

EARTHING

UZEMLJENJE

ASIER MENDIZABAL

ASIER MENDIZABAL je umetnik koji živi i radi u Bilbao. U svom radu, Asier Mendizabal ispituje protivrečnosti između, s jedne strane, formalnog jezika i apstrakcije, s njihovim implikacijama transcendentije i, s druge strane, nastojanja da se tom jeziku prida konkretno značenje. Njegovi su radovi izloženi na samostalnim izložbama u izložbenim prostorima Hordaland Kunstcenter (2013) u Bergenu, Norveška i Raven u Madridu i Muzeju kraljice Sofije (2011) u Španiji. Učestvovao je na sledećim grupnim izložbama: *A Singular Form* u Zgradi bečke secesije; *In the First Circle* (2011–2012) pri Fundació Tapies u Barceloni, Španija; *As artes, ciadaños* (2010–2011) muzeja Serralves u Portu, Portugal i *Després de la notícia* (2003) pri Centru za savremenu kulturu u Barceloni, kao i na 31. Bijenalu u Sao Paulu (2014), Brazil; na 54. Venećanskom bijenalu (2011); *Manifesta 5* (2004) u Tajvanu, kao i na trećem Bijenalu u Taipeiju (2002), Tajvan, kao i na četvrtom Bukureštanskom bijenalu (2010).

1_1 Naslovna strana prvog izdanja *Leviathana* Thomasa Hobbesa, 1651.

1_2 „Rim: komemorativni skup u čast druge godišnjice stupanja Italije u rat“, *The Graphic*, 9. jun 1917.

2 „Gredsko straža jurša na gonilu ispred hotela g. Guizota“, *The Illustrated London News*, 26. februar 1848.

3 „Toskanski poslanici odlaze na otvaranje Narodne skupštine, Firenca“, *L'illustration, Journal universel*, avgust 1859.

4_1 Gustav Klutis, *Pobeda socijalizma u SSSR-u je izvesna*, plakat, 1932. Ruska državna biblioteka, Moskva. ©Heritage-Images.com

4_2 Xanti Schawinsky, *1934, godina XII fašističke ere*, plakat, 1934. Kolekcija Merrill C. Berman. © Jim Frank

4_3 Umberto Boccioni, *Gomila oko konjaničkog spomenika*, 1908, pero i olovka na papiru.

5_1 Asier Mendizabal, *Gurentza-Unamuno (Columna)*, 2014. © Asier Mendizabal

5_2 Asier Mendizabal, *Gurentza-Unamuno (Capitel)*, 2014. © Asier Mendizabal

6_1 Natan Altman, *Načrt za Aleksandrov stub u čast prve godišnjice Crvene Armije*, Petrograd, 1919.

6_2 Aleksandar Rodčenko, *Ženska piramida*, 1936. © VEGAP

1_1 The frontispiece of the editio princeps of Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* or *The Matter, Forme and Power of a Common Wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil*, 1651.

1_2 "Rome: The Meeting to Commemorate the Second Anniversary of Italy's Entry into the War", *The Graphic*, 9 June 1917.

2 "The Municipal Guards Charging the Crowd before M. Guizot's Hotel", *The Illustrated London News*, 26 February 1848.

3 "Les députés Toscans se rendant à l'ouverture de l'Assemblée Nationale, à Florence", *L'illustration, Journal universel*, August 1859.

4_1 Gustav Klutis, *The Victory of Socialism in the USSR is Guaranteed*, poster, 1932. Russian State Library, Moscow. ©Heritage-Images.com

4_2 Xanti Schawinsky, *1934, Year XII of the Fascist Era*, poster, 1934. Collection Merrill C. Berman. © Jim Frank

4_3 Umberto Boccioni, *Crowd Surrounding an Equestrian Monument*, 1908, ink and pencil on paper.

5_1 Asier Mendizabal, *Gurentza-Unamuno (Columna)*, 2014. © Asier Mendizabal

5_2 Asier Mendizabal, *Gurentza-Unamuno (Capitel)*, 2014. © Asier Mendizabal

6_1 Natan Altman, *Design for Alexander Column Celebrating the Red Army's First Anniversary*, Petrograd, 1919.

