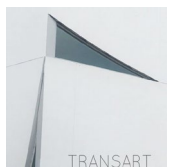


ECHO CHAMBER
VIOLETTE BULE

VIOLETTE BULE
www.violettebule.com
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THE TRANSART FOUNDATION
FOR ART AND ANTHROPOLOGY
1412 West Alabama St.
Houston 77006

Echo chamber, 2020

Violette Bule

Texts

Echo Chamber, **Surpik Angelini**

Subversive Echo, **Irina Troconis**

V, **Aisen Caro Chacín**

Abstracts EL Guiso, **Andres Sepulveda**

Echo Chamber, 2020

Violette Bule

The Transart Foundation

for Art & Anthropology - Houston

In loving memory of my dear friend

Marianella Muñoz (la China)

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COLLABORATORS

Curatorial Advisors & Research

Surpik Angelini - **Echo Chamber**

Gina Monc - **El Guiso**

Michel Otayek - **#Requiem200z**

Oriana Bastardo

Rafael D´Armas

Computer Engineer

Milton Laufer

José Millán

Austin Moreau

Electric Engineer

Eric Todd

Fabrication and Design

Robert Bacon

Augusto Briceño

Aisen Caro Chacin

Installers

Carlos Pelayo Martínez

Facilitators

Justin Hughes

Weston Porter

Video Art

Gina Monc -

Tonada del Becerro Eres Tu (Helicoide)

