



Composting as Artistic Practice

Gerardo Gomez Tonda
Portfolio 8/2020

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Composting as Artistic Practice

Origin Stories

Workshop-performance and video installation, 45min. *If Not Now*, BAK basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht 2020.

Composting with Worms

Video documentation, 15min. HKU MAFA, 2020.

Composting with the Archive

Workshop-performance, 13 sessions of variable durations in 9 months. Various locations in the Netherlands 2019—2020.

Antecedents

Aguila Devorando Serpiente

Lecture -performance, 9min. HKU MAFA, 2019. *Making Sense*, UU, Utrecht 2020.

Cube

Performance, 10min. HKU MAFA, Utrecht 2019.

Infernillo 1961 / Winter, allegro non molto

Video, 3:32min. HKU MAFA, Utrecht 2018.

Bios



Composting as artistic practice

Composting is a practice of soil renewal. As artistic practice composting works and thinks through forms of belonging. It takes place in form of eco-social collaborations investigating relationship to land and multispecies encounter.

As a migrant in the Netherlands, I'm looking to open spaces and find opportunities to learn with the structures and everyday practices that articulate belonging, namely that which grounds, enables and facilitates rooting.

Composting as artistic practice asks:
'How can we imagine and build an inclusive form of belonging?'

So far three sub-projects have emerged: Origin Stories, Composting with Worms, and Composting with the Archive.





Origin Stories

Origin Stories explores narratives and articulations of belonging in a series of participative collaborative performances. They combine the stories of a flooded town, my family archive, a fish invasion, together with the exercise of composting waste. It is the concrete challenge of finding belonging in a particular physical space.

Some important elements of *Origin Stories* are participation, conversation and performing simple exercises that trigger haptic relations like embroidery.

Storytelling, context and belonging. Departing from family archive, I have researched social-political-ecological trajectories that reveal other sides to the stories that inform my sense of belonging. These intertwined narratives are the case study for the workshop-performance.

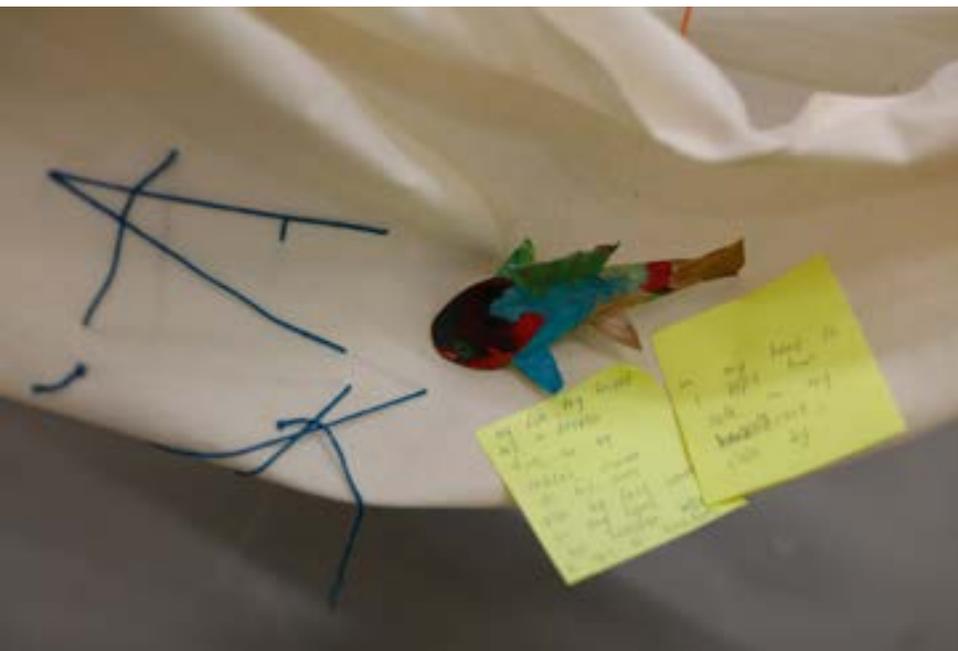


Futures with Belongings, Embroidery and conversation exercise. MAFA HKU Open day 2019. Inspired by the training from Patricia Kaersenhout, (New) Formats of Care in Times of Violence, BAK 2019.

As part of the workshop performance, we practice articulations of belonging via storytelling. *Origin Stories*, workshop - performance and video installation. *If Not Now*, BAK 2020. Photo: Chun - Yao Lin

A long piece of fabric hangs from strings making a shelter for the participants. It provides the needed architecture for the workshop: to keep 1.5 mts of distance, a screen for a video-projection, and a setting for sharing stories.

