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Protest action to demand the lifting of the
Endangered and Protected Species Act
for wolves in Asturias. Courtesy of *El Fielato*.

INTRODUCTION

The Wolf and Europe

He said the wolf knew nothing of boundaries. The young don nodded as if in agreement but what he said was that whatever the wolf knew or did not know was irrelevant and that if the wolf had crossed the boundary it was perhaps so much worse for the wolf but the boundary stood without regard.

—Cormac McCarthy, *The Crossing* (1994)

The story of the last wolf was set in the Castellana de Vieja and began with the great wolf hunt to exterminate a whole pack with the help of a *lobero*, nine wolves to be precise, but the *lobero* only killed seven, so the remaining two, a young female and an even younger male, succeeded in staying alive, though the locals didn't really understand how.

—László Krasznahorkai, *The Last Wolf* (2009)

On April 28, 2023, two wolf heads, one male, the other female, appeared on the steps of the town hall of Ponga, in Asturias, Spain. The composition of the scene was not only disturbingly violent, but also striking in its formal procedures. In the photograph that appeared in the local papers and eventually in *El País*, the head of a female wolf is resting on the marble steps. The stairs appear as lines of a musical staff or pentagram. Together with the governance and the laws the town hall building represents, they stand as a regime that integrates the decapitated head, one long, single monotone that

resonates in the imagination like a hammer. Yet this wolf head and the space note that she becomes refuses to stand still. She is at once a displacement, a spacing, and an interval that reminds us that even the steps are themselves a liminal space. They are not yet the building, but a means of access to it — one across which one can either enter or exit the building and everything it represents. The second wolf's head, a larger, male head, sits outside the bounds of the rectilinear formation — not completely assimilated by the emblems of the rule of law, but not entirely beyond the violence that sustains it. And this because, to continue with my musical annotation of the image, it is incorporated as a ledger note, situated along a truncated horizontal line that is simply an extension of the staff. It signals a border that must not be crossed. The threat, macabre as it is, is eloquent. Performative violence goes hand in hand here with an agile and effective visual literacy. It not only kills the wolves, but also, by choosing a male and female, figuratively kills the possibility of more wolves or even the idea of what a wolf is by arresting the relentless movement that defines it.

It barely matters whether these formal procedures are intentional or not; the fact remains that the image's composition is a perfect articulation of the logic of the border, an articulation where wolves have played a crucial role from the very beginning. This image thinks and makes us think with it, alongside it; it immerses us in the logic that makes it possible. It tells us what a border is by becoming a border itself and by perching us at the threshold of that border and the violence it summons. A border is a violent cut. This image thinks like an artwork, disclosing as much as it hides, presenting itself with the force of an enigma. Like any artwork, it far surpasses the intent of its maker. It is a force field that sets each of its components in tension with one another. It contemplates and demands us to contemplate its unpredictable and violent emergence.

The photograph ostensibly documents a protest and an act of civil disobedience. An action designed to become an image, to be

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disseminated and multiplied, it challenges the rule of law and its boundaries by becoming a wolf itself, by materializing what the protesters say a wolf is and acts like. The protest calls for the lifting of the Endangered and Protected Species Act for wolves in the Iberian Peninsula. Wolves are now returning to their habitats after becoming almost extinct because of excessive and indiscriminate hunting. The story, both of the extermination and of the recent returns, repeats itself across Europe, in all of Eurasia, and the American continent. The reactions these wolves invariably trigger are also variations of the same — fear, hatred, fascination, and an intense need for fabulation and symbolization. Their capaciousness as emblems and enigmas matches the force of the sentiments they inspire.

Even as emblems of the wild and the unknown, wolves remain unbounded by discourses or boundaries. Wolves exhibit their unruliness through semantic excess as a form of fugitivity. They appear as musical figures and musical puzzles, as essential actors in certain political philosophies, as encoded figures for immigrants and strangers, as nurturing animals, as predators, as victims of human cruelty, as sacred animals, as commodities in colonial trade, as fellow travelers in America and Europe's Indigenous genocides, as guides and guardians of the mysterious wisdom of nature and her unwritten laws. The list goes on and on.

Figures are dematerializations that demand a relentless labor of interpretation, a contextual mobilization that will bring them back to life as essential participants in the composite ecology of the living. When they manage to come back, they come, no longer as figures, but as shards of life, as remembered experiences of becoming. At once beings and symbols, nexuses for borders and struggles over sovereignty and meaning, wolves become a conceptual problem, as well, because they are never just one just thing. Nothing is, but wolves are particularly splintered figures, depositories of an imagination that cordons them off, but cannot do without them. I begin with this image as an emblem of what this book wants to explore and, above all, think with, and this because my reflections here, if

they are to be true to the questions they pose, must acknowledge the violence this image crystallizes. Not just the brute force that these two wolf heads inscribe, but also that of the ones that came before them and will surely come after and the things they are made to represent.

