

# Andrea Geyer

## Carlos Motta

[Clip from *Deus Pobre* is shown]

(on screen text)

*Deus Pobre: Modern Sermons of Communal Lament*

*Missionary of the Word: Father Jose Martins Junior reads Father Antonio Vieira*

*November 20, 2010 Serralves Museum's Gardens, Porto*

*Now, Sirs, the time of this tilling is to be done, the time of Lent. This is the time to sow.*

*Father Antonio Vieira (b. 1608) was a Portuguese Jesuit missionary, diplomat and orator who fearlessly denounced slave owners and pleaded the cause of the outraged Indians of the Americas. Vieira worked in Brazil, teaching Indians the Catechism and the arts of peace. Arousing the hatred of the colonizers, he was sent back to Lisbon, where he continued to advocate for the just treatment of the disenfranchised and the poor.*



Carlos Motta, Still from *Deus Pobre*, 2011. Courtesy of the artist.

**Jose Martins Junior (Speaker in video):** *Think about what you are required to do at Lent. You are asked to do two things: to fast and to give alms.*

*What I will say now is what Saint Augustine, and Saint Ambrose, and all the Doctors of the Church have said before me. On the days when you are not asked to fast, we have two meals: we have lunch and we have dinner; on fast days; we eat only once; we have lunch but we have no dinner. And why? To give to the poor what we would have had for dinner. To fast and to keep food is not abstinence, it is greed. Just as greed detracts from the merits of fasting, giving alms enhances them. Let us give alms for all of us can do so. Those who have great wealth, give alms out of your abundance, and those who have but little, give a little, and those who have nothing to give, be patient about not having and keep alive the wish to be able to give. I am well aware of the fact that much charity is done in this region, but I cannot but be surprised at a great need which has not been covered. How is it possible that in such a noble city, the capital of a state-São Luís do Maranhão - there should be no hospital and that the mission of the House of Mercy should be only to bury the dead? See what Christ will say on Judgment Day.*

**Andrea Geyer:** What we just looked at is part of a new work by Carlos called *Deus Pobre: Modern Sermons of Communal Lament* (“Impoverished God”), which he just put together last year.

**Carlos Motta:** Last week!

**Andrea Geyer:** I wanted to start by asking Carlos to describe the methodology that informs this work in particular, specifically the elements that came together to create what we just saw.

**Carlos Motta:** *Deus Pobre: Modern Sermons of Communal Lament* is the second work in which I have staged readings of historical texts. In this particular case I worked with the history of liberation theology, a religious movement that emerged in the 1960s within the Latin American context—in which a number of priests came back to the idea of solidarity and the love of the poor as being the foundational element of faith, rejecting the institutional and operational role of the Catholic Church. *Deus Pobre* is set in Portugal: Portuguese priests re-read the texts and question the role of the Portuguese crown in the “discovery” of the Americas. *Deus Pobre* was conceived as a reflection on liberation theology as well as the history of evangelization and the Catholic missions.

But the methodology I employed—something that will bring

Andrea's work and my work together—is that of working through these historical texts and reactivating them in the present as a way of inserting a historical conversation into a contemporary political discourse.

**Andrea Geyer:** What is the historical timeline of these texts?

**Carlos Motta:** The work includes two texts from the 17th century, which was my way of making the leap between liberation theology from the 1960s and the time of the conquest.

**Andrea Geyer:** Are these complete texts or are they edited?

**Carlos Motta:** It is not the full text. I was interested in highlighting certain aspects of the text: I chose to include some things and to leave some things out according to the conversation I wanted to propose.