6_2 Aleksandr Rodchenko, *Women's Pyramid*, 1936. © VEGAP

ASIER MENDIZABAL is an artist who lives and works in Bilbao. In his work, Asier Mendizabal explores the contradiction between, on the one hand, formal language and abstraction, with their implications of transcendence and abstraction, the pretensions of attributing concrete meaning to this language, by positioning it in relation to specific historical situations. His work has been shown at solo exhibitions at the Hordaland Kunstcenter (2013) in Bergen, Norway; Raven Reina Sofía (2011) in Madrid; and MACBA (2008) in Barcelona, both in Spain. He has participated in the following group exhibitions: *A Singular Form* at the Secession Building in Vienna; *In the First Circle* (2011–2012) at Fundació Tapies in Barcelona, Spain; *As artes, ciadaños* (2010–2011) at the Museu Serralves in Porto, Portugal; and *Després de la notícia* (2003) at CCCB in Barcelona, as well as in the following festivals and biennials: the 31st Biennial de São Paulo (2014), Brazil; the 54th Venice Biennale (2011); *Manifesta 5* (2004) in Donostia-San Sebastián, Spain; the 3rd Taipei Biennial (2002) in Taiwan; and the 4th Bucharest Biennial (2010).

Istorija oblika (*form*) gomile je istorija njene nepredstavlivosti. Svaki značajan trenutak, svaki uticajan događaj političke istorije od političke historije from the antaity to the present was marked by the promotion or rejection of a particular representation of the frightening potency of the multitude. Most political writing has treated, to give it a proper name, the technical side of this representability, since governing the multitude is its main concern. This is why throughout history, whenever a treatise on political relations referred to the representation of the multitude, it specifically referred to the problem of the legitimacy of the delegate model of representation: the representation of many by a few and legitimated to a few and illegitimate to the rest. What is of interest to us here today is the fact that the essential problem of politics has been simultaneously illustrated through representations – in this particular case through visual representations, allegorical and metaphorical – of the phenomenon of the multitude. In other words, the way abstract representation of the multitude in the figure of sovereignty has been illustrated through particular representations of the mass as an image, Spinoza, or symbol. And in each such instance, these images, signs, and symbols of the masses contained a symptom or the true reverse of its historical epoch. The era of the Enlightenment inaugurated a way of rationalizing what used to be the formless figure of the crowd. Conversely, this new way of imagining the masses determined the political thrust of the Enlightenment project. Illegitimate and, most of all, irrational use of fear, of force, to hold the multitude, – which becomes ferocious when it comes to fear – proves not only unfair, but also inoperative. Only a voluntary and contractual submission of individuals to the law can hold over time with enough stability.

In 1651, Thomas Hobbes wrote his *Leviathan*, a treatise on good governance, accompanied by the revealing subtitle *The Matter, Forme and Power of a Common Wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil*. If the matter of the people is the multitude, the political key will be its form. Literally speaking, the image on the frontispiece of the first edition of Hobbes's treatise is a visual summary of his thesis concerning the State. It is one of the first known images where the masses are the object of visual representation. What is represented is neither a battle, nor a carnival, as was common in pictorial representations, few and far between, portraying a large number of people in a single scene. The figure framed here by the outline of the sovereign's body is a screen formed by a huge number of little heads that represent its totality, not the sum of its parts. We will come back to this idea later on.

