

*Love is: a spider  
That cautiously  
Weaves its web  
In a corner of the soul,  
So stealthily  
That no sage could  
Sever the thread.*

Francisco Rodríguez Marín, *Cantos populares españoles*, no. 5,557, 1882–1883.

*Seeing life as a weave, this pattern (pretence, say) is not always complete and is varied  
in a multiplicity of ways. But we, in our conceptual world, keep on seeing the same,  
recurring with variations. That is how our concepts take it. For concepts are not for use  
on a single occasion.*

*And one pattern in the weave is interwoven with many others.*

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, no. 568 and 569, 1967.

## **A Coarsely Woven Web**

Pedro G. Romero

Loose threads here and there. A few tapestries lined the floors and walls. They also served as bedclothes and garments. Others covered the floor area reserved for the animals. A fairly pretty blue one, shot through with orange and red threads, lay in the centre of the sitting room as a decorative piece, framing the seat usually occupied by

grandmothers and mothers. Tied high above, the most threadbare cloths provided shade—or, rather, protection from the rain in cold, wintry Vienna.

These notes were gleaned from the reports filed by civil servants with the Austrian Ministry of Culture who, several months later, attempted to retrieve the works by Teresa Lanceta that had been exhibited at Haus Wittgenstein in Vienna. For the past two years, the house had been occupied mainly by Bulgarian and Romanian gypsies, who had been assembled there by the Bulgarian Embassy, current owner of the Jewish Viennese philosopher's erstwhile residence. Urged by Romani associations and a few artists and curators working on the resistance mechanisms of the scattered culture we refer to as "gypsies", Teresa Lanceta agreed to show drawings, old pieces and tapestries at the house, in part as a gesture of solidarity with the its occupants, but also motivated by a desire to recover her memories of the many years she spent living among gypsies in Barcelona, Granada, Madrid, Seville and all across Spain.

All that frayed material had to be useful for something besides the insurance reports, which was what the cultural bureaucrats sought to certify. That experience, that ending—whether sad or happy we cannot say, but undoubtedly exemplary—should have something more to offer. That was my task—also a bureaucratic one, I fear. I had to find something useful in those reports and photographs. It was rich, disturbing material. I had images, catalogues, all the preliminary materials put together to prepare the exhibition. The scrap of a rug, with its black-and-white rhomboid pattern, taken directly from among the remnants of the house, and the photograph of a tapestry used as a shroud for a dead gypsy were sensitive materials: touching, seeing, smelling them immediately triggered thoughts, preparing us for action, putting us in context. I left the room without any ideas—full of suggestions, yes, but without a single clue as to what I might pour onto those blank pages.

*Because we live in houses...*

*Narrow street, narrow stairs with steep steps, small building with insignificant courtyards. An elongated flat with a constricted corridor where the electric light was always on, the third floor in a five-storey block. Seven tiny rooms. Three private quarters: bedrooms with little more than a bed and a wardrobe of meagre dimensions. One for her, Ch., and him, J.; another for the grandfather, Ch.'s dad, and the grandkids; and the third for L. and me. In ours we had to walk sideways because the walls were lined with shelves that held our belongings, some of which also hung from the ceiling.*

*The common areas: a small sitting room with a balcony overlooking the street where L. painted and the children played when he wasn't there. L.'s painting tools were always stored in our bedroom which, like the grandfather and children's room, opened onto this little parlour at one end of the house facing the street. To reach the other innermost end, where the third bedroom was, we had to pass through a microscopic loo or wash-room, although in reality there was nothing to wash with: no basin or shower, just a toilet with a high pull-chain and old newspapers. To wash up, we had to take turns in the kitchen! Those were the times of daily shopping trips. Ch. prepared gipsy stews and potatoes with cod that I never ate, because I worked in a nearby restaurant, and on Sundays, when I was off, we'd buy several rotisserie chickens and eat them straight out of the wrapping they came in. It was a party.*

*I would go from the Central University to the restaurant where I worked. Free afternoons and evenings were for roving; the cobblestones and asphalt of the streets called to us. We walked at a slant, zigzagging to draw out the narrow places we passed through. We lived on the streets.*

*That was the kitchen where one night Ch. spilled a huge pan of chips on her belly. We went to the hospital and they gave her ointment, antibiotics and sedatives. Afterwards she went to work swathed in*

*bandages because she couldn't afford to lose her daily wages. And also because she feared being replaced.*

*Now that I obsessively long to change my place of residence, I think of the needs we had those days: few and simple, and perhaps for that reason easily satisfied. We had hardly any possessions or even furniture, aside from a chair for each person, two tables and beds—no sofa or armchair or ornaments, just a telly for V., who smacked it now and again to rescue the image from the perpetual affliction of fuzzy lines. The house was old and hadn't been touched since it was first built, more than a century ago. Wall panels, tiles, carpentry and light fixtures were all original. There were no decorative details or photos hanging on the walls. They owned only a few photographs, which they kept with their "papers", and I have never been fond of personal photos myself.*

*The walls in the room where we ate were painted green—an intense, glossy enamel in the bottom and tempera above. Every memory I have of that house has a green halo.*

*The grandfather had linked the deep sorrow brought on by the death of his wife with the "loss" of his beautiful young daughter, Ch., at the tender age of fifteen, to a much older gipsy man whom he had asked to watch over his darling child during their tours along the Costa Brava. The guardian's pledge was broken on a train one night, when the two of them, the mature guitarist and the young dancer, found each other in their sleepless lust-driven rambles. The two men had never spoken since, and that guitarist, now the father of his three grandchildren, shared a bed with his daughter, even though he never abandoned his other family. Home is where happiness lives, but not always.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Teresa Lanceta, "Arquitectura", spring 2015.

