

PERPETUUM MOBILE

MUSEO NACIONAL
CENTRO DE ARTE
REINA SOFIA

PERPETUUM MOBILE

CONVERSATION BETWEEN IGNASI ABALLÍ AND JOÃO FERNANDES
REGARDING *WITHOUT BEGINNING / WITHOUT END*

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I. FOREWORD

Let's start with this book. More than a catalogue, a book. An artist's book that accompanies an exhibition and is itself one more work in that exhibition. Ignasi Aballí has always liked the expanded concept of the book as universe made explicit by Stéphane Mallarmé, who said, "A book neither begins nor ends: at most it pretends to." Time is revealed as an agent that constructs the materiality of the artistic discourse in Aballí's work. *Without Beginning / Without End* is an exhibition and a book. The exhibition centers on the last ten years of the artist's activity, with some new works presented for the first time. The artist has opened his archives of images and words, subtly constructing a process for questioning the museum. References to the picture gallery, the library, the periodicals archive, and the film library coincide as instances of the deflagration of conflicts between seeing and knowing. Some of the works on display here for the first time constantly alert visitors to their condition and question them about their status as viewers, challenging their ability to see and interpret. For example, photographs show sign cards displaying useful information ("the exhibition continues," "mind the steps") or noting the restrictions and conventions of the museum space ("please do not touch the works of art"); some walls are painted in tones of white that interrogate

the standard whites of museum walls; photographs show the systems the museum uses to hang paintings on its walls. The exhibition reveals itself as a meta-exhibition, an over-exhibition, occurring at different levels, like the photographs juxtaposed in a single image, offering those who visit the exhibition a perceptual experience of the works they encounter, all the while continually challenging viewers to reflect critically on the conventions that define the circumstances of their visit. The book is a book of books. On its pages appear other pages of other books: lists of contents, photographs of other catalogues, works that become pages, and pages that become work with the announcement of forewords, afterwords, and summaries. In its graphic conception, one rule: the 1:1 scale. All of the works are reproduced at this scale. Those that are larger than the pages of this book are reproduced in the form of photographs of other books. One gaze, two times. One reading, how many interpretations between these two times and their spaces? The text, a conversation between the artist and the curator of the exhibition. Another book within a book. Revealing its identity in the otherness of the discourses. *Perpetuum mobile*, as in music. Without beginning, without end.

JOÃO FERNANDES — The preparation of this exhibition for the spaces of the museum could be compared to the preparation of the book accompanying it. Just as you confront the differences between these spaces and other spaces where you have previously presented some of these works, so you confront

differences between the pagination of this book and other books you have made in the past. This takes you to different situations that at the same time structure a whole set of measurements and scales of works in relation to the space and of images in relation to the book. The issue of scale in your work is manifested in the way in which proportion forms part of how you play with the image and the rules of its systems of presentation. But scale also leads you to a second issue, which is like an *effet de vérité*, a truth effect, as a reflection on what is representation and what is presentation; what is *vraisemblable*, what has verisimilitude in a play of scales also implies a relationship between the image and its referent. You subvert Aristotelian mimesis from a rhetoric of the visible that becomes invisible in things such as the size or numbering of a page, the design or proportion of a photograph on a newspaper page, the size of the type or of a piece of information with regard to contexts that you transfer to other contexts, calling attention to what was not previously visible and which you work with in exercises of presentation that make the moment real on the basis of what possesses verisimilitude. *Verisimilitude* is a curious word because it yokes together the two terms *similitude*, that which is the same as something else, and *veri*, that which is true. In essence the word is a paradox, because something that is the same as another thing should not be true: it should be a copy... How do you see this question of the effect of verisimilitude in your work, linked to the question of scale that is manifested in it?

IGNASI ABALLÍ — I think some of the works, especially recent ones, explore these two aspects of the simulation and the verisimilitude of the image. This is an aspect that has concerned me a good deal lately. When you take a picture, what size should it be when you print it to show it in an exhibition? I am more and more interested in seeing that the size coincides with the reality, that the photograph can be superposed on reality and almost match it. This has been one of the themes or motives that I have also sought to apply in the book that will be published on the occasion of the exhibition, so I have tried to ensure that everything that appears in it is represented at its actual size, as it really is. Visitors to the exhibition will be able to see some examples of this, especially in some recent works in which the coincidence between what is seen

and the reality is at 1:1 scale. Given that this idea will also be applied in the publication, everything will have a logic and a relationship to the aspects you have commented on.

JF — You choose your referents not for what they represent but for what they do not represent but nevertheless manifest, as a further meaning revealed in them. When you work with the question of the image, the image always has an iconic relation to a referent. We know that this relationship can also be symbolic, but sometimes you deconstruct all of the symbolism of the image, underlining its iconic status, which makes what was invisible visible in the referent. In the book, you establish the rule of presenting works at actual size or, whenever the size of the original image exceeds the dimensions of the present publication, of using an image from a previously published book that can be reproduced exactly while fitting within the present book's dimensions. This is an instance of how the icon is not symbolic but is, in some cases, an icon of an icon of an icon; just as, at times, a book can also be a book within a book. Or a rose is a rose is a rose, as Gertrude Stein said... In this way we are confronted with a process of what the French call *mise en abyme* with regard to the condition of the signifier with regard to the condition of the signified, the meaning of the image. Similarly, you open up paradigms within paradigms, whether with your images within images, with words and their lists, or the categories of your theories of colors. The latter, for example, do not come from Ludwig Wittgenstein or Johann Wolfgang von Goethe but from the industrial manufacturers of color, from what their color charts offer you, making visible what is usually not so perceptible when we speak of color in painting. Isn't that so?

IA — Yes, of course. I thought, at a time when I was working on the constituent elements of painting, that when you go to buy colors in the shop, in a sense the work has already begun in that act, because the choice you make will determine the subsequent result. As I see it, the color chart already contains in some way all of the possible paintings that can be made, because a painting is the concretion of its combination of different colors, but at the same time any painting would be possible.

As for the books reproduced in the publication we're making to go with the exhibition, that arose from the need to respect the actual scale of what is reproduced in the book. I asked myself how I could introduce works that don't fit into the size of the book but that I wanted to be present in some form. The solution was to go to the catalogues I had previously published and reproduce these at their actual size so that the photograph of the work reproduced in the present catalogue somehow respects the condition of 1:1 scale that I had previously imposed on myself. Going back over other previous publications, in parallel with the presentation of earlier works, some of which are in the exhibition, has been interesting. It's an indirect way of talking about them, because they will also be part of the book.

Ignasi Aballí's work is a constant challenge to the viewer's attention and perception. Using strategies characteristic of conceptual art, which include text, found images, archives, and documents, his projects subvert the distinctions between artistic genres such as painting, literature, photography, installation, film, and video. Researching, listing, grouping, numbering, and classifying are actions of a creative process in the same way as the disposing of the shapes and colors in a painting. Painting combines with literature as the matrix of a process open to the literality and materiality of everyday life, where the artist finds catalogues of industrial colors or words in newspapers and books or references to a history of art and culture.

JF — Your work is not only a consequence of a conceptual program; it is also a body of work that develops various programs in different projects, and it seems to me that those programs can be recursive too: you can use a process that

may return at different moments in your work. For example, your lists are lists that are made over an extended period of time—and are still being made, right? Do you see your sets of works or projects as open, as works that will always go on being made, as the manifestation of an idea of open work?

IA — I think that both possibilities are there, and some projects may continue to operate indefinitely in an open-ended way. You have mentioned one of these, the one that takes the newspaper as a starting point. Some lines of work reappear, not having developed for some time. They appear again and I have no problem in taking them up again to make a new proposal: it may be a work done with household dust, for example, or any other line of research; or the little sheets of paper with ballpoint pen tests: I could go on returning to them indefinitely.

In parallel with these are works that have a shorter, more determined trajectory and take shape more rapidly. All of my work operates at these two speeds, one very slow and open and the other, related in some way to the former, that opens up to other proposals and has a shorter, more determined, and more concrete trajectory, with projects that are defined much faster. All of the work is structured on the basis of these two methodologies. Some are works that by their very nature require a lot of time to obtain the material and to construct. With others that is not necessary; they can be realized in a short time.

JF — The conditions of your art and how you structure your work at times have parallels in an awareness of the invisible structures of the conventions that characterize the cultural artifacts of our time: the book, the painting, the photograph, the newspaper... That structural awareness leads you to principles that have a parallel in certain literary practices, such as those of Georges Perec or Oulipo,¹ by way of different moments of play with that consciousness of the structure of things. I would like to know how relevant they are for you, these literary models in which at times the work is never a finished model. You never impose a finite system on the outcome of a working process, even if you set out from finite rules that may turn out to be infinite in their productivity, like the grammatical rules of a language. And that idea of opening up the process

1. Oulipo (Ouvroir de littérature potentielle), founded by François Le Lionnais and Raymond Queneau in 1960, began as a group of mathematicians and writers interested in exploiting to the full the possibilities (potentialities) of language through the creation and observance of *contraintes* or constraints, in the form of a set of arbitrary rules that impose and determine a literary structure.

is a big difference, as I see it, from the literary models that are enclosed in the book, in a novel, a story, a work that has its objective limits in the intrinsic viability of the support on which it exists—its pages—which is not the case with your work. How do you see this difference between the programmed and the unprogrammed in your work in relation to the development of the projects that emerge in it?

