

Marcel-Í Antúnez Roca - Texts

CONVERSATION BETWEEN MARCEL-Í ANTÚNEZ & CLAUDIA GIANNETTI

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Claudia Giannetti: Before we get on more conceptual subjects I'd like to talk to you about your career so far. What experience did you have in the field of performance art before you started with La Fura dels Baus?

Marcel-Í Antúnez Roca: Nothing very important, it was really just a period of formation. Performance art as such didn't become part of the creative language of La Fura dels Baus until five years after 1979, which is when the group was founded. 1984, when Accions was premiered, marks the beginning of the group's most important work. Accions was a piece, which looked deeply at the nature of performance art and provides a permanent reference for the group as far as their style was concerned. A style which is still in use today. Nonetheless I would like to mention the group called Error Genético, which consisted of four people: Mireia Tejero (vocal, sax), Paloma Loring (vocals, guitar), the bass player Gat and myself, although I was also involved in other groups. This group was run by Mireia and myself and was based on a musical idea, though I wanted to incorporate certain taboo subjects in our society into the performances and compositions, so that synthesiser noise, metal percussion sounds or animal performers (we had a singing parrot) were incorporated into our standing and music. We also wanted to include a drum-playing chimpanzee. On the other hand, we were interested in themes related to illness and physical incapacity; hence the name, Error Genético. The philosophy of Error was to take a new look at the monstrous nature of the human body, sickness, and animal performers... That is to say, to expand the limits of what was strictly musical, to expand the limits of a certain aesthetics. We wrote a small manifesto, made a tape and sent it to the M.A.K. Festival in Zurich, and they ended up selecting us. We played in Rote Fabrik in October 1982.

C. G.: To what extent was Error Genético an innovative proposition as far as Spain was concerned?

M. A. R.: The founding of Error Genético took place at a time when there were already alternative groups in Spain, such as Macromassa -which had already been going for three or four years- in Barcelona, and Esplendor Geométrico in Madrid -whose name influenced us to some extent. Both Esplendor Geométrico and Macromassa are still going, albeit sporadically.

C. G.: But Error Genético, although it was basically musical at the beginning, aimed at being multidisciplinary...

M. A. R.: That's right. There was a certain concern with aesthetics, which went beyond music as such. The truth is we were bad musicians; Gat, the bassist player was good at keeping the beat going. So we decided to make wire headpieces with a horn at the front which had an electric light hanging from it. Gat would touch a pedal switch and the lights would go on; that was how we knew when we had to close or start a piece. The stage setting was also important. For example, at the start of the Zurich concert we met up in the middle of the audience and started screaming and throwing firecrackers.

C. G.: Do you think that the experiments with Error Genético were basic for your formation as an artist?

M. A. R.: Without doubt. The importance of Error Genético for me was greater than the group in itself. The group's idea were one of the seeds which eventually germinated into many of the proposal which I later developed in other fields and with other people. Error Genético was also the first manifestation of an opposition to the hippy lifestyle, which was clearly present in the early days of La Fura, and of a tendency towards a rawer, more aggressive and punk style.

C. G.: But, parallel to working with Error Genético, did you also do more 'theatrical' work with La Fura...?

M. A. R.: Yes, during the years with Error Genético I continued to study Fine Arts until I finished the course. I also went on working with La Fura. Up until 1982, La Fura was a group that varied somewhat, with different types of format. We did village festival parades and shows, school parties... We had a hippyish feel to us. Even though at a given moment, these shows were done under contract, the early La Fura basically did street theatre. This was clear, for example, when, a few months after having founded the group La Fura dels Baus, we bought a white mule and a cart and spent three months doing villages all over Catalonia. The cart, when set up, was used for our performances. What I'm saying is, La Fura began as the last gasp of the hippy movement, that mix of folklore and romantic idealism.

C. G.: What kind of theatre did you do?

M. A. R.: A kind of popular theatre, with a certain amount of social criticism. A play we wrote ourselves called The life of Tarino and his wife Teresina. The four acts consisted basically of the following story: there was a pregnant woman on the cart-stage. Her husband was pulling up turnips made of cloth. The women give birth on stage and Tarino was born. In the second act, these children become a good-looking young man who fell in love with Teresina. Problems in the countryside forced them to flee to the city. They'd become a suburban family. In this way, we dealt with the theme of the disillusionment and problems of urban life. The fourth act had to do with Tarino's children, who went back to the countryside. In this way, an idyllic vision was presented of life in the country, where parents and children come back together again. This plot more or less summarised both what was going on at the time, that is, the emigration from the countryside to the cities, as well as the hippy ideal of the 'simple' life, Nature, the communes and all that business. But people liked it, and it worked very well. When we arrived at the villages, we were like some kind of weird apparition: five scruffy young people with a painted cart, looking as if they'd stepped out of Middle Ages. For us it was an amazing experience, which lasted until October, because we had to pack the tour in when the October rains started.

