

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.

Writing An Essay About and With Luz Broto

Martí Manen

Talking about Luz Broto's work means participating in a series of secret glances, proposals for scripts (with their requisite twists and turns), tangents and various movements. Her artistic practice defies tidy categorisation, instead carving out its own timelines, proposing new ways of doing things. You could parse it through an architectural lens or a sociological one – or one that is social, political, narrative. Poetic. The approach oscillates between warm and cold, intimate and distant at the same time. No contradiction this, simply life's inherent flux. The encounter with Luz Broto's oeuvre may be a fleeting moment or one that never ends. It could materialise as an inscribed line, a wall that grows, an exchange of keys, a rope or a void. Perhaps it represents a way of working from a sense of both smallness and grandeur. Her work extends an invitation to look at reality with fresh eyes, pausing and sweeping aside much of what we assume. Indeed, Luz Broto's art is a constant invitation to look and re-look, to shed preconceived notions and plunge into a desire for discovery, a desire that simultaneously maps a travel through time from who you were long before you saw the installation to who you are long after.

I ask Luz Broto about lines and perspectives. I wonder about how she sees things, how she relates to the world. From the family home and village where she grew up, Luz says: "I remember thinking about this in the shower of that house when I was around 18. Studying the brown tiles in the corner, I thought about how I could represent what I saw, not just the tiles, the flowers, the light reflecting on the water and the drops, but the frame of the viewpoint, the periphery, a slice of my nose, my cheeks, the fringe that perhaps blurs the image. How to include the frame within the representation". A complex perspective that seeks to try and understand the very act of looking, what we can discover, the elements that make up the world and how we relate to them.

Perspective implies action, a point of view charged with subjectivity. But Broto's work pursues crossroads, scenarios where both gazes and gestures, buildings and cities are aware of their potential to be structures affected by chance and desire, will and belief. Through her projects, Luz Broto offers an

opportunity to rediscover through a shared perspective that dismantles what we look at, who we are and where we are. “I think this is something I try to do with my projects: to look at the nose of the person who is looking, the one speaking, enunciating...from what body, structure, system”. Luz reminds me that years ago, I once defined her work as “a series of moments that change everything”. And perhaps that’s it – the possibility of change, the latent potential that the impossible is possible. Dismantling structures and norms by rendering them visible through minimal gestures. And seamlessly beginning anew.

Joan Brossa spoke of the austere gestures of visual poetry and performance. Austere gestures that allowed a small community to share a moment, to create an escape. Luz Broto recalls: “I remember traveling by metro, by train, during my university years. There were times when there was contact with the other, when there were intimate glances, bodies in contact, conflicts and collusion as well”. Moments that can pass by unnoticed, moments that—by their own fleeting nature—move in fragility. Remembering striking moments, revisiting situations to redefine places and contexts. To observe and allow others to observe, to shift to a secondary plane from which you can—again—observe anew.

Perspective. The act of looking. A shift of planes. Luz Broto achieves a kind of prestidigitation in many of her pieces. Suddenly, the work itself disappears. All the tremendous effort, all the preparation, the entire team of people and the research required to (first) understand a concept and (then) disrupt it through a situation, all withdraw to allow for unobstructed observation. And herein lies enormous generosity: the situations that the artist manifests do not end with the situation itself but open up to much more. This tiny gesture¹ (which requires intense preliminary work to be tiny) paves the way for a continuation, weaves itself with reality and spreads throughout the environment. It is not easy, yet it is simple – and again, that is no contradiction.

Tensar una línia entre dos interiors paral·lels. Prolongar els pilars. Exposar les columnes (Tensing a Line Between Two Parallel Interiors. Extending the Pillars. Exposing the Columns) are three propositions, or titles, of works by Luz Broto that “disappear” to make room for everything else to be there. *Tensar una línia entre dos interiors paral·lels* was a 2018 project completed in

1 We have been talking with Luz Broto about the concept of gesture. Luz asks me what this word means to me. Gesture for me is transformation, it is action, it is going from the realm of ideas to something different where subjectivity plays its own role. Gesture is neither representation nor fiction; gesture implies a stance and a will. For me, gesture is unrelated to theatricality or representation, it is the performative fact that makes a translation—perhaps—and a generous potential for dialogue possible.

