

**The Dissertation Committee for Rodrigo Lopes de Barros Oliveira certifies that this  
is the approved version of the following dissertation:**

**The Artist among Ruins: Connecting Catastrophes in Brazilian and  
Cuban Cinema, Painting, Sculpture and Literature**

**Committee:**

---

Jossianna Arroyo-Martínez, Supervisor

---

Lily Litvak, Co-Supervisor

---

Niyi Afolabi

---

Diane Davis

---

Enrique Fierro

---

César Salgado

**The Artist among Ruins: Connecting Catastrophes in Brazilian and  
Cuban Cinema, Painting, Sculpture and Literature**

**by**

**Rodrigo Lopes de Barros Oliveira, B.A.; M.A.**

**Dissertation**

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of  
The University of Texas at Austin  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

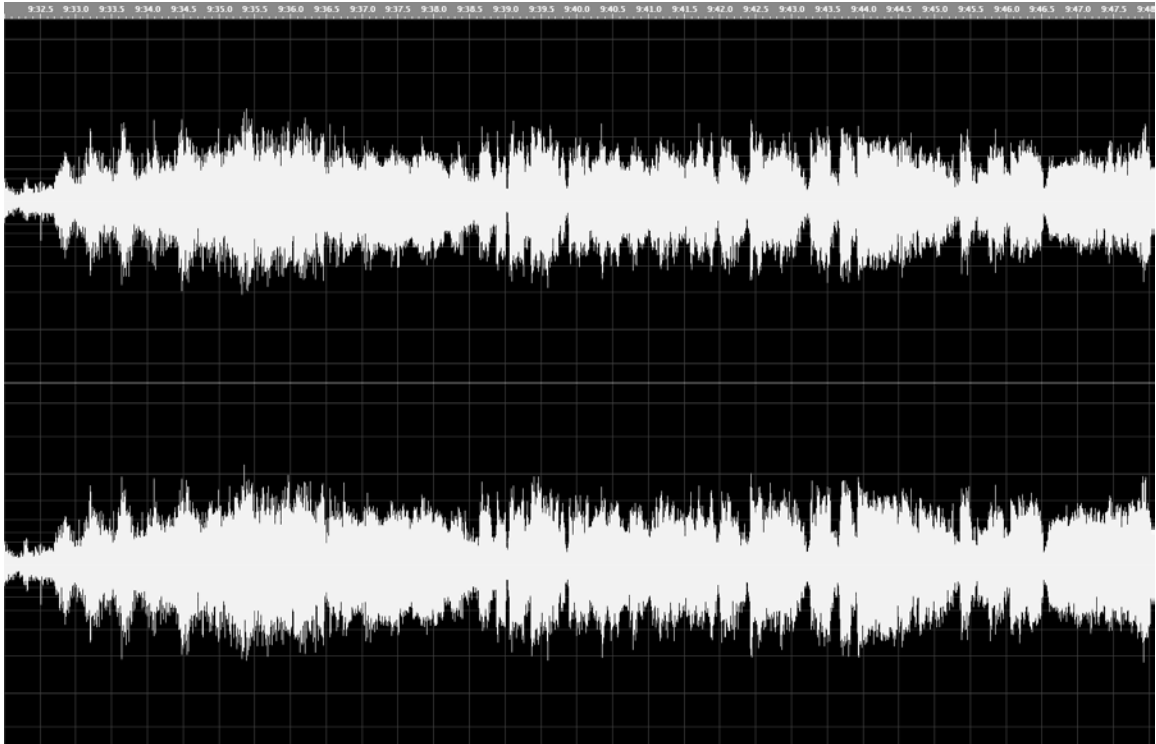
**The University of Texas at Austin**

**December, 2013**

# Epigraph

**The Fool on the Hill**  
Lennon-McCartney

Waveform from *Coffea Arabica* (1968)



## **Acknowledgements**

In the years of writing this project I was deeply helped by many friends. I would like to especially thank a few of them. Jossianna Arroyo and Lily Litvak for their advice during my stay at Austin. Also, Ana Luiza Andrade, who, after I had left the Island of Desterro, suggested me to write about this other island in Recife, the Island of Brennand. The comments and ideas from Enrique Fierro, Diane Davis, Tola Mosadomi, César Salgado, and Niyi Afolabi. I am in gratitude to my generation of fellows at UT Austin. We were together pursuing a future in Texas, some of them permanently, others just passing by. I discussed many of the ideas presented here with them and we were able to create an intellectual community: Silvia Regina Lorenzo Castro, Paula Park, Ingrid Robyn, Thiago Nicodemo, Omar Vargas, Samuel Cannon, Rene Carrasco, Enrique Gonzalez-Conty, Juan Carlos Lopez, Amy Olen, Dorian Jackson, Eliseo Jacob, Sean Manning, James Staig, Qing Ai, Heloisa Aruth, Lorna Torrado, Lanie Millar, Andréia Lisboa, Miguel Santos-Neves, Lucas Legnare, Jaime Alves, and Yehonathan Brodski. Those who helped me to arrive in Austin: Raúl Antelo, Alai Garcia Diniz, Sérgio Medeiros, and João Pedro Garcia. I own my survival in Cuba to Ynaê Lopes dos Santos. I am also grateful to the members of the *Cultura e Barbárie* collective, which we founded in the past decade: Alexandre Nodari, Diego Cervelin, Flávia Cera and Leonardo D'Avila. The man who kept me thinking as a writer: Peter LaSalle. Some of the artists themselves who opened their minds to me: Ramón Alejandro, Antonio José Ponte and Francisco Brennand. A



little book by Vanessa Daniele de Moraes. The immense encouragement of Ivan Teixeira, who is greatly missed. The institutional support of Luis Cárcamo-Huechante, Laura Rodríguez, and Derrick Davis. Finally, I thank my fiancée Maria del Mar Bassa and her family for the support even when I had to take tough decisions to maintain my intellectual freedom.

# **The Artist among Ruins: Connecting Catastrophes in Brazilian and Cuban Cinema, Painting, Sculpture and Literature**

Rodrigo Lopes de Barros Oliveira, PhD

The University of Texas at Austin, 2013

Supervisor: Jossianna Arroyo-Martínez

Co-Supervisor: Lily Litvak

**Abstract:** This work is an attempt to create a constellation. In a constellation, some stars are greatly apart from each other. However, they appear on the same plane to our eyes. This method is derived from Walter Benjamin. Here I have, as my *objet petit a*, the pictorial, sculptural, cinematic and literary production of Brazil and Cuba from 1959 and beyond. As a barrier for creating meaning of such a vast content, I chose the theme of ruins, expanding when possible to its relatives: decay, catastrophe, debris, death, war, the lost paradise, the garden, intellectual thinking, utopia, dystopia, dreamworlds, rot, hope, human destruction, homelessness, and more. I work with figures of those two geographic regions, in which I think ruins—being inorganic, organic or abstract ones—have a major role in the work of: Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, Glauber Rocha, Orlando Jiménez Leal, Sabá Cabrera, Nicolás Guillén Landrián, Rogério Sganzerla, Néstor Almendros, Antonio José Ponte, Ramón Alejandro, and Francisco Brennand. This effort led me to reevaluate the classical concept of ruins in Western thought, which I think was relatively in force until World War I and which underwent a radical transformation after the advent of twentieth-century concentration camps, the domination by humans of atomic power, and the establishment of extremely high speeds for travels. I also propose that modern ruins

acquire their full significance especially in the Third World. For, to the contrary of the central nations of capitalism, the Third World cannot be turned into ruins. It has already been born as such a thing. The aforementioned events just made this state of existence clearer.

## Table of Contents

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| List of Illustrations .....   | ix  |
| 0. Prelude .....  | 1   |
| 1. 68, Glauber Rocha and the Memory of Underdevelopment .....                                   | 15  |
| 2. <i>La Fiesta</i> according to Fidel Castro (and to some outsiders) .....                     | 35  |
| 3. From the Beach to the Human Ruins: aka, Néstor Almendros .....                               | 65  |
| 4. Havana: The City as Catastrophe in Antonio José Ponte .....                                  | 115 |
| 5. Fruits among Ruins: Ramón Alejandro and the Perverse/Paradisiacal Landscape<br>.....         | 131 |
| 6. Interlude: a Photographic Essay on Ramón Alejandro .....                                     | 168 |
| 7. The Psychosis of the Marvelous: From the Island of Brazil to the Island of<br>Brennand ..... | 187 |
| 8. History of the Egg: Or, the Beginning .....  | 214 |
| 9. The Horror, The Horror: Or, the End .....  | 242 |
| 10. Epilogue .....  | 260 |
| Bibliography .....  | 268 |
| Filmography .....   | 281 |

## List of Illustrations

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| 1.1 – Still from Guy Debord, <i>On the Passage...</i> , 1959. ....                   | 16  |
| 1.2 – Still from Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, <i>Memorias del Subdesarrollo</i> , 1968..... | 18  |
| 1.3 – Still from Glauber Rocha, <i>Terra em Transe</i> , 1967.....                   | 19  |
| 1.4 – Still from Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, <i>Memorias del Subdesarrollo</i> , 1968..... | 21  |
| 1.5 – Still from Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, <i>Memorias del Subdesarrollo</i> , 1968..... | 23  |
| 1.6 – Still from Glauber Rocha, <i>Terra em Transe</i> , 1967.....                   | 25  |
| 1.7 – Still from Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, <i>Memorias del Subdesarrollo</i> , 1968..... | 27  |
| 1.8 – Still from Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, <i>Memorias del Subdesarrollo</i> , 1968..... | 31  |
| 1.9 – Still from Glauber Rocha, <i>Terra em Transe</i> , 1967.....                   | 34  |
| 2.1 – Still from Orlando Jiménez Leal and Saba Cabrera, <i>PM</i> , 1961.....        | 40  |
| 2.2 – Still from Nicolás Guillén Landrián, <i>Coffea Arábica</i> , 1968.....         | 45  |
| 2.3 – Still from Nicolás Guillén Landrián, <i>Desde la Habana</i> , 1969. ....       | 46  |
| 2.4 – Still from Nicolás Guillén Landrián, <i>Desde la Habana</i> , 1969. ....       | 49  |
| 2.5 – Still from Nicolás Guillén Landrián, <i>Desde la Habana</i> , 1969. ....       | 51  |
| 2.6 – Still from Nicolás Guillén Landrián, <i>Desde la Habana</i> , 1969. ....       | 52  |
| 2.7 – Still from Nicolás Guillén Landrián, <i>Coffea Arábica</i> , 1968.....         | 54  |
| 2.8 – Still from Nicolás Guillén Landrián, <i>Coffea Arábica</i> , 1968.....         | 56  |
| 2.9 – Still from Rogério Sganzerla, <i>O bandido da luz vermelha</i> , 1968.....     | 60  |
| 2.10 – Still from Rogério Sganzerla, <i>O bandido da luz vermelha</i> , 1968.....    | 62  |
| 2.11 – Still from Nicolás Guillén Landrián, <i>Inside Downtown</i> , 2001. ....      | 64  |
| 5.1 – Ramón Alejandro, <i>Voluptas</i> , 1992.....                                   | 135 |
| 5.2 – Ramón Alejandro, <i>Olokun</i> , 1996. ....                                    | 137 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| 5.3 – Ramón Alejandro, <i>Le sacré cœur</i> , 1992. ....                               | 140 |
| 5.4 – Ramón Alejandro, <i>El gusto del poder</i> , 1991. ....                          | 142 |
| 5.5 – Ramón Alejandro, <i>Allá va candela</i> , 2008. ....                             | 144 |
| 5.6 – Robert Capa, <i>Carnival</i> (Austria), 1950. ....                               | 154 |
| 5.7 Ramón Alejandro, <i>Le virginal</i> , 1968. ....                                   | 158 |
| 5.8 Ramón Alejandro, El carácter efímero de los fenómenos de este mundo,<br>1987. .... | 160 |
| 5.9 Ramón Alejandro, <i>La Terre Promise</i> , 2004. ....                              | 162 |
| 5.10 Ramón Alejandro, <i>Abrecamino</i> , 1991. ....                                   | 164 |
| 6.1 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Ramón Alejandro Series</i> , 2012. ....         | 171 |
| 6.2 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Ramón Alejandro Series</i> , 2012. ....         | 172 |
| 6.3 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Ramón Alejandro Series</i> , 2012. ....         | 173 |
| 6.4 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Ramón Alejandro Series</i> , 2012. ....         | 174 |
| 6.5 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Ramón Alejandro Series</i> , 2012. ....         | 175 |
| 6.6 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Ramón Alejandro Series</i> , 2012. ....         | 176 |
| 6.7 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Ramón Alejandro Series</i> , 2012. ....         | 177 |
| 6.8 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Ramón Alejandro Series</i> , 2012. ....         | 178 |
| 6.9 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Ramón Alejandro Series</i> , 2012. ....         | 179 |
| 6.10 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Ramón Alejandro Series</i> , 2012. ....        | 180 |
| 6.11 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Ramón Alejandro Series</i> , 2012. ....        | 181 |
| 6.12 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Ramón Alejandro Series</i> , 2012. ....        | 182 |
| 6.13 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Ramón Alejandro Series</i> , 2012. ....        | 183 |
| 6.14 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Ramón Alejandro Series</i> , 2012. ....        | 184 |
| 6.15 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Ramón Alejandro Series</i> , 2012. ....        | 185 |
| 6.16 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Ramón Alejandro Series</i> , 2012. ....        | 186 |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| 7.1 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Brennand Series</i> , 2012.....  | 194 |
| 7.2 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Brennand Series</i> , 2012.....  | 196 |
| 7.3 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Brennand Series</i> , 2012.....  | 197 |
| 7.4 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Brennand Series</i> , 2011.....  | 200 |
| 7.5 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Brennand Series</i> , 2011.....  | 202 |
| 7.6 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Brennand Series</i> , 2012.....  | 204 |
| 7.7 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Brennand Series</i> , 2012.....  | 206 |
| 7.8 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Brennand Series</i> , 2012.....  | 209 |
| 7.9 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Brennand Series</i> , 2012.....  | 212 |
| 7.10 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Brennand Series</i> , 2012..... | 213 |
| 8.1 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Brennand Series</i> , 2012.....  | 216 |
| 8.2 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Brennand Series</i> , 2012.....  | 218 |
| 8.3 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Brennand Series</i> , 2012.....  | 220 |
| 8.4 – Maria del Mar Bassa, from <i>Brennand Series</i> , 2012.....      | 222 |
| 8.5 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Brennand Series</i> , 2012.....  | 225 |
| 8.6 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Brennand Series</i> , 2011.....  | 226 |
| 8.7 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Brennand Series</i> , 2012.....  | 228 |
| 8.8 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Brennand Series</i> , 2012.....  | 230 |
| 8.9 – Maria del Mar Bassa, from <i>Brennand Series</i> , 2012.....      | 231 |
| 8.10 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Brennand Series</i> , 2012..... | 232 |
| 8.11 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Brennand Series</i> , 2012..... | 234 |
| 8.12 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Brennand Series</i> , 2012..... | 236 |
| 8.13 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Brennand Series</i> , 2012..... | 239 |
| 8.14 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Brennand Series</i> , 2012..... | 241 |
| 9.1 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Brennand Series</i> , 2012.....  | 244 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| 9.2 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Brennand Series</i> , 2012.....   | 246 |
| 9.3 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Brennand Series</i> , 2012.....   | 247 |
| 9.4 – Maria del Mar Bassa, from <i>Brennand Series</i> , 2012.....   | 249 |
| 9.5 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Brennand Series</i> , 2012.....   | 251 |
| 9.6 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Brennand Series</i> , 2012.....   | 252 |
| 9.7 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Brennand Series</i> , 2012.....   | 254 |
| 9.8 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>Brennand Series</i> , 2012.....   | 255 |
| 9.9 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from <i>The Amerika Series</i> (Donald Judd, “15<br>untitled works in concrete” [1980-1984]), 2011..... | 257 |
| 9.10 – Maria del Mar Bassa, from <i>Brennand Series</i> , 2012.....  | 259 |
| 0.1 – Still from Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, <i>Memorias del Subdesarrollo</i> , 1968.....   | 267 |



## 0. Prelude

*The disposition in the human psyche  
makes our obsessive fears of great  
cosmic catastrophes a perpetual  
condition.*

Pierre Mabille

One of the defining characteristics of the Third World is that it lives in a constant state of catastrophe. And the main by-products of catastrophes are their debris, wreckages, and fragments: or, the ruins. The aim of this work is to trace the production of a generation of Brazilian and Cuban artists and intellectuals that came into life among those ruins. Not only the production of those figures who created their artistic visions immersed in this world of residues and vestiges, but mainly of those who had in their paintings, sculptures, films, or literally pieces, modern ruins as a central object of reflection. The figures chosen here—Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, Glauber Rocha, Orlando Jiménez Leal, Sabá Cabrera, Nicolás Guillén Landrián, Rogério Sganzerla, Néstor Almendros, Antonio José Ponte, Ramón Alejandro, and Francisco Brennand—with the exception of Ponte, are individuals who share the same generational time in history and started the core of their artistic production around the 1960s or early 1970s. Although Ponte is younger, he is intrinsically connected with some of the older ones, either by selecting them as subjects of analysis in his essays or by having established intellectual

bonds with others such as Ramón Alejandro, who was for him an illustrator, editor and supporter during part of his early career.

Cuba and Brazil are very different and at the same time similar countries. One is the giant Portuguese-speaking version of what Simón Bolívar could not achieve for Spanish America, and the other is a small island that defied its own size and put itself in the center of the Western imagination as much politically as literally and artistically. These two geographic regions become siblings in a tragic and gifted event (if we were to remember Borges); both places were central gears of the slave trade and the plantation landscape. Specifically, the northeast side of Brazil is considered here part of the Caribbean: for its relation with the tropical sea and its influence on a displaced African culture in America. It is one of the repeating islands. This work is also a continuation of Antonio Benítez Rojo's proposition of a Great Archipelago. The method I adopt is to link the above-mentioned artists and writers in an intellectual constellation inspired by the writings of Walter Benjamin. In a constellation, even though some stars are far apart, to the human eye, they appear to be on the same plane. For this reason, the boundaries among several disciplines (literature, art history, history, urbanism, philosophy) are here to be erased as much as possible.

Cuban and Brazilian figures are read against each other and are used to throw light on the work of their peers. Rocha and Gutiérrez Alea are compared through the theory of a Latin American cinematic trance; Guillén Landrián, Jimenéz Leal, Sabá

Cabrera, and Sganzerla are seen as the reflection of the outsider's will. Brennan is read through the work of José Lezama Lima and Severo Sarduy using their theories of the Baroque. Alejandro functions as the establishment of a Caribbean longing for the lost paradise that I also develop in Brennan. Ponte has a dual role in this work, as his very intellectual production has two sides: he functions as a critic to part of the Cuban production anterior to him (the film *PM*, the paintings of Alejandro, etc.), and is seen as the writer at the pinnacle of ruination of Havana's urban space. The Cuban revolution is the enactment of a constant and indefinite war. And the consequences of this destruction are not only cracked buildings but also the advent of collateral effects for the Cuban population—refugees and prisoners of concentration camps, which will be seen through the two documentary films by Almendros. Due to the interdisciplinary and multicultural nature of this project and to the singularity of each of the figures studied here, I decided to establish an equally diverse theoretical framework, searching for conceptual answers in several thinkers of modernity.

In Chapter I depart from Guy Debord's theory of cinema, and especially his critique of the documentary as just a portrayal of everyday life in an apprehensible and linear way. For him, cinema must be applied to the transformation of life, to revolution itself, questioning the position of the audience, and of the filmmakers themselves, in the society of the spectacle. I show how Gutiérrez Alea's *Memorias del subdesarrollo* and Rochas's *Terra em Transe* are works that deal with the dichotomy fiction/documentary in order to construct a new language for Latin American revolutionary cinema much in tune

with Debord's postulates for radical films, which he developed in the Parisian cauldron leading to May '68. I argue that they develop an aesthetic of trance, making worlds clash and melt into each other, in the same way a ritual possession in *santería* or *candomblé* represents the ecstasy of the encounter between humans and nature, present and past, fiction and reality, the living and the dead.

I began to develop this concept of an aesthetic of trance and how African cosmogonies were appropriated by Cuban and Brazilian twentieth-century art, film and literature in two of my previous works: the monograph *Derrida com Makumba: o dom, o tabaco e a magia negra* and the article "From Underworld to Avant-Garde: Art and Criminology in Cuba and Brazil." In the latter, I discuss how the black body and the religious manifestations of African origin were first approached in the end of nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century through a eugenic and positivist eye, especially in the works of Fernando Ortiz and Nina Rodrigues. They were the tropical version of Cesare Lombroso and thought of Cuba and Brazil as a laboratory to study and develop a theory on the clash of distinct civilizations, which, according to them, were in different stages of evolution. I also illustrate how this approach changed during the first half of the twentieth century, being later incorporated by several instances of the avant-garde in Cuba and Brazil. I developed this work in discussions with Jossianna Arroyo and departing from her research on Fernando Ortiz and Gilberto Freyre. Arroyo's book, *Travestimos culturales*, shows that the construction of Brazilian and Cuban ideas of nation is the process of dealing with a masculine black body undertaken

by their foundational thinkers: Gilberto Freyre and Fernando Ortiz. I think these previous studies on Ortiz serve as a background for what I will show here in terms of the appropriation by post-'59 artists of Cuba and Brazil regarding the religious and artistic manifestations of African origin. In this work, I think now I am able to show how the trance is an essential part of Rocha and Alea's attempt to create the Third World's own cinematic language. I also discuss the role of the intellectual in dark times, the beginning of their ruination when confronting the catastrophes of both failed and successful revolutions, their destruction in the middle of regimes that cannot concretize utopian dreams, and their disturbing relationships with "the people." I conclude that the position of the intellectual tends, in those films, to overlap with that of the outsider.

In Chapter II, I start seeing the relation of party and censorship in Cuba. It reached its pinnacle in two paradigmatic cases. In the first, the banishment of the Sabá Cabrera and Jiménez Leal's film *PM*, which led Fidel Castro to personally address Cuban intellectuals in a series of meetings. Castro claimed the obligation for art to be constrained inside the revolution's moral. This regime's position created a Kafkaesque atmosphere of an underground world for intellectuals that obscured their horizons. *PM* is also a film that searches for an aesthetic of trance and is seen as the opposite, or better, a complement to *Memorias*, both traveling from the path between party and war, which encompasses drunkenness, music, and fights. *PM's* repercussions showed that outsider artists, that is, those who are not inside (the revolutionary process), would not be tolerated and the backlash for such actions could reverberate in the highest figures of the

revolution. The revolution was aiming for total control, and anything that was outside of it had to be forbidden. The second paradigmatic case was the regime's censorship of the Beatles' music. It was important, not only because it was one more assault on party, but also because it was encompassed in the plan for the attack on Cuban intellectuals. Anything (music, film, literally works) that could be seen as divergent from official propaganda, or from the figure of the great leader as the libidinal center of society, was an affront to the regime itself. Those two aspects above, the intolerance of outsiders and the role of the Beatles' music in Cuban artistic scenario, are synthesized in the figure of Guillén Landrián. Departing from Colin Wilson's theory of the outsider, I analyze two of Guillén Landrián's most experimental films: *Coffea Arábica* and *Desde la Habana ;1969! Recordar*. I perceive how he constructed a position as an outsider to the regime, the one who had the obligation to give order to the chaos and fragmentation generated by the catastrophe. One of the weapons for accomplishing that is once again an aesthetic of trance, propelled by jazz, rock and a frenetic edition of images. His artistic choices led to his imprisonment, torture and expulsion from the country, which brings me to his last film, *Inside Downtown* and the very ruination of Guillén Landrián as a filmmaker. This event opens space for the next theme of this work, human ruins. On the Brazilian side, the outsider that reaches their own destruction is seen through the figure of the bandit in the *cinema marginal*. Sganzerla produced the desperation of a man seeking truth in the land of the spectacle, where all relations, as Debord said, are mediated by images.

In Chapter III, human ruins as a collateral effect of the Cuban revolution is dealt with through the work of Néstor Almendros. First, I examine his short, experimental documentary, *Gente en la playa*. I argue that the beach is exposed as one of the last spaces of party and leisure before the asceticism of the regime took over the coast. But not only the coast was taken. The beach is seen as an extension of the tropical metropolis, where life (with all its types and social layers) can be registered by the photographer under the peculiar light of the Caribbean. If the city would become ruins through the calculated revolutionary abandonment, the first signs of that could be seen in the 1960s in the reception that *Gente* had among the official channels of Cuban filmmaking. Also, this tropical environment proved to be the space from which Almendros' developed his technique as a cinematographer later transported to France. *Gente* finally shows the signs of homoeroticism that would only come back in Almendros' work decades later, as a reading of the Cuban catastrophe. From there, I see how the creation of the "new man," and the transformation of society into a "huge school," proposed by the Cuban revolution as one of its goals, especially through the writings and discourses of Che Guevara and Castro, is linked to the idea of a society with the mandatory transformation of its people into "mass-men" (a concept I borrowed from José Ortega y Gasset). But instead of the mass-man as technician, as in high capitalism, in Cuba they should reflect the morals of the guerrilla. I also analyze how the mass-man as guerrilla is linked to stupidity as a driving force of society, as shown in the work of Avital Ronell. This imposition of mass-men as guerrillas created new forms of outsiders (besides the purely artistic ones previously seen) such as homosexuals and political dissidents, whose lives are the theme

of Almendros' films *Mauvaise conduite* and *Nadie escuchaba*. The regime's persecution to those outsiders created spaces of exclusion inside the revolution itself, such as concentration camps (UMAP) and prisons, where the practice of torture was common. Those liminal sites where humans are exposed in their naked lives are treated under the theories of Giorgio Agamben, elaborated from the testimonies from survivors of Nazi concentration camps, Lacanian psychoanalysis, which is used to trace a link between torture and love, and Slavoj Žižek's thoughts about the dependence of the military on a "frustrated homosexuality."

Cuban writer Antonio José Ponte is the central figure of Chapter IV. After viewing several aspects of human ruins through Almendro's films, I will enter into the urban experience of buildings, dwellings, houses, squares, cars, and streets in decay. Even though there are many studies on Ponte's view of Havana as a city in ruins, I felt that a reading through Benjaminian and Nietzschean glasses was still due. Not only a reading that would cite Benjamin's work as the basis of authoritative gestures on urban debris, but one that would attempt to emulate his methods, including the deliberate use of anachronism. I start with the idea that Cuba after the revolution is a society at a standstill. Time just stopped, and the regime transformed Havana not in a "huge school" but a colossal, open-air museum. I claim that this fact is less an isolation of Cuba from modernity than the way the country found itself to be inserted within modernity. According to Agamben, the entire world is going through a process of museification.



After establishing this framework, I pass to an analysis of Ponte's short story *Un arte de hacer ruinas* and his reading of the museification and consequently ruination of Havana. Ponte sees, as a consequence of the catastrophe caused by the revolution, the birth of an underground city—Tuguria. The catastrophe, as shown in *La fiesta vigilada*, is the consequence of a bombardment of the city that never took place but had actual effects on the destruction of Havana. Tuguria's entrance is an air raid shelter. This imaginary underground space is linked with questions of memory, eavesdropping and archive, which I consider with the assistance of some of Jacques Derrida's propositions. The existence of this subterranean site is accompanied by a desertification of the surface on which Havana is established. This desertification is read through the Nietzschean idea of homelessness that is employed by Ronell. The Cuban landscape, in Ponte seen as a tropical desert, is to assume a central role in this work and will serve to move us to study how Alejandro revised the image of Cuba through its nature.

Chapters V and VI are dedicated to Cuban painter Ramón Alejandro. I depart from the view and impressions of the first European travelers who reached the lands of the New World. Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca and Christopher Columbus are brought into the text to show, as Lezama Lima points out, how the American landscape was first seen as pure nature, as a piece of the lost lands of paradise. However, this paradisiacal place has also an aspect of horror and catastrophe. As I draw from my discussions with Lily Litvak, who has an article in preparation about Alejandro, in his paintings, the presence of death is often indicated in objects lying on the landscape such as knives,

candles, and crowns of thorns; they are in fact traps for the viewer. Death is also implicated in the fruits that are depicted in a state just before the beginning of their decay. The more mature and tempting the fruits, the closer they are to rotting. Alejandro makes a tropical reading of the classical genre of still life painting. His depictions of fruits—juicy and threatening, dreadful and marvelous, which give both pleasure and pain—are seen as the reinterpretation of this foundational paradox of the image of Latin America. The landscape is also depicted as perverse, in which eroticism acquires the necessary levels of suffering claimed by Bataille. Torture machines take over the canvas. The fruits are also ruins: ruins of the Cuban future, ruins of the destiny and yearning of the motherland from exile. In Alejandro, trance is likewise present. He incorporates, together with the fruits, symbols of Cuban religions that appear to give rise to new beings. Also, the image of abundance of American nature is contrasted with Ponte's account of hunger and scarcity that Cuba went through during the Special Period (after the fall of the Soviet Union). The lack of food is seen as another consequence of the war, and, unexpectedly, it was able to give birth to new creations: from the black market that transformed inorganic objects into food, to literature that was able to rise to a new level through the use of metaphors, the substitutions that are so common in times of scarcity. During my research about the painter, I traveled to Miami to conduct a series of interviews with him. I also took the opportunity to exercise another of my means of expression: photography. I wanted to register the artist working among the ruins of exile, which always leaves its marks, however successful the artist may be. Chapter VI, specifically, is a photographic essay on Alejandro. In this chapter, I took the risk to believe that images are as powerful as words.

Finally, Chapters VI, VII and VIII discuss the sculptural work of Brazilian sculptor Francisco Brennand. In the same fashion as Alejandro's fragment, it begins with Columbus' hallucinations—which happen to bear the quality of literature, as noticed by Alejo Carpentier—with the view of the Caribbean and its garden of islands. From there, I retrieve the idea of a mythical island of Brazil, which many of the first colonizers believed to have been found in the vast jungles of South America. This legend is recovered through the work of Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, Gustavo Barroso and Roger Casement. I argue that Brennand's work is an attempt to dialogue with this mythical past of Brazil. However, because that past is permanently lost, he creates its image based on the ruins he found around the city. As ruins are empty spaces that can be filled with one's imagination, Brennand decides to go back, not only to paradise itself but also to the moment of the creation of the world. Embodying a type of demiurge, he produces new beings that are the integration of the realms of animals, plants, and inorganic matter—in a gesture much closer to the one undertaken by Wifredo Lam, which generated a discussion about his "primitivism" with a significant contribution by Fernando Ortiz. Brennand also incorporates machines into humans, the dead into the living, art into life, the museum into the city.

There are several topics that are related to Brennand's attempts to give rise to the image of a new cosmos: islands, gardens, ruins, the sea, the jungle, and also the egg. I have dedicated one entire chapter to the discussion of this object. The egg is seen as

symbol of primordially. It is one of the Baroque objects par excellence. The egg occupies the center of Brennand's Oficina. It is spread all over the place, and is treated by the artist with total importance. The egg is unfolded into other significant objects for the human psyche, especially the eye. I trace how the egg (and ovality) had a role in the thinking of modernity in artists and writers such as Clarice Lispector, Eugène Ionesco and Bataille. But this obsession with the egg, the form that contains all forms, is a symptom of the obsession with totality. In Sarduy's baroque theory of art, it can be seen as an expression of the horror to emptiness. The last chapter is dedicated to the way horror functions in Brennand's art, the means of its expression, and the reason why it fascinates us. The chapters on Brennand are also another photographic essay. It started when I went to Recife in 2010 with Ana Luiza Andrade. We visited Brennand's Oficina and the Parque de Esculturas and I took the first pictures of his immense body of work with my 35mm camera. I was then greatly influenced by Ana Luiza's eye that showed me pieces and pieces of good raw material for the negatives. After that, I came back to Brennand's monstrous world in 2011 in the company of another photographer, Maria del Mar Bassa, and we spent many hours attempting to cover the obsession of the artist with his ruins and with totality. The photographs that accompany the text are the fruit of those two travels and are supposed to be in constant dialogue with the written world.

As this work is the attempt to draw a constellation uniting diverse Brazilian and Cuban intellectual and artistic lives, there are still topics, theories, narratives, discussions, artworks and authors that are treated in the following pages and are not exposed in this

“Prelude” so as to avoid the risk of making it too extensive. They are links floating in text, which sometimes I make in order to make the central pieces appear connected to the human eye. Some of those authors I would like to highlight in advance in order to whet the appetite for the fruits and ruins that are about to come: George Orwell, Hannah Arendt, Salvador Dali, María Zambrano, Franz Kafka, Rafael Barrett, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Alejo Carpentier, Roland Barthes, Stanisław Lem, Reinaldo Arenas, Karl Marx, Pierre Verger...

The effort I took, to trace the theme of the ruins in these Cuban and Brazilian artistic and literary figures, led me to reevaluate the relatively established concept of ruins in Western thought. The philosopher Volney, in his foundational study on the theme, concentrated on the fact that ruins inspire a reflection on the fate of empires and nations when they are confronted with time and the power of nature. I think this view of ruins was relatively in force until World War I. However, it underwent a radical transformation after the advent of twentieth-century concentration camps (specially in their “extermination” version), the domination by humans of atomic power, and the establishment of extremely high speeds for travels, not only for the transportation of bodies but also bombs and other means of destruction. I make these final considerations through Marinetti’s futurist manifesto and two films of Alain Resnais: *Hiroshima mon amour* and *Nuit et brouillard*. By recapitulating the above-mentioned Cuban and Brazilian figures, I also propose that modern ruins acquire their full significance especially in the Third World. For, to the contrary of the central nations of capitalism, the Third World cannot be turned into ruins. It has already been born as such a thing. The possibility of a global nuclear catastrophe—which in 1962 almost reached its realization,

having Cuba as its epicenter—just made this state of existence even more exposed through some of the artists from the island.

## 1. 68, Glauber Rocha and the Memory of Underdevelopment

*Brazilian intellectuals have no importance at all. There are some exceptions . . . but those constitute a select group.*

Nelson Rodrigues

Guy Debord says: “the cinema, too, must be destroyed.”<sup>1</sup> In 1959, he makes this declaration in a film about passages, about the city, about everyday life and the new way of dealing with it. This film bears the title: *On the Passage of a Few Persons Through a Rather Brief Unit of Time*. Through the juvenile voice of a woman accompanied by a white screen, one hears: “there are now people who pride themselves on being authors of films, as others were authors of novels. They are even more backward than the novelists because they are unaware of the decomposition and exhaustion of individual expression in our time . . . the only interesting venture is the liberation of everyday life.” This statement is one of his preparations for the *Society of the Spectacle*: theses that surfaced as a book in 1967... and whose aphorisms appeared rightfully plagiarized throughout the streets of Paris in the following year.<sup>2</sup> Debord’s cinematographic demand, that is to say, the non-conformity to an audience that still demands originality, is also a new conception of what is the very intellectual. The new intellectual is now less a director than an editor: he copies, pastes, mixes, gives new contexts and other meanings to the existing material. It is a new reconfiguration of the documentary and the document in itself. Debord

---

<sup>1</sup> Guy Debord, *Sur le passage de quelques personnes à travers une assez courte unité de temps* (France: 1959), film.

<sup>2</sup> See: *Beneath the Paving Stones: Situationists and the Beach, May 1968* (Edinburgh: AK Press/Dark Star, 2001).

claimed a politics of plagiarism and detour.<sup>3</sup> I, in order to transpose this proposition to the tropics, will name it a politics of trance and embodiment.



1.1 – Still from Guy Debord, *On the Passage...*, 1959.

Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (1968) starts in trance: the music with only one sentence, the African-derived drums, the frenetic dance. It is like being lead by a party in black and white. The film has its first images taken from this convulsion: with shots of blurred heads that look at each other, and sounds of bullets and screams. The party, as much as the trance, is a space of exploration. It is “an open:” an

---

<sup>3</sup> See: Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (London: Rebel Press, 2000).



orgy of skins that get mixed, the ecstasy, and the faint. In *Memorias del subdesarrollo*, the faint occurs at the end of the party/trance. It is the encounter with the most exterior party of death, its transparent membrane. The party is rather experimentation with this wall, this point of no return, than a celebration of life. The trance, in this sense, is the passage from consciousness to the caves of memory; it is a way to be connected to the underground, creating a spectacle, converting death into something bearable. The memory of underdevelopment, or of this third world, a world sunk in the inferior layers of the planet, is defined in its first scene: a space in-between, a threshold that works through the party/trance in order to grasp its mortal essence. As for Glauber Rocha's *Terra em Transe* (1967), again the African-derived drums are what one listens to in the opening scene, the voice from the ritual music makes the accompaniment to the sea visualized in the background. The sea is a space of trance, a state that is precisely transitory, in constant movement, which takes the earth and returns it digested afterwards.<sup>4</sup> It brings the monstrous storms and tests, and at the same time, it also brings the flesh to survival; the Caribbean Sea that clashes on the rocks of the *malecón* while Sergio walks in *Memorias del subdesarrollo*, defining his isolation among a desert of thoughts. A sea that is present in the two cinematic works exactly because of that: it works as a layer between two worlds, the homogenous, non-visible exterior, and the convulsive and, at the same time, imprisoned and sterile interior.

---

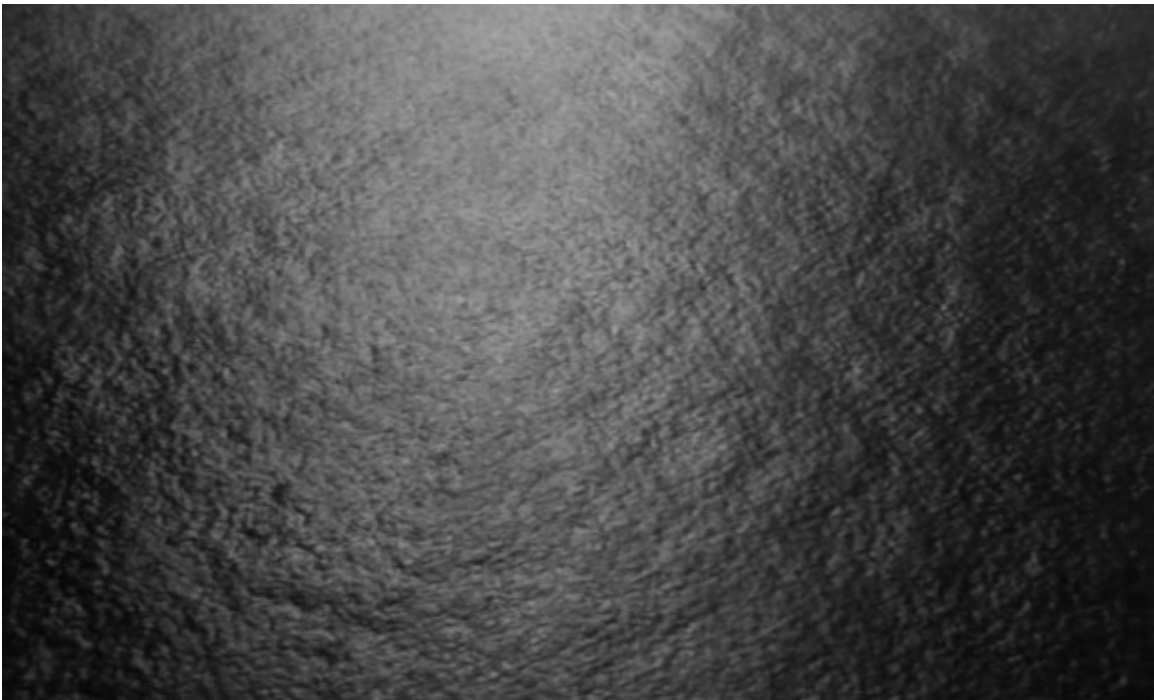
<sup>4</sup> For the sea as an indefinite, liminal and in-movement element, see: Alexandre Nodari, “‘‘Todo camburão tem um pouco de Navio Negreiro’’” (presentation, *II Semana de Letras da UFSC*, Florianópolis, Brazil, May, 2008).



1.2 – Still from Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, *Memorias del Subdesarrollo*, 1968.

The intellectual always contrasts this initial sea with the sensation of the desert, which step by step takes over the film. It is the nothingness that invades the inhabited, the sensation of imminent destruction. Paulo, the journalist in *Terra em Transe*, raises his gun among the dunes in an inhabited country, as well as Sergio who sees from his window the transformation of the city into a battlefield. They are two films about the process of ruination, of going back once more to the condition of threshold, as the beach: life without vegetation constantly swallowed by the waters. The beach is a constant in Glauber Rocha's work: it is in *Barravento* (1961), and later it is where Porfirio Diaz (the authoritarian politician) makes his premier ritual. The beach is not the place or the time of leisure, as in the discovery of the nineteenth century, but it is the point of connection between two worlds. Havana, a city without beaches, where the *malecón* takes over the

coast, loses this connection, dissolves into an implosion: death that comes from the inside. Havana will be a city ruined by war. As with Dresden, it prepares itself for the bombardments, for becoming a battlefield: it is besieged. The city is a tension field of memory, an archive: an archive that will be corroded by the destructive force of accelerated time. War is the acceleration of time. War, above all, has a deep relation with speed as underlined by Paul Virilio.<sup>5</sup> The Third World is the place of a party that celebrates death. For this reason, *Memorias del subdesarrollo* proceeds to the ruins, to the destruction by war. This destruction is the climax of the isolation of the intellectual who is able to concede neither to the masses nor to the power that controls them, as does Debord who turns the cinema into a blank screen to attack the spectacle.



1.3 – Still from Glauber Rocha, *Terra em Transe*, 1967.

---

<sup>5</sup> Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics: An Essay on Dromology* (New York: Columbia University, 1986), 73-79.

The isolation of the intellectual occurs even when he pretends to introduce himself in the political debate: in the case of Sergio, the Cuban revolution creates spaces where the hierarchic structures do not change, even though another type of idea takes the central place; in the case of Paulo, *Terra em Transe*, all of his political attempts are unfruitful. He lives in a space where his poetry intends to be a weapon, but he ends up making a work that does not manage to correspond to his artistic expectations because he is limited by the political reality: “and we won; the things I saw in that campaign, a tragedy much bigger than our own strength; in the calm of the same balcony where we had planned, in joy, the fight, I then by your side thought about the problems that would surface; and I wondered: how would the elected governor respond in the face of the promises of the candidate? Above all, I asked to myself and to the others, how would we react?” He sees how his acts get degenerated by attacking a peasant who was so “cowardly” and “servile” that could not react. The people are “weak” and “afraid.” In the end, he concludes that the obligations of the intellectual are with himself only. The intellectual is only committed to his own ideas. In an interview, geographer Milton Santos declared that the intellectual is he who is together with his ideas even if he is the only one to defend them.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Milton Santos, “Entrevista,” *Roda Viva* (first broadcasted by TV Cultura, São Paulo, Brazil, March 31, 1997).



1.4 – Still from Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, *Memorias del Subdesarrollo*, 1968.

The intellectual is constructed by a constant work of negotiation; it is a process of trance that places him in an outside sphere, in a passage: he has “the hunger of the absolute”... he cannot stand the world in which he lives and its immediate needs. “Alone, alone, alone...”—screams the dictator Porfirio Díaz to Paulo when seeing the journalist abandoning his mansion. “Everybody, who loved me and was screwing me until the last minute, left—cries out Sergio in *Memorias*. *Memorias*, so the film is called not because the intellectual lives in a melancholic world but because the revolution (a form of the spectacle) puts time at standstill... “Everything looks the same... here everything looks the same... all of a sudden, it appears to be a scenography, a cartoon city... however, today everything appears so distinct... Have I changed or has the city changed?... it is

time to go, oh abandoned like the wharves at dawn, everything in you was shipwreck... ah,” repeats the intellectual, Sergio, from his apartment, spying on the lives of others. It is a phenomenon that founds a type of time of leisure, for the revolution is the negation of business—if I redefine a sentence by Oswald de Andrade.<sup>7</sup> However, it is a type of fictitious leisure as the pseudo-parties denounced by Debord:<sup>8</sup> it is the revolution that provides the necessary time of leisure so that the intellectual can dedicate himself to write, create, think, but, at the same time, it establishes panic in that same intellectual, the panic of free thought. It is the metaphor of the bird that is freed by Sergio in the film. He takes it from the cage, but the bird is almost dead; it cannot fly and falls like a rock from the top of the building. In sum, one can think that there is time at one’s disposal, but the thinking has to be ideologically enlaced with the revolution itself.

---

<sup>7</sup> Oswald de Andrade, “A marcha das utopias,” in *Obras Completas*, vol. 6 (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1978) 160.

<sup>8</sup> Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (London: Rebel Press, 2000), 89.



1.5 – Still from Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, *Memorias del Subdesarrollo*, 1968.

In this paradoxical space of time and fear are established the memories in Gutiérrez Alea's cinematic work. And if life looks the same, Sergio recurs to the purely carnal pleasures of the young body and the frivolous mind. He goes to swim in the club's pool, imagines an affair with his maid, starts another one with a young girl who aspires to be an actress, has to deal with tedium in the face of time that passes. One must take advantage of the last breaths of the city before the ruin. The ruins of the city get mixed with the ruin of the tropical body: "there is a weird point between the thirties and the thirty-fives in which the Cuban woman abruptly passes from maturity to rotteness... they are fruits that decay at an astounding speed," says Sergio. His wife had warned him, "I will leave... I will leave alone... I am becoming old... old... I will leave alone... I will leave alone." The bodies start to decay, as well as the architecture of the urban

surroundings. This also applies to him. Sergio declares that with thirty-eight years of age he already feels old and compares himself to rotten fruits: “as a rotten mamey, as a chaff... it is possible that it has to do with the tropics... here everything matures and decays easily... nothing lasts.” In *Terra em Transe*, the intellectual Paulo also throws himself into immediate pleasure, into the chaotic parties and orgies: “I did not believe in dreams or anything else; only in the flesh I used to lose myself and to find myself.” A permanent state of happiness is declared, as it was the staging of a 1968 graffiti... “here is the image of a destroyed man, take it, sustain this ruin,” screams a friend to Paulo. One has to surrender to flesh, to trance, to orgy, to embodiment, to the most extreme that can liberate them from tedium: tedium, one main characteristic of what we see here as the society of the spectacle according to Debord’s situationist partner, Raoul Vaneigen: “a world in which the guarantee that we shall not die of starvation entails the risk of dying by boredom.”<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Raoul Vaneigen, *Traité du savoir-vivre à l’usage des jeunes générations* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), 8 cited in Anselm Jappe, “Sic Transit Gloria Artis: ‘The End of Art’ for Theodor Adorno and Guy Debord,” *Substance*, vol. 28, no. 3 (1999): 110.





1.6 – Still from Glauber Rocha, *Terra em Transe*, 1967.

In the solitude of his apartment, Sergio cross-dresses, slims his shoulder with a fur coat, covers his face with female tights: with the clothes of his wife who left, exaggeratedly detached from the oppressing heat of the tropical city... once more, a trance. Film that is a sequence of trances. Cross-dressing that is an embodiment. He wants his body to be taken over, but he demonstrates that his wife is a group of signs, which get mixed, which converge, and which have their own life. The revolution is also an act of cross-dressing, or better yet, a complex game with the cross-dressings of sovereignty: it is the exposition of sovereignty as an appearance that can be taken over, imitated, overtaken, in sum, it is an invention. The revolution demonstrates that sovereignty is an invention that sustains itself as a group of signs, which can be remodeled at one's taste, as well as the sexual cross-dressing reveals the woman as a

form (according to the view of Severo Sarduy).<sup>10</sup> The revolution in this aspect is pedagogical. It teaches that sovereignty is an empty space where the possible is governed by two vectors, violence and imagination. Fact that is reflected in the scene of the trial, when Sergio attends the court under the charges that he had raped a young girl from the lower class. Everything looks the same as in a court from the previous regime, but it is a cross-dressed court with its signs taken over by the revolution. Sergio, aware of being under the roof of an institution in trance, declares: “I was the only one who spoke with a certain degree of coherence and that just ruined me... they started to threaten me as if I had fooled a naïve girl from the people... now everything is the people... I am sure that before I would have been the respectable one and they the wretched guilty ones... I saw I was lost.”

---

<sup>10</sup> See: Severo Sarduy, “La Simulación” in *Obras Completas* (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999).



1.7 – Still from Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, *Memorias del Subdesarrollo*, 1968.

I have the obligation to note: *Memorias* here is being read against itself, or at least against its director. Even though Gutiérrez Alea, in a posterior text, argues that only an identification of the viewer with the bourgeois intellectual would produce an understanding of *Memorias* as a critique of the state of the intellectual (in broad terms) within the revolution, it seems that the director's own reading of the film backfired with the catastrophic consequences of Cuban revolution.<sup>11</sup> Edmundo Desnoes confessed in 2003 that when faced with the interpretation of his novel/film as a desperate account of current Cuban political situation, he would argue, as a medium of self-defense, that the

---

<sup>11</sup> Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, *Dialéctica el espectador* (La Habana: UNEAC, 1982), 61.

gringos had not got it right.<sup>12</sup> Even though in 1982, he appeared to be still defending *Memorias* as a critique of bourgeois consciousness in the land of “Imperial Rome.”<sup>13</sup> Gutiérrez Alea kept defending that *Memorias* was not a critique of the position of the intellectual within the revolution at least until 1982. He seems to not understand the culture of gift that is one of the foundations of art itself. As we can derive from Jacques Derrida, a work of art is a gift that is thrown into an anti-economy without expectations of return, without expectations of closure of the circle.<sup>14</sup> Gutiérrez Alea was still concerned with controlling the results of his own work and the readings that could be made from it, readings that would contradict his ideological positions, while controlling the innumerable possibilities of critique can no longer belong to the author after releasing the work. Gutiérrez Alea (and we can take it further to include the regime) aspired to totality not only in the regulation of what should be produced but also how the products should be read. I will ignore their desires and will continue to proceed as if the film was given to me with no exceptions of gratitude.