**[Excerpt from *Comrades of Time*: Anna is shown.]**

**Anna (Speaker in video):** *We consider it our particular duty that everything must be discussed and everything that moves the soul of mankind must be considered.*

*We believe that it is lack of imagination that leaves most people unable to experience even their own lives, not to mention their world. Because if it were otherwise, reading just a single page of today's newspaper would*

*cause humanity to rise up in revolt.*

*We believe that to further the people's imagination stronger tools are needed and we believe that one of them is art.*

*With the help of these tools we demand a psychological sense of engagement, an enthusiasm that can break down unimaginable social frontiers.*

*We demand to pose more questions than one can answer because we feel that too often people answer with assurance and self-satisfaction without even knowing the questions. We advocate for more than one way of thinking, one set of values.*

*A light of a thousand suns must stream in to darken the shadows. This light must be a promise to the simplest of men because which poet feels misery more deeply than that of a conquered people?*

*We recognize a complete uncertainty about what the next day will bring. What the next month and years will bring. And we observe that warmth is ebbing from things and objects of daily use gently but insistently repel us. Therefore, day-by-day, in overcoming the sum of secret resistance we have an immense labor to perform and we must compensate for their coldness with our warmth if they are not to freeze us to death.*

*We have witnessed workers who have had the courage to die for the revolution. Who found themselves weak and fearful in the face of the challenges of the revolutionary life that follows. We recognize that social misery can only partially be seen as a motivation to fight. If it becomes systemic, it turns to retard and to weaken the spirit.*

*Yet we know that in the depth threatens a volcano.*

**Carlos Motta:** Could you briefly describe the work?

**Andrea Geyer:** What we just saw is a three-minute excerpt from an 11-minute video. Right now there are seven videos



**Andrea Geyer**, Still from *Comrades of Time*, 2010/2011. *Courtesy of the artist.*

within the group called *Comrades of Time*. For this work, I wrote seven scripts that are based on texts, speeches, and letters written in the 1920s in Germany. This is the time period right after the revolution and during the Weimar Republic. They are the words of workers, artists, politicians, architects and musicians that come from publications and books and from personal letters that I bought on eBay or found in my own family's history. I collaged each script from at least six or seven different sources to create one voice. Each script is then spoken by a group of young New York women.

It is important for me that none of the seven scripts are based on just one character from the past. They are always a combination of multiple voices, from a specific group of people. There is something that Carlos mentioned earlier that I would like to reiterate here in the context of my work: I do not consider these videos reenactments. I consider them a visualization of an embodiment of history. I am interested in the idea that there are certain memories and histories that live in us as people—even if these are histories of things that we did not experience ourselves, but that are transferred across generations. By offering these scripts for women to speak, I ask them to embody the history and knowledge that resonates with the historical context of these texts, all the while speaking the words as themselves. I asked all of my performers to speak the scripts I prepared for them from their own position. I don't want them to enact a historical figure, but rather to speak the history as themselves.

**Carlos Motta:** One interesting aspect of the tape we just watched was the voice that Anna uses. She is speaking in plural: “We, we, we, we.” Why that voice? And who is she talking to?

**Andrea Geyer:** Each script is based on a group of ideas, and Anna’s is based on fragments from multiple manifestos. Sometimes I collage straight quotes taken directly from a specific source text, other times I write passages myself based on manifestos that I have read. I learn from that voice, then I move that voice through myself to these young women.

I should give credit for the title of the work, *Comrades of Time*, to Boris Groys. In a text with that same title he describes the German term *zeitgenössisch*, which is usually translated as “contemporary.” But in German the term is made of two words: *zeit* is “time” and *genössisch* is “like a comrade.” So if you literally translate *zeitgenössisch* to English it’s “comrades of time.” In this logic, Groys describes a person who is *zeitgenössisch*, meaning someone who is with time, rather than in time.

In this sense my characters are comrades of time, being with time rather than within it. They move through different moments and account for the histories and the memories that formed them and make them the people as whom they speak today. They speak as themselves but informed and



conformed through these histories. Furthermore these videos address the viewer who is implied in the idea not only of being a comrade but also being a comrade with time. This opens up a sense of time—the viewer is asked to think about what it means to be called out as somebody who is part of this group of young women.

