

Talking to Action: Art, Pedagogy, and Activism in the Americas is the first publication to bring together scholarship, critical essays, and documentation of collaborative community-based art making by researchers and artists from across the American hemisphere. This volume is a compendium of texts, analysis, and research documents from the *Talking to Action* research and exhibition platforms as part of Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA, an initiative of the Getty.

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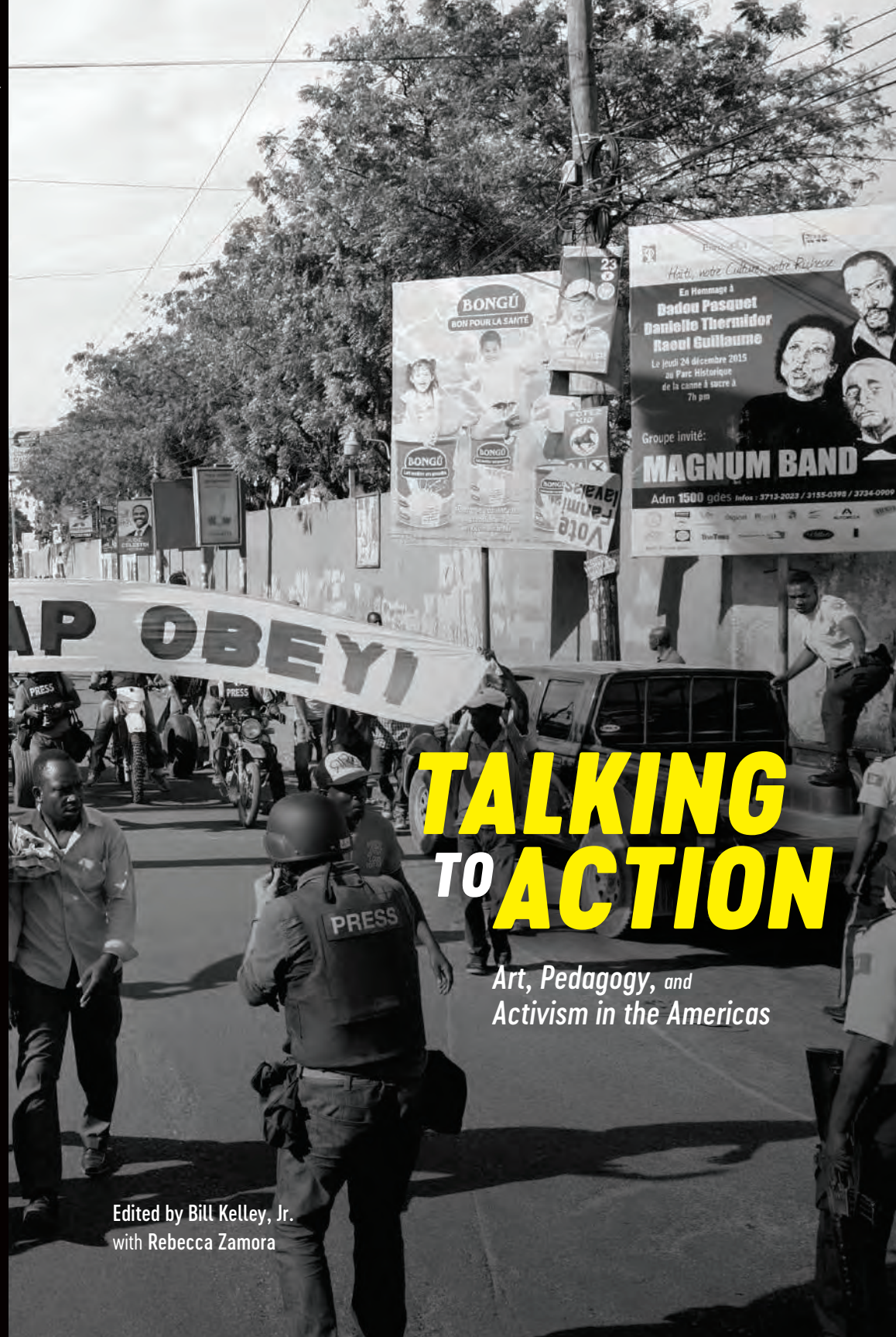


TALKING TO ACTION

Art, Pedagogy, and Activism in the Americas

Chicago Social Practice History Series
The School of the Art Institute of Chicago with OHS College of Art and Design
Distributed by the University of Chicago Press

Kelley, Jr.



TALKING TO ACTION

Art, Pedagogy, and
Activism in the Americas

Edited by Bill Kelley, Jr.
with Rebecca Zamora

- 24 Ramón Grosfoguel, “Del ‘extractivismo económico’ al ‘extractivismo epistémico’ y al ‘extractivismo ontológico’: una forma destructiva de conocer, ser y estar en el mundo,” *Tabula Rasa* [Colombia], no. 24 (January-June 2016): 126. Original text: “La cosificación es el proceso de transformar los conocimientos, las formas de existencia humana, las formas de vida no-humana y lo que existe en nuestro entorno ecológico en ‘objetos’ por instrumentalizar, con el propósito de extraerlos y explotarlos para beneficio propio sin importar las consecuencias destructivas que dicha actividad pueda tener sobre los seres humanos y no-humanos.”
- 25 Ibid., 136. Original text: “El extractivismo también es una manera de pensar y producir conocimientos...”

