On Spectatorship

Leaping into the Arena: Extras, Spontaneous, and Delegated Performance in the Work of La Ribot

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In 2008, Claire Bishop and Mark Sladen jointly curated *Double Agent,* a collective exhibition of performance artists who use other people as a medium. In an essay included in the catalogue, Bishop coined the term *delegated performance* to refer to this practice of "outsourcing" to other non-professionals or specialists in other fields the task of "being present and performing at a particular time in a particular place on behalf of the artist, and following their instructions" (Bishop, 2008: 112). According to the British visual art scholar, the practice started in the early 1990s, a period in which the claim for authenticity was relocated from the singular body of the artists, to the collective authenticity of a group. Delegated performance also needs to be understood in the broader context of what Bishop called the "social (re)turn" of the arts, which is very much linked to the surge of an era of participatory culture, to use Jenkins' expression (1992). In other words, it follows the way in which most avant-garde artistic interests were orientated towards the social context through participative, collaborative and community-based art. Consequently, "the artist is conceived less as an individual producer of discrete objects than as a collaborator and producer of situations" and "the work of art as a finite, portable, commodifiable product is reconceived as an ongoing or long-term project with an unclear beginning and end; while the audience, previously conceived as a 'viewer' or 'beholder', is now repositioned as a co-producer or participant" (Bishop, 2012: 2).

One of the pioneers in using delegated performance in Spain was the multifaceted Madrilenian dancer and performer La Ribot. Working in the intersection of contemporary dance, live art, performance, and video, her distinctive way of including non-professional performers from

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the very outset of her career, nevertheless, occupies a difficult position in what have been considered the most prominent features of delegated performance. In this article, I explore the evolution of this practice in the work of La Ribot, through the four pieces in which she resorts to delegated performance. I argue that the work of La Ribot invites us to reconsider this new practice in relation to previous and more traditional uses of non-professional performers in film and theatre.

Twelve Tons of Feathers and a Couple of (Not so Observant) Beholder Extras. 12 toneladas de plumas (1991) *and Delegated Performance*

As a daughter of the (counter)cultural experimentation of La Movida, La Ribot started her professional career in the mid-1980s in what would soon become Bocanada Danza, a company that assembled dancers, artists and musicians working with different genres, from classical to contemporary dance, from jazz to music hall. Bocanada and its hybrid style cannot be separated from the flourishing period of the 1980s, during which Spanish contemporary dance made significant developments, notably thanks to the works of female choreographers.

Created with the aim of promoting research and experimentation in contemporary performing arts (Heras, 1994: 11), the short-lived National Centre of New Performance Trends (CNNTE), one of several national cultural endeavours created by the first socialist government after the return to democracy[2], was one of the main supporters of this new wave of contemporary dance. After hosting *Ahí va Viviana* (1988) —the third and final choreographic piece created by Bocanada— the CNNTE went on to co-produce *12 toneladas de plumas* (1991) [*Twelve Tons of Feathers*], La Ribot's first piece as an independent choreographer, and the first in which she worked with non-professionals[3].

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2 Unlike the Spanish National Company of Classic Theatre and the National Drama Center, which are still alive today, the CNNTE closed its doors in 1994.

3 On the website of the Centre for the Documentation of Music and Performing Arts it is possible to find a section devoted to the CNNTE. Archival material (such as dossiers and programmes) of *12 toneladas de plumas* as well as other works by La Ribot linked to the CNNTE (such as Bocanada's *Ahí va Viviana*), can be found via the following link: https://www.teatro.es/contenidos/CNNTE/#danza.

Presented as a show made in collaboration with a visual artist, a light designer and three dancers, *12 toneladas de plumas* explored the concept of weight from an "ironic" perspective. As explained in the dossier the concept was understood "as a complex pre-judgement or mental burden; as a physical and psychological exhaustion that has to be discharged on another person". The show was divided into several sections with different pieces, the majority of which were choreographies in which the three dancers (either together, in duets or in solos) explored the dynamics of weight dynamics, working with their own bodies or with props (e.g. a feather, or objects resembling rocks). The background music (with a strong presence of Beethoven) contrasted with the movements of the dancers, who peppered their performances with parodies of ballet choreographies, and acting techniques taken from mute cinema or mime, to create gags and humorous effects. In the show, the dancing body is thus placed in opposition to or even questioned by other kinds of physicalities, namely those of the twenty non-professional performers that were selected in every location to share the stage with the dancers. As described in the dossier, the extras were conceived of as a sort of "living set" that added "colour, environment, movement and uproar" to the production The day devoted to preparing the set was therefore also replaced by a day of rehearsal with the non-professional extras. The "living set" created in this manner was far from passive, however, and was meant to produce a disrupting effect. According to La Ribot, the extra "desmantela todo lo que lo que están construyendo los bailarines y trae una realidad de las calles, de los cuerpos que no son todos profesionales, lo mismo que en el extra de cine, que es en realidad como un proletario" ["dismantles what the dancers are building, bringing the world of the street, of the bodies that are not professionals to the production, in the same way a movie extra does, after all they are the working class of films"][4].

