

As if all work will cease
and universal laziness
will overtake us

Laura Vallés Vílchez

Outside Witness

On the Historical Reception of
The Potosí Principle

Chapter 3
No 3e

Outside Witness. On the Historical Reception of *The Potosí Principle*

The Dismantling of the Social Contract

During the debt crisis of the late 1970s, the representatives of international capital—namely, IMF and World Bank—structurally adjusted the economic system and recolonised much of the old colonial world. This crisis arose as a consequence of the economic stagnation of the United States after the Vietnam War, and the first oil crisis that resulted in the devaluation of the dollar and the rise in interest rates. At the time, Richard Nixon's decision to unpeg the US dollar from precious metals, and to introduce the system of floating currency regimes that had dominated the world economy since 1971, marked the beginning of a new phase of financial history.

Immediately, this caused the price of gold to skyrocket. Of course, the US was in possession of a large proportion of the world's gold reserves; meanwhile poorer countries kept their holdings in dollars—which turned into wet paper. As Silvia Federici points out in her essay "From Commoning to Debt: Financialization, Micro-credit and the Changing Architecture of Capital Accumulation,"ⁱ this adjustment buried entire regions in a debt that, far from becoming extinct, continues to grow. The consequences of the debt crisis simply furthered a new order that went from industrialisation to global export, restructuring a political economy that systematically channels resources from Africa or Latin America to Europe, the United States, and China.

Nevertheless, these coercive relationships have a long history. In *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*, David Graeber explains how, over centuries, debt has articulated the connections between capital and labour, increasing exploitation and transforming communities based on reciprocity by means of mutual slavery.ⁱⁱ This history would date back to—and range from—the debtor revolts against subjugation in ancient Athens in the 6th century BC; the Rome of the so-called "army of debtors" against the patricians of the year 63 BCE; the system of land labour and compulsory worship—*mita*—of the Andean regions of the colonial period of the 15th century; the public debt of the modern era as a lever of state capital accumulation at the end of the 19th century; the Great Depression of 1929; the 2008 subprime crisis, and up to the current exceptional situation of the Covid-19 pandemic.

If one looks at the history of debt, as Graeber points out, what one discovers is profound moral confusion. A struggle that has taken the form of conflicts revolving around right and wrongdoing, often wrapped in a religious patina and behavioural myth-making around our inherent drive towards barter. This discourse has displaced the ideological discussion on debt with respect to power and violence, its marriage to war; its consumption logic has fostered renewed identity debates that have fragmented the working class, while global inequality continues to give way to the gap between those with resources and those without. Societies have overcome a struggle for recognition that sets in motion a crisis of representation of an uncertain dimension, giving rise to the commercialism of difference—what Daniel Bernabé calls “the diversity trap.” Inequality and individualism operate as “an alibi to make an unjust system of opportunities ethically acceptable and to promote the ideology that leaves us alone in the face of the economic structure, distancing us from collective action.”ⁱⁱⁱ In this scenario—where, on the contrary, there is a legitimate and long-overdue dispute around the subaltern subject—, populist polarisation only reinforces the cracks of an impossible consensus. An inherently political antagonism that hinders the possibilities of *politics*, understood as an exercise of correlation of forces that establishes the harmony between communities that, in its continuous suspicion of one another, stare back—as the pages that follow these lines will show.

However, in the 1970s, it was not just gold that glittered. The financial and social struggles that gave rise to the welfare state, still based on the correlation of wages, productivity and inflation, would give way to the neoliberal consensus and the aspirational desire manifested in the idea of credit. Thus, Federici reminds us “the institution of a *debt-based* economy is an essential part of a neoliberal political strategy responding to the cycle of struggles that in the 1960s and 1970s put capitalist accumulation in crisis, and that it was triggered by the dismantling of a social contract that had existed between capital and labour since the Fordist period.”^{iv} An abandonment that, undoubtedly, does not affect the entire population equally. For María Galindo, one of the artist members of the Bolivian anarchy-feminist collective *Mujeres Creando*, which Federici refers to in her essay—and who is instrumental in the research at hand—, micro-finance is focused on recovering and destroying the survival strategies that poor Bolivian families had created in response to the crisis. Loans are granted to women. The family men manage them. Planners, Galindo says, prefer to work with women because of their responsibility and vulnerability to bullying.

This is an argument that Federici extends to other geographies in which denigratory methods are used to terrorise them: if in Bolivia some institutions mark the houses of the defaulters and then hang posters in their neighbourhoods, in Niger the banks display photographs of their debtors, and in Bangladesh NGOs tear off doors, soils and roofs to sell off, in order to recover the balance owed: punishments and sanctions that, as Lamia Karim says, include whipping, tar spillage, shaving of hair or public spitting.^v Snatching the big pot in which they cook rice to feed the whole family is also common practice. As I recall in my essay on “Stimulants: Circulation and Euphoria” in which I speculate on the history of active substances in relation to their colonial past, *debt* seems to be inseparable from *guilt*. In German *schuld* means both things.^{vi}

Mujeres Creando, as street agitators, carry out actions and creations that disrupt the asymmetric processes that subordinate and colonised women suffer. As they pray to the virgin in one of their graffiti statements in the exhibition we are about to unfold: “Hail Mary, you are full of rebellion.” However, “to end God’s judgement,” as Antonin Artaud would put it, all that is necessary is for the army of men cased in steel, in blood, in fire and bones, as it advances, railing against the invisible Christ, that “crab” who “agreed to live without a body.”^{vii} Following Nixon’s decision to unpeg the US dollar from precious metals, Latin America’s so-called “lost decade” took place, a result of the debt crisis where money was

Ave María
llena eres
de rebeldía

Mujeres
Creando



Mujeres Creando, exhibition Principio Potosí, Museo Reina Sofia 2010

divorced from its material correspondence with the gold standard in order to print more fiduciary bills—based on community faith—to, in turn, pay for wars.

But Nixon's gambit started to totter. Debt imperialism was met by an equally global movement of social and fiscal rebellion in East Asia and Latin America. By 2000, these countries had begun a systematic boycott and, in 2002, Argentina committed the ultimate sin: they defaulted and got away with it. The traumatic consequences of these experiences are the starting point of a project that will lead our protagonists to develop the following research on global capitalism. And so in a dualist world of innocent and guilty, of servants and prophets, we face increasing difficulties when addressing the complexities that emerge from the processes of entrenched inequality that have dismantled welfare states and have financialised the reproduction of our lives. Logics that increase precarisation in its etymological sense: prayers and supplications for achieving resources that allow the sustenance of life on earth that each one treads, have slipped across all geographies, including the muddled West.

So, How Can We Sing the Song of the Lord in an Alien Land?

That is precisely the question that *The Potosí Principle* engages with.^{viii} A collective exhibition co-produced by several national museums, MNCARS (Madrid, Spain), HKW (Berlin, Germany), and MNA/MUSEF (La Paz, Bolivia), and exhibited between 2010 and 2011, whose repercussions and complexity—that is, its historical reception—I was invited to address in this text.

Collectively curated by a group of artists and thinkers, who decided to tackle the marriage between capital and religion, global economy and colonial production—and whose pitfalls I will detail below—, this was one of Manuel Borja-Villel's first ventures to take on after being assigned a new role as director of the Madrid museum.

“At the beginning, Manuel Borja-Villel organised the Reina Sofía. In his second year he rearranged the permanent collection. And on the third day?,” Iker Seisdedos wrote in a prophetic tone in the newspaper *El País*, “the revolution would concern temporary collections.”^{ix} Thus, the organisation of the museum would become, in its first phase, a state agency: a legal structure that would give it management autonomy similar to that of the Prado Museum. At the same time, the programming would attend to the approach of “inverted modernity:” the collection would be rearranged “without fear of anachronism and unorthodox confrontation,” offering a “non-formalistic vision of art” in which there would be room for “space-time jumps” in the manner theorised by the critic, ethnologist, art historian and eccentric Aby Warburg, reconfiguring the collection through micro-narratives that would superimpose concepts in an open and changing display that would question the unconscious memory of the images. In parallel to *The Potosí Principle*, an exhibition curated by the French philosopher George Didi-Huberman would be expressly dedicated to Warburg: *Atlas, How to Carry the World on One's Back?* A journey through the history of images from 1914 to the present day that would constitute a “new way of telling the history of the visual arts far from the historical and stylistic schemes of academicism”; narrative that would say “goodbye to the canon” and would offer a “personal journey through modern art in which the ages and artistic schools were entities [...] to tell a story.”^x

“On the third day,” the temporary exhibitions would investigate “the idea of the other.”^{xi} *Drifts and Derivations*, curated by Lisette Lagnado and María Berríos, would present the School of Valparaíso, Lina Bo Bardi, and Flávio de Carvalho, as an alternative to Eurocentric and neo-colonial discourses. *Martín Ramírez*, curated by Brooke Davis Anderson, would show the drawings of a self-taught Mexican artist who, for the final three decades of his life,

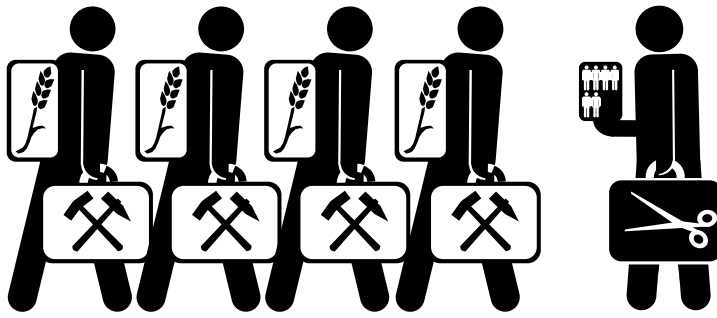
was confined to a mental health hospital in northern California. And, closing the trilogy, in the framework of the celebration of the bicentennial of Latin American independence (1810-2010), *The Potosí Principle* would advocate displacing the *origin* of modernity, traditionally located in Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries, to the city of Potosí in the 16th century. This inversion would serve to rethink those mechanisms for dismantling the social contract of which Federici describes, based on Baroque colonial painting, colonisation processes and correspondences between the ideological function of legitimation of power and, therefore, disrupting the settled asymmetries that emerge from the production and circulation of images then and now. In other words, territorial exploitation, the art world and its flirtations with the global market in the form of a *pattern* (in Spanish *principio* means both beginning and principle), would face the mirror of Marx and his original accumulation of capital—and all while Spain had a conservative government at the head of the State.^{xii}

