

*The Texts Collection* is a program that accompanies and amplifies artistic practices by generating a collection of monographic texts for Hangar residents. Each artist has the possibility to commission a text about their work from an author of their choice—local or international; known or to be known—in editorial dialogue with Hangar. The intention is to produce publications on their practice in general—beyond this work or that particular work—designed for agile circulation and reedition, ensuring a long life, and contributing to expanding the networks and frameworks of artistic practices.

Through this editorial device, artists can count on a comprehensive and in-depth text that captures their ways of doing and thinking holistically, integrating different projects to build an overall view of their practices. The *Texts Collection* also provides artists the opportunity to establish a writing relationship as a starting point, rather than as the result of a project or exhibition.

# Quantity Stress<sup>1</sup>

## Marta Sesé

The writing of this text attempts to somehow replicate one of the methodologies of Juan David Galindo (who works under the name Un Juan—“Just a Juan”).<sup>2</sup> So the idea is to accumulate layers, to assemble voices: my own voice, that of Un Juan, the voice of the theoretical and artistic influences that resonate in his body of work—or take us by surprise by association, however tenuous—and the singular tone of the voice of the works themselves.

As such, this text is not intended to be an in-depth exploration of the themes addressed. Instead, it draws together many of the inputs generated during the writing process, harnessing all the stimuli that may perhaps, some time down the line—a *calm*, almost unattainable time—allow us to delve much more deeply into each of the themes that Un Juan’s body of work is capable of bringing up. An image: an internet browser with *too many* tabs open.

In a broad sense, or at a glance, Juan David Galindo’s work sheds light on the frameworks of power and control that condition our lives, giving them opacity. From considering the overarching umbrella of capitalism to zooming in and seeing it as the intersection of many powers and control strategies: consumption, identity linked to social media, and the productivity and hyperactivity that define the continuous present in which we live. His observations and analyses are based on experiments and dynamics that take place in specific contexts, thus shedding light on the inherent qualities of particular forms of violence. Two early projects illustrate this: *Juerga preventiva* [Pre-emptive Party] (2016) and *Acción el primero de mayo* [Action on the First of May] (2015). In the first, Un Juan marks out a square in a public space and invites a group of people to dance to one song, and then immediately disperse—an ephemeral occupation that conjures an exceptional moment of collective euphoria. The second takes place in the metro and involves carrying out an act that is usually done in private—cu-

1 The title is a direct reference to one of the images in Javier Peñafiel’s *Víctimas de diagnóstico* [Victims of Diagnosis] series (2006).

2 See *Get into The Zone* (2022) by Juan David Galindo <https://www.unjuan.com/get-into-the-zone>

tting one's hair—in a public space. The action generates a certain tension and brings home the quiet violence that characterizes these environments, where the standardisation of behaviour quickly highlights-controls-monitors exceptionality of any kind. In a formal analogy, this work makes me think of María Sánchez's *En todos los lugares a todas horas* [In all places at all times] (2016)<sup>3</sup>, a subtle action in which the artist, in the metro, removes a single hair and leaves it on a stranger without him noticing, and watches him for short while to see whether this hair that was formerly a small part of her body-identity remains in place or falls from its new body-medium.

### On Consumption-Identity-Productivity

In *Reificación* [Reification] (2016)—a pivotal work in his career—Un Juan thinks about the political and global implications of consumption in each of our actions. In this video-essay, he removes all the objects and items of clothing that he wears or carries on him on any given day and carefully arranges them on the floor. At the same time, a voiceover reads out different kinds of information relating to his underpants, sourced from various sites on the internet. The body is a point of convergence of the violence of capitalism and he asks himself: what is the process by which I become a capitalist subject?<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, in *#menorca, 15 de agosto 2020* (2020), Juan David Galindo generates an archive of the more than one thousand photographs that were posted on Instagram on the date mentioned in the title, 15 August 2020 (bearing in mind the significance of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020), with the hashtag #menorca. This mass of images reflects the shift away from traditional photo albums and also the consequences of the current means production and reproduction of images. The convergence of amateur and professional and consumer and producer blurs the boundaries of the personal, intimate realm. All of which reinforces the fact that the value of

