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IMPOSTURE

"When useless servitude has been alleviated as far as possible, and unnecessary misfortune avoided, there will still remain as a test of man's fortitude that long series of veritable ills, death, old age and incurable sickness, love unrequited and friendship rejected or betrayed, the mediocrity of a life less vast than our projects and duller than our dreams; in short, all the woes caused by the divine nature of things".

Memoirs of Hadrian, Marguerite Yourcenar

INTRODUCTION

This title emerged from a recent interview (1) in which my background in the 80s was analyzed within the social, cultural and political context of the Basque country. At that time, I began to explore different ways of expressing myself, such as through language. Since I began, I declared myself an aesthete, an essential attitude that I've always tried to harmonize with my artistic practice. In the interview, I explain how within my own social environment, I was considered an impostor. This was because my attitude did not reflect the reality imposed by my position in society, gender and place. Because I transformed my experience into symbols. Since that moment, what for others meant imposture—a false authenticity—for me became art.

The word "imposture" has served as a motto, or better said, as an intangible material that has allowed me to make art during this time. It's an echo. A thought floating in the air and rousing shapes that has made me capable of creating a story in time and space. I would like to outline the impetus and ideas that have gone hand in hand. Most of all, I am going to quote others, since I feel it is the best way to describe how the world of others represents me. I'm fascinated by the genre of biography. Even in the most poorly written biographies, the protagonist always has an enlightening idea that redeems the book. I don't believe in "idols" because calling them such makes them seem unattainable. When I've met someone famous, I've looked into their eyes as if to say: "I am the same as you." There are certainly people who are influential to others. It doesn't matter if they are wrong. They are people who frequently appear in your life again and again. Both anonymous and

known. Perhaps it is there, in a world comprised by the traces left by others, where everything makes sense.

“FAKE MENTORS”

“And I take on the presence or absence of he who is: dead, a skeleton, in rags or a trace.”

Maruja Mallo

“To many people I was a heretic. A heretic is a woman who is put upon in all she does, a woman who is frightened. Everywhere she goes, she goes against the heavy beat and footsteps of those she opposes. Maybe she is a heretic in a religious way, maybe in a social way. I felt at time I was a heretic. I was outside of the realm of women. I did not dance the way that people danced. I had what I called a contraction and a release. I used the floor. I used the flexed foot. I showed effort. My foot was bare. In many ways I showed onstage what most people came to the theatre to avoid.”

Blood memory: An autobiography, Martha Graham

“People's lives should be as interesting as their art”

Genesis P.Orridge

When a person themselves is the art, they distort themselves and overshadow the interpretation of the piece.

Hannah Wilke’s chewing gum wounds (*S.O.S Starification Object Series, 1974-1982*) remained in the background amidst the beauty of her self-portraits. Her work was only understood once she was diagnosed with a deadly disease and she addressed her decline through her art. It was then that her explicitly female genitalia sculptures were better understood. Tiny vulvas placed in different areas stripped the mysteries and taboos that were hidden directly in the center and inside of the body. My eyes, my neck, my shoulders, my torso, my chest, my back...my very skin are my other uteri, she seemed to claim. The erogenous map she sketched was more detailed than the anatomical surface itself. It seemed that the more she stripped herself, the more she became obscured. We see what we project of ourselves. Bodies are flesh-coloured mirrors. She fought—as did many other artists of her generation—to break through the barrier of “respectability,” the patriarchal millstone that has forced women to conceal their desires and obsessions. It is not only men who perpetuate this false dignity but also the mothers, wives and daughters who subject themselves to it.

“There is passive art and aggressive art, and what we do is aggressive art...”

Wendy O. Williams

The common trend implies destroying, under order, "the aesthetic." The creation of a style implies, for many people, the absence of thought, and thus the absence of work. It could be seen as a non-conformist response to the art market. How can the productive time of an artist be measured?

A dandy, for example, is generally somebody whose eccentricity and attitude are considered his only merits in life. An artist is valued only for their artwork; the rest is considered an anecdote. People talk about Maruja Mallo's makeup in a patronizing manner, though it was an inherent element in her work. It's not difficult to understand that Francis Bacon also painted when he hung around with hustlers.

In literature, there are people who simply want to live and appreciate themselves through their everyday acts. Some people are incapable of putting into practice wisdom gained from the books they've read. However, there are people who are intuitively gifted in inciting universal emotions. It's not only content that defines a work of art, but also the perspective.

"I write to have somebody. Everything I write has a motive behind it. I write in the same way I perform. I mean, you only perform because you want people to fall in love with you. You want them to react to you."

