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# WALTER BENJAMIN, PRODUCTIVIST

— MARCELO EXPÓSITO

— PÁJARO Y ORNITÓLOGO  
— AL MISMO TIEMPO  
— BIRD CUM ORNITHOLOGIST

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This *workbook* forms part of a series of writings that function as footnotes to Walter Benjamin's text *The author as producer*. A work tool for opening debates around the notion of production in contemporary art, a field that has been widely explored by the producer of art projects consonni. And, specifically, through the research project *Bird-cum-ornithologist*, since 2010

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**INTRODUCTORY NOTE TO THE 2013 EDITION**

The title of this essay evokes another by Walter Benjamin, entitled «The Author as Producer», which he wrote in 1934 in the form of notes for a lecture that he was to have given in Paris but never did. In it, Benjamin attempted to argue not with the rightwing, but with some progressive sectors of the anti-fascist cultural field whose criteria in relation to the political condition of literature were, in his opinion, inadequate. «Walter Benjamin, Productivist» was originally delivered as a lecture in 2009. It seeks to argue with the sector of the cultural field which considers itself progressive, but whose readings of Benjamin I consider to deactivate the power of his original contributions to the level of a materialist aesthetic theory that is not speculative, but avant-garde in its aesthetic politics and revolutionary in its political orientation. In this sense, Benjamin's contributions in the 1930s sought to intervene — in an unequivocally partisan way — in the dilemma that beset the European working classes, torn between revolutionary subjectivation for socialism and the drift towards fascism. My aim is to update these attempts in order to link them to the real movement today, beyond the confines of self-referential academicism. The texts «The Author as Producer» and «The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction» (1936) are key to this endeavour, but they must be read diagrammatically through each other and thought about in connection with the history and the present of social movements.

Benjamin travelled to Moscow from December 1926 to January 1927. His melancholy *Moscow Diary* — reflecting his frustrating experience as part of a love triangle with Asja Lacin, whose partner was Bernhard Reich — does not encourage us to deduce that Benjamin developed an intensive relationship with the climate of the revolutionary cultural organisations. But the articles that he wrote immediately on his return to Berlin — «The Political Grouping of Russian Writers» and «On the Present Situation of Russian Film» — clearly show that Benjamin had been strongly influenced by the leftwing of the Russian-Soviet avant-garde, and

a few years later this knowledge was to be embodied in the two major essays from the 1930s mentioned above. A whole constellation of facts would seem to authorise us to think that the intellectual activism of Benjamin — who seemed determined to incorporate an anti-positivist Marxism and take into account the practice of revolutionary intellectual and workers' organisations from the time he fell in love with Asja Lacis in 1924 — was not merely circumstantial. Tretyakov's visit to Berlin in 1931 had an impact on a circle of communist intellectuals. Coming into contact with Brecht was a turning point for Benjamin, and the intensity of their relationship from 1929 onwards explains Adorno's belligerence towards the essay on mechanical reproduction. (Another love triangle, this time with Benjamin as its apex.) From this turning point — recounted with detail and insight by Erdmut Wizisla — I venture to deduce a decisive epistemological break during the final period of Benjamin's career, which «Walter Benjamin, Productivist» aims to reactivate. I agree with those who object that the tension between Marxism and messianism is inherent to late Benjamin as a whole, and that in this sense it is not possible to see Benjamin's decision to embrace materialist thought as a real rupture. Be that as it may, my argument is militant, not hermeneutic. I'm convinced that at this moment in history we must take sides as our societies swing between something similar to what fascism was historically, and something like what the proletarian revolution meant historically. In other words, I try to refunctionalise Benjamin through the paragraph that concludes «The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction»: now as then, the task of art is to either contribute to the self-destruction of alienated humanity or to cooperate with social emancipation through revolutionary practice. This imperative is inescapable, particularly in the context of Europe, which is in a state of war declared by neoliberal financial and political elites against the labour force and other productive forces of society — the elites supported in their criminality by neoconservative violence against subjectivities in revolt.

In letters to Gershom Scholem (1925-1926) quoted by Wizisla, Benjamin claims that the «communist signals» he was picking up from Capri — in reference to the start of his relationship with Lacis — marked «a turning point, awakening in me the will not,

as before, to mask the contemporary and political facts in my thinking behind a baroque form, but to develop them, and to do this tentatively, in a radical mode.»

Precisely in September 1926, before his trip to Moscow, Benjamin had just finished *One-Way Street*, which opens with the aphorism entitled «Filling Station»: «Significant literary work can only come into being in a strict alternation between action and writing; it must nurture the inconspicuous forms that better fit its influence in active communities than does the pretentious, universal gesture of the book — in leaflets, brochures, articles and placards. Only this prompt language shows itself actively equal to the moment. Opinions are to the vast apparatus of social existence what oil is to machines: one does not go up to a turbine and pour machine oil over it; one applies a little to hidden spindles and joints that one has to know.»

For the purpose of this lecture, I've taken a series of notes that are like a kind of script for a film. A virtual film that I will now construct in the form of a prototype, attempting to produce a small event, reading them as a voice-over that you will hear over a series of still images organised into sequences and projected onto a screen at the back of this darkened room. I will dispel the 'aura' that usually surrounds the lecturer — as we regularly see in congresses and conferences like these — in order to direct your attention to this device, which is a substitute for a cinematic apparatus, broken down into its constituent parts, with its technical complexity stripped back to the point of reproducing a scenario similar to early film. Given the content of this lecture, it makes sense to point out our relationship with the apparatus — yours as audience and mine as speaker.

I've written a sequence of three stories, or perhaps a single story in three parts. Or it may even be the same story, actualised over time. The title of the intervention comes from the first story:

### I. WALTER BENJAMIN, PRODUCTIVIST



— fig. 01

This <sup>[fig. 01]</sup> is an image of an unknown Latin American woman, a young student of Sociology of Art at the New School for Social Research in New York. For practical reasons we will give her a name: Marina Eisler. In the 1980s, Marina spent a full eight years studying Walter Benjamin's aesthetic theory, the last three exclusively analysing «The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction».

Marina is riding her bike to defend the thesis she has written as a result of her long research process. She knows that over the next few hours she will have to act as if she knows everything there is to know about Benjamin, to project total self-confidence. But she feels anxious.



