or up-stage performing a show in the 'performance zone'. This 'zone' however is fluid and contagious, it can change from one moment to the other, and it might not even be formed by a physical perimeter. At times the spectator might feel inside this zone to the extent there is no 'outside' corner unless s/he exits the pluriverse.

Stations/altars are built to honour-expose a range of bodies: the undocumented immigrant body, the sex worker, the Indigenous, the Arab, the mapa-corporo (body-map) inhabited by modern oppressions, etc. The Pochxs work through their performative personae. These personae are not characters in the theatrical sense, as each of these enhances the body-

subject's imaginary-reality fed by social projections. From a vast variety some examples are: the Cyber-Vato or the Lowrider Moctezuma (Roberto Sifuentes), the Travesty Shaman or the Indigenous from the Amazon (Guillermo Gómez-Peña), the Ballerina in Bondage or the Cyberdoll a.k.a. La Deconificada (Dani d'Emilia), the Robo Xolotl (Juan Ybarra), the Xochipili: God of Transgenic Corn (Saúl García López) the Ex-Prima Ballerina (Michele Ceballos Michot), the Chamula Vampire or the Eagle Drag Queen (Daniel B. Chávez). These personae have been also explored in La Pocha Nostra's photo-performances available online.⁹⁹ However, in the live encounter these personae transform, physically and symbolically, and their transformation provides other layers of complexity that are absent in the archival document. Each Pocha member or collaborator develops and brings to the show the variety of personae s-he becomes. La Pocha Nostra's members are constantly shifting under the direction of Guillermo Gómez-Peña. Current 2017 core members include: Saúl García-López (MX/U.S.), Emma Tramosch (U.S.), Michele Ceballos Michot (CO/U.S.), Balitronica Gómez (U.S.), Nayla Altamirano (MX), and Juan Ybarra-Ysunza (MX). Ex-core members include: Dani d'Emilia (BR/IT), Daniel Brittany Chávez (U.S./MX), Roberto Sifuentes (MX/U.S.), Violeta Luna (MX/U.S.), and Erica Mott (U.S.). This flux has allowed a variety of bodies to produce the Pocha pluriverse for more than two decades (1993-current).

Although this investigation focuses on the performances by La Pocha Nostra as a system rather than as separate performance works, in this section I will describe three performances for the purpose of further comprehension: *Ejercicios para artistas rebeldes* (Exercises for Rebel Artists), *Pan-Indigenous (Anti) Manifesto: Co-Creating a New Performance Declaration for the Americas*, and the body-metaphor used in the *Mapa Corpo* Series. In addition to a concise description of the aesthetics, sequence, proposal and overall configuration of these performances, I will focus on specific aspects in each of these, which will be of special relevance for the following sections of this chapter.

⁹⁹ See: Gómez-Peña, 2015b; Gómez-Peña and La Pocha Nostra, 2008; Gómez-Peña and La Pocha Nostra, 2016; and La Pocha Nostra, 2017.

Ejercicios para artistas rebeldes (Exercises for Rebel Artists) was performed the 21 March 2015 at the Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art (MACBA), Spain. The performance was conceived after a week-long workshop with the students from the MACBA's Independent Studies Program (PEI) in collaboration with artists and activists from Barcelona. The workshop was given by Pocha members at the time Dani d'Emilia, Daniel B. Chávez and Guillermo Gómez-Peña. D'Emilia was herself part of that year's PEI. The context of the workshop and performance process was heavily informed by the unexpected collapse of the museum during that same week after the cancellation of the exhibition 'The Beast and the Sovereign' and the consequent firing of Paul B. Preciado, PEI's director and one of the curators of this exhibition. The piece that originally triggered this polemic was the papier-mâché sculpture *Haute Couture 4. Transport* by Austrian artist Ines Doujak which represented a German Shepard dog penetrating the Bolivian workers' leader Domitila Barrios de Chúngara who is penetrating the Spanish king, Juan Carlos I, while he lays in his four legs on a pile of SS helmets. The act of censorship revealed the museum's political and ideological mechanisms and alliances. This specific issue of the 'Art' World unveiled the monarchical power over a public institution. Equally revealing were the citizens' debates over censorship which centred on the figure of the king, the monarchy and its links to the museum institution while the figure of Domitila was made invisible, as Diana Torres (aka Pornoterrorista) has denounced (Torres, 2015). Unfortunately, La Pocha Nostra did not address this blind spot either as noted by Torres.

The performance *Ejercicios...* was a response to this incident, under the abovementioned limitations over the ignored figure of Domitila. From MACBA's censorship, a connection was broadened into other forms of quotidian censorship (xenophobia, transphobia, islamophobia, sexism, racism, etc.) and some members of the artistic, academic and activist communities of the city were invited to reflect on their position on censorship within a

performative assembly that was held as part of the performance.¹⁰⁰ The performance was structured in three parts. Previously, before entering the building, a pre-performance of two women on roller-skates holding a placard that read ‘Cuidado! Sudakas motorizadx’s’ (Caution! Motorised South Americans), one with a skull mask and the other with face-paint, skated outside in the *Plaça dels Àngels* interacting with the other skateboarders and passers-by.



Image 18. ‘Abortion Altar’, Top: Isil Sol Vil and Camila Bastos Bacellar. Bottom: Balitronica Gómez and Daniel B. Chávez. *Ejercicios para artistas rebeldes*, 2015. MACBA, Barcelona. Photo: Eva Carasol (MACBA)

Once inside, viewers encountered a live workshop, with the ‘contemporary monsters’ responding to the architecture [Image 18]. Upon entering, the spectators found a metal scaffolding structure with a tableau vivant where two nude bodies (a woman with a galactic crown and a man with a mirror mask) choreographed some poses that included the woman consistently hitting her genitals while the man hid his. At the bottom of the space, a human altar to a sex worker was installed, decorated with sex toys, fruits, vegetables and dolls. A transwoman wearing a hijab with a camera attached to her chest and a bare-chested glamorous diva with a diamond-like beaded mask guarded the altar. Individual altars inhabited the niches found in the architecture, including a colourfully tattooed male body

¹⁰⁰ Some of the invited speakers included: a MACBA employee, Lechedevirgen (Felipe Osornio), Sergio Zevallos, Brigitte Vasallo, Joyce Jandette, Antonio Centeno, Duen Sacchi, and members of the social movement ‘Jo també estava al Parlament’.

with clothes pegs on his nipples and a black tongue, a golden virgin manipulating two plungers on her nude body, and a punk-BDSM figure with a tubed mask working an electric drill. Walking around the space, a nun in lingerie with a gun, a sexy bearded transgender individual on high heels with a feathered headpiece and a chain attached to the neck, and a woman wearing a mouth opener and with the words 'diálogo', 'opresión' and 'democracia' written on her nude body which she manipulated and deformed using a methacrylate transparent board. These wandering bodies interacted, with the others, and with the spectators and the overall space.

On the microphone directing the show was Guillermo Gómez Peña, dressed in black with a shamanic feathered head piece. He explained to the spectators they were seeing a sample of the workshop dynamics and called to activate the jam. A session of hypersexualised performance jam on the sex worker's altar (or porno pop altar) took place. At the other side, on the scaffolding, a third body entered the scene and scarred the woman's lower abdomen with the phrase 'aborto libre' (free abortion) with a tattoo machine. Noise mixed with catholic/satanic music is heard. The jam disintegrated and part two began. An open microphone was activated by some of the workshop participants, followed by ten invited speakers, to be later offered to all spectators. This performance assembly was presented as a 'techno-shamanic amplifier to exorcise the demons of censorship'. Part three went from the war of separation into a Bakhtinian party. This collective exercise demanded the spectators' participation. It began by naming dichotomies for the spectators and performers to position themselves in the accurate space-place, an exercise known as 'the Spectrum'.¹⁰¹ Later all were given fake police truncheons to hit the ones on the other side and finally music, dance, and party replaced the act of aggression.

The general conception of this presentation was framed as a showcasing of the workshop exercises in a spectacular and premeditated way. LPN performance did not submit to the specificity of the issue over artistic censorship happening at the time but expanded from it

¹⁰¹ For a detailed explanation of The Spectrum exercise, see: Gómez-Peña and Sifuentes, 2011: 84-87.

into other forms of censorship and oppression. On the overall, the performative actions provided a preparatory ground for the assembly and were later reinserted to enact, revolt, and unleash the tensions surfacing the specific instance of institutional censorship, and the overarching systems of censorship behind this issue. La Pocha dealt with the immediacy and proximity to the situation by providing a space within the performance for discussion and debate. The effectiveness of this assembly is beyond our interest; however, its staging is significant in its concerns and its mimicking of social organisation. The pretext of the performance gave LPN the space to call for a ‘public’ assembly with a filtered art audience. This precarious structure compromised the power both of the ‘performance actions’ and of the ‘assembly’ in a clumsy configuration that linked both ‘performances’ as part of one and the same.

Pan-Indigenous (Anti) Manifesto: Co-Creating a New Performance Declaration for the Americas was an urban intervention performed on 27 June 2014 in Viger Square, Montreal, Canada during the IX *Encuentro* of the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics, ‘Manifest! Choreographing Social Movements in the Americas’. This action was conceived after a six day workshop session occurring during the *Encuentro* but began weeks before the first physical encounter through an online collective manifesto: ‘A new (anti) manifesto for the Americas’. This open text was a Google Doc jam that involved not only the workshop participants and facilitators but over 40 writers and artists from throughout the Americas. The anti-manifesto was read by several voices in several languages during the public performance:

We believe in indigenous cultures and the revenge of the body against colonial capitalist abstraction. The indigenous body is the traveling site of resistance. (...) Recordemos: Las fronteras cruzaron nuestros cuerpos/territorios. Indígenas binacionales o trinacionales, desplazados de sus propias tierras ancestrales. (...) We believe in the political power of imagination to reinvent reality... Acreditamos no poder da imaginação para reinventar a realidade. (La Pocha Nostra, 2014)

Indigenous participants from various communities throughout the continent formed part of the workshop and performance concerning Indigenous and women's rights and resistance in the Americas.



Image 19. 'Human Altar', Karina Vargas and Peter Kulchyski. *Pan-Indigenous (Anti) Manifesto: Co-Creating a New Performance Declaration for the Americas*, 2014. IX Encuentro Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics, Viger Square, Montreal. Photo: Julio Pantoja.

The performance at the public square started with four sisters of the Indigenous movement Idle No More from the northern hemisphere standing across from four sisters from the southern hemisphere, some, members of the Montreal Immigrant Women's Centre.¹⁰² Gazing into each other's eyes, these holders of the space built the symbolic perimeter for the ritual. The space had two altars, each with a body lying on his/her back covered by a white cloth. The altars were located on each side, and in the centre two bodies huddled in between them. These two bodies had maps drawn or previously tattooed, the former with the Gondwana (Southern hemisphere, specifically addressing the union of South America and Africa) and the latter with the map of the Americas 'turned upside-down'. Two working tables are placed further away with all sorts of elements, objects, fruits and flowers. The ritual began and the

¹⁰² Initiated by a group of women living in Saskatchewan, Idle No More is seen as one of the largest Indigenous mass movements in Canadian history. Alex Wilson, active member of Idle No More participating in La Pocha Nostra's workshop and performance explains: 'Idle No More is many things—an affirmation of Indigenous sovereignty and protection of land and water; a series of nationally and locally organized teach-ins, rallies, protests, and round dances; a call for peaceful revolution—but always, at its core, it is a very contemporary political expression of old knowledge: that we, the land, the water, and all living creatures are related and, as relatives, we are meant to love and care for each other. This commitment to relational responsibility and to action that effects love is the starting place of Idle No More.' (Crowe and Wilson, 2015)

bodies in the altar are unveiled by two sisters from each side. One altar holds the nude body of a white middle aged man; the other altar holds the nude body of a young brown woman. Both their skins were covered with words. The soundtrack began and the two bodies huddled in the centre open up from each other. These two women were connected by a wire tied to a piercing they both had on the centre of their upper chest. This border-wire has brassieres hanging from it. The holders of the space began to construct the altar and after a while the rest of the group joined in—all inhabiting their performative personas. The construction entailed placing diverse elements onto the bodies in the altar [Image 19]. The Anti-Manifesto is voiced in different languages and by different people through a microphone. Once the altars are finished, one of the space holders cuts the wire that connected the two women and they leave. The altars began to ‘activate’ (to move and hold poses) and the spectators are invited to get closer to the altars and to read what is written in the bodies. After a while the altars became ‘emancipated’ and the two bodies left their sites to slowly encounter each other and walk together to the public fountain to wash off the writing.

An unexpected ending took place after the bodies became ‘emancipated’. Viger Square is an urban square in Montreal, shelter and home to many homeless. The *Encuentro* proposed this site for all the urban interventions of that day. The organisation of the *Encuentro*, despite its radical claims, did not address at any moment the people living there nor were these people informed of the overall context of the festival. Rather, the performances were to be presented as far away as possible from their living site. A man living in the square saw La Pocha Nostra’s performance and incorporated himself to it, using the elements on the working tables to create his own performative persona and engaged in the creation of the altars. After the emancipated bodies washed-off, the microphone was handed to him and he spoke. It is with his intervention, then, that the performance came to an end.

The essence of this Pan-Indigenous spectacle was rooted in the collaborative efforts of uniting many voices, bodies, thoughts, and experiences. The handing over of the microphone to the unexpected collaboration of the man that lived in Viger Square was consistent with

these pluriversal beliefs. To address such a wide and complex Pan-Indigenous reality, LPN counted with many people directly related to these struggles and modes of life including members of activist groups, Indigenous communities in North, Central and South America, researchers and artists who either were physically present throughout the process of the workshop and performance or/and collaborated with the virtual writing of the manifesto. For those performing, bonds had been built in the process and the performance was the *mise en scène* of this collaboration, aided, supported, and in solidarity with a reality that is close (in affection, ideology, genealogy and geography) to the core members of LPN. Nevertheless, the aesthetics of the performance risked making a spectacle of the realities (spiritual practices, languages and culture) of the Indigenous communities—a remark made by many spectators of the festival.¹⁰³

Mapa Corpo (body map), unlike the abovementioned performances, has been a touring show mainly composed by La Pocha Nostra's core members at the given time and collaborating local artists. This performance series was done itinerantly from 2002 through 2009, during and after the invasion of Iraq. Acupuncture is practiced on a nude, usually female, body using needles bearing the flags of the countries belonging to the 'coalition of the willing'. Once the acupuncturist 'priest' has finished, the spectators are invited, one at a time, to remove the flags as a way of committing to peace. *Mapa Corpo* includes other elements, actions, transformations of performative personae, music, video projections and the usual MC voicing in various languages of Guillermo Gómez-Peña. Together with the (female) *Mapa Corpo* station an undocumented (male) immigrant station is ritualistically intervened and the spectators are asked to write words of hope on his body.

The acupuncture healing-wounding metaphor has been used on several occasions as a psychomagic act of peace and/or decolonisation led by the spectators. *Mapa Corpo* re-enactments have been done afterwards. In 2010 in Teatro Gilberto Gio, Rio de Janeiro,

¹⁰³ My personal notes made after the performance ended and several spectators were asked their impressions of what they experienced during this performance. In Montreal, June 2014.

Brazil, the flags used were the flags of Latin American countries afflicted by organised crime violence. In 2013 in Grace Space, Brooklyn, N.Y., a re-staging of *Mapa Corpo* took place with corporate flags. The resource of the acupuncture act with the spectators' removal of the needles has been readapted in other performances as well. One example is *Corpo Insurrecto 3.0* at the MACBA in Barcelona (June 2013) where the body initially covered with the European Union flag used needles with the symbols of multinational corporations (e.g. Google, Vodafone, La Caixa Bank, Nestle, Facebook, etc.) and the spectators are invited to 'decolonise Europe' [Image 20]. More recently, in *Ex-Machina 3.0* at the Museum of Modern Art in Mexico City (August 2016) the needles had the flags of multinational companies, political parties and drug cartels in Mexico considered by La Pocha to be accomplices of this nation's economic and cultural crisis.



Image 20. Spectator extracting a needle with the icon of la Caixa bank. *Corpo Insurrecto 3.0*, 2013. MACBA, Barcelona. Still from video by MACBA.

Cartography bears a story linked to the globalisation of power structures. *Mapa Corpo* uses the body as global geography. The distribution and design of the oppressions' map is made visible by the intervention of the acupuncturist. The whole (usually female) body is made cartography to be manipulated collectively in a ritual of decolonisation. This body is given to the spectators as a psychomagic act that holds the possibility of changing the current socio-political reality. In this hope of change, the spectators are positioned as those who have the power to manipulate and decolonise the wounded *Mapa Corpo*.

4.2 Aesth/et(h)ics of Resistance: A Desirable Spectacle for the Spectator

Whether or not desire for contact with the Other, for connection rooted in the longing for pleasure, can act as a critical intervention challenging and subverting racist domination, inviting and enabling critical resistance, is an unrealized political possibility. Exploring how desire for the Other is expressed, manipulated, and transformed by encounters with difference and the different is a critical terrain that can indicate whether these potentially revolutionary longings are ever fulfilled.
(hooks, 1992: 22)

The by-product of La Pocha is 'ultimately seeking a new aesthetic that truly reflects the times' (La Pocha Nostra, 2001b). The issue of aesthetics in La Pocha follows the form of a carnivalesque hyperbole of the idea of the Other (hybridised, dislocated and displaced) which becomes dismantled in its complexity as a discursive devise of oppression and marginalisation. The images created use all that which is marginal, fetishised and objectivised that trespasses the individual bodies. The fetish is exposed, or created, to later be decomposed, broken, and dismantled... but for/by whom?

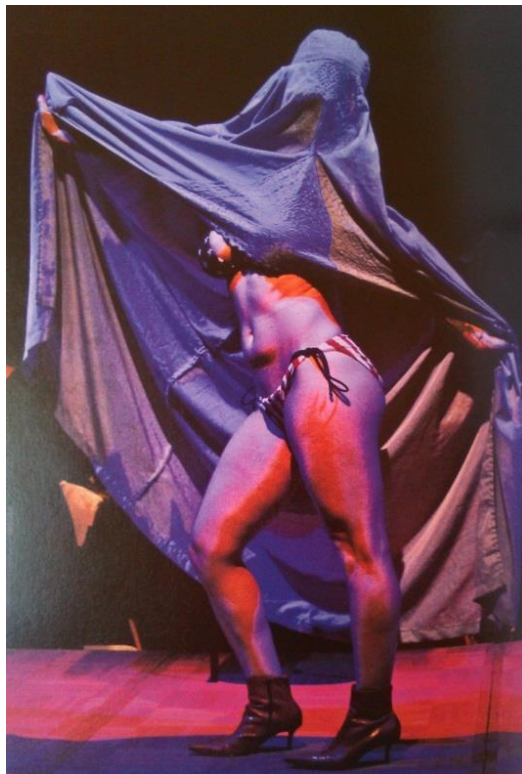


Image 21. 'Afghani burka striptease', Dani d'Emilia. Brazil, 2010.
Photo: Angela Alegria. Taken from *Exercises for Rebel Artists*. p.174.

In the pluriverse that is shared with the spectators, props and costumes are changed in front of the audience while other actions occur as identities or performance personas become more complex, hybrid, multi-layered and ever-changing. The pluriverse of possibilities is in constant metamorphosis. Different images occur at the same time, charged with explicit content that feeds from displacing cultures, genders and sexualities and the icons that represent them [Image 21]. ‘Hybrid personas’ are developed based on the own persons’ complex identities, personal aesthetics and political burdens.

Performance in La Pocha does re-present to the extent La Pocha understands identities to be also representations of societal characteristics (d’Emilia in Audio Fluorescer, 2015) together with exposing one’s own subaltern identities (Gómez-Peña and Velasco, 2013). The performance is proposed as a ‘space for the free circulation of complex identities’ as a poster held by one performer read during *Spiritus Mundi VS Aztec Ouroborus* in São Paulo, 2015. This complexity dissolves the borders around culture, ethnicity, gender, sex, language, etc. in a demystification of the pure nature of such concepts (Gómez-Peña, 2005b: 78). That free circulation also translates into the spatial distribution at the performances of La Pocha Nostra which usually allow the spectators to move within the given space, choosing where and what to look at, and for how long. At some point the voyeuristic experience becomes open to participation.

The North/Western culture satire is La Pocha’s carnivalesque costuming with a dystopian, cyborg kitsch and hyper-sexualised presentation that sells and shocks wonderfully. In this creative Bakhtinian chaos of simultaneous actions the aesthetic experience aims at the deconstruction of the dominant discourses through constant questioning of impertinent, irritant and complex questions. Within this heightened state created for the spectator (music, video projections and simultaneous performances) a pedagogical dimension arises when making the audience aware of this inquiry process—‘when the performance becomes the search, and when the process of search becomes the performance.’ (Gómez-Peña and Thackara, 2011) Societal wounds are set out to bleed and stain all those who are present.

In the display of fantasies, desires are unleashed in a space of filtered audience (art people or avant-garde intellectuals) secured by the Art World.¹⁰⁴ The performance becomes an institutionalised carnival space, supported, welcomed, studied and devoured by the institution. Knowingly, desires are directed towards specific manifestations while experiencing an explosion of images held by the erotic/sexual. These desires are linked directly to the idea of the other, as commodified Otherness fed from the pleasure and enjoyment of the idea or imposition of difference [Images 22 and 23]. The spicy and juicy element of ethnicity can boost the dull mainstream white culture, and in consequence a ‘mainstream bizarre’ (Gómez Peña, 2005b) has been welcomed, supported, and desired in the Art scene. La Pocha brings to the surface those revived fantasies of (sexual) contact with the ‘primitive’ Other embedded in the structures of White/Western/Male supremacy. These fantasies are queered into androgynous bodies with homoerotic display. The question is ever present: Does this presence of the Other still exist to serve the ends of Western desiring subjects, in order for them to become *transgressive* desiring subjects? The symbolic unexplored frontier with the Other is a fertile ground, instrumental, for their own transformation. The seduction by the other reinstates narratives of power and desires. As bell hooks argues in her chapter ‘Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance’:

Most importantly, it [the desire for the Other] establishes a contemporary narrative where the suffering imposed by structures of domination on those designated Other is deflected by an emphasis on seduction and longing where *the desire is not to make the Other over in one’s image but to become the Other*. (1992: 25. My emphasis)

The alternatives to postmodern neoliberal depression are presented in the projection of the Other (through diversity) as sustainable possibilities of being. Under these complexities La Pocha’s multiple and fluid identities embody the epitome of Western desire. This projection of dreams unto the othered body includes those dreams of change (the most desirable of all)

¹⁰⁴ Although La Pocha Nostra performs in places that are outside of the international art market (Oaxaca, Zagreb, Curaçao, villages in Alaska or in the Canary Islands, in Sami communities, etc.) the majority of the performances are nonetheless performed within the art context rather than the ‘social’ context or public sphere.

which are framed or reframed inside La Pocha as forms of imaginary activism. However, as I will argue here, activism is present within the pedagogical proposal but rather aestheticized as desire for the spectators, who do not cease to be positioned on the other side of the borderline, with growing desire.



Image 22. [Left] Dani d' Emilia. *Corpo Insurrecto*, 2014. Venice International Performance Art Week. Photo: Monika Sobczak. Image 23. [Right] Daniel B. Chávez. *Spiritus Mundi VS Aztec Ouroboros*, 2015. II Bienal Internacional de Teatro da USP, São Paulo. Still from video by Roderick Steel.

With the increased or heightened othering on the side of the performers comes a proportional increased sense of normativity on the side of the spectators. The wandering of the spectators through and within the othered pluriverse of interstitial body-subjects is set as a museum display of *fetishized identities*; a circus of wonders where the spectator does not become what she is seeing but is rather trapped, captured and mesmerised by it. This effect has been named by a curator and incorporated by the Pochxs as 'reverse anthropology', an (social) inversion where the centres of power or the spectators in this case, are pushed to the margins. Although the overall pluriverse is set out as a carnival for the spectators to feel, its nature does not pretend to erase the spectator-performer divide, as carnival originally is set to do. The spectatorial is toyed with, seduced, redeemed and confronted, but never blurred. It nurtures a

desire (not merely sexual, although this is an initial pretext or an easy access) of the possibility of an-Other world, an-other way of being humans. It teases the spectator into societal change, without providing it. This relates to Augusto Boal's notion of theatre as a rehearsal for the revolution and not revolutionary itself. Stemming from Boal's influential Theatre of the Oppressed (1960s) and what the Brazilian theatre director understood as 'spect-actors', a humanisation of the spectator as both observer and creator of the action, the spectatorial in La Pocha however, is critically understood not as essentially passive, but rather as essential part in the mechanisms of othering.

