

## A world without us

### [Notes on the ambient-utopian imaginary of Santiago Talavera]

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“We are—like in the 19th century—living on the great crossroads of a total distrusts on institutions; but now utopias are created by *marketing*, and it is reality itself that creates its own distopias.”<sup>1</sup>

Among the many reasons for the advent of “accelerationism”<sup>2</sup> we shouldn’t dismiss those social pathologies that have emerged from the systematic distortions of the conditions of communication. “In the age of globalisation and the web’s “u-topicality,” time is increasingly conceived as capable of compressing, or even of annihilating, space.”<sup>3</sup> Space “contracts” virtually by effect of the speed of transport and communication. We know that there’s always something outside a media. Each media constructs a corresponding zone of immediacy, of the unmediated and transparent in contrast with the media itself. From our flat’s windows we’ve moved on to the windows of computers, from the ways of dwelling to the ways of computing,<sup>4</sup> in a mutation of what we perceive as “outside” but also in a complex game of transparency and opacity. The (presumed) age of *access* is nothing but an economy of (supposedly) “authentic” experiences.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps our “acceleration” is no other thing but the sedentary bogged-down

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<sup>1</sup> Santiago Talavera interviewed by Óscar Alonso Molina: *Santiago Talavera*, Ed. Nocapaper Books, Santander, 2016, p. 128.

<sup>2</sup> “Among the key factors for the development of a new form of accelerationism that we find here there’s the collective-pharmaco-socio-sensorial-technologic adventure of *rave* culture and the simultaneous invasion of the home by mediatic technologies (VCRS, videogames, computers) and the popular interest in dystopian cyberpunk sci-fi which includes William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* trilogy and the films *Terminator*, *Predator* and *Blade Runner* (which have become key “texts” for these authors)” (Armen Avanessian and Mauro Reis: “Introducción” [“Introduction”] in Armen Avanessian and Mauro Reis (comp.): *Aceleracionismo. Estrategias para una transición hacia el postcapitalismo* [*Accelerationism. Strategies for a transition towards postcapitalism*], Ed. Caja Negra, Buenos Aires, 2017, p. 26).

<sup>3</sup> Hartmut Rosa: *Alienación y aceleración. Hacia una teoría crítica de la temporalidad de la modernidad tardía* [*Alienation and Acceleration. Towards a Critical Theory of the Temporality of Late Modernity*], Ed. Katz, Buenos Aires, 2016, p. 23.

<sup>4</sup> “The window was, of course, a media on its own, dependent on the apparition of the adequate technologies glass lamination. Windows are perhaps one of the most important inventions of visual culture, opening up architecture to new relations between the interior and the exterior, and reshaping the human body, by analogy, in interior and exterior spaces, so that the eyes appear are, as the trope goes, the windows of the soul. The ears are the porches and the mouth is bejeweled with pearly doors. From the lattice of Islamic ornamentation and the stained windows of Medieval Europe, passing through the picture-windows of shops, to the modern shopping mall and the *flânerie* of modernity, and the windows of Microsoft’s interface, the window is anything but a transparent entity, obvious and unmediated” (W.J.T. Mitchell: *¿Qué quieren las imágenes?* [*What do images want?*], Ed. Sans Soleil, Vitoria, 2017, p. 271).

<sup>5</sup> “The new culture of hypercapitalism—noted Jeremy Rifkin in the year 2000—where everything in life consists in paying for experiences, which describes the purchase and sale of human experiences [in] theme cities, in the development based on shared interests, in centers dedicated to entertainment, in shopping malls, in global tourism, in fashion, cuisine, sports and professional games, films, television,

binge-watching of the ubiquitous catalogue of home shopping networks in a time which is manifestly complex or, to put it simply, out-of-joint.<sup>6</sup>

To approach Santiago Talavera's work, which is, as Noemí Méndez aptly notes, also a *plastic activist*,<sup>7</sup> entails also a *raising of awareness* about his radical speculative interests, but above all else it reveals an aesthetic strategy which he has articulated as a critical reaction within the bosom of a "culture of the now."<sup>8</sup> In his works he pays constant attention to landscape; fascinated by Patinir, by Hiroshige's visions of Fuji-san, enraptured admirer of Friedrich *The Sea of Ice*<sup>9</sup> (an hypnotic condensation of the *Winter Journey* which leads, explicitly, to the shipwrecking of all hope), taking romanticism as a cultural current very much alive, without falling notwithstanding into picturesque sublimations. "In one of my drawings, *The Point of View*, I imagined—says Santiago Talavera—Petrarch, walking up to the top of the Mount Ventoux once again, and seeing an objectified nature of fluoride colours where the stones looked like candy."<sup>10</sup> In his prodigious and obsessive paintings there's a constant disjointness of the logic backdrop-figure as well as a delight in miniatures as if reality would have been consumed into a uncanny diorama. Our gaze is entrapped inside strange angles or, to employ a barthesian term, in fascinating *punctualisations*: art touches because of its details.<sup>11</sup>

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virtual reality and [other] simulated experiences." Rifkin warned that while the industrial era fed our physical being, the Age of Access feeds our mental, emotional and spiritual being: "While the control over the goods of exchange was what characterised the age that just concluded, the control over the exchange of concepts is what characterises the age to come. In the 21st century, institutions increasingly trade with ideas, and people, in their turn, buy increasingly more into those ideas and into the physical embodiments contained therein" (Jeremy Rifkin: *La era del acceso. La revolución de la nueva economía [The Age of Access. The Revolution of the New Economy]*, Ed. Paidós, Barcelona, 2013, p. 48).

<sup>6</sup> "But, what is "our time"? The world of terrorism post 9/11 and the world belonging to incipient forms of neofascism, from the Taliban to the New American Empire? Is it the age of postmodernity or the age of a modernity (as argued by the philosopher and anthropologist Bruno Latour) that could have never existed? Is it a time defined by new media and new technology, an age of "biocybernetic reproducibility" which follows the age of "mechanical reproduction" of Walter Benjamin, the "world of cables" of Marshall McLuhan, a time that blurs the difference between machine and an organism? Is it this the moment when new objects in the world produce new philosophies such as that of objectivism and the old theories of vitalism and animism seem to be (like fossil formations) adopting new life?" (W.J.T. Mitchell: *¿Qué quieren las imágenes? [What do the images want?]*, Ed. Sans Soleil, Vitoria, 2017, p. 214).

<sup>7</sup> "Talavera is not a run-of-the-mill artist, he's a plastic activist, a draughtsman of virtuosity, a master painter that we don't know whether to classify as a new Renaissance painter or a "conceptual baroque artist." Santiago is, to put it briefly, a visual philosopher, a plastic poet, a romantic.... A clear example of *mestizaje* between creation and social compromise through compositions along the lines to the great masters of the history of art. Santiago presents us with a new *Garden of Earthly Delights* where the viewers lose themselves and become the silent protagonists of his scenes" (Noemí Méndez: "11 tesis y más de 1001 motivos y el no cuestionamiento ante la obviedad" [11 thesis and more than 1001 motives and the Lack of Inquiries before What's Obvious," prologue to Óscar Alonso Molina: *Santiago Talavera*, Ed. Nocapaper Books, Santander, 2016, p. 10).

<sup>8</sup> Stephen Bertman has coined the term "culture of now" and "hasty culture" to refer to the lifestyles of our age and society, Cf. *Hyperculture. The Human Cost of Speed*, Ed. Praeger, London, 1998.

<sup>9</sup> "*The Sea of Ice* by David Friedrich influenced me a lot ever since I first saw it as a young kid. That boat sunk behind a heap of stones and ice is us—it's our failure" (Santiago Talavera interviewed in Óscar Alonso Molina: *Santiago Talavera*, Ed. Nocapaper Books, Santander, 2016, p. 128).

<sup>10</sup> Santiago Talavera interviewed in Óscar Alonso Molina: *Santiago Talavera*, Ed. Nocapaper Books, Santander, 2016, p. 120.