C. G.: How did you combine your studies of Fine Arts on one hand, and your experience outside the university with La Fura and Error - on the other?

M. A. R.: Somewhat schizophrenically. I have always found myself living a permanent contradiction between what I do and the requirements of the market

and the artistic canons of the time, and that is still the case today. Maybe that's why I defend the idea that things can be seen from other points of view, from a hyper textual angle, for example. Meaning that you can do interesting things in different fields; it isn't necessary to be loyal to a single artistic field. Although things have changed a lot since then, what was happening in Spain at the time was that people followed the great models, who are artists like Miró, Tàpies, Picasso... all of them very orthodox as far as the matter of loyalty to a single discipline was concerned. People like Beuys, Duchamp and even -allowing for differences- Dalí, who did exactly as he pleased, were not taken as models. I defend the interdisciplinary position, which is pluralist, but that is exceptional as far as what is going on in the Spanish State is concerned.

C. G.: This interdisciplinary stance is clearly shown by the three paths you have followed: music on one hand, performance and theatre on the other, and then Fine Arts.

M. A. R.: Yes, throughout my career I've combined these three fields, always very much on a self-taught basis. It's important to understand that both *Error Genético* and *La Fura* were collective projects and, as such, much more open to a multidisciplinary approach.

C. G.: Looked at personally, what factors made you want to enter the world of theatre and art?

M. A. R.: A lot of things have changed in the last two decades, but when I was seventeen years old, when I came to Barcelona, I wanted to run away from my family, who lived a tough rural life which involved a great deal of work: a butcher's, two sheepfolds, pigsties, woodland... Everybody worked, and this went on every day. I wanted to run away. I was the youngest but one, of six brothers and sisters; the older brothers and sister served as models at the time, so you could see what was going to happen to you in the next few years. So I decided to study and do a graduate degree. Although I wasn't a very good student, my family was economically capable of letting me be one. That was my way of escaping. After a year in the Catalan capital, I told my friends in the village that it was a fantastic place: meeting other people, the bars, and the girls... So they came to Barcelona as well, and we rented a flat close to the Rambla. A few months later, Pere Tàntinyà, Carles Pedrisa and myself founded *La Fura*. The years 1978 and 1979 were very special in Barcelona. There was a lot of energy there -Nazario, Ocaña, Mariscal in the early days, magazines like *Star*, *Ajoblanco*, alternative comics- and even though this situation didn't last very long (as the scene moved to Madrid in the Eighties), it was a very lively moment, culturally speaking. We lived in a house on Arc del Teatre Street through which a whole load of people come and went, so that a very special, intense set up was created. This was the context in which -on the 13th of May 1979, to be precise- *La Fura dels Baus* was born. It was our way of channelling this energy. So it wasn't a tough-out process, but rather formed part of an existential moment.

C. G.: The first piece of *La Fura* really does give off this feeling of overflowing, impulsive energy. Would you say that is what lies at the heart of the group's first major piece, *Accions*?

