# Resonant Passages: Painting as an Allegorical Machine

Submitted for the Degree of
PhD in Arts & Humanities, School of Arts & Humanities
at the Royal College of Art

2024

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Word count: 38.335

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# Acknowledgements

# Abstract

The present research project explores the ways in which painting can function as an "allegorical machine," a sort of alchemy lab where the flux and experimentation with images can provoke unexpected interactions between memory and imagination. In a context in which this relation is threatened by the strong standardizing pressure of current digital networks of production and circulation of images, the aim of this project is to develop an artistic practice capable of turning mere accumulation into different forms of aggregation and encounter.

The working hypothesis that sustains this attempt lies in the assumption that such accumulation, usually referred as "media overload", is not so much a problem of quantity but rather an issue about the redundant, cacophonic quality of the information that suffuses our everyday perception —pictures, documents, videos, data all around us. From this point of departure, the present research articulates a series of pictorial methodologies in which painting operates simultaneously under an archival logic as well as a practice that encourages speculative making and thinking. It is this twofold notion what triggers a pictorial synergy between memory and imagination, letting images to become, and eventually produce, "something other".

Under these considerations, the present thesis is organised around three main chapters.

The first section aims to outline the main motivations of this practice-based research project, which arose at the time of integrating an archival dimension into my painting practice. Originally formulated as a strategy to deal with a personal creative crisis I was going through, this approach consisted of rethinking the internal logic of those visual sources that used to serve as a model for my pictorial work. However, from its very onset, this process soon revealed itself as an autonomous side of my practice, which was also capable of embodying a series of large-scale questions about memory and imagination in today's media culture, largely shaped by the standardizing influence of algorithms. In this regard, the chapter seeks to give an account of this influence in relation to contemporary forms production and circulation of images. By discussing how standardization operates as a profitable form of contemporary iconoclasm, this section explores the scope of the double pictorial-archival configuration of my artistic practice, insofar as it can offer a response to this form of *damnatio memoriae.*

The second chapter delves into the ways in which my practice began to shape this response, which broadly consisted of understanding archives as creative artifacts, not only oriented toward the preservation of the past but also to the production of the future. To that end, the second part of this

thesis reviews the processes developed under this temporal layout, underpinned by a concept of record that was capable of incorporating the instability inherent in the highly personalized form of image production that painting entails. The analysis and evolution of these processes are exposed here according to some unexpected transformations in my own creative work, and how the fundamental reference of this research project began to become explicit in it: the work of the German historian Aby Warburg, and in particular, his famous, and to some extent still underappreciated, *Atlas Mnemosyne* project. The plurality of time both implied and provoked by Warburg's approach to images is the model from which my own project seeks to devise ways of overthrowing the homogeneous and predictive logic that governs our current technological devices, provoking instead a vertigo whereby images exceed their own material, iconographic and epistemological limits, allowing all kinds of visual sources, previously considered unconnected or too distant, to resonate with each other. This second part of the thesis then seeks to expose the qualities of such an echoing reflection amid the unfamiliar in order to discover what determines the status of record in paintings, considering, as has been said, their highly personalized and unstable conditions of production.

Finally, the last section of the thesis is focused on reviewing the creative possibilities that arises from such instability, as they were specifically put in action in the context of a solo exhibition that I held by the end this research project. By resorting to what could tentatively be called a 'poetics of encounter', this exhibition became the instance in which I was able to escalate all the pictorial and archival experiments I conducted along the research, as well as to measure their possible future developments, inasmuch as it was the occasion to observe how such poetic powers can engender the new through the permanent search for a radical otherness within and between images. By drawing upon a speculative drive as a constructive mode that refutes the catastrophic bias that comes from the prevailing model of the obsolete and the new, the research has taken instead the elusive but composing capacity of an aggregative logic as an alternative to the barren and predictable quality of media accumulation.

The contribution that this project hopes to make consists of providing the methodological coordinates that have emerged throughout its development, and how they can be used as a sort of compass for navigating amidst the confusion of a global culture obsessed with the predictive mandate of its technological promises, yet increasingly confronted with the glaring evidence that the only secure prediction is that there may no longer be any world to be predicted. The *allegorical machine* can then be understood as a kit of possible exits from such enclosure, a poetic toolbox for all those who seek to overcome their creative self-fulfilling prophecies.

# Contents

# Introduction



1. Kenichi Hatsumi, *Futuristic Illustrations for Kids of the Showa Era.* Seigensha Press, 2012

In the short science fiction story, *The Instability*, Isaac Asimov narrates the time travel that a crew made up of two 'chrononauts' undertakes to a distant point in the universe, 27 million years away in the future. But apart from some quick references, the story is not so much about the journey itself as about the discussion that both men have at the time of embarking: how to map, scan, or simply register whatever they will find there, how much to extend the visit to that distant point, and especially, how to get back from there. Although the discussion was obviously far from trivial, densely packed with technical jargon and conceptual paradoxes that defy straightforward explanation, its imaginative momentum comes rather from a very simple fact. Because unlike many stories of the genre, this time machine did not move at ultra-high speeds to attain its objective but instead in the opposite way: forcing its mechanisms in the direction to absolute immobility, a very brief stoppage but strong enough so that the rest of the whole universe will continue its vertiginous movement behind it. The hypothesis, or just the ambition of the crew of the *Glenn 2217* spaceship, was to reach a new vision of time and its layers by virtue of this maximum stillness, a possibility attractive enough even at the risk of disappearing through some spacetime fissure that might not be registered in their 'chronomaps'.[1]

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[1] ASIMOV, ISAAC. "The Instability", in *Timescapes*. Edited by Peter Haining. London: Souvenir Press, 1997.

The possibility of envisaging immobility as a form of displacement serves as a valuable figure for describing the motivations behind the work, I have developed throughout this research project, which has sought to fix certain points in the ceaseless flow of images that characterizes our hyper-saturated media environment. It is impossible, or at least unproductive, to try to identify an overarching subject matter that unifies these points, although it is clear that the paintings, drawings and other pieces produced along this time emit a particular radiation, full of references to ancient cultures, mass media imagery, apocalyptic visions, machinic procedures, bureaucratic deliriums, and an always unfinished list of forking paths to get lost on. Yet, it has not been in spite of these disparities but rather because of them, to its radical instability, that my research has attempted to start up a sort of engine, an artistic contraption capable of moving across the silence and stillness of painting.[2] It is the concurrence of unlike things in a common space, the volatility produced by the collision of different registers, voices, and worlds previously considered to be antithetical or simply unable to coexist in the same place what this research project has wanted to experiment with. In times when the faculties of both memory and imagination are being massively delegated to all sorts of digital devices, thus to the standardizing character that radiates from its large-scale production, my research work aspire to develop creative strategies via the rough, even rudimentary, but certainly sensuous singularities of painting, whose poetic forces (from the Greek *poiesis*, "to make, bring forth") have been summoned in this project through the figure of the *allegorical machine*.

Encouraged by the desire of crafting the circuits of such an instrument, the present research project is based on an understanding of painting as an esoteric practice, a kind of alchemy whose mixture of technical and mythological elements allows to address the impact that the current media overload is having on the ways we perceive and produce images. But instead of focusing directly on media itself, the creative work developed along the project seeks to awaken 'the occult' among leftovers of such media saturation by means of a doubled notion of painting: as an archival tool by which these remains can be collected and mapped, on the one hand, and on the other, as a speculative technique for composing something unforeseen out of them. The central hypothesis of the project is that this unexpectedness triggers a series of interactions between memory and imagination that are increasingly unlikely to occur within the flat and standardized surface of today's electronic image display devices and interfaces. Instead, the type of contingencies around painting production, the slippery and elusive character of the circumstances in which it unfolds, in one word, the *thickness* of painting is what makes it capable of turning mere accumulation of images into different forms of aggregation and encounter. From this perspective, the archival and the speculative moments of

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[2] As stated at the beginning of the first chapter of John Berger's famous TV series *Ways of Seeing*: "the most important thing about painting is that their images are silent, still." John Berger, BBC 1972.

painting, as developed along the research, have been articulated in opposition to algorithmic structures, that tend to normalise these interactions in order to make them more predictable for large-scale profit, thus commodifying our experience of the visual. In this regard, all the ideas and artworks discussed throughout this thesis will be addressed inasmuch as they trace different forms of escaping from this predictive logic, a genealogy of the struggles for breaking the clichés that keep images, and information in general, tied to fixed meaning-labels, so that something "other" —the forgotten, unnoticed, marginal, tacit, unforeseen or unimagined— might rise again from the dead.[3] Assuming the instability of such an attempt, the contribution that this project hopes to make is to provide a body of artworks as well as a creative methodology capable of seizing upon the energy released by this instability. The *allegorical machine* is thus configured as an internal network of pictorial passages and transfers that are capable, in turn, of resonating with those other hyper-saturated networks of image circulation at a global scale.
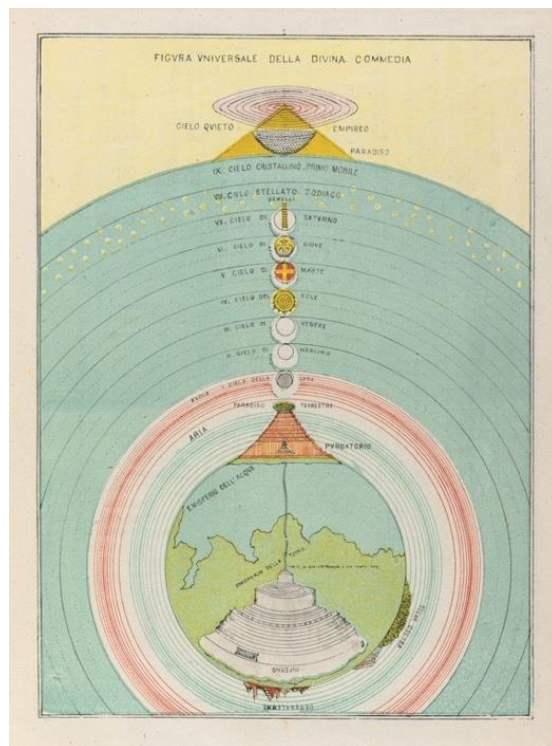


2. Michelangelo Caetani
*Figura Universale Della Divina Commedia* (Overview of the Divine Comedy)
1855

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[3] *Ma qui la morta poesì resurga, O sante Muse, poi che vostro sono.* "Here from the dead let poetry rise up, O sacred Muses, since I am yours." Divine Comedy, Purgatory, I.

The text that follows begins by reviewing the circumstances around which the present research project originated, at the moment when my painting practice expanded beyond painting itself towards the consideration of archives as a fundamental dimension of my work. The first chapter exposes the issues around the structures and powers of image sources—archives, collections, image banks, repositories— as well as the particular features of my own extensive work of collecting pictures that supports my practice as a painter. Although the idea of an archive began just as a strategy for improving the organization of my visual sources and the material I used as reference for my painting work, it soon became clear, as we shall see, that a series of unknown possibilities within that material could arise according to the way it was assembled, enabling the archive to become an autonomous dimension of my work. The chapter, then, gives an account of my attempts on such possibilities, whose multiple sides share what I describe as an 'othering' power, that is, the capacity to metamorphose, distort, or even pervert the identity of images by virtue of the moving influences around it. From these considerations, the text goes on reviewing the efficacy of the aforementioned othering drive as it started to become visible in my artistic practice, both in painting production as well as in my picture collection.

At the same time, however, the creative potential behind these experimentations has to face the strong opposition of a logic that permeates our links with technology, and particularly, with those electronic tools with which we normally access to the Internet and all its up-to-date archives, image banks, and other picture browsers: algorithmic structures. They rule over our thinking processes to an extent that we are hardly capable of measuring, with a pervading and growing impact over the most critical aspects of contemporary global societies, like social media or politics, as well as in several fields of knowledge, including data analysis, machine learning, financial transactions, cybersecurity, and all currently known models of artificial intelligence. However, despite its sci-fi appeal, algorithms still respond to their primal assignment, when developed back in the 9th century by the Persian mathematician and scholar Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi: to serve as a sequence of instructions to be rigorously followed in order to solve a problem, a step-by-step procedure expected to perform a well-defined task. Undoubtedly, delving into the whole technical aspects behind contemporary algorithms is far beyond the scope of the present research. But what does hold significance is to observe the cultural influence of its basic, 'instructionist' command, and the particular processes that it produces. Because the very resolution concept behind any algorithm entails the prior definition of the object to be attained, or put in different words, the responsive capacity of algorithms already delineates the boundaries of what can be asked to them. Consequently, and regarding the field of images, the predictive mandate that lies at the base of this temporal layout of algorithms entails not only the aim of anticipating the ways in which memory and imagination

may interact and eventually lead to some specific behaviour, but also, as I will argue, the will to retain those interactions within the limits of the already done, the *cliché*, thus inducing, rather than predicting, the required behaviour.

The thesis then continues by showing the possible routes I began to develop to resist and move away from these standardizing pressures, exposing some conditions of plurality and desire that were taking place in my artistic work, a fertile notion of abundance and multiplicity that proved different from the mere build-up of images, information, or data. The chapter describes the ways in which the huge disruption of the global crisis of the Covid-19 meant a complete alteration of the plans I had for how to attain this fruitful excess in my artistic practice, though exposing how, at the same time, such disruption opened the path to find an unexpected approach for turning the barren accumulation into a 'lively' profusion of forms. In line with what the Italian anthropologist Carlo Severi has called the "chimera principle", the text reflects on the possibilities arising from the articulation of heterogeneous, divergent elements in a shared space, where painting becomes a scoring tool both for exploring and provoking particular intensities on images, a visual salience that makes them memorable. The visual affinities between colours, shapes, compositions, as well as their multiple temporalities are able to unfold in their accidental intersections, chronologies are altered, anachronisms proliferate, influences spread in multiple directions, and the stiffness that the ideas of the new and the obsolete often impose on our ways of seeing and thinking is dismantled. Drawing deeply on the pioneering work of the German historian Aby Warburg, all such outpouring of possibilities allows this research project to unfold a series of questions about the properties of painting as a twofold instrument both for setting a specific mnemonic logic as well as an experimental, speculative practice. In this context, the main question of this section of the thesis consists of finding out what determines the status of record in a painting, especially considering, as Isabelle Graw argues, its highly personalized, and thus unstable and ambiguous condition of production[4]. However, as we shall see, it is precisely this ambiguity what endows painting with a unique power to act as a lively form of memory, a kind of record marked by a particular time signature: that of *kairos*, the enabling yet dangerous moment at which something must be done, a time filled with a sense of urgency and significance, by which its chronological and regular structures can be productively overflowed.

Providing a series of additional artistic and literary references, the scope of this affective temporality will be addressed throughout the third and final chapter of this text in order to outline what could be called a 'poetics of the encounter'. The text examines the form in which such poetic

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[4] GRAW, ISABELLE. *Thinking through Painting: Reflexivity and Agency beyond the Canvas.* New York: Sternberg Press, 2012.

drive has been put in action throughout a large exhibition that, by the end of this research project, has served as a concrete materialization of the logic of the *allegorical machine*. Like the spaceship in Asimov's story, the project assumes a vision of history that responds to the multiplicity of time and space that necessarily emerges from the encounters with which we seek to challenge the limits of the imaginable: "to articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was' (...). It means to seized hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger."[5] Precisely addressing the actual effects of this danger —namely, the algorithmic standardization of our senses in pursuit of the predictability of our behaviour— painting assumes in this project the task of generating a series of image networks freed from the sole function of representation and recognition, offering instead the means to abandon oneself to the free play of associations on the constellation of graphic and pictorial records that constitute the whole body of artworks developed here: paintings, drawings, sketchbooks, picture collections, and the aforementioned exhibition. As in a Tarot cards reading session, this investigation has followed the hints of the unforeseen, the smoky and silent register of images. A lab without protocol.

In a world saturated with commodified information, moving between the fetish of the new and the growing standardization of interactions in the digital realm, the spirit of this research project lies in answering the following question: how to imagine a future not determined by a predictive logic but from the genuine ambition to invent it? "We neither strive for, nor will, neither want, nor desire anything because we judged it to be good; on the contrary, we judge something to be good because we strive for it, will it, want it, and desire it"[6], says Spinoza in a passage of his *Ethics*. This kind of reversal could well be taken as an attractive provocation to begin to answer this question.

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[5] BENJAMIN, WALTER. *Theses on philosophy of history*. London: Pimlico, p. 247
[6] SPINOZA, BARUCH. *Ética*. 1677. Ciudad de México: Porrúa, 2007. p. 92

# I. Esoteric Times

*I intend to speak of forms changed into new entities.*

Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book I

It is said that at the time of the Cold War there was a joke that since then has been quoted many times to express the paradoxes and problems related to freedom: a citizen of Soviet Germany receives a job offer from Siberia. Aware of the difficulties he would have in communicating with his friends due to censorship and controls by the regime, he decides to establish a code with them: letters written in blue ink will be taken as true and reliable, while those written in red ink are to be considered false. Sometime later, the friends receive the first letter from Siberia, written in blue ink: "Everything here is wonderful. The stores are full of products and the food is abundant. The apartments are spacious, the cinemas offer all kinds of movies, and women are always up for an *affair*. The only thing nowhere to be found is red ink."



3. Adrian Gouet, *I Send you this Cadmium Red*
Oil on canvas, 60 x 50 cm.
2014

In one way or another, the present project began with a similar intuition regarding the limits of my own creative freedom, probably as a sign of my inability to articulate or understand a strange disquiet that I began to experience regarding my work. Towards the end of 2016, I had a reasonably established career as an artist, and particularly, as a painter. In the narrow world of Santiago's art scene —'small town, big hell', as Chileans ourselves use to say— my work had reached a certain level of visibility through several group and solo exhibitions, a couple of prizes here and there, plus some good experience as a freelance teacher. By that time, all these aspects of my professional practice were still agglutinated with some degree of coherence thanks to the ever-promising label of the emerging artist. As a painter, my work had reached a point of sufficiency that only required some occasional variations that, however, did not altered the stylistic parameters that characterized the ways in which I used to address some topics or the visual character of my pictorial creations. Apart from a few sporadic periods of hesitation, I prided myself on having a good degree of knowledge of how the paintings I made should look like, a clear awareness of what my methods were and what ingredients I needed to make them work. And if this is not enough, all that high self-confidence was endorsed by the sales that I used to have, which without being too profuse were nonetheless constant. In short, I was well on my way to providing my work with a stable and recognizable identity, something to which, so it appears, most artists aspire.

However, there was still some part of me that was capable of realizing that all this was written in blue ink, that is, I suspected that perhaps all that sufficiency was not sufficient, that there must be some red ink out there whose lack indicated the possible traps into which I could be falling. Because after all, what motivational horizon could I have for the following years if all that awaited me was a series of iterations and revivals of what I had already done? So it was that I began to provoke the call from Siberia, but intending to do so in such a way as if it were not myself who was calling. I needed to push back the increasingly predictable layout of my work, but no matter how inventive I might be, all my attempts at a new series of paintings or drawings fell within the blue ink mode of my already proven solutions. Basically, I didn't know how to picture something outside that limit because that would require from me to not be the one who was imagining. Until I realized that this was precisely the way out of this silly labyrinth of mirrors: for entering that exteriority, in the hope that something truly new could happen to my work, it was necessary to suspend my certainties about who I was and surrender or letting myself to become a kind of an-other myself:

We live by action —by acting on desire. Those of us who don't know how to want —whether geniuses or beggars— are related by impotence (...) To act —that is true wisdom. I will be what I want to be, but I have to want whatever it is.[7]

Still, for whatever it was out there, I did not want to give in to the temptation to approach this process of "self-othering" in a metaphorical way, so I tried to be as literal as possible. Just as a way of shaking off what seemed too resolved and thus immobile, by the beginning of 2017 I attended a residency program located in a rural area in northern Finland, more than thirteen thousand kilometres away from my home, at the edge where the arctic circle begins and my ability to imagine some basic conditions for human life abruptly ended. An almost radically strange place



4. Detail of *The Last Judgement*, by Michelangelo Buonarroti
1536 - 1541
Sistine Chapel, Vatican City

for me, it was also a destination far and hostile enough as to turn impossible or at least too complicated to carry all the burdensome logistics of painting, even less during the two winter months that I was going to spend there. Thus, apart from my laptop, a sketchbook, and a handful of pencils, my stay consisted mainly of being able to endure myself physically and mentally in that extreme and improbable landscape, getting used to only two hours of daily light, to temperatures that I had never felt before, heavy loneliness and to some considerable degree of disorientation in my perception of time. In any case, I still had great moments for wandering through that silent whiteness, as well as social engagement with local people and other resident artists, with whom we shared our working hours in a well-appointed studio space.

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[7] PESSOA, FERNANDO. *The Book of Disquiet. 106* Barcelona: Acantilado, 2007, p. 120

5-6. Work spaces
(right) and
surroundings (above)
of Arteles
Residency Program.

Hämeenkyrö, Finland.

2017
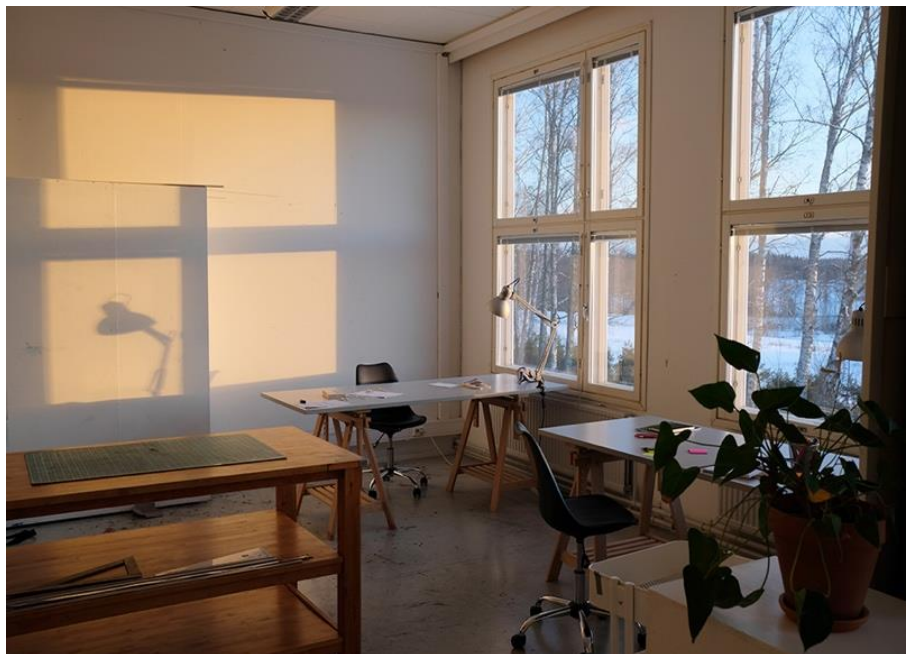
Extending as much as possible this wish for distance, I spent my time in the residency far from any temptation of producing or making any new piece but instead just looking backwards into the "deep past" of my own work. Although I eventually ended up making some drawings and collages, my game consisted mostly of reviewing the files and documents that I had been producing around painting for years: portfolios, applications, exhibition projects, commissions, unfinished ideas and, especially, all the images I collected as visual references for my paintings: photographs, pictures, screenshots, notes.

After a while, however, this revision became increasingly difficult. And not because of some particularly unwieldy disorder among the variety of things that I was dealing with, but for the simple reason that the main place where all these memories were stored was my laptop, and it happened that the screen of it became a rather clumsy vehicle for approaching this variety, as it was somewhat tricky to properly display the many pictures and photographs I was attempting to see. I remember being quite aware that, for example, the paintings I did around 2014 had a deeper chromatic exploration than those of my beginnings in 2010, in which I mostly drew on monochromatic palettes and lots of gray colours. But I wanted to envision the whole four-year period at a glance, and then move inside it in the very same way we do at maps. Instead, I could only see the files of these works exclusively in a sort of sequential way, one by one, folder by folder, year by year. In addition, my skills in the digital realm were quite limited, and I didn't have enough time to learn which kind of software or app could help me to render a practical and quick comparison between all those digital files in order to better visualize my pictorial genealogy, the drifts and paths that I took regarding the aforementioned colour exploration, what transits had occurred along them, or how they had altered other elements of my paintings such as the composition of each canvas or the iconographic repertoire with which I was working.

In certain moment, I realized that this tension between my ambition for visualization and the material verification of my incapacity to actually make it happen indicated the very moment of confrontation against those limits I was supposed to break through. So, in a moment of sudden insight, I quickly moved to the printing area of my North-Pole studio for getting a little printed version of each of the pictures I had in the "ideas for painting" folder of my computer, which I estimated to be around two hundred. After a couple of days of resizing the files for optimization, I had all the digital images of my computer transposed into a bunch of hand-size pieces of paper, all of them scattered over my working table.

7. Studio working table at Arteles Residency, 2017

My surprise was significant and double. On the one hand, I was pleasantly astonished due to the unbelievably easy and even enjoyable experience of handling and grouping these pictures, a feeling of playfulness that sharply contrasted with the complicated manoeuvres within the digital space in which I was trapped on just a few days ago. But on the other hand, as soon as the wish of getting that long-awaited comprehensive approach towards my visual sources was granted, the truth showed up in ruthless way to my eyes: the visual references and pictures that inspired my work until then seemed to me all sadly similar, repetitive, too conservative in almost all the visual features one could consider: a quasi-invariable centred-oriented composition, smooth transitions between colours, and a narrow iconography that mainly drew on mass media imagery from military and cinema representation of tragedies —atomic bombs, blasting bodies, and some odd clouds. It was disappointing and even shameful to realize that all my material resembled the uncountable websites and repositories of free wallpapers that I used to visit without noticing how everything in there did taste homogeneous and dull no matter how "spectacular" they pretended to be, just as the food served on any long plane trip nowadays. And the really problematic thing was that all this dullness was spoiling the very character, as well as the aesthetical possibilities of my paintings of that time.

8. Top left:

Adrian Gouet
*Untitled*
Oil on canvas, 30 x 45 cm.
2010

9. Top right:

Adrian Gouet
*H*
Oil on canvas, 110 x 90 cm.
2009

10. Middle left:

Adrian Gouet
*Acari VIII*
Oil on canvas, 40 x 50 cm.
2015

11. Bottom left:

Adrian Gouet
*Mesophase*
Oil on canvas, 160 x 200 cm.
2014

Nevertheless, the discouraging debunking of past choices regarding my visual supplies for painting (and by extension, to paintings themselves, as those supplies were defining what was "paintable" for me), also opened up an immediately available opportunity to effectively move on into something new. Because it did not take me too long to start infiltrating this physical display of pictures adding some others that had no apparent or obvious connection with them, "unorthodox" images that mainly came from my colleagues at the residency, whom I invited to participate in the classifying and assembling experiments. So, a collection initially dominated by HD photographs was now populated with blurry pictures, fragments of printed paper, illustrations, diagrams, cartoons, and even words or phrases that we started to take from old books and magazines stored in the studio facilities. Without being fully aware, the hilarious connections provoked by the simple game of putting alien things together revealed the most seductive of all mysteries in art creation: the possibility of transmutating the visual matter into some kind of unexpected entity, or in more psychopathic words, the lure of perverting the assumed identity of each picture —thus its conventional use or destination— towards a more unstable, yet possibly new, territory.



11-15. Studio space at Arteles Residency, and details of the work done around pictures

2017

13

14



15

Consequently, my whole survey into the long distances and paths to bring forth a new beginning in my artistic work was just as simple as it must have been in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, at the dawn of modern astronomy, when Johannes Kepler discovered that the age-old problem of the inexplicable reduction in the diameter of the moon during solar eclipses had nothing to do with either the moon or the sun, but with the apparatus they were using to observe them[8]. Applied to my own situation, I realized that my creative dilemmas had nothing to do with painting as such but with some kind of outside dimension on which it nevertheless radically depends, a fundamental instrument of all imagination to which I had inexcusably never lent special attention as a painter: archives.

16. Self-portrait
Arteles Residency

2017

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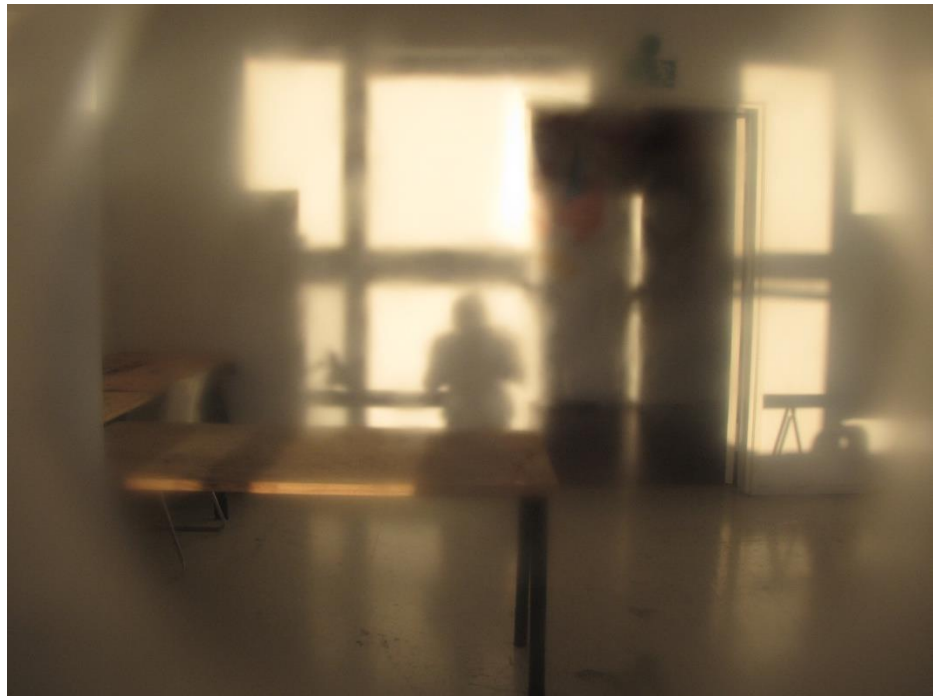
[8] ALPERS, SVETLANA. *The Art of Describing: the Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984, pp. 33 – 34.

I) An 'othering' power

As we have seen, the impossibility to carry out an act of memory about my own work triggered a whole chain of decisions and discoveries in my studio practice, raising a series of methodological questions, many of which marked the time when this research began. Echoing the experiences described above, I judged that there must be something more involved in this mnemonic drive than just the mere wish of calling back something from the past as a practical move to enhance my painting production. Even then, it would still be puzzling how the forward movement involved on this enhancement can gain its vigour, its emotional impulse, from looking backwards. As my attention to archives created an inner distance in my practice, a sort of unknown 'intraface'[9], it was necessary to investigate in greater detail the different visions and models used to understand memory, and by extension that of archives, beyond the conventional forms that place them exclusively in function of the static representation of the past.

An initial group of interrogations appeared when I noticed that this focus on archives started to demand from me not only to play the role of painter as the maker, the manufacturer of that coloured surfaces, but also that of a hunter-gatherer of valuable supplies for that work, namely, pictures. Thus, my first thoughts were mostly about the need of paying more attention and care when picking up images or taking photos that may be of use, trying to build some internal logic within these gatherings, in order to make it easy to find there some good inspiration when needed.

But sooner that I thought, it became evident that beyond any consideration on the practical use of these pictures in my painting production, the singularities alongside this gathering process were itself an entirely different area from which to deal with images. With the sole initial intention of being more exposed to new imagery, I was unexpectedly becoming an excited amateur collector of stuff, and especially, an enthusiastic explorer of all sorts of marginal places from where unknown 'visual entities' may show up, that is, flea markets, second-hand bookstores, bazaars, variety stores, improvised street fairs. As something that I would not have imagined about myself before, I became eager to poke around or to rummage through the junk and souvenirs, fragments of imagery about someone's past life as it is possible to catch in many of this kind of places, with the hope of finding some bizarre photos or slides, a travel album, tourist brochures, a birthday or Christmas card, paper envelopes where there might still be an out-of-date stamp, or some odd drawings hidden in the margins of a phone book. In more than a couple of occasions I even reached into the garbage bags outside stores that throw out catalogues and prints of their discontinued products, and I have

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[9] GALLOWAY, ALEXANDER. *The Interface Effect*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012

developed the habit, as I walk down the street, to constantly look down the pathway where I often find political propaganda papers, shopping lists, police reports, identity documents, drawings, scratched receipts and bills.





17, 18, 19. Improvised street bazaar in Santiago, Chile (top left), and garbage piles both in London and Santiago.
2020 - 2021



In this way, looking after the encounter with rare material, my duties as a painter were no longer restricted to the studio-based activities of crafting an image but also a matter of cultivating an external place, that of a collection of visual debris, fragments, and traces —or, for the purposes of this research, an archive. And not only were my visual attention, my memory and imagination articulated in an entirely different way than they were when I was properly painting. It was also that such difference between my approaches toward painting and archives were somehow resonating on each other, provoking each other yet without being directly connected. I did not know if there would be

any benefit on accumulating this material, but I could recognize that the joy around my archival curiosity was sparkling a new way of seeing, and that was certainly, and still is, something highly significant when you are a painter. As this curiosity was feeding from a very palpable energy that was ebbing and flowing around the mystery of what these ruins were capable of, it became necessary to handle the archive as an essential and autonomous dimension of my art practice.

If it is a matter of characterizing such mystery, it can be said that it bears an 'othering' power, an intriguing and attractive potential to become someone or something else, certainly in line with the ancient fantasies around metamorphosis and other themes of transformation, and that I would summarize drawing upon a brief sentence stated at the first pages of Spinoza's *Ethics*: "we do not know what a body can do"[10]. Following the line of Deleuze's interpretation, such ignorance must be taken not as deficiency to be mend but as a fruitful provocation, an invitation to go beyond any given definition of the body-archive or bodypainting, witnessing instead the unfolding course of whatever they can be capable of, its yet unknown powers:

> What does Spinoza mean when he invites us to take the body as a model? It is a matter of showing that the body surpasses the knowledge that we have of it, and that thought likewise surpasses the consciousness that we have of it. There are no fewer things in the mind that exceed our consciousness than there are things in the body that exceed our knowledge.[11]

Accordingly, the shift I conducted in the approach to my body of visual sources, from the digital-based repository to the heaps of printed paper in a table, was the very proof of my ignorance not only about what was going on within my records but also about what they could become or provoke on my own understanding of my practice, now suddenly split both into the gathering and making roles.

To which point, then, the physicality of technological supports encloses the narratives, dreams, imaginations, memories, or just the illusions that lie behind the desire of painting or collecting pictures? Or, on the contrary, how the unusual sort of arrangements allowed by these material modulations seductively consent the disclosure of latent forces within them? Of course, as a painter I have to provide myself with references or ideas exciting enough for my personal tastes and inclinations as to provoke a chain of 'pictorial actions', very much like a chef that stocks a variety of ingredients, spices, and tools in the kitchen in order to put together what he or she considers to be

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[10] SPINOZA, BARUCH, *Ethics*, III, 2, scholium.
[11] DELEUZE, GILLES. *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988, p. 18

a desirable dish. But in this case, and recalling Deleuze's remarks, there was not any predefined dish in my mind, an expected outcome to which I could refer the ideas-ingredients that were necessary to set up an archive that could work for me as a creative device. If we agree on considering that the 'newness' to which creative attempts generally aspire to are made up of a paradoxical substance, a blend of a not-yet existent but somehow insistent kind of being, then it is necessary to acknowledge that the material supports of such attempts—papers, screens, canvases, pigments, electrons— are necessarily imbued by this paradoxical signature as well. For that reason, my archival attempts could not depend so much on a sort of ontological, intrinsic quality or property of these elements but on the gaps between them, in the traffic they allow, on the interaction and flux that the structures of these arrangements enable:

> You can look at a piece of a puzzle for three whole days, you can believe that you know all there is to know about its colouring and shape and be no further on than when you started. The only thing that counts is the ability to link this piece to other pieces, and in that sense the art of the jigsaw puzzle has something in common with the art of go. The pieces are readable, take on a sense, only when assembled; in isolation, a puzzle piece means nothing – just an impossible question, an opaque challenge. But as soon as you have succeeded, after minutes of trial and error, or after a prodigious half-second flash of inspiration, in fitting it into one of its neighbours, the piece disappears, ceases to exist as a piece.[12]

Even if we hold to the more traditional consideration of archives as attempts to articulate or reconstruct the past "as it really was", the legibility of such articulations necessarily produces, as an emergent property, a hypothesis about a time to come, a speculative exchange about what all these preserved pieces will be able to do once their context of origin disappears and they face the gaze of possible future researchers in who knows what new contexts. Because, despite the tendency we may have to associate them with a retrospective gaze, archives are always made to be consulted by an eventual user, and under that condition, their own structure is necessarily oriented towards an open sense of time:

> We might be tempted to think of these Seleucid archive buildings as institutions oriented toward the past, preserving, accumulating, and even arresting temporality. But they were also, and in more significant ways, directed forward, toward an open future. The registration of documents was a responsibility and a promise.[13]

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[12] PEREC, GEORGES. *Life a user's manual.* London: Collins Harvill, 1987

[13] KOSMIN, PAUL. *Time and its Adversaries in the Seleucid Empire.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018, p. 58

Each of the images I had collected pointed to some fragment of the past: pages from an old encyclopedia that attracted my attention, loose photos from a family album I bought in a street fair, leaflets from a memorable political campaign, doodles on the margins of an abandoned notebook that reminded me of my own fascination for doodling. However, since there was always a hypothetical painting wandering through my thoughts, the act of collecting all this material was necessarily invested with projections and hypothesis about its future re-enactments, as it opened up the possibility of an afterlife for these images formerly condemned to oblivion:

Full fathom five thy father lies;
Of his bones are coral made;
Those are pearls that were his eyes;
Nothing of him that doth fade
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange[14]



20. 1967: Soviet officials view the charred remains of cosmonaut Vladimir Komarov. Multiple technical issues and a parachute failure caused his Soyuz capsule to crash into the ground after re-entry, making him the first human to die in a spaceflight.

And the future encounter with such coral-made records is always uncertain. As Derrida argues, "if we want to know what an archive means, we will only know it in times to come. Perhaps."[15]

The use of archives as artistic sources profoundly transforms the definition of memory by opening new spaces where the past is not merely represented but actively reconfigured to project possible futures. In conventional models, memory is primarily understood as a tool for representation, a mechanism to reconstruct and preserve the past. This view, based on the idea of memory as a static repository, holds that images, documents, and narratives in the archive function as traces of something that has already occurred, thereby anchoring the archive to historical authenticity and temporal fidelity. However, when the archive becomes a basis for artistic creation—such as in paintings inspired by historical documents or archival photographs reinterpreted in new contexts—memory ceases to be a fixed reflection of the past and begins to

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[14] Passage from "The Tempest", William Shakespeare, quoted in the epigraph of DIDI-HUBERMAN, GEORGES. *The Surviving Image*. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press, 2018

[15] DERRIDA, JACQUES. *Archive Fever. A Freudian Impression*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995, p. 36.

act as a dynamic process that activates the imagination. This process challenges the traditional model by suggesting that the archive can serve as a starting point for creating new meanings and narratives oriented toward the future.

Memory, when transformed into a creative act, expands into the realms of imagination and anticipation, an idea explored by authors such as biologist Gerald Edelman, to which we shall return in more depth later in this thesis. According to Edelman, memory is not simple reproduction but a reconstructive process that enables forms of learning and future adaptation, suggesting continuity between remembering and imagining. In the Humanities, theorists like Pierre Nora and Aleida Assmann have analysed how *lieux de mémoire* ("realms of memory") not only preserve the past but also construct frameworks that can shape our visions of the future.[16] Thus, the use of archives in art allows the past to be continually reinvented, breaking free from the limits of fixed documentation to propose new possibilities and perspectives. The work of contemporary artists who reuse historical archives —Kara Walker, Gerhard Richter, Christian Boltanski, or Hans-Peter Feldmann, just to name a few— confirms this view: the archive, overflowing its conservative function, becomes fertile ground for exploring connections between what was, what is, and what could be.