* * *

Europe and the Wolf: Political Variations on a Musical Figure begins by recuperating a baroque musical concept that acquires a renewed meaning amid contemporary aesthetic practices that seek to respond to the histories, violence, and promises contained in Europe, understood as the name for an ongoing conceptual and political problem. The “wolf” is the name baroque tuners gave to the dissonant and resilient sound produced in any attempt to temper and harmonize an instrument, the greatest challenge to the dream of complete harmonization.¹ By returning us to Pythagoras, and not just to his dream of absolute harmony but to his understanding of *logos* as music, interval, and number, the wolf becomes a solution, rather than a problem. The relational nature of this musical *logos*, a *metaxis*, transforms the task of tuning and harmonizing frequencies, pitch, scale, or temperament and deploys, rather than eliminates, the wolf by acknowledging that harmony is a carefully constructed acoustic fiction. This intervallic wolf, always present, but not always heard, is a form in flight, a border-crossing figure whose movement cannot be arrested and that always escapes capture.

The first mention of the wolf as a Western emblem of disharmony, however, predates tuning efforts against dissonant notes and comes from the Latin proverb “Homo homine lupus est,” or “Man is a wolf to man,” an endlessly appropriated and translated phrase that traces the pervasive fear and even hate for what is foreign and unknown, for what marks the borders of a community. Already in Plato’s *Republic*, the tyrant is transformed from man to wolf, initiating the lasting bond between sovereignty and lycanthropy — a bond always traversed

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by mimesis and metamorphosis. Plautus's variation on the original proverb, "A man is a wolf rather than a man to another man, when he hasn't yet found out what he's like," extends and interprets it through a mirroring effect: we are the wolves, and we become wolves precisely because of our fear of the unknown.² For Plautus, violence stems from the misidentification of the self and from its dissociation from the other, from its refusal to acknowledge that the other is already inside, already constitutive of the self. Thomas Hobbes also turns to the phrase in the dedication of *De Cive* in what is possibly its better-known version, "man to man is an arrant wolf," as well as the one most often instrumentalized by reactionary thought. Passing through Niccolò Machiavelli, Hobbes's sovereign and his brute, prosthetic, and artificial force mark him as a political animal that imposes the law by first breaking it.³ As Jacques Derrida puts it in *The Beast and the Sovereign*, unravelling the paradox that Hobbesian political philosophy so fully inhabits, "sovereigns and beasts seem to have in common their being-outside the law."⁴ Picking up and weaving the threads of the always proliferating European political wolves, he describes "political man as superior to animality and political man as animality."⁵ Hobbes's war of all against all, a world of men-wolves, still resonates in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, written between two world wars and during the rise of European fascism. There, Sigmund Freud famously echoes the original Latin proverb to explain the many forms of aggression and exploitation that plague group formations that deny their entanglement with others. As he puts it, "their neighbor is for them not only a potential helper or sexual object, but also someone who tempts them to satisfy their aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without compensation, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill him. *Homo homini lupus*."⁶ The wolf and its political genealogy is not exhaustive; it names a problem within the logic of community when that community is understood as the product of a social harmony predicated on the violence of exclusion and the expropriation of rights.

My mobilization of the wolf as an emblem that resists efforts to harmonize sound and to homogenize political communities activates all these resonances and adds a few more. The fact that not all notes can be reconciled in harmony or that musical codes or political community formations are not all-encompassing is materialized in the wolf as a conceptual emblem for various forms of disagreement and refusal. In the same way as the condensation of dissonance into a single note or interval — the exception that tempers the rule of harmony as a universalizing system and model — doubles as a mechanism of transference that allows dissent to persevere, the wolf as a fugitive figure carries within it the ability to transmit a dissent that can be politically resituated every time it is performed. As Derrida notes, “Without asking permission, real wolves cross humankind’s national and institutional frontiers, and his sovereign nation-states; wolves out in nature [*dans la nature*], as we say, real wolves, are the same on this side or the other side of the Pyrenees or the Alps; but the figures of the wolf belong to cultures, nations, languages, myths, fables, fantasies, histories.”⁷ In the artworks I explore, a logic of encryption is at play: the figure of the wolf intensifies and retains an exceptional but necessary dissonance that allows for it to travel nested in the apparent harmony of cultural legacy, political consensus, and community formations. It smuggles a figure of dissent into the uses of organized sound and organized political communities alike, enabling it to inhabit — sometimes legibly but more often surreptitiously — the claims to universalization of the European *nomos*.

The sovereign, says Carl Schmitt, is the one who has the right to suspend rights through force, and to suspend rights is fundamentally to erect a border, to be able to expel.⁸ To become identifiable as a sovereign — yet another baroque figure — to become the infrastructure that sustains both nation and state, means inevitably to enter the logic of enmity and exclusion. A projected but never actualized political formation, Europe is entirely articulated through the border, the most Eurocentric of concepts. The imaginary

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connotations of the wolf and its materialization in the person of the immigrant and the refugee are central to an understanding of how a political concept founded on the transnational and universalizing appropriation of the 1789 revolutionary Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen proves to be the condition of possibility of border formation and a politics of exclusion and coloniality. Europe is at present an uneven economic coalition with no political content or democratic legitimacy that finds its center in the oscillation between the reductive operations involved in the opening and closing of borders — under the euphemisms of free trade on the one hand and of safety and preservation on the other. The free circulation of currency and “European nationals” (a nomenclature that points to a contradiction) conceals the very real border that Europe is. An aggregation of national sovereignties is, in practice, a multiplication of borders — proof of Europe’s unwillingness or inability to supersede the nation-state.