<sup>11</sup> "It's not only mere curiosity, nor is it iconographic bulimia; his way of looking at things in the world—and at the world itself—presents an aesthetics resembling the love for detail found in Gothic and

Santiago Talavera has related his plastic methodology with the passage of “Las babas del diablo” [“The Devil’s Drool”] by Cortázar (which inspired, to a certain extent, Antonioni’s *Blow Up*) where photographs are amplified several times and also to an interest for haikus and the Japanese garden. In some occasions he has mentioned that his “hyperzoom” aesthetic has something to do with the fascination that he experience before that scene in *Blade Runner* where Detective Deckard uses a machine to gain access into a photograph, giving a third dimension to the image, suggesting that “certain images hide crucial details.”<sup>12</sup> We visually inhabit a “stage-managed” space which seems to reveal the fractal dimension of nature where macro and micro elements interchange their qualities, forcing us to accept the truth that one derives from the title of one of this artist’s exhibitions: *Que el destino de las cosas se decida en lugares pequeños* [Let the fate of things be decided in small places] (Galería Blanca Soto, 2005). Santiago Talavera can be interpreted as a *pointillist* painter of time, capable of bearing witness to ruptures and continuities, unfolding an imaginary that gives cohesion to the heterogeneous and even to the pulverized.<sup>13</sup> His landscapes, between paradisiac and dystopian, conjuring up the excesses of Brueghel’s or Bosco’s imaginaries, have something of that *baroque allegory*, that is, of a staging of sadness, leaving us as astounded spectators before the shipwrecking of the world.

In an article titled “The Great Consolidation of Power,” which commented upon the multiple disruptions brought by the year 2010—the financial collapse of Greece, the cloud that came from Iceland, covering the skies of Europe and the great petrol spill in the Gulf of Mexico—Ross Douthat, think-piece contributor for the *New York Times*, wrote: “The panic of 2008 happened partly because the public interest had tied itself so much with private interests that the later couldn’t allow themselves to fail.”<sup>14</sup> We are marked, in every sense, by catastrophes, from the shipwrecking of the *Prestige* to the disaster of Fukushima, in a planetary collapse that has also consequences on the “aesthetic bubble.” In a way we are living a “Korean experience” (hyperconnected, but on the edge of suicide), frenetically stirred by nothing, addicted to the *gangnam style*. “The South-Korean mind—notes Franco “Bifo” Berardi—has reconfigured itself in this artificial landscape and has entered without problems into the digital sphere, with a low degree of cultural resistance if we compare it with other populations of the world. In a social space emptied out by military and cultural aggressions, the Korean experience

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Flemish painting, where every nook and cranny of the painting tried to capture the attention of the spectator with the same strength” (Santiago Talavera interviewed in Óscar Alonso Molina: *Santiago Talavera*, Ed. Nocapaper Books, Santander, 2016, p. 60.)

<sup>12</sup> Santiago Talavera interviewed by Iván Lópeza Munuera: “En este pequeño lugar hay una gran prueba” [“In this Small Place There is A Great Trial”] in *Santiago Talavera. En la vida anterior* [*Santiago Talavera. In the previous life*], Centre Municipal d’Eix, 2011, p. 20.

<sup>13</sup> Michel Maffesoli has analysed what he terms *pointillist* time in his book *El instante eterno. El retorno de lo trágico en las sociedades posmodernas* [*The Eternal Instant. The Return of the Tragic in Postmodern Societies*] (Ed. Paidós, Barcelona, 2001), a time which is defined by the proliferation of ruptures and discontinuities. “*pointillist* time is broken, or rather pulverized, into a multitude of “*eternal instants*”—events, incidents, accidents, adventures, episodes— monads shut into themselves, different bites, and each bite reduced to a point which approaches more and more its geometric ideal of un-dimensionality” (Zygmunt Bauman: *Vida de consumo* [*Life of Consumption*], Ed. Fondo de Cultura Económica, Madrid, 2016, p. 52).

<sup>14</sup> Ross Douthat: “The Great Consolidation” in *New York Times*, May 16 2010.

is defined by an extreme level of individualisation and, simultaneously, it is directing its steps toward a complete rewiring of the collective mind.”<sup>15</sup>

When History seems obsolete or a mere spectral repertoire, perpetrating the dismantling of the common goods as carried out by neoliberal egoism,<sup>16</sup> it becomes difficult to recuperate the critical impulse and it might even seem that the utopian is absolutely precluded. The *horror vacui* operates, in Santiago Talavera’s work,<sup>17</sup> as a reaction to that history smashed to pieces. In his works he displays surprising accumulations and superpositions, making use of collage, “simulating” the *glitch*. One must understand that—planned—vertigo of juxtapositions in a ludic manner,<sup>18</sup> like an exercise of immersion into a present which offers simultaneous situations. “We live—notes Santiago Talavera—in a world of copies of copies, in a multi-referential and vertiginous world which tends toward accumulation.”<sup>19</sup> This *artist of the hybrid*, as I’ve indicated, is attracted by the detail, sucked in by the wound. One has only to contemplate that drawing, explicitly entitled *The Wound* (2015), where it seems like the pain of the animal could be mitigated by adamantine perfection, to understand that this artist doesn’t look for “pamphleteering” solutions but rather keeps always an *enigmatic* coefficient. In his fragmentary discourse, manifest in his beautiful miniature gardens, images are always in movement, broken-and-rebuilt, cut up and placed in theatrical arrangements borne out of the consciousness that there’s no such thing as a self-sufficient totality.<sup>20</sup> He resorts, cunningly, to

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<sup>15</sup> Franco “Bifo Berardi: *Fenomenología del fin. Sensibilidad y mutación conectiva* [*Phenomenology of the End. Sensibility and Connective Mutation*], Ed. Caja Negra, Buenos Aires, 2017, p. 121.

<sup>16</sup> “Fukuyama himself warned that this radiant neoliberal city couldn’t last the threat of ghosts, though he was mostly thinking about nietzschean rather than marxist ghosts. Some of the most anticipatory pages of Nietzsche are those where he describes “the oversaturation of history to take place in a certain age,” which would lead it “to direct a dangerous irony towards itself,” as he wrote in *Untimely Considerations*, “and ultimately, most dangerous of all, toward cynicism.” Cynicism, that “cosmopolitan assignment,” which is nothing but an unattached form of spectacularism, replaces the space belonging to involvement and commitment. This is the condition of the Nietzsche’s Superior Man, he who has seen it all but is precisely weakened by this decadent excess of (self)consciousness” (Mark Fisher: *Realismo Capitalista. ¿No hay alternativa?* [*Capitalist Realism. Is there no alternative?*], Ed. Caja Negra, Madrid, 2016, p. 28).

<sup>17</sup> “The work of Santiago Talavera stimulates the clinical possibility of descrying, through impetuous clues, the rhetoric of overlapping layers which leaves us with that forgotten hole of the *horror vacui*” (Marcos Fernández: “Pasaba por aquí: notas sobre fragmentos, piezas que recoger y Santiago Talavera” [“I was just passing by: notes on fragments, pieces to pick up and Santiago Talavera”] in Óscar Alonso Molina: *Santiago Talavera*, Ed. Nocupaper Books, Santander, 2016, p. 16.)

<sup>18</sup> “When I began to use *collage* or *papier collé* I saw that the tactile dimension some drawings took affected in some way its reading; the commentaries and reactions to the images showed me how textures, glows or the thickness of papers and cardboards introduce synesthesia and play” (Santiago Talavera interviewed in Óscar Alonso Molina: *Santiago Talavera*, Ed. Nocupaper Books, Santander, 2016, p. 118).

<sup>19</sup> Santiago Talavera interviewed by Iván López Munuera: “En este pequeño lugar hay una gran prueba” [“In this Small Place There is A Great Trial”] in *Santiago Talavera. En la vida anterior* [*Santiago Talavera. In the previous life*], Centre Municipal d’Elx, 2011, p. 14.

