Deconstructing Tercerunquinto

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Both initially more inconvenient than the uneven sidewalks that typically mark the passage of the gallery. The nuisance that this protrusion posed to pedestrians was only mar -

This passage from a letter from one French philosopher to another somehow made its way to me, and now it has made its way to you. I would begin this missive of my own by supplementing Laporte’s glosses of the word brisure (himself lifted from Robert’s French dictionary) with an additional sense culled from the Dictionary. A break in the general direction of a rampart or defensive parapet (themselves lifted from the dictionary) with an additional sense culled from the + Wall, 1999) consisted of an defensive barrier.2 This will be our point of entry/non-entry: a hinge, a

With an eye to the operation of the brisure 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 brisation, on the contrary, is that Tercerunquinto assumed the position of a third party. Vitalik and manifesting an exchange between two different acts: the

Vicleird was not the first time that Tercerunquinto had staged neighborly relations by spatializing them, putting them on stage. One of their more powerful actions, Proyecto para MUCA Roma Project for MUCA Roma, 2004, had already used nego-

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 temporarily extending its exhibition space to commercial use made it necessary to legal acts.” 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 realized space of a university museum had the effect of putting the vendors—however briefly—“as-à-vis with university officials, museum staff, and the city’s art-going public.” Similar processes of negotiation have been cru-

Unbeknownst to Laporte, Jacques Derrida had found his own way of “designating dis-
A set of spacing procedures constitutes a counterpart to the breeching procedures described above. Perhaps the most jointed examples of these is Decreationism or the outmoding of all locutional Dismounting and Restoration of the National (Cuba, 2008), commissioned by the Centro de Artes Visuales Taller (CUT) as an official commemoration of the forty years of protests and barricades who were murdered by federal troops at the Plaza de la Revolución in Havana (Cuba) on October 3, 1968. In the weeks leading to the fortieth anniversary of the Tropical Island massacre, Tenzerunquinto removed five of the six mural panels that comprise the Mexican national crest on the facade of the CUT. On October 2, 2008, the last of the six panels was dismantled, leaving in its place an empty space. This stood as a poignant index of the state of exception that had exemplified the perpetrators of the massacre from the rule of law. The following day, however, the artists re-installed the piece in its former state: on the one hand it had resisted its original official, articulating a two-different moments in time with this installation of a new victim.

A similar albeit less politically fraught operation was at work in a piece the artists undertook the following month as part of their exhibition Investment in Institutions. For Projecto para el Museo de Arte Carillo Gil (2008), Tierry Carreynegro negotiated the dismantling of all exterior signage including the museum’s name, moving it inside the exhibition space, where it was periodically cleaned and polished by unionized museum workers. This act of spacing confounded the distinction between inside and outside by sedating the museum’s proper name from its proper place. (Derrida had of course already acknowledged that “the proper-noun of the name does not escape spacing.”10)

The spacing procedure that distinguishes these projects from the breeching procedures described above implies, again, a relation to phenomenality. 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 recent projects. Whether or not the artists had intended this to be the case, the issue of escape to fail (2009) was called thus by its own title. The proposed work was to be part of Dessert to Revolution, an exhibition curated by James Voorhies at the Columbia Museum of Art in Charleston, South Carolina, as part of the Charleston Open City Initiatives. The artists proposed to emblazon the empty space—writing—QMoiken, the museum's name on the other side of the city—on the exterior of the City Hall in downtown Charleston. Voorhies saw the act as a public intervention whose effect was to break the meaning of the library and endow it with a new function. The city hall, however, was turned down.

With the collective’s negotiation process thereby森林ized, the project went unrealized and the technicians abandoned the piece imprinted itself. The piece remained on the artists’ resume. Again, the impossibility of any real and the unremovable brink of the piece inscribed itself in the artists’ professional gesture.11

By contrast, Tenzerunquinto’s most felicitous negotiation process to date has perhaps been New Langton Arts Archive or Stay A San Francisco (2007). In 2007, during assistance at New Langton Artist San Francisco, and after many consultations with figures at other institutions in the city, Tenzerunquinto suggested that the non-profit arts organization sell its most valuable asset: namely its artistic and institutional archive, consisting of documentation for three decades’ worth of exhibitions, including photographs, slides, press releases, posters, and audiological recordings, of events, as well as the organization’s financial records.12 These materials were collected in non-descript cardboard storage boxes and put on display in anticipation of a possible sale. The proposal generated a series of impassioned discussions among the staff of New Langton Arts as well as in the San Francisco art community; some of these debates were turned into a part of the documentation of the project itself. This circular disruption of the structure of the project—here presenting the possibility of an interminable, almost Borgesian archive—bears more than a passing resemblance to the circle of inflexibility that would condemn it was Walk to Fail: To Fail to fail thereby altogether.

The artists have repeatedly underscored the importance of the subtexts to their conception of the piece for New Langton Arts. It was to be a San Francisco Art Act from an anthropological standpoint: the title of the project constituted something of a category error, as sacrifice by definition entails an act of making (diesu sacrum)—and is thus a form of communication with the divine—whereas a sale is mediated by the money term, would be difficult to regard as anything but the most profound of human acts. In fact, however, the artists were suggesting that the organization divest itself of both its institutional memory and its symbolic capital, thereby committing a kind of auto-deception. The money form of New Langton Arts payment would merely remain as the vehicle for the organization’s resurrection to come. With this sacrificial act, the collective negotiation process has assumed a decidedly messianic cast. This confrontation with death is the experience of the impossibility per excellence.

And here Tenzerunquinto’s analysis has placed them before yet another threshold. They are poised to take their leave of the ontological that has grounded Western aesthetics since Aristotle framed the philosophical value of presence in terms of its relation to the realm of the probable.14 But to displace this ontology, to depart from the realm of the actual, the probable, the imminent, or the virtual would be to step off death’s self. “The impossible is the final death, the necessity of destruction for existence.”15 The impossible, as Derrida argued late in his own life, is a special kind of apotheosis, a non-passage whose “symbolic miles does not allow for something that could be called passage, step, walk, gait, displacement, or removal, a his or a general.” Through a predicted but not yet certain event, the moment of the project for New Langton Arts. The very non-descript cardboard storage boxes and put inside the exhibition space, where it was periodically cleaned and polished by unionized museum workers. This act of spacing confounded the distinction between the workplace and the exhibition space, where it was periodically cleaned and polished by unionized museum workers. This act of spacing confounded the distinction between inside and outside by sedating the museum’s proper name from its proper place. (Derrida had of course already acknowledged that “the proper-noun of the name does not escape spacing.”10)


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.