Potosí was once an economic nerve centre; one of the most important cities in the world, larger in size and population than Paris and London at the time. The precious metals discovered in the territory gave rise to the monetary circulation that would characterise the Modern Age. In turn, Potosí would become the promoter of an artistic production destined to evangelise the indigenous labour force, and whose overabundance established the new slavery order mentioned at the beginning of this text, the *mita*, whose extractive work would serve to pay for a series of European wars. In the Casa de la Moneda de Potosí, the metallic money that was exported to the Spanish metropolis was minted. The economist Adam Smith pointed out that its spread was a great loss of life for the European economy.^{xiii} *The Potosí Principle* would include works of colonial baroque art from between the 16th and 18th centuries from convents, churches, archives and museums, works that represent a true void in historical reading that is part of institutional practices, along with contemporary responses from close to twenty-five artists appealing to four centres of economic power: Moscow, Beijing, London, and Dubai.

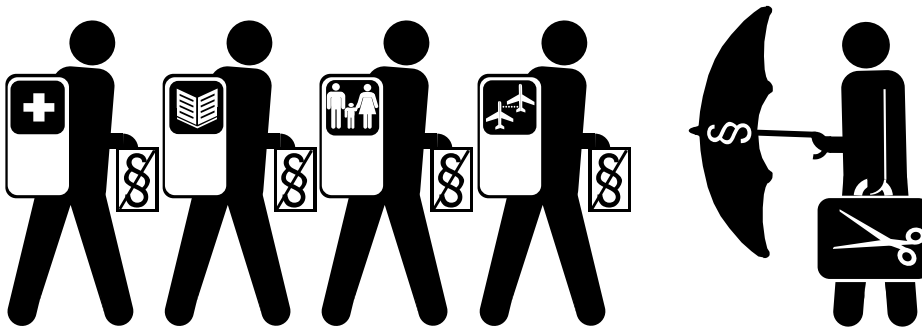
Hegemony, primitive accumulation, human rights opacities, and the ideological investment of an upside-down world, would be the four concepts that would interweave between the galleries of the three museums to which the exhibition would travel. Mujeres Creando themselves, as well as Elvira Espejo, Sonia Abián, Chto Delat?, Stephan Dillemath, Ines Doujak, Marcelo Expósito, Harun Farocki, León Ferrari, Isaías Griñolo, Sally Gutiérrez, Dmitry Gutov, Zhao Liang, Rogelio López Cuenca, Eduardo Molinari, David Riff, Konstanze Schmitt, Territorio Doméstico, or Christian von Borries, among others,^{xiv} would be part of the proposal together with the work of two of the curators, and also artists, Alice Creischer and Andreas Siekmann. The Bolivian-German philosopher, Max Jorge Hinderer Cruz, and the Aymara mestiza sociologist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, according to the current Reina Sofía Museum's website, would close the exhibition's team of four curators. Although it will soon be seen that this presentation launched by the institution would not be entirely correct, and that an enduring impossible consensus would lead to two institutional publications: the official catalog and a so-called "dissident" book, both published by the Reina Sofía Museum.

The official catalog, edited by Creischer, Siekmann and Hinderer Cruz, received the public in this cited way:

Welcome to an alien land. We hope you managed to endure the security at departures. Please don't let the handcuffs of the security guards disturb you. You are neither in prison nor are you being held in a bank as a potential investor. You are not even here anymore. You have left your contemporariness, so to speak, for you are now in a historical space which, we claim, does not draw a straight line but constitutes a simultaneous and never-ending space. The point from which you will begin your



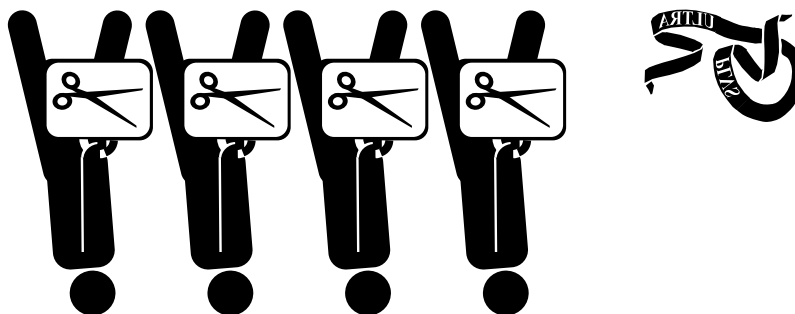
There is a primitive accumulation that is merely so called



There are human rights to have rights over humans



How can we sing the alien song in the land of the Lord?

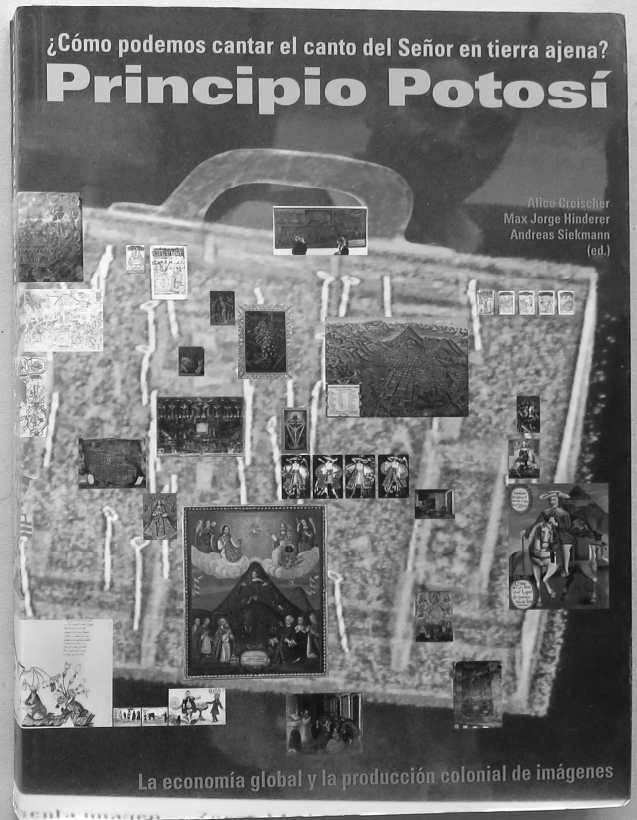


The world upside down

departure is the city of Potosí, a mining city in Bolivia, of which it is said that in the sixteenth century it was larger and more magnificent than London and Paris, and that on public holidays the sidewalks were paved with silver. It is said that with the silver brought from Potosí to Europe a bridge could be built across the Atlantic, all the way to the port of Cádiz. There is an ongoing disagreement about how one can assess the number of people who died from forced labor in the mines. It must have been hundreds of thousands, but it does not stop with this region no longer being a colony—it extends throughout the 200 years of the Republic that is celebrated with the Bicentenario, right up until the present day. [Today, the life expectancy of these workers is around forty-five years]. This dynamism discharges a mass production of images that are first shipped to the colonies, where they then produce their own images. When we show some of these pictures here, we want them to bear witness to the fact that cultural hegemony is not a symbolic dimension but instead is linked with violence. [...] There are different paths you can take during your departure, but you will always cross the same geographical points, places from which we have invited artists to respond to the pictures from Potosí, based on their local situation in today's boomtowns. Not the least of our concerns was to make it clear that the production of images is never entirely in line with the technology of power, and that even in its most repressive forms it is capable of expressing a fear and an anticipated revenge against the impossibility of conceiving that a border can actually exist within this infinite immanence of power, and that there are indeed opponents—erratic, corruptible, and unstable ones, who refuse to partake.^{xv}

In a similar spirit, the publication under the care of Cusicanqui appealed to those representational resistances and proposed another plot:

Another look at the totality. In proposing to approach The Potosí Principle as a concrete historical totality, located in the southern hemisphere, we should first place the colonial paintings selected for the sample on a kind of macro-scale map, which would map the ordering routes of that space from the middle horizon to the discovery, in April 1545, of a very high-grade silver vein at Potoxsi, a wak'a or place of worship that the mit'ayos of the Inka came to from Porco. We have turned to the textile-spatial metaphor, marked by the ritual function of the khipus and their structuring power over the Andean space on its state horizon. The structuring function of the khipus and thakis survives the colonial invasion and re-articulates the territories-spaces of the Andes around new axes or nodes of power: the churches and the patron saints, in a complex and variegated ritual plot. But it is the experience of that rituality in the present that gives intuitive force to our desire for reconstitution. It is the feeling of the presence of the mountains, listening to the voices of the landscape, the substrates of memory that speak to us from their summits, the lakes and water holes or from their multiple apachetas and paths. Thaki is a polysemic Aymara word that marks the itinerary of libations, dances and songs on the routes that connect the wak'as with the centres of power of the successive historical horizons of significance and territorialisation. The Church and Money, new colonial wak'as, are thus inscribed in a dense semantic fabric and painstakingly built [...] In this space the pictures and churches that mark the itinerary of our gaze are inscribed. A new modern centralisation (that of the museum) functions as a powerful deterritorializing force for its meanings... We will deal with this patriarchal and totalising dimension on the right side: the white and masculine face of this book. Her left, dark and feminine face runs through the lived space of Andean geography in the cycle of festivals that mark milestones in time / space (pacha).^{xvi}



Catalogues, Principio Potosí Reverso and Principio Potosí, 2010

Both stories offer a look at the historical totality from a spatial metaphor that weaves together their respective narratives: if the first bets on a simultaneous and open story, located in five cities and an expanded time, the second, on the contrary, roots that view in the American southern hemisphere and, instead of speaking of baroque simultaneity, proposes an approach to history as an ordered structure of knots and ties: the same ones that Andean civilisations would use as an accounting system, namely, *kipu*.

