Deconstructing Tercerunquinto

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Much of Tercerunquinto’s work around the turn of the millennium was characterized by a talent for capturing the palpable relations of neighborhood. This intervention was made particularly explicit in a project called *Vicelincio* (2007), a word that carries, on the one hand, to a specific kind of multi-family housing unit arranged around a central patio, prevalent in certain lower income neighborhoods in Mexico City, or, on the other, to more general notions of scarcity and neighborhood. For this project, the artists prompted negotiations between the owners of two adjacent prefabricated housing units in order to reconfigure the wall separating their property, adding additional folds to its surface without altering the square footage of land occupied by either one. With an eye to the operation of the barrier in the collective’s work, it might be tempting to read the angular form of the reconstructed wall as a first architectural step on the evolutionary path toward a defensive parapet for each neighbor. The most salient aspect of *Vicelincio* on the contrary, is that Tercerunquinto assumed the position of a third party, virtually and affectionately between two different actors in the artists' architectural intervention was but a pretext for a social process, which inevitably became the core of the piece: by contrast to *Trabas para puerta*, which materialized the imaginary relationship between a sender and his target, *Vicelincio* orchestrated an act of mutual accommodation, the practical territorial outcome of which being quite deliberately nil.

Vicelincio was not the first time that Tercerunquinto had staged neighborly relations by spatializing them, putting them on scene. One of their more powerful actions, Proyecto para MUCA Roma (Project for MUCA Roma, 2004), had already utilized negotiations between neighboring sets of actors to reconfigure and re-humanize the barrier between them, if only temporarily. For this project, the artists sought to transform the space of the Museo Universitario de Ciencia y Artes in Colonia Roma, an outpost of Mexico City’s Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, by converting it into a storage space for a group of merchants who sold their wares at artisanal weekend markets on the median that bisects nearby Avenida Dírigente.

According to Mariana David, then curator of the MUCA Roma, the project involved negotiations with several actors, including the Legal Department of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, “since temporally extending its exhibition space to commercial use made it vulnerable to legal suits.” Individual vendors were eventually made to sign short-term contracts before they were assigned a padlocked storage space within the museum. The negotiations leading up to the exhibition lasted longer than the exhibition itself. The incorporation of participants in Mexico City’s bustling “informal economy” into the so-called space of museum used the effect of putting the vendors—however briefly—as-à-av with university officials, museum staff, and the city’s art-going public. Similar processes of negotiation have been crucial elements of a number of Tercerunquinto’s recent works, notably *Inelegibility: Consulado General de México en Miami* and *la exposición México: Sentencia Negativa*. Proyecto para Museo de Arte Álvar y Carmen T. de Carrillo Gil (2007), a word that can refer, on the one hand, to something that is never complete, which reflects our way of producing. The lewsene “Tercerunquinto” itself offers a handy illustration of what Demida was describing. In an interview, the artists gave an idea as how they understand their name, which has often been rendered, somewhat misleadingly, as “Third of a Fifth.” In Julio César’s words, “Tercerunquinto” is “like dividing a whole into five parts and then naming each of the parts made up.” Gabriel Cazáres continues: “Primeroquinto, segundoquinto, tercerunquinto, *Finosina* [thirdfifth], *seconfinotrinquinto*. It also refers to something that is never complete, which reflects our way of producing. Here the artists instruct us in how to parse what they themselves typify as a single lewsene unit: “Tercerunquinto” is to be read as “terce un quinto” (rather than, for example, “tence润inqito”). Regardless of the graphic decision to erase or to close the implied spacing within the Spanish syntagm “tercer un quinto,” that spacing continues to operate (in Spanish speakers, at any rate) at the level of signification.
The spacing procedure that distinguishes these projects from the breaching procedures described above implies, again, a relation to phenomenonality. Spacing—the blank interval that separates the words on this page, these very words, here—is precisely the non-phenomenal, that which does not disclose itself to sensory experience. The impossibility of a brute that would articulate these two different procedures has become evident only in some of the artist’s most recent projects.

Whether or not the artist had intended it to be so, the failure of Wall To Fail (2009) was justified by its own title. The proposed work was to be part of Desertion to Revolution, an exhibition curated by James Voorhies at the Columbus College of Art & Design in Ohio, as part of the Venice Open City Initiative. The artists proposed to emblazon the eponymous words—quoting Michael Coleman, the mayor of Columbus——as undivided lexemes was the artists’ or the interviewer’s. See Ricardo Porrero, “Contrato colectivo de trabajo: Entrevista a Tercerunquinto,” Estudios Politicos del Sur, vol. 2, no. 3, 2007.

The spacing procedure thus articulates this brisure that has been repeatedly underscored by the artists. In the interim it had been restored to its original brilliance, articulating two different procedures has become evident only in some of the artist’s most recent projects.

“The impossible is the final death, the necessity of destruction for existence.”

It was foretold by its own title. The proposed work was to be part of the artists’ performative gesture, to emblazon the eponymous words—quoting Michael Coleman, the mayor of Columbus——as undivided lexemes was the artists’ or the interviewer’s. See Ricardo Porrero, “Contrato colectivo de trabajo: Entrevista a Tercerunquinto,” Estudios Politicos del Sur, vol. 2, no. 3, 2007.

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No young artist can resist a $50,000 cannon blast, 2012. Installation view at Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, part of the group show Resisting the Present, Mexico 2000-2012. Courtesy of the artists.