

***Between Apparatus and Subjectivity: Carlos Garaicoa's Post-Utopian Architecture***

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In the past three decades, contemporary Cuban artists have been an important critical force in the global art world. This visibility has been acutely negotiated in the network of relations in which art from diverse historical contexts and cultural situations has engaged radically opposed logics of contemporaneity. The field of contemporary art, especially since the postwar era that began around 1945, has been a ground on which these logics have been played out. Some of these logics were based on a dialectic that was initially ideological in orientation: between the assumed positivity of capitalism and the alleged deficiencies of socialism. The historical term for this dialectic was the Cold War. Cuba, as the only proper Communist state in Latin America, was exceptionally positioned within the geopolitical struggle based on ideology.

In acceding to the ideological conceit on which the dialectic of the Cold War stood, contemporary art's role is exemplified in the positions occupied in the immediate postwar period by Socialist Realist art and Abstract Expressionism. The former was allegedly marked by its conformity to ideology and therefore subordinated the expression of the artist to the glorification of the State. The latter, on the other hand, was promoted for its supposed rebellion from such conformity and thus represented the will of the artist. In the 1950s and '60s, in the midst of decolonization and wars of liberation, ThirdWorld intellectuals, writers, filmmakers, and artists—along with sympathetic Western colleagues—vigorously contested these logics of contemporaneity. In Cuba, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's film *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (*Memories of Underdevelopment*, 1968) underscored the allegorical tension between the liberal sensibility of ThirdWorld liberation and the economic reality of capitalist hegemony in a sophisticated exposé of the Cold War dialectic. The following year, Argentine filmmakers Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino published their landmark manifesto, *Towards a Third Cinema* in the Cuban magazine *Tricontinental*, a publication sponsored by the Havanabased OSPAAAL (Organization of Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa, and Latin America). In that manifesto, Solanas and Getino outlined and analyzed three different situations that defined postwar cinema: "First Cinema" represented the escapist spectacle of the Hollywood film industry with its bourgeois conventions; "Second Cinema" was the auteur cinema of European art film, which refused the Hollywood model, and instead focused on the individual expression of the director as an autonomous artist; "Third Cinema" rejected the previous two by emphasizing the collective nature of film and its relationship to mass social action and political engagement. The manifesto further underscored the dialectical battle within contemporary representation. Underdevelopment was not merely an economic term related to apparatuses of colonial subordination, it also signified imaginative impoverishment—aesthetic colonization—from which artists and intellectuals in the Third World must work to free themselves.

Under the terms of the anticolonial movement of this moment, to free oneself is not merely to subvert the accumulated apparatuses of colonialism but also to frame oneself as a subject of history. But in Cuba, both the logic and counterlogic of art—between colonial and decolonial practices—was a fundamental paradox that also revealed the conflict between artists, intellec-

## B A R B A R A G R O S S G A L E R I E

tuals, filmmakers and the apparatuses of the State. By the end of the 1970s the precarious economic situations could no longer mask this paradox that further alienated artists and intellectuals from the ideological machinery of the State, which tended to suppress subjectivity.

The emergence of contemporary Cuban art in the global arena coincided with the subtle questioning of this paradox and also of the prevailing international logic of contemporary art, which functioned staunchly under the ideals of capitalism. This period can be divided into two cycles of resurgence, the first occurring in the 1980s with such artists as José Bedia, Tonel (Antonio Eligio Fernández), Ricardo Brey, and others. The generation of Cuban artists who gained international exposure during this period emerged at the juncture when neoexpressionist painting was ascendant in the West. But it was also in the wake of the post-Civil Rights debates around multiculturalism and identity politics in contemporary culture.