The disagreement will become visible in the pages to come, in part, due to the impossibility of agreeing on a single place of enunciation from which to create that discursive space; with different languages, each curator would speak from the land on which their feet step, from their own experience, in turn leading to a debate around extraction. However, what both would share apart from the recognition of a space of exception that limits the immanence of power and survives the invasion—would be the suspicion of the museum as a powerful centralising force, whose bureaucratic and diplomatic dynamics would make the work process an even more complex scenario for negotiation. While one part mistrusted but accepted the institution, the other eventually rejected its exhibition format.

This complexity makes *The Potosí Principle* a paradigmatic case within the brief historiography of exhibitions and, consequently, it has not gone unnoticed in the literature of the last decade. Doctoral theses, book chapters, articles and daily press have written about the museum, the exhibition, the curators, the artists and their images, as well as their audiences, from prisms as diverse as postcolonial and political theories, ecofeminism, history of art, curating and museography, communication, and mass media. Each of these areas of knowledge addresses a different set of issues and therefore postulates their claims. The tailored journey that I offer below—one of the many possible—will work to consolidate the renewed interest of a project that returns, transmuted and crossed by the urgencies of the present, a decade later.

In addition, I will try to shed light on an aspect that becomes key when approaching this project, oftentimes reduced to stories of responsible and guilty, exonerated and absolved, and that is the idea of representation and its paradoxes. A term that, seen from the *museum*, has a long history, particularly if we focus on the 20th century and on the different waves of institutional critique, in which artists took a position against institutions to, over the years, see in them not only a problem but part of a solution. As seen from the *exhibition*, the semiotic question of (re)presentation as the unlimited presence of difference would be problematised; that is, as a praxis of human actions that are presented as future possibilities in which the tensions between bodies and objects, in their polysemy, render a story visible. From the *curators*, the methodological character could be addressed; who narrates and in what way is the articulation between the elements that facilitate communication and that, on this occasion, has the additional complication that two of them are, in turn, artists in the exhibition. From the *artists*, the spatiality of the images or material proposals would be negotiated in dialogue with the rest of the participants, as well as the possibilities of association and agency in relation to the discourse of the exhibition, the museum its regular visitors, as well as potential audiences. Finally, the *public* would work on mediation strategies, often negotiated with the curators, but also with the administrative bodies that claim them as figures to justify their reason for being. These terms—from the institution to the audience—will serve as poles to hold on to, when following this essay.

This is a story where, ultimately, *representation* manifests itself in all its meanings according to the dictionary: as an act and effect of representing; as an image or idea that substitutes reality; as a group of people who represent a community; as a thing that represents another; as a category or social distinction; as a dramatic work featuring primarily religious themes; as the right of one person to take the place of another; as a

concept in which an external or internal object is made present to consciousness; as a plea or proposition supported by reasons or documents addressed to a superior.^{xvii} In short, a complex term that in its different long-term epistemological and methodological approaches, halfway between politics and semiotics, offers a difficult consensus—but one which undoubtedly contributes to complicate the set of rules that defines the multiple. However, it is not enough to shout, “Long live the multiple!” “The multiple must be done.”^{xviii} But how?

Can The Museum Shape, Share, or Serve?

In a small volume entitled *Radical Museology. What's 'Contemporary' in Museums of Contemporary Art?* (2013),^{xix} Claire Bishop would present the Reina Sofía Museum as an example of museography, as an archive of the commons and of radical education.

The museum has adopted a self-critical representation of the country's colonialist past, positioning Spain's own history within a larger international context [...] While all these galleries present art conventionally thought of as modern rather than contemporary in terms of periodisation, I would argue that the total system of display is dialectically contemporary [...] the museum presents constellations of works in which the artistic media are no longer the priority, which are driven by a commitment to emancipatory traditions, and which acknowledge other modernities (particularly in Latin America). Temporary exhibitions, meanwhile, are used as testing sites for rethinking the museum's overall mission and collection policy. In 2009, for example, the museum initiated "The Potosí Principle", curated by Alice Creischer, Andreas Siekmann, and Max Jorge Hinderer. The exhibition argued that the birthplace of contemporary capitalism might not be the Industrial Revolution of northern England or Napoleonic France, but the silver mines of colonial Bolivia.^{xx}

For Bishop, Borja-Villel would have developed a method to rethink the contemporary museum, using triangular diagrams to express the dynamic relationships that support three different models: the modern, the postmodern, and the contemporary. These diagrams would set in motion the narrative or motivation, the intermediation structure, and the museum's goal. If the MoMA represented the modern linear historical time of the white cube; Tate Modern and Center Pompidou, the apparatus of multiculturalism and marketing of the mediation of quantifiable audiences; then Reina Sofía would be, for this author, the complexity of the other museums from the contemporary, introducing the so-called “decolonial” discourse and the commons that seeks models of collective property.

The starting point for this museum is therefore multiple modernities: an art history that is no longer conceived in terms of avant-garde originals and peripheral derivatives, since this always prioritises the European center and ignores the extent to which apparently “belated” works hold other values in their own context. The apparatus, in turn, is reconceived as an archive of the common, a collection available to everyone because culture is not a question of national property, but a universal resource. Meanwhile, the ultimate destination of the museum is no longer the multiple audiences of market demographics, but radical education: rather than being perceived as hoarded treasure, the work of art would be mobilised as a “relational object” (to use Lygia Clark's phrase) with the aim of liberating its user psychologically, physically, socially, and politically. The model here is that of Jacques Rancière's “ignorant schoolmaster,” based on a presumption of equality of intelligence between the spectator and the institution.^{xxi}

Bishop would situate the dynamics of the museum in the debates that occupied both the early 2010s and that of the idea of “the contemporary” as a discursive category. In the 1990s, the term would function as a synonym for the post-war period—art after 1945—, then understood as high modernism, and ultimately, linked with the emergence of global markets. While Peter Osborne would define the contemporary as a fiction on a planetary scale in which there is no shared subject position (although it operates as if there is, as if it could be lived as a unit of multiple temporalities), Boris Groys would consider it a kind of non-historical excess of time. For Giorgio Agamben, however, the contemporary would be faced by its relationship with a time that is defined by disjunction and anachronism. A kind of simultaneous and incompatible coexistence of different modernities and ongoing social inequalities, as Terry Smith would say, that persists despite the global expansion of telecommunications systems and the supposed universality of market logic. It ultimately presents, in Julia Bryan-Wilson’s words, a space of radical uncertainty. “You are not even here anymore. You have left your contemporariness, so to speak, for you are now in a historical space which, we claim, does not draw a straight line but constitutes a simultaneous and never-ending space.”^{xxii} Creischer, Siekmann, and Hinderer Cruz told us, the visiting public, after making sure that the museum’s security control was not a threat, but rather the entrance to a space of fiction on a planetary scale of shared subject position that Osborne expounds. Cusicanqui, on the contrary, would prefer to move the story to the opposite extreme, another *principio*, to the period of development of the Andean civilisations (due to the predominance of the Wari culture), and whose uncertain chronology is between 500 and 1200 BCE. According to the sociologist, “we should first place the colonial paintings selected for the sample on a kind of macro-scale map, which would map the ordering routes of that space from the middle horizon to the discovery” in order to face this “new modern centralisation—that of the museum—[that] works as a powerful force, deterritorialising its meanings.”^{xxiii}

During this period, many Western institutions would begin to regain the notion of “modernity” by acknowledging the museum’s difficulties in dealing with the great narratives of history and its violence. If modernity could not be overcome, exhibitions such as *Defining Modernity* (Getty Center, 2007), *In the Desert of Modernity* (HKW, Berlin, 2008), *Altermodern* (Tate Triennial, London, 2009), *Modernologies. Contemporary artists investigating modernity and modernism* (MACBA, Barcelona, 2009), *Afro Modern: Journeys Through The Black Atlantic* (Tate Liverpool, 2010) or *Multiple Modernities 1905-1975* (Center Pompidou, Paris, 2013) would examine and reevaluate the term through the lens of postcolonial theory, ethnology, and urban planning. In order to gain momentum towards and into the future, museums would bring the term back to the curatorial realm to address their representative paradoxes as national and ideological entities, and offer new possibilities for reading around the great utopian project linked to well-being, equality and progress, without forgetting the processes of oppression and colonial control of which the museum would be art and part. As we witnessed, the fragmentation of the great historical narratives of the late twentieth century would not lead to the so-called “end of history”^{xxiv} after the fall of communism and the emergence of world markets, but to a new interest in representing the past, alongside criticism of national narratives and the institutions that shaped their ideologies.

Institutional critique, which traditionally operated outside the western museum, would be institutionalised from within, becoming a method of spatial and political criticism as well as a mechanism of discursive control. These administrative, educational and curatorial efforts to redefine the museum as a space of strategic importance far from the hegemonic forces, would give rise to “new institutionalism.”^{xxv} Nevertheless the debate that institutions are structures of social support would settle, because they regulate both memory and forgetfulness and, therefore, are scenarios of a kind of civil imagination; the question of

what importance society attributes to this fact would give rise, as Rachel Mader writes, to axiomatic debates.^{xxvi}

Richard Sennett would remind us that, in the global contexts in which we live, introducing more flexibility to institutional structures could be a threat to a population that is already walking on quicksand. The loss of stable relationships and the deregulation and financialisation of communities would require, for Paolo Virno, the strengthening of institutions without forgetting that they also operate as centres generating exclusions. These issues enter into dialogue with aspects of political theory, such as the use of the concept of *hegemony*—fundamental in both *The Potosí Principle* and the Reina Sofia—, and serve to think about the possibilities of action and critical agency within the institutions that respond to the neoliberal paradigm.

