

Dispatches

David Escalona/Daniel Lesmes

August 4th

I recognize those crystals, now turning into snow, where you buried your hands into “Things Lost.” I see you have gathered all your materials now; however, when I asked about this, your new work, you merely sent me some images with hardly a word, almost as a riddle. The first two depict Bethanien Hospital long time ago. The third is exactly the one that came to my mind when you invited me for a walk in the snow: it’s of Robert Walser, author of *The Walk*, collapsed on the floor after his final one. As to the others.... They bring you to mind so intensely! – *Crocus corymbosus*, snow saffron flowers, growing where least expected. Looking at these images, I wonder at once what sort of constellations you are coming up with and why you are sending them to me to talk about the spider-hand, the frost shirt or the fascinating clusters of ampoules on a dissection table. I assume the name of that old hospital, which from a certain point in time has sheltered artists, has not escaped you. The reference to the town of Bethany evokes that most radical of cures: the one that brought Lazarus back from the dead. It is as if old Walser had become a snow saffron before your very eyes; I think I will accept your invitation. A walk with you is always a pleasure.

August 6th

I chose to send you some pictures of those things that marked the beginning of my project in Berlin, as I do not work with concepts *strictu sensu* but with images. If I worked with the former, I would just “confine myself to addressing them,” as Joseph Beuys famously stated in one of his interviews. I do not intend to discover and impose new truths, but to create fictions and to suggest participation in them while they last. It was Plato himself who warned: artists are liars precisely because they participate in all that *does not exist*. For me a work of art is rather an artefact with the ability of conveying extremely complex realities to the audience, of shaking each one of our certainties, and of inviting us to contemplation. Artists think by doing, be it painting, sculpting, drawing, putting on a performance.... Very often, however, there is no need

to “do” anything in order to express something, it’s enough just by stopping, by breathing, by making a gesture, like pointing at something far away in the distance. That *doing* generates unforeseen ideas and affective responses – and, vice versa, that unforeseen ideas and affective responses generate *doing* – responses of such complexity that they are impossible to convey with words. Furthermore, due to the logocentrism embedded in our culture, that which cannot be conceptualized is often underestimated and, therefore, relegated to the world of fiction or non-existence (the world of non-being). Ultimately, I do not believe much in words, because when it comes to “beliefs”....

It all started with a stream of purely physical or affective imprints. For days, I strolled around the impressive building of the old Bethanien Hospital. I was struck by the soft crackle of snow under my steps, the cawing of crows flying around. A gentleman (who noticed me) could not understand my enthusiasm for the snow-covered landscape, such a common sight in a Berlin winter. Of course, when something settles into a routine, we suddenly lose interest in it, as if it has become invisible before our very eyes. Snow is not that common for me, though. And there I was, surrounded by it. Maybe the most important thing was feeling the cold, like needles piercing my stiff and blue fingers. Suddenly, I evoked Robert Walser’s body, his corpse sunk in the snow far away and which we failed to recognize. The trail of footsteps he left behind came to my mind, as if he were a wounded animal, before collapsing near the mental institution where he spent his last years. How did he fall? When did he stop breathing? The body of this lonesome writer, who used to take long walks and could interpret the world through the little things that came across his way and that usually go unnoticed, was found in the snow.

Strolling can be an art. It is maybe the most dynamic form of thinking, of being in the world. Without warning, that poet’s stiff and frozen body was found in a sort of no man’s land, like those snow flowers that unpredictably spring up anywhere. I thought of all the people who were ever admitted to Bethanien Hospital, all the patients that died unnamed inside its walls.... Like corpses abandoned to the inclemency of the crows, the wind, the snow.