THE BATTLEGROUND OF THE PRESENT: *The Pocho Research Society, Archivo Caminante, and Etcétera...*

Jennifer Ponce de León

What is history but a battleground of the present.

This quotation is attributed to a pseudonymous member of Los Angeles’ Pocho Research Society of Erased and Invisible History (PRS), a guerrilla art group founded by Sandra de la Loza. It appeared in a 2002 press release announcing *Operation Invisible Monument*, which involved the installation of a series of (un/anti-official) historical plaques dedicated to “erased moments of Los Angeles history.” Two years earlier and across the hemisphere, the artists of Etcétera... staged a guerrilla street performance in Buenos Aires that challenged the dominant conception of history deeply embedded in Argentina’s political culture, in which state-sanctioned violence is consigned to a past period of dictatorship that is cordoned off from the democratic present. Also in Buenos Aires, artist Eduardo Molinari was working under the aegis of the Archivo Caminante [Walking Archive], which is both an actual archive and, like the PRS, a semi-fictional institution that serves as a platform for historical research and art production. In 2002 Molinari began work on the Archivo Caminante’s *El Camino Real* [The Royal Way], an intermedial diptych consisting of an installation and publication addressing silences embedded in historical production, the relationship between these silences and colonial and counterrevolutionary violence, and the persistence of the past in the present—especially in modalities not captured by history and its archives. The Pocho Research Society, Molinari, and Etcétera... produce counter-hegemonic narratives about the

past; to varying degrees, they also engage in counter-history as this practice is theorized by philosopher Gabriel Rockhill: a practice that challenges the “historical constitution of the unquestioned givens of certain ways of doing history” and “aims at changing the very meaning—and direction—of history and narrative [*le sens même de l’histoire*], in all senses of these terms, and thereby modifying the field of possibilities.”¹ For all of these artists, history and social memory are a battleground and their art is a means to engage in struggles over representations of the past and its relationship to the present.

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Combining tactical intelligence, surrealist aesthetics, and a mordant and iconoclastic sensibility, Etcétera...’s work denaturalizes and critiques conditions of exploitation and state violence suffered by Argentina’s working and popular classes in the country’s postdictatorial neoliberal and postneoliberal social orders. One compelling strategy they have deployed to do this turns upon the representation of right wing violence seen in Argentina under its last civil-military dictatorship (1976–1983) and its relationship to class and state violence in the present.² Etcétera... directs the powerful denunciation of state terror under the dictatorship that the Argentine human rights movement has popularized towards an analysis of class warfare as it has continued after re-democratization and deepened neoliberalization. In doing so, the artists challenge a powerful state narrative wherein Argentina’s neoliberal democratic order is represented as a historical phase that transcended a preceding stage of armed struggle, counterrevolutionary violence, and authoritarianism.³ In this narrative, the state-led violence that was visited upon workers and leftists during the dictatorship known as *El Proceso* (the Process, shorthand for *El Proceso de Reorganización Nacional*) is seen as a unique excess of an authoritarian regime, while the neoliberal democratic order that has followed is seen as post-violent. This narrative obfuscates the fact that the brutalities of the civil-military regime were the very condition for the implementation of a neoliberal political and economic project that was then radicalized under the democratic administrations that followed it.⁴ Its ideological representation of history, wherein historical progress is seen as transition between stages, colludes with and reinforces a liberal technocratic ideology wherein the economic order is represented as if it were autonomous of politics.⁵ As a result, the social order created by neoliberalization is seen as the outcome of market forces alone, rather than the result of a political and economic project of the ruling class that marshalled state terrorism, political genocide, and authoritarianism to guarantee its success. Etcétera...’s work challenges such ideological enclosures by showing how top-down class warfare continues

from dictatorship and democracy, notwithstanding differences in the uses it makes of the state or in the forms of violence it produces.