<sup>20</sup> “The image couldn’t be enough in itself as an enclosed architecture shut in its own beauty. Precisely, the harmony of its transparent maze needed to be broken, running the risk (because there was, indeed, a physical need) of breaking everything” (George Didi-Huberman: *Vislumbres* [*Glow*], Ed. Shangrila, Santander, 2019, p. 265).

inverosimile *particularisations*, avoiding a delight or enthusiasm at a distance, showing us an edulcorated and, ultimately, bitter landscape.<sup>21</sup>

“We arrive too late, strutting about the stage of the already experienced, the already given: the performance already finished.”<sup>22</sup> Without a doubt the poetics of Santiago Talavera denotes a melancholic undercurrent, which results from a backward glance at lost paradises<sup>23</sup> as well as from a *nostalgia of the future*.<sup>24</sup> His is a poetics based on calamity and defeat, nearing the register of science fiction or the tone of films like David Lynch’s *Lost Highway* where present and future blend together, or in the dystopian visions of *Blade Runner*. Let us recall the phrase “Then we are stupid and we will die” which Pris says, one of the four replicants of Ridley Scott’s film who escaped to the extraterrestrial colony and came back to the Earth to meet the only person that could prolong his life, the God of Biomechanics, the executive director of Tyrell Corporations, who created the body and mind of the Nexus generation. To think today of the *multiple catastrophes* that devastate us (in the environment, in the fabric of our social well-being and across our education systems we are experiencing an unimaginable devastation, suffering beyond descriptions) requires new methodologies. “Semiocapitalism—I quote Berardi again here—has infiltrated itself into the nervous cells of conscious organisms, inoculating them with a thanato-political logic, with a morbid sense penetrating our collective unconscious, our culture and sensibility; this is the obvious effect of sleep deprivation and a direct consequence of the stress imposed upon our attention.”<sup>25</sup> The franticness of *forced socialisation* reconfigures or, rather, keeps *subjectivities* available. Economic obsession provokes a feeling of constant mobilisation of the productive energy. According to Jonathan Crary, this is the form of contemporary progress: the ruthless appropriation and domination of time and experience, the ruthless colonisation of sleep.<sup>26</sup> The works of Santiago Talavera are at the same time, oniric and extremely real, dystopian and concrete, laid out in a masterful game

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<sup>21</sup> “As before a fantastic set for kids, we feel a strange tension. What seems naive hides something dangerous, more uncanny as it is edulcorated” (Galería García: text in *Santiago Talavera. La isla de los voraces* [*Santiago Talavera. The Island of the Voracious*], Galería Soto, Madrid, 2009).

<sup>22</sup> Óscar Alonso Molina: *Santiago Talavera*, Ed. Nocupaper Books, Santander, 2016, p. 86.

<sup>23</sup> “The melancholic look of the painter back at those lost paradises requires drawing to give the spectator the possibility of looking back as well, back to those imaginary cemeteries where we go on throwing whatever we don’t want” (Carlos Rodríguez Gordo: “Reflexiones en torno a la obra de Santiago Talavera” [“Considerations on the oeuvre of Santiago Talavera”] in *Santiago Talavera*, La Lisa Arte Contemporáneo, Albacete, 2010).

<sup>24</sup> “There’s a kind of nostalgia for the future, for being at the same time in a past moment and in one still to come. In a way it’s a nostalgia for an imagined past time, but one which rings very close to home for me” (Santiago Talavera interviewed by Iván López Munuera: “En este pequeño lugar hay una gran prueba” [“In this Small Place There is A Great Trial”] in *Santiago Talavera. En la vida anterior* [*Santiago Talavera. In the Previous Life*], Centre Municipal d’Elx, 2011, p. 14.)

<sup>25</sup> Franco “Bifo” Berardi: *Fenomenología del fin. Sensibilidad y mutación conectiva* [*Phenomenology of the End. Sensibility and Connective Mutation*], Ed. Caja Negra, Buenos Aires, 2017, p. 325.

<sup>26</sup> “The 24/7 world constantly erodes any distinction between day and night, light and darkness, actions and rest. It’s a zone of insensibility, of amnesia, of that which destroys the possibility of experience. To paraphrase Maurice Blanchot, “as both belonging to the disaster as to the period after disaster, a world characterised by the empty sky, where no star or sign is visible, where one loses one’s way and one’s sense of direction.” It is, specifically, alike a state of emergency, when a conjunction of searchlights lit up suddenly at night, apparently as a response to some extreme circumstance, but actually in the permanent condition of never disconnecting or normalizing themselves” (Jonathan Crary: *24/7. El capitalismo al asalto del suelto* [*24/7. Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*], Ed. Ariel, Barcelona, 2015, p. 27).

of scale, imposing, with their forced perspectives, a sensation of anomaly.<sup>27</sup> Hito Steyerl has pointed out that the vertical perspective (hegemonic in the world of videogames and also in most contemporary audiovisual productions) integrates military, surveillance and entertainment uses.<sup>28</sup> The displacement of Santiago Talavera's video-musical *Cortar por lo sano* [*A Clean Break*] is, to a certain extent, a *drone journey* which elevates us as much as it throws us down into a complete defeat, continuing with that interweaving of the sublime and the infraordinary which is so characteristic of his imagination.

“The theme of the untamed paradise—notes Óscar Alonso Molina—which banishes us is a recurring motif for radical subjectivism. Talavera establish himself within this long tradition, introducing new age-specific aspects of a ecological nature and that new gestaltic consciousness which locates man in the middle of a complex ecosystem, in an ecological niche in equality of conditions, but with greater responsibility.”<sup>29</sup> But this artist of the sublime doesn't find himself in a tempestuous sea but—to put it provocatively—in Chernobyl.<sup>30</sup> We perhaps need a new *cartographic-landscaping* process to understand a world dominated by a “cruel aesthetic.” Santiago Talavera tries, relentlessly, to *think the world*, allegorising the disasters of capitalism,<sup>31</sup> at a time when neuro-totalitarianism is taken as an unavoidable and impending possibility, in an age hit by waves of *post-truth* tsunamis and riddled by complete informational opacity. *Consparanoia* has profound roots in our world, as if the inheritance of the school of suspicion were the “addiction” to detective narratives. “If detective stories—remarks Ferrán Barenblit and Cuahtémoc Medina in the catalogue of the exhibition about *Forensic Architecture* that they curated in 2017—had a central role in producing the imaginary of surveillance society as a product of a kind of rational police magic, the system of government of our age finds in the media staging and the investigation entertainment and in forensic trials (such as those of TV shows like *CSI*) one of its greatest consense-producing theaters. It refers to a world where the judiciary process (and practices such as the public exhumation of mortal

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<sup>27</sup> “It shouldn't surprise anyone that Talavera uses frequently a canted perspectiva. The oblique or militar perspective offers a higher vantage point to the viewer, allowing him or her to hover over the stage. It is, obviously, the result of a kind of *strained* point of view, certainly, but also the effect of a kind of *exhaustion*....” (Óscar Alonso Molina: *Santiago Talavera*, Ed. Nocapaper Books, Santander, 2016, p. 40).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Hito Steyerl: “En caída libre. Una experiencia mental sobre la perspectiva vertical” [“Free Fall. A Mental Experience about Vertical Perspective”] in *Los condenados de la pantalla* [*The Wretched of the Screen*], Ed. Caja Negra, Buenos Aires, 2014, p. 15-32.

<sup>29</sup> Óscar Alonso Molina: *Santiago Talavera*, Ed. Nocapaper Books, Santander, 2016, p. 70.

<sup>30</sup> “To my mind the sublime exists, for instance, in Chernobyl, where, thirty years after the nuclear disaster, biodiversity is much more abundant and animals live in harmony without the need of human regulation” (Santiago Talavera interviewed in Óscar Alonso Molina: *Santiago Talavera*, Ed. Nocapaper Books, Santander, 2016, p. 128).