Quote Rilke:

People die the small death here.... Now there are 559 beds to die in. It's natural mass production. With such a high number as that, a single death does not get much attention; however, that is not what matters. Quantity is what matters. Who today still cares whether or not a death has been well put together? Nobody. Even the rich who, after all, can afford to attend to the details of dying are starting to grow slipshod and apathetic; the desire to have a death all of one's own is becoming less and less frequent. Only a while now and it will become as rare as a life of one's own.¹

August 16th

No one dies pricked by the thorn of a rose anymore, as it is so often said of Rilke. Undoubtedly, he wrote the book you quote with a deep fear in that ultimate depersonalization of death. But what really strikes me is the melancholy with which he clung to the most minute memories, as if the loss of all common experiences, which are also the most subtle, was a requisite to the "big death" as well – deaths like the distinctly aristocratic demise of Malte Laurid Brigge's grandfather.

Perhaps we still drag along Rilke's own fear, even if, as Rilke said, our grandparents never had any familiarity with the things he felt fading away. We tend to believe that there was a time when a house, a jacket or even an apple – objects all mentioned by him – were "endlessly more, endlessly more intimate" ("*unendlich mehr, unendlich vertraulicher*").² In this sense, the management of death, by which Rilke was so unsettled, is also the perfect epitome of the total disappearance of any *intimacy* we might have with the living. Undoubtedly, that is why in his *Duiner Elegien* he said, "the affirmation of life and death is shown as something unique" ("*Lebens- und Todesbejahung erweist sich als Eines*").

However, David, I find the fact of your bringing up Rilke interesting inasmuch as he himself defined the poet's task as an endeavor to translate all that disappears within its own invisible essence, as something like "reviving" it within ourselves. I have always thought, and this may be a completely personal point of view, that Rilke spoke

¹ RILKE, Rainer María, *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, Leipzig, Insel, 1910.

² RILKE, Rainer María, Brief an Witold con Hulewicz, 13.XI.1925, *Briefe aus den Jahren*, t. II (1914 bis 1926), Wiesbaden, Insel, 1950, pp. 478.

of the kind of vibration through which the poetic (by which I mean not just that which is commonly understood by “poetry”) recreates and, to certain extent, rearticulates that intimate relationship with things, with ourselves, and ultimately with the living. I use the word “vibration” because I don’t think the whole process is as simple as just making things visible again. On the contrary, everything indicates that Rilke, in his own dialectics, was talking about redirecting them back to invisibility by other means. “We are,” he said, “the bees of the invisible. We wildly gather the honey of the visible to store it in the great golden hive of the Invisible” (“*Nous butinons éperdument le miel du visible, pour l’accumuler dans la grande ruche d’or de l’Invisible*”).

I confess I have always perceived that element in your work, most notably in installations like the ones you did for your series *Donde mueren los pájaros* (*Where Birds Die*). I am not at all surprised that you have worked extensively with a poet like Chantal Maillard, being as she is so keen on that kind of thought not displayed as concepts, as you very aptly put it. Of course, it isn’t about concepts! As a matter of fact, that very loss of experience described by Rilke, and precisely located by Walter Benjamin in the rise of capitalism, always comes with an oppressive richness of ideas (“*der beklemmende Ideenreichtum*”).³ On the contrary, the vibration I talk about does not have causal foundations that instrumental reasoning can access.

In this regard, there is a passage in *Die Aufzeichnungen* that I cannot help but evoke. Just when Malte remembers how his mother used to show him her collection of lace, kept and preserved in a wooden cylinder. She would unfold the pieces before Malte’s eyes, who would lose himself in the filigree of her bewildering pieces of point d’Alençon, the splendid pattern’s blossoms dousing him in their stupendous pollen. Then came the Valenciennes, with their frost, and he would “thrust himself into the snow-covered fronds of Binche, arriving at places never trodden before.” At that point, cold would surround them and when they reached the finest bobbin lace, his mother would say: “now crystals of ice jump into our eyes,” and it was true, says Rilke, “for it was really hot inside us.”

³ BENJAMIN, Walter, “Erhaltung und Armut,” *Gesammelte Schriften*, II.1 Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1977, p. 214.

That is the way I feel when confronted with your new works. With their snow, their frost, their ice, I feel suddenly transported somewhere else, I can't exactly tell you where. You talk to me of your fascination with that distinctive sound snow makes when crackling under your steps; you talk to me of your wanderings around Bethanien Hospital. Yes, cold also pierces everything you have shown me; however, a Malte before his mother's lace, they remind me of the warmth within us. Maybe that was what you were looking for "under the bed," precisely one of those hospital beds you sometimes show.