The second transformation of contemporary Cuban art occurred in the mid 1990s, with the generation of such artists as Carlos Garaicoa, Kcho (Alexis Leyva Machado), Tania Bruguera, Los Carpinteros, José Toirac, and many others. Though conceptually and formally diverse in their practices, and not representative of a singular aesthetic style or artistic movement—and in spite of the distinctive differences that mark each of their practices—the work of these artists does form a cohesive trajectory in the development of the language of contemporary Cuban art. Implicitly, this shift subtly worked to move beyond the political rhetoric of the State. However, these artists did not necessarily convert en masse to the seduction of desubjectification that would have been necessary to allow them to enter the sphere of contemporary Western art. Within the debates that shaped the critical positions of these artists, there are at least three historical points that played a crucial animating role in the reorientation of their work. The first of these is the pedagogical role played by the government-run Instituto Superior de Arte (ISA), founded in 1976 in Havana, for advanced training in art, theater, performance, and music. Second was the establishment in 1984 of the Havana Biennial, which paved the way for a broader postcolonial investigation of curatorial and cultural discourses that underpin contemporary art. And finally, there was the socioeconomic crisis of 1980 that precipitated the so-called Mariel Boatlift and which led to the massive exodus of Cubans beginning in April 1980 and ending in late October of that year. The event was an unprecedented epic regatta of rickety boats and other floating devices that transported more than 120,000 Cubans to the shores of Florida.

However, the two factors that may have most firmly fixed public attention on the work of Cuban artists during this period occurred in the development of their own aesthetic strategies apart from the ISA, and the global awakening to their work as a result of the Havana Biennial. The work of the artists of the 1980s and 1990s are directly tied to the aesthetic foundations laid first in the curriculum of ISA, and then in the counterhegemonic curatorial logic of the biennial, which embraced the work of artists from the developing world. Still, the stark political dimension of the rough crossings of the Mariel Boatlift exposed the socioeconomic contradictions in which millions of Cubans had been living under the island's Communist regime.

The image of the boat departing the shores of Cuba would play an important symbolic and iconic role throughout these two decades in the work of both older and younger Cuban artists. In the way it was deployed in the work of such artists as Kcho, the boat signified not just a search for fresh artistic horizons, but also served as a metaphor for issues of exile, displace-

## B A R B A R A G R O S S G A L E R I E

ment, migration, and the collapse of ideology. Even more significant is how the two cycles—between the generation of the 1980s and that of the '90s—exposed a politics of form that were conceptually, politically, and formally different from one another.

Carlos Garaicoa is heir to these several historical conjunctions, between aesthetic nationalism put forward in the artistic program at ISA, the rupture in the utopian potential of communist ideology, and the access provided to global artistic practices made possible by the biennial. His work emerged as a consequence of these developments and as a dialectical response to the changing conditions of the role of the artist in Cuba, in the wake of the massive migration which occurred in the 1980s, and the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe that would make Cuba, as a Communist state, an anachronism without the Soviet Union, its chief economic and ideological sponsor. Garaicoa is perhaps one of the most significant artists of his generation—along with Kcho, Tania Bruguera, and Los Carpinteros—to develop a sustained aesthetic and analytical framework that would fuse the heritage of modern Cuban art and its complex political structure.

Garaicoa works across mediums and disciplines: in photography, video, sculpture, drawing, architecture, and urbanism. In specifying the diverse forms across which he works, what is immediately thrown into relief—despite the differences between the flatness of the photograph and drawing, the narrative and temporal structure of video, and the threedimensional quality of sculpture—is the fact that Garaicoa's work is foregrounded around the spatial conditions that are embedded in the corporeality of sculpture and the social and structural networks that it constructs between the institutions of art and of politics. Even when his work is on a twodimensional surface, such as a photograph or a drawing, the schematic register of the work calls attention to the way in which space is generated or how architecture could be imagined, space inhabited and embodied, and social dialogue between them is experienced or produced.

This is most clear in the way his work draws attention to the body, and therefore to subjectivity.

Through numerous architectural sketches, multiple schematic outlines, installations, models, and photographs, Garaicoa's work often takes the spatial conditions of the diverse heritage of Cuban architecture and city planning as its point of departure. His work is invested in the investigation of the different architectural discourses of colonial, modern, and socialist citymaking

practices. This analysis subtends the late baroque buildings and enormous squares of Spanish colonial urban planning to the modernist experience of twentiethcentury architecture and the centralized planning that represents the socialist inheritance of Cuba's postrevolutionary period.

