

The Occurrence of the Non-Essential Community

About Need in *Socius* by Adrián Alemán

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Reside, from the Latin *residere*, formed with the prefix *re*, as an intensifier, and *sedere* (sit down). Remain. On an island, residence must at some stage be approached as a possibility and a dilemma. The island dichotomy is always located between two doubtful projects: leaving and staying. This duality is part of the very nature of the island and its definition. However, it is in no way connected to a real choice, a genuine alternative. What is certain is that on an island it is only possible to remain.

The way that *Socius* speculates about this possibility of residence and how it reflects on this act of “staying” and “settling down” is one of its most important features. It is only by deferment, only in the time-space opened up by the pages of the book inherent to the project, that it is possible to perceive at great depth what we could call its *situational politics*. Politics that unfolds in the work in a profound performative dimension and the obvious *operation of the body* that it sets off. The critical-textual space of the book, a key element in the project, serves to prolong the reception of the idea of “settling” and “stopping”, which form the germ of the project. The visual experience then demands an *expanded time for telling*, over and above the instantaneous durations that denote the consumable, hurried visuality that is characteristic of our time.

Settling down in one place, remaining, residing is an act whose meaning today will surely encounter an addition. An addition of resistance that, as we shall see, will emerge from a close link with *dispositifs* of power.

One concept strengthened the global capitalist colonization process throughout the 20th century. A powerful regressive notion that, as in Borges' *The Aleph*, reveals an inclusive, all-embracing figure, an image capable of containing them all: the idea of total immersion in the world as a *matrix*, the establishment of the absolute interior founded on an all-powerful *socio-technical eye*.

Against this approved background, we have seen how the category of *spectator* has progressively mutated throughout the century—a modern finding

that emerged to ultimately transform the *people* into the *public*. In the post-TV era, new, claustrophobic narrative forms, stemming from TV reality, have inserted the illusion of democratization of discourse. The participatory surroundings of the new millennium have blurred the fixed frontiers between transmitter and receiver in an enormous and complex informational mesh. Yet the context is hostile to discernment; all meaning is rapidly diluted, absorbed by the pre-eminence and speed of the spectacle, the prevalence of merchandise.

In this immersive system, self-representation is on the rise. The spectator takes the floor. Narcissistic and voyeuristic practices now more than ever provide the substrate to fuel a largely alienating imaginary. There is a strange irony in this, a cannibalistic circularity to some extent predictable.

The Debordian “alienation of the spectator” that benefited the contemplated object, a separateness expressed according to the formula: “The more he contemplates, the less he lives; the more he identifies with the dominant images of need, the less he understands his own life and his own desires”,¹ seems to close over itself insofar as the contemplated object is the very production of own subjectivity. Or as Brea maintains, of the *effect* of subjectivity, of that *subject as effect*,² which is undoubtedly the seam of new forms of economic power in which it could rather worryingly be called a *capitalism of identities*.

We have to agree with Foucault: we are much less Greek than we thought. “We are neither in the amphitheatre, nor on the stage, but in the panoptic machine, invested by its effects of power, which we bring to ourselves since we are part of its mechanism”.³ It is precisely this statement that makes it possible to understand the assertion we made at the beginning, when we pointed out that the conscious operation of *residing* and of *remaining* is one of the most important aspects of *Socius*. By that we were pointing to an idea of a mutual immanence of the phenomena of resistance and dispositifs of power. If there is a place where the subversive can be reactivated for art, it is from the collapsing of a world of spectacle into the ocean matrix. That is where the occurrence—in its singularity and depth—in its extreme location harbours the power to bring about a cultural, political and social recomposition.

The consideration of the *local operation* in *Socius* is, in this sense, profoundly political. Nonetheless, in no way does the project attempt to reissue a global-local dichotomy by reviving a professed “local” or even folkloric

¹ Guy Debord, *La sociedad del espectáculo* (Society of the Spectacle), point 30. Pre-Textos, Valencia, 1999, p. 49.

² José Luis Brea, “Fábricas de identidad (retóricas del autorretrato)”, *EXIT. Imagen y cultura*, no. 10, Madrid, 2003.

³ Michael Foucault, *Vigilar y Castigar* (Discipline and Punish), Siglo XXI, Madrid, 1994, p. 220.

value as an area of resistance in itself. It could never be thus when in the post-colonial period it is obvious that *originality*—the original myth in all its meaning—functions as a fundamental lure in the great swindle that is the spiritual industry of the journey. In a world with a uniform backdrop, market efficiency must necessarily hunt for the power of localism and singularity. The *effects of identity and difference* are true consumer products for an exhausted reality—*déjà vu*. The perfect instrument of colonialist expansion, the *typical quality*, the logic of clichés and labels is a fundamental notion in the programme of world subjugation under a universal visuality.