Chantal Mouffe, the post-Marxist theorist whom Borja-Villel would invite to MACBA in the 1990s, following the war of positions around Gramsci and moving away from the autonomist theses of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, would insist on the possibility and convenience of a critical appropriation of already existing hegemonic structures.^{xxvii} This was a thesis that Borja-Villel embraced, and one that was later shared by the political party that emerged after the *indignados* movement, Podemos—now in government. With Podemos' co-founder and strategist, Íñigo Errejón, Mouffe would write *Construir pueblo* (2015), that is, precisely, “in the name of the people.”^{xxviii} She would also contribute to the recent publication by *The Principio Potosí's* artist-turned-into-politician of the Catalan wing of the party, Marcelo Expósito, *Discursos plebeyos* (2019), on the taking of the floor and the institutions.

Terms like “radical” or “progressive” have been used to point towards an institutional future whose programming would incorporate experimentation and political commitment in their discursive proposals. Terms that, however, carry the paradox that Sennett and Virno had already anticipated, and that so closely affects the art systems to which *The Potosí Principle* appeals. The so-called radical or progressive museums, the “museums of the commons,” mainly directed by white men who, despite their good intentions, find it difficult to escape from the overwhelming and legitimising force of individual careers and from the impulse of the event economy. Ultimately, they fail to change the rules of the game, often reduced to rhetoric—the foundation of society, if we echo Ernesto Laclau—, to become that “radically democratic space for free-form discussion on how things could be otherwise,”^{xxix} of that “place of democracy and eternal antagonism”^{xxx} between art and society, in which one should ask: if the artistic production of today is the heritage of tomorrow, shouldn't the museum have among its objectives the redistribution of wealth?

In a workshop on the transfer of critical studies to public programming held at Goldsmiths,^{xxxi} Yaiza Hernández, who was responsible for MACBA's public programmes a decade ago, would speak precisely on how the democratic and critical premises that were once the foundations of a debate around public production are now unraveling. They are caught in the paradoxes of post-democratic institutions, namely those whose decision-making is progressively limited and co-opted. In her view, “the kind of critical claims that many of these institutions have repeatedly made, in practice, have been systematically betrayed.” Hernández would criticise Bishop's statements in which she would contrast her ideas of “radical education” with an image of Borja-Villel launching “the first degree of Fine Arts online in the world,” in collaboration with the Open University of Catalonia. The programme's transgression would be called into question for its similarities with the well-known liberal Anglo-Saxon academic systems, through which students, also us, teachers and researchers, enter into the art systems via these spaces of legitimation, due to the difficulty of implementing alternatives that escape the logic of competitiveness and consumption. Hernández would speak of the uses and abuses of theory, not to cancel it,

since its level of abstraction is what allows us to imagine things as they are not—and to imagine things otherwise is fundamental in the times we live in—, but for reinforcing the idea that the theory follows the problem and not, as it sometimes seems to be postulated, theory as solution.

New institutionalism, anchored to institutional critique and to the desire for autonomy traditionally linked to the figure of the curator, and whose genealogy has run in parallel since the 1970s, is for the researcher, part of the paradox in which the so-called “progressive institutions” are immersed in their authorial battles over discourse. The public programmes that appear precisely to reverse the narrative logics and promote the idea that the public “sphere,” in a kind of *balance* of subjectivities, are the ones which infuse the production of knowledge that finally form institutional experiences. Ultimately, Hernández would regret the fact that those topics debated *as part* of the museum’s activities did not reach the institutional machinery. They did not result in self-criticism exercises in which cultural policies against precariousness induce an effect in the museum and its organisational charts, turning their fellow activists into legitimisers in a way that is contrary to their principles. Nor would it happen at the level of communication—guides, brochures, tours—still anchored in the traditional history of art.

So, is the museum to shape, to share, to serve? What about care? In “Notes for a museum Yet-to-Come,” the current head of public programmes at MACBA, Pablo Martínez, would claim what many of us have been exposing for some time, from the platforms from which we operate: the possibility of rethinking the ethical and political foundations of the structures and economy of the museums, whose dynamics are based on permanent mobility, the economy of visibility, and the logic of continuous growth. In short, the processes of legitimation and complicity to which *The Potosí Principle* appealed in its critique of art systems. Instead of debating what social distancing measures will be implemented when reopening museums after the pandemic in which we are presently immersed, it should be questioned: under what material and aesthetic conditions? According to Martínez,

If museums want to play a key role in this restructuring, and make a commitment to climate justice, they have no choice but to give up their present mission and learn how to fail better [that is, following Jack Halberstam, betting on] a genuine form of existence that simply does not conform to the prevailing logics. An act of rebellion against the imposed norm. If we consider Halberstam’s proposal from ecofeminist perspectives, this kind of dissidence would be enacted by dismissing any concept of well-being that is based on buying power, by spurning the accumulation of goods and by proposing ways of living that are more austere and therefore less harmful to the environment. In terms of museums, this approach would ideally lead to a model that pushes back against the overbearing logics of accumulation, productivity, value, property, novelty, and the constant pressure to sustain income from ticket sales, venue hire, and sponsorship. It would bring about a museum that is more internationalist than international, that supports the local without being provincial, and that refuses to keep adding to their already bloated rosters of international artists, star speakers, and low-paid workers. A museum that advocates simplicity, and that ditches all the conventional indicators that have, until now, been used as gauges of success. Because, as the Spanish ecofeminist Yayo Herrero has noted, all these indicators have helped shape a culture that is directly at odds with life itself.^{xxxii}

These notes arose in the heat of declarations by Borja-Villel who, appealing to the current political and health crisis, stated “the museum will have to provide care like a hospital, while still being critical.”^{xxxiii} Such affirmations have troubled those feminist sectors that understand their practices, before and after the pandemic, as ways to institute with care.

These practices defend the need to implement what Donna Haraway calls “situated knowledge” and “stay with the trouble”^{xxxiv}, as one of the few possible ways to counter the opacity of our sick and patriarchal institutions, in favour of their complexity and transparency towards a new social contract. Practices that, in the end, when troubling the trope of visual clarity, embrace the muddle, the entanglement, the cat’s cradle game, and favour collective authorship. Perhaps for this reason, Martínez would timidly clarify the words of the director of the Reina Sofía, in fear of a new “hospitable turn,” and would remind him of what Hernández was already demanding:

In this sense, it would perhaps be more accurate to say that the museum “will have to continue to provide care” or that it “must care for those who do the caring and improve the working conditions and status of educators, mediators, and all the staff who do outreach work.” The task of caring is crucial in these times of “capitalist realism,” to echo the words of the cultural theorist Mark Fisher, given that suffering is not limited to the museum’s visitors, but extends to its workers. It is therefore necessary to review the extent to which the museum is also the root cause of this distress, given the forms of production it favours: the present model allows and in fact demands that cultural producers work on several different projects at the same time, all of which are paid at dubious rates, are extremely precarious, require the tireless and hurried efforts of many interconnected people, and are in a state of constant mobility.

In a time when we are living in a perfect storm, in a suspended and muddled time in which the importance of caring for those who themselves care, guard, heal, becomes evident; a window of opportunity opens to activate healing and collaborative processes not so much (or only) as public policies, but as a capacity for self-government and solidarity that shifts the institutional politics of representation towards what I call an “instituting politics of attention.”

The current crisis allows us to radically instigate the creation of collective spaces, as social fabrics from within which to disagree, from which to enter the ecosystems that rehearse assembly propositions such as those carried out by the participants in *The Potosí Principle*, whose “difficulties in collaborations intercultural issues and the challenges of negotiations in different epistemological positions,” writes Anthony Alan Shelton in *Curatopia*, “mark a milestone in the history of exhibition and curatorial making, which warrants an extensive debate to come.”^{xxxv}

This brings to the fore a debate that includes the privileged, yet paradoxical, potential to make visible and tangible lived realities. A discursive power that carries a contradiction that oftentimes displaces what in my view institutions should secure. In the same way that justice works to achieve equality, museums must sustain the ability to stay with the trouble of difference. They can operate under the premise of balance, not symmetry.

Why Should our Bodies End at the Skin? In Search of the Contact Zone

In *The Potosí Principle*, dissent unleashed such a trail of disagreements between the agents involved that was decided to render this visible to the audiences in various ways: from the curatorial positions in the respective publications and the institutional confrontations whose loans were denied, to their ultimate encounter in La Paz. A paradigmatic visibility of the conflict that does not usually manifest in other curatorial and institutional processes.^{xxxvi}

A few years later, one of the coordinators of the exhibition’s first iteration in Madrid, Francisco Godoy, would publish a doctoral thesis in which he would postulate the argument

of “the exhibition as recolonisation,”^{xxxvii} placing the practice of Creischer and Siekmann, in particular, within the colonial matrix underlying the construction of the national discourse. Building on Latin American postcolonial theory, which has systematically criticised Hegel’s thinking as a promoter of the hierarchical global world-system, Godoy’s research would propose a journey through the recent history of Latin American exhibitions held in Spain, with *The Potosí Principle* as one of the four case studies.

Godoy’s paper would introduce the two curators within a militant genealogy of diverse antecedents during the second half of the 20th century, mainly linked to the development of colonial narratives, institutional critique, and sexual politics with agents such as Lucy Lippard, Nelly Richard, Douglas Crimp, Gustavo Buntinx, Marion von Osten, WHW and, in the Spanish sphere, Mar Villaespesa, Jorge Luis Marzo, and Borja-Villel himself. In addition, their practices would be inscribed in the parameters of the figure of the artist-curator in line with the work of Martha Rosler or Fred Wilson.