There is a social contract whereby I accept the limits of the law on the condition that you accept them as a body, a body whose head is that of the sovereign. The seed of political liberalism rests on the early Enlightenment idea promoted by Hobbes, John Locke, and Baruch Spinoza that the individual can and must, according to natural law, pursue his own interest and that the irrational dogma of political or religious tyranny cannot suppress this natural law for long. This idea does not oppose the notion that, unless subjected to the law, individuals are wild, uncontrollable, and brutal. In his *Bodies, Masses, Power* (Montag, 1999), a book on Spinoza and his contemporaries, Warren Montag asks to what extent the first liberal ideology was determined precisely by this fear of the masses. The war of all against all is Hobbes's nightmare scenario, an image that today still figures as the disastrous ultimate consequence of the lack of order. This idea, defended by these authors, only affirms that the subjection of individual wills can only be efficient and lasting if they submit voluntarily. That is the social contract whereby I accept the limits of the law on the condition that you accept them as a body, the image of the body as the masses and the mind as the sovereign posits an organicist interpretation whereby natural balance is inscribed on the social body in a mechanical way. The rational mind of the sovereign must drive or guide the abilities and physical strength of the masses. Locke, mentioned above, proposed a similar image: that of the sovereign as a horseman wearing a helmet, the masses, "that untamable beast". This equestrian analogy of the horse and the horseman appears time and again in the history of the crowd's images and we shall get back to it repeatedly. We will also get back to another metaphor by Locke, in this case, a metaphor that explains the masses' desire for stability: "unless when some common and great distress, uniting them in one universal ferment, makes them forget respect, and emboldens them to carve to their wants with armed force, and then sometimes they break in upon the rich and sweep all *like a deluge*." (Locke 1824, 71).

For now, we will stop at the distinction between the head and the body on the *Leviathan* frontispiece. In both versions, the wild horse and the flood, the irrationality of the masses suggests only one result: having to resign oneself to the wild nature and lack of responsibility of the multitude as a deluge overflowing the banks of the law. However, this characterization of the headless body implies a series of implications that we need to generate some relevant effects in order to understand. "Who knows what a body can do?" This mysterious question, posed around the same time by Spinoza, acquires a particular inflection when placed next to the image-symbol of the masses as a body. Who knows what a body can do? Maybe we could say the following: who knows what the body could do without the limits imposed on it by the mind? Here, references to the sonnambulist and the drunkard come to mind: those who do not do what they want or should do, not even to serve their own interest. The Spinozian idea of "bodies that move other bodies" harbours not only the fear of the multitude but rather, and simultaneously, a fascination with its inexorability. After all, Spinoza's concern, which is still in force today, is summed up in his axiom from *Ethics*: "to see the better but follow the worst". In other words, why do people fight for their servitude as bravely as though they were fighting for their salvation? After all, as Spinoza also points out, human beings are always conscious of their own desires, but not of the reasons that force and condition them to desire. A century later and following the same division of responsibilities, desires, and duties between the body and the mind, Kant gave a cynical solution to this problem by stating that outrage is a legitimate driving force of reason, advising the following: "Argue as much as you will and about whatever you will, *but obey!*" (Kant 2009, 10). As long as the body is kept subjugated, one can fight for the mind's freedom.

2

A brief interlude: When at the beginning of this paper I said that what matters to me is the history of the crowd's forms, that was because it is precisely in this problematic crystallization of what is allegedly formless that I see emerging the irreducible truth of this phenomenon. The binary of form and content that resonates in everything I have said so far is under the apparently naive coupling of the body and the body also alludes to another series of factors that are essential for understanding the aesthetic: the issue of the figure and the background. I propose a correlate between the figure/background pair, always present in the formal (or formalist, if you wish) analysis of the aesthetic, and the unresolved political paradox of the individual's inscription in the social, or the subject's inscription in the collective. The inscription of the fragment in the totality. Elsewhere I have proposed that a structural analogy of this irreducibility of the individual to the social relationship between the weave and the warp in textiles. This concerns the limitation of optical perception that prevents us from seeing simultaneously the weave and the warp in a fabric, the limitation that allows us to see the weave as long as we do not see the warp and vice versa.

