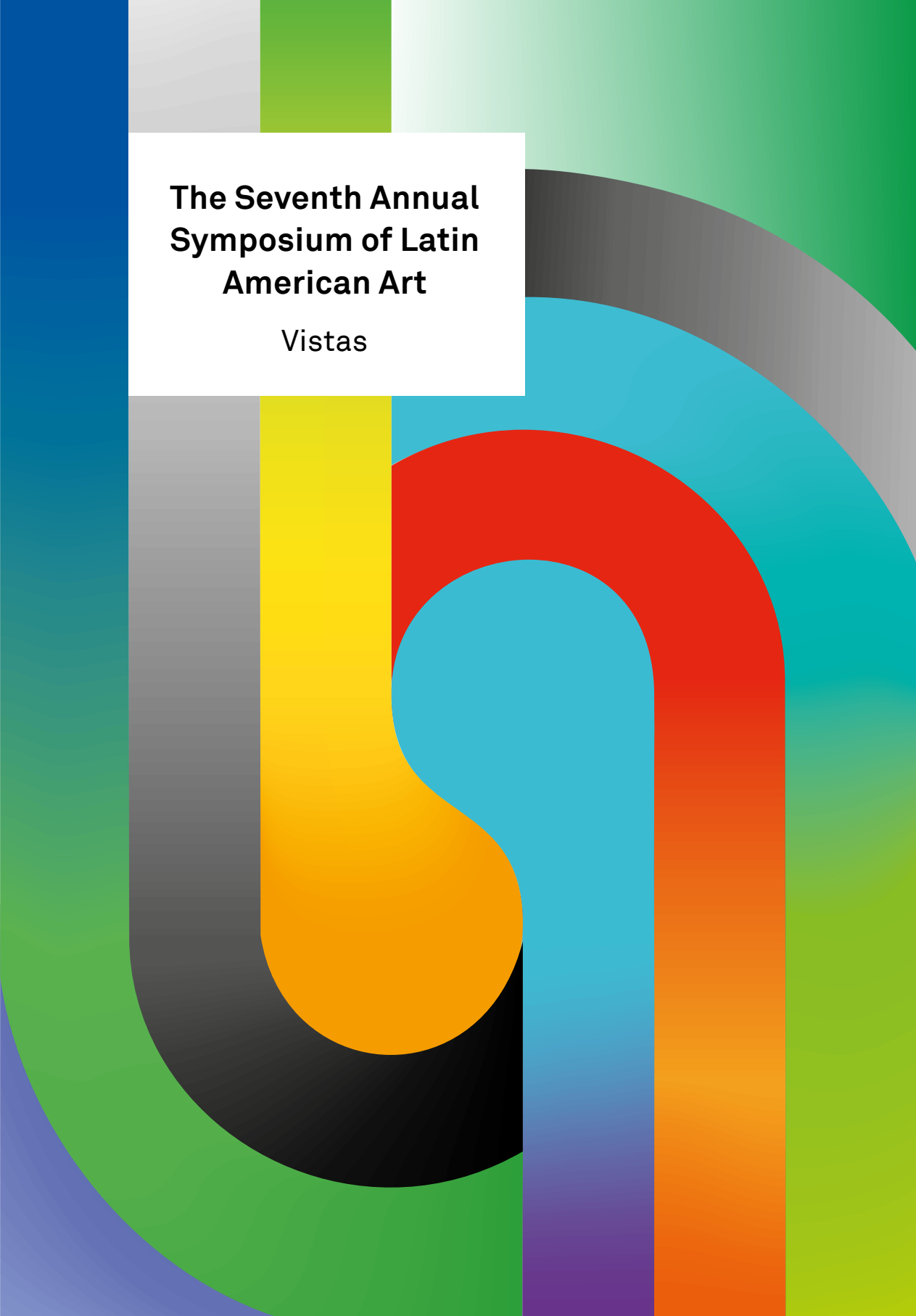
The Seventh Annual Symposium of Latin American Art

Vistas



Vistas 10

The Seventh Annual Symposium of Latin American Art

Making Space, Making Place: Marking the Americas

Edited by
Corey Loftus, Tatiana Marcel, and Rebecca Yuste

INSTITUTE FOR STUDIES ON LATIN AMERICAN ART

Established in 2016, the Annual Symposium of Latin American Art features graduate students, scholars, and artists who present original research and discourse on Latin American and Latinx art and visual culture.

This international event is supported by the Institute for Studies on Latin American Art and organized by graduate students at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University; the Graduate Center, City University of New York; and Columbia University.

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Preface

Corey Loftus, Tatiana Marcel, and Rebecca Yuste

This edition of *Vistas* is dedicated to the Seventh Annual Symposium of Latin American Art, *Making Space, Making Place: Marking the Americas*. The symposium was held in late March 2023 and featured panelists from the United States and Latin America who presented papers in English, Spanish, and Portuguese.

The seventh symposium marked a return to an in-person format after two years of online programming due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Speakers and moderators from Mexico, Brazil, and various US institutions came together for two days of panels on cartography, geography, and spatial dynamics. The wide range of topics covered in the symposium is represented in the essays selected for this issue, by Jerónimo Reyes-Retana, Claudia Garay Molina, and Caroline Alciones de Oliveira Leite.

The symposium concluded with highly anticipated keynote lectures delivered by Delia Cosentino, associate professor in the history of art and architecture at DePaul University, and Adriana Zavala, Andrew W. Mellon Professor at the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts at the National Gallery and associate professor in the history of art and studies in race, colonialism, and diaspora at Tufts University. Cosentino and Zavala are coauthors of the recently published book *Resurrecting Tenochtitlan: Imagining the Aztec Capital in Modern Mexico City* (University of Texas Press, 2023). Cosentino presented on the book's framework, describing how artists, intellectuals, and government officials attempted to revive the Aztec capital as part of the reassessment of postrevolutionary national identity. Her talk traced the transformation of Mexico City and the production of a mestizo identity during the excavation of the original Mexica capital. In Cosentino's words, "Mexico City became the site of a complex reconstruction of spatial identity in the first half of the twentieth century—a process that in many ways continues to this day." In her presentation, Zavala investigated two views of Mexico

City: "ancient" and modern. Zavala argued that "[Diego] Rivera's *Gran Tenochtitlan* (1945) and [Juan] O'Gorman's *La Ciudad de México* (1949) express new notions of time and place brought about by discoveries about the Mexica capital gained through archaeology and archival study of maps in particular; however, they also caused anxiety as Mexico City's population grew and urbanization forever transformed the city's historic center."

The first essay in this volume, by Jerónimo Reyes-Retana, is titled "Playa Bagdad/SpaceX: Transboundary Sonic Violence, the Colonial Voids of Infrastructure, and Counter-Archiving as a Place-Making Practice." Reyes-Retana explores the history of Playa Bagdad, a small fishing community near the Mexico-Texas border, connecting the Mexican-American War to neoliberalism and the war on drugs and finally to the acoustic disturbances caused in the area by SpaceX's launches. Challenging the Enlightenment myth of progress, he ties the industrialization of outer space to the original colonization of the Americas, accentuating the recursive nature of territorialization, development, and political expansionism. Drawing attention to the transnational acoustic violence suffered by the people of Playa Bagdad, Reyes-Retana concludes his essay with a discussion of a public program he has helped pioneer.

In the second essay, "'A rumbo y tanteada': Manuel Toussaint, Justino Fernández y el mapeo del patrimonio artístico en México (1927–37)," Claudia Garay Molina examines the history of artistic patrimony in early twentieth-century Mexico. Focusing on Toussaint, Fernández, and their circle of researchers, she argues that state-funded historical and touristic projects played a pivotal role in shaping national geography around sites of cultural importance. This symbiotic relationship between tourism and scholarly exploration, which led to the publication of academic texts, not only legitimized tourism but also ensured the preservation of culturally significant objects in specialized institutions. This circle of scholars and writers later established the Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, consolidating the study of art history in Mexico.

The third essay, "To Where the Stars Point: Cildo Meireles's *Cruzeiro do Sul*" by Caroline Alciones de Oliveira Leite,

embarks on a poetic exploration of the work of Brazilian artist Cildo Meireles. Dismantling the cartographic work of white European colonists, Alciones de Oliveira Leite argues that Meireles's *Cruzeiro do Sul* establishes a different kind of spatial configuration, one that transcends bodily boundaries: an explosion of divinity. Rejecting the artificial limits of two-dimensional maps and lines, Alciones de Oliveira Leite's essay bends toward plurality and multiplicity, invoking the grandeur of the jungle and the expansive nature of Amerindian cosmography. Through the framework of shamanic epistemology, of occupying more than one perspective at once, Meireles's work collapses and shatters a neatly delineated, colonial, productive understanding of Brazil.