The way Etcétera... has reframed representations of violence under dictatorship in order to trace continuities with ruling class violence into the post-dictatorial present is exemplified by their guerrilla performance and act of public denunciation *Huellas del Ingenio* [Footprints from the Mill] (2000). In addition to being a conceptualist artwork, *Huellas* was also an *escrache*: a form of direct action that consists of a collective and public denunciation of an individual and the exposure of his or her wrongdoings.⁶ In post-dictatorial Argentina, *escraches* were a key tactic in the human rights movement’s efforts to bring to justice war criminals who enjoyed official impunity for their crimes for over two decades after the end of *El Proceso*.⁷ Through their participation in the human rights movement, beginning in the late 1990s, Etcétera... fused art and direct action by making their provocative and surrealist street theater function within *escraches*. In *Huellas del Ingenio*, the performance itself was the *escrache*. The target of its denunciation was Nelly Arrieta de Blaquier, a member of Argentina’s powerful agro-oligarchy and ex-wife of Carlos Pedro Blaquier. He is the President of the Ledesma Corporation, an enormous Argentine agribusiness and the most important producer of sugar in the region.⁸ *Huellas* denounced the Blaquiers and Ledesma for their profiteering from state terrorism under *El Proceso*. Moreover, the performance also uses the history of the Ledesma Corporation—up to the present—as an object lesson about the organic entwinement of violence and capitalist accumulation.

Etcétera... staged *Huellas* at night, at the entrance of Argentina’s Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (National Fine Arts Museum), where Blaquier was the long-standing president of the museum’s *Asociación Amigos* (Society of Friends). The artists used Ledesma-brand sugar to stencil a ghostly path of footprint silhouettes on the darkened street leading to the museum and then ascending its stately staircase. An Etcétera... member playing Nelly Blaquier carried a large golden frame around her own face as she followed the trail of footprints to the museum, as if anticipating the portrait paying homage to

Etcétera..., *Huellas del Ingenio* / *Escrache a Ledesma* [Footprints from the Mill / *Escrache of Ledesma*], performance in front of the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires, 2000. Courtesy of the Etcétera... Archive.



Blaquier's patronage that would be hung inside it. Other artists followed behind "Nelly," dousing the footprints in kerosene and setting them afire. This haunting nighttime scene made direct reference to the "Ledesma Blackouts," the name given to terror raids carried out in 1976 in several towns in Jujúy where workers of the Ledesma Mill live. During a series of planned blackouts in Ledesma, military agents kidnapped and detained hundreds of mill workers, dozens of whom were forcibly disappeared.⁹ Carlos Pedro Blaquier is accused of being an accomplice in these terror raids.¹⁰ Capitalists like him profited enormously from the state terrorism of El Proceso, which was targeted to repress workers' movements and stamp out resistance to pro-capital economic and labor reforms that eviscerated workers' rights, impoverished the working class, and constituted the beginnings of neoliberalization in Argentina. Since 1983, activists in the human rights movement in Argentina have carried out annual demonstrations on the date when the Ledesma blackouts began to demand justice for these disappearances. Etcétera... 's *Huellas del Ingenio* was part of a series of escraches held in 2000 that specifically denounced the Ledesma Corporation for its complicity in this episode of state terrorism.

