



MELANIE SMITH

FORDLANDIA



POTENTIA
AND THE SAVED NIGHT

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Film Credits

Fordlandia, 2014

Full HD video

41:27 min

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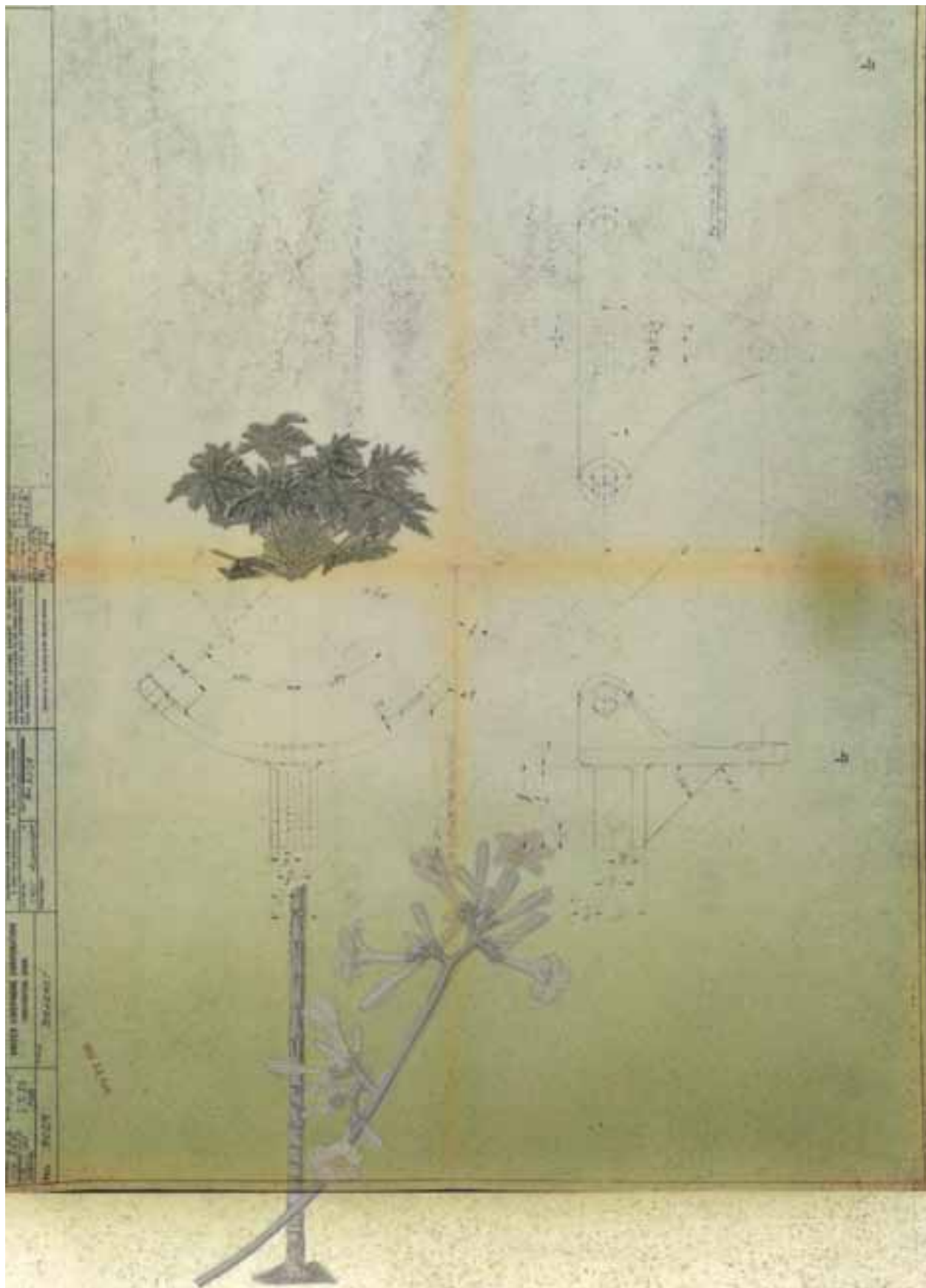
MELANIE SMITH

FORDLANDIA



POTENTIA
AND THE SAVED NIGHT

JOSÉ LUIS BARRIOS



Relation written by
ANTHONY SPIRA AND SJAREL EX

Wherein he gives an account of the
dazzling discovery of Fordlandia

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Prologue-Letter by
DANIEL GARZA USABIAGA

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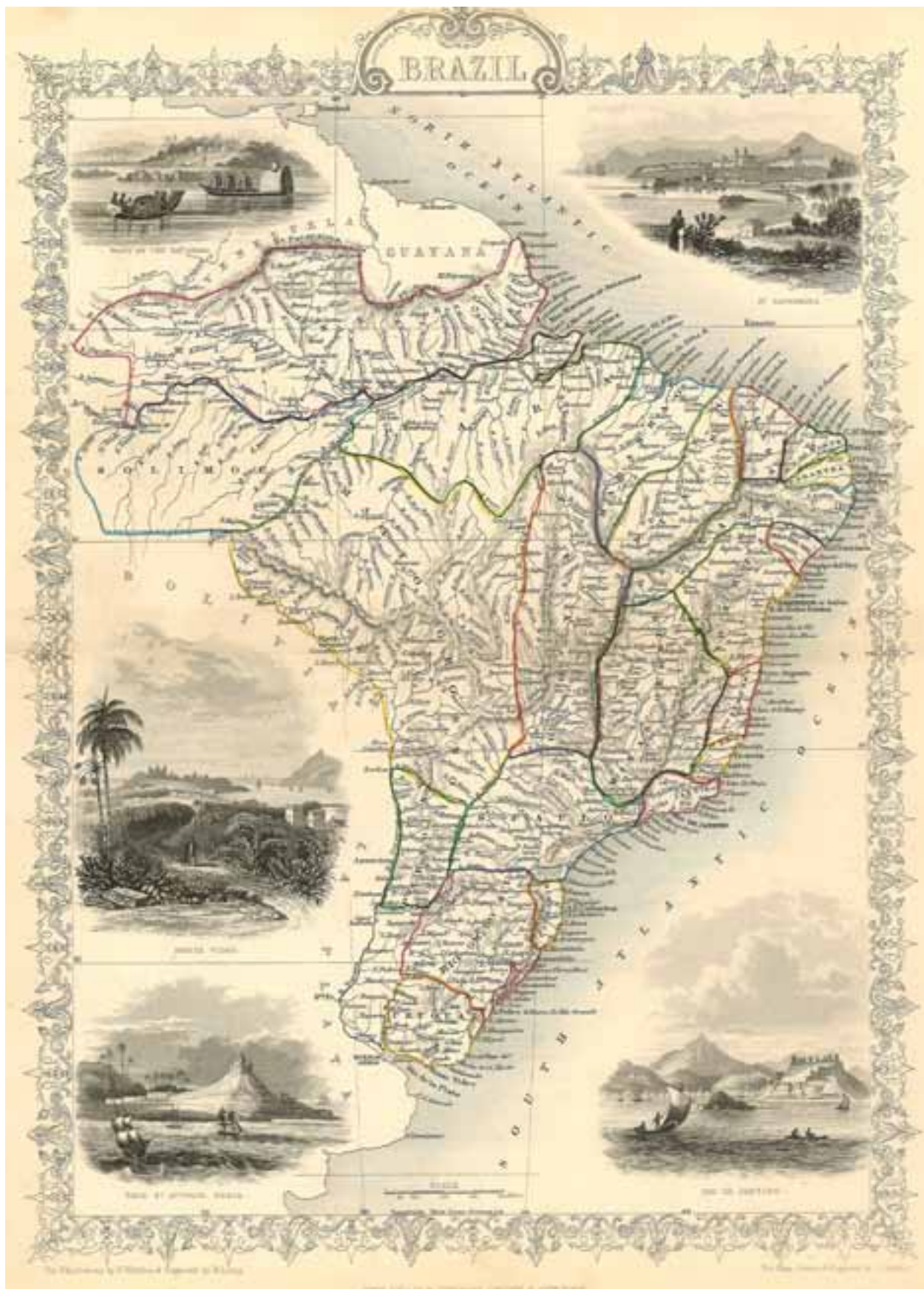
Log book wherein there features an account of the expedition
through the Amazon, formerly known as the Río Orellana and
now designated Fordlandia by the English traveler