The story is more or less well-known. It appeared in *Arquitectura del cante jondo*,<sup>2</sup> a compilation of texts by Federico García Lorca on the subject of *cante jondo*—or “deep songs”—and the 1922 Cante Jondo Competition in Granada, a genuinely ecumenical encounter between progressive Spanish intellectuals and flamenco. Anyway, the episode takes place one night in Granada, when Lorca and Manuel de Falla are out for a stroll. Their conversation revolves around the decline and waning prestige of the Spanish folk songs called *coplas*, which, according to these two good friends, are now in the hands of delinquents, drunkards and flamenco singers. As they ponder this predicament, suddenly they hear a *copla*, an old song, floating through an open window: *Flowers, let me be, for he who has a great sorrow, is no fun for anyone, I came out to the countryside for amusement, let me be flowers, let me be.*<sup>3</sup> Published decades earlier by Rodríguez Marín in his *Cancionero popular*, there are more recent version of this tune, sung by Porrina de Badajoz, among others. Juanito Valderrama used it as inspiration for one of his *coplillas*. But, apparently, the version that Falla and Lorca heard, the old song, had been made popular in those days by Manuel Escacena, better known as El Niño de Escacena, a flamenco singer from Seville who had recorded it, given those lovely lyrics good publicity in taverns and flamenco clubs. This is important, of course, because for Lorca’s mythological vision the meaning of the lyrics was far from coincidental. The “flowers”, or tavern entertainment, attempted to “amuse”, in the most disreputable sense of the word, and distract from true sorrows, from the tragedy expressed in the authentic folk *copla*. Although Lorca and Falla eventually changed their minds—after the famous competition, which was an artistic failure in spite of all its glittering publicity and fame—at that time they wove a discourse—somewhere between paternalistic and redemptive—about the needs of the common folk, an Adamic vision of peasants and gypsies.

And this is important, because the narrative takes a surprising twist:

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<sup>2</sup> See Christopher Maurer, *Federico García Lorca y su “Arquitectura del cante jondo”* (Granada: Editorial Comares, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> “Flores, dejadme, que aquél que tiene una pena, no se la divierte nadie, salí al campo a divertirme, dejadme flores, dejadme.”

*We stepped up to the window, and through the green lattices we saw a white, aseptic room without so much as a single picture, like one of the architect Le Corbusier's machines for living in, and in it were two men, one with a guitar and the other with his voice. The one who sang was so clean and pure that the strumming man subtly averted his eyes to avoid the sight of such nudity. And it was perfectly clear to us that that guitar was not the guitar that comes in raisin cases and is marked by coffee stains, but the liturgical box, the guitar that comes out at night when nobody sees it and becomes spring water. The guitar made with the wood of Greek ships and African mule manes.<sup>4</sup>*

It is obvious that some years passed between the time of the events and that when the text was written. Falla and Lorca's evening walk must have taken place in 1921, and the text was written in the 1930s. Le Corbusier visited Madrid's Residencia de Estudiantes in 1928, and his discussion of folk architecture, of the adaptation of vernacular construction to the lay of the land in Spain, inspired Lorca's words in what we might call an exercise *a posteriori*. Even the final metaphorical images of a Greek ship and African mule manes are in synch with the Swiss and French architect's discourse at the time, which perceived a degree of continuity between Mediterranean and African architectures. For Lorca, Le Corbusier's visit was a momentous occasion that flooded his mind with aesthetic options and suggestions. Permanent records of that visit can be found in his conversations with Salvador Dalí,<sup>5</sup> among other sources. Lorca began using the term "purism"—coined in reference to painting by Le Corbusier's acolytes in *L'Esprit Nouveau*—to describe the austerity and primitive functionalism of flamenco song, more in that precise sense than in the racist meaning of original, racially pure or untainted that the word would later acquire. We should remember that Amédée Ozenfant published in 1923 a review of flamenco songstress La Niña de los Peines in that same journal.

Despite considerations of historical context, and despite the changes that Lorca's views on flamenco and folk culture would later undergo, the comparison that the poet drew

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> See Juan José Lahuerta, *Decir ANTI es decir PRO. Escenas de la vanguardia en España* (Teruel: Museo de Teruel, 1999).

between a poor man's house—which judging from old photographs and accounts of Granada in those days was probably beggarly—and the functionalist comfort that European architects, spearheaded by Le Corbusier, sought for the modern home—*la machine à habiter* become a machine for living—is still revealing. It reveals that paternalistic, redemptive gaze I mentioned earlier, a terrible vision related to a certain bourgeois ideology, festooned with colonial embroidery, which aimed to regenerate and urbanise the lives of the poor, the proletariat and the lumpen-proletariat, as they were called at the time.