These three contributions significantly deepen our understanding of the interplay between place, memory, territory, and mark-making. The first and last essays call into question Western, Enlightenment-era, and colonial concepts of space, exposing illusions of development by turning our attention to those who have been hurt and left behind. The second essay illustrates the deliberate manipulation of geography and territory necessary for constructing a national and political narrative. In these essays, nothing is taken for granted, and conventional paradigms of place-making are turned on their head.

It has been an enormous pleasure and a privilege to organize the Seventh Annual Symposium of Latin American Art and to encapsulate a selection of the talks presented there in this edition of *Vistas*. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the audience, presenters, and moderators of *Making Space, Making Place: Marking the Americas* and to our co-organizer, Eric Mazariegos. We also extend special thanks to our faculty advisors, Edward J. Sullivan, Helen Gould Sheppard Professor in the History of Art at the Institute of Fine Arts; Lisa Trever, Lisa and Bernard Selz Associate Professor in Pre-Columbian Art History and Archaeology at Columbia University; Jerónimo Duarte-Riascos, assistant professor of Latin American and Iberian cultures at Columbia University; and Alexander Alberro, Virginia Bloedel Wright Professor of Art History at Barnard College and Columbia University.

Playa Bagdad/SpaceX: Transboundary Sonic Violence, the Colonial Voids of Infrastructure, and Counter-Archiving as a Place-Making Practice

Jerónimo Reyes-Retana

El Campo Pesquero de Playa Bagdad in Tamaulipas, Mexico, is a site built on an unconventional greatness, one that is not characterized by majestic architectural features or overflowing wealth but instead by the unique and controversial geographic position that steers the course of its history. This marginalized fishing community is hidden in the eastern corner of the bordering state of Tamaulipas—a territory heavily impacted by the ongoing war on drugs waged in Mexico since 2006. Playa Bagdad lies on the shores of the Gulf of Mexico, next to the banks of the Río Bravo (known as the Rio Grande in the US), which contours the territorial limit between Mexico and the US. The inherent confluence of Playa Bagdad's location entails complex phenomena that extend beyond the meeting point of the two bodies of water. This settlement holds in its memory an eclectic sequence of events ranging from the spreading of capitalist networks of distribution and extraction in the nineteenth century to the raising of infrastructure to industrialize outer space in the twenty-first.

With the arrival to the region of SpaceX—the leading corporation in the race to industrialize outer space—a unique and more-than-geographical encounter reasserts the historical interpretative significance of Playa Bagdad as a nerve center from which the political anatomy of contemporary domination can be (re)articulated.[1] In other words, Playa Bagdad exists as a critical location to scrutinize the industrialization of outer space as a central axis of a new, yet recursive, global design. Playa Bagdad is a protagonist in this historical moment, one in which the emergence of planetary-scale infrastructure in the dark skies creates a contested arena for technological competition across various domains, from enterprise to military defense and state administration.[2] This asymmetrical landscape is already manifesting as a unique "contact zone," a concept proposed by theorist Mary Louise Pratt that involves the emergence of a social space where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with one

another.[3] In this scenario, the inherent violence of a non-mutualist geopolitical relationship mediated by sonic shock waves will have enough potency to damage the body, the biosphere, and built structures but will also resonate as politics. These tensions now inform a series of on-site instances that started in 2020 with *Memorias en 194 dB* (Memories in 194 dB), an installation that sought to capture SpaceX's transboundary sonic violence (fig. 1).

Playa Bagdad has taken different forms throughout history, with different names and functions dictated mainly by the political and commercial interests of the West. Its origins date to the mid-nineteenth century, when the shores that today encompass the settlement were named Puerto Bagdad (Port of Bagdad) during the Mexican-American War in 1846 and the US invasion of Mexico. At that time, the US played a crucial role in a global textile production system that relied on a cotton industry whose weblike connections extended around the globe. A couple of decades after the Mexican-American War, Puerto Bagdad became a coveted seaport during the American Civil War when the Union states imposed a naval blockade on the Confederacy.[4] This measure aimed to debilitate the latter's highly profitable cotton industry, which relied on the intense exploitation of slave labor and served as a primary income source to finance the accumulation of weaponry. In response, the Confederacy identified a viable opportunity to keep alive a prosperous transatlantic trading network through the binational waters of the Río Bravo/Rio Grande, using international law in their favor and Puerto Bagdad as their main back door. This situation was a major determinant in the growth of Puerto Bagdad, which rapidly became an affluent and cosmopolitan port town. As a strategic geopolitical and economic point of interest, Puerto Bagdad stirred the expansionist desires of the Second French Empire, which surveilled the port for years before finally invading the territory known as Mexico in 1861.

Furthermore, the Gulf of Mexico is a zone of particular note for the often-devastating hurricanes that strike the region. According to historical weather records, Puerto Bagdad was heavily hit by tropical cyclones in 1867 and 1874, shortly after the second French intervention came to an end. Both hurricanes contributed to the formation of sandbanks along the delta of the Río Bravo/Rio Grande, impeding all sorts of commercial traffic

by blocking the harbor. The hurricanes also brought destruction inland, subsequently giving rise to a mass exodus that marked the downfall of a multiculturally vibrant port that, ironically, had once been known by merchants as a "whirlwind of sin." Nonetheless, according to oral accounts collected locally while doing community work, in the early twentieth century Puerto Bagdad reappeared in a new location with a new name. Seemingly predestined to embody the radical contrast inherent in modernity, Puerto Bagdad mutated from a thriving seaport to a small community located nine miles south of its original location and was renamed Playa Washington (Washington Beach) after a homonymous abandoned boat that sat for years on the nearby shore.

In the mid-1960s, neoliberalism in North America took off with the implementation of the maquiladora program, which industrialized the totality of the northern Mexican border. It turned the region into a haven for transnational enterprises seeking to establish manufacturing plants and agricultural fields in peripheral lands under the enticing scheme of corporate colonialism. Simultaneously, the Mexican government sought to reinforce a weak notion of national identity along the northern borderlands by instituting the Programa Nacional Fronterizo—an initiative to promote political and social integration through culture. This exaltation of nationalism had effects in Playa Washington, which in 1970 was renamed Playa Lauro Villar, paying tribute to the Mexican insurgent general Lauro Villar Ochoa, who fought in la Batalla de Bagdad (the Battle of Bagdad) during the second French intervention in 1866.

In 2014, when SpaceX started the construction of its main spaceport in the neighboring community of Boca Chica, Texas, Playa Lauro Villar was again renamed, this time to Playa Costa Azul—an homage to the late songwriter Rigo Tovar and his band, Costa Azul. Born and raised in Matamoros, Tamaulipas, musician and performer Tovar was a national idol who embodied the syncretism of the Mexico-US border culture with his music. Besides having an outspoken fascination for the shores of Playa Bagdad, he is also credited as the creator of Tecnocumbia, a musical genre popularized in the 1980s. In 1994, as the emblematic queen of Tex-Mex music, Selena, released the hit song "Techno Cumbia," a seminal track in the evolution of

modern Latin music, the North American Free Trade Agreement was endorsing stringent neoliberal policies. Mexican politics experienced an ideological shift during that period, moving toward technocracy and seeking to organize peripheral territories through technological domains that seemed far removed from formal political institutions.

Finally, in 2017, Playa Costa Azul was renamed Playa Bagdad, a political move that seemed to be motivated by a nostalgic attempt to recall the commercial origins of a once-coveted seaport that blossomed as the West's imperialist network spread during the nineteenth century. This renaming appeared logical for a site awaiting a new paradigm shift as it was fully exposed to the cultural, ecological, and political consequences of living with Starbase—SpaceX's main launch site—in its backyard.

Starbase is located two miles north of the Mexico-US border, on privately owned property in Boca Chica, Texas, on the same coastline as Playa Bagdad. As SpaceX's primary operations center, Starbase is currently where preflight operations, static fire engine tests, and launches of orbital and suborbital spacecraft take place. The base serves an agenda that boldly advocates for the industrialization of outer space and the pursuit of interplanetary expansionism through long-term and escapist assumptions, undergirded by narrow technocratic thinking that reinforces the hegemony of the West.[5] Now the capitalist networks will ascend into the dark sky, giving rise to new apparatuses of government built on technological superiority. The unfolding of new modes of sovereignty in outer space seems unavoidable, a situation that promises to unveil new geopolitical crises. But controversy begins here on the ground.

Spaceports are crucial infrastructure for the industrialization of outer space, and therefore they have several basic location requirements and environmental implications that must be addressed. One of the main concerns associated with spaceports is the damage caused by the impact of shock waves produced by engines and sonic booms created during static fire tests and launches. The acoustic energy produced by rocket engines during liftoff reaches a volume intensity oscillating between 170 dB and 205 dB, which is considerably louder than the 140 dB level that marks the human threshold of pain.[6] The mid-low frequencies produced during a rocket launch cause physical damage to built

structures and disrupt the behavioral patterns of wildlife. They also affect the human body in several significant ways, which can be divided into two general categories: auditory effects (hearing loss) and nonauditory effects (cognitive interference and other physiological consequences).

