

**THE INDIGENOUS AS AN ALLEGORICAL FIGURE  
IN ANTONIO CARO'S *HOMENAJE A MANUEL QUINTÍN LAME*  
AND CILDO MEIRELES' *ZERO CRUZEIRO***

by

Juan Andrés Gaitán,

B.F.A., Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design, 2002

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(The Department of Art History, Visual Art, and Theory; Art History)

We accept this thesis as conforming to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

October 2004

© Juan Andrés Gaitán, 2004



## Library Authorization

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the head of my department or by his or her representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

JOAN A. GAITAN

Name of Author (please print)

October 7 - 2004

Date (dd/mm/yyyy)

Title of Thesis: THE INDIGENOUS AS AN ALLEGORICAL FIGURE IN  
ANTONIO CARO'S 'HOMENAGE A MANUEL QUINTIN LAME' AND  
CILDO MEIRELES' 'ZERO CRUZEIRO'

Degree: MASTERS IN ARTS

Year: 2004

Department of Art History, Visual Art, and Theory

The University of British Columbia

Vancouver, BC Canada

## Abstract

This thesis will look at two works of art from the 1970s: *Homenaje a Manuel Quintín Lame* (1972) by the Colombian artist Antonio Caro, and *Zero Cruzeiro* (1974) by the Brazilian artist Cildo Meireles. In the context of this thesis these works are linked through the reference that both make to indigenous peoples. I argue that their reference to indigenous peoples is laden with a number of complexities that derive from the wide range of political concerns that these artworks addressed. The political panoramas of Colombia and Brazil during the 1970s were primarily framed by an opposition between the peasant movements, which had a nationalist programme, and capitalist developmentalism, which had an internationalist programme. In this sense, the representation of indigenous peoples depended on the spaces they might have occupied within local political landscapes. However, in Colombia and Brazil, the emergence of indigenous organizations, and their detachment from other organisms to which their own struggle for self-determination had been hitherto tied, was an important event during the early 1970s in both Colombia and Brazil. Thus the reference to the indigenous in these works also runs parallel to what is now called a "third space" in politics at the time. I argue that, even if indirectly, these works attended to the restructuring of strategies at the level of indigenous struggles for self-determination.

On a second level, I take issue with the ways in which these two works have been linked through the category Latin American Conceptualism, of which they figure today as important examples. This category has been structured around the idea that the works it represents are "more political" than the North American or European counterparts. In this thesis I question the validity of this claim on the basis of it being too superficial to be useful for expounding the complexities of the respective realities that surrounded these works at the time in which they emerged. In this sense, the reference that these works make to indigenous peoples provide an important way for approaching the specificities of the political realities outlined above, as well as a way to dislocate these works from facile generalization such as those found in categories such as Conceptualism or "Political Art."

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .....	ii
Table of Contents .....	iii
List of Illustrations .....	iv
Preface .....	vi
Acknowledgment .....	xix
CHAPTER ONE Introduction "The Figure of the Indian" .....	1
CHAPTER TWO     The Perplexed Sign: Antonio Caro's <i>Homenaje a Manuel Quintín Lame</i> (1972 - ) .....	11
CHAPTER THREE    The Dysfunctional Figure: Cildo Meireles' <i>Zero Cruzeiro</i> (1974-1978) .....	37
CONCLUSION .....	67
Figures .....	71
Bibliography .....	82



## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

<b>Figure 1:</b> Reproduction of lost original of Antonio Caro's <i>Homenaje a Manuel Quintín Lame</i> , original version from 1972	71
<b>Figure 2:</b> View of Installation of Caro's <i>Homenaje a Manuel Quintín Lame</i> , Salon de Artistas Universidad Jorge Tadeo Lozano, 1972	71
<b>Figure 3:</b> Image of Cildo Meireles' <i>Zero Cruzeiro</i> (1974 – 1978)	72
<b>Figure 4:</b> Antonio Caro's <i>SAL</i> (SALT) 1971	73
<b>Figure 5:</b> Antonio Caro's <i>Homenaje</i> , Version from 1979	74
<b>Figure 6:</b> Antonio Caro's <i>Homenaje</i> , Version from 1992	74
<b>Figure 7:</b> The artist Antonio Caro installing his work <i>El Imperialismo es un Tigre de Papel</i> (Imperialism is a paper tiger, Bogotá, 1972	75
<b>Figure 8:</b> View of installation of Antonio Caro's <i>Colombia/Marlboro</i> , Bogotá, 1973	75
<b>Figure 9:</b> Antonio Caro's <i>Coca-Cola Colombia</i> , 1976	75
<b>Figure 10:</b> Cildo Meireles' <i>Eureka/Blindhotland</i> , 1970-1975, photomontage	76
<b>Figure 11:</b> Cildo Meireles' <i>Eureka/Blindhotland</i> , 1970-1975, installation view	77
<b>Figure 12:</b> Cildo Meireles' <i>Money Tree</i> , 1969	78
<b>Figure 13:</b> Cildo Meireles' <i>Insertions into Anthropological Circuits</i> , 1971	78

<b>Figure 14:</b> Cildo Meireles' <i>Insertions into Ideological Circuits</i> , <i>Coca-Cola Project</i> , 1970 _____	79
<b>Figure 15:</b> Cildo Meireles' <i>Insertions into Ideological Circuits</i> , <i>Coca-Cola Project</i> , 1970, detail _____	79
<b>Figure 16:</b> Robert Indiana's <i>LOVE</i> , 1971 (1966) _____	80
<b>Figure 17:</b> Five Cruzeiro Banknote with portrait of Dom Pedro I, 1970 _____	81
<b>Figure 18:</b> Ten Cruzeiro Banknote with portrait of Dom Pedro II, 1970 _____	81
<b>Figure 19:</b> Model for a Five Hundred Cruzeiro banknote with the theme of "Ethnic Evolution," 1972 _____	81
<b>Figure 20:</b> One Cruzeiro banknote from the 1942 to 1967 series _____	81

## Preface

The two artworks addressed in this thesis, Antonio Caro's *Homenaje a Manuel Quintín Lame* (1972 - ) (**Figs. 1 and 2**) and Cildo Meireles' *Zero Cruzeiro* (1974-78) (**fig. 3**) have little in common. They are, of course, roughly contemporaneous, but this matters only inasmuch as we are able to bring other links into view. Both of these artists are from South America, a fact that may easily lead us to presuppose an affinity between them, a category perhaps; but the consideration of provenance is only useful when we lack other ways of engaging with a group of works that are more strictly historical, for what would prevent us from making a coincidental circumstance determinant? – provenance does not guarantee that these two works are related, nor does it mean that these two artists knew each other at the time, or even of each other, nor should it lead us to infer that they were roughly informed by similar artistic trends or similar political discourses. There is a great distance between Colombia and Brazil, there is little exchange in terms of economy, or politics, or culture, and the exchanges between the art-worlds here and there are rare<sup>1</sup>. Yet, in the end, this has not discouraged some writers from bringing these two works together, as in the category "Latin American Conceptualism".

In October of 1972, the Universidad Jorge Tadeo Lozano in Bogotá hosted a Salon of Artists famously known today as the *Salon de La Tadeo*. There is little photographic or written evidence that this was a significant event, or an interesting one for that matter, but word-of-mouth has ensured that it remains (even if just as a name) in the memory of the Colombian art circuit. This Salon was meant, at the time, as an alternative space set

---

<sup>1</sup> As a matter of fact, it was only in around 1978 that these two artists learned of each other's work, mostly through the writings of Frederico Moraes, an important Brazilian art-critic who was promoting a Latin Americanist project

against the orthodox, backward and well established *Salon Nacional de Artistas*, which still today functions as the principal institution for the exhibition and promotion (and prizing) of “professional” artists in Colombia. Even if these two Salons were at odds in their political positioning, Caro submitted works for both. For the latter he submitted a work titled *Aquí No Cabe el Arte* (“Art Doesn’t Fit Here”) which consisted of a list of names of people who had died or disappeared in the past two years due to political violence<sup>2</sup>. For the former, the *Salon de La Tadeo*, he submitted *Homenaje a Manuel Quintín Lame*, which is the subject of the second chapter. Lame, an important Paez indigenous leader that had been active mostly during the 1930s and 1940s, had died in 1967 of old age, and was slowly becoming an iconic figure of indigenous insurgency. For this now famous work (a work that was largely overlooked at the time), Caro chose to make a series of hand-made “imitations” of this indigenous leaders’ signature. But he chose only the last name (Lame) and the flourish (a hieroglyph with pseudo-pre-Columbian motifs), and blew these up, as a unit, to full-size sheets of paper. He hung these on the windows at the front of the building that housed the exhibition, so that they would be the first thing seen upon entering the Salon. Caro has made different subsequent versions of this work since 1972, for which he has chosen to include the complete signature, and where he has allowed himself more “free play” with the elements that were already there, in Lame’s own signature.

The second work I write about, which is the object of the third chapter, is Cildo Meireles’ *Zero Cruzeiro*. This work is part of a larger series of “hand-made” or “counterfeit” currency that the artist did, all of value ‘zero’: *Zero Centavo* (1974 - 78),

---

<sup>2</sup> This work was surely meant to disturb the idea, held mostly if not only by the ruling classes, that in Colombia political violence was a thing of the past, an important idealization of the present for, especially, developmentalists who wanted foreign capital to come into the country.

*Zero Dollar* (1978 - 82), and *Zero Cent* (1974 - 1982). For *Zero Cruzeiro*, Meireles produced his own series of bills, and gave them the value of 'zero'. He took the design of existing Cruzeiro banknotes, and made a number of "alterations": on the obverse, instead of the face of a "Leader" of the Nation (historical or present), he inserted the image of a man cuddled against a corner, with his back turned against the viewer, we will call this the 'dispossessed', or 'cornered man'. Below this image, he replaced the signatures of that validate the minting and emission of bills (the Presidents of the Monetary Council and of the Central Bank) with his own, single signature. At the top left and lower right corners of the bill, his initials prefigure the years of issuing (CM1974; CM1978), on top of which is the serial number, over-flooded with zeroes (A000000). On the reverse of this banknote, Meireles chose to replace the typical allegorical image of the nation (an image of natural wealth sometimes, sometimes of modernization, and sometimes of bucolic life), with an image of a nude indigenous man standing before an expansive tropical landscape, seemingly absentminded and unselfconscious. Even if on the basis of an arbitrary coincidence, *Zero Cruzeiro* gives me an opportunity to link Meireles' work with that of Antonio Caro, for both works are somewhat eccentric within the spectrum of works of "Latin American Conceptualism" in that they both represent 'the figure of the Indian', and they do so with aggravating ambiguity. In Caro's work, it is uncertain whether this is a serious, and respectful homage or (what seems to be more the case) an ironic gesture that responds to a number of ways in which indigenous peoples have been the object of appropriations and of political stratagems. We will see more about this in chapter 2. In the case of *Zero Cruzeiro*, it is uncertain whether the figure of the Indian is meant to be triumphant as a positive sign (that is, as the positive outcome of a true, radical change in the structure of reality) or as a negative sign (in which case this figure would signify the

sublimation of an archaism that is meant to be the source of many maladies in Brazilian culture). The object of the third chapter is to contemplate the several possible readings of this work.

This preface addresses three questions that have been posed at different times and which have been important in the direction that this thesis has taken. The first is the question of appropriation. Since the works I look at in the next chapters present us with what I call here 'the figure of the Indian' (I will explain this term in the first chapter), it became increasingly evident to me that I had to take issue with the problem of appropriation, and clarify how it was that these two works appropriated the Indian *qua* figure – the figure of an allegory. The political and ideological charge – the charges on the basis of an epistemic violence – that we now hold *against* appropriation were not so clearly defined during the 1970s, and were indeed in the process of being defined. Today we understand it as the relatively or absolutely irresponsible and violent use of the image (stereotype, for example) of an "other", even if for an apparently positive project. The question of appropriation is, to use Deleuze's words, a matter of "the indignity of speaking for others"<sup>3</sup>, a question of 'representation'. When I began to think about the topic for this thesis, I found it important to note that in the 1970s two artists considered to be Latin American Conceptualists, the Colombian Antonio Caro, and the Brazilian Cildo Meireles, had independently produced a couple of works that, as I would have put it then, "dealt with the question of indigenous peoples". I began my research (the little research I could do from Vancouver on two works from two very different South American countries) with

---

<sup>3</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault, "Intellectuals and Power," in *Desert Islands and Other Texts* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004): 209.

the naïve hope that I would find that, for the first time in the history of Latin American art, two artists had decided to pay attention to the rift that has existed between representations of the Indian and indigenous peoples themselves. Indeed, this dilemma would have not been foreign to discourses around art and philosophy during the 1970s. It was a somewhat Sartrean dilemma of the *for-itself* against the *in-itself*. The Indian for-itself as the live, vivid, glittering and organic representation of a conglomeration of misconceptions and stereotypes that had, in truth, nothing to do with indigenous peoples themselves, and which came from a variety of disciplines such as archaeology, anthropology, science, the law, philosophy and, of course, art itself. Or the Indian in-itself as an expressive subject with claims to difference and the right to change, one that would not be expected to remain always the same, to act according to what is anticipated by normative notions and discourses, and with an unalienable tendency to regain a sense of individuality and uniqueness. These two works looked quite interesting and positive, and this was the position from which I began my work on them. Slowly, through a number of changes and after very many questions (especially questions of appropriation) I was able to realize that there were two important problems when approaching these works, one was methodological, the other merely empirical.

As I was well ahead in the process of writing this thesis, one of my readers made the remark that it was looking more art critical than art historical. This remark (perhaps it was a question of why) is important, since it forces me to say something about the way in which I have approached these works. In an article from 1991 Donald Preziosi suggests that these two disciplines (art history and art criticism) share a fundamental question: they both wish to find out the "truth" of the artwork. However, he also tells us – and this is something I believe – that the object of art history is history itself, and that artworks are but

an "occasion" to speak of historical problems. But the problems I have encountered are twofold, one relates to the historical period in which these works were produced (the early 1970s), and the other to the historical moment in which they were catalogued as works of Latin American Conceptualism (the late 1980s). Firstly, as it is the norm, I began to read the literature that had been written on these works and on other works of the period, as well as on Latin American Conceptualism. And I recognized in these writings the construction of a rather vague category: *Political Art*. For example, in her famous essay "Blueprint Circuits: Conceptual Art and Politics in Latin America," Mari Carmen Ramirez tell us that since the 1960s Latin American countries entered into a phase of anti-democratic, totalitarian regimes (she speaks of Latin America although she is referring to Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Chile) which helps her give the argument that these works were "necessarily" political. Speaking about works such as those I analyse in this thesis, and those of for example Luis Camnitzer, Alfredo Jaar, or Victor Grippo, Ramirez tells us that

"All of the artists discussed here experienced authoritarianism, in its psychological and material forms, either as internal or external exiles. Translating this experience artistically in a significant way could proceed only from giving new sense to the artist's role as an active intervener in political and ideological structures."

From here we are then to assume that the works that these artists make could not be read in any way if not against the background of a troubled social and political climate with which the artists had an affective and a material relationship. This category of political art (or political-conceptual art, as Mari Carmen Ramirez calls it), had also the benefit of locating these Latin American Conceptual artworks as paradigmatic in how Latin American art *in general* was to be viewed, even retrospectively. From here onwards, it was to become nearly impossible to repeat the old, stereotypical notions according to which



Latin America was the land of the Fantastic, that its art was baroque, that life there had the aftertaste of a Greek tragedy. These works were, in short, serious. And very rational. They remained cool even when faced with the overabundant, sensual, and violently political reality of Latin America.

The category Political Art (expressed through the works of Latin American Conceptualism) produced what we might call an *inessential* Latin America. Not grounded on a genealogical lifting of subsequent moments of miscegenation and cultural encounters, but upon the unifying and centralizing power of despotic regimes. It would follow that artists from the 1970s could not help but share a fundamental experience, even without being conscious of this fact.

Thus, if this thesis remains half-way (or perhaps even less) between an art-critical and an art-historical essay, this is because in a way I wanted to both take issue with the debates that have recently produced the categories "Latin American Conceptualism", and its derivation, "Political-Art". I wanted to show how these texts that have permeated an international(ist) conception of art from Latin America left behind some stereotypes, but allowed for other ones to emerge, mostly in relation to the idea that, since artists from these peripheral countries were "soaked" in politics, their work was already infused with a vitality that could only have been dreamed of by the historical avant-gardes. I recognized a number of ways in which, directly or obliquely, artworks could be understood as being, so to speak, *engagé* – involved with politics, with social life, a whole range of possible avant-gardist strategies that would seem to us to be quite successful. What I was confronted with, as much as other readers of these essays and articles I am referring to (the critic Gerardo Mosquera, the artist Luis Camnitzer, etc), was the idea that in Latin America art was *necessarily* political and thus it was there that we were to find the positive

actualization of the avant-garde, an art that was truly immersed in, and dispersed, across the public sphere: in other words, a truly “democratic” set of artistic practices. This affirmative view can be found in for example the writings of Mari Carmen Ramirez, especially her essay “Blueprint Circuits”, where she draws from a rather reduced group of South American countries (Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay) that miraculously become representative of Latin America.

Indeed, from the proto-avant-gardist overtones of her line of reasoning, Ramirez goes on to suggest a full-fledged actualization of the ideal of the traditional avant-gardes, saying, later on in the same essay, that “the acts of “reinsertion” carried out by these artists are intended to reinvest objects with social meaning. The ready-made, then, becomes an instrument for the artists’ critical intervention in the real, a stratagem by which patterns of understanding may be altered, or a site established for reinvesting reality with meaning.”<sup>4</sup> But these arguments, whether possible or fictive, are still articulated upon a much deeper problem that has been affecting the understanding of Latin America and other places considered today to be “marginal” (almost all of them once belonging to the so-called Third World). It derives from an anthropological construction famously known as the ‘native informant’, an individual whose intimate relationship with the studied culture and social-political environment gives her/him agency (for the curious outsider, of course) as representative of an entire society and an entire culture. Thus, every time we encounter an exhibition of artworks that has been framed in terms of a geopolitical space, be this an area, a nation, or a more provincial setting, we are confronted with traces of a predicament of representation that we have not been able to solve properly.

---

<sup>4</sup> Mari Carmen Ramirez, “Blue Print Circuits,” in Alberro and Stimson eds. *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999): 550-563.

I would not claim to solve this predicament in this thesis. My aim, furthermore, was not to establish whether the artworks that are addressed in this thesis *are*, or *are not* political. These works are unquestionably engaged, in some way, with the political climates that they address. But I wanted to see *in which ways* it was that they were engaged with those political discourses. The *how* was therefore important here. And it quickly became a matter of the effect that understanding these works in one or other way would have on the ways we see them today. Here we may retake Preziosi's point that art criticism and art history (amongst other institutions) share a common desire to reveal a "truth" about the artwork. The artwork as "evidence" of either an interiority (as in the artists' intentionality) or a milieu (as in appears in ideological critique) still haunts us at the moment of looking at art. For instance, in 2001 the San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art hosted an exhibition called *Ultrabaroque: Aspects of Post-Latin American Art*, organized by Elizabeth Armstrong. In her essay for this exhibition, Armstrong speaks of all the regular predicaments of the contemporary world – "eroding borders," "virtual and reality," "global and local," "education and entertainment" – and she tells us that "the artists represented in *Ultrabaroque*<sup>5</sup> embrace such contradictions *in their work and their lives*.

In this era of global villages, cultures, economies, and networks, which is defining our future in ways we don't yet understand, *the baroque resurfaces as a model for coming to terms with the challenges presented by this transnational period*. Rather than emphasizing assimilation, these artists,

---

<sup>5</sup> The artists that were included in this exhibition were either sons of families who had migrated to different English Speaking countries (mainly the United States, and Australia), or artists who had migrated themselves, or artists who were still living in countries of Latin America. It was a small exhibition, but it certainly flirted with the possibility of reinstituting old notions of Latin America through a number of works that were supposed to function upon a "baroque attitude", that is (we assume) an intermixing of sources of cultural production, both popular and relating to a canon of modern art, which were supposed to "express" the nature of everyday life from a (post) Latin American perspective.

underline difference and valorise imperfection ... Their work *reflects* the hybrid character of their time, the unique fusion of ideas, tastes, and cultures that distinguishes the present from other eras."<sup>6</sup>

Attempting to locate the ways in which the works presented in this thesis were engaged with politics would perhaps have ended in a similar attitude towards the artwork. The artwork, as Preziosi would say, is not a piece of "evidence", but an "occasion" for speaking of something. Thus, what I present in the following pages is a number of possible readings that I have related to a number of issues that were present during the 1970s and for which it is nearly impossible to establish a chart of valences and of relative importance:

1 - 'The Figure of the Indian': the phrasing here is meant to point out that indigenous peoples, and an indigenous cause as we see it gaining impetus today, were not so much an active part of the discourses with which I am concerned here – that is, the predominant discourses – but more as a 'figure' that was borrowed, contested, appropriated, or discarded according to the needs and agendas of the most predominant parties, such as the traditional Left, or the Right, the government, environmentalists, developmentalists, etc.

2 - The Third World: this was, as Fredric Jameson has noted, the period of the end of the wave of wars of liberation, and the end of international communist parties. But this was not a quiet ending, and I believe that even though somewhat disillusioned, possible utopias were still sought during the 1970s.

3 - Utopia: this is meant as a reference point, as a model, it points at a certain dying discourse, but it also makes evident a number of optimistic views that, even if they seem

---

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Armstrong, "Impure Beauty," in *Ultrabaroque: Aspects of Post-Latin American Art*, (San Diego: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2001): 17-18. (Emphases added).

naïve today, were very sophisticated, and sprung from an at least interesting understanding of capitalist culture.