\*\*\*

The trance, as an attempt to access underground memory, is also the search for a face of truth: “the truth of the group is in the killer,” scream the enormous letters in *Memorias*. Just before that, a sequence of images and sounds starts, which takes us to the

---

<sup>12</sup> Edmundo Desnoes, *Memories of Underdevelopment: A Novel from Cuba*. Pittsburgh (Latin American Literary Review Press, 2004), 9.

<sup>13</sup> See: Edmundo Desnoes, commentary to Julianne Burton, *The Intellectual in Anguish: Modernist Form and Ideology in Land in Anguish and Memories of Underdevelopment* (Washington, D.C: The Wilson Center, 1983).

<sup>14</sup> See: Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

barbarities of the previous dictatorship. Those are the trials of the torturers. The trial has the obligation of establishing the truth: it is what the filmmaker thinks and it is what common sense thinks. This reason and primordial obligation are present in the cinema. The cinema becomes a machine of trials, of establishments of stories that intend to be officialized: to clarify, to demonstrate, to prove, to charge, to defend, to justify, and to denounce. The documentary is the perfect weapon for that, for it is based on a presupposition that is the capture of a certain exteriority of the world. But the trial is also the creation of a story, the most credible one or the most able to convince us, or even the one that cannot give an opportunity to the defendant. Thus, the new cinema, the revolutionary cinema or the cinema of the revolution, is nothing but an invasion of the documentary into fictional work. Gutiérrez Alea has consciously traced a double-view of cinema: “since the first moment [cinema] opened itself to two parallel paths: it was a ‘true’ document of some aspects of reality and was, on the other hand, a fascination of magicians. Between those two poles—document and fiction—the cinema has been always moving itself.”<sup>15</sup> The new revolutionary cinema aims to reunite those two paths. There is no fiction possible that is not documented. Gutiérrez Alea, Glauber and Debord (on different levels) recognize the documentary as a creative technique of montage or they recognize the montage itself in its potential to create new documents. Debord, in *On the Passage of a Few Persons...*, expresses:

What makes most documentaries so easy to understand is the arbitrary limitation of their subject matter. They confine themselves to depicting fragmented social functions and their isolated products. In contrast, imagine the full complexity of a moment that is not resolved into a work, a moment whose

---

<sup>15</sup> Gutiérrez Alea, *Dialéctica del espectador*, 11.

development contains interrelated facts and values and whose meaning is not yet apparent. This confused totality could be the subject matter of such a documentary.

The documentary has to encompass life in its complexity, and one can later see this proposition by Debord gaining force in Gutiérrez Alea and Glauber Rocha. One cannot forget that some scenes in *Terra em Transe* were taken from a cinematographic register of the electoral campaign of José Sarney, who later will become the president of Brazil. There is in this new documentary a gigantic “no” directed to the purely pictorial that is heard. And if the trance is precisely in this space of blurred memory, between the fictional creation and the images of personal or political events, the use of archival images, either in Gutiérrez Alea or in Glauber, is one more facet of the creation of '68. Through the streets of Paris, one could read on the walls by means of graffiti: “only the truth is revolutionary.”<sup>16</sup> *Memorias* travels among those several spaces of registers of truth: the revolutionary archive, the immediateness of the streets, the conjugal discussions inscribed in a magnetic tape, the imminent war, the future in ruins. Everything is recorded: word by word. The idea of the intellectual that records himself, his intimate life: a totalitarianism applied to himself, the omen of what is to come... the eye that watches, in a scene subsequent to a questioning by the public servants who trace an X-ray of his apartment.

---

<sup>16</sup> Ken Knabb, ed, *Situationist International Anthology* (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), 457.



1.8 – Still from Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, *Memorias del Subdesarrollo*, 1968.

\*\*\*

As much in Gutiérrez Alea as in Glauber, there is an exposition of a pedagogy, often taken into the discussion by the intellectual: the people of the Third World, in its current state, is so submerged into immediateness, into the realization of his most carnal needs that, therefore, they cannot access a level of consciousness that would allow them to see the mechanisms and laws that rule life. When analyzing his new affair, in *Memorias*, the intellectual declares:

One of the things from the people that makes me most uneasy is their incapacity to sustain a feeling, an idea without dispersion. Elena showed to be totally inconsequent, she is pure alteration, as Ortega would say. She cannot relate things. This is one of the signs of underdevelopment. Incapacity to relate things, to

accumulate experience, and to develop oneself... all the talent of the Cuban is wasted in becoming adapted to the moment... the people are not conscious and always need that someone else to think for them.

One can see the same effect in Glauber's *Terra em Transe*. The people is a stupid mass. During the party, the machinegun silences everybody. In this void of sound, everybody waits for the speech of Gerônimo, who is the people. In the beginning, it appears that he is not going to speak, but he starts a discourse full of uncertainties and with lack of eloquence. Paulo, the intellectual, shuts his mouth: "you are seeing what the people is: a stupid, an illiterate, an depoliticized... can you image Gerônimo in power?" This also reflects a posture of creation, which one can see transmitted to the cinematographic sphere. If the intellectual is he who can proclaim the stupidity of the people while he confronts the spaces of power, his work cannot take that same people into consideration. As Lacan says, one has to speak to "nonidiots": the cinema screen has to do just like Paulo and proclaim the stupidity of the audience.<sup>17</sup> The audience, too, must be destroyed. For, it is presumed that he belongs to the mass. The cinema has to be a machine of creating subjectivities: "I have already told you several times that inside the mass is the man, and the man is difficult to dominate, more difficult than the mass." The position of the intellectual is always the one of not belonging. In the case of Sergio, in *Memorias*, he demonstrates his disgust towards the bourgeoisie. The revolution is his vengeance against it, but at the same time he is incapacitated to fit in the new reality. He cannot lose his lucidity. The intellectual has a sort of pedagogy of the outsider, of putting himself apart: "I always try to live as a European and Elena forces me to feel the

---

<sup>17</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Television* (New York: Norton, 1990), 3.



underdevelopment in every step.” And later he continues: “and you... what do you do here below, Sergio? What does all that mean? You have nothing to do with this people, you are alone... you are nothing, nothing, you are dead; now your final destruction, Sergio, starts.” The intellectual is facing destruction, the act of being tossed in the *outerworld*, but from where is he out? Edmundo Desnoes, who created the novel (or the testament as the author himself refers to it) on which *Memorias* was based, declared in a posterior introduction that he felt like a character of Fyodor Dostoyevsky trapped in the tropical city of Havana, embraced in “isolation” and “existential doubts,” being a profound outsider:

if any novel casts its shadow over *Memories* it is *The Stranger* by Camus. The character is a stranger of sorts in the revolution. As strangers we all find ourselves in the world; we are all passing through. We all feel banished from Eden. The revolution, for me, was an attempt to end my existence as an outsider. It was not a Marxist, materialistic pursuit, it was a Catholic, a religious quest, a search for paradise lost.<sup>18</sup>

As a reflection of Desnoes, Sergio paradoxically became an outsider in a space that should be already at the margin of post-fall existence. The revolution should make the paradisiacal exterior inhabitable once again. The interior should be opened and connected to that in a messianic gesture. Sergio is at the stage in which one becomes fully aware of the impossibility of such a task, fully aware of what appears to be human destiny. The outsider is the one who is not only unable to rediscover a path for paradise but also has no illusion to find it. The outsider is the one who, by seeing the ruins, stops

---

<sup>18</sup> Desnoes, *Memories of Underdevelopment*, 8.

dreaming and starts dwelling on it. To derive a thought from Médar Serrata, the outsider is the conscious and deliberate avoidance to turn the paradise ruins into monuments.<sup>19</sup>



1.9 – Still from Glauber Rocha, *Terra em Transe*, 1967.

---

<sup>19</sup> Writing about Dominican ruins, Médar Serrata shows us an excellent panorama of the transformation of ruins into monuments: “the capacity of an old building in giving aesthetic pleasure, or evoking the subjective experience of a past, conflicts with the apparent indifference of the nationals, who strictly appreciate it for its practical use. Only when the elites separate the ruins from the quotidian flux of life, can they reach the category of monuments.” Médar Serrata, *De la carnicería al monumento: Las mutaciones de las ruinas de la ciudad de Santo Domingo* (unpublished text given by the author, 2013).

## 2. *La Fiesta* according to Fidel Castro (and to some outsiders)<sup>20</sup>

*The criminal breaks the monotony and the  
quotidian security of bourgeois life,  
saving it from the stagnation and  
provoking this constant tension, this  
unease without which the very sting of  
competition would chip.*

Karl Marx

The general Jorge “Papito” Serguera was the prosecutor of the revolutionary trials in which the deemed collaborators of the former dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista were harshly sentenced. Papito was so efficient and successful in having people condemned and executed that he received the nickname of “Charco de Sangre,” which can be literally translated as “Puddle of Blood.” After the end of the revolutionary trials and of his posterior positions in Africa, he took over the direction of the *Instituto Cubano de Radiodifusión* (ICR) from 1966 to 1973.<sup>21</sup> Having to deal with the types of artists that would certainly inhabit this supposed space of creation, which should be turned into a piece of the propaganda machinery, he acquired a heavy hand for censorship: hand that famously forbade the broadcasting of the Beatles’ music in Cuba, considered part of another propaganda, the capitalist one. In the middle of deciding what should be listened or not, viewed or not, what kind of art would survive in the new society, a society that would give birth to the new man, Papito wrote another famous proposition for Cuban socialism. In his text *El intelectual y la revolución* published in 1967, he simply

---

<sup>20</sup> The first part of the title of this chapter was taken from Orlando Jiménez Leal’s documentary about the trial and execution of Arnaldo Ochoa: Orlando Jiménez Leal, *8-A* (Italy: 1992).

<sup>21</sup> Wilfredo Cancio Isla, “Fallece Jorge ‘Papito’ Serguera, fiscal y censor,” *El Nuevo Herald*, April 02, 2009.

recommended the extinction of the word “intellectual” from the Cuban Spanish vocabulary altogether: “why do we not eradicate the word intellectual? Or else we give it its true meaning. To recognise their existence and to treat them as such, does it not mean to divide.”<sup>22</sup> One who dominates language dominates society as anticipated in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by George Orwell. In the visionary novel, the totalitarian government would progressively substitute the English language for a new one, in which most of the lexicon would be abolished.<sup>23</sup> Erasing words is to erase concepts and without them critique is not possible. Language that grows in its complexity with new inventions would stagnate and shrink. Stagnation that would be reflected on the pace of life, a life at standstill in order to maintain the power of the revolution. Revolution is the ultimate change that will put an end in any possibility of future changes. Revolution is the last party, a party so radical that it will make future parties not only unnecessary but also forbidden.

From a certain perspective, Papito was somewhat right. The most effective way to get rid of intellectuals, and of all those who resisted the transformation into mass-men, was to deny a linguistic existence for them. In the end of his life, Papito commented in an interview that in fact he did appreciate the Beatles’ music and that he acted in such a manner because directing layers of the Revolution were not completely comfortable with that type of artistic manifestation.<sup>24</sup> Papito seemed to be a very erudite, well-educated man. He would, in the last part of his life, take himself out of the revolutionary command, start renting his house for extra income (a practice that was not seen positively by the

---

<sup>22</sup> Jorge “Papito” Serguera, *El intelectual y la revolución* cited in Wilfredo Cancio Isla, “Fallece Jorge ‘Papito’ Serguera, fiscal y censor,” *El Nuevo Herald*, April 02, 2009.

<sup>23</sup> See: George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (New York: Knopf 1992).

<sup>24</sup> Ernesto Juan Castellanos, *La Habana with a little help from my friends* (La Habana: Ediciones Unión, 2005).

bureaucratic elite until very recently), and express a disillusion with a power that would emanate from state. So why would that sort of music, a sort that was even pleasing to such a high figure of the Revolution (and we have no reasons to think that Papito was the only one) be seen as a threat or at least as something not suited for the historical moment in which the country was immersed?

Rock is not merely a musical style to be listened to. It can equally be performative and have in itself a claim for social change. Rock is youthful and rebellious, and mainly anti-traditional by nature: from the first chords of Elvis Presley and his rewriting of the American view on the white middle-class youth to the artificial paradises of LSD trips in the imagination of Jimmy Hendrix, Jim Morrison and Janis Joplin, to the anarchist screams of the Sex Pistols, and to the post-punk disillusion of Nirvana. If capitalism needs to destroy itself again and again to continue to exist, as posited by Marx, this destructive attitude of Rock is actually welcome, even if it is repelled and attacked in the first moment. Rock is, above all, music made especially for a party, in the sense of a party that eclipses social structures. And a party is the complete opposite to the state of permanent war necessary to the sustainability of the Cuban regime, in which the guerrilla elite would need to keep its dominance in order to guarantee the safety of the population, national sovereignty, and ultimately freedom from the enemy. The Beatles was the sign that the party could continue to go on. On the other hand, by being part of the society of the spectacle, the Beatles carried, along with their music, the cult of the star. In a communist society, the only possible star is the leader. He has to concentrate the entire public desire. He has to generate the entire public libido. If a party was permitted to take

place in Cuba, it had to be a party according to the rules of Fidel Castro, which means, given his sense of castration, no party at all. The modern star exists to entertain and to provide to the masses a compensation for how meaningless their own lives are.<sup>25</sup> In communism, the leader accumulates those wasted existences in order to build the path for a redeemed future. That is one of the reasons why anyone who cannot afford to sacrifice his singularity for that messianic goal is seen as an enemy of the regime, an enemy of the people. This person does not share the mass dream, does not belong to the unified march towards the new society. This person walks apart from the multitude. This person is an *outsider*.

*Memorias* is without a doubt a film about war and party. The film departs from the party to arrive at war, which means that war takes over the party. However, *PM* (1961), a short documentary movie by Orlando Jiménez Leal and Sabá Cabrera is where the opposite happens, and the party takes place where the sounds of war should be reigning. Jiménez Leal calls attention for the fact that the documentary was commended in order to register the way the Cuban population was preparing themselves for the imminent war against the US.<sup>26</sup> As Antonio José Ponte points out, the movie is in fact all about partying and how the partying had to be put under surveillance.<sup>27</sup> *PM*, as *Memorias*, also starts with a trance. Actually, *PM* is a trance in its totality. The film has its first images in the ocean. Always, the ocean. But at this time, the waters are black as they are reflecting the sky at night. The boats are bringing people from one side of the island to

---

<sup>25</sup> Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, 29.

<sup>26</sup> Orlando Jiménez Leal, "Cine y censura: el caso P.M." (presentation, 29<sup>th</sup> Miami Book Fair International, Miami, USA, November 18, 2012).

<sup>27</sup> See: Antonio José Ponte, *La Fiesta Vigilada* (Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama), 2007.

the other. They are crossing a body of water, as enslaved Africans had done in the past to encounter horror in the New World. They, however, expect to find the opposite, or its complement. The night of Havana is seen and the Africanized drums begin to sound. The water remains in the movie, but now mixed with alcohol. The trance is a very close experience to being drunk, intoxicated. In *PM*, the drunk dancer's movements could be easily taken as gestures of a possessed person during a ritual. Later, men, dressed elegantly with grey suits and hats, spin around as if they were the embodiment of some African deity. The alcohol takes over the brain: there are fights, dances imitating sexual movements, hunger. The empty bottles themselves become a source of sound. Drunkenness, or a drug high, as well as the trance, is to open oneself to other sensibilities apart from everyday life. Many states of trance in religious contexts are actually induced by hallucinogenic plants. Modern life is an overwhelming reception of stimuli, of shocks. Walter Benjamin noted that the neurological systems of soldiers who returned from the war were ruined. According to Benjamin, the psyche shuts down to protect the body from the external world. And not only that, he noted that this state had become the norm in modern cities. The life there is a life of shocks. The inhabitants of the urban space are now suffering the consequence of overstimulation. Only living in a state of reverse anesthesia provoked by recreational drugs could lead us back to an understanding of life through unimpeded senses.<sup>28</sup> Havana was not only a modern city in the sense of overwhelming sensory stimulation, but it was a city at war. The idea of the regime to install a permanent state of war would mean the transformation of every citizen into a soldier. Everyone should have his sensorial apparatus disconnected in order to be able to

---

<sup>28</sup> See: Susan Buck-Morss, "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered," *October*, vol. 62, (1992): 3-41.

undertake the tasks of such conflicts. That is why *PM* should show the preparation of the people, or how they were shutting down their sensory relations to the external world. In fact, partying, the state of being drunk, was just the opposite, it was an escape for that. Partying was anti-revolutionary because it was a gathering of people refusing to accept their destiny as soldiers.



2.1 – Still from Orlando Jiménez Leal and Saba Cabrera, *PM*, 1961.

The film was a scandal. Fidel Castro himself interviewed and convoked a meeting with Cuban intellectuals to discuss the matter. Carlos Franqui describes the environment of such place as a “Beckett’s work, an atmosphere of this subterranean and torturous world.” Franqui also accounts for how Alfredo Gueverra, then director of ICAIC (*The*



*Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry*)—responsible to coordinate, produce and approve Cuban cinematographic productions—condemned *PM*: “[he] said that *PM*, the film that was sequestered and censored . . . but defended by us, was counterrevolutionary, which photographed parties and weaknesses and not the militiamen and the fight, and that Sabá Cabrera y Orlando Jiménez, its authors, were the example of the anti-revolutionary ideology . . .”<sup>29</sup> In a recent book organised by Jiménez Leal and Manuel Zayas, *El caso PM*, there is a transcription of this discussion about the film between Cuban intellectuals and the revolutionary leaders. There is a time when Gutiérrez Alea gives his opinion about the film, showing that revolutionary cinema for him was much less connected with form than content: “it is a film that, by touching an aspect of reality, does not touch it in a proper manner and, consequently, lies in the most possible hypocritical manner, which is to hide a part of the truth.”<sup>30</sup> 1961 was The Year of Education in Cuba and, by bringing drunken people to the screen, it would not correspond to that context. At the end of the three-day meeting, Castro gave his famous speech in which he declared:

Inside the Revolution, everything; Against the Revolution, nothing. Against the revolution, nothing, because the Revolution has its rights; the first right of the Revolution is the right to exist. And before the right of the Revolution to be and to exist, nobody—since the Revolution understands the interests of the people, since the Revolution means the interests of the entire nation—, nobody can allege, with reason, a right against it. . . . Which are the rights of revolutionary and non-revolutionaries writers and artists? Inside the revolution, everything; against the revolution, no rights.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Carlos Franqui, *Retrato de familia con fidel* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1981), 265 and 272.

<sup>30</sup> Orlando Jiménez-Leal and Manuel Zayas, *El caso PM: cine, poder y censura* (Madrid: Editorial Colibrí, 2012), 173.

<sup>31</sup> Fidel Castro, “Palabras a los Intelectuales,” speech at Biblioteca Nacional, La Habana, Cuba, June 30, 1961.

To be inside the revolution was to dwell on the promise of socialist fulfillment. The ones who put themselves against it would be destitute of all rights: and that included any form of rights, even the more basic ones, including physical freedom and life. Castro gave his message to the outsider. No thought that shows discontent, non-acceptance of the path toward the new society will be tolerated. The intellectual outsider or the artist outsider is put on the level of the criminal. Let me correct a statement I made during the personal ecstasy of the last chapter. Learning from Colin Wilson, the intellectual may be an outsider, but (as the artist) the intellectual is not necessarily an outsider.<sup>32</sup> Actually, very few intellectuals are outsiders. The outsider is too intelligent to conform to society's predominant norms and too stupid to live from the products of their own intelligence.<sup>33</sup> Still according to Wilson, the outsider is the one who has a weakened touch with the normative interpretation of "reality." In a would-be communist society, as the Cuban one, every aspect of what people see as social reality is under the desire of being controlled. There must be discipline, conformity, symmetry. But everything that the outsider sees is chaos.

The Outsider is a man who cannot live in the comfortable, insulated world of the bourgeois, accepting what he sees and touches as reality. 'He sees too deep and too much,' and what he sees is essentially chaos. For the bourgeois, the world is fundamentally an orderly place, with a disturbing element of the irrational, the terrifying, which his preoccupation with the present usually permits him to ignore. For the Outsider, the world is not rational, not orderly. When he asserts his sense of anarchy in the face of the bourgeois' complacent acceptance, it is not simply the need to cock a snook at respectability that provokes him; it is a distressing sense that truth must be told at all costs, otherwise

---

<sup>32</sup> Colin Wilson, *The Outsider* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1956), 15.

<sup>33</sup> Colin Wilson, interview by Paul Newman, *Abraxas Unbound*, no. 7, n.d.

there can be no hope for an ultimate restoration of order. Even if there seems that there is no room for hope, truth must be told. . . . The Outsider is a man who has awakened to chaos. He may have no reason to believe that chaos is positive, the germ of life (in the Kabbala, chaos—*tohu bohu*—is simply a state in which order is latent; the egg is the “chaos” of the bird); in spite of this, truth must be told, chaos must be faced.<sup>34</sup>

If the egg is the chaos of the bird, for the filmmaker Nicolás Guillén Landrián, the fragment is the chaos of cinema. The fragment is the potency for cinematic order. It does not guarantee cinematic order. Landrián is whom I would call one of the deepest embodiments of the outsider (as Wilson defines it) in post-revolutionary Cuban cultural history. Guillén Landrián not only awakened to chaos; as the outsider *par excellence* of Cuban revolutionary cinema, for him, truth must also be said at all costs, even if there is no hope. Or, as Kafka says: “Oh, [there is] plenty of hope, an infinite amount of hope-but not for us.”<sup>35</sup> Guillén Landrián was the nephew of the Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén. He started his career at ICAIC in 1962. He went to direct his own movies and progressively developed his personal style as an experimental filmmaker. The pinnacle of his work was the highly experimental documentary shorts *Coffea Arábica* (1968) and *Desde la Habana ;1969! Recordar* (1969), in which he develops a profound irony and famously placed, in the first mentioned film, archival footage of Fidel Castro together with the Beatles’ song *Fool on the Hill* as a background. “I overdid it,” he said in the documentary *Café con leche* (2003) by Manuel Zayas. “Among officials who were watching, somebody did not like the song *The Fool on the Hill*, which worked very well with my reservations towards the production of coffee because I had doubts and wanted to somewhat situate those

---

<sup>34</sup> Wilson, *The Outsider*, 15.

<sup>35</sup> Franz Kafka cited in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken, 2007), 116.

doubts inside the film.”<sup>36</sup> The outsider needs to say the truth because he is always in doubt. He is never capable of believing. He is an iconoclast by nature. He does not participate in “the euphoria of a historical moment,” as Sofía Gallisá Muriente says about Guillén Landrián.<sup>37</sup> The filmmaker was incarcerated, in the prison of Isla de Pinos, for the first time after making his first documentaries dating up to 1966. He was tortured with electroshocks.<sup>38</sup> After which, he was still able to produce *Coffea Arábica* and *Desde la Habana*. Guillén Landrián was arrested several other times throughout his artistic life in Cuba. The last time, he was accused of plotting to kill Fidel Castro.

Well, I was arrested and the last time I was arrested they set a risk index for me, that included: plans for an assassination attempt against the Commander in Chief, ideological divergences . . . I proposed the script for a fictional film called Buena gente (Good People), about a very good type guy who wanted to kill a head of state. This script, which wasn't approved, was brought out in some of my trials. They said I had dared conceive of the death of a head of state as a counterrevolutionary. Even though the movie had a damn happy ending.<sup>39</sup>

For Guillén Landrián, Fidel Castro himself, and not the directors of ICAIC, not even Alfredo Guevarra (who seemed to consider Guillén Landrián fairly), was the one who went against his movies, and who was the main reason for the censorship of his work and his destiny as an outsider.<sup>40</sup> With the help of ex-prisoners and intellectuals, he went into exile in the US, which meant the *de facto* end of his occupation as a filmmaker.

---

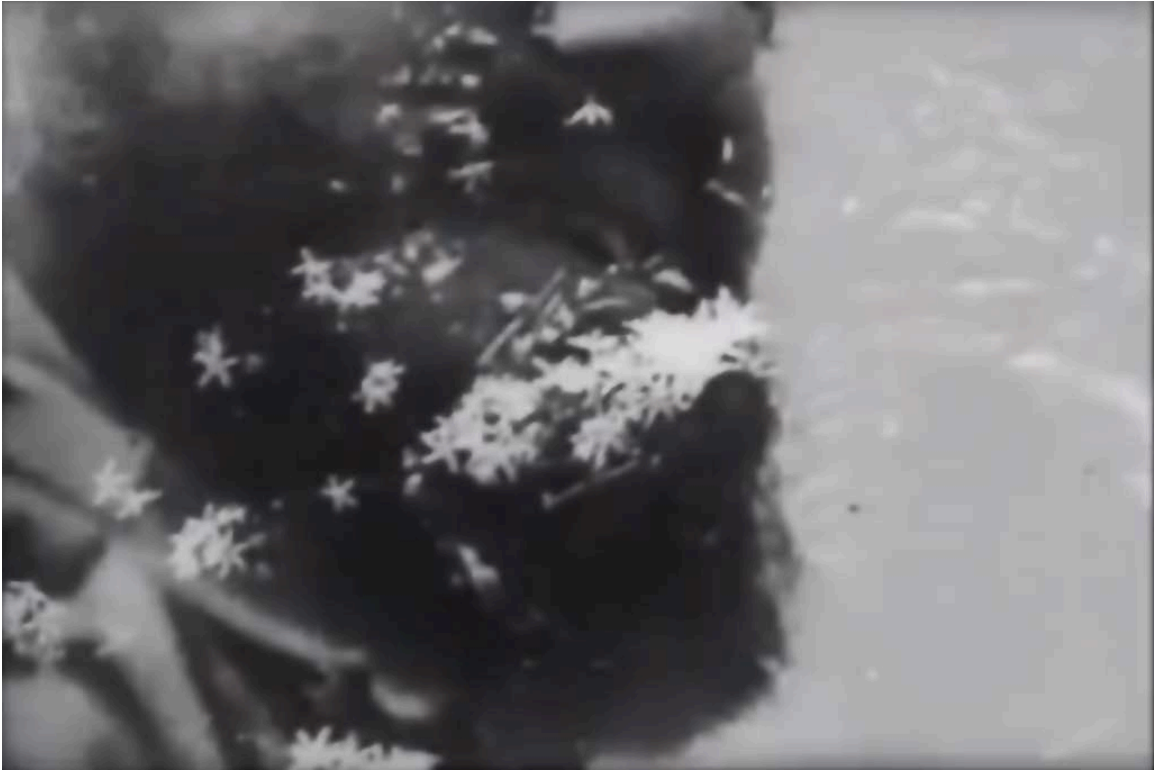
<sup>36</sup> Manuel Zayas, *Café con leche* (Cuba: 2003), film.

<sup>37</sup> Sofía Gallisá Muriente, “Good Samaritan: the artist as sacrificial lamb, savior & rebel, while inevitably alien.” Text given by the author.

<sup>38</sup> Nicolás Guillén Landrián, interview by Manuel Zays, *Cine-ojo... кино-глаз*, October 8, 2011, manuelzayas.wordpress.com/2011/10/08/interview-nicolas-guillen-landrian.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

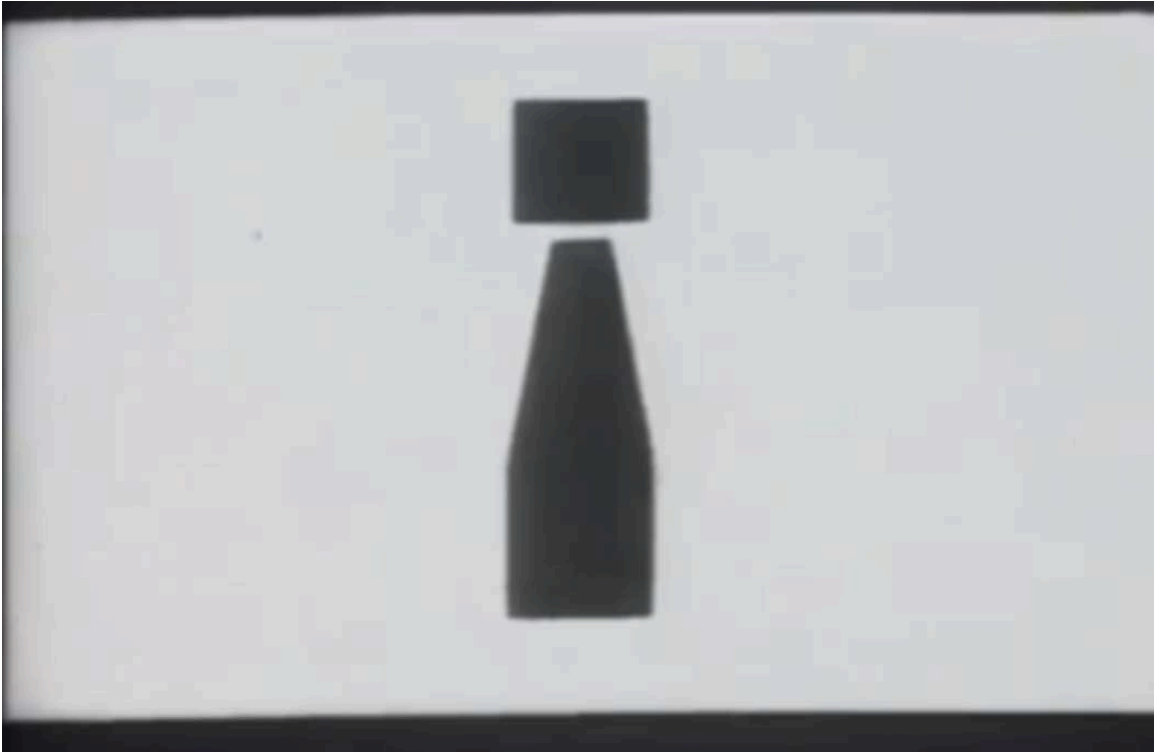
<sup>40</sup> Ibid.



2.2 – Still from Nicolás Guillén Landrián, *Coffea Arabica*, 1968.

*Desde la Habana* is the artist confronting the chaos. The chaos of war, the total destruction caused by our own intelligence and will. Images of concentration camps, corpses... they are interlaced with the narration of human endeavors into space. The progress that led to the catastrophes and the unutterable disasters also made possible the reach of the wonder. The artificial heart is announced in the film: the beginning of immortality for humanity. The evolution of ourselves into perpetual machines: a symbiotic human-machine. How can we be so close to extinction and endless life at the same time, to the artificial heart “and the Viet-nam”—it is what one can see asked through the images of the film. And *Mother Nature’s Son* from the Beatles is playing on the background. He just wants to see that little boy contemplating the stream of water in the countryside. What is lost? I lost innocence—says the collage to the viewer. There is

no place to be innocent anymore. I saw the horror of the dark cells of Pinos, I felt the electric current breaking my flesh—one can imagine Guillén Landrián explaining in his calm and introverted voice. I lost faith in the revolution, I lost faith in salvation. But I have to speak out: I am also guilty of the revolution. I let myself into this. I believed in progress, in the new man, in the avant-garde. So I have a part in all this chaos—the outsider confronts the chaos that they themselves contributed to. They are aware of their role. This is the reason why the outsider is always retracting themselves, even though they long to engage with the masses. They refuse to be accomplices, or at least they intend to minimize their participation. The outsider lives with the guilt for the paradise lost. He feels responsible for human destiny but he cannot create empathy for their specie.



2.3 – Still from Nicolás Guillén Landrián, *Desde la Habana*, 1969.

For Wilson, the outsider can sometimes revert their feeling of misery. They can put some order to chaos. They can reach a state in which a connection with the world is finally established. In general, those moments are very brief and most of the outsider life is concerned with the search for inhabiting that instant again. The torture of the outsider is that they want a meaningful life, to establish friendships, to end solitude. But it is impossible for them. They cannot fully give themselves to this end. Guillén Landrián, in his interview to Zayas, expresses a similar tone to the psychology of the outsider described by Wilson.

I am not happy. The brief moments of happiness I have with my companion Gretel Alfonso are what make me feel relatively happy sometimes. Because happiness is a bit of a myth... But I aspire to be happy. I want to get there. I don't know if I'll know how. But there is always the anguish of living . . . having friendships, which is always very hard . . . not be alone.<sup>41</sup>

*Desde la Habana* is a movie about the end of the world when the moments of happiness are thought to be forever lost. In the same decade of the Missile Crisis—in which Cuba was keen to acquire nuclear power from the Soviets, and in which Castro appeared to be willing to sacrifice the island if it was necessary to the success of the new society of the new man—Guillén Landrián puts a scene of the explosion of an Atomic Bomb (an atomic bomb that is getting closer and closer): the end, an end that was on the horizon of Cuba. “The direction of ICAIC considered [*Desde la Habana*] incoherent with

---

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

the [Cuban] context,”<sup>42</sup> he recounts. The “remember” in the full title of the film, is to remember the personal ruins of the urban space destroyed by the madness of his supreme fool. Madness that is contagious, that spreads throughout society. “I was already somewhat emotionally weak when I started those films, because the pressure, under which I was living in Havana, was slowly taking me towards madness.”<sup>43</sup> Madness is one form of ruin for humans (or even the desperation to avoid becoming ruins, to control the inevitable decay). What matters here is that each view of the ruin is personal: when one sees it, one is always composing a fiction among pieces of experiences that modeled their lives and the historical landscape of forgotten and unrecoverable events. In *Desde la Habana*, one can see a possible path of the future, a path that did not happen due to contingencies, but that at some time appeared to be certain. Havana could have ceased to exist. And in a certain way, it did: the revolution is an atomic bomb that has been detonated very slowly as we will see later in *Ponte*. This catastrophic future remains very alive in the artistic imagination and in the façades of the city that continuously degraded. This past, a personal past from Guillén Landrián, of a Havana that was on the verge of being ripped off by a nuclear catastrophe must only be remembered from its ruins, the ruins of 1969 (a year from which the city would not exist anymore). From 1969’s Havana, the artist is bringing back his memory of the city. But the artist, in the end, has lost their ability to remember. Guillén Landrián says in the exile: “I no longer know what it is to remember.” The true about ruins is that they show memory will eventually perish. This is one of the reasons why Guillén Landrián’s cinematic technique is so fragmented.

---

<sup>42</sup> Manuel Zayas, *Café con leche*.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*



One can only encounter pieces, rests, residuums. No history can be fully put together.  
The truth, the truth that must be told, will emerge among ruins.



2.4 – Still from Nicolás Guillén Landrián, *Desde la Habana*, 1969.

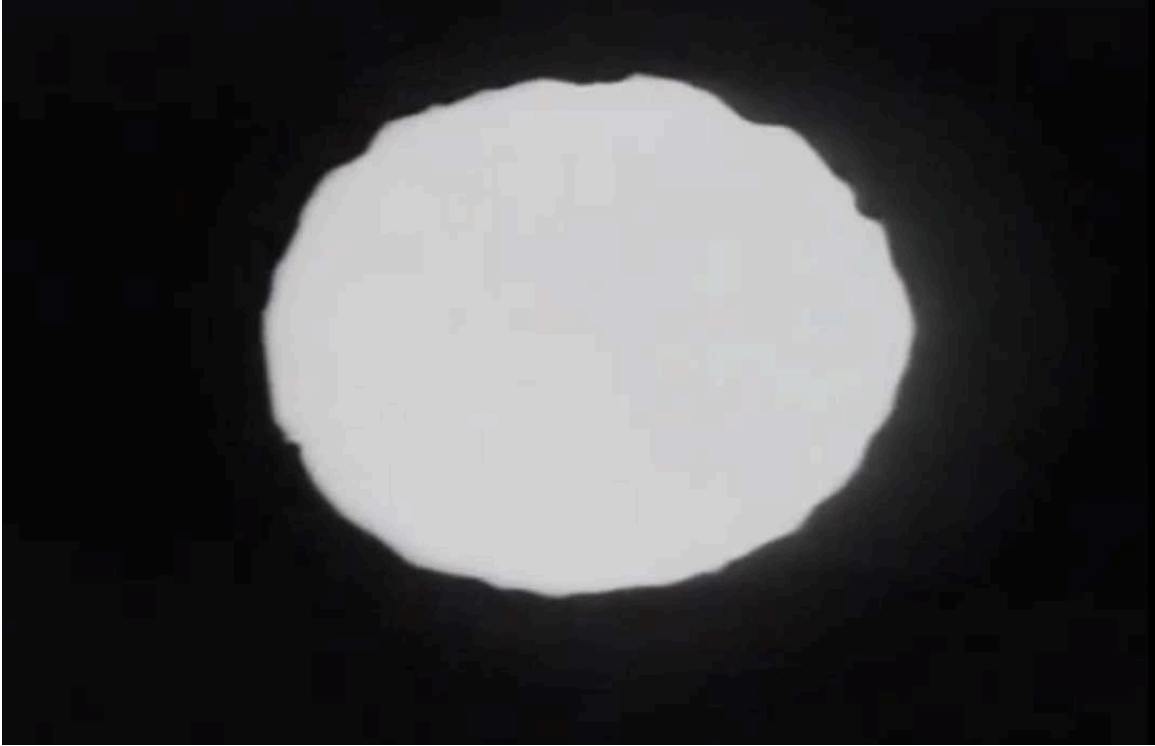
Guillén Landrián is also concerned with the eye. Not only the eye that does select the coffee beans in *Coffea Arábica*. He is squint-eyed. His cat, Fausto, was one-eyed: they look at each other in the documentary about the documentarist, which was directed by Jorge Egusquiza Zorrilla. Ramón Alejandro once confessed to me that he was also squint-eyed, that his eye was faster than his brain, and that this corporeal failure made him see the reality in a deformed way: deformed, as I use here, means only a different form. Guillén Landrián wanted also to be a painter. He, from the beginning of his life,

was involved in the world of the canvas by means of the friends of his mother.<sup>44</sup> After his expulsion from ICAIC, he came back to painting. Guillén Landrián as Ramón Alejandro is a squint-eyed painter, but turned into filmmaker. That abandoned beginning can be a reason for why his films are collages, one artwork after another appearing on the screen. Guillén Landrián is painting traveling at 24 frames per second. One of the first movies he worked on was *Homenaje a Picasso* (1962)—which was lost.<sup>45</sup> The cubist in him never died. Guillén Landrián is the cubist filmmaker. Cubism is not only the superposition of spaces but also the intersection of historical times. It is the admission that art is the attempt of the coexistence of several dimensions on a two dimensional plane. “The moon is a dream. Columbus is the discoverer, 90 miles from the US”—one can read in *Desde la Habana* after the announcement of Apollo 11’s landing. In art: 1969 is equal to 1492. 1969 is equal to 1959. 1901 is equal to 1902 which is equal to 1903 which is equal to 1904 which is equal to 1905 which is equal to 1911. Camilo Cienfuegos is equal to Che Guevara who is equal to Castro who is equal to Machado who is equal to Batista. “Machado is a killer.” 1968 is equal to 1868. The Ten Years’ War, the liberation of Cuba, must start again. War tanks, missiles, guns, soldiers, multitudes... Time opens in several layers. Guillén Landrián is the exposition of the bi-dimensionality of the cinema screen and the sense of multi-dimensionality that it can propitiate. His cinema is purely sensorial.

---

<sup>44</sup> Jorge Egusquiza Zorrilla, *Nicolás: El fin pero no es el fin* (USA: 2005), film.

<sup>45</sup> Zorrilla, *Nicolás*; and Guillén Landrián, interview by Manuel Zays.



2.5 – Still from Nicolás Guillén Landrián, *Desde la Habana*, 1969.

The surface of the projection almost becomes a sheet of paper. In *Desde la Habana*, black capitalized letters pop up on the bright background. The typeface is harsh and ironic at the same time: it is like a scream that is accompanied by laughter. But the letters are there as another image. They are not saying. They are expressing: as Eugene Jolas would protest.<sup>46</sup> Guillén Landrián talks: “the image was more important than the word itself, and I was interested in elaborating the image through a new language, a bold language, an interesting language for the audience.”<sup>47</sup> And the language is frenetic: the language of a trance. The voodoo of *Memorias* is stolen from Gutiérrez Alea and edited in the middle of *Desde la Habana*. More: overexposed cars, running cars, old cars,

---

<sup>46</sup> Eugene Jolas, “Revolution of the World,” *Transition*, no. 16/17 (1929).

<sup>47</sup> Manuel Zayas, *Café con leche*.

broken cars, dismantled cars. It is all about velocity, velocity and ruins. Ruins have a deep connection with velocity. Ruins carry the marks of the path through which the social movement took place, from the point of an ancient era to the establishment of another. Ruins are marks that should be read. They cannot exist by themselves. Ruins are not like the sun or the moon or the ocean. They must be declared as such by the viewer. Ruins are a totally abstract idea. And it snows in Havana—as the film is taken by white flakes and comes to an end.



2.6 – Still from Nicolás Guillén Landrián, *Desde la Habana*, 1969.

*Coffea Arábica* is the closest brother of *Desde la Habana*. The film, made one year before the latter, is also centered on the capture of life fragments. Fragments of production. Modern production is where the worker loses contact with the whole process

of making. They are assigned for a small, specific, and generally repetitive role in the steps of that process. Production is no longer familiar or the result of the artisan's work. This aspect of modern production is reflected in the fragmentation of the film. However, the film should be lauded. It was commended by the ICAIC to celebrate the success of the coffee harvest. Guillén Landrián appears to have taken the opposite side. The film is full of irony and double meaning. The workers of coffee cultivation are Blacks. "Blacks?"—asks the screen. Guillén Landrián's film has no narrator. The narrator is actually the own cinema screen. Remember: it is the image, not the words, that matters. Back to black. Coffee cultivation generates its sub-products or collateral effects. Diseases, plagues, accidents, toxic fumigation. It was also one of the agricultural and economic activities that gave rise to slavery. The workers are not only producing in a fragmented environment but also they are fragmented themselves. If production is broken into pieces, all parts involved will face the same fate: including the cultural existence of the worker. Blacks were extracted from their land, from their known world, and tossed into the unknown. They were separated from friends and family. They are now striving to remember their past traditions.



2.7 – Still from Nicolás Guillén Landrián, *Coffea Arábica*, 1968.

In *Coffea Arábica*, there are flashes of trance. The trance is an attempt to recover the sense of wholeness lost during the journey in the slave ships. The Yoruba religions are driven by the basis that the body is connected to nature. If one is possessed by the power of the river, they will be the river. Every aspect of life is connected to natural environment: food, housing, clothes, music. The idea of ritual trance had to adapt itself in the Americas. The trance in Cuba is not the same as in the regions of today's Benin or Nigeria. The symbols are in constant transformation, adaptation: new foods, new architecture, new vestments, new music. They had to get mixed with the new environment. Jazz is a sub-product of the new trance, a collateral effect of plantations, of ritual music that encountered new possibilities in the catastrophes of America. The

editing of Guillén Landrián recalls a jazz session. It is not only the soundtrack that brings the rapid bass mixed with grains of coffee popping from the machines. The film itself is full of improvisation, difference through repetition, citation, and virtuosity. *Coffea Arábiga* is an attempt to make visual jazz. He has a theme, coffee production, and a collection of raw material: manuals, images of tractors revolving the land, people selecting small plants, machines for classification and for drying the coffee beans, a Russian lady walking through the streets of Havana. He assembles. *Coffea Arábiga* is music made from the fragmentation in the mind of the worker. And the film does not intend to hide it. As such, the film is the attempt of the artist to embody the collective and make their own contribution. It is based on pre-existing parts that are put together in a new way. The concern is authenticity not originality.<sup>48</sup>

*Coffea Arábiga* was made famous for the juxtaposition of footage from Castro's preparation for public discourse and of the Beatles' song *Fool on the hill*. At first glance, one can imagine that the fool on the hill is Castro himself. He who is talking for hours and hours and nobody is willing to listen to his words. As we know, Castro's extremely long speeches became a part of his own caricature. The lyrics say: "The man of a thousand voices talking perfectly loud/ But nobody ever hears him/ Or the sound he appears to make/ And he never seems to notice." But also the fool on the hill can be Guillén Landrián himself, the figure of the outsider who is isolated and apart from society. Every outsider is a fool. Their words cannot reach and modify the people. They are who speak the truth that nobody is listening to. They just stay there, observing the

---

<sup>48</sup> Helene Hegemann, when questioned about why she had appropriated parts of other authors in her work, she replied: "There's no such thing as originality anyway, just authenticity." Nicholas Kulish, "Author, 17, Says It's 'Mixing,' Not Plagiarism," *The New York Times*, Feb 17, 2010.

world: “But the fool on the hill,/ Sees the sun going down,/ And the eyes in his head,/ See the world spinning 'round.” In fact, the fool on the hill is aware of other readings of life: the fool on the hill can see what others prefer to reject and those others use the fool’s awareness to despise the fool. The visionary, the genius—as I draft from Wilson—is much closer to the fool than the mass-man. “The visionary is inevitably an Outsider. . . . He starts from a point that everybody can understand and very soon soars beyond the general understanding.”<sup>49</sup> But he knows that the others are in fact the fools. “And he never listens to them,/ He knows that they’re the fools,/ They don’t like him.”



2.8 – Still from Nicolás Guillén Landrián, *Coffea Arabica*, 1968.

---

<sup>49</sup> Wilson, *The Outsider*, 203.



Castro once said that the work of Guillén Ladrían could be made by a Frenchman. As Guillén Ladrían recognizes, such a comment in the post-revolutionary Cuban context was in fact a serious accusation.<sup>50</sup> The cinematic acts of the documentarist made him out to be a criminal. His crime: as said before, ideological diversionism. The plot to kill Castro was just a consequence of that. The outsider is, in fact, closely related to the criminal. In *O Bandido da Luz Vermelha* (1968), made in the same year of *Coffea Arábica*, Rogério Sganzerla brought to the cinema screen, in Brazil, a radical depiction of the criminal as an outsider. In the film, we are abruptly brought again to the discussion we saw in Guillén Landrián of the fool as genius. However, now the fool displays much more violence and wildness. In the very first scene, there is a bright neon sign that wonders: “a genius or a beast.” The city is in a state of siege. “Total war in the Boca do Lixo [Trash Mouth].” Boca do Lixo is the social underground of São Paulo. The habitat of an underworld composed of criminals, gigolos, pimps, prostitutes, the homeless, corrupt cops. *Bandido* was the flagship film of a movement known as *cinema marginal*, which I translate as “outsider cinema.” “*Marginal*” in Portuguese is also a noun: meaning “outsider,” “bandit,” “criminal,” and “social outcast.” The first music of the soundtrack is once more, as in the quasi-totality of the films I discussed so far, of African influence, specifically a music that is used in rituals of possessions. Again, *Bandido* is a movie about trance. The trance of violence. Kids shooting machine guns in a landfill are seen in the first scenes. The trance and the machine gun reappears. The same elements we saw in Rochas’s *Terra em Transe*. Those are two films trying to make sense of the Third-World

---

<sup>50</sup> Guillén Landrián, interview by Manuel Zays.

chaos. Ismail Xavier traces a parallel between those works that I can use to expand the reading.

Like *Land in Anguish* and its character-poet, *Red Light Bandit* and its protagonist make a speech out of impotence, with the difference that irony and self-mockery replace eloquence and drama. In Sganzerla's film, impotence bedecks itself with humor because a splitting of the self allows for an exterior view of its own fall. Within the context of the "aesthetics of hunger," the sertão in *Black God, White Devil* is taken as the allegorical site of a teleology, and the prophetic evocation of Third World revolution places the national experience in the center of a universal order. The distinctive trace of the present against history would be this Third World vocation to fulfill a universal task, to aid the essential transformation of humankind on its path to freedom. *Land in Anguish* is Rocha's version of the crisis of these historical purposes; it is a dramatic version of historical purposes; it is a dramatic version of this removal to the periphery that reasserts, however, the sacred side of violence as the answer of the oppressed. *Red Light Bandit* completely separates time from any supposed sacred realm, composing the allegory of a world deprived of teleology. The "aesthetics of of garbage" finds its dwelling in the vacuum generated by history and reaches the allegorical drawing of Brazil as a comic province far from the civilized world.<sup>51</sup>

If in *Terra em Transe* sacred violence can still be an answer, and in *Bandido* there is the recognition of the impossibility of such a violence, as said by Xavier, what we witness in Sganzerla's film is violence for its own sake. The outsider has a destructive character—if I was to connect Walter Benjamin with Wilson. The outsider proceeds to create a tabula rasa. The *Red Light Bandit* is committing his crimes not for money, not for surviving. He wants to "demoralize" [*avacalhar*]. I translated "avacalhar" as "to demoralize" because I believe the outsider is against, above all other things, the established morality, maybe this is their main characteristic. And a deep root on morality,

---

<sup>51</sup> Ismail Xavier, *Allegories of Underdevelopment: Aesthetics and Politics in Modern Brazilian Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 120.

as we are going to see later, is one of the bases of the communist left. That is the reason why the outsider could not even find their place in the communist revolution. Inácio Araújo gives a glimpse at the relation between demoralization [*avacalhção*] in *cinema marginal* and the traditional Brazilian left:

It demoralizes with manners, one can say. Nobody wants to talk about peasant leagues, of CPC [Center of Working-class Culture], of the deep and rural Brazil any longer. Nothing of that. The core of the country was in fact urban. And in this urban setting, the privileged figure was banditry, contravention. If there were an art (and in general there was none, art was another type of frivolity), then it would belong to these people. No longer collective manifestation (revolution), but individual revolt, fragile and useless, but which meant a desire of living against all objective contradictions that the world was proposing, against the arresting of desires, against the destruction of our utopias.”<sup>52</sup>

“When we cannot do anything, we demoralize”—says the Bandit. In *Bandido*, Sganzerla shows criminality as an extreme form of art by those who could not manage to access more traditional spaces, by those who could not develop their abilities, by those who were negated the entrance into the world of galleries, museums, publishing houses, and art schools: “I wanted to be big.” Criminality in the film comes from this personal frustration. The outsider is the one who makes life an open work of art no matter what. He rejects all forms of life that cannot lead to a reflection on life itself. He is, in the eyes of the other, a loutish man [*boçal*]. For the Bandit, a security guard does not deserve to live because he is willing to receive little money to protect a fortune. While firing against a police car, the Bandit reflects: “I can say loudly: I am a loutish man.” The narrators

---

<sup>52</sup> Inácio Araújo, “No meio da tempestade,” in *Cinema marginal e suas fronteiras: filmes produzidos nas décadas de 60 e 70*, ed. Eugênio Puppo and Vera Haddad (São Paulo: Central Cultural, Banco do Brasil, 1990), n.p.

explain: “The masked Bandit does not respect either the (private) property or the woman of anybody.”