This is the reason why, in the context of art practice, the characteristic uncertainty of the future can be liberating rather than problematic since there is no need for any hypothesis about the future to be proved, nor does it have to function as a predictive endeavour. Rather the contrary: if my long-term goal was to boost my paintings with some fresh new impulse by means of this attention to archives, I could only get that by resigning to determine in advance what the final picture should be when its mechanics were fully operational, that is, getting rid of any know-how pretension about the way in which this archive should work. Though I could positively say that, recalling the North-Pole experience, my idea of the archive was always to make it work as an othering device, the fact is that no otherness can be grasped as such because it ceases to be 'other' as soon as one tries to take hold of it. Hence, there was literally nothing to be functionalized by that archive yet, no pre-existing destination for my decisions about it. As Donald Barthelme has argued though a series of examples in literature:

> The not-knowing is crucial to art, is what permits art to be made. Without the scanning process engendered by the not-knowing, without the possibility of having the mind move in unanticipated directions, there would be no inventions.

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[16] ASSMANN, ALEIDA. *Transformations between Memory and History*. Social Research, SPRING 2008, Vol. 75, No. 1, Collective Memory and Collective Identity (Spring 2008), pp. 49-72

But then he acutely adds:

This is not to say that I don't know anything about Jacqueline or Jemima [characters of his literary examples], but what I do know comes into being at the instant it's inscribed.[17]

Therefore, the first station along this PhD project had to be devoted to exploring the conditions around that particular moment, examining how plastic and malleable archival structures may be by virtue of the pulling force of that inexistence or ignorance, and not in spite of it, in order to glimpse the character of the events they could enable. If not knowing what a body-archive is capable of means to declare its power to make us imagine a possible or unthought future, any attempt to equip my incipient archive with some kind of structure would need then to fully embrace that absence, that radical incompleteness, as a guarantee of the freedom for being able to precisely imagine new things. Paraphrasing our Dutch mentor, there should be no fewer things in the archive that exceed my memory than things in painting that could exceed my imagination.

## II) FROM SIMULACRA TO UNREASONABLE FOSSILS: A BORGESIAN APPROACH

Having in mind the risks and opportunities around this logic of the excess, the first year of this research project began when I arrived at RCA studios carrying a box containing a large collection of printed pictures, all of them gathered like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle whose hypothetical overall composition was unknown to me, and without being fully aware about how extensive was the variety of the imagery within it. Roughly speaking, these pictures consisted of a profuse array of old photographs and prints that I had been collecting for almost three years mostly from discarded and residual media, plus several printouts of some of my own photographs and screenshots. My expectation was that all these pieces were able to be connected with each other in some way or another, so what I had in mind was to start my studio activities by setting a series of experiments on the arrangements of these pictures in order to find out what happen with them, how their features and meanings change and move according to different contexts, looking ahead for getting new ideas for painting. This attempt, and eventually my entire research as we shall see, was highly motivated

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[17] BARTHELME, DONALD. *Not Knowing. The Essays and Interviews*. Berkeley: Counterpoint, 1997, p. 12

by the famous *Atlas Mnemosyne,* the outsized and thus unfinishable picture-collecting project developed by the German historian of art and culture Aby Warburg by the end of his life, in the late 1920s. Since long I have been hearing about the necessary reconsideration of Warburg's work, praising him almost as a prophet of our current digital image browsers and the logic behind the layout of many of the screens we currently use in our everyday life[18]. But, as I will explain along this text, I suspected that a significant side of such powers (re)discovered and released by the *Atlas Mnemosyne,* have not been exactly esteemed as valuable or convenient for those very electronical supports. My aim was then to unfold my paper-based collection of images to start the challenge of verifying such suspicions.
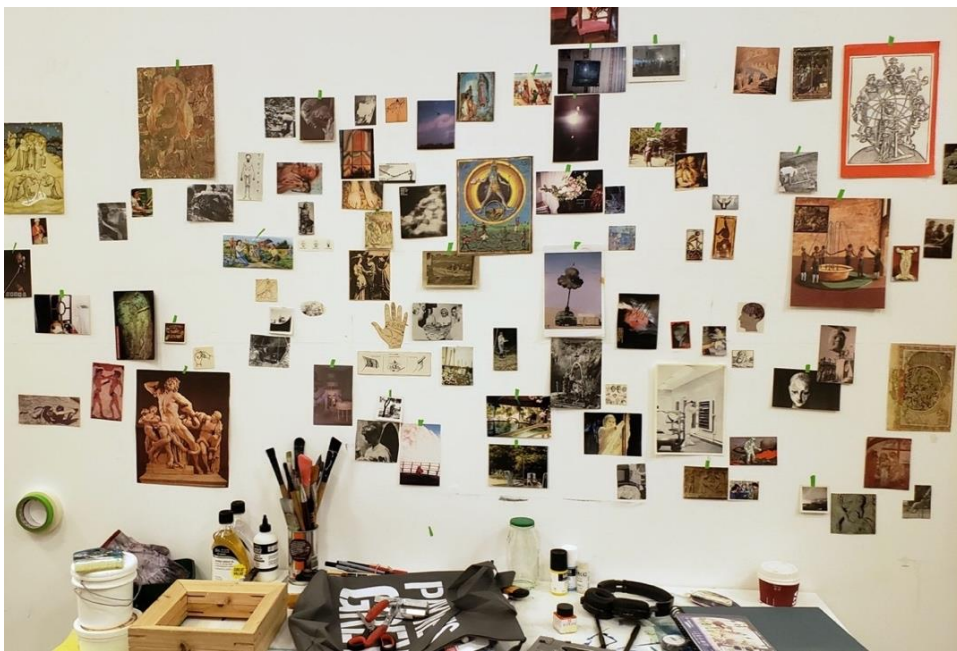


21. Working space at RCA studios. 2019

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My first studio activities consisted mainly of getting immersed inside the pile of pictures I brought with me. I was very aware that, at some point in the near future, all these small and not that small photographs and printed papers should be the source for a whole new group of paintings to be done during my research project. But long before I even thought about how will I paint through those images, or what kind of paintings they may help making, I just stayed for a while exclusively devoted to the very act of observing and playing with these pictures, moving them along the walls of my studio and wandering about the virtually infinite and constantly changing connections they had, with no other intention than exploring these image-made lands and letting myself to be surprised by the unexpected encounters that were taking place all the time. By physically manipulating the proximity and distance between pictures, I was able to visualize the numerous echoes and resonances among the variety of colours, textures, and motifs. Removed from the networks and contexts that had originally provided them a functional meaning, these scattered pictures showed off all their playful relativity, the variability of their capacity to either influence or

be influenced, the plasticity of their formal traits, its potential to be transformed or revealed as 'something other' by virtue of the different visual contexts around them. So, a diagram of the 'lines of life' obtained from a palmistry manual was suddenly able to distort the tender observation of a couple walking hand in hand on a photograph that I got from a family album, while the faithful gesture made by the dowser seeking for water with a wooden stick resonates with an illustration from a biblical passage depicting a demon using a spear to throw sinners down to what looks like a cliff. From these bizarre connections and overtones, in which figures and images can become almost anything, the painting process started, echoing the interruptions of meaning that took place between pictures.



22. Detail of the wall at RCA studios, 2019

However, the transfer of these dislocations towards pictorial decisions occurred during this period rather spontaneously and without any specific direction. The first paintings I did along this time were conducted by the sole assignment of recreating within their own pictorial dimension the absolute randomness with which pictures on the wall had also intersected each other. This brought into my canvases a great variety of figures and motifs in a very short time, plus an amusing tendency to improvise with colours, and a remarkable preference for the unfinished character on images. But all this was attained at the expense of no gaining any significant depth within the whole group yet. And what seemed problematic was not so much the increasing accumulation of unfinished works but the arbitrariness of my pictorial decisions, which started to look weak and plain.

In any case, despite the modest quality of these first undertakings, I discovered that paintings themselves were functioning as resonant devices, since they were not only transferring a diverse imagery from one material support to another with different degrees of distortion. Even as an autonomous form of configuring images, they were somehow mirroring the same capricious character of the archival structure they were drawing upon, thus expanding and reformulating my initial questions: how to avoid the confusion between the rich profusion of images in my collection —thus of references, techniques, places, and narratives within them— with the barren and immobilizing overload of information? To what extent, and by which mechanisms, could the basic model of my archive-painting system account for that difference?



23-24. Some of the first series of paintings done at the beginning of the research project.
Oil on canvas, variable sizes. 2019

25. Adrian Gouet, *Dancing figure*. Oil on canvas, 90 x 150 cm. 2019

After an initial period of an overwhelming feeling that almost *any* picture could become worth being included in my new 'infiltrating' mode of collecting and assembling imagery for painting reference, I started to confront the unavoidable necessity of sorting out in some way that unbounded material I had been accumulating. Otherwise, the matter could quickly escalate to the absurd: in times when we have such ease in recording all sorts of things and events, with cameras everywhere and a virtually infinite capacity for storing digital images, it is perfectly imaginable not only to avoid any sort of filtering or selection but instead decisively adhering to the fantasies regarding absolute archives, or "total libraries"[19]. Undoubtedly, these speculations have great literary interest, as demonstrated by Perec in his *Attempt to Exhaust a Place in Paris* (1975), which also recalls the appeal of many contemporary technological ventures, such as the *Svalbard Global Seed Vault*, a massive collection of the seeds of the Earth stored in a bunker somewhere in the Norwegian mountains, or even the *Pioneer* plaque, launched to space in 1977, which is supposed to contain an audio recording that includes samples of all types of humankind musical production along history, plus an allegedly comprehensive compendium of the sounds of nature, all of it to be played and heard by an hypothetical non-human intelligent being[20]. All these huge and totalizing endeavours, as well as its political motivations, are imbued with strong mythological resonances inasmuch as the figure *par excellence* of every archive, attested by its own etymological roots, relies in the *Ark*, the biblical figure of the mission assigned by God to Noah for 'cataloguing' and housing all forms of life in the verge of a global disaster. And it is probably that sense of a looming tragedy what this totalizing fever more clearly evokes, as in Borges' *On Rigor in Science* (1946), where we vividly grasp not only the futility but, above all, the danger that such a fantasy represents:

> In that Empire, the Cartographer's art achieved such a degree of perfection that the map of a single province occupied an entire city, and the map of the Empire, an entire province. In time, these vast maps were no longer sufficient. The Guild of Cartographers created a map of the Empire which perfectly coincided with the Empire itself. But succeeding generations, with diminished interest in the study of Cartography, believed that this immense map was of no use, and not impiously, they abandoned it to the inclemency of the Sun and of numerous winters. In the deserts of the West ruined fragments of the map survive, inhabited by animals and beggars; in all the country there is no other relic of the geographical disciplines.[21]

[19] BORGES, JORGE LUIS. *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and other Writings*. Harmonsworth: Penguin, 1970
[20] See further references of the full project in SAGAN, CARL. The Cosmic Connection. Cambridge University Press, 1973
[21] BORGES, op. cit. p. 67

26. Above: the Noah's Ark replica in *Ark Encounter*, a Christian young creationist theme park at Williamstown, Kentucky, US, based on literal interpretations of several biblical sources.

27. Right: the Svalbard Global Seed Vault featured in *The Futurama Holiday Spectacular*, aired in November 2010.



For it does not matter how accurately we can construct a map that matches the size and scale of the territory, there is no memory and thus no possible future contained within such totalizing attempts.

From this perspective, I decided to establish a series of categories under which the accumulation of pictures could be organized, having in mind that, whatever the structure, it had to allow the unexpected encounters and resonances that I was looking for. I bring Borges back again to outline the kind of strategy I took in order to attain this, which I found in *The Analytical Language of John Wilkins*. In this brief text, the Argentinian author reviews the postulates that the English clergyman and philosopher John Wilkins (1614-1672) proposed for the creation of a universal language, a mechanism of formulae and concepts whose functioning aimed to rid itself of all the troublesome ambiguities of natural languages, thus achieving total understanding among human beings. With incomparable ironic subtlety, Borges suggests an alternative to such colossal enterprise by referring to the "remote pages of certain Chinese encyclopedia", in which animals are classified as: "a) belonging to the Emperor; b) embalmed; c) trained; d) piglets; e) mermaids; f) fabulous; g) stray

dogs; h) included in this classification; i) that shake as if insane; j) innumerable; k) drawn with an extremely fine camel-hair brush; l) etcetera; m) that have just broken the vase; n) that from afar look like flies"[22]. As Foucault comments in the preface of his *Order of Things*, it is the very impossibility of managing a taxonomy like this what challenges the limits of what can be thought, and in the case of my research into image archives, the limits of what can be imagined[23].

Following this logic, I set out to create my own 'Borgesian' mode of handling my collection of pictures, for which I defined a group of 22 different sections, mainly aimed at two aspects that I needed to work on: on the one hand, a certain structural dimension that was necessary to start up the connections among pictures (types of categories, linking criteria, rules, traffic laws), and on the other, the dynamics of the visual material I was including, the plasticity of the pieces in the collection, the specific qualities of the images that had dragged my attention.
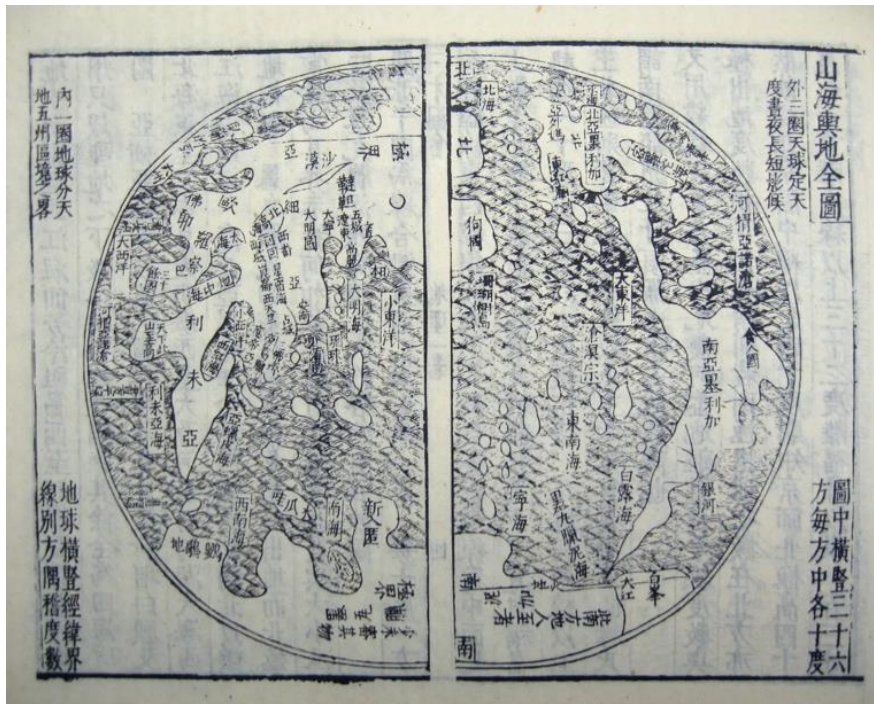


28. The world map Shanhai Yudi Quantu, included in the Chinese *leishu* encyclopedia Sancai Tuhui, finished in 1607 and published in 1609, during the Ming dynasty.

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[22] BORGES, op. cit. p. 91
[23] FOUCAULT, MICHEL. *The Order of Things*. London: Routledge, 1989, p. xviii

As part of the structural area of this investigation, my thoughts were firstly directed to the Tarot deck of cards as a model, and particularly, to the group of Major Arcana or *Trumps*, which are composed of 22 characters that together configure a kind of miniature cosmos[24]. As a former student of Psychology, I have always had a special interest in the field of projective psychology, and the variety of techniques based on images that can be developed as exploratory tools of the unconscious. But far from any particular use of the cards themselves, I was interested in the non-authored origins of the deck, a sort of diffuse and impersonal collective invention with no precise beginning that nonetheless held the power to work as a playful oracle, a performative device to which is possible to ask a question, or input, and getting some kind of output, or response. As it is well known, the input-output structure is a key concept in current information processing systems, a model for exchange prediction in economic analysis, as well as a fundamental programming standard that have shaped the interactive configuration of all our computers, cell phones and other daily-used apparatus. What caught my attention, however, was not only noticing that this machinic, depersonalized oracular character was somehow present in the Tarot cards, but also that such character had a fundamental link with a diachronic and impersonal side of Western history, displayed in the ambiguity of the visual 'language' of the deck: uncertain gestures, lines and textures that resemble several things at the same time, situations depicted than can be both disastrous and magnificent, all of which is the result of a sedimentary memory of these motifs and images, myths, figures, and signs, as well as all the metamorphic distortions, modifications, condensations, and mistranslations that they have undergone throughout history. This multi-layered condition and the imprecise limits between the identity of each character was what I had in mind for my categories, as it is what endowed the Tarot deck with its exceptional visual richness, not only regarding the concrete graphic features of the cards but for the dynamics and interactions that can take place. The Tarot deck thus became a model by which I brought into my collection the idea that meanings are not fixed but emergent, they only occur as outbursts of the particular arrangements in which they are displayed.

A clear instance of this playful structure in the field of contemporary art practitioners is the art of the American painter Mark Tansey. Tansey's paintings are characterized for its use of monochromatic palettes, in which he meticulously creates all sort of iconographic contradictions, optical illusions and alterations, underpinned by a varied set of narratives related to art history, psychology of perception, and some good amount of humour, thus echoing many of the strategies usually deployed by surrealist artists. The initial impression of figurative coherence thus reveals as only apparent, turning each of Tansey's paintings into a puzzle to be resolved. Nonetheless, my

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[24] SHEPHARD, JOHN. *The Tarot Trumps: Cosmos in Miniature*. Kent: Aquarian Press, 1985

attention towards Tansey's work was not so much directed to paintings themselves but to the archival foundations that allowed them to acquire its unique character. These foundations are what Tansey has called *The Colour Wheel*, a cylindrical wooden device that contains a large number of words, names, phrases and other written denominations. In three separate sections, these pieces can be spun around, so that depending on the randomness of the twists they can make up longer sentences, often in the form of puzzling and hilarious descriptions that are then used by Tansey as "orders" to follow, a metaphor machine, a compass, a guide through the territory of images[25]. Echoing a long list of artists and writers that ascribed this kind of logics under the possibilities of surrealism, Tansey's combinatory game brought to my own research a more precise view on the structural properties of archives, as they allow to manage randomness through some rules by which the unexpected emerge to stimulate further pictorial speculation.




29, 30. Mark Tansey and his *Color Wheel*
1989 - 1990
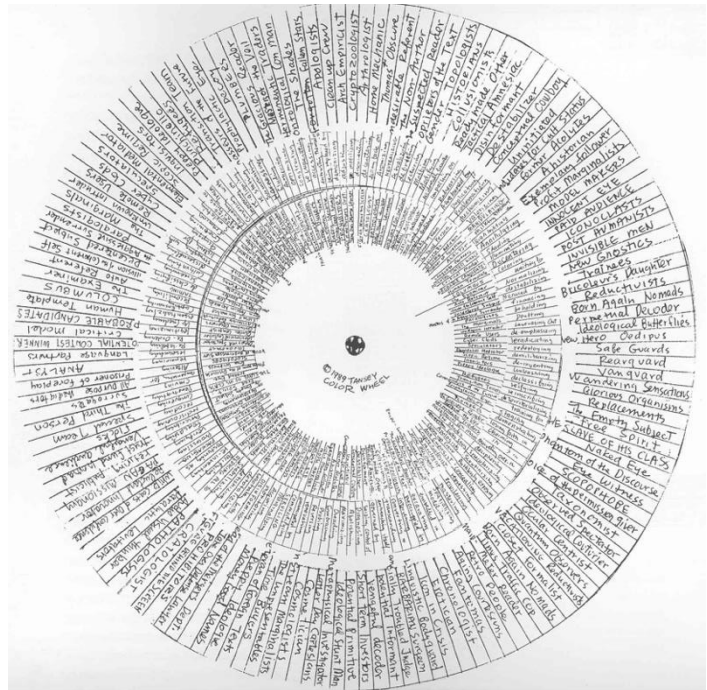
On the other hand, the dynamic aspects of my inquiry into the categorization of my picture collection was more related to such speculative drive, connected to the very contents of each section and the attributes of the stuff I was more attracted to. Part of this came from a book that I used to consult very often at that time, *The Rough Guide to Unexplained Phenomena*, a compendium of all sorts of mysteries, anomalies, paranormal events, pseudo-scientific wonders, and a long list of thrilling, terrific, and bizarre realities that lie beyond the visible world[26]. Although I initially got this anthology

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[25] Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/1997/04/27/arts/the-wheel-turns-painting-paintings-about-painting.html
[26] MICHELL, JOHN. *The Rough Guide to Unexplained Phenomena*. London: Rough Guides, 2007

as it contained a plethora of illustrations and pictures from different times and locations, I soon realized that it was its table of contents what resembled much better the uncanny contiguity of Borges' Chinese Encyclopedia I was looking for. So, the list of my own categories for my picture collection was not only labelled by direct allusions to this book's index (as for instance "Accidents to Iconoclasts", "Wild Talents", "Simulacra", or "Unreasonable Fossils") but also from remaking, distorting, or mixing up some of its entries, resulting on categories like "One-Dimensional Images", "Pictures about Making Pictures", or "Uncanny Domestic Scenes".

An essential reference for supporting this process was the work of the American artist Tony Oursler, whose approach to the archive would be of great influence for the coming stages of this research, as we shall see. Wonderfully compiled in the large-size book *Imponderable* (as well as in films and several exhibitions under the same title), Oursler's archive is much more oriented to speculate around the material he gathers, from whose strangeness the overall structure of the archive can be derived —and not the other way around, as in Tansey's approach. As a result, the *Imponderable* crawls under the blurring zone between science and magic, between the technical and spiritual, the space of the bizarre spectacle of beliefs and apparatuses, richly supported through a massive collection of photographs, documents and various unique objects. Although there is no clear limits or boundaries in the display of the whole archive, one can still perceive a poetic drive that bounds everything together. Free from the wing of any overarching concept, Oursler's archive enacts an utter confrontation with the unknown, and although using some labels like Cryptozoology, Spirit Photography, or Alien Writing to classify the pieces, the archival approach of Oursler stems from the uncanny quality that emerges from the encounters among the uncountable singularities of the multiple objects, releasing all sorts of connections that he then embodies on his multimedia sculptures and installations.





31, left: book cover of I*mponderable*, the collection of pictures and objects that compose Tony Oursler's archive. 32, above: samples of the collection as can be seen along the book.

With all this background, I returned to my studio production to start playing with my brand new 'engine' of Borgesian categories.
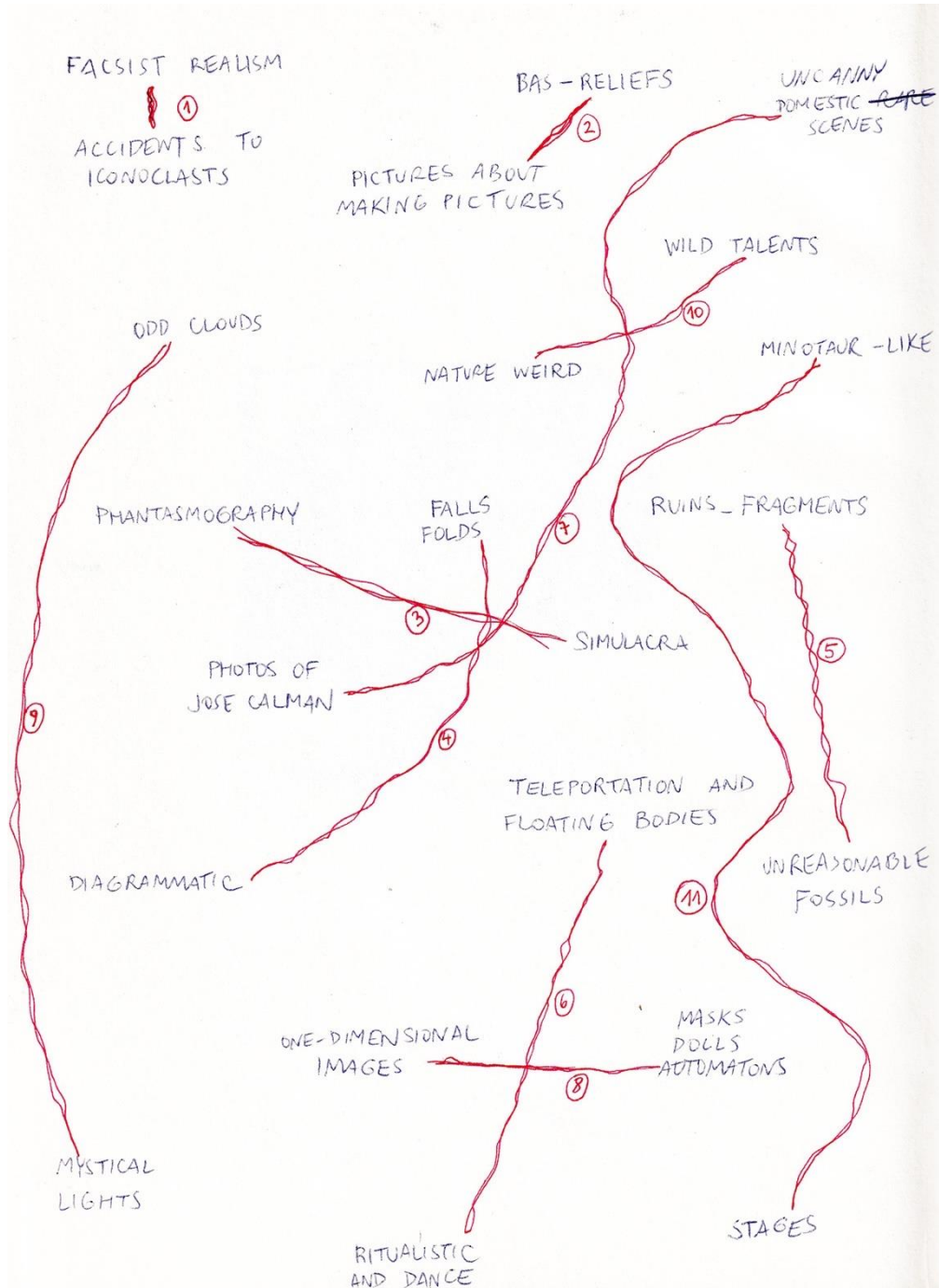


33. A draft of the Borgesian collection of pictures, a list of twenty-two categories of the image collection; the folder containing the physical pictures of the collection (34) and the deck of cards for assorting the selection processes (35)

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36. Pictures of the collection distributed along the wall of the studio. 2019

After distributing an initial group of pictures and designing a deck that represented each section, my first use of it consisted of randomly picking pairs or groups of three cards, and then taking a bunch of pictures from each of the sets selected. Arranging a preliminary display of these pictures on the wall of my studio, I simply started painting each of them, attempting to address the variety through the use of some elements of painting that may turn the pictures comparable: a common colour palette, certain compositional rhythm, a specific pattern in the canvas sizes I was using, etc. By doing this, my painting process moved into a more precise use of the picture collection, as the particular set ups created by this restricted selection process highlighted certain attributes of each image rather than others, which provoked a series of technical decisions about how to use materials, colours, brushes, and other painting tools.

37. Top left

Adrian Gouet, *Fall, folds*
Oil on canvas, 25 x 25 cm.
2020


38. Top right

Adrian Gouet, *Automata*
Oil on canvas, 35 x 35 cm.
2020


39. Bottom right

Adrian Gouet, *Untitled*
Oil on canvas, 46 x 30 cm.
2020

40. Small drawings and paintings on paper. Variable sizes. 2020

As the painting process progressed, the value of each category to account for the pictures they contained was gaining some distance and autonomy, as if the whole set was becoming something more similar to a literary artifact than just a container of pictures. From this perspective, the very concept of a category did not have to be restricted to the sole task of being the receptacle of my visual references for painting. They could also designate actions, things to do, operations. In other words, categories could also be considered as *functions*. For example, in more than one occasion, I drew a couple of cards at random for choosing categories with which to make a kind of condensation of shapes and motifs between pictures, inspired by the contents of the category "Minotaur-like", hence preserving certain characteristics and removing some others, searching for connections, disruptions, echoes, and resonances that would allow their hybridization through painting. In a different, more elaborated approach, I also chose a pair of categories, like "Bas-reliefs" and "Fall-Folds", from which to get some pictures, and then a third one, "Phantasmography", with the exclusive assignment of indicating the kind of procedure I should take for elaborating the pictures previously selected. The final task to develop was then to *phantasmographiate* the sculptures, reliefs, carvings, corrugates, pleats, and doublings that were present along the group of pictures. My

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particular —and, certainly, not generalizable— understanding of the "phantasmographic" function at that moment gave rise to a group of paintings around the ideas of removing, erasing, deleting, extracting matter out of the canvas, letting some kind of trace or pictorial 'phantasm' to lie in the ground in an imprecise state of visibility. And apart from realizing that this embodiment of 'phantasmographic operations' was especially influenced by some of my readings of that time[27], the interesting thing was that the act of pulling out paint from the canvas was an operation that could always be performed according to different material conditions, thus bringing forth a variety of pictorial approaches: sometimes by retiring fresh paint from the canvas —thus working in quick mode, no longer than one or two sessions— some others by scratching or eroding old canvases that



I had previously done, either reanimating or ruining altogether an old, long-forgotten idea. All this allowed the paintings to turn visible a multiplicity of temporal qualities by means of the 'phantasmographic command' thus established.

41. Adrian Gouet, *Phantasmography I*
Oil on paper, 40 x 30 cm.
2020

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[27] See STUBBLEFIELD, THOMAS. *9/11 and the Visual Culture of Disaster*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015

42. Above:

Adrian Gouet, *Phantasmography II*
Oil on canvas, 50 x 60 cm.
2019

43. Left:

Adrian Gouet, *Phantasmography III*
Oil on canvas, 90 x 65 cm.
2020

44. Adrian Gouet, *Spolia.* Oil on canvas, 75 x 95 cm. 2019

III) THE BUREAUCRATIC SPELL

Nevertheless, there were some critical problems that I started to notice once I tried to escalate these experiments to the whole group of categories —thus to the entire collection of pictures. Even allowing for the unexpected virtues that might emerge from the adoption of this "aesthetic of administration"[28] —in which methods typically associated with bureaucracy, such as documentation, language, and archival practices, became central to the artwork— this administrative approach began to show signs of weakening in the production of those very artworks. It is true that since the emergence of conceptual art in the 1960s it has been possible to make a sustained institutional critique of the usual practices of art, enabling artists to challenge the commodification of art, as their

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[28] BUCHLOH, BENJAMIN. "Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions." *October*, 1990, Vol. 55 (Winter, 1990), pp. 105-143

works often resisted material form or any notion of "unique" object status, which hindered traditional commercial exchange. For instance, artists like Sol LeWitt, Lawrence Weiner, and Joseph Kosuth used language and instructions as art, thus shifting focus from the physical object to the idea itself. But in the context of my current research work and studio practice, the management of the increasing number of physical pictures that I was dealing with started to show itself as an unavoidable issue to be solved. This was certainly not an unknown problem in my practice, since the very necessity of endowing the collection with some form of internal organization was aimed at controlling the continuous overflow of pictures coming up. But contrary to what I expected, my strategy of passing them all through this kind of filter of categories was adding a new layer of difficulties to the former concerns I had about how large the number of pictures was: from now on, accumulation was not only a problem of quantity of files, documents, and pictures but also a series of administrative duties, office routines, sequences of actions and commands to be followed. And it may seem that such 'procedology' was problematic inasmuch as it was too an issue about quantity —of time, mainly. But things were rather pointing to something else: beyond time-consuming rituals of classification, my logic of working the archive was inadvertently functioning as a sort of mechanism in which all the pictures had to be processed and organized *before* entering into a kind of 'paintable' zone, that is, they first had to be labelled, stabilized into a clear location-category as a condition to be considered for painting. This simple but inflexible time scheme, the causal connection between the anteriority of collected pictures in relation to the further painting work, forced me to always be looking for a pictorial reason for keeping each picture, a justification to collect and save every piece of imagery that crossed my path, even the tiniest and almost invisible ones, imposing on them pictorial purposes which nonetheless had not even been formulated yet. It seemed clear that I was somehow working against the original purpose of my studio research on painting and archives, namely, to induce or facilitate an immersion in the rough indeterminacy of pictures and its unknown or hidden resonances as a form of overturning prejudices and getting new insights and ideas for my practice. However, like a Kafkaesque labyrinth, escalating things this way only took me into a habit of meeting so many requirements before I can even take a pencil to sketch out a couple of pictorial ideas that I ended up forgetting what I wanted to do, thus losing the creative momentum. Even throughout the 'Borgesian' mode of distribution and classifying, I was spending a lot of time scrutinizing the features of each category —what does it mean exactly to 'phantasmographiate' or 'bas-reliefizing' a picture? Were they something more than just a mere stylistic filter, like those popularly used on social media apps?—, designing the steps and criteria by which images can be mixed and intersected with each other, and also performing the role of watching over the boundaries around that traffic, very much like a customs official, since no matter how strict

and acute I could be in order to determine the limits of each kind of image, there was always a blurring limit between them, an insubordinate element, a problematic ambiguity or unclassifiable figure that resisted to be anchored to a concept, or which may pertain to more than one category. My focus was then almost entirely put in creating consistent rules for making decisions within the ever-growing number of pictures, perhaps with an unconfessed longing of anticipating all possible scenarios for my future painting performance, leading myself to be constantly fixing the organization, or even redefining the rules and criteria of the whole business, putting me even further away from being able to just paint something.

Fortunately, once again, the resonating capacity of my paintings was the means to visualize all these issues in just one sight. If there was something wrong along this burdensome procedure that the paintings I did under these conditions could reveal, it was not about any particular aspect of the canvases themselves, but quite the opposite: the very lack of them, the relentless evidence that after several weeks I was barely able to paint at all, let alone finish the few attempts I managed to start, because of this time-consuming —and also imagination-consuming— logics of image administration.
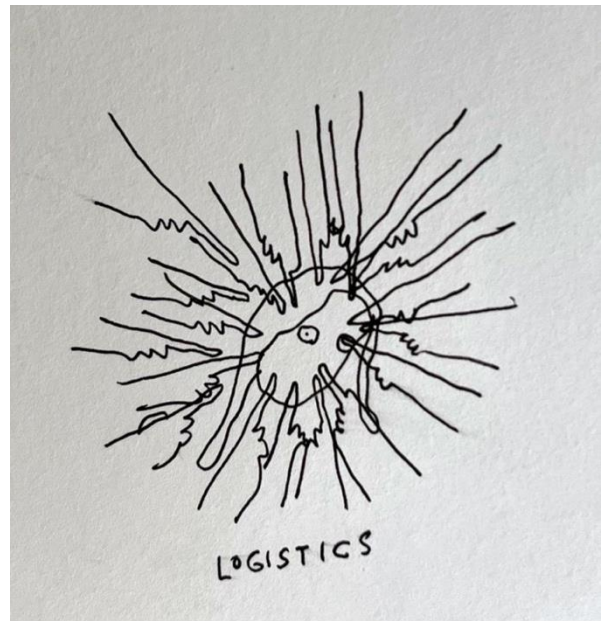


45. Liana Finck. *Logistics*. Drawing on paper, 2024

Therefore, it seemed evident that, in a broader sense, my practice was suffering from a detrimental tendency towards seeking the full control of the situation, visible under the form of what I would term a "bureaucratic spell": the illusion of being always about to reach some mis imagined totality by the work and grace of an elaborate and exhausting circuit of procedures to anticipate and predict the scenarios of a future performance that, nonetheless, never take place:

> We are all familiar with bureaucratic libido, with the enjoyment of certain officials derive from this position of disavowed responsibility ("it's not me, I'm afraid, it's the regulations"). The frustration of dealing with bureaucrats often arises because they themselves can make no decisions; rather, they are permitted only to refer to decisions that have always-already been made (by the big Other). Kafka was the greater writer on bureaucracy because he saw that this structure of disavowal was inherent to bureaucracy. The quest to reach the ultimate authority who will finally resolve K's official status can never end, because the big Other cannot be encountered in itself: there are only officials, more or less

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hostile, engaged in acts of interpretation about what the big Other's intentions. And these acts of interpretation, these deferrals of responsibility, are all that the big Other is. [29]

In this way, seized by the fantastical appeal of an endless chain of rules and possible archival games by which to comprise that alleged super-totality of collectable pictures, my practice was gently falling under what Mark Fisher calls 'the bureaucratic anti-production', since all I actually had was only a pile of images in my desk and a heap of unfinished canvases stacking up. The bureaucratic spell was thus a tendency that was paralyzing, halting, arresting my creative drives, neutralizing my capacity to act —the Pessoa's "true wisdom"—, to effectively move between archive and painting, the continuous and cumulative deferral of my main responsibility as a painter, namely, to paint.

How then to understand the deep significance of having an appropriate archival framework for my research work? If all these bureaucratic symptoms were somehow pushing my practice into a particular configuration —even at the level of the anti-production just referred— it is necessary to address the ways in which archives shape, control, and mediate knowledge, power, and memory. As historical artifacts for structuring authority over what is memorable, the essential groundwork for the next steps in my practice should consider two key authors in this field for comprehending the cultural and political implications of archival practices.

On the one hand, Michel Foucault's conception of the archive is central to his theories on power and discourse and has been elaborated in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. From the very onset of his analysis, Foucault goes beyond the notion of archives as mere collections of records:

> Instead of seeing, on the great mythical book of history, lines of words that translate into visible characters thoughts that were formed in some other time and place, we have in the density of dis-cursive practices, systems that establish statements as events (with their own conditions and domain of appearance) and things (with their own possibility and field of use). They are all these systems of statements (whether events or things) that I propose to call archive.[30]

In this way, Foucault puts instead the efficacy of archives as they constitute "epistemological fields" from which a set of implicit rules arises to determine what can be said, thought, and understood within a specific historical context:

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[29] FISHER, MARK. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* Winchester: John Hunt Publisher, 2009, p. 49

[30] FOUCAULT, MICHEL. *The Archaeology of Knowledge.* New York: Harper & Row, 1976, p. 145.

The archive is first the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events. But the archive is also that which determines that all these things said do not accumulate endlessly in an amorphous mass, nor are they inscribed in an unbroken linearity, nor do they disappear at the mercy of chance external accidents; but they are grouped together in distinct figures, composed together in accordance with multiple relations, maintained or blurred in accordance with specific regularities; that which determines that they do not withdraw at the same pace in time, but shine, as it were, like stars, some that seem close to us shining brightly from afar off, while others that are in fact close to us are already growing pale . The archive is not that which, despite its immediate escape, safeguards the event of the statement, and preserves, for future memories, its status as an escapee; it is that which, at the very root of the statement-event, and in that which embodies it, defines at the outset the system of its enunciability.[31]

This framework suggests that archives actively shape knowledge by validating certain discourses and excluding others, thus enforcing boundaries around what is considered legitimate knowledge. The archive, in this sense, becomes a disciplinary mechanism of "power/knowledge" that reinforces social norms and institutional authority across time. Foucault's perspective invites a critical interrogation of archives as tools of control, where the power to remember, record, and legitimize rests in the hands of those who manage and access them. Consequently, archives do not simply reflect history; they construct it, shaping collective memory by regulating which narratives are preserved and which are erased.

