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Between us everything happens twice

ACT X

Still has a role to play

The two headed horse.
Reenactment in ten acts

Mariela Sancari

Exploration of the transformation of a fixed image
into a performed image

Harmony is about to be shattered into pieces.
A family tragedy. Two sisters embark on a quest
to balance the forces that define their lives.
They will put all of their efforts towards trying
to restore peace, facing numerous obstacles
and adversities.

This will take a very long time to be achieved, if ever.

We will witness their rumblings and hesitations
when trying to understand their past and settle
into a new order.

Notes:

Two actresses and actors on stage playing sisters
for a seemingly absent audience. Recreations of past
scenes, scenes they already played some time ago.

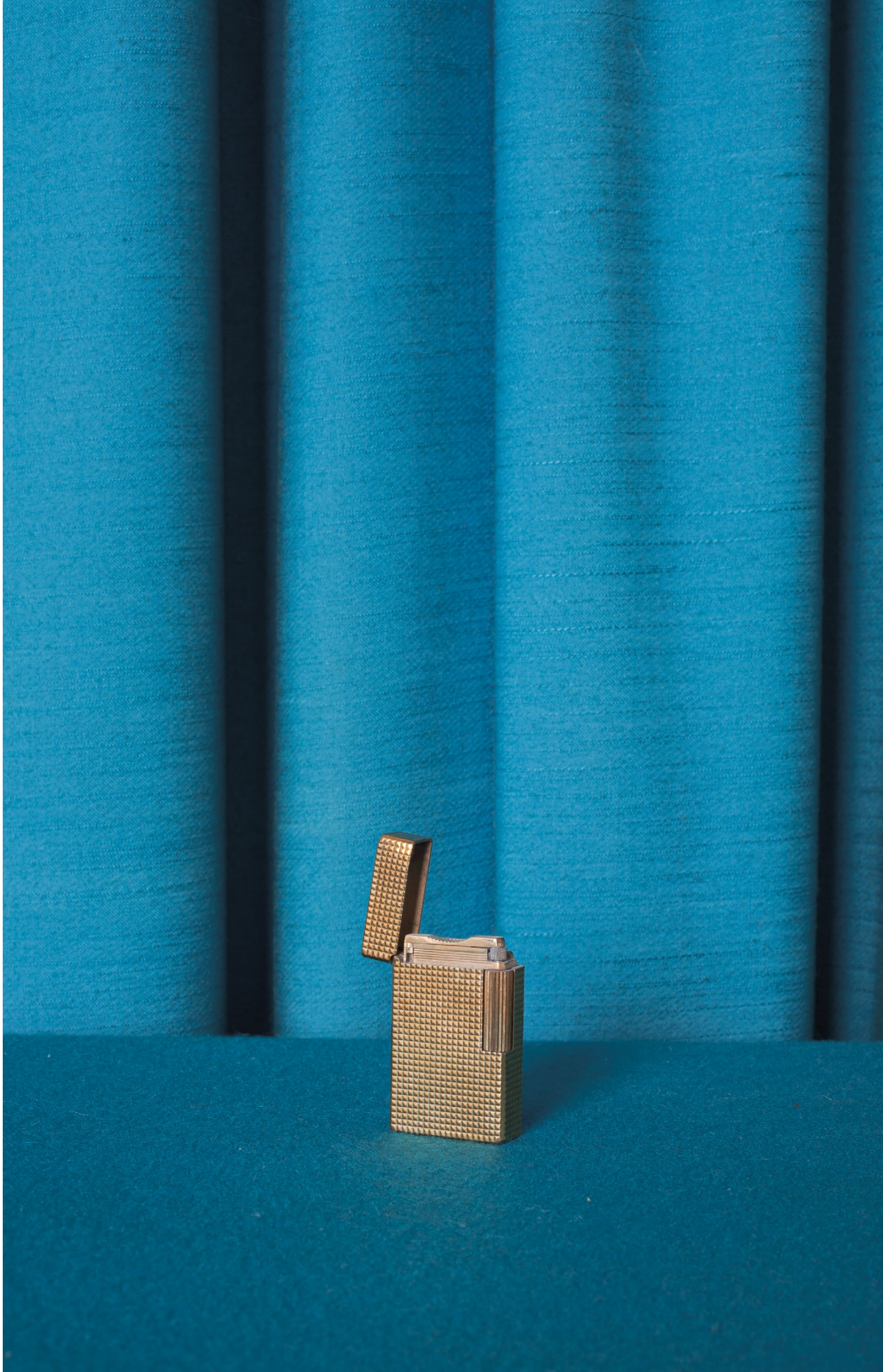
The body. Dialogues and actions.