Bogotá during the Flora ars+natura open workshops. Broto could look out some 150 metres from her studio to a window facing hers at the same height, three streets away. The destination of her gaze set, she then had to draw a line. Using technical equipment and a drone to fly a cable across the streets that separate the windows, Luz Broto launched a line, opening up a reconsideration of what it means to occupy airspace, of making contact with “distant neighbours” perhaps unwitting or unwilling, asking them to open their window so the cable could pass through, connecting an artist’s studio to another that does not necessarily have a cultural role to play. Luz Broto tensed a cable and bridged the two interiors, previously connected only by the projecting gaze. An enormous undertaking that would “disappear” like one more tangle in Bogotá’s chaotic aerial lattice of wires. But once beheld, this cable could not be unseen: cables join points, perspectives, people. They tie together stories, desires and undesired situations. The technical (and aesthetic) *finezza* of Broto’s cable would meld into that chaotic tangle, rendered anonymous yet (un)seen as something necessarily purposeful. Not electrical, but it does serve another purpose.

Luz Broto developed this project in Bogotá with a proposition based on a wandering gaze that discovered a specific location. And, recognising the context, a desire, possibility, proposition emerged. What Broto achieves is the leap from potentiality to reality, from idea to form, from language to gesture. The words first articulating an option become substance. And that is when they disappear, transformed.

If in Bogotá Broto bridged two distant points via cable, her 2021 proposition for Barcelona’s Ethall lets us “see” an architectural interplay of weights, functions and lengths. Extending the proposition behind *Prolongar els pilars*, the pillars delineating Ethall’s perimeter became extended walls that transformed the gallery into five new spaces. Exploiting the space’s architectural language, Broto started from the existent pillars and the implicit logic that walls could be built up between them. She built four 5x4 metre walls, provoking questions of how to access (or deny access to) these new spaces, some now only reachable through exterior windows. But also—suddenly and following architectural reason—what happens is that the pillars disappear, the space’s architectural meaning is lost and the pillars themselves become invisible, despite now being much longer in the form of a wall. What did Luz Broto do? Commission specific texts from five authors so that written language and literature could infuse these new spaces with particular meanings: spaces became potential narratives and theories, blank pages, fields of subjectivity.

Broto’s proposals respond to contexts, to predefined frameworks—reality—that become a place and a moment when they respond to that same place

and moment. If the pillars disappeared at Ethall, another disappearance made architectural history when it met the present at Dilalica in 2019. The Dilalica gallery space had been fireproofed, the old columns that supported and defined the site covered with rectangular plasterboard casings. Luz Broto exposed these still operative yet hidden (for security reasons) structural elements by opening their fireproof cladding. In revealing the columns, she eliminates the literal security of the gallery as well as the “security” of the architectural enclosure. The exposure of the columns implies the disappearance of the cladding that covered it, offering an approximation of prior spatial experience now unsettlingly present through the artist’s work.

A work that disrupts architectural language and administrative regulations, a space split into two fragile temporalities. Luz Broto reflects: “Spaces, what we understand by spaces, the built spaces that we enter and exit are always broken (...) I think that space results from a break. Building a wall is a break; installing a door that opens and closes is an invention to comfortably maintain an intermittent rupture between inside and outside. Thus, every constructed space is *broken* from its capacity. It implies a discontinuity, a limit, a full stop. And this makes me think of my work as a way of re-establishing continuity. Things, no matter if today they are on one side of the wall or the other, one compartment or another, inhabit the same space, the same world. And this makes them fundamentally the same. I like the idea of continuity”.

Continuity, then. Continuity would be a key element, an element that produces a kind of loop that makes it possible to start from one perspective and open to others through otherness. In a continuous gesture, Broto proposes the will to understand time as an artistic factor, accepting variations and manifold possibilities, offering options transformed into gesture and form, body and space. And once manifested, they disappear and begin anew.