IA — The idea or the work often emerges in a more or less intuitive way, but that initial idea already has its implicit methodology. In other words, I may think at a certain moment, while working with the newspaper, that the following year I will save all the front-page photographs and organize them at the end of the year as a calendar, putting each photograph in the place of the day on which it appeared, and on the basis of this gesture put together a calendar using the 365 images. In this case the process is carried out to the letter, so that I cut out the first picture on January 1 and the last on December 31. Once I have all the images, I construct the calendar. There is no difference between the idea, its execution, and the final result. This happens with many of my works in which there are self-imposed preconditions. Perec said he couldn't start writing without prior conditions and that then the work would develop by complying with or responding to these limitations or self-limitations. To some extent I share this methodology that writers such as Perec have embraced. But another thing I find interesting in him and in my favorite writers in general is that they reflect on the end of literature, on the possibilities literature has of continuing to be valid as a form of expression or a form of communication. I'm fascinated by James Joyce and Samuel Beckett because their work is also a reflection on language, on its meaning as a medium of communication—or perhaps rather as a medium of noncommunication—on what writing is. Thomas Bernhard interests me because he develops the same concept, albeit in a different way. The same applies to all of the referents that I use to develop my own work. I think this idea of finite or infinite is closely associated with one's obsessions. It's something greater than you. Despite your desire to finish, to get to the end, it's impossible because there will still be

aspects that interest you. For example, when I read the newspaper each day, I see words or pictures that I have to cut out and file away for possible use in some work. I have often thought of concluding this project, and I thought the exhibition at the Museo Reina Sofía would be a good opportunity to do so: to show all that it has amounted to and terminate it. But I really don't know if I'll manage it. I don't know if the next time I pick up the newspaper I won't also reach for the scissors to carry on with this obsession of cutting out words and other materials that I can use later...

Aballí interrogates the artwork, highlighting differences, similarities, and contradictions between appearance, reality, simulation, and value. The conventions of art, like the conventions of the representation of cultural or economic value, are interrogated in his work as a way of questioning the opposition between the ephemeral and the permanent, the visible and the invisible, the perceptible and the knowable. The materials and processes can be extraordinary, even though their origins are often simple and everyday, as in the case of the dust, the newspaper clippings, the shredded banknotes, the typewriter correction fluid, or the ballpoint pen tests from stationer's shops.

II. FIRST VARIATION: THE BALLPOINT PEN TEST

JOÃO FERNANDES — For one series of works you collected tests of ballpoint pens by anonymous customers from shops that sell pens. This seems like a curious inversion of the relationship between potential and act. We have already heard you talk about the process of acquiring colors—when the color is purchased, all of the possibilities of that color are set in motion by that act—but here, when someone buys a pen, they don't buy it to do those drawings...

IGNASI ABALLÍ — No, I don't think they do.

JF — Do you make a selection of these slips of paper while in stationer's shops? Do you take the lot and choose later? Do you make no selection? Do you change them? Are they assisted readymades, as Marcel Duchamp defined them? Do you make any intervention in them? I would also like you to talk a little about this reduction of the possibility of writing to the scribble, before the functioning of the object that writes, which at the same time is expressive of the individual identity, because a drawing is always in principle a very personal thing, an exercise that could be used to identify us, perhaps, like our fingerprints. This being so, a personal projection will always remain in those anonymous drawings, and in the fact that you present them as drawings even though you know they were never made as drawings, especially when they share their form of presentation with the result of an action that could be classed as a doodle.

IA — I situate this work with earlier ones that use recovered materials—dust, bits of fabric from the filter of the clothes dryer, or shredded euro notes—materials that no longer have any value, for which the fact of being recovered and reused as art gives them another value, not only economic but symbolic. I think they are works that hold out the possibility of being read in different ways.

I was in a stationer's shop one day, and the little sheets of paper on which people had tried out pens caught my attention. I was interested, first

of all, in the idea that these were drawings made without any aesthetic or conceptual intention, or any notion that they were interesting or attractive. At the same time I was interested in the fact that this was a collective intervention. Often many people had intervened on these slips of paper, so they were usually collective drawings. In short, the two aspects that interested me were the absence of intentionality, whether aesthetic or conceptual, and the fact that they had been made by a number of people. I started to collect them, and I realized there was a wide range of possibilities; for example, the type of implement that had been used: some had been done only with a pencil or a pen of a single color, while others had been done in all of the materials, colors, and types of pen and marker sold in the shop.

I was interested in the idea of automatic writing, unthinking writing. The gesture has nothing more to it than finding out if the thing works properly in order to write with it. What the drawings have in common is the phase prior to the normal use of the pen: checking to see if the ink flows correctly and the pen writes well. I eventually obtained a series of pieces of paper of different types and sizes: some are white, others are colored, squared, and so on, and they allow me to show a fairly large and diverse repertoire of these works.

Seeing how these drawings relate to works by other artists is also interesting. A lot of them remind me, for example, of works by Cy Twombly or artists who have worked along similar lines with an intentionality that pen-test drawings don't have, although formally they resemble one another. I remember that you once remarked to me—I think at an ARCO where I was presenting a table with some of these slips of paper—that painting was always in some way present in all my work and that those pieces of paper still seemed to you to be very close to painting. And I agree: with their tangles of lines, gestures that get confused with one another, many are reminiscent of works by Jackson Pollock. I'm interested in the careless, messy aspect, because a lot of people write nonsense words and do bad drawings, or try to do them well but in a hurry and without paying attention. The pen-test drawings also have a relationship with graffiti, with that kind of free expression without any

kind of intention, and also with the drawings we do when we talk on the phone: we're not thinking about what we're drawing, so the lines take shape in an unconscious, automatic way.

III. OTHER VARIATIONS: FUGUE FOR TWO VOICES

JOÃO FERNANDES — How does it feel to have a second retrospective exhibition? Does the same river flow past the same banks twice? The fact is that between your first and second retrospectives, ten years have gone by. And that creates new work, as well as one or two decisions about the work that already exists. In this exhibition, for example, we are recovering works that were not included in your first retrospective though they did exist then. At the same time we are presenting works that were created later, in these last ten years. And we are constructing a new situation, one that is diversified by the space and time in which it occurs in relation to the first, which took place at MACBA, Serralves, and Birmingham...

IGNASI ABALLÍ — That exhibition traveled for a year. It started at the MACBA in Barcelona in 2005 and was then shown at the Serralves Foundation in Porto, at the Ikon Gallery in Birmingham, and finally at the ZKM in Karlsruhe in 2006.

JF — Your MACBA exhibition, for example, was different from your exhibition at the Serralves. It was the same show, the same catalogue, but you declined the exhibition in a very different way, in accordance with the differences in the spaces, too. In your work often has a relationship with the space in which its shown. You appropriate the space, making use of what it offers. Space is a material for you, one whose characteristics and possibilities you get to know and use for works that are installed directly on the wall, on the windows. That creates a particular situation of enunciation in your exhibitions. More and more I've come to think that even in your gallery exhibitions of the last few years the format of the exhibition is also a work, because increasingly the way the works are situated in the space, the way they construct possibilities of reading and relationships among themselves, is itself fundamental to the nature of those same works. Yours is a clear case of a situation of working on a situation of enunciation, of involving the subject with the time and space in which it is

situated. Is the model of the exhibition as artwork important for you when you start to think and work in the spaces of the museum?

IA — Yes it is, and it's true that this is something that began to happen above all in the last three years or so. Before that the space was important, obviously, because you always have to take it into account in order to adapt the work, and so on, but now, as you say, the space is one more aspect of the work, and in the last analysis even the exhibition itself can be a situation that produces or provokes new readings of the works. And what is more, many of them relate closely to the spaces: they have to be located in a particular place, because their formal characteristics necessarily demand that space. And the dialogues that are established between works from different periods, for example, can also create new contexts that open each of them up to new readings. And that is achieved in part by working well with the space, keeping it very much in mind and incorporating it into the works as if it were one more aspect of them.

JF — How do you see these older works that have reappeared in this exhibition?

IA — Well, funnily enough they are works I had more or less forgotten and that I even thought of as the result of a moment of some measure of doubt and uncertainty, but seeing them now, with a temporal distance, I think they connect very well with things that are much more recent. The distance between some of those works we're going to show, those from the late 1970s or early 1980s, and works from the last ten years to the present is not so great. I'm interested in recovering them, and I'm interested in reading them in relation to the latest stuff, because on the one hand I think they are not so far removed, and on the other hand they can prompt other readings of the new works, to show how at an initial stage certain things were already being attempted in an intuitive, incipient way, things that then became more defined and were consolidated in a clearer manner. I think those first attempts, those first approximations, already contained many of the concerns that run

through what I've been doing up until now. I think it's good to look back once in a while in order to draw the past toward the present, toward the contemporary, and take stock of this evolution.

JF — What dilemmas have attracted you now, on this second occasion of revisiting your work?

IA — More than an anthological exhibition in the sense of a total review of the oeuvre, we are talking about a review that is really more partial. And this show obviously has more to look over than the previous one, because ten years have passed. I think the main idea for the present exhibition was to engage the possibility of looking back over this period of time, of exploring what has happened between the MACBA exhibition and now, over a period of ten years. And in reviewing what has happened, I saw that some of the earlier works that were not in the MACBA exhibition could be interesting to present now, in view of their connections and relationships with even the most recent works. And, well, I think the result is really quite a different exhibition, one that reveals the evolution of the concerns I've been thinking about for a number of years. The work with the exhibition space is also totally different and is approached from a different set of concerns. And for all of these reasons I think this will not be a repetition of the previous exhibition; rather, it's a next step, a step forward, a review that presents and adds the works made most recently, some of them specifically for this exhibition.