While the Mediterranean has become Europe’s most deadly border, it is literally an invisible one. A tomb for migrants and refugees, it is a maritime space where the continent’s colonial violence continues to reverberate, entangling the old with the new and the dead with the living. The negativity structuring the slogan “no one is illegal” or the struggle of the *sans-papiers* is crucial to understanding its critical and political force. Like Derrida’s insistence on the acoustic polysemy of *à pas de loup*, at once a description of the stealthiness of the wolf and a marker of its absence, these enunciations of the political are a negation and critique of the universalism of the European *nomos*, unveiling sovereignty and the law as instruments of violence. What they propose is a reconfiguration and metamorphosis of Europe from an identity or legacy that must be violently protected because it is always “in danger” into an accumulation of exclusions that, gathered as a force of dissent, constitute an alternative and always growing community that truly transcends the nation as an organizing political principle. As the intervals that would structure this collectivity,

transit and absence are the vehicle of its becoming, the rhythms of a *pas de loup*.

Throughout, I will think *with* a select number of artworks that specifically experiment with Europe's musical legacy rather than give an art-historical or critical account of any of the artists, more accurately "producers," with whom I engage. I will treat these artworks as sites of intensity, of historical and layered density, that think, experiment, and compose through a complete immersion in the resonances of their specific contexts.

The book is structured in three movements, each of which includes interludes and variations that echo and multiply the main themes of the book — inheritance, collaboration, improvisation, violence — and the figures and tropes that repeat them with a difference — pianos, animals, bones, shipwrecks, demolitions. My subtitle, *Political Variations on a Musical Figure*, describes the configuration and structure of the project, a series of variations and relays between the musical and the political that in their complexity match the polysemic heterogeneity of the histories they mobilize. Like the artworks I think with, the argument of the book proceeds through layering, accumulation, and combination — procedures that allow resonances and echoes to proliferate and multiply as its pages and movements unfold. In the process, additional variations and associations are called into being — they take the form of interludes — and in this way match the underlying logic of complex, composite artworks that are produced as always expanding sites of encounter. My claim is that these transmedia artworks provide us with new relational compositional models that allow us to think through the aporetic logic of political communities that are wary of heterogeneity and to embrace instead endless metamorphoses that are both symbolic and material.

In Part 1, "The Labor of Sound: Pere Portabella and Carles Santos," I examine the work of the late musician and artist Carles Santos and of filmmaker Pere Portabella, particularly their collaboration on the film *Die Stille vor Bach*, and in Santos's musical theater piece

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La pantera imperial. Going back to their early anti-Francoist conceptual practices — which are fully mediated by their participation in the collective Grup de Treball — there is an emphasis on labor and value production that extends into all of their subsequent productions. For them, culture is never innocent, and it is one of art's tasks to uncover the violence that inevitably fuels cultural capital. Against the backdrop of several political benchmarks, including the fraught political context of European fascism, the Spanish transition to democracy, and the fall of the Berlin Wall, they turn to music as a historical archive of the failures of a European collective, a collective that has too readily forgotten the violence that structures it. For them, music is a fully socialized labor force that cannot be instrumentalized because it remains immanent and historical, even if contentless; it is this absence of content that allows for historical resonances to multiply and gather in the contingency of their work. In their works, the acoustic functions as a speculative form that sustains the political undertones of a musicalized labor. In their hands, for example, Johann Sebastian Bach becomes a threshold from which to question the logic of cultural patrimony and patronymics by refusing to cover up the violence it demands. Santos's lifelong engagement with Bach in his performances, his love-hate relationship with the composer's music, is above all an attempt to listen more carefully to the fractures that inhabit it by making the wolf tones that Bach's achievements in harmony and temperance were intent on making less audible howl again.

In Part 2, "Acoustic Relations: Allora & Calzadilla," I focus on the artists' exploration of the relations between music, violence, and the question of the animal. Their work is presented as a compositional arrangement of different forms of acoustic existence, of multiple ways of being in the world — forms of existence that range from the human to the animal, from the organic to the mineral. My reading untangles the historico-political potential of Puerto Rico's ambivalent status in the United States as "foreign in a domestic sense" as the archipelagic anchor of their practice. Following María

Zambrano's call for a nonsacrificial history — which demands thinking without the inherited thoughts of the Western sovereign subject that articulate sacrifice as a requisite of imperial politics and its logic of enmity and domination — and juxtaposing it to the archipelago as an alternative form of political organization, I read Allora & Calzadilla's production of acoustic encounters through the violence encoded in the musical archive they mobilize. This violence becomes legible not only in their engagement in different forms of colonial extraction but also with the destruction of nature that is the signature of colonialism. Their works seek to resurrect the force of this destroyed nature — to hear its traces, but also its survival, in demolition sites, in prehistoric caves, and in animals that strike back by exposing the long history of accumulated annihilations, making themselves heard through bones, fossils, and different kinds of remains and debris. Indeed, their works feature a veritable bestiary — vultures, dogs, bats, elephants — that signals the limitations of humanism's approach to the compositive environments the artists construct and sometimes simply occupy. They explore the role of music as an organism that functions like a multitemporal and polyphonic ecology that permeates our surroundings, even when we cannot hear it.