What is then the meaning of *local character* in *Socius*? It is the assumption of a basic, simple fact that we have fully comprehended since the end of the millennium: resistance no longer takes the form of opposition, contradiction or social exclusion. No one is looking to leave the matrix. We have known this for a while now; the “game” is on the inside. Power lies in *remaining*, in *staying*; inhabiting the public space, like a tactic. In these times, residing is resisting.

And residing in the devastation of the capitalist space is no easy task. However, the operation undertaken by *Socius* is constructed on apparently simple foundations, where the act of inhabiting is as essential as reviewing the idea of monument. This is not the first time that Alemán has revisited the concept of monument. *Hacia el paisaje* (1999) was an approach in which a recumbent, heavy black pedestal symbolized the modern vacuum, an action of breaking-off and a desolate reflection of public space, where the boots of Fascist, prophylactic references reminded us of the exercise of inscription, vestige or despotic writing that “makes” landscape—monumentalized barbarity often become heroic tale. Through its incapacity of transforming into an edifying symbol, the monument could only be impugnation, suspense and moratorium.⁴



Certainly the way monument is dealt with in *Socius* is much more abstract, although the underlying power of impugnation is the same. The performative power of presence becomes clear in the obsessive repetition of the operation: returning again and again to the same place, to the same observation point on the ridge overlooking the sea. “Rehabilitating the vacuum today demands *presence*”.⁵ Sitting over and over again in the same spot, which is nothing more than an observation post, reliving the place and persevering with the gaze. A silent tribute. “The *monument* is a kind of place, a confluence point of the gaze,

⁴ Adrián Alemán, Ester Tortell: “Una crítica en forma de escultura”, interview. *Futuro público* [online]. World Wide Web Document, URL: <http://futuropublico.net/recursos/textos/una-critica-en-forma-de-escultura.pdf> [consultation: 23-09-2010].

⁵ Ramón Salas, “La retórica de la precisión”, in *Adrián Alemán*, Exhibition catalogue for Centro de Arte La Granja-Centro de Arte La Regenta, Viceconsejería de Cultura y Deportes del Gobierno de Canarias, Tenerife- Gran Canaria, 1999, p. 31.

but also a place from where to look”.⁶ Here we might say re-look: look again, recognize, reflect on what has been seen. Now all symbolic efficiency settles on that *re-*, on that power of repetition and on the way it is able to intensify the visual experience through habit and custom, through the reiteration and cyclicity caught up in the idea of residing.

Can public space be inhabited perhaps? Doesn't inhabiting involve being on the inside and isn't it an attribute of "private persons"? These questions have no meaning in a reality where the categories of public and private, interior and exterior have collapsed, and where it is possible to verify on a daily basis how capitalism restores the entire world to an absolute interior, an immersive paradigm.

"To dwell means to leave traces," said Benjamin.⁷ It is to engrave symbols on space, *habits* that are "the mark of an intensity that has wanted to be the symbol of an occurrence".⁸

Driving a stake into the ground, settling into the bosom of a space, in its interior, to inhabit it is how nomadic peoples create a dwelling place. Setting up an Axis mundi where all abodes must be located, a beginning and a centre that enables us to sound out the other, a zero image, a fixed point that makes it possible to recover a kind of holy dimension.⁹ In 2004, Alemán was already working explicitly on this symbolic structure; his piece, *La estaca*, a kind of commercial space installed around the centre of a camp, was conceived as a relational machine that generated social space and a money-making mechanism.¹⁰ An ironic and paradoxical system that, in the end, reflected on the nature of the collective in a desacralized world.



⁶ Carles Guerra, Aimar Arriola, "La historia está hecha de micro-acontecimientos", interview. *Arte Nuevo* [online]. World Wide Web Document, URL: <http://arte-nuevo.blogspot.com/2009/06/la-historia-esta-hecha-de-micro.html> [consultation: 20-08-2010].

⁷ Walter Benjamin, "Luis Felipe o el interior" (Louis-Philippe, or The Interior), *Iluminaciones II*, Taurus, Madrid, 1980 p. 183.

⁸ José Luis Pardo, *Sobre los espacios. Pintar, escribir, pensar*. Ediciones Serbal, Barcelona, 1991, p. 64.

⁹ *La estaca*, Adrián Alemán, 2004. cf. Mircea Eliade, *Lo sagrado y lo profano*, Editorial Labor, Barcelona, 1992, pp. 25-61.