2.9 – Still from Rogério Sganzerla, *O bandido da luz vermelha*, 1968.

A little man, a dwarf, screaming: “the Third World will explode. They who wear shoes will not survive. They must not survive. The solution for Brazil is extermination. I am a poet. I see it.” *Bandido* is making a clear reference of a radical rebellion of slaves. The enslaved Africans in Brazil could not wear shoes. That was a characteristic sign of their condition. The Third-World life is a continuation of slavery. It is the totalization of slavery. The tropical outsider, the Bandit, sees that, and refuses to cooperate. According

to the narrators, he can be Brazilian, Cuban, Paraguayan, Mexican. He is the “underdeveloped criminal” who actually wants revenge. It reminds me of another story of a tropical, criminal outsider: *O Cobrador [The Collector]* by Rubens Fonseca. He would go through the streets of the metropolis planting bombs, robbing rich families, decapitating businessmen. The Collector would say: “I do not pay for anything else. I am tired of paying . . . now I only collect.”<sup>53</sup> He would go on with his violence for its own sake while writing poems about the Beatles’ songs. Another, criminal outsider who was an impeded artist. The underdeveloped outsider is aware of the impossibility of becoming a hero. Banditry is an extreme option to attain some sort of fame. In accordance with the threats of the outsider seen before, the narrators of *Bandido* ask themselves: “Who was this legendary outsider [*marginal*]? . . . A frightening sexual predator? A mere provocateur, teaser? Or is he an abnormal person seeking truth? Or does truth not exist? A magician, an outlaw? . . . Or a poor devil who came from Freud or from the Trash Mouth?” The outsider is an abnormal person seeking truth. That could be a good definition of my reading of Wilson with Sganzerla. The abnormality of the Bandit is celebrated. He drinks in ecstasy jets of water from the bidet.

---

<sup>53</sup> Rubem Fonseca. *Contos Reunidos* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1994), 492.



2.10 – Still from Rogério Sganzerla, *O bandido da luz vermelha*, 1968.

The end of the Bandit is tragic. He was looking for an escape throughout his whole life. There were several attempts of suicide: the first one, when he was only twelve years old. He tried to sink in the ocean. He drank oil ink. His mother wanted to have him aborted. “Of course I will destroy myself”... “Who am I?”—he whispers. He starts to plant bombs through the city. Surrounded by the police, he electrocutes himself in a suicidal farewell. A wild party is started, with UFOs landing and exploding on the surface of Earth and the sound of Jimmy Hendrix’s guitar getting mixed with the African trance music on the soundtrack. The Bandit is an extreme and desperate face of the outsider who could not find a valve to let his artistic imperatives escape. The one who could not stand

the frustration against humanity and devolved into a destructive form of indiscriminate violence. Guillén Landrián, who became the character and subject of his own last film, *Inside Downtown* (2001)—which was made in the US in exile—is the outsider who was broken and destroyed for precisely having managed to find a way of artistic expression, but who was not willing to conform with the rules posed by those who controlled morals. Guillén Landrián is the outsider who just wanted to be remembered as a good man and he paid a price for that.<sup>54</sup> *Inside Downtown* is the last years of a man striving to keep sanity against the contagious madness of the great leader. He just wanders through the city, searching for meaning. *Inside Downtown* is the portrait of a human in ruins. And the human ruin is the topic of the next chapter.

---

<sup>54</sup> Guillén Landrián, interview by Manuel Zays.



2.11 – Still from Nicolás Guillén Landrián, *Inside Downtown*, 2001.



### 3. From the Beach to the Human Ruins: aka, Néstor Almendros

*The man who constantly smiles is a man who annoys. He possesses an internal consciousness that does not allow him to be impressed by all other things—men and ideas—that are strange to him.*

Josep Artigas

As said before, the beach, as a space of generalized leisure, is an invention of the nineteenth century. First, it was a complement to the urban landscape, a new discovery of nature in the middle of an environment modified and dominated by the expansion of the metropolis' concrete. However, it is a form of nature that is not completely untouched but that is capable of sustaining the pleasure of its guests. Linda Nochlin exposes how the realist artists face this new component of modernity:

The beach, like the country picnic, offered the realist a milieu neither urban nor rural—of nature tamed, made both approachable and elegant, even *mondain*, by the presence of urban pleasure-seekers. The very idea of the sea-cost as a resort, a place for the pursuit of pleasure rather than of the hazardous occupations of sailors and fishermen, the very existence of the beach *as* a beach, with its casinos, boardwalks and bathing machines, was still a relatively recent one in the mid-nineteenth century, and one which appealed to artists of realist inclination because of its very contemporaneity. Once again it is the English who have chronological precedence in the painting of the theme, but it was the French who succeeded in embodying its contemporaneity in truly inventive, contemporary terms.<sup>55</sup>

Robert Herbert, more specifically in his book about the impressionists, had already said to us that the beach creates a new confrontation between the inhabitants of

---

<sup>55</sup> Linda Nochlin, *Realism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), 147.

the new suburbs of Paris that go to the coast in search of “leisure” and the local population who become their “servants.” What attracts these new tourists is the ability to join a new group, a new class, since at the beach the traditional separations between the inhabitants of the city are abolished, and yet, at the same time, the fact that they are “strangers” at the site places them in a separate, isolated, group from the native inhabitants.<sup>56</sup> The beach, here, is not a total break with the city, but a way to reconfigure their structures without destroying them completely. Anyway, it is certainly a new aspect that nature gains in the modern imagination. Lily Litvak notes how the sea was seen as a place of untamed nature while the coast is the place of the man:

At any other place but at the sea can one feel the fury of the elements, the emptiness and vastness. Like anywhere else, there one is able to read the multiplicity of temporal rhythms, experience the geological term, observe the indecision of the biological boundaries, the uncertainty of kingdoms and the amazing transformations that bind them. By contrast, the coast, which has a dual spatial condition, as it combines the natural and urban, belongs to the man. The coast was considered a privileged place for meditation, a suitable site for rest and entertainment.<sup>57</sup>

The beach, while creating new reconfigurations among the inhabitants of the city, as a space for further continuation of the urban, it also reproduced some social divisions. It was actually a mixture among equals, since the lower and upper classes, men and women, etc., continue to be allocated in separate environments. Alain Corbin, in *The Lure of the Sea: The Discovery of the Seaside in the Western World*, shows how the beach was primarily an aristocratic hobby up to around 1840, when it began to be handed

---

<sup>56</sup> Robert, Herbert, *Impressionism: Art, Leisure, and Parisian Society* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 265-6.

<sup>57</sup> Lily Litvak, “El mar como tema de la modernidad en la pintura española, 18970-1936,” *A la playa: el mar como tema de la modernidad en la pintura Española, 1870-1936*, 13-63 (Madrid: Fundación Cultural Mapre Vida, 2000), 15.

over to the masses, mainly thanks to the construction of railroads. Before there were fences separating the spaces of those who had better financial resources, but soon the working class took over the place: “the spread of seaside holiday breaking to the masses, both where it has occurred and where it was foreshadowed, aroused criticism, scorn, and revulsion. . . . The scorn . . . is aimed not only at the speech and commonplace conversations concerning the picturesque quality of the sea, but also at the lack of culture and morality and the stupidity of those who choose to make stays.”<sup>58</sup> There is another historical time for which we have to refer to France, in the beach/town relation, where a discovery also “inventive” and “contemporary” did make the beach resurface. During the events of '68, this was a graffiti that one could read: “Under the paving stones, the beach.”<sup>59</sup> In the explanation given by the collective Dark Start, the words are simple:

On one level a slogan on a Parisian wall referring to the beach appears a contradiction. The beach with its connotation of seaside holidays, fun and leisure scrawled on an urban wall in the capital of France. However, although the quality of our illustrations doesn't allow us to show it too clearly, if you look carefully at photographs of Parisian streets which had their paving stones/cobbles torn up what can you see? Sand, of course.<sup>60</sup>

The destruction of the city, the attack on authority through paving stones thrown at police, could bring directly to the downtown the time of pleasure at the beach without the need for a displacement to the coast. However, not as an exception, such as vacation work or a weekend, but as a rule of life. The revolution should establish the meaning of the beach instead of the work place, sand instead of asphalt, outdoor life instead of the

---

<sup>58</sup> Alain Corbin, *The Lure of the Sea: The Discovery of the Seaside in the Western World, 1750-1840* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 279

<sup>59</sup> Knabb, *Situationist International Anthology*, 449.

<sup>60</sup> *Beneath the Paving Stones*, 119.

factory, joy instead of austerity: a breakdown of social barriers where there would be no distinction between the group of visitors and the native inhabitants.

The beach is an evident utopian point of reflection, more distinctive with respect to the tropics and at the same time more complex. The tropics have a sun too scorching as noted by the protagonist of *Memorias*: a destructive force, a light extremely inflexible that breaks everything around easily. A light that exacerbates contrast, which does not allow the delicate passage of colors and the perception of small degrees of saturation. It is not the European perpendicular light that makes it possible to highlight the chromatic nuances in our optical field. It's a harsh light that only rests during afternoon downpours. Ramón Alejandro, says that his uncle, a painter who caught his curiosity for art, tried his whole life to imitate, without success, the Impressionist technique in Cuba, without realizing the complete difference of light in the tropics.<sup>61</sup>

In the tropics, the Cuban revolution saw how necessary a new way to deal with the beach was, even in revolutionary terms. Under the paving stones, the beach... a beach that should not be taken to everyday life in the city, but one that must be destroyed. A destruction of the beach as the city will be destroyed. In place of the city, the desert. If the European revolutions of the second half of the twentieth century, as the graffiti of '68 claims, should introduce this way of life as dominant, the revolutions of the tropics seem to seek the opposite: the extinction of that environment... How we can forget the sarcastic passage of Woody Allen in *Bananas*, a film that can be seen as a retelling of the Cuban

---

<sup>61</sup> Ramón Alejandro in discussion with the author, Miami, Nov. 2012.

revolution, where the new dictator goes out to declare Swedish as the new country's official language. Or the tale of Antonio José Ponte, *Corazón de skitalietz*, where Cuban students must pass an initiation ritual walking in the open sky under the powerful Russian winter.<sup>62</sup> Metaphorically, the beach should be replaced by an environment of ice: that is, from the possibility of creation and of the new that takes place in the encounter between the unknown sea and man's ingenuity on the coast, one has to go to the immutability of cold. The extreme cold preserves, guarantees the immutability and imposes an ignorable severity for preserving life. Man cannot be more exposed, naked, in front of their surroundings, as on the beach. It is a closure rather than an opening.

This extreme landscape, and yet so striking to the understanding of the tropical metropolis, the beach, is the centerpiece for one of the early documentaries by Néstor Almendros, *Gente en la playa* from 1961. Unlike the Parisian bourgeoisie that takes the coastline, in Almendros the arrival to the sea is by the lower class: old and full bus, people of color in clear contrast to the country's elite. The beach is no longer a shelter, but a place of chaos. Chaos is empty, etymologically, a primordial void, where origin is.<sup>63</sup> Sarduy, in his play *La playa*, also defines it like this, as essentially a void: "The beach is also a tribute to the nude body and the panoplies of seaside. I tried to convey that universe with the minimum number of elements: simple vocabulary, repetitive, 'emptied.'"<sup>64</sup> The chaos/emptiness of the beach was also searched in '68, it was a new possibility of living: a beach that would establish new living spaces within the city itself,

---

<sup>62</sup> Antonio José Ponte, *Un arte de hacer ruinas y otros cuentos*, (México, D.F: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2005), 156-91.

<sup>63</sup> *EOD*.

<sup>64</sup> Severo Sarduy, "La playa," in *Obras Completas*, 1010.

in opposition to the touristic pseudo-adventures that are the domination of time and space by spectacle, an extension of the work that feeds them back. Debord, on tourism, closely linked it to a version of the modern beach, gave us this view: “tourism—human circulation packed for consumption, a by-product of the circulation of commodities—is the opportunity to go and see what has been banalized.”<sup>65</sup> Revolution would be the de-trivialization of the landscape. Almendros, I could say, also had this quest for revolution as the void where creation occurs.

In *Gente*, there is a melting pot with no native inhabitants. In '68, the city should turn into beach. Before, Almendros did turn the beach into a city. This time, not by train, as in the nineteenth century, but by bus. Despite the difference of the means, it is public transportation that allows the urban world to reach the beach. Transportation is essential to giving a new shape to space, shortening distances and allowing not only the aristocracy to travel out of the city, from which follows the modern view of the beach.<sup>66</sup> Based on this, the movie starts inside such a transportation machine. It is possible to see all types who reached the coast. *Gente* is like a categorization of types: the mother giving food to her son, the man who prepares the syrup, the seller of sandwiches, the domino players, the guitar player, the drunkards, the well-dressed girls who seek new lovers, the renters of wetsuits, the dancer, the babies, the children, the couples dancing *bolero*, the young men taking care of their hair, the phonograph machine, the old lady resting with the family, half-naked people, people in shoes and long trousers... however, of all of these types, there is no painter. The figure of the painter is absent. Or better yet, replaced. In *Gente*,

---

<sup>65</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 94.

<sup>66</sup> Corbin, *The Lure of the Sea*, 281

the beach is not portrayed by the Impressionist painter in their quest to dominate the light outdoors. Instead, the appearance of a photographer is constant in the film: shirtless, carrying a large format camera trying to capture the children running with their rubber rings. The photography in black and white has more affinity with the tropical beach than painting does.

The contrast is much more welcome and mitigates the effect of the sun desaturating the colors: deep colors are lost in a bright environment. François Truffaut in his opening of the Almendros's book, *Días de una cámara*, argues that the photography in black and white is already an effect on reality, an effect of beautification of reality when removing its colors. "Films were more or less beautiful depending on the talent involved, but they were rarely ugly, since photographing something ugly in black and white is to make it less ugly than it is in reality. Since black and white is a transposition of reality, it was already an artistic effect."<sup>67</sup> And to the words of his friend Truffaut, Almendros himself adds:

I think of cinema as a generous art form. Through the lens, something like an automatic transfiguration is produced on the photographic emulsion. Everything seems more interesting on film than in life. The process similar to the art of the engraving. The artist takes a piece of wood, inscribes some sort of design on it with a tool, inks it, prints it on paper, and the result is usually interesting. The same design done directly on paper would have no value at all. Somehow the reproduction enhances the work. In the same way, there is a sort of magic in cinema; the camera heightens reality.<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>67</sup> François Truffaut, "The Lights of Néstor Almendros," in *A Man with a Camera*, Néstor Almendros (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1984), VII.

<sup>68</sup> Néstor Almendros, *A Man with a Camera* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1984), 10.

Hence, underdevelopment is embellished by black-and-white photography. The ugliness of hunger, of the modern city already in ruins, of the precariousness of its marginal neighborhoods, gains the possibility of aesthetic representation. The revolutionary cinema in the tropics existed thanks to this confluence between the available photographic technique and its effect of apprehension of the Third-World landscape. Almendros developed his technique in the precariousness of the Third World. Without being able to count on artificial lighting, he learned how to use the light of the tropics, even in internal scenarios. Almendros was looking for the window light, reflected on the ceiling, on the walls, on objects. A technique that he took to France and the US, and that accompanied him for his entire life, growing in certainty with time.

I am for the simplicity, for the plainness . . . I am for the lighting based on one source of light only. As it occurs in reality, generally the light comes from only one place. In the studios, in the past, the lights were multiplied. There was light that would come from here, another from there. The result was that there were multiplex shadows. In contrast, the window light, which is the light from Vermeer, is a light that comes from only one place. . . . this is the type of light that interests me, because I believe that cinema has a realist vocation above all, even more with the arrival of color.<sup>69</sup>

And in his book, *A Man with a Camera*, Almendros adds: “more and more, I tend to use only one light source, which is usually what happens in nature. I reject the typical lighting of the forties and fifties. . . . Since I lack imagination, I seek inspiration in nature, which offers me an infinity variety of forms.”<sup>70</sup> The effect of embellishment of the Third World by the use of its natural light and forms, by the black and white image, after the

---

<sup>69</sup> Néstor Almendros, interview by Joaquin Soler Serrano, *A Fondo* (first broadcasted by TVE, Spain, 1978).

<sup>70</sup> Almendros, *A Man with a Camera*, 8-9.



massive adoption of color film by mainstream cinema, remained in photography. One can see the example of Sebastião Salgado, who is able to express misery with a profound aesthetic rigor. This embellishment of the Third World can also have a dangerous side, as a possible *aestheticization* of violence. Almendros seems to propose that the camera makes the ugly more acceptable: “In fact, one of the dangers of cinema is precisely its ease. Everything tends to seem prettier through the lens. This is especially obvious when films dealing with poverty or ugliness make those things look lovely.”<sup>71</sup>

The tropical photographer ends up registering what the painter could not do. Photography as an independent form of art, can distance itself from painting. It does not need to be pictorial but a register. In the US, already in the 1930s, the Group f.64, formed by Ansel Adams and Edward Weston, among others, defined photography as an art form that could be comprehended without external help, that is, by means of purely photographic mediums: “the Group will show no work at any time that does not conform to its standards of pure photography. Pure photography is defined as possessing no qualities of technique, composition or idea, derivative of any other art form. The production of the ‘Pictorialist,’ on the other hand, indicates a devotion to principles of art which are directly related to painting and the graphic arts.”<sup>72</sup>

The photographer can be seen as an archivist, a copyist, he gives form to reality during the writing of light. In *Gente*, one saw the last breath of the beach, before it was closed by the revolution, being registered by the photographer. *Gente* is the framing of

---

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>72</sup> “Group F.64 Manifesto,” in *Seeing Straight: The F.64 Revolution in Photography*, ed. Therese Heyman, Mary S. Alinder, and Naomi Rosenblum (Oakland: Oakland Museum, 1992), 53.

the Cuban beach. It is the transformation of the beach into a landscape and consequently its immortalization. And in the time of now, as a historical piece as all landscape depictions, it makes the viewer imagine what was lost. About framing, landscape, and the not seen, Alemdros has to say:

(During the Stone Age, the men of Lascaux and Altamira did not frame their paintings.) And what counts in two-dimensional art is not only what is seen but what is not seeing, what does not let itself be seen. Eisenstein hit upon a brilliant explanation of why we Westerns need the frame. We see our landscapes through windows, whereas the Japanese, who are used to architecture with sliding walls and no windows, did their painting on scrolls that could be unrolled and had only two edges . . . the framing is an analyzing tool.<sup>73</sup>

*Gente* was also a movie made in opposition to the regime. In fact, it is more than a mere opposition which could only become readable after the fall of the socialist block. *Gente* was reordered when ruins began to materialize itself in the first cracks on the new revolutionary institutions. Revolution seems to have an enormous power to speed up change, to engage the people into transformation. And with this same speed, it reaches the pinnacle of its triumph and starts to become a force of impediment. Revolution, for being so aware of how time can be accelerated, of how violence can be applied to radical social transformation, is paradoxically afraid of transformation itself. A continuous and perpetual revolution would cancel itself, would destroy itself, would despair in a blow as fast as it took power. Revolution is a reaction that, if not stopped, can run *ad infinitum*. Revolution in order to stabilize needs to declare itself as the ending point of history. Almendros saw that Cuban cinema, through its proclaimed leader, Alfredo Guevara, was

---

<sup>73</sup> Almendros, *A Man with a Camera*, 12-13.

on its way to becoming one of the central pieces of revolution's propaganda machine. They were creating a state monopoly of art and, in what appears to be a contradiction, were infiltrating the so-called revolutionary cinema with aspirations of First-World technique. As Žižek said, communists consider themselves part of the enlightenment.<sup>74</sup> The Cuban regime wanted a tropical Hollywood. Almendros wanted no Hollywood at all.

*Gente* was conceived with the idea of exploring tropical light and not of adapting that light to conform with the cinema standards of the time. . . the revolution in his view should also be a revolution of light: "if someone was dancing, I didn't care about the face, which could remain in the shade; what I wanted was the body against the light. I purposely worked with raw elements. I was challenging the myth that an image can never be good without artificial light."<sup>75</sup> Almendros wanted the light to have its deserved realm within the cinematography of the Caribbean. He was not afraid of letting the sun blow out the highlights, burning the film. But this attitude had a price. It was an experience that was outside the control of the new ruling class, the bureaucrats, and that gave a privilege to nature and spontaneity which could not be tolerated in a place that was walking towards the totalization of life. To apprehend life is to make the preponderance of nature as hard as possible. That was the answer Almendros received when asked for the opportunity to develop the cinematography of the tropical revolution: "your windows are overexposed, you don't compensate."<sup>76</sup> Of course, *Gente* was censored and Almendros had to finish the film secretly.

---

<sup>74</sup> Slavoj Žižek, "Radical Evil as a Freudian Category," Lacan.com.

<sup>75</sup> Almendros, *A Man with a Camera*, 36

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

What the revolution did was to finish with the trance, the party, and the beach, with this life where the beach becomes the urban space par excellence. *Gente* is a register anterior to the catastrophe that will come, even it being not intentional. The beach that will become a camp, as in the descriptions of a refugee from the Spanish Civil War, a beach that was fenced by the French in Argelès-sur-Mer—a beach “is an inhuman camp: sand, sun and sea, with no shelter, with no food, with no water.”<sup>77</sup> The photographer is like a historian of immediate events. Or, as it was posited by Benjamin, the photographer is like a detective that registers the scenes of a crime, for “every square inch of our cities [is] the scene of a crime,” “every passer-by [is] a culprit.”<sup>78</sup> In Cuba, as it occurred posteriorly, the beach became the scene of a crime, already dominated by police, isolated. Parts of the coast became forbidden places for the natives, a case that was intensified by the Special Period, when only tourists could enjoy certain places, certain beaches.<sup>79</sup> More than a detective, the photographer will become a voyeur. In *Gente*, he already starts to register the forbidden, unexpected, unthought, hidden movements. It is his future: later, he will have to register the tourists themselves from a distance, concealed, undercover as a foreigner. He will have to go from detective to criminal on the same beach, now forbidden to him. Nothing that the photographer cannot take care of. When talking about the difference between directing and photographing, Almendros compared it to the relation between brain and eye: the eye of the voyeur is the eye of the photographer: “[Éric] Rohmer is more cerebral, is more intellectual, and perhaps I am more physical . . . I have the visual part, which is a physical part, he is concerned more with content . . . the

---

<sup>77</sup> Trisha Ziff, *The Mexican Suitcase* (Mexico: 2011), film.

<sup>78</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Little History of Photography,” in *Selected Writings: 1931-1934*, vol 2, part 2 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 527.

<sup>79</sup> See: Ponte, *La fiesta vigilada*.

art of image is an art of the tangible, of what is seen. One has to be a little voyeur, to love the objects, the things, the people, the faces.”<sup>80</sup>

In *Gente*, the beach as the new city is full of homoeroticism: young men dance for other men, who jump on top of sailboats, and exhibit their slim bodies. The eye of the camera looks for these moments of seduction among men. The beach allows for a certain degree of promiscuity for men. With the end of the beach as a city, this homoeroticism was taken to the underground. After *Gente en la playa*, *Ritmo de Cuba*, *Escuelas rurales*, all from the beginning of the sixties, Almendros signed a feature film as director, in a partnership with Orlando Jiménez Leal, twenty years after those first documentaries in Cuba. The film is precisely *Mauvaise conduite* (1984): where homosexuality, intrinsic and apparently free in *Gente*, is revisited. The first scene is significant: the multitude walks in support of Castro, they scream for supporting exile of others: “let them leave... let them leave.” Here we have, once more, the intellectual, now openly the documentarist, the filmmaker, attacking the masses. José Ortega y Gasset defined the mass-man as the individual that is unable to stand out from the others, of having an “I” that is inexorable, and that precisely this incapacity makes them feel fulfilled, equal to the others. The mass-men see the State as feeding parents, who should provide them all means to live: as the anonymous beings that they are, the mass-men believe that the State is part of themselves and that it exists at their disposition.<sup>81</sup> Departing from Žižek’s idea of linking the figure of Castro with the psychoanalytical concept of castration, one could say that Cuban society, from the revolution to the Special Period, was an entity centered around two

---

<sup>80</sup> Nestor Almendros, interview by Joaquin Soler Serrano.

<sup>81</sup> José Ortega y Gasset, “La rebelión de las masas,” in *Obras Completas*, vol. 4 (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1966), 225.

pillars: of the mother-provider, the extinct Soviet Union, which should supply the basic needs, and the father-castrator, seen in the figure of the great leader.<sup>82</sup> It is possible that this total takeover, by the State, of the guarantees of the very elementary means of survival, even if in Cuba this takeover became more and more rhetorical with the passage of time, is equivalent to the paternalist functions of European states, which are commented on by Ortega y Gasset. However, as Debord defined well, the society of the spectacle functions in different forms: the first one, in the societies belonging to high-capitalism and, the second, in the societies of Stalinist and fascist tendencies, where the State has the monopoly of production: a differentiation that Debord named the diffuse spectacle, linked to the large media conglomerate, and the concentrated spectacle, which is dominated by the bureaucratic class by means of the use of violence and the cult of the leader, as is the case in Cuba.

The concentrated spectacle is primarily associated with bureaucratic capitalism, though it may also be imported as a technique for reinforcing state power in more backward mixed economies or even adopted by advanced capitalism during certain moments of crisis. Bureaucratic property is itself concentrated, in that the individual bureaucrat takes part in the ownership of the entire economy only through his membership in the community of bureaucrats. And since commodity production is less developed under bureaucratic capitalism, it too takes on a concentrated form: the commodity the bureaucracy appropriates is the total social labor, and what it sells back to the society is that society's wholesale survival. The dictatorship of the bureaucratic economy cannot leave the exploited masses any significant margin of choice because it has had to make all the choices itself, and any choice made independently of it, whether regarding food or music or anything else, thus amounts to a declaration of war against it. This dictatorship must be enforced by permanent violence. Its spectacle imposes an image of the good which subsumes everything that officially exists, an image which is

---

<sup>82</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!: Five Essays on 11 September and Related Dates*, London: Verso, 2002, 8.

usually concentrated in a single individual, the guarantor of the system's totalitarian cohesion. Everyone must magically identify with this absolute star or disappear. This master of everyone else's nonconsumption is the heroic image that disguises the absolute exploitation entailed by the system of primitive accumulation accelerated by terror. If the entire Chinese population has to study Mao to the point of identifying with Mao, this is because there is nothing else they can be. The concentrated spectacle implies a police state.<sup>83</sup>

In advanced capitalist societies, the mass-man is identified with the spoiled child (that is, they should have all of their needs fulfilled and do not know limits for their desire) and at the same time they should annihilate any singularity (namely, to behave like everybody else). But in bureaucratic capitalism, identification should be with the great leader. Instead of simply behaving like everyone else, in bureaucratic capitalism, they should act in accordance with the teachings of the leader. So in which case would the ideal type consist of an undifferentiated person that the Cuban society of the spectacle was looking for? This mass-man would be the figure of the guerrilla. In the discourse made in the commemorations of Che Guevara's death, on October 18, 1967, Fidel was heard saying: "if we want to express how we inspire our revolutionary combatants, our militants, our men, to be, we should say with no doubts whatsoever: They must be like Che! If we want to express how we want the men of the future generations to be, we should say: They must be like Che!"<sup>84</sup> The new Cuban men would repeat the model of the guerrilla, the mass-man should do so. In comparison, the typical mass-man of the European capitalism, according to Ortega y Gasset, is seen in the figure of the

---

<sup>83</sup> Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, 31-2.

<sup>84</sup> Fidel Castro, "Discurso en memoria del comandante Ernesto Che Guevara," Speech at Plaza de la Revolución, La Habana, October 18, 1967.

technician.<sup>85</sup> Nevertheless, if they are technicians or guerrillas, the mass-man can also be compared to the figure of the idiot. Again, the idiocy of the people is brought to the debate, but the way I use it here is not in the same tone of desperate denunciation that one sees in *Memorias* or *Terra em Transe*, it is a kind of personal quality of some people in the society of the spectacle.

The word idiot, beyond the most common meaning of someone who is lacking mental faculties, with its ethnological root in Greek, also denotes one who does not participate in the public sphere, namely, one who is a “private person,” being *idios* is literally “one’s own.”<sup>86</sup> Precisely by inverting this position of the idiot, by making the public space a propitious habitat for them, in which they can participate without the need of developing a public discourse and without running risks—because the public discourse is already determined by propaganda—the spectacle empties the outside spaces. A symptom of modernity that is described by Nelson Rodrigues: “a long time ago, everyone was an idiot and they knew it. The world had millions of idiots, all of them very humble. Very smartly, they considered themselves idiots. But nowadays, almost all people consider themselves competent. The idiots want to be professors, ministers, presidents. Our world is dominated by idiots.”<sup>87</sup> What is interesting here is to see how stupidity can also work as a driving force of society. Avital Ronell, whose work is dedicated to understanding the question of idiocy, brings a sentence by Marx: “for Marx there were main world powers that . . . propelled history: one was economy as you know, the other violence, and the third was stupidity.” Thus, as Ronell says, it is not a question of starting

---

<sup>85</sup> Ortega y Gasset, “La rebelión de las masas,” 216.

<sup>86</sup> *OED*.

<sup>87</sup> Rodrigues, Nelson. “As últimas palavras de Nelson Rodrigues.”



a “war on stupidity,” but of understanding what is its function regarding “history” and “knowledge.”<sup>88</sup> The Cuban regime presupposes stupidity as an essential factor of its existence: and so we have the relations between the masses and the vanguard, the attacks on intellectuals, censorship. And it is necessary to recognize this role of stupidity, which I believe lies in the figure of the guerrilla.

The guerrilla stands for, among their characteristics, the position of self-sacrifice and ascetic posture. Che Guevara writes to Carlos Quijano: “The man of the future could be glimpsed in the attitude of our fighters. . . . During the October Crisis and at the time of hurricane Flora, we witnessed deeds of exceptional valor and self-sacrifice carried out by an entire people. . . . To build communism, a new man must be created simultaneously with the material base.”<sup>89</sup> In his book, *La guerra de guerrillas*, we can read: “to the austerity needed in virtue of the tough conditions of war, another one should be added, one born from a rigorous self-control, which must not allow any excess, not only a single mistake, in the occasion in which the circumstances could allow. The guerrilla must be an ascetic man.”<sup>90</sup> This asceticism, proposed by Guevara, can be seen as an exacerbation of the masculine role. In his book, what is differentiated as exceptional, although important, is the female role in guerrilla welfare. The first is taken as a standard. The guerrilla should appear as a kind of dominant male towards the community. They face the most adverse conditions (impossibility of hygiene, hunger, thirstiness, bad weather) in order to guide the masses as its vanguard. Their last objective is to transform the entire masses in

---

<sup>88</sup> Avital Ronell, *Stupidity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 5.

<sup>89</sup> Ernesto Che Guevara, *Man and Socialism in Cuba*. [www.marxists.org/archive/guevara/1965/03/man-socialism-alt.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/guevara/1965/03/man-socialism-alt.htm)

<sup>90</sup> Ernesto Che Guevara, “La Guerra de gerrillas,” in *Che* (La Habana: 1969), 325.

guerrillas, ending the very differentiation between vanguard and mass. The ultimate end of communist society, the society of the new man, is that all people reflect the quality of the leaders, or better, that the leaders behave as the dominant male while the other individuals do as beta males.<sup>91</sup> The men who do not behave as that beta macho cannot be identified with the great leader, suffering for their “detour” the consequences of the police state and terror. Che Guevara says about a total “education” that should be undertaken by the masses, convoking society to be a “huge school.” The regime has a preoccupation with morality. A moral education is one of its aims. Moral means literally a “good conduct” (specifically of the body). For Nietzsche, the dualist vision of body and soul gives less importance to the body in the name of “moral values,” as well resumed by Verônica Azeredo:

The ascetic ideas present themselves . . . as a metaphysical support of religion, morality, philosophy and science. In the search for plenitude in the moral life, the transcendent world became a reference for all values beyond this life, and, in the world we live in, such things as life, the body, and pathos, are negated. It is this disdain for the body and the world that Nietzsche translated as the ascetic ideal that impregnates even the aspirations for objectivity pertaining to “men of knowledge.”<sup>92</sup>

The homosexual is seen by the regime as someone who gives an importance to the body that negates this asceticism posited toward the transcendency of a communist society, where the full realization will be reached only by future generations.<sup>93</sup> They are

---

<sup>91</sup> Reinaldo Arenas, *Necesidad de libertad* (Mexico, D.F.: Kosmos, 1986) 218, cited in Servando Gonzalez, “Dulces guerreros cubanos, obra cumbre de la literatura gay castrista,” Published at [www.intelinet.org](http://www.intelinet.org), March 29, 2011.

<sup>92</sup> Verônica Pacheco de Oliveira Azeredo, “O corpo em Nietzsche a partir de uma leitura da ‘genealogia da moral’” (master’s thesis, Universidade Federal de Ouro Preto, 2008), 130-1.

<sup>93</sup> For a critique of communism as the realization of mass utopia only for further generations, see: Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 260.

inhabiting the place where they give their body to pleasure with no finality. In the first years of the Bolshevik Revolution, the Russian cosmists believed that the ultimate end of the revolution was to reach eternal life and the resurrection of people who sacrificed themselves for its accomplishment.<sup>94</sup> As Susan Buck-Morss demonstrated, there was a search for immortality in the idea of revolution: “the communist body does not decay,” Stalin said, delineating a similar promise.<sup>95</sup> In the Cuban version, the will to sacrifice and the will to negation of life by moral are the face of the guerrilla. To those who refused to become the mass-man of communism (the guerrilla), homosexuality could be, as claimed by Reinaldo Arenas, a form of resistance against the regime.<sup>96</sup>

In the film *Mauvaise conduite*, we see how Almendros is in this field claimed by Arenas: homoeroticism as political resistance. After the initial march of the masses, the scene is followed by an interview with Cuban ballet dancers who had deserted to France, asking for political asylum, they became known as the “Group of 10”: Cuba is not a dream, the art is politically compromised—they say. A tendency that was being repeated in other parts of the concentrated spectacle, as we can see in the well-known cases of Rudolf Nureyev and Mikhail Baryshnikov. Dialectical image (Walter Benjamin): the film is cut to an image of the guerrillas walking up on the hills. Fidel Castro, Camilo Cienfuegos, Che Guevara, guerrillas and ballet dancers are opposed on the screen: on one side, the hardship of the tropical jungle is stamped on the faces, on the other, the delicacy of dance movements. To the one who does not want to be merely a mass-man, a

---

<sup>94</sup> See: Boris Groys, *Ilya Kabakov: The Man Who Flew into Space from His Apartment* (London: Afterall, 2006).

<sup>95</sup> Joseph Stalin, cited in Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge: MIT, 2002), 71.

<sup>96</sup> See: Reinaldo Arenas, *Antes que anochezca: autobiografía* (Barcelona: Tusquets, 1992).

bureaucrat in the film gives us their destiny. They must be “expurgated [*depurados*],” which means in practical terms to be humiliated, insulted of all imaginable forms, by the masses. The bureaucrat says: “since the year ’65 . . . a great amount of moral expurgations were taking place . . . the humiliations during those expurgation assemblies consisted of forcing all people who were there to say all the unimaginable insults to the person who was being expurgated. It was something that nobody could escape from.” Any different posture, any different word that could be deemed of suspicion, any less orthodox clothes or haircuts, any gesture that could not fit into the guerrilla mass-man standard, were reasons to put an individual under this type of public humiliation. Still according to the dissident bureaucrat that is shown in the film, many people left universities and others even committed suicide led by the impossibility of standing an expurgation as homosexuals.

Raoul Vaneigem, companion of Debord in the situationist creations, in his essay about humiliation, calls our attention to the following point: “the feeling of humiliation is simply the feeling of being an object.”<sup>97</sup> The expurgated, the one who is unable to become the image of the leader, is objectified and serves as a cathartic element. They actually are a sustaining pillar of the regime. At the same time that their destruction provokes the fear of humiliation, they provide a space for others to reaffirm the sense of equality and union. It is the same effect described as “Two Minutes of Hate” in the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by George Orwell, when the members of the party, before going to work, get together to insult the image of Emmanuel Goldstein, the greatest ideological

---

<sup>97</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (Oakland: PM Press, 2012), 19.

enemy of the regime. Through Winston, the main character of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the hate session is described. After it begins, an uncontrollable feeling takes over the mind of the participants, even of those ones who do not want to take part in the cathartic discharge. This feeling is said to be even more “horrible” than the obligation of joining the act:

A hideous ecstasy of fear and vindictiveness, a desire to kill, to torture . . . seemed to flow through the whole group of people like an electric current, turning one even against one’s will into a grimacing, screaming lunatic. And yet the rage that one felt was an abstract, undirected emotion which could be switched from one object to another like the flame of a blowlamp.”<sup>98</sup>

The bureaucrat of *Mauvaise conduite* confirms: “it is what maintains people entertained.”

The big step forward in the society of the concentrated spectacle, as was the case with Cuba in the 60s and until the fall of the Socialist Block, is that the domination of the mass-man is taken to its limits. It is a crime not to be a mass-man and there is no way to maintain a position of outsider without the possibility of risking life. In Cuba, the underground—the cultural creation that wants and needs to put itself as an inventive space of rupture on the margin of what the mass-man aspires to—cannot be tolerated. A complete fidelity is required, nothing can scape from the concentrated power of the regime under the risk of being against the regime itself, which aspires to be total. This bureaucratic regime created then a space to where those “deviants,” those inhabitants of the concentrated spectacle, should be interned. The spaces that were concentration camps

---

<sup>98</sup> Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 16.

called UMAP (Military Units of Help to Production), created in the 60s, spaces where homosexuals were apprehended for “rehabilitation.” Electrified fences, some survivors say, were surrounding them, with “a big sign [fixed on the entrance], which said ‘work will make you free’—a sentence by Lenin. This was what reminded me of that sentence that Salvatore Quasimodo says was on the entrance of Auschwitz: ‘work will make you free.’” The UMAP as a concentration camp is a space that is outside society, that takes away those who cannot fit in and puts them under the total desire of violence of those who maintain the institution. At the same time, UMAP is inside society, for it must destruct or, at the best possible outcome, reeducate the outsider. *Mauvaise conduite* is a film about the camp. A film that can be read as a version of the novel *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, posteriorly transformed into a film by Caspar Wrede (1970), which tells us about life in the Gulag, the Soviet version of the concentration camp. This comparison, between the UMAP and the Gulag is not only metaphorical, as it is well demonstrated by Enrique Rios in his book *La UMAP: el gulag castrista*:

In the first years of 1965, there was the arrival of the first group of Soviet specialists responsible for the instruction of the Cubans in the forms of controlling the growing wave of prostitution and homosexuality. This group was composed of twelve assistants headed by Colonel Ivan Micharov and they stayed three years in Cuba. . . . One of the main measures was to select, according to the information received, the people who should be sent to the recently constructed Military Units of Production Assistance (UMAP). Seventy-two people would die due to the abuses and to forced labor to which they were submitted. Five hundred and seven had to be hospitalised in order to receive psychiatric treatment. All those numbers correspond to the 38,641 condemned to the UMAP.<sup>99</sup>

---

<sup>99</sup> Enrique Ros, *La Umap: El Gulag Castrista* (Miami: Universal, 2004), 33.

The camp is the place where the person can be infinitely destroyed, where “the human being . . . can survive the human being.”<sup>100</sup> The camp is the place of naked life.<sup>101</sup> The exposition to naked life is an exposition of the body to the environment, to nature in its non-dominated violence. In the camp, any time of protection is negated to the inmates. In the Gulag, snow and the almost polar cold weather had a role to play for the interns in their defining characteristics, which made their *persona*: dignity, ethics, respect, up to the point where they can be transformed into the living-dead. Solzhenitsyn describes a scene in which the intern of the Gulag, sick and with fever, seeks help in the nursing office only to hear, from the assistant, that if the intern proceeds with the visit and the physician finds that he is in condition to work outside, the intern will be sent to the cells: “how can you expect a man who’s warm to understand a man who’s cold? The cold stung. A murky fog wrapped itself around Shukhov and made him cough painfully. The temperature out there was -17°; Shukhov’s temperature was +99°. The fight was on.”<sup>102</sup> The most extreme situation was not to have to work during the day, but to be sent to the cells during the night:

Brick walls, cement floor, no windows, a stove they lit only to melt the ice on the walls and make pools on the floor. You slept on bare boards, and if you’d any teeth left to eat with after all the chattering they’d be doing, they gave you nine ounces of bread day after day and hot stew only on the third, sixth, and ninth. Ten days. Ten days “hard” in the cells—If you sat them out to the end, your health would be ruined for the rest of your life. T.B. and nothing but hospital for you till you kicked the bucket. As for

---

<sup>100</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz* (New York: Zone Books, 1999), 134.

<sup>101</sup> See: Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

<sup>102</sup> Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (New York: Dutton & Co. Inc., 1963), 22.

those who got fifteen days “hard” and sat them out—they went straight into a hole in the cold earth.<sup>103</sup>

The UMAP is the tropical Gulag, where, instead of the destruction of the human being to be undertaken by the extremity of the winter, the regime adopted the typical violence of the tropics: the heat, the insects. The poet José Mario, in a posterior interview to Alemendo’s documentary, in which the first was a central point, bears witness:

I was conscripted for military service, and when I was at the place where I was notified to be, I realized that I was actually recruited to go to UMAP, the place where the government sent the dissidents, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, everyone who refused to conform. It was like concentration camps. There were thousands of people. They tried to fuck me up the most they could. The military treated the recruited like beasts. They buried the Jehovah’s Witnesses with sand up to the neck for the whole night in order to punish them, in order to allow the mosquitos to finish with them. They put me above a car and made me endure the mosquitos. They forced us to applaud all of that, in the best fascist tradition.<sup>104</sup>

Beyond snow and heat, the Soviet Gulag and the Cuban UMAP use another method to destroy their inmates: hunger. Quotes of production were installed, most of the time it was impossible to fulfill them, and they defined the amount of food that every intern would receive. Anne Applebaum, in her book about the Gulag, transcribes the testimony of an administrator: “those who worked well lived extremely well, she said, much better than the general public: they could even purchase condensed milk . . . which ordinary people could not. ‘It was only those who refused to work, they lived badly.’”<sup>105</sup> To work hard, as the author later shows, was maybe only a faster and more painful way

---

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 164-5.

<sup>104</sup> José Mario, interview by Reinaldo García Ramos, *La Habana Elegante*, no. 19-20, 2002.

<sup>105</sup> Anne Applebaum, *Gulag: A History* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 350.



to die: “hard work sometimes backfired. Lev Razgon described peasants who killed themselves trying to overfulfill the norm, earning themselves a ‘big ration,’ 1.5 kilos of bread.<sup>106</sup> For Hannah Arendt, the camp is where the impossible can happen.<sup>107</sup> In *Mauvaise conduite*, the phenomenon is repeated in the tropics: “the real idea was for us to produce like slaves . . . then, they impose on us quotas of production, that is, you had to perform at a certain level, and if you did not reach that level, they would retaliate.” The horror in camp is so extreme that for those who are outside, for those who could not see it with their own eyes, it is difficult to believe in the testimonies of the survivors. Primo Levi, intern of Nazi concentration camp, had as one of his deepest anguishes, the fact that even in the very improbable case of him surviving the horrors of the camp, he was sure that nobody would believe him: what he has saw was too implausible, was of a too extreme brutality and evil.<sup>108</sup> It is not by chance that *Mauvaise conduite* starts the description of the UMAP in this way: “José Mario, editor of the *EL puente*, a small publication in Havana, was interned in one of this camps. After he went into exile in Madrid in 1969, José Mario was the first one to write about them. It was probably too soon. As it previously happened with Stalin’s concentration camps, few people believed in what he described.”

The documentary continues with the testimonies. *Mauvaise conduite* is also a discussion about what the intellectual represents in the context of revolution, about how intellectuals were identified, labelled and eliminated. “There was a soldier . . . who said to me that I belonged to the Association of Writers and Artists (UNEAC), and that all

---

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 352.

<sup>107</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1976), 437.

<sup>108</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 157.

artists, intellectuals, and writers were a bunch of fagots.” The identification of the intellectual as being necessarily and admittedly homosexual, and both, the homosexual and the intellectual, being a danger to the regime, bring us back to the attempt of imposing the guerrilla as the mass-man in the Cuban revolution. Slavoj Žižek, in a text criticizing the excessive focus on the homosexual relationship between the two cowboys in the film *Brokeback Mountain*, talks about the fact that the Western genre itself has a “layer of homosexuality” in which its films are centered. This layer is also seen inside military organizations. Although those institutions are based on the figure of the macho, they possess an intrinsic homoeroticism. Actually, what sustains the very military environment and what maintains its cohesion is precisely its homosexual relationships accompanied by the violent suppression of such relations, which Žižek calls “frustrated homosexuality.”

Why does the universe of the military oppose so strongly the public acceptance of gays in its ranks? There is only one possible answer: it is not because homosexuality represents a menace to the libidinal economy, supposedly “phallic and patriarchal,” of the military community, but, on the contrary, because the libidinal economy of the military community depends on a frustrated homosexuality, not recognized as a key component of the masculine bounds that are formed among the soldiers . . . This weak coexistence between violent homophobia and “clandestine” frustrated homophobia is a witness to the fact that the discourse about the military community can only work when it censors its own libidinal foundation.<sup>109</sup>

In *Mauvaise conduite*, what one sees is how this tension between “homophobic violence” and “frustrated violence” goes beyond the spheres of the military and tends to encompass an entire society through the fact that the mass-men must equal the figure of

---

<sup>109</sup> Slavoj Žižek, “Por que ‘Brokeback Mountain’ perdeu?” *Folha de São Paulo*, Mais!, March 12, 2006.

the guerrilla. In the armed forces, those identified as homosexuals are instantaneously excluded from the environment through violence, at the same time in which the very soldiers have their “identity” created through “homosexual allusions” between them: homoerotic games, the persecution of those who let their homosexuality appear too clearly.<sup>110</sup> They, who are labelled as the scorn, who are thrown into the “reeducation” camps and put on the outside of social life, are those who can clearly see and expose the homoerotic condition of the guerrilla: a witness, in the documentary of Almendros, tells us that Castro had a posture of “marquise” when visiting the camps. Reinaldo Arenas, in *El color del verano*, traces a character “Fifo” (Castro’s nom de guerre) who throws himself in numerous orgies without ever being able to get satisfaction either in male roles or in female ones. He, for this reason, nourishes a feeling of destruction for those who bear any identity. “By being a non-defined human being, he only could find peace in the destruction of every vital instinct and, consequently authentic. Thus, while the ‘culipandeo’ went on, Fifo almost screamed of pity and solitude. The only thing he possessed was power. But power could not possess him. Power was solitude and death.”<sup>111</sup> Ramón Alejandro, coming from his potent visual imagination (of which we will talk later) to a literary style full of the same delirious content, describes a dream he once had, where “Fifo” and the ruling class of the regime get together at a big Halloween party, inundated with power and exhibitions of transvestism, where these two aspects of the revolution, which are very interrelated, communicated by means of an exhibitionism with extremely pedagogical consequences:

---

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Reinaldo Arenas, *El Color Del Verano* (Miami: Universal, 1991), 425-426.

Taken by assault, I woke up from a dream: I was in Havana and Edmundo García gave me an invitation to a party that was going on in the Palace of the Revolution. The State Council had decided to celebrate Halloween in the intensive care room, where they had interned the Chief of State for weeks. They dressed him as a zombie and some probes were hanging from him, adhesive plasters, ventilation tubes, and all types of paramedical adornments, which lifted him to the most elegance of his indisposed composure . . . Raúl was dressed as Turandot de Puccini with an enormous needle going through his gigantic bun in his costume of Chinese queen. Mariela was dressed as Madame Butterfly. Both showed off riding on a dragon that the People's Republic of China had jointly lent to that occasion. Meanwhile, among loud applauses, a door is opened and Hugo Chávez and Evo Morales appear flying, dressed as witches, and riding brooms, which were manipulated by tackles and cables sustained by wheel tracks installed on the low ceiling . . . and a choir of transgenders with their cut genitals on their heads danced a frenetic French cancan.<sup>112</sup>

The regime stocks inside itself the desire for cross-dressing, for exaggeration, for excess (the clear bases of a revolution in action). Revolution is an act of abundance of violence. In Alejandro's dream, we see all the great leaders changing from guerrillas to *drag queens* in the subverted space of the carnival, where the accomplishment of suppressed phantasies is possible. But austerity is what must be imposed on everyday life, because, after the fall of the defeated, it is a way to control those desires of expansion: a plane of tensions between the search for extreme rigidity to the solidification of the new order and the possibility that the propagation of ruptures continues to happen in an uncontrollable manner. The drag queen is in reality the alert to the fact that other revolutions can still happen, or at least that society has not yet eliminated every space of abundance of desires: then, the drag queen must be repressed.

