

Laboratorio de Antropología Audiovisual Experimental (LAAV) y La Rara Troupe





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**Laboratorio de Antropología
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Who are you and what's your career path?

Chus Domínguez: I'm Chus Domínguez. I'm in the world of experimental audiovisual documentaries. I also teach, and I lead workshops in some institutions and universities. Since 2007 I've collaborated with the Department of Education and Cultural Action of the MUSAC, the Contemporary Art Museum of Castilla y León. That's a short summary of my path.

Belén Sola: And I'm Belén Sola. Who am I? What do I do? Well, many things. I've been involved for a long time in cultural management, mediation, education, and the Department of Education that Chus was talking about. Little by little I've been getting more involved in translating research into a type of education or production. I've been in more of a creative space, while always thinking about the intersection of creation, research, and working with communities and critical pedagogies. Lately I've been really interested in contemporary anthropology and ethnography.

Where are we?

Belén Sola: We're in La Provisional, which is a house here in Barrillos de Curueño in the León province, in northern León.

Both of you are involved in the Laboratorio de Antropología Audiovisual Experimental (Experimental Audiovisual Anthropology Lab), or LAAV, and La Rara Troupe (The Strange Troupe). The two are related. Could you explain your relationship with each one?

Belén Sola: Chus had worked programming at the DEAC (Department of Education and Cultural Action) of the MUSAC for a long time, and we'd done many things together, but La Rara Troupe was the project that really brought us together in programming and methodology. That was when we really started to think about how we could create a group beyond a workshop, because you'd already done workshops in the museum. And we were also looking for other places to work together, trying to explore other ways of creating community through audiovisual media, which is what Chus was bringing— that and his whole creative process. So La Rara Troupe for me was a creative confluence with Chus that opened up a new way of thinking in my work with the Department of Education. La Rara Troupe opened a lot of doors.

Chus Domínguez: It was also the first project where, on top of developing cultural and artistic work, we also proposed creation with others. And it was long-term. It started out as a workshop, then we saw it made sense to continue it. There was internal demand for us to continue, and we wanted to. I think this was the first time we launched such

a big, long-term creative project, and it was the seed for the La Rara Troupe project, which would later become the Audiovisual Anthropology Laboratory.

It's complex. Now La Rara Troupe is a part of a larger project of LAAV's, but it actually laid the foundation for certain methodologies and ways of understanding work, relationships, etc, that we applied in later projects at LAAV. But we always think about, and I always talk about, a session we had with Martín Correa and La Rara Troupe during a week-long creative residency. Martín Correa is an anthropologist, and talking with him we reflected and understood that we're really doing "auto-ethnography." It's interesting because we'd never really thought of ourselves in that way. We'd never thought of what we were doing as auto-ethnography. That reflection opened a lot of doors in our thinking. It helped us understand that the field we were in is bigger than one concrete project about mental health and the audiovisual format. We realized we could go other places, work with other collectives. And that was sort of the seed for LAAV. So our involvement is that both projects came from us, and we're a part of and implicated in both. The two projects are very closely associated with each other. LAAV is a broader project that encompasses more things, learning groups and future endeavors. All of this was already coming up in the research for La Rara Troupe. La Rara Troupe was the seed for LAAV.

What does each project have to do with the Department of Education at MUSAC (Contemporary Art Museum of Castilla and León, or Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León in Spanish)?

Belén Sola: That's something that also links La Rara with LAAV. Both projects were made possible by an institution like MUSAC. Since I was the head of the Department of Education at MUSAC, both projects came into being sort of in the center of that institution.

How many people are part of LAAV's leadership?

Chus Domínguez: As a laboratory, we're a team. There's another co-worker involved in the association, because LAAV is also an association. We got started as a project in the University of León's Anthropology department. That relationship didn't prosper over time. We've tried to grow and are always looking to expand, but for now it's just the people who are here right now.

La Rara Troupe is a working group that addresses mental health and psychosocial distress through self-representation and first-person narration in audiovisual media. The project started in 2012 in the Sta. Isabel de León Hospital for Mental Health and was there until 2013, when these workshops were moved to MUSAC's DEAC, and a more stable group of participants came together—people with varied and intertwined interests ranging from audiovisual creation to mental health to psychosocial distress. Why did you choose this name?

Belén Sola: With La Rara, we were trying to explain the project to hospitals, mental health centers, and other places we were visiting. We wanted to tell them we weren't trying to make traditional films or explain life in any way, but we wanted to do something to express ourselves in a "strange" (or rara, in Spanish) way. The word "strange" helped us talk about things that weren't mainstream or well-known. We were also doing radio in the beginning, so it was really easy to get on Radio Fórmula or interview channels.

Chus Domínguez: It was a euphemism for experimentation.

Belén Sola: Exactly. And experimentation is exactly what we did in the end. We started Rara Radio, we experimented with radio, and then La Rara Troupe came into being.

Chus Domínguez: Yes, and I remember that when we were looking for projects to model La Rara Troupe after, we really liked the idea of group work that can be sustained over time. I remember Fassbinder's troupe. He'd always work with the same people, technicians, actors. We saw one of his films, and we kind of identified with that. From there the two of us became La Rara Troupe.

Belén Sola: We're talking about a three year trajectory, which is really interesting. We started with a workshop, then Radio Rara, then La Rara Web. In 2015 after three years of working, we're now La Rara Troupe, which moved into its own space when we did the creative residency you were talking about before. That's when we named ourselves La Rara Troupe, which was also an interesting moment in the creation of this group, or really of this human group.

La Rara Troupe inspired the creation of the Experimental Audiovisual Anthropology Laboratory (LAAV) associated with MUSAC that was created in 2016 and is linked to the Education and Cultural Action Department of MUSAC. How did you come to the name Experimental Audiovisual Anthropology Laboratory (LAAV)?