Golden lighter on a table covered with a thick blue tablecloth (the lighter should be open).
A heavy curtain, also blue, as backdrop.

Artificial light from the left, side shadow on the tablecloth.

(Voice over)
Actress 1:
–Dad buying and selling gold at his shop.

Actress 2:
–Dad’s fancy lighter.

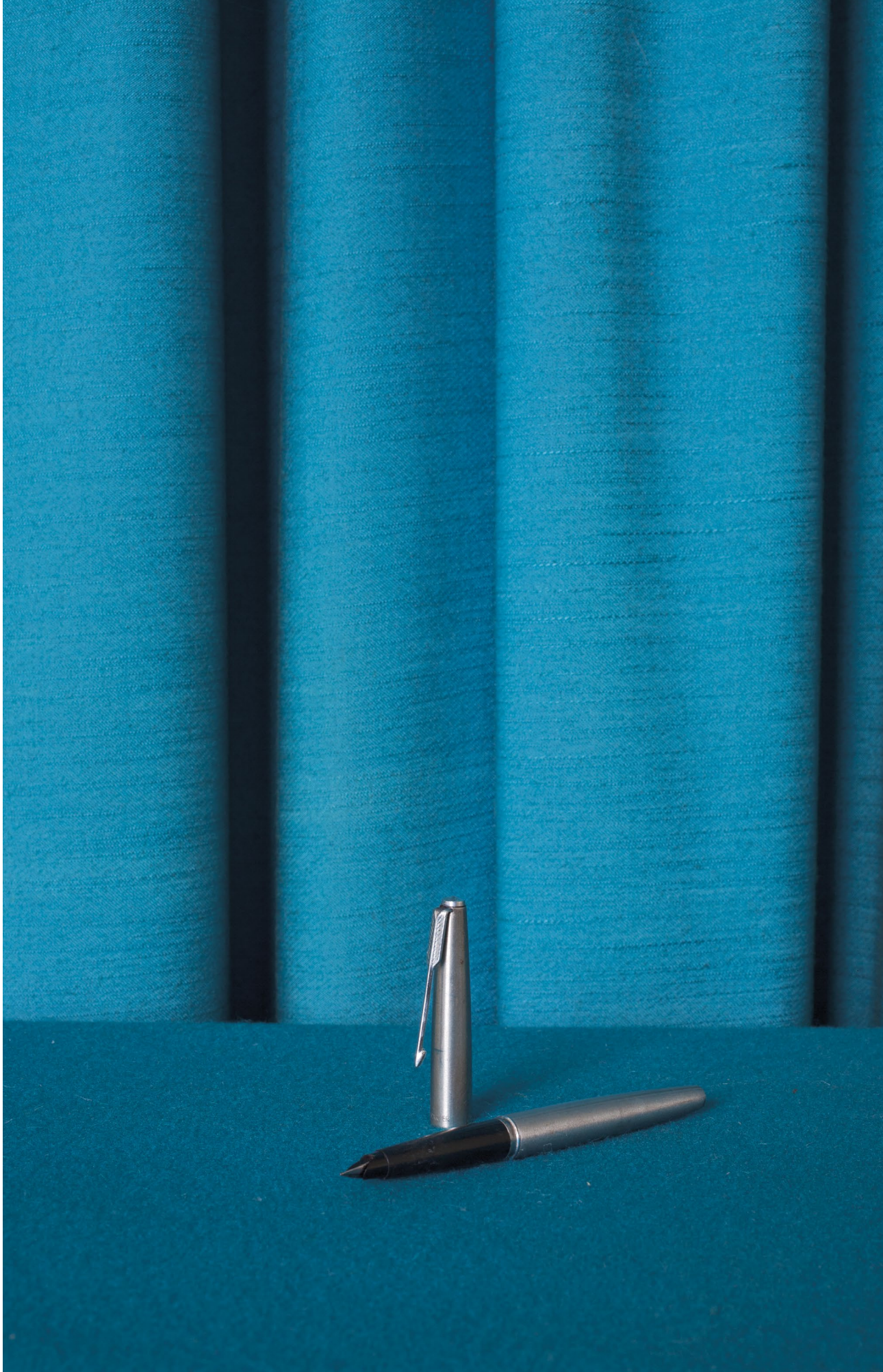


Metallic fountain pen on a table covered with a thick blue tablecloth. A heavy curtain, also blue, as backdrop.

Artificial light from the left, side shadow on the tablecloth.

(Voice over)
Actress 1:
—One of our childhood’s fountain pens. Mariela kept it as if it was made out of gold.

Actress 2:
—My sister’s fountain pen. One of our most valuable treasures.



Plastic picture frame with two photographs of our father on a table covered with a thick blue tablecloth. A heavy curtain, also blue, as backdrop.

Artificial light from the left, side shadow on the tablecloth.

(Voice over)
Actress 1:
–(Sigh) Two beautiful pictures of our father, smiling,
the way we always remember him.

Actress 2:
–Daddy.



Old metallic cup with flowers on a table covered with a thick blue tablecloth. A heavy curtain, also blue, as backdrop.

Artificial light from the left, side shadow on the tablecloth.

(Voice over)
Actress 1:
—Memories of our grandmother’s house. The most delicious food we have ever tasted.

Actress 2:
—Grandmother’s cup for “mate cocido”.



Golden wedding ring and plastic square case on a table covered with a thick blue tablecloth. A heavy curtain, also blue, as backdrop.

Artificial light from the left, side shadow on the tablecloth.

(Voice over)
Actress 1:
–Dad’s wedding ring. Something that belonged to him. A real connection.

Actress 2:
–Dad’s wedding ring.



The two headed horse.
Reenactment in ten acts

Captatio
(or the pursuit of empathy from the audience
since the very beginning):

(Voice over)
Actresses 1 and 2:
–What you will see here is not me, it is not my father,
it is not my sister and it is not my mother.



ACT I
Love for each other saved their lives