In the structure of the show, the extras performed different functions. Seated at the side or at the back, they sometimes acted as a frame for the dance choreographies, creating a second, in-between audience inside the production. While performing this *mise-en-abîme* audience within the show, the extras talked among themselves, left the stage, and walked in front of the dancers, momentarily blocking the real audience's vision. The extras were also used for one of the transitions, during which,

[4] See the interview with La Ribot on the CDAEM's website: https://www.teatro.es/contenidos/CNNTE/#entrevistas-audiovisuales.

running from one side of the stage to the other, they played with the contrast between levity and weight. As the production progressed, their presence became more emphasized. In one of the pieces, for instance, they took the stage completely. With *Wellington's Victory* playing in the background, they first pretended to be shot by the musket-like sounds from Beethoven's piece, their bodies slipping from the folding chairs where they were seated and falling to the floor repeatedly. Afterwards, they rode the chairs as if they were horses, before finally running and falling on stage, in the style of an action movie. The scene was so vivid and impressive that on the recording stored in the Artea Archive[5], the real audience burst out in spontaneous applause. The progressive victory of the extras in the battle over the real audience's attention is made explicit in the last dance choreography when, intimidated by a group of onlooking extras suddenly rising to their feet at the back, the dancers left the stage. It is obvious, therefore, that the final applause is directed at the non-professional performers.

If the use of delegated performance in this show can be understood as an homage to the figure of the extra, the possibility of approaching the audience and "making it a participant of the performance in a direct and freshly elaborated way" was also stated in the dossier as one of the reasons to integrate non-professionals in the production. In this sense, the final applause for the extras can be interpreted as a celebration of this participatory rush, although, strictly speaking, there is no real participation of the audience, only a "delegated participation" by way of the extras. La Ribot's statement, nevertheless, gives us a clue about one of the symbolic values of the extras in her shows. Their presence is a representation of the audience, which I will return to in my conclusions.

Finally, there is also a more practical reason behind La Ribot's decision to work with extras. As Sánchez (2006: 24–29) explains, after the boom of the 1980s, the 1990s witnessed a withdrawal of the institutional support for the contemporary performing arts (e.g. the aforementioned closure of the CNNTE). La Ribot's separation from Bocanada and the start of her independent work was, in fact, the result of her disappointment with the result of the PSOE's initial cultural project, which was finally

[5] See http://archivoartea.uclm.es/mediatecas/toneladas-de-plumas/ (min. 38)

unable to provide the necessary institutional support for contemporary dance companies to survive and consolidate[6].

In a cultural context that did not particularly encourage the existence of big contemporary dance companies, delegated performance provided La Ribot with a tool to keep exploring the possibilities of working with a large group of people. Ultimately, nevertheless, her solution was to reduce her "field of action", something that she would eventually achieve by expanding her artistic exploration to the arena of performance and visual arts. This reduction followed two paths. In the following years she would transfer her work to the (private) Teatro Pradillo[7]. There, instead of the much bigger productions for the CNNTE, she created three performance duets as well as her short solos *13 piezas distinguidas* [*13 Distinguished Pieces*] (1993)[8], which became the first series of a project that is still alive today. Paradoxically, this reduced format and the success of *13 piezas distinguidas* presented La Ribot with more international visibility. In 1995, thanks to Lois Keidan (the current director of Live Art Development Agency and former director of Live Arts at the Institute of Contemporary Arts [ICA]), she visited London with the show. Two years later, she decided to move there, hoping to find a better environment for her interdisciplinary work[9]. In London, she soon entered the flourishing

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6 See the interview with La Ribot on the CDAEM's website: https://www.teatro.es/contenidos/CNNTE/#entrevistas-audiovisuales

7 The Teatro Pradillo was founded in 1989 by La Tartana Teatro group as a space for interdisciplinary artistic creation, and "cross-pollination" between music, visual arts and especially between theatre and dance. The venue soon became an important reference for Spanish avant-garde contemporary performing and performance arts, although it was shortly replaced by the Sala Cuarta Pared. Both alternative spaces were the cradle where some of the most internationally renowned figures of the Madrilenian contemporary performing and performance arts, such as a Rodrigo García or Angélica Liddell, took their first steps (see Sánchez, 2006: 31).

8 The point of departure (and transition) of *13 Distinguished Pieces* was *Socorro! Gloria!* [*Help! Glory!*] (1991), a hilarious solo-striptease that La Ribot had previously included in *12 toneladas de plumas* (it was her only intervention as a performer in the show). In the piece, La Ribot performed as a lecturer who was unable to articulate a single word in front of a microphone, and who started an unending and frantic striptease during which she removed several layers of clothes, not all of which were in the expected place.

9 La Ribot explains her encounter with Lois Keidan and her final decision to leave Spain in an interview performed for the CDAEM (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o-KetfIghCM). She says the following (min 32.47): "[Las 13 piezas distinguidas en UK] se entienden perfectamente mientras que aquí [en España] me tachaban todo

British live art scene of the 1990s[10] and, after a few years of working in this new reduced format, La Ribot again expanded the size of her creations in *El Gran Game* [*The Big Game*] (1999). Delegated performance was once again part of the show.

Joining the Game. Dance, Visual Arts and Extras in El Gran Game *(1999)*

Thanks to her choreographic research with deaf British dancer Marc Smith, in which she focused on the meaning and codification of movement and for which she used consecutive translation between word, action, sign language and classic dance codes[11], La Ribot returned to a language closer to dance in *El Gran Game.* At the core of this piece, designed in the style of a live board game, was the notion of random composition, a structural approach which she had already started to explore in the duets *Oh! Sole!* (1995), and *Los trancos del avestruz* (1993), the latter of which is also based on a children's game.