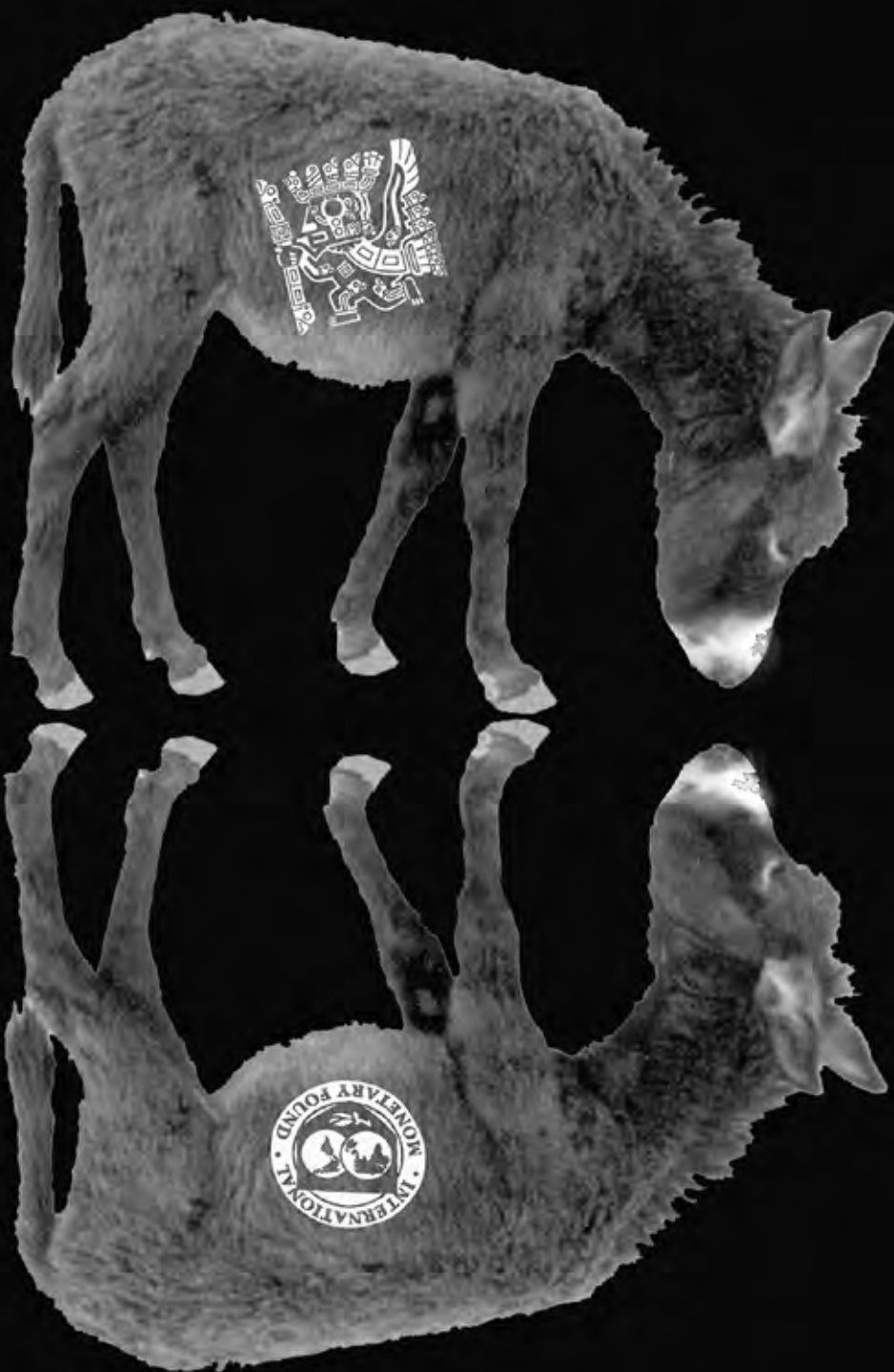
In *Huellas*, the footprint silhouettes stenciled in sugar symbolize workers disappeared in the Ledesma Blackouts, as well as workers currently working in the Ledesma Mill. Silhouettes encode the absence of the bodies they index. Within the Argentine human rights movement, silhouettes of human bodies have long functioned as signifiers of disappeared persons and have been used to make publicly visible the fact of forced disappearances that were denied by the state under El Proceso.¹¹ *Huellas* partakes of this aesthetic and activist strategy, which has served as a call for justice in the face of disavowal (during dictatorship) or official impunity (after the passage of military amnesties after re-democratization). At the same time, the footprints' medium—sugar—evokes those workers who currently work in the Ledesma Mill, as it is the commodity form of their abstracted labor. Thus, in *Huellas*, Etcétera... produces a materialist aesthetic-action, bringing together references to the mill workers who were assassinated in the 1970s with a critique of the current conditions at the Ledesma Mill, which operates now under different but just as deadly forms of violence toward the workers.

Human rights activists have brought into public awareness the fact that the Ledesma Mill literally poisons its workers and their families with the air pollution it produces, while rampant unemployment and poverty in the region surrounding the mill make workers there especially vulnerable to such deadly forms of exploitation.¹² *Huellas* traces the connection between two modalities of class domination: the use of state terrorism to discipline workers, and the disciplining of workers by systemic impoverishment—both of which enable the hyper-exploitation of labor by agro-capital (by the very same corporation, no less). This connection is made all the more salient by the fact that the pollution and occupational diseases to which mill workers are subject also bring

about their premature deaths, even if this form of violence is slower and less recognizable. *Huellas* mobilizes the affective force and moral condemnation associated with the human rights movement's critique of state violence towards a more capacious critique of capital and the violence of accumulation. It also reconfigures the temporality of the human rights struggle, suggesting that any reckoning with acts of violence committed in the past must also entail a reckoning with present conditions and relations of power made possible by this violence. Etcétera... 's work examines how a history of right-wing violence against leftists and workers impresses itself upon the present, making itself felt in the (only seemingly) disparate spheres of Argentine society—from the condition of agro-industrial labor to the hierarchies of the metropolitan art elite—"resonating" deeply with the counter-historical practice of Eduardo Molinari and his Archivo Caminante [Walking Archive].

Eduardo Molinari's work with the Archivo Caminante is a research-based inter- and extradisciplinary practice that integrates visual art, historiography, ethnography, literature, and walking in works that analyze specific conjunctures in Argentine and world politics in the context of centuries-long histories of (neo)colonialism, capitalist domination, and popular resistance. As Molinari's work investigates the ways neoliberalization has transformed Argentina's political economy, landscape, and culture, it meditates, in particular, upon the ways this is manifest in ideologies of history and uses of social memory. In his book *Los Niños de la Soja* [The Soy Children], Molinari suggests that the experience of neoliberalization in Argentina has worked to channel energies into "remembering [and displaying memories of] past struggles, instead of continuing them in the present." This results in the "transformation of these memories into mummies [similar to those exhibited in museums trying to account for the death of native [cultures of the Americas]]."¹³ Molinari's work with the Archivo Caminante can be understood as an attempt to reveal the mechanisms of this mummification and militate against it. His work brings into view the present-ness and relevance of political and social struggles, ways of life, and worldviews whose subjugation has operated within ideological representation as having been consigned to a past. Its formal and methodological characteristics—its fragmented, layered, and non-linear narratives, its cross-pollination of different genres and disciplinary knowledges—enable the representation of the presence and persistence of subjugated histories and knowledges that cannot be subsumed into dominant narratives of the nation, modernity, or development.