The guerrilla and the drag queen are two sides of the same coin: one is the figure of

---

<sup>112</sup> Ramón Alejandro, "Fiesta de Halloween con Fifo moribundo," *Café Fuerte*, Reflexiones de la Caimana, Oct 28, 2012.

austerity with abundance of violence, while the other is the pacificity under the mask of exuberance. In Cuba, “extravagant behavior” ended up being considered a crime. Vagabondage, or extravagancy (remembering that “extra” means “out” and “vagrant” means “wander”),<sup>113</sup> negates a society based on the appropriation of work by the State. Arriving at the idea of Ponte, the regime that had praised itself for being responsible for the elimination of racism, was trying to create a society of slaves.<sup>114</sup> Heberto Padilla, in a testimony to Almendros, tells:

The homosexuals in Cuba are the most spectacular. So, for example, people who were talking in the streets and had extravagant attitudes were put immediately in the UMAP. What was “extravagant attitudes”? The gestures. He wanted to erase appearances because he wanted a serious homosexual. In Cuba, there are many political leaders who are serious homosexuals. That is to say, they speak with a strong voice and they hide the truth with that. . . . In a country like Cuba, which is a place of machismo par excellence . . . it was the way they used to forgive the existence of many homosexuals that occupy positions of political leadership in the country, and, above all, in the police, where homosexuality with serious gestures exists.

Free homosexuality (especially in its practice of anal sex), as an act of pure excess, if we trace a parallel from the studies of Georges Bataille, it is a competition to war and must be consequently placed in a function of war by means of its passage to the underground.<sup>115</sup> The “frustrated homosexuality” will come back to the surface as a destructive force. It is where part of violence, part of the economy of war is being fed. *Mauvaise conduite* is also a documentary about war, or better yet, about a face of this side of the permanent war created by the regime. Permanent war is the way by which an

---

<sup>113</sup> *OED*.

<sup>114</sup> See: Ponte, *La fiesta vigilada*.

<sup>115</sup> About the relation between anal sex and excess, see: Georges Bataille, *A parte maldia*: precedida de “A noção de despesa” (Rio de Janeiro: Imago, 1975).

escape valve to suppress spaces (among them homosexuality) is created. If cinema should be a weapon in favor of the Cuban revolution, as the entire culture should do, Almendros' film is ironically an answer to the documentary as the revolutionary genre par excellence: it is the weapon of the regime used against itself. *Mauvaise conduite* shows how a state of exception, where life was put under the discernment of the sovereign, bureaucratic and military elites, was installed in Cuba. Anyone who was deemed dangerous, who had improper manners, should be treated, healed or eliminated.

Not only homosexuals were confined in these concentration camps, but all the “social scourge”: “the lumpen,” “prostitutes,” “people who did not sympathize with the regime,” everyone who could be classified as holders of an “improper conduct.” But why did the regime need a proper conduct? The one who conducts is the one who guides, leads, imposes a behavior. In a society where the bureaucratic elite must centralize all the means of production, the conduct of these means is consequently established by the elite. In order to make this domain coherent, which, in the end, possesses, as its only function, the incoherent task of eternally perpetuating the highest castes, history needs special attention. As well posited by Orwell, who controls the present controls the past, and who controls the past controls the future.<sup>116</sup> Improper is simply what “is not true,” what is not part of history and, thus, it must not exist. The big danger provoked by these people was to refuse to be part of the official history to create another dimension of history that could function in parallel, generating other possibilities of life that do not put the work as its central pillar. The intellectual or the hippie, the prostitutes or the lumpen, all of them

---

<sup>116</sup> See: Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

have in common the fact that they have unproductive functions that do not fit in (and even negate) the idea of a society based on production.

Work will make you a mass-man, the sign at the entrance doors of UMAP should say. In such a regime, the mass-man is the productive being that feeds the war machine, which is, in turn, a machine of constant destruction, impeding that the material gains elevate the economic level of the population to a stage in which the people would start to find work as unnecessary and would give themselves to leisure. Thus, the people who for some reason manage to stay inside a space of leisure, as can be the case of artists and intellectuals, should do it according to the conduct established by the revolutionary elites. That is, even if they had free time, intellectuals should not have the freedom of independent thinking, of exposing thoughts that do not fit into the proposal of the historical line intended by the party. It is not by chance that the Cuban revolution, which comes to power on January 1, 1959, ends up not managing to keep an openness to the Cuban tradition of independent journals, many of them publishing important intellectuals from Cuba and abroad, as in the case of Martin Heidegger and María Zambrano. These journals circulated in the decades anterior to the new regime (*Revista Cubana de Filosofía*, *Lyceum*, *Orígenes*, among others) and they did not have successors. The few attempts to establish channels of thinking, that were not totally controlled by the regime, were progressively suppressed: see the clear example of *Lunes de Revolución*, literally a supplement directed by Cabrerar Infante and Carlos Franqui. The same happened with cinema, centralizing the whole production and distribution process in only one institution, the ICAIC.

The ICAIC has a dubious role: to the documentary as revolutionary, vanguardist cinema, it has aggregated the documentary as the maker of history. The newsreels have the function of corroborating the desired, linear, coherent narrative, the opposite of a fragmented editing with no pretension of unity. About the ICAIC, which “according to Almendros give the official story of facts,” Reinaldo Arenas define them as one of the seven wonders of Cuban socialism: “it is the only newsreel in the world during which we can close the eyes, dream, sleep, and, when we wake up, we can resolve it with an applause, certain that we had seen everything, even though we did not see anything of the newsreel.”<sup>117</sup> Interestingly, the newsreel has as part of its own tradition totalitarian propaganda: especially during the period of Nazi Germany. Joseph Goebbels, for example, had a great interest in newsreels: “[he] was specially attached to the motion Picture. At least three evenings a week he previewed a feature film or newsreel not only to seek relaxation and the company of film people but also to offer what he considered to be expert critiques.”<sup>118</sup> And Lenin about the cinema has to say: “Of all the arts for us the cinema is the most important.”<sup>119</sup>

As Richard Taylor explains, the great appeal of cinema as a propaganda medium to the revolution is that cinema is a form of visual art that can be exhibited to several types of audiences simultaneously, being able to take an educative character. Moreover, cinema is a purely technological, artistic means. It can be connected to the idea of

---

<sup>117</sup> Arenas, *El Color Del Verano*, 246.

<sup>118</sup> Leonard W. Doob, “Goebbels’ Principles of Propaganda,” *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (1950): 427.

<sup>119</sup> Lenin, cited in Richard Taylor, *The Politics of the Soviet Cinema, 1917-1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008): 29.



progress, something very important to the revolution.<sup>120</sup> Bringing Taylor's comments to my field of analyses, cinema is a perfect tool for a society in which the ruling class considers the mass as idiots (redundant affirmation, because the simple fact of calling it a "mass" presupposes an idiotic quality). It is not by chance that Arenas, the intellectual, falls asleep during ICAIC's newsreels: mass propaganda should have as its objective to be understandable by the majority, and, consequently, it has to be aimed at what is considered the lowest levels of the intellectual pyramid. Cinema, because it does not need written language, is essentially a form of art and of education (depending on the perspective) that can traverse several layers. As Taylor claims, cinema is, for instance, a form of art even more contractible than theater.<sup>121</sup> A form of art that can be technically reproducible—if we were going to use a term by Walter Benjamin—has the easiness to spread fast and to exist with simultaneity. At the same time, it is a facilitator for the process of expurgation and censorship, which are extremely necessary for propaganda.

This censorship machine needed for propaganda has two levels: the first one is situated in the public field, as in the choice of what should be exhibited, known and seen as a political discourse, the second one develops itself in the private field. Actually, in the totalitarian state there should be no differentiation between the two. In *Mauvaise conduite*, we see the installation of a society of widespread espionage: the neighbors watch each other, denouncing the suspects by means of the *Committees for the Defense of the Revolution*. Gossip gains the post of indispensable social norm. The big city is turned into a small village of the countryside, where each event (the most minimum one) of the

---

<sup>120</sup> Taylor, *The Politics of the Soviet Cinema*, 26-42.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

lives of others had the potential to become news. A space of constant suspicion is created. The newsreels of ICAIC are the complement to the surveillance of the lives of others: the newsreels delineate the path of history that must be followed, the surveillance makes sure that there is nothing outside it.

This involvement of the masses in the creation of a society where everybody is under surveillance and is being censored can be considered as part of what Hannah Arendt, analyzing the scandalous and at the same time logical argument of Adolf Eichmann that he was only carrying out orders when he participated in the extermination of the Jewish people in Nazi Germany, called it the banality of evil.<sup>122</sup> The concentration camp is only possible when evil becomes part of everyday life. Executions by television, as the ones we saw in Cuba, do not mean that the event is so extraordinary that it deserves to be broadcasted nationally. As Debord explained, when something is part of the society of the spectacle, it means that that thing became a triviality.

Those ones who are excluded inside the territory—as in the case of concentration camps—and who are put in a liminal situation of inclusion and exclusion (of bare life)<sup>123</sup> are followed by others who had to go into exile. Almendros' *Mauvaise conduite*, being a movie about war, is also an account about the refugees that necessarily come after it. Arenas, bearing witness in Almendros' film, tells that after having been released from prison he had all of his belongings confiscated. In his own words, he defines himself as a “homeless.” To not have a house is a supplement of the camp, it is to continue to be in

---

<sup>122</sup> See: Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking Press, 1963).

<sup>123</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 11.

“naked life,” with the body relying on no shelter, under the wish of the weather and of the violence of urban space. The city is the great inhabiter of humanity. At the same time, it is a very rough place for those who have no home. If one is refused a house to live in, there is no other way than leaving the country. The homeless and the refugee are two sides of the same figure, as well as the refugee and the camp intern are two sides of the same coin. Agamben remembers that, in Nazi Germany, the condition for the Jewish people and gypsies to be sent to concentration camps was their denationalization: “it is significant that the camps appear together with new laws on citizenship and the denationalization of citizens – not only the Nuremberg laws on citizenship in the Reich but also the laws on denationalization promulgated by almost all European states, including France, between 1915 and 1933.”<sup>124</sup>

However, the hardship of the condition of “homelessness” can lead to the openness of new spaces of humanity. As Avital Ronell shows, Nietzsche saw this condition with positivity.<sup>125</sup> To live without barriers and roots, to be open, to always start all over and to reinvent, are the qualities that can be present in those ones who abdicated to have a home or were thrown in the situation of not having a land. Hannah Arendt sees a positive aspect in the figure of the refugee: “Refugees expelled from one country to the next represent the avant-garde of their people.”<sup>126</sup> The Cuban regime considered its ruling class as the “vanguard” of the masses, and thought of those who did not fit in their precepts literally as “worms” [*gusanos*]. Ironically, it ended up creating a layer of people,

---

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>125</sup> See: Avital Ronell, “Proving Grounds: On Nietzsche and the Test Drive,” *MLN* 118, No. 3 (2003): 653-69.

<sup>126</sup> Hannah Arendt, “We Refugees,” *The Menorah Journal*, 1943 cited in Giorgio Agamben, “We Refugees,” *Symposium*, No. 49, 02 (1995), republished at [www.egs.edu/faculty/giorgio-agamben](http://www.egs.edu/faculty/giorgio-agamben).

(internal and external) refugees, who developed a great part of the advanced thinking on Cubanhood. Arenas in *Mauvaise conduite*, from where I departed to wander among those subjects, is the paradigmatic case. He went from intern, to homeless, and to refugee: “I am a non-person”—he says. The one who has no home is a refugee inside the city itself. They live in the streets. The photographic collective selvaSP, which wanders the streets of the biggest Brazilian metropolis, and received notoriety with the revolts of 2013 (revolts that many compared to a new ’68), in its manifesto declared: “according to André Breton, one of the fathers of surrealism, streets are the only legitimate field of experience. . . . But we also know, as João do Rio posits, that streets are living beings in constant mutation, a being that thinks, philosophizes and even has religion. . . . It is the stage for the most diverse actors of every-day-life under the light of history, in an atemporal spectacle that speaks by itself.”<sup>127</sup> Because of this independent life, the Cuban regime took the stand to make the street sterile, and to turn the city into ruins. To the internal refugee, it was negated this possibility of dwelling the streets, of positive homelessness: there was no other alternative other than the diaspora.

If *Mauvaise conduite* is a film about the refugees of the total war, Almendros’ next step is a film about the prisoners who are the result of it: *Nadie escuchaba* (1987), co-directed with Jorge Ulla. There, we see the lost being in the middle of a bureaucratic environment. With its Kafkaesque beginning, the desires are lost in the middle of a labyrinth of telephone calls. Kafka writes about the weight of an unreachable (and at the same time omnipresent) judicial power in *The Trial*. K’s torment is not the sentence, a

---

<sup>127</sup> *Manifesto selvaSP*, published at [www.selvasp.com](http://www.selvasp.com).

guilty verdict, but the simple fact of being accused, of being included in the justice machine. For this reason, the requests of Ulla to question the Cuban machine of justice cannot be answered: it is a type of regime that needs secrecy in order to maintain its existence, that needs institutions that create a personal life. Only secrecy can guarantee the feeling of omnipresence. In *The Trial*, one can read: “proceedings are generally kept secret not only from the public but also from the accused. Only as far as that is possible, of course, but it is possible to a very large extent.”<sup>128</sup> Bureaucracy in a totalitarian regime has as its function to make institutions more anthropomorphic as it dehumanizes the individuals subjected to them. Killed “like a dog,” those are the words K. uses to describe his own execution at the end of *The Trial*. The totalitarian bureaucracy has the duty of taking humanity away in order to allow the sentence to be executed on a “non-person.” It is not by chance that when a secretary of the film crew in *Nadie escuchaba* calls an institution and says she wants to question it about human rights in Cuba, the bureaucrat responds that he does not know what she means by that. The regime that proclaimed the creation of the new man proceeded to dehumanize them. To create the new man, first it is necessary to destroy them.

The method of destroying the human being is what is shown in *Nadie escuchaba*. The image of Cuba as a paradise for tourists contrasts with the executions followed by the revolutionary trials. A testimony: “a popular trial took place on the prison patio. The multitude of uniforms was roaring as wild beats. The prosecutor, the judge, and everybody else, were insulting those poor people . . . they hauled them from the tribunal

---

<sup>128</sup> Franz Kafka, *The Trial* (Fairford: Echo Library, 2006), 212.

and took them to a pile of sand bags. There, they were shot.” But how can a judicial system based on secrecy coexist with popular trials? In Kafka, it is heard that the court accuses someone only when they are sure about the guilt of that person, and hardly do they change their opinion during the process. Secrecy is not in the trial but in the accusation: a neighbor who tips the police, a “suspicious” commentary made in front of friends who are in fact informants, a telephone call that is being watched, a weaker cry in a parade celebrating the great leader. Once more: secrecy and omnipresence. The accusation can be at any step of someone’s life. K. hears that a defense petition consists of a lot of work. It is extremely long, as nobody knows for sure the content of the accusation, it is necessary to describe all the relevant events in life in order to make an argument as broad as possible. The popular judgment is a cathartic but calculated process. It is more directed to the multitude than to the accused. It is another form of surveillance, of capture of new people to be accused as one sees how everyone is behaving. Sandra de Oliveira, detouring Bataille, wrote that “the multitude is a monster, no identity of archive can apprehend it, it is a form in formation.”<sup>129</sup> The total regime is the task of domesticating the monster that the multitude is. Let us see the parades (which are the other extremity of popular trials): the extreme discipline applied in such moments of celebration is one of the highest points of the concentrated spectacle, and it shows that the multitude can have a fixed form.

For those who are unable or refuse to constitute the form of the multitude, the prison system (for those who were deemed treatable and consequently not suitable for

---

<sup>129</sup> Sandra de Oliveira, in communication with the author. For her Bataillean thesis on José Saramago, see: Sandra de Oliveira, *Um sobre-ensaio de cegos* (M.A. thesis, Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Florianópolis, 2008).

being shot) is an extreme and last form of reeducation. The regime is a mix of society of control and society of discipline. As Foucault posits, the prison is one of the apparatus of discipline that works in conjunction with schools, hospitals, and factories.<sup>130</sup> Che Guevara's society as a "huge school" (pedagogical experiment) is the despotic accomplishment of the generalized panoptic, but it makes prison the last and hardest stage for those who cannot fit in. They need this type of reeducation because they failed to embody the education received as members of society and, hence, they must be excluded from it. They must be excluded to a space that is outside educated society, a place in which educational methods that would be unthinkable inside it can be unapplied. A witness of *Nadie escuchaba* thought, while suffering cruel tortures, of how a "revolutionary" can reach such a stage of dehumanization. This outside, barbarous space is what allows society to continue to proclaim a path towards progress. It takes away and reeducates the individuals who are considered dangerous to the ultimate end.

Reeducation relates not only to the mind but it also includes the body. And not only hard labor, but also torture is its method. Franqui tells how Castro reacted when the tortures that were taking place under the orders of the Commandant Dermidio Escalona were communicated to him: "it is an efficient method, which is used by the policies of almost every country since the beginning of time. They do not do that because they are 'bad'. It is practical, functional. It is used to annihilate the enemy." And questioned about the "moral dangers" of the use of torture in a revolution, he contested: "Yes, yes. That is

---

<sup>130</sup> See: Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977).

true. . . . This revolution will shoot. It will not torture.”<sup>131</sup> But the revolution was already torturing and that would not change. As Ponte discusses, torture can happen by a mutual agreement between the torturer and the tortured.<sup>132</sup> From Agamben considerations of the relations between interns and officials in Nazi concentration camps, one can say that in torture there is a grey zone where torturer and tortured get mixed.<sup>133</sup> There is game that consists in what to say, what someone wants to hear, what to reveal, what to hide. Torture is the closing of the ascetic posture of the guerrilla. It still intends to have a separation between body and mind, to destroy the body in the name of a new morality. Torture intends to “break” individuals through their deepest fears. Torture, in order to be efficient, needs a degree of intimacy between the parts. It is a perverse and extreme attempt to establish a relation of love. Love is to give what you do not have, Lacan says.<sup>134</sup> Jacques-Alain Miller commenting on love in Lacan, wrote: “love is addressed to the one you think knows your true truth. But love allows you to think this truth will be likeable, agreeable, when in fact it’s rather hard to bear. . . . To really love someone is to believe that by loving them you’ll get to a truth about yourself. We love the one that harbors the response, or a response, to our question: ‘Who am I?’”<sup>135</sup>

It is not by chance that the ultimate end of torture is not the establishment of a factual truth, but confession. It is necessary to confess the truth to the torturer, to give the torturer the lack that constitutes the condition of the tortured. In order to complete the torture, it is necessary that the torturer feels that he is loved. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by

---

<sup>131</sup> Franqui, *Retrato de familia con fidel*, 231-232.

<sup>132</sup> Ponte, *La fiesta vigilada*, 60.

<sup>133</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 25-26.

<sup>134</sup> Derrida, *Given Time: I, 2*.

<sup>135</sup> Jacques-Alain Miller, interview by Hanna Waar, published at Lacan.com.



Orwell, the “Ministry of Love” is responsible for torture. Winston is arrested and taken to the central building of such institution because he felt in love for a forbidden woman, conspired against Big Brother, did not accept to be part of the party’s historical narrative, lived outside of the controlled world by the regime. He suffers physical and psychological tortures, is put in a room with no external communication, and, when he is almost collapsing, he hears from the mouth of his torturer: ““You are improving. . . . It is only emotionally that you have failed to make progress. Tell me, Winston—and remember, no lies. . .—tell me, what are your true feelings towards Big Brother?’ ‘I hate him.’ ‘You hate him. Good. Then the time has come for you to take the last step. You must love Big Brother. It is not enough to obey him: you must love him.’” The last step is to be taken to the Room 101, where there is “the worst thing in the world.” In the Room 101, torture is individually directed to the horror of each one. “‘The worst thing in the world,’ said O’Brien, ‘varies from individual to individual. It may be burial alive, or death by fire, or by drowning, or by impalement, or fifty other deaths. There are cases where it is some quite trivial thing, not even fatal.’”<sup>136</sup> It is not by chance that Winston, after being imprisoned, suffering sessions of torture, being broken, having to be faced with his “real,” namely, the unsayable and unbearable, ends up acquiring the desire of the regime. “He loved Big Brother.” Torturing is to ruin in order to attempt to construct an empty space for total love. Torturing is a love among the ruins, if we were to steal the title of Edward Burne-Jones’ nineteenth-century painting. It needs a destructed subject in order to rise in its absolute form.

---

<sup>136</sup> Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 295-6.

Torture is also a perverse attempt to regain hope: as we said, torture is the transformation of people in ruins. To torture is placed as a synonym for “breaking,” “cracking,” “making mad people.” Ruins can be defined as an open space that can be filled, inhabited. For this reason, the “reeducation” of the regime had to start by emptying, by ruining the people. The ruins of the city are reflexes of the ruins of its population. The “new man” of Che Guevara is a concept that presupposes a certain hope, a certain hope about “man” himself. This is the reason why by destroying them, by turning them into ruins, a space necessary for the implantation of the desired morality is open. The new man begins with the man in ruins. Ruins do not mean death. They are only a realization of death’s power. What is ruined is not death, but it lives by means of a carcass that only resembles its past state. But the resemblance is so light that this anterior state begins to fade and to give room to new configurations of history. The ruined is kept alive, but it is linked only with a delicate line coming from its past life. The ruined lives in torment, always having to situate itself in the present by reconstituting the past. To become ruined is to feel death and somehow to maintain life. There are several instances where this state of human ruins is presented: the *Muselmann* of Nazi concentration camps;<sup>137</sup> the “living dead” of Soviet Gulag, called *dokhodyagi*, well remembered by Anne Applebaum; or even the person who, being in front of a firing squad, receives clemency, as the case with Fyodor Dostoevsky, who underwent this destiny and later turned this event of survival into one of the mystical themes of his literary production.<sup>138</sup> Ruination to survive a firing squad by commutation of the sentence in the last minute, or

---

<sup>137</sup> See: Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*.

<sup>138</sup> Malcolm Jones, *Dostoevsky and the Dynamics of Religious Experience* (London: Anthem Press, 2005), 6.

by being the firing squad itself a play that was repeated as a form of torture in the prisons of the Cuban regime, is a fact that is told in *Nadie escuchaba*.<sup>139</sup>

Another witness puts the situation in the following terms: the only way to keep strength is “to think life was lost.” The one who thinks life is lost does not mind running rinks. Soldiers in the WWII battlefield used to say that the only way to survive a total war is to accept, from the first moment, that one is already dead.<sup>140</sup> For this reason, the ideas of throwing themselves from a boat into the sea that separates Havana from Florida become something banal: ever more people look for this path with no good end. Or one puts an end to biological life, or one goes back to prison, torture sessions, and homelessness. The great teaching of the Cuban exile is that, as one can see in Almendros, but even more clearly in *Balseros* by Carles Bosch and Josep Maria Domènech, there is no good end. The American dream also does not belong to them, or it is not sufficiently broad and lets lots of people inhabit its margins. The position of those who refused to be mass-men is that of a person in a corner. We see that the arrival in the US is most of the time the continuation of catastrophe. Intellectuals who touched bottom, the last stage of ruination: Reinaldo Arenas, Leandro Eduardo Campa, Esteban Luis Cárdenas, Eddy Campa, Nicolás Guillén Landrián... But the reference to the *balseros* is what makes the sea come back to Almendros’ work. Now the sea is neither chaos nor unpredictability of the beach, nor the origin of life, but life’s opposite complement. The sea becomes the space of the “living dead,” of those who already passed to the other side, of those who boarded the journey to the unknown, of those who cannot have their voices heard.

---

<sup>139</sup> Also the “living dead” is described in José Martí’s poetry. See: Jossianna Arroyo, *Writing Secrecy in Caribbean Freemasonry* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

<sup>140</sup> For a view of the soldier psyche during WWII, see: *Pacific* (USA: 2010), TV series.

*Nadie escuchaba*. To listen is an inherent function to the documentary. Among the cinema genres, the traditional documentary is one of the rare instances where most of the time sound is more important than image. It is puzzling that a cinematographer like Almendros signs a future film as director in this space where light, plane, focus, camera, types of negatives and lenses, are almost secondary aspects to the final artwork. Almendros abandons any visually aesthetic pretension in order to focus on the accounts, stories, on words that many times could be part of a book, or even a book CD with merely illustrative images. *Nadie escuchaba* can be understood, in an extreme act of critique, as a film that could exist only in sound form. If we turned off the light of the projector, only leaving the soundtrack playing, we would have an equally powerful movie. We would lose almost nothing. Or better, we would lose the moments of silence in which the viewer concentrates on the face of the witness. There, in the silence, is where the image can speak. As when a former political prisoner, bearing witness of the tortures he suffered, raises his mutilated hands, or yet when another witness recounts to the camera, from his wheelchair, the story of a murder in the labor camps, losing his voice in the end.

Besides being a sound documentary made by a cinematographer, *Nadie escuchaba* gives the impression that it can only exist as a film in the exile environment. Ironically, the documentary as a revolutionary genre, goes into extinction in Cuba as the regime opts for the fictionalization of the present. There is a mismatch, which is clear in the interpolation of interviews, between Castro and the testimonies of political prisoners.

When the regime is confronted, the rhetoric for its defense is more in line with leftist intellectuals, especially intellectuals from the First World, than with the mass-man. The mass-man should only wait for receiving everything from the State. Many times, the rhetoric of the revolution is efficient due to the old longing of intellectuals from developed nations to pacify life with the idea of progress, of finding a point in which technology would be used to the advancement of humanity (tradition that we can appreciate since the first avant-garde movements). The regime that wants to expand the mass-man as the only possible model, and to create the impossibility of divergent thoughts or exile to the interned intellectual, finds great support in the foreigner class of thinkers. Ponte, ironically, traces the exemplar grace with which Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir saw the first years of the Cuban revolution from an acclimatized room in the National Hotel.<sup>141</sup> The writer René Tavernier, in *Nadie escuchaba*, makes one of the most lucid analyses of the relation between leftist intellectuals and the Cuban revolution.

From the First World War on, we've seen, specially among intellectuals, a certain kind of understandable anguish as we face the tragedy of history expressed, in each case, by faith in a mythical "Revolution" certainly harsh, but pure, that will liberate the world from all past errors and create a new society. Thus the belief between the two World Wars in Lenin, Stalin and Hitler, began. And at the end of World War II, there was renewed belief in Stalin. Finally, a little disappointed with this horrible illusion, we abandoned the idea of Moscow as The Land of Salvation. It would come from elsewhere. Mao would bring it. He was so far, that we knew nothing and thought Mao would liberate the world from Peking. Then someone arrived in a small country. Piece of cake for intellectuals. No big power, no cold monster. This time it is Cuba, and Castro who liberates his country from a ridiculous dictatorship, the shameful tyranny of Batista. Besides, Castro is a

---

<sup>141</sup> Ponte, *La fiesta vigilada*, 183.

friend of the intellectuals. So he pretends and we believe him. 'We were wrong before, but this Revolution will work.' Well, the lie has moved from a huge to a small country or from the small to the huge: eternal illusion exported, of course, by K.G.B. agents but nurtured within us by that innocent but guilty need to have our conscience cleaned so easily instead of facing reality with courage, trying to be informed. This is what I've learned from you today.

Almendros with his two sound documentaries, *Mauvaise conduite* and *Nadie escuchaba*, without the necessity to profoundly demonstrate his technique of photographing under natural light, was one of the pacific bombs that fell to ruin the relation between intellectuals and the revolution. In a review dated from the release of the second of those films, Carlos Verdecia begins his text for the *El Nuevo Herald* with this statement: "Just when Fidel Castro thought that the international impact of Armando Valladares's book, *Against All Hope*, was beginning to wane, along comes the film *Nobody Listened*."<sup>142</sup>

The testimonies had the function to ever more take away the intellectuals of the First World and make them feel forced to withdraw their support for the Cuban Revolution. The regime has to adapt itself to a new era in order to survive. In 2010, Castro, in an interview with the newspaper *La Jornada*, made his *mea culpa* for the attacks on homosexuals in Cuba after the revolution.<sup>143</sup> This *mea culpa* appears when ever more homosexuals are being integrated in the society of the spectacle, and less and less their behavior is seen as a transgression. Even though the Cuban regime's position regarding homosexuals was extremely draconian, it found a certain amount of backing

---

<sup>142</sup> Carlos Verdecia, "Nobody Listened Shows us a True Cuban Horror Film," *El Nuevo Herald*, Feb. 18, 1988.

<sup>143</sup> Fidel Castro, interview by Carmen Lira Saade, *La Jornada*, August 31, 2010.

from an assumed familiar structure that received during '68 one of its most serious questionings. Although homophobia is still present in the West, the simple fact that there are discussions (and, in some cases, actual measures) to make the same-sex marriage bureaucratically viable, demonstrates how people who do not adopt heterosexual conduct are considered less outsiders, and the condemnation of them is seen as a form of fundamentalism. Michel Foucault in an interview to James O'Higgins, already in 1983, posited that "where freedom of sexual choice is concerned one has to be absolutely intransigent. This includes the liberty of expression of that choice. . . . Now, there has been considerable progress in this area on the level of legislation, certainly progress in the direction of tolerance, but there is still a lot of work to be done."<sup>144</sup>

Castro's *mea culpa*, almost two decades after Foucault pointed out the progress being made in societies of the diffuse spectacle, was being prepared much before. In 1993 Gutiérrez Alea reached the end of his cycle of films about the intellectual and the revolution directing *Fresa y chocolate*: where Diego, the homosexual intellectual established a relation that goes from platonic love, to disagreement, and to friendship with a young communist militant who is the caricature of the machoist-leninist (to steal a term by Zoé Valdés), in a clear cinematographic metaphor of what the regime wants its relationship with intellectuals to be.<sup>145</sup> But this metaphor happens on two levels, not only in the fictional realm of the film plot, but in the figure of the writer José Lezama Lima who, by suffering in the final part of his life with the censorship of the revolution, by being put in the margins of the official propaganda of the concentrated spectacle, for

---

<sup>144</sup> Michel Foucault, interview by James O'Higgins, *Salmagundi*, no. 58-59 (1982-1983), 12.

<sup>145</sup> Zoé Valdés defines the Cuban regime as an instance of "machismo-Leninism," see: *La nada cotidiana* (Barcelona: Emecé Editores, 1995).

totalitarian censorship and propaganda are parts of the same machine, and should also be redeemed by means of *Fresa y chocolate*. It is, actually, a film about Lezama Lima. As well said by César Salgado, it is a film about Lezama Lima that is not Lezamian.<sup>146</sup> It is the negation of a baroque poetics as intended by the writer. There is no excess, *hipertelia*. There is no rebellion in form, a form that should expand itself to touch the absolute.<sup>147</sup> It is a realist film, of even a socialist realism, but also of a socialism that ended in catastrophe. Boris Groys writes about the difference in the treatment of form between vanguard and socialist realism.

Stalin approved the slogan “socialist realism” and proclaimed it mandatory for all Soviet art. Most important here was literature—the socialist realist method was given its final form and adopted at the First Congress of the Writers’ Union in 1934, and was subsequently superimposed on the other arts with no alterations whatever. This alone is evidence of its ‘antiformalist’ spirit, which was oriented not toward the specific characteristics of a given art form, but toward its “socialist content,” and it is for this reason that socialist realism is usually interpreted as the absolute antithesis of the formalist avant-garde.<sup>148</sup>

Groys goes on to propose an even more radical relation between avant-garde and socialist realism. The socialist realism is not a rupture with the avant-garde, as one can understand from this formal divergence, but socialist realism is the radicalization of the avant-garde to a level that the latter could not reach. The avant-garde, according to Groys, is the “prelude” of the utopic society, while socialist realism is where this transformation of the world is taking place in the historical time of the revolution.

---

<sup>146</sup> César Salgado, “Origenes in Context” (seminar, The University of Texas at Austin, Spring 2012).

<sup>147</sup> For Lezama Lima and the absolute, see: Juan Pablo Lupi, *Reading Anew: José Lezama Lima’s Rhetorical Investigations* (Madrid: Iberoamericana-Vervuert, 2012).

<sup>148</sup> Boris Groys, *The total art of Stalinism: avant-garde, aesthetic dictatorship, and beyond* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 36.



Like the avant-garde, Stalinist culture continues to be oriented toward the future; it is projective rather than mimetic, a visualization of the collective dream of the new world and the new humanity rather than the product of an individual artist's temperament; it does not retire to the museum, but aspires to exert an active influence upon life. In brief, it cannot simply be regarded as "regressive" or pre-avant-garde. At the same time, Stalinist culture is interested above all in the creator of this new utopian world, who in the art of the avant-garde remained outside the project he had created in "the present," which was merely a prelude to the future. In this sense the avant-garde may be said to be "Old Testament": its God transcends the world he has created, and the prophet does not enter the Promised Land. Stalinism overcomes this excessively one-sided iconoclastic spirit and makes a new icon using the realistic devices of secular painting. Socialist realism does not need stylizations of historical icons or the classics of antiquity, because it is based upon the thesis that sacred history takes place here among us, and that the gods and demiurges—Stalin and his "Iron Guard"—constantly work their world-transforming miracles in the here and now of the everyday.<sup>149</sup>

How does one qualify the socialist realism that comes after the failure of this historical project? Cuba is in a peculiar situation. It is still a regime where the concentrated spectacle is reigning, but the figure of this demiurge, in that case, Castro, is truly weakened, decadent and unable to accomplish "world-transforming miracles." *Fresa y chocolate* is not a film that one can easily label as socialist realism, from a purely formal point of view, but it is what I will call realism in ruins. It is a movie that appropriates many of the realist methods, but it is in the middle of the catastrophe created by the demiurge. This realism in ruins, even though it is still shy in Gutiérrez Alea, for *Fresa y chocolate* desperately seeks to breathe in order to sustain a story that allows a new beginning for the project of a redeemed future (the *macho* communist who can have

---

<sup>149</sup> Groys, *The total art of Stalinism*, 113-115

pacific and friendly relations with the homosexual intellectual), reaches its maturity in the writings of Ponte. There, the realism in ruins is already dealing openly with death, with the fall of the utopic project, with the decadence of the demiurge. This is the topic I will discuss in the following chapter.

#### 4. Havana: The City as Catastrophe in Antonio José Ponte

*New ruins have not yet acquired the weathered patina of age, the true rust of the barons' wars, not yet put on their ivy, nor equipped themselves with the appropriate bestiary of lizards, bats, screech-owls, serpents, speckled toads and little foxes which, as has been so frequently observed by ruin-explorers, hold high revel in the precincts of old ruins. . . . But new ruins are for a time stark and bare, vegetationless and creatureless; blackened and torn, they smell of fire and mortality.*

Rose Macaulay

##### **Prologue**

Ortiz saw the acceleration of time in Cuba. However, the museification (Agamben) has become the agenda of post-revolutionary Havana. For Ponte, to walk through the streets of Havana is like undertaking time travel. The city is not only a museum but also a museum in ruins. Havana is a bombarded city by a bombing that never took place. Thus, life goes underground. Tuguria, the submerged city, is however fully synchronized to the wasteland that grows on the surface.

##### **Post-Prologue**

The anthropologist Fernando Ortiz, who wrote one of the most important books in order to forge Cubanhood and the national identity of that nation, *Cuban Counterpoint*, once wrote in that same text the relationship between territory and time, which had taken place after Columbus arrival and before the socialist revolution. “The entire cultural climb that Europe experienced within more than four millennia, in Cuba happened in less

than four centuries. That which was a rise by means of ramps and steps in Europe, here has been progress made by jumps and shocks. . . . In just one day, there were several epochs in Cuba; one could say thousands of ‘cultural-years’ if such a measurement was admissible to the chronology of people.”<sup>150</sup> But, nowadays, Cuba goes through the same single day, which has lasted more than half a century, in a time that is at a standstill, the opposite of the accelerated time as seen by Ortiz.<sup>151</sup> Havana has become an enormous roofless museum, with its cars from the fifties, old buildings, and so forth. According to Giorgio Agamben, we could say that the case of Havana is a more general event. Modernity faces a phenomenon called museification.

The museification of the world is today an accomplished fact. One by one, the spiritual potentialities that defined the people’s lives – art, religion, philosophy, the idea of nature, even politics – have docilely withdrawn into the Museum. ‘Museum’ here is not a given physical space or place but the separate dimension to which what was once – but is no longer – felt as true and decisive has moved. In this sense, the Museum can coincide with an entire city (such as Evora and Venice, which were declared World Heritage sites), a region (when it is declared a park or nature preserve), and even a group of individuals (insofar as they represent a form of life that has disappeared). But more generally, everything today can become a Museum, because this term simply designates the exhibition of an impossibility of using, of dwelling, of experiencing.<sup>152</sup>

The museum, which was thought as a utopian space in the nineteenth century and had its architecture “conceived on utopian texts inspired by the notion of universal knowledge”—as we can learn from an essay by Lily Litvak—can also acquire a

---

<sup>150</sup> Fernando Ortiz, *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar: advertencia de sus contrastes agrarios, económicos, históricos y sociales, su etnografía y su transculturación* (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1987), 94.

<sup>151</sup> About time acceleration and modernity, see: Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

<sup>152</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations* (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 83-84.

catastrophic meaning.<sup>153</sup> This is one of the readings that the Cuban writer Antonio José Ponte makes about Havana and its museification. For Ponte, in his short-story *Un arte de hacer ruinas*, to walk through that city is like undertaking a journey, or even time travel. The story is about the crisis of writing a doctoral dissertation on urbanism, and its director, who is responsible for guiding the student, advises him that there is a narrow connection between space and time, that is to say, geography and history. And then, he essentially incites his disciple to become a time traveler in order to write on the architecture of Havana. “When one is a child, geography is more captivating than history. Other countries count more than other epochs. Maybe now we have to start our time travels. . . . Time, as they should have taught you, is another space. Now it is your turn to explore it.”<sup>154</sup> He needs to explore this museum called Havana, the time of the city, as if it was indissociably mixed with its space. This museum is not however a complete, concrete entity, but it is closer to the emptiness, to the desert. The preservation of the buildings in Havana also means turning them into exhibition constructions with no possibility of using, of dwelling, of experiencing them.

According to Ponte, in his book *La fiesta Vigilada* and in the essay *La Habana: ciudad y archivo* (written at the request of the Cuban Research Institute, University of Florida), the museification of Havana became an official project as well, instead of being simply a gratuitous outcome of the revolution. Thus, museification in the current politics of Cuba means desertification. The very process of restoration embodies a demographic practice that contributes to the gradual emptying of the “historical body.” “The museum

---

<sup>153</sup> Lily Litvak, “El Siglo de los museos,” presented at *I Seminario Internacional “Memoria y Patrimonio,”* Granada, November 12, 2009.

<sup>154</sup> Ponte, *Un arte de hacer ruinas*, 61-62.

city, dedicated to international tourism, needs these works of desertification.”<sup>155</sup> And about the possible outcome, he also writes: “The old city, its exquisite protected buildings, could in the future become a zone as desirable as the historical towns of other capitals of the world.”<sup>156</sup>

The standstill suffered by Havana can however give rise not only to a museum but also to a landscape of ruins. In this perspective, Ponte writes: “for almost fifty years Havana has been at a standstill, this standstill, the collapse brought by it, will have to be faced. . . . And it is such a magnitude of the disaster that one could talk about a [new] foundation of the city.”<sup>157</sup> For Ponte, who defined himself as a ruinologist, Havana is mainly catastrophe and debris. Thus, the museification of the old city coexists with the ruins of its remaining part. He writes that one “could not aspire to an entire archaeologized capital, a city converted to a museum,” because, if it happened, Havana would become a “new Pompeii, a Pompeii buried by the vulcan of revolution.”<sup>158</sup> Time is also the author of ruins. Ruins and museum, this apparent paroxysm is what constitutes Havana. “The geological variety that distinguishes Havana architecture, rich in extracts of several ages, is due to the estate of statism imposed by the revolutionary administration. The Cuban capital shows, thanks to it, an inevitable aspect of museum, as well as a collapse adjacent to the irresolvable: Havana is a museum in ruins.”<sup>159</sup> The

---

<sup>155</sup> Antonio José Ponte, “La Habana: ciudad y archivo,” presented at the *Cuban Research Institute*, cubainfo.fiu.edu.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>159</sup> Ponte, *La fiesta vigilada*, 178.

collapse is also a practice of creating empty spaces, desertification: “fabricating a void where a construction is missing is a feature in a city that has lost its habit of building.”<sup>160</sup>

Besides the Cuban case, museification and ruination may also work together in many theoretical respects, as Ponte points out, in the example of when the British art critic Kenneth Clark created the *War Artists Advisory Committee*, which sent painters to the cities of the United Kingdom, that were put on fire by the German bombers in order to depict the ruins.<sup>161</sup> With this perspective, Ponte goes back to Cuba, to state that “Havana is the scenario of a war that never happened.”<sup>162</sup> That is to say, after the crisis of the missiles in 1962, Havana was turned into a bombarded city of a bombing that never took place. “These streets destroyed by the bombings of time are a perfect scenario for a discourse of the besieged square. Havana is a place to the extent of this longing . . . for the military attack that John F. Kennedy did not lead, neither have any of his successors in the presidency until today.”<sup>163</sup> There, maybe more than in any other place, the destructive war power of the enemy is shown as pure appearance, as images, defined by Paul Virilio as one of the characteristics of modern warfare.<sup>164</sup> Havana then is left in ruins so as to appear a bombarded city and to disable the process of forgetting the permanent state of war against the United States that has its most tangible aspect in the economic embargo. In this perspective, to use another term defined by Agamben, we would even dare to say Cuba lives in a state of exception that has lasted fifty years.<sup>165</sup>

---

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 170-171.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> See: Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception* (London: Verso, 1989).

<sup>165</sup> See: Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

According to the Parisian studies of Walter Benjamin, one of the most important ruinologists, ruins are residues of a dreamworld. Studying the Paris of the nineteenth century, he writes that the city has the ruins of the decadent bourgeoisie. “The development of the forces of production shattered the wish of symbols of the previous century, even before the monuments representing them had collapsed.”<sup>166</sup> For Susan Buck-Morss, by analyzing the work of Benjamin, we see that “these decaying structures no longer hold sway over the collective imagination, it is possible to recognize them as the illusory dream images they always were.”<sup>167</sup> In the case of Havana, however, this “dreamworld” is a junction of the revolutionary utopia from 1959 with the conservative power that succeeded it. This “dreamworld” also longs for the US bombardment (in order to become the stage of war), and not only for the capitalist world of merchandise. However, those utopic matrixes are inserted in the same project of modernity, as the US philosopher shows us in another study, opportunely entitled *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*: “The Bolshevik experiment, no matter how many specifically Russian cultural traits it developed, was vitally attached to the Western, modernizing project, from which it cannot be extracted without causing the project itself to fall to pieces—including its cult of historical progress.”<sup>168</sup>

However, there is a place in time in which Paris and Havana, Benjamin and Ponte, can be read together, by means of a fragment from the past. In other words: the

---

<sup>166</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Das Passagen-Werk,” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol V-1 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1982), 59.

<sup>167</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, *The dialectics of seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades project* (Cambridge: MIT, 1991), 159.

<sup>168</sup> Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*, 68.



historian Rafael Rojas, in his text *Walter Benjamin no llegó a la Habana*, recounts that the German critic seriously considered to go into exile in the Caribbean in order to manage to accomplish his escape from Europe, which was ever more taken by the Nazis. In the letters exchanged by Adorno, they considered the possibility of Benjamin taking a job as a visiting professor at the University of Havana. However, the impossibility of getting a visa, and the imminence of being captured by the Nazis, made him commit suicide at the border between France and Spain. He had no opportunity to touch Cuban ground, where he could have expanded his studies on architecture, a different space, in which perhaps he would have had the opportunity to reflect once more about the *flanêur* by wandering through the corners of Havana, as he had done before during his visit to Moscow. For Rojas, however, Benjamin did not arrive in Havana twice: physically and as an intellectual read by Cubans, for his theses could not be studied in Cuba due to the domain of the marxist-leninist ideology, which closed itself at the same pace that Benjamin's work received posthumous recognition in the West as one of the most radical elaborations of modernity.<sup>169</sup> Perhaps, now, even with all counter-attacks generated, we could say that Benjamin entered the alleys of Havana by means of Ponte.

For Ponte, Havana is a kind of pre-modern Paris, and, thus, the politics of ruins led by the Cuban administration can only give rise to a total demolition and reconstruction of the city as it happened in Paris when under the direction of Haussmann, who, according to Benjamin, gave himself the title of “demolition artist.” Haussmann, in some respects, anticipates the logic of the bombers. These tactics consist in reaching total

---

<sup>169</sup> Rafael Rojas, “Walter Benjamin no llegó a la Habana,” in *Changing Cuba/Changing World*, ed. Mauricio Font. New York: Bildner Center for Western Hemisphere Studies, 2008.

annihilation, as Sebald says in his book, *On Natural History of Destruction*, quoting some World War II generals accountable for the raid on German cities that reduced those places to ashes: “Harris, a man who had risen to the head of Bomber Command, who . . . liked destruction for its own sake, and was thus in perfect sympathy with the innermost principle of every war, which is to aim for as wholesale an annihilation of the enemy with his dwellings, his history, his natural environment as can possibly be achieved.”<sup>170</sup> Precisely it is this annihilation, brought by the mass use of military airplanes, that makes the urban imaginary distance itself from dreamworlds: “the collective image of the city as a utopian space was shaken fundamentally in World War II by the catastrophic air attacks that so many cities endured. To be sure, cities worldwide have continued to attract immigrants to them in ever-great numbers, drawn by the promise of work and dreams of consumption. But a countertrend is increasingly apparent: dreams are divorcing themselves from the space of the city.”<sup>171</sup>

In this perspective, in a city that was transformed catastrophically into ruins by means of bombings, sometimes it is only possible to live underground, in the air-raid shelters. Sebald narrates, for example, the story of families that lived for years underground in bombarded German cities: “in Hamburg, says Dagerman, he talked to one Herr Schumann, a bank clerk then in his third year living underground. The white faces of these people, writes Dagerman, were just like the faces of fish coming up to the surface to snatch a breath of air.”<sup>172</sup> If we go back to the short story written by Ponte, *Un arte de hacer ruinas*, we find out that Havana, the bombarded town, hides an

---

<sup>170</sup> Sebald, Winfried. *On the Natural History of Destruction* (New York: Random House, 2003), 19

<sup>171</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, “The City as Dreamworld and Catastrophe,” *October*, Vol. 73 (1995): 23-25.

<sup>172</sup> Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction*, 38.

underground city beneath its ruined buildings. This city is called Tuguria and the entrance that leads to its main tunnel is an air-raid shelter. Tuguria is the “sunken city, where everything is preserved into memory.”<sup>173</sup> As Anthony Vidler tells us, memory and space constitute the neuralgic center of architecture. The architectonic space is a fiction for something else, for something potentially forgotten, and, in this sense, Benjamin conceives the underground as an equivalent to the city’s subconscious: “In his imagination, Paris was transformed into the semblance of an antique excavation, with its ruins, its sacred places, and even its entrances to the underground.”<sup>174</sup> This underground city is composed of Havana’s collapsed buildings that resurge over there. According to the story, the inhabitants of this secret town are the tugures who are responsible for the collapse of the buildings above the soil. “I would have to recognize that there existed a city very close to the above one. So close that it would have been planned by those who made them collapse.”<sup>175</sup> This practice of collapsing buildings would have the name of tugurization.

The oldest buildings in the city called the attention of the tugures. After some time, the first tugur started living in the prowled building. This first one managed to bring others and little by little they filled it with their people. . . . They sought collapse by all means, but not to die, because a real tugur demolishes a building without even the dust of a brick posed on him.”<sup>176</sup>

The word “*tugurio*” in Spanish means a very old, dirty, cheap house. The city of Tuguria in fact would look like a metropolis of slums. The tugur is the one who inhabits the Catastrophe and, as such, he is a nomad. The tugur is a kind of nomad but nomadism

---

<sup>173</sup> Ponte, *Un arte de hacer ruinas*, 73.

<sup>174</sup> Anthony Vidler, *Warped Space* (Cambridge: MIT, 2001), 75-76.

<sup>175</sup> Ponte, *Un arte de hacer ruinas*, 72-73.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

is difficult in such a small island. The island is also what makes nomadism impossible. By walking, one always faces the ocean, then for the tugures, who cannot go outside the island, the only alternative is to dig. Ponte says in his short-story: “when you do not find new land, when you are surrounded, you can still have one more option: to bring up the land that is beneath what is constructed, to dig, to walk in a vertical way, and to search for the connection of the island with the continent, the key of the horizon.”<sup>177</sup> The city consequently grows downwards. This verticalization of the tugur nomadism has a vast similarity with the foundational cosmogony of modernity that, according to Rosalind Williams, is also vertical.