Walter Benjamin's approach, on the other hand, centres on the archive's relationship with collective memory and material culture, a theme he extensively explores in *The Arcades Project*, the unfinished, major project of Benjamin's mature years that consisted in a massive collection of fragments, quotes, commentaries, and citations about the dawn of the industrial culture, especially Paris. Although Benjamin never addressed the philosophical or cultural problem of archives as such, it is possible to derive all his conceptions about memory and history from a sort of archival treatment of the reservoir of cultural remnants he deals with —fragments and traces, the "debris of mass culture" that resist the linear and official historical narratives that often overshadow marginalized voices and lost stories. He envisions history as a constellation of multiple origins, which holds the power to explode time's continuum, as well as the mythic prevalence of the present. Constellations thus became for Benjamin a space for surfacing forgotten and fragmented histories, one that challenges dominant interpretations and invites alternative perspectives. In this perspective,

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[31] FOUCAULT, MICHEL. Op. cit., 1976, pp. 145 - 146

Benjamin's implicit idea of the archive aligns with his concept of *Jetztzeit*, or "now-time," a transformative moment where historical fragments collide with the present, offering a critical rupture that destabilizes accepted narratives. By gathering and reinterpreting cultural fragments, the archive becomes a revolutionary instrument for disrupting dominant history and cultivating an emancipatory, critical engagement with the past. For Benjamin, this approach holds radical potential, encouraging us to reclaim and reinterpret memory in ways that resist authoritative historical frameworks, fostering a more inclusive and dynamic cultural consciousness.

Having these theoretical considerations in mind, it was clear that my usage and understanding of archives, even as creative devices, must be organized around a simpler approach that let me play through my collection of pictures as a true source of the 'othering' power I was looking for. Without being swallowed by suffocating administrative obsessions, I still needed to establish some sort of circuit to avoid the chaos of a completely unbounded field. And it was not as easy as to simply arrive at the middle point between these extremes, a kind of equidistant balance, a reasonable agreement amid these two contradictory positions. Because I was eager to find a way to catch a glimpse of, and hopefully incorporate into my work, what can be called the *plurality of the world* [32], the fertile overabundance of life and death in images, the Dionysian excessiveness that goes across art and history, from the dancing statues of Lakshmi, the Hindu goddess of Plenty, through the cornucopia of the ancient Greeks and their theatrical tragedy, all the way back through an immemorial list of indigenous rituals and carnival celebrations around the globe. For some reason, I was mistaking these two versions of multiplicity, confusing sensuous proliferation with mere accumulation, a confusion whose dreadful symptom was the bureaucratic spell, the inaction made visible in the very scarcity of paintings. How, then, to overcome this danger and resolve within my studio practice the critical significance of making this distinction?

## IV) DANGER, DESIRE, AND THE ACID PATH

We can certainly agree on some of the reasons that had turned the word 'danger' as one of the most frequent in our current vocabulary, and link them with some type of immobility: the arresting force of the lockdowns and quarantines during the recent global health crisis that we have just experienced with Covid-19, the perplexity before the current rise of extreme political movements as

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[32] ARENDT, HANNA. *La Pluralidad del Mundo.* Madrid: Taurus, 2020

part of an overall crunch of liberal democracies in the West, the era of "permanent emergency" that we live in since the attacks on September 11th in New York City[33], plus a growing list of natural disasters spreading throughout the world, loosely encompassed under the geological-scale disruption known as the *Anthropocene,* the quasi-official term by which human's impact on Earth's thermodynamic balance has been recognized, and from which humanity itself has hardly move from —a certainly tough revelation about our impotence that has raised entire new areas of research and studies far beyond the scope of 'natural sciences'. In any case, one could go in the opposite direction of this pessimistic position and argue that this kind of extreme situations precisely involves a strong sense of shaking energy, thus implying much more than just joining the catastrophic voices. Therefore, one can say, it is possible to optimistically declare that danger also brings the opportunity to mobilize people in search for new standpoints, as the *Ecomodernist Manifesto* attempts to demonstrate[34], even at the risk of ruining everything altogether. Somewhat similar to what scientists must have thought when discovering the mechanisms of nuclear fission in the late 1930s: 'we do not know what an atom can do.' Certainly, the release of such unknown power had the potential to transform the possibilities of medicine as well as to build monstrously devastating bombs.

But I believe the matter goes in another direction. Providing various examples of artists' practices throughout the 20th century, historian Benjamin Buchloh speaks of a 'mnemonic desire' that emerges in critical circumstances, those moments of extreme duress "in which the traditional material bonds among subjects to objects, between subjects and objects, and between objects and their representation appear to be in the verge of displacement, if not outright disappearance"[35]. We know that Warburg was conducting his experimentation with images at a time when Nazism was gaining strength, just as Gerhard Richter, in direct reference to Warburg, began his own *Atlas* at the other side of that unprecedented collective trauma of the World War II. However, as clearly stated in Buchloh argument, it is not just a compulsion that responds by directly recording the tragedy, as if desperately trying to satisfy the need to accumulate memories before the imminent apocalypse. Precisely, it is not the need but a *desire* what unfolds the energy for these endeavours around memory. The connections between need and desire are vast, but let us agree on pointing out the following: necessities, in some way, come with us, they are something given; desire, on the other hand, is something we produce throughout life, a construction made up of affections, fantasies, and memories.[36] In one way or another, we all have the need to remember and imagine things, but the

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[33] This is not to say that the post-9/11 war on terror was new as far as the issues of states of emergency are concerned, but rather, as aptly put by Dyzenhaus, "all that is new is the prevalence of the claim that "This emergency has no foreseeable end and so is permanent." Retrieved from https://verfassungsblog.de/os7-three-natures/

[34] VIVEIROS DE CASTRO, EDUARDO; DANOWSKI, DÉBORAH. *The Ends of the World*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017, p. xi

[35] BUCHLOH, BENJAMIN. "Gerhard Richter's 'Atlas': The Anomic Archive". October, Vol. 88 (Spring, 1999), p. 136

[36] LAPLANCHE, JEAN. *Essays on Otherness*. London: Routledge, 1999, p. 97

particular way in which we do it, the specific sympathy with which we interact with certain materials, forms, and places, belongs to the realm of desire. That is why the mnemonic desire, as expounded by Buchloh, is not just about storing records in a charming way, or defining with some degree of inventiveness the laws under which they can be linked with each other. It is rather about the dynamics of the very production of memory, a faculty that is not restricted to the unique function of preserving information or precious objects but also of creating networks among all class of records by virtue of a wish to expand into the future what we consider, at a given circumstance, memorable, generating the material that such future can appropriate—if so desires—to write history.

It is important to mention some of the so-called Post-War Painters and how they address the violence of the standardized image, inasmuch as their approach has a fundamental connection to certain understanding of history from the view of image manipulation.

We already indicated the high significance of the work of Gerhard Richter, whose blurred photorealistic paintings grapple with the limitations of photographic and bureaucratic imagery. The blur becomes a metaphor for the failure of standardization to fully capture the human or historical experience, configuring a plastic critique of the totalizing gaze of bureaucratic processes, which flatten individual narratives into uniform data or symbols.

Likewise, known for subdued palettes and hauntingly ambiguous imagery, the Belgian painter Luc Tuymans focuses on the afterlives of bureaucratic violence—specifically, the Holocaust and colonialism. His works engage with historical imagery that has already been mediated, showing how the act of painting can reinsert ambiguity into standardized or overdetermined narratives.

On the other hand, Sigmar Polke's experimentation with materials and appropriation of commercial imagery directly criticizes the mechanized and commodified reproduction of images. By manipulating the half-tone dot patterns used in mass printing, Polke disrupts the mechanisms of standardization, emphasizing the failure of systems to fully contain or communicate meaning.

 Like Richter, Tuymans, and Polke, my work uses painting and the whole attempt to configure an archive as a way to interrogate the limits of mediated images. However, while these predecessors primarily addressed bureaucratic and photographic systems, my engagement with the digital extends this critique into the hyperstandardized and algorithmically driven domain of the online image.

Thus, what is crucial is for understanding accumulation and the possibility of the fertile plurality we mentioned before, is to see to what extent the question of danger affects the desire through which the interactions between memory and imagination may thrive, and how my own practice around archives and painting is able to account for that. And as the artistic production of this research attest, such danger should not be simply understood as some particularly difficult conditions that enduring contexts impose but to some extent as something inherent to desire itself. We are all familiar with

the famous saying 'beware of what you wish for, for it might come true', and many of the tales and narratives that stem from the old-aged topic of the genius in the bottle are rather catastrophic and regrettable for those who have the fabulous opportunity to be granted whatever they ask for[37]. We already noticed that sense of paradox, but above all, a sense of risk that resonates in Pessoa's words, regarding the capacity of desiring: "I will be what I want to be, *but I have to want whatever it is*". The point, then, is to highlight how the inquiry around danger as historical impelling force necessarily leads to explore the conditions of plurality and desire in a world that is, on the one hand, highly determined by a mass media culture scattered in countless forms, and, at the same time, highly apocalyptic, as a rising number of docufictions, scientific books, videogames, academic journals, reports issued by world organizations, papal pronouncements, philosophical tracts, New Age and neo-pagan ceremonies, plus an exponentially rising amount of political manifestos can attest[38]. In this cultural background, the original approach by which this research project has sought to find a route towards a creative proliferation in painting by means of the 'othering' power of archives, must first recognize the dangers that comes from what I been referring so far as media overload, or media accumulation, especially in a field where such danger shows its most tenacious and perhaps most seductive effect: technological change.

On the one hand, there is the danger derived from what various authors call 'informatic saturation' or 'infobesity' (Cornella, 2000; Ruiz, 2009; Urbano, 2010), the massive and almost compulsory immersion in digital networks of images and information which are increasingly taking a dominating role in our relationships and ways of thinking. In this context, we are surrounded by a predictive logic: under the illusion of access to an infinite variety of data, browsers and apps store our search patterns for anticipating our future behaviour, 'suggesting' certain connections or products that may be of our interest. With all our likes and responses, we ourselves are constructing what psychologists have called 'confirmation bias,' the tendency to select information that aligns with our beliefs and prejudices, disregarding anything that contradicts them. This is how a certain illusion of knowledge is installed, polarizing our positions, and filling us more and more with commodified information, full of clichés and commonplaces. It is the danger of the standardization of desire, and the reason why this happens so frequently in digital networks is quite simple: profit expectation of tech companies that dominate these networks requires our behaviour to be as predictable as possible, so that a complete record of each of our actions, clicks, searches, the material we share, the words we use, the images we view—in other words, the complete profile of our desire in action, can be sold for advertising purposes, as they offer a sufficiently predictive map of our

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[37] See *Tales from the Thousand and One Nights*. London: Penguin Classics, 1973.
[38] VIVEIROS DE CASTRO, op. cit., p. 2

future performance. That is why it is becoming less surprising to receive some strangely coincidental ad related to a topic we have just discussed with someone in a coffee shop or during a phone call. It is true that we have unprecedented access to volumes of information that no one would have imagined a hundred years ago, but as researcher Patricia Dias argues, the 'infoxication' of this digital immersion has less to do with a problem of quantity and more with the redundant quality of information:

> Smart technologies enable users to subscribe to feeds and to aggregate information in personal dashboards. By allowing so and adding suggestions that also reinforce the users' preferences and beliefs, one's agenda becomes more redundant. In addition, is it not set or managed exclusively by the self, but by technology, and it becomes less permeable to the influence of the mediatic, public or political agendas. Thus, this techno- agenda-setting contributes to enhance homogeneity within communities and heterogeneity among them.[39]

Essentially, it is becoming increasingly difficult to get lost on the Internet, that is, to find something we were not looking for. As Boris Groys recently argued:

> Internet is something that I use when I'm sitting in front of my computer, which means it's a medium that only leads me to answers to my questions. If I click, if I search for something, I get an immediate reaction. It's a machine that reacts, just a mirror of my own interests and desires. The Internet cannot show me anything new that I don't already know because the new will be unexpected, something I didn't ask for. On the Internet, our will is being forced: you can replace traditional file types, but in a certain way, a bubble is formed. If one lives on the Internet, they live in a bubble, one of our own subjectivity.[40]

The profitable forms of this bubble of the already known can be closely linked with some forms of governance and power we already mentioned regarding the political role of archives. In this sense, the standardization that characterizes bureaucracy often operates as a subtle but powerful mechanism for domination, control, and, in extreme cases, the rationalization of violence. It formalizes structures of authority and, while often seen as neutral or efficient, can become a tool that facilitates projects of repression and conquest. As we have discussed regarding the "bureaucratic spell" in the context of my practice, the layers of paperwork, rules, and procedures create a buffer that distances individuals from the ethical implications of their actions, not just enabling a series of

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[39] DIAS, PATRICIA. "From 'infoxication' to 'infosaturation': a theoretical overview of the cognitive and social effects of digital immersion". Ámbitos. Revista Internacional de Comunicación, Vol. 24 (2014) p. 7

[40] Retrieved from https://www.clarin.com/revista-enie/ideas/boris-groys-internet-puede-mostrarme-nuevo_0_PdYYOhPYb.html

outcomes to occur in the name of protocol, order, or "the greater good" but an entire sense of time attached to the regularization of all the processes involved:

> If each stamping of a document marked a single bureaucratic encounter, its intelligibility came from the full "set," for it was the archive's systematized accumulation of date-marked documents, the consigning through a repeated technique, that established a relational temporal order.[41]

In historical contexts, bureaucracies have played crucial roles in projects of conquest and repression. European colonial empires, for example, required extensive bureaucratic systems to administer vast colonies, categorize and "manage" indigenous populations, and enforce policies that would otherwise be seen as morally unacceptable. This bureaucratic machinery allowed for rationalized violence by embedding cruelty in layers of documentation and administrative steps. Colonial officials could feel justified in their actions because their decisions were "procedural" or "necessary for progress," obscuring the oppressive reality they were enforcing. In this sense, bureaucracy also allows violence and repression to be dispersed, making it difficult to assign accountability. Hannah Arendt famously identified the "banality of evil" in her analysis of Adolf Eichmann, a key administrator in the Holocaust. It is said that Eichmann was not a sadistic figure but rather a diligent bureaucrat who, in following orders, enabled mass murder. He epitomized how bureaucracy can turn cruelty into an impersonal, routinized task. The layers of authority and rules allowed Eichmann and others to absolve themselves of guilt; their participation in horror became a job to be done rather than an ethical decision.

But there is another kind of danger, less evident, camouflaged within that imaginative capacity we try to outline concerning archives and painting. If the danger of standardization can be located in those algorithms or systems we were talking about, there is another kind of danger embedded within ourselves, which is related to what Paul Valery once called 'the idol of the new'[42]. In a cultural context that praises itself for having innovation as one of its supreme values, the new can be regarded as a kind of fetish, assuming the full religious, psychoanalytic, or even political considerations around such term[43]. All these fields converge in the basic idea behind fetishes as cultural artifacts: the worship of objects with intrinsic attributions, the object in itself as conveyor of magical powers. In some way, this fetish of the new resembles the stubborn searches that alchemists conducted for centuries to find the formula for making gold. Observing that matter could be transformed in unexpectedly

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[41] KOSMIN, PAUL. *Time and its Adversaries in the Seleucid Empire*. op. cit. p. 53

[42] VALERY, Paul. "Literature", in *The Hudson Review,* Vol. 2 No. 4, Winter 1950, p. 545

[43] To review the full developments of the concept commodity fetish, see Tom Bottomore's *Dictionary of Marxist Thought*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1983, p. 190.

profound ways, it was logical for many of them to be seduced by the possibility of creating such scarce and fascinating material themselves —and thereby becoming immensely rich— venturing into a variety of intricate techno-mythological predictions to justify the merit of their efforts. But even having found such formula, it is reasonable to deduce that the value of gold would have rapidly collapsed as it turned into an abundant, mass-produced material. Or, to put it in more contemporary terms, it would have become obsolete. Instead, as Isaac Asimov aptly points out in his *A Short History of Chemistry*, what truly revolutionized the understanding of this science was the study of acids, these substances capable of altering matter, dissolving it, burning, biting, corroding, neutralizing, electrifying, catalysing, gasifying it —in short, the analysis of its transformative capacity, rather than a single particular case of such transformation[44].

From this perspective, a critical question arises: how do we release ourselves from this commodity logic to create a passage between archive and painting that provokes the capacity to invent the future? How to engender something new without turning it into an object of veneration? Or, put differently, how might we visualize a timeframe free from the constraints of predictive reasoning, authentically embracing the endeavour to create it anew? If the present research project, as a possible miniature version of these large-scale concerns, was devoted to unfolding a sense of plurality by distinguishing mere accumulation from fertile overabundance then it should take on more resolutely such 'acid path' in order to effectively overturn the paralyzing effects of the bureaucratic spell and finding the hints of the 'othering' power on images.

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[44] ASIMOV, ISAAC. *A Short History of Chemistry*. New York: Anchor Books, 1965, pp. 25 – 26.

# II. Didactics of Fossils

I) A CONFINED THEATRE

By the end of the first year, while my research was gaining in depth, the global crisis of the Covid-19 came to disrupt completely the plans I had in mind for my practice. As a form of confronting what in the previous chapter I referred to as the 'bureaucratic spell', those plans specifically consisted of beginning a series of paintings without the slightest consideration for any of my archival matters and the whole tangle of instructions that were emanating from it. My intention was to regain a sense of joy and improvisation on my pictorial decisions by suspending, at least for a while, my tendency to try to catch the full mechanics of my creative work *as a condition to make it*, or putting it differently, the requirement of having a clear governance on the rules of the game in order to be able to play it. However, if these plans were somehow intended to provide an external vantage point, certain distance from where to reconsider my archival attempts at that time, such distance came from an entirely different side as soon as lockdowns and quarantines began to be imposed by governments. Like almost everyone else around the world, I was forced to stay at home without any chance of going back to my working place in a very long time, turning painting, then, at least in the way I used to understand it, into a completely unfeasible activity.

As a result, my art practice had to be reduced only to what could be done in the domestic space. In my case, that meant to exclusively play with portable materials, as they could be used over a dining table, that is, nothing larger than a A3 size, 30 x 40 cm. approximately, that were also simple and clean enough as to be quickly cleared up for everyday meals. So, apart from the clippings and printed images of my collection and some loose pieces of primed cardboard, the main space for continuing with my research and studio practice were the sketchbooks, the classic pad or journal that artists and creative practitioners have been using for centuries for outlining ideas and thoughts. And even beyond the art world, to handcrafting journals, scrapbooks or to personalize agendas and diaries have always been a very popular practice among kids and people in general who enjoy combining drawings, stickers, clippings, and other souvenirs along the bound pages. This popularity was remarkably confirmed during the Covid crisis and its aftermath, a time that paradoxically was also that of an unprecedented domination of screen-based settings for pictures and media, as well as for all kinds of social interaction.

Strictly speaking, my use of sketchbooks was not entirely a novelty within my practice. In fact, I've always used some kind of notebook for making drafts of my pictorial ideas and projects or simply for writing down observations and memories while traveling or moving. There is actually a strong connection between sketchbooks and traveling, displacement, transportation, passage[45], but this time there was nowhere to move, no destination that I had to get to via train or bus trip, a museum or gallery to visit, a library or bookstore to stumble upon a good reading or unexpected items, which for me had always been the most enjoyable circumstances in which to use these notepads. So, experiencing directly all my former considerations on danger and history, the necessity of defeating the paralysis of the 'bureaucratic spell' —the very emblem or symptom of what we pointed out as the problem of media overload— was being unexpectedly forced to be tackled through the extreme reduction of my art practice almost completely to the sole spot of sketchbooks.

The first steps I took for adapting my practice to the new context were nonetheless the very proof that the powers of such spell were still very active. My initial plan consisted of creating a scale version of each of the areas of my art practice at the moment, as if the pages of sketchbooks could contain a miniature compendium, an avatar of all the topics and images I was working and planning to work with at the moment I left my studio. In this way, I believed back then, I would be able to regain some degree of control in the middle of an extremely uncertain context, a minimum level of

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[45] See the history of the informal 4th Century Greek School of the Peripatetics, from the word περιπατητικός (peripatētikós), which means "of walking" or "given to walk about". In the field of literature, we can find remarkable examples as the famous lecture "Walking" delivered by H.D. Thoreau in 1851 at the Concord Lyceum, or Rebecca Solnit's *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (2001). Additionally, there are profuse use of drawings and notes on the sketchbooks of Charles Darwin and Alexander von Humboldt, developed throughout their travels and exploration journeys.

power that would allow me to continue in some way with my research project, that was still supposed to be developed through the following three years. But besides the administrative purposes, I was also thinking of retrieving the seduction that mobilizes creative desires:

> The miniature has the capacity to make its context remarkable; its fantastic qualities are related to what lies outside it in such a way as to transform the total context. Thistledown becomes mattress; a corn cup becomes cradle; the father's breath becomes a cyclone. (...) Time is managed by means of a miniaturization of its significance; the miniature is the notation of the moment and the moment's consequences.[46]
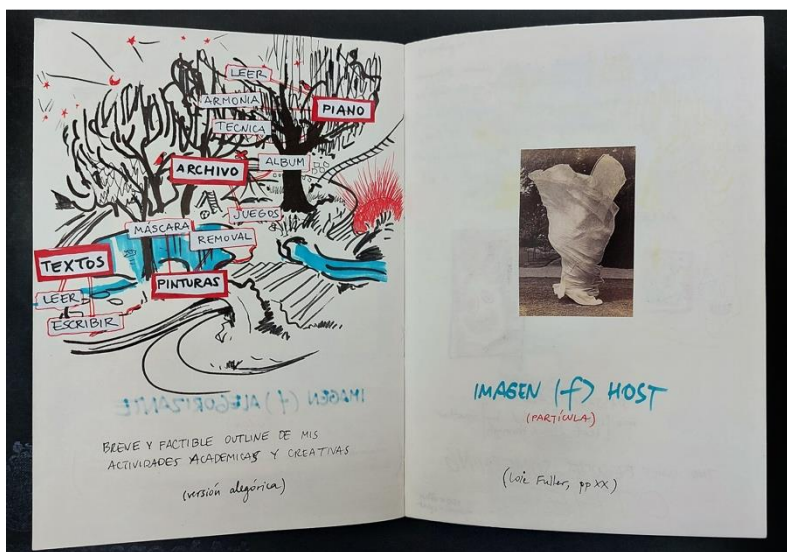




46, 47.
Adrian Gouet
Outline of the plan to work during the quarantine
Drawing and printed pictures on paper

2020

[46] STEWART, SUSAN. *On Longing. Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1993, p. 46

Having this in mind, I set up different sketchbooks for each of the areas of my studio work, having one for my painting ideas, another for analysing through drawings and diagrams the constellations of pictures I was using from my collection, a third one for my literature review —thus dedicated exclusively to written ideas, quotes and commentaries from my readings— in addition to my regular agenda, which also contained notes and graphic depictions related to applications and future projects. But when after a while, and still captivated about making these scale models, I started to seriously consider the possibility of adding to these books another twenty-two for each of the categories of my image collection, I realize how strong the bureaucratic spell still was. For it was evident that this plethora of notepads would become impractical, as well as all the coming troubles around the growing number of notebooks, the subsequent larger amount of space required to store them at home, the ever more demanding way of managing its intricate divisions and subdivisions, with the highly probable result of having few, if any of them, effectively well developed.

At first sight, the kind of approach I was taking did not have to be necessarily condemned to failure just because inventorying my whole studio work in this miniature dimension could represent a long and tiresome venture. After all, what I was attempting was simply to document my practice by sections in order to constitute a *body of records* of my own research, hoping to recreate the dynamics of my studio within the pages of sketchbooks and have a glimpse of the following steps I could take to continue my project. As a



48. David Teniers, *Archduke Leopold Wilhelm in his gallery at Brussels (IV)*. Oil on canvas, Schleißheim State Gallery. 1654 - 1670

reference, I would say that my attempt was as straightforward as the *Theatrum Pictorium,* the visual compendium that the Flemish painter David Teniers carried out in the 1660s for his employer, the Archduke Leopold Wilhelm of Austria, who commissioned Teniers to register his full painting collection in reduced-size copies that were then to be engraved and published in a book form. Likewise, as time under lockdown was extending and even distorting the sense of passing, this plan, however lengthy, seemed to be easy and gentle as "the oneness of Dutch art and life, the notion that instead of talking or even thinking about what he was doing, the Dutch artist simply set himself the

task of describing all of the world around him."[47] But the facts were rather indicative of the opposite. Instead of resembling Teniers' compendium, the approach I was taking was closer to an even older stage-like endeavour, that of the *Theater of Memory*, a famous yet never realized project developed in the 1500s by the Italian philosopher Giulio Camillo, and to which he devoted his entire life.

Giulio Camillo was probably one of the most famous figures in sixteenth century Europe[48], whose life was fundamentally dedicated to devising the principles and logics of his *Theater*, largely supported by the King Francis I of France. Although there is not so much documentation around the specific circumstances that prevented the *Theater* to be physically constructed, we do know, by means of a book —or sketchbook, one could say, as it was richly supported by pictures, sketches and diagrams of the building— which was Camillo's main ambition: to radically transform the ancient tradition of mnemonics, the so-called art of memory, into a definitive system of archetypal images linked by an intricate combinatorial system, that was meant to be spectacularly displayed inside a large amphitheatre inspired by the Vitruvian model, so that "whoever is admitted as a spectator will be able to discourse on any subject no less fluently than Cicero"[49]. Under the huge influence of the then newly discovered body of texts known as the *Corpus Hermeticum*, Giulio Camillo dedicated his entire life to materialize the dream of composing a universal body of knowledge by invoking the mythical past that the *Corpus Hermeticum* embodied, whose authorship was attributed to a legendary figure known as Hermes Trismegistus. He thus conceived of his theatre as a total and definitive organization of the wisdom of all times and cultures through images, a theatre of Everything supported exclusively by pictures, all of which were linked by a knotty if not outright obscure combinatorial technique that fed on the Jewish Kabbalah, magic, pseudo-Egyptian divination, astrology, among other "neglected knowledge".

Since ancient Greece and Rome, and then descending into the European tradition, the *ars memoriae* grouped a series of techniques aimed at enhancing memory in times when jurists, priests and orators in general did not have printed papers to prepare their public speeches. Under different approaches, such techniques generally drew on some version of a *method of loci*, an imaginary architecture through which memory undertakes a journey in order to recall impressions or even conceive new ideas, boosting the rhetorical efficacy of the orator. But when the printing press was invented by the mid-fifteenth century, the use of these techniques declined, and mnemonic systems gradually became obsolete, "a fossil of a vanished world."[50] The unprecedented proliferation of texts

[47] ALPERS, SVETLANA. "Realism as a Comic Mode. Low-Life Painting Seen through Bredero's Eyes". Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art Vol. 8, No. 3 (1975 – 1976), p. 115

[48] YATES, FRANCES. *The Art of Memory*. London: Routledge, 1969, p. 129

[49] Ibíd., 131

[50] BOLOGNA, CORRADO. *El Teatro de la Mente. De Giulio a Aby Warburg*. Barcelona: Siruela, 2017, p. 9

that followed the new invention prompted a whole new cultural background, as the excess of new books and translations of all kinds profoundly altered the reach and possibilities of memory: new techniques of referencing, classifying and compilating appeared amid the early confusion that the overabundance of texts provoked. And the experience of such overabundance not only encouraged the spread and development of various learning methods or reference genres: they also affected the way scholars worked, read, and thought, thus transforming their understanding of the past and the hierarchies that had dominated the ways of transmitting knowledge[51]. Consequently, the long tradition of Western memory techniques may seem to come to a definitive end, with Camillo's intricate theatre project as one of its most memorable victims[52].
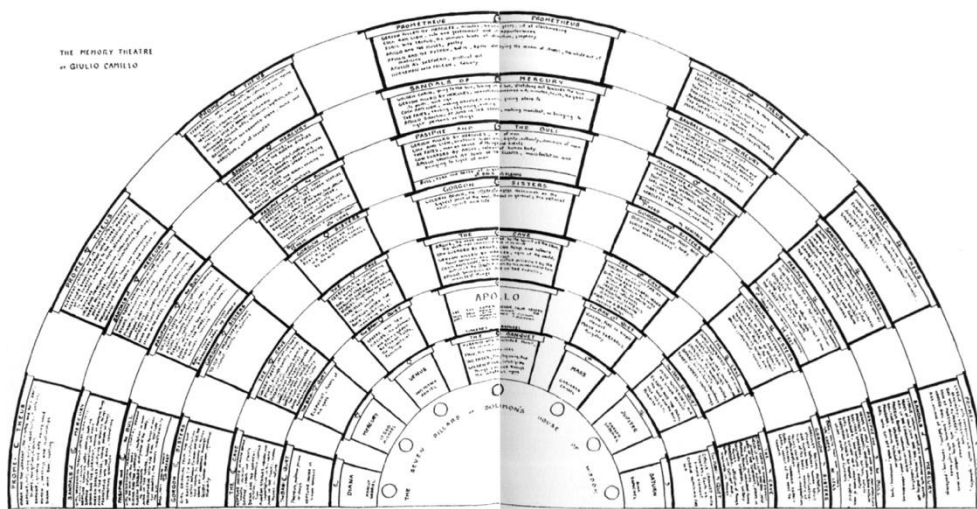


49. Giullio Camillo, *L' idea del Theatro.* s XVI

Similarly, since my approach to sketchbooks was again relying on the efficiency of a clear division among the variety of things collected —pictures, quotes, ideas— I was on the brink of a destiny parallel to Camillo's: the perpetual unrealized manifestation of my ambitious documentary opus. Beyond its apparently irrational and fantastic semblance, the Theatre of Memory was an early attempt to organize and convey knowledge through a systematic spatial and visual organization, an

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[51] BLAIR, ANN. "Reading Strategies for Coping with Information Overload ca. 1550-1700". In *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Jan. 2003, Vol. 64, No. 1, pp. 11-28. University of Pennsylvania Press.

[52] Eventually, however, things were not going to be that dreadful for the *Theater,* or at least, for its core ambition. Because even though Camillo's approach was aimed at endowed the art of memory with an afterlife by means of the mystical and occult influx that came through the Hermetic texts and myths, the aftermath of his attempt seems today more like a contribution to the modern mind that was then looming rather than a resistance against it. As Frances Yates argues, "the basic changes of orientation within the psyche which are shown to us by Camillo's memory system have vital connections with changes of outlook out of which new movements were to come. The Hermetic impulse towards the world and its workings is a factor in turning men's minds towards science. Camillo is closer than Erasmus to the scientific movements, still veiled in magic, which are stirring obscurely in the Venetian academies. Yates, 158.

early instance in the genealogy of a rationalized endeavour of Renaissance man to embrace knowledge as a whole, and "control his destiny by science"[53]. And the particular, unprecedented way in which the new lineage was tackling this kind of project can be well characterized through Bruno Latour's concept of the 'Great Divide', the logics of partition and separation that governs the so-called modern approach of mapping and classifying the world.[54] In this sense, if my aim at this research was not just to build a comprehensive compilation of countless pictures but above all the formation of my own art of memory, a generative device for painting production, then my strategy was failing at producing any kind of interaction as its dissected logic was rather an attempt to stabilize, dominate, and eventually exhaust the plurality it was supposed to congregate. If the prominent quality of sketchbooks has always been deeply linked, as we previously noted, to the circumstances around traveling and displacement, embedded in the temporal arrangements of journals, diaries, chronicles, calendars, agendas, annals, and other memoire books, the only remaining chance for succeeding in my attempt to retrieve or recreate inside the sketchbooks the creative impulse that was present in my abandoned studio, was necessarily by getting rid of any bureaucratic temptation of building a map that fits exactly the shape and size of the territory, and instead plunge directly into images as a territory in itself. In other words, it was necessary to find a method of producing motion within sketchbooks, a particular form of transmission among images, thus organized as a true *ars memoriae*, so that records within them could shake, agitate, mobilize, disrupt each other.

II) WASTE BOOKS: THE PROBLEM OF TRANSMISSION

As we mentioned above, radical alterations were necessary to be considered in my research in order to visualize the limitations of the approach I was taking. And that was especially important and even urgent as the Covid crisis persisted for much more time than we all expected. What type of conductive energy, then, should be prompt and set in order to articulate a moving, acting, dynamic interconnection of the memories of my studio work as well as the imaginary expansions within it? What kind of external place or 'intraface' should be set for a support like a sketchbook, which is already a place on itself? If Camillo's *Idea del Theatro* was a useful reference for thinking in terms the performative possibilities about memory and imagination, but also an insufficient model as it was

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[53] YATES, FRANCES. *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*. London: Routledge, 1964, p. 116
[54] FRANKE, ANSELM (Ed.). *Animism (Volume I)*. Antwerp: Sternberg Press, 2010, p. 11 and following

still a delirious yearn for exhausting totality, overruled and extremely intricate as its never realized construction eloquently proves, what kind of coordinates may I define to embrace and set in motion this new totality that my research sought to cover, not even of the whole stream of ideas, pictures, readings, or even experiences of life that I was intending to register, but at least the essential elements to carry on with my projects in painting and image collections, for which the use of sketchbooks was so essential?

My decision to get through this issue was to developing sketchbooks the same way I did with my picture collection from the very beginning, that is, creating conditions for the encounter with the unexpected, rather than knowing in advance what has to be found as a condition for seeking it. By simply reversing the logic and letting in some degree of 'not-knowingness' it was possible not only to actively generate the confrontations among the material that I was collecting, but also making space for the manifestation of unimagined ideas. As Armen Avanessian clearly argues,

> This is where poetics has its place: the creation of something that could not even have been imagined before it was produced and was, for that matter, impossible before it was real; the production of a novelty whose genesis cannot be explained via any causality but remains contingent.[55]

Noticing the great relevance of such poetic ambition, a fundamental guide showed up in my research that helped me to develop a deeper and much simpler methodological understanding of contingency, as it appears to be a key temporal component for articulating my arrangements. This guide was the collection of short ideas, notes, and observations that the German physicist G. C. Lichtenberg (1742-1799) collected along his life, and that he used to called "waste books". Lichtenberg himself, an enlightened, hunchbacked, and hypochondriac extravagant, trained in the rigor of science and mathematics but who always remained close with literature and philosophy, explained the purpose of this designation in his notebook E:

> Tradesmen have their 'waste book' (scrawl-book, composition book I think in German), in which they enter from day to day everything they buy and sell, everything all mixed up without any order to it, from there it is transferred to the daybook, where everything appears in more systematic fashion... This deserves to be imitated by scholars. First a book where I write down everything as I see it or as my thoughts put it before me, later this can be transcribed into another, where the materials are more distinguished and ordered.[56]

[55] AVANESSIAN, ARMEN; TÖPFER, ANDREAS. *Speculative Drawing: 2011 – 2014*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014, p. 13
[56] LICHTENBERG, GEORG CHRISTOPH. *The Waste Books*. New York: New York Review of Books, 2000, p.

This is how the problem of accumulation, the distinction between mere stacking and fecund profusion, can be addressed: not by resigning the multiplicity of things nor by imposing barriers or customs to check the suitability of each possible new record in my archive or sketchbook, but articulating space and time in such a way that certain flow of encounters may take place. It is important to remark that Lichtenberg's waste books were not journals or diaries, which he also kept as separate supports, but the non-methodical but surprisingly productive gathering of aphorisms, scientific jottings and sketches, linguistic experiments, phrases, quotations from books and magazines, notes for future work, dates to be remember, titles of books to be purchased, all this collected while it was showing up day to day. Under this flowing model of transfers and transcriptions, Lichtenberg was able to unfold his encyclopaedic curiosity into a wide range of philosophical questions, through a variety of disconcerting and sometimes hilarious conclusions that nonetheless did not lead him to the paralysis that may come as a result of the excess or disorder, nor to any sort of comprehensive or conclusive knowledge. The experimental, provisory, fragmented, and tentative character of these annotations were rather the source of a provocation, even far from the classical scheme of aphorism which are usually subscribed to —those brief sentences that carry a doctrinal and personal stamp– given Lichtenberg's critical approach to any form of systematic knowledge:

> Its brevity is not due to a desire for synthesis or epitome, but most of the time, it's because they are incomplete or no more than sketches. They do not convey doctrine or teaching, but rather formulate disjointedly, and always in the shadow of doubt and hesitation, what could be called the pulse of his thinking.[57]

If one considers Lichtenberg's education and scientific activity, they could be called 'intellectual experiments', but that would still fall short of capturing their essence. Therefore, the word 'wastes' is perhaps the most faithful, as it points to an always-becoming condition of his thinking process, that arise from his collecting impulses.