It is no coincidence that, under the auspices of Le Corbusier, architects began experimenting with housing estates on North African soil, dormitory towns for working-class labourers on the outskirts of modern urban centres that would later spread to European and Latin American cities and, eventually, the rest of the world. Interestingly, Le Corbusier sublimated many of these cultural and political references in parallel ideas and projects. Thus, while he supported that “concentrative” streamlining of lower-class suburbs in Algeria, he was simultaneously capable of waxing poetic on the subject of the tapestry, the “Muralnomad”, or nomadic mural, to which he gave architectural and constructive roots in the dwellings of nomads, gipsies and Saharan peoples, among others.

The idea of the tapestry as architecture borrowed notions and applications from bourgeois life and even from American still lifes: *Tapestries are nomadic murals. It is the mural of modern times. We are nomads inhabiting apartment buildings, and we change apartments as the needs of our families evolve.*<sup>6</sup> The tapestry is the home. In Le Corbusier's primitivist fantasy, times and cultures, north and south, past and future are folded together. *We cannot have a mural painted on our apartment walls. However, this wall of wool that is a tapestry can be taken down from the wall, rolled up under our arms at will and taken to hang elsewhere. This is why I have called my tapestries “nomadic murals” (Muralnomad).* The Granada-born architect Juan Calatrava elaborates on this topic: *Questioning the traditional use of tapestries and, in general, of textile elements inside the home soon reveals the autonomy of the tapestry as a*

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<sup>6</sup> Le Corbusier, *Tapisseries Muralnomad* (Brussels: Zodiac, 1961).

*genre separate from painting and points to a closer connection with architecture, understanding it not as a mere ornamental object but as a powerful means of defining space (including the acoustical aspects with which [Le Corbusier] was so preoccupied at the time: the balance between concrete, a sound material, and textile, a sound-absorbing material). The tapestry is more like a wall than a canvas. In fact, Le Corbusier even specified what the height should be, that of the Modulor minus 5 cm.<sup>7</sup> The Modulor with 5 cm lopped off! He certainly must have believed gypsies and Moors were short people.*

In 1953, Aix-en-Provence hosted the 9th International Congress of Modern Architecture, or CIAM, on the theme of habitat, where Le Corbusier's *unité d'habitation*, or "housing unit", was enthroned as a universal standard. Unlike Team X, the group of architects (Alison and Peter Smithson, Jaap Bakema, Aldo van Eyck) who refuted these ideas at the next CIAM—the 10th CIAM in 1956, to be precise—the self-styled International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus emerged as a knee-jerk reaction to that hegemonic discourse about what "habitation" ought to mean. The emphasis on traditional crafts and other supposedly "lesser" arts was one of their leitmotifs. Constant, who played the guitar and was a fan of gipsy music, brought fabric patterns with the names of flamenco song styles to the movement's Alba Congress in 1955. Asger Jorn also responded to the invitation with pieces related to textiles—works made of pure cotton—and other crafts which he associated with his ceramic creations. This exaltation of craftsmanship was at the heart of their preoccupations. The aim was to modify the habitat through its tools, but by endowing it with psychological and even magical properties, instead of the functional value ascribed by Le Corbusier. Both Jorn and Constant were familiar with the psycho-geographical experiences and unitary urbanism advocated by a group of lettrists related to Guy Debord and Michèle Bernstein. The North Africans Mohamed Dahou, Mustapha Khayati and Abdelhafid Khatib were especially active, becoming the first to enunciate psychological conditions for objects and the urban space: fundamental conditions that had nothing to do with the rationalist practices of functional

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<sup>7</sup> Juan Calatrava, "El sentido de una exposición", in *Le Corbusier el artista*, exh. cat. (Zurich: Fundación Pablo Atchugarry, 2010).

architecture and touted the merits of *the hair of a goatskin or the elasticity of a leotard/net*.<sup>8</sup>

Giuseppe Pinot-Gallizio, who played the role of host at the Alba encounters, had ties to a group of gipsies camped on the esplanade of Alba's Central Market. Gallizio was a socialist councillor on a town controlled by Christian democrats as well as a member of the former Partisan Republic. He proposed that the gipsies should be allowed to settle on lands seized from his family by the fascists, where one of Mussolini's old Youth Colonies had stood until the Tanaro River flooded and destroyed it after the war. Taking advantage of Constant's presence at the congress, they worked together to design a colony, an architectural project to give the gipsies a permanent home that would later, as is now common knowledge, give rise to the New Babylon urban development project. Constant and Gallizio's shared observations associated the gipsies with those psycho-geographical qualities: their known nomadic lifestyle, of course, but also their special custom of establishing relationships between people and things.

