LATIN AMERICA INSIDE OUT
IDENTITY, MODERNITY AND POLITICS IN CONTEMPORARY ARTWORKS

by

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I had great support from family, friends and professionals in this journey, but to represent all of them, I chose three names which I believe without them this project wouldn’t have been possible:

My grandfather Fernando, who taught me the value of reading: the most powerful weapon a man can own and the most beautiful wings a man can fly with. Thank you, I’m proud of having your name.

My best friend Fabio, whom with I laughed and cried, had long nights playing backgammon or planning our works, but above all, whom I admired and made me feel admired; we learnt a lot. Thank you, I’m proud of having you by my side.

My tutor Maxa, a German by birth but Latin by heart, who guided me along the road and showed me there is no dead end, encouraging my ideas and developing also my personality. Thank you, I’m proud of having you as a mentor.

DEDICATIONS

To my modern parents, whose politics brought me home without knowing my origin to help me build my own identity in the contemporary world: your efforts are more than art.

To my sister, always my South, even when I’m in the North: what we have is borderless and untranslatable.

To all the Latinos, inside and outside the Americas.
ABSTRACT

This material aims to analyse how contemporary Latin American artworks can serve as a vehicle to understand the concepts and problematics of identity, modernity and politics in the region. Through selected works by six artists from different nationalities - Adriana Varejão, Regina Galindo, Damián Ortega, Carlos Garaicoa, Marcelo Brodsky and Oscar Muñoz - and using an essential book banished during the dictatorships in some countries as a background (Eduardo Galeano's *Open Veins of Latin America*), I investigate Latin America's history and the impacts of it in its post-colonial identity and art. To link art and history in each chapter, I chose a second voice from other cultural area and country to address the same issues of my argument, attempting to make this bondage stronger and more interesting for a broader public.

The thesis can also be read as a study between local and global events. The dialogue between Latin America and the West both in art and history is in the core of each section, and my conclusion is based on this complex relationship; with a seventh artwork, by Doris Salcedo, created partly in Latin America and partly in the United Kingdom, I intent to raise questions regarding displacement and borders, otherness and communication in the 21st Century. The comprehension of the past in the present time is crucial for the construction of a better future in Latin America and elsewhere; contemporary art proves, in this sense, to be a forceful platform for discussion.
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“LATIN AMERICA NEITHER WANTS, NOR HAS ANY REASON, TO BE A PAWN WITHOUT A WILL OF ITS OWN; NOR IS IT MERELY WISHFUL THINKING THAT ITS QUEST FOR INDEPENDENCE AND ORIGINALITY SHOULD BECOME A WESTERN ASPIRATION. HOWEVER, THE NAVIGATIONAL ADVANCES THAT HAVE NARROWED SUCH DISTANCES BETWEEN OUR AMERICAS AND EUROPE SEEM, CONVERSELY, TO HAVE ACCENTUATED OUR CULTURAL REMOTENESS.”

GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ

‘THE SOLITUDE OF LATIN AMERICA’, LITERATURE NOBEL PRIZE LECTURE STOCKHOLM, 1982
'Latin America’ is a term I have been struggling with, and even now, I still find hard to understand completely. It automatically stereotypes a group of countries with different cultures and realities, and that can lead to numerous misinterpretations; the sheer geographic scale of the continent contradicts the homogeneity the term Latin America implies. Coming from one of the only countries in the region whose Spanish is not the first language – Portuguese is the official idiom in Brazil – I always felt insulted when referred to as ‘Latin’, The concept of ‘Latin America’ is strongly linked with the idiom and one generally tends to believe everybody south of the United States speaks Spanish. However, the exceptions in terms of language (Brazilians, Haitians and Surinamese amongst others) did not make much of a difference in the destiny of these countries. As the Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano has denoted:

“Along the way we even lost the right to call ourselves Americans. (...) For the world today, America is just the United States; the region we inhabit is a sub-America, a second class America of nebulous identity. Our part of the world, known today as Latin America, was precocious: it has specialized in losing ever since those remote times when Renaissance Europeans ventured across the ocean and buried their teeth in the throats of the Indian civilizations. Centuries passed, and Latin America perfected its role. (...) Latin America is the region of open veins. Everything, from the discovery until our times, has always been transmuted into European – or later United States – capital, and as such has accumulated in distant centers of powers.”

It is not my intention here to discuss what Latin America is or is not, but it is important for the reader to acknowledge that the following chapters will eventually be referring to specific nationalities (and some facts are not general for the whole continent). My point is to show what these nationalities have in

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1 The term ‘Latin America’ was coined in the nineteenth century by Colombian intellectual Torres Caicedo to refer to the parts of America with romantic spoken languages (Spanish, Portuguese and French) with an economy and educated civil society connected to the interests of Europe. According to Guardiola-Rivera, Oscar in What If Latin America Ruled The World?: How The South Will Take The North Into The 22nd Century. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010. Pg. 172-173.

common in their societies and courses, therefore, the distinctions between them are important but not the centre of my discussion. The issues regarding different races and groups inside the Latin American society are also of minor significance to my text; even though important voices in the region accentuate some causes, like the Colombian academic Oscar Guardiola-Rivera does with the indigenous people and the Cuban cultural critic Coco Fusco with the black population, I chose to write about the Latin American society as a whole, hoping to represent and communicate with these people regardless of their backgrounds. My position changed from rejection to embracement because as much as I have wanted to see myself out of this ‘Latino label’, I know I have been getting more and more into it, simply because the differences between these people are as many as the similarities; this is something I only realised when I travelled to some of these countries or met people from there. No matter how high one goes in the Andean mountains, how deep in the Amazon forest or how far in the Caribbean islands, some things will be the same, which is what makes viable for me to write this text.

When I first read and heard about the history of my country I did not find it very interesting and always preferred world history, probably because of the revolutions, wars and the idea that all the remarkable people and facts were coming from overseas. When eventually I learnt about the history of other countries of my continent, and by then, I already could make sense of the similarities between them and my own people’s fate. Nevertheless, it still seemed like that the reality in Latin America was nothing but an appendix in the course of Western civilisation. Since then, my interest and knowledge of Latin America has grown, in fact I now understand that my former neglect with it is an aspect of the culture I was born in and one of the issues I intent to discuss in this text: the self sabotage Latin American people are trapped in, the conviction that what comes from outside is worth more than what is produced inside; I will return to this inferiority complex. More recently I came to realise that there are other features of my own personality deriving from this historical background, and that became my main reason to write this dissertation.
What I once saw as two different subjects (Latin American and world history) I now feel able to write about in the same thesis, using similar examples. In these terms, I aim here to analyse contemporary Latin American artworks by six artists from different nationalities, representing topics familiar to most of the countries in the continent. The relationship between Latin American art and Latin American identity will be at the heart of this thesis. My argument will explore the complexity of history and culture in relation to the selected artworks and I will analyse how these issues are part of this society while revisiting their worldwide impact. To strengthen the arguments a second voice in each chapter will show how the same issues have been explored by other artists in dissimilar cultural areas and countries.

In the first chapter entitled THE REMAININGS OF COLONISATION I explore the series of paintings Linguas e Cortes (Tongues and Incisions), by the Brazilian artist Adriana Varejão, along with the sculpture Looting by the Guatemalan artist Regina Galindo; what they touch upon can also be read about in the books by the Chilean writer Isabel Allende. They are directly related with the second chapter, THE PROMISE OF MODERNITY in the continent. This section looks at the installation Cosmic Thing, by the Mexican artist Damián Ortega, and the sculpture The Point, the Line and the Plan by the Cuban artist Carlos Garaicoa; the idea of the failed utopia is also clearly reflected in Venezuelan architect Jesus Tenreiro-Degwitz’s projects. These chapters all link up with chapter three, THE BODIES BENEATH THE POLITICS, which discuss dictatorships and urban violence. The photographic essay Buena Memoria (Good Memory), by the Argentinean artist Marcelo Brodsky, and Oscar Muñoz’s photoserigraphs Aliento from Colombia address the same problems that the Brazilian musician Chico Buarque sang about in some of his songs. To understand how these issues connect in Latin America it is necessary to go through parts of its history, the hidden facts of the Western history, and I would say that perhaps it
will even require from the reader to see his/hers country's history from a whole different angle. Although the arguments of this text could be exemplified with many different artists, I believe the connection between their backgrounds and their works are of major importance to create a clearer picture as a whole, not only for the public familiar with contemporary art, but also for people in general. The way the examples interrelate in the middle, what they represent individually and as a group, is essential to make the blood run in the veins of this thesis. The structure of the chapters will follow the trajectory of Latin American identity development (from colonialism, passing through imperialism and military dictatorships, to the recent times), in which history overlaps at some points (see Appendix for timeline).

What do these artworks symbolise in local and global history? How does the content apply in different contexts? The conclusion is also supposed to demonstrate how local matters are directly related to global reality, the latter being either a cause or developing into a consequence of the first one, as I will show with a final work by the Colombian artist Doris Salcedo, an intervention already born as local and global – *Shibboleth*, a bridge between the two ironically created as a crack on the floor. The name is a Biblical term referring to nationalities and languages in ancient society, just like *Babel*, the film by Mexican director Alejandro González Iñárritu, and both address problems with immigration and displacement in the 21st Century. Given that the history of Latin America is part of the world's history, the matters concerning its social issues in times of globalisation are, to that end, beyond borders.

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3 “Latin America’s new advocates – the natives of Bolivia, Mexico and southern Colombia, the landless of Brazil, the free associations of Chile and Argentina, and the Latino community organisers of the United States – together with a new generation of economists and historians, point out that the real history of globalisation includes such episodes as: the river of silver and gold flowing between Spanish America and Europe from the sixteenth century to the late eighteenth century (...); the Mexican-American and the Spanish-American wars that ended with formal or de facto dominion of the United States over California, Texas, New Mexico, Cuba and Puerto Rico (...); the Anglo-German blockade of Venezuela in 1902 with the purpose of claiming overdue debts from the South American country; and the US-assisted separation of Panama from Colombia in 1903 that resulted in US control of the Panama Canal until 2000.” Guardiola-Rivera, Oscar in *What If Latin America Ruled The World?: How The South Will Take The North Into The 22nd Century*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010. Pg. 6.

4 “According to most estimates, by 2040 the United States will have a majority Latino population. This transformation will forever change the political, economic and cultural face of America. It will also have profound consequences for the rest of the world.” Guardiola-Rivera, Oscar in *What If Latin America Ruled The World?: How The South Will Take The North Into The 22nd Century*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010. Pg. 15.
In terms of bibliography and methods of research, I will focus on a selection of books by historians for the historical facts, literature writers for the local subjective perspectives, critics and curators to analyse the relationship between art and politics, and finally my own voice which I hope will make this text more lively. My main reference is *Las Venas Abiertas de América Latina* (Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent), by the Uruguayan historian Eduardo Galeano, a book banned by the dictatorships in Chile, Argentina and Uruguay and considered by many to be the most important book about the history of the region; even though Galeano has clearly a left position in his writings – the illustration on the back cover of the latest English version of the book is the Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez giving it as a gift to the president of the United States, Barack Obama –, what he wrote in 1971 is a faithful reflex of what happened to the continent and although a lot has happened since then, the roots of the problems remain the same.