¹⁰ The work, *La Estaca*, was the central dispositif of the activist project promoted by the artist himself in collaboration with several social movements on the island and financed by Fundación César Manrique: *En venta artistas frente al macropuerto*, Círculo de Bellas Artes, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, 2004. The background for the project was the huge civilian opposition to the construction of a macro-industrial port in Granadilla (south Tenerife). The project attempted to generate a space of visibility, meeting and dialogue for the citizenry by confronting the incredible silencing of the media that patently revealed the systematic usurpation of public space. It was also a powerful resource for receiving finance to oppose the

In a similar way, the experience of *Socius* is looked upon as a contradictory movement, a structure of tension attempting to constitute a modern mythical topos, by adopting to a certain extent the tools of the past; that is, by establishing (provisionally) a fixed point, an axis around which the gaze and space blend into one. It thus rests on a paradoxical system, an aporetic statement that expresses the inescapable sacred mission of art when totally bereft of God. “Only then is art realized as authentic, as a contradictory utterance”,¹¹ as Brea would say. This profane, materialistic, Benjaminian illumination—understood as a tenacious determination to recover the link with the world from linguistic essence—inspires Alemán’s entire production. This is the frame that sustains and justifies that fixed shot, that recurring view over the sea. An almost mystical persistence that does, however, bear no relation of affinity with the auratic sense of modern art—that re-issuing of white cube mysticism—and the permanently profitable operation of the fetishistic sacralization of the artistic object.

In this way, in order to comprehend the full scope of the procedure that Alemán proposes within *Socius*, we must understand the tension contemplated herein—a tension that is capable of creating an account that yearns to revitalize the social fabric. For him, materialism and the de-auratization of artistic oeuvre are as fundamental as a constant exercise of scepticism located and extended over the efficacy of doubt. His *Axis mundi* must therefore be a precarious vertical. A fabricated, counterfeit, almost fanciful vertical: the fixation of the transvestite, as Sarduy would say.

From this unstable and unessential axis, Alemán invariably displays his doing. In *Socius*, the documentary aspect, entrenched in the very plot that shapes “the real” inside our cultural codes, illuminates a phantasmatic setting linked to a psychological reality.

But perhaps what we would really like to discuss here is what throbs beneath that way of doing things. We must remember Deleuze when he declared that “a creator is not a being who works for pleasure. A creator does

port; the cultural merchandise in the form of a “beach bar” depicted in *La Estaca* lent added value which benefitted the social movement. Devised for this project, *La Estaca*, was presented as a highly effective war machine, a cross between a supermarket trolley and a placard, under the comforting shadow of the nomadic structure of a beach bar. A shopping centre arranged around the centre of a camp. For a month, the exhibition hall was used for a wide-ranging programme of meetings, press conferences, debates and talks dealing with aspects of the problem in hand.

¹¹ José Luis Brea, “Los últimos días”, Sevilla, 1992. In *SalonKritik* [online]. World Wide Web Document, URL: <http://salonkritik.net/10-11/2010/08/los_ultimos_dias_jose_luis_bre.php> [consultation: 01-09-2010].

only what he or she absolutely needs to do”.¹² The procedure is not so important as *the need* on which it is based, a need that is only expressed through it. To put it another way: we will not be able to understand the conduct of an artist unless we succeed in sensing his or her *need*. Moreover, in the same text, Deleuze makes us notice a fundamental fact: that *needs* are by definition *completely local* and specific. They are required by circumstance. Thus, any creative idea or project must start from absolute specificity, from absolute location.¹³

If at the outset we expounded the idea of a situational approach to artistic production, when we pointed out the coherence of the *operation of the body*, in its physiological specificity, we can surely glimpse the germ of this idea in the words of Deleuze. In Alemán’s approach, such *physiological quality* is manifested with particular force.

We must then ask ourselves about this always situational need located at the centre of creative activity and that is its driving force: what aspects make up the need that fuels *Socius*? The question is ambitious because the needs may be very complex and deep-seated. We must begin with a kind of anticipated failure, a speculative impossibility. The comment is secondary to the oeuvre and cannot replace it. It is the same as when Borges says that he will not explain the details of his own tale because in such an analysis it is impossible to spin the essence of the tale itself. A need may be similar to a tale. But perhaps it is possible to approach it as an unspecified problem, bestowing value not on the solution but on the constellation of propositions it is able to generate. To that end, we shall devise three approach routes, three ways of closing in on this *need* perceived as a problem:

A. Firstly, we shall consider the route that outlines the determination to build a specific space-time as a vanishing line within the social field. *Socius* speculates about public space as a place where representation is negotiated, about “collectivity as a project” in a specific community.

B. The second route stems, to a certain extent, from the first and coincides perhaps with one of the most important concerns of a possible critical programme within current artistic practices. It is essential that the work construct *another kind of public*.

C. The third approach route to the problem must project a line of unreadability. This line moves towards a kind of pure desire as an ultimate background. If a need is something impossible to elude, miss or resist, in this third route, the drive must verge on madness or illness; also on repetition and

¹² Gilles Deleuze, “¿Qué es el acto de creación?” (What is the creative act?), *Dos regímenes de locos. Textos y entrevistas (1975-1995)*, Pre-textos, Valencia, 2007, p. 284.