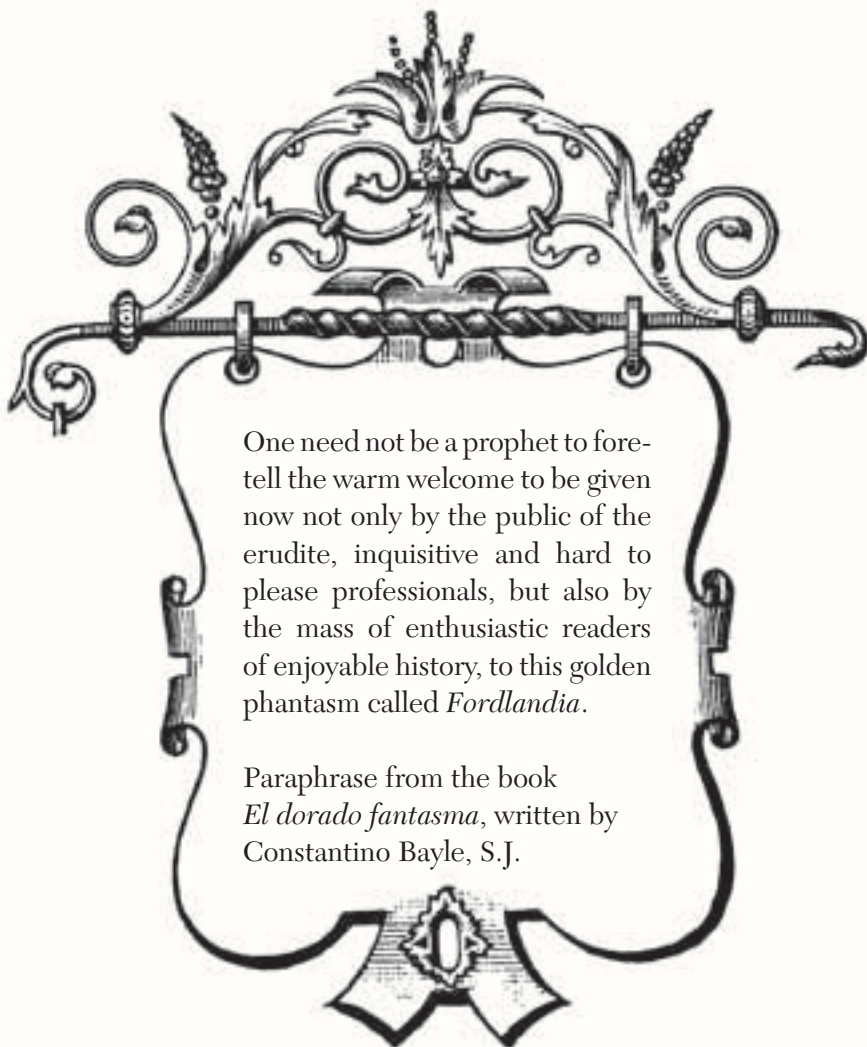
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and the Mexican philosopher
JOSÉ LUIS BARRIOS

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Manao, or, On El Dorado
For a Poetics of the Animal: Potentia and the Saved Night by
JOSÉ LUIS BARRIOS

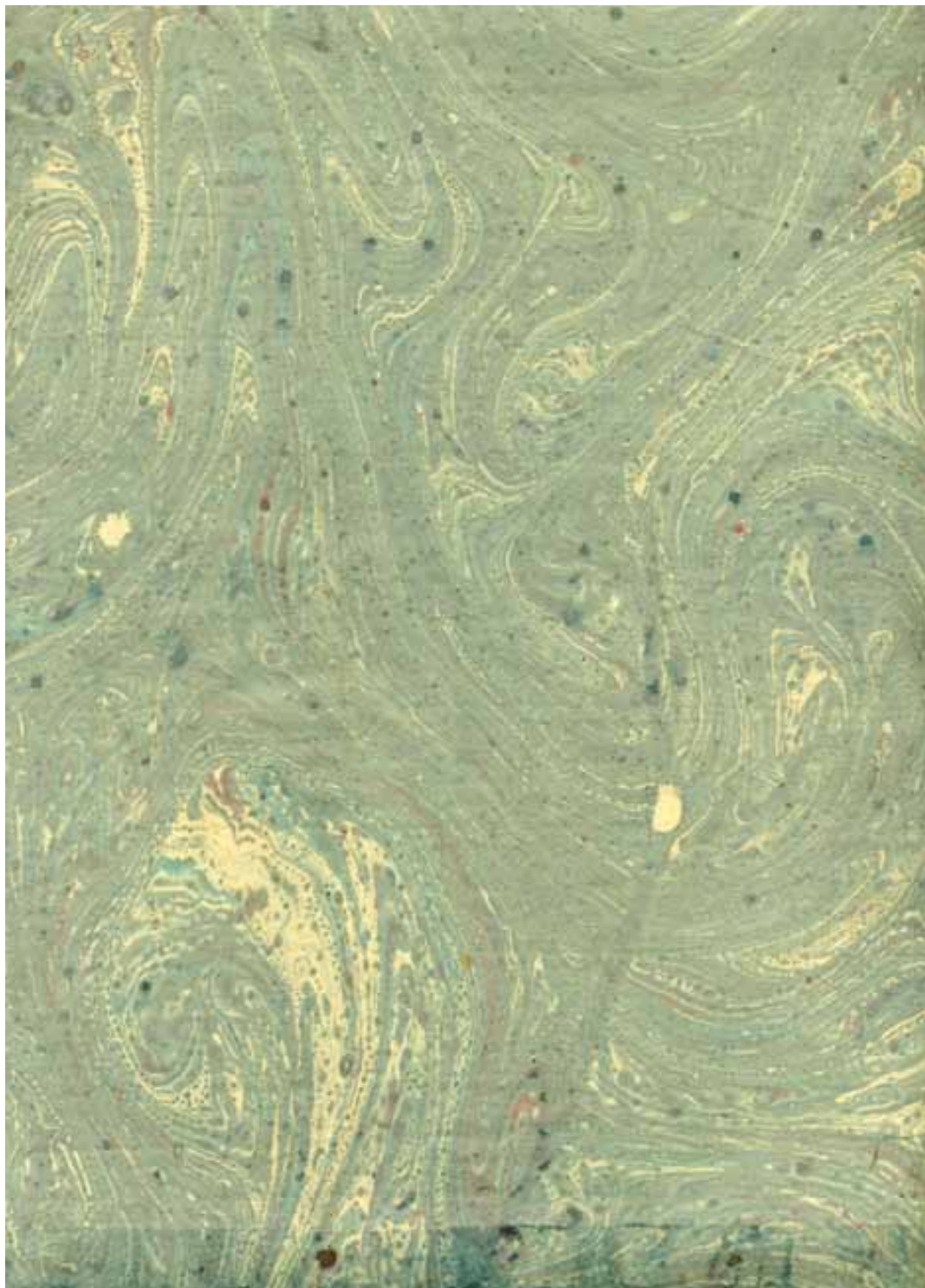
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One need not be a prophet to foretell the warm welcome to be given now not only by the public of the erudite, inquisitive and hard to please professionals, but also by the mass of enthusiastic readers of enjoyable history, to this golden phantasm called *Fordlandia*.

Paraphrase from the book
El dorado fantasma, written by
Constantino Bayle, S.J.



ANTHONY SPIRA SJAREL EX

Fordlandia: an introduction

Auto magnate Henry Ford's brief for his new city and rubber plantation in the Brazilian Amazon, in the 1920s, reads like a roll call of absurdities: Choosing one of the most inhospitable regions on earth? Tick. Shipping prefabricated homes from the United States? Tick. Imposing rigid *Fordist* schedules and structures deep in the rainforest? Yes. Readings of the best Anglo-Saxon poetry for local employees? Why not? Indigenous residents forced to wear shoes? Alcohol banned? A nine-hole golf course to dominate the new city? Yes, of course! Unsurprisingly, local workers were outraged by the rubber baron's delirium. They revolted and had to be subdued by the Brazilian army. The tropics also rebelled. The rubber trees were planted too close together and were ravaged by pests and viruses. Ford's ambition had been to produce 1000s of tonnes of rubber for his car tyres, but latex was never actually harvested there. Having invested 20 million dollars, he eventually sold the land back to the Brazilian government for 250,000 dollars. Since then, Fordlandia slept, practically buried alive in the jungle.

This episode presents an overwhelming, and potentially overbearing, context for Melanie Smith's latest work. It is an extraordinary

and imposing narrative—a readymade story—that provides many levels of meaning. On one hand, it traces a battle between nature and rationality; on another, it offers a critique of colonial enterprise; it is also perhaps a cautionary tale about human ambition, endeavour or greed. The objective of Smith's project is not to document Fordlandia, but to create layers of visual encounters that reflect our relationship to industrialisation, global expansion and the local. More than pondering Ford's failed utopia and looking at the past through the melancholy of the ruins, Smith has produced a visual diary of the journey to Fordlandia. By celebrating the flora and fauna, the natural indigenous life of the region, Smith's film plays with the way the site is understood. The Amazon jungle is no longer an image of opposition and otherness, nor a metaphor for terror and cruelty, as in the writings and films of Thomas Whiffen, Werner Herzog and Joseph Conrad. Smith's account deconstructs a colonial vision and negotiates the dominating symbolism of decadence and displacement, in order to give nature its place and potentiality.

In her previous film, *Xilitla* (2011), Smith also chose a powerful story, another readymade narrative with which to work. This film is a visual exploration of a fantastical garden, filled with architectural follies erected in North Mexican jungle between 1960-1984, by Edward James, an English aristocrat, poet and close friend of the Surrealists. In this film, the surreal mechanisms that James imposed on this semi-tropical enclave are disassembled. Workmen carry a large mirror along the paths and through the pools, doubling, breaking up and reflecting the image of the garden, in a tribute to the work of American artist Robert Rauschenberg. A frequent visitor to Mexico in the 1960s, Rauschenberg used mirrors to dislocate our sense of order, writing that, 'Reflection falls onto mirrors without logic, and in so doing invalidates every rational assertion.' [Robert Rauschenberg, 'Incidents Of Mirror-Travel In The Yucatan,' *ArtForum* (1969)]. In *Xilitla*, sound and image are frequently disconnected and the film is projected in a vertical format that further destabilizes our perspective and disrupts stereotypical images of exotic landscapes.

The stories of *Xilitla* and *Fordlandia* are of course very distinct but there are a number of overlapping impulses and mechanisms.