In accordance, it is also the more appropriate term to designate the form that my own sketchbooks acquired. Drawing upon the model of waste books, I realized that my notes did not have to be always as reasonable, complete and coherent as possible, but also provisional and tentative; my drawings, likewise, could be truly experimental, unfinished and subject to change, and not exclusively a faithful and resolved account of some topic or subject; and the pictures and

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[57] OYARZUN, PABLO. *La Letra Volada. Ensayos sobre Literatura.* Santiago: UDP, 2009, p. 107

printouts of my collection could again display its fragmentary and residual delights along the pages of my sketchbooks no matter to what extent they were related. It was this unfinished, residual character what precisely turn these elements permeable, porous, thus capable of join and coalesce.
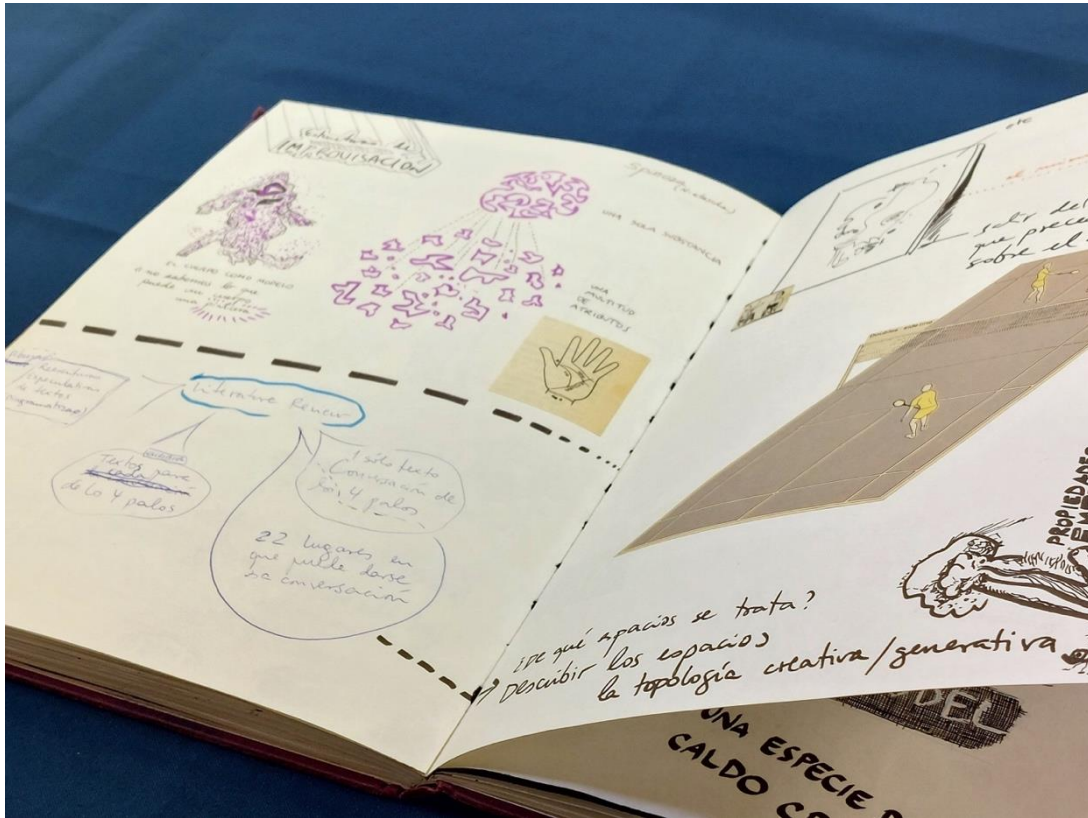


So, beyond the consideration about the individual value of each of these elements, as in Perec's art of jigsaw puzzles, the only thing that mattered along my own waste books was to arrange them so that a kind of movement take place, in the expectation of fostering unusual encounters, in accordance with what the artist Hannah Höch called "the beauties of fortuity" regarding her pioneering collage works:

Whenever we want to force this 'photo matter' to yield new forms, we must be prepared for a journey of discovery, we must start without any preconceptions; most of all, we must be open to the beauties of fortuity. Here, more than anywhere else, these beauties, wandering and extravagant, obligingly enrich our fantasy.[58]

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[58] ADES, DAWN (Ed.). *Hanna Höch*. Munich: Prestel, 2022, p. 4

50, 51, 52. Adrian Gouet, Sketchbook. 2020-2021
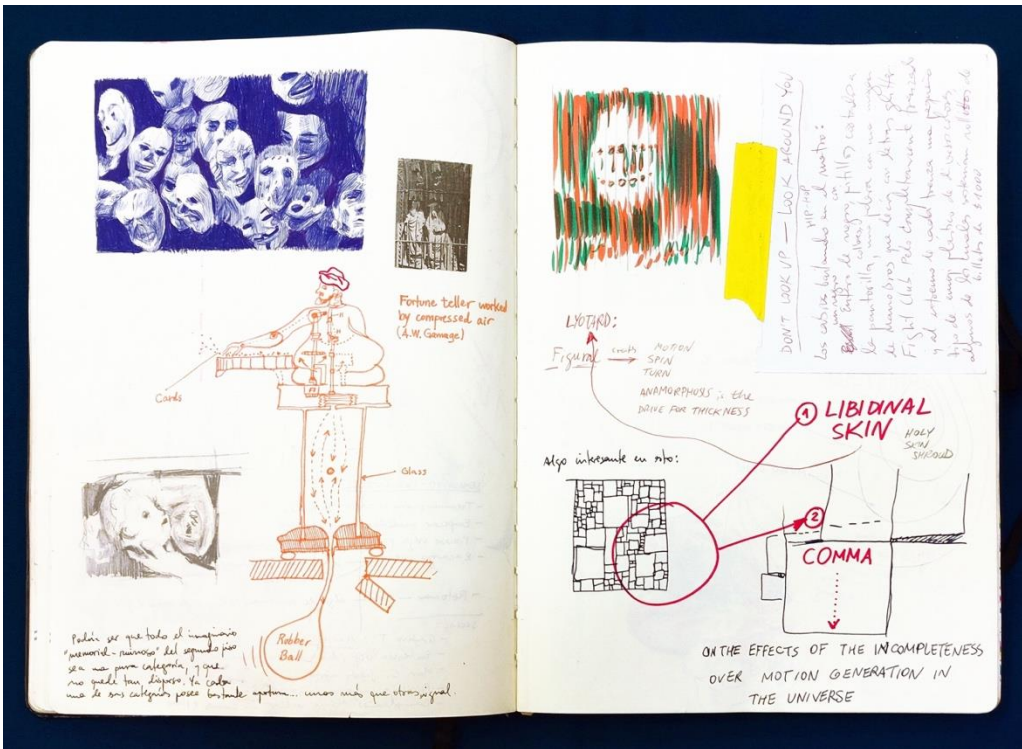
51
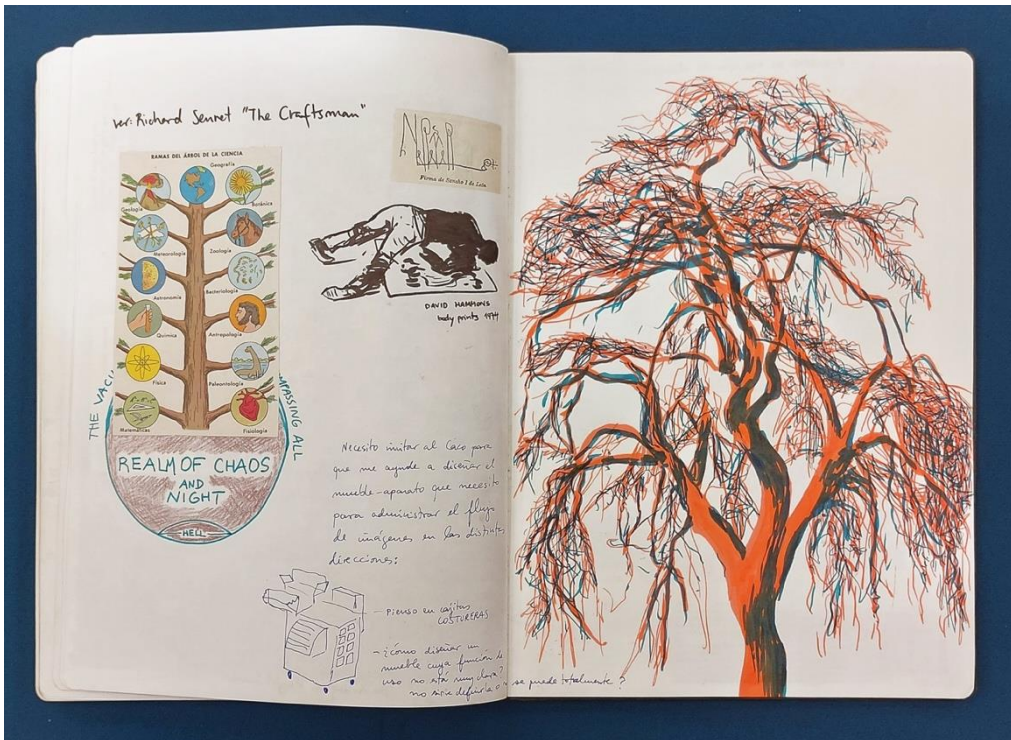


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Following these paths, I resigned any further attempt on ruling over the accumulation of the never-ending, anti-productive bureaucratic logics, and instead I started to devote myself exclusively on using only one sketchbook at a time, a single and unique ground in which to put everything that comes up on the daily basis of my readings and studio work. A restriction such as this could then be useful as it was not defined by a thematic approach anymore but by a spatiotemporal parameter: sketchbooks as a straight beam of a temporal flux, a charged current of ideas no longer determined by a timeless and pre-existent layout —categories, typologies, parameters, and so on— but by the documentation of the circumstances in which that records were encountered, interrogated, and finally included in its sequence of pages. It is only as an outburst of this flow that an architecture can then emerge, as a subsequent manifestation of all the plastic intensities wandering around the pages —colours, material densities, narrative, and iconographical connections— that together builds up an image of the present in which my creative conditions were unfolding:

> Language develops our understanding of the world in the same way and to the same extent that it continues to develop itself. The principle of language is not arbitrariness but contingency. Language, in other words, develops in a continually changing framework of possibilities constituted by its ties to thinking and the world.[59]
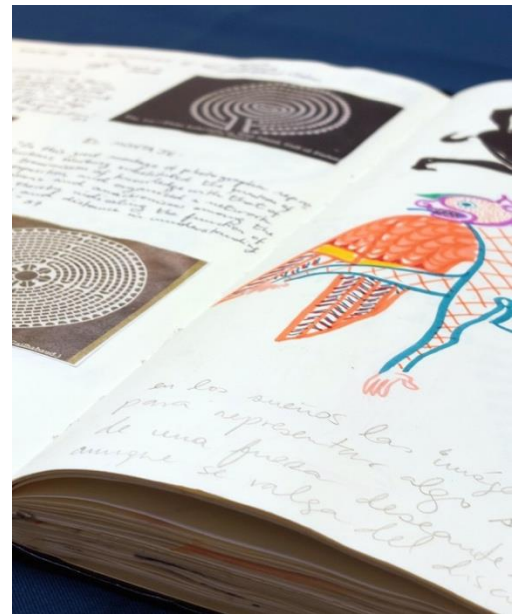


53. Adrian Gouet, Sketchbook, 2021

This temporal restriction meant that I was not forced anymore to previously decide if an idea fit some thematic sketchbook instead of another as a condition to consider it worth to be recorded. Instead, it was enough just to administrate the common space of the pages at the very same time those ideas were being find and placed within the sketchbook, where quotes from books intersect with drawings, which in turn may resonate with ideas for paintings in the same page, as I was gluing magazine clippings in the interstices of that encounters:

> The rough draft notebook method is highly recommended. Do not refrain from jotting down any twist, any expression. Access to richness also comes from sparing trivial truths.[60]

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[59] AVANESSIAN, ARMEN. *Metanoia*. London: Bloomsbury, 2014, p. 2
[60] LICHTENBERG, *The Waste Books,* p.

se trata de mantener lo más intacto posible la dinámica del yo... en que...
de una forma completamente distinta a la que has venido haciendo desde hace...
pse buscar "qué pintar" y agenciarme los medios para hacerlo. O sea, miro el...
en un espa... (cio, etc) y luego voy y trato de que eso aparezca. He ido dejando...
con cada vez menos presencia de objetos o figuras amo...
a una imagen, abordando la forma de hacerla existir, de novela...
en ese mismo esfuerzo, que yo llamo partidamente "ontolog..."
e imágenes o dibujos que... más que una... each (por mundo que eso cambie de...
side imagen de la contingencia dond...
mantener esa "fri... en un momento dado (dado en esas páginas)...
cio" de registro, y no la voluntad compositiva y onto...
ticas aparece más tada a cumplir una función casi utilitaria. Cuando...
naturalmente la potencia estética de mis pensamien...
que estoy mani... lo que veo o lo que pienso. Me bypasseo para apo...
registro **CAMBIO DE TEMA:** Fines de Nov, post expo-venta. Estoy queriendo aterrizar una id...
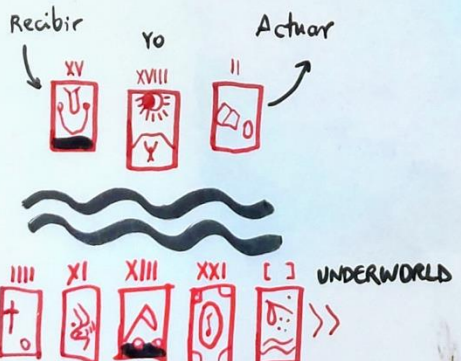
Recibir    YO    Actuar

XV   XVIII   II

UNDERWORLD

IIII   XI   XIII   XXI   [ ]

54. Adrian Gouet, Sketchbook page, 2021

55. Adrian Gouet, Sketchbook pages, 2021
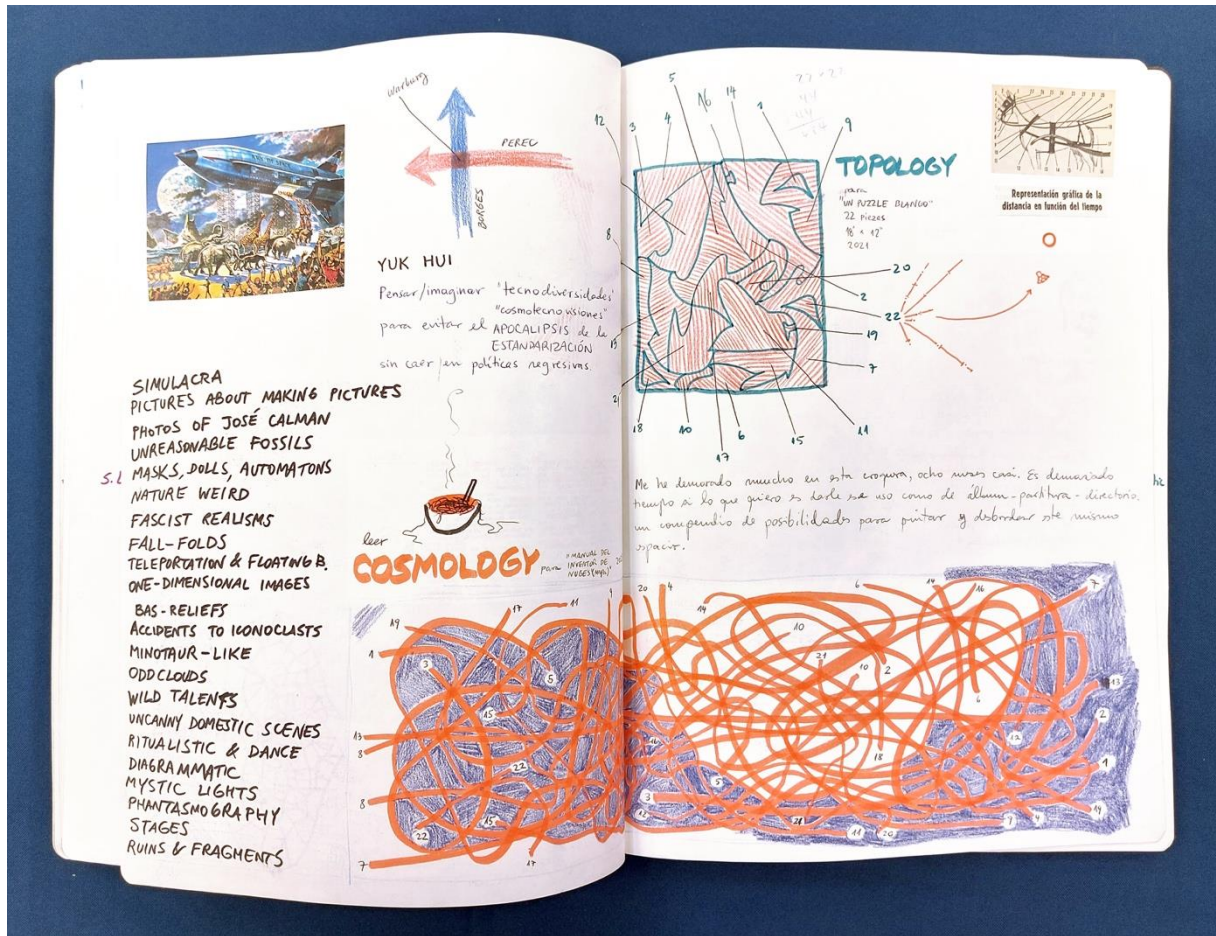
56. Adrian Gouet, Sketchbook, 2021-2022

At this point, my research has attained its first accomplishment in the route to find an alternative to the problem of media accumulation. The unexpected duration of restriction measures imposed due to Covid meant that my creative attempts on sketchbooks lasted much longer than I thought, also bringing out many more valuable things and insights than I expected. Coming down from Lichtenberg's model of *wastebooks*, I was now supplied for my next steps with an eloquent sign of the fluctuating character that I was seeking to develop in my practice, a material verification of the difference I was seeking between the barren accumulation and fecund profusion of images. The very fragmented and provisional quality of the pieces gathered on sketchbooks has kept them open to many interpretations, both because of the perplexity, a sense of oddity they might provoke, as well as the changing conditions around the own reader or viewer, whose impressions today will always be different from those they could have tomorrow. In this unstable temporal regime, the prominent role that contingency was having in the arrangement of these books —and in my practice at large, as we will see— was demonstrating that the kind of encounter I was seeking to yield supposed more

multi-layered aspects than just setting random structures within which loose items may collide with each other:

> When a body 'encounters' another body, or an idea another idea, it happens that the two relations sometimes combine to form a more powerful whole, and sometimes one decomposes the other, destroying the cohesion of its parts. And this is what is prodigious in the body and the mind alike, these sets of living parts that enter into composition with and decompose one another according to complex laws.[61]

Thus, not every encounter is desirable. There could be also fatalities of this type: bad encounters, poisoning, intoxication, relational decomposition.[62]

This type of considerations started to show up as confinement measures started to being eased and we were all able to gradually return to studio facilities, indicating that a new stage in the research project had to begin.

III) AFTER-LIVELINESS

If the sketchbooks had been my main creative space during the long months of confinement, the gradual returning to the so-called "real life" studios in RCA provoked some relevant shifts on the value they had within my research. We have already seen that my initial task was to recreate along the pages of these books the dynamics and movement of my workspace, for which I assigned myself the mission of documenting that place fully at the very moment of leaving it for a long time. Under the fictional framework of the sketchbook as a miniature replica of my studio, I was attempting to revive the pulse of my artistic work and, from there, that of the research project itself. We also saw that these records gradually began to disengage from their original mandate of representing this place to instead constituting themselves as an autonomous territory, engendering their own movement, subjected to very particular circumstances around the encounters among the gathered material. But now that little by little we were all beginning to work again in something resembling a studio space appropriate for painting as we traditionally understand it —a dirty spot surrounded by wooden stretchers, canvases, oils, solvents, pictures, and colours all around there—what value or utility would there be in continuing to compose new sketchbooks? Certainly, they had been a very impactful

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[61] DELEUZE, GILLES. *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, p. 19
[62] Op. cit., 22

solution for articulating not just the variety and even the eclecticism of the elements that I have the tendency to collect and preserve, even during the strictest confinement times, but also for generating a particular space that comes as a result of these encounters. However, it did not seem very clear that, with this return to painting "as we know it"—and which I was eagerly looking forward to— sketchbooks would necessarily continue to fulfil the same function. After all, they were largely the exceptional product of an also exceptional context in which we were, fortunately, beginning to move away from.

The clues to glimpse at the forward steps on this new post-Covid stage came from my own desire to paint again. At first, I sought to follow more or less the same procedures that I had been using just before the onset of the pandemic: taking some images from my always expanding collection of photos, clippings, and printouts, distributing them in a "constellated" mode on one of the walls of my studio, and then starting to paint based on the resonances that I could perceived between their respective details, colours, shapes, or figures. The sketchbooks were progressively put aside, and almost without realizing it I was back again in my old habit of thinking about the rules for selecting and combining images prior to any pictorial attempt, for which I tried to revive my also abandoned idea of categories, thus all my former concerns about what formulas were better to make them interact, as well as the schemes and diagrams to visualize those formulas. In a few words, I was once again falling under the bureaucratic spell.

But since even under this entangled setting I needed to jot down somewhere the ideas that were coming, I never really strayed far from my sketchbooks. In fact, I began to dedicate more time to them than I did during quarantines, especially as health restrictions decreased in intensity: more trips on public transport, more spaces in the city to visit, meetings scheduled again with family and friends. All that displacements, in conjunction to my desire of staying at my studio as long as possible, made me loyal to the sketchbook as a kind of portable working space. And what happened is that this portability did not only mean continually adding new items in them, but often simply revisiting what they already contained, looking back at my previous quotes and drawings, and seeing how they could be put together in a group of new paintings that, unlike the previous months, I was able to do. Gradually then, the sketchbooks not only continued to be the mark, the record of that stream of contingencies around my visual collections, but also a kind of laboratory for the future, a space from where I could imagine the new works that I would start producing again in my "real-life" studio. Therefore, without too much effort, sketchbooks became the most effective antidote to the recurring bureaucratic temptation.

Understanding the effectiveness of this antidote turned out to be crucial to the development of my project from this new stage. To a large extent, as we have seen, these notebooks "migrated"

from a representational command to what I described as an "autonomous" configuration, expanding the concept of "record" from the function of registering and documenting my studio work to one of mirroring the pulse inside it, ultimately becoming itself an artwork and studio space on its own right. But now that we have building studios available again, those same records were no longer stacked in sketchbooks as neutral, self-sufficient entities, or just as the stationary testimony of the moments in which they were composed. They now seem to be migrating again to becoming a reference point for something else, as going back over their pages meant exposing myself to a source of provocations and stimuli to start new works, this time in the outside dimension of canvases and larger papers. In other words, with the gradual lowering of sanitary restrictions these records acquired a double character, at the same time accounting for the trajectory of my past searches as well as suggesting different routes for the ones that could begin to emerge, a new way of seeing the former encounters I was able to produce along the pages that were now acting as an incitement for upcoming works. In short, the new significance of the sketchbooks lied in their *afterlife*, as the energy coming from the sudden and perplexing proximity of the things gathered on them was overflowing the pages and demanding new embodiments, thus turning sketchbooks into a lively —or rather *after-lively* body of records.
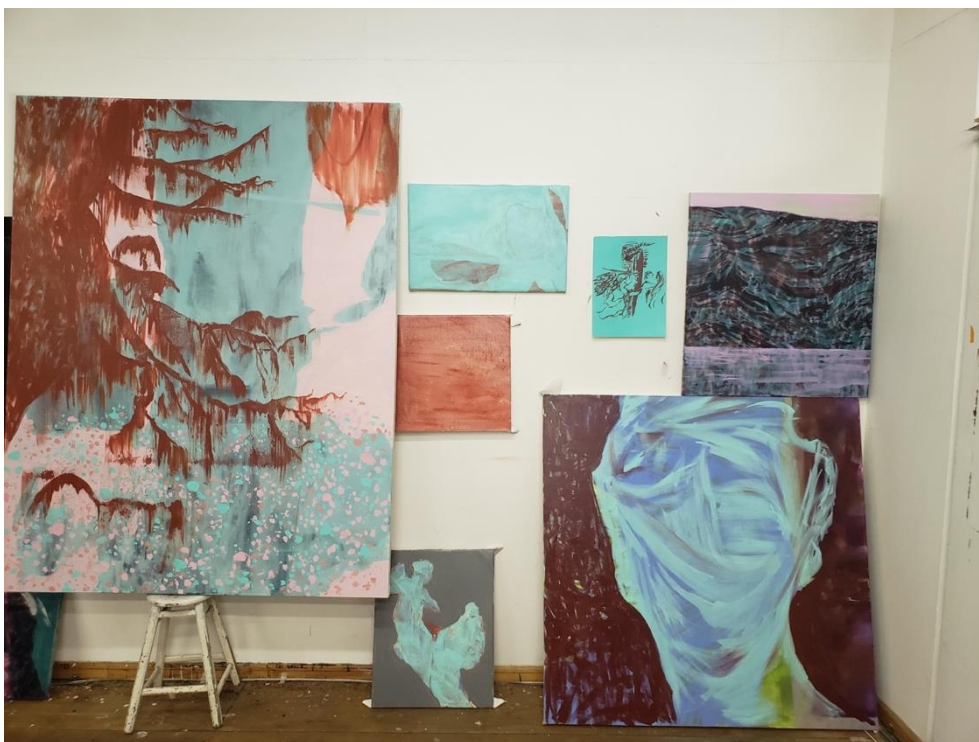


57. Studio space, 2021

In a very simple and concrete way, this 'after-liveliness' meant that the new series of paintings I started to work on came directly from drawings and little drafts made long before on the sketchbooks, and without any intention of serving as a rehearsal or preview of these paintings that were now beginning to appear. It happened then, for example, that part of the material I gathered in the 2020 sketchbooks about automata and mechanical dolls became the source of several new paintings two years later, in which I returned to this topic after a re-reading of Walter Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History*[63]. And as a result of this pictorial impulse, other "already finished" sketchbooks suddenly showed their relevance in this setup of new works, as if they were reference albums with all kinds of past ideas capable of becoming, in an unexpected moment, actively present. In the same way, ideas included in one sketchbook were continued and expanded in others or altered in different ways according to the painting process being undertaking. Likewise, in relation to the more systematic work that I was already beginning to do for writing this thesis, the sketchbooks, abounding with quotes and notes from my readings, demanded continuous consultation, after which I was able to transfer the information into more organized textual formats with corresponding references, echoing Lichtenberg's logic of transmission between "waste books" and other notepads. Within this dynamic temporal framework, then, the status of records that can be attributed to sketchbooks exhibited that lively character we mentioned earlier: the intricate interplay of its assorted contents endowing them with the ability to burst into the present at any given moment.



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The motif of the *Pietá* as it was developed through different sketchbooks, panels and canvases.

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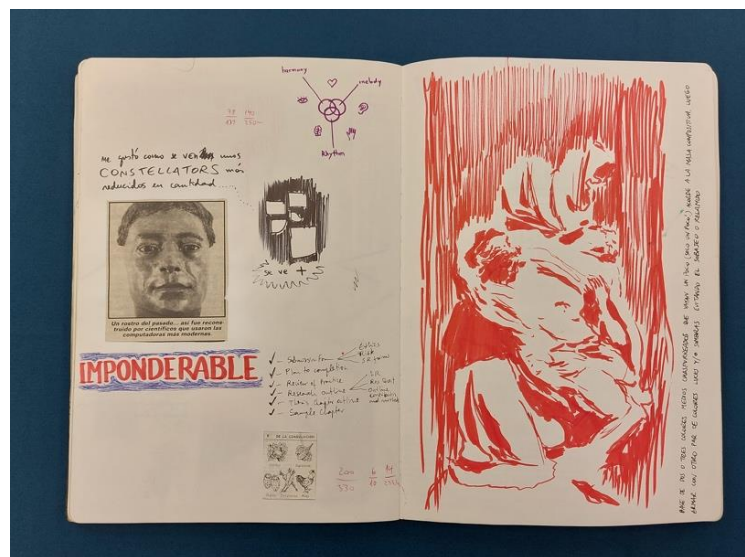
[63] "The story is told of an automaton constructed in such a way that it could play a winning game of chess, answering each move of an opponent with a countermove. A puppet in Turkish attire and with a hookah in its mouth sat before a chessboard placed on a large table. A system of mirrors created the illusion that this table was transparent from all sides. Actually, a little hunchback, who was an expert chess player sat inside and guide the puppet's hand by means of strings. One can imagine a philosophical counterpart to this device. The puppet called 'historical materialism' is to win all the time. It can easily be a match for anyone if it enlists the services of theology, which today, as we know, is wizened and has to keep out of sight." BENJAMIN, WALTER. *Theses on philosophy of history*, on *Interrupted speeches I* (Spanish version). Madrid: Taurus, 1973, p. 245

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63. Adrian Gouet, *I Will Show you Fear in a Handful of Dust*
Oil on canvas, 240 x 160 cm.
2022

As my work through this lively condition was gaining in depth, I started to look for further references that may help on deepening my understanding of it, as well as of the methodological consequences that might come along. One of the most useful of these references lays on the main ideas of what is known as the Theory of Neuronal Group Selection (TNGS), or simply 'neural Darwinism', as it is commonly known. The TNGS was developed and published between 1987 and 1990 by the American biologist Gerald Edelman, as an innovative approach to describe several biological processes. Building upon his previous discoveries in the field of the immune system — which earned him the Nobel Prize in 1972— Edelman elaborates a vision of brain function as a system of selection, expanding Darwin's ideas from its large-scale focus on the origin and evolution of species to the realm of each individual body or organism, from the early development of foetal neuronal microscopic aggregates to the structural macro-patterns of the individual being, already launched into the world and experience. Edelman explicitly rejects the instructional and computational approach with which algorithmic models have sought to account for the various functions and capacities of the nervous system. Instead, he holds an understanding of the whole system as an evolutionary process in itself, based on the permanent task of selection and adaptation that multiple neuronal groups, as well as the "maps" that these groups compose between each other, carry out continually. And this continuous process occurs in relation to one of the most distinctive features of living entities, in Edelman's view: its huge variability, something that would be catastrophic for almost any computational or mechanical system, where accuracy and reproduction are essential:

> As we have discussed, no two brains are alike, and each individual's brain is continually changing. Variations extend over all levels of brain organization, from biochemistry to gross morphology, and the strengths of myriad individual synapses are constantly altered by experience. The extent of this enormous variability argues strongly against the notion that the brain is organized like a computer with fixed codes and registers. Furthermore, the environment or world from which signals are delivered to the brain is not organized to give an unambiguous message like a piece of computer tape (...) Instructionism, the idea that the environment can reliably provide the kind of information required by a computer, fails as a principle of brain operation.[64]

When this approach is applied to the study of memory, as Edelman does, we see that conventional models for rendering the nature of this faculty —the wax imprinted by a seal, the figure of the great library, and even the computational model itself— lack the mobility and dynamism

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[64] EDELMAN, GERALD. *A Universe of Consciousness: How Matter Becomes Imagination*. New York: Basic Books, 2000, p. 81

brought by Edelman's vision. Indeed, under neural Darwinism, records on memory do not pile up on static shelves waiting to be retrieved to represent a certain content again and again. Rather, far beyond this representational framework, memory records are continually interacting with other signals coming from both the outside and inner world that the subject is dealing with all the time, so they must adapt to new conditions by constantly undertaking a reconfiguration, a new association with other groups of neurons or "maps", much in the same way species do in relation to the ever-changing environments on the biosphere. In that sense, as Edelman says, "memory is more like the melting and refreezing of a glacier than it is like an inscription on a rock."[65] Under this view, a dynamic vision of memory emerges, in which records not only are stored waiting to be reproduced; they are rather actively moving to the point of even pushing and shaping the subject's perception itself, selecting, or sculpting new, more complex connections patterns. As Oliver Sacks comments:

> Regarding the perception of objects, the world, as Edelman likes to say, is not 'labelled', it does not come 'already classified into objects'. Indeed, we must *make* them through our own characterizations. 'Perception makes', said Emerson. 'Every perception', says Edelman echoing Emerson, 'is an act of creation.' Thus, our sensory organs, as we move, sample the world creating maps in the brain. Then something like 'survival of the fittest' neurologically speaking, occurs, a selective strengthening of those mappings that correspond to 'successful' perceptions; 'successful' insofar as they prove to be more useful and powerful for the construction of 'reality'.[66]

It is precisely from this constructive power that Edelman's vision has allowed me to incorporate into my own research the energy that animates the 'after-liveliness' of the interplay of archives and painting, a generative, poetic (from Greek *poiesis*, 'to make, bring forth') model of memory characterized, as we have seen, by its constant movement and variability, by the instability and inaccuracy inherent to living and desiring organisms, capable, however, of great associations and networks of meaning, beyond the 'reality' that builds up from the narrow, instructionist effectiveness of labels.

From these reflections, a series of works that I had left on pause for a long time began to return to the sphere of my artistic practice. These works can be seen as a branch in the logics of the sketchbooks, and I have grouped them under the simple rubric of *panels*: medium-sized cardboard surfaces with a handful of pictures scattered like constellations in an open space, without following

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[65] EDELMAN, op. cit., 93

[66] CORNWELL, JOHN (Ed.). *Nature's Imagination: The Frontiers of Scientific Vision*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 147

any particular order or underlying structure apart from the edge of the panels themselves. In strict terms, I had already worked on creating these panels from some time before this research project began, and also in its early stages, as we have already commented regarding the display of pictures in the walls of my studio. From the very beginning, as well as in this renewed version, my panels were exclusively made up of printed pictures, all of them obtained from the countless clippings I had been collecting from second-hand magazines and books for years. Without any authorial pretensions, these panels had no other purpose but to sharpen my visual attention when looking at images, striving to replicate as accurately as possible the same logic with which Aby Warburg conducted his own panels during the late 1920s, which together make up his endless *Atlas Mnemosyne*.

Everything we were just discussing about memory in a mobile and dynamic sense could be clearly appreciated by putting this 'Warburgian method' into action: according to the variability of what Warburg himself called "the law of good neighbour", the images on each panel gradually revealed their powers to influence and to be influenced by other images according to the context in which they were located. These shifting influences were thus able to make certain details to suddenly acquire an unexpected significance, or turning elements that were considered purely decorative into an abruptly powerful echo of the main forms or narratives coming from another image of the set. The mapping and visualization of these "hidden sympathies" was thus the ultimate purpose of Warburg's panels, and by extension, also of those that I myself was now returning to make, "not as historical artifact but as a living aesthetic and cognitive process of outmost relevance to our age, above and beyond its specific content"[67].
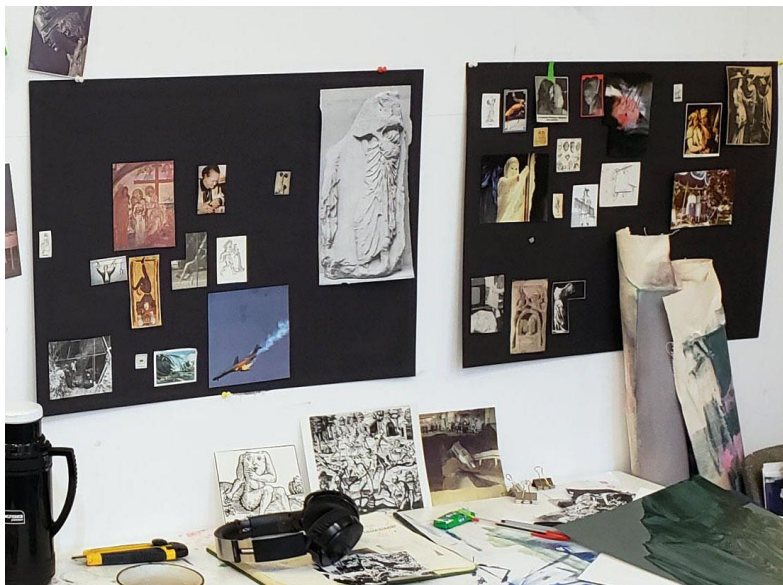


64. Studio space. 2021 - 2022

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[67] OHRT, ROBERTO; HEIL, AXEL (Eds.). *Aby Warburg, Bilderatlas Mnemosyne. The Original*. Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2020, p. 9

65. Adrian Gouet, *Panels.* Pictures glued on a cardboard, 77 x 110 cm. 2021



66. Adrian Gouet, *Panels* (assembled layout). 2022

This time, however, my work on panels started to defy the validity of the "good neighbour" law from which Warburg develop his method of work, the management of the intervals between pictures, and thus acquiring certain degree of autonomy in relation to any further painting requirement, as I used to do, with panels serving mainly as an inventory of imagery for such painting process. Prompted by the very problem of media accumulation that I've been addressing throughout this research, I started to wonder to which point the distance within pictures on each panel could be reduced, wondering if there was any limit beyond which all possible networks between images had to collapse. Where was the boiling point that I was approaching by pressing through more and more images into each panel? By the simple task of filling the panels with as much pictures as possible, I noticed that they appear more eloquent in regard to the questions and paradoxes we have been asking about current modes of media interaction. By filling every centimetre of the gaps between pictures with other pictures or phrases and words taken from magazines and books, these panels were staging a tension between the dissonant and jarring intersection of unlike images and the increasing immobility that comes from total saturation of space, the careful process of covering, with no overlap, every point of the surface. As if they were tiles on a wall, this new, overloaded version of my panels started to make up an image of the paralyzing effects of what we have designated as media accumulation, the flat, uniform and undifferentiated noise that floods perception as a plain surface of distractions, in which we move with the same apathy of the impulse to scroll down our phone when we browse social media, no matter how varied its content is.



67. Pictures distributed on a sketchbook, 2021-2022

68. Adrian Gouet, *Crowded panel*. Printed pictures, postage stamps and bus tickets on cardboard.
110 x 70 cm. 2021

69. Aby Warburg
*Atlas Mnemosyne*. Panel 28-29:
contemporary life in motion (transition:
lower register in the Palazzo Schifanoia)
120 x 150 cm

1928-1929





70, 71. Kazimir Malevich. *Analytical charts*. Cut-and-pasted printed paper, gelatin silver prints, ink and pencil on paper
72.4 x 98.4 cm. each. 1924-1927.

As for my work in painting, it was during this stage that a new series of canvases began to take shape, where both the panels and the sketchbooks served as a direct source of the creative process. On the one hand, and following one of Warburg's foundational topics[68], I began to work on motifs that alluded to movement, both at an iconographic level (garments, folds, moving objects, suspended objects, fluids, etc.) and at the level of paint itself, and the more direct sensation of mobility that a set of strokes was capable of producing, as well as the immobility of a petrified density of layers of tiny brush touches and glazes. Different compositional rhythms were also undertaken as much as they help on intensifying the sense of displacement, instability, the imminent dismemberment of the painted ensembles. Eventually, these practices led me to work more in depth with a particular technique that consisted of superimposing several images on the same canvas. By means of different degrees of transparency and pictorial density, all kinds of unexpected shapes were formed, pieces of the lower images that reappeared like ghosts behind those that came later, which then could be painted over again, refiguring a new whole that ended up being removed or blocked because some new piece or fragment of picture over it. It was somehow the logic of the palimpsest: aggregation of successive layers —of colours, figures, meanings— that were then partially washed off to give rise to a new sequence that was covered again or treated as the beginning of another new series.

From this perspective, it can be said sense of motion was no longer restricted to the representation of moving items, or by the direct traces of the pictorial process but also in the eyes that observe the painting as such, an active progression on reconstructing the events or guessing what kind of figure is hidden behind some familiar shape that looms here or there in the canvas. The ambiguity that paintings acquire by this aggregating process is what keep things moving around it. In this regard, I was following Leonardo da Vinci's advice to his students and taking the wall as the paradigmatic figure of my paintings:

> By looking attentively at old and smeared walls, or stones and veined marble of various colours, you may fancy that you see in them several compositions, landscapes, battles, figures in quick motion, strange countenances, and dresses, with an infinity of other objects. By these confused lines the inventive genius is excited to new exertions.[69]

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[68] In the prefatory note of his seminal text *Sandro Botticelli's Birth of Venus and Spring* (1893), Warburg announces the key elements that would mark his project of grasping the full implications behind the afterlife of the classical antiquity in the art and culture of the Renaissance and beyond: "to trace, step by step, how the artists and their advisers recognize 'the antique' as a model that demanded an intensification of outward movement, and how they turned to antique sources whenever accessory forms —those of garments and of hair— were to be represented in motion." p. 89

[69] DA VINCI, LEONARDO. *A Treatise on Painting*. New York: Dover Publications, 2005, p. 84

72, 73. Images of the Chilean "Estallido Social". A huge social crisis took place throughout Chile starting in October 2019, marked by months of demonstrations against the political system as a whole. For several months, massive and pacific protests coexisted with unprecedented destruction of public space, vandalism, and street violence, which even meant having to resort to military force as the last option to contain the state of chaos that was experienced at that time.



From these impressions, I began to work on how to weave two registers of the image in a single painting, in the sense that the textures and reliefs of a wall could function as an independent image to that of the layer of drawings, scratches, colours and all kinds of traces that covered it. My paintings were thus oriented toward the process of intersecting two or more pictures in almost any way, very much like a mapping projection, causing all kinds of unforeseen ambiguities to appear. The wall could now be seen as a contemporary paradigm of the image just as the window was for the Renaissance, or what the screen is for us as well. One could even say that the wall is the most ancestral paradigm of the image, and is precisely that ancestral character, in collision with a contemporary register in terms of colour and urban culture, what these paintings have wanted to invoke.

74. Adrian Gouet, *Pompeian wall*
Oil on canvas, 53 x 50 cm.
2022



75. Adrian Gouet, *those are Pearls that Were His Eyes.* Oil on canvas, 100 x 140 cm. 2022

76. Adrian Gouet, *Archival Impulses*. Oil on canvas, 120 x 120 cm. 2021

77. Adrian Gouet, *Archival Impulses*. Installation view of the group exhibition "Unruly Encounters", at Southwark Park Galleries. London, 2022

78. Adrian Gouet
*Imprinted stone*
Oil on cardboard, 12 x 15 cm.
2021



79. Adrian Gouet, *Anachronic Image*
Oil on canvas, 72 x 45 cm.
2023

80. Adrian Gouet, *Metopa.* Oil on canvas, 30 x 20 cm. 2022

81. Adrian Gouet
*The Screen, Desire and the Stones*
Oil on canvas, 160 x 140 cm.
2022



82. *The Screen, Desire and the Stones* (detail)

83. Studio space, 2022.

In all the areas of my art practice that we have discussed so far, images started to acquire a position that have reshaped the initial structure of the research. If they originally seemed to be oriented in a single way, from sources provided by the archive to the outcomes enacted by paintings, the structures or interfaces as developed in my artistic practice have produced a shift by which images can no longer be treated as objects but rather as phenomena endowed with different attributes:

> We do not stand confronted with or *before an image* the way we do before a thing whose exact boundaries we can trace. The ensemble of definite coordinates —author, date, technique, iconography, etc.— is obviously insufficient for that. An image, every image is the result of movements that are provisionally sedimented or crystallized in it. These movements traverse it through and through, each one having its own trajectory —historical, anthropological, and psychological— starting from a distance and continuing beyond it. They oblige us to think of the image as an energy-bearing or dynamic *moment*, even though it may have a specific structure.[70]

We can say that images are thus not entirely contained within its physical boundaries, confined to the very paper or canvas that holds the inks and marks, but rather in that *moment* of interaction between the eyes and that material support, as fluctuations between a physical and mental existence. This is the reason why so many iconoclastic struggles throughout Western history have been dedicated not only to the destruction of objects—paintings, sacred sculptures, icons—but above all to erasing from the faithful's imagination the memory of those objects, which connects them to censorship and other practices of social control[71]. Also, the multiple etymological roots account for this dual nature: the *eidolon* was understood as the image of a dream, the appearance of a god, or the ghost of a deceased person or a memory, while the *kolossos* represented the artifact of stone or metal, what we generally understand as a physical image, the materialization of figures or icons.[72] In this regard, the emphasis I was putting on the dynamic logic of images prevents them to function in a unique direction, as we were saying, flowing instead between the poles of the archival and the pictorial, passing from a waste book as the source of a few panels, which in turn provide the motifs for a couple of paintings, whose material expressions then redefine the panel where they came from, generating a new set of drawings to be done back in the same waste book again, and so on.