Spectators of La Pocha are positioned as witnesses and re-producers of the universalisation of the Other as an ontological entity. The multicultural and multi-gendered (dis)placement of the performers presents issues that relate both with the origin of danger and the origin of difference as an oppositional force in dialogue with a notion of homogeneity coming from those who live on the other side of difference, who 'recognise' difference as such. Fear, violence and disgust, or fetishised desire and mystification are all reactions to a same notion of difference, which entails dehumanisation. In this process of dehumanisation the Other is cut off from her own stories of her determination. These implications are the creative ground of La Pocha which heightens and underlines them in each case creating a spectacle of difference.

These spectacles of difference are not equally relevant, powerful and effective in a 3rd World community as they are inside a First World institution or museum. LPN does not cause the same reception, effect and affect in Mexico and Latin America as it does while touring through Europe. A same *Mapa-Corpo* action is received differently in London than in Tijuana, with an academic group from a U.S. university than with the Mexican *campesinos*. A German lady sees in the eyes of Sifuentes' illegal immigrant Latino persona (healed by the spectators during a *Mapa-Corpo* performance, 2008) the gaze of Christ and is extremely

moved by the performance¹⁰⁵ while a Chilean activist finds in the Indigenous mix portrayed during the *Pan-Indigenous Manifesto* performance (Montreal, 2014) a spectacular disregard toward these struggles and traditions.¹⁰⁶ Some aesthetics are reframed or addressed in diverse ways depending on the context, place and community implied. However the desire for the Other is a constant fixation.

‘Difference’ is diversified and hybridised in La Pocha’s images which exist and coexist among each other. The pluriverse of hybrid trans-identities (othered as the origin of difference) encounters the body of spectators. These identities are ‘performative personas’ made to be experienced, prepared to be encountered and desired. They are composed of:

One-quarter stereotype, one-quarter audience projection, one-quarter esthetic artifact, and one-quarter unpredictable personal/social monster. These ‘artificial savages’ are cultural projections of First World desire/fear of its surrounding subcultures and the so-called ‘Third World Other.’ (Gómez-Peña, 2005b: 81)

In this formula given by Gómez-Peña himself half of the ‘persona’ is determined and identified and half of it is created and recreated constantly. The social monster and the aesthetic artefact however, are to be consumed by the stereotypical and the spectator’s projection. ‘The idea is to heighten features of fear and desire in the dominant imagination and “spectacularize” our “extreme identities,” with the clear understanding that these identities have already been distorted by the invisible surgery of global media.’ (Gómez-Peña, 2005b: 63) In this process of consuming the artwork (eating the Other) the specificity of the voice being represented is decontextualized, while its knowledge is in danger of becoming erased. In a reactionary fashion, notwithstanding, these ‘performance personas’ are made to be consumed, to settle in the psyche of the spectator through strategies supported mostly by an erotic masquerade of historical implications.

The spectators in La Pocha engage with different forms of participation. Gómez-Peña has commented that for him the performance becomes effective when the performers imply the

¹⁰⁵ See: La Pocha Nostra, 2008.

¹⁰⁶ My personal notes (Montreal, 2014).

spectators in the creation of the artwork as a way of making them allies of the work's destiny (Gómez-Peña and Pérez Llosa, 2016). This, he believes, gives them a capacity of civic consciousness that in general they do not experience in their daily lives. In this libertarian 'format', participation is role playing, in a game which is already set out. In that sense, the effectiveness is strongly conditioned, especially as the majority of these performances do not count with unfiltered audiences. Nevertheless, this does not exclude the possibility that the role given may bring responsibility, redemption, consolation, hope, confrontation or/and the unleashing of personal or social desires.



Image 24. Pocha Jam Session with audience members. 2004, Tucuman, Argentina.
Photo: Ramon Teves. Taken from *Intercultural Poltergeist*, p. 14.

At times La Pocha invites some spectators to participate of a human diorama inserting their bodies into the image, proposing a new image or action [Image 24].¹⁰⁷ The becoming and stepping out of a 'performative persona' is the possibility of playing in with the notion of identity in-becoming. This sets a game of flexible and complex roles of identity through a simultaneous agency in the negotiation of this identity in relation to the other identities present. In this negotiation the overall image or proposed action is also negotiated (a

¹⁰⁷ Some examples are the performances *Ex-Centris*, 2003 in Tate Modern or the series of *The Living Museum of Fetishized Identities*, 1999-2004.

reinterpretation and influence from Augusto Boal's *Image theatre*). Props are provided and costuming is invited as part of this post-colonial psycho magic/ social game where othering oneself is a possibility. Interracial sexual fantasies are welcomed. Crossing the aesthetic border, the spectator owns the stage. In this participation the spectatorial body does not cease to exist. The possible shifts toward an inclusion of a spectator are gazed upon, spotlighted. The division remains as the individual from one side crosses to the other side as a messenger or representative, mediated by this possibility given by the performers/Others. Are you with us or against us? Do you dare to be with us? Do you want to play with us? We know your desire is to be part of us, to belong to this *us*. In the game of becoming the Other comes the responsibility of holding together the proposed pluriverse. By crossing over, the desire of becoming the Other is only partially realised, but nonetheless satisfactory.



Image 25. *Two Simultaneous Performances*, 2009. VII Encuentro, Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics, Bogota. Photo: Julio Pantoja.

Exploring and playing with these Others is also enabled. The performing others offer their bodies as human dolls to a variety of possible interactions. One proposal could be: killing the leader, the male Chicano police, for example. Gómez- Peña 'gives' his body for the spectators to direct their anger and anxiety over the sentiment of policing vigilance and patriarchal authority, symbol of the safety of some and the oppression of others. The male Chicano performer invites the spectator to use a shot gun as she wishes [Image 25]. While the roles are clearly set out as police and citizen, the symbolic violence also trespasses into the

realm of performer and spectator—the imaginary possibility for the spectator to kill the spectacle.

Inspired in the George W. Bush administration (U.S. presidency from 2001-2009) and its global War on Terrorism, the body of the performer has been exposed as the (social) body to be healed by the spectators through the action of writing on the immigrant's skin words of protest, solidarity and tenderness, or through the action of removing acupuncture needles from the body which bears flags with the icons of contemporary aggression.¹⁰⁸ In this redemption act the spectators become metaphorically responsible actors in the process of social change. Furthermore, the spectators are directly invited to decolonise the social body in the imagiNation created during the performance [Image 26]. The act of resistance becomes inclusive, accessible and desirable. The spectator in this sense can be another warrior against systemic violence. The performer's body becomes a vessel of liberation for the spectators.

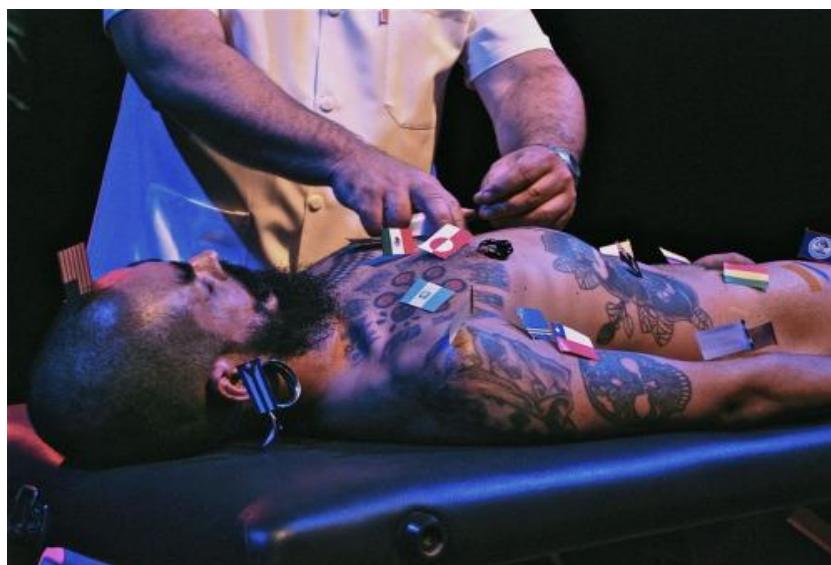


Image 26. Filipe Espindola. *Mapa Corpo*, 2010. Teatro Gilberto Gio, Rio de Janeiro.
Taken from *Intercultural Poltergeist*, p.16.

Taking part in the performance 'action' to become critically displayed as oppressed or empowered, the Other or the decoloniser are ultimately choices constructed by the performance structure. Most of these settings provide alternatives perhaps unexperienced or unthought-of on a daily basis by the spectators. Nonetheless the notion of participation

¹⁰⁸ I am referring to the performance series *Mapa Corpo*, 2002-2009, and its re-enactments, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

becomes ambiguous and deceiving. In general, spectators are always part takers of a performance especially in a performance of La Pocha Nostra where they are unknowingly positioned on the other side of the border, as the co-creators of the Other. La Pocha Nostra as a system functions through the encounters between worlds, cultures, epistemologies, genders, not only within the performing body but moreover and most relevant here, as performance aesthetic/ethic La Pocha Nostra becomes an encounter with the spectators that by opposition reinforces the structures of Othering they wish to unveil and question.

The performance is presented as spectacle where a division exists. The border is set together with the desire of crossing it. To experience other possibilities of liberty which have been denied in society through horizontal structures of collaboration occurs within La Pocha system and pedagogy while proposed, although not yet translatable, to the encounter with the spectator. The performance is presented as a form of radical democracy with the spectators. The civic exercise may be inserted as part of a performance in the matter of popular assembly.¹⁰⁹ Moreover its democracy is understood principally by the involvement of the spectators in collaboration with the artists in the creative act and as partially responsible for the destiny of the artwork ('spect-actors' in Boal's understanding). La Pocha is interested in presenting the othered bodies to re-politicise and decolonise them in ritual collaboration with the spectators. This relation aims to propose that the spectator is an agent of creation and transformation: 'the performance as a strategy for emancipating the spectators' (Gómez-Peña and Velasco, 2013).

Two main issues emerge from this last proposal: The spectator's responsibility of the decolonisation of the Other and the emancipation of the spectator through her involvement in the decolonisation of the Other (the performance). The Other's body at this point aims to become the social body more broadly. The interdependency is enacted as an encounter of asymmetrical powers (Ahmed, 2000) triggered by power and desire. 'The live performance

¹⁰⁹ E.g As mentioned previously, for the performance *Ejercicios para artistas rebeldes* [Exercises for Rebel Artists] (2015, MACBA, Barcelona) an open mike was provided for the filtered audience to express themselves in relation to an issue of censorship occurred within the supporting institution.

becomes the process via which we reveal the morphology of intercultural fetishes and the mechanisms propelling the behavior of both our “savages” and our audiences.’ (Gómez-Peña, 2005b: 81) Contemporary notions of the ethics and aesthetics of encountering the Other are delicately addressed in their sharp complexity. In this encounter the figure of the Other is instrumentally desired as transformative source of self-discovery and self-redemption, while its liberation is externally given and not internally achieved. The body of the Other is the wounded body receiver of the ‘humanitarian’ aid. Recent leftwing discourses of the Western white situate themselves as subjects of change, as if the future of the Other depended on them, positioning the Other as a passive and inferior political subject. This paternalistic behavior is not a new mechanism of colonialism, expressed in epistemological imposition and colonial guilt/aid that reinserts the Other in a not-completely-civilized position, that is, denying the existence of these subjects as political subjects that can search for their own social solutions. This image of political inferiority of the Other risks to be at the underoil of La Pocha’s communal ritual of decolonisation. What is mentioned as the emancipation of the spectator is at the expense of the Other. Re-framed as performative, martyrdom *does* something in relation to the social space in which it is constituted. In martyrdom performer gives her body for the spectators to eat. If performance is used as a strategy for emancipating the spectators, must this be through the decolonisation of the Other? Or by the becoming Other?

This reading, acknowledges the mechanisms of the performer/spectator binary vis a vis the Other/Same encounter. The performer of La Pocha Nostra does not propose to become un-Othered nor undesired. It rather, perhaps, proposes collaboration and integration to the process of decolonisation. Although the mechanisms of Othering are presented, the particularities of those voices, epistemologies and cosmogonies which have been placed and silenced under these mechanisms are not addressed. By reinforcing the fetish of the Other as freak and critical-spectacle-for-the-spectator (Gómez-Peña, 2005b: 62) this possibility does not arise in the terrain of the public performance. The universalization and ontological

dimension of the Other is not effectively and affectively deconstructed. In these decolonising rituals that aim at politicising the Other through spectacle, the collaboration of the spectators risks undertaking the abovementioned implications.

LPN spectacle plays and exhibits the universalization of the Other. In this sense the system's logic (of totalising exteriority to systematise alterity) is re-enacted and unveiled as spectacle. To put it into Enrique Dussel's terms, the Other is not allowed to be Other, but rather trapped in the *totality*—the totalisation of the system attempting to include all exteriority.¹¹⁰ In these spectacles diversity is presented as display, through a mockery of overlapping recognisable cultural symbols. In the imagery produced, this (re-, over-, mis-)use of signs mimics the visual bombardment of the mediatised, contemporary, capitalist, 'multicultural' society. It is a doing of exteriority linked to the systemic logic, not beyond it.

The decolonisation of the bodies through performance can access a symbolic language as a psychomagic action with the somatic possibilities of healing/empowering an individual and her community. La Pocha, among others, believe performance can transform the individual and connect her to her civic and metaphysical dimension.

Our bodies are occupied territories. Perhaps the ultimate goal of performance, especially if you are a woman, gay or a person "of color," is to decolonize our bodies; and **make these decolonizing mechanisms apparent to our audience in the hope that they will get inspired to do the same with their own.** Though we treasure our bodies, we don't mind constantly putting them at risk. It is precisely in the tensions of risk that we find our corporeal possibilities and *raison d'etre*. (2005a: 498. Original italics, my bolds)

The decolonisation of the artists' own bodies/subjectivities is a constant process from which the public performance is a slight moment that is shared. This moment of the spectatorial is conceived as a triggering device of tensions and negotiations that provide or stage the meaning of greater systems of oppression that hunt our daily lives. The interactions

¹¹⁰ Refer to Chapter 1, Section 1.2.2 Liberation and Emancipatory models: Dussel and Rancière in conversation.

in LPN entail political and ethical implications inserted in a world of 'extreme spectacle' in the aims of creating a 'performance that functions both as a bizarre set design for a contemporary enactment of cultural pathologies and as a ceremonial space for people to reflect on their attitudes toward other cultures' (Gómez-Peña, 2005b: 85). This anthropoetical enquiry is the outer layer of La Pocha pedagogy, as it will be later discussed. The 'epidermis' in LPN radical pedagogy however promotes the deconstruction of the imposition of difference (Otherness in this sense) towards the epistemological, cultural, gendered diversities through a (embodied) process of radical tenderness where agency is understood/lived as negotiation. In the workshop scenario this outer layer is approached after experiencing the intersubjective presence with each other and the communal support that triggers (communal and personal) risk-taking into unknown sensibilities. The ephemeral community created with the spectatorial encounter does not propose a radical tenderness, ever-present in La Pocha workshops. The possibility of weaving affectivities of dissidence through performance is not ultimately directed to the spectatorial body. How to address such complex othering issues satirising the wounds of colonial/patriarchal projection of our bodies without promoting a spectacle of citizen diplomacy? In the performances questions are raised and decolonisation is mentioned as a broad proposal to perform on the social body. The decolonisation of the spectator may arise when she is not positioned as the co-creator of Othering. Or perhaps the notion of 'spectator' exists only under a Western umbrella that conditions what it entails being in presence with and through the others.

4.3 Zapatismo in La Pocha System: I am We and We are the Others

The genius of the Zapatistas was to create a fresh new language, a poetic language that could cut across ideological bullshit and still articulate theoretical complexity, but in a way that could appeal to a wide spectrum of people, from campesinos to intellectuals. Zapatismo was essentially a framing device, a new way of naming the world that suddenly made sense to a lot people. We need to learn that lesson from them. (Gómez-Peña, 2005b: 256-257)

*For us, Zapatistas, art is studied by creating many imaginations,
reading the gaze, studying in listening, and practicing.
(...) Because the most marvellous of all of the arts is collective mutual support.
(...) It is the art of solidarity, the support for the people who struggle.
(EZLN, 2016)*

I think the most radical act that an U.S. artist or intellectual can engage in is to listen to the indigenous voices of the Americas. (Gómez-Peña in Latino USA, 2016)

Many influences come to the fore in the moulding and cracking process of creation of La Pocha, where principally ephemeral and fragmented communities come to be in the mediation of performance art. However, La Pocha's proximity (physical, cultural, ideological and chronological) to the Zapatista movement has deeply threaded into its organisational composition and overall system as reference and inspiration. This influence on the LPN is openly acknowledged and referenced by its members (Gómez-Peña, 2005b; Gómez-Peña and Sifuentes, 2011) who have even appropriated Zapatista iconography in one of their many cultural appropriations [Image 27]. Already in 1995 Gómez-Peña was claiming to be a Zapatista himself during a performance (*Unemployed Artist*, Mexico City)¹¹¹ and playing with this Mexican stereotype-identity in 2005 (*Rito instantáneo para recuperar la identidad*, video-performance).¹¹² LPN 1996 performance *The Dangerous Border Game* premiered in San Francisco with nude 'Zapatistas' mopping the floor among other performative personae while during the EZLN's *Other Campaign* in August 2005, LPN did a performance in solidarity with their cause and claims. Nevertheless, the Zapatista's influence on LPN has never been fully discussed. Gómez-Peña, together with founding member Sifuentes, has visited and exchanged ideas with the Zapatistas since the 1990s and sporadically continues to do so. Core members (until October 2016) Dani d'Emilia

¹¹¹ See *Intercultural Poltergeist*, p.9.

¹¹² See Guillermo Gómez-Peña: *Instant Identity Ritual*, 2007.

and Daniel B. Chávez have also recently been collaborating with the Zapatistas and their approach. As part of their performance project *Inmiscuir*, Chávez and D’Emilia presented the performance *Si hablas te desaparecen* as part of the first festival CompARTE por la Humanidad (July 23-12 August, 2016) in San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico where different Indigenous nations from Mexico participated, including the Zapatistas.¹¹³ Since their early years strategies from the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) have been followed and adopted in the inner ‘methods’ and pedagogy of La Pocha Nostra. More accurately, these form part of La Pocha system; while the internal and external environment may vary (performance members, knowledges, practices and sites), the system remains.



Image 27. ‘Zapatista Crucifixion’, Michele Ceballos Michot.
Gran Canaria, 2001. Photo: Nacho Gonzalez.
Taken from *Intercultural Poltergeist*, p.11.

¹¹³ Dani D’Emilia also participated of the second CompARTE festival (23-29 July 2017) with a workshop entitled ‘Radical Tenderness against the Patriarchal System’, and attended the First International Gathering of Women in Struggle organised by the Zapatista women (March 2018).

LPN was founded in 1993 in Los Angeles, California by Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Nola Mariano and Roberto Sifuentes.¹¹⁴ Months later, during the first hours of 1st January 1994, the Zapatista Indigenous uprising took place in Chiapas, Mexico as a reaction to the integration of Mexico to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), on that same day.¹¹⁵ Although this was the first public appearance of the Zapatistas and the creation of the character *Subcomandante Marcos* (the main spokesperson and icon of EZLN until 2014) the movement had existed since November 1983.

Ever since the uprising, the EZLN has strived to construct a collective reality outside the structures of the Mexican State. Their horizontal autonomy is based on the collective organisation of Mayan Indigenous people (tojolabales, tzeltales, mames, tzotziles, choles, and zoques).¹¹⁶ Originated as guerrilla defence force, they have refocused their strategies to a non-violent disobedience through symbolic politics and the use of the Internet to gain global support. Through a rebel heart they have built their own system of government, justice, health, and education inspired mainly by Mayan (Indigenous) views of life and social organisation together with influences from the left—a syncretism with the urban Marxist intellectuals inside the movement. Consequently, the Zapatista revolution began not exclusively as a fight through the Indigenous methods of resistance. It was what Mignolo calls a ‘theoretical revolution’ rooted in the process of double-translation and double

¹¹⁴ While LPN has always been officially based in the U.S., in the state of California, Gómez-Peña’s deceased parents’ house in northern Mexico City has also served as occasional headquarters of the troupe. In Mexico, the institutional recognition of the troupe and its Mexican-American director has shifted over the last decade, with the continuous invitations and support from important museums and cultural centres during the last years—the most significant and current example being the exhibition of Gómez-Peña’s first career retrospective at the Museo de Arte Moderno in Mexico City (Fall 2017–Spring 2018). After being moved out of their Galería de La Raza studio in San Francisco on 2016 there were rumours of a possible return to Mexico for Gómez-Peña, although this has not yet occurred. Regardless of the motherland’s lack of institutional support before these times, Gómez-Peña and LPN’s reference to the Mexican reality and alliance to its struggles has been constantly present, especially regarding the Zapatista movement since their uprising on 1994.

¹¹⁵ EZLN occupies several cities of Chiapas such as San Cristobal de las Casas, Las Margaritas, Altamirano, and Ocosingo.

¹¹⁶ The EZLN created the Rebel Zapatista Autonomous Municipalities (in Spanish, *Municipios Autónomos Rebeldes Zapatistas-MAREZ*) and the five *caracoles* (since 2003), each with a Council of Good Government (in Spanish, *Junta de Buen Gobierno*) as organism of popular power. The five *caracoles* are: La Realidad, Morelia, La Garrucha, Roberto Barrios and Oventik. These are composed of the following Indigenous groups respectively: tojolabales, tzeltales and mames; tojolabales, tzeltales and tzotziles; tzeltales; choles, zoques, and tzeltales; and tzeltales and tzotziles.

infection (letting in/ getting in) between the Marxist urban intellectuals and the rural Indigenous intellectuals and communities in Mexico, which conceives possible futures beyond (neo) liberalism and (neo) Marxism (Mignolo, 2002). ‘In the Zapatista’s theoretical revolution, border thinking emerges from the double translation across the colonial difference...’ (2002: 262) As Indigenous have been marginalised from the production of knowledge and government, the iconic figure of Western-looking *subcomandante* Marcos, for example, was strategic for pushing through the Indigenous ideas. 22 years after the 1994 uprising, the new generations have brought about an important change of class, race and thought in the EZLN’s structure, resulting in its total reorganisation by and for the Mayan Indigenous people—as Marcos himself (only non-Indigenous spokesperson of the EZLN) points out in 2014 when publicly declaring his own death as a hologram spectacle of the EZLN.¹¹⁷

Proposing new forms of organisation based on horizontalism, collective leadership and the recovery of historical memory, the Zapatistas fight the omnipresence of capitalism—a globalised dilemma. The cultural and historical values of the Zapatistas Indigenous, epistemologically different from Western (post)colonial thought, are intentionally made available for the Western and non-Western world not only through the original cross-contamination of the urban Marxists. The Zapatistas are within a wider Indigenous anti-neoliberal social movement that has emerged strongly since the 1990s. In the decade of the 1990s with the fall of the Berlin wall taking with it the white and Mestizo revolutionary-Marxist utopia and the rise of the neoliberal project, also came the emergence of the Indigenous movements of the Americas. From this moment onwards the social struggle is not only or predominantly a class struggle but a decolonial fight of the racialized communities that have suffered marginalisation and have resisted and survived domination and colonialism. This revival of Indigenous resistance has provoked Bolivia and Ecuador to rethink and reconceptualise their constitutions (Walsh, 2013). Zapatistas’ democracy

¹¹⁷ Marcos’ death symbolises the shift of EZLN to a completely Indigenous leadership. For his final discourse *Entre la luz y la sombra* [*Between Light and Shadow*] see, Subcomandante Marcos, 2014.

resembles the notion of *Ayllu* democracy in Bolivia. Stemming from this research, the Aymara sociologist Felix Patzi Paco, together with others, understands the 'communal system' to be the antagonist alternative to the contemporary liberal system (Patzi Paco, 2004).

