

ARCHIVO F.X. / Pedro G. Romero

Business, Economics, Conjecture

February 11 – April 29, 2012



NOTICE TO THE PRESS

Press conference: Friday, February 10, 2012, 2 p.m.



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INTRODUCTION

From February 11 to April 29, 2012 the Württembergischer Kunstverein is presenting the project *Archivo F.X.* by Spanish artist Pedro G. Romero.

The project is based on an archive that Romero has been compiling since 1999. Within the archive are more than one thousand documents linking the history (histories) of anticlerical iconoclasm in Spain (between 1845 and 1945) with international positions of the modern avant-garde.

Drawing from this continually expanding pool, Romero develops various ways of staging the *Archivo F.X.* that range from publications or multimedia objects to complex exhibition choreographies. These approaches also redraft the archive's conceptual framework from ever-new perspectives, such as city, knowledge, community, or economy.

The exhibition staging of the *Archivo F.X.*—specially conceptualized for the Württembergischer Kunstverein and subtitled *Business, Economics, Conjecture*—is conceived as memory theater, archive, and imaginary museum in equal turn. Here the presentation predominantly revolves around the relations between iconoclasm and avant-garde, secularization and economics, money and the holy. Plundered churches, vandalized saints, or church-tower bells that have been smelted into weapons are related to Hugo Ball, Valie Export, or Joseph Beuys. A coin from which the word “Catholic” has been removed meets anti-globalization opponents. A machine that converts five cent coins into effigies of saints meets Georges Bataille. And banknotes that were once expressly printed to disseminate the change of city names which formerly had been religiously connotated are here associated with Marcel Duchamp, Cildo Meireles, or Salvador Dalí.

Taking the form of a walk-in montage—comprised of text-image-collages, photographs, audiovisual documents, objects, and all kinds of different artifacts—the *Archivo F.X.* interrelates the seemingly irreconcilable. In so doing, this veritable “archive machine” sets into motion a steady reconfiguration of things: the reconsideration of existing conditions, which are literally made to dance.

The exhibition fosters a special dialogue with the artists Hugo Ball and Emmy Ball-Hennings, Joseph Beuys and Alexander Kluge. Three rooms are dedicated to works by these artists, formally referencing the “Salon” (Ball/Ball-Hennings), the “White Cube” (Beuys), and the “Black Box” (Kluge). However, only sections of these three rooms are present. In other words: situated at the margins of the actual exhibition space, these three rooms expand the space along the lines of an imaginary continuation. At the same time, they spare the exhibition's central area, which accommodates—again in a backstage-like situation—the various materials, objects, and arrangements of the *Archivo F.X.* Suspended between this “center” and its “peripheries” is a multifarious net of cross-references that evokes an interminable process of de- and recontextualization.

In this respect, the exhibition—which, considering its abundance and density of material, can hardly be grasped in all its entirety—may be viewed as an opportunity to enter into this game of reconfiguring things far beyond any claim to being exhaustive. For the *Archivo F.X.* itself contradicts the idea of completeness; it has been deliberately designed as an interminable project—a project under permanent construction. This is ultimately mirrored in the exhibition architecture, which references the space of potentiality expanding beyond the situation at hand.

The exhibition *Archivo F.X.: Business, Economics, Conjecture* has been developed in close collaboration with Romero as well as with the co-curator Valentín Roma (Barcelona). Various publications will be issued in conjunction with the exhibition.

ARCHIVO F.X. / THE FILES

(also see: <http://fxysudoble.com>)

The project *Archivo F.X.* started by Romero in 1999, is based on a continually expanding collection of various materials—photos, texts, audiovisual documents—on anticlerical iconoclasm in Spain. The documents originate from the century spanning between 1845 and 1945, with a particular focus on the nineteen-thirties (Second Spanish Republic and Spanish Civil War). They show destroyed sculptures and altars, as well as churches that were expropriated, plundered, or subjected to other functions, taken apart stone for stone or burned to the ground. Contained in the archive are photos of stolen liturgical items or of statues of Christ displaying the initials of Spain's anarcho-syndicalist union, the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT). Forming the background for such widespread anticlerical activities were the societal, political, and ideological conflicts within the country, which in 1936 culminated in the Civil War.

What sets *Archivo F.X.* apart is its classification concept, which associates what at first glance appears to be two disconnected contexts: here political, anticlerical iconoclasm in Spain is contrasted with positions from the international avant-gardes from the realms of visual arts, literature, theory, et cetera. This means that each individual iconoclastic image document is recorded under the name of an artist, an artists' group, a movement, an art institution, art magazine, or a work title from the avant-garde. For example, the façade of a church dispossessed in 1936 in the Catalan city of Olot has been titled "Critique of German Intelligence" as an allusion to a work by Hugo Ball. An effigy of a saint whose eyes are cutted out has in turn been named after artist Hannah Höch.