¹³ *Ibid.*

death; also on everything that must be erased or uncoded—everything that vanishes.

A. First Route: Collective Daydream

To constitute spaces—space-times. This is the mark of any creative discipline, the *collateral effect* of any need that drives an artist.¹⁴ The specific space that *Socius* generates is primarily induced by a daydream: the collective daydream, society, people. It has to do with the first lesson taught by the island, its initial root of meaning: human beings cannot be conceived in isolation. In order to inhabit, the other is necessary: the *socius*. The others are necessary. In other words, “homes must be shared: living in a home is not an absolute experience: it is to participate in a language game”.¹⁵

Socius is therefore about an old tale that never stops being told; a tale which is followed by humankind’s reencounter with Earth, with an Earth no longer real but inhabitable. It is perhaps the greatest wish underlying *Socius* and its principal negotiation centres on the requirement for a *public space* beyond the over-coding of the territory as a dispositif of power, unmarked by mandatory merchandise. A space beyond all that accumulation of registers of island landscapes, far removed from despotic symbols and local inscriptions that constitute an exhausted territory.

As we have said, the operation is simple and characteristic of ethology. What is at stake is the entire performative power of habit, capable of generating landscape. The power of territorialization, inscription or tattoo, or the semiotization of territory described by Pardo.¹⁶ Repetition is liable to produce not yet “another reality” or “a reality” but to segregate a physical “space” or habitat. A habitat in an observation post beside the sea: a lighthouse keeper’s dream. Facing the damp and cold, and the uninhabitable, the abyss towards which that somewhat anachronistic figure of the artist must always gravitate. Under these conditions, there seems to be some kind of curse hanging over us; a curse of Friedrich who invented for romanticism this subjective angle before the void—those faceless figures, their backs to us, who we can easily identify with: a trampoline, an intercession in order to penetrate the incommensurable.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 283.

¹⁵ Ramón Salas, Ángel Mollá, “Glosario”, in *Adrián Alemán*, Exhibition catalogue for Centro de Arte La Granja-Centro de Arte La Regenta, Viceconsejería de Cultura y Deportes del Gobierno de Canarias, Tenerife- Gran Canaria, 1999, p. 20.

¹⁶ José Luis Pardo, *Sobre los espacios. Pintar, escribir, pensar*, pp. 56-57.

However, the apparatus of visualization of *Socius* differs from that romantic stroll on the boundaries of nature. Above all, it deals with an observation post, a strategic site founded over two years of meticulous habitation. The raw file of the project contains over eight thousand photographs taken of the same place. There is no doubt that this form of obsessive scrutiny interacts with the instrumental, panoptic gaze that largely determines the visibility of our time. Aerial photography, surveillance cameras, satellite cameras, today handed over to the general public to democratize, a little, the all-seeing eye of God.

Alemán constructs an apparatus of visualization like a precision dispositif that “responds” in some way to the panoptic visual regime that offers the world the “rind of the world”, which is intolerably redundant. In it we would certainly be captivated by the vision of the territory obscenely disembowelled, equal to itself, in a world rounder than ever—if Gertrude Stein were to see it. The eternal confirmation of a stagnant, non-discursive present. A present without past or future. *Socius* pokes into this reflexive impotence in an attempt to recompose a specific territory. One element of this operation is essential: memory.

There is no doubt that the public display of historical facts is often beset by a feeling of boredom that seems to condemn the activity of remembering to a kind of game for those with time on their hands. A game for old folk, some might say. It is a big mistake to think like this. Attempting to re-read the past is the only way to help ourselves interpret the present and plan the future. Sloterdijk expressed it better: to disregard the past is to accept that we are the answer to a question we ignore.

This boredom, this expression of rejection of the past in a culture that glorifies the new and the next five minutes is undoubtedly covering up a much deeper need, the need to forget. Extreme expiry, the immediate obsolescence of everything that happens, is the result of this “amnesic mode” introduced during modernity and on which a logic of world representation was erected, based on *shock*, commotion and the negation of thought.

But it would be absurd to demonize oblivion because it is unquestionably an essential part of memory. Memory is always selective—and should be. Its architecture should be like a network, a structure laid over another made up of negative space, hollows, gaps and blurred or illegible symbols. This is why memory is always a complex process of selection in which the role of erasure and hollowing out is fundamental. Yet it is also possible to assert that there are various hollows and various kinds of omission.