4 - Allegory: my use of this term merits an explanation, which brings us to the third question I want to address here, the question of how it is that I use the idea of allegory. Since this question came rather unexpectedly, I was forced to engage with it. This quickly took me to places that have become important here. To be sure, my use of this term is functional, as in the idea of a National Allegory. This is true for Manuel Quintín Lame, in the sense that he went on to represent (and somewhat embody) the Indigenous Cause in Colombia. Although this was not yet the case when Caro made his *Homage*, it was surely a process that was well underway, with the publication of books on his life and writings, and later with the formation of a guerrilla front that adopted his name. It is all the more true for the figure of the Indian that appears in Meireles' *Zero Cruzeiro*. Since this figure represents a whole people, it is not only forced into the space of allegorical speech, but it is also unrecoverable, which is why we do not expect this figure to represent an individual – the individual that is standing before us – with a proper name, and a singular life. If one thing is true for allegory *in general*, it is that the figure of the Indian is at the same time *always allegorical* for a dominant discourse on the Modern Nation, and that as a result *all indigenous peoples are living allegories*. If I state this so dramatically, and so reductively (there are certainly exceptions) it is only to emphasize the violent situation in which indigenous peoples of Latin American countries must live. It is, for example, due to this “negative” allegorical character that still today indigenous peoples are acknowledged as *such* only in relation to the degree of resemblance to what a normative discourse has idealized as the “true” indigenous character. We can see an important account of this tendency in a recent book by Jonathan W. Warren titled *Racial Revolutions: Antiracism*

*and Indian Resurgence in Brazil*. In this book Warren tells us, for example, that the so-called assimilated Indians of Brazil must go through painful and humiliating circumstances in order to prove that they are indeed indigenous if they wish to have access to the benefits that have been accorded to indigenous peoples alone. In Colombia, in a recent gathering of indigenous peoples, someone jokingly stated that they should invent the *indimetro* (*Indian-meter*). In Canada, there have been important debates round the question of the "urbanized" Indian (which should not be a question at all), who is seen as being inauthentic, merely because they do not live in what is considered to be their "natural habitat". Alcida Rita Ramos gives an example of this too, when she tells us that environmentalists and NGOs have supported indigenous peoples only from the perspective of their own interests, imposing on them old stereotypes such as those of the "pure", "primitive" interpenetration with nature, respect for nature, etc., but, as soon as indigenous tribes and groups show signs of wanting to capitalise on their own land, environmentalists and NGOs turn against them with litanies of moralistic accusations<sup>7</sup>. Thus, it is important to note that, in context of this thesis, allegory is best understood as an assembly whereby a singular figure (the figure of the Indian, for example) is forced into a space of representation where it becomes a sign of something, *of many things*, that exceed the individuality of this figure<sup>8</sup>.

Lastly, in trying to establish what exactly allegory meant here, I also attempted to establish the difference between Allegory and Utopia, since both are forms of speech that

---

<sup>7</sup> Alcida Rita Ramos, *Indigenism, Ethnic Politics in Brazil* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998)..

<sup>8</sup> On other hand, it is necessary to mention that the question of Allegory has been a prevalent and contested one in the space of literature, and in discussions on Latin American art, literature and culture. An example that is quite accessible in the famous debate between Fredric Jameson and Aijaz Ahmad, which took place in the pages of *Social Text*, in 1986-1987.

tend to unify and solidify a number of scattered, often unrelated elements. Louis Marin's book *Utopics: Spatial Play* proved incredibly useful to me, because in showing "utopics" as a changing model of the future, it established it in the space of abstraction (and judgment), while Allegory has the tendency to reify. In other words, utopic discourse begins with the present and produces a model of the future against which present actions are evaluated; allegory begins with an idea (as in the idea of the National Subject) and desperately tries to make it seem "real", it imbues a singularity with a meaning that exceeds it. One works as a space for reflection, the other functions in the way of faith. I approach *Homenaje a Manuel Quintín Lame* from the perspective of allegory, since I locate the signature as being both allegorical (in that it represents an Indigenous Cause that Quintín Lame himself made cohesive) and utopian (in that it is also meant to represent what he called "the image of his thought", an idea of the future as a place where indigenous peoples would have been emancipated from their already historical forms of oppression). I claim that Caro's homage arrests the utopian character of this signature and re-articulates it within the context of competing factions in which the Indian was figured in different and convenient ways. For *Zero Cruzeiro* I begin with an allegorical reading that has been given by the prominent art critic Paulo Herkenhoff, and then flesh it out until it becomes possible to see a utopic discourse at play, albeit one in which it is unclear whether the Indian is figured in a positive or in a negative way. In the following chapter, I will be explaining a couple of important points about the figure of the Indian and the Question of the Indigenous.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my readers, Professor Rita Eder whose support and guidance throughout the past two years has been profoundly significant for the ways in which I now look at the issues presented in this thesis; and Dr. Carol Knicely, whose exciting and perceptive comments are present in the most stimulating parts of this thesis. I also thank the people at UBC who have been with me for these past two years, and whose friendship and work have been inspiring. I would also like to thank my good friends Sadira Rodríguez, Monika Szewczyk, and Corin Sworn for the thought-provoking discussions on these works. Finally I would like to thank my family, who might not know very well what I have been up to in the past years, but who haven't let that obscurity affect their unconditional support.



## Introduction: "The Figure of the Indian"

The way we look at Latin American art practices today, even in retrospect, is informed by a series of re-definitions and re-categorizations (re-Writings, to use a term from that time) that took place during the late 1980s and early 1990s.<sup>9</sup> Most, if not all of these, were geared towards providing new ways for looking at Latin America; ways that didn't see it as homogeneous geopolitical body, and which placed our gaze on the cultural specificities rather than on what were hitherto considered essential characteristics. The idea of Latin American Conceptualism emerged within this new need, perhaps

---

<sup>9</sup> Of these we can distinguish Tzvetan Todorov, *La Conquete de l'Amerique: la question de l'autre*, (Paris: Seuil, 1982); Néstor García Canclini, *Culturas Híbridas: Estrategias para Entrar y Salir de la Modernidad*, (Mexico: Grijalbo, 1989); Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: literacy, territoriality and colonization*, (Ann Arbor: U. Michigan Press, 1995); and the writers included in Gerardo Mosquera ed., *Beyond the Fantastic: Contemporary art criticism from Latin America*, (London: IVA, 1995). It is worth noting here that this publication assembled together texts by different writers from different places in Latin America, providing a good compendium of essays that have been important for the understanding of certain local problematics. In doing this, Mosquera edited a book that, through the conjunction of many voices, and the support of important editorials, made it impossible to sustain the reductive views that were being offered in exhibitions and writings about Latin America. But it is also a publication that takes after the Reader model, which is suspicious in itself, for attempting to provide an overall impression of a certain place, or a certain academic dialogue. An analysis of the "Reader" might reveal that, as one reads through the introductions, one notices that all of them begin with a disclaimer, and one wonders whether disclaiming something is enough to justify the act. This bears a strange analogy to the claim that "Latin American art has ceased to exist", as Gerardo Mosquera once put it. And yet it is still with us, and he is still one of the central cultural attachés for Latin American art in the world-circuit. More recently, the prefix "post-" entered as a way for replacing Mosquera's disclaimer (that Latin American art does not exist) in the exhibition *Ultra-Baroque: Aspects of Post-Latin American Art*, organized at the San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art in 2001. Here "post-Latin America" became a way of renouncing the idea that artists "represent" Latin America. But, instead, these artists came to represent the diverse Latin American cultures, reinstituting strange conceptions about the present vis-à-vis the past, and about the artist vis-à-vis society. "Just as the baroque era was a time of choices – people could choose a different faith, a different occupation, even a different part of the world to live in – so today we are barraged with "lifestyle" options. The eroding borders of contemporary life between virtual and reality, global and local, education and entertainment ... present us with unfathomable possibilities and choices. The artists represented in *Ultrabaroque* embrace such contradictions in their work and their lives." (Emphasis added) Elizabeth Armstrong, "Impure Beauty," in *Ultrabaroque: Aspects of Post-Latin American Art* (San Diego: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2001) p.17.

because the series of works that it represents are supposed to be “politicized,” or *engagé*.<sup>10</sup> What these works have in common, if we want to see them as belonging to a general category, is that they responded “rationally” to the highly irrational political panorama of the 1960s and 1970s and, and “formally” to the absurd social structure of the time. But this does not mean that these works are “more political” than works of North American or European Conceptualism, which is the underlying rhetoric in almost all texts we find today about Latin American Conceptualism. Rationality (or the concept) and formalism (or a treatment of icons and a use of formal aspects specific to art) were at the time, to use an old-fashioned term, “dialectically opposed” to reality, which made no sense. As we see briefly in Chapter Two, making sense of this reality was a pervasive practice, reflected in the numerous articles on newspapers and magazines on diverse topics that were at the time considered to be “hot.” But among the numerous groups involved in addressing an ever-changing range of political and social concerns, there was one that is now conspicuous, but which was at the time, if we can take some liberty with language, “subterranean:” it was the emergence of indigenous organizations.

Among the few texts that today circulate in the English speaking world, “Latin America” seems to be no more than a name that stitches together a content that is on the verge of collapsing, and which can only be tangentially referred: we now have a Latin America that is neither Old nor New, whose Modernity remains incomplete, weighed

---

<sup>10</sup> Recently, the term “Conceptualism” was used to suggest “Conceptual Art” as an artistic practice that, around the 1960s, constituted what could be called a “contemporaneity” all over the world. The exhibition was structured according to regions that sometimes coincided with continents (as in Latin America) and sometimes according to the divisions between socialist and capitalist nations. This exhibition remains as the most spectacular attempt at “de-centering” conceptualist practices, although one could argue that it also unifies scattered practitioners that, at least in the case of Latin America, rejected the term “conceptualism”. Cf. Camnitzer, et al, *Global Conceptualism* (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999).

down by violence and made up by a number of phenomena that can be seen as pre-modern, a-modern, proto- or anti-capitalist, and so on. It seems that Latin America is held together by a number heterogeneous, pluralistic, multicultural, multi-ethnic tensions and disruptions, voids and gaps, contradictions and aporias, and so on, producing an *inessential* Latin America that remains strangely justified. And in this sense, it seems necessary to find other ways to construct Latin America, or new "global" links that exceed geopolitics and which force us to find new cartographies based on the exchange of what Stuart Hall has called "conceptual frontiers," which I take to mean the space at which any given "idea" or "concept" undergoes a process of cultural translation.<sup>1112</sup> We must therefore see if we can identify this sinister force, if we can take apart its workings, find the space where we can no longer claim anything as an "expression" of Latin America. It is in this space that we may find, for example, that within the essentialist fantasies of nature, the tropical jungles of the South find an odd correlative in the cold Rainforests of the North; or that within the capitalist and modernist fantasies about rural living, the stereotype of the 'passive Indian' resonates with certain Hollywood dreams about Tibet.

This thesis springs from the suspicion that, in the present, indigenous peoples have become the figure of this a endeavour to give Latin America a more "real" grounding, because they make it seem more *urgent* to deconstruct old stereotypical notions of

---

<sup>11</sup> Stuart Hall, "Creolité and the Process of Creolization," *Documenta 11* (2002): 27.

<sup>12</sup> The essay "Los Límites de Macondo" ("The Limits of Macondo") by the Colombian writer Carlos Rincón is an exceptional exemplification of this last point.<sup>12</sup> This to the extent to which Rincón sees that the "adaptations" of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in diverse literatures around the world were determined not by the sole merit of the book but by the ways in which it was able to become an "event" in literature: "As a reflection about history and about the problematics of historical models, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* confronted at least seven discourses within itself: that of sacred history, that of a cyclic vision, of a history *by* generations, a history of the sign, a national history in terms of dependency theories, an entropic history, as well as narrative versions of the passage from nature to culture that move between myth and alchemy." Carlos Rincón, "Los Límites de Macondo", in *Mapas y Pliegues*, (Bogotá: Colcultura, 1996): 13-62.

passivity, nature, fantasy, and “primitiveness”, since they are today figures of oppression and marginalization<sup>13</sup>. The right to self-determination certainly places a significant opposition to these endeavours that attempt to speak *for* indigenous peoples, but it certainly hasn’t fully dismantled them<sup>14</sup>. However, instead of dwelling into the ways in which indigenous peoples are figured today, within the space of what we call “identity politics,” I begin by looking at a period, between the early to mid-1970s, that seems pivotal for many reasons. For one, it was a moment when indigenous peoples began to organize themselves independently from other organizations such as peasant movements, to which their cause had remained subdued for a few decades. In Brazil, for instance, the anthropologist Alcida Rita Ramos tells us that this separation was encouraged by non-indigenous organizations in large part because the indigenous cause promised to be a useful space “to be used opportunistically as a platform from which to launch attacks concerning the breach of rights of the Brazilian citizenry at large.”<sup>15</sup> But this also meant that indigenous peoples were beginning to establish their rights to self-determination. In Brazil, Ramos tells us, the Pan-Indian movement began to consolidate during the early 1970s, through several regional Indian meetings that were at first sponsored by the CIMI

---

<sup>13</sup> I do not claim that texts coming *from* Latin America are attempting to do this, for it is clear that those texts, at least for the most part, respond to local phenomena. The exchanges that take place within Latin America, between different writers and scholars, have a very clear sense that the sharing of knowledge is not comparable to the sharing of experiences. This does not seem so clear “outside” of Latin America.

<sup>14</sup> We see this today in, for example, the environmentalist and neo-hippie romance with their idealizations of the indigenous as a being interpenetrated with nature. It can also be seen in ways in what we may call the “aesthetization” of cultural diversity in posters and adds that take pseudo-anthropological motifs to attract tourism. But also in the academic world, as in the Duke University Press series *Latin America Otherwise*, which has taken almost full monopoly over the publication of texts concerning the Latin American Subaltern.

<sup>15</sup> This was mainly due to the fact that speaking for, for example, the workers would entail much more severe acts of censorship and retaliation from the State. Ramos, 114 – 118.

(Catholic Indigenist Missionary Council),<sup>16</sup> from which they became quickly detached. The same is true for Colombia, where the first meetings of the CRIC (Indigenous Council of the Cauca Region) were held in 1971, after which they became consolidated. At the same time, two legislative acts were passed by the Colombian government: the Law 31 of 1967 (July 19) "in which is approved the International Labour Organization's Convention No. 107 (Geneva 1957) relating to the protection and integration of Indigenous peoples"; and the more aggressive Decree No. 1741 (August 1973) which regarded indigenous peoples' cultural autonomy, although it also stated the necessity to aid indigenous peoples in "their integration to national development". The complex political environments that surrounded this emergence of indigenous organizations will be addressed in the chapters that lie ahead.

The scope of this undertaking seems already too broad, and thus I will approach it through a peculiar case: Latin American Conceptualism; and all the questionings will be converging onto a single theme: "the figure of the Indian", or the ways in which the Indian has been figured across what is conceived as a troubled political field. More specifically, I approach this topic through two works of art, Antonio Caro's *Homenaje a Manuel Quintín Lame* (1972- ) and Cildo Meireles' *Zero Cruzeiro* (1974-78). Since I use them as a way to enter into more historical problematics (of politics, economy, and the public sphere), these two works provide a way to approach a discussion on the ways in which, within those discourses, indigenous peoples were figured at the time. Tangentially, they also provide a way to question the ways in which, through the category Conceptualism, they are inscribed within works of "political art" without fully addressing *how* it is that they are engaged with politics. In this sense, this thesis is not about these artworks themselves. The

---

<sup>16</sup> Ramos, 119.

artworks provide me with an *occasion* to speak of these problematics in relation to the cases of Colombia and Brazil. They provide me with this occasion because, instead of linking them through questions predetermined by the category Conceptualism (which are useful if one wishes to speak of ideological and economic issues) I link them through the question of Indigenous peoples, which is referred to by both works, even if in a problematic way. At the same time, it is not indigenous peoples themselves that are referenced in these works of art, since what appears in them is what I call "The Figure of The Indian" – that is, a representation of indigenous peoples that seems to be iconic. But it is precisely in the way in which they make reference to indigenous peoples that they seem to be unconventional in the context of Latin American art. While they present us with "figures of the Indian," they do so in a way that cannot be easily situated, or directly linked, to how indigenous peoples had hitherto been figured in Latin American art in general. They do not present us with an icon of the Indian (of the National Indian), but with a figure of representation that is not meant to be "realistic" – and hence not to be identified with a concrete reality – but much more ambiguous and diffuse. To approach these works as if they were appropriations or attempted representations of indigenous peoples would not account for the fact that they present the figure *as it is being appropriated* in the space of politics. They do not "construct" an image as much as they "use" constructed images. As gestures, these two works respond to dominant political discourses, not to the problematics of indigenous peoples as such. And they are useful for fleshing out some of the ways in which indigenous peoples were being figured within these dominant discourses. How they appeared, how certain stereotypes were reproduced and recycled, how others were made up.

Before approaching the topics discussed in the following chapters we must address two discourses that I bring together in a more or less arbitrary way: "The Indian Question" and "Latin American Conceptualism". "The Indigenous Question" is the term that is used, in Latin America, to refer to the peculiar discrepancy between state-national developmentalist politics and indigenous communities' civil and cultural rights. The term has a history at least as long as the history of each nation-state<sup>17</sup>, which means that, more than representing the conflict itself, it represents the contempt of the ruling classes towards indigenous communities. However, what we call The Indigenous Question does not have a singular sense. This is because it is a question that doesn't expect an answer or, better yet, it is a question that is always implying its own answers. Its meaning is contingent upon the milieu; upon the one who poses the question; and upon the historical moment. The same is true for the kinds of responses we are to anticipate. We may expect, for instance, that the concerns of a "Father of Liberation Theology" such as Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas would be radically different from those that the indigenous leader Manuel Quintín Lame would have in the early to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. We may also expect (and indeed we see) that the questions asked by Manuel Quintín Lame are not the same as those asked by indigenous organizations of the 1970s. Thus, we can't assume that the ways in which indigenous peoples are figured in art remains the same, which is why I take issue with Antonio Caro's and Cildo Meireles' works. The Indigenous Question (what the Brazilian anthropologist Alcida Rita Ramos calls the "Indian Issue"<sup>18</sup>) is therefore a

---

<sup>17</sup> This does not mean that there was no conflict between indigenous peoples and dominant classes before the formation of nation-states in Latin America. But I take issue with these topics here only in relation to the ways in which indigenous peoples appeared as a "question" within a developmentalist and libertarian mentality typical of the formation of modern nations. Older forms of this discourse exist, but those are encompassed in what we call "Indigenismo".

<sup>18</sup> Ramos.

question of encounters: of the encounter of indigenous peoples with the modern state, and of their encounter with a modern economic system. It is also, and more so, a question of an encounter where representation takes a crucial role. It is a question against nonsense, whatever the perspective may be: the bourgeoisie wonders about the Indian's inanity; while the Indian wonders about the stupidity of the White Man's acts. It may be, as Ramos suggests, a matter of interethnicity, as long as this doesn't mean that the "question" leaves out things that we consider to be cultural: the structure of the law and the sense of justice, the economic system, and an idea of what it is to exist.

Here, for the purposes of elucidation, I will provisionally take up the term "The Indigenous Question"<sup>19</sup>, which is often interchanged with "the indigenous problem," in order to give name to a particular discourse, the main sides of which are, on one end "Indigenismos" as a rhetoric tied to the interests of the modern state, and on the other grass-roots indigenous movements. I take it because while it names a conflict, it doesn't imply a "side", but three sides, or three complementary factors which must be distinguished within this modern state-national discourse on indigenous communities: 1) indigenous rights movements and organizations geared towards self-determination; 2) the social-political aspect (a paternalistic, protectionist legislation that is traceable to at least the xvi century; and the enforcement of these laws that invariably takes an oppressive form against indigenous peoples); and 3) an artistic and literary tradition that naively serves an oppressive social-political program. The first aspect will appear in the following chapters as an opposition to the normative discourses that were going around at the time.

---

<sup>19</sup> This term is used here only in a functional way, in order to elucidate a point. But it is a term that I have also been analyzing in my search to distinguish between Indigenismos and the larger schema within which Indigenismos, artistic representations of indigenous peoples, and indigenous grass-roots movements are caught.



It is the second aspect (normally known as *Indigenismos*) that will concern us in the context of this thesis, since it is the one I think the works address. The third aspect, which, in the context of Peru, the critic Mirko Lauer has called *Indigenismo 2*,<sup>20</sup> relates to a phenomenon that roughly began in 1920: the construction of the Indian as the pre-historic foundation of the National Subject. In this sense, indigenous peoples became, as I've claimed in the preface, "living allegories" of a national past. And as they were figured as a pre-historic foundation, they served as a way to lay claim on the land upon which the Nation was located. At the same time, through these constructions of the indigenous as the national subject's living past, it became possible to create an ethnic category for the construction of allegories of the nation. In Colombia this was attempted in the works of a group of artists known as "Los Bachué", some of who had first-hand contact with the Mexican Muralists, and took after their mythologizing appropriation of a pre-Columbian aesthetic. It is significant that these "movement" coincides with the time of Manuel Quintín Lame's life as an Indian activist, roughly between 1920 and 1960. In Brazil, this construction was visible in, for example, the positivisation of the "bad savage" in the *Pau Brasil* manifesto of the avant-gardist movement of the 1920s<sup>21</sup>.

The first chapter, titled *The Perplexed Sign*, looks at how Caro's reproduction of a fragment of Manuel Quintín Lame can be useful in order to show that, within the political panorama of 1970s Colombia, a new "figure of the Indian" was emerging. The suggestion

---

<sup>20</sup> For Lauer, whose perception is perhaps too generous, the works of art (by bourgeois artists) that are associated with *Indigenismo 2* did not participate in official discourses willingly, despite the fact that their effect was detrimental to the understanding of, and attitude towards indigenous peoples by the ruling classes. Cf. Mirko Lauer, *Andes Imaginarios: Discursos del Indigenismo 2* (Lima: Sur Casa de Estudios del Socialismo, 1997).

<sup>21</sup> As we see in Meireles' chapter, the Brazilian critic Roberto Schwarz questions this aspect of Oswald de Andrade's *Pau Brasil* manifesto, and its resurgence during the 1970s, on the basis of it taking the abstract Brazilian, without class specifications, as their subject. Roberto Schwarz, *Misplaced Ideas*, (London: Verso, 1992).

is that the emerging indigenous organizations began to complicate simplistic relationships to indigenous peoples in both the arts and in politics. *Homenaje a Manuel Quintín Lame* is thus seen as responding to the perplexity with which one must have viewed the eroded and unstable political and social environment at the time. In the second chapter, titled *The Dysfunctional Figure*, I use Meireles' *Zero Cruzeiro* as a way to uncover distinctions between two different categories of citizenship: the Indian and the dispossessed. There I speak of the impasses that are to be found if one wishes to read this work in terms of a contemporary understanding of "identity politics." The two figures that appear on either side of the banknote are used, one vis-à-vis the other, in order to give a series of possible relationships that may take place. The conclusion is that these two figures cannot be assumed independently from the systems that the work critiques: the art-circuit and the economy. In the following pages I therefore show that, in these two works, the figure of the Indian appears as a way to lay claim on a specificity that is more "real" or "profound" – even archaic – than the pseudo-internationalist discourses that were taking place at the time in the respective countries.

## The Perplexed Sign: Antonio Caro's *Homenaje a Manuel Quintín Lame* (1972 - )

The circumstances that surrounded Antonio Caro's first exhibition of his work *Homenaje a Manuel Quintín Lame* are quite peculiar (**Figs. 1 and 2**). A quick account may be here useful, for these circumstances condense what was going on in national politics at large. *Homenaje a Manuel Quintín Lame* was first presented to the public in the First (and last) *Salon National de Artes Plásticas Jorge Tadeo Lozano*, commonly known as *Salon Independiente*, which opened in October of 1972. This Salon remains today as a relatively pale memory, referred only in passing as an unusual event in the recent history of Colombian art. Nonetheless, from a brief debate that took place on the pages of the local newspaper *El Tiempo*, we find that its three organizers<sup>22</sup> and 133 participants<sup>23</sup> had helped set it up in opposition to the official *Salón Nacional de Artistas*. The Official Salon, which opened three days later, was considered too conservative for the committed political views of young artists of the time, and was being heavily criticised for having sacrificed the budget for prizes so as to make it an itinerant exhibition<sup>24</sup>. A month before either of the events opened, Eduardo Serrano, the main organizer of the *Salon Independiente*, launched a passionate accusation against the Official Salon:

The 'official' style of the next Salon has been evidenced in the organizer's proclamation that, as in the case of the workers, peasants, students, etc., protests exist only in the minds of a 'small group'. That the

---

<sup>22</sup> This Salon was organized and structured by Eduardo Serrano, Rita de Agudelo, and Ana de Jacobini, in careful response to all the demands against the Official Salon: the abolition of prizes, the representation of new forms of artistic expression, the inclusion of younger members in the jury, a more democratic selection, and so on.

