

# L21

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# SUEDE

Ian Waelder - SUEDE

From September 8th until December 16th 2016



Part of the installation views

# SUEDE

Text by Sonia Fernández Pan

The US50 is a highway of over four thousand kilometres that horizontally crosses the United States. During its route through Nevada, it goes through a desert where you can find a popular tree from whose branches hang many pairs of shoes. Both the US50 and this tree, occupied by anonymous shoes, are the elements that Agustín Fernández Mallo uses as a nexus to connect the numerous characters of a novel that worked as a failed label for a supposed generation of writers that never existed. When Ian Waelder spoke to me about Suede for the first time and about his intention of hanging a pair of shoes from the top of the L21 gallery's new space, the first thing that came to my mind was that tree from *Nocilla Dream*. A novel I had not thought about for many years, the enthusiasm I got from reading it was quickly escorted to oblivion. Since Suede and those connections that happen unexpectedly thanks to the art and situations in the past, but also in the near future. In fact, a few weeks later, walking by a road on the outskirts of Barcelona -again with art as an excuse- I would find a pair of boots hanging from an electric wire over a secondary track for freight trains. As one of my companions would mention, in Argentina, shoes hanging from power lines work as a code (also an open secret) to ingeniously inform that it's possible to buy drugs in that place and its proximities. This explanation sounded reasonable when I thought about the past history of that area and the urban legends that still plague it. Nonetheless, thinking about the current state of the place -almost like a dystopia that's happened before its time- and in the particular location of those shoes, my mind rejected this explanation to remain in the doubt of why how did that pair of boots end up hanging up there, in the middle of an industrial infrastructure not too suitable for an impromptu stroll or sporadic transactions. Yet another enigma that joins the general mystery of shoe tossing, of the crop circles, the numerical stations and many other numbers sent intermittently through the radiophonic space, the Toynbee tiles and its messages spread through the US and South America, or those staples thrown around the cities that stick to the wheels of bikes with the intention of puncturing them every now and then.

Shoe tossing is a practice that consists in hanging shoes from power lines, telephone lines and even trees. However, for this to be possible, the shoes must have laces. In the same way as in *Nocilla Dream*, shoes can accumulate on the same place, increasing the visual efficacy of its message as well as its mystery. Shoe tossing, as a practice that extends through the globe, enables an idea of a community in which its members don't necessarily know each other personally, but it exists and makes itself visible through a common object. Shoes, in this case. A critical way of thinking the object - also the artistic- appears when we keep in mind the processes of production that enable it.

Processes that include a series of human and labor relations that we don't usually consider in our daily relation with those items we identify with and that, in consequence, speak of us. Other than this previous life, exists a posterior life of the object that manifests in what we do with it. Be it in relation with its common use or in personal variations different from their general utility. Like, for example, fusing a pair of shoes in bronze to hang them from the top of a private space.

Long before the current effervescence by the ontology of the object, Walter Benjamin claimed that a language of things exists. A type of communication that manifests itself through a community defined by matter. So just as there is a language of rocks or skyscrapers, there's also a language of shoes. And all these languages exist simultaneously in a silent cacophony for us humans, who connect one another with words. But, who translates this language of things? Is it even possible to translate? Is it a proper language? What does it mean to translate some things to others? According to Hito Steyerl, Benjamin would aim with this apology of things towards a politic of the form. And it would position itself against the protagonism of the contents or the origin of language in everything that has to do with the process of translation. This language of things that Benjamin uses to take an eccentric turn in philosophy are understood with independency to the human being and could be seen as a founding milestone of the accusations that weigh nowadays on anthropocentrism and our way of being in the world as an exercise of domination of reality.



This autonomy of the object, however -like any other- is relative. Objects exist in relation to others, but also in relation to us. And, more than the objects themselves, the relations that happen between them are very interesting. Moreover, these relations are the ones that mark their potentially extraordinary character. Personally, I interpret objects as time capsules, witnesses of prolonged moments or specific situations to which these items remain permanently linked, despite the risk of continuing to place the human being in a central position of the lives of objects. Like emotional souvenirs, but without any of the derogatory or negative burden connected to this concept borrowed from another tongue and manipulated with a different meaning from our own. That's why I perceive the past through many objects and not through the pragmatic measurement of the calendar, that I do use consciously to relate myself with the future. The objects from the future exist in potency, they are always about to reach our lives. Sometimes they do it as a projection and are easy to see, like a new pair of shoes replacing the old ones. Ian sees his shoes in a similar way, as witnesses of an action we perform over an object and with it. An action that, in this case, refers both to the fact of walking as well as to the fact of skating with a board, another object which also acts as a witness of progressive deterioration through time and does it in a dependency relation between other objects. For a skateboard to deteriorate with use, another object -a pair of shoes- must suffer a similar action.