Graphic Design

Jessica Rivas

Translators

Rafael D´Armas

Rebecca Woodward

Rosa Ana Orlando

ECHO CHAMBER

VIOLETTE BULE

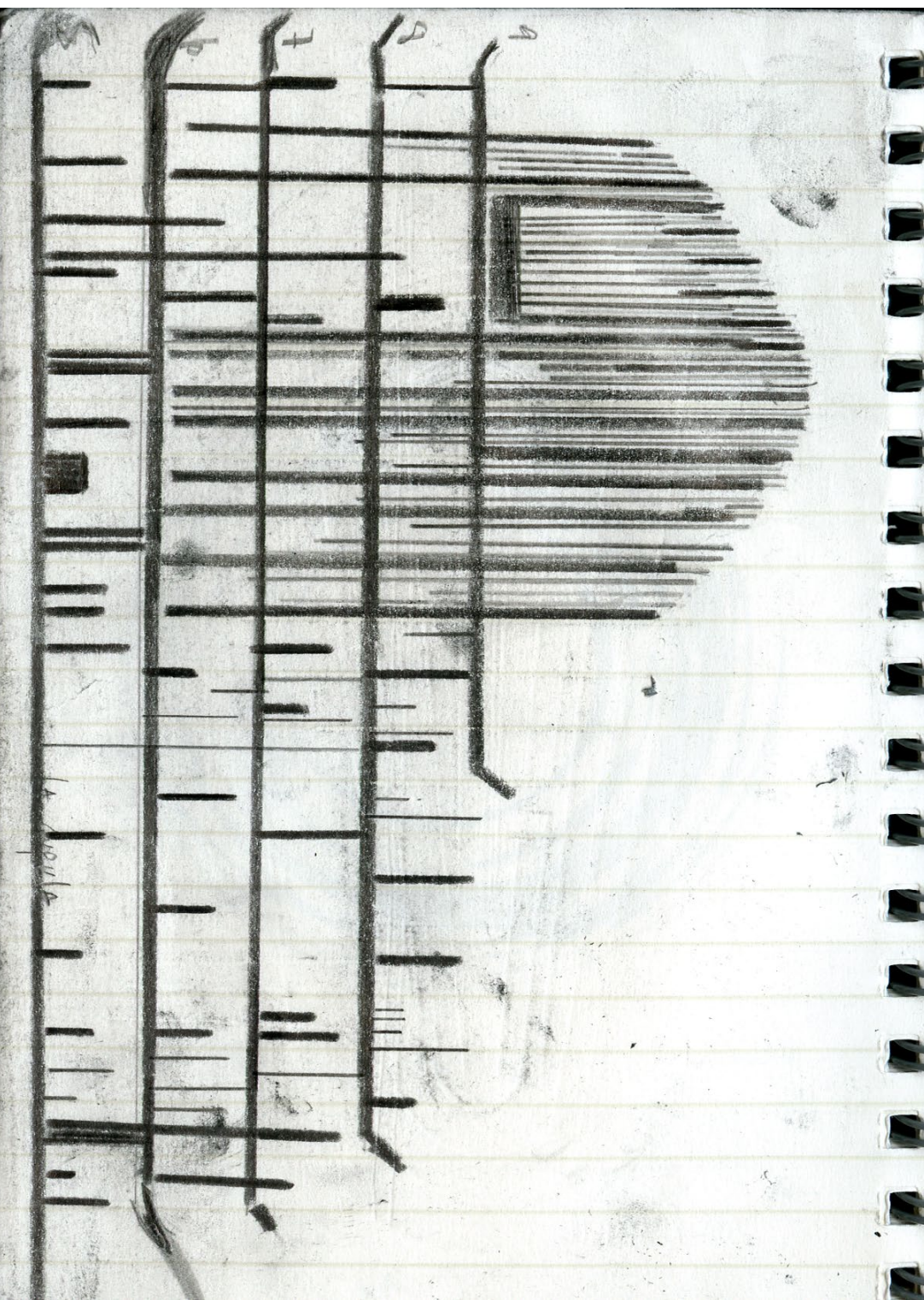
AN ECHO CHAMBER by Violette Bule

Jacques Derrida sees the myth of Narcissus and Echo as the relation between light and speech. He goes on to explain that according to the myth, Echo and Narcissus are cursed by blindness. A blindness that cannot render “otherness” beyond self reflection in a pool of light... a blindness that does not render a distinct voice beyond spoken repetition. It is a tragic entanglement, entrapped in a Narcissistic echo chamber, haunted by an engrossed self image and loud soliloquies. The Echo Chamber, “The Promised Land” where the Other is banished forever, its edenic beauty defaced beyond recognition.

Violette Bule’s “Echo Chamber” is a requiem to Narcissus, who dies a thousand deaths in the broken mirrors of oblivion.

Surpik Angelini

August 1, 2020



Violette Bule: Subversive Echoes

Irina R. Troconis, Cornell University

In *The Politics of Aesthetics* (2004), Jacques Rancière defines aesthetic acts as “configurations of experience that create new modes of sense perception and induce novel forms of political subjectivity” (3). These acts disrupt “the relationship between the visible, the sayable, and the thinkable without having to use the terms of a message as a vehicle” (59). They are interventions that trigger the formation of new networks between subjects, meanings, and the fabric of the sensible and, in doing so, offer the possibility to reconfigure what are given to be facts: the taken for granted and already understandable reality. Stepping into Violette Bule’s *Echo Chamber* is entering and engaging with the ongoing reconfiguration of what Rancière calls “the fabric of the sensible”: the system of a *priori* forms that presents itself to sense experience and that, in the context of Bule’s work, defines how Venezuela is conceived within and outside its national borders. The echoes that come out of her installations—each constituting a multisensory experience engaging tangled temporalities and crisscrossed geographies—are pieces in an

Sketch 01 *El Helicoide*, Violette Bule.

ever-changing puzzle where the country's recent history comes together and comes apart. This history—an accumulation of unfulfilled promises of the country's many revolutions, of the unachieved progress of its “spectacular modernity,”¹ and of recurring clashes between the needs and demands of the population and the power and rhetoric of the “magical state”²—is not there as a message, just as the members of the audience are not there as spectators. Bule instead stages a sort of “history in the making”: a work-in-progress that demands not only the attention but also the labor of those who, as they interact with each installation, unavoidably become actors/authors.

This call to agency and participation is embedded in the logic that structures each piece and that brings together the materiality of the physical/analogue world (recycled wood, metal pots, and iron nails) and the virtual world of social media and digital archives. *REQUIEM200* is

made of a wooden structure painted in black that (mi)shapes the map of Venezuela, punctured by QR codes—printed on small white squares—that the audience must scan with their phones after downloading the application Bule developed for it. Once scanned, each code shows the details of the more than 200 deaths that occurred during the protests against the regime of Nicolás Maduro between February 2014 and February 2017: a picture of the face, the specific location where the person died, their National Identification Number (“cédula de identidad”), and the way in which they were killed. *El Helicoide*—also a wooden structure painted in black—is a re-production of the famous architectural building by the same name that became the symbol of Venezuela's “petromodernity”³ and that currently serves as a prison where the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (SEBIN) holds both regular and political prisoners under blatantly inhumane

conditions. Using a device with a screen provided as part of the piece, the audience must slowly scan the wooden structure in order to find the codes hidden in the dome that will take them to fragments of YouTube videos which do not appear in any order—chronological or otherwise—and which capture moments of the many lives the Helicoide has lived, hinting at (without ever articulating) resonances and continuities between them. Lastly, *El Guiso* is a collection of fifteen pots displayed in a circle on top of a round table made of the same recycled wood painted in black and used in the other pieces. As the audience moves around the table, they lift the lid of the pots and look inside. There, they find their own image—reflected on the surface of a mirror that has been placed at the bottom of each pot—and hear, as if coming from it, the mutterings of a corrupted state: the sounds of a rigged election, the desperate screams for help of protesters who realize they are being murdered, the loud clicking of cameras capturing the

moment when the country's two presidents (Nicolás Maduro and Juan Guaidó) negotiate Venezuela's fate with their allies, and the banging and hitting of pots in the hands of a starving and angry population.