Both situations are prime examples of utopian imperatives or Robinson Crusoe fantasies, from colonisation to survivalism, driven by the urge to build a new, better, idealized life elsewhere. Smith's own personal experiences of migration from the UK to Mexico City twenty-five years ago inevitably resonate in this context and much of her earlier work, shortly after her transition, is characterized by recording the city's chaotic energy. Pieces such as *My World* (1995) and *Orange Lush I* (1995) are part of a vast accumulation of cheap orange plastic goods, foraged and gathered from stores and street markets in Mexico City. This arbitrary taxonomy, based purely on consistencies in colour, generates a structure that seeks to make sense of this brave new world. Smith applies a similar process in her more recent work, despite or perhaps because of their heavy narratives. In *Fordlandia*, particularly, the treatment of different shots, takes and sounds recall elements in *My World* and *Orange Lush*. Right from the beginning, the searchlight and camera are scouring the landscape, going in and out of focus, in search of some unknown aim. As the film progresses, a sequence of apparently disconnected scenes or images gradually build up into some kind of consistency, with repeats, echoes and overlaps: fingernails, toenails, claws; stripes, ripples, reflections; silhouettes and shadows; body hair, crawling ants, rustling foliage; and so on. Through energetic and experimental camerawork that is at times sweeping, tentative or jerky, these kinds of formal correspondences proliferate as the film progresses. Occasionally disorienting but always inquisitive, the camera appears, almost, to be operated by a search engine, pre-programmed to seek out formal parallels, patterns and colours. Sometimes, however, the sequences seem more deliberate: the incisions in the bark of a rubber tree and aerial views of rivers and roads cutting through rainforest; a soldier's finger or phallus and an evocative pink flower; or an upside down scarab and abandoned machinery. Nevertheless, any significance remains slippery and uncertain; whether serendipitous or inferred, it is the potential of these connections that recalls the automatic writing and exquisite corpses so enjoyed by the Surrealists.

Either way, Smith's filming in *Fordlandia* appears to level off the hierarchies between form and content. There is no privileging,

for example, of human over animal or mineral: human skin or snake-skin; human body hair or a monkey's fur; a soldier's finger or a pink flower; a dolphin's wrinkles or a furrowed brow... all are viewed equally and treated the same. Also, intriguingly, the real and the illusory are set on equal footing, as in the animal print on a woman's shirt or the real spots on a jaguar. This feature—how similar forms migrate across materials, subjects, situations and contexts—may be a longstanding trademark of Smith's practice. In *Green Lush* (1998-9), for example, artificial foliage appears to have anticipated the rich vegetation in the later tropical films, as representations of exoticism, for example, clearly provide a consistent line of enquiry. In display cabinets recently installed in proximity to the films, strange synthetic objects and manmade fabrics, including plastic fruit, items made of rubber, Baroque frames and fingernails, offer further echoes of, as well as tangents from, the films. In some respects, the film *Bulto* (2011) epitomises this process. Shot in Lima, it shows an ambiguous pink bundle literally driven, carried and dragged across different landscapes and scenarios. Like a strange, foreign body it invites a symbolic, psychoanalytical significance as it obstructs, interrupts and hinders the normal flow of life. Despite sharing a similar colour, a group of paintings, also called *Bulto*, represent such diverse subjects as pigs, flamingos, clouds and theatre curtains, for example, that reveal the bundle's wildly associative and uncertain character.

This continual sliding of meaning and multitude of readings is one effect that Smith frequently employs. By removing hierarchies and freeing forms from their context, Smith engages in a process of defamiliarisation that releases the subject's potential, paradoxically enabling or encouraging multiple points of entry while obscuring, erasing and creating fixed meaning all at the same time. As one reading is obscured, another is revealed and vice versa; as the jungle grows over the ruins, a palimpsest is created. Whether through Henry Ford's absurd impositions or Edward James' fantastical interventions, Smith's approach contains in part a surrealist tactic of incongruity; a formalist strategy of defamiliarisation; the Smithsonian idea of displacement; and perhaps, even, an inevitable consequence of migration. Smith's work has always played with the priorities

between vision and perception. Earlier works such as *Spiral City* and *Parres* (2004-5) have literally captured the transition from one subject to another through a process of erasure and abstraction. In *Parres*, for example, the visible, recognisable world appears or disappears through a transformative process, as, for example, a man sprays paint directly onto the camera lens. This effect also occurs in bleached out scenes towards the end of both *Fordlandia* and *Xilitla* and particularly at the very end of *Fordlandia* as the scene finally evaporates into a dramatic, abstract, pink mist.



DANIEL GARZA USABIAGA

Prologue

FORD, FORDISM, FORDLANDIA

Melanie Smith's video *Fordlandia* revisits one of the few failed projects to have been undertaken by the North American Henry Ford: Fordlandia, an industrial city built in the Brazilian jungle with the aim of the mass extraction and processing of natural rubber. Fordlandia may nevertheless be seen as one of Ford's most significant enterprises, in the sense that its project was not merely of an industrial character, but an entire lifestyle. Fordlandia was an exercise in how an industrial corporation could organize everyday life as a whole. Conceived as a "model community," this industrial complex, situated in a remote point of the Amazon, required a significant migration in order for it to operate. With this aim, the project went beyond a simple factory; it proposed a total urbanization. Built in the middle of a wild and savage terrain, it comprised living quarters, an energy plant, schools, a hospital, a fire station, and nursery schools. Furthermore, it also included shops and recreational spaces, from a pool to a golf course. These characteristics are evidence of Fordlandia's functioning on the basis of a model of community in accordance with patterns and lifestyles of U.S. origin as well as with a corporate character, transplanted to the Brazilian jungle.

The case of Fordlandia proves what David Harvey has written about Ford and his particular organization of the processes of production and consumption, known as Fordism. As Harvey indicates, what makes this model characteristic is not so much the industrial solution of assembly line production—developed first by F. W. Taylor in his book *The Principles of Scientific Management* (1911)—but the introduction of the eight-hour workday with an attractive salary. This division of time presupposes the recognition that assembly line production went hand in hand with mass consumption, for which free time is needed. Harvey remembers Antonio Gramsci as one of the first to recognize the implications of Ford's proposals in terms of articulating a particular form of everyday life and, citing some of his notes written while he was in prison under Benito Mussolini's regime, he underlines how Fordism was "one of the biggest collective efforts to date to create, with unprecedented speed, and with a consciousness of purpose unmatched in history, a new type of worker and a new type of man." The methods of work behind Ford's proposal were "inseparable from a specific mode of living and of thinking and feeling life."¹ In its attempt to create a "model community," Fordlandia is a fitting example with which to illustrate said reach, indicated by Gramsci, contained in the proposal of Ford's model of production.

After the foundation of the Ford Motor Company (1908), the introduction of the Model T car (1908) and the development of the system of production based on the assembly line (1913), Ford settled on an accelerated process of motorization in the U.S. that, toward the end of the 1920s, added up to more than 15 million automobiles sold. This process transformed everyday life, beginning with his urban factory and the landscape. During this period, miles of streets, avenues and highways were constructed. This phenomenon of nascent motorization, a factor also owing in large

¹ Antonio Gramsci, quoted in David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1990, pp. 125–127.

part to Ford, was not exclusive to the U.S. The international expansion of his corporation was also unobstructed. In that same decade, the company had distributors on the five continents, in countries like Australia, India, Germany, and Canada. One case that demonstrates his interest in expanding his market internationally is the invitation extended to him in 1929 by Joseph Stalin to develop a business in cooperation with the Soviet Union. Ford, whose inventiveness was also celebrated on more than one occasion by Vladimir Lenin, helped make the Gorky Automobile Plant (NNAZ) a successful part of the USSR's plans for industrialization.

The case of Fordlandia, begun practically at the same time as NNAZ, demonstrates the corporation's swift international expansion, not toward consumption or investment, but rather toward production. Fordlandia was a model community whose ultimate intention was the industrial production of natural rubber with which to make tires. It was also a gamble on Ford's part, aimed at reducing costs and eliminating intermediaries in the process of producing his vehicles: basically, English rubber suppliers who had previously transplanted a tree native to Brazil (*Hevea brasiliensis*) to Southeast Asia, where it could grow and be developed without the threat of plagues endemic to the Amazon. Ford negotiated a concession from the Brazilian government for a plot of 10,000 square kilometers on the banks of the Tapajós River, where he would build his recently created Companhia Industrial do Brasil, and then begun the cultivation and transport of trees. These plants had nevertheless been modified by the North American man of industry. Ford installed a laboratory in Fordlandia to make *Hevea brasiliensis* more resistant to plagues and natural predators, in what might be called an early version of genetic engineering. This can be seen as one of the first manifestations of a constant posture taken in Fordlandia: the desire to totally control and dominate natural processes through industrial solutions and technical rationality.

Another manifestation of this posture, perhaps the bluntest, was the urbanization of the grounds at Fordlandia, which involved a massive deforestation to erect manufacturing spaces, housing, and medical and educational buildings. Ford organized his "model

community” on the pattern of the garden city, which is no more than a sort of antecedent of the country lifestyle associated with the postwar U.S. suburb. Unable to be otherwise, the housing area was filled with houses following a formula of living space that originated from the U.S. Perhaps the most conspicuous element of this model was the presence of front lawns, with trimmed grass and arrangements of plants and flowers. This ornamental detail of the houses is further evidence of the control Ford sought to exercise over nature. The houses’ front lawns were constantly maintained while, outside the grounds of Fordlandia, the jungle was overgrown. This image shows the contradiction between the desire to control nature and the inability to do so, sometimes at all.

