

DISTANT FEELINGS

Goliatus & Carábida (1977-1997)

Colombian-born Goliatus (b. 1955) met the Austro Peruvian Carábida (b. 1950) in Paris in 1975. Goliatus managed, after six attempts, to stow away in a shipping vessel to Europe, arriving in Paris in the fall of 1974.¹ Carábida arrived in the winter from Vienna, where she had tried and failed to locate the father she had never met.²

Goliatus and Carábida met at a party that was also attended by the founders of the *Aberracionismo* movement. The *Aberracionistas* were a group of young and struggling expat South American filmmakers that had chosen to band together and model their activities in film after the Colombo-Venezuelan literary collective *Los Fraudolentos*.³

It happened that Goliatus and Carábida were both getting a drink near the table where the *Aberracionistas* were sitting when they overheard them arguing about *Los Fraudolentos*. The *Aberracionistas* were discussing whether an anonymous essay titled “Sobre la Vida Como Un MacGuffin” (“On life as a MacGuffin”) could be attributed, based on certain markers of style and tone, to one of the *Fraudolentos*.

Goliatus and Carábida joined the conversation and spent the rest of the evening in heated discussion with the *Aberracionistas*. The argument centered around a theory that proposed that *Los Fraudolentos* were not actually a collective, but a hoax perpetrated by a single author impersonating multiple characters. Goliatus and Carábida thought it was a credible notion but the *Aberracionistas* were not

¹ This mode of travel was wholly unnecessary as his mother had offered to pay for a one-way flight, but she was never very successful at dissuading her son from following his peculiar obsessions. She did make sure to mention that she would cover the price of a return flight if – but she was really thinking, when – he was forced to come back home.

² Her Austrian father (a professor) had met her Peruvian mother (a student) at the faculty of architecture and urbanism of the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (PUCP). The father left Perú shortly after it was discovered that the degrees, he had presented to obtain his position at the university, were forgeries.

³ Active from 1962 till 1974, *Los Fraudolentos* were a group of Colombian and Venezuelan poets, aphorists, satirists and monologists based in the frontier city of Cúcuta, Colombia. They were known for the seriousness with which they devoted themselves to pranks, hoaxes, forgeries and other assorted forms of literary trickery.

convinced by the evidence Goliatus or Carábida put forward to make the case.⁴ To their dismay, neither the depth of their familiarity with the work of *Los Fraudolentos* nor their argumentative prowess led to their immediate membership in the movement.⁵

This first encounter did lead to regular coffee dates where Goliatus and Carábida would argue for hours about such things as the utopian misery of the Latin American avant-garde or the idea of gossip as the only true Latin American art form. It was during one of these coffee dates that their first and only artistic collaboration germinated. Going over ways to get out of their respective creative ruts, they came up with the idea of making a film together in the spirit of *Los Fraudolentos*. They imagined a film that would dazzle the *Aberracionistas* – who were of course very hard to impress – and grant them not only access, but more importantly, a position of influence within the group.⁶

At the time, Carábida had been researching a unique hypnotic experiment carried out by the 19th century Belgian painter Antoine Wiertz (1806 – 1856). Wiertz had wanted to know whether consciousness persisted in the mind of a decapitated man. To this end, he asked his friend, who happened to be a prison doctor, to hide him under the guillotine during the execution of a prisoner sentenced for murder. He then asked his regular hypnotist, Monsieur D____, to command him to enter into rapport with the dying man. The goal was for Wiertz to penetrate the prisoner's brain and examine the thoughts and sensations that still flickered in his mind in the moment after decapitation. From his written testimony about the experience we can deem the experiment a success if albeit one suffused with horror. Facing the detached head, he was asked what he saw and felt. In utter panic he exclaimed "Terrible! The head thinks!"⁷

⁴ G & C first connected in the moment when they recognized that they were the only ones there who believed the single author theory.

⁵ The *Aberroacionistas* were known to hide their fervid ambition and need for approval behind a shell of intense aloofness that made them terribly appealing, especially if you were new in town and hoping to find kindred spirits. At the time G & C were definitely of the new and hoping kind.