Chus Domínguez: To be honest, for us, or maybe more for me, we referenced Harvard's Sensory Ethnography Lab, and even though we didn't want to reproduce their method of creating or even aspire to be that, it was a reference, a space where they made things that we thought were interesting. At that time there wasn't the abundance of laboratories that there is today, or maybe I didn't know about them. Suddenly there are so many laboratories. But at that time that was my reference as a laboratory—it was a creative space that connected creation with research. That's where the laboratory part comes from.

For "anthropology," we were interested in reflecting on ethnography, auto-ethnography, and also working with groups and taking it to a broader place beyond just ethnography and observation. For "audiovisual" it was because we worked with the audiovisual format. "Experimental" was an effort to add that tagline and make it very clear because I think I also remember talking to the university, and they had their doubts. Like it didn't really make sense to them for someone with a university background to experiment with something that sounds weird. We thought about naming it "Experimental Audiovisual Anthropology Museum," but we wanted to make it very clear that all the projects needed to have a certain level of risk, of searching for new ways forward, of experimentation. It's a bit absurd, because I think all laboratories conduct experiments. But I think we just needed that to be very clear in the context we were working in, because I think it's a way to communicate, even in our name, that we're coming from a place of searching. We're exploring, not doing what's already been done.

Belén Sola: Yes, and the term experimental is useful because it tells people with a super classical background in anthropology or audiovisual production that we're working under this umbrella of art and experimentation. We prevent attacks we might run into if we tried to paint ourselves as audiovisual anthropologists because we don't have that background.

LAAV as a workspace was born in the context of a public institution. What type of reception and support does this approach get in the museum?

Chus Domínguez: I think that Belén will give you a better answer, but the truth is there isn't a mold that the laboratory is trying to fit in. It really is just a name until we make another association. Let's just say it doesn't really fit into the mold of any institution. It's just a project that happens to have that name. But I'm going to let Belén answer this one since she was in charge of that department.

Belén Sola: Well, on one hand I'm thinking yes. It's true that this was created in a public institution like MUSAC, but we can't forget that we were able to launch this because of private financial assistance from the Daniel and Nina Carasso Foundation. If it weren't for this money, we wouldn't have been able to launch it. That gives you a good initial idea of the public institution's interest in this. By interest I'm referring to their initial interest, a position of "this is something essential for us," as a museum that conducts research and has the public generating projects. This project wasn't on the museum director's agenda. It just wasn't in the plan. But it was possible because in a way we emerged out of that original experience with La Rara—and because Chus and I were able to get some private funding from a project we wrote. The museum could have tried to look for the funding to make this possible, but that wasn't the case. In my opinion, now that we're talking about it in this interview, everything that happens in that public museum in the end comes from a grassroots experience. In other words, it comes from the organization of citizens. The drive to find funding is carried by a grassroots community like La Rara. Then Chus and I will put it on paper and look for the funding. But LAAV emerged out of that experience, it didn't really come from the institution. Another thing I always talk about is that in the institution there are spaces that allow you to do things, because I also know places that won't even allow you. We also have to acknowledge that there are institutions that do. Another thing is how much they'll allow. But at least you have a space that allows you to do it.

How is LAAV, which is a workspace within MUSAC, legally an Association?

Chus Domínguez: Well, it has to do with the fact that people, rather than the institution, created this project. One creator is a department head at MUSAC, and the other is an external collaborator. When the pandemic-related economic crisis hit, the laboratory basically stopped existing for the institution. The institution can only support certain projects, the exhibits, basically. But the laboratory has stopped relying on support from the institution. In that sense it's something external. And time and circumstances will dictate what happens next, as they have from the beginning and throughout the project's existence. There was a time when we no longer had the support of the Carasso Foundation, which had supported us for three years and made our launch possible. I think we had some help, another type of support, for about a year.

Belén Sola: Well, La Caixa gave us money for La Rara last year but it was always private funding. The MUSAC never bet on us...

Chus Domínguez: So I think that at that moment we realized that there isn't a model for the laboratory or any type of permanent support from institutions. That was when we decided to become a legal association, so we could sustain ourselves long-term. This led, consciously and almost necessarily, to a kind of detachment from the museum as the project's owner. This was a moment of realization that the laboratory needed to have legal status.

Was there ever a possibility of LAAV being a cooperative?

Belén Sola: I was working in MUSAC but it didn't really make much sense to make a work cooperative because the goal from the beginning was for it to stay in MUSAC. The important thing for us was for this to permeate institutions and for the institutions to manage it, take care of it and nurture it. So we didn't really want to make a cooperative because our intention wasn't to work. Chus had his job and I had mine. For me the laboratory was more about establishing protocols in our work and research, and generating projects in community and in a different way than what's common in institutions. But if the institution wouldn't maintain it, that wasn't our battle to fight at the time. I was working as the head of the Department of Education, so we chose to be an association because we thought it was the best legal status for requesting external funding. LAAV was already such an external entity that it was better off as an Association, even asking MUSAC for money, than being part of it. In our home institution it was almost like we hadn't really structurally permeated the MUSAC's budget. LAAV was always understood as a project that was financed with private funding and if there wasn't any...

What state will LAAV be in once it breaks off from MUSAC?

Belén Sola: We're trying to make LAAV last. If it can't be a project with continuous fieldwork we still want to publish research or have some meeting spaces. In the end, the Association allows us to have that. We've worked with the DA2 Domus Artium 2002 of Salamanca. We're working with the Etnográfico de Zamora. I believe, or I want to believe, that we will work with the MUSAC here in León. By being in an Association we can think of the LAAV in another way, trying to break away from that relationship of being MUSAC's child. I've always thought of it as something that was born at MUSAC, raised there, and then broke off once it grew up. Now it works in a different way.

