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BETWEEN ANDRÉS GARCÍA LA ROTA AND SILVIA RIVAS IN BOGOTÁ  
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## CUENTAS DE VIDRIO

**To start us off, I'd like to know a bit about your role models. How did they appear? Which lines of artistic thought make up the foundation for your work?**

It's not easy for me to pick out individual role models; there are pieces that move you, artists whom you admire, one or another mentor. There is not such a clear lineage throughout my work. I think of Víctor Grippo as being a role model, mainly due to his sensitivity in recognizing the energy contained in materials. There was something mystical about that relationship. We lived really close to one another and, when I was in art school, I would, with all the impatience of youth, take my artwork for him to look at, which, with all his saintly patience and respect, he did. I used to call him, ask for his opinion and then I would head over. For example, once I was making some cellulose masks with natural elements—as a college assignment—, and had glued some hooks on their back. When he saw the masks, he began to tell me about the role of the mask in Latin American indigenous culture and symbolism. When I was with him, even the simplest of things could open up a series of associations; I thought they were like master classes. He turned one of the masks over and asked, "What did you use to stick that hook on?" and I told him, "I used acrylic adhesive." So he said, "No, that is not a good fit if you're using natural materials." And I said, "But, Víctor, it's on the back, no one's going to see it," and he answered, "You can't see it, but you can feel it." That answer has stayed with me since. The material itself says something and carries something that goes beyond what can be seen. The way of working it, its physical qualities, the association between them... From then on, that has been a guiding principle for me, and it constitutes my way of working. The material, the format, should be associated with the poetry of the work. Here's an even earlier memory: my father collected a series of books called *La pinacoteca de los genios*,<sup>1</sup> and I loved them. I would spend hours sitting on the floor flicking through them. But of all those classic artists, with whom I would sit in absolute contemplation, it's the ones who I remember as a moving aesthetic experience, prior to any type of intellectual analysis, who are the same ones who still move me in the same way today. Piero della Francesca, Vermeer, Velázquez... Their eternal nature, the way they capture a moment in time, the dignity of their subjects.

<sup>1</sup>*La pinacoteca de los genios* [The Art Gallery of Greats] was a collection of booklets, each dedicated to a different painter, published by Editorial Códex.

**You spoke about a group of people that were educated around Víctor Grippo, a conceptual artist and also one of the pioneers of the electronic art scene. Those groups weren't necessarily made up of artists. Did you get together to discuss art?**

Yes, it was a small group for people from various professions trying to think things over together. It was a short-lived experience, it didn't last very long at all, but it was a time when there wasn't much in the way of opportunities to learn about art, and it was a huge privilege for me. Víctor would sit us down around his table and give us little exercises to perform: handle a stone and then analyze it to seek out its

essence in the shape, in its materiality, in its texture. The weight, the temperature, the edges... what you focused on and why; those types of things...

### **And you were studying Fine Arts at the same time...**

<sup>2</sup><http://loftgiesso.blogspot.com.ar>

Yes, in the Prilidiano Pueyrredón School of Fine Arts, I did the teacher training course for sculpture. And I took painting classes at Kenneth Kemble's studio on Cangallo Street<sup>2</sup> at the same time; that was when Alberto Heredia, Pablo Suárez, Gorriarena, Torroja, all had their studios there... and others came and went. That was where I met Grippo, who was preparing one of his pieces about tradesmanship. After starting off as a pupil, I quickly became Kemble's assistant and then went on to teach drawing in his studio. It was from this environment that I got my real education; breathing in that atmosphere, the stories, the conversations that would arise around those artists. I mean, just think about it, I began studying in the School of Fine Arts in 1976, the same year as the military coup; it was already an academicist and outdated way of teaching, in the middle of a dictatorship... it was a pretty dense and constraining environment. Although I can't deny the value of the technical training that I gained from the experience.

### **When you say you work on the edges of disciplines, what exactly do you mean?**

I mean the limits of a medium. I became a specialist in sculpture and began to exhibit and paint my first pictures, and spatiality was always a factor. I then drifted toward objects, which is a format that has closer ties to matter and space, and I found it more direct. As part of the process of creating two-dimensional representations of space, I began to include photography. It was like bringing a hobby or family game into my work. My brother had his camera, and I had an Instamatic; very simple, but very efficient. Ever since we were very small, we would take photos of the same thing and then compare them. We were always surprised by the difference between the two points of view, to the point where we would try to justify it and discuss it for a while. I continued to enjoy taking photographs well into my teenage years. My brother set up a lab at home and our equipment got a bit more sophisticated. I never lost that desire to capture the things that "capture you." I didn't even see it as an art form; it was a way of saving things from your own forgetting about them.

It was only natural for me to later begin to include photography in my work, although I struggled to find a way to do so. I used transparencies, graphic film, did any amount of experiments, and I ended up using photographic emulsion traces, which gave me what I was looking for. There was something about the process: seeing the light, catching something, carrying the world in your pocket. After the excitement of developing, the liquids... preludes and strategies for finding whatever it was that you had first seen and that was now no longer the same. All those stages were related to my world: water, tides, the living and the deceased, imprints, vagueness and loss. All the same, I never

was or thought of myself as “a photographer.” Later on, I needed the moving image, video, which today dominates my work. But the truth is that I don’t belong to any sort of purist tribe. That sometimes leaves me feeling a bit lost, but I like to arrive at things without too much conditioning.

**Did you take any practice shots?**

Yes. I took shots of marks, textures, scenery, details, black-and-white nature photographs, and I used a 35 mm camera. I later went on to add a 6 x 6. But I didn’t think of it as artwork at the beginning, I just did it for the sheer joy of doing it. Those cameras held an important place in my life. I even liked them purely as machines; the noise, the resistance when winding back the roll and the feeling when it released at the end. Cleaning them with a soft little brush. Then my work ended up leaning towards the photographic record side of things.