August 18th

Being wounded by rose thorns may be very romantic, but nowadays there seems to be no time left for "romanticism." Nor is there time to stop and count the thorns on a rose, which reminds me of Gina Pane's action when, one by one, she drove every thorn from a bouquet of roses into her flesh. A performance, *Sentimental Action*, in which pain happened within a pre-established frame, where pain itself seemed decontextualized. Besides, it is also my belief that nowadays we would feel ashamed of dying from a flower that has for centuries been a recurring example of beauty. Just remember the rose that needed constant care from the *petit prince* and considered itself unique in the universe.

On the other hand, death is indeed present in my work. Yes, Rilke had already foreseen the depersonalization of the act of "dying," more than of death itself. Death is the otherness which, although not representable, forces us to think; the unattainable shadow that negates us, as Deleuze wrote about Blanchot in *The Logic of Sense*. And it is precisely this very "non-representation" that I try to show with the black circles in the drawings of my series *Vendados (Bound)* and in the installation that I have designed here at Künstlerhaus Bethanien. These unsettling holes that seem to pierce the here and now are black mirrors reflecting the environment of the spectator, unable to penetrate it. That is to say, they are like that "depthless surface," an expression used by Deleuze to speak about the very *event* that evades us, as if confirming another dimension which, free from the constraints of chronological time, is closer to an unearthly time related to the Nietzschean concept of becoming. And there is no other event as important as one's own death, so impersonal.

It is true: death has been trivialized and turned into merchandise or show. Rituals have changed. It is unnatural to die in a hospital, bereft of personal belongings, surrounded by strangers who you depend on. The patient is often reduced to diagnosis, to medical history, their body inseparable from a net of observations, measurements, chemical reactions or institutional connections, as experienced by Jean-Luc Nancy after his heart transplant post-op period. Altered by the effects of medication, he felt he had become an intruder within himself, a sci-fi android in which the limits between technology and his own body had been blurred due to the many prostheses on which he depended for survival. That is why he wrote:

I am the disease and the medicine, I am the cancer cells and the transplanted organ, I am the immunosuppressive agents and the palliative care, I am the steel thread hooks that hold my sternum together and I am that injection site permanently sawn under my clavicle...⁴

You are right, Daniel, nowadays we witness an “erosion of intimacy,” as pointed out by Günter Anders. It seems like we no longer have a right to intimacy, usually misunderstood as privacy, as the privatization of objects, spaces and relationships in the late-capitalistic era in which we live, where everything is eventually reduced to merchandise, to purchase-sale relationships, to fake desires. The intimacy referred to by Rilke is closer to a different attitude than the habitual one, a predisposition that, as you very aptly point out, has nothing to do with instrumental or discursive reasoning but rather with intuition, with a more sensitive reasoning, creatively organized. But I believe intimacy perhaps has more to do, in the words of Chantal Maillard, with a “bias in perception, a reality-piercing obliquity,”⁵ with the pleasure or vibration that we experience when contemplating the world and displaying something universal in and of the particular, and not the other way round. That is quintessential of the poet, not of the scientist or the philosopher. Undoubtedly, reason has its own limits and, as pointed out by many authors, it must be made more flexible, more “sensitive” to what happens. And what cannot be tackled with reasoning might be tackled through aesthetics. I am not talking about that selfless (unending) pleasure in which Kant located the contemplation

⁴ NANCY, Jean-Luc, *L'intrus*, Paris, éditions Galilée, 2010, pp. 42–43.

⁵ MAILLARD, Chantal, *La baba del caracol. Cinco apuntes sobre el poema*, Madrid, Vaso Roto Ediciones, 2014, pp. 11–12.

of a piece of art, or the sublime experience that takes place when the subject is overwhelmed, when the free play of imagination and reason is thwarted.

