

**On Hexentexte**  
Tupac Cruz

*Whatever put it there, no matter why, no human being will be able to live in it until human beings have lived through it.*

—Algis Budrys, *Rogue Moon*

Could it be said, of a lecture, that no one could live in it until someone had lived through it?

It sure is, sometimes, something that some people may describe themselves as enduring, for a while, during which they may ask: how much longer? But to endure, in that sense, might not be the same as to 'live through.' And such an enduring would not be followed by a 'living in.'

Two people do eventually live through the "formation" described in *Rogue Moon*, not knowing "why it's located there, what its true purpose might be, or what created it," or "whether it's animal, vegetable, or mineral," "natural or artificial;" although knowing, "from the geology of several meteorite craters that have heaped rubble against its sides, that it's been there for, at the very least, a million years"<sup>1</sup>. As they entered the formation one of them saw "a tilting plane of glittering blue-black, toward where two faces of coarse dull brown thudded together repeatedly," and swirling "curtains of green and white" through whose folds "shafts of crystal transparency opened [...] with flickering red light dimly visible at their far ends and blue, green and yellow heaving upward"<sup>2</sup>. That does sound like something you might say that you lived through, by walking through, from entrance to exit.

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Suppose it makes sense to distinguish, as situationist doctrine does, between spectacle and situation. This is a formal distinction between two types of event, both of them produced. A spectacle would be a produced event that separates those who produce it from those who enjoy it. A situation would be a produced event "made to be lived by its constructors (*faite pour être vécue par ses constructeurs*)," as we read in a pamphlet from 1957<sup>3</sup>. The verb "to live," in this context, has been recruited to synthesize what spectacle is said to separate: the act of producing and the act of enjoying what is produced. To cypher this synthesis, the pamphlet uses the term *viveurs* to describe those beings who engage in the construction of a situation as those who live through it. A situation would be a kind of event that can only be produced by being lived through, and

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<sup>1</sup> On page 87 of my copy, published by Gold Medal Books in 1960.

<sup>2</sup> On page 161 of my copy.

<sup>3</sup> *Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l'organisation et de l'action dans la tendance situationniste internationale* (Brussels: Internationale Situationniste, [1957]): x.

that can only be lived through by those who produce it.

Situationist doctrine grounds this distinction on what it defines as “a non-continuous concept of life (*une conception non-continue de la vie*)”, under which “the notion of unity must be shifted from the perspective of a whole life [...] to the perspective of isolated instants of life”<sup>4</sup>. This means that a situation is not ‘lived’ as an event that is a part of a whole that is a life (being a conjunction of events), but rather as an event that is driven out of a life. So if you tried to approach the practice of lecturing by way of situationist doctrine, you would understand a lecture as something that drives those who live through it out of their lives, so that they either live their life or they live through your lecture.

Then again, how could a lecture, as an event that is produced, not be a species of the genus ‘spectacle.’ A lecture is ‘given’ by someone and ‘taken’ by someone, where ‘to give’ is ‘to produce’ and ‘to take’ is ‘to enjoy.’

As far as I could tell, *Hexentexte*, a set of three lectures delivered in Cali, Colombia, in the summer of 2018, did not present itself as an attempt to do otherwise. The lectures were given in the context of (*escuela incierta*), a summer school program that requires neither guests nor students to subscribe to any established understanding of what academic procedures are like and are for. The seats where the students sat were of the plastic poolside variety, designed for allowing sitters to expose their body to solar radiation. But they all looked towards the side of the room that functioned as the stage, where Benzel, the lecturer, sat in front of a screen against which images and texts were projected. So: nothing too unusual, if maybe a looser version of the usual.

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A lecture in an academic setting is typically something you might ‘give again,’ after giving it once, and less likely to be something you would ‘take again,’ unless you had to. If the same people were to ‘give’ and ‘take’ the same lecture many times over, something would be off. This did not seem to be the case with *Hexentexte*. —I should say, I did not ‘take’ *Hexentexte*, and I also did not ‘give’ it: I was there to interpret the lecture, from English to Spanish. But I might think, having been there, that it was a set of lectures that one could want to ‘take’ again, and I might even think that one *should* take it again, that it should be given and taken more than once, so that it may really come to be what it is, so that this three-phase event may properly ‘happen.’ And as soon as I think this, I think the opposite: that it should only happen once, and that it already did.

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<sup>4</sup> Same pamphlet, same page.

If I now wonder just 'what it was,' I would say that the lecture set *Hexentexte* can be described as having been a 'presentation of materials.' Both of these terms warrant event-specific definitions.

'Presentation' was here under the form of a sequence. As though materials previously un-presented in space were now presented in time; as though they had been drawn out of space, where they remained in synchrony, so as to be laid out in time, in a sequence.

They could all have been, the materials, displayed in the same room, as in an exhibition. They could all have been laid out in space and the layout could have, to some extent, hinted at a possible set of sequential paths for going through them. But in the absence of a guide to lead you, the materials would remain only pre-sequenced, or multiply sequentiable, and the visitor who examined them in a certain order would not thereby have sequenced them in any definitive way.