Small green bench. Daylight fills the room.

Actress 1 wearing robe.
Actress 2 wearing wool jacket.

The two actresses sit together on the bench facing the wall and embrace, their heads gently touching.



Note for the actresses:

Desire vs. Obstacle:
what you long for vs. what you have to overcome.

(Think about how to translate an action to the body.
Then, try for the body to become an image)

What do I want? What am I looking for?
What do I need?

Actress 1 (monologue):
–Whom will I find? Is there anyone concealed in the shadows?

Come out, show yourself!

Nobody else but me, my own reflection everywhere.
My true self, my hidden self, my frightened self,
my younger self.



Note for the actresses:

When Actress 1 speaks, Actress 2 listens to her with heartfelt attention.

Actress 2:
—Dear sister, did you call me? I believe I heard you called my name.

Actress 1:
—I was just talking to myself.

Lately, strange questions haunt me. And suddenly I find myself speaking out loud, as if I was talking to someone.

(Long silence)

The past has caught up with us now.



Actress 1:
—*I am looking for the face I had before the world
was made.*





ACT II
Emotions will keep you safe

Daylight fills the room.

Actor 2 wearing wool jacket, standing, staring
fiercely at the audience.

Note for the actor:

Tired voice. It feels like his words come from the
darkness within his body. Nevertheless, he is angry.
He has many reasons to be.

Actor 2, as he enters the scene (monologue):
–This dark, jaded cave. I can see myself projected
in the dripping walls of this cave, everywhere I turn.

I don’t hate it. It has been my shelter for so long,
but it does frighten me. Too high of a price to pay for
its warmth and favors.

(Shouting, with a recriminating tone):
–What do you know? You were never there for us.



Same directions, notes and dialogues.







ACT III
Actions are our symbols



Two small wooden benches. Daylight fills the room.

Actresses 1 and 2 wearing black clothes, sitting on the small wooden benches, facing the wall.