Patti Smith

Experiences don't guarantee a language. It is the writer who gives transcendence to little things, those which—if the main characters themselves were responsible for narrating their lives—would go unnoticed. The sum of the unnecessary can engender the essentials.

"I try to find the difference in each body, in unsatisfied consciences, in bad form, in what others call shortcomings, in all of these attributes which lend character to a personality. That's why outsiders and people with bad reputations are drawn to me."

Tainted Life: The Autobiography, Marc Almond

Borges spoke of poetry during a lecture as a (2): *"Fickle, winged and sacred thing"* and recognized Oscar Wilde as a profound writer who tried to come across as frivolous. Borges said, *"Wilde realized that his poetry was too visual and intended to cure himself of that defect. He wanted to make poetry that was aural."*

The struggle between the aesthetic and the poetic is latent in every work of art. The adjective "decorative" becomes a real nightmare, which artists run away from in terror. There's an expression that illustrates this sense of panic: *"It's too much."* No, it's never too much. Structure, colour and form are the key.

From where and why is the desire to develop a personal testimony born? It's necessary to examine urban sub-cultures born out of a need for self-expression. Many times, it has to do with lack of fantasy among the working class.

These are not purchased aesthetics, but rather aesthetics developed as a means for survival. There is a conscious abandonment of the worker's attire—representing austerity and sacrifice—for one that's made up and lacking in functionality. A reaction to what must not be done. Among the working class, it's a sacrilege to stand out; no one is special. It is similar to how a disease works when it strips human beings of their desires. It's interesting—we must abandon functionality to let another use emerge, so that it becomes a tool for life. To create a piece of fiction from its origin is an artistic work in itself.

Two aesthetic behaviours that survive different iterations and emerge on the outskirts are heavy-metal and punk. Enemies to each other, both explicitly grant agency and leadership to the men who are part of these cultures. When there is a shift that stirs the foundations of an era, it is often wrongly attributed to men. The credence of "do it yourself", which relates to many contemporary movements—not just punk—is what women have been always doing since the beginning of history.

It is often said that Sex Pistols (without a doubt, a band with one of the best styles ever), were a group of space cadets hanging around. They'd buy clothes at Vivienne Westwood's shop *Sex*, while daddy McLaren sought to capture their chaos. How clever. Objects of envy. The production of the album *Never Mind the Bollocks* is neither considered to be particularly polished, nor to have much art behind it.

Vivienne Westwood (3): *"Technique was something I learnt working with Malcolm. He showed me that creativity isn't a mystical process. You don't really have to have an idea. It's the way you do something that becomes the idea in the end. It's ultimately technique which generates ideas, not ideas which generate technique. The form is the idea... With technique you never run out of ideas. As you cut and measure and look at fabrics, ideas come and associations are suggested..."*

This statement contradicts the lack of technique, the official definition of what punk seems to be. How can an artistic expression based on the notion of "I don't want to be filtered to be understood" get beyond that? Because they represent an era and most of all, because they appropriate a universe that belongs to them.

Malcom McLaren (4): *"At the beginning of the seventies, when I had left art school, that meant to me Brian Ferry. It meant to me green velvet loomed pants. It meant to me hippies, bright young*

things, social realism, the American flag, television and PG ratings. The first T-shirt I designed was purely about trying to determine that if you were to wake up one morning and find which side of the bed you'd been lying on, you'd know that there would be a list of either "good" names or "bad" names, and that list was the beginning of me deciding how to use "bad" and make it work in a way that ultimately might change culture itself. In that list there was a name—the Sex Pistols, which meant to me all sort of things. It came about by the idea of a pistol, a pinup, a young thing, a better-looking assassin, a sex pistol. And to launch the idea in the form of a band of kids who could be deduced as being bad was perfect, especially when I discovered those kids had the same anger as I did. And they could possibly help me to keep dreaming, and make me refuse to ever return to what I was terrified of normality."

In art conferences aimed at collectors, among the list of concerns about what to purchase, a recurring question arises: "*But, what guarantee is there that an artist will be a valuable asset?*" Among responses that relate to the market, one timidly tacked on at the end should really be the most important one: "*That the artist represents his own world.*"

In the documentary "*Until the Light Takes Us*," (5) about the origin of black metal, some of the genre's cutting-edge bands talk in first person. An aesthetic consciously inspired by darkness, silence and the romantic landscape of Nordic countries. Their first works were intentionally poorly produced. They start from a material more or less planned, without stiving for anything too contrived. They seek to restore the beast. Tension always arises when artists delegate the finishing touch to someone else. The idea to "do as badly as possible" would soon become a signature notion emulated by followers over and over again: voices from the grave, lyrical features from Scandinavian literature, fake satanic rituals, male-only bands, long hair, tight-fitting trousers, spiked wristbands, white make-up, cattle eyes, mouths poorly painted in black, etc.