When the photographic technique appeared, it seemed to promise a happy reconciliation of this pair, of this paradox. The immediacy of the photographic take caused the camera to catch mechanically a frozen instant in which both levels get registered without any distinction: on the one hand, the outline of the collective body, with the totality of the components of the mass forming some sort of reticule and, on the other, each one of them, with their particular features and singular gestures and attitudes they happened to be holding at the very moment the image was taken. The indistinguishable mass, which shares the almost textile quality of the engraving on *Leviathan's* frontispiece and of successful representations of the masses, did not allow for simultaneity. Therefore, it is not too daring to propose (and we could look for support in Walter Benjamin or Siegfried Krauczer, for instance) that this fact, the formalization of the masses through the photographic medium, retrospectively determines the self-consciousness of its participants, who are, for the very first time, able to look at themselves in the picture and empathize with those represented. This sort of representational effect is backed by the fact that the emergence of an organized and self-conscious mass a political subject coincided with the advent of photography and its printed circulation via newspapers. However, it has to be noted that, due to the use of the photoengraving technique for their reproduction, the circulation of the first photographs in the press was through the illustrated magazines, which members of the more affluent classes used to obtain by means of subscription. It was only in 1897 that the possibility of directly reproducing photographs in the press gradually began to allow them to circulate at a level massive enough to permit the shaping of a self-consciousness in those who saw themselves reproduced in those photographs. More interestingly, due to the same technical limitations, the rudimentary weave in those initial techniques did not allow for good reproductions of multitudinous gatherings. This is due to the fact that the dots in the reticule that makes the picture would weave together with the small heads that form the image, dispersing them into an unrecognizable mass.

As I already pointed out above, until the advent of photography, the scarce representations of the mass as a homogenous object had to sacrifice the detail in the features of each individual and reduce them to a gestural riticle, to a sort of figure that translated the effect of the multitude to the burin technique in engraving or textures in painting. This sort of representational effect is the idealical perception of the mass as a fluid or flow, a blind dispersion of its elements. At the end of the 19th century, however, at the moment I defined as the advent of photography and change in the perception of the masses as a political subject, there was a suggestive tension between the two reproduction techniques. Although, as I said above, directly printed pictures did not circulate until nearly the end of the century, with the advent of photography, news items were illustrated in the press with photographs of the masses. This technique allowed the engraver to reproduce the jumbled details contained in the original take, as thoroughly as was deemed pertinent in each case. Thus, the technique appears to us as a symbolic form, maybe a symptom whose materiality reveals the truth that the discourse conceals.

3

The historical events that shaped the philosophical reflections with which I began by examining the power of the crowd and its govtivity were in the 17th century, however, at the moment I defined as the advent of photography and change in the perception of the masses as a political subject, there was a suggestive tension between the two reproduction techniques. Although, as I said above, directly printed pictures did not circulate until nearly the end of the century, with the advent of photography, news items were illustrated in the press with photographs of the masses. This technique allowed the engraver to reproduce the jumbled details contained in the original take, as thoroughly as was deemed pertinent in each case. Thus, the technique appears to us as a symbolic form, maybe a symptom whose materiality reveals the truth that the discourse conceals.

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

26

27

28

29

30

31

32

33

34

35

36

37

38

39

40

41

42

43

44

45

46

47

48

49

50

51

52

53

54

55

56

57

58

59

60

61

62

63

64

65

66

67

68

69

70

71

72

73

74

75

76

77

78

79

80

81

82

83

84

85

86

87

88

89

90

91

92

93

94

95

96

97

98

99

100

The history of the crowd's forms is the history of its unrepresentability. Every relevant moment, every determining event in the course of political history from the antaity to the present was marked by the promotion or rejection of a particular representation of the frightening potency of the multitude. Most political writing has treated, to give it a proper name, the technical side of this representability, since governing the multitude is its main concern. This is why throughout history, whenever a treatise on political relations referred to the representation of the multitude, it specifically referred to the problem of the legitimacy of the delegate model of representation: the representation of many by a few and legitimated to a few and illegitimate to the rest. What is of interest to us here today is the fact that the essential problem of politics has been simultaneously illustrated through representations – in this particular case through visual representations, allegorical and metaphorical – of the phenomenon of the multitude. In other words, the way abstract representation of the multitude in the figure of sovereignty has been illustrated through particular representations of the mass as an image, Spinoza, or symbol. And in each such instance, these images, signs, and symbols of the masses contained a symptom or the true reverse of its historical epoch. The era of the Enlightenment inaugurated a way of rationalizing what used to be the formless figure of the crowd. Conversely, this new way of imagining the masses determined the political thrust of the Enlightenment project. Illegitimate and, most of all, irrational use of fear, of force, to hold the multitude, – which becomes ferocious when it comes to fear – proves not only unfair, but also inoperative. Only a voluntary and contractual submission of individuals to the law can hold over time with enough stability.

