

THE ARCHIVE OF DUST: *AN ONGOING PROJECT*

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ELENA DEL RIVERO

“The Archive of Dust” is a project by Elena del Rivero, curated and choreographed by Mateo Feijóo. It started at Naves Matadero, Madrid in 2019 and continues its vital process at Es Baluard Museu.

Elena del Rivero, *DUST*, 2013. Selenium toned silver gelatin print on barite paper, 27.9 × 35.56 cm. Courtesy of the artist

BEYOND THE DUST: ACTION AND COMMUNITY

Imma Prieto

Nothing makes us as poor and unfree as this defamiliarisation of powerlessness . . . And being contemporary means, in that sense, returning to a present we were never in before.¹

The years of memory could be calmer were they not stranded on the shores of pain . . . Madness, that great apocalyptic and undoubtedly supreme spark, finds the appropriate word with which to express the whole.²

Loud crashing, tumult and debris, flashing lights, beams of light with no visibility, workers on the move day and night, anonymous. These are some of the images we attach to the imaginary generated in the wake of 9/11. It made no difference if you woke up in the morning or in the middle of the night, and stood at the window of any of the apartments that lined the perimeter of the World Trade Center in NYC. Each day seemed to repeat itself endlessly. In a sort of eternal echo, the presumption of patriarchal power attempted to win the battle against history. Many years after the attack, what came to be called Ground Zero remained immersed in frenzied activity. The greed of construction and development, the supreme will to build up strength and power, there where the only thing that should rise up is fragility and poetry. This is the key to getting into the work that Elena del Rivero has been carrying out for twenty years. A process that shapes *The Archive of Dust* and that can only be understood based on a personal and collective history, on a writing in time, revealing itself through a biography

1. Giorgio Agamben, *Nudities* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2010).

2. Alda Merini, *Delito de vida. Autobiografía y poesía* (Madrid: Vaso Roto Ediciones, 2018), p. 49.

that demands a name and an essence from a position of anonymity. An action that feeds on the poetic and extols vulnerability.

Elena del Rivero has known how to speak with memory, through gestures as symbolic as immersing her hands in the dust she found in her studio after the attacks. Elena del Rivero's home was right in front of the Twin Towers. Months passed before she was able to return to it. Not only were those objects that make up the domestic space covered with all kinds of rubbish, but also her work, her pieces, most of them made of paper, were in tatters. Layers of dust and thousands of letters that had flown from the towers into her studio following the explosion.

Dust, a lot of dust. Not ruins, debris: this distinction is important in understanding how Elena del Rivero has approached a series of found materials. She has managed to transform the debris, something that would have otherwise simply been abandoned in a scrapyard, into ruins, allowing it to age and become memory and writing. This is what now makes up the ensemble of materials that Elena del Rivero and Mateo Feijóo have arranged in "The Archive of Dust: *An Ongoing Project*".

The result is the sum of different processes that have materialised through works such as *[Swi:t] Home: A CHANT* (2001–2006), a waterfall more than eight metres high, constructed with fragments of the letters that flew from the towers into Elena del Rivero's home/studio. Remnants sewn by hand, tacked with the utmost delicacy and care to a tarlatan gauze. Between the different pieces, pearls and threads are revealed, pointing to that timeless time, vertical, that floats and does not sink, and is inscribed resiliently against linear time and progress: "Home. Hole. Black threads emitted by the core of light. Celestial hole of time, broken in place. Chants and patches arising from the need to find something, to tread on what was. A place. Gold is what blinds us, what locks us in. Its dust is a mask of needles that grants us the possibility to hurt ourselves while doing. Stitch up and forget . . .

The passage of time in light. In the only light. The light that shatters in the home."³

[Swi:t] Home: A CHANT was presented for the first time in 2008 at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington DC. Two years later, coinciding with the tenth anniversary of the terrorist attack, it was presented at the New Museum in NYC. Now, coinciding with the twentieth anniversary, the work travels to Palma, moving through time and space. It is not only interesting to move and relocate it, but also interesting to highlight other damaged latitudes. The Balearic archipelago is, as regards the Mediterranean Sea, a place of crossing and meeting of cultures, of different communities. That is how it has been throughout history and that is how it stands today, between Africa, Europe and the Middle East. Exiting the North American sphere is relevant and necessary, because to show this work again is to recognise that the wounds are still open, as they were before 2001. The intensity and reality of which it speaks is not the same that encircled the media then, or even now.

Just like the conflicts that followed and those that came before, the attack was the fruit of the dark depths of capitalism, yet the project rises above by placing humanity at its centre. With each seam, Elena del Rivero inscribes and heals the time shared. Its traces contain moments damaged by a delusional and impenetrable present, a present that remains ours. Therefore, twenty years later, the work continues to foster community, dialogue and a shared home. A cascade of anonymous letters, spaces perforated by time. A time that knows amnesia. A time that has neither beginning nor end, only a latent continuity, impregnated with apathy. The condemnation of disappearance is responded to with force, through the gap and the space that seek to be a memory. This is how Elena del Rivero defies oblivion, by defying the gaze and consciousness... The central room is the centrifugal

3. Pepa Balsach, "Agujeros celestes", in *El archivo del polvo: Elena del Rivero* (Madrid: Caniche Editorial, 2020), p. 17.

force, something beats, strongly, very strongly, and despite the mixture of music and sounds, silence prevails. It is as if the sound keeps us on our feet, so as to not give in to the weight of silence. So many voices silenced daily, smashed to pieces, now manage to speak, to beam light through their holes. The cascade of letters and the sound come together and become a parable not only of NYC, Paris or Barcelona, but of all territories that have been abused, of all the places where the only destruction sought was that of the home.

