

For a Critique of the Neoliberal Event

Picasso in the *Dispositif* of Urban Souvenir Formation

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Rogelio López Cuenca knows the potential of the archive. *Ciudad Picasso* (Picasso City)¹ emerges, in fact, as a collection and archive of texts, images, photographs, newspaper articles, and audiovisual materials on what the artist identifies as a double parallel process: the Picassification of the city of Málaga, and, as a corollary, the attribution to Pablo Picasso of a typically *malagueño* character.

1. *Ciudad Picasso* was the title of a solo exhibition of Rogelio López Cuenca at Galería Juana de Aizpuru, Madrid, in 2010.

Characteristic of *Ciudad Picasso*, at one with a common interest in the use of the archive as a source or structure, is the choice of the latter as a *dispositif* capable of generating counter-histories, useful for deconstructing the official version—that of the powers that be and of the mainstream media, that discursive apparatus that Gilles Deleuze aptly defines as the order-word (*mot d'ordre*).²

The *mot d'ordre* functions as a mechanism of affirmation of the discourse of powers, but at the same time, when it is not a direct emanation of the policing institution, it works while concealing the presence of the order; here the term *order* is to be understood not just as a synonym of command but also in its allusion to the project, and therefore to a space ordered according to a planned process.

The archive is useful because consulting it makes it possible to decipher that order. In this way, López Cuenca declares, that discursive order is revealed that is difficult to trace in the everyday reading of the press organs, and the organic nature of the plan for turning the city of Málaga into Picasso City emerges.

So how does an archive function? By working simultaneously on two axes: the spatial and the temporal. To archive and to consult an archive always means organizing knowledge spatially, arranging it within physical spaces and containers, filing cabinets, ring binders, and storage boxes, or exploring a space (either directly or with the help of an archivist) and creating a meaningful relation between the various articles consulted through their spatial juxtaposition (even if only mentally). And time? An essential element for Picasso City is the impressive press collection on the multiple aspects of the “encounter” between Málaga and the figure of Picasso. And it is through this instrument, López Cuenca reminds us, that time is enabled to free itself from what Walter Benjamin called “the small change of ‘the contemporary,’”³ and to expose what the everyday reading of the newspapers fails to reveal. The potential of the archive, then, develops along the temporal axis as a sign of the noncontemporary, the time of the archive is what breaks with the contemporary, the latter understood as the time of the *mot d'ordre*.

2. Gilles Deleuze, “What is the Creative Act” (1987), in *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews, 1975–1995*, ed. David Lapoujade, trans. Ames Hodges and Mike Taormina (New York: Semiotext(e), 2007), 325.

3. Walter Benjamin, “Experience and Poverty” (1933), trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Selected Writings*, vol. 2: 1927–1934 (Cambridge MA and London: Belknap Press, 1999), 735.

Through the confrontation between discursive and nondiscursive formations, the archive of López Cuenca becomes the instrument for a two-way archaeology of the Málaga/Picasso relation. On the one hand, it throws light on the process of the application of the Picasso brand to the city and its effects in relation to urban, political, and cultural history. At the same time, on the other hand, by reversing his gaze, López Cuenca illuminates the creation of a typically Andalusian Picasso in the service of the capitalist-cultural reconversion of the city. It is a process that focuses on the production of a “different” Picasso, above all when compared with the image that was internationally fashionable until some twenty years ago: that of the cosmopolitan and Republican artist par excellence.

Ciudad Picasso has the merit of being a project that clarifies the terms of the branding of a city based, in the present case, on the figure of one of the icons of twentieth-century art. That branding is pervasive. In *Casi de todo Picasso* (Almost All About Picasso, 2010), López Cuenca presented what he called a visual essay, a collection of Picasso brand objects and artifacts—some of them genuine, others produced by the artist himself—that bears witness to the pervasiveness of the body of images connected with the *malagueño* artist. Fans, cups, dolls, postcards, posters, and other objects recall that trivial realism to which Harald Szeemann dedicated a section of his Documenta 5 in 1972. When cultural industry and tourism meet, the urban semiosphere seems destined for a kitsch characterization. But it is not only a question of the triviality of a particular “visual world”; this process of Picassification (which has affected very humble objects, shops, popular festivals, and a museum) seems to have turned the evolving urban reality into a process of souvenir formation.

