

## BUSTLING ECOLOGIES

With a process of material relationships we shall call “bustling ecologies”, Ariadna Parreu asks us what type of natures are we producing. While she works on the Glossary that accompanies her *boca-bola* (mouth-ball) exhibition, I ask myself what is she looking for, how is she looking for it and what will she do to know whether she has found it. However, I know for a fact that Ariadna does not believe in the imperative of form or in the hermetic categories of hard and encapsulated knowledge. She is a fan of the messiness of dark, salty, combustible and spectral matter. Something tells me that her bustling ecology is an illusion, a flight of invisible threads like the ones invoked by the Chilean artist and author Marianne Hoffmeister on the subject of radical empathy, when she claimed, without hesitation, that the essence of the world is ghostly, and that we live trapped in a web of invisible and material worlds: “Ours is a corporal experience, but there are so many dimensions that expand beyond our senses and end up far from what we consider our body and our perceptive mind.”<sup>1</sup> In this sense, *boca-bola* is a dark and ghostly ecology, an empathetic radicalism that rejects the cryptic mysteries of a supernatural world in favour of the living invisibilities linked to our present location.

This present which establishes all that we cannot see at first glance is referred to by the English philosopher and author Timothy Morton as “*the mesh*”<sup>2</sup>. A muddle in which all living and non-living beings are connected to each other and where nothing exists by itself. His ecological thinking is an ironic expression of uncertainty, an environment not too remote from the one presented by Ariadna Parreu in her synthetic, constructed nature. Away with blame and the aesthetic screen. In *boca-bola*, Nature has lost the irreconcilable quality of always being somewhere else, separate from the human space we like to consider exclusively human, and which is often something else. The dark ecology of bustle is not just an idea, but an urbanised space that is also philosophical, mental and social. A mythology of undergrowth, of red sky and of lovers of gas. The look of desire and otherness. A reworking of Canova’s *Eros and Psyche*. It presents material ramifications and speculations about which meshes reproduce and/or sustain the forms of life and death of the universe that connects us. Plastic, the raw material and the extruded material. Minerals and metals also. Improvement and progress. The rubber engine valve.

*boca-bola* not only debunks the ecology as a human desire for power that lies beneath the false appearance of non-human agency, but proposes affirmative, positive and alternative formulations, even utopian ones, to the epistemic and taxonomic legacies of the

broken world of modernity. There is no ontological division or difference between Plant-being and Object-being. Nor is there one between nature and culture, or between mouth and ball. In fact, researchers of the darkness have told us that in the late nineties last century, and also early this century, what we knew as reality entered a particle accelerator run by cybernetic machines, transnational companies and financial agents, which gave rise to a series of cuts, flows, associated waves, partial objects, convergent vectors and dissociative lines that have deterritorialized thinking, in terms of the vector of the matter, towards a space-time, what we consider to be Real, that is strange and almost frightening. In dialogue with this context, the researchers of the darkness have created a cognitive and perceptive prosthesis called Gothic Materialism from which it is possible to trace the viscous flow of said new reality, which merely underlines and manifests that the logic of the paired categories of Aristotle’s square of opposition of modernity surpass the limit of all sensible reality to enter a zone referred to by the English critic Mark Fisher as “*gothic flatline*”: “A plane in which it is no longer possible to differentiate between the animate and the inanimate, and in which having agency does not necessarily imply what we understand by being alive today.”<sup>3</sup>

The flatline concept has, at the very least, a double meaning. Firstly, it points to a vernacular terminology for reading an Electroencephalogram (EEG), which indicates brain death; a representation, on digital monitors, of non-activity. However, from the perspective of Gothic Materialism, the flatline construct refers to everything that occurs on the “*Otherside*”, beyond the screens (of subjectivity): “The ‘line Outside’ does not delineate a line of death, but a continuum which refers to, and ultimately goes beyond, death and life. In the Gothic Flatline, the subjects and the agents, both human and non-human, are neutralised, and placed in suspension with regard to life and death.”<sup>4</sup> The ecology of bustle would also be materialistic and Gothic. Although intuition tells us that the artist has subjected the cybernetic flatline to vertical loads in order to suspend the forms of life and death that connect our universe in a differentiating curve, like an overhead cable or a cavernous density. Over the heavy lines of the spectral matter lie the flown eyes of the petro-chemical industry. Coffins and sarcophagi. The mortification of matter. About this transmutation of the overhead line, Ariadna Parreu says “atomic bombardment”, and offers gold, which is the first element we find in the *boca-bola* exhibition. Golden flame. Sexuality and food, the strange logic of turbulence. A 500 degree embrace, the mouth constricting and exploding in this way.