Disappearances and drawn-out processes, with moments of visibility and moments of pause, actions and rhythms that let us think about the art installations she creates. Like a slow-moving river, Broto’s work is shaped by meanders, moments that can be seen one after the other, entering and leaving, always conscious of a framework that makes a statement possible. In this loop, the continuous present becomes a layer that implies a rethinking of place and space, a proposal that also requires multiple dialogues.

Luz Broto proposed *Obrir un forat permanent (Opening a Permanent Hole)* in the MACBA in 2019. As part of its temporary *Espècies d’Espais (Species of Spaces)* exhibition, Broto came up with the idea of drilling a hole through the building’s façade as a way to permanently bridge interior and exterior. Because if the discourse of the new approach to museums calls for

permeability and connection with the local context, then let’s do it. Let’s do it literally. This hole, despite its small scale, would trigger a certain dislocation and a myriad of institutional questions. The museum wants to connect more with the outside yet cannot risk affecting its interior climate and humidity controls. It wants dialogue yet needs the protection of its closed interior. The hole was made in the public stairwell access on the Meyer building façade and remains open, a potentially permanent piece in the collection. But institutional bureaucracy takes a long time, and the hole is a problem for today. What should be done with the hole? With the possibility of a museum adding a hole to its collection? With the museum’s purpose? What should be done about security? What, how and when? Is it possible to be in-between, neither inside nor out?

It was at this point that the museum decided to buy itself some time, ultimately plugging the inside of the hole yet keeping it in place until a decision can be made whether to keep it (or not). In the meantime, the hole is made but is invisible from inside the museum; it can only be seen from without. It is and is not. Luz Broto says: “What I do in art is try to generate the conditions for something to happen, for a new situation, thought, feeling to exist. Whatever happens later. When reality doesn’t offer these possibilities, I think what we can do is re-allocate resources to create a framework that makes it possible for other things to happen. And if they don’t happen once created, we’ll also see how things are, because ultimately the reactions speak about us, about how we are as a human society, how we organise ourselves, how we relate”.

Years later, at that same museum, Broto installed *Una paret (A Wall)*, a large work-in-progress. Invisible, yet large scale. As part of the *Intenció poètica (Poetic Intention)* exhibition period that began in 2022 as a framework for presenting and dialoguing with the collection, Luz Broto started building a wall that would grow, over time obstructing entrances and disrupting and forcing the flow of traffic inside the museum in unusual ways. Broto’s wall is built like any other temporary wall in the museum, and visitors will find it under construction. Coming across the wall does not necessarily require seeing it, since museum walls are designed not to be seen, but to disappear into a presumed neutral whiteness² that seeks to make time stand still. If, like with the hole, the museum put the gesture on standby, this expansive, multi-story wall will

2 The presumed neutrality of the museum as a “white cube” has been critically examined for decades, from Brian O’Doherty’s seminal 1976 essays to the modernist exhibition typologies of kunsthallen and landmark museums like MoMA insulating interior space. Crucial too are decolonial re-readings unpacking this situation’s ideological framings.

compel the institution to reconsider what route it offers visitors, what to do when certain routes are blocked, how to explain what is happening. Visitors too must rethink their itineraries and relation to this space under construction. The informal rules of the space, as well as decisions about our movements, are brought to the fore.

Narrating or explaining what is unfolding is crucial in Luz Broto's work. We talked about propositions, words and their transformation, the instants when something becomes an artistic phenomenon. Today, Luz understands her projects as something poised between words and action: "The projects shift from theory to reality, doing what words attempt or claim to do; what words say but cannot do". In *How to Do things with Words*³, J.L. Austin grappled with the idea of textual material transformed into action through its very enunciation, taking as prime examples performative uses of language in acts like marriage vows, where saying "I do" makes the union official. But there are liminal moments where text is no longer text in Broto's oeuvre; ideas take shape, the stories have already happened or haven't happened yet. The construction goes up and at that point enters into process, physical mass becoming an action verb that modifies the notion of spatial grammar. Texts cease being texts to become proposals for real action meant as propositions, ideas in the making that spark the imagination. Drawings are architectural designs and projects to preview, objects are traces of action, actions are a way of doing something to get somewhere else. Again, circularity and constant negotiation in translation, never overlooking the need for encounter, interaction with others, desire for community. The factors that make circularity possible are found in all those who participate in the work, whether at conceptual remove or through active, empathetic proximity.