In “Zentralpark” (“Central Park”), a text on the poetry of Charles Baudelaire, Benjamin declares that one of the salient features of the French poet’s work is the fact that memory has given way to a process of souvenir formation. What does he mean by “souvenir” here? “The souvenir is a secularized relic.” But whereas the relic proper derives from a cadaver, the origin of the souvenir lies not in a dead body but in “the defunct experience which thinks of itself,

euphemistically, as living.” The “souvenir,” the philosopher from Berlin goes on, “is the schema of the commodity’s transformation into an object for the collector.”⁴

In fact, in his patient and obsessive work of collecting and archiving, López Cuenca acts like the Benjaminian collector as he tries to redeem that defunct experience that characterizes the commodity as souvenir. But it is directly art rather than possession that transfigures those objects, “to disguise the commodity character of things.”⁵ They are “freed from the drudgery of being useful,”⁶ not through their possession but through their entry as readymades into the artistic field. Here, their expository value prevails over their value to the collector. We find ourselves in Adornian territory: the transfiguration and removal of these objects from their commodity status only functions if we accept that, through the affirmation of its own autonomy, the work of art rejects use value to such an extent as to render grotesque any reduction to its exchange value.

The work of López Cuenca has implications not only for the transfiguration of certain objects but also for a determinate process (or *dispositif*) that affects many cities in the world today, and not just Málaga, eager to find a place in the sun in the postindustrial economy. We define this process as one of *urban souvenir formation*. We are interested in analyzing the status of the experience of the city once this process has been set in motion. Urban souvenir formation, as we shall see, is distinguished by an insistence on the centrality of the event and of experience. Let us begin here.

In his *Infanzia e Storia (Infancy and History)*, Giorgio Agamben takes up the testimony of Benjamin, who in the 1930s had pinpointed the catastrophe of World War I as the event that had definitively brought about a crisis in the human capacity to experience anything and to communicate that experience. With the Great War, all that had been experienced before was swept away, erased with such violence that the very idea that such a category could represent an effective compass in the real world was undermined. However, this phenomenon of erosion had begun earlier. Once again

4. Walter Benjamin, “Central Park,” trans. Edmund Jephcott and Howard Eiland, in *Selected Writings*, vol. 4: 1938–1940 (Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap Press, 2003), 182, 183, 190.

5. *Ibid.*, 172.

6. Walter Benjamin, “The Collector,” in *Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap Press, 1999), 209.

Baudelaire is crucial. It is the key role of shock (a characteristic phenomenon of modern metropolitan life) that produces a vacillation of experience that, if it had until then guaranteed certainties and habits, now began to withdraw under the blows of a succession of traumas, clashes, and unforeseen events. So it is not fortuitous that Agamben points to tourism as one of the fields that are most illustrative of this phenomenon: "A visit to a museum or a place of touristic pilgrimage is particularly instructive. Standing face to face with one of the great wonders of the world (let us say the *patio de los leones* in the Alhambra), the overwhelming majority of people have no wish to experience it, preferring instead that the camera should."⁷

7. Giorgio Agamben, *Infanzia e Storia* (Turin: Einaudi, 1978), 6; Eng.: *Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience*, trans. Liz Heron (London: Verso, 2007), 15.

To be sure, Agamben is here referring to two different conceptions of experience: first as (moral) authority (typical of an elderly person); second as a term referring to first-person participation, particularly in something unique and unrepeatable. Still, it is difficult to separate them from one another, as the first at any rate cannot do without the second, in other words, experience understood as moral authority is still based on the fact of having experienced a certain number of situations and events in person.