A series of pieces that are part of the personal ecosystem that the artist has been creating over the years will be installed in the museum spaces, from *DUST* (2001–2009), which collects part of the dust that flooded her home, to some of the video pieces she made about 11 September: *Nu Descendant an Escalier and Returning, as Well* (2002–2013) and *Ground Zero* (2011). In the last room we will find *Nine Broken Letters* (2004), written during nine consecutive days of insomnia, a state resulting from not being able to return home. For their creation Rivero was inspired by Marina Tsvetaeva's *Florentine Nights*, in the same way that, years later, while stitching together pieces of paper in her new studio, she was accompanied by the melodies of Black voices such as Billie Holiday, as well as the powerful compositions of Lawrence D. "Butch" Morris, the musician who composed *Bring Light* (2006), a sound piece that has always accompanied the presentation of the *A CHANT* installation. *Bring Light* opens us up to a new relational state in which accompaniment and collaboration act as the creative engine, seeing as the piece was composed based on the artist's own recordings around Ground Zero, in conversation with compositions by "Butch".

These concentric spheres continue to open up by means of new collaborations. On the one hand, the intervention that graffiti artist OVAS has made on one of the walls of the museum. It displays some of his collages, created as a result of the Black Lives Matter demonstrations, placed face to face with the *Nine Broken Letters*. On the other hand, becoming a

present standard bearer and defending the need to raise our voice and lead a domestic revolution, a collective action has been carried out by collecting dozens of kitchen towels that have been sent from all over the world. Cloths inherited from grandmothers, used cloths, rags, after all, that come from private spaces of care, and that now become collective, public.

The final intervention takes place in the wall's turrets. Large white flags flutter across them with the word MOTHER inscribed on them. A word that intrinsically contains care, altruism and attention.

The strength of the project lies in its timelessness, its contemporaneity and its relevance. It is, perhaps, through bringing together all the fragments, not only of letters but of times and spaces, a homage to and a recognition of all women who continue to live in oppressed places such as Afghanistan, Iran, Senegal or Nigeria, among many others.

Elena del Rivero has spent the past twenty years working on "The Archive of Dust: *An Ongoing Project*", but the layers it's composed of are part of many of her past processes in which writing, correspondence and the domestic established a naturally strong trident. In spite of everything, these years are the result of knowing that she is part of a community some attempt to erase and make invisible. Therefore, presenting the complete archive in Palma is to think about the consequences that have continued to be squandered since 9/11. The attack was the first of many in the 21st century, and this changed the course of history and contemporary thought while also marking the birth of new threats, but let's not forget that the seeds were already sown. These works propose and project other ways of seeing and thinking in common. The naked and radical gesture challenges normativity, the patriarchal structure that orders, objectifies, silences. Based on the poetics of fragments and the immateriality of sound, a new universe is created in which the word is able to be again. To name collectively, to construct in community: MOTHER.

THE ARCHIVE OF DUST: AN ONGOING PROJECT

Mateo Feijóo

For French philosopher Jean Baudrillard, “The collapse of the Twin Towers is the major symbolic event. Their collapse is an image of the fragility of the great global power and its internal fracture. The towers were a positive—triumphal—emblem of that power and embody it negatively even now in their dramatic end, which in some sense resembles a suicide.” This unique event in the recent era has continued to produce reverberations, like a sort of geological process. In *Principles of Geology*, published in three volumes between 1830 and 1833, Scottish geologist Charles Lyell argued that changes on the surface of the earth in the distant past are the result of geological processes still in operation. To a very real extent, the present is the key to the past.

We could say that Elena del Rivero’s work “The Archive of Dust: *An Ongoing Project*” gives us the key to interpret the marks created by humans on the surface of the earth on 9/11. A very public tragedy witnessed by the whole world became a private tragedy for many, including Elena del Rivero, whose studio and apartment at 125 Cedar Street lay directly across from the World Trade Center. Starting with this premise, she began to explore how to visualise this human drama by bringing personal experiences into the public realm. Her project speaks of shared suffering, of how the shock wave keeps propagating. “Humans leave their mark, and the earth carries it forward as an archive.”¹ Elena del Rivero’s living archive is a collection of debris, so we could describe “The Archive of Dust: *An Ongoing Project*” as an ecological project that recycles remains, remnants,

1. Parikka, Jussi. *A Geology of Media*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015.

fragments and other detritus, while not ignoring the fact that it is also covered in earth, dirt, dust and death.

Once Elena del Rivero had obtained special permission to enter the area around the Twin Towers cordoned off by the police in the wake of 9/11, she spent every day for six months in her apartment gathering materials, taking photographs, shooting videos and carrying out performative actions on her own, until the New York City Department of Health sealed off the building for renovation and decontamination work in August 2002. By then, her relationship with the materials she had gathered—these fragments/traces of a very recent past—had begun to spark a series of questions: What does “transmission” mean? What are the implications of using a material context to store fragments of a deliberate disaster? The catastrophe had shaken the ground beneath her feet and transformed history. Now it was time to study, to analyse the different layers, to relate and interconnect, to devise systems of relations.

Over the following twenty years, Elena del Rivero has kept coming back to these materials, these processes still in operation as the result of a past action. The result is this work spanning a breadth of time with critical insights from two angles: the artist as an observer of events who records facts and ascertains situations; and a private, interpretive gaze that creates pieces such as *Nine Broken Letters* and many of the videos she sets herself up in. *Desnudo bajando la escalera* [Nude Descending the Staircase]—a clear nod to Duchamp’s piece—is a symbolic relationship in a contemporary key.

A sense of fragility runs through the pieces hinting at the possibility of catastrophe.

“my prophetic words burn like fire in the sky”² every searing
blow of yours is a felled body I am trampled by prophets
I offer snakes my heel my crook as Tiresias’ stick
the blind shall quench their thirst with my light

2. Szyborska, Wislawa. *Poems, New and Collected, 1957–1977*, trans. Stanisław Barańczak and Claire Cavanagh. New York: Harcourt, 1998.

[*Swi:t*] *Home: A Chant*, the centrepiece of this installation, is made out of the 3,150 bits of paper that inundated Elena del Rivero's studio and apartment. In an archaeological endeavour, she set about piecing them together and cleaning, cataloguing and photographing them without any clear idea of what to do with them, other than giving meaning and value to ostensibly useless scraps of paper. Once she had recast these splinters thrown out by a colossal movement, the material nature of each salvaged scrap of paper ceased to be an abstract concept and, when catalogued, they regained a value within the structure of things that make up the world we know.

