

# REENACTMENT AS SOCIAL ACTION: THE MAKING OF ENCIERRO

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## Situating place and practice

Almadén (Southern Spain) has hosted for over 2000 years the most productive mercury mines in world's history. The mining exploitation stopped in 2003, with the final coup de grace coming from the 2011 European Union ban on mercury trading. As it happens with many industrial towns that mostly rely on a main source of economy, the closure of the mines in Almadén brought about the loss of over 1000 jobs, high rates of migration and an important economic, social, cultural and identity crisis. Prompted by the gradual decay of the mines, Almadén region has passed from some 31.500 inhabitants in 1960 to around 10.800 in 2021, losing more than two thirds of its population and becoming an ageing and hard-hit community.<sup>1</sup> In addition, Almadén suffers the effects of a rather remote location and a very poor road and railway network. In June 2012, UNESCO recognized the joint candidacy of Almadén and Idrija (Slovenia) and Almadén Mines become inscribed as a World Heritage Site, turning the mine of Almadén into a Mining Park for tourism. Post-industrial societies like Almadén have passed from a livelihood based on industrial activity to one that manages and exploits the industrial heritage, and ruins, left after the end of industry.

Almadén, whose Arab etymology means "the mine", is now a mine without a mine; or at least, without a mine functioning as such. The whole Almadén Mining Park is a big representational space, in which the visitor enters real underground galleries that *stand for* the mine but, as the old miners frequently state, it is not the mine. In the mine visit-experience, instead of real miners, there are mannequins in working postures and gestures; instead of the noise of working duties such as perforation, transport of mineral, pumping, etc, there are pre-recorded sounds that stand for those absent working

clatters. And instead of industrial works, there are stories about them. In short, our mining past is gone, and now it can only be accessed through representations. Representation is the paradigm of post-industrial societies such as Almadén, in which everything seems to have already passed. A simple way of understanding representation is by having something *stand for* something else (Barbara Bolt, 2004). For instance, a flag stands for a country; a biography stands for the life of a person; a map for a territory; politicians represent, or stand for, the people of a country, etc. And also, a film about a mining strike could stand for the actual strike. As Barbara Bolt explains, "the representation stands in the place of the absent object. Representation is a model" (Barbara Bolt, 2004, p. 16). This idea of representation taking the place of the absent object is the reality of post-industrial areas like Almadén. This representational paradigm supposes a predominant focus on the past, the time of the grand histories of the mine. Looking at the present becomes far more painful, due to the lack of re-structural measures after the closure of the mine, and the precariousness of the current life in the area. Considering the future is equated with extreme uncertainty as people often talk of a "dying village".

In this game of past, present and future tenses, I want to explore the conditional in my documentary film practice - a tense that expresses possibility and desire -as a creative strategy to move beyond the overwhelming representational paradigm. The conditional is the temporality of that which is not real, but potential. It is a mood of possibility, of change, of transformation, of the potential passage from the imagined, speculated, feared, desired, virtual, etc., to the real. The conditional is also a tense of speculation and hypothesis, of inquiry, of experimentation, and also of research. The conditional is present in the premise of this documentary project: *what if* 11 people will lock inside the mine now, when

<sup>1</sup> The depopulation of rural areas is a widespread phenomenon in Spain since 1960. In Almadén, this exodus is also closely related to the decay of the mining industry. The demographic evolution of Almadén town since 1960 is as follow: 13.443 inhabitants (1960), 10.774 (1970), 9140 (1986), 7152 (2000), 5105 (2021). Almadén region (eight villages) progression: 31.534 (1960), 18.409 (1986), 15.057 (2000), 10.817 (2021). Sources: <https://www.ine.es>; <https://www.foro-ciudad.com>.

Almadén suffer high rates of emigration, unemployment, and an overall sense of ruin, after the end of mining?

The conditional is not the verb tense that one first identifies with documentary representation, whose temporal roots are more anchored in the past and the present. However, I will argue that this speculative and hypothetical approach to reality, which explores the “potentially” real, the “possible”, and the “*what if*” in documentary filmmaking, opens up opportunities for acting upon the world when creating, and not only documenting, reality. I will ponder how this approach can be used for social action, as well as some of the entanglements inherent to the transformation of a past workers’ strike into a present artistic intervention.

### **"Less serious than life"**

My research considers documentary practices not only as representations *about the world*, but as representational practices happening *in the world*. In other words, before a documentary film becomes a product that can travel around the screens, it is a creative and social process rooted in the place and time where it happens. In this article, I will introduce the potential of documentary film shooting to take on a different relationship to normal life than the same or similar events would have as “untransformed reality” (Goffman, 1974, p. 157) as it happens in play, ritual and performance – a strike versus the reenactment of a strike – and its potential for conviviality, activism and social transformation.

In *Frame Analysis*, Erving Goffman takes Bateson’s concept of metacommunication to argue that “within the play frame, all messages and signals are recognized as in a certain sense not true” (Goffman, 1974, p. 157). Goffman uses frame as a concept to set apart “social events, especially those events that, like play or performance, take on a

different relationship to normal life and normal responsibilities than the same or similar events would have as “untransformed reality”, outside the confines of the frame” (Goffman, 1974, p. 157). Developing the notion of play, Caillois finds six essential qualities of play activity, namely, that is not obligatory, that it is circumscribed in time and space, undetermined, materially unproductive, rule-bound, and concerned with alternative reality (Carlson, 1996, p. 25). Not to be taken “seriously” (Bateson); in a sense not true (Goffman); a different relationship to normal life (Goffman); concerned with an alternative reality (Caillois), are important considerations that my research aims to import into how we can approach some of the processes put in motion by documentary shooting, highlighting the consideration of fieldwork documentation as not being totally “real”, and not being totally a “fiction”, as Schechner identifies in performance situations (Schechner, 1985, p.4). As the following artistic research aims to show, documentary-making has the possibility of being less “serious” than everyday life, and in doing so, it can penetrate important aspects of reality, potentially becoming a transformative activity.