<sup>31</sup> “No gaze is objective, right? But my first intention is to think the world, to make a portrait in a moment when the relationship between man and nature is more and more reduced to the powers of a brand of capitalism that already announces its final chapters” (Santiago Talavera interview in Óscar Alonso Molina: *Santiago Talavera*, Ed. Nocapaper Books, Santander, 2016, p. 121). “The relationship between capitalism and eco-disaster is neither coincidence nor accident: the need for a “market in constant expansion” and its “fetish with growth” implies that capitalism is opposed to any notion of environmental sustainability” (Mark Fisher: *Realismo Capitalista. ¿No hay alternativa?* [*Capitalist Realism. Is there no alternative?*], Ed. Caja Negra, Madrid, 2016, p. 44).

remains) has turned into an ever-present passage of the experience of the present, just as the extended privatisation of violence as a mode of production around the world.”<sup>32</sup>

Eyal Weizman, leader of the *forensic architecture* project, speaks of how they used smoke clouds produced by bombs as an architectonic testimony. “Those clouds are in themselves the limit concept of architecture, since they reveal something essential about it. In the first place, the cloud originating from the bomb is composed of steam and dust from all the materials that made up the building (concrete, cast, wood, plastic, textile, drug, remains, humans). It is a building in a gaseous state.”<sup>33</sup> Weizman manages to take stock, in a critical and extremely lucid key, of the *Théorie du nuage* of the Art Historian Hubert Damisch: we move through the landscaping of the 16th century to the military systems of the brutal border that Israel has build up with Palestine. The paradox is that *to have one’s head in the clouds* is not a synonym of “digress” but, on the contrary, of *making a point*—barthersian pun intended— on the criminal dimension of political power. Santiago Talavera has drawn, with an impressive minuteness, a *detail* from the eruption of Indonesia’s volcano Tambora as an example of our *accident-ridden world*; those volcanic clouds are *signs of the contemporary disaster*, elements that this artist analyzes with a “forensic precision.”

The brilliantly catastrophic imaginary of Santiago Talavera,<sup>34</sup> characterised by a distrust toward the flow of the world, leads to the conclusion that we *are a plague*.<sup>35</sup> As Walter Benjamin warned in the final considerations to *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, that man has turned its own self-destruction into a spectacle of the highest

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<sup>32</sup> Ferrán Barenblit and Cuauhtémoc Medina: “La estética libre de la estética” [“Aesthetics Free From Aesthetics”] in *Forensic Architecture. Hacia una estética investigativa*, MACBA, Barcelona, 2017, p. 22.

<sup>33</sup> Eyal Weizman in conversation with Foster et. al. in: *Forensic Architecture. Hacia una estética investigativa*, MACBA, Barcelona, 2017, p. 38.

<sup>34</sup> “What’s happened to the work of Santiago is that it has acquired a catastrophic nature. The boundless accident, the implacable action of the forces of nature, the prodigious and saturnian technological media of our contemporary world, which once set in motion seem to be out of control...” (Óscar Alonso Molina: *Santiago Talavera*, Ed. Nocapaper Books, Santander, 2016, p. 92). I find certain connections between the aesthetics of Talavera and Paul Virilio’s reflections on accident: ““A characteristic, unique above all the rest, opposes contemporary civilization to those which have preceded it: *speed*. The metamorphosis took place in the lapse of a generation”: such observation was made around the 1930’s by the historian Marc Bloch. This circumstance determines, at the same time a secondary characteristic: *the accident*, progressive generalisation of catastrophic events which not only impacts our current reality, but that are also a source of anxiety and distress about future generations” (Paul Virilio: *El accidente original [The Original Accident]*, Ed. Amorrortu, Buenos Aires, 2009, p. 13).

<sup>35</sup> “We are a plague and we are proud of the intellectual and technological refinement that we have achieved, while we continue on redesigning social power orders which nowadays still favour white supremacy, the oppression of women and homosexuals, and the daily exploitation of millions of animals for reasons that could be prevented such as traditional habits and conveniences” (Santiago Talavera interviewed in Óscar Alonso Molina: *Santiago Talavera*, Ed. Nocapaper Books, Santander, 2016, p. 131). “The idea that our species is a recent apparition upon our planet, that history such as we know it (farm-based, city-based, written-based) is even more recent, and that the industrial organisation of life, based on the intensive use of fossil fuels, began less than a second ago in the long count of *Homo Sapiens*’s evolution clock, and seems to be leading to the conclusion that *humanity itself is a catastrophe* [the italics are mine], a sudden and shattering event in the history of the planet, which will disappear much more rapidly than the changes it has brought into the thermodynamic cycle and the biological balance of the Earth” (Déborah Danowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro: *¿Hay un mundo por venir? Ensayo sobre los miedos y los fines [Is There A World to Come? Essay on the Fears and the Ends]*, Ed. Caja Negra, Buenos Aires, 2019, p. 45).

standard. In the works of Santiago Talavera man doesn't appear—only the spectator remains or the point of view where he would to place himself. “Because we are no longer there. Our cultural remains stand, piled up, absurdly mixed up and devoid of meaning: the great and the dreadful are by now indistinguishable, though pessimism rules above it all. We contemplate the last scene: the world goes on without us (the curtain doesn't fall).”<sup>36</sup> What happens is no longer a slow cataclysm<sup>37</sup> but an accelerating catastrophe. It isn't only that the world is a (memoryless) museum, a dispositif (*gestell* in the heideggerian sense), which exhibits everything while at the same time it excludes us,<sup>38</sup> but that what remains is a veritable junkyard. Santiago Talavera appears like a *speleologist or cartographer* of the human garbage dump, contemplating our abandoned objects,<sup>39</sup> the derelict traces of our consumerist world where products come from the factory with “programmed obsolescence,” the abject accumulations of an age defined by the exponential growth of the waste disposal industry.

Santiago Talavera warns that all landscapes entail a collective portrait<sup>40</sup> and, in his case, what he shows us is the uncanny (in the freudian sense, something familiar that becomes strange by way of repression) as in those drawings of Santiago Talavera filled with rotting bodies.<sup>41</sup> Many of his works are disturbing, gifted with a rare power of seduction, but at the same time affording a bittersweet aftertaste, an impression brought about by something *undefined*, like a throbbing of *suspense*.<sup>42</sup> We have been—pun somewhat intended—

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<sup>36</sup> Óscar Alonso Molina: *Santiago Talavera*, Ed. Nocapaper Books, Santander, 2016, p. 84.

<sup>37</sup> Commenting upon the film *Children of Men* by Alfonso Cuarón, Mark Fished notes that “the disaster doesn't have a punctual moment. The world doesn't end with a bang: it rather goes on languidly extinguishing itself, dismembering itself gradually, sliding into a slow debacle” (Mark Fisher: *Realismo Capitalista. ¿No hay alternativa? [Capitalist Realism. Is there no alternative?]*, Ed. Caja Negra, Madrid, 2016, p. 23).

<sup>38</sup> “Maybe there is no real outside for us. But we still have a place in the threshold of between inside and outside, between museum and its opposite, and only in that place, looking back to the world as presented and exhibited, and blinking before a nothing where everything is possible, can we recognize ourselves as inhabitants of a world that can't be exhibited” (Peter Sloterdijk: *El imperativo estético [The Aesthetic Imperative]*, Ed. Akal, Madrid, 2020, p. 329).

<sup>39</sup> As he commenting upon his fascination for a film such as *Lost Highway* by David Lynch, he adds: “For me it's the same sensation that I experience when I look at a junkyard, a place which goes on storing up those objects which have had their use, whichever it was, and find themselves now mixed up, their origin forgotten” (Santiago Talavera interviewed by Iván López Munuera: “En este pequeño lugar hay una gran prueba” [“In this Small Place There is A Great Trial”] in *Santiago Talavera. En la vida anterior [Santiago Talavera. In the Previous Life]*, Centre Municipal d'Elx, 2011, p. 15).

<sup>40</sup> “In fact I would say that any landscape is a collective portrait, a great stage that changes at the same pace as our relationship with the world. In the process of *Desde el vomitorio [From the Vomitorium]*, I understood that it was a mirror of our present and that the socio-historical consciousness, to which we all belong, was the principal driving force that pushing the work forward” (Santiago Talavera interviewed in Óscar Alonso Molina: *Santiago Talavera*, Ed. Nocapaper Books, Santander, 2016, p. 120).