Chus Dominguez: As for the location, I think we were also really interested in the idea of a nomadic laboratory, which we also used as a reference, although nowadays that isn't as important. Well, it still is important, we work, and the projects are pretty situated. But you can move around, meet online, travel. And we're so happy about that. I think we're going to develop those events in Zamora, at another institution, and collaborating with different institutions is really beautiful.

Belén Sola: Last year we also led a seminar for a masters program in Valencia, the Permea Education Masters. I think this year of transition, leaving the MUSAC and being on our own, we're in a moment of transferring methodologies which is really beautiful, because La Rara, in a way, founded the laboratory. But now La Rara was invited to Salamanca to launch another group. We're seeing that it's very beautiful transferring and transporting some methodologies.

Is it possible to have a project like LAAV without institutional support to economically sustain your work?

Chus Domínguez: This relationship between work, money, time, and dedication is really complicated. The truth is that LAAV itself didn't have the resources to develop projects. When someone doesn't have the resources to support themselves, other opportunities that are more or less related arise, but they take time, so you might spend less time on the laboratory. In that sense, I think we have different stances. Belén is calmer and sees the laboratory as a long-term project, where it's not a big deal if there are "stand

by” periods. That’s a lot harder for me. I’m more of a pessimist and I really struggle with these patterns because I question myself. It’s a project that we’ve given so much to, so I want it to be working really well continuously, but I think we balance each other out.

Belén Sola: Well there’s no other option. There was a year when we were left with nothing; there wasn’t any money to make our last movie. It was all so discouraging.

Chus Domínguez: Yes, it’s really essential. In fact I could have a job that I can earn a living from and have it consume 100% of my time. I can take time away from my dream, my family, to push something forward. But I don’t consider myself to be “working on the LAAV,” you know? It doesn’t seem like the right way to put it.

Belén Sola: Because we aren’t working right now.

Chus Domínguez: Yes, but at least we’ve been able to start up the meetings in Zamora. We did that on our own time. But launching a creative project is impossible because it would consume us. They’re projects that take over your whole life.

Belén Sola: Yes, that’s very clear. We know that when LAAV gets funding we’ll get into another long-term project. But in the meantime, that clearly isn’t going to happen. We also think of them as just that: jobs. We come from an institution and think it’s important to demand that. Why are some jobs financed well while others aren’t? Are they not interesting to you? Well that’s fine, you’ll find them interesting later. I’d rather wait. I think that at some point people will see we deserve support, and if it isn’t in the public sector, then it will be in the private sector, and if it isn’t through either, then it will happen another way. But things will work out, maybe not as well as I’d want them to, but I’m sure they will. It’s also very clear to me that if you’re going to do this, it needs to be funded, that’s very clear to me.

Did 15M affect the origin of La Rara Troupe?

Chus Domínguez: I don’t know. I don’t really see much of a relationship there, personally. I really haven’t noticed it. If there is one, I haven’t...

Belén Sola: People have come to La Rara, I’m thinking of Alfredo, of partners, of La Rara’s leadership group, that were really affected by the 15M. They came with a very open mind about community, assembly, and other topics. I’ve seen this happen to some people. Not a lot, for example, not for the people at the hospital. It isn’t something that’s radically or directly influenced La Rara or LAAV. But of course, at the personal level there were people affected, but not in our case.

In LAAV’s case we’re dealing with an Experimental Audiovisual Anthropology Museum (LAAV) that’s presented as a permanent space for research and creation with communities. How do you work on creating and recreating a community of practice in a research project that, on top of producing knowledge, also results in an audiovisual project that represents the community involved?

Chus Domínguez: I think it’s very related to my work in the Department of Education, with their philosophy of working with people. Simply put, there’s no other option. It isn’t about working over people, but working with people. If we’re talking about La Rara Troupe, it was a process where we started working with people, and we discovered and invented the methodology together with everyone. In the end it

was obvious that at the root of LAAV's processes were these groups, collectives, or communities. And I don't know if they're always created or if sometimes we just bring them to the surface, because there are times where there's already more or less a community there. Other times you end up understanding what community or subcommunity is the one that wants to be involved or wants to develop that project. I don't know. I see it so clearly. Creating that learning community is also embedded in the methodology. But at the same time, if you think about the work, in order to make a project you need the community. To create a community you also need the project. It's like there's a common goal that unifies us, and in the end this is what makes the community appear. It makes the implicated project clearer.

Belén Sola: For me, and I've always thought about it this way, when I wrote my thesis about La Rara it became clear that what we're doing also has something to do with performance because of the creation of living things, of something that's alive. Generating a community to me is also a work of art. It has as much to do with humanity as it does with the final, material product. In my thesis I explored this idea of live arts, because you also end up transforming yourself in this collective journey, and to me this has a lot to do with action art. People say, "Action art is something different, it's performance". I'm talking about action art, thinking about the counterculture from the 70s, Joseph Beuys's social culture, and all of this has to do with sitting down at the same table to debate and transform ourselves. That's both social culture and action. If you tie it to the fact that you're creating a tangible product and conducting formal research through the audiovisual medium, then everything fits together. There's a conscious pursuit of creating community in the diversity of people, because of course there's a creation of community. It can't just be me sitting down to work with my three sisters, who I know very well how they think. The interesting thing that I always talk about is when we sat down with the women of Puta Mina, or with high school students to make Libertad. The interesting thing is opening these spaces of convergence with other people that you normally wouldn't meet, or with people from the hospital. Inviting this diversity and being able to have them sitting at a table and, on top of that, using that to creatively inform something. I think that's action art, that has to do with creation. For me, both of these things have always been really important, creating the group in the sense of relational art, connective art, art that makes us human groups at a table, but that also unites us because we want to create something that represents us.

