

Transvestite Museum of Peru: Processes of Sexed Art, the Political Body, and the Transvestite Nation

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Introduction

Giuseppe Campuzano wants to relate history all over again. He wants to unfold the bitchy version, the one with mascara running down its face. He wants to tell us all the stories that were taken from us. More than fifteen years ago, while he was dressing up in sequined costumes, feathered headdresses, and high heels, going from queer to queer, wig to wig, salon to salon, Giuseppe began to wonder about the lost ancestors of his joyful transvestite body. This question was also a performance, and a portable revolution about to explode. Out of his silver bag, Giuseppe took a series of writings, images, and objects that he had been accumulating since his childhood: this was the album of becoming-transvestite. This collection of recycled fictions—culled from the sewers of the heterosexual gaze's regime of representation—was the beginning of an unstoppable vampire journey constituted by activism, theoretical writing, sexual practices, and cultural production. It was a vital journey on the road to subversion, with no predetermined plan or return ticket, and it would lead him to gather a collection of queer images and create the incredible archive, warehouse, and arsenal of disobedient bodies that he calls *Museo Travesti de Peru*—the Transvestite Museum of Peru (TMP).

Before founding TMP in 2003–04, Giuseppe had, since the late 1980s, already been intensely exploring the political possibilities of his transgender body, defying sexual normativity at parties, discos, street fairs, protests, and art galleries. The project stems from a reaction to the lack of recognizable representations in official Peruvian history, with its abysmal gaps in race, gender, and class.

The space to imagine new and unique forms of intervention was also a consequence of the critical distance he took at the end of the nineties in the face of the mass media promotion of the image of a domesticated transvestite during the times of the dictatorship, as well as the journey he made to visit his father's town in the Andes, where he lost himself to the collective peasant dances and celebrations. His commitment to confronting the persecution of his own outlawed transgender community, and his obsession with the development of vernacular codes and historical characters, crystallized rapidly into a series of questions about the politics of the representation of his/their/our weird body/bodies.

It was precisely his personal questioning of the role of the transvestite in the media and in official history that brought Giuseppe to initiate this visual, historical, and philosophical archeology of his origins. "I see transvestism as a ritual, like a priest performing a liturgy or a shaman of the native cultures."¹ Understood as an analogy for the mask—the false, the copy, the camouflage—transvestism started to be a useful analytical concept capable of visibilizing and philosophizing the processes of colonization, resistance, hybridization, and *mestizaje*. It was transvestism that was capable of understanding the link between "the androgynous rituals and the transvestite dancers as cultural mediators; the hair from sacred indigenous and colonial offerings and the livelihoods of the modern transvestite hairdresser; the feathers of the Inka Manco Capac of the man-woman caste and those of the colonial androgynous archangel, or the figure of the contemporary transvestite showgirl."² Yet, transvestism is also understood as a series of daily rituals, similar to the relation between a body with HIV and the apparatus of medical technologies. Ingesting this cocktail—apart from being a vital necessity—is also a way of occupying the political history of medication: to ingest pills is seen by Giuseppe as an aesthetic experience as well as a ritualistic act where the body takes control of its own therapy with the objective of modifying the destination of the illness.³

Exploring the artistic and political legacy of the philosopher, drag queen, and activist Giuseppe Campuzano means entering into a debate about the politics of representation and memory of the transvestite body. His performances, interventions, and writings fracture the space that privileges heterosexual subjectivity and redistributes the power it has always wielded to construct hegemonic histories. His work also disturbs the Western modern-colonial perspective of sexuality and the epistemologies of the north: he displaces the discussion about the relations between the state and the body's disciplining during the European modernity of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by shifting the focus towards the historical period of colonization, racialization, and primitive accumulation of the sixteenth century. He introduces into the debate a nascent and underlying legal framework of colonial governing officials who were already, by 1566, trying to manage