<sup>41</sup> “We see rotting bodies, concrete, made of flesh and bone, where previously we used to bombastically discourse about the decomposition of the social order of a whole civilization or about its structural disarrangements; in the same way, the splendour of the woods, the growth of vegetation, the proliferating quality of wild nature, treated with our new technical media, becomes more convincing than ever, wrapping itself in a much more oppressive atmosphere” (Óscar Alonso Molina: *Santiago Talavera*, Ed. Nocapaper Books, Santander, 2016, p. 94).

<sup>42</sup> “There's something in the environment which you can't define. You begin to note a strange nervousness that grows little by little in the stomach. Something strange happens, something bad. Calmness remains, but there's no longer peace. Suddenly terror prickles one's senses. It dawns on you that perhaps you are in a narratively coherent dream, a thriller with uncannily abnormal elements,



*suspended*, remaining only *in absentia*. In his magnificent and disquieting drawings, developed as prolonged experiences of time,<sup>43</sup> he sediments his experiences<sup>44</sup> and gives us allegories about the need for spaces of dwelling, tracing houses which are perhaps in need of a heartening drive of hope.

As Deborah Danowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro note: *dystopias only proliferate*.<sup>45</sup> Santiago Talavera, in a truly self-critical turn (taking certain inertias of the catastrophic perspective in a dialectic manner), composed a piece where some workers (in a singular re-appearance of the human figure) struggle to rebuild a gigantic HOLLYWOOD sign to then, in truth, force the sentence NO MORE DYSTOPIA. Perhaps this artist wants to avoid Laocoonte's destiny, without forgetting that *any gift can be poisoned*, but understanding that an overdose of omens is somewhat counterproductive. The *pyknolepsy of the worse* can end up in a lullaby and critical discourse and accomplish, along the lilt of a letany, the function of a mere accompaniment to the great unfolding of the the same always. Even if we are etherised by a *scopic narcolepsy* "other things" apart from the *pre-cooked* can take place. "Art capable of bearing with its destiny must be able to propose a short-circuit in the cycles of the "already seen" so that, at the same time, it doesn't redound on another opportunity for us to witness the vision—behind the screen—of the Accident. An aesthetics of failure worth paying attention would have as its mission quitting this collective paranoia as the catastrophic sublime. Before the epilepsies of art, absorbed by the porn psychophonies of having nothing to see due to an hyperexcess of visibility, against an art whose thirst of events leads it to understand the real as a stammering of the obscene and the hyperbanal, only an aesthetic of ellipsis is possible, a

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a bitter teenage nightmare capable of holding any kind of monster" (Ángel M. Alcalá: "El arte del confín del mundo" in *Santiago Talavera*, La Lisa Arte Contemporáneo, Albacete, 2010).

<sup>43</sup> "The drawings of Talavera come out in proportions beyond measurement, needing periods of time that have sometimes surpassed a year so as to be created in all their almost maniac detailness; they are beyond scope even before they are framed, they become true deposits of time and memory — both private and collective—, accumulating various private anecdotes from the artist himself and his surroundings" (Óscar Alonso Molina: *Santiago Talavera*, Ed. Nocabaper Books, Santander, 2016, p. 46).

<sup>44</sup> "In general, the work with which I feel the most uncomfortable with is that which gives me greater joys: my works on paper. Their composition is very uncomfortable, it's a very cerebral task, very contained, it requires more hours of work, a slower process. There's always the anxiety of seeing them finished. Entering the studio, seeing the piece after six months and still unfinished is always tough. Long periods end up collecting a lot of personal themes" (Santiago Talavera interviewed by Iván López Munuera: "En este pequeño lugar hay una gran prueba" ["In this Small Place There is A Great Trial"] in *Santiago Talavera. En la vida anterior* [*Santiago Talavera. In the Previous Life*], Centre Municipal d'Elx, 2011, p. 23).

<sup>45</sup> "Dystopies proliferate; and a certain perplexed panic (derogatively termed as "catastrophism"), when not a somewhat macabre enthusiasm (recently popularised under the name "accelerationism," seems to ride the spirit of our times. Suddenly, the famous *no future* punk ethos has gained new life—if this is the term suitable to our times—, while profound questions arise, of a dimension comparable to those brought about by the nuclear arms race of the not so distant years of the Cold War. Thus, one can't help but remember the somber and dry conclusion of Günther Anders, in a crucial text about the "metaphysical metamorphosis" of humanity after Hiroshima and Nagasaki: "The absence of future already began"" (Deborah Danowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro: *¿Hay un mundo por venir? Ensayo sobre los miedos y los fines* [*Is There A World to Come? Essay on the fears and the Ends*], Ed. Caja Negra, Buenos Aires, 2019, p. 26).

strategy of terrorist bombardment, an art of rejoicement before that Real which ignores us before our very eyes.”<sup>46</sup>

Mark Fisher, an author of Santiago Talavera’s devotion, pointed out that the dystopia of the 21st century is not only something that was imposed upon us, but something that was constructed after our own captured desires. *Hauntology* is something of a *failed mourning*:<sup>47</sup> our future has been stolen. The club of hypertechnological snobs has vindicated and even turned into marketing that *failure* which offers the “perfect camouflage.”<sup>48</sup> A legion of *idiots* offers the spectacle (para-warholian) of the *nothing special*, under the appearance of understanding absolutely nothing they make an attempt to *hipsterise their life*, showing across the *total screen* that there is no other way of contemporary being other than showing oneself as *strictly bipolar*. We have, literally, seen it all and with the universalisation of the *Ludovico Treatment* we can smile and declared that “we are healed,” though traces of spit still cover in our faces. We are passionately invested in the obscene and we share “experiences” in an *ultra-digital reality show* as (unconscious) collaborators on the global regime of surveillance and control.

Oscar Alonso Molina warned that the will for a *Gesamtkunstwerk* in the aesthetic of Santiago Talavera, both in his installations (as in that occasion when, compelled by an extreme passion, moved his studio into the gallery) as in his musical compositions. This artist keeps a constant rapport with music,<sup>49</sup> recognizing the influence of Philip Glass and especially that of Steve Reich and his composition *Music for 18 Musicians*. His pieces can be understood as modulations within the *ambient* or *noise* genre, being manifestations of a preoccupation on the

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<sup>46</sup> Javier González Panizo: *Escenografías del secreto. Ideología y estética en la escena contemporánea* [*Staging of the Secret. Ideology and Aesthetic of the Contemporary Scene*], Ed. Manuscritos, Madrid, 2016, p. 234.

<sup>47</sup> “Hauntology can be constructed as a failed mourning. It’s about refusing to let the ghost go or — which is the same sometimes— the refusal of the ghost to abandon us. The spectre won’t allow us to get used to mediocre satisfactions that we can reap in a world governed by capitalist realism” (Mark Fisher: “La lenta cancelación del futuro” [“The Slow Cancellation of the Future”] in *Los Fantasmas de mi vida. Escritos sobre depresión, hauntología y futuros perdidos* [*The Ghosts of my Life. Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures*], Ed. Caja Negra, Madrid, 2018, p. 49).

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Andrew Keen: “Fracaso épico” [“Epic Fail”] in *Internet no es la respuesta* [*Internet is not the answer*], Ed. Catedral, Barcelona, 2016, p. 259-291.

<sup>49</sup> “I’ve always played in bands, I read the world through styles, songs, music histories, and that has crucially shaped my way of understanding the visual arts. Often when I work both in sketches or with drawings, toiling over their madness of layers upon layers, I think about that recorder [a multitrack recorder he was gifted when he was in school] and how I would go on adding and removing tracks until I managed to reach some harmony. It’s a similar process to that” (Santiago Talavera interviewed in Óscar Alonso Molina: *Santiago Talavera*, Ed. Nocupaper Books, Santander, 2016, p. 125).

concept of the *ambiental*.<sup>50</sup> The ecological consciousness of this artist<sup>51</sup> can be related to the concept of *atmospheres* as proposed by Gernot Böhme which brings Benjamin's notion of the "aura" into other "spheres of presence."<sup>52</sup> If man is absent perhaps it is perhaps a chance to think other forms of inhabiting the present, pulling the break on our *devastating* actions, learning to saunter, as in Tarkovsky's film (as Santiago Talavera points out himself, this filmmaker is the one that has influenced him the most), about the *zone* where we are (still) forced to live.