As the Archivo Caminante's work investigates ways the past is alive in the present, composing historical narratives that attempt to reckon with such communications and reverberations, it reveals relationships between colonial, neocolonial, and neo-imperial formations across time. The installation and book that comprise *Los Niños de la Soja* investigate the political, social, cultural, and environmental transformations that proceed from and enable export-oriented transgenic soy production in Argentina,



Eduardo Molinari / Archivo Caminante, *Plateado y real*, collage, DocAC/2004-2016. Image courtesy of Eduardo Molinari. This image appears on the cover of the Spanish edition of *El Libro Plateado y Real*. It speaks to the anti-neocolonial critique at the heart of the Archivo Caminante's work and, in the image of the mule, symbolizes its practice as one that conveys across time and space those things that are potential (and thus, very much alive) though latent in the past. Molinari describes the metaphorical character of the mule within his work "Like a mule, an animal equipped with a strong strong intuition that directs it when to move and when to stop as it traverses difficult mountain terrain, the Archivo Caminante transports latent memory-potentials from one place to another, from one person to another, from one generation to another" [Eduardo Molinari, "Transporting Potencies," talk delivered at Political Imagination & (im)possible Archives conference, University of California, San Diego, January 12, 2012].

which is paradigmatic of the financialized monocrop production whose ascendancy in South America has been a hallmark of neoliberalization. By moving through time with precisely composed and juxtaposed narratives and images culled from histories of colonization up through the 2000s, *Los Niños de la Soja* interrogates the neocolonial nature of this neoliberal agro-export model, as seen in the economic dependency it perpetuates, the penetration of national politics by the interest of transnational capital it foment, and the deepened colonization and commodification of nature on which it rests. It also shows how the industry's "conquest" of nature not only produces super profits for capitalists, but sickness, death, and poverty for the working class and poor, who are rendered redundant as workers and poisoned by industrial agrottoxins. Representing history in ways that can account for the persistence in the present of practices and ideologies that are normally represented as belonging to another time thus enables a wide-ranging critique of the machinations of capital and the reproduction through time of colonial relations and epistemologies. That critique equally focuses on ideologies through which the violence that enables accumulation is legitimated, naturalized, or rendered invisible.

In *El Libro Plateado y Real* [*The Unreal Silver-Plated Book*]¹⁴ Molinari investigates ways historical discourse silences or renders anachronistic certain collectivities, ways of life, and ideas, thus continuing in the realm of ideology efforts carried out through physical forms of violence like genocide, dispossession, and state repression. The book's fragmented and nonlinear narrative moves between the times and spaces of Spanish colonialism in South America; ideologies and practices of modernization in nineteenth century Argentina, including genocide of the indigenous population; popular insurgency, armed struggle, and counterrevolutionary state terrorism in the 1960s and 1970s; and, finally, the ravages neoliberalization brought upon Argentina's working class in the 1990s and the organization of subaltern-popular movements that resist it. In a narrative thread that addresses repression inflicted upon leftists during civil-military dictatorships of the 1960s and 1970s, the text suggests that state terrorism and political genocide not only aimed to eliminate persons, organizations, and movements, but ultimately, attempted to eradicate a political imaginary that sustained collective desires, worldviews, and subjectivities. History actually carries this effort forward, the text suggests, as the silencing of counterhegemonic and subjugated worldviews is enacted at every stage in the process of historical production, from the conceptualization of historical evidence, the creation and reliance on archives, to the conceptualization and composition of narratives. Thus, *El Libro Plateado y Real*, and the work of the Archivo

Caminante more broadly, suggest that an understanding of the circulation and renewal of counter-hegemonic ideologies, including radical left political imaginaries, as well as worldviews subjugated by colonialism, demands an interrogation of the production of historical discourse. Here, its affinities with the Pocho Research Society of Erased and Invisible History are most salient, as both projects render visible the systemic silencing that the production of history entails, while also making visible subjugated pasts that, though negated in dominant historical representations, nonetheless persist in other ways in the present.

Led by its founder Sandra de la Loza, the Pocho Research Society (PRS) produces artistic-literary work that throws light on the systemic invisibilization of working class Latina/o/xs in dominant histories and cultural imaginaries of Los Angeles. The PRS's work counters these erasures by appropriating representational conventions proper to official repositories of US history, such as monuments, museums, and state-commissioned memorials, to create its own critical and poetic memorials to the everyday life practices of working class Latina/o/xs. The histories commemorated are "invisible" because they pertain to pasts excluded from hegemonic representations of Los Angeles and the US Southwest, and because they pertain to subjects whose worldviews, practices, and places in the city are continually under erasure—where "erasure" describes a condition of representation, as well as territorial displacement and material destruction.