JF — Some issues have been present in your work from the beginning. Some of your works from thirty years ago might have been made yesterday, and works made yesterday could have been made thirty years ago. They offer different points of reference for ideas about what representation is, what the image is, what value is attributed to the image in language and in representation—transverse elements in all of your work, which at times may be organized in series, at other times in more isolated works, but all of it is deeply metalinguistic, creating a critical distance between the referent and the discourse on the referent. All of your work always proposes a discourse in relation to the different referents it

invokes. These referents may be colors, they may be materials, they may be images, they may be texts, they may be works of art, they may be exhibitions. Your work can not only engage with the relationship between art and everyday materials such as newspapers or colors of paint, for example, but it can engage in a highly conceptual way with the discourse on the artwork itself and on its possibilities of redefinition. Do you think this—the way the metalinguistic condition of your work invokes its referent by positing a critique and a critical distance—could be the line that most clearly identifies the path taken by your works, regardless of when they were made?

IA — Yes, it's possible. When working, one always has the aim or the intention to think one is doing new things, progressing, moving forward. Sometimes I think I'm doing something I haven't done before or that I'm offering a new perspective on the work. But often, too, after a while, I realize that it's simply a transformation that is more of form than of content, because I immediately see the relationship of what I have just made with works I had made (in some cases) quite a long time before, and of which I was not previously aware. This leads me to think that we really develop only two or three ideas at most in the course of a lifetime, and that we go around and around these, over and over again. To escape or get outside of your referents and your obsessions so as to suddenly do something really different is very difficult. So it's true, then, that the metalinguistic discourse may be a feature or a line of continuity running through my work, at least since the 1990s or a little earlier. This is one of the ideas or themes that I've been interested in developing, addressing, and presenting in various works and one that certainly runs through many of the projects. I would also say that the relationship with language, with words, with the text, is very important and that many works are articulated on the basis of reflection on how image and text, image and language, are linked—not only in painting but, for example, in the printed image—through works in which the text is of fundamental importance, precisely because in them there is only text. This text almost always refers to an image that we cannot see, that isn't there but that we can imagine.

JF — Much of the time your work on images touches on aspects we don't see when we look at an image—aspects that are present nonetheless. This question of what is visible, what is not visible, what is perceptible, what is imperceptible, is a dynamic aspect of your work and present in a number of projects. In some cases you add diagrams to reality, such as an image that comments on what it represents, as if its iconic status could be analyzed to distinguish the different elements that constitute it. Reflecting on the condition of the image and of the artwork in your work also involves questioning the value of materials in different universes: the economic universe, the universe of work, and of everyday life.

IA — The symbolic universe, too, right?

JF — Yes. We find the question of value throughout your work, right from the outset. Material value, symbolic value, and economic value are all implicated in the way you confront the person who looks at your work. Can a work of art exist independent of the values attributed to it? This is another question that is always open in your work, but a critical skepticism is revealed when you address with a certain humor how ridiculous it may be to attribute an economic value to a material or a work of art...

IA — Yes, in fact this reflection is represented more or less explicitly in several works from the late 1980s in which I was questioning in particular the economic and symbolic value of certain materials—why coal is cheaper than gold, why brass is cheaper than gold brass—and on that basis altering and questioning those values and mounting in those works a critique, as you say, with a degree of irony or humor, subverting those established categories. In later projects I used materials such as dust, Tipp-Ex, and money in the form of shredded euro notes. I used them for what they represent in themselves, in order to see how they take on a new value as a result of being treated as art and forming part of an artwork. I always try to respect what each material contains in itself. Dust is a material that, on the one hand, consists of just about everything that erodes—dust particles are composed of everything that has eroded and is suspended in the atmosphere, in the air—but

it's also a fragile material and has to be treated with care. It's a material we reject, and the fact of reusing it is tantamount to re-investing it with value, which it doesn't usually have, because it's a poor, troublesome material: we remove dust from things, we get rid of it. Tipp-Ex correction fluid is a material that has the capacity to correct, to let us get back to the white paper, giving us the opportunity to start over again. All of the works I've conceived using this material incorporate the idea of error and correction. So we could go on analyzing the relationship between the materials and the works in terms of the degree of questioning on all of the levels you have commented on—economic, everyday, ultimately symbolic or artistic—and explore how they change and are transformed when they are used in a different way. Old newspapers are another of these materials with no economic value. Newspaper is a cheap everyday material with a short shelf life, but the fact of shifting it into the art context turns it into something else, revalues it. We can apply this same line of thinking to paint...

I started working with the question of value as a critique of certain stereotypes, and also, of course, in relation to the work of art, which often has a market value slightly beyond the realm of logic. The price of an artwork is a very relative thing. An artwork is usually worth whatever someone is willing to pay for it. On the basis of that idea, I thought it would be a bit provocative—or, rather, something between poetic and provocative—to alter the accepted value we attach to different materials and question why gold should be more valuable than iron or coal and why, as a result, it is more expensive, and bring out that contradiction. At the same time, when you, for example, take banknotes withdrawn from circulation and shredded by the Bank of Spain and put the shreds in a glass case and they become art, they regain a value as devalued material that may be even greater than before. Or when you work with dust, which is also a cast-off material, the fact of turning it into an artwork endows it with a new value. So, too, in the case of other materials with which I have worked. On the one hand is the somewhat absurd question of addressing the idea of why we attach more value to some materials than to others. On the other hand is the idea of recycling,

of recovering, of giving a second chance to materials that have been dismissed as lost or useless.

JF — In your work, the materials are often displayed as materials rather than as the metamorphosis of those materials. The materials are catalogued, they are organized, they are filed. The system of cataloging, indexing, and presentation is what changes the way they are perceived, rather than an action on them that changes their form to something other than it was. When you present us with shredded banknotes, you present a material that already existed: those banknotes were destroyed by the bank and not by you. The same is true of your textual works. You look for existing texts, words that exist in the newspaper, with which you construct lists, paradigms that are more or less arbitrary in the manner of their organization but that are always legible even though don't make sentences with the words. You organize morphological or semantic paradigms, but you don't construct sentences, you don't organize them in a syntax in which their functionality would make us forget their materiality. In this persistence in the materiality of language independent of its uses, your lists—like all of the materials you show us—propose a deixis, a system of presentation wherein you present the materials you have come across and selected in a different context where the consciousness of those materials endows them with a visibility they didn't have prior to your system of presentation. You create systems of assembly and presentation of materials, of words and of images that are themselves the work. What operates as the dynamic principle of your work is the system with which you bring together and present the things rather than the form of a material or the possible symbolism of a material. Is this work on systems of presentation connected with the idea of the archive? Is all of this what challenges the viewer to discover a hidden structure of things, a hidden structure of the world?

IA — Yes, that's so, in a way. There is a need to present the materials with a certain objectivity; that is, without expressiveness, without subjective aspects, without a...

JF — Rhetoric.

IA — Exactly... and that they should not be seen as an expression of feelings. In that sense I'm interested in keeping a distance between my subjectivity and the work. In that sense I always try to keep it as neutral as possible, although I make many decisions. For example, I decide to construct the lists "that way," in a certain format, with two columns of text, and so on. I decide which groups are possible and which are not. The fact is that I designed it, I decided how to construct it and what form to give it. But beyond those first decisions there is no work of creation. The whole process remains unaltered, with the same structure I have decided on prior to the start of the project. I think this objectivity with which the works are presented also allows the viewers to be more participatory or to assume a more active role in how they understand, or read, the works. Starting from what can be seen, each viewer can interpret the works as she prefers. For my part, I feel I need to create a distance between myself and the work and the materials with which it is made. In fact, in some works I am interested in having no physical contact, not even with the surface. The work in this case is made without touching it, by letting something happen, or by creating a mechanism that enables the project to be constructed with a certain autonomy. In other cases, those with more intervention, I always maintain a distance from and a respect for the materials and their particular characteristics.

JF — To visit your studio is always to find things that are made by mechanisms that you program. I've visited your studio when you had cards being printed by the sunlight coming through the windows, or diapositive slides being made as the sun destroys their colors... Time is another mechanism that produces works, and in some sense a part of your work is made by time. In some cases this is also a way of constructing a system where the exhibition is a direct consequence of a mechanism, one that allows you to arrange things yourself but that manifests in the way you let time act by itself. How do you see this situation in which exhibition is more disposition than exposition, where the composition is not a dilemma (unless it's the almost graphic dilemma in the design of an exhibition or the pages of a catalogue) but a consequence; that is, where the composition is the consequence of an arrangement? Here you will

not compose different colors among the colors or different words among the words, as would be the case in a painting, in a picture, or a poem. But neither do you use a mechanism, as often happens in conceptual art, as a problem that only exists in being a problem. Your works always possess a tension between the visible and the invisible, between their materiality and their immateriality, stemming from the semantic connections that the viewer can construct on the basis of her perceptions and knowledge. Your works never lean solely toward the invisible, because they live in that dialectic tension between what is visible and what is invisible. That relationship between the mechanism and the exhibition is something in which you cannot think either one independently of the other, even when the exhibition is a result of the mechanism.