In Part 3, "*Inter Canem et Lupum: Anri Sala's Fictions*," I attend to the complex role of fiction in Sala's acoustic and cinematic assemblages, which also feature a bestiary that is simultaneously literal and symbolic. As in Allora & Calzadilla or Santos and Portabella, Sala's acoustic and filmic reconfigurations of a European musical legacy cannot be insulated from the political violence, national and colonial, it encrypts and deploys — Tirana, Sarajevo, and the Germania pavilion at the Venice Biennale form a nexus of that violence. Sala's treatment of different media (acoustic, cinematic, spatial) and of different discourses (aesthetic, political, historical) produces a series of relays that intensify their relational dependence on one another. It is cinema, however, that allows him to elaborate an internal version of time through the musicalization of the image. Music, in his works,

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becomes an unfolding anamorphosis of historical time that intensifies and multiplies its complexity through a cinematic mediation that allows him to move backward and forward in looping motions that contract and densify the musical experience of time, making it more opaque and less legible, but also phenomenologically richer and more textured. His collaboration with saxophonist Jemeel Moondoc, for instance, brings these all to bear in relation to Black sorrow songs and the disturbances that inevitably plague collective historical memory.

Finally, in a brief coda, I turn to Tarek Atoui's collaborations with Deaf communities in his expansion of hearing beyond the aural and in the direction of a collective swerve expressing an endless connectivity to our environment.⁹ Like all the artists I think with in the main three parts of the book and in the interludes that connect them, Atoui's speculations on a community briefly bound by the experience of listening are not *explicitly* political — they have no political content — but rather they are formally and *implicitly* political because they propose a composite and compositional organization that extends the logic of community beyond the logic of sovereignty, sacrifice, and identitarian exclusion.

The artworks with which I engage incorporate the wolves that Europe has willingly excluded through a series of historical and political choices. This is because they find in music the form of a promise that no longer thinks in terms of oppositions or of difference understood as inequality. Such promise emerges as a gathering force of historical relations that become manifest in collaborative and multimedia artistic practices. The speculative nature of these artistic approaches, with their layered acoustic and visual assemblages, enact a metamorphosis of Europe's musical legacies. In so doing they propose an imagined European community capable of surviving its foundational violence, a community that has too often been conceived either as a simple aggregation of wounded sovereignties or as an endless partitioning of these same sovereignties.

The collaborative relationship between music and cinema in many of the artworks I examine is also an exploration of their

differences, each of them underscoring the singularity of the other, a singularity that remains intimately connected to their technological mediation. I underline the exceptional and paradoxical nature of the cinematic as a visual environment for the political and experimental potential of this disjunction by following the figure of the wolf, an acoustic condensation that bears witness to the discontinuous and dissonant ensemble, the fragile organization of differences, that we call “Europe.”

The gesture is akin to understanding that Socrates learning to play the flute before his death is the *mise-en-scène* of a wordless and exceptional philosophical situation because it is conveyed in a medium other than the purely philosophical. In his reading of this scene in Plato’s *Crito*, Derrida transforms Socrates into a musical instrument and philosophy into music through the mediation of a dream and the delay the dream demands. Although Derrida does not make it explicit, this is, indeed, *logos* as interval. Socrates dreams that with the flute he has learned to play, he must compose a melody to the god that, delaying the arrival of the ship from Sounion, has temporally stayed the philosopher’s execution. “Socrates must thus transform himself into a musical instrument” to continue to do philosophy, but also to show, through this final metamorphosis, that philosophy is a kind of music, an interval, a delay, and a dwelling in place.¹⁰ Similarly, the collaboration between image and sound asks us to rethink cinema and music altogether: if cinema and music can be thought only in relation to other media, even anachronistic and obsolete ones, it is because their unfolding calls other media and singularities into being. Or to put it another way, these media bear their own wolf within them, a wolf that, fissuring them from within, opens up their historico-political potential through the figure’s latent mobility, metamorphosis, and heteronomy.

In the context of the acoustic turn taken by contemporary art practices, it is necessary to think about the specificity of sound as a mode of production, reproduction, and organization. Indeed, what Jean-Luc Nancy calls the “musical-becoming” of our times

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has changed the way in which we understand composition as a relational model.¹¹ Can we treat acoustic organization, its discontinuities and its complexity, as a blueprint onto which to project larger geopolitical forms? Is it possible to address Europe's failed political project through a musical understanding? The privileged relationship of music to number — think of scores, partitions, and algorithms — provides a unique representation of the contemporary economic realities that shape Europe's violent social and cultural legacy. The fact that European sovereignty is exclusively economic and that it functions fundamentally by tempering and harmonizing transnational fiscal dissonances underlines the centrality of musical models in our thinking of political communities.

The hour of the wolf is here the hour of the artwork, unsafe, because it belongs to the realm of the uncertain, the displaced, and the dissonant. Coming with the poetic presence of ghosts or artworks, wolves are ontological refugees. The urgency of rethinking European citizenship as open-ended is at the core of these artworks and takes the enigmatic shape of a wolf resisting harmonization, categorization, enclosure, and indeed any kind of limit or border. As Étienne Balibar puts it, “the relationship between politics and violence” is “illustrated by the operation of the ‘border’.”¹² Europe is fundamentally a series of operations of the border. However “harmonious” it may be in its conception, it consists primarily of an inscription of political violence, most often meant to domesticate the immigrant wolves at its borders or already within them. If these artworks incorporate the wolves that Europe has excluded, it is because they find in music a form that does not think in terms of opposition or exclusion, but rather emerges as a gathering of resonances that, woven together, become manifest in the imminent present of these collaborative practices.