How bizarre that you should mention bees even before seeing my last piece. It is an aseptic bathroom cabinet with mirrors, inside of which I have placed the sculpture of a wild beehive that can be seen from the cabinet's transparent glass door. To me, it is like an organ, a heart, in contrast with the feeling of asepsis and cold. Both honey and wax, as Beuys believed, are warm matter, subject to environmental changes of temperature, subject to the world's becoming. Honey and wax are a sharp contrast to the rigid, geometric, frozen forms of reason. That is why my two fencers look like beekeepers.

You know that, as a child, I spent a long time in hospital. Although I knew that it was forbidden, I used to keep a collection of rocks, bugs, insects and all sorts of little insignificant objects under my bed. By playing I managed to develop differently in an environment as crude and as painful as a hospital. The ludic dimension was, and still is, my medicine. However, when I speak about the ludic dimension I mean the ability of fluttering with the objects, of seeing snow in a piece of lace, of lying down on an operating table and being able to feel the cold of some faraway glacier, when your skin comes in contact with the steel; of being able to hum a tune to the beat of the drip in one's arm.... Illness can amplify the awareness of one's own body and environment. In this way, details and subtleties that used to be overlooked are now perceived, such as the wrinkle in a bedsheet, an insect or the thorns of a rose, for which you even feel compassion. The ill can perceive things that normally go unheard, unseen, unfelt; they are capable of thoughts that lead to strange places ... to states of mind, sometimes chemically-induced by drugs, those legalized poisons that cure, affect and even kill us. Wound by wound, such is the cure, the struggle. Maybe this idle form of reflection is the most valuable. Maybe it is a form of rebellion or resistance against the frenzied pace of our society, in which you must either become a frantic producer and consumer, or else be cast away and forgotten, as usually happens to the infirm and the old.

Virginia Woolf, who suffered from constant health problems throughout her life, wrote an interesting reflection on this matter. According to her, there is no register of the daily tragedies of our bodies: "Big wars fought by our bodies in the solitude of a bedroom, with our minds enslaved by them, against the onslaught of fever or the

coming of melancholy are never tended to.... Seeing it would require the audacity of the lion tamer, a robust philosophy, a reason firmly rooted in the depths of the earth.”⁶

August 20th

There is an image by Woolf for this ignorance of the ailing body that I find very moving. She claims that during bouts of fever “a snow field where even the print of birds’ feet is unknown”⁷ can be perceived in each of us. To get to know this field , “Love must be deposed in favor of a temperature of 104”⁸. Maybe that is the reason why we should change the cultural trope of the rose for the snow crocus, when we refer to one of the images you sent me, to its germinal character. Flowers, David, flowers like those “lilacs out of the dead land” described by T. S. Elliot (to whom, and not by mere chance, Woolf dedicated the essay about sickness that you just mentioned) ... of that land where “memory is confused with desire.”

Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers.⁹

It is only now, as I return to your work – even as I read your descriptions of the pieces that I have not seen yet – that I understand your fascination with the snow around the old Bethanien Hospital. Even the image of Walser’s last stroll comes back to me in a different light. Even words take our side when we discover the Scandinavian root *flana* in the *flâneur* that Walser was: to wander (not necessarily around the city) without a definite purpose or plan; to roam and to drift as well, to dream, even, setting one’s step loose.¹⁰ The very way that Walser defined the stroll makes me think of that sort of

⁶ WOOLF, Virginia, “On Being Ill,” in *The New Criterion*, vol. IV, no. 1, January 1926, p. 33.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁹ ELIOT, T. S., *The Waste Land*, New York, Boni and Liveright, 1922, p. 9.

¹⁰ BESCHERELLE, Louis-Nicolas, *Dictionnaire classique de la langue française*, Paris, Bloud et Barral, 1880.

“augmented sensitivity” that you just mentioned: “details and subtleties that used to be overlooked are now perceived,” you said, “such as the wrinkle in a bedsheet, an insect or the thorns of a rose.”

