NORMOPATHIES

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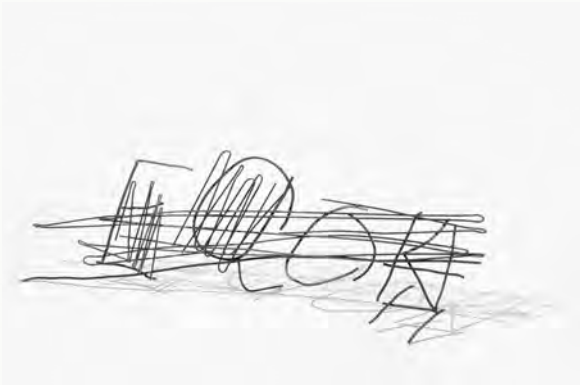

WORKS FROM THE ES BALUARD MUSEU COLLECTION

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COLLECTION

Participant artists: Helena Almeida, Toni Amengual, Mercedes Azpilicueta, Erwin Bechtold, Irma Blank, Miriam Cahn, Helmut Dorner, Vicente Escudero, Will Faber, Mounir Fatmi, Jean Fautrier, Lara Fluxà, Alberto García-Alix, Susy Gómez, Núria Güell, Petrit Halilaj, Peter Halley, Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Richard Long, Ibrahim Mahama, André Masson, Joan Morey, Tim Noble & Sue Webster, Lydia Ourahmane, Javier Peñafiel, Perejaume, Walid Raad / The Atlas Group, Antoni Tàpies, Juan Uslé, Eulàlia Valldosera and Wols.

Petrit Halilaj, *Abetare (Fook)*, 2015. Steel, 60 x 180 x 20 cm.
Es Baluard Museu d'Art Contemporani de Palma, Juan Bonet collection long-term loan

NORMOPATHIES. THE HYPOTHESIS OF A WORLD WITHOUT WRITING

Carles Guerra

Normopathy is, in short, a pathological obsession with conforming to norms. Psychiatrist Francesc Tosquelles (Reus, 1912 – Granges-sur-Lot, 1994) claimed to have identified it at the age of seven. In an interview recorded in 1987, he recalled attending a football match between patients and staff at the Institut Pere Mata, an early-20th-century psychiatric hospital where he would later work after completing his medical degree in the mid-1930s. The young Tosquelles noticed that the referee would blow his whistle for a foul and stop play at the first sign of any approaching contact between members of opposite teams. Years later, the newly qualified Tosquelles discovered that the doctor who had refereed that match had risen to the rank of hospital director. He asked him why he had been so keen to blow his whistle even before there had been any physical contact. The director's reply opened Tosquelles's eyes to how utterly unaware we can be of deeply ingrained norms. The referee's fear of patients' violent behaviour, Tosquelles realised, had led to an unspoken counterphobic law. The director admitted that he had been determined to prevent any contact with patients classified as mad. That was how Tosquelles interpreted the psychiatric hospital's mission: to uphold the strict segregation between two groups as effectively as possible.

This scene on a football pitch outside a psychiatric hospital is one of many ways in which normopathy can be exemplified. The effect is to disregard a part of humanity which, as Tosquelles pointed out, does not even have access to the law in operation. This segregation acts like a shockwave that

sends ripples through many different other areas. When I interviewed British anthropologist Jack Goody (Hammersmith, 1919 – Cambridge, 2015) in 2015, we talked mainly about his book *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society* (1986). He said it stemmed from an interest in exploring how certain societies operated without the technique of writing. The hypothesis of a world without writing led him to suspect that, in the absence of any records of the past, such societies would not partake in history with a capital H. He later developed this idea further in *The Theft of History* (2006). In the same way that we recognise neurodivergent people, we could also talk about a divergent history that has been excluded from hegemonic accounts: a world in the shadow of writing.

