

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.

Lying on the Moon

Raphael Fonseca

Pedro Torres' career as visual artist spans almost two decades. And like any artist with such a solid research practice—and having experimented with individual and collective projects, in small and monumental spaces, exhibitions in his country of residence, Spain, and abroad—, many are the ways to interpret his work. Though the approaches vary, according to the artist's own reflection through an image he calls “conceptual diagram”, the key words diverge and also interconnect.

Analysing his production, some lines of force clearly come to the fore. Treating works from different moments, this essay presents a series of short texts that temporarily connect them, like a fictitious retrospective exhibition. We can consider the following sections as nuclei.

Light and circle

If there is one element that has been present since his early works, it is light. Whether through video projectors, slides, spotlights or neon pieces, the artist touches a semantic field that acquires new layers with each project.

In one of his oldest works, *Framin* (2010), he employed a *modus operandi* that he would later experiment with and expand in future works. After recording the reflection of a burning TV on a white surface with a digital camera, the artist sped up the recording to a duration of three minutes, projected this video and recorded it again in super-8. The final work consists of a super-8 projector and a film that—in case the spectator is not familiar with Marcel Duchamp's concept of *inframince*— could be seen as something completely abstract, or “just light”. In *Distancia* (2014-2018) he also used projection, now old slide projectors bearing no images. The focus of the work becomes the device of image construction and its relation to processes of memory, particularly that of information retrieval.

Over time, Torres has broadened this frontal use of light and achieved formats that resemble small light houses. In *Los días* (2011) a projector displays a video counting numbers from 1 to 365—referring to days in a year—, increasingly overlapping as the speed of the reproduction decreases. A magnifying lens connected to a motor rotates and distorts this

projection in space. Entering the room, the spectator steps into a kaleidoscopic light effect—similar to a disco ball in a dance hall—spinning above the architecture.

Once we recognise his treatment of light in movement, we immediately realise the importance of colour in his research. Whether in video works like *Trato* (2016-2017), where the colours of a sunset were seemingly digitally manipulated, or in installations with multiple elements such as *The Many Suns Inside Your Head* (2021), light-colour is fundamental. In this last work, the use of photographic filters brings the audience close to different temperature sensations. The combination of different coloured filters in movement provokes a constant meandering of lights through space, evoking different moments of the day and over the course of time, alluding to events such as celestial eclipses.

The projectors used in these works present us with a recurring geometric form: the circle. From the magic lanterns of the seventeenth century to the hyper realist machines that reign in today's movie theatres, light, for various physical reasons, is always projected from circular structures. In Torres' research, this association takes on an additional interpretive layer given his interest in the broad field of science, specifically astronomy,

This geometric form, historically associated with the representation of the Earth and all the other planets of the Solar System, also appears insistently in images such as the so-called black hole. The circle, Plato's ideal form, fantasised by artists like Vitruvius, da Vinci, Boullée and Malevich, manifests in Torres' works provoking an encounter between the ghosts of scientific illustrations and the history of Western art.

As Nam June-Paik teaches us—and Torres seems to agree—, “the moon is the oldest television”. His works, especially his installations, situate us somewhere between the observers at a planetarium and spectators at a theatre. This movement of light in space could therefore be something else: revolution and rotation. The colours of these lights could refer to the different distances of the heavenly bodies in space. A projected circle could be the silhouette of a planet, just as the gradients that transform before our eyes seem to echo global warming.

Torres' research moves in this balance between an extremely seductive experience of art and its possible metaphors. These aspects lead us to others which, far from being alien to his research on light, deserve special attention.

Space and materiality

If Pedro Torres' work dialogues with architecture and the site-specific, thus focusing on space as its central preoccupation, what stands out is how he creates objects that bring an industrial materiality to the heart of his exhibitions. Various pieces made of light can be seen as the next step in his experimenting with three-dimensionality.

I refer to the neon structures that first appeared in 2020 in *Time Bends as We Get Closer*. Interested in space and time in their equation with gravity, the artist assembles objects made of neon; two of which have identical designs and are installed facing one another and inverted along the horizontal-vertical axis. Other pieces stand in the middle of the room. There is elegance in this way of composing images. Observing the photographic documentation of the exhibition, we are struck by the conversation between these lights that seem to levitate in space and a yellow piece of fabric, a rug with a graphic design on its surface. Torres experiments with the relationships between line and curve, light and space, inviting the public to walk through forms as synthetic as a diagram.

Similar gestures are present in *No calma, no cura, no sublima* (2021), where the artist presents neon in dialogue with a video and another rug, just like in *Un trou dans la main* and *),co*, both from 2021. In the latter, we are again stricken by his interest in concentric forms. Beyond representation, the artist invites the viewer to experience them physically, to enter a space which seems like a fragile, fragmented and smaller-scale version of Richard Serra's monumental circles. Between material transparency, at the centre of this nucleus there are two neon circles, accompanied in other parts of the installation by pages from books and laser prints detailing scientific information. And what if these diagrams and formulas were invocations to play at drawing in space?

Un trou dans le main has a formal concision that dialogues, for example, with the installation *Photochron (Fern Turn)* (2020). Both—the first directly using the floor and the second by way of metal shelves—concentrate materials, appropriations of images and uses of light, inviting the viewer to establish relations between the signs chosen by the artist, as in a book of poems.

Body and movement

O (2016) is a work composed of four video channels. Projected onto the internal sides of a large, suspended cube, we are invited to dwell its centre and view images concerning notions of natural, artificial, macro and micro. The

public finds itself in a situation similar to that sparked by our inability to capture all the sides of a sculpture at once. Our body will almost automatically adjust its focus to one or at most two channels of rapidly interlacing images. This work is a prime example of how Torres's research incites movement.