The world offered itself to Walser in a similar fashion during his walks: “a mosquito, a butterfly, a sparrow....” And thus he explained how the eyes of the wanderer – the eyes of the strolling poet – “must roam and glide everywhere” (“*Uneigennützig und unegoistisch muß er seinen sorgsamem Blick überallhin schweifen und herumstreifen lassen*”), and he must be able to fade into the observation and perception of things, to the point of forgetting about himself.¹¹ Maybe that is the oblivion evoked by his body, lying in the snow-covered landscape, the underside of his strolling around objects, of his vibration as a snow saffron flower.

August 21th

To “forget oneself” is *conditio sine qua non*, to vibrate, or like I usually say, to resonate, to open oneself up and to be a part of the weave that forms the whole. In order to achieve that, one has to lose the limits of things, of those concepts that limit us; one has to be right on the edge of language, mumbling. One has to wander, to drift, to be lost in and within the wandering; to become mosquito, spider or sting, to become rock, wrinkle, snow crocus, prints in the snow that crackles under one’s body, weariness.... To slide on the surface of things is just to vibrate, to be “among the things,” as Deleuze used to say. Ancient Japanese monks knew it when they drew bamboo or wrote haikus. This sliding requires lightness, requires stripping off the weight of one’s ego or one’s self; requires forgetting all kind of preconceived ideas, all the load of repetitions, all of one’s personal history, ultimately, all of one’s habits, as suggested by Maillard.... One has to put a stop to the ticking of the clock, liberate oneself of chronological time, over-fly and over-know; one has to be not right about bird prints in the snow, because it is not about recognizing: as everything is being here and now, nothing is what it is *accustomed* to be. To slide on the surface of things is not a sign of superficiality: inside and outside get con-fused in it, like in a Moebius strip.

¹¹ WALSER, Robert, *Der Spaziergang*, 1917, pp. 50–56.

Did you know, Daniel, that I wanted to create a hospital bed that looked like a snow-covered landscape? Due to technical difficulties, I chose to crystalize some shirts, a bird and some other objects with salt. The shirts I have created for this exhibition point out the dissolution you mentioned as well as at the emptying of the self that makes space for.... Like that shirt I placed on a music stand with its collar covered in a transparent resin that looks like water about to spill over. Meltwater and the warmth that, as you very well sensed, I am always searching for.... Water, like the water on the crow that I crystalized to make it look like a bird frozen by winter; a bird on the brink of resurrection, about to start singing once more a melody carried from one of those faraway unknown countries that we visit during a bout of fever. Watch the drop about to fall from its beak, the dripping of saline solution, the frozen tuning fork hanging from a string. Notice the other shirt collar, covered with a glass bell jar on one of the hospital beds, by a heap of pills. Isn't it maybe a metaphor of the patient, isolated from the outside world, just about to dissolve? It could even mean a person in need of protection from the aggressions of the outside world due to their fragility.... But let's go back to those two foil-wielding fencers in PPE [Personal Protective Equipment]. Nothing, nobody behind their masks. What are they defending themselves from? Who are they attacking? Curiously enough, the Spanish word for fencing, *esgrima*, comes from the Germanic root *skermjan*, meaning "to repair or to protect." The sculptures of these uncanny fencers could be a metaphor of **mourning,*** a state in which one tries to repair something (an emotional or physical wound) after a loss which produces an identity crisis, a state conducive to start looking at the world with a fresh pair of eyes, once we have accepted our own body's frailty, the feebleness of our existence. Those who have discovered that are easy to recognize: they walk at a different pace, maybe more slowly, they often stop and observe seemingly unimportant things. Maybe death is not the most feared thing, but the decrease, the disfigurement of the ego, the fear of being nobody, of turning into a freak, of becoming aware of the otherness that makes us conform.