After listening to the stories of the video, with the knowledge we carry in our lives, we help the fishes in finding their belonging. The session closes with composting BAK's waste, with making new soil.



One of the 50 fishes that I made together with my partner and two children for the workshop - performance at *If Not Now*, BAK 2020. Photo: Chun - Yao Lin

View of the installation *Origin Stories*, at *If Not Now*, BAK 2020. Photo: Chun - Yao Lin



To move around

Composting with Worms

But

Composting with Worms, is a video documentation of the process of adopting worms that my partner, two kids and me did over the course of two weeks during the COVID 19 lockdown.

This 15min video was edited with close attention to the work of re-arranging ourselves in the constellation of belongings that is our family to accommodate the worms as new members. Facing the challenge of making space for other critters, pushing our sense of belonging beyond, are in this case registered as subtle transformations and movements in the dimensions of emotional labor and haptic relations.

Yes



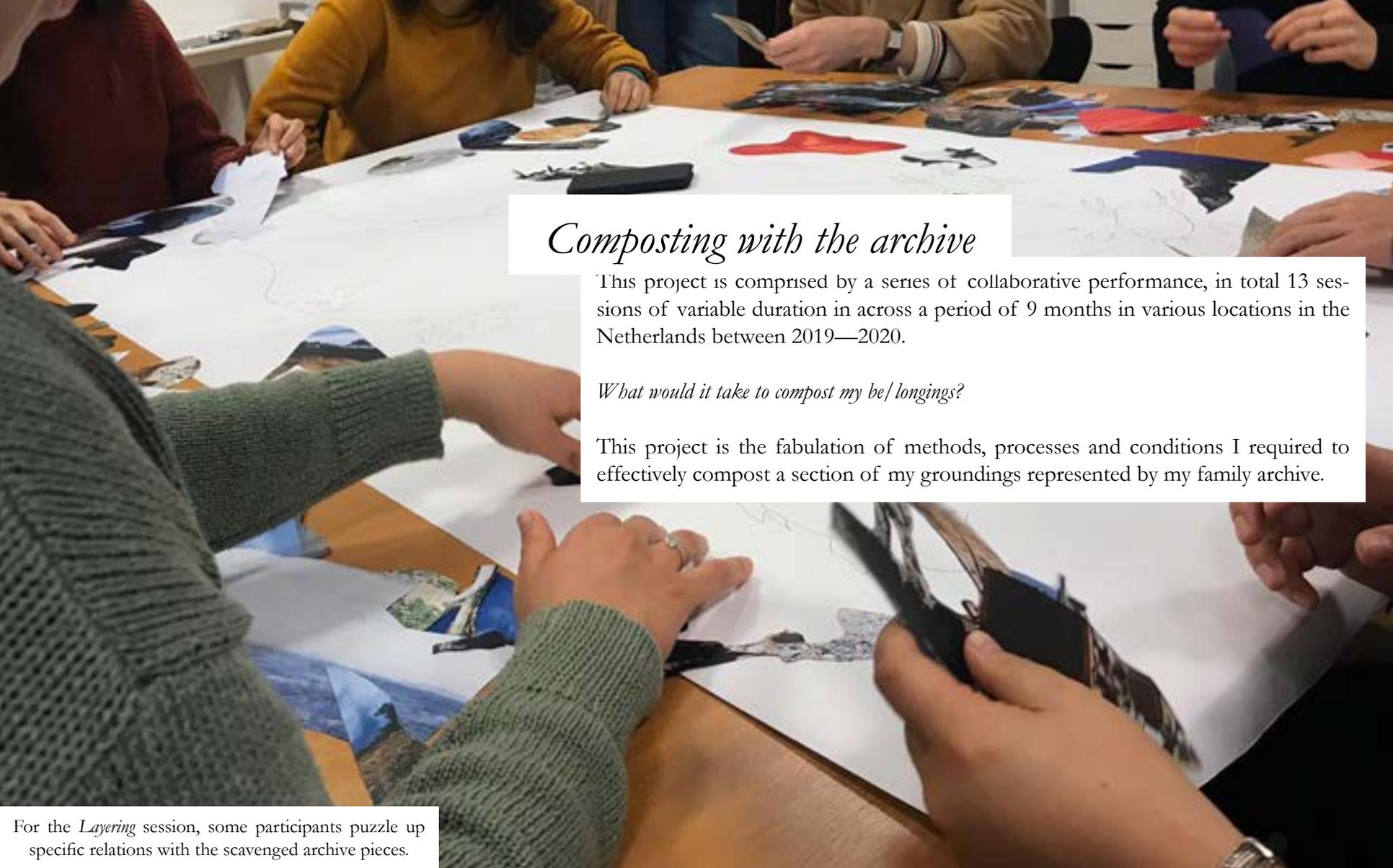
Above and below: *Composting with Worms*, video documentation still. HKU MAFA, 2020