From an analysis of your methodology, it's very clear what differentiates extractive research and creative processes from processes that work in community to create something, then return their acquired knowledge back to the community. Working in community requires a lot of trust, among the participants and also in you as the mediators of the process. How do you build this trust?

Chus Domínguez: Well you have to invest a lot of time there. A lot of time.

Belén Sola: A lot of time, a lot of sincerity in the sense of honesty. When we were in the museum, one of the things that worried me the most was the capital. Things like: "Who needs to sign off on this?" or "The museum supports this." We always try to talk about these things because there's a lot of mistrust there, like, "Here come the museum people," because it didn't stop being a museum. So it was important to break away from that. The institution is a very tough space; usually no one trusts them, and I could feel that. I myself came to the table with a lot of prejudices, prejudices in thinking about how to present myself so they don't think we're going to make a

MUSAC movie. And you explain to them that no, what you want is for them to make the movie, for us together to make the movie. Trust is a matter of time, honesty at that level, saying well this is what the MUSAC is, but I'm Belén, and he's Chus, and we're people. It's talking about everything, and more than anything, it's time and trust.

Chus Domínguez: Yes, for people not to feel used over time. Having them feel that they have something to offer and that we're all there to learn, are all offering something, and that there's space for everything. There isn't a formula.

The protagonists of your audiovisual works are self-represented people. Methodologically speaking, is this gesture of giving them the camera so that they can be the ones narrating important?

Belén Sola: Yes, I think those are the basics of the self-representation methodology. First, handing over the tool because we aren't going to make you a movie, you're going to make it yourself. This is important. I think this is something that strikes people at first, but then they're thankful for it. It's like they first think, "But you're the one that knows, you have to tell me things," but then they realize. I talk a lot about pedagogy, criticism, dialogic practices, and I'm not going to film something if I don't know anything about it. Let's instead sit down to talk, and I'm going to listen to you because you're the one that knows about this subject. In the case of Puta Mina, this was very clear. That's why there were so many hours of recorded conversation. I think these listening methodologies make people understand that yes, they're the protagonists. We're really here because we want to listen, understand, and make something with you. However we make this audiovisual project work, we're going to do it together. I'm not just going to record everything you tell me.

Chus Domínguez: I don't think sharing the camera is that essential. I think it catches people's attention and makes people from the outside look in. But in the process of audiovisual creation, I don't think the camera is essential because there's a whole initial reflection that takes place, and there's continuous reflection. There's filming, editing, and presenting. There are always behind-the-scenes changes and rewrites of scripts, so it isn't just that moment with the camera. That's why I thought it was interesting when you brought it up, because, I mean yes, but if we're making it together, then the camera is just one part of that process. It catches people's attention because when the viewer watches a movie, they see what the camera is filming and they don't see the montage. But that montage was made by everyone, right? And you also aren't seeing the planning. That process is a lot longer, and it goes beyond just the camera. I think the moment with the camera is important and should be shared. Or sometimes it isn't shared, because there are also cases where I've picked up the camera, or if you're responsible for it, then you'll grab it.

Belén Sola: Yes, but as a gesture, saying we hand over the camera it isn't just literally giving someone the camera. It's really sharing the production and thinking tools. To me that's what handing over the camera means, and that does happen.

Can you explain what traditions have shaped LAAV's unique way of working when facing an audiovisual creation process?

Chus Domínguez: I think that maybe the tradition of critical pedagogy, right? That's there. In the work...

Belén Sola: Yes, critical pedagogy has informed the Department of Education that I founded since 2005. It was always clear to me that the department's philosophy should be rooted in classical, Freudian critical pedagogy. The idea of the educator-educating, breaking down barriers between student and teacher, and starting to think of emancipatory models for everyone. But also being very critical of classical critical education. From there you start researching and questioning yourself. This idea of "empowering people" doesn't convince me. These questions have always been around: Educate who? Why? These are the questions that critical educators ask ourselves, and sometimes it's too many. I also have a background as an art historian. I work closely with art and have always been averse to museum art, but not to other art. I'd see art in other things. In the end you learn, and I brought in more counterculture, street movements, performance, activist art, to put it that way. I was always looking for different things; things you wouldn't normally see in a museum and that were important and had to do with creating spaces of enunciation and seeing other stories and people. I saw that there's a really potent intersection between art that's critical of the system and an art system that's very shaped by merchandising, etc., etc. Critical pedagogy allowed us to work in that intersection within our communities. We've also worked a lot with that topic in the Department of Education, from the start. When we got to MUSAC, the first thing we did was see where we were and who was in the city. We had a network there composed of collectives and communities and associations that was interesting and important. I came from that—from a critical, community-based, street-smarts education. But also, again, with my idea of more social, open art—a democracy. The culture had to be something much more participatory, not just four artists who happened to be selected for the Biennale. That's what I was seeing it turn into. Well, there's a long history there, of people from the 60s, 70s, 80s, that have done wonders, and you find them outside of the visual arts many times, you find them in performances or other spaces. We had a lot to learn from that, and we had to take this to the museum. I looked at those educational and social spaces more broadly. That's where I started.

Chus Domínguez: If I had to identify a philosophical reference, I'd talk about Jonas Mekas. His philosophy has been essential to me in finding my path and understanding what it means to create freely and experimentally, to defend amateurs, to defend representations of daily life, to work on self-representation, to work with intimate moments and question institutions. I think this is a reference that we've taken to La Rara, more than anything, and I don't know about other projects. For me it would be working and thinking the Jonas Mekas way, of working with small things, giving importance to the small things, the amateur things, and for everyone to feel they can do it and belong. It's also a way to tell and show things that people can identify with, and can do as well. We always thought it was interesting, also in teaching, that Mekas's work connects with people over time and little by little. At least people hold on to this amateur spirit, this drive to do something, that desire to live, and talk about the small things, the things that are close.