1. Tatiana Fuentes, "Entrevista a Giuseppe Campuzano," in *Archivo Virtual de Artes* (Escénicas, 2008), <https://artesescenicas.uclm.es/index.php?sec=texto&id=134>, accessed October 28, 2015.
2. "Giuseppe Campuzano y el Museo Travesti. Entrevista con Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes," in Hemispheric Institute E-misférica 6.2 Cultura + Derechos + Instituciones (2009).
3. This is what Giuseppe Campuzano proposed in a text that accompanies his photographic essay *Dos veces al día* (*Twice a Day*, 2005), which won second place in Imágenes of Life (Images of Life), a photo competition related to the reality of people living with HIV/AIDS.

and organize gender as a binary system that would exclude and prohibit transvestism in America. Standing before the figure of the white, Western transvestite that Anglo-Saxon Queer Theory has reclaimed, are the traces and features of the *cuir* from the South⁴ whose impurities TMP excavates for all to see: the androgynous, the divine, its relationship with ancestral dances and rituals associated with harvest, or the proliferation of apocryphal saints and Andean traditions. Throughout his work, Campuzano places the body *in transit* at the center of his enunciations—a false and prosthetic body “whose nature is nothing but uncertainty.”⁵ There is no longer a recognizable subject, only processes of mutation and de-identification where bodies become others. There is nothing more certain than these fakes, frauds, and displacements—a fabulous reality emerging from artifice.

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4. The terms *cuir/kuir* are a sign of the commitment to a *mestiza* perspective with regards to the sexual-dissident struggles: *transfronterizo* (transborder) and promiscuous positionings invoked from the South to confront the epistemologies of the North, its modern/colonial systems of gender and sexuality, and the hegemony of the white Western subject.
 5. Giuseppe Campuzano, “Un Museo Travesti. Concepto, Contexto y Proceso”(2008), in *Saturday Night Thriller y otros escritos, 1998–2013*, ed. Miguel A. López (Lima: Estruendomudo, 2013), 66–73.

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This article consists of a series of reflections and stories about the project Transvestite Museum of Peru (2003 and ongoing), based on some of the questions raised during its processes. Why opt for an identity among many to name this project? What is the need of the substrate “museum” when it implies contexts of plundering, exoticism, colonialism, and elitism? How can a political project stem from sexuality? To what end a politicized sexuality? Why a Peruvian transvestite museum?

The modern museum

The physical and ideological construction of the modern museum originates from two simultaneous mechanisms: the exoticization of everything non-Western within European collections, which has as its origin the “cabinets of curiosities” of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, where the documents from “other” cultures were presented as rare. Also, this same colonization of knowledge projected its guidelines for selection, cataloguing and distribution of that worthy of being cognizable and recognizable, “abroad” (Africa, Asia, America).

But at this point, perhaps we are asking ourselves what is the direct relationship between the museum and sexuality, beyond the approaches of the Transvestite Museum of Peru. Certainly a lot, if we consider museums as historical administrators of knowledge and the impact of cataloguing on sexuality and how we relate to it.

However, the ways modern museums collect and present knowledge are being challenged since the early twentieth century by various individuals and communities with their revolutionary ways of remembering, approaches echoed in movements like feminism and decoloniality. These displacements of memory have enabled artists, activists, and intellectuals to raise a fundamental question: from what circumstance is a truth stated? A question that not only highlights the presumptions within a worldview, but also proceeds to its dismantling as an opportunity for the emergence of a new story from a different perspective.

A transvestite at the museum

The steady dismantling of the museum is similar to transvestism as the quotidian dismantling of gender mandates and hegemonic sexuality perceived as natural—keep in mind that in some parts of Latin America the term “transvestite” has been repurposed by its own addressees, passing from daily insult and noun defined by the Academy of the Spanish Language as a “person who, by natural inclination or as part of a show, wears clothes of the opposite sex,” to political subject. Such ideological or everyday decentering involves a review of the order we contest, and even of the very concept of eccentricity from where we assert ourselves. Thus,

transvestite sexualization and marginality are offered not as insults but as potentiality, by proposing a number of new associations. History in reverse. A memory backwards.