<sup>23</sup> Among whom there were Felisa Bursztyn, Omar Rayo, Luis Caballero, and Carlos Rojas, now some of the most important names in 1960s and 1970s Colombian art.

<sup>24</sup> Eduardo Serrano, "El Primer Salon Oficial." *El Tiempo*, September 4, 1972. (All translations mine).

great majority is satisfied with the *rosy* situation. That nothing happens in this country. That discontent is the result of babble (cause of dismay for the prudes and for those with a dirty conscience). And that those who won't opt for resignation have dedicated themselves to the defence of unworthy and obscure interests, such as their own subsistence.

Having thus endorsed the chauvinistic conviction that the quandaries faced by students and artists were equivalent to those faced by peasants and workers (indigenous, we see, were not mentioned) he further accused the Official Salon for closing "one of the few open doors for the country's emerging artists, maintaining its 'curriculum' before the unending series of honours received by established artists." And to conclude, he spoke of the ways in which the works included would be compromised "by linking them to the Government's cultural agenda."<sup>25</sup> This tirade had been written, we presume, against an article that had appeared a week earlier on the same newspaper, where Juan Antonio Roda, member of the Advisory Committee for the Official Salon, had explained the series of financial and bureaucratic predicaments that the Salon was facing. Besides these predicaments, Roda wrote, there was the question of what, in a rather cabalistic manner, he called "the distribution of quotas of power to the different pressure groups", and which he attributed to a relatively anonymous person who was making public the names of artists that the Committee was considering<sup>26</sup>.

However, these exhibitions produced quite unexpected responses: while the opening of the official Salon went by rather quietly, the *Salon Independiente* was revealed by the artist Clemencia Lucena as an elitist act of bigotry, accused by students and "political artists" alike, who "categorically repudiate[d] those artists whose works serve the oligarchic frond." In her long and thundering diatribe, she justified her presence in both

---

<sup>25</sup> Serrano.

<sup>26</sup> Juan Antonio Roda, "El XXIII Salón Nacional: Razones de una Decisión," *El Tiempo*, August 23, 1972.

events by claiming that being a revolutionary was not enough if one is willing to "allow State- or Private-sponsored events to remain saturated with alienating and counterfeiting works of art that poison the minds of the public" etc.. On its opening night, she recounted, the students "silenced 'the tinkling of the precious garments of the ladies' with an uproar that disturbed the sweetness of 'distinguished' feminine faces, and disrupted the metaphysical meditations of the most 'notable' gentlemen."<sup>27</sup> These ladies and gentlemen would have been the representatives, owners, and friends of the "25 important private and 'official' enterprises" that funded the event.

On the other hand, the organizers of the Official Salon, headed by the renowned historian German Rubiano Caballero, were proud to have it be the first 'truly National Salon', for now "the works of many artists, especially young ones," would be known by people all around the country<sup>28</sup>. Responding to the question of whether the Official Salon offered a fair representation of the National artistic landscape, they included the same young "politicized" artists (Maria Victoria Benito-Rebollo, Enrique Hernandez, Mario Salcedo, Maria Teresa Nieto, Clemencia Lucena, and Antonio Caro) whose names had been brandished by the "opposition" as the Colombian new wave of "political artists", and whose works had also been included in the *Salon Independiente*<sup>29</sup>. For the catalogue of the Official Salon, the organizers, whose de-politicised and aestheticist taste was notorious, described "Political Art" with masterful ambivalence, saying first that it uses "a

---

<sup>27</sup> Clemencia Lucena, "El Artista y la Participación," *El Tiempo*, November 12, 1972.

<sup>28</sup> Roda.

<sup>29</sup> It was significant that they had participated in both the Official and the "Independent" Salons, for would have been a reason for dismissing their political engagement as being superficial. We may assume that it was this potential or actual contradiction that led Clemencia Lucena to use the idea of the "travelling Salon" in order to justify their presence in both events, arguing that for "political art" it was more important to be seen by larger crowds all around the country than to participate in a "revolutionary" event that would only seen by small crowds. Cf. Lucena.

language where the ideological content minimizes the importance of purely aesthetic elements." And concluding that "[Political Art] oscillates between a primitive or naïve typology and violent expressionism. The plastic expression of 'committed art' is narrative. It employs a thematic of concrete episodes with clear didactical intentions."<sup>30</sup> These last words would have tied all these works together through the reference to the educational slant of Maoist propaganda posters, which some of the works by these young artists evoked, but which at least Caro would not necessarily endorse. Thus turned into a novelty, and a nameable form of artistic practice, the term "Political Art" enabled formulaic definitions of the works of so-called "committed artists" that would clarify the nature of these works in general, without attending to the specificities of what each work was attempting to consider. Other, more enticing formulas, would claim that these artists "actively engage with an historical moment creating an aesthetic expression at the service of an ethics,"<sup>31</sup> but the nature of the engagement with an historical moment, or the ethical motivations of such engagements, were never truly addressed.

We see that neither of these two exhibitions "lived up" to the reputations they had earned during the months leading up to their respective openings. After all, the group of "progressive" entrepreneurs who set up the *Salon de La Tadeo* came to be reactionaries in disguise, "posing as Independents", while the "regressive" ones, who apparently stood for anti-nationalist (i.e. capitalist) interests, managed to produce the first travelling National Salon, proudly including the most "revolutionary" artists of the moment. Moreover, the realization that an apparently revolutionary endeavour, such as the *Salon Independiente*, could be in fact quite reactionary was sure to take priority in the eyes of disillusioned

---

<sup>30</sup> "Arte Politico," Catalogue for the XXIII *Salon Nacional de Artistas*, (Bogotá: Colcultura, 1972): 13.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

audiences that were counting on it as a positive response to an already conservative panorama. This ease with which opposing parties could exchange positions within the political spectrum was symptomatic not only of the rather "fantastic" artistic panorama of the 1970s in Colombia, but also of the political environment of the entire country. These were thus the general circumstances within which Caro's *Homenaje a Manuel Quintín Lame*, was first presented. But this does not mean that Caro's work was "committed" to the same political position as those by other "political artists" were. For what was lacking in the works of others was surely central to his own work: *irony*. It is from this perspective that we must approach Caro's *Homenaje*.

## I.

Upon approaching the main entrance of the *Salon Independiente*, audiences would notice a series of large sheets of paper covering each of the twenty or so windows facing the street, the same "sign" reproduced on each of these sheets. A oppositional gesture, perfectly suited for this "Independent" Salon, was then already to be sensed from a distance, even before properly "seeing" the work. However, upon getting closer, one would have noticed two important elements "lacking": figuration and didacticism. These signs were only "half-readable", if at all: it was clearly the signature of someone, but the signature ended with a flourish that, even if stylistically unremarkable, would throw the reader towards a different space of representation. Whosoever lingered on this blown-up sign would quickly recognise what appeared to be pre-Columbian motifs inscribed within this flourish. The last stroke of the legible signature (the letter "e" in Lame) at the intersection between two spaces that we can claim to correspond, at least for now, to two sides of the law. On the left, the name Lame signified a proper name, expressed in a

legible signature, a social being that could sign contracts of an economic or a legal nature, petitions, complaints, letters, and books; on the right, however, the pre-Columbian motifs made this flourish more difficult to read, for one does not see *just* a flourish, as one would see it in signatures of 19<sup>th</sup> century gentlemen, but a hieroglyph, a sign that one may be able to interpret, although not without the necessary knowledge. In this sense, this signature did not simply accentuate a certain ethical obligation; it presented an encounter between the legal name of the subject and the expressive sign of his existence. The straightforward, committed, “educational” slant of political art had taken an obscure, almost mystical tone.

## II.

Manuel Quintín Lame’s signature is said to be the image of his thought. In it we recognize a confrontation that has become quite familiar: the Modern and the pre-Modern; the West and the non-West; the centre and the periphery;. Or, perhaps, the Logos vs. hieroglyph, the End vs. the journey. His name appears to the left, written in Roman script, and designates him as a subject of the modern state; on the right, inscribed in the flourish – which, however anachronistic, still works to give the name a ‘higher’ standing – we glimpse fragments of pre-Columbian motifs, perhaps an indication of alterity. These fragments remain “unreadable”, opaque, there is no definition offered, no description, nor an account of their origins, no translation; and yet it is through them that the signature takes on an allegorical character<sup>32</sup>. In any case, these are two signs of a singular identity, split into two separate signatures – one designates ‘accountability’, the other ‘expression’; reason and affection; two signs delineated by a trembling line, gently

---

<sup>32</sup> For a discussion on the notion of allegory, Cf. Preface, pp. 12-15.



gesturing towards each other. The instruments of citizenship on one side (the law, representation before the law, political and social representation); and on the other an unusual intelligence that is “external” to a normative logic, and in the process of gestation. As in drawing, this line is the site of a design, it is the horizon against which Quintín Lame has left his own mark; it is the site of his utopia.

Manuel Quintín Lame Chantre was born in 1887, on a hacienda near the city of Popayán, close to the Pacific coast of Colombia. As many others at the time, he was the son of indigenous peoples who now worked as peasants. He and his family worked the land during his early years. He fought in the Thousand-Days War, the first great Colombian civil war, at the turn of the century, between 1899 and 1902. It is said that it was in the course and effects of this war that he was able to see the true source of the wretchedness of his people. By the 1920s he had already become the mystic, political leader we now identify in his name – a “Shadow”, as he would call himself, taught by the “Voice of Silence”. By then, he had taught himself in reading and writing, recognizing that reading and writing are symptoms of a bourgeois state: “I am the Indigenous man who was educated in the jungle ... in order to defend the wretched Indian from the calumnies of the white enemies, judges, magistrates, and ministers ...”<sup>33</sup>. He taught himself the law, and learned and taught others how to use the instruments of the law; he was imprisoned nearly two hundred times, without ever being charged with a crime – for it wasn’t just that his words were cunning and dangerous; his dangerousness was also inscribed in his body: “a shadow was being educated and educated itself, when “the Voice of Silence”

---

<sup>33</sup> Manuel Quintín Lame Lame, *Los Pensamientos del Indio que se Educó Dentro de Las Selvas Colombianas*, Bogotá: Funcol, 1970?

penetrated my body with a rare warmth and with juridical bravery ..."<sup>34</sup>. His life had been devoted to two principal projects: the unification of all indigenous tribes in Colombia, and the affirmation of their rights to sovereignty. Quintín Lame organized the indigenous communities of at least three adjacent regions in Colombia, setting an important precedent: he made it possible to participate in national politics without losing one's identity; one only had to make the laws change. His words were always allegorical. He said he wanted to be remembered as "the Indian who educated himself in the jungles of Colombia, and who didn't kneel before injustice". The life of Manuel Quintín Lame could then be said to have been an *enactment* of this immanent distribution between "reason" and "affection". His signature trembling; caught between a "mystical ideology that became a hindrance to the [indigenous] struggle," and a "confidence in the State that later took him to an absolutely 'legalist' orientation of indigenous vindication."<sup>35</sup>

By the time of his death, in 1967, and roughly for a decade, indigenous communities' participation in national politics had become contingent upon their collaboration with the Marxist-Leninist left<sup>36</sup>, whose programmatic language was heavily

---

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> "Plataforma Política" (political platform) (1971) in *CRIC* (Bogotá: CINEP, 1978): 68.

<sup>36</sup> The *Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca (CRIC)*, which is today the most important indigenous organism in Colombia, published a book in 1978 where they explained the reasons that led to their formation, which was established during two separate assemblies in 1971: in Toribío, February 24, 1971; and La Susana, September 6, 1971. In the introduction, they give an account of some important changes that were done between the first and the second assembly, which hinged on two important factors: Firstly, the structure of their first assembly, and the content of their demands, was "too influenced by the laws of the Government, and in particular by the Agrarian Reform. This related to the first two points that were discussed: 1. That the INCORA (National Institute of Agrarian Reform) expropriated the lands of haciendas that had formerly been indigenous *resguardos*, and that these lands be given gratuitously to indigenous families; and 2. That given the fact that there were *minifundios* (small plots of land occupied by *colonos*, or non-indigenous peasants) around these lands, these *resguardos* would be expanded to include those as well. Secondly, that they had not approached their problems "as indigenous peoples." The reason for this, they said, was that their organizational model had been taken after peasant organizations that already existed in the Cauca region before the formation of CRIC. "Since up until there hadn't

influenced by Mao Zedong's Thought. Mao's notable talent for oversimplifying matters was surely effective in overcoming the three most important predicaments the Latin American leftist intelligentsia was facing at the time: 1. the applicability of a Leninist schema in an agrarian economy; 2. the nature of the relationship between the State and the Masses; and 3. the dialectical dilemma between nationalisms and internationalisms.

Firstly, in countries where the economy was mostly agrarian, it was practically impossible to conceive of an urban proletariat as according to Marx's and Lenin's thought, although a desire to overcome underdevelopment did allow to imagine this urban worker in the near future. It was through Mao's thought that it became possible to proletarianise the peasantry, giving the party a sense of urgency as it related to an agrarian economy in the midst of a wave of unfinished Land Reforms that were taking place all across the so-called Third World. Secondly, at the time it was necessary to envision a radical politics that integrated the proletariat in a much less passive way than Lenin had accorded it, along with a much less totalitarian State, allowing a space for free-thinking that had not been allowed in the Stalinist schema, for whom it was imperative that the State's stranglehold on the masses was maintained, in fear of internal and external enemies. In Mao Zedong's Thought, the State was to remain present, but only as a service provider that would ensure the well-being of the people. With Maoism, it became possible to idealize an educated peasantry that would itself find the tools and importance of literacy, and which would at the same time be able to establish a solid economic system if

---

been an exclusively indigenous organization anywhere in the country as of yet, no one thought that what was ours could provide a ground for organization. We ourselves thought that "to be Indian" was not good, and that in order to get ahead one had to imitate what came from outside." *Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca*, (Bogotá: CINEP, 1978): 10-11.

this Land Reform was to finally take place<sup>37</sup>. Thirdly, and perhaps more importantly, there was a crisis of nationalism. From the perspective of the right, it was seen as an obstacle for development insofar as it was opposed to the opening of the market economies and free trade agreements; from the perspective of the left, nationalism was structured around a set of bourgeois ideals that excluded the vast majority of the population: nationalism was to be revitalised from below, with a truer sense of national identity that was popular and not bourgeois and which resisted the internationalisation of the economy. Mao Zedong's Thought also spoke to this dilemma between internationalism and nationalism

We are at once internationalists and patriots, and our slogan is, "Fight to defend the motherland against the aggressors." ... For only by fighting in defence of the motherland can we defeat the aggressors and achieve national liberation. And only by achieving national liberation will it be possible for the proletariat and other working people to achieve their own emancipation. The victory of China and the defeat of the invading imperialists will help the people of other countries. Thus in wars of national liberation patriotism is applied internationalism."<sup>38</sup>

We see now that Maoism's global scope was largely due to Mao Zedong's remarkable rhetorical talent, which helped solidify the idea of a Third Worldist

---

<sup>37</sup> It was precisely in this point that the Agrarian Reform failed the most, for in the few cases in which it was possible to divide the land into useable plots, the peasantry was quickly bought out by an elite of landowners who made sure that the mechanisms of financing and the availability of technical and knowledge resources were as scarce and inaccessible as possible. For example, the CRIC commented that "the death of livestock and the loss of crops are in large part due to the neglect of personnel in charge of offering technical assistance" who were employees of the government (Cf. CRIC, "IV Congreso," (1975) in CRIC: 40). There also was a conflict with poor *colonos*, who were occupying some of the land that the INCORA had designated as indigenous reservations, and with landowners' lands, which even if not overlapping with reservations lands, would commonly surround the reservations. (Cf. Stephen Corry, *Towards Indian Self-Determination in Colombia*, p. 31). As a matter of fact, in the *I Encuentro Indígena Nacional*, which took place in Silvia, July 15, 1973, one of the main "existing problems" was that there was "a very scant service or absolute inoperativeness of the governmental organisms such as the División de Asuntos Indígenas (Division of Indigenous Affairs), the Caja Agraria (Agrarian Bank), the IDEMA (Institute of Agricultural and Livestock Marketing), the ICA (National Institute of Agriculture) and INCORA." (CRIC, "III Encuentro," (1973) in CRIC: 28).

<sup>38</sup> Mao Zedong, *Mao's Red Book*, taken from *Mao's Little Red Book*, [http://freedom.orlingrabbe.com/lftimes/red\\_book.htm](http://freedom.orlingrabbe.com/lftimes/red_book.htm) on Patriotism and Internationalism.

emancipation. Indigenous peoples would be incorporated into this internationalist patriotism (which had by then reorganised the Latin Americanists along a Third Worldist schema) only on the condition that they identify themselves as peasants, and thus as members of an international class whose liberation was underway<sup>39</sup>. However, this did not result in an "absence" of indigenous peoples from national politics. The State was quick to identify the contradictions between the petitions of indigenous movements and the Leftist parties around land reforms and division of lands. Indigenous communities' demands for reservations that would be communal were already historical, as was evident in the publication of books on Manuel Quintín Lame's thought, but the Agrarian Reform that the left was supporting had a different nature. While Indigenous peoples had already secured a number of reserves, the official discourse of the peasant movements was aiming at the division of land into individual plots to be exploited by families of peasants. If indigenous peoples wished to participate in this reform they would inevitably have to become peasants, driven by individual interests and therefore "modern". Little has been said of this problem between indigenous peoples and a militant left, but surely it was one of the most ruinous, as it would cause an irreconcilable division between them<sup>40</sup>. We must at least

---

<sup>39</sup> On this point, in the exposition of its "Political Platform Project," (1971) the CRIC proposed that "it was important to study closely the example of peoples that have fought for their liberation and who have undertaken the construction of socialism" But they also considered that this should not involve "siding with any given State at an international level, for this would harm the autonomy of our own revolutionary process and would aggravate, as it is already happening, the division of popular forces in the interior of our country." This was, to be sure, not a matter of merging with Colombian organizations, but rather, it meant that international politics could not be brought to bear, ideologically, on the relationships between these national organizations. Cf. CRIC: 66-69.

<sup>40</sup> This seems to have been a matter of a series of progressions. At first, the INCORA, which was the governmental organism in charge of the expropriation and repartition of lands, handed over these lands only when pressured by the peasant organizations. At the same time, this governmental organism held full control over the credit lines offered to the peasants, or to those who would accept to hold and exploit the land as peasants, thus forcing indigenous peoples into an agrarian economy that was not theirs. (Cf. CRIC, "IV Congreso" (1975), in CRIC: 40) Later on, this situation became much more radicalised (perhaps due to the government's bias towards the peasant

admit the possibility that it was upon recognizing this chasm that the State, and the ruling classes began to attend to the petitions and needs of indigenous peoples, changing the official *and* extra-official positions in order to accommodate (perhaps quite strategically, or cynically) indigenous communities within the space of contemporary politics<sup>41</sup>.

### III.

It is within this confounded political landscape of the 1970s in Colombia that we must locate Antonio Caro's *Homenaje a Manuel Quintín Lame*. However, this should not lead us to imply that, as a "Political Artist," Caro was committed to an indigenous cause. The ideas that, through this work, Caro "forced the spectator to ... acknowledge the presence of the negligence and the oppression against which Quintín Lame fought,"<sup>42</sup> or that "learning by heart Lame's signature, Caro reinstated a presence that official histories had systematically obliterated,"<sup>43</sup> are undoubtedly agreeable if one wishes to prove that the political engagement of these works from the 1970s is still "relevant" today. However, this does not account for the fact that, as the artist himself has noted, his commitment to

---

organizations) when the "ANUC (National Association of Peasant Users) tried to impose its direction upon the indigenous movement in Colombia." After this, the CRIC spoke of what they called the "two deviations in the indigenous movement": "The first deviation, known by some as "racist" or "indigenist", consists in the absolute primacy given to aspects of the struggle that are specifically indigenous, without questioning the class-based system of domination nor the situation of imperialist dependency." This division, they claimed, which came from a "mystical ideology" like that of Manuel Quintín Lame, "and which orients the struggle against the whites in general, are quicker to form alliances with the dominant classes and their institutions than with other exploited groups." The second deviation was the complete opposite. It was an infiltration of a leftist tendency to proletarianise indigenous peoples. (CRIC, "Análisis de su Organización y sus Luchas, (1978)" in CRIC: 67).

<sup>41</sup> Although in no way predominant, these are the years in which the media begins to present the public with a positive image of the Indian, publishing a number of humanistic texts that complicated notions of the Conquest and the Colonial period, along with some anthropological texts on different tribes and communities, articles on Manuel Quintín Lame and on other indigenous leaders from across Latin America, and so on.

<sup>42</sup> Luis Camnitzer, "Antonio Caro: Guerrillero Visual," *Poliester* V.4 no.12: 40-45.

<sup>43</sup> Jose Roca, *Define "Context"* (New York: Apex Art, 2000).

indigenous peoples – with whom he now maintains close ties – developed in the process of making his *Homenaje a Manuel Quintín Lame*, and cannot be brought to bear on the circumstances within which this work first emerged.<sup>44</sup>

It is at this point that we are able to bring up the “formalist” strategies in Caro’s work, through a connection that Caro has repeatedly insisted on, but which has not been taken very seriously: namely, the relationship to POP art, and especially to Robert Indiana<sup>45</sup>. Caro has not been very explicit as to what it is that he saw in Robert Indiana’s piece *LOVE* (**Fig. 16**), but we can note that this piece doesn’t merely put into question the marketability of any given category such as love. We are led to question the parameters that regulate the insertion of a certain element, love for instance, into the market. And what we find is that this element must become “iconic”, or “logical” (as in the logo), it must first be fit, or packaged, if we wish to use this outdated term. A certain kind of “reductionism” appears in Caro’s work as well: the “reduction” (a sort of reverse transmutation) of the image to pure form, as for example in his work *SAL* (Salt), which was presented at the First Biennial of Graphic Arts in Cali, Colombia, 1971, which was no more than a block of salt on which the word *SAL* was carved in relief (**See fig. 4**). The elements of a propagandistic iconography (its simple, didactic forms and straight-forward presentation) would be taken up strategically in order to *complicate* the sign. This is what, Marta Traba would later refer to as an “aesthetics of resistance”, a precarious aesthetics set against the increasingly technologized aesthetics associated with imperialism. We can see,

---

<sup>44</sup> Interviews with the artist, Bogotá, June – August, 2004.