So what does this crisis of experience indicate? It would be wrong to reduce it to a definitive alienation with the modern city as its privileged *dispositif*. On the contrary, such a crisis is at the same time itself a condition for which the metropolis has often been regarded as a privileged location for the rupture of the status quo, for disobedience to the *mot d'ordre*, for constituent events or their opposite, and for the construction of new possibles. This is true not only for Benjamin but also for Toni Negri and for post-work-erist Marxism, for transfeminist thinkers of the caliber of Paul B. Preciado,⁸ and of course for urban theories and theoreticians such as Saskia Sassen,⁹ Rem Koolhaas, Henri Lefebvre, and David Harvey. This crisis of experience is not resolved exclusively in forms of alienation or mediation (as Agamben seems to suggest with regard to the tourist industry); it certainly breeds in a territory that is contested and charged with ambiguity, an arena of innovation capital obliges of it, under the continuous pressure of radical biopolitical processes. From the crowds of the arcades to

8. Paul B. Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*, trans. Bruce Benderson (New York: The Feminist Press, 2013).

9. Saskia Sassen, "The Global Street: Making the Political," *Globalizations* 8, no. 5 (2011): 573–79.

the predictions of mass behavior based on algorithms, from the prostitution of Baudelairian memory that carves out thousands of labyrinths and shelters “in the heart of the city of mire”¹⁰ to the pharmacopornographic industry, from the analog to the digital flâneur, from the exhibition of the exotic in the universal exhibitions of the nineteenth century to the communities living in diaspora, global urbanization has led to the identification of the city as the most fertile place for meeting, for the processes of the production of the masses as subjects and the production of singularity. The global metropolis assumes the status of the real social fabric of and in contemporaneity. It is the quintessential place of the event. And it is on this concept that I would like to dwell in presenting some considerations on its change of status within the souvenir city, taking the artistic research of López Cuenca as our guide.

Like other cities that have opted for a postindustrial relaunch under the banner of the link between culture and tourism, Picassified Málaga is a *dispositif* that functions through the continuous production of events. It is common today to speak about the event economy, but it is impossible to clearly determine the status of the event within this economy without first suggesting some coordinates (without claiming to be exhaustive) with which the same term in contemporary philosophy and architectural theory was conferred political meaning radically opposed to that of the neoliberal agenda.

No one has defended an explicit interpretation of late twentieth-century space as a *dispositif* emerging at the interface between city, architecture, and event more than Bernard Tschumi in his *Manhattan Transcripts* (1976–81).¹¹ In opposition to the modernist tendency toward a pure space, toward an architecture that links form and function in a linear fashion as directly as the link between a machine and the purpose for which it has been constructed (at least until the explosion of artificial intelligence), Tschumi declares that the real challenge to contemporary architecture is its capacity to face up to the event, or rather the continuous succession of unforeseen events and accidents. It is not fortuitous that this polemic against the projection of an ideal space is articulated through a

10. Charles Baudelaire, “Le crépuscule du soir,” in *Les Fleurs du mal* (Paris: Auguste Poulet-Malassis, 1857); Eng.: “Twilight,” in *The Flowers of Evil*, trans. William Aggeler (Fresno: Academy Library Guild, 1954).

11. Bernard Tschumi, *The Manhattan Transcripts*, 2nd ed. (London: Academy Editions, 1994).

series of traumatic, violent, impulsive, irrational happenings. The experience of the modernist project is constantly put to the test by the recurrence of shock; or rather, if that project is to be a match for the challenge posed by the contemporary space, its (aseptic and rational) language will have to learn to understand, record, and accommodate that which is not rational, in other words, what always exceeds the functional expectations of the project maker. And what is this contemporary space? It is the twentieth-century metropolis that, still in the wake of Benjamin, is seen essentially as the space of trauma, as the matrix that has provoked the crisis of the authority of experience. In fact, Tschumi's *Transcripts*, like Koolhaas's contemporaneous delirium, start from Manhattan: the congested and fantastic matrix of going beyond the ideals of the modernist movement.

What is particularly important for us is that the events transcribed by the Franco-Swiss architect are qualified by their traumatic and discontinuous quality, that is, their breaking with the linear spatio-temporal conception of the architectural project. The residents are not standardized and integrated in preconceived functions, nor is any enthusiastic adhesion of the city users to the ideology of rendering represented. On the contrary, Tschumi's transcripts record "structurally exceptional" situations: a homicide in a park, the adventure of an ex-convict who crosses invisible urban borders and meets a woman who will kill him after making love with him, the trajectory of a body falling from a skyscraper, and, finally, the "improper" use of five internal courtyards by acrobats, skateboarders, soldiers, and ballplayers.

