

Las cosas que se quedan

The things that remain

by Coco Guzmán

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ABSTRACT

This MFA exhibition thesis explores the relationships between borders, embodied memories, ghosts, and non-linear narratives through practice-based research that incorporates drawing, installation, and performance. The body of work utilizes the space as a site of memory and storytelling, where the viewer walks, remembers and stitches together fragments of a larger story. Using multiple drawing strategies and installation approaches, the exhibition raises questions about the representability of the haunting, the narrative strategies of impossible stories, and the absence-presence of the body from the art work. The frame of research that resulted in my exhibition focuses on the complex experiences of haunting on the *Frontera Sur*, the Spanish Mediterranean shore: from the ghosts of those killed by the Francoist dictatorial regime to the more recent ghosts of those killed by EU immigration policies, workers exploited in the fields, the policed bodies of women and queers. This borderscape, with its millions of sunbathing Spaniards and tourists is a site that contains iterative hauntings. Employing North American and Hispanic authors, this research considers the haunting as a resilient

response emerging from systemic violence, as well as an insidious systemic leaking from previous oppressive regimes.

Keywords: *haunting, drawing, ghost, Mediterranean, Franco, Spain, migration, cultural memory, borderscape, storytelling, state violence*

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INTRODUCTION

My MFA exhibition thesis explores the relationships between borders, embodied memories, ghosts, and non-linear narratives through practice-based research that incorporates drawing, installation, and performance. Accordingly, this research raises questions about the representability of the haunting, the narrative strategies of impossible stories, and the absence-presence of the body from the art work. My investigation focuses on the Southern Spanish shore, where I am from, and emerges from my own experiences of haunting.

In the exhibition *Las cosas que se quedan / The things that remain* the viewer walks into an antechamber with elements of a fragmented seashore landscape: large colourful drawings of palm trees, beach patios and the offing. Between the large drawings, the white walls of the gallery remind the viewer of the fictitiousness of the touristic site, and also of the borderscape this scene occupies. Drawings of actual highway signs and other specific signalization place the viewer on the sea border between Southern Spain and Morocco. Then, through a large doorframe, the viewer enters the main gallery space. In this spacious room, the lights are dimmed down and the continuous noise of the AC system acts like a never-ending wave of ocean sound. Here, the viewer is confronted with clusters of

drawings dispersed throughout a large space, allowing for multiple paths and thus multiple readings. The drawings face different directions and are taped onto thin wooden sticks of different heights, emerging from little dunes of sand. In order to see them all, the viewer needs to walk around the space, look down, and in some cases, lower their bodies. On the wall, the shadows of the walking viewers are projected on the walls, among the shadows cast by the drawings.

Through the spatial and material dimensions of the installation, my work positions the body of the viewer as an agent and site of memory, echoing Diana Taylor's statement that "people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by 'being there,' being part of the transmission."¹ Contrary to the archive, where records exist independently of the researcher, embodied memories require the presence of the viewer and their interaction to emerge. The role of the body—the body of the ghost, the body of the viewer—becomes, therefore, central to my research, and to the exhibition, where the contrast between room temperatures, light, and room sizes are intended to invoke an embodied experience of the haunting. In so doing, I did not aim to reproduce the violence

¹Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, 20.

nor the haunting as experienced in the Mediterranean borderscape, because, as Avery Gordon states, it is the way of the ghosts to speak for themselves.² Instead, I reflected on my own physical sensations and on my own narrative processes when immersed in an experience of haunting: how did I feel the haunting in my body? How did I make sense of the ghosts around me? What were the stories that I told myself about these ghosts? Why? How were these haunting stories related to my life history? These are the questions that I invited the viewer to ask themselves while walking through the work.

Avery Gordon in her book, *Ghostly Matters*, proposes that the haunting emerges from the oppressive conditions imposed by systemic powers;³ my investigation understands the haunting as *always* political. Using the tourist beach as a geographical metonymy of the Southern Spanish Mediterranean shore, my work explores the tension inhabiting this space; between the bodily pleasures of the sun, the sea, the sand, and the embodied experience of moving through a site

²Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 22.

³Gordon, 8.

inhabited by multiple hauntings, where current forms of violence are continuously silenced by Spanish (and European) necropolitical regimes.⁴

Los Almendros and Albaterra, the Francoist torture camps situated on the Mediterranean shore of Alicante, have been supplanted by massive plantations of palm trees. The renowned Costa del Sol in Malaga hides the bodies of 5,000 people killed by German Nazi and Italian Fascist planes. Large department stores, like El Corte Ingles in Barcelona, occupy the buildings of former Francoist prisons. The beaches, with their hypervisibility of sunbathing bodies, are still spaces where women and queer bodies like myself, are severely observed, policed, and violated. And what to say about the abandoned boats, the abandoned shoes, the abandoned clothing that one finds strolling along the beach in the *Frontera Sur*, the name that the EU has given to Southern Spain Mediterranean Shore, the Southern Border? What about the fences covered with razor blades, drones equipped with heat

⁴My research scope starts with the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), continues through the Francoist Dictatorship (1939-1975), the Transitional period (1975-1982) and extends until today, with Spain integrated in the European Union (1986-). However, this is not a historical project, but one that examines how these events in the past continue to haunt present-day Spanish society and how new hauntings emerge from European Union migration policies. In his essay 'Necropolitics', Achille Mbembé identifies the European Union borderscape as one of the sites of necropolitics, or the politics of death, in which certain lives are disposable. Mbembé, 'Necropolitics'.

cameras, underwater radar, camouflaged observatories, and war-developed technologies at the service of EU migration agencies. This is the deadliest borderscape in the planet.⁵

My work directly refers to the ghosts of those assassinated during the Franco dictatorship and those who drown daily while attempting the Mediterranean crossing, because they inhabit the same sites. But in my work, the haunting also includes—using Achille Mbembé’s analysis—the *living dead*⁶: both the invisible migrant workers laboring in the greenhouses along the coast of Almeria and Murcia (my hometown) and the migrants and asylum-seekers legally disappeared in centres for immigrant detention in Tarifa. My research also incorporated the *fantasmas*⁷ of what remains of Franco’s dictatorship; traces of National-Catholic fascism that, as Alicia Vilarós analyzes, systematically leaked

⁵ International Organization for Migration, ‘Four Decades of Cross-Mediterranean Undocumented Migration to Europe: A Review of the Evidence’.

⁶ Mbembé, ‘Necropolitics’, 39.

⁷ I use the Spanish term *fantasma* instead of “ghost” when I am referring to the specific postdictatorial haunting or possession as analyzed by Spanish-speaking authors.

into the post-dictatorship regime, impacting not only our memories of the past, but our embodiment of the present⁸.

In this sense, my work engages with the investigation of a diversity of artists and scholars who aim to trace the continuity from past fascist or oppressive regimes to the present, bringing to light the roots, as well as the masquerade of change, of our current necropolitical systems of power. Achille Mbembé, Sayak Valencia, Alicia Vilarós, Kara Walker, Christina Sharpe, Silvia Schwarzböck are scholars I draw on because of their search to establish this continuity, and in doing so, ask us to pay close attention to the connections between the past and the present; how slavery and colonialism impact current Western migration policies, and how modern dictatorships continue to prevail through aesthetics in post-dictatorial countries. My work is also influenced by the analyses of Avery Gordon, Diana Taylor, Marianne Hirsch, and Saidiya Hartman. For these scholars, the liminal presences, the impossible stories, and the embodied memories challenge dominant discourses of knowledge, science, and history. For them, the question of the continuity of the system extends to the future. Indeed, for Gordon, the ghost is a

⁸ Vilarós, *El mono del desencanto. Una crítica cultural de la transición española (1973-1993)*, 59–60.

social figure emerging from past/current systemic violence but asking us to act *now* for a better future.⁹

The first section of this paper, *An Exhibition, Haunted/Possessed*, is dedicated to the exhibition work. It begins with a detailed description of the work and the studio-based methods and reflections that I used to create the components of the installation. It also includes the strategies deployed on-site to implicate the viewer in the experience of haunting and the creation of narratives from their walk through the work. I then discuss my practice-based methodology, which is composed of three distinct stages: research, pause, and studio work. I close this section with an analysis of key elements in the work of Teresa Margolles, Doris Salcedo, Kara Walker, and Nancy Spero that were turning moments in the development of my research.

The second section, *The Ghosts, Incarnated*, focuses on the theoretical frameworks that have informed my research and resulting exhibition. These are theoretical approaches that have allowed me to better understand my own physical sensations in the presence of the haunting. The section begins with an

⁹Gordon, 'Some Thoughts on Haunting and Futurity'.

analysis of Necropolitics, or the politics of death, as the political conditions necessary for the haunting to emerge. This analysis draws from the work of Achille Mbembé, Giorgio Agamben, and Sayak Valencia. Through the work of Avery Gordon and Saidiya Hartman, I engage with the political dimensions of the haunting, the ghost and the impossible story, as well as with strategies to engage with the liminal presences. The last part of this section is dedicated to the specificities of the Spanish haunting. Largely studied by Alicia Vilarós, the Spanish haunting expresses itself through body, as a possession or incarnation of the *fantasmas*. A discussion of the body and its role in the expression of haunting closes this second section.

By way of conclusion, in addition to summarizing the main elements of my research, I have included the third and final section, a reflection on the challenges and limitations of this exhibition research, as well as the new projects that I wish to see emerge from this exhibition research.

At the end I have included two appendices. The first one is the written text of the artist talk I gave at SAVAC on February 28th 2019, which focuses on the queer strategies and elements of the work. The second appendix is a reflection on the exhibition and the different activities throughout the three weeks of the show.

AN EXHIBITION, HAUNTED/POSSESSED

ART WORK

My MFA thesis exhibition consists of an installation piece titled *Las cosas que se quedan / The things that remain*. I started the conceptualization and the production of this piece before knowing the Bachir/Yerex Presentation Space (*figure 1*) and later adapted the piece to its specificities. Before producing the full body of work, I carefully observed each element of the gallery, taking note of lighting systems, surrounding noises, architectural components, electrical plugs, dimmers, and any other item that could have a—desired or otherwise—impact on the work. The space is composed of a small hall and a large room. The gallery double door opens to the small hall (3m long x 2m wide) with a high ceiling of beautiful exposed wooden beams. On the left side of this hall there is a door that leads to a storage space and the dimmers and computer system that operate the lighting, air conditioning, and projection in the large room. The floor is dark laminated wood. Opposite the entrance double doors, a wide doorframe opens into the main presentation room. This is a large space (11m long by 5.34m wide), equipped with six lighting rails each with two or three removable spots. The AC system runs constantly in this room for ventilation. The floor here is dark grey vinyl.

The first components of the installation that the viewer see are in the small hallway and consist of large drawings of a typical Mediterranean scene: palm trees, a patio table with the remnants of tapas, the sea, a postcard stand, some traffic signage (*figure 2*). The drawings are colourful, made with oil pastel on light grey paper, and are pinned to the walls with little colourful map pins. Though helping to situate the new site into which the viewer enters, the drawings do not compose a fully-accomplished scene. Instead, they are obviously cut-outs floated on a white wall. The grey paper contrast with the white walls help to make apparent the gaps between the drawings, highlighting the process of selection of what is to be seen or not.

The small hall serves as an antechamber to the main gallery. It serves as an invitation to the viewer to suspend belief and imagine themselves at a beach site that is recognizable though purposefully artificial. As such, I used unrealistic colours (for example, a pink palm tree trunk) to communicate a sensation of warmth and fantasy. I drew with large energetic gestures, standing or on a ladder, and kept the drawings flat, with no shadows nor perspective. Other drawings, like those of the signage and the postcard stand are more detailed, but still remain quite loose. The lights in the small room are bright, set up to maximum intensity.

The viewer enters the large gallery, through a wide doorframe. The lights here are dimmed down, bright enough to see the drawings and project shadows but much softer than in the small hall. From the smaller hallway space, the viewer is already able to glimpse the first drawings of “things:” some large dunes of seaweed, an almost full bottle of water with the brand name in Arabic. When the viewer enters into the room, they are surrounded by drawings that were not visible from the hall: a gigantic music tape, a jacket, a boat, cigarette butts. A total of seventy drawings taped onto thin sticks of different heights emerge from small dunes of sand,¹⁰ forming clusters or constellations around the room (*figure 3*). Each step further into the room brings new drawings to view and because the viewer is placed among the drawings as soon as they enter the space, their impulse is to continue moving through the room.

The back of each drawing is black, as well as the tape attaching them to the stick. This black back offers a very abstract image to the viewer; sometimes it

¹⁰ As scholar Paulie McDermid pointed out when visiting the exhibition, the sticks elevating the objects from the sand echo Spanish playwright Federico Garcia Lorca’s aspiration of “*el teatro bajo la arena*”, the theatre under the sand. In his play *El Público* (1933), Lorca describes the theatre under the sand as the theatre of real life, against the hypocrisy and masquerade of society, a theatre eminently queer (183). For further description of the queer aspects of the piece, including the sand, please see Appendix C.

resembles a recognizable silhouette (like in the case of the illustration of the glasses), but more often, it remains unidentifiable (*figure 4*). The dark back contrasts with the light drawing and the white walls, but also merges with the dark floor and the very low light in the room. Accordingly, it is the front of the drawing that emerges as “ashes of imagery.”¹¹

Each image is a pencil drawing on thick paper. Some pieces are cream, some pieces are slightly pink. Some drawings are done with very light pencil, others with dark traces (*figure 5*). Every drawing has a story behind it that emerges from many hours of research and from my own memories and reflections, through which I establish a relationship with each of the stories/drawings – a discussion between me and them - that is certainly ghostly. Each drawing is, therefore, haunted.

The drawings are all facing in different directions, so that the viewer is confronted with a mix of pencil drawings, black backs and the spaces in-between. In order to see all of the images, the viewer needs to walk among them, looking down, kneeling down, coming closer. There is not a single path to follow to view

¹¹ Hirsch, ‘The Generation of Postmemory’, 109.

all the drawings; rather there is a network of gaps between each of the clusters that the viewer may choose to walk through (*figure 6*).

Las cosas que se quedan / The things that remain emerged from a series of experiments on fragmentation: of memory, of oblivion, of bodies, of narratives, as well as the fragmentation of the processes of remembering and forgetting. These are the drawings of what remains from my walks on the beach in southern Spain; from my online research of the digital archives of the Spanish National Library and the Spanish Communist Party; from multiple readings of texts on haunting; and also, very importantly, what is left from the stories that I conjured through this research process. The drawings are the traces of the ghostly relationships I establish with these stories while I am in the process of drawing. It is through drawing that I conjure the stories that are present in the main gallery.