<sup>45</sup> In our interviews, for instance, he brought up this point repeatedly. Finally, not knowing what to do with his insistent references to Robert Indiana, I asked him what it was that he thought was different between his relationship to POP art, and the relationship to POP art that painters had had at the time, and whose works were mostly imitative. His response was, simply: “they came from painting, and I came from POP”.

nonetheless, that she had been laying the structure since earlier on "... the language of plastic arts, must suggest a structure of sense", said the famous critic in a somewhat loose passage from 1969:

It must reach a point in which it is able to *signify* through its internal [i.e. self-referential] relations, as well as through its external relations with regards to the milieu it is expressing. It is quite probable that, in an unformed [or informal] community such as Colombia, lacking express definitions that mark a "sense", the best artists will not realize that they have to configure their oeuvre along a structure of sense; this [structure of sense] derives, spontaneously, from the resulting work. The result will be all the more interesting if they are able to [express] all the socio-cultural elements that surround the work, without merely describing them – if they are endorsed – or ignoring them – if they are rejected.<sup>46</sup>

This foregrounds the strategies taken by Caro in his works, where a simple gesture with iconic overtones was at the same time complicated by a precariousness that would be mimetic, or better yet, a mimicry of the precariousness of the visual landscape of the Colombian public space. This can be seen in, for instance, his famous *Coca-Cola/Colombia* sign (**fig. 8**) painted on tin with red enamel ink, emulating the *Coca-Cola* signs that one would find in front of convenience stores, infusing an iconic product of transnational capital with an obsolescence that typified underdevelopment.

This reduction of the image to pure form only serves, in his work at least, to reveal that this form is much less manageable than we anticipated. This might account for the fact that Caro chose not only to amplify this signature-cum-icon of Manuel Quintín Lame, but also that he so insistently repeated it, by hand, and placed it all along the front of the building that hosted the exhibition. More so since these "banners" would also prevent the light from coming into the building, which would force the exhibition to be constantly lit artificially. Furthermore, this repetition of a fragment prefigures at the same time

---

<sup>46</sup> Marta Traba, "Las Dos Líneas Extremas de las Pintura Colombiana: Botero y Ramírez Vilamizar," *Eco* No.112, August, 1969: 354-386.



fragmentations in the space of politics, such as the ones we've been addressing, and the fragmentations of Quintín Lame's signature as it has appeared in later versions of this work. For instance, in the 1979 and the 1992 print versions (**figs. 5 and 6**), Caro took motifs that originally appeared within the flourish and repeated them beneath the signature, also blowing them out of proportion<sup>47</sup>.

Questioned about how *Homenaje* came about, and why he chose the figure of Quintín Lame, Caro said that he had first read about him in a newspaper supplement<sup>48</sup>, in an article that was published in relation to the publication of the book *En Defensa de Mi Raza* (*In Defence of My Race*).<sup>49</sup> After reading the book, he said, "it seemed to me too unsightly to draw a portrait," while his signature, through its association to Quintín Lame's reputation of "being a legal representative had become a peculiar symbol. Difficult to reproduce, he had turned into the seal with which he authenticated his documents."<sup>50</sup> What Caro must have seen in Quintín Lame's signature was precisely this self-containment of the icon already unsettled by a precariousness of its execution.

But more recently, he stated quite bluntly that at the time this would have been a "politically correct" gesture. A gesture that is tied to the circulation of several texts on

---

<sup>47</sup> Here it is important to note a discussion of the icon that has informed these views in an important way. In an essay called "The Power and the Illusion," the Peruvian critic Gustavo Buntinx has given an exceptional account of how the icons of resistance and the icons of dependency became intimately connected during the troubled years of the "Peruvian Weimar Republic", between 1980 and 1992. Popular images such as *Sarita Colonia*, POP aesthetics, and icons of the revolution such as Maoist posters blended together forming sites that could easily shift from the sphere of the arts to the popular sphere, becoming sites for dilettantes as much as for migrants. This polysemic view of the icon could have been brought to bear upon these two works, but especially on Caro's treatment of Quintín Lame's signature, where it appears between singularity and fragmentation. Cf. Gustavo Buntinx, "The Power and the Illusion: Aura Lost and Restored in the 'Peruvian Weimar Republic' (1980 – 1992)," in *Beyond the Fantastic*: 299-326.

<sup>48</sup> Javier D. Restrepo, "Manuel Quintín Lame, el Indio que no se Humilló," *El Tiempo*, May 21, 1972.

<sup>49</sup> Lame, 1971.

<sup>50</sup> Antonio Caro, "Quintín Lame me Voltió La Cabeza" *El Mundo*, n/d.

indigenous peoples (in official media and otherwise) of an anthropological nature.<sup>51</sup> But it was also tied to the translation of a letter that Chief Seattle's letter wrote in 1885 to the President of the United States, which circulated around 1971 in Colombia, perhaps due to the resonance it had had among the hippie movement in North America. In this letter, Chief Seattle spoke of the incompatibility between the ways in which the State valued the land vis-à-vis the ways in which indigenous peoples did. This letter resonated with a number of groups such as hippies, environmentalists, leftist groups, and among indigenous communities as well<sup>52</sup>. The letter began with the following lines:

The Great Chief in Washington sends word that he wishes to buy our land. But how can you buy or sell the sky? The land? The idea is strange to us. If we do not own the freshness of the air and the sparkle of the water, how can you buy them?<sup>53</sup>

The idea that there could be an "other" relationship to nature was not entirely new; what was new, nonetheless, was that there could be different kinds of societies, with different

---

<sup>51</sup> Besides the article on Quintín Lame, and the publication of his book, scattered throughout the pages of newspapers one would find articles that had preceded them such as: Gustavo Pérez Ramírez, "Planas: Espejo de la Oposición del Indígena," (Lecturas Dominicales, Feb 7, 1971); Jaime Paredes Pardo "La Alternativa del Indio: Vestirse de Blanco?" (Ibid, March 7, 1971); Gerardo Reichel-Domatoff, "El Misionero Ante Las Culturas Indígenas," (Ibid. December 12, 1971); or Jaime Paredes Pardo, "El Indio: Compatriota sin Patria," (Ibid. July 23, 1972). At the same time, the renown anthropologist Nina S. Friedemann, whose work had mostly focused on black communities in Colombia, began working on an important essay that she presented in 1974 at the *IX International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences* in Chicago. This essay, was later included in a small but important book: Nina S. Friedemann, Juan Friede and Daniel Fajardo *Indigenismo y Aniquilamiento de Indígenas en Colombia*, (Bogotá: CIEC, 1975).

<sup>52</sup> As we have seen, Indigenous communities did not take the positions adopted in this letter uncritically, nor did they have an entirely positive image of Quintín Lame. For them, the essentialist views adopted by Chief Seattle and Lame were certainly part of the history of indigenous movements across the continent, but they were regarded as inoperative when faced with the more pragmatic situations they were facing: namely, the need to find a common ground with the peasant struggle, and the need to moderate any type of opposition that was purely based on racial determinism. (Cf. note 21)

<sup>53</sup> There are numerous translations and transcriptions of this letter, the Spanish translation seems to have been taken from a transcription done around 1969. Although it did appear in some official newspaper, it is not clear which one it was (the artist referred to a Sunday supplement, but I was unable to find it). This particular transcription was taken from the website: <http://www.barefootsworld.net/seattle.html>, although there are numerous other websites that have a version of this text.

laws, and different cultural structures, all coexisting within the same space. What was radically new – and perhaps not yet fully acknowledged – was the idea that the law was not determined by nature, that a people's relationship to nature was determined more by tradition and culture than by an essential ethnic or racial character. It was the gradual infiltration of this anti-essentialist understanding of cultures into the spheres of politics that would allow for the emergence of a new relationship between the modern state and the people that we now call *pluralism*<sup>54</sup>.

#### IV.

As we've seen, in Manuel Quintín Lame's signature we find an allegory of the encounter between the bourgeois and the indigenous subject. This signature denotes both an impasse and a site of reconciliation between different kinds of national subjectivity. It is originally framed by the structure of the social contract. Up until the 1970s, indigenous peoples sought to make a difference in the politics of integration, they sought to cleanse political participation, and representation before the law, from their assimilationist tendencies; in this sense, the struggle of indigenous peoples took place within the nation state, and was not concerned with its borders, or limits, as it would be later on. They

---

<sup>54</sup> Early signs of this "decentralization" (if one may call it that) of official institutions is to be seen in the fact that, in 1972, the Colombian government gave absolute control over the administration and realization of an indigenous census to the CRIC (Cf. CRIC, Op. Cit., p. 18). In his book *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson tells us that the census was, along with the map and the museum, a colonial institution that reproduced an ethnically determined categorization of the space of the nation. Nonetheless, it was also a first step towards allowing self-determination, since it would be indigenous peoples themselves who would decide, to put it bluntly, who was Indian and who was not. (Cf. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*: 163-185.

On the side of the movements of resistance, as we have seen, through the formation of the CRIC, indigenous peoples came to differentiate themselves from the peasant movements (although sometimes claiming that they were themselves peasants, but only as a way to indicate their participation in a labour market), keeping ties with the peasant movements but this time as allies and not as members. This alliance was formed through the creation of the Secretaría Indígena in the ANUC (the peasant movement organization), although this Secretaría was in the hands of the CRIC and not of the ANUC.

sought the fulfilment of the promise of the social contract, but the social contract still remained within the confines of a Humanist discourse, and was still to be regulated through the institutions of the Nation. But what was this promise of the social contract? Gilles Deleuze has laid it out simply: as a private individual, as she or he lived in nature, each human being was “not mean”, and it was through socialising that meanness emerged; this was because, in isolation, human beings did not need to confront the problem of self-interest. Thus, the social contract was nothing more than the structural schema upon which would emerge a system of regulation (the law, for instance) that ensured that people were not cruel with each other, as they were motivated by self-interest,

The private individual, by virtue of his relation to things, has already warded off the infantile situation that gives him a stake in being mean. But the citizen is one who enters into relationships with others, such that it is precisely in his self-interest to be virtuous. To create an objective, actual situation wherein justice and self-interest are reconciled is for Rousseau the proper task of politics. ... In [*The Social Contract*] the citizen learns about the mystification of the separation of powers, and how the Republic is defined by the existence of a sole power, the legislative.”<sup>55</sup>

This is surely Rousseau’s idea, but it is here that we must find a difference between two kinds of critique of the state that Caro’s *Homenaje* evokes. In calling it an homage – that is, a demonstration of reverence towards some-one, usually a historical figure – Caro reconstitutes the singular individual that this sign represents – the name without ethnicity. Caro’s title, *Homenaje a Manuel Quintín Lame*, highlights the “readable” elements of this signature (i.e. Manuel Quintín Lame’s name), sublimating them over the “unreadable” elements that are inscribed in the flourish: the flourish itself, and the pseudo-archaeological, pre-Columbian motifs, which would be related to the well known and

---

<sup>55</sup> Gilles Deleuze, “Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Precursor of Kafka, Céline, and Ponge,”: 53-55.

well-discussed mysticism in Quintín Lame's thought.<sup>56</sup> In this sense, Caro's gesture seems to emulate the role that the flourish would traditionally have in signatures: the elevation of the name in terms of status. However, what is suggested in the title is opposed by the form in which the signature is presented. By itself, without the flourish, Quintín Lame's signature represents a person, but it doesn't represent an ethnic or racial identity, while the flourish, as it appears in Quintín Lame's signature, evokes associations to the pre-Columbian past. Albeit anachronistic, it is the flourish that gives a sense of prominence, and it is within the flourish that we find inscribed the marks of difference, so vital in the message that this signature gives. It is perhaps for this reason that Caro chose, at first,<sup>57</sup> the rightmost side of Quintín Lame's signature, which he turned into a "seal", or an icon. It is in this overstatement of the signature's iconic character that Caro's gestures seem to produce a fragmentation. This idea could hardly be better expressed than in those words that, even if with dubious intentions, the organizers of the Official Salon used to refer to "political art": political art "charges plastic elements with an extra-artistic content that limits them in their specific function."<sup>58</sup> The limitation of a specific function of the icon would be, at the same time, the expansion of its signifying possibilities, for the work refused to remain self-referential, and because it disabled any conclusive interpretation, for these icons were not meant to give opinions or solutions, but to throw things into question.

## V.

---

<sup>56</sup> See, for example, Gonzalo Castillo-Cardenas, *Liberation Theology From Below* (New York: Orbis Books, 1987).

<sup>57</sup> Later versions of this work include the entire name, along with the flourish.

<sup>58</sup> "Political Art".

In the sphere of politics, or more precisely, in the space of dominant discourses on politics and of populist nationalism, another set of fragmentations were taking place. The illusion of the Nation had a dual nature: for developmentalists, or the right, it was the source of wealth, and it needed to be assembled to an international economic market-system through different sorts of trade agreements; nationalism had to give way to these open markets if nations wished to stabilise themselves and overcome underdevelopment. For a militant left, the nation was the space for the construction of a truer popular consciousness, and of liberation. Thus, from the perspective of the normative discourse, “nationalism” became a pejorative term, as is evidenced in the editorial of the newspaper *El Espectador* from January 2, 1972: “Nationalism is Reborn”:

As with every year, the year has ended with ominous signs in the international panorama. (...) A characteristic event of the year has been the exacerbation of nationalisms in diverse parts of the world, causing grave conflicts [as in Southern Ireland’s religious war, Pakistan, Bangladesh, or the Soviet minorities]. (...) And to top it all off, it is certain that 1972 will bring another conflict, already in the making, in the Balkans, where World War I was originated. Croatian nationalism in Yugoslavia is already creating internal conflicts that may probably capsize the prestige of Marshall Tito, himself Croatian. (...) And even in our Latin America this virus emerges in an insidious fashion: the economic disagreements in the Grupo Andino are another display of nationalism that, even if disguised, doesn’t cease to be dangerous.”

Antonio Caro’s response to the developmentalist position would emerge in other works, such as *El Imperialismo es un Tigre de Papel* (1972) – clearly drawn from Mao Zedong’s famous statement “imperialism is a paper tiger” – *Proyecto Marlboro* (1973), and *Coca-Cola-Colombia* (1976) (See figs. 6, 7 and 8). On the occasion of his homage to Quintín Lame, however, the critique was geared, I believe, towards another phenomenon that was much less identifiable. It was, in fact, related to an impossibility to identify what it was

that was going on at the time, and thus to identify with any of the sides involved: an inability to endorse them or to dismiss them.

If Caro's gesture waivers, as we've seen, between the singularity of Manuel Quintín Lame as an indigenous leader, and his status as an allegorical character that is emerging with the formation of indigenous organizations, this is because *Homenaje a Manuel Quintín Lame* responds to a process whereby Lame himself, as a "figure of the Indian", is in the process of being caught within a set of appropriations and distributions that seem new, unclear, differential rather than essential. Seen from the perspective of "political art", which was then associated with a group of artists of strong leftist inclinations, can only be understood as an appropriation of the figure of Quintín Lame for the purposes of a Maoist idea of culture as "a revolutionary weapon."<sup>59</sup> In calling this work an homage Caro was not indicating a moment of intimacy between himself and this historical figure; nor can we come to the conjecture suggested in Roca's phrase that Caro was unproblematically contributing to the mystification of this figure. This reinstatement of "a presence" is also tied to a certain taste for the icon, a taste that derived surely from the icon's promiscuity, as it was used simultaneously to express a revolutionary spirit of emancipation (as in a Third World Aesthetics, as in the famous image of Ché Guevara), and the spirit of capitalism, where it took on the form of the logo through the circulation of commodities such as Coca-Cola or Marlboro. Caro's homage is caught within the icon and the logo, holding elements of both, but being neither. As an icon, it would have carried an essence, of a cause perhaps, certainly of a person, and giving the illusion that the viewer might be able to communicate with that person who is embodied in this image; or it might have

---

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Marta Traba, "Arte y Revolución" *El Tiempo*, January 16, 1972; Antonio Montaña, "A La Guerrilla Estética"; Clemencia Lucena, "El Artista y La Participación" Op. Cit.

been emptied of its essence, in which case, as in the logo, it was merely representing a certain materiality, something that was circulating, which was going around, and which could be taken, and even purchased.

In the end, the question in dominant discourses on politics, was one of comprehension much more than one of allegiance. Questions rose faster than answers. And it was no longer possible to give definitive answers, as in Mao Zedong's Red Book, to structural questions. Although there were still several outlets for a militant left, from pamphlets to magazines and newspapers, public talk seemed to be more concerned with understanding the "nature" of "The Left" – with discerning a relevant situated discourse from within the universalizing rhetoric of a Leninist-Marxist intelligentsia on one hand; and with gleaning a positive dimension to holistic socialist strategies from the ruins left by Stalinism, Fascism and Nazism – than with proposing a new dialogue, new strategies and projects. Thus, the newspapers and magazines, and especially the Sunday supplements, were flooded with numerous articles on hippyism – "Are Hippies Tired?", or "Hippies: Who Are They?" – , on the student movements – "The Global Character of the Student Struggles" – , on Maoism and the "Chinese Model" – from hefty topics: "The De-Maoization of China", to quite light ones: "Love in China" – interviews with reputed intellectuals such as Sartre, Caillois and Marcuse, where they spoke of "intellectual responsibility"; essays on Lukács, Adorno and Horkeimer, and an occasional review on Cuba, which was perhaps too close and too influential (or too enigmatic and "dangerous") to be granted regular coverage in the media<sup>60</sup>.

---

<sup>60</sup> See, for example, Salvador de Madariaga, "Comunismo y Pueblo"; Juan José Sabreli, "Radiografía del Pequeño Burgués" (Lecturas Dominicales, ; Mario Laserna, "Reforma Agraria: Imperialismo y Oligarquía" (Ibid.); [author unknown], [author unknown] "Capitalismo y



Thus, more than anything, what seemed to be taking over the public discourse was a wave of explanations of what had happened between the end of World War II and the tumultuous, yet conservative present. This frenzy for clarifying the nature of the different factions involved in political positions and disputes had the additional disturbing effect of disallowing any kind of agency to those who were not clearly positioned in the map of political-ideological categories that the discourse itself was producing. On the right side of the spectrum, one was either a liberal or a conservative; on the left side of the spectrum, however, one could be part of a number of strange hybrids, ranging from an orthodox Marxism, which was mostly reserved for a university intelligentsia, to a militant Maoist-Leninism, actualised through the movements of peasants and the workers' movements. In terms of the Agrarian Reform, one was simply a reformist or a counter-reformist. The question of indigenous peoples was far less prominent than any other, only represented through a series of anthropological texts, some by Colombian authors, some by foreign authors, without making any distinctions of provenance, method, or the year of the original publication. Its presence in the political sphere was, as we've seen, conditional. All these articles, books, reviews, interviews, reports, they all questioned, they put things into question. Disguised as mere acts of curiosity, often answering questions they had themselves made up, inserting doubt where there wasn't; the normative discourse of the time surely contributed to the dissolution of the left while solidifying the right, even if in a negative way. In other words, the right became nameable (its diseases as much as its achievements) while the left was undergoing a period of reflection, perhaps even self-reflection, which in the public sphere was quickly translated as a crisis, a dissolution, a

---

Comunismo: Están Obligados a Coexistir?" (Ibid, January 31, 1975); Antonio Caballero, "Más y más humanismos" (Ibid, May 14, 1972).

fragmentation, complete chaos. It became impossible to reconcile the wants of the left with the needs of indigenous peoples since the questioning of the relationship between these two groups was quickly turned into an impasse. All these articles that might have been understood as explanatory worked together in giving the overall impression that a radical sector of society was incapable of structuring itself, while a conservative sector was at least coherent, even if their agreements were, after all, detrimental for society.

Caro's gesture embodies this sense of perplexity. It is in this *homage* that Quintín Lame's signature becomes most vulnerable, most volatile. In the context of an art exhibition, this sign acquires an ambiguity that was not there before. There, in the *Salon*, Manuel Quintín Lame's signature is at once arrested and turned over to the public, as if, through a cynical gesture, Caro wished to reveal the cynicism with which contemporary politics appropriates elements of the past. The ambiguity in Caro's work is therefore linked to the impossibility of producing a work-of-art, or a certain sign, that would be inherently expressive of a certain ideological criterion. By placing this signature, or this sign, in the space of the gallery, by reducing it to something that could be either an *icon* or a *logo*, *Homenaje a Manuel Quintín Lame* could then be said to metonymically represent the series of appropriations of the indigenous that were taking place in the public sphere. This image, the image of Quintín Lame's thought, begins to take a new shape in the milieu of an exchange that, endangered from within, must remain unfulfilled. For it was the dawn of a new kind of opposition that would be "transnational" in unexpected ways, challenging the sovereignty of the modern state through the formation of alternative "nations" such as the Mayanist Movement, or the Pan-Andean Movements which emerged between the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1980s.

One could expect that there was a "position", and a political opinion, implicit in this gesture, but there was nothing that would give away this position. It was only as one approached the main entrance door that a first explanation for this obscure gesture would be given: on the sheet of paper that filled the window closest to the left of the main entrance, there was a short text containing brief biographical notes on the indigenous leader called Manuel Quintín Lame, who had died in 1967, five years earlier. On this sheet of paper one would also find a transcription of some his writings.<sup>61</sup> Even if one was not too familiar with Antonio Caro's name, it was clearly referenced as the name of the artist, along with descriptive annotations. This should have been a relief for, recognising this artist's name, now one could see that this was a work of "Political Art," and one could therefore inscribe these works amongst those that "resort to written language, or to symbols ... in order to determine plastic elements and imbue them with an extra-artistic content that limits their specific function."<sup>62</sup>

This was the first time that Caro had used Quintín Lame as his topic, and it must have been the first time that the visitors of the exhibition (at least most of them) had heard of this indigenous man. A fragment of an indigenous leader's signature, repeated across the entire frontal side of the exhibition building, and a fragment of an indigenous leader's writings, reproduced on a large sheet of paper. It might have been with this work in mind that Rubiano Caballero spoke of "political art" as using a "primitive or naïve typology."

---

<sup>61</sup> Right around this time, two important books were published on the life and works of Manuel Quintín Lame: *Los Pensamientos del Indio que se Educó Dentro de Las Selvas Colombianas*, Funcol, Bogotá, 1970?, and *En Defensa de Mi Raza*, Comité de la Defensa del Indio, Bogotá, 1971. Both of these books contained the writings of Manuel Quintín Lame, the former had a prologue by Juan Friede, a famous Colombian anthropologist, and the latter has an introduction by Gonzalo Castillo Cárdenas, a member of the Presbyterian Church who has published other books about Quintín Lame. The excerpts included in Caro's work were taken from *En Defensa de Mi Raza*.

<sup>62</sup> "Arte Politico".

But the vibrancy of this gesture derived from its irony, from a refusal to express a political opinion, from the emergence of an “unreadable” sign that disturbed the ease of “taking sides” within a range of prescribed political concerns. If, as we’ve seen above, the side one took could be easily exchanged with an oppositional one, Caro presented a sign that, insofar as it was inaccessible (i.e. obscure) could not be so easily exchanged. And nonetheless, he presented a sign that was to gain increasing visibility within the political panorama of the following years.