**How was video incorporated to your work? I mean, you included photography, something you were already familiar with, because you were interested in scenery. There you make some very similar points to Wolf Vostell’s; where he talks about *collage* and *décollage*, you call them representation and reality. So, I’d like it if you could tell me about how video came to appear in your work.**

As I was telling you, at some point video became an absolutely necessary instrument for moving forwards. But I had been interested in testing it out as a tool since much earlier; it’s hard for me to pick out an exact moment. VHS was starting to appear in Argentina. People began to want to have their own archive of memories, and I had a friend who worked in advertising and who edited on those cameras. The idea of saying something with a moving image made me very curious. It just so happened that at that time, at the very start of my career, I had the chance to do a project for an exhibition in the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (MNBA), curated by Jorge Glusberg and Laura Buccelatto.<sup>3</sup> It was an opportunity to put the experimental tests I had been doing with my friend together into an installation.

They invited me to take part because the exhibition had a section dedicated to installations and that’s what I had been working on. The video installation section included artists such as Nicolás García Uriburu or Ernesto Ballesteros, who weren’t specifically video artists even though they used it as a medium. In the actual video section, there were pioneers like Jaime Davidovich, David Lamelas or Margarita Paksa, as well as other younger artists who had been working specifically in that medium. At that time, I saw it as an opportunity to generate sensations, all-encompassing situations specific to the electronic medium, so as to add sense to my installations. I made that first video, which I’ve never digitalized and still have on VHS, in a really old house in the Palermo neighborhood that had been squatted and ended up being my studio. With a group of friends to help me, I threw water down the stairs

<sup>3</sup> *Video arte internacional*, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1990.

and from the upper floor, which had a balcony overlooking an internal courtyard. There was so much water everywhere. The water poured down and ran out into the street, endlessly, it was as if the house was flooding the outside world and not the other way round. That piece was called *Cuentas de vidrio* [Glass Beads], alluding to the beads on a necklace. Drops of water formed on the ceilings and on the stair rails and the light made them look like crystals. I felt like a famous filmmaker, I thought the result was incredible! This was something sensorial, much more all-encompassing. Cayetano Vicentini, an artist friend who was also a model at that time, gave a very intense performance: he was covered in metallic dust; he was a crystalline apparition amongst those flooded spaces. I have never presented that piece again. That's where my fascination with video started. But until digital formats appeared, it was just too hard, in terms of limits on time and money, to keep working with video. On the other hand, I was already really focused on producing my art in metal, resin and photographic emulsion. Those formats, at that time, fitted perfectly with my poetic vision; it was later on that I found I was unable to avoid the moving image, and luckily small amateur digital cameras were already available and they turned out to be my first tool.

**When you talked about detail in Vermeer, I thought about the representation of the fourth dimension, about relative time; also about Renaissance painters and their technical experiments to represent a three-dimensional scene in a two-dimensional medium. The medium itself contained a represented dimension. It makes me think of Duchamp when he talked about the poles of all artistic creation: the artist on the one side, and the spectator—who is to become posterity—on the other. How do you think of your spectator?**

I don't really know, you are your own first spectator. You seduce yourself, you convince yourself, you say, "I'm being seduced and this isn't what I'm looking for." It's a process of rejection. I follow an idea obsessively, I get sidetracked and I come back to it, I get sidetracked and I come back to it... and sometimes I even abandon it, it gets left on the shelf. But we were talking about the spectator... I don't really individualize the spectator whilst I work. You are thankful for and aspire to attract all viewers. In the end, it is the other who fulfills the purpose of your work, who puts it into operation.

**Is that related to the various levels of immersion, to the interpretation by a potential spectator?**

Yes, I try to trigger concrete existential associations within the spectator, to make them feel: this is something I recognize, something we share and that has to do with the condition of our existence. The experiences are different; each series will have its little story and metaphor. But I'm looking for a sensation on the edge of our subjective perceptions, intuitions that become highly defined, which are mine, of course, but I try to transmit them to others whilst I do it. It's connected to the

issue of where I'm standing when I see a Vermeer painting. I am at a scene, a particular situation that has somehow become eternal. It has a temporality of its own. You go into that space, you see how surfaces and light are depicted, you move around a space optically, but the feeling is physical and there is a recognition. You understand the moment, you experience that instant. Space is always connected to light and, fundamentally, to time. I think in those terms. We are conditioned to understand things in a linear manner, because of our memories and our mortality. Ultimately, I seek out stations and diversions, trying to open windows along the aisle of perception.

## DUCHAMP

### Does this imprisonment in linearity stem from writing?

<sup>4</sup> Michel Foucault, "Language to Infinity," in Donald F. Bouchard (ed.), *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1977. (Original edition: "Le Langage à l'infini," in *Tel Quel*, no. 15, Paris, 1963.)

Yes, certainly. I am thinking, for example, of Foucault's essay *Language to Infinity*,<sup>4</sup> which fell into my hands during my twenties, when I was painting. Along the first pages, he discusses emptiness. He talks about discourse as connectedness in time: Ulysses, while telling his story, wouldn't die; because he would put off the end so as to open up a time, one that is specific to narration. I find that fascinating: parallel realities opening up like balloons whichever way you look along that linearity, like places where you can live a different reality with different timescales and different frequencies. Finitude, emptiness, and death are at stake. Everything is just a gambit to avoid facing up to emptiness. So we keep going round in circles with words, with images or whatever. I sometimes think of artists like Duchamp as mystic mediums. As an expression of desire; anyway, I feel like a pretty clumsy medium... there is something that gets lost along the way...

**Yes, that's what Duchamp said: an artist is a medium, and, when he enters into a trance, he receives information without knowing where it comes from and he translates—or expresses it. Everyone is surprised by what he says, but he can't remember anything because he was in a trance.**

It must be that feeling of defamiliarization upon seeing the result...

**That's why I asked if you let yourself get lost in your work.**

**That was an artistic coefficient as far as Duchamp was concerned, an act of disappearance: the artist wants to do something but, when he acts as his first spectator, he realizes that that something is no longer there, that it has disappeared. Nonetheless, it's also an act of appearance, something else appears. The artistic coefficient (the creative act) is right there, between those two acts.<sup>5</sup> Now that I'm talking to you, I can see you also feel that in some way.**

<sup>5</sup>Marcel Duchamp in an American Federation of Arts convention in Houston, Texas, in April 1957. The debate also included William C. Seitz (Princeton), Rudolph Arnheim (Sarah Lawrence), Gregory Bateson, anthropologist, and M.D., “poor artist” ([http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/duch/hd\\_duch.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/duch/hd_duch.htm)).