IA — I really like this distinction you draw between the mechanism and the exhibition, because it really does work like that. With many of the works, it's a question of constructing something, a mechanism, a methodology that will eventually make them possible. On the other hand, time is also a fundamental aspect of many of the works. Time is often the element that makes them possible. But the passage of time, too, is necessary: to collect the material or for the work to finish constructing itself. So time, or temporality, is an important aspect that runs through a great deal of my work.

I also want to talk about this question of invisibility and visibility. The conflict between these two terms, between the visible and the invisible, is something I'm very interested in and have engaged with in some of the works. As an artist and a creator of images—that is, someone who is contributing, adding images to the world—one necessarily has to reflect on what that means and how those new images are going to position themselves in the world, in reality. I think this reflection is indispensable for anyone who produces images at a time of massive overproduction, a time when our relationship with images is everyday, almost unconscious, but also absolutely overwhelming. We probably all take a picture every day, send it out, and receive others—in addition to those we see on television, on billboards, in the newspaper, at exhibitions, and so on. The critique I was making of this situation was to choose

to propose a reflection on invisibility, using two basic strategies. First, appropriation: plenty of images are already circulating in the world, so there is no longer any need to produce new ones. I can simply use those that exist, in an approach that also questions the concept of authorship. Second, consider the possibilities of invisibility: not as part of what we see, because it is invisible, but as a part of the sensible that can be perceived by senses other than sight and can be incorporated into the world of art, expanding the possibilities of the purely visual.

JF — Many of your works are based on materials that exist in the realm of everyday culture: perhaps a newspaper, perhaps a book. A newspaper can include words, can include images. A book has pages but also words. How do you articulate ideas using the traces of the cultural objects that exist in the world of your work? Because books, periodicals, and so on all form part of a *Homo culturalis*, a person who reads, who thinks, who interprets. At the same time you can also work well with the colors of a paint catalogue in such a way as to deconstruct the cultural legibility of a color. Talking about one of your colors as if it were a color in a painting is never possible, because your work is also a deconstruction of the cultural pretensions of a color. The same thing happens with words, just as it does with the pages of the books you appropriate. What we have here is a reobjectification of all that deconstructs the cultural construction that these things may signify. Is it a case of giving art back to life, which was a modernist or postmodernist paradigm in the 1960s and 1970s?

IA — Well, I don't know if it's that or not, but it's true that the word *deconstruction* could perhaps be applied to various processes, both in painting and in other disciplines. I think this is a consequence of my background as a painter, because I studied painting at university. I started out as a painter but gradually realized that painting was a practice that didn't satisfy my expressive needs, and my move away from painting into other practices, some of them close to painting, some of them further away from it, enabled me to apply the same criteria I used in painting in other areas, such as literature, or film, or information, as in the case of newspapers. The process has always consisted in looking

at the structure of all of these media in order to work on them. I'm not a writer, I'm not a filmmaker, I'm not a journalist, and I don't work in the field of information. This being so, when I take an interest in these areas, I do so from the periphery, seeing what their structure is, what their fundamental elements are, what constitutes each of them, and from there I pick out the aspects that allow me to develop a work. For example, in the case of books, if I tear out the pages with the words *Table of Contents* or *Index*, with the words *Prologue* or *Epilogue*, with the word *Bibliography*, and so on, all pages that serve as the starting point for content that follows, you turn those words into the index, the bibliography, and so on, of any book. You are inviting the viewer somehow to fill those indexes with the books she imagines, because my work gives no indication of the books to which those words correspond. The methodology consists in standing back, analyzing them from outside, from a distance, so as to open up the possibilities of all these means of creation and expression: literature, film, painting, and the world of information, among others.

JF— There was a period when you took a great interest in, for example, the work of Georges Perec.

IA— Yes, I've always been interested in his work and his approach to writing.

JF— Perec is one of those writers who conjure up literature by means of mechanisms that make their literary works a consequence of those same mechanisms. Did you find in Perec the same type of reference for your work that Duchamp found in Raymond Roussel, when he discovered the Rousselian mechanism? Duchamp always said with regard to Roussel that it's better to be influenced by a writer than by another artist...

IA— Yes, I think so. To a great extent I think he was a referent on the strength of which I did several projects. Not only that, I think he's a writer whose way of understanding writing is close to how I understand the practice of art. When I first read him, I realized I shared intensely his way

of working, his methodology, especially in the most experimental texts, in which he works with language as a material, positing a reflection on what it is to write, what literature is. He constructed all of those metatexts on the basis of restrictions he had previously imposed on himself and then followed with the utmost rigor. Something Robert Bresson said in his book *Notes on the Cinematographer* complements this idea: "To forge iron laws for oneself, if only in order to obey or disobey them *with difficulty*." Perec's texts are often fashioned formally on the basis of minutely detailed descriptions of what he sees at a particular moment, descriptions of the everyday, or in the form of lists and enumerations, or that kind of writing that isn't normally considered literature but is somewhere out on the fringe, such as instruction manuals or advertising copy. I'm also interested in how Perec constructs his works on the basis of a preconceived idea, the way he outlines a clear prior conception and the work is the result of that initial conception. The structure of the book is well established in advance, and what he does is simply develop and complete that structure, while at the same time succeeding in giving the work meaning and interest from the literary point of view. His books are not only the result of a previously drafted scheme; they are also well written. All of this interests me very much, and I also apply it in my approach to my work. And I think that, yes, as Duchamp said, it's better to be influenced by or to work in proximity to a writer, or several writers, or a filmmaker, than another painter, with whom there can always be problems on account of being in the same creative field.

JF— Still on the subject of Georges Perec as a referent for your work, do you see art as a way of using life, or is life a way of using art?

IA— I would say it's really the former, art as a way of using life. I've always, for as long as I can remember anyway, been interested in looking at the work of other artists. Above all, since I studied fine art and began to develop my own work more intensely, the work of many artists has made me see reality in a different way, transformed by their work. I can no longer look at a landscape without thinking of Paul Cézanne, for

example, or Claude Monet, or other artists, depending on the situation. For me this is a way of enriching the vision of reality. It's something that has been very important and has also given me many happy moments, the ability to see life through the prism of certain artists' work. I think I can no longer separate life from art, both from the standpoint of the practicing artist and from that of the viewer and observer of the works of other artists who interest me and who reveal to me new ways of analyzing reality, who enrich it and make it more complex and as a result help me to live better, in a more complete way.

JF — In this discussion of the relationship between art and life, the paradigm of modernity has been all but subverted by the way in which life converges with art today. If art has looked to life as a means of reinventing itself and rediscovering itself in a new connection with people and with the sensory experience of thinking about the world, nowadays works of art and their mythologies can also be associated with many other works of art, particularly in the case of films, which are paradigms of models of life. Life is today more or less aestheticized by art too. Is your work a resistance to this aestheticization of life by art, a continuing to seek out details of that life that can be presented in the most neutral way possible, with that false neutrality that makes you question them?

IA — Yes. At certain moments and in certain works I've considered how to produce a work that would avoid the aesthetic aspects or at least not put them at its center. I thought that in order to do so the best approach would be quasi-scientific research consisting of an aseptic presentation of data, but without deriving any conclusions from them. The conclusions should be left up to the viewers. I've always been interested in the concept of "aesthetic anesthesia" that Duchamp applied to the readymades, with which he sought to avoid any idea of taste (good or bad taste) or values such as beauty or emotion that are traditionally considered intrinsic to the work of art.

JF — For example, in this exhibition you're going to present a set of objects that are measuring instruments. Can they be regarded as readymades?

IA — Yes, I suppose they can, because what we have here are objects that don't belong to the realm of art being shifted to another context in which they're going to be seen as works of art. But I don't know if they're readymade in a literal sense, because the readymades reached the end of their journey when they were shown in an art context or when they were signed by the artist. In this case, I've used these objects because they allow me to make visible things that are not visible; that is, to measure aspects of reality that we don't perceive through our eyes and the sense of sight, which is dominant in the visual arts. Exhibiting a set of instruments (*Tomar medidas [Taking Measurements]*, 2012) which are used to measure time, temperature, sound, radiation, airborne particles, moisture, and so on is to bring into the realm of visibility aspects of reality that we don't perceive with our eyes. If each of these pieces of apparatus shows a reading as it measures the quantity of something we don't see, then that something exists, even though it isn't visible. I'm very interested in the act of demonstrating that many things we don't perceive with our eyes nonetheless exist and affect us and that our not seeing them doesn't mean they don't exist. At the same time, I'm also interested in the scientific approach to landscape, as an alternative to and critique of the romantic vision. I opt for the precision of the data provided by certain instruments that measure factors we can't see, as opposed to the imprecision of the paintbrush. It's funny that you should have mentioned readymades, because these instruments also remind me of another work by Duchamp, *Neuf moules mâlic* (Nine malic molds), with its representations of molds of the uniforms of different trades. These are pieces of apparatus that measure different factors, and we could compare them to people whose job is to measure something while at the same time monitoring museum spaces, where instruments to measure various environmental conditions, such as humidity or temperature, are also used and also exercise a degree of control over the viewer. A lot of ideas are mixed together in this work, and it can be interpreted in several ways. It's a work that particularly interests me because it consists in shifting, in the direction of sculpture, objects that in principle have nothing artistic about them. They're going to be

presented as sculptural or archaeological pieces inside a display case. To sum up, I would emphasize the idea of the measuring of the invisible, of the scientific view of landscape, and the Duchampian idea of the different persons and the molds of their uniforms.