## The Dysfunctional Figure: The Indigenous and the Dispossessed in Cildo Meireles'

### *Zero Cruzeiro (1974 – 1978)*

In 1974, the Brazilian artist Cildo Meireles designed, printed and handed out a series of *Zero Cruzeiro* (**Fig. 3**) banknotes in the streets of Rio de Janeiro<sup>63</sup>. The design incorporated four unusual features that would belie the bill's status as regular currency. Firstly, it was printed on a somewhat glossy paper, stiffer and less resistant to the effects of time than regular bills would have been. Secondly, it announced its value as "zero", and thus claimed itself as a "non-exchangeable" object. Thirdly, the artist's signature appeared replacing the ones that would endorse the minting in a regular bill, namely those of the Presidents of the Monetary Council and of the Central Bank. Lastly, and perhaps more importantly, two intriguing images replaced the etched illustrations that would normally appear on the obverse and reverse side of official banknotes: on the obverse, instead of the iconic images of historical personalities, the artist inserted a photograph of a man huddled against a corner, with his back turned towards the viewer; and on the reverse, instead of an archetypal allegorical image (of the nation's wealth, or of bucolic life), he inserted a photograph of a nude indigenous man standing before an expansive landscape (**See figs. 17 and 18**). It is these two figures, which we will call "the figure of the Indian" and "the figure of the dispossessed", that demand our attention. It is their presence on the surface of this banknote that makes us pause for a moment, look at this object more closely. Their ambiguity throwing us into an almost frantic longing for unity where we wish to establish, once and for all, a clear relationship between the two figures. Guided

---

<sup>63</sup> Other works have been added to this currency series: *Zero Centavo* (1974), *Zero Dollar* (1978) and *Zero Cent* (1982).

perhaps by the expression "two sides of the same coin," we are hereafter captive of the promise that enough attention will yield a "truth" about their relationship.

## I.

We are given an object that resembles a banknote, but which proclaims itself as a simple hoax. But we already sense that there is more, for whoever produced this banknote took too much care to reproduce the pattern that appears in official Cruzeiro bills. Whoever made this bill found or took these photographs, cutting them so as to make them fit within the circles. They don't seem arbitrary at all. But their presence on this bill seems odd. We pause, and we look closely, the images make things too problematic if this is just a matter of making a witty comment on the value of money. Before we go on to try to establish the relationship that these two images have, we study the banknote again. There are serial numbers (A00000). There are also years (1974 and 1978) on the top left side and the lower right side of one of the faces of the bill; it is the side on which the huddled man appears; the years are preceded by two upper-case letters (CM). We flip the bill. There is a nude indigenous man, but there are no serial numbers, nor years, no initials, just zeroes, and the name of the Central Bank of Brazil. We flip it again, to the side of the huddled man. There is a hand-made signature. Certainly each one of these notes (we don't know how many) was signed by someone after they were printed, for the pen has left a clear mark, a physical mark on the paper.

At this point we take out a "real", official banknote. We find that the official banknote also has all those features – serial numbers, patterns, figures inscribed within circles, signatures – there are, however, two signatures, they are the signatures of the President of the Monetary Council and of the President of the Central Bank. We return to

that odd *Zero Cruzeiro* bill, we see again that there is only one signature. It is more or less readable: *Cildo Meireles*. Now we know that the letters that precede the years (CM) are this person's initials. We realize that, since this banknote is relatively faithful to official ones, this must be the obverse of the banknote; the side on which the nude indigenous man appears would then be the reverse. We look at the official banknote once again. We note that on the obverse, just above the signatures, there is an etched portrait of some republican figure – the republic herself, or a former president. We return to the *Zero Cruzeiro* banknote and see that the man huddled against a corner is replacing these figures. We see that on the reverse of official banknotes there would be an allegory of the nation: a landscape, a scene of bucolic life, a republican building. The indigenous man stands in for these allegorical images. It is therefore inscribed, literally, within the space of allegory. We already know that a person made this bill, and that this person is called Cildo Meireles. Now we know that he chose the photographs, be they found or taken by him. But why these photographs? What possible relationship could there be between them? Are they causes or are they effects of this worthlessness? Are they signs or representations of worthlessness? Are they substitutable, interchangeable?

## II.

In a relatively recent essay on the work of Cildo Meireles, the Brazilian art critic Paulo Herkenhoff offered a critical interpretation of this work, in which he locates these images as representations of marginal citizens. Insofar as this interpretation typifies a contemporary reading of Latin American conceptual art, it merits being quoted at length.

"Certainly, to print currency which *admits* its own worthlessness confounds logic. Moreover, in *Zero Cruzeiro*, Meireles substitutes the portraits of national heroes – bearers of wealth and power – on traditional banknotes

with a Brazilian Indian on one side and a psychiatric patient on the other. Thus, Meireles interrogates the relationships theorized by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their study *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1969). Indigenous people ... and those who are incarcerated in psychiatric institutions, are marginalized citizens to whom society attributes no value. Meireles freely distributed his zero banknotes and coins in Brazil, allowing the silent voices of these ghettoized communities to enter into the system of circulation, thus proposing a utopian vision of a world where difference does not exist.<sup>64</sup>

A rough familiarity with current writings on Latin American art would already predispose us to expect the incidence, in these works, of a certain discourse on marginality and politics. As we've seen in the preface, the category "political art" took on a "radical" tone in writings on art from the conceptualist turn in Latin America (although the works associated with this category were mostly by South American artists) between the 1960s and the 1980s<sup>65</sup>. And that in those writings, Latin American art is prefigured as being marginalized within the international art-circuits, especially with the influence of Post-Colonial studies. Hence, more than an insight attributable to Herkenhoff, the understanding of these two figures as constituting an allegory of marginality is but a matter of common sense, or of consensus. Besides, more than a coherent paragraph, Herkenhoff's lines cited above seem to be a series of more or less unconnected notes, each one of which will nonetheless provide a good reference point from which to unravel this peculiar artwork. We will thus take issue with the points brought up in them.

Herkenhoff's interpretation already suggests that standard conceptions of conceptual art cannot disclose the entirety of this work, which is perhaps why he speaks of marginality, and of this utopian vision of a world without difference. Terms such as interpellation, or aesthetics of the administration (Buchloch) are undoubtedly promising,

---

<sup>64</sup> Paulo Herkenhoff, "A Labyrinthine Ghetto: The Work of Cildo Meireles," in *Cildo Meireles*, London: Phaidon, 1999): 44.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. pp.6-11.



but they take us directly to the space of politics, or the public sphere; other more self-referential terms like dematerialization and tautology can help, but they take us to discourses on art that remain North American and to an extent European. The idea that these works are “political” insofar as they have infused conceptual art with an explicit political content<sup>66</sup> can only lead us to suppose that these works function as “objects” that suddenly disrupt the seamless functioning of established circuits. These well-known notions presuppose ideological and economic circuits, but they do not take us to the space of representation, which is where we must locate the two images that appear on either side of *Zero Cruzeiro*, and which we need to study closer, as if we wished to find their actual relationship, be it differential or convergent.

On the frontal face of the bill, we find a photograph of a person with his back turned against us, the beholders, holders of this banknote. This person wears a white t-shirt, and ill-fitting trousers; his face and his hands remain concealed before his body; we don't know if he is engaged in a specific action (urinating, for instance), or if he remains huddled against the corner, refusing to engage with us, the beholders, the ones who hold this banknote. In either case, something is wrong with this person. If the case were the former, he would appear here as a raw body, as a body that, far from representing the “model”, far removed from the precious elegance of those who regularly occupy this space of the bill, represents a concrete body, with organic functions. He would be a body that attends to its organic impulses, albeit in a rude manner. To the overdressed, upright, almost mummified bodies of Emperors and Presidents that would normally appear in Cruzeiro bills, this body responds with functionality: it is a “functional” body: “It breathes,

---

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Alex Alberro, “A Media Art,” in M. Newmand and J. Bird eds. *Rewriting Conceptual Art* (London: Reaktion, 1999); Ramirez; Camnitzer et al. Op. Cit.

it heats, it eats. It shits and fucks"<sup>67</sup> it also "works". On the other hand, this person may be a prisoner, a prisoner of any kind, in which case we would have a "dysfunctional" body, it retains all those functions of the organism, but it does not "work". But this ambivalence between a "functional" and a "dysfunctional" body remains uncertain because the space that "it" inhabits remains undisclosed. We can only claim, with some degree of certainty, and in a non-metaphoric sense, that this is a "built environment". And yet, even if this is a "functional" body, we can only assume that he is fulfilling his organic functions (urinating) out of place, in a place not socially designated for that action; while if this is a "dysfunctional" body, he is "in his place". In either case, he is a figure of dispossession: poverty or imprisonment: perhaps imprisonment *due* to poverty; perhaps, as Meireles suggests, madness.

The context within which this dispossessed man appears is, however, less ambiguous in an earlier work by Meireles, from the series *Eureka/Blindhotland* (1970-1975) (See fig. 10). For this particular work, Meireles chose a photograph of the same man, clearly taken almost at the same time, but which was taken from a different angle, slightly to the left, allowing us to see more clearly what it is that this person is doing. He is inside some inhospitable institutional room; perhaps, as Herkenhoff suggests, for the mentally ill. On the left side of the frame we notice what appears to be a barred window. We see that the man (prisoner, psychiatric patient) conceals his face between his hands, while he huddles against the corner, refusing to engage with us, the beholders, or with the camera for that matter. We could offer a number of possible interpretations for this gesture: grief, shame, catatonia perhaps. We will however determine that this is a

---

<sup>67</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p.1

"dysfunctional" body, and the body of the dispossessed, the opposite of the President or the Republic.

This image seems to support Herkenhoff's argument that this is a psychiatric patient, who stands in for what is not valued by society. Meireles' *Zero Cruzeiro* is understood thus a self-referential object that creates a continuous field of worthless objects in which the artwork, the Brazilian Indian, and the psychiatric patient are caught (along with the entire monetary system). The figure of the dispossessed has an identity that coincides with the identity of the indigenous man: they are both figures of marginality. At this point, the banknote we have been looking at is stable. The zero represents nothing, nothing but the worthlessness of this banknote. It tells me that this banknote is worthless, and so everything in it is understood as worthless. But here we must pause again.

When we say, like Herkenhoff does, that these citizens (indigenous peoples and psychiatric patients) are not valued, we are not saying that they are in themselves worthless. They have no value within a particular system: the capitalist system, which is the system that this work implies. They have no value because they don't "work", because they do not "function" as a means for producing wealth, and so on. In this case, what we are saying is that these two figures represent the *effects* of a capitalist system. How? Surely not in the same way, surely they are not-valued *in different ways*.

Perhaps the images themselves will tell us something. We've now taken the *Zero Cruzeiro* banknote again, and this time we look at the image of the nude indigenous man, the figure of the Indian. We notice that this image doesn't suggest a marginality. This figure of an Indian stands absentminded and "care-free" before a generous landscape that extends all the way to the horizon. Like the image of the dispossessed, it is a photograph, and not an engraving, which would be the usual media in which images on banknotes

would be rendered. We also notice that this is a manipulated image, for (as with the image of the "cornered man") the background has been cut off at the edges so as to give the background a sense of continuousness. The continuousness of the landscape (and of the built environment, in the case of the obverse) is intentional, the artist has chosen to produce it. This continuousness was produced, we presume, because it was not there to begin with. It was produced because, we may think, as with the image of the dispossessed where the barred window and the gestures of the man have been cut off, it would be there, in that space that is now invisible to us, that a context would be given, and the ambivalence reduced. The ambivalence that these images acquire in *Zero Cruzeiro* is therefore intentional. But in the case of the indigenous man, the continuity of the landscape does not seem to us to dislocate the figure, this figure of an indigenous man. Nature is his place, at least according to an anthropologic conception, which has informed so much of how we perceive indigenous peoples today. There is therefore a continuity between the figure of the Indian and the landscape that lies behind him. It is the image as a whole, however, that seems out of place – and this applies also to the image of the "cornered man" – it seems absurd because it appears on a banknote.

Unlike the "cornered man", who refuses to engage with the beholder, the indigenous man gazes in our direction, beholders and holders of this banknote. From the corner of his eye, as in a fleeting gesture of acknowledgment, he meets our gaze, us who hold this bill that he clearly does not possess. And we therefore inhabit a common space; we more or less share a piece of that generous landscape that, without doubt, remains his, and which we can only look at. Yet, the space he inhabits is not the forest itself but a small opening that lies before the forest. We thus share, not his space, but a threshold. What is this threshold? Is the answer to be found in that invisible space that was cut off

from the image? Is this continuity so artificial that, had the artist left the edges intact, we would have recognised the space that is inhabited by this indigenous man and which, through the meeting of our gazes, seems to be familiar to us? In other words, what is "our" relationship, as beholders, with these two figures that appear on this banknote that we hold?

The "cornered man" has turned away from us, the indigenous man faces us with a certain derision, in an angle in which, were we to share that space, we would be placed below the place he stands. We look up at him, while he looks down on us (an effect of the angle of the camera). I, the one who holds the banknote, am not him. It would not seem that we, beholders of these images, are supposed to empathise with the figure of the Indian (nor with the figure of the dispossessed). Surely, in official banknotes I would not be those "heroes" of the nation either, but there is still a slight chance that I might be *like* them, a model citizen. Indeed I may become one of those "model citizens", developers of the nation. We begin to see that, in the meeting of my gaze with the indigenous man's, I am the one who wishes to lay claim on that generous landscape, and the 'zero' in this banknote represents no more than my inability to do so, his reluctance to allow me to reach out for it, and thus to allow this banknote to gain value. Faced with this indigenous man who seemingly protects the forest, faced with this warrior of the jungle, I hold nothing, and everything is in his dominion. In this context, this indigenous man appears here as the figure of what an industrialist that I embody, the ideal modern citizen, would call "the Indian problem".

We have therefore arrived at a slightly different conclusion from Herkenhoff's. These are not two figures that are "not valued" but, much worse, these are two figures to whom society attributes a *negative* value. The dispossessed is locked up because it

represents a danger to society, the indigenous man is the effigy of something that is in direct conflict with a developmentalist desire to acquire wealth. But this solution is still not so clear, for we can also claim that they may therefore be *two interrelated and non-exchangeable figures of the Indian*.

As we've seen briefly in the preface, in his book *Racial Revolutions*<sup>68</sup>, Jonathan W. Warren tells us that in Brazil indigenous peoples of the Amazon are represented as the archetype of what it is to be Indian, and that those indigenous peoples who have been "assimilated", either as "urbanized Indians" or as peasants, find it increasingly difficult to establish their condition as indigenous. From Alcida Rita Ramos we also learn that indigenous peoples of the Amazon live in isolation because there are clear and present traces of history that have made them suspicious of any approach by Brazilian officials. For one, there is the question of alterity, which is shared by many writers across the sub-Continent: "Indians, the privileged Others of Brazilian consciousness, in their supposed passivity, supply the perfect contrast for a nation that portrays itself as the dynamic country of the future while singing a destiny modulated in the national anthem as 'eternally lying in a splendid crib.'<sup>69</sup>" She also tells us that, in order to get close to indigenous peoples, government agents bribe them with presents from the "modern world," such as machetes and ropes, only to abandon them later, at which point indigenous peoples' lives have become dependent enough on the goods that are brought from "outside" that they must find their way into the fields of haciendas, and work for ridiculous wages, in order to sustain their new economic and cultural configurations<sup>70</sup>. The North American historian, Seth Garfield, says that these are in large part effects of

---

<sup>68</sup> Jonathan W. Warren, *Racial Revolutions* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

<sup>69</sup> Ramos: 147.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.: 147-167.

Brazilian developmentalism which conceived of Development "as a linear progression premised on a collective will, transcending regional and particular interest and benefiting all members of the 'nation'." From this perspective, he continues, "State officials presented Brazilian nationality as a constituted entity that was threatened by "feudal" modes of production and ethnic separatism; in fact", he says, "the very emergence of that national identity was contingent on the reproduction of capitalist social relations and the elimination of cultural differences."<sup>71</sup> The dramatic fate with which indigenous peoples that venture into the "modern" world may be faced is dramatically expressed in the story of the Pataxó Indian Galdino Jesus dos Santos. Dos Santos found himself lost in Brasilia, and fell asleep on a bench in a park on the early hours of April 20, 1997. A group of kids, nineteen years of age, sprayed dos Santos with gasoline and immolated him. Upon being arrested, these kids claimed in their defence that they had mistaken the indigenous man for a *mendigo* (a homeless or street person). "Forgetting or never appreciating that race and class are intimately entwined in Brazil, editorialists [seized] on this statement to reassure their readers in the subsequent weeks that albeit a heinous crime, at least the 'racial democracy' was still intact since dos Santos 'was not burnt for being Indian or black, but because he was homeless.'"<sup>72</sup>

Thus, according to these accounts, indigenous peoples in Brazil live in between two polarities, one of excessive identity, in which they remain – as the figure of the Indian on the reverse of the *Zero Cruzeiro* bill – an allegory of an archaic racial purity; another where their identity is indeed inseparable from the marginalized citizens of urban Brazil – homeless, beggars, etc, as represented in the obverse side of the banknote. Thus, these

---

<sup>71</sup> Seth Garfield, *Indigenous Struggle at the Heart of Brazil* (Durham: Duke, 2001): 10.

<sup>72</sup> Warren: 5-7.

two figures of the Indian can also be brought over to bear on the two figures that appear on either side of the banknote. The figure of the Indian, as it appears on the reverse of *Zero Cruzeiro*, can be then said to be the figure before dispossession, the figure on the obverse being therefore the dispossessed Indian- the archaic Indian inscribed in the space of allegory, the "assimilated" Indian in the space of the modern subject.

### III.

But here we must pause once again. At this point we could conclude that, under capitalism, the Brazilian Indians' ethnic difference is the guarantee of their exclusion. This is surely a serious interpretation of Meireles' work, but it is one that functions upon a discourse on identity politics that we cannot claim to have been present at the time, neither in the sphere of contemporary art, which was concerned with more formal elements, and much more abstract notions of liberation; nor in the sphere of politics, where concerns were much larger, much more broad, since they related to international capital, to a Latin American Leftist intelligentsia, to economic imperialism, and so on. For example, if we take Roberto Schwarz seminal essay "Culture and Politics in Brazil: 1964-1969," we see that the primary concerns were with the conditions of artistic expression under an authoritarian regime. We find, for instance, that he speaks of the allegorical character of the most predominant cultural movements, such as *tropicalismo*, whose main figures (such as Caetano Veloso) were forced to exile. Also, Schwarz tells us that *tropicalismo* functioned upon a mixture between the archaic and the modern, creating an allegory of Brazil that was laden with ambiguities:

The vehicle is modern and the content archaic, but the past is noble and the present commercial; on the other hand, the past is atrocious and the present authentic, etc. Politics and a kind of collective social exhibitionism



were combined: artistic power derives from quoting, without sympathy or collusion, as if they came from Mars, the civic values that have come out on the streets.<sup>73</sup>

Schwarz tells us too that in order to understand *tropicalismo* one needed not only to see a Brazilian "street politics", but also to have "a certain familiarity with international fashion" from which one would have been able to establish a "distance towards the patriarchal heritage", which was "the monopoly of university students and the like." "For the tropicalist image", he concludes, "it is essential that the juxtaposition between old and new ... should make something *absurd*, should be an aberration."<sup>74</sup> At the same time, in another essay Schwarz speaks of the 1970s revival of *Anthropophagy*, a concept from the 1920s Brazilian avant-garde whose scheme was the "critical swallowing up of foreign culture." In fact, Meireles himself subscribed to the new wave of Anthropophagites when, in a 1970 essay titled "Cruzeiro do Sul" (Southern Cross) he wrote: "Those in the jungle always believe rumours; for in the jungle, West of Tordesillas, lies do not exist; there are only individual truths. (...) These are our origins. Who could have dared to try to comprehend the West of Tordesillas other than its inhabitants?"<sup>75</sup> With regards to this revival, Schwarz asks: "How can one fail to notice that the *Antropófagos* – like the nationalists – take as their subject the abstract Brazilian, with no class specifications"?<sup>76</sup> This question already suggests that the cultural environment in Brazil during the 1970s, and up until the 1980s, was not concerned with specificities about Brazilian life, but with allegorical figures of Brazil that were, at once, against a foreign capitalist imperialism, and against an authoritarian State-national conception of Brazil. It was at the intersection –

---

<sup>73</sup> Schwarz: 126-159.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.: 139-144.

<sup>75</sup> Cildo Meireles, "Cruzeiro do Sul" in *Cildo Meireles*, (London: Phaidon, 1999). (This essay was written for the exhibition *Information*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1970).

<sup>76</sup> Schwarz: 9.

which seemed much like a marriage at the time – between foreign capital and the State that these concerns emerged.

Hence, despite promising a political correctness in Meireles' *Zero Cruzeiro*, the reading that Herkenhoff suggests for us, and which we followed up to what seemed a conclusive point, does not account for a historical moment in which the figures of the Indian and the dispossessed appear in much more obscure and conflictive ways. It is here that we depart from Herkenhoff's reading of *Zero Cruzeiro*. For while it may be true, as Herkenhoff suggests, that the figure of the dispossessed represents a marginalized citizen "to whom society attributes no value", the figure of the indigenous man seems to resist this reading.

We will return to this in a moment, after we've established another possible relation between these two figures that appear on *Zero Cruzeiro*. We will do this by way of looking again, briefly, at that work from the series *Eureka/Blindhotland* – a series that Meireles claims to constitute the "basic nucleus" of his works<sup>77</sup>.

For this version of *Eureka/Blindhotland*, Meireles opposed this figure of the dispossessed to a picture of a black sphere, arranging them in four different relationships of scale that were to be inserted in a single issue of a daily newspaper in Rio de Janeiro. As a result, throughout the newspaper, the reader would find a series of basic permutations: small sphere – large man; small sphere – small man; large sphere – small man; large sphere – large man (**Fig. 10**). When asked about this early series of insertions, Meireles explained that his aim was to create "a continuum of perceptual information ... The insertions were placed in particular spaces and positions in each instance, so that the visual continuum would be perceived only in relation to the sum of these different

---

<sup>77</sup> Meireles, "Eureka/Blindhotland" in *Cildo Meireles*: 118.

instances.<sup>78</sup> Only after encountering two or more of these images would the reader of the newspaper realize that they form a set of permutations, and this would be reached through a certain short-circuit that would take place in our engaged (and hopefully critical) interaction with the work<sup>79</sup>. In this sense, it is not a sense of discovery that is sought or indicated in *Eureka*, but it could indicate a solution that must be given over to diverse experiences. These may be perceptual as in this particular work. They can also be multisensorial<sup>80</sup>, or in Meireles' choice of words, *synaesthetic*, as in the installation works that he produced for this same series in which spheres of different densities would be laid on the floor so that one could only identify their weight through direct contact (See fig. 11). This problem of the continuum is then reinscribed (and as we will see) within the circuit proposed in *Zero Cruzeiro* – money-paper-artwork<sup>81</sup>: for, in Meireles' *Zero*

---

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> For example, in other, more sculptural versions of this experiment, apparently similar spheres of different densities would be installed in a gallery space, creating a situation where the viewer would only recognize the differences in density between these spheres upon entering in direct contact with them, through kicking them around or lifting them (See Fig. 11).