I think that ever since I finished studying, all along, in my studio, I have been trying to define and isolate a particular aspect of time. Occasionally, everything comes apart: why, for whom, for what purpose... that something I want to say and is never said, the way I find of doing it is never definitive... And so I envy the person who makes a chair, which is useful for sitting on, and satisfies needs about which no one has any doubts. But, anyway, they're the rough patches... All that time invested in chasing that thing that gets away...

My studio flooded one day and a lot of my work was severely damaged. When assessing the damage, I chose a few pieces to be restored and I decided to throw a lot of them away. Whilst I was throwing stuff out, I thought about how long it had taken me to make it all and how long it was taking me to get rid of it. I realized that the object itself had lost its meaning; it was nothing more than an expression of time. It was a release to be able to throw the pieces away, to shed a burden, to make space, to clean up the area and start again.

**You talk about five things: time, space, the subject, scenery and materiality. The subject is the scenery, whilst it could also be its surroundings. How do you divide these focal points? In what way do you begin to tie them together?**

They are simultaneous layers. I generally work in different media at the same time; materiality sort of decides how I approach an idea. For instance, a video could be an ambiguous sensory immersion, and its translation into drawing a dizzying graphism. But drawing and words are what tie the thing together. I try to define a temporal situation from the point of view of its presentation. Space is what allows me to immerse; and the subject appears as inhabiting a strange—or indeterminate—space and is also the matter of that same time. It appears as a condition of being that manifests itself through the experiences that are specific to that condition. The scenery is usually a metaphor: it sometimes appears as a vast stage... and lately as imaginary or artificial.

**There are some articles by Duchamp where he refers to the concept of “infra-thin.” He said they were micro-moments that relate to a material’s potential. For example, he spoke about the twitching of an iris: you can’t perceive it, but it exists. Same with the heat a person leaves behind on a seat. All of this is connected to the imprint that is the presence of an absence, or the thing you would call a trace.**

Extremely tenuous, but exceedingly present; I can acknowledge an association in that concept. That attention to a tiny, revealing trace; low-contrast, but vibrant. The limit between one gesture and another; that's the pearl you just saw. I'm interested in that slight reverberation, because I think that's where we can begin to perceive ourselves, to look inwards. Like a discovery, a right answer that hasn't been defined. I don't know how to explain it... It's like saying, “Ah, this was it! This is it!” You breathe in and release; in that micro-pause just before you sigh is when you understand a reality, like an epiphany. It's not something

intellectual. But there it is, and I try to define it as if I could give it a measure, fit it into a frame or make it appear in the simple tension of connecting two elements.

**So it's like in *Momentum*; the research that took years... That is, do you feel satisfied when you can define those micro-moments in *Momentum*?**

Yes, fleetingly, of course, as satisfaction tends to be. But yes, it is a relief when others perceive it without an explanation; when the spectator becomes involved in that floating movement. There are no words; any justifications sound too abstract, although I seek and test out words that may operate as an aesthetic overlap. But the resulting associations are highly recognizable, simple experiences: the moment just before rain; changing your mind when getting onto the bus, that point when you step on and you've left, or you decide not to get on and the bus has left. That's when a change of meaning takes place, a decision that is clearly an instant with its own identity, sometimes dramatic, and final, and sometimes not. An impulse that results in the present. Because to talk about a point in time is to talk about trapping the present, the sense of being there... it's very lonely.

**I remember a video by Bill Viola inspired by the caves of Mallorca: inside a cave harboring stalactites that are millions of years old, he set up a camera that can shoot over a thousand frames per second. As a result, what the eye sees in the video installation is a stalactite in slow motion.**

**That is, the installation shows us a second inside a cave that is over a billion years old, expanding that second to the point of making it last for hours. Something happens in that cave. You can see it for a second or you can see it for twenty-four hours, and the effect is never the same. There is an accumulation of time in that place that makes the object constantly become another with every passing second, while simultaneously being projected onto all of time... That video summarizes Shklovsky's theory on defamiliarization:**

**"People who live by the sea no longer hear the waves."**

**Do you think that you create that type of triggers so that spectators can access the infra-thin?**

I certainly try. I suppose that to make art is to try to expand perception. I attempt to focus on those fields of experience that we tend to devalue on account of being imprecise—and draw attention to them. To provoke defamiliarization in such an elementary action as taking a step, so as to render visible that which is unique to that hazy area. Working on the limits of the technique and the limits to our ability to see. That is where the questioning and the exploration into the medium and the tool really come to the fore: How do I say it? What is it similar to? What am I going to use to say it? Video and video installations are languages to me; I can use them to perform the analysis I want to apply on a perennially unanswered question. There is never going to be a final answer, yet all



answers get a little bit closer, building upon one another. I write things, I make lists, I find paragraphs or sentences whilst reading that help me establish an outline. I insert certain quotes in between sketches and various notes, and I also collect them in notebooks. On that point, I'm going to read you the first sentence in this notebook I brought with me today, which is very old, as you can see. It's by the Chinese poet Yang Lian, and says, "'Now' is the furthest away." I think that is a very simple way of summarizing this thing that is permanently slipping away from us. *Momentum* was a project that I came back to after reading something that came to me by accident. As I was telling you, I wanted to isolate evidence of the irreversible, the point in time after which reality is different. I had thought of it as a fall; of taking a picture just before a fall, that exact moment when suspension occurs before collapse. I did loads of tests with two different cameras, I did a shoot with gymnasts as performers, I edited it and re-worked it a thousand times over, but it wasn't right, the exact impression didn't come out. So I put the project to one side, and there it stayed with all my other unviable ideas. One day, in a bookshop I used to go to, I was rummaging around when I overheard a conversation between the bookshop assistant and a customer about *The Silent Crossing* by Pascal Quignard, and I said, "Ah, I want that book." They didn't have it in stock, so they suggested another book by the same author: *Butes*. I bought it, and I didn't read it until a while later when I was laid up in bed recovering from a serious accident: I had to throw myself from a bolting horse. Lying there, all broken, I discovered that *Butes*, the character named in the title of the book, is the Argonaut who throws himself into the sea from the mast of the *Argos*, to dive into the sirens' song. Amongst other things, the book talks about the present as being in debt to an original impulse, it talks about origin and irreversibility. In one part, it says, "...I am leaping as a leap, I am leaping to fall, a leap in which the unrecoverable is never ever recovered." I found every page of this little book sublime. If I'm honest, I'd never heard of the author, I googled him and found a lecture where he talked about his latest book. *Les Désarçonnés*. *Désarçonner* means to throw a rider off his horse, or to get confused, in the figurative sense. It was a surprising coincidence, a clear connection with the situation I had just experienced and with the idea in the project I had set aside. A person responding to an impulse, who makes a decision: I'm going to throw myself off. That interminable micro-instant is as clear as day in my mind, even now, and at that point in time I had just experienced it. I threw myself back into the atmosphere of *Momentum*, I wanted to go back to it and find a way. Discovering Pascal Quignard's compact and beautiful writing, which holds a sort of eternal nature of temporality, made something clearer for me.