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[70] DIDI-HUBERMAN, GEORGES. *The Surviving Image*, p. 19

[71] FREEDBERG, DAVID. *Iconoclasia. Historia y Psicología de la Violencia Contra las Imágenes*. Buenos Aires: Sans Soleil Ediciones, 2017, p. 60

[72] BELTING, HANS. "Toward an Anthropology of the Image". In *Anthropologies of Art*. Massachusetts: Sterling and Francine Art Institute, 2005

These multiple directions in which my art production was moving put the question about the status of records in the whole practice that I have been developing throughout this research, and by extension, on the quality of the interactions of memory and imagination to which I was pointing. If all my attempts to stabilize the flowing dynamics of pictures were always disrupted by some kind of volatile element, which then imposed particular material conditions, such disruption or destabilization responds to the variability in which these records can be played, executed, performed, through different times and spaces. That is what researchers Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood have described as the "anachronic" quality of the work of art, as the key element that establishes its spatiotemporal plurality and instability. When recounting several practices that took place in the transition that marked the passage from Medieval to Renaissance culture, they highlight the growing aware among artists about the multiple relations that the work of art was capable of maintaining regarding the past and future. By presenting different models of production as well as several alternative functions of authorship, Nagel and Wood draws upon the "anachronic" quality in order to emphasize the particular capacities of artworks to address the time and space in multiple directions, in contrast the strict former norms and practices around the legacy of the past model, from where the more often used term "anachronistic" normally arises, the judgmental designation of a misplacement in time that assigns to every object and every event a suitable and stable location in linear and objective time. On the contrary, "anachronism", according to Nagel and Wood, conveys a significant tension between the container and the contained:

> The ability of the work of art to hold incompatible models in suspension without deciding is the key to art's anachronic quality, its ability really to "fetch" a past, create a past, perhaps even fetch the future.[73]

A similar approach, now in the context of contemporary art, is sustained by the Isabelle Graw, when she develops her notion about the "unspecificity" of painting as its characteristic quality in a context in which the borders between different art forms have become permeable, a "re-mediatization" by which different media relate and remodel each other, at least since the 1960s. The point, again, is the unstable character of the signs conveyed in art practice in general, and in painting in particular:

> How to determine a practice that renders impossible the rigorous distinction between what is intrinsic and what extrinsic to it? I want to propose that we conceive of painting not as a medium, but as a production of signs that is experienced as highly personalized. By focusing on painting specific

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[73] NAGEL, ALEXANDER & WOOD, CHRISTOPHER. *Anachronic Renaissance*. New York: Zone Books, 2010

indexicality, we will be able to grasp one of its main characteristics: it is able to suggest a strong bond between the product and the (absent) person of its maker.[74]

Consequently, and considered together, these reflections are all drawing on some idea of motion, mobility, displacement, instability, plurality of time, among other terms, all of which indicate the quality that my painting practice was acquiring. The status of records that we have been discussing is then characterized by a flow of dislocations and shifts, thus making clear that what I used to call "the" archive has no precise location nor has it a unique material definition. There seemed to be rather *archival practices* within my work, a variety of situations around the act of collecting, displaying, or classifying all kinds of material resources over different places: waste books, panels, the walls of my working space, or even the canvases themselves. Accordingly, there must have been no paintings altogether but instead only *pictorial practices* occurring in those very same places, now metamorphosed to serve as the field of a multiplicity of speculative drills with brushes, pencils and all sort of marking tools, the game of making visual conjectures to become alive, the reawaken of all kinds of fossils from vanished worlds.

In this scenario, if my practice is an attempt to portray a particular form of an 'art of memory', this can be possible as long as it points to what the art historian David Joselit has called the "transitivity" of painting. In a detailed analysis of the work of the German painter Jutha Koether, Joselit highlights the features of a painting practice that enacts a particular sense of time inasmuch as it recognizes the ways it belongs to networks of production and circulation of images. The focus on Joselit's approach is thus placed not on the objects that pertain to those networks but rather in their behaviour within and outside them, their moving quality as it is visible through the series of passages they describe while acting, for instance, over the stage of an exhibition:

> Transitive painting, on the other hand, invents forms and structures whose purpose is to demonstrate that once an object enters a network, it can never be fully stilled, but only subjected to different material states and speeds of circulation ranging from the geologically slow (cold storage) to the infinitely fast. A Poussin might land in the hands of Jutta Koether, or Stephen Prina might seize the entire oeuvre of Manet.[75]

Accordingly, we have seen that this has been also the main concern of my examination about quality of records created between painting and archives in the context of the present research. In

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[74] GRAW, ISABELLE. *The Love of Painting.* New York: Sternberg Press, 2018, p. 50
[75] JOSELIT, DAVID. "Painting beside Itself". October 130, Fall 2009, p. 6

this regard, the perspective of such "transitivity" can be well described under the notion of *score*, in the musical sense of the term, as a figure that helps connecting both the archival and pictorial. As we have seen, archival practices started to function in my work as a form of notation —though wild, unsystematic, open, and malleable as jazz music lead sheets may be— that can be "played" in uncountable future pictorial performances, which in turn may redefine the terms of the former notation in a new set of pictures in any of the material supports of my practice. By this approach, it becomes clear that it was present in my practice a more complex structure of time—in articulations of contingency and performance— and space —the wall of my studio, the sketchbooks, panels, and canvases. Hence, beyond its apparent dispersion, all these dimensions of my research shared a mobile and unstable quality as the main character of their value as records, although such recording capacity entails a performative dimension around the documenting networks, as Joselit maintains: "rather than foreclosing action and agency, the kind of accumulation I'm thinking of may function as a score, in the sense of a musical score which can enable an infinite number of future performances."[76] Thus, sketchbooks, panels and paintings can now be viewed as material configurations that "explicitly visualize such networks"[77].

I would say, then, that it is through the notion of score that my research has attempted to craft a certain "art of memory", a mnemotechnic arrangement that has determined that the status of records in my research is aimed at both preserving memories as well as provoking new images, in line with the notion of what the Italian anthropologist Carlo Severi has called the "chimera principle". Severi draws on the ancient Greeks but also in several Native American non-literate cultures, intending to expose the conditions of memory and imagination as they were conditioned through a variety of systems of pictograms and visual signs. The analysis focus on how the unstable and multiple meanings around images can nonetheless play the role of very accurate records, carriers of numerous significances that are blended and visually condensed through a series of heterogeneous, and even contradictory graphic features. The formal uniqueness of chimerical figures, as Severi calls them, endows the viewer's experience with a special capacity to store ideas, due to the visual salience and intensity of the condensed forms, which is what ultimately render images memorable. In this sense, the chimerical figures studied by Severi functions as scores, since "every technique of remembering is also a technique of the imagination"[78]. The ontological shift prompted by the chimerical figures functions as a mnemotechnical device, indicating the inflections,

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[76] JOSELIT, DAVID. "Marking, Scoring, Storing, and Speculating" (on Time), in *Painting Beyond Itself*, ed. by Isabelle Graw. Berlin Sternberg Press, 2016, p. 15

[77] JOSELIT, DAVID. "Painting beside Itself", op. cit., p. 1

[78] SEVERI, CARLO. *The Chimera Principle. An Anthropology of Memory and Imagination*. Chicago: Hau Books, 2015, p. 199

nuances, and the general structure that the imagination of the viewer will follow as it unfolds its inventiveness, in the path traced by the visual salience in each of them, its "fertile ambiguity".[79]

In accordance with Severi's anthropological research, the history of musical notation as developed in the Western culture provides a useful insight for picturing the scope of how some mnemonic techniques in the musical realm have informed my own pictorial performance. When the Italian priest Guido d'Arezzo created, by the end of the 9th century, what we know today as the five-line staff notation, we are told that he was attempting to bring some order in the confusion of the voices within the choirs he conducted.[80] Until then, those poor singers should memorize long melodic phrases with the only help of a very rudimentary notation system, the *pneuma* notation, devoted exclusively to mark some elementary rhythmic inflections that the voices should place over the recited texts. But what was really revolutionary in staff notation was not the tidiness of its particular mnemotechnic system but something that Father Guido was completely unaware of: the emergence of what since then is known as polyphony, that is, the possibility of multiple melodic,

harmonic, and rhythmic lines at the same time thanks to the spatial spread of the notes. Once a very practical solution to organize a singing performance, the graphic language of the staff notation began to be dissociated for the then-expected type of music and instead became the very source a whole new aural experience, an unparalleled new field of practice through the innovation between mnemonic notation and performance. This unforeseeable development carried by the new modes of inscription of the staff completely reshaped the field of music and its forms of transmission, allowing unheard textures and unprecedented compositions to appear in Western music since then.

Accordingly, the multiple uses that my sketchbooks, panels and paintings offered began to multiply my sense of the possible into a new series of some new sketchbooks, panels and
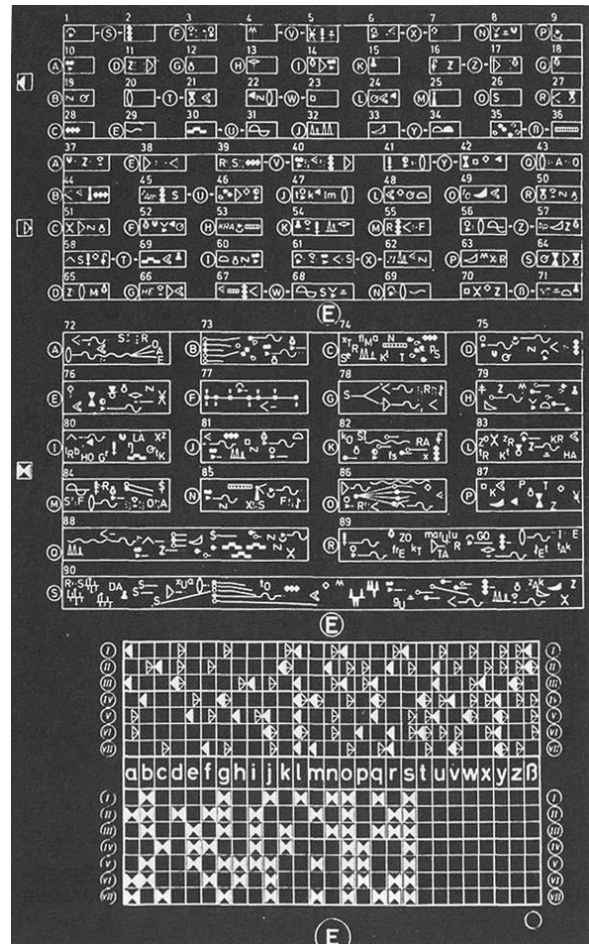


84. Roland Kayn, score for *Cybernetics*, sign memory and control system, reproduced on the insert of the LP *Elektroakustische Projekte I.* 1966-68

[79] SEVERI, op. cit., P. 64
[80] MAGNUSSON, THOR. *Sonic Writing. Technologies of Material, Symbolic & Signal Inscriptions.* New York: Bloomsbury, 2019

paintings, a sort of creative recurrence that have been following the features of "chimera principle", where the quality of the memorable —the reverse side of the imaginable— comes from the visual salience, the intensities of the material gathered, the *Pathosformel*[81], which is not just a result of some particular odd quality of each piece but rather the expressive energy that is transmitted through unexpectedness of their encounter, the improbable, if not outright impossible, space created by the sudden proximity between seemingly distant or disparate entities.



85, 86. The *Rhizomatic Drawings* (2021-2022) have been the most literal approach to the model of musical score within my practice. Through the use of a limited repertoire of pictures and shapes (above), the drawings are then developed as improvised compositions that moves through the limits thus imposed (right).



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[81] "Nietzsche, in his article on "The Dionysian Vision of the World," had already spoken of dance as an "intensified language of gesture," which is a way of describing the conversion of a natural gesture (walking, taking a step, simply appearing) into a plastic formula (dancing, spinning around, strutting about). Warburg elaborated the notion of the *Pathosformel* in large part to account for this choreographic intensity, which permeates all of Renaissance painting". DIDI-HUBERMAN, GEORGES. *The Surviving Image.* Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press, 2018, p. 163
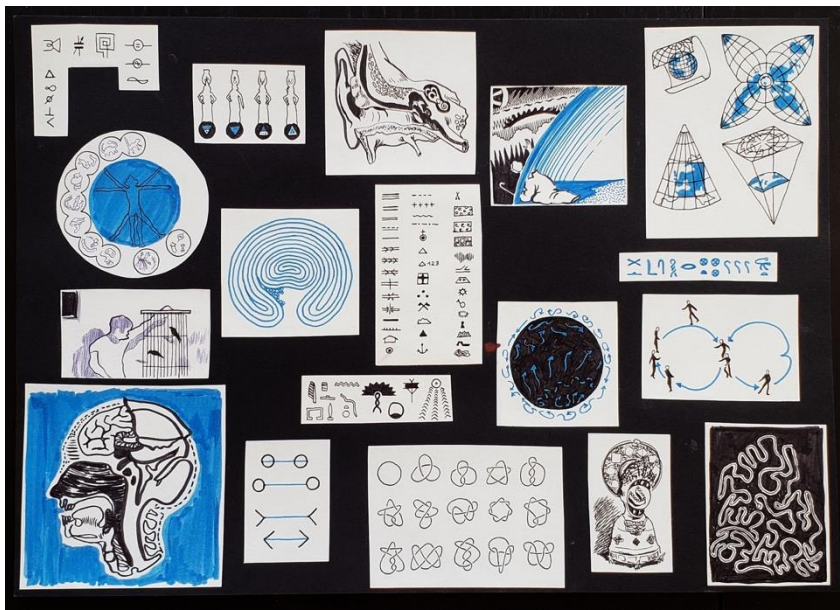
87. Above:

Adrian Gouet
*Rhizomatic Drawings*
Repertoire of pictures.
40 x 60 cm.
 2021.


88 (right), 89, 90:

Adrian Gouet
*Rhizomatic Drawings*
Performed images on
paper, variable sizes
2021-2022

89



90

While it may seem that, from this point of view, the original plans for this research project — namely, to develop a painting practice whose creative force stems from the 'othering' quality of archives— are being blurred under the dissolution of the boundaries between archive and painting, the truth is that a whole genealogies of art practices are at hand on showing the powers of these focus on events and the forms in which contingency connects all this apparently entropic scenery. Among the many artists that have worked on these coordinates, I have placed a special attention, out of the field of painting, on the practice of the Mexican artist Abraham Cruzvillegas, whose series of sculptures he designates as *autoconstrucción* (self-building), provides an exemplary case of the instability that characterizes the encounters of memory and imagination that we have been examining. The *autoconstrucción* series is a practice derived from the ad-hoc building procedures common in squatter settlements on the outskirts of megacities. Cruzvillegas uses all kinds of found materials as they show up like remains, debris and obsolete commodities: plastic and wood crates, scrap heaps of Formica, wooden boards, dowels, wire grids, screws, glass, all of them pulled together through seemingly spontaneous experimentation. In this regard, *Autoconstrucción* series delivers a sharp picture of commodity networks, expressing the material unevenness in the economic flows of production and exchange among the centre and periphery in the global market, "in which our experience of objects is governed ever more strictly by an overproduction of commodities whose compensatory marketing mechanism is the production of the 'new' as already obsolete detritus."[82]

But these arrangements are not attractive and powerful just because of the lure and irony that carry as peculiar composites of artisanal and post-industrial worlds. As Robin Adèle Greeley argues, Cruzvillegas aesthetics' "adheres more strictly to a one-on-one sculptural engagement but does so to foreground a radical instability—both structural and significative—that registers not as entropy but as dynamic contingency."[83] There is a uniqueness, then, rendered by the particular circumstances around the encounter between material remains and the constructive attempts of the artist, or the builders in Mexico City's peripheral settlements. As unclassifiable aggregates, the instability of the resulting sculptures is the consequence of a contingency that plays not only through the productive precariousness and singularities of each piece, but also by means of the viewer's own curiosity about both the permanent sense of risk of things to fall apart, and also of the creation, as Greeley suggests, of an unexpected new dynamic after disintegration.

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[82] GREELEY, ROBIN ADÈLE. "The Logic of Disorder. The Sculptural Materialism of Abraham Cruzvillegas". October 151, Winter 2015, p. 80
[83] GREELEY, op. cit., p. 79

It is then this "logic of disorder" what have been permeated my practice as well, now rising again in the shift from my common use of sketchbooks towards the spatiotemporal layout of the *waste books*, which are characterized not only for allowing contingency to unfold and reflect on my own self-building surroundings, but also, as in Cruzvillegas' works, for elaborating precarity as a productive tension between collapse and vitality, between confusion and systematization. In this way, the dynamics created in my sketchbooks, paintings and panels have set a set of interfaces in which the risk of making "wrong decisions" — and also, unfortunately, the hope for the "correct"



91. Abraham Cruzvillegas, *Autoconstrucción.* Wood, artist's hair, rubber, metal and hemp cord, 100 x 120 x 9 cm. 2008

ones— had no meaning anymore. By leaving behind all pre-existing categories to which my observations should match in order to be considered valuable, the flux between these interfaces evacuates any trace of arbitrariness in my selection process putting instead the role of contingency as the key element that ties my work with the outside world of pictures and ideas, simultaneously preventing the "whatever" quality that my work was acquiring to fall apart into the barren chaos of mere accumulation. From now on, anything was allowed to get in as long as it can be an active player in the distribution game of pictures and traces within and beyond the panels, the pages of a sketchbook, or the canvas.

# III. The Flower of Time

*Oh, do no ask 'what is it?'.*
*Let us go and make our visit*

T. S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"

In the middle of the Arizona desert, a huge geodesic structure that housed all of Earth's climates was completed in the early 1990's. For an initial period of two years, which thereafter extended to more than ten, a crew of eight scientists, four men and four women, lived in total autarky within this closed circuit to explore the survival conditions of the human species under a regime of total isolation. An ocean the size of a soccer field, a little savannah, a small-scale rainforest, and even a miniature version of the Arizona desert itself —though devoid of indigenous people or hazardous insects to exterminate— were vitrified in this experimental bubble called Biosphere 2, under the implicit promise of building a refuge from the eventual large-scale disaster, such as an atomic war or a global pandemic.

There is a profuse literature on the causes that led to the failure of the project by 2007, most of which point to a series of technical failures in the insulation systems. After an early period of relative balance, the levels of oxygen started to decrease in a more accelerated rate due to a slight but persistent rise in methane particles that were discovered to be released by the concrete pieces of the structure. In addition, around 40% of the 3,800 species at Biosphere 2 went extinct at the end of the first mission, regardless of the apparently well-conceived replication of their ecosystems[84]. After several attempts to fix the technical issues, replacing the members of staff and the crew, Biosphere 2 was definitively abandoned and transferred to a local organization, that today keeps its remains functioning as an amusement park.[85]

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[84] NELSON, MARK. *Pushing Our Limits: Insights from Biosphere 2*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2018.
[85] Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/film/2020/jul/13/spaceship-earth-arizona-biosphere-2-lockdown

Most of the critics of the project claimed that, despite its futuristic appeal, everything in this 'Glass Ark', as it was promoted, was conceived with the same degree of abstraction that some of the most conventional, old-fashioned models of the brain, that is, with no consideration to what was known even then about it: its plasticity, elasticity, the reversibility of many of its operations, or the dynamics that we have already seen in approaches like Edelman's TSNG. Instead, Biosphere 2 relied on the idea of a miniature synthesis of each of its functions and operations, each lobe of the landscape replicated in a regular scale version and placed according to a general plan of control and follow up. We have already talked in this thesis about the extended history of many other attempts to succeed under this 'great divides' logics. But unlike those projects, there is something relatively unique about Biosphere 2, or at least more eloquent as a symptom of this type of archival fever, beyond technical feasibility or conceptual consistency: the fact that the artificial promiscuity of the climates corresponded to the artificial immunity of the space, which meant the elimination of all types of spontaneous generation of germs, microbes, the permanent purification of water and air, and ultimately, of the physical and emotional environment —strict celibacy, the prohibition against any sexual or reproductive contact, as it was the rule for the 'biospherians'. Because even the contamination of the living was dangerous.
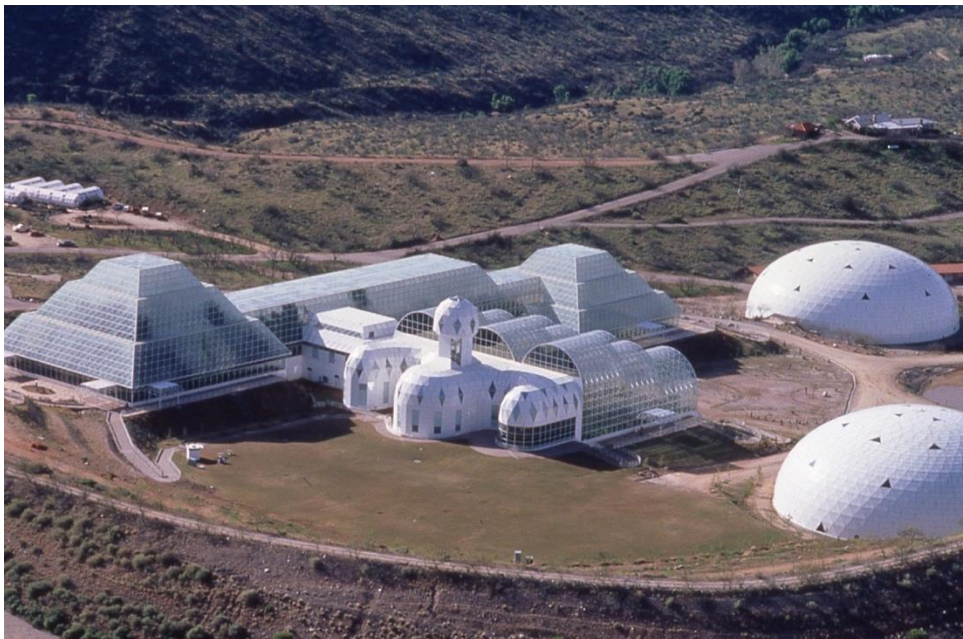


92. *Biosphere 2* facilities. Arizona desert, 1989.

We have been able to see so far that the development of this research project has consisted of finding out how certain practice of painting in relation to archives can articulate a sense of plurality whose fertile 'liveliness' opposes the cacophonous accumulation that characterizes the self-sufficient enclosure of our media environment. The model for this articulation has thus been based on an interaction between memory and imagination that, in different ways, has continually attempted to incite new or unexpected insights and approaches in the production of images by tracing the movements and intensities of 'living fossils', pictures and fragments of pictures as they migrate through canvases, sketchbooks and panels. And it has done so by distancing itself from the standardizing pressure that comes from the hallmark of mass-media networks of circulation and production of information in the digital sphere, namely, the particular temporal structure of the 'know how', the algorithmic logic of the previousness of an anticipated result, and the subsequent unambiguous series of steps to achieve it. Although this logic is extremely useful and necessary in an extensive range of fields and practices, it proves to be deficient when used to tackle the kind of questions that art practices normally arises, which involves, widely speaking, all the fields connected to poetics, that is, questions regarding our ability to bring forth the new, in addition to the complexity and the aforementioned instability that implies being biased by those same questions, given that it is our own desire that takes centre stage on them. Let us remember, for the sake of clarity on this point, the words from Spinoza I quoted at the beginning of this thesis: "We neither strive for, nor will, neither want, nor desire anything because we judged it to be good; on the contrary, we judge something to be good because we strive for it, will it, want it, and desire it"[86]. In that sense, the algorithmic logic applied to poetics is not just about prediction but above all to inducing those anticipated outcomes, akin to what is known as self-fulfilling prophecies, where beliefs or expectations influence behaviour to bring about their own fulfilment.[87] This is what Boris Groys referred to as the "bubble" in the interview we commented early on this thesis[88], the redundancy of the closed-circuit of information and beliefs that is so easily formed in or on the Internet by our own tendency to reinforce what we already wanted to know or believe.

But if Biosphere 2, as we have just seen, can be viewed as an almost literal materialization of this delirium of the closed self-sufficient gardens, we should be aware that its totalizing attempt was fuelled on the base of an alleged inevitable large-scale catastrophe, on some kind of hypothetical

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[86] Cf. page 12

[87] Impacting a wide range of fields, from finances, marketing strategies, consumption habits and cultural practices, all encompassed under the omnipresent economy of attention, self-fulfilling prophecies are pervasive in contemporary society. The concept was first introduced in the academic field in 1949 by Columbian professor Robert K. Merton in his book *Social Theory and Social Structure*. New York: Free Press, 1968.

[88] Cf. page 52

apocalyptic event, and the measures against its subsequent "coming barbarism"[89]. This assumed disaster functions retrospectively as the source that justify both the myth of origin of this 'Glass Ark', as well as the authority and power that it wields to control the instability of living and desiring bodies, the *commence* and the *command* of its archival pretensions, for using the well-known expression from Derrida[90]. For this reason, if this micro-universe attempts to exorcise the conditions of the catastrophe by making an artificial synthesis of all its data, it is only at the price of not living, not enjoying, not dying that this gives us the certainty of surviving. As Jean Baudrillard claims,

> The real planet, supposedly doomed, is reduced beforehand to its miniaturized clone, air-conditioned (...) and destined to defeat death through total simulation. If the dead were embalmed for eternity in the past, today the living are embalmed through survival. Is this what we should expect? Is it necessary that, having lost our metaphysical utopias, we have to build this prophylactic utopia?[91]

In that sense, the artistic practice of this research has been attempting to show that it is possible to think differently, based on a model in which this "surviving" element can be the opportunity — and not the formula, or algorithm— to bring forth something new:

> The model of *Nachleben*, therefore, is not applicable solely to a quest for disappearances; rather, it seeks the *fecund* element in the disappearances, that which yields a trace and, accordingly, is capable of becoming a memory, of returning, indeed, of a 'renaissance'.[92]

Throughout this thesis we have been discussing different forms by which my artistic practice has attempted to devise routes towards the conditions of the memorable in world highly determined by a hyper-saturated media environment. And if this meant to move away from the prophylactic saturation of the mass media, it was still essential to do it without giving up the abundance, profusion and even the joyful excess that comes from the simple artistic exercise that traverses my whole practice: that of bringing into the same space different voices, figures, registers, and worlds previously considered too distant or dissimilar. If the unexpected connections and resonances between these elements endows the space of their meeting with a mobile and unstable quality —the 'othering' power that we have been talking about— we still need to find out more precisely what kind of time is configured in the encounters enabled by this logic, so that such power, and more

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[89] STENGERS, ISABELLE. *In Catastrophic Times: Resisting the Coming Barbarism*. London: Open Humanities Press, 2015.
[90] DERRIDA, JACQUES. *Archive Fever*, p. 1
[91] BAUDRILLARD, JEAN. "Sobrevivencia e Inmortalidad". Revista de Estudios Públicos, Winter 1993. Santiago, p. 21
[92] DIDI-HUBERMAN, GEORGES. *The Surviving Image*, p. 51

critically, its *fecund* quality, can be effectively wielded. For that, this final section of the thesis will follow the path laid out by Walter Benjamin, when he states that "to articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was'. It means to seized hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger."[93] By examining in detail the works and the assembly of an individual exhibition that I had the opportunity to carry out towards the end of this research project, we will delve into the particularities around that "flashing time", and how its 'othering' power can help us outline the poetic foundations and aimed contributions of this project, the pictorial harvests of the "allegorical machine".



93. Jenny Holzer, *Protect me from What I Want*. 1985

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[93] BENJAMIN, WALTER. *Theses on philosophy of history*, p. 247

## i) ESCHATOLOGICAL DELIGHTS

*It is Better to Imagine the End of the World than the End of Capitalism* was the name of the solo exhibition that I presented at the Museum of Visual Arts (MAVI) in Santiago, Chile. It was composed by a large group of paintings and graphic works that circled around the richness and paradoxes of apocalyptic visions as a form of scanning contemporary modes of image culture. Installed in the two upper rooms of the museum, the seemingly endless topic of the end of the world was presented from two different perspectives, both antagonistic and complementary.

The title is a subtle inflection of the famous dictum attributed to both Frederic Jameson and Slavoj Žižek that "it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism", the idea that we have so naturalized the conditions of life established by the current global economic order that our sense of the possible or, rather, of the imaginable, is incapable of conceiving any other alternative. And one of the most eloquent proofs of this is that the apocalypse itself has become a kind of cliché, a matter of routine, absorbed by the market system itself: even the most realistic visions of all kinds of disasters and tragedies that we continually "witness" through media ends up transformed into a spectacle, and the spectacular, into a condition of possibility of seeing.

In a cultural context increasingly saturated with commodified information, where climate catastrophe looms and political disorientation increases, the main motivation behind this exhibition consisted of empowering the viewer's imagination by resorting precisely to the extensive and paradoxical heritage that Western culture has produced around the vision of the end of times. With a simultaneously theatrical and archival montage, this exhibition sought to articulate in each room two modes or states of the apocalyptic to get rid of the clichés and commonplaces that surround it, so that we are able to reimagine the history of the world and its forthcoming endings. In the manner of *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, by Hieronymus Bosch, each of the two rooms of the exhibition functioned like that panel in its double dimension, as a graphic and pictorial artifact that allows us to unfold our gaze through the images of its own disappearance, not only as tragedy but also as revelation.



94. Adrian Gouet, *Commentary to the Apocalypse*
Oil on canvas, 180x110 cm.
2023

The first space accessed upon entering the exhibition was a spacious room, just over 200 square meters, dominated by a low and rather mournful lighting. Much akin to the stillness of that inert and encapsulated world of the closed panel of Bosch's *Garden*, the impression one got is one of total immobility, a sensation corroborated by the works that occupy the three walls.

Due to the museum's spatiality, the first of these works we see is an extensive mosaic of images titled *The Pages of a Distant Chinese Encyclopedia*, a collage of prints sourced from all sorts of magazines and second-hand books, found photographs, slides, printed screenshots, stamps, receipts, and sheets of all kinds, collected during the years of this research project. What appears from afar as a more or less uniform texture of tones and colours ends up revealing itself with unusual exuberance once we approach more closely: every corner of the wall's surface is occupied by completely diverse and heterogeneous images, and no space has been left vacant. Everything is crowded and brim-full, with figures displayed everywhere and in all possible registers of the visible, from black and white old pictures to colourful sci-fi illustrations and diagrams, media clippings as well as phrases and words speaking to us even from the minutest edge that separates two almost adjacent pictures. Like a radiation field, the entire space of this 11-meter-long wall seems exhausted of images and by images, incapable of bearing even the slightest addition of new elements, as if it were Aby Warburg's most terrible nightmare, that of a future where the "law of the good neighbour" has been irreversibly destroyed.
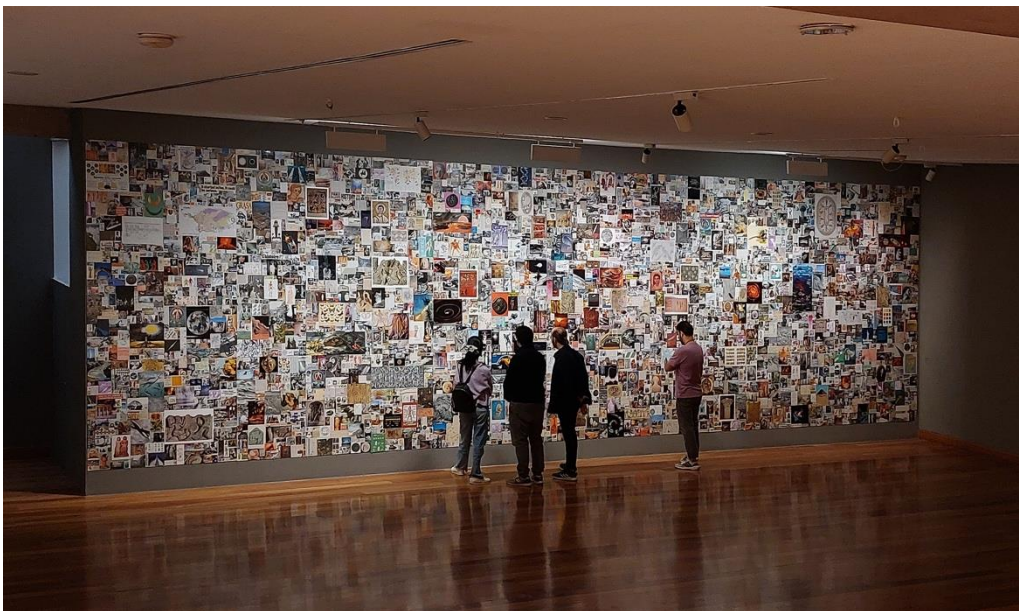


95. Installation view of *The Pages of a Distant Chinese Encyclopedia*. 380 x 1150 cm. Museo de Artes Visuales. Santiago, Chile, 2023

Furthermore, this completeness is highlighted by the fact that none of the images overlap each other, giving the work a variety of scales that are visible in the care with which the small and not so small pieces have been tightly fitted together, like tiles on a wall. *The Pages of a Distant Chinese Encyclopedia* comes directly from the panels we reviewed in the previous chapter of this thesis, and it is a work that, although made especially for this wall in the museum, does not entirely belong to it. The general impression, as mentioned, is one of more or less homogeneous radiation, a sort of white noise that possesses no internal structure allowing a hierarchical organization of its quasi-infinite 'pixels', nor does it have an external boundary that can be claimed as necessary, for had it measured one meter more or one meter less, the pattern of the fabric would be the same. There is no edge in this work, but rather the contrary, a single image of the overflow of any possible edge.

However, in spite of its jarring variety, there is nothing in this overflow of pictures that really brings along any kind of the expected, let's say, Dionysian energy: there is no frenzy, no raging and ecstatic transgression of limits, nor does the madness of the nymph possessed by her hysterical dance appear. There is nothing but a static and compact block of a myriad of images flooding the wall's space, whose energy seems to be trapped and contained in the immobile juxtaposition.



96 - 99. Details of *The Pages of a Distant Chinese Encyclopedia*.

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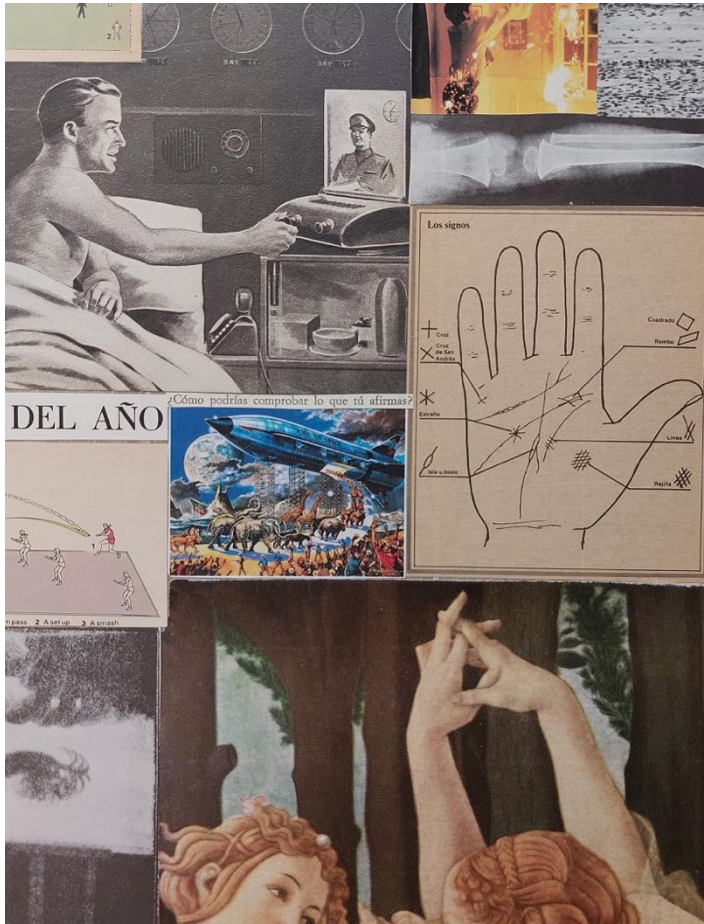
98
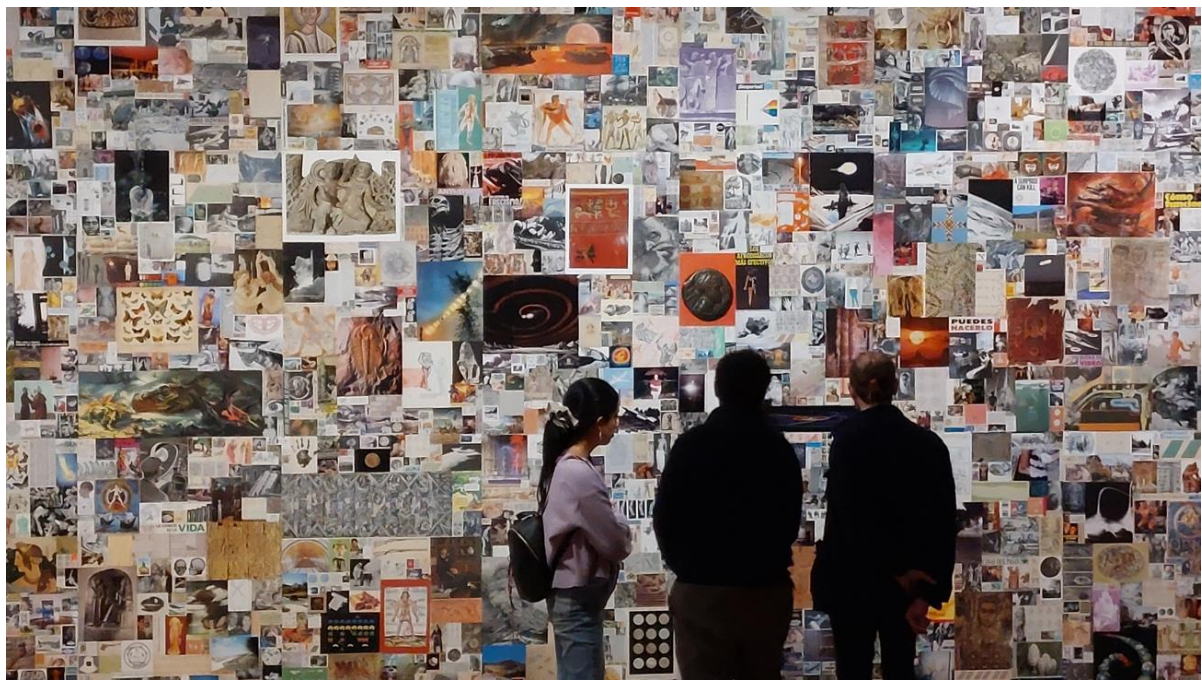


99

Next to this wall, two separate works stand echoing the same sensations just described. On one side, the complete text of *The Waste Land*, a poem written in 1922 by T. S. Eliot, is mounted, which was the only work in the exhibition destined to disappear once the show is concluded. Implicitly, this duration imposes on the visitors a certain expectation to read the full text, much in the same way that curatorial texts are expected to be read when visiting an exhibition. But the truth is that, beyond its particular extension, poems are not 'to be read' like those other texts, where reading is nothing more than the exercise of decoding a certain message. The poem, instead, claims for itself a special disposition:

It is my hope that the reader dares to experience the poem as an opportunity to find new angles and to open a space for whatever he may find there, for whatever may affect him whether it be on the first or subsequent readings. I am proposing a life-long perspective.[94]



100. Installation view of *The Pages of a Distant Chinese Encyclopedia* and the full poem *The Waste Land*, by T. S. Eliot. Museo de Artes Visuales. Santiago, Chile, 2023

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[94] FORNS-BROGGI, ROBERTO. *Knots like Stars: The ABC of Ecological Imagination in our Americas*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016, p. 2

Reading a poem is thus comparable to standing before a painting, gazing upon the marks left on the surface that shows the manual condition of its manufacture, so that reading can be a way to traverse and inhabit that place that constitutes the poem, where the phrases remain resonating beyond their verbal meanings, where the cadences and images persist in memory beyond their mere representational value. Therefore, this presence of the poem is the first thing that appears before the exhibition visitor, imposing from the outset a scale that envelops and surpasses him. And it does so in the same way as we commented regarding the great collage, namely, by causing the extension of the poem to completely fill the entire wall where it unfolds. Visually, thus, a consonance is formed between the exhausting 'texture of the text' with that other great exhausting texture of cut-out images. In this regard, it is worth indicating that *The Waste Land* is a poem of fragments, a true mosaic of all sorts of voices, references to deep past, myths, and many other literary sources, from the Bible, through Dante, Shakespeare, to more modern authors like Baudelaire. And that co-optation that Eliot does of foreign and distant voices produces an echo, a certain whisper, which is what makes it so memorable. Additionally, the poem itself is a journey through a series of figures that in one way or another appeal to the end of the world, to modern desolation and abandonment. And the interesting thing is to discover that the key to that collapse that Eliot shows —cultural, historical, social, and above all personal collapse—has to do to a large extent with the problem of fertility. *The Waste Land* is the physical and spiritual sterility of the human being, in the manner that Alfonso Cuarón's film *Children of Men* (2013) shows the dystopia of a humanity whose apocalypse comes not from a single, abrupt blow of a spectacular downfall but from a gradual yet inescapable global disease of infertility. What revolves then around the question of imagination we have spoken of are ultimately questions about fertility, desire, seduction. So yes, the poem must be read in its entirety.