Romero thus interlinks radical forms of anticlerical image destruction with equally radical twentieth- and twenty-first-century art practices—which, iconoclastic in their own way, oppose the existing systems of representation. Though, iconoclasm, as interpreted by the artist, implies not so much a negation of the image or of the art itself, but instead an actual validation of its symbolic function.

Each of the aforementioned image-keyword combinations—which introduce the different *Archivo F.X.* "files"—are followed by textual fragments of varying origin, which alternately allude to the iconoclastic act documented by the image and to the author or work named in the keyword—thus generating new and surprising chains of associations.

As such, the *Archivo F.X.* "files" emerge as dense image-text fabrics that activate—both individually and reciprocally—a multifaceted process of de- and recontextualization. This process also affects the different stagings of the *Archivo F.X.*, generated in ever-new ways.



Zur Kritik der deutschen Intelligenz
(On the Critique of German Intelligence)



Hugo Ball



Hannah Höch

For the “files” merely form the foundation or “toolbox” (Romero) for the diverse variety of forms taken by the *Archivo F.X.*, including workshops, publications, objects, installations, audiovisual works, and so forth, with new referential areas of content being integrated again and again throughout the process.

Romero’s project thus entails far more than just a simple juxtaposition of concrete examples of iconoclastic encroachments and radical artistic practices. It moreover invokes these so as to create a widely ramified, rhizomatic rereading of a political, ideological, and aesthetic narrative: an undertaking that, according to the artist himself, is localized “somewhere between documentation and dance.”

In terms of his methodological approaches—montage, rereading, citation, the idea of the interminable work, and the idea of the archive as a machine—Romero explicitly makes reference to the methods of Walter Benjamin (*Arcades Project*), Aby Warburg (*Mnemosyne-Atlas*), and Georges Bataille (*Documents*).

The artist himself considers his project an endeavor to “urbanize the province of nihilism” (as inspired by Jürgen Habermas).

THE EXHIBITION: ARCHIVO F.X. / BUSINESS, ECONOMY, CONJUNCTURE

This exhibition at the Württembergischer Kunstverein, for which a complex exhibition architecture has been specially designed, is based upon a selection of “files” originating from the *Archivo F.X.* that revolve around issues related to economics. A setting that merges memory theater, archive, and imaginary museum facilitates opportunities for fathoming correlations between iconoclasm, secularization, and economics.

The exhibition approaches the term economics from different vantage points that range from common parlance (in terms of frugal usage) to terminology used in political economics. Here economics is not merely negotiated as a value exchange, but also with a view to the general distribution of things and to the inclusions and exclusions this entails.

– Thesauri

The point of departure in this exhibition is formed by three thesauri from the *Archivo F.X.*—the thesauri *Capital of the Republic*, *The Unavowable Community*, and *The Old and the New*—each of which consolidates a selection of the archive’s files according to a particular aspect.

Capital of the Republic (30 Files)



Capital. The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret



Transformation

The thesaurus *Capital of the Republic*, which comprises thirty files, negotiates nineteenth-thirties Spanish iconoclasm in the context of various theories on political economics. Here, for example, the film *Nuestro Culpable* (Our Guilty Man; director: Fernando Mignoni) is contrasted with the chapter “The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret” from Karl Marx’s *Capital* and also with Sergei Eisenstein’s unrealized plans to film this written work. *Nuestro Culpable* deals with, among other issues, a chain of purchases and sales of the figure of a saint—or, as per Romero’s interpretation, with the figure’s utility or exchange value. Another file involves a series of photos documenting the transformation of church bells into weapons. This file is associated with an action by Joseph Beuys in which he transformed a replica of Czar Ivan the Terrible’s crown into a “peace rabbit” at Documenta 7.

The Unavowable Community (25 Files)



Thesaurus *The Unavowable Community* (detail)



Notice to Guests



Anti-Globalisazi3n (Anti-Globalization)

The thesaurus *The Unavowable Community* (named after a publication by Maurice Blanchot) encompasses twenty-four files on various banknotes that were put into circulation during the Spanish Civil War by Catalan institutions. This act was meant to propagate the renaming of localities whose original names had been religiously connoted. These banknotes are negotiated in the context of numerous artistic works and interventions—ranging from André Breton to Chris Burden, from Marcel Duchamp to Andy Warhol, from Cildo Meireles to Jeon Joo Ho—that reference currency and money transactions. Furthermore, there is one file (classified under the title “Anti-Globalization”) dedicated to a Spanish coin where the word “Catholic” has been scratched out.