In 2020, the landscape of Playa Bagdad started to change with the appearance of a 394-foot-tall phallic object on the horizon: SpaceX's Starship spacecraft and Super Heavy rocket, collectively referred to as Starship. The spacecraft stands as the largest ever built; the rocket has more thrust than any other in history (fig. 2). The monumental presence of Starship raised concerns among local community members and environmental NGOs in the US. Public opinion forced the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to revise the environmental impact statement, originally published in 2014, that had allowed SpaceX to operate in the area. In 2022, the FAA issued a second environmental impact statement, a so-called new document that reads more like a poorly edited version of the 2014 statement. Both versions consider a wide range of potential harm caused by noise from Starbase within the territorial boundaries of the United States. However, both overlook that geopolitical borders are porous; they do not block cultural, economic, environmental, or normative flows—not to mention sound.[7]

This form of systemic negligence renders Playa Bagdad a territorial void, overtly erasing from the map a community that will have to face a corporate-made phenomenon of transboundary sonic violence. Thus, when talking about territorial voids, I refer to the colonial practices of cartographic erasure through which certain places and communities are nullified by way of land modulation technologies that open pathways for infrastructure development. In the case of the first version of the environmental impact statement endorsing SpaceX operations on the Mexico-US border, the FAA and SpaceX claim—falsely—that by looking at aerial imagery collected from Google Earth, they can affirm that the transboundary impact of rocket noise in Playa Bagdad is not a matter of concern. They justify this by saying that the closest Mexican settlement to Starbase is the border city of Matamoros, which is approximately twenty miles southwest of the vertical launchpad.[8] This false declaration flagrantly erases Playa Bagdad from the map. The second version of the statement uses the same rhetoric but implements even more problematic terminology,

asserting that sonic shock waves will move seventeen miles across the Mexico-US border into Tamaulipas, hitting "unpopulated settlements,"[9] which, according to their assessment, is still not a matter of concern.

In the book *Placing Outer Space: An Earthly Ethnography of Other Worlds*, anthropologist Lisa Messeri reflects on the political role that Silicon Valley tech corporations play in reworking planetary imaginaries, informing cartographic systems imbued with the norms of the entity that creates them. Following Messeri's idea, the systemic negligence intrinsic to the Playa Bagdad/SpaceX encounter reveals how cartography and mapmaking enable a neoliberal land tenure technology that allows for the expansion of material infrastructure through nebulous techniques of spatial mediation and integration. Here, territorial voids will continue to emerge, conditioned to various technologies of representation swayed by government agencies and private enterprises. The erasure of Playa Bagdad is a reminder that centralized mapmaking platforms—such as Google Earth—go beyond their capacity to create precognitive cartographic depictions. They operate as archiving sources that validate jurisdictional schemes, collecting, controlling, and categorizing the human record to later engage in opaque dynamics of place-making and -unmaking. The nature of archiving is full of the desire to affirm the past, present, and future. Within the linearity of this process, some identities and voices are present and visible, and others are rendered invisible and absent.[10]

Infrastructure's ontology stems from the Enlightenment idea of a world in motion, in which the free circulation of goods, information, finance, and people would produce the means to pursue modernity's myth of progress. Infrastructure development is possible due to technological networks of extraction, production, and distribution that inevitably become powerful tools to buttress systems of truth production and political domination. As physical networks that enable the possibility of exchange over space, infrastructure systems shape territories and determine societal movements and processes within and across them. As much as they can include, liberate, and move, infrastructure networks also exclude, contain, and subjugate.[11] In this way, it is essential to think about infrastructure as a technology in its own right, composed of large subsets of smaller technologies. As such, infrastructure hides in the layers of the *pharmakon*, a notion

proposed by philosopher Bernard Stiegler that describes Western technology as both a remedy and a poison.

From a bifocal perspective, while SpaceX's plans to assemble interplanetary-scale infrastructure to industrialize outer space dazzles as a spectacular sign of technological innovation, it also resonates as an alarming case of cultural regression. When tracing the parallelism between outer space exploration and the colonization of the Americas, the principle of terra nullius[12]—nobody's land—applies to these two historical moments that share a fixation on political expansionism and territorial domination. In both, the West's obsession with finding the "new" through exploration is used to justify the production and control of global infrastructure projects seeking salvation, development, and progress. In this way, the industrialization of outer space promises a new paradigmatic stage of modernity and, in turn, coloniality.[13] Yet this "new" global design cannot escape a recursive rhetoric of deterritorialization and environmental racism that reinforces schemes of marginalization by creating a wide range of territorial voids. These will extend from places far above the Kármán line,[14] all the way down to terrestrial sites that remain politically erased by the same corporations and state agencies that hold the political power and technological means to reach a new and elitist market up in the cosmos.

As a marginalized settlement rendered invisible by the US protocols that allow SpaceX's operations in the Mexico-US borderlands, Playa Bagdad stands as a sacrificial zone facing a unique case of transboundary sonic violence. The jurisdictional uncertainty of the community creates a need for the interweaving of transdisciplinary strategies and multifocal perspectives that illuminate the political conditions that gave rise to it.[15] In this scenario, thinking and sensing collectively through art and culture open the door for the emergence of critical place-making practices using the non-fixed structures of counter-archiving and community-based art as methodology. The connections between the former and the latter aim to form new interpretations emerging from local subjectivities that, in the words of artist and activist Imani Jaqueline Brown, give "more [or different] access than the visual register privileged by Western Enlightenment."[16]

The practice of counter-archiving engages land, territory, human, and more-than-human bodies that remain otherwise

absent from dominant systems of representation. Counter-archiving identifies individual and collective struggles through cross-platform assemblages. In this process, media, oral accounts, material expressions, open-ended processes, and collaborative interactions condense in uncontainable art iterations. Novel forms of cultural engagement consolidate into aesthetic frameworks shaped by new modes of sensing and sensemaking, looking for political insertion through a dialogical mode of praxis that, in the words of philosopher Paulo Freire, unfolds from "actions to reflections and from reflections upon actions to new actions."[17]

Moreover, over the course of building a relationship with El Campo Pesquero de Playa Bagdad, a body of work (fig. 3) has been presented in various nonprofit exhibition spaces, including the Museo de Arte de Ciudad Juárez. In addition to representing a leading cultural institution within the art circuit of the Mexico-US borderlands, the Museo de Arte de Ciudad Juárez has a suggestive design by Mexican architect Pedro Ramírez Vázquez. A 100-foot-wide fiberglass dome makes this public museum a monumental acoustic container in which the subjectivities intrinsic to the Playa Bagdad/SpaceX encounter resonate with much more potency. Likewise, the figure of the dome prevails as a recurrent amplifying force in this investigation. In June of 2023, the first edition of the *Programa de arte público: Por un espacio (exterior) colectivo* (Public Art Program: For a Shared [Outer] Space) was held in the public elementary school of Playa Bagdad. In this program, a different kind of dome was used to host a socially engaged initiative resulting from a collaboration with a local educator and community organizer speaking on behalf of a marginalized settlement located on the edges of the Mexican border state of Tamaulipas, one of the most contested frontiers in the Global South. Months of detailed conversations and a long process of on-site planning took shape as a public art program strongly informed by scholar Walter D. Mignolo's proposition to "use the imaginary of modernity rather than being used by it."[18] The resulting program consisted of multisensory activities centered on an inflatable planetarium (fig. 4)—an immersive dome commonly used to showcase the power of science and technological innovation. In *Programa de arte público: Por un espacio (exterior) colectivo*, the planetarium had a different function. It was utilized as a forum for open dialogue and critical

processes of (un)learning concerning the environmental, geopolitical, and cultural implications of facing a reality that promises to be changed by proximity to the SpaceX spaceport in Boca Chica, Texas.

According to philosopher Brian Massumi, the practice of counter-archiving is made of formative tendencies and compositional forces seeking to create new compositions and new forms of knowing.[19] The feedback between the former and the latter was crucial to assembling an aesthetic framework with the capacity to go beyond one-dimensional notions of beautification. In retrospect, creating multifocal ways of aesthetic thinking was one of the central challenges of *Programa de arte público: Por un espacio (exterior) colectivo*. Through collective action, the program successfully implemented the affordances of research-based art and counter-archiving as an engine to pervert the dogmatic grids that, in the words of architect Eyal Weizman, uphold the institutions that "monopolize the production of truth."

The public program still has a long journey ahead. Nonetheless, in its first edition, it was possible to set the groundwork to collectively cultivate some of the analytical (and disruptive) means to start deepening our exploration of this complex, multidimensional, and dire situation. We also dedicated time to creating counter-narratives with the critical potential to alleviate and pervert the anxieties/fantasies arising from SpaceX's (inter)planetary-scale infrastructure project. The program's flexibility allowed us to speculate about the possibility of (re)existing through a new form of citizenship, in which transnational political coalitions embrace the preservation of the environment by recognizing a shared ecological zone. In this first edition, we delved into alternative ways of using art and culture to reconfigure the territory of the common, aiming to insert new voices into the political space. In the programs to come, we will keep exploring contingent modalities of sensing and sensemaking driven by careful attunement, looking forward to amplifying the effects of this unique case of transboundary sonic violence that, ironically, remains silenced by the deafening sound of progress.

