

PROJECTS

Reactivation of Memory: The Pleiades Reactivación de la memoria: Las Pléyades

Elena Bajo

Received: December 2016

Approved: January 2017

Image references

Elena Bajo, *The Pleiades*, 2016. Performance Program TAKE UP YOUR SPACE, curated by Julia Schleis and Marion Eisele.

Dancers: Megan Ugur, Laura Burgener, Kai10 Arthena Foundation, Dusseldorf, Germany. All images are courtesy of Kai 10 Arthena Foundation; D+T Project Gallery, Brussels; Garcia Galeria, Madrid; Annex 14, Zurich and the artist.

Biography

Elena Bajo

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Elena Bajo obtained a degree in Science from the Complutense University in Madrid, (Spain) she received an MA in Architecture from ESARQ, School of Architecture at International University of Catalunya, Barcelona (Spain) in 2002 and a MA in Fine Arts from Central Saint Martins School of Art, University of Arts, London (UK) in 2005. She has taught and lectured at Goldsmith's College, London; Rhode Island School of Design, RISD, Providence; and Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield among other institutions, and was a co-founder of the temporary art project EXHIBITION, NY (2009). She is co-initiator of the Los Angeles, CA collective D'CLUB (Divestment Club) engaged in fossil fuel divestment activities, and climate action. As artist, her practice explores the intersection of anarchist thought, social ecology, and metaphysics. She has had recent solo exhibitions at García Galería, Madrid; D+T Project Gallery, Brussels; Kunsthalle Sao Paulo, Brazil; and group shows: 44th Salon Nacional de Artistas, Pereira, Colombia; and Kai 10 Arthena Foundation, Dusseldorf; 3rd Mardin Biennial, Turkey and "Trust" at Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Copenhagen, Denmark. She is a 2016-2017 recipient of the Botin Foundation Visual Arts Grant, for *Urania's Mirror*, an interdisciplinary project that investigates environmental and social impact that neoliberal economies have on the land and communities, in Latin America. Her artist's publication *Isle of Innocence (After Fordlandia)* will soon be released, published by KSP Kunsthalle Sao Paulo, Brazil. Elena Bajo lives currently in Los Angeles and Berlin.

Suggested citation

Bajo, E. (2017). Reactivation of Memory: The Pleiades. *Sin Objeto*, 00, 138-150
Doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.18239/sinobj_2017.00.10



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The PERFORMANCE is generated by a cut up TEXT-SCORE-SCRIPT created by the artist from digital and analogue sources and interpreted by invited PERFORMERS. A video is projected onto the ceiling. The audience is invited to participate by lying down on a bench and watching the projection, playing this way a double role as experiencer and performer. Simultaneously the dancers perform their score. This process will both preserve and generate future PERFORMANCES. Before the Performance: The artist creates 3D sketches, imagined situations in an imagined space. During the Performance: Numerous videos and photos were taken. After the Performance: An aural archive was opened to record voices of the audience's experience. The preservation and collection of the PERFORMANCE is best attained by facilitating the reactivation of its mediated aural, visual, and written MEMORIES, by endlessly PERFORMING them so they are inscribed in life and aligned with history and transmitted by means of space and the body taking this way a political dimension.









Fordlandia was originally established by American industrialist Henry Ford in the Amazon Rainforest of Brazil in 1928 as a prefabricated industrial town intended to be inhabited by ten thousand people to secure a source of cultivated rubber for the automobile manufacturing operations of the Ford Motor Company in the United States. We do exist. I want to say to the world that we are alive and we want to be respected as a people. We Indians are like plants. How can we live without our soil, without our land? You have schools, we don't, but we know how to look after the forest. Why is it taking so long to believe that if we hurt nature, we hurt ourselves? We are not watching the world from without. We are not separate from it. I am a shaman of the rainforest and I work with the forces of nature, not with the forces of money or weapons. The shaman's role is really important: they cure sick people and study to know the world. This here is my life, my soul. If you take the land away from me, you take my life. We didn't know the white people were going to take our land. We didn't know anything about deforestation. We didn't know about the laws of the white men. In the old days, we were free. Now we are no longer. So our young people think there is nothing left. They sit down and think, they lose themselves, and then commit suicide. Capitalism steals our past, steals our present, steals our future. Capitalism steals our memories