The audience thus finds itself in an echo chamber—as the title of the exhibit promises—, but not passively or comfortably. Rather than encountering already-digested stories that align with preconceived notions about Venezuela, they are unsettled by the attack of noises coming from all directions, places, and times that do not complement but instead battle each other, and that render present sore, dirty, and hidden truths gurgling from the depths of the country's entrails. Going back briefly to Rancière, it is a disruption of the production of meaning that occurs through a sensorial intervention, the effect of which is the vertigo of dislocation. Not only do the noises generate confusion regarding what is being said and by whom—a confusion

¹Lisa Blackmore proposes the term “spectacular modernity” to explore the “narratives that prop up political projects and that justify their leaders as indispensable figureheads, the promises of progress fueled by developmentalist agendas, and the behind-the-scenes roles played by political and economic stakeholders to buttress regimes” (Blackmore 2017,

212). In the context of her book, these phenomena are discussed in relation to the dictatorship of Marcos Pérez Jiménez (1952-1958).

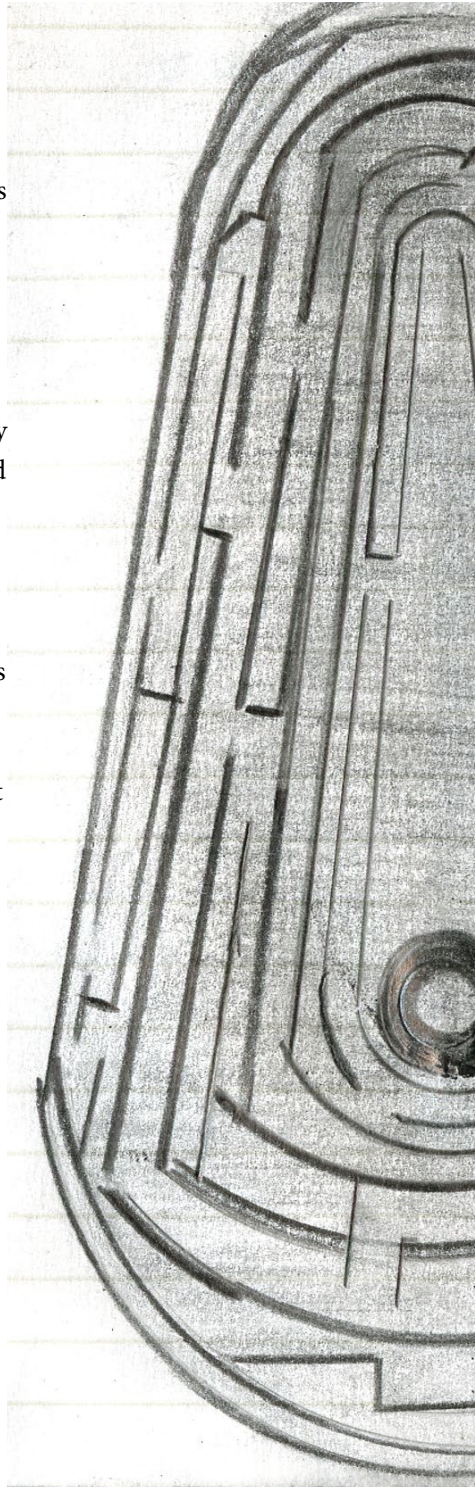
² Coined by Fernando Coronil in his book by the same title, the term describes the Venezuelan state as one that “astonishes through the marvels of power

rather than convinces through the power of reason, as reason itself is made part of the awe-inspiring spectacle of its rule. By manufacturing dazzling development projects that engender collective fantasies of progress, it casts its spell over audience and performers alike. As a ‘magnanimous sorcerer,’ the state seizes its subjects by inducing a condition of state of being receptive to its

illusions—a magical state” (Coronil 1997, 5).

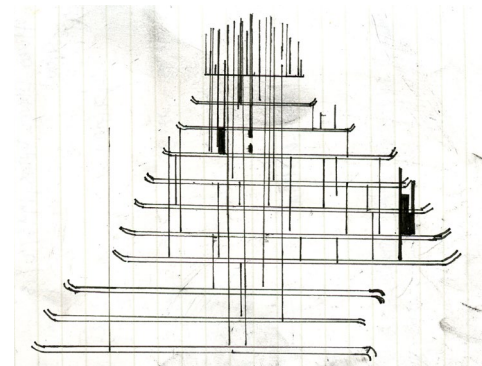
³Defined by Stephanie LeMenager as a modernity “fueled and infused by the oil industry where boom-and-bust cycles disrupt even the best-laid plans” (Stephanie LeMenager in Celeste Olalquiaga and Lisa Blackmore 2018, 8).

that must be worked through—but the hybrid nature of the installations also alters perceptions regarding time and place. The virtual world that Bule gives access to and the fluidity of its time/space weaken the certainty regarding the “when” and the “where” that frame the pieces and the audience. The “when” loses its referentiality as present, past, and future become tangled and refuse to fall into chronological order; the “where” loses its specificity as the reality of the Venezuela that is staged in each piece enters in dialogue with the assumptions, interpretations, and reactions of an audience made of people of multiple nationalities who are simultaneously located in the physical “here” of the exhibit and the abstract “there” of the online world.