1. Michael Truscello, *Infrastructural Brutalism: Art and the Necropolitics of Infrastructure* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2020), 31.

2. Yuk Hui, "For a Planetary Thinking," *e-flux Journal* 114 (December 2020), https://www.e-flux.com/journal/114/366703/for-a-planetary-thinking/.

3. Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," *Profession 2006* (1991): 33–40, http://www.jstor.org/stable/25595469.

4. Casey Walsh, *Building the Borderlands: A Transnational History of Irrigated Cotton along the Mexico-Texas Border* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 24.

5. Yuk Hui, *Art and Cosmotechnics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2021), 93.

6. Caroline Parsons Lubert, "Sixty Years of Launch Vehicle Acoustics," *Proceedings of Meetings on Acoustics* 31, no. 1 (December 2017): 7, https://doi.org/10.1121/2.0000704.

7. Teddy Cruz and Fonna Forman, "Nation against Nature: From the Global Border to the Cross-Border Commons," *Architectural Design* 90, no. 1 (January/February 2020): 115, https://doi.org/10.1002/ad.2534.

8. Federal Aviation Administration Office of Commercial Space Transportation, "Volume I, Executive Summary and Chapters 1–14," in *Final Environmental Impact Statement: SpaceX Texas Launch Site* (Washington, DC, 2014), 3–18.

9. Federal Aviation Administration Office of Commercial Space Transportation, *Draft Programmatic Environmental Assessment for the SpaceX Starship/Super Heavy Launch Vehicle Program at the SpaceX Boca Chica Launch Site in Cameron County, Texas* (Washington, DC, 2021), 52.

10. Stephanie Springgay, Anise Truman, and Sara MacLean, "Socially Engaged Art, Experimental Pedagogies, and Anarchiving as Research-Creation," *Qualitative Inquiry* 26, no. 7 (September 2020): 899, https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800419884964.

11. Kenny Cupers, "Editorial," in "Coloniality of Infrastructure," *e-flux Architecture* (September 2021), https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/coloniality-infrastructure/412386/editorial/.

12. The principle of terra nullius holds remarkable historical relevance as one of the central axes for the expansion of the colonial apparatus and modern territorial schemes foreseeing the acquisition of peripheral land to be rationally domesticated, planned, and reengineered to feed a world economic order reliant on extractivist practices.

13. Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 158.

14. The Kármán line is an attempt to define a boundary between Earth's atmosphere and outer space and offers a specific definition set by the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale, an international recordkeeping body for aeronautics.

15. Matthew Fuller and Eyal Weizman, *Investigative Aesthetics: Conflicts and Commons in the Politics of Truth* (London: Verso, 2021), 10.

16. Imani Jaqueline Brown, "The Remote Sensation of Disintegration," *Black Ecologies* (2020), https://imanijacquelinebrown.net/The-Remote-Sensation-of-Disintegration.

17. Paulo Freire, *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power, and Liberation*, trans. Donaldo Macedo (South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey, 1985), 50.

18. Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality*, 146.

19. Brian Massumi, "Working Principles," in *The Go-To How-To Book of Anarchiving*, ed. Andrew Murphie (Montreal: Senselab, 2016), 6–7.

Figures

Figure 1

Jerónimo Reyes-Retana, *Memorias en 194 dB* (Memories in 194 dB), 2020
Eight-channel sound installation (contact mics, glass panels, stands)
Installation view at El Campo Pesquero de Playa Bagdad, Tamaulipas, Mexico
Photograph by Jerónimo Reyes-Retana

Figure 2 (page 21)

Nighttime image of Starship at Starbase,
SpaceX's launch site in Boca Chica, Texas, 2023
Photograph by Jerónimo Reyes-Retana

Figures. Jerónimo Reyes-Retana. Playa Bagdad/SpaceX

Figure 3

Jerónimo Reyes-Retana, *Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow,* 2021
Mixed media installation (eight-channel sound interface, two-channel
video array, salvaged wood, and glass panels)
Installation view of *Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow*,
Museo de Arte de Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico, 2022
Photographs by Jerónimo Reyes-Retana

Participants in *Programa de arte público: Por un espacio (exterior) colectivo* (Public Art Program: For a Shared [Outer] Space) gather around the inflatable planetarium to discuss the anxieties and fantasies arising from (inter)planetary-scale infrastructural projects such as SpaceX's. In the program, we used various astronomical observation methods as a starting point to examine the industrialization of outer space. Educational workshops were conducted by astronomers Diego López Cámara Ramírez and Jorge Fuentes Fernández (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Institute of Astronomy, Mexico City).

Figure 4

Jerónimo Reyes-Retana and Ana Cerino,
Programa de arte público: Por un espacio (exterior) colectivo, 2023
El Campo Pesquero de Playa Bagdad, Tamaulipas, Mexico
Photograph by Jerónimo Reyes-Retana

«A rumbo y tanteada»: Manuel Toussaint, Justino Fernández y el mapeo del patrimonio artístico en México (1927-37)

Claudia Garay Molina

Introducción

Durante los últimos años del siglo XIX, la expansión de nuevas tecnologías como el ferrocarril y la litografía permitieron conocer el territorio nacional de formas inusitadas, de manera que, en las décadas posteriores, México entró en una suerte de renovación cartográfica gracias a una serie de prácticas espaciales que generaron nuevas identidades y relaciones con el territorio que quedaron plasmadas en un nuevo repertorio de mapas elaborados gracias a la colaboración entre políticos, artistas e intelectuales. Estas representaciones a escala nacional mostraron «nuevos espacios» que eran ya accesibles gracias a innovaciones tecnológicas que gozaron de amplia difusión social, como fue el caso del automóvil.

La construcción de la Carretera Panamericana, las nuevas posibilidades de movilidad y una naciente industria turística articularon una variedad de programas gubernamentales que tuvieron como objetivo «mapear» a México en términos de una geografía cultural, particularmente a partir de tres características de su patrimonio histórico y artístico: sus vestigios precolombinos, su arquitectura colonial y las artes populares. Para tal tarea, los Gobiernos posrevolucionarios se sirvieron de un grupo de agentes culturales que trabajaron durante las décadas de 1920 y 1930 en el desarrollo de varias exposiciones, conferencias, catálogos, folletos, monografías, investigaciones e inventarios que sirvieron como puente entre la producción cultural y el público general.

Entre estos agentes destacan Manuel Toussaint y Justino Fernández, quienes colaboraron en proyectos gubernamentales que reconfiguraron la geografía nacional a partir del estudio de su patrimonio, particularmente en un proyecto de inventario de bienes nacionales organizado por la Secretaría de Hacienda. Maestro y discípulo se dieron a la tarea de observar, recoger y sistematizar datos para realizar estudios cartográficos que continuaron a partir de 1935 como investigadores del Laboratorio de Arte, el cual se convirtió en el Instituto de Investigaciones

Estéticas (IIE) de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). De ahí que el presente ensayo se enfoque en el trabajo de estos personajes, que durante esos años crearon y consolidaron los estudios académicos sobre la historia del arte en México.

El arte colonial y sus inventarios

En 1917, el pintor Saturnino Herrán pintó el retrato de su buen amigo Manuel Toussaint, quien en ese entonces se desempeñaba como bibliotecario de la Escuela Nacional de Altos Estudios. Toussaint, un hombre de veintisiete años y figura alargada, aparece en un primer plano vestido de traje y corbata de lazo con ambas manos apoyadas sobre su regazo. Con un brumoso paisaje de fondo que el propio retratado caracterizó como un «evocador de emociones»,[1] esta obra encierra un valor espiritual y una vitalidad que comparte con otros retratos de crayón acuarelado que Herrán hizo de otros destacados colonialistas en esos años, como el del escritor y diplomático don Artemio de Valle Arizpe y el político Alberto J. Pani. Miembros de una sociedad de pensamiento que retroalimentó su interés por la historia y el arte colonial, todos estos personajes articularon sus trabajos como políticos, diplomáticos, artistas y estudiosos en aras de la revalorización de este pasado.

En el caso específico de Toussaint, su participación en empresas editoriales como Editorial Cvltura y la revista *México Moderno* le permitieron colaborar en proyectos de registro y estudio como la serie *Monografías mexicanas de arte* (1917), una iniciativa del artista jalisciense Jorge Enciso, en ese entonces inspector general de Monumentos Artísticos de la Dirección General de Bellas Artes; y la serie *Iglesias de México*, coordinada por Gerardo Murillo, Dr. Atl, entre 1924 y 1927 y patrocinada por la Secretaría de Hacienda gracias a sus titulares durante esos años: Alberto J. Pani y Luis Montes de Oca.