Unlike other movements, the EZLN has self-consciously used social media as a weapon, interested in creating alliances, convergences, and awareness throughout the nation and beyond. In this sense the Zapatistas have been masters of spectacle while subverting its systemic function. They have gained global support from other social movements and subversive individuals creating an ethos of resistance through symbols (such as the face-covering with the *pasamontañas*, black ski masks) that allow everybody to be a Zapatista: '*todos somos Marcos*'.¹¹⁸ Zapatismo has provoked a strong mysticism, interest and desire in many worldwide dissidents who understand the Zapatistas to be builders of a different world based on Indigenous knowledges of democracy, education and liberty. 'To question this macro-narrative of "democracy" (written from the perspective of Western civilization and modernity) and to open new avenues to imagine democratic futures is precisely what the Zapatistas's theoretical revolution has achieved.' (Mignolo, 2002: 260) Rooted in Indigenous values of life, self and community they develop and share other societal possibilities.

4.3.1 The Icon: Hologram or Mother Diva

Many intellectuals, activists and dreamers from around the world have visited and continue to visit the Zapatistas to learn from their ways of being. In spite of Gómez-Peña's mistrust of political tourism, on September 1996, together with Roberto Sifuentes, Lorena Wolffer, Tania Frontera and others, he visited a community of Zapatistas in the Chiapaneca jungle where he describes the experience as follows:

[The] exoticizing gaze slowly turned through 180 degrees towards us. And in the end, they were clearly in control of the gaze, of the context, and of the terms of the

¹¹⁸ Global supporters include organizations from the Basque Country and encounters and alliances with the Black Panthers movements (a union that has been called the 'Zapantera'), among others.

communication process: they clearly knew more, much more, about us than we knew about them. (1997: 69)

The overall experience of this visit to Ejido Zapata and San Juan Chamula left the performance visitors feeling like ‘ethnographic specimens on display’ (Gómez-Peña, 1997: 69). However, Zapatistas’ ways of seeing came to be threaded into LPN’s web. Back then during this visit, the *Chicano/Zapatista* connection began to take form.¹¹⁹ It was proposed and discussed with the Zapatista community in Ejido Zapata, after they were directly asked to introduce themselves at their *asamblea* and to present a concrete proposal.

A year after their encounter, Subcomandante Marcos wrote his famous poem ‘Marcos is gay’ (1997), believed by Gómez-Peña to be inspired by his own 1992 poem ‘Spanglish lesson’ (2016). In ‘Spanglish lesson’ Gómez-Peña had described his (trans)border self as ‘an Aztec in Nova Hispania / a Mexican in San Diego / a Puertorrican in New York / a Moroccan in Paris / a Pakistani in London’ living in a state of siege... an irregular citizen who receives constant social aggression, produced by colonial (historical and contemporary) oppression. The state of violence and alert is an individual experience which is also a collective one; or, as he puts it, ‘is a translatable statement’ (2016). The *Others* perhaps are the *Many*. El Sup in 1997 follows a structural and conceptual conversation with the writing of Gómez-Peña. After he is ‘accused’ by the Mexican opposition of being homosexual, Marcos (EZLN) decides to describe his emblematic character in his communique:

Marcos is gay in San Francisco
Black in South Africa
an Asian in Europe, a Chicano in San Ysidro, an anarchist in Spain, a Palestinian in Israel, a Mayan Indian in the streets of San Cristobal, a Jew in Germany, a Gypsy in Poland, a Mohawk in Quebec, a pacifist in Bosnia, a single woman on the Metro at 10 pm, a peasant without land,
a gang member in the slums,
an unemployed worker,

¹¹⁹ In a similar quest to the Zapatista-Mayan struggle through native knowledge, the Chicano Movement with the notion of Aztlán, shaped their struggle through their ancestral link to non-Western, Indigenous (Aztec) knowledge.

an unhappy student,
and, of course, a Zapatista in the mountains.

Marcos is all the exploited, marginalized, oppressed minorities resisting and saying "Enough". He is every minority who is now beginning to speak and every majority that must shut up and listen. He is every untolerated group searching for a way to speak. Everything that makes power and the good consciences of those in power uncomfortable—this is Marcos. (1997)

The icon and vocal of the Zapatista revolution for 20 years (1994-2014) represents all the unwanted, moreover, the invisibilised, *los nadie* (the nobodies). *Los nadie*, who have their own voice and have said *¡ya basta!* (enough!).

Recently Gómez-Peña has decided to continue the ‘conversation’ and has re-adapted his own text from Marcos’ adaptation in order to ‘Rewrite Marcos’, or more accurately, to re-write himself after Marcos’ intervention. As he explains: ‘this is my voice, developed by Marcos and re-appropriated by my older self as an attempt to remap my consciousness in the new century’ (2016). The remapping of the ‘I’ is done again listing the displaced in the capitalist-neocolonial system:

In Mexico, I am an activist against violence; in the US, I am always against amnesia, but to be more geographically specific, in the Sonora desert I am a Yaqui elder who remembers the way things were before the Spaniards and the Anglos arrived; and in Oaxaca, I am a Zapotec teen who has chosen to forget. It’s a survival strategy and if you want me to elaborate, I can stretch my identity even more across borders and continents and states... (2016)

There is an open bond, mirroring and solidarity to the Zapatistas, ‘& yes, y por supuesto, I haven’t forgotten, I am still a Zapatista in Chiapas...’ Gómez-Peña writes (2016), as for him this century’s reconfiguration of consciousness is a re-re appropriation of the Self triggered by the Zapatistas proposal and what this ‘I am’ means—‘I just can’t stop being “others”...’ and more than two decades after the Spanglish lesson (1992) and the EZLN uprising (1994), ‘ “We are,” or rather I am all of us but no one in particular, *nadie*, ...’ (Gómez- Peña, 2016).

The Western 'I' is contested, disfigured, and de-constructed, or rather, re-constructed. The lyrical exchange between Marcos, the invented icon at the imaginary service of a social movement, and Gómez-Peña, the 'godmother' of an ever-changing community of activists, is the questioning of a historically imposed sense of the Self, and consequentially the hierarchical idea of the leader.

In the case of Marcos the *leader* was a 'hologram' (Marcos, 2014), a complex manoeuvre of spectacular distraction that filtered through the media. The character of el *Sub* Marcos, was born as a '*performancero*' of the Zapatista revolution in the 1st January 1994 (Gómez-Peña, 1995b). Marcos was a faceless icon who wore a ski-mask as all the Zapatistas do. The mystery of his 'true' identity attracted the attention of many, although as he is not I, but We; he is the community of the Zapatistas and extensive to all the oppressed in resistance (Marcos is gay, 1997) speaking through a character that came into existence as a terribly efficient trick for gaining national and international attention. After twenty years he declared himself dead at 2:08 am on 25 May 2014 during his discourse *Entre la luz y la sombra* at the memorial of the colleague Galeano. Compañero 'Galeano' or José Luis Solís López, was a teacher at the *escuelita* who was murdered on the 2nd May by the Mexican paramilitary forces that also injured 15 after entering La Realidad (one of the Zapatista *caracoles*) weeks before. Marcos 'dies' and Galeano revives from the dead, as the *communique* of Marcos' death is pronounced by 'Marcos' and signed by 'Galeano'. The character of 'Subcomandante Marcos' as that of the 'Subcomandante Galeano', the former in 1994 and the latter twenty years after, took the names of fallen *compañeros*, an honouring tradition that defies both Western constructions of death and the concept of the individual.¹²⁰

Diana Taylor (2016) states that "'Marcos'" reactivated the trickster's potential of enormous trans-possibility: trans-race, trans-gender, trans-personal, trans-national, trans-historical.'

¹²⁰ This tradition is seen throughout the Mexican revolutionary history. As Leonidas Oikonomakis reminds us, this tradition is evidenced since the days of Pancho Villa (Mexican Revolution, 1910) who was born Doroteo Arango and adopted the name of his fallen comrade killed by the village guards. Likewise Marcos, known before 1994 as 'Zacarias' took the name in honour of his friend Mario Marcos killed in 1983 (Oikonomakis, 2014).

Even more tricksterish, his death brought the rise from the living dead, of the character *Subcomandante Insurgente Galeano* ‘born’ that morning of 25 May 2014 ‘in collective and in spite of myself (...)’ as he says (Sup Galeano, 2015), taking the name of the fallen compañero ‘Galeano’. The tricksterish here is concentrated on the act of Sup Marcos reading the communique of his death, which he signed as Galeano, followed by the even more contemporary tricksterish energy of asking as a postscript: ‘Anyone else here named Galeano?’ To which the present crowd responded ‘We are all Galeano!’ The trickster is neither Marcos nor Galeano. Trickster is collective... trickster is-are the Zapatistas: ‘through his voice we speak, through his eyes we see, through his steps we walk... we are him.’ (Sup Galeano, 2015) [Image 28]



Image 28. *La Mirada*. 2013. CIDECI, Chiapas. Photo: Skarlos Ogaz. <http://galerias.zapatista.org/>

As Marcos, Gómez-Peña is a desirable spectacle, claimed by his public. Gómez-Peña is not only LPN’s ongoing member, but LPN is presented as *his* collective, at times referred to as ‘Guillermo Gómez-Peña and La Pocha Nostra’. His investment in spectacle is the spectacle of the ‘Other’ extensive to the othering spectacle of La Pocha Nostra. LPN’s original objective was to formally conceptualise Gomez-Peña’s collaborations with other artists. Using the ‘spectacle of the Other’ as a strategy for creating a community of support has also been an interesting resonance with the very effective and transgressive use of spectacle by the Zapatistas, discussed in Chapter 1. The resource of spectacle has been *used* by La Pocha Nostra in a heightening extravaganza of the bizarre, exotic-erotic desire as subversion which works as a mechanism of attraction that holds together the Pocha system. This system is not

only composed of the core members but has honorary members including Lois Keidan, James Luna, Heather Haynes, Guillermo Galindo, Gustavo Vazquez, Orlando Britto-Jinorio, Gabriela Salgado, Rachel Rodgers, Gabriela Leon, and Reverend Billy. There are more than 30 associates spread throughout 10 different countries including Natalie Brewster Nguyen, Allison Wyper, Marcos Najera, Maria Alejandra Estrada, Gerardo Juarez, Julia Antivilo, Lucas Avendaño and many more artists. Also each workshop provides the site for encountering other artists, academics and activist that at that time become part of La Pocha Nostra's performances, ephemeral community and overall system. In this system the spectatorial body is not dismissed, but rather the principal target of this flaunting otherness.

The body-subject of Guillermo Gómez-Peña is the Mother Diva, *La Diva Madre* (as he describes himself) of this system. Zapatistas as an Indigenous community make themselves visible by covering their faces with the implicit intersectional possibility of 'We are all Marcos'. On a very different social-political-artistic context, LPN tackles invisibility by hyperbolising otherness. The multiplicity of bodies is important in this doing. In this aspect, Gómez-Peña does not re-present the bodies that form or deform La Pocha. He is *one* of these bodies. The possibility of renovation and integration of new members holds LPN's relevance and contemporaneity as each member contributes to the overall Pocha system. The multiplicity of bodies and the hierarchical signifiers embedded in each (race/gender, age, body structure, etc.) allows the visual 'variety' in La Pocha's community of Others. Who is part of LPN core members has a strong effect during their workshops. A young multi-mestiza transgendered person leading a pedagogical experience of radical tenderness has a specific approach and experience to share, for example, that may become a referential and emotional support for some people. Also the powerful work of some of the women that have been part of LPN is also of special relevance in LPN's development—an interesting and necessary research to engage on that demands further investigation especially in regards to the desire for the Other.

In the EZLN leadership is internally collectivised, in spite of the external necessity of iconising a figure. The EZLN practiced democracy follows what they describe as *mandar obedeciendo* (to rule by obeying) and the *acuerdo* (agreement) or *palabra común* (common word) (EZLN, 1994).¹²¹ In the Zapatista land the people rule and the government obeys. To an extent, constant efforts of horizontality and de-hierarchy are also practiced in the inner structures of LPN. In terms of organisation, the core members of LPN distribute among themselves their roles in each occasion or particular project. La Pocha's structure has its core collaborators, an outer circle of people who are involved in half of the projects, a third circle of people involved in specific projects, and a last ephemeral outer circle of local artists and activists that join the Pocha process weeks before performing usually through a workshop. 'Our model is Zapatista. We even learned it from [el *subcomandante*] Marcos: concentric circles and circles that are superimposed.' (Gómez-Peña and Pérez Llosa, 2016) These circles ultimately revolve around the inclusive or exclusive decision of *La Diva Madre* who decides which bodies-subjects are the desirable core members that represent LPN's othering.

Gómez-Peña acts as godmother or performance nurse. He queers his male persona into a DJ in the 'dance' created by the ephemeral and heterogeneous community of performers. As him, La Pocha DJs might be any other of the core members. These members have been trained under the pedagogy of La Pocha Nostra which ultimately relies on Gómez-Peña as the constant figure and director. However, the pedagogy is collectively built through a multiplicity of sources and in these constant contributions rests its radical hybridity. In their system and pedagogy LPN understands the potentiality of the performance practices as shamanic acts on the socio politic body (hetero-patriarchal, neoliberal and colonial) achieved through collective presence of divergent, complex and hybrid bodies and identities. Each of these individual bodies is the site of creation, intervention and activism. The artists and collaborators work through their own personal cartographies, cultural references, and archaeological altars to build a performative persona. These are always in (embodied)

¹²¹ As the EZLN writes in the first communiqué '... *el que manda obedece si es verdadero, el que obedece manda por el corazón común de los hombres y mujeres verdaderos.*' (EZLN, 1994: 175-176)

dialogue with the others performative personae, in the sense that these are not conceived as solo shows but cross-referential and are sometimes produced in the performance jams, where certain situations may trigger certain embodiments and actions. In the creative process of making these personae other collaborators directly edit or suggest. All the performative personas come into being as the individual realities from each biographical experience, local history, and subjectivity are triggered, re-activated, re-worked and played with among all.

In its pedagogical project the transnational collective encourages the creation of a communitarian and participatory democracy where a space to assembly is given when issues arise during the community-building processes and in the possibilities of presenting the work—i.e. tensions within the ‘internal’ dynamics together with the ‘external’ particular situations of the given socio-political context. Is nudity a problem and in what context? How to proceed when the workshop sponsors are linked to a Spanish museum institution that practices censorship with artworks that criticise the current monarchy? What to perform during times of social and economic crisis in the midst of a Greek referendum? Which devices to use when being invited to perform at a university in the U.S. that woke up to the murder of some of its Muslim students? All these questions and many more are examples that have been discussed and attended collectively with whoever was part of the ephemeral community in that particular moment. These town-meetings are said by LPN to be directly inspired from the Zapatista assemblies and are included as ‘exercise’ in the publication of LPN’s radical pedagogy (Gómez-Peña and Sifuentes, 2011: 88-89). It is the community who leads the actions, or appears to do so.

...we propose a space of collective elaboration from the relationship between the bodies, destabilising the expectations and projections that we make of ourselves and the others, opening paths so that it becomes possible to challenge ourselves collectively, generating affect from unusual alliances, based on transient and contextual affinities instead of rigid and totalising identities. (d’Emilia, 2015b: 6)¹²²

¹²² My translation from Spanish. Original reads: ‘... *proponemos un espacio de elaboración colectiva desde la relación entre los cuerpos, desestabilizando expectativas y proyecciones que hacemos de nosotrxs mismos y del otrx, abriendo caminos para que sea posible desafiarnos colectivamente,*

By providing a demilitarised zone some of these tension producing processes are conceived through embodied co-creation, a conversation of the bodies. LPN decentralises the colonial hierarchy of the word / rational process. Understanding the centrality of embodiment and action, most of the immediate challenges that arise within the community are approached not through a rational worded dialogue, but rather through the dialogue between the bodies—bodies which carry the violence of the social categories that shape them. Through affect and tenderness the false rigidity of these social categories may be collectively contested.

4.3.2 Othering the *us*

When threading La Pocha with the Zapatistas, two ideas arise at the base of both organisations: the ‘collective I’, and *los nadie* (the nobodies), which ultimately are ‘the others’ and/or the ones from ‘below’ (*los de abajo*). Both ideas are intertwined and have been part of the system developed by the Zapatistas and LPN creating discursive and ideological synchronicities. Although these discourses may mirror populist narratives in Latin America they differ in their notion of the collective I, taken from Indigenous cosmogony and worldview.

The Zapatista philosophy, as an Indigenous movement, has been nourished by the Mayan worldview in different ways. Most relevant for this discussion and in relation to La Pocha is their idea of community, the communal, the ‘us’ and the individual within that ‘us’. From the Mayans, the Zapatistas follow the ‘Ich’el ta muk’, that is, the respect and recognition of the other’s greatness. The process of unlearning the Westernised modern notion of the ‘us’ to incorporate an alternative sensibility is part of this process. As Carlos Lenkersdorf has noted when approaching the Tojolabal language, learning it meant a commitment with the *us*, a communitarian ‘us’ which the Western view is ignorant of (Lenkersdorf and Ceceña, 1999). This communitarian principle *reinforces* singularity and difference as explained by a member of the Zapatista movement:

generando afecto desde alianzas insólitas, basadas en afinidades transitorias y contextuales en lugar de identidades rígidas y totalizantes.’

There is an interaction where the other is the one who constitutes me, and vice versa. If this is not understood in this particular way, it could be interpreted as an identity loss. But I would say it is more of a winning of identity, because in the modern western 'me' that we defend so much, this individual 'me' as a supposed warranty for identity, we are actually losing our identity...

...amongst the indigenous Mayan people, the necessity of the other's singularity is included in that reciprocity that is implied in the *Ich'el ta muk'*, in the respect to the other. ...There is a singular guaranteed identity that finds its origins in the *Ich'el ta muk'*, the respect... this 'us', whose expression is precisely the community, is constituted by singularities. A community is an ensemble of singularities. A community is an ensemble of diversity. (Taylor and Servin, 2016)

The individual is not shadowed by the Western sense of community, rather heightened, and tenderly pushed to his/her borders, as it is similarly experienced in the work and workshops of La Pocha. Zapatistas speak of the collective 'I' which puts interaction as a condition, and only in interaction does differentiation exist.

All the elements of an interaction are the singularities, the personalities. Then, the mode of differentiation exists only in the interaction, obviously. On the other hand, in the figure of the individual and western 'I,' these things are not clear, and the 'I' can even have a tendency to deny the 'us' to assert itself, which is how all power repressions appear—all the possible abuses in that concentration of the 'I' that signifies the denial of others. Of course, in psychology it is recognized that this is not healthy, but always taking as a premise the constitution of a self-asserted 'I.' However, what we want to express, a healthy 'I,' would be the 'I' that is constituted with the other, whose interaction is based in the respect for that other's greatness that at the same time constitutes me and whose interdependence is self-asserted. (Taylor and Servin, 2016)

The Indo-European rooted societies are characterised by the subject-object relation, while the Amerindian, like Mayan-Tojolabal, are characterised by their intersubjective relation they are based in the cosmology that understands living systems and nature to be subjects, not objects (Lenkersdorf, 2005).¹²³ The 'intersubjective us' expands from the human society into the

¹²³ A further explanation on Lenkersdorf's 'alternative' notion of the intersubjective is discussed in Chapter 1, in the sub-section entitled 'Intersubjectivity: An-other Approach'.

whole cosmos, having different kinds of subjects (instead of objects) that complement each other. In this language and cosmology subjects do not subordinate the objects but rather the subjects need each other.

Further into the notion of the ‘intersubjective’ (useful, nonetheless, a Westernised explanation) is the Mayan Tzeltal sense of the *ch’ulel* (spirit, conscience, soul. *Ch’ul*: the sacred) and its sacred presence in everything, that is, everything has a heart as explained by the Mayan scholar Juan (Xuno) López Intzin. Under capitalism, however, all has been transformed into a commodity and the world has suffered what López Intzin and others call a *de-ch’ulel-isation* through the colonial domestication of nature and the subject. The ‘epistemologies of the heart’ call for a *re-ch’ulel-isation* of humanity together with the ecosystem (López Intzin, 2016). Looking at this new tomorrow with a rebel heart ‘from below and to the left’ is a struggle that has been represented (although not exclusively) by the EZLN.

The other constitutes me and vice versa, as expressed in the *In Lack’ech* Mayan greeting ‘you are my other me’. If the intersubjective (inter-action) is amongst a heterogeneous collective the socialised subjectivity of its individuals, what is understood as *habitus* in Pierre Bourdieu (1990), might begin to be reconstructed, challenged, and deformed. In the de/re-formation of subjectivities Beatriz (Paul) Preciado writes: ‘The aim of art is no longer to produce an “object”, but to invent a device of re-subjection that is capable of producing another “subject”: another consciousness, another body’ (2013b).¹²⁴ The device of re-subjection produced by La Pocha is rooted in the understanding of the (subject-subject) intersubjective: the collective I. The re-subjection is as much a ‘collective’ process, at it is an ‘individual’ one. This is constantly (re)worked through what LPN calls *radical tenderness*. The term ‘radical tenderness’ has been used by La Pocha Nostra since the 2000s and has been further theorised in 2015 by core-members at the time, Daniel B. Chávez and Dani d’Emilia, through

¹²⁴ Original reads: ‘El objetivo del arte ya no es producir un ‘objeto’, sino inventar un dispositivo de re-subjetivación que sea capaz de producir otro “sujeto”: otra conciencia, otro cuerpo’.

a live manifesto. In the manifesto of radical tenderness (d'Emilia and Chávez, 2015) the constant process of re-subjection is called upon, followed or activated by the embodiment of the *In Lak'ech*, the Mayan cosmogony of 'you are my other me'. The manifesto reads: '(radical tenderness) is to not be always the same / to embody the *In Lak'ech*'.¹²⁵ Affection becomes revolutionary when it functions as a device of bond-creation with critical and collective possibilities.

LPN's ephemeral and mutating communities are environments of exchange where borders (national, cultural, sexual, ideological, corporeal) are continuously crossed and the individual is redefined in each relation with the other. Moreover, human relationships are redefined. Radical tenderness, used in La Pocha system, branches from the idea of the 'collective I', where interdependence is self-asserted. Through that understanding the re-subjection can only be intersubjective and consequently an embodied process.

To look, touch, explore, challenge and care for each other in different ways, recognising and rethinking our differences, contradictions, fragilities and transformations as sites of resistance, imagination and political-affective agency: is what we call radical tenderness. (d'Emilia, 2015b: 6)¹²⁶

The bodies are the sites of societal wounds, struggles and resistance of hegemonic discourse. LPN tensions the awareness of our politicised bodies—the individual's body is a metaphor of the socio-political body. In this sense, the creation is always a communal creation. When La Pocha invites the workshop participants or spectators to edit an image / a body, it is an invitation to re-create and edit the world. The possibility of change—to not be always the same, to be the others—is the psychomagic / shamanic act that aims at a communal change.

The 'intersubjective us' is experienced in each bond created, and practiced in the process of disintegrating the idea of authorship. The author is not dead... the author of the creation is the communal process and the creation itself is never completed. When an image or performance

¹²⁵ The manifesto in Spanish reads: *[ternura radical] es no ser siempre las mismas, los mismos, les mismos / es encarnar In Lak'ech*.