There can be no more fruitful place to reveal the effects of multiple normopathies than an art collection, where the very notion of history is embodied in a set of objects. These objects are often installed on the threshold of what we might consider to be art at any given moment. Objects with a contingent status: it is not always clear what they are trying to say. For long periods of time, several of these objects may fall outside the bounds of comprehension. Nonetheless, their resistance to signify does not diminish their value as works of art; indeed, it can sometimes even reinforce it. A collection is ultimately the space where a gathering of objects can be staged and duly refereed or, taking the opposite approach to the doctor in Tosquelles's anecdote, allowed to come into contact. However, the suspicion that the works on display are often either segregated or related through a vision governed by unconscious bias suggests that it is not only psychiatrists who ought to cure their own normopathy. We also find symptoms of normopathies at the heart of a collection, this time related to unwritten laws that determine which works can be placed alongside others, and which not.

In the late 1990s, artist Eulàlia Valldosera (Vilafranca del Penedès, 1963) made a series of surprisingly radical and, above all, therapeutic works. While she was trying to quit smoking, she collected the cigarette butts and ash from her ashtray and scattered them over a canvas stretched out on the ground, before sweeping them into shapes suggestive of an abdomen and navel. More than a performative action, this work process hinted at a form of expiatory behaviour. If the work itself is a task, the kind of task produced by this action was designed to cure an addiction. The virtue of *El melic del món #3. El cul de la terra* [The Navel of the World #3. The Arse of the World] (1990–2001) lays in its situated nature. The site was determined by the artist's body. Valldosera used this action as a means of pointing and guiding the gaze towards her own body, a body destined to become indistinguishable from an even vaster body, such as the earth. This connection paved the way for what has become known as ecofeminism. In this case, the pathology should be seen as an ailment linking different bodies: human and more-than-human.

These connections, however, can only be carried out in a space that temporarily suspends normative separations. Art practice and the institutional role of a museum to oversee the coexistence of objects from different worlds create a place for undoing differences, assimilated in turn as normopathies. Núria Güell (Vidreres, 1981) often identifies herself as an artist who creates political projects for institutions that ought to feel uncomfortable with her interventions, as if her projects were in prefigured critical mode, resistant to institutions' usual attempts to neutralise them. However, Núria Güell understands that if you want to live up to this critical expectation, you have to turn the museum or art centre inside out. As part of her project *La feria de las flores* [The Flower Fair] (2015–2016) for the Museo de Antioquia in Medellín, she organised guided tours of the exhibition to be given by girls aged 12 to 17 who had been victims of sex tourism. These young guides offered visitors insights into several artworks that had been donated to the museum by acclaimed Colombian

artist Fernando Botero. This world-famous figure is now being promoted as a cultural icon by Medellín as the city strives to distance itself from its long history of violence and reinvent itself as a cultural destination. Núria Güell unpicks this strategy to reveal the perverse continuity between cultural policies that use art to rebrand the city and the implicit violence they help perpetuate in the form of sex tourism. In a space where aesthetic disinterest might deactivate all forms of politics, Núria Güell makes room for voices that can express an obscene connection between culture and sexual violence.

However, the most critical and innovative aspect of Núria Güell's work is found not in the most obvious act of condemnation but in the way she reassigns roles to the victims of exploitation within the context of a new urban economy that is characterised, among other things, by its ability to commodify immaterial aspects. These guides can comment on artworks in the museum and act as interpreters in a context where they would normally be represented critically and, at best, compassionately; here, the artist ensures that they receive fair pay for their work. Because this a common trap in such institutions. This is what, among other things, cultural institutions have taught us: there is an enjoyment that is not comparable to an exchange economy, or which escapes any attempt to quantify it. These girls are paid to work as guides while they share their experience of the business of the child exploitation they have suffered. They give a voice to Fernando Botero's paintings, although probably not the voice or body that the artist would ever have envisaged.