**[Clip from *Six Acts* is shown.]**

*Act III*

*Excerpt of an unidentified speech by Jamie Pardo Leal from 1986. Performed by Ivonne Rodriguez on March 16, 2010 at el Parque de Lourdes in Bogota.*

**Ivonne Rodriguez (Speaker in video):**     *Some of us are under death threats on account of our fidelity, from our youth, to the homeland, the people, the workers, and the cause of socialism. The enemy does not forget or forgive, BUT WE HAVE GIVEN OUR LIVES TO THE WORKERS. They are the owners of our lives. Yet in the event that the enemy should succeed in taking our lives, WELCOME BE DEATH, because we know, without a doubt, that when we fall, from the Union of Young Patriots, will emerge those who are bound to represent us, those who are bound to replace us, those who will continue in the direction of what the people want, a happy Colombia, full of hope.*

*(on screen text)*

*Jamie Pardo Leal was the President of the Union of Patriotic Party and ran for the Presidency of Colombia in 1986.*

**Andrea Geyer:**     Carlos, I am interested in the relationship between our works in regard to the role of text—in your case it's predominantly speeches, in my work predominantly writ-

ten text. Can you talk a little bit about the importance and functionality of text in your in your work?

**Carlos Motta:** *Six Acts: An Experiment in Narrative Justice* engages with the idea of social injustice. I was interested in going back to the political history of Colombia, the country where I'm from, and working with speeches about peace that were delivered by presidential candidates from the left who were assassinated in the last hundred years. There are six actors who re-speak these texts out in public squares during the 2010 presidential election.

My interest lay in taking these texts, but not necessarily reenacting the role of the politician as a person, as a figure, but actually going back over the "spirit" of the text. To me these texts are a collection of ideas that are embodied by the person who reads them at any given time. Any text can do that. A historical text spoken in the present can speak to power.

**Andrea Geyer:** And how do you pair your speeches with your actors and actresses?

**Carlos Motta:** Power has been for the most part exercised by men. But when I was choosing the actors for *Six Acts* it became apparent that I did not want to reproduce that. I wanted to have a gender-plural group of people—men, women, and otherwise—to embody these texts so that



**Carlos Motta**, Video Installation from *Deus Pobre*, 2011. *Courtesy of the Artist.*

they would not be tied to that specific person but to the ideas they invoked.

**Andrea Geyer:** That's interesting also in relationship to my very conscious decision to work exclusively with young women for *Comrades of Time*, which is informed in a similar way by an idea of how texts exist in our own memories and what bodies we associate them with. What are the bodies we listen to and we recognize as bodies of knowledge and authority, and what are the bodies that we don't listen to or recognize as memorable? Can you talk a little bit about that in your work?

**Carlos Motta:** They are all trained actors in *Six Acts* except the priests, who are actually ordained priests. The actors were really nervous about the way that they should present themselves in these roles—they would ask, “What should I wear?” I kept on insisting that they should respond to the text and that they should dress according to what the text would tell them.

An interesting difference between the projects we're discussing now is the space in which they are perceived. Mine exist within the public space, as a performance, and also as a video presentation. Yours seem to be made as a performative video, correct?

**Andrea Geyer:** Yes.

**Carlos Motta:** There isn't an element of public performance. Can you speak about that?

**Andrea Geyer:** I'm working with different levels of abstraction in the work. There's an abstraction of space. Then there's an abstraction of time. For the videos, I was interested in creating an abstracted space which I call a space of shades of black. All videos happened in this space, in this abstracted set, which is a loosely appropriated design of a Marcel Breuer desk made for Walter Gropius and his wife. It was designed as a collaborative workspace, which I thought was interesting.

So the performers speak in this same abstract study, yet always by themselves. There are never two of them in this space together. (There is another part of this work, a series of photographs called *Imagine To Be Here Right Now*, in which the comrades leave little notes for each other. Their connections get materialized there. They write to each other but also seem to receive notes—for example Hannah Arendt, Yvonne Rainer, “my grandmother,” “my lover.”)

The public space in these works is created through exhibition, where the videos are installed to surround and address the viewer in a very direct and very intimate way. Especially in political work, or work that addresses politics—there is this literal idea that the *only* public is that which is in the public space. I'm interested in the social space that is created

in a museum, a gallery, and that often gets ignored. Those spaces are not just presentation spaces for consumption but are social, public spaces. I'm very interested in that as an artist, in all of my works. What is that public space that we are creating in an exhibition space? Your work exists in both registers, right? On the street and in the museum.