Would it be correct to say that LAAV is in the intersection between anthropology, auto-ethnography, and critical pedagogy?

Belén Sola: I think about it like...

Chus Domínguez: I think it's all the same in the end. Sometimes you don't even need to name the critical pedagogies because they're all there. It's all mixed. It's okay to name them. It's okay to give references, but sometimes you realize you

have that in you, you carry it with you. I'm trying to say that it's in anthropology, in ethnography, I think it's in Mekas's work perfectly, and it's in pedagogy.

Belén Sola: Totally, but we also need to define it—I already learned this. The older I get the more I realize that you need to define yourself because if you don't, others will define you. So you have to say no, I define myself this way and I place myself here. I also think we have a very specific practice and that anthropology can show you that okay, we're all evidently subject to... and it has to be very clear where you're coming from in all of these matters. With everything that's going on, with the decolonial angle which I'm also interested in, I'm beginning to see that evidently we come from there and that in a very intuitive way, we're there. In addition, there are very strong epistemic shifts now. So to be able to take all of that and put it in practice I think is a superluxury and we can do this because of an independent laboratory, because in a university it might not be so easy to conduct research from that angle.

In our capitalistic cultural moment there's a tendency to spectacularize events with the goal of influencing the way people think. There's also an academic and cultural tendency toward extraction for financial gain. Considering all this, what lines shouldn't be crossed when working on a community audiovisual production?

Chus Domínguez: That has now become a defining element of our work. Anything that doesn't come out of the community doesn't really make much sense. So, who are we to draw that line? The group is the one that decides what they want to tell. We've been involved in complex projects that had a lot of complexity at the time of being developed and transmitted. I'm specifically thinking about Puta Mina. But of course, a group takes it from there, and in that case...

Belén Sola: ...We do it as a group.

Chus Domínguez: Yes, and I think we can also offer a point of view for making that decision. Sometimes, for example in mining, you can say well, I'm looking in from the outside and I can offer another point of view that as a group we can decide if we want to take. It has happened in La Rara Troupe where we've had moments when we've wondered until what point does material need to be included, and it's the people that have decided this by discussing and reaching an agreement as a group. I think that this decision belongs to the group, fully understanding that there's some material that can go public and become a problem, which happened in Puta Mina. But they wanted to include it and took on the risks. We would've never pushed them to include something that could give them problems. We could intervene by saying, "We're going to bring up the topics that we think are essential, but we're going to see from there what gets included and what you want, and then we can decide." In montages, people should intervene in some way, by revising the material and making a final version of that montage. So there are decisions that are made there. Or for example in the case of Hostal España, there were people that didn't want to participate in the montage. So we had screenings, which is a way to participate in the montage, and no one said that they wanted sections to be cut. It was the opposite, people were saying "this part is missing" and we added those materials. That's why I'm saying that the majority creates it.

Belén Sola: Another line that was very clearly not crossed was for another project, which we don't have a movie for: Proyecto Teleclub. Proyecto Teleclub was a project we tried to make in 2016. It was one of our first projects, along with Puta Mina. Teleclubs are like communal bars that some towns here in the León area still have. Someone,

Raquel, launched a teleclub in Navadria, a town in Sobarriba here in León. It was a type of cultural center and everyone would tell us about it and say, "Look, there are really cool things happening over there where Raquel is, it might be interesting to look into it." It was a space for exchange between the new residents of the town and those that had been living there their whole lives, and we were also really interested in rural spaces and that new reality, or whatever it's called. We wanted to see what was happening there. And it was a project we worked on for almost two years, especially with Raquel. We worked with the Telclub and others for six months or so because they closed the Teleclub on the seventh month because of a problem in the town. In the eighth month Raquel told us that she didn't want anything to do with the project, and we had months worth of recorded footage of the Teleclub. There were 7 or 8 of us in the group and we were trying to see what else we could do with it to continue our audiovisual research. But in the end, Raquel left and we had to leave. So all of that material had to be discarded, and that project ended there out of respect for Raquel's wishes. There was already some footage we weren't going to use, that was already half of what we had recorded. But that was a very clear line. You can't use a person's material, even if they tell you that they don't want to continue or that they would rather not see it published halfway through the year.

Following the line of the previous question, and keeping in mind your broad experience working in the audiovisual field, do you think it's possible to influence the hegemonic dominant capitalist imaginary through images? Is it possible to put out fire with fire?

Chus Domínguez: I'm questioning that myself right now. I work with young people, they keep getting younger, and I've noticed it's gotten harder to reach them because their imagination is completely taken over by Netflix. But in the end, it's because of this culturally induced inclination toward a single imaginative space. That space is plenty interesting for its own reasons, but it discourages interest in other imaginaries, and I don't know what to do about that. Up until now I had my secret recipe of Jonas Mekas. But I'm starting to see this also failing because it doesn't really interest them because they immediately think about how this is the same thing as Instagram stories. I think it's necessary to watch and listen again. To rediscover what needs to be watched and what we should watch and why. That has to do with images and also with sounds in the audiovisual field, in my opinion.

