

ANIMALS THAT SUPPORT THE WEIGHT OF MYSTERIOUS BURDENS IN ENVIRONMENTS CREATED BY OPPOSING FORCES

As a child, I was told that the old system used to create walkable paths up a mountainside consisted in loading a donkey with a heavy burden and setting it loose in the direction of the mountain top. The donkey saves as much energy as it can, takes the flattest slopes possible which, zigzagging, will lead it to the top and exerts itself as little as possible in relation with the burden it is carrying. Once defined by the animal, the path would be widened into so-called tracks, and adapted for human use. The 'form' – the zigzag path – could be considered the result of an equation that includes: 1. A pre-existing obstacle: the mountainside. 2. A desire or goal: to climb the slope. 3. A measuring and calculation instrument: the donkey, that has a built-in energy-saving mechanism. And last but not least, 4. Something extra needs to be added to the equation: the burden.

Similarly, in the artistic process, in order to arrive at a form – be it the zigzag or be it the mountainside, whose slope and height remain unknown to us until we reach the top – all we only instinctively know is that we have to load a structure as much as possible, with a large amount of Real, Ideal and Vital materials to ensure that the relationship between their weight and the animal's energy-saving principle will forge the path forward. Following this path we will perceive the size of the slope, and when we come to its end (if we manage to) we shall discover the form, i.e., the zigzag and the mountain's height. As does the donkey, we shall have to come up with subterfuges by dangling some sort of carrot before us, decoys that will steer our animal selves in a certain direction. The specificity of the artistic process is that we ourselves are at once the donkey, the mountainside, the burden, the track and the carrot. Once the foregoing has been fulfilled, a structure or strategy may give us a form, but no form in itself will guarantee a meaning, which will always be somewhere else and will depend on the complexity of the question and the motivation, and on the way in which the factors are involved with the genuine need of our action.

An External Digestion. An Exhibition

As well as being a place where completed works are displayed, an exhibition can be used as a device for hastening the processes that will enable us to publicly and externally digest the material with which we have been working. Some spiders, having no stomach, paralyse their prey with poison, injecting digestive juices that externally digest the animal within its own integuments, after which the spider sucks out the resulting mush. This exhibition, *Animals that Support the Weight of Mysterious Burdens*, is also a digestion, a long rumination in full view, where each gallery on the third floor of the Museo Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo (CA2M) can be compared to a specific part of a stomach understood as a place of production, where avoiding the idea of exhibition is essential for producing *an exhibition*.

29 Conditions for an Imposition

In 2017 I taught a workshop on writing and critique addressed at people whose professions required them to write. I thought up a series of questions on key issues that would make them think about the various factors that come into play in the act of writing. Later on, when I was invited to publish them, I couldn't resist the temptation to expand them, changing the angle in the case of each question, trying to embrace the different aspects of the theme. The result was a text entitled '29 condiciones para una imposición. Para la organización de un cuerpo que se pone a disposición de la escritura' (29 Conditions for an Imposition. Setting of a Body that is Made Available for Writing), conceived as a self-portrait in the negative, a double proprioceptive exercise that consisted in delimiting, question by question, a specific body – my body – only to remove it from the place it occupied, thereby enabling the incorporation of any other body so that this movement could provide whoever may be listening a precise representation of their own body in the act of writing. One year later, thinking that as a text it was too demanding, I ended up transforming it into a performance, an action. It was a passive exercise in listening.

400 Movements to Elude the Predictable

Two years later, the performance entitled '29 Conditions' served the purpose of creating a specific exhibition device in relation with the floor (the horizontal and slightly inclined planes) where the public could interact with the various sculptures that occupied the space, three-dimensional works produced by processes of extrusion and folding, either by lying on them, between them or inside them. The process of creation and design of these elements generated thousands of images, from which I selected four hundred that form the two-channel video-installation entitled *400 movimientos para esquivar lo predecible* (400 Movements to Elude the Predictable) that articulates all the elements in the exhibition.