From 2002 to 2007, de la Loza and the PRS installed official-looking (yet wholly unofficial) memorial plaques at sites in various LA neighborhoods. The texts inscribed on the plaques offered fragmentary histories of spaces and practices that have sustained subaltern collectivities in the city. They also attested to long histories of geographic displacement that shape the lives of working class Latina/o/xs—from migration and exile to displacement caused by urban development and gentrification. For example, one plaque memorialized the migration to Los Angeles of Mexicans and Central Americans fleeing political upheaval, as well as migrants' day-to-day use of public plazas; another commemorated the city's displacement of a working class Mexican community to enable the construction of Dodger Stadium; and a series of plaques marked the former sites of bars and nightclubs that had been frequented by queer working class Latina/o/xs before gentrification shuttered them.

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Whereas traditional monuments function to naturalize the historical narratives they put forward and the spatial orders to which they correspond, the PRS's counter-monuments make visible the conflicts and the symbolic and material violence that attend the production, occupation, and control of space.¹⁵ This is seen in the way they historicize displacement and often commemorate places that no longer exist. It is also seen in the memorials' own guerrilla and ephemeral character. When the PRS's memorial plaques are inevitably removed, their removal symbolically reiterates the critique they are making about the erasure of subaltern Latina/o/x histories. This removal demonstrates how public and quasi-public spaces are controlled in ways that might not be readily apparent, as the historical and cultural meanings publicly ascribed to them are also an object of state regulation.

The PRS's Invisible Monuments function in a deconstructionist mode to supplement dominant historical narratives of nation-building and capitalist urban development, in which subaltern Latina/o/xs and their histories are identified as constitutive absences. In some cases, the PRS adds its own memorial plaques to sites that have been memorialized with official monuments. The PRS's counter-memorials attest to subaltern pasts and practices inhabiting the same sites, yet erased from dominant historical narratives. When read intertextually with the official monuments alongside which they were placed, the PRS plaques put into sharp relief the overwriting and invisibilization enacted by official history.

Sandra de la Loza / The Pocho Research Society of Erased and Invisible History, *El Otro Ellis* [The Other Ellis], guerrilla intervention in the Los Angeles Plaza Historic District, 2002. Photograph courtesy of Sandra de la Loza.



This strategic assertion of subaltern particularity—clandestinely erected under the guise of a historical society, moreover—comments on the emergence of universalized knowledge, especially as this is seen in the production of history and its constitutive erasures.

Etcétera..., Archivo Caminante/Eduardo Molinari, and the Pocho Research Society/Sandra de la Loza bring into view mechanisms at work in the production of history that silence and marginalize subaltern and counter-hegemonic pasts and worldviews or attempt to make them anachronistic. Their work also shows how complete subaltern erasure cannot be fully achieved by the dominant class and its aesthetic and narrative machinations. These counter-historical practices, which use methods of historiography, but refuse its disciplinary protocols, offer us narratives that attest to the persistence of fugitive pasts in the present, the resistance of subjugated worldviews to their total suppression, and the insurgence of marginalized knowledges from below and outside official circuits of knowledge production. Ultimately, it is the force of these subjugated pasts, their persistence and potential, that recruits these artists into the battleground of history.

1 Gabriel Rockhill, *Counter-History of the Present: Untimely Interrogations into Globalization, Technology, Democracy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 4.

2 Argentina's last civil-military dictatorship, known as the Proceso de Reorganización Nacional (PRN, National Reorganization Process), began in 1976 after a CIA-backed coup. It dissolved democratic institutions and used authoritarian governance and state terrorism in its efforts to eliminate socialist practices and ideologies in Argentina, break the country's powerful labor movement, and annihilate popular resistance to pro-capital economic and labor reforms that eviscerated workers' rights and immiserated the working class. Under El Proceso, the Argentine armed forces and their civilian allies used kidnapping, torture, and forced disappearance against guerrillas, leftist militants, intellectuals, students, labor organizers, and other workers. This political genocide resulted in the disappearances of approximately 30,000 people and the exile of thousands more.

3 Literary and cultural critic John Beverley argues that a neoconservative turn in Latin American cultural politics is evidenced in a widespread tendency to historicize the Latin American armed struggle in ways that combine a coming-of-age narrative in which the political ideals that inspired revolutionary movements are seen as a kind of adolescent romanticism with an evolutionary and stagist view of history, wherein forward movement in time is identified with progress and redemocratization and neoliberalization are seen as constituting a historical "stage" that transcended the stage of armed struggle. Beverley, *Latinamericanism After 9/11* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 98-100.