One other painting by Swiss artist Miriam Cahn (Basel, 1949) also incorporates the same gaze appealed for by the girls in Núria Güell's video. Miriam Cahn is known for works that distil unease, albeit in often virtuoso paintings. *Schauen 07.03.2018* [To Look 07.03.2018] (2018) is a work that she insists be hung so that the eyes of the painted figure are level with the eyes of visitors. Other versions of *Schauen 07.03.2018* are titled *Le milieu du monde schaut zurück* [The Middle of the World Looks Back] (2017), making clear her intention to show that even in a famous painting such as Courbet's *L'Origine du monde* [The Origin of the World] (1866) there are still some framings that cause disquiet today. Our view of female genitals is now joined by a face that literally returns our gaze. The fact that this kind of feminism, which makes such basic demands, continues to bewilder many viewers shows that there is still a long way to go. Moreover, the fact that the title of her painting, which shows a replica of Courbet's work, incorporates a very recent date demonstrates, as the artist says, that what concerns her is not an abstract idea of origins, but a highly contemporary issue. The body that Miriam Cahn speaks of is a body that suffers, among many other things, the ravages of normopathy.

In our interview with Jack Goody in 2015, he said that the first step to imagining a world without writing was a healthy dose of speculation. Nevertheless, an anthropologist often works on the threshold of cultural systems, a vantage point for carrying out a comparative exercise. Goody said that he had observed societies where schools were yet to introduce forms of literacy proceeding writing. This, he explained, enabled him "to compare populations". The works in a collection are hardly comparable to a "population" but are nonetheless representative of cultural systems, some very short-lived and others so deeply interwoven through art history that they have become commonplace in our ways of thinking. But this is exactly where the tendency towards normopathy becomes most evident. At the same time, this is also the ideal space for testing the effect produced by a series of works which, although integrated in the Es Baluard Museu collection, evoke a wide range of different worlds and origins. Extracting meaning from differences and, as much as possible, freeing ourselves from inherited categories would be a good place to start a critique of normopathy. In an earlier

interview, from 1977, Tosquelles said: “Psychiatrists should be able to free themselves from the prevailing cultural norms,” adding adamantly: “At the end of the day, they need to cure their own normopathy.”

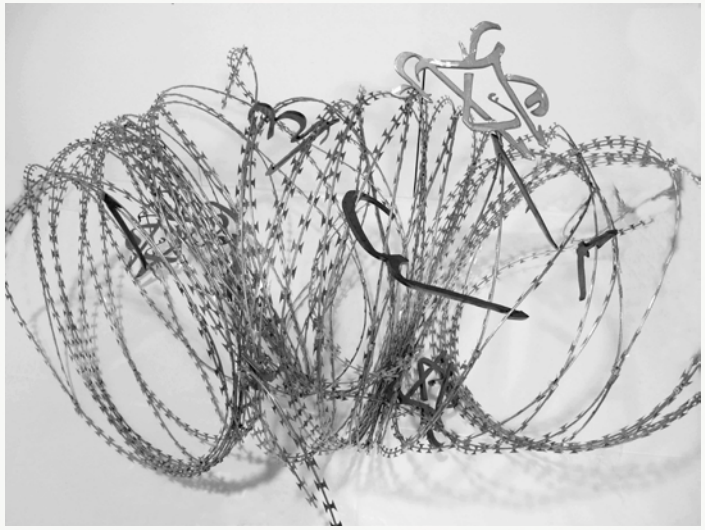
Eulàlia Valldosera, *El melic del món #3. El cul de la terra* [The Navel of the World #3. The Arse of the World], 1990-2001. Installation in progress. Canvas of four meters long, a garden broom, text exhibited on a light box, documentary video and set of six photographs. Dimensions variable. Edition: 1/3. Es Baluard Museu d'Art Contemporani de Palma, donated by Nueva Colección Pilar Citoler

Miriam Cahn, *Schauen 07.03.2018* [To Look 07.03.2018], 2018. Oil on canvas, 160 x 180 cm. Es Baluard Museu d'Art Contemporani de Palma, Juan Bonet collection long-term loan

Nuria Güell, *La feria de las flores* [The Flower Fair], 2015-2016 (video still). Video. Single-channel, colour, sound. Duration: 42' 51" Edition: 3/3. Es Baluard Museu d'Art Contemporani de Palma

Ibrahim Mahama, *AMD. Product Of Ghana*, 2015. Coal sacks on dyed sacs with markings, 217 x 254 cm. Es Baluard Museu d'Art Contemporani de Palma, Juan Bonet collection long-term loan