I think this is a battle, and it's present in all of our projects, because we need to communicate that there are other ways of living. This was very clear in our Libertad project, where one of the parts of the workshop we did was sharing movies with them, but of course that was our imaginary. Looking at it that way, it's like we're imposing our own imaginary onto them instead of sharing theirs. But the problem is that in this culture that we're living in, this country, this socio-cultural and socio-political space, there hasn't been a way for young people to be introduced to alternate imaginaries. The only thing we can do is try to give them an additional window to look through, so they can see that in addition to what they see, there are other alternatives. That's the only thing we can do. Upon reflecting on this, I picked out a movie that I thought the 16-year olds would love. They hated it, but they'll remember it forever. It was a really beautiful movie called Ah Liberty! by Ben Rivers. So the only thing we can do is slowly share and introduce material that they can watch and listen to. But then there comes a moment where you start wondering if you're the one that's getting old; you're more disconnected with the current imaginary, and it becomes clear that you can't fully criticize it, because

there are also really interesting parts of it, and you also need to work with that, but in a very critical way, questioning it, which also yields really interesting results.

Belén Sola: Yes, and in my opinion there's also a huge problem with artistic education. There isn't audiovisual education. Young people are born being bombarded by millions upon millions of images and audiovisual materials, and they don't have any critical education to deal with the images that surround them. There's a huge educational problem.

Reflecting on the capitalist industry of leisure and entertainment, it seems that the media and social media are what is primarily teaching an uncritical way of watching, thinking, connecting, and interacting with the world. What role do you think formal and informal education play in the development and acceptance of other imaginaries and other ways of thinking, watching, and relating with other people and the world?

Chus Domínguez: I've found educators in the formal setting that are trying to introduce these imaginaries to their students. So I think that my answer would be yes, but we're doing this too late. That's the feeling that I have. It's something we need to be doing outside of formal education. In fact I think that the problem isn't just in artistic education, it's always been there. It's in how we can educate in a critical way starting from age 3 or from age zero. I don't like to criticize everything so generally, but I think there are a lot of deficits in terms of critical, participatory education that promotes autonomy. We need education that questions everything, not just the images. This is absent at the formal level, and it's done in a limited way in universities. I think there are a few spaces that accomplish this. I'm in the ICAM, in the film school, as part of the documentary degree and I'm seeing that they're doing it there. I can't talk about other spaces. In the Fine Arts degree, I see professors that are working on it. So I don't want to criticize everything, but I'm generally seeing that it's too late. It's happening with people that are at the end of their degree, and there isn't enough time in a year or two to change the whole way that someone acts, thinks, breathes, watches. The institutions that give this formal education should work on it. I think other countries are doing this. Well, I want to believe that it's happening, but I think it's minimal here.

Belén Sola: Here it's done very minimally and poorly. I do think that there's an issue specifically with artistic education. There's this systemic push to separate the people from critical thinking. That's how I see it. In the university there are people that do have the drive and desire to change things, but people come to ask, "What do I need to do?" and the problem is that that's their question.

I think we can agree that the audiovisual material that LAAV produces requires a critical viewer that's prepared to watch this type of material. I personally think your material is very rich to work with in the classroom, but I do think it requires some mediation to help viewers connect and converge with the protagonists... Do you know if your material is being used in formal and informal classrooms? Have you developed your own teaching units?

Chus Domínguez: It depends how you're introduced to LAAV's materials. Our materials are available on the Filmin platform, and if you're introduced to them through that, then you might be missing some context, and you'll be asking yourself a lot of questions, and you'll probably just end up changing movies because the scope of the movie is too broad, and you have too many questions, and the material doesn't

line up with the way we tend to consume audiovisual content. On the other hand, if you go to a project presentation where we talk about the processes, you can see the people who participated, and you become aware and internalize that this is really a collective project. I think those spaces are totally educational. I don't know about the educational potential for isolated materials. I really hope they have educational potential. But if they aren't contextualized, you can see that it can get complicated because they aren't surrounded by an accommodating space, where you can really enjoy the material. We don't just do it out of pleasure, it also has its artistic side.

Belén Sola: Yes. I'm thinking about, for example, the La Rara Troupe project. I know of two teachers that use La Rara's webpage in their classes as a methodological resource. So yes, of course, they can be educational resources. I don't really know if there are other people that are using it.

Chus Domínguez: That's why we've worked really hard to try to contextualize all of our material. Like the audiovisuals, we always have interactive maps, information, and other material that goes along with it on the webpage. I think these are really interesting educational spaces.

Belén Sola: I'm thinking that if we had a paid worker in LAAV, for example, this could be done, and it would be wonderful. We tried to do it once. We tried to brainstorm how we could circulate some documentaries in the United States and Europe, because we knew they were being used for educational purposes, but it didn't happen, we couldn't make it work. But maybe by adding teaching units with each movie, which we've also tried...

Chus Domínguez: Well they're there, I think they're experimental teaching units.

Where can we find La Rara Troupe and LAAV's materials?

Belén Sola: Right now everything is up on the LAAV webpage on laav.es. You can also visit La Rara Troupe's webpage, which is the other webpage that has material. But from laav.es, you can access all the projects the laboratory has made.

Chus Domínguez: The projects are there. Not all the movies are accessible there. Some are on Filmin, which is a paid platform. But from the beginning we wanted them to be open-access. But then, looking at the viewership, we realized we weren't reaching many people at all. So we decided to try this platform as a space to reach people, while trying to complement it with the web materials.

Belén Sola: La Rara has a variety of audiovisual exercises that can be accessed. They're all open and available on rara's webpage which is www.raraweb.org.

Can anyone request access to watch one of LAAV's works by sending an email through the webpage's contact page?

Chus Domínguez: Yes, and we've always granted access to anyone that's requested materials for screenings in viewing spaces. We're really pleased if people can pay, if it's an institution for example, but if it's a cineclub, person, researcher, student, or someone that's interested, they can just write to us and we can talk.

Belén Sola: If we can, we try to get people from the team to present the materials, because to us that's also part of the process of generating a group, and that ownership also means defending the work that we've done. If and when we can, someone that's participated in the movie will go.

Can you contextualize the origins of the 4 projects that you've done as part of LAAV: Libertad, Puta Mina, Proyecto Teleclub , and Hostal España?