Note for the actresses:

Sisters are trying to conjure their past. Kindness, patience, silent gestures.

Actress 2:
—Actions can be interpreted in so many ways.
Stop asking me the meaning of everything. What a nuisance! Your undying impulse to find meaning, echoing Sisyphus’s fate.

Actress 1:
—Yes, I guess you can say I am like Sisyphus.

Actress 2:
—Inhale. Exhale. Inhale. Exhale.

Inhale.

Exhale.

Actress 1:
—Thanks for waiting for me.

(Long silence)



Actress 1:
—All this makes perfect sense to me.

Actress 2:
—Only I wouldn't know how to explain it.

(Silence)

Actress 1:
—Did you sleep well?

Actress 2:
—Why? Do I seem agitated?





ACT IV
Confrontation manifests itself



Daylight fills the room.

Actress 1 wearing robe.

Actress 2 wearing wool jacket.



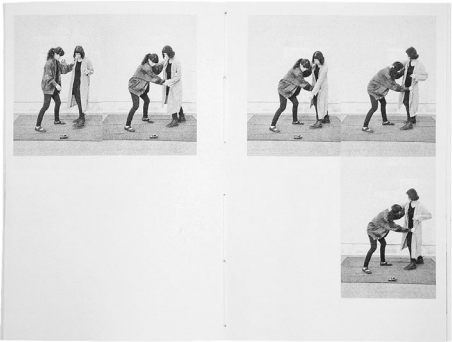
Note for the actresses:

The body as tool, setting, method and space.

Tense, heavy breathing. Alert, remembering and trying not to despair.

Inspiration:
But anyone who ever had a heart
Oh, they wouldn't turn around and break it
And anyone who's ever played a part
Oh, they wouldn't turn around and hate it

Actresses 1 and 2 (internal dialogue):







ACT V
In order to avoid confusion

I thought I was chosen to play this role because of my resemblance to the two women in the photographs (slim, brown hair, average height), but now I know that I was selected because of my inexperience. The director envisioned the moment I would face a decision (in the play) and imagined the terror on my face, my genuinely unprepared reaction, and the nuances that this would bring to my character.

White wicker bassinet. A heavy blue curtain as backdrop.

Artificial light from the left, side shadow.

Note for the actresses:

These images are critical. Try to push the audience away from the associated readings.

(Voice over)
Actress 2:
–Darling sister, it has become increasingly difficult to understand what you say.

I think you are obsessed with our past.

Actress 1:
–Naturally.

My thoughts plunge deeply into the darkness, like thin frail roots seeking answers. They return back to the surface and utter incomprehensible words. Often times, I am about to understand that other syntax, but these sounds are elusive and soon they just vanish in the air and I am left with a feeling of guilt. And a relentless sense of duty.

Night becomes day, and so on.







ACT VI
An action of the past has consequences
in the present and future

Plain background. De-constructed replica of the scene (carpet, walls, characters).

Soft artificial light from the right, side shadow.

Note for the actresses:

(Meditation on the stage and its potential)

Don't discard hesitations and trials. Look for different points of view and consider them as an altogether substantial part of the work.











ACT VII
Focus only on the action, not the adjectives

Four small benches, metallic cup and plastic picture frame. A white curtain as backdrop.

Artificial light.



Note:

The body is both protagonist and antagonist. Images are not enough.



(Voice over)

Actress 1, when the action is finished:

–I fantasize constantly about what could happen to us, with all the potential tragedies.

Actress 2:

–What leads you to do this?

Actress 1:

–The hostility around us.

Actress 2:

–I see.

Often, I don't feel quite myself. I am like a stranger in my own skin. Sometimes, this feeling fades away and I get used to it all again.

Some other times, in these black and hazy days when all is doubt and mistrust, I hide and take shelter in anger. Everything falls into place and regains that early sense, only then is the anguish eased. Until the next moment when something, anything really, brings back the oddity.

Actress 1:

–I see.



ACT VIII
The burning house

Plain background.

Soft natural light.



Note for the actors:

Remember, we’ve discussed it before:
the body as tool, setting, method and space.

You are about to perform a dramatic moment.
Rely on gestures, on the potencial of the body.

Daylight fills the room.

Actor 1 wearing robe.