M. A. R.: Without a doubt, but *Accions* also came about by accident. It happened like this: in the spring of the year 1982 the group changed personnel and the next eight months saw the creation of the definitive line-up of *La Fura*, which has stayed the same up until present. We weren't a group of friends anymore; rather we took on new people because of their professional qualifications and because of the group's artistic requirements. One was a juggler, another knew how to walk on stilts, yet another played an instrument... They were people with professional experience as actors or musicians. With this new line-up we managed to refloat the group over the next two seasons. New costumes were made, a show was prepared, we rehearsed on regular basis... And we became a little famous locally. In September 1983, we took part in the third *Fira de Tàrraga*, an important festival in the field of street theatre. We prepared a show in which, among other things, we lowered a live pig with angel wings, using a steel cable, from a high building onto stage, and put it in a washing machine. In the end we threw pesetas at the audience, as a response to the refusal of the festival's organisers to pay us: 'They're not paying us, but we don't care'. This performance got a good reception and we were invited to perform in the fringe section of the 16th International Festival of Sitges. We were well aware that our festive type theatre wouldn't work in a context such as Sitges. So there arose a need to do something different, and instinctively we took all the festive and folkloric elements out of our work, and invented new ways of doing things. We moved from the open space in the street to a closed space: a pedestrian subway, under the train tracks, an underground square. This presentation turned into a performance that made strong impact on the audience. It was like a chain of different shows. The direct influences from the musical discoveries of *Error Genético*, from having studied Fine Arts -Yves Klein, the Viennese Actionists, Beuys_ and our own '*Fura*? Experience converted into new formats. The Director of the Centre Dramàtic de la Generalitat saw it and liked it, and he invited us to perform this piece in Barcelona, as part of the "Teatre Obert" ('Open Theatre') programme. Before premiering *Accions* in May, 1984, a full colour feature appeared on *La Fura* in the Sunday supplement of *El País*, at that time the most influential newspaper in Spain, which showed all these photos of naked bodies drenched in paint and covered in mud. These images got the public interested in us -we were completely unknown then- a month and a half before the premiere. We premiered *Accions* and it worked very well. The piece fitted in perfectly with the mood of early Eighties, the best proof of which was the fact that a whole series of cultural, musical and artistic movements were heading in the same direction as we were: industrial music -with groups like SPK or *Einstürzende Neubauten*-, what was left of the punk movement- we were defined as 'punk theatre'- the German New Savages in the field of painting, the new British sculpture, etcetera.

C. G.: It has been said, and indeed you have confirmed this, that in fact *La Fura* created a 'trilogy'. Which are the pieces which made up this trilogy? What connections are there between them?

M. A. R.: They became a trilogy without anyone having decided on this previously. The decision was made after the premiere of the third piece, *Tier Mon*, which took a long time to put together. While doing so, in 1988, there was a feeling that the driving force behind *Accions* and *Suz/ o/ Suz* no longer existed. I think there are periods in the life of any artist or collective when you work yourself dry. A metaphor for this situation would be the planting of vegetables in the same place year after year. After a time, the soil becomes sterile and you have to plant something else or let it lie fallow. And this is what happened, more or less, at that time: we reached the end of the trilogy out of exhaustion and also, in part, because the thread running through our method had worn thin. *Accions* was, as its name suggests a group of actions or performances, which followed on, form each other, and which took place in the middle of the audience without a narrative. We noticed, however, that this set of actions produced a narrative, at least for those who experienced them. Maybe because of this, in the group's second work, *Suz/ o/ Suz*, we wanted the initial elements of *Accions* to become something more orderly, more dependent on performer. In *Accions*, the object-based, pictorial and material elements were very important. For example, the performers appeared covered in paint or in mud, they used instruments to develop their actions and the

action was always dependent on the value inherent in the object or the physical situation. In Suz/ o/ Suz, however, objects were no longer the protagonists and came to be at the service of the performer and of a central idea, which held the piece together: the idea of a modern/ primitive ritual. The great ceremony in Suz/ o/ Suz puts a lot of emphasis on music; a twelve metre stage dominates the space, in which there are always three, four or six musician playing. The move from Accions to Suz/ o/ Suz took place in a natural, continuous fashion. From the premiere of Accions, in May 1984, up to that of Suz/ o/ Suz, in August 1985, there is only a gap of one year. But the creative process behind Tier Mon turned out to be a lot more complicated. The group now had a lot more responsibility, more money, more fame, had thought more about its methods, and found it difficult to move beyond the ritual of Suz/ o/ Suz, which was La Fura's best piece.

C. G.: So the more ambitious project of Tier Mon came about as a result of this wish to do something more theatrically 'consistent'?

M. A. R.: The aim of Tier Mon was to be more literary, even though no texts were used, and there was a wish to make the characters deeper. Tier Mon is a much more complex piece as far as the staging is concerned. Special attention was paid to the way in which characters moved from scene to scene in order to give a sense of continuity; there was a protagonist and two antagonists, who appeared throughout the piece... And, although Tier Mon was on a huge scale and had sound financial backing, nonetheless it was a piece created from a position of fear, of timidity. When you do something which as worked very well, anything you do afterwards is conditioned by the fear of doing something different, and that was what affected the group. From 1985 until 1988, three