In addition to these—like most contemporary artists whose practices are inflected by the dialectical relationship between artistic categories and concepts—the formal structures of Garaicoa's work are built around the crisis of categories and the hierarchies of mediums. Neither purely architecture nor sculpture, documentary photography or archive, drawing or sketch, Garaicoa's work exemplifies the application of the concept of the apparatus as a means of imagining the relationship between signs and structures, systems and procedures. In a recent essay, "What is an Apparatus?" the philosopher Giorgio Agamben explores the way this con-

## B A R B A R A G R O S S G A L E R I E

cept informs more than a technical idea by revisiting the numerous ways it appeared in Michel Foucault's philosophical discourse from the late 1960s through the 1970s.

Reading Foucault's definition of the apparatus reveals a powerful insight into the structural operations of Garaicoa's meshing of diverse technical systems in his own work. In a passage quoted by Agamben, Foucault clarifies the meaning of the term: What I'm trying to single out with this term is, first and foremost, a thoroughly heterogeneous set consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral, and philanthropic propositions—in short, the said as much as the unsaid. The apparatus itself is the network that can be established between these elements....<sup>1</sup> Within such an explication, Garaicoa's project *Continuity of Somebody's Architecture* (2002), an installation conceived and produced for Documenta 11, isolates both formally and philosophically this idea of the apparatus.

The combination of sculpture, architectural model, drawing, and photography insinuates the terms of the apparatus, first as a formal process through the heterogeneous media employed, and secondly as a series of discursive procedures linking the forms and the concepts. *Continuity of Somebody's Architecture* is situated in what could be called the ruin of Cuba's failed revolution and, in a sense, represents a melancholic reflection on the impasse of the revolutionary principles of ThirdWorld intellectuals. But first, let us start with the idea of ruin and failure, since they represent the bedrock leitmotifs of much of Garaicoa's engagement with architectural forms and urban spaces in the contemporary Cuban experience. To visit Havana during the period of unprecedented scarcity after the revolution and—in the wake of the nationalization of entire industries—the dissolution of all forms of associational life, the eradication of private property, the ideologization of representation, and the subordination of all types of critical reflection—is to understand the extent to which Cuba had fallen into the brittle rhetoric of state propaganda.

The decrepit appearance of the onceglorious city of Havana—granted a fantasy built by the colonial imaginary under the auspices of violence, of extractive greed, and of slave labor—belies the claims of social progress being made by the regime on behalf of Cuba's citizens. Whole blocks and entire neighborhoods were either collapsing from the weight of neglect—no doubt

because of the hardships imposed by the brutal economic embargo of the United States—or were disappearing entirely. Reduced to barely subsistence levels and left with limited resources, many of the grand projects and urban schemes of the revolution, which would have counteracted the opulence of the Spanish colonial architecture with the radical modernity of planned urban Socialism, had come to a standstill.

Garaicoa inserts his analytical telescope to review this state of urban anomie, and applies a stethoscope to probe the febrile core of socialist state planning. It is a dialectic premised on the investigation of the ruin, symbolically and materially. In an essay outlining the rationale for *Continuity of Somebody's Architecture*, Garaicoa writes of the forlorn state of the architectural heritage of Havana, especially those structures built between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which had been sacrificed in a bid to inscribe the stamp of the regime's new urban imagination. However, he does not view the phenomenon of abandonment of the old and the enthusiasm provoked by the new socialist forms as separate entities. In fact, they represented the twinned tragedies of Cuba's search for a universal ideal of itself free from both

## B A R B A R A G R O S S G A L E R I E

its colonial past and its socialist present. The historical conjunction of these two parts of Cuban history only exposed the extent to which it had subordinated its historical imagination to the ideologies of the West. However, his earlier work had been much more focused on the collapse of the architecture of the past as a metaphor for the bankruptcy of ideology, irrespective of the positive claims made by the State which sold the illusion of progress wherein the distinction between social classes and racial hierarchies had been eliminated.