Actor 2 wearing wool jacket.

This does not make any sense! You need to explain to us more clearly what we are doing. Can't you anticipate the end, the outcome of all this, instead of holding us in suspense of your decisions?

I cannot. That is actually the dilemma.
I can only quote:

A play is a structure. Dialogues and actions are the elements of this structure. These are spoken aloud and acted, transmitted by characters that in themselves are part of the structure. The structure has a meaning, which we can discover by adding together the different elements, actions and characters. The characters are not what they claim to be. The characters are what their function within the structure of the play tells us they are.

Note for the actors:

I used to refer to this image as “Roles” but I have changed my mind. It is far more complex than that.

It is good to change one’s mind.



Note for the actresses:
Seeking what is true is not seeking what is desirable.





ACT IX
Between us everything happens twice

Note for the actresses:

Latent content vs. manifest content.

Actress 1:
–We couldn’t find any photograph of him wearing
this sweater.

Actress 2:
–Perhaps he never actually wore it.



ACT X
Still has a role to play

The woods. Peaches have fallen from a tree.

Natural, sunset light.

(Voice over)
Actress 1:
–This is the final hour.
I have anticipated it would be overwhelming but,
contrary to what I imagined, the day is silently
coming to an end, like any other day.

At this particular time it is too early to state
if we have succeeded or not.



Notes:

This work resignifies the photographs of a previous series named *The two headed horse* –self-portraits with my twin sister that revolve around memory and fiction–.

Conceived as a performance, the recreation of the representation seeks to explore the power of the body to dis-organize the frames in which images have been inscribed and to open a crack in the structures that bestow meaning.

All the performers involved are sisters and brothers.

Quotes:

Act I, quote of W. B. Yeats.

Act IV, quote from a Lou Reed's song.

Act VIII, quote of Ulises Carrión and of Albert Camus.

Two abysses, one well crossed by air
Andrea Soto Calderón

*I am restoring to our silent and apparently immobile
soil its rifts, its instability, its flaws; and it is the same
ground that is once more stirring under our feet.*

Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses* (1968)

1. The transitions of certainty

A long and dense history ascribes images to the tradition of representation; in other words, to a specific operation that organises images according to their visible contents and their capacity to establish correspondence links with the subject they seek to represent. This also explains their subordination to the word, as a complement to express the theme they aim to defend or as an illustration of an idea that seeks a sensitive mode of appearance. But how can images accompany our doubts, accommodate disaffection and the lack of meaning that organises the common, as José Bergamín would have said, the discovery of the skeleton that occurs in the fall, between the slippery shadows of sleep, the necessary mask *that is sometimes a bandage and sometimes a veil?*

How can images help to organise the controversial meeting between reality and possibility? How to forge a capacity to appear without focusing it on the visible contents of images? How to create links not of similarity but of companionship for those who seek? This exploration of another framework for understanding images demands giving much greater thought to relations that instead of establishing oppositions between words and images open up a new territory for their compositions and textures. It demands crossing the thresholds of the rules of figuration, those liminal areas of images and the shifts they introduce in their forms of representation.

Pondering other ways of making images beyond the representative regime is not the same as saying that images should renounce representation. It is not a question of no longer using representation: after all, representation is one of the many operations that make images so powerful, one of the ways in which they create worlds. The challenge is rather to release the hold on the logics of representation, on the need for a cause-effect relationship; to stop creating images thinking about the effects they might generate or the ideas they might convey, in order to start examining the potential of images to articulate dissident modes of imagination, unexpected modes of gazing to see that which has never been seen. The question about the limits of representation usually leads to the inevitable horizon of the unrepresentable. But as Jacques Rancière has rightly pointed out, *the problem does not reside in the moral or political validity of the message conveyed by the representative device, but in the device itself*. As such, the challenge consists in thinking about determinations of appearance that are not determinations of images as objects presented to a subject; in other words, thinking about images not from what they fix but from their operations of transition, their capacity to tilt reality and introduce a differential potential, another scene of appearance.