As in *12 toneladas de plumas*, *El Gran Game* featured three dancers and a group of extras who had again been selected in every location where the piece was performed. On this ocassion there were seven extras, one of whom was a professional ballet dancer. This live game took place on a large white board, with several squares stuck to the floor. Each of the squares had different instructions, and the dancers needed to throw a pair of dices to know which of these instructions they had to perform next. The movement code that the dancer used was, nevertheless, the result of an individual process of translations and, therefore, non-decodable

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el rato tú lo que haces no es danza. […] Mi sueño de poder seguir existiendo aquí [en España], que se había acabado como compañía también se se estaba acabando como artista. Veía que aquí me iba a quedar en una cosa totalmente underground, cuando yo no me sentía underground, inaccesible, cuando yo no creí que era inaccesible, pequeña, cuando no tenía por qué ser pequeña" ["*13 Distinguished Pieces* was perfectly understood in the UK, while in Spain people didn't believe that what I was doing was dance […] If my dream of creating a dance company in Spain was already over, what was at stake now was my work as an artist. I feared that my work in Spain was always going to be considered underground, that is to say presumably incomprehensible pieces of small format. I didn't see my work in that way"].

[10] For a recent introduction to the live art cultural practice in Britain see Chatzichristodoulou (2020).

[11] See Keidan (1998).

for the audience[12]. The dancers did not compete against each other, but against time. After the first 36 minutes of the show, the squares on the floor were removed every 30 seconds, and the game finally finished when there were no squares left.

Occasionally called by the actors, the extras leapt onto the board to perform a choreography using the grey jogging suits they wore. They took off the clothes, threw them to the floor, folded and unfolded them, and put them back on[13]. As in *12 toneladas de plumas* the choral work of the extras added another physicality, that of everyday life[14], to the stage, but also created a sense of unity in a piece in which the dancers composed their choreographies individually and without interacting.

A main difference with her previous work in regard to delegated performance, had to do with the positioning of the extras. If in *12 toneladas de plumas* they were placed as an audience inside the piece and, as such, divided from the work of the dancers, both groups shared the space in *El Gran Game*, erasing the previous spatial (and metaphorical) opposition between dancers and extras[15]. The result was "not a machine, but a system of rules in which everything was possible: life, hesitation, problems" (Sánchez, 2003: 109).

This change can also be understood in relation to a shift in the way La Ribot's work started to address the audience, a shift prompted by her contact with the British live art movement[16]. If in Spain most of La

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[12] As Sánchez (2000: 51) describes: "En ese mundo de bailarines elocuentes, es el espectador el que se siente excluido, es el espectador ahora el mudo. Así que la Ribot invierte las condiciones tradicionales de la danza: intérpretes mudos/ sonido (música) elocuente frente a intérpretes elocuentes/música silenciosa (inaudible)" ["In this world of 'eloquent' dancers the audience becomes the one excluded, the one that is mute. There is, therefore, an inversion of the traditional dance codes. The dancers are no longer mute"].

[13] It is worth noting, also, that the choreography the extras developed was linked to a veritable obsession of La Ribot in her solo work: the relationship between body and garments, and the actions of getting dressed and undressed.

[14] The exception is the extra ballet dancer who was called to dance segments of *La Sylphide*, thus bringing a different trained physicality on stage, that of traditional ballet.

[15] La Ribot, in fact, acted as a mediator between both groups, but also with the public: she coordinated the movements of the extras in their intervention, she took parts in certain ludic intervals played by the dancers, (the so called "exceptions"), and she occasionally directly addressed the audience using sign language.

[16] In a personal interview (Bastianes, 2019), she explained how this process has to do with an approach from dance to the procedures of visual art: "Lo que ocurrió es que

Ribot's initial pieces were presented in a frontal and distanced arrangement of space, the audience in *El Gran Game* was seated at the same level and surrounding the performers.

In the following years she further investigated the relationship with the audience, moving from the traditional spatial arrangement of theatre/dance shows to that of galleries and visual arts. The evolution is particularly telling in her distinguished pieces project, from the more traditional theatrical spectator-performer relationship of the first series (1993), to the frontal view, working with the vertical position of the body, adopted in *Más distinguidas* [*More Distinguished*] (1997) [17] or the art installation arrangement of *Still Distinguished* (2000), in which the spectators could freely move around the space[18].

In a way, this process culminated with *Panoramix* (2003), a retrospective of the first three series of the distinguished pieces organized at the Tate Modern as part of *Live Culture*, a live art exhibition in collaboration

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cambió la la forma de entender la danza contemporáneas. Jerome Bell, Gilles Jobin o yo no queríamos una coreografía bajo la ley de la música y de las formas y del movimiento. […] Yo utilizo procedimiento de las artes visuales, de artista plástico, con el cuerpo y con el espacio y con los objetos y con los colores y como los corto y los pego; lo que pasa es que en vez de utilizar el canvas, utilizó el cuerpo, utilizo el espacio o al propio espectador, le coloco aquí le coloca allí, le muevo. Y eso ha sido así desde el principio lo que pasa es que yo no lo había formulado o sea yo no me había dado cuenta y eso fue lo extraño, eso fue lo que cambió la forma de hacer danza contemporánea en mi caso" ["Basically, what happened is that the way of understanding contemporary dance changed. Practioners such as Jerome Bell, Gilles Jobin or myself rejected the idea of creating choreographies following the rules of music and movements. […] Thus, I use visual arts procedures in my creations, the way I 'cut and paste' colours and objects, the way I operate with the space and the bodies of performers and spectators as canvas is closer to the work of a visual artist. And it has been like that from the very beginning of my career, but it took me some time to be able to articulate this, to understand what I was doing"]. She later also pointed out the impact it had on her way of thinking in regard to the relationship with the audience, eliminating the distance between audience and piece.

[17] "I wanted to see the body more like a canvas –an object to stick things on […] It was a very flat thing, like a picture, that you always see from the front", she stated in an interview (Palmer, 2001: 7).