The cosmos of modern technology, as much as that of ancient mythology, has a vertical structure. As it reached upward in the shapes of skyscrapers, railway bridges, oil rigs, and missiles, it also sank into the earth in building foundations, railways tunnels, oil wells, and missile silos. The decent below the earth’s surface was in part a quest for scientific truth; it was also a quest for technological power. The triumphs of modern industrial and urban life arise from connections buried below the surface of the earth. These structures rest on hidden infrastructures.<sup>178</sup>

It is not by chance, for example, that science fiction writer H. G. Wells, who lived during the pinnacle of the industrial subterranean construction, depicted the future as an underground civilization in his book *Time Machine* (first published in 1895).<sup>179</sup> This text unleashed a *topos* taken up again by other science fiction works, as in *Memoirs Found in a Bathtub* by Stanisław Lem, in which the tension between memory and underground once more is established in the story through a militarized and submersed society, where a secret agent must spy on what is unknown even to him. The story is about a manuscript

---

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 66-67.

<sup>178</sup> Rosalind Williams, *Notes on the Underground* (Cambridge: MIT, 2008), 50.

<sup>179</sup> H. G. Wells, *The time machine: an invention* (London: W. Heinemann, 1895).

found in a distant time, but written in the period of the Neogeneo (term by which the civilization of the future refers to the periods (as we call) from antiquity to contemporaneous era) just before the Great Collapse: “that catastrophic event which in a matter of weeks totally demolished the cultural achievement of centuries,” and, after which, “those archaic cultures left behind permanent monuments in bone, stone, slate and bronze.”<sup>180</sup> And so the text that presents the *Notes from the Neogene* follows.

Most of the Neogene, we fear, will forever remain shrouded in mystery, for even chronotraction methods have failed to provide the most fundamental details of the social life at that age. . . . The evolution of ancient beliefs underwent a curious bifurcation. In the first period, the Archeocredonic, various religions were founded upon the recognition of a supernatural, nonmaterial principle, causative with respect to everything in existence. The Archeocredonic left behind permanent monuments—the pyramids of the Early Neogene, the excavations of the Mesogene (the Gothic cathedrals of Lafranss). In the second period, the Neocredonic, faith assumed a different aspect. The metaphysical principle somehow merged with the materialistic, the earthly. Worship of the deity Kap-eh-Taahl (or, in the Cremonic palimpsests, Kapp-Taah) became one of the dominant cults of the time. . . . Up to the very end—that is, to the formation of the Earth Federation—the center of the most fanatic devotion to Kap-Eh-Taahl was Ammer-Ka, a land governed by a series of dynasties of Prez-tendz. These were not high priests of Kap-Eh-Taahl in the strict sense of the word. It was during the Nineteenth Dynasty that the Prez-tendz (or Prexy-dents, in the nomenclature of the Thyrric School) built in the Pentagon. . . . At the close of the Neogene . . . the cult of Kap-Eh-Taahl, mired in complex corporational rites and intricate institutional rituals, began in the course of time to lose one territory after another to the followers of secular sociostatic management. . . . [The archeologist] Wid-Wiss defended his hypothesis, claiming that when the populace of Ammer- Ka went over to the side of the “heretics” and joined the Federation, the priests of the Last Pentagon ordered it to be completely sealed off from the outside world. So the underground Moloch isolated itself from the rest of humanity and endured to the Chaotic without the least knowledge of what was taking place

---

<sup>180</sup> Stanisław Lem, *Memoirs found in a Bathtub* (New York: The Seabuty Press, 1973), 1.

on the surface of the earth. . . . Our Histognostors answered these arguments with a stony silence. But Wid-Wiss did not give in. For twenty-seven years, with only a handful of loyal colleagues to help him, he combed the Rocket Mountains from end to end. Just when almost everyone had forgotten him, his stubbornness was dramatically vindicated. On 28 Mey 3146, the head archeological team, having cleared away several hundred tons of rubble at the foot of Haar-Vurd Peak, stood before a convex shield, cleverly camouflaged, excellently preserved: this was the entrance to the Last Pentagon.<sup>181</sup>

The underground city of Tuguria, below Havana, whose main entrance is also the shield of an underground tunnel, like the submersed construction seen in Lem (the last and most secure shelter of what had remained of our contemporaneity and, consequently the foundational nucleus and base for the surface that is apparent to us), maybe is the way by which Cuba inserts itself in the industrial tradition, or better, is the way that nation can participate in modernity, even if it is through a catastrophic way. Williams argues, using Lewis Mumford's words, that "the modern city involves a co-ordination of the super-surface city with the sub-surface city," as much as the Paris of Haussmann studied by Benjamin was made both by demolition and underground excavation.<sup>182</sup> Haussmann made a regularization of the Parisian underground. "When Haussmann and Belgrand began, Paris had under 100 miles of sewers; by 1870, at the end of Second Empire, the city had 348 miles, or nearly four times the total of 1851. Thus, as [Victor] Hugo notes with pride, the Parisian sewer system had expanded tenfold between 1800 and 1870."<sup>183</sup> In a symmetrical gesture to the one of Richard Wright (who was very much influenced by

---

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 6-11. It is interesting to note that this connection between capitalism and religion as shown by Stanisław Lem is very much in line with what Walter Benjamin exposed about the subject in his text: "Kapitalismus als Religion," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol VI (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1982), 100-103.

<sup>182</sup> Williams, *Notes on the Underground*, 52.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 71-72.

Victor Hugo), who inserted the US blackness—then seen as the sign of the archaic—in the modern city by means of the sewers and the subterranean in *The man who lived underground*. The participation of Cuba in modernity is also reached by expanding itself through the underground, but it is made not only through the sunken city of Tuguria, or through the construction of sewers, or through the attempt to opening a subway in Havana, but also through espionage.<sup>184</sup>

In his essay “La Habana: ciudad y archivo,” Ponte writes about this other underground city, the city of archives: “one can also talk about a submerged city, in which are the unthinkable conversations, the letters that did not arrive or depart to its destiny . . . [the parallel telephonic universe, the eavesdropping]. I talk about the city . . . made by miles and miles of secret archives.”<sup>185</sup> But this archive is nourished not by the accumulative force of memory, but by corrosion. This city of archives is not Tuguria, in the sense of a memorial city, but its opposite, or maybe its double (because the archive is at the same time destructive and conservative), its other face, an archive that does not produce speech but only the unmatched violence of silence. If we go to the theories of Jacques Derrida, we could say that those letters that do not arrive, and even the totality of the espionage complex in itself, are part of this anarchic, archiviolithic force (a force that violates the archive), for “it works, but, as it works always in silence, it does not ever leave an archive that belongs to itself. It devours the archive . . . it always is, by vocation, silent, destructive of the archive.”<sup>186</sup> In this way, Ponte is precise, this submerged city of

---

<sup>184</sup> See: Richard Wright, “The man who lived underground,” in *Accent: A Quarterly of New Literature*, (Spring 1942): 170-176. A later version was published at *Eight Men* (Cleveland: World Pub. Co., 1961).

<sup>185</sup> Ponte, “La Habana: ciudad y archivo,” 8.

<sup>186</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Mal de arquivo: uma impressão freudiana* (Rio de Janeiro: Relume Dumará, 2000), 21.

espionage spreads together with the desert throughout the surface. The spaces of desertification have as their main aspect the creation of a lack of speech that is insuperable, of a lack of questioning, of an absence of test, namely, of an “untested presumption par excellence, held together by pseudo-precepts,” that do not put in check ideology, to use the terms of Ronell when commenting the experiment in Nietzsche.<sup>187</sup> And as Heidegger noted, Nietzsche screamed: “the desert grows” [*die Wüste wächst*].<sup>188</sup>

The desertification, in this sense, can even mean censorship, for, by being a fruit of this interception of thinking by means of espionage, “it empties the forms of collective imagination, substituting it by a pure form that guaranties, above all, its control, inscribing its mark, the mark of mediation”—in the conceptualisation of Alexandre Nodari.<sup>189</sup> In sum, the submerged city of espionage is a collateral effect of the desert (of a government that trespasses the own nature of the governed, of a power that is not transcendent but immanent).<sup>190</sup>

It is a collateral effect of this wasted space that grows and that assumes the landscape of the surface and that propagates the silence: here is an indissociable pair, desert and silence, to those who could walk through the site of death in order to receive in the end, together with Paul Bowles, the baptism of solitude:

---

<sup>187</sup> Ronell, Source, “Proving Grounds: On Nietzsche and the Test Drive,” 668-9.

<sup>188</sup> Martin Heidegger, “Was heißt Denken?” in *Gesamtausgabe - Abteilung I: Veröffentlichte Schriften, 1910-76*, vol 08 (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 2002), 31. The connection of Nietzsche screaming about the desert and Heidegger, from: Avital, “Proving Grounds: On Nietzsche and the Test Drive,” p. 661.

<sup>189</sup> Alexandre Nodari, “Teses sobre a política,” *Sopro*, no. 23 (March 2010): 4.

<sup>190</sup> Giorgio Agamben, “Metropoli,” presented at *Metropoli/Moltitudine*, Università IUAV di Venezia, March 11, 2006.



Immediately when you arrive in Sahara, for the first or the tenth time, you notice the stillness. An incredible, absolute silence prevails outside the towns; and within, even in busy places like the markets, there is a hushed quality in the air, as if the quiet were a conscious force which, resenting the intrusion of sound, minimizes and disperses sound straightaway. Then there is the sky, compared to which all other skies seem fainthearted efforts. Solid and luminous, it is always the focal point of the landscape. At sunset, the precise, curved shadow of the earth rises into it swiftly from the horizon, cutting into light section and dark section. When all daylight is gone, and the space is thick with stars, it is still of an intense and burning blue, darkest directly overhead and paling toward the earth, so that the night never really goes dark. You leave the gate of the fort or town behind, pass the camels lying outside, go up into the dunes, or out onto the hard, stony plain and stand awhile alone. Presently, you will either shiver and hurry back inside the walls, or you will go on standing there and let something very peculiar happen to you, something that everyone who lives there has undergone and which the French call '*le bapteme de solitude*.' It is a unique sensation, and it has nothing to do with loneliness, for loneliness presupposes memory. Here in this wholly mineral landscape lighted by stars like flares, *even memory disappears*; nothing is left but your own breathing and the sound of your heart beating.<sup>191</sup>

Where even memory disappears, only that which Agamben called naked life remains, that is, "life that may be killed and yet not sacrificed."<sup>192</sup> The human being, when he faces the desert that dominates ever more the spheres of the living, becomes reduced to this biological life, to the sound of air going through the tracheas and of the march of a heart that is still beating.

Landscape, as I showed here, gains its full meaning when put in relation to memory. For Ponte, an inhabitant of a city destroyed and annihilated by an imaginary but

---

<sup>191</sup> Paul Bowles. "Baptism of Solitude," in *Collected Stories and Later Writings* (New York: The Library of America, 2002), 813. (second italic mine)

<sup>192</sup> Agamben, *Homo sacer*, 8.

effective war, the only possible landscapes are the emptiness of the desert or the obscurantism of the underground city. In the next chapters, I am going to discuss another effect that memory can have on the construction of Cuban landscape. But, at this time, it is not only the desert or the sunken city that are waiting for us in the horizon of the sky or the verticality in the buildings. I will take you to the longing of lost—and, at the same time, preserve—paradises.

## 5. Fruits among Ruins: Ramón Alejandro and the Perverse/Paradisiacal Landscape

*Are we not justified in hoping that landscape painting will flourish with a new and hitherto unknown brilliancy when artists of merit shall more frequently pass the narrow limits of the Mediterranean, and when they shall be enabled, far in the interior of continents in the humid mountain valleys of the tropical world, to seize, with the genuine freshness of a pure and youthful spirit, on the true image of the varied forms of nature?*

Alexander von Humboldt

The Caribbean seems to always have borne the aspects of the Promised Land. This mythical place has as its main characteristic to have no history but only to be pure nature. As Lezama Lima wrote, the image of America as eminently landscape has been established since the first European travelers reached the continent.<sup>193</sup> The first example is Columbus' view of the New World as the space of the marvelous.

Hispaniola is wonder; the hills and the mountains, the plains and the fields, and the so charming land, which is thick enough to cultivate and to seed, to raise all types of cattle, to construct buildings for villages and places. One cannot believe the seaports here without seeing it, and there are many rivers, which are large and have good waters, and the most of them bring gold. The trees, fruits and weeds are very different from those of Juana. Here are many spices, and big mines of gold and other minerals.<sup>194</sup>

For Columbus, it is evident, the Haitian landscape appears more interesting than the Cuban one. He contrasts them, I must admit: they are almost the opposite of each

---

<sup>193</sup> José Lima Lezama, "Imagen de América Latina," In *América latina en su literatura*, ed. César Fernández Moreno (México, D.F.: Siglo XXI, 2000).

<sup>194</sup> Juan José Antequera Luengo, ed., *La carta de Colón anunciando el descubrimiento* (Madrid: Alianza, 1992), 46.

other. However, regarding his certainty, which would grow more and more with each of his travels, of having discovered the earthly paradise, those two islands are parts of the same mythical machine. According to scholar Elvira Vilches, for Columbus, the marvelous was part of an economy, a transfer of wealth from gold to other aspects of nature (islands, rivers, mountains, trees, fruits). Because of Columbus' need to demonstrate the existence of wealth in the new lands to his sponsors, he used several metonymic equivalents of gold, amongst them, fruits. They are tropes of the abundance of American nature and this abundance is present in the contemporary artist Ramón Alejandro whose work I would like to present, analyze and discuss in this chapter. In Alejandro, fruits, which first symbolized the richness of America, are the main theme of his paintings: fruits as sensual images of wealth and pleasure in a bountiful nature.

But in this sensual garden of delights, there is also the existence of a counterpoint: the destroyed and ruined. The ruination of America is present in Alejandro's depiction of open fruits ready to decay, in the horror caused by some of his deadly pictorial elements, and in his view of the tragic destiny of Cuba. Even before, the American paradise, in the knightly imagination of the first European travelers, also had this tension between dreamworld and catastrophe, namely, the two central points that give the estranged meaning to the ruins. One of these first conquerors who arrived at the island of Cuba and who produced one of the more intriguing tales of this catastrophic side, was the Spaniard Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca. Before arriving in Brazil, specifically in the island of Santa Catarina in order to discover the Iguazu Waterfalls during his second trip to the American continent in 1542, Cabeza de Vaca went to Cuba on a trip that ended in a shipwreck and a

posterior peregrination of eight years. This event took him to what is today Texas (then the lands of New Spain), and back to Mexico City. When departing into a short journey in 1527, between the Cuban ports of Santiago and Trinidad, in order to get materially prepared for the posterior travel that could lead to the domain of the northern lands, under the orders of the governor Pánfilo de Narváez, Cabeza de Vaca, Official of the King and named accountant and *Alguacil Mayor*, faced the other side of the island-paradise, the destruction inherent to the myth:

Then I left [to the land]. I wanted some people to accompany me, but they did not wish to leave, saying that it was too rainy and cold and the town was too far, but that the following day, which was Sunday, they would leave with God's help to hear mass. An hour after I departed the sea began to be very stormy and the north wind blew so strongly that not even the skiffs dared go toward land, nor could they beach the ships because of headwinds. . . . The rain and the storm began to increase so much that it was just as strong in the town as on the sea, for all the houses and churches were blown down, and it became necessary for us to go about in groups of seven or eight men locking our arms together so that we could keep the wind from blowing us away. And we feared being amidst the trees as much as the houses, for they too were being blown down and we could have been killed beneath them. In this storm and danger we went about all night without finding a place nor a spot where we might be safe for half an hour. While we were going about we heard all night long, especially from the middle of the night onward, a great uproar and noise of voices, and a great sound of little bells and of flutes and tambourines and other instruments that went on until morning, when the storm ceased. Never in these parts had such a fearsome thing been seen. I gathered evidence of it and sent the testimony to Your Majesty. Monday morning we went down to the port and did not find the ships. We saw their buoys in the water, from which we realized that they had been lost, and we went along the coast to see if we could find signs of them. Since we found nothing, we went into the woods, and a quarter of a league into them we found one of the ship's boats in some trees. Ten leagues from there we found the bodies of two persons from my ship, and certain box covers, and the bodies were so disfigured from having struck the rocks that they could not be

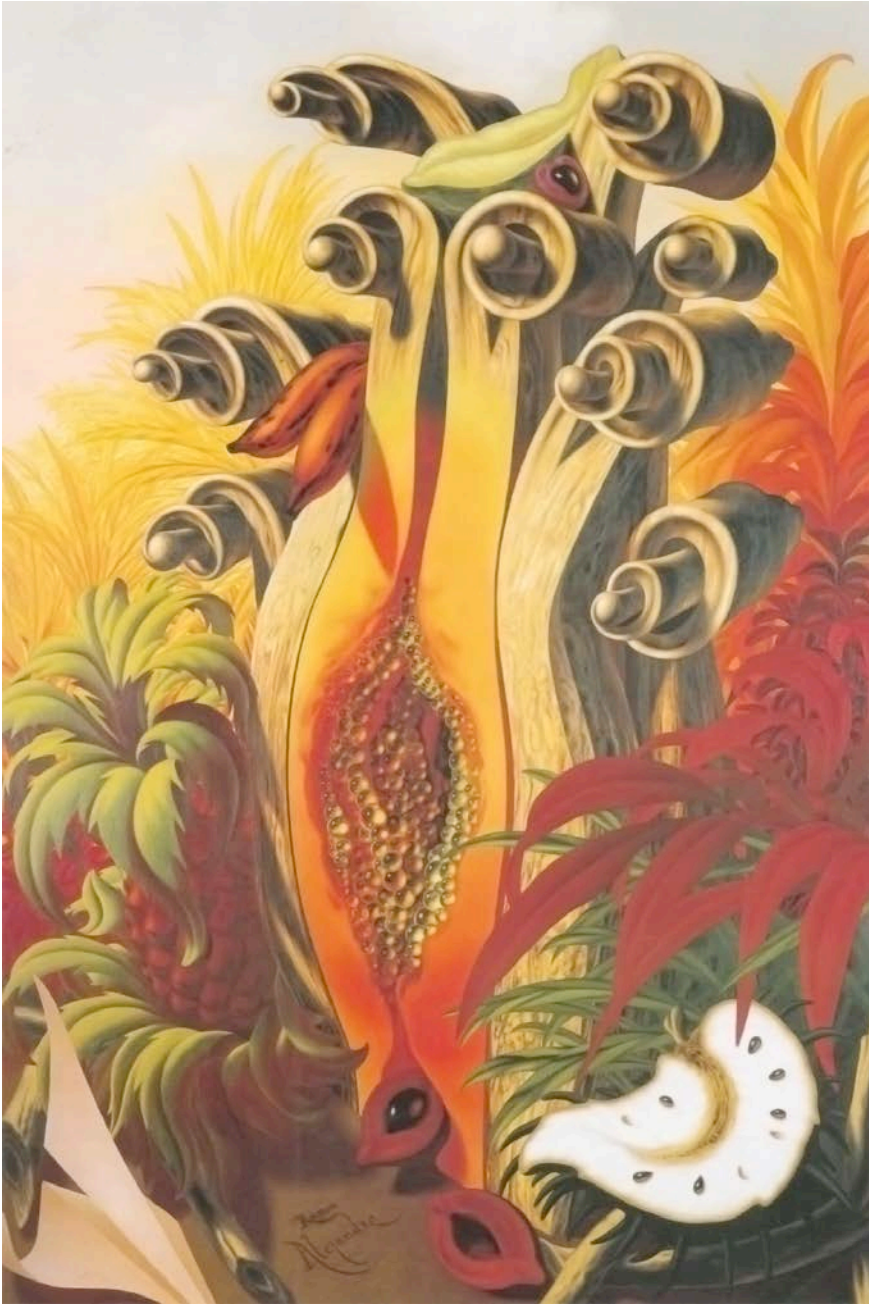
recognized. A cloak and a quilt torn to shreds were also found, but nothing else appeared.<sup>195</sup>

It is from this tension, between paradise and destruction in the first accounts of the New World, that is, between the vision of a Columbus and a Cabeza de Vaca, that one could find a departing point to connect the artwork of Alejandro and the Cuban literature of the 1990s and beyond, especially the liminal work of Antonio José Ponte, which does not differentiate between essay, critique, autobiography, and fiction. They are paradigmatic intellectuals for current Cuban culture who also have their personal histories crossed. In 1999, Ponte launched a book totally dedicated to the painter. A text that was later reproduced in several parts, both in Spanish and French. Analyzing the pictorial work of Alejandro, Ponte shoots: “any painting of Ramón Alejandro, even the most placid, seems to enclose something secret and terrible. And when he does not paint the tremendous, it is because he is panting the moment that comes before the tremendous. His machines and his fruits possess, each of them in their own terms, dangerous natures, and he works on them with the care of whom manages to exude very sweet poisons.”<sup>196</sup>

---

<sup>195</sup> Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, *The Account: Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca's Relación* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1993), 31-32.

<sup>196</sup> António José Ponte, “Ramón Alejandro,” in *Ramón Alejandro* (Paris: L'Atelier des Brisants, 2006), n.p.



5.1 – Ramón Alejandro, *Voluptas*, 1992.

The vision of the Cuban painter is concentrated on pleasure and horror, immersed mainly in the way of appropriating one of the most intriguing objects from the unknown New World of the time of the conquest: the new, powerful and attractive fruits. They

were so important that the Spaniards and others, who were so obsessed with the mythical hunt for El Dorado, discovered and introduced in their culinary this organic, edible gold, which revealed itself as a changing factor in everyday life. Fernando Ortiz describes the impact that this strange and unexpected “finding” had on the habits of the other side of the Atlantic: “tobacco, as well as quinine and coca, corn, tomato, potato, papaya, bell pepper, yuca, sweet potato, cocoa, peanut, cashew, avocado, pineapple, among other natural and agricultural products, which today constitute perhaps the most part of the vegetables of the world.”<sup>197</sup> Ponte, in his essay *Las comidas profundas*, digresses about how in Cuba the precious metal taken from the ground was the new types of food that were sent to Europe: “the only mining that gave sufficient fruits in that land was the one who retrieved from it edible roots and tuber.”<sup>198</sup>

Alejandro portrays certain paradoxes of the discovery, more specifically, of the impact and visual power that fruits must have provided to those first people who ventured into the jungles of the New World. Ramón Alejandro focuses on the duality of fruits. They carry all the possible importance in his work. They reach the threshold in order to emulate, if not surpass, and even take the place of the human figure. They are fruits that have the density of a body, or of its parts, that are mixed with the human being (human being and other aspects of nature reunited in the same physical space), tempting the viewer not only in their merely gustatory sense, with their flavor different from everything previously tasted, but in their optical, and therefore, erotic power. The fruits in Ramón Alejandro are primarily corporal: legs, arms, sex organs but mainly faces: the

---

<sup>197</sup> Ortiz, *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar*, 113.

<sup>198</sup> Antonio José Ponte, *Las comidas profundas* (Angers: Éditions Deleatur, 1997), 22-23.



fruit is the face of America, the fruit is the face of Cuba, it is the first contact with the exteriority that looks at it. The fruit-genital that looks at us, as in the painting *Voluptas* (1992). The critic Raúl Antelo, in a text about Albert Eckhout and Clarice Lispector, stated, by analyzing the American fruits in the Dutch still lifes: “Nature is no longer strange when it is humanized.”<sup>199</sup>



5.2 – Ramón Alejandro, *Olokun*, 1996.

---

<sup>199</sup> Raul Antelo, “The stream of Brazilian life: still leven, natureza morta and world market,” presented at Cátedra Rui Barbosa de Estudos Brasileiros, Leiden University, Much 18, 2008.

The fruit, in the tradition of *still lifes*, also occupies the space of presenting itself as the face, as it was understood by Cabrera Infante: “some painters, as Jan Brueghel, the Velvet, seem to paint only flowers and fruits. Others, such as Cézanne, reduce the fruits to pure geometric forms. While others still, as Arcimboldo, make disturbing *trompe-l'œil* from fruits: fantastic visions that are pure paranoia. The fruit composes a face; the face is decomposed into fruits.”<sup>200</sup> Only to later entering in the specificity of Alejandro: “Few painters, however, put the fruit (or just one repeated fruit, the papaya) as the center of their plastic universe. This painter is Ramón Alejandro, a Cuban from Paris, who so enjoys [*disfruta*]. The papaya is for him the presence, not the memory, of a particular but not private Eden.”<sup>201</sup> Cabrera Infante’s perspective here is sharp. What mostly calls our attention in Alejandro is this private paradise, I would even say singular, which clashes with a simply idyllic and peaceful vision and makes us have the desire to uncover in his paintings the tension that exists between garden and wilderness, between the calm of tamed nature and the perversity of it unleashed, between pleasure and pain, as if it belonged to the limit of the erotic search as posited by Bataille.

Rafael Rojas, which before me had seen the relation and Alejandro’s painting and concept of eroticism in Bataille, shows us that these oppositions lie in the perverse desire for access to an interior, either that of the fruit or that of the body, which are both the same. Rojas, from his understanding of the painting *Olukun* (1996), writes: “the fruit, the mollusk and the flesh share the same entrails, the pulp. . . . In these interiors of flesh the

---

<sup>200</sup> Guillermo Cabrera Infante and Ramón Alejandro, *¡Vaya Papaya!: Ramón Alejandro* (Paris: Le Polygraphe, 1992), n.p.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*

entire history of sensibility is unfolded, with its events of joy and torment, lacerations and relief, roughness and smoothness.”<sup>202</sup> It is the pulp of the paradise, a perverse but pleasurable paradise, the sweet paradise of the sugary fruit, of the three hummingbirds who take the erotic honey that leaks from the fruit, now between a female sex organ and a heart, but at the same time surrounded by thorns, as in *Le Sacré coeur* (1992), in which in the background one can see the deforested landscape filled now with spread palm trees. Or also the paradise of fruits imprisoned by machines of sharp teeth that will devour them as in *El gusto del poder* (1991). A symbiotic machine, from the typical colonial tradition, that arrives in America to exert its dominance, feeding on nature, incorporating nature into its operations. The taste of power has the flavor of fruits. It is the dominance of life, which existed in the New World in a diverse and essentially fragile form, open to enjoyment. It is interesting to notice that a previous version of the same image, a drawing made on paper using black stone, takes the title *Fatum* (1990), a Latin word meaning “fate,” “destiny,” but also “inevitable” or “ruin.” It is Cuba (the flag with the lone star trembling to the left) already ruined, with its destiny delineated in the early days of its discovery.

---

<sup>202</sup> Rafael Rojas, “El dolor y la pulpa,” in *Ramón Alejandro* (Paris: L’Atelier des Brisants, 2006), n.p.



5.3 – Ramón Alejandro, *Le sacré cœur*, 1992.

In Ramón Alejandro, we have paradise, but paradise as an anticipated ruin. That is, one can find all the classic themes of the representation of Eden. One of his last

paintings, *Alla va candela* (2008), is an example of the convergence of such symbolic aspects—the relentless flow of water, the serpent (in the shape of a candelabrum that holds a flame of fire), the tree (that occupies with importance the foreground), and the fruit. It is interesting to note that the fruit, inside the general myth of paradise, is above all connected to fetish. According to Richard Heinberg, the fruit is the fetish par excellence: the isolated object, the end product, autonomous and completely separate from the process of creation from which it originated. Heinberg says: “the eaten of the forbidden fruit, and other metaphors used in describing the fall, suggest that the spiritual degeneration of human beings came about because of their excessive involvement with the end product of creation, the manifest world of things and forms.” The fruit is human’s “fascination with form.”<sup>203</sup> In Alejandro, it is the pure form, and it is paradoxically destruction, pain, fall, and disgrace. For this reason, the fruits are often gloomy, poisonous, and deadly: they herald the downfall of those who look at them, who want them, who are willing to eat them. Severo Sarduy, when defining the painter’s work, coined the expression: a predictable archeology. For him, Ramón Alejandro’s creations are not the celebration of the new, of the birth, but rather are the future of a powerful era that will fall into a deep sleep. When speaking of Ramón Alejandro’s oldest machines, lost in desolate landscapes, Sarduy made considerations that can be used within the ambit of the fruit, he calls them ruins *avant la lettre*:

---

<sup>203</sup> Richard Heinberg, *Memories and Visions of Paradise: Exploring the Universal Myth of a Lost Golden Age* (Los Angeles: Jeremy Tarcher), 93.





5.4 – Ramón Alejandro, *El gusto del poder*, 1991.

Alejandro gives a vision, in a prismatic and astral light, of his constructions that dress the most diverse simulacra, the most different figures. These ships of stable appearances and good energy—with structures of gothic traces—which the painter gives us in an enigma, are the emblem of the human constructive compulsion, the key of the *homo faber*, but also the key of his

unpredictability and lack of reflection: a breath, a light seism can put them upside-down. They are ruins *avant la lettre*, the vestiges of a *predictable archeology*. These constructions are nothing but the definition of the same drawing: the proportions of man in the center of the rosacea of numbers.”<sup>204</sup>

Fruits are like constructions, perhaps more. They can feed us (as much physically as mentally) and be converted into another type of energy, into dreams, into erotic pleasure, or simply they can spoil, be swallowed by time, in any case, they will disappear and will become another form, as the ruins do. That is, in Alejandro, fruits are ruins because they show themselves as the thing that will decay, will be purified, for his fruits are open, sliced, exposed to the outside. More than a trivial eroticism, they are corrupted, they are the death we will eventually find: this inexorable future. One can see then that the theme of paradise in Alejandro is not that of the future and redemptive paradise, but of lost paradise, of a civilization, nature and landscape that no longer exist and only survive through its dreams. In the case of pre-Columbian America, it is a dream of nature, of total dominance of creation, in its most powerful forms and meanings. But if we were to be more specific, Alejandro’s landscape is twofold, as it deals with the pre-Columbian America in general but also with post-revolutionary Cuba. It is the before and the after of two revolutions, the one of the conquest and the one of Castro, they are two heaps of ruins in a picture, two overlapping planes that dialogue, as if the two eras had fallen to the same fate.

---

<sup>204</sup> Severo Sarduy, “Une archéologie prévisible,” in *Ramón Alejandro* (Paris: L’Atelier des Brisants, 2006), n.p.



5.5 – Ramón Alejandro, *Allá va candela*, 2008.

In *Las comidas profundas*, a book illustrated by Alejandro, Ponte develops the thesis that eating is to be submerged in ruins, in an archaeological site. “Eating is to sink, to dig, to take out the roots, cement, poles.”<sup>205</sup> Food is ruin, in the sense that in its absence, in its scarcity (as in the case of Cuba in the Special Period of the 90s, economically destroyed after the end of the Soviet Union), it becomes a metaphor. The ruin, as defined by Spanish philosopher María Zambrano, is the metaphor par excellence.<sup>206</sup> And food, according to Ponte, can easily move from one meaning to another, like the transformation of floor cloths into meat, peels of grapefruit into milk. He starts the account evoking his empty table: “I write on the eating table. The table is

---

<sup>205</sup> Ponte, *Las comidas profundas*, 22.

<sup>206</sup> María Zambrano, “Uma metáfora da esperança: As Ruínas,” *Sopro*, no. 37 (2010).



covered with an oily tablecloth, with food drawings: fruits and grilled meat and glasses and bottles, everything I do not have. My Spanish castle is to write about food. To get seated in front of the empty table and to cover it with the white sheet the drawings of food and to write about food on the sheet.”<sup>207</sup> The lack of food, the lack of possibility of pleasure through eating, is particularly harsh on the island. Orlando González Esteva, in his book *Cuerpos en Bandeja*, illustrated by Alejandro, states how taste is an essential part of Cubanhood: “There is no doubt that all the senses of Cubans coincide with taste. We see, hear, and touch with taste. We even think with it.”<sup>208</sup> In this absence, food can only be profound or subterranean, that is, imaginary or clandestine. In the first case, the hungry, or the writer, become cartographers, seeking imaginary lands. American land, which before was abundant, is destroyed: Cuban agriculture is not functional. It does not feed. We enter the recovering of the most deformed in memory. Ponte says: “I suppose that in the north pinecones and breads are abundant. Like an old cartographer who fills maps with Aeolus and whales and people of antipodes, I locate somewhere the Place Where Delicious Food Comes From (I saw it on a postcard, a painting by Paul Klee). And I still call this imaginary place Cuba.”<sup>209</sup> In the second case, that of the underground or clandestine food, the madness of the erotic object or the economic crisis, deepens the metaphor, the search for substitution. Ponte recounts stories of the poet Guillaume Apollinaire, of men who eat women’s shoes: they equate the shoes to the flesh of the women who reject them. He also takes the opportunity to divagate about the food substitutions in the Cuban black market.

---

<sup>207</sup> Ponte, *Las comidas profundas*, 7.

<sup>208</sup> Orlando González-Esteva, *Cuerpos en bandeja: frutas y erotismo en Cuba* (México, D.F: Artes de México, 1998), 77.

<sup>209</sup> Ponte, *Las comidas profundas*, 11.

[There], two raw materials mainly occupy the substitutive searches. . . . The first one is meat. To intend the materiality of a cow, the life that palpitates in this mountain of food, in this big bag of blood. The second one, good alcohol. One extracts opaque liquids, fabricates elixirs of surprising names: Champagne of Hammock, Take-the-Panties-off, Spit-Far, Wait-for-me in-the-Apt, Pyongyang, Tiger Bone. (Pyongyang was the farthest name that could occur to one of the manufacturers. The farthest city is the one that one trespasses in the middle of drunkenness. You walk through unknown streets and, in the event you cross with someone else, they cannot understand your words).<sup>210</sup>

As said before, the lack of food is the work of a state of exception in which people lived and still live in the Caribbean island. A state of war that was ironically named Special Period. It was a state of exception inside an already existing state of exception, if such a thing is possible. It is not by chance that, in *Las comidas profundas*, Ponte is all the time searching for parallels to his own condition, comparing it to those lived by other writers who were under armed conflict. By describing the state of Virginia Woolf during WWII, isolated in the countryside, after having her house destroyed by a German bombardment and only having as a last resource to describe the food that lacks on her table, Ponte points out:

In the middle of the war, the novelist does not want to get food, to cook it, to eat it. They still suffer from an ordinary hunger, but maybe what preoccupies him the most is to help the loosening of their writing. They want to maintain the mastering of the words that mean food, that mean life before the war. They try not to lose power on the restrained, it is important for them to grasp what probably does not emerge from anything: the word, a fragment of jar taken from the debris of some bombardment. The English novels (who knows it the most are the translators) abound in gardens, in the names of plants. In the middle of a war, the novelist knows that he cannot oversee either the garden or the

---

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 31.

pantry, for the name of food and flowers would become so literal and remote as the ones of stars. Sausage and codfish respond to the tides of the black market and should respond to the fluctuations of the one who writes. Here also the year ends and food becomes words, projects of life or memory. They are in the future and in the past, never in the now. In the present, the tongue cannot touch them but by their names. From the imitation of swallowing them, words sprout and the stove and the table are filled with them. . . . As novelists in the middle of a war, we need to talk of that which feeds us, it is difficult to believe in the tangible when it appears. It seems so mythological to eat, that the food should appear through a psalm, recited. . . . Paris, during 1871, Barcelona in the Spanish Civil War, the London of the war and the post-war of Virginia Woolf and Eugenio Montale: I cannot find a better way of explaining to myself the foods we make, but only if I turned them into provisional, substituting ones, food of campaigns. War—one can see through the diaries of Virginia Woolf—comes before any mobilization and after the waves of licensing.<sup>211</sup>

As seen, Ponte's greatest book about war is *La fiesta vigilada*. If one starts to analyze the book by the cover, one finds that it is edited by the Catalan press Anagrama, with a cover that follows the standard for the literary series that the book belongs to: "Letras Hispánicas." Thus, below the title and the name of the author, an image should be placed. In the case of Ponte, it is a photography that singularly called my attention. On the foreground, there is a man dressed in black for a party. He is elegant with his bow tie, well-done hair. He wears a discreet—but apparently expensive—watch on his left hand, and hugs wildly a blond woman—whose face is not seen. She was caught by surprise and reacts to it. The photography is made a second before the woman pushes back the man. The man is masked, is also hidden behind the female body. He bears a peculiar mustache. In sum, it appears that he does not want to be recognized, or better, to have his presence at the party recorded by someone else.

---

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 34-36.

Another possible reading is that, knowing that his image will be apprehended, he exhibits himself. By hugging the woman, his eyes do not make contact with her (but only with the camera), ignoring the female, as she was only an object that gives him power, superiority in relation to whom is looking at him. It is the encounter of the exhibitionist with the voyeur. In the photography, there are two aspects that are even more peculiar. The masked man and the woman are registered slightly blurred, even though they are on the foreground. The photographer, actually, focused the lenses on another couple that is behind the first one. And, although they are almost vanished from the print, the face of the second man appears in perfect sharpness. Perhaps the photographer wanted, in reality, to register the figures on the background. This other man does not wear a mask, and is also hugging a woman who has her back to the camera. But his look is not directed at the camera as one would expect. He is looking at the first man, the irreverent masked one. He watches that man. The masked man is under surveillance. Thus, the photography fits perfectly into the title of the book. It gives us the sensation that the party is tense, artificial, closer to a game of hide-and-seek, of cat and rat, of subterfuges and appearances. In other words, it is not a party. There is no possibility of a party under surveillance. “The revolutionaries had converted the party into an obsessive point of attack during the old regime,” Ponte declares.<sup>212</sup> An attack on leisure, on frivolous music, on nightlife, on cinema.

---

<sup>212</sup> Ponte, *La fiesta vigilada*, 124.

Bataille, always him, in the text about *The Notions of Expenditure*, places the party as one of the forms of useless expenditure, as an event that is closer to the side of lack of control, of anomy, and perhaps of extreme permissibility, rather than restriction. Hardly do Surveillance and partying coexist: one must very often annihilate the other. Bataille writes: “the destructions, in the American northeast, reach the levels of village burnings, of the sinking of canoe fleets. Ingots of blazoned copper, sorts of coins to which sometimes one attributes a fictitious value . . . are broken and thrown into the ocean. The typical delirium of the party is indifferently associated with hecatombs of properties and accumulated gifts.”<sup>213</sup> Partying must be excess, while surveillance is constriction, necessity of verifying if the norm is being observed, ultimately, of denouncing what is outside the establishment. Partying presupposes that which occurred in its interior and is not subject to future reviews. The surveilled party is, actually, a pseudo-party.

In his most well-known text, Debord postulated—as part of his thesis on the society of the spectacle—that, in the contemporaneity, there are no longer parties in the proper sense, no more parties as the archaic ones, which followed the cyclical time of nature, but only pseudo-parties that are integrated to the reign of image, to the domain of appearance, and not of being. This rule of image is spread throughout all spheres of the living. Our time does not know parties, there is no participation of a community in the luxurious expenditure of life, for societies do not possess either luxury or communities. The pseudo-parties are merely parodies of their predecessors, they are disappointing. For

---

<sup>213</sup> Bataille, *A parte maldia*, 35.

Debord, parties are as much inexistent in capitalism as in the so-called socialist societies: as seen before, one is the diffuse spectacle, the other is the concentrated spectacle, nothing more. Both are simulacra of parties, parties under control.

The great party of poverty is revolution. It is when the person, who comes from scarcity, could, by means of violence, reach the objects that before were put in a sphere only reachable to the rich classes. To reach luxury, that is to say, to bring to the hungry the possibility of useless expenditure, should be ultimately the objective of revolution. Ironically, the Cuban revolution, rather, installed poverty as the norm and luxury as the enemy. A paradoxical case is Lezama Lima. With his totally protuberant, excessive, wasteful writing, he attained a remarkable enthusiasm for the revolution. Just in the following years after the taking of power by the regime, he considered the subject: “among the best things of the Cuban revolution, reacting against the era of madness that was the stage of dissipation, of false richness, is to have brought again the spirit of the irradiating poverty, of the superabundant poor by the gift of the spirit.”<sup>214</sup>

One has to note, however, that in Lezama can be a double game. Perhaps, before poverty was placed as norm by the revolution, creativity will survive. As pointed out by Jorge Luis Arcos, soon Lezama became critical of the situation, ever more unsustainable due to the limitations of the revolutionary intellectuals.<sup>215</sup> The discussion about revolution and poverty in Lezama can be seen as a last and desperate attempt to adorn revolution with luxury. It is indicative that party, or waste, would no longer have the central place,

---

<sup>214</sup> José Lezama Lima, “A partir de la poesía,” in *La cantidad hechizada* (La Habana: Unión, 1970), 49-50.

<sup>215</sup> Jorge Luis Arcos, “El barroco carcelario: Lezama Lima y la revolución, 40 años después de ‘Paradiso,’” *Cubaencuentro*, July 04, 2006.

the space of the famous huge banquets hosted by Lezama. Ponte, commenting on that fragment from Lezama, is even more harsh. He could not imagine that poverty would reach such high levels. For Lezama, Cuban imagination is historically grounded in scarcity. There would be a formula where money and creativity would occupy inversely proportional positions. One should give one away to have the other. It is a quixotic Lezama: “the revolution of 1959 will be responsible so that one part of this formula—poverty—happens to everybody. The irradiating, as in all revolutions, spread to the time of promises, to the future.”<sup>216</sup>

Ponte is a kind of involuntary heir of this poverty that even Lezama could not imagine. He has to depart from this insipid, deserted place in order to make literature. From there, it maybe comes the double game in Ponte’s text, which goes around food and scarcity. Hunger is also the party of Baroque’s repertory, he says: “the horror of emptiness does not leave us (hunger is used to be sinuous, not rotund; it is used to speak in spirals, not in a straight form; it is baroque, not scanty.”<sup>217</sup> And the urban decadence is also baroque. Havana is, for the author, a city of unpainted walls, which are so weather-beaten that they appear to always be under rain; the rain is printed on the walls, with mud spots: the city crumbles. The structures collapse. Columns are taken down, extracted, demolished. The only luxury is the very inhabitant, they have the sumptuousness of being alive: “everyday [the inhabitant of Havana] makes himself believe that he lives and that each of his gestures, habits and surprises, sum up into Havana. He seems to say: I am the

---

<sup>216</sup> Antonio José Ponte, *El libro perdido de los origenistas* (Sevilla: Editorial Renacimiento, 2004), 162.

<sup>217</sup> Ponte, *Las comidas profundas*, 36.

only luxury of this city, which is more miserable day by day.”<sup>218</sup> By establishing the revolution, the rime sought to distance itself from the excessive, the abundant, and it preferred the aridity of militarization, the isolation of its inhabitants, the intellectual monopolization, the persecution of homosexuals. One could not diverge, detour. But scarcity is one of the engines of imagination, one of the forms of creative survival that was found by many inhabitants of the island: “scarcity is the paradise for nominalism and black markets.”<sup>219</sup>

Žižek, on a Leninist affirmation, argues that the desire to deprive revolution from excesses is to want a revolution without revolution.<sup>220</sup> It would be the moment in which the so-called proletariat would take themselves to the instant in which they can break with all limits, destroy them, and, hence, open a opportunity to establish a new order of a new historical time. Something has constantly been going wrong with this scheme: the new order, already on stage and made effective, must pass to reject the party in its full manifestation. This was one of the first contradictions of Soviet socialism, as perceived by Buck-Morss when analyzing its mass culture. During the celebrations for the October Revolution anniversary, that is, the commemoration of the great party—which should be a new party—another breaking in historical time could become possible again, and the staging of the revolution could turn itself into its own revolution, possessing all the expenditure, excess and anomia characteristic of such an event.<sup>221</sup> In other words, the celebrations of the revolution must be converted into a pseudo-party, a surveilled party.

---

<sup>218</sup> Antonio José Ponte, *Un seguidor de Montaigne mira La Habana* (Madrid: Verbum, 2001), 41.

<sup>219</sup> Ponte, *Las comidas profundas*, 34.

<sup>220</sup> Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!*, 28-29.

<sup>221</sup> Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*, 140.



Cuba seems to follow the same path: “and the same revolution that is able to mobilize hundreds of thousands of people for its anniversaries, condemned any festive contact between two or more people. It sought to manage the enthusiasm and happiness, to detour them towards mechanical political rules.”<sup>222</sup>

Debord coined the term the society of the spectacle, and not consumer society, because the non-party and the theatricalization of life, its transformation into a spectacle, is the characteristic that dominated the outcome of mass utopias during the twentieth century. For this reason, the photograph that is stamped on the cover of *La fiesta vigilada* seems to belong to a theatrical play, a staging to the eye of the camera. It is interesting to note that the author of the image is none other than Robert Capa: perhaps the most important war photographer of the twentieth century, who covered such events as the Spanish Civil War, WWII, which gave him the recognition of being the modern eye of the battlefield.

---

<sup>222</sup> Ponte, *La fiesta vigilada*, 126.



5.6 – Robert Capa, *Carnival* (Austria), 1950.

As we saw in the last chapter, the biggest theatricalization in Cuba, according to Ponte, perhaps is not even the revolution in itself, but the idea of a constant war (war is another medium that should lead to waste, to useless expenditure). There is a pseudo-war against a Yankee enemy, and this war is so staged that it closed Cuba as an “amusement park” in two senses: the party that should be the revolution itself and the party of the society of the spectacle. That is, the island of pleasure, gambling, prostitution, music, mafia—as Cuba was characterized before the revolution—was abandoned. The city of

Havana was deformed, had its buildings destroyed, its streets filled with holes. The urban landscape was totally changed along with the behavior of people, the governmental investments, the nationalist discourse. After the installation of the Soviet nuclear devices, during the Missile Crisis, in Ponte's words, Havana was a city waiting for the apocalypse:

If some cabaret of Havana was left open, it was only to propitiate the entrance to the delegations of foreign governments that visited the city. The country closed its beaches and concentrated all its attentions in secret arsenals: missiles and radars. The war industry came to substitute the industry of tourism, war preparations reveled in the touristic scheme. Music was substituted by rants, prostitution was substituted by other forms of body swashbucklings. And Havana was declared a battlefield that would last for decades. Even until today. For, as the Missile Crisis passed, it is still profitable to count on the foreign military menace. (Nothing better than a good enemy to cohere and give personality). Cuban capital started to live under a more or less flexible curfew. All wasted tension in showing off a determined body in a brothel or cabaret, all exertion on a number among the rest of the numerals of the lottery or the roulette, were concentrated in the campaign to make a small island politically unforgettable. The dreams of tourism served, properly recycled, to politics. Even to get from the state of siege, from the curfew, touristic gratifications. Even to convert Cuba into the amusement park of Cold War, and to make coexist the Havana that was described by Graham Greene and the Havana of a war memory of Antonio Benítez Rojo.<sup>223</sup>

It is not by chance that Ponte, when writing his short story *Un arte de hacer ruínas*, starts to slowly erase the ruined Havana from the surface. As we saw earlier, he does that through demolitions, collapses, and remounts another city in the underground, a city hidden under the name of Tuguria: the city-memory.<sup>224</sup> But this remounted city is based on fragments. Memory is a broken object. There is no reason to believe that Tuguria is not as catastrophic as Havana. The catastrophe makes memory a dead game.

---

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 66-67.

<sup>224</sup> Ponte, *Un arte de hacer ruinas*, 2005.