years had gone by; Suz/ o/ Suz had been performed almost all over the world, and a great deal was expected of La Fura. That was frightening! A large part of the group felt blocked, not only because of all this, but also because of the individual development going on inside each of us. When you get to thirty you lose a certain ingenuousness and become aware of everything. During the process of creating Tier Mon two different methods of work were developed, and that was when I began to have problems with the other members. I realised that we didn't have to have the consensus of the entire group, that it was possible to perform Tier Mon without such a consensus. I learnt that I could do things by taking on responsibility as an individual, and that I didn't need the collective; it was then -unconsciously, I think_ that I started to prepare my departure from the group. Although I'm not superstitious, I had a series of physical disasters during the last two years with La Fura, which made it clear to me that I couldn't go on as I was. I had an operation for skin cancer; I had a car accident, in which I broke my right humerus; later, one of the Tier Mon cranes fell on me, striking my temple and breaking my left wrist bone; and then, in 1989, to top it all, another skin cancer. All that bad luck must have been due to something. In October, 1989, one of those things happened which I wouldn't wish anybody: my lifelong friends and fellow actors got together on their own, wrote a letter, signed by everyone, and, without any warning, 'fired' me. They wrote: 'Take a year (or the rest of your life) off'. According to them, I had move forward in terms of being creative and wasn't leaving them any space, and, if I let them, with time they could take the responsibilities which I carried. That was how - with considerable bitterness- I ended my ten years with La Fura dels Baus.

C. G.: Nonetheless, you looked for other outlet for your creativity over that period; you did other parallel activities in different fields...

M. A. R.: One of the things I disliked the most was the repetitive element in the theatre work, something which was driven home with Suz/ o/ Suz. I realised I was going to be repeating that for a year or a year and a half, and that I'd be with the same people, too; there was something monotonous about this, and it left me no short term possibilities for creating something new. I looked for an outlet so I could go on creating. Then I happened to meet Pau Nubiola and Sergi Caballero, and we decided to set up an action performance group called Los Rinos. Pau is a painter and Sergi too, as well as being a musician. Although we differed in age -Sergi was nineteen, Pau twenty-one and I was twenty-five- the group gelled very well and we began to do a series of street painting, graffiti, actions. We used targets, that is the design with concentric circles, which is used as a target for archery, as symbol of identity and representation of the group. I should add that at this time, in 1985 and 1986, graffiti was a big thing in countries like France or the United States and in Barcelona: as well as us, there were two or three groups doing the same kind of thing. The direct action involved in grabbing paint brushes and 'targeting' different neighbourhoods in the city -a conceptual act in the sense that you make public space your own by using your sign- was very intense, but also problematic. We had the usual problems with police; in London we were even put in jail because of an erotic mural we painted in front of a nursery school...

The street painting thing led us to other areas. We painted animals, posters, banners, and even made the 'Rinosuit' with a target pattern, which turned us into a work of art in ourselves. This period come to a head with the publication, in spring 1986, of the magazine Los Rinos, which included large-scale photographs of our actions, as well as texts and drawings done by the group. This period of painting and graffiti work was presented in the Metrònom gallery, in December, 1986, in the form of an exhibition in which , apart from Los Rinos, other graffiti groups in the city took part.

C. G.: At different moments in our conversation, you have made clear references to the close relationship between artistic and events in your own life. But I think that this relationship grows even closer in your books. How did you get your idea for your diaries?

M. A. R.: They're not exactly written diaries, but rather books of images, artist's books, one-off items. They're travel books, which gather together my impressions, ideas and sensations at the time. I called them Art Cagarro. As I said earlier, the business of acting continually is fairly hard; you've got to go on at night, go to the party. If you like that, that's fine, but after a year it becomes completely exhausting. So the books became like a safety valve which allowed me to continue thinking, to continue the creative process. I believe that the act of creation is a very fragile act, and that it isn't often you get really great ideas. At all events, the latter are, in part, product of everyday. Years earlier, a painter friend recommended 'Take a blank notebook and make notes'. I used the idea in a new way. In three years I made around fifty booklets or books, which contain drawings, sentences, and writings. The first booklets are drawings and short written pieces: little by little, they turned into objects into which I glued things like empty Coke cans, dead toads, bread, chicken feet, chewed gum, excrement, blood... so that they ended up becoming a personal diary of materials and objects. They are like physical fragments of something you might really find in a travel book, even though the worms have had a go at some of the materials.