This loss of the sense of time and place becomes visible and tangible in the design of the wooden structures of *REQUIEM200≤* and *El Helicoide*. The map in *REQUIEM200≤* is not the kind that clearly draws the outline of Venezuela’s territory, making the country legible and easy for the eye to apprehend (and for the audience to comprehend). On the contrary, the map is the map of a wreckage: a country in pieces, a wounded body with limbs sticking out in odd angles, a shattered coffin where nails do not hold anything together but rather tear the wood apart and threaten to cut the skin of those who carelessly approach it. Similarly, the Helicoide in *El Helicoide* is a work in fragments. The smooth surface of the original structure and the ascending spiral that promised to take the vehicles visiting “Latin America’s greatest shopping mall”⁴ to the heavenly heights of progress have been mutilated and reversed. Pieces

of wood in all sizes and shapes pile on top of each other, forming a deep labyrinth that folds onto itself, supported by a base in the shape of a spiral that reaches down rather than up, into the depths of a present made of layers of forgotten and unsightly remains of multiple pasts. A cube pierced by copper-toned sticks appears in the center of the labyrinth—forming a sort of “dome”—as if fighting to stay afloat and not be swallowed by the oil drenching the wood. The sticks evoke, on one hand, the people forgotten, left behind, or sacrificed in the country’s journey to modernity: the *barrios* that serve as background to *El Helicoide* but that never became part of it or of the wealth it promised. On the other, they seem to represent the audience and the experience itself of engaging with Bule’s pieces: an experience that draws you in, asking you not to watch but to navigate a space that was once familiar but that is now uncertain.



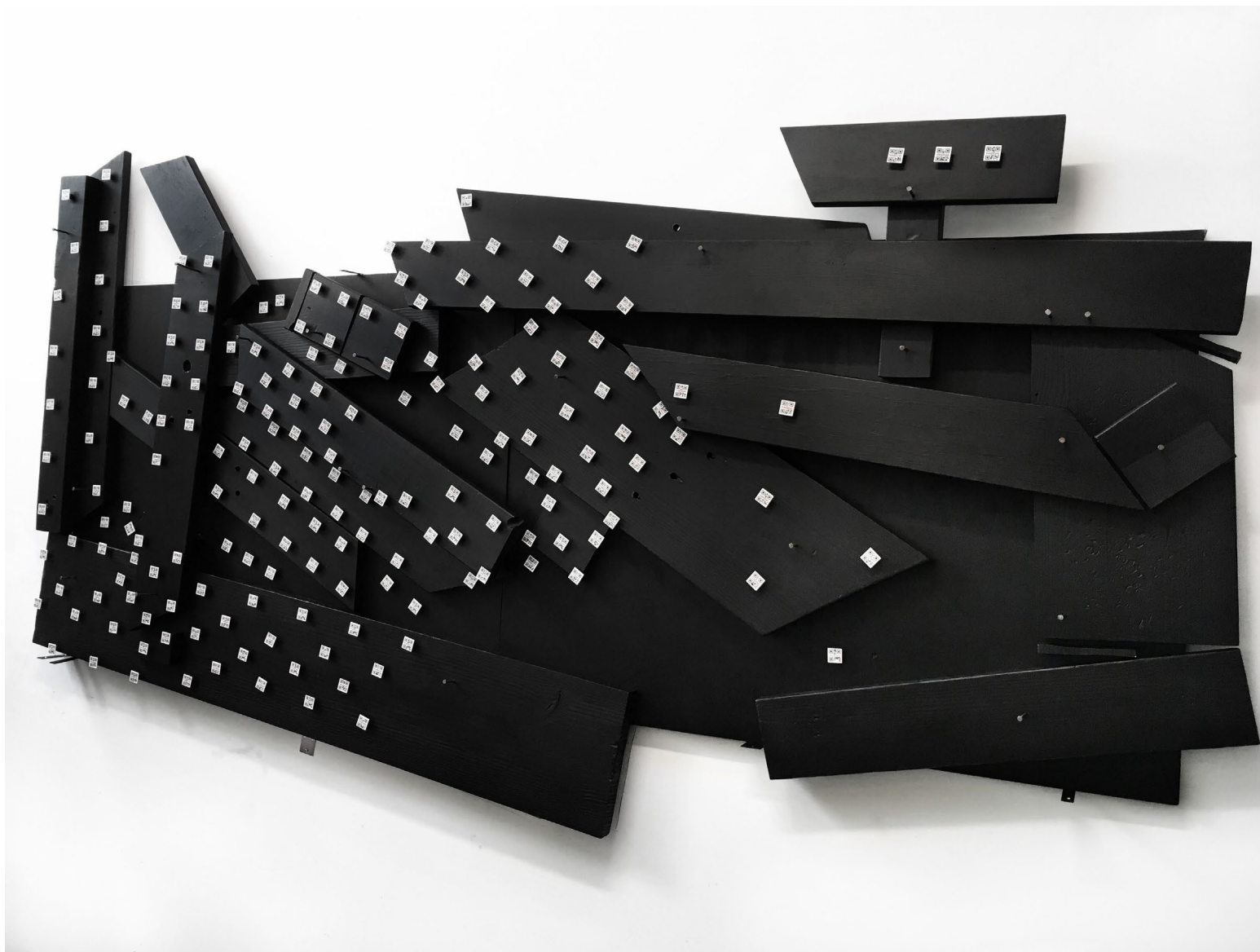
⁴For a discussion of the history and significance of *El Helicoide*, see Olalquiaga and Blackmore (2018).