**Carlos Motta:** Yes, but particularly in *Six Acts*, it was very important that the texts were read out loud on the street in public. The passersby, who had no idea of the context proposed by the piece, would be hearing the texts as if they were addressing contemporary issues. At some point somebody approached me and said, "We're standing here in front of the Palace of Government. Are you speaking to Uribe?"<sup>1</sup>

**Andrea Geyer:** Let's move to another clip that addresses the role of the actresses, or the protagonists, or performers.

**[Another excerpt from *Comrades of Time: Jess* is shown.]**

**Jess (Speaker in video):** *I'm never a victim, always a fighter. Looking at me, you might wonder who I am and what I stand for. You may even be startled for a moment over such a question and that's okay. Take your time.*

*Take your time to think about it, to stay with it. Maybe even a little longer than usual. Because I want you to recognize that that thought that rides your emotions, that bounces around the insides of your mind, of your body is yours and yours alone.*

*I don't share your confusion. I'm not startled. On the contrary, I find myself in utmost clarity and calm. Stepping into the place of who I am is like*

*taking a rest after being very tired, like coming home to a complete and, yes, complex individuality within myself.*

*When I dress like this I become completely peaceful and my entire organism functions with more balance.*

*Like many of us, I am simply born somewhere between dawn and day. No one can blame us for that, make us take responsibility for being squeezed between cultures, between pasts and futures, between this and that way of being.*

*Yet, nevertheless, many of us are still accused, hassled, blamed, called out for who we are and why we are here in the midst of all others. With more of us showing our true face, daring to step into the light of day, the push back is mounting, accusing us of making choices merely to be different.*

*Names are called, judgments are waged. And as you can imagine, there are still some individuals among us who are responsive to such blame, who will find themselves pushed into unhappiness and sometimes even suicide, unable to find a larger perspective on their life. They have not learned or been offered the necessary and relieving recognition of their own innocence. They still feel alone, the only one of their kind in the sea of others.*

**Carlos Motta:** Would you talk about the way that you approached your actors and the way that you worked with the selection of the texts and specifically about the mode of address in this particular text?

**Andrea Geyer:** The texts that informed Jess's speaking are taken from the community surrounding the Hirschfeld Institute, the Institute of Sex Research in Berlin during the time of the Weimar Republic. Its founder, Magnus Hirschfeld, was deeply committed to the idea that all forms of gender identity and sexual desire are possible and natural, and that all of

them therefore should be accepted. He explained the idea of heteronormativity and gender normativity as just the outermost fringes of a huge field.

I used a form of abstraction in the script that speaks about Jess as a person—"we" that is squeezed somewhere between times, between cultures—and nobody can blame us for that. She asks: "You wonder who we are?" She reflects her thoughts back to the audience, making the viewer aware that what they see and hear is part of their own world and that they are not separate from it.

The purpose of this meaning or implication within this script was to have a particular community recognized, to have their voices heard. It also speaks again to what voices are recognized within a political and public sphere.

That's one of the most attractive parts of your work for me. The way in which you invite your audience to listen again to things we were never able to hear before, or even to those things that might already be familiar to us. You invite us to hear them through the individuals you chose. You shift a text (or one could say a historical moment) into a contemporary body, or rather into a particular body. We could talk about this also as the utilization of the estrangement effect, in a Brechtian sense. You shift something slightly over to make something new visible and audible which is otherwise hard to hear. This is something I think we both work with.



**Carlos Motta:** What you're talking about also relates to the filmic decisions that you make in relationship to your work—the relationship of how that voice is conveyed through a set of formal decisions and how that enables that specific mode of address. Can you speak about your formal and filmic decisions?

**Andrea Geyer:** It varies across the different videos. The performers' movements are repeated over and over throughout editing, although the text never gets repeated. Using this method I have my characters settle into their own physicality, within a space before they speak. I have them situate their body into a place to where they can address somebody else. Because of the generational shift between the source text and the performers, they were alienated from the language of the scripts, even though they strongly identified with the meaning. Emotionally they identified with the content but physically they needed to feel themselves into the form—the language in which this content reached them.