The objects that I draw also carry with them the traces of what they were once, and to f whom they once belonged. I have chosen these objects precisely for this characteristic, as I consider them *haunting impersonations*, that is, they help me to highlight and perform the absence of bodies. The stories the viewer tells themselves about these things, and about the traces and the disappeared bodies, rely on the viewer's positionality, their experiences, their knowledge, and their

memories. The viewer constructs the story, but they are also a fundamental element in the story; the only full body, fully alive character, all the others being ghosts.

Of the things that the viewer encounters in the gallery, the drawings of the hands are what I drew first, drawing from my fear of finding a body while swimming in Tarifa (Spain) in June 2017. Before drawing these hands for inclusion in the exhibition, I had previously experimented with drawing dismembered bodies that I then assembled into paper puppet-like figures. But as I did not want to represent a full body on a beach, I drew one hand instead. Then I found archival pictures of bodies of Republican fighters who had been thrown from airplanes by Franco's army. The bodies were decomposed, interwoven, entangled with each other; I could only identify the hands. After seeing these pictures, I drew a hand with very light pencil marks, building up the shadows to create the outline of the fingers (*figure 7*). This was a painful process, investigating a body part as an object. I cut out the contour of the hand, which gave shape to the whole limb. I put this drawing aside and then I drew it again from memory. This time I focused more on the outline and on exaggerating some of the features. I then mounted both drawings of hands on sticks. I painted the back of the sticks in black, because I could not "see" the other side of the picture, that is, the repercussions, the impact,

the shattered stories produced by this violent action. Thus, black became for me both the colour of grief and of everything I could not conceive/perceive. That other side, the black side, had not disappeared, the contour of the hand remained, but I could not make sense of its shape, of its depth, of all the other impossible stories I could not even think of. Black is therefore the colour by which I pay tribute to what I could not draw (*figure 8*).

While I started the process of accumulating “things” for the exhibition by creating a well-defined list of objects to draw, I soon abandoned this list to follow my own memory-desire path. As such, the process through which the drawings were made also mimicked that brokenness, re-membling, dis-remembering, dismembering, ephemeral quality of discontinuous objects. The origin of the drawings did not follow a linear path, nor a single source; some of the drawings of objects are based on archival research, others emerge from my own memories, others are borrowed from movies, from what I find in my wallet, from stories that I have been told. They are all extirpated moments or images from longer narratives and topographies that I have chosen to isolate in drawing them.

One the most salient of the extirpated moments comes from a memory of walking down my favorite beach and finding my feet sinking in dunes of *poseidonia*

(seagrass) that had washed up onshore. When I drew this sea plant as a “thing that remained,” I looked carefully looking for pictures on the internet that resembled my memories, that is, the dead plant on the shore and not a healthy plant in the sea. I then looked for images on the internet that resembled those memories. This process demanded that I reflected on what the “things” were that triggered the haunting, and which characteristics of these “things” activated that experience. Soon I came to recognize that what all these things have in common was that they hold the traces of the presence of a body and that they are disposable.

Finding pictures of dead, broken, dismembered, and abandoned things was not always easy. Most of the times, these objects are considered garbage, something that disrupts the pristine beach aesthetic. Therefore, depending on the object, online pictures of these objects may not be easy to find, or they tend to portray excessive amounts of specific objects (for example, of beer cans or of lifejackets) in order to make a political or social commentary, which made it difficult for me to discern the individual objects and draw them. In the case of the migrant boats (*figure 9*), images tended to focus on dead bodies or sinking boats with people trying to hold on to floating devices. I chose not to draw any part of these images of migrant bodies out of a concern for the re-victimization of the anonymous people I would portray. Instead, all the images of dismembered bodies

in my work are exclusively drawn from archival material from the Spanish Civil War, and, from those, I decided to not draw faces or any other element that may identify the victim¹².

In understanding my drawings of “things” as remnants of impossible stories, stories I could not possibly tell, that were made un-knowable by the dominant powers, I drew upon Saidiya Hartman’s “critical fabulation”¹³ strategies. Hartman describes “critical fabulation” methodology as a “recombinant narrative”¹⁴ composed of several strategies, notably the interweaving of past-

¹² Writer and researcher Nehal El-Hadi questioned why I feel differently about drawing dead migrants than dead Spanish civilians and pointed out how my position towards these two groups may have an impact on these different emotions. Though my position as a white Spaniard may play a role in me choosing not to draw Black and Arab migrants drowned at sea, I believe that my choice is mostly a reaction to the hypermediatization of those images, taken and shared without the permission of the relatives. In my opinion, these images serve to reduce migrants to the status of victims, to placate the European savior complex and to evade challenging the systemic structures of colonization, racism and capitalism that are at the origin of these deaths. In the case of Spanish civilians killed during the war, these images have been silenced from history manuals and Spanish media, they have not been mediatized as much as they should have been to provoke a transitional justice process. Many of the pictures of killed or disappeared civilians have indeed been shared by relatives with the hopes of finding the remains of their loved ones. However, as long as I do not have the explicit consent of the relatives, I do not want to draw actual dead people in a way that the identity of the person may be recognizable.

¹³ Hartman, ‘Venus in Two Acts’, 11.

¹⁴ Hartman, 12.

present-future, the “refusal to fill up the gaps,”¹⁵ “the respect of Black noise,”¹⁶ i.e. superposition, opacity, non-sense, the awareness that visibility only happens in disappearance, and the acceptance of the “inevitable failure”¹⁷ of ever reaching the factual truth.

Using exclusively graphite pencil on warm white paper and inspired by Hartman’s critical fabulation, I explored the following drawing strategies:

- reinforcing the contrast between dark and light areas
- experimenting with shading as a technique of abstraction
- mixing clean outlines with textured shapes
- resizing of objects as an emphasis technique
- exploring how the repetition of one category of objects may accentuate their presence
- using the negative space to bring to view what is missing
- rotating the drawing to understand different impacts of different positions.

¹⁵ Hartman, 12.

¹⁶ Hartman, 12.

¹⁷ Hartman, 12.

These drawing strategies accentuated the tension between “the insight and blindness” that Avery Gordon identifies as fundamental to the process of writing with ghosts: “To be haunted and to write [draw] from that location, to take on the condition of what you study, is not a methodology or a consciousness you can simply adopt or adapt as a set of rules or an identity; it produces its own insights and blindness.”¹⁸

The drawings that emerged from this practice function in-between revealing and concealing, between figurative and abstraction; they invite the viewer to fill in the gaps and pay attention to the figurative and literal empty spaces in-between them. By spreading the “things” in the space of the gallery, the viewer is required to put their body into motion to discover the different drawings of the piece. This walk is unique for each viewer, as no path was set. Making the viewer walk among the drawings is an act of invocation that invites the viewer to invest the drawings with their own memories and experiences. The performative quality of the piece is what activates the process of memories, storytelling and haunting.

¹⁸ Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 22.

METHODOLOGY

Though my exhibition does not focus on self-identified queer individuals, my project is theoretically, methodologically, and politically queer and seeks to bring queer reflections to our understanding of history, memory, and political action. Queer people, as in those that do not conform to the dominant norm, are heavily penalized and invisibilized during fascist regimes. They are invisible from the archives but also from our current landscapes, cityscapes, and mediascapes, where, as Argentinian philosopher Silvia Schwarzböck argues, the aesthetics of fascism have become the aesthetics of everyday life.¹⁹ Approaching the thematic (theme?) of haunting through the drawing of things is therefore an investigation into queer strategies that survive technologies of erasure and devices of dominant discourses.

The title *Las cosas que se quedan/The things that remain* refers to José Esteban Muñoz's reflection on "queering evidence".²⁰ He argues that "the key to queering evidence [...] is by suturing it to the concept of ephemera" which he describes as "a trace, the remains, the things that are left, hanging in the air like a rumor."²¹ The

¹⁹ Schwarzböck, *Los Espantos: Estética y Postdictadura*.

²⁰ Muñoz, 'Gesture, Ephemera, and Queer Feeling: Approaching Kevin Aviance', 65.

²¹ Muñoz, 65.

“things that remain” are fragments, broken pieces emerging from the sand through a wooden stick.

On my walks along the beach, I find multiple objects, abandoned or lost by someone: an empty can, a piece of rope, broken sunglasses, a shoe. What are the stories behind these objects? Who left them? Who lost them? Are these objects remnants of the daily crossings that migrants attempt from Morocco to Spain? Where are the bodies of those who drown? Is there a dead body next to mine, both pushed against the shore by the waves? Sometimes these remains are solid, stone-made, like the bunkers from the war, built on first line at the beach. Sometimes there is no actual object, maybe a local legend, a collective memory, or a rumor travelling from queer ear to queer ear about having sex behind certain dunes at the beach.

A methodology that explores liminal presences cannot follow a *straight* line. Instead, my methodology operates by following *lines of desire*. As Sara Ahmed explains, “lines of desire” is an architectural term to define the paths that people create in parks and streets in spite of design, signalizations, and other urban

planning devices.²² My research comprises multiple ramifications of these paths of desire. My investigation includes archival documents, contemporary movies, historical analysis, philosophy texts, news articles, conversations over a drink, and many walks on the beach. It does not discriminate nor create hierarchies between these sources, and I move between them depending on my curiosity and my sense of storytelling. I walk from one to another both metaphorically and literally; sometimes it is my mind that pursues a hint, sometimes I physically walk between places.

Walking is a central component of my methodology. When I was in residency on-site in Spain in the summer of 2018, I established daily walks along the beach that allowed me to observe patterns, dynamics, disruptions, erasures. After the stage of collecting media and academic texts, going for long walks helps the information to settle within my body. Similarly, in the exhibition I invite the viewer to walk among the drawings, therefore mimicking my own process. The things that I drew were those that remained in my memory after these walks (on the beach and through the different sources); these were the things that sparked

²² Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 19.

my memories and my sense of storytelling. In turn, I intend for the viewer to walk around, see the things, and invest them with their own memories and stories. The performative quality of memory is reinforced by the action of bodily walking among the work.

My research started with figurative and literal wanderings, cumulating notes on readings and notes of my own on-site perceptions. At this stage, I gathered anything and everything, so much so that I often created mind-maps or sketches that helped me organize and connect the information. At this point, I sought to acquire a general sense of the issue and I looked for the tensions and gaps that often lead to interesting stories. The story was, in my methodology, what I was h(a)unting for. What I was interested in was often the anecdote, the mystery, the unknown fact, anything that brought history or theory into the concrete life of people. I took a lot of notes, I drew a lot of sketches in my notebook, I wrote or illustrated these stories, and once I felt I had enough to establish connections between them and my research questions, I put my notes aside.

This was the moment of the break or pause. I did not look for more sources and I did not start any drawings. Instead, I went for long walks. Sometimes I remembered the stories I had collected and continued to bridge connections

between them. The walks helped me to unconsciously integrate all the information, discarding some elements, merging others, allowing for fiction to fill in some gaps and letting the external information settle within my body. Through this process, I hoped to establish a relationship with the ghosts, and, as Gordon proposes, “to be haunted and to write from that location.”²³ It was only after the break that I entered the studio.

It is in the studio where the process of invocation began. In my practice, invoking means sitting down with a large piece of paper, music playing and letting the story emerge. Invoking means paying attention to where my mind is going, what are the things I am remembering? What are the emotions that are appearing? It is by paying close attention to these memories and feelings that I started perceiving the difference between a story and a haunting. A story is a narrative that I create myself or that I am told, while a haunting is a process by which glimpses of this narrative emerge from a discussion with ghosts. The drawing was the process through which the ghost is invoked.

²³Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 22.

This may sound like an abstract and disturbing process but it was not. Most of the time, this took the form of a candid silent conversation. For example, when I drew a boat, I asked questions like: Who painted the boat red? Where were you sailing from? Do you remember the first time you sailed? How long have you been here? Who saw you? This was a one-on-one conversation with the ghost that guided my formal choices. I did not draw the object as I saw it in my documents or in pictures, but as it surfaced from these discussions between the ghosts and myself: objects were drawn smaller or larger, they were sometimes very detailed, sometimes abstracted, their positions were turned around, in some cases the empty silhouette depicted the complete object that the drawing represented as fragmented.

I also experimented with repetitions by creating different drawings of the same categories again and again. I used this strategy for the drawings of the boats, which I drew as small objects, many times and positioned around the room. Fundamentally this meant that, in the gallery, there were as many stories of boats as drawings of boats, as many ghosts sharing the stories of boats as drawings of boats. Ten out of the sixty drawings in the exhibition are of boats, which gives these particular stories and ghosts a strong presence in the room, even though the drawings were themselves small and sometimes not easy to see.

How these drawings and these ghosts occupy the space was also part of my experiments in the studio. First, I started by gluing the paper drawings onto a cardboard sheet and I cut them out with a knife. I wanted the drawings to stand alone away from the wall because I wanted to create a site, a space where the viewer could walk among the drawings. I intended for this walk to echo my own explorations at the beach and to activate the process of invocation in the viewer. In this work I considered there was a first invocation that happened through the process of drawing, and a second one, that occurred when the viewer activates the space by walking and re-invoking the stories through their viewing of drawings. Space was crucial in this latter invocation in terms of how the drawings are placed, facing what, with what light, in what cluster, where in the room. Through experimentation and feedback from my peers and supervisors, I developed a choreography of drawings that helped me to create the conditions for the invocation and for viewers to move around. I use the term choreography on purpose, as I established the drawings and the sticks according to focal points and rhythm.

It is these focal points that attract the viewer's attention and move them towards the other side of the room. For instance, the drawing of the bomb was positioned and lit so as to incite the viewer to look at it and feel confused. All the

other drawings that the viewer saw from the entrance conveyed information about this site being a beach, nevertheless, the bomb, placed a little way? bit behind these objects and across the room, was perfectly visible and disturbing at first sight. As the viewer walked towards it, they would discover the rest of the drawings. I used shadows as well as focal points, playing with drawings whose shadow were easily recognizable and which served to amplify the presence of the objects, for example, with some hands, the glasses, and the crab.

Rhythm was the other strategy that I used to experiment with the space. Rhythm was produced by the height of the stick, by the size of the drawing, by the fact that I showed the black or drawn side and by the story and the ghost inhabiting the drawing. Rhythm is also contingent on the room; its size, its colour, the light, the architectural elements. Therefore, the choices for this particular exhibition would not work for another space because all the decisions I made, even though I had experimented multiple times in other sites, were made *in* the site for site. In fact, I brought the drawings to the space separated from the sticks and it was only in the space that each drawing was assigned a particular height of stick. Once the drawings had been taped to the sticks, I started by placing my focal point drawings and then I continued creating the different clusters. In so doing, I set myself two rules: I could not repeat two drawings of the same category in a cluster (for

example, no two boats), and the drawings in the cluster could not all be visible at once, in order to force the viewer to move around to be able to view all of the cluster. Once I had finished with the placement, I studied the rhythm of the room, observing how the black and the light sides worked in the space, whether there was too much noise on one side and not enough on the other, how the heavy stories and ghosts interacted with the not so heavy ones. A good friend of mine who is a professional percussionist helped me with the last positioning: we walked around the room “listening” to the drawings from every gap between clusters. Once we were both satisfied, I left the choreography to rest.

