

GALLERIA MACCA

All the circuits, a circuit

(About “Sulla Curva Chiusa” by Rafa Munárriz, at Galleria Macca, 20.07 – 5.09 2017)

By Marta Ramos-Yzquierdo

When walking a circuit, there will be a moment in which we will inevitably be at the spot designated as the beginning or starting point. In fact, logic will lead us to start our way following this established principle. If we talk about circuits, then, the beginning goes back to Homer, as it usually happens when we search for first references in our western culture. More specifically, it goes back to Book XXIII of the *Iliad*.

“The chariot inlaid with gold and tin ran close behind his fleet horses. There was little trace of wheel-marks in the fine dust”.

The chapter recounts the games organised by Achilles to mourn the death of Patroclus. It describes a chariot race that went around an old tree. Contestants ran around this track to see who was best at combining their dexterity as drivers and the strength of their animals in order to come in first. That balance would be altered by another variable: the intervention of the gods, who would secretly benefit their favourite contestants from the Olympus.

Funerary rites, competitions, and religious systems are signs that we associate with the existence of an established society. We can consider games as part of a society, but also... society as a game? According to Vilém Flusser, society in itself is a game and we —our “being in the world”— are the players¹. Today’s world would function through a structure shaped by the interrelation of different practices. A meta-framework of games, which are nothing but a series of codes, of systematised signs which, in the hands of mankind, become what we call “culture”. And this culture is a meta-system composed of other systems, such as that of politics, the economy, the arts, or sports.

In the 4th and 5th century B.C., the first sports facilities were built in Olympia. They had a hippodrome, a stadium with a racetrack, where contestants needed to do 12 laps around a 1500 metres long elliptical circuit, which was 780 metres long and 320 metres wide, according to Pausanias². From this circular or elliptical structure, which was built into a hillside, the model for arenas and amphitheatres would develop during the Roman era, with more sophisticated engineering and used for all sorts of games. Since then, the number of laps has multiplied, just like the type of vehicles and the shapes of stadiums. One example of this is the Interlagos circuit in São Paulo, chosen by artist Rafa Munárriz for his latest research.

¹ Zielinski, S., Weibel, P., ed., *Flusseriana – Uma Caixa de Ferramentas Intelectual*, ZKM | Center for Arts and Media, Karlsruhe, Vilém Flusser Archive at Berlin University of Arts, e Univocal Publishing, Minneapolis, 2015.

² Pausanias. *Guide to Greece. Volume 2: Southern Greece*. London: Penguin Classics, 1979.

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The rules of his game/circuit, or the codes of his system

Rafa Munárriz works with closed curves.

From there, some of the operations he carries out are:

1. Seeing and reproducing the amphitheatre, its inner space and the reverse of its inner space. Seeing and reproducing the island, its inverted volume, the emptiness of its inverted volume³.
2. Shifting the perspective: now our view is always perpendicular to the circuit's direction. There are no turns, only stripes of a landscape that becomes an abstract horizontal line going up and down in the continually moving image⁴.
3. Looking at the circuit, following the circuit, tracing the circuit, drawing the circuit, reproducing the circuit, changing the circuit, distorting the circuit, cancelling the circuit⁵.

The circuit is no longer a circuit. The closed circuit is now an never-ending line.

Strategies applied to different notions of itinerary/circuits/systems

First change in the direction of a turn⁶: considering other ways of going through a circuit.

- And they say it's absurd!

The concept of absurd, as Flusser associates, "seen as a variation of utopia (u-topos), lack of place or a place that does not belong to our foundations, (...) could also be translated as exile"⁷.

- Julio Cortázar and Carol Dunlop started "a completely mad plan" during 33 days in the summer of 1982⁸. The adventure involved taking the highway that connects Paris and Marseille following a set of simple rules that opposed the logic of travelling and the very functioning and rules of the road system: they would never leave the highway and they would stop in one of every two lay-bys, where they would spend the rest of the day. By doing so, a well known path is walked differently and, all of a sudden, what matters is not the route but the world around it, its margins. "All parking lots the parking lot", Cortázar wrote.