Gallizio had earned the gipsies friendship in the open-air cloth markets where they earned their living. It was more than just buying and selling; he was also struck by the special use of fabrics and scraps. The infinite cloths and prints of his *Industrial Painting* grew out of those observations. Drawing on the gipsies' unique way of dealing in yards of cloth, on their imaginative ability to reuse scraps and bits of wool and cotton, Gallizio thus produced his *Industrial Painting*, based on artisan printing systems—no less than with a candy-making machine!—and the sale by pieces, cut to the customer's specifications, of those same fabrics. Another of his works, *Cavern of Anti-Matter*, was based on his experiences in the cloth-draped "habitats" that the gipsies created inside their wagons and temporary rental homes. By lining the walls with fabrics, mixing textures and colours, the gipsy women maintained a familiar common thread in all of their rooms, whether they were here or there, on this road or that. Observing how the gipsy women took advantage of the insect-repellent properties of rosemary or the

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<sup>8</sup> Pedro G. Romero, "Los nuevos babilonios", in *Constant. Nueva Babilonia*, exh. cat. (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2015).

fragrance of lavender to “decorate” their rooms, Gallizio gathered country herbs with magical properties and spread them on the floor. With the collaboration of Walter Olmo, he also had a soundtrack made in which industrial and electronic music was mixed with gipsy songs and music, a cushion of sounds that reverberated deep inside the environmental construction formed by the fabrics in his *Cavern of Anti-Matter*.

Years later, the situationists Guy Debord and Alice Becker-Ho would proclaim the merits of a textile artist, Jan Yoors, who had lived and travelled with gipsies since he was thirteen.<sup>9</sup> Yoors’s fascinating devotion to crafts was inherited from his father, a glass artist who had travelled and worked in Spain, where he developed a taste for flamenco and for gipsy culture in general. It was not that Yoors attached special value to gipsy crafts or discovered any special form of textile craftsmanship in his wanderings with Polish, Hungarian, Romanian, French and Spanish gipsies, but he was convinced that that life experience had planted the seed of his devotion to the tapestry, to the construction of tapestries with architectural dimensions, motivated by a determination to shape space with cloth, in other words, to provide habitability. In one sense, Yoors inherited Le Corbusier’s preoccupations, although he had no intention of pursuing a functionalist purpose. Ornament and other sensible sensations are at the root of his tapestry art. His large abstract rugs, modelled on his own architectural photographs, are quite curious. Posters torn down from the wall, dark alleys, the rear side of old mansions: these are the sources of an abstract profusion of interwoven colours, spreading colour fields in the form of tapestries across rooms, halls and vestibules of large buildings.

When he speaks of the gipsies, Yoors exhibits a sensible memory related to the use of clothing, of a new suit—a gipsy man will don a newly-bought suit and wear it until it falls apart or becomes intolerably stained and begrimed—of dressing well, of nary a hatless head, of the connection between that personal grooming, that concern with looking one’s best, and the dead. Recalling the tastes of his dead brother, Pulika—Yoors’s fellow adventurer—purchased new suits, shirts, shoes, coats and hats in order to give them to the first gorger (non-gipsy) he met in the street, thus honouring the

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<sup>9</sup> See Jan Yoors, *The Gypsies* (Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press, 1987).

memory of the dearly departed. A strange expenditure, indeed. Yoors says that no one ever explained the origin of that custom to him. Nor did they tell him the history of the *mulengi dori*, or “dead man’s ribbon”—colourful pieces of patterned fabric as long as a coffin—which they would tie about their necks like amulets; yet there was something about the comfort and shelter of the clothing, the blanket on the floor and the mattress of bunched rags that Yoors found reassuring, even though it simultaneously brought to mind a clear image of death and, perhaps in consonance, a joyful awareness of being alive. Ultimately, the gipsies’ constant struggle to survive—for Yoors does not idealise the often miserable and harsh conditions of their way of life—is what he finds comforting. It is a tactile memory of all this, triggered by frills, by the rustling sensation of mere cloth, that brings home both the reality of death and of being alive and enjoying that moment.

Yoors also speaks of that unconscious learning in connection with gipsy women. Of course, he does so with plenty of misgivings. The consideration of weaving as a lesser art, a craft associated with women’s work—Yoors never overlooked the collaboration of his wife and his sister-in-law in these labours—and the secondary social status of the gipsies were elements that had to be taken into account in order to practise the art of the tapestry. Nevertheless, that lesser condition offered Yoors the possibility of eluding greater art, of avoiding the commercial and corporate web of contemporary art that somehow excluded him. In that exclusion, in his dedication to craftsmanship, in the feel of the threads and the smell of the dyes, Yoors found a carefree sense of separateness that for him was the source of the *joie de vivre* with which he wanted to face each day.

Francisco Moreno Galván, a one-eyed flamenco writer and painter, liked to give his maimed condition an aesthetic dimension. He had only one good eye, the painter claimed, because he had dedicated and lost the other to the flamencos, to the gipsies. In reality there was nothing wrong with his eye, but that supposed disability was a useful defence against the reproaches of his brother, the art historian and critic José María Moreno Galván, who believed Francisco was losing his talent as a painter because of his passion for flamenco song and dance. Francisco applied the same

handicap, more or less mockingly, to his sister-in-law, the artist Carola Torres, who won the National Visual Arts Prize in 1980 for her work with tapestries; she was the first woman to receive this distinction, but, if we attach any importance to institutional recognition, this honour has done little to promote the understanding or study of her work, conceding her successes with the Tàpies and Miró tapestries but disparaging her status as an artist. Francisco thus equated that lesser condition which José María attributed to flamenco with another “disability”, the female condition and the craft of weaving.