In an essay on the topicality of materialism, Toni Negri achieves in philosophy something similar to what Tschumi attempts in architecture. While the latter inserts the event as an element that fractures the uniform spatiality of the modernist project, the Italian philosopher uses the same concept to indicate the need to insert the possibility of discontinuity in those conceptions of time that do not allow for it. Negri questions those conceptions of time (from the classical era to postmodern thought) that interpret it as illusion or duration, as a concept challenged by the end of history, as a homogeneous plane and an extension devoid of gaps. They

are different perspectives, but they share one aspect: the exclusion of the event. For Negri, the event is what puts an end to the linearity and homogeneity of history, and it is linked with a different concept of temporality, that of *kairòs*. He explains, "In the classical conception of time, *kairòs* is the instant, that is to say, the quality of the time of the instant, the moment of rupture and opening of temporality." *Kairòs* is therefore in every way the moment of the event that, as such, is bound to present itself as an act of creation that intercepts the temporal flow, that breaks the cycle. "*Kairòs* is the modality of time through which being opens itself, attracted by the void at the limit of time, and it thus decides to fill that void."¹²

For the philosophy of difference, particularly for Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, the event is a way of looking at the production of reality seen through lenses that transcend the binary oppositions produced by the philosophy of the subject. It is an antidote to identity categories and to teleological visions of history. In his *Politica dell'evento*, Maurizio Lazzarato declares that embracing the perspective of the event means essentially recognizing in the creation of new possibles the salient aspect of revolutionary politics. We are still in the wake of Deleuze: these possibles assume a first level of existence in the so-called assemblages of enunciation (or begin to exist in signs and language) before being enacted (i.e., raised to a higher level of existence) in the social dimension by becoming an institution, *dispositif*, or any other type of social construct. In this study, Lazzarato draws a clear distinction between the pairs difference-event and subject-praxis, underlining how, in the philosophy of the subject, "the distribution of possibles is already given in the form of binary alternatives (man/woman, capitalists/workers, nature/society, work/leisure, adults/children, intellectual/manual), in such a way that our perceptions, tastes, emotions, desires, roles, functions, are already contained within the limits of updated dichotomous oppositions."¹³ On the contrary, to abandon the perspective of predefined subjects and their praxis entails opening up to the creation of possibles, liberating potentials that otherwise remain trapped within a binary schema.

It is clear that the question of the relation between event and subject cannot be trivialized and reduced to a further binary

12. Antonio Negri, *Kairòs, Alma Venus, Multitudo* (Rome: Manifestolibri, 2000), 25; Eng.: *Kairòs, Alma Venus, Multitudo*, in *Time for Revolution*, trans. Matteo Mandarini (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 156.

13. Maurizio Lazzarato, *La politica dell'evento* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2004), 9.

opposition. Rather, the event is that which generates a process of different subject formation. Contemporary art criticism has already noted how some mass urban events (for example Occupy Wall Street, or the Egyptian revolution of 2011) have produced processes of radical subject formation among thousands of artists and cultural agents.¹⁴ It is there, in the moment of the event that coincides with the opening up to a new being, that they have radically transformed their own convictions on art and its social role, modifying their praxis beyond neoliberal canons and constituting themselves as subjects against the violence of the powers that be and financial governance, breaking structurally with that capitalist realism Mark Fisher has described as the incapacity to even imagine an alternative to capitalism (and therefore, we should add, also an artistic practice different from the neoliberal one).¹⁵

14. See Yates McKee, *Strike Art: Contemporary Art and The Post-Occupy Condition* (London: Verso, 2017), and Anthony Downey, ed., *Uncommon Grounds: New Media And Critical Practices in North Africa and The Middle East* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2014).