"I can find empathy whenever I look. Is empathy related to something common?", Luz Broto wonders. "We lack spaces where we can look at each other".⁴ It's unsurprising then that her works includes cables that unite, or (as with her work for Manifesta14 Prishtina) an invitation to exchange house keys with a stranger. For this travelling European biennial, Luz Broto devised

3 JL Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*. 1962

4 Luz Broto tells me: "I heard this phrase from my workshop in Hangar; the voice came from another workshop, and on hearing it, I thought it was true, and that it was related to what we were talking about here. The phrase formed part of the conversations that were generated in the collective residency on death and mourning, organised by Hangar and La Poderosa, with the participation of DU-DA, Isabel de Naverán, Marta Echaves, Arantxa Martínez and Sara Torres". (<https://hangar.org/ca/agenda-hangar/micro-residencia-colectiva-muerte-duelo/>)

a system that lets visitors and locals meet and access each other's keys and addresses. The rendezvous point was a locksmith shop, the locksmith, "at a distance", making this potential dialogue between different people possible and explainable. A myriad of questions came to the surface through this piece: practical (how the exchange worked, where houses were located, future implications); political and moral (meanings of ownership, rights to space, host/guest dynamics); and context-specific (who holds political/economic rights to leave Kosovo; the relation to tourism; historical/cultural meanings of hospitality in Kosovo; what kind of connection an international art event can offer the local fabric). What is idealism. What is realism. What is activism. Who wants to participate. Who can.

When it came to drafting this essay, after many questions and gestures, and as we approached the idea of finishing the essay, the possibility emerged to revisit an earlier Luz Broto work that sought to sustain something impossible until it was impossible to sustain. In 2014, at the Centre d'Art La Panera in Lleida, Broto proposed *augmentar el cabal d'un riu (Increase the Flow of a River)*. This essay will continue in a perhaps unexpected way in the last footnote⁵, but looking back in time now serves as a way to revisit that meandering current from a future vantage point in the river. Another river, not the same one as 2014, but a different one that becomes a focal point—a framework—for thought and act: the Segre, the river crossing Lleida, has historically been channelled to boost regional agriculture, and also harnessed for hydroelectric potential. Broto sought the art centre's cooperation in "returning" water to the river via

5 I talked extensively with Luz Broto as I wrote this essay. Different channels of communication, different times. After I told her the title of this essay (*Writing An Essay About and With Luz Broto*), Luz asked me about this "with" and what kind of proposition was open to us. It is an essay that I write but in which she has a lot of agency. It is an essay in which her voice plays a fundamental role, but what would happen if this "with" also incorporated the readers? Can the reader also be invited to write? Can one be part of the writing of this essay even if the essay has already been published? When does an essay end? Faced with these questions, Luz and I decided on one thing: the essay could continue, we could continue to expand the dialogue with other possible voices. We also talked a lot about what an essay is, what an idea is, what an installation is, what a proposition is and what literature is. I have a tendency to make both linguistic and structural choices, I suppose it's something that happens thanks to my fascination with a certain French way of thinking – if it's possible to "nationalise" thought. Talking to Luz Broto means that every word, every grammatical construction can be positively challenged. We have been talking about the idea of community and about the sentence we used to conclude this writing portion of the project: So, what's going to happen next? Well, here are our phone numbers: +46 734045222, + 34 693620388.

a precarious system of hoses siphoning flow from hydroelectric infrastructure. An (im)possible gesture from an artistic perspective. That very perspective that matches up windows and creates new potential realities, new cartographies, new relationships.

Luz Broto's work affects reality: a river receives more water, however minimal and temporary the gesture (the water still receives a little more water even if the amount is minimal and temporary, even if its small and for a limited time); two neighbours are connected via cable; a museum gets a hole in its façade; a space multiplies. We could go on: strangers swap house keys, tread motorways, open locks, but also wait behind the door, trade "closed" for "open" and let strangers in. "So, what's going to happen next?"