Wols, *Untitled,* 1940. Watercolour on paper, 25,3 x 32 cm. Es Baluard Museu d'Art Contemporani de Palma, Serra Collection long-term loan



Mounir Fatmi, *All that I lost,* 2019. Barbed wire and metal calligraphies, dimensions variable. Edition: 1/5. Es Baluard Museu d'Art Contemporani de Palma, artist collection long-term loan

Juan Uslé, *Soñé que revelabas IV* [I Dreamed that You Revealed IV], 2000. Vinyl, dispersión and pigments on canvas, 274 x 203 cm. Es Baluard Museu d'Art Contemporani de Palma

Jack Goody, Ghana, *ca.* 1960. Courtesy of Goody Family

JACK GOODY AND THE LOGIC OF WRITING

A conversation with Jack Goody, conducted, recorded and edited by Carles Guerra, Xavier Ribas and Mary Goody.
Cambridge, United Kingdom, 2015.

Jack R. Goody (Hammersmith, 1919 – Cambridge, 2015) is not an intellectual à la mode. He was, however, one of the most influential anthropologists of the second half of the 20th century. His research put particular emphasis on the social and cognitive impact of writing on the formation of society. From an anthropological, historical and linguistic perspective, Goody revealed the dynamics of historical change and the emergence of new forms of power that writing, camouflaged as technology, came to catalyse.

Obsessed as I was about this thinker who I had learnt so much from, in 2015 I travelled to Cambridge to interview him. That day I was accompanied by his daughter, Mary Goody, and by Xavier Ribas, his son-in-law. The interview lasted about an hour. I posed the questions, Xavier Ribas recorded the conversation on video and Mary Goody edited the transcript. Unfortunately, this was his last interview. Jack Goody passed away not long after, at the age of 95.

CG: Can you take us back to your motivation for writing *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society* in 1986?

JRG: Well, I'd always been interested in writing. I think it was because I'd been trained in English Literature and had a great friend, Ian Watt, who wrote about the impact of writing in Europe, and especially on the novel. So when I went to Africa, I was very interested in what they could do without writing, and I was interested in the impact of writing on local cultures that previously didn't have it. I was in the first gene-

ration of people who could see that schools were being set up. I worked in an area where schools had just come in or were coming in, so I was very conscious of what writing could and couldn't do.

So it was really that that led me to write it. And also it seemed to me that most people in Europe had no idea of what was possible without writing. And what writing had done for them. So that's what stimulated me to work on that.

But essentially it was because earlier I had studied English and European Literature before I went into Anthropology, and that made me very conscious of the impact of writing. And it always seemed to me that Europeans assumed writing but didn't understand what they could do with it, such as edit it, and they didn't understand what it was like before writing, because they had already had it for a long time.

CG: Jack, one of the things that most impressed me about this book is that you propose communication exchanges as being more important than production or the new forms of labour.

JRG: Yes.

CG: That's quite revolutionary. I was impressed by the shift from considering the means of production as a sign of progress towards the idea of writing techniques as being more crucial in terms of the evolution of societies.

JRG: Yes, I really thought there wasn't a lot of difference in the means of production between say the Roman world and the medieval world, and that perhaps the most important thing was the evolution of writing, the use of writing, this was more important or as important. I thought that economists and particularly Marxists had managed to concentrate on the changes in the means of production and were setting aside the means of reproduction or writing.

And I do still feel there was perhaps too much emphasis on changes in production, as compared with changes in reproduction, in writing. That seemed to me so important, especially in Africa. Because I met there so many people who were as intelligent as you or me but who couldn't do the same sort of things because they didn't have writing. I thought about how many things we could do because of writing, like organising at a distance a meeting like this. Various things like that, it seemed to me, had been much downgraded by economists, and more attention should have been given to changes in the means of communication.

That's not to say I didn't think the work on the means of production very important, but I did think they had played down, deemphasised, changes in the means of reproducing the word, reproducing text. And the change that a written text brought in seemed to me of great importance. So that's why I shifted direction slighty to that perspective, to think about that.