A Field of Critical Tension

'The forces which are ignored do not go away just because they are ignored. They lurk, frustrated, underground. Sooner or later they erupt in violence: and the system which seems to win is then exposed to far more catastrophic dangers. The only way that a pattern can actually help to make a situation genuinely more alive is by recognizing all the forces which actually exist, and then finding a world in which these forces can slide past each other.'

Christopher Alexander

Upon entering Museo CA2M, we immediately sense a discomfort caused by the tensions generated by hidden opposing forces operating in space. On the one hand, we have the forces derived from the original architectural project. In an attempt to become a distinctive urban element, the building — like many contemporary museums — tends towards exaggeration, hence its outward-looking features like the huge glazed east-facing façade. This usually produces an inability to define interior spaces, which in a place destined to stage exhibitions is always a problem. In the case of Museo CA2M the situation is even more acute, as the building had, in fact, been designed to look inwards — like constructed memory — given that

in an attempt to embrace its past, its central area welcomed the former building on which it had been erected. Its structure, therefore, was also formed by rooms that open on to the centre that were like vantage points. Funnily enough, new functional needs have led this old construction (that brought meaning to the shape of today's building) to be demolished as a result of the second current of forces acting on it — the reactive forces of the art institution. In an attempt to correct and redirect the architectural design, adapting it to its uses, and in its eagerness to create exhibition spaces, it strives to solve its deficiencies by raising massive curtain walls on each of the floors that, contrary to the presumed initial places of architecture, create odd, lingering spaces.

The tension of the building as it is produced by these two forces that generate the pressure we perceive. The first force, that of the architecture, the building itself, tries to break the physical limits by gaining possession of as much space as possible, forging reciprocal connections between interior and exterior, and trying to strike a hypothetical balance between open and closed, construction and space. This force could be visualised as a continuous movement in both directions that, not responding to the functions that shaped it, is unable to create minimally static spaces, spaces of passage.

In its turn, the opposite force generated by the institution that reacts by rejecting the previous force, tries to thwart this movement and contain the interior by compulsively erecting physical walls on the perimeters that almost completely prevent the view of the building itself and its exterior. It is a structure that refers to something else, an earlier building no longer extant. Nevertheless, in its negotiation with the architectural design — that tries to resist, and would like to remain open — the institution doesn't take the problem to extremes and continues to allow access to exterior non-places (ramps, vantage points, traces of corridors) that may be used as possible exhibition spaces.

The Proposal: Expansion Contraction Compression and Anastomosis

As stated by Alexander, it isn't suffice to be aware of the existence of these forces and avoid them as if they weren't there. In order to redefine the framework of action, I've chosen a 'passive' or collaborationist proposal that would consist in taking everything one step further, extending and propelling the two inertias resulting from the two abovementioned forces to the extreme, to see if it is possible to produce a crisis between the two, a predicament that will eventually prove expressive and meaningful. To give the conflict shape (and space), to provoke it instead of avoiding it in order to define a living and functional (transitory) organism. To incite a clash, an intersection of forces in the hope of causing something to happen by applying criteria of economic and material sustainability. Dealing with isolated inconveniences perceived from the experience of space on the third floor where I have been invited to work.

CM at Museo CA2M

Animals that Support the Weight of Mysterious Burdens is an ongoing project whose initial proposal was related to the consequences of the force of gravity: the physical burden, conceived from the experience of the body perceived vertically, and its symbolic weight. As a part of the development of the proposal of the CA2M project I have added pressure to the title, Product of Opposing Forces, a reference to the tension that arises from the clash of forces between the Museum as a body (the building) and the Museum as an institution.

This exhibition is an organism resulting from four superimposed structures.

1. **Intensifiers.** Interventions designed to point out specific closed areas within the building-container that may be opened by placing sculptural works in them. This would allow them to be physically penetrated, and the interventions would be conceptual rather than real. Having taken the institution's constructional inertia to an extreme by closing the accesses that would usually remain open, these

signs intend to 'extend' the fluxes of the architectural design in each of the walls I have erected thanks to openings or cat flaps that are connected to the exterior and are 'passable' by human beings.