Underlying the entire work is the relevance of these thoughts and ideas from 1920s Germany to the contemporary U.S. I don't at all think that these time periods are the same, but there is an echo of something between them that one can recognize and that I am very interested in thinking about, without necessarily having fixed conclusions. The work opens up the space to patiently experience these reverberations. I think that's what happens in your work, too.

In terms of filmic strategy, can you talk about why you choose to use the form of performance-documentation within your work?

**Carlos Motta:** Yes, that will lead us to the next clip. It was interesting to me to use documentation and to play off of documentary conventions. Generally I shoot with three cameras. There is a full shot, a medium shot, and a close-up. The clip that we are about to see presents a moment in which both the performative and the filmic constructions were disrupted.

**[Another clip from *Six Acts* is shown.]**

*(Atala is standing in a square in Parque de Soacha.  
She is approached by an elderly man)*

**Atala:** Hello nice to meet you.

**1st Man:** I listened to your speech carefully. It was very good

**Atala:** Thank you very much.

**1st Man:** Congratulations. We need more of that...but you didn't speak about the "Abuelito." We have a problem with the elderly bonds.

**Atala:** What is the problem?

**1st Man:** The problem is they don't pay us in a timely manner. See the date now...and they tell us again to come next week. And they keep us going like this.

**Atala:** Why?

**1st Man:** *They say there is no money.*

*(Two more men approach)*

**Atala:** *Good day.*

**2nd Man:** *Here we are to say hello.*

**3rd Man:** *Nice to meet you. How are you?*

*(More men and women approach Atala greeting her with extended hand)*

**1st Man:** *We came to see how you can help us.*

**1st Woman:** *We the elderly are being put aside and it is not fair. This is going on since December. They don't help us. They give us nothing. It isn't fair. I declare it with my mouth. God is watching the unfair treatment given to the grandparents. We are not one or two we are plenty. The mayor says yes. The mayor is not taking care of his people. He is leaving the grandparents left behind. We deserve respect.*

**Atala:** *Yes, you are completely right.*

*(Carlos Motta comes on screen and stands next to Atala)*

**Carlos Motta:** *Excuse me ma'am, I will explain what is going on here. Sadly we cannot legislate or exert influence on your situation. We are reading a historical text of the assassinated candidate Luis Carlos Galán, trying to remember his ideas...*

**1st Woman:** *Yes because they kill those people that can really help!*

**1st Man:** *If we are in this story of Galán who was a martyr here in the square of Soacha, why don't we get together and fight his battle? He said very clearly: The people united will never be defeated! That is why he was killed! Why don't we unite with you too and scream his words together. The people united will never be defeated! If you can't help us let's wait for the person that says they will help us... Because people from the city hall just*

*look at us and leave, look at them...*

*That's it for me. Thank you very much.*

**Carlos Motta:** *I am sorry that we cannot help you more concretely but we will share this material with the authorities.*

*(on screen text)*

*Upon Completion of "Act V," a group of elderly protesters approached us to ask us how we could help their struggle. We explained that our project was only an experiment aimed at invoking Galán's ideas in the context of the 2010 presidential campaign. But that sadly we didn't have the power to "actually" help them...could we?*

*They seemed disappointed.*

**Andrea Geyer:** When I first saw the work and I hadn't talked to you about it before, it was such an incredible experience to have that scene from the clip we just saw. What we just witnessed is a form of breaking down your setup, but also breaking open the implications of what you are doing. I would like you to talk about how you felt in the very moment of this happening, and also how you felt in retrospect—after talking to the people who approached your actress.

**Carlos Motta:** It was a difficult moment, because suddenly we had to face the "repercussions" of our actions. But what was really interesting at the time was how this fictional space, this symbolic space that we were attempting to create within this specific square that had witnessed the assassina-

tion of Luis Carlos Galán back in 1989, had been completely misperceived by the protesters and they actually felt that the actress was for real, that she was running for office, and that she was promising things. These words didn't have a historical context to them—they were actually being perceived in the present tense. At that point I completely freaked out. I freaked out because she was put in a really uncomfortable situation. She went from acting to suddenly deceiving, so she could not continue to act. There was a moment in which—

**Andrea Geyer:** Why do you say “deceiving”?

**Carlos Motta:** Because she was acting, and she continued acting even while she was shaking his hand. And at some point she turned around, looked at me and asked me with her eyes, “What do I do now?” At that point I came in and that's when the performative, the space of the representation and the fiction, collapsed.