¹²⁶ Original reads: *'Mirarnos, tocarnos, explorarnos, retornos y cuidarnos de distintas maneras, reconociendo y replanteando nuestras diferencias, contradicciones, fragilidades y devenires como lugares de resistencia, imaginación y agencia político-afectiva: a eso le llamamos ternura radical.'*

persona is created by someone during the workshops and gatherings of La Pocha, the others ‘intervene’ and alter the individual creation, as a form of active citizenship and collective responsibility towards the ‘pluriverse’ created. The possibility of creating a situation, action or body-image is the possibility of making an-other reality, even only for the time being. The spectators of a Pocha jam session are invited to go inside the performance zone and edit the existing images by adding, replacing or eliminating props, taking bodies outside the image, and / or inserting their own bodies. The bodies being manipulated are not lacking agency but negotiating the interaction. After several transformations, at times happening to several bodies and sites simultaneously, authorship becomes intentionally blurry with the combination of these interventions from those ‘outside’, the individual’s aesthetic decisions, and the accidental juxtapositions of the individual images.¹²⁷ This contemporary embodied form of *cadavre exquis* contests the notion of authorship/ownership while establishing ‘collaborative and multi-centric relationships’ with the others. (Gómez-Peña and Sifuentes, 2011: 107). In this creative jam of subjects/bodies, certain questions are suddenly deconstructed: Whose idea was it to take a certain object and give it to that specific person? How did the person ‘know’ the best way to incorporate the change of situation? Why, when or how did the image/action mutate? The cognitive and individualist insistence on authorship becomes dismembered by the collective body knowledge and body instinct working alongside the energies present at that moment. Through the connection of the subjects/bodies with each other and their surroundings, the image may perhaps obtain unexpected power. Furthermore, whatever is created in a Pocha workshop is invited to be re-appropriated by whomever, inside or outside the workshop time / space. Appropriation, inspiration, (mis)use of the creations is welcomed and constantly stimulated. The ego of the individual (artist) is negotiated and re-conceptualised—everything belongs to everyone. This is not exempt of tensions, while a body-image done by an artist during a Pocha workshop can appear as La Pocha Nostra’s without giving any credit to the artist, unless s-he is sufficiently recognised.

¹²⁷ For a detailed pedagogical explanation of this exercise see Gómez-Peña and Sifuentes, 2011: 137-141.

Ownership (of an idea, image, or action) is communal under the frame of La Pocha Nostra's community.

The Zapatistas in the political terrain undid the fiction of the individual, through a faceless revolutionary symbol (face-covered by the ski-mask), a radical otherness: the identity of the Indigenous, of everything non-Western. La Pocha's proposal understands collaboration as citizen cartography: a 'bigger We'.¹²⁸ The individual within the ephemeral community finds a place to push her identities by the decolonisation and re-politicisation of the body. In this process a radical democracy occurs while the diverse communities found in each of the participants create a dialogue between the other 'others'. This 'bigger We' of La Pocha looks for those radical others or *los nadie*, in a different context but following a similar discourse to EZLN.

The EZLN's discourse and action differentiates 'the below' (*los de abajo*) from 'the above' (*los de arriba*). The below is defined by the antagonistic position to capitalism (Taylor and Servin, 2016). These have been mistreated as *los nadie* (the nobodies) by the system. Similarly to the concept of 'the South' in Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014) which expands into all those oppressed and exploited by the different forms of capitalist domination in their colonial relation with the world, the EZLN branches from the local struggle of Indigenous peoples from Chiapas with the Mexican government, into a worldwide rebellious and subversive solidarity. 'The common fight is the one that transforms the pain into rage, the rage into rebellion, and the rebellion into tomorrow.' (Sub Galeano, 2015) The crack on the system's wall is done by the nobodies (*los nadie*) that 'are the ones that move the wheel of history...' (Sub Galeano, 2015).

Los Zapatistas speak from the voice of *los nadie* as Indigenous community of resistance. By covering their faces with the ski mask, the Zapatistas make visible and finally subvert the invisibility that the colonial othering has imposed on the Indigenous people since the 'conquest' of the Americas. Othering, as colonial enterprise, began with the *creation* of the

¹²⁸ Taken from my personal notes in Athens, June 2015.

Americas. In La Pocha's structure, hybrid compositions arise from the exoticised transient others: the trans (-national / -racial / -gendered) bodies, from a diasporic reality (ancestral and contemporary). LPN has been working with the concept of the Other since its foundation. Previous to LPN, Gómez-Peña's work elaborated on 'otherness' since his early years as border-crosser activist with the collaborative actions of the Border Art Workshop (*Taller de Arte Fronterizo*, 1984-1990) on the U.S.-Mexico border, and with his previous 'immigrant' actions for his first performance group *Poyesis Genética* (1978-1983) with Sara-Jo Berman in Los Angeles. As border creatures coming from the interstices of society, the diverse individuals that form La Pocha (past, current, and future) bring to the artistic realm their 'othered' subjectivities (issues of race, gender, class, nationality, ancestry, etc.) to critically work and re-work with the other members and ultimately with the spectators. Flaunting their 'otherness', the border is what they share. The constant activist outcomes of these compositions address the complex mechanisms of imposed othering (violence, desire, fear, and fetish). In La Pocha spectacle the idea of the Other is initially hyperbolised and then inverted or displaced through techniques of 'reverse anthropology' that put the Other in the centre and push the spectators into the periphery (as discussed in Chapter 2). While in performance spectacle the Other-Same divide is reinforced, their structural system works by threading these others together.

The troupe's structural system was born out of the connections made with immigrant artists: 'La Pocha is a way to formalise those connections and maintain an open global network of ongoing artistic and political communication.' (La Pocha Nostra, 2001c) Originated in Los Angeles, La Pocha's early years dealt with more localised issues of violence on the Latino 'Others' in the U.S.—the reality of the initial core members of the group. However, the collaborative essence of the transnational collective has always invited issues of oppression and colonial violence in other communities to be addressed. 'The fundamental idea of this project has been to draft an ever-evolving cartography, which inter-connects nomadic, immigrant, hybrid and "subaltern" rebel artists from various countries bypassing the

hegemonic centres of cultural power’. (Gómez Peña, 2005b: 91) The link between the diversity of LPN is the othering—structures of colonial power and difference lived in the different biographies. The input of each new and ever-changing member adds levels of complexity and the multiplicity on the panoramas of resistance.

LPN liaises with members of the particular communities—representative of the excluded or invisibilised sectors. This liaison becomes a way of working through local issues, not by a process of translation from the outsider’s view but by the integration of the local voice into the collaboration (e.g. *Pan-Indigenous (Anti) Manifesto*, 2014; *Ejercicios para artistas rebeldes*, 2015). This union allows the creation of bonds and solidarity with the different social issues occurring in the specific nations or communities where the performances are presented. Furthermore, it becomes a strategic way of addressing a reality, which is initially not one’s own, but becomes part of the community’s when integrated. The political project of LPN relies upon this cross-cultural, ideological and embodied exchange. The trans-hybridity (race, gender, class, nationality, profession, etc.) of La Pocha is key to its social importance as a possible community building process.

The diversality in the structural system of LPN is also related to the political views of the Zapatistas: multiracial, multigendered and multiparticipatory. What Dani d’ Emilia (2015b) calls the ‘bastardisation’ of La Pocha welcomes, integrates, and searches for those unrepresented and marginalised voices and sensibilities. This bastardisation is intrinsically related to contemporary currents of decolonial resistance that advocate for a ‘pluriverse’. ‘Pluriversality is not cultural relativism, but entanglement of several cosmologies connected today in a power differential.’ (Mignolo, 2013) Quoting from the Zapatista’s Fourth Declaration of the Selva Lacandona (1 January 1996): *El mundo que queremos es uno donde quepan muchos mundos* (We want a world where many worlds fit) (EZLN, 1995-1997: 89). This pluriverse comes with integration and use of various languages mixed and merged into one another, and their queerization. This acknowledgement ‘opens the field for infinite discursive and nondiscursive exchanges with unfathomable codifications and

horizontalities.’ (De Sousa Santos, 2014: 15) The ephemeral communities of La Pocha mainly intertwine activists, artists, and academics from a range of socio-cultural, racial and gendered backgrounds. The relation between theory and praxis (thought and activism) is contained in the terrain of performance. The ongoing discussion of tensions between the utopian and the historical, positivism and mysticism, between the thinking and the doing—a continuous Cartesian division of mind and body—is part of the decolonial struggle. New ways of theorising and producing transformative collective action aim to be the experimental terrain of performance in La Pocha.

What becomes radical about LPN project is not mainly the activism created against the oppressive power which becomes spectacular in its reaffirmation of the Same-Other divide with the spectatorial body, but rather the decolonial proposal of relationality among diverse subjectivities that delinks from the notion of the Western ‘I’ in a process of border thinking, which integrates the notion of the ‘collective I’ through radical tenderness. This relationality is not proposed in the performances but rather in the radical pedagogy. The pedagogical project of LPN has become a central focus for the troupe. Interestingly the Zapatistas have also pushed forward a radical pedagogy of autonomous education in their communities being one of the strongest points of their subversive proposal which defends their intellectual, cosmological and cultural ways of being—an education based on resistance and re-existence of their Indigenous community, culture and ancestry, recognising themselves in their others: as *In Lack’ech*.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ For more on the Zapatista education system, see: Baronnet, 2013.

4.4 Decolonial Pedagogy: Border Crossing Methodology in Three Skins

...it is appropriate to return to pedagogy in its praxistical aspect, meditating on its strategic-actional use as a radical driver of and towards understandings, postures and thoughts not only critical but also of imperative character and decolonial project. (Walsh, 2013: 31)¹³⁰

4.4.1 In Pedagogy we Trust

Since its origins LPN has been under the dynamics of hybrid collaborations and the conduction of interracial workshops, that later became international—these moved from their original site in the U.S., mostly Chicago and later San Francisco (1995), into other international contexts since 1999. The pedagogical internationality of the workshops came with the specific (political) challenges faced in each of the countries visited. How to create a meaningful, fair and radical exchange of cultural experiences and political ideas became even more complex. The decision of where their summer school workshops (occurring since 2005) would be held, for example, was strongly influenced by the particular political situation occurring in the country to be chosen. La Pocha's search has been on the lookout for new forms of citizen diplomacy especially where cultural difference exists. The workshops given in the 1990s under the name of The Brown Sheep Project already worked under a collective system of community based on the organisational structure of the Zapatistas (Gómez-Peña and Sifuentes, 2011: 5). The pedagogy is the most important political praxis of the troupe, understood, together with performance itself, as a form of activism.

Pedagogy, as pointed by Catherine Walsh, has been linked to social struggles, as these are also pedagogical scenarios where the participants practice their pedagogies of learning, unlearning, relearning, reflexion and action.

Pedagogies are practices, strategies and methodologies that are woven together and built in resistance and opposition, as well as through insurgency, *cimarronaje*, affirmation, re-existence and re-humanisation. (Walsh, 2013: 29)¹³¹

¹³⁰ Original reads: '...es oportuno retomar la pedagogía en su aspecto praxístico, meditando en su uso estratégico-accional como radical conductor de y hacia comprensiones, posturas y pensamientos no sólo críticos sino de carácter imperativo y proyecto decoloniales.'

As understood by the critical pedagogies of the 1960s initiated by Paulo Freire, the pedagogical here is not conceived as the process of learning and transmission of knowledge but as an essential methodology within and for the social, political, ontological and epistemic struggles for liberation. These are pedagogies that propose the reinvention of society and furthermore transgress the colonial dominant frames of thought, embodiment, and spirituality. As the legacy of Franz Fanon has contributed, decolonisation is not only a political matter but an intervention practice that allows the creation of new men and woman.

Decolonization never takes place unnoticed, for it influences individuals and modifies them fundamentally. It transforms spectators crushed with their inessentiality into privileged actors, with the grandiose glare of history's floodlights upon them. It brings a natural rhythm into existence, introduced by new men, and with it a new language and a new humanity. Decolonization is the veritable creation of new men. (Fanon, 1963: 36)

For Fanon humanisation is at the core of decolonisation, of unlearning the systems of colonial oppression. This is both an individual and collective task that implies all citizens.

The decolonising pedagogy of La Pocha Nostra proposes the re-invention of the established subjectivities, in a constant questioning and invitation that asks: ‘what border will I cross today?’—a phrase constantly repeated throughout the workshops. These crossings are triggered by the possibility of building a heterogeneous, multiple, and fluid community through creative and radical exercises of citizen diplomacy that develop the paradigms of being together through and across difference. In the creation of a radical community identities are re-articulated constantly—an unlearning process of fixed identities, bodies, genders, races, and minds. This does not blur differences but works alongside them potentiating in the difference a border-crossing possibility of cross-contamination that seeks into the ancestral memories of each participant, individually and collectively. It works through the responsibility (individual-communal) of learning, unlearning and relearning to be oneself in

¹³¹ Original reads: *‘Las pedagogías son las prácticas, estrategias y metodologías que se entretienen con y se construyen tanto en la resistencia y la oposición, como en la insurgencia, el cimarronaje, la afirmación, la re-existencia y la re-humanización.’*

relation and against the fixed structures in oneself—what implies to have human ethics in and with the world. The aim of co-creating a pluriverse that can contain our extreme difference is at the political core of the collective. The embodied expressions arise as part of the necessity of sharing and communicating specific issues within the created collective. Performance is the terrain of embodied resistance and re-existence.

In this clumsy democracy of many voices, notions of identity and community are understood to be fluid and subjective. Self-perception and self-identification are worked in exercises and performance emancipating from imposed identities. Binaries are problematised as categorical constructions that imprison the modern individual: between masculine and feminine, between individualistic and communal, between aesthetics and art of protest, between intellectual discourse and poetry, between multicultural and mono-cultural, between art and life, etc. The exercises proposed by La Pocha blur these binomials and human politics become embodied in each encounter.

Performance is understood by many performers including La Pocha Nostra as a proposal of imaginary activism where body-landscapes of possibilities are built. The complexity of each body in relation to the others adds a multiplicity of meaning. The atmosphere created in LPN's workshops allows the transitory nature of identities to be recognised through the encounter with the other/ community, understanding the performativity of the subject (both the process of being acted on and the conditions and possibilities for acting). Border methodology is possible only through radical tenderness, which radicalism is found in the tender pushing of the other towards her borders to ultimately take a risk with the support of her community. The community's support triggers each one to jump into her personal abyss defying socially imposed borders and censored desires. This process also involves healing. Only in risk-taking may there be social and individual change. The vulnerability of the risk is a potential mobilising force. Vulnerability in this sense is understood as presented by Judith Butler, a way of being exposed and agentic at the same time. 'Vulnerability as a deliberate exposure to power is part of the very meaning of political resistance as an embodied

enactment.’ (Butler, 2015) Vulnerability is part of the very practice of resistance. In La Pocha vulnerabilities become activated as sites of communication, agency and resistance, where intimate questioning is mediated through a transfeminist approach (d’Emilia, 2015b), that is, an embodied dialogue across gender, race, and class through a decolonial perspective. In the temporal community of the workshops an atypical net of relations is created through the radical tender, where our individual and collective monsters find a floor to dance on and/or a site for the battle.¹³²

The centrality of the radical tender in LPN’s pedagogy has developed since the 2000s and has been reshaped, moulded and triggered by the different members of the troupe. Especially, the approach to the radical tender as a corpo-affective means of decolonial relationality has been a primal source of life-investigation for Dani d’Emilia (2015b) who continues to generate this pedagogical research beyond LPN (2015a). The empowering affectivity of the radical tender developed during the years of d’Emilia and Chávez’s interventions in LPN (2011-2016 and 2014-2016, respectively) has nurtured the decolonial relational shift of LPN’s proposals of the encounter within the pedagogical ground. In these encounters healing and risk-taking is part of an individual/communal decolonising process.¹³³

Dani d’Emilia explains the pedagogical threads of this supporting net:

In these processes, our work as pedagogues is not to invisibilise the differences, but rather the contrary. For us, radical tenderness as affection and pedagogical praxis is an important tool that proposes a type of agreement of consent to explore with the other the processes from which one is constituted. Through radical tenderness we can propose to each other the collective challenge of facing the violence that inevitably cross us as subjects, embodying them, sometimes even exaggerating them, with the aim of recovering some agency over them. (2015b: 22)¹³⁴

¹³² This poetic image is appropriated from Dani d’Emilia (2015b), who re-appropriated it from the collective wording of La Pocha’s workshops.

¹³³ It is interesting to note that Chávez and d’Emilia together with Violeta Luna (also past member of LPN) made a workshop in Brazil on August 2016 in search of ‘a process of justice that involved healing’. See ‘Ações performativas: encarnando justiça dissidentes’ in d’Emilia, 2015a.

¹³⁴ Original reads: ‘*En estos procesos, nuestro trabajo como pedagogxs no es invisibilizar diferencias, sino todo lo contrario. Para nosotrxs, la ternura radical como afecto y praxis pedagógica es una*

As d'Emilia notes, following Butler, to share our experience from the places of greater vulnerability allows a greater feeling of being affected by the others. The encounters in La Pocha become political, not only as the possibility of gathering to discuss, enact, react and rethink our social constraints, but as a space that encourages other forms of affection which are censured by heteropatriarchal and colonial mechanisms. The subversive nature of this understands that 'the body, in spite or perhaps by virtue of its clear boundaries is defined by the relations that make its own life possible.' (Butler, 2015) The bodies-subjects are decolonised and re-politicised, not as a sequential process but as an ongoing flux between these intertwined dimensions. In the pedagogical experience, difference is explored and emphasised alongside the constant construction of a radical tenderness. Long-term collaborations, solidarities, and companionships across multiple borders may begin. Some visual examples of activist radical encounters developed in the workshops will follow, but first a deeper discussion on how these encounters come to be is needed.

4.4.2 The Hypodermis, Dermis and Epidermis of a Communal Body

La Pocha Nostra has produced a generous contribution to performance pedagogy with their book *Exercises for Rebel Artists: Radical Performance Pedagogy* (2011), where the exercises used by the troupe are clearly detailed in hopes to be used and reconceptualised by the reader. This guide can surely never replace the experience of the workshop, the energetic power and commitment of its members, or to explain in text how to suggest, practice, revise and embody a space of radical tenderness. Many exercises are used by the troupe and readjusted each time according to the workshop necessities. Many have been appropriated from other theatrical, activist, dance, literary and Indigenous practices. From all of these exercises and their variations I will discuss three which I consider to be the building blocks of what has been referred to as radical tenderness. At this point I speak from my experiential and embodied

herramienta importante que propone una especie de pacto de consentimiento para explorar con el otro los procesos desde donde uno se constituye. A través de la ternura radical podemos proponernos el desafío colectivo de enfrentar las violencias que inevitablemente nos atraviesan como sujetos, encarnándolas, a veces incluso exagerándolas, justamente para poder recuperar alguna agencia sobre ellas.'

knowledge, having participated of three workshops of La Pocha Nostra each within a very different context, duration, and country (Montreal, 2014; Barcelona, 2015; Athens, 2015). As these are sensorial processes of the body I use the metaphor of the skin in its different depths (hypodermis, dermis and epidermis) to emphasise the embodied knowledge of La Pocha's proposals. Paradoxically, or not, the skin is the first and most evident physical border between the bodies, but also the exposed organ that covers all the body.

The hypodermis is a liminal, in-between, structure. As the deeper lowermost layer it attaches the skin to bone and muscle. It shapes the corporeal outline, provides mobility and maintains the body's temperature. La Pocha's hypodermis is the discovery of the other 'others' through the ancient shamanic practice of durational gazing. Both bodies stand in front of each other at a comfortable distance and, if they are of different heights, they adjust their posture so that their eyes are at level.¹³⁵ This most basic gesture of being in front of a stranger and looking into each other's eyes for an extended period of time is a ritualised action of recognition, mirroring, and commitment to intimacy through shared presence. In between the physically separated bodies a strong bond is created 'only' through the eyes of both seeing-visible human creatures. Nervousness and discomfort might arise as a sense of invasion or vulnerability into one's innermost self. Culturally diverse interpretations (as hostility or desire) and previous personal experiences of this action will influence the encounter. The intensity of this embodied practice is the basis of what an encounter is, as the etymology of this word shows—from Late Latin *incontra* is 'in front of', *contra* meaning 'against' or originally 'in comparison with'. To be confronted against or in comparison to the other's presence is a cross-cultural and ancestral practice. In other times this could be the encounter of the Spanish colonisers with the native Indigenous people. Very different worlds and realities could be coinciding and reconstructing themselves in relation to one another.

¹³⁵ This is important for the initial exercise as the gaze (looking down on someone or looking up) has strong social implications or power relations, which are later worked on the variations of this exercise.

During the exercise, letting time pass will perhaps create visual effects that disfigure the image of the other's face or can even enable trance states to be reached. More importantly, time permits the simultaneous observing and being observed to be developed and held in a globalised world where social interactions are brief and impersonal. A union begins, more intimate than could be explained in words. As described by La Pocha, this exercise is most basic and existential: to be energetically present together, that is, being in the 'here and now' in recognition of the other's presence on you and vice versa. This unveils the relationality of the subject, in the body, in the practice. This is the temperature, outline, and mobility of La Pocha's body. The evolution of this exercise integrates levels and positions (power relations within the act of gazing: to look up or look down to), physical distance and points of contact (related to intimacy and connection) being finally asked to freeze in an image you feel describes your encounter. As the workshop develops, the poetics and politics of the encounter become more complex.

The hypodermis is below the dermis. The dermis is a connective tissue that has a protective function. It also provides a sensitive function with its many nerve receptors that are sensitive to touch and temperature. Its blood vessels nurture the epidermis. The warrior practice of running blind is La Pocha's dermis. This exercise is taken from the warrior training of various tribal societies as an action of trust, risk and commitment with oneself and the new community. The group forms a human corridor with two facilitators at each end. One at a time each person is asked to run to the other end as fast as possible with eyes closed. Even in the context of the performativity of running and what happens when the body believes it is in danger (screaming, bizarre or funny expressions and gestures, etc.), this exercise is mainly about human solidarity and the power that solidarity holds. Likewise, it does not cease to be a preparation for battle, only under another less violent terrain. You trace your path and then jump into the abyss of the unknown, aware that you are not alone. Each person is responsible for the blind warrior if she loses her straight path. The person running is, as always, also responsible for her own body. Care-taking of the others and self-care come together. Some

people fall; others stop or open their eyes. As with all of these exercises it is not a technique to be learned, nor a competition of right and wrong. The experience is part of a social proposal.

People may find unexpected courage in the communal support. The protective function of the community is held alongside the pushing of the personal boundaries towards risk-taking. The previous exercise (what I call the hypodermis) was focalised on the shared gaze, the subject-body as seeing/visible or giver/ receiver, developing in time a strong (co)presence with an 'other'. The dermis on the other hand, is not a one-to-one relationship with the other 'other' but a relationship with the community where the communal presence nurtures and supports the possibility of exploring and relating to the unexpected—here vulnerability is triggered, shared, and exposed to all and through all. In its running action, the blind body may incorporate intuitive reactions to fear and momentum that assimilate more to animals than to 'human' forms. The security, dependence, and hierarchy of the visual are contested while the other senses and sensitivities become (re)activated and enhanced. The seeing subject-body becomes the sensing body, aware of her existence or perhaps re-existence within a larger body. This other layer of interdependency and interconnectivity is relational to the given community, with which levels of collective intimacy are built on further by stimulating the notion of solidarity that opens the exploration of new sensibilities, and new terrains of activist resistance. The experience, as an exercise but also as a wider possibility of communal support, causes the adrenaline and desire to continue.

The dermal nurtures the outermost layer of the skin: the epidermis. Apart from regulating the body's temperature and preventing diseases to enter, the epidermis' basal layer is where the melanin is found (determinant of skin colour). The epidermis is the skin layer that is visible in its particular colour, hydration, elasticity, etc. It also reveals the scars (accidental or produced) that have marked the history of that body. The epidermis holds difference. La Pocha's epidermis explores this difference, aware of the socio-colonial implications assigned onto some types of bodily traits by the bodies that do not have these traits. The epidermis of

La Pocha is found in an exercise of poetic ethnography. Pairs are made by finding a person who is physically different to you (age, gender, race, body composition). One person becomes the specimen and the other one, the ethnographer. These roles are later reversed. The ethnographer explores or ‘discovers’ the other’s body through her senses while the specimen remains still and with eyes closed. The ethnographer begins by observing closely each detail, then smells the different corners, afterwards listens to the sounds that each part of that body produces and finally touches, manipulates and weights the specimen. The ethnographer wants to learn as much as she can from this examination of the other body-subject.

Historical and contemporary implications of using the terms ‘ethnographer’ and ‘specimen’ to describe this encounter are not unintentional. This exercise plays with references to the colonial enterprise of ethnography and its dehumanised study of the cultural specimen as an example of its *species*. In the case of ethnography, the relationship of observer/observed develops against the backdrop of a colonial relationship of domination established between the colonised and colonising society. In the Pocha exercise, when you close your eyes, you immediately become the specimen. However, the exercise works as a colonising act that decolonises.¹³⁶ The complexity of this exercise juggles power positions with extreme tenderness, care and respect. The apparent passive role of the specimen is rather a radical generosity that negotiates the borders of physical intimacy. More broadly, in this exercise agency is revealed as a matter of negotiation.¹³⁷

The body-subject who is the specimen gives her body for multi-sensorial exploration as far as she decides, while the responsible ethnographer is careful to prevent excessive discomfort. When the ethnographer begins the creative manipulation of the specimen, (moving, rotating parts of the body, holding in a position), the active-passive role playing becomes further blurred. We are reminded by the workshop facilitators that the specimen is always active. In

¹³⁶ Retrospective remark made by a workshop participant of La Pocha Nostra’s summer school in Costa Rica, 2014.