101. Installation view of *The Waste Land,* by T.S. Eliot. Museo de Artes Visuales. Santiago, Chile, 2023

102, 103. Installation view and details of *The Waste Land*. 380 x 940 cm. Museo de Artes Visuales. Santiago, Chile, 2023

Finally, the last work contained in this first room of the show consists of a small painting that stands alone on the wall at the back of the room. Once again, the problem has to do with scale: if that great mural of cut-outs we just spoke of could be considered an emblem of the madness of the media-saturated life we live in, that is largely because of the dimension in which it is presented, the size, the density, even its immersive quality. In that sense, the small painting of the atomic bomb is already indicating that problem of scale, both due to the radical contrast of size and also because it is probably the very icon of our modern idea of the apocalypse, the falling apart of our very sense of reality:

> What is so monstrous about the atomic bomb is not simply its capacity for destruction, but the more disturbing and radical fact that the very texture of reality seems to disintegrate.[95]

Thus, in an inverse proportion to that of the spectacular monstrosity of its model, this small, coffin-like painting attempts to set a void of emptiness, silence, and stillness around the image.
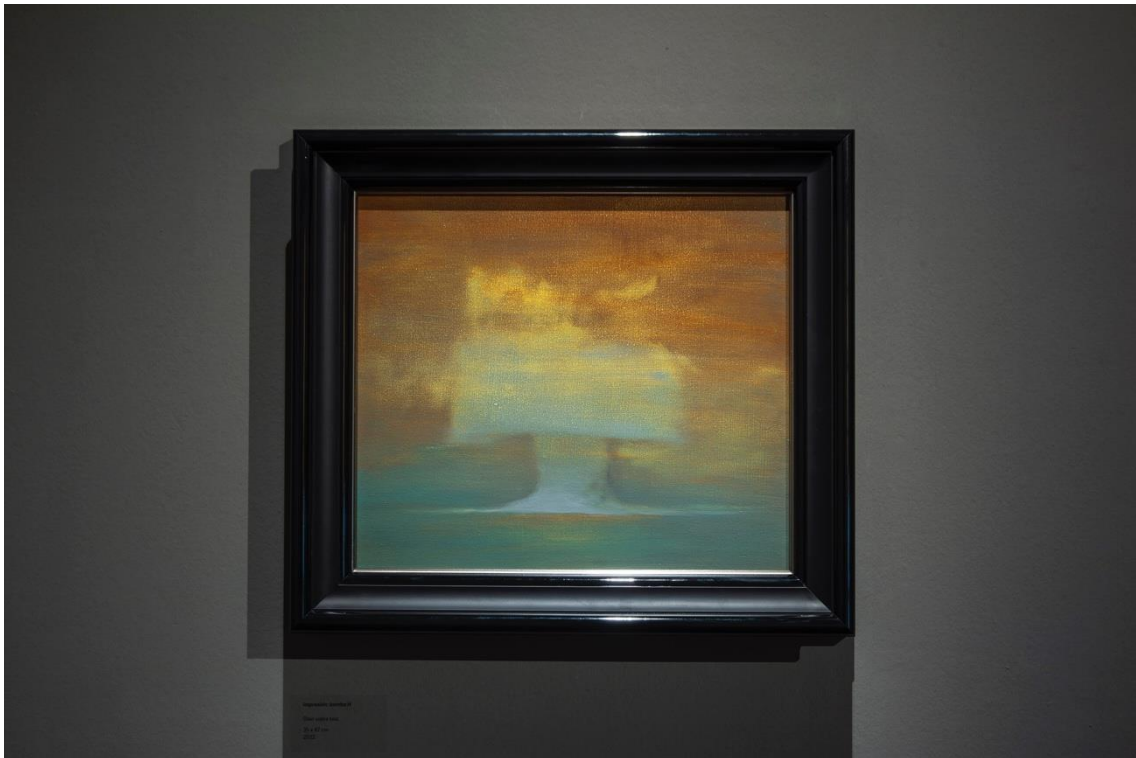


104. Adrian Gouet, *Impression: H bomb*. Oil on canvas, 35x47 cm. 2022.

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[95] ZIZEK, SLAVOJ. Órganos sin cuerpo.: Valencia: Pretextos, 2004, p. 174

105. Above: installation view of
*Impression: H bomb*. Museo de Artes
Visuales. Santiago, Chile, 2023

106. Right: Closed position of
Hieronymus Bosch's, *The Garden of
Earthly Delights*. Oil on oak panel,
1490 -1510.
Museo del Prado, Madrid.

As we ascend to the upper floor of the museum, where the exhibition continues, things change drastically. The first of these changes comes from the architecture of the room. While downstairs we traversed an apocalyptic landscape through the extensive openness of flat and panoramic walls, this new space is crossed by several folds and corners, curved areas, openings that connect to the lower floors, changes in height, and breaks. In short, it is a very active space, in which a lot is going on. Unlike what was happening downstairs, what we find displayed in all these corners is also sharply different: a large group of around eighty paintings of various formats, mounted in a scattered manner, whose rich chromatic load contrasts with the general austerity we had been seeing on the first floor. It is in this dimension of colour where a key resides that once again leads us to *The Garden of Earthly Delights*: unlike the inert matter we saw before, Bosch's panel has now been opened, and with it, we access the profuse promiscuity that characterizes life, the propagation of all kinds of extravagances, visions, strange monsters, fabulous landscapes, dark corridors, and waters charged with powers to transform the dancing bodies that enter and exit the scene. Everything moves, everything dances, everything vibrates in the garden of painting.
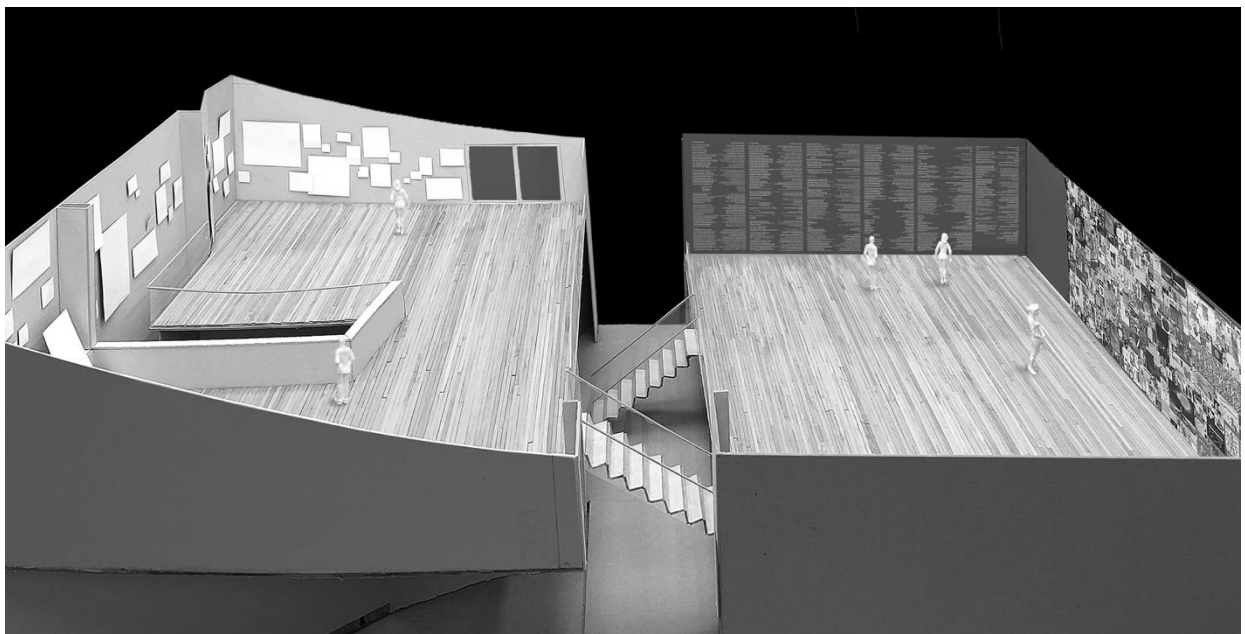


107. Physical scale model of the MAVI museum. 2022-2023
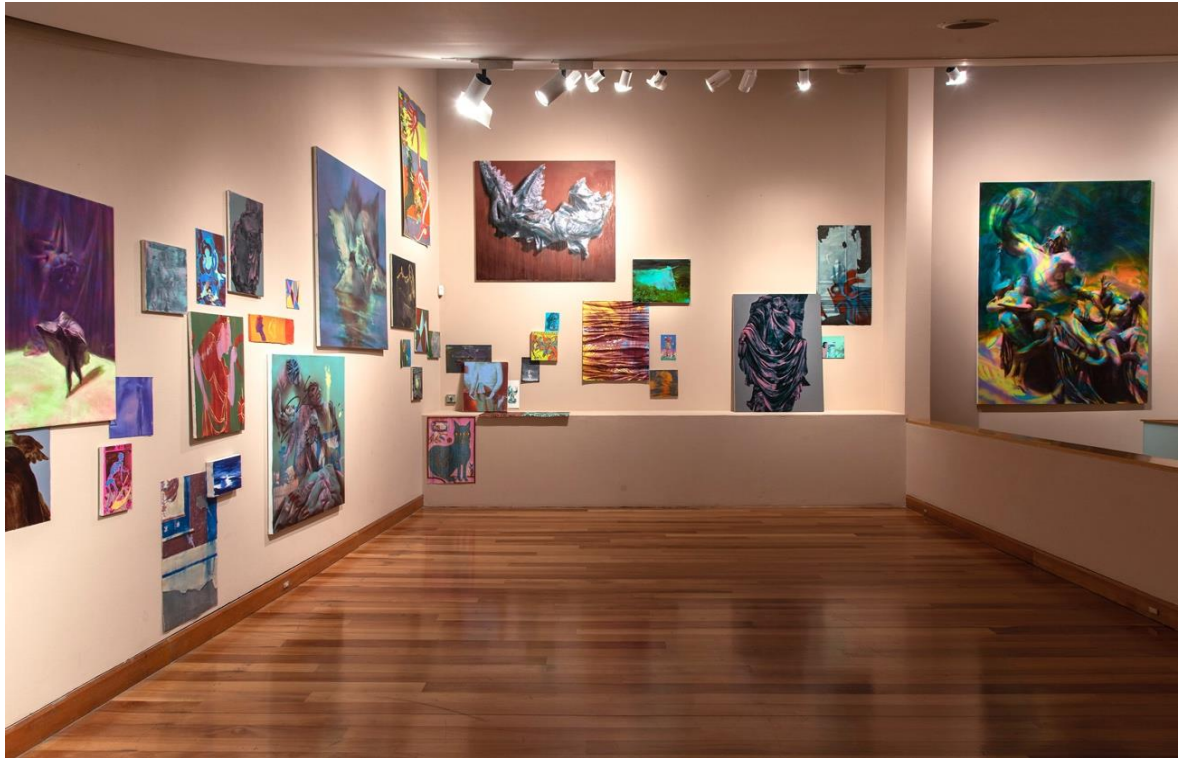
108. Above: installation view of the exhibition at MAVI museum. Santiago, 2023. 109. Below: Open position of Hieronymus Bosch's, *The Garden of Earthly Delights*. Oil on oak panel, 1490 -1510.
Museo del Prado, Madrid.
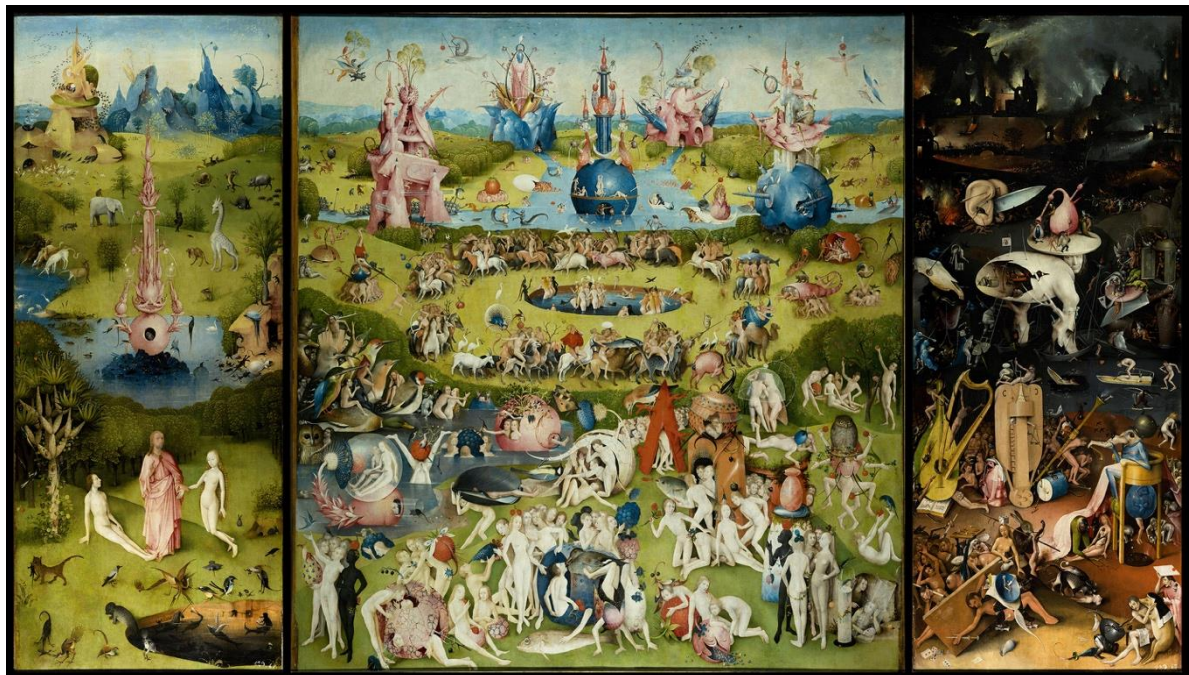
Throughout the ensemble, there are certain recurring motifs: explosions, clusters and raging waters, fossils and ghosts, vestiges of ancient Western cultures, the history of art. An atmosphere of chaos permeates the entire room, which we could associate with the media universe: the overproduction and saturation of images. However, unlike a certain temporality of progress that characterizes this overproduction, filled with clichés and commonplaces, the paintings displayed in this room function as an ongoing symbology, a network of connections between distant and alien materials in continuous transformation, in the sense that the logic by which they have come together can never be considered closed or resolved. By means of that visual diversity, the moment of that encounter seeks to embody an alternative time that allows us to look at and imagine things outside the monopoly of 'know-how', which imposes its conditions not only for productive activities but even creative practices. Most importantly, such variety of themes and references, as well as the arrangement of the paintings on the walls contrasting with each other along their several material qualities, is organized in such a way that they can provoke in the gaze all kinds of connections and resonances between seemingly unrelated elements. In this room, then, what we have seen extensively throughout this thesis occurs: the idea that there is a very attractive perversion in the possibility that, for example, the image of a medieval reliquary resonates with an illustration of a black metal band's album cover that uses all kinds bright colours and materials, all of this only steps away from a painting where we see hands in a gesture of prayer or opening, a gesture that is subtly repeated in the detail of another painting that has been made from a simple domestic scene. The affects that each image evokes dissolve into an unknown field of associations, and suddenly the things we see become capable of becoming almost anything else. So, creating and sustaining these associative networks requires an act of imagination for which a particularly intense type of attention is required, because it transforms mere accumulation —of images, fragments, data— into various forms of aggregation and encounter. The time of that imaginative attention is what makes the difference with that of the progress I spoke of earlier, whose time is one of permanent distraction.

110 - 113. Installation views
of the second floor of the
exhibition.

Museo de Artes Visuales.
Santiago, Chile, 2023

112



113
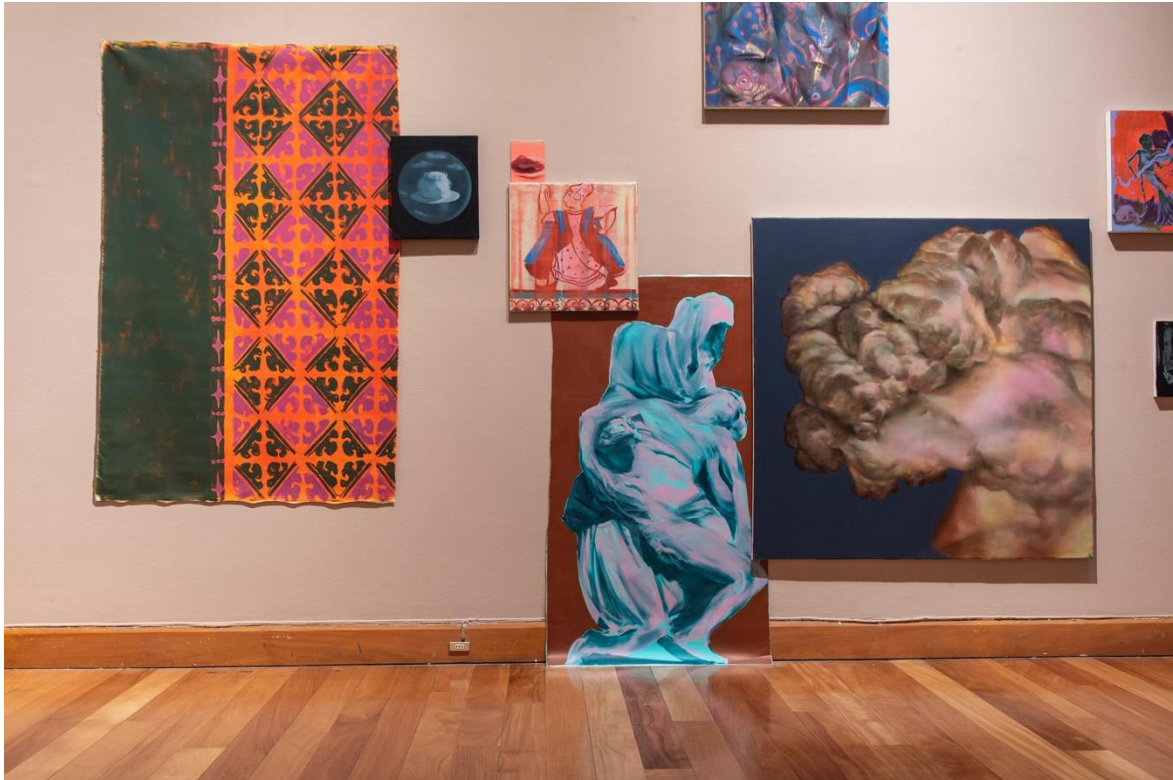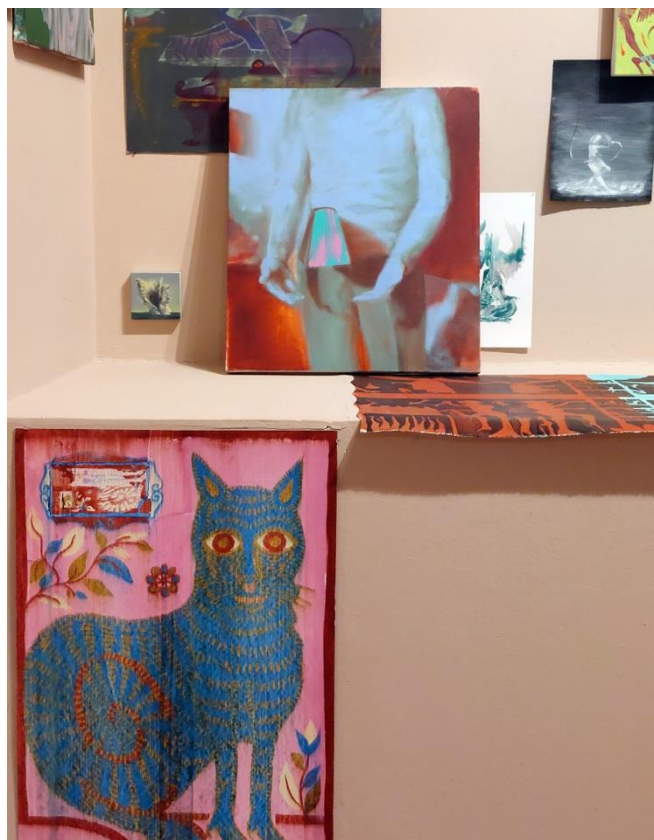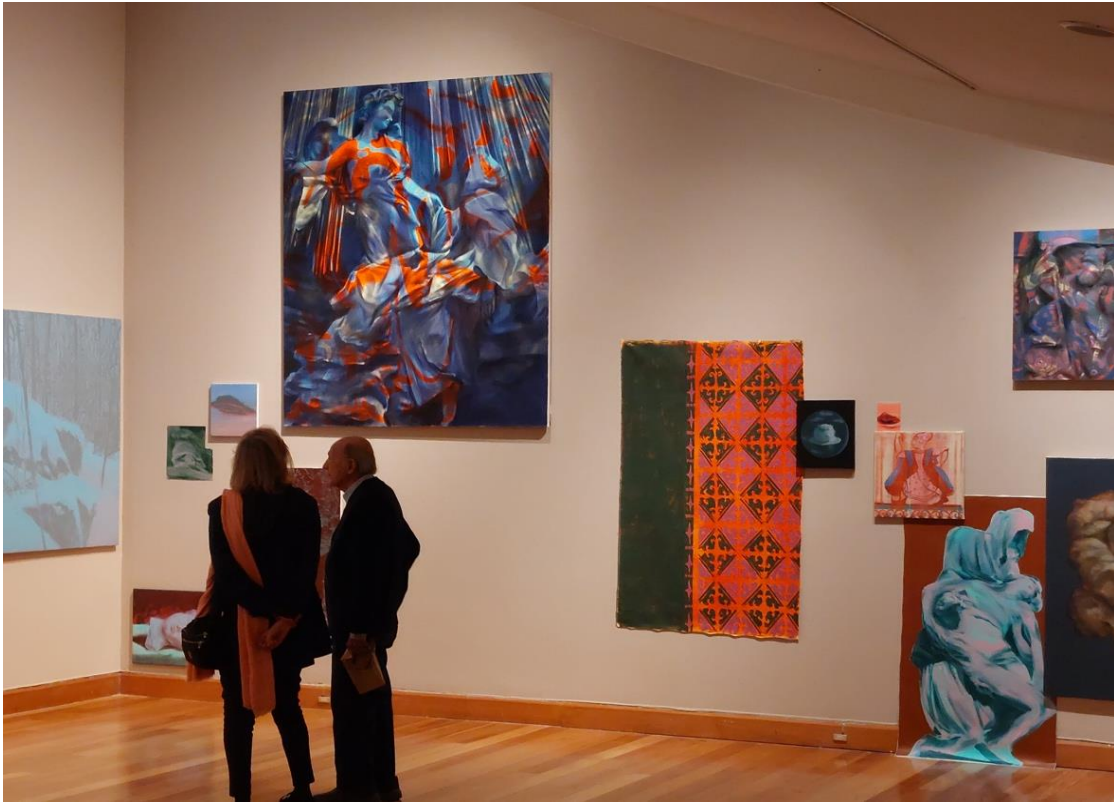
114. Installation view of the second floor of the exhibition. Museo de Artes Visuales. Santiago, Chile, 2023



115. Adrian Gouet, installation view of the second floor of the exhibition *It's Better to Imagine the End of the World than the End of Capitalism*. Museo de Artes Visuales. Santiago, Chile, 2023

This is, in general terms, the overall disposition of the exhibition, which, as we have mentioned, was aimed at unfolding in both rooms of the museum two antagonistic yet mutually involved visions of the theme of the end of the world. If in any way the arrangement of the artworks throughout the show responds both to the spatial and architectural conditions as well as to the several knots around its main theme of the end of times, that is largely due to the way in which both rooms articulate the experience of the image, precisely, at different times. And the key is ciphered in the phrase presented as the title of the entire exhibition: it is better to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. We have already talked about the core of the famous phrase by Jameson-Žižek, and that I have slightly modified: the most eloquent symptom of our crisis of imagination lies in the fact of having reduced the topic of the apocalypse to a common place, a commodity in its own right. Not only because of the enormous popularity we see in the growing series of works and productions in the entertainment industry around all kinds of catastrophes—video games like the "Fallout" series (1997), "The Last of Us" (2013), and "Horizon Zero Dawn" (2017), or in the widespread audio-visual productions of the type of "The Walking Dead" (2010), "Don't Look Up" (2021), "Leave the World Behind" (2023) or even the story of Biosphere 2 itself in "Spaceship Earth" (2021)— but above all because the media business often gains traction through the spectacularization of tragedy by capitalizing on sensationalism, emotional appeal, and the public's fascination with dramatic events. Media outlets recognize that tragic events tend to attract high viewership and engagement. Whether it is a natural disaster, a terrorist attack, or a mass shooting, audiences are drawn to the dramatic nature of these events and seek out information and coverage from news sources. With the rise of 24-hour news networks and online news platforms, there is a constant demand for new content and updates. Tragic events provide a steady stream of material for media outlets to cover, analyse, and discuss, allowing them to fill airtime and drive traffic to their platforms. All of this aggregated under the emotional influence around these images.

In this way, the overall catastrophism to which Jameson-Žižek's phrase points to works as a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy as long as there seem to be no option. Very much like the dystopian thriller film *Children of Men,* we can do anything but to take the attitude of Nigel, a high-ranking British government official, who is also an art collector who owns a large residence filled with "rescued" artwork. When asked about his vision about the imminent disappearance to which humanity is supposedly condemned by the infertility pandemic that afflicts it, he responds apathetic: "I try not to think about it."

Consequently, in what sense should we consider it "better" to dedicate ourselves to imagining that absolute end rather than that of our current economic and political system, so popularly

dismissed as unfair, polluting, even devastating? Weren't we just talking about the current profusion of works by which the apocalypse has become a genre in itself, a mixture of history and spectacle of prediction that unfolds like a macabre dance of disturbing images about the future that awaits us? Why this insistence on imagining in a better way this end of the world, which nonetheless would not necessarily cease to be terrifying and paralyzing?

In our everyday language, we tend to use the term "apocalypse" to refer to the set of figures that, in a generic way, make up what we could describe as the imaginary of the end of the world: representations of the destruction of the cosmos, narratives that describe the disappearance of every living entity, of nature, even of space and time themselves. Apocalypse and end of the world are essentially equivalent terms. But once we delve a little deeper into the theological strands behind these concepts, we begin to find clues that reorient the meanings we can assign to them, many of which are, in the context of the present research project, divergent from the catastrophism we commonly attribute to them. 'Apocalypse' is a word of Greek origin that means 'revelation,' (from *apokalýptein*, 'unwrap,' 'bare'), the terrible and/or joyful uncovering of a picture of the gods. It groups together all the religious texts that deal with prophetic disclosures of symbolic forms of bestowal of meaning and significance upon time, and that were produced from c. 200 BCE, first in Judaism, and flourishing into the Greek-Hellenistic world of the second century CE. But beyond its religious function, the specific cultural force of apocalyptic literature lies precisely in its poetic power:

> In the epochal crises in the history of European Christianity, the Apocalypse ceases to be merely a text: it becomes literary material, or 'fabric.' It serves as a pattern for the interpretation of the phenomenon of the world in terms of salvation history, for the purpose of overcoming crises by 'reading' them. The text is appropriated by the most divergent social groupings. The hierarchical or anarchical attempts at various legitimizations in the name of eschatological salvation nevertheless remain elements of a quasi-infinite history of interpretation. While, for example, in the Middle Ages emperor, pope, and dissidents, in alternation, counted as embodiments of the Antichrist, Christ became the antithetical figure of all authority across the board. In the medieval sense, the Apocalypse is the fabric used in, for example, Dante's Divine Comedy. Here the poet highlights, to be sure, his vision of the next world; but he also designs, with the help of citations from the Apocalypse, a just society of earth.[96]

In this way, the cultural heritage of apocalyptic literature constitutes a reserve where the image articulates time no longer in its mere sequential development but as a unit of meaning, from beginning to end. In this way, it is its visionary character, its revealing power, that can always be

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[96] VON STUCKARD, KOCKU. *Brill Dictionary of Religion.* Leiden: Brill, 2006, p. 120

"used," a source that can be resorted to at any time as the possessor of motifs and figures that at a given moment support the interpretation and understanding of a moment of crisis. Thus, the invitation to reimagine the end of the world is not presented as a parody or irony in the face of what seems an inevitable dystopian scenario. Quite the contrary: in moments of crisis and confusion, the extensive literary and cultural reserve around the apocalypse may well be the place from which we can begin to imagine a new world again, and with it, the encounter with our own capacity to invent it.

In what sense does painting then become a tool, or a fundamental medium to find this visionary, or even creative, dimension of the apocalyptic matrix? How can the choice of colours, visual styles or different pictorial techniques be combined to make possible this encounter with our still unknown capacities to invent the new?

To better understand the scope and significance of this "encounter" it is necessary to consider the effectiveness of painting as an agent that can facilitate it. As the main medium around which this research project is developed, it is useful to compare the qualities of the assembly in each of the two rooms of the museum to see to what extent the most ostensibly material dimension of the images is decisive for this encounter to occur. But we already said it previously in this thesis (p. 75): "not every encounter is desirable. There could also be fatalities of this type: bad encounters, poisoning, intoxication, relational decomposition". Thus, what we are looking for is the fertile element in this encounter.

If we have already spoken about how the first room stages the media accumulation through the absolute and almost literal occupation of the space of the walls —taking up, exhausting every centimetre of it to the point of not being able to add one more image to the great collage, nor one more letter to Eliot's poetic lament, nor even a minimal mismatch in the hyper-centred position of the small painting of the atomic bomb— the second room confronts us with a radically different situation, dominated by the mobile and unstable quality of the network of paintings mounted on it. Derived from the folded and fragmented architecture of the room itself, this movement or instability is also given by the internal structure of each painting, as well as by the interaction between the techniques used in each one of them.

From the earliest stages of production, the paintings are treated based on the relationship of colours established on the palette, seeking to produce between the tones the same unstable quality that we later see in the assembly. Highly saturated colours that are modulated by various greys and lights of a strange naturalism. This whole process of colour regulation can be seen as the germ that will later spread through the other dimensions of the painting, especially its iconographic dimension, where all kinds of references to art history, popular culture, digital images, press photographs,

fragments of paintings coexist. It is at the crossroads of these differences that the encounter we were talking about before takes place, which is also accentuated by the differences between the materiality of the support of these paintings. While there are certain paintings made with smooth tones and flat and thin colours on loose canvases, there are others next to them supported by a thick frame whose canvas carries a considerable amount of paint, which in turn are surrounded by papers and cardboard where the paint is very liquid and transparent in colour, which contrasts subtly with the opacity of other canvases. It is at these intersections of matter, colour and space where it is possible to appreciate the encounter given by painting through its thickness, the variable density of its matter, its concentrations or dispersions.

The encounter of we are speaking of, as it was presented in both rooms of the museum, is well exemplified through one the most relevant methodological references along the present research: the creative practice of Raymond Roussel (1877-1933), a French writer of great influence on many avant-garde movements of the 20th century art, from Duchamp, Picabia and the Surrealists, up to several generations of writers and practitioners. Roussel developed his process along a series of novels, poems, theatre plays, and an even in a publication explicitly devoted to explaining the working principles of his method, which was as simple as this: to find to two identical or almost identical words with totally different meanings, and then expand the kind of gap between them until the very last consequences:

> The prisons, the human machines, the tortuous ciphers, the whole network of words, secrets and signs issue marvellously from a single fact of language, a series of identical words with two different meanings, the tenuousness of our language which, sent in two different directions, is suddenly brought up short, face to face with itself and forced to meet again.[97]

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[97] FOUCAULT, MICHEL. *Death and the Labyrinth. The World of Raymond Roussel.* London: The Athlone Press, 1987, p. 16
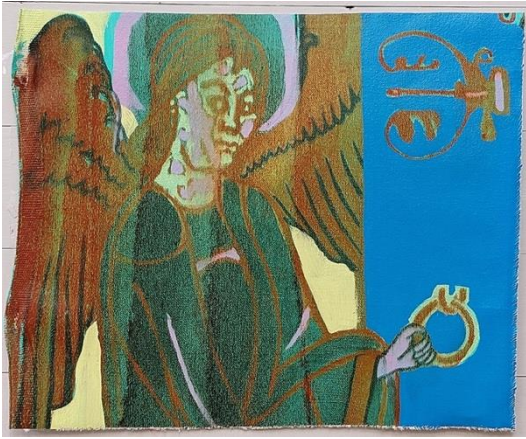
116. Above:

Adrian Gouet, *Winchester fragment*
Oil on canvas, 28x34 cm.
2022

117. Right:

Adrian Gouet, *Totem and Taboo*
Oil on canvas, 100 x 68 cm.
2022

Roussel wrote stories using several kinds of homophonic equivalences, starting, and ending a passage with the very same sentence, or rather, the same sentence with a slight change in the order of letters: the green-felt surface of certain table (*billard*) becomes an old plunderer (*pillard*). So, by a series of repetitions and reflections of this sort, words are forced to abandon their usual meaning as a way of showing their hidden excesses. The improbable proximity of alien things suddenly put together triggers a machinic process by which language doubled itself, a game of joining and rediscovery, misunderstandings abruptly transformed into fabulous insights, the release of a whole flurry of semantic differences by way of the simplest fact about language: "there are fewer terms of designation than there are things to designate."[98] And all this metamorphosis was sustained through a sense of rhyme and rhythm between words, a simultaneous resemblance and disparity by which figures start to proliferate, meanings to deviate and distort, in a drift towards what the researcher Adam Morris refers to as the 'book-machine' of heteronymity in Fernando Pessoa's writings[99]

It is then along this rhyme and rhythm among paintings, colours, shapes, textures, figures, that the machinic character of Roussel's works can be posed at the foundations of my research project as well, the development, akin to an art of memory, of an artistic practice aimed at fostering

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[98] Op. cit. p.16
[99] MORRIS, ADAM. "Fernando Pessoa's Heteronymic Machine". Luso-Barzilian review, Vol. 51 No. 2, (2014), p. 128

encounters, or as Althusser puts it, "to create conditions for a swerve, and thus an encounter"[100]. It is this minimal margin of deviation, of shifting, the almost marginal mismatch that triggers Roussel's hilarious series, and whose successive aggregation leads the narratives to unpredictable, often illogical, and certainly bewildering situations. Likewise, the paintings in the MAVI exhibition seek to induce this same chaining of the unusual through this deviation, across the 'creative misunderstandings' that arises from relating figures strange to each other, making the imagery of the 'End of the World' an opportunity to visualize its reverse:

> The clinamen is an infinitesimal swerve 'as small as possible'; 'no one knows where, or when, or how' it occurs, or what causes an atom to 'swerve' from its vertical fall in the void and breaking the parallelism in an almost negligible way at one point, induce an encounter with the atom next to it, and from encounter to encounter, a pile-up and the birth of a world.[101]

It is this infinitesimal yet radically decisive deviation what is tirelessly sought to be erased by the various examples we have seen of these exhausting totalizations, from Camillo's *Theatro* to Biosphere 2, passing through Borges' cartographic sciences and his atavistic nostalgia for re-enacting 'original tongues' or constructing unequivocal languages, without any trace of ambiguity or clinamen of any kind, the final form of which always acquires that prophylactic character that Baudrillard spoke of. Outside of these schemes, the logic of the prolific excessiveness of the End of the World, as posed in the exhibition, seeks to harness the energy triggered by that residue, which gives rise to a world whose totality can never be exhausted but only experienced in its dispersion, "experienced as the 'given' into which we are 'thrown' and on the basis of which we forge all our illusions"[102]

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[100] ALTHUSSER, LOUIS. *Philosophy of the Encounter. Later Writings, 1978 – 1987*. London: Verso, 2006, p. 171
[101] Op. cit., 169
[102] Op. cit., 179

As viewer's attention and curiosity is precisely directed to the compositional, poetic possibilities of these illusions, as well as to the 'destructive plasticity'[103] behind this more complex idea of the encounter, we are able to grasp how significant for this research the work Aby Warburg was. Living fossils, anachronism, anomalous archives, mnemonic images, serendipity, historical uncertainty, temporal instability: if all these concepts can together account for the kind of approach that my research has taken for confronting the paralyzing effects of current media overload on the interactions, or encounters, between memory and imagination, is largely because the time I spent during my research wandering in that unique *loci* that



118. Adrian Gouet, *Aurora Consurgens*. Oil on canvas, 47 x 35 cm. 2023

characterizes Warburg's work and life, and from which an 'art of imagination', as has been sought throughout this research, can be developed: his *Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek*, the rhizomatic library that Warburg shaped throughout his life, where the boundaries among the fields of knowledge undergo a particular disorientation or 'swerve'.

The Warburg Library, officially ascribed to the University of London after its transfer from Hamburg in 1933 fleeing the Nazis, is renowned for its unique and distinctive qualities. The particular arrangement of books, documents and collections are far from any standard organization as other large libraries normally uses. This arrangement endows the Warburg Library with the capacity to embrace an interdisciplinary approach to the study of culture, art, and history, as it brings together diverse fields, such as art history, anthropology, philosophy, religion, science, among many others, fostering connections between seemingly unrelated subjects as a form of detecting the "afterlife of the antique". The library's open-stack system allows visitors to freely browse and explore its vast collection, promoting the serendipitous discovery of materials, and advancing unforeseen links and intellectual insights.

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[103] MALABOU, CATHERINE. *Ontology of the Accident. An essay on Destructive Plasticity,* trans. by Caroline Shread. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012

To this day, the Warburg Library remains a labyrinth of possibilities where the categories separating different areas of knowledge are somewhat blurred, so that anyone searching for a book on, say, topology and mazes, might come across a manual on medieval alchemy or a study on the symbolic use of colour in the pre-Columbian cultures of Central America. But it is not just about how the Library's structure allows this kind of casual encounters between disparate things, but rather how it prompts the visitor's mind to speculate about some sort of unthought relationship between them, thus altering and reordering the terms and hierarchies of that search. Such speculation or intuition is precisely imagination at work, something that Armen Avanessian has linked to the Greek term 'metanoia':

> The othering that takes place in a metanoia only emerges in a different aspect of the concept of experience, in the sense of "having an experience." It is about encountering a changing object, an encounter in which we suddenly cross the line into the future. What we come across at the same time in metanoia is a new subjectivity: the subject has encountered either a knowledge or an object that has changed its reality.[104]

As we have seen, this 'othering' logic along the encounters is what suffuses Warburg's way of thinking, and that can be summarized in the following idea: *to find what we were not looking for*, that is, the possibility of discovering, through these unpredictable encounters, that we are largely unaware of the scope of our own quests, and even of who we are when delving into it. This is one of the most radical contributions coming from Warburg's 'logic of disorder' into my research, another way to surpass the self-fulfilling prophecies of the 'know-how'.