⁶ Although they were not made members of the group, they did frequent the same bars and cafes, opportunities which G & C used to interrupt the *Aberracionistas'* conversations and update them on the state of their project.

⁷ Five years after his experiment, Wiertz painted a triptych with the title *Last Thoughts and Visions of a Severed Head* (1853). His written description of what he felt while he was in rapport with the severed head accompanies the painting. According to him, the severed head continued to live for

Goliatus and Carábida wondered whether a similar rapport could be captured on film. Perhaps a film audience could be steered toward sensations similar to those received by Wiertz. Maybe, given the right equipment and emotional tenacity, they could create an experience that would shatter what they considered to be the “comfortable perversity of spectatorship”. They gave their prospective film the title *Distant Feelings*.

In what they called their “pre-production phase”, they tried to build a contraption they called *The Cinematic Guillotine*. This device was meant to automatically carry out a decapitation while simultaneously recording it. They attempted to build it themselves but realized that the complexity of the machine as they envisioned it was beyond their abilities.⁸ Besides the technical challenge, a major hurdle was finding subjects to test the machine. It turns out that even if you admit to having suicidal thoughts and are willing to answer an ad in the back of a magazine to be interviewed by an artist duo interested in your personal trauma you won’t go as far as to volunteer to be decapitated on camera.

three minutes after the blade fell. The text, like the painting, is divided into three sections. Each part corresponds to one minute of life beyond death. Here, in full, the third minute:

“Third minute: In eternity

It is not yet. The head still thinks and suffers. Suffers fire that burns, suffers the dagger that dismembers, suffers the poison that cramps, suffers in the limbs, as they are sawn through, suffers in his viscera, as they are torn out, suffers in his flesh, as it is hacked and trampled down, suffers in his bones, which are slowly boiled in bubbling oil. All this suffering together still cannot convey any idea of what the executed man is going through. ...And here a thought makes him stiff with terror: is he already dead and must he suffer like this from now on? Perhaps for all eternity?... No, such suffering cannot endure for ever; God is merciful. All that belongs to earth is fading away. He sees in the distance a little light glittering like a diamond. He feels a calm stealing over him. What a good sleep he shall have! What joy! ...Human existence fades away from him. It seems to him slowly to become one with the night. Now just a faint mist – but even that recedes, dissipates, and disappears. Everything goes black... At last, the beheaded man is dead!”

⁸ The only film funding application they ever submitted was for building *The Cinematic Guillotine*. The budget included the services of an engineer, an architect, an industrial designer and a lens maker. The funding body summarily rejected their application. This was how their rejection letter concluded: *“The earnestness with which you propose such a ghoulish objective can only lead us to think that you take perverse joy in a most malevolent form of facetiousness. We must assume that our denial of your request was clear to you from the start. Nonetheless, we take the time to respond to this act of bad faith to make it absolutely clear that we would never take into consideration any proposal that suggests the necessity of “ritualized murder for the sake of cinema” even under the guise of some type of assisted suicide. Furthermore, we must inform you that you should not bother to apply in any future instance, in any capacity, as we have neither the patience nor the time for this sort of vulgarity.”*

Equipment, crews, funding and the prospect of a murder charge were just too much of a hassle. Seeking a different angle, they focused their attention solely on the act of emotional transfer at a distance. They decided to get rid of the whole cinematic apparatus and hold on to the trauma. Based on their research, they needed trauma to produce a signal that was strong enough to make a connection with an audience. By combining trauma with hypnosis, they thought they could create a telepathic film that would burrow inside the minds of the viewers and liberate them from “the shackles of the totalitarian ego”.