3 See *En todos los lugares a todas las horas* by María Sánchez <https://vimeo.com/96473026>

4 See *Translating (with) Frank* (2020): <https://vimeo.com/465833008> by artist and architect Diego Morera. This research project in the form of a video essay explores the urban and productive implications of the use and consumption of apps that are ubiquitous in our everyday lives, such as the app for food delivery service Deliveroo. In the description of the project, Morera mentions the efficiency—fast and temporary—of the algorithm to optimise productivity, an aspect that is also linked to recent work by Un Juan.

privacy has been on the rise for quite some time. The notion of privacy on the Internet is somewhat (totally) illusory, and the use of digital technologies enables an extremely sophisticated control structure.<sup>5</sup> The archive of images that makes up this piece makes it clear that “picking up your mobile phone and taking a photo is not even a habit, it's a knee-jerk reaction. But photographing ‘anything’ [as in banal aspects] is not just that, and it is not as innocent as it sounds. Those any ‘things’ are the fragments that make up our personal life. When we post these images we are giving out information: what kind of food we eat, what cat we own, what metro line we take to go to work, what time we wake up, and so on. As such, this stream of images, which we initially probably intended to share with friends, can eventually turn into a source of surveillance and power exerted over us. For the simple reason that we cannot control the ultimate use of those digital images, and we fail to consider how another person, an intelligence service, or a business can profit from this voluntary documentation of our lives.”<sup>6</sup>

In a fragmented and discontinuous conversation on Whatsapp, I ask Un Juan, who is about to board a plane: *Like a hidden trap, to what extent does consumption have to do with a sense of self-governance, of decision-making capacity and the opportunity to express an image or construct a self-image?*

With one click you can flag that you've just left a relationship, report that you've joined a study group, share your new music tastes, post a new photo, show any new changes that you want to show. I think the problem is that it creates an impression that the whole of life is one click away if you can afford to buy it, and that impression is false. I mean, we can't all decide what we can end up becoming, and this process never happens at a click.

### On Identity-Productivity-Consumption

The construction of the individual and of digital identity (if there is enough difference between them to warrant this distinction nowadays) is another recurring element in Juan David Galindo's work (always connecting and in-

5 See José Luís de Vicente and Gema Galdón (eds.), *Anonimizate. Manual de auto-defensa electrónica*, CCCB: Barcelona, 2014. Available at: [https://www.cccb.org/rcs\\_gene/18-Anonimizate\\_def\\_CAST-ENG.pdf](https://www.cccb.org/rcs_gene/18-Anonimizate_def_CAST-ENG.pdf)

6 Alejandra López Gabrielidis, “Visibility and Surveillance Regime in the Age of Digital Identity” in *Teknokultura, Journal of Digital Culture and Social Movements*, Vol. 12(3), 2015, pp. 473-499. Available at: <https://revistas.ucm.es/index.php/TEKN/article/view/50385>

tersecting with the other aspects mentioned here). Two significant projects in this sense are *De Urobóros y quimeras* [Of Ouroboros and Chimeras] (2017) and *El Otro de Ellos y el Yo* [The Other of Them and the I] (2018). The first presents a narrative made up of videos appropriated from YouTube, which explores how social media influences the construction of the individual and the power relations that take place in the internet's notion of community. The second project takes the form of an archive of the ads that the Facebook algorithm showed Juan David Galindo over a one-year period. This archive functions as a kind of self-portrait based on the interpretation of the data generated by the algorithm to offer each user the products and services that match his profiles. A kind of swap takes place: we provide information about our tastes and biological details in exchange for an image of ourselves that invites us to consume in order to fulfil our identity. Instead of encouraging specificity and difference, this data is usually organized into segments that end up standardising aesthetics and experiences in line with the category we are assigned to. These works by Un Juan bring to mind Penélope Umbrico's *Sunset Portraits from Sunset Pictures on Flickr* (2010-current), an ongoing project in which the artist collects all the images of sunset images posted on Flickr. Each photograph is taken by an individual asserting their own particular sensibility and individuality in response to a "unique moment", which blurs into the mass of the algorithm and the platform's search criteria.<sup>7</sup>