— fig. 02

Here <sup>[fig. 02]</sup> we see Marina pedalling, deep in thought. She is reflecting on a fragment, the famous final paragraph of the essay on the mechanical reproduction of the work of art. Marina has always found this text disturbing; she senses that there is something incomprehensibly dark in it, even though she literally knows it by heart. She repeats it silently to herself as she pedals:

«Fiat ars — pereat mundus», says fascism, and, as Marinetti admits, expects war to supply the artistic gratification of a sense of perception that has been changed by technology. This is evidently the consummation of «l'art pour l'art.» Mankind, which in Homer's time was an object of contemplation for the Olympian gods, now is one for itself. Its self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order. *This is the situation of politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic. Communism responds by politicising art.*

Suddenly, Marina has an epiphany: Benjamin must have made a mistake when he wrote this paragraph. Almost certainly, he was forced to finish it in a rush. It would fit nicely with the clichéd romantic version of Benjamin's life to imagine that this lapsus occurred just as he was forced to flee Nazism, which pursued him until it drove him to commit suicide in Portbou, on the border between Spain and France, where he may have dragged the unfinished manuscript along with him. But Benjamin's flight and suicide took place in 1940, while the paragraph was written four or five years earlier. There must have been a much less epic reason: Benjamin would have had to finish the manuscript quickly and send it post haste to Adorno and Horkheimer so that he could collect his fee from the Institute for Social Research. He was always struggling to make ends meet. If Benjamin had not been a precarious intellectual worker, he would have had more time to ponder the proper wording with which to end his essay:

Fascism renders politics aesthetic.  
Communism responds with the social revolution to which art contributes by its politicisation.

This alternative phrasing would be a much better way to close the argument on the technical reproduction of the work of art, given that what the essay ultimately does — Marina suddenly realises — is to radically displace the central role that the 'work of art' has traditionally had in aesthetic theory. What we can then deduce from Benjamin's text, Marina thinks, is that the work of art has ceased to be a problem, or that it has become a secondary issue. What matters are the effects that the practice of art, with or without 'artworks', provokes in the spectator. By simply deciding to read Benjamin's texts through different eyes, leaving aside the idealistic mystique of the art object, we can see that in this case he does not merely try to set up an

opposition between the traditional 'auratic' work of art and the mechanically reproducible work of art — the work of art in which the potential for reproduction is an inherent structural trait, not external to its mode of production. Instead, what Benjamin does is compare these two types of artworks in terms of their effects on the spectator. Whereas the auratic work of art is absorbed into tradition by means of its cult value — by means of the devotion that the spectator is compelled to profess to it through ritual — in the case of reproducible works of art the relationship with the spectator comes about through the technical apparatus, in the sphere of politics, and in keeping with potentially mass, non-individual reception, suggesting what we could call a spectatorial socialisation.

«At any moment the reader is ready to turn into a writer», and «work itself is given a voice», Benjamin mysteriously claims. How can the 'work' of the receiver be given a voice? Isn't it the author who speaks through his work? If the reader can become an 'author' at any moment in the new social paradigm that technology makes possible — Marina deduces — it is precisely because the work of the artist or the writer consists in creating the conditions that favour the delegation of the faculty of voice through the production of a type of work that can be received in a demystified, liberating manner by somebody else: the subject-spectator. When the author relinquishes his authority and becomes the producer of a 'work' that is articulated within non-auratic conditions of reception, the reader — thus socialised — is able to perform his or her own work of emancipated reading. The proposition that Benjamin expresses in his essay is the loss of the aura and the change in the aesthetic, social and historic status of the work of art, thinks Marina. The final wording of the conclusion of the famous essay seems to emphasise the issue of how art is politicised, in a way that suggests that the question lies in the sphere of art and the work of art as the problem. But the latent content of the text — Marina finally decides — is a political theory rather than an aesthetic theory: *a theory of the socialist subjectivation of the masses by means of the politicisation of an art practice in which art and the artwork are no longer important as an end, but as a means to the emancipation of the subject in society.*

Here <sup>[fig. 03]</sup> we see Marina looking very worried as she rides away. In the back of her bike she carries the laptop where she has saved



— fig. 03

her thesis, which is no longer of any use to her. We don't know what Marina ended up saying to the examining board. But we do know that if the anonymous student who nobody remembers was right, the hypothesis of Benjamin's lapsus would explain a widespread historical misunderstanding: that of aesthetic theories that claim to be based on Benjamin's texts but keep circling around the supposed problem of the auratic status of the artwork and its political condition, ignoring the fact that the politicisation of artistic practice must necessarily go hand in hand with a praxis of social change.

This <sup>[fig. 04]</sup> is Walter Benjamin hurriedly writing the ambiguous conclusion to «The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction».

This <sup>[fig. 05]</sup> is Benjamin's grave in a delicate whitewashed cemetery facing the Mediterranean Sea. The tombstone that bears his name rests on the site of the former mass grave, because Benjamin's remains have never been identified. He too, ultimately dead as a result of fascism. May this never be forgotten.

In the last seven symposia and congresses that I've attended, I've amused myself by counting the number of times Walter Benjamin is mentioned: A total of 52; 53 if you count this one. An average of 7.57 mentions per congress, so far. Each of them contributed new revisions of Benjamin's aesthetic theory, *without once citing a single one of the artworks or artists that Benjamin analysed or mentioned in his own texts*. I'm going to mention two:

*Borinage* <sup>[fig. 06]</sup>, a film made by Joris Ivens in a Belgian mining area in 1933, at the request of Henri Storck. *Borinage* is a paradoxical documentary: Ivens and his team set out to document a tough workers' strike that had already been crushed. The area and its inhabitants were under rigorous police control. The film recreates this episode of frustrated struggle by staging the recent events using the actual protagonists, who act clandestinely during the shoot.

At a certain point, they decide to re-enact a crucial demonstration that had taken place a few months earlier, and had been suppressed by the police. They plan a quick action, inspired by the direct action methods of the workers' organisation: a few workers go out into the open in small groups, making it difficult for the police to identify and arrest them. The camera films them as they suddenly gather at a certain point in order to march together



— fig. 04



— fig. 05



— fig. 06

through the muddy streets with their clenched fists in the air. But unaware that they are witnessing a scene that is being secretly filmed, onlookers who see the actors march by also raise their fists, they join the demonstration and its numbers unexpectedly swell. Those at the head of the demonstration carry a large portrait of Marx painted by one of the workers who is an amateur painter. Then it becomes an unplanned but real demonstration: the police arrive and violently suppress it again. The film set out to 'document', but it ended up almost inadvertently triggering a real political event. The episode lasts barely a few seconds in the final cut of the film, but it is the historical symptom of a formidable invention.

When Ivens presented the finished film it was snubbed by the avant-garde circles that had praised him earlier for his first experimental films. They claimed that he had turned his back on art to produce political propaganda that eschewed aesthetics. But it was precisely his refusal to make the formal avant-garde *style* of his films an end in itself that allowed Ivens to invent a modern political filmmaking *technique*, which does not negate the formal experimentation that had been carried out by the avant-garde to date, but is *derived* from it. This principle consists of questioning the connection between the reality of an event and the naturalism of its representation, in order to prepare the ground for *an art practice that documents and simultaneously modifies reality, contributing to changing it by modelling events that are not necessarily perceived as artistic while they are taking place*.