Un ávido coleccionista de arte europeo y colonial, Montes de Oca veía en las viejas raíces culturales del país «la razón de un legítimo orgullo patrio», por lo que fortaleció una agenda cultural y conservacionista a partir de la creación de una Comisión de Bienes Nacionales en la que estarían involucrados el Dr. Atl, el arquitecto Carlos Contreras y el ingeniero Enrique A. Cervantes. Uno de los primeros proyectos de esta comisión fue estudiar la conveniencia de declarar la ciudad colonial de Taxco como Monumento Nacional, por lo que pronto se hizo necesario

un proyecto de investigación que estudiara todas las características del arte colonial. Así, en 1927, Montes de Oca invitó a Toussaint, junto a los arquitectos Federico E. Mariscal y Manuel Ituarte, a fundar el Seminario de Investigación de Arte en México, con el objetivo de instruir al personal de la Secretaría de Hacienda para registrar los monumentos religiosos que eran propiedad del Gobierno e incluso certificarlos como peritos en arte colonial.[2]

Tanto los temas como las bases del seminario y sus profesores fueron anunciados en la prensa nacional para comenzar actividades en 1929. Las asignaturas de Historia del Arte de la Nueva España y Pintura Colonial estarían a cargo de Toussaint; la materia de Investigación del Arte en México # —parte teórica— le fue asignada al arquitecto Federico E. Mariscal; mientras que el curso de Investigación del Arte en México —parte gráfica— lo impartiría el arquitecto Manuel M. Ituarte.[3]

Entre los estudiantes de este seminario se encontraba un joven de veinticuatro años que era dibujante de trabajos de arquitectura y planificación en los despachos de los arquitectos Carlos Obregón Santacilia, Carlos Contreras y Federico E. Mariscal. Se trataba de Justino Fernández García, hijo de un ilustre político del Gobierno de Porfirio Díaz.

Tanto Toussaint como Fernández encontraron en otras disciplinas como la literatura, la historia y la arquitectura una puerta de acceso al ejercicio profesional de la historia del arte. Sin una formación universitaria temprana, sus relaciones sociales fueron fundamentales para el desarrollo de su vida intelectual. Una de las más importantes, sobre todo para Fernández, fue con Cecil Crawford O'Gorman, un ingeniero de minas inglés afincado en México desde finales del siglo XIX. Conocedor del arte, amante de las antigüedades coloniales y también pintor, la casa de Crawford O'Gorman al sur de la Ciudad de México se convirtió en un espacio de exhibición de su propia obra y un punto de encuentro para una nueva generación de artistas e intelectuales que incluía a dos de sus hijos: Juan, arquitecto y pintor; y Edmundo, abogado de formación y después historiador, con quien Fernández estableció una estrecha amistad y complicidad intelectual a lo largo de los años, algo que Crawford O'Gorman hizo visible en el retrato que pintó de Fernández en 1936, al incluir en el escritorio del ya historiador del arte una

encuadernación de *Alcancía*, la revista que Justino y Edmundo editaron juntos en 1933, junto a un plano arquitectónico y un compás. Sobre este punto, es posible que dicho retrato se pintara en ocasión del ingreso de Fernández al Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas ese mismo año, en calidad de «dibujante».

«A rumbo y tanteada»

El mencionado seminario de la Secretaría de Hacienda derivó en un proyecto que se planteó dividir el país en varias zonas a las que acudirían comisiones técnicas con el objetivo de reunir y compilar los datos necesarios para elaborar un catálogo artístico nacional. Esta empresa se propuso publicar un conjunto de monografías artísticas que se dividiría en dos series: la primera se dedicaría a las pequeñas ciudades como Taxco, Atlixco y San Miguel de Allende, y la segunda a «lugares pintorescos o muy interesantes» desde el punto de vista geográfico: el Popocatepetl, el Iztaccihuatl y La Malinche.

El primer resultado fue la publicación de la afamada monografía *Tasco* (1931) de Manuel Toussaint, publicada con tres acuarelas y varios dibujos técnicos realizados por Justino Fernández. Entre las primeras, destaca el detalle de la cúpula de la parroquia de Santa Prisca y la vista de la casa Borda por su dominio del conjunto y la escala, que resolvió al incluir en la composición a dos personajes que suben por el camino escarpado. En cuanto a los dibujos técnicos, sirvieron como una fuente de datos que identificaron las características arquitectónicas de la ciudad en aras de preservarla.

El nombre completo de la monografía, *Tasco: Su historia, sus monumentos, características actuales y posibilidades turísticas*, da cuenta de un proyecto estatal que se valió de un acuerdo tácito entre el Gobierno y los estudiosos: el turismo se legitimaría con base en una investigación seria y metodológica, mientras que el patrimonio garantizaría su conservación dentro de instituciones culturales especializadas.

Como bien han apuntado investigadores como Dina Berger, para la década de 1930, el turismo era un proyecto nacional que pretendía modernizar y desarrollar el país económicamente, al mismo tiempo que ayudaría a dar forma estratégica a la imagen nacional e internacional de México.[4] En este sentido, la industria turística estaba alineada con un

proyecto de pacificación e integración social que tenía que trabajar con retóricas nacionalistas que incluyeran el estudio de la lengua, el arte y la historia de México.

Personajes como Toussaint y Fernández fueron claves en este proceso. Con una metodología que incluyó la búsqueda y análisis de documentos, así como la descripción de la obra de arte —ya fuera arquitectónica o pictórica—, la monografía *Tasco* se convirtió en un modelo de investigación histórica y documental de las ciudades coloniales en la que se conjugaron descripciones detalladas de la historia, la arquitectura local y sus monumentos con narraciones del folklore y la vida cotidiana que invitaban al lector a convertirse en un «viajero culto» gracias a las posibilidades que ofrecía el nuevo trazo de la Carretera Panamericana.

De esta forma, los primeros viajes de Toussaint y Fernández establecieron una característica del historiador del arte mexicano al buscar, identificar y documentar los bienes artísticos de la nación. Esta prerrogativa profesional fue particularmente útil durante la presidencia de Cárdenas, quien legitimó su poder a partir de sus propios viajes por el territorio mexicano.

Debido al éxito de la edición de 1931, en 1935 se publicó una versión abreviada en forma de *Guía ilustrada de Tasco*, con una traducción al inglés y fotografías del autor, de Hugo Brehme y de los estudios fotográficos Cervantes y José María Lupercio, además de un plano de la ciudad realizado «a cálculo, sin instrumentos geodésicos» por Fernández, quien publicó su propia monografía en 1934 bajo el título *Recuerdo de Tasco*.

En su monografía, Fernández reunió los datos principales de la ciudad, además de un croquis «levantado a rumbo y tanteada ocularmente por el autor» que señala los principales puntos de interés de la ciudad y sus principales servicios: hoteles, boticas, lavaderos públicos, la oficina de correos y las gasolineras, así como el kilometraje de la «ruta» desde la Ciudad de México hasta Acapulco. Orientado con el este en el extremo inferior de la hoja, el croquis de Fernández dirige la experiencia turística de Taxco alrededor de su corazón urbano al ubicar de manera efectiva la Plaza Borda en el centro de la composición. Este enfoque ayudó a definir las relaciones entre los espacios y, al mismo tiempo, a identificar los lugares históricos más significativos, pero, sobre todo, los servicios

disponibles al turista, particularmente los hoteles, que se marcan con color negro y números. Mientras la carretera y las calles están pintadas de blanco, son los patrones naranjas (como alusión a los techos de tejas) y verdes (para plazas y parques) los que llaman la atención del espectador y presentan a Taxco como una unidad estética armoniosa. La prioridad que Fernández dio a la ubicación de los hoteles en este croquis sobre otros lugares históricamente relevantes hacen pensar en la ciudad como un producto turístico. Como bien ha señalado el historiador del arte James Oles, la industria hotelera en la ciudad guerrerense era todavía incipiente en 1930, por lo que varias guías turísticas sugerían buscar alojamiento en otros puntos como Iguala. Sin embargo, eso cambió al año siguiente, cuando el estadounidense John H. Sutherland y su esposa Chiltipin abrieron el primer hotel moderno de Taxco: el Hotel Taxqueño. Construido en un estilo neocolonial, el lugar ofrecía al turista una experiencia del pasado, invariablemente complementada con las comodidades modernas. El hotel, junto al primer taller de plata fundado por William Spratling «pronto serían tan cruciales para la identidad del pueblo como las torres rosadas de Santa Prisca».[5] Para 1934 había ya siete hoteles que eran reconocidos en el croquis de Fernández, todos con nombres que aludían a la herencia colonial del lugar —Hotel Alarcón, Hotel Real, Hotel de los Arcos, Hotel Colonial—, además de las boticas y los lavaderos públicos. En este aspecto, la higiene fue una preocupación constante entre los viajeros extranjeros, por lo que las guías y mapas turísticos insistieron en marcar sitios que garantizaban tuberías interiores y agua potable. Baste recordar la guía turística de Anita Brenner, en la que aseguraba que el turista no encontraría «bandidos, personas hostiles o gérmenes» durante su viaje.[6]