There are necessary omissions, happy omissions, reconciliatory omissions and omissions that are liberating because they succeed in fending off the past and fleeing the tyranny of the Self. “A lot of memory is needed to get rid of the past”, says Deleuze. It is true; a lot of memory is needed to descend into oblivion. Memory, then, should be more of a capacity to scare away the past instead of summoning it. “My memory is not of love, but of hostility, and it does not work to reproduce but to discard the past”.¹⁷ Yet there is also an obscurity that is savage, or rather, soul-destroying. An obscurity that mutilates, rips up and uproots. Within the social field, this oblivion is certainly a micro-dispositif of power, in a Foucaultian sense. It does not function according to ideology or repression. It is normalizer and constitutor, affecting society as a whole and the processes of subjectivization that occur within. Collective oblivion responds as much to the pressing need to erase a trauma and to break off from the past in order to carry on, as to a cunning manipulation of institutionalized discourse that seeks to sustain the genealogies of power in a specific community.

In the Canary Islands, we have internalized as a compulsory inheritance the oblivion of a recent era, which corresponds to the historical period of the civil war and the ensuing dictatorship, the Franco regime. But the war in the islands expressed itself in an autonomous way that managed to condense all the blackness of a time. The exacerbated violence of that moment was channelled by a repressive system whose purpose was to exterminate a generation committed to a different social future. A Nazi-like *clean-up* operation that underpinned the social structure traditionally centred on the island oligarchy.

Despite the temporary relief that the collective oblivion of such horror provoked in ensuing generations, this leap in the dark could never be anything other than a leap towards a bogus life. Memory is not so much the root or the “essence” of identity as the telling of it. It is its arrangement in time like a construction; it is its *duration*. And no community can ever be imagined without it. The image that forsakes us, that voice lost in the hollow, is missing like a ghost would be missing, like the dead, missing but always present.

The defective operation that puts memory on an equal footing with information is often ventured. Memory is too easily compared with a collection of data, a set of scrappy documents about the past that comprise a historical construction and a continuity, while forgetting the true complexity of the power to remember. When all is said and done, information and counter-

¹⁷ Gilles Deleuze, “El Abecedario de Gilles Deleuze” (videoed conversations between Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet recorded between 1988 and 1989. In *Archive.org* there is an unauthorized transcription in text format. World Wide Web Document, URL: <http://www.archive.org/details/Abecedario_Deleuze> [consultation: 03 -09-2010].

information (that is, information of whatever type) has never stopped being a set of propagandistic instructions or slogans,¹⁸ and as such, it will always be part of a system of control, a dispositif of power.

If, in some way, *Socius* aspires to *return* an image to a community—an image that attempts to recompose territory—it does so by transcending the informational dimension, the purely documentary aspect of memory, by plunging into a conception of monument as threshold or point of densification, or as an accumulation of indecipherable images in an information node. Memory is not, then, unilaterally conceived as a “memory store” and a more or less re-liveable past, or a historical series of events. It is more than information, a simple file or supply of data; it is a living mechanism, susceptible to traversing the present, becoming part of the now and the visible, and of projecting itself towards a virtual future. A threshold where the three dimensions of time flow and converge.

This is the form that memory takes within the file-format that encompasses the entire project. This is the way it emerges from inside the accumulation of images that is *Socius*.

A repeated series: the ship is repeated on the back of the sea. It is a mournful shape suspended over the mirror, a shape that becomes an endemic image. Floating figures, detained graves, accommodated in the passing of time and in the changing weather. They exude a strange timelessness: the past appears to coexist with the present and future of this “collectivity as a project”—this community daydream.

The *tale that must always be told* knots itself in a phantasmatic image to evoke the “people that do not yet exist”.¹⁹ But it is not entirely right to use the word *image*; the term should at least be qualified to expand its scope. We should really talk about a “densification zone of the visual field”, or perhaps of a “visibilization process” that requires a textual gaze, that demands its tale to be expanded to fit the format of the pages of a book.

If the monument displayed in the hall, that silent sailing club scene, does not lend itself to immediate significance—it is unstable, light, lyrical and could even be mysterious or enigmatic—it does appear accompanied by the required textual drift. Excavation, the arduous and inescapable task of defining the meaning of action in an uncertain world. So the tale, as an essential part of the process, unfolds a kind of detective game, exploration or investigation of the signs and inscriptions that “make” territory and that are transformed into features of a *poetic geography*. Through them, Alemán constructs a mythical

¹⁸ Gilles Deleuze, “¿Qué es el acto de creación?” (What is the creative act?), p. 287.

¹⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *La imagen-tiempo. Estudios sobre cine 2* (Cinema 2. The Time-Image), Paidós Comunicación, Barcelona, 1996, p. 289.

and relational topos. But it is not about subjectivity; we are not talking about subjective or imaginary spaces. We are describing an essentially physical operation, devised through a lengthy process of accuracy that concentrates on the visible; a system of distinction and relation that brings to bear all the reconstructive and relational potential of photographic practice.

Carles Guerra very simply pointed out something basic that often escapes us and that defines a certain aspect of the ontological status of the images we live with: “having an image does not imply having a voice”.²⁰ This silence, as Benjamin adverted, appears to be the ultimate background and the most disturbing truth of the image. This is the unbreathable, uninhabitable atmosphere, the shadowy zone into which *Socius* ventures, making words an act of resistance.

