

The Miguel Benlloch Archive

Miguel Benlloch was a performance artist, essay writer, poet, activist, and cultural producer who was born in 1954 in Loja, a town in the province of Granada. He died on 12 September 2018 in Seville.

Benlloch began his political and poetic work in the '70s, joining Granada's Communist Movement organisation, a party aligned with the so-called revolutionary left. At the end of that decade, he drove the Frente de Liberación Homosexual de Andalucía (Homosexual Liberation Front of Andalusia) and opened the concert hall Planta Baja, "a spiritual place," he wrote, "where the spirit incarnated, at times just flesh, to create proxemics, the proximity of corporeal spaces, interrelations, and mobile constructions of identity."⁸⁸ Indeed, Planta Baja helped to foreground the first musical bands that surfaced in Granada (TNT, 091, KGB), groups followed by many others, and defined a real music scene. He also worked and joined forces with pioneering figures who put on concerts and produced fanzines like *La Visión* (*The Vision*); organised exhibitions for visual artists, for instance the Agustín Parejo School; and facilitat-

ed the circulation of desire and protest through the Asamblea de Mujeres de Granada (Women's Assembly of Granada) and the anti-militarist movement that was based there.

Cutre Chou was a cabaret-style show staged during the Corpus Christi festivities at the stand of the Movimiento Comunista de Andalucía (MCA, Communist Movement of Andalusia); it constituted an affective pole from which Benlloch began to reconcile political militancy with the creative scene coming from Planta. With *Cutre* he set in motion what he called his proto-performances.

Cutre Chou, he said in another of his texts, expressed the rupture from revolutionary certainties, opening up new struggles, like feminism and free sexuality, which placed our own lives at the heart of social changes. The combination of diverse forms, understood as popular culture in song, drama, comedy of manners, soap operas, trite verse, variety shows, trans shows in late-seventies' gay bars remixed with certain political concepts that

⁸⁸ Miguel Benlloch, "Era 1987", *Planta Baja 1983-1993*, Granada, Ed. TRN-cien-gramos, 2015.

were not expressed on a flyer but as a juxtaposition of images. That was what *Cutre* stood for.⁸⁹

In the '80s, Benlloch was the driving force behind Anti-NATO and coordinated pacifist organisations. The incorporation of Spain into the Military Alliance and the defeat of the referendum signified the abandonment of the last non-agreed resort of political reform. The Transition was deemed over and a new political order was consolidated, legally victorious at the '85/86 biennium with the entry into the European Economic Community (EEC) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). This process symbolically strengthened at the '92 Barcelona Olympics and the Universal Exposition of Seville, which “built” —according to Fernández Savater— “a true monopoly over ‘common sense’, defining the framework of what is possible, setting out, from that point onwards, who can speak, how and from where.”⁹⁰

After this defeat, Miguel (my partner and friend, with whom I did everything) and I who were an active part of this movement and who, like many others, were excluded from the new “political, symbolic and aesthetic order”⁹¹ that emerged from the Transition; we also assumed that organised political militancy was over and, in 1989, created BNV Producciones. This was the starting point of the so-called cultural production, together with indispensable contributors like Alicia Pinteño and Mar Villaespesa and, more recently, Feli Romero, Charo Romero Donaire, Isaías Griñolo and Inmaculada Salinas.

As highlighted by Fredric Jameson, “the existence of genuine cultural creation depends on a genuinely collective life, on the vitality of ‘organic’ social groups, in whatever form.”⁹² The oeuvre of Miguel Benlloch is an example of work that emerges and can only be understood from its interdependence and affiliation with the social, political and artistic collectives with which it has been connected. For Miguel, the work of art

was, above all, a language for the transformation and knowledge of the world, and its function, to discover life hidden in front of what is visible, “a kind of supra-perception that moves away from reality, enabling it to be transformed.”⁹³

Artist Pedro G. Romero, a friend of Miguel, and with whom we have worked intensely in BNV since the '90s, said:

many of the functions that the artist undertakes today —not only after Duchamp but also after the Russian constructivists— retrieve meaning linked to biological or mechanical machines, to the collective management, to the function of prosthesis, to liturgical or performative organisation; in short, to the critical organisation of things.⁹⁴