While I was looking for some words to open my own text, I found the Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa's Literature Nobel Prize speech from last year. It is a fascinating text, full of references to the world literature and globalisation, but not as remarkable as Gabriel García Márquez's speech from 1982, in which the Colombian writer wisely puts across part of the complexity of the Latin American uniqueness and how secluded it is from the rest of the world. Even though, it was interesting to notice that the two writers were living different realities when they won the prizes; Márquez talks about the solitude of Latin America, and by the time some countries were still under military regime, while Llosa believes the continent is moving towards an integrated role in the world today, and for the first time in History the majority of the political leaders were


5 "(...) it is understandable that the rational talents on this side of the world, exalted in the contemplation of their own cultures, should have found themselves without valid means to interpret us. It is only natural that they insist on measuring us with the yardstick that they use for themselves, forgetting that the ravages of life are not the same for all, and that the quest of our own identity is just as arduous and bloody for us as it was for them. The interpretation of our reality through patterns not our own, serves only to make us ever more unknown, ever less free, ever more solitary” Gabriel Márquez, Gabriel in [Gabriel García Márquez - Nobel Lecture](http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1982/marquez-lecture.html) Accessed on May 2011.
elected by the people. Llosa and Márquez are very influential writers in the region and were close friends for many years until their political standpoints interfered in the relationship, now they do not talk to each other anymore. Regardless of their beliefs and opinions, both have written as Galeano has said once “against one’s solitude and the solitude of others” and “to awaken consciousness, to reveal identity – can literature claim a better function in these times, in these lands?”

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6 “We are afflicted with fewer dictatorships than before, only Cuba and her named successor, Venezuela, and some pseudo populist, clownish democracies like those in Bolivia and Nicaragua. But in the rest of the continent democracy is functioning, supported by a broad popular consensus, and for the first time in our history, as in Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, Peru, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, and almost all of Central America, we have a left and a right that respect legality, the freedom to criticize, elections, and succession in power. That is the right road, and if it stays on it, combats insidious corruption, and continues to integrate with the world, Latin America will finally stop being the continent of the future and become the continent of the present.” Vargas Llosa, Mario in Mario Vargas Llosa – Nobel Lecture. <http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2010/vargas_llosa-lecture_en.html> Accessed on May 2011.

7 Márquez still believes in socialism and supports the Cuban regime and populist governments like Chávez in Venezuela and Morales in Bolivia, while Llosa has turned to the democratic and liberal wing, even running for presidential elections in his country in 1990 for a center-right coalition (FREDEMO).
I. THE REMAININGS OF COLONISATION

ADRIANA VAREJÃO (BRA) + REGINA JOSÉ GALINDO (GUA)

LITERATURE: ISABEL ALLENDE (PER/CHI)

“He was deaf and blind to the needs of his house. He was very busy with his politics and his business, travelling constantly, financing new political campaigns, buying land and tractors, raising race horses, and speculating on the price of gold, sugar and paper. He did not notice that the walls of his house were eager for a coat of paint, that the furniture was falling apart, and that the kitchen had turned into a pigsty.”

Isabel Allende, La Casa de Los Espíritus (The House of The Spirits), 1982.

The period of colonisation has left deep marks in the Latin American post-colonial identity; as Coco Fusco states, “in the debates and art emerging from the tumult of the present are reflections of the many legacies of the conquest and colonisation of the Americas, among them, its limiting views of art and culture.” 8 Although the Portuguese America was different from the Spanish in some aspects of its colonial period both had similar forms of administration by their colonisers, which themselves divert completely from the model followed in the Anglo part of America, as Eduardo Galeano tells:

“The Mayflower pilgrims did not cross the sea to obtain legendary treasures; they came mainly to establish themselves with their families and to reproduce in the New World the system of life and work they had practiced in Europe. They were not soldiers of fortune but pioneers; they came not to conquer but to colonize, and their colonies were settlements.”

According to Galeano, “the sword and the cross marched together in the conquest and plunder of Latin America” 9; as part of the Counter-Reformation of the Catholic Church in Europe, the Spanish and Portuguese Crowns set missions – “the principal form of colonisation in most of Latin America” – to spread the Catholic faith in the ‘New World’. The indigenous people were baptised in mass

by the priests (e.g. the Jesuits) and later on the same happened with the slaves. Quickly the mix of creeds has even created a blend between indigenous, African and Catholic sacred images\textsuperscript{12}, and it became unquestionable the influence of religion in the region until these days. The colonisers also brought the machismo culture, in which men are considered superior than women, a point of view that became even stronger in Latin America through the centuries and is still common in many houses. In addition, the Europeans started the land distribution problem by dividing the land into large sections which, along with indigenous or black labour forces, were donated by the governments to a small number of privileged officials – the systems of the capitanias hereditárias in the Portuguese America and the encomiendas and haciendas in the Spanish America. Finally, employing a term widely used by Galeano and most historians, there is the trauma of being “exploited”; in Latin America there is a constant fear of being deceived and a terrible habit of taking advantage of the other, the best example of it being the historic of corruption in politics.

These are some of the dogmas incrusted in the Latin American social life that are sometimes unnoticeable at a first glance and which I believe can be found addressed in the artworks analysed in this chapter. The course of four generations of a Chilean family, described by the Peruvian/Chilean writer Isabel Allende in her book La Casa de Los Espíritus (The House of the Spirits), serves as an example to illustrate these remainings of colonisation I described and to introduce the works of the artists. In Allende’s writings, the impact of religion can be seen in many passages, for instance:

“The priest was blessed with a long, incriminating finger, which he used to point out sinners in public, and a tongue well schooled in arousing emotions (...) Even Satan was described in his most intimate perversions in the Galician accents of this priest whose mission in this world was to rouse the conscience of his indolent Creole flock.”\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{12} e.g. The Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico (fused iconography between indigenous elements and the Virgin Mary) and Our Lady of Aparecida in Brazil (fused iconography between afro elements and the Virgin Mary).

The idea of men as superior and therefore with more rights than women, the so-called machismo culture, is present in most of the male characters of the book, such as Severo, who “felt that it was time for his daughter to shake off her lethargy, stand firmly in reality, and learn the domestic skills that would prepare her for marriage”\(^{14}\) and Esteban, who embodies “the oppressive and violent patriarch that rules his family and all of his domain with an iron fist, just as a long line of conservative leaders will rule the country” and whose “conformity to a traditional political and family system, in which man rules by force and intimidation, will be synonymous with the efforts of the Chilean conservative elite to block social and political progress” as the academic Sara Cooper analyses.\(^{15}\) Cooper also believes that “from the beginning of the work, the narrator intimates that the ruling political system is corrupt as well as conservative”, which is a reflex of a society ruled by people like the character of Esteban, who “contentedly establishes himself as a powerful and successful feudal lord, ignoring any sign of social or political change that occurs beyond his property lines”\(^{16}\). Corruption, as I said previously, is a reality as old as the feudal lords that own large unproductive land properties in Latin America, and they both are overlooked by the Latin American society.

The series of paintings Línguas e Cortes (Tongues and Incisions, 1995-2005; see fig. 1, 2 and 3), by the Brazilian artist Adriana Varejão, is a good example of all the aspects referred above in Allende’s text in the post-colonial Latin American lifestyle. Varejão’s works “point to the aggressive nature of colonization, a process she insists is still ‘happening right now under our very eyes’ within the scope of international politics” according to the specialist of Brazilian and Portuguese studies Marguerite Harrison\(^{17}\). “Her works explore implicit, untold stories, creating a type of critical historiography” says the professor Karl Erik


\(^{17}\) Harrison, Marguerite Itamar in ‘Envisioning the Body Politics through Dense Layers of Paint: The Art of Adriana Varejão.’ *Chasqui; revista de literatura latinoamericana* May 2008. Pg. 72.
Varejão examines wounds that “are still open. Basically, to speak of colonization and decolonization in Portugal”, observes the Portuguese art critic and curator Isabel Carlos, “pure and simply means not to speak.”19 The artist’s oeuvre is full of references to the Brazilian-Portuguese relationship; in this series specifically, the paintings create an image of flesh coming out of traditional Portuguese tiles, like marks left by the colonisation. The tiles in the canvas are oil painted, and the mass of flesh is a three dimensional result of a mixed material painted on top of the tiles, in fact it becomes so heavy at a point that it has to be supported on an aluminium and wood extension of the canvas. To understand Adriana Varejão’s works, two elements must be taken as essential according to the art critic Paulo Herkenhoff and the anthropologist Lilia Schwarcz: thickness and tiles. Thickness is what Herkenhoff referred to not only in terms of the aspect of the paintings, but also as “the interaction of planes of representation”20; these are dense works with many layers of paintings and meanings.21 Tiles are not mere tiles here, in fact the azulejos22 were traditional in Portuguese façades from religious to governmental institutions, and they are “the most recognisable aesthetic aspect of Portuguese colonial architecture” according to Harrison23.

What Varejão does on the canvas is to dig in these beautiful façades, pull out some vital organs for us to examine, and uncover the red (bloody) side of a blue

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20 “A tissue of sectorial histories imbricates temporalities without having a one and only course. The history of art, the history of knowledge, the history of cultural exchanges, and the history of the body – all are unexpectedly contagious to one another.” Herkenhoff, Paulo in ‘Pintura/Sutura’. Adriana Varejão: Pavilhão Branco. Lisboa: Instituto de Arte Contemporânea, 1998. Pg. 26.

21 “Adriana Varejão herself underscores the term espessuras, or densities, when referring to her works which, indeed, thrive on multiple depths of field, in order to project a monumental presence capable of challenging the past, as well as its present-day aftershocks.” Harrison, Marguerite Itamar in ‘Envisioning the Body Politics through Dense Layers of Paint: The Art of Adriana Varejão’. Chasqui: revista de literatura latinoamericana May 2008. Pg. 74.

22 “Hybrid by birth and definition, the origin of the tile is hard to pin-point and its uses have been varied, whether geographical, temporal, religious, erotic, quotidian, or merely aesthetic. Thus, whereas language oftentimes limits an understanding of cultures, the azulejo tile dialogues, socializes and allows for exchange.” Schwarcz, Lilia Moritz in ‘Paved and Tiled by Adriana Varejão’. Adriana Varejão: Entre Carnes e Mares (Between Flesh and Oceans). Rio de Janeiro: Cobogó, 2009. Pg. 144

(azul) history; “tiles that should be clean are soiled when in contact with meat”, in the words of Schwarcz.  