Here lies the tracker’s task, the fundamental sense that illuminates the work of investigation and reconstruction. It is here that the political interpretation of place unfolds and takes on meaning. An undertaking to recover and update stories, but never history, in an account that reveals that “all speech is the fragment of unfinished discourse, a postponement of meaning always open to unlimited usage”.²¹

Uttering, describing and discerning beyond the immediate revelations of the mechanical eye of the camera and its unconscious optic, beyond all those “perceptions that escape us” and that photography “saves” for us every day. Beyond that fetish-moment when the shutter snaps that accompanies practically all photographic stories of the 20th century. Only delay, only *inhabiting* a territory can activate the precision process that comprises the visual operation that evolves in *Socius*. Only delay and wait, waiting on the border of the mirror, at the far edge of reflection that defines the Deleuzian *crystal-image*²² and its penetration power.

Inhabiting and staying in the images, not as resistance to the instantaneity or eventuality of the world but as in that Duchampian sense of *retardation* that thrusts us towards the halfway point of the *still* or static photo and the promising plenitude of the *still possible*. And it is a well-known fact from days of old that while you wait, you weave, and stories are told, *still*.

Everything unfurls in the text, only to furl over a single image that is a vanishing line. Over *thousands-of-a-single-always-the-same* image, an obsessive series, a vicious file of someone seeking repetition because they

²⁰ Carles Guerra, “Cosas que ocurren. Acontecimientos, hechos, sucesos y noticias a la luz de las prácticas documentales postmedia”. *Después de la noticia. Documentales postmedia*, CCCB, Barcelona, 2003, p. 79.

²¹ José Luis Brea, “Los últimos días”.

²² Gilles Deleuze, *Op. cit.*, pp. 113-114.

know that each repetition is unrepeatable. A slip road to the horizon or the depths of the ocean. Threshold: minimum value of a magnitude that gives rise to the *community effect* of that “missing people”—that collective that does not exist. The spectral “we”.

B. Second Route: The Other Public

We said that this second route could be inferred from the first, as the flaw or absence of people could, in art, be extrapolatable to a flaw or deficit on the side of collective reception. The public is also missing. We do not mean the number—the amount, what initially appears to be what defines or establishes this almost statistical category—but the possibility of the public thinking according to their qualities. The insistence on constructing *another public* and finding another interlocutor other than the passive subject who consumes “cultured entertainment” would answer the crucial and necessary question: “how can we turn artwork into a socially useful cognitive tool?”

In other words, by insisting on finding (on needing) *another public*, *Socius* refuses to accept the idea of art that only acts to validate established powers and systems, and refuses to give up the idea of “art without effect”.

Hence, *Socius* dedicates a considerable amount of effort to connecting its production with other “uncommon” social milieu. The complex expository and connective operation, concentrated in a perfectly located place, enables it to extend its reach and, therefore, to use a nautical term, to gain greater draught. The local tone and specificity of the apparatus of visualization proposed by the project enable it to go beyond the often de-potentiated medium of the artist’s ghetto and cast its significant production towards an open social field.

Breaking the barrier of the white cube, dodging the symbolic violence of the museum and the domestication of all meaning beneath the fetishism of art-goods. Everything seems to echo well-worn instructions, naive yet outdated, more or less Utopian programmes with the life squeezed from them. But perhaps the condition that best defines us is *déjà vu*—that “it reminds me of something”. A state you can rest in without ever feeling comfortable. Not everything need “feel new”. Reviewing old places opens up a space to settle into.

At this stage, we could say that the most reasonable thing seems to be the stubborn and repetitive; we persist with our “kids” needs and our obsessions aspiring to a refoundation of space. *Socius* certainly reclines on a persistent wish: to challenge, for an instant, the regime of individual atomization of the neoliberal *world-system*—that seeks to distort any aspect of the community—and attempt to redefine a new category of *public*. The activation of its entire critical potential would then lie in its capacity to deny a social landscape whose reality is political deception, a deception of ironic gestures but corrosive

intentions, and the total acceptance of the atomization of individuals within a space of representation managed under the market as the only god.

C. Third Route: Libidinality

According to Peter Sloterdijk, “Whoever attempts to talk theoretically about “society” must operate outside the confusion of the “we””.²³ Outside that “magical circle of reciprocal hypnosis” required by any homogenous and monolithic idea of the social field that does not bear in mind its true form, which is fluid, permeable, hybrid and promiscuous. Indeed, it is not possible to think about *us* as an organic totality, as a stable whole under a political name or under a constituent spectre. Instead, as Sloterdijk shows, the social field is based on a principle of co-isolation, on a symbiotic aggregation of endless micro-spheres like “bubbles isolated in a lot of foam”.