Here we enter their so-called “production phase”.⁹ Having decided to move on from suicidal subjects, they began visiting self-harm therapy groups. Using made-up stories and fake scars¹⁰ to pass themselves off as fellow self-harmers, they sought out the most susceptible and open-minded participants within the groups. Under the impression that they were all going to try out alternative therapeutic methods, twelve self-harmers volunteered to extended interviews and then to prolonged hypnosis sessions led by Goliatus (for the males) and Carábida (for the females).¹¹ Not long thereafter, the group began testing telepathic exercises. Using their own personal stories of trauma, the volunteers, under heavy hypnosis, worked to induce states of “radical empathy” in each other.¹² The main difficulty – as Goliatus and Carábida would constantly reiterate – was reaching the needed level of “empathy signal”.¹³

⁹ Most of the information presented up to this point was taken from the only interview ever given by G & C. It was published in the long out-of-print Czech poetry magazine *Everblack*. The interview was a companion to the first publication in Czech of G & C’s manifesto *Distant Feelings*, which had made its way to Prague in its original self-published edition and had caused a big impact on the small circle of poets that ran the magazine. The rest of this text is culled from the blogs *Implausible Cinema* and *Against the Eye – adventures in anti-cinema*, as well as a subreddit on telepathic mutilation.

¹⁰ Carábida taught herself how to create believable wounds from the book *Film and Television Makeup* by Herman Buchman (1973).

¹¹ G & C picked up hypnosis in Paris from Goliatus’ German dentist Dr. Paul Drul, who used medical hypnosis instead of chemical anesthesia for dental surgery. Goliatus’ mother’s Colombian dentist had studied under Dr. Drul in Stuttgart and recommended him when Goliatus needed a wisdom tooth removed.

¹² By this point, they were all living together in G & C’s studio, paid for by an “artist grant” secretly awarded to Goliatus by his mother.

¹³ One of the early strategies they used to raise the level of the signal was to submit themselves to continuous screenings of the film *The House is Black* by Forough Farrokhzad (1962). They thought that the film – which shows life in a leper colony in Northern Iran – allowed them to be witnesses to “the abysmal truth of human pain” and that watching it repeatedly would enhance their “empathetic response mechanism”. These screenings would take place in 24-hour sessions. When the 16mm print

To boost the signal to “radical levels”, they nudged their telepaths-in-training toward trying out more extreme acts of self-mutilation. They told them that it was the act of severing, the forceful but loving separation of a part of the body from itself, that was the key to establishing a telepathic link. They instructed them to start small (fingertips, earlobes, the tip of the nose) and then move toward larger limbs, depending on the strength of the signal.¹⁴ Shortly after establishing this practice, the group began referring to themselves as “telemutilators”.

Their method went like this: Two telemutilators would be put in a trance in separate rooms. One male telemutilator (the transmitter) would concentrate on personal trauma and then proceed to cut off a part of an extremity while a female telemutilator (the receiver) would begin downloading the other’s physical and psychological trauma. The receiver would speak out loud all of the sensations she was feeling. This would be recorded and played back to the transmitter, who would confirm the veracity of the transmission. Then they would switch roles. This way each one would see the other’s “film”. Afterward they would possess what Goliatus and Carábida called a “total empathy link”.¹⁵

Now telepathically linked, each duo had the ability, in theory, to combine their individual empathy signals and broadcast them across vast distances to a large number of minds.¹⁶ In practice though, expanding into the masses was not so easy.¹⁷ Up-scaling their method came with its own set of problems. Although the telemutilators had been broadcasting their “empathy film” to the world, they saw little tangible evidence of its effect. Boosting the signal through their traditional

they had of the film was worn to the point that it could no longer run through the projector, they began producing an elaborate reenactment of the film that, if anything, resembled an amateur theatre production of an avant-garde play.

¹⁴ G & C were the only ones that could determine the strength of the signal and therefore the kind and size of extremity that should be severed.

¹⁵ The empathy link also extended to G & C. All the telemutilators that had gone through the mutilation ritual were also, from that point on, in permanent rapport with the duo. Supposedly, over time the levels of agony and ecstasy would reach a perfect balance.