### **Strikes are past...**

Like many other locals from younger generations, I hardly knew anything about the 1984 mining strike until I met Pablo Marjalizo, one of the striking miners of 1984, and started making a film with him in 2011.<sup>2</sup> The first time Pablo mentioned the mining strike to me was around 5 weeks into the shoot. That day, Pablo opened one of the drawers underneath his TV and took out what it seemed to be a cardboard covered book called ‘*Recuerdos*’ (*Memories*), (Fig. 1.)<sup>3</sup> ‘*Recuerdos*’ was in fact a 1984 issue of a ‘Semana’ magazine, one of those popular celebrity magazines, which Pablo had transformed into a scrapbook which documented his 11 days of lockdown 600 meters underground. Pablo’s

2 *Pablo’s Winter* (Chico Pereira, 2012, UK/Spain, 78 min.)

3 Later, I found out that Pablo has kept this document rather secret from most of his own family.

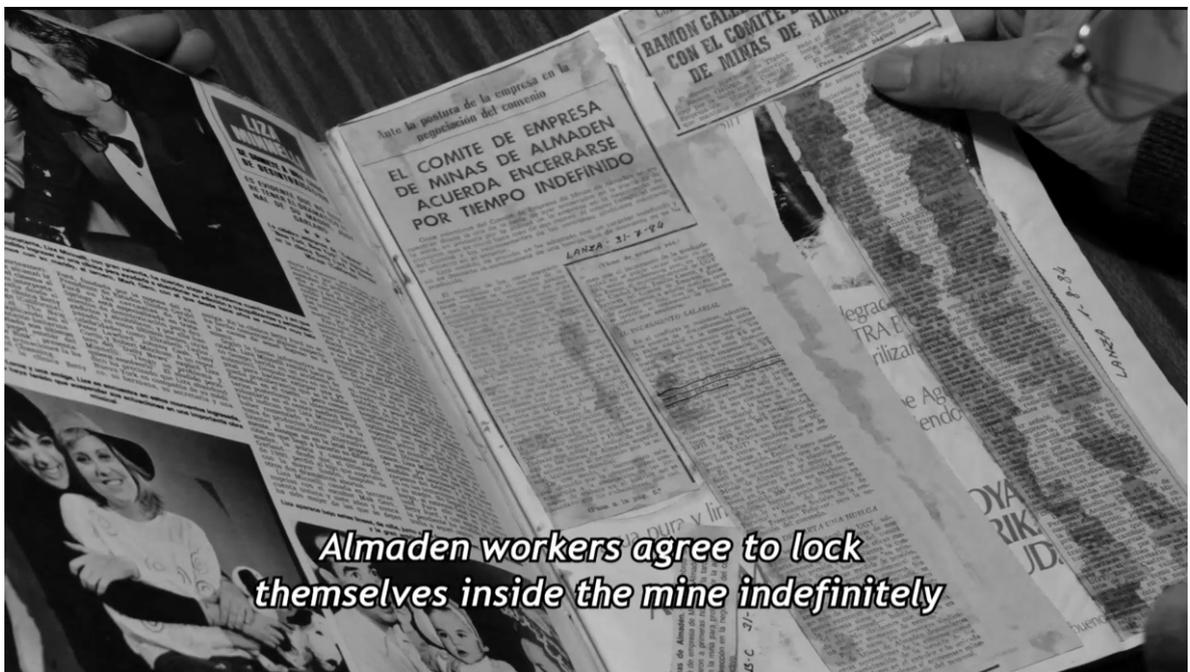


Fig. 1 Pablo's scrapbook, from *Pablo's Winter* (Chico Pereira, 2012). Photography: Julian Schwanitz.

scrapbook contains the correspondence between the striking workers and Almadén Mining Company (MAYASA), press clippings, messages of support from the community as well as notes accompanying the gifts that came from the surface to make the life of the striking miners more bearable: folding chairs, newspapers, magazines, tobacco, cakes, fruit, etc. Rather than showing the strike itself, the scene gives the viewer access to the wound that the end of mining has left in this generation of miners.

What has lasted the most in the collective memory from the mining strike of 1984 is the sense of union and solidarity experienced in the community, as the messages in Pablo's scrapbook testify. Locals describe it as a moment when "the entire village was there day and night". By going to the dark depths of the mine, the miners of 1984 created an 'excess' of

visibility for their social problems. By restraining their movements to the inside of the mine, they created social action on the surface. I guided my artistic process following these ideas of community union, action and solidarity, as well as the paradox of creating an excess of visibility by going into darkness, and generating social movement through an underground confinement. I turned my artistic inquiry into the form of a question, expressed in conditional terms: *what if we locked ourselves in the mine now, in our post-industrial present; would we be able to awaken the feeling of community and give visibility to the current problems of the area?* When thinking about the potential answers, I feared that the sense of community and the ability to fight together might have also disappeared together with the mining world. It was an absent object, possibly only accessible through memory and representations.