Marguerite Harrison says “the paintings of contemporary Brazilian artist Adriana Varejão train viewers in the art of seeing”\textsuperscript{25}; I agree with it in two senses: firstly because the cut in the canvas historically implies the discovering of what is on the other side; like Lucio Fontana in his cut canvases, Varejão stimulates the curiosity of the viewers and opens to them a new perspective. Secondly, for the reason that the paintings are somehow illusionists; this is due to the juxtaposition of textures and colours between the flat geometrical patterns in the painted tiles and the thick layers of flesh coming out of them. These layers of flash projected into the spectator’s space are aggressive, invasive and threatening the environment, similar to the way the first colonisers arrived in Latin America. The contrast between beautiful tiles and thick layers of raw flesh can be read on many different levels: from the exploitation of the Latin American’s soils in order to bring profits to the European metropolis to the exploitation of the Indians and Africans themselves on these fields of production; or from the extravagance of the royal saloons in the Old World at the costs of Latin American commodities to the extravagance of the debts left by politicians in the New World aspiring the European way of life; and this is only in terms of exploitation and extravagance, or excess, which according to the art critic Luiz Osorio is something “Adriana Varejão’s painting has never feared.”\textsuperscript{26}

Hidden underneath Varejão’s tiles are also the wounds Latin Americans have been making in themselves since they became independent. I’m referring to the sacrifice the elites have submitted their countries to for their own private interests or even the lack of faith in their own paths. The writer Oswald de Andrade has already raised questions about the Brazilian identity in his Manifesto Antropófago (Anthropophagite Manifest) from 1928, an important text for the


\textsuperscript{26} Osorio, Luiz Camilo in Adriana Varejão: Pavilhão Branco, Lisboa: Instituto de Arte Contemporânea, 1998. Pg. 229.
modernism period27: “Tupy, or not tupy that is the question.” The play on words with Shakespeare is a reference to the influence of the Euro-American culture in the country; Tupy is the abbreviation for Tupinambá, the name of the indigenous people living in the Brazilian coast before the Portuguese arrived. Just like the indigenous people throughout the countries in Latin America, the tupa has a strong presence in the Brazilian identity, for instance, the several words incorporated in the Portuguese vocabulary. Varejão’s tongues have the Latin blood flowing on them, but they were taught to speak like Europeans – hence the tiles around them. This is symptomatic of the very old dilemma of acceptance of our heritage, the inferiority complex28, and the quest for an original identity.

The title of the series, Tongues and Incisions, becomes even stronger when one considers the power of the language in the flourishing of the term ‘identity’ in the 1990s, when the series started; it was the first wave of post-colonialism, pluralisation of History and deconstruction of the Western reading in the art world. The title, in addition to the “appropriation and inversion of stylistic and rhetorical elements of the baroque”29, that according to Herkenhoff are common in her works, can also be associated with the impact of religion in the Latin American culture, a key aspect of the colonisation process that still shapes the structure of the Latin American society.

Religion is also a vital part of the Guatemalan artist Regina José Galindo’s works, according to what the curator Rosina Cazali says: “Given the weight of Catholic religious culture in Guatemala, Regina Galindo has established a line of work that often attempts to establish linkages with the representation of

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27Oswald de Andrade was one of the main figures in the Brazilian modernism; he also participated in 1922 in the Week of Modern Art in São Paulo. The Uruguayan artist Joaquín Torres-García wrote a few years later, in 1935, the manifesto Escola del Sur (South School), which is another example of the attempts to hatch cultural identities in the countries of the region.

28This can also be found in Allende’s writings: “He wanted her, at all costs, to learn English. He was convinced of the superiority of English over Spanish, which in his view was a second-rate language, appropriate for domestic matters and magic, for unbridled passions and useless undertakings, but thoroughly inadequate for the world of science and technology in which he hoped to see Alba triumph.” Allende, Isabel in La Casa de Los Espíritus (The House of The Spirits). Trans. Magda Bogin. Great Britain: Black Swan, 1986. Pg. 344.

martyrdom and the body as the receptacle of sacrifice". In her performances, Galindo has been chained like slaves (Peso, 2006), tortured like rebels (Confesión, 2007), attacked like Indians (Hermana, 2010), amongst other actions that demand not only a physical and psychological balance but mostly boldness to go through all the way, which is exactly what the people from these countries have been trying to find for centuries. “Her actions implied being or reflecting through her own self the experiences of others”, observes Cazali, it is “a naked body calling insistently on the public space” according to the Costa Rican writer Tamara Bringas.

Cazali claims the works by Galindo are also “forceful statements against machismo, the hostility that defined society, moral and religious convention”, some of the same dogmas found in Allende’s writings. To the aims of this chapter though, her work Looting (2010; see fig. 4 and 5) is the one that suits best: the artist went to see a dentist in Guatemala to get eight of her grinding teeth pierced and filled with pure Guatemalan gold. Then, she visited a doctor in Germany to have the gold removed from the teeth, which turned into eight small golden sculptures, commissioned by a gallery in Berlin and later on exposed in the Latin American pavilion in the 54th Venice Biennial, on top of a velveteen pillow inside a glass box. In my opinion Galindo embodied the pillage of the whole continent, repeating the history of the colonisers (extracting) and performing the course of the material (travelling). By doing so, she also challenged the artist Luis Camnitzer beliefs that “when coming from the periphery, success has a frontier. The artist can be only moderately successful by the standards of mainstream art.”

Adriana Varejão’s and Regina Galindo’s works have contexts that go beyond the national spheres, embracing the whole continent. Both artists are using metaphors for the mouth (tongue, teeth), and its primary functions:

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language and nurture. In Latin America it is an arduous struggle to obtain freedom of speech or ensure enough food. In the first case, language, it is interesting to note that this chapter is based on feminine voices, which until this century were not taken as relevant as masculine ones, given the machismo culture established since the early times. The corruption in the political system and the land-distribution that is still based on a feudal system in most of the countries lead to the second case, nurture, given that the rich soils of Latin America have provided minerals and food for their high societies and for the rest of the world for centuries, but not so much for the Latin American masses; the ones that work on plantations are actually the ones who benefit the least from the agriculture, as Galeano describes: “the more a product is desired by the world market, the greater the misery it brings to the Latin American peoples whose sacrifice creates it.”

Varejão seems to be saying “where there are tiles, there is also blood,” and simultaneously Galindo is suggesting “where there is gold there are also holes”. This is a reference not only to the Western pathway to industrialisation paved with Latin American gold under much blood, but above all a call to the nature of human greed: how many holes are necessary to build a palace full of tiles? What are the wounds, and in whom do we leave them, in order to progress ourselves? The colonisers that went to America, Guardiola claims, had no limits: “Having grown up destitute and apparently condemned to a life on the fringes of an extremely hierarchical society, these people would stop at nothing to achieve their dream of power, status and wealth.”

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35 “The perpetuation of the established landholding system not only aggravates the chronic problem of low rural productivity through waste of land and capital in large unproductive haciendas, and of labor in proliferating minifundios; it also involves a copious and increasing stream of unemployed workers toward the cities. Rural underemployment turns into urban underemployment.” Galeano, Eduardo in *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*, Trans. Cedric Belfrage. London: Serpent’s Tail, 2009. Pg 248.


38 “The metals taken from the new colonial dominions not only stimulated Europe’s economic development; one may say that they made it possible. (...) The Spaniards owned the cow, but others drank the milk.” Galeano, Eduardo in *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*, Trans. Cedric Belfrage. London: Serpent’s Tail, 2009. Pg.23.

When I started researching this topic, I believe what I felt was similar to Galindo having her teeth pierced and Varejão making incisions in her canvases in one sense: we were all taking the role of the explorers this time, craving to find the facts, to feel the pain and to see the other side, in order to transform the raw material into something else on the next stage – the text writing, the golden sculptures, the layers of flesh. The remaining of colonisation will last until Latin Americans discover their own pathways to understand the events beyond their own bodies and let the wounds of the past heal. Then, it will be the real El Dorado: the key to an integral identity.
“Modernity has traditionally been associated with progress and, therefore, was seen as a necessary tool for decolonization and independence. It is ironic that in this particular process values are subverted to a point at which, in fact, a new colonization takes place.”


When the Europeans “discovered” America they referred to it as the New World. The continent was doomed since the beginning to be a place with a fresh face and a source for original material for the Old World. What followed after is a story of other illusions and eternal pursue for independence in the former colonies; from the Tordesilhas Treaty\(^{40}\) to the Washington Consensus\(^{41}\), Latin America has never been out of international influence, or like Galeano said, “for U.S. imperialism to be able to ‘integrate and rule’ us today, it was necessary for the British Empire to help divide and rule us yesterday.”\(^{42}\) The Latin American potential is also still underestimated in national territories: according to the Peruvian writer Mirko Lauer, “in contrast to the Chinese example, it is all the more evident that Latin America lacks an exclusive concept of self with which to face the West”\(^{43}\); this instability in the basis of the regional identity explored in the first chapter is reflected outside the cultural environment as well. The concept of independence in Latin America can be questioned in the economy, according to Galeano’s writings: “While the north of America grew, developing internally within its expanding frontiers, the south developed outwardly and blew into fragments like a grenade”\(^{44}\); in politics, when rulers in Latin American countries became manipulated by the interests of foreign leaders, a subject widely

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\(^{40}\) A treaty between Spain and Portugal in 1494 dividing the West Hemisphere in two parts among them.