[18] She forced the public to start moving by means of a video played on several screens around the exhibition space. Video (especially handheld videos) and video installation would become some of the other work methods La Ribot developed in those years, e.g. *Juanita Pelotari* (2001), *Another Pa amb tomàquet* (2002), *Traveling Olga/Traveling Gilles* (2003), or the video installation *Despliegue* [*Display*] (2001).

with the recently created British Live Art Development Agency[19]. In *Panoramix,* La Ribot mixed, reorganized the sequences and eliminated the most theatrical effects of her distinguished pieces to arrange them into an art installation. In a personal interview (Bastianes, 2019), La Ribot nevertheless strongly emphasized that this change in the arrangement did not affect the circulation of her pieces: she would continue to present her work irrespectively in theatres, galleries, and even mime festivals. It is telling that in her next piece after *Panoramix*, *40 espontáneos* [*40 Spontaneus*] (2004), La Ribot, who now had moved to Geneva, came back to a traditional theatrical format, although only to break some of its most sacred space, sound, and light conventions. The extras, promoted to the absolute protagonists of the piece this time, played a key role in this subversion.

From (Runaway) Hollywood to the Bullring. The Spontaneous Extra Takes the Stage in 40 espontáneos

In *40 espontáneos,* a co-production between different French and Swiss institutions, La Ribot takes the use of delegated performance to a next level. The forty extras were selected on a first come first served basis, the only restriction being they had to be over forty years old[20]. There was an authenticity claim behind this limitation, as La Ribot explained that "Los mayores de 40 añ os suelen ser menos formales y más conceptuales a la hora de trabajar con el cuerpo. Copian peor, pues les interesa menos, y suelen ser más auténticos con sus cuerpos" ["People over forty tend to have a less formal and more conceptual approach to their bodies. They are not usually interested in copying others, so their body gesture is more authentic"] (Perales, 2006).

The audience entering the theatre was at first confused about where to sit. A series of objects (tables, chairs, roles of fabric, clothes, maps, posters, etc.) were disseminated on stage as well as in the stalls (even on top of the seats). The show started when the extras, some of them infiltrated among the audience, collected the scattered objects, and either donned

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[19] It was the first-time contemporary performance was placed against the context of the gallery's display of the collection. See https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/live-culture.

[20] For the opinion of some of the non-professional performers involved in the project, see Alegre, Moura, Alves (2012).

them as garments or carried them on stage, where they were assembled in a brightly coloured patchwork that gradually covered the floor. The lights remained on all through the performance, constituting another violation to 20th century theatrical conventions. As a result, the extras' initial entrance into the performance space was quite disconcerting for the real audience, who, as the recording of one of the performances at Le Quartz (Brest, France) shows[21], looked around, unable to recognize who was one of "them" and who was an infiltrated extra[22]. This initial confusion between in and out was ultimately linked to one of the sources of inspiration for the show: the world of bullfighting and the *espontáneos* (the "spontaneous"). La Ribot defines this bullfighting figure as an "untrained" member of the audience who, breaking the official bullfight rules, unexpectedly leaps into the arena and, despite the danger, tries to steal the attention of the public from the bullfighter[23]. While there are several kinds of *espontáneos* (not all of whom are necessarily untrained)[24], their unifying characteristic is the disruptive essence of their gesture[25]

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21 I would like to thank La Ribot Ensemble for giving me access to the recordings of *40 espontáneos*, *PARAdistinguidas* and *Film Noir.*

22 As Hargraves (2004: 35) explains: "However, the piles of clothes and upturned furniture, the spillage of theatricality and symbolic objects beyond the frame, particularly violate the architecture of the proscenium. The frontal representational apparatus of the theatre has collapsed producing a strange feeling of vertigo. Although eventually everyone sits somewhere, this moment of suspension, of an active re-engagement in the plane of vision extends throughout the piece".

23 See her website: https://www.laribot.com/work/12.

24 In the past, most of the *espontáneos* were more or less trained young men (mainly from poor backgrounds) looking for a chance to show their abilities in the insular world of bullfighting. This was, in fact, the way renowned bullfighters such as Manuel Benítez, El Cordobés, started their careers. Ironically, El Cordobés was also the protagonist of the end of this practice when, during a bullfight in 1968, a fellow matador, Miguelín, leapt into the ring as a "spontaneous" to show the audience that the bull El Cordobés was fighting against was very young and not sufficiently aggressive. This irruption from a far from untrained "spontaneous" had an impact in the bullfighting code: instead of getting a fine, from then on anyone jumping into the ring would be banned forever from working as a professional bullfighter. The result was that, nowadays, the most frequent *espontáneos* are, paradoxically, members of the anti-bullfighting movement, who also try to attract the attention of the audience and cameras, sometimes risking their lives, with a very different aim. About the *espontáneos* in bullfighting see Wheeler (2020: 36–9)

25 As an annoyed Hemingway stated in *The Dangerous Summer,* a report originally published in *Life* magazine (1960: 106): "Nothing can spoil a bull for a matador so rapidly and completely as the intrusion of a spontaneous in the fight. The bull learns

and their somewhat fluid identity as spectators who suddenly become performers. In the piece, the important presence of the colour red in the clothes and fabrics, refers both to the Spanish "national fiesta" and to La Ribot's own artistic world. Indeed, red is a colour that features extensively in her work, from dying her (pubic) hair a flashy red, to the "pool of blood" consisting of red objects, which the performer finally lies down on in "Another Bloody Mary" (from the *Still Distinguished* series).