It would in fact be a mistake to talk about *us*, about the “social foam”, and not begin by talking about that minimal bubble that constitutes each individual: “unmentionable last person I”.²⁴ How can we forget that the artist’s work is drawn first of all from this persecution—disconcerting to the point of delirium and blindness—that Samuel Beckett formulated for the cinema and that expressed the inevitable nature of self-perception.

This *bio/psycho-analytical* condition seems to be indelibly engraved onto creative activity. It may not seem obvious, hidden in very deep layers or invisible membranes, displaced, transformed or disguised, but it will always be there. Even when the question formed by the work impetuously deals with “we”, even then, the “I”, that “people of my atoms”,²⁵ the encounter with the non-being in flight, will always come first.

The fine, flimsy thread of individual identity and singularity always being tensed in the utterance. This idea is fundamental to understanding the background of the graphic drive within Alemán’s work; without it, we would be unable to perceive the nature of this profoundly serial and repetitive operation underlying which is the subject of desire as a principle of individuation.

²³ Peter Sloterdijk, *Esfemas III* (Spheres), Siruela, Madrid, 2006, p. 49.

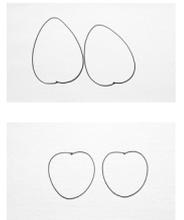
²⁴ *Cit.* Jean-Cristophe Royoux, “El momento de volver a partir: después del cine, el cine de los sujetos”, *Brumaria* no. 1, Madrid, summer 2002, p. 168. *cf.* Samuel Beckett, *Film*, black and white, 20 min., 1964.

²⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Op. cit.*, p. 292.

He systematically seeks the experience of a mechanical drive of desire always manifested as lavishness and repetition. He clearly bases this on a kind of orgiastic conception of representation: “a little of Dionysius’ blood to flow in the organic veins of Apollo”, as Deleuze would say. Endless effusiveness with an underlying instinct of death as the supreme aspiration of the living: “allowing representation to conquer the obscure; of allowing it to include the vanishing of difference which is too small and the dismemberment of difference which is too large; of allowing it to capture the power of giddiness, intoxication and cruelty, and even of death”. This effort has always permeated the world of representation: “the ultimate wish of the organic is to become orgiastic and to conquer the in-itself”.²⁶

Thus, the repetitive machine that intercedes in Alemán’s production process, according to the author himself, constitutes “a desirous production space beyond representation”.²⁷ The generation of intensive quanta during this process is symptomatic of a non-representable intensity. Alemán’s work, *Corona de las frutas* (1995-1999), clearly demonstrates such a procedure as well as profound connections to *Socius*: an enormous series of repetitive drawings in which, either like a mantra or a torture machine, the author gives himself over to an endless process of inscription, a rhetoric in which circular pairs, one after the other, redundant to the extreme, lead us to a kind of pathology of language, an ultimate hollowing out, like a fold for the being to hide in (or flee to).²⁸

But if the fold of the “I” is the space that flows into the repetitive inscription machine of *Corona de las frutas*, the generative question that throbs inside the heart of the machine does not refer to the subject or individual but specifically to the earth and collectivity—to the “us” and “them”. It clearly responds to the *desire and the tension of the other*—to that *libidinality* that Brea insisted in locating at the epicentre of thought—the desire of man that Lacan concretely defined as the desire of the other.²⁹ The fruit evoked here is the generous promise of the earth, an allegory of collectivity and space for *communion*. A pagan Eucharist in which the “we” is vital. But the actual production process of the series reveals another truth: in the broadness of the



²⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Diferencia y repetición* (Difference and Repetition), Editorial Amorrortu, 2002, p. 389-390.

²⁷ Adrián Alemán, *Espacio social y espacio lingüístico: pensar el arte hoy*, Tenerife, 2003. Doctoral paper presented at the University of La Laguna, Tenerife.

²⁸ *Corona de las Frutas*, Adrián Alemán, 1995-1999. This is a series of drawings the process of which involved doing more than 15 000 drawings over four years. This process, which was finally destroyed, led the artist, in 1999, to entitle “a replacement image”, the work entitled, *El sueño evangélico de la Colectividad*, Adrián Alemán, 1999.

²⁹ Jacques Lacan, *El Seminario, libro 16. De un otro al Otro*. Clase 5. Colección *El seminario de Jacques Lacan*, Paidós, Buenos Aires, 2008.

bourgeois of the Atlantic baroque, such a dream of collectivity becomes an authoritarian register, a despotic dispositif of torture.³⁰

This idea, this complex problem that must necessarily be expressed through a repetitive machine, a loop, undoubtedly provides a framework for Alemán's entire oeuvre. It reappears over and over again, in transformation, exploring media to hook onto and manifest itself through, sounding out the surroundings in search of signs to empower its work. And this idea always has to materialize itself beneath a baroque structure, just as Barthes said: a kind of *torment of a finality in profusion*, which closes over its own boredom, emptying all discourse and ultimately only leaving the power of its own tautology. Nothingness that laughs.