**It's similar to what happened when the Hun archers released their arrows. There was a micro-moment where they did it and, although they couldn't release it again, the arrow was still in their bow and they already knew it was**

**going to hit the target. I read about it a short time ago, that Hun archers could control those micro-moments and that's why they were expert night archers. It is like saying; I know everything that's going to happen, I know what that moment embodies, without waiting for it to reach its destination or to fall.**

You release the arrow, and you are aware of the finality of that action. I am trying to isolate the period between the decision and the action as a unit of time. As far as the meaning of the series is concerned. The process of creating the pieces is a process of getting close, of hitting the target, I am not as sure as the Huns. It was a whole different production when I went back to the series.

**But, what happens when doubt rears its head? I mean, we see the Sun, but we see it after eight minutes. We would have eight minutes if the Sun died.**

Nonetheless, what we are seeing is light. The temporal situation actually contributes, because it is a projection of light that is being stretched in relation to our everyday lives. That is, the image of the Sun would arrive here late according to the Sun, if it were a being who wanted to make himself heard, but that is not the case for us, because it is arriving right now. In *Retard*, you see a projection of a woman taking a step that never ends. Her silhouette carved into marble is the representation of a past for which there is no current evidence. Is it a record, or a memory? How far can we trust a human construct?

**Theories about thermodynamics and quantum times are referenced in your work. Do you know much about that?**

No, but I was interested in understanding the concepts of entropy, of irreversibility, the concept of time from a scientific point of view. That is how I came to *Only an Illusion*, by Ilya Prigogine, amongst other things. Everything seems to be explained, but I can't help but read it as poetry, and it sets off associations in me that would irritate any scientist. In the end, I don't think I have been able to grasp the concept. I even took a course to understand a bit about quantum physics. At the time, I thought it was within my ability, but I would be incapable of explaining any of it by the next day. I'm passionate about it, but it just slips through my fingers. The less I understand, the more I'm intrigued by it, I have periods where I devour the topic, but, to be honest, I don't know anything.

**In that regard, it's interesting to see what happens, for example, with *The Fold*, by Deleuze. He explains it in several of his interviews, and says that the shortest distance between two points is no longer a straight line, it's a fold. And that can resemble time.**

As if it were a spatial environment. As if it were a unit of development, or something of the sort. But a line can be folded an infinite amount of times, multiplying space and harboring spiritual states. Deleuze holds that "What is expressed says nothing beyond its expression."<sup>6</sup> It is really

<sup>6</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *El pliegue. Leibniz y el barroco*, Barcelona, Paidós Básica, 1989 [1988], translated by José Vázquez and Umbrella Larraceleta. (English edition: *The Fold. Leibniz and the Baroque*, University of Minnesota Press, 1992.)

hard not to associate that with spatiality, because that is what is related to our experience. I think that intuitions, sensations, reveal things that our experience cannot corroborate.

## DAÑO INMINENTE

I made that piece in 2013. It was a piece that ended up being an epilogue. You can already see in it the concern for separating the imminent as a precise instant, that moment of suspense when a tension is generated. That's why I put a plate on a tablecloth. I looked for the tablecloth for a long time so it would be generic, that is to say, white. And the same went for the plate; I looked around until I found the right one to convey a classic image. A china plate with milk and a white tablecloth. And, behind them, a white curtain. All white, in a house in the country. You can't see where, but it has that reverberation of light, that calm.

**As a spectator of that piece, I always thought of a house in the country, of an old house in the country, belonging to a large family. I thought of all of that (without getting into a narrative), but I felt it. You said something very specific about it: that there was a threat.**

The threat lies in what can't be seen... an omnipresent sound can be heard in this scene of absolute stillness—the buzzing of a fly, just one. Without even seeing it, it hints at the imminence of harm. I have been busy working with that tension lately. Like drawing a bow and drawing... drawing it and keeping that tension indefinitely. The aim was to suggest that drowsy mid-afternoon atmosphere. It came to me when I was out in the country; more precisely, at that time of day when you can hear the little buzzing sounds, and sunlight begins to fall diagonally. In places like that, time becomes bloated, and slows down. On summer afternoons in the countryside, the buzzing is on the outside, but, by introducing the buzz into that scene inside the room, a strangeness manifests itself. Ultimately, when the insect comes in—an insect that is just as innocent as one on the outside—, it's desperate to get out. Inside the house, it creates an exasperating situation, a contradiction with that static situation, instilled with purity... We wait for the fly to fall into the milk, and the very assumption that it's going to fall into the milk suffices to create an aversion, an exaggerated disgust... those atavistic things one has... and, no, it doesn't happen, and, though the tableau is beautiful, the tension never lets up.

**I'm very interested in the "other" scene, that empty space on the second screen where there is no plate.**

It was presented on two channels because there is a direct link to a window and the presentation is the relationship between an outside and the stillness of the inside. That space where there is no plate is actually the same space; it might not say anything on its own, but it adds to the scene and the quality of the dialogue between the different elements. The emptiness accentuates the suspense: a single plate, a single fly, nothing else on the table, nothing else in the room, apart from the anxiety.