After a brief presentation of the German artists’ bodies of work, whose practice began in the mid-nineties, Godoy unravels the first project that they would do in Latin America, and for which they would receive the invitation of the Reina Sofía Museum: *Ex Argentina* (2002-4). In 2001, after the so-called “corralito” and the institutional crisis after the economic collapse of the country, the popular uprising that took place constituted, for Creischer and Siekmann (apart from the ultimate sin described at the beginning of this essay), “an evident model of the traumatic processes of the global capitalist system.”^{xxxviii} In several episodes, and incorporating classic works of Argentine conceptualism and new productions, they would program *Plans for Leaving the Overview*, a congress in Berlin, and *Steps for the Flight from Labour to Doing* in the Ludwig Museum in Cologne, as part of the project *How do we Want to be Governed?* by Roger Buerger and Ruth Noack.

The research would end in 2006 with the proposal travelling to Buenos Aires, where artists of the Etcetera Group and Eduardo Molinari would newly curate and shape the work to the new post-crisis norm. Ultimately, Creischer and Siekmann’s research would recover the pre-modern notion of “government,” in which the term would “not only refer to political structures or to the management of states, rather it designated the way the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed [...] to structure the possible field of action of others,”^{xxxix} in order to build the multiple and not just celebrate it.

Alexander Alberro, in an anthology that analyses when the exhibition becomes form and *The Artist as Curator* (2017), tells us how:

The idea for the show originated in early 2000s while Creischer and Siekmann were working on a project titled Ex Argentina (2002-4), which explored the effects of neoliberal financial policies on democratic representation in that country and the importance of the new social movements that intervened in political discourse [...] While working on Ex Argentina, they became increasingly interested in the afterlife of colonial structures, and in 2006, together with Hinderer, they traveled to Potosí, Bolivia, where they began to investigate pictures created in the Andean mining sites under Spanish rule—As Alice Creischer, Max Jorge Hinderer, and Andreas Siekmann explain: “After Ex Argentina, the Reina Sofía asked us to develop a project. So we decided, without knowing what we were getting into, that this would be it. We would research the collection of museums within and beyond the Americas for pictures that had been produced in Potosí; we would bring the pictures to Madrid and curate an exhibition in which contemporary artists would respond to them in direct and engaging ways. But we should emphasize that this project is not being created on commission. Its subject is ours.” The last couple of sentences were meant to stress that the celebrations of the 2011 [sic] bicentennial of the independence of Argentina,

Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Mexico, Chile, and Venezuela, an event under whose banner The Potosí Principle was implemented at the Reina Sofía was merely the occasion that allowed the curators to secure the funds required to realize their proposal.^{xi}

Borja-Villel offered Creischer and Siekmann the curation of an exhibition that would deal with the accumulation of colonial wealth, and that would reinforce that idea of inverted modernity, away from the canon, as was in fact advocated in his new museum project. Once invited to develop the proposal, the artists would grow to include Hinderer Cruz and Cusicanqui. In turn, Cusicanqui, the sociologist, decided to extend the invitation to a series of young anthropologists, students of hers, who would propose a self-managed action and cultural critique. They would eventually abandon the project in 2009, in order to re-engage in the exhibition's iteration in La Paz in 2011. One of the reasons, according to Godoy:

The list of contemporary artists was practically closed, which made it impossible to intervene in the selection. On the other hand, more than peer curators, they were asked to be "informants" regarding colonial works, stories and local processes.^{xli}

This unease reached the press, which echoed the sentiment, as in the case of Juan Batalla, who would write that,

The European curators reviled the collective's gaze to distinguish between "art"—the politically and aesthetically significant work that those who assume the illustrated canon do—and "folkloric practices," using the colonial logic that dates back centuries: art is what what they and their friends do, while folklore is what the Others do.^{xlii}

This was a position that would introduce the dispute on the aforementioned Hegelian path, in which Marx himself understood the South as a counterrevolutionary space in which the "peoples without history"^{xliii} were not able to develop structures of economic and social success. Godoy would suggest, later supported in Santiago Castro-Gómez's thesis, that the curators would make a reading of Latin American societies as "enclaves" of the world revolution. According to Jaime Vindel, the "enunciative tone [was] halfway between the authority and the arrogance of the wise Marxist."^{xliv} Borja-Villel himself would point out that it was "an intrinsically hostile exhibition [...] something brutal, antagonistic, impervious."^{xlv}

In a recent essay, "Baroque Modernity, Criticism and Indigenous Epistemologies in Museum Representations of the Andes and the Amazon" (2018), Anthony Alan Shelton would unravel the disagreement in the following way:

Alice Creischer, Max Jorge Hinderer and Andreas Siekmann, the European curators of the project, rejected historiography predicated on the nation state in favour of a global purview [...] Despite the interpretative audacity of the exhibition, disagreement emerged between the German and Bolivian curatorial teams. The German curators' marxist deterministic perspective was rejected by their Bolivian counterparts who, organised under the banner El Colectivo, fractured the attempt at a unitary interpretation of colonial history. The first problem emerged early on in the project over the Reina Sofía's loan negotiations with communities and its complaints of excessive transportation and insurance costs associated with loans from Bolivian museums. However, some members of El Colectivo had already been offended by Berlin's Ethnologisches Museum's refusal to extend loans from its collections to the Bolivian venue. Distrust and accusations of coercion from communities of old asymmetrical power relations that had historically divided the two countries; claims confirmed by the anecdotal stories reported in the exhibition catalogues. Mistrust may have been exacerbated by the confusion caused by the curatorial methodology, which

disavowed established strategies in favour of an experimental methodology that called for the suspension of the usual division of labour between museum professionals and a prolongation of research time. [...] The most serious rupture between the German and Bolivian curators resulted from Creischer's, Hinderer's and Siekmann's rejection of Indigenous interpretations of history, which they discussed as the product of cultural essentialism that privileged Native exegesis above others. For the German curatorial team, equating culture with ethnic identity obscured the global interdependence of politics and economics and, among other negative consequences, obfuscated alliances between local and foreign classes that cut across culture. In opposition, El Colectivo argued for the incorporation of video presentations and first voices to express the Indigenous historical perspectives of how Andean communities had appropriated Spanish colonial imagery which they had ritually re-articulated and transmuted into an efficacious sources of power to fortify resistance against external aggressors and to strengthen local values and network villages. El Colectivo furthered the position of contemporary Chinese and Indian migrant workers who, unlike themselves, had not resisted domination through their appropriation and redeployment of the images and ideologies pitted against them. [...] Despite good intentions, the politics of The Potosí Principle aptly confirms Ziauddin Sardar's assertion that "Columbus did not 'discover' America: he globalised a world view" moving the focus of visual interpretation from the factual to the hermeneutic. The Potosí Principle presented a marxist worldview in place of commonplace narrative descriptions and subsumed Indigenous exegesis and local knowledge under its interpretative embrace.^{xlvi}

In a recent conference, entitled *White Skin, White Masks*,^{xlvii} Godoy detailed that then and now, the role of art has been fundamental in reproducing white supremacy. Multiple white masks will validate those white people who have proposed false political fictions such as racial democracy or miscegenation. For Godoy, the division of the world would be first racial and then social. *The Potosí Principle*, in line with Federici's thesis, seems to posit otherwise. An argument that, in the Canarian context in which Godoy's lecture was inserted—known for struggling with being simultaneously related to the coloniser and the colonised in a very complex tricontinental relationship with Latin America, Africa and Europe—,^{xlviii} gave rise to a conversation that attended to a paradox: How to decolonize thought in the face of the impossibility of escaping its subaltern state as much as escaping its privileged position? Or as Haraway would put it: Why does the body have to end in the skin? "Being white is a moral choice," James Baldwin exhorted.

"Many of the pictures we requested that are held by institutions arrived; none, however, arrived from the communities," Creischer would clarify. "We barely had the opportunity to speak ourselves, or respond directly to the many legitimate grievances raised: What is this Reina Sofia Museum in Madrid, after all? [...] The representative character ascribed to *The Principio Potosí*, which became particularly evident in the conduct of loan negotiations, made us apprehensive as to how our project as a whole would be represented."^{xlix} Hinderer Cruz would add that pretty soon they "realised that organising an exhibition for the Bicentenario would attract a quite blatant form of neocolonial paternalism. The post/colonial interests of an institution like the Reina Sofia lay less in relativising its own claim to power, and more in actually extending that power. And it soon became obvious that the real issue was *hegemony* over the manner in which Latin American art is represented. The Museo Reina Sofia had been pursuing this sort of agenda for several years, primarily with respect to modernism and conceptualism; but now a wider discourse had emerged, namely, the neocolonial rhetoric of a Spanish government seemingly set on a paternalistic course towards its ex colonies."¹

Nevertheless, through a meticulous tracing and dissecting of the images, the Bolivian art historian Teresa Gisbert, with whom the curators and artists worked very closely, was able

to show that the hybrid character was not necessarily an indigenous versus European one, but an incredible entanglement of material and historical conflicts and contexts.