4 Argentine economist and historian Eduardo Basualdo describes the new model of accumulation installed under El Proceso as a "home-grown variant of a neoliberal plan," which was marked by financialization, de-industrialization, diminished employment, degraded working conditions, and an unprecedented redistribution of wealth at the expense of workers. Eduardo Basualdo, "El legado dictatorial. El nuevo patrón de acumulación de capital, la desindustrialización, y el ocaso de los trabajadores," in *Cuentas Pendientes*, ed. Horacio Verbitsky and Juan Pablo Bohoslavsky (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2013), 98-99.

- 5 Argentine sociologist Mariana Heredia argues that the dominance of this technocratic liberal ideology, which represents the economic order as if it were autonomous of politics, has been one of the fundamental continuities between Argentine society under El Proceso and the neoliberal democratic regimes that followed it. Mariana Heredia, "Ideas económicas y poder durante la dictadura" in *Cuentas Pendientes*, 63.
- 6 The word *escrache* means "to drag into the light" in Argentina's Italianate argot Lunfardo. It is the name given in Argentina to this form of direct action, which is practiced throughout Latin America.
- 7 After the passage of amnesties in 1989 & 1990 and until their annulment in 2005, formal channels for seeking justice from state institutions for war crimes were blocked in Argentina. In the face of official impunity for war criminals, escraches served as a form of social movement-based popular justice not dependent on state institutions. They consist of grassroots organizing around the home or workplace of the person being denounced to alert others of his or her crimes. These efforts culminate in a march to the person's home or workplace where the act of collective denunciation may include speeches, performances, dancing, chanting, and the marking of the site with red paint and graffiti. While they make a public demand that these persons be tried and punished by the state, the escraches themselves enacted a form of popular justice that brought about the exposure and social exclusion of fascists. See Maristella Svampa, *La sociedad excluyente. Argentina bajo el signo del neoliberalismo* (Buenos Aires: Taurus, 2005), 229-231; Raúl Zibechi, *Genealogía de la Revuelta. Argentina, la sociedad en movimiento* (La Plata, Argentina: Letra Libre, 2003), 50-53; and Mesa de Escrache / Colectivo Situaciones, *Genocida en el barrio* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones de Mano en Mano, 2001).
- 8 *Huellas* was part of a series of protests directed at the Ledesma Corporation to mark the history of the Blackouts. These included protests near the Ledesma Mill in Jujuy, which form part of a local tradition of protests and marches that human rights organizations have carried out since 1983 to commemorate the disappeared and demand justice for their deaths.
- 9 Alejandra Dandan and Hannah Franzki, "Entre análisis histórico y responsabilidad jurídica: el caso 'Ledesma,'" in *Cuentas Pendientes*, 218.
- 10 In 2011 Blaquier and Alberto Enrique Lemos, Ledesma's former administrative manager, came under investigation for their participation in the kidnapping and disappearance of 26 persons during the Blackouts, as well as for the earlier kidnapping of four leaders of the union of Ledesma Mill workers. See Dandan and Franzki.
- 11 The paradigmatic example of the use of silhouettes as social index and political icon is the *Siluetazo* (1983), a collective art action carried out by the human rights movement during the dictatorship in which thousands of life-sized silhouettes of human bodies were hung on public walls in Buenos Aires, representing the absence of the disappeared.
- 12 "Ingenio Ledesma: Una historia sin éxito y sin gloria," *La Normalidad*, ed. Gabriela Massuh (Buenos Aires: Interzona Editora, 2006), 163-166.
- 13 Eduardo Molinari, *Walking Archives: The Soy Children*, trans. Fernando Aita, (New York: Minor Compositions, 2012), 46-47. First published in Spanish as *Los Niños de la Soja* in 2010 as part of the exhibition *Principio Potosí*.
- 14 Eduardo Molinari, *El Libro Plateado y Real* (Buenos Aires: Goethe-Institut, 2004). *El Libro* was half of a diptych, *El Camino Real*, which Molinari produced for the exhibition *Pasos para huir del trabajo al hacer* as part of the ExArgentina project. An English translation of *El Libro*, including a new prologue by Molinari, was published as *The Unreal Silver-Plated Book*, trans. Brian Whitener (New York: Fiction Department, 2011) as part of the exhibition *Arrhythmias of Counter-production: Engaged Art in Argentina, 1995-2011*.

SANDRA DE LA LOZA + EDUARDO MOLINARI

b. 1968, Los Angeles, California, United States / b. 1961 Buenos Aires, Argentina

BIOGRAPHIES

Sandra de la Loza's work examines underlying power dynamics embedded in social space often drawing upon extensive archival research and mobilizing community-based networks. She is the founder of the Pocho Research Society (PRS) [2002], a project that explores the elasticity of the artifact and the mythmaking aspects of "History" through conceptual, performative, social, and aesthetic strategies that result in multi-media installations, video, photographic work, social engagement, publications, and public interventions. She also co-generates autonomous spaces for artistic production, community action, and critical dialogue. These efforts have resulted in collectively run community centers, pedagogical spaces, and multi-disciplinary events such as the *October Surprise* [2004], *Arts in Action* [2000-2004], *decolonize LA* [2016] and *at land's edge* [2016-2017]. Currently, de la Loza collaborates with a variety of groups including Everything is Medicine, the North East Alliance, and the School of Echoes to employ creative strategies to mobilize residents and shift the debate around gentrification. As a result, these collaborations produce alternative knowledges and practices to enact one's agency to reshape and redefine our relationships with the various social, cultural, and ecological landscapes we inhabit guided by a decolonial impetus.