Leaving the work for some time after it is initially placed on-site and before the opening is crucial to me. It gives the work the possibility to appropriate the space and to make the space part of the piece. If not, the work feels as if it has been dumped into an uncomfortable elevator. As these drawings are inhabited by stories and by my discussions with the ghosts, letting the choreography rest allows for the ghosts to occupy the room. For this exhibition, the choreography remained unchanged and alone for three days in the room. I came by twice or three times in that period, checked that everything was fine and left again. On the fourth day, with the help of my relatives, we covered the base of each stick with sand. At every step, I kept “listening” to the exhibition and taking decisions, as theatre artist say,

“on my feet.” It took 50kg of sand to cover the bases and create the sandy webs within the clusters. Once it was done and the lights were adjusted, I left the show to sink into the space again, for a final evening before the opening.

ARTISTIC CONTEXT

The moments that I have explained until now (thus far?) as giving pause to the work (the process of reflection; the breathing space for the work in the gallery before the opening night) are those (the moments?) concerning the dialogue between the ghosts and myself through the emergence of a story that takes the form of a drawing, and the moment where the drawings engage, making the space their own. In addition, there was a third kind of pausing in the process of making, a pause in which I was confronted by hesitations that most often translated into emptiness, that is, into not being able to resolve a decision or a drawing. For those situations, which happened throughout the process of drawing, I surrounded myself with the work of artists whose reflections resonated with mine: Esther Ferrer’s performances, Doris Salcedo’s installations, Kara Walker’s narrative visuals and Nancy Spero’s three-dimensional drawings. I also always had Federico Garcia Lorca’s play *El Publico* close at hand to where I was drawing. In those moments when I could not make the drawings emerge, I immersed myself in the

work of these artists, wandering around in their practice, their words, their ideas, not so much looking for a solution to my doubts as to deploy a strategy of pausing in their company. In so doing, I chose these artists as “mentors” not only because their work echoes my own practice, but because I respect and admire how they position themselves as artists engaged within society and because we share similar progressive values. Therefore, they acted for me as guides, not only in the specificities of my practice, but in my understanding of my role as an artist.

Working beside the practice of these artists meant not only that I became familiar with their work, but, more importantly, with their methodologies and the way they understood questions such violence, haunting, history and the agency of the viewer in their work. It was through my proximity to their work that I was able to formulate my own thoughts and strategies. Through a “conversation” with their works and their ideas, I established what my ideas for my work were, our ideas sometimes similar, other times different. For instance, engaging with Spanish artist Esther Ferrer’s ideas on the relationship of performance, politics and the viewer, clarified my position on the importance of gaps between drawings as a space where the viewer may situate themselves and become agent of the story, that is, a political being.

Ferrer argues that “En una performance dejas un vacío para que la gente lo rellene como quiera, para que se proyecte como quiera”²⁴ [In a performance, you leave an emptiness so that people fill it up as they want, so that they project themselves the way they want]. Indeed, one of my exhibition’s main characteristics is its fragmentation (cut-outs of landscape, isolated drawings mounted on sticks, glimpses of a site, traces of stories through two-dimensional monochrome drawings of objects), and it is this fragmentation that forcibly implies that there are gaps in-between fragments. These are the gaps, the *emptiness*, where the viewer can “fill it up as they want [...] project themselves the way they want.”²⁵

This idea of the viewer filling up the emptiness in their own way is very important in my work. While I recognize that with this idea of emptiness comes the risk of being misread, or, even worse, the risk of the viewer rejecting any form of engagement with the piece, it also offers unexpected rewards, experiences of the work that I could not envision, readings that push the piece further than I expected.

²⁴ Basterra González, ‘Esther Ferrer: “En La Performance Dejas Un Vacío Para Que La Gente Lo Rellene Como Quiera”’.

²⁵ Basterra González.

Esther Ferrer's statement that the viewer "project[s] themselves the way they want" can be considered in various nuanced ways. Firstly, these projections are not only what the viewer wants, but they are connected to the viewer's experience, memories, knowledge, desires, and positionality in social and political structures. Secondly, the strategy of isolating a movement, scene, action as a performance, or my own strategy of isolating things, traces, shapes as drawings, are the product of a selection process established by the artist. Both Ferrer and I choose what we want the viewer to see, and therefore we also construct the gaps.

Ferrer acknowledges that there are performances in which she guides the viewer to a single understanding of the work. She calls them "eficaces" [efficient]: their message is clear and "without ambiguity."²⁶ This is the case, for instance of her performance "2.856" (2016) that criticizes EU border policies in the Mediterranean Sea. Though my exhibition dealt with similar issues to Ferrer's "2.856," I identified my work as a patchwork of fragments and emptiness where the viewer is in charge of *suturing* the story. In so doing, I positioned my work in a grey zone between the open performance and the performance "eficaz." I sought

²⁶ Bastera González.

to direct the viewer's projection through my aesthetic choices, but I did not? intend to restrict this projection to one single reading.

What I chose to draw and how I chose to draw it constitutes an aesthetic action that is at the same time a political action. My drawings are of everyday discarded objects, limbs that the State wants to disappear, lost objects that are meaningful for invisible activism, and abandoned boats, all of which are emerging from the sand in the exhibition space. By selecting these objects through the process of drawing, and by elevating them from under the sand, I assigned these objects with a narrative value, I pointed them out as being witness or actors of real tragedy. For as Garcia Lorca reminds us in his queerest play, *El Público* (1933), the theatre under the sand is the theatre of real life, of real tragedies, the theatre that "emerges from a tomb."²⁷

My choice of drawing discarded everyday objects shares a resonance with Doris Salcedo's work. Salcedo uses the everyday objects of found and reclaimed chairs, closets, and tables that once belonged to missing people to create sculptures that do not appear to be directly connected to a situation of violence but which

²⁷ García Lorca, *El Público*, 183.

bring into question the absence of the missing people/bodies.²⁸ Though Salcedo interferes with these objects, for example by pouring concrete on them or gluing hair onto them, her work echoes the haunting idea of “the furniture without memories” that Avery Gordon borrows from Toni Morrison.²⁹ With Salcedo’s work, I always have the impression that I have arrived too late to a scene where there is no longer anything to see, or worse, to do. Not even the body itself is present, it has already been removed from sight. Who owned the chair? Who used the wardrobe? Why is there no one writing on the table? What happened to all these people who owned all these pieces of furniture? These are the questions provoked by her sculptures. Indeed, her sculptures are “furniture without memories” and my mind rushes to find traces of the people who may have used them as a starting point from which to “remember” their stories.³⁰ The haunting presence of these objects is astonishing.

²⁸ Bacal, ‘The Concrete and the Abstract: On Doris Salcedo, Teresa Margolles and Santiago Sierra’s Tenuous Bodies’.

²⁹ Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 3.

³⁰ Beltrán Valencia, ‘Doris Salcedo: Creadora de Memoria’.

The objects that I choose are less charged with symbolic values than those of Salcedo. While Salcedo uses found and reclaimed chairs, closets, and tables once housed in the private spaces of missing people, I draw beer cans, lost plastic toys, and abandoned wooden boats that are to be found on the public beaches of southern Spain. The intimacy that Salcedo's objects claim cannot be found in most of the objects that I draw, which are for the most part discarded and broken.

In this respect, my choice of objects was also influenced by Spanish artist Carmen Calvo's use in her work of what remains of her studio practice: old pencils, broken brushes, dried colour palettes. Calvo keeps these objects as remnants of and witness to her artistic work. She individually frames each of them, with the wooden frame taking the shape of the object and then she hangs the framed pieces in a cluster of otherwise discarded objects in the gallery. The action of framing each object and creating a specific frame that accentuates the shape of the object confers a much higher value on it than it originally had. Echoing this process, in my exhibition, I chose to isolate discarded objects. I mounted them on cardboard and made them stand upright using a wooden structure. An obvious difference between Calvo's piece and mine is that she works with the actual objects, while I abstracted and manipulated these objects through multiple drawing and installation strategies.

In relation to my process of drawing these objects and placing them in the gallery, an artist who has been central to my consideration of drawing, space, and the aesthetics of political engagement is Kara Walker. Using large black paper cut-outs, Kara Walker creates extraordinarily detailed scenes depicting multiple forms of violence against the African-American population in the United States. Though Walker roots her work in archival documentation from the slavery period and her drawing mimics illustrations from the 1800s and early 1900s, she manages to establish a connection between past and current white supremacist violence. By doing so, she succeeds in speaking of contemporary racism as a *continuity* from past slavery, bringing attention to the haunting presence of the slavery trade apparatus in contemporary America.³¹ This notion of continuity, of an oppressive discourse systemically leaking from past to present to future society, is also present in my work where multiple histories from different periods are situated in the same site, raising the questions of the continuity or disruption between past and present events.

³¹ Shaw, 'The "Rememory" of Slavery'.

In contrast with Walker, however, the narrative of my work is not linear. Instead, I purposefully make it fragmented, opaque, and blurry. As exemplified by *The End of Uncle Tom and the Grand Allegorical Tableau of Eva in Heaven* (1995), Walker's drawings are easily readable in the space. They are large clean-cut black silhouettes pasted against the white walls of the gallery. They are positioned in a left to right script, so that the viewer is able to "read" them as they would a book in language with a left to right script. Though flat, they utilize linear perspective, and as such, the further the object from the viewer, the smaller and closer to the top of the wall it is. Monochromatic, they are nevertheless, extremely intricate; a hair in the air, a broken branch, the folding of a dress, in a manner that mine are not. The narrative capacity of these drawings is exceptional. As a viewer, we enter the narration immediately and we are, at the same time, immersed in the work as we approach and the silhouettes stand as tall as our shadow on the wall. In contrast, the narration is quite loose in my work. I place the drawings around the room without a specific order. As the viewers move in the room, they see different drawings or different black silhouettes (the back of the drawings). I do not aim to narrate a single story, but to invite the viewer to invest the drawings with their stories, bringing their experiences, memories, and imaginaries.

As different as our narrative strategies are, something that resonates with me is Walker's investment in "fiction" as a tool of empowerment. Walker's drawings contain a multiplicity of details and elements rooted in African-American storytelling, sayings, songs, folklore, mythologies, oral history, etc. Other elements are the product of her imagination, and finally, some formal characteristics, like repetitions, exaggerations, and grotesqueness are strategies of her storytelling³². Her capacity to interweave the official history of the archives with the embodied stories of the repertoire and, at the same time, leave gaps for the viewer to fill, is one of the reasons why I am so touched by Kara Walker's work. According to Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw, "Kara Walker takes a deficient history that is both visual and textual and re-members it in a way that calls forth the ghosts from our collective psyche."³³

In relation to the formal characteristics of my drawings, I have drawn inspiration from the American artist Nancy Spero, whose art is the closest formally to my own work. Spero's process of drawing has been very influential in how I approach mine, specifically in the different mark-making techniques and strategies

³² Wall, 'Transgression, Excess, and the Violence of Looking in the Art of Kara Walker'.

³³ Shaw, 'The "Rememory" of Slavery', 43.

she uses. As someone who has also worked in screen printing and engraving, I admire Spero's capacity to mix media and use the multiplication advantage of these printing techniques to explore performativity and embodiment. Through a practice-based exploration of these different techniques, Spero draws women bodies (from art history archives) and repeats them again and again, using different colours, overlapping them, relating them to other drawings. Some prints lack detail, some overflow with ink. Some are very visible, some merge with the paper. These experimentations and the results produced by them resonate with how I approach my practice-based work, specifically how I think about questions of visibility and invisibility within the same drawing, and how I bring the drawings together in a cluster.

Most significantly, Nancy Spero's work, *Maypole: Take No Prisoners* (2007), has been instructive in how to make a two-dimensional object occupy a three-dimensional space. In her work, Spero takes the drawings out of the sheet (in this case aluminum), ties them to a Maypole through a colourful ribbon, and puts them around the room as in a dance. The action of taking the drawing out of the canvas questions the distinction between drawing and sculpture, drawing and installation, and brings a medium often thought of as fragile, closer to the body of the viewer. In my work, I aim for the drawing to occupy the same space as the viewer; it is not

a viewer looking at the drawing, but the body of work and the body of the viewer
sharing the space and interacting accordingly.

THE GHOSTS, INCARNATED

EVERYTHING STARTS WITH DEATH

If there is something I have learnt through the process of this research is that to become a ghost one must first die. In her extraordinary essay *Gore Capitalism*,³⁴ Sayak Valencia affirms that “contemporary history is no longer based on the experience of survivors, but rather on the vast numbers of dead.”³⁵ Contemporary history is thus one of a vast number of ghosts. The story my work tells in relation to this history is one of many dead and many different ways of dying; of corpses and living dead, of dismembered bodies and people without names, of disposable flesh and disposable lives. Accordingly, my story is a story of hauntings, ghosts, spectres, systemic leaking, vampires, and addictions. While how one dies may take

³⁴ Mexican philosopher Sayak Valencia, with whom I coincided during my residency at Universidad de Altea, Spain, in 2018, has been very influential in my understanding of current haunting in the Frontera Sur and the role of aesthetics in the rise of neo-fascism. Based in the border city of Tijuana, Mexico, Sayak Valencia coined the term “gore capitalism” to refer to “the disruption of values and practices taking place (most visibly) in border territories.” (20) Those gore practices, Valencia affirms, are illegal activities that must be understood not as a breaking of the law, but as a continuation of a neoliberal system in which the notion of nation-state has been replaced by that of a nation-market. Accordingly, Valencia argues that “in the era of globalization, the State can be understood more as a worldwide interstate political entity that eliminates its economic borders while reinforcing its internal borders and beefing up its surveillance systems. This proliferation of borders, surveillance and internal controls increases the costs, the boom and the demand for gore's goods: drug- and human- trafficking, contract killings, private security run by mafias, etc.”(41). Valencia, *Gore Capitalism*.

³⁵ Valencia, 28.

different forms, death, in every one of its shapes, starts by (with? in?) the body. As such, I recognise the haunting as *in-carnated*, originating *in the matter* of the body.

Throughout my research, the haunting emerged when the individual or the community has been reduced to what Giorgio Agamben calls “bare life”, that is, when the person or the group are diminished to their biological body and they are robbed of the potential and capacities of humanity.³⁶ “Bare life” is when certain people can be legally and/or morally killed or disappeared by the dominant system, and when others may be kept alive but exploited, tortured, imprisoned, unacknowledged, de-humanized, turned into data. *Bare life* is not about being barely alive, but about living under the conditions in which those in power have the *sovereign* right to kill, or, as Achille Mbembé describes it, “the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die.”³⁷ *Bare life* and the right to kill are two of the core characteristics of the biopolitical regimes theorized by Foucault, who described Francoism as a biopolitical dictatorship.³⁸

Expanding Foucault’s analysis, Mbembé describes our current political system as Necropolitics, the politics of death, in which certain lives in certain spaces are disposable. One of those spaces, according to Mbembé, is that of the borderscape, specifically, those created by the European Union.³⁹ In 2017, the International Organization for Migration named the *Frontera Sur* as the deadliest

³⁶ Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*.