Curra Márquez, a tapestry-maker and loom artist who has worked in Seville since the 1960s, also suffers this type of disregard. Her work with the architect Luis Marín has always been written off as merely ornamental; however, this is patently false, given that her curtains and draperies often serve a constructive purpose, whether they are designed for housing projects or grand theatres. Her tapestries, whether they are lavish stage curtains or modest drapes, humanise the space, transforming and making it visible. It is in that condition of visibility that Curra Márquez devises her ingenuous patchwork creations. The important thing is, of course, the constructive aspect, the weft, not the figures and patterns of the different patches; the plaiting, not the anecdote of small representations.

*Yet this is precisely what Teresa Lanceta has been doing for years, ever since a chance encounter with the world of textiles set her on the difficult road of investigating and reinventing the expressive possibilities of textiles, aside from any decorativist intention. That road is especially difficult when dealing with a medium so long associated with the decorative arts, and when available channels of artistic dissemination are so habituated in painting. “For a long time, at the galleries they told me, ‘Do the same thing with paint and we’ll show your work right now’. But I have always refused to do that. I admire the gestural nature, the rapid rhythm of painting, but I can’t do it. It’s too straightforward for me. I need to shape the idea and make it emerge little by little. Plus, there’s something about tapestry that I find particularly appealing: the fact that if*

you make a mistake, you can't correct it. It's like life. What's done is done, and you just have to accept it."<sup>10</sup>

### *Cripples*

*(It always surprised me, when we were there sitting on the terrace of a bar, that our hearts did not break at the sight of so many cripples, many of them with operable conditions. But no, Jamaa el-Fna, the king of squares, draws you into its spinning wheel, and all you see after a while is an arena of gladiators who magnify life [Teresa Lanceta, "Ciudades vividas", in Luis Claramunt, exh. cat. (Barcelona: MACBA and MNAC, 2012].)*

### *The fallen light is very lovely*

*There were many cripples back then. The dictionary definition of the term "cripple" described most of them fairly accurately: "A person who is partially disabled or unable to use one or more limbs." And I'm not really talking about the handicapped or disabled persons sheltered under the wing of the National Association for the Blind, of charities or churches. No, these were red-light-district cripples, with clearly visible, unwieldy metal braces supporting their legs that made you think how hard it must have been for them to get used to the pain inflicted by those same apparatuses. There were also those with poorly disguised prosthetic hands and arms.*

*The jerky movements of both types certainly gave them a Frankensteinish air—much less pronounced than what I saw later in Morocco, but pretty much in the same fashion. And there were others in*

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<sup>10</sup> María Escribano, "Sobre la exposición 'La alfombra roja'", *El País*, 9 December 1989.

wheelchairs. They stood out, not only because they were more handicapped than crippled, but also because their need for a companion, a kind of travelling guide, added a picaresque nuance.

In that neighbourhood no one bothered to conceal their misfortunes, perhaps because, even though it was a place where natural or inflicted cruelty existed in all its potency, luck was present in equal measure, even when the dies were cast. They engaged in a wide variety of activities that essentially boiled down to making a living by any means possible—a life of precariousness and dedication, sometimes even grazing the hazily-defined boundary of small-time racketeering, doing errands or multiple favours.

Their survivor mentality was another visible indication of extreme want. Thus, although they distrusted and personally despised the police, they also admired them and always showed themselves willing to cooperate, especially with the officers that blended in well in the red-light district. The police represented authority and the powers-that-be: something that simultaneously commanded both fear and respect, the authorities and the powerful.

The cripples were accompanied by the drunks, later far outnumbered by the drug addicts. Both shared the bars, taking daily communion in their efforts to forget. They lived in the realm of possibility and crowded together under its sheltering wing, some in their daily struggle and others in their going wherever the winds took them.

To float was an art form, and that verb upheld the entire neighbourhood. The gipsy drive had a fascinating allure: survival as violence and art. And so this one artfully sold his lottery tickets and that other one had an artful knack for hoodwinking, singing or getting folks to fork over a few quid.

*Among these small-time specialists the odd murderer would suddenly appear, like that newlywed cop who killed his pregnant wife with his standard-issue weapon. But he wasn't crippled; he was young and strong and he got paid every month.*

*Night came before sleep/ the dream.*<sup>11</sup>

Teresa Lanceta's own observations on her work, her structural analysis, are quite clear. María García recorded some of her remarks about the square-triangle dichotomy in the symbolic development of abstraction during the twentieth century.<sup>12</sup> Erwin Panofsky has already warned us that perspective, for example, rather than an innocent tool for representing the world, is actually a powerful ideological weapon for colonising it.<sup>13</sup> Perspective, like courtly love and financial credit, was born in a certain place and era and is bound up with a particular way of understanding the world. Therefore, conceiving the opposition between square and triangle as structural composition forms—*the opposition between the cube-house and the gabled roof*, as María Ruiz puts it—is something more than a mere aesthetic choice, among other reasons because there are no mere aesthetic choices; all decisions, including ornamental ones, have consequences. Ornament and crime.<sup>14</sup>

For instance, let us compare these notes from Teresa Lanceta's writings with the reports filed with the Austrian Ministry of Culture—mentioned at the beginning of this text—on the whereabouts, abandonment and loss of the tapestries exhibited by the same Teresa Lanceta at Haus Wittgenstein.