Cross-dressed as museum to cross-dress the museum, entering it not to belong by disappearing but to transform it from within, like a Trojan horse, piercing many backdoors towards its revolution. Thus, its tactics are reproduced to collect past and present transvestisms; this double transvestism consists in a process of restoring transvestite tactics themselves.

- The crowd of cross-dressed dancers in traditional Peruvian celebrations as a double transformation, from indigenous men to white women; like wisely satirical old ladies; or as devils that complete the facets of the virgins for whom they dance. All simultaneous acts of opposition and complementation.
- The *tapada*¹ with her attire of Muslim origin, which, in the context of a miscegenated society, derived into a social space where women, skin colors, and non-normative men undermined the Republican and Colonial patriarchal society for over three centuries.
- The indigenous ritual androgyny as a simile of social uncertainty in the face of adverse weather or a strange ethnic group, but also as a link with the unknown and, therefore, conducive of culture while making explicit its process.

The history of transvestism is also a history of fashion where appearances convey a criticism of the established order, where sexopolitics must disfigure the clean breaks between private and public, and where gender constitutes a remark about other social dimensions, such as ethnicity or class. A transvestite museum as a space of empowerment and memory of transvestite people, but also a letting go beyond the need for a differential and safe space, towards a necessary deconstruction of bodies. A transvestite in the museum, not as a mark of identity, but as visibility of the constant metamorphosis of bodies and knowledge; as living culture.

“Peruvianness” as transvestism

Just like we must begin from gender boundaries to erase them, we will methodologically begin with Peru as territory, as well as the documents deposited within its borders, moving towards Peru as meaning, where the analysis of these documents will provide the shores that make up its memory while erasing its borders and disrupting its geographies. Unprecedented geopolitics for the body and the nation: another Peru where the transvestite shifts from marginal subject to hinge of the fractured nation.

The friction between three stereotypes—the marginal transvestite, the colonizing museum, and nationalist Peru—is the intentional breaking point. A museum that begins from self-reference: citizen, sexopolitan, transvestite. A project from the body as a nation.

A transvestite museum: from exotic sex to political tool

The Transvestite Museum of Peru is a sexual archive. However, the documents comprising it are merely the means to explore the strategies of a transvestite body at once historical and current. Its dismantling, from exotic sex to political tool, goes through a process of gathering and cross-referencing this archive, towards its subsequent communication that will implement the mutant strategies of this memory, always in process. I will recount some of these assemblages.

Pageant. The other site (Project for a Transvestite Museum)

Site Museum of the Battle of Lima, 2004

In 2004, and after several months of research, there was still the question of how to connect a handful of newspaper clippings on the murders of transvestites in Peru during the 1980s and 1990s with indigenous pottery of the Moche culture, where an androgynous character leads a ritual in which the complementary gender implies the link between native and foreign, between the concrete and the supernatural.

The dire consequences of a body-strategy misread as body-essence are evident. But the horror of these murders has decreased the equally important recognition of the historical persistence of these non-essentialist bodies. Therefore, this first exhibition insisted in disrupting the normative reference system, moving the transvestite body from the margins to the center, from denial to its affirmation in national memory.

This exhibition, housed in a site museum, used this opportunity to compare itself with a stereotypical museum focused on one of the most politically manipulated chapters in Peruvian history: the war with Chile. Thus, those images of Peruvian men-heroes, women-victims, and Chilean men-villains, surrounded by a profusion of nationalist and military symbols, served as framework for the falsification of those stereotypes proposed by an adjacent museum of transvestite heroines fighting for their citizenship in a contest, not of war, but of beauty and alterity. This first display was also related to self-reference, as signaled by the introductory text:

Just over a year ago I took a trip to my father's home town, Muquiyauyo; while at the main square, immersed in this therapeutic music, with the fireworks about to be fired, the ribbons looking for a sponsor, and the big tree decorated for the occasion, I experience my double origin, that other essential half that my unconscious had ignored for thirty-three years. I drink the beer that is offered and prepare myself to dance connected to the town that I'm finally part of [...] The return of an Inkarrí that has not stopped traveling underground, and who arrives to reconcile those two halves which run parallel within us.