From 2020, the artist has been experimenting in the field of performance arts: *Blue While Black* (2020) consists in the projection of the first image of a black hole on the body of a dancer –Guillem Jiménez– in a dark space which gradually fills with smoke. The performer moves in circles and, at a given moment, holds a reflective object and plays with light in space. What if these rays invited the public to improvise its own movements?

In *From the Past, From the Future* (2021), again we find Guillem Jiménez, now accompanied by Paula Serrano, playing with the neon structures featured in the exhibition *Time Bends as We Come Closer*. Two bodies, four sculptures, past, future and two black holes set the tone for a dance wherein the impression of the double is triggered at every moment. In the shadows and accompanied by a soundscape that stems from another work –*Falling* (2020)– the neon exposes these bodies in minimalist costume, evoking identity projections of a couple or siblings walking, moving objects and rapidly passing through space.

Just as the ghosts on the neon lights remains in our eyes for a moment each time we blink, in the darkness, we can only imagine the continuity of these movements.

Writing and citation

The absence of the spoken word in these performances draws attention to the constant presence of writing in Torres' work. In his titles we note the importance conferred to text; the artist creates names that suggest mental images with a narrative character. Observing the way words appear explicitly in his works, the stitching together of different authors producing new textualities is impressive. In *Trato*, for example, we have a collage between *Outer Space Treaty* (1967) and phrases by the researcher Natasha Myer, extracted from the book "Art in the Age of the Anthropocene" (2015). The artist is interested in temporal contrasts, different text formats and their discursive sites which, each in its own way, is a document that rhymes with the other, all located in different presents.

More recently, his texts are read in his own voice, those of actors or of artificial intelligence. In *Enhebra el futuro con el susurro del pasado* (2021) there is a moment in which the artist's voice weaves an extensive list:

“broken light, compound air, carbon in bone, cellular plasticity, responsive plasticity, solid flexibility flexibility, estomatic aperture, hydraulic transference, energy balance, passive movement, synthetic movement, multiplication by division, replicant growth, replicated units, distributed intelligence, diffuse system”. There is a pause, another list of words appears, and in the sequence we hear the same voice repeat at length: “up, up, up, up, up, up”.

What do these words refer to? How many viewers will hear these pairings and associate them with scientific knowledge? The artist is more interested in expressing –as Umberto Eco would say– the “vertigo of lists”; his writing ceases to be a reflection of academic research and becomes a statement of accumulations of information and confusion by the cut of the absurd. There is an increasingly evident irony in his practice.

Sequence and time

It is no coincidence that in *No calma, no cura, no sublima*, Torres refers to Aby Warburg, the German art historian famous for his research on how images with a great historical and geographical distance can repeat forms in a way that is not directly documented. Warburg's thory is here provided through the studies of the French art historian and curator Georges Didi-Huberman, author, among others, of *The Surviving Image Phantoms of Time and Time of Phantoms: Aby Warburg's History of Art* (2000). In this book, the writer discusses the relationships between images and temporal distances. Particularly interested in the art historian's perspective, Didi-Huberman's reflections on the ways humans relate to the image and to the notion of memory extends easily to Torres' propositions:

Faced with an image –as old as it is– the present never ceases reconfiguring itself, even if the disassociation of the gaze has not entirely given way to the infatuated habit of the ‘specialist’. Faced with an image –as recent, as contemporary as it may be– the past never ceases reconfiguring itself, since this image only becomes thinkable in a construction of memory, if not of obsession. Finally, faced with an image, we must humbly recognise the following: that it will probably outlive us, that before it *we* are the fragile element, the passing element, and that before us it is the element of the future, the element of duration. The image often has more memory and more future than the beholder

This last sentence especially resonates with Torres' research. Initially interested in time as a philosophical and existential problem, his works demonstrates an ability to orchestrate images, sounds, texts, textures and

sensations that are small transhistorical surgeries. More than an obsession with scientific studies, Torres' trajectory shows that he is an iconophile and, like a videoclip editor or an organizer of collections of texts –or rather, like an archivist– his works are iconographic coffers of the human endeavour, throughout Its existence on Earth, to look up to the sky and extract meaning from the stars that shine thousands of light years away.

A first encounter with his research does not arouse suspicion, but after observing his production, his spectacular treatment of light, his attention to dialogue with architecture, the invitation his installations offer to the public's body, and a certain nonsense in his writing, his work appears to owe more to pop culture than we may initially imagine. Suddenly, his great interest in astronomy seems, more than anything else, to be the work of great fiction. Fantasies about NASA dissipate, now I can only hear the melancholy voices of Karen O and Spike Jonze singing "The Moon Song" –not in vain part of the soundtrack to the film *Her* (2014). As the first verse of the song goes: "I'm lying on the moon / my dear, I'll be there soon / it's a quiet starry place / times we're swallowed up / in space we're here a million miles away". More than an exercise in encyclopaedic knowledge, Pedro Torres' research is an essay on his enchantment with the stars and images.

It could be important to take one step further: his research can be thought of as a series of essays on his obsession with the mysteries that images still make an impression on the world and on what we conventionally call humanity. With so many uncertainties that surround us –even if scientific methods seem to provide us with certainty–, let us not lament –let us lie in these ephemeral moons of light, let us lose ourselves in scientific phrasings and strum the strings of a guitar... let us dream.

This text was originally written in Portuguese.

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