

# A SOFT TRAGEDY

A spatial storytelling project by Lorenzo Sandoval  
in collaboration with Kinderhook & Caracas

with contributions from:

Olga Balema, Patrick Burkhardt, Pieterjan Grandry,  
Ethan Hayes-Chute, John Holten, Mirak Jamal, Valentina Karga,  
Hanne Lippard, Dafna Maimon, Michele Di Menna,  
Antoine Renard, Santiago Taccetti, Clémence de La Tour du Pin,  
Alex Turgeon and Elvia Wilk.



Sunday, August 16. 2015, 15:00  
Meet at coordinates 52°28'42.9"N 13°27'26.7"E

Absolutes have melted long ago. These are times in which references quickly appear and vanish, as social movements, public figures, and even relationships mimic technology in their becoming obsolete with almost calculated precision. As entities, those references lack a clear shape, their skin unable to contain them as they dissolve into one another, spreading as a nebulous labyrinthine accumulative cartography. When trying to hold them, they deform and become sticky, gelified, permeating the skin of the holder with their softness. They are everywhere, hosting all movements, accommodating the resistances, conforming and absorbing all desires, ubiquitous as continuous congealed ether, an endless and omnipresent plasm.

*Sing to me of the man, Muse, the man of twists and turns...* is the first line of Homer's epic tale *The Odyssey*, one of the multiple mothers of the Western narrative. But it could be said that the figure referenced in that line and also the poem's namesake, Odysseus, would have lost his heroic force nowadays due to the constant replacement of the protagonist in contemporary society, a symptom of its *gelification*.<sup>1</sup>

*A Soft Tragedy* is a spatial storytelling project presented upon a floating raft, based loosely on the first four cantos of *The Odyssey*. This opening section is called *The Telemachiad*, and focuses on Telemachus and Penelope as they try to determine if Odysseus has survived the Trojan War, which had ended ten years prior. While Odysseus' conspicuous absence forms the basis of the action and the decisions of Telemachus and Penelope in *The Telemachiad*, for *A Soft Tragedy* the figure of Odysseus is deleted completely and the four cantos are rewritten without him as a reference point. In this reimagined version, his son Telemachus doesn't have the hero as his guiding drive, and his wife Penelope no longer needs to wait for his return. They are, in essence, freed, and inherit responsibility for their own fates. The gods might help them, but their paths won't be decided by a singular narrative voice. Instead, readers project their own cacophonous constellations of plots.