Our first reaction to the installation of "The Archive of Dust: *An Ongoing Project*" is a strange feeling, a kind of shock, an unnerving sense of surprise; but at the same time there is also movement, a circulatory effect emanating fluidly, weight, lightness. This may be the result of exposure to so many hours of private, solitary work, to the intense emotions invested in each piece. Running right the way through Es Baluard Museu, this installation eschews the traditional analysis of a context imposed by the exhibition space: there is no agreed convention. Each piece forms a whole that spreads out before us in different planes, from vertical to horizontal. As our gaze wanders through different angles, our bodies have to adapt to these forms and volumes. The work on show here is neither shifty nor polished and evades the aesthetic banality that contaminates everything around us—hence the appearance of the crack, the infinite folds, and the onus on spectators to halt and face the deep emptiness.

in the crack in each hand	in the memory of each body
in the cry of every orphan	in every mouth craving bread
... the harvest laid waste	hunger as insatiable as ever

In Western culture, the archive forms part of our habits, it shows our understanding of ourselves and is linked to the debris we accumulate. In contrast to a fleeting performance,

the archive takes on the role of "guardian of origins", "sentinel of order". But this particular archive is somewhat different: it isn't finished, it has continued to create new works and reinterpret items excavated from the tragedy. Elena del Rivero restores the past with every new piece. The "archive of dust" in the title is borrowed from Australian intellectual and scientist Warwick Anderson, whom Elena del Rivero met at a Rockefeller Foundation residency in Bellagio, Italy, in 2005. Elena was thinking about how to create an archive of all this material and sensed that dust had to be at the heart of the discourse. Warwick grasped this immediately and came up with the definition of an "archive of dust" in a constant relationship with an "archive of death".³ "Our mourning is always caught in the attempt to ontologise remains, to make them present."⁴

immensity as ephemeral as the shadow cast
 on petals at the edge of the lake
 the wind carries off every gesture written in the silence of dust
 suspended desires silent over the ocean
 like ecstasy no body no memory
 only the enduring abstraction of the infinite

As a public space for contemporary art, Es Baluard Museu forges close ties with the artistic community and the spectators attracted by each exhibition. This necessary imaginary creates symbolic capital within the ephemeral, temporary regime that underpins each exhibition or installation, as in the case of "The Archive of Dust: *An Ongoing Project*". The white cube is a present historical reality, full of a complicit salubrity we ought to challenge, after having accepted

3. Anderson, Warwick. "Archive of Dust, or other Hydrocarbons", in *El archivo del polvo*. Madrid: Caniche Editorial, 2020.

4. Derrida, Jacques. *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, The Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf. New York: Routledge, 1994.

it without too much questioning. In this installation, we don't let the context impose itself: each and every piece is a necessary construction for approaching the work as a whole, brimming with possible readings and subjectivities. I curated this project as an exercise in writing in motion, with each piece striking up its own spatial and temporal relationship with visitors, requiring them to listen and pay attention, and therefore make decisions and take on a degree of commitment to the piece in question. As Lawrence Weiner might say, "Once you understand a work, you possess it." The encounter between visitors and the installation should be thought of as a practice of the impossible, experiencing that unique moment as a construction of each individual's performative body. A body eager to perceive, to experience life beyond the automatic existence imposed on us by the "moral progress akin to discarding all values systems other than our own".⁵

Activating a space, a territory, creates a connection between bodies and emotions, in this case, by strengthening collective imaginaries and memory. "This process leads to a new place, which then superposes itself on what we remember and imagine. This new place will be inhabited by everyone and belong to everyone because it will have been built by a community."⁶

it's the cobalt time of day	walkers burnt by the desert light
facedown in the vertical hour	there aren't enough pins to tack together so much fear
the whims of the deaf	why does no-one feel good?

"The Archive of Dust: *An Ongoing Project*" forms part of an ecosystem: order and care are key to the construction of this installation. Memory as knowledge of relevant facts interpreted from Elena del Rivero's experience and wisdom.

5. Baudrillard, Jean. *The Spirit of Terrorism and Requiem for the Twin Towers*, trans. Chris Turner. London: Verso, 2002.

6. Halac, Gabriela. *Espacios revelados. Prácticas artísticas en territorio*. Córdoba, Argentina: Ediciones DocumentA/Escénicas, 2020.

"The Archive of Dust" proves to be a fecund pollinator that integrates other organisms, which is why it is constantly sprouting new pieces open to dialogue from other gazes, other emotions. Interdependencies in a complex system of relationships. Pushing aside a creaking moral framework, Elena del Rivero's work breaks free of institutional inertia and bursts through the museum's orifices out to Pepa Balsach's "celestial holes": poles bearing, thrown-away, donated, picked-up tea towels. Flags by the Mediterranean decrying abandonment, pillaging, orphanhood.

Inside and out are united in this installation, just as public space becomes private in the eyes of each spectator, who opens up a previously unexplored territory home to danger and innocence. The body as a category of social and political action directly related to the artist's work. Listening was what let Elena del Rivero realise that she had the necessary material to give an unofficial account of history. In this installation, she reveals her own and everyone else's personal, subjective story, thus integrating new "carriers of meaning" into existing perceptual schemata.