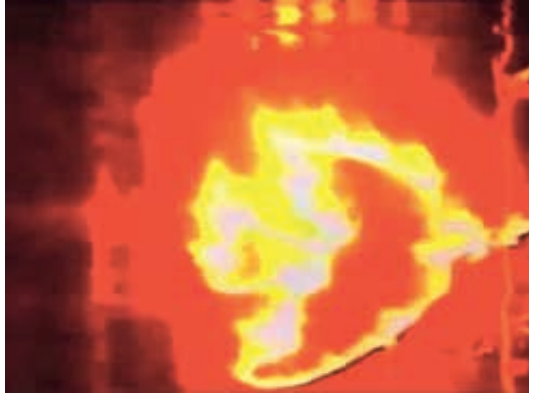
15. Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (London: Zero Books, 2009).

Of course, this is not meant to imply that the current reactionary wave in Egypt, in the United States, and in many other parts of the world does not raise some questions about those forms of insurrection, but it is clear that observing movements like those just mentioned from the perspective of the event means grasping the radicality, the subjective and constitutive power beyond the curtain of backlash and repression.

So far we have tried to clarify a certain genealogy of the concept of event. Let us now attempt to shift our point of view and take on board some aspects from the neoliberal conception proper to the tourist economy and management studies.

What clearly emerges from the literature connected with event studies is that the neoliberal thrust is toward reconciling event with experience, understood as an appeal to (moral) authority.

In the conception of the city of Benjamin's Baudelaire, or in Tschumi's transcripts, the event is synonymous with trauma, with experiential crisis, and with an ideologically homogeneous spatiotemporal matrix. These are the conditions necessary to enable the receptivity to the creation of new possibles, of new constituent forms of subject formation that elude binary logics. The intellectual





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mission proper to event studies, on the contrary, is the mastery of the event. They want to reduce it to an object of management and to reorganize it, tamed, under the banner of experience.

So what happens when an urban souvenir formation replaces an evolving reality? The urban souvenir formation is a *dispositif* that sets in motion a process to make the experience of the metropolis as a space of the unexpected, the event, the unforeseen, more and more difficult. It is a code that from Baudelaire on has characterized the vision of the city as the most advanced point of the capitalist spectacle and, at the same time, the ideal place for its fracture, its interruption, through the appearance of revolutionary biopolitical events or radical forms of life of which the flâneur represents only the archetype. Very many others could be added today: the queer, the squatter, and so on.

The term souvenir formation indicates that it is a process that gradually transforms the urban space into a space geared to tourists and publics in which the hypertrophy of experience (the exhausting and incessant recurrence of cultural, artistic, religious, sports, tourist, and folklore events), its apparent vitality, unrepeatability, and inevitability allude in reality to its end, tamed in the cage of the neoliberal politics of postindustrial regeneration. Tautologically, it could be said that nothing happens in the neoliberal event but the event itself, but that would not be correct. The alarming thing is that the neoliberal event (often linked with culture or art understood as universal values) produces a truth of its own, that is, it modifies reality in the direction desired by the neoliberal plan, which in the case of the city spells expulsion, gentrification, real estate speculation, and so on. If Hans-Georg Gadamer understood the event as the place of an experience of truth beyond the range of methodical knowledge (among other things, indicating the encounter with the work of art as the model of an experience of this kind), that is, different from the one that depends on the application of scientific method,¹⁶ and if the methods of scientific knowledge are improved on the basis of the truth of the event (understood as an epochal fact that produces a historical discontinuity), then the neoliberal event seems to have turned this schema upside down. It is the method (the

16. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (1960), 2nd rev. ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Sheed and Ward, 1989).

management of the event) that defines the event in spatiotemporal terms of an experience of the neoliberal truth that is once again methodical.

This all overturns Tschumi's perspective and contrasts sharply with the vision of the event of Negri and Deleuze. Certainly, one might object that, in the tradition of workerist thought, the event is not something that the revolutionary subjectivities should simply know how to embrace, but they should also "prepare" it, that is, they should identify the tendency, but this tendency is always aimed at breaking the capitalist order and not at confirming it.