Drawing on the writings of F. Nietzsche, S. Freud, A. Warburg and W. Benjamin, Georges Didi-Huberman carries out a detailed analysis in an attempt to understand that *unravelling skein of images* beyond the hierarchised practices of the fine arts; in particular, that Warburgian legacy which, counter to the entire history of positivist, schematic or idealistic art, sought to respect the essential complexity of its objects, which implied confronting entanglements, stratifications and over-determinations. His analysis is an invitation to tear up the notion of image as diagram, as synthesis, imagery, production, iconography, and even its reduction to the figurative aspect; in other words, seeing images not as constituted objects but as channels of visibility. It is therefore a question of challenging the criteria according to which we have valued images and of arguing that their power lies not so much in their visible and mediatizable contents but in that which often cannot be seen, or which can be glimpsed but is always elusive. The power of images resides rather in their reserves, which he calls “survivals”, the element that makes them defy a period, in the times and experiences they accumulate, in the seeds of new imaginations that nest.

Images have their structure but the essential characteristic of this structure is that it is open. The structure is torn, like the most radical point of a deployment. We should therefore try to think about the power of this negativity, “not so much as a cliché but rather as a dynamic or economic question”,¹ a resistance related to the actual questioning of the order of the visible that is inherent to every image, a wound of the legible; in other words, of the order of the devices of signification that attempt to shut off their meanings. This materiality or resistance of images is also the opacity that is found in the skin of every transparency.

Images always contradict the traditional rule of *adaequatio*. Their structure is one of interference, which means that it inevitably fractures the appearance of totality that we expect it to contain. This negativity, which Theodor Adorno examined in great detail, implies assuming that the urgency of images is that which they fail to reach in their synthesis, their unresolved part; it demands renouncing the spectre of the *whole*. It is not a question of doing away with it, but of reducing the tension that is neutralised in the principle of the unit.

In order to prosper, thought through images must embrace openness, negativity, *à fonds perdu*. Images are always meanings in the making. S. Freud proposed a visual model that is impossible to understand both from the classical conception of design and from the synthetic homogeneity of Kantian schematism. The image is torn from the schema; in other words, it resists all attempts to imbue it with the sense of an organised whole. Its nature is rather that of fragments *placed together*, the presentation of dreams with all their *lacunae*.

To understand images we must therefore avoid referential prejudices at all costs.

In a way, to represent is to signify in accordance with a series of specific references, to render visible and legible as such certain ideas that seek their correlation in a sensitive form. By contrast, images transcend the boundaries of that framework to avoid constituting a system, and certainly not a system of representation; at most, they assume unstable compromises with signification. It is the material anchor, the attention to the singular, which activates their particular economy that resists annexation to a concept or its semantic anorexia. Tearing through the synthetic unit that has purported to standardise images is to restore what J. F. Lyotard calls their *free-floating power*.

Insistence and the return of the singular in the regular as a transient capacity to generate appearance, but always off-centre from its order. Deploying a body of images while allowing them to stumble, implementing strategies to question certainties.

2. From image as representation to image as scene

The scene is a complex notion because it references a tradition that has placed its entire weight on it. In fact, we say “scene” and almost inevitably think about the theatre, that is, about a very particular way in which things are presented before our eyes. For images to rebel against their representative status we must analyse the extent to which the authority of representation continues to prevail over thought.² Thinking about the scene beyond the scene as representation implies creating a device to serve as its support, a type of scaffold, with which to articulate the “hinges” –what Derrida³ called *brisure*– between different terms used to determine the status of objects and the aesthetic configuration of thought. A regime that acts as fissure and union at the same time. Casting aside the meaning based on the imperative of the frontal plane, however hard we try to fix the scene in one place, it always teeters and sways towards its own determination. The schema fixes a unique image, fictitiously separating one image from all the others contained within it, whereas the scene is always relational.

In the representative regime, all images seem to bear the mark of similarity in constructing their narrative: two separate elements in which the similarity constitutes a union, a type of *pairing through likeness*, as if two terms could reconcile

the same thing. Historically, the image has based an essential part of its visual power on similarity. However, a considerable part of the work of images consists in creating new ties. Consequently, there are operations of images that do not operate through that duality but rather destroy all possibility of comparison. It is more a question of strained relations, a non-correspondence between our habitual objects of sensitive perception.