If this is accurate, we could say that Miguel’s work becomes political not because his texts and performances are studded with political signs. If we say that his work is political, it is primarily on account of his early understanding that

time that bears down on us is not only a time of activism; it is a time of creation in organisational laboratories, a time of subversive patience that rethinks us as vital bodies in action, and it is in this construction of our desires and in their intercommunication, from where we must address the profound short-circuits that we can cause in the greed that capital signifies. We are not powerful; our aim is not power, but to constitute ourselves as living beings, as organisms that assert themselves, as an organ that reflects the breadth of life. This organicity is what must be considered, and I am not speaking about a political party or hierarchical structures; I’d like to think that I’m talking about my friends and I, of my affections and desires, of the structure that life has given me to cross it with joy and the conflicts that life engenders to carry on being life; a new constitutionality of politics that is introduced into an

⁸⁹ Miguel Benlloch, “¡¡Larga vida al Cutre Chou!!”, *Dig me out, Discourses of Popular Music*, Donosti-San Sebastián, Arteleku, 2009.

⁹⁰ Amador Fernández-Savater, “La Cultura de la Transición y el nuevo sentido común,” *elDiario.es*, Madrid, 14 June 2013.

⁹¹ Idem.

⁹² Fredric Jameson, *Signaturas de lo visible*, Buenos Aires, Ed. Prometeo Libros, 2012.

⁹³ Miguel Benlloch, *Acaeció en Granada*, Granada, Ed. TRN-cien-gramos, 2013.

⁹⁴ Pedro G. Romero, *L’Andalouse*, unpublished.

expanded commons of the material and the im-material, that enables the conflict of the commons to be a place of creation for action, as As Hannah Arendt said, “that makes us human.”⁹⁵

For Miguel, only from the construction and slow development of processes to retrieve lexicons and accounts; from the formation of organisational and creative structures; from the creation of contexts which allow spaces of debate and controversy to exist; from the opening out to other bodies and communities, can memories and experiences be developed, through which not only these new formations, but also individual artists and create their own life and artistic expression. “Capitalism,” Jameson says, “systematically dissolves the fabric of all cohesive social groups with no exception, including its own ruling classes, and as a result makes an issue of aesthetic production and linguistic invention, which originates from group life.”⁹⁶

Miguel's work, and his archive presented here today, shares this affirmation of understanding that the problem we face is not solely the commodification of art. Rather, it is also the transformation of an operation that works by means of the birth of the so-called cultural industry at the turn of the 20th century. In such a way that the culture which ascended from the masses, which we know as popular culture, was supplanted by a culture *for* the masses, which did not stem from this culture, from group life, but from the interests of an industry. This one looked to sell not only the cultural product but also the consumer and spectator's attachment to the product and to the organisation supplying it, be it curators, museum directors, artists, companies or any type of public or private cultural institution.

To recompose this operation, invert this process, modifying a regime and the circulation of top-down artistic production for another regime and another bottom-up circulation, is the work that Miguel set out to do through his agency with hidden or ignored realities.

With forms of art and life. These, although relegated to a marginal existence, to inner and outer exiles, when they meet, produce new forms of life and art that help us to understand our present and create other modes of projecting the future. “Crossovers,” he said, “create multiplicity, the existence of diversity, the possibility of transformation, the shaping of transitable knowledge.”⁹⁷ To continue and keep on facilitating the production of these crossovers, encounters and collisions is the work that, from BNV, we have set out to replicate in the implementation of its archive, which must continue to grow in the future, in as much as we can keep alive a work and a life that was born and lived with many others; an endeavour that existed in others.