**I'm going to come back to the word "threat." I think I find the emptiness on the monitor more threatening than the buzzing. I think of the monitor as telling me something about memory, as hinting at death. Do you think your work is related to death?**

Yes... there's something implicit in it, right? It's clearer in some periods, like when I used silkworm cocoons: the cocoon, as an egg or as a shroud. Or those images of the devastating force of water, that leaves death in its wake or is a vehicle for life. It's that double nature of killing and creating, of hiding and revealing. Also, in *Paisaje a definir* [Landscape to Be Defined], our river appears, with its wide-openness that hides a violent history beneath its docility. There is something latent there. I am interested in that ambiguity... everything comes into it.

## PEQUEÑOS PARAÍDOS ENSAMBLADOS, THE BEGINNING OF THE END

I find it interesting that you mention the river, not just because of what happened, but also because of the idea of death as emptiness, as something that erases. In the piece *Pequeño paraíso ensamblado* [Little Assembled Paradise], you spoke of a first pool that annoyed you, and, then, when thinking about setting it up for the exhibition in Miami, the water spouts appeared. You began to think about natural disasters. I think that, in many parts of your work, there is a time that is standing still awaiting a catastrophe.

**I'm going to come back to the word "threat." I think I find the emptiness on the monitor more threatening than the buzzing. I think of the monitor as telling me something about memory, as hinting at death. Do you think your work is related to death?**

Material also appears as a trace of what's left of the catastrophe, what's left behind when the wind has blown away everything there was to blow away. That material makes us confront the finitude, our finitude, because that's all that's left. Those landscapes begin with a bit of irony... kind of like a game, but in line with the inaccessibility of the ideal, thinking about

the specific geography in how it's set up, water spouts or desert scenes appear... And then I'm right back on the topic of format... Irony and jokes don't last very long for me, there is a certain melancholy behind those landscapes. It's something to do with the limitations of the subject who redesigns and isolates the catastrophe; who salvages fragments and builds herself a refuge with the remains and with the ubiquitous image of these little devices that show the world in miniature, the electronic image, the little box of everybody's dreams.

**You come back to material in these little assembled landscapes. There is a direct indication towards it. I find the amount of materials you used in that piece, in those landscapes, very suggestive. It allows it to be measured in other stages of human existence.**

Yes. In one of them, the planks, for example, are all that remains after the disaster. That's rearranged so as to protect and treasure the idea of paradise lost, only accessible through its representation, and in the end it turns out that in that way, as an artifice, in an ever more exposed reality, it becomes safer, more trustworthy.

**Are these *Paraísos ensamblados* directly related to your piece *Zumbido* [Buzzing]?**

There is a certain amount of humor or irony in *Zumbido*, too. It is a condemnation of action, but presented as white and rhythmic like a dance. In both series, there is a way of stretching the limits of aestheticism. How far can I take it, until a particular artificialness appears to decry the lie. That's why I'm interested in the digital image. In the case of *Zumbido*, at the edge of hyperreality, annoyance and exasperation at times become seductive. While, on the contrary, no thought was given to quality in relation to the archive images in the *Pequeños paraísos ensamblados* that show disasters occurring in idyllic, supposedly perfect, places.

**I think that that absence is revealed in *Pequeños paraísos ensamblados*, because there, in the video, there is a detonation of exactly those things that aren't in the video. That's where a large part of your work occurs: in the things that can't be seen. Is the notion of emptiness and death there?**

I suppose so... it appears again, but not on purpose in this case. I honestly didn't think about it in the *Paraísos*... It must be my Spanish roots! I think there is something of that in my origins, and even more so coming from a family marked by my maternal grandparent's early deaths. Particularly my grandfather's. A young widower with four small daughters who was killed during the Civil War. They shot him in the chest early one morning as he returned home from visiting a friend who had been sentenced to the firing squad. You couldn't make a worse tragedy up... A catastrophic event that unleashed a terribly hard journey for these girls. By the time I was born, my mum had already built up a pretty strong scaffold around those absences, I walked confidently along

the walkways in another world that was in no way a mock-up—as my little montages were—; reality and strength were unquestionable conditions. But that history and emptiness were there, always; an emptiness that wasn't a threat... no, it was just there, all the time, and paradise; I don't know... it was nostalgia.

<sup>7</sup> Michel Foucault,  
op. cit., pp. 5–6.

On this topic, I'd like to come back to the text by Foucault I referred to earlier. I'll read you a sentence: "...it is possible that closeness to death, its sovereign gesture, its imprint in man's memory, might hollow out inside being and the present that void from- and of which we speak..."<sup>7</sup> Isn't that beautiful? He talks about writing, about words, about their ability to suspend any event for as long as it takes to tell a tale. But I felt that the thing I was looking for in my work was related to thinking about that delay. I am obsessed with seeking out a clear image of what cannot be expressed by language. The things that are just-and-so diluted are captured and are at the same time present, imminent, a clear and recognizable intuition. There is no such thing as a right answer. What I feel is that each series I embark upon is a search that adds some extra time to my urgency. Maybe I could compare it with the act of reading; it's like experiencing other measurements of time, which are simultaneous, correlative or superimposed, and adding them on to your own time. Like deferring conclusions. It happens in everybody's head, I suppose, but as far as I'm concerned, an artist's job is to pay attention to and to try to somehow materialize those layers of reality that lie beneath our every day experience. To pit mental experiences against the urgent presence of the void.

## TIME TIME TIME TIME TIME

**We talked about Borges yesterday. About the inspiration and source of the poetry in his work. He said several times that the poetry comes from the poetry itself, but also, sometimes, as part of any old thought, an obsession, or something hidden. In *Notas sobre el tiempo* [Notes on Time] and *Momentum*, where do those video installations come from?**

It's true; the bread crumbs to follow usually appear in the piece itself. There are certain obsessions that run through it, the thing that attracts you reappears. I think Borges questioned the concept of eternity in classical texts, eternity as infinite or eternity as something unchanging. Thinking about eternity is in itself poetic. In that regard, I was interested in the dual nature of time. How it makes a mark, leaves a trace, and erases it, all at the same time. That was the image in my work with metal and photographic emulsions. Time draws a line, and constantly amends it. From there, I don't really know why, I began to think about

time as a material, as a thing. Or an entity, with a will and some sort of consciousness. I used a quote by Deleuze in the piece *Notas sobre el tiempo*: "All that changes is within time, but time itself does not change."