*One pick, another, one thread, another; starting with the most primary forms, vertical threads crossed by horizontal ones [...]. As she was making it [the striped weave], she*

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<sup>11</sup> Teresa Lanceta, "Tullidos", autumn 2015.

<sup>12</sup> María García Ruíz, *Notas de construcción. Somos las calles* (Madrid: Espacio Nadie, Nunca, Nada, No, 2015).

<sup>13</sup> Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (New York: Zone Books, 1991).

<sup>14</sup> Adolf Loos, *Ornament and Crime: Selected Essays* (Riverside, California: Ariadne, 1998).

*intermingled the white and grey stripes with a few in colour [basically red and yellow], creating small variations in the pattern. She interrupted the stripes and later continued them a bit higher up, and so appeared those diagonal rhythms that emerge so often in my work.*<sup>15</sup> The bureaucrat tells the story of the boy Saú, the spitting image of the children persecuted by Herod, who barely knew German and could hardly speak Romani but clung fiercely to the tapestry that, according to the enclosed description, was secured to the wall by ropes and marked his place in the house at bedtime. It was a gloomy, miserable place, a hole in the partition wall separating the kitchen from the sitting room, a wall on which that cloth meant something so significant that the orphan boy held on to it—the civil servant’s interest was mainly focused on the inexplicably good condition of the cloth—with desperate determination.

*The square creates and delimits the space, while the triangle allows movement and optic activity. The triangle is the simplest polygon, and its uniform multiplication produces bands, rhombuses and hexagons, transformations in which colour also plays a part. Given its properties and visual behaviour, the triangle is associated with the rhombus, as shown in many predominantly geometric traditions, including North African textiles.*<sup>16</sup> On the terrace, which lost definition when the gipsies took over Haus Wittgenstein, the new overhead coverings had been draped with several eye-catching cloths, tapestries that fell left and right from the makeshift roof. These weaves, onto which some of the dogs, and even the house goat, frequently climbed, had withstood the natural deteriorating effect of rain fairly well, and on sunny days one could still pick out a few colours—oranges on blues—or the odd unexpected glint among the frayed threads that moved when the wind played havoc with the rooftops of the building.

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<sup>15</sup> Teresa Lanceta, *Esperando el porvenir* (Madrid: Galería Buades, 1993).

<sup>16</sup> This footnote and the following ones are excerpts from Teresa Lanceta’s PhD dissertation: “Franjas, triángulos y cuadrados: estructuras de repetición en tradiciones textiles y en artistas del siglo xx”, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Facultad de Geografía e Historia, Departamento de Arte Contemporáneo (read on 17 July 1999).

*The unit, which constitutes the module of repetition, is simple and joined directly to the next, following the Western method of seeking the essence of the image and winnowing out accidents.* The outer areas of the house, those visited frequently by the police and bureaucrats who were constantly hassling the community, had barely any tapestries, so the fabrics could not be construed as any kind of signage or sophisticated communication system. The decorative urge was not touted as a banner by the group; those draped weaves had nothing to do with expressing their identity. In fact, the prettiest tapestries, in the gipsies' opinion (the most splendid and best preserved, according to the bureaucrats), were placed in the "delinquent zones", the police term for the areas that escaped their surveillance through the house's large windows.

*The juxtaposition of bands is not a common pattern, for the module can only be multiplied on two of its sides, whereas on the other two there is extension rather than multiplication. The most peculiar characteristic of this pattern is its resistance to hierarchy, even when the bands differ in size and colour.* Yet the arrangement of the tapestries in the different parts of the house had a significance that the bureaucrats noticed and highlighted despite their inability to understand it. There was a meaning. The grey triangles were transferred to the bedrooms, and the red borders were predominant in the kitchens and food storage areas. No one could explain why this was so, but all of the house's occupants understood and knew how to follow that enigmatic rule. The German expert who accompanied them believed he had discovered the meaning of several small white fragments hanging from the ceiling in a zigzag arrangement; he thought he had found markers indicating some kind of hidden exit. But he got lost and ended up in a room at the back of the basement, a corner where no one ever went and where he could clearly hear everything going on in the small theatre that the Bulgarian authorities had built on the sloping terrain where the house stood. That theatre, of course, was where the parties were held; the many parties where the gipsies celebrated everything that entered or left the house, distinguished visitors, barbecues and weddings. But everyone joined those festivities; it never occurred to any of them to hide out in that remote basement corner that apparently boasted such excellent acoustics.