The archive, the legacy he left us, is almost entirely structured around a diverse, nebulous, playful, vague, improper, non-identitary, diluted, conjugated body; and is upheld by the feminist theoretical discourses that articulate the queer paradigm. Designed by Charo Romero Donaire and Inmaculada Salinas, the archive-website is unfurled for the first time in the rooms of CentroCentro, which funded its set-up. In 2021 a website redesign process began, taking as a starting point the content developed for the first version, but this time using a content manager (WordPress), with a lightweight code template and a responsive design compatible with any mobile device. This new version incorporates a bar to facilitate the search for information. In addition, all entries contain metadata that allow suggesting the relationship of some content with others, improving the user experience. With regard to the multimedia content strategy, certain changes have been incorporated, such as the hosting of videos on archive.org in order to guarantee their permanent access and avoid the usual censorship of other video hosting services (for example, YouTube). In addition, the visual contents will be optimised for web resolution, thus speeding up navigation within the file and ultimately favoring the indexing of the same by search engines. The new version is being created by

⁹⁵ Miguel Benlloch, *Pensarnos como débiles nos hará fuertes*, unpublished text.

⁹⁶ Fredric Jameson, *Signaturas de lo visible*, Buenos Aires, Prometeo Libros, 2012.

⁹⁷ Miguel Benlloch, “Tránsito,” 1995, cited in the brochure of the exhibition “*Cuerpo Conjugado*”, Madrid, CentroCentro, 2019, written by Mar Villaespesa and Joaquín Vázquez.



Cutre Chou, 2009. Recinto ferial, Granada.
Photo: Gracia Gámez.

Miguel Benloch, 56 Genres, 2010. José Guerrero
Centre, Granada. Photo: Mariló Fernández Indiano.



Cutre Chou. The Super
Vedette, 2007.
Fairground, Granada.
Photo: Miguel Benloch.

Elena Romera, with the collaboration of Daniel Villar Onrubia, and will be launched on the occasion of the exhibition *Ensayos sobre lo cutre: Lecturas del archivo de Miguel Benlloch* (Essays on the Crappy: Readings from the archive by Miguel Benlloch), programmed by the IVAM between November 2021 and March 2022.

The intention of the archive is to compile the breadth of the work he produced, with a great deal of material still left to include and organise. The archive-website is structured around a series of works that can be understood as the backbones. Several details are presented for each one of them: existing records whether videos, photographs, texts, etc.; a description or synopsis of the work; a timeline of the places where it has been displayed; other related works by Miguel; and connections to the archives of other artists, collectives and institutions with ties to his work.

Thus, the archive is made up of Miguel's work, but also other works, projects, organisations, exhibitions and websites that help to understand it, that contextualise it, that are at the root of his work or which he directly contributed to create. For instance, the Archivo de Feminismos Post-Identitarios (Archive of Post-Identitarian Feminisms) from the UNIA arteypensamiento programme, which we will stop at shortly.

Let's take a look at some examples.⁹⁸ Take the aforementioned *Cutre Chou*: in addition to the description, the chronology, and related works, in a final column we find the archives and websites this work links to. For example, the website of Acción en Red (Networked Action), an organisation stemming from the former Communist Movement, of which there is no archive as such; *Dig me out, Discourses on Popular Music, Gender and Ethnicity*—a publication edited by María José Belbel and Rosa Reitsamer and funded by Arteleku— which assembles song lyrics, journalists' writing, activist and theoretical texts that question the normativity of gender, racism, homophobia and

transphobia in popular music; *El porvenir de la revuelta* (The Future of the Revolt), a programme of exhibitions, workshops, performances, music, cinema and seminars held in Madrid from 17 April to 31 October, coinciding with Madrid Destino World Pride 2017; and the MUMS - Movimiento por la Diversidad Sexual en Chile (Movement for Sexual Diversity in Chile), with which Miguel collaborated in his final years.

If we click on one of his final performances, *Derrerum natura. Quien canta su mal espanta* (Der Rerum Natura. Singing Drives Away Sorrow), first performed at Tabakalera Donosti, and which, according to Miguel, involved “a report on the sick body, as a challenge to the perfection of the healthy body conceived as merchandise,”⁹⁹ it connects us to AnarchivoSida. This is a project of research and production by the Equipo re colectivo (composed of Aimar Arriola, Nancy Garín and Linda Valdés), which set out to activate a process to compile and analyse those aesthetic practices, collective experiences and performance tactics that have determined the politics of HIV/AIDS, developed outside the Anglo-Saxon and Western European context. It also connects us with Equipo re, a research platform bringing together action in archival spheres with the organisation of encounters and workshops, the construction of cartographies and the production of narratives as a method of research. And with *Concreta*, a biannual publication deployed as a platform of resistance that faces the cultural impoverishment of the present and which sets forth a theoretical framework of research, inside and outside academia, around the image.