JF — At a certain point you started thinking about video and film. And as your work is made in time and in some cases made by time as well, the moving image is an expression of time, it's a way of being captured, edited, presented, and all the rest. It's impossible to think about the moving image of a film or video without the perception of time, of duration. The question of time as duration is important in your work. Your videos are often records of situations you encounter in life, but they may be situations that are articulated in terms of issues present in other parts of your work. For example, you may film a factory that produces images, like the factory that creates the photographs you have in one of your works, or you may film a person speaking alone in the city without anyone noticing that person, where the issue of the visible and the invisible is again present. How did it come about, this desire to film, to capture images that you find in reality and to present them? What place does the question of cinema have in your work?

IA — Clearly, it does have to do with the idea of temporality. The content of certain works is such that they need a longer development over time than does a still image, such as a photograph or a painting. Two aspects in this kind of work interest me: time, on the one hand, and movement on the other, the ability to visualize the movement of the image. A question that has always intrigued me is the question of narrative. When we watch a video at an exhibition, at a biennial, and so on, we often start watching it after it has started and leave before it ends. Often we see only a small fragment of something that is constructed in such a way that it needs to be seen in its entirety, from beginning to end. This is an issue I've addressed, and in the videos I've made I've tried to ensure that it wouldn't be a problem; that is, although the videos are almost always quite long (some last several hours), a viewer who watches a short part of it can imagine and understand the rest. They are videos in

which a part contains in itself the basic idea of the rest of the projection. Watching a few moments gives you an understanding of the entire work. This is an issue that I'm interested in trying to resolve. At the same time, I'm also interested in the structural elements of cinema. The first video I did consisted of making a film collage by putting together credits from various films. Called *No Movie* (1996), it consisted precisely of showing the other side of the film; that is, all those people who make the film possible: the actors and everyone who works behind the scene on the sets, lighting, cameras, makeup, wardrobe, and so on. Putting together a sequence of credits was a way of constructing a film solely out of the names of people who had made other films. In the wake of this first experiment, all the other incursions I've made into film have been based more or less on the same idea: to use or reflect on the constituent elements of film such as image, light, text, sound, or the translation of sounds and words when there are subtitles from one language to another, and so on. The relationship between image and language is an issue that I've also been interested in exploring in the realm of cinematography. In the case of *Revelaciones* (Revelations, 2005), about filming the machine that endlessly develops photographs, I was interested in the relationship between the still image, which is photography, and the moving image, which is film, applied to that still image, and by finding that it was impossible to construct a recognizable image and represent the idea of movement, because each frame was different and therefore the result was not logical or correct from the cinematographic point of view. A lot of the thoughts and ideas that interest me are also behind the work in video, and that's why I use it in certain projects.

JF — In the same way that you can use colors and inks without painting, you also use the cinematographic image without editing. The cinematographic image is something that takes place in the temporality of life in which you capture it, because you don't edit the screening time of the image. Time there is in its expression of real time, just as the materials you often work with are materials that are ostensibly presented in their condition as materials and not in what

is done with them, although they also invoke the memory of what is done with them. Do you think that's a parallel between the film image as material composed of fragments of life—and for that reason your film work is always a documentary of a situation or a moment—and the documentary condition that recreates its condition as commentary in relation to what thoughts you may have on the basis of this documentary condition? This would be similar to the way the exhibition of your mechanisms creates the possibilities of interpretative ambiguity by virtue of the references exhibition invokes but never enunciates. Do you think this parallel may exist between the film material and the materials you use in the rest of your work?

IA — Yes, I think they are related in many ways. Often, while making a video work, I've felt that it was something new, that I had finally managed to say something that I hadn't said in other works, but afterward I can almost always make connections between the video works and the other works. Ultimately the same concerns crop up time and again. I believe that certain obsessions are recurrent and are stronger than one's ability to transcend them. The video works share 90 percent of the interests and themes that we see in the works in which I didn't use video, but they also incorporate different elements, which transform and expand because they offer a different reading. I liked what you said about my works in video almost always being documentaries, because even when they are not—because what appears on the screen is not a documentary in the strict sense of the word—they do share the concern and the idea of the document, such as working with images or reflections of reality, aspects related to the image-text relationship or the cinematographic structure.

JF — That is also a highly distinctive way of collecting instants in life that you make visible, thanks to the particular perspective from which you assemble or present them. Nobody reads a newspaper the way you do, looking for the nouns or the dates to be found there and grouping them morphologically and semantically.

IA — I don't recommend it.

JF — Similarly, in some of your films you pick up on instants of life. You seem to be an eyewitness to the moment that you then share from the point at which you present it in its time. Just as in all of your lists, catalogues, archives, works on paint, and so on, you engender a perception of what is there, of what was knowledge and expectation, through the evocation of a literality, a materiality. You rematerialize what the culture had initially presented in a far more metaphysical way. In a sense, your work is a work against the metaphysics of things.

IA — In some way I affirm—in some works it's far more obvious than in others—a proximity to the scientific, to the system of analysis and investigation that is central to science. In 2011 I had an exhibition called *CMYK Color System* that pleased me because it almost seemed more like an exhibition in a science museum than in an art space. I was interested in the subtle shift from one sphere to another. What was clearly apparent was the nonromantic side—the analytical side, we might say—the objective, neutral, distant treatment of the research into aspects of reality and landscape on the basis of precise data, which is what I usually try to present with the works. I'm not sure if that's what you meant. But even when I speak of the invisible side of the landscape, I also want to take it as far as possible into the scientific realm. This is a personal interest. If this is reconsidering or positing once again the use of certain concepts that society had established and that were taken as known, then, maybe so; I don't know.

JF — Do you see yourself as part of a context? For example, in Barcelona, where you live and work, one finds the stereotype of a history, a tradition of conceptual art, of generations of artists who have worked from the conceptual languages, transcending the "Tàpies effect." You, too, work on concepts, on mechanisms, and thus could illustrate the stereotype of a Catalan context. How do you see this possible association with that stereotype, which exists independent of your work? You have not contributed to it: it existed before you and has continued to exist throughout the period in which you have been active. Although not its author, you've ended up being a good example of the stereotype, don't you think?

IA — Yes, I'm sure that this link with the conceptual that you describe exists. As with a lot of generalizations, two major lines can be established. One would be the material-informalist and other the conceptual, which emerged as a reaction or an alternative to the expressive, expressionist rhetoric represented by Antoni Tàpies and other artists of his generation. To some extent you inhabit that environment, and it influences you. I think what you say is true: in the context where I work, the Catalan context, you find an interest or a tendency to produce more work related to the conceptual than elsewhere; far more than in Madrid or elsewhere in Spain, for example. I remember visiting the last Frieze art fair in London and going round the exhibitions in the city's galleries with someone who said, "This would be impossible in Barcelona. If you saw this in a gallery there, we would crucify it." Because it was painting, and painting in the most classical sense. We are no longer used to seeing certain types of work, except in the most traditional galleries. In a contemporary art gallery, to see a work that does not suggest a strong conceptual component, even if it is an exhibition of painting, would be very unusual.

JF — At the same time, you belong to a generation of artists that has revisited some of the strategies of conceptual art, of process art, of many things that came out of the paradigm shift of the 1960s and 1970s, but without any pretension to being avant-garde, because this is a generation that was formed in a library and not a generation making a tabula rasa of previous artistic languages. Quite the contrary. You belong to a generation of artists who are particularly aware of many things that have happened in art and find some of these to be of interest and some not, and while there is nothing like an avant-garde attitude there is a connection with that second stage of the avant-gardes of the twentieth century, the 1960s and 1970s, a reinterpretation and a working from that basis, perhaps in the same way that artists in the 1960s and 1970s made a connection with the first avant-gardes, which they also appropriated in order to produce new possibilities for making art. While the first avant-gardes were groups with manifestos, identifiable by the classifications that grouped the artists' works (all those isms), we don't find that in the 1960s and 1970s, much less today. You belong to a generation of artists that in different countries around the world, from the 1980s and 1990s, started

off from a library of avant-garde attitudes without being avant-garde. How do you see the notion of a relationship with the avant-garde moments of modernity and postmodernity in your work? In a way, this is the question of modernity and postmodernity, a debate that was very much in progress when you started working.

IA — Yes, I started when the debate was at its hottest. I think it's clear that almost everyone works in line with, let's say, a postmodern method of recycling, of mixing, of reviewing what went before in order to make new work. I'm not sure what you're referring to when you talk about the avant-garde now. I'd like to know if you know what the avant-garde is today and if it's a term that can still be used. Because if you visit any international exhibition of the biennial type, you'll see aspects or lines of work that could be described as more avant-garde than others, but I would find it hard to define what the avant-garde is now. Perhaps we could establish the difference in terms of the use of new technologies. I'm not sure if the avant-garde would be the Internet and everything that derives from there, or perhaps video art, or multimedia installations, or performance... I believe the avant-garde is defined more by an attitude to art than by the type of work that is done, although that is important too.

JF — The avant-garde always insists on the tabula rasa, on how it's going to eclipse everything that went before because it's creating a new way of doing, working on new material processes, attitudes, concepts. That's not a programmatic claim one would recognize in your work or in that of your contemporaries. On the contrary, you belong to a generation of artists who have clearly spent time in the library but are going to found anew the possibilities of making art on the basis of conceptual strategies that existed in the past but developing these in a way that, while it never involves a tabula rasa, doesn't involve the quotation, the copy, or the derivative either. You use paths that were opened up by those avant-gardes without any pretensions to constructing an avant-garde attitude. Your work is quotational in all its references, because it's made of things that exist and can be referenced but have been recycled in the way they are presented: precisely between these dichotomies we have been going over, such as the question of the visible and the invisible, of how something is seen

that has always been there but has never been seen in that way, which is the central issue of the perception of the work of art, for instance. The activation of the artwork as an exercise in perception and reflection on the viewer's part is something that seems just as important in your work.