Havana in ruins, as a bombarded city (destroyed by the catastrophe of the revolution), it can only exist through an imagined metropolis, that is, transferred and remounted through fragments of memory in another space, a space that is accessible only through excavation, eating, and creating a metaphor. The slum is the metaphor of the proper city. Ponte's underground city, his Tuguria, occupies the same space of meaning of Alejandro's fruits. They are an attempt to access the interior of the body-city: even if this action provokes pain or collapses. Ponte in his somewhat biographical essay, *Un seguidor de Montaigne mira La Habana*, clarifies that the urban space is ever more fabled, he believes that "we make and inhabit symbolic cities, we try to read them in the same way we read books. We leaf through the streets as a reader would do with pages, we leaf through them. And, when finding them in books, readers want to recognize them, transforming themselves into pedestrians of Utopia."<sup>225</sup>

The fact that Havana, now in ruins, can only exist as an imagined city is also unfolded by several artists. The painter Aldo Menéndez, with his collage (or simulated collage) technique, converts the ruins into a cinematic view, as if the debris of the city were part of a dystopic film, posterior to the total annihilation, but they are debris that are put together only momentarily, causing a certain degree of strangeness on the part of the viewer. He makes a quasi inversion, as if the ruins could become virtual, that which cannot be touched. This is also the case with the visual artist Fernando Rodríguez, who created for himself the fictional friend Francisco de la Cal, a simple man who became blind in 1960, right after the arrival of the revolution. As he cannot see the city in ruins,

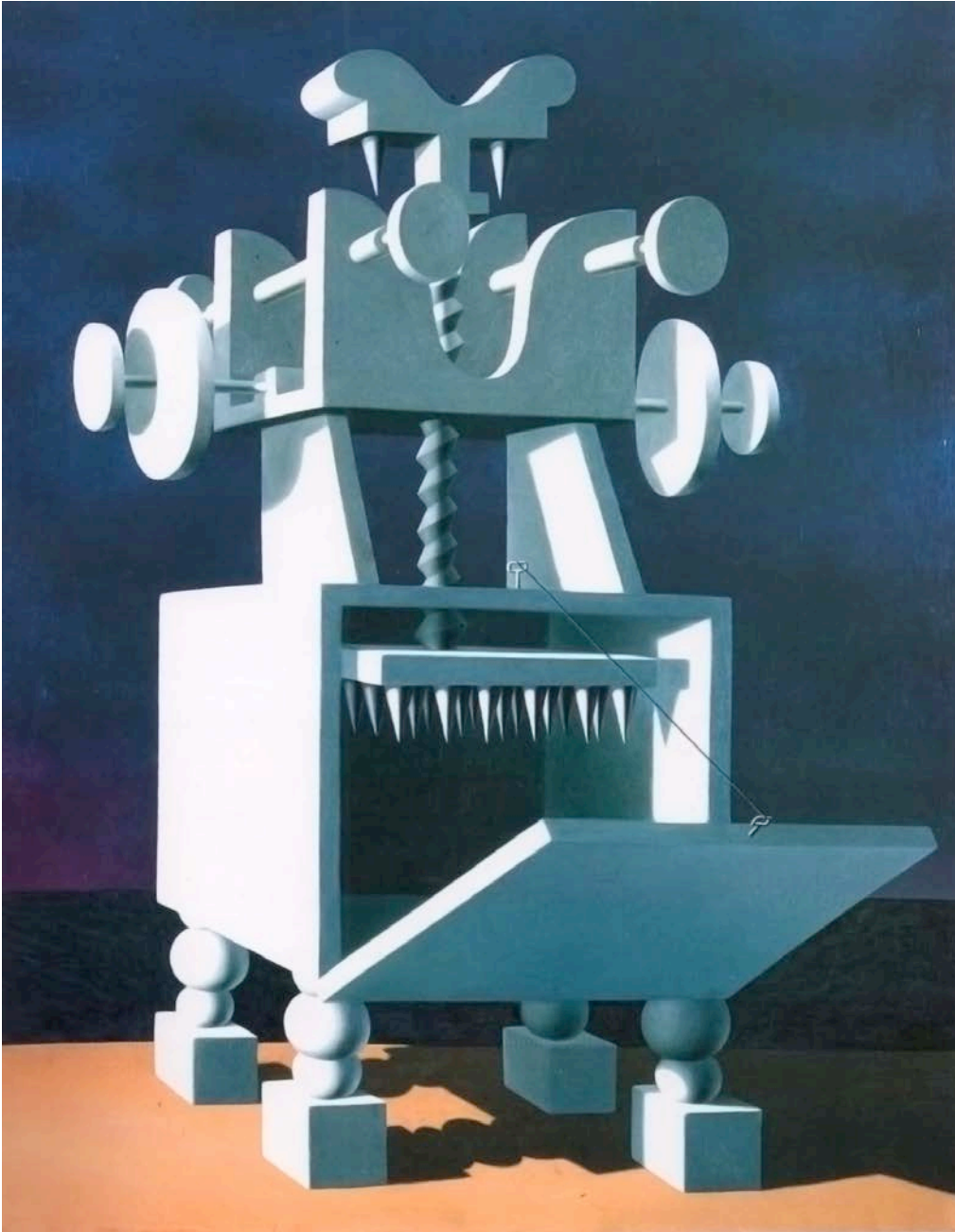
---

<sup>225</sup> Ponte, *Un seguidor de Montaigne mira La Habana*, 26.

and being an extremely patriotic person, he has his own interpretation of and beliefs in the advancements announced by the regime's propaganda. Rodríguez acts as the means of expression for the blind man, constructing his works from the descriptions that he receives from his friend, descriptions of how the blind man imagines the present in his own mind.<sup>226</sup> The result is an obvious lack of synchronization between his visions, which are often mythical, and the present inhabited by those who, in a certain way, are obliged to see the abandonment: from the wedding between Castro and the Virgen de la Caridad to the richness generated by agricultural production in times of scarcity, as in the work *O Camponês Orgulhoso* (1997). Another one who departs from the ruins to arrive at the imaginary city is Vicente Hernández, who in paintings like *Opus Habana* (2008), transfers the typical cityscape of Havana (its port that divides the city in two) to a baroque field, as if the city has been transferred to a new phantasy story that takes place in the eighteenth century. Vicente Hernández is full of flying machines. Flying machines that can even be seen as new apparitions of former pieces by Alejandro. Flying machines: as an escape from the typical claustrophobia of the islands.

---

<sup>226</sup> Luis Camnitzer, *New Art of Cuba* (Austin: UT Press, 2003), 289-290.



5.7 Ramón Alejandro, *Le virginal*, 1968.

If we go back to Alejandro. In his paintings, the machines, before arriving in such things as the mentioned *El gusto del poder*, had their first appearances in *Le virginal* or *Ce n'est pas du Louis XV* (1968). They were so well cut, of ferric colors, and isolated, as

instruments of torture photographed during their exposure in any European museum. But they are still so well preserved that they could also be fully operational, being kept in an aseptic enclosure of some institutional body, waiting to be sent to the land of its victim, perhaps in some penal colony, wishing to acquire meaning, and to be placed at the center of the show, as in Kafka's short story. This machines ends up occupying the main aspect of the landscape (*L'eau*, 1984), as if they were left there by an archaic civilization. Ramón Alejandro calls them "articulated structures that represent heavenly or hellish entities."<sup>227</sup> Barthes was one of the first that interpreted them as torture machines: "In the beginning (which is that of the illusion or parodies), the objects painted by Alejandro appear as torture machines, cages, boxes, crates, sticks, caps, rakes, pitchforks, ready to finish, sting, crush, or as cartilaginous things that are representative of the deepest horror, which is one of the threat."<sup>228</sup> According to the philosopher, they are intransitive and non-subjective machines, without the executor or without the tortured. They are open so that we give them the meaning. They can be torture machines, as well as pleasure machines.

Alejandro's machines, specifically the ones he paints in the 1980s and which were commented on by Sarduy, are objects, as said, that are part of the landscape and are so well preserved that they do not look like ruins. Actually, it would be impossible for them to belong to the rest of a lost civilization. Rather than machines built as totems of an ancient civilization, they were created by some natural power, put there during the creation of the world, or better, in the instant just before the fall. Flying machines but paradoxically machines that do not have propulsion power, as *L'air* (1984). Alejandro

---

<sup>227</sup> Cabrera Infante *¡Vaya Papaya!: Ramón Alejandro*, n.p.

<sup>228</sup> Roland Barthes, "À la recherche du nom," In *Ramón Alejandro* (Paris: L'Atelier des Brisants, 2006), n.p.

rescues them from an instant anterior to the time in which a god would decide if they would be kept or not, prior to seeing, as in Haroldo de Campos' transcreations of *Genesis* into Portuguese, if they were good or not.<sup>229</sup> But Alejandro's Eden always walks towards the city, even when apparently it is all nature. And it walks not towards any city, or a city in general terms, but towards the urban space of Havana. That city is present through small symbols and other typical references of that place. But one thinks that they were added to his work little by little. Over time, his paintings gain ever more details, coming from an arid desert to a much more populated universe.



5.8 Ramón Alejandro, *El carácter efímero de los fenómenos de este mundo*, 1987.

---

<sup>229</sup> Haroldo de Campos, *Bere'shith: a cena da oriem* (São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2000).



In the painting *El fruto del esfuerzo* (1986), one sees the landscape (which is, in this case, not very Caribbean and more arid and European) invaded by a composition of such geometric characteristics that it could only be made by human ingenuity. But, in the place of a civilized mark, in the place where one would expect to see a trace of Havana—in that amorphous monster made by precise compartments—there is a skyscraper made of stones that defies gravity. Such a landscape of rocks is also present in *El carácter efímero de los fenómenos de este mundo* (1987), in which there is something of a spiral labyrinth that ends with a big arc in the background like the entrance of a temple. However, in *La Terre Promise* (2004), this same arc returns accompanied by buildings that recall the portrayals of the Tower of Babel made by Brueghel or Matthieu Merian), with its typical circularity: a mixture of city, house and mountain. And the landscape (that before had an Iberian aridity) receives the most diverse fruits on wet sand, as if the sea had just receded. They are soursops, papayas, bananas, cashews, starfishes, watermelons, pineapples and more, everything arranged in a typical *ebó* along with candles, occultist cards, mirrors, coins, and a spinning top. In the sand, there is also an Abakua sign, the secret society of Black Cubans so well studied by Ortiz and Alejo Carpentier. This is the Havana of Alejandro, which was returned to the idea of Eden, as a primordial place, but at the same time, it was brought to the future, redeemed, with the embodiments of its African structure.

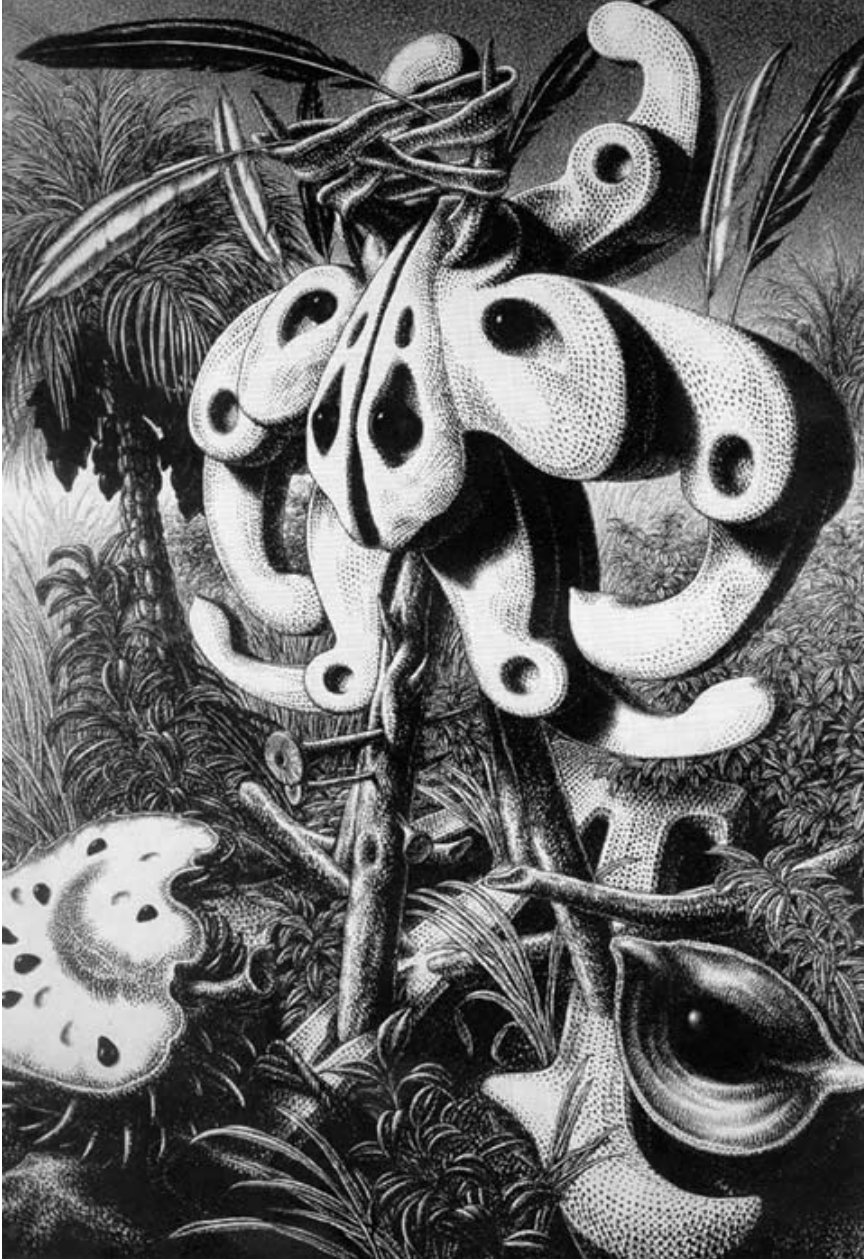


5.9 Ramón Alejandro, *La Terre Promise*, 2004.

In Ramón Alejandro, the African idea of symbiosis between nature, humanity and the spiritual world is constantly present. Everything can be turned into a fetish, including the non-worked, the purely natural. It is remarkable that we attribute, almost automatically, the cult of the African deities and ancestors to sculpture, to the singular transformation of wood made by the most diverse groups of Africa, as the masks of the Ivory Coast, the *nkondi* (or nail fetishes) of the Congo, or even the perspective of the carving that comes from the Dogon people that so amazed and terrified part of the European artistic circle since the nineteenth century. In Alejandro, everything can be worshiped in the same sense of a primordial spirit that is a river, a tree, a mound of soil. Fruits become the object of the fetish in itself. Eshu (the African deity) no longer needs to be present in a sculpture, a phallic artifact, but he appears embodied in the fruits themselves, in the compositions or arrangements made from them. He is not an Eshu of

the African dark colors, of the aged wood spattered with blood, but a colorful god, composed by the yellow tropicality of the papaya, of the smoothness of the soursop with its exterior of thorns, and of the plumes of exotic birds that inhabit the jungle, everything being nonexistent in the black continent. In the drawing *Abrecamino* (1991), we see exactly that: the meeting of Yoruba mythology—of a deity who is able to free, those who are pleasing to her, from all difficulties, to show them the diverse possibilities of choice—with the nature of the New World.

What is most impressive is that in the composition of Alejandro there is very little human work. In other words, despite being clearly an assembly of parts until it reaches a figure or something that reminds us of the appearance of a humanoid (as in the baroque technique of anamorphosis), it seems more likely that this form was made without human intervention and was assembled by a spiritual force that used what was available to make its representation. Ramón Alejandro is clearly inserted into the realm of magic, although his fruits are soaked into a booming realism, appearing more real even than photographs, as a painting that aims to duplicate, and even to expand, reality. It is not for nothing that some of his paintings, despite dealing with such natural topics, remind us of compositions of virtual reality. They seem to have been made with the aid of electronic textures, and it is astonishing that they are composed only with acrylic managed by his hands controlling the brush.



5.10 Ramón Alejandro, *Abrecamino*, 1991.

Alejandro's technique is to reach, through details, the limits of painting. As a Neo-Renaissance man, he superimposes layer after layer, color after color, in an attempt to produce a copy of reality with perfection. However, his desire to duplicate reality, reached such a point that Alejandro touched bottom. Around 2001, when he was painting

a work for the series *El huracán*, based on the writings of Ortiz, he became aware of the impossibility of his task and contemplated the end of his life. By being so obsessed with reality and with establishing a perfect contact with reality, Ramón Alejandro surpasses it. He ends up actually producing a delusion of reality, a kind of marvelous.

However, we have to understand that this reality of his paintings is not the “marvelous real” (as defined by Carpentier), but a realism that is at the edge of the ahistorical, the discovery of a place without a past and a place of madness, a place in-between as Silviano Santiago would say: between literature (or the dreams caused by it) and everyday life, as in the case of European travelers who came to America and mingled their delusions, their expectations with what they found.<sup>230</sup> It is a realism of image when it is between dreams and optical impressions. Ramón Alejandro also paints literature or that which literature led him to imagine.

The historian Sérgio Buarque de Holanda defined this relation to reality, which is created in the encounter of literature with the environment, in his case of study, Atlantic ancient mythology with the overwhelming nature of America, as the “psychosis of the marvelous.” It reached such a point that during the first centuries of the New World, the first Iberian colonizers had the idea that Brazil was an island that fulfilled the Celtic legends of a land of promise. It would have in its center a lake of gold formed by the encounter of the Riverplate with the Amazon River.

---

<sup>230</sup> For the theory of Latin American literature as a space in-between, see: Silviano Santiago, *Uma Literatura Nos Trópicos: Ensaio Sobre Dependência Cultural* (São Paulo: Editora Perspectiva, 1978).

Lacanian theory says that psychosis is not a loss of connection with reality but actually is a desperate attempt to be connected with it. It has to do with the impossibility of forging ties, with the creation of a fragile structure around the structure we call reality: it is a fragile structure but it is a productive structure—explains Marcus Coelen.<sup>231</sup> In Brazil, it almost forged a nation. As you already noticed: from here, we are going to move to another part of the Caribbean, the northeast side of Brazil. In which I believe the union between the psychosis (desperate attempt to connect with reality) and the marvelous (abundance of American nature seen through the eyes of knightly persons) gains its full force—we had already started to see that with Alejandro. In the case of Brazil, sculptor Francisco Brennand is searching for the lost paradise of that land, as I said, a land first imagined by European travelers as an island with a lake of gold in its center. This legend was discussed throughout the 20th century by several intellectuals besides Buarque de Holanda, as for instance Gustavo Barroso. Brennand's quest takes shape in the construction of a mythical universe inhabited by fabulous beings: cannibals, monsters, and totems, which are also, as Alejandro's fruits, emblems of the voluptuousness and fertility of the New World. The ruination of the New World is also present in Brennand. He preserves the ruins of the ancient city of Recife, the starting point of a dreamed Brazilian civilization, as he wants to recreate the lost Garden of Eden in the savage and violent loneliness of the tropical jungle. Now, we will go deeper into the journey through this marvelous and psychotic world. The means of transportation will be my words, the words of other writers—connected here as stars in a constellation—and the photographic images that Maria del Mar Bassa and I were able to recover from there.

---

<sup>231</sup> I took this explanation of what is psychosis for Lacan from: Marcus Coelen, "Por que a estrutura psicótica?" *Cult*, 174, November 2012, 34-37.

Before that, let us have a little pause.

## 6. Interlude: a Photographic Essay on Ramón Alejandro

*Today, the [graphic] art document triumphs, and one can affirm that the twentieth century will undergo the great revolution of which some of its first manifestations we now experience: graphic Language, the Image, goes as a pair with the literary language, Writing.*

John Grand-Carteret

During the first two weeks of November 2012, I threw myself into a trip to the capital of Latin America, Miami. I wanted to meet the man who constructed those marvelous and at the same time perverse worlds I was so fascinated with. I had the desire to enter into the very world of the painter Ramón Alejandro. I heard several times from friends and more experienced intellectuals that one of the biggest mistakes a writer can make is to meet personally their person of study. Well, it is true that I had previously known a few difficult experiences indicating that maybe they were right.

That was not the case with Ramón Alejandro. His generosity was beyond comments. He received me as one would do with an old childhood friend or a family member. During those days, especially at night, we threw ourselves into the streets of Miami. We met other painters, art dealers, homeless people, Buddhist practitioners, and marginal artists, such as the Cuban photographer JP Amador, who fascinated me and Ramón with his powerful work created in an abandoned, ruined house in Little Havana. Some of those encounters and peregrinations through the city are registered here.



Above all, we spent countless time talking in his studio. He would paint during the day, in order to take advantage of the sun brightening through his window. “I never paint with artificial light,” he said. I would then ask him tens of questions about his personal life, his theories on painting and color, his opinions about Cuban and French intellectual life, and, of course, take pictures of him. He would answer a question for several minutes, some times for one hour or two, while I took the opportunity to photograph him under the sound of his voice mixed with boleros played from his vast collection of CDs. Alejandro would reach a quasi hypnotic state during the answers. He would travel from one subject to another revealing all his erudition while still painting with perfection and precision. “How do you do that, digressing and painting at the same time?”—I asked. “To paint you do not occupy the brain, only the eye”—he answered.

My main desire was to record Alejandro in the process of creation. I had no plan. I just wanted him to paint. I just wanted him to work in his studio enclosed by ruins. The ruins of exile, the ruins of personal losses, and the ruins one always leaves behind. I was there with my camera waiting for the instant in which to make that decision, to release the shutter. As painting is often concerned with movement or the lack of it, I also used video to capture the dance of his hands. Some of the images shown here are stills extracted and printed from those videos. At any rate, the trance state, which Alejandro would go into, left me free to move around, to disguise myself as part of the studio itself. On the last day, I showed him some of my results and he responded: “oh, now you made me aware that you were recording me.” I wanted to grasp his handwork with the brush, his eyes focused on the canvas, and his fingers were becoming dirty with the ink. I was,

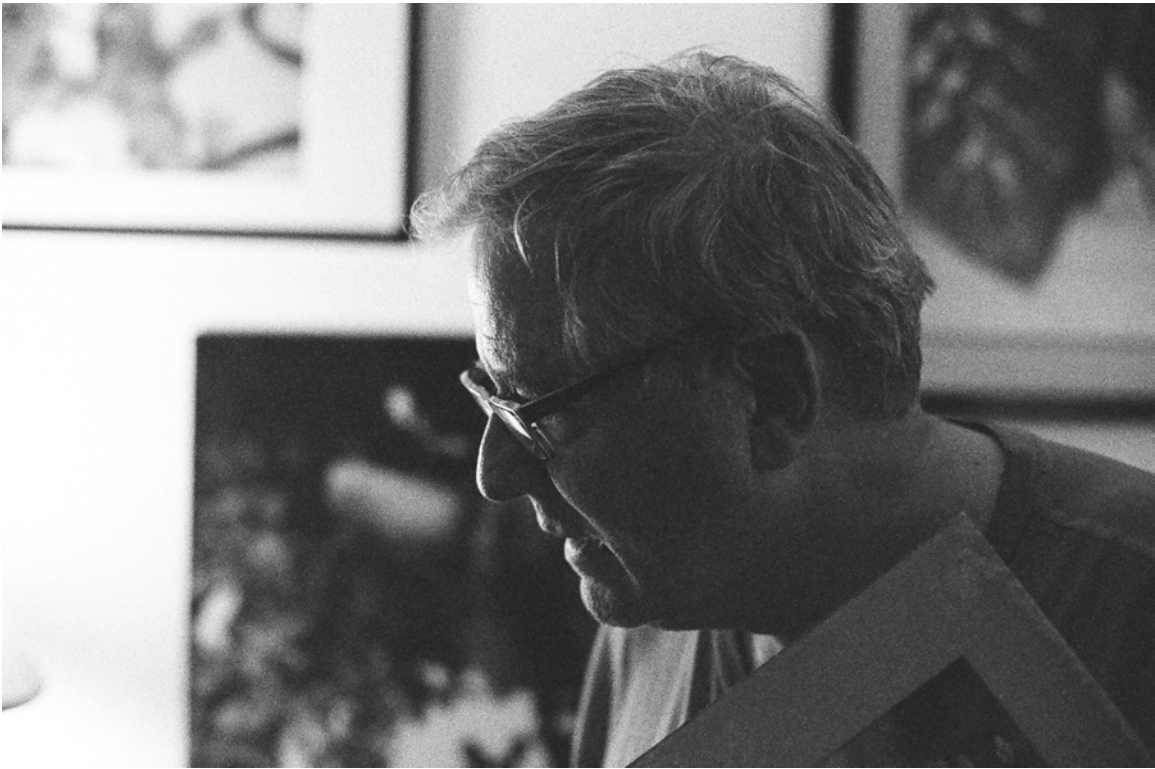
in the best tradition of photography, a voyeur. This short photographic essay is a work in progress. What you are going to see are the first results of one form of art reading the other.



6.1 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Ramón Alejandro Series*, 2012.



6.2 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Ramón Alejandro Series*, 2012.



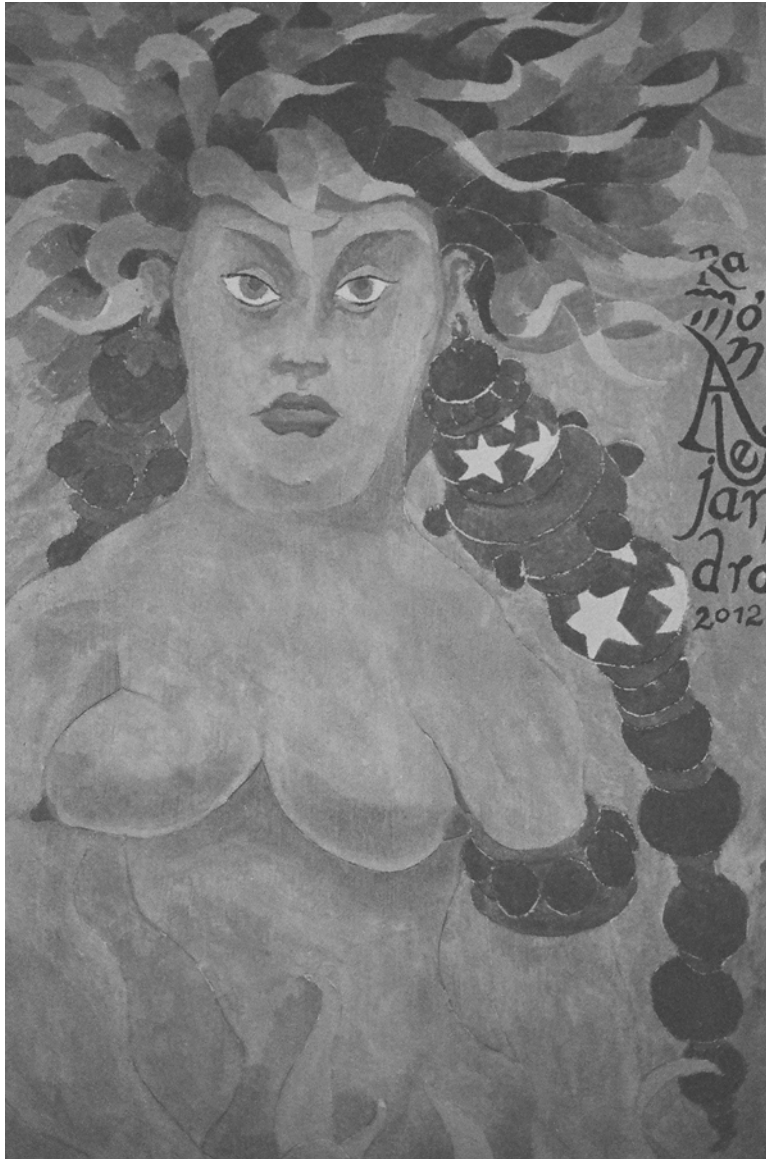
6.3 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Ramón Alejandro Series*, 2012.



6.4 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Ramón Alejandro Series*, 2012.



6.5 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Ramón Alejandro Series*, 2012.



6.6 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Ramón Alejandro Series*, 2012.





6.7 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Ramón Alejandro Series*, 2012.



6.8 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Ramón Alejandro Series*, 2012.



6.9 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Ramón Alejandro Series*, 2012.



6.10 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Ram6n Alejandro Series*, 2012.





6.11 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Ramón Alejandro Series*, 2012.



6.12 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Ramón Alejandro Series*, 2012.

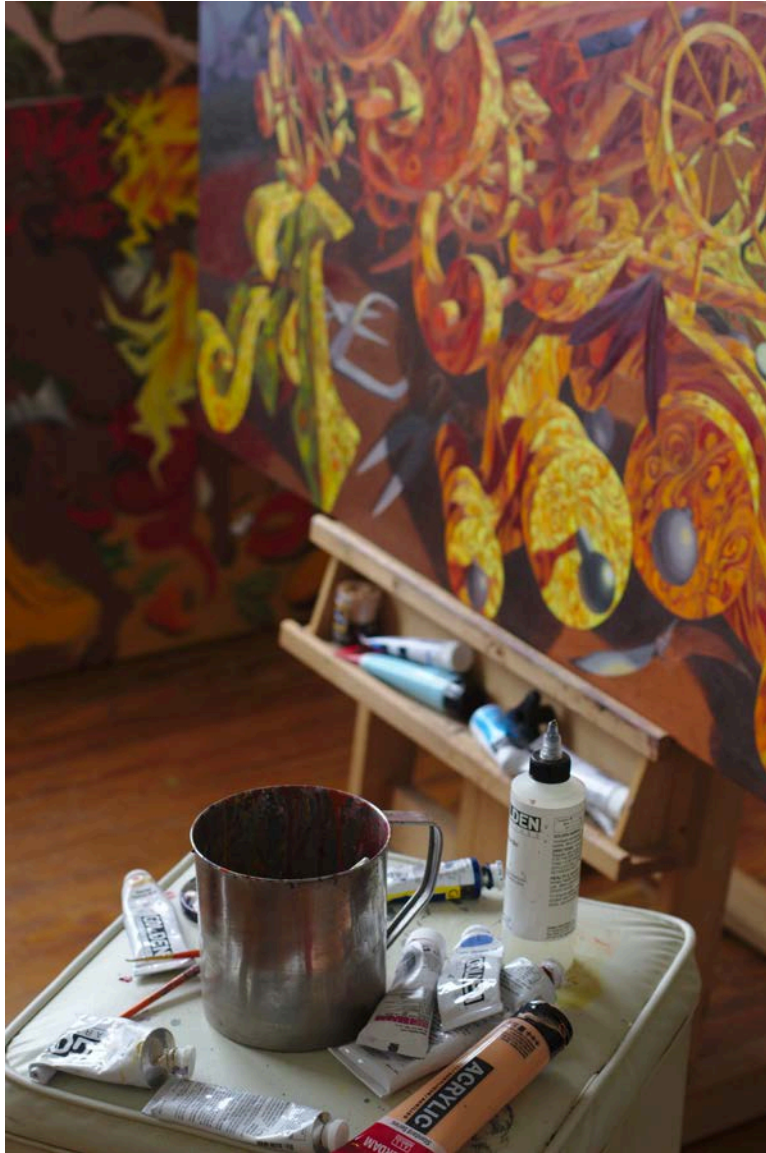


6.13 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Ramón Alejandro Series*, 2012.



6.14 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Ramón Alejandro Series*, 2012.





6.15 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Ramón Alejandro Series*, 2012.



6.16 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Ramón Alejandro Series*, 2012.

## 7. The Psychosis of the Marvelous: From the Island of Brazil to the Island of Brennand

*We were created to live in Paradise  
and Paradise was determined to  
serve us. Our destiny was modified.  
But, as to what would happen with  
the destiny of Paradise, nothing was  
said.*

Franz Kafka

Let us start with he who started. Let us start with he who discovered. Let us start with the last Big Bang.

Islands, Islands, Islands... A large one, a tiny one, a harsh one, a mild one; a bald island, a hairy island, an island with grey sand and dead lichens; an island with pebbles churned up, submerged, burned to the rhythm of each successive wave; broken-up island – with a saw-toothed shoreline; a swollen island – as if pregnant, the pyramidal shape of a dormant volcano; an island with an arc of fish and parrots; an island with austere points, sharp snail shells, mangrove thickets with a thousand hooks; an island surrounded by foam, like a little girl in a lace skirt; an island with the music of castanets and an island with the roaring gorges; an island to run aground on, an island to be stranded on, an island with neither name nor history; an island where the wing sings through the cavities of enormous shells; an island with coral-like water flowers; an island with an inactive volcano; a moss-green island, a chalk-grey island, a salt-white island; islands in such a tight and sunny constellation – I have counted a hundred and four – that, thinking about whom I'm thinking, I have named them *Gardens of the Queen*... Islands, islands, islands.<sup>232</sup>

---

<sup>232</sup> Alejo Carpentier, *The Harp and the Shadow* (San Francisco: Mercury House: 1992), 113.

In this way, Columbus narrates, according to Carpentier, his vision of the Caribbean Archipelago: A Garden of Islands. Another Columbus, embodied by the voice of Friar Bartolomé de las Casas, writes on October 14 of 1492 in his lost journal:

After having taken a survey of these parts, I returned to the ship, and setting sail, discovered such a number of islands that I knew not which first to visit; the natives whom I had taken on board informed me by signs that there were so many of them that they could not be numbered; they repeated the names of more than a hundred. I determined to steer for the largest. . . . They are all . . . exceedingly fertile and populous, the inhabitants living at war with one another, although a simple race, and with delicate bodies.<sup>233</sup>

Columbus, between a renaissance man and a medieval knight, of the sort who writes to the King about a magic world of beautiful fields, delicious fruits, trees and herbs, wide rivers from which gold emerges, nevertheless is a recurrence. He is already inserted into a chain of travelers for whom the island is the space of the unknown and, consequently, of the discovery of life's new possibilities: garden of islands, paradisiacal and paradoxically monstrous.

Much earlier, we can recall the literary mythical island as a shelter from the inherent dangers of the open sea, or yet as a privileged space because of its isolation and power of originality. Chet Van Duzer traced the island in early Western literature.<sup>234</sup> His survey starts with the *Odyssey*, where Ulysses navigates, like Columbus, island after island. Ulysses begins the story of islands in Ogygia, having already passed and still to

---

<sup>233</sup> Christopher Columbus, Bartolomé de las Casas, and Samuel Kettell (*Personal Narrative of the First Voyage of Columbus to America*. Boston: T.B. Wait and Son, 1827), 47.

<sup>234</sup> Chet Van Duzer, "From Odysseus to Robinson Crusoe: A Survey of Early Western Island Literature." *Island Studies Journal* vol. 1, no. 1, (2006): 143-162.

pass through several others: the island of the Sirens, the island of Aeolis (the divinity of the winds), the island of Aeaea (where the witch Circe lives), the island of Cyclops, the island of Lotophagi, the island of Scheria, etc. The Greek island reappears in other stories as in Plato, maybe the most fabulous island, Atlantis, which was described in his dialogues, which submerges due to natural disasters after being defeated by Athens.<sup>235</sup> The island, this place of importance for the imagination, also is present in the Irish *immrama* (word that means *grosso modo* “travel”), medieval tales where the island always occupies a central role. As in the story about Maél Dúin, a hero who takes his ship from Ireland in order to go over a succession of numerous islands and find his father’s killers and take revenge.<sup>236</sup> They are: Island of the Assassins, Island of the Gigantic Ants, Island of the Great Birds, Island of the Monster with a Horse-Like Face, Island of the Salmons, Island of the Marvelous Fruits, Island of the Revolted Beast, among many and many others.<sup>237</sup> The most interesting aspect of these Irish stories is that, among an endless number of islands, one calls our attention immediately to: the mythical island Hy Brazil. About the Island of Brazil, the historian Sérgio Buarque de Holanda writes, claiming its existence owing to the “psychosis of the marvelous:”

The large popularity of stories [about the Earthly Paradise] . . . and the long credit that they received, seem to offer a psychologically reasonable explanation to the mentality of many European sailors, which in the era of the great maritime discoveries, had about the New World. Not only the unreal stops which especially Celtic legends deal with, among many a Fabulous Island of Brazil, which in 1480 came to seriously concern Bristol ship-owners and appeared in medieval and

---

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 145-156.

<sup>237</sup> From: H. P. A. Oskamp, *The Voyage of Máel Dúin: A Study in Early Irish Voyage Literature followed by an Edition of Immram Curaig Máele Duin from the Yellow Book of Lecan in Trinity College, Dublin* (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff Publishing, 1970).

cinquecentist castes. But also in a period of two centuries, from 1526 to 1721, we know that they left the Canary Islands in the search of that *land of promise*. . . . This *psychosis of the marvelous* did not impose itself only on the popular simplicity and credulity. The idea that, on the other side of the Ocean Sea, one would certainly find, if not the true Terrestrial Paradise, at least a simile in every aspect comparable to it, was pursuing, with small differences, all the spirits. The image of that *garden* fixed throughout time in rigid forms, almost invariable, . . . could not be separated from the suspicion that this mirage should take shape in a still unexplored hemisphere, which the discoverers had the habit to tint with the colors of dreams. And the suspicion could be imported even to the most discreet and witty people, those who the spirit had been formed in the assiduous companionship with the authors of Antiquity.<sup>238</sup>

And perhaps, it was in this mixture of a dream to encounter a paradisiacal space and the companionship of Antiquity that Bento Teixeira wrote his epic poem *Prosopopéia*, a piece of literature narrated and listened to by mostly marine gods on the coast of Paranambuco. Paranambuco is, if not an island, a place that contained something of unparalleled beauty, of origin of a superior civilization, of high moral nobility, with some aspects of a small paradise. Thus, Bento Teixeira writes: “*É este porto tal, por estar postal/ Uma cinta de pedra, inculta e viva,/ Ao longo da soberba e larga costa,/ Onde quebra Neptuno a fúria esquiva./ Entre a praia e pedra descomposta.*”<sup>239</sup> But I do not doubt that they thought that this new world, Paranambuco or Pernambuco, was also an island like the Irish mythical one: on the map *Terra Brasilis* by Pedro Reinel from 1519, eight decades before *Prosopopéia*, the Amazon River and River Plate tend to meet in the Midwestern region of Brazil and form an island with the Atlantic Ocean. At the encounter of the two Rivers, an oasis, where today Brasília is: at the same time, the most

---

<sup>238</sup> Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, *Visão do Paraíso: Os Motivos Edênicos no Descobrimento e Colonização do Brasil* (São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1985), 178. (italics mine)

<sup>239</sup> Bento Teixeira, *Prosopopéia* (João Pessoa: Idéia, Editora Universitária: 2004), 102.

mythical and most modern city. Even on the maps from the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth century, this disposition (then more accentuated) still persists. It is possible to see Brazil depicted as an Island in the *Letter of Arnoldus Florentinus* and on the map entitled *América Meridionalis* on a version of 1630. In the encounter between the two rivers, there is an oasis: in the place where Brasília is today (the most modern and at the same time most mythical city). Brazil is part of a fantastic geography, from Brasília to Pernambuco, mainly its northeastern region, as the Caribbean imagined by Columbus. The Irish writer Rogér Casement who, in his roaming as a British diplomat, composed his famous accounts, including passing through the lands of Amazonia,<sup>240</sup> and defended fiercely the Archipelago called Brazil. The Irish Brazil of Casement was brought into life again by Geraldo Cantarino in *Uma ilha chamada Brasil*.<sup>241</sup> In this book, we see how Casement revitalized once more the pre-historical alliance between Brazil and Ireland. The latter, then seen as the boondocks of Europe, would have given the origin for the name of the tropical country. So Casement says in his text *Irish Origins of Brazil*: “that Brazil owes her name to Ireland—to Irish thought and legend—born beyond the dawn of history yet handed down in a hundred forms of narrative and poem and translated throughout all western Europe, until all western Europe knew and dreamed and loved the story, and her cartographers assigned it (a) place upon their universal maps.”<sup>242</sup>

---

<sup>240</sup> See: Roger Casement, *The Amazon Journal of Roger Casement* (London: Anaconda Editions), 1997.

<sup>241</sup> Geraldo Cantarino, *Uma ilha chamada Brasil: o paraíso irlandês no passado brasileiro*. Rio de Janeiro: Mauad, 2004.

<sup>242</sup> Roger Casement, “Hy-Brasil: Irish origins of Brazil,” in *Irish Migration Studies in Latin America*, vol 4, no. 3 (2006): 162.

Yes, the Island of Brazil appears constantly on the maps from the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and even the Baroque period. The Brazilian writer Gustavo Barroso investigated these apparitions in his book *O Brasil na lenda e na cartografia antiga*. And after tracing many of those imagined lands and islands where the name Brazil surfaced with different variants and spellings and in general as a paradise, Gustavo Barroso proposes a proliferation of possible names for those lands in a “perspective . . . similar to the theory of names by Dom Quixote” and a “surprising Joycean chain of equivalents” as the literary critic Raúl Antelo noted (and from where I borrowed Barroso’s halucioantions):<sup>243</sup> “Bersil, Brazilien, Bresil, Braxilis, Brazil, Braxil, Brisolis, Brasyl, Brisilium, Brezel, Bracil, Bracire, Braçur, Braxiel, Braxil, Bresail, Brezill, Hy – Bresail, O’ Brasil, O’ Brasile, Prazil, Presillg.” And after, he completes: “the Celtic, or better, Irish forms come from the very old root *bress*, which has the idea of “benção” (blessing) and means good luck and prosperity. In the opinion of these scholars, the English verb *to bless* – “abençoar” is derived from this. Bresail, Bressail or Brasil would then be in Celtic *the blessed country, the fortunate country, the country of prosperity or the country of happiness.*”<sup>244</sup>

This same Gustavo Barroso of the Island of Brazil with a Joycean anxiety was publishing, incidentally, myths and cosmic legends of Brazilian indigenous people in the journal of the French-American avant-garde writer Eugene Jolas called *Transition*. He was published side by side with two theorists of the Caribbean: Alejo Carpentier, in sections with the titles “Four Primitive Documents” and “Interacial Documents,” and

---

<sup>243</sup> Antelo, “The Stream of Brazilian Life: Still Leven, Natureza Morta and World Market.”

<sup>244</sup> Gustavo Barroso, *O brasil na lenda e na cartografia antiga* (São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1941), 125.



Fernando Ortiz and his essay about mulatto poetry and African drums. In the same journal, James Joyce also presented his “Work in Progress” later known as *Finnegans Wake*.<sup>245</sup> In the translation of Joyce’s text into Portuguese called *Finnicius Revém* as proposed by the concrete poets Augusto e Haroldo de Campos and finished by Donaldo Schüler, which deals with the fall of Finnegans, or even the Fall of Humanity, the translators transfer the plot of Joyce’s story to Bahia: “rolarrioanna e passa por Nossenhora d’Ohmem’s, roçando a praia, beirando ABahia, reconduz-nos por cominhos recorrentes de Vico ao de Howth Castelo Earredores.”<sup>246</sup>

The Brazilian northeast is an island, or perhaps is the part of Brazil that is closer to being an island, like the Caribbean archipelago. And in this Island, in this archipelago of several islands that is the Brazilian Caribbean lies Pernambuco, and inside Pernambuco there is another island, the island of the visual artist Francisco Brennand, which he calls his “Oficina” (workshop, atelier, etc.). It is with this image, the image of a Celtic navigator who arrives in a paradisiac and mythical island, after months navigating through the inhospitable sea, facing dangers and storms, the unknown and without knowing what to expect, that I would like to begin to see the Brennand’s Oficina, constructed with his sculptures. Nothing can change my mind that it is this sensation that one has when faced with the Oficina for the first time, the vision of a paradise, as a lost island, another world, a mythical world of exotic animals, inhuman men, bizarre beings and monsters brought into life by the sculptures of Brennand.

---

<sup>245</sup> Gustavo Barroso, “Astronomical Legend,” in *Transition*, no. 23, (1935): 52; Gustavo Barroso, “Astronomic Myth,” in *Transition*, no. 25, (1936): 125; Alejo Carpentier, “Two Cuban Negro Prayers,” in *Transition*, no. 23, (1935): 52-54; Fernando Ortiz, “Jitanjaforas in Cuba,” in *Transition*, no. 25, (1936): 172-178.

<sup>246</sup> James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake; Finnicius Revém* (São Paulo: Ateliê, 1999), 30.



7.1 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Brennand Series*, 2012.

If the island is defined by its isolation and inaccessibility, the Oficina of Brennand receives this title as a secluded museum surrounded by the virgin forest and not by the ocean or not even by the city. A forest that has the peculiar name of “Forest of the Secret” as if it were hiding something in its interior. If the island is the paradise per excellence, it is not a surprise to see among the sculptures of Brennand that welcome us: Adam and Eve. It is as if in that place, the lost paradise reappeared as an obsession, as the sentence that dominates his thoughts: “Our destiny is to live with the Lost Paradise...”<sup>247</sup> and this “living” can only be achieved by feeling deeply its absence ... the island-paradise of Brennand, which is his Oficina, is less the reconstruction of an idea than the show of

---

<sup>247</sup> Francisco Brennand, *Diálogos do paraíso perdido* (Recife: Prefeitura da Cidade do Recife, 1990), 6.

the absent by its excessive presence...<sup>248</sup> by shaping a paradisiacal place as a studio, as a museum, Brennand confronts us with the impossibility of having it, its loss ... and that only by entering the paradise he rebuilt, we can miss the very paradise... This paradise of Brennand is not an illusion. It is only a demonstration of the illusion that we live in. If we depart from Kafka, the destruction of paradise put us into a state of “false belief,” for it should be “indestructible.” Paradise is actually lost (not destroyed) in front of us. Brennand gives us this consciousness, this possibility of a lack. The destruction does not give space for lacking. “If one supposes that what had been destroyed in Paradise was destructible, then here is something of no importance. But, if it was indestructible, then we are living under a false belief.”<sup>249</sup> Paradise is indestructible, for this reason, (re)fundable. More than melancholic, Brennand is active. In Brennand, the past is just his raw material to a future opened to all possibilities of matter.

---

<sup>248</sup> For reflections on the meaning of presence through absence, see: Zambrano, “Uma Metáfora da Esperança: As Ruínas.”

<sup>249</sup> Franz Kafka, *28 desaforismos* (Florianópolis: Editora da UFSC, 2010), 61.



7.2 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Brennand Series*, 2012.

The island-paradise par excellence, however, has something of forest, of vegetal beauty that is lawless and untamed, of lush woodland chaos. Often, what gets our attention in Brennand's *Oficina* is just the opposite, that vegetation is subdued, forming with the scattered sculptures a beautiful garden, a garden designed by Brazilian landscape architect Roberto Burle Marx: the same designer of the gardens of the city of Brasília. This garden is a dominated paradise: it has the idea of being a paradise in miniature, organized to serve as a treat, where humans can even survive without dangers. Paradise is not pure and free nature. Paradise is mastered nature. It is a given garden, where the human being does not need to maintain it.



7.3 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Brennand Series*, 2012.

The garden is the reign of discipline. There is nothing more anti-natural, nothing more artificial, nothing more imprisoned than nature in a mundane garden. To cultivate a garden is to throw yourself into an eternal confrontation, in a battle already lost: it is an arduous task and requires unshakable disposition. Work, work, work... The garden is the realm of appearance, it always deceives us: it is not by chance that a garden embodies, exhales, exerts power. A power that aspires to find the divine again. The garden is also the realm of beauty: a pruned, trimmed, and tilled beauty, a eulogy to the dominance of what before had been taken as... indomitable. The Spaniards have nourished a fascination with this game between garden and paradise since the conquest. Columbus (the pioneer of this Iberian endeavor through the New World), always him, in the marvelous exuberance of tropical nature, of the exotic and mysterious Indies, saw nothing but the

Garden of the Eden. As Prest explains, the great admiral was sure to have found the lands inhabited by Adan, which, according to some medieval theories, were separated by enormous seas.

Even on his first voyage in 1492 Columbus was convinced that he had arrived back in Old Testament country. Luis de Torres, “whom he selected . . . for a reconnaissance mission, was chosen because . . . as a converted Jew he knew Hebrew, Arabic and Chaldaic—the languages that would certainly be required in the circumstances”, and in describing the flora and fauna, and the manners of the inhabitants, Columbus had recourse to the language of Ovid’s description of the golden age. On his second voyage he enthused about the lovely weather he had encountered in the West Indies, and gave his first hint, Morison says, that there was located the terrestrial paradise spoken of by “sacred theologians and wise philosophers”, and on his third voyage, when he reached what is known South America, he became convinced that he had reached the region of the earthly paradise.<sup>250</sup>

And soon this nature that convinced Columbus of having arrived at earthly paradise was transplanted to the Old World, and gardens spread as miniatures of Eden. Still comparing this New World with the Iberian Peninsula, America later produced its own interpretation of the garden. An interpretation of itself, the opposite of Europe, which was receiving a transplanted nature from an alien land. The American garden, according to Onésimo Almeida, is wilder than the European one: it is opposed to symmetry, and it uses unpruned big trees. It is also more sober in the choice of colors, while the Portuguese garden is undoubtedly more baroque, with an appraisal for the view of the whole, for the creation of a microcosm, which is shown in the search for harmony

---

<sup>250</sup> John Prest, *The Garden of Eden: The Botanic Garden and the Re-Creation of Paradise* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 31.



and in the choice of more controllable plants.<sup>251</sup> Still according to Almeida—who uses *Livro do desassossego* by Bernardo Soares in order to say that “a garden is the summary of a civilization”—the Portuguese imaginary is dominated by the city, an urban culture, while the Anglo-American one shows, through its gardens, its country culture, which “for many of us, is the place of tedium and hard work of the time of our parents and grandparents.”<sup>252</sup> The garden of Burle Marx is in this search of bringing local nature to life, or what was lost from it. Brennand pays tribute to his friend in a square in his Oficina, and through the name of a phallus in the Parque de Esculturas (*Coluna de Cristal*), whose name comes from a flower that was brought into modern gardening by Burle Marx and which he saw in the garden of his daughter.<sup>253</sup> Burle Marx wants to repopulate the land with its own nature, it is the opposite of the imperial garden of the metropolis, which wants to distance itself from the local. Burle Marx does not want to create an illusion, he wants to take us from it. Once more, I remember Kafka: the illusion is to believe that the lost paradise is not among us.

---

<sup>251</sup> Onésimo Almeida, *O peso do hífen: ensaios sobre a experiência luso-americana* (Lisboa: Instituto de Ciências Sociais, 2010), 89-92.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>253</sup> “Eu vi o mundo...” *Jornal do Commercio*, December 07, 1999; Pedro Henrique Cunha, “Marco zero vai ganhar nova obra de Brennand.” *Diário de Pernambuco*. October 18, 2013.



7.4 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Brennand Series*, 2011.

The Garden of this fusion Brennand/Burle Marx is, more than ever, part of this lost paradise, its contemplation provokes again a profound lack. But this paradise of Brennand, somewhat garden, somewhat mysterious island, now dominated by the sculptures of a solitary artist, forces us to look at the process of occupation of the land where his Oficina is today, occupation of an abandoned farm, an archaic and unproductive clay factory, condemned to vanish and die. In the same vein of what Fernando Monteiro has to say: “[Brennand] ‘abandoned’ the world as an eremite of antiquity would do, who, however, remains attentive to and aware of the weight of the ‘abandoned’ world, because, since then, his comfort has been work. . . , his leisure has



been to carry the rocks of his cathedral built in the name of the religion of art.”<sup>254</sup> It is like if Brennand had to cross a black and degraded sea, alone, carrying his sculptures, as the oarsman of the symbolist painting *Isle of the Death* by Arnold Böcklin does (incredibly influenced by the Odyssey and Greek mythology): a man, an island with portals designed in stones and a rowboat filled with a coffin and a ghost, which by having so many white clothes seems to be a white-salt sculpture.

The island itself, however, was already occupying the central point for the development of important theories in the nineteenth century, such as the Galapagos Islands, or as we opportunely call them, the Islands of Columbus, which were present in the writings of Darwin (and these writings also had a profound impact on Böcklin and forced him to seek sea topics and creatures – the sea goes back then to the core of life). According to Katharina Schmidt, more specifically in the Böcklin’s *Isle of the Dead*:

Two nostalgic dreams of the nineteenth century are mixed, the solitude of the mountains and the solitude of the sea. . . . Certainly we can see in the ‘tomb-island’ the reminiscence of Charon, the oarsman who carries old souls in the afterlife. . . . In his profound peace, this painting seems to remove the existential reality of the death of his frightening character and dismiss life of its weight.<sup>255</sup>

Thus, one can think about Brennand, lonely transporting his sculptures to occupy a bleak and desolate island and, to that end, transform it. In a letter from his father, Ricardo Brennand, we can read: “you, who transformed into a temple of art these old and

---

<sup>254</sup> Fenando Monteiro, “Civilização e Grandeza,” *Jornal do Comércio*, March 30, 1994.