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[104] AVANESSIAN, ARMEN. *Metanoia*. London: Bloomsbury, 2014, pp. 164 - 165

119. Adrian Gouet, *Memorial.* Oil on canvas, 65 x 50 cm. 2023

But let us recall the instructive words with which David Joselit closes his essay *On Aggregators* (2013), which does not hide his criticism of that 'catastrophic ease', even against one of the most influential voices:

> In *The Society of the Spectacle*, Guy Debord gives a definition of images that is as influential today as Clement Greenberg's association of modernism with flatness was in the mid-twentieth century. With stunning brevity, Debord declared in 1967: "The spectacle is capital accumulated to the point where it becomes image." The partial truth and poetic power of this slogan tends to veil how reductive, even caricature, it is. For if we reduce images to the epiphenomena of brute accumulation it is certainly time to give up on art. In fact, modern art developed many alternate means of understanding accumulation, including but not limited to collage and montage, which introduces jarring visual disjunction into conditions of media accumulation, the readymade, which undermines the identity between a commodity and its image; and more recently the "archival impulse," by which formations—or multitudes—of images can produce alternate epistemologies. In these strategies, modern art renders the unevenness and precariousness of accumulation articulated. Unlike "the" spectacle, it does not totalize.[105]

It is precisely along this line drawn by Joselit that I have come to slightly change the famous Jameson-Žižek's dictum for the title of my exhibition at MAVI, drawing on the model of aggregators as an alternative to accumulation. In the very production of this show I have attempted to express the fruitful side of apocalyptic imagination, no longer reduced to its sole tragic expression but resorting to its own and original visionary character, that is, the apocalypse as a literary genre focused on the extreme experience of time as a matter of vision, a self-reflective image that makes the viewer think and move around the activity of depicting an impossible-to-see object of depiction.

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[105] JOSELIT, DAVID. "On Aggregators". October 146, Fall 2013, p. 18

# Conclusions

Throughout this thesis we have explored the fluctuations and paths of my artistic practice, as well as that of a series of literary and cultural references, where the question about the new is not presented as the search for something absolutely original, without any precedent, but as something similar to a *déjà vu*, a time disruption in our experience brought about by the encounter with the unexpected, the unpredictable singularities that certain forms of interaction between memory and imagination can suddenly produce, the 'flashing moment' that Benjamin spoke of. This kind of bursting time, as it has appeared along the different contexts around my painting practice, can be linked to the notion of *kairos*, by which the Greeks pointed to a temporal dimension that surpasses the sequential frame of chronological time and instead reveal the prominence of the occasion, the circumstance, the contingencies around an enabling moment for something to occur, and that demands swift response and action, the right time at which something must be done.[106]

But far from the technical and intellectual sophistication that we have seen in many of the references cited here, that 'flashing moment' is perhaps something more like a violent and shameless annihilation of the illusion, or rather, the *desire,* to attribute to the world much more order than really exists in it —from where all the conspiracy theories that have flourished so much in these times of ecstasy and confusion, including my 'bureaucratic spell', come from. If this annihilation can be somehow view as the main goal behind the 'othering' power that we have talked about at length in this thesis, I would like to bring, to use it as an open conclusion, one last literary figure that may help visualize the character of the search for otherness that has gone through this thesis, as well as to project its possible future developments. This figure comes from *The Roulette Player*, a short story in which Mircea Cărtărescu exposes with eloquent brutality such othering drive we have been talking about.

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[106] HEREMANS, STEPHANIE (Ed.). *The Right Moment. Essays Offered to Barbara Baert*. Leuven: Peeters, 2021

The story takes place in the underworld of an undetermined city in Interwar Europe, where a writer in agony recounts in his memoirs some of his impressions of the Roulette Player, an unfortunate man who gives the story its name. The Roulette Player is a rudimentary individual, corroded by a terrible life and especially by misfortune, and who is remembered by the narrator when he tells how he came to know him in the gangland of Russian roulette. Under strict measures of anonymity and secrecy, the game of Russian roulette brought together a series of people from the most diverse stripe to place bets on the possibility that the single bullet from a revolver could blow the head out of the roulette player on duty. The roulette players were normally beggars or adrift people whom some guys called 'patrons' were recruiting to offer them money in exchange for serving as cannon fodder in this game, risking death in front of the bettors eager to witness the performance of truly tempting fate. In general, the roulette players dared to accept this crazy invitation once or twice, and after that it was unlikely that they would survive a third time, or that they would endure the horror of a moment like that again. But the Roulette Player, with capital letters, bursts into this scene initially as one more of these poor souls who nevertheless survives again and again, reaching mythical dimensions by escaping death after loading the drum of the revolver with six bullets. Some suspect that he has a pact with the devil (another conspiracy theory), but it is nothing more than a foolish and simply brilliant gesture that the narrator invokes to explain this miracle that gives life to the story: knowing himself to be miserable and marked by chronic bad luck, the Roulette Player has the slightest cleverness to put the gun to his temple, convinced that he is going to kill himself. But since he had always been a failure and had never in his life experienced the joy of winning even the most trivial of games involving chance, he could do nothing but fail in his attempt to commit suicide. Thus, simply by betting against himself, the Roulette Player triumphed: by making his failure fail.

This is the kind self-doubling behind the 'othering' power that this project has sought to trace and provoke through the interaction of painting and archives, the ability to alter each other as a way of breaking the closure of the cliché, the standardization of our capacity to glimpse the limits of what is imaginable. For that, I assume that there will be as many possible methods as there are artists who are wanting to do strange and exciting things. We have already seen the ways in which contingency gave Cruzvillegas' works all the vigour of their instability, as well as the haphazard method with which Mark Tansey delegated the generation of the illogical themes of his paintings to a roulette wheel; in a similar form of depersonalization, Paul Neaugu founded a collective of four fictional artists in the early 1970s to exhibit a series of drawings with them; John Cage used the *I Ching* and coin tossing to compose his 1951 *Music for Piano*, from which the *Cage paintings*, those enormous abstract paintings by Gerhard Richter, come from; Wade Guyton 'incorrectly' uses different types of printers to paint from error and accident, and Francis Bacon painted in his own way constantly

looking for an accident to occur, and it was also a famous accident that gave the *Large Glass* the characteristic mark that Duchamp liked so much.

All of these mechanisms, as well as those of my own artistic practice throughout this project, come to show a kind of absence of the subject or author, the will to suspend or at least momentarily exceed the pre-eminence of consciousness and the shallowness of its intentional configuration by delegating on autonomous procedures the expectation of results that are as unanticipated as they are powerful for opening new routes. And this is when the figure of the 'allegorical machine' that titles this research project reveals its ultimate meaning: in its capacity to work both as a technique as well as an experience of time brought about the encounter among the alien and strange, the structure of transfers by which images become something other (*allos*, 'other' + *agoreuei*, 'to speak') by virtue of the way in which they are placed in unusual arrangements, thus creating an impossible *loci* for an endless metamorphosis, in what Benjamin described as the "suddenness of discontinuity":

> This is the quality T. S. Eliot attempted to capture in "The Waste Land" by paraphrasing Baudelaire in the phrase *Unreal city*, and suddenly seeing the crowd on London Bridge as denizens of the vestibule of Dante's hell. The experience of allegory as a sudden change of referentiality becomes its foremost characteristic.[107]

The way in which the future is linked to these allegorical mechanisms will then depend on how we move in the shifting lands where desire intersects with the risks that all creative activity entails. Perhaps it is this instability that Paul Claudel described regarding Rembrandt's *The Night Watch*, when he said that a composition is "an arrangement en train de se désagréger", an arrangement in transit of falling apart. In any case, archives, paintings and all their possible interactions will continue to resonate with memory and imagination as they are put in motion by some kind of desire, although it is worth remembering that it was also a desire that the gamblers addicted to Russian roulette were eager to satisfy. Whatever our choice, this project is just an attempt to recognize such ambiguity at the flashing moment when loading the revolver and choosing a strategy. And in that contingency is where a 'poetics of the encounter' can find its place: in the creation of something that could not be imagined until the moment it was made. That is why it is worth turning once again to Pessoa, one of the masters of self-doubling, to imagine an artistic practice that abandons the instructionist logic of *know-how* and surrenders to the uncertain yet seductive fluctuations of a *no-how*: "I will be whatever I want, but I have to want whatever it is"

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[107] COWAN, Bainard. "Walter Benjamin's Theory of Allegory". New German Critique, Winter 1981. No. 22, p. 120

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APPENDIX: Wastebooks as the archive

The **Wastebooks** are the set of ten notebooks developed during the years of research for this project (2019 - 2023). They initially emerged to fulfill the function of being the studio space that I had to abandon for a long time, due to the quarantines imposed during the covid-19 crisis. Once the restrictive measures were over, the practice of composing these **Wastebooks** continued to be the basis of my artistic practice, becoming a fundamental tool of the project, in its particular function of serving as an interface for all my ventures in the field of painting.

This appendix presents a brief selection of pages from these **Wastebooks**, which nevertheless fulfill the function of directly showing the logic of the encounter between countless kinds of pictures, notes, photos, sketches, and which can be seen throughout them. In this way, the **Wastebooks** can be properly considered as the archive that this research project has sought to develop.

Estando junto con viejos amigos
tree nuevas aventuras.
Números de Suerte 1, 27, 36, 42, 44, 49

FACSIST REALISM ①

ACCIDENTS TO ICONOCLASTS

BAS — RELIEFS ②

PICTURES ABOUT MAKING PICTURES

UNCANNY DOMESTIC ~~RARE~~ SCENES

WILD TALENTS

ODD CLOUDS

NATURE WEIRD ⑩

MINOTAUR - LIKE

PHANTASMOGRAPHY

FALLS FOLDS ⑦

RUINS _ FRAGMENTS

③

SIMULACRA

PHOTOS OF JOSE CALMAN

⑤

④

⑨

DIAGRAMMATIC

TELEPORTATION AND FLOATING BODIES

UNREASONABLE FOSSILS

⑪

ONE-DIMENSIONAL IMAGES

MASKS DOLLS AUTOMATONS

⑥

⑧

MYSTICAL LIGHTS

RITUALISTIC AND DANCE

STAGES
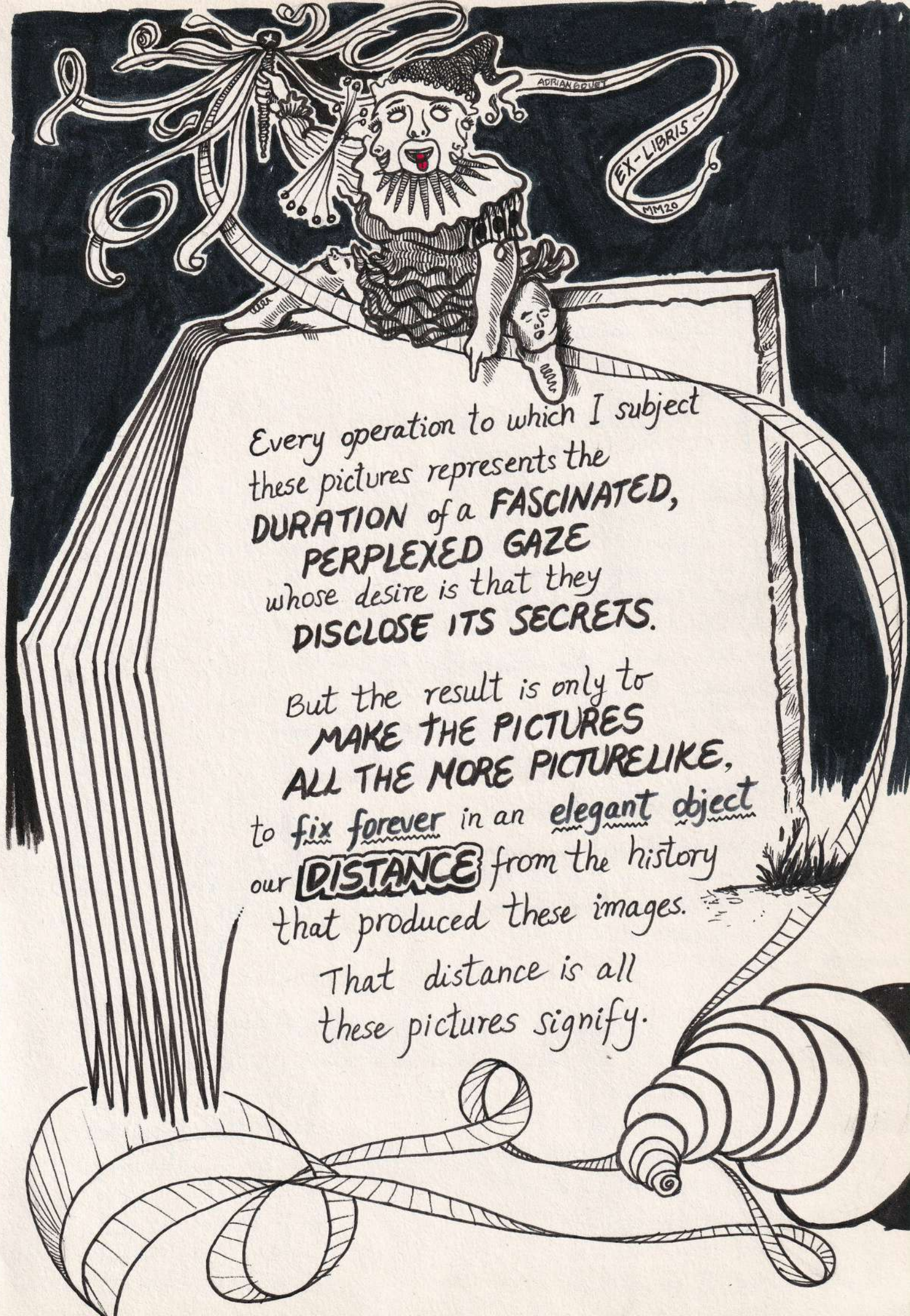


Every operation to which I subject these pictures represents the **DURATION** of a **FASCINATED, PERPLEXED GAZE** whose desire is that they **DISCLOSE ITS SECRETS.**

But the result is only to **MAKE THE PICTURES ALL THE MORE PICTURELIKE,** to _fix forever_ in an _elegant object_ our **DISTANCE** from the history that produced these images.

That distance is all these pictures signify.

"The logic is essentially geometrical and is best studied via appropriate *DIAGRAMS*"



FALLING

RISING

Ab = G#

ABSTRACT IDEAL
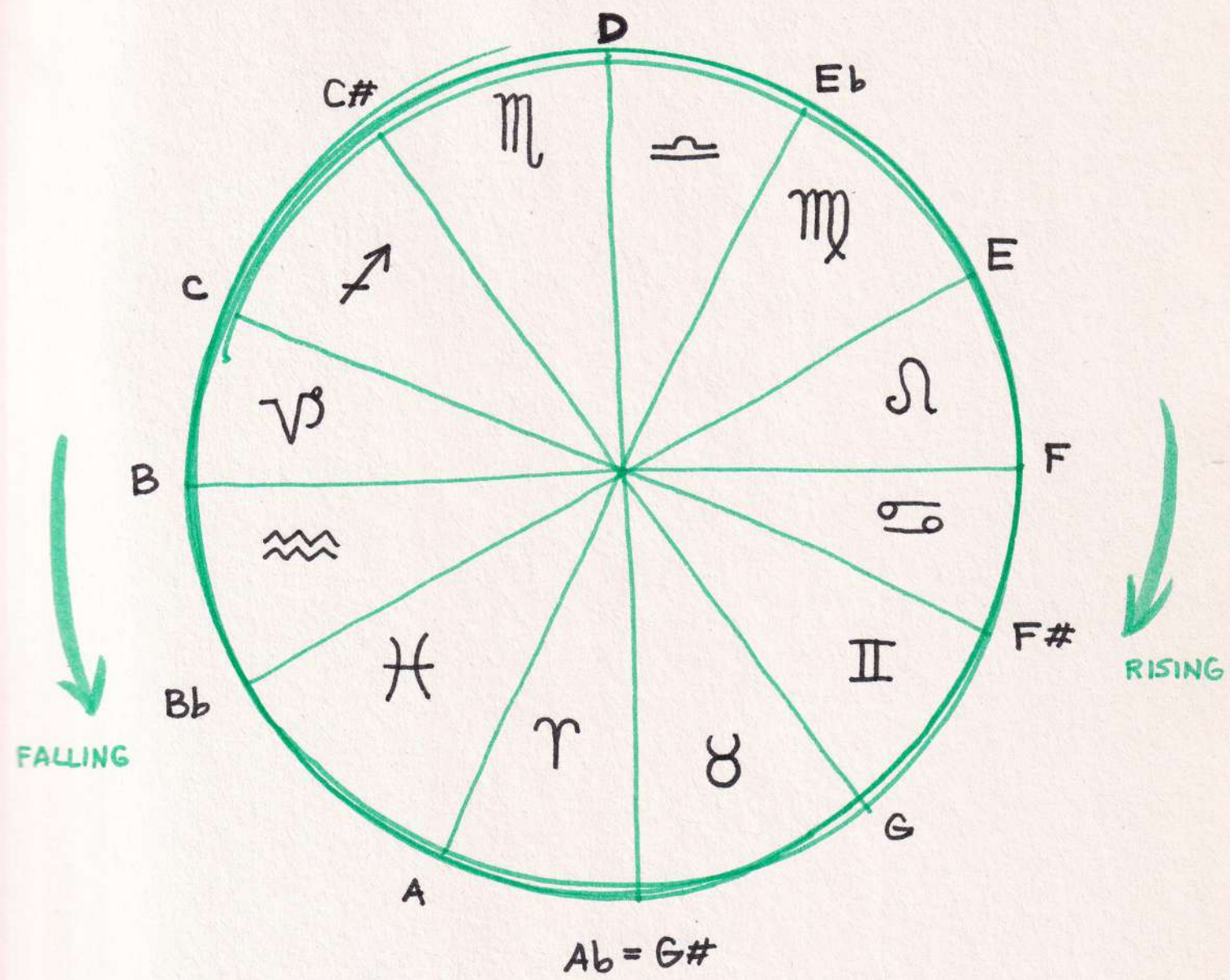
MNEMOSYNE ⟩ MUSES ⟶ MUSIC and MEMORY

Zeus

MNEMOTECHNICS

THE BODY-STONE INTERFACE
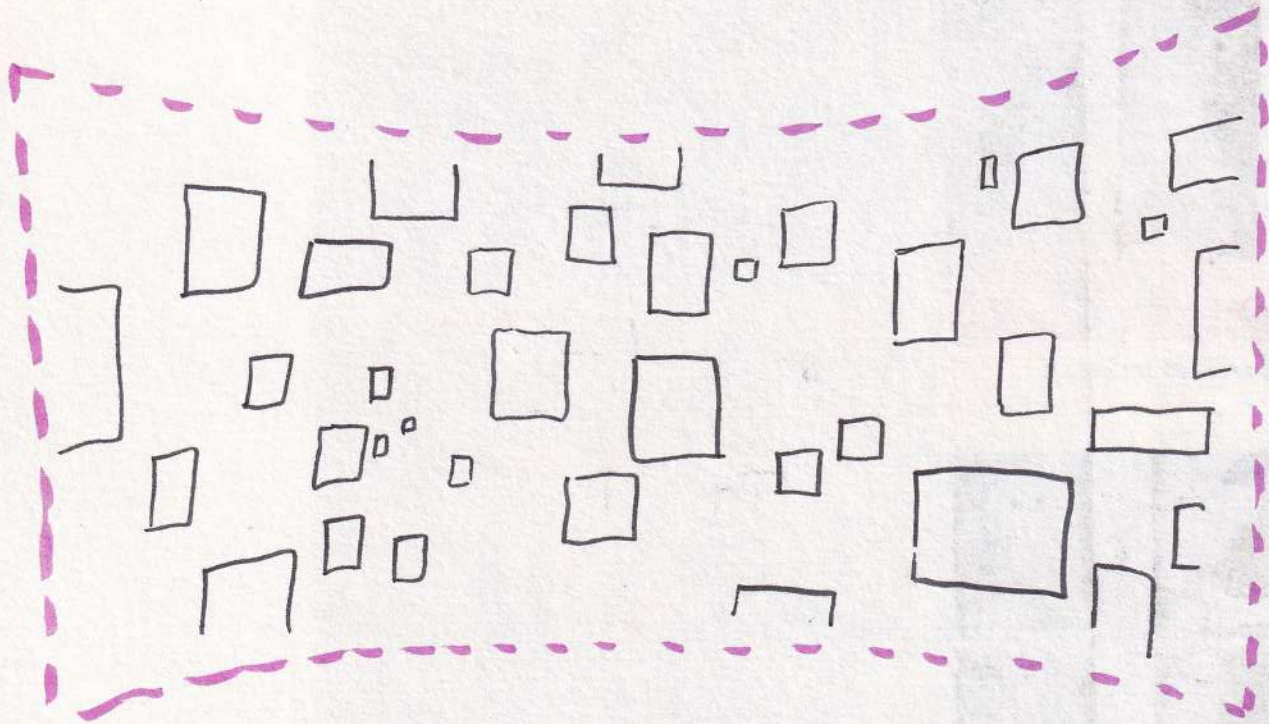
" is not that stone tools are proxies
of mind but something closer to
the reverse: mind as an outgrowth
of the body-stone interface "5

sonic
writing

Tony Iron 2015:68

CREAR UN
........ ESPACIO

LA IGUALDAD, enseñaba Jacotot, no es ni FORMAL ni REAL.



La igualdad es fundamental y ausente,...
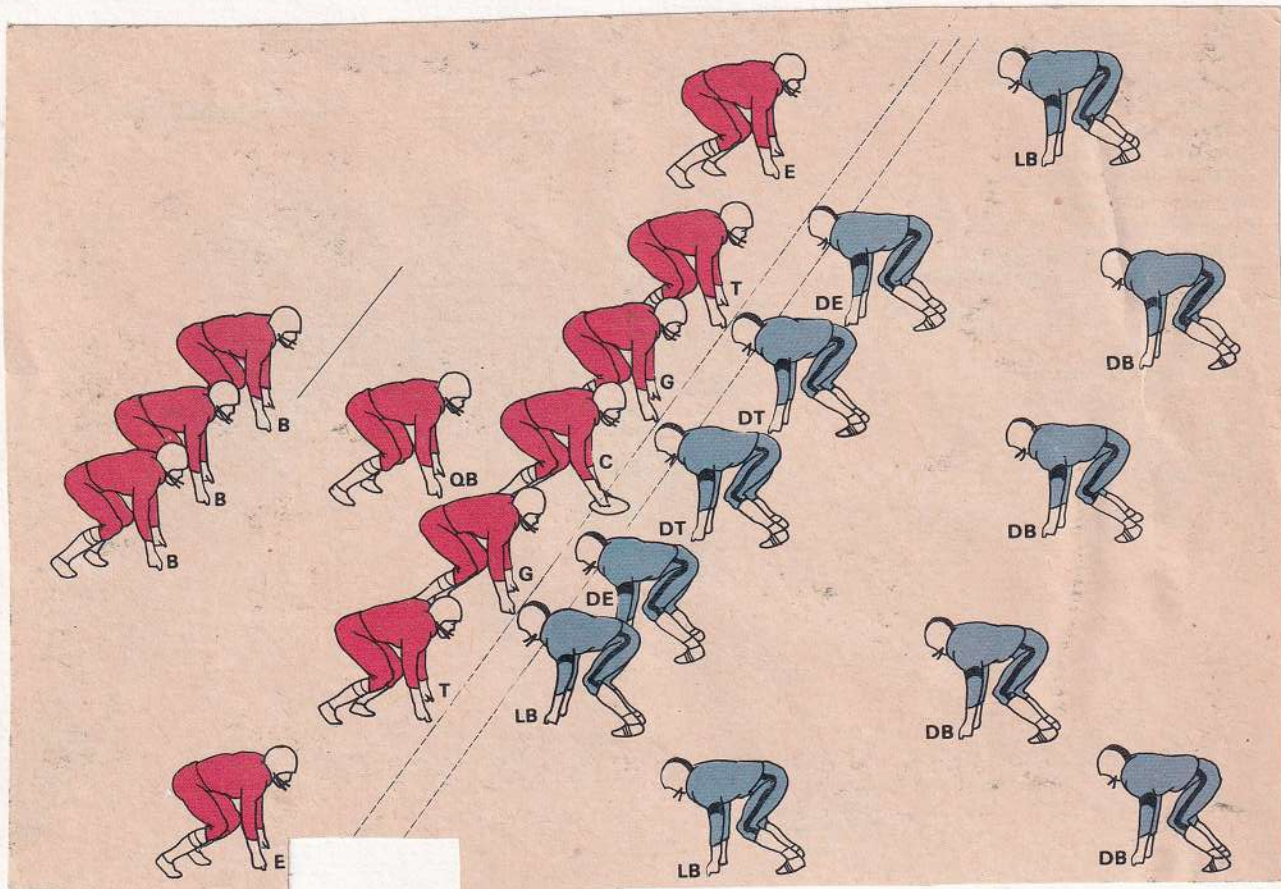


No consiste ni en la enseñanza uniforme de los niños de la República...

... ni en la disponibilidad de productos a bajo precio en las góndolas de los supermercados.





es actual e intempestiva...
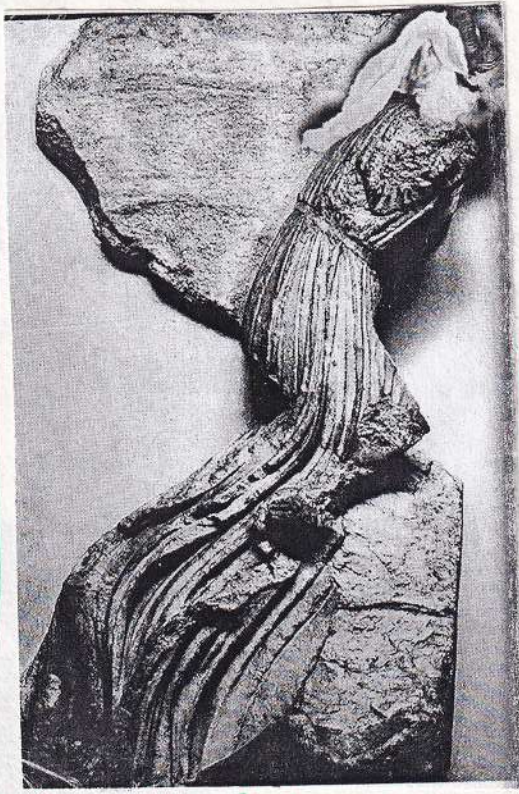
Este el "El hombre de Rendswühren"
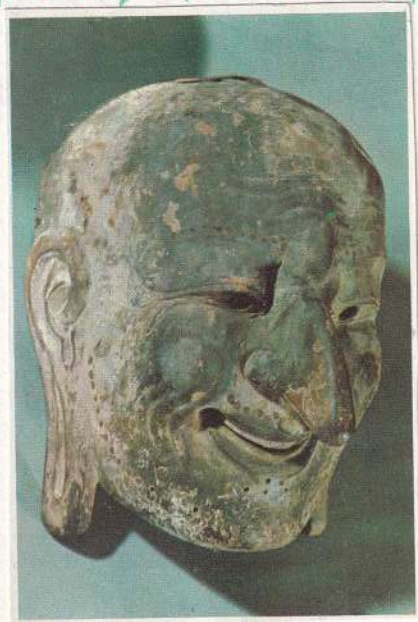
Esto podría ser un diagrama... o su comienzo
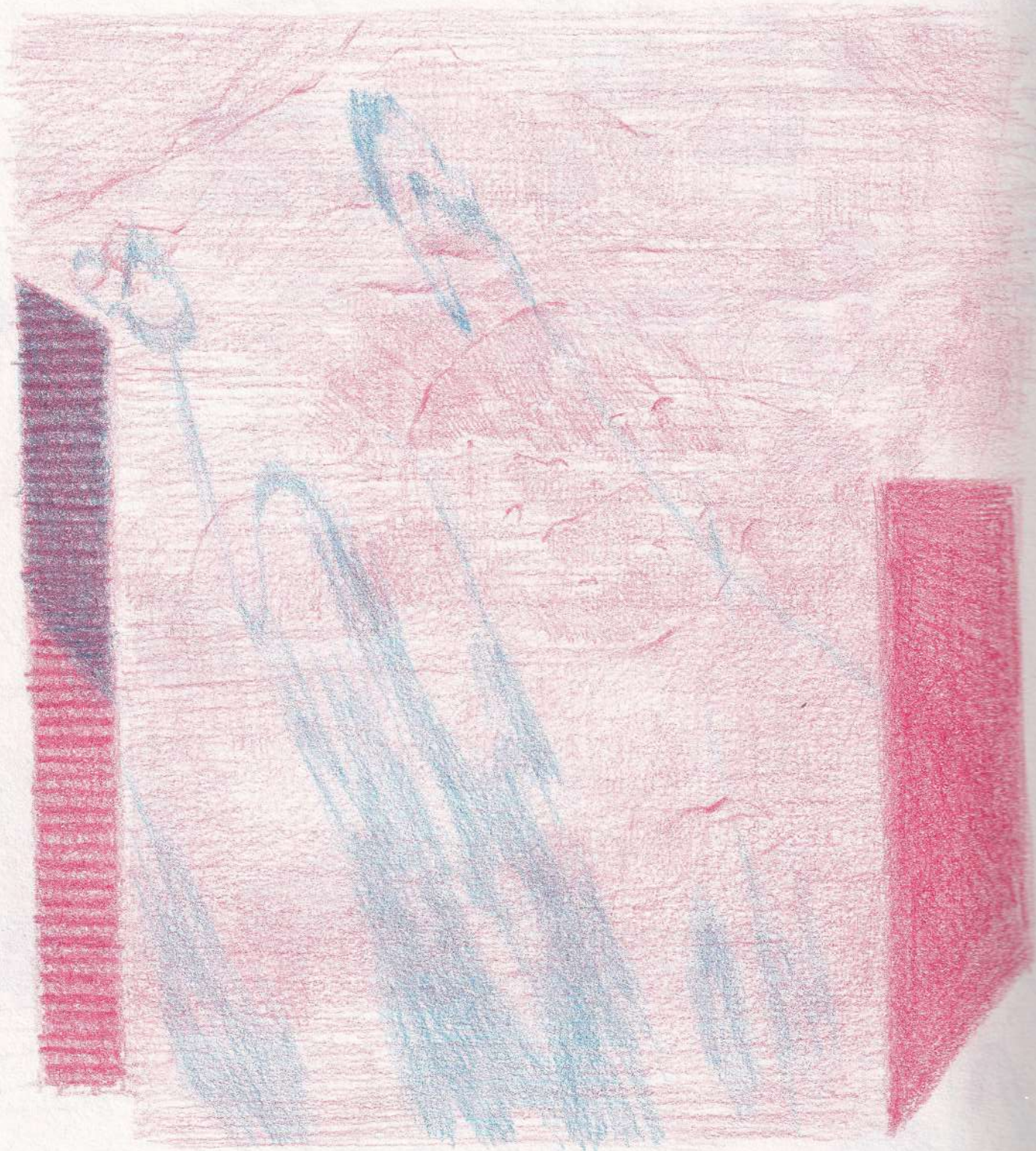


"The speculative techniques of various poets today evoke such alterities: they glimpse other zones within an integrated capita-list-world-system, or they emphasize the gaps, the rifts, and discontinuities in this system's workings, or they imagine other horizons to come. They develop vocabularies and forms that generate, as Kelley writes, "cognitive maps of the future, of the world not yet born".

RATHER THAN DEVELOPING ELABORATE PLOT STRUCTURES OR PORTRAYING THE COMPLEX TECHNIQUES OF ALTERNATIVE WORLDS, POETIC SPECULATIONS OFTEN CONVEY DISTILLED, DEFAMILIARIZING LOGICS OF SUBJUNCTIVITY THAT IMAGINATIVELY ALTER, DECELERATE, OR SIDESTEP SEQUENTIAL OR PROGRESSIVE LOGICS → NARRATIVE AND HISTORICAL.

Potes para agua/aceite
Delantal
Toalla Nova
Frascos pa pinceles.
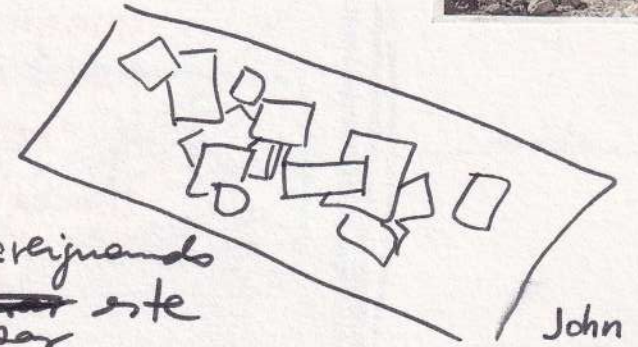




Se está averiguando
como usar este
descubrimiento
→ con un aparato?
artefacto?

John Bablessari.
Diego Maguiña

In this way, the
Strangement-effects
of these works,
REFRAME the PRESENT
as subject to
renegotiations and
unexpected turns.



Lo especulativo evoca
alguna especie de
ALTERIDAD

# ESOTERIC TIMES

Composición del N-14
Corteza: 7 electrones
Núcleo: 7 protones y 7 neutrones

Eclectic ---- **NEW AGE**    The histories of Western Esotericism (Occultism)

Apocalyptic Bias (conspiranoid delirio)    Zeitgeist

Counter culture

Quizá el New Age, por su misma condición de indefinible no delimitable capaz de ser cualquier wea, deba ser mirado estudiado no como desde un programa de ideas sino como un SÍNTOMA

Mystery Tradition ⟹ counter culture of

↘ Pop culture

Enlightment Religion Science

New Age as Pandemics

**COMMA**  A SMALL DISAGREEMENT BETWEEN TWO DIFFERENT DEFINITIONS OF A TONE

D
C#
Eb
C
E
B
F
Bb
F#
A
G
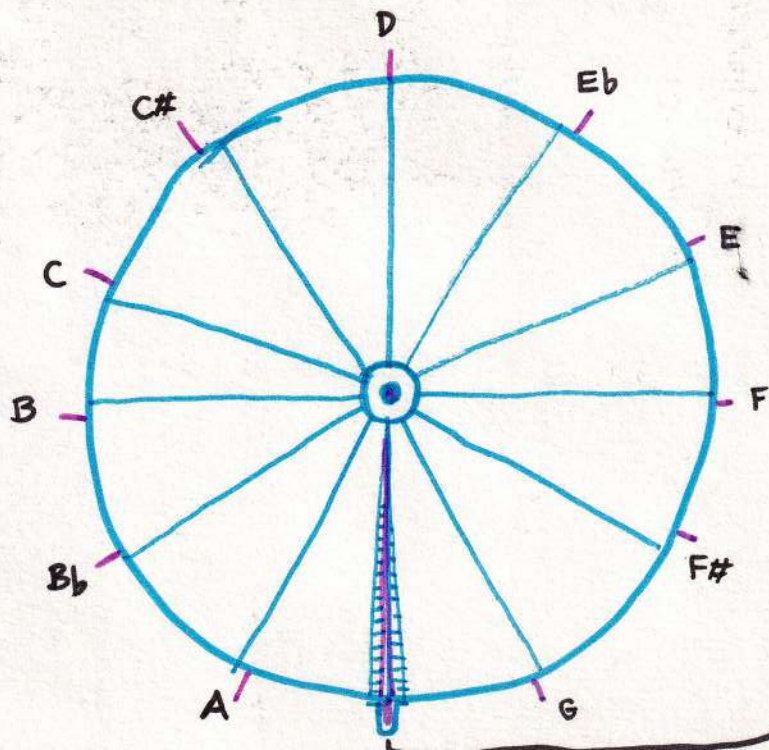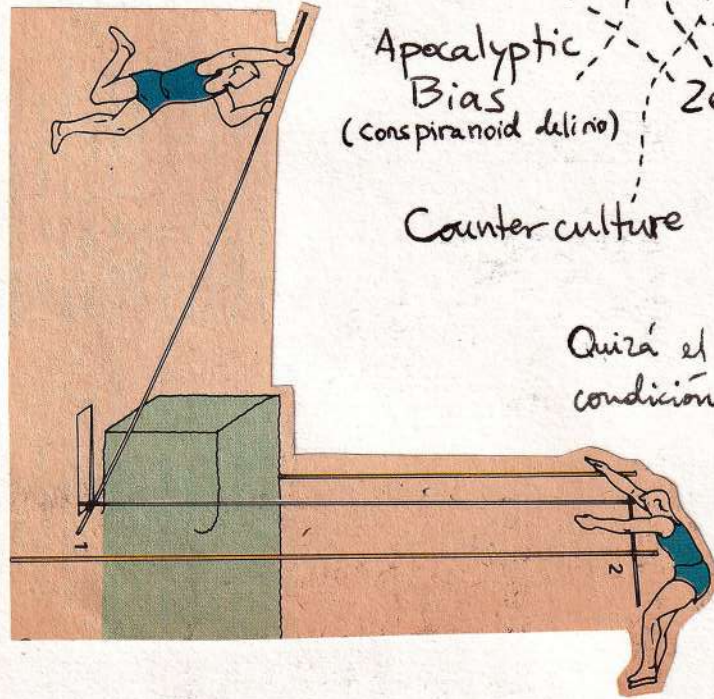
G# ≠ Ab    PYTHAGOR  729/512
ab ≠ gb    JUST      45/32
G# = Ab    EQUAL     √2
           TEMPERAMENT
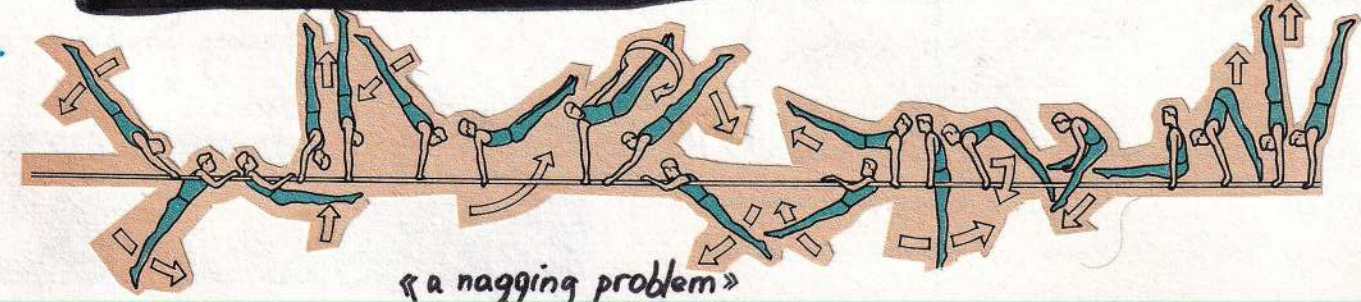
《a nagging problem》

CHIMERA
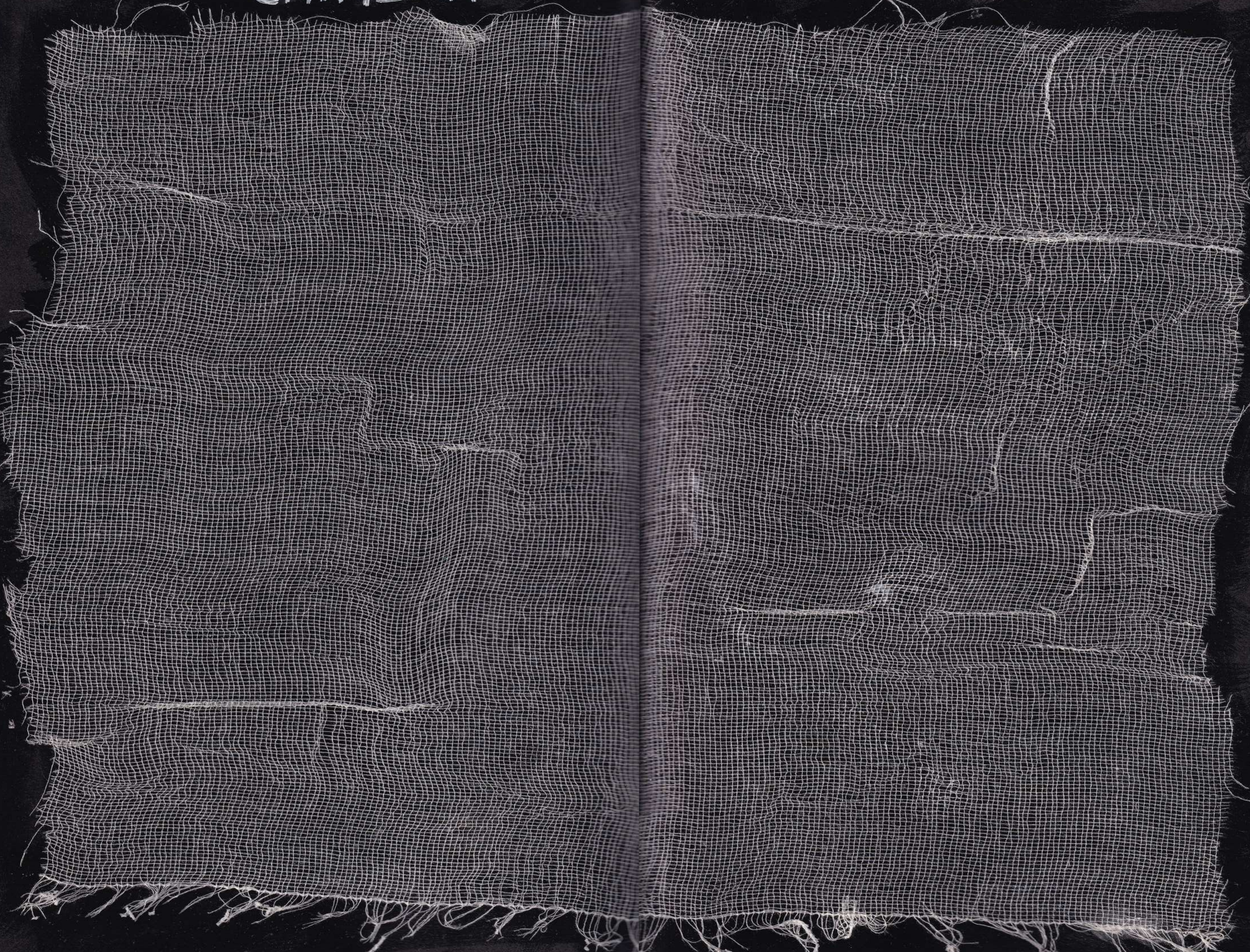
A SHIFT IN THE ONTOLOGICAL FIELD

Los croqueras son un
REGISTRO de la CONTINGENCIA......