<sup>80</sup> The idea of the 'multisensorial' was an important aspect of artistic discourse that was going around in the Rio de Janeiro group of neo-Concretists such as Hélio Oiticica and Lygia Clark. Informed by Merleau-Ponty's writings on phenomenology, and perhaps also by Sartre's, these artists were concerned with the central role of the human body in aspects of liberation. Surely, a phenomenological question was also present in other works of Latin American art at the time, in particular Optical art, for whom a work of art was completed not only in the act of viewing, but more so in a holistic sensorial experience. However, what differentiates the Brazilian artists of the 1960s and 1970s is that they were focused on the problematics of freedom, and on the role of the individual and the human body as the source for the determination of liberation. Cf. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, especially Part Four, Chapter 1; and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's critique of Sartre in Chapter 3 of *The Phenomenology of Perception*.

<sup>81</sup> This circuit is quite evident in this artwork, if not because it is somewhat implicit – as I show later on – because it has been directly referenced by the artists, who seems to always avoid any reference to the figures contained in the banknote. There are surely other circuits, and as I have suggested already, those would be more the object of this paper. But the circuit suggested in the figures (the figure of the Indian and the dispossessed or cornered man) is highly ambiguous, for we have no way of establishing what exactly it is that these figures stand in for. Furthermore, I begin by fleshing out this schema of value and economy because I believe it the system of value, as it relates to capitalism, that establishes the limits within which these two figures operate as signifiers. In other words, the two figures that appear imprinted on this bill are signifiers of value, but we

*Cruzeiro*, the piece of paper is the “real” object upon which two different operations of abstract value (money and artwork) are exchanged, and it is in this claim to its objecthood as *paper* that a spasm is created in the circuit. This glimpse of the paper’s “objectness” would in fact be quite synchronic with a larger trend in Brazilian cultural production at the time, where realism became the principal strategy against the unmanageable abstractions of capitalist society<sup>82</sup>. As holders of a *Zero Cruzeiro* bill, we would then be made aware of the fact that, were it not for our belief in the value of money, a banknote could not possibly claim any value beyond its proper materiality; likewise, we become aware of the fact that without the artist’s endorsement, and our belief in the ‘artwork’, this bill would surely be no more than a worthless joke (and here we return to something we’ve touched upon at the beginning of this essay). This exchange of systems of value is effected through the replacement of the signature, whereby the artist’s signature arrests the exchange value of this object as *money*, which would have been established through the signatures of the Presidents of the Monetary Council etc., and reinscribes it within another, more volatile and arbitrary system of exchange value, this time as *an artwork*. In the end, the viewer is caught in this short-circuit that is first produced by the discrepancy between the object’s claim to be a banknote (expressed in the design, which makes it easily recognizable as such) and its claim to be worth ‘zero’. Confronted with this reduction the viewer must realize that this is no more than a worthless piece of paper and, in realizing this, the viewer recognizes what she or he is holding as ‘printed paper’, only to then

---

can’t know exactly how it is that they signify value, or what kind of value it is that they stand in for.

<sup>82</sup> This move towards realism was also present in cinema and in theatre, evident in the expression “aesthetics of hunger”, put forward by Glauber Rocha as the axiomatic structure of a new Brazilian cinema. See, for example, Glauber Rocha, *Revisão Crítica do Cinema Brasileiro* (São Paulo: Cosac & Naify, 2003).

realize that it is signed by an artist (this would be recognized not only in the signature, but also in the fact that the artist's initials accompany the years of issue on the top-right corner and lower-left corner on the obverse) and then re-valued as art, although the viewer is unable to determine what the new value would be. As we will see shortly, this circuit of exchange of systems of value also works upon an additional circumstance with which Brazilians would have been quite familiar with at the time, inflation: the devaluation and revaluation of money, with its effects on the national economy, would have had the effect of making the value of things and of property unstable and therefore unreliable.

In short, while it may be true that in Meireles' banknote the figures of the Indian and of the dispossessed are brought together under the category of value, we must also see that there are a number of permutations and exchanges taking place (money-paper-artwork, for instance) and that these two figures are perhaps also subject to permutations and exchanges. This seems to be the basic logic through which Meireles deploys the elements contained in *Zero Cruzeiro*. Therefore there is no reason to presuppose that, in this banknote, these two images are of *equal* value, even if this value is negative. They may well be differential, producing a series of possible relations that are caught within a larger system that is being critiqued, which is in this case the capitalist system. They represent bodies: working bodies, functional bodies, dysfunctional bodies, non-working bodies, etc.

#### IV.

As we have already seen, Meireles' choice for the image of the dispossessed gave it an added ambiguity that wasn't there in other photographs of the same man. We've seen that they force us to long for a unity, a convergence of the two images. We saw, up to a

point, that *Zero Cruzeiro* establishes an absolute denial, as in the idea that “we’ve achieved nothing”. Everything in this artwork would be expressive of a nothingness that surrounds us, a worthlessness. However, the figure of the Indian, as it appears by itself, is easily recognized as an archetypal representation of the indigenous peoples of the Amazon, (which was perhaps taken from a local newspaper) a region that in Brazil is identified as the residence of the true, unadulterated Indian, often strategically opposed to those peoples who inhabit the more southern regions, which are understood as having undergone several processes of miscegenation<sup>83</sup>. This figure of the Indian, an archetypal icon, is inscribed within the space of allegory (the reverse of the banknote being that space) and is indeed allegorical, while it has been difficult to establish what it is that the dispossessed stands for as its counterpart – perhaps a psychiatric patient, perhaps an “assimilated Indian”, or both, or neither<sup>84</sup>. In any case, even if the indigenous is allegorical of Indianness, so far we’ve looked at these two figures as being *effects* of capitalism. Their marginality being a result of processes of industrialization and developmentalist mentalities. But this still does not account for the fact that, from a developmentalist mentality, these may well be the *causes* of a failure in the capitalist system, which is precisely what was going on in Brazil at the time.

As a matter of fact, upon a closer look at the reverse side of *Zero Cruzeiro*, we notice that it is not so clear that the indigenous man is returning my gaze. His gaze may be in fact directed past the frame, downwards, introspective. He therefore gazes at that space that is invisible to us, beholders, and in which the context of our encounter would

---

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Ramos; Warren; Garfield.

<sup>84</sup> While presenting a paper on this topic in Bahia, a member of the audience suggested that this figure of the dispossessed could be the artist himself. While I won’t go into a detailed analysis of this possibility, I think that it is quite possible to link it to Schwarz’s arguments about the possibilities of artistic expression under an authoritarian regime.

be disclosed. He is no longer a “guardian of Nature”, no longer the one who stands between “me” who wishes to lay claim on that apparently generous. We no longer share a space, or a threshold. Our alterity now encompasses the space that each one of us inhabits. In this sense I truly behold his figure, I gaze upon him, he is the captive of my gaze and here, once again, the technology of the camera increases our distance. I am free to look at him, study his anatomy, and the anatomy of the landscape that lies behind him and which doesn’t seem so generous after all, but quite barren. He is then a figure of nature, or of “naturalness”. Free or captive, this indigenous man has a specific identity: he is not *himself*, he stands in for something else that exceeds him, his singularity imbued with an excess of meaning, his body not “functional” nor “dysfunctional” but *significant*, as a statue. A true *figure of the Indian*, captive perhaps of an evolutionist construction, where he allegorizes the most archaic traces of the so-called national subject.

Indeed, we find this “archaeological” motif in a model for a \$500 Cruzeiro banknote that is included in the Museu de Valores (Museum of Values) of the Central bank of Brazil (it is not specified whether this banknote was issued, or replaced with a different design). In this banknote from 1972 (**See fig. 19**), triumphantly titled “Evolução Étnica” (“Ethnic Evolution”), the indigenous appear as the background of a series of “layers” that (we presume) together make up the “Brazilian Character”, represented in the frontal face that appears in the foreground. On the reverse, opposite this model citizen, we find an historical narrative of the nation, retelling the story from the pre-conquest (represented with a map that resembles a head-dress) to the modern republic (highways included). It is told from right to left, perhaps so as to make the images coincide with the types presented in the obverse. The sequence seems to be structured as a continuity of “types” that are

allegorical of historical periodization: the pre-Columbian past<sup>85</sup>, the Conquest, Slavery, the Empire, and the Republic. The Brazilian character is thus formed from the juxtaposition of different temporalities, layers of historical and a-historical spaces and times, laying claim to an entire genealogy of ancestors whose conflicting histories harmoniously come to terms in a singular identity. In a sense, this banknote seems to epitomize the position that, up to the present, has been accorded to indigenous peoples (in Brazil and in other places) within modern allegories of the nation. As we've seen in the introduction<sup>86</sup>, during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and especially in the period between the two World Wars, the idea of the construction of the National Indian as an ancestor (and as the trace of a pre-history) became an important aspect in the construction of a national imaginary, establishing a continuity (both ethnic and historical) between the aboriginal Indian and the bourgeois National Subject, and a discontinuity (both ethnic and historical) between the bourgeois National Subject and the colonizer. The indigenous was therefore posited as the trace of a national identity through which the national subject could lay claim to the land and to territory. Furthermore, the indigenous past was given a positivity only insofar as it remained buried under several historical layers, as the symbol of an archaism since, at least from a developmentalist perspective, its resurgence would be a sign of negativity, as is evident in a public statement that was apparently given in 1994 by a Brazilian political

---

<sup>85</sup> It seems that this map represents at the same time a pre-Conquest territory, determined by primitivist tropes such as the headdress, and also a pre-historical space not yet circumscribed by modern scientific cartographic descriptions, which begin with the second stage and, as the narrative in the image suggests, is brought on with the Discovery, signified by the arrival of the ship, itself pointing in the direction in which the narrative is to be read, namely from right to left.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Jean Franco's analysis of the construction of national roots through tropes of negritude, nature and the indigenous. Jean Franco, *The Modern Culture of Latin America: Society and the Artist*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970).



scientist: "national unity can be threatened if Brazilian underdevelopment is to persist, that is, if the Indians remain Indians."<sup>87</sup>

It is perhaps this resurgence that Meireles wishes to suggest. The figure of the Indian is, on the reverse of *Zero Cruzeiro*, the inevitable sublimation of the backwardness of Brazilian culture. If we are willing to accept the 'Ethnic Evolution' bill as paradigmatic of how indigenous peoples were figured at the time<sup>88</sup>, we recognize that in *Zero Cruzeiro* the order of this evolutionist diagram has been turned on its head, for on the reverse (of Meireles' banknote, that is) the figure of the Indian rises as the effigy of a denial of the capitalist system. Consequently, this indigenous man (traditionally understood as the "root" of the failure of a modern system) would appear here representing the sublimation of an archaism of Brazilian society, as a symptom of an impasse in this system of capitalist value: in this case, the "figure of the dispossessed" may be the result of an inversion where, as Manuel Quintín Lame would have put it, the Indian is the master and the white

---

<sup>87</sup> Hélio Jaguaribe cited in Garfield: 216.

<sup>88</sup> We can't presume that Meireles knew of this banknote (although we can't presume he did not) since it isn't clear whether it was ever issued officially, or if it was merely proposed as a model (in which case it is possible that the model itself was circulated among the public sphere). Nonetheless, there are other, older banknotes where the "Indian" was the theme, as well as banknotes where the reverse side showed pseudo-anthropological images of indigenous peoples in their own milieu. At the same time, I have used this banknote in order to give a reductive example of the position accorded to indigenous peoples in Brazil at the time, which is far more complicated than this. As Alcida Rita Ramos tells us in her book *Indigenismo*, during the 1970s speaking for indigenous peoples was inseparable from the impossibility of speaking against the state from other perspectives, especially from the old Marxist positions such as "the worker" and "the proletariat". At the same time, as Ramos also tells us, the media in Brazil had already developed a fetish for indigenous peoples, who were given wide visibility as objects of exoticism, almost persistently within a battle between inclusions and exclusions, where the rights of indigenous peoples were formulated upon scientific discourses on nature, ecology, evolution, and so on. In the growing literature on indigenous peoples from Latin America, we find an almost constant reference to the 1970s as a pivoting moment when the voice of indigenous peoples themselves could be discerned, even if vaguely, from an otherwise metropolitan set of statements and opinions on indigenous peoples. We may say, therefore, that this is a problematic of the Indian for itself, as it appears in public discourse, against the Indian in itself, as it begins to emerge with growing impetus.

man is the slave – we would then be speaking of a dialectical overturning of the structure of Brazilian national subjectivity. Meireles would thus be using the normative idea that the Indian represents a pre-capitalist society that has risen in order to produce a spasm in the present economic system.

This possibility takes us to a point that we've already touched on briefly: inflation. By 1974, the year Meireles made *Zero Cruzeiro*, the 'zero' would have surely meant for the Brazilian public much more than just a negation of value. (In 1942, the government issued a monetary reform whereby the devalued Reis was replaced with the Cruzeiro. But during the 1960s, with the building of the Brasilia, inflation once again forced Brazilian money to adopt denominations of up to Cr\$10,000.00, which would have seemed all the more absurd during the 1960s since its exchange value was under US\$5. Slowly, through a transitory currency called the Cruzeiro Novo (1967-1972), the government had been revaluing the Cruzeiro, which would enter into circulation once again in 1972, dropping three zeroes, and the transitory suffix "novo"). Rather than redeeming currency from inflationary tendencies by knocking off the zeroes, Meireles' *Zero Cruzeiro* seems to redeem money from the very possibility of inflation, by knocking off the number that gives it value, 'reifying' the zero (that is, the cipher, or the impossibility of gaining or losing value, the myth of the "stable economy"<sup>89</sup>). In this sense, Meireles' works function upon a neutralizing operation through which we can establish two separate analogies between *Zero Cruzeiro* and *Money Tree* (1969), between *Zero Cruzeiro* and the series *Insertions*

---

<sup>89</sup> This myth of "stable economy" was also something that would have been prominent in Brazil at the time. The building of Brasilia was an important event, not only in the purely architectural terms in which it is understood today, but also in that it was the promise of a Modernized and developed Brazil. The government's anticipated inflation of 15% became insignificant compared to the actual inflation of 50%+ percent in Brazilian economy, which made it an important factor in the need to revalue the Cruzeiro once again.

(1970 - 1971) (See figs. 12, 13, 14 and 15). The first analogy appeals to the disabling of abstract, arbitrary economic operations such as devaluation and revaluation; the second appeals to the production of a spasm in a given system that may be economic and/or ideological.

*Money Tree* (1969) consists of a stack of one hundred One Cruzeiro bills cross-bound with a rubber band. Hence, this work combines two elementary aspects, both of which come from everyday life: Rubber and Money. The rubber band is surely noteworthy. Having been an important element of the Brazilian economy, especially with the demand for Brazilian rubber during World War II, this industry began to collapse for the second time in the 1960s<sup>90</sup>, after the demand for rubber dropped significantly<sup>91</sup>. By 1969, the currency that Meireles used for *Money Tree* had been out of circulation for over two years (the One Cruzeiro banknotes had probably been out of circulation for longer, since inflation had surely rendered them worthless) (See fig. 20), and had been replaced temporarily by the Cruzeiro Novo, which was to then be replaced again in 1970 by a

---

<sup>90</sup> Up until the 1920s, Brazil had had the monopoly of the world's rubber industry. However, the British had been establishing rubber plantations in their colonies, especially Malaya, where the production became significant enough during the 1920s and 1930s so as to destabilize the Brazilian economy. During World War II the Japanese took hold of several of these colonies, and the plantations, which made Brazil once again the primary supplier of rubber for Western Europe and North America.

<sup>91</sup> As a result, in the 1970s, the government began a new campaign of modernization and development that would, amongst other things, revitalize the rubber industry in the Amazon. Of course, this meant the continuation of a series of historical and long-lasting traditions of abuse and slavery principally affecting indigenous peoples of the Amazon, some of which were still living in relative isolation. And since the "discovery" of Nature as a cause for activism, more or less during the 1960s, it has also been one of the principal grievances for environmentalist's peace of mind. As Alcida Rita Ramos has stated in her book *Indigenism*, these two groups have been engaged in a rather strange conflict whereby environmentalists tend to side with indigenous peoples only as long as they act according to the stereotype of existing in a "primordial" (i.e. intuitive) loving relationship with "nature". As soon as indigenous peoples display any sign of desiring to capitalize on their own lands, their own means of production, and/or their own knowledge, environmentalists (and other groups with them) accuse them of becoming assimilated into a corrupt system (Capitalist or otherwise) and thus of being corrupt. Cf. Ramos.

revalued Cruzeiro (after which the design of *Zero Cruzeiro* was fashioned)<sup>92</sup>. It seems, then, than in this minimalist work Meireles is tying two factors of inflation: industry as the underlying factor (rubber, in this case) and money as the surface on which inflation is made most evident and “palpable”. Rubber – which as we know comes from the rubber tree – would therefore be at one and the same time that which would disallow the growth of this “money tree”, and that which ties money together, binding the inflationary tendency of Brazilian economy<sup>93</sup>. It seems that in *Zero Cruzeiro* the reduction of the value of money to ‘zero’ replaces the role of the rubber band in *Money Tree*, and at the same time it brings forth the indigenous man, who can then be read as representing the most affected human being within this game of economic speculations, or as an iconic representation of what a developmentalist such as Jaguaribe (whom we’ve cited above) would call “the Indian problem”, that is, the cause of underdevelopment (and the source of their guilt).

The two series *Insertions into Ideological Circuits* (1970) and *Insertions into Anthropological Circuits* (1971) operate at a different level, more synchronic with the kinds of interpellation that Benjamin Buchloch attributes to artworks of a European and North American Conceptual art. As we have also seen in the series *Eureka/Blindhotland*, Meireles’ works were indeed concerned, albeit in a different way, with the “assault on the

---

<sup>92</sup> It is also significant that this One Cruzeiro bill was manufactured by the American Bank Note Company. This company, which changed its name in 1999 to American Bank Note Holographics, has for over 200 years issued Gift Certificates, Currency, Food and Gas, Stamps, Traveler's Checks, Social Security Cards, Identification Cards, Passports, Manufacturer's Certificate of Origin, Certificate of Authenticity, and other documents of the sort within the United States and all around the world.

<sup>93</sup> Also, as Dr. Carol Knicely pointed out to me, in an inflated economy with a devalued currency, stacks of bills tend to become a regular sight, in buses, taxis, gas-stations, etc. Surely Meireles noticed the “objecthood” of these stacks of bills as they were folded into a pile that would hopefully be worth something, since individually each bill would be more or less worthless, in that there would be nothing that would worth as little as the amount stated on the bill.

status of the [art] object: its visuality, its commodity status, and its form of distribution,<sup>94</sup> (and it is in doing this, as we have seen at the beginning of this chapter, that his work differs from those of the Brazilian neo-Concretist movement). For *Insertions into Ideological Circuits*, Meireles made use of existing systems of circulation, such as recyclable Coca-Cola bottles and banknotes, in order to send anti-informational and anti-imperialist statements such as "Yankees Go Home" (which he imprinted on Coca-Cola bottles) and "Who Killed Herzog?"<sup>95</sup> (which he stamped on circulating bills). For *Insertions into Anthropological Circuits*, Meireles produced a series of "counterfeit" ceramic tokens that would acquire value, not through the regulations of a normative economy, but through use: they would become valuable in their ability to replace the more valuable tokens that were used for public transportation. Meireles' expectations were that these works would be "models" that were thus to be repeated, in similar or dissimilar ways, through practices that would liberate individuals from oppressive ideological constructions and from inaccessible economic restrictions.<sup>96</sup> It is here that we encounter the "utopian" possibilities of *Zero Cruzeiro*, as we will link it, mostly for the purposes of elucidation, with Louis Marin's concept of "utopics".

Assumed from the perspective of Louis Marin's concept of "utopic" discourse, we are able to establish how it is that *Zero Cruzeiro* is not necessarily restricted to a negative

---

<sup>94</sup> Benjamin Buchloch, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the aesthetic of the Administration to the Critique of Institutions" in Alberro and Stimson eds.: 515.

<sup>95</sup> This makes reference to the uncertain conditions of Wladimir Herzog's death, a journalist that was reportedly arrested and tortured in prison during the early 1970s.

<sup>96</sup> In his interview with Gerardo Mosquera, speaking of these series, Meireles said that his "intention was at the same time to arrive at a formula which could potentially have a political effect," even if "the contribution of each individual insertion is minor in comparison with the potential scale of the artwork". Asked then if these insertions were "a systematic project, a kind of public 'artistic guerrilla' action, or [his] own personal gesture", he responded that they were at the same time "information and instructions on how to repeat the process". Meireles, Interview with Gerardo Mosquera.

reading, but indeed may indicate an emancipatory ideal. In his book *Utopics: Spatial Play*, Marin tells us that the concept of Utopia, as the name of a no-place that is supposed to exist outside cartographic (that is, Modern, scientific) maps and spaces, is to be understood as an ideal model for society that is inseparable from the society within which it emerges. That is to say that it is impossible to conceive of Utopia as existing elsewhere, for in the production of this new place, we would then be either bringing in society as a whole (and thus its history and its problems) or we would be establishing an isolated community and thus leaving society behind, with its history and problems. Both of these would be impossible, therefore we must imagine "utopic" as being a model, and it must be pluralized as "utopics" insofar as this model must change, and adapt to the changing structures of society. Utopics thus becomes a *changing figure of the future* that affects and is affected by all current actions, be them social, political or economic, while at the same time being that figure of the future against which actions in the present will be measured. Furthermore, in order to displace this "utopic" figure from any possible value, Marin conceived it a compound of two or more apparently irreconcilable "sides" or discourses (the Left and the Right, for instance), producing a "neuter": not a harmonious conjunction, but a differential juxtaposition of these opposing perspectives that are already operating on a singular phenomenon (economic development, for example)<sup>97</sup>. This is perhaps the kind of reconciliation that is sought in *Zero Cruzeiro*, where the 'zero' brings all the elements

---

<sup>97</sup> Louis Marin, *Utopics: Spatial Play* (London: Macmillan, 1984). The idea of the "neuter" is important here, since it is what differentiates "utopics" from the more usual notions of "utopia". In "utopics", this figure cannot acquire any value, insofar as it is the juxtaposition of different "opinions" which are already giving value-judgments to present actions and discourses. Utopics is therefore not an "image" of the future, but the "figure" of a future reconciliation that is always already displaced, since it is not an *absolute* reconciliation, which is why it is pluralized.

(the figure of the Indian, the figure of the dispossessed, money, and the artwork) together in the space of a "neuter", an ideal field of immense possibilities.