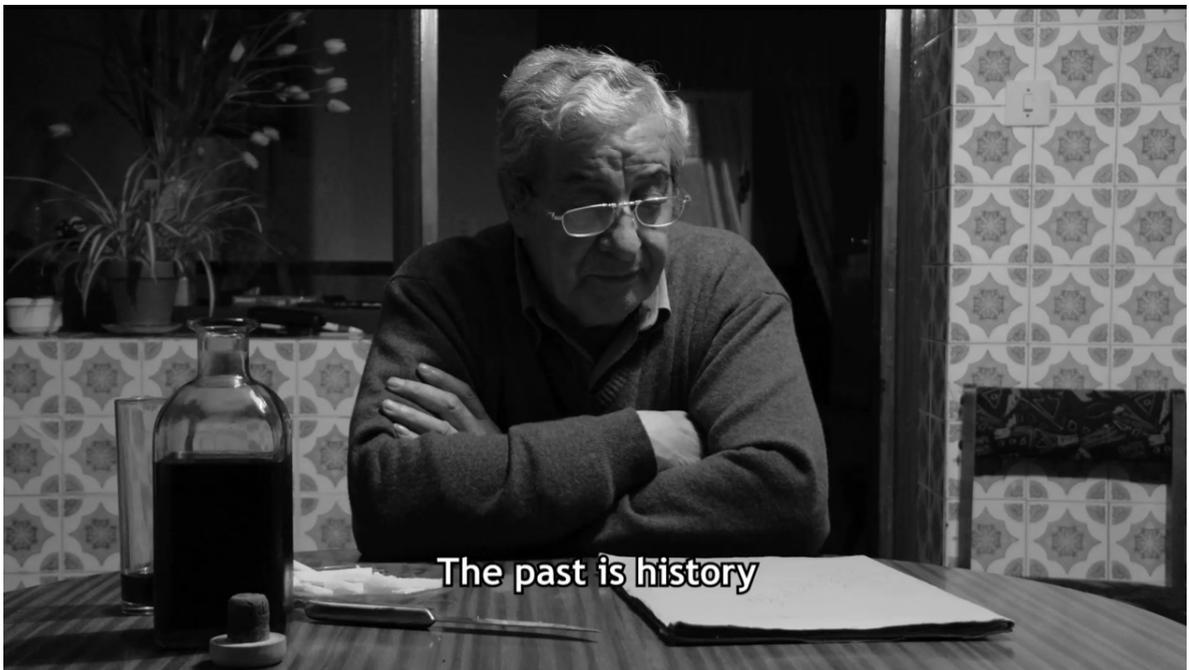


Fig. 2 Pablo Marjalizo, from *Pablo's Winter* (Chico Pereira, 2012). Photography: Julian Schwanitz.

But what if we do not need more representations? What if what we need is to act? I return once more to the scene of the strike in *Pablo's Winter*. The scene ends with Pablo closing the album and stating a solemn "la historia es la historia", which could be translated as "history is past." (Fig. 2) It is precisely this "history is past" which *Encierro* tries to creatively put into question. The scrapbook scene in *Pablo's Winter* presents the mining strike as a historical event anchored in the past, even though its emotional echoes still resonate in the present. *Encierro* seeks to transform that historical referent into a present event that will recreate the form and duration of the strike. Whereas Pablo had engaged in a process of documentation, transforming his experience of the 1984 lockdown into archive, as a local documentary filmmaker from Almadén I aimed to change the status of the 1984 strike from 'archive' back into real action. My intention

is not to faithfully reenact the mining strike, but to use it as a model to act and reflect upon the present. Through documentary film praxis, I aim to put into motion a creative and social process in which community struggle could be embodied, not merely represented, avoiding as much as possible to just activate the nostalgia of a past in which we fought as a community.

### Closeness and distance

Inke Arns sees an important paradox at work in contemporary reenactment practices, namely, the desire for both shortening as well as creating a distance between the reenactments and the historical referents they are based upon (Arns, 2007). For Arns, "one reason for this rather uncanny desire for performative repetition seems to reside in the fact

that experience of the world, whether historical or contemporary, is based less and less on direct observation and today operates almost exclusively via media" (Arns, 2007, p. 2). In other words, our access to history, and to the world, is overwhelmingly mediated by images and representations. Striving for a more direct engagement with history, reenactment practices aim to find out "what the images we see might mean concretely to us, if we were to experience these situations personally" (Arns, 2007, p. 3). Thus, the paradox Arns identifies in artistic reenactment is based on a desire of "erasing distance to the images and at the same time distancing itself from the images" (Arns, 2007, p. 3). In post-industrial sites like Almadén, representations not only serve as access to the past, but whole towns seem to have retreated into a representational space. The need for a closer contact with our history, as well as distancing ourselves from the overwhelming representational paradigm that turns everything into past, is also at the core of *Encierro*.

Going inside the mine presented, for the participants in this project, an opportunity to feel part of something that has defined our identity, but that we never experienced directly. As some of the participants in the reenactment project state, "the mine was a constant subject of conversation in our house: the mine, the mine, and the mine." The people of my generation have heard innumerable stories about it, yet the mine has always had a halo of mystery for us. Going inside

the mine was an opportunity to feel in our bodies something that has always been transmitted to us through words and representations. Along with that desire for getting closer to our ancestors through a more experiential access to the mine, there is also an awareness of the extreme distance between the reality of 1984 and the present. For instance, with the closure of the mine and the definitive loss of most of the jobs, the unions weakened to the point of practically disappearing in the area. The collective self is extremely damaged in post-industrial Almadén and therefore the conditions of possibility for collective action, like the strike of 1984, hardly exist.<sup>4</sup> We are faced with the precarity of the present, but we are not actively engaging in collective social action as our "grandparents" did. This is where this project sought to intervene, reconsidering through artistic practices, our sense of collectivity and struggle. Thus, besides this dynamic of separation and connection, I wanted to explore in *Encierro* how the struggle of our mining 'grandparents' (even as model and absent object) could become a catalyst for social and community action in the present. I wanted to look at the past and its protagonists with the intention of finding an example that we could follow, and embody, now<sup>5</sup>.

### The past as a score

I take the strike of 1984 to be a documentary 'score' which I need to adapt and perform in the current post-industrial

4 However, my artistic research also poses the question of *what if* a reenactment of a strike is also a strike, even though in post-industrial Almadén there is no more mining, no production to be shut down, and this *would-be* strike is not originating from labour action, but from a creative act.

5 The paradox of shortening and creating distance also affects me as the main researcher of this project. On the one hand, I am local to Almadén and belong to the younger generation represented in *Encierro*. I am also one of the 11 participants locked down in the mine during the reenactment. On the other hand, my working methods as researcher and documentary filmmaker often mean that I take a more observant position during the project. In my case, it is the negotiation between being an observer and a participant which becomes an issue of positionality. As the project transforms during its making, this dual position of participant and observant gets more entangled, even questioned. As the reader will notice, this closeness/distance is also reflected in my use of pronouns in this article. During my writing, I often switch, rather unconsciously, from using "they" to "we" when referring to the participants.

reality.<sup>6</sup> I consider this a process of adaptation, appropriation, and citation of a past event that occurred in a particular context (the mining Almadén), into a new context (the post-industrial Almadén 35 years later). The adaptation process necessitates maintaining, discarding, and above all transforming the historical reference, the model. A clear example is the selection of the 11 participants for the 2019 lockdown. In 1984, 11 male miners carried out the strike because only men worked in the galleries, and there was no female presence in the workers' unions. I found it essential to rethink how to treat this aspect in the process of selecting participants for the 2019 reenactment. Whereas in 1984 the strike was part of the workers movement, in 2019, the lockdown needs to be understood as a broader social reclamation, not tied to workers' claims. It would not make sense to restrict the casting to only male participants. The reenactment of the strike does not strive for verisimilitude, rather for adapting the political and social actions of the past into social and political "gestures" in the present.<sup>7</sup> The participants would not have to represent the old miners, if anything, they have to be present as current inhabitants of the area.