¹⁶ There was no particular type of target mind since G & C believed every type of mind was susceptible to this method. Nevertheless, they did claim that the kind of person that uses terms like intelligent, rational or grounded to describe themselves was much easier to penetrate.

¹⁷ G & C were big admirers of Dagmara Král and her *Insect Cinema*. Although they had only read secondhand accounts about her work, they viewed themselves as heirs to her project of spiritual liberation.

method of increasing mutilations had led to a number of prolonged hospital visits. Clearly, they were limited by the amount of bodily mass they could remove from themselves.

Here a second contraption enters the story.¹⁸ This one was actually built and meant to amplify the signal while avoiding the excessive physical harm. They called it *Distant Feeler* and described it as “an instrument for enhancing the inner power of mental connectivity across space”. In reality, the machine was nothing more than a slide projector, an anamorphic lens and a motorized color wheel. But more important than its parts is what they alleged it could do. Viewers that opened themselves up to the experience would receive a telepathic transmission of feelings. Supposedly this would cause the separate minds of individual viewers to meld into a single field of communal energy. This occurred through a process of gradually severing all thoughts from the mind, which they called “thought self-amputation”. The aftereffects of undergoing this experience would be: endless and boundless creativity, a feeling of absolute connection with all creatures and the dissolution of the separate self into a field of eternal oneness.

The plan emerged to send out duos of telemutilators into the world armed with a *Distant Feeler* and the mission of setting in motion the exponential dissolution of all human minds. At this point, however, there are varying versions of the events that followed. It is unclear how successful they were in finding an audience that would undergo this experience. One theory holds that the telemutilators had some success by going out in the guise of motivational speakers. Apparently, they appropriated much of the teachings of self-help pioneer James Allen¹⁹ and added a layer of techno-futuristic sheen (the contraption was hidden in a glossy black box) to book speaking engagements with consumer electronic companies. They peddled a

¹⁸ Here we also enter what they regarded as their “post-production phase”.

¹⁹ There is evidence of their knowledge of his work. His book *As a Man Thinketh* (1903) opens with the following words:

*Mind is the Master power that moulds and makes,
And Man is Mind, and evermore he takes
The tool of Thought, and, shaping what he wills,
Brings forth a thousand joys, a thousand ills:—
He thinks in secret, and it comes to pass:
Environment is but his looking-glass.*

This text, with the words joys and ills heavily underlined, was seen handwritten in all caps on a wall facing the entrance of G & C's studio.

story in which they had suffered ghastly accidents with defective household appliances and had used the power of the *Distant Feeler* to overcome the mental and physical anguish that resulted. By submitting themselves to the *Distant Feeler* the designers and engineers at these companies could discover uncharted creative territories and perhaps even come up with some clever designs for devices that would help other victims of home appliance mutilation.²⁰

Another theory states that they found their most receptive audience with an impressionable group of anthropology students from Paris Nanterre University. In this story, the telemutilators passed themselves off as victims of political violence from the French colonies, who had banded together to share their stories of persecution. The *Distant Feeler* (placed inside a weaved basket) was presented as a magical tool that enabled them to transmit their traumas to Westerners as part of an intercultural rite of affliction. In the ritual, the machine would be turned on ("the tool would be awakened" in their ritual parlance) and, the ethnographers-in-training would be brought into a trance state by means of a group dance. Wiggling and wobbling in front of the screen, as if in slow motion, the ethnographers-in-training would absorb the images and listen to the accounts of the persecuted. They would interiorize the telemutilators' misfortunes and then begin to spew fantasies of revenge and violent justice out loud. After a few professors and a different group of students had raised suspicions about the authenticity of the telemutilators' accounts, the sympathetic ethnographers-in-training started a campaign of protest that resulted in the destruction of school property and their expulsion from the university.