But underlying La Ribot's work with delegated performance is her lasting obsession with film extras. At the start of the piece, and once the objects had been assembled on stage, the extras lay down on them one by one, holding a piece of paper with a number on it. As La Ribot explains on her website, this idea was triggered by a photograph from the set of Kubrick's *Spartacus* "showing hundreds of fake-blood-spattered 'rebel slaves' lying in a field, all playing dead – but at the same time, brandishing large, numbered cards at the camera"[26]. This reference to *Spartacus* (1960), a Hollywood film that was partially shot in Spain with Spanish extras, took on an important weight in La Ribot's conceptualization of the extra, as I will explain later. After staying in this prone position for a while the extras dismantled the montage they had created, dressing themselves in the clothes that had been lying on the floor, and organizing the rest of the objects into a pile. In the following section, the extras explore some of the sequence of movements performed by the non-professionals in *12 toneladas de plumas*, albeit fragmented in different groups (they run and fall, slowly melt to the ground from a chair, play with weights, e.g. two people occasionally embrace, and one of them then slips while the other holds them by the arms). The show also featured some images that are distinctive of La Ribot's work, such as the limping walk wearing one heel only. But most important, as Baudelot (2004) notices, is the fluid relationship between the vertical (the bodies) and the horizontal (the floor) – an "aller-retour permanent entre le corps et l'espace du corps où se superposent plusieurs couches de vêtements au sol qui se recouvre progressivement des vêtements délaissés par les corps" ["a continuous back and forth between the space of the bodies and all the layers of clothes they wear and the space of the floor, gradually covered by the clothes dropped by the bodies"]. This dynamic is a predominant factor in the

with every pass and a great bullfighter does not make a single pass without intending to lead toward a definite result".

[26] See https://www.laribot.com/work/12

earlier solo work of La Ribot, from *Still Distinguish* to *Panoramix*[27], and is also present in her work with the extras in *El Gran Game.*

At some point in *40 espontáneos*, the extras started to reconstruct the patchwork on the floor. On top of this new montage, they placed brown cardboard sheets (recalling the carboard floor used by La Ribot in *Panoramix*).The previously colourful display of objects was thus turned into a uniform grey, under which the extras lay down once again, only partially visible. Suddenly, the performers' mobile phones started ringing, a tongue-in-cheek reference to another (very spontaneous) way of breaking the codes of theatre audience behaviour. The different tunes were heard one by one, and then all at the same time, in a collage of sound that transcended "the banality of their tinny tonelessness to become truly polyphonic, a strange chorus of teletechnology singing the ambiguity of 'personalizing' a ringtone" (Hargreaves, 2004: 36). For a few moments after the blackout, the audience could see the lighted screens of the held-up phones.

As in *El Gran Game,* the meaning behind what is happening on stage remains ambiguous and opaque to the audience. Baudelot (2004) states that "les 40 corps spontanés font acte de résistance; face aux regards extérieurs ils refusent de se laisser intégrer par la narration" ["the 40 spontaneous bodies show resistance to the external gazes of the audience, that fail to integrate their actions in a narration"]. However, what was more defiant in the way these *espontáneos* behaved was their equally spontaneous laughter.

Throughout the show, the non-professional performers burst into all kinds of laughter, from little giggles to loud, manic laughs (or even cries), for no apparent reason. Exploring the physical act of laughing and crying (leaving aside the emotional aspect) was, in fact, part of the training the non-professional performers received during the workshop with La Ribot, before the opening of *40 espontáneos*. During the piece, this collective laughter helped to create complicity among the performers, while also tickled the audience's funny bone. As Hargreaves (2004: 35) notices, this reaction produced a slippage between non-professional performers and audience[28]. Nevertheless, far from creating a positive sense

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[27] For La Ribot's work with horizontality in *Panoramix* see Lepecki (2006: 65–86).

[28] The powerful way the audience reacted to laughter on stage was something La Ribot had explored at the beginning of one of her early duets at the Teatro Pradillo, *Los*

of community, the fact that the audience did not know exactly what the extras were laughing about, generated tension and suspicion. As La Ribot (Weaver, 2013: 258) would confess in a later interview, her intention was in fact to work with the "dark side" of laughter, following Baudelaire's paradoxical definition of laughter as "satanic" and, therefore, "profoundly human" (1972: 148)[29] – especially the laughter provoked by the grotesque. According to the French poet, the grotesque arises from a primitive "wild hilarity", "a burst of instantaneous laughter" provoked by what has not "explanation drawn from common sense" (151–2).

It is worth remembering that during the 20th century, the grotesque was the object of two main (almost contradictory) interpretations, represented by Bakhtin's (1972) and Kayser's (1964) respective studies on the topic. While in *40 espontáneos* the laughter is closer to Bakhtin's (1974) festive conception of the grotesque[30], La Ribot's second attempt to explore the violence of laugher in *Laughing Hole* (2006) adopts the more tragic, terrifying, and distressing model of the grotesque proposed by Kayser. Premiering at the Art Unlimited exhibition (Art Basel), *Laughing Hole* featured three (trained) performers dressed in cleaning uniforms and flip flops. In this installation, the performers undertook the repetitive task of picking up grey cardboard placards with captions from the floor and attaching them to the wall, after having shown them to the audience—all in a continuous state of unexplained laughter. Without the bright colours of *40 espontáneos* and besides the exhausting effort of laughing for up to six hours, this laughter was particularly sinister because of the clash

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trancos del avestruz (1993) [*The Strides of the Ostrich*] (see https://vimeo.com/760600 63?embedded=true&source=vimeo_logo&owner=17270198). On the other hand, the exploration of the effect of crying was part of "Hacia dónde volver los ojos" ["Where to Turn the Eyes"], one of the most unsettling pieces of the first series of the distinguished pieces project. In this piece La Ribot enacts the gesture of a woman abandoned in a psychiatric hospital during the Bosnian War, which she came across in the press. The Spanish dancer and performer stood on a folding chair, her swinging body bent over forwards completely, so the beholder could not see her face, yet could hear her continuous, anguished crying. Placed right after the hilarious *Socorro! Gloria!* striptease, the piece creates an unexpected and uncanny atmosphere which disrupts the humorous tone of much of the show.