Indeed, *humour is the eternal tenant of the void*.³¹ Black, cosmic, unfathomable humour that underscores the words: "there is no reading without fantasy, no writing without the vertigo of the pronunciation enigma of everything that has not been said, of what was never there".³²

There is certainly humour, black humour, in the choice of the anachronistic sailing-club atmosphere that the artist recreates in the museum space to frame his remarkable collection of funereal forms. The romantic, 19th-century room acts as an effective decoy-image, a baroque trap-image spread over the hall and closing the monument in on itself.

The nautical-club atmosphere alludes more than any other setting to a way of showcasing the bourgeois. A passion for the sea and a long literary tradition reflect the bourgeois mystique of travel and the sublime woven over a heroic naval past when the world was still immense and no network or grid could ever encompass it. When marvellous remote locations still remained to nourish the romantic underlying layer of maritime mythology. A mythology that flowed in perfect keeping with the capitalist line of progress. The expression of democratic idealism and Utopian romanticism naturally intermingles with the world of entrepreneurship and the relentless capitalist conquest of space. The pure power of the majestic, threatening sea is one of the great metaphors of

³⁰ For further Information about this work, please consult Adrián Alemán, *Espacio social y espacio lingüístico: pensar el arte hoy*. Chapter 5, entitled "Lo escritural y la inscripción", specifically develops these ideas in detail, pp. 269-309.

³¹ Enrique Vila-Matas, "Amé a Bo", *Exploradores del abismo*, Anagrama, Barcelona, 2007.

³² José Luis Brea, *Por una rizopolítica*, 2010. SalonKritik [online]. World Wide Web Document, URL: <http://salonkritik.net/10-11/2010/08/la_construccion_experimental_d.php#more> [consultation: 07-09-2010].

capitalism; that same metaphor that Allan Sekula would unrelentingly rip apart to place us before its postmodern return and hyper-real representation.³³

Sheathed in the cross-dressed disguise of marine fantasy, the artist eventually accomplishes his private possibility of non-being, his need to dissolve and disappear.

All that reflective abundance, all the critical potential displayed sink beneath a final bourgeois representation, a worn-out camouflage. Humour is sewn to the costume and becomes part of the trick of his disguise. We can see it more clearly in several of Alemán's drawings in this book, which feature the *toons*, characters taken from the world of animation that show us, as Agamben explains, a kind of ultimate comic meaning that emanates from a Bartleby-like nullity, from the silence and indifference of figures devoid of essence and fundamentally hollow.³⁴ An expression of our time and of that *whateverness* that permeates us and from which the community feeling can surely only occur in the fragile meeting, like a spark, from *the unforeseen*.

This book also contains a tiny diagram of the French Society of Photogrammetry, discovered in an old edition of a treatise on aerial photography.³⁵ The illustration, which deals with underwater exploration, belongs to the sphere of instrumental rationalism of the gaze, the panoptism that is part of the language of *Socius*. Now out of context, the drawing seems to be showing us something, highlighting a certain significant key to the game of reading and interpretation.

The diver wins; the winner is anyone capable of immersion and *remaining* long enough to cover the image in all its density, acknowledge it as a *threshold*, perceive it as a habitat and unfold it as a tale. Extra merit is perceived by anyone who does not let himself be trapped by the decoy-image and does not lose himself in the beauty of the single subjective shot whose rhythmical repetition seems to play around in the moods of the sea and spread itself over the skin of this magnificent mysterious liquid body now transformed into a registry surface. A single shot that unfurls in atmospheric exquisiteness and subtle variations of weather and light.

I heard somewhere that when you get old, you are no longer interested in the passing of time, but what the weather is doing. Probably it is just the

³³ Allan Sekula, "Between the Net and the Deep Blue Sea (Rethinking the Traffic in Photographs)", October 102, Fall 2002.

³⁴ Giorgio Agamben, *La comunidad que viene* (The Coming Community), pre-textos, Valencia, 2006.

³⁵ Bulletin de la Société française de Photogrammétrie, no. 32, p. 3. *Cit.* Raymond Chevallier, *La photographie aérienne*, Armand Colin, Paris, 1971.

proximity of death that makes time more contemplative; it makes us *wiser in the moment*, more present and perhaps also more open to the unforeseen. Maybe the proximity of the ocean has the same effect on us. This is not really surprising as the sea is potential death—the sea is the end of the world and always belongs to the dead. To the others, that immense population whose singular strength impels us to win the game against an adulterated life; accompanied by them, belonging to them, loving them for life from the unyielding tenacity of life.

**The Occurrence of the Non-Essential Community
About Need in *Socius* by Adrián Alemán**

Teresa Arozena 2010

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