

Conversation

Conversation is an invitation to listen to a looped audio piece through a 'suitcase telephone' receiver. The telephone rests on the exact model of typewriter the artist's father used to write his exile theatre works in the 1950s -1960s (Olivetti Lettera 22).

A copy of his play *Tierra Cautiva* (*The Captive Land*) can be seen in the cabinet which forms part of this installation. An extract from the artist's own play *Playa y Toro*, which was written in response to *Tierra Cautiva*, forms a posthumous conversation between the artist and her father on the subject of a devastating unspoken trauma brought on by war, exile, and the critical rejection of his play.

Jose García Lora was an academic and a playwright who was exiled from Spain in 1939. In *Playa y Toro* he appears as Lora who is in dialogue with the cast; together they determine the action.

The company assemble expectantly. Antonio stands apart from the others.

Antonio: *(He looks back at the cast.)* No you mustn't expect pyrotechnics or some grand finale...but, *(to the audience)* don't go home yet. You see I haven't decided what to do. Mercedes doesn't want me to go to the *corrida*, and I do love her...only it's my one chance. *(Abuela approaches him as if to speak but hangs back).*

I haven't told you what happened to my leg. It was gored by an infernal bull...oh, and the pain, and the fear - well I can't give you the words for it. Somehow I survived, aged 25 and all washed up. A limping ex-torero, with no further prospects. It's all I know. So I have to return to that battle front once more. I wanted to be a famous bull fighter and leave this pitiful life behind me - to give Mercedes the life she deserves, to leave the tyranny of this captive soil.

Antonio looks back at Mercedes in anguish, and then the stage blacks out, leaving a spotlight on him. He is alone.

Antonio: I should have died that day. My tragedy is to have survived. Without the *corrida* I am nothing. *(He bows his head. Abuela becomes spotlight and moves forward, she carries her broom.)*

Abuela: There is no glory in an early death, my boy - it's only a life cut short into which others can insert their own desire for a hero to look up to. You simply become the padding for their plumped-up mythologies. That bull will bring you either *pesetas* or the reaper on the turn of a coin. It's time to turn your hand to other things, hang up your *traje*, sell it, move on.

Antonio: No, no! You don't understand, the *corrida* is in my soul, in my blood. It's in the everyday twists and turns of my body, it's in the way I carry my poor moth infested jacket like a cape. I am like Lora whose hands simply had to type, who lived and breathed for the stage, always the stage. We must do it or die - don't you see that? The critics were his bulls, the stage his *corrida*. We were both gored. *(He hangs his head again. Abuela steps towards him and puts her hand on his shoulder).*

Abuela: It is a triumph to live a life most ordinary, I tell you. In truth the extraordinary, the heroic even, lies in surviving wars and hardships and choosing to go on living every day. Domesticity is our anchor Antonio, without it we are truly NOTHING, ZERO. Let me show you a scene from the future. Don't choose until you've seen it. Promise me that at least? *(Antonio nods.) The stage blacks out to change the scene. We are transported to a dining room many years later.*

The characters assemble around a dining table. Lora is to one side, seated and typing on a small table. There is a bottle of Codorniu and a cake - six glasses can be seen resting on the table and Abuela hovers with her tongs and cake slice. Engracia pours the Codorniu. Antonio wears a shirt and trousers - not tatty nor overly smart.

Lora: And so we travelled endlessly it seemed, retracing the footsteps of exile, and we brought our daughters back to the homeland, always to leave it at the end of our summers to return to the dark ,damp climes of England. The Spain I left behind at the moment of my exile had vanished. My return was always a bitter blessing.

Antonio, who had earlier left the scene, returns with his bicycle and makes to knock on a door. His panniers are loaded with groceries - he is now a delivery man for the local market. Mercedes opens the door to him and he begins to empty the panniers as though making a delivery.

Antonio: I brought the manchego, the wine and the olive oil you asked for, oh and the bread and the olives for the salad. Did the tomatoes ripen? I can get some from Maruja she's selling them off, practically giving them away. For me they would be a gift - she owes me enough with all the extra rounds I've taken on - I even deliver to Señora Magdalena on the fifth floor - no lift!

What! You're all here? A glass of cava - I don't mind if I do - what's the occasion? Cake too. What are we celebrating?

Abuela: We are gathered to make a toast to Lora, to his typewriter and to a life most ordinary! We end our play with no fatalities and in the warm glow of domestic triumph.

Socorro: I'm not sure Lora would like that for the ending?

Abuela: Well, well, let's see. *(She turns to Lora with a questioning look, Lora stands to address the audience - he clears his throat. Socorro steps forward and tries to give Lora the C, Breakdown yaps in delight. Lora shakes his head but takes Socorro's hand and begins to speak a little shyly).*

Lora: Well now...what shall I say? Finally my moment to speak has come. *(Pause for thought and to look at Socorro)* Now that you're all listening I'm a little tongue tied! Oh damn it all, I might as well say it...I think that the triumph of my life *(he looks at Abuela)*, if there was one, was truth. I never gave up feeling sad about the country we lost. I was faithfully, colossally, and quite monumentally sad. And in the end they,

having taken everything else, couldn't take *that* away from me. *(He raises a glass)*

The cast gather round. Lora and Antonio embrace like brothers and all raise their glasses. Breakdown yaps. The play appears to be over.

Suddenly the fanfare of the corrida sounds again. All characters look towards the sound and then at Antonio. Antonio takes his bicycle and without a glance backwards removes the jacket from his traje de luces from a pannier, slings it over his shoulder and sets off for the corrida, singing the correct Lorca version of Cafe de Chinitas.

Abuela *(Holds her face in shame):* Oh I lied of course - cake and cava in a shanty! I was trying to save the boy. Antonio took what he thought was his only chance of a better life. Bull or bust, you might say. Bull or bust...that's what.

Lora takes Abuela's and Mercedes hands, and the cast hold hands so that they are all linked and facing the audience. Even Antonio comes on and joins them.

Cast: *Why has Antonio been assassinated, assassinated is the word! Why has he been assassinated in front of the nation? The death of Antonio is the death of a people. It's the death of a people. He had to die this way, this way. He had to die this way for us to understand. We must try to understand.*

Lora *(Nodding):* Ah! You're quoting me. Loosely, of course! Final Act of The Captive Land. You are a good cast, loyal and extremely knowledgeable, every one of you *(they all bow theatrically to Lora in thanks)*. And it is true, at the hands of the Guardia civil or the horns of a bull, Antonio, for all that he makes good lemonade, must die. Sorry Antonio - I wish I could write it another way. I know the daughters do too. You'd make such an honest delivery boy. Here, let me buy you a beer and we'll go over your lines once more. No hard feelings?... Excellent! Remember, being the torero of the piece is a promotion!