<sup>255</sup> Katharina Schmidt, “Non Omnis Moriar,” in *Arnold Böcklin* (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2001), 19.

dismantled ruins of an ancient brickyard, today a true and unique museum.”<sup>256</sup> It is not by chance that Brennand says, “it was not difficult to guess that the ruin itself grounded my entire way forward. That is to say, the ruin was the draft to be fulfilled.”<sup>257</sup>



7.5 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Brennand Series*, 2011.

---

<sup>256</sup> Cited in Júlio Tavares, *Brennand: Arte e sonho na construção de um novo mundo* (São Paulo: Terra das Artes Editora, 2007), 118.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

This refuge created by Brennand cannot be seen merely as a lost, paradisiacal island, a garden, but also the opposite: ruins. It is as if the city of primitive sculptures he builds were actually the result of an excavation work, or rather the restoration of an archaeological site in order to reshape a lost, dead and phantasmagorical civilization for the present time. To walk through Brennand's Oficina is perhaps like going to one of those Mayan cities, enter their forgotten temples, their inhabited palaces, which are now brought into a new life by the work of the historian: yet living, they are paradoxically filled with a frightening absence, that pierces the observer, that strikes mercilessly those who visit them. For as much as they were excavated, as much as they were unearthed, as much as they were exhibited and explained, these cities will never show themselves completely. They always certify that something is missing and irretrievably lost. It is as if the mystery that they exude was mocking us with its unintelligibility.



7.6 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Brennand Series*, 2012.

With regard to the ruins, the philosopher María Zambrano, when in the middle of her exile also in an island, noted this perseverance of absence:

In the ruins, what we see and feel is an imprisoned hope, which when what we now see undone was intact maybe it was not as present. It had not reached with its presence what it achieves with its absence. And this, the fact that the absence surpasses the presence in intensity and in strength is the unequivocal sign that something must have reached the category of “ruin.” . . . And, if this impression is produced when contemplating the ruins, [the fact that the absence is more than what the presence achieved], is because in any complete presence we find that something, that guest whose absence impregnates everything; in no palace, temple, city could we see the face of this stranger. [And then, she continues] God is the big absent, Ortega says. Yes: the pure absence is the absence of the divinity, that which the big mystics expressed. . . . It appears to be confirmed by the fact that the perfect ruin is the ruin of a temple. And also that all ruin has something of a temple, of a sacred place. Place of perfect

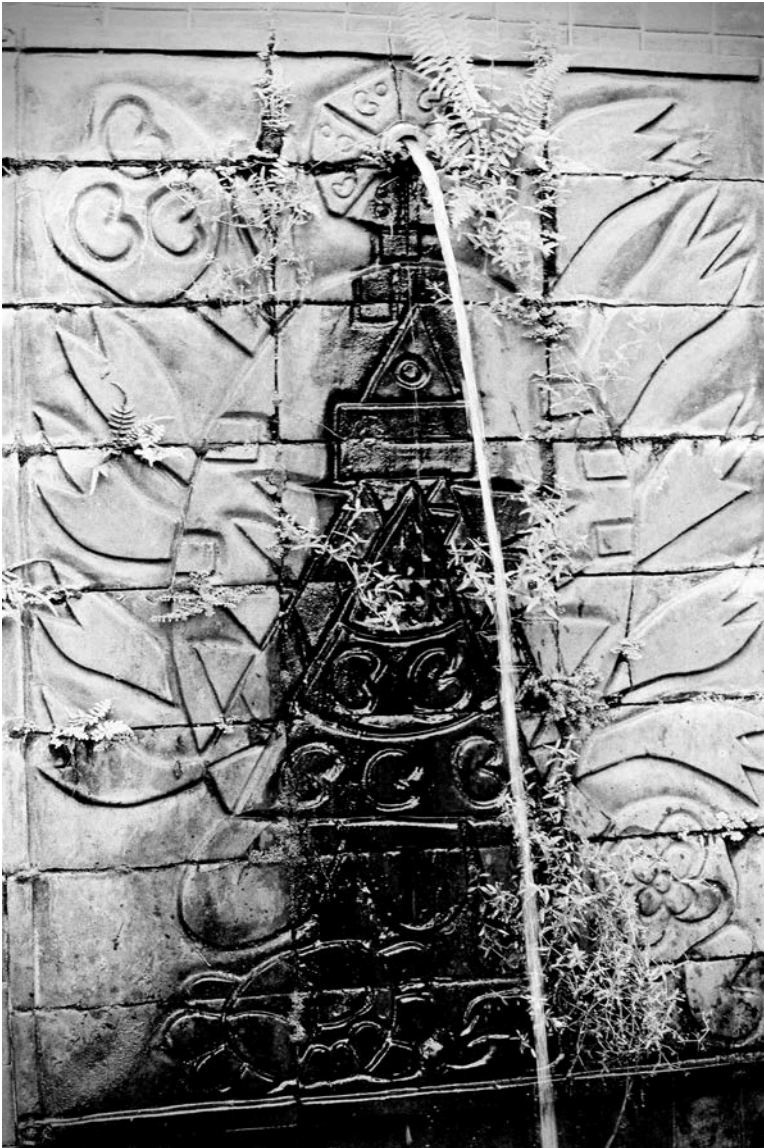
contemplation.<sup>258</sup>

There is no doubt that the Oficina of Brennand possesses something of a lost temple, in the middle of a tropical jungle, of a place that seems dominated by a mystical force that increases its creatures, and at every moment its pottery monsters, fetishes, masks, totems can suddenly be provided with movement and devour us, helpless, naked in front of their strength. Nonetheless, the ruins of Brennand, despite the absence, this absence of a temple, sometimes they seem more or less intact. As I said, they also form an island-garden in paradox, without ivy, without wild forest or vegetation, without the bestiary of animals or the action of time on the newly constructed facades, no rust or patina all over the place, everything so typical of the ruins... In classical ruins everything is so old and smells of death...but then of what type would these ruins that compose the Oficina Brennand be? Just an old family brickyard, an old farmland lost in the lands of Pernambuco or, conversely, a completely artificial atelier, a collection of buildings with a purposefully old air, like a theme park? They are precisely a threshold: already restored, already transformed into a garden, with its moss-green well-cut grass, contrasting with the worn bricks of collapsed pillars, Oficina Brennand is an archeological site that contrasts the modern metropolis, the new Recife, and urges for another sunken city, forgotten, destroyed. In his book *Diálogos do Paraíso Perdido*, this is the subject that torments his head: the destruction of the city by a modernizing force: “a city is a center of permanent reference, a place where all people should know each other and have their roots reined in the city itself; [But] the cities are besieged. They are now surrounded from the inside. Instead of the old concepts of wall . . . now that we are in a world that is

---

<sup>258</sup> Zambrano, “Uma Metáfora da Esperança: As Ruínas.”

upside down, we have already been invaded. The cities are invaded.”<sup>259</sup>



7.7 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Brennand Series*, 2012.

Brennand, then, is a mixture of archeologist and sculptor, at the same time he preserves the ruins of the ancient city, the old Recife amid modernization (in the form of a brickyard of 1917 from his father), he also adds new parts. But these new parts are

---

<sup>259</sup> Brennand, *Diálogos do Paraíso Perdido*, 12.

already old, but older than the very ancient city destroyed by reforms, older than Paranambuco of Bento Teixeira and his paradisiac sea-frontier, older than Columbus and his wonderful islands, older than the medieval Irish literature of *immrama* or the Mayan civilization and its lost cities, or even more distant in time than Ulysses and his odyssey through the Mediterranean; these are parts from an immemorial time, perhaps his totems and his men-animals date from when humans inhabited caves, such as Lascaux, so well remembered by Bataille.<sup>260</sup> So primitive are they that the material of the sculptures of Brennand is clay. Clay, unlike Bronze or other metals, contributes to this mixture of primitivism and ruin. A sculpture of clay announces its fragility, it is born already in decay and revealing its inevitable future destruction: as if it came to the world already in ruins... ready to break apart and be turned into historical fragments... They are sculptures that require the action of fire to exist, paradoxically, they must be burned at high temperatures, they must meet death. The sculpture of Brennand, therefore, has a deep relationship to fire and death. It goes beyond the common temperatures for ceramics. Brennand is searching for the limits of matter in contact with fire in order to create new forms that are in accordance with his interpretation of physical reality. As Fernando Monteiro points out:

Unlike the approach taken by traditional pottery art (low and average burn temperatures of about 1,000° C), he looked for the perfect combination between the solidity of clay's strength and its glaze coating. He sought to produce pieces cast out of some new material, worked nearly to breaking point under high temperatures (1,400°), hitherto applied only to refractory bricks, suitable for oven walls from which the artist learned the mutest (and hardest) of lessons. Here a demiurge Brennand is appropriately surrounded by fire pits where new clay mixtures

---

<sup>260</sup> See: Georges Bataille, *Lascaux, Or, the Birth of Art: Prehistoric Painting* (Lausanne: Skira, 1955).

burn and reburn. Here he finds a secret in the ashes, a confession, as the inner and glassy walls of the old abandoned factory cool. He perceives in these fire altars the beauty of the topaz shine and hardness. But he also sees the interaction point between the clay base and the molten dyes and enamels, as if they formed a new molecular structure purified by the intense heat.<sup>261</sup>

---

<sup>261</sup> Fernando Monteiro, *Brennand* (Rio de Janeiro, Spala: 1987), 78.





7.8 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Brennand Series*, 2012.

New forms through creational high temperatures of fire give birth to new beings with different functions in Brennan's world. At the entrance of the temple, which is the Brennan's Oficina, rises a guardian army. They protect some ancient emperor, but instead of men, they are, in the style of Lascaux, warriors with bird heads: the sculptor calls them "rocca birds." They secure the egg. Eggs are an obsession for Brennan. It is the primordial object. The egg is also anterior to history. Hence, from there perhaps comes the reason why looking at those primitive sculptures—which are strange and awkward animals with inhuman, rounded heads like bladders ready to explode, and disgusting and evil monsters—does not simply take us to an indigenous or African influence, to cannibalistic rituals, sacrifices or possessions. More than that, it seems to take us to a place like that inhabited by the creatures of Wifredo Lam, or rather, to the place where Fernando Ortiz inserted the Sino-Cuban painter. When I hear Ortiz talking about the Caribbean vanguardist, it is as if I received an explanation about Brennan: "he uses fantasy to envision the most distant and the most lost in the path that stretched itself for millennia in the man's head . . . he finds again these embryonic ideas as pictographic blobs in the caves of prehistory or as subconscious stalactites in the cavities of the human brain."<sup>262</sup>

Brennan's work, as Lam's, is poetic. The Cuban painter said once about the African themes in his paintings: "erroneously, it is believed that my work took its shape in Haiti. . . . What really caused an evolution in my painting was African poetry."<sup>263</sup>

---

<sup>262</sup> Fernando Ortiz, *Wifredo Lam y su obra vista a través de significados críticos* (La Habana: Publicaciones del Ministerio de Educación, 1950).

<sup>263</sup> Wifredo Lam, cited in Odette Cisneros Casamayor, "Piñera y Lam: inusitadas aproximaciones," in *La Gaceta de Cuba*, no. 5, 2004, 23.

Departing from Cisneros Casamayor's considerations, we would say that, as Lam, Brennands' is comprehended as a divine entity, hence its symbiosis between the vegetal, the animal, the human and the object. He is capable of inventing a different view of the cosmos, which takes elements from American nature, but it is at the same time universal.<sup>264</sup> Still adapting Casamayor to Brennand, the work of Lam follows the postulates that Carl Einstein gave to African art, the junctions between nature, the human being and the world.<sup>265</sup> As one can draw from Niyi Afolabi's arguments on Afro-Brazilian literature, African cosmogonies are linked to the natural environment in order to create a knowledge of the world that does not separate humans and nature.<sup>266</sup> The same scheme is seen in the metamorphoses of Brennand's work.

---

<sup>264</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> Niyi Afolabi, "Environmental Cosmologies and Epistemologies in Miriam Alves's *Aro Boboi!* And Niyi Osundare's *Eye of the Earth*" (presented at the 36<sup>th</sup> Annual African Literature Association Conference, March 12, 2010).



7.9 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Brennand Series*, 2012.

If we look at that mark of Oxóssi (the African god of the forests) that Brennand carries on the wall of his Oficina, as a coat of arms from the family, at first we only see a misleading clue that does not reveal the depth of the primitive unconscious in his works. However, this entire primitiveness does not face the past, just the opposite. Because it aims to be prehistoric, Brennand's work is not nostalgic, is not indigenous or African or Portuguese. Brennand aims at the future: a formless future, another becoming. Diving deep, going into the profundities of the most monstrous in imagination, in language, in art, he seeks another possibility, another utopia in his island, in his garden, in his ruins, another future, a redeemed future. As noted by Francisco Mota, "his plastic meditation is

not Cartesian nor clear as a crystal. Rather, it is in a tumult caused by a pantheistic view, steeped in vitalism. . . . For him, it is not the being, but the becoming.”<sup>267</sup>

In Brennand, the central figure of this becoming is the egg.



7.10 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Brennand Series*, 2012.

---

<sup>267</sup> Francisco Mota, *Brennand* (Recife: SENEC-DECA, 1961), n.p.

## 8. History of the Egg: Or, the Beginning

*We say that the egg is oval because it has the form of an egg. What is characteristic about it is that the egg is oval without having been ovalized and that its ovality is perfectly natural. We can say, without any great risk of being wrong, that except on rare occasions, so rare in fact that they are scarcely worth mentioning, the ovality of the egg is inherent in the egg.*

Eugène Ionesco

Eggs. Eggs. Eggs. Eggs. Eggs. Eggs.

With the same obsession that Oswald de Andrade nourished with scripts [*roteiros*],<sup>268</sup> Brennand is populating his ruins with eggs—this open-air manifesto (pure expression of will, will of style, as Ortega y Gasset would say.<sup>269</sup> One would say, however, that it is not only possible to find this contact, between the anthropophagic and the monstrous, in serial repetition, but also in the shared belief in “signs, and instruments” and, mainly, “in stars.”<sup>270</sup> The egg eats, in Tarsila do Amaral’s *O urutu*: anthropophagic egg. *O urutu* is “magical landscape.”<sup>271</sup> Its snake-egg is charged with the idyllic. Here is a relation between paradise and anthropophagy: not as the opposite but as complementary to each other. To travel to the lost paradise is to find the opportunity to meet the savage. Brennand is always in search for this moment, where the swallowing of

---

<sup>268</sup> In the *Manifesto Antropófago*, Oswald de Andrade writes as one of his theses: “Roteiros. Roteiros. Roteiros. Roteiros. Roteiros. Roteiros. Roteiros.” Oswald de Andrade, “Manifesto Antropófago,” *Revista de Antropofagia*, year 1, no. 1, (May, 1928): 3.

<sup>269</sup> See: José Ortega y Gasset, “La deshumanización del arte,” in *Obras Completas*, vol. 3 (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1966), 353-386.

<sup>270</sup> Oswald de Andrade, *Manifesto Antropófago*, 7.

<sup>271</sup> Aracy Amaral, *Tarsila: sua obra e seu tempo* (São Paulo: Edusp, 2003), 289.

the being by the being is possible, where the primitive bears a modification of the supposedly known world. Brennan wants the state of nature. So he searches, in the ruins of the city, of the civilized. Now what rules is not science, which cannot imagine (if we take a detour from Heidegger), or the real, but magic... let us abandon the realm of Funes (the most extreme of the nominalists),<sup>272</sup> insomnia, according to Borges, the impossibility of dreaming, and enter, undoubtedly, the proliferation of cosmogonies: worlds, worlds, worlds, worlds... The creation and destruction of worlds from a perspective between horror and marvelous. Brennan constructs—with his beasts, monsters, humanoids—his tale of the universe. His eggs, in this sense, are celestial. Celestial eggs, in the words of Lezama, whom I bring to the text: “celestial egg . . . that engenders the empty space.”<sup>273</sup> This empty space is open to the endless possibilities of creation, of metamorphosis, of mutability, where free combination can always happen, where birth takes new forms to break with the expected, with the common characteristics of creatures: the singularity is the germ, germinated in each egg. From there, the new beings, that populate his garden, sprout: this garden, which is undoubtedly a lost island, produces new species by isolation, as a new genealogical breach that grows in the *Árvore da Vida*.

Eggs. Eggs. Eggs. Eggs. Eggs. Eggs. Eggs.

---

<sup>272</sup> See: Alejandra Eidelberg, “Rouxinóis de Novo,” *O Rouxinol do Americano*, no. 2, Escola Brasileira de Psicanálise, Seção Santa Catarina, September, 2006.

<sup>273</sup> José Lezama Lima, *Paradiso*, ed. Cintio Vitier (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1993), 675.



8.1 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Brennand Series*, 2012.

\*\*\*

*Ovo azul, azul de ozônio, com camada e casca camuflantes. Ovo de cerâmica albumínica, verde, marrom e branca. Ovo oval, ovalado, ovulante: ovo-origem. Ovo de pássaro, de máquina, de homem...*

In his series of eggs, one can also find those of pre-historical beings, which inhabit another island of Brennand, even more hunted, frightening, hugged *de facto* by the maritime infinitude: the Marco Zero of Pernambuco, or Paranambuco, the center of the island, of this larger island that surrounds the others, from where all distances are measured. Antonio Benítez Rojo commented on this island that repeats itself (not only regarding, here, the relation of Recife with the islander lands of Brennand, but also



regarding an approach that disseminates itself throughout the entire Caribbean and beyond):

Within the sociocultural fluidity that the Caribbean archipelago presents, within its historiographic turbulence and its ethnological and linguistic clamor, within its generalized instability of vertigo and hurricane, one can sense the features of an island that “repeats” itself, unfolding and bifurcating until it reaches all the seas and lands of the earth, while at the same time it inspires multidisciplinary maps of unexpected designs. I have emphasized the word repeats because I want to give the term the paradoxical sense with which it appears in the discourse of Chaos, where every repetition is a practice that necessarily entails a difference and a step towards nothingness. . . . Which one, then, would be the repeating island, Jamaica, Aruba, Puerto Rico, Miami, Haiti, Recife? . . . [The Caribbean] is the last of the great meta-archipelagoes. If someone needed a visual explanation, a graphic picture of what the Caribbean is, I would refer him to the spiral chaos of the Milky Way, the unpredictable flux of transformative plasma that spins calmly in our globe’s firmament, that sketches in an “other” shape that keeps changing, with some objects born to light while others disappear into the womb of darkness: change, transit, return, fluxes of sidereal matter.<sup>274</sup>

---

<sup>274</sup> Antonio Benítez Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 3-4.



8.2 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Brennand Series*, 2012.

The Caribbean is a repetition of islands, they are identical islands that differentiate themselves, they are the islands of the *différance*. Pernambuco is a repetition of Cuba; The Oficina, a repetition of Pernambuco; the Marco Zero (Parque de Esculturas), a repetition of the Oficina, and so on. They are repeating islands, the landscape always returns: the view of the sea, endless. What characterizes the Caribbean is above all the sharing of the same water or, if you prefer, the sharing of isolation (that most of the time is maritime). This sea of a celestial blue that washes Recife. This sea that is part of the Parque de Esculturas, an island, and to which the man-birds are facing. This sea that feeds the eggs: the sea from where life is born. The sea: the space of

uncertainty par excellence. It is always mobile.<sup>275</sup> It is challenging, total immensity, absolute zero. Zero is nothingness, anterior to the beginning, which is one. Zero is the origin, dwelling of the impossible. As Macedonio Fernández (an influence in the babelic ruins of Borges) once wrote:

A presentiment of this noble art about nothingness through words has already existed in all unfinished words—letters that were not answered, discourses, symphonies, incomplete statues—from which an inexperienced or crude person, regarding the artistic, would lament that, through adversity or catastrophe, they are not concluded. For me, they touch the artistic precisely in what they lack. They are like types of beginnings of the non-begging, or they are at least arriving to the place of the entrance of the unfinished, that is, to the noble cult of nothingness.<sup>276</sup>

---

<sup>275</sup> Nodari, ““Todo camburão tem um pouco de Navio Negreiro.””

<sup>276</sup> Macedonio Fernández, *Papeles de reciénvenido y continuación de la nada* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 1944), 106.



8.3 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Brennand Series*, 2012.

I bring Macedonio to the text, because, no matter how monstrous in its details the work of Brennand is, no matter how burnt the ceramics are, no matter how adorned in porous colors the sculptures were, no matter how built in amorphous forms, the work of Brennand is always incomplete, in expansion. It is an infinite work: a cult of nothingness, of potency, of movement, of zero, and, paradoxically, of everything. For intending to be total, for trying to dominate the environment and its ruins, gardens, jungles, the city itself,

the work of Brennard has already lost the war. It is producing incompleteness, as a *Big Bang*: that is, a cosmos in expansion. If the universe expands itself, if the galaxies are distancing themselves from us, there is no starting point, we are irremediably submerged in the initial explosion, in the originary zero. For this reason, Brennard's work presents itself as a cosmogony: we see a cosmos, another world that grows surrounding us, a world that is governed by solitude. It is *The Book* of Mallarmé, that cosmic-textual structure of "all relations between everything" and, therefore, impossible.<sup>277</sup> Or, it is *Galáxias* by Haroldo de Campos, in this endless trip from *Os Lusíadas*, namely, endless expansion of language, or the collection of quotations in the *Project* by Walter Benjamin, or the total metaphor of life in Lezama and his *Paradiso*. Sarduy, however, who also wrote a poetical trip through the Caribbean, passing by Recife, New Orleans and even Rio de Janeiro, maybe more than anyone else has investigated, specifically, this will to zero.<sup>278</sup>

---

<sup>277</sup> Klaus Scherubel, *Mallarmé, Le Livre (Compilation)* (New York: Printed Matter, 2004).

<sup>278</sup> Severo Sarduy, "Big Bang," in *Obras completas*, 158-159.



8.4 – Maria del Mar Bassa, from *Brennand Series*, 2012.

In his book of poems, *Big Bang*, one can hear: “galaxies seem to distance themselves one from another with considerable speeds. The most distant ones submerge with the acceleration of two hundred and thirty million kilometers per second, next to the

speed of light. The universe is swelling. We watch the results of a big explosion.”<sup>279</sup> In his essay *Barroco*, Sarduy adds the words I want for Brennan: “[Big Bang]: work without ‘motive’: in expansion, expandable to infinity, a series of pure gesture in its repetition or mark of zero.”<sup>280</sup> However, it is the search for the measure of the universe, or better, the constitutive form of modern cosmogony, that Sarduy places us closer to the oval, that is, to the anamorphosis of the circle, to Kepler’s ellipsis.

The three laws of Kepler, altering the scientific support on which rested all knowledge of the epoch, creating a point of reference in relation to which is situated, explicitly or not, all symbolic activity: something decenters itself, or better, duplicates its center, unfolds it; now, the master figure is not the circle, of only one center, irradiating, luminous and paternal, but the ellipsis, which puts into visible focus another equally operative one, equally real but obstructed, dead, nocturnal, the blind center, a reserve of the Yang germinator of the sun, the absent . . . [and Sarduy proceeds], the thought of the finitude requires the impossible thought of infinitude as the *conceptual clausura* of its system and guarantees of functioning. The inexistent exterior menace—the empty is nothing for Kepler, the space does not exist but in the function of the bodies that occupy it—exterior to the universe and reason—the unthinkability of the nothingness—rules, therefore, at the same time, a closed economy of the universe and the finitude of logos.<sup>281</sup>

Brennan, in his turn, generates new figures with his garden already populated by deformed circles. He practices a radical disposition: the anamorphosis of the egg itself in a close manner with which Borromini executed the anamorphosis of the circle. The egg-ellipsis is a baroque form. But the forms that are derived from the egg are not secondary. One could arrive into the egg-form from them, one could arrive into the egg-form from a *rocca* bird, a jar, a buffoon or a comedian, a *Caju*, a *Jaca*, a *Caramujo*, a *Albatroz*, a

---

<sup>279</sup> Sarduy, “Big Bang,” 165.

<sup>280</sup> Severo Sarduy, “Barroco,” in *Obras Completas*, 1246.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*, 1223-1224.

*Largato*, a *Mercúrio*. In the same way that the ellipsis has the performative power of a circle: one can arrive in a circle by decomposing an ellipsis. As Brennand said: poor is the form that cannot be accommodated into an egg. As artwork, Brennand's creations take the Baroque to its own limits: it is an excessive work, that privileges ornaments, adornments, folds, proliferation of the signifying, the cruel, the blondish, superabundance, waste, the infinity.<sup>282</sup>

---

<sup>282</sup> Olívio Tavares de Araújo, "Proposta para uma Leitura de Brennand," In *Brennand* (São Paulo: Métron, 1997), 19.





8.5 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Brennand Series*, 2012.

The egg is the maximum potency: The egg can be. The egg can be everything. The egg is the absolute. The egg is the plenitude and scarcity of the world. And because it can contain all forms, the egg has no form. Formless egg, formlessness that, according to Bataille, is the universe, anything between a spider and a spit.<sup>283</sup> From Brennand's eggs, more than spiders are born. They give birth to snakes, birds, monsters, and women. Eggs

---

<sup>283</sup> Georges Bataille, "Informe," *Documents*, no. 7 (1929): 382.

that become naked legs of a woman. There is one sculpture in particular, *La Tour de Babel* (1975): albuminous porcelain as an egg, white as an egg, but in its base, ex-base of an egg, two branches grew; they composed two white cylinders, with a shell, which are now legs; and with that, one sees a hip; there is also a rope of a Mallarmean blue, which ties the legs of that ex-egg woman; it is an egg that gave birth to half of a human being; more than giving birth to it, the egg became it as in a metamorphosis; we receded from the human being to Kafka's cockroach in order to see the primordial event: from the egg to human being. The egg in Brennan, I have to make it clear, does not break when its interior is mature but it morphs: the egg, for Brennan, is a living being; it is hyperreal, as said before, an egg that eats (egg that expels a snake from its anus, from the series *O ovo da Serpente*).



8.6 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Brennand Series*, 2011.

Origin-egg, snake-egg, primitive-egg, new-egg, birth-egg, evolutive-egg, link-egg, lost-egg, human-egg, reptile-egg, amphibious-egg, vegetal-egg, anyhow, eggs and more eggs, white ones, green ones, brown ones. They are spread throughout the Oficina or the Parque de Esculturas. They appear as an indicator of the past of humanity, anterior to cities, architecture and, eventually, dominance of nature. Ruins, for their part, are already human work in decay. They apparently are the opposite. One is time with no memory that is getting prepared to receive us, a time from a stark world, full of poisons, inhabitable. The other is the inexorable future: the vanishment. However, they are cyclical. For this reason, procreation and decadence take turns in an apparent succession. Where the ruins are facing dustiness, the underground, the becoming of an archeological site, the eggs appear (in the middle of the debris, as a new cycle, a cycle of new species that come to populate the world after our vanishment. *O Nascimento do Roca* (1978), in the idea of opposition to the ruins, or of populating the ruins, makes us see that the ruins are characterized by constant non-human life, which turn the ruins into their new habitat. When the human being is gone, when the human being no longer exists, animality, or in the case of Brennan, its limit, monstrosity, has room to be installed. The egg shows that ruins are being retaken, repopulated by new, strange, modified beings, which can still carry some humanoid traces, such as a duck with human feet. The green, vegetal ducks, of Brennan, walk as humans. To decipher the ducks is to see the beginning of humanity, to see humans being dismembered, ultimately going back, in the middle of their civilizatory disasters, to its primordial cellular condition: the proteinic broth from where they came. The city is the new primordial soup of Oparin.



8.7 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Brennand Series*, 2012.

Let us see more deeply the egg-ruin relation. The egg, perhaps more than the opposite of, is the complement to ruins. Brennand's *Oficina* carries this apparent paradox. Constructed under the passion of ruins, its temple hides, in the generational center of that place, a building imagined like the *Madonna and Child with Saints* (c. 1450) of Piero della Francesca.<sup>284</sup> In there is the celestial egg, surrounded and protected by bird-warriors, vertebra-trunk vultures (somewhat humanoids, somewhat vegetables), snakes and other creatures. It is as if the reproductive force was delivering the monsters that surround it. And not only the egg, but the ruins, to the contrary of what many think, are reproductive: they produce images, images that also populate a space, coming from a time that only

---

<sup>284</sup> Feli Coelho and Celso Geovanni, *Francisco Brennand: o demiurgo* (Brasil: 1997), film.

existed as a fiction. That Brennand's *Officina* center piece has emerged from his contact with the work of Piero della Francesca is symptomatic: the ostrich egg (in the view of some critics) that is suspended above the head of the virgin, and imitates the form of her face, does not mean only emergence or reproduction, but also it is the mark of a tomb: Francesca's egg is the birth of Christ, but, at the same time, his death and resurrection. The ostrich egg is also a receptacle, a precipitate that keeps relics from history, life, and the body of Christ and of the saints. It is a place for resting that becomes sacred. By representing the death of the former possessor of the relics, or even parts of their bodies, it can intervene in life, modify it, cure it, generate it, in the figure of that which some call a miracle. The ostrich egg hanging in the temple had already appeared before Piero della Francesca in many works from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries, and continues as a symbol in paintings in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. When the ostrich egg is in these images, it follows the standard adopted by della Francesca and is always put in a position above the virgin, a symbolic position. Besides being a "tomb," the ostrich egg is the reproduction of the virgin, that is, reproduction by itself, auto-reproduction, for the ostrich is known to leave her eggs underground, having Earth's heat to hatch her eggs.<sup>285</sup>

---

<sup>285</sup> Isa Ragusa, "The Egg Reopened," *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 53, no. 4 (1971): 438.



8.8 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Brennand Series*, 2012.

An egg with no paternity symbolizes the being that can reproduce by parthenogenesis: death that creates life. As Brennand usually says, eternity is reproduction, “things are eternal because they reproduce.” But, in Brennand, the virgin is violated. She is a suffering virgin, a virgin that went through a ritual of sexual violence. She is not under the egg, angelical, holding the child. She is spread throughout the Oficina. She is multiplied in sculptures with widened vaginas, vaginas that take over the body. They have primitive breasts. They are women with tragic ends, virgins that experienced the violence of death. Brennand’s virgins, rather than being angelical, are in the instant of ecstasy: they are in the second before becoming ruins. Their eyes are absent, the violated virgins of Brennand have no eye. This can be seen in sculptures such as *Charlotte Corday*, *Maria Antonieta*, and *Inês de Castro*. The eyes, in the instant of

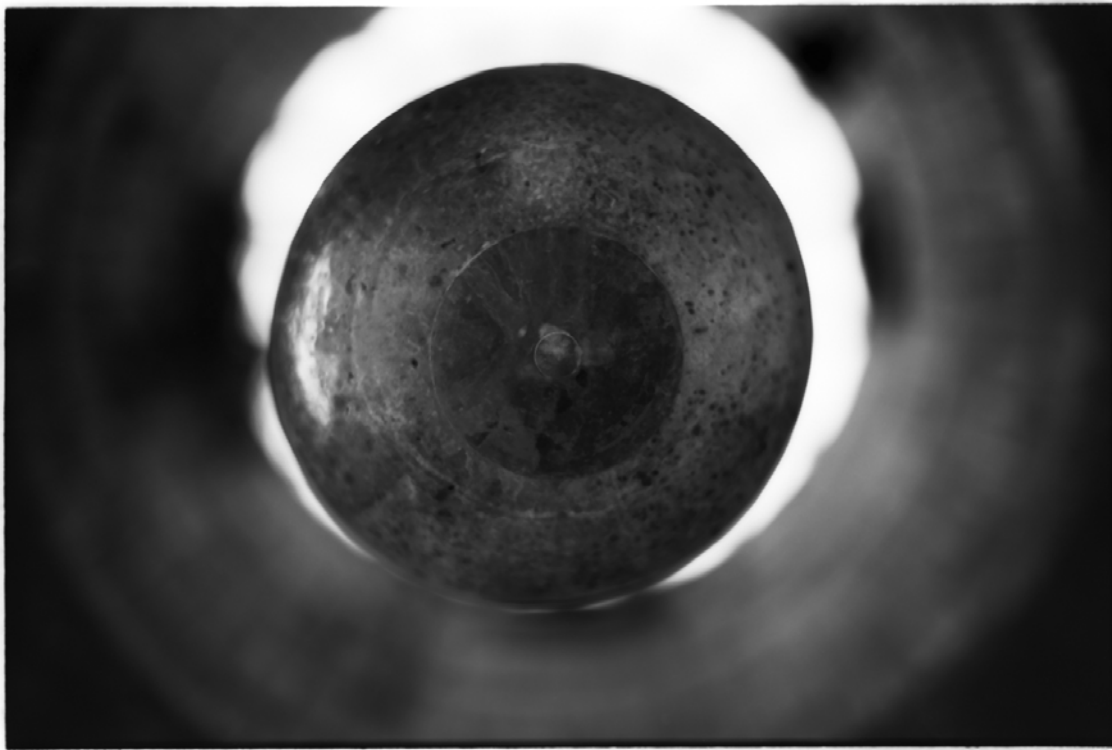
ecstasy, popped out from their heads. They left a hole, they became eggs. The eggs that hunt Brennand's Oficina are also eyes, eyes that did not survive, they were transformed by the violence of the ecstasy. Virgins that produce eggs.



8.9 – Maria del Mar Bassa, from *Brennand Series*, 2012.



Eye that becomes egg: as in *Story of the Eye* of Bataille, where the eye is the means for extreme sexual pleasure: eye-egg, anus-egg, testicle-egg: “only then I put the egg on the hole: she was enjoying moving with it inside the profound slit.”<sup>286</sup> Or in the final scene, when the eye of the priest assassinated in the church—by strangulation in the instant of orgasm—takes the position of an egg (“it is an egg,” they say), becoming the central artifact of the sacrificial rite, inserted between the legs of Simone, in a mortal ecstasy: phallus-egg. As in *Brennand*, each part of the Body can become a fetish, each part of the body can become phallic.



8.10 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Brennand Series*, 2012.

---

<sup>286</sup> Georges Bataille, *História do Olho* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2003), 29.



Eye that becomes egg: eye that can be eaten like a cannibal delicacy, in the words of Bataille, an eye that is at the border between extreme seduction and repugnance: “if Buñuel himself, after filming the scene of the cut eye [in *Un Chien Andalou*], became sick for eight days, how can we not see to what extent horror can become fascinating.”<sup>287</sup> In Brennan, horror fascinates us.

Eye that becomes egg: as in the photography imagined by Salvador Dali (who talked about himself as a man with a cannibal eye hungry for vision, who was Buñuel’s partner in *Chien*, and who inhabited a house with two gigantic eggs of Castor and Pollux on the roof). I am talking about the photography *The Eyes on the Plate of Santa Lucia* (1971), in which the white eyes of the saint are made from the introduction of egg white between the eyelids of the model while two boiled eggs float on the plate.<sup>288</sup> The same Dali: who before had made an ostrich egg float over the virgin, following della Francesca, in *Madona de Port Lligat* (1949). But Dali’s Madonna is without a doubt in ruins, her body falls apart, her head is opening itself, the bricks of the arcade are staring to appear under the peeling ink. Rather than evoking melancholy, here, the ruins cause an intervention in life.

---

<sup>287</sup> Georges Bataille, “ŒIL,” in *Documents*, no. 4 (1929): 216.

<sup>288</sup> *Dali Monumental (catálogo)* (Rio de Janeiro: Museu de Belas Artes do Rio de Janeiro), 1998.



8.11 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Brennand Series*, 2012.

Eye that becomes egg: as in *Film* (1965) by Samuel Beckett and Alan Schneider, originally called *The Eye*. The staging of a tormented character, who lives in a haunted environment. Haunted by being perceived, by existing for an eye that is impossible to see, but an eye that follows him everywhere: omniscient and omnipresent.<sup>289</sup> The same feeling of being haunted that follows us in Brennand's *Oficina*: we feel observed by eye-eggs, by the obsession of the artist that scans us, that pursues us. We are pursued by this obsession. Beckett, Harold Pinter and Eugène Ionesco, would, each one, make a short film at the Evergreen Theater in 1963, each one about his own obsession. Beckett chose the eye. Ionesco chose its double, the egg.<sup>290</sup> The idea of Ionesco, however, was not up to

---

<sup>289</sup> Antonio Gonçalves Filho, "Beckett & Keaton," *O Estado de São Paulo*, July 1, 2011.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*

the egg, for the eye transformed into the egg, an egg that sees, perhaps is much more powerful: his project was abandoned.<sup>291</sup>

Eye that becomes egg: which cannot be seen, but it is an eye that can see. In Clarice Lispector (her text, *O ovo e a galinha* [*The Chicken and the Egg*], was presented in a conference on witchcraft in Bogotá),<sup>292</sup> it is inhuman, outside the animal realm, inorganic: “seeing is the necessary instrument that, after being used, I will throw away. I will keep the egg. . . . To see the egg is impossible: the egg is supervisible as there are supersonic sounds. Nobody is able to see the egg. Does the dog see the egg? Only the machines see the egg.”<sup>293</sup> The egg is already the sign of ruin. We have only an image of the egg, an image that the machines can read, we cannot read it, because we look at the egg and we see the ruin, of something that is definitely lost: “to see an egg is something that never remains in the present. Barely do I see an egg and it becomes: I have already seen an egg three millennia ago.”<sup>294</sup> In order to gain life, the egg must be broken, ruptured, split, ruined: a fried-egg. If someone sees more than the surface of the egg—as Lispector wrote—he wants something else (he is hungry), someone who sees more than the surface of the ruins also wants something else (he is melancholic). The egg, as ruins, cannot be understood. The egg is the encounter with the Other. The ruins are the encounter with the Other, in the same way that Levinas proposed this encounter, in the

---

<sup>291</sup> The script, however, remains, which deals with the formal elementarity of the egg: Eugène Ionesco, “The Hard-Boiled Egg,” *The Brooklyn Rail*, September 2, 2006.

<sup>292</sup> This is an article that has already compared the egg/eye in Bataille, Clarice, and Brennard, and from which I borrowed ideas to compose this fragment and to which I recommend the reading: Vanessa Daniele, “O ovo vê o olho – imagens alegóricas (ou ovais) em Clarice Lispector,” *Desenredos*, no. 5, (2010).

<sup>293</sup> Clarice Lispector, “O Ovo e a Galinha,” In *Felicidade Clandestina* (Rio de Janeiro: Francisco Alves, 1991), 56.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*

field of inapprehensiveness.<sup>295</sup> As Diane Davis explains (she was the one who showed me the connection between Levinas and Lispector): “[For Levinas], the Other is exterior to me to the extent that he or she gives me the ‘idea of infinity’ and so remains absolutely inassimilable, resistant to my powers of comprehension.”<sup>296</sup> This is the paradox of Brennan’s work: the paradox of Lispector’s egg, the paradox of Levinas’ Other. Thus, claiming an understanding of Brennan’s work is also the proof of a mistake. It would be the certainty that his work escapes me because of its totality. Thus, we found some of the reasons for its horror effect, something I will discuss later.



8.12 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Brennand Series*, 2012.

---

<sup>295</sup> See: Emmanuel Lévinas and Philippe Nemo, *Ethics and Infinity* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985).

<sup>296</sup> Diane Davis, “On Levinas and the Wagging Tail.” *JAC*, vol. 29, no. 3 (2009): 603.

As I said, a split in the egg is the decadence of a first form, the death of a potency that contained everything: the defacement of full life, or better, of the potency of life. By bringing to life unknown, strange aberrations, he lets us see other possibilities of infinite creation. Brennand, by breaking the potency of the egg, finds himself in the realm of life. The egg produces being, which in Brennand assumes the forms taken from his imagination, forms of junction, of strange ligatures: of vertebrae, of reptiles, of slugs, of birds, of women, of men, of machines, of clay, of ceramics. They are forms that come from the egg, but they will eventually be ruined: they will gain cracks, fissures, slits, fractures; they will lose color, youthfulness: they will age.

If the eggs are also ruins, then Brennand constructs ruins over ruins. Time ruins the ceramics: the structures decay, change from sculptures to images of what they were. What we see are circular ruins, a *mise-en-abyme* of ruins. The Oficina is a constant (re)edification of ruins: ruins of his father that walk to death. It is another archeological layer that lies on land, getting mixed with the familiar past, the plantation past, the Dutch invasion past, the Amerindian past, the primitive past, the prior-to-the-fire past, the Adamic past, the prior-to-the-man past, the Pangaea past, the cosmic past, the Big Bang. It is not by chance that the Baroque always returns to this extreme moment, to the creation of universe. As seen before, Brennand searches for this cosmic time of creative eruption: his Oficina has the tortoise in the center of the panel that depicts the instant of the great explosion, imagining the universe during birth. The tortoise is the symbol of the eternal and of the beginning of time. La Monte Young, an experimental, minimalist musician, when trying to create eternal music—endless music in a constant sound like a

ray of light—named it *The Tortoise, His Dreams and Journeys*, which should be executed in “Dream Houses” for hundreds and hundreds of years:

This music may play without stopping for thousands of years, just as the Tortoise has continued for millions of years past, and perhaps only after the Tortoise has again continued for as many million years as all the tortoises in the past will it be able to sleep and dream of the next order of tortoises to come and of ancient tigers with black fur and omens the 189/98 whirlwind in the Lost Ancestral Lake Region only now that our species has had this much time to hear music that has lasted so long because we have just come out of a long quiet period and we are just remembering how long sounds can last and only now becoming civilized enough again that we want to hear sounds continuously.<sup>297</sup>

What we can take from La Monte Young’s eternal music to apply to Brennan is that the moment of creation is too ephemeral: so fast that it is inapprehensible. However, it lasts forever, as the universe is still expanding. As La Monte Young’s music will never stop, his Tortoise can be played for years and years, *ad infinitum*, Brennan’s world will continue to expand. The tortoise in Brennan is the message remembering us of this infinite Project.

---

<sup>297</sup> La Monte Young, “Notes on The Theatre of Eternal Music and The Tortoise, His Dreams and Journeys,” published at melafoundation.org.



8.13 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Brennand Series*, 2012.

For this reason in *Brennand*, the egg is not only the sign of the primitive, or just a paradisiacal trace, the egg is also where everything comes to an end. The snake egg, which is so recurrent in *Brennand*, is a symmetrical figure to the mythical snake that eats its own tail—as Oxumaré, the African deity responsible for mobility and activity, and, at the same time, for continuity and permanence, it is a rainbow-snake, male and female, that curls up with its mouth into its extremity:<sup>298</sup> as Ouroboros, the origin and the end contained in itself: one is all, as defined by Lezama.<sup>299</sup> The same Lezama, who digressed about the figure of the snake that swallows its own tail in another opportunity, *Oppiano Licario*: “I see the open mouth of a recently dead snake. Now, I understand the

---

<sup>298</sup> Pierre Verger, *Orixás*. Salvador (Currupio, 2002), 206.

<sup>299</sup> José Lezama Lima, *La posibilidad infinita* (Madrid: Verbum, 2000), 152.

Ouroboros, the snake biting of its own tail, for its mouth and its anus is the same thing. The Ouroboros is the mouth that bites the anus, the Greek identity, the A is equal to the A. In the Egyptian snake, it is the equivalent of that which creates and uncreates. The phallus *in integrum restitutum*.”<sup>300</sup>

Finally, returning to the sculpture of the ex-egg woman, which I discussed earlier, I said that in Brennan the origin-egg carries everything in itself, transforms itself in everything, it is potency. Now, I add: even potency of language. For this reason, *La Tour de Babel* is rather the union of human and egg. From the egg, masculine forms also come to life, as in the other version of the series (1997), which even ends up in ferric forms (when the human becomes obsolete and the language of the machine assumes his role). In the Tower, we found ourselves immersed in an apparent communication, the language was mutually intelligible grunting: absolute primitivity and absolute ovality. The egg is the birth of language. For, to contain all languages, means the non-necessity of any, as in the infinite library of Borges—*La biblioteca de Babel*—which, by containing all books, contains zero books.

The universe—Borges explains—(which others call Library) is composed by an indefinite number, and maybe infinite. . . . I claim that the Library is endless . . . The Library exists *ab aeterno*. . . . When it was proclaimed that the Library encompassed all books . . . the universe was justified . . . one talked about the Vindications: books of apologias and prophecies, which forever vindicated the acts of each man in the universe . . . but the researchers did not remember that the possibility of a man finding his own vindication, or any perfidious variation of his, is *compatible to zero*.<sup>301</sup>

---

<sup>300</sup> José Lezama Lima, *Oppiano Licario* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1989), 231-232.

<sup>301</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, *Ficciones* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1956), 85-90.



We read in Borges that the Library has no limits and is paradoxically periodical, that if an immortal traveler decided to cross it, he would verify that, after many centuries, the books would get repeated in the same disorder. Perhaps this is the most frightening and fascinating contrast of Brennan's Oficina: between infinite repetition and infinite potency, or, in islander terms, between horror and marvelous. And, right in this repeating island, which repeats Columbus' garden and also the Irish infernal islands, which repeat Recife, Pernambuco and itself, one can read, carved on the ruins, a silent scream: "*The horror, the horror*"—Joseph Conrad.



8.14 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Brennand Series*, 2012.

## 9. The Horror, The Horror: Or, the End

*This is the way the world ends  
This is the way the world ends  
This is the way the world ends  
Not with a bang but a whimper*

T. S. Eliot

In the closing scenes of *Apocalypse Now* (1979), Benjamin Williard, the depressed Captain of the US army sent on an ultra secret mission, navigates the humid jungle of Cambodia—already tuned into a no man’s land—in order to find the lost city where a dissident militia is concentrated. Among the bodies of man hanging from the neck, others simply piled up in decomposition in the company of exposed decapitated heads, he finds the colonel Walter Kurtz. Kurtz took over a place in ruins in order to create a reign of pure violence among the native people, and whom Williard should kill. Kurtz, when meeting the young captain, asks Williard what he heard about that place: the reason why Kurtz’s command should be terminated. “They told me that you had gone totally insane, and that your methods were unsound”—Williard responds only to be questioned. “Are my methods unsound?” To which he answered. “I don’t see any method... at all, sir.” Kurtz, then, realizing that his destiny is to be fulfilled, starts to create in Williard a desire that the latter kills him in a way that honors his accomplishments. While recording part of his farewell book, Kurtz is interrupted by Williard with strokes of a sickle, at the same time a bull is decapitated in a sacrificial

ritual by a native tribe, which dances, primitively, under the voice of Jim Morrison singing *This is the end*. Kurtz leaves life with a whimper: “The horror, the horror.”

This sequence by Francis Ford Coppola shows that the ruins can easily travel from hope to horror. If we were to find a definition for Brennan’s work, we could say: it is a haunted house, its Oficina: a place in which the only inhabitants are ghosts. This is not an escape from reality, a refuge in a spiritualist world, but, on the contrary, it is to go into the encounter of reality. As Lacan said, “reality is, in fact, commanded by the ghost.”<sup>302</sup> And, if we were to go a step further, the real is the non-knowing: that which emerges and refuses to be understood. This, in Brennan, takes another side: the monster. Monster and ghost, monster or ghost, are two primordial entities in Brennan.

---

<sup>302</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Silicet*, no. 1 (1968): 58.



9.1 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Brennand Series*, 2012.

As I said before, Brennand's work is an attempt to create a particular cosmos and, in this sense, proceeds by breaking with the external world, or at least with the external world largely shared by the undifferentiated multitude, the world of the spectacle, the world of the mass-man, negating all of them. With this manoeuvre, the machine of

production of images of Francisco Brennand manages to take us to fascination, presenting us with new beings that could have come from another dimension (unique and singular), with unknown textures, colors, forms, appearances, functions, all of them strange to the common and the expected, namely, to our rules of what must be the interpretation of reality: the reaction of horror is immediate. Nonetheless, through this same procedure, an equally total solitude is installed. To create another world breaking with the anterior ones is nothing but a formula for solitude. To walk through Brennand's *Oficina* is to be in this solitary world, it is to attest to its character of isolation and separation. It is not to be satisfied, and moreover, it is not to accept the world in which one was tossed into. It is to be an outsider. The outsider nourished a horror to the gaze of the other. If we go back to Levinas, it is the horror of being seen, of someone else trying to understand them. As we saw in *Lispector*, she felt alleviated by the gaze of the egg. The egg did not try to understand her. "The egg sees me. Does the egg idealize me? Does the egg meditate on me? No, the egg only sees me. The egg is free from the understanding that hurts. . . . The egg is invisible to the naked eye. From egg to egg, one reaches God, who is invisible to the naked eye."<sup>303</sup>

---

<sup>303</sup> Lispector, "O Ovo e a Galinha," 58.



9.2 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Brennand Series*, 2012.

The egg in *Brennand* is also relief from horror. As I said, the egg is primordial, it has all forms, it accepts everything, it does not try to understand, it contains all worlds, it gives hope of breaking with this world. The egg is the perfect company for the solitary person. Once, when talking about the solitary character of the Mexican, Octavio Paz pointed out: “the double signification of solitude: breaking with a world and attempting to create another one.”<sup>304</sup> Breaking with a world and attempting to create another one... is it not the most appropriate definition of *Brennand*’s *Oficina*? It is not by chance that in the decayed walls that form its ruins, there is always a reminder for us: “Do not interrupt this silence,” do not interrupt this solitude that produces worlds. Do not disturb this artist

---

<sup>304</sup> Octavio Paz, *El Laberinto de la soledad* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1976), 184.

who decided to be isolated among the ruins. The silence is the producer of new worlds, but also the silence of Brennand is the one that precedes the scream. It is the void that anticipates creation, the hollow man. The silence is also violence. Brennand is also this hollow man, and hollow men have only a few places to survive: the hollow man searches for a separated world, as Kurtz. We always face separated worlds: from the underground of the cities to the tropical jungle of the new world.