During the development and pre-production phase, people interested in being one of the 11 strikers, as well as people interested in helping with the organization and production, join the project. Several group meetings are held. Besides talking about the organization and logistics of the artistic project, the group often engages in conversations and round-table

discussions about the situation in the area. The preparation of the project seems at times very close to community politics or to the formation of a grassroots organization. An artistic and a social side of the project begin to appear and coexist. More concretely, the artistic initiative fosters and allows encounters in which people get to know each other and share their social concerns. Below, we will see how the double nature of the project as artistic and social intervention creates both opportunities for social engagement as well as entanglements. This double nature is also at the core of the gradual metamorphosis that the project will undergo through the 11 days of the reenactment.

The prospect of living inside the mine for 11 days is an extreme commitment for the project's participants. It is not only the dark, humid and uncomfortable underground environment that present a challenge for the interested participants. The question of how to balance these 11 days underground with other commitments on the surface such as potential work, family life and any other responsibilities, becomes an issue. Eventually, some interested participants cannot commit to the lockdown. Apart from their willingness and availability, I selected the participants for their degree of involvement in the current social problems of the area, not for any possible acting capacities, personality traits, etc. Looking for socially engaged people was my way of adapting the concept of trade union members to the post-union context of 2019. The final group of 11 participants was made

6 My use of the term score is inspired by the work of Fluxus artists. See for instance, Anna Dezeuze, "Origins of the Fluxus score" in *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts*, 7:3, 78-94, 2002. DOI: 10.1080/13528165.2002.10871876; Natilee Harren, *Fluxus Forms: Scores, Multiples, and the Eternal Network*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020. The score can be understood as "a generic, flexible outline for an action defined by a set of loose coordinates pertaining to time, space, and materiality, which were to be fully fleshed out by the performer in the context of a specific performance situation" (Harren, 2002, p. 3). Especially seen in the work of George Brecht, the "score involves the arrangement of objects and actions in spatial and temporal relationships. Above all, it is open and generative, embodying the potential for an immense range of actions to take place in its wake" (Harren, 2002, p. 9).

7 According to K. Konuk, reenactment establishes different kind of "figural relationships" between past and present. Konuk names: reproduction, imitation (creating a mirror image), assimilation (gradually becoming the other), mimicry (creating similarity with a difference), animation (revival of specific elements), masquerade (performing a character), simulacrum (simulating reality), simulation (creating imaginary realities). Konuk "Mimesis", in *The Routledge Handbook of Reenactment Studies: Key Terms in the Field*, edited by Vanessa Agnew, Jonathan Lamb, and Juliane Tomann. New York: Routledge, 2020, 143.



Fig. 3 *The new "miners"*, from *Encierro* (Working Title, Chico Pereira, in post-production). Photography: Julian Schwanitz.

up of men, women, people from different towns in the area, ethnic and gender minorities, and people who have had to emigrate, like myself, as I am one of the participants locked down in 2019. Poignantly, Celia, one of the locked down participants, is Pablo Marjalizo's granddaughter (Fig. 3). During the lockdown, Celia slept on the same mattress her grandfather used in the strike 35 years earlier.

Richard Schechner's concept of "restored behavior" can help to situate this artistic proposition. For Schechner, "restored behavior is living behavior treated as a film director treats a strip of film" (Schechner, 1985, p. 35). In *Encierro*, I am considering certain actions of the 1984 strike -11 people living inside the mine for 11 days, the support of the community, the political meetings, etc.- as strips of behavior. Those behaviors that originated in a particular context of labor reclamation and protest, i.e., the strike of 1984, can be "stored, transmitted, manipulated, transformed" (Schechner, 1985, p.

36), and in this case inserted in the reality of the post-mining Almadén as part of an artistic and social intervention. Schechner argues, strips of behavior "can be rearranged or reconstructed; they are independent of the causal systems (social, psychological, technological) that brought them into existence. They have a life of their own" (Schechner, 1985, p.35). For Schechner, restored behavior is at the core of every performance, being theatrical, ritualistic, or our everyday life "performances".

The behaviors in *Encierro* belong to a mining world already gone, but following Schechner's ideas, they can be restored in a different moment and context, for instance as part of an art project happening 35 years after. Key for understanding the motivation behind *Encierro* is Schechner's argument that "restored behavior offers to both individuals and groups the chance to rebecome what they once were – or even, and most often, to rebecome what they never were but wish



Fig. 4 *The Cave*, from *Encierro* (Working Title, Chico Pereira, in post-production). Photography: Julian Schwanitz.

to have been or wish to become” (Schechner, 1985, p.38). In a mixture of nostalgia for a mining world that we never were part of, and political desperation towards the current socio-economic situation of the area, *Encierro* aims to restore the behavior of our striking grandfathers, not to being absorbed into the role of striking miners, “but rather to exist ‘side by side’” these roles and act upon the present following a previous model (Schechner, 1985, p.36).

### The mine: a liminal space

There is a key element in this intervention, which is the fact that 11 people are actually living inside the mine for 11 days. The mine is both a real space in which they are living, and a symbolic space that has shaped the identity of Almadén

over centuries. Even though the mine is closed for production, the underground is a real space and, in fact, a potentially dangerous one. The intervention presents some risks to the participants, who have not any prior experience of spending extended time inside a mine (Fig. 4)<sup>8</sup>.

Almadén rose as a town from these mining shafts, and it is the decay of the mines which has made Almadén crumble. The mine has provided work, livelihood, community, identity, pride, progress. It has also brought about sickness, death, exploitation, slavery, struggle, abandonment. The underground in Almadén is both a place for life and for death, and mines in general cannot be understood without that entanglement. The dynamics of life and death are also present in this project (Fig. 5). The general view in Almadén now is

<sup>8</sup> All the participants in this project went through medical checks to ensure that there were no health issues that could be affected or worsened by living underground for 11 days. The mining company (MAYASA) also provided all participants with health and safety training and procedures prior to the lockdown.