Ford transported more from the U.S. than models of habitation. With a titanic effort, in a gesture that might bring to mind Werner Herzog’s film *Fitzcarraldo* (1982), he also exported all the machinery for moving the industrial framework of Fordlandia with the aim of rapidly producing rubber. In the same way, Ford implanted his particular vision about labor management in Fordlandia. Since founding his own company in 1903, Ford had felt that the optimal functioning of his labor enterprise required his intervening in the conduct and the living spaces of his workers. For example, he discouraged the consumption of alcohol, and sought a new standard of hygiene with the aim of avoiding illnesses that would translate into economic losses. With time, Ford’s company called this focus on labor “scientific management,” an extension of the attention he gave to his products (the automobiles) in the process of industrial production.

Fordlandia had its own standards of “scientific management.” The houses of the laborers, for example, had a modern floor plan inspired by the model of the minimal dwelling with ventilation currents and spaces that would enable airflow. The children of Fordlandia, on the other hand, continued the day’s education and recreation after getting out of school in the nursery, a space designed so as not to distract parents from their labor activities and where they received “scientifically balanced meals.” By means of a particular education and even a diet, Ford prepared those who

would be, according to his initial calculations, Fordlandia's future generations of workers. The Ford Company portrayed these measures of "scientific management," as well as of the project of Fordlandia as a whole, almost like a civilizing process in the documentary *The Amazon Awakens* (1944). In this short film, the model community is presented as a sort of paradise on earth; a sort of *arcadia*, properly so called, a utopia where man and nature live in absolute harmony. In the documentary, everyday life in Fordlandia would seem to be flawlessly organized to total perfection.² This audiovisual document makes clear the image of the modern man that Ford desired to be, and that, from his perspective, was the example to follow: the man of business who can negotiate directly with a nation-state (without the interference of intermediaries or ideologies), as well as implanting and guaranteeing a social order in accordance with the logic of capital.

Although in 1944 Ford celebrated the Fordlandia project through the cinematic image, reality on site was far removed from the idyllic appearance portrayed in the documentary. Fordlandia's establishment was not simple, and serves as a case that supports Harvey's hypotheses about why Fordism did not work in full until the postwar period. Prior to that historical moment, according to the author, Ford's model ran up against impediments that did not guarantee a process of efficient production in accordance with his vision and rules. One of these was workers' rejection of the assembly line model of production. In Ford's case, his relationship to workers was problematized even further through his paternalistic approach, which was, at the same time, openly hostile to independent

² During the 1930s and 1940s, Ford commissioned several films to promote the virtues of his business. In 1940, for example, he produced a short documentary, *Symphony in F*, in which the assembly line process was put to music and thereby aestheticized. The promotion of the Ford Motor Company was not limited to films. In 1932, Ford commissioned Diego Rivera to paint the mural *Detroit Industry*. As is well known, this mural has also been criticized for idyllically representing workers' lives in Ford's industry.

organization in the form of unions. Over the course of his business's history, this meant that Ford would be characterized as having relations with his workers that were hardly smooth. Fordlandia was no exception. In 1930 it underwent its first general strike, which was broken with the help of Brazilian security forces. According to Harvey, in addition to labor relations, another factor that impeded the full functioning of Fordism in the interwar years was finding, in the process of production, industrial solutions using methods that were still manual or strongly artisanal.³ In Fordlandia, this is perfectly represented in the cultivation of the rubber tree, above all in the process of extracting latex from it. Smith's video illustrates this process: the cortex of the tree is manually scored with grooves until liquid latex begins coursing through them. Although Ford's genetic engineering projects sought to create "super rubber trees," as they were described in the 1944 documentary, their growth, inexhaustible supply of latex and speed in the process of extraction were factors that could neither be foreseen nor controlled. Nor were these trees immune to local plagues, as had been hoped. These factors not only show the points indicated by Harvey to explain Fordism's lack of total success before the postwar period; they are also key reasons that led Fordlandia, as a business, to fail. Its failure throws in doubt the power to exercise total control over nature that was attributed to instrumental reason.

The unstable state of Fordlandia, assailed by the uncontrollable forces of nature, received its coup de grâce with the arrival of synthetic latex, perfected around the same time that Ford was showing off his project in a documentary lasting a little over three minutes. After imperial Japan invaded the British colonies in Southeast Asia during the Second World War, the U.S. mobilized its local industries toward finding a substitute for natural rubber. In the early 1940s, thanks to the work of the scientist Waldo Semon, the B. F. Goodrich Company was able to consolidate the product known as Ameripol – an antecedent of the polymer from which all tires would be made

3 Harvey, *op. cit.*, pp. 127-129.

after the war. Ford was not unaware of this discovery, nor of the scenario it bade for the future: the postwar as an era of the oil industry with low-cost products made from polymers and thus during which many natural materials (like rubber) would become practically obsolete. With this scenario as a backdrop, in addition to the natural problems experienced on the grounds of Fordlandia, Ford was obliged to sell his model community to the Brazilian government at a low cost in 1945. Because of its remote location, the Brazilian state never used its buildings, and Fordlandia was gradually abandoned to become the ruins it is today.

BEYOND THE RUINS

From its first images, Melanie Smith's *Fordlandia* makes evident the remoteness of the location of the industrial complex erected by Henry Ford around 1928. To reach the site one has to fly over the jungle, as well as navigate through the river. This geographical condition, as mentioned above, was what led to the Brazilian government's total disinterest in Fordlandia after acquiring it in 1945. It could also explain, in part, why Ford never visited it. The economic dynamics of the postwar period, strongly marked by the model of Fordism at a global scale, were incapable of getting his machinery going all over again. The appearance of synthetic latex had succeeded in making the natural raw material obsolete, especially as regarded large industrial processes. Along with the oil industry and its derivatives, Harvey observes, the clash between industrial and manual processes in production proper to Fordism during the interwar period was also overcome. The creation of polymers, especially as concerned the manufacture of automobiles, accelerated the process of production, making it more efficient and economical. With this context in mind, it is not surprising that Fordlandia would be transformed over time into the ruins of a failed industrial project and model community. Nature, which Ford always tried to control, regained its land and irreparably damaged the constructions.

Focusing on ruins situated in a remote and barely accessible landscape, *Fordlandia* could recall another, earlier project of Smith's: *Xilitla* (2010). Ford and Edward James shared an enthusiasm for building large-scale architectural projects located in remote, inaccessible locales. The former constructed an industrial complex and an adjacent community in the Amazon jungle, while the latter opted for an imaginatively conceived sculpture garden in the Sierra Huasteca, in the state of San Luis Potosí, Mexico. Beyond this enthusiasm, however, there is little in common between the figures of Ford and James, or between their respective projects. Laz Pozas, located in the community of Xilitla, was an aesthetic project of James's for which he transplanted the model of the English garden or the picturesque garden to a tropical grounds in the Huasteca, where he constructed, through concrete sculptures, a series of architectural interventions (known as "follies" in the field of garden design) inspired by the imaginary of surrealism (from the painting of Leonora Carrington to the photographs of plants and flowers taken by Karl Blossfeldt). His enterprise, in productive terms, amounted to pure expenditure. This not only refers to the outpouring of economic resources necessary to construct a set of structures that, ultimately, have no economic function whatsoever, but also to the activities that the sculpture garden frames and orchestrates: recreation, relaxation, and amazement. In these terms, Ford's project represented something radically different. Everything in *Fordlandia* was constructed to enhance productivity: industries, social engineering applied to the model community, and genetic engineering applied to the domain of nature. *Fordlandia* obviously included an aesthetic program, but it also encapsulated a psychological plan, as well as a politics and an administration of labor; i.e., a new lifestyle in its entirety. Another difference: James was eager for his sculptural interventions to be devoured by nature, thereby articulating the archaic and timeless appearance characteristic of ruins. Ford, as mentioned earlier, controlled nature's advance at all costs: he experimented with the production of new varieties of plants, he ventured to urbanize a fragment of the jungle and he even demanded strict landscaping measures within his community. His control over

nature, as also mentioned earlier, was reproduced on individuals. His position supports what Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno wrote in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944) about instrumental reason, which frames the development of capitalist modernity, whereby man's domination over nature is easily extended to domination over other men.⁴

In *Xilitla*, Smith makes explicit her interest in investigating a gaze that appears obliquely, and which, through the use of a mirror, allows us to see beyond the image circumscribed by the framing of the camera – a strategy that is at work in photography associated with surrealism, as can be seen in some of Brassai's photos, such as *Mirrored Wardrobe in a Brothel, rue Quincampoix* (ca. 1932) or *Bijou in the Bar de la Lune* (1933).⁵ In Smith's video, a group of individuals, with no apparent direction, transports a large mirror through the sinuous, ascending and descending pathways of Las Pozas. In these scenes, the mirror allows fragments of unusual images to be seen, which are simply out of the frame; the mirror aids in the articulation of a delirious landscape that is seen in part. The workers' activity in this video can nevertheless be seen as a critical commentary on the arduous process of production that was involved in the construction of this site, built by hand using concrete in a place that is difficult to access. The case of *Fordlandia* includes a similar, albeit broader critique. The ruins of Fordlandia today are presented in this video without a trace of melancholy that would imply a longing for a lost time that is assumed to be better, in any way. The ruin, in this case, represents the fall of an entire system of production and consumption that was put to the test and subsequently collapsed on this site between 1928 and 1945. This system is that of Fordism as a form of corporate capitalism prior to the postwar

⁴ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, London, Verso, 1997, p. 110.