It's very easy to copy an aesthetic appearance, or steal an appealing look—but bringing something to the table is much more complex. Impersonating someone else is possible in the most superficial sense. Maintaining it is another story. Persistence is what legitimizes the path of an artist.

At the end of the documentary, when Frost, *Satyricon's* drummer, does a performance in an art gallery, it's quite pathetic. His shadow appears among the sinister light of a candelabra before the expectant eyes of the world of visual art, with fog machines simulating the cold north, spitting fire after a few swallows of gasoline, burning posters of portraits on the wall, stabbing a sofa, cutting himself with a dagger, etc... People applaud.

This represents what the others expect to see from the stands, the perversion observed from a distance. It is the artist-clown figure that Bruce Nauman and Paul McCarthy have subversively

represented.

Lou Reed's music is fascinating, and how we long for the explicit biographical part in an album as forceful as the 1972 *Transformer*, though in all sincerity, would you want Lou as a neighbour when he was singing *Walk on the Wild Side*? In *Transformer*, we catch a glimpse of the people at the *Factory*. The place was the perfect breeding ground for their individuality. "Weirdos" understand each other very well.

Lou Reed was asked in a 1974 interview: *"Does your music have a message? No, he replies. How could you explain Transformer? A fleeting moment—I'm not there anymore... People I hang out with, and my origins are very present. I wasn't looking for credibility, I just cared about what I liked... Bowie had tons of fans... I never had that kind of empathy with the audience, and all I got were pieces of fruit and cigarette butts thrown at me."*

It was a woman, Angie Bowie, who was responsible for Bowie's and Reed's clothes, make-up and haircut at that time.

The spectator dares to look at the abstract space where the artist births his work. And this place is not exactly a studio with octagonal walls. An impoverished translation of the appearance arises from that look.

"What do you spend your money on, Mr. Reed?..." "On drugs," he replies. The journalists laugh. Society calls for an artist with good behaviour, who doesn't cause problems—just a mere supplier who shows up on time and offers perfect service, like a plumber or electrician.

"We always suffer from our father's submission and abuse... Our pleasure is the ultimate revenge."
-Lydia Lunch

Among artists, categories of art don't exist as a communication barrier: "social," "minimal," "conceptual," "objectual," "relational," "political," etc, etc. It's simply art. The key of an artist lies on their talent. Talent is measured by other artists' validation. It is not about creating work that is similar, but rather promoting an intense dialogue from the difference.

There is not just one creative and impeccable life full of wise decisions. Artists are very hard on themselves. They are obliged to confront their own mirror, to sustain their universe. The key element is not the exhibition spaces that society deems so prestigious in an artist's career. What is really crucial are the experiences they live and how they turn them into tools. It doesn't matter how many experiences the artist has had, how many good or bad critics—any new exhibition gives an artist the sensation of starting over.

If someone feels within themselves that they have “done their homework”, they earn a reward that drives them to keep on working. When one is not satisfied, it is because they are not honest. Many doubts arise during the creative process. Being incorruptible is the hardest. The best way is not to surrender to others' judgements. In this sense, artists have the right to make mistakes (6). The greater the knowledge, the less that is known. You learn that the search for one truth doesn't exist... nobody is right. History is carved in the darkest and most fragile lines of human nature. Both male and female identities are unstable and their fluidity must be perpetually questioned.

NOTES

1. “Interviews with Two Basque Artists Ana Laura Aláez and Azucena Vieites”, *N.paradoxa: International Feminist Art Journal* (London), vol. 34 (July 2014), Lessons from History pp. 5-15, Zoe Bray / 2. “Conferencia sobre la ceguera”, Jorge Luis Borges, August 1977, Teatro Coliseo, Buenos Aires / 3. “Vivienne Westwood: Fashion, Perversity and the Sixties Laid Bare”, Fred Vermorel / 4. “Please kill Me: the uncensored oral history of punk”, Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain / 5. “Until the light takes us”, 2008, documentary, Aaron Aites and Audrey Ewell / 6. Exhibition (Curator: Manuel Segade): “Haber hecho un lugar donde los artistas tengan derecho a equivocarse”, *Historias del Espai 10 y el Espai 13 de la Fundació Joan Miró*, Barcelona, 2014