Relinquishing the logics of representation is therefore not so much about renouncing the act of representing. It has more to do with the ways in which a connection is established, with the expectations underpinning these ways, with the challenge of finding *something else* that is common but often hidden, precisely because it does not operate through likeness. A fictional shift in the field of the common. Accordingly, the effectiveness of images is built on a tension between likeness and dissimilarity.

The very existence of an image depends on the introduction of a difference. In those interstices and gaps, the image finds its own mode of operation, light and imperceptible. An image is likeness and dissimilarity at the same time; in other words, it twists the meaning of at least one recognisable element through slight balances that permit the alteration of its structure. It is important to practise using these balances because images saturated with the unreal are incapable of creating links across the distance.

It is that differential potential that allows images to create and destroy stereotypes, to generate other meanings of the common, but always alternating between increasing and relaxing the tension required to address the promise and the failure to keep it. Transcending boundaries through disaggregation or excess can lead us to poetic experiences or visionary policies. From that perspective, images do not so much represent a reality but are a field of exploration; as J. L. Godard tells Marguerite Duras, “To make a film you don’t only have to create a world but the possibility of a world”.⁴ So working on the possibility of a world also means working with invisibility, with latency, not to render it directly visible but to develop methodologies for transcending boundaries, for working on those tears where the apparently stable horizon falters.

Rather than establishing a reality, the scene presents different ways in which the same thing can be perceived. In this respect, a scene is what Rancière calls “a space of appearance that always stages its appearance and disappearance”.⁵ It shifts the meaning of things; it reconfigures the coordinates of a field of experience; it doesn’t determine a way of seeing and nor does it establish a specific way of being.

3. Gestures, the journey of a wound

Images have a particular capacity to highlight relations that are often imperceptible in daily life. One way or another, they are always the journey of a wound, an interval that demands its own cures and personalised treatment. This appears to be the quest of Mariela Sancari’s work *The two headed horse. Reenactment in ten acts*, a series of photographs performed live. The images are re-photographed from an earlier series, self-portraits with her twin sister that revolve around memory and fiction. It is a dual quest to create images that she misses and explore ways of activating existing images so that they furnish other truths, in this case through texts and choreographies of the bodies, questioning the reliability of photography, its self-reference, the methods in which it constructs its meaning and its staging, as well as the processes through which we understand what we see.

Sancari retraces earlier steps, returning to her own *poiesis*, seeking to problematise the figurative content of her own images, rebelling against the forms and concepts that articulate them, taking the body as territory, as method and space, to enable the images to open up meanings that had been shut down. How to translate a quest into images? The unspoken yet insistent question in her work is whether images can be separated from the normativity of representation to assume other functions, over and above that of reproduction in the sense of recognition of forms, and play an exploratory role as the creator of other possible worlds.

Her work suggests the hypothesis that it is in the act of never ceasing to search that the powers which define our lives are forged, in the recreation of past scenes that never were and the desire even while sleeping to establish a new order of spectres articulated in a phenomenology and economy of objects, in how these are arranged, in the heat of the hands that graze a lighter, hands that curve around a feather, a photo that attempts to freeze a momentary happiness although we’ll never know how happy or how fleeting it could have been. A metal cup that was found with the lips that can no longer kiss it, a wedding ring supported by its void, asserting an impossible promise.

The two headed horse. Reenactment in ten acts examines the transition from still image (photograph) to live image, in which the images are released from their representation to reshape their relations through the very failure of their performance. “Between us, everything happens twice”, says Mariela. Like G. Deleuze, we cannot help but wonder what is repeated in repetition. When we see the photographs or the audiovisual record of the performances, we see the pressure of a hand that sinks into the folds but fails to match the intensity of the first gesture, a clumsy attempt to

hold something that cannot be grasped. The effort to imitate a movement that occurs between a rough balance and a smooth one. Arriving a little late at the gesture is a way of breathing and containing the tension of its impossibility.

The bodies trace a grammar, generating new forms of a space we thought we knew. What happens in the image, how is an image composed, what do we ask of images, what relations do they reveal? It is especially interesting that the method chosen to question images or question their transition is to perform precisely what has been represented, because “acting means assuming the risk of not knowing what one is doing”.⁶ A quest that hurts to the core, a pausing before objects to release their *potential history*, as Ariella Azoulay would say, to seek in gestures, the bearers of memory. A questioning of narratives and recollections, relations that are only seen in images.