And that gives rise to a fundamental question: why doesn't it change? Time itself could mutate. That's why, in many installations, I assigned time with qualities. As if rushing or waiting weren't subjective sensations, but rather objective qualities of time that force that experience upon us. As if time itself chose to deposit you into a wait or a rush, as if it decided to stretch out so you never arrive or to fold in on itself so that leaving and returning be the same thing. And at the instant, at the point in time in which it shows itself, it takes on an individual nature, and then decides to go back to dissolving itself in duration. So I wanted to convey that thought in a sequence of installations as a huge, multi-temporal body of work that doesn't entail just one duration, but instead multiple simultaneous streams of time. A scene that shows waiting, that shows an eternal coming and going without ever reaching a result, a bombardment of moments underway. There is the time of a journey and the time of a reader who is travelling and reading a novel about time, the time that is opened by the narration, the time of the world that passes by on the other side of the window, and so forth.

**So the installation's time is the spectator's time?**

Yes, as well. In turn, the spectator is witness to the simultaneous nature of those times. In this installation and in others, the spectator is immersed in that rhythm. In momentary shock or in the infinite sequence where time is a succession: it goes by and goes on infinitely, and, suddenly, something overlaps with it that cancels it out, that brings the whole sequence to a halt. They are just perceptions of time.

**Now we are in 2016, almost two decades after the start of your career in making video installations. That obsession has turned you into a meticulous creator of video installations, who also coexists with the trade. Could you talk a bit about that? What do you do every day?**

I arrive at my studio in the morning, I sit down at my computer to edit, or to download images from the camera, or to select them, to work with whichever application comes handy at the time. I head over to my table, I draw, I go back to the computer, and so on... Obviously, there are different stages to my work. I find the studio stage the most absorbing and enjoyable, thinking, manipulating the image, projecting... but then comes designing how it's going to be laid out, looking for the right technology to set the piece up, adapting it to the actual space; that part is kind of a drag for me. You have to contend with the outside world and limitations. To be honest, I prefer to stay in my little factory. All the same, depending on the project I'm working on, drawing might take center stage; or, for example, I have been pretty busy with a little workshop I made to manufacture the bone china objects I have used in my most recent installations.

### **How do you make those objects?**

First I make a clay model, then a plaster mold, I prepare a slip with powdered china, I dry it, I sand it, I bake it. It's a process full of accidents, but those smooth little tiles, the warm and opaque whiteness are the essence of the material. Porcelain brings to mind ideas of something precious, delicate and fragile, whilst also being an extremely hard, resistant material, it sounds musical when it breaks but it cuts like glass. I'm interested in that duality and, since it couldn't be any other way, also in the complexity of the process.

**I know that you edit all your own material; you like to learn how to do everything. One thing you said that I found moving was that "I can't lend out my pencil so that other people do my drawings."**

I have a hands-on approach. I can feel the physical part of making, of adding to, of taking away, of cutting. It's a process of trial and error, be it for digital images, making objects, or drawing. It's as much the case for digital post-production as it is for porcelain that I have to find out an awful lot, I ask questions, I consult tutorials, forums, I buy all the technical books I can find, and I just get on with it. I like to experiment, to literally get my hands dirty. I teach myself because I'm impatient. I always need to feel some sort of control to be able to improvise solutions, so I don't have to depend on somebody else's translation. That doesn't mean I haven't ever worked with other artists or with collaborators who work with tools that I don't know how to use. In *Zumbido*, with Juan Pablo Ferlat, we established a really fruitful collaboration, giving and taking, and I learnt a lot from it. It was also really nice to work on creative collaborations with musicians and dancers for some projects. On the other hand, my work always poses technical challenges for me.

**Do you make diagrams for the video installations? How do you imagine them?**

I imagine an ideal layout and variations: I'll do a first design in pencil, with loads and loads of drawings. Then, once I'm a bit further on with editing the video, I do mock-ups for different layouts in Photoshop. The drawing always comes first, as a way to get my ideas straight. I was a really quiet child. Drawing was my anchor and my safety net. Drawing was what I was most interested in.

**What else do you draw, apart from your installations?**

Sometimes I draw very classic drawings, or I do quick sketches, which are a bit like my handwriting, somewhat messy, oversized, my drawings have lines through them, I do corrections without erasing anything. I have to think with a pencil in my hand. I used to doodle on fresh sheets of paper that I would keep in a pile and then throw them away. In the last few years, I threw notes away during my clear outs that I later wanted to use but they weren't there any more. So I started using sketchpads and notebooks, which are also beautiful objects in themselves. The sketchpads are full of projects and sketches, lists and random bits of



writing. The notebooks have quotes from things I've read; and there are others that I start during a trip and never finish. Afterwards, since I haven't filled them out and I've got a new one, I start writing other things down that are perhaps about a book I've been recommended, next to a recipe for stoneware or porcelain... Or I write down a thought, experiences... I've got several notebooks going at the same time that have gotten mixed up with one another, that run from one into the other, so now I no longer have one for quotes, one for trips, one as a diary, because they all got mixed up. But they're there, still active.

**There is a text you wrote in the catalogue for *Todo lo de afuera* [Everything out There]: "Everything from outside is a question, an imprecise object, a blurry desire. The images depict a sensation that as such cannot be described... but the certainty of the existence of an inaccessible environment, the steadfast insistence on overcoming an obstacle, and the figure of that obstacle all circulate, like movements of a single piece."<sup>8</sup> Those sentences come across as literary poetic thought. I mean, you write poems. Where do those thoughts come from?**

<sup>8</sup> Catalogue for *Todo lo de afuera* exhibition, MAMBA, 2004.

The things I write and my artwork come about at the same time, I'm not exactly sure where from. I write things and then I polish them up, they start off as poetic descriptions of the piece, I want them to have a rhythm. I don't think about it during the shoot, but when I'm editing I'll go round in circles thinking about what exactly it is I mean by that... Sometimes I say, "I want to study imminence"; in that case, the idea came first. Other times, that's not the case. When I study sensation, the texts and the space appear during the effort of describing it and finding a way to do so and an image to show it.