Having been there, my sense is that, in the performance of *Hexentexte*, time was determined as "not enough" and/or the material to be presented as "too much." If you were to look at the syllabus, which was distributed in advance, and you had divided the materials listed as to be presented by the time of presentation, you would have seen it: too much by not enough. I had already seen it, when L. had taken two of Benzel's lecture courses at CalArts: I had never been to the lectures, but I had looked at the syllabi and thought, with a mixture of excitement and apprehension: too much. So it seems fair to say that this is not something that befell the lecturer in a particular case, when one of these lectures was performed; it seems more like this is the form of presentation that is thereby performed. The form of presentation is: a sequencing of a surplus of material unto insufficient time, presenting both as such: material as too much and time as not enough.

It also seems to me that the material was not the 'what with' of the presentation, or something that the lecturer was using to make a point. The material was the 'what of,' or what the lecturer was there to present. This determined an economics of presentation, according to which *only* material could be used to present material. 'A sequence,' the form thereof, can be described as: one material, another material, and something between them—a transition that allows for synthesis. But I would say that in *Hexentexte* the transition was performed by a third material, leaving then no transition between the first material and the intermediary, transition-material. So the parts of the lecture were not that by which something could grow—a grasp, an understanding, taking shape like a plant as it unfolds—because the transition from material to material was itself just more material, and the means for synthesis were overdriven into deterrents of synthesis.

Well, something was given to be understood: the lectures were about tactics developed in art contexts, and about tactics developed by agencies of social

control, and about how these tactics circulated and forged complicities between those two kinds of context. Maybe a sad thing to be given to understand. The lectures were also about the enactment, in such tactics, of an entropic drive, and the presentation of the material might also have been so driven, as it was hard to tell whether one was having too many ideas as one worked through the lecture, or having none. Ideas about hexing by recording and recoding what had been recorded—but what person, what site would I want to hex? Ideas about regressing and or progressing towards a language made and shared by you and me alone, a production of syntax for sharing panic and joy with nothing for these to be 'about,' just you, and me, and syntax—projecting us to before the mind drew a line on the surface the earth, a line whose illegitimate warrant the mind would then become—projecting us to after the drawing of this line has come undone or been abolished.

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You could say that there was the time of the lecture and the time of the students, the first being uni-dimensional, the second constituted by a plurality of perpendicular dimensions, projected by students as they used their 'own' time to go deeper into some of the material. The student's time would then be parasitic of the lecture's time. It might not have 'fed from' it, or 'lived off' it, but it would have latched onto it and dragged it sideways, into a depth that was not its own. Were the student's time to prevail, the lecture would have had to stop.

As somehow dictated, the lecture's time prevailed. Is this a problem? It would be, under situationist doctrine, for it would confirm that the lecture was a spectacle. Had someone who was taking the lectures wanted to interject by projecting their own time, perpendicularly, against and through the lecture's time, they would have thought it better to wait and do it later, to wait for the lecture to be over in order to work through it in their own time, placing their own time after the lecture's time. Later, a PDF was shared, which contained the materials projected against the screen during the lecture, in the sequence in which they had been projected: maybe a compromise between sequence and non sequence, a partially re-spatialized version of the lecture that the students could 'use' or 'work with.'

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In this and all respects the mode of presentation deployed in *Hexentexte* was generous, or the presentation embodied generosity: the lecture was very much given and the materials were shared. One could see this as something that the lecturer might both love and hate to do. The lecturer presented a 'wealth' of material, but the wealth was maybe not the lecturer's as much as the material's—its wealth as valued by the lecturer.

You could suspect that there had been an earlier sequence: that the lecturer had compiled the material, and the compilation had been sequential. Then the material had come to rest de-sequenced in space, and now it was being re-sequenced. The order in which it had been compiled may have been random, in any case it was probably not the order in which the material was to be presented. The order of presentation corrected the order of compilation, and this was the valuation of the material by the lecturer and as the lecture: the wealth of the material is the product of this process by which it could be shared as valuable. This, of course, for the sake of entropy, so that the entropy of wealth, choreographed, may fluoresce against the screen, the choreography coming not from but out of the intelligence of those who were taking the lecture.

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Was the material being shared by being presented? One would know that the material was being shared with the students if they found that they could use it. Sure, to receive the material just as it was shared, laying back and letting it radiate you, was already to use it, to use it for pleasure by not having to make any particular use of it. But it would have taken more, a further use, a use that would have been someone's own, for the material to have been shared —this, I say, is what the material might say.

Could this material be so used? Maybe not: maybe to use what had been shared would have been to steal it—as I am still of a mind to do, even though I did not take the lecture. The lecturer was using the material, and the use value of the material could have been utterly consumed by the lecture, which would have used the material up by sequencing and presenting it. Some do say that there is use value only when there is only use value. Well, we may be following a false lead, leading us to think that the verb 'to use' should always be there, right next to the noun 'material.' And we may well follow the lead all the way to the transgression, because to 'use' the material would be to make it one's own, to really come through with the act of 'taking the lecture,' and so to abuse the lecturer's generosity and to devalue the material. Could this have been the form of our being intelligent about it, letting it live through our mind, making a passage for it through it, a passage both uncoded and for the sake of its uncoding?