Fig. 5 *Still breathing*, from *Encierro* (Working Title, Chico Pereira, in post-production). Photography: Julian Schwanitz.

that we are in a different kind of hole, a dark shaft, due to the state of financial and social depression caused by the closure of the mine and the lack of restructuring plans. *Encierro* turns that metaphor into its driving force. During 11 days, the participants will live in the most representative hole of Almadén (the underground mine) in an attempt to collectively imagine a more hopeful future around a mining shaft. The 'Voyage to the Center of Earth' in *Encierro* is meant as an underground journey in search of connection with our origins and ancestors, but also as a trip to the darkness in search of a path that could make us see some bright light at the end

of the tunnel. As the group of 11 participants gathered and discussed the situation of Almadén, a motto emerged: "Del Pozo Se Sale". This could be roughly translated as "We'll get out of the hole"<sup>9</sup>.

The combination of a real and symbolic experience grants the 11 days spent inside the mine a ritualistic character. The participants inside the mine are 'removed' from the realm of their everyday life, and are immersed into the no-time/no-space of the dark cave. This *in betweenness* of the

9 It could also be translated as "Hope in the Dark", a concept Rebecca Solnit has coined. Rather than equating darkness with negative connotations, Solnit uses the term darkness to refer to the uncertainty about the future. For Solnit, "to hope is to give yourself to the future, and that commitment to the future makes the present inhabitable." Hope necessitates action, and "action is impossible without hope". Solnit speaks about activist social transformations and reminds us that what "these transformations have in common is that they begin in the imagination, in hope". Rebecca Solnit, *Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities*, Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016 [2004], p. 4.

underground mine can be compared to Victor Turner's concept of liminality.<sup>10</sup>

In Turner's ritual theory, liminality is a transitional space. The liminal is "a no-man's-land betwixt-and-between the structural past and the structural future" (Turner, 1986, p. 41). Turner describes liminality as "a fructile chaos, a fertile nothingness, a storehouse of possibilities, not by any means a random assemblage but a striving after new forms and structure, a gestation process, a fetation of modes appropriate to and anticipating postliminal existence" (Turner, 1986, p. 42). In other words, liminality is the time and space of transformation, the darkness in which life and death, and fear and hope coexist.

## Beyond representation

Thus, the experience of living inside the mine could not be explained solely from the framework of representation. Rather than representation, the concept that could closely approach the functioning of this project is mimesis. Walter Benjamin describes the mimetic faculty as "the powerful compulsion in former times to become and behave like something else" (Benjamin, 1978, p.333). The desire for a bodily approximation to a past experience in *Encierro* could be explained as this compulsion to become and behave like something else, in this case, somebody else, the striking miners of 1984. Developing Benjamin's thesis, Michael Taussig argues in *Mimesis and Alterity* that "the wonder of mimesis lies in the copy drawing on the character and power of the original, to the point whereby the representation may even assume that character and that power" (Taussig, 1993, p. xiii). This point is extremely important for *Encierro*. Our reenactment aimed at "granting the copy the character and power of the original, the representation the power of the

represented" (Taussig, 1993, p. xviii). The ultimate motivation behind *Encierro* was in fact to achieve something similar to what they did in 1984: at least to give visibility to the social problems of Almadén and to inspire social action in the area. The historical referent for the reenactment project, therefore, was also a referent in a broader sense, a model to follow for a group of people looking for social change without knowing quite how to start acting upon reality. To merely represent the past felt short of a stronger desire, the desire to intervene in reality through artistic praxis.

To exemplify the power of mimesis, Taussig speaks about the power of representational objects such as wooden figurines or other kind of figure/image mimesis in primitive healing and magic practices. Even if healing and magic practices in archaic societies seems a far stretch for theorizing reenactment, mimesis, copy and imitation are at the core of reenactment practices (see for instance, Konuk, 2020). In the section named "Where Action Puts Forth Its Own Image" Taussig argues that it is fundamental "to insist on breaking away from the tyranny of the visual notion of the image" (Taussig, 1993, p. 56). Taussig explains that, by image, we should not merely understand representation, but also include design, actions, and ritualistic practices that establish a relationship with the thing of which it is a copy. As an example, he explains how "the Navaho sand-painting is said to cure not by patients' looking at the picture inscribed therein, but by their placing their body in the *design* itself" (Taussig, 1993, p. 57, *my emphasis*). The notion of design takes us closer to the kind of imagining a reenactment can be: a situation, a design, an image in a broader sense, that the participants enter and both act and are acted upon. Taussig also foregrounds the sense of ritual to articulate the power of mimetic practices, beside the materiality of the objects used. Taussig wonders "what happens if we move the frame

10 Elsewhere, I have introduced the idea of *in-betweenness* in documentary practices. See Moving People & Images Journal: <https://movingpeopleandimagesjournal.com/arturo-delgado-pereira/> I aim to further explore the relation of documentary fieldwork/shooting with ritual practice and theory in my ongoing PhD research work.

outward from the realm of the ritual objects...to include the gestus of the ritualistic herself?" (Taussig, 1993, p. 56). Here, Taussig emphasizes the power of practices and events, and not only of objects themselves, in effecting reality, as "we move from image, to scene, and from scene to performative action" (Taussig, 1993, p. 56). We can argue that the potential of *Encierro* to effect reality also relies on the performative action of locking down in the mine, that is, on the event created for the film, and not just with the film "object" to be made out of the event.<sup>11</sup> Sylvie Jasen presents the notion of "reenactment as event". For Jasen, understanding reenactment as event is "to acknowledge the production process as a formative experience, one underscored by the ethically and politically charged relations of filmmaking (Jasen, 2011, p. 1). Jasen argues that "reenactment as event is less interested in replicating or even representing the past than in evoking its current traces and ongoing impact" (Jasen, 2011, p. ii). The past "is not so much represented as it is conjured in its current affects and resonances" (Jasen, 2011, p. 22).