**In those texts, which are later incorporated into the catalogues and end up in posterity, there are lots of things that are personal, that don't come out, but that are in them. How do you include those texts in your video installations?**

They aren't included as texts in the video itself. Maybe the odd sentence plotted on the wall if I think it completes the work, that it's part of the piece. In the specific case of *Todo lo de afuera*, I feel that the text is part of the piece, so it appears in the catalogue. But most of the time the things I write stay in their notebook.

**"That's how it is, someone singing to himself to keep himself together. So the echo sets the limits for everything inside."**

Ok, that little sentence got out. It goes with a video about insomnia, where a girl lies curled up, infinitely repeating small movements. I associate those situations linked to childhood questions. When we're in the dark and an infinite space opens up within you. And you sing; you repeat something; you fold up into an echo against your own limits and define an internal space.

## SMALL ASSEMBLED GARDENS

See, once again we've identified important points where the process of creation is at the edge of space and time. I started by asking you about death, which is the end of time (for some of us mortals). We've gone over that. But I can see that you have a certain love of expanded time. I'd made a note here about Marie-Jo Lafontaine, because I think there is a likeness between your works. You make micro-fragments where time begins to expand, and that time is anguished.

I get the feeling that the anguish in your work is pleasurable.

I think there's a link with those Japanese Zen Buddhist proverbs about time and emptiness, as occurs, for example, in *Daño inminente*. I think that piece is about inverted and parallel time. A proverb comes to mind that talks about happiness: "If you want to be happy for an instant, buy something; if you want to be happy for a while, get married; if you want to be happy for ever, be a gardener." Gardening, in that sense, has an expanded course of time, a time that goes between a human lifetime and the lifetime for the thing you're looking after and that, in turn, looks after you. I know you are interested in gardening. Could you tell me about it? Do you have a garden?

Yes. That question about times and limits.... I don't know if its pleasurable, but those are my circumstances. I think that gardening is a way of breaking down limits, or of finding meaning in that relationship with something living; it's a very human activity. It's not like seeing and enjoying the wilderness, or having a mystical experience in it. Gardening lies in the human need to care for something, to modify and recreate our surroundings... to make an inhabitable space to take responsibility for. Death is part of an absolutely vital and necessary process. Everything that dies in a garden is therefore full of meaning, and it's a huge comfort because nothing is lost. We also have that illusion of control (I did this, I put this there like that, this grew because I planted it), it touches on the divine.

**I have read several essays by artists who are gardeners. One of the ones that left the biggest impression on me was by Severo Sarduy, the Cuban writer, where he narrates a series of events during his stay in New Delhi; his only joy was looking after Octavio Paz's garden. In it, he writes about an everyday act (sending daily reports about the flowers' condition to their owner), which turns out as a series of notes about gardening that runs parallel to contemplation, and an idea of multiple time continuums. Do you think there is any connection between your garden and your video installations and video landscapes?**

I've never really thought about it, but I'm sure there is, without a doubt. I'm a complete amateur in the garden. I don't have any sort of advanced knowledge. I apply the same system as I use to learn about the technology I need for my pieces. That is, I buy all the books on the topic, I ask someone who knows more than me... in this case, my friend Mercedes; she is a specialist in biodynamic food growing, we chat for ages, she gives me tips and ideas that I half follow or end up changing without meaning to whilst we wander around looking at things and pruning. I don't follow her advice all that well, but those walks are nonetheless full of meaning. Today, while we were walking around here, I was surprised that there was an aguaribay (*Schinus molle*) at the entrance to your house and I wanted to know if it was called the same here in Colombia. I like to know those names, it's a mix of recognition and a slightly obsessive exercise, I get really annoyed if I forget the name of plants. It's like you call your dog by its name. It's not a methodical interest, it's a type of fascination, I don't claim to be a landscape gardener. I research and apply things all together or intuitively. Having contact with plants is enjoyable, because of that physical, sensorial connection, like crushing a camphor leaf in your hand and inhaling that energetic, healing kind of smell, all the way down to your feet if you can... something like that.

I think of a garden as being a borderland, it's natural but it's not "nature." It's a reordering that appears over time, with long waits or sudden appearances, but it can't get away from us, and neither is it autonomous. It needs to be tended to, otherwise it will run wild; that's what I like about it, that it permanently escapes control, it covers tracks, it always goes back to looking indifferent. It's a place where you play with uncertainties, like deliberately putting yourself under a spell. To give you an example: I amass a ton of seeds that I chuck around the place (at the right time in the year, obviously), or sometimes I sow a special one, carefully, in a corner or flowerpot, according to... and then I can't really remember what I sowed or where. Whatever grows, and when it grows, is a surprise, unexpected, like a happening. Sometimes nothing grows and I'm left wondering...

There are also some plants that are like princesses, I control them, I wait for them, they have this sovereign, independent, highly fragile beauty... too beautiful to just be at the bottom of my garden. It's a hobby I've always had alongside my work. Yes, I've always been interested in landscapes, but in a different way... as a metaphor, a deciding context, a witness, the scenery... But now, it's true... gardens appear in those small paradises I put together. In the end, the operation is pretty similar. Putting together elements or reorganizing whatever is to hand to build ourselves a refuge, a convincing replica. In that series, I use those little devices to miniaturize the world on a screen, like windows through which we could capture and treasure the idea of paradise...

## ZUMBIDO

### **Let's talk about *Zumbido*. I see these two catalogues are put together like an installation.**

This is the one for MALBA, where you can see possible layouts; then, once I had the space in the museum itself, I sketched variations and the gallery space itself ended up inspiring me to make a video. The combination is a series that came about in different formats and materials. It started off as a set of diptychs where an action and its result were separated into groups of two adjacent screens. The tension was in the gap between them: here an action, there its result. The two instances then moved into a single space—an enormous projection—where the scenes occurred in an interaction that went from rhythmic to excruciating. That was the layout for *Zumbido (dinámicas)* [Buzzing (Dynamics)] in MALBA. On the other hand, there were the little scenes—for really small monitors—in *Zumbido (Fe)* [Buzzing (Faith)], where a single fly, which has now become a subject, fought against an obstacle in different ways. Lastly, there are the drawings, which are the ones you can see in the Fundación Alon catalogue as part of the *Odisea invisible* [Invisible Odyssey] series. I did them after the installations as an attempt to do a graphic representation of those melodious, obsessive or exasperating journeys that became gestural situations. I did loads of them, and then I intervened the walls of the PROA Foundation, of my studio and the Museo Castagnino in Rosario. Those pictures represent actions in our surroundings, they are a dynamic that can't be seen, it's like the flight tracks of an insect or millions of particles: the invisible drawing made by its journey. An action that imitates or releases.