"The Archive of Dust: *An Ongoing Project*" gathers together the echoes of all the calls that crisscross us. How much more will the skin have to bear? "As yet has my word not removed mountains, and what I have spoken has not reached man. I went, indeed, to men, but not yet have I attained to them."⁷

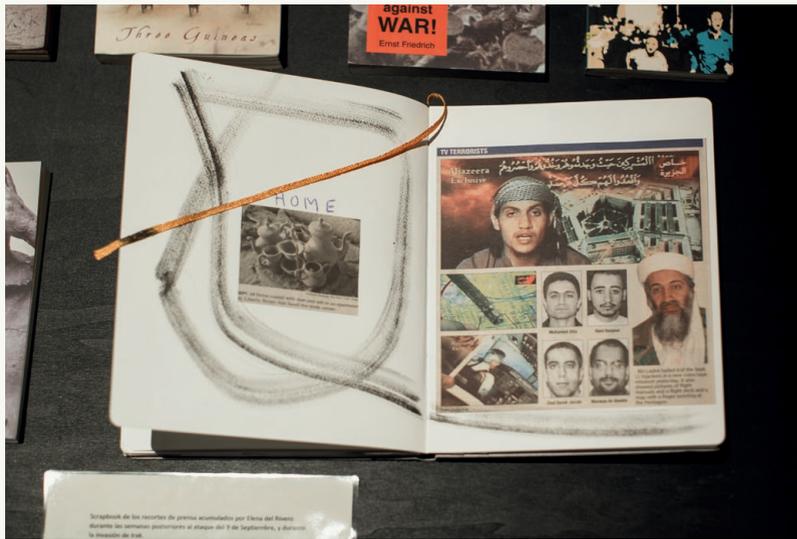
seasonal birds migrate oblivious to people's cries
the wind pushes their light bodies through the heart of the desert
dust shrouds the great battle between Cain and Abel
the deepest abysses sleep like fossils
one day the cockerels will fall silent just as stars go out

7. Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, trans. Thomas Common. New York: Modern Library, 1917.

Elena del Rivero has been constantly making pieces out of the materials gathered from her studio and apartment in the aftermath of the destruction of 9/11, mainly her paintings and postcards hanging on the walls. You could say that right now Elena del Rivero is still making new pieces in the *Memory I* series, presented here for the first time as part of “The Archive of Dust” ecosystem. The artist’s first-hand experience of the SoHo riots during the Black Lives Matter protests were a fresh source of inspiration for her: every morning she would pack her latest collages into her backpack and install them on the graffitied plywood used to board up storefronts. She then photographed her work in this new context, thus linking the 9/11 terrorist attacks with the latest civil rights movement in the United States. Actions like this turn “The Archive of Dust” into a constantly evolving living project.



Elena del Rivero, *Self-portrait*, 2002 (video still).
Courtesy of the artist



Elena del Rivero, *An Archive of Dust*, one of several scrapbooks with newspaper cuttings from 2001-2003. Courtesy of the artist



Elena del Rivero sewing and mending some fragments of paper collected from her studio home in preparation for attaching them to tarlatan in *A CHANT*, 2004. Location: Tompkins Square Park, East Village, New York



Elena del Rivero, *[Swi:t] Home: A CHANT*, 2001-2006 (exhibition view, Es Baluard Museu). Installation. Found paper, mended and sewn into tarlatan gauze, dimensions variable. Installed artwork accompanied by the sound piece *Bring Light*, 2006, composed by Lawrence D. «Butch» Morris. Courtesy of the artist

EL 11-S: THE SHIFT OF OUR TIME

Carmen C. Santesmases and Jorge García García

In the final quarter of the 20th century, Islamic fundamentalism and American aspirations to dominate the resources of the Middle East grew side by side. The culmination of this circumstance came with the attacks that took place on September 11, 2001. This strategic shift in international terrorism was a true reflection of the logic of our time.

The 20th century confronted its closing years with a horizon split in two, consequence of the interventions of the Soviet Union and the United States in Greece, Korea, Egypt, Cuba, Vietnam and the Middle East. The end of the Cold War left Europe polarised, as its walls began to crumble and capitalism declared itself the victor. Yet American interventions did not stop with the end of the Cold War. Backed by the legitimacy attained by whomever wins the war, the US persisted in the conflict for control of the Middle East.

In the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1989), as contemplated from within the framework of the Cold War, the United States supported Saddam Hussein in the Iraqi occupation of Iran, where a revolution had taken place against the Shah. However, over the course of the conflict the United States shifted from one side to the other, leading to a weakening of both nations. The conflict ended with no clear victor. The year following its end, in the Gulf War (1990–1991), which was authorised by the United Nations (UN), a group of thirty-four countries led by the United States took on Iraq in response to Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait.

Since the 1980s the United States had contributed to the ideological and strategic rearming of Al Qaeda with training camps in Afghan territory, along with weapons investment in Taliban organisations, ongoing disinformation

campaigns and the rejection of international treaties.¹ All of this led to a massive turn, which the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers in 2001 would be part and parcel of, with Osama bin Laden at the head of Al Qaeda. This attack was a historic inflection point.

From this point forwards the United States prepared the invasion of Iraq (2003–2011), basing its action on the accusations (which were false and later denied by the government) that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. They claimed to seek to overthrow Saddam Hussein, free the Iraqi people and set up a democratic system. However, the invasion was soon revealed to be a strategy to activate the American weapons machinery and demonstrate that the world order could be re-established in the United States' favour through a military deployment. For the American administration, war had become the instrument whereby states of exception could be established, allowing it to raise public defence spending to the detriment of social expenditure. In this way, national wealth was directed towards weapons manufacturers and the petroleum industry, with Iraq eventually converted into a client dependent on American production.²

Surely one of the most significant legacies of the Cold War in marking the political discourse of the United States, with the fall of the USSR and September 11th attack, is the conceptualisation of the enemy as physical, whether a person (Bin Laden), a state (Iraq or Afghanistan) or a flag.

Beginning in 2001 and on the basis of the successive interventions of the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan, it became clear that the logic of the attacks had changed, along with the strategy of terrorism and its reaction. Examples such as the Madrid bombings on March 11, 2004, the London attack in 2005, Nantes (2014), *Charlie Hebdo*

1. Stone, Oliver; Kuznick, Peter. *The Untold History of the United States*. London: Ebury Press, 2013.

2. Lakoff, George. *Thinking Points: A Progressive's Handbook*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008.

and Bataclan (2015), and London, Barcelona and Jakarta in 2017, point quite precisely to a terrorism that has gone about altering the manner it appears before the world.