In fact, the list of unplanned events that the tourist economy expert Donald Getz lists as examples that his discipline is supposed to ignore is revealing: "The only unplanned events we are not including are those that fall under the headings of accidents, forces of nature, wars and insurrections."¹⁷

17. Donald Getz, *Event Studies: Theory, Research and Policy for Planned Events* (Oxford: Elsevier, 2007), 48.

This body of knowledge is heavily committed to the governance of the neoliberal city, and its main task is to rewrite the status of the event in terms of gentrification, regeneration, and gross parasitism of real estate wealth on art and culture. The work of retrieving the anthropological studies on the radicality of rituals, particularly those profane ones like carnival, is clear in this sense too. There is a recurrent use of the term "liminal," coined by the anthropologist Victor Turner to describe the space-time of carnival,¹⁸ a moment in which communities come together and perform a temporary reversal of the hierarchies and social roles. In event studies (and therefore in the neoliberal event), this suspension becomes completely organic to reinforce the hierarchies, the pre-established roles, the status quo, and a progressive restriction of public space for all the forms of life that are not aligned with the dictates of the tourist industry and real estate.

18. Victor Turner, "Frame, Flow and Reflection: Ritual and Drama as Public Liminality," in *Performance in Postmodern Culture*, ed. Michel Benamou and Charles Caramello (Milwaukee: Center for Twentieth Century Studies, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1977), 33–55.

The politico-aesthetic revolt of López Cuenca against the neoliberal event is manifested in the video *Picasso opening* (2010), in which, through the montage of fragments of television news, recorded by the artist on VHS, two events taking place at a distance of a few hours are confronted with one another. They are events

that are very different from one another but linked by being presented within the same edition of the news. On the one hand, there is the inauguration of the Museo Picasso Málaga, in the presence of members of the royal family, on October 27, 2003. On the other hand, there is the contemporaneous and tragic sighting on the beach of Cádiz of some lifeless bodies washed up by the current, the result of the shipwreck of a boat carrying migrants from Morocco on the way to Spain. There are three survivors, as against thirty-seven certified victims.

López Cuenca explains how the idea of the video came to him from the physical deterioration of the tape that, a few years after recording, displayed a slight loss of synchronization between the images and the sound. As a result, the image of the king at the inauguration was accompanied by a commentary on “small boats with cadavers,” and the footage of a series of lifeless bodies on the beach was accompanied by a voiceover declaring how “they had been received with all honors by the prime minister.” This deterioration of the tape gave the artist the idea of exploring the effect of contrasting associations in more depth. Against the “naturalism” of the representation in the media, against the *mot d’ordre* of the TV news, he had recourse to montage and collage—two techniques very popular with the historical avant-gardes, including the Cubists. López Cuenca: “In fact, the unforeseen accident could not help recalling the experiments of the artistic avant-gardes at the beginning of the twentieth century: collage and montage as an angry rejection of the bland mimesis of naturalism, the denunciation of so-called realism as a falsely simplifying lure that actually camouflages and conceals the complexity, simultaneity, and problematic multiplicity of the real, masking its character as an ideological construct. The damaged tape produced the alienation, the deactivation of the automatism of the gaze that the Cubists were trying to achieve: ‘The artist’s dream become reality.’”¹⁹

To complement the video, López Cuenca has inserted some moments in which the montage of the fragments of TV news is interrupted and replaced by a text against a black background with the words “For copyright reasons the image is not available.”

19. Rogelio López Cuenca, “Mal: de archivo / 1: Inauguración,” *El Observador. Revista de culturas urbanas*, November 29, 2013, <http://www.revistaelobservador.com/opinion/28-flaneur/8207-mal-de-archivo-1-inauguracion>.

This is a recurrent theme in the entire project on the Picassification of Málaga. It appears not only in the video but also in publications and installations and printed on a T-shirt. It refers to some implications of these cases of urban co-branding. In fact, the Picasso brand is protected by a legal entity, the Picasso Administration (a branch of the Picasso Succession), which holds the copyright on the images produced by the Andalusian artist. The paradoxical result, highlighted by López Cuenca, is that, from the copyright point of view, the moment of the maximal diffusion of the image world of Picasso coincides with a series of obliterations of the master's visual repertoire. Take the case of the logo of the Universidad de Málaga, containing the design of a dove "taken" from a Picasso lithograph. Through their society, the heirs first claimed the copyright to the image, and then granted the university its use free of charge but bound by a limited number of conditions. The terms of the agreement were subsequently renegotiated in 2016, but that makes little difference. López Cuenca underlines how Picasso has been not only imposed but also erased in this process of affirming urban and nonmaterial enclosures.