### **Invisibility in your work?**

Invisibility is a form of latency. I think that art in general expresses the invisible. Not just the invisible as what can't be seen, but also what can't be said or represented: there are no words because it's something that comes prior to words, something that was already there. Getting closer to something invisible, unsayable, latent, out of frame... how else could I put it... it's what you're chasing after.

## COLLABORATIONS

**Now let's talk about the work you did in collaboration with Charly Nijensohn and Carlos Trilnick... I know you work alone, and it's also something you feel from your work, that obsessive labor by an artist going in circles around an issue related to duration and proposing only one path. That's why I'm interested in hearing about those collaborations.**

I met up with Carlos Trilnick and Charly Nijensohn at the Mercosur Biennial. I knew Carlos and admired his work in Ar Detroy, but I only just met Charly that year on the plane to Porto Alegre. It was only the third edition of the Biennial, in 2001; the installations were shown in a kind of camp full of containers, with each artist having a container. My installation was simple, a projection on the back wall from *Notas sobre el tiempo* where it rained through a succession of hoops, to try and penetrate the whole length of the container with that infinite succession (to be honest, it didn't turn out like I expected once it was in place). Carlos presented *Una tarde* [One Evening] and Charly *10 hombres solos* [10 Men Alone]. It was one of the first editions of the Biennial, the projects weren't too complicated, but the conditions were. The containers heated up in the sun and the extra heat meant the projector bulbs kept burning out, the installation... you never knew what was going to happen... You left everything ready and, when you came back, everything was burnt out! So you'd set off on a pilgrimage around the container camp to try and resolve the catastrophe. On the day it opened, I even rushed off to Porto Alegre market with Charly to buy incense to ward off damn accidents in Carlos's installation. It was crazy! There was also time to sit down and chat calmly on the shores of Lake Guaiba, place the camera on the concrete tables there and record the boats passing by in the distance, slowly, almost at a standstill. A friendship was forged and, in an Argentina that was at breaking point, we formed a strong alliance, too.

**Yes, there's a similarity in your ideas of time. *Una tarde*, by Trilnick, came about as an adaptation of the story *One Evening*, by Samuel Beckett. In it, the character walks through the countryside and feels the "anguish of stumbling across a dead body." This never happens in Carlos Trilnick's piece, the dead body is never found, but the footfalls, the footsteps are there... which make reaching the cadaver last forever. The same thing happens with your pieces, *Zumbido* or *Momentum*. They are about uncertainty.**

Heading towards uncertainty, somehow coming to terms with it. I think the three of us have combined our work in *Una vision de lo humano*. [A Vision of What Is Human] because we found a shared cadence.

**I know that communal processes aren't easy, especially for artists who create video installations. That's why we aren't filmmakers. As such, I'm a lot more interested in anecdotes than in theory.**

During arteBA (2002), Jacobo Fiterman invited us to present a video installation project for Generalitat Valenciana. We made *Una visión de lo humano*. The title of the exhibition kind of expresses the search in our individual work. That resulted in a dynamic that led to Carlos and I setting up several video installations together between 2003 and 2005 for a project called *Delta*, about the River Plate region. The poetic foundation was Juan José Saer's essay *El río sin orillas* [The River without Banks]. There's one piece I really like that I think it was a synthesis of the series: *Cheating muchachita* [Cheating Little Girl] (2004). It looks at aspects of immigration and exile, as facts that turn into the definition of the country. We found a tango sung in English by Carlos Gardel on the internet, and we felt like it was a metaphor for both circumstances. We felt that the name, *Cheating muchachita*, was able to refer ironically to a deception and aspirational fantasy that is particular to our part of the world. The river is the door and tango in English is our misplaced identity. We thought about what sound to use, whether to use the sound of footsteps on the riverbank, of nature. We remembered the atmosphere in Saer's *Limonero real* [Royal Lemon Tree], and well, we began to add layers of sound, the splashing of the river, when it splashes against the banks, little noises, a movement and, in the background like an old radio, Gardel's tango. Charly Nijensohn moved to Berlin at the end of 2002, and ever since then he has used my studio as a base when he's in Buenos Aires. As you can imagine, his visits are pretty intense and a lot of fun. We are happy to give each other opinions and advice, we also give each other a lot of support, he is a very close friend who I respect and value an awful lot.

**How does your work relate to Argentina?**

The things that appear are the things that transpire in the piece itself, like in *Todo lo de afuera*. In *Tiny Events*, the first project I did for the Wexner fellowship, I worked on presenting convincing facial features, they are young people who seem completely familiar to us, we recognize that look challenging our lack of answers. Now, the little refuges are more connected to Latin America, to the external imagination and the real-life opposite. I prefer to talk about fragility, fragility and resistance. About how vulnerable our condition is in the face of an environment and certain circumstances that clearly show us for what we are and that we don't have control of.

**You talk about the Río de la Plata as a dream, but also as a disappointment. It makes me think of all your pieces from 1999 to date, which is when you have spent the most time on doing video installations**

What you said brings to mind *Historia de un desengaño* [A Story of Deception] by Francis Alÿs. In *Paisaje a definir*, I think of the Río de la Plata as being the surface it is, defined by its minimal geometry, a place where an immense plain spreads right up to the horizon. That sole flashing line is exactly that: a horizon, a direction, a future. It's a piece that is very pretty, perhaps too pretty, with its music box accompaniment, but, like I said, I was interested in bringing to the surface everything lying beneath the apparent docility of the landscape and all the history that implies.

**How did you feel talking about Argentina?**

It's hard, but meaningful.