Wormpjes, drawing by Juna Gomez Tonda depicting a section of the worm bin we made. Color pencils and copper tape on paper. The Hague, 2020



Patriarchy and human supremacy. The structures that organize the cohabitation and sociality of my home are the site of contestation and work for this project. Facing patriarchy, with its hierarchical arrangements of subjects is one of the biggest challenges of the project.



Composting with the archive

This project is comprised by a series of collaborative performance, in total 13 sessions of variable duration in across a period of 9 months in various locations in the Netherlands between 2019—2020.

What would it take to compost my be/longings?

This project is the fabulation of methods, processes and conditions I required to effectively compost a section of my groundings represented by my family archive.

For the *Layering* session, some participants puzzle up specific relations with the scavenged archive pieces.



Scavenging session at home. The Hague 2019



Layering session, the participants piece the diagram together . HKU MAFA, Utrecht 2019

Scavenging: Together with my partner, and my two kids, we went through prints of my family archive with scissors, breaking-down the images following the intuition of our hands. This took place in two sessions of 1.5hrs each.

Layering: With the help of 10 participants, we organized the broken-down pieces using our intuition, and placing them on a soil microbiology diagram based on Elaine Ingham's diagram.

Sound scale: My kids and I, explored sonic expressions of microecological soundscapes. Later I arranged the samples in a sound piece.

[Link to the *Sound Scale*.](#)

Mesophiles session at Share Your Practice, HKU, Utrecht 2019. Wooden structure, fabric, video projection, and archive prints scraps.