IA — Now I understand what you were saying about the avant-garde or postmodernism. True, I don't work on the basis of a tradition, but I do work from a knowledge of the history of art in general and of contemporary art in particular and an interest in the work of artists who have gone before me, with the intention, as far as possible, of coming up with something new and moving another step forward, but without the idea of a tabula rasa. I don't know if anyone today is working from that position... or if the tabula rasa is even possible. Do you think it's possible? I see it as being very complicated.

JF — To think that one could start from a tabula rasa today is an arrogance that seems incompatible with how things are now done, in the same way that one doesn't think of a global political or economic program, one doesn't think of a revolution, but one can think of small revolutions, of networked actions, in a collective but diverse and individualized way. Today the world is so diverse and complex in its diversity that awareness of this complexity prevents generalizing simplification. We know, too, how the artists at the forefront of the avant-gardes went on to make their work more complex and refused to be bound by the programmatic principles of their avant-garde period. We cannot think of the Duchamp of *Étant donné* (Given) in the same way as the Duchamp of *Nu descendant un escalier* (Nude descending a staircase), for example. And I think that's why today's artists don't have that arrogance, those pretensions, because today the perception of the world, of the possibilities of making art in the world and the ways of reacting to art in the world are totally different from those that existed in the past. Our historical consciousness of the present is much more complex and diversified. But just as in politics we talk about small revolutions and networks, so, too, your work is made of moments of perception that expand the possibilities of understanding the world of those who see it, on the basis of principles, of mechanisms for the collection of materials.

Your latest exhibitions are also meta-exhibitions. You work on the very idea of exhibition and make the viewer aware that she is a viewer visiting an exhibition. And in doing so, you use as a working hypothesis the codes and conventions that an exhibition space often reveals, and sometimes you work from what is not explicit in the presentation of the artwork while at the same time working on the circumstances of the presentation of the artwork. A sign in a museum, information, a wall card, a photograph are suggestions of a work that affirm its autonomy in relation to the expository situation of other works that you take as a reference... For example, in this exhibition you work with a selection of images of the systems for hanging paintings on the walls of this museum. How do you see that double consciousness of the viewers at your exhibition, the fact of discovering your work and at the same time thinking about what they're doing there, in the space where they're discovering your work? You posit for the viewer an almost Brechtian distancing. In the same way that Bertolt Brecht wanted audience members to be aware that they were in a theater and construct a critical reflection on the basis of the awareness that what they were seeing was a play, a representation, you, too, constantly remind the viewer that she is in an exhibition, that she is only one part of the interpretation of a whole mechanism that is being represented. This is something that has been increasingly present in your work in recent years, isn't it?

IA — That's right, especially in a number of concrete works that develop this idea of presence in a specific place and propose a more performative aspect in relation to the viewers, such as preventing them from doing certain things in the museum, reminding them that they must not touch the works, that their movements are being monitored at all times by security cameras, that the exhibition continues here or there... information of this kind that in some way conditions the visit, which the viewer encounters throughout the itinerary. The intention is, on the one hand, that people should be aware that they are in a place that has limits and that as users of the institution they cannot do certain things. Some are as obvious as not touching the works, but I also want to explore how this display of the museum, these elements that make the museum a specific space, can also be converted into work; in other words, how

the fact of photographing a wall on which “please don’t touch” is written and transporting that image to the wall of another exhibition space is presenting a photograph on a wall that could itself contain that injunction. It’s a question of adding another thin layer. The image is at once a sign containing an injunction and also a photograph, a photograph of a part of reality that incorporates that information or that limit. These are the two aspects that interest me in these works.

JF — At the same time, your work may suggest a critical distancing in relation to the exhibition space and the institution, but it doesn’t seem to me to be an example of what has come to be called the institutional critique, because I think its meta-expository condition is more the creation of a new possibility of subversion of the condition of the viewer than a situation of critique of the museological or expository institution...

IA — I think several readings are possible. One might be that it incorporates a certain critique of the role of the viewer in the institution; in other words, what the viewer does in the museum and what limits are set and reminding people of that by incorporating some injunctions that continually mark their itinerary. But I’m also interested in the possibility of developing a new project in relation to a specific context of where the exhibition is going to be held and bearing in mind some features of that place with which to develop some of the works. I think that the two readings of these works are interesting. For me, both are correct and both are possible and at the same time inseparable, because putting up a sign that seems to have been put there by the museum is not the same as taking and putting up a photograph of a sign, which we automatically identify as a work. There is a small difference between the two things, but they are also very close; it’s a very subtle difference. In the same way that in other works I have incorporated everyday things from my surroundings—things that are a meter away from me, such as the newspaper, the Tipp-Ex, or the fabric fibers from the filter of the clothes dryer—in the case of the museum other elements also serve to develop proposals of this kind.

JF — You sometimes work with the idea of redundancy, repeating a known or recognizable situation, and what surprises us as viewers is the way this situation is transformed into a work of art. And that always implies a tautology to what you know of the world. You are repeating a signal, you’re repeating information, you’re repeating all of the things that may be stage directions in that theater that may be the museum. In the same way, when you work with the book object you choose certain formal aspects that pertain to the book but that we don’t often interpret as part of the book, such as the table of contents, page numbers, chapter numbers... A suprasegmental dimension always exists above and beyond what the book is or what the space is, which is where you create that distance, the distance that is almost like the search for what is redundant in the stage directions of the world. Is that an intention? Is it a natural consequence of the development of your work in recent years?

IA — It may be. I think these works derive in some ways from the previous work of deconstructing painting, from the fact of addressing painting as a language that can be analyzed, separating its constituent parts and working on the basis of these. I can also apply that same strategy of engaging painting to literature or to film.

JF — Could this exercise in redundancy be compared with the way in which On Kawara created a biography of everyday life as represented by its most neutral conventions, such as a calendar?

IA — Yes, I think in the case of On Kawara the idea of autobiography is pretty clear, but in a contradictory way because he tells us nothing about himself. We know he’s alive, we know he has walked around a city, that he has met people, that today is a particular day, and that he has painted the date. But beyond that we know nothing about On Kawara, because what he has done is precisely to represent what we all do, the ordinary life story of all human beings, which consists in moving around, interacting, working: in short, living. Yes, the same methodology On Kawara used is applied in certain aspects of my projects, but above all it’s a matter of observing each of these languages from the outside, not getting

inside them as a qualified professional would do but analyzing them from outside. The methodology consists, for example, in approaching film by way of its characteristic features, such as motion, time, sound, words, translation, subtitles, all of that, and working from each of these elements independently. And it's the same with the books. Each book has its content, but other parts of the book are the structure of which it's composed, such as blank pages or pages with the numbers of the chapters, the table of contents, the bibliography. In short, different parts that, if they were all we had, could become any book, any book we can match to that structure. I'm very interested in this possibility of it's being any book, of presenting the absence rather than the content and leaving it to the viewer to fill those gaps with her own knowledge, her sensibility, her imagination, her own world, and her library.

JF — You work with a wide variety of media. In many cases the way you work with each one ties in to a cultural tradition of that medium. That is, when you work with painting, you problematize an abstract concept of painting that is also a historical concept and a cultural heritage. When you work with a book, you fragment and question a concept of the book. When you work with photography, we find you relating your photographs to evidence of painting as a subject. How do you see this questioning of genres and media in your work?

IA — Well, in my work there has always been an intention to take painting into other areas, to expand its boundaries, its traditional boundaries, and to investigate how materials that would not be regarded as painting from a traditional point of view could, from a reconsideration of the boundaries of painting, be incorporated into that area, as happened with sculpture in the 1970s, when it was extended from the exclusively three-dimensional object to practices such as land art, performance, and installation. All of these practices were incorporated into what was traditionally called sculpture, and something similar happened with painting. We can see work by artists who are not painters but whose work—even video work—clearly invokes painting, takes it as a reference. On the strength of these considerations I began to question

the limits of traditional painting, to see how I could go beyond them, and then I extended the same analysis to other disciplines or areas of creation: literature, film, and others. This whole period of questioning the established languages allowed me to move toward positing new ideas and undertaking new projects.

JF — We have, for various reasons, chosen to publish a book for the exhibition that in some ways takes up a similar challenge to the one you have undertaken with the spaces of the museum. In the same way that you intervene in those spaces, you also make an intervention in the conception of an object, in this case a book in which images of your works and texts such as the conversation we're having now are going to be paginated in much the same kind of way as you work in three-dimensional space, only now within the space of the book. How do you see the possibility of an artist's book today within the context of a museological institution?