*The quadrangular arrangement presents itself as the most neutral one, whether in grid form or with coloured blocks, and rarely violates its salient characteristics:*

*homogeneity, virtually infinite extension on all sides, and non-hierarchical composition.*

Everything always had an efficient, orderly appearance. The reports described the most lurid details and the deplorable condition of the rugs and tapestries, but the general impression was one of hygienic, cerebral order: this goes here, and that over there. The camp mentality, with its military connotations, had taken over. That was why the tapestries had captured the gipsy community. In the clarity of their arrangement and the forcefulness of their forms, the inhabitants found a tranquillity and a visual comfort that compensated for the prolonged contemplation of the wefts, for the complexity of the lines, for the visible and lazy scattering of zigzagging curves and triangles. The authorised voice of a young man called Musika, who had entered the house months after the occupation—another escapee from Herod's wrath—likened the tapestries to televisions and computers: a bunch of dots and lines, the famous bytes, the entertainment of seeing the world there, in stitches of thread. Now we ran among the tall ears of wheat, punching and kicking each other as we chased a ball of rags; the cigarette butt that still passed from hand to hand, no one wanting to selfishly hog it even while defending each puff to the last breath; the value of the awkward tripping episodes that made you go flying and take a nose-dive into the straw and grain, yelping in pain and then immediately letting out a roar of laughter met by all with raucous applause.

*The triangular arrangement also has the possibility of extending itself infinitely on all sides, of not establishing a hierarchy or prioritising certain parts of the composition.*

*However, in shattering the parallel with the architectural environment, it tends to create a continuous sense of motion. The work itself is so patient and, in a certain sense, monotonous—one pick, another, and another—that the only way to avoid stagnation is by making allowances for intuition and improvisation. And yes, life also became a nightmare. Some tapestries were condemned without just cause simply because they had served as the backdrop for a fight, for the cruel beatings the women sometimes received or for a bloody brawl between two leaders over who got the pig*

head or the strongest liquor. The snaking line that reminded us of the old streets of Kampala became an actual snake and awakened old fears, superstitions and bad omens, condemning the weave to conceal a crack or soak up a water leak. One of the final reports mentioned restored tapestries, which were actually some of these disgraced cloths, which the older women of the house had tried to recover by altering the arrangement of triangles, lines and squares. They cut out the most significant part of the design, flipped it over and presented the weave once again, to be seen by everyone through new eyes. As I have already said, that practice had no symbolic purpose; there were no signs or warnings. It was simply a question of redrawing the design. No matter how hard our ethnographers try to relate these designs to elementary literacy systems, the fact remains that the patterns of craftsmanship had no meaning other than that of impression, a sensation of space, an attention-grabbing capacity: all of this was deemed sufficient reward for the mending work with which the older women occupied their breaks and free time.

In *The Arachnean*,<sup>17</sup> Fernand Deligny constantly quotes from Karl von Frisch's classic *Animal Architecture*,<sup>18</sup> but his motivation does not derive from an elementary fascination or a desire to find a scientific basis for his conjectures. Deligny knows what the predominant forms of architecture are in the human animal and has no intention of distinguishing them from the constructions of other animals. He knows that inside humans there is a conscious animal colonised by language, and that colonisation is what gives rise to the various habitats, habitations and modes of inhabiting. That alternative tension between language and animal is what opens the door to the possibility of understanding other needs, other ways of being in space, and even of being without full acknowledgement of that state as true habitation. The spider's highly precise *modus operandi* illustrates the complexity of the habitational apparatus that Deligny wants to demolish. We know that Deligny works with autistic children, but he does not abuse that specificity. What interests him is the ability to differentiate between a web of seemingly non-standardised and definitely non-hegemonic ways of

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<sup>17</sup> Fernand Deligny, *The Arachnean and Other Texts* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Univocal Publishing, 2015).

<sup>18</sup> Karl von Frisch, *Animal Architecture* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974).

being-in-the-world and the inherent complexity of one who must also survive, eat and stay warm in that cold, harsh world. How is that interaction possible? Deligny does not conceal the fact that the same system with which the spider segregates the slender threads of its web is also the maw it uses to obtain food and the constructive channel that enables it to move through, inhabit and colonise the space. The spider's web is at once a digestive system, a home and a mode of transportation in the world, a trap for self-defence and for hunting others. The complexity of this system must serve to understand a certain world, not to become its lord and master. Thus, nothing is exemplary; there is no model, only threads that vibrate here or there, music rather than signs. This is what *The Arachnean* desperately attempts to achieve: that the vibrations of the woven web and the knowledge it entails should not be seen as signs or vocabulary of any kind, but only as intentions, as the acknowledgement of certain gestures, as nothing effective, as a mere dissolution in a system of affects. At most, as a music of sorts.

The important thing is the network. On that point, the reports of the bureaucrats from the Ministry of Culture are conclusive. If the intention of the thread networks woven by the artist is something other than mere decoration, we cannot say that their dissemination and ruin across the length and breadth of Haus Wittgenstein at the hands of its gipsy inhabitants implies the alteration of that intention—in fact, it probably offers its most convincing expression. Indeed, the tapestry—the tapestry understood in its profound warp and weft—becomes a way of understanding the complexity of languages that appear in the world, and whether with gipsies or North Africans, with videos or with fabrics, with pencils or with hands, overlapping threads always appear, multiple opportunities to make room for different things. The tapestry, that web of overlapping threads which, in reiterating the design, also reiterates its own structure and rationale, allows for a diversity of forms to emerge, provides opportunities for things to occur in different ways; the warp of happenings that keep up alive day after day.