Eduardo Molinari is a visual artist and research professor at the Visual Arts Department of the Universidad Nacional de las Artes (UNA), Buenos Aires. At the core of his work are walking as an aesthetic practice, research with art-based tools, and multidisciplinary collaborations. His body of work is made up of collages, photographs, installations, interventions in public space, drawing, painting, films, and publications. In 2001 he created the Archivo Caminante [Walking Archive], a visual archive in progress that delves into the relationships between art and history; and develops critiques of the dominant historical narratives, actions against the mummification of social memory, and exercises in collective political imagination. Since 2010 he has co-directed, with the artist and teacher Azul Blaseotto, the independent cultural space La Dársena_Plataforma de Pensamiento e Interacción Artística [The Dock_Platform for Artistic Thought and Interaction],

Buenos Aires, and the publishing house unproblema+. Between 2007 and 2008 he was a resident artist at the Akademie der Künste in Berlin and at the Weltecho Art Center, Chemnitz, Germany.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

In *donde se juntan los ríos: hidromancia archivista y otros fantasmas* [where rivers meet: archivist hidromancy and other phantasms], Eduardo Molinari and Sandra de la Loza deployed a decolonizing research-based investigation to explore the production of space and landscape as a historic and ongoing process in their respective cities, Buenos Aires and Los Angeles. Through constant dialogue in the form of “cartas caminantes” [itinerant letters], field investigations, archival research, and “encuentros” [encounters], a multitude of concerns surfaced including: the building of urban infrastructure both past/present, the relation between the city and nature, buried and living indigenous knowledge, extractivist economies, speculative housing markets and their impact on displacement and the re-figuration of the city, fights for space, the impact of agribusiness on landscape, invisible histories, moments of social destabilization with emancipatory impulses, and the role and responsibility of art institutions in these practices.

By engaging local actors, and visiting archives and sites relevant to their investigation, the artists gathered different types of visual, archival, sound, and textual registers that are woven into this installation/archive. Within their process, the idea of a *brujería archivista* [archivist witchcraft] and/or paraarchivismo emerged to describe methods deployed to both unlock and reveal obscured narratives and hidden ghosts embedded in archival material while simultaneously employing methods of ritual and reassemblage to explore how the material detritus of our past and present can serve as a smoking mirror to conjure visions, open portals for other modes of knowing, being, and envisioning that can guide future/present actions through the exercise of collective memory and political imagination

RESPONSE TO QUESTION

Art and learning are two sides of the same coin in our respective practices. Through the possibility of materializing our imaginaries, we believe that art provides an enormous potential for creating social change. The pedagogical triad of “informing, teaching, and transforming” is at the center of our work, which is always context-based. It is not a question of thinking of politics, memory, and history as “topics” or of representing anyone, but of being present with others in the daily construction of history itself. Research using art-based methodologies and tools allows for the creation and transference of knowledge, as well as the creation and strengthening of community bonds.

As humble artists walking in territories, sometimes overwhelmed by their scale and complexity, we carry out archival work as we try to be active and present in our historical moment and in our specific contexts seeking to inhabit the micro and macro dimensions that coexist in

them. We co-create social spaces in which we co-learn by dreaming, creating language, and doing. Through ways we cannot find anywhere else, we enact processes that are not clear or necessarily defined, but that take shape, appear, and disappear along the way. We continue creating our own structures, chasing ideas, conceiving ideas through materials, which inevitably mean that learning and teaching are always present. Our action demands reflection, and reflection leads to action.



(top) Eduardo Molinari, *Confluencia 2: Los Angeles River*, DOC AC/2016, collage.
(bottom) Eduardo Molinari, *Confluencia 1: Los Angeles Police Museum*, DOC AC/2016, collage.



WORKS

donde se juntan los ríos: hidromancia archivista y otros fantasmas [where rivers meet: archivistic hidromancy and other phantasms]

2016-2017

Installation of postcards, photographs, photographic collages, drawings, altar objects, ceramic objects, various seeds, paper baskets, woven palm leaves, obsidian rocks, painted banners, and soundscape
Various dimension [1](#)

Letter to Eduardo/Carta a Eduardo

2017

Digital Film

Directed by Sandra de la Loza



(top) Sandra de la Loza, *Confluence of the Arroyo Seco and Los Angeles Rivers*, June 28, 2016, photograph [1](#), (bottom) Sandra de la Loza, *Women's March, Downtown Los Angeles*, January 21, 2017, photograph [1](#)