Sketch 02 y 03 de *El Helicoide*, Violette Bule.



Key to this navigation is the transformation of sight into touch: the eye, rather than passively observing the display of a quickly consumable spectacle, is forced to linger in the corners, under the panels, and around the nails. It thus “touches” the surfaces, slowing down in order to understand not what is being shown, but what is being said in those textures that, in Bule’s hands, become “textxtures.” Coined and conceptualized by Renu Bora, “textxture” is dense with information about how an object substantively, historically, and materially came into being, thus differing from “texture,” which “defiantly or even invisibly blocks or refuses such information” (Bora in Sedgwick 2003, 14). Textxture is “loud,” it draws our attention to the bumps, blemishes, holes, and rough edges and to the stories that they tell, stories that, in the case of Bule’s pieces, are connected to the equally blemished, rough, and hole-ridden (hi)story of the Venezuelan nation. The textxtures that “deform” the space thus render tangible the temporal layers that accumulate to make up a present that also includes the audience, as the pots in *El Guiso* explicitly indicate.

In fact, the reflection that appears once the lid is lifted and that changes with each new face that looks inside the pots visibly places the members of the audience at the center of “el guiso.” In Venezuela, this word denotes both a sort of stew that can be made with a wide variety of ingredients, and an act of fraud, corruption, or deception that goes against the law and that is done in order to achieve personal gain. The audience thus not only becomes part of the installation—their faces “completing” the design of the pots—but it also becomes part of the network of questionable acts and decisions that materializes in the sound coming out of each pot. Bule thus subverts the act of consumption of the art piece and of the information provided in it. Rather than automatically absorbing what the eye apprehends—the way you would do when presented with a regular “guiso”—the audience must carefully navigate uneven surfaces and difficult corners while trying to make sense of the echoes coming from them, and of the role each person plays in a spatiotemporal puzzle that refuses to stay still.



REQUIEM200s, Violette Bule

In the case of *REQUIEM200s*, the role requires accessing an online archive where Bule has stored the “digital remains” of those who died during the protests against Maduro’s regime and whose deaths have either remain in the margins of the state’s official narrative, or become invisibilized through the politization of the media and the protagonism it gives to ideological agendas where the dead are just a number. This archive—put together by Bule through a gargantuan effort of research, fact checking, and compilation of official and unofficial data—is still in the making, open to changes and additions that can come from anyone who has something new to contribute. It is also a ghostly archive, not only because it exists in the margins of the narrative that shapes the institutional memory grounding the political agenda of the government, but also because, being virtual, it escapes that narrative not to deny it or ignore it, but to haunt it. This haunting quality is, according to Andrew Hoskins, a key characteristic of digital remains. In his conceptualization of the “restless past,” he argues that “digital memory has become an awesome new risk in its entanglement in the unimaginable scale and complexity of hybrid personal/public networks and archives, and therein digital

traces' immeasurable capacity to haunt, including after death" (Hoskins 2018, 3). This "immeasurable capacity to haunt" is connected to the fluidity of the digital archive, to the fact that the bodies it stores are not tied to the logic of time/place: they are not geographically anchored and they do not have—or belong to—a past or a territory, but rather restlessly move across spaces and times. As the audience interacts with Bule's piece, it participates in the preservation of this restlessness. With their phones turned into pocket-sized tombstones for the far-away dead, those in the audience contribute to the creation of an afterlife that escapes the reach of the state and the boundaries of the nation-state, and that produces a memory that "does not stay put but circulates, migrates, travels; [...] a work that is continually in progress, rather than a reified object" (Bond, Craps and Vermeulen 2018, 1).