\(^{41}\) Term used to refer to the period when institutions based in Washington DC – the IMF, the World Bank and the U.S. Treasury – promoted economic packages towards the Latin American financial crisis (late 1980s until 2008).


found in the intellectual Noam Chomsky's texts\textsuperscript{45}; and in the cultural sphere, like the critic Mari Carmen Ramirez states:

“Latin American culture, by reason of its colonial legacy, is inscribed in the Western tradition and has always functioned within its parameters. The specificity of its ‘alternate way of being Western’ resides in its appropriation, recycling or ‘repossessing’ of Euro-American culture to respond to the needs of Latin American realities.”\textsuperscript{46}

The idea of becoming a part of the so-called developed First World countries described in this chapter is also a stigma left by colonisation and an important instrument used in the Latin American military dictatorships. What Latin Americans do to themselves (the internal sabotage) and what the Western globalised world expects from them (labour force and commodities) reinforces a cycle of ups and downs – more of the latter – in this everlasting quest for sovereignty, economic stability and social justice. “Latin America has been the forum for every hope and every failure” says the Cuban art historian and curator Gerardo Mosquera\textsuperscript{47}. Modernity, in this context, is a word not only related to a new stage in society, but mostly to failed utopias in the continent; the Argentinean anthropologist Néstor García Canclini summarises what I mean by the promises of modernity in Latin America in one question:

“Why did the metropolitan model of modernization arrive so late and in such an incomplete manner to our countries? Is it just because of the structural dependency created by a deterioration in economic relations or the selfish interests of the ruling classes who resisted social modernization while elegantly dressing their privileges with modernism?”\textsuperscript{48}

The promise of modernity can be seen clearly along the continent through the architecture in some places. Brasilia is a good example: Oscar Niemeyer and Lucio Costa projected in the late 1950s the city of the future, but


\textsuperscript{47} Mosquera, Gerardo in \textit{Beyond the Fantastic: Contemporary art criticism from Latin America}. London: inIVA, 1995. Pg. 11.

apart from its cutting-edge constructions, the city has nowadays serious problems of violence and drug traffic in its periphery’s slums. In Ciudad Guayana, Venezuela, the architect Jesús Tenreiro-Degwitz was designated to create the new CVG (Corporación Venezolana de Guayana) headquarters in 1967 (see fig. 6), a pyramidal building supposed to be the icon of an era that never came in his country. “It was to be the first building in the future centre of Alta Vista, the heart of the new city, so it had the character of a foundation stone for an imagined beautiful metropolis - one that ultimately never came to be” according to the architect 49. Pyramids are in our imaginary a symbol of ancient periods, with long timespan and impressive power; the CVG headquarters did not succeed in this sense, although it was constructed to be a landmark at the highest point of the city, what it came to symbolise was the ghost of modernity in Venezuela. The second irony comes in the form of the construction’s material; in this case, the issues go as deep as an oil well. The building was made of steel, as Tenreiro-Degwitz explains 50, steel that came from the iron deposits in the Amazon region (in Venezuela and Brazil) but belong to a foreign industry (U.S. Steel) 51, a destiny similar to many other mineral reserves in the continent nowadays or in the past century: sold by the national governments for banana prices (e.g. copper in Chile, tin in Bolivia, aluminium in Guyana) 52. I believe the CVG headquarters is for these reasons the pinnacle of the promise of modernity in Latin America, giving a clear idea of what I explore next in the works of the artists Damián Ortega and Carlos Garaicoa.

No better work exemplifies this theory than Damián Ortega’s installation Cosmic Thing (2002; see fig. 7), the first part of his Beetle Trilogy (and the

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50 “We began thinking of erecting a prefabricated building on site with steel from the newly created SIDOR (Siderúrgica del Orinoco), but no contractor would take the risk of building it, because SIDOR light profiles were thought to be too troublesome. Then a contractor of concrete structures proposed changing the material to concrete. I was overwhelmed. In the seat of the steel industry, a steel structure was the only logical thing to build. Finally the controversy was settled by the president of CVG, General Alfonso Ravard, who backed my proposal of a steel structure. But it had to be made with U.S. Steel profiles.” Tenreiro-Degwitz, Jesús in “BOMB Magazine: Jesús Tenreiro-Degwitz by Carlos Brillembourg.” Winter 2004. BOMB Magazine. <http://bombsite.com/issues/86/articles/2604> Accessed on August 2011.

51 “Steel is produced in the world’s wealthy centers, iron in the poor suburbs; steel pays ‘labor aristocracy’ wages, iron mere subsistence wages (...) U.S. Steel got the Sierra de los Carajás iron deposit concession in Amazonia. (...) The Brazilian government, as usual, said that Brazil lacked the capital to exploit its own wealth.” Galeano, Eduardo in Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent. Trans. Cedric Belfrage. London: Serpent’s Tail, 2009. Pp.156.

centrepiece of his 2009-2010 touring exhibition *Do It Yourself* in the United States. Presented as a dismantled vintage Volkswagen Beetle, with its pieces suspended in the air through long cables holding from the ceiling of the gallery, it is an installation that occupies plenty of space. In addition, its complex assemblage grabs the attention and request time for the viewer’s full comprehension; Ortega invites the public to fill in the gaps. The work looks big and fragile, just like Latin America; it stands as a metaphor for all the fragmented dreams and hope, the projects unfinished, the semi-dependent autonomy of the continent. The Mexican artist deconstructed what was once a symbol of progress in his country in the 1970s and now remains only a popular car amongst the mass – just like the name in German suggests (*Volks*=people; *wagen*=car); as Galeano suggests, in Latin America “the symbols of prosperity are symbols of dependence”\(^{54}\), and the beetle is the form of it. “*Cosmic Thing* is about the creation of a balanced system in which all the elements are reciprocally related. It is, at the same time, a system where each object keeps a relationship with the rest of the elements. Such a relationship is political and equivalent to a social system”, says Ortega\(^{55}\). The space between the pieces is what prevents the car from working, just as the different levels of interests within the classes composing the Latin American society; what should be the embodiment of force is actually the personification of impotence. Nevertheless, it can be interpreted as a denounce of the relationship between First World and Third World countries in the capitalist system, where the production is made in the latter (Mexico) but the brand and profits belong to the former (Germany), in other words, how the Latin American underdevelopment became a condition for the Western development.

Although Ortega’s artistic career has developed around an “apparent contradiction between our everyday perceptions and our scientific substance”, according to the curator Jessica Morgan\(^{56}\), and his enormous interest in the technology and functioning of the objects that surround us, he has also a strong

\(^{53}\) Néstor García Canclini says Latin America is the continent of the semi: semi-modern, semi-developed, semi-European, semi-indigenous.


\(^{55}\) Ortega, Damián in *Damián Ortega: Do It Yourself*, Boston: The Institute of Contemporary Art, 2009. Pg. 78.

engagement with politics, starting from his previous occupation as a political cartoonist in the 1980s. Taking from this point, the 1983 VW Beetle entitled *Cosmic Thing* has a meaning beyond the complexity of its physics, in fact, the artist encourages the audience to read between the lines (and parts): “I wanted to give it a title that offered an open vision of the piece, something that would allow the viewer to recognise my interest in the notion of a system – something both microcosmic and macrocosmic, collective and individual, global and local.”\(^{57}\) The beetle used to be very popular in Mexico and Brazil in the 1970s when they started to get manufactured in these countries; it was a period of “inward development” in many countries in Latin America, through the ISI (Import Substitution Industrialisation) model, in which the development of national industries was considered crucial for modernisation according to the ideas of the Argentinean economist Raúl Prebisch.\(^{58}\) Therefore, the beetle became an affordable car for the masses, since “for many people it offers the only possibility to have their own cars and get around town. There are even taxis using that model. I drive one of them too”, says Ortega.\(^{59}\) It is also a “powerful symbol of an era, and speaks of a moment in contemporary Mexican history when there was a shift from one technology to another”, continues the artist, speaking of a time when the economy in most of the Latin American countries was booming. “The technological change obviously implies a political and ideological change. There is a change in the means of production and distribution that transforms social relations.”

In addition, it was a car easy to be repaired; anyone could do it with the help of a guide book, which increased the pirate market of the pieces\(^{60}\) – “The robbery and sale of auto parts is a millionaire industry in Mexico”, says Ortega\(^{61}\) – and was one of the inspirations for the artist to “construct” his deconstruction.

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\(^{60}\) “The pirate market in auto parts broke the consumer system, since it was very cheap to buy the components and replace them by yourself, which is why the cars lasted many years and thousands of people could have one and repair it with the help of this didactic handbook.” Ortega, Damión in *Damión Ortega: Do It Yourself*. Boston: The Institute of Contemporary Art, 2009. Pg. 80.

work. “It is not rare to find the car pieces displayed suspended from the ceiling in auto parts stores, as if a metallic beetle had been dissected”, he says, hence the title of the US show: Do It Yourself. What have been in the hands of modern international “pirates” as well, since the dawn of the independence movements in the region, are the national companies in a wide diversion of areas. The so-called “filibusters”, as Guardiola-Rivera says, “the rise of the sort of discreet faux imperialism exemplified by the Panama Railroad Company and the United Fruit Company in Panama, Costa Rica and Colombia”62, is a cheap investment and can last long, just like Ortega’s beetle. When the consumers in Latin America have to choose between the original pieces/national companies or the clandestine ones/foreign entrepreneurs they often opt for the latter, the easy road, financing the dubious side and stimulating the cycle; the rulers of the pirate market in auto parts do not want the end of their empire, the same way the contemporary “pirate” from overseas is not the one who wishes modernisation to arrive in Latin America, for he will see the change of the system as a threat to his Empire. Thus, it depends on the other side of this grey63 trade, the Latin Americans, to stand up for a more transparent change.

The beetle has also a different connotation in the Volkswagen land – Germany – “where it was a symbol of the Third Reich’s social and infrastructural planning and where its full production after the World War II became a symbol of the new economy” according to Jessica Morgan.64 How the two countries saw the same car with very different eyes is an example of the distance between these cultures as García Márquez said, and the dissimilar realities of these societies. When Ortega presented Cosmic Thing for the first time, it was the year VW stopped producing that model in the world, “thus the installation referred to some mythical or archaeological figure, like a dinosaur in the Natural History Museum”, as he said recently65. Dinosaurs were extinct because they couldn’t


63“The grey made it more graphic and cold, that is to say, more analytical. Besides, it is the color base of the automobile before it is painted.” Ortega, Damián in Damian Ortega: Do It Yourself. Boston: The Institute of Contemporary Art, 2009. Pg. 78.


adapt to the new environments; in the case of this “dinosaur”, in Germany the new times provided innovative technologies that helped the evolution of people’s life; in Mexico the fog announcing the new times is still in the air and because of it the people are not able to see clearly.

Still in terms of evolution, Ortega believes “three is the minimum number required to describe any process that involves an origin, a transformation, and a conclusion”66. “There you have a story”, he says, which is why the artist has made two other works with beetles – together they are known as The Beetle Trilogy – which I shall not analyse here, but will briefly try to make a connection with this chapter. I see Ortega’s second work (Moby Dick, 2004; see fig. 8) as an intermediate period of the promise of modernity; the performance has the artist’s beetle as the main character – the Moby Dick – wound up by ropes pulled by the artist and others, while a band plays Led Zeppelin’s song Moby Dick in the back, as a soundtrack for the “fight”. For me it shows the struggle of Latin Americans to take control of the ropes that bound them with the West, and the references to Moby Dick (both the book and the song) show the influence of the foreign models in Latin America. The third part (Escarabajo, 2005; see fig. 9) I believe to be the end of the promise of modernity, which in my opinion is yet to come; the artist’s beetle this time is “driven to its ‘place of birth’ (the site of the VW factory in Puebla, Mexico) and buried” upside down in a field of flowers, according to Morgan’s analysis of the video67.