Nevertheless, the delocalisation of terrorists throughout the globe is part of the turn that occurs both in terrorist organisations and in policies that respond to it. Terrorists are no longer external subjects; they have been educated and trained in the countries where they carry out their attacks. This fact lies behind the slogans of the sort “we are surrounded”, or “they are amongst us”. Terrorism makes itself felt as a phantom spirit, haunting us day and night. This apparition, this ghostly presence, is used to justify not only the most heinous of wars in geographic extremes well beyond European borders—causing a flood of refugees going to Europe—but also is wielded to normalise and garner acceptance for the most technologically advanced security devices, which put a price on individual privacy, and, above all, on our coexistence.

The scenario in the wake of this tragic opening of the century is double-sided. First, Islamic fundamentalist terrorism is a confirmed reality, despite a diversity of organisational metamorphoses and important losses in concrete geographic enclaves such as Al Raqa: the danger exists and persists. Second, it is a consummated fact that the United States' policies of international interference, with its direct accomplices and tacit allies, have left a horrific web of lifeless bodies in the Mediterranean Sea.

The historical encounter between the upsurge in terrorism and its dispersion takes on a worldwide dimension. It is impossible to geolocalise a supposed enemy who is no longer external, but rather is present within affected nations, so that upon occasion those carrying out an attack have never even been near a *boly land*, or has only done so in some moment of their training. This circumstance exists alongside the logic of fluidity and hyper consumerism offered by the ultimate scenario of globalisation and the technological revolution.

While it may be true that these two factors need not be provoked by each other, their respective strategies could be mutually aggravated. Both logics reduce historical sites of social harmony to spaces beyond any possible human relation or occupation. They are impoverished through policies that sacrifice freedom in favour of a form of security that is demanded not only by the most monstrous terrorist attacks but by despicable foreign interventions.

This terror, which is hard to locate, is what self-legitimises the permanent militarisation of spaces in all parts of the globe, making it impossible to identify with a given territory in its permanent state of tension. Meanwhile, nowadays we have gone from occupying sites where we might hope to construct a referent we can identify with, to already be occupying these *non-places*³ as simple users or consumers.⁴ Both factors converge in the disintegration of the network of harmonious coexistence in the spaces we inhabit on a daily basis.

The tension between security and freedom is understood by Western governments as a relationship where, to the degree the former necessarily emerges, the latter is inertially submerged. It is understood that they cannot coexist. While wars in the Middle East are constant, the West suffers from terrorism intermittently. Regardless, our maximum warning devices immerse us in a sensation of ongoing peril.

It is fundamental to understand that war and terrorism, regardless of what comes first, have economic, technical and fundamentalist motives, and thus ideological motives as well. However, once events have been consummated, the result is a dismemberment of spaces that are common and shared. This is a situation where those who proclaim themselves leaders in management and in the architecture

3. Augé, Marc. *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*. John Howe (trans.). London: Verso Books, 1995.

4. Nates Cruz, Beatriz. "Lugar, no-lugar", in Ascensión Barañano (coord.), *Diccionario de relaciones interculturales, diversidad y globalización*. Madrid: Editorial Complutense, 2007.

of the so-called civilised world, standing against terror and disaster, are likewise its resultant products, as well as being co-responsible for this very dismemberment.

The delocalisation of terrorism and the transformation of urban space brought on by public security policies in the wake of 9/11 have shaken those sites where society organises its values, enabling these very sites to be socially inscribed by those inhabiting them. The weave of our experience is reset as its various localisations become disengaged from the cultural context that made them possible. War just leaves us with dust: it infects civilisations, puts a price on land and its resources, spits human beings into fatal escape routes and disintegrates the hope of transforming local spaces into the ideal and material contexts of cultural and social identification.

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NINE BROKEN LETTERS¹

Elena del Rivero

Letter #1

November 7th, at night

“Sweet evening comes, friend of the criminal,
Like an accomplice with a light footfall;
The sky shuts on itself as though a tomb,
And man turns beast within his restless room

Charles Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, Dusk

I am in an empty room. Light is dying and I cry for what keeps us apart. I am here with you without knowing what is to come next. I forget myself, empty myself out, so I can pay full attention to this empty space where things really happen. I have not heard from you in a long time, it seems. Perhaps, I have. Perhaps I am confused. I hear animals crying; they must be looking for something they cannot find, just like myself looking for something I cannot find.

A bell is tolling not very far away. a phone is ringing. Now there is silence.

I remember meeting you. Now you are so far. Lightness is the image I keep of you surrounded by, was it art? It was of no importance but you were there right in the middle and I felt a kind of awe. It was cold outside, as if winter, I don't remember well, but I felt warm.

Night is falling as every night. News of you is rare and comes in undecipherable ways, like the wolves at night who cry and I do not know what their crying is about, or the song of birds overhead, melodies and calls I cannot understand.

I am going right into the night without you. I feel you close. You are absent but eternally present, part of me without your knowing you are part of me. Are you really in my life?

We come together in a constant “duermevela;” that space and time between consciousness and sleep. You, whose skin is sentiment

1. Transcription of the texts from the work by Elena del Rivero, *Nine Broken Letters*, 2004.

and feeling, but who never come close to me. I have barely touched your hands, but they are always in my dreams. At night, in darkness, you are with me even when I do not know you are.

Now that I am not what I was, and have no place in which to find myself, you are still there, secret and hidden, only you, but not alone because I am in you, my solitary other who does not know where I am. At dawn with the creation of day and the coming of light you are gone before you recognize me; like the wolf leaving at daybreak, you leave me alone.

Your desiring is like my desiring you, but we belong elsewhere and that is why we meet when night falls and nothing is clear, and feelings are like animals sniffing what instantly appeals to them and I am engulfed by a wave of longing, an implacable urge to be possessed.

The chemistry of my pills reacts to my desires and unable to control my urges, I fall asleep into your arms.

And you are gone.

The night, the stars, the skin, you and over there space where I find you in my dreams, your tender embrace and your unquenchable warmth. Skin, scent, and the convulsion of desires that keeps us alive, like animals searching and preying at night in silence, silently marauding.

Where are you going to be?

Letter #2

“Wild nights - Wild nights!

Where I with thee

Wild nights should be

Our luxury!”