So I was originally interested when I went to Africa, where I met people who didn't have writing, so they couldn't record and build upon what other people had done in the same way that we were able to do. So much of our own society became built upon what people had done before, that I thought this had been a neglected topic, really.

CG: It seems very revealing that by describing this transition in the ancient ages you were illuminating present contemporary conditions of capitalist economies, because in the late 1970s and early 1980s we were indeed shifting towards a more cognitive capitalism based on communication exchanges.

JRG: Well, yes, but it always impressed me that up until the introduction of compulsory schooling in the 19th century, the majority of people in England—as in other advanced industrial capitalist countries—were unable to communicate by

writing. They were illiterate. It impressed me that literacy followed on changes in the economy and didn't bring about those changes. Literacy was only effected in England—an advanced capitalist country—at the end of the 19th century, in say 1880, 1890.

CG: Jack, I would also like to ask how can you actually get material evidence of the importance of writing in an ancient time, like Ancient Egypt.

JRG: Well, that is difficult, since it goes without saying that evidence from before to the introduction of writing is limited, but you can do it by looking at contemporary societies. I mean, you could go to Africa, as I did, and to nuclear societies where writing was just being introduced, and try to see what the effects were. You see, there I could work with a population that was completely without writing, and I actually saw what happened when writing came in and I could talk to people about this. So that in my mind was similar to what it must have been like in Egypt. But otherwise one would have to think what was logically possible with writing that you couldn't do without writing. And that again was possible to see in Africa, where you had complicated kingdoms that had no writing and also had cultured people.

Even when Egypt had writing, there were many people in Egypt who had no writing. So you can compare the two populations as to what they could do. But a certain amount of my work had to be speculative, because part of my argument was that even when you had a population that was illiterate but also a certain number of people who knew about writing, the effect of writing was important, even among the illiterate population.

And my thought was principally of writers in the medieval period who were like Shakespeare, who could influence the illiterate part of the population with their ideas. But those

ideas came, according to me, from literacy and were not possible without literacy.

CG: Can you talk a bit about your book *The Theft of History,* which was published in 2006?

JRG: I was amazed by how far Europeans had seized the world after the Industrial Revolution and forgotten what happened before that in other parts of the world. By the "theft of history" I meant that Europe had seized hold of the story which began long before, in the Middle East, with Egypt, but even before that. I felt that so much of the story of the universe had been concentrated upon Europe and America and that it neglected what happened in the Middle East and in China. All connected incidentally with writing, since writing undoubtedly moved from the Middle East to China.

In that sense, all written cultures of the world are one, or at least descended from one original—an original that was not in Europe, but in the Middle East and spread from there. Our origins didn't begin with Greece and Rome as many of us were taught to believe in school, but started way before that in Egypt and Mesopotamia, and were influenced by those cultures at an early stage. But in Europe this was cut off, with the thought of Greece as being the foundation of civilisation. But this claim is untrue. The cultures of Egypt and Sumer and so on had contributed so much to the growth of modern society. But we had cut that off; we pretended that the Middle East was something completely different from Europe.

But it wasn't: it was there that things started. For instance, the alphabet on which we place so much emphasis was undoubtedly invented in the Middle East, in Palestine, probably around there. And yet the Europeans had more or less said that writing began with them, began with Greece and Rome.

So I was trying to get away from this very Eurocentric idea that we did everything—we clearly didn't. We clearly

didn't invent writing. Writing was Middle Eastern and spread from there to Europe and to China and India. That was the origin of civilised life, if you like, which we had claimed. And still in a sense, there's a hierarchy; we built up a hierarchy from that.

We certainly added something later on with the Industrial Revolution, but the main revolution in writing occurred in the Middle East without a doubt and that's why in so far as it's tied to writing, that is where History began. Not in Europe. In fact, Greece and Rome, which we look back to as the classical ancient civilisations, were very much offshoots of the Middle East. That's clear with Greece, and clear too with Rome.

So when I said that we had "stolen history" to my mind, History began with writing, since that enables you to look back at a different record.

Normopathies. Works from the Es Baluard Museu Collection

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