IA — The idea of working on the book in this way really appeals to me. I would almost say it interests me more than doing a traditional catalogue that presents the works alongside texts by two or three writers—which is fine, too, but I feel more attracted right now to this possibility of developing a project in parallel, one that will have a lot to do with the exhibition but at the same time will be resolved in a different format and will be almost like a separate exhibition. Because the book as object interests me. That's clear in a number of works. The book both as object and for its content is something I like a lot. I have quite a few of them, and I look at them and read them often. And I think the opportunity to carry the ideas of the exhibition over into that format can be very thought-provoking. I already have some ideas for it... In fact a number of the works we'll be presenting in the exhibition match the page format, so it won't be difficult to make a translation from the pages displayed in the exhibition to the same pages as part of the book. The exhibition is to some extent the book unbound, taken apart and distributed through the rooms. The book will be like bringing it together again and concentrating the exhibition in this small object we're going to publish.

JF — In this exhibition you'll also be presenting your source materials. You're going to open up a part of your archives and show models of works that you subsequently presented at a larger scale. For instance, you're going to show your press cuttings. Evidently you have a desire to share the creative process with the viewer. Is it important for you to reveal something of your creative process by presenting your archives in the exhibition?

IA — Yes, I think it's appealing for the viewer to be able to see something of where the work comes from, how it was constructed. I am also interested to show a body of surplus material that, at least until now, has not been a direct part of any work. It's material that is lying around, latent, that in principle I'm not going to use, because the project using the newspapers has evolved toward other content. But all of what has been cut out and collected from the newspaper is interesting, and showing it, not as a work but as a part of the process, can help people understand the meaning and the methodology adopted in producing these works. I'm interested in showing the viewer how all the material is archived, and I want to see it, too, insofar as none of it is or ever will be a work. This is material that has been selected and classified but that failed to make the final step to becoming part of a work. It's left sitting, like a railway car on a siding. Showing these two possibilities of the work is appealing to me.

JF — You've worked a good deal with texts, with words, with images that you find in the newspaper. Newspapers entered the history of twentieth-century art with the collage. In a way, your lists, whether of words, of numbers, or of images, are like an iconoclastic version of the tradition of collage. How do you see it? Would you consider your work fitting somehow within the sphere of collage, or do you see it completely differently? Do you think a relationship can be established between the way you use newspapers and the way in which the newspaper entered the history of painting?

IA — I think it's different. How I use this material is different from how the cubists and other artists in other periods have made use of and

appropriated images from the press. What interested me was the reordering of information that was originally presented in a chaotic fashion and that came to me all jumbled. That's how it reaches us on a daily basis. I've tried to understand it by reordering it, classifying it, and presenting it in an anonymous, neutral, atemporal manner, lifting it out of the context in which it originally appeared, extracting words and numbers from the concrete information to which they belonged, and at the same time turning them into an image. What interests me in working with these materials is presenting them as images. And in part that's why the original collage has never been the final work but has been understood as if it were a photographic negative from which an enlargement has been made, which cancels out the material quality of the collage, turning it into something flat and also changing the size, as we do with a photograph. We go from the collage-negative to the print, enlarged to the degree that interests us. I wanted these works to be seen as images of a part of reality, such as death, the economy, time, the weather, people, immigration. But it was also a way to translate text, words, into image. Obviously these works can be read—they can literally be read—but I'm also very interested in their being seen as images.

JF — Do you now read newspapers in the ordinary way, or are you still reading them in search of numbers and words, noting down possibilities?

IA — Mostly the latter. Increasingly it's a matter of finding something I'm in need of or discovering something that gives me an idea for a work, because the printed newspaper as a source of information is relatively obsolete. We get digital information almost as it happens, and a newspaper takes twenty-four hours to appear. Usually, by the time information appears in print we've already read it online or seen it on television or in other media. So I think reading the newspaper as a source of information is a bit anachronistic; it's not the most interesting source of information at present. But the fact is that newspapers still exist; they continue to be a representation of reality, of the most important things that have happened on a certain day, and that being so, I'm still drawn

to them and remain interested in using them and in carrying on with this work of selecting and searching for words, numbers, images, and so on. I would never do it if I had to write or invent those numbers myself. For me it's crucial that for one reason or another they are part of reality. If they were invented, this work wouldn't make any kind of sense to me.

JF— Is the idea of the archive a driving concept in your work, or is it a consequence of your work?

IA— I think it's more the consequence. I've never thought like an archivist or like someone who collects or archives things. Yes, I am interested in classifying, but I have never entertained the idea of collecting or archiving, and I don't think that's what I've done. I think that the obtaining of material over a long period of time is better described by the word *collecting* or *gleaning*. The other day, talking to someone about this, I said that, for me, this whole process is like keeping the lees of what filters through to us of reality, little drops that drip down every day, and in the end you can construct a representation of the world. The initial idea, absurd to a certain extent, was to construct an image of the world parallel to the real one, constructed with an element that reality itself had given me, such as the information in the newspaper. The idea was to re-present that same reality, reorganized, so as to read it in another way, so as to be able to interpret it. And the result of this daily filtering and gleaning over a long time—which is what makes it possible to have so much material with which to construct all of this large body of work, this project of so many years that has so many ramifications within a single project—is not the construction of an archive as that would be understood according to the traditional idea of the archive.

JF— Art history appears as a theme in many of your works. Some of your works engage with the diachrony of a history of art in a neutral way, in its alphabetical and chronological dimensions, just as you take from a book aspects that are less meaningful but nonetheless have their own meaning. In some of these works you present a series of artists that you have arranged sequentially in the

history of painting or the history of engraving. You've also worked with images from art history. Now you are presenting a project in which obsolete slides are digitized and projected, offering us bleached-out images of well-known works from the history of art. How do you see the question of art history today?

IA— Yes, the theme of art history crops up at times. I was interested in presenting aspects of this history as a synthesis, formalizing it on the basis of lists of artists and addressing (by way of a selection of names) what certain artists have meant for the history of painting or etching—for example, which ones have structured these respective histories up to the present—and presenting the information in a highly objective way, without indicating my preferences. I have addressed this theme because art happens to be the sphere in which I work, and I think it's appropriate to incorporate in my own work my own reflections on art history. For this exhibition I'm thinking about a new work that to some extent will involve an approach that differs from the approach I took with previous works, which respected chronology, the order of the periods and styles, and included the most important names, and so on. In this new work, which is entitled *HST R F RT* and is going to be a video projection of a slideshow, the idea is to present art history in the most incorrect way possible; that is, by breaking up and altering all the traditional frameworks of its presentation, such as the choice of works and periods, the chronology, the correct view of the works (color, position), and so on. Nothing will be in its proper place. Some periods will not even be represented, while others will be overrepresented to an absurd degree. To give an example, the work may include many images of Greek pottery and none of Romanesque or Gothic painting. The idea of breaking with the traditional presentation and using images in the form of slides came to me because a professor of art history happened to give me a haphazardly organized collection of slides. I've altered them by exposing them to sunlight for over a year. I find the whole process thought-provoking. Using all this material that has come to me without my having selected it reminds me to some extent of the works I did with the newspaper. I don't decide what content appears in the newspapers.

These slides that someone gave me I'm simply going to organize and present in a way that prompts us to rethink our assumptions and to see another interpretation of the history of art, if it's possible to attempt that. I'd like to take the opportunity afforded by this conversation to ask you a question. I'd like to explore in more depth the way you approach exhibitions, which I think is basically in two ways. In one you work on an artist that someone has suggested to you, and in the other you suggest working with an artist. In the second case—that is, when you decide to work with an artist in order to organize an exhibition with him or her—what motivates you to make the choice, to work with one particular artist and not another?

JF — What motivates is discovering in the work of an artist an experience of art that raises new questions for me about my own experience of life and the world. It's that curiosity that is aroused by something I would never have imagined possible, something that surprises me and makes me want to know more about an artist's work. That's why I'm interested in artists who surprise me with questions and forms and concepts and solutions that give rise to new questions; artists who come up with new possibilities, who expand the possibilities of what a work of art can be.

IA — You like to be surprised.

JF — Yes.

IA — But that might mean that you weren't interested, a priori.

JF — I like above all to be stimulated so that new ideas are created, ideas that may even change my certainties, because art is one of the most effective exercises for destroying all certainties. So I love to change my mind about many things in response to an artist's work. I'm never interested in recognizing in another artist's work ideas that I've already had. I'm more interested in developing new ideas on the basis of new things that the artist's work brings me. At a museum, an institution, you do exhibitions for many reasons: in some cases because an

artist's work is to your personal taste, it represents a desire for knowledge and research; on other occasions because it is important for the understanding of a context, for the coherence of a program. An exhibition program is not usually a mirror of an individual's personal tastes or private obsessions. Harald Szeemann did that, but it works only when you have a museum of obsessions, one not paid for with public money... If you're in a public institution, you have a program that's constructed beyond your own obsessions. The Harald Szeemann model is the curator's utopia: to be allowed to work in a museum purely in pursuit of your obsessions on the basis of other people's obsessions that you encounter in a utopia that you project in your life and in your work.

IA — So the program or the decision to exhibit one artist and not another is prompted by motives with which, a priori, you might not agree.

JF — In an institution the program is drawn up in a collective way...

IA — It's all born out of a dialogue.