9.3 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Brennand Series*, 2012.

The tropical jungle is not Paradise. Paradise, as I said, needs a certain control of nature. In Brennand, Paradise is in the openness that was made in the jungle by him. An openness inhabited by ghosts of tragic women: *Galatéia*, *Hália*, *Helena de Tróia*, *Inês de*

*Castro*... "Museum of horrors." But the horror is not only in the artificial field of sculptures, even if they are sculptures that resuscitate destroyed martyrs. There is also the horror to the natural, or better, the horror to nature. Horror to the jungle. Nature that surrounds his Oficina is the dwelling of a possibility for incommensurable sadness. When I commented on Böcklin's painting, the romantic themes of solitude were brought to the text: the solitude of the sea and the solitude of the mountains. The solitude of the sea in Brennan is clearly seen in the Parque de Esculturas: a piece of land, almost an island, isolated. Recife, however, is a city with no mountains, it is a plain space that does not contribute to any pretension of having the horizon modified by lines and curves and elevations. Thus, I believe that Brennan substitutes the theme of the solitude of the mountains with the solitude of the tropical jungle. Horror to nature, here, is horror to the jungle. Rafael Barrett, a Spanish anarchist who lived in Paraguay, was maybe the great theorist of the horror to the jungle:

The jungle! Millenary layer of humus, washed by the acrid transpiration of land; the inextricable monster, immobile, made from millions of plants tied in only one infinite knot; the humid solitude where death peeps and where horror drips as in a cave... The jungle! The serpentine foliage and the elastic claw and the silence devouring invisible insects. You, who were erased in a calaboose, do not envy the prisoner of the jungle. For you, it is still possible to lie down in a corner in order to wait for the end. For him, it is not, because his bed is made of poisoned thorns; innumerable and minuscule jaws, engendered by a tireless fermentation, which will dissect him alive if he does not leave. For you, only a wall is the separation from freedom. For him, the separation is a long distance, the walls of a labyrinth that never ends. Half naked, abandoned, the worker of the *yermal* is a perpetual vagabond of his own jail. He has to walk with no stops and it is a path of fight; he has to advance sickle thrust by sickle



thrust and the trail that he opens with the sickle closes again behind him as a starfish!<sup>305</sup>



9.4 – Maria del Mar Bassa, from *Brennan Series*, 2012.

As Alai Garcia pointed out, in her study about horror in Barrett, the narrator of Augusto Roa Bastos's short story, *Chico-coá*, also departs from the ruins, in this case the ruins of a Jesuit temple in Trinidad, to enter the jungle accompanied by a group of Guayakies Indians, and he realizes that both, the ruins and the jungle, are catacombs, the place where death rests:

I was already conceding completely to the irresistible fascination of the jungle. I was entering it as in a region of green catacombs

---

<sup>305</sup> Rafael Barrett, *O que são os ervais* (Desterro: Cultura e Barbárie, 2012), 39.

where the rite of the elementary mystery developed strange ceremonies for life and death. . . . In some way, I knew that I had arrived at the end of a trip and that whatever happened to me from that moment would be only the vegetal propagation of my human life sucked by the jungle.<sup>306</sup>

Horror fascinates. And horror always has something that tosses us into supernatural fears. Fascination, as well observed by Ortiz, is the sister of fetish, of spell [*feitiço*, in Portuguese].<sup>307</sup> Thus, the sculpture *O Feiticeiro* does not stop appearing everywhere in Brennan's Oficina. It gives the tone of the Oficina itself, making us see that we just entered the world of magic.

---

<sup>306</sup> Augusto Roa Bastos, *Cuentos Completos*, vol. 4 (Asunción: Última hora, 2007), 129 and 131. For a study about the horror of the jungle in Barrett and from where I had contact with this connection above between Barrett and Road Bastos, see: Alai Garcia Diniz, "Sobre fronteiras e ervais: cem anos sem Barrett," in Rafael Barrett, *O que são os ervais* (Desterro: Cultura e Barbárie, 2012).

<sup>307</sup> Fernando Ortiz, *Glosario de Afronegrismos* (La Habana: El Siglo XX, 1924), 204-05 and 547.



9.5 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Brennand Series*, 2012.

In *Brennand*, there is also the horror to the machine, progress and technology. But, in his *Oficina*, the machine does not command, dominate or even sanitize a future, in an attempt to make it entirely inorganic. It is even crueler. On the contrary, *Brennand's* machines melt with the biological. It goes back to a pre-savage state, where beings are formed into a profane fusion between nature and artifice, a machine that is morphed into

an animal, that mixes its gears with organs, its mineral fluids with visceral compounds, creating, eventually, aberrations. If we think about Darwin and his metaphor of evolution as the tree of life, Brennand's Oficina is a branch that did not survive, of a class of beings that could not exist, which are now retaken artificially by the machine, a machine that absorbs them and brings them into life as images. It is a putrefied branch, killed by a plague: a grey, dry, defoliated branch, part of a tree that does not breath. If we were to transport the metaphor, Brennand's Oficina would not be Darwin's tree but one of those that are in a mysterious, hidden garden, the garden of Dalton Trevisan: the tree, which is already ruins, is somewhat dead; its first half is green and robust, full of leaves, but its top is ruined, pruned grey: it is only the decadent and horrible account of what it could have been.



9.6 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Brennand Series*, 2012.

Horror in Brennand is not only the view of the sacrifice; more than the view of the sacrifice, it is sexual horror—sex as a sacrificial instance. Olívio Tavares de Araújo says that, in Brennand, we have a potent “sexuality” and not “eroticism”:

They are strange and dramatic images, with a violent content of sexuality—not eroticism, which is another thing. Surely they do not seduce, they do not arouse, they do not prepare or induce to intercourse. Sex in Brennand is something anterior, if not avert to pleasure. The numerous gigantic and conspicuous phalluses, which are spread throughout the *Oficina*, are the ones of sacrifice, not those of joy, as those on which maids in puberty sit in order to become women.<sup>308</sup>

Sex in Brennand is what surpasses its own limit, what cannot restrain its power, what must exceed life itself. Horror in Brennand is a horror to excess. That is, the excessiveness in Brennand’s work is one of the reasons for so much horror, horror to the impossible. It causes horror, with no doubt, the ambition of totality, not only ambition, but also certainty of totality. Totality—which because of the fact of being impossible, but unreachably hunted—is going to be found there, waiting, in infinity. The excess, more than the work that exceeds itself, is a desire, a desire that, by being unachievable, becomes image, an incomplete image that is always longing for completeness: a torment. The work of Brennand is tormenting. As Bataille said, the excess is the impossible, the marvelous, the exception, the miracle... The excess is an attraction, attraction or horror, attraction or torment, attraction or torture, attraction or pure sexual power... Brennand’s work is the horror of the attraction to death. It is vertigo.

---

<sup>308</sup> Olívio Tavares de Araújo and Francisco Brennand, *A alma gráfica: Brennand desenhos* (São Paulo: CAIXA Cultural São Paulo, 2008), 12.





9.7 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Brennand Series*, 2012.

When talking about Brennand and his total work, I cannot forget to mention the Cuban poet, *origenista*, Gastón Baquero: stealing one of his verses, I would say that the Garden of monsters created by Brennand is an act of “[putting] some drops of horror in the sweetness of the world.”<sup>309</sup> As if the well-cut and clean grass, the ornamental plants, the healthy ducks, the settled sand, should always be spotted by deformity, by the unbearable. The work of Brennand is total, for it is a settlement with the idea of an omnipresent and suffocating god, at the same time it is the expression of the very horror

---

<sup>309</sup> Gastón Baquero, “Palabras escritas en la arena por un inocente,” in Cintio Vitier, *Diez poetas cubanos, 1937-1947* (Havana: Ediciones Orígenes, 1948), 135.

of the artist facing the possible absence of, or abandonment by, that same god: the artist goes, then, to the Baroque's horror to empty space. We can see that horror also lives in this second layer. The impossibility of dealing with this possible lack makes Brennand wish to take every fragment of the environment: the entire site, with no exception, composes the work of art, starting with the nature that surrounds it, that penetrates and inhabits it. But god, being total, is also part of the emptiness, god is present even when he abandons. "God is also the horror to emptiness and the emptiness of the world."<sup>310</sup>



9.8 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *Brennand Series*, 2012.

---

<sup>310</sup> Ibid., 136.

The work of Brennan, as a total work of art, appears to be the opposite of minimalist art: a vision that can be changed if one realizes that both of them, the total and the minimalist, have the same concern about art itself: how to deal with infinite space, how to deal with the horror of empty space. The total work of art is an *a priori* frustrated attempt to dominate space, while minimalism accepts that space will always endure attacks on its infinity and even the most grandiose work of art will always look inexpressive if put in relation to it. Both of them recognize that sculpture is more effective in dealing with this concern than painting due to its three dimensionality. Brennan had put painting in low priority until recent years and it still appears that he has never gotten over the lack of recognition for his two-dimensional work: ceramics made it possible for his creatures to inhabit the ruins and only when his *Oficina* appears to be a world of its own, a world fulfilled by imagination, Brennan was able to focus mainly on painting again, which does not mean that that world stopped growing. For its part, minimalism is a form of abstract ruins. The ruins are there but reduced to a compact mass that leaves the remaining space free: “the artist provides a partial image of complete order throughout all the space which can be imagined, and leaves the spectator to fill the rest in.”<sup>311</sup> What can be more like ruins than Donald Judd’s impeccable *15 untitled works in concrete* (1980-1984)? It is not by chance that Judd, like Brennan, constructed a new city in the middle of a powerful natural landscape, the desert in his case. Monsters and concrete squares are there to show that a new cosmogonical creation of universe is desired.

---

<sup>311</sup> Edward Lucie-Smith, *Movements in Art Since 1945* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984), 244.





9.9 – Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, from *The Amerika Series* (Donald Judd, “15 untitled works in concrete” [1980-1984]), 2011.

From a chapter that Sarduy dedicated to baroque eroticism, or to supplement in general, I can take some considerations that could help us face the relation among obsession, reproduction, fascination and horror that exists in Brennan. In the first place, the Baroque, and in this case Brennan’s *Oficina*, possesses the language that erects the supplement, the surplus and the partial loss of its object: “the search, by definition frustrated, for the partial object. The ‘object’ of the Baroque . . . is the one that Freud, but mainly Abraham, call *partial object*: the maternal breast, excrements, gold, eye, voice, things that always are foreigners to everything that man can understand, assimilate from

the other (and from himself) . . . a residue that we could describe as (a)lterity.”<sup>312</sup> This object is precisely what Lacan calls (a), an object that is not on the field of view, is not in front of the eyes, but behind the neck, pushing us, and here we see the same in Brennan, always pushing forward. This object (a) is, at the same time, residue and loss: “the non-synchronization between reality and the phantasmagorical image that sustains it, between the visible baroque work and the limitless saturation, the choker proliferation, the *horror vacui* that presides over the baroque space.”<sup>313</sup> As Arroyo points out, the emptiness in Sarduy is connected with the idea of the transvestite: whatever hides behind the dress instead of being phallic is an absence: horror to castration, horror to death.<sup>314</sup>

The *Horror vacui*, horror to emptiness is the finding that comes to my mind in Brennan’s *Oficina*: a fight against the impossible, the horror to solitude, the horror to not being able to complete everything possible, but to uselessly try to accomplish it, to try to fill all spaces, even if they are minimal or uncommonly large. It is to advance over the ruins, the lake, the jungle, the river, the city, the world: it is the verification of failure. “The presence of a non-representable object, which resists exempting the line of alterity: (a)lice that irritates *Alice* because the latter cannot make her come to the other side of the mirror.”<sup>315</sup> The failure is the repetition rather than the modification of the project: the obsession dominates. The word that defines the Baroque, the Baroque of Brennan, is, above all, “work,” or better, pointless work, useless work, waste: that is, a game. All

---

<sup>312</sup> Sarduy, “Barroco,” 1250-1251.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*, 1251.

<sup>314</sup> See: Jossianna Arroyo, *Travestismos culturales: literatura y etnografía en Cuba y Brasil* (Pittsburgh: Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana, 2003).

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*

those spaces—spaces of games, waste, and pleasure—are eroticism. The eroticism in Brennand, or the incessant image of reproduction, is less reproduction as reproductive finality than a game of waste, of pleasure. The reproduction in Brennand is a failure. It aims at eternity, not at the eternity of the species, but at the ephemeral eternity of ecstasy. For this reason, its results are monsters, aberrations, eggs... it is reproduction that establishes itself as the search for the lost object: the horror, the horror. The reproduction in Brennand is the perversion that is implicated in “every metaphor, in every figure.”<sup>316</sup>



9.10 – Maria del Mar Bassa, from *Brennand Series*, 2012.

---

<sup>316</sup> Ibid.

## 10. Epilogue

*All cities would look the same were it not  
for the monuments that distinguish them.*

Alberto Cavalcanti

The Third World did not become a ruin. It was born a ruin. The Third World—as other significant phenomena of the twentieth century, especially modern warfare—contradicts the classical idea of ruins itself. During the writing of this work, I was led to reflect on the new qualities that ruins have acquired in contemporary modernity. The classical idea of ruins, I should recognize, has something of ennoblement, even though it can function as the unmasking of the human aspiration for defeating eternity. It was directly linked with the aesthetic contemplation of an object that could conduct the observer to a past in which great empires and nations had their moment of glory, their moment of domination on Earth, propelling their dreams of grandeur along with the tragic consequences that boundless power inflicts. Even if the ruins are the ultimate proof of the failure of those endeavors, they still demonstrate that a civilization was potent enough to attempt gestures at such levels of ambition and opulence. In turning from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, the philosopher Volney constructed the treatise *Ruins (or Meditation on the Revolution of Empires)*, in which he invokes the spirits of debris:

Hail, solitary ruins, holy sepulchres, and silent walls! you I invoke; to you I address my prayer. While your aspect averts, with secret terror, the vulgar regard, it excites in my heart the charm of delicious sentiments—sublime contemplations. What

useful lessons, what affecting and profound reflections, you suggest to him who knows how to consult you! When the whole earth, in chains and silence, bowed the neck before its tyrants, you had already proclaimed the truths which they abhor, and confounding the dust of the king with that of the meanest slave, had announced to man the sacred dogma of *Equality*. Within your pale, in solitary adoration of *Liberty*, I saw her Genius arise from the mansions of the dead: not such as she is painted by the impassioned multitude, armed with fire and sword, but under the august aspect of Justice, poising in her hand the sacred balance wherein are weighed the actions of men at the gates of eternity!<sup>317</sup>

As the Futurists noticed, the twentieth century is marked by the domination of speed. In 1909, Marinetti had proclaimed in his manifesto: “the beauty of the world has been enriched by a new form of beauty: *the beauty of speed*. A racing car with a hood that glistens with large pipes resembling a serpent with explosive breath... a roaring automobile that seems to ride on grapeshot—that is more beautiful than the *Victory of Samothrace*.”<sup>318</sup> Still in the nineteenth century, ruins were seen as the union between nature and human work. Buildings would be constructed, monuments would be erected, and palaces would be located as the dwelling of the most important of their eras, only to be gradually corrupted and transformed by the action of time. Nature would take hundreds, perhaps thousands of years to wear and sculpt its marks on human creations. Ruination was seen as a deeply slow process that could not be accompanied by one generation or two, but needed a large gap in the history of civilizations to come into life. In the twentieth century, the game radically changed. With the advent of modern machine guns, airplanes, bombs of enormous magnitude, ruins could be created within weeks or

---

<sup>317</sup> C. F. Volney, *Volney's Ruins: Or, Meditation on the Revolutions of Empires* (New York: G. Vale, 1853), 19.

<sup>318</sup> F.T. Marinetti, “The Manifesto of Futurism,” in *Futurism: An Anthology*, ed. Christine Poggi and Laura Wittman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 51.

days. In fact, with the atomic bomb, humanity could convert an entire city to ruins in just a matter of seconds.

In the mythical film *Hiroshima mon amour*, Alain Resnais embarks on the task of registering this new process of making ruins: the megatonic bombs. In the first scenes, the skin of two lovers—covered by a mixture of sand and brilliant dust—are contrasted with recordings of human tissue detaching from the bodies, scalps burns and hair lost by the women, birth defects and deformations caused by exposure to radiation, iron melted by high temperatures creating disturbing forms, and archival footage of the city in ruins or the desert that took over the landscape. Some of those objects are positioned as in a museum—I must admit—but it is also true that they do not form a museum with classic forms of art, with pieces of an ancient civilization full of grandeur as the *Victory* reining in the Louvre. They stand for an exhibition of the power that comes from the atomic weapon. The ruins, which in the past were seen as monuments, as bits of dreams that should be contemplated, which even could have parts of them transported to the galleries of the most important metropolises or to the gardens of bourgeois mansions, became a sign of *total* disaster. Before *Hiroshima*, in his documentary *Nuit et brouillard*, Resnais had captured the horrors of Auschwitz—men and women being stripped, “shaved, tattooed, numbered,” tested, tortured, burned, castrated: they are destitute of their subjectivity. “In the end—says the narrator—each inmate resembles the next: a body of indeterminate age that dies with its eyes wide open.” There are piles of those bodies forming terrifying structures, along with masses of shoes, combs and eyeglasses that

grow. A desert of human life, a land without bodies, was intended. Along with the atomic bomb, the extermination camps were another sign that humanity had reached the capacity of self-annihilation: slaughterhouses for men and women, machines of mass death, factories of human debris. Himmler is quoted in the documentary: “we must destroy, but productively.” The film ends with a succession of color images of what remained from the extermination camps, and with a hopeless voice that reflects on the ruins:

As I speak to you now, the ice water of the ponds and ruins fills the hollows of the mass graves, a frigid and muddy water, as murky as our memory. War nods off to sleep, but keeps one eye always open. Grass flourishes again on the inspection ground around the blocks. An abandoned village, still heavy with peril. The crematoria are no longer used. The Nazi’s cunning is but child’s play today. Nine millions dead haunt this countryside. Who among us keeps watch from this strange watchtower to warn of the arrival of our new executioners? Are their faces really different from our own? Somewhere in our midst, lucky Kapos still survive, reinstated officers and anonymous informers. There are those who refused to believe, or believed only for brief moments. With our sincere gaze, we survey these ruins—as if the old monster lay crushed forever beneath the rubble. We pretend to take up hope again as the image recedes into the past—as if we were cured once and for all of the scourge of the camps. We pretend it all happened only once, at a given time and place. We turn a blind eye to what surrounds us and a deaf ear to humanity’s never-ending cry.

The lesson, learned from Resnais, is that the modern ruins of the twentieth century gain a much larger and abstract meaning. They are not the ruins of a single empire or nation, or of a single civilization or culture—as posited by Volney—but they embody the ruins of the whole humanity as a species. The speed of the airplane, “whose

propeller flaps at the wind like a flag [that] seems to applaud like a delirious crowd,”<sup>319</sup> carries the possibility of our own catastrophe and disappearance from the universe, which was not plausible until then. Humanity conquered the ability to travel rapidly throughout the Earth but, at the same time, it also multiplied its power of destruction. From Cuba, on October 26, 1962 during the Missile Crisis, Castro wrote a letter to Nikita Khrushchev suggesting he launch a thermonuclear attack if the US president John Kennedy decided to invade Cuba. As Žižek analyzed by quoting the fragments below, for Castro, the Soviet Union should take the advantage of being the first one to strike, rendering null—or at least very debilitated—the ability of the North American enemy to react.<sup>320</sup> “[If] the imperialists invade Cuba with the goal of occupying it—Castro says—the danger that that aggressive policy poses for humanity is so great that following that event the Soviet Union must never allow the circumstances in which the imperialists could launch the first nuclear strike against it.”<sup>321</sup> Four days later, Khrushchev, in a clear state of perplexity, contested to Castro:

In your cable of October 27 you proposed that we be the first to launch a nuclear strike against the territory of the enemy. You, of course, realize where that would have led. Rather than a simple strike, it would have been the start of a thermonuclear world war. . . . Obviously, in that case, the United States would have sustained huge losses, but the Soviet Union and the whole socialist camp would have also suffered greatly. As far as Cuba is concerned, it would be difficult to say even in general terms what

---

<sup>319</sup> Marinetti, “The Manifesto of Futurism,” 2.

<sup>320</sup> Slavoj Žižek, “A Letter which did not Reach its Destination (and Thereby Saved the World),” published at Lacan.com.

<sup>321</sup> Fidel Castro, “Prime Minister Fidel Castro’s letter to Premier Khrushchev,” October 26, 1962, cited in Žižek, “A Letter which did not Reach its Destination.”



this would have meant for them. In the first place, *Cuba would have been burned in the fire of war*.<sup>322</sup>

Burned in the fire of war: that was the image of the city in ruins, which remained in the imaginary of post-revolutionary Cuba. As we saw in Ponte, it worked both ways: to turn Havana into a wasteland and to serve as a metaphor for artistic creation. Indeed, people still travel to see those ruins. They also were turned into a tourist attraction, as was Hiroshima with its present-day streets illuminated by neon lights and even the extermination camps to a certain extent. I can only see these morbid, organized tours as the degree of penetration reached by this society of mediating images described by Debord: our own destruction transformed into spectacle, into banality. Of course, the ever fewer that refuse to enlarge the rows of mass-men cannot see it this way. The modern ruins, immersed in the idea of a future of total destruction, also mean, for the outsider or for those who sympathize with them, the becoming of human ruins. Almendros recapitulated the horrors of the tropical Gulag through the testimonies of its wrecked victims. Guillén Landrián paid the price for being the outsider artist himself and converted his life into a fragment of catastrophe. This type of marginal existence lead to suicidal moments that predicted a dark destiny for the Third World: the trance of the carnival—in Sganzerla—was substituted with the desperation for expression seen in the terror of the hallucinated bandit. The party was shut down and, in its place, arrived the generalized and permanent state of war as *PM*'s case reveals: the last breaths of the Cuban nightlife that accompanied the final moments of a potent beach.

---

<sup>322</sup> Nikita Khrushchev, "USSR, Letter, from Chairman Khrushchev to Prime Minister Castro," October 30, 1962, cited in Žižek, "A Letter which did not Reach its Destination."

Brazilian filmmaker Alberto Cavalcanti, started his career with visual, urban symphonies in Europe. In 1926, he produced *Rien que les heures*, which begins with a beautiful epigraph declaring that cities are in fact differentiated only by the singularity of their monuments. When the succession of images takes the screen, one expects to contemplate the picturesque landmarks of the great Paris. Instead, Cavalcanti predominantly brings to the viewer the existence in decay: not even urban decay but human beings in a state of destruction—degraded workers, the miserable, murderers, and vagrants. His epigraph can be read otherwise: what makes every city look the same is their transformation into ruins—not when the ruins become monuments, but when the monuments are transmuted into ruins. Havana is Dresden for Ponte. Recife is the besieged Roma for Brennand. But the ruins for Brennand are also nothingness, and the baroque artist cultivates a horror to it. Nothingness is equivalent to the absence of past. In his *Oficina*, everything is beginning: a new cosmos, another universe, and a different possibility for paradise. Brennand is fighting against decay: this privation of reason and the mark of the failure of progress. The decay that is also depicted in the fruits of Alejandro: sliced, open, ready to putrefy and die—they are *vanitas* displaying how American nature is to be devastated, and how the utopic projects for the Third World cannot give an answer for catastrophe. The same desperation we see in Glauber. The backlands are the emptiness that the intellectual cannot deal with, and this immensity of meaningless land will inevitably lead the intellectual into their own ruination. The same emptiness that Sergio, in *Memorias*, is facing while his world collapses giving him no

path for escape: he just walks alone under the sounds of the waves breaking on the grey stones of the *Malecón*.



0.1 – Still from Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, *Memorias del Subdesarrollo*, 1968.

## Bibliography

Afolabi, Niyi. "Environmental Cosmologies and Epistemologies in Miriam Alves's *Aro Boboi!* And Niyi Osundare's *Eye of the Earth*." Presented at the 36th Annual African Literature Association Conference, March 12, 2010.

Agamben, Giorgio. "We Refugees," *Symposium*, No. 49, 02 (1995): 114-119. Republished at [www.egs.edu/faculty/giorgio-agamben](http://www.egs.edu/faculty/giorgio-agamben).

---. *Homo Sacer*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.

---. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.

---. *Remnants of Auschwitz*. New York: Zone Books, 1999.

---. *State of Exception*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

---. "Metropoli." Presented at *Metropoli/Moltitudine*, Università IUAV di Venezia, March 11, 2006.

---. *Profanations*. New York: Zone Books, 2007.

Alejandro, Ramón. "Fiesta de Halloween con Fifo moribundo." *Café Fuerte*, Reflexiones de la Caimana, Oct 28, 2012.

Almeida, Onésimo. *O peso do hífen: ensaios sobre a experiência luso-americana*. Lisboa: Instituto de Ciências Sociais, 2010.

Almendros, Néstor. Interview by Joaquin Soler Serrano, *A Fondo*. First broadcasted by TVE, Spain, 1978.

---. *A Man with a Camera*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1984.

Antelo, Raul. "The stream of Brazilian life: still leven, natureza morta and world market." Presented at Cátedra Rui Barbosa de Estudos Brasileiros, Leiden University, Much 18, 2008.

Andrade, Oswald de. "Manifesto Antropófago." *Revista de Antropofagia*, year 1, no. 1, (May, 1928): 3-7.

---. "A marcha das utopias." In *Obras Completas*, vol. 6. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1978.

Antequera Luengo, Juan José, ed. *La carta de Colón anunciando el descubrimiento*. Madrid: Alianza, 1992.

Applebaum, Anne. *Gulag: A History*. New York: Doubleday, 2003.

Amaral, Aracy. *Tarsila: sua obra e seu tempo*. São Paulo: Edusp, 2003.

Araújo, Inácio. “No meio da tempestade.” In *Cinema marginal e suas fronteiras: filmes produzidos nas décadas de 60 e 70*, edited by Eugênio Puppó and Vera Haddad, n.p. São Paulo: Central Cultural, Banco do Brasil, 1990.

Arcos, Jorge Luis. “El barroco carcelario: Lezama Lima y la revolución, 40 años después de ‘Paradiso.’” *Cubaencuentro*, July 04, 2006.

Arenas, Reinaldo. *El Color Del Verano*. Miami: Universal, 1991.

---. *Antes que anochezca: autobiografía*. Barcelona: Tusquets, 1992.

Arendt, Hannah. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. New York: Viking Press, 1963.

---. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Harcourt, 1976.

Arroyo, Jossianna. *Travestismos culturales: literatura y etnografía en Cuba y Brasil*. Pittsburgh: Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana, 2003.

---. *Writing Secrecy in Caribbean Freemasonry*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Artigas, Josep. *Escrits D'art*. Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona, 1993.

Azeredo, Verônica Pacheco de Oliveira. “O corpo em Nietzsche a partir de uma leitura da ‘genealogia da moral.’” Master’s thesis, Universidade Federal de Ouro Preto, 2008.

Baquero, Gastón. “Palabras escritas en la arena por un inocente.” In Vitier, Cintio. *Diez poetas cubanos, 1937-1947*. Havana: Ediciones Orígenes, 1948.

Barrett Rafael. *O que são os ervais*. Desterro: Cultura e Barbárie, 2012.

Barroso, Gustavo. “Astronomical Legend.” In *Transition*, no. 23, (1935): 52.

---. “Astronomic Myth.” In *Transition*, no. 25, (1936): 125.

---. *O brasil na lenda e na cartografia antiga*. São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1941.

Barthes, Roland. "À la recherche du nom." In *Ramón Alejandro*. Paris: L'Atelier des Brisants, 2006.

Bataille, Georges. "ŒIL." *Documents*, no. 4 (1929).

---. "Informe." *Documents*, no. 7 (1929).

---. *Lascaux, Or, the Birth of Art: Prehistoric Painting*. Lausanne: Skira, 1955.

---. *A parte maldia*: precedida de "A noção de despesa". Rio de Janeiro: Imago, 1975.

---. *História do Olho*. São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2003.

*Beneath the Paving Stones: Situationists and the Beach, May 1968*. Edinburgh, Scotland: AK Press/Dark Star, 2001.

Benítez Rojo, Antonio. *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997.

Benjamin, Walter. "Das Passagen-Werk." In *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol V-1. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1982.

---. "Kapitalismus als Religion." In *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol VI. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1982.

---. "Little History of Photography." In *Selected Writings: 1931-1934*, vol 2, part 2. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005.

---. *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. New York: Schocken, 2007.

Borges, Jorge Luis. *Ficciones*. Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1956.

Bowles, Paul. "Baptism of Solitude." In *Collected Stories and Later Writings*. New York: The Library of America, 2002.

Buarque de Holanda, Sérgio. *Visão do Paraíso: Os Motivos Edênicos no Descobrimento e Colonização do Brasil*. São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1985.

Burton, Julianne. *The Intellectual in Anguish: Modernist Form and Ideology in Land in Anguish and Memories of Underdevelopment*. Washington, D.C: The Wilson Center, 1983.

Brennand, Francisco. *Diálogos do paraíso perdido*. Recife: Prefeitura da Cidade do Recife, 1990.

Buck-Morss, Susan. *The dialectics of seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades project*. Cambridge: MIT, 1991.

---. "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered." *October*, vol. 62, (1992): 3-41.

---. "The City as Dreamworld and Catastrophe." *October*, Vol. 73 (1995): 3-26.

---. *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*. Cambridge: MIT, 2002.

Cabeza de Vaca, Álvaro Núñez. *The Account: Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca's Relación*. Houston: Arte Público Press, 1993.

Cabrera Infante, Guillermo and Ramón Alejandro. *¡Vaya Papaya!: Ramón Alejandro*. Paris: Le Polygraphe, 1992.

Camnitzer, Luis. *New Art of Cuba*. Austin: UT Press, 2003.

Campos, Haroldo de. *Bere'shith: a cena da oriem*. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2000.

Cancio Isla, Wilfredo. "Fallece Jorge 'Papito' Serguera, fiscal y censor." *El Nuevo Herald*, April 02, 2009.

Cantarino, Geraldo. *Uma ilha chamada Brasil: o paraíso irlandês no passado brasileiro*. Rio de Janeiro: Mauad, 2004.

Carpentier, Alejo. "Two Cuban Negro Prayers." In *Transition*, no. 23, (1935): 52-54.

---. *The Harp and the Shadow*. San Francisco: Mercury House: 1992.

Casement, Roger. *The Amazon Journal of Roger Casement*. London: Anaconda Editions, 1997.

---. "Hy-Brassil: Irish origins of Brazil." In *Irish Migration Studies in Latin America*, vol 4, no. 3 (2006): 157-165.

Castellanos, Ernesto Juan. *La Habana with a little help from my friends*. La Habana: Ediciones Unión, 2005.

Castro, Fidel. "Palabras a los Intelectuales." Speech at Biblioteca Nacional. La Habana, June 30, 1961.

---. "Discurso en memoria del comandante Ernesto Che Guevara." Speech at Plaza de la Revoluciuón. La Habana, October 18, 1967.

---. Interview by Carmen Lira Saade. *La Jornada*, August 31, 2010.

Cate, Phillip Dennis. *Prints Abound: Paris in the 1890s: from the Collections of Virginia and Ira Jackson and the National Gallery of Art*. Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2000.

Che Guevara, Ernesto. "La Guerra de gerrillas." In *Che*. La Habana: 1969.

---. *Man and Socialism in Cuba*. [www.marxists.org/archive/guevara/1965/03/man-socialism-alt.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/guevara/1965/03/man-socialism-alt.htm)

Cisneros Casamayor, Odette. "Piñera y Lam: inusitadas aproximaciones." In *La Gaceta de Cuba*, no. 5, 2004.

Coelen, Marcus. "Por que a estrutura psicótica?" *Cult*, 174, November 2012, 34-37.

Columbus, Christopher, Bartolomé de las Casas, and Samuel Kettell. *Personal Narrative of the First Voyage of Columbus to America*. Boston: T.B. Wait and Son, 1827.

Corbin, Alain. *The Lure of the Sea: The Discovery of the Seaside in the Western World, 1750-1840*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994.

Cunha, Pedro Henrique. "Marco zero vai ganhar nova obra de brennand." *Diário de Pernambuco*. October 18, 2013.

*Dali Monumental (catálogo)*. Rio de Janeiro: Museu de Belas Artes do Rio de Janeiro, 1998.

Daniele, Vanessa. "O ovo vê o olho – imagens alegóricas (ou ovais) em Clarice Lispector." *Desenredos*, no. 5, (2010).

Davis, Diane. "On Levinas and the Wagging Tail." *JAC*, vol. 29, no. 3 (2009): 595-631.

Debord, Guy. *Society of the Spectacle*. London: Rebel Press, 2000.

Derrida, Jacques. *Given Time: I*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

---. *Mal de arquivo: uma impressão freudiana*. Rio de Janeiro: Relume Dumará, 2000.



Desnoes, Edmundo. Commentary to Julianne Burton. *The Intellectual in Anguish: Modernist Form and Ideology in Land in Anguish and Memories of Underdevelopment*. Washington, D.C: The Wilson Center, 1983.

---. *Memories of Underdevelopment: A Novel from Cuba*. Pittsburgh: Latin American Literary Review Press, 2004.

Doob, Leonard W. "Goebbels' Principles of Propaganda." *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 14, no. 3 (1950): 419-442.

Eidelberg, Alejandra. "Rouxinóis de Novo." *O Rouxinol do Americano*, no. 2, Escola Brasileira de Psicanálise, Seção Santa Catarina, September, 2006.

Eliot, T S. *Collected Poems, 1909-1962*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963.

"Eu vi o mundo..." *Jornal do Commercio Recife*, December 07, 1999.

Fernández, Macedonio. *Papeles de reciénvenido y continuación de la nada*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 1944.

Franqui, Carlos. *Retrato de familia con Fidel*. Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1981.

Fonseca, Rubem. *Contos Reunidos*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1994.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1977.

---. Interview by James O'Higgins. *Salmagundi*, no. 58-59 (1982-1983), 10-24.

Gallisá Muriente, Sofía. "Good Samaritan: the artist as sacrificial lamb, savior & rebel, while inevitably alien." Text given by the author.

Garcia Diniz, Alai. "Sobre fronteiras e ervais: cem anos sem Barrett." In Rafael Barrett, *O que são os ervais*. Desterro: Cultura e Barbárie, 2012.

Gonzalez, Servando. "Dulces guerreros cubanos, obra cumbre de la literatura gay castrista." Published at [www.intelinet.org](http://www.intelinet.org), March 29, 2011.

González-Esteva, Orlando. *Cuerpos en bandeja: frutas y erotismo en Cuba*. México, D.F.: Artes de México, 1998.

Gonçalves Filho, Antonio. "Beckett & Keaton." *O Estado de São Paulo*, July 1, 2011.

“Group F.64 Manifesto,” in *Seeing Straight: The F.64 Revolution in Photography*, ed. Therese Heyman, Mary S. Alinder, and Naomi Rosenblum. Oakland: Oakland Museum, 1992.

Groys, Boris. *The total art of Stalinism: avant-garde, aesthetic dictatorship, and beyond*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

---. *Ilya Kabakov: The Man Who Flew into Space from His Apartment*. London: Afterall, 2006.

Guillén Landrián, Nicolás. *Cine-ojo... кино-глаз*. Interview by Manuel Zayas. October 8, 2011, manuelzayas.wordpress.com/2011/10/08/interview-nicolas-guillen-landrian.

Gutiérrez Alea, Tomás. *Dialéctica del espectador*. La Habana: UNEAC, 1982.

Heidegger, Martin. “Was heißt Denken?” In *Gesamtausgabe - Abteilung I: Veröffentlichte Schriften, 1910-76*, vol 08. Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 2002.

Heinberg, Richard. *Memories and Visions of Paradise: Exploring the Universal Myth of a Lost Golden Age*. Los Angeles: Jeremy Tarcher.

Herbert, Robert. *Impressionism: Art, Leisure, and Parisian Society*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.

Humboldt, Alexander von. *Cosmos*, vol. 2. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1850.

Ionesco, Eugène. “The Hard-Boiled Egg.” *The Brooklyn Rail*, September 2, 2006.

Jappe, Anselm. “Sic Transit Gloria Artis: ‘The End of Art’ for Theodor Adorno and Guy Debord.” *Substance*, vol. 28, no. 3 (1999): 102-128.

Jiménez Leal, Orlando. “Cine y censura: el caso P.M.” Presentation at 29<sup>th</sup> Miami Book Fair International, Miami, USA, November 18, 2012).

---, and Manuel Zayas. *El caso PM: cine, poder y censura*. Madrid: Editorial Colibrí, 2012.

Jolas, Eugene. “Revolution of the World.” *Transition*, no. 16/17, 1929.

Jones, Malcolm. *Dostoevsky and the Dynamics of Religious Experience*. London: Anthem Press, 2005.

Joyce, James. *Finnegans Wake; Finnicus Revém*. São Paulo: Ateliê, 1999.

Kafka, Franz. *The Trial*. Fairford: Echo Library, 2006.

---. *28 desaforismos*. Florianópolis: Editora da UFSC, 2010.

Koselleck, Reinhart. *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

Knabb, Ken, ed. *Situationist International Anthology*. Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006.

Kulish, Nicholas. "Author, 17, Says It's 'Mixing,' Not Plagiarism." *The New York Times*, Feb 17, 2010.

Lacan, Jacques. *Silicet*, no. 1 (1968).

---. *Television*. New York: Norton, 1990.

Lem, Stanisław. *Memoirs found in a Bathtub*. New York: The Seabuty Press, 1973.

Lévinas, Emmanuel, and Philippe Nemo. *Ethics and Infinity*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985.

Lezama Lima, José. "A partir de la poesía." In *La cantidad hechizada* (La Habana: Unión, 1970).

---. *Oppiano Licario*. Madrid: Cátedra, 1989.

---. *Paradiso*, ed. Cintio Vitier. Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1993.

---. *La posibilidad infinita*. Madrid: Verbum, 2000.

---. "Imagen de America Latina." In *América latina en su literatura*, ed. César Fernández Moreno. México, D.F.: Siglo XXI, 2000.

Lispector, Clarice. "O Ovo e a Galinha." In *Felicidade Clandestina*. Rio de Janeiro: Francisco Alves, 1991

Litvak, Lily. "El mar como tema de la modernidad en la pintura española, 18970-1936." *A la playa: el mar como tema de la modernidad en la pintura española, 1870-1936*, 13-63. Madrid: Fundación Cultural Mapre Vida, 2000.

---. "El Siglo de los museos." Presented at *I Seminario Internacional "Memoria y Patrimonio,"* Granada, November 12, 2009.

- Lucie-Smith, Edward. *Movements in Art Since 1945*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1984.
- Lupi, Juan Pablo. *Reading Anew: José Lezama Lima's Rhetorical Investigations*. Madrid: Iberoamericana-Vervuert, 2012.
- Macaulay, Rose. *Pleasure of Ruins*. New York: Walker, 1966.
- Mabille, Pierre, and Jody Gladding. *Mirror of the Marvelous: The Classic Surrealist Work on Myth*. Rochester, Vt: Inner Traditions, 1998.
- Marinetti, F.T. "The Manifesto of Futurism." In *Futurism: An Anthology*, ed. Christine Poggi and Laura Wittman. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.
- Mario, José. *La Habana Elegante*. Interview by Reinaldo García Ramos. No. 19-20, 2002.
- Marx, Karl. *Elogio del crimen*. Paris: Éditions Deleatur, 1999.
- Miller, Jacques-Alain. Interview by Hanna Waar. Published at Lacan.com.
- Monteiro, Fenando. *Brennand*. Rio de Janeiro, Spala: 1987.
- . "Civilização e Grandeza." *Jornal do Comércio*, March 30, 1994.
- Mota, Francisco. *Brennand*. Recife: SENEC-DECA, 1961.
- Nodari, Alexandre. "'Todo camburão tem um pouco de Navio Negreiro.'" Presentation at *II Semana de Letras da UFSC*, Florianópolis, Brazil, May, 2008.
- . "Teses sobre a política." *Sopro*, no. 23 (March 2010): 3-4.
- Nochlin, Linda. *Realism*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971.
- OED (Online Etymology Dictionary)*. Published at [www.etymonline.com](http://www.etymonline.com).
- Oliveira, Sandra de. *Um sobre-ensaio de cegos*. M.A. thesis, Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Florianópolis, 2008.
- Orwell, George. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. New York: Knopf 1992.
- Ortega y Gasset, José. "La deshumanización del arte." In *Obras Completas*, vol. 3. Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1966.

---. "La rebelión de las masas." In *Obras Completas*, vol. 4. Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1966.

Ortiz, Fernando. *Glosario de Afronegrismos*. La Habana: El Siglo XX, 1924.

---. "Jitanjaforas in Cuba." In *Transition*, no. 25, (1936): 172-178.

---. *Wifredo Lam y su obra vista a través de significados críticos*. La Habana: Publicaciones del Ministerio de Educación, 1950.

---. *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar: advertencia de sus contrastes agrarios, económicos, históricos y sociales, su etnografía y su transculturación*. Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1987.

Oskamp, H. P. A. *The Voyage of Máel Dúin: A Study in Early Irish Voyage Literature followed by an Edition of Immram Curaig Máele Duin from the Yellow Book of Lecan in Trinity College, Dublin*. Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff Publishing, 1970.

Paz, Octavio. *El Laberinto de la soledad*. México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1976.

Ponte, Antonio José. *Las comidas profundas*. Angers: Éditions Deleatur, 1997.

---. *Un seguidor de Montaigne mira La Habana*. Madrid: Verbum, 2001.

---. *El libro perdido de los orígenistas*. Sevilla: Editorial Renacimiento, 2004.

---. *Un arte de hacer ruinas y otros cuentos*. México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2005.

---. "Ramón Alejandro." In *Ramón Alejandro*. Paris: L'Atelier des Brisants, 2006.

---. *La Fiesta Vigilada*. Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama, 2007.

---. "La Habana: ciudad y archive." Presented at the *Cuban Research Institute*, cubainfo.fiu.edu.

Prest, John M. *The Garden of Eden: The Botanic Garden and the Re-Creation of Paradise*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981.

Ragusa, Isa. "The Egg Reopened." *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 53, no. 4 (1971): 435-443.

Roa Bastos, Augusto. *Cuentos Completos*, vol. 4. Asunción: Última hora, 2007.

Rojas, Rafael. "El dolor y la pulpa." In *Ramón Alejandro*. Paris: L'Atelier des Brisants, 2006.

---. "Walter Benjamin no llegó a la Habana." In *Changing Cuba/Changing World*, ed. Mauricio Font. New York: Bildner Center for Western Hemisphere Studies, 2008.

Ronell, Avital. *Stupidity*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002.

---. "Proving Grounds: On Nietzsche and the Test Drive." *MLN* 118, No. 3 (2003): 653-69.

Rodrigues, Nelson. "As últimas palavras de Nelson Rodrigues," *O Estado de São Paulo*, Caderno 2, Jul 8, 2002.

Ros, Enrique. *La Umap: El Gulag Castrista*. Miami: Universal, 2004.

Salgado, César. "Origenes in Context." Seminar, The University of Texas at Austin, Spring 2012.

Santiago, Silviano. *Uma Literatura Nos Trópicos: Ensaio Sobre Dependência Cultural*. São Paulo: Editora Perspectiva, 1978.

Santos, Milton. "Entrevista," *Roda Viva*. First broadcasted by TV Cultura, São Paulo, Brazil, March 31, 1997.

Sarduy, Severo. *Obras Completas*. México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999.

---. "Une archéologie prévisible." In *Ramón Alejandro*. Paris: L'Atelier des Brisants, 2006.

*Manifesto selvaSP*. Published at [www.selvasp.com](http://www.selvasp.com).

Sebald, Winfried. *On the Natural History of Destruction*. New York: Random House, 2003.

Serrata, Médar, *De la carnicería al monumento: Las mutaciones de las ruinas de la ciudad de Santo Domingo*. Unpublished text given by the author, 2013.

Scherubel, Klaus. *Mallarmé, Le Livre (Compilation)*. New York: Printed Matter, 2004.

Schmidt, Katharina. "Non Omnis Moriar." In *Arnold Böcklin*. Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2001.

Solzhenitsyn, Alexander. *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. New York: Dutton & Co. Inc., 1963.

Tavares, Júlio. *Brennand: Arte e sonho na construção de um novo mundo*. São Paulo: Terra das Artes Editora, 2007.

Tavares de Araújo, Olívio. "Proposta para uma Leitura de Brennand." In *Brennand*. São Paulo: Métron, 1997.

---. and Francisco Brennand. *A alma gráfica: Brennand desenhos*. São Paulo: CAIXA Cultural São Paulo, 2008.

Taylor, Richard. *The Politics of the Soviet Cinema, 1917-1929*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Teixeira, Bento. *Prosopopéia* (João Pessoa: Idéia, Editora Universitária), 2004

Truffaut, François. "The Lights of Néstor Almendros." In *A Man with a Camera*, Néstor Almendros. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1984.

Valdés, Zoé. *La nada cotidiana*. Barcelona: Emecé Editores, 1995.

Van Duzer, Chet. "From Odysseus to Robinson Crusoe: A Survey of Early Western Island Literature." *Island Studies Journal* vol. 1, no. 1, (2006): 143-162.

Vaneigem, Raoul. *The Revolution of Everyday Life*. Oakland: PM Press, 2012.

Verdecia, Carlos. "Nobody Listened Shows us a True Cuban Horror Film." *El Nuevo Herald*, Feb. 18, 1988.

Verger, Pierre. *Orixás*. Salvador: Currupio, 2002.

Vidler, Anthony. *Warped Space*. Cambridge: MIT, 2001.

Virilio, Paul. *Speed and Politics: An Essay on Dromology*. New York: Columbia University, 1986.

---. *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*. London: Verso, 1989.

Volney, C. F. *Volney's Ruins: Or, Meditation on the Revolutions of Empires*. New York: G. Vale, 1853.

Wells, H. G. *The time machine: an invention*. London: W. Heinemann, 1895.

Williams, Rosalind. *Notes on the Underground*. Cambridge: MIT, 2008.

Wilson, Colin. *The Outsider*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1956.

---. *Abraxas Unbound*. Interview by Paul Newman. No. 7, n.d.

Wright, Richard. "The man who lived underground." In *Accent: A Quarterly of New Literature* (Spring 1942): 170-176. A later version was published at *Eight Men*. Cleveland: World Pub. Co., 1961.

Xavier, Ismail. *Allegories of Underdevelopment: Aesthetics and Politics in Modern Brazilian Cinema*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

Young, La Monte. "Notes on The Theatre of Eternal Music and The Tortoise, His Dreams and Journeys." Published at [melafoundation.org](http://melafoundation.org).

Zambrano, María. "Uma metáfora da esperança: As Ruínas." *Sopro*, no. 37 (2010).

Žižek, Slavoj. "Radical Evil as a Freudian Category." [Lacan.com](http://Lacan.com).

---. "A Letter which did not Reach its Destination (and Thereby Saved the World)." Published at [Lacan.com](http://Lacan.com).

---. *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!: Five Essays on 11 September and Related Dates*. London: Verso, 2002.

---. "Por que 'Brokeback Mountain' perdeu?" *Folha de São Paulo*, Mais!, March 12, 2006.



## Filmography

Allen, Woody. *Bananas*. USA: 1971.

Almendros, Néstor. *Gente en la playa* from. Cuba: 1961.

---, and Orlando Jiménez Leal. *Mauvaise conduit*. France: 1984.

---, and Jorge Ulla. *Nadie escuchaba*. USA: 1987.

Beckett, Samuel and Alan Schneider. *Film*. USA: 1965.

Bosch, Carles and Josep Maria Domènech. *Balseros*. Spain: 2002.

Cavalcanti, Alberto. *Rien que les heures*. France: 1926.

Coelho, Feli and Celso Geovanni. *Francisco Brennand: o demiurgo*. Brasil: 1997.

Debord, Guy. *Sur le passage de quelques personnes à travers une assez courte unité de temps*. France: 1959.

Egusquiza Zorrilla, Jorge. *Nicolás: El fin pero no es el fin*. USA: 2005.

Ford Coppola, Francis. *Apocalypse Now*. USA: 1979.

Guillén Landrián, Nicolás. *Coffea Arábica*. Cuba: 1968.

---. *Desde la Habana ¡1969! Recordar*. Cuba: 1969.

---. *Inside Downtown*. USA: 2001.

Gutiérrez Alea, Tomás. *Memorias del subdesarrollo*. Cuba: 1968.

---. *Fresa y chocolate*. Cuba: 1993.

Jiménez Leal, Orlando and Saba Cabrera *PM*. Cuba: 1961.

Jiménez Leal, Orlando. *8-A*. Italy: 1992.

*Pacific*. USA: 2010.

Resnais, Alain. *Nuit et brouillard*. France: 1955.

---. *Hiroshima mon amour*. France: 1959.

Rocha, Glauber. *Barravento*. Brazil: 1961.

---. *Terra em Transe*. Brazil: 1967.

Sganzerla, Rogério. *Bandido da Luz Vermelha*. Brazil: 1968.

Zayas, Manuel. *Café con leche*. Cuba: 2003.

Ziff, Trisha. *The Mexican Suitcase*. Mexico: 2011