C. G.: Are you going on developing this work?

M. A. R.: There was a gap in the Art Cagarro project, when I worked on the production of Tier Mon, but it continued from 1989 to 1992, albeit in a very different form. I dropped the idea of a travel diary so as to turn it into an art object. The format of the books grew larger and the themes changed and showed an increasing tendency to be grouped according to subject size; then, in the final period, they became codex's, a kind of fold-out accordion which made it possible for the book to be shown within the context of an exhibition. Each of my books can only be seen if handled individually, with the exception of the codex's which can be seen as pictures, when unfolded.

C. G.: Could this different experiences which took place parallel to working with La Fura be considered as the first step towards a radical change which would involve abandoning collective activity and beginning to work as an individual artist?

M. A. R.: Yes, but it was a long process. After leaving La Fura I worked with Los Rinos in what turned out to be their last performance, 1^a Conferència a

Rinolàxia '91, a piece which was clearly theatrical in nature. Months later, I put on a play called El artificio, which was put together using more orthodox methods,

with actors I didn't know personally, and with people who worked as director, stage designer, a costume designer etceteras. In respect, I suppose I felt a need to rebuild a group, to recuperate a certain status within the theatre world, but little by little, what with one thing and another, I came to realise that it wasn't that interested in staying in that world, in doing things in that way. Then something happened which had its roots in the past: in 1987 I had asked for a six-month sabbatical from La Fura, and over those months I worked intensively with Los Rinos. This activity now resulted in three projects: Gegant, Rinosacrifici and Rinodigestió.

C. G.: What did these pieces consist of?

M. A. R.: Gegant was a large format mural picture-performance. It was a huge mural painting (12 x 22 meters) executed in an half an hour and done in various phases. The first phase involved the creation of a large drip painting by smashing plastic demijohns full of painting against a wall. In the second phase, three painters suspended from climbing ropes painted the figure of a giant Atlas. The last phase consisted of action sculpture and fireworks, in which old pieces of furniture tied to cables, and full of flares and fireworks, were thrown from the roof. This action performance was repeated, years later (1990), in Yokoama (Japan), with the title Abatón. The other piece was Rinosacrifici, a video performance that was created with a view to being shown in one of the Metrònom gallery's monographic exhibitions. It's a very disturbing video, reflecting our idea of sacrifice -in 1987- in a domestic context, with vomiting, the sacrifice of a rat in a mixer, etcetera. As you can imagine, it's a very disagreeable and nihilistic video, but it works well at dealing with the problems involved in the idea of sacrifice.

C. G.: Earlier you mentioned the Wiener Aktionismus movement, which was important in 1960s, and which proposed taking a fresh look at ritual and sacrifice. Did their projects have any important influence on your aesthetic outlook?

M. A. R.: When I come across some images by Hermann Nitsch or Otto Muehl in the Fine Arts faculty library, it was like discovering how some of my most important childhood experiences could be artistic material: the weekly visit to the slaughter-house with my father to collect the slaughtered animals meant that I was constantly seeing calves being killed, which is a very violent business; sheep sometime had to be slaughtered at home, a ritual in which I took part... All this now became part of an aesthetic outlook. This kind of connection is what interested me -and still interests me- about the Viennese Actionists.

C. G.: Going back to Rinosacrifici, was it a piece designed for video...?

M. A. R.: Yes, for video. The actions only happened once, for the camera. The disturbing nature of the video is underscored by the music and sounds of theme music from programmes and news bulletins taken from the Spanish TV. The last project done in 1987 was Rinodigestió. A mural installation, which consisted of twenty-seven wood and glass boxes full of food: fruit, vegetables, raw meat,

seeds, bread... These boxes were placed in a fashion similar to that of paintings in 19th century galleries. They were all connected by transparent tubes; the upper part of the installation had three large funnels, which collected the rain and thus started a process of decomposition within the boxes, with bacteria, air and water combined. You could see how the box-picture changed day by day. The installation was presented at the L'H. ART show, in L'Hospitalet de Llobregat (Barcelona).

C. G.: The idea of the decomposition of the biological material is particularly noticeable in Rinodigestió, and has a special meaning in much of your work. It strikes me as being an important transition piece, taking you to L'home de carn, or the 'Flesh Man'...

M. A. R.: Without doubt. Five years later I presented the robot known as JoAn?, l'home de carn. The 'Flash Man' was made at the same time as two films I did with the Catalan director J. M. Aixalà, entitled Retrats and Frontón el hombre navarro va a la luna.

C. G.: I believe that a connection can be seen between the vital biological process inherent in decomposition, as in Rinodigestió, and a similar process in JoAn?. Nonetheless, JoAn? represents a hybrid figure lying between the organic (flash9 and the artificial (mechanics). Why a robot with that 'flash overcoat'?