At last, most reviews reduce the exhibition to a simplistic dichotomy between Europeans and Bolivians, ignoring the fact that Hinderer Cruz was born right in the middle, while subsuming artists such as the weaver, narrator of the Bolivian oral tradition, documentary maker and poet Elvira Espejo, and Mujeres Creando themselves, among others. Once such artist was Gisbert herself, who willingly added to the fabric of contributions that challenged the national narrative—anticipating the *indignados* movement—and embraced the experimental method that suspended the division of labour in favour of a weaving an entanglement where dissent was absolutely welcome. “Guilty of birth,” Galindo would say:

If we simply take the data that the curators who have developed the conceptual framework of the show are German or from a German academy, that it has been financed and promoted by two official cultural institutions of Spain and Germany and that it has cost hundreds of thousands of euros spent especially in the museum apparatus of restoration, transport and insurance, we can quickly draw the mechanical conclusion that it is a question of one more Eurocentric eccentricity; come to a third world country, dare to ask for the loan of an important collection of his heritage works and simply play “contemporary art” with them in order to follow the Eurocentric routine of being those who interpret us, devour us and mediate us to hold ownership over “universal culture.” However, thank goodness that neither the data of a person’s nationality, nor the data of skin color are elements to label actions in a simplistic way [...] The exhibition is incorrect, it has been deliberately placed in the middle of all institutional tensions that we can imagine [...] In the case of The Potosí Principle it seems that its inability to satisfy, to please everybody, the ability to generate tension within the institutions it visits, the uncertainty and suspicion that it generates in art critics is just the measure of its questioning potential.^{li}

These institutional tensions took various forms within the exhibition space and, as Hinderer Cruz points out, provide a good example of how complicated and asymmetrical the relationship between decolonisation and cultural heritage is, and how flawed the process of negotiation between these two instances can become.^{lii} A clear example of this would be the “spoken piece” by Galindo, which presents a conversation between the director of the Museo de Cultura Hispánica Cristóbal Colón in Madrid and the artist herself, on why Melchor Pérez de Holguín’s painting, *Entrada de Virrey Morcillo en Potosí* (1716), could not be loaned to the Reina Sofía Museum because it did not fit through the door. In exchange, Galindo asks how does the museum address the issue of colonialism and the processes of expropriation, pillage, and dispossession? The answer, plain and simple: It doesn’t.

Another case would be *Camino de las Santas* by the artist Elvira Espejo, who presents a circle made of threads accompanied by images that describe the historical path of the Virgen de la Candelaria from Tenerife to Qaqachaka in the Andes. “According to the legend of my town,” explains Espejo, “the Virgin of Candelaria appeared inside the Potosí mines to save the miners from an accident in the mine and resurrected those who had died.” Both the threads and the images appeal to the khipus, important transmitters of information in the indigenous culture of the precolonial period. The Ethnological Museum in Berlin houses more than half of them. “The photos hanging on the strings are snapshots of the museum warehouse. On the other side, you can read why the ethnological museum hesitated about lending some khipus for the exhibition.”

Additionally, the paintings from the Church of Machaca did not travel either, due to the mistrust rooted in the request for certain works, including one that had recently been



Elvira Espejo, Camino de las Santas, Reina Sofía Museum Madrid, 2010, MUSEF, la Paz, 2011

stolen. Instead, the exhibition would include a reproduction of an image of a triumph chariot from this community, showing the hierarchy formed by prophets, priests, allegories, famous saints, and Mary and Jesus—always muddled with both indigenous and humanistic ideas. In Latin America, the triumph chariot abandons the realm of painting and joins festivals and processions. The chariot that is presented in *The Principio Potosí*, along with the replica, comes from a demonstration by a group of domestic workers promoted by artists Konstanze Schmitt, Stephan Dillemath, and the Territorio Doméstico collective. “Without us, the world does not move,” proclaimed these women, mostly from former Spanish colonies.

The Bolivian newspaper *Cambio* would interview both María Galindo and Elvira Espejo. In this conversation, Galindo would insist that she did not participate in the project representing Bolivia, nor did she represent Bolivian women, or Potosí, based on her work. “I am not here as an artist, I am in a job that I have always been doing in *Mujeres Creando*, which is *to understand creation as a transforming political force*. And this reflection goes beyond what we understand by art.” Espejo would also point out that,

The exhibition deals with a more contemporary aspect and tells our region that it is not simply its own gaze and that we do not continue to look at each other with the door closed, just me, me, me and me, that “I am the great saviour of things.” No, it is looking at things’ recto and their verso [...] I was quite interested in what happened in the Reina Sofía, which is a very firm museum and that presents a proposal like The Potosí Principle, because there you have to see, for example, a painting from both sides, you can not only see the painted part, but also the back. So, that has been to get a little out of those rules that are firmly established and question these things, and see how far you get. That is the most important thing to see both sides, and there is that look from both sides that is the past and the contemporary.^{liii}

The two curatorial propositions shared space in La Paz, where Cusicanqui and El Colectivo organised a street market at the entrance of the national museum, parodying the art trade conditions that the exhibition addressed. A museum located right next to the MUSEF, the other venue that, by the way, Espejo later directed, from 2013 until the preparation of this essay, when she was unjustly fired by those who did not share her views on how to govern.^{liv} This performative gesture would surely constitute, for an anonymous voice that could well be the artist Pedro G. Romero’s, “a poetic *correlation* of the form of exhibiting [...] one of the forms of labour that identifies most Romani, Latin American, and African workers in Spain.”^{lv}

For Romero, the interference of Romanies, gitanos, and flamenco defines a cultural “camp” full of tricks and traps. The term “camp” encompasses all its complexity, from the paradigm of the concentration camp and the nomadic settlement to what Halberstam calls queer archive. It is a term ultimately rooted to the construction of the bourgeoisie. Camp goes beyond certain music and dance. It is built from what we call today the “subaltern,” but also from what the contrived-if-useful marxist term lumpen-proletariat calls for. In this sense, it may be helpful to think of the fascinating mythical story about the kidnapping of Adam Smith, the theoretical founder of capitalism, by the “gypsies” when he was a child. A careful reading of the myth reveals, in Romero’s view, the challenges facing the emancipation of the Romani from their subaltern status, when read through the lens, for instance, of Edward W. Said’s orientalism. According to Romero, the exaggeration of difference manifests the simplifications of postcolonial thought, but also marxist difficulties when trying to understand declassification. The written historical traces that I have collated, and present to you here, seem to tell this reductionist story of either/or; however, a careful and attentive look allows us to see that, all in all, these cases were not antagonistic, but correlate together.



Konstanze Schmitt, Stephan Dilleuth, Territorio Doméstico, Triunfo de las domésticas activas, exhibition Berlin, 2010

In its first use, *flamenco* means “gypsy” and it does so with clear delinquent, marginal, and jargon-esque connotations coming from their resistance to being governed. They are “bastards”, and bastardism is also defined by Galindo as a term opposed to colonialism and, on the other hand, to indigenism—as a place in which it is evident that the question of the origin is not resolved. She speaks of bastardism as a substitute for that other word imposed by the coloniser, miscegenation. For Galindo, miscegenation is a half-truth that hides violence, violation and the repression of desire. Thus, as it has occurred with terms such as queer, the humiliation of flamenco, which ultimately is a cultural group of Romani and non-Romani, has become a source of pride and a defiant sign of identity. So yes, like the stunning Catalan pop star Rosalía, whose work is in close dialogue with that of Romero, regardless of our origin, “we can all be flamencos.”^{lvi}

Cul-de-sac! At Odds Together

There is no doubt that these different responses contribute to a dualistic history of representation, inclusion, integration or incorporation, appropriation or even co-optation, as Pablo Lafuente would say with regards to the first paradigmatic exhibition of this kind, *Magiciens de la terre* (1989), in a publication titled *Making Art Global (Part 2)* (2013). In other words, a story of anything that has not emerged from within—like this text.

This framework, if applied to the history of contemporary exhibitions, would provide a historical narrative articulated in terms of struggle—not of class, but of national, continental, geographical and cultural identities, along more or less defined hierarchical axes: West and East (or West and the rest), North and (global) South, contemporaneity and tradition, developed and un(der)developed...^{lvii}

This historical narrative articulated in terms of struggle may well begin in the 16th century with human zoos, to world exhibitions of the 19th century. However, it would not be contested until the 1980s. The size and ambition of projects such as *Magiciens de la terre* (1989)—but also *Primitivism* (1984)—, as well as their repercussions in terms of ideas and production, would generate a series of controversial and dramatic changes in the works of art, curatorial discourses, and acquisition policies, which would in turn modify the context of contemporary art production. As a result of a broader cultural, political, and economic arena, divergent epistemological approaches emerged, challenging Western art history and its modernist foundations. Because, as Catherine David points out regarding *Magiciens de la terre*, “modernity is a complex phenomenon full of folds that we must unfold taking into account temporalities that do not overlap [...] there are no people in the present who live in the past,”^{lviii} so here we are, at odds together. Looking out from this dichotomy, exhibitions of this nature would begin to be organised, troubling the traditional notion of belonging.

But this history of representation only tells a fraction of the story. Partly due to the political urgencies in the motivation for (at least a large percentage of) these exhibitions, and also as an effect of the discourse of identity politics that was constructed around them (both by those organising the exhibitions and by their critics), what was often forgotten was a consideration of what arguably constitutes the essential aspect of the medium of exhibitions: display. By this I refer not to the exercise of selection, nor to the matter of who made the decisions about that selection and authored the conceptual framework, but the actual articulation of a specific set of relations between objects, people, ideas and structures within the exhibition form. Display, and the principles that rule its articulation, proposes a discourse that is sometimes at odds with the discourse that surrounds the exhibition. Only by addressing the two together does a comprehensive picture of the actual position of the

exhibition in relation to this history of identity struggle emerge. And not just this. By considering display rather than identity and representation, and the way in which display enacts this movement of inclusion and exclusion, we can attempt to look at this “partial” history of identity struggle as more than that: as a means to understand something about the nature of the mechanisms of “art” and “exhibition”. [...] The history of the inclusion in the (Western) contemporary art context of what comes from outside (in the form of both cultural products and producers) offers a privileged window from which to understand and, therefore intervene in, the contemporary art system itself.^{lix}

The inclusion of the artist or cultural producer as an active agent within the contemporary exhibition—instead of as a presented subject and, consequently, as a reified or fetishised figure—, would be a historical novelty that gave continuity to the debates initiated in the late 1960s with the exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form* (1969). A radical approach to the practice of exhibition-making as a linguistic medium and that of the curator as an author. Yet these disputes about horizontality and agency, in terms of collaboration, are presented under the parameters of political theory; that is, as antagonistic dynamics: a constant mode of confrontation based on the fact that what is being negotiated is not the materiality of the exhibition, but the authorial voices that are permitted to talk and those forced to remain silent.