In 1651, Thomas Hobbes wrote his *Leviathan*, a treatise on good governance, accompanied by the revealing subtitle *The Matter, Forme and Power of a Common Wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil*. If the matter of the people is the multitude, the political key will be its form. Literally speaking, the image on the frontispiece of the first edition of Hobbes's treatise is a visual summary of his thesis concerning the State. It is one of the first known images where the masses are the object of visual representation. What is represented is neither a battle, nor a carnival, as was common in pictorial representations, few and far between, portraying a large number of people in a single scene. The figure framed here by the outline of the sovereign's body is a screen formed by a huge number of little heads that represent its totality, not the sum of its parts. We will come back to this idea later on.

There is a social contract whereby I accept the limits of the law on the condition that you accept them as a body, a body whose head is that of the sovereign. The seed of political liberalism rests on the early Enlightenment idea promoted by Hobbes, John Locke, and Baruch Spinoza that the individual can and must, according to natural law, pursue his own interest and that the irrational dogma of political or religious tyranny cannot suppress this natural law for long. This idea does not oppose the notion that, unless subjected to the law, individuals are wild, uncontrollable, and brutal. In his *Bodies, Masses, Power* (Montag, 1999), a book on Spinoza and his contemporaries, Warren Montag asks to what extent the first liberal ideology was determined precisely by this fear of the masses. The war of all against all is Hobbes's nightmare scenario, an image that today still figures as the disastrous ultimate consequence of the lack of order. This idea, defended by these authors, only affirms that the subjection of individual wills can only be efficient and lasting if they submit voluntarily. That is the social contract whereby I accept the limits of the law on the condition that you accept them as a body, the image of the body as the masses and the mind as the sovereign posits an organicist interpretation whereby natural balance is inscribed on the social body in a mechanical way. The rational mind of the sovereign must drive or guide the abilities and physical strength of the masses. Locke, mentioned above, proposed a similar image: that of the sovereign as a horseman wearing a helmet, the masses, "that untamable beast". This equestrian analogy of the horse and the horseman appears time and again in the history of the crowd's images and we shall get back to it repeatedly. We will also get back to another metaphor by Locke, in this case, a metaphor that explains the masses' desire for stability: "unless when some common and great distress, uniting them in one universal ferment, makes them forget respect, and emboldens them to carve to their wants with armed force, and then sometimes they break in upon the rich and sweep all *like a deluge*." (Locke 1824, 71).

For now, we will stop at the distinction between the head and the body on the *Leviathan* frontispiece. In both versions, the wild horse and the flood, the irrationality of the masses suggests only one result: having to resign oneself to the wild nature and lack of responsibility of the multitude as a deluge overflowing the banks of the law. However, this characterization of the headless body implies a series of implications that we need to generate some relevant effects in order to understand. "Who knows what a body can do?" This mysterious question, posed around the same time by Spinoza, acquires a particular inflection when placed next to the image-symbol of the masses as a body. Who knows what a body can do? Maybe we could say the following: who knows what the body could do without the limits imposed on it by the mind? Here, references to the sonnambulist and the drunkard come to mind: those who do not do what they want or should do, not even to serve their own interest. The Spinozian idea of "bodies that move other bodies" harbours not only the fear of the multitude but rather, and simultaneously, a fascination with its inexorability. After all, Spinoza's concern, which is still in force today, is summed up in his axiom from *Ethics*: "to see the better but follow the worst". In other words, why do people fight for their servitude as bravely as though they were fighting for their salvation? After all, as Spinoza also points out, human beings are always conscious of their own desires, but not of the reasons that force and condition them to desire. A century later and following the same division of responsibilities, desires, and duties between the body and the mind, Kant gave a cynical solution to this problem by stating that outrage is a legitimate driving force of reason, advising the following: "Argue as much as you will and about whatever you will, *but obey!*" (Kant 2009, 10). As long as the body is kept subjugated, one can fight for the mind's freedom.