At first I recognized it as something that was deceiving to the people that had “believed” her performance, but later on I realized that the work was actually having an effect. I understood that I should not apologize, but that I should embrace the fact that the work had actually produced an interaction of great value.

**Andrea Geyer:** It is an interesting moment when you take anything out of your own world into a world that is more

than just yourself, like the public. It can't simply be fiction anymore. It's a history that's written in that moment. The moment she started speaking in the square, she created an event. With her embodiment and voice, you made something audible—knowledge of a history and a memory of that particular square. We know that the speech was not given there, but the person who spoke it was assassinated there and his voice was taken.

What an art practice can do is engage ideas from the political realm and tie these politics to larger questions of social and historical reality, to memory and agency across time, across generations. It can abstract political ideas and questions from the specific context that created them and open them up through their repeated iteration within a cultural context to larger social, cultural, historical considerations, which definitely include the political but are not confined to it. That this voice is so powerful to these people who are oppressed, still, 30 years later, makes these questions still very present.

**Carlos Motta:** I am interested in the space of representation versus the space of action. At that moment that there was a slight overstepping of that boundary it was uncomfortable for everybody. You see the reaction of the leader of the elders when he says, “Well, they can't help us. Let's move on and find somebody that will.” I think that's what happened in that piece: we had to deal with people's de-

mands in specific ways. So we were no longer representing an abstract situation but we actually had to engage with people's stories in concrete ways. It was not the filter or the distancing mechanism of history, of time, it was right there in our face. That's a place in which there is a relationship between the efficacy of political action and the efficacy of symbolic gesture, which are both called into question at that very moment.

**Andrea Geyer:** Exactly. When this connection is made, that's when things become really powerful.

**Carlos Motta:** But of course the experience of something being seen in a museum or a gallery space is different. That's something I wanted to ask you about.

**Andrea Geyer:** When I recently went to a series of dance performances, I was conscious of the immediate, collective experience that you have when you go and see a dance. It's a feeling of being somewhere together, experiencing something together with friends and strangers. Of course this also happens when artists do live performance work—even when the crowds are hardly ever as large. You come together in a space to think something through as a group. Intellectually, emotionally, physically. I do have a deep appreciation of this coming together and I definitely have a longing for this in my practice and in my work.

For works installed in a museum or gallery space this coming together is a bit abstract, of course. You often experience work by yourself. Yet nevertheless I would claim that there's a collective awareness (even if unconscious) that there are many people who are or have or will see what you see in the gallery, who share the experience you have with a work with you. It's not as immediate even though it is underlying. Because even in the U.S., where there are many privatized spaces, museums and exhibition spaces are in a certain way public spaces in which people recognize themselves as part of a public, as part of a history. I believe that even though one step removed, the work does produce community and will gain agency through that.

**[Another clip from *Comrades of Time*: Anya is shown]**

*Anya (Speaker in video): It can be done, my friend. And like all great things, once a seed is placed it can give birth to itself. Because where we create space for our speeches we open up space for thought. Where we will create debate, you can be certain to find imagination.*

*And where you open up imagination, there will always be truth. Not truth as a reflection of fact but truth as a reflection of process.*

*And it is this kind of truth that is ultimately the indication of our movement, of our potential. It is an indication of that which needs to be activated and has not yet become.*

**David Deitcher:** The most striking aspect of the presentation for me was how thoroughly haunted you both seem to be—perhaps not by the 1920s, but by Walter Benjamin's



text, “The Author as Producer.” I say this as a result of the use you both make of montage—a very particular and curious kind of montage.

There’s a weird ventriloquism involved in providing actors with a text to read that is not theirs. What I’m thinking more about is a kind of montage of history or of fragments from history; and how differently it functions in different aspects of your work.