Transvestite Museum of Peru
Park of the Exposition, Lima 2004

To cover in order to reveal
Streets of Lima, 2006

Passer-by Museum
Squares, universities, streets and markets of Lima
and Tarapoto, 2006

Transvestite Pasquinade of Peru
Streets of Madrid, 2010

Also during 2004, and after that first foray into the official museum, a second exhibition takes place in the context of a fair for sexual diversity, located on the exterior of Lima's most important modern museum, Museo de Arte de Lima (MALI). A small booth within the fair housed a portion of the documents previously shown inside the museum, this time as a counterpoint and commentary on the practices and usages (outside-inside, reproduction-original) of community and artistic spaces.

This first street version was continued by a sit-in on April 6th, 2006, and in the context of the close of the campaign of the last general Peruvian elections, won by Alan García. However, until the second electoral round, the frontrunners were two gender manipulators: Ollanta Humala, a nationalist whose mother proposed to shoot homosexuals, and Lourdes Flores, a neoliberal who promised to bring about change on the grounds of being a woman while opposing, for instance, abortion.

The site chosen for the sit-in was one of Lima's central locations, where a mural with photographs of women neighbors of the financial district (including Lourdes Flores), adorned with quotes about the influence of Peruvian women, had been on display for quite some time. It was then that a group of transvestites and other activists and artists covered these images with their own bodies, covering themselves in turn with enlarged newspaper clippings related to a previous investigation reported by the Peruvian press on four decades (1966–1996) of persecution and murder of transvestites. The sit-in was further complemented by the distribution of leaflets containing the following statement:

Faced with the hate crimes against transvestites committed by the Shining Path, MRTA, right-wing groups, the Armed Forces and law enforcement, of which the "Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission" and the media have given account. Faced with their legal closing. Faced with the complicity with these crimes, reflected in an election campaign where this hatred is an integral part of the proposals of some candidates while others oppose, though not in their proposals. Faced with their approval by part of the population according to opinion polls. Faced with the manipulation of women's speech while their situation remains as uneven and contradictory as ever.

This overlap of messages emphasized the complex manipulation of “gender” issues, from and beyond the election campaign, where the feminine is essentialized to the point of considering some women more representative and with more rights than others, or excluding transvestites, when many of them consider themselves women, even within self-proclaimed feminist spaces. Also, one of the strategies introduced was that of the indigenous mask as ritual instrument that covers in order to reveal. This paradox, from a Western point of view, established links between the political act of contemporary transvestism and the social ritual of indigenous androgyny, which problematized a transvestite identity where sameness is also negotiable. In addition, the intervened street had formerly operated as a space of sexual work, so that this action also involved the recovery of a space by the sexed body to express its views on the political situation.

This journalistic archive was first presented at the National University of San Marcos (Lima, 2004), and has since continued appearing in various spaces and cities with the intention of recovering these stories of persecution and unpunished murders—although also of community and survival—for collective memory, often provided with various tactics destined to register the impressions of the attendees.

In 2010, the international year of the bicentennial celebration of the independence of the Caribbean and Latin America, the Transvestite Museum of Peru will be part of a series of disruptive memories of such celebrations, with the proposal to challenge those official historiographies and theories that continue omitting certain aesthetic and political insurgencies.

The sexed nation, the management of historical memory and the political-social function of archives, the production and circulation of knowledge, and colonial and modern structures are some of the topics the Transvestite Museum of Peru will review through a workshop intervention proposed to the community. To this end, this sexual archive will shift from mimicking the strategies of the museum to mimicking the strategies of the press. From a transvestite museum of transvestite book-history to a transvestite newspaper-comic. After sharing the transvestite archive and its strategies and processes with those interested, the elaboration of a map of Madrid’s sexual and transvestite pleasure-violence will be proposed in order to share this “other” memory through a street intervention where disclosure strategies of the local media will play an important role.