This <sup>[fig. 07]</sup> is the playwright, poet and Bolshevik agitator Sergei Tretyakov, photographed by Alexander Rodchenko in Moscow in 1928, the year when Tretyakov left the Russian capital and settled in a kolkhoz called The Communist Lighthouse in the Northern Caucasus. This chapter of the life of Tretyakov would become central to the narrative thread of Benjamin's 1934 text «The Author as Producer».

In his diary of the agricultural commune, Benjamin tells us, Tretyakov describes his activities as follows:

What did I do in the kolkhoz?

I took part in the directors' meetings, where all the vital questions of the kolkhoz were raised: starting from the purchase of spark plugs for the tractors and mending the tarpaulins and ending with setting up the threshing machines and help for single farms.



— fig. 07

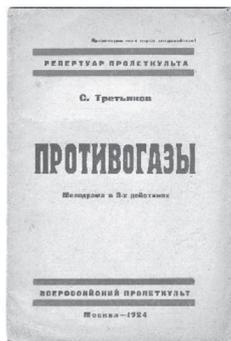
I held mass assemblies in the kolkhozes and collected money to pay for the tractors and the state fund. (...) Made peace among fighting mothers in the children's nurseries. Took part in consultations about how to distribute the harvest. Argued with overly zealous economists, who didn't want to give the education functionaries any horses. Wrung material for the newspaper from intellectuals. Helped participants in radio courses to figure out passages of the lectures that were hard to understand. (...)

I organised and led the kolkhoz newspaper. Originally it was only a supplement to the newspaper *Terek*, which provided information for preparing to cultivate the fields. Later I fought, yes I fought and achieved, after many meetings, telephone discussions, letters, telegrams, reminders, depressions and promises, that Moscow newspapers (...) assumed patronage. Moscow provided the typesetter, the paper and the setting material. (...) I set the typesetter with an apprentice, a former shepherd, an artist in his own right.

(...) I was a member of the commission for military physical examinations and had to check the readiness of the kolkhoz for cultivating in spring. This I found difficult, because in the beginning I could not tell which horse collar was good and which was bad or if parts of the plough were missing. There are people who find this trivial. They think the smiths are there for the ploughs, it is not necessary to trouble the writer with that. They are wrong: *without exact knowledge of the plough, it is impossible to have a clear understanding of what makes the moods of the collectivists, and in consequence you could put forward no line, offer no description* — in other words, *you could not be the author of any work at all.*

Less than a decade later, in 1937, Tretyakov was arrested by Stalin's police, accused of espionage and jailed. Some say that Tretyakov wasn't executed, but he committed suicide by flinging himself down the stairwell at Butyrka prison. As it is impossible for anybody to write down their final thoughts, we don't know whether Tretyakov killed himself to defy his jailers or as an act of political desperation. May this too, never be forgotten.

This [fig. 08] is the cover of an extremely rare copy of the only monographic edition ever published of the play *Protivogazy* (Gas-masks) by Tretyakov: a simple, didactic work of agitation written in 1925 against the petit bourgeoisie that had emerged alongside the New Economic Policy introduced by Lenin's government. It is attributed to Proletkult Editions, the Organisation of Proletarian Culture. Also in 1924, Tretyakov and Eisenstein staged the play *Gas-masks* in a real factory, with the characters played by actors who were members of the Proletkult. This episode was one of the radical actions of the 'theatre of attractions', the failure of which led Eisenstein to swap theatre for film.



— fig. 08



— fig. 09

Here [fig. 09] we see the publication displayed on a website that sells Russian cultural products on the internet. The items on sale may be sourced from speculative trading or from the plunder of private and public archives following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The entry that accompanies Tretyakov's opus says: *SOLD*, because I bought it myself two years ago. It cost me just over 100 euros. Tretyakov — the writer who belonged to Proletkult and the LEF (Left Front for the Arts) and founded the homonymous magazine that became the most important avant-garde publication of the first half of the twentieth century; the first man to translate Bertolt Brecht into Russian and who may even have disclosed the notion of 'estrangement' to Brecht; the aesthetic theorist who helped to coin concepts such as 'factography' and 'operative writer' and claimed that theatre should be written with a current newspaper in hand, and who ended up channelling his own literary practice into the production of educational and agitational press; the political-cultural agitator who played a part in radicalising Eisenstein's aesthetic practice and directly inspired Walter Benjamin's productivist theory of literary work... The market value of a work by this true giant of the twentieth century is equivalent to his political value on today's intellectual market of progressive aesthetic theory: a pittance.

I would like to propose a hypothesis. If we consider a substantial part of the current academic and critical theories of the politicisation of art that claim to be the heirs to Walter Benjamin's groundbreaking work, and if we apply them to the specific practices that directly inspired Benjamin's materialist aesthetic theory, the result would probably be as follows: these practices would not be considered art, or they would be denigrated as minor, ideological art, as a sociological deviation from art, as activism or outright politics or agitation or social work, but never art. I suggest that we reflect on this paradox.

## 2. THE ARTISTIC AVANT-GARDE, OUT OF JOINT

... In other words: *unhinged, not in the right alignment*. Just as time was said to be out of joint in Hamlet's tragedy. But from what joints, from what alignments and frames, did avant-garde art become unhinged?



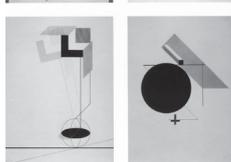
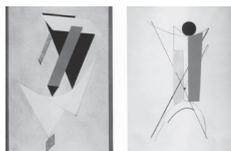
— fig. 10



— fig. 11



— fig. 12



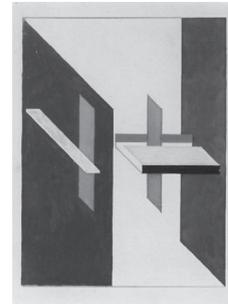
— fig. 13

This <sup>[fig. 10]</sup> is El Lissitzky in his studio in Vitebsk, in the north of Belarus. In this city's art school, Kazimir Malevich founded the avant-garde art group Unovis (Champions of New Art), which existed in different forms from 1919 to 1922. The paintings in the background show El Lissitzky's complicity with Malevich's Suprematism at the time.

This <sup>[fig. 11]</sup> is *Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge*, the painting by El Lissitzky dating from 1919-1920 that is one of the most inspiring works in the history of the avant-garde. The design was intended for a poster celebrating a decisive victory by the Red Army during the civil war that still lingered on after the Bolsheviks seized power in 1917. The painting is unsettling for the contradiction it reveals: working within Suprematism, El Lissitzky broke away from the anti-representational premise of non-objectivity by making reference to an external event. Suprematist geometric rigor is contaminated by the inclusion of texts written on the surface of the painting, in a way that seems inexplicable if we only consider its internal logic.