³⁷ Mbembé, ‘Necropolitics’, 11.

³⁸ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*.

³⁹ Mbembé, ‘Necropolitics’, 23.

border in the planet.⁴⁰ I am not certain about the truth of this statement when considering the people missing in deserts, seas, crossings, trucks, that are never found and therefore counted in these other borderscapes. Also, I am in favour of changing this statement to something more accurate, like “The *Frontera Sur* is the border where the EU migration policies kill a large number of people every day” or “The banality of evil is back in Europe.”

I thought a great deal about this southern border during my residency in the summer of 2017 in Tarifa, the southmost town of peninsular Europe, during which I established two walking paths that I followed every day. The first, a morning path, consisted of an eight kilometer walk along Los Lances beach on the Atlantic shore. With the exception of the Strait of Gibraltar, Tarifa is the only other site in Spain that has beaches both on the Mediterranean and the Atlantic shore. It is possible to stand on the road that leads to the Isla de las Palomas and have the Atlantic to the right and the Mediterranean on the left. Los Lances beach is the one preferred by Northern European windsurfers and kite-surfers who have turned Tarifa into a surfing hotspot. Because of its size and the sea currents, Los Lances is also where most migrant boats arrive. Though I never saw a boat land, I did see old abandoned wooden boats, the new ones being rapidly removed by the police. I also saw clothes, shoes, ropes, fishing nets, water bottles, and plastic bags. I saw a constant stream of different police agencies: border police, municipal police, and state police. I saw migration-policing radar on the upper hills of the town, fences

⁴⁰ International Organization for Migration, ‘Four Decades of Cross-Mediterranean Undocumented Migration to Europe: A Review of the Evidence’, 1.

all around the harbour, and police ships much larger and faster than the Red Cross boats stationed in the marina. I saw postal trucks and grocery shop trucks entering the fortress on Isla de las Palomas, the site of one of the most infamous Francoist jails for political prisoners and currently the Tarifa detention centre for migrants.

When the levant wind takes over Tarifa, it is excruciating. The inescapable noise never stops; millions of sand grains hit your skin, the windows, the walls, and enter through every single crack. It is literally maddening. Francoist prisoners inside the Isla de las Palomas went mad because of the levant, and many died or killed themselves. Nowadays, this is the place where migrants are forgotten for years, incarcerated inside a panoptical stone fortress with a madness-inducing wind. Nobody talks about the levant as a torture strategy, but it is, the weather weaponised against the migrants in more ways than one. The European kite-surfers, in the meantime, use the levant to fly higher than the walls of the prison, a dozen metres away from the cells holding migrants.

The “vast number of dead”⁴¹ that Sayak Valencia writes about in her book *Gore Capitalism* do not simply die; they are set to die or left to die at sea, in Isla de las Palomas, or in the greenhouses that produce the vegetables required by the globally-renowned Mediterranean cuisine. As Sayak Valencia states in her analysis of the necropolitical strategies of neoliberalism, the systemic violence of gore capitalism strikes particularly in the borderlands.⁴² In the Spanish *Frontera Sur*, a “vast number of dead” and therefore, a vast number of ghosts, cohabit with

⁴¹ Valencia, *Gore Capitalism*, 28.

⁴² Valencia, 20.

tourists, resorts, seaweed, greenhouses, back roads, and highways. The ghosts are those of the civilians raped, tortured, killed, and thrown into mass graves by the Francoist army. The ghosts are those of the drowned migrants who attempted to cross the Strait of Gibraltar from Africa to Europe smuggled in crowded patched boats. The ghosts are also ones of those of the people who physically survived but were turned into *bare life*: those who lived under 40 years of National-Catholic necropolitical dictatorship, brought up in a fascist system legitimized by Western democracies; the queers who were systematically raped, tortured, and used for experiments even after the end of the dictatorship and who still until today have never been acknowledged; the Roma people who are systematically silenced, erased, persecuted, stigmatized, and robbed of their cultural production, notably flamenco; the migrants and refugees who survived the crossing, who arrived in buses and planes, but who are systematically being exploited by a Western liberal democracy that does not acknowledge their humanity.

“Any historical account of the rise of modern terror needs to address slavery,”⁴³ states Mbembé, who describes slavery as “one of the first instances of biopolitical experimentation.”⁴⁴ The slave is, according to Mbembé, a *shadow* whose condition “results from a triple loss: loss of a “home,” loss of rights over his or her

⁴³ Mbembé, ‘Necropolitics’, 21.

⁴⁴ Mbembé, 21.

body, and loss of political status.”⁴⁵ The latter is equivalent to *social death*, that is to “the expulsion from humanity altogether.”⁴⁶

Agamben also analyzes social death in his influential book *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1995), in which he considers the fate of Jewish refugees escaping from Nazi Germany. Following Hannah Arendt, Agamben states that the figure of the refugee proves the deception of the modern notion of human rights. He wonders why, if refugees are humans, their human rights are not acknowledged by the nations that are supposed to offer asylum. He concludes that in the modern nation-state system where citizen rights are prioritized over human rights, the humanity of refugees is less important than their citizenship. In other words, their human condition is dependent on their birthplace, nationality, race, ethnicity, and religion.

This raises the question, as Judith Butler poses it, of “who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives?”⁴⁷ If the body does not *pass* in the “host” society, if the person does not belong in the category of “citizen,” then the process of de-humanization that constitutes bare life and social death occur. Racism, colonialism, classism, ableism, homophobia, sexism, transphobia are all occurrences of this process.

⁴⁵ Mbembé, 21.

⁴⁶ Mbembé, 21.

⁴⁷ Butler, *Precarious Life. The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, 20.

In my work, the ghost is never an ethereal abstract figure, but a material manifestation of bare life and social death. Perhaps this is because I have seen too much along the beach, in the back roads leading to the vegetable fields, in the rabble of the concentration camps. I have seen too many pictures, talked to too many people, listened to too many stories to believe that ghosts are immaterial. In my work, the ghost is someone with a body who leaves traces of their bodily presence. The ghost is someone reduced to bare life by a necropolitical system that condemns the non-citizens to death.

My work is based on the premise that the death that produces the ghosts is not biological death. Many people die every day without becoming ghosts. The death that produces the conditions for the haunting in the Spanish shores is that of bare life and social death. What all of these ghosts have in common—the migrants drowned at sea, the civilians killed by the Franco army, the migrants exploited in the greenhouses, the stigmatized Roma community, the political prisoners tortured in Francoist prisons, the women and queer survivors of a sexist ideology inherited from National-Catholicism, the asylum seekers jailed in migration centres— is that they have been robbed of their humanity, that they have *socially died*. It is after this death that the haunting begins.

THE LIFE OF THE GHOST

Avery Gordon published *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* in 1997, in another era, before the popularization of the internet, smart

phones, social media, before, as she reminds the readers of the new edition, 9/11 and the Global War on Terror with its “ghost airplanes, ghost prisons, ghost “detainees,”⁴⁸ Through interdisciplinary research, candid social commitment, and poetics, Gordon establishes the haunting as a political occurrence and the ghost as a social figure.

To be haunted and to write from that location, to take on the condition of what you study, is not a methodology or a consciousness you can simply adopt or adapt as a set of rules or an identity; it produces its own insights and blindness. Following the ghosts is about making a contact that changes you and refashions the social relations in which you are located. It is about putting life back in where only vague memory or a bare trace was visible to those who bothered to look. It is something about writing ghost stories, stories that not only repair representational mistakes, but also strive to understand the conditions under which a memory was produced in the first place, towards a countermemory, for the future.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, xix.

⁴⁹ Gordon, 22.

Gordon defines the haunting as “an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known,”⁵⁰ that is, the haunting emerges from the violent conditions created by systemic necropolitical powers. The ghost is, for Gordon, “the sign [that] a haunting is taking place,”⁵¹ and accordingly, the ghost is not “simply a dead or missing person, but a social figure.”⁵² The haunting and its ghosts are always political as they emerge as a consequence and a response to the systems of power: white supremacy, colonialism, heterocentrism.

Though these systems of power have existed for a long time, the Francoist regime in Spain reinforced them through the imposition of its National-Catholic ideology. Today these systems are still in place in Spain, under different shapes and masks, within current EU migration policies. In that sense it is important to remember the everlasting capacity for power to mutate and adapt to new social environments. As Gordon puts it:

⁵⁰ Gordon, xvi.

⁵¹ Gordon, 8.

⁵² Gordon, 8.

Power can be invisible, it can be fantastic, it can be dull and routine. It can be obvious, it can reach you by the baton of the police, it can speak the language of thoughts and desires. It can feel like remote control, it can exhilarate like liberation, it can travel through time, and it can drown you in the present. It is dense and superficial, it can cause bodily injury, and it can harm you without seeming ever to touch you. It is systematic and particularistic and it is often both at the same time. It causes dreams to live and dreams to die. We can and must call it by recognizable names, but so too we need to remember that power arrives in forms that can range from blatant white supremacy and state terror to "furniture without memories."⁵³

The phrase, "furniture without memories," that Gordon borrows from Toni Morrison's first novel *The Bluest Eye* (1970), is where, for me, that the haunting emerges. I instantly question how any (I assume used) furniture can exist without the memories of the bodies that touch, manipulate, and lie on it. This "without memories" is not casual nor accidental; it is an intentional act of erasure that, "to

⁵³ Gordon, 4.

those who bothered to look”,⁵⁴ reaffirms the silenced invisible body. According to Gordon, this “furniture without memories” is that “sad and sunken couch that sags in just that place where an unrememberable past and an unimaginable future force us to sit day after day.”⁵⁵

In my own work, I chose to depict this “furniture” as objects from diverse categories that may be found at the beach, and where the traces of the body also remain: beer cans, glasses, shoes, boats, cigarette butts, broken chairs. We drink from cans, use glasses to see, board boats to migrate, walk in shoes, smoke cigarettes. The relation between the object and the body is direct and concrete, for instance, we may find DNA on the cans, boats, cigarettes. If we were to try on the shoes, we would physically feel the weight, the posture, the movement, the shape of the person who wore them. Erasing the memory of the body from the shoe is impossible, except if, as in the case of the migrant boats, the shoe is itself removed from view, hiding the shoe and the reasons that brought the shoe to the beach in the first place; the person who wore it, the sea crossing, the, migration journey, its

⁵⁴ Gordon, 22.

⁵⁵ Gordon, 4.

roots in European colonial history, and the European neoliberal migration policies that put an end to it.

If the shoe remains, the traces of the body remain, and the ghost remains. If the shoe is removed, the traces of the body are removed, but the ghost remains. This is what the Spanish border police fail to understand when they remove the boats from view. As long as there is an “unresolved social violence,” Gordon asserts, the ghost will “[make] itself known.”⁵⁶ The ghost does not only respond to a past or present violence but it “prompts a something-to-be-done,”⁵⁷ an action from the witness of the haunting. Indeed, the ghost demands “a countermemory, for the future.”⁵⁸

This brings me to an important reflection in my work, which is that of victimization and complex personhood. Gordon’s understanding of the haunting, though pointing at the violence of the system, does not reduce the ghost to a victim. Instead, she proposes to apply the notion of “complex personhood”⁵⁹ to everyone

⁵⁶ Gordon, xvi.

⁵⁷ Gordon, ‘Some Thoughts on Haunting and Futurity’, 3.

⁵⁸ Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 22.

⁵⁹ Gordon, 4–5.

involved in the haunting: the ghosts, the witnesses, and those in power. “Complex personhood” for Gordon means that everyone is engaged in multiple social dynamics, imaginaries, stories, memories, and forgettings. No one is exclusively, or in all contexts and relationships, a victim. This obviously does not mean that people are not victims of the white supremacist EU migration system, or were not victims of the Francoist torture apparatus, but it does acknowledge that one is victim of a system, not a victim in essence. The essentialization of victimhood does negate the complexity, resiliency, and agency inherent to every human. To the contrary, recognizing the “complex personhood” of those living the “unresolved social violence” acknowledges their humanity.

The “things” that I chose to draw also allow for multiple readings, and what is more important, the viewer may bring into these readings their own memories, fears, dreams and hauntings.⁶⁰ The shoe that I drew may be the shoe of a migrant who drowned at sea, it could also be the shoe of a fisherman or the shoe of a tourist who lost it while they wandered bare foot, or a shoe of my childhood memories. A

⁶⁰ Writer Nehal El-Hadi pointed out this important characteristic of the exhibition. I was able to witness this difference in readings through a series of guided visits, in which the viewers identified the drawings they were the most touched by. I was struck by how different people project different emotions and memories to these objects.

wooden boat is an abandoned migrant boat; it could also be an old fishing boat in need of repair. A bottle of water with a label in Arabic is the remains of a crossing, the remnants of a picnic in Tangiers, a piece of trash from a greenhouse. Each object carries many memories and many possible stories.

In the essay “Venus in Two Acts,” Saidiya Hartman shares the painful challenge of writing the story of a little girl, Venus, who was killed on board a slave ship. Her name only appears once in the archive (notes taken during the judicial process against the captain of the ship). According to Hartman, this single record raises questions for the historian, on how to tell her story, what is appropriate in the framework of history when there is a lack of records, and, again, the violence of the archive. Hartman asks:

And how does one tell impossible stories? Stories about girls bearing names that deface and disfigure, about *the words exchanged* between shipmates that never acquired any standing in the law and that failed to be recorded in the archive, about the appeals, prayers and secrets never uttered because no one was there to receive them?⁶¹

⁶¹ Hartman, ‘Venus in Two Acts’, 10.

Hartman responds to her question with a methodology that she names “critical fabulation,” which simultaneously serves “to tell an impossible story and to amplify the impossibility of its telling.”⁶²

Like Hartman, I am interested in telling these impossible stories, the stories that cannot be proven according to traditional historical, sociological or scientific methodologies. The stories of haunting, ghosts, vampires, leaks, and living dead that inhabit my work cannot be narrated as historical findings finally unrooted from archival records. Although I am fascinated by archival records and I use some of these sources in my work, my intention is to understand what these records tell us about the haunting and about the systems that created the conditions for the haunting. In that sense, using these sources allows me to create the space, the details, the connections that will bring the impossible story into view. What is seen, though, is not the story *as* truth, but the impossibility to fully apprehend the truth.