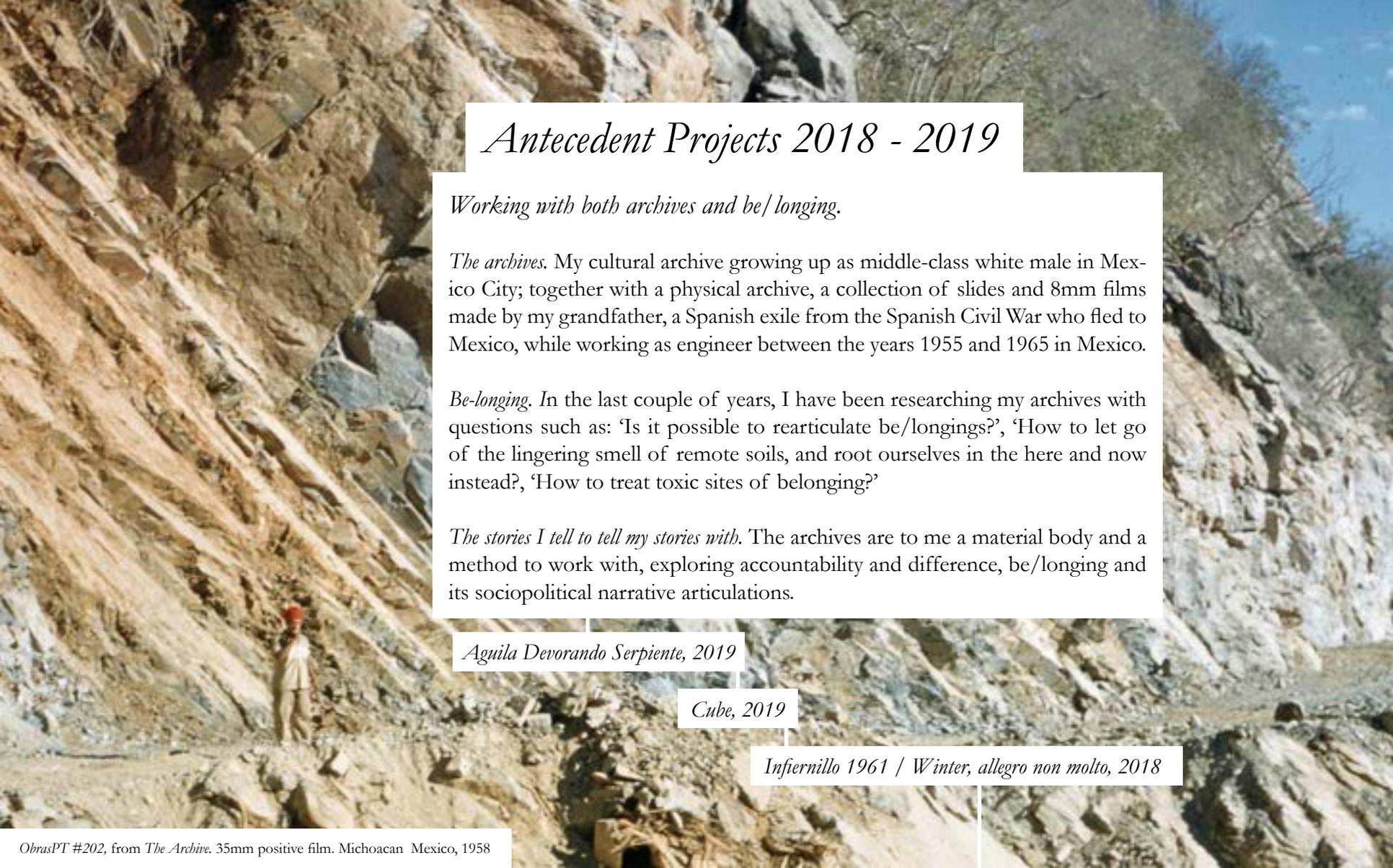


Mesophiles: MA students Fine Arts, Scenography , and tutors from both programs of the HKU, we enacted a soil dynamic to process further the pieces of the archive. The dynamic involved making groups of fungi, bacteria, and nematodes, that would engage together with the archive scraps, ingesting them and transforming them into something new.

A bag: This pending session, will happen with the help of 6 to 8 volunteers that participated in the *Mesophiles* process, which will turn the previous session materials into a bag or a container or a carrier.

Mesophiles session at Share Your Practice, HKU, Utrecht 2019. Some participants -that played the role of **fungi**, write down their group sentences.



A photograph of a steep, rocky hillside. The rock face is light-colored and shows distinct horizontal and diagonal layering. A person wearing a red hat and light-colored clothing stands at the base of the cliff on the left side, providing a sense of scale. The sky is blue with some light clouds.

Antecedent Projects 2018 - 2019

Working with both archives and be/longing.

The archives. My cultural archive growing up as middle-class white male in Mexico City; together with a physical archive, a collection of slides and 8mm films made by my grandfather, a Spanish exile from the Spanish Civil War who fled to Mexico, while working as engineer between the years 1955 and 1965 in Mexico.

Be-longing. In the last couple of years, I have been researching my archives with questions such as: 'Is it possible to rearticulate be/longings?', 'How to let go of the lingering smell of remote soils, and root ourselves in the here and now instead?', 'How to treat toxic sites of belonging?'

The stories I tell to tell my stories with. The archives are to me a material body and a method to work with, exploring accountability and difference, be/longing and its sociopolitical narrative articulations.

Aguila Devorando Serpiente, 2019

Cube, 2019

Infiernillo 1961 / Winter, allegro non molto, 2018



Aguila Devorando Serpiente

A sonic, visual, haptic storytelling performance of 9min. Performed at HKU in 2019 and at *Making Sense*, UU, Utrecht 2020.

This lecture-performance, is a decolonial reflection on the construction and interrelation of stories and myths that carry a personal sense of belonging.



In both images, the audience engages with sonic, visual and haptic storytelling at the HKU performance in 2019.



Storytelling and Hapticality. Complex interrelated stories, encounter the audience by weaving a performance haptically, with sounds, and visually.

Decolonial storytelling. A story without conclusions, made from a relational perspective, challenges the foundational myth of the begetting of the Mexican nation-state by highlighting its colonial discourse.

Link to *Aguila Devorando Serpiente* at the UU, 2020

Three of the 29 slides projected in *Aguila Devorando Serpiente* using positive film slides of my archive, digital drawing and text. **Upper left:** the eagle is also a piece of removed rainforest. **Lower left:** an allegory to the Mexican national emblem. **Lower right:** the Infiernillo Hydroelectric Dam the day of its inauguration.



Lake Rocks Prickly Pear Plant Eagle Snake





Cube

Performance involving three projectors with a duration of 10min at the HKU, Utrecht 2019. With the three projections (video, slides and film), bringing their specific temporalities and narratives of displacement, I draw a virtual space walled by the perspectives that inform my belonging in displacement.