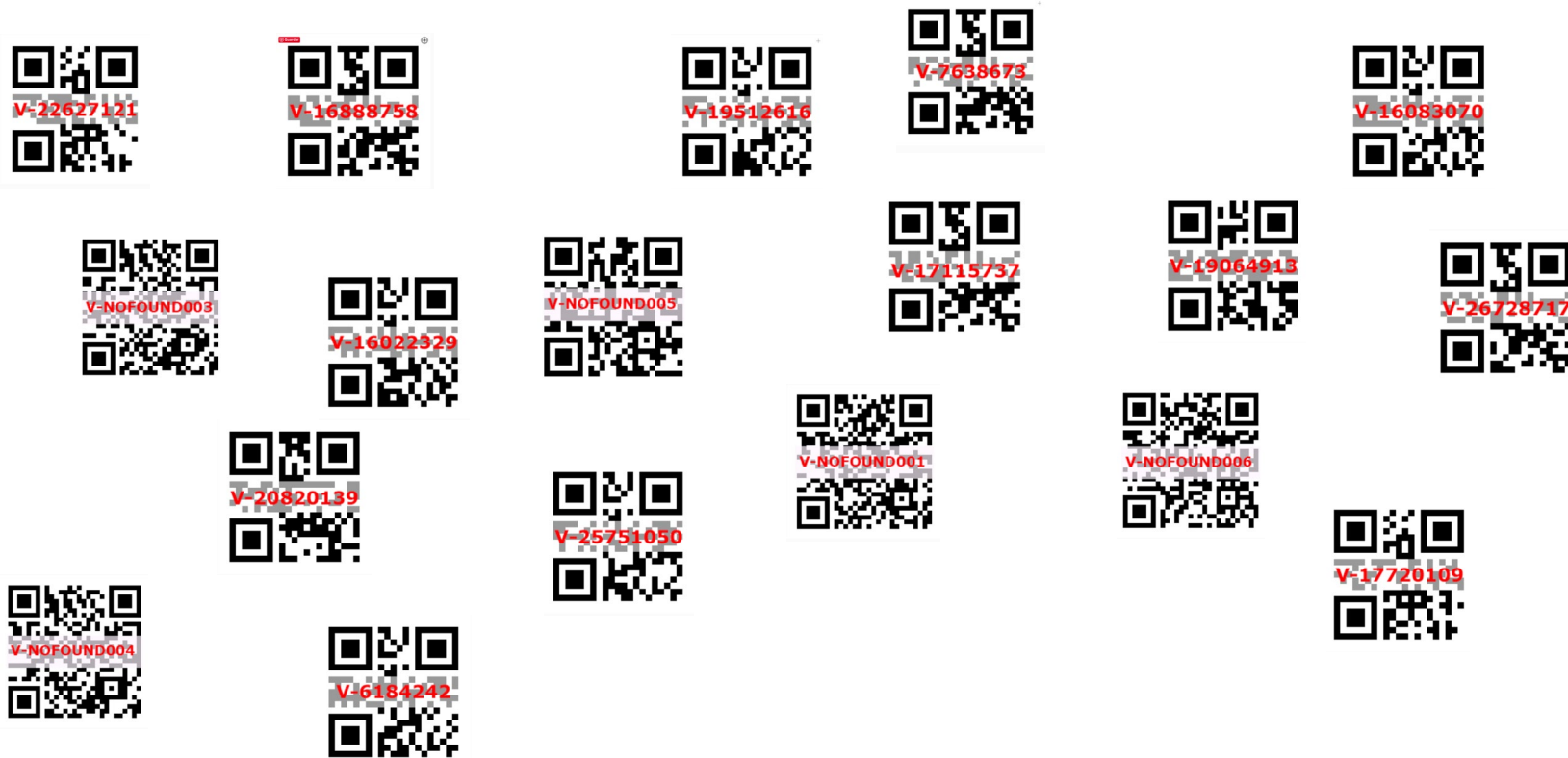
In the case of *El Helicoide* and *El Guiso*, the role of the audience, though equally active and dynamic, is not tied to the preservation of a sort of subversive archive but rather to the disruption of the memory narratives that have defined the nation's identity and that have been repeatedly articulated by those in power. In *El Helicoide*, this narrative goes back

to the progress that the country's seemingly infinite oil reserves promised and that the Helicoide was supposed to represent and consolidate. To achieve this progress has meant, historically, to dismiss, ignore, and obliterate a past that is always portrayed as primitive, inferior, and shameful by those who, as they come into power, promise to *finally* transform the country into a modern and wealthy nation. Hence the many lives of the Helicoide, each built on top of the remains of the previous one, the spectacle of the new an easy distraction from the burden of the old. Similarly, in *El Guiso*, this fetishization of the always-elusive future and rejection of the always-unworthy past translates into a string of revolutions that, in their attempts to lead the country to its unfulfilled independence—as mandated by Simón Bolívar, the Liberator and "Padre de la Patria"—have repeatedly weakened democratic institutions, bypassed the country's many constitutions, and created networks of corruption that benefit the few and injure the many. These violations—a constant in every government, regardless of political orientation—have been easily ignored, becoming quiet and "inconsequential" whispers amidst the deafening drumroll

announcing the arrival of the "New," the "Great," and the "True" Revolution.