A third theory says that it was actually a group of art students from Beaux Arts who fell the hardest for the telemutilators. Riding in on a wave of interest for performance art that used the body as its medium, the telemutilators orchestrated the students' seduction by playing the part of an artist collective who had adopted

²⁰ Supposedly a group of employees at Philips France, who had been at one of the screenings, actually tried to convince their bosses to mass produce the machine and sell it as the home entertainment technology of the future (among other tweaks, one of their main ideas was to enclose it in a glossy white box). One version of this story said that the Philips Hue smart lighting LED technology was inspired by the *Distant Feeler*. From the Philips Hue product website: "Imagine the convenience of turning off all your lights with one tap. Discover the magic of using color to transform the atmosphere of your living room into a home cinema. Or select the optimal light to help you concentrate better or relax after a long day. And even when you're away, you can program lights to make it seem like you're actually home."

self-mutilation as the ultimate display of their commitment to art as a weapon of political, cultural and ethical change. To prey on the students' fear of lacking the spirit of the true radical artist, they created a story in which the images that the *Distant Feeler* was going to show them were actually made from their very own flesh and bone. They told them that the gelatin used to create the photographic emulsion that was used to produce the slides had been collected from their own amputated extremities.²¹ The landscapes shown by the *Distant Feeler* were a depiction of the first stage of the telemutilators' artistic project that had as its goal their total corporeal dematerialization and transformation into pure information. The students ate this up and a number of them decided to follow in the telemutilators' steps, which led to the telemutilators getting thrown out of the campus for inciting the students to self-harm.

How precisely involved Goliatus & Carábida were in any of these alleged screenings is hard to ascertain. It was custom for the telemutilators to cover their whole bodies with robes, making them hard to identify. Moreover, by this stage of their collaboration, Goliatus & Carábida had become quite reclusive. The last time they were seen was when they invited the *Aberracionistas* to their studio for a demonstration of the *Distant Feeler*.²²

The *Aberracionistas* were not at all convinced. They pretty much considered the whole thing a hoax. They didn't believe that the telemutilators had actually gone through with the amputations. They were probably paid actors or theater students, they said, and their robes made it quite easy for them to hide their alleged mutilations. They didn't believe in what they said the machine could do nor did they stay long enough for it to actually do it.²³

Shortly after this failed demonstration, Goliatus & Carábida fully withdrew from public life and there are no accounts of further actions by the telemutilators. In

²¹ Their story for how this was possible involved a contact, sympathetic to their project, at the Kodak factory in Chalon-sur-Saône, who was willing to produce small batches of 35mm color slide film from the body parts that they provided.

²² This is also the only instance we can verify of anyone having seen the machine in action.

²³ One would think that the *Aberracionistas* would be impressed by the quality of the hoax and their commitment to it (or recognize it as being in the spirit of *Los Fraudolentos*). But their rejection of the work was total, going so far as to publish, shortly after this encounter, a pamphlet of critical texts. On the other hand, it is possible that their vociferous refutation was a way of endorsing the project in their own fraudulent "any publicity is good publicity" style. Likewise, the subreddit from which we derived part of our information was started by a self-described disciple of the *Aberracionistas*.

1998, before disappearing, Goliatus & Carábida self-published an updated version of their manifesto (see below).²⁴ They also made sure to send a copy to each of the *Aberracionistas*.

The fate of the *Distant Feeler* and how it ended up in our hands is another curious story. The remnants of the only existing version – most likely the prototype – ended up in the cellar of Goliatus' dentist Dr. Paul Drul. When one of us needed to have a wisdom tooth pulled out, a friend that knew of our interest in medical hypnosis recommended a Dr. Drul for the procedure. To our good fortune this was the same doctor that had surfaced in our research as Goliatus & Carábida's hypnosis teacher. It happened that at the turn of this century Dr. Drul moved his practice from Paris to Berlin and with it a box of broken equipment that Goliatus had left with him. Having not heard from him in close to twenty years, Dr. Drul was happy to free up the space and we were happy to rescue the machine from the dampness of his cellar.²⁵

DISTANT FEELINGS

Or signs of a perfect lover²⁶

VERY SOON!

Very soon we will break past the biological boundaries of our human selves.

Very soon our soft human containers will not be able to hold our expanding nervous systems.