¹³⁷ This remark was made by a workshop participant shortly after this exercise was done. Montreal, June 2014.

this creative process, the specimen is the raw material for the artist-ethnographer. Depending on the context and continent of where the exercise is presented, the facilitators replace the wording of this encounter into ‘raw material’ and ‘artist’ instead of ‘specimen’ and ‘ethnographer’. In a way, relating the ethnographer with the artist exposes the ‘creative liberty’ or epistemological privilege ethnographers have had of presenting the studied cultures in the ways they choose, reproducing colonial power and domination through the invention of what Gayatri Spivak (1985) calls the *self-consolidating* others—in the process of creating the other the self is reconfigured in its hierarchy. By presenting the exercise with references to the creative relation (artist/ raw material) instead of the colonial one (ethnographer/ specimen) the reference to this particular criticism is missed and the wounds in the ancestral memory are not activated. On the other hand a patriarchal reference could be read from the objectivation of the body as the raw material for the creation of desires. Moreover even under this reading, the exercise understands agency in all bodies, that is, in all objects—the creative process of the ‘artist’ is a dialogue and negotiation with its ‘creation’. The raw material/specimen carries a history with an embodied memory as well as the artist/ethnographer, and the negotiation between them is both historical and present. New histories are created in the body. One of the variations of this exercise develops into creating an interesting and powerful image for the specimen to hold. By experiencing the agency in both bodies, the concept of authorship begins to be dismantled. The epidermis of La Pocha is the bodies touching each other through an agentic negotiation of difference, and the complexity and fluidity within this relational difference. Not only these apparently fixed social roles are interchangeable (once the exercise finishes the roles are reversed) but the given agency of these roles is contested. La Pocha’s epidermis is regenerative; difference is generated in alternative ways that do not constrain its agency through a negotiation of and through the bodies.

In essence La Pocha’s defensive and sensible skin is composed of three layers. The deepest layer from which its outline, temperature and mobility is produced through the intersubjective

presence. Following this layer is the connective tissue which protects while providing sensibility. This tissue translates into the experience of communal support that triggers the risk of crossing our personal (and ultimately collective) borders to new and unknown sensibilities. Finally, the outermost layer, visible to all; where the subject-body's history and cultural ancestry is exposed together with the power relations that are embedded on to them. This exposed layer proposes and develops agentic negotiation of difference. Precisely by being the exposed layer, the epidermis of La Pocha is what has been worked throughout in various ways when La Pocha's body is exposed to the spectators. In general all these practices or skin layers to some extent negotiate points of conflict and comfort developing vulnerabilities in resistance. Borders are exposed and crossed through, in relation, and together with the others. From these three aspects a radical tenderness begins to develop in the workshop scenario allowing extreme differences and binaries to be explored, created, recreated, and encountered.

4.4.3 Embodiments produced by the Poetics and Politics of the Encounter

In LPN's pedagogy, the politics and poetics of the encounter are constantly revisited as each part is redefined while being deconstructed by its other. During an intensive workshop in Athens from 1-13 June 2015, in the midst of the Greek Referendum (5 July 2015), these paradigms became theoretically embodied. This intensive workshop had a duration of 12 days, 8-hours a day with more than 24 participants that included academics, activists, pedagogues, performance artists, journalists, writers and poets, visual artists, musicians, singers, dancers, choreographers, actors and puppeteers. Some of these came from Spain, U.K., U.S., Australia, Germany, Sweden, Canada, and Finland. An important presence of local Greek participants (more than half of the group) provided a better access to the inner political aspects dealt in this country at the time. La Pocha Nostra's title for this International Summer Workshop was 'Territories of Crisis' and Athens was said to be chosen as the site for the 2015 workshop because 'Athens is perceived as Ground Zero in the European crisis on the verge of existential collapse'. This was explained in the programs handed out to the

spectators on the day of the performance. The following selected actions of encounter were produced by the participants of the summer workshop.



Image 29. Laura Corcuera (ES) and Litsa Kiouisi (GR/ DE).
Territories of Crisis, 2015. Athens School of Fine Arts. Photo: ASFA BBQ Archive.

The encounter of the raw, nude bodies in mimesis of Spanish performer and journalist Laura Corcuera with Greek performer and choreographer Litsa Kiouisi is divided by a physical, yet thin, almost transparent, fragile but real division [Image 29]. The movable, liminal thread held between them determines the mobility of both bodies. The poetics of the action was charged with the energetic and embodied co-presence of these bodies-subjects within a crowd of spectators. In vulnerable proximity to the people around, Corcuera and Kiouisi subtly divided the spectators with a border as symbolically powerful as any other.

On a different but interconnected pluriverse, the encounter of U.K. performer Ria Hartley and queer Chicana poet Denise Benavides exists as a family portrait composition of posed power relations/ negotiations between two different embodiments of a history of geographical frontiers. The blood red body of Hartley sat down with demonic stoicism wearing the U.S. flag in her chest while Benavides was standing next to her, bare chested and using a Mexican flag as a ski mask while her head was trapped inside a cage structure. Both were strong in their postures, which were created with and through the relation of their body-geographies to one another [Image 30].



Image 30. Ria Hartley (U.K.) and Denise Benavides (U.S.). 2015. Athens School of Fine Arts. Image created by the artists in collaboration with Manuel Vason during La Pocha Nostra workshop.

Moreover each artist's body holds a history and ancestry which allows a deeper exploration of this interrelation. Hartley's black female body painted red unveils a foundational history of slavery, violence and inequality towards black lives in the U.S. and beyond, including her own U.K. homeland. Benavides is Mexican American; a Mexican female body rooted on U.S. soil, firmly touching its ground with her black boots in spite of the cage of cultural discrimination constantly suffered. They are connected through their gendered and racial stories of resistance against state and social oppression. This connective bond of solidarity moves in the subsoil of the national representation they carried against the surface, architecturally framed by the cradle of a Western civilization in decadence.

In a parallel world two veiled women encounter each other, one covered in black the other covered in white. They come from two different religious cultures that divide, fear and demonise the other. They are both dressed in relation to the ever-present but physically absent male figure, one in a burka, the other one in a Christian wedding dress. The patriarchal structure and belief both in Christianity and in Islam is what they wear; what wears them. From the distance they walked slowly towards each other until their veiled faces were facing one another. Black unveiled white and then White unveiled black. With exposed faces they

tenderly kissed on the lips, while this kiss moved them into the position of the other [Image 31].



Image 31. 'Encounterings of the Tender', Anonymous (U.S.) and Marina Barys Janer (P.R.). *Territories of Crisis*, 2015. Athens School of Fine Arts. Photo: Menelaos Myrillas.

After their repositioning they slowly separated turning away to continue their paths, unveiled and with the gaze fixed on the other woman. Radical tenderness triggered this union that lasted only a moment but unveiled new possibilities, new solidarities, new sensibilities. Localising this action in Greece meant performing it on the farthest corner of the West, which is 'facing' the Middle East.

This last action, *Encounterings of the Tender*, was the result of a proposal I had envisioned months before and was brought to life in the context of this Pocha workshop in Athens. A woman from the U.S. with Pakistani heritage offered to collaborate in this project, which dealt directly with her personal curiosities in relation to her family story. She decided to remain anonymous. This encounter created controversy in the group as the U.S. facilitators were attracted to the action but uneasy with its possible consequences.

To encounter involves a negotiation of agency, an embodied knowledge experienced by the exposed, epidermal layer of La Pocha's pedagogy. It involves conflict, intrigue, and desire. Furthermore, as Sara Ahmed notes, 'the encounter itself is ontologically prior to the question of ontology' (the question of who encounters) as the existence of each subject-body is not separated from the encounters with the others (Ahmed, 2000: 7). We are perpetually

reconstituted by our encounters (not only human but extensive to all elements). So existence is the action of existence given by the encounter. For Ahmed the encounter has a surprising and antagonistic nature, through the inability to read the other's body and the asymmetry of power framed under broader relationships of power and antagonism. Traces of those broader relationships are within the particular encounters, while the particularity of each encounter also informs the broader relations. Difference is not in the body of others but through the encounters with others.

What are stressed by Ahmed as (colonial) encounters which involve a necessarily unequal and asymmetrical dialogue between once distant cultures that transform each one are La Pocha's starting point for the creation of embodied actions. However, it would be a risky and partial misunderstanding to think of the actual meeting between activist, academics, and principally artists mediated by La Pocha as asymmetrical or unequal. While the issues addressed in the workshops and overall work of this transnational collective constantly acknowledge and display these differences under the radar of how these are constructed by antagonistic power structures, the ground for these creations is among individuals that bring those histories of difference to a zone of tenderness where these can be exposed, caressed, supported and collectively deconstructed. Through the proposed practice, each participant autonomously decides what to do with them and how to transform her own doubts and daily resistances through a space that is artistically protected. However, the collaborators and members of La Pocha do enjoy certain privileges that allow them to be in a Pocha context. These 'others' are less othered than other 'others'. La Pocha Nostra is conscious of this insider-outsider position and tries to manoeuvre it through chameleonic strategies of balancing their collaborations between the Art World and Academia, and civic activism and community engagement; although the former has been noticeably predominant. In some of LPN workshops local participants are granted economic support while the internationals are asked to pay a substantial sum. LPN does not usually gather the most othered of society (refugees, poor, prostitutes, criminals, etc.) although it does display their social issues on the

performance. The aesthetics, ethics and politics of LPN develop under the complex mechanisms of Othering.

Certainly universalising the figure of the Other is problematic. Nonetheless, La Pocha's workshops and more broadly, La Pocha's project is the mediation of such encounters where the imposition of difference is worked through a system of equalities. Participants, members and collaborators in general of La Pocha bring in their embodied memories of oppression and/ or privilege to the performance jam, together with their personal fantasies and fears. This performance jam is a feast of complex identity embodiments.

If the othering is produced by an unequal and asymmetrical dialogue, the process Ahmed refers to as 'encounter', then La Pocha's pedagogical proposal is a de-construction of this notion of the encounter within the group and a re-construction of it with the spectators. I have argued in this chapter that the position of the spectator within the LPN performances restages a division that mimics the social hierarchies implied in the construction of the Other, while their pedagogical praxis and system is developed through decolonial modes of organisation, relationality and affects. While in the pedagogical La Pocha Nostra's proposal is a border crossing methodology through its radical tenderness, their proposal with the spectatorial body recreates known and unknown borders that become a palpable question mark.

CHAPTER 5: TACTICS OF RE-EXISTANCE

... resisting is a response backed by collective, shared and always being made anew meaning. (Lugones, 2014: 10)

The main ingredients of performance are place, content, audience, time, and the goal—the end, so to speak—which could be instruction or pleasure, or a combination of both—in short, some sort of reformative effect on the audience. The state has its areas of performance; so has the artist. While the state performs power, the power of the artist is solely in the performance. Both the state and the artist may have a different conception of time, place, content, goals, either of their own performance or of the other, but they have the audience as their common target. (Thiong'o, 1997: 12)

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1997) speaks of enactments of power in the struggle between the power of performance in the arts and the performance of power by the state. He understands the performance space to be the main locus for struggle, 'the site of physical, social, and psychic forces in society.' Enactments of power are sharpened within colonialism. Thiong'o concludes and reiterates the centrality of the politics of performance space for theorising the postcolonial condition, to which we understand and extend to the colonial or neo-colonial condition. Surely art can also work and be used by the mechanisms of the state. The performances presented here study these mechanisms and embody them to reveal and contest the power of state in regulating life in society (moral and formal laws). The following chapter discusses tactics and understandings that are present in both cases discussed which become vital to these activist proposals. Moreover these existential postures and resistance doings are implied in the restructuring of our modern relations, which this investigation addresses from the implications, construction and enactment of the spectator as social position in correspondence to othering discourses.

By using intersecting tactics of counterperformativity on whiteness, xenophobia, misogyny, and heteronormativity Freddie Mercado and La Pocha Nostra produce worldmaking performances that opt to reject what the state has proposed as 'real', a life-art process understood as 'disidentification' in José Esteban Muñoz (1999). The disidentification processes are constantly fluctuating between reception and production (25) that contributes to

the creation of a counter public sphere (7).¹³⁸ In contesting binaries of art-life, artist-spectator is also deconstructed. The reception and production of the artists is both spectatorial and performative. In this flux the erotic is de-formed and created through all our relations and the institutional power of Art is approached with pungent humour.

5.1 Intersectionality: Weaving through Local and Global Possibilities¹³⁹

In this era of global capitalism, mainstream culture has predisposed and framed the encounter of cultures through a representational economy that marks those unknown with iconic displays made easy to identify and digest. These dynamics of identifying and digesting assuage the desire for possible mutual knowledge and intimacy emerging from the encounter. The ‘dominant’ culture creates a corporate multiculturalism where ‘integration’ is only welcomed in exchange of a ‘normalisation’ process, that is, a one-way integration that assumes the other cultures to be outsiders from the encountering culture. Furthermore, these ideas of ‘alienation’ and ‘assimilation’ imply the understanding of culture as fixed and pure, a notion historically unsupported and ontologically absurd. Cultural superiority and the fear of cross-contamination derive from this panorama.¹⁴⁰

Cross-contamination, coined by Gómez-Peña (2005b) to describe the La Pocha Nostra project, is in direct dialogue with what theorist Kimberle Crenshaw referred to as intersectionality (1991), originated as a black feminist critique. Intersectionality does not

¹³⁸ ‘Disidentification is a performative mode of tactical recognition that various minoritarian subjects employ in an effort to resist the oppressive and normalizing discourse of dominant ideology. Disidentification resists the interpellating call of ideology that fixes a subject within the state power apparatus. It is a reformation of the self within the social. It is a third term that resists the binary of identification and counteridentification.’ (Muñoz, 1999: 97)

¹³⁹ The metaphor of weaving is active and constant, past and present, and in the present, creating a future. It is an action associated with the ancestral knowledge of Indigenous women which is also connected to the figure of Anansi, the spider trickster in Yoruba storytelling common in the Caribbean. Used by many Latin American feminists that tribute both Indigenous and Afro-American knowledge, weaving through colonial wounds is a metaphor used by Daniel B. Chávez (2015) taken from Nadine George-Graves, as a decolonisation of gender from a diasporic ancestry.

¹⁴⁰ I pay homage to Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s (2005b) notion of ‘cross-contamination’ used to describe La Pocha Nostra’s project. It entails not the loss of one’s own multiple biographical embodied histories but the intersectionality of these histories with the histories of another in mutual recognition and exchange.

reproduce the abovementioned multicultural model but speaks of the *relations* between systems of oppressions (e.g. racism, colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism, etc.) that construct our multiple identities and social locations (race, gender, sexuality, class, age, religion, etc.) within the hierarchies of power and privilege. Transformative potentials of multiculturalism become potentially radical through a project of intersectionality that understands oppressions as multiple but neither separate nor separable.

The logic of modernity is organised in dichotomous categories of opposition in evaluative relation to one another (male/female, black/white, public/private, mind/body) that hides the violence of oppression

as it hides the intersection of categories through rendering the social world into impermeable, homogenous, complete categories of people in relation and as it hides the power that needs to be deployed to maintain the oppositional dichotomizing. As people are conceived, classified and treated in terms of homogenous categories, each group is rendered from the inside. Those who are categorially not homogenous, are disappeared. (Lugones, 2014: 2)

Oppression is understood as constituted by multiple, converging and interwoven systems. Intersectionality is both a necessary theoretical category as well as (or more importantly) an indispensable tool for movements of resistance. In order to experience and create other ways of existence an articulation between coordinates of oppression is needed. Islamophobia is meshed to homo/transphobia, racism to misogyny, and classism to xenophobia. As María Lugones emphasises (2008) depatriarchalisation is a decolonising project.¹⁴¹ The understanding of the interwoven and connected systems of oppression does not homogenise the particular experiences but reveals a common ground allowing a wider perspective on their functionality. In this process, not falling into the naïveté of englobing all oppressions as

¹⁴¹ This is a critique formulated by María Lugones to decolonial theories that prioritise race as colonial creation and do not conceive gender binaries as a dichotomy imposed with colonisation. She reiterates that race is not separable or secondary to gender oppression, rather constitutive. 'The coloniality of gender is with us, it is what lies at the intersection of gender/class/race/sexuality as central constructs of the capitalist world system of power.' She states that the colonial introduction of a gender system also divides the human from the non-human. See: Lugones, 2008; 2014.

experientially the same becomes crucial.¹⁴² Undeniably, Western concepts of humanity do not exist without the dehumanisation of others (zone of being / zone of not-being), as Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2016) explains. Furthermore, there is a need ‘to create other type of articulations between the bodies through a decolonial *mestizaje*.’ (Santos, 2016)

Following Santos’ decolonial *mestizaje*, we return to the cross-contamination proposed as an encounter project in La Pocha Nostra where those particular experiential oppressions caused by capitalism/ colonialism/ patriarchy are exposed and caressed in a communal threading of resistance and re-existence.¹⁴³ The internationality of La Pocha project rehearses a democratic project of ephemeral heterogeneous trans-cultural/ -racial /-gendered communities under this thread of interweaving experiences of oppression. The mirage of the multicultural model is used as spectacle in the public performances (with the spectatorial body) and radicalised in the workshops and building communities gathered through the pretext of the performance presentation.¹⁴⁴ Radical tenderness is at the core of a decolonial *mestizaje* through a critical understanding of intersectionality that acknowledges the in-becoming (*devenir*) of identities (Chávez, 2015) which consequently brings a constant reconfiguration of those intersecting experiential oppressions, weaving through ancestral memories of existence and intersubjective relations.

La Pocha Nostra has been understood as a system with particular methods that allow individual resistance and re-existence. Within this system the core members push and pull certain understandings that influence the system’s *devenir*. Past members Daniel B. Chávez and Dani d’Emilia have strongly advocated for a radical tenderness, a term used by LPN long before both were part of the troupe. The constant collective reformulations, through embodied practice and theory, of what this *is* (in transformation and in-becoming) are tuned in and collaborating to contemporary currents of critical and decolonial (trans)feminism.

¹⁴² Following these grounds a provoking reading is the article White Fragility. See: DiAngelo, 2011.

¹⁴³ The decolonial *mestizaje* in Santos is in relation to what Gloria Anzaldúa refers to as the ‘new mestiza’. See the section entitled ‘Border Thought and Affectivity’ in Chapter 2.

¹⁴⁴ This discussion has been presented on Chapter 4, in the section entitled ‘Aesth(et(h)ics of Resistance: A Desirable Spectacle for the Spectator’.

Performance has been the terrain of constant development and exchange. As he states, Daniel B. Chávez as transsexual afro-Latino and Cherokee descendant has developed his in-becoming corporeal and political re-existence through performance.¹⁴⁵ As he understands it, corporeal decolonisation is a process he expresses as a *devenir performer* (in-becoming performer):

This final goal of the decolonization of the body through performance does not try to reach a final aim, but to enter into a life process of becoming and decolonizing. The work of decolonization is the in-becoming [*devenir*] performer. [...] In-becoming performer comes from the desire to occupy and embody our bodies with a high consciousness and to present a struggle of presence with these bodies as we have not lived it in the past, for various reasons. When I speak of our bodies, I mean both the physical matter that feels, bleeds, sweats, is tired, as to the sphere of the spirit where we connect with energies, memories, and ancestry that are larger than our bodies and / or deeper than our inner beings. (Chávez, 2015: 92)¹⁴⁶

Chávez and d’Emilia’s contributions of radical tenderness within LPN and beyond have sharpened the radical possibilities of affect within intersectionality, working on a pedagogy that is shared and (re)developed internationally. Part of what Chávez (2015) expresses as a ‘*devenir performerx*’ (in-becoming performer) entails looking for or creating an environment within a community where risks can be taken in the regaining sovereignty of our bodies. In these gatherings structural violence is confronted through each body-subject’s particular experience that becomes communal through a delinking of these binomial categories of race, gender, and class understanding they are interconnected elements within a broader spectrum of oppressing forces.

¹⁴⁵ Daniel Chávez was previously Brittany Chávez, before September 2014. He now names himself Daniel B. Chávez.

¹⁴⁶ Original reads: ‘*Esta meta final de la descolonización corporal desde la performance no es pretender alcanzar una llegada, sino entrar en un proceso de vida de devenir y descolonizar. El trabajo de la descolonización está en el devenir performerx. [...] Devenir performerx viene de un deseo de ocupar y encarnar nuestrxs cuerpos con alta consciencia y plantear una lucha de presencia con estos cuerpos como no lo hemos vivido en el pasado, por razones variables. Cuando hablo de nuestrxs cuerpos, quiero decir tanto la materia física que siente, que sangra, que suda, que cansa, como el ámbito o el plano del espíritu donde conectamos con energías, memorias, y ancestralidades que son más grande de nuestrxs cuerpos y/o más profundo que nuestrxs internos.*’

Intersectionality has found tensions and contradictions when moving from social movements and academia into the realm of the state. Contradictions also emerge when intersectionality moves to the spectatorial, or the idea of the spectatorial, where identities are not neutralised, but rather turned into spectacle. The internationality of La Pocha Nostra, as a system, as a pedagogical project and as public presentation works with intersectionality, through the challenges and possibilities it brings.

Intersectionality presented under local ground has its own challenges. Although the multicultural has been addressed so far, intersectionality is definitely not reduced to multicultural affairs. At this point even referring to multi-cultural becomes reductive and misleading, especially when addressing the multiplicity and complexity of the Caribbean, a site of many and continuous rounds of colonisation. The Caribbean Sea could be a point of union and intersection between the islands; nonetheless, the fragmentation in the Caribbean has been and still is a colonial strategy of isolation and invisibility.¹⁴⁷ Within this broader context, the island of Puerto Rico, a former U.S. colony ('territory belonging to but not part of') has noticeable high rates of social inequality. Racially, in Puerto Rico a discourse of hybrid race mixture or 'colonial' *mestizaje*—a metaphoric construction of the three roots: Taíno, Spaniard, and African that functions as an European-led whitewashing—cultivates the notion of 'folkloric blackness' as a static and historical version of blackness that represents its African heritage linked to the idea of cultural tradition denying its contemporary presence.¹⁴⁸ Racial segregation then refers not only to social place but also to time (captured in past

¹⁴⁷ Before the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors migration and commerce between the indigenous populations of the islands was common (mainly Taíno, Arawak, and Caribs). The current variation of languages in the Antilles responds to the different rounds of colonisation. In general the indigenous communities were mostly vanquished in the conquest and the enslaved West Africans were kidnapped and brought to the Caribbean for labour work. Currently some islands are independent while others are still 'dependencies' or 'territories' of other nations. Each of these islands in the archipelago is a historical mixture or melange of their coloniser's culture (Spain, Netherlands, United Kingdom, United States, and France) together with the racial, spiritual and cultural commonalities of the region produced by the enslaved's culture. The Caribbean region shares a cultural background linked to race and oppression, geography and sea, and a colonising project.

¹⁴⁸ Puerto Rico has a tendency of what Yeidy M. Rivero (2005) calls 'Tuning out blackness'—as if it was a radio channel you could lower off. This tendency entails a 'folklorisation' process as described by Isar Godreau (2002), where blackness is 'nostalgic' and seen as 'distant' in space and time. This folklorisation denies what Petra R. Rivera-Rideau (2013) refers to as the 'urban blackness', the presence of blackness in the city centres and furthermore in the present time.

generations). In this racial invisibility or ‘confusion’ (Pedreira, 1934) of great inequality, gender violence, misogyny and homophobia are not uncommon. The hypervisible presence of Freddie Mercado’s persona in the Puerto Rican ‘here and now’ is intersected by and responding to all these oppressions through (social) place and (historical and current) time.