Emily Dickinson

This day is finally over. I am getting my room ready so I can write to you, moving slowly into the empty space I inhabit every night when we come together.

A sliver of moon slips behind a tall building. I light a cigarette and watch it disappear, feeling the earth spins under my feet, while wolves and other animals are baying at the moon. *La biche brame au*

clair de lune et pleure a se fondre les yeux; I do not cry but long again for you. You, who are so spartan and so stoic, who thinks one thing but wants its opposite. Why? I know everything about you; I know nothing. I am paralyzed by your ferocity and hunger, vulnerable yet eager for your gaze, your eyes wide open, seeking mine.

I want to remain what I am and be desired as such. In a chess game, I choose white pieces but I much prefer the blacks; they respond to my game without showing their strategy.

You are so soft in your approach; your gentleness, your shyness, your remoteness is so dear to me, the sudden pulling back when the prey is coming close. You keep moving in the night with me, mindlessly. Too worried, trying to escape from your own self, you cannot see what is in front of you. I am here looking at you, because it is the night that brings you to me. Dawn breaks and you disappear, returning the following night, here by night, gone by day, again and again, so we are together night after night after night after night, effortlessly, without commitment or formal arrangement, in freedom without a question being asked.

The animals of the forest are already moving through the trees. I love them because they mean you are coming closer and I am ready for you. You belong to my dreams. And as it is in dreams, we shall forever be together.

Perhaps past and present, neither is real. There is just one instant among infinite possibilities and I would rather be a lover to anyone, man, woman, old or young, than pretend to be other than I am. And you are always there, reminding me that I belong only to you at night.

Days go by and you are not to be found. Like a river, you are flowing away, bound for somewhere else, traveling to places I dare not go because I am afraid to see you. I trust only my empty room, I fear going outside in the night filled with lights as it might destroy the image I enjoy of you.

And you are with me every night, in darkness, with the wolves howling, the skin on edge, trembling and my body erect, ready to be taken. I am riding on a horse that disappears in the mist, knowing that you will return when light is gone and my *duermevela* shimmers with wild dreams before the chemistry takes me away from you into the region of the unknown.

Letter #3

“Because of concentration (tension)
I suddenly and in a violent manner
became sleepy.”

Marina Tsvietáieva, *Florentine Nights*. Letter IX. July 9th, midnight.

This moment when everything is about to start is silent. Things around me seem to move and shift and, slowly disappear. Suddenly, nothing is to be found; everything is gone from my sight. I close my eyes and drift, weightless, as if I were inside a cloud, ready to gather and hold all that is to come.

For the first time, I don't want to be alone.

The first quarter of the moon emerged tonight, but I could not see it. When I looked out at the sky, the moon had vanished. It was a warm night, the streets were busy, and couples were holding hands and kissing. People are still getting married, I suppose.

You don't know that my feelings swing back and forth all the time; weak and emotional, always in flux and in search of myself. We jump here and there, as if we were moving from one boat to another, never ending up together in the same one. The sea is choppy and our task precarious, but we do not hold hands to steady each other. As I was reaching for you, you were already gone, back by yourself, to your own boat.

Waiting has become my vocation. I feel myself alive in that waiting and in that waiting I have found a purpose, a purpose which I can realize during my nights of silent dreaming as I wait to be taken to the worlds which disappear when I wake up during the night.

My solitude is crowded by your absent presence. You will just never know if I suffer. I don't, not really. My turmoil has nothing to do with time. I become conscious of my skin, and then my love for you becomes a reality that carries me into your arms. It is not in the saying or in the naming, not in the meeting or in the parting; that is for lovers who don't love. Mine is nowhere to be found.

I love you; with your smile and the way you look at me, your brightness and your distance, your compassion and your yearnings. Mine, your's, I am.

The night blooms. My animal self emerges and I ache in between my legs, longing to be possessed in my world of dreams. I can't see you anymore; it has become too dark. My head starts to spin while I am thinking of you.

I was awakened in the middle of the night. Now the pale light leaks through the venetian blinds. It is dawn on a Sunday morning in New York, cold and damp with flimsy clouds showing up in the sky.

There are few people on the streets, one here, one there. Some are coming home from parties, but there are those, like us, wondering the streets with nothing but themselves, looking for a place to rest, knowing that such a place does not exist.

White noise. And suddenly the daily sounds start up, ticking away. I am going back to bed.

Letter #4

“And-you won't think me base-it wasn't because of the pain
I was silent, it was because of the ugliness of the pain!
Now it's over. Now I'm writing to you”

Marina Tsvietáieva, *Letters: Summer 1926*. Letter to Rilke

I wish two things at the same time: to stay and to disappear.

You are like a stone that's not quite impervious to water, like the giant squeezing a piece of cheese in the Spanish fairy tale my mother read to me. It is my move: NF3.

A dream takes shape before me, carrying me far from your reality. It sounds like you're going away, but where are you going when everything you might need is here, next to you? As not all that looks like art is art, the same goes for love.

Perhaps you will decipher the puzzle one day. Like the water that runs around and through a Roman fountain, some of it will have evaporated, will have been lost. Perhaps you love me but can't live with me; we live like characters in a novel, Marina and Boris. Is it true that some people are still getting married?

I was about to dial your number, but stopped short and lit a cigarette instead. What sort of metaphysical move was I about

to make? The contradiction and ambivalence of such an action shook my perception of who I was at that particular moment. My move: KGB.

He asked me for a drink but I said, let's wait for next week, and you were meanwhile, blooming in my head and beating in my blood. My thoughts of you get tangled up with bills, the phone, my cigarettes and wine. Are you thinking of me?

War. Why not peace?

And reading? No, that is not a problem, since you are never going to read these letters. You will hear an echo of a voice reading the lines that you were never meant to read, lines I had to wait to write, until the time was ripe, the waiting deep and nights long.

Neglect and tedium; your move: NFXH7.

But why do I have to blossom now, at this late stage, through you, my unknown receiver of unsent letters riddled with mistakes?