⁵ Rosalind Krauss, "The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2002, pp. 87-118.

period—a moment when this particular vision of production and consumption was consolidated in a large part of the world as the only avenue for economic development and modernizing progress.

The collapse of Fordlandia, as it is expounded in Smith's video, did not owe principally to postwar conditions of production with a new industry dedicated to the manufacture of petroleum-based polymers, but rather to the natural forces that Ford always sought to control. An index of this is to be found in the images of animals that recur constantly in *Fordlandia*, predators ranging from a crocodile to a mosquito – which could well serve as a pointed representation of epidemic. Ford's enterprise declined basically for these reasons: illnesses resulting from insects, natural predators, plagues that attacked his laboratory-modified trees. It is this reversal of the instrumental logic of modernity that Smith's work seems to underscore: Fordlandia as a failed experiment in early corporate, transnational capitalism that went under from the vital force of nature. The industrial detritus that Smith records in her video is proof of the collapse of this model: old, unusable, U.S.-brand automobiles left abandoned at the site, machinery brought from North America and irreparably damaged by the conditions of time, industrial architecture fallen into ruin. The scene in the video showing a man using one of the machines of the industrial complex to make an object in a practically artisanal way perfectly exemplifies the reversal suffered by Ford's project after its clash with nature.



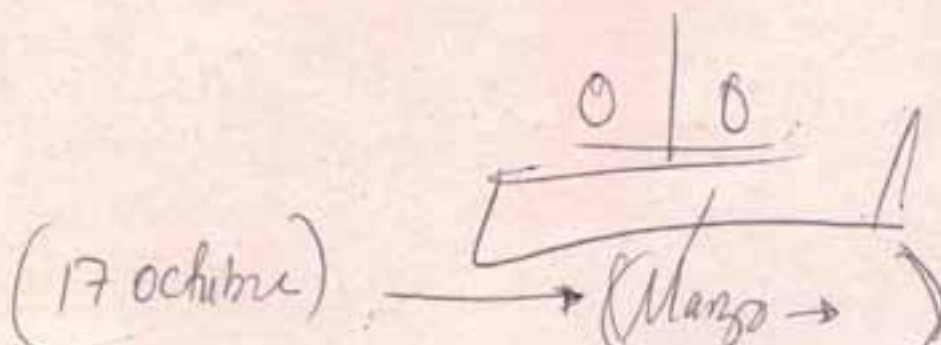
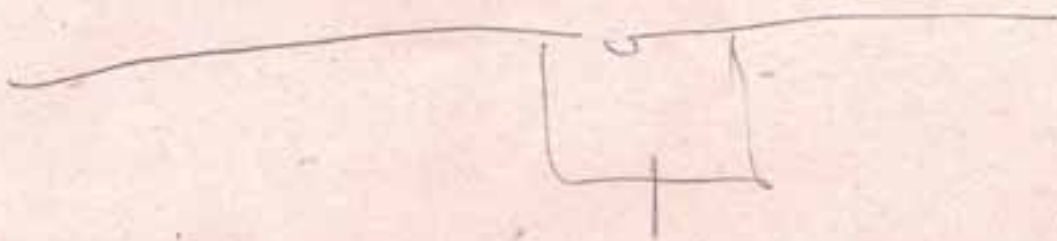
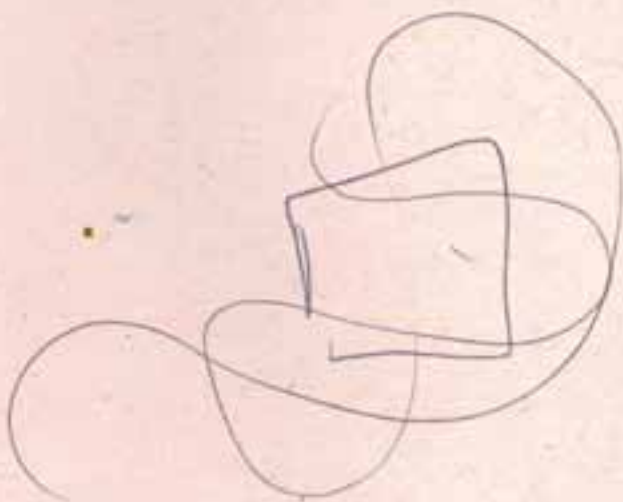








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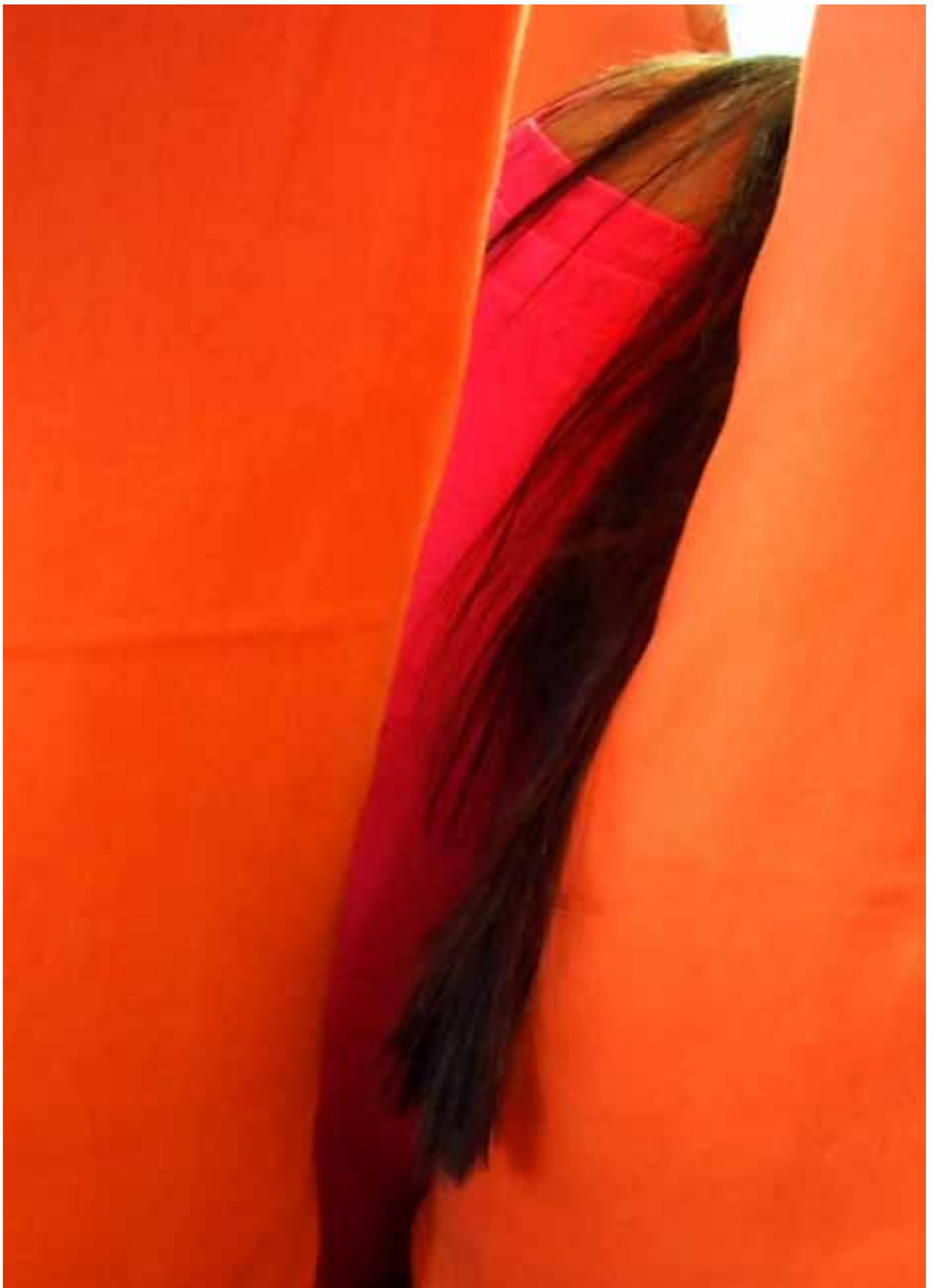