In this sense, *Zero Cruzeiro* establishes a 'ground zero'. Along with *Money Tree* and Meireles' other works on money, what *Zero Cruzeiro* negates is no more than the possibility of circulation, and specifically the possibility of the circulation of money. We can see that there is a strange alchemy at work, cynically fulfilled in the expression of alchemy's own misfortune: the splendour of nothingness: which would be the object of capitalism's abjection. This bill represents *no-single-portion* of the state's reserves, a paradox that is only possible in the modern world, with the advent of representation, when it became possible to dissociate words from things, value from its materiality or, in our case, money from gold:

In Brazil today, one can observe the model of the artist-*marchand* – a relationship of production, distribution and consumption. This system is founded on the systematic favouring of the individual who purchases, invests and creates humiliating conditions for those who produce [i.e. the worker]. However, today artists can direct their creative abilities towards acquiring (shaping) a behaviour that focuses on: 1. Exploiting no one; allowing no one to exploit oneself; 2. Having nothing. Nothing to lose.<sup>98</sup>

Meireles thus dreams of producing a radical spasm in the monetary system. By determining the value of paper money at zero, transactions are forced to a different plane, the economy is forced to detach itself from the monetary system, while, by the same stroke, ruling the State out of the system of exchange; Since this worthless banknote can only limit those transactions that are determined by money, it could potentially liberate other possible types of exchange and trade, perhaps even archaic ones (which might be represented in the figure of the Indian). Seen in this light, Meireles' works about money are a statement against speculation, they produce an impasse at the level of the monetary

---

<sup>98</sup> Cildo Meireles, "Insertions Into Ideological Circuits 1970-75" in *Cildo Meireles*: 110.

system, they freeze the late-capitalist economy, while liberating all other types of transactions. This would be the dream-world that, from the perspective of a utopic discourse, these works project<sup>99</sup>.

Throughout this chapter, I've attempted to give two interrelated arguments. The first is that Cildo Meireles' *Zero Cruzeiro* cannot be solely read from the perspective of contemporary art criticism, nor from the perspective of the discourses on Conceptual art. For this would restrict the ways in which the two figures that appear on the banknote – the figure of the Indian and the figure of the dispossessed – forbear our longing for unity and render inoperative any desire to discover a "truth" about their relationship to each other. And at the same time these approaches seem to put more weight on current problematics such as those around identity politics than on larger problematics that were at work during the 1970s, such as the assemblages between local forms of governmentality and transnational economic capitalism. Which brings us to the second argument, namely that the relationships between these figures – the figure of the Indian and the figure of the dispossessed – were, first and foremost, caught within these political-economic problematics of the 1970s, and secondly, within an artistic operative schema that had already been developed by the artist in former works – and which he acknowledges as constituting the "core" of his practice. I have argued that the artistic schema relates to notions of permutations, in which these figures are constantly slipping under each other and destabilizing any fixed reading we might wish to ascribe to each of them. I may

---

<sup>99</sup> Of course, this utopian ideal doesn't account for the fact that this banknote is an artwork, which makes it enter into a system of value that, being more arbitrary, is also unrestricted. But for now we will leave this point as a suggestion, for that would perhaps involve an entirely different reading of the two figures we've been addressing. A reading that would render them yet more slippery, since it would involve them in a discussion about the art-circuit itself.



explain this more clearly by way of an absurd claim that we've encountered already, namely that "Cildo Meireles interrogates the relationships theorized by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their study *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*" (without, of course, wanting to find a "redemptive" aspect to the claim). In their chapter "One or Several Regimes of Signs", from the second volume of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari give us a useful distinction between a "despotic" and an "authoritarian" regime, and of how the face of the despot and the face of the dispossessed appear in each of these regimes. Despotic regimes are characteristic of empires and kingdoms, where the emperor and the king are assumed to be the embodiment of power. Thus, beheading is at the same time the beheading of the king and the beheading of the kingdom. These are then placed in contrast to authoritarian regimes, (and this is a profoundly Foucauldian conception) where there are no fixed loci of power. This would be the nature of the nation-state, and of bureaucratic systems, where power is diffused across a field of institutions that form *figures of power* and *figures of dispossession* that produce and reproduce each other and which emerge according to discourses on politics, on economy, about the environment, the nation, the national subject, etc. Thus, the series of permutations that we've seen above. The figure of the dispossessed may signify several things: the underclass, the homeless, the psychiatric patient, the prisoner – but all of these may indeed be figures of the Indian, of an "assimilated" Indian. Likewise, the figure of the Indian may signify several things: the "primitive", positivized as the foundation of the Brazilian national subject (and even this is not clear for in this the Indian competes with blackness); or negativized as a pre-capitalist archaism and thus as the figure of backwardness; or as an allegory of the Indian as the Brazilian "Other"; and so on. But this figure may easily become the dispossessed; it may be a figure of sorrow, staring

downwards, pensive, a "last Indian" standing at a threshold between the barren, desecrated landscape and a modern world that I, the beholder of the image, inhabit.

## Conclusion

*The artist is not outside the symptoms, but makes a work of art from them, which sometimes serves to precipitate them, and sometimes to transform them.*<sup>100</sup>

Certain artworks are, as the Peruvian critic Gustavo Buntinx has put it, “symbolic operations on reality.” And since we’ve been addressing artworks from the 1970s Latin America, we may take some freedom with Mao Zedong’s words and claim that there was a “bourgeois” reality and a “proletarian” reality at the time.<sup>101</sup> This is certainly what is suggested in Buntinx’s essay “The Power and the Illusion”, where the figure of *Sarita Colonia*, “a popular saint in whose printed image [is perceived] the mystical face of the new syncretic culture millions of migrants [from the country to the city] are building in their march towards modernity.”<sup>102</sup> This icon of migrants was taken by an art collective called *Huayco*, who made a large reproduction of it beside the Pan-American Highway, a favoured route for migrants. As a result, it became the space of a rare *rendezvous* between a public of art who had read about it, who saw it as “avant-garde” (insofar as it was placed in an “different” space), and the migrants, who saw it as a religious icon, placed in a familiar space.

Gilles Deleuze’s words introduce an ambivalence concerning the potential of the artwork: it may “precipitate” the symptoms of the reality it speaks to as much as it may “transform” them. This ambivalence inheres in the two works that I have addressed in this thesis. It is this ambivalence that I have attempted to reveal in the preceding pages, for it is

---

<sup>100</sup> Gilles Deleuze, “On Nietzsche and The Image of Thought,” in Deleuze, 2004: 140.

<sup>101</sup> Mao Zedong’s words were actually, spoke of a “bourgeois human nature” and a “proletarian human nature”.

<sup>102</sup> Gustavo Buntinx, “The Power and the Illusion: Aura Lost and Restored in the Peruvian Weimar Republic (1980-1992),” in *Beyond the Fantastic*: 304.

an ambivalence that makes them all the more attractive. As works of art from the 1970s, produced by artists informed by notions such as "institutionalization", "imperialism," the "aesthetics of hunger,"<sup>103</sup> or "the aesthetics of resistance,"<sup>104</sup> *Homenaje a Manuel Quintín Lame* and *Zero Cruzeiro* are intimately tied to discourses on art. They begin from a critical perspective developed within artistic circuits, and from there they take on topics that relate to politics. But they do so not for the purposes of art, but because in a sense there was a formal structure of resistance. We've seen in the case of Caro that we can call this an "aesthetics of resistance", a concept conceived by the critic Marta Traba, for whom the adoption of high production standards constituted a "lie" in the works of Latin American artists working in precarious conditions. In this sense, precariousness was to be more or less expressed in the works, constituting a resistance to imported trends. In the case of Meireles, we've seen that his works explored intricate and complex formal questions, or they constituted a formalization of abstract structures such as permutations and sensorial perceptions. But we've seen that this was also infused with an oppositional charge; they were not straight-forward representations of abstract ideas. In this sense, Meireles' work took the forms (or icons) of economic domination (the banknote for instance) or of cultural imperialism (the Coca-Cola bottle, for example) as lying at the heart of a system that he wishes to disrupt. His formal strategies would then be geared towards producing a spasm in these systems through the insertion of symbols, figures or icons that complicate the way they signify.

---

<sup>103</sup> Rocha: 66, n.20.

<sup>104</sup> Marta Traba, a famous Argentine art critic who lived in Colombia for several years, used this term to refer to artworks that resisted the technologization of society, which for her was the equivalent to the deterioration of an original sensibility. It is in this sense that the use of graphic arts took on a "revolutionary" potential during the 1960s and 1970s, in Colombia and in other places. Cf. Marta Traba, *Dos Décadas Vulnerables en las Artes Plásticas Latinoamericanas, 1950-1970* (México: Siglo XXI, 1973).

Antonio Caro's *Homenaje a Manuel Quintín Lame* responded to a perplexity with which one must have seen the panorama of political engagements during the 1970s in Colombia. But in contrast to works done by other so-called "political artists" such as Clemencia Lucena or Enrique Hernandez, his work did not take a clear position within the range of possible sides, be this a conservative, a revolutionary; nor had it taken the actively pro-indigenous one that it has today.<sup>105</sup> I have argued that if Caro's concern had been "to reinstate a presence that had been obliterated by official histories,"<sup>106</sup> a single, delicate reproduction of this signature would have sufficed. But the insistence with which Caro repeated this gesture and the display of these reproductions across the façade of a university<sup>107</sup> bear a monumentality that seems quite caustic. They also bear a scepticism in relation to the political environment of the time; as if he had wished to drop a curtain of "realpolitik" before the theatre of political posturing that enveloped the world of the arts and the university. Perhaps, among the debates about the proletariat, the peasants, the workers, the students and the artists, the figure of Manuel Quintín Lame would have seemed an oddity. Cildo Meireles' *Zero Cruzeiro* establishes a continuity between the banknote and the artwork that, as I have claimed, is momentarily arrested by the objectness of the banknote as paper on one hand, and by the presence of the two figures on the other. It is there, in this objectness, in those figures, that this banknote makes reference to a reality. But that the two figures do not necessarily converge in a singular

---

<sup>105</sup> Despite the possible contradictions that one may find between an engagement with the art-world and the forms of engagement with indigenous peoples themselves, Caro's commitment to indigenous peoples in Colombia (and bordering nations such as Venezuela) is today well known.

<sup>106</sup> It is certain today that there are many people in Colombia, me included, who learned of Quintín Lame through Caro's work. Even if not a large number, Caro considers this to be an important achievement, as he told me in one of our interviews.

<sup>107</sup> A university that was, at least from what we can glean from the articles at hand, associated with a proletarian emancipation.

identity, namely that of the marginalized, for this kind of notion was not what was going around at the time. I have used the words “functional” and “dysfunctional” to show that they are on one hand related to the body of the dispossessed and the indigenous, but under a capitalist system of value where the body “works” if it is productive, and does not “work” if it can’t produce something that may be accumulated – the body of the worker is significant here. I have also argued that, in relation to images that appear on official banknotes, these two figures *signify*: they signify, for instance, the kinds of allegorical figures that indigenous peoples are forced into, the model citizen gone mad, the “assimilated” Indian, and so on.

From a contemporary perspective – from a “politically correct” perspective – these works would have to be read as either being straight-forward appropriations of the figure of the Indian, or as vindicating the indigenous from their condition as oppressed, or from their suppressed role in historical narratives. However, such a reading would not allow us to enter into the complex realities that each one of them addresses. Nor would a reading from the perspective of prescribed notion of Conceptualism suffice. As “symbolic operations on reality” these works constitute a highly sophisticated form of engagement with their specific historical milieux. What these works provide is not so much a “politicization” of art; their value derives from a slightly different characteristic: it derives from a structuring of the most conservative forms (the icon, for instance) so as to reveal a potentially subversive possibility, and possible ways for subverting them.

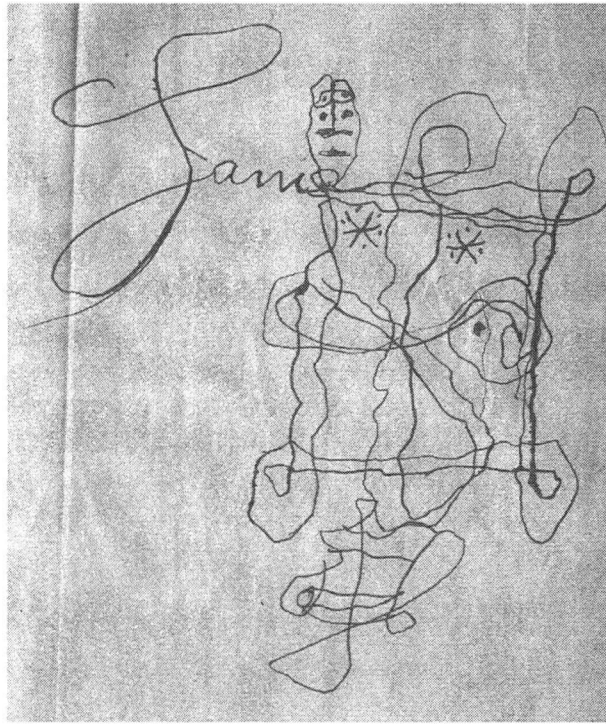


Fig. 1: Antonio Cato, *Homenaje a Manuel Quintín Lame*, 1972, image taken from an artist's reproduction

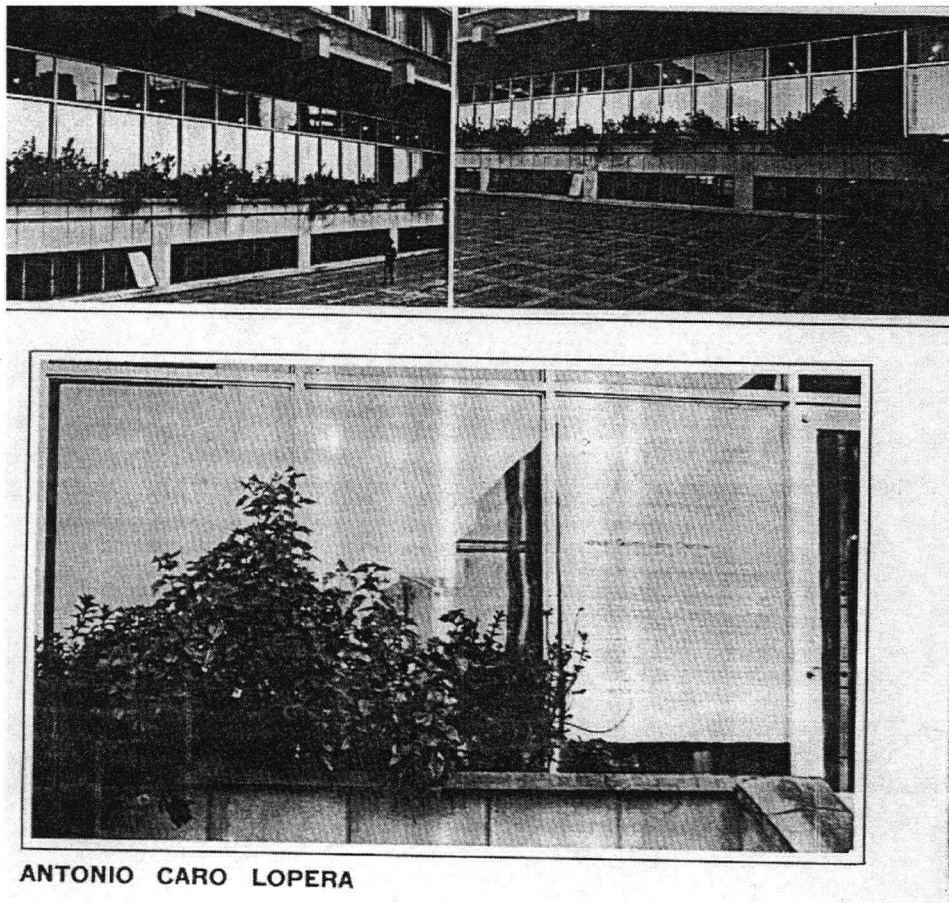


Fig. 2: Antonio Caro, *Homenaje a Manuel Quintín Lame*, 1972, Installation View, Salón de Artistas, Universidad Jorge Tadeo Lozano(1972)