But the antagonism through which the State framed its critique of the colonial past tended to mask the absurdity of its own claims to a better future. Garaicoa subtly challenges this stance by carefully analyzing how the architecture of the past and that of the present are both symbols of the imagination of other empirebuilders at the expense of the Cuban people. In this project he takes on the character of a new master builder. But he does so by first tracing the genealogy of Cuban architectural history. From that he writes about his motivation for undertaking such an approach: If I departed from the physical ruins of buildings constructed mostly between the late XIX and early XX centuries in a series of previous drawings, now I wanted to be in a more recent history. With the participation of an architect, a team of model makers and sculptors, a restatement of the urban and architectural phenomenon has been done, which has incited more strongly in Havana of the last 30 years: The Social Micro brigade. During Socialism in Cuba, architecture has had a contingent nature as many other social projects have had. Construction plans have been focused in providing new housing buildings, schools, hospitals, etc., leaving in an almost absolute abandonment the estimations and maintenance of the architectural treasures which constitute Havana City and others in the interior of the Island. Most of the construction systems used, imported from Eastern Europe Socialist countries, have collapsed together with this political project. If there is architecture in Cuba during this period, we could understand it as an aborted architecture, which failed both in its useful and aesthetic purposes.”<sup>2</sup>

The foregoing statement places architecture in a state of suspension, as a symbol of both the unrealized and the unbuilt. It references the broken potential of the Socialist state, imagining it as a metaphor for the failure of central planning or as a mechanism for the utopian organization of social life. In this sense, Foucault again proves incredibly instructive as he further elaborates on how the apparatus functions and what mobilizes it: “by the term ‘apparatus’ I mean a kind of a formation, so to speak, that at a given historical moment has as its major function the response to an urgency. The apparatus therefore has a dominant strategic function....”<sup>3</sup>

Surely the ideology of socialism in Cuba emerged at a moment of great political urgency. It served as a rallying point for the overthrow of a despised despotic regime. Cuba’s revolution therefore forms part of the continuum in the revolutionary processes of political ideology of the twentieth century against the forces of imperial power and capitalism. It is clear that the history of political ideology in the twentieth century was animated by the struggle between the utopian ideals of socialism and the defense of democratic capitalism. Part of this dispute was not only about the conception of politics and economic production, it was also about each of their differing ideals of democratic society and the role played by capital and labor in generating social goods that can be equitably distributed. Socialism conceived of politics and economic activity by placing the collective at the center—much as it was articulated by advocates of Third Cinea—over the individual through the diffusion of wealth, capital, and social goods. Capitalism, on the one hand does the reverse, placing the individual at the center— which is why

## B A R B A R A G R O S S G A L E R I E

Third Cinema rejected the basis of auteur cinema— and put the collective on the periphery, thus constituting an elite based on private accumulation. This difference in the conception of politics and society marks an important tension in the protocols of modern politics and the logics of autonomous art.

The principal reforms of modern politics since the beginning of the modern state have often hinged on the redistribution of power from the elite to the masses, from capital to labor, from autocracy and dictatorship to democracy and liberty, from institutions to individuals. Since the American War of Independence and the French Revolution, the ideal of individual liberty was what animated all considerations of social emancipation and therefore the doctrine of equal participation in the democratic process. Thus, politics responded to the nature of capital and its distributive potential to accomplish economic justice and ensure social equality in the conflict between workers and employers, the state and citizens.

In the context of socialism, however, economic production and benefits were deposed from their hierarchies, while social wellbeing was organized through shared risks and responsibilities. Political power seemingly rested in the hands of labor, namely the collective (society), the proletarian worker, and not in the tyrannical hands of capital and individual ownership. The experience of the twentieth century has shown that, in those countries and societies where there was neither political nor economic justice, and where tyrannical oligarchies maintained the monopoly of power, the theories of socialism and its utopian and emancipatory ideals in the organization of a just society had great appeal.

In the first half of the twentieth century, Cuba was a highly stratified society. The hierarchy of the social classes was maintained both in relation to race and class, labor and capital. Cuba was a society which subordinated a mass class of its citizens to the rule of the elite. The state was governed by a regime that was indifferent to both social equity and democratic principles. This placed Cuba in the firm grips of an oligarchy that was indifferent to the welfare of the labor force, and was ruled by a political dictatorship that denied its citizens full and equal participation in politics. Exacerbating this situation was the fact that Cuba, with its large African slave population, was historically developed by Spain as a plantation economy. As a result, democratic participation and social welfare were always inimical to the interests of the plantation owners.