2

A brief interlude: When at the beginning of this paper I said that what matters to me is the history of the crowd's forms, that was because it is precisely in this problematic crystallization of what is allegedly formless that I see emerging the irreducible truth of this phenomenon. The binary of form and content that resonates in everything I have said so far is under the apparently naive coupling of the body and the body also alludes to another series of factors that are essential for understanding the aesthetic: the issue of the figure and the background. I propose a correlate between the figure/background pair, always present in the formal (or formalist, if you wish) analysis of the aesthetic, and the unresolved political paradox of the individual's inscription in the social, or the subject's inscription in the collective. The inscription of the fragment in the totality. Elsewhere I have proposed that a structural analogy of this irreducibility of the individual to the social relationship between the weave and the warp in textiles. This concerns the limitation of optical perception that prevents us from seeing simultaneously the weave and the warp in a fabric, the limitation that allows us to see the weave as long as we do not see the warp and vice versa.

When the photographic technique appeared, it seemed to promise a happy reconciliation of this pair, of this paradox. The immediacy of the photographic take caused the camera to catch mechanically a frozen instant in which both levels get registered without any distinction: on the one hand, the outline of the collective body, with the totality of the components of the mass forming some sort of reticule and, on the other, each one of them, with their particular features and singular gestures and attitudes they happened to be holding at the very moment the image was taken. The indistinguishable mass, which shares the almost textile quality of the engraving on *Leviathan's* frontispiece and of successful representations of the masses, did not allow for simultaneity. Therefore, it is not too daring to propose (and we could look for support in Walter Benjamin or Siegfried Krauczer, for instance) that this fact, the formalization of the masses through the photographic medium, retrospectively determines the self-consciousness of its participants, who are, for the very first time, able to look at themselves in the picture and empathize with those represented. This sort of representational effect is backed by the fact that the emergence of an organized and self-conscious mass a political subject coincided with the advent of photography and its printed circulation via newspapers. However, it has to be noted that, due to the use of the photoengraving technique for their reproduction, the circulation of the first photographs in the press was through the illustrated magazines, which members of the more affluent classes used to obtain by means of subscription. It was only in 1897 that the possibility of directly reproducing photographs in the press gradually began to allow them to circulate at a level massive enough to permit the shaping of a self-consciousness in those who saw themselves reproduced in those photographs. More interestingly, due to the same technical limitations, the rudimentary weave in those initial techniques did not allow for good reproductions of multitudinous gatherings. This is due to the fact that the dots in the reticule that makes the picture would weave together with the small heads that form the image, dispersing them into an unrecognizable mass.

As I already pointed out above, until the advent of photography, the scarce representations of the mass as a homogenous object had to sacrifice the detail in the features of each individual and reduce them to a gestural riticle, to a sort of figure that translated the effect of the multitude to the burin technique in engraving or textures in painting. This sort of representational effect is the idealical perception of the mass as a fluid or flow, a blind dispersion of its elements. At the end of the 19th century, however, at the moment I defined as the advent of photography and change in the perception of the masses as a political subject, there was a suggestive tension between the two reproduction techniques. Although, as I said above, directly printed pictures did not circulate until nearly the end of the century, with the advent of photography, news items were illustrated in the press with photographs of the masses. This technique allowed the engraver to reproduce the jumbled details contained in the original take, as thoroughly as was deemed pertinent in each case. Thus, the technique appears to us as a symbolic form, maybe a symptom whose materiality reveals the truth that the discourse conceals.

3

The historical events that shaped the philosophical reflections with which I began by examining the power of the crowd and its govtivity were in the 17th century, however, at the moment I defined as the advent of photography and change in the perception of the masses as a political subject, there was a suggestive tension between the two reproduction techniques. Although, as I said above, directly printed pictures did not circulate until nearly the end of the century, with the advent of photography, news items were illustrated in the press with photographs of the masses. This technique allowed the engraver to reproduce the jumbled details contained in the original take, as thoroughly as was deemed pertinent in each case. Thus, the technique appears to us as a symbolic form, maybe a symptom whose materiality reveals the truth that the discourse conceals.

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

26

27

28

29

30

31

32

33

34

35

36

37

38

39

40

41

42

43

44

45

46

47

48

49

50

51

52

53

54

55

56

57

58

59

60

61

62

63

64

65

66

67

68

69

70

71