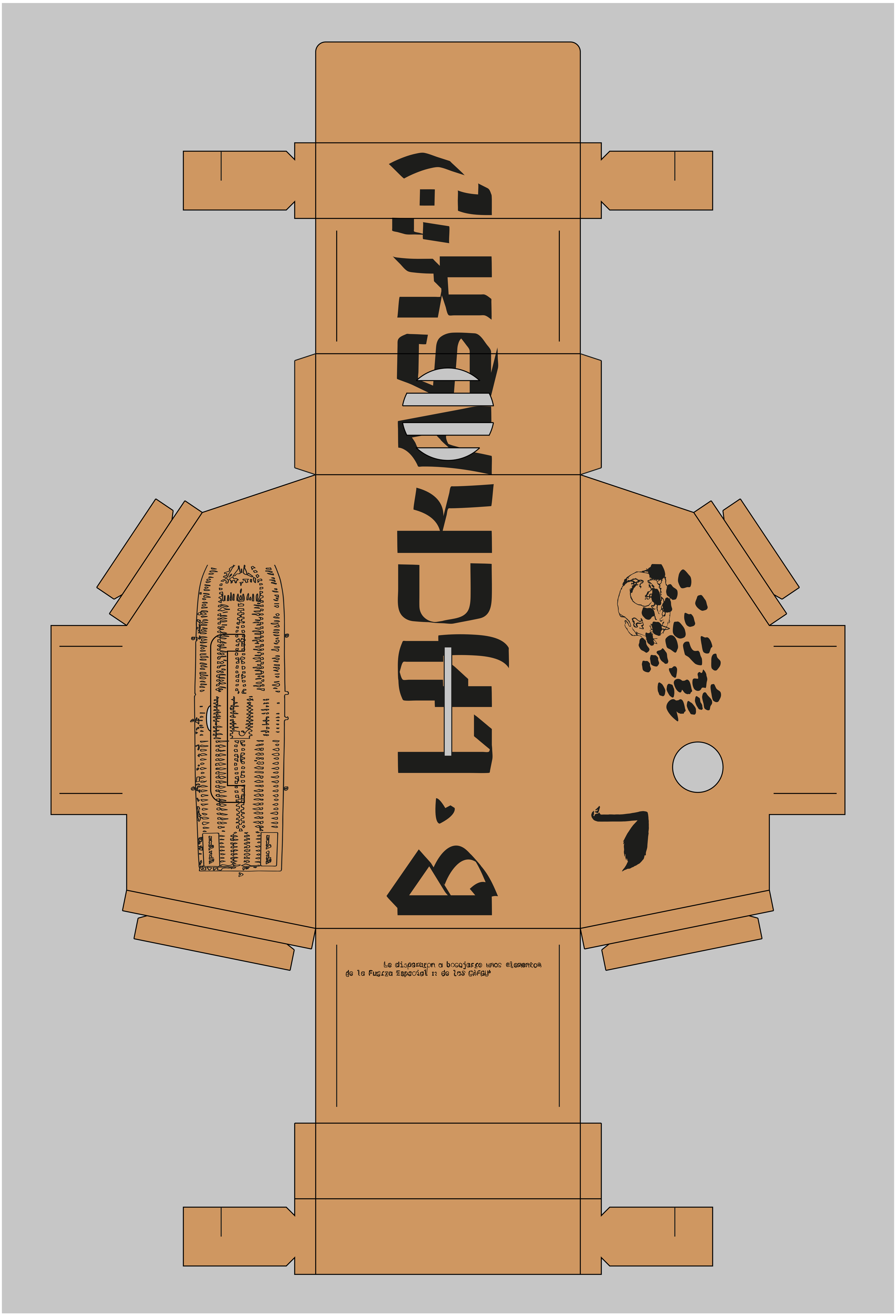
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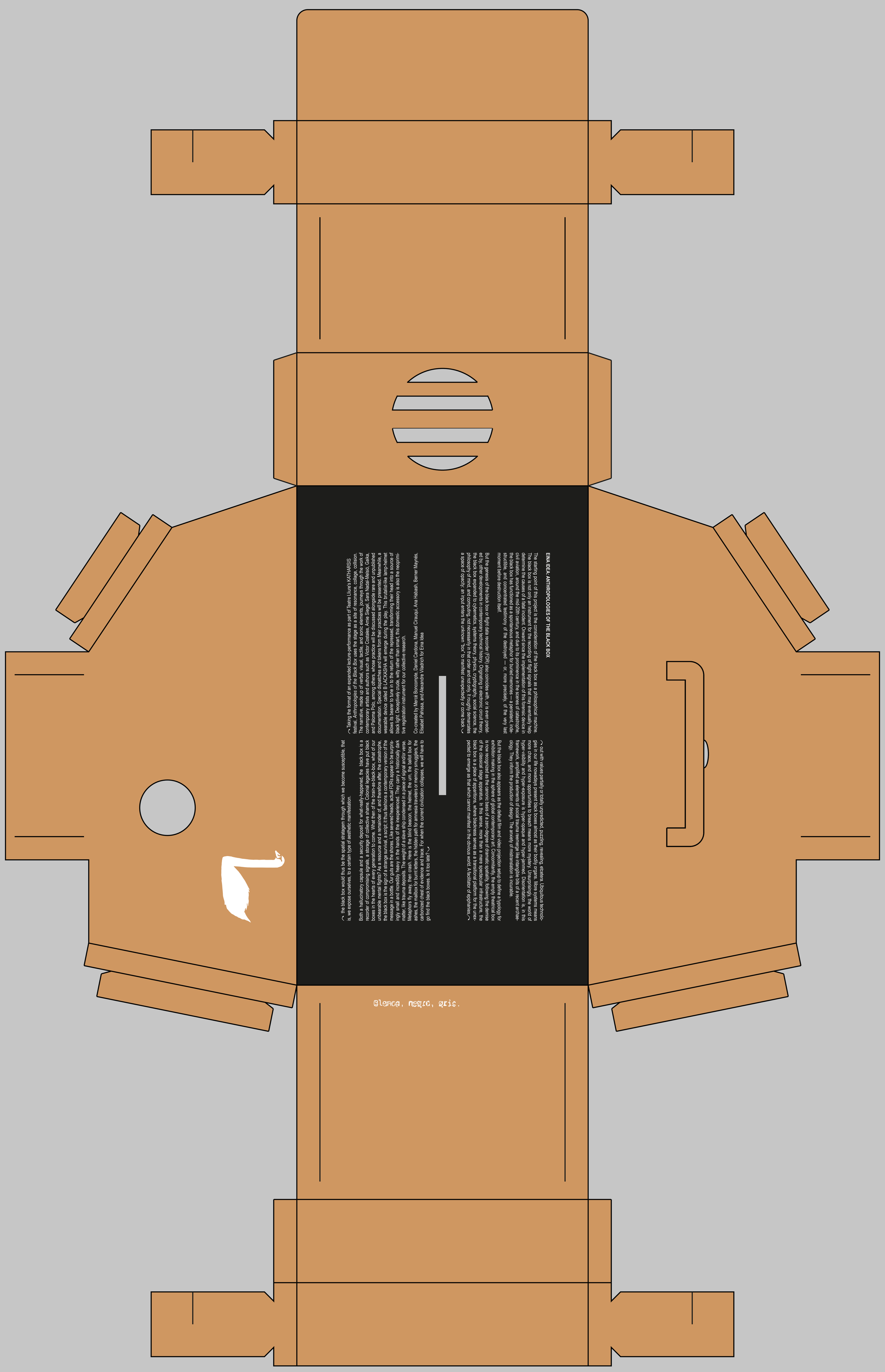
EINA IDEA: ANTHROPOLOGIES OF THE BLACK BOX
The starting point of this project is the consideration of the black box as a philosophical machine. The black box is not only an instrument for the recording of flight signals that may eventually help determine the causes of a fatal incident. Onward since the implementation of this forensic device in civil aviation, around the mid-20th century, and due to its prominence in the scenes of catastrophe, the black box has functioned as a spontaneous metaphor for buried memories — a persistent, indestructible, and concentrated testimony of the destroyed — or, more precisely, of the very last moment before destruction itself.