Mercado’s embodiment becomes the cartography of a decolonial trans/hybridity that denies racial recipes and gendered binomials. The trans- intersectionality of Mercado is not only presented as gendered diversity and multiple sexuality but also engaging with the fragmentation of race (a problematic hybridity of hierarchical Darwinism) and class. The constant creation, recreation and reproduction of his doll-Self and doll community is a commentary on racial constructions in the island, which are intrinsic to cosmogonies and ways of being. Part of this radical doll-making/becoming in Mercado’s process is linked to Afro-Caribbean practices where the possibilities both of healing and of imagining / creating new subjectivities (through the projection of the doll) can affect and reflect onto the social ground.¹⁴⁹ In Puerto Rico, first experiment of neoliberal capitalism (Carvalho, 2013), Mercado turns over individualism through the ritualistic creation of new subjectivities/ dolls in a decolonial approach rooted in Afro-Caribbean practices, while his movement in social space connects the fragmented realities through his persona. As the mother doll he may embody a two face reality where the black face takes over as a contour over-imposed to the white frontal gaze (*Bodegonas*, 2013; *Resistencia en fractura...Desnuda*, 2017); become the white virgin of hybridity with prosthetic white and mulato babies holding hands over her waist where the offspring of this spiritual/virginal encounter alludes to the invisible other (in holy spirit) that produced the mestizaje (*La Virgen Madre*, 2004); or be the white motherly care-taker of the black baby doll, a historical critique through the racial inversion of the black *madama* or nanny that raises white children (*Madama*, 1996). Likewise, his engagement with the feminine and the animalesque responds to the historical introduction of colonial systems that divide the human from the non-human (zone of being / zone of not being), still

¹⁴⁹ See the sub-section entitled ‘Unheimliche Objects? : Disidentifications of Mother Doll’ in Chapter 3.

experienced today and presented as the main barrier for generating a local and global dialogue of democratic futures (Davis, 2016). Mercado's transient presence and shared transformations (publicly morphing from one persona to the other especially in his *Cabaret* presentations, a processual similarity with La Pocha Nostra) is a radical practice that challenges any identitarian or cultural purity and simplicity. The local un-identify-ability of Mercado has been read as identity transvestism (Venegas, 1998) and more recently as 'transloca', a term coined by Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes which he defines as

a gay Latino man (or *loca*) who uses drag as part of an exploration of transgender, translocal, and transnational phenomena, and who bridges the *trans* to account for the multiplicities of gender, sexuality, race, and geography.(2015)

La Fountain-Stokes' approach to Mercado's wider context of 'queer terrorists' is a great contribution for reading further into the transgression of this artist. For him Mercado is the transloca 'par excellence', inserting this artist into the transnational phenomena of the gay Latino (living or coming-and-going to the U.S. mainland) or into a wider world notion beyond the insular.¹⁵⁰ This consequently runs the risk of dismissing the particularities of Mercado's life-work persona in relation to his (trans) locality, based and developed *within* the island of Puerto Rico in a constant performance of multiple social mobility—a flux that inhibits and defies the segregations between the private/public, institutional/popular, high class/immigrant, Art World/night life, and spectacular/daily in a 'very queer democracy' (La Fountain-Stokes, 2015). Mercado's constant performance is a metaphor and incarnation of movement (a performativity of movement), within class/race/gender/religion stratification (in a physical and symbolic space) through a constant transit of the Self in becoming (embodied-spiritual). While Mercado is not precisely within what La Fountain-Stokes refers to as the transnational phenomena in terms of the relation to the flow between the main-land and the is-land, Mercado's transnational bonds could be perhaps alternatively formulated with the neighbouring island of the Dominican Republic. These bonds have solidified in the past

¹⁵⁰ La Fountain-Stokes (2011) includes Mercado to the transnational as 'he threatened and challenges insularist geography, and quotes in every moment a much wider, transcontinental and transoceanic world.'

decade (although one of his first exchanges was in 1995 with *Coco Barroco*), not only with the current invitations of Dominican cultural institutions and awarded recognition (27th National Biennial, Santo Domingo, 2013) of Mercado's ground-breaking work but also through Mercado's constant public affirmation of the sister/brotherhood between both islands and their people.¹⁵¹ This recognition is of particular relevance as the numerous groups of Dominican immigrants in Puerto Rico live under a precarious and invisibilised socio-political reality. These bonds also contest the colonial fragmentation of the Caribbean. Intersecting oppressions are revealed under the in-becoming movement of Mercado's body-geography.

Intersectionality, in a sense, tensions while making possible the re-definition or trans-definition of the local/global binomials. The challenge is to trigger radical transformations in our societies that do not erase particular ways of being and seeing the world but rather allow cross-contamination connected to ancestral memories and future becomings. The notion of solidarity becomes reformulated as gaining awareness—through a fight over the sovereignty of our bodies—of points of convergence woven and in the process of being weaved.

5.2 Trans EroticA

The transfeminist struggles disassociate from the patriarchal and heteronormative models and are positioned as antiracists, anti-capitalists, and decolonial. In other words, the transfeminist politics do not pretend to arrange static political identities but insist in self-criticism within the same movement and open to other processes: other bodies, other epistemes, other sexualities. (Rojas and Aguirre, 2013: 134)

Our relationships with the erotic impact our larger communities, just as our communities impact our senses of the erotic. (Driskill, 2004: 52)

As Angela Davis (2016) notes, recently the transgender movement has become an important territory from where to fight for justice. Nevertheless, she points out, there is a fundamental difference between the dominant representations of trans issues, which usually stress

¹⁵¹ *Coco Barroco* was presented in Dominican Republic, Santo Domingo as part of the exhibition *Aproximación del Caribe* (1995) at the Colegio Dominicano de Artistas Plásticos. A variation of *Coco Barroco* was presented in 1998 at the Museo Extremeño e Iberoamericano de Arte Contemporáneo (MEIAC) at Badajoz, Spain as part of the exhibition *Caribe: Exclusión, fragmentación y paraíso*.

individual identity, and the trans intersectional movements, which consider both race and class as fundamental elements in the struggle of transgendered people. I situate the erotic proposals of La Pocha Nostra and Freddie Mercado under the latter as presented in the previous section. The struggle of sexuality and gender becomes myopic if race and class are not centrally accounted for in the affective revolution. Furthermore, it entails a historiographical overview in gender conceptions that surfaces its Western imposition within a greater enterprise of global arrangements; but also looking into those colonised societies where not only the fe/male divide was (or still is) not conceived as a 'natural' binary that follows the social arrangements assumed by the West to be universal, but also understanding these other forms of 'gendering' as intrinsically weaved to spirituality.

Sexuality and gender are dislocated and relocated into a time and space that has been queered, that is, following Judith Halberstam (2005), not conforming to the Western model of desired stability and its bourgeois structure of the mono nuclear family as sole system of support and affectivity. Alternative models of temporality entail place-making practices of a 'new understanding of space enabled by the production of queer counterpublics.' (6) These 'nonnormative logics and organisations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time' (6) which Halberstam understands as 'queer' take upon Foucault's comments in 'Friendship as a Way of Life' where homosexuality (or queer) entails a way of life that is a menace to heterosexual life. On understanding of what is and how this heterosexual life comes to be is useful to address Beatriz Preciado's term 'sexpolitics' presented in *Testo Yonqui*, in conversation with Foucault, as one of the dominant forms of biopolitics in the West that emerge from disciplinary capitalism in the late XIX century:

The heterosexual body, one of the apparatus with the most governmental success of the sexpolitics in the nineteenth-century period, is the product of a division of the labour of the flesh with which each organ is defined in relation to its function, reproductive as well as producer of masculinity or femininity, of normality or perversion. (Preciado, 2008: 59)

This initial capitalist society produces the individual as owner of an identity and of one sole sexual truth. Within this system of recognition any corporeal divergence becomes a monstrous, unnatural, immoral perversion. Sexual practices become identities, and disciplinary political conditions. After World War II, new technologies of the body (surgery, body-modification, and hormonal pharmacology) changed the construction of subjectivity; these micro politics of control now take the shape of the body. The body does not inhabit discipline, it is inhabited by it. Preciado affirms the invention of 'gender' (femininity/masculinity) comes in this post World War II period. In dialogue with Butler, she explains that 'the certainty of being a man or woman is a somatic-political fiction produced by a combination of technologies of the body's domestication...' and that 'gender functions as an operative program through which sensorial perceptions are produced taking the shape of affects, desires, actions, beliefs, identities.' (Preciado, 2008: 89)

In Preciado's reading, gender as a post World War II somatic-political construction of the body's domestication functions as control mechanism of sensorial production carving through and shaping the idea of the 'innermost' 'self'. On a more recent writing (2013a), Preciado calls upon a peaceful insurrection of 'total affection' (*afecto total*), a revolution where *we* are a 'sex-semiotic battalion, a cognitive guerrilla, an armada of lovers.' (Preciado, 2013a: 13) The notion of 'gender' which Preciado discusses is localised as a Western construction (the term itself was coined by the West, by child psychologist John Money in 1947), and part of the historicity of West, never in spite of its colonial relation. The globalisation of the notion of 'gender' and its multiple dissidences must take into consideration its legacy especially when aiming to produce alternative affective possibilities in the call for a revolution beyond the modern construction of subjectivities.

The 'performing' of 'gender' is conceived in other cultural contexts, geographies and times delinked from Judith Butler's 1990 iconic contributions and revealing formulations on this matter (Butler, 1990a; 1990b). Carnival and ritual are symbolic sites that produce the disruption, reversal and trans-aggression of gendered norms, among other socially constricted

hierarchies and dichotomies imposed by the West during the colonisation processes. I will briefly discuss notions of gender initially in the Yoruba ritual /life threaded in the underoil of the (trans)local performances of Freddie Mercado to follow with First Nations people's ancestral recovery of the native knowledge of the 'Two-Spirit' in relation to ex-Pocha member Daniel B. Chávez' ideas and experiences woven into La Pocha pedagogy.

Two years after Butler's *Gender Trouble*, Margaret Thompson Drewal published her research on Yoruba ritual, in which she argues that Yoruba themselves are conscious that gender is a construction. 'Most of the binary oppositions invoked in literature on gender [...] say perhaps more about how the West thinks than they do about any non-Western reality.' (1992: 174). On Thompson Drewal's last chapter 'Gender Play' she explains:

Even with the sexual divisions within masking and possession trance, both men and women have institutionalized opportunities to take on the attributes of the opposite gender temporarily, either glorifying it or satirizing it; in either case engaging in an ongoing dialectic on gender. [...] That Yoruba shift back and forth between gender roles in ritual situations, that are not necessarily construed as either comical or horrendous, it is and of itself significant. It suggests that Yoruba are conscious that gender is a construction, dividing sex into two mutually exclusive categories to underscore biological difference. What this does, in effect, is to channel human behavior that is not biologically determined. (1992: 186)¹⁵²

In Yoruba mythology and its traces found in the Caribbean, the *orisha* (Yoruba spirit) Ogún, for example, is the male deity of iron and war, but not necessarily his warrior essence is always masculine as women may also be daughters of Ogún and become possessed by the 'male' energy in ritual. Gender is enacted again after possession. Nevertheless, ritual does not operate as a timeless model of/for society outside of the 'real' but constructs how reality is understood and experienced. These African cultures are constructed through the ritualization

¹⁵² This quote by Thompson Drewal was read directly to me by visual and performing artist Awilda Sterling-Duprey, a past teacher, close friend, and collaborator of Freddie Mercado. Mercado was introduced to performance by Sterling-Duprey and has been greatly influenced by her notions of ritual/gender/ blackness (*negritud*). Sterling-Duprey, who has been initiated and is involved in the Yoruba-derived religion Santería, conceives the performance-ritual time/space as where she feels and she can become her true self, a experience influenced by African cultures' ritualization of life. She understands that the disdain for African culture in Puerto Rico is due to a systematic ignorance: 'What we know is constructed ignorance' (Sterling-Duprey, 2011).

of life where human behaviour is channelled and agentic. Dichotomies between the sacred and the profane are transcended as nothing is entirely profane. These religious practices (especially relevant in transatlantic slavery) function as enactments of subversion of power—ways of achieving agency for humans. Anybody who has the power, the ability to invite the spirits, to control the spirits, to bring them, and ‘make them say things’, has the power to influence people (Okagbue, 2013). In the invention of the Americas the spiritual practices of the enslaved West Africans resisted the colonial enterprise in a survival syncretism or transculturation of the *orishas* with the Christian saints.¹⁵³ In this ‘cosmological duality’ of the ‘New’ World the *orisha* Changó, masculine hunter and warrior, became associated with Saint Barbara, and was first used by Puerto Rican Spiritualists as an *orisha* to whom (male) homosexuals became devotees. (Pérez y Mena, 1998)

Until this point, the ‘gender’ construction has been discussed as an anatomically identified social category. Locating what is being constructed also needs to identify who is doing the constructing. Using Western gender theories to analyse other cosmogonies and ways of living becomes part of an epistemic imperialism. The radical investigations of Oyèrónke Oyèwùmí (1997) address the historicity of the invention of woman as a colonial imposition that did not exist in pre-colonial Yoruba society, which did not organise itself by social categories based on gender (while seniority or birth-order were determinant factors to social arrangement). More broadly, Oyèwùmí’s work emphasises that human anatomical differences were not the basis of social categories in pre-colonial Yorubaland. Consequently, social segregation accounted through race and gender is a Western contribution brought with the colonial process. As phrased by Walter Dignolo (2015) the colonial wound is rooted on the two foundations (arguably one with several manifestations) of the colonial matrix of power: patriarchy/masculinity and racism.

¹⁵³ Regarding Afro-Latin cultures in the Caribbean, scholar Andrés I. Pérez y Mena believes religious syncretism has been a false proposition; iconography may be syncretised while the believers distinguished between Catholic beliefs and their Yorubaland religious inheritance. European saints, he argues, were not used to become the *orishas* (Yoruba spirits) rather to *hide* them. ‘[...] it is not that the religion is syncretized but that believers in Afro-Latin religions can have two religious cosmologies.’ (1998: 20) This cosmological duality is the core of Afro-Latin religiosity.

From an-other cosmogony but with historical similarities threaded by colonialism, Cherokee activist, writer and performer Qwo-Li Driskill (2004), in the text 'Stolen from Our Bodies', speaks of a 'colonised sexuality' where the sexual values of the dominant culture have been internalised. 'As Native people, our erotic lives and identities have been colonized along with our homelands.' (52) In this colonisation process 'I have not only been removed from my homelands, I have also been removed from my erotic self and continue a journey back to my first homeland: the body.' (53) Some people from the First Nations, including Driskill, have revived the term *niizh manitoag* (problematically translated into 'Two-Spirit', a wording that reproduces Western binaries) as a resistance to colonial definitions of gender together with the understanding that the terms 'queer' and 'trans' still ignore their complexities and particularities and are decontextualized from the Native communities.¹⁵⁴

Driskill notes that these internalised European sexual values include sexism and the construction of masculinities rooted in genocides and sexual abuse of Native and African peoples, an essential aspect for understanding the history of the European invasion to the 'Americas' ('Turtle Island' as called by the Natives of the North). Moreover, s/he calls for a return or continuation of the erotic in human and non-human forms connecting the erotic to the sacred cosmogony of the Indigenous. Regaining the erotic wholeness from ancestral memory functions as a 'radical, holistic decolonization', (Driskill, 2004: 58) a process of what Driskill coined as 'Sovereign Erotic' over the bodies/souls and lands. By connecting individual desire and wounding with collective stories of violence, dispossession and imposition, s/he understands that the ongoing processes of decolonisation cannot be separated from healing our sexualities. This healing process reconnects ancestral knowledge with a present affective reconfiguration that recognises the impact of colonialism into intimacy that has carved itself in all relational experiences (between parents and children; partners, friends and lovers; humans and the land, and the spiritual world). Similarly Mississauga Nishnaabeg

¹⁵⁴ The Ojibwa term *niizh manitoag* was a pan-Indigenous term selected in the 1990s by lesbians and gay indigenous in Winnipeg with the intention of including the diverse indigenous identities GLBTQ. Pocha member Daniel B. Chávez has identified himself with this cosmological terminology and has been greatly influenced by Driskill's sovereign erotic (2015).

academic/artist/activist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson evokes a 'decolonial love' (2015) grounded in a nest of good relationships which do not exclude human relationships to water and land and to the impact this has on the spirit world. It is also the reclamation of the spectrum of genders, sexualities and sexual orientations, relationship orientations and the concept of love itself. Simpson explains that often the settler colonial society pathologises the Native's love and their concepts of love which did not include binary gender conformations or the affective disassociation from the land and the spirits.

Indigenous women and Two-Spirit writers are reclaiming sovereign erotics. Driskill introduces the terminology of the erotic, in dialogue with Audre Lorde, as encompassing all aspects of our existence beyond the personal. For Lorde (1978) the erotic knowledge does not separate the spiritual from the political.

I speak of it as an assertion of the lifeforce of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives. (1978: 55)

Lorde contrasts the source of power and information of the erotic to the pornographic, for it represents disaffection and the suppression of feeling. The erotic is to be alive; an ongoing presence through feeling. In the Indigenous context its sovereignty works as 'an erotic wholeness healed and/or healing from the historical trauma that First Nations people continue to survive, rooted within the histories, traditions, and resistance struggles of our nations' (Driskill: 2004, 53). The erotic has become a tool against the intimate effects of the settler's imperialism (politicians, conquistadors, priests) where the personal, natural, territorial, metaphysical, and political are not contrasted.

The playfully sexual displays of the artists of La Pocha Nostra and the actions of Mercado are a reminder of the agentic possibilities of the erotic carried through embodied histories of oppression. Their bodies work through caged desire exposed to the spectators as invitation, provocation, and questioning of their own erotic empowering as spectrum. The lines drawn between the pornographic and the erotic (as empowering and potential joyous feeling held in

all life's aspects) are interestingly at tension and not exempt of controversy. Ways of being and feeling are encountered and in negotiation, within a group of collaborators, and within the encounters with the spectators.

Chávez quotes Driskill in the beginning of his text: 'We were stolen from our bodies, but now we are taking ourselves back.' In this reclaiming through the erotic, what mechanisms from the *settlers* are not yet delinked? In this trans-it through histories of oppression and ancestral knowledges revived, evoked and relived as present and futures possibilities, the body of knowledge/ the knowledge of the bodies must continuously delink from body-spirit-mind imposed divides that affect directly the erotic proposals. The connection between the erotic and the sacred is dismissed in Christian imported traditions or directed towards a discourse of gendered disciplinary restrictions of the bodies; the biopolitics worded as 'purity'. The monstrous / sane, the impure / pure, the savage / civilised dichotomies created in the different rounds and complexities of the colonisation processes, traced as beasts those to be tamed. In this violent process affects and percepts (to insert a Western concept/understanding. Deleuze and Guattari, 2005) were also colonised. That is, when Driskill speaks of colonised sexuality it extends into a colonised relationality with the other beings (human and non-human beings, land, spirits, etc.) in which, consequently, affect is the main vessel to be cut off... dismembered. To re-appropriate and freely associate Chicana artist Amalia Mesa-Bains' notions (2001), this politicised spirituality is based on a communal sensibility.

When do hypersexualised performances become a transgression of empowered erotics charged in spiritual energy and when are they a reproduction of the heteropatriarchal / colonised programmed fantasies through the pornographic female/ othered body? Contradictions are welcomed.

As part of the spectacular, the bodies of La Pocha Nostra present the desired bodies by the heteropatriarchal colonial gaze, even within the display of GLBTQ affairs. In a cabaret

fashion, by heightening their ‘sexuality’ the bodies reproduce the desired objects in display. The sexual display of colonial desires plays through those female, transsexual, othered (Indigenous, Black, Arab) bodies pierced with the violence of possession, imposition and control. These appropriations aim to critique an imaginary of racialized sexuality and uncover its political functionality. However, the politics of the spectacle become diffuse under the sexy body display. The aesthetics used in La Pocha follow a historical tradition of Mexican and Chicana employment of female staged sexuality that has consequently co-existed as a corrosion of Christianity’s virginal impositions.¹⁵⁵ However, this staging tradition of women’s sexuality and erotic display does not develop under male direction as it does (not unproblematically) in the case of LPN.

The processual and pedagogic are different from the spectacular display. In this alternative terrain of La Pocha’s proposal, Daniel B. Chávez (2015) understands performance as a possible terrain to decolonise the body, where he can seek to regain a sovereign erotic coming principally from a spiritual positioning rather than through physical appearance or practice. Following Chávez, Dani d’ Emilia (2015) speaks of an ‘embodied self-decolonisation’ (*auto-descolonización corporal*), a dynamic process of undoing and redoing oneself where LPN pedagogy offers each participant a space to autonomously handle her embodied colonialism and regain corporal sovereignty, allowing empowerment at both an intimate and collective level. For d’Emilia operating from a radical tenderness in the processes of performance-pedagogy of LPN,

activates collectively the energy of the erotic (of Eros, the one who produces affect), feeding the creative potential that emerges from the libido in the physical and social body, as an embodied strategy of resistance against neoliberal politics [...] (2015b: 26)

In a different modality of embodiment, the voluptuous prosthetic doll-body of Freddie Mercado is closer to playing with the grotesque and the monstrous than with the luxuriously

¹⁵⁵ With their very unique aesthetical and generational differences, inserted in this tradition we can mention the works of Astrid Hadad, Nao Bustamante, Rocío Boliver (aka Congelada de Uva), Anúk Guerrero, and Xandra Ibarra (aka La Chica Boom).

fleshy. The oversexualised embodiment has also been recurrent in his work however under an inanimate aesthetic. Interestingly, the becoming-object of Mercado defies objectification. The invitation to play with his doll-Self is charged with a critical energy nested under a female spirituality. This becoming-object, which initially may seem paradoxical, rests in the notion of animism—the spiritual essence held in all animate beings and inanimate objects. This process mediates the erotic through the in-becoming selfhood. Mercado's delicatessens, his erotic selves presented in *Freddilicias* (2014) for example, come to existence 'because we are all fruits and we are all tasty' (*porque todos somos frutas y estamos saborsas*), as the subtitle of this piece indicates. His *Freddilicias*' embodiment is saturated with painted images of his multiple selves (his women personae including historical figures like Frida Kahlo) attached and inhabiting his body as a garden of earthly delights. The flavourful subtitle for his work is part of Mercado's own *delicias*, both delicacy and sensual, emotional and energetic pleasure, recognised also in and through the others; as we are all different fruits having and producing multiple desires.

Treating desire as another construction expands its possibilities of de- and re-construction within and beyond the sexual into communal affectivities. The autoerotics bring pleasure into the creative force of self-existence in resistance to physical, psychic and spiritual impositions. In the erotic, affective patterns are observed with critical understanding and subversive feeling on how these have been constructed by societal purposes of control in many levels and over many worldviews... many bodies (human, animal, inanimate, spirit). Affectivity is not only compassion; it is tuning into similar wavelengths, recovering and living through other embodied sensibilities.

5.3 Perversion in the Art World: A Play-full Story

Playfulness allows disinhibition and inter-action, a *relajo* (Taylor, 2003) from the norms and joy in defiance. A seemingly harmless moment where sharing (even ‘only’ through presence) becomes an act of complicity. The body of the artists is given for play, as a vessel of transformation. The creative force in play is a risky stepping out of the everyday, dancing its own steps into existence. The pleasure of playing connects to the creative life-force within those playing and creates the desire to play in those left out. Play is at the base of civilization (Huizinga, 2004), and what is at stake is the fixed nature of the imposed societal norms. Playing to contest the ‘real’; playing to exist; playing to preserve and defend; playing to experiment. The perverted nature of play understands in the creation of rules for playing, the functionality of setting behaviours, propelling or denying affectivities, framing or inhibiting desires...the possibility of creating norms, laws, moral, and ethics. The perversion is an act of denying and re-making, working through mechanisms of attraction. In the Art World, perversion is constantly at play. As we can experience through Freddie Mercado and La Pocha Nostra, performances *inside* the institution carry their own logics of perverse resistance.