This <sup>[fig. 12]</sup> is the cover of El Lissitzky's first *Proun* portfolio, published in Germany, consisting of a series of lithographs of the 'Proun' drawings that he had made between 1919 and 1923. The title is a Russian acronym for *Project for the Affirmation of the New*. Originally, the drawings <sup>[fig. 13]</sup> were based on a dynamic alignment of geometric forms arranged on the two-dimensional space of the paper <sup>[fig. 14]</sup> which gradually embarked on an increasingly complex exploration of the representation of three-dimensional shapes that do not exist in the real world <sup>[fig. 15]</sup> which eventually became the concept and design for a series of *spaces that were intended to be produced in the real world* in accordance with the principles of geometric construction. This <sup>[fig. 16]</sup> is actually a detail from the previous print: a design for a *Proun Room*, dated 1923 and built that same year. This <sup>[fig. 17]</sup> image shows a 1965 reconstruction.

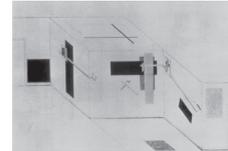
What we've just seen is the summary of a case study that offers an insight into a brilliant process that forms part of the history of the avant-garde. A shift in which art gradually reduced classical representation to degree zero. When artists decided to break the connection between reality and its pictorial representation, and when the technical nature of naturalist representation was revealed, a threshold was reached, and this threshold was characterised by an aporia: with the rejection of the naturalist link



— fig. 14



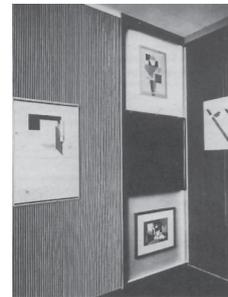
— fig. 15



— fig. 16



— fig. 17



— fig. 18

between representation and the reality outside of the painting, it became impossible, in absolute terms, for the new visual regime of the non-objective avant-garde to renew any connection with the real. The work of art revealed itself as an autonomous material object. In other words: the avant-garde challenged naturalist classical representation and destroyed the illusionism that subjugated spectators, exposing the fact that a painting is a singular artefact, just one of many elements in the physical reality of the world. (Benjamin would say: it became impossible to continue to perceive the work as part of a ritual, and therefore its aura vanished.) But this artefact that revealed itself as a material object — one that does not *represent* reality, but is *a real thing* in itself — denied itself the possibility of offering the spectator a link with the material world, other than the strict contemplation of the artistic object as such. The boundary signalled by this aporia was the limit of the speculative phase of the historical avant-garde.

One of the strategies used by the avant-garde to overcome this impasse was to find ways of overflowing the frame of the painting and starting to experimentally alter the broader framework of the art institution. This 'overflowing' was a step towards an art practice in which the concept of the 'artwork' lost its centrality in favour of a new emphasis on the processes of imagining and experimentally creating other possible realities that spectators could experience by inhabiting them. These inventions were no longer merely representational, virtual or symbolic. They sought to take on an emphatically material form, within which the spectator was invited to experiment the reconfiguration of his or her own subjectivity.

This <sup>[fig. 18]</sup> is the *Cabinet of Abstract Art* produced by El Lissitzky in 1926. The small exhibition room is designed in such a way as to produce variations in the spectator's perception of the paintings hanging on its walls. Some of the artworks are mounted on mobile panels, so that the exhibition device can literally be reconfigured. (A text written at the time when the constructivist group was active in Moscow suggested the following correlation: if the artwork ceased to be a pictorial *composition*, revealing its material components and becoming something that is *constructed*, then exhibitions would no longer be spaces that naturalise the ritualised reception of singular works of art. Instead, they would

be *archives* showing the current status of an experimental process.) In 1927, the Soviet Government commissioned El Lissitzky to lead an unprecedented project for an artist <sup>[fig. 19]</sup>: he was to plan, design, and produce the Soviet Pavilion for the *International Press Exhibition of the Deutscher Werkbund* (known by the acronym *Pressa*), which would be held in Cologne a few months later, in 1928. El Lissitzky immediately rounded up a team of artists and non-artists to build this pavilion.



— fig. 19



— fig. 20

This commission <sup>[fig. 20]</sup> was of utmost importance: with the Soviet Union blockaded by international diplomacy, which was terrified by the enormous influence of the October Revolution on workers' movements throughout a Western Europe that was in the midst of upheavals, the Soviet government needed to inject authority into its presence at the International Exhibition. The USSR had to present socialism as an advance in the living conditions of the working classes, achieved by means of the industrial and economic development of the country which was now governed by the proletariat through the Party-State. And to show that technological progress had enabled the mass media to embark on an educational and training programme as part of this collective endeavour.

The historian Benjamin H.D. Buchloh — to whom I am partly indebted for this narrative thread — described El Lissitzky's magnificent artefact as a work of «semiotic architecture». This unprecedented structure can be described as a communication device that incorporates, on an architectural scale, the experimental forms that were produced during the laboratory, speculative stage of the avant-garde. El Lissitzky claimed that his propaganda pavilions were the most important work he had ever produced. If we take his claim seriously, a mysterious question looms: where or what is the 'artwork'?

Now <sup>[fig. 21]</sup> we will look at another case study that also synthesises this shift that led art to overflow its limits. This is an image of a 1919 drawing by Gustav Klutsis entitled *The Dynamic City*. It consists of a dynamic two-dimensional construction of geometric forms.



— fig. 21

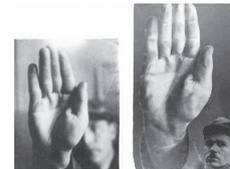
This <sup>[fig. 22]</sup> is a homonymous drawing from that same year. The leap from one to the next is one of the most disconcerting phenomena in the history of the avant-garde. As we can see the second drawing <sup>[fig. 23]</sup> — which has a controversial positivist claim



— fig. 22



— fig. 23



— fig. 24

to being the first photomontage in history — includes a few tiny human figures. They are cut-out photographs. It shows, at precisely the same moment in history, the same type of anomaly that we saw in El Lissitzky's *Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge*. Written language or iconic symbols are introduced into a system of non-objective representation. This is impossible to explain if we confine ourselves to thinking in terms of the formal evolution of the avant-garde's dismantling of naturalist representation tending towards an increasingly rigorous and synthetic geometric abstraction.

We'll quickly examine Klutsis' *modus operandi* in order to try to shed some light on how and why this singular formal leap that we've just seen came about: on the left <sup>[fig. 24]</sup>, we have a photograph that Klutsis took of himself in 1930. His hand is the foreground, in focus. His head is in the background, out of focus and smaller in the depth of field. On the right, this photograph becomes a photomontage. Klutsis' hand remains in the foreground, but his head has been replaced by the head of an anonymous worker, who has been cast in the role of generic worker. Here, both elements, the hand and the head, are in focus: manual work and intellectual work are no longer shown separately or in contradiction, but in solidarity as part of an iconic regime in which the hand has primacy.