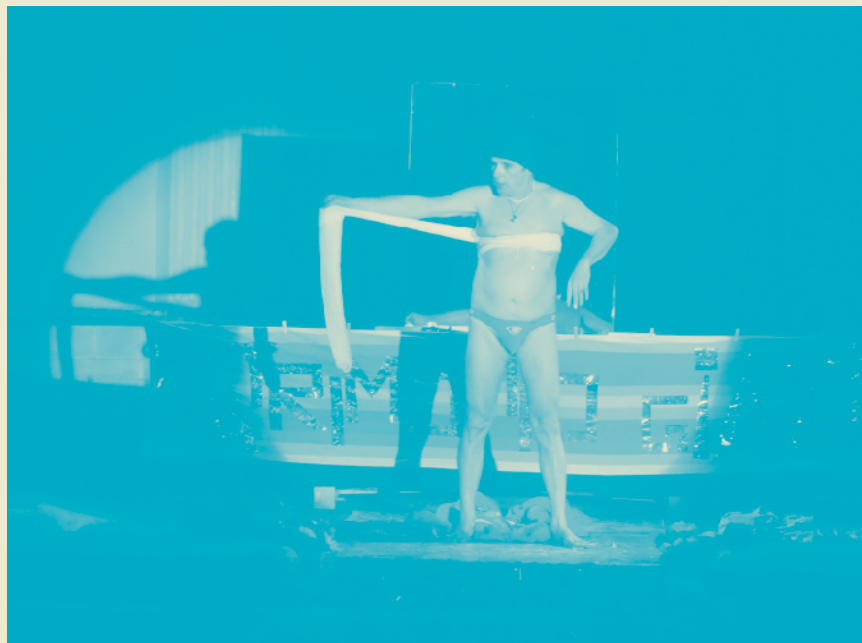
A third and final example is his action *51 géneros* (51 Genders), the first in a series with an epicentre that envisages radical themes around the theoretical debate on gender by means of executing a set of acts, which, in the actions *56 géneros y 58 géneros* (56 Genders and 58 Genders), extend and vary according to the political and cultural context in which they

⁹⁸ At this point, Joaquín begins to review the Miguel Benlloch archive website in front of the audience.

⁹⁹ Miguel Benlloch, *DERERUMNATURA. Crónica de la enfermedad y la sanación*, Mirar de Frente, Madrid, CentroCentro, 2016.

Miguel Benlloch, 58 Genres, 2012. Museo Ex Teresa Arte Actual, Mexico City. Photo: Oliver Ludwing.

are presented and the years he is completing. This action in the archive is linked to: *Desacuerdos, sobre arte, política y esfera pública en el Estado español* (Discrepancies, On Art, Politics and the Public Sphere in the Spanish State), an editorial project and archive under construction, co-produced with Arteleku, Centro José Guerrero, MACBA, MNCARS and UNIA arteypensamiento. It also connects with Arteleku, where it was presented for the first time; and with Terry Thaemlitz's text *I Am Not a Lesbian*, which Miguel would recite repeatedly during the performance.



Yet if there is one recurring archive which ties together most of his work, then it is the aforementioned *Archivo Feminismos Postidentitarios* (Post-Identity Feminisms Archive) from the UNIA arteypensamiento programme. This panorama is structured around six lines of research. In 2014, the project lost funding from the University and its operations came to a halt.