Desde otro ángulo, el croquis de Fernández también puede considerarse un mapa vernáculo de Taxco. Michel de Certeau ha llamado a este tipo de narrativas «recorridos» para distinguirlas de los «mapas». Su distinción está pensada no solo para diferenciar diversas formas de representación espacial, sino también como una consideración lógica del poder que, en este caso, está inevitablemente envuelta en el mapa; su perspectiva, que se asume como la del «ojo de Dios», refleja una posición epistemológica y política. En contraste, en el código del usuario el «recorrido» constituye una perspectiva contextual y horizontal

derivada de las prácticas cotidianas. En el mapa vernáculo, la narrativa enfatiza, pues, la especificidad histórica y geográfica y vincula los nombres de las ciudades con el contexto humano y su historia.[7]

En *Recuerdo de Tasco* también destaca un dibujo que nos muestra «el recorrido» desde la Ciudad de México hasta Taxco. Esta representación, que evoca a los mapas del siglo XVI —como el Mapa de Sigüenza o el Códice Boturini—, muestra este nuevo recorrido carretero a partir del kilometraje entre la capital del país y la ciudad guerrerense; las huellas de pies indican el camino recorrido y vinculan los poblados situados entre el punto de partida y el destino turístico como una constancia del nuevo escenario geográfico. Además, varios de los personajes que se encuentran alrededor del camino tienen la vírgula de la palabra, un símbolo y acción que también se vincula a la proximidad espacial entre las figuras.

Fernández dibujó, además, la portada de *Recuerdo de Tasco* en forma de una vista panorámica de la ciudad enmarcada en un cortinaje y con la parroquia de Santa Prisca en el centro de la composición. Esta vista desde lo alto, recreada en colores, permite imaginar la región en su conjunto como un panorama geográfico teatralizado al que se puede acceder en un automóvil, estratégicamente colocado en el ángulo superior izquierdo del paisaje. En su conjunto, todas las imágenes de la monografía rinden un homenaje a las tradiciones de los mapas coloniales, desde sus vistas oblicuas y escalas a «tanteo», a las figuras glíficas e imágenes de lugares y personajes como José de la Borda, empresario minero y mecenas de la construcción del templo de Santa Prisca.

Coda

A estas publicaciones les siguieron las monografías que Fernández escribió sobre Hidalgo, Pátzcuaro, Uruapan y Morelia, publicadas por la Secretaría de Hacienda en 1936. En el caso de esta última, Fernández también incluyó un mapa que dibujó en septiembre de 1934, y que construyó a partir de un plano de Morelia creado en 1898 y de información del Directorio de la Ciudad de 1932.

Estas monografías también pueden considerarse como un resultado del seminario de arte que coordinó Toussaint junto a los arquitectos Federico E. Mariscal y Manuel Ituarte en 1929, pues de acuerdo con la correspondencia de Fernández, este se

incorporó al curso teórico-gráfico de Investigación del Arte en México para trabajar en las Comisiones de Inventario y certificarse como perito en arte colonial.[8]

Los fundadores del IIE fueron especialistas en la historia del arte colonial, un área de estudio que había sido marginada por la historia positivista del siglo XIX, la cual sentó las bases de la era moderna en el pasado prehispánico. Así, el trabajo de Toussaint y sus dos principales discípulos, Justino Fernández y Francisco de la Maza, establecieron al arte colonial no solo como una herencia de la conquista española, sino como un elemento fundacional del arte y la nación moderna. Los tres contribuyeron notablemente a desarrollar una noción de «lo típico» que redefinió la experiencia afectiva de los monumentos históricos promovidos en el contexto turístico.[9] En este sentido, los términos «típico» y «pintoresco» fueron asociados a zonas y pueblos que quedaron protegidos por los reglamentos de la Ley sobre Protección y Conservación de Monumentos Arqueológicos e Históricos, Poblaciones Típicas y Lugares de Belleza Naturales.

Finalmente, el interés por la catalogación, el registro, la investigación y la conservación del patrimonio artístico ha sido una constante de la disciplina de la historia del arte en México, aun antes de entrar en el ámbito universitario. Esta característica del historiador del arte mexicano también coadyuvó a establecer una relación con el paisaje en la que la cartografía y la topografía se sumaron como medios para describir el territorio nacional como símbolo de un país moderno, y a su vez, de una gran herencia cultural.

1. Manuel Toussaint, «Saturnino Herrán y su obra» (Ciudad de México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 1990), 24.

2. «Seminario que va a patrocinar Hacienda», *Excélsior*, 5 de septiembre de 1929.

3. «El seminario de Hacienda ya tiene profesores», *El Nacional*, 13 de septiembre de 1929.

4. Dina Berger, *The Development of Mexico's Tourism Industry: Pyramids by Day, Martinis by Night* (Nueva York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 93.

5. James Oles, «Walls to Paint On» (tesis doctoral, Yale University, 1995), 58

6. Anita Brenner, *Your Mexican Holiday: A Modern Guide* (Nueva York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1935), 15.

7. Michel de Certeau, *La invención de lo cotidiano* (Ciudad de México: Universidad Iberoamericana, Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Occidente, 2010), 130-1.

8. Correspondencia de Justino Fernández a Marte R. Gómez, 9 de noviembre, 1934. Archivo personal de Justino Fernández, colección particular.

9. Para una reflexión sobre la noción de «lo típico» en un caso específico como fue el desarrollo de Pátzcuaro, ver Jennifer Jolly, *Creating Pátzcuaro, Creating Mexico: Art, Tourism, and Nation Building under Lázaro Cárdenas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018).

Figures

Figure 1

Saturnino Herrán, *Retrato de Manuel Toussaint*, 1917
Crayón y acuarela sobre papel, 23 ⅝ × 13 ¾ in. (60 × 35 cm)
Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México

Figure 2

Cecil Crawford O'Gorman, *Retrato de Justino Fernández*, 1936
Óleo sobre masonita, 24 × 20 ½ in. (61 × 52 cm)
Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México

Figure 3

Justino Fernández, Croquis de Tasco
Publicado en *Recuerdo de Tasco* (Ciudad de México: Editorial Lumen, 1934)
Biblioteca Justino Fernández, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas,
Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México

To Where the Stars Point: Cildo Meireles's *Cruzeiro do Sul*[1]

Caroline Alciones de Oliveira Leite

Background

Cruzeiro do Sul (Southern Cross, 1969–70) was first shown in the exhibition *Agnus Dei: Thereza Simões, Guilherme Vaz e Cildo Meireles*, held at the Petite Galerie in Rio de Janeiro in 1970. The show aimed to gather all the works Cildo Meireles had produced up to that point. However, the gallery's spatial constraints made it impossible for *Cruzeiro do Sul* (fig. 1) to be installed in the way specified by Meireles: on a shelf in a room with particular dimensions.

More than four decades later, in September 2013, Philippe Vergne, then the director of the Dia Art Foundation, wrote a letter to Meireles[2] in which he asserted the relevance of *Cruzeiro do Sul* to contemporary art history, proposing to acquire it for permanent exhibition at Dia Beacon.[3] While these negotiations did not progress, between 1986 and 2016 the work was installed according to the original project specifications in more than five exhibitions, both in Brazil and abroad.

At the exhibition *Salão da Bússola*, held at the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro in 1969, Kynaston McShine, associate curator of painting and sculpture at New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), encountered Meireles's works and subsequently invited the artist to participate in MoMA's show *Information*, which was held from July to September 1970. For the exhibition's catalogue, Meireles contributed the text work *Southern Cross* (fig. 2),[4] and for the exhibition he presented the works *Inserções em circuitos ideológicos: Projeto Coca-Cola* (Insertions into Ideological Circuits: Coca-Cola Project, 1970) and *Projeto Cédula* (Bank Note Project, 1970).

In an interview held at Meireles's studio on February 13, 2023, the artist, recalling the circumstances under which he wrote *Southern Cross*, discussed the outrage he felt at the time, which coincided with the harshest moment of Brazil's military dictatorship and, at the same time, the direction that conceptual art had taken among artists of his generation, who, he believed,

confused "conceptual art with anything."[5] The artist also expressed his discomfort with the perceived contradiction of embracing an artistic concept—conceptual art—that originated from a country that supported, encouraged, and financed the military dictatorships in Brazil and other Latin American countries. Immersed in these contradictions, Meireles, who was only twenty-two years old at the time, wrote *Southern Cross* for the catalogue of what would later be recognized as one of the most relevant conceptual art shows on the international stage: *Information*. Between the 1970s and the early 2000s, the artist tried to distance his artistic production from the idea of conceptual art.[6]

In order to comprehensively analyze Meireles's text work and his installation, it is important to highlight that the artist encountered the reality of the Indigenous genocide at a very young age. His father and uncle worked for the Serviço de Proteção ao Índio (Indian Protection Service, SPI), and his cousin José Apoena Soares de Meireles was only twenty years old when he began working for the Fundação Nacional dos Povos Indígenas (National Indian Foundation). At the time of their involvement with Indigenous communities, in the 1940s and 1950s, in the Bico do Papagaio region—which spans the states of Goiás, Pará, and Maranhão—the Krahô Indians were being massacred by their colonizers.