The shift from Klutsis' photograph to his photomontage reveals the political — and even psychological — meaning of his process: the first formal manipulation — the shift from the photograph to the photomontage — brings about the declassing of the artist, a desublimation of his work that is now identified with manual labour, which thus becomes both the productive subject and the object represented in the work. The key to this progressive linking of the labour of art and blue-collar work lies in the following principle: this articulation does not come about by the mere symbolic identification of the artist with the proletariat, or by simply including the proletariat as part of the subject matter of the work. *The articulation comes about by means of a technical invention: an innovation in the apparatus of production.* To put it simply, what is expressed here is not the author's 'progressivist' commitment, through his work, to the proletariat or the social revolution. The artist becomes part of the social relations, operating within a production apparatus that

he modifies by means of a technical invention. What matters is not how Klutsis positions himself *in regard* to the relations of production, committing to the working class from outside of it, or what his political position was before the production of the work. What matters is *the technique by which* the work is inserted into the actual social and production relations that it contributes to developing in a politically progressive direction. That is exactly what Benjamin proposed on the theoretical level a few years later in «The Author as Producer».

Here [fig. 25] is a more complex photomontage: a large generic hand — which started out as Klutsis' hand — synthesises an increasing number of many singular hands that cooperate, in a dynamic alignment, creating the diagonal axis of the painting. The hands rest on a mass of anonymous faces of male and female workers: the proletariat. This photomontage is a hand-made mock-up of the next image, which was to be mechanically reproduced for mass dissemination:



— fig. 25



— fig. 26



— fig. 27

This image is the poster *Let us Fulfil the Plan of the Grand Projects* (1930) [fig. 26], which is part of a series produced by Klutsis to promote compliance with the First Five-Year Plan. A generative series that finds echoes in John Heartfield's photomontages and in Josep Renau's posters during the Spanish Civil War.

Here [fig. 27], we can see a demountable device for displaying posters, designed by Klutsis to operate functionally in public spaces. We could even describe it as a *device for the production of public space by means of the insertion of artefacts for political communication on the streets*. It is important to remember that the posters that Klutsis produced — and his experimental production of political agit-prop iconography more generally — were intrinsically connected to the design and production of conceptually sophisticated but easy-to-execute dissemination and communication devices, which literally functioned as ready-to-assemble models.

This [fig. 28] is the famous kiosk that Klutsis designed as part of the Soviet Pavilion at *Pressa*, with the name of *Seven-hour Working Day*.

We can keep this image in mind as we summarise this second story. Some of the trajectories of the historical avant-garde reached a limit that provoked an aporia: as the naturalist link between pictorial representation and the reality outside of the painting gradually broke down, the increasingly radical distance



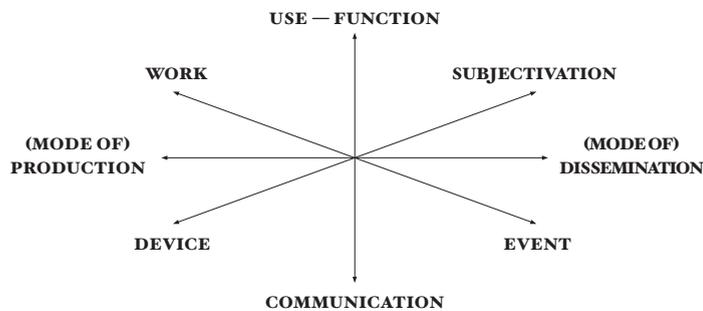
— fig. 28

between the sign and its referent made it possible to move away from the illusionism that hypnotised the spectator of the auratic work, revealing it to be a material artefact that does not *represent* reality, but *belongs* to the order of the real. But the radicalisation of anti-illusionist processes — the complete rejection of representation — led art to chase its own tail, tautologically: the only material reality that the spectator could connect to through the artwork was the artwork itself as a material construct. The only way this aporia could be overcome was through a paradigm change. And the motivation for this could only come from somewhere other than the internal logic of the tautological processes of the laboratory phase of the avant-garde, outside the frame of the art institution. At a moment in history when the opportunity to take a conflictive path towards its own emancipation was within reach of a section of society. At this point, certain trends of the historical avant-garde embraced new methodologies in order to cross this threshold, which would have seemed unthinkable and impossible to understand from within the strict logic of non-objective experimentation. Even so, these solutions for a paradigm change were *deduced* from this previous stage. I'm going to mention three of these 'solutions' that the avant-garde turned to in order to cross the threshold of its paradoxical tautology:

- 1.— Overflowing the 'frame' of the work of art so that art becomes a collective activity that spills over the institutional 'framework', revealing it and affecting it, changing it experimentally.
- 2.— Continuing to develop the way in which collage had helped painting to move away from a naturalist representation of reality and starting to literally include fragments of reality on the two-dimensional surface of the painting: that is, the shift from *representing* to *presenting* a reality that is transformed through its inclusion, in a modified version, within the work of art. Based on this principle, photography contributed to the invention of photomontage, a type of *anti-naturalist realism* that reconciled the anti-naturalist experimentation of the laboratory stage of the avant-garde with the new needs of an art practice which, aligned with the social revolution, had to dispute the hegemony over public space against the mainstream media and rightwing mass politics.

3.— Displacing the centrality of the ‘work of art’ in favour of the production of artefacts, devices, and events that can be inhabited by the subject-spectator, with the aim of transforming collective subjectivity in an emancipatory sense, sometimes even by means of creating *art without artworks, or art that does not appear to be so, or that appears to be something other than what it is or that is, in fact, something else as well as art.*

In short, some of the paths of the avant-garde were able to overcome the limits of its laboratory stage, overflowing its bounds and transforming art into a practice that moves within the following diagram:



### 3. NOBODY KNOWS WHAT A BODY IS CAPABLE OF

In the late 1980s, a certain graphic image<sup>[fig. 29]</sup> began to turn up on posters pasted on the streets in some parts of New York City, constructed according to this simple schema: a pink equilateral triangle against a black background, on which the words *SILENCE = DEATH* were written in white. The symbol was recognisable and decipherable by the members of a community that is used to marking public spaces in order to produce collective identification mechanisms based on semi-clandestine codes.

The pink equilateral triangle is in the middle of the visual space. It is a direct reference to the symbol that was used to brand people who were imprisoned in Nazi concentration camps for their homosexuality. But the triangle that the exterminators imposed on bodies pointed downwards, while this triangle rests on its base, pointing upwards. A simple graphic inversion that transforms



— fig. 29

a symbol of stigmatisation into a symbol of affirmation: the same type of reappropriation that movements based on identity politics have been using since the 1970s–1980s to resignify the negative words and signs that stigmatise certain individuals for our ethnic origins or sexuality (poofter, nigger, fag, dyke...), thus transforming them into labels that are positively adopted with the pride of a publicly — and tactically — declared identity. The triangle is emphatically underlined by an equation in which two words are said to be equal to each other. This would have been easily understood by the people who this poster targeted, at a time when the growing AIDS pandemic was worsened by the problems faced by people with HIV when it came to publicly declaring and discussing the illness: silence around AIDS is equal to the propagation of death.