The first thing the artist explained to me about her sculpture exhibition was that the two words coincide in their etymological origin: mouth and ball. The

lump and the cavity. Where form cancels itself out. Material/anti-material, particle/anti-particle. Two poles in contact, rubbing. Through contact the bustle is ignited: hubbub or din, row and disorder. Confusion, racket, uproar, chaos. Murmur, noise, mess and shouting. The matter that informs. Response to the “dumb matter” the North American political philosopher Jane Bennett referred to in her essay on the political ecology of things, to speak to us of the habit of interpreting the world based on the distribution of what is sensible that consists of separating ‘it’ (things) from ‘vibrant matter’ (us, humans). The claim of the vitality of matter in Bennett’s studies highlights “the capacity of things –edibles, commodities, storms, metals– not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans, but also to act as quasi-agents or forces with trajectories, propensities or tendencies of their own.” The hunch that “the image of dead or thoroughly instrumentalized matter feeds human hubris and our earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption is at the same time the foundation that prevents us from detecting, listening to, smelling, tasting, feeling a fuller range of non-human powers circulating around and inside the human body.”<sup>5</sup>

*boca-bola*: the obverse–reverse does not exist neither here inside, or there outside. “The processes or entities that we cannot perceive with our own senses, or which escape our temporality are spectral, yet inevitably material since they shape our place in this world.”<sup>6</sup>. In this regard, it was Marianne Hoffmeister who pointed out that, in truth, the limits have always been blurred and the identities diffuse. The bustle of *boca-bola* asks the question what would happen if we stopped considering what is in front of us as if they were cast-offs of a consumer society, waste material, and instead relate to it as if it was a vast quantity of potentially-hazardous vibrant matter: “How would our patterns of consumption change if our rubbish was no longer far from the house, separated from our lives, and we had to co-exist with the dynamic currents of chemical substances or volatile methane gases?”<sup>7</sup>.

Plastics, toxic materials, even all waste that is difficult to recycle, such as computer monitors (with such a low green energy value), shape an asthmatic, white body here. Ariadna Parreu says that “we produce ethylene ourselves with our breathing and it causes the ‘natural’ putrefaction of fruit. Propylene, on the other hand, is synthetic, even though it has been found in rather amazing subterranean lakes.”<sup>8</sup> The lead in the first exhibition hall, black. The copper in the third, red. In the three halls, different overlapping states of the transformation of the matter. All have some element of self-portrait: action and conscience. If we think about it, there is not so much difference between conscience and action. Both always imply some form of self-reflection. The conscience can be

understood as a *quantum*, a zero degree of the action. Consequently, thinking of or about something is already intervening in its reality, since this reality could transform the initial thought through its material agency.

Our reality covers different timescales and shapes a rhythmic pattern where a diversity of glints of light which elude a cohesive and singular image is undone, superimposed or blurred. A planar movement similar to the behaviour Parreu describes about liquid glass in red-hot state, when it is hurries to cool down: “Placed between panes of glass to contain a state, an in-between difficult to contain, like something blatantly solid, as ideas are. It brings to mind the particle accelerator of the nineties and the processes of deterritorialising thought and matter. So I also think of what Timothy Morton said, that art could be a good tactic of socio-material occupation, since, instead of holding up a placard about the petro-chemical installations in the city, for example, we could build a wall of ecological action. Deploying relations and processes more similar to the anarchistic tactic of occupying public space and the confusion of the matter, at all times in favour of the ghosts.

*From the abyss we cannot see,  
the darkness observes us.*<sup>9</sup>

Núria Gómez Gabriel

1. Hoffmeister, M. (2020). *The Ghostly Ecologies*. Pimoa Cthulhu Tentacular Writing Residency This is Jackalope x Institute for Postnatural Studies Marianne Hoffmeister. Issue 03. This is Jackalope. pp. 111-121 (Own translation)  
2. Morton, T. (2019). *Dark Ecology. For a logic of future coexistence*. Barcelona: Paidós  
3. Fisher, M. (2022). *Flatline Constructs. Gothic Materialism and Cybernetic Theory-Fiction*. Buenos Aires: Caja Negra. p.35  
4. Jorge, J.I Zalazar, B. (comp.) (2022). *Pulsiones materiales Buenos Aires: Teseo*. [Online search] tsetopress.com [4 May 2024]. E-book available at the URL: tsetopress.com/pulsionesmateriales.

5. Bennett, J. (2022) *Vibrant Matter. A political ecology of things*. Buenos Aires: Caja Negra. pp-10-15 (Own translation)  
6. Hoffmeister, M. (2020). *Op. Cit.* pp. 111-121  
7. Bennett, J. (2022). *Op. Cit.* p. 9  
8. In-person communication with the artist. 22 April 2024. The quotes in this paragraph are fragments of the initial version of the Glossary of materials which Ariadna Parreu sent us with Sergio Ibáñez by e-mail. The entry referred to in the Glossary is the one she dedicates to lead.  
9. Dedication made by the Catalan poet Maria Sevilla when she signed a copy of her book of poems *La nit ovipara* (2024), when we shared a table on 23 April at the book signing at the Crisi Espai thinking cooperative in Barcelona.