It is encouraging that there is no lack of positions in Málaga that criticize and resist this process of urban souvenir formation. In 2017, Casa Invisible, a social and cultural center "run by the citizens," and the Museo Reina Sofía organized a joint event called "Picasso en la institución monstruo" (Picasso in the Monster Institution), a program centered on the effects of the entanglement of art and urban regeneration, obviously with its main focus on Málaga. This program envisaged a meeting lasting several days that led to a workshop called "En la ciudad genial" (In the Brilliant City) curated by Elo Vega and López Cuenca himself.²⁰

In an article included in the publication of the results of that meeting, López Cuenca throws light on another relevant aspect of this type of process of urban transformation: "The model is, obviously, that of mass tourism, which is nothing but a variant applied to a specific segment of consumption. It is consumption, not production, that is the backbone and nucleus of contemporary capitalism."²¹

20. For the results of this workshop, see <http://malaga2026.net/en-la-ciudad-genial/>.

21. Rogelio López Cuenca, "El elefante blanco y la marabunta," *El Observador. Revista de culturas urbanas*, March 24, 2015, <http://www.revistaelobservador.com/opinion/28-flaneur/9907-el-elefante-blanco-y-la-marabunta-un-texto-del-artista-rogelio-lopez-cuenca-sobre-la-inflacion-museistica-de-malaga>; see also <http://malaga2026.net/el-elefante-blanco-y-la-marabunta/>.

True, but besides declining production and the stimulation of the desire to consume, what characterizes the processes of urban souvenir formation is primarily the revenue deriving from land and real estate. It is the weapon of mass destruction of entire portions of the metropolitan fabric. When most of the value produced by an urban economy derives from revenue, we are faced with a genuine metastasis, a phenomenon that is not confined to gentrification but that produces real depopulation; in Venice, for example, an exodus is taking place. Urban revenue corresponds to a rationality: the complete and definitive replacement of the resident by the tourist. The great power of revenue lies in its across-the-board nature: it benefits big multinational real estate companies and small proprietors, tourist rental agencies, and whoever decides to put the apartment inherited from their grandparents on Airbnb. How is one to respond? Which residents can breathe life into an urban chaos if the city is increasingly depopulated? If the small *rentiers* turn a blind eye to the social desertification? If the bass drum of institutional politics, of the world of entrepreneurs and academics, beats the rhythm of urban souvenir formation? If too many artists, museums, and agents are dying to give in to the flattery to take part in the major postindustrial and cultural shift laced with a neoliberal sauce? These are only some of the questions raised by projects like *Ciudad Picasso*, *Casi de todo Picasso*, and *Picasso opening*.

Rogelio López Cuenca engages in a kind of artistic practice that asserts itself as an effective institutional critique of the urban space. That is no mean feat at a time when neoliberalism is enrolling the cultural industries, including the visual arts. Certainly, to criticize the cultural industries always means also criticizing their capacity to reabsorb and detonate criticism. The problem can only be resolved on the basis of a political activation of aesthetics, which, without abandoning the institutional field, cannot be reduced entirely to that, but which, on the contrary, constructs its own social *modus operandi* outside the confines of the so-called art system. The work of López Cuenca is interesting in so far as it gives us back a practice that does not renounce its own critical character and, at the same time, is not paralyzed by the paranoia of ensnarement. This combination is possible

because it is a question of an oeuvre that unites the desire for a convinced grip on reality with the intelligent mastery of the lessons of the avant-gardes and a certain updating of the theses of the Frankfurt School. The Andalusian artist holds together the political engagement with the world and the world of the work as the bearer of its own specific politics. It is from this combination that, at bottom, the potential may spring for an insurrectional event in the face of the dominant aesthetics—one of those that neoliberal knowledge has not yet managed to bend to the dictatorship of method.