The Old and the New (35 Files)

Zur Kritik der deutschen Intelligenz
(On the Critique of German Intelligence)

Kritik der zynischen Vernunft (Critique of Cynical Reason)

The thesaurus *The Old and the New*, composed of thirty-five files, in turn interweaves iconoclastic encroachments having taken place in the Catalan city of Olot with the names or works of German-speaking artists and intellectuals from the Catholic south, such as Hugo Ball, Alfred Kubin, Gerhard Rühm, Gustav Metzger, Peter Sloterdijk, or Thomas Bernhard. Referenced here, for instance, is Ball’s work “Critique of German Intelligence” (1919) in which Ball takes on the canon of great German minds like Luther or Hegel and supplants it with his own canon, starting with Thomas Müntzer.

– Dialogues: Joseph Beuys, Dada, Alexander Kluge

The exhibition enters into unique dialogue with four artists—Hugo Ball and Emmy Ball-Hennings, Joseph Beuys and Alexander Kluge—with three rooms specially configured for their works. The design of these spaces is aligned to the model of the “Salon” (Ball/Ball-Hennings), the “White Cube” (Beuys), and the “Black Box” (Kluge) respectively. Yet these are in fact rooms that only partially occupy existing area, for they extend beyond the tangible exhibition rooms, meaning they continue as imaginary spaces. Situated at the margins of the exhibition space, these rooms spare the exhibition’s central area, which is in turn inverted into a backstage-like situation, where various materials (objects, texts, books, images, installations, etc.) from the *Archivo F.X.* are to be found.

Salon d'Or: Dada

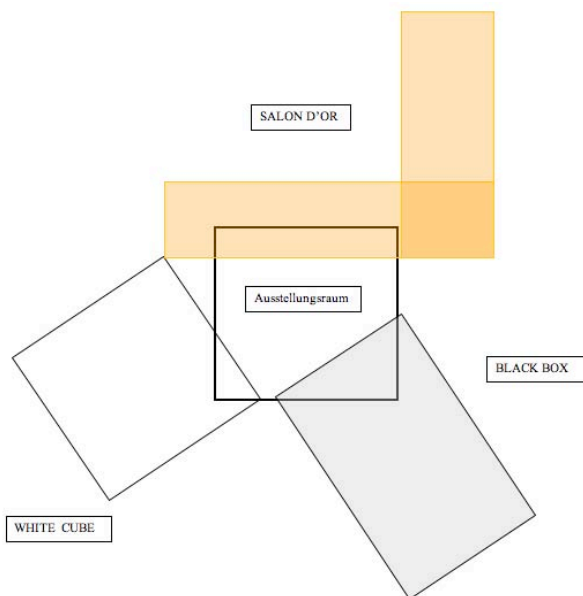
Various different works and documents by Hugo Ball and Emmy Ball-Hennings are presented here, ones that trace the path taken by the two artists from Dadaism to Catholicism and mysticism. Included here is documentation on their performances at the Cabaret Voltaire, as well as an interpretation of Ball's sound poem *Totenklage* (Elegy), which was produced by the Stuttgart group EXVOCO in 1978, a variety of first editions from their written works from the nineteen-tens to the fifties, and memorabilia like Hugo Ball's death mask.

White Cube: Joseph Beuys

Next to documentation and editions on Joseph Beuys's action *Wandlung* (Transformation) at Documenta 7, during which he morphed the czar's crown into a "peace rabbit," and also on its current presentation at the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, shown here are various editions by Beuys that revolve around money or capital.

Black Box: Alexander Kluge

Finally, the exhibition presents Alexander Kluge's film *Nachrichten aus der ideologischen Antike* (News from Ideological Antiquity), with a running time of nearly ten hours. This film ties into Sergei Eisenstein's (unrealized) project of filming *Capital* (after the literary model of James Joyce's *Ulysses*). Through a dense nexus of conversations, typefaces, scenes, film clips, documents, musical pieces, and more, the film takes different perspectives in circumscribing the present-day proximity and distance to Marx—he brings Marx into play as a "scout" who "can lead us through a highly complex world" (Kluge).