***Translator's note: in Spanish, the word *duelo* means both *mourning* and *duelling*.**

August 24th

You surely hit the nail on the head when you speak about metaphors, David. Every metaphor invokes an absence, as in your beekeeper fencers: “nothing, nobody behind their masks.” “They might be a metaphor of mourning,” you said. A duel to the death and the mourning that ensues.* “They might be....” Poetry always has had that advantage over history: it might not have taken place and even so, it would not matter: for us it has indeed taken place. That is why seeing how your work invokes the idea of the hospital, I wonder whether it could be “the hospital of metaphors” at least in the strange hospitality it offers us. As if the aforementioned ludic moment – to see snow in a piece of lace, to feel the cold of a distant glacier in steel – were only possible through metaphor, I suddenly notice that metaphor is indeed what allows such displacement.

In one of your dispatches you said that your job is to “create fictions,” even pointing out the disdain with which fiction is often morally demoted to the level of deception. However, you have very good reasons to claim that *artistic experience* is closely linked to fiction. It is insightful that in Latin the term *factor* was used to define the baker in charge of kneading the dough and the sculptor who models the clay. I believe you are well aware of this relationship, and in a most intimate way. At least that is what I believe when I recall the exhibit you proposed a number of years ago: “Bread.” This is something to get your teeth into, David; let’s say that even the metaphor is served: the fact that a metaphor is false – for example, the fact that a tree does not “give” fruit, because when we use those words, we are already speaking metaphorically – this is not what matters. If we use metaphors so often it is not to deceive. On the contrary, we use them to point out a reality that descriptive language is unable to express. Metaphors have an artistic hardcore we all have access to. This hardcore exists from the very moment a metaphor not only “reflects” any given reality, but opens it up the way fiction does: it expresses only through pretence, only in a figurative sense, only by creating a figure. Therein lies its extraordinary fertility, David.

Nevertheless, metaphors also imply a sort of sacrifice on the very solidity of things, and in that sense they all drag some *mourning* along. In their eternally inappropriate game, metaphors open up a space of instability. In their steady transfer of meaning – and above all in the concatenation of metaphors through which art weaves itself and weaves ourselves in it – we are struck by that suspicion you pointed out before: perhaps there is nothing under the mask, perhaps there is no one. Perhaps. Due to their own dynamics, metaphors create a space that only imagination could inhabit, a

space that is paradoxical in itself – i.e., opposite to any formed opinion, opposed to *doxa*-. What kind of relationship is there between a metaphor and the object from where it originates? What are the limits of a metaphor? Probably, all your works are already in that game, as they usually suggest a temporary – “while they last,” as you said at the beginning – *participation* from the spectator. Your works, just like metaphors, come and go in sparkles and glints of light. But just like sparkles always evade us, what is built by metaphors, what metaphors make us feel, is certainly fragile, subtle like that drop on the tip of a beak, “like a drip of saline solution” just about to fall. That is how we stand regarding metaphors: about to fall, about to drip, because the only thing that could still retain us is but an intimate agreement between the things, their delicate articulation. And nevertheless, that is the only way we can move in the extension of the metaphor, in its dispatches. Without them, we could not even act; furthermore, we only act, we only persist in action, to unravel the enigma contained in a metaphor and come up with an answer.

Ultimately, the question is the one you uttered, if but between lines: “What or who am I?” When writing about María Zambrano, Chantal Maillard approaches it from a perspective opened by metaphor. And she says something very true, David. She says we cannot cease to act: “It is not fair to throw down the mask in the middle of the play.” That is the tragedy implied in the phrase: “We cannot cease to address it,” as every response is, in itself, “action.”¹² Nor could I refrain from answering when you sent me those images concerning the old Bethanien Hospital with its sparkles, fired at Walsersaffron. Similarly, I cannot abandon action – the response – when confronted to your work. But even then, I sense there will always be something that escapes me, something to which I will only be able to utter a “silent response.” Right there, beneath the bell jar; right there in the frozen flight of the bird, all your installations, your sculptures, your drawings even, all your metaphors seem to give off a last metaphor, more complex still and yet the simplest of them all. It is the silence that envelopes your work, the silence that emanates from it. Never has the metaphor been as open as at that point. The silence. Simply.

¹² MAILLARD, Chantal, *La creación por la metáfora. Introducción a la razón poética*, Barcelona, Anthropos, 1992, p. 180.