This symbol quickly became the logo of the Aids Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP). Founded in New York in March 1987, ACT UP has displayed two of the distinctive characteristics of the social movements that emerge from the social crises caused by the neoliberal hegemony. On one hand, it is a movement that carves out a new, previously nonexistent space based on solidarity and mutual support, in which it is possible to mitigate the impact of the social crisis on the affects and private lives of individuals by sharing the experience. A space in which to work together on the molecular dimension of life. On the other hand, this shared affective space, which is an existential territory, is the prerequisite for the emergence of a collective politics: a crisis that is initially experienced as a personal problem or a problem exclusive to certain groups is transformed into a public conflict. A conflict that seeks to challenge hegemonies and to affect social power relations. Instituting process and antagonism. The construction of a new commons and public lobbying. The autonomous politics of the new cycle of social movements generally swings between these two types of processes.

One of the famous posters<sup>[fig. 30]</sup> produced by the artist collective Gran Fury, which worked within ACT UP, was based on a schematic design. It can be read as an image constructed through the gradual build-up of three levels of meaning, from the top down.

First of all, there is a phrase printed in smaller type at the top: «With 42,000 dead». A clear statement that instantly transmits



— fig. 30

the magnitude of the crisis: forty-two thousand deaths are the heart of a pandemic that also affects partners, lovers, families and potential future HIV-positive persons.

On the second level, in a slightly larger font: «Art is not enough», a phrase that seems to be a reflection on the role of art in times of serious social crisis. I would say that the comment «Art is not enough» has a double meaning. Firstly, it seems to reject the conclusions of those who decided to turn their backs on artistic practices during the political radicalisation and social conflicts of the 1960s-1970s. The poster does not tell us that art is useless for confronting the crisis, just that it is *not enough*. Secondly, the phrase also seems to challenge the art system's acceptance of solidarity without political articulation: the tendency of museums to adopt humanitarian declarations or content, or commercial art spaces that hold auctions to donate funds to non-governmental organisations. Actions that allow cultural institutions to reaffirm their clear consciences while leaving the art system untouched by the political dimension of the crisis.

If «art is not enough», what *else* does it need to be, or what needs to be *added* to it, in order to confront the crisis? The third sentence on the poster, the one that is printed in the largest font, that comes last but takes up the most space, suggests the answer: collective direct action is needed in order to end the AIDS crisis. Innumerable photographs show members of ACT UP in New York and other parts of the world captured in moments of direct action and civil disobedience. For example, in sit-ins that would be blocking access to some governmental building or boycotting some official event.

Civil disobedience and direct action have been the two key tools used by social movements in the current cycle of protest to unleash their power and break out of the straitjacket imposed by neoliberal consensus. Groups and individuals from many different positions have felt the need to put the democratic legitimacy of the conflict back into public space by means of practices that clash with legality. The first ACT UP action took place on Wall Street. It openly named the pharmaceutical companies that had been put in charge of public health management, and, as such, were the main beneficiaries of the pandemic. Seventeen people were apparently arrested as a result of this first action. If we pay attention to the photograph, we will realise the way in which this



— fig. 31



— fig. 32

ACT UP logo *flows through* collective direct action: it is inscribed on the bodies <sup>[fig. 31]</sup>.

ACT UP can be considered one of the generative matrices of the expressive forms that characterise the new movements of the current cycle of conflict: a *biopolitical* matrix. ACT UP understands that the power it faces is a *biopower*. A power over life, power that is applied directly onto the spaces where life is produced and reproduced. Power that directly affects the management of the life and death of individuals — very literally in the case of the AIDS pandemic. ACT UP puts the body back into political action: it refunctionalises public space by introducing into it bodies that embody the effects of power, and also of the immanent resistance that opposes it through conflict.

Biopower as power applied to the management of life and death. 1983 <sup>[fig. 32]</sup>: three artists who have been working together in Buenos Aires — Rodolfo Aguerreberry, Julio Flores and Guillermo Kexel — decide to submit a project to a major visual arts award. Their idea is to paint life-size outlines of the human body on canvas or paper — as many of them as the estimated number of people who had been forcibly ‘disappeared’ to date by the military dictatorship that was still running the country and had been since the 1976 coup d’état. The competition is called off, and in any case the artists realise that their project faces some practical obstacles: there would not be enough walls in all the museums in Argentina to accommodate the dimensions of this signalling of absence, and three people alone would not be able to generate such a huge volume of silhouetted bodies in a limited period of time: the equivalent of 30,000 detained-disappeared.

They decide to propose their project to the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, who immediately adopt it — adding some modifications — making it part of their preparations in the lead up to the 3rd Resistance March. The Resistance March traditionally consists of a mass occupation of the Plaza de Mayo starting on the afternoon of the first day, continuing through the night, and ending with a demonstration the following morning. On the appointed day in September 1983, the multitude that gradually fills de Plaza slowly begins to join the process of producing the silhouettes by hand and then disseminating them on a mass scale on street facades and columns, the epidermis of houses and public buildings. Since that day, as the historian Ana Longoni points out, silhouettes have

become one of two main matrices adopted by the Human Rights movement in Argentina for publicly invoking the disappeared: the other matrix is the photographs of the disappeared persons that Mothers, Grandmothers and Relatives traditionally wear pinned to their clothing.



—fig. 33



—fig. 34

The visual image of the silhouettes<sup>[fig. 33]</sup> interpellates passers-by in the space of the street. We can see how the point of view from which this photograph was taken<sup>[fig. 34]</sup> places us in the shoes of the police column as it moves towards or tries to block the path of the demonstration. What we would see moving towards us is a collective body made up of those who are present and those who are absent: the outlined bodies also move towards us. The bodies of those who have been forcibly disappeared come to the fore, embodied in images that are all different but equivalent to each other.

The potential of the *siluetazo* also lies in its mode of production: the most powerful way of making the silhouettes is by using the body of a living person as a template. A simple gesture in which many processes of signification and transference overlap, and which restores the ties of solidarity that the overwhelmingly repressive military dictatorship seeks to destroy. This solidarity creates a bond between an absent person and one who is present, even though each finished silhouette is a symbol of a double absence: that of the disappeared person, and that of the person who has recently lent their body to be outlined. There is thus something heart-rending about this technique: the body of the living person is a reminder of the fact that he or she could have been, or could one day become, one of the forcibly disappeared. This ineffable dimension of the image that is produced by the *silueteada* has complex links to a practical aspect of the methodology that has just been described: the *silueteada* is not merely a marker of protest, or simply a channel through which to spread a proclamation or a speech. As could be seen from the first *siluetazo* in 1983, the collective production of silhouettes is a key expressive tool for the material configuration of the movement when it occupies public space.