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FIRST INTERLUDE

EUROPA 2005, October 27

This is not Europe gone mad; this is not aberration nor insanity;
this *is* Europe.

— W. E. B. Du Bois, *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil* (1920)

We need to reinvent borders, destroy the Europe of Dr. Goebbels.

— Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet,

“Questionnaire on Globalization” (2001)

On October 27, 2005, in the Parisian suburb of Clichy-sous-Bois, two Parisian teenage boys of Mauritanian and Tunisian origin, Bouna Traoré and Zyed Benna, were electrocuted as they fled the police. Their friend Muhittin Altun survived, but was severely injured. As they were trying to elude their pursuers, they had hidden in a power substation, where they were burned alive. Their deaths were the result of a legally sanctioned police hunt and sparked nearly three weeks of uprisings and violent protest across France’s *banlieues*. Vehicles and buses were torched, consumer goods destroyed — the highly visible violence was a television spectacle. There were thousands of arrests, a state of emergency was declared, and a curfew was imposed, based on laws passed during the Algerian war in 1955. Ten years later, the court in Rennes cleared Sébastien Gaillemain and Stéphanie Klein, the two police officers from whom the teenagers

were fleeing, of the charge of failing to assist someone in danger.

The 2006 short film begins and ends five times. Same place, same pan, repeated but not identical—proceeding like musical variations. Each time, a date—*EUROPA 2005, October 27*—which is also the title of the film, appears on the screen, marking the singularity of a single and unrepeatable moment in time that still somehow keeps starting over again. Each of the five iterations is a variation of an invariant cycle of violence. First, in a static shot, we face a graffitied sign, “STOP. Ne risque pas ta vie.” Then the camera begins to pan slowly to the right. It’s spring—we hear birds, see a line of blooming trees next to the cars parked by the sidewalk. The light is slightly different every time. It is almost peaceful—the violence here cannot be represented, but it colors everything we witness. In succession, we see another series of variations of the same scene: a metal fence, a locked gate, another metal fence, barriers everywhere. There is another graffitied sign on a large metal door, a large building behind it: “STOP. L’électricité est plus fort que toi.” There are electric towers in the background. The camera pans to the left. We are back at the first gate. The street is a cul-de-sac; it leads nowhere. A dog we cannot see barks every time we see the first sign again. It is either alerting us or guarding a gate, impossible to tell. These words, with the typographical disposition of poetic verses, appear on the screen: “chambre à gaz,” “chaise électrique.” It all starts again, one, two, three, four, five times—a cinematic accumulation. A little over ten minutes long, the film bears reference to a history of racialized violence, exclusion, and displacement.

Commissioned for Italian television on the centenary of Roberto Rossellini’s birth, *EUROPA 2005* is Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet’s final collaboration. It is their response to the neorealist filmmaker’s *Europa ’51*. Rossellini’s film, part of his war trilogy, is a parable and female version of his earlier *The Flowers of St. Francis* and is set in postwar Rome. The likely suicide of a boy who has survived bombings and the deprivations of war, echoing the suicide of another child at the end of his *Germany Year Zero*, is the event that unravels

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the film, triggering the transformation of the film's protagonist. In her mourning, Irene, the child's mother, played by Ingrid Bergman, a wealthy immigrant living with her diplomat husband, is now able to see another Rome, a city still at war. By 1951, after the irreversible shattering of a world war, the struggle has taken the form of a brutal class war amid Europe's postwar reconstruction. In this merciless city, lodged within the city she thought she knew, and with a Communist journalist as mediator, she meets parents who cannot afford the cost of medical care for their son, a single and poor factory worker with a large brood of adopted children, a dying prostitute, and a petty thief fleeing the police. Once she assumes a place in the factory assembly line, there is no turning back. Irene chooses — her privilege is that she still can choose — to identify with Rome's underclass, and the results are jarring in her milieu, intolerable. Her husband decides to lock her up in an asylum for the insane, where she will meet other women also vanished and forgotten. There she is visited by her working-class friends, who think of her as a saint, as otherworldly. In the last shot of the film, we see Irene behind the bars of the asylum's window.

Straub and Huillet remain faithful to Rossellini. They, too, are talking about Europe, not just Rome or Paris. This Europe has internal borders within its metropolises, frontiers that are heavily guarded by the police.¹ Their version, however, replaces Rossellini's Christian humanism and its redemptive undertones with political militancy. That they decide not to compromise in their last film together should surprise no one. These are not accidents, they tell us, but executions. Their film is also part of a series on the violence of the state, which, in their hands, is a war — organized, targeted, efficient, and under cover of the law.