In this respect, my work resonates with both Hartman’s narrative strategy of critical fabulation and with Marianne Hirsch’s notion of post-memory: fragments of stories, traces of events, flashes of memories, embodied recollections

⁶² Hartman, 11.

of what we feel more than what we know. As such, the haunting is systemic but also particular to each of us. The meanings and stories embedded in and created by my drawings of “things that remain” depend on the positionality, life experiences, knowledge, emotions, and imagination of those who see them. The role of the body; the body of the ghost, the body of the viewer, is central in my research; it is what allows me to recognize the limitations of storytelling when dealing with impossible stories.

THE BODY THAT HAUNTS

My work, by positioning the body of the viewer as an agent and site of memory in the haunting, parallels performance scholar Diana Taylor’s proposition that “people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by “being there”, being part of the transmission.”⁶³ In *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (2003), Taylor reminds us that there are other forms of knowledge outside the written word of archives and history which are manifested in the repertoire of embodied memory: “the repertoire [...] enacts

⁶³ Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, 20.

embodied memory — performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing — in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, non-reproducible knowledge.”⁶⁴ Taylor states that performance, which she defines as “embodied practice [that] offers a way of knowing,”⁶⁵ is intimately connected to the experience of haunting because “performance makes visible (for an instant, live, now) that which is always there: the ghosts, the tropes, the scenarios that structure our individual and collective life.”⁶⁶

In turn, the emergence of ghosts through the embodied action offers the possibility of “an alternative perspective on historical processes.”⁶⁷ Accordingly, Taylor presents performance as an “act of transfer”⁶⁸ that challenges dominant discourses by “generat[ing], record[ing], and transmit[ing] knowledge.”⁶⁹ Through her extraordinary analysis of performance in the Americas, Taylor positions the repertoire as the colonized subversive strategies of cultural resistance

⁶⁴ Taylor, 19–20.

⁶⁵ Taylor, 3.

⁶⁶ Taylor, 143.

⁶⁷ Taylor, 20.

⁶⁸ Taylor, 1.

⁶⁹ Taylor, 20.

and knowledge transmission. Central to her analysis is how colonized, silenced stories continue to be transferred from one generation to the other by subverting dominant genocidal discourses.

Marianne Hirsh also addresses how traumatic memories of genocide are transmitted intergenerationally through her focus on the transmission of memory in post-Holocaust Jewish families. Concurring with Taylor, although using different terminology, Hirsch states that, in contrast to history, memory is characterized by “the presence of embodied experience in the process of transmission.”⁷⁰ Additionally, she coins the term *post-memory* to “describe the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they “remember” only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up.”⁷¹

What is particularly interesting about Hirsch’s definition of post-memory is that post-memory does not function as a factual recording tool of past event,

⁷⁰ Hirsch, ‘The Generation of Postmemory’, 111.

⁷¹ Hirsch, 106.

instead, it is built on “imaginative investment, projection, and creation.”⁷² In her poetic writing style, Hirsch argues that post-memory, which she also calls “no-memories,” are “communicated in “ashes of imagery” and “broken refrains,” transmitted through “the language of the body.”⁷³ Along with Hartman’s “critical fabulation,” Hirsch’s insightful depiction of post-memory has been very influential in the development of a fragmented narrative strategy in my own work.

My research also addresses an understanding of the haunting that is specific to the context of Francoist Spain. In this respect, while both Taylor and Hirsch focus on memories or embodied practices as acts of transmission in spite of the subjugation of dominant powers, in the case of the Spanish haunting, bodies were *possessed* by the Francoist regime through what I have called an embodied systemic leaking after the terminology used by scholars and artists Eve Tuck and C. Ree.

In their inspiring article “A Glossary of Haunting,” Eve Tuck and C. Ree describe how Ree’s installation *Dark Water* is a response to the homonymous Japanese horror movie by Hideo Nakata, in that both the installation and the movie

⁷² Hirsch, 107.

⁷³ Hirsch, 109.

focus on the presence of a leak: "Nakata's simple device of the leak expresses the horror of walls transgressed, physical structures made permeable and violated of their visual promise of protective boundaries."⁷⁴ In the movie and the installation, the leak manifests itself through architectural sites and for Tuck and Ree it is clear that the boundaries that are crossed and changed through this leaking are indeed our personal (physical, emotional, cultural, etc.) boundaries that uphold systems of colonial power and oppression. Who we are is impacted by the leaking through a process they name "mutual implication," noting that "mutual implication, or *nos-otras*, is a way of describing how the colonized and the colonizer "'leak' into each other's lives" (Torre & Ayala, 2009, p. 390, citing Anzaldua, 1987) after centuries of settlement."⁷⁵

While Tuck and Ree's discussion of the haunting focuses on how the colonized leak into the colonizer's lives (a process described by Diana Taylor as *transculturation*),⁷⁶ in the case of my research, I envision leaking as an infiltration from top to bottom, from dominant to dominated, from Franco to the Spanish

⁷⁴ Tuck and Ree, 'A Glossary of Haunting', 645.

⁷⁵ Tuck and Ree, 649.

⁷⁶ Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, 10.

social body. One of the consistent characteristics of the way the haunting and the ghosts of Francoist Spain is thought of and expressed by Spanish scholars is through the persistence of the body. The ghosts retain experiences of the in-between; their existence is anchored in the flesh and their presence remains strongly embodied or tied to bodily actions.

In this respect, the notion of leaking and mutual implication is central to the work of the Spanish authors and artists I have studied, for it is not possible to consider the current political situation without understanding Franco's haunting or leaking into present Spanish society.⁷⁷ This leaking is expressed, not through an architectural metaphor as in Tuck and Ree's text, but through a full bodily experience, as in this extract from Teresa Vilarós' *El mono del desencanto: Una crítica cultural de la transición española (1973-1993)*:

⁷⁷ "Se ha olvidado que la democracia española descende directamente del franquismo. No se recuerda que sus espacios, sus signos y sus actores han sido formados por las escuelas y las formas de vida de aquellos sombríos años, por sus mismos cuadros políticos y élites intelectuales." [We have forgotten that the Spanish democracy descends directly from Francoism. We don't remember that its spaces, its signs and actors have been formed in the schools and in the ways of life of those dark years, by the same politicians and intellectual elites] Eduardo Subirats, "Contra todo simulacro", cited in Vilarós, *El mono del desencanto. Una crítica cultural de la transición española (1973-1993)*, 49.

De la expulsión a la aspiración, del vómito a la succión, la transición española se instala en el cuerpo español, en nuestro cuerpo, como quiste canceroso e invasivo, como ancestral serpiente o antiguo vampiro que en un eterno retorno de lo mismo, regurgita y chupa, chupa y regurgita.⁷⁸

[From the ejection to the inhalation/ambition, from the vomit to the suction, the Spanish transition settles into the Spanish body, in our body, as a cancerous and invasive tumor, as an ancestral snake or an ancient vampire who in an eternal return of the same thing, regurgitates and sucks, sucks and regurgitates]⁷⁹

For Vilarós, leaking through the body emerges in the context of “la siniestra biopolítica imperial-nacional franquista”⁸⁰ [the sinister Francoist imperial-national biopolitics], where historical memory of the Spanish war and the dictatorship needed not only to be forgotten, but also for the society to be “disincarnated,” to have the soul separated from the (social) body. Vilarós uses multiple figures to evoke the *desencarnado*: *el fantasma*, *el vampiro*, *el caníbal*, *el adicto*, *el zombie*, the

⁷⁸ Vilarós, 51.

⁷⁹ All the translations of Vilarós’ text are mine.

⁸⁰ Vilarós, 17.

transplanted body, the cyborg are among them. What these terms have in common is the liminal position of the living dead and their direct relationship to Franco. For Vilarós, Franco or Francoism “alimentaron el cuerpo del país, fueron fuente única, surtidor que de forma inescapable y minuciosa, perversa si se quiere, de año en año, de mes en mes y de día a día dirigió el fluido vital de la sociedad española”⁸¹ [fed the body of the country, the only source, a pump that inescapably and meticulously, perversely if you like, from year to year, from month to month and day to day directed the vital fluid of Spanish society].

Accordingly, Franco’s leaking simulates a feeding tube or a transfusion that consistently replaces the vital fluids from the body of Spanish society. Thus, Franco is not only a *fantasma* overshadowing Spanish society, as many authors have stated,⁸² but also the haunting that takes the form of an inescapable *systemic leaking*. In this systemic and systematic leaking, individuals are transformed into living dead or *desencarnados* through a constant, inescapable, transfusion of Francoism.

⁸¹ Vilarós, 55.

⁸² Juan Carlos Ibañez, though critical of these statements, summarizes different scholar’s positions on the matter: “the figure of Franco as the origin of the social conflicts and cultural specters affecting contemporary Spain; the persistence of the myth or shadow of the dictator over present-day decentralized Spain [...] and/or the vision of the transition to democracy as an experience of collective amnesia and the erasure of memory.” Ibañez, ‘Memory, Politics, and the Post-Transition in Almodóvar’s Cinema’, 156.]

Indeed, such is the amount of the leaking (40 years of it) that by Franco's death, he has become part of every Spaniard born during and after the regime. Spanish society is *possessed* by Francoism.⁸³

One of the key elements to understanding the current social and political situation in Spain is to make sense of how this process of possession not only affected those on Franco's side (who were already convinced by his National-Catholic biopolitics and therefore welcome to turn into "Una, Grande y Libre"⁸⁴ [One, Big and Free] with him), but also those who resisted him in life and after his death, the new generations born in the Transition (1973-1993) and the Democratic period (1993-). The disturbing power of this possession/leaking was manifested in Franco's last days when, in Vilarós' words, he became the "Franco-cyborg,"⁸⁵ a body kept alive artificially through machines and whose agony is continuously

⁸³ Catalan poet Gabriel Ferrater, who committed suicide in 1972, expresses the possession in this simple verse: "quan el cucs faran un sopar fred amb el meu cos, trobaran un regust de tu" [when the worms make a cold supper with my body, they will have an aftertaste of you]. Gabriel Ferrater, "Posseït" cited in Vilarós, *El mono del desencanto. Una crítica cultural de la transición española (1973-1993)*, 69.]

⁸⁴ "Una, Grande y Libre" is one of the main Francoist slogans to describe Spain: it helped the regime to reinforce national unity, imperialism and independence from foreign powers.

⁸⁵ Vilarós, 'Banalidad y Biopolítica: La Transición Española y El Nuevo Orden Del Mundo', 36.

mediatized.⁸⁶ At an historical juncture when anti-Francoist resistance could have exploded, nothing much happened: “muchos, muchísimos, simplemente siguieron adelante con sus vidas de siempre.”⁸⁷ [many, many, simply continued on with their lives as always].

One of the ways in which the Francoist apparatus was able to continue on after Franco’s death was through the financial and social transformations produced by the state’s development of tourism that negated embodied memory. The dominant discourse was one of how Spain had entered modernity thanks to the tourism: how Spain is now a new country where there is no need—and no time—to reflect on the insidious consequences of a civil war and 36 years of fascist dictatorship⁸⁸. Spain can be changed without the necessity of radically changing anything. To the present day, policemen are still everywhere, but now they are different: “no hay lugar para guardias estentóreos sino para aquellos silenciosos y

⁸⁶ On Franco’s death and the relationship to power, Foucault writes “[Franco’s death] is very interesting because of the symbolic values it brings into play, because the man who died had, as you know, exercised the sovereign right of life and death with great savagery, was the bloodiest of the dictators, wielded an absolute right of life for forty years, and at the moment when he himself was dying, he entered this sort of new field of power over life which consists not only in managing life, but in keeping individuals alive after they are dead” Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 248.

⁸⁷ Vilarós, ‘Banalidad y Biopolítica: La Transición Española y El Nuevo Orden Del Mundo’, 37.

⁸⁸ Alicia Fuentes Vega, *Bienvenido, Mr. Turismo. Cultura Visual Del Boom En España*.

eficientes que ya pululaban en los sesenta en el panorama civil y turístico”⁸⁹ [there is no longer room for strident policemen, only for those, who silent and efficient, swarmed in the cities and touristic landscape of the 1960s]. This tourism becomes the myth-alibi covering for Franco’s regime of terror.

This haunting of Francoist Spain has an even more threatening aspect due to its characteristic systemic leaking. If Franco, as Vilarós affirms, was the constant vital fluid that took over the bodies of Spanish society, one could expect that after his death, the bodies would regain agency. That did not happen, not even among the anti-Franco movement, nor the intellectual elite. The insidious systemic leaking, much like the political apparatus, survived/s Franco-cyborg’s physiological death. In this sense, Francoism opposes Agamben’s *bare life* (the living dead), by becoming the dead that stays very much alive.

Vilarós explains the stagnation of leftist thinkers in Spain after Franco’s death as an embodied response to the sudden lack of vital fluid. Using the slang term for a violent symptom of abstinence, she names this state *el Mono* and argues that “Franco o el franquismo no fueron únicamente un régimen político; fueron

⁸⁹ Vilarós, ‘Banalidad y Biopolítica: La Transición Española y El Nuevo Orden Del Mundo’, 36.

también y quizá sobre todo ... una adicción, un enganche simbólico y real.”⁹⁰

[Franco or Francoism were not only a political regime; they were also and maybe over all ... an addiction, a symbolic and real coupling]. Vilarós’ committed investigation with *el Mono* as a constitutive element of Spanish democracy, brings light to the extent to which Franco’s traces continue to flow in the blood of Spanish society. At the same time, the metaphor of Franco as an addictive drug (specifically heroin) is useful to understand the current political situation; on one hand, as with any addictive substance, we are constantly haunted by the presence of its absence, and, on the other, a small portion of the same drug can make us addicts over and over. With the rise of the extreme right in Spain, Franco’s haunting certainly has the potential of reincarnation.

This systemic leaking of Francoism – the addictive substance of the right-wing– haunts my drawings of “things that remain.” The exhibition installation, through its fragmented forms of the objects and gaps in-between them, is a reflection of the direct or indirect legacies of the National-Catholic dictatorship: the systemic heterocentrism; the racist notion of “Reconquista” used by extreme-right

⁹⁰ Vilarós, *El mono del desencanto. Una crítica cultural de la transición española (1973-1993)*, 55.

political parties; the monuments and streets consecrated to the dictator; the mass graves, the razor-blade border fences; the radical church; the masses and festivals to the glory of the Franco's army; and the stolen properties. It is this persistent leaking of National-Catholicism that my work has revealed for me. It has opened an uncomfortable examination to pursue in the future; a question of how much of this possession continues to live through me and those in the post-dictatorial generation.

CONCLUSION

SUMMARY

In my research I have explored how the haunting emerges in the Spanish borderscape in relationship to systemic violence, embodied memories, and erased narratives. Through a practice-based methodology rooted in queer lines of desire, I experimented with drawing and installation as strategies to work with the ghosts and activate embodied memories in myself and in the viewer. This process allowed me to investigate issues of the representation of the haunting and the body as a central component of the performance of remembering/ forgetting, as well as to further understand the impact of the systemic leaking of fascist ideologies in our current politics.