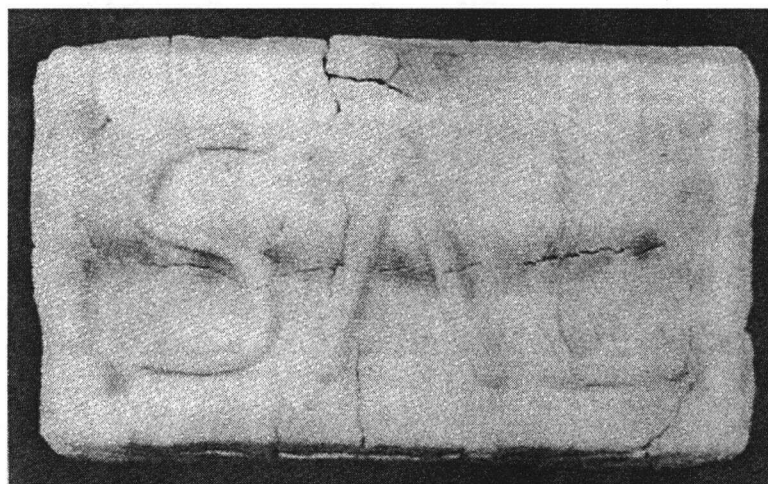


Fig. 4: Antonio Caro, *SAL (SALT)*, 1971, Carved pressed salt



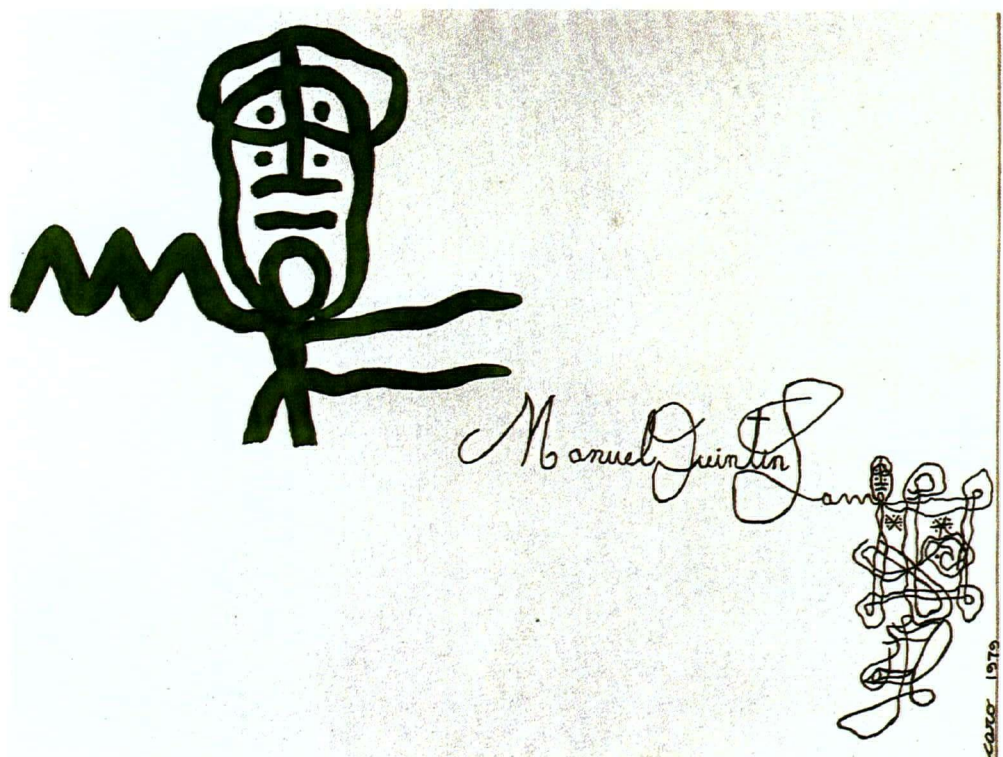


Fig. 5: Antonio Caro, *Homenaje a Manuel Quintín Lame*, 1979

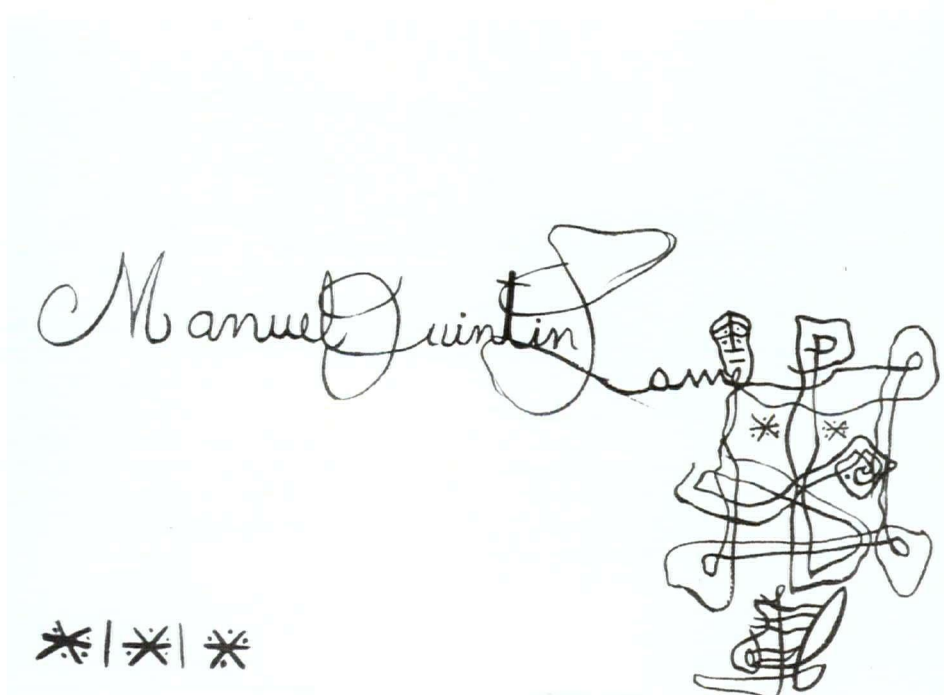


Fig. 6: Antonio Caro, *Homenaje a Manuel Quintín Lame*, 1992



Fig. 7: Antonio Caro, *El Imperialismo es un Tigre de Papel*, 1972

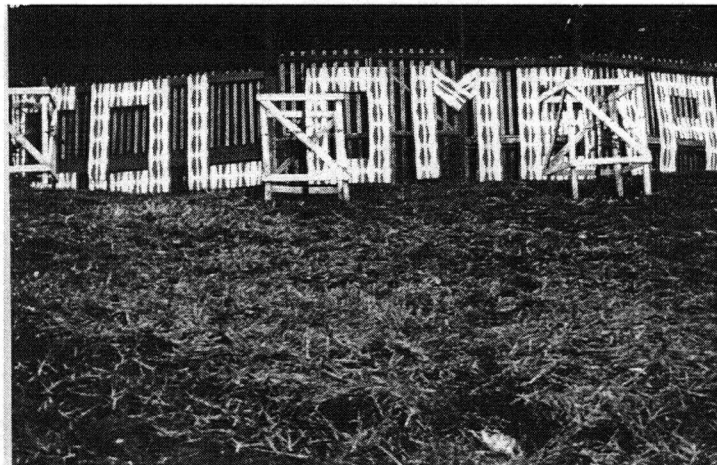


Fig. 8: Antonio Caro, *Marlboro/Colombia*, 1973

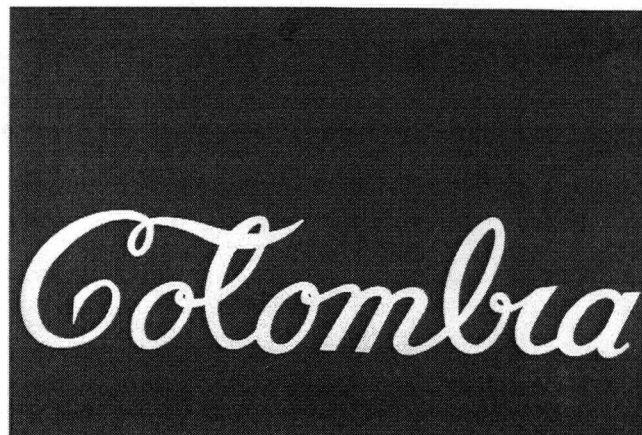


Fig. 9: Antonio Caro, *Coca-Cola Colombia*, 1976

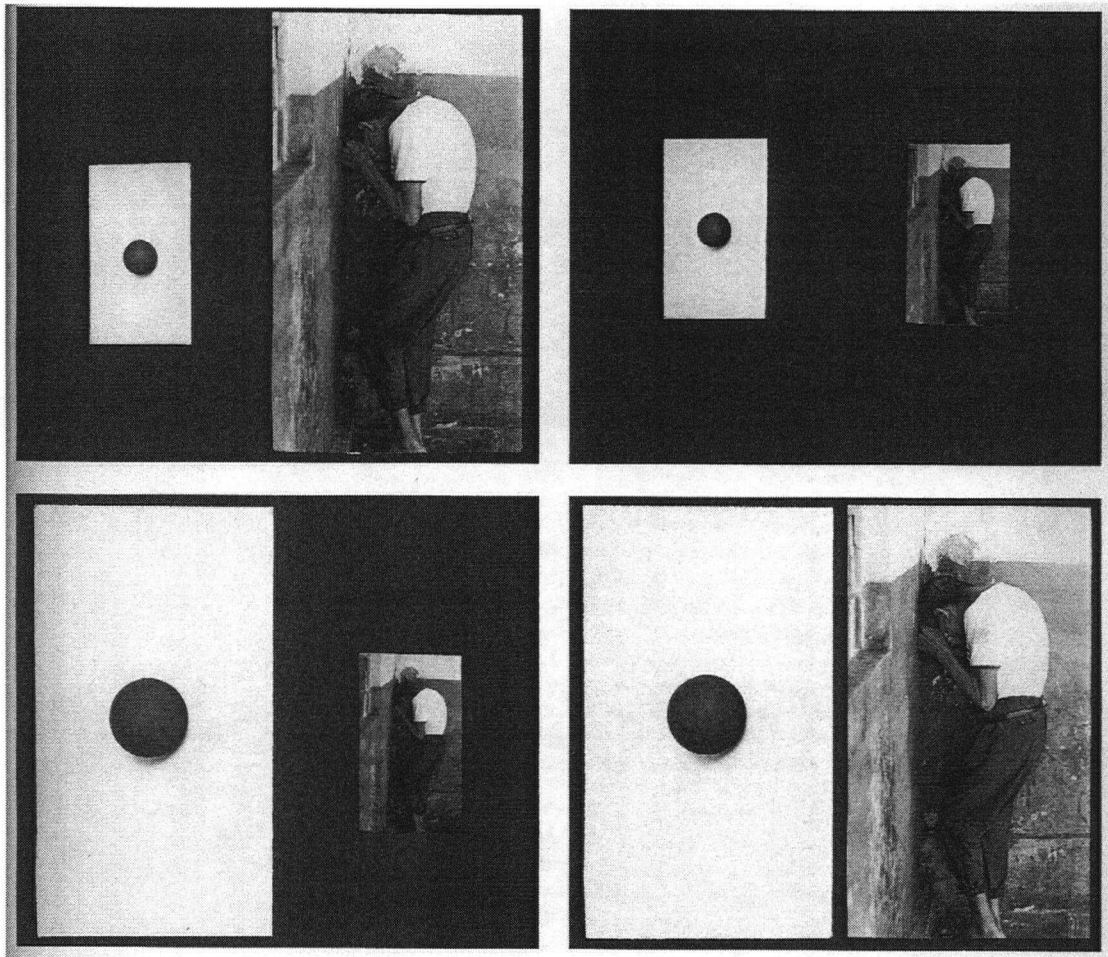


Fig. 10: Cildo Meireles, *Eureka/Blindhotland*, (1970-1975), black and white photomontages





Fig. 11: Cildo Meireles, *Eureka/Blindhotland*, (1970-1975), Installation view

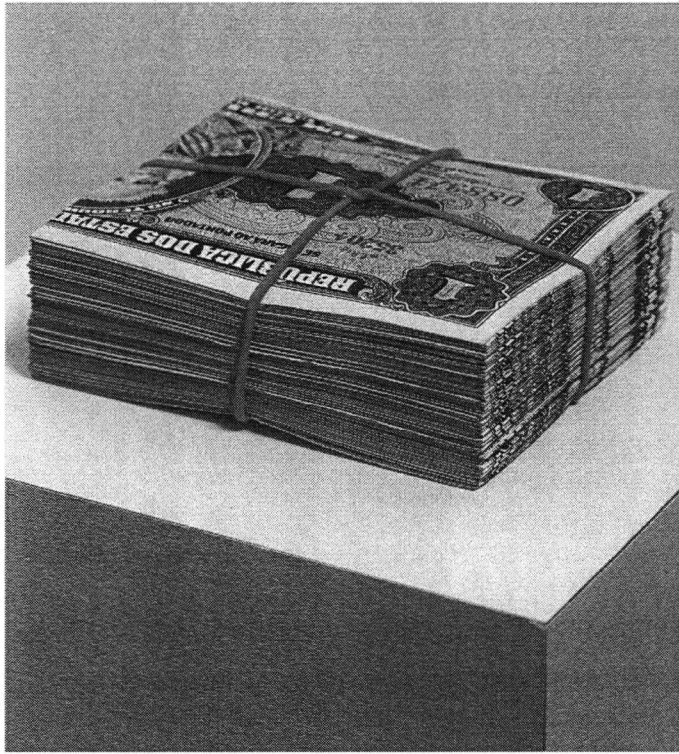


Fig. 12: Cildo Meireles, *Money Tree*, 1969, stack of One Cruzeiro banknotes cross-bound with rubber band

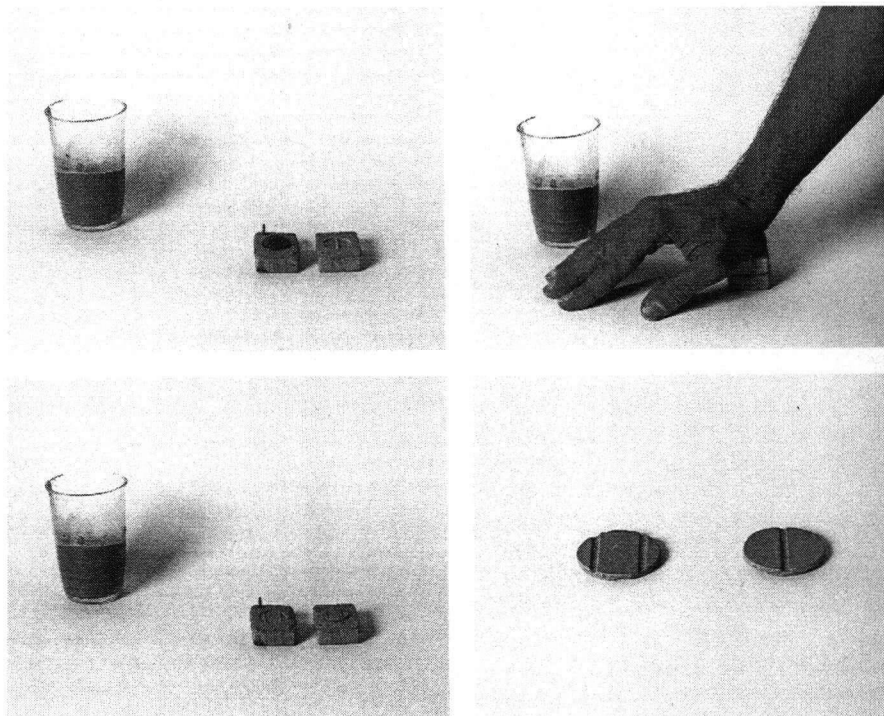
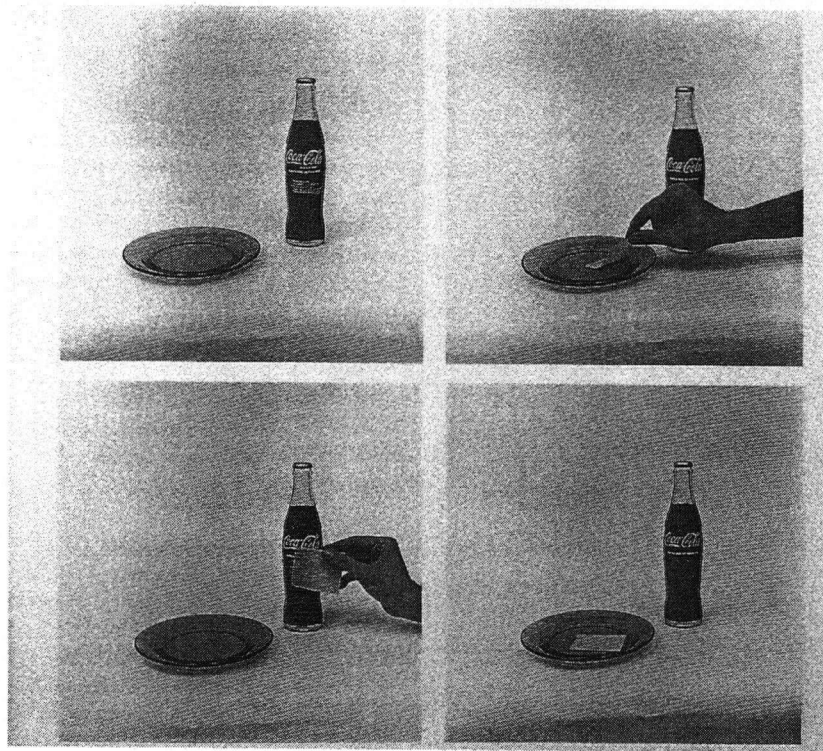


Fig. 13: Cildo Meireles, *Insertions into Anthropological Circuits*, 1971, clay tokens dispensing machines, telephones, or transport.



Figs. 14 and 15: Cildo Meireles, *Insertions into Ideological Circuits, Coca-Cola Project*, 1970



Fig. 16: Robert Indiana, *LOVE*, 1971, one of several versions made since 1966



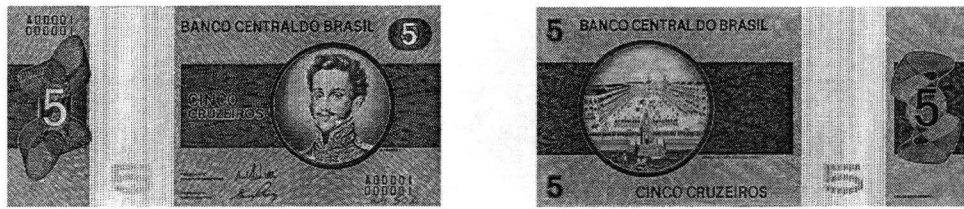


Fig. 17: Cr\$5 Banknote with portrait of Dom Pedro I, 1970

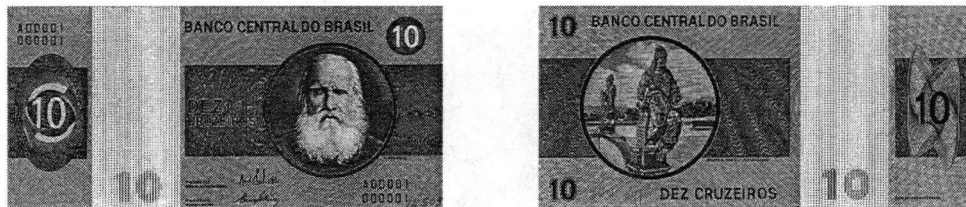


Fig. 18: Cr\$10 Banknote with portrait of Dom Pedro II, 1970



Fig. 19: Cr\$500 Banknote with the theme of "Ethnic Evolution", 1972



Fig. 20: Cr\$1 Banknote from the 1942 to 1967 series



## Bibliography

- , "Capitalismo y Comunismo: Están Obligados a Coexistir?" *Lecturas Dominicales*, January 31, 1975.
- , Catalogue for the XXIII Salon Nacional de Artistas, (Bogotá: Colcultura, 1972).
- , *Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca – CRIC: Diez Años de Lucha, Historia y Documentos*, (Bogotá: Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular – CINEP, 1978).
- Ahmad, Aijaz, "Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory'," in *Social Text*, no. 17: 3-25.
- Alberro Alex, "A Media Art," in Newman, Michael and Jon Bird, *Rewriting Conceptual Art*, London: Reaktion, 1999: 140-152.
- Alberro Alex and Stimson, Blake, *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999).
- Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991).
- Archila Neira, Mauricio, *Idas y Venidas, Vueltas y Revueltas: Protestas Sociales en Colombia, 1958-1990*, (Bogotá: ICANH and CINEP, 2003).
- Armstrong, Elizabeth, "Impure Beauty," in *Ultrabaroque: Aspects of Post-Latin American Art*, San Diego, Museum of Contemporary Art, 2001, pp.17-18.
- Barrios, Alvaro, "Entrevista con Antonio Caro," in *Orígenes del Arte Conceptual en Colombia (1968-1978)*, (Bogotá: Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá, 1999).
- Buchloch, Benjamin, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the aesthetic of the Administration to the Critique of Institutions," in Alberro and Stimson eds., *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*.

- Buntinx, Gustavo, "The Power and the Illusion: Aura Lost and Restored in the Peruvian Weimar Republic (1980-1992)," in *Beyond the Fantastic*: 299-326.
- Butler, Judith, Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality, Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (London: Verso, 2000).
- Caballero, Antonio, "Más y Más Humanismos," *Lecturas Dominicales*, May 14, 1972.
- Camnitzer, Luis, "Antonio Caro: Guerrillero Visual," *Poliester V.4* no.12: 40-45.
- Camnitzer, Luis, Jane Farver and Rachel Weiss, *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin (1950s-1980s)* (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999).
- Caro, Antonio, "Quintín Lame me Voltió La Cabeza," *Periodico El Mundo* (Medellín).  
From the artist's personal archives, n/d.
- \_\_\_\_\_, Unedited Interviews with the Artist, June-August, 2004.
- \_\_\_\_\_, Correspondence with the artist, 2003-2004.
- Castillo-Cardenas, Gonzalo, *Liberation Theology From Below: The Life and Thought of Manuel Quintín Lame* (New York: Orbis Books, 1987).
- Chief Seattle, "Letter to the President of the United States," (C. 1854)  
<http://www.barefootsworld.net/seattle.html>. (accessed October 2, 2004).
- Corry, Stephen, *Towards Indian Self-Determination in Colombia* (Survival International, 1976).
- Deleuze, Gilles, "On Nietzsche and The Image of Thought," in *Desert Islands and Other Texts* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004). Originally published as *L'Île déserte et autres textes : textes et entretiens 1953-1974*, (Paris: Minuit, 2002).
- \_\_\_\_\_, "Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Precursor of Kafka, Céline, and Ponge," in *Desert Islands and Other Texts*: 53-55.

- Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *A Thousand Plateaus*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).
- Escobar, Ticio, *La Belleza de Los Otros: Arte Indígena del Paraguay* (Asunción: Museo del Barro, 1993).
- \_\_\_\_\_, "Issues in Popular Art," in *Beyond the Fantastic* (London: InIVA, 1995): 91-114.
- Franco, Jean, *The Modern Culture of Latin America: Society and the Artist*, Revised ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970).
- Friedemann, Nina, Juan Friede and Daniel Fajardo, *Indigenismo y Aniquilamiento de Indígenas en Colombia* (Bogotá: CIEC, 1975).
- García Canclini, Néstor, *Culturas Híbridas: Estrategias para Entrar y Salir de la Modernidad*, (Mexico: Grijalbo, 1989).
- Garfield, Seth, *Indigenous Struggle at the Heart of Brazil: State Policy, Frontier Expansion, and the Xavante Indians, 1927-1988* (Durham: Duke, 2001).
- Giunta, Andrea, *Vanguardia, Internacionalismo y Política: Arte Argentino en los Años Sesenta* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2001).
- González, Miguel, *Todo Está Muy Caro*, (Ex. Cat.) (Cali: Museo de Arte La Tertulia, 2002).
- Herkenhoff, Paulo, "A Labyrinthine Ghetto: The Work of Cildo Meireles," in *Cildo Meireles*, (London: Phaidon, 1999): 38-78.
- Jameson, Fredric, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*,
- Lame, Manuel Quintín, *Los Pensamientos del Indio que se Educó Dentro de Las Selvas Colombianas*, Bogotá: Funcol, 1970?
- \_\_\_\_\_, *En Defensa de Mi Raza* (Bogotá: Comité de la Defensa del Indio, 1971).

- Laserna, Mario, "Reforma Agraria: Imperialismo y Oligarquía," (Bogotá: Lecturas Dominicales, January 11, 1970).
- Lauer, Mirko, *Andes Imaginarios: Discursos del Indigenismo 2* (Lima: Sur Casa de Estudios del Socialismo, 1997).
- Lucena, Clemencia, "El Artista y la Participación," (Bogotá: El Tiempo, November 12, 1972).
- de Madariaga, Salvador, "Comunismo y Pueblo" (Bogotá: El Tiempo, January 17, 1971).
- De Man, Paul, *Allegories of Reading* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).
- Marin, Louis, *Utopics: Spatial Play*, (London: Macmillan, 1984). (Originally published as *Utopiques: Jeux d'Espaces*, Minuit, Paris, 1973).
- Medina, Alvaro, *El Arte Colombiano de los Años Veinte y Treinta* (Bogotá: Colcultura, 1995).
- Meireles, Cildo, "Cruzeiro do Sul," in *Cildo Meireles* (London: Phaidon, 1999).
- \_\_\_\_\_, "Eureka/Blindhotland", in *Cildo Meireles*.
- \_\_\_\_\_, Interview with Gerardo Mosquera, in *Cildo Meireles*: 6-35.
- \_\_\_\_\_, "Insertions Into Ideological Circuits 1970-75", in *Cildo Meireles*.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, (London: Routledge, 1962).
- Mignolo, Walter, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: literacy, territoriality and colonization*, U. Michigan Press, 1995.
- Montaña, Antonio, "A La Guerrilla Estética," (Bogotá: Lecturas Dominicales, July 16, 1972).
- Mosquera, Gerardo ed., *Beyond the Fantastic: Contemporary art criticism from Latin America*, (London: InVA, 1995).

- Mosquera, Gerardo, Rachel Weiss and Carolina Ponce de León, *Ante América*, (Ex. Cat.) (Bogotá: Banco de La República, 1992).
- Paredes Pardo, Jaime "La Alternativa del Indio: Vestirse de Blanco?" (Ibid. March 7, 1971).
- \_\_\_\_\_, "El Indio: Compatriota sin Patria," (Ibid. July 23, 1972).
- Pérez Ramírez, Gustavo, "Planas: Espejo de la Opresión del Indígena" (Bogotá: Lecturas Dominicales, February 7, 1971; p.3).
- Ponce de León, Carolina, *El Efecto Mariposa: Ensayos Sobre Arte en Colombia, 1985-2000* (Bogotá: Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá, 2004).
- Ramirez, Mari Carmen, "Blue Print Circuits," in Alex Alberro and Blake Stimson eds. *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999).
- Ramos, Alcida Rita, *Indigenism, Ethnic Politics in Brazil* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998).
- Rappaport, Joanne, *The Politics of Memory: Native Interpretation in the Colombian Andes*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).
- Reichel-Domatoff, Gerardo, "El Misionero Ante Las Culturas Indígenas," (Ibid. December 12, 1971).
- Restrepo, Javier D., "Manuel Quintín Lame, El Indio que no se Humilló," *Lecturas Dominicales*, (Bogotá: El Tiempo, May 21, 1972).
- Ribeiro, Darcy, *Las Américas y La Civilización* (Buenos Aires: Bibliotecas Universitarias, 1985).
- Rincón, Carlos, *Mapas y Pliegues*, (Bogotá: Colcultura, 1996).
- Roca, Jose, Exhibition Catalogue, *Define "Context"*, (New York: Apex Art, 2000).
- Rocha, Glauber, *Revisão Crítica do Cinema Brasileiro*, (São Paulo: Cosac & Naify, 2003).

- Roda, Juan Antonio, "El XXIII Salón Nacional: Razones de una Decisión," (Bogotá: El Tiempo, Agosto 23 de 1972).
- Sabreli, Juan José, "Radiografía del Pequeño Burgués" (Bogotá: January 24, 1971).
- Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Being and Nothingness*, (Washington: Washington Square Press, (1983).
- Serrano, Eduardo, "El Primer Salon Oficial," (Bogotá: *El Tiempo*, September 4, 1972).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Un Lustro Visual: Ensayos Sobre Arte Contemporaneo Colombiano* (Bogotá: Tercer Mundo, 1976).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Arte Colombiano Contemporaneo: Certámenes y Exposiciones Colectivas, 1971-1998* (Bogotá: Alcaldía Mayor Santafé de Bogotá, 1999).
- Todorov, Tzvetan, *La Conquete de l'Amerique: la question de l'autre*, (Paris: Seuil, 1982).
- Traba, Marta, "Dos Líneas Extremas de la Pintura Colombiana: Botero y Ramírez Villamizar," in *Eco* No. 112, August, 1969: 354-386.
- \_\_\_\_\_, "Arte y Revolución," (Bogotá: El Tiempo, January 16, 1972).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Arte Latinoamericano Actual* (Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1972).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Dos Décadas Vulnerables en las Artes Plásticas Latinoamericanas, 1950-1970* (México: Siglo XXI, 1973).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Hombre Americano a Todo Color* (Bogotá: Editorial Universidad Nacional, 1995).
- Warren, Jonathan W., *Racial Revolutions: Antiracism and Indian Resurgence in Brazil* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).
- Xavier, Ismail, *Allegories of Underdevelopment: Aesthetics and Politics in Modern Brazilian Cinema*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).
- Zedong, Mao, *Mao's Little Red Book*, taken from *Mao's Little Red Book*, [http://freedom.orlingrabbe.com/lfetimes/red\\_book.htm](http://freedom.orlingrabbe.com/lfetimes/red_book.htm).