2. **Decelerators.** Sculptural pieces (taken from the idea of '29 Conditions') placed at the angles of the galleries and pillars. These are devices that slow down the fluxes of energy, or channel them in a building made up of residual transitional spaces.

3. **Occlusors.** Flat prototypes, templates for potential interventions for opening holes connecting gallery spaces to the areas inside the walls.

4. **'Essayistic' Video Projections.** Halfway between cryptic and explanatory, these imaginary approaches, suggestions, studies and notes (along the lines of '400 Movements to Elude the Predictable') will create the various works. These interventions could be produced in the building-container where the succession of images, while constructing a lively sequence, represents the reality of the mental (and manual) process that has taken place during its making. The project's specificity is, perhaps, the way in which it has arisen and developed, a consequence of speculations and imaginary projections structured by a vast amount of visual material (3900 images), two-dimensional representations on which I virtually project myself and where I try to heighten awareness of place through the image almost as an Ignatian *composition of place*.

The desire for form generates most of the blocks in creative work. Technically speaking, defining any form of production as a notation enables focus to be placed on the desire without apparently considering form. All projections towards possible future events that could take place in the beginning of a production affects its very creation. Present forms are generated starting from projections towards the future. This intersection of the four superimposed structures creates a device to stage performances, a conventional exhibition space where works are displayed and that contains an explanation, a lesson or a comment.

One Thing to Name. Another Thing to Declare ...

'I have but half a score things to do in the time—I have a thing to name—a thing to lament—a thing to hope—a thing to promise, and a thing to threaten—I have a thing to suppose—a thing to declare—a thing to conceal—a thing to choose, and a thing to pray for—.'

Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*

While writing the words you are now reading, I am preparing and designing the conditions that will produce the events which will ultimately define the works — the exhibition itself. Everything is almost decided and at once everything remains yet to be done.

Jon Mikel Euba, 4th of January, 2023

Jon Mikel Euba. (Amorebieta 1967)

Studied at the Fine Arts School in Bilbao and went on to further his training at Arteleku, San Sebastian, between the years 1992 and 1995. His work is grounded in drawing as a procedure, and in sculpture as a programme produced in a range of media. Since the late nineties he has been developing a practice guided by the need to generate systems of production through an 'economical technique'. This search, which is also a form of resistance, requires processes that involve other people, processes in which the artist plays the role of mediator or filter. From 2006 onwards he has been carrying out research, condensing its results in a number of performances for which he has developed a didactic approach aimed at the various participants involved. In 2010, together with Txomin Badiola and Sergio Prego, he organised the experimental educational project Primer Proforma 2010 at the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León (MUSAC) in León. In 2015, along with artists Itziar Okariz, Asier Mendizabal and Sergio Prego, he produced the Kalostra school project in San Sebastian. Former director of the Action Unites, Words Divide (On Praxis, An Unstated Theory) MA at the Dutch Art Institute in Arnhem between the years 2014 and 2017, in 2006 Euba embarked on a writing-based project whose goal is to define a praxis that could evolve into a technical theory. Endeavouring to lay the foundations for a *praxeology* of art to reflect on practice through the means of writing, this process is predicated on the application of a *taxonomy* that, by dividing aspects of artistic production inasmuch as a complex action into parts, aspires first of all to understand it from another perspective and then to convey it in such a way that will enable it to be re-implemented in all its complexity by other people. In 2017 he published *Writing Out Loud* (edited by If I can't dance I don't want to be part of your revolution and DAI), and four years later, *Vulnerario* (edited by Caniche).

His works nourish the permanent collections of important museums such as the Museo Reina Sofía in Madrid; the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) in Barcelona; MUSAC in León; The Contemporary Art Museum of Luxembourg (MUDAM); FRAC Poitou-Charentes in France; and the repository of the Spanish Ministry of Culture in Madrid, among others. Euba's practice embraces performance, installation art, video and photography.

This text has been written by Jon Mikel Euba as part of the exhibition celebrated at Museo Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo from 19th of January to 21st of May 2023