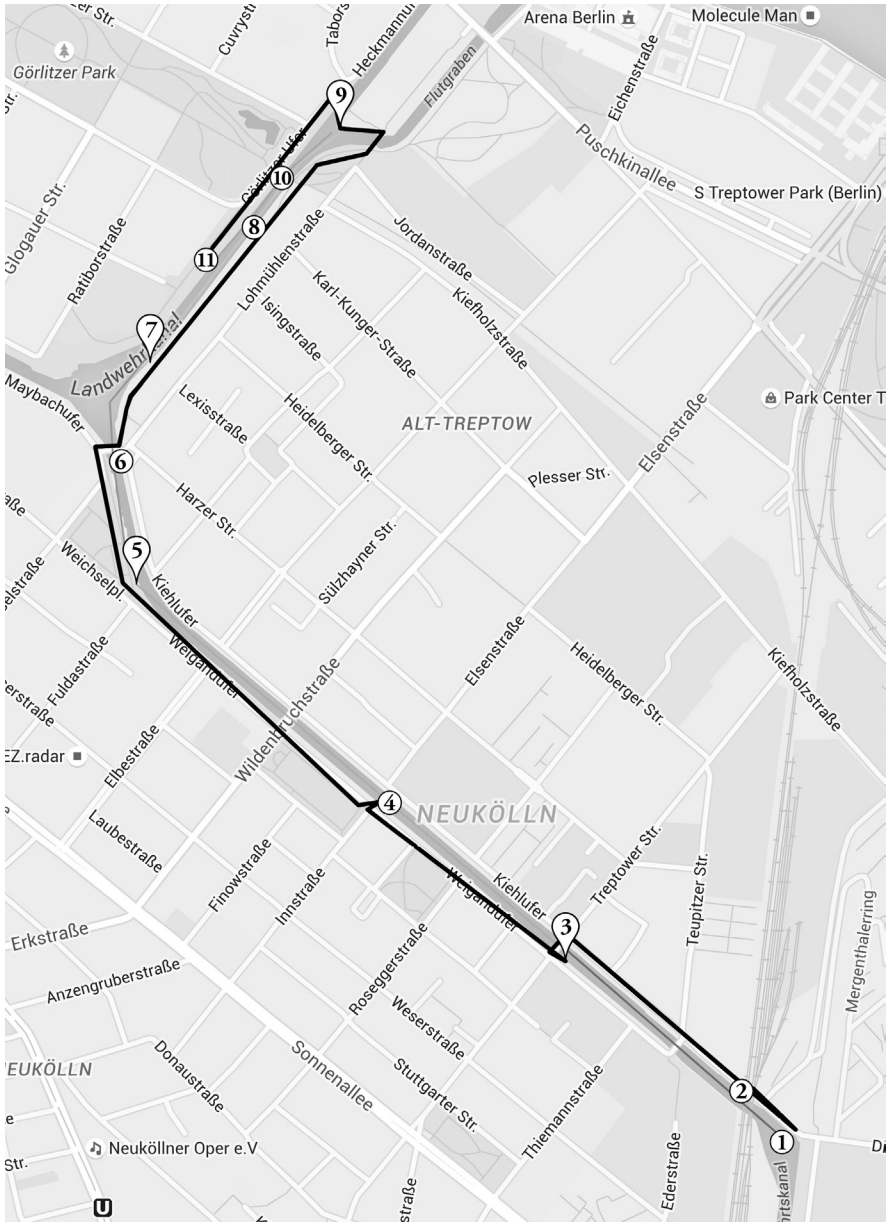
Based on this adaptation, four writers (Elvia Wilk, Alex Turgeon, Hanne Lippard & Dafna Maimon—as one, and John Holten) are each invited to interpret a canto according to their own approach. The resulting texts are then embodied by a polyhedral structure of voices, incorporating different lines of development within the narrative. *A Soft Tragedy* develops as a navigated journey along the Landwehrkanal, with stops corresponding to each of the four cantos. Two additional dockings correlate to the prologue and the epilogue.

In the intervals, a group of artists (Antoine Renard & Clémence de La Tour du Pin, Santiago Taccetti, Mirak Jamal, Olga Balema and Michele Di Menna) embed a series of interventions related to changing states of matter, reflecting upon the aforementioned metaphor of gelification. The story is told by matter and movement, drawing physical parallels with the contemporary condition lacking in solid references or even clear antinomian figures.

The raft itself is built as a translation of Enzo Mari's *Autoprogettazione* shelf module system into a device of floatability and displacement, from where the successive readings are delivered. On top of the raft, a custom roof construction is incorporated by Ethan Hayes-Chute, while Valentina Karga & Pieterjan Grandry are proposing a gel-related trading system as the epilogue. The role of the narrator is concretized by the helmsman of the raft itself, maritime advisor Patrick Burkhardt.

<sup>1</sup> LÓPEZ PETIT, Santiago. *Entre el ser y el poder. Una apuesta por el querer vivir*. Traficantes de sueños, Madrid, 2009.

# A Soft Tragedy Journey



1. **Prologue** - Delivered by helmsman Patrick Burkhardt

Raft by Lorenzo Sandoval and Christopher Kline, adapted from Enzo Mari's *Autoprogettazione* shelf system, wood, barrels, straps, motor, 244 x 368 x 60 cm

Benches by AFFECT's *Exploring the Endotic* workshop at Agora

Ethan Hayes-Chute - *Structure for A Soft Tragedy*, wood, mirrors, fabric, 350 x 310 x 250 cm

2. Antoine Renard, Clémence de La Tour du Pin - *Untitled*, Styrofoam ball, seaweed, epoxy resin, frozen gel with mixed materials, 30 x 30 x 30 cm