Interesante lo "constructivo", las dif.
hipótesis constructivas de Buena Vecin
dad:
1. Escritura lineal oriental A
2. Escritura lineal occidental A
3. Escritura lineal oriental B
⋮
n. Escritura parentésica (desde dos
bordes simultáneamente)

⮕ ver Cómo se ajusta
se cierra
se calza al alcanzar
la saturación en
grados x que no
s solo repletar

↳ ver PATTERNS

↳ ver las
3 COMMAS en acción

"Buena vecindad n° 1"
es análogo a:

cosa textil

A TEXTILE
MODEL AS WELL

A 0060609
BILBAO
Lo Franco
237
JORMAR
A 0060607

Cuba CORREOS 1986 20
MARX LENIN
CARÁCTER SOCIALISTA DE LA REVOLUCIÓN
25 ANIVERSARIO

Elasticidad

AN AGGREGATOR MODEL

...Y UNA ESPECIE DE
CALDO CRIATURERO.

TÍTULO DE LA SERIE:

"LA BUENA
VECINDAD"

etc

Recortes sobre cartón
Dimensiones variables
2021-2022

EJERCICIOS de ESPACIO

¿Cómo    un
Saturar el espacio?

Sin repletarlo

¿Cómo agregar estos
elementos?

→ LUCRECIO
El género

08
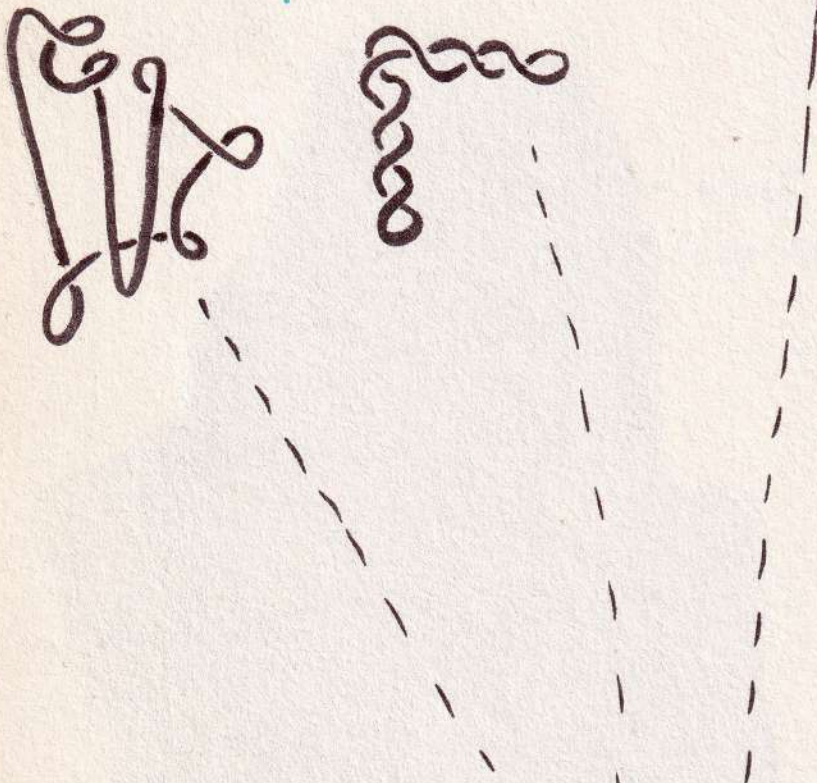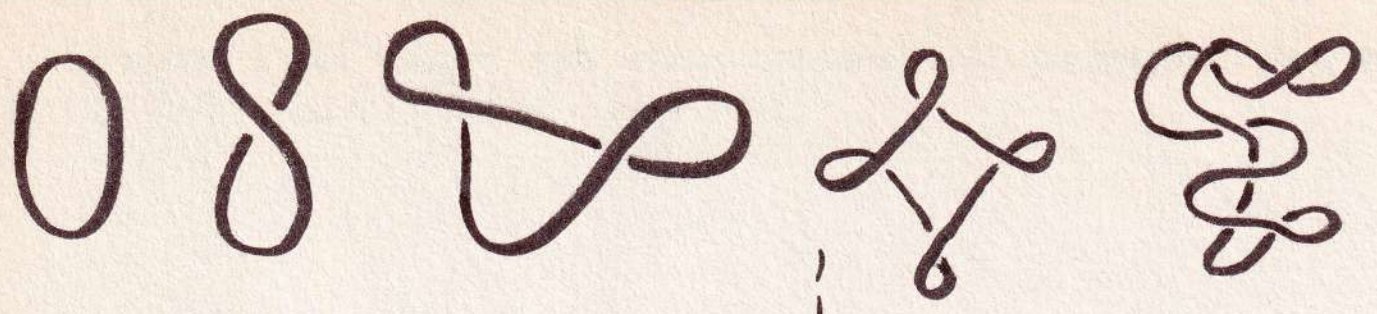
AN INFINITY OF
ATTRIBUTES
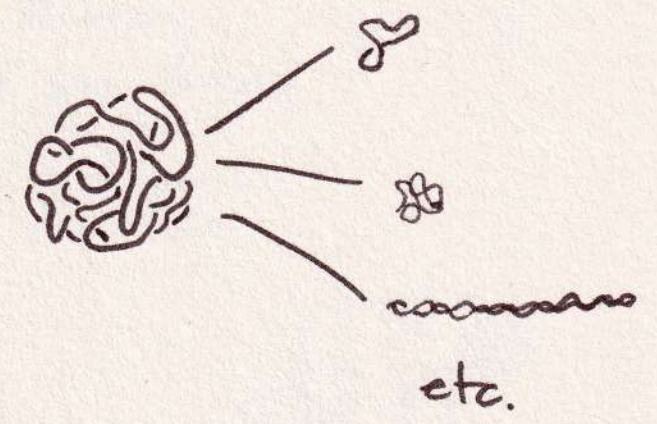
etc.

ONE SINGLE
SUBSTANCE

KNOTS

I

exceeds
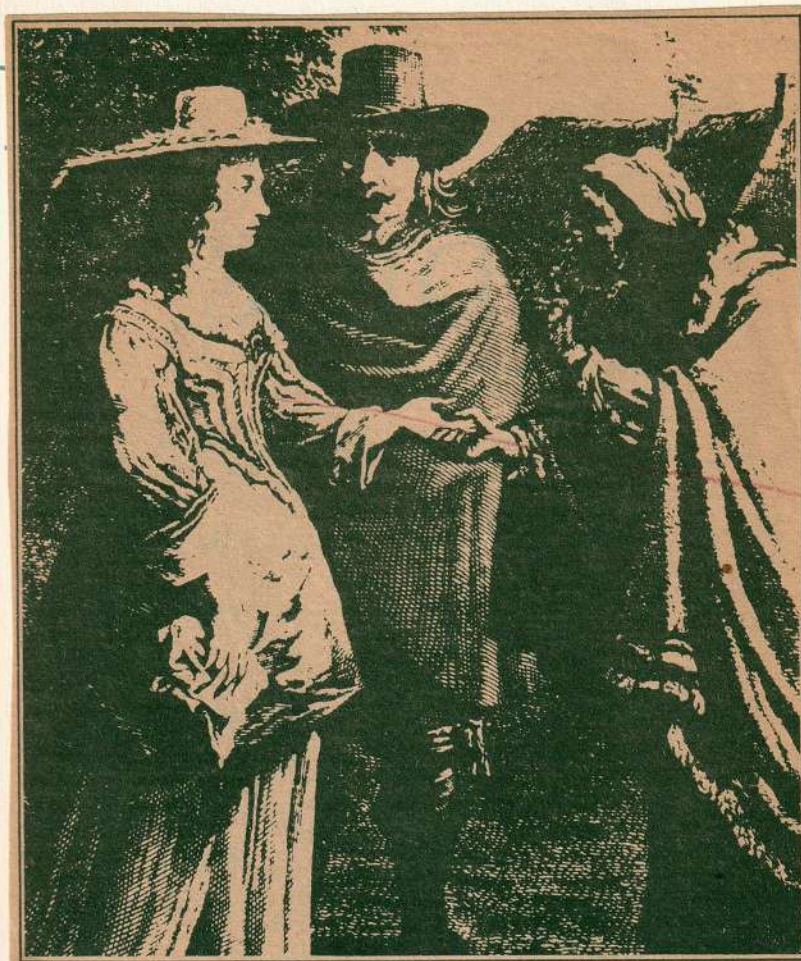
USELESS MAP

1:1

TERRITORY
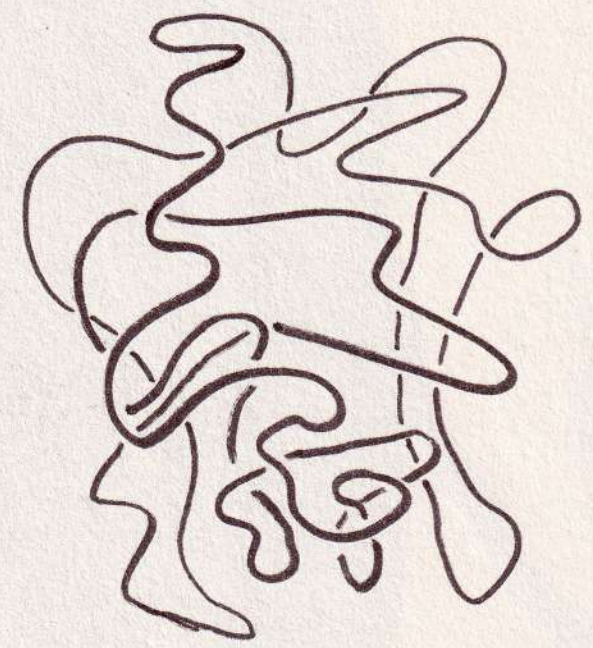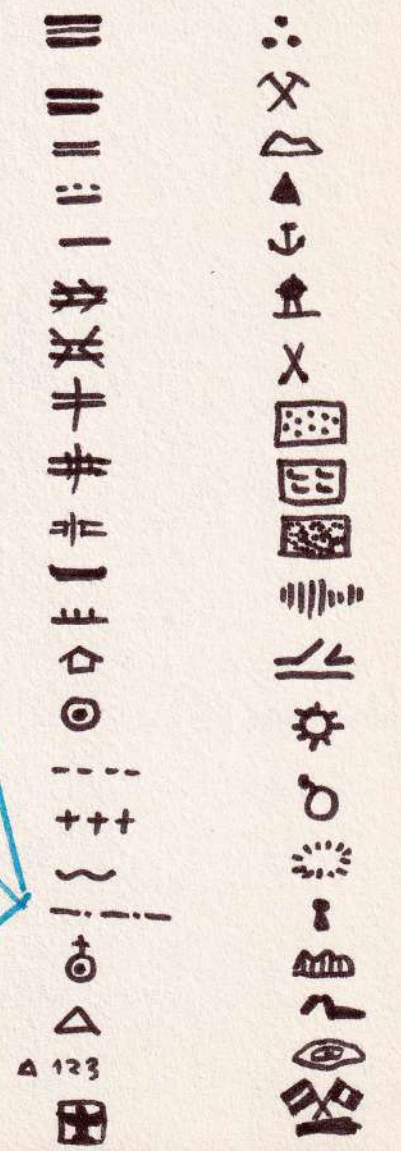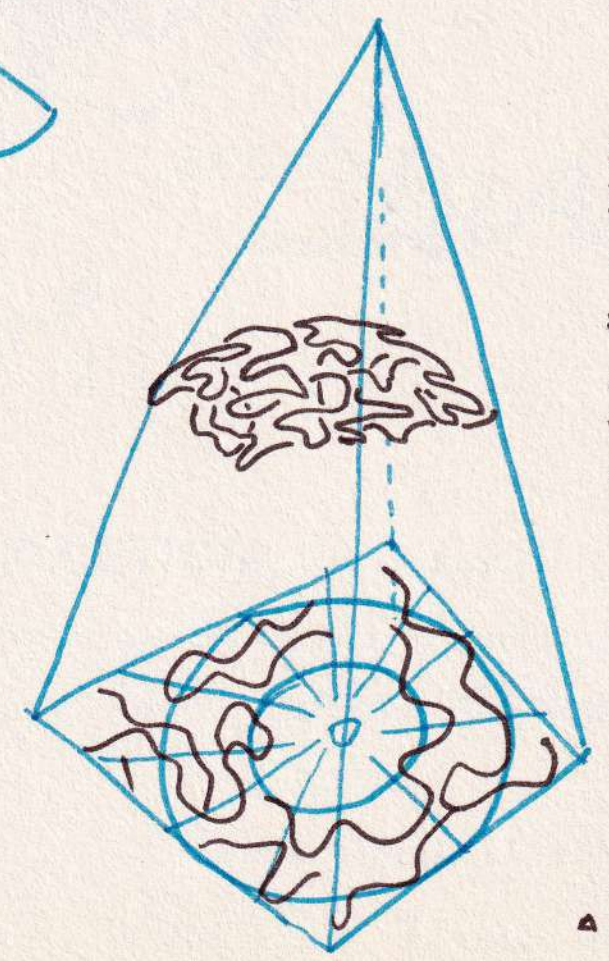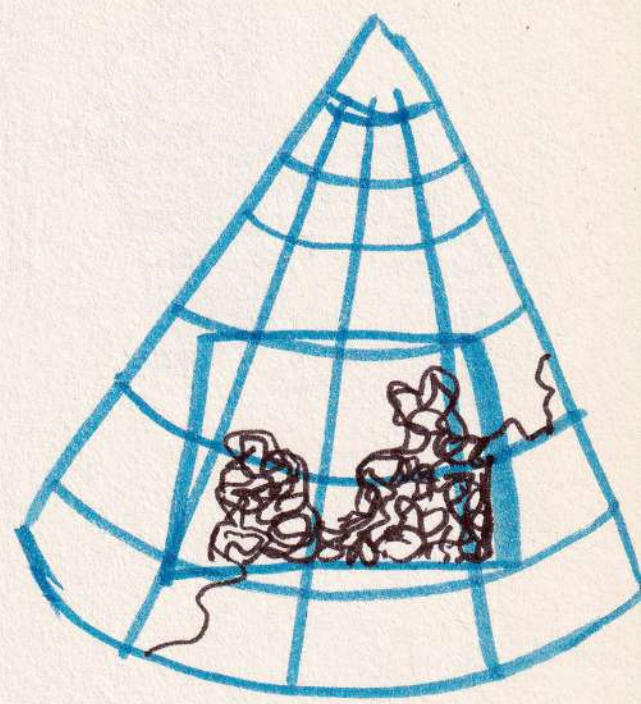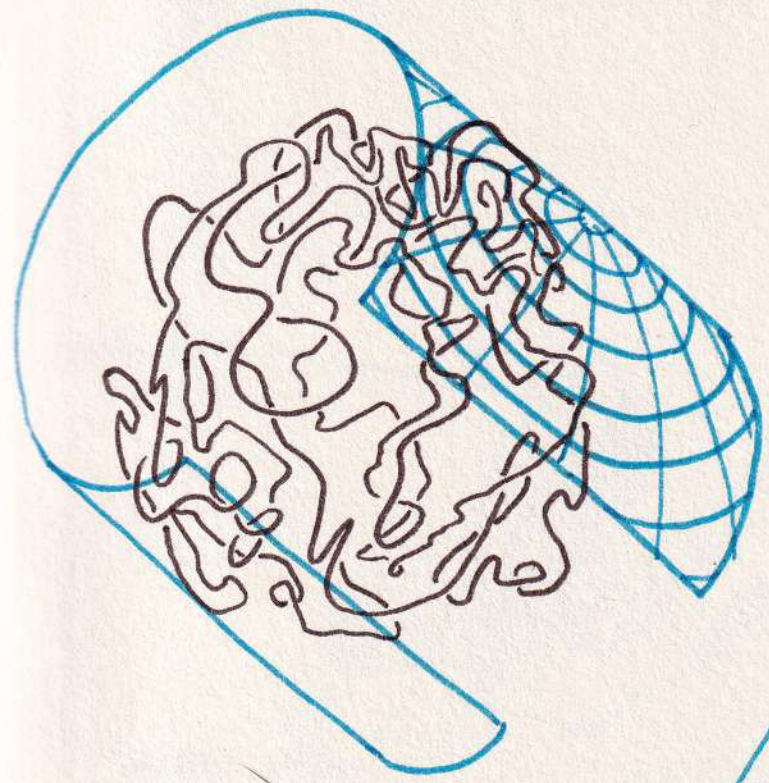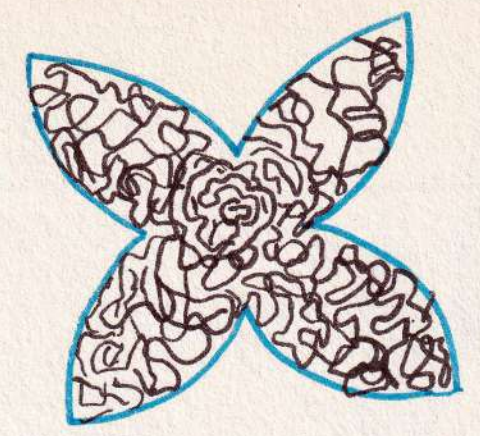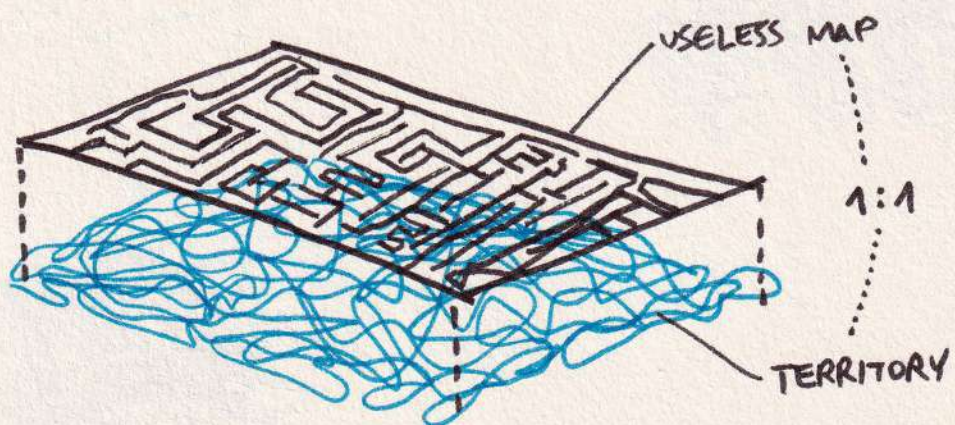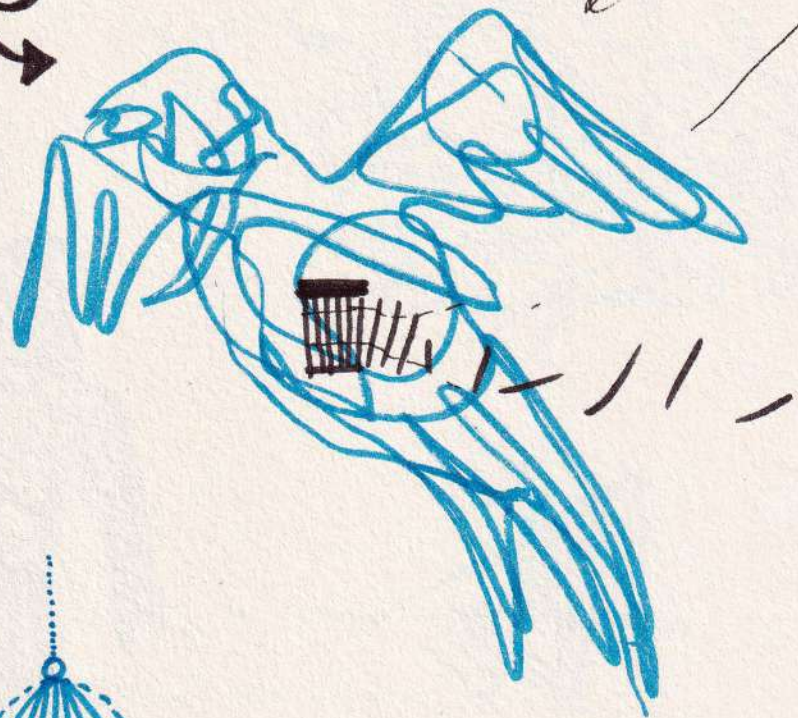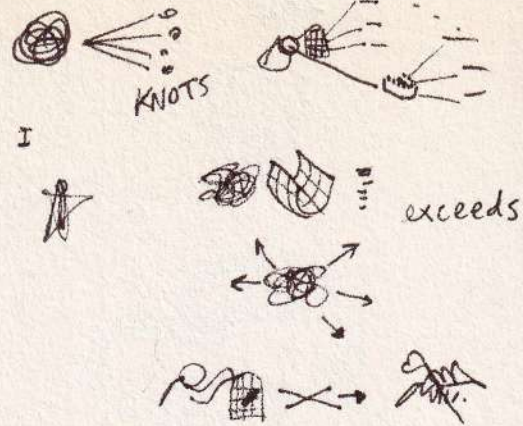
PARALELISM

BODY
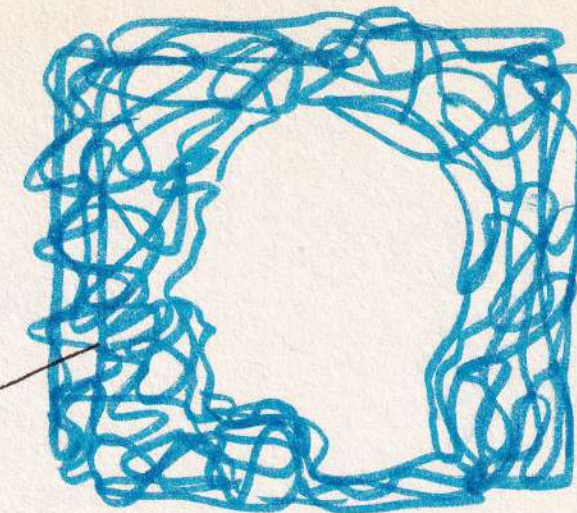
MIND
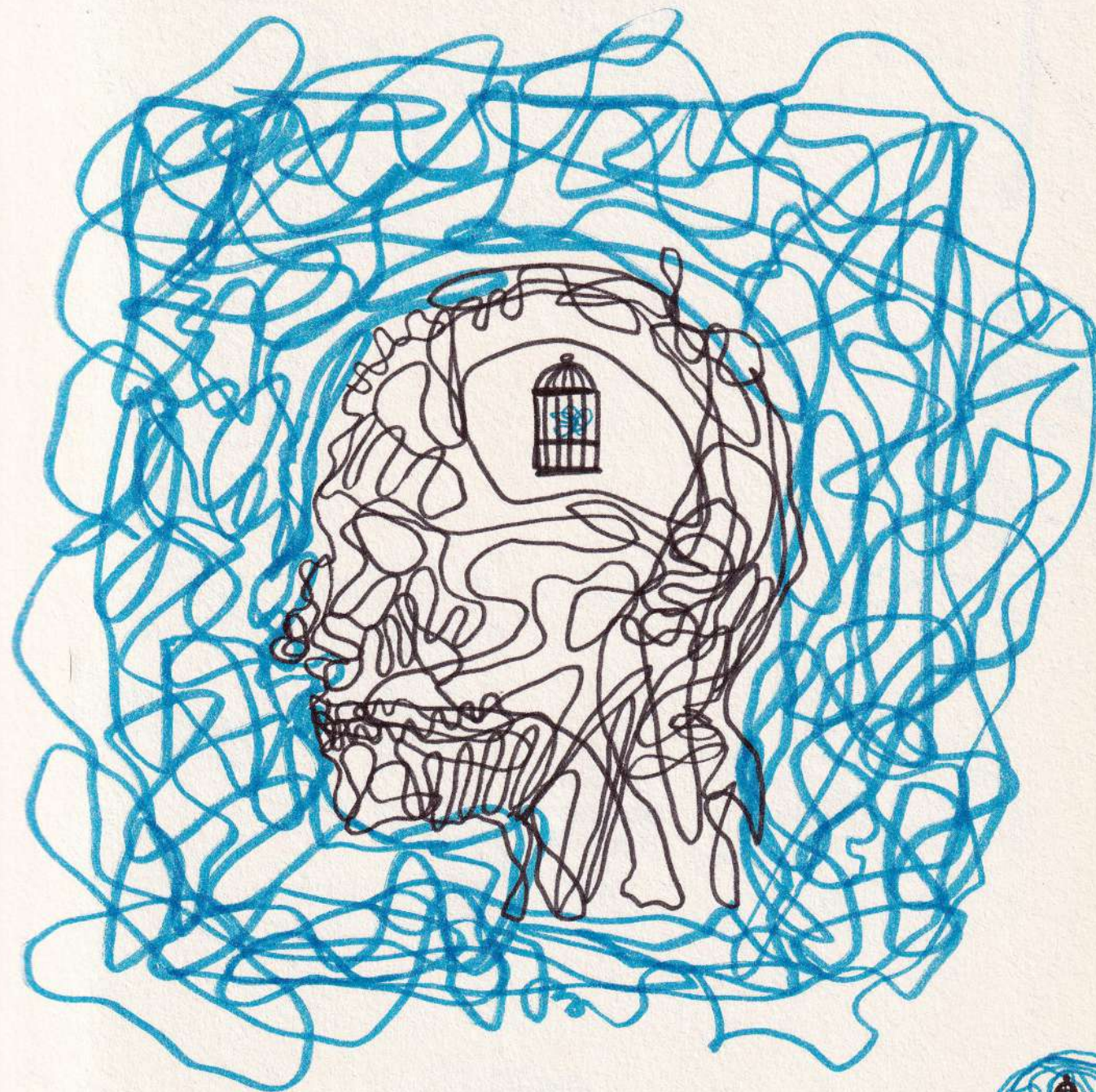
ILLUSION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

THOUGHT

CONSCIOUSNESS

Conrad Gallery
Fisher

30.000

So, dentro de la parte 1, tenemos los subconjuntos:
- cómo empezó todo: ~~de pro~~ ~~pro~~ la atención al archivo, el
  espacio ~~cerrado~~ descubierto
- the character of the          seduction of
  thing/space discovered : new visual practices - the othering quality —
                            physicallity for/against disclosure — not knowing
                                                                   moment
                                                                of inscription
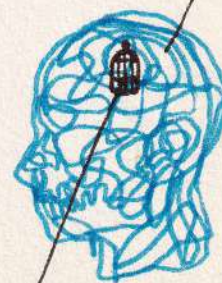


COSAS QUÉ
NO EXISTEN
PERO INSISTEN:

- las palabras
- el pasado
- el futuro
- los sueños
- la burocracia
- la "música urbana"
- la muerte.

The kind of self-trap or trap
to the self, ~~which~~ is as follows:
~~as long as you start creating~~
~~something~~
As soon as you decide to do
~~something~~, think of it as a
transitional object, thus emptying
it fully until it gets the appearance
of something almost entirely
instrumental. This will take some
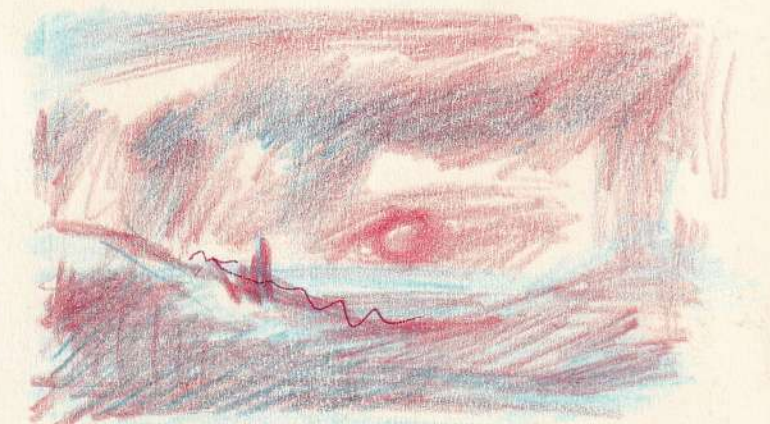pressure off ~~all your~~ creative attempts.

sketches   temporary folders
models     reminders.
pre-views



EDWARD GOREY

Otto Dix, Orange Evening, 1942 / Kunstmuseum, Stuttgart
los climas

memory:
suspension of studio
activities

and
realizing that I was in
London
More tiempo for
reading
hunting (wasn't this a Ph...
sketchbooks

fondo naranjo
Gris rosado
1/2 luz

gris/plateada
algo

SPHINX

Gris violeta
oscuro

CERVUS GIGANTEUS

and also
the city ITSELF

# UNA COSA MUY COMPLICADA
# PERO IRRESISTIBLE

Estoy mirando hace rato esta pintura que de repente se me apareció, lo que llamé "escena de caza" (óleo, 39 x 32, 2022-2023). De un cuadro anterior, interline cortando un pedazo de éste, y al girarlo vi que había una especie de caballito y, x debajo, un personaje haciendo un gesto antiguo. Fue una "aparición" en el sentido literal, me vino "de fuera". Y lo pongo entrecomillas xq sé que es la proyección mía y todo eso.

Pero el asunto es este: el cuadro se ve estupendo y se armó al margen, al menos de modo relevante, de mis "intenciones".
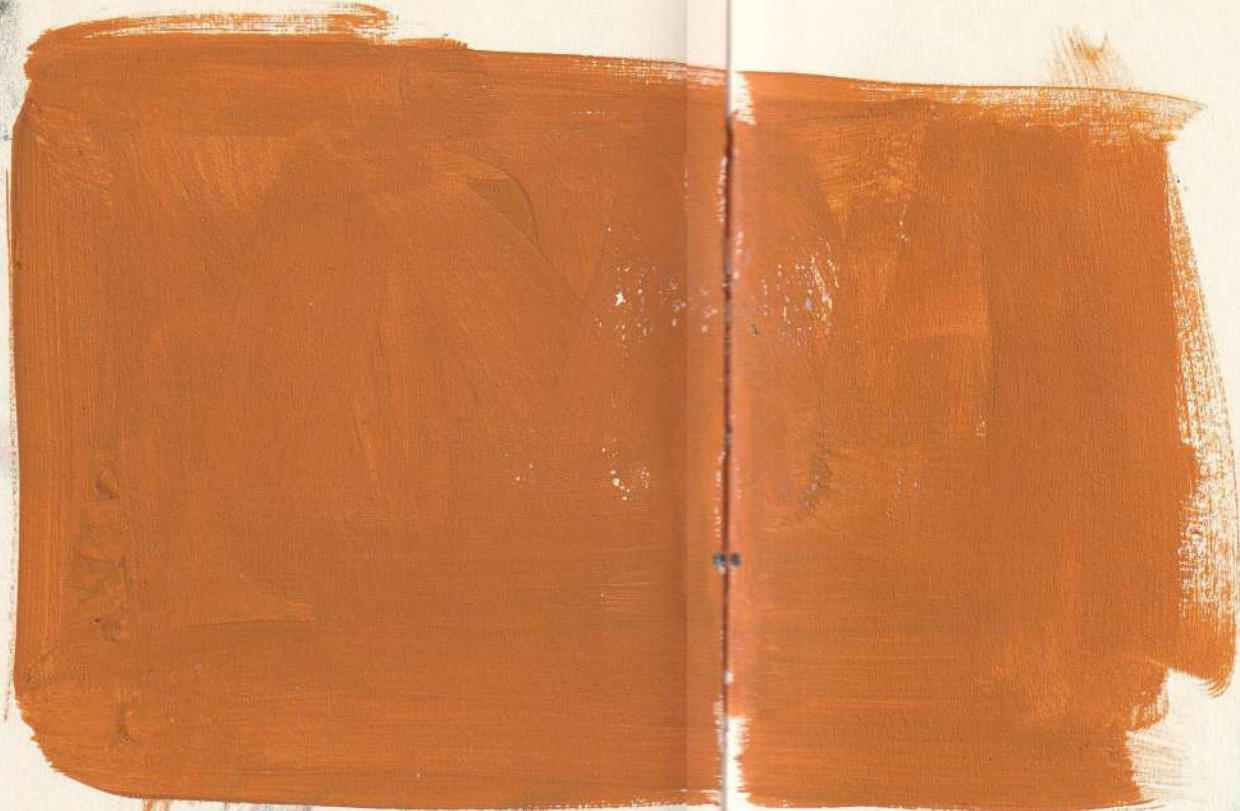
shārdulā / 6th century

130 x 220
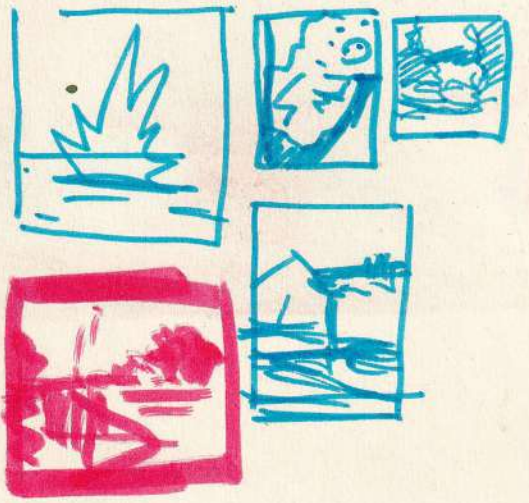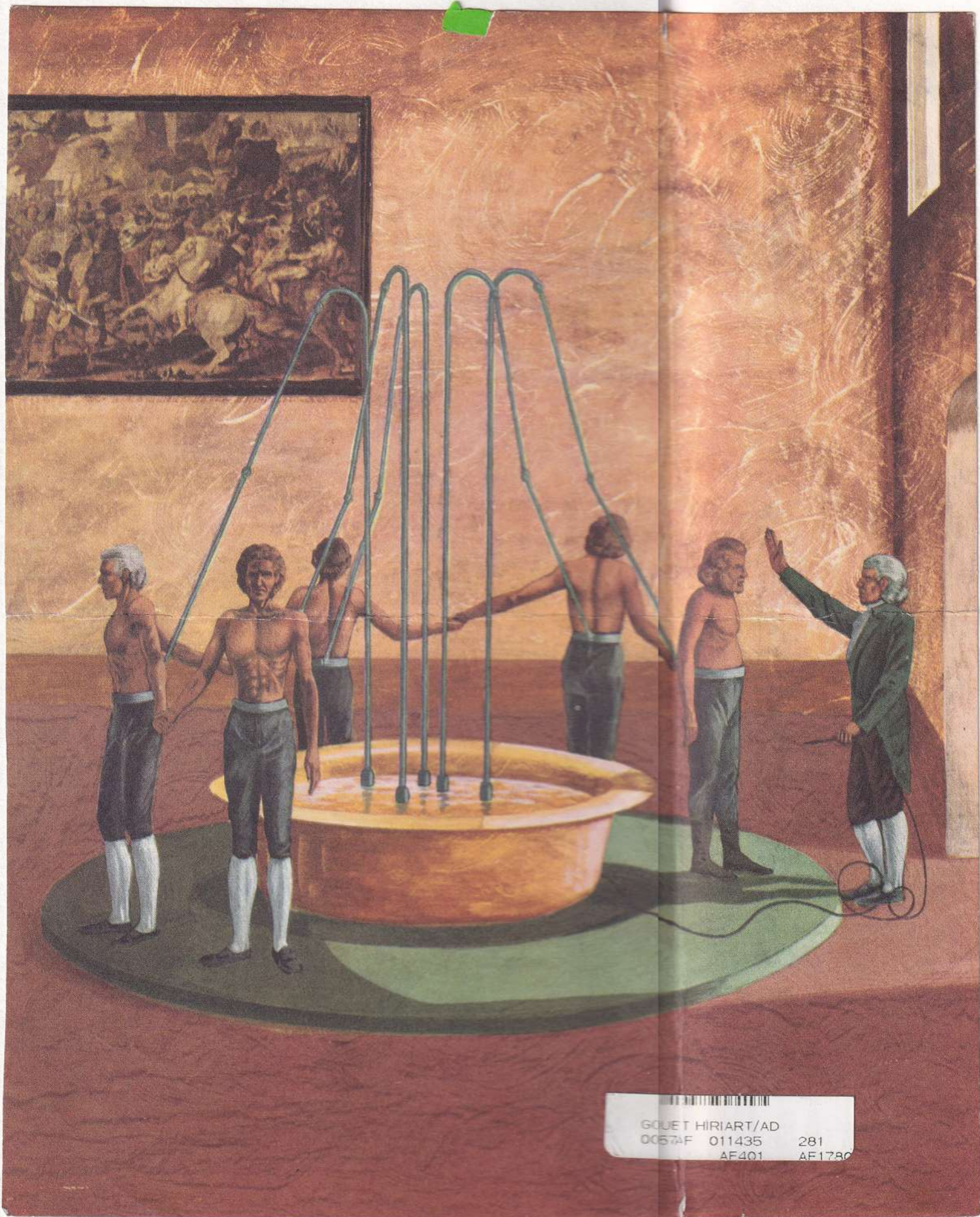
CRETAN BULL

THE CURSED

Durga

combating divinity against evil or threats to prosperity, peace and DHARMA

Fight against
Slaying the buffalo MAHISHASURA demon

→ evil SHAPE-SHIFTING

somewhere between

En alguna parte entre Londres
y Paris, Noviembre 2020