In “Transhistoric Display and Colonial (Dis)Encounters” (2018), researchers María Íñigo and Olga Fernández conclude that to render visible the frameworks shaping exhibitions such as *The Potosí Principle*, it would be necessary to avoid considering elements rooted in other cultures from within our own prism; that is, we must be able to apprehend other historical perspectives, other methodologies, accepting that vision cannot be reduced solely to our own gaze.^{lx} This conclusion leads us to an inescapable interrogation: How to articulate an “ethics of the gaze” that does not succumb to extractivist dynamics and from which it is intended to escape? At what point does that shared, attentive, and careful gaze transform the guarded object into a fetish? Because, as Creischer describes:

Everything seems to indicate that in both cases we ourselves are the triggers of a process we call “fetishisation,” that is, of an attribution of value that is always hostile to its environment because it can represent a threat to the communities of theft of paintings, either by gangs of private buyers, or by the government itself or by European national museums.^{lxi}

“Is it possible that there is a horizontal interlocution when worldviews are always subject to a codification or translation from the West?” Íñigo recently asked Mayan writer, Aura Cumes: “The problem is that perhaps we are talking about horizontal interlocutions but with different themes. I am talking about the joint construction of societies where the colonial is still valid and needs to be overcome. If you are talking about knowing other worldviews, this is a complicated matter because indeed the issue of extraction is always present.”^{lxii} In this sense, was *The Potosí Principle* ultimately apprehending an indigenous worldview or, on the contrary, addressing the asymmetric reassembling of the social? The commitment to the modes of production and circulation of the present has me leaning towards the latter—a statement that, I suppose, leads me to fall into the very trap Romero talks about. Nevertheless, Cumes continues to warn us of the dangers of investing so much of our energies in destroying one another, criticising “the competition within indigenous sectors, activists and artists, due to the irresponsible action of white, mestizo or foreign people, who come to our countries and use their power to say who is more important.”

In the final two decades of the previous century, hybridisation, creolisation or diaspora would contribute to a muddling of the conventional mediation and exhibition technologies

of objects.^{lxiii} The emphasis on these movements entailed an intertwining of postcolonial theories with Latourian proposals, setting in motion rhizomatic actants that would undoubtedly shed new light on the tensions between peoples, their objects, and institutions. Thus, for Lafuente, what would be ultimately in question is the field of agencies.

The struggle on this occasion is no longer a struggle among individuals, but among individuals and objects—objects that might be willing to act in certain ways, and that are made to act by the curators in a manner that might be contradictory with those ways. The ghost in this discussion [...] is context; the question that hovers in the background is whether objects are able (or willing) to set themselves apart from their original context without being forced to.^{lxiv}

This approach opens up another type of “historical conception” that would overcome the reductionist debate over who is allowed to speak—because, of course, we all are—displacing representation towards attention based on mutual consideration between human and non-human, bodies and objects. What is at stake, if we echo Teresa de Lauretis, is not who speaks but how to change the framework from which things are spoken about. The ghost in this discussion is, indeed, the *milieu*, understood as surrounding the discussion, but also as its medium.

For Cumes, “Mayan spirituality reproduces the meaning of life where existence is an indivisible, interrelated, and interconnected whole.” Environment and behaviour go hand in hand because there is no relevant ecology without a correlated ethology. In Haraway’s terms, this relational ecology would emerge from the knots of a cat’s cradle, whose string figures would lead us to reconfigure our collective efforts towards “story telling for earthly survival.” Haraway says that the cat’s cradle game is a model for thinking with others how to tell another story, and how to otherwise add to the work of those who are already storytelling. The only possible thing to do in the world we are inhabiting is to revolt and for that, she says, we also need an imaginative kind of marxism that enters the game with which we *think with*. Since no exhibition can tell the whole story, a rebellion of intervals plays a fundamental role in providing an ecology of care within the structures we cannot govern. These include the institutions of international capital mentioned at the beginning of this essay, which decided to create a new order of the world; one in which inequality and individualism operate as an alibi to make an unjust system that continues to distance us from collective action. The ambivalence of the positions taken by the artists present in *The Potosí Principle*, who permanently cross the barrier between artist, curator and activist, must be understood in relation to this. As Godoy acknowledges, “this is where the poetic and political potential of the reversal of history resides most incisively, articulated in a spatial way simultaneously as juxtaposition and disagreement.” Ultimately, this underscores the reason why “its proposals were still urgent and necessary in the context of the uncritical celebration of the bicentennials.”^{lxv}

Prior to *The Potosí Principle*, exhibitions such as *Lotte or Transformation of the Object* (1990), curated by Clémentine Deliss; *Núcleo Histórico*, 24th Bienal de Sao Paulo, (1998), curated by Paulo Herkenhoff and Adriano Pedrosa; or *documenta 12* (2007), organised by Ruth Noack and Roger Buerge, would aim to advance an instituting politics of attention and claim a notion of practice that encourages the creation of sociability as an embodied form of knowledge production, whose materiality is as important as its emergency and investigative discursive capacity. Since 2010, we should add to these exhibition histories the programme at the MUSEF under the care of Espejo, built on the beautiful subject of “mutual nurturing;” Francisco Huichaqueo’s work on the Mapuche communities; Deliss’s *Foreign Exchange (or the Stories You Wouldn’t Tell a Stranger)*; Lafuente’s and Guaraní Ñandeva Sandra Benites’s co-curated exhibition, *Dja Guata Porã: Indigenous Rio de Janeiro*;

and, among others, Romero's *Actually, the Dead Are Not Dead* on the overcoming of binary worlds and the redefinition of the alliances with those who are not presently living.

It is precisely in the objects within the exhibition where very different networks of forces and stories converge, which is why they must be seen as impure artifacts that need a political act of translation; one that is capable of making visible the threads of the string figure and the structures that cross and sustain them. Lafuente reminds us that what these displays share is the incorporation of an artistic, cultural or primitive object, which refuses to determine what it is or how it should be read. In short, instead of ensuring visibility or strengthening identities, displays displace or reproduce a "contact zone" or "migration of form" in which the movement favours the re-articulation of both content and container. This migration of form introduces the public sphere into the equation, whose agency, in turn, contributes to developing new ways of understanding how objects and cultural producers of any origin can relate and work together.

Against resistance, much has changed in the past decade since *The Potosí Principle* inaugurated its first episode, and debates that seemed exhausted have since returned anew. Yet consensus is not always smooth in these emerging contact zones. Suspicious and unequal power subverts reciprocity. Nevertheless, through the strengthening of transversal relationships and alliances—making visible and tangible lived realities without falling prey—, historical legacies of mistrust beyond the museum can and should be overcome. These displays reflect on the strategies, positions and issues of an exhibition in which the museum space becomes a bridge where provocations emerge that point to territories that are not only physical spaces, but also bodies in motion;^{lxvi} bodies that build their way of being; a territory of morality and change where the spectres of the past and the future communicate and, as such, we need to be accountable. Because, ultimately, a conciliatory awareness between the extractivist or appropriationist past, and the places of enunciation of those who themselves care, guard, heal, require reciprocity and negotiation. And it does so, particularly, if we embrace the museum as a space for civil imagination, sharing the view that it needs to fail better if it is willing to carefully engage with diverse communities and "remediate," in Clémentine Deliss's terms, the same way public hospitals do. The notion of queer or flamenco display could, in my view, contribute to redefine these temporary structures that exhibitions by definition are, these "camps" where the narratives around social and racial difference are otherwise rapidly overlaid. This is a paradox and ambiguity that will always exist, and, for this reason, it will need a politics of attention to be constantly re-inscribed.