And this web, like the spider web Deligny spoke of, is a highly efficient political tool. The network is a city, yes, a public space, a cluster of rooms and streets. The warp of

the weave allows for things—the everyday flow of things that are repeated and different, the habits conferred by each space—not to repeat themselves in the same manner and form. The network of the tapestry permits differences within continuity. One does not only find rest in the tapestry, for its designs also inspire nightmares. Good and evil are interwoven, inseparably intertwined. The woven web is both comfortable and coarse. So arranged, the warp of Teresa Lanceta's tapestries has that ability, that design of the world and its experience. We are not really interested in the reasons or cultural references they establish, not even in their tremendous capacity of evoking intensely lived life experiences. The tapestry is an apparatus, and a complex one at that. In contrast with other models, such as miscegenation or multiculturalism, the tapestry has its own meaning. In that sense it functions as an anchoring system, a complex government of the world and its things. But the principal matter is that the world happens in a thousand ways, and it is enough to be able to record it in all its complexity, to have a model, a way of truly inhabiting it.

Crime versus ornament. Teresa Lanceta knows that the law is no longer ornament, but its containment, the functionalism that governs us. If Adolf Loos linked crime with ornament, we must realise that what it presented as rationalism is in fact mere decoration, the smoothness of a roof mere modern imposture, minimalism a mere chic trend, simplicity a police uniform.

The weave versus the arabesque. It is no coincidence that Teresa Lanceta explored in Morocco the forms of craftsmanship that withstood Arab colonisation and its imposing calligraphies. Yet that focus on the abstract imagery of the nomads who dwelled in this land before the Arab invasions, before the Alawite kingdoms and sultanates, also hides something that seeks to direct our gaze. Teresa Lanceta's interest in artisans and their lives, in the daily reality of the women weavers she worked with and in that of their daughters, many of them now emigrants, has to do with the act of looking at the cloth, at the structure of the weave: threads beyond threads, expanded warp.

Ragged tears versus melisma. Let us stop for a moment to meditate on Lanceta's work from the 1990s *Mujeres con rajo* [Women with *Rajo*<sup>19</sup>], a series of written portraits of flamenco women—flamenco understood as “gipsy” but in a broader sense, beyond ethnicity, almost as an art, a different qualification of life. One thread shows the strength and character of these women, while the other, the overlapping thread, represents the chauvinistic atavism that covers them with beatings and acts of submission. Another group of threads intersects, like the paths of gipsy basket-makers and restless wanderers of old and those of petty thieves pursued by the police. Another thread shows their voices when they sing. Another one shows the voice that guides them through the daily routine, the one that keeps their houses, families and labours alive. And still another shows the voice of complaint. Threads that come from Romania, from scrap dealers, threads of copper wire, threads that clash with the sedate lights of the Andalusian towns where they settle, threads from a different time and place, threads of social discrimination intersecting with threads of symbolic hyper-representation, romantic threads intersecting with miserable threads... A weave, rich and extreme.

And so I understand why the gipsy carries a rug to bed down on the grass, letting stalks, spikes and nettles mingle with its warp and weft. Nobody wants to lie on the hard ground: that only happens in romantic imaginings or bourgeois picnics. The gipsy prizes the thickness of the weft when he lies down on the earth. He knows there is no difference between the forest floor and the cloth on which he rests; he knows that culture and nature are one and the same. I am not talking about all gipsies. No. I speak of the one who, at the end of the day, lies down and sings, *I have a mat, I have a mat, where I sleep off my drunken haze, where I sleep off my drunken haze.*<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Translator's note: *Rajo* is a Spanish word that literally means “gash” or “tear”, but in flamenco music it refers to a rough, coarse, ragged or “torn” vocal quality that is essential for singing certain types of songs.

<sup>20</sup> Juanito Mojama and Ramón Montoya, “Que calle tan oscura [What a Dark Street]”, 1929 (*soleares* and *bulerías*): “Que calle tan oscura, / Que calle tan oscura / que oscuría de calle / ay, que niña tan bonita / si me la diera su mare. // Ahí viene Pepe con el carbón / carbón de encina lo vendo yo. // Lo que tú has hecho conmigo / ni hecha cuartos, no lo pagas. / Lo que tú has hecho conmigo / ni puesta por los caminos. // Qué miedo me da / Qué miedo me da / de ver a los moros de pelear / que de ver a los moritos de pelear. // Al tiempo / al tiempo / al tiempesito / me contestó una voz / ay, que ay, ay, ay ya / ay que ay! por amor de Dios! // Tengo una estera / yo tengo una estera / aonde yo duermo mi borrachera / aonde yo duermo mi borrachera” [What a dark street, / What a dark street / what a street

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of darkness / oh, what a pretty girl / if only her mother would give her to me. // There comes Pepe with the charcoal / holm oak charcoal is what I sell. // What you've done with me / you can never pay for, not even if you were drawn and quartered. / What you've done with me / not even if you were sent to the streets. // It frightens me so / It frightens me so / to see the Moors fight / oh, to see the little Moors fight. // After a while / a while / a little while / a voice answered me / ay, and ay, ay, ay ya / ay and ay! for the love of God! // I have a mat / I have a mat / where I sleep off my drunken haze / where I sleep off my drunken haze].