Deterioration is an action that happens in time, but also in space. Going back to that language of things Benjamin talked about, we might be able to imagine a memory of the space that gathers all the situations that happen in it. And that remain only if a register of them exists. We could also consider the existence of a language of space that exists through other languages, for instance, those that derive from the objects that inhabit it intermittently for some time. The memory of space is a shared memory that, not only does it linger inside of it, but it also moves to other places with those objects that transit it. This accumulation of perishable situations also has the opposite effect: the lack of memory. What happens when the activity of one space moves to another one? When is a space the activity that happens inside of it and not the specific place it occupies? What happens when a space reforms itself and with this transformation removes marks of its previous state or any clue of previous activity? How do all these spaces that have been replaced by other manifest themselves? Is it possible to access them beyond the photographic registry?

There's a quote by Raphaël Zarka that Ian uses as a statement and refers to the effects that all actions produce. The noise, the traces and marks are the results of an activity that did not necessarily expect to produce them. These effects, without fully unlinking themselves from the activity that creates them, can work independently. Like prints or marks that aren't just something that lingers, but something directed somewhere else. Something transporting an action in time, forward, but is capable of omitting the

literality of what concerns it. I remember a piece by Elena Almeida that amplified the sound produced by a pencil on contact with a sheet of paper and that, without a proper explanation, it wouldn't have attributed to the relation between these two elements. In fact, she consciously rose the volume to mislead the viewer of a subtle sign. The protagonism of the drawing as the mark of a physical action was replaced by the sound permanence of that same action. I also remember a piece by Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller for documenta13, *Alter Bahnhof Video Walk*, on which confusion was created between different realities that had had place at the same space at different times, Kassel's train station. *Alter Bahnhof Video Walk* worked like a mobile movie built into the body. Each spectator walked through the station looking at the screen of an Ipod in that same space, but accompanied by an omniscient narrator, other people and other situations. The confusion between realities wasn't so much because of the station that appeared in the screen was the same one my body was in, but because of the substitution of the real sound by the binaural sound of the film through the earphones. What I remember the best of that experience is jumping back in shock thinking I was about to be hit by some skater that would later show up crossing the screen of my Ipod. If it hadn't been for the sound experience of that path, *Alter Bahnhof Video Walk* would've just been yet another video on a portable screen.



I've always been a bit skeptic when it comes to that idea of an image being worth over a thousand words, or that an image freezes a specific moment in time. When I look at a personal picture I'm aware I'm looking at an image that I haven't even lived in the way this image shows. While I'm not interested in the antagonism between image and sound, the latter permits to reproduce the temporality of a particular moment. However, this may not allow for that offscreen that makes photography so attractive. On the other hand, sound allows some kind of acoustic immersion that negates the chance of listening mnemonically to other things. While we observe a photo we can think about many other images at the same time. While listening to something, it's much harder to listen mentally and simultaneously to a different thing we've heard in the past. That said, centering all sound experience in listening is to forget the references, also objectual, that make this sound. And that that sound exists beyond our listening and independently from us.

Going back to the object and its function as a time capsule or trigger of many tales, both historical and personal, I can't help but think of a text that served as a pretext for the origin of my relationship with Ian Waelder. It may be that inside the strict parameters of ontology, a text cannot be considered an object, but the publication that contains it can. Believe me, I tried was Ian's project through which we met and started our relationship via text, by email, due to another text I had to write for a publication that formed part of his exhibit in Sala d'arcs. It was thanks to Ian that I learned the story of Anthony Pappalardo, an American skater whom failure came upon him the same force that success had boosted his career earlier on. I also discovered with Ian a way of combining the art of skateboarding through sculpture. With remains of things that had been handled and unlinked from their original function that could refer to that politic of the form that Benjamin mentioned. A form freed of the initial utility of an object decomposed in parts and repurposed into something else, a sculpture.