JF — ...At the Museo Reina Sofía we work collectively—a relationship that extends to the curators, the museum teams, and so on—to discuss different possibilities. When you're in an institution, a lot of yourself is personally invested in drawing up the program, but a lot also comes from dialogue with people both inside and outside the museum. You're always perceiving or trying to understand what happens when people visit an exhibition, and you're always trying to see what's going on, whether in the context where you work or in what's happening with the artists you have worked with or want to work with. So, just as an art institution, a museum, or an art center should always maintain a lively curiosity in the people who visit, so that even if they don't like a particular work they'll still try to engage with it, to understand why it's there and why they are there looking at what the artist has done, the relationship she's created, a curator should always be open to meeting all of the artists that may cross her path. Because even when I see works of art that really don't interest or motivate me, they always contain within them other ways of thinking about art. For example, one of the fascinating things that happens all the time is that art debunks the

stereotypes of the dominant tastes in art, which have manifested themselves since time immemorial. Some artists have always gone beyond the desire to please or to make art that was an expression applied to a system—of art, of a grammar, of the world, of a style, of a language—and, far from restricting themselves to those possibilities of an applied art, have done things that were quite different from what existed in their day. The simple truth is that even something that could be dismissed as a piece of bad art can generate interesting ideas about the times in which it was made. I learned that, for example, in the Musée d'Orsay. When I first visited, I was far from impressed to find the mythical works from the Jeu de Paume in the midst of so many nineteenth-century French vernacular paintings. But now I think it's wonderful! I come across many things that make me think about history, about other times, or about my relationship to life at the present moment, because we are always responding to the present when we look at a work of art, regardless of when it was made. Curiosity is always one of the most important intellectual stimuli when it comes to art.

IA — I agree, and I also believe it's right to go against the idea of taste, against the things we know and find easy, and try to posit situations that are the result of an effort to overcome an initial difficulty.

JF — You know how it is when you start to like a work of art, in the same way that you start to like someone you meet, and you don't know why...

IA — Yes, it's something that happens gradually, as you get to know them and start to find out what they're all about.

IV. AFTERWORD

A conversation is not an interview. Questions and answers, references and implicit or explicit allusions develop into a game of mirrors in which each interlocutor encounters the other in the reflections of a work, between its making and its possible interpretations. A curator and an artist invent a common territory with regard to where the exhibition is. Works are chosen; the spaces and times of their presentation are thought about; contexts are sought where the viewer and the reader can find an intimate discussion with history via the experience of dialogue. Every exhibition presupposes that dialogue, that metamorphosis of identity on the basis of a different gaze that expands and transforms our knowledge of the world and of life. The roles of each are revealed as reversible in this scene. Curiosity merges with the desire to get to know the work, to get to know the other, to get to know oneself. More than seeing, it's a question of thinking—and thinking is a way of inhabiting the world, of organizing it, of reinterpreting it in order to see better. Knowing has always been a way of interpreting.

JOÃO FERNANDES — In his way of doing, On Kawara is like a functionary or administrator of his own work, which is a way of distancing oneself from the myth of the artist, free from all the systems of functioning provided by virtue of the always diverse nature of her work, the moments of her life, and all the rest, but this idea of being a functionary of his own work is something that

characterizes On Kawara's work and way of working. Do you think this also applies to your work?

IGNASI ABALLÍ — In some sense, yes. The rigor of his approach is a referent for me, as is his idea, which also holds for some of Perec's texts, of proposing to oneself a methodology and a project in order to respect it and follow it through to the end. In On Kawara's work we don't find aspects we would consider normal in the work of other artists, such as an evolution of style, continuous invention, or the constant quest for originality. Instead, he defines works in order to make them each day, and his daily activity consists in making these works. I imagine him almost like a functionary: from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. sending a postcard with the time he got out of bed, painting a picture with the date of the day in question, drawing on a map his itinerary around a city tour and the people he met that day. This was his systematic work, in which he didn't yield an inch of ground from the rigor or the obsession. Without that obsessive component it's hard to adhere to a life project of that nature. I have looked at, read, and reflected deeply about On Kawara, and I think we have a lot of common interests—for example, the way he also developed a pictorial oeuvre with the *Date* paintings—even though our works are necessarily different. We are at once close and distant.

JF — In the same way, an artist like Stanley Brouwn is also part of your visual library, your conceptual library.

IA — He's another artist I would name as a support. I like to think of these artists as if they were a walking stick, an aid: in moments of doubt in which you start doing things that deviate from your ideas, you take down a book of Stanley Brouwn or On Kawara and find your way back to the right path. They are a kind of conceptual support for me. Michael Asher too. His work probably has less to do with mine, but I see him as an exemplary model from the point of view of ethics, of strength, of not giving ground, of keeping faith with an idea of what art is and carrying it through to the end—something I don't think I've achieved, even though

I often feel I have no possibility of turning back. One tries to do the best one can at all times and with what life allows. But I admire these people who have been able to maintain an attitude that is completely rigorous and faithful to their original idea. It's curious: often one doesn't do the work one really wants to do; very often the gap between what you wanted to do and what you end up doing is considerable. A part of it escapes you along the way, and this is conditioned by the day-to-day, by commitments and compromises, by the possibilities afforded to you, by your way of being, your environment; in short, by a whole set of circumstances that sometimes take you along paths or lines of work that you didn't foresee yourself taking.

I would like to ask you something else. As curator of the exhibition you have spent time immersed in and researching my work. How do you see your relationship to that work? How do you position yourself with regard to it? Does it influence you in some way as a curator, or can you maintain a position of neutrality? Do you think the artist's work, or the artist as a person, can change your perception as a curator, not only of this exhibition but in general?

JF — I often think the curator is like a traveler who enters a strange land as he gets to know an artist's work. This new land has rules, conventions, ways of thinking, ways of seeing the world, landscapes and architectures that are completely different from what he knows. Like that traveler, a curator cannot see what he discovers for the first time with the same eyes he had on some other occasion. The curator has to multiply himself as a traveler in different people, because when you visit an unfamiliar country you're not the same as when you're living in your own country: you have a curiosity, you have a desire to know, you do things you would not do in your own country, you walk into a restaurant where you eat things you would never have imagined eating, you go down roads you don't know, you decide to get lost, to do things you might not normally do in everyday life. When it comes to entering into an artist's work, the curator is like a tourist in the days before tourism was industrialized, possessing some intelligence of the situation, or not. What interests me most is to be someone else, to "other myself," as Fernando Pessoa said, almost like

another alter ego, which sometimes gets mixed up with what the artist's work suggests to me, because each body of work has its own models of thinking, of acting, of making things visible, of conceptualizing, and what interests me at times is the way of entering into them, imagining how the artist would think at that moment, almost as if the curator were a heteronymous artist. For example, if you have a close friend who talks to you in an interesting way, you sometimes ask yourself how he would think about some question or other. Sometimes the curator is trying to think like the artist, in order to interpret the work better. My relationship with an artist's work, with her working processes, begins in that conversation that a working process has to have in which we seek and share languages with one another. In this drawing closer, we turn into Zeligs of the artist's work.² But this then develops an attentiveness in you to what you did not know—and a conflict, too, because you cannot, as when you travel to a unknown country, stop being yourself; you can't cast off your education, your culture, your other identity, your point of view, your interpretation. This being so, for a curator, working with an artist is always an interplay of identities. I think artists could make far more use of that process of working with the curator, using the curator almost as a character in their work, rather than the artist being a character in the curator's work, which is frequently the case in the art world we know.

In your work I find a universe that makes me discover that what is visible is sometimes what is most invisible, and that no knowledge or understanding is possible without paying attention to the details that hide from us in the everyday. In your work I find that to think is to perceive what we see according to how we question the conventions that allow us to classify it. To think is to classify, as Perec said... but seeing and thinking are the same when I confront in your work that particular mode of capturing our time in the humblest details of daily life, in the materials you collect and in the processes of their metamorphosis. Rediscovering time in your work is also a way of rescuing myself from that permanent want of attention that life imposes on us. An exercise of resistance to alienation...

IA — One last question: we have already worked together on a previous exhibition, so my work is not as unfamiliar to you as if this were the

first time you had come into contact with it. Has it been a different experience for you? Do you see differences between the two occasions on which we have worked together? Was it like visiting a country you already know, or have you discovered new things and seen some kind of evolution in your approach to it?

JF — I think that just as a river doesn't flow past the same banks twice, when you visit a country—just as when you watch a film a number of times and never see the same film twice—you never visit the same country twice. You're confronted with your memories, but you are also confronted with new things, and you see the memories in a different light. Something similar happens to me when I reread a book. I stopped underlining passages in my books because I find the confrontation with myself in that other time very disagreeable. What struck me in the book ten or fifteen years ago and what I would choose to emphasize now are very different, and I don't enjoy confronting that. Each time I work with an artist, I try to free myself from my memories, from my previously constructed thoughts, but a crucial familiarity remains, along with a complicity that comes from the familiarity of having some knowledge of a work. I've also had the surprise of discovering things in your work that I didn't know before and of discovering others coming from new projects that you have done recently. But the fact is that even though we share a curiosity and attentiveness—from which this project came into being—neither you nor I are the same as when we first worked together. One difference is objective: the last exhibition we worked on together was one that I was coproducing with other institutions, and the Serralves wasn't involved from the start of the construction process. You had initiated the exhibition at your home base, which was MACBA, and the exhibition was then presented in Birmingham and at the Serralves and in Karlsruhe. At the Serralves we adapted it and changed it based on our conversations in and about the Serralves spaces. In our conversations for this project at the Museo Reina Sofía and for the book accompanying it, some things take me back to those times when new ideas came to us and when the spaces also inspired new projects and so on. That said, the present exhibition is diverse enough to be seen as a moment that contains the earlier exhibition while at the same time being very different from it.

² *Zelig* (1983) is a film by Woody Allen that presents the story of a human chameleon, a man with the supernatural ability to change his identity in accordance with the circumstances of his life.

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