We are living the "experience of the swarm," oriented, without the need to make use of the subliminal, by the "bubble filter." The contemporary anesthetising of our sensibilities, its systematic tearing apart, "is not only—we read in *Now* by the Invisible Committee—the result of survival in the bosom of capitalism, but its condition. We don't suffer as individuals, we suffer in our attempt to be individuals."<sup>53</sup> In the tsunami of *big data* what governs royally is the kingdom of lies.<sup>54</sup> Your computer screen, as noted by Eli Pariser, is increasingly less a kind of unidirectional mirror "that reflects your own interests, while algorithm analysts consider everything you click on."<sup>55</sup> In the middle of a process of *uberisation* of the world, at a time when we have initiated the age of "molecular machinery,"<sup>56</sup> which brings about enormous

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<sup>50</sup> "In a painting—warns Santiago Talavera—there's a moment when I begin to interest myself as much in the human figure as in what affects that figure. In that sense there's a departure from the character so as to lay the focus on the background. That brings implicitly an interest on the *ambiental*, that's where one finds the staging resembling that of David Lynch films, with those red drapes and black-and-white tiled floor, those strange sculptures that touch the spectator in such an emotional and brutal manner. There's also an interest toward music without voice, ambient music, in an attempt to imagine the soundscape of the spaces these characters inhabit" (Santiago Talavera interviewed by Iván López Munuera: "En este pequeño lugar hay una gran prueba" ["In this Small Place There is a Great Trial"] in *Santiago Talavera. En la vida anterior* [Santiago Talavera. *In the Previous Life*], Centre Municipal d'Elx, 2011, p. 22).

<sup>51</sup> "That "impossibility toward nature" has stirred an increasing interest in the social problematics related to the world of ecology and animal rights, and perhaps that's the reason that my artistic gaze is nowadays more tinged with a "environmental ethics," as one can see in *Clausura* [Closure], where the crystal bell jar contains landscapes that seem to be broken" (Santiago Talavera interviewed in Óscar Alonso Molina: *Santiago Talavera*, Ed. Nopaper Books, Santander, 2016, p. 137).

<sup>52</sup> Böhme defines *atmospheres* as spaces, in as much as the presence of things, people or the constellations that surround them, their "ecstasis", "tinge" them: they are spheres of presence themselves, their reality in space. *Atmospheres* are inherent to the subject, "they belong to the subject in as much as they are experienced by people in their physical presence, and in as much as, at the same time, this experience is for the subject a physical encounter with space" (Gernot Böhme: *Atmosphäre. Essays zur neuen Ästhetik*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 1995, p. 33).

<sup>53</sup> The Invisible Committee: *Ahora* [Now], Ed. Pepitas de Calabaza, Logroño, 2017, p. 147.

<sup>54</sup> "The "lie" is right now an extramoral subject, and the lack of truth is the least of problems: also self-deceptions, illusions, strategies thanks to which people "imagine things as they are not"—they all belong to the age of *big data*, that is, the age of web interconnection between all data about people and things, to this category" (Frank Schirrmacher: *Ego. Las trampas del juego capitalista* [Ego. *The Tricks of the Capitalist Game*], Ed. Ariel, Barcelona, 2014, p. 160).

<sup>55</sup> Eli Pariser: *El filtro burbuja. Cómo la red decide lo que leemos y lo que pensamos* [The Purple Filter. How the Web Decides What We Read and What We Think], Ed. Taurus, Madrid, 2017, p. 13.

<sup>56</sup> "Nanocatalysm begins as science fiction. "Our skill to order atoms is the basis of technology," notes Drexler, "though this has traditionally meant that we end up manipulating them like a tamed flock." The precise engineering of atomic assembling would do away with rudimentary methods, beginning the age of molecular machinery, "the greatest technological leap of History." Since neither logos nor history has the least chance of surviving said transition, this description is substantially deceptive" (Nick Land: "Colapso" ["Collapse"] in Armen Avanessian and Mauro Reis (comps.): *Aceleracionismo*.

emotional turmoils, our “culture of lack of attention” is one, almost always, of profound *antipathy*.<sup>57</sup> The hypertrophic stimulation and the simulation of pleasure breed obsessions if not a profound boredom at the heart of hyperexcitation.<sup>58</sup> We are exhausted about what Ernest Gellner has termed the “International of Disbelieving Consumers,” we have born the brunt of the *austericide* with those “bailouts” given to the banking industry, a testimony that the citizen has to always be doomed to *support* the greed of Capital<sup>59</sup> and that our landscape is as desolate as those “sledges” or amusement park ruins which Santiago Talavera has shaped into timely allegories of what happens to our age.

In *The World Without Us* by Santiago Talavera, animals amble about our residues, like those pigs which stand right next to a “hull lost” plane turned into a strange “hut.” The *catastrophic monologue* of this artist seeks, desperately, company, though it knows that it’s extremely difficult to establish a fruitful dialogue. “The experience of the Other—writes Franco “Bifo” Berardi—is turned into something uncomfortable and rare, perhaps even painful, since it becomes part of an uninterrupted and frantic stimulus, and loses its singularity, intensity and beauty. The consequence is the reduction of curiosity and the increase of stress, aggressivity, anxiety and fear.”<sup>60</sup> A contradiction of the present has taken place between the degree of social bonds and an increase in the number of social interactions people have, which, with the help of the mass communication media, leads to a “saturated self.”<sup>61</sup> In the year 1903, Georg Simmel said in his meditations on metropolitan life that we are abandoning and finding so many new people, establishing networks of communication so vast that they make it impossible for us to

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*Estrategias para una transición hacia el postcapitalismo [Accelerationism. Strategies for a Transition toward Postcapitalism]*, Ed. Caja Negra, Buenos Aires, 2017, p. 56-57).

<sup>57</sup> “In the same way that there were “manners of cut” in the ages of monarchic regimes, there are forms and “manners of democracy” bred by the “communities of emotion” of fascism, nazism and its diverse variants. From this point of view, the contemporary age, whether we term it neocapitalist or spectacle society, seems to be characterised by what Claudine Haroche defines as a “culture of the lack of attention”: a culture where the old manners (moderation, composure or decorum, everything that the 18th century called “self-government,” promoted by the bourgeoisie in opposition to the “effusions” and “torments” of the people) would be channeled and transformed by strategies of perception tied to the *antipathy* mentioned above. It’s a whole strategy of *lack of interest* which turns the mass of our fellow human beings into a mass of “insignificant individuals.” The crucial point of all these observations is that there is no contradiction in fact between the two phenomenon, which are, its *insensitising*, its location in a situation of indifference, its vocation toward generalized “antipathy” (Georges Didi-Huberman: *Pueblo en lágrimas, pueblos en armas [People in Tears, Peoples in Arms]*, Ed. Shangrila, Santander, 2017, p. 72-73).

<sup>58</sup> In 2015, Pornhub, the pornographic website, was visited for more than 4392486580 hours, which is twice and a half the amount of time the *Homo sapiens* has inhabited the Earth.

<sup>59</sup> “It was made clearly evident, once again, that more than representing the end of capitalism, the bailouts of banks became the brutal guarantee of typical insistence of capitalist realism, that is: that there is no alternative” (Mark Fisher: *Realismo Capitalista ¿No hay alternativa? [Capitalist Realism. Is There No Alternative?]*, Ed. Caja Negra, Madrid, 2016, p. 117).

<sup>60</sup> Franco “Bifo” Berardi: *Fenomenología del fin. Sensibilidad y mutación conectiva [Phenomenology of the End. Sensibility and Connective Mutation]*, Ed. Caja Negra, Buenos Aires, 2017, p. 204.