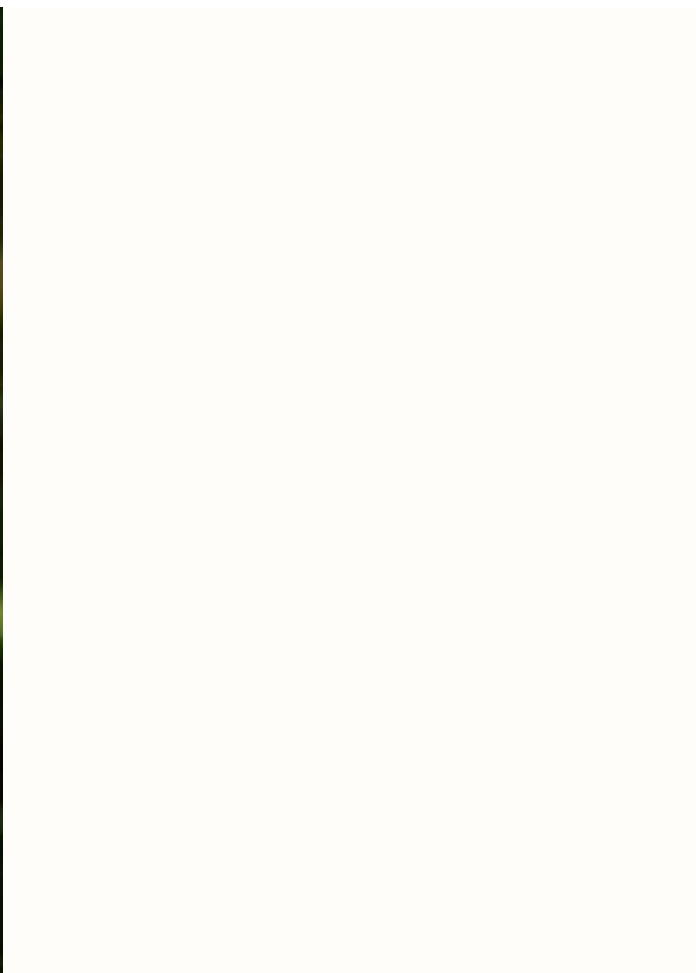






















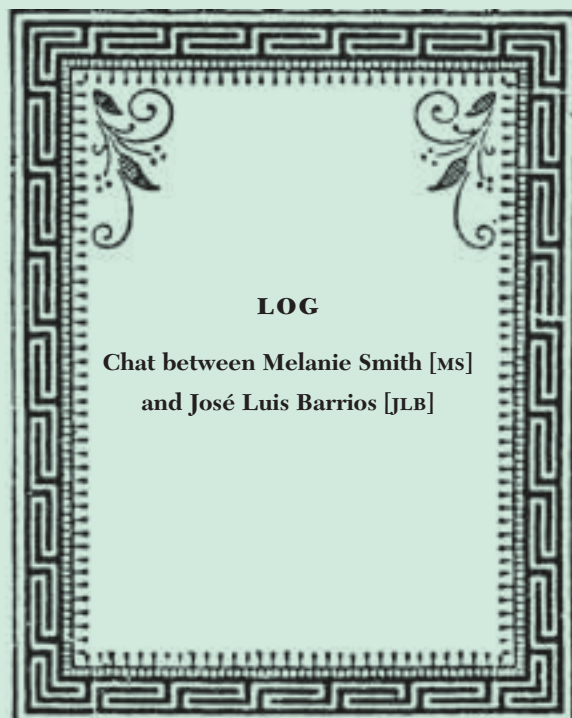


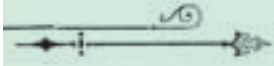






Aclarar





09/10/13

MS: Is it me or have you not sent the letter yet?

JLB: No... I was waiting for your corrections and the adjusted budget that Cristina'll send me.

MS: Ah! I thought you were going to send it to me to make corrections.

JLB: I sent it to you. You haven't gotten it?

MS: No.

JLB: I sent it to you... Check to see if it's there yet, pls.

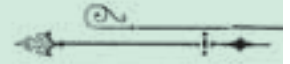
MS: I've got it now, but at my old email address!

JLB: That whole multiple email addresses business is like Ariadne's labyrinth... Find the door if you can! I'll wait for your corrections. Bye.

MS: Haha! I found the door... Now I'm getting a good feeling from the project, and I've got faith in those who are joining me – all men. Pity there aren't any women, but it's coming together nicely and after reading your letter everything makes sense. On that first trip my fears were alleviated, and I'm hoping it's just a matter of enjoying what's to come.

JLB: I got another 100,000 pesos for the book.

MS: Hey! Wonderful! I've been thinking for a few days now that I'm impressed at how you read me. We make a very interesting team. I think there's something there that pushes our limits, and that's good... I like the title.



JLB: Yesterday as I was writing the letter it was like getting a handle on the project. The structure expresses, really, everything we've been discussing. At least that's what I think... And you know what? Julien, in his style, understood quite well and he looked very fired up to me.

MS: Next week I'd love to have a meeting together. The sound guy could be really useful. He could understand the narration quite well.

...

MS: Hello. Did you call me about the letter? I just sent it to you.

JLB: OK... Hey, I haven't gotten your email with the letter. Which email did you send it to?

MS: Your Ibero address.¹ Hahaha, what a mess with these emails!

Jlb: Thanks, have a good trip... Hey, I didn't get it. Would you send it to me again?

09/11/13

Ms: I hope you got my email finally. If you send everything to Tania, she can deliver the letter. I'm on my way to Dallas.

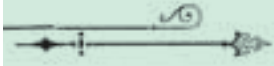
09/15/13

MS: Hello, how are you? Maybe we could meet up this week?

JLB: Certainly, let's talk. I imagine Tania must've delivered the letter.

MS: Yes, I think she delivered it. Could we meet up on Tuesday?

1 [Universidad Iberoamericana. – Trans.]



09/18/13

MS: Hello. What's your day like today, do you have a moment in the afternoon-evening to come by the studio to see the Tlacoachahuaya project?

JLB: I've got a class until 8pm. How about tomorrow at like 12:30?

MS: Hmm, maybe... But at 1:30. I've got a studio visit at 12:00.

JLB: Or around 10:00, before I head up to the Ibero?

MS: Alright then. I had something with the guy who's helping me with animation then, but it would help me to see you sooner. I'll change with him.

JLB: OK, see you at 10:00, or we could do Friday afternoon.

MS: The project's at a crucial moment.

JLB: Whatever works better for you, you tell me.

MS: Friday after 4pm I've got the children. Come tomorrow instead and I'll change the other guy.

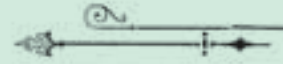
JLB: Done.

09/29/13

MS: Hello. How's it been going?

JLB: Hello. Well, but weird.

MS: Where are you?



JLB: Right now at a lunch.

MS: OK, I'll call you later?

JLB: Yes. Let's talk later.

MS: I'm going to eat with the children. After that, taking it easy at home.

jlb: Shall we talk?

MS: I'm here.

09/30/13

MS: Hey, you're going to kill me, but I always forget the title of the Vargas Llosa book. I want to take it on my trip.

JLB: *El sueño del celta*.²

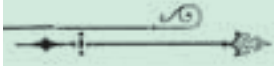
MS: OK. Thanks. Tomorrow you have the seminar at the UNAM?

JLB: Yes, at 5:00.

MS: Yikes! I wanted to see if we could get together in the afternoon, but... Are you going to be busy? I'm leaving on Wednesday, and today I've got the children. Let's at least talk. How did it go with Daniel?

JLB: I didn't see him, he was ill. Let's talk... I'll tell you about it later, bye.

² [Mario Vargas Llosa, *The Dream of the Celt*, trans. Edith Grossman, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012. – Trans.]



10/02/13

MS: So, it all got off to a bad start... We missed the flight in Panama, out of our own stupidity... I can't believe it. How do you miss a flight when you were at the airport three hours early? We managed it... So, a night in Panama.

JLB: Hahaha!

MS: Yeah, absurdly funny. Fools.

10/04/13

JLB: How amazing! About to arrive?

MS: In Santarem now. With pilot. Checking to see if we'll go up today. Horny guide.

JLB: Don't show me these things...! What I'm missing out on.

MS: In the back you can see where the Amazon River meets the Negro River... That's why it changed color. We're going to film it from the air. There's still time!

JLB: The colors are marvelous. How's the water moving? Is it calm? Do the colors of the water clash?

MS: I'm checking with Leo if we can do a screening at the theater in Manaus (the one in *Fitzcarraldo*), maybe you can come to that. A place made by an English architect. We have to have a screening there. The project has to come back here, I think.

MS: And yes, you're missing out on this guide, eh? Yes, there are clashes in the water. It only happens here in Santarem. I think the

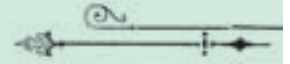


image from above will work. Last time, because of the light, you couldn't see it.

JLB: I think those blurrings could be a good motif.

JLB: Tell him now there's someone who sees him from Mexico.

MS: Tell whom? The guide or the theater? Or both? Hahaha!

JLB: The guide in the theater... Why not? Hahaha!

JLB: Send me the images so I can work with and comment on them.

MS: I'll see if there's any reception in Fordlandia... In Manaus and around there, for sure.

10/05/13

MS: Sweaty table. Ford.

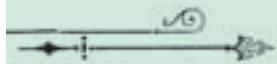
jlb: How's everything going? The images of the bodies are wonderful, especially the woman's back. I don't know why, but it reminds me of the surface of the cocodrile.

MS: I spent the whole trip fascinated by that woman... It's a leopard print. Julien got some amazing stuff on the book. Zero landscape!

JLB: The table is fantastic. The work on surfaces is very suggestive.

MS: Yeah, and we've been sweating all day. The industrial nave is like an oven... Strong heat. Impossible heat.

JLB: I can imagine... You're in Fordlandia now, how amazing!



MS: I like the image of the certificate for the book... more crocodiles at night and repetition of the river scene with lights... I think the book's going to turn out incredible. We're going to take aerial shots... We'll see if I dare go up in the microlight.

JLB: Sure, you dare... It's clear to me that you have the spirit of a nineteenth-century English traveler. Hahaha.

MS: Hahaha. Yes, but heights aren't my thing.

JLB: I'm saving the images you're sending me. An interesting narrative of the trip is coming together.

MS: I'm keeping a log – in my own way.

JLB: That's good, I think that's important. Later we'll have to see if we can save these conversations and if we can do something with them.

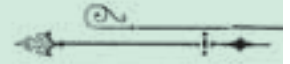
MS: I've even thought that we should do a project on Whatsapp. Or rather we are doing it... Something interesting is happening.