In this sense, my work engaged with the investigation of a diversity of scholars who aim to trace the continuity from past fascist or oppressive regimes to the present, bringing to light the roots, as well as the masquerade of change, of our current violent systems of power. From Achille Mbembé and Sayak Valencia to Giorgio Agamben and Alicia Vilarós, all of these scholars seek to establish this continuity and ask us to pay close attention to the connections between the past and the present; how slavery and colonialism impact current Western migration

policies, and how modern dictatorships continue to prevail through aesthetics in post-dictatorial countries. These were the questions that, in my work, I associated with the Francoist *fantasma* and its systemic leaking to the present day. In the case of the National-Catholic ideology of the Francoist regime, the haunting was and remains always in-carnated, that is, as a coherent biopolitical regime it has possessed, not only the infrastructures and the apparatus, but also the body of the Spanish society.

My work was also framed by the analyses of Avery Gordon, Diana Taylor, Marianne Hirsch, and Saidiya Hartman. For these scholars, the liminal presences, the impossible stories, and the embodied memories challenge the dominant discourses of knowledge, science and history. As such, they all perceive in these elements, resilience and survival against the silencing methods of power. For these authors, the question of the continuity of the system extends into the future. Indeed, for Gordon, the ghost is a social figure emerging from past/current systemic violence but asking us to act *now* for a better future.

The practice-based focus of my research engaged with a multiplicity of fragmented possible stories and memories through drawing “the things that remain.” These were “things” that remained behind on the beach on my walks,

and on which the traces of the bodies who used them also remained. Those traces are not visible, rather the drawings of the things that remain become synonymous with the space of the body that is no longer there; they become *haunting impersonations*. The viewer, while walking among these impersonations in the exhibition, sees/remembers/imagines the absence of these bodies whose stories are impossible to know or tell.

For the purpose of my research on the haunting I chose to focus on my birthplace of the Southern Mediterranean shore, but I know that ghosts inhabit other borderscapes. The choice of this specific location responded to my desire/need to comprehend my own experience of haunting on this site. From the ghosts of those killed by Franco to the current ghosts of those killed by EU immigration policies, the workers exploited in the fields, the queers imprisoned, and the women policed, this borderscape, with its millions of sunbathing Spaniards and tourist, haunts me. Thus, my research was rooted in my own personal tensions, between what I see and what I feel, between the landscape I love and the terror I know it hides. This is a landscape I know very well and that I have taken the time to know better during my master's studies through two on-site residencies, as well as through walks through, and readings and conversations about, the region and its histories. It was also important to me to bring to my thesis

research an Hispanic understanding of the haunting, the leaking and the violence, and to contrast this understanding with the dominant North American perspective. Bringing together these different frames of reference allowed me to further understand the role of the body as a site of memory and haunting, which is an element very important in the Hispanic framework. Sayak Valencia, Diana Taylor, Alicia Vilarós, and Silvia Schwarzböck all position the haunting *within* the body and not as an external experience that impact the body from the outside.

FINDINGS, CHALLENGES, LEARNINGS

Through my research, the body came to occupy a role that I had not anticipated when I began my investigation on the haunting. What I envisioned as experiential process anchored primarily in drawing and material experimentation soon came to be an embodied exploration of how systemic violence *in-carnated* or manifested in flesh. As such, the question of the body and its traces, the body traversed and physiologically impacted by the violence, by the borderscape, by necropolitics, by silenced memories, became central to my work.

Part of this shift was due to my research into Spanish-speaking frameworks of haunting, in which there are an abundance of figures of the living dead, from

fantasmas to vampires, cannibals, cyborgs, zombies, and transplant bodies, that serve to identify the different ways in which the haunting *possesses* the social and individual body. The works of Valencia and Vilarós were essential in enabling me to reflect on the haunting in relationship to body politics.

The other part of this shift was hidden in the notes I made at the very beginning of my research, when I was reading the work of Elizabeth Povinelli and Christina Sharpe. Both scholars investigate the distinction between life and non-life and analyze the organic, material, chemical, and embodied strategies by which memories and bodies remain. Indeed, both authors have a very corporeal approach to memories, stories and the haunting. They extend the notion of the body to its chemical and physical composition which, on one hand, allows them to challenge the definition between life/non-life,⁹¹ and, on the other, support their contention of the everlasting presence of bodies and their stories. In relation to this presence, while reviewing my notes, I found this quote from Christina Sharpe's

⁹¹ This distinction is what Elizabeth Povinelli names "Carbon Imaginary". Povinelli explains that this distinction is socially constructed and pursues to investigate how memories and stories remain if the notion of Carbon Imaginary is challenged. Povinelli, 'Can Rocks Die? Life and Death inside the Carbon Imaginary'.

book *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016), in which she studies the remnants of the Middle Passage trade and slavery to date:

What happened to the bodies? By which I mean, what happened to the components of their bodies in salt water? Anne Gardulski tells me that because nutrients cycle through the ocean (the process of organisms eating organisms is the cycling of nutrients through the ocean), the atoms of those people who were thrown overboard are out there in the ocean even today. They were eaten, organisms processed them, and those organisms were in turn eaten and processed, and the cycle continues. Around 90 to 95 percent of the tissues of things that are eaten in the water column get recycled. [...] The amount of time it takes for a substance to enter the ocean and then leave the ocean is called residence time. Human blood is salty, and sodium, Gardulski tells me, has a residence time of 260 million years.⁹²

Although in the end I did not draw on Povinelli and Sharpe to frame my theoretical considerations on the haunting, Sharpe's question, "What happened to

⁹² Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, 40–41.

the bodies?" nevertheless resonates throughout my exhibition. I am now convinced that, while I did not focus on these scholars, my exhibition and my reflections on traces, haunting impersonations, embodied memories, and the role of the viewer were unconsciously influenced by Sharpe's reflection on residence time. I owe to Elizabeth Povinelli and Christina Sharpe, as well as to Sayak Valencia and Alicia Teresa Vilarós, the elements of my investigation that are the most significant for the realization for the exhibition; the relationships between body and storytelling, body and memory and the everlasting presence of the absent body through traces, empty spaces, and abstracted objects.

Approaching the haunting as a physiological corpo/real experience in my thesis exhibition came with a series of challenges, limitations, and frustrations. The most salient of these were related to there being no images of bodies in the work. While the lack of representations of the body in the exhibition reflected a conscious decision on my part to investigate how to convey the presence of the absent bodies without corporeal form, at the end of my research I found my studio-practice limiting. I love drawing bodies, the matter of bodies, and the queerness of bodies, and by the end of the production of the work for the exhibition I had become frustrated with my own self-imposed limitation of not drawing bodies.

At the same time, my decision to draw things instead of people pushed me to further reflect on the qualities of the drawing itself, instead of focusing my attention to the content of the drawing. That is, I was able to ask myself how to draw instead of who to draw. Accordingly, my drawing practice grew exponentially throughout my research process; I investigated questions of trace-making, space, installation, light, and temperature because I pushed myself out of my comfort zone. I now look forward to applying these new reflections in my future projects.

FUTURE RESEARCH

For my next research project, I want to bring together these new reflections with the drawing of bodies. I intend to further investigate this relationship between the body and the haunting, specifically exploring how queer bodies are transformed, impacted, and traversed by the systemic leaking of fascism. I am interested in researching how, for instance, queer bodies in Spain have been altered by National-Catholic ideologies; what are the behaviours that have come out of this possession, how Catholic heterosexism continues to infiltrate the queer experience, and what have been and are the embodied strategies of resistance. In

order to do so, I am looking forward to further exploring notions of “Queer Archeology,” as developed by artists Renate Lorenz and Pauline Boudry,⁹³ and the persistence of fascism aesthetics in our current Western societies. It is my intention to focus this research in the construction and development of queer Spanish identities by utilizing archival materials, documents of queer resistances, and on-site observation. At the core of this research, I want to explore how the body is a site of memory, resistance, and possession in the time of gore capitalism and systemic fascism leaking. I want to ask how the aesthetics of fascism continue in our societies, how they impact the queer bodies, and how they possess the queer bodies. Using the practice-based research methodologies I developed during my research for my master’s thesis work, I want to continue experimenting with critical fabulation strategies in order to bring into view impossible stories, impossible and new stories that can provide a new understanding of our capacity for resistance and change in times of rising fascism.

⁹³ Christoffersen, Boudry, and Lorenz, ‘Pauline Boudry & Renate Lorenz in Conversation with Helga Christoffersen’.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: FIGURES

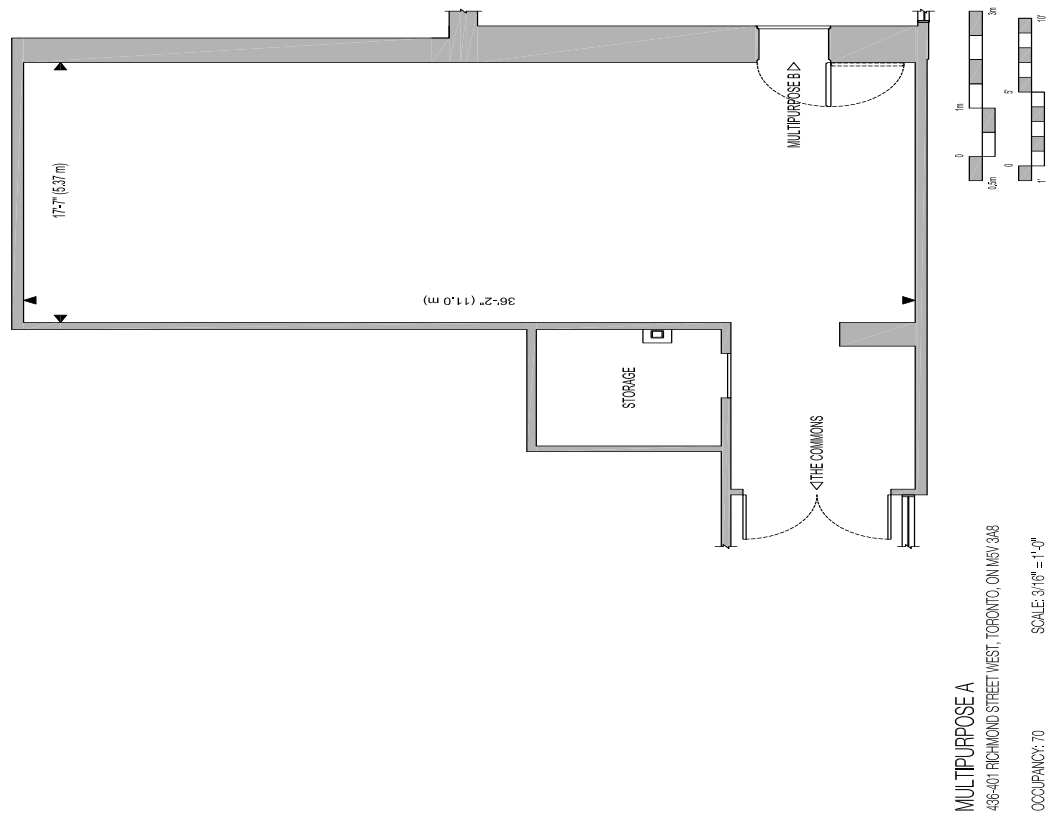


Figure 1. Bachir/Yerex Presentation Space floorplan. Curtesy of SAVAC



Figure 2. Martín, Teresa, 2019. Drawing of traffic signage for *Las cosas que se quedan* / *The things that remain* at Bachir/Yerex Presentation Space, Toronto, February-March 2019. Oil pastel on paper, 90cm x 100cm



Figure 3. Boyce, Kristy, 2019. Las cosas que se quedan / The things that remain at Bachir/Yerex Presentation Space, Toronto, February-March 2019



Figure 4. Martín, Teresa, 2019. Detail of glasses and other black silhouettes from *Las cosas que se quedan* / *The things that remain* at Bachir/Yerex Presentation Space, Toronto, March 2019

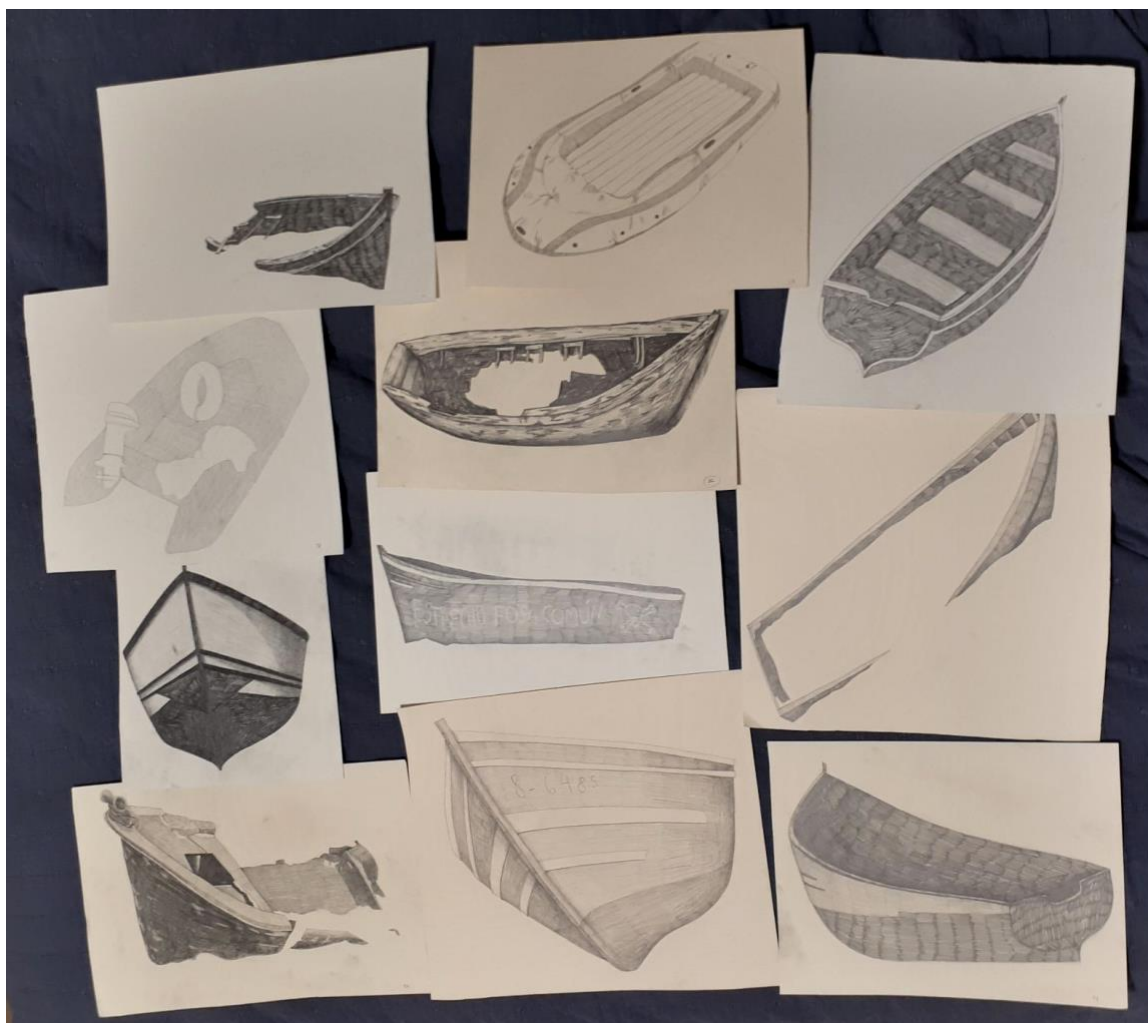


Figure 5. Guzmán, Coco, 2019. Process documentation of drawings of boats from Las cosas que se quedan / The things that remain. Pencil on paper, diverse measures between 7cm x 7cm to 5cm x 15 cm.