M. A. R.: Already with La Fura, we'd use electronic music and interfaces in order to convert M. I. D. I. Language into a robot control system. We also used this system in the exhibition of the sound artefacts we called Automàtics (designed by Jordi Arus and myself) in 1988; and in physical sound instruments, such as foghorns, pumps and bells with electric percussion, in Tier Mon. JoAn? came about as a result of all this research, all these attempts, and of course these precedents also made it possible to think of interaction with the audience, even though this was taken a step forward. But JoAn? was also a result of a recurrent, personal theme; first, because flesh or meat is an icon of my childhood. When I was a child, in the family butcher's I realised that by slicing up various parts of the pig I could build little anthropomorphic 'golems'. The second inspirational element was a dream I had in 1990, in which I saw myself sewing -rebuilding - a human body in my family's butcher shop. My initial idea was that this could be eaten, and later, together with Sergi, we decided to build a robot, that is to say, a machine covered with 'skin' of real flash.

C. G.: What level of interaction was there between the audience and JoAn?

M. A. R.: Interaction was made possible by means of a microphone which served as an interface between the voices of the audience and a computer equipped with an application subject to a random process, so that the reactions of the robot, within its mechanical limitations, were not always the same. It was odd to watch how people reacted when this object was exhibited in a public space such as the Boqueria market, right in the centre of Barcelona. The women shouted, or laughed, to the object's face. One even sang to him every morning... It was fascinating to watch this game go on. At times, a situation would arise that made the piece into a real action performance.

C. G.: Working with flesh as the 'building' material of the object led to a series of objects entitled La vida sin amor no tiene sentido...

M. A. R.: The offer of an exhibition in the Montcada gallery belonging to the Fundació "la Caixa" got me thinking about working with separate parts of the human body. When preparing the separate parts of JoAn?, I had discovered that a more violent effect was created when the body was broken up.

C. G.: When observing the attitude of the public at the La vida sin amor no tiene sentido exhibition, and also when in front of the 'Flesh Man', I realised that both caused a complex reaction, a mixture of surprise and disgust, of reject and anxiety. Did you consciously seek to get this effect?

M. A. R.: My past forms part of a social past which goes back into the mist of time, and in which the idea of the perennial return still persists. For example, my elder brother's Christian name is the same as that of my grand father, and my grandfather was named after his grandfather, and my father is named after his great-grandfather, etcetera. This kind of continuity, which begins at some specific moment in history, develops into a whole social environment in which there is a series of powerful rites which, almost on an unconscious level, are linked to my work. La Fura provoked the type of violent effect laced with the fascination that you mention. It should be stressed that the violent effect of my work is connected, to some extent, with the Press. The latter tends to highlight the sensational, the

'gutter elements'. It is also the result of the fact that the work touches upon certain taboos for certain social groups. But really, I think of myself as a sensitive person, I react emotively to the work of other artists, I have my own ethical code, and, deep down, in almost all my work there is an interplay between simulation and reality.

C. G.: Simulation and reality are, without a doubt, the key themes of your other piece, Epizoo, which on the one hand continues to develop aspects which are direct and violent, to do with reality and its relationship with new technology and with control; on the other hand, with Epizoo you continue your research in the field of performance art. There is a third element, which can be included here as well: the interaction of the audience with the piece, a theme you already had begun to explore with JoAn?

M. A. R.: I think that JoAn? is, in fact, a step towards Epizoo. Everything comes out of a process which develops little by little. In 1^a Conferència a Rinolàxia '91, for example, there was a live pig on stage with a pneumatic piston that we remote controlled so that the animal would dance when we wanted it to; this idea of having a 'puppet' controlling animals was an idea that precede Epizoo. Another example would be the logical process of creating an interface between the musical and the robotic, which had been developed in Tier Mon, and which made it possible to imagine its application to other type of mechanism. I believe that it is precisely the writing of pieces that take place in real time, such as stage pieces, for example, which go through the filter of computer technology, mechanics and so on. I understand that this process is collective. I do not defend the position of the artist as an isolated, unique brilliant person; I firmly believe in working together, and my career is proof of that. When you create a new piece, there always emerges -after the feeling of satisfaction- the

frustration caused by knowing what you have been unable to achieve with it. For example, the frustration with Accions was due to the impossibility of creating something more complex, even though its strength lay precisely in its simplicity. Suz/ o/ Suz came about as a consequence of this frustration. Partly out of the frustration caused by what I had been unable to achieve with 1^a Conferència a Rinolàxia '91, there came the idea of Epizoo. Epizoo was also the result of the frustration produced by the interactive programme in JoAn?, which was based on random sequences. I am not much interested in randomness and its consequences. As an artist I prefer to work on other themes, such as behaviour, for example, or the discovery of the capacity of the machine to understand its environment and who is watching it, etcetera. Jordà and I talked about the need to look for a more efficient interface than the one of JoAn?. I mentioned that I'd had a good idea: Epizoo. At first, he didn't believe in the idea, but he started work on the project, together with Paco Corachán and Roland Olbeter.