One form of social playfulness might take the form of *relajo*, an understanding of a situation that includes aspects of seduction and criticism through disorder, lack of solemnity, and elasticity of the norms and habits. Diana Taylor (2003) understands *relajo* as ‘a specifically Mexican mode of debunking hegemonic assumptions through a disruptive acting-out’ (68). Beyond Mexico, *relajo* is a commonly used word also in the Hispanic Caribbean. It is a sharp joke but also a common state of well-being implied usually, although not restrictively, under bacchanal enjoyment. This specific wording has an etymological connection to the state of being relaxed (*relajarse*). Relaxation is embodied; muscles are loose, while thoughts are also under a state of openness to seduction and joy. Norms are toyed with pleasure. For Taylor, through the humorous and subversive nature of *relajo*,

the world becomes divided into those who understand the gesture and those who don't: *Relajo* reverses the colonialist insider/outsider configuration, embracing those who get the joke and excluding those left wondering what it's all about. Like camp and rasquache, *relajo* denies easy access. It's a form of minoritarian coding—of revealing and concealing—in order to survive in the public sphere. (2003: 130)

However, *relajo* works through different levels of analysis that can also respond to a multiplicity of references and the hybridity of gestures that move beyond the insider/outsider arrangement. This humorous survival is also producer of imaginary in the public sphere. It is a responsive-constructing mechanism of counter-publics.

The distortion of the 'real' or misrepresentation becomes performance's thriving force, not aiming at re-presentation but at corroding the notion of 'reality', of the space-time of bodies. Spatiality and its implications vary from the institutionalised space to the state's 'public' space, from the global space to the space of self-embodiment. Vigilance is present in all but with significant differences. The space-time of bodies entails a psychical map that establishes a conception of space and time through the subject's perspective of her own body-image. Specular is thus the component of the ego and of space. Can representation be perverted? Can desire be conceived without the mirror?

Perversion is understood to be a deviation from the original course of something, of turning aside from the truth. The assumption of the originary and the true are done from a locus of enunciation, the place from which knowledge is created and articulated (Mignolo, 2000), enunciated from a perspective that invents the entity it enunciates. In other words, the pervert is the enunciation's agent of the perverse, which before its enunciation did not exist as an entity. The historicity of the Western notion of perversion dating from late XIV century was abstracted from its military connotations into moral (theological) implications that dictate behavioural conduct, proscribing the perverse as unnatural and evil. Its sexual prescriptive implications are determined in late XIX century with the rise of psychological thought. Perversion, as movement of digression, assumes the dependency on that which is turning away from. However, as mentioned, the enunciation of the perverse invents it rather than

naming an existence. Aiming at perverting the systemic structures of control over the space-time of bodies, works by corroding these structures from an outsider/insider perspective.

Insider/outsider is the trickster figure, the pervert par excellence. As discussed in Chapter 2, the performances of La Pocha Nostra and Freddie Mercado evoke the trickster energy in its most contemporary forms and deformations. Trickster does playful perversions on notions of the space-time of bodies and their spectral constructions, using a playing out, a *relajo*, through the desire for sexual and affective regulation and surveillance. The spatiality is located or pointed out, its social norms re-enacted through hyperbole, and perverted with bodies that physically and/or symbolically lick and masturbate from it to extract the their own pleasure from these structures of power. This behaviourally perverse doing of trickster is creating a spectral play on society's mechanisms.

Inserting the monstrous bacchanal on the Art World cultural market created and designed for exclusion (selection process) or fetish on the global economy is an insider/outsider trickster's move.¹⁵⁶ The desiring intrigue of the empowered circuits on the art peripheral to these has been embedded in several discourses from the initial fascination for the 'exotic', 'primitive' and 'fantastic' to the more recent humanitarian approach and the socio-political engagement with the subaltern communities.¹⁵⁷ The phenomenon of inverted curating adopted by curator Gerardo Mosquera (1994), where the countries which host the art of other cultures are the ones who curate the shows, has been legitimised and normalised as part of the same scheme of those countries that produce the cultural discourse (curating cultures) and those countries that are defined and described by the latter (curated cultures). The figure of the curator as 'discoverer' has been led by the notion of transcultural colonialism. A new model proposed

¹⁵⁶ Throughout this section Art is written with capital 'A' referring to art inserted in the institutional and global market.

¹⁵⁷ Cosmopolitanism in art has begun with the notion of the art biennale born from the model of the Venice Biennale in 1895 with an imperialistic division of the nation states. Hierarchical arrangements were evidenced when countries outside the centre locus were brought to the art market through ethnographic objects which were given value by the agents of the centre locus for being expressions of a cultural identity with anthropological quality. The desire and mystic for these othered cultures is evidenced through several 1980s exhibitions such as: *Le Magiciens de la Terre* (Centre Pompidou, Paris: 1989); *Art of the Fantastic: Latin America 1920-1987* (Indianapolis Museum of Art: 1987); *Primitivism in XX Century Art* (Museum of Modern Art, N.Y: 1984). This is not an exhaustive list.

in 1984 with the Havana Biennale, effective or not in its original proposed resistance, has predominated in further contemporary biennials where the attempt of inclusion of countries *inside* and *outside* the main locus of dominance in the Art World has triggered an internationalisation of art widening the view towards contemporary art. However, as Mosquera notes, the lingua franca or in Mignolo's terms the locus of enunciation remains the same:

Although art gains the rise of artists from all over the world who circulate internationally and exercise influence, on the other hand it is simplified, since artists have to express themselves in a lingua franca that has been hegemonically constructed and established. In addition, all lingua franca, before being a language of all is a language of somebody, whose power has allowed them to impose it. (Mosquera, 2011)

The lingua franca is produced not only by the agents of cultural potencies but also by those local agents from the cultural elite who participate of it: those who 'understand' Art. Trickster does its tricks, seduced by this scenario where intellectual/class segregation, capitalism, globalisation, and colonialism are ever-present and intrinsically intertwined. The lingua franca or imposed tongue is aroused and devoured. Museums, fairs, institutions, and biennales are spaces of imposed definitions where sexual imaginary of the exotic view of the Other is a resource used by artists as a weapon of the perverted. That is, the allusion of the Others' (sexually) perverted nature speaks directly into the discourses enunciated, invented, by the enunciators.

In a provocative and alluring form the doing of the trickster energy aims to transform the image/imaginary through the imposed logics of desire, and/or appeal to transform sensitivities. These transmutations of desire allude to diverse deformations in relation to the space performed and how space performs our subjectivities. The abovementioned nature of the Art World provokes the former as strategy of mirroring the spectral imaginary while the latter as affective re-existence is worked through the in-becoming citizen in the case of Freddie Mercado's whereabouts in the multiplicity of public spheres and in the pedagogical

and collaborative unions that embody the radical tender in the case of La Pocha Nostra. While the transformation of sensitivities is worked through differently, both Mercado and LPN share similar sexually ‘perverse’ aesthetic proposals when approaching the institutionalised spaces and their image-producing discourse. In my understanding, the mechanisms of how these spaces work allow a certain degree of transgression where the most radical transformations cannot be cultivated. Inhabiting these institutional spaces allows these artists to infiltrate through parodies and subtle critiques of the representational. It is in these spaces where *relajo* is most pungent, while in other stances it may call for a sharing of attractions.

Inserting himself inside the Art World, Freddie Mercado’s in-becomings include the ‘art’ spectator: the visitor of galleries, art fairs, biennials, and museums. *Looking* at Art while becoming ‘it’ is part of Mercado’s most constant criticism. He began this strategy since his early performance years. As he commented to Peggy Ann Bliss on his performative attendance during the 1991 opening of the 9th San Juan Biennial of Caribbean and Latin American Graphics: ‘This is my piece of graphic art [...] One must always say something, even if one is not chosen by the jury’ (Bliss, 1991:29). Organised by the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture, the uninvited 23 year old artist came to exhibit himself face-veiled and wearing a long black Renaissance dress, which Bliss attributes to ‘his own protest against machismo’. The playfully sensuous and flirty big wo/man strolled through the hallways of the Arsenal de la Marina museum, observing Art and chatting with the other Art spectators. Regularly on the openings of art exhibitions in museums and galleries of San Juan, Freddie Mercado would attend as spectator-spectacle and refocus the gaze towards his persona challenging the art objects displayed in a seducing game over the attention of the spectators (Álvarez Lezama, 1995c; Páes, 2014). On these Art visits Mercado can also become overtly sexual inviting the other spectators into his perversion. On the CIRCA Puerto Rico 2007 International Art Fair he attended as *La Vaca Maja* (The Spanish Maja Cow), a veiled cow creature that milks herself and feeds cold white (seminal) yogurt to spectators out of her

udder prosthetic.¹⁵⁸ The perverting of the spaces is together with the sexual prescriptive perversion always present in Mercado's transit through androgyny.

Mercado performs spectatorship to unveil its performativity and pervert its norms. In his sudden reconfiguration of the focal point of desire Mercado-as-spectator creates a crack that becomes an overture onto the norms that dictate how to be a body in space-time, in relation: to the Art object, to performing spectatorship, and to the other performing-spectators. Furthermore, the spectator-Art Space intrinsic relation is presented and played through. In a radical denial and market reformation of the institutional Art spaces, Mercado proposes to become the gallery space himself: '[the body] became an urgent gallery to exhibit immediately' (Mercado in Pérez Rivera, 2003: 79)—a similar notion to what the Berliner duo EVA & ADELE propose when they claim 'Wo wir sind ist Museum' (*wherever we are is museum*). As insider/outsider Mercado uses his body as the perversion of the spectator-spectacle-Art World space.

The bodies of La Pocha Nostra have satirically played with becoming the ethnographic specimen or the objects of study, placing themselves inside museum or university spaces as bodies to be investigated (desired) by those intellectual researchers or displayed as contemporary (trans)cultural and (trans)ethnical representative (border)creatures.¹⁵⁹ Using this colonial display mechanism they re-represent themselves under the logics of the Art space as a pedagogical filter that inscribes an outsiders' perspective (the figure of the Western ethnographer or anthropologist commonly male and white) as the ultimate truth regarding the colonised ('discovered' and studied) culture. In these museum and university contexts Lxs Pochxs saturate their bodies with fetishised cultural references mixed, changed, and replaced in front of the spectators throughout the performance. The troupe's performance proposal of a *museum of fetishized identities* has been continuously readapted and reformulated but nonetheless constant in their spectator/spectacle positioning. This *modus operandi* of

¹⁵⁸ See: Javier Rivera, 2007; La Fountain-Stokes, 2015; and Reyes Franco, 2007.

¹⁵⁹ One example is *Ex-Centris: A Living Diorama of Fetish-ized Other* performed in 2003 during Live Culture at London Tate Modern by La Pocha Nostra (Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Juan Ybarra and Michele Ceballos Michot) with Kazuko Hohki and Ansuman Biswas.

identitarian exhibition and disinhibition could also take the form of a catwalk of the bizarre. Spectators' participation invites the becoming-fetish. Play to become the Other. Play to become. Play to change of identity in complex and hybrid ways. Become attracted to changing forms.

In this play-full perversion with the spectating world, fetishism is enhanced through the sexually desired body/object. The mixed re-representation of the desired bodies is charged with historical and current implications of how and why these desires are constructed (e.g. a naked white sexy female body with a head burka having her breast cleaned by a sexy nun or an Indigenous-looking man that has on his bare chest written 'macho power' simulating a vaginal masturbation while a queered Che Guevara looks and enjoys).¹⁶⁰ Inserting the sexually constrained through a bacchanal of bodies and sensations inside the institution corrupts the behavioural codes with the inclusion of the spectators allowing the absurd, the repressed and the trashy to take the stage, while appealing to seduce back those power mechanisms that have imposed the norms of desire. The altered state produced by the simultaneity of the actions, with the atmospheric aid of the loud music and the lighting effects, alludes to a bahktinian carnival with a pedagogical twist that satirises (rather than denies) the modern construction of identitarian individuality contextualised through the imposition of colonial desire: suddenly spectators hear a voice that announces the 'performance exercise number #... activation of the body in museum-exhibition mode... random corny music' (*Corpo Insurrecto*, 2014). LPN uses pedagogical humour to critically approach the imperial exhibition format and to ridicule its epistemological superiority and 'objective' truth. The carnivalesque night scene is orchestrated by the voice of Guillermo Gómez-Peña mixed with other voices, tongues, languages, and sounds, which may play to become the activator(s) of creatures in this dystopian / utopian pluriverse while disfiguring and corrupting the institutional lingua franca. The all-encompassing nature and sensorial

¹⁶⁰ These examples are directly taken from the performance *Spiritus Mundi VS Aztec Ouroboros* presented in the II Bienal de Teatro da USP in São Paulo, Brazil on 12 December 2015.

intensity of these performances bombard the spectators with complex imaginary in the fashion of mass media's hyper-projection of discourse.

This image-experience production uses the body as a cultural display of the spectacle of otherness from where sexuality is a device that may work both as antidote and re-production of the imposed logics of desire—introduced and backed by power structures and colonial aggressions. As desiring and desired subjects/objects of Art institutions, La Pocha Nostra evokes a collective production of desire through performance. The desired becomes grotesque, deformed, and desired once again. Although there is an integration of other bodies through the workshop collaborations, the core members (specially the women) have been constantly sexy bodies that are within the normative discourses of desire (slim, big breasted, shaved, etc.) even under the performance's integration of the queer. How much of these desirable displays of the Other are actually transgressive? By mimicking the sexualised imagery towards the female colonised body, the complexity of gender and its colonial implications is not fully deconstructed in LPN's performances. The hyper-reproduction and reversal techniques (inviting the spectator to become Other) are at the expense of the Other's own erotica. Although disidentification methods might be in course during the construction of these performative personae—where the projected gendered and raced identities fixed by the mainstream dominant culture are charged 'to enact new ones and bring agency back to marginalised identities' (Chávez, 2016)—these are not perceptible for the Art World spectator of the othering spectacle. This limitation in LPN spectacles (made to be consumed by the Same) is part of the separation these performances continue to portray in terms of the spectatorial body.

Perversion works directly through the corrosion of the space/norms inhabited. In this sense, it is not delinked from these but plays in-between identification and counter-identification. With-in the Art World, Mercado is and also is not an Art spectator; the Pochxs are and also are not (trans)cultural specimens. Playing inside-out the Art World becomes a scenario where perversion emerges as a *relajo* of serious implications. In the cases briefly discussed,

performance's reformatory effect against the colonial logics of the state's neoliberal power is localised inside its own façade. Mercado and LPN attempt to question the overall logics the Art World mechanisms of consumption and knowledge through a carnivalesque allure where the sexually desirable connotation, presentation and deformation proposed shouts out directly producing echoes on the walls of the institutions. By mirroring, observing, hyperbolising and seducing the constructed discourses of the Art World these performances reframe the desiring Art human/object in an insider/outsider trickster move.

5.4 Vaga-bonds of Radical Tenderness

... a set of technologies for decolonizing the social imagination.[...] All these technologies together, when also joined to those of differential social movement and to those of differential consciousness, operate as a single apparatus that I call the physics of love. Love as social movement is enacted by revolutionary, mobile, and global coalitions of citizen activists who are allied through the apparatus of emancipation.
(Sandoval, 2000: 183)

In a radically political move, the pretext or vehicle of performance may begin to construct new affective possibilities that de-link from those imposed mirroring identifications traced through the history of the modern colonial construction which encompass the sense of self, time and space. It entails a core reformation process into politics of intimacy and relationality that resonate and crack into systemic power and citizenship. In the realm of the art institutions or within the global market of the Art World (where a filtered selection of people attend and spectatorship is produced: re-enacted and normalised) the performance's image/imaginary is presented and perverted through the imposed logics of desire corresponding to power positionality by playing to blur the body/object implications. Deconstruction and re-existence of affects and intersubjectivity are emerging on alternative grounds of communal spatiality—safe and/or exposed, in body proximity and/or in transcontinental symbiosis. Desire is also present but as a branching out of the erotic, understood as a creative force available in all and potentiated in its insertion and claim of life.

The affective trans-formation steps out of spectatorship into communal horizontal creation and responsibility, into creative energy undivided from our sense of being. It weaves a web of radical bonds in space-time and through the bodies-spirits.

In the constant weaving action, bonds in flux are made anew in a rooted sisterhood of civilians. These bonds are political unions at the time where affect has become revolutionary, and human to human connections are revisited through an *Other's* perspective which is extensive to the relation with other bodies (beings, spirits and the land). Moving away from the tricksterish performance dynamics dealing with the context of Art (in capital letters), the art-life of these proposals is timeless and space-less or rather moving from the static and constrained chronological versions of what time-space is. To these more contemporary proposals of tricksterism we include the performer's *devenir* as a life process to which we link to a performing civilian, found both in the pedagogy-life of LPN and in the 'constant performance' of Freddie Mercado (Mercado in Ramírez, 1999).

The wanderings of the vagabond are re-contextualised into the nature or action of what I have coined here as 'vaga-bonding', where the network of bonds that emerge in place and time, reform what place/time/Self may be.¹⁶¹ Art-life (politics) and what the figure of the artist-civilian is meant to be, becomes shattered in this process. The bond understands agency to be shared negotiation. The bonds need not only the stance of encounter and how the encountering may come about, but intersecting convergences that resist against the mirrored dynamics of identity-framing that confuse episteme or the sense of 'being in the World' with the denial of how constant bonding conforms the sense of Self. Vaga-bonding identity is constantly reconfigured together and outside of geo-specificity. Not denying the locus of where sensitivities and cosmogonies are built in each subject/body, but rather unblocking the sense of stability that does not account for the complexity of each ongoing inter-action. The wandering through bonds implies commitment and presence unrestrained by modern conceptions of time or space, what LPN and others understand by ephemeral communities,

¹⁶¹ See Chapters 2 and 3.

allowing the honouring of each other's struggles and the licking of each other's wounds. Vaga-bonding recognises the movement of one self in relation to others, to the bonds weaved, undone, and reconfigured. This unsteady movement works both as cause and effect, as purpose and response. Mercado's *constant* performance is that constant movement of the vaga-bonds, affecting-affected by each encounter/ space/ time and being balanced in each and all.

In this metaphor of movement, the specular (as component of the ego and of space) is re-focalised and de-linked from ideas of passivity/activity, mirroring or othering as selfhood; and is more in tune with ancestral and current notions of ritual play and carnival life connected to the evolving and reconfiguring of the intersubjective (where culture and politics are cored).¹⁶² Understanding the idea of the spectatorial is to understand the times, and how these uncover modes of power relationality: hierarchies that condition the time-space-subject/body of creation and how this creative force is *staged*—framed as something outside of life, detached and broken from the vessel of existence.

Understanding the spectatorial as part of an othering device under a perspective given in a certain history allows us to imagine and speak of an aperture into relationality that is beyond the staging of 'participation' into energetic implications of presence, animistic understandings of objects, inseparable being-becoming that transcends linear chronologies, and the aliveness of space—thinking, speaking, transforming (decolonising) and triggering memory consciousness. Resistance is not separated from re-existence, and this implies a sense of the world beyond political arrangements that fragment peoples, lands, animals, times, etc. Activism also takes the form spiritual resistance through communal sensibility. The horizontality is held through a conception of spider web's interconnectivity, intersectionality, and support. In horizontality, to play is to allow the breaking of the norms of reality's conception. Vaga-bonding says 'let's play'.

¹⁶² Anthropologist Victor Turner (1967) described the liminal aspect of ritual as the instance where culture is created.

Through radical tenderness the vaga-bonding is fed by an almanac of relations. Radical tenderness is playful, and joyous, erotic and sublime. It is the body-to-body force that holds trickster's energy. The radical tender is a physical phenomenon where intersubjectivity is charged in intercorporeality, an embodied politico-affective operating system of relationality (d'Emilia, 2015b). These forms of radical tender bonds are weaved through rebel joy producing shared pleasure 'translated into political action in the world' (d'Emilia, 2015b: 26). Shared pleasure is a bridge of affection that can sustain or become the base for understanding better the unshared and the fear of difference with the others, while activating and experimenting joy (erotic: life-force) in one's body/subjectivity that revolts from internal colonialism or self-imposed oppressions.¹⁶³ The threaded net—thin, transparent, strong, and in constant (re)generation—contests the borders set by the imposition of the 'I'. It connects with the OtherOneSelf (*Otromismo*) by peeling-off the ego, in the spatiality of the mirror. The translation of the political action in the world is embodied, in connectivity, as Freddie Mercado's erotic wanderings, sustained, cultivated, and growing in the radical tender advocated in LPN through Dani d'Emilia and Daniel B. Chávez's contributions.

The *vagari* of the radical tender bonds takes a place and a time, in the traditional sense. The body-subject of Mercado exposes in vulnerable force the wanderings, enacted inside the Puerto Rican insular colonial space. Mercado's almanac of relations creates movement, creates symbol, which circulates through the intimate-public of the colonised lands /colonised bodies...colonised histories, colonised relations. In the U.S. colony of Puerto Rico, the subjectivity of the home-land is detached from the is-land's territorial/legal policies. In the

¹⁶³ Internal colonialism is cored in the production/effect of neo colonialism: expressed by dependency, self-negation/ self-invisibility, numbness, separatism and isolation. The implications of the erotic force is a self and shared stimulation that rebels against the seeds of the neo colonial condition engrained in our psyches, sensitivities, bodies, and lands. D'Emilia (2015b) quotes Audre Lorde's erotic: '*compartir el gozo, ya sea físico, emocional, psicológico o intelectual, tiende entre quienes lo comparten un puente que puede ser la base para entender mejor aquello que no se comparte y disminuir el miedo a la diferencia. (...) Al estar, en contacto con lo erótico, me rebelo contra la aceptación de la impotencia y de todos los estados de mi ser que no son naturales en mí, que se me han impuesto, tales como la resignación, la desesperación, la humillación, la depresión, la autonegación.*' (Lorde: 1978).

U.S. mainland ‘I am a stranger in the country of my passport.’ (Lalo, 2016)¹⁶⁴ On a transnational sense, the relationality shaped in the trans-border movement of La Pocha Nostra’s performance pedagogy re-thinks/re-senses the notion of home, a primal survival gathering around the fire of humanity.¹⁶⁵ Chávez and d’Emilia quote Audre Lorde: ‘for the embattled/ there is no place/ that cannot be home/ nor is’ (1978) and ask ‘Can home exist among the embraces of the loved ones?’ ‘Is transit a home?’ (Chávez and d’Emilia, 2016: 12)¹⁶⁶ The global movement of peoples across nations and cultures shake fixation and solidity, affects and effects. Home nurtures and recharges the support for resistance, always in movement and backed by collective. The vaga-bonding, global or local, is weighted through and across relationality sharing embodied emotion. These life-art proposals take a stand for inter-relationality and the life-force or creative energy held in the bond.

As d’Emilia notes, one of the things performance can be is ‘a moment of chosen crisis with a potential of collective transformation’ (d’Emilia in Audio Fluorescer, 2015). The political implications across vaga-bonding are held through shared desire, where reformulation and the potency of Eros (who produces affects) are in constant movement. As the famous proverb goes (popularised worldwide throughout the Mexican justice struggle for the Ayotzinapa student massacre on 26 September 2014), ‘They tried to bury us; they didn’t know we were seeds’. The vaga-bonding within and through difference (localisation, social strata, gender/race) by a radicalism of the erotic has been a historically continuous occurrence in demands for significant social change. The ‘eros effect’ coined by George Katsiaficas, following Herbert Marcuse’s *Eros and Civilization*, activates humans’ love, care and solidarity with each other that suddenly replaces dominant values and norms’ such as national chauvinism, hierarchy, and domination or competition (1989; 2011). Affirming the emotional content of social movements as erotic action, Katsiaficas describes the eros effect as the

¹⁶⁴ Puerto Ricans have U.S. passport, and belong to the U.S. (‘part of’ in a territorial and military sense but not in a domestic sense).

¹⁶⁵ The reference of fire as a component of the home (in Spanish *hogar*- home; *hogar*-fire place) dates to the first notions of what the human species is and its primal development.

¹⁶⁶ Original reads: ‘¿El hogar puede existir entre los abrazos de los seres queridos? [...] ¿El tránsito es un hogar?’

collective sublimation of the instinctual need for freedom that occurs during unframed moments outside planning or institutional behaviour where millions of ‘ordinary’ people reconstruct popular reality. These erotic moments simultaneously negate the systematic values of hierarchical survival competition as organising principles while triggering the bonds between human beings at fundamental levels of social solidarity. ‘The transformation of self-interest into species-interest is the essential dimension of the eros effect.’ (Katsiaficas, 1989: 8) Following this understanding, we can place these activist lifeforms of the vaga-bonding as either a ‘tribute’ to carnival’s erotic effect in the case of Freddie Mercado’s constant performance or the ‘sample’ gathering towards collective sublimation in the politico-affective pedagogy propelled by Chávez and d’Emilia. Tribute and sample become micro revolutions of the everyday... tactics of re-existence, reformative effects, in spite of the power (values and norms) performed by the state.