Especially when we saw Carlos’s fragment from *Impoverished God*, I was thinking about hearing a priest recite words that derive from Liberation Theology, I wondered whether the montage aspect, which is to say, the contradictory aspect of it, is strong enough to make us aware of just how alien Liberation Theology is from the Catholic Church today.

Contradiction functions very differently in Andrea’s footage of Jess, possibly because the contradiction is extremely subtle. Although Jess recites a text that dates from the ‘20s from the Hirschfeld Institute, she seems perfectly at home with the words she recites. There doesn’t seem to be quite so dramatic disconnect between past and present as there is in the fragment from *Impoverished God*.

I wonder about the ‘abstraction’ to which Andrea speaks and I don’t entirely understand how it works. Especially when one sees one video clip following another and that same space is



Andrea Geyer, Still from *Comrades of Time*, 2010/2011, Courtesy of the artist.

occupied by different actors, yet one doesn't know about the space's design, its place in history.

In that case it's the rhetoric of what the actors recite that establishes the extent to which we might consider that abstract space public. It's very different when Carlos directs people in a historically resonant outdoor space, which then becomes the stage for sometimes passionate recitals of words dating from the not quite-so-remote past.

The epilogue is really shocking. It raised a number of questions for me about what Carlos described as a breakdown of the performance space—the space of representation. For me, it was also a breakdown of the formalism that Walter Benjamin's essay calls "technique." Benjamin wrote "The Author as Producer" as a speech that he delivered at a conference on fascism in Paris in 1934. He spoke, on the one hand, about the importance of what he called "tendency," by which he meant the nature of one's political allegiances. And on the other hand, he emphasized the equal importance of what he called "technique," by which he was referring to the techniques that an artist or author uses to put across whatever he or she intends to convey.

To see Carlos's actor being confronted by what I hate to call 'real' people was an odd and troubling moment. But it's the most convenient way to refer to the people who enter and invade the bubble-like hermeticism of what otherwise would

have been just another work of art that aspires to public significance.

I wonder what thoughts come to mind when our deep and sometimes impassioned involvement with the politics of representation, with the symbolic, collides with that other reality with which it also coincides and into which some artists, critics and viewers very much want to intervene.

It's a strange thing how that moment in Carlos's video fragment has such power, how striking it is. But I don't want to localize the issues it raises to that one dramatic moment in the epilogue, since the issues it raises go to the very heart of your practices.

So I wonder about the extent to which an artist's employment of vanguard 'technique' speaks from the cloistered, sometimes academic space of the ghetto that the art world can unfortunately be.

**Andrea Geyer:** What Walter Benjamin also talked about in his text is how art organizes its viewers, like an artistic practice should organize its viewers as producers. That's a very interesting key that is visualized within Carlos's work, when the people in the square approach the actress. Her speech recognized and organized them as producers. And the work tied those people together with its own action, without specifically directing them. It tied them into an awareness of

history that might or might not be productive for them. We will not know. That's a challenge we have to work with. Art is a ghetto, but it does reach a lot of people. The problem is that the feedback loops are not that direct. As a maker, I will be grabbed by somebody on my way out somewhere and they will tell me about something they experienced in the work. That is of course a really wonderful moment. Many of you share this experience, when you recognize how your work moves onward and forward without you. It's not apparent or measurable. And in this moment in Carlos's work it becomes apparent in a very direct way. It was a reminder for myself as an artist that this ghetto that we sometimes speak about is a fiction.

**Question from audience:** Could you tell us how—if you think it does—your artwork influences each other's?

**Carlos Motta:** Do you want to speak about your collaboration?

**Andrea Geyer:** A colleague and friend of mine who I collaborated with in my work *Spiral Lands*, Simon J. Ortiz, a poet with Acoma Pueblo heritage, put it this way: Collaboration allows us to see things in each other and therefore, also, in others. It's a way of recognizing that everything that we do is much bigger than ourselves and that it's always already in a dialogue with other people. This is a political stand. He calls that kind of collaboration a form of maintenance of life. I

agree with Simon, that there is something real about the “labor” of collaboration, the affective or collegial labor we do in relating to each other in dialogue with each other. That’s why collaboration is a very important practice for me.