Figure 6. Martín, Teresa, 2019. Opening reception of Las cosas que se quedan / The things that remain at Bachir/Yerex Presentation Space, Toronto, February 20th 2019



Figure 7. Guzmán, Coco, 2019. Detail of hand drawn from archival material. *Las cosas que se quedan* / *The things that remain*. Paper, pencil, cardboard and wood, 55cm x 18cm

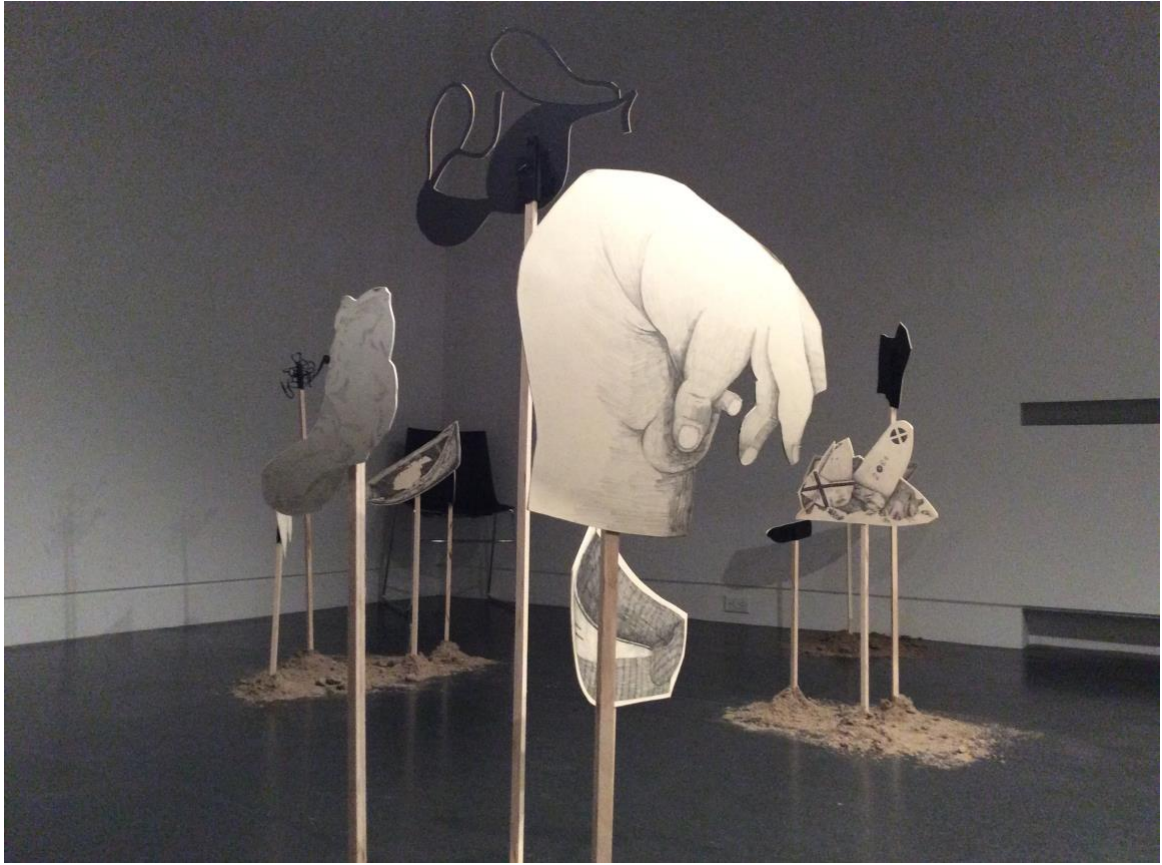


Figure 8. Martín, Teresa, 2019. Detail of hand from *Las cosas que se quedan* / *The things that remain* at Bachir/Yerex Presentation Space, Toronto, February-March 2019



Figure 9. Boyce, Kristy, 2019. Detail of boat drawing from *Las cosas que se quedan* / *The things that remain* at Bachir/Yerex Presentation Space, Toronto, March 2019

APPENDIX B: REFLECTIONS ON THE EXHIBITION

From the moment I started installing to the day I took the exhibition down, four weeks passed. During that time, I had:

- four days to install the exhibition with the assistance of a musician friend and my family visiting from Spain. I only used two; for the other two days I let the show rest in the space.
- an opening reception (February 20th 2019) attended by 150-180 people.
- a drag performance happening during that same reception
- a series of four postcards printed with the writing of my friend Nehal El-Hadi that served as an introduction to the exhibition. There were 250 copies of each, 1000 copies in total, and there are only around 150 left.
- an artist talk given at SAVAC on February 28th and attended by 30-40 people (this is the text from Annex I)
- my thesis defence with curator Mona Filip and professors David McIntosh, Derek Sullivan and Dot Tuer. This process seemed more like an inspiring conversation with friends than an oral examination of my work.
- a closing reception (March 9th) with a discussion with writer Nehal El-Hadi attended by 40-50 people.
- not even one full day to take all the work down and transport it to my studio at OCAD.

Making this list helps me to realize the number of events and work that happened during the exhibition itself. It also reminds me of the interactions, discussions, and questions that this exhibition produced; the many times I discussed with people a specific event, the numerous moments where someone

shared with me their holidays experiences, their thoughts on the question of migration, of fascism. I cherish how generous the viewers have been with this show, and how through these discussions I have been able to clarify my work. Observing and discussing with the viewers is fundamental in the process of evaluating my own work. To consider what moves them, how they engage with the work, and what stories they tell me.

For example, there were things that worked in my head, and that worked in the space, but that did not work once the viewer was in the gallery. This is the case of the drawings in the antechamber, which I enjoyed by themselves but which seemed lost, incongruent once the viewer entered the space. Most people did not pay attention to these drawings nor did they ask me questions about them, because they were not as moved by them as by the drawings in the main space. For future iterations of the exhibition, I would either choose to create a 3D construction of beach elements as suggested by curator Mona Filip, or I would leave the antechamber empty, maybe with some sand on the floor and the sound of the sea, as proposed by Professor David McIntosh. I may also just eliminate this part of the show and further think about how to introduce the work to the viewer; maybe the title of the show would have been enough or a short explanatory text. This is an element of the show that is conditional upon the gallery configuration, and whether or not there is a little hall before entering the large space.

Without this site-specific component, the drag performance does not make sense, so this also needs to be re-evaluated. Many people commented on the drag performance as something positive, as a component that helped them feel they were entering a space that was other, that of the beach. In the aftermath of the

exhibition and having written about the queering strategies of the show, I believe that the drag performance was interesting but was not enough; the goal should be to make people realize they are entering a queer space, not simply a beach. Is this possible to achieve only through the performance? Or in other words, can the drag performance carry the responsibility of making visible the queering strategies of the exhibition? This is the main issue I am contending with in my work; queerness is fundamental in this process of disinterment while simultaneously masked in the exhibition, as David McIntosh pointed out during my defence. Queerness is what brings things to light but hides others, aware of the dangers of showing too much, aware of the privileges of keeping things secret. This is my own experience of queerness, a choreography of lights and shadows. But queerness, being one of the fundamental methodologies and strategies of the exhibition, was not fully understood, except by some close friends of mine. The drag performance was not enough to invoke the queer haunting.

When I wrote the artist talk for SAVAC, the queer ghosts started to emerge. This is why I have included the text of my artist's talk as an appendix, for the exhibition was not complete the day it opened, rather, it became complete the day I read the text in the gallery. What is an appendix in this paper, should rightly have been the preamble; a text that walks the reader into entering the work from a queer perspective. In this respect, it is my intention to bring queerness forward in future versions of the work, to insist on how queerness impregnates every drawing, not only the ones that relate to violence against queers and homosexuals during the Franco dictatorship.

The drawings are now all packed away in a box. The sticks are in a giant plastic bag. I donated the sand to the playground on the ground floor at 401 Richmond, where the exhibition took place. At the beginning, it felt strange to give toddlers this sand that has been used in a ghost invocation. Then it felt fine, because the kids will build castles and will eat it and this is what children do with the sand on any beach, haunted or not. The sticks I will probably throw away. I do not have space and I never considered the sticks anything other than thin plinths. The drawings, I will keep safe until next time. Maybe I will give some away as gifts, but when I tried to offer them to special people after the show, everyone seems reluctant to take them.

During the closing reception, researcher and writer Nehal El-Hadi asked me how I live with so many ghosts, once I have called them into being. I do not have answers for this, but it explains why I consider giving the drawings away and why nobody takes them. Throughout the exhibition, it struck me how many people felt that the space was too intense. Some friends came to me and told me that they had a difficult time staying in the space, walking around the drawings. My relationship to the drawings is very different, because I have made them emerge, one pencil stroke at a time, through conversations with the ghosts. I know each drawing intimately (which does not mean I know the exhibition intimately) and therefore the ghosts are somehow familiar.

While I will continue my exploration of stories of haunting and specifically possession by the “bad” ghosts of fascism, Nehal El-Hadi’s question resonates from a different angle. It is not about how I feel about the ghosts living with me,

but about my responsibility when invoking these ghosts that I despise, what happens when these ghosts are exposed and let loose?

This is a question that I still do not have answers for. However, I consider that these ghosts are always present, within us, parasitizing our bodies. The difference therefore, in the case of this invocation, is that the audience and I would be confronted by the awareness of their presence. I believe this is where the challenge lies, not so much in the presence/absence of the ghosts, but in how much I, we, may look at their faces and recognize ourselves. How much of the fascist traces flow in our veins?

APPENDIX C: TEXT FROM THE ARTIST TALK GIVEN AT SAVAC⁹⁴

Between 1929 and 1930, Spanish playwright Federico Garcia Lorca was writing an impossible play, *El Publico*, often translated into English as *The Public* or *The Audience*. As with his other plays, Lorca read passages out loud to friends and then typed a new manuscript containing changes resulting from his friends' feedback. He did this several times but it is uncertain whether he ever finished the play. When Lorca saw the rise of fascism in Europe and specifically in Spain, he became concerned for his safety but believed that his fame as a poet and his upper middle class would protect him no matter what. Nevertheless, on July 13th 1936, just right before taking the train from Madrid to Granada, he gave a friend a manuscript draft of *The Public* and made him promise to destroy it if something were to happen.

The fascist army of Francisco Franco attacked the democratically elected government of the Spanish Republic four days later on July 17th 1936, which was the beginning of the Spanish War that ended with the defeat of the Republicans and a fascist dictatorship that lasted until 1975. With the Francoist army taking his hometown of Granada, Lorca hid in the house of a close friend, who was a member of the conservative party. The Francoist soldiers looked for the poet. They found

⁹⁴ As part of my MFA exhibition at the Bachir/Yerex Presentation Space, SAVAC, the co-organizers of the show, invited me to give an artist talk as part of the General Assembly. After multiple conversations, SAVAC and I decided to focus this talk on the queer component of the piece. This text is the written version of this artist talk, that was documented and will be soon available through the SAVAC website. Because this text was written to be read out loud and performed, I have taken certain liberties with it in terms of form if they helped me to maintain the attention of the audience and to successfully develop the narrative.

and arrested him. On August 18th 1936, he was assassinated, according to the police report written in 1965 and only made public in 2015, for being a “socialist”, a “mason” and a “practitioner of homosexuality, aberration that has become “vox populi”.”⁹⁵ His body, along those of three other men, two bullfighters and a teacher, was thrown in a creek and has never been found. Lorca, like every queer I know, knew a lot of things, some of them things that are not told but sensed, maybe things whispered by ghosts, which is what are called by some premonitions. Lorca himself wrote in 1930, six years before his death, the poem “Fábula de los tres amigos” (Fable of the three friends) that accurately predicted his assassination:

Cuando se hundieron las formas puras

bajo el cri cri de las margaritas

*comprendí que me habían asesinado.*⁹⁶

When the pure forms sank

⁹⁵ News broadcasting Cadena Ser published the pictures of the two pages of records they were given access to on their website. It's on the last page, almost at the end that the homosexuality of the poet is stated as one of the reasons for his assassination. Torres, 'La versión franquista del asesinato de Federico García Lorca'.

⁹⁶ García Lorca, *Poeta En Nueva York*, 6–7. In this artist talk, I started reading the poem in Spanish to give the audience a feeling of the sonority of the poem. The first three lines of my English translation are the same as those I previously had read in Spanish, and I then continued reading the poem only in English so that the audience could fully understand the weight of Lorca's premonition. The translation is mine.

in the cri-cri of daisies,

I knew they had assassinated me.

They combed the cafes, cemeteries and churches,

they opened the wine-casks and closets,

destroyed three skeletons to take their gold teeth.

But they couldn't find me.

They did not find me?

No. They did not find me.

But it was known the sixth moon fled above the torrent,

and the sea— suddenly!— remembered

the names of all it had drowned.

In 1975, the dictator Francisco Franco finally died, after been kept artificially alive for months, tubes and machines protruding from his body, his death fully mediatized through photography and television. Images of a dictator eternally dying but never completely dead. That same year *The Public* manuscripts, which had been thought lost, reappeared in Lorca's friend house, who had kept them locked and hidden for 39 years. Very few knew about the existence of this play that overflowed with homoeroticism, gender fluidity, feminism and a general rage

against the normative system. The play was subsequently performed, not many times, because as Lorca stated, it was an impossible play.

Bear with me then, for the main influence for this exhibition, *Las cosas que se quedan/The things that remain* is indeed a theatre play that I have never seen performed, the queerest of plays by the queerest of Spanish writers. Seeking to investigate how to express experiences of haunting on the Spanish Mediterranean coast through drawing, I work with issues of liminal presences and political violence in the context of touristic sites. The exhibition evokes the ghosts of those assassinated during the Franco dictatorship as well as those who drown daily while attempting the Mediterranean crossing, and though it does not directly focus on queer experiences, my project is theoretically, methodologically and politically queer and it intends to bring queer reflections to our understanding of history, memory and political action.