## We would strike

The concept of the strike in *Encierro* is mobilized as a symbol for the need to fight for a better future, this time in the post-industrial context. A strike in the traditional context of

labour is no longer possible in the present circumstances. The mining company does not operate as such; there are no more miners, nor workers' unions. Nonetheless, the sense of injustice, the frustration and the desire for improvements that fuelled the mining strike is still present 35 years later. The constant presence of those feelings of injustice could make us wonder whether this artistic strike is merely a re-enactment, or if it is also a continuation (or animation) of an unresolved issue already expressed 35 years ago. This time, the frustration is not directly focused at Almadén Mining Company, but at the general situation of distress and historical injustice that is perceived in the area as a result of the continued extractive practices that this mining community, like so many other, has suffered.<sup>12</sup>

Primarily, *Encierro* aims to temporarily transform the heritage mine gallery back into a political space, as it has always been, and especially during workers' protests such as the 1984 mining strike. The strike of 1984 was a time of intense meetings between workers, workers' representatives, Almadén Mining Company (MAYASA) and the State, owners of the mine.<sup>13</sup> My idea was not to reenact these meetings as if we were in 1984, but to have political meetings and debates anchored in the present and about the situation in 2019. The possibility of bringing together members of the community, politicians,

11 Even though it is outside of the scope of this paper, there are numerous examples of reenactment films in which the process of copying and imitating generate new reality. To exemplify this point, we could for instance foreground some films about mining communities such as *Borinage* (Joris Ivens, 1934), *El Coraje del Pueblo* (Jorge Sanjinés, 1971) or *The Battle of Orgreave* (Mike Figgis/ Jeremy Deller, 2001) in which the generative character of reenactment is observed. Reflecting upon his filmmaking, Joris Ivens wrote how one reenacted scene in *Borinage*, "which had been especially repeated for the film, developed itself into a real scene, a real demonstration, because of the existing tense political situation in the Borinage." (Ivens, 1954, p.2) Ivens continues that if these scenes "emerge honestly out of the reality which the film-maker is facing, life itself will 'catch' such scenes and fill them with new form and emotion." (Ivens, 1954, p.2)

12 TJ Demos writes: "According to theorists Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, extractivism identifies both historical and current modes of wealth accumulation based upon the withdrawal of raw materials and life forms from the planet's surface, depths, and biosphere in the production of financial value, which run in coordination with expansive politico-economic and socio-technological systems pledged to its operations. Fundamentally, extractivism comprises a calculus of accumulation by dispossession, to use the terms of David Harvey, an accumulation without corresponding deposit (except in the form of waste, disease, and death)." TJ Demos, 'Blackout: The Necropolitics of Extraction', 5. See also Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, 'On the Multiple Frontiers of Extraction: Excavating Contemporary Capitalism', *Cultural Studies*, vol. 31, issue 2-3 (2017).

13 Almadén Mining Company (MAYASA) is a state-owned company. Historically, the state has rented the mine to foreign actors such as the Fugger family (1525-1645) or the Rothschilds (1834-1921), to pay for the accumulated state public debt.



Fig. 6 *Political dialogues around the shaft, from Encierro* (Working Title, Chico Pereira, in post-production). Photography: Julian Schwanitz.

representatives of the educational and health system, etc., is difficult to achieve in the everyday life of this area (Fig. 6). Through this artistic proposition I have the opportunity to devise a time and a space for conversation and reflection (the 11 days in the mine), and to carry out those encounters. In those meetings, we collectively discussed and analyzed the current problems of the area. This common diagnostic was the foundation to devise a road map containing the most urgent claims for the area. During the 11 days of *Encierro*, we gave form to this document, handed it to our regional political representatives and requested them a series of working meetings after our lockdown ended to continue working on the fulfillment of some of these claims.

Even though the 'strike' in the context of labour is not possible, the strike as a symbol-form is appropriate for this artistic intervention. The participants feel that they would all go on strike *if* the strike was possible. In this case, this intervention

unfolds '*as if*' it was a strike. A kind of pseudo-strike, which does not start from a labour demonstration, but from documentary intervention. The conditional (*as if; what if*) is the temporality of that which is not actual, but potential. The conditional is also a tense of speculation and hypothesis, of inquiry, of experimentation, of research. As we'll soon see, the conditional, the tense of the question *what if* we lock down in the mine now, as well as the tense of *as if it was a strike*, will become increasingly actualized in the present of *Encierro*, until the point in which the representation of a strike starts looking like a proper strike.

Along with the conditional tense in documentary, the notion of play is important to understand the approach of *Encierro*. In his essay, 'A Theory of Play and Fantasy', Gregory Bateson speaks of metacommunicative messages, those that frame the exchanges of messages happening within. In other words, a metacommunicative frame establishes "the

relationships between the speakers” (Bateson, 1972, p. 317). Using the example of animals playing at wrestling in the zoo, Bateson notices how the actions and signals exchanged were similar to those of combat, but it was clear, both for the human observer and for the animals playing, that this was not combat (Bateson, 1972, p. 316). Bateson identifies a degree of metacommunication in these actions whose exchange convey the message “This is play” (Bateson, 1972, p. 316). The frame of play, thus, makes the messages happening inside to be understood as something different to they would if the frame of play was not at work. For instance, there is a difference between a labour strike and the action (or set of actions) that are similar to a strike but happening within a different frame, i.e., the making of a film about a strike. This new frame or metacommunicative situation (the making of a film) comes closer to being an evocation/recreation of a strike.<sup>14</sup> As in the past, the group of 11 new ‘strikers’, are living underground for 11 uninterrupted days; they aim to give visibility to the problems of the area; they organize discussions and debates with political representatives, and they design a roadmap for the improvement of the socioeconomic conditions of the region. All these actions are similar to those that occurred during the strike of 1984, but “this is play” means that “these actions in which we now engage do not denote what those actions for which they stand would denote” (Bateson, 1972, p. 317).

### Is this play?

Even though play might be seen as ‘less serious than life’, *Encierro* works with the hypothesis that play has the capacity

to access important aspects of reality, critically approach them, and even rework them.<sup>15</sup> The 11 days lockdown started on 30<sup>th</sup> July 2019. Having 11 neighbours inside the mines for 11 days creates special dynamics in the village. The community starts gathering every evening in the mine esplanade to support their neighbours underground. Partly because of having family members, friends and neighbours underground, partly because the collective memory of the strike of 1984 is that “the entire village was there”, the mine esplanade becomes a place for daily encounters between the members of the community. The role of TV, radio and newspapers, which increasingly cover the event, also has a powerful effect on engaging people with this artistic intervention. It attracts political attention to Almadén beyond the original scope of the project. As a result, both participants and the involved community members outside the galleries start realizing that this is also a good opportunity to express their discontent and to fight for this post-industrial area.