JLB: Hahaha... We had the same idea... I think it has to do with what's happening with the images and the way you're thinking or imagining the shots. Bodies...

MS: Yeah, every day I do the framing with my iPhone and tell Julien that's how I want the image. It works well.

JLB: Tight or aerial framings. Little presence of narrative moments. As if it were in a latent state.

MS: Yeah, the hardest part is capturing the sweat. Julien sweats a lot. Raúl a bit, I not at all. The two from the jungle, zero.



JLB: Even the shot of the boat at the pier is like it's timeless... That idea of breathing is interesting.

MS: Yeah, we're using tight framings all the time, but tomorrow everything's going to change. There's no description. I'm a little worried that we're just going in to details, but I think there's another way to describe it.

JLB: Yes... But texts and documents are history's appendices... Don't you think?

MS: Yes, record the sweat... Because it's really intrusive to record other people's sweat.

JLB: It's true, you have to position it... I don't know!

MS: This is kind of daring. To go to the jungle without jungle... But regardless the jungle will show up when we get to Leo's house. He says we're going to hallucinate with all the fauna there. The aerial shot is what's going to position us – I'm sure of it. That's why tomorrow is important. We're going to go all the way to the Trans-Amazonian Highway in the plane.

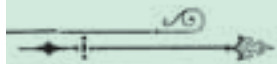
JLB: We'll have to see what happens with the context shots. Landscape, jungle, plants...

MS: And there the violence of the cut of the highway will look like a wound in the jungle, because it's a red earth highway.

JLB: That aerial shot is also like *Spiral City*.

MS: Yes, I hope so, because all the "green" is still missing.

JLB: The city is and isn't a city. It's like a monster.



MS: Yes, and I love the idea of the modernity-wound.

JLB: Like suspensions of the continuum of the green or of the movement of the jungle, another macro-micro element.

MS: We'll see the extension of the Amazon River. The monster that it is... Yes, in this project it's either macro or it's micro, like there's nothing in between.

JLB: Yes, it's going to be fascinating... I'm guessing you'll be able to fly at a low altitude.

MS: I'm going to ask the pilot to do kamikaze-like approaches to the ruins. Haha... Poor Julien is going to vomit.

JLB: And if you take it out of the framing that'll be really good.

MS: We have 16 hours in the air. The pilot sent the gasoline on the boat with us.

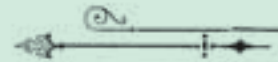
JLB: It seems like it's a really interesting project for Julien, to work on pure images...

MS: Yes, I'm getting the impression that it hasn't been easy to take out the the documentarian part.

JLB: Sure... There's something like very static that I'd guess is difficult for him, but he has a really good eye, hahaha. Work on the defect to dismantle the image.

10/06/13

MS: Right now I'm having a moment of genius. Guilherme, the owner of the guesthouse, with the wireless microphone, talking in the



foreground, with the sound of Julien on the plane in the midground (of the audio) on top of the ruins of Fordlandia. Reggaeton in the background. Roosters and dogs behind that. Insects behind that. I cried when I saw Julien disappear like a little point in the sky. A lot of battles to get to this point, I thought.

JLB: Pure forces in tension. It's got to be crazy.

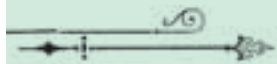
MS: Yes, incredible. I'm missing you like mad. Raúl, beginning to understand the impurity of the matter.

JLB: Impurity... The animal aspect!

MS: Yes... Last night we found more crocodiles. I think it's the season. And the owner of the boat, all quiet, telling us how to get closer, a lot of tension. The oar, insects, us making an effort to stay still. Cruel laughter when the crocodile leaves. "*Jacaré*," they're called here, *jacaré* eyes younger now, greener, it almost makes you fond of them. Julien just got back. I'll find you later.

JLB: OK... I want to send you a text by Benjamin that I'm looking for. This thing in Benjamin is proper to art because it's from nature. Models of a nature that's not there, that's not the stage of history, nor of man's inhabiting the world: the saved night. This is sort of the idea of the bewilderment of the animal.

MS: Yes. In the waiting room without waiting. I fly in the afternoon. Julien with a constant buzzing in his ear. I'M CUBA. He doesn't react. Like he's saturated with that sensation, the noise of the airplane, the impression, the wind, and he spent half the flight outside of the plane, they took the door off and one gets really tired. The highway has to be symmetrical and we didn't manage to get it. But the pilot is all set to go up again. The camera needs more stability. We're looking into how to resolve it.



MS: Martin Sheen or Dennis Hopper? We had an odd moment last night when Leo, of his own volition, put on Wagner from the river scene in *Apocalypse Now* on his iPad, against the grain of the aerial image of the river, which the pilot shot on his GoPro camera. Everyone cracking up.

JLB: Very apocalyptic, there's no doubt... The last image from yesterday is marvelous.

MS: I'm not sure whether to carry an editing rhythm. The way the images are coming out is the way I'm sending them to you. I hear Julien passing overheard in the plane. I've sent him up there three times now! The framing is difficult and important, but I'm convinced that this image makes the film.

JLB: An aerial shot is like a little peninsula that goes out toward the river.

MS: Yeah, that image is like something between mass and landscape.

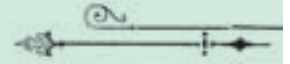
JLB: It's a little like a solid transparency, if you can say that.

MS: Now we're going with Raúl, recording sounds from the pilot's headphones, talking about coordinates with other pilots in the area. Technical stuff about location. I'm thinking about Smithsonian again, like all this is pulling me toward *Spiral City* again.

JLB: I think that indeed you'll have to let the shots play freely.

MS: Gelatinous, unstable, then...

JLB: Yeah, off-camera sound could be really interesting, especially from the airplane. It could make for an interesting play with the bewilderment we were talking about.



MS: The peninsula, I mean.

JLB: There's something of *Xilitla* and of *Spiral City*.

MS: Yes, technical coordinates: 45 North, two, two, five.

JLB: Elements from the earlier works are getting combined.

MS: Zodiac 4, do you copy?

JLB: Copy, Venus 7.

10/07/13

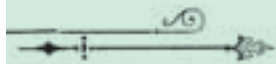
MS: An odd bit of information. According to Leo, there's a rumor running around town that we're missionaries, because of all the comings and goings in the plane. Now they've associated us with the little plane. The closer to God, I imagine... Tonight we return to Santarem on the boat with hammocks. More bodies, and the rubber region tomorrow. I'm disconnecting until Manaus. We'll have a couple of heavy days with few hours of sleep to be chasing after animals.

10/08/13

MS: Amazonian time. The boat is delayed because there was a storm.

JLB: Time to film the tropical storm...

MS: How to take a trip without describing the physical voyage? Sometimes I have doubts about what we're doing, it's not saying anything beyond a series of unrelated moments. But perhaps that's precisely the challenge, to be able to relate everything together, what's in-between those separate parts. And here comes the audio.

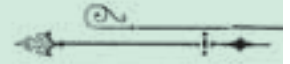


I think Raúl is understanding that part now. Good night. I'm exhausted. Night boats, planes, and pink dolphins tomorrow.

10/09/13

JLB: You were asking me about the relationship of the fragment. A bit of sleeplessness after a few good hours of sleep, now it's 4:40am in Mexico City. Where's the interstice of those two images you sent me...? There's something in the color and its form of rest that has to do with breathing... It will have remained in time, in the way that bodies breathe, which is like the sweat on the table and the windows and that in a lot is the palpitation of water in the red of night. Yesterday I was finishing my text for today's conference, at one point I refer to Deleuze on the concept of the percept. It's that part where perceptions no longer belong to a person, but rather to matter as such, there is no subjectivity but rather intensity of vibration, the struggle or collision of bodies and distension. As if restfulness, as if night and sleep bled into each other to create pure palpitation and timbre... I'm fascinated by the relationship between the last two images you sent me.

MS: All of us are physically tired now. More tears with the dolphins. Leo took us to a place on the Negro River; two hours on the boat to find them. We got in the water with the dolphins. They do come up to you. They're curious. According to Leo, they're telepathic and respond to sound frequencies. They feel like fat little prehistoric babies. They don't bite and they're really respectful of humans. Of course I cried again. They don't call it Río Negro [Black River] for nothing. It's black as oil. We put the camera in the water and the dolphins came closer out of curiosity. A hallucinatory moment. The material from today is really good. I'm happy, on the verge of crying at all times. Your comments make me think that maybe I should open the field a little more. The photo of sunset only appears as an iPhone image... And the truth is that in Julien's camera we're almost always in the fragment... Very rarely wide (banal description, huh).



There'll be a couple of days in Manaus and maybe it would be good to get some wider shots. It's just that I can't disassociate the wide shot from a literal description of the "voyage," but maybe in static shots it would work better. It depends on how you cut it, obviously. Yesterday, when we shot the cutting of the rubber trees in macro – and how the rubber flowed in channels – it brought to mind the wound of the Trans-Amazonian Highway. Here there could be a transference of sound from the cutting of the knife and aerial shot of the Trans-Amazonian... The only thing that I don't know is how far to open the project. Vanessa got permission to film inside the Amazonas opera theater in Manaus (*Fitzcarraldo*). Perhaps details of the English architecture, static wide shots could be interesting. Here in Manaus the English architecture is interesting.

JLB: I think that's the way to go... It seems backward to me: switch the background for the foreground.