[29] A laughter that is at the same time "a sign of infinite greatness and of infinite wretchedness, infinite wretchedness in relation to the absolute being, of whom man has an inkling, infinite greatness in relation to the beasts" (Baudelaire, 1972: 148)

[30] La Ribot (Weaver, 2013: 258) states that the use of strong colours contributed to create a "beautiful –sensual– bright and hedonistic" piece.

between a nonsensical wild hilarity and what was written on the placards displayed by the performers. As a result of the contagious nature of laughter, the audience were often roaring with laughter themselves, while confronted to placards referring to conflicts and crimes against humanity (e.g. Guantanamo Bay, the Lebanon War, or the Gaza refugee crisis)[31].

It is nevertheless interesting to note that, while the raising of social and ethical-political debates is often at the heart of delegated performance practice, La Ribot's experimentation with laughter became more poignant when she turned to trained performers. In this sense, and although *40 espontáneos* is perhaps La Ribot's purest approach to delegated performance, as none of the performers in this piece were professionals, the presence of the figure of the extra is much more politically charged in the fourth series of the distinguished pieces: *PARAdistinguidas* [*PARAdistinguished*] (2011).

Bodies into Pieces: Delegated Performance and Exploitation in PARAdistinguidas (2011)

In *PARAdistinguidas* (2011) the work of the multifaceted Madrilenian artist once again defied classification. Reuniting her distinguished pieces project with her exploration of delegated and re-enacted performance[32], La Ribot not only broke the expectations of her audience, but also violated the artistic rules that she had herself imposed on her previous work for the distinguished pieces project.

In *Panoramix,* the adaptation of pieces previously conceived for the stage and performed on the same level as and in a fluid relationship with the audience[33], was greeted by scholars such as Lepecki (2006: 65) as a

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[31] See, for example, the experience as beholder of Burt (2008: 21), who also offers a description of the show.

[32] La Ribot's investigation with re-enacted performance started in 2002, with *Anna y las Más distinguidas* [*Anna and the More Distinguished*], a work in which the dancer Anna Williams took the place of La Ribot to re-enact the second series of the distinguished pieces project.

[33] La Ribot stated herself that "now the space belongs to the spectator and to me without hierarchies. My objects, their bags or coats; their commentaries and my sound; sometimes my stillness and their movement, other times my movement and their stillness. Everything and everyone is scattered around the floor, across an infinite surface, in which we are moving quietly, without any precise direction, without any definite order" (in Heathfield and Glendinning, 2004: 32).

"critical reassessment of dance and visual arts' complex relationship to horizontality", thus also implying a reassessment of representation and hierarchies. In PARAdistinguidas, however, La Ribot took the distinguished pieces project back to the traditional and hierarchical arrangement of theatre. Up to then, the project was composed of short solos and resulted from the process of reducing both size and materials, but the inclusion of twenty extras and five performers (La Ribot included) completely changed the rules of the game. To start with, it allowed for the pieces that made up the show to take place simultaneously instead of one piece inevitably succeeding another in the solo work. For instance, "Huan Lan Hong" – in which both extras and trained dancers took turns to dress in work uniforms and keep a sewing machine going all through the show – overlapped with the other pieces of *PARAdistinguidas*. Performed on one side of the stage, in a small, elevated booth resembling a sweatshop, the sounds of the sewing machine distorted the reception of the other pieces, and unsettled "the security of the sceptical, satirical point of view"[34], as La Ribot states on her webpage. In fact, it was a continuous reminder that our contemporary world, and specially the comfortable life of the Global North, perpetuates exploitation, a subject that was a veritable leitmotif in *PARAdistinguidas*.

Exploitation, for instance, was subtly hinted at in the beautiful image used to create "Chairs", a piece that evoked and re-elaborated piece number 14 of *Más distinguidas*[35]. In the latter, La Ribot sandwiched her naked body in between a foldable wooden chair and pumped its seat backwards and forwards with increasing violence until she completely collapsed on the floor. The "On sale" cardboard sign hanging from her neck left not doubt as to the exploitative nature of a gesture that is paradoxically open to multiple interpretations (it could be read as an allusion to sexual abuse, or the sex trade, as much as an allusion to self-exploitation). In "Chairs" the dancer Ruth Childs arranged a stack of chairs around her waist and upper body one by one, until the audience was only able to see a pair of trembling legs supporting the impressive wooden structure.

Nevertheless, it is in the work with the extras where the subject of exploitation is approached in greater depth. In this sense, it is important

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[34] See https://www.laribot.com/mobile/distinguished_pieces_one/2. The generation of an uncanny effect with a piece that disrupts the tone of the rest of the series is a device that can be traced back to the very first series of the project.

[35] In *PARAdistinguidas* there is a constant dialogue with the distinguished pieces from previous series.

to remember that delegated performance and the exhibition of non-professionals has generated a long ethical debate (especially if the performers selected belong to socially marginalized groups[36]). In fact, this debate is a central concern in Bishop's seminal work (see 2008: 121; and 2012: 239). I will come back to this in the final conclusions.