C. G.: What was the initial idea behind Epizoo?

M. A. R.: My idea consisted of offering the erotic parts of my body to the audience and so break up the - albeit metaphorically- the situation created around the Aids epidemic, which has turned us all into potential contaminators. And I began to work with this idea. Bit by bit, what had started off as a very simple interface turned into something much more complex. This situation was fantastic for me, because it opened up a whole new horizon for me. I began to think in methodological terms. I'd been dreaming ever since the 1980s of a participatory system like this one. With Epizoo it became possible.

C. G.: Up until then, your career had been marked by a very intuitive, almost impulsive way of doing things. How did you make the step to a more reflective, more methodical attitude?

M. A. R.: My reflection as regards procedures and methods has been a fairly slow process, which hasn't involved a great deal of theory. At a given moment I began to search for the keys which would help me understand which mechanisms would function in a complex and spectacular project like this one. I realised, for example, that certain stage pieces, like those of La Fura, are like a multi-layer cake in which each level represents a different discipline. Like a musical pentagram in which, instead of instruments, you have areas of intervention: music, action, materials, lights, etcetera. As I see it, the method behind classical theatre results in a strict hierarchy, with a pyramid structure, in which the figure of the author and/or director is to be found right at the top, and below which are some actors who obey orders, and only offer solutions as actors, and then the stage designer, who offers solutions regarding the set. This system creates a language, which has been worn thin, which is predictable, and which few artists manage to get away from. In La Fura we didn't use any type of hierarchical arrangement, on the contrary, we worked on collective basis, so that each member contributed what he or she could; not in pyramid fashion but horizontally, openly, interactively and with right of reply. In Epizoo I took another look at this problem of levels or areas of intervention. It was fascinating to be

able to work with animated images, to intervene in the music using my voice, and for there to be interactive control of my own body, that is an element necessary to the spectacle, which plays part in the pieces as a whole. It should be stressed that this is a piece in which the text doesn't have the importance that it might in classical theatre or in talking movies, with their dialogues. Once the text has disappeared as an essential element, it is much easier to intervene in the multidisciplinary project. I find it interesting to work on precisely with this consideration as a base, while being fully aware of what it means when these areas interact amongst themselves, creating a superior and unbreakable reality, that is, the project itself. We can often see multimedia pieces which use all this resources, and the latter are not integrated in any way; they are developed as independent registers which are taking place at the same time and in the same space; it doesn't work and it's impossible to generate any kind of poetry.

C. G.: So that meant you created an open system which made any type of intervention possible at any given moment...

M. A. R.: Yes, but months after the first presentation of Epizoo, I discovered that I was absolutely victimised, without any right of reply, and that decided me to change the piece. I incorporated a video camera and a microphone with a range of sound effects which enable me to struggle against the existing pressure, which was psychologically very strong and which made me vulnerable. This vulnerability might well be the basis of the poetical element in my work. JoAn?, for example, despite his cruelty, looked like a nice guy, he was a friendly character who inspired feelings of friendliness... Curious, isn't it? People missed him when the exhibit was dismantled, The same thing happened with La vida sin amor... exhibition, with its material of torn flesh transformed into love poems, the pots with hearts...