The group *Ne pas plier* was formed in 1991, taking its name from a play on words between the instructions printed on envelopes to protect images sent by post ('do not fold'), and the decision to not buckle under or give in as a declaration of resistance ('we remain

unbowed'). The group mainly operates in the 'red belt' on the metropolitan outskirts of Paris. In the beginning — according to one of the co-founders, the designer Gerard Paris-Clavel — *Ne pas plier* declared that its objective was to ensure that «the signs of poverty are not reinforced by the impoverishment of signs.» Through their work in the 1990s, *Ne pas plier* played a significant role in the development of 'collaborative practices', which consisted of reconnecting art and emancipatory politics by means of community-based practices that bring 'experts' in symbolic production together with the new social movements that emerged from the crises provoked by criminal neoliberal policies. Over the years, *Ne pas plier* has worked very closely with the APEIS (Association pour l'emploi, l'information et la solidarité des chômeurs et précaires), an 'association for the employment, information and solidarity of the unemployed and the precarious', which started out as a platform for coordinating self-organised groups of individuals affected by the crisis of stable waged employment that became more pronounced in Europe during the 1990s.

In order for art and the politics of social movements to be articulated once again by means of collaborative practices, it was necessary to imagine new, conceptually sophisticated organisational devices that could be easily and effectively implemented. One of these devices was the 'collaborative workshop'. Collaborative workshops are not spaces where experts in symbolic production teach ignorant participants communication skills such as how to produce effective publicity images for their campaigns. To understand how collaborative workshops were gradually shaped into a tool for connecting art and social movements in the course of the 1990s we should look at two key aspects:

1.— Firstly, it seems relevant to rethink the concept of 'expert' in light of Walter Benjamin's revision of it in «The Author as Producer». The solidarity between the expert and the proletariat — Benjamin pointed out — can only be a *mediated* solidarity. In order to put the tools and the knowledge that are inherent to a specialised social task such as art at the service of a social movement, *the apparatus of production must be adapted*. (An idea that Benjamin borrows from the essay «Radio as a Means of Communication», written by Bertolt Brecht in 1930.) Basically, it becomes necessary

to consider what types of mediation and devices, what technical inventions and changes to the apparatus, allow the expert to articulate his or her own work with the work of a movement.

2.— Secondly, we need to understand how collaborative artistic practices had to overhaul the principles of *emancipatory social pedagogy* by means of these modifications of the apparatus of production, these new mediations and devices. Paolo Freire's «Pedagogy of the Oppressed» inspired the *siluetazo* action, just as the social education that was once implemented by the French workers' movement was reinvented by Ne pas plier in its own practice.

Collaborative workshops are basically spaces of co-learning and co-production, where knowledge, skills and tools of different kinds and from different origins are pooled together and shared. A space in which every individual has some kind of minor or specialised knowledge to contribute, and where subjectivities are modified through cooperation. They are also spaces of solidarity and mutual support, and — as we saw in the case of ACT UP — an existential territory that allows individual, private experiences of the crisis to be projected in the form of public conflict through the expression of symbolic production, which in turn works hand in hand with civil disobedience and direct action.

When participants in a collaborative workshop organised by APEIS and Ne pas plier were attempting to verbally express the subjective experience of their own long-term unemployment, one unemployed person apparently put it like this: «Being unemployed is like a fire in your head, and then an explosion.» This description inspired one of the distinctive symbols used by APEIS: the generic silhouettes of two heads [fig. 35] looking at each other, so that their gazes meet in the middle. Inside the head on the left, there is a fire with the word *URGENT*. Inside the head on the right, an explosion with the word *UNEMPLOYMENT*. The two heads don't look at each other in silence: they are talking, and out of their mouths comes the simplest slogan expressing the revolutionary ideal of political freedom, equal representation and rights for all. They seem to be demanding that the Republic fulfil the promise at the heart of the foundation of its governmental regime: *LIBERTY EQUALITY FRATERNITY*.

Here as in the case of ACT UP, we cannot overlook the way in which these symbols circulate. In a discussion of the images



— fig. 35



— fig. 36

produced by Ne pas plier, the activist cultural critic Brian Holmes wrote that «their value is their use.» One device for the occupation of the open space of the street, designed by Ne pas plier in collaboration with APEIS, basically consists of two large pieces that the group used to call «parentheses», mounted on wheels to give them mobility.

As the «parentheses» are pushed through the streets [fig. 36], the two heads outlined on the front of the mobile pieces approach and then move away from each other. When they stop, the space between them is staked out as a public space produced by means of a political, communicative action. The everyday uses of the space (commercial, administrative, etc.) are suspended, and political communication can take place. The inner walls of the space that is created are lined with murals and information graphics that show links between, say, the individual experience of unemployment, national economic policies and neoliberal globalisation processes. People can start dialoguing within this delimited space, as suggested by the entrance with its two silhouetted talking heads, which become almost like an archetype through which to produce dialogue with the ability to reconstruct the political dimension of society that is being crushed by neoliberalism. This space for dialogue is created and guaranteed by means of the occupation of the street through a device for collective direct communicative action.

The three recent examples of symbolic production within social movements that we have just looked at have a shared characteristic. None of them involve the objectified production of symbols that function in a stable form, with a closed meaning. Rather, each of them activates a kind of symbolic production that collaboratively generates processes that can be collectively appropriated, changed, multiplied and disseminated, and iconographic matrices that are resignified as they flow through different intervention contexts.

In this head-on image of an APEIS demonstration [fig. 37] we can see the two blazing heads operating in a variation of the model described above. The point of view from which this photograph was taken positions us as spectators who have to interpret the overall image of the demonstration by means of a combined reading of the fragments that come together in its composition. At the front of the demonstration, instead of the



— fig. 37

usual banner with a closed, one-dimensional message, there is a symbol that is open-ended and non-literal — but not ambivalent or simply abstract either. In the traditional manner, the bulk of the mobilisation *presents* the occupation of an archetypal public space (in this case, the Place de la République in Paris) by a collective subject that, through its unified public presence, expresses a desire for recognition within the mechanisms of social and political representation. But unique, individual faces emerge from that unified collective subject. Community does not crush singularity, it reinforces it. The photographs that the demonstrators are carrying show anonymous individuals. They were produced in collaborative workshops led by the photographer Marc Pataut — also a co-founder of *Ne pas plier* — in a cultural centre situated in the suburbs of Paris, in which photographic portraiture and self-portraiture worked as a tool for individual and collective empowerment. The images thus produced *shape* the presence of the struggle in public space.