EUROPA 2005, October 27 is often screened with Straub's 2009 *Joachim Gatti, variation de lumière*, which, less than two minutes long, acts like a coda to the first and insists on what is invariant in relentless variations of the same. The film is a static shot of a photograph of filmmaker Joachim Gatti on the phone, positioned to the left of the screen and framed inside a red screen — it is film

as an urgent political poster, a protest. Gatti was blinded by the police by a flash-ball gun during a peaceful protest in Montreuil, Paris. Straub's distinctive voice reads from Jean-Jacques Rousseau's preface to his 1755 *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men*. Evoking the European Enlightenment and implicitly its failure, he recites this passage on violence and inequality:

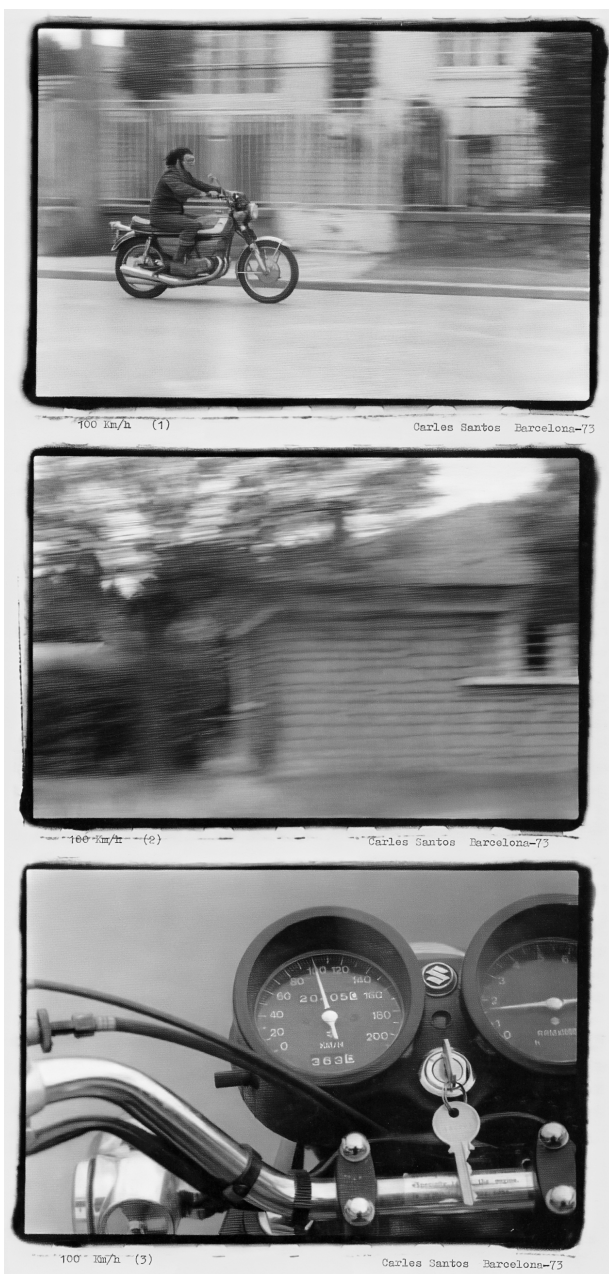
Only the dangers of society as a whole trouble the philosopher's tranquil sleep and tear him from his bed. Someone can slit his counterpart's throat with impunity under his window. He only has to put his hands over his ears and argue with himself a little to prevent nature, which revolts within him, from identifying him with the one who is being assassinated. Savage man does not have this admirable talent, and for want of wisdom and reason he is always seen heedlessly yielding to the first sentiment of humanity. In uprisings and street fights the populace assembles and the prudent man distances himself: the dregs of the people, the women of the markets, separate the combatants and prevent honest people from slitting each other's throats.²

Rousseau's text is mobile and speculative in its arguments. It relies on rhetoric, irony, and understatement and incorporates the ambivalence that the writer associates with philosophical statements in general. While it is a philosophical and literary text, however, it is not a militant one. It reinforces Straub's emphasis on violence and inequality as invariants that permeate the European Enlightenment, but in Straub's filmic jab, covering one's ears is not an option, and the idea of a self-regulating mass has become almost utopian. The "*reduction of politics to the police*" both simplifies and intensifies Rousseau's scenario. There are now only two possible identifications: either with the police or with the victims of the police in the permanent segregation of the *banlieue* and in the criminalization of its uprisings. Straub seems to be wary of any ambiguity in this context, a luxury he can no longer afford. After a brief pause, he indicts the violence of the police, sanctioned as it is not only by the state, but by the "Europe" of 2005, of 2009, and beyond: "And I Straub, I say to you that it is the police, the police armed by Capital, who kill."

PART ONE

The Labor of Sound:

Pere Portabella and Carles Santos



Carles Santos, 100 km/h, 1, 2, 3, 1973.
Performance documentation. Fons Carles
Santos, Caixa de Vinarós.

Bach at the Modelo

We do not understand music — it understands us.

