

My life and performances¹

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I started doing performances with the Uruguayan poet Marosa di Giorgio in the eighties. I remember one at the theater of the Alliance Française of Montevideo, with the music by the Uruguayan composer Renée Pietrafesa, and a group of drummers playing candombe. Marosa and I read from each other's work, but at times we held a dialogue based on the poems. We projected slides of the Uruguayan coast I had taken as a teenager. We moved a lot, going up and down the stage, and through the alleys, and mixing with the public as we recited. This event was called "Pecarí labiado: una ópera popular", and it was truly popular, since a lot of people came, thinking perhaps that we would present a Maoist show. Another event with Marosa was called "Sur". Marino Rivero played bandoneon, and he played the tango with the same title, which Marosa liked a lot. Another performance ("Copos de oro") took place at the Goethe Institute; we were accompanied by a flutist. Another took place at the Ministry of Culture, with Marosa and Eduardo Espina. And still another, at the restaurant Lobizón, among the smell of fired potatoes. These shows happened during my holidays from New York University, which I spent in Montevideo. In those years, Marosa also did a few presentations of her own.

I spent three years in London and seventeen in New York. In London I participated in events organized by the Gay Liberation Front in the early seventies. They were for the most part big balls at the town halls, plus some street demonstrations. The balls were very creative, with costumes elaborated for the occasion, and various types of sketches. Perhaps one could also call performances the sometimes violent attacks on us by straight thugs at the entrance of the town halls.

Having lived in English speaking environments for some time, I wanted to generate versions of my poems in this language. A couple of translators offered their services, but I was not happy with the results. On the other hand, it seemed to me redundant and painful to translate the poems myself. I turned to another idea: to write directly in English, but in a certain way. As a foreigner, my speech was flat and simple. It occurred to me that it was not worthwhile to add my sober entreaties to the rich expression of native speakers. I therefore became – like Conrad, like Nabokov – a dutiful collector of idiomatic terms and expressions, to a degree that a native speaker would hardly become. My focus was precise. I was not interested in using words taken from a dictionary, or to employ every conceivable idiom. The reason I was in London, and later in New York, was to witness and, if possible, to take part in the stylistic developments linked with rock music. Conversations on this subject, and the music magazines, lent me lexical material. While American publications were keen on their pictures rather than the texts, the British reviews of records and gigs were full of witty manifestations. Despite the fact that I lived in the USA, I was nourished by British printed material. I gathered those bits and pieces in order to elaborate my poetic narratives. They came together as a prophecy of the present, the traces of a new sensibility. The result was a

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series of longer poems. On reading them aloud in public, I realized that the audiences did not connect with them; they did not understand the stylistic attitudes alluded to by the poetry. With my foreign accent I was not the best interpreter of those verses. I thought that my most satisfactory piece was a longer poem called “Atlantic Casino”. I decided to make a film with the same title, in which the image would be in accordance with the words. The actors in the film were rock musicians in full glam; those were the stylistic directives of the time (1988). The image interacted with the words. The accent of the musicians sounded streetwise, whereas the verses had a Shakespearean extravagance, not because the language was Shakespeare’s, but because it shed that “Italian” exaggeration Borges saw in the Bard, which is but the concentrated wit of England. Later on I had occasion to concentrate on his language, as I translated *Troilus and Cressida* for a publisher in Buenos Aires.

After “Atlantic Casino”, I wrote “Pacific Palisades”. It is an even longer poem, and also a more baroque one. This time, instead of making a film, it occurred to me to use the piece for a plastic installation. I was presented at the Convent of Santa Teresa, converted into an art gallery close to the Zócalo of the Mexican capital (1994). We published a book in connection with the objects of the installation plus the full text of “Pacific Palisades”.

From the year 2000 onward I lived in the Río de la Plata (Uruguay/ Argentina), and became part of a group of poets and painters called Pira, around the Estación Alógena, a center for readings, performances, and courses in Buenos Aires. With Pira we organized several performances in different spaces: at the MALBA museum, at the Centro Borges, at the Centro de España in Montevideo, and so on, through the years, until the present. These performances, although structured around a loose script, have been largely improvisational. Besides the poetic texts, they turned increasingly into a musical jamming of electric and acoustic instruments, including dance and devices such as the “Dream Machine” (a turning cylinder illuminated from the inside, which, on rotating, brings a state of hypnotic trance on the viewers). The intent of these performances was, and is, to induce the audience’s participation, either by playing musical instruments left at their disposal, or by entering the dance, so as to fuse the bystanders into a physical state of excitement and receptivity to the energies released by the event itself.