The performance is the vehicle or pretext of sharing a space-time to experience other possibilities of living together, through practiced embodiment not theoretically detached where radical forms of the tender erotic allow the interweaving intersections of difference within the mechanisms of oppression. These various encounters, where we can include La Pocha Nostra’s, provide perspective and with it the daily normative reality of the neoliberal automats’ suffering becomes unreal, or ultimately becomes changeable. Ordinary and extraordinary, real and unreal are shifted, expanded and intertwined. This chosen perspective is felt, soulful and embodied. To introduce this alternative perspective into the ordinary flow is a risky task for one body; nonetheless, the seemingly individual body of Freddie Mercado performs community as a body-geography (of dolled entities, beings, animals) that erotically calls out to the others, vaga-bonding to actualise and revise carnival’s resistance.

I have stated that these world-making performances move within broader systems of resistance. This last chapter has explained doings, experiences, ideologies, and beliefs considered of major importance for providing subversive aspects of relationality and otherness exposed throughout this thesis. Performance can become a powerful political

doing(-becoming) by creating a rebellious and transgressive mode of being that stages and fights the mechanisms of power and oppression hunting our quotidian reality by pushing forwards other experiences of being in the World through all our relations—the creation of a glocal community that lives an intersubjective decolonial revolution of diverse (and perverse) bodies and affects. This revolution calls for more rage to become struggle and for more love to become bonds.

CONCLUSION

acaso quiero derribar el muro, basta con hacerle una grieta
(*You think we're trying to take down the whole wall? It's enough to make a crack.*)
(EZLN, 2015: 200)

In this thesis I have presented two cases of othering performance focusing in their encountering proposals in relation to the socio-political 'position' of the spectator. I have argued that these hyperbolic, erotic, and perverse displays of being 'other' are charged and invested in the co-creation of the relation they produce and are produced by according to those who are producing and produced by it in terms of the community implied. Depending on where and by whom are these relations coming into being, the relation weaves horizontal bonds of solidarity or, by contrary, demarcates divisions and re-reproductions of hierarchical constructions. In this last configuration, the spectator becomes present as a position of the non-other: the co-creator of such dichotomy (Other/Same). Certainly, in some cases, the relations can also become unfixed and fluctuate between both arrangements: spectator/Other and self-in-community. Furthermore, the investigation of these encounters with the 'Other' has revealed that these carry specific complexities in their relational modes of being-in-the-World which are linked to non-Western decolonial resistance doings, understandings, and conceptions of experiencing each other, the objects, the spirits, and the land.

Performance engages in the world-making processes in each encounter, action and embodiment. Enactments of power are tested, contested and revealed while aiming to redesign them. An epistemic/ affective revolution cannot occur without decolonial practices to which the embodied knowledge acted, dismembered and re-adjusted by performance becomes another possible frontline. Border-building mechanisms, perpetrators in the architecture of emotions and relational models, construct the social-intimate realm of the intersubjective. The politics of the intersubjective are at question. Objectivation by the Other-producing subject is staged by the othering bearer. The insertion of this conflictive encounter into the realm of the spectator-spectacle-performer exchange and co-creation initially appears

as an extrapolation from these oppressive mechanisms. Furthermore, it allows the unveiling of a conception of the spectator and the spectatorial that is interdependently constructed from these social mechanisms. By studying the spectator we study the times, their configuration of relations as political mechanisms inserted within the intersubjective.

Ways of seeing and experiencing the world are not exempt from the politics of segregation, hierarchy and violence. The foundational elements of concepts such as 'identity', 'nation', 'race', 'gender', 'class' are held from the same core where opposing forces are built by the uneven relation to one another. Sexism and racism do not consist in the awareness of difference but its assignment as a social condition. In this overarching glocal context the Western inherited modern concept of the spectator is only possible within this scheme, and cannot be fully conceived if placed independently from it. The modern colonial capitalist patriarchal world produces social relations and the 'spectator' as a concept becomes the emblem of this relational system. Corroding its existence would be a delinking from power relations, and could result in gaining an evicted territory of the collective imaginary.

The contemplating weight of the *spectare* is a Latin derivation, culturally confined to a particular way of experiencing, which has been brought in the form of language-concept to other experiences through a history of conflict.¹⁶⁷ In the malleable structure of art-life, spectacle has been appropriated by some artists and activists as strategy used in the co-creation of resisting alternatives to that which is suppressed under normativity, invisibilised by hierarchy, and oppressed because of difference. The techniques, aesthetics, and proposals have varied in each encounter. The strategy of spectacle has provided a possibility for initial contestation. Spectacle is not produced as post-Otherness but as hyper-Otherness, which stresses the relational binomial distortions and the fantasies and desires produced by these.

¹⁶⁷ Some derivatives of spectacle '*spectaculum*' are specular (1398), speculate (1590) spectator (1615), spectre, spectrum, perspective (1695), and specimen (1732) among others (Coromines and Pascual, 2000; and Ferrater Mora, 1998). All of these concepts provide different angles into the notion of a spectacle that has produced the spectator.

In the era of spectacle, the usage of spectacular forms adopts the image representation of the Other-as-spectacle. Re-appropriating the spectacle of otherness by the so-called Other risks the re-reproduction of the othering discourse, especially if done under the logics of the ‘non-other’. To make a crack from within a spectacular system using spectacle relies on the aims and ideology within this othering re-reproduction. The perspective of the so-called Other may find in spectacle a communication tool that allows alliances and solidarities to be built. If spectacle is to be consumed and eaten, can the consumption of certain spectacles become a virus? Tricksters have used, misused, and overused spectacular mechanisms to address issues concerning certain communities under the glocal structure of power (matrix of domination). Trickster’s doings underline the social borders that may or may not be apparent. Nevertheless, the symbolic act of border-tracing into the visible and the communal does not imply its consequent border crossing.

Tricksterish Other also mutates its form, reshaping the othering repertoire. Emphasising non-normative/hierarchical ways of being in the World through carnivalesque animal sexed monstrosity and/or desirable trans-racial and gendered bodies proposes the constant creation of beings and belongings through the social relations upon which these are built. In the encounter, cultural and social patterning is fleshed. To reverse the social positioning of power-knowledge in the encounter, as in the case of La Pocha Nostra’s spectacle of ‘reverse anthropology’ with its spectatorial mass inside the international Art institution, or to insert a constant rebuilding of otherness within the daily social sphere of the othered, as in the case of Freddie Mercado, are tactics of existence, resistance, and re-existence that are produced and are producing distinct encountering dynamics and relational possibilities. The former performs social division. It exchanges power positions in a rebellious seductive twist with the spectator, who is pushed to the margins and perhaps, may have the chance to play to become Other (a staging of cultural assimilation) or be redeemed through the participation in the decolonisation process of the Other. Spectator exists as ‘Same’ in the position of privilege and La Pocha Nostra’s spectacle reverses the centre of power towards the Others. The latter

performs equality. The citizen-Other Freddie Mercado moves in its/his/her citizen ground using the hyper-visible to question Puerto Rican invisibility, social relations and segregation by fluctuating in and out from the spectacular pose, unveiling the dynamics of object-to-spectator relation. When Mercado becomes pose, the spectator exists—at times with the invitation to become spectacle together with the Other. However, object-subject divisions are delinked in Freddie Mercado's doings, worked through the treatment and vision of his dolled embodiments. Spectator is not, but rather a member of the heterogeneous community.

The decolonisation of the modern spectator entails a deconstruction that would allow the contextualisation of the concept 'spectator' as a modern social relation based on hierarchies of knowledge and power. Its terminology was born in the early XVII century, a century that saw the metaphysical Western 'I' imposed as a philosophically universal subject with the Cartesian *Cogito ergo sum*. The 'universal' modern 'I' has metamorphosed into what has been proposed in Western thought as a post-modern XX-I century subject that follows an intersubjective model contingent of the Other. This intersubjective model stems from the centred Cartesian modernist subject, who is a subject built *in relation* to the previous conquering and extermination of whole populations during the late XV and XVI century, as we have presented and discussed in Chapter 1. The decolonisation of spectator's relational construct perhaps would need to dismiss the concept due to its historical Westernised implications. In other geographies, times and histories spectator does not exist. Cultural gatherings, creative exchanges, ritual ceremonies and carnival play do not know, evoke, require or demand the 'spectator' in these terms.

Border thought has uncovered diverse ways of relationality found in these hyper-Othering performances. These relational arrangements are brought from Western and non-Western worldviews. In the case of Freddie Mercado, specifically in terms of the doll, the essence of the 'object' bound to the conception of the Other is both a vessel of ancestral power and energetic force inherited from Afro-Caribbean ritual life, and the inanimate materiality apparently lacking agency at the expense of the 'subject', perception brought with the

Spanish colonisation. During Mercado's performance-life he plays with both ideas of the object-doll by becoming, creating and carrying his troupe of doll-selves in a constant movement within the colonial ground that verifies equality (Rancière). In the case of La Pocha Nostra the hyper-othering performance is the hyperbolic distortion and reversal of the spectacle of the Other, where the Western division of the 'I' (Self-Same) and the Other is constantly re-enacted. With pungent humour the bodies of the performers portray a diversity of the Other that heightens the constructed fantasies of the Same, where these othered bodies fall into the totality of the system's exteriority (Dussel), that is, they all fall into the totalising category of the Other. In the spectacle of the Other during public performance the Western colonial divisions are portrayed, reversed and seduced, but nonetheless present in relation to the spectator (I/Other or subject/object). In LPN's methods of reverse anthropology (treating the dominant culture as exotic and positioning spectators as minorities or foreigners) the division of spectator-performer is not blurred but reconstructed in its political implication of Other (performer/object) and Same (spectator/subject). Meanwhile, this Western division of the intersubjective (subject-object) is deconstructed during the workshops through the integration of radical tenderness into a life-process of embodied decolonisation or *devenir* that freely appropriates and incorporates ancestral and present Mayan knowledge of subject-subject interrelations within the 'us'—ultimately brought to LPN by the empowerment and acknowledgement of these communities through the Zapatistas.

In decolonial relational re-construction, object to subject/ subject to object relation becomes refocused. If all the elements are understood as subjects then all relations are subject-subject relations. In this alternative intersubjective model of subject-subject experience, otherness with the land, with the materials, with the animals and with the people does not imply a hierarchical social structure. Influenced by Afro-Caribbean cosmovision, Freddie Mercado becomes, produces and is produced by the doll (the 'object') as agentic process. As objects in Yoruba tradition are filled with spiritual power, so is Mercado-as-doll. In his social relations vaga-bonds are unleashed in the social sphere, stretched and weaved, but always moving. His

work is built by how others perceive, conceive and are mutually reconstructed by the encounter with his embodiment as their own reflection as society. Within national ground playing to become object-subject is a playful spectator-citizen *trompe-l'œil* with the other. Influenced by Zapatista and their Mayan worldview, La Pocha Nostra's pedagogy proposes an ephemeral community of radical tenderness that understands the interrelations as a collective us from which 'I am another you' (*In Lak'ech*). From this principle a net of nourishment and radical self-care and care for others sustains and allows the reaction to the persistent mechanisms of alienation and domination. Unlike La Pocha's performance spectacle, within their pedagogical proposal there are no spectators, only active civilians that explore their individual borders in aims of collective transformation. Both of the abovementioned relational constructions are built among empowering vulnerabilities that explore their embodied marginalisation and invisibility creating national vega-bonds through troupe building (dolls and citizens) or a bigger We of solidarities through radical tenderness. Resisting an essentialist stereotypical definition, that excludes, confines, controls, and interprets the diverse possibilities of being in the World, these artists of otherness advocate for a pluriverse where many worlds fit, socially equal and humanly different.

The cases explored have mainly developed the othering dynamics together with their spectatorial implications since the 1990s. Hyper-otherness has been approached by these performers with a sexual humour that explores the desired body as Other-object (colonial, capitalist, patriarchal). Spectacle has been used strategically as an essential component in the othering implied. Beyond the cases presented developed from the late 1980s activist treatment of the Other, contemporary artistic proposals have found an inherited tradition in spectacle as terrain for deconstruction. The example of the *Spictacles* (2002-2012) performed by Xandra Ibarra aka La Chica Boom (b. El Paso, Texas 1979) are described as a site from where 'I embodied my own racial and sexual abjection and directly engaged the politics of racialized sexuality to discover queers forms of pleasure.'¹⁶⁸ Ibarra's work follows the use of

¹⁶⁸ Artist's webpage: <http://www.xandraibarra.com/spictacles/>

hyperbolised modes of racialisation and sexualisation as contestation to whiteness, coloniality and Mexican identity. However, other recent proposals on coloniality, sexism, and racism have disengaged from the spectacle-Other into alternative relational dynamics that co-create subversive complicity, oppressive witnessing and perpetuation. U.K. performer Jamal Harewood (b. 1986) creates temporary communities through participatory events that decompose the hierarchy of spectator/performer focusing on ideas of race and identity.¹⁶⁹ In Harewood's performance *The Privileged* (2014-2017), part-taking is beyond participating, and passivity becomes a position. Arranged to resemble an animal enclosure by a rectangle of chairs, a man in a polar bear suit is manipulated by the written instructions given to the spectators (to feed, play, 'undress', etc. the animal). The white bear hides a naked black man. The fearsome predator is object of study and the instructions become increasingly aggressive. Ethics of witnessing, participating, and behaviour are at play together with racial fear. The ambiguity for the responsibility of the actions produces tensions and sufferings that ultimately become unbearable. *The Privileged* may gather a community of predominantly white artsy audience, which powerfully produces the cross-generational reality of racial violence. *(De) Colonial Reconquista* (2014) performed by myself, Marina Barys Janer (b. San Juan 1988), summoned a heterogeneous community of seven Puerto Rican women (including feminist activists, pedagogues and artists) to mark my back with a letter, forming the word COLONIA ('Colony') while the back of my head held a mirror at the level of their eyes. In the presence of a male lawyer, each signed for the ownership of their artistic labour whilst the marks were inscribed permanently by a female tattoo artist.¹⁷⁰ This community provided a double narrative: being colonisers of an individual's body and partaking in the legal emancipation of a Puerto Rican body-geography by its own (female) citizens. The people witnessing could only get close to the action through the mediation of a camera that some could manipulate and which was simultaneously screened in a big TV. The controlling environment mimicked the colonial (legal, territorial, embodied, censored) restrictions, and

¹⁶⁹ Artist's webpage: <https://harewooo.com/>

¹⁷⁰ See Epilogue. Artist's webpage: <http://www.marinabarysjaner.com>

became filled with layers of complicity that stirred the wound of the colonised bodies observing the permanent inscription and enraged those who wanted to get closer. Presented under the filters of a museum environment, several days later the action continued with a long walk through the streets of the capital city of San Juan.

Hyper-otherness performances use as their base the spectacle of the Other created by the imperial and colonial machinery of segregation. From this historical and contemporary form of spectacle they create a humorous, critical and ironic spectacle triggering these imposed signifiers of the erotic/exotic savage 'other' through methods of disidentification. Can the marginalised create taking into account the logics of their oppression while going prior and beyond them? Beyond exaggeration as a carnivalesque device, are there other paths to walk towards resistance? Evidently so, and these are the current explorations of some artists that rethink colonial/patriarchal relations. Nevertheless, regardless of the 'aesthetic technique' used for critique, healing and (de-)construction, the summoning of heterogeneous communities of struggle that account for the diversity of oppressions while recognising the transversality of the systemic neoliberal machinery of racism/sexism becomes the revolutionary task in contemporary activism from which to build other possible anti-systemic futures. Within this communal project, artists are also part-takers in these decolonial efforts of radical encounters.

The summoning of community has accompanied the praxis of experiential unity in world-making processes. We are here together to be here together. Many artists have inserted themselves inside the spaces of symbolic power (Art institutions, Academia, etc.) aiming to pervert these spaces from within. Nevertheless, communitarian proposals of decoloniality within in the Art World are never completely exempt of the neoliberal enclosure of the institution. Likewise the basis of many decolonial workshops, at a theoretical level as well as an embodied approach, reproduce the same social filters of capitalist (classist), racist and patriarchal society. To disengage from institutions is one path, taking the social sphere as principal working ground or working from sites of resistance disengaged from the state

apparatus, banks or private corporations. Some artists walk on a tight rope at this liminal point of in-betweeness, while others do not find any conflict in this support if it aids to achieve the intended project.

Art is a daily force and through it, another life force of resistance and re-existence. Decolonial practices are equally everyday practices that are based on horizontality and pluriversality of knowledges and experiences. In other words, to break the metaphorical and geographical border that is cored in the everyday relational experiences of being in the World. To eliminate the imposition of a universal way of being, seeing, experiencing, embodying, behaving and believing inasmuch these ways are not based on the oppression of certain others in order to be. We understand this not only to be held amongst human beings, that by means of alienation, violence, invisibility and oppression have constructed ways of being that have positioned themselves as superior in relation to those inferior, but the relationship to the Earth herself and all of the elements and beings that are present in her. The creative doings of people that are advocating for these forms of existence are also creating art forms that are part of these aims for glocal change. Decolonial activist are engaged in the decolonisation of affects and within this struggle comes the possibility of radical encounters, where 'otherness' is not accounted for under a binomial hierarchy of power. These encounters go beyond otherness, and spectator as a binomial figure in the configuration of the matrix of power ceases to exist. The politics of relationality and the affects and perceptions (re)produced by them are our most contemporary tangible and spiritual quest.

In this revolution of relations communitarian belief and solidarity is essential. Solidarity is not chronologically time-based. Ephemeral communities might be constantly building, morphing, and vanishing. But the constant re-building and weaving is necessary together with the elasticity, growth and flexibility possible through the intersectional understanding of the matrix of domination. Contemporary trickster does collective and in the enormous tricksterish trans-possibility lays the intersectionality of resistance. The border mutates in appearance thus trickster's energy of transmutation is essential for an ongoing dissidence. The resistance

becomes trans-national, trans-racial, trans-gendered, transpersonal, and trans-historical. Apathy, violence, fears and ignorance produced by neoliberal separatist and stereotypical fixation is worked in community. Spectators in community exist only as threads of a same web system. Social configuration is formed as a communal construction. A truly **post**-modern (or rather, prior and beyond-modern) decolonial spectator is a communal being, unfixed by the dichotomies from which this figure was constructed, seeing-sensing beyond the oppressive dual system of the Westernised individual, resisting against the privilege and/or oppression from where it was built. As far as patriarchy, capitalism, and colonialism exist, the spectator will be re-produced by these. If spectator is historically charged to the point of being intrinsic to separatist dichotomies of power, that is a further concern to explore.

Regaining territory from the imaginary would allow other ways of conceiving, experiencing, producing and being produced in relationality. To co-create a site of construction de-linked from the structures of power from within ourselves in collective; where these structures no longer inhabit our relationality with the world-ourselves-others. Or better, a topography that is constantly changing to become constantly present where other worlds are possible and the structures are communally and horizontally restructured. Belonging is experienced under other nuances that do not homogenise but are affective moving bonds that are alive and interconnect the nodules of existence.

By focusing on the decolonisation of the spectator as a sociohistorical construction, this thesis has uncovered the relational complexities that othering performances have aimed and are aiming to address and contribute to restructure through Western and non-Western experiences of the encounter and the intersubjective ways of being in the World, which is ultimately a constant process that is not limited to a human to human relationship. The cases addressed have found in spectacle a strategic function to play around the construction of the Other. Both of these cases become spectacle either throughout the performance (addressed as spectacle) or as an in-and-out of spectacle-life (other-citizen), each in their own way informed by the community that co-creates the performance. To decolonise the spectatorial is to decolonise

the erotic and to dismantle hierarchies of oppression into alternatives of other affective relationalities—through all our relations. There is no post-Otherness until societal hierarchical binaries have been decolonised, although this does not imply the insistence of the hyper-Otherness by contemporary artists. More recent proposals are still resorting to this hyperbolic usage or are finding other alternatives, depending on the social geographies implied and the individual tactics of the artists. Trickster energy is the trans-possibility, not as a productive hybridity working within and for a system of oppressions, but rather as a collective re-existence through intersectional resistance.

Is post-Otherness possible? Is a decolonial ‘spectator’ possible? We believe so, in a future to come.

EPILOGUE

The process of this doctorate research was influenced, processed, informed and guided by the embodied explorations I took into the terrain of my own performance practice. A trilogy came into being, one project per year (2014, 2015, 2016). The following are visual memorabilia of these actions.

(De) Colonial Reconquista

19 November 2014, Puerto Rico Museum of Contemporary Art (MAC)

25 November 2014, streets of San Juan, Puerto Rico

The action in the museum was made in collaboration with a community of women: Marisel Robles (C), Rosa Janer Aponte (O), Soraya Serra Collazo (L), Yma Ríos Orlandi (O), Olga Orraca Paredes (N), Angelí Vélez (I), and Awilda Sterling-Duprey (A); a female tattoo artist, Lidiette del Valle; and a male lawyer paid by the hour. Each of these 7 women wrote one letter of the word 'COLONIA' (*colony*) in my back to be then made permanent by the tattooist. Each signed a copywrite document over her letter while it was being tattooed on my back. This performance was done on the 19th November due to its national implications, celebrated as the day of the 'discovery' of Puerto Rico. Some days later on the 25th November, International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, this same body-image took the streets in an unannounced solitary procession through the different social cartographies of the capital city of San Juan.



(De) Colonial Reconquista. Marina Barsy Janer, 2014.
Santa Maria Magdalena de Pazzis Cemetery, San Juan. Photo: Luis Alcalá del Olmo.



(De) *Colonial Reconquista*. Marina Barsy Janer, 2014. MAC. Photo: Arnaldo Rodríguez Bagué.



(De) *Colonial Reconquista*. Marina Barsy Janer, 2014. MAC. Photo: Pedro Iván Bonilla.



(De) *Colonial Reconquista*. Marina Barsy Janer, 2014.
Capitol of Puerto Rico. Photo: Luis Alcalá del Olmo.

DERMIS COMUNAL: Transmutación de una epistemología colonial
[COMMUNAL DERMIS: Transmutation of a colonial epistemology]

25 July 2015, MATERIC.org, Barcelona, Spain

The body is filled with over 100 acupuncture needles that bear a bee each. The colonial land becomes a communal metaphor of the bee colony. Since 1952, the 25th of July is the Constitution Day in Puerto Rico commemorating the invasion of the U.S. troops on that same day (1898). Also on the night of that date, two nationalists were murdered at Cerro Maravilla in 1978.



DERMIS COMUNAL: Transmutación de una epistemología colonial. Marina Barsy Janer, © 2015.
MATERIC.ORG, Barcelona. Photo: Pancho de León.



DERMIS COMUNAL: Transmutación de una epistemología colonial. Marina Barsy Janer, © 2015.
MATERIC.ORG, Barcelona. Photo: Pancho de León.

BORDER MOVEMENT... [Grenzbewegung... / movimiento fronterizo...]

In collaboration with tattoo artist Caro Ley

2 December 2016, Die Beginen, Rostock, Germany

Part of the Universität Rostock's 'Transnational Performance in Practice' event, curated by Andrea Zittlau.

A border-wound was scarred over my whole body. This line began and ended in my vagina, connecting the body parts while dividing the body-geography in two. The tattooist tenderly imprinted her translucent medical robe with segments of my line-wound.



BORDER MOVEMENT... [Grenzbewegung... / movimiento fronterizo...] Marina Barsy Janer in collaboration with Caro Ley, © 2016. Die Beginen, Rostock. Photo: Isil Sol Vil.



BORDER MOVEMENT... [Grenzbewegung... / movimiento fronterizo...] Marina Barsy Janer in collaboration with Caro Ley, © 2016. Die Beginen, Rostock. Photo: Isil Sol Vil.



BORDER MOVEMENT... [*Grenzbewegung...* / *movimiento fronterizo...*] Marina Barsy Janer in collaboration with Caro Ley, © 2016. Photo: Isil Sol Vil.

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