The entanglement of participants, community, media and politics creates a metamorphosis in the project. Some of the participants feel that presenting their lockdown as a documentary film diminishes the realness of the social movement they have now started in the area. They all agree that the film is the initial force of the lockdown, but now the lockdown has been transformed into something else. At this point, the creative part, loosely understood as an homage to the struggling mining generations, and the social part (that is, the intention of turning the homage into present action), begin to take parallel paths, but still coexist. This coexistence becomes increasingly entangled. Several

14 Reenactment films with and about miners’ communities are present throughout film history. For instance, *Borinage* (Joris Ivens, 1934), *The Silent Village* (Humphrey Jennings, 1943), *The Brave Don’t Cry* (Philip Leacock, 1952), *The Salt of the Earth* (Herbert J. Biberman, 1954), *Hope*, (Harold Schuster, 1960), *El Coraje del Pueblo* (Jorge Sanjinés, 1971), *Far From Poland* (Jill Godmilow, 1984), *The Battle of Orgreave* (Mike Figgis/Jeremey Deller, 2001), *Los 33* (Patricia Riggen, 2015), *Bisbee’17* (Robert Greene, 2018), to name a few.

15 For an introduction of play and reenactment practices, see Robbert-Jan Adriaansen “Play”, in *The Routledge Handbook of Reenactment Studies: Key Terms in the Field*. For other theories of play, see for instance Eugen Fink ‘The Oasis of Happiness: Toward and Ontology of Play’, *Yale French Studies*, vol. 41, 1968, pp.19-30; Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*. Champagne, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2001. Sallen, K. and Zimmerman, E. *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2003.



Fig. 7 *Beyond reenactment?*, from *Encierro* (Working Title, Chico Pereira, in post-production). Photography: Julian Schwanitz.

newspapers reflect this transformation in headlines that read as: "what started as a documentary film project turns into a social movement in Almadén".<sup>16</sup> As the days progress, the basic frame of "as if it was a strike" starts being stretched. As one of the locked down participants expresses, "it is not clear for me whether this is a film about a strike, or a real strike". While the real lockdown of the participants inside the mine engages the community into social action, the engagement on the surface further inspires and moves the participants underground. The sense of social apathy, the negativity, the "everybody sees the village dying and nobody does anything" transforms into social action

and to a sense of unity and community similar to that of 1984. There is a widespread feeling in the community that something real is happening. The representational aspect of the project starts dissolving. Rather than representing of the past, participants start identifying with the past. As one of the participants says, "I'm starting feeling like a real syndicalist". In the meetings around the shaft, the participants demand concrete political commitments.<sup>17</sup> Whereas the documentary film project appropriated aspects of the mining past into the creation of the event, the participants now 'appropriate' the documentary film to demand commitments from politicians. Moreover, they start considering the

16 See for instance 'El grito de la Comarca de Almadén frente al olvido.' <https://www.lanzadigital.com/provincia/el-grito-de-la-comarca-de-almaden-frente-al-olvido/> Del Documental a la Protesta: La recreación del encierro de mineros de Almadén en 1984 desencadena una nueva movilización social.' [https://www.eldiario.es/castilla-la-mancha/documental-recreacion-almaden-desencadena-movilizacion\\_1\\_1403633.html](https://www.eldiario.es/castilla-la-mancha/documental-recreacion-almaden-desencadena-movilizacion_1_1403633.html)

17 The main demands focus on measures for the reindustrialization of the area and the creation of jobs, improvements in the access to health, transport and infrastructures, implementation of policies to make Almadén a more competitive tourist destination, and policies to ensure the survival and consolidation of Almadén University School of Mining and Industrial Engineering (EIMIA).

possibility of staying in the mine beyond the agreed duration of 11 days if those agreements do not come. In the beginning, they say it in passing, but gradually in more serious terms. The people of the village organize a rally to which around 4.000 people attend to claim for betterments in the area. As one of the supporters from the surface state, "there is the documentary film; and there is the social movement. People are engaging in social action. We have said "this is enough". We don't want to be silent anymore." There is a general confusion as to whether people on the surface are following a script, or showing their genuine desire for a better future (Fig. 7).

The conditional premise at work for this artistic intervention, *We Would Strike*, is turning into something more like *We Are Striking*. This shows the limits of play, or rather an instance in which play becomes serious. Tensions arise between the participants, the mine company management and the creatives of the film, who could get into serious legal troubles if participants decide to stay beyond the permission granted to stay in the mine. That is, if we break the rules of the game. The mine representatives try to convince the participants that all the mobilizations happening on the surface are only a fiction. According to them, the people on the surface are merely reproducing what happened in 1984. As one of the mine representatives says, they have interiorized those roles and "are expressing them in a natural way, which is the best possible acting." Using terms as "main and secondary actors", and defining other elements as "attrezzo" (objects and props), the mine representatives make an effort to resituate the project within the cinematographic and theatrical realm. The participants oppose this view and argue that the management is resisting the obvious, which is that the documentary project has channelled the real frustration and desire for social transformation of the people from this area. In other words, whereas participants highlight how the documentary project has ignited the real desires for change in the area, the mine representatives allude to the collective memory of the past as

the responsible for the different performances of discontent with the situation that are being expressed during the 11 days of reenactment.

In between, as the director of the project I try to deal with my double responsibility and role: on the one hand, I am part and parcel of the social movement; on the other hand, I am a film professional that have agreed with the mine representatives to shoot a film about a strike inside the mine, and to conduct different social and political meetings underground as part of it, but not to carry out a proper strike. I have passed from being the initiator of the event to being entangled in a reality that has exceeded its own framework as a representation of the past. My position as one of the lockdown participants, local to the area and committed to the social action generated through the reenactment, is complicated by my desire to salvage the cinematographic project, which also depends on abandoning the mine on the agreed day, and not breaching the contract established between our production company and the mine. A question hovers over the people most closely involved in the project: is this a film, or a protest disguised as a film? Following Bateson, we can claim that we are reaching the limit of play, in which "This is play" turns into a disconcerting "Is this play?" (Bateson, 1972, p. 318).