A methodology that tightens representation, making it a place of articulation where the experiences of knowledge and sensitivity are produced and thought, pushing us precisely to liminal areas. Sancari explores different boundaries, diverting the image understood as substitution towards the potential of fiction, towards a performative understanding of images, in their indeterminate passages.

Focusing on gestures as intensity in shifting how photography constructs its meanings is crucial to Sancari’s praxis. Gestures are virtually unintentional movements and yet to a certain extent they define our singularity. We could say that the gesture is the movement of a body for which there is no satisfactory causal explanation but which is nevertheless highly symbolic. We are continually trying to *read* certain gestures, from the tiniest facial movements to the most tremendous movements of masses of bodies that are called “revolutions”.

Using gestures to guide us is an operation we perform intuitively, but above all through links. When those links break, we are cast adrift from the ties of symbolic production, as if the channels through which it flows had been sealed off. Late capitalism is rushing headlong in that direction, increasingly impeding those flows that one way or another were inscribed in us. Fractured languages, a geological memory that is interrupted, sensitive knowledge that grows quiet. Even so, gestures have a memory that floats back up to the surface, a certain contingency of falling together, an insistence of repetitive forms that link them to other memories, recollections of the body, doubts, traces of voiceless existences.

Movement that is not an extension as such but nor is it a rupture. Above all, gestures are a tone. In this case, intensities that prevent images from pairing them through likeness, instead exploring the movements of the truth that is composed with

them. That meeting with *reality*, what W. Benjamin referred to as a shadow, a trace of a hole of sorts, one that bears the image of its experience of residue, of something it has survived. As Aristotle would say, if we love looking at images it's because in doing so we learn how to know, not as a dual deception but as a sensitive rationality.

The two headed horse. Reenactment in ten acts constantly problematises how to break with an existing order while not continuing to affirm the representation dynamics of the territories imposed on us. How to promote artistic practices that are not reduced to repeating learned gestures but rather serve to destabilise the apparent regularity of the traces that affirm and constantly reinforce certain identifications? Crossing thresholds where constructed meanings teeter, venturing towards border areas, reminding ourselves that all borders are simultaneously spaces where boundaries are set and whether their rupture is at stake. Borders are not only lines that separate: they are also interstices, places where there is no permanence, only flow and desire. Hence their fragility.

Notes:

1. Georges Didi-Huberman (2010), *Ante la imagen. Pregunta formulada a los fines de una historia del arte*, Murcia, Cendeac, p.189.
2. See J. Derrida's philosophical discussion with M. Heidegger in the text "Envoi"; cf. Jacques Derrida [1980] (1997), "Envoi" en *Psyché (Tome I): Invention de l'autre*, Paris, Galilée.
3. Jacques Derrida (1967), *De la grammatologie*, Paris, Les Éditions de Minuit. [Eng. ed. (1998) *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, tr. Baltimore, The John Hopkins University Press, p.155.] "You have, I suppose, dreamt of finding a single word for designating difference and articulation. I have perhaps located it by chance in Robert['s Dictionary] if I play on the word, or rather indicate its double meaning. This word is *brisure* [joint, break] '–broken, cracked part. Cf. breach, crack, fracture, fault, split, fragment [brèche, cassure, facture, faille, fente, fragment]. –Hinged articulation of two parts of wood- or metal-work. The hinge, the brisure [folding-point] of a shutter. Cf. joint'. Roger Laporte (letter)."
4. Marguerite Duras, Jean-Luc Godard (2014), *Godard/ Duras Dialogues*, Paris, Post-éditions/Centre Pompidou, p.19.
5. Jacques Rancière, Adnen Jdey (2018), *La méthode de la scène*, Paris, Lignes, p.14.
6. Jordi Carmona (2018), *La paciencia de la acción*, Madrid, Akal, p.58.

To Gi, for being there with me in every act.

To mamá, for teaching us to keeping going, always.

To Ado, for showing me other ways of living.

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The two headed horse.
Reenactment in ten acts

Exploration of the transformation of a fixed image
into a performed image

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