The artist reports that the greatest of these massacres occurred when a single-engine airplane flew over the region and dropped clothes infected with the influenza virus and Koch's bacilli, the bacteria that causes tuberculosis. As a result, "four thousand Indians became four hundred, of whom two hundred went mad because they had lost everything: family, bonds, and identity."[7] Following an administrative inquiry, Meireles's father, then director of the SPI in Rio de Janeiro, was called on to investigate the case, whereupon he discovered that there had effectively been two massacres, not just one.

Meireles recalled that his father "managed to transform the administrative inquiry into a police inquiry, and [the person responsible for these crimes] went on trial. This landmark case was one of the first times someone was convicted of killing Indigenous people."[8] This event and many other massacres involving Indigenous people persist in the artist's memory.

Illuminated by Mysteries

In the midst of darkness, a beam of light points to the ground. The pupil dilates, seeking to widen its range of vision. We see a focal point, but we can't tell whether it is real. We move toward the light, as if this were a basic principle of walking through the dark. Beyond us, we see only the beam of light and the unmoving point on the ground. As we move toward the light, we become more and more enveloped by the silence of the room and by a persistent question prompted by the small object against the immense darkness: what does the light beam indicate?

The illuminated point is a tiny cube. What is contained within this cube, which the light cuts through the darkness to illuminate? The inquiry becomes heavier and heavier, our knees bend, and, as our bodies draw closer, our hands reach for the cube. Just as this movement begins, a force pulls our hands back, as if to warn that density has its mysteries and touching the unknown has consequences. The cube is made of two different kinds of wood: two of its faces are made of a single type of wood, one of pine and one of oak, while the other four faces are made of both wood types, in equal parts.

As we bend down, we realize we are as tiny as the cube in the vast darkness. We stand up, eyes fixed on the object that never stops eliciting questions from us, and decide to change direction and walk toward the other light, the one coming from outside the room. Before leaving, we look back at the cube, and this time, we see it with great clarity within its simplicity and dimensions amidst the immensity of that space. The cube remains undisturbed, a singular interruption in the void, illuminated by mysteries.

Suddenly, a legend enters our awareness, beckoning us toward the light under which the object rests. According to Tupi legend, the friction between pine and oak, woods considered sacred by the Tupi people, could provoke the manifestation of their greatest divinity, Tupã, through an explosion. In an environment of large dimensions, ideally with a minimum of two hundred square meters, and with a cube with a width of only nine millimeters, the artist conveys the density and the existence of something magnificent with an object that fits on the tip of one's index finger (fig. 3).

Like the Southern Cross constellation, Meireles's work points to an invisible region, situated to the west of the imaginary

line. This line, a colonial construct historically imposed upon and written on official Western maps, institutionalizes the voracity of those who do not belong to this region. *Cruzeiro do Sul* illuminates the density and grandeur of what—despite efforts to compress it, to confine it within artificial boundaries, and regardless of its small dimensions—contains something immense.

On the Far Side of the Western World

In *Southern Cross*, Meireles writes a kind of letter in which he describes what is happening to the west of the historically imposed colonial line, warning about a future that will be shaped by the strength of Indigenous peoples. In the very first sentence, the artist states that he is not defending a nationality but rather encouraging a reflection on a part of the world undervalued within its epistemes—something that concerns Brazil but that also pervades the continent conventionally called South America. It is a neglected region, often disregarded at the expense of colonial processes that have assumed different forms throughout history and have been present ever since the first European glances at the lands of the Southern Cross. It is a region that transcends borders because it is genuine, a region unmarked on the official maps and whose complexities the artist continually explores.

With the prize he received at *Salão da Bússola*, in 1971 Meireles traveled to New York, where he lived until 1973. It was there that the artist was able to observe the idea of the ghetto from ethnic, ideological, and economic perspectives, which led him to believe that Indigenous people would be the fundamental element of what he termed "ghetto cosmogony," viewing their situation as analogous to that of other marginalized groups. Meireles believed that, over time, this dynamic would be reversed, the relationship between the oppressors and the oppressed would be inverted, and that "where there was a compression, there would always be an explosion. It doesn't matter if we want it or not. Whenever a certain type of procedure is configured, another one will be generated."[9]

Even before encountering the idea of the ghetto in New York, in *Cruzeiro do Sul*—in both the installation and the text—the artist seemed to anticipate the notion of ghetto in relation to the compression of Indigenous peoples and the marking of Indigenous lands, which reminds me of the words of the Yanomami shaman Davi Kopenawa:

> You claim that we want to cut out a piece of Brazil to live there alone. These are lies to steal our land and confine us to it in little pens like chickens. You do not know how to do anything with the forest. You only know how to cut down and burn its trees, to dig holes in its floor and soil its watercourses. Yet it does not belong to you and none of you created it![10]

The Yanomami shaman's words provoke a reflection on the exploitative use of the land by the white man, in contrast to that of a diverse people who, before the arrival of the colonizers, had a relationship with the land far removed from notions of commodity and property. "Its original inhabitants never divided it. Others came, however, who for some reason did it. Such a division remains to this day,"[11] stated Meireles in *Southern Cross*, more than fifty years ago.

The idea of the inversion of the ghetto proposed by Meireles regarding the Indigenous peoples does not unfold within the Western logic of changing positions within a hierarchical structure, since Amerindian cosmogony does not operate under the framework of Western white culture.[12] The explosion of the ghetto by Amerindians takes place in a different register, one of peoples who establish a relationship with territory that differs from the perspective established by the state.

Among the studies that address the notion of territory, it is worth mentioning those by the Brazilian geographers Milton Santos[13] and Marcos Aurelio Saquet.[14] But it is in the research of the Brazilian geographer Rogério Haesbaert[15] that we find an incisive reflection on territory from a Latin American perspective. Surveying different ways of defining territory among Indigenous peoples, Haesbaert states that, in opposition to Eurocentric and supposedly universal definitions, "a Latin American perspective on territory is characterized by plurality, involving a multiplicity of social subjects."[16] I align with this perspective, understanding that the territory marked by the artist in *Southern Cross* exists within the realm of plurality, of the multiplicity of peoples, and of their relations with the land, with nature, and with one another. With his words, Meireles marks a space that "does not appear on official maps, a region called the SOUTHERN CROSS."[17] It is a wild region, unknown to Western culture except through postcards, photos, and books.

The Jungle Knows No Artificial Boundaries

In analyzing Meireles's creative process, it is relevant to observe the artist's approach to Indigenous issues in addition to his creative method. First, it should be noted that, within scientific knowledge, the objectivist epistemology of Western modernity has consolidated the idea that knowledge involves desubjectification. This implies distinguishing what characterizes and constitutes the object from what concerns the cognizing subject and what, perhaps, can be projected onto the object. As observed by the Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, according to the Western ideal, to know something well means to reduce intentionality to zero, transforming the subject into an object.[18]

On the other hand, Amerindian scientific thinking, the shamanic thinking, is based on Amerindian perspectivism, which engages with the possibility of occupying other points of view. Within this framework, knowing involves adopting the other's perspective, deliberately crossing bodily barriers, and returning to tell the story.[19] In Amerindian shamanism, "to know is to personify, to take the point of view of that which is to be known—of that, or rather, of them; because the shamanic knowledge aims at a 'something' that is a 'someone,' another subject or agent. The form of the Other is the person."[20] The success of a good shamanic interpretation is, therefore, directly linked to the intentionality ascribed to what one seeks to understand, to the point that the object of knowledge becomes a subject. Setting aside the differences of the Amerindian context, I venture to propose that, when creating works about the people of the Southern Cross territory, Meireles adopts a practice analogous to Amerindian shamanism.