Finally, Ortega’s beetle resembles Tenreiro-Degwitz’s project in Venezuela in many grounds: the “partnerships” with foreign companies (Volkswagen in Germany/U.S. Steel in the USA); how the projects were expected to take shape, like Ortega relates about his work: “It was about presenting a constructed system divided into all its fragments in order to compose a scheme: not a pictorial representation but a three-dimensional diagram”68, when one thinks of their displays in space, with the structure completely opened to the eyes of the public, as Tenreiro-Degwitz describes his building:

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“The stepped pyramid of the CVG building is not actually hung but held by a rather conventional steel structural frame, and the brick fills the spaces between in a rather unconventional sense; the brick “floats” in the air and the structure is always exposed. No tricks here; everything shows how it was built, giving the building a sense of being true to itself.”

Lastly the metaphors the artwork and the building can be for their countries and in extension to the region; in the end, “dinosaurs” and “pyramids” are ruins in History.

Ruins are exactly the starting point of Carlos Garaicoa’s works, “as a theme and as a metonymy of the crisis of a political and social project” according to the Colombian curator José Ignacio Roca. Growing up in Havana after the Cuban Revolution, Carlos Garaicoa witnessed the alteration in the landscape of his hometown; the result of this experience is in the influence of architecture in his artworks – and mainly in the hub of his pieces: the utopian future of a country reflected in its constructions. His work The Point, the Line and the Plan (2009; see fig. 10) illustrates well the illusions he refers to: The material he used to create the work is an educational book on architecture drawing, republished in its original language (English) in Cuba after the revolution (1966), at a moment where the American culture was already being banished from the island; “Havana shows the influence of American culture, an architecture that was fostered in the twenties and thirties by American architects”, relates the artist. The book appropriated is transformed into an artwork as he cuts out and erects the pages, isolating them from the original site – so that the book becomes a three dimensional sculpture (similar to a pop-up book) – and making the mock-up of an unreal city with paper buildings. Turning flat pages into three-dimensional constructions works as a metaphor for the process of creating, developing and building behind the physical architecture of civilisations and the political architecture that sustains societies.


70 Roca, José Ignacio in Carlos Garaicoa. La ruina; la utopía. Bogotá: Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango - Banco de La Republica, 2000. Pg. 96.

In relation to the social and political aspects of the work, it is necessary to look back to the years before the Cuban Revolution, the 1950s and 1960s. In his work Garaicoa comments on the political changes and the way in which they were expressed aesthetically. In this case, the artist criticises the way Modernism was thought to be a tool for social changes and how it mislead to a failed utopian society in his country of origin. In José Ignacio Roca’s words, “Garaicoa refers in a wide sense to the crisis of the modern project, whose postulates – among them a noncritical faith in architecture’s power to propitiate social change – are unmasked in the deterioration of modern buildings and in the kind of social relationships they stimulated.”

Havana has gone from splendour times to a decaying era that still remains; the buildings in Havana are living proof of Garaicoa’s theory. The urban planning plays a vital role in the course of a city and how it will function, while at the same time the constructions within it go beyond their practical purposes and become symbols of either a degraded past or a promising future – in other words, a physical reflection of the society in Tenreiro-Degwitz’s building, or a measure of it in Garaicoa’s works.

“All that is solid melts into air” wrote Karl Marx in his Communist Manifesto from 1848. All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity is the name of a book by Marshall Berman, considered to be an important reference in the studies of modernity. In Ortega’s installation, all that is solid melts into air and that is the failure of modernity; in Garaicoa’s work, the experience of modernity is not solid and pops-up in the air; in Latin America, modernity “was a misappropriated and modified project” according to the academic Andrea Giunta. To me, modernity is not even a failure, for its experience has never truly been felt in Latin America’s air; how could one recognise what is solid when the only perspective known is brokenness?

The task of breaking the unity of something into separate pieces for a better understand from the public’s standpoint is not an easy one; I did it when arranging this material, Ortega did it when deconstructing the beetle and

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72 Roca, José Ignacio in Carlos Garaicoa. La ruina; la utopía. Bogotá: Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango - Banco de La Republica, 2000. Pg. 98.

Garaicoa did it when cutting the pages of the book. Once the chapters of this text connected to make a point, the parts of the beetle were all hanging from the ceiling aligned to shape like the original, and the paper buildings were placed to look like a city, the ideas finally took concrete shapes. In this light, the writing in the Brazilian flag *Ordem e Progresso* (order and progress) should actually be *Ordem é Progresso* (order is progress). The promise of modernity will last as long as the Latin Americans do not learn how to organise their structures, put each piece in its right place and understand the importance of each for the functioning of the whole: this is the key to solid modernity.
3. THE BODIES BENEATH THE POLITICS

MARCELO BRODSKY (ARG) + OSCAR MUÑOZ (COL)

MUSIC: CHICO BUARQUE (BRA)

“Hoje você é quem manda
Falou, tá falado
Não tem discussão, não.
A minha gente hoje anda
Falando de lado e olhando pro chão.
Você que inventou esse Estado
Inventou de inventar
Toda escuridão
Você que inventou o pecado
Esqueceu-se de inventar o perdão.”

Chico Buarque, first lines of the song Apesar de Você (In Spite of You), 1970.

When the musician and writer Chico Buarque wrote the song Apesar de Você (In Spite of You), in 1970, he had just returned from one year of auto-exile in Italy; by the time Brazil was the leading symbol of human rights violation according to the historian James N. Green. The song is a critique of the military dictatorship established in the country in 1964 and it is also said that it is a personal critique to the president Emílio Médici as well, who was in power at the time, although Chico denies this part. Filled of references to the repression lived by the citizens at time and with a chorus claiming the end of the situation -- "apesar de você, amanhã há de ser outro dia" (in spite of you, tomorrow will be another day) -- it became very popular and therefore, forbidden by the militaries to be played on the radios for a few years; the same happened in 1973 with the song Cálice (this is a play word, since it means "chalice", but the pronunciation also means "shut up", just like the rest of the lyrics refer to ambiguous connotations, such as wine = blood).

I remember in school studying various of his songs when learning about the dictatorship period in my country; Acorda Amor (Wake Up, My Love) refers to

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the fear people had of the police in 1974\textsuperscript{75} and \textit{Meu Caro Amigo} (My Dear Friend) was written as a letter reporting the situation in 1976 to his friend Augusto Boal\textsuperscript{76}, exiled in Lisbon at the time. Many intellectuals and artists went into exile at the time\textsuperscript{77}, not only Brazilians, but from the whole continent given the coup d’états and the ferocious repressions spread in Latin America during the following years; several others had their works censured, Eduardo Galeano’s book \textit{Open Veins of Latin America} being one of the cases\textsuperscript{78}. Despite all his critiques to the military regime, Chico was never physically harmed, although he has been intimidated and harassed many times\textsuperscript{79}. He was one exception amongst the long list of \textit{desaparecidos}\textsuperscript{80}, tortured and murdered in Latin America during the years of military dictatorships, and still growing due to the violence in the urban centres.

Marcelo Brodsky exposes in his works the same \textit{desaparecidos} in the Dirty War in Argentina (1976-1983) and Oscar Muñoz raises the discussion of the \textit{desaparecidos} in Colombia after the violence created by the narcotraffic in his country. Both artists denounce the crimes through photography, Brodsky in his photographic essay \textit{Buena Memoria} and Muñoz with his so-called “photoserigraphs” in the work \textit{Aliento}. The subject of their art has its roots in a long tradition of usurped democracy on the Latin American continent – be it in

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\textsuperscript{75} “Approximately a week after the generals closed Congress in December 1968 and decreed Institutional Act No.5, officers carted off the singer and songwriter Chico Buarque to the Ministry of the Army for questioning. He later captured that moment in the tender and ironic song ‘Wake Up, My Love’, in which the person being arrested called out for a thief rather than a cop to save him.” Green, James N. in \textit{We Cannot Remain Silent}. London: Duke University Press, 2010. Pg. 168.
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\textsuperscript{76} Boal was an influential writer and theatre director who was kidnapped and tortured by the military regime in 1971; he went in exile in several countries after the occurred event. His acclaimed book \textit{The Theatre of The Oppressed} (1973) is based on the idea of interaction and dialogue between the performers and the audience. From his point of view the traditional theatre is oppressive since it excludes the spectator’s collaboration; to me it is similar to what the military dictatorships did to the citizens’ democracy. <http://www.theatreoftheoppressed.org> Accessed on October 2011.
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\textsuperscript{77} “When Chico left Brazil for exile, he was not a member of a political group that the military regime had outlawed and declared subversive. Nor did he face charges linked to accusations that would have assured him prison time and possible torture. His self-exile was a preventative act (…) designed to avoid what seemed to be the almost inevitable fate of artistic and intellectual opponents of the regime: escalating government persecution, closer personal scrutiny, and vigilant censorship of their work.” Green, James N. in \textit{We Cannot Remain Silent}. London: Duke University Press, 2010. Pg. 169.
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\textsuperscript{78} Galeano wrote seven years after the book was first published: “And the most favourable reviews came not from any prestigious critic but from the military dictatorships that praised the book by banning it. For example, \textit{Open Veins} is unobtainable either in my country, Uruguay, or in Chile; in Argentina the authorities denounced it on TV and in the press as a corruptor of youth.” Galeano, Eduardo in \textit{Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent}. Trans. Cedric Belfrage. London: Serpent’s Tail, 2009. Pg. 265.
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\textsuperscript{80} \textit{Desaparecidos} is how the people who were kidnapped by the militaries became known in the continent.
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the form of *caudillos*\(^{81}\), political dynasties, like the Somoza empowered for a total of 43 years in Nicaragua, or military dictatorships (before the ones referred in this chapter there was a series of periods on and off dictatorships in many countries) –, and in addition due to the failures of the modernisation described on the previous chapter, as the professor Andreas Huyssen relates:

“In Latin America, the failure of the promises of modernization took the form of the dirty war in Argentina, the caravan of death in Chile, the military repression in Brazil, narcopolitics in Colombia. Transnational modernization was given shape in the form of the organization Condor in the context of Cold War paranoia and anti-socialist class politics. The dashed hopes of the 1960s generation for a different road to social justice and equality were quickly and efficiently transformed by the military into national trauma across the continent.”\(^{82}\)

In Argentina 30,000 citizens disappeared and/or were massacred under the dictatorship. Marcelo Brodsky got close to being one of them; he got shot after an attempted kidnapping in 1977, which led into his auto-exile in São Paulo and later on in Spain, as he recalls in his interview with Nicolás Guagnini\(^{83}\). He went back to Argentina for a short period during the 1980s, but the financial crisis made him move to Spain again, where he established his photographic agency until 1995, the year he returned to Buenos Aires for good. When he settled in his country, Brodsky “felt the need to work in my identity. Photography, with its precise ability to freeze a point in time, was the tool I used for this purpose”, as he says. After looking into his old photographs he found his official “class portrait from first year (eight grade), taken in 1967, and felt the need to know what had become of each one of my classmates”. That is the starting point of his project *Buena Memoria*, and that photo became the core of the whole photographic essay and as himself said “a seminal piece” in his work.