Queer bodies, and more so, penalized queer bodies in times of fascist dictatorship, become liminal at the beach; they are present but often hidden in spaces where bodies are highly visible. As a Southern Spanish queer artist, born in the transition between dictatorship and democracy, I am very aware of the presence of those bodies, those stories never told, but to which I owe so much. This exhibition is therefore a brief attempt to explore the queer haunting at the beach, to question the failure of the archives in accounting for these experiences, and to reflect on the potential of queering strategies in art. In short, my work is a tribute and a call for queer action in times of fascism.

In this talk, I have chosen to present three stories. Keep in mind that there are many more stories to tell and that I may not know them all. Ghosts do not like

to be described and analyzed, and queer ghosts are even more sensitive to any attempt at theorization. Therefore, instead of explaining my work, I have chosen to tell you three of the many possible stories associated with the exhibition.

The first one, which I had already started, is that of *The Public* and how the sand came to be in the show. From here I will move to what I believe to be a crucial notion in our current times, the idea of the life on the right. I will share with you the reflections and embodied actions of Spanish painter Ocaña who is, in fact, depicted in the exhibition. I will end with my dear friend Philomena, who some of you met at the opening. She was very kind and came to spend a day with us during her holidays at the beach. Her presence reclaims the space of queer gestures, queer bodies and queer memories as a site of resistance against the life on the right.

Story 1: The theatre under the sand

As you have seen, in the show, every drawing emerges from the sand. There is almost 50kg of sand in that room. The sand is, in fact, the queerest element of the work. There is also sand in Lorca's play *The Public*. When *The Public* reappeared nobody knew what to do with it. It was and still is an impossible play. There is no linear narrative and the characters, that Lorca named figures as if they were drawn, change appearances, challenge gender constructions, reject straight romantic love stories, and choose their own names. There is also a play within the play; references, subversion of other theatre texts; there are shadows who fall in love and horses that speak; a naked homosexual Christ fully painted in red; and a scene

in a hospital-train wagon very similar to the ones where the Francoist doctors used to lobotomize homosexuals. And there is sand, a lot of sand.

On the last pages of the draft, the conservative Magician whose specialty is to make things that are not real seem real, angrily yells: “what can you expect from a group of people who inaugurate the theatre under the sand? If you open that door, this theatre would be full of dogs, of mad people, of rain, of monstrous leaves, of sewer rats. Who dares to think that all the theatre doors can be broken?”⁹⁷ The figure of Director, who also sometimes happens to be Enrique, who also happens to be Juliette and sometimes the homoerotic Pámpanos and the red Christ answers: “It is only by breaking all the doors that the theatre can be justified, by seeing, through its own eyes, that the law is a wall that can be dissolved in the tiniest drop of blood.”⁹⁸

The theatre under the sand opposes the open-air theatre, the one of appearances, fake news, normative stories, dominant cultures, erasure, and silencing. It is from under the sand that everyday tragedies, forbidden love, secret desires, unspoken stories, unheard whispers, and queerness emerge, to not only make the hidden truth visible, but to question the hypocrisy of the audience, the public, by, in the words of Lorca, “dirtying [them] with blood.”⁹⁹ *The Public* is, in

⁹⁷ García Lorca, *El Público*, 185. All the translations of *El Público* are mine.

⁹⁸ García Lorca, 185.

⁹⁹ García Lorca, 182.

fact, as the title of the play signals, the principal agent of this play called life, the one that feeds a society built upon fascist principles.

Furthermore, the Director underlines the unbreakable relationship between the theatre under the sand and the ghosts. But not every ghost, the ghosts that, as Avery Gordon argues in her book *Ghostly Matters* (1997), emerge from the systemic violence allowed and perpetrated by the audience. This theatre under the sand, which is the theatre of truth, which is the theatre of blood and queerness, emerges from the recognition of this violence, of this haunting and of the need for a call for action. The Director warns the Magician “one day, when all the theatres burn, you will find on the couches, behind the mirrors, and inside the golden cups made of cupboard, the gathering of our dead locked there by the audience.”¹⁰⁰

Story 2: The life and death of dissent

Some people have asked me about the Nazi and Francoist symbols in the exhibition: the crashed plane with a Nazi swastika on the wing; the dress of the Feminine Section of the Francoist regime with the Falange symbol embroidered on the chest; and the lighter that advertises the National-Catholic slogan of *Arriba España!* [Up Spain]. What are these objects connected with the history of fascism doing in a show that speaks about the haunting of those killed by the dominant systems? Isn't haunting about the ghosts of those silenced?

¹⁰⁰ García Lorca, 184.

Believe me that, as a political artist striving to make visible what is kept invisible, this was a very challenging question. Ultimately, I chose to draw what I named *los fantasmas*, the Spanish word for ghosts. I did this because I found many Spanish texts from Argentina, Mexico, Chile, and Spain that refer to this other experience of haunting, the one of a system named “democracy” haunted by the *fantasma* of a fascist dictatorship. In other words, these drawings are a reminder that we live in a live regime built upon the aesthetic principles of the “fascinating fascism” as Susan Sontag would say.¹⁰¹

It may not seem important, because it is only aesthetics. But think about it, if one can make public a tattoo of an Indigenous image and cry when acknowledging European settler colonialism, but still sign a document that contributes to the persistent theft and genocide of Indigenous communities, then the politics of moral justice and western democracy are just a PR campaign. That is, you are maybe handsome for a white cis-straight dude, but it is all, as Lorca would say, open-air theatre. It is not about you say, but about how well you make us believe the story you are telling. So, it is about form, so it is about aesthetics.¹⁰²

As my close friends know, I am actually obsessed with fascist aesthetics, and I see them everywhere, even on Instagram. Living under fascist aesthetics is

¹⁰¹ Sontag, ‘Fascinating Fascism’. [page #]

¹⁰² This paragraph makes sense in the context of the reading and performance of the text where I was engaging with the audience, but its sense may be lost in the current transcription. The paragraph is referring to current Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his ambiguous politics towards Indigenous people. On one hand he seems to express repentance and empathy for Indigenous communities’ catastrophic social situation, while on the other, he continues to implement policies that directly impact those communities.

not the same as living under fascism. Affirming that we live in a fascist regime is a complex statement that would require many discussions. Instead of using the term fascist aesthetics, I will from now on refer to this system of practices and beliefs as “life on the right.” Argentinian philosopher Silvia Schwarzböck uses the term “life on the right” to describe current regimes in modern post-dictatorial countries like Argentina, Chile and Spain, where a military totalitarian regime gave place to a democratic liberal system¹⁰³. In these countries, contemporary democratic politics are haunted by the *fantasmas* of the dictatorship, or as Spanish Teresa Vilarós analyzes, the social body remains possessed by fascism. It would not be fair to say that Argentina, Chile, and Spain live under a fascist regime, however, I believe it is accurate to affirm that our current neoliberal system imposes a life on the right on all of us, which in post-dictatorial countries is exacerbated by the incarnation of the *fantasmas*.

The life on the right does not allow for any alternative way of living, it may seem as if it gives you a choice, but it does not allow for radical structural challenges, as there is no life outside neoliberalism. The life on the right dreams of an existence without dissent, without problems, and without disagreements. The life on the right affirms that if you work hard you will achieve your dreams. The life on the right states that it is ahistorical, just, and morally superior because it is natural. Therefore, the life on the right is always heteronormative and always violent against queer people. The life on the right believes in comfort, in saying sorry when you don't feel sorry. The life on the right answers “this is the way

¹⁰³ Schwarzböck, *Los Espantos: Estética y Postdictadura*, 14.

things are". The life on the right is the life I live because there is currently no other life to live. This is a sad realization, a tough acknowledgement. Which is why I drew the Nazi and Francoist symbols.

Any dictatorship aims to kill dissent. The Spanish fascist dictatorship of Francisco Franco was built upon the ideology of National-Catholicism. This ideology sets Catholicism at the core of Spanish National Identity. For example, in the *Discourse of Spanish Catholicism* we can find quite disturbing statements like "Spain [is] Christ's girlfriend."¹⁰⁴ By creating this theological national paradigm merging Catholicism and Spain, Franco's regime equated any infringement to the Catholic religion as anti-Spanish. Therefore, homosexuals were perceived both as sinners and as a danger to the nation. From 1970 onwards, the Francoist regime imposed re-education therapies, lobotomies, electroshock treatments and other forms of tortures for homosexuals and trans people. Homosexuals and trans people were also sent to prison, either to two specialized isolated prisons, or to regular prisons where they were subjected to routine torture and rapes. Homosexuals and trans people in jail were identified as "social prisoners," in contradistinction to "political" prisoners and "common" prisoners.¹⁰⁵ In 1975, after Franco's death, an amnesty process was started but no political faction, including the socialist party and the communist parties, supported the release of "social prisoners." "Social prisoners," that is homosexuals and trans people, had to wait until 1978 to be freed. They did not get to vote on the first democratic elections

¹⁰⁴ Corazón Rural, 'Sexo en el franquismo: el regreso de las tinieblas'. My translation.

¹⁰⁵ Osborne, 'Good Girls versus Bad Girls in Early Francoist Prisons: Sexuality as a Great Divide'.

after the dictatorship, nor were they consulted in the referendum for the Spanish Constitution. Until today, “social prisoners,” contrary to “political prisoners,” have not received any compensation nor acknowledgement for the repression they suffered. Many of them don’t have a right to pensions because they did not work, as they were in prison. They did not study because they were in prison; they did not have any job experience because they were in prison, which often put them in a precarious financial situation after the dictatorship. Nor do they have a right to specialized healthcare after the physical and psychological violence they were subjected to by the state.

In the exhibition, there are drawings of two main queer Spanish activists, trans organizer Silvia Reyes, and queer artist Ocaña. It is to Silvia Reyes that I owe a lot of my knowledge of the repression of that time. Ocaña’s art keeps inspiring my work, and, as such, there is a drawing of one of his performances, which was held on May 1st 1977 in Barcelona. For this performance, he took over the stage of a large festival organized by the CNT, the confederation of anarcho-syndicalist labour unions.¹⁰⁶ As he often did, he appeared dressed as a rich Andalusian lady, an image of femininity cherished by National Catholicism. Along with two other friends, he started singing a *pasodoble*, a traditional music style often played in bullfighting, while getting undressed. The band that was playing loud rock and punk music had to stop. The audience, according to contemporary sources, only

¹⁰⁶ The following description is a summary of the article by Paul B. Preciado, ‘The Ocaña We Deserve’.

had eyes for Ocaña, who, completely naked, was asking for everyone to get rid of the clothes of Francoism.

This was only one of the multiple interventions that Ocaña did. All his actions aimed to subvert and question not only the pervasive presence of National-Catholicism after Franco's death, but also to challenge the normalized life that left-wing parties and gay organizations were working towards. Indeed, Ocaña and his friends were soon made to leave progressive and LGBT associations, as their political positionality was too radical. They placed transgender, drag, cross-dressing, sex work and the destruction of the state, gender and sexual identity binaries at the core of their political actions. They did not believe in the state and they did not believe in the normalization of homosexuality. They fought for the queerization of the political left.

Very few of these radical queer activists have survived. Many died of heroin overdoses, or of AIDS. Many others, like lesbian social prisoners who were ostracized by communist and socialist political prisoners, committed suicide.¹⁰⁷

Ocaña died in 1983. He had created a papier-mâché costume of the sun and while performing in his hometown, the costume caught fire. As did Lorca, he also had a premonition and had painted his own funeral years before.

Story 3: My dear Philomena.

¹⁰⁷ Osborne, 'Good Girls versus Bad Girls in Early Francoist Prisons: Sexuality as a Great Divide'.

I have a very good friend, whom I met through a common acquaintance. My friend was having a drink with this acquaintance when I entered the bar. She, the acquaintance, said, you both need to talk as you are both obsessed with Federico Garcia Lorca. This was true. We sat and we talked about *The Public* for hours. We talked about the play longer that it takes to perform it. We spoke so much that we decided to perform *The Public*, which was obviously a mistake, because it is an impossible play.

However, we still decided to create a theatre collective named Pez Luna and perform our own plays where multiple genders meet. Not only genders like feminine and masculine genders, but art genders and literary genders, and space genders. My friend Philomena Flynn-Flawn and myself like to bring what we like together. We like drag shows, we like puppets, we like drawings, we like theatre, we like cabaret, we love Federico Garcia Lorca. So, our plays are a cabaret performance mix of hand-drawn drag shows with finger and shadow puppets and obviously, Lorca. This mix is itself a queer manifesto; we bring together all of these things that may not always belong together. It is like when my partner makes miso banana bread: it sounds strange but it is delicious.

Philomena came to visit for the exhibition opening. Some of you may have met her. She interrupted her holidays in order to spend an evening with us at the beach in the exhibition. She was just standing there, sunbathed and magnificent as always, engaging in conversations with the viewers. For example, she asked: Did we meet yesterday at the beach? How are you enjoying the sea? From what I have been told, she managed to take some of you from the position of the art viewer to that of the beach tourist. Through her questions and conversations, she made you

realized you were entering another space to the one you were expecting. May it be possible to call this site, then, a drag site? May it be possible to call this exhibition, indeed, a drag exhibition?

I am not bold enough yet to state those things, but I do believe that drag as a subversive narrative that brings to light how we construct stories, is very present in my work. Another fundamental element of drag is to take things so seriously that there is no point in being serious about them at all. In other words, the elements of humour and playfulness, the subversion of stealing some minutes of our lives to the production system of neoliberalism just for pleasure. For pleasure is a radical queer principle.

I constructed this exhibition as I met Philomena. My many walks at the beach resulted in many findings, some of them took me to the archives, a document in the archives took me to a song, a song took me to a story, a story took me to a friend, a friend took me to another finding. In all this process, I followed my pleasure instinct for stories. I love stories, all of them. The ones I have been told a thousand times as much as the ones that do not have an ending. In this exhibition, I did not plan of a story for you, the viewer, but of a constellation of drawings, of keys that may open the doors to the stories you want to tell.

I built this exhibition, as I work with Philomena in Pez Luna collective, mixing fiction and facts, mixing poetry and life, mixing tears and laughter in a non-linear narrative that echoes the theatre under the sand. This is a very serious and a very un-serious show. I do believe, as Philomena does, that the two things can cohabit, we can laugh and cry at the same time.

My friend Philomena also brought the queer body at the core of this exhibition. In the drawings there are no bodies, the only bodies in the show are those of the viewers walking around. With Philomena though, who stated she was vacationing at the beach in the show, something else happened. She belonged in the space, and all of us, maybe myself included, strived to enter that site. The drag queer body of Philomena, her gestures, her words, her interactions, allowed the viewer to enter a site that, because of her, was visibly identified as queer. My friend Philomena stood there, sunbathed and magnificent as always.