Informed by his family's experiences, the artist addresses Indigenous issues by seeking to cross borders and occupy, from his own body, a point of view that aligns as closely as possible with the Indigenous perspective. Returning to his own context, Meireles creates his works by narrating invisible stories, using his art to mark the territory of the Southern Cross as someone who understands the subjectivity that characterizes shamanic epistemology, which in Western culture would be located within the realm of art. In the words of Viveiros de Castro:

> Scientific knowledge is epistemologically superior: it is in charge. Art is not science and we are done. It is precisely this distinction that seems to make no sense in what I am calling shamanic epistemology, which is an aesthetic epistemology. Or aesthetic-political, insofar as it proceeds by attributing subjectivity or "agency" to the so-called things.[21]

In this register, *Southern Cross* emerges as an aesthetic-political text to the extent that the artist implements his subjectivity to advocate for issues related to the territory of the Southern Cross. From what can only be seen under the skies of the Southern Cross, the smallest of all constellations, Meireles turns to the grandeur of the jungle, its Indigenous peoples, and their epistemes, establishing counterpoints to the sterility of the colonizing Western culture and its omissions. The artist warns that "the jungle will grow and spread out to cover their sterilized beaches, . . . their earth-works, think-works, nihil-works, water-works, conceptual-works, and so on."[22] Unbound by artificial constraints, "the jungle will go on spreading itself over the East and over those who compromise, until all those who have forgotten, or no longer know, how to breathe oxygen will die, infected with health."[23]

Subjectivizing the Territory and the Stars

Both the text work and the installation *Cruzeiro do Sul* allow a critical look at the secular reality of the imposition of white European cultural values that repeatedly results in the death of Indigenous peoples. In the midst of the infinite, something extremely small can contain an absurd density capable of bridging the gap between the divine and life in nature. Although this entity may be unknown, neglected, and ignored, its potential remains latent and ready for activation through frictions, rubbings, and explosions.

Meireles recognizes that the Indigenous peoples, in their relationship to nature, do not fit into the imaginary constraints of a map, of a line. Drawing from his life experience traversing the west side of the Tordesillas Line, with his father, uncle, and cousin directly involved with Indigenous issues, the artist is constantly being influenced by Amerindian cosmogony. Meireles, when he was only twenty-two years old, stated that metaphors

hold no value on the west side of Tordesillas, what I understand as a shamanic epistemology in his creative process. Subjectivizing the territory and the stars, he uses words to create an aesthetic-political text work, expressing his desire that listening to the stories of the Southern Cross territory be an encounter with "lendas e fábulas e alegorias fantásticas. Porque o povo cuja História são lendas e fábulas é um povo feliz."[24]

1. *Cruzeiro do Sul* refers to a set of two works by Cildo Meireles. In this essay, *Cruzeiro do Sul* refers to the installation, and *Southern Cross* refers to the text work presented for the first time at *Information* (MoMA, 1970).

2. I'd like to extend a special thanks to Cildo Meireles for all his help with this research. I would also like to thank Wilton Montenegro and Pat Kilgore for licensing the images used in this essay.

3. Philippe Vergne, email to the artist with the subject line "Dia Foundation: An invitation to a permanent view of Southern Cross," September 6, 2013. Archive of the artist.

4. Cildo Meireles, "Southern Cross," Information (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, [1970], 2019), 85.

5. Cildo Meireles, in discussion with the author at his studio, February 2023. All translations by the author unless otherwise noted.

6. Meireles in discussion with the author, 2023.

7. Cildo Meireles, "Memórias," in *Cildo Meireles, Coleção Encontros*, ed. Felipe Scovino (Rio de Janeiro: Beco do Azougue, 2009), 253.

8. Meireles, in discussion with the author at the artist's studio, November 2021.

9. Meireles, "Memórias," 259.

10. Davi Kopenawa and Bruce Albert, *The Falling Sky: Words of a Yanomami Shaman*, trans. Nicholas Elliott and Alison Dundy (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 2013), 314–15.

11. Meireles, "Southern Cross," 85.

12. Caroline Alciones de Oliveira Leite, "O que não está aqui nem do lado de lá: Uma análise do sonoro na obra de Cildo Meireles" (PhD diss., Escola de Belas Artes da Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, 2022), 179.

13. Milton Santos, *The Nature of Space*, trans. Brenda Baletti (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021).

14. Marcos Aurelio Saquet, "As diferentes abordagens do território e a apreensão do movimento e da (i) materialidade," *Geosul* 22, no. 43 (January/June 2007): 55–76.

15. Rogério Haesbaert, "Territory/ies from a Latin American Perspective," *Journal of Latin American Geography* 19, no. 1 (January 2020): 258–68, https://muse.jhu.edu/article/744030.

16. Haesbaert, "Territory/ies from a Latin American Perspective," 263.

17. Meireles, "Southern Cross," 85.

18. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *A inconstância da alma selvagem* (São Paulo: Ubu Editora, 2017), 311.

19. Viveiros de Castro, *A inconstância da alma selvagem*, 310.

20. Viveiros de Castro, 311.

21. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, "O chocalho do xamã é um acelerador de partículas," interview by Renato Sztutman, Silvana Nascimento, and Stelio Marras, in *Eduardo Viveiros de Castro: Coleção Encontros*, ed. Renato Sztutman (Rio de Janeiro: Beco do Azougue, 2007), 43.

22. Meireles, "Southern Cross," 85.

23. Meireles, 85.

24. Cildo Meireles, *Cruzeiro do Sul*, Portuguese version of the text *Southern Cross*, 1970. Presented in the exhibition *Arte Democracia Utopia—Quem não luta tá morto*, Museu de Arte do Rio, Rio de Janeiro, September 2018–March 2019.

Per the English version of the text work *Southern Cross*: "fantastic legends and fables and allegories. For a people who can transform its History into fantastic legends and fables and allegories, that people has a real existence."

Figures

Figure 1

Cildo Meireles, *Cruzeiro do Sul* (Southern Cross), 1969–70 (detail)
Pine and oak cube, ⅜ × ⅜ × ⅜ in. (9 × 9 × 9 mm)
Photograph by Pat Kilgore

Cruzeiro do Sul

Não estou aqui nesta exposição para defender uma carreira e nem uma nacionalidade.

Ou antes, eu gostaria sim, de falar sobre uma região que não consta nos mapas oficiais, e que se chama Cruzeiro do Sul.

Seus primitivos habitantes jamais a dividiram. Porém vieram outros, e a dividiram com uma finalidade. A divisão continua até hoje. Acredito que cada região tenha sua linha divisória, imaginária ou não. Essa a que me refiro chama-se Tordesilhas. A parte leste, vocês mais ou menos conhecem; por postais, fotos, descrições e livros.

Mas eu gostaria de falar do outro lado desta fronteira, com a cabeça sob a linha do Equador, quente e enterrada na terra, o contrário dos arranha-céus, as raízes, dentro da terra, de todas as constelações. O lado selvagem. A selva na sua cabeça, sem o brilho da inteligência ou do raciocínio. Dessa gente, e da cabeça dessa gente, esses que buscaram ou foram obrigados a enterrar suas cabeças na terra e na lama. Na selva. Portanto suas cabeças dentro de suas próprias cabeças.

Os circos, os raciocínios, as habilidades, as especializações, os estilos acabam. Sobra o que sempre existiu, a terra. Sobra a dança que pode ser feita para pedir a chuva. Então pântano. E desse pântano vão nascer vermes e outra vez a vida. Outra coisa. Acreditem sempre em boatos. Porque na selva não existem mentiras, existem verdades pessoais.

Os precursores. Mas quem ousou intuir a oeste de Tordesilhas senão seus próprios habitantes? Azar para os hippies e suas praias esterilizadas, suas terras desinfetadas, seus plásticos, seus cultos eunucos e suas inteligências histéricas. Azar para o leste. Azar para os omissos: tomaram sem querer o lado dos fracos. Pior para eles. Porque a selva se alastrará e crescerá até cobrir suas praias esterilizadas, suas terras desinfetadas, seus sexos ociosos, seus edifícios, suas estradas, seus *earth-works, think-works, nihil-works, water-works, conceptual works and so on*, o leste de Tordesilhas e todo e qualquer leste de qualquer região. A selva continuará se alastrando sobre o leste e sobre os omissos até que todos que esqueceram e desaprenderam como respirar oxigênio morram, infeccionados de saúde. Cama de gato.

No seu ventre ela traz ainda o acanhado fim da metáfora: porque as metáforas não têm um valor próprio a oeste de Tordesilhas. Não que eu não goste de metáforas: quero algum dia que cada trabalho seja visto não com um objeto de elucubrações esterilizadas, mas como marcos, como recordações e evocações de conquistas reais e visíveis. E que quando ouvirem a História desse oeste estejam ouvindo lendas e fábulas e alegorias fantásticas. Porque o povo cuja História são lendas e fábulas é um povo feliz.

Lilda Wanderley.

Figure 2 (page 50)

Cildo Meireles, *Cruzeiro do Sul* (Southern Cross), 1970
Typewriter ink on paper, approx. 8 ⅜ × 11 ⁷⁄₁₆ in. (21 × 29 cm)
This text work, presented as part of the exhibition *Arte Democracia Utopia—Quem não luta tá morto*, at Museu de Arte do Rio, Rio de Janeiro, in 2018–19, is the Portuguese version of the text that appeared in MoMA's *Information* catalogue
Photograph by Caroline Alciones de Oliveira Leite

Figure 3

Cildo Meireles, *Cruzeiro do Sul* (Southern Cross), 1969–70 (detail)
Pine and oak cube, ⅜ × ⅜ × ⅜ in. (9 × 9 × 9 mm)
Photograph by Wilton Montenegro

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