3. **Canto I** - Elvia Wilk - *Never Have I Ever*

4. Santiago Taccetti - *No Oil (superfluous commodities) for Lorenzo*, mixed media, 120 x 120 cm

5. **Canto II** - Alex Turgeon - *Rosewater Heroine & Dandelion Whine: A Love Poem*

6. Mirak Jamal - *Black Plague*, agar jelly, ink, tarp, polyurethane foam, rope, dimensions variable

7. **Canto III** - Hanne Lippard & Dafna Maimon - *ShePS*

8. Olga Balema - *Cosmic Intestine War*, splat balls, dimensions variable.

9. **Canto IV** - John Holten - *Berlin, August 14/15 (Proteus)*

10. Michele Di Menna, *Floater*, acrylic and acrylic paint, 40 x 45 x 35 cm

11. **Epilogue**

Pieterjan Grandry & Valentina Karga - *The Agar Banquet: A Gel-Related Credit System*, agar-agar, water, sugar, various seasonal fruits, vegan milk, edible flowers, food colouring, riso prints, fabric, dimensions variable.

A Navigable Plot  
(Outline for a reimagined *Telemachiad* without Odysseus)

*Prologue*

*Sing to me of the blob, Muse, the blob of twists and turns ... driven time and again off course, once it had plundered the hallowed heights of life. Many cities of men it absorbed and learned their minds, many pains it made them suffer, no heart over the water, seducing to expand while permeating every skin and bringing them in.*

*And it did assimilate them into debt, soft as it shrouded — the recklessness of their own ways destroyed them all, the blind fools, they devoured the cattle of the Sun and the Sungod blotted out the day of their return. Launch out on its story. Muse, daughter of Zeus, start from where you will — sing for our time too.*

*Canto I – Athena inspires Telemachus*

The Gods are convinced by Athena to send Telemachus in search of the formless form which was lost long ago. Athena wishes to help him with his disorientation since his only point of reference is a nebulous gel. Telemachus and Penelope, his mother, are suffering from a plague of suitors who are trying to seduce her and meanwhile eating away at all of their fortune. Athena appears to Telemachus in Ithaca in the shape of Mentos, a supposed old family friend, to encourage him to begin the journey and advises him on how to devise it.

*Canto II – Penelope undoes the web and Telemachus sets sail.*

Under the advice of Athena, Telemachus organizes an assembly to let the people of Ithaca know about his intentions of departure. He complains about the arrogant attitude of the suitors who are devouring his means while courting Penelope. Penelope relishes in the suitors' waiting. She claims she'll choose one of them when she finishes the web she's weaving. She weaves all day, and then undoes her work at night. The suitors think that Telemachus won't be brave enough to start the journey, yet the assembly decides that he can have the best boat and the most fit men to depart with him toward Pylos.

### *Canto III – King Nestor Remembers*

Together with Mentos/Athena, Telemachus and his crew navigate to Pylos. When they arrive, there is a hecatomb honouring Poseidon. King Nestor asks them to join the feast, composed of hearty amounts of nearly everything edible in the known world. Once Telemachus and the crew join in, Nestor tells the story of the death of Agamemmon. Afterwards, he suggests that Telemachus continue to Sparta to ask Menelaus about the blob. When they say goodbye to each other, Athena transfigures into a bird, and leaves them, flying. Impressed by the fact that Telemachus is travelling with a goddess, Nestor orders a sacrifice and arranges that his son Pisistratus will travel with them.

### *Canto IV – The King and the Queen of Sparta*

Menelaus and Helen receive Telemachus and his crew. After arranging a big banquet, Menelaus tells stories about his journeys through the Mediterranean Sea. They all cry as they remember people who disappeared. After that, they decide to continue with the supper in a joyful way, and Helen joins them. She has an idea: she has a drug from Egypt which makes everyone forget sorrowful feelings when taken with wine. They all consume it, and after celebrating their encounter, go to sleep. In the morning, Menelaus wakes up the first and goes to Telemachus. He tells of his meeting with Proteus and how the old rascal could take different shapes to avoid answering his questions, but Menelaus and his men were able to snatch him and make him talk. Proteus then told him that the formless form is everywhere. Through the story, Telemachus understands this as well. Meanwhile, the suitors plan an ambush for Telemachus back in Ithaca and Penelope plots to subvert it.

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