At this time, the project has taken a life of its own. Documentation, and reenactment as representation, fall short of fully grasping what the artistic project has generated. To fully understand it, we need to move from the realm of representation and signification (what the project is *saying*) to the realm of action and performance (what the project is *doing*). In other words, rather than representation *of* the world, we need to also situate it as an intervention *in* the world. We might be close to what Simon O' Sullivan means by the function of art over its power of signification, or representation, when he writes:

(...) art, then, might be understood as the name for a function: a magical, an aesthetic, function of

transformation. Art is less involved in making sense of the world and more involved in exploring the possibilities of being, of becoming, in the world. Less involved in knowledge and more involved in experience, in pushing forward the boundaries of what can be experienced (O' Sullivan, 2001, p. 130).

## Beyond lockdown

The making of this reenactment became an intense social and political time in the area, a 'collective effervescence', to borrow Émile Durkheim's term.<sup>18</sup> This was closely related to the actual presence of 11 people living inside the cave, the continuous support of the community above ground, and the engagement of mass media in the project, something that situates the project between artistic reenactment, social action and media event.

The making of *Encierro* was a gesture towards increasing participatory politics in the area. Around San Aquilino's shaft, 50 meters underground, the lockdown participants gathered

with local politicians, educators, health experts, representatives of tourism and heritage, teenagers, entrepreneurs, etc., engaging in a collective dialogue to identify the main problems affecting us. At the centre of *Encierro* is the paradox of engaging with the future via restaging of the past. In *Encierro*, descending vertically into the ground created a horizontal and transversal space for collective political imagination. During the lockdown, the participants shaped the content of those conversations into a series of social and political claims, which arising from the depths of the mine eventually reached the Regional Parliament.<sup>19</sup> Also during the reenactment, a former Citizen Platform called 'Forzados' got re-activated in the area.<sup>20</sup> Currently, this citizen platform has around 2000 members, including most participants of the reenactment. Forzados still engages in social action to which a considerable number of people from the area respond with their presence and support.<sup>21</sup> A Youth Association called 'El Fuerte de la Mina' ('The Fortress of the Mine') has been also formed in Almadén after the reenactment. Some of its members were participating actively in the meetings and activities held during *Encierro*.

18 Durkheim writes, "There are periods in history when, under the influence of some great collective shock, social interactions have become much more frequent and active. Men look for each other and assemble together more than ever. That general effervescence results which is characteristic of revolutionary or creative epochs. Now this greater activity results in a general stimulation of individual forces. Men see more and differently now than in normal times. Changes are not merely of shades and degrees; men become different." Émile Durkheim, in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life: A Study in Religious Sociology*. Trans. Joseph Ward Swain, London: Allen & Unwin; New York: Macmillan, 1915, 210-211.

19 The main demands that emerged from the reenactment were voted on in the Regional Parliament of Castilla La Mancha on 24 September 2020, becoming the first instance when a series of claims written directly by a citizen platform were voted on in that parliament. The propositions were eventually rejected, with a parliament member from Almadén voting against them.

20 Forzados (Forced) is the name given to the slave workers in the Almadén mine between the XVI and the end of XVIII centuries. Even though Forzados Citizen Platform was legally established on 24 January 2020, Forzados was first formed on 15 May 2012 to protest against the plans of the University of Castilla La Mancha to close Almadén Engineering University (EIMIA) campus and take the studies to the capital of the province. Almadén Engineering University (EIMIA) is the first Mining Engineering University in Spain (founded in 1777), and the third oldest in Europe. Currently, the EIMIA campus still operates in Almadén. Forzados stopped its activities in 2012 and got re-activated during the making of *Encierro*.

21 In the summer of 2020 Forzados carried out a protest in which we camped for 11 consecutive days in front of the main train station of the area, which is not situated in any of the villages (curiously, it is 11 kilometers from Almadén) and without public transport to reach any of them. The number of trains have been gradually cut, and the train tracks are some of the oldest in Spain, causing frequent delays and making the commuting time to the nearest town long. This station symbolizes the geographical isolation and the lack of infrastructure that characterizes many rural areas in Spain. Despite the COVID pandemic, this protest could also count on the support of the community, media engagement and political action.

The reenactment has meant for many of its participants a decisive moment to engage more fully in social and political action. With its material and symbolic characteristics, the mine became a liminal time and space for this transformation to happen. However, this transformation cannot be understood as permanent, and it can easily revert. For instance, the opportunities for participatory politics in the area are still as scarce as they were before the making of *Encierro*. Moreover, to keep the social engagement and the collective action alive, as well as achieving concrete socio-economic improvements, is proving to be more difficult than it promised to be while inside the mine.

We can highlight the idealistic and usually short span of artistic interventions such as *Encierro*. However, I prefer to focus on the capacity that artistic interventions of this kind have to penetrate reality and transform, albeit briefly, the interpersonal, social and political dynamics of the areas in which they happen. Artistic propositions like *Encierro* propose activities "where conventional structure is no longer honored, but [are] more playful, more open to chance", and "more likely to be subversive, consciously or by accident introducing or exploring different structures that may develop into real alternatives to the status quo" (Carlson, 1996, p.24). Under the framework of artistic interventions, it is possible to propose and enact new practices (or reenact old ones like in this instance) that become possibilities for alternative social engagements and political configurations, a process that, like in *Encierro*, is not free from tensions, paradoxes and even contradictions. It is important to reflect upon this transformative power from the point of view of artistic practice itself, as it will continue to help us define the roles of (engaged) art and artists in society. Crucially, we should keep deepening our understanding of the social, political and historical implications of these interventions, to help us navigate the paradoxes they bring up. For instance, are not the spaces for social and political imagination created by these artistic practices both exciting opportunities for social and political engagement as well as potent warnings

of the lack of these spaces in our everyday lives, institutions and politics? Moving 'beyond representation' necessitates being alert to both the power and the limits of documentary practices in the field of civil society, as well as their potential to (re)connect and complicate past, present and future narratives.

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