*Question from audience:* With both your pieces you’re dealing with the displacement of time and displacement of place. Sometimes you’re doing a more literal place. Andrea’s work is in this black-box theater, so it’s with only one prop and people’s clothing seem to be created by themselves and seem to speak to what they are talking about. But at the same time it’s timeless or kind of a time, it depends on the clip. Then in Carlos’s piece you’re taking literal things out of their time and putting them into a new time. I’d like to hear you talk about why you engaged with time in the different ways that you two are engaging.

*Carlos Motta:* What I’m interested in is the dislocation of these texts that were delivered, and had a specific kind of significance in a given time and space into the present as a way of recognizing a legacy that has not been acknowledged and the potential that it had.

In the clip that you saw, with the woman speaking about the necessity to respect the life of the workers, at the time in which I was inserting the speech back into the contemporary time it made absolute sense to speak about this because so many union workers are being killed in a specific situation

in Colombia. In that sense, it's really about learning from our disregard of history and embracing the potential of this text as an agent of history back into the present, and the same with the locations and the customs and all of that.

**Andrea Geyer:** I often talk about this idea of memory and the way in which the politics of memory—and when I say memory, I'm talking basically about three things: One is the memory of the things we've experienced in our own lives. Next is the memory that gets transferred to us through the people and communities we grow up with. Those memories are often nonverbal. Like myself for example having a very clear memory of the Second World War and fascism in Germany even though I was not alive then. There the emotional trauma of my family has been transferred to me subtly. And then there's what I call institutional memory, which is the memory that we are taught within our particular communities to remember. Sometimes we also like to activate that by making communities and creating memories collectively. These three parts of memory become one, within us, when we act in the present, when we are active agents. We relate ourselves toward the knowledge that enables us to act and to speak and become political, social, cultural actors in a current moment. That's where the characters in my work who are with time rather than in time originate as an idea. The ideas they are talking about are not as specific as in Carlos's work, but they are an echo of a knowledge that I claim exists in all of us.

*Question from audience:* Could you each speak a little bit about how you organized your viewers as producers, and specifically decisions that you made about how to exhibit the work and whether you have a set format that you would choose to exhibit in or whether you'll have the videos online and how much control you exert over that?

*Carlos Motta:* To me it is very important to make the work accessible online, so I've put everything up on video through my website. But, to answer your question more directly, I always think of the work existing in two ways. One is the space of presentation or the space of the Internet as a straightforward way of encountering the work. And the other is the space of the—well, there's a third one, the space of the installation itself. In that sense I like to respond to the space to make the work function within the confines, within the descriptions of the possibilities of the space.

So it will range from, in the case of these two pieces, from projection to monitor according to the circumstances. But then the third one is the actual space where the performance took place, which is an ephemeral space, in that it was only occupied for five or six minutes. Once with camera equipment, once without camera equipment, which is something I haven't said. There is a meeting that is done without setup of the filming and then there is a reading that is made for the filming. Because when you have cameras, people respond in specific ways and they approach or not. They think that



you are acting.

So there are those three things, and they demand different considerations in terms of how the work existed and how it is reproduced.

**Andrea Geyer:** I finished the work three weeks ago and showed it once. I create spaces with the screens that are slightly shifted within a larger exhibition space. The idea is that the space of the monitors or small screens are tilted in a way that there is a disorientation in the space. Regarding your question about how we organize our viewers as producers, that is a question that I continuously ask myself. And I'm learning from showing the work and getting responses in their installation where that becomes more apparent or more productive.

**Question from audience:** Both of these works seem to be a short series. Do you ask that your viewers watch all of them in sequence or do you have multiple monitors set up or how do you divide that?

**Carlos Motta:** Well, the two works function differently but, yes, there is a trajectory within a space that the viewer is encouraged to take.

**Andrea Geyer:** As a viewer you can choose to watch one of them or you can watch all of them. The videos themselves

are self-contained, so that something happens when you watch one of them. More happens, more ideas open up, if you watch all of them.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Alvaro Uribe, President of Colombia from 2002 to 2010