However, these whispers—and the remains of the Helicoide's many pasts—are impossible to ignore in Bule's pieces, where they become loud echoes that surprise the audience and that demand to be acknowledged, handled, and worked through. The goal then is not to feed the audience an already-constructed narrative that "explains" Venezuela—thus adhering to what has been established as "visible," "hearable," and "sayable,"—but to present them with the fragments of a history that is yet to be written and that is not oriented a priori towards a bright and well-known future. The work of dealing with these echoes is difficult, in part because they appear as if "out of nowhere." In fact, in *El Helicoide*, there is no way to tell when the video will appear on the screen in the scanning device that the audience holds, for the codes that trigger it are hidden in the dome of the structure. Equally shocking is to lift the lid of the pots in *El Guiso* and find, not a thing, but a sound in it, and one that appears to come from your own reflection, *from your own mouth*. Furthermore, the fact that the videos and audio files in the two pieces are not organized chronologically means that

the notion of a past followed by a present and a future is completely disrupted: there is only the work to be done, in the present, on the remains of not one but multiple pasts. Lastly, the nature of the videos itself dismantles the narrative that, coming from the "magical state," relies on the grandiosity of power and the allure of the spectacle. Taken from a corner of YouTube that Bule herself calls "la cloaca del mundo mediático en Venezuela" ("the sewer of Venezuela's media"), the videos are not what we wanted or were hoping to see. They present us with difficult and uncomfortable truths, there are contradictions among and within them, and some are fragmented and of poor quality. Similarly, the audio files coming from the pots produce a jarring effect—particularly if more than one pot is "shouting" at a time—that further complicates the production of a straightforward narrative.



Passivity is thus not possible for the audience that moves—slowly, carefully, suspiciously—through Bule’s echo chamber. With each sense heightened and without the comfort of a familiar narrative, the only option left is to embrace the task of sorting through the “stuff” the present is made of: the many pasts that never “passed”, the forgotten traces, the good deeds and the bad decisions, the hope that was carelessly buried and the crap that was carefully hidden. In the process, new agencies are activated. Each member of the audience finds their own way around the network of echoes, discovering continuities and contradictions, writing and rewriting the narratives that they will take away with them and that can be as subversive, irreverent, and disloyal (to the dream of progress, to the magic of the state, to the will of spectral heroes) as they dare to be. A possibility thus arises to draft futures for the nation that are truly new not because they do away with the past, but because they are born out of a conscious, painful, uncomfortable, and careful journey through it.

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V

Aisen Caro Chacin

V de vaca,
de verdad, de vista gorda*,
de Venezuela,
de vaina*,
de Violette,
de *venganza*, de vergüenza,
de vivos todos,
de victoria, de volver,
de *vulnerable*,
de vuelta,
de vacaciones,
de vida, de ver,
V de mujer.

La V,
pirámide inversa,
inestable,
embudo de la humanidad,
destila el peso visceral,
de donde la vida misma viene,
se queda,
te vacila, y se va.

¡Este *guiso* está más bueno!
¡Te la comiste!*

Zamuros de carne y hueso,
del mundo entero llegaron
al banquete de putrefacción.
Vacas, peste,
al uno / al otro
arrasan de desayuno,
almuerzo y cena.

De postre
nos dejaron pidiendo cacao*
por las esquinas,
gimiendo auxilio,
asco,
quítate tú pa' poné'me yo.

Vista gorda,
nadie vio nada.
Yo no fui,
tú fuiste;
Tú hiciste
yo no hice nada.
Desvalijando
y yo aquí estando.

Tu venganza de depresión interna,
de dolor cotidiano,
de represión sistemática,
de resentimiento,
de echar pa'lante*,
de esquema piramidal,
de pela bola*.
No puedo hacer nada.

Que vergüenza me dá,
aquí todo pasa,
yo empaco y me voy.
Me lavé las manos,
limpias.
Hazte la cirugía,
pa' que no te encuentren,
pa' que no te apenes.
Car'e tabla.

Quedó así todo igualito,
la misma tele de ayer,
desmoronándose,
y sin ver pa'trás,
te fuiste.

V de visa y divisas*,
pasaporte caducado,
voy qué quiero ser educado.
En este salvajismo
no me han domado.

Pásame un CADIVI*,
mango bajito*,
pa' come un poquito.

Ahora estas presa en esa cabeza.
Libertad plena,
esposada
a la impotencia.

V de victoria inaccessible,
de que solos no podemos,
de puñalada por la espalda,
pactos por debajo de la mesa.

Victoria de maletín*,
de vivos todos,
de cuánto hay pa' eso.
Victoria electoral,
militar,
la victoria de vagos
todos y todas.

V de venas vasculares
llevan la sangre patriarcal
de la patria misma
que te dio tu madre.

V de vesícula quema grasa,
aceite negro que es nuestra desgracia.

V de verga,
del coño e' la madre*,
de válvula de escape,
que de aquí
no hay quien me saque.
Violencia,
bestias, vigas
y comer cable*.

V de viajeros que sueñan, vuelan,
tripean, y periquean.
Cocaína que duerme la boca,
en trance despegamos de esta roca.

V de veneno,
de oro bien cotizado.
Dinero mal habido,
dame pa' acá,
que esto queda en el olvido.
Ventarrón de churupos* roba'os,
real y medio*, pela'o.

Viscosa mucosa de tantos llantos.
Ya esta vaina no me la aguanto.
¿Y hasta cuando?