In a performance, which took place at the theater of the MALBA museum in Buenos Aires in 2003, three poets intervened (Gabriela Bejerman, Nakh Ab Ra, and I) and also three boys disguised as “androgynies” with made up faces and tulle skirts. The “androgynies” interrupted our readings, participated in them by reciting or repeating some verses, ran on stage taking us hostage, and went into the public for different kinds of actions. We did another performance at the same museum in 2008. The participants were Gabriela Bejerman, Romina Freschi, Nakh B Ra, and I. This time we went through the whole building. We started in the lobby reciting our texts under public following suit. They followed us through two big rooms where we traced our steps with playing cards, taking different positions, saying poems in turn as each one got to specific points in space. We ended our tour at the museum terrace, where we painted our faces and bodies, preparing a final celebration in which the public took part.

In a recent performance at the Estación Alógena, the public entered the room blindfolded. They were led by the participants and sat on the floor around de “dream machine”. A group of improvisers produced a musical curtain that helped them relax. We later uncovered their eyes and the “dream machine” perfected the integration of the visitors. Glasses with salvia

divinorum were passed around. In a short time the public start to dance to anything we played, no matter whether it was dance music or not. The musical atmosphere brought an incredible sense of liberation and free play. The guitars were processed with distortion, flanger, delay, and intervened physically with Chinese sticks placed through the strings to generate an unpredictable sound. The instruments became musical in a new way, without guarantees, transformed in a new venue for sounding out and exploring, a buzzing timbre generating virtual and ephemeral “chords”. This “performance music” becomes critical in a way. It is not organized, it is not subject to tonic scales, harmonic sequences, or measured rhythms. It is not the expression of subjective feelings. It consists of synthetic micro sounds at the service of an intensity that may be melodic at times, but as a whole becomes a very open musical landscape. Nevertheless, themes and leitmotifs emerged from that chiaroscuro field. There were not measured rhythms, but chaotic ones; not a homogeneous plane, but a passage through heterogeneous levels. There were voices that took the microphone in order to sing, recite, babble, or shout. The ritornello was the performance as a whole, as a modular unity never equal to itself. There was a second sea of sound: the acoustic unplugged instruments. When the electrical instruments were muffled from the console table, one could hear the clinking of metal, glass, leather, wood, flutes, tambourines, and maracas. We were then aware of all the levels of maritime sustenance we were promoting. I took the microphone and started to recite some sort of psalmody. After which a slow musical crescendo started, involving some kind of rite. People went after it and progressed on its horseback, as it were, in order to appropriate and digest it. This psalmody culminated in a sort of general chant.

I have the impression that in any successful improvisation of space-rock-candombe a will for the unconscious expresses itself. Sometimes it takes off like a disastrous comet, and at other times with a gust of triumph, and new individuations come out of the unformed soup. It can be exhausting, and one feels rather like fussing into the whole instead of coming out with individuality. These are vital experiences, in order to become more attentive, or connected, in a loose way, to what changes inside and outside.

These performances are related to other intellectual pursuits of Estación Alógena, such as two recent publications: a) *Nosotros, los brujos. Apuntes de arte, poesía y brujería*, edited by Juan Salzano (Buenos Aires, Santiago Arcos, 2008), to which I contributed with “Discusión del eros en *Paradiso* en José Lezama Lima”; b) *Deleuze y la brujería*, by Matt Lee and Mark Fisher, translated, edited and introduced by Juan Salzano (Buenos Aires, Las cuarenta, 2009). From persecutions, the outcome of the codified interests of organized religions and the mechanisms of church control, to the accusations of superstition connected to the disenchantment of nature initiated by modern science, in particular in its rationalistic and instrumental version, sorcery, it was Gilles Deleuze, since he subscribed to a vision of nature different from mechanism, causalism, or the more traditional organicist finalism. Matt Lee and Mark Fisher have been the first to value and explore this aspect of Deleuze’s work, and also Nakh A Ra, a poet and writer, founder of the Estación Alógena, who has explored the less codified sources of esoterism.