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\(^{81}\) Original from the 19\(^{th}\) Century, these populist governors, many coming from a military background, would rule the countries focused on their personal interests and control the population through demagogy and offering cheap favours.


\(^{83}\) The quotes by Brodsky were taken from his interview with Guagnini in his project after *Buena Memoria*: *Nexo: Un ensayo fotográfico de Marcelo Brodsky*, Buenos Aires: la marca, 2001. Pg. 119-124.
Brodsky made a blown-up version of the photograph, known as a “gigantograph” (116 x 175 cm), and after contacting some of his old classmates, he sketched on the surface with grease-pencils what happened to them since the photograph was taken. The coloured inscriptions crossed the faces and bodies of his colleagues to relate careers, exiles, disappearances and death; Brodsky embodies the militaries for a moment while making the notes, his acts are similar to a police creating a list of possible criminals or marking the future victims to be chased – only the marks left by Brodsky never left the paper and never became physical marks on anyone. The intervened photograph was entitled 1er Año, 6ta Division, 1967 (1st Year, 6th Division, 1967; see fig. 11) as a reference to the original photo and moment. In 1996, Brodsky’s former school CNBA (Colegio Nacional de Buenos Aires) hosted one of the many commemoratives events of the 20th anniversary of the coup; his work was selected to be exposed in the Memory Bridge ceremony, organised by the Argentine Historical and Social Memory Foundation and Madres de Plaza de Mayo to pay homage to the school’s desaparecidos; they summed up 98, some of them were 15, 16 years old when the events happened, I saw the list. One of them was Brodsky’s brother, Fernando, who was kidnapped in 1979; two were part of the classmates photograph, including Brodsky’s best friend Martín Bercovich, disappeared since 1976.

The book composed by Brodsky’s photographic essay is in a way pure aesthetic journalism, as it comprehends facts of the General Videla regime along with a personal narrative through photos and texts, all leading into first-hand information combined to be a rich research material for the period. What follows after the centrepiece of the class are details of the Memory Bridge ceremony, a chapter dedicated to his best friend, one to his brother and one on the role of the River Plate in the period as “an anonymous tomb for those who were imprisoned and tortured by the army”\(^84\). But the most touching part of it, in my opinion, are the testimonials of the new students at the time of the show, and the photos of the same reflected on the glass while looking at Brodsky’s work with sympathy (see fig. 12), or as professor David William Foster would say, “the blending of the two generations in the single photograph underscores the

continuity between human generations and the reverence for that continuity that the project seeks to promote.”85 If what the new generation stated86 can survive time, like Brodsky’s photograph did according to the art critic and curator Gabriela Salgado – “The group photograph became a portion of history, the picture of an entire nation.”87 –, then they both can serve as a warning to the generations to come in Argentina and elsewhere in Latin America.

Memory is a key concept in Brodsky’s and also in Oscar Muñoz’s works, but that is not the only link between the desaparecidos. Before focusing on Muñoz’s Aliento it is helpful to introduce a few contextual facts. What is known by many but ignored by many more people is the role played by the United States in the events that led into these crimes. This does not mean the national governments are free of guilt in any circumstances, but the fact is that “there is a legitimate debate about the motivations for U.S. intervention in Latin America, as well as its consequences”, according to the politician and academic Jorge Castañeda88. From the Monroe Doctrine to the Manifest Destiny and the Good Neighbour Policy89, the excuses to interfere in what was happening in the Southern neighbours and maintain the region as a backyard have been several, and the actions to make sure these plans would be taken ahead have been


86 “They went to the same school as us. They hated a lot of the professors, just like us. They got Fs, A’s, C’s or D’s, just like us. They smoked in the bathrooms, just like us. They had boyfriends, girlfriends, and friends, just like us. They disappeared, they were kidnapped and forced to suffer the most horrible torments, and were probably assassinated in the cruellest possible way. They were more dangerous than we are, because they had very clear ideas and believed in solidarity, and they were more united than we are. Let us try to achieve that without suffering the repression they did, or any other repression. They were categorized as subversives. I think they acted and fought and struggled with love, a lot of love.” Human Rights Comission of the CNBA Students Association in Buena Memoria: ensayo fotográfico de Marcelo Brodsky. Trans. Astrid Wessels. Buenos Aires: la marca, 1997. Pg. 56.


89 The Monroe Doctrine (1823): US president James Monroe’s principle of non-intervention and non-colonisation by the Europeans in the American continent, known as America for the Americans, which later on took a more aggressive form in the government of president Theodore Roosevelt (1904) and became a “pragmatic policy aimed first at protecting the national interests of the United States”, according to Guardiola-Rivera, Oscar in What If Latin America Ruled The World?: How The South Will Take The North Into The 22nd Century. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010. Pg. 197.

The Manifest Destiny (1845): term coined by John O’Sullivan to refer to the popular belief that the United States were meant to expand across the continent. This was used later on to support the annexation of territories after the Mexican-American Wars (1846-1848).

The Good Neighbour Policy (1933-1945): Franklin Roosevelt’s principle of non-interference in the domestic affairs of Latin America and a period where the US tried to engage culturally with the neighbours (e.g. Walt Disney’s film Saludos Amigos, 1942). The policy ended after the World War II shortly before “Latin America became contested territory in the war against communism.” Green, James N. in We Cannot Remain Silent. London: Duke University Press, 2010. Pg. 177.
countless. This list includes assistance to implant and maintain most of the military regimes in the continent (such as in Brazil, Chile and Argentina), which resulted in the subject of this chapter. The United States is also one of the largest consumers of drugs in the world; hence, there is an obvious economic interest in keep the intense production in countries like Colombia and use Central America and Mexico as a corridor for delivery, which leads to the strengthening of parallel powers in these countries and again to the problem of the desaparecidos.

The difference between the desaparecidos in Argentina, Chile or Brazil and the ones in Colombia is that the latter still make the headlines in the newspapers; the bodies missing in Colombia since the beginning of the internal conflicts in the 1980s total more than 60,000 in 2011, according to Colombia's National Search Commission for Disappeared People, by far the largest in the continent. The faces in the work Aliento (Breath, 1995-2002; see fig. 13 and 14), by Oscar Muñoz are not only teenagers like Brodsky’s, they have all ages and are dated in a time when there was no military dictatorship in his country, in fact, Colombia is one of the few exceptions in Latin America that hasn’t had a military dictatorship in the second half of the twentieth century; these people became victims of the warfare between the leftist guerrillas and the far-right paramilitary

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90 "Between the 1950s and 1970s, the US allied itself with the armed forces in Latin America in an effort to contain the advance of left-wing governments and insurgency in the region. It was in fact in Latin America, more than in the jungles of the South East Asia, that US military, bureaucratic and intelligence personnel acquired crucial 'experience' in counter-insurgent warfare and economic development to wage the battle for hearts and minds in other parts of the world." Guardiola-Rivera, Oscar in What If Latin America Ruled The World?: How The South Will Take The North Into The 22nd Century. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010. Pg. 13.

91 Recently the Mexican president gave a public declaration about the US-Latin America War on Drugs: "Mr. Calderón made 'an appeal to the society, the Congress, and the government of the United States' asking them to 'reflect on the tragedy that Mexico and many Latin American countries live through, in large part, as a consequence of the instable consumption of drugs' in the US. Joseph Califano, who is the Founder and Chairman of the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University in New York, has noted that the US makes up 5 percent of the world's population, but consumes 90 percent of the world's cocaine. Approximately 60 percent of that cocaine is shipped into the US from Colombia and Venezuela via Honduras, Guatemala, and Mexico." Honduras Weekly, "Calderón Blames US Consumer for Drug Wars in Latin America," A27 August 2011. <http://www.hondurasweekly.com/calder%C3%B3n-blames-us-consumer-for-drug-wars-in-latin-america-201108274057/>
groups\footnote{According to Oscar Guardiol-Rivera, the roots of the violence in his country started in the 1948 conflict \textit{La Violencia} or \textit{El Bogotazo}, triggered by the assassination of the populist politician Jorge Eliecer Gaitan. Since then, the peasant guerrillas such as FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and the paramilitary groups like AUC (United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia) have been fighting for different causes (lands, political power, private interests, social justice, etc.); both sides have been accused of being engaged with terrorism, kidnappings and illegal drug trade, violating human rights. Guardiola-Rivera, Oscar in \textit{What If Latin America Ruled The World?: How The South Will Take The North Into The 22nd Century}. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010. Pg. 326-331.} that took control of the nation in the last decades. According to the Costa Rican curator Virginia Pérez-Ratton, “when living in a violent context, artists produce art that deals with this”\footnote{Pérez-Ratton, Virginia in \textit{On curating: interviews with ten international curators}. New York: D.A.P., 2009. Pg. 111.}, and that is the case of Muñoz and his works.

The artist has a strong interest in photography, in portraits particularly, as he told the curator of his first solo exhibition in the UK, Sebastian Lopez.\footnote{Muñoz, Oscar in \textit{Mirror Image: in conversation} Sebastian Lopez. London: INIVA, 14 June 2008.} Muñoz collected images from newspapers from a long time and one of his collections is composed by images of people murdered in the conflicts in Colombia; he believes the family publishes the photos of the relatives to “socialize mourning”\footnote{Muñoz, Oscar in \textit{Mirror Image: in conversation} Sebastian Lopez. London: INIVA, 14 June 2008.}, so somehow he feels his work is “enforcing the potential of the wish of the family.” “Muñoz goes from “working and studying the photography found in printed means, to supporting his drawing in the own record of the image” according to the art critic Maria Iovino\footnote{Iovino, María A. in \textit{Volverse aire}. Trans. Paulina Gómez. Bogotá: Ediciones Eco, 2003. Pg. 176.}. \textit{Aliento} is composed of twelve round stainless-steel mirrors, each hiding instead of showing an image: Muñoz worked with a mix of drawing, print and photography, creating photo silk-screen or “photoserigraphs” of the \textit{desaparecidos}, which are “stamped on a greasy film that covers the metallic mirror”\footnote{Iovino, María A. in \textit{Volverse aire}. Trans. Paulina Gómez. Bogotá: Ediciones Eco, 2003. Pg. 179.}. These portraits can only be seen for a brief period, when the warm breath of the public gets in contact with the cold surface of the mirrors; this intermittence in the images confirms Muñoz’s beliefs that “there is never a completely finished portrait”\footnote{Muñoz, Oscar in \textit{Mirror Image: in conversation} Sebastian Lopez. London: INIVA, 14 June 2008.}. The black-and-white photoserigraphs have an aesthetic typical of Muñoz’s practice, as Iovino comments: “Muñoz, since the beginning of his professional practice, leaves aside or plays down the importance of color and concentrates in the tonal possibilities or in the light gradations that he has been working in
drawing, drawing nourished from the images of the media.”99 To reveal the identity of the desaparecidos, Muñoz counts on the spectator to approach the mirrors and breath next to them, almost as if the viewer is there to testify these bodies that never got the chance to be discovered, and then, just like in reality, they disappear. What intrigued me more is the ambiguous meaning of the English word “blow” in this scenario: the observer has to blow the air in order to make the faces appear in the mirrors, but before him, many people had to use and/or sell “blow” (common name for cocaine) to make these same faces disappear in the hands of the narcotraffic. Meanwhile, other innocent victims are being blown away from their families; until there is a blow-up in the investigation of these cases, like Brodsky did with his photo, and the organised criminal factions are blown apart, the hopes for a safer society are being blown out.