C. G.: How do you see the tradition of Baroque and the ritualised, which is so strong in Spain?

M. A. R.: You might say that is the territory in which I move, and no other. I like the Baroque precisely because of its anti-stylistic nature and also because of the figure of artist who goes beyond the barriers of genre and of given artistic fields. That is what I feel, and that is what I get the most enjoyment from. On top of that, going beyond the idea of the baroque, I believe that all the countries of the European stretch of the Mediterranean are more or less the same. I don't see a great deal of difference between Greeks, the Balkanic people, Italians, Portuguese, Spaniard, Catalans... There is something we have in common which define all of us. However, if we have to look for idiosyncrasies, I would say that the people who had lived in Spain since the year dot, even before the advent of Romans, have projected a more dramatic way of being than other peoples. It is odd to observe how over the years artists have appeared who always carry this tragic, sacrificial, ritual vision with them: Goya, Valle Inclán, Buñuel... Without putting myself on the same level as them, there is something, which links me to this tradition; I feel

closer to Buñuel than to Miró. Maybe that's the reason why La Fura was so successful. Deep down, Europe is still entrenched in its pre-industrial beliefs. With Epizoo something similar happened because, although we try to live rationally, there are certain elements over

which we have no control, handed down from generation to generation. Most of my work is involved with that symbolic, preconscious state of mind.

C. G.: How did you connect the Iberian tradition with the media of the contemporary world?

M. A. R.: The interplay between telluric ancestry and the technological future strikes me as being interesting. Maybe one of the most fascinating debates involving the latest scientific and technological advances is that which concerns the possibility of integrating the latter into our own 'nature', given our limitations as animal equipped with instincts, impulses and unpardonable desires. I don't believe that we have to give up our legs, sexual organs or sense of taste, simply because we have artificial products which are superior to them. It is no longer strictly necessary to fuck in order to reproduce... You can eat freeze-dried food which is absolutely tasteless. Science, technology and art, it goes without saying (even electronic art), have to accept these facts and adapt them to the breakthroughs being made in each respective field.

C. G.: Epizoo had a tremendous national and international impact. It was a piece that you presented at major art, performance and new technology festivals around the world. If I'm not mistaken, you've given over fifty performances in seventeen different countries. What is more, you were one of the Catalan artists who gave the most performance during 1997. How do you cope with fame?

M. A. R.: I honestly don't think about it. When I see myself in the Press or in catalogues, I see another person; I see a product which I either like or dislike. I often have the feeling that each passing second leaves the person who was occupying your body behind, and that at each given moment you are somebody new, different. I suppose that this is to do with a need to get what you haven't yet got, and which you are struggling to get. What is more, as far as fame is concerned it is very easy to fall into oblivion... It happened to me once, and since then I've been very sceptical about the meaning of fame.

C. G.: I have read the project notes for Afasia, your latest work: a mixture of performance, multimedia action, and spectacle; I was surprised by the fact that you have brought back the Ulysses myth and transformed his voyage in the script for your work. What made you decide to propose a contemporary version of the epic poem known as The Odyssey?

M. A. R.: One of the reasons why I did this was to mark out a clear working framework within which the different interactive elements that make up the work could be developed. When working in an interactive environment, there is always the possibility that you will get lost one the way, especially if you are using an extensive database. My starting point was the assumption that a storyline of this type, well known to everyone, would make it easier to recognise the different elements involved and give the journey certain sense of continuity. Interactive language is often closer to being a metaphor for a geographical, spatial or three-dimensional area than for a time sequence. The possibility of using the places in The Odyssey, that is to say, a sea with islands on each of

which certain specific things take place, seemed to me to be a good idea. Afasia has been in the pipeline for almost two years. At all events, any reference made to Greek epic is highly personal, and priority is given to the initial intentions, the ideas that are the prime movers behind my piece.

C. G.: The way you have conceived Afasia is more radical, in that you incorporate interactive robots and projected characters on video who 'respond' to your actions, as actors. On the other hand, you have developed new interface possibilities between your body and the different objects which make up the piece, thus establishing a direct body-machine dialogue. With this piece, are you materialising the concept of art as communication between different systems? How do you envisage the role of the spectator?

M. A. R.: With Afasia I wish to stress the idea of how the expansion of different artistic disciplines and their hybridisation has come about thanks to technology. Contemporary art and all that is connected to it cannot be pigeonholed off into stagnant compartments. I believe that, while certain aspects of technology are moving forward very fast, others are still very underdeveloped. Among the latter are interfaces; our relationship with computers goes through the keyboard, which is simply an extension of the piano keyboard invented several centuries ago, and the mouse, invented by Xerox relatively recently and which is excellent but has certain limitations as regards precision and the possibility of acting simultaneously on different levels. In my opinion the substitution of these traditional interfaces for an exterior skeleton which acts according to my body position, and the use of a system of artificial vision which allows me to use my position in space as an interactive element, constitute new advances towards the development of systems which strengthen the possibilities for interaction and expand them in more human directions. Although the responsibility for interaction lies mainly with myself, there are also certain sections of Afasia which are open to the interaction of audience, using sound.