— Theodor W. Adorno, *Beethoven: The Philosophy of Music* (1998)

I begin with a story the Catalan filmmaker Pere Portabella loves to recount, a story regarding avant-garde composer, artist, and musician Carles Santos's return to piano playing after a self-imposed hiatus that lasts three years.¹ In 1971, before Portabella's narrative begins, Santos decides to intensify his refusal to play and sells his piano, buys a motorcycle with the money he receives, and in 1973, records the performance *100 km/h, 1, 2, 3*. The piece consists of a series of photographed intervals of the pianist speeding on his new motorcycle, a view of his surroundings, now blurred and transformed by the rush of motion, and a close-up of the motorbike's speedometer. The metronomic focus of the piece suggests the transposition of musical technology and its temporal movements onto a motorized movement materialized in space, as well as in time — an allusion to early chronophotography. The speed indicator brings to mind the urgency of the piece's political and historical context — the last violent and agonizing years of Francoist rule in Spain — and suggests a revolutionary acceleration of history as an antidote to the ideological ossification of the regime.² It is also an artistic reflection on the question of what can and cannot be measured, on the hesitation between the calculable and the incalculable as the interval of the possible.

That same year, Santos devotes himself to clandestine political activities in order to put an end to Francoist rule. In October, he is arrested together with 113 members of the *Assemblea de Catalunya*, an anti-Francoist platform founded in 1971 and active until 1977,³

and incarcerated in the Modelo prison in Barcelona. Upon arrival, Santos cannot be fingerprinted by the police, because his daily piano practice, and this despite his motorcycle interlude, has worn out his fingerprints. As we will see later, this failure of biometrics resonates loudly in the context of the musician's investment in the impersonality and anonymity of artistic and political practices.

In the prison, his cellmate is none other than Portabella. It is here that the raconteur's story begins: on learning that somewhere in the building there is an abandoned piano, Santos decides it is time to play again. He proceeds to play an entire Bach sonata on a hopelessly out-of-tune piano, and in doing so, joins risk and violence to the act of playing, using virtuosity in defiance of itself. His playing is now of a different order, and it will remain so. He no longer plays the piano, but plays *with* the piano and even against it—as an incongruous piece of furniture in the prison, as a conceptual object, and as the symbolic carrier of a fraught cultural tradition and political order. He finds a way to connect his virtuoso skill as a renowned pianist to the political dissonances of the Spain of his time, transforming the concert form into a performative “action.” He deploys the disharmony of the wolf to intervene militantly in the biopolitical regime of a Francoist prison—forcing a listening that falls far outside the signifying references of the space where it resonates and, in doing so, emphasizes music's disidentificatory potential. His performance is at once an interpretation and a labor of composition that defamiliarizes both music and location. It is the expression of a musical inheritance that is set to work by unveiling the disharmony any legacy carries within it—by wrestling out into the open the strangeness in every patrimony.

In this instance, the unstable anachronism that exists between the production of sound, its resonance, its transit through space, and finally its reception by the ear calls into presence the dissident political community in the prison through the notion of an interval—through what is at once belated and new, too late and too early. This gap or hesitation, this unavoidable delay, is an important element

that underscores the temporal intensity of music and its unfolding — its capacity to make us feel time in the body through intervallic modulation. One could even say that music is a direct effect of these delays, intervals, and spacings. Or that in music, time itself becomes polysemic — rhythm and tempo, extension and contraction, regularity and variation, memory and anticipation. Additionally, the fact that in the Western musical tradition in which Santos is embedded, intervals can be viewed as either consonant or dissonant — can be perceived as antagonistic — is precisely what allows for the emergence of “wolves.” Wolves are another name for the encounter of these opposing beats as they clash together in disharmony and dissent, for the unstable border between music and nonmusic. Their howling is simultaneously the negation, the denial of a metric and its rules of containment, and the expansion of a structure that can no longer hold them inside it. It is also a multiplication of the uncountable — after all, when three wolves howl together, they sound like several more; their number remains forever uncertain. The impossible reconciliation between the one and the many structures the movement of the political and of the artwork itself.

In the prison, those who listen may well hear their dissent temporally echoed and amplified in every out-of-key sound Santos plays. They may even experience it as an acoustic and transient reenactment of their physical displacement, as an inscription of their multiplicity, alone, yet together, singular in their anonymity. The acoustic semblance of harmony is revealed here as an auratic mirage that echoes Spain’s vexed sociohistorical context, resonating with all its contradictions. Through Santos’s action, the listener, albeit briefly and in an intermittent refraction, recognizes himself (the Modelo was a male-only prison and a panopticon designed to increase a sense of isolation) through the critical distancing effect of having his own dislocation resonate in the dissonant sounds of the out-of-tune piano and in the newly found strangeness and splintered uncertainty of Bach’s music. If the political prisoner exists

outside the bounds of the prison as a political actor, that is, he has an active life that has been displaced elsewhere, Santos's militant mobilization of the emancipatory potential of an artwork, a deviation of Bach's music, in this case, functions like a heterotopia, or better still, as a practice and rehearsal of freedom. It transports the prisoners forward and elsewhere to a differential space-time that, until now invisible or inaudible, cannot be accounted for within the logic of a Francoist prison and does so through the free play of an unpredictable artistic action. It materializes the musical fugue as a flight, as an experiment and a speculative encryption of both freedom and its impossibility within material, formal, and ideological constrictions.⁴

Santos's piano performance embodies what Adorno calls "a desire for dissonances," an "expression of the suffering, simultaneously autonomous and unfree subject" for whom music "is Utopia as well as the lie that Utopia is here now."⁵ Political and aesthetic freedom are understood here as ephemeral and performative sites of production, aftereffects of a singular labor that cannot be predicted, counted, or extracted. It is this performative aspect of artistic practice, its engagement with its present context together with the demand that we somehow play along, but also move forward, that opens the door to political possibilities. It bears no relation to content or expression but rather hinges, in the words of Trinh T. Minh-ha, "on the complex task of generating, arranging, altering, arresting, modulating, inflecting, distorting, adjusting, tempering, perfecting, purifying, setting, and standardizing intervals."⁶ In other words, music always operates negatively and through silence—the source of its proliferating contentless content—and produces, above all, a condensation, intensification, and shattering of different temporalities.