With the publication of that text our relation could've ended. However, thinking about the emails we had shared during the process and that way Ian has of speaking without complexes and in first person of

many things that others don't talk about in relation with working with art, I proposed him to take part in a 'esnorquel' with a written conversation. It was about translating our emails into the public space, but without all of those hypertextual links or the clutter of ideas that tend to accompany them. As expected, we wrote that long conversation quickly and in a rather short time. A conversation that equally produced other parallel ones via email, our usual communication method since we don't live in the same city and Ian travels a lot. With these emails I've been able to follow up on Ian's work from his anecdotes and personal comments. Projects like The noise, the traces and the marks for LOCAL in Chile and that relates directly to Suede, as did his intervention about the works of Felipe Mujica in El biombo y el eco for Salón in Madrid.

Our relationship began after Ian's individual exhibit After a Hippie Jump in 2014 for the L21 space in Madrid. A space that doesn't exist anymore, neither does the one in Mallorca, where L21 carried out its activities for several years and I had a chance of visiting twice. The first one as a sporadic visitor, with an exhibit of Ignacio Uriarte where I met Óscar Florit and stumbled upon Ian in his workshop, inside the gallery. The second time was as a partaker in the L21 Art Fair thanks to Ian's invitation and the gallery to talk about 'esnorquel' and the conversation as a methodology of work and investigation. L21 Art Fair was an event that lasted 3 days and of which many people with ties to Ian took part, and some of us were identified with the context of Barcelona. Although I could only go for the first day, L21 Art Fair was also a place for coexistence between all of those that joined the talks and the L21 team, showing how professionalism and intimacy aren't mutually exclusive.

When thinking of an artistic context, we have two possibilities: a rigid one, on which its members must reside and work continually in said context in order to be considered a part of it; and an expanded one, where belonging to a context comes by ways of exchange through an intermittent yet more or less regular contact. From this second perspective, some of us consider that Ian belongs to other artistic contexts even though he lives and usually works in Mallorca. It was because of his residency in L'Estruch de Sabadell that we met in person, in Barcelona without a keyboard in the middle, seeing each other again for the inauguration of Ruido in the Ana Mas Projects gallery, an exhibit where he shared the space with Élia Llach and that was curated by Fede Montornés.

That first text for Ian ended with a stated wish I didn't fulfill. It was a personal note towards the future and not from the experience of what has already been lived. Nearly done with this text, I'm reminded again of the tree with shoes from Nocilla Dream, as well as the vast amount of images on the Internet that show up if one writes "shoe tossing" in Google. Almost all of them correspond to a recognizable brand and some of them remind me that both Ian and I use the same brand of shoes, although I believe one of the worst choices one can make is be loyal to a brand almost unconditionally. And that, nonetheless, there's a great difference between his shoes and mine. Both are witnesses of the deterioration through similar actions in different lives, but some have been able to exchange the obsolescence of the weathered object by that drive of future that Boris Groys points out in relation to art. A space that is capable of letting things talk even when we try to anchor them with language

Ian Waelder

Born in 1993. Lives and works in Mallorca, Spain. His artistic practice explores suburban culture from memory. Working with photography, sound or sculpture, the artist collects experiences from his environment, interested in researching the traces and marks left by the individual. Recently, he's been an artist in residence at HANGAR Lisboa (2016) and at NauEstruch, Sabadell (2015). He's received awards like the Full Contact Prize at SCAN International Photography Festival at Tarragona (2014), Honor Mention at Ciutat de Palma (2013) and finalist at the Miquel Casablanca Award from Sant Andreu Contemporani (2014, 2016). He has also received grants like INJUVE (2015) and has been selected at portfolio reviews like Café Dossier (2014) and the Encontro de Artistas Novos at Cidade da Cultura in Santiago de Compostela, Spain (2014).

He's had solo exhibitions at L21 Gallery in Palma and Madrid (Spain), at the Chirivella Soriano Foundation in Valencia, LOCAL Arte Contemporáneo in Santiago de Chile, DAFO Projectes in Lleida, Spain, and has recently participated at two-person exhibitions at Ana Mas Projects in Barcelona and at Bacelos Gallery in Madrid. His work has been included in curated projects at Salón, Sant Andreu Contemporani and La Casa Encendida.

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