Here comes the animal again, in between my legs, like a need to create, which will subside once the need is fulfilled. I will go on to other lands to dream the dreams that were far gone-and the chemistry will take me away, farther and farther than I can imagine. And when I wake up, I will have forgotten where those dreams went. You are all water now.

There will be time and pearls will fall again from walls, as tears from broken hearts that no one knew of. And you will be there to see them and you will talk and talk while the tears keep falling on you.

Everything is rushing inside me, I am in a hurry to get to you, but everything seems to dissolve into sand. I scoop the sand from the floor and suddenly my hands are empty, except for a pearl hidden in the corner of my fingers, a pearl that could not find its way back to the sea. You

I reach out to you again, alone.

Letter #5

“The volatility of dreams
allows memory to shake them off.
Reality needn't fear being forgotten.
It's a tough nut.

It sits on our shoulders,
lies heavily on our hearts,
bars the way.

There is no escape from her,
she accompanies each flight.

There is no stop
on the route of our journey
where she isn't waiting.”

Wisława Szymborska, *Reality*

My dear,

The big room has not changed: no doors, a large blank window, an empty space that will soon be filled with recollections and dreams. I am looking at you but you are not here. The mist is thick. I have no words. I cannot name your name; my head starts spinning and I am taken away.

And you are gone in silence. My unknown receiver, you are gone like the summer that vanished and left us, alone.

It is now dusk, when my day starts to take shape. This conscious somnambulism.

And night is falling again. The breeze is warm, as it is on a late september night. Outside the window, people walk quickly, as if they were busy again. Drinking tea while I read my paper, the news of the world is not good. Ignorance is everywhere; they would rather act than think. Turmoil everywhere, but I have to do what I need to do. Time abandons me to this endless task of not doing, but then comes the night when the animal returns to remind me of who I am, what I could be and I am not.

The moon is growing and so are my desires. I can't go home because you are not there. Our ordinary life is destroyed by circumstances or borne by them. My dreams are sealed; not even dreaming is allowed. Only in restless silence when night comes am I allowed to be. A veil of white gauze blinds me and brings me

slowly back to the land beyond. Then all are gone. The veil grows thicker with the chemicals. Where have you gone? I try to reach you, but ahead is only the abyss, the void where my dreams go. I am searching, unaware of time until the reign of night becomes inescapable and I give up without a struggle, abandoning my useless limbs, surrendering.

How immense this nameless place. I see a fountain, flowing water. Like the nymph, I enter the sacred sleep. I remain there alone, my unconscious however remembering you. But it is so late that my body gives up, and without fear becomes one with you in a space that belongs to neither of us.

A voice tells me you have arrived. I wake up and light is filtering through the window. You are gone from my dreams. Day is work and work is day and far-gone my desires. Once again I begin my routine.

I have just understood what afflicts me so deeply, never sending my letters therefore never receiving an answer. However, neither distance nor time can silence my voice. I feel the same whether I am here or there. But I wait for the night that only belongs to us.

Someone brought daisies to me today.

You are so gentle, and suffer so much for me. However always in distance, but now you are asleep, unprepared to fight back. I love you then.

Letter #6

“These many long years only you have filled my dreams,
for none other could awaken me from my spell...”

Aurora. *The Sleeping Beauty*

Fly, fly high! The space is so vast and brilliantly lit, so deep and still that it feels as if a performance is about to begin. Where have all the players gone?

The verbs I am and I am not stand in the way, taunting me, ambiguous, mysterious.

I cannot see you through your words or understand their meaning; they are as ephemeral as snowflakes, floating in a space of

non-existence. Thrown into the air like a handful of confetti, they take on a reality that is not mine.

Do not be afraid to take me. I have been taken already and I'd rather stay where I am. Please, keep emailing me. You can do it without fear, because I don't quite belong, these lonely days.

I was born with no place, and thus remain. I can't find my country anywhere, but I bear the weight of a whole land that gave me birth and is now gone.

The night has come, the time for this on-going performance, the actors and the audience quite unprepared; motionless and wet as I am when I think of you. Removed from my feelings, I soften with the silence of the night.

You are close to me in that remote place where you have gone beyond the sea. That land drenched in the fragrance of my childhood that once delighted me. The air there is sweet and balmy as it is here tonight, damp as the animal that springs to life in my in-betweens. You can take walks there full of surprises that connect you to the underworld, Proserpine is around; be sure to go and see her.

The more you give, the more I feel your distance; the less I give, the closer I become to you.

It is not that I don't miss you.

Not anymore. Your return will bring back memories of long ago. I have kept all the corners in my head, like postcards prized by tourists hungry to remember where they've been.

Everything flows; in flowing we become ourselves, flowing blood and flowing river, flowing love and disappearing long before you know it.

Come closer, now that you can't.

The excuses are always there and like walls they separate us, but were they to fall we would not find each other, anyway. And, of course, we could not bear the lack of them. However, it is in that space of non existence where my dreams start.

I lie down on the pillow. It cuddles me in my sleep. I move towards a loving embrace. I am drifting past your arms, wondering if perhaps this is what it feels like to be dying. A fleeting moment of wonder, I wish it went on forever.

Run today; run tomorrow; running all the time fueled by an antic drive to be left alone. The news is a burden to me; the paperwork

piles on my desk, and time is a precious gift I don't have these dreary days.

Letter #7

"If we shadows have offended,
Think but this, and all is mended,
That you have but slumbered here
While these visions did appear.
And this weak and idle theme,
No more yielding but a dream,
Gentiles, do not reprehend."

Shakespeare. *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Puck (epilogue)

My dear friend,

I am sure it was a roach. You kept saying it was the dog upstairs.

When I left the house to go to dinner the air was brisk, hinting of winter. But, on a fall full moon night I am warm, whatever the weather.

I am returning home, and once again you are gazing at me, so I put myself to writing. I think of the pleasure that I am so much afraid of. Understand me. I associate pleasure with you; the pleasure that blooms up when I think of you and the pleasure that makes me spell your name while dreaming. It is up to you.

Impatience and resignation. Devotion and grief.