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Through these three stories, I've tried to show how the recoupling of experimental art and the politics of social movements that has brought about numerous practices in the current cycle of conflicts can be understood as an update of the hypotheses and prototypes that originated in the historical experience of the art avant-garde. This historical experience needs to be properly reactivated, not only to argue positions of academic hegemony but mainly because of its usefulness today for a new practice of social change. But this realisation leads to several other questions. It is still necessary to account for the paths that these connections between experimental art and movement politics have taken, linked to the dizzying changes that have taken place on a global scale from the 1980s to the present. We still have to map out a new diagram that can help us to think about the territory in which the re-alignment between experimental art, social activism, mass communication and the autonomous politics of movements has taken place. To

define the techniques that these practices have invented, in terms of subjectivation processes, forms of political organisation and institutional experimentation in the current cycle of conflicts. But the answer to these questions would be another story.

«Walter Benjamin, Productivist» was initially pronounced as a lecture in Santiago de Chile on 8 November 2009 at the Colloquia *Art in dialogue and tension with social and cultural transformations*, programmed at the Chile Triennial. First of all, I'd like to thank Nelly Richard, the organiser of the Colloquia, and Ticio Escobar, the overall curator of the Triennial, who was, at that time, the Minister of Culture in the Paraguayan government led by Fernando Lugo, which was subsequently overthrown by a coup d'état disguised as a constitutional process.

Trying to break down the composition of one of 'your' works — of this text, in this case — is like summoning a big meeting inside your head, orchestrating the cooperation between people you know and love and people you admire. The fictional story featuring the unknown Latin American student is based on the short story by Alexander Kluge «An Observation of Walter Benjamin», included in *Cinema Stories* (New Directions Books, New York, 2007). My interpretation of Tretyakov is partly the result of long conversations with Gerald Raunig, and of reading and translating into Spanish his books *A Thousand Machines. A short history of machines as a social movement* (Semiotext(e), Los Angeles, 2010) and *Art and Revolution. Transversal Activism in the Long Twentieth Century* (Semiotext(e), Los Angeles, 2007; particularly the chapter «Writers to the Kolkhoz! Tretyakov and the 'Communist Beacon'»). My approach to the trajectory of the Russian-Soviet constructivist and productivist avant-gardes was initially enlightened back in the 1980s when I came across the original documents translated in the books *Constructivismo* (compiled by Grupo Comunicación) and *Arte y producción* by Boris Arvatov (both published by Alberto Corazón, Madrid, 1973), and by reading the memorable essay by Benjamin H.D. Buchloh «From Faktura to Factography», published in 1984. The concept of «semiotic architecture» applied to the Soviet Pavilion at *Pressa* was suggested by Buchloh during the seminar he delivered at the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) in 2006. To the best of my knowledge, he has never put it in writing. Since I wrote «Walter Benjamin, Productivist», my knowledge of these issues has been enhanced by reading the admirable book *Factografía* by Víctor del Río (Madrid, Abada Editores, 2010), who also emphasises the influence of the constructivist avant-gardes and of productivist and factographic practices on Benjamin; and

also by conversations with my friend the Argentinean philosopher Luis Ignacio García, author of the wonderful text «Alegoría y montaje. El trabajo del fragmento en Walter Benjamin» ([http://www.constelaciones-rtc.net/02/02\\_07.pdf](http://www.constelaciones-rtc.net/02/02_07.pdf)). In 2009, with Jorge Ribalta, I co-organised a seminar at MACBA entitled *The New Productivisms*, which was, in part, an extension of «Walter Benjamin, Productivist». Its contents can be found here: <http://eicpc.net/transversal/0910>.

In 1993 I spent a year in Amsterdam to study the legacy of Joris Ivens. His films led me to definitively gear my work towards a practice based on the articulation between documentary, experimental art and social activism. I deduced the inventions that Ivens produced in *Borinage* through a close reading of his two moving autobiographies: *The Camera and I* (1969) and *La mémoire d'un regard* (1982), which was given to me by Marceline Loridan-Ivens in 1998.

Some of the key information that forms the basis of my reading of ACT UP NY came from the generous participation of Douglas Crimp in my *Political Imagination* seminar at the Independent Studies Program (PEI) at MACBA, and from his important book *AIDS Demo Graphics* (Bay Press, Seattle, 1990). Ana Longoni helped me to understand the complexity of the *siluetazo* before the publication of the collective book that she co-edited with Gustavo Bruzzone (*El Siluetazo*, Buenos Aires, Adriana Hidalgo, 2008). (From this book, I have used mainly ideas put forward by my teacher Eduardo Grüner.) I was also helped by subsequent generous conversations with Julio Flores and Guillermo Kexel, who, along with the late Rodolfo Aguerreberry, were the trio of artists who organised the first *siluetada* (1983). In particular, the unpublished doctoral thesis by Julio Flores inspired me to develop a deeper Benjaminian/productivist reading of the *siluetazo*. We introduced Ne pas plier to Spanish-speaking readers in the volume I compiled with Paloma Blanco, Jesús Carrillo and Jordi Claramonte (*Modos de hacer. Arte crítico, esfera pública y acción directa*, Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 2001), and my interpretation of this French collective would not be the same without the access I have had over the years to the ideas of the activist cultural critic Brian Holmes, texts by the militant designer Gerard Paris-Clavel and the work of the factographic photographer Marc Pataut.

The Latin American student who we have called Marina Eisler is the actress Nathalie Baye in Jean-Luc Godard's 1980 film *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*. The portrait of Walter Benjamín hard at work was taken by Gisèle Freund at the National Library in Paris in 1939. My partner Paula Cobo Guevara and I took the photo of Walter Benjamin's grave in the cemetery at Port Bou. The suprematist, constructivist and productivist artworks, or their photographs, belong mainly to the collections of the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, the National Museum of Latvia in Riga, and the State Museum of Contemporary Art and the Costakis Collection in Thessaloniki; they have appeared in numerous catalogues and other specialist publications. The ACT UP images are published in *AIDS Demo Graphics* and/or on the website <http://www.actupny.org>; specifically, the street action was photographed by Donna Binder. The first two photographs of the *silueteada* were taken by Guillermo Kexel and Daniel García, respectively; the third photo is from the book edited by Gustavo Bruzzone and Ana Longoni, *El Siluetazo*, and comes from the archive of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo. The Ne pas plier images are from the website: <http://www.peripheries.net/article285.html>, and from the personal archives of members and collaborators of the group.

Walter Benjamin's quotations are taken from: «The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction» (in *Illuminations*, translated by Harry Zohn, Jonathan Cape, London, 1970); «The Author as Producer» (in *Understanding Brecht*, translated by Anna Bostock, Verso, London, 1983), and «One-Way Street» (in *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, translated by Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter, Verso, London, 1997).

I would like to thank my colleagues of many years Brian Holmes and Gerald Raunig for their annotated reading of «Walter Benjamin, Productivist», and my translator Nuria Rodríguez for her usual dedication and competence. I dedicate this publication to my daughter Marina and my son Manuel, who have already brought a new world with them.