In Cuba, political repression and economic inequality had been deeply socialized within its society. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, under the despotism of Fulgencio Batista (1901–1973), this historical legacy represented two dominant strains of political and economic hierarchy in Cuba.

The overthrow of that system and the introduction of a socialist regime without economic and racial inequality represented the ideological fulcrum of the insurgent and guerrilla movement led by Fidel Castro and Ernesto “Che” Guevera. It was their leadership toward the successful Cuban Revolution which has been at the center of Cuban life since 1959. However, the revolutionary potentials of power and ideology not only rested in the sphere of politics. They also informed the thinking of artists, especially the early avantgarde, who imagined not only new societies, but also new forms and representations.

From cinema to mass media, architecture to design, painting to sculpture, the projects of the 1920s radical avantgarde were conceived on the order of enacting a new reality of collectivization. From the curving spiral of Vladimir Tatlin’s giant utopian tower Monument to the Third

## B A R B A R A G R O S S G A L E R I E

International (1920) to Sergei Eisenstein's montage film Battleship Potemkin (1925) and Fritz Lang's film Metropolis (1927), new artistic conceptions of the struggle between past and future, utopia and dystopia, paralleled the debates around politics and ideology. The Cuban Revolution of 1959, like its predecessor and model, the Russian Revolution of 1917, is symptomatic of the search in the twentieth century for a conception of politics and an aesthetic of the masses over the democratic idealism of the individual. The Cuban revolution emerged at a specific historical moment, in the age of ideology, which meant that the emancipatory impulse that drove Castro, Guevara, and the insurgents to seek control of the state apparatus was not a Cuban issue alone, but a struggle over both ideology and representation. This struggle led to the triumph of the utopian potential of Socialism.

But it has left Cuba bankrupt and economically ostracized. While the dictatorial oligarchy was dismantled, the revolution did not lead to greater freedom for the masses. The country has been ruled not by the collective but by the party apparatus, thus further entrenching the very values of authoritarianism it sought to displace. This has left Cuba in ruins, not only economically but also politically, not only physically but psychically as well. Garaicoa's work is situated in the center of the ruin of the Cuban social realm by metonymically displacing its psychic violence into the scar of the urban space.

In his writing, Garaicoa restates the fact that Socialism is an imported phenomenon in Cuba, and as such is an alien force in a political landscape littered with derelict buildings and abandoned projects. Addressing this, he states: After the declining of European Socialism (author's italics), many Cuban architectural works and projects have been stopped and abandoned. In Havana, as in other cities of the country, idyllic and nostalgic ruins of the colonial era [another imported legacy] and the first republic coexist with the ruins of a social and political project that has come down. Hundreds of unfinished, disregarded, or momentarily (sic) forgotten buildings exist.... The encounter with these places evokes a rare sensation; they are not the ruins of a luminous past, but of a present inability. We face an architecture that has never been completed, poor in its incompleteness.... It is a true image of a ruin by abandonment; I will call it ruins of the future.<sup>4</sup>

In *Continuity of Somebody's Architecture*, Garaicoa begins by disowning this Potemkin dream of Socialism in order to restructure the rationality of Cuba's displaced architectural heritage. Starting with photographs of different buildings in various states of incompleteness and desolation—many of them overtaken by the growth of vegetation, as if they will disappear into a forest for later discovery by future archaeologists searching for the story of the Cuban revolution; and images of collapsed neobaroque architecture, some of them already a pile of rubble—he sketches out in drawings and models a project of both renovation of the heritage architecture and completion of the aborted Socialist architecture.

But in so doing he creates architectural hybrids that unite various symbols and therefore entangle them, between colonial and postcolonial, prerevolutionary modernism and postrevolutionary contemporaneity. Using drawings, photographs, and models, architectural schemes are extended and transformed, both by concretely humanizing them through placement in the current urban fabric, and by reimagining them through the renovation of extant buildings. The planning scheme is both a critique of the aesthetic of underdevelopment and a revision of the ideals of development.