Three projections: a fixed beamer, forward and backwards 8mm film, and a moving slide projection, filtered by my hand. HKU, Utrecht 2019

Nine 35mm slides made by me as a child, one 8mm film reel made by my grandfather in 1964, and a video composition of footage of the Mexican revolution and the Spanish civil war.



Still of the video projection of *Cube* [link here]. This footage shows Spanish exiles in 1939, walking the so-called *The Road of Death (La Carretera de la Muerte)* close to the city of Malaga, Spain.

Time and Temporalities coming together in the form of exile. With *Cube*, I explore ways in which the Mexican revolution, the Spanish civil war and the modernization of Mexico inform the childhood of my grandparents, that of my parents, and my own. Three temporalities are made present by a forward and backwards 8mm projection, a video projection with sound and slide projector, are intersected with a slide projection, that is search for a binding position. This slide projection, is me pointing the projector, looking for a moment to conceal the cube.

Link to *Cube* documentation of HKU 2019 performance.

An aerial, slightly blurred photograph of a massive dam construction site. The dam's concrete structure is visible, stretching across a deep valley. The surrounding landscape is rugged and mountainous, with some buildings and infrastructure visible on the slopes. The overall tone is somewhat desaturated, with a mix of earthy and grey colors.

Infiernillo 1961 /

Winter, allegro non molto

With this video essay of 3.5Min, presented at the HKU in 2018, I attempt to question the (colonial) narrative devices used in the historic documentary/propaganda of the making of the biggest hydroelectric dam in Latin America at the time; a project where my grandfather took part in the making.



Infiernillo 1961 / Winter, allegro non molto, video with dissonant L and R channels. The left audio channel has the original soundtrack of the documentary, which contains Vivaldi's piece, and the right audio channel a different version of the same music piece. On each still, Vivaldi's sheet music on the left, the corresponding poem line on top; on the right Infiernillo - 1961 footage, and english subtitles at the bottom.

Listening. How to listen to the sounds uttered from hegemonic discourses, the *modernity/colonial* speech on behalf of their interests and endeavors, in diametric contrast to the subaltern and the local, could this sonic encounter be dissonant? For this work, my attention is placed on the tension between the images, the text, and the music.

Infiernillo's Dam and Vivaldi. Departing from the documentary made by ICA about the *Infiernillo* dam, where my grandfather collaborated as an engineer for its construction, I payed close attention to the decisions made by the filmmakers. I was then taken by the soundtrack which is composed by a selection of European classic and romantic music. For this video, I focused on the fragment where the third movement of *Winter* by A. Vivaldi plays. How to listen to Vivaldi's piece in such context?

Link to *Infiernillo 1961 / Winter, allegro non molto*

Bios

Gerardo Gomez Tonda (b. 1981, Mexico City) is an artist who is based in The Hague, the Netherlands. He holds a BA in Visual Arts from the ENPEG La Esmeralda, Mexico City, Mexico (2009) and an MAFA from the HKU University of the Arts Utrecht, the Netherlands (2020). Gomez Tonda is interested in the post-anthropocentric politics of relation, composting his family archive to unlock its nutrients and identify/filter toxicities, while facilitating participation through a relational process in which the self can become-with the audience. He is inspired by the power of stories, images and sound, especially the relationships, entanglements, kinships and nostalgia they embody, and the pathways they open up to imagine other ways of being (together). While exploring notions of accountability and difference, the artist utilizes his own position of displacement to understand complex and situated narratives of belonging, and to form propositions for more caring ways to live and die together. His work takes the form of performances, videos, workshops, drawings, and installations.

His solo exhibition *Shadowland* was presented at 't-Attelier, The Hague, the Netherlands (2017). Selected group shows include *Anonyme Zeichner*, Galerie im Körnerpark, Berlin, Germany (2018); *Sinóptica*, Galería del centro Multimedia, CNCA, Mexico City (2005); *Código Local*, Centro Cultural Muros, Cuernavaca, Mexico (2007); *New Mexican Videocreation*, Contemporary Art Salon, Tenerife, Spain (2008); *Palatti Istanbul*, KunstVlaai Istanbul, Istanbul, Turkey (2010) and *Dear Amsterdam, Greetings from Istanbul*, Kulter, Amsterdam, the Netherlands (2011). Several of Gomez Tonda's works were featured in Réplica 21 and Origina. His work is included in numerous private collections.

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