<sup>61</sup> “New technologies—notes Kenneth Gergen in *El yo saturado [The Saturated Self]* (Ed. Paidós, Barcelona, 2006)—make it possible to have relationships—directly or indirectly—with a wider arch of people. In various aspects we are reaching what can be seen as a social saturation. The magnitudes of those changes are rarely self-contained. They keep a power of reverberation through culture, they accumulate PAUSADAMENTE till one day we find ourselves blocked, giving an account of when we have been dislocated, without being able of recovering what we’ve lost [...]. With the intensified saturation of culture, however, all our previous assumption about identity are at bay and our traditional patterns of relationships become even stranger. A new culture is in the making.”

relate to each other emotionally, let alone with all those belonging to our circle of acquaintances. While social networks offer a *situational identity*, we are also getting used to a state of “flexibilisation,” of provisionality, of precarisation. We are constantly throwing “self-promotion”<sup>62</sup> messages around and we are more sendentarised than subdued to hysteria, stretched out by a “corporeality” that seems to will-everything:<sup>63</sup> shut in the bubble of the (in)signifier.

We suffer-and-rejoice in the midsts of calls to indulge in an aesthetic excess which, at the same time, entails a “subjection” and construction of a neoliberal subjectivity.<sup>64</sup> In the age of digital “globalisation,” the physical and social proximities are kept increasingly more separate: those who stand socially close to us have no longer need to be physically close and vice versa. Once again we have to recollect the shakespearian dictum, “the time is out of joint,” and that we have to generate new processes of subjectivation.<sup>65</sup> Perhaps art has to direct its task

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<sup>62</sup> “Facebook in itself takes the form under which it calls for people to throw their little self-promoting messages to the wind, before an imagined public standing in rapt attention, where the passing opportunities of genuine exchange of ideas seem to shut up in an instant” (Martha Rosler: “Al servicio de la(s) experiencia(s)” [“At the service of experiences] in *Clase cultural. Arte y gentrificación* [Cultural Class. Art and Gentrification], Ed. Caja Negra, Buenos Aires, 2017, p. 189).

<sup>63</sup> In the Freudian *Studies on Hysteria* there are references to the “active or stenian affects,” an expression coined to refer to the surprising potencies (in relation to the old question about “What a body can do?”) characteristic of hysteric mobility. “The “active,” or “stenian” affects compensate the access of [psychic] excitation with a mobile discharge. The screams and leaps of joy, the added muscular tone of rage, the vociferations, retaliation, allow for the excitation to discharge itself through certain movements. Moral suffering releases itself from excitation through the breathing efforts and secretions: sobbing and tears. We can confirm everyday that these reactions tend to reduce themselves and pacify excitation” (Gilles Deleuze: *Francis Bacon. Logique de la sensation* [Francis Bacon. Logic of Sensation], Ed de la Différence, Paris, 1981, p 43).

<sup>64</sup> “In a climate such as this there’s nothing more precious than excess. The further you go, the more materials you’ll come across to accumulate and capitalise upon. Everything is organised in relation to limits, intensities, modulations. As Robin James said, “for the neoliberal subject, the aim of life is “to go to the edge,” coming closer and closer to the point of decreasing efficiency [...]. The neoliberal subject has a boundless appetite for more and more new differences.” The aim is to reach “the limits of exhaustion”: to follow a line of intensification and, notwithstanding, to be capable of abandoning that frontier, treating it as an inversion and recuperating the intensity as gain. As James stated, “privileged people live the most intense lives, lives of inversion (individual and social) and max benefits.” This is why transgression doesn’t work anymore as a subversive aesthetic strategy. Or rather, transgression works *too well* as a strategy for the accumulation both of “cultural capital” as well as capital *tout court*” (Steven Shaviro: “Estética aceleracionista: ineficiencia necesaria en tiempos de subsunción real” [“Accelerationist Aesthetics: Necessary Inefficiency in times of Real Subsumption”] in Aremn Avanesian and Mauro Reis (ed.): *Aceleracionismo. Estrategias para una transición al postcapitalismo* [Accelerationism. Strategies for a Transition Toward Postcapitalism], Ed. Caja Negra, Buenos Aires, 2017, p. 175).

<sup>65</sup> “The time is out-of-joint,” wrote Gregory Bateson, quoting Hamlet. Out-of-joint, dislocated. The increasing connectivity and the subjection of our cognitive activities to the management of digital machines has brought about a disadjustment between the mutated rhythm of the connected mind and the rhythm of the corporeal mind. As a consequence, the *general intellect* has separated itself from the body. The problem here is not the subject as a static and given reality. The problem is subjectivation, the process whereby consciousness and self-reflection emerges, without considering it in an isolated manner, but rather in the context of its technological environment and its social conflicts. The subjectivation must be also understood as morphogenesis, as the creation of forms” (Franco “Bifo” Berardi: *Fenomenología del fin. Sensibilidad y mutación conectiva* [Phenomenology of the End. Sensibility and Connective Mutation], Ed. Caja Negra, Buenos Aires, 2017, p. 251).

towards those emotions or affects that we ignore.<sup>66</sup> Santiago Talavera, meanwhile, keeps his trust steadfastly on the power of imagination.<sup>67</sup> The *Triebenergie* (pulsional energy) that emerges “through” art can perhaps liberate us from the *subordination* that comes with the flourishing of information technologies and with automatised economy. Emotions or affects appear as a subjective or gestual embodiment that perhaps can intensify itself from a philosophy of “pure affirmation” which would come to posit once again the question of what can a body do.<sup>68</sup> In his *Ethica more geometrico*, Spinoza pointed out “that potency entails the power of being affected.” We have to, perhaps, do our best to “hurry slowly” in the *incorporation of art*, even if it is to give an account of the passage of things that pass. We need—much more than to know what we can—to activate our potentialities before the ultimate collapse takes place, putting an end or fracturing the “hypertititional invocation”<sup>69</sup> which can only doom us to the worst.

Beyond “funeral rhetoric” we must salvage the *right to live*.<sup>70</sup> Santiago Talavera doesn’t wallow in punk’s “no future” ethos, though he knows without a flicker of a doubt that all utopias have been dynamited. His attitude is that of learning from the destructive traces of man<sup>71</sup> and to keep on painting as if he were thinking-and-living in the *katechon* (the time before the end), in these “interesting times” of the Antropoceno or, even better, of its collapse. Santiago Talavera imagines, in a certain meaning, the *wilderness* (the world without us) and the dystopia where we have almost disappeared.<sup>72</sup> The interest for *hauntology* is, in the work

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<sup>66</sup> It isn’t incidental that the epigraph of Vygotski for his *Psychology of Art* belonged to a great text by Spinoza on emotions, which asked the question, “what can a body do,” precisely because “no one today has determined it” (Lev Vygotski: *Psychologie de l’art*, Ed. La Dispute, Paris, 2005, p. 13).

<sup>67</sup> “What led me to keep on talking about landscape is its oneiric component, its direct ties to the imagination. William Blake, for whom this subject was of the first importance, wrote: “to green-eyed imagination nature is imagination itself” (Santiago Talavera interviewed in Óscar Alonso Molina: *Santiago Talavera*, Ed. Nocapaper Books, Santander, 2016, p. 119).

<sup>68</sup> “Now, this fundamental “affirmation” is certainly destined to appear as gestures in the expression. Thus the question posited by Deleuze on the chapters of the *Ethics* dedicated to the effects of emotions: “What can a body do?” A way of saying that the expression is *potent because it’s active*, as long as the sequence is constructed to make us move from *suffering to imagining* (the “image is the idea of affection,” summarizes Deleuze, even if it makes us “only think the object by its affect”), from imagining to *thinking* (following the game of “common notions” and the “free harmony of the imagination with the reason”), and, finally, from thinking to *acting*; that’s what Deleuze terms the “active-becoming” which is intrinsic to all expression” (Georges Didi-Huberman: *Pueblos en lágrimas, pueblos en armas*, Ed. Shangrila, Santander, 2017, p. 37).