- In his research on the habits and customs of autistic children, Fernand Deligny studied a well known way of walking that does not follow a pre-established path. From this experience, started in the 1960s at the Clinique de La Borde, he produced a series of writings, movies and drawings. Under the name of "wandering

³ About Rafa Munárriz, *Anfiteatro [Amphitheatre]*, 2017. Three white concrete reproduction of the amphitheatre of Cagliari. 4x16x14 cm. each one; dark glass plinth, 1x25x20 cm. each one.

⁴ About Rafa Munárriz, *Trayecto infinito (Interlagos) [Infinite route (Interlagos)]*, 2017. Video installation, 2 channels 9:16 3'55" loop.

⁵ About Rafa Munárriz, *Desde la curva cerrada*, [On the closed curve], 2017. 15 drawings, Conté stick on Kraft paper, Abura wood frame. 25x20 cm.

⁶ This part of the text mirrors the structure Munárriz uses in his drawings, changing the direction of the turns in a contemporary racetrack.

⁷ Zielinski, S., Weibel, P., ed., op.cit.

⁸ Cortázar, J., and Dunlop, C. *The Autonauts of the Cosmoroute*. New York: Archipelago Books, 2007.

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lines”, his drawings describe the children’s spatial movement, forming a cartography of itineraries that are alien to common logic.

- Walter Benjamin, as he talked about the “flâneur” in *The Arcades Project*, compiles the following quote: “As if the mere fact of turning right or turning left already constituted an essentially poetic act”⁹, with no need of a destination, an end, a time or a rhythm. It is the mere act of wandering that matters, in a stroll contrary to any productive concept.

[We also recall now the first surrealist and dadaist walks, the situationists, Bas Jan Ader’s one-way trip; or, more recently, Francis Alÿs walks/trips]

Second change in the direction of a turn: thinking about the matter and the energy of itineraries and systems.

To do so, I would like to evoke two specific images. The first one is taken from Hans Haacke’s *Circulation* (1969-2009), an installation where water flows through tubes in real time, and where the importance lies in the fact and the time of flowing. It is a circuit that allows Haacke to put forward the analysis of floating and the possible consequences of that action as an analogy to social and cultural relationships established in different social layers. The second image is the opening photograph for the last chapter of one of his writings, “Robert Morris Replies to Roger Denson (Or Is That a Mouse in My Paragon?)”¹⁰. The photo caption reads “*Farmyards in Kansas City, Missouri, July 1946*” and in the picture we see a panoramic view of hundreds of cattle in a barn. Morris’ is another correlation, perhaps more charged with perverse irony, to begin the critical analysis of his work within a system, the arts. A system which, as Morris explains in his texts, has traditionally placed sculpture between the dimensions of a monument and an ornament. In his minimalist proposal, sculpture becomes a structure to explore the limits and possibilities of the material chosen and how it relates to its surroundings; it uses the energy that results from this relationship. In these new possible systems, we would have the capacity to infer from reality and its behaviours, thus generating new “experiences of being”, new possibilities for paths, routes and systems.

Third change in the direction of a turn: thinking with total non-conformism

Cildo Meireles’ poetic strategy questions any system to order things, and from that continual doubt new forms of spatial representation are sought¹¹. In the same way, Munárriz’s circuit disappears in a poetic and political reflection. The continuous turn is twisted into a never-ending line, multiplying the possible routes of what was a closed circuit. Now it is a journey, a path that has no finish line and no pre-established end. Instead, it emerges as an invitation to find ways of thinking by looking outside, anywhere and nowhere.

⁹ Benjamin, W. *The Arcades Project*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002: 436.

¹⁰ Morris, R., *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris*, MIT, The MIT Press, Cambridge, 1993.

¹¹ Enguita, N., Todolí, V., *Cildo Meireles*, IVAM-Centre de Carme, Valencia, 1995.

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Note to Rafa Munárriz's exhibition at Galleria Macca: in Cagliari there is an old amphitheatre, about 700 metres away from the gallery. It was recovered for some years to put on shows, for which they installed new terraces on top of the original ones. This scaffolding led to a fungi attack on the ancient stone. Activities had to be ceased and the amphitheatre restored. They are now considering placing the terraces outside of the semicircle and using the old arena as a stage, leaving the old terraces as decoration. The dislocation of the game action would entail a change in point of view.

[Marta Ramos-Yzquierdo]

(Translation: Gaizka Ramón)