Continuing the conversation with Un Juan, I ask: *What do you make of the fact that social media has given rise to a multitude of identities that we supposedly see ourselves reflected in? Is there a connection between the identification-generating strategies used by these platforms and those used by nation-states?*

I'd like to paraphrase something Mark Zuckerberg said in a speech at Harvard in 2017, something like "every generation expands the group it considers 'one of us', and right now that generation encompasses the entire planet." Those words made quite an impression on me. I think he was referring to two things: on the one hand, Silicon Valley's idea of the construction of a new kind of global person, and on the other hand, Zuckerberg meant it as a promise—a promise of connection for humans. I think that this idea of the construction of the individual is presented as an opportunity to overcome the limits of the past, be they cultural or to do with tradition, families, or coun-

<sup>7</sup> See *Sunset Portraits from Sunset Pictures on Flickr* by Penelope Umbrico at <http://www.penelopeumbrico.net/index.php/project/sunset-portraits/>

tries. And also as an opportunity for individuals to create a new, globalized identity—to become digital natives who are motivated, who can work, who are self-taught entrepreneurs. I'd also like to mention the Cambridge Analytica scandal, which proved that several political parties were using Facebook as a tool to offer people different types of advertising based on the platform's audience segmentation-classification. It's curious, because this kind of multitude-identity created by Facebook is a continuation of the modern Western order, but it is also an evolution. In both cases, there is a crystallisation of identity. By crystallisation I mean that a particular identity materialises in a person or a social context by means of certain rituals, certain objects. We already know how national identity behaves, with national anthems and patriotic pride. And in the case of Facebook, it takes the form of the materialisation of a personality based on their likes and dislikes. Both cases involve a process of anchoring the self in the constant flow in which all beings live, changing from one state to another. Both Facebook and national identity create the idea that there is always something else beyond the present. We can picture a pigeonhole structure, or a grid, in which each individual has an allocated space for their own identity, but the space and the way of filling it is exactly the same for everyone. It is interesting to study the change that took place in social media—represented specifically on Facebook—which involved fixing or linking a profile to each person, with a name, an ID, a phone number. Imagine if there were social media platforms in which we could invent an avatar or a person who has no connection with us, with another name, or even imagine ourselves as another species. But no, that's not how social networks have developed. Instead, they've developed precisely with the idea of identifying users and making sure that the user is the person they claim to be, and this is something that states and institutional organizations are starting to use: tools to pay rent, to travel, to open a bank account... I think there's another relationship there: the inability to imagine ourselves other than as we are, and the legal relationship of proving that we are who we are.

## On Productivity-Consumption-Identity

Sustaining our digital and physical identity—responding to the imperative to consume in order to satisfy the self-image reflected back at us—plunges us

into a high-speed continuous present that demands our constant attention. This cycle of saturation, hyper-productivity, anxiety, depression and exhaustion is the current focus of Un Juan's artistic research. Once again, this is an element that runs through all his works, but we can look at two that directly highlight this aspect. On the one hand, *Seasteading* (2018), a video-essay based on videos of idyllic beaches as symbols of the desire for relaxation, through which Un Juan explores sleep and insomnia in the context of semiotic overproduction and overstimulation. On the other hand, *Get into The Zone* (2022), a project whose title is a phrase some programmers use to refer to the particular state of stimulation and concentration that enables hyper-productivity. This recent video-essay explores various neuropsychiatric states produced as a result of attention capture in screen-based work and leisure, such as attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), occupational burnout, hyperstimulation, anxiety and depression. This "new" social regime that can be described in terms of overload and saturation is also one of philosopher Franco Bifo Berardi's lines of research. He writes, "The entire media system has been mobilised to expand on the promises of enjoyment, but this acceleration of the information-flow has overloaded the capacity of human attention, thus ever postponing the possibility of pleasure, which has ultimately become unattainable. This social regime has led to the configuration of a new psychopathological regime, which has characterised the last few decades: the age of panic, depression and, ultimately, psychosis."<sup>8</sup>