Chus Domínguez: Libertad is a project we made from recordings of a woman who lived through the repression of the Civil War and the post-war, which started when she was 16 years old. So we created a learning community made up of boys and girls that were her age when she had to face the war, at 16, 17, 18 years old, the last year of high school. Together with teachers, an artist filmmaker, and us, we made this working group and followed their geographical route, through prisons, through the geography of northern Spain, or Iberia. From there we made a movie accompanied by an interactive map, where you can access all the documents. It's beautiful because all the documents from the process are there.

So along with the boys and girls, we would start by laying down on the apartment's carpeted floor, turning off the lights, and listening to this woman's voice which I had recorded a few years prior. We would have 15 minute listening sessions lying down, and then we would turn the light on, sit up, and start talking. Trying to talk to understand someone who had suffered through certain situations many years ago was how we started this project. And from there, it was a process that was developed filmically in 16 millimeters, where we had to learn how to use a 16 millimeter camera, which implies another type of audiovisual learning.

Belén Sola: Then we made the whole movie there in the department.

Chus Domínguez: ... We made everything simple, and we reflected not only on memory and current and past society, but also about what the audiovisual element is.

Belén Sola: That has to do with what you were asking us before about images. With the question of what do we want to film? Because every second of that movie costs money. So we have to choose carefully, because we aren't recording with the digital camera. It was about looking where you were pointing the camera and what you were shooting at. It needed to be very clear what you wanted to record. You can take all the time you want. We had to think really carefully about the image we wanted to capture, which is something really revolutionary in this day and age. This was so cool, and it's very true what you were saying about performing an educational exercise to train your eye.

Belén Sola: Puta Mina was a project...I also think it's really interesting...Well, each of LAAV's projects starts and is filmed in different, diverse ways. But, Puta Mina is a project that took place during a very distinct moment in León, when the laboratory came into being, in the summer of 2016: The trapped miners of Pozo Aurelia in Ciñera de Gordón, just 40 kilometers from where we are now.

So they were really trapped in that mine, and they were asking for an organized closure of the mine. They weren't even asking them to keep their jobs because it was very clear that the mine was going to close. At that time we had a colleague from the university named Conchi Unanue, who was from Ciñera and told us, "Guys,

we need to go here because there are 5 miners trapped. One of them is my friend and I think we should try to do something,” and just like that we left to go there with so many doubts, because we also didn't know what the narrative would be, but there was this feeling that something was happening, and we needed to be there. The story wasn't so much under the mine with the trapped miners in their struggle. It was instead on the surface, with a lot of women there who had a lot of things to say. Right away when you listen closely, you realize there's a story above the mine, on the surface, that these women wanted to tell. That was how, little by little and through Conchi, we connected with the town and people, and that was how we started to draft Puta Mina, with the women and everything they wanted to tell us about their life in the mining basin, the trapped miners, and everything else.

Chus Domínguez: Just like you were saying, starting so quickly scared us because we like to analyze what the possibilities are first. We went with our gut, but we've also gone with our gut on other projects that didn't work out, which is also okay. We tend to talk about our success stories, but there are projects where we've tried and they haven't worked out.

Chus Domínguez: And Hostal España was a project about a small hostel in León where there were, and currently still are, older people. It was one of our friend's hostels, so there was a lot of trust. I already knew the hostel, so we could get closer with our cameras and spotlights. Over the course of our work with them, especially with the women, they gathered the courage to start trying to pick up the camera and think about what their day-to-day was like, and from there trying to understand what it means to be older, if it even needs to mean anything. In the end it led to that: an audiovisual piece where mostly these women, but also some other members and workers of the hostel along with us, tried to tell what our day-to-day was like. And I think this worked out really well. We tried to approach this representation of older people in a different way, in a way that would allow them to self-represent.

As part of LAAV you've launched four projects that have a very clear political dimension. Is LAAV a political project? If so, what kind of politics are we talking about?

Belén Sola: Of course this is a political project. But I don't think LAAV could work any other way. I don't think we could do other things. I don't think I could work on other types of projects or try to tell other stories. It's a political project, both in how we do things and at our core. I think the right way to do this is politically. I could be talking about other things, but I'm involved in things that I want to be involved in, and I also think this has to do with what I was saying about how there isn't a separation between us and them, it's all of us together. They have stories and perspectives that I find really interesting. I'm not doing charity work for them. I'm very conscious of the fact that political transformation involves and is the responsibility of all of us as a community. That's why we talk about community so much, with all the complexities of the word. The topics are political because they're issues that concern us. They're present, and they're issues that you'll come up against even if you're working on the smallest, most painstaking tasks. I'm convinced of this, because when you work with others, what comes out of it and the things on the line are fundamental issues that make us the same in terms of emotions, fears, and overcoming challenges. In my opinion it's also a matter of social justice, in which we should all participate in different ways. In my case as a cultural worker, culture belongs to us. So we have to work on it in some way. If we make movies together, that's great. For me, that's where the political matters lie. They

lie in how to do it, how we open spaces for cultural democracy where voices can be plural and where we can all be holistically represented, with the good, bad, regular, with all of our diversity. That to me is 100% political. But I also consider myself a very political person in my day to day. And I'm not talking about partisan politics, I'm saying that all of my actions and decisions are political. My work is also obviously political.

Chus Domínguez: I agree that this is a political project. But at the end of the day, what are we calling political? I think it has to do with what you were saying about social justice and thinking about it in a very broad way. It also goes beyond just people and living beings. We have to include our planet and the spaces we're all in—the human and physical space. I really do think it's political. I always remember when we were trying to draft the fundamental building blocks of LAAV. We wrote that we were going to define ourselves and communicate our definition on our webpage. You were talking about how it was a critical project, and I was unsure about that at the time. I was saying, "I just don't understand why we have to put this critical statement here," and no. Over time I realized that it's so obvious that we have that critical approach to a lot of issues. In that sense it's also political, but I think that politics and policy like Belén was saying, can be found everywhere.