Translator's note: as explained before, in Spanish, the word *duelo* means both *mourning* and *duelling*.

August 26th

I agree, Daniel. My works behave as visual metaphors and with them I try to shatter every certainty, I try to challenge the solidity of things and open a fragile environment of confluences, echoes, glints of light, resonances that point at something that language itself is unable to describe. In that fragility, in that suggestion, in that “as if...” lies the “metaphoric power.” But I must also state that the patient’s ability to metaphorize when they are on the brink of revelation has often been overlooked, and tends to be underestimated. Doctors believe scientific language is the most efficient. As Susan Sontag did, when she asserted that an objective language, purged of metaphors, is the healthiest way of being ill and understanding illness¹³. Yet, is it even possible for us to stop forming metaphors? I don’t think we can. We can, however, substitute one metaphor for another. There are undoubtedly evil, dark metaphors about certain ailments that endure and last throughout history. Nevertheless, saying that an illness is caused as a punishment from God or by a microorganism is not quite the same thing. Even today, there still exists too much tabooing and demonization. Take patients of cancer, AIDS or hepatitis C, for instance; many believe their suffering is the payback for their improper behavior. The problem is not the creation of metaphors per se, but rather the kind of metaphors we create. To ignore or suppress metaphors might leave us stripped of resources. There are certain metaphors that, administered in the correct dosage, can heal and help a patient through the hardest nights in their life, creating something constructive with and from their wounded, unbalanced body because something vital has been drained after counteracting pain and fear. It sounds stoic, I know. The following words by Michel Tournier come to mind and could be of help here:

Only a shriek of pain now ... I am inside a more or less pumped up bubble, I am the bubble, sometimes its flaccid membrane sticks to my body,

¹³ SONTAG, Susan, *Illness as Methaphor. AIDS and Its Metaphors*, Penguin Books Ltd,1977.

meets my skin.... I envisage the birth of a barometric, pluviometric, anemometric, hygrometric body.

A porous body where the wind rose will come to breathe. Not a heap of organic refuse lying on a pallet, but the living, shaking witness of meteors.... My left leg, the amputated, invisible one, has been coming out of the bandages, the bedsheets, hanging over the floor of the room for two hours now. My leg invaded the room and my hand, although not disappeared, was just a snow narcissus bud under the gauze.... My body is a dismembered whole as well, from now on I will be a flag, flying in the wind, and if my right edge is prisoner of the flagpole, the left is free and it vibrates and flutters and shakes its cloth among at the vehemence of meteors.¹⁴

The creation of new metaphors of our illnesses and ailments is undoubtedly vital to settle us. We must not forget either that doctors also create our pathologies with their diagnostics. How to speak about such a physical feeling as pain? Pain can dissolve language and reduce it to a jumble of sounds that reminds us of the beast we essentially are (without being) –, maybe our healthiest side. According to Emily Dickinson, there is a void side of pain that terrifies us. That is why we need to associate it, to compare it to something, to create a metaphor or a narrative that lends it some sense. And so we bleed stories, we cry out for metaphors when pain storms through us and we are devoid of diagnostics explaining what is wrong with our body. It is interesting how ancient images, associations, gestures or beliefs suddenly re-emerge in such moments of crisis, as if we were pierced through by what Aby Warburg calls a transhistorical *pathos*. We cannot bear the silence and void produced by pain. Couldn't this be related to the bell jar covering the shirt collar in my installation? Or the sculptures of Chantal Maillard's hands upon the bed? Daniel, look at the little lead balls that drip from their fingers and roll along the track of a line in a book. Those little balls, that continue rolling on a bedsheet fold until they fall on the floor, are a metaphor of chronic pain, that pain we cannot write about but that is even able to re-write our nervous system. However, the ludic dimension can save us; we can play with the little balls of pain, we can let them slip away along the line of the book, over the sheet fold traversing the bed like a riverbed or a schoolyard slide ... until we lose sight of them completely.

¹⁴ TOURNIER, Michel, *Los meteoros*, Madrid, Alfaguara, 2002, pp. 455, 463, 467–469.