Photographs of formerly abandoned buildings are collaged into new plans that synthesize the potential of reuse and recovery of the language of the original plan. Drawings focus attention not only on spatial ruptures, but point out elements of continuity that unify the urban fabric

## B A R B A R A G R O S S G A L E R I E

through the coexistence of historic heritage and contemporary forms. Various philosophical queries are posed in the design through the use of captions for different areas of the master plan. For example, in the project *Is the Human Body Equal to the Social Body?* one part employs drawing, watercolor, photography, sculpture, and model to address the tension between the self

and society, and in so doing exposes the aporia evident in the way Socialism unwittingly constructs a process of alienation and desubjectification by severing the relationship between the two. In this zone of separation between the human body and the social body, Agamben makes the observation concerning human beings and apparatuses, writing, “we have then two great classes: living beings (or substances) and apparatuses. And between these two, as a third class, subjects. I call a subject that which results from the relation and, so to speak, from the relentless fight between living beings and apparatuses.”<sup>5</sup>

Public Building as Greek Agora undertakes the task of examining that most ancient of Greek philosophy that inheres from the confrontation between citizenship and equality, with the agora signifying the space where these two positions are reflected. Then there is Garaicoa’s *Campus* or the *Babel of Knowledge*, which uses drawing, photography, sculpture, model, and video to engage concretely a broader plan of action, the space of intersection of knowledge, ideas, subjectivities, and so on. Throughout *Continuity of Somebody’s Architecture*, Garaicoa moves away from the singular formats of earlier work, which isolate discrete, individual units and buildings, to the multiple, cellular intersections of architecture and society. Through new plans and drawings, as well as through documentary photographs of existing buildings and constructions, the work elaborates a postrevolution plan for the Cuba that will come after the conflict of ideologies. In addition, in proposing a fresh course of action, Garaicoa’s model city equally admits the necessity of uniting the conditions of the failed political project and some of the repression embodied in the beauty of the colonial architecture. As such, this project is not the insertion of another utopian construct but rather a strategic intervention. He counterposes his own concept of the apparatus to that of the Socialist model. Here it is necessary, one last time, to evoke Michel Foucault on the nature of the apparatus and how Garaicoa’s continued investigations of architecture, urbanism, spatial practice, social ideals, politics, ideology, and contemporary art have been entangled in the last sixty years:

I said that the nature of an apparatus is essentially strategic, which means that we are speaking about a certain manipulation of relations of forces, of a rational and concrete intervention in the relations of forces, either so as to develop them in a particular direction, or block them, to

stabilize them, and to utilize them. The apparatus is thus always, inscribed into a play of power, but it is also always linked to certain limits of knowledge that arise from it and, to an equal degree, condition it. The apparatus is precisely this: a set of strategies of the relations of forces supporting, and supported by, certain types of knowledge <sup>6</sup>. As is so clear in this statement, Foucault’s idea of the apparatus is fundamentally linked to how the logic of capitalism defines the relations between labor and capital, between production and accumulation.

In 1959, when the revolutionary forces led by Fidel Castro took over Cuba, the motive was to interrogate the capitalist apparatus. But in so doing, it implemented its own idea of what an apparatus should be. Between these two forces were the Cuban people. It is the network of relations between them that is often constructed, albeit allegorically, in all of Garaicoa’s medi-

# B A R B A R A G R O S S G A L E R I E

tation on the state of the architectural form. Over the past two decades, his principal project has been to imagine how the vision of architecture can mediate the relation of forces between the human body and the social body, the citizen and the forces of political ideology, between individual subjectivity and the disciplinary power of the institution. But one must caution that the notion of the apparatus in Garaicoa's work is not invoked here as a sign of positivism, but as the task to unmask the unaccountability of power to incarcerate social life.

## (Endnotes)

1. Michel Foucault, quoted in Giorgio Agamben, "What Is an Apparatus?" and Other Essays, translated by David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 2.
2. Carlos Garaicoa, Continuity of Somebody's Architecture (Kassel: Documenta 11, 2002), 8.
3. Foucault, quoted in Agamben, 2.
4. Garaicoa, 9.
5. Agamben, 14.
6. Foucault, quoted in Agamben, 2.