Publication and presentation of the book *Transvestite Museum of Peru*

Another format of dissemination of the project is the academy, through lectures and publications. In 2008, the book *Transvestite Museum of Peru*, which contains a major part of the sexual archive and its processes, was published. Editing this book was a difficult process, as it implied adapting a project based on the non-normative body and the three-dimensional to the order of the pages of a book. However, it was through this change of format that the transvestite archive was reworked into genealogies that

are based on specific transvestite attributes: therapeutic, power, duality, feathered, preceptive, epic, miscegenation, choreography, and revolution, to establish alternative historical relationships to the simplifications of causality and linearity. The book's foreword stresses the process of such genealogies:

The purpose is to review both the roles that have been conventionally assigned to the transvestite as well as those that have been taken away from the transvestite, which underlie the complementary opposition between colonialism—imposition and heredity—and encounter—their overlaps and restorations. An historical and hermeneutic analysis of iconography and texts is thus postulated; and avoiding the sterility of isolated studies, we proceed to a multidisciplinary work that transcends linear history—which only remains in the nature of its graphic support. Different disciplines miscegenate inside the selection, on a journey through time, space and the most diverse sources—from pre-Inca to post-industrial cultures, from art collections to the tabloids. The transvestite is a bridge between image and text, between time and space, where, as heir to a lineage of mediators—shamans, gods, virgins and saints—he is to be found again. A ritual performed in his own body. Nine transvestite attributes guide a display plagued by temporal reversals that evince the impossible dissection of the transvestite-everything, like pacha³ of reciprocal parts.

Of course, these genealogies are perfectible, mobile, and replaceable, just as the documents that constitute them, overlapping the discursive body always in a different way, like a retrovirus does with regard to the human body. The publication is complemented by a glossary that includes, but does not exhaust, the different voices that enunciated and continue to enunciate the transvestite subject, as well as a statistic (1776–2005) of this community's sustained persecution.

After almost two years of writing texts, gathering images, and designing the book, its presentation consisted of a complex performance based on some of the already published genealogies and the development of new ones: forbidden, feathered, miscegenated, therapeutic, and sacred, which, as revenge, returned the living body after its stagnation as result of the editorial process.

Each genealogy corresponded to a group of performers who acted as circuits by interacting with the public—contradicting the usual criterion of maintaining a distance from the artworks in the museum—and whose simulated order was broken by the emergence of a “sacred” genealogy, a troupe of transvestite dancers from different regional festivals. One choreography thwarting another, while mixing historical and current transvestites with the public at an exceptional moment where the transvestite was being reinstated as national nexus. Also, a colloquium was organized where transvestism was addressed from the academy and its different perspectives: anthropology, history, literature, psychoanalysis, painting, and museology. Finally, a cinema and theatre series was programmed where a selection of transvestite aesthetics and circumstances could be appreciated.

Other projects

In 2008, the Transvestite Museum of Peru participated in a five-week residence in Havana. This experience in a society with a peculiar process proves once more that the investigations about sexuality cannot be separated from the process of their geographies. Thus, after exploring various archives and panning the sexual strategies of Havana society, the documents collected and compared consisted of a superposition of sexual, artistic, religious, and political elements where the transvestite was synonymous with the Cuban nation.

In the last two years, and from its preliminary condition, this project has satirized the artistic structure. Hence, the proposal for the Galician Centre for Contemporary Art (Santiago de Compostela, 2009) was a transvestite curating of the official curation that selected it, alongside other political projects of sexual diversity. Located in one of the entrances to the exhibition, this piece comprised an enlarged drawing of the ritual ceramic previously described; a folding screen, whose collage repeated images from the transvestite archive, sheltering the alleged original ceramic, which in fact was a replica; and a wall text about the show in general, but from the perspective of transvestism:

(Transvestite) curation of curating? Dislocation of knowledge [...] realities that clarify the representations at stake, no opposition—male or female, public or private—but continuum sexualis that reveals the identitarian fallacy [...] TRANVESTITE MUSEUM: multiple self-portrait [...] history of representation [...] androgynes, dwarves, Amazons, Siamese twins, sirens, the disabled, anorexics, make up a queer aesthetic where all times are one, devoted to Janus the transformer and Saint Liberata whose androgyny dates back to the hermaphroditic cults of ancient Greece [...] Death as transvestism. Not finality but a stage, death as ritual that the AIDS epidemic, disease in general, has blurred. AIDS as complex and contradictory concept when proposed as scourge, visibility and stereotype of sexual diversity, as symptom of the violence that makes invisible other ways of seeing the world, and counteroffensive violence where information does not imply protection. AIDS as a redefinition of relations between death, illness and life, between infection, pain and pleasure [...] Death as a rite of passage, the Heraclitean river as transvestite: never the same. TRANVESTITE MUSEUM: the recuperation of ritual theatricality [...] hallucinatory, mutant, illusory, elusive realities that challenge the production of fixed identities, only letters priming an acronym. Postcolonial icons in (a beauty) contest: Trojan horse as détournement of the 'museum', of the 'transvestite', of 'identity' and of this selection. 'To build' the TRANVESTITE MUSEUM from its deconstructions.

Hence, a ritualization of space that would alter the predetermined relationships between the Northern and Southern hemispheres, artist and curator, public and exhibition, and object and subject was proposed. Also, a poster that simulates a retrospective exhibition for a fake museum has just been produced: Transvestite Museum of Peru. Everything within the “real” exhibition in Lima related to the invitation.

In addition, for the First Triennial of Visual Arts of Chile (Santiago, 2009), the sexual archive was rigorously ordered in a transvestite-Peruvian time line, ironically alluding to the installations of those historical and anthropological museums where museography refers to a linear and perfective time.

The participation fee of transvestites in sexual activism has also been questioned, locating the traces of transvestite memory in the backroom of the main auditorium of the Sixth Conference of the International Association for the Study of Sexuality, Culture and Society (Lima, 2007). It was thus stated in the introductory text:

This selection of documents of the TRANSVESTITE MUSEUM [...] is not exhibited on the brick walls bordering the main auditorium by chance, for it symbolizes the current situation of the transvestite community, both regarding society in general and sexual minorities, and those working for their rights, for we have yet to overcome many barriers. The situation of transvestites is still precarious but we know that improving it is a task we have to do for ourselves. From here, much gratitude to all groups and transvestite people struggling to make this possible.

Similarly, the violence transvestites endure has been highlighted by showing the news archive of persecution and murder during various meetings of sexual diversity (First National Encounter of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans Organizations and Activists, Lima, 2005; Institute of Development Studies, Brighton, 2005; Palais des Congrès, Montreal, 2006).

Conclusion

The project Transvestite Museum of Peru arises from the constant roaming of a body: transsexual roaming (the migration of gender) and transnational roaming (geographical migration). This continuous displacement consists of a dialogue of distribution and collecting, revealed not only in its documents, but also through an immaterial memory that rebels with the performance of gender.

This sexual micropolitics is offered as an opportunity for citizenship beyond macropolitical manipulation and the tyranny of the dominant theory, where the recovery of a transvestite memory does not involve the recovery of the memory of a certain group that claims an original power, but certain historical strategies where context prevails over the subject, which in individualistic contemporary society means a strategic rather than identitarian subject. Transvestites, with their past as symbolic link, their history of survival thanks to their own ingenuity, and their contemporary explanation of the processes of identity, account for it.

Giuseppe Campuzano (1969 - 2013) was a researcher and artist. Since 2003, he has been working on the "Transvestite Museum" project, an exploration of the realities of transvestism, a staging of its aesthetics, and a confrontation between its forms of knowledge and official discourses.

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1. Translator's note: the *tapadas* were women from Lima who would veil their faces ("tapada" means covered), a custom rooted in traditions of Moorish Spain, which lasted from the sixteenth until the nineteenth century.
 2. Translator's note: the Inkarrí is an ancient myth about the last Inca ruler's return from the dead, seeking to avenge his death and reclaim his kingdom.
 3. Translator's note: *pacha* is a Quechua term that refers to the earth, the universe, and space-time, among other meanings.