<sup>69</sup> “Hypertition [writes Nick Land] is a circuit of positive feedback that includes culture as a component. It can be defined as the experimental (techno)-science of self-fulfilling prophecies (“Hypertition. An Introduction” in merliquify.com).

<sup>70</sup> “Even in the mouths of those suspect of being the undertakers of the the whole future, even there remains a symbol of the most fundamental human right, the symbol of the right to life, in a present bearable because such present can still have hopes that, with regards to the future, there is no reason to lose all hope” (Peter Sloterdijk: *El imperativo estético [The Aesthetic Imperative]*, Ed. Akal, Madrid, 2020, p. 376).

<sup>71</sup> “It’s all been an excuse to speak about ourselves through our trace. Bonaventura Puig and Perucho used to say: “... there’s hardly any truly primeval landscape but as backdrop for human action,” and in my works it can be understood in the same manner, it could even serve as an example to understand that landscape as an aesthetic element doesn’t exist without the human animal” (Santiago Talavera interviewed in Óscar Alonso Molina: *Santiago Talavera*, Ed. Nocapaper Books, Santander, 2016, p. 132).

<sup>72</sup> This is something that has been discussed by Déborah Danowski and Eduardo Bibeiros de Castro in *¿Hay un mundo por venir? Ensayo sobre los miedos y los fines [Is There A World to Come? Essay*

of this artist, as much aesthetic as political, it entails a commitment not to allow hope to disappear or, at least, a commitment to keeping some images of the future, even if they are unsettling, drawing (meticulously like an intense experience of time) what has not fulfilled itself *yet*.<sup>73</sup>

Santiago Talavera rewrites Günther Anders's phrase: "We are only apocalyptic in order to be wrong." We have a duty to be pessimists or, at least, to avoid that deplorable complicity with the disaster that is termed happycracy. In his works the world is, literally, *upside-down*.<sup>74</sup> Spaces of entertainment are, to deploy a term dear to Dean MacCanell, "places of empty encounters," Disneyland reveals its emblematically nihilist condition. *Only the images survive* on the stages without public, across empty stadiums, amusement parks where no one suffers from vertigo, at a time when catastrophe has already happened, placing us, apparently, in a present without future.<sup>75</sup>

Ivan López Munuera pointed out, in a conversation with Santiago Talavera, that it was curious to note, in some of his studio photographs, that a chair was standing in front of a half-finished work, to which the artist responded that *the painting had swallowed him*.<sup>76</sup> The "survivor" has secluded himself, perhaps to a hut to think, while at the top of columns we find no longer the prodigious Simon of the Column<sup>77</sup> but rather a goat which perhaps embodies a

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*on the Fears and the Ends*] (Ed. Caja Negra, Buenos Aires, 2019, p. 57-63), a book that, as Santiago Talavera confesses, has influenced him greatly.

<sup>73</sup> "What should overtake us is not the *no more* of social-democracy as it existed, but the *not yet* of that popular modernism prepared us to wait for but which never materialized themselves. Those specters—the specters of lost futures—question the formal nostalgia of the world of capitalist realism (Mark Fisher: "La lenta cancelación del futuro" ["The Slow Cancellation of the Future"] in *Los fantasmas de mi vida. Escritos sobre depresión, hauntología y futuros perdidos* [*The Ghosts of My Life. Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures*], Ed. Caja Negra, Buenos Aires, 2018, p. 55).

<sup>74</sup> "In the paintings and drawings of Santiago Talavera our world appears represented upside-down. Reason hasn't been able to support as much as it constructed and now it's only capable of showing its absolute failure. There's nobody left, only the trace that remains after the perfect catastrophe, which can show us the structures, the ruined intentions, the impossibility of what could have been the paradise that the old rational plans wanted to erect" (Rafael Doctor: "Las aperturas que se vienen" ["The incoming Openings"] in *Santiago Talavera. En la vida anterior* [*Santiago Talavera. In the Previous Life*], Centre Municipal d'Elx, 2011, p. 9).

<sup>75</sup> "The revolution already happened... the events which we have to deal with are not in the future but to a large extent in the past [...] whatever we do, the threat will remain with us for centuries or millennia" (Bruno Latour: *Face à Gaïa. Huit conférences sur le nouveau régime climatique* [*Facing Gaïa. Eight Conferences about the New Climatic Regime*], Paris, La Découverte, 2015).

<sup>76</sup> "The painting has swallowed me up. I love this photograph by Ilya Kabakov which shows an empty chair in front of an enormous drawing that is also empty, as if it had swallowed it" (Santiago Talavera interviewed by Iván López Munuera: "En este pequeño lugar hay una gran prueba" ["In this Small Place There is A Great Trial"] in *Santiago Talavera. En la vida anterior* [*Santiago Talavera. In the Previous Life*], Centre Municipal d'Elx, 2011, p. 20).

<sup>77</sup> "Simeon the Stylite (son of a shepherd, Syria and Cilicia: South-East of Anatolia: 390-459). Furor of asceticism by self-interrogation: he buries himself in a garden, in a hole up to his head, the summer long: forty days in a cave without light (the monastery tries to get rid of him). He immures himself, cements his door: forty days without nourishment. In 423, near Antioch he installs himself on a pillar [*stylos*: the column], first somewhat low, increasingly elevated; in 430: forty elbows (=twenty meters). He builds himself a balustrade (and instigates the emperor against the Jews). It's a kind of sportive *performance* of asceticism: a proof of reclusion like a jump with a vaulting pole. Institution of cenobitism: limiting such excesses, by way of the benedictine virtue par excellence: the *discretio*. Cf. Dostoievski, in *Devils*, speaks of Elisabeth, mad for Christ: has been living in a kind of cage for the last 16 years, without talking to anyone, neither cleaning herself nor combing her hair (Roland Barthes: *Cómo vivir juntos*).

kind of mockery of our apocalyptic discourses. Even if, in agreement with Fredric Jameson, it seems that today it would be easier to imagine the total deterioration of the Earth and nature than the demise of capitalism, we have an *ethic-and-aesthetic commitment* to sketch utopias or, at least, to open up cracks in the system, with full awareness of the catastrophe of our collapsed present.<sup>78</sup> If in the works of Santiago Talavera we contemplate residual objects it is not only in order to seek a morbid-eschatological pleasure; on the contrary, it is a composition of an *emerging* reality,<sup>79</sup> in an attempt (this will sound ambientally utopian) to make the world better.<sup>80</sup>

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*Notas de Cursos y Seminarios en el College de France, 1976-1977 [How to Live Together. Notes for Courses and Seminars at the College de France, 1976-1977]*, Ed. Siglo XXI, Buenos Aires, 2003, p. 110-11).

<sup>78</sup> “The long and black night of the end of History must be taken as a superb chance. The oppressive generality of capitalist realism means that even the most untenable political and economic alternatives store immense potential. The most subtle of events is capable of opening an enormous hole in the grey and reactionary curtain that has covered the horizon of possibilities beyond capitalist realism. From a situation in which nothing could ever change, everything appears as possible once again” (Mark Fisher: *Realismo capitalista. ¿No Hay alternativa?*, Ed. Caja Negra, Madrid, 2016, p. 120-121).

<sup>79</sup> Fredric Jameson, in his text “The Utopia as Replication” (included in *Valencias de la dialéctica [Valences of Dialectics]*, Ed. Eterna Cadencia, Buenos Aires, 2013), picks up again on the distinction made by Raymond Williams between emergence and residual: “the forms of an utopian future threatened across the fog, an utopian future that we must grappled with like an opportunity to exercise fully our utopian imagination, rather than a chance to make moralizing judgements or to practise a regressive style of nostalgia.”

<sup>80</sup> “As always I want to channel the powers at war, as always, to make things better. If it isn’t to make the world better, art would be of no use” (Santiago Talavera interviewed in Óscar Alonso Molina: *Santiago Talavera*, Ed. Nocupaper Books, Santander, 2016, p. 137).