Italicized text is a direct reference to a title in Bule's work.

* Appears in the glossary.

Vileza egoísta, unos comen y toman cerveza mientras otros se mueren de hambruna y pobreza. la pobre excusa, de que así es la naturaleza.	V de verde con botas, de <i>macho vernáculo</i> , disparando, <i>Tupac Marus</i> , con la revolución cobrando y culos intercambiando.	V de vulgar y violencia, aquí no queda decencia. V de volcán explotando y estos güevones* siguen gobernando. V de vínculos raros, que de repente hacen un paro. No pasa nada, es pura paja*. El <i>guiso</i> * está bueno pa' seguir robando.	V de valorar, de valor, de violar. Todos encanados a dentro y fuera. Vértigo bestial, ganas de vomitar.
<i>Acaparo con descaro</i> , sin margarina, no hay existencia. Te como, me jarto, me hartó. Falta de ignorancia y bajeza, que duras estas pieza(s).	Orden en la sala que ya estamos a otra escala. Pónganme otra canción. Me voy a la pista, pillate mis movimientos terrorista(s). Paciencia, lo que tiene que haber es desobediencia. No hay nadie que sepa más que en la adolescencia.	V de víctima de su propia conciencia, al que protesta inconforme y dice lo que piensa. Un tiro a la cabeza, al pecho, que te guinden del techo. Esto todo está hecho.	Ahí está el vigilante, sigamos pa'lante, ojitos del comandante. Vendiendo el alma, sin patria, muerte. Todos a Bello Monte, con la cara hacia el horizonte. No por ahora, por siempre.
Que pecado, al muerto lo han robado, moribundos todos por canibalismo impuesto. Dame acá que ya es navidad y tengo que llevarle algo a mi mamá. Navidades sin Maduro seguro. El hambre aumenta, hay que sacar la cuenta.	Piedrita en la bota, represión, cállate y vota. ¿Y a esta hora, de'sa camisa roja quién no se enamora? Reverol revirao, quítate padrino, échate pa' un la'ó.	A dormir nené peluche, que sueñes con los angelitos verdes, marines y terrestres a ver si te salvan el pellejo, este peo ya esta viejo. Todos somos causa. Te tocó el número de suerte, aquí eres parte de la estadística mística. Las cifras dan igual, es que nadie sabe a qué número apostar. Aquí todo es oficial.	Basta de aparentar, los vínculos hay que verificar. Vil y cruel, "Agarren su escudo y muevan ese culo". Febrero, guerrero, luto y velo.
Se fue la luz, Misión cumplida. Robinson no llegó a esta partida. Acude, aquí estamos aguantando. Misionero apagao' esperando un milagro.	V de Vladimir, no dejas al pueblo vivir. V de volando y con el mazo dando. ¿Aquí quién coño está al mando?		

V GLOSSARY

VISTA GORDA: to turn a blind eye, "fat view".

VAINA: sheath or pod, also a vulgar way to refer to a "thing."

VIVOS: mischievous, cunning, "alive".

GUIISO: Treacherous business dealing, "stew."

TE LA COMISTE: telling someone they did something very well, "you ate it."

PIDIENDO CACAO: asking for forgiveness, "asking for cocoa."

ECHAR PA'LANTE: to get ahead in life, "to move forward."

PELA BOLA: someone who has nothing, "ball skinner."

DIVISAS: currency exchange controlled by the Bolivarian Government often at a favorable rate.

CADIVI: (Comisión de Administración de Divisas) Commission for the administration of currency exchange in Venezuela at a set rate.

MANGO BAJITO: easy to get, low hanging fruit "low mango."

MALETÍN: suitcase corporation made to take advantage of the set foreign exchange rate to sell dollars in the black market.

COÑO 'E LA MADRE: expression of lament, such as "fucking hell", meaning "cunt of the mother."

COMER CABLE: having nothing to eat, "eating a cable."

PERIQUEAN: those on cocaine, "parequeeting."

CHURUPOS: ¢5 from 1879, a little amount of money.

REAL Y MEDIO: currency reference made popular by the children's song by Serenata Guayanesa.

GÜEVONES: big-balled individuals "assholes."

PURA PAJA: bullshit, "all hay."

ARTWORKS

1) **#Requiem200≥**, 2018 - 2020

2) **Helicoide**, 2020

3) **EL Guiso - (Gee-soh)**, 2020

4) **Testiculus Vernaculus Tupac-Marus**, from the series "*Detonaciones*", 2014

5) **Al Uno / Al Otro**, from the series "*Detonaciones*", 2013

6) **Acaparo con Descaro**, from the series "*Detonaciones*" 2013

7) **Las Odaliscas**, from the series "*Las Heroínas*", 2012

8) **Caracas Relativa**, 2007 - 2013

9) **La Manicurista Muñoz**, from the series "*Caracas Emmental*", 2010

10) **La Playa Huequito**, from the series "*Caracas Emmental*", 2009