Draft of the Exhibition Architecture

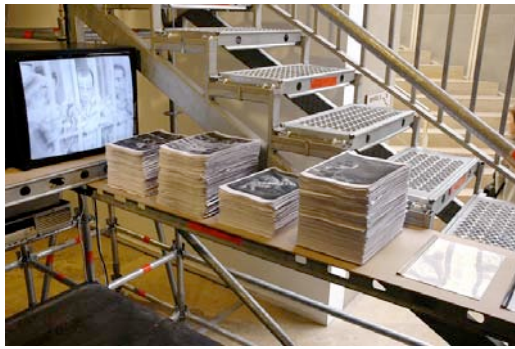
– Interfaces (Selection)

Running between the exhibition center/backstage and the three real/imaginary rooms are several referential axes: for example, between the thesaurus *Capital of the Republic* and the "Salon Dada," between the thesaurus *The Unavowable Community* and the "White Cube" dedicated to Beuys, and between the thesaurus *The Old and the New* and the "Black Box" installed to show Kluge's film. Related interfaces include a series of "theatrical arrangements" (Romero) that the artist has produced in regards to individual files and thesauri within the *Archivo F.X.*

Hugo Ball / Emmy Hennings

The installations on the files "Hugo Ball" and "Emmy Hennings" consist of two sound pieces. Here, the famous flamenco-singers Inés Bacan and Tomás de Perrate present their interpretations of poems by the two writes.

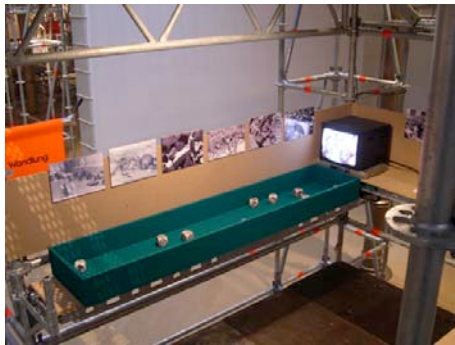
El capital. El carácter fetichista de la mercancía y su secreto (Das Kapital: The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret)



Installation on the file *El capital...*

The installation on the file *El Capital ...* for instance involves a monitor presentation of a clip from the film *Nuestro Culpable* next to which a printer is printing out—live during the entire duration of the exhibition—each individual image from the entire film sequence. This generates a constantly growing accumulation of batches of paper, the escalating weight of which is displayed by a scale.

Wandlung (Transformation)



Installation on the file *Wandlung*



Taking recourse to Mallarmé's *Un Coup de Dés...*, the installation on the file *Wandlung* (Transformation) invites us to play a dice game, yet the six sides of each die show no numerical values. Instead, pictures of the smelting of church bells are shown along with their transformation into weapons.

Georges Bataille



Georges Bataille



Model for coin-minting press

The file by the name of *Georges Bataille* links the name of this writer and philosopher with the effigy of the Virgin de la Esperanza from the Spanish brotherhood of Macarena (Sevilla). Hidden in a Banco Español crate, the likeness was secreted off to a location safe from the anarchists in 1936. In conjunction with this file, Romero presents a coin-minting press that transforms five-cent coins into effigies of the saint.

BIOGRAPHY

Pedro G. Romero

born 1964 in Aracena, Huelva; lives and works in Sevilla



Pedro G. Romero

Solo Exhibitions (Choice)

2009

Silo. Archivo F.X., Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid

The Unavowable Community, Catalan Pavilion, 53rd Venice Biennial (with Daniel G. Andújar/Technologies To The People and Sitesize)

2006

Archivo F.X. La ciudad vacía, Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona

Group Exhibitions (Choice)

2011–2012

Atlas. How to Carry the World on One's Back?, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; ZKM, Karlsruhe; Deichtorhallen, Hamburg

2010

Manifesta 8, Murcia and Cartagena

Monument to Transformation, Montehermoso, Vitoria-Gasteiz

2009

Insiders. Practices, Customs, Know-How, Musée d'art contemporain, Bordeaux

Out of Storage II: Rythmes, Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, Luxemburg

2008

Soy el final de la reproducción, SculptureCenter, Long Island

2007

Soy el final de la reproducción, Castillo/Corrales, Paris

MACBA im Frankfurter Kunstverein, Kunstverein Frankfurt

1st Thessaloniki Biennial of Contemporary Art, Thessaloniki

Curatorial projects (Choice)

2007–2008

The Spanish Night. Flamenco, Avant-Garde and Popular Culture, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid

2007

A Theatre Without Theatre, MACBA Barcelona

DATA**Archivo F.X. / Pedro G. Romero**

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Press conference

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Press release (Text and image)

<http://www.wkv-stuttgart.de/en/press>

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An exhibition by

Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart

Curators

Hans D. Christ, Iris Dressler, Valentín Roma

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