Endnotes

- ⁱ Silvia Federici, "Del común a la deuda: financiarización, microcrédito y la arquitectura cambiante de la acumulación de capital," *Concreta 11*, Editorial Concreta, Valencia, 2018. English version in *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 113:2, Spring 2014.
- ⁱⁱ David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5000 Years*, Melville House Publishing, New York, 2011, pp. 8-13.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Daniel Bernabé, *La trampa de la diversidad*, Akal, Madrid, 2018.
- ^{iv} Silvia Federici, *op. cit.*
- ^v Lamia Karim cited in Federici, *ibid.*
- ^{vi} Laura Vallés Vílchez, "Desde la maraña a la araña," *Concreta 09*, Valencia, 2017, pp. 104-113. English version, "From the Tangle to the Spider's Web," see online: <http://editorialconcreta.org/From-the-Tangle-to-the-Spider-s>
- ^{vii} Antonin Artaud cited in Laura Vallés Vílchez, *op. cit.*
- ^{viii} "How Can We Sing the Song of the Lord in an Alien Land" is the subtitle of the exhibition and a psalm from an Emblemata book entitled *Pia Desideria Emblematis*, published by Hermanus Hugo at the Catholic University of Leuven in 1628.
- ^{ix} Iker Seisdedos, "El Reina Sofía revoluciona su política de exposiciones temporales," *El País*, 7 May, 2010. See online: https://elpais.com/diario/2010/05/07/cultura/1273183205_850215.html
- ^x Seisdedos, *ibid.*
- ^{xi} Seisdedos, *ibid.*
- ^{xii} The Popular Party is a liberal conservative Spanish party located on the political right. It was founded in 1989 to replace the old Popular Alliance, a party founded during the Transition and made up mostly of former Francoist hierarchs.
- ^{xiii} Interview with the curators, "El arte de la Independencia... y algunas reflexiones sobre lo heroico," see online: <http://www.goethe.de/wis/bib/prj/hmb/the/154/es6568303.htm>
- ^{xiv} Complete list: Sonia Abián, Anna Artaker, Monika Baer, Quirin Bäumlner, Gaspar Miguel de Berrio, Matthijs de Buijne, Maestro de Calamarca, Maestro de Caquiaviri, Chto Delat?, Culture and Arts Museum of Migrant Workers, CVA (María Luisa Fernández and Juan Luis Moraza), Stephan Dillemath, Ines Doujak, Alejandro Duránd, Elvira Espejo, Ethnologisches Museum, Marcelo Expósito, Harun Farocki, León Ferrari, Isafas Griñolo, Felipe Guamán, Luis Guaraní, Sally Gutiérrez Dewar, Dmitry Gutov, Hermanus Hugo, Zhao Liang, Rogelio López Cuenca, Melchor María Mercado, Eduardo Molinari, Francisco Moyén, Mujeres Creando, Juan Eusebio Nieremberg, Luis Niño, Mariano Florentino Olivares, Melchor Pérez de Holguín, Plataforma de Reflexión sobre Políticas Culturales (PRPC), Juan Ramos, David Riff, Konstanze Schmitt, Territorio Doméstico, The Karl Marx School of English Language, Lucas Valdés and Christian von Borries.
- ^{xv} Alice Creischer, Andreas Siekmann, Max Jorge Hinderer, *The Potosí Principle. How Shall We Sing the Lord's Song in a Strange Land?*, MNCARS, Madrid 2010.
- ^{xvi} Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, *Principio Potosí Reverso*, MNCARS, Madrid, 2010.
- ^{xvii} Spanish Dictionary, *Diccionario de la Real Academia de la Lengua*, see online: <https://dle.rae.es/representación>
- ^{xviii} Gilles Deleuze y Félix Guattari, *Mil mesetas. Capitalismo y esquizofrenia*, Pre-textos, Valencia, 2002, p. 12.
- ^{xix} Claire Bishop, *Radical Museology. What's 'Contemporary' in Museums of Contemporary Art?*, Konig Books, London, 2013.
- ^{xx} *Ibid.*
- ^{xxi} *Ibid.*
- ^{xxii} Alice Creischer, Andreas Siekmann and Max Jorge Hinderer, *op. cit.*
- ^{xxiii} Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, *op. cit.*
- ^{xxiv} Francis Fukuyama, "The End Of History," *The National Interest*, 1989.
- ^{xxv} Lucie Kolb & Gabriel Flückiger, "Editorial (New) Institution(alism)," *OnCurating*, Issue 21, 2013.
- ^{xxvi} Rachel Mader, "How to move in/an institution," *OnCurating*, Issue 21, 2013.
- ^{xxvii} See the essay on the representational paradox and rhetorical dependence of Spanish archival practices based on Mouffe's definition of *antagonism* and *agonistic pluralism*. Laura Vallés Vílchez, "Mind the Gap Fissures and prospects of an impossible consensus," *photographies*, 13:1, 2020, pp. 137-151.
- ^{xxviii} For those readers outside the Spanish political scene, for a few months Podemos has been part of a left-wing coalition government at the head of the state, although since its foundation until now, the party structure has been severely criticised, losing its confidence of many of its followers, promoters of the "they do not represent us," by ascertaining the difficulties of the "new politics" to avoid new exclusions in their diatribes in the face of the new national-popular wave of the right and, therefore, transform the structures of power that currently sustain it.
- ^{xxix} Charles Esche cited in Rachel Mader, *op. cit.*
- ^{xxx} Simon Sheikh cited in Rachel Mader, *ibid.*
- ^{xxxi} Yaiza Hernández en *From Critical Studies to Public Programming: Public Knowledge at the Post-Democratic Impasse*, lecture at Goldsmiths University, 18 mayo 2018.
- ^{xxxii} Pablo Martínez, "Notes for a museum Yet-to-Come", See: <https://kunsthallewien.at/en/pablo-martinez-fail-better-notes-for-a-museum-yet-to-come/>

- xxxiii Marcelo Expósito in conversation Manuel Borja Vilel, "El museo tendrá que cuidar como un hospital sin dejar de ser crítico", Ctxt, 14 de mayo 2020, en línea en <https://ctxt.es/es/20200501/Culturas/32247/Marcelo-Exposito-Manuel-Borja-Villel-museo-Reina-Sofia-MNCARS>
- xxxiv María Puig de la Bellacasa, "Pensar con cuidado", *Concreta 09*, Valencia, 2017. English version in: *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds*, University of Minnesota Press, 2017, pp.1-24.
- xxxv Anthony Alan Shelton, "Baroque Modernity, Critique and Indigenous Epistemologies in Museum Representations of the Andes and Amazonia," *Curatopia. Museums and The Future of Curatorship*, Schorch and MacCarthy Eds, Manchester University Press, 2019, p. 133.
- xxxvi "Why do paintings come and don't come" is one of the first reflections that the exhibition catalog presents. Alice Creischer, Max Jorge Hinderer Cruz, Andreas Siekmann, *Principio Potosí*, MNCARS, Madrid, 2010, p. 18.
- xxxvii Francisco Godoy Vega, *La exposición como recolonización. Exposiciones de arte latinoamericano en el estado español (1989-2010)*, Fundación Academia Europea e Iberoamericana de Yuste, 2018. Published on the occasion of the doctoral thesis defended in 2015 and awarded the third CEEXCI research prize for doctoral theses "Fernando Serrano Mangas."
- xxxviii *Ibid.*, p. 383.
- xxxix Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power" in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Chicago, 1982, p. 221, cited in Roger M. Buerger, "Editorial," ¿Como volem ser governats?, MACBA, Barcelona, 2004. See English version online: https://img.macba.cat/public/uploads/20131129/editorial_eng.0.pdf
- xl Alexander Alberro, "The Potosí Principle" in Elena Filipovic, *The Artist as Curator: An Anthology*, Mousse Publishing / Koenig Books, Milan/London, 2017, p. 362.
- xli Francisco Godoy Vega, *op. cit.*, p. 390.
- xlii Juan Batalla, «Esquizoide. Vejámenes, desalientos e histeria crítica. Post-it city + Principio Potosí», *Sauna. Revista de arte* 1, 1, see online: http://www.revistasauna.com.ar/01_01/05.html
- xliii Santiago Castro-Gómez, *La postcolonialidad explicada a los niños*, Editorial Universidad del Cauca, Popayán, 2005, p. 16.
- xliv Jaime Vindel, «Principio Potosí. ¿Cómo podemos cantar el canto del Señor en tierra ajena?», reseña, *Latinart.com*, see online: <http://www.latinart.com/spanish/exview.cfm?id=326>
- xlv Interview to Manuel Borja-Villel by María Galindo in Radio Deseo, La Paz, February 2011, cited in Godoy Vega, *op. cit.* No longer available.
- xlvi Anthony Alan Shelton, *op. cit.*
- xlvii Francisco Godoy, *White Skin, White Masks*, 20 September 2019. Lecture held at TEA Tenerife Espacio de las Artes, en línea: <https://teatenerife.es/index.php/actividad/piel-blanca-mascaras-blancas-por-francisco-godoy/1987>
- xlviii The conference was inserted in the *Europe, that exotic place's* exhibition public programme: <https://teatenerife.es/noticia/tea-presenta-la-exposicion-europa-ese-exotico-lugar-comisariada-por-gilberto-gonzalez/1797#>
- xlix "Interview with the Curators of the Exhibition The Potosí Principle" by Artefakte at *Dark Matter*, 18 November, 2013. See online: <http://www.darkmatter101.org/site/2013/11/18/interview-with-the-curators-of-the-exhibition-principio-potosi-das-potosi-prinzip-the-potosi-principle-on-the-mobility-of-colonial-baroque-paintings-between-europe-and-the-americas/>
- l *Ibid.*
- li María Galindo, "Este texto no tiene nada que ver con la creatividad", see online: <http://losartistasdicen.blogspot.com/2011/02/este-texto-no-tiene-nada-que-ver-con-la.html>
- lii "Interview with the Curators of the Exhibition The Potosí Principle," *op. cit.*
- liii "Colonialismo, modernidad, arte... Principio Potosí", interview with Elvira Espejo and María Galindo in the Bolivian newspaper *Cambio* in 2011, see online: <https://potosiprincipioprocess.wordpress.com/2011/02/12/maria-galindo-and-elvira-espejo-interviews-for-cambio-periodico-boliviano/>
- liv See Letter in Support of her as well as Max Jorge Hinderer Cruz, who was appointed director of MNA in 2019: <https://www.change.org/p/fundación-cultural-del-banco-central-de-bolivia-apoyo-a-elvira-espejo-ayca-y-max-jorge-hinderer-cruz-en-bolivia?redirect=false>
- lv Francisco Godoy Vega, *op. cit.*, p. 346.
- lvi Pedro G. Romero, ¿qué es un campo? *Concreta* 14, Valencia, 2018.
- lvii Pablo Lafente, "Introduction: From the Outside In - 'Magiciens de la Terre' and Two Histories of Exhibitions," in Lucy Steeds and other authors, *Making Art Global (Part 2) 'Magiciens de la Terre' 1989*, Afterall, Exhibition Histories, London, 2013, p. 9.
- lviii Catherine David cited in Tim Griffin, "Global tendencies: Globalism and the large-scale exhibition," *Artforum*, November, 2003.
- lix *Ibid.*, p. 12.
- lx María Íñigo Clavo and Olga Fernández López, "Transhistoric Display and Colonial (Dis)Encounters", *The Transhistorical Museum*, Valiz, 2018.
- lxi Alice Creischer, *op. cit.*

^{lxii} María Íñigo, "Conversation with Aura Cumes on Maya epistemology, postcolonial theory and the struggle for identity", *Re-visiones N° 7*, 2017.

^{lxiii} María Íñigo Clavo and Olga Fernández López, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

^{lxiv} Pablo Lafuente, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

^{lxv} Francisco Godoy Vega, *op. cit.*, p. 365.

^{lxvi} Sandra Benites and Pablo Lafuente, "A Way of Working Together. On Dja Guata Pora: Rio de Janeiro indígena," *South As a State of Mind*, Issue 10, Summer/Fall 2018, pp. 64-73.