Although finalized in different formats, the two series of photographs – Brodsky’s Buena Memoria and Muñoz’s Aliento – are tools used to examine an opened vein that has been flooding blood in the Latin American society, the sacred blood of thousands of victims of state terrorism and civil war; Brodsky and Muñoz are only the messengers to the public. In both cases, the observer has in front of him images of what the philosopher Giorgio Agamben named the homo sacer (sacred man), the one set apart to live a bare life in a state of emergency; although Colombia was not officially a state of exception with its laws suspended as Argentina was during the dictatorship, it could be seen as a fragile state in the hands of illegal power, in which case, its citizens have also been robbed of their basic rights and live in the margins of democracy. As the art historian Anthony Downey has concluded in relation to the practices of the same artists, they "examine the very moment when states turn on their people and, in so-called states of emergency, set about terrorising their own citizens.”100 Nevertheless, what both artists expose are the issues of a society that has been under repression and surveillance for several centuries; from the colonisation through dictatorships passing through imperialism, Latin America has never been


100 Downey, Anthony in “Zones of Indistinction: Giorgio Agamben’s ‘Bare Life’ and the Politics of Aesthetics.” Third Text (March 2009). Pg. 118.
out of the political and economical sights of the Western nations, and Latin American governors have always kept an attentive eye on their people.

Finally, there is a moment when the viewer finds himself immersed in the reality proposed by the author, the Greek used to call this *catharsis*; it is an “emotional cleansing” experienced by the audience while the drama unfolds. This purging of emotions is what the students twenty years after the original classmates’ photo experienced when looking at Brodsky’s altered version of it; what the observer felt for a few seconds after breathe into Muñoz’s metallic discs and see the faces appearing and disappearing; what I expect the reader to perceive after reaching the end of this essay. In Latin America, military dictatorships are becoming part of the past – but should not be forgotten –, even though the urban violence in the centres is still a big concern in the present; to avoid having more piles of bodies beneath the politics, Latin Americans must reach for a catharsis to understand the suffering of each neighbour, stand up against repression and denounce these crimes in photos, mirrors, texts or any kind of vehicle available in their hands: this is the key to sheerer and stronger politics.
"The idea of making Babel came to me out of a certain need that can stem only from exile and the awareness of being an immigrant. When one comes from the Third World, it is difficult to live in a First World country. Nevertheless, one's vision is broadened and takes on a new perspective. Now it is more usual for me to ask myself ‘Where am I going?’ rather than ‘Where do I come from?’ (…) In a considerable part of the planet, borders and airports have become a carnival of distrust and degradation where freedom is exchanged for security, X-rays are the weapon and otherness the crime. In spite of all this, in filming Babel, I confirmed that the real borderlines are within ourselves and that more than a physical space, the barriers are in the world of ideas."


This past year I have stumbled upon the words ‘boundaries’ and ‘borders’ over and over in texts and in reality. In my research I came across a book by the British journalist Michael Reid entitled Forgotten Continent: the battle for Latin America’s soul. Reid has lived as a correspondent in the region for many years in several countries, he even married a Peruvian woman, and although his writings are extremely detailed and accurate, for me the title denounces he is not a local straight away: the continent has been forgotten by whom exactly? Surely not by the people living there. Who are the opponents in this battle he refers to, and how exactly can a whole continent’s “soul” be in jeopardy? Seems to me that Reid reaches to comprehend the other but is found at the crossroads between his place of origin and his place of work, where global meets local; a reality more and more common nowadays. I felt included and excluded in different situations, sometimes both at the same time, and in most of them my nationality played an important role in these feelings; having two citizenships (Brazilian and Portuguese), I realised how different one can be seen through the eyes of the same individual, not only in an airport border control, but also in the most common places. The artist and writer Guillermo Gómez-Peña believes “today, if there is a dominant culture, it is border culture. And those who still haven’t crossed a border will do so very soon. All Americans (from the vast continent America) were, are, or will be border crossers.”

physical act or a constant state of being? What exactly defines one from being inside or outside and above all, what are the roles of language and heritage in this discussion?

The Mexican director Alejandro González Iñárritu explored the issues of language and otherness in both local and global spheres in the film *Babel*. Through interrelated stories in Morocco, Japan and in the Mexican-American border, the film presents characters that are constantly struggling to communicate with the other in unfamiliar environments, while at the same time they have to face their own boundaries as individuals. In different interviews, Iñárritu has talked about how he avoided “a very common thing, to portray another culture in the light of our eyes, of our reality. That's a caricature, a very Occidental way to portray an African or a Mexican or a Japanese.”

He commented on the US-Mexico border as well:

“There are no sadder tales than those concerning the border. I travel to Tijuana every six months with my children in order to renew my visa. The lineup there is one in which humiliation is an institutionalized ritual. The scene that describes it in *Babel* is a faithful rendition of the form and machinery of inspection that I, myself, sometimes had to suffer. (...) To me, the character of Amelia was always the incarnation of Julia: the Mexican woman who was working for my family in our Los Angeles home. She had told me about how she had crossed the desert six times and how she was caught by patrol cars. (...) To get to the heart of things and examine the border subculture, which I used to avoid and reject, was no less than an anthropological undertaking. (...) Some call Tijuana the armpit of Latin America. To me it is a place where the most noble dreams overlap with the saddest ends.”

In *Babel*, Amelia (see fig. 18) is the Mexican nanny living and working illegally in the United States. For Iñárritu she represents the paradox of many Mexicans while she has to “neglect her own children in order to take care of others. Like many more Mexicans who, while living in the United States, fix cars for the North Americans without having the right of a driver’s license and build

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houses without being able to afford the rent for their own home”\textsuperscript{104}. In that sense, what used to be a local issue is increasingly becoming a global one and in order to find the best solutions it is necessary to comprehend the reality of the other in Latin America or elsewhere.\textsuperscript{105} Although the director started the project focused on “the difference between human beings – that which separates us, the physical barriers and those of language”, by the time he had finished this had been replaced with “the things that join us, connect us, and make us only one. Those things are love and pain: What makes a Japanese or a Moroccan happy can be very different, but that which makes us miserable is the same for everybody.”\textsuperscript{106} If that is the case, it does not matter what languages are spoken in the contemporary Babel because the real cut is deeper, as the Colombian artist Doris Salcedo exposes.

In fact, the best representation of these issues in my opinion is \textit{Shibboleth} (see fig. 15, 16 and 17), the large and deep cut made by Salcedo in the floor of London’s Tate Modern. The work was commissioned to be exhibited in the Turbine Hall in 2007, Salcedo was the first Latin American artist to exhibit in the prestigious space and the first to directly interfere physically in the building. The 167 meters-long crack begins tiny in the main entrance of the hall and increases along its course to the other side of the room. It was made with Colombian rock and concrete cast with a wire fence embedded in it, the fence representing a symbol of exclusion and delimitation originally from the 19\textsuperscript{th} Century colonialism according to the architectural theorist Eyal Weizman\textsuperscript{107}. According to the art critic Ivonne Pini “the structure that held open the Tate’s cavity was produced through a complex and laboriously handcrafted process in Salcedo’s Bogotá studio over a year’s time.”\textsuperscript{108} The fracture “zigzags across the floor of the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern like the crack of doom: a fissure in the foundations that seems to threaten the structure of the mighty building itself”, in the words of

\begin{footnotes}
\item[105] “Babel is about the point of view of others. It literally includes points of views as experienced from the other side. It is not about only one country. It is a prism that allows us to see the same reality from different angles. While \textit{Babel} is a foreign-language film in some countries, in others it is a local film.” Iñárritu, Alejandro González in ‘Hollywood Must Portray Point of View of Others’. \textit{New Perspectives Quarterly} (Spring 2007). Pg. 7.
\end{footnotes}
architecture critic Martin Gayford. The Turbine Hall is considered the golden room in the temple of contemporary art in Europe, and the ceilings of this old power station are extremely high, therefore the works exhibited previously have been of monumental scale and/or presence. Salcedo’s concepts of monument and scale according to the cultural critic Mieke Bal are essential to her body of work: “Monuments relate to memory and to scale, and Salcedo addresses both these aspects over and again. (...) Scale, the shock of disproportion, is yet another of Salcedo’s aesthetic strategies to make political art.”

The artist did not fill the room with material, but instead, left it as empty as possible for the viewer’s interpretation; to see the work the public had to look down and away from the elevated ceilings, this simple gesture is exactly her intention: people lowered their heads for a moment and I assume thought beyond their dreams and more into the other’s reality, felt between the abyss and heaven – “an attempt to address the section of humankind that has been left out of the history of modernity, and kept at the margin of high Western culture” as she puts. Salcedo also challenged the building and the institution of the museum in the contemporary world, as suggests the post-colonial theorist Paul Gilroy – “It endorses the proposition that institutions like the museum and the gallery will have to be damaged if they are going to be adequate to the task of managing the relationship with otherness, with difference.” This reflects what artists, critics and curators from Latin America have been claiming for decades: Coco Fusco argues “that mainstream culture has periodically expressed desire for subaltern art has never obligated anyone to deal with subaltern peoples as human beings, compatriots or artists. That is, perhaps, until now.” For Paulo Herkenhoff,

“Political hegemony has its correspondence in the writings of art history and curatorial practice. (...) What is the place of Latin American art historians and critics within this new geography of art, where the artist leaves


the ghetto? Will they remain disengaged from the
competitive work market? Will their voices be recorded
in the regional geographic register?"114

I strongly agree with Gómez-Peña’s when he says that

“What the art world wants is a ‘domesticated Latino’ who
can provide enlightenment without irritation, entertainment without confrontation. (...) We want understanding, not publicity. We want to be considered as intellectuals, not entertainers; partners, not clients; collaborators, not competitors; holders of a strong spiritual vision, not emerging voices.”115

The Russian theoretician Boris Groys believes “the power of European
culture is precisely that it is constantly producing its other”116; Doris Salcedo is
the other, and she told the curator Carlos Basualdo that her works are “the
product of many people’s experience.”117 In this case specifically Shibboleth is also
the product of her own place in the world, as she explained after being invited to
make the work: “If I as a Third World artist am invited to build one of my works
in this space, I must bring them what I am, and the perspective of what I am. I
think the space defined by the work is negative space, the space that, ultimately,
Third World persons occupy in the First World.”118 This conflict can be analysed
in the creation of the work as well: the origin of the material and the
development of the idea are Colombian but the place where it became a real
work is the United Kingdom; this raises a common questioning regarding site-
specific works and their identity and nationalities, and what is indeed the meaning
of the local. Sebastian Lopez believes the question of migration is very important
in Europe now: people migrating, works migrating…he asked Oscar Muñoz if it is
“possible a work conceived for a specific culture to be appreciated in a different

114 Herkenhoff, Paulo in ‘The Void and The Dialogue in the Western Hemisphere’. Beyond the Fantastic: Contemporary art
place?” For Muñoz, the answer is yes, but the level of information is relevant for the public to interpret the works, both in Colombia or London.