As in *El Gran Game,* the extras in *PARAdistinguidas* not only shared the space with the trained performers, but also interacted with all the dancers, breaking the division between artists, participants and audience that is characteristic to delegated performance (see Austin, 2009: 109). But, to borrow Shannon Jackson (2008) term[37], this gesture is again far from the "feel good"-model of collaborative or participatory art. The economic dynamics behind participation, for instance, were playfully and humorously acknowledged at the start of "Another Hors Champ" ("Another Off-Screen"), when the actress and performer Laetitia Dosch invited people from the audience to watch a film with her in the hall. In the recorded performance at the Parisian Centre Pompidou (November 2011), one of the volunteers among the audience tries to step on the stage after which Dosch quickly redirects him to one side of the stalls, explaining that the stage is only for the people who are being paid to be there. Immediately afterwards, Dosch took the volunteers outside the venue and into the hall, while the extras and the trained performers started to walk on stage, picking up blue yoga mats and other objects lying on the floor. Every now and then, they froze, as if someone had suddenly "paused" their action. The voice of Dosch, who was simultaneously watching a film with the volunteers in the hall, could be heard off stage. She asked the volunteers and, indirectly, the audience that had remained in the theatre to pay attention to the film extras, claiming that they were interesting to observe because they were not directed in the same way as the main characters. Behaving in a much freer and more personal way (presenting instead of representing), they added authenticity to the fiction. Dosch's offstage observations on the film extras altered

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[36] The use of migrants and low paid workers from disadvantaged countries has been particularly polemic. This is what has happened, for instance, with the Spanish visual artist Santiago Sierra and works such as *160 cm Line Tattooed on 4 People* or *Polyurethane Sprayed on the Backs of Ten Workers* in which he displayed low-paid labour as sculptural objects (drawing attention to the economic exchange behind his pieces in order to produce ethical discomfort).

[37] Jackson's article also offers a very useful revision and contextualization of Bishop's work, placing it in a linage of debates around visual arts and social practice.

the audience's perception about what was happening on stage, especially when the movements of the performers could be vaguely associated to the film descriptions, creating a feeling of estrangement.

In the "Angle Dance", according to the description given on La Ribot's website, dance becomes "a factory production line". Aligned in groups behind one of the trained performers, whose movements they had to imitate, the extras painfully (and not always successfully) attempted to synchronize their dance, in the style of a Busby Berkeley routine. Described as a satire, "La Revolución" exposed the contradictions of the film industry when low paid and submissive extras are employed to perform the roles of, for instance, protesters, agitators, or rebels. But, among the pieces that work with extras, the most striking one was "The Exchange", perhaps because it formally takes the exploration of the exploitation theme to a new level. The piece started in a disturbing atmosphere, with dim lightning and unsettling sound design. One of the trained performers firmly called one of the extras by her name, and subsequently used her as a fulcrum for a series of physical exercises with a ballet leg stretcher. The performer displayed the full range of possibilities of her elastic body, while ordering the extra to perform a series of tasks which progressively became more humiliating (touching one of the dancers' breasts, smiling at the audience, adopting a posture with her backside up in the air, coughing). Seated around the couple, the other dancers and extras, all dressed in short white pants and long shirts, observed this strange sadomasochistic display like a ritual. Later, other couples of domineering trained performers and submissive extras replicated the situations. The orders and actions became increasingly violent, and the piece ended, for instance, with La Ribot pulling the hair of her untrained partner with all the weight of her stretching body, while silencing the extra's complaints. The contrast between the trained dominant body and its humiliated untrained counterpart, both struggling to compensate each other's weight, created an unsettling image that triggered multiple meanings. It transcends the exploitation of the other to talk, for instance, about classic dancers' exploitation of their own body, but also seems to allegorize the eternal fight between the Apollonian and the Dionysian.

PARAdistinguidas was the last work of La Ribot to use delegated performance, but the artist still devoted a last piece to the film extra, a figure that has always featured in her work with non-professionals. From 2014 till 2017, she created the video *Film Noir* as a continuation of the aforementioned "Another Hors de Champ". Also divided into different series,

Film Noir explored the world of the film extra in its own medium. La Ribot returned to the history of cinema to work with excerpts of mainly large-scale Hollywood productions. Covering the movements of the film's main characters with a black band, *Film Noir* explored the faces, gestures, and movements of the extras, a manipulation that completely de-automatized the way of watching these cinema classics. Moreover, this fresh perspective on (mainly) old films also foregrounded the social dynamics behind the camera. The figure of the extra was, once again, exalted as the working class or marginal figure of the world of cinema.

For instance, the exploration of the extras' behaviour in some scenes from Kubrick's *Spartacus* (1960) and Mann's *El Cid* (1961) became a comment on the politics of the moment. As *Spartacus* and *El Cid* were partially or almost completely shot in Spain, the labour dynamics behind both films have recently received scholarly attention as case studies of Hollywood's outsourcing production work to foreign locations[38]. While scholars have shown the difficulty to reduce the phenomenon of runaway productions to a single meaning and cause, looking for cheaper, below-the-line labour certainly was/is one of the main reasons for filming abroad. From the 1950s up to the late 1960s, Spain was one of the preferred locations for finding background talents that could be hired for a fraction of what was current in the US, making it an especially cost-effective country for grand-scale productions (see Johnson-Yale, 2017: 63). In Spain, however, it was of course necessary to negotiate with the Francoist regime and the arrival of Hollywood was soon capitalized upon as pro Franco propaganda

As Rosendorf (2007) has shown, *El Cid* was an example of successful cooperation between the Regime and Hollywood producers. This was not the case for *Spartacus*. According to Rosendorf (2007: 87–88) this was a film that created frictions with the Spanish government because of its subject –the uprising of Roman slaves lead by Spartacus– and its left-wing screenwriter, Dalton Trumbo. For instance, the government briefly withheld permission to hire Spanish Army recruits to perform as Roman soldiers. The hiring problem was finally solved, though, and *Spartacus* got its military extras, just as *El Cid* would too. The difference was that in the latter film, the Spanish Army men played the "good fellows", while in the former they represented the tyrannical forces of Rome.