Indigenous tribes in Brazil's Amazon rainforest, are facing "annihilation" from illegal loggers, ranchers and miners who want their land. Powerful business interests will accelerate the displacement of indigenous groups to access resources on the land they have called home for centuries. The indigenous peoples want to protect the land, but they don't have the firepower to take on the illegal loggers or gunmen hired by ranchers. For indigenous tribes, annihilation means the destruction of their land and livelihoods... the genocide of indigenous people is an ongoing situation. In the southern Brazilian state of Mato Grosso do Sul, indigenous Guarani leaders are being targeted by private militias hired by cattle ranchers who want their land. Brazil's constitution recognizes indigenous land rights, but the government is not adequately protecting them due to a lack of political will and resources. I worry for my children, for all our children and the future generations. Despite our fight to keep the earth in balance, to protect our territory and our tradition, the Amazon is in danger. The world should know that indigenous people are being left to their own fate here in Brazil. Like other Indian rights activists in the region, she has received death threats for her work defending native communities from the loggers. My grandfather said long ago that the un-controlled action of man has unbalanced

nature. Fish are dying because the rivers are drying up, and this has harmed forests too. The cycle of rainfall is not the same, which affects the plants and animals. This saddens me because my grandfather told me before he died that he was part of the land, part of the river, part of the forest. Then I see that nature is crying and it is as if my grandfather is crying... For me, caring for nature is caring of my ancestors. Corporations are interested in environmental impacts only to the extent that they affect profits, either current or future. They may take what appears to be altruistic positions to improve their public image, but the assumption underlying those actions is that they will increase future profits. If there is a future on Earth it is by preserving the wisdom and knowledge of the indigenous and their land, by preserving the South from the North. Let us re-enact the story but consider anthropological collaborations with cultural industries beneficial to indigenous futures, because they fill in the deplorable void of bureaucratic indifference within a nation-state that prioritizes profit over the wellbeing of its disenfranchised subjects. There is at least a risk that there will be no more human history unless humanity undertakes a radical reconsideration of itself.



In astronomy, the Pleiades (/ˈplɑːədiːz/ or /ˈpliːədiːz/), or Seven Sisters (Messier 45 or M45), is an open star cluster containing middle-aged hot B-type stars located in the constellation of Taurus. It is among the nearest star clusters to Earth and is the cluster most obvious to the naked eye in the night sky. The celestial entity has several meanings in different cultures and traditions.

The Pleiades played an important role for the Indians in establishing the seasons and the right time to sow. When they disappear behind the western horizon, the rainy season starts, and when they reappear above the eastern horizon, they indicate the dry season.

Ntôni Kisêdje, leader of the Kisêdje people in the Xingu river basin in Mato Grosso, Brazil, is a traditional healer and a highly skilled forest farmer, and like most of his peers across the Amazon he pays very careful attention to what the myriad plants and animals of forest are doing at different times of the year and to the weather. "Before, when the little group of stars [the Pleiades] came out at sunset, and the muricí (Byrsonima crassifolia) flowered, it was the time to make gardens". "People would clear their gardens, then the rains would come. We can see that this has changed."

What Ntôni is seeing is dramatic. And he's not alone. There are 15 other indigenous groups who live in the vast Xingu National Park and they too, like Indians throughout the Amazon, time their yearly farming cycle to the appearance of the Pleiades at sunset. They take this as a reliable signal of the end of the dry season and the beginning of the rains needed for crops to grow. This is part of their oral tradition, handed down over hundreds of generations. If the rise of the Pleiades has indicated the start of the rains for thousands of years, and now is no longer a reliable signal, this is itself probably an alarming sign of a drastic situation on Earth (of climate change.)

This work is dedicated to Berta Cáceres, environmental activist recently assassinated in her home in Honduras. She represents all the activists in the world who are fighting to preserve our future in the hope to keep alive the spirit, the wisdom and energy of mother earth. Her last words somehow will resonate in all of us and in generations to come:

"...I believe it (water) signifies life. I would go into the river and I would feel what the river was telling me. I knew it was going to be difficult but I also knew we were going to triumph because the river told me so." Berta Cáceres



**Audio Recording after the performance.
Contribution by Claudia Pages Rabal**

http://www.elenabajo.com/elenabajo_thepleiades_claudiapages.mp3

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