Shibboleth is also a platform to discuss two central themes in contemporary art: displacement and post-colonialism. In terms of displacement, the artist believes “displaced is the most precise word to describe the position of the contemporary artist. Displacement allows us to see the other side of the coin: indifference and war (...) from the position of displacement art derives its most powerful expression.” This is a reflex of Salcedo’s origin as well, if one takes in consideration that “Latin America is a continent of internal and external displacement”, as Gerardo Mosquera remarks; “this situation has sharpened multiple identities and emphasized frontier cultures” as he argues. While the incisions on Adriana Varejão’s paintings denounce the effects of post-colonialism in the former colonies, Salcedo’s incision is the scratch of these same people in the skin of the past colonisers; Salcedo thinks Shibboleth’s appearance “disturbs the Turbine Hall in the same way the appearance of immigrants disturbs the consensus and homogeneity of European societies. In high Western tradition the inopportune that interrupts development, progress, is the immigrant.” Galeano believes “History is a prophet who looks back: because of what was, and against what was, it announces what will be.” In this light, I assume Art predicts the same, and as Bal claims, Shibboleth is “a tiny portion of a cut that really runs through the entire globe. It pervades everyone’s life, private and public; it runs between and within cities, countries and continents.”

Just like Iñárritu’s film title, Salcedo’s piece has its origins in a Biblical term from the Old Testament: while Babel is the story of men’s ambition in build a tower that can reach the sky and God’s punishment in the form of multiple languages preventing men to understand each other, Shibboleth is the crucial word

that led to “the largest massacre recounted in the Bible”\textsuperscript{125}. The Gileadites mispronunciation of the word \textit{shibboleth} was considered the element of exclusion by the Ephraimites, and for that reason the latter did not allow the losers of the battle to cross the river Jordan, it was a “linguistic test of authenticity, of belonging to the privileged”\textsuperscript{126}; the river is another allusion in Salcedo’s chasm. These titles become even more powerful in the context of the director’s/artist’s background – one of the remainings of colonisation discussed here in the first chapter. In 2011 these messages translate in our very own intolerance and prejudices, in our daily tests by society, in our final Amen’s. Furthermore, Iñárritu and Salcedo expose the different realities in the so-called First and Third World, and what came along with the promise of modernity in the latter, emphasising here the content of the second chapter. Their works concern the lives of people constantly threatened by the fear of being the other, hoping not to become another body beneath the politics like the ones discussed in the third chapter. To sum up, \textit{Babel} and \textit{Shibboleth} address local and global issues in their essence.

In the end, are the \textit{babels} the cause of the \textit{shibboleths} of the world, or would the opposite apply better; the \textit{shibboleths} are the foundations of the \textit{babels}? How much longer will we keep on listening only to what we want and when will we make a true effort to understand the words/worlds of the other? How high or how low do we have to go? The \textit{Open Veins of Latin America} described in Eduardo Galeano’s book and referred here throughout my text are swollen and their bleedings are trespassing frontiers; although “some innocents still believe that all countries end at their frontiers”\textsuperscript{127}, I say that the local wounds of today are the global scars of tomorrow. Art in this context, is “a space for negotiation, a space for translation” and has the power to “cut through rigid territories, boundaries, political ideologies and make us see the connections from one place to another” according to the curators María Clara Bernal and Karen Borchardt-Hume, Achim in ‘Sculpting Critical Space’. \textit{Doris Salcedo: Shibboleth}. London: Tate Publishing, 2007. Pg. 17. \textsuperscript{125}


MacKinnon.\textsuperscript{128} For me, all the boundaries are mere creation of mankind and hence not unbreakable; as a Latin American currently living in Europe, art has definitely played a crucial role in my understanding of the other, and mostly, it is a language in which the accents are not essential for the message to come across.

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Fig. 11 Marcelo Brodsky, *1er Año, 6ta Division, 1967 (1st Year, 6th Division, 1967)*, 1996

Fig. 12 Marcelo Brodsky, Memory Bridge Ceremony, from the photographic essay *Buena Memoria (Good Memory)*, 1996

Fig. 13 Oscar Muñoz, *Aliento (Breath)*, 1996-2002

Fig. 14 Oscar Muñoz, *Aliento (Breath)*, 1996-2002

Fig. 15 Doris Salcedo, *Shibboleth*, 2007

Fig. 16 Doris Salcedo, *Shibboleth*, 2007

Fig. 17 Doris Salcedo, *Shibboleth*, 2007

Fig. 18 Alejandro González Iñárritu, *Babel*, 2006
Fig. 1
Adriana Varejão
Azulejaria em carne viva (Tilework with live flesh), 1999
oil on canvas and polyurethane on aluminum and wood support 220x160x50 cm
Fig. 2
Adriana Varejão
Língua com padrão sinuoso (Tongue with winding pattern), 1998
oil on canvas and polyurethane on aluminum and wood support 200x170x57 cm
Adriana Varejão
Azulejaria com incisura horizontal (Tilework with horizontal incision), 1999
oil on canvas and polyurethane on aluminum and wood support
200x170x57 cm
Fig. 4
Regina Galindo
*Looting*, 2010
documentation of performance

Fig. 5
Regina Galindo
*Looting*, 2010
golden sculptures, velvet pillow, glass box
variable dimensions
Fig. 6
Jesus Tenreiro-Degwitz
Corporación Venezolana de Guayana (CVG) headquarters, 1967-1968

Fig. 7
Damián Ortega
Cosmic Thing, 2002
disassembled Volkswagen Beetle
variable dimensions
Fig. 8
Damián Ortega
Moby Dick, 2004
documentation of performance

Fig. 9
Damián Ortega
Escarabajo, 2005
documentation of performance
Fig. 10
Carlos Garaicoa
The Point, the Line and the Plan, 2009
hand cut book
variable dimensions
Fig. 11
Marcelo Brodsky
1er Año, 6ta División, 1967 (1st Year, 6th Division, 1967), 1996
gigantography intervened
121 x 177 cm

Fig. 12
Marcelo Brodsky
Memory Bridge Ceremony, from the photographic essay Buena Memoria (Good Memory), 1996
cibachrome
34 x 54 cm
Fig. 13
Oscar Muñoz
Aliento (Breath), 1996-2002
grease photo-silkscreen on steel discs
20 cm each

Fig. 14
Oscar Muñoz
Aliento (Breath), 1996-2002
installation view
Fig. 15
Doris Salcedo
Shibboleth, 2007
intervention on floor
167m
Fig. 16
Doris Salcedo
Shibboleth, 2007
installation view
Fig. 17
Doris Salcedo
Shibboleth, 2007

Fig. 18
Alejandro González Iñárritu
Babel, 2006
BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS


**EXHIBITION CATALOGUES**


**PERIODICS**


ONLINE


AUDIO


**VIDEO**

APPENDIX: LATIN AMERICA TIMELINE

To help the reader understand the impact of politics in Latin American identity, I made a timeline with some historical facts and artistic information from the works mentioned in the text.
POLITICS

The New World (1492)
Columbus arrives in Hispaniola, current Haiti and Dominican Republic.

Tordesilhas Treaty (1494)
The Spanish and the Portuguese Crowns divide the West Hemisphere in two halves.

The Dream of El Dorado (1519-1533)
Cortés meets the Aztecs in Mexico in 1519; Pizarro enters Cuzco, Peru, in 1533.

Silver Cycle (1544-1783)
Potosí, Bolivia.

Gold Cycle (1693-1750)
Minas Gerais, Brazil.

Methuen Treaty (1703)
Portugal and England sign the last contract of a series that led Brazilian gold to London's vaults.

Independence Movements (1804-1825)
Haiti was the first country to become self-governing in 1804; this was followed by a series of independence movements in the region until 1825, in Bolivia. Some countries such as Uruguay and Panama have become officially States afterwards, but were not European colonies anymore.

Monroe Doctrine (1823)
“America for the Americans”.

Congress of Panama (1826)
Bolívar's failed Pan-American dream.

Manifest Destiny (1845)
USA expansionism mission.

Mexican-American Wars (1846-1848)
Mexico lost almost half of its original territory to the USA.

War of the Tripple Alliance (1864-1870)
Paraguay devastated by Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina - financed by British bankers and industrialists.

Good Neighbor Policy (1933-1945)
Franklin Roosevelt principle of non-intervention in domestic affairs of Latin America.

Military Dictatorships (1936-1989)
In 1936 the Somoza dynasty begins in Nicaragua; Noriega was the last dictator to fall to date, 1989, in Panama.

**Washington Consensus (1989-2008)**

### IDENTITY

**Jesús Tenreiro-Degwitz**  
CVG headquarters (Venezuela, 1967-1968)

**Chico Buarque**  
Apesar de Você (Brazil, 1970)

**Isabel Allende**  
La Casa de Los Espíritus (Chile, 1982)

**Adriana Varejão**  
Línguas e Cortes (Brazil, 1995-2005)

**Marcelo Brodsky**  
Buena Memoria (Argentina, 1996)

**Oscar Muñoz**  
Aliento (Colombia, 1996)

**Damián Ortega**  
Cosmic Thing (Mexico, 2002)

**Alejandro González Iñárritu**  
Babel (Mexico+USA, 2006)

**Doris Salcedo**  
Shibboleth (Colombia+UK, 2007)

**Carlos Garaicoa**  
The Point, The Line and The Plane (Cuba, 2009)

**Regina José Galindo**  
Looting (Guatemala+Germany, 2010)