Santos's expansion of physical and political spaces through acoustic temporalities implies a negative understanding of the artwork, and its unchosen legacies, that, as we will see, he shares with Portabella. Sound's ability to traverse walls and enclosures speaks

to an emancipatory potential that calls for a redistribution of a cultural capital no longer understood as a closed archive and no longer embedded in the logic of property and inheritance. Bach's music and the physical resistance to it performed by Santos's playing, in collaboration with the materiality of the piano's out-of-tuneness, transport listeners beyond the boundaries of the ideological and aesthetic harmonization of cultural patrimony, a form of unfreedom that both prison and concert hall eerily share. The duration of Santos's performance—he played the *entire* sonata, uninterrupted—takes the form of an attack,⁷ and his mobilization of the wolf underscores the violence of his musical charge on Bach's temperance and harmonization as carriers of a larger social and political normativity they often have been instrumentalized to represent, preserve, and transmit. Violence and rupture play a prominent and often playful and comical role in Santos's relationship to Europe's musical heritage, and his choice of Bach is key.

The Panther

Love, hatred, attraction, repulsion, suspension: all are music. The more the displacements one has gone through, the more music one can listen to.

— Trinh T. Minh-ha, *elsewhere, within here: immigration, refugeeism, and the boundary event* (2010)

This little book is a *great declaration of war*, and as for sounding out idols, this time they are not just idols of the age, but *eternal* idols that are touched here with the hammer as with a tuning fork.

— Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Twilight of the Idols: Or, How to Philosophize with a Hammer* (1899)

According to art historian Fèlix Fanés, when Joan Brossa—a visual artist, early cinema fanatic, magician, playwright, mainstay of the Dau al Set, principal instigator of a conceptual Catalan avant-garde, and one of Santos’s future collaborators⁸—met Carles Santos in the Barcelona of the 1960s, he demanded a piano recital. In such encounters, Brossa often called for a performance as a “carta de presentació” (formal introduction). The young avant-garde pianist and composer, who had studied with John Cage and was successfully introducing Fluxus noise music and Minimalism to the hungry and stifled Spanish audience of the *tardofranquismo*, responded by playing Bach.⁹ The notoriously demanding Brossa retorted to the virtuoso display by simply declaring that Santos clearly knew how to play the piano and then provocatively asked, “*I ara què?*” (And now what?). Santos’s lifelong engagement with Bach’s music, his love-hate relationship with it, can be understood as a protracted attempt to answer this question.

Bach himself advocated on behalf of the new technology that resulted in a tuning that compromised the Renaissance pursuit

of pure fifths in favor of a system that eliminated wolf tones and facilitated the development of modern tonality. Bach is the crucial figure in baroque aesthetics because he employs traditional forms — the fugue, most of all — in the service of a new technology, an intensified formal speculation, and a modern harmonic system. His music resounds simultaneously forward and backward in progressions and inversions, augmentation and diminution — musical figurations that recur constantly as variations and contrasts in his compositions. Santos's relationship with Bach is crucial in understanding what one might call, with Adorno, his "musical conduct" and, with Baruch Spinoza, his *affectus*, that is to say, his being at once affected and affecting. While the loops that adorn the first page of Bach's "The Well-Tempered Clavier" visualize a circular temperament where all keys sound in tune and produce a loop of call and response that harmonizes them, Santos reminds us that despite Bach, and maybe because of him, not all sounds — and the cultural capital they are made to carry — can be reconciled in harmony.

Santos's rendition recalls Bach's towering figure in the dream of harmony and the fragility of such a dream in the context of Europe's cultural legacy. With Bach's developments in harmony, which call musical modernity into being, dissonance is neutralized, integrated, and subsumed into a larger system. Harmony becomes an ideological mystification that in turn echoes a fabular idea of Europe. In addition, the connection of Bach to imperial ideology and its logic of domination, on the one hand, and to subservient artistic labor, on the other, holds the key to Santos's 1997 musical theater piece *La pantera imperial* (*Dedicat, com el 1802, als "admiradors patriòtics del vertader art musical"*) (The imperial panther [Dedicated, as in 1802, to "patriotic admirers of the true musical art"])¹⁰ — one of his first collaborations with Mariaelena Roqué, responsible here for the costume design and art direction and a turning point in Santos's increasing dramatization of the musical. The title of the piece refers as much to Bach as it does to the piano, the instrument that entirely mediates Santos's relationship to Bach. In fact,

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Zone Books series design by Bruce Mau

Image placement and production by Julie Fry

Typesetting by Meighan Gale

Printed and bound by Maple Press