*Finally, I ask Un Juan: Do you feel hyper? Is there a relationship between your productivity and the return it generates? Are you able to channel your "excess" energy into non-productivity?*

Although it may seem contradictory, going fast and having excess energy doesn't always lead to greater productivity. In fact, it is often the exact opposite, i.e. excess energy makes me unproductive because having a lot of energy and being unable to focus it or channel it into paying attention, is extremely unproductive. If by productivity we mean finishing something concrete. I think it's interesting to consider that productivity needs an individual who is not just productive, but also focused. And for this to happen... I don't know. For example, I was considering whether it makes

8 Franco Bifo Berardi, *The Third Unconscious: The psychosphere in the viral age*, London: Verso, 2021, p. ix.

sense to think about the effects different substances have on people. On the one hand, stimulants—from coffee to amphetamines—help people focus. But I was also thinking, if I can bring up the cocaine-individual, about the effects of cocaine. It is both a stimulant and an anaesthetic. I think this says a lot about the kind of construction of the individual that the system needs in order to be productive, right? If we were all extremely hyperactive, we might not be able to produce anything. We might be too anxious to sleep.<sup>9</sup> A certain amount of hyperactivity, focus and anaesthesia is necessary in order to sustain the productive state. In this sense, I think hyperactivity is closely related to precarious work, which makes it necessary to have five projects going at the same time in order to make ends meet, to have enough energy and income to allow me to satisfy my basic needs of housing, warmth, food, entertainment.... So this intensifies the high-speed feeling. The high-energy cycles also generate a "comedown" or slump, such as the need to sleep a lot of hours to be able to sustain very long days full of activities. It's not just an energy slump, but also an emotional slump, doubting that what you do has any meaning. So I think that energy hyperproduction goes hand in hand with existential depression, a sense of meaninglessness. And that's where I think there is an interesting state, if we can somehow abandon productive processes and embark on processes of self-care. This is a shift in priorities that I find interesting. I can see an opportunity to break free of the trap of hyper-productivity, to turn our backs on certain promises, certain meanings.

This "turning our backs on promises" that Juan David Galindo talks about is directly associated with Bifo's "possibilities of pleasure" in the aforementioned quote. In this sense—and also invoking the Bartleby's "I would prefer not to" as written by Herman Melville almost two hundred years ago—I end with a quote from an essay by Remedios Zafra on the potential of stopping or disconnecting: "I believe that managing this disconnection is a fundamental tool for free thought today. Even when it means accepting a supposed 'failure', according to which you either push yourself to the limit all the time or you are worthless: either you are visible and productive at all times or you disappear. I am suggesting that disconnecting and 'failing' or 'giving up' can be the cornerstone of a possible emanci-

9 As soon as Un Juan mentions sleeplessness, I am reminded of [ASMR] Reading You To Sleep. Soft Spoken Relaxation About Affective Capitalism (2020) by Gloria López Cleries, which can be directly linked to Juan David Galindo's *Seasteading*. See <https://glorialopezcleries.com/ASMR-Reading-You-to-Sleep>

pation. Reclaiming time and rejecting hyper-production matters. Turning away from the screen and towards the person next to you matters, coming up with political collectivity matters [...].”<sup>10</sup>

Translation into English by Nuria Rodriguez Riestra

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10 Remedios Zafra, “La expectativa cruel” in Marta Echávez, Antonio Gómez Villar and María Ruido (eds.), *Working Dead. Escenarios del postrabajo*, Barcelona: Ayuntamiento de Barcelona, Instituto de Cultura, La Virreina Centre de la Imatge, 2019, pp. 92-93.