But the genesis of the black box or flight data recorder (FDR) also coincides with, or is even predated by, other developments in contemporary technical history. Originating in electronic circuit theory, the black box expanded to cybernetics, systems theory, physics, cryptography, social science, the philosophy of mind, and computing, not necessarily in that order and not only, though, demarcates a space of opacity: an input enters the unknown "box" to manifest unexpectedly or come back ⤻ out with values partially or totally unpredicted, puzzling, revealing, etcetera. Ubiquitous technologies in our lives nowadays present black boxes almost as their bodily organs. More systems means more chaos, and more opportunities to breach means more mystery. Unsurprisingly, the world of hyper-visibility and hyper-exposure is hyper-opaque and hyper-jammed. Disorientation is, in this framework, amplified as elements of social trauma reemerge like intangible bits of a recent archaeology. They inform the production of design. The anxiety of mistranslation is incurable.
But the black box also appears as the default film and video projection setup to define a typology for exhibition making in the sphere of global contemporary art. Concomitantly, the empty, theatrical box is now recognized as the iconic basis of a zero-degree of dramatic spatiality following the ethos of the classical stage apparatus. In this sense, more than a mere spectacular infrastructure, the black box is a place of apparitions, where blackness serves as a transitional platform for the unexpected to emerge as that which cannot manifest in the obvious world. A facilitator of epiphanies ⤻
⤺ the black box would thus be the spatial stratagem through which we become susceptible, that is, we expose ourselves, to a certain type of aesthetic manifestation.
Both a hallucinatory capsule and a security deposit for what-really-happened, the black box is a recorder of compromising signals, a storage of collective shame. Colonial legacies have put black boxes in the hearts of every generation to come. What then of the brain-as-black-box, what of our unbearable mental flights? As a resource and a remainder of, and therefore after, the catastrophe, the black box is the sign of a strange survival, a script; it thus fashions a contemporary version of the message in a bottle. Our guts are the shores. Like severed heads, actual FDRs appear to be surprisingly small and incredibly heavy in the hands of the inexperienced. They carry a historically dark matter, like trauma deposits. The weight of a slave ship condensed in a piece of signal and/or verse. Metaphors fly away, then crash. Here is the blind beacon, the helmet, the urn, the ballot box for ashes, the mailbox for burnt letters, the hidden path for amnesia travelers or memory smugglers, the cartoonized chest of evidence and trace. For when the current civilization collapses, we will have to go find the black boxes. Is it too late? ⤻
⤺ Taking the format of an expanded lecture-performance as part of Teatre Lliure's KATHARSIS festival, *Anthropologies of the Black Box* uses the stage as a site of resonance, collage, collision. The narrative, made up of verbal, visual, tactile, and sonic elements, journeys through the work of contemporary artists and authors such as Víctor Costales, Arnie Siegel, Sara Nadal-Melsió, Gaika, and Paloma Polo, among others, whose practice will be discussed alongside rare and unpublished documentation. Special dispatches and tokens from their practices will be presented. Meanwhile, a wearable device called B·LACKASHA will emerge during the play. This brutalist-like lamp-helmet allows its bearer to tune in to the return of the repressed, transforming their head into a source of black light. Deceptively crude, witty rather than smart, this domestic accessory is also the neogrimitive registration instrument for our collective research.
Co-created by Mercè Boncompte, Daniel Cardona, Manuel Cirauqui, Ana Habash, Berner Maynés, Elisabet Pallissa, and Alexandre Viladrich for Eina Idea
Blanco, negro, gris.