The line of research on feminisms, which developed seminars, labs and workshops from 2003 to 2013, was coordinated by Miguel almost in its entirety, and, in some cases, he co-directed the programme and its activities with Paul B. Preciado, the collective Erreakzioa or with María José Belbel. Encounters and an exhibition were organised. The first, in 2003, was the seminar-workshop *Retóricas del género/políticas de identidad: performance, performatividad y prótesis* (Rhetorics of Gender/Identity Politics: Performance, Performativity and Prosthesis). The second, in 2005, was *Mutaciones del feminismo: genealogías y prácticas artísticas* (Mutations of Feminism: Genealogies and Artistic Practices). A third encounter, in 2007, *Crítica queer. narrativas disidentes e invención de sub-*

jetividad (Queer Critique. Dissident Narratives and the Invention of Subjectivity). A fourth, held in 2010, which Miguel called *Movimiento en las bases: Transfeminismos, feminismos queer, despatologización, discursos no Binarios* (Movement in the Bases: Transfeminisms, Queer Feminisms, Depathologisation, Non-Binary Discourses). The fifth seminar took place in 2011: *Cuerpo impropio. Guía de modelos somatopolíticos y de su posible usos desviados* (Improper Body. Guide of Somapolitical Models and their Possible Deviated Uses). The sixth and final activity, in 2013, was coordinated by Equipo re and was called *Agenciamientos contra-neoliberales coaliciones micropolíticas desde el SIDA* (Counter-Neoliberal Agencies: Micro-political Coalitions from AIDS).

When I was preparing this talk, Mar Villaespesa sent me an image that looked surprisingly similar to Miguel's drawing that we used on the website. This article mentions how the forest ecologist Suzanne Simard discovered, at the end of the 20th century, that trees in a forest are connected by a network of roots and mycorrhizae, through which they transfer nutri-



Miguel Benlloch. DERERUMNATURA: Who Sings His Evil Scares. The peacock in Loja, 2016.
Photo: Juan Antonio Peinado

ents from the “sources” or transmitters to the “drains” or receptors.

In her experiment, she marked the leaves of a birch tree in Canada with carbon isotopes and checked that this carbon was transferred to the neighbouring birch seedlings, which grew in the shade. Conversely, during winter, the carbon marked on the spruce leaves appeared on young birch trees devoid of leaves. Yet there is also a dark side to this network; not everything is altruism and cooperation between trees. Some produce chemical compounds called allelopathies; that is, those which restrict the growth and development of other plants. For instance, the roots and leaves of walnut trees contain juglone, which is toxic to other plants.¹⁰⁰

Thus, Miguel’s archive should work in a similar way to this network produced in the forest’s subsoil. The miguelbenlloch.net Archive is an archive or a website—I’m not sure how to define it—pivoting on a system of connections with other archives which, like his, delve into processes that deconstruct identities rooted in dual compartments: masculine/feminine, active/passive, productive/unproductive, desire/love, health/illness and, therefore, vindicate the existence of other types of bodies: dis-normative, lame, transitory, non-income, non-profitable. Excluded bodies that erode identity constructions. Diverse bodies which allowed Miguel to shed the identities that, as an activist, poet, gay person, artist, producer, and performance artist, were assigned to him. It was through this resistance that he was able to progress in a vital and artistic project which was and is political.

¹⁰⁰ “La red social del bosque”, Los Árboles invisibles blog, 27 April 2017, <http://losarbolesinvisibles.com/la-red-social-del-bosque/>

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PRÁCTICAS de CUIDADO

Los archivos de arte/política constituyen hoy laboratorios políticos de lo común. Ante el giro archivístico en el coleccionismo artístico y la incorporación de colecciones documentales en las economías cognitivas y de información, los textos reunidos en este volumen, exhiben modos alternativos de instituir, preservar y socializar archivos, que ponen en cuestión la lógica de la propiedad como principal eje organizador. Desplazando la discusión patrimonial por la pregunta por las políticas de alianza y comunidades de cuidado y de uso, el repertorio de experiencias recogidas en este volumen exhiben la porosidad de las fronteras entre el dentro o fuera de las instituciones y formas de hacer archivo desde la corresponsabilidad y la participación no propietaria, mostrándonos rutas que siguen direcciones contrarias a la mercantilización.

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