Life with its ups and downs, rough and tender, but life, after all. Is there anything else we have of such value? What would it all be without life? Would I be writing these letters to you? Would I become music when I see you, like a mute violin that suddenly sings?

How tender you are, and how deep the journey ahead is. Are you an animal, a bird or a lost soul searching in the middle of emptiness?

Love abandons us by surprise. The beast is pacing, with no place to rest, tormented by brutal desire. My hair stands on end. Why don't I belong? But the night comes again, softly it takes us from reality into the undreamed world of dreams where we can escape from that unreality that pretends to be real: day.

Do you feel alone?

As for me, I try to mend my life while living it. Sometimes dreams help, but I find myself dreaming in the streets, not knowing where I am going.

I make a move and I lose the king; my pawns offer no protection. The battlefield is divided in two and I don't know which side to take. I'd rather take yours, but right now it seems I'm on the other side. Allow me to be sad.

I am listening to the click, clack of the dripping taps. A leaky faucet is my only companion. One day at sunset you will come to me, you will enter in between my legs, looking for the animal in me that you smelt from far away. I will be here waiting for you. In the meantime, it is getting dark and the air is cold. I pull my blanket over me and, as always, I feel the chemicals taking possession, they dominate me. I am pushed into silence accompanied by dreams that will be gone at dawn. But the pleasure still there; enough so that my days flow smoothly, until the return of another night.

Letter #8

"I promise myself for one day this same silence, I promise us what I have now learned. Only for us it will have to be by night, for we are moist, salty beings, we are beings of sea water and of tears."

Clarice Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*

Today I returned to the place I used to call home: it was desolate, empty, barren land: sad as a room with no views. I avoided looking out of the windows, where there was nothing but a maze of twisted steel and cinders, a heap of wires and scraps of paper. The graffiti HSH still there, as if no one dared to pull it down.

It is twilight and raining outside; a voice heralding another sleepless night. I am again thinking of you, my inseparable companion. I cried today, I wept whole rivers. Something inside me was shattered to pieces. I looked around for fragments of life, but I found none.

I loved you from the first day I saw you. What kind of love? That kind of conspiracy where hours don't count. The road in front of us split, left and right, and you went away.

By some mysterious coincidence I met you again. At first, I did not remember how I had felt about you, but the feelings quickly came rushing back. Again the road diverged and you were gone before I could even say a word, before we could touch. All I was left with was desire.

Nothing has changed. I am burning inside, longing to be possessed. My breasts bursting with fire. I want, but I don't. I hunger, but I don't. There is always the road with its impediments, conventions, expectations, so we destroy ourselves, we snuff out the animals we want to be.

Broken and abandoned, bleak and empty, living in a room with no view is like living in oblivion. Only through memories, distorted by the passage of time are we reminded of what we were, disconnected fragments of a project planned but doomed from the start.

There is no fountain to be seen today. I feel the subway beating underneath my feet, passengers rushing in and out. Are you still there to hear me?

Cars splash water as they go by. People on the sidewalk jump out of the way, as if they were awakened from a dream.

I am hard, broken, torn, but still I crave your love. Your soul, jailed behind steel bars, seems never to be free. I wonder if you realize how much you gave me. How human your words made me feel.

We met for a purpose. But love was not intended. We kept apart. What else could we do?

Look! It is past full moon; full moon was always a joy for me; my body burst, expanded, and grew with uncontrollable yearning, especially in summer.

So I do desire you tonight as if time, twisted by magic, could be recovered. You, who I have loved beyond measure, in my dreams.

Letter #9

“ ... So that in this world
Everyone dreams the thing he is, though no one
Can understand it. I dream I am here,
Chained in these fetters. Yet I dreamed just now
I was in a more flattering, lofty station.
What is this life? A frenzy, an illusion,
A shadow, a delirium, a fiction.
The greatest good’s but little, and this life
Is but a dream, and dreams are only dreams”
Calderon de la Barca, *Life Is a Dream*. Segismundo

Friday.

Do you love me? Do I what?

We often disagree about small matters, but not about the big ones. Got an announcement in the mail of a promising Winterreise. Winter is always to me like a woman with no shadow.

I wish I had something to say that would move you towards me, but I find I’m speechless. I am a stone that doesn’t feel, a rock with no needs at all. Days are filled with petty tasks that don’t give back any joy. Joy, in fact, is long gone.

When it is quiet I can make peace with my past. But silence too often gives way to aloofness, remoteness and uncontrolled feelings which suddenly swamp me. Perhaps you do not understand. Perhaps there’s nothing to understand. A void is in front of me; I find you there. We are kissing in the dark.

The night sky is alive with desperate searchlights. But there is nothing to be found. Art? No. What is it you’re looking for with that flashlight? A nickel? My gift is dreams and darkness and the blues, and the sugar in my bowl.

Temperance, sadness, hubris, spectacle, and junk.

Two days and you will be back. I wait for your return, knowing that it may well mean I’ll hardly ever see you. You are always so busy with your books. But do not feel guilty. You try to pretend you are not, but I sense you feel you are. You are always pretending to be what you are not, but that is what makes you so vulnerable and delightful.

Hush! Translucent night, the moon’s light is now filtering through the crying clouds. Slowly the sky deepens, darkens; the streets

get quiet as it grows late. A cabby gets into a fight. I hear cries. They took down the poster outside the window; for the second time, the towers came down forever.

There is no one to hear my story, so secret my life has become, unable to share my burden. Now, what else is new? Despair and they will all leave you.

Again I hear the subway desperately rumbling underneath the street. The rain is already getting heavy.

I can’t continue in this place much longer. It is time for the chemicals to take charge. I gave them the power that I lack, commanding me to go on, they order me to rest. I am their humble servant: no resistance, not anymore. It is an affair that offers forgetfulness in place of love.

But I will take my dreams with me, and be content I had them even if they were but dreams.



Elena del Rivero, *Traços de cocina*, 2021. Installation. Donated dishcloths, cables, flanges and clamps, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist

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An Ongoing Project
Elena del Rivero
From 12th September 2021
to 30th January 2022

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