The Constellation of Commons is working on the production of a new proposed imaginary that can encourage civic engagement in the eco-social, polyethical and economic transformation. Could you name some of LAAV's milestones or accomplishments that have contributed to the pending structural and systemic change?

Chus Domínguez: It's probably something more subtle and so widespread that it affects all of us and that can affect other people. Still, every time I get asked this question, I always think of moments and milestones that have happened in the process of working on projects. Something I really liked in Puta Mina was when we had two groups that came from completely different associative and geographical backgrounds and belonged to the same community of the women miners group. They would have arguments and confrontations because they had different ways of looking at things. Just through conversation, by talking and talking, these two groups—which weren't quite opposing but had been separated—really started seeing things differently. By talking, they ended up understanding each other perfectly. They still had their differences, but they ended up building a community. For example, I think of that moment as an accomplishment—that the process of the project in itself generated a community. I think that was really beautiful because it was something we could also see. I think there are a lot of other accomplishments that are subtle, so we aren't fully aware of them.

Belén Sola: It's true, the movie presentations are also like that. When people are aware that they've made a movie, it gives you a really important creative rush. To be able to accomplish that without calling yourself an artist is also fantastic. I think those are really transformative moments for anyone. Also going back to eroding institutions, I always say that when MUSAC accepted the donation of LAAV's movies, that was a way of crossing the fine line that separates educational projects from artistic exhibitions. It seems to be the norm that educational projects can't cross over into other spaces. So we were able to overcome that with LAAV's projects. And on the other hand, we're introducing voices, narrations, and stories that wouldn't normally be a part of a public contemporary art collection. In my opinion these two events are a remarkable achievement that LAAV and the other groups that have worked there were able to accomplish. Like Chus was saying, it's very

personal. In La Rara Troupe, I can imagine that of the one hundred or so people that have stepped through the doors, each one has taken something away from it. But the biggest thing to me was that LAAV was able to make a small crack at the institutional level by having their materials be a part of a public collection.

What do you think the pending institutional transformation needs in order for the public to enjoy collaborative spaces and laboratories like LAAV?

Chus Domínguez: When critical education and political processes reach those who design the institutions, then there will be a transformation. It's a shame, but it depends on the people in those positions and the amount of leeway they have. If the question were: is it possible for there to be a change in the institutions such that they'd take up these kinds of projects? Well I do think that's possible. But we're unfortunately far from it because these structures need to change. Also, politics needs to be understood in the sense of the word that includes civic participation. But we aren't there yet. This needs to reach the design of structures, and then there will be a change.

Belén Sola: Yes because I've seen it and lived it in MUSAC, and it seems like everything depends on the person in charge of the management. That's a lie, it will never happen. The direction they'll go in is just...

Chus Domínguez: It doesn't let you create something long-term...

Belén Sola: It doesn't change structures. It doesn't implement an emancipatory structure of any kind. The director is one person; they're hired to do something that's very surface level. The real changes don't come from management. They come from spaces that tell you how you need to hire and how you can make less noise and how you can get private funding, which is what we're doing in our day to day. The director comes in and starts working on entrepreneurial projects, partnerships with private companies, and large-scale public exhibitions. Those are the orders that the institutions are following at the cultural level. Are there people that are doing really interesting things in them right now? Yes, of course. But it's just that, there are people there doing interesting things.

How do you maintain your energy and confidence in systemic change, living as we are now in this time of energetic collapse, eco-social crisis, and political disaffection?

Chus Domínguez: Well, the desire and drive to do things. Despite the problems that we've mentioned, we find great pleasure in what we do, and that comes from this desire. There's an inner desire in me to do projects, share projects, learn, get involved in messes, get out of messes, and move forward. Let's just say that it's a search for this pleasure at so many levels—the creative level, social level, political level. There's a desire to do something and enjoy life. I don't think this is very rational. It's something that arises from within you. That's what happens to me. I don't really feel like there's this necessity to change the world and that I need to do something. It's my own necessity to do things and learn that keeps me going, independent of the conditions we're in, which are very hard to forget about sometimes. I don't know, if you were to do this interview ten years from now, maybe I'd say "What year was the pandemic in again?" because I don't really pay much attention.

Belén Sola: LAAV encourages me a lot. I need it because it's such a stimulating space, and if I'm not in a stimulating space, I stop working. That's what happened

to me when I saw that everything was coming to an end for me at MUSAC, and I said, "What am I doing here? I'm dead." You need to look for stimulating projects at the intellectual and human level, and people with whom you can do what you really want to. That's all we can do. It's also the only thing I have in my life: being able to choose. I'm very lucky to be able to choose, because not everyone can. I can choose a project that I want to get involved in. I want to get involved in stimulating projects that I can learn from, and I'm learning so many things from LAAV. They're projects that push you to get involved with other collectives and people, so every door that you open, you'll learn something new. When we worked on this project about mining I was amazed because it was something that I didn't know anything about before. Everything was like wow! I wanted to read everything about the workers' struggles of the 20th century. The same goes for the topic of rurality or youth. Each collective that we've worked with is a world, and it's a new opportunity to learn from them and myself. I'm now really excited about older people, and right now I just want to be involved in the subject of old age and dying and illness and all these topics, because they're issues that concern us. With mental health too; who doesn't care about mental health or psychosocial distress? In the end these are topics that interest all of us. But then you add the intersection of creation, experimentation, and anthropology, and it's a very stimulating space. It gives me a lot of life.