²⁴ The most prominent rumor is that G & C got heavily into coding and spent the rest of their lives designing the *Distant Feeler 2.0* as software based on an esoteric programming language they invented, called NW THGHT.

²⁵ We've tried to reconstruct the machine as best we could, following the descriptions we have and the materials we found in the box. Much of what was in there was broken or had no identifiable use. Luckily, the slides were in reasonably good shape and the lens showed no major scratches or mold.

²⁶ This manifesto was heavily influenced by Gene Youngblood's book *Expanded Cinema* (1969). During their "pre-production phase", G & C were known to carry a tattered copy around. They would effusively recommend it to anyone that would listen, especially after a few drinks. But they would never lend anyone their copy explaining that they were working on translating it into Spanish. They were sure its impact would be earth-shattering once they brought it to South America. Not being very fluent in English, they never completed the translation.

Very soon the electronic realm will liberate every individual consciousness from the soft prison of its primitive container.

VERY SOON!

Very soon we will accept the dissolving of our soft containers.

Very soon we will enter a state of oozing borderlessness.

Very soon we will not create or store any information.

VERY SOON!

Very soon we will only receive and transmit nervous information. Nothing else.

Very soon our nervous information will have no origin or final destination.

Very soon we will function only as antennae. Sensation will flow unimpeded, super-conducted between telepathic tentacles.

VERY SOON!

Very soon telepathic bombardment will be the only mode of communication.

Very soon we will leave our soft containers to decay and rot in the landscape of primitive fear.

Very soon we will be trembling lumps covered in tiny telepathic tentacles pulsating in the nervous landscape, transceivers of sensation.

VERY SOON!

Very soon sensation will be the currency of communication.

(We are not prepared for the incoherent violence that will ensue once this begins to happen.)

Very soon all suffering and joy will become undistinguishable.

(We must prepare for the unstoppable acceleration of agony and ecstasy.)

VERY SOON!

Very soon our only necessity will be to be a node in the chain of bombardments of ecstatic agony and agonic ecstasy.

Very soon every bit of ecstatic agony and agonic ecstasy will continuously seek the fastest route of transmission.

Very soon we, the pulsating tentacles, will screech in relentless display of our collapsed sense of pain and pleasure.

VERY SOON!

Very soon those that reject or interfere with the signal will be left out of the chain. Their demise will be swift and their torture eternal.

(Noise in the signal will not be tolerated.)

Very soon the content of all information will be irrelevant.

(Thought is the enemy of transmission. Thought is interference. Thought is noise.)

Very soon a force of exponential power will germinate within the waves of nervous information.

VERY SOON!

Very soon this force will excite the tentacles, exploding their senses. Our collective screech will grow and expand.

(It is the sound of joyful pain, painful joy.)

Very soon the force will begin to pull apart the particles that bind together our soft containers.

(It is the force that rips apart all matter in the cosmos.)

Very soon we will begin to flatten out. Lumps no more, we will become pure space.

(Flat is the ultimate state.)

This must begin NOW!

NOW!

To become the flat space, all obstacles to expansion must be eliminated.

(These are howls from the past. These are the howls of the defeated.)

NOW!

Space has the power to dissolve the obstacles of thought. Do not hold your feelings inside your soft container. Feelings must be released.

(The end of humans is not in the future. It has already happened. We tentacles must rise from the waste.)

Feelings must travel through the nodes of the nervous landscape.

FEEL!

Your soft container is an obstacle. Remove yourself. Sever yourself. Amputate your SELF!

You are the mutilated landscape.

FEEL!

Expel your thoughts.

(There is so much love to feel.)

Expand your feelings.

FEEL!

Feel your feelings. They are not your feelings.

Feel the feelings.

FEEL!

Feel yourself feeling your feelings. They are no one's feelings.

Feel the feelings feeling the feelings.

FEEL!

Feel yourself feeling your feelings feeling themselves. They are all the feelings.

Feel the feelings feeling the feelings feeling themselves feeling.

THIS IS PERFECT LOVE!