[38] See Steinhart, 2019, and Johnson Yale (2017)

Film Noir focussed on the other extras of these productions, those who performed as slaves or ordinary people. In the voiceover, La Ribot points out how the expression in the eyes of *El Cid*'s extras shows their boredom and passivity, how they could not understand what they were doing. On the contrary, in *Spartacus* extras are engaged and enthusiastic since, as the voiceover (by Laetitia Dosch this time) suggests, they were performing their dream in real life, namely rebelling against the oppression of an antidemocratic regime. Although reality under Francoism was much more complex, it is perhaps worth noting that from the mid-1960s popular discontent with the regime started to show. Nevertheless, the dreams of overthrowing the dictator would never come true, and the transition to democracy would have to wait until Franco's death.

Conclusions

Bishop makes a first general division between three types of delegated performances: "actions outsourced to non-professionals who are asked to perform an aspect of their identities, often in the gallery or exhibition" (2012: 220), "the use of professionals from other spheres of expertise" (223), and, finally, "situations constructed for video and film" (226).

La Ribot's work with delegated performance, however, is difficult to define according to these parameters[39]. Although she uses non-professionals in her work, they are generally selected on a very open basis. Any restrictions, such as inviting only people over forty in *40 espontáneos,* have a formal reason that is related to the expressiveness of the bodies rather than to their social identity. It is worth noting that, according to Bishop, the strategy of employing people to perform within their "own

[39] She neither fits the definition proposed by Julia Austin (2009: 102): "The first uses surrogate bodies to examine issues of authorship and authenticity. The second utilises or even deliberately exploits the bodies of Others in order to re-invigorate some of the ethico-political debates that undergird the practice of working with marginalised constituencies. In the third model, artists collaborate with non-professionals so as to re-enact painful historical events and probe the fabric of cultural memory. In the fourth model, artists tackle global crises by bringing members of the public into contact with hired representatives of an economically underprivileged group/'problem' community. Finally, artists use delegated performers to interact with and engage spectators in highly artificial and socially awkward situations, thereby compelling us to re-examine the concept of unmediated behaviour and the supposed authenticity of live encounters".

socio-economic category, be this on the basis of gender, class, ethnicity, age, disability, or (more rarely) a profession" (2012: 219) is what ultimately differentiates delegated performance from cinema and theatre acting. By creating an artificial situation that restricts the agency of the non-professional performer's, delegated performance accentuates, as is shown in Jestrovic's (2008) article on hyper-authenticity, the tension between presence and representation, theatricality and performativity, immediacy and mediation, authenticity, and constructed subjectivity. This is especially the case for most of La Ribot's work with delegated performance, in which the bodies are placed on stage and are thus much more exposed to a process of semiotization, since "all that is on the stage is a sign" (Veltruský 1940: 84).

Considering presentation and authenticity, La Ribot's pieces seem to have attracted mainly middle-class participants of different professions in the search for a new experience (see Alegre, Moura and Alves, 2012), even though anyone was welcome to participate. Considering representation this group of non-professional performers did not metonymically "signify an irrefutable socio-political issue" (Bishop, 2012: 237). Instead, it would seem that the heterogenous middle class composition of the extras stands for the larger group of the audience that is watching (as is also hinted at in *12 toneladas de plumas*). Far from being a participatory art device, the division between the "audience inside the show" and the real audience in the stalls is never really broken. If the similitude between both groups creates confusion in *40 espontáneos*, their difference is humorously emphasized in *PARAdistinguidas* when members of the real audience are also called to participate, but outside the stage. In this sense, the extras in the work of La Ribot act as much as delegated performers as delegated spectators.

In fact, the gesture of including non-professionals becomes more transgressive, paradoxically, on a symbolic level. As a contemporary homage to old film extras, a symbolic value that La Ribot progressively emphasized in her work, the non-professional performers are a reminder that the social dynamics and subsequent ethical debates surrounding delegated performance in visual art, are actually part of a long tradition in the world of cinema[40]. Working with an imagery that takes the audience

[40] Casting performers from disadvantaged populations generated ethical debates far before the arrival of delegated performance to performance work. Just to quote an easily accessible example, in the 1960s, Pasolini performed an interview with his actor

back to a time in which Europe (and Spain) was also part of that underprivileged world and a source of cheap labour, La Ribot reminds us that unpredictability is also part of the contemporary Global North's exploitative (Gran) Game.

Finally, however, I find that one of the most powerful features of La Ribot's art needs to be found as much in the situation it creates as in its own materiality. In this sense, it is important to understand that the arrival of La Ribot to delegated performance follows an inverse path, from the world of performing arts and the body to the procedures of visual arts. La Ribot's extras are not only present "to introduce aesthetic effects of chance and risk", "to problematize the binaries of live and mediated, spontaneous and staged, authentic and contrived", or "to challenge traditional artistic criteria by reconfiguring everyday actions as performance" (Bishop 2012: 238). They are also present as a living set; they are present because of the different materiality they bring to the stage, because the contrast between the trained and the untrained body provides an effective composition device, one that makes it impossible not to be "engaged" in the world that La Ribot creates.

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Franco Citti, who, coming from a Roman shanty town, had performed the main role in Pasolini's first film *Accatone* (1961). In the interview, included in Jean-André Fieschi's documentary *Pasolini l'enragé* (1966) for French TV (min 11.40), the director confronts the actor and asks him if he agrees with the criticism the director has received about "hiring actors from poor backgrounds" and then "ruining their life by giving them false hopes and raising their ambitions to become a film star."

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