MS: There it's a little macro-micro, no? But with a guiding pulse. Now I'm thinking maybe I've focused a lot on the foreground.

JLB: Yes, agreed... It's like managing off-balance wide shots, if those exist, vs. saturated, close, physical shots.

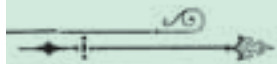
MS: This is where I wonder about the meaning of the specificity of the place. But even in macro you can tell where you are. What do you mean, off-balance? Slightly unsettling but normal?

JLB: Exactly.

MS: Whew... it's all in the framing. We have been talking about this isn't a documentary. I tell him that every time we get to a shot he has to put it on record from the beginning, while he's framing.

...

MS: I like it: wide shot of English architecture / mosquito. Mosquito in macro, I mean. And I'm full of bites.



JLB: I tried to scan a couple of pages of Deleuze about physical framing for you. And another on any-space-whatevers that has to do with the free, indirect shot that doesn't frame, but rather becomes. I'll send it to you this afternoon.

10/10/13

JLB: Good luck on today's expedition.

MS: I'm not so sure how to frame the wide shots. Manatee and monkey. We have much better close-ups of the monkey. Today was harder with sound, because it's like the animals are in a reserve, there are people. And hence unwanted noises. I'm going to have dinner, I'll write you later.

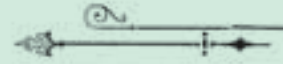
JLB: How's it going? I'm downloading the PDF of the Deleuze.

MS: The wide shots are a little more difficult, and today I've had moments of insecurity.

10/11/13

MS: It's been a difficult day for the team. Tight shots, unpredictable animals, Raúl in a bit of a bad mood, patience, soldiers from the reserve. There's some fantastic audio of them singing names of animals in military rhythm... A difficult moment to direct, audio-image syncs and that puts everyone in a bad mood. Beastly hot. Sweating all day. But there are some fantastic shots... It got up to 40 degrees.³ Too much!

3 [Celsius, over 100° Fahrenheit. – Trans.]



10/12/13

JLB: It's wonderful... It's like one of Grandville's etchings... It's got a bit of spaceship and some monster to it. The boats in the background are really powerful, between buildings, forklifts, and animals.

MS: Yes, I think it's going to work quite well. An intense place. Very suggestive sound. Close-ups and long shots following people. Hard to focus with so little time.

JLB: Those low-angle shots are splendid. I think the tripod from above could be interesting. Tell Julien to put the camera on his shoulder and walk among the people, the stalls...

MS: Yes, we did a tripod from above and it worked quite well. Later, camera on the shoulder, from below.

JLB: I like it a lot.

MS: But I think we've got enough images to take from.

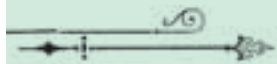
JLB: There's something very organic about that space.

MS: You're sweating, sweating, sweating...

JLB: I'm guessing, too, that with so many people, the sound is wide open. The intensity of voices and the noise of the object in the detail could create an interesting counterpoint.

MS: Yes, and then comes Julien, too. There's shouting nearby. It's crazy! Soldiers and jaguars, opera and port...

JLB: There's something very seductive about the bodies in the jungle and then the jaguars.



MS: Yes, it's powerful with all the names of the animals. We're on our way. Now I'm a little vulnerable with so many men.

JLB: Totally!

MS: We're going to the jungle to camp for a night.

JLB: Have you gotten shots of the water, of the coursing of the river?

MS: This is jungle intensity. Now we're going to go up into the trees to get shots of animals.

MS: Overhead tracking shots.

JLB: You should also be thinking about the night and the animals' slumber... Bewilderment. Perhaps it would be worthwhile to lift close-ups from the floor.

MS: Yes, let's see what animals we get.

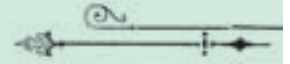
JLB: I'm seeing two kinds of intention in the shots. The wide ones, which are sort of monumental, and the close shots of animals, which are of expectation. There's a third one, which is bewilderment and the dozing off of human bodies. There are like those three elements.

MS: Yes, there are...

JLB: Then there are the static shots of the ruins or of action on the living. I don't know, something is missing between the two, like waiting, calm.

MS: I'm hoping to get that in the jungle... And then I have rubber trees in medium shots, where nothing happens.

JLB: That's good.



MS: I think today's architecture could be in a medium shot, too. Static architecture. Maybe the opera, too.

JLB: Yes... I like that a lot.

MS: I'll let you go, we're going to the opera for the screening in Manaus, you have to come.

JLB: Passing over façades of buildings, like you do over the retables in Oaxaca.

MS: I can't believe it. Very, very excited to find myself at this mythical place in the imaginary. More tears. Sound of refrigerator, of air conditioner. We got to hear an opera singer rehearsing in the distance. Hallucinatory, the contrasts we're experiencing in one day.

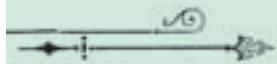
JLB: That theater reminds me of Lezama Lima. I don't know why... The space is marvelous.

MS: Yes, I really feel it could work as a counterpoint, and I can exhale. Why Lezama Lima?

JLB: There's something where the exuberance and the chaos of the Tropics is appropriated by nineteenth-century modernity, by bourgeois liberalism, at the same time that it wants to domesticate the landscape, everything is eroticized, it's like an excess. I'm thinking of it in relation and in counterpoint to *art nouveau*. It sublimates nature into industry and here progress and the aristocratic are eroticized by the medium.

MS: And is the erotic in the excess or in the domestication? Or in both?

JLB: I think there's tension in both. I'm imagining ladies all dressed up, sweating from the heat in the theater.



MS: Do you think it's erotic or perverse...? They showed us the reception hall where they used to serve cocktails and snacks before coming into the program. And there's a balcony that looks out onto the street.

JLB: I think it goes through both parts... At the same time there is desire, but this gets rerouted toward the father (the law) and that's why it's perverse. That's why bodies are so equivocal for the white gaze... It's like conceiving the other as an object of desire or labor-power. That seems clear to me in the photo of the close-up of one of the soldiers you sent me. It's like an imaginary that functions almost all the time.

MS: Yes, and here's my vulnerability as a subject. What am I doing here? Over-exoticizing everything in order to show the flight of escape? This is delicate territory.

JLB: Yes, I think there's some of that, but it's part of the question that's being played as an add-on all the time in the project.

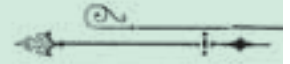
MS: Here the counterpoints are key.

JLB: Yes, I'm convinced of that. I think you always have to try to dislocate the image's logics of legibility.

MS: But sometimes I have doubts about the gaze: physically, visually, conceptually.

JLB: If we accept that it's always being negotiated from the imaginary... perhaps the question is how to return the imaginary to instinct [*pulsión*], to pleasure.

MS: Yes, the negotiation is very complex.



JLB: That's what's interesting to me about your idea of the free indirect shot: to leave the camera free and dislocate the elements.

MS: It seems to me that it's being on the edge at all times, not being able to read the gaze up to a certain point...

JLB: Shot plus shot... Continuity and not sequence. For example... I don't know... I see it all the time in what you send me.

MS: Discontinuity, that's how I imagine it.

JLB: Contiguity... not continuity.

MS: Fuck, it's hard.

MS: What happens, for example, if from the shots of the market you zoom on a continuous tracking shot over the top part of the boats, from there toward the sky, and you leave the sound of the market off camera.

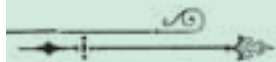
MS: I see where you're going but it could also work with the close-up image of the manatee, etc.

JLB: It's the same thing that happens with the woman's back on the boat and the stain of the manatee.

MS: Yes, that's clear to me.

JLB: It's like generating oppositions, tension and abstraction of the elements. It's like at the Azteca, the relaxation between the void and force.

MS: *Xilitla* magnified. There's a lot of material, that's the good part, maybe too much. I have to reduce it all to the most essential.



JLB: You've already got tons of hours on film, no? That's cool, you can choose from a lot of possibilities and ways out.

MS: Yes, and on top of that I've got a clear idea of when something doesn't work. The work and the location switches are demanding, but I'm clear about the images I want. The hard part is getting to something new: decide/negotiate with the people at the place or animals/framing/heat or sync or no sync. That's tiring. It's not the territory of cinema where everything is under control. The animals don't react when you want them to, there's Amazonian time, and that's been a negotiation.

JLB: What are we going to do!

MS: Hahaha. It's also the first time we've worked together, but all things considered, it's really good.

JLB: They're good guys, and on top of that I'm sure that when they see where the thing's going they're going to be happy.

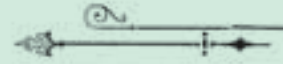
MS: I'm telling you. Last day at Manaos. Now to the jungle for real.

JLB: Bon voyage.

10/14/13

MS: What's this, then? You can indeed get lost in the jungle. Very dense. Very humid. Very hot. Very delirious.

MS: Filming mosquitos.



10/17/13

MS: In Panama. Another sleepless night. It was really hot in the jungle, which made the work really heavy. We climbed up a 60m tall tree with ropes to get images from the canopy, but it wasn't easy. It was an act of personal overcoming, with vertigo from doing it. It took us a long time to get the atmosphere of the jungle. I tried not to get the typical descriptive shots of the jungle, and to focus on depth of field, but in the abstract. Not at all easy. I want to be home and to see the children.

JLB: I love the images.

MS: I'm emotionally very exhausted. Will you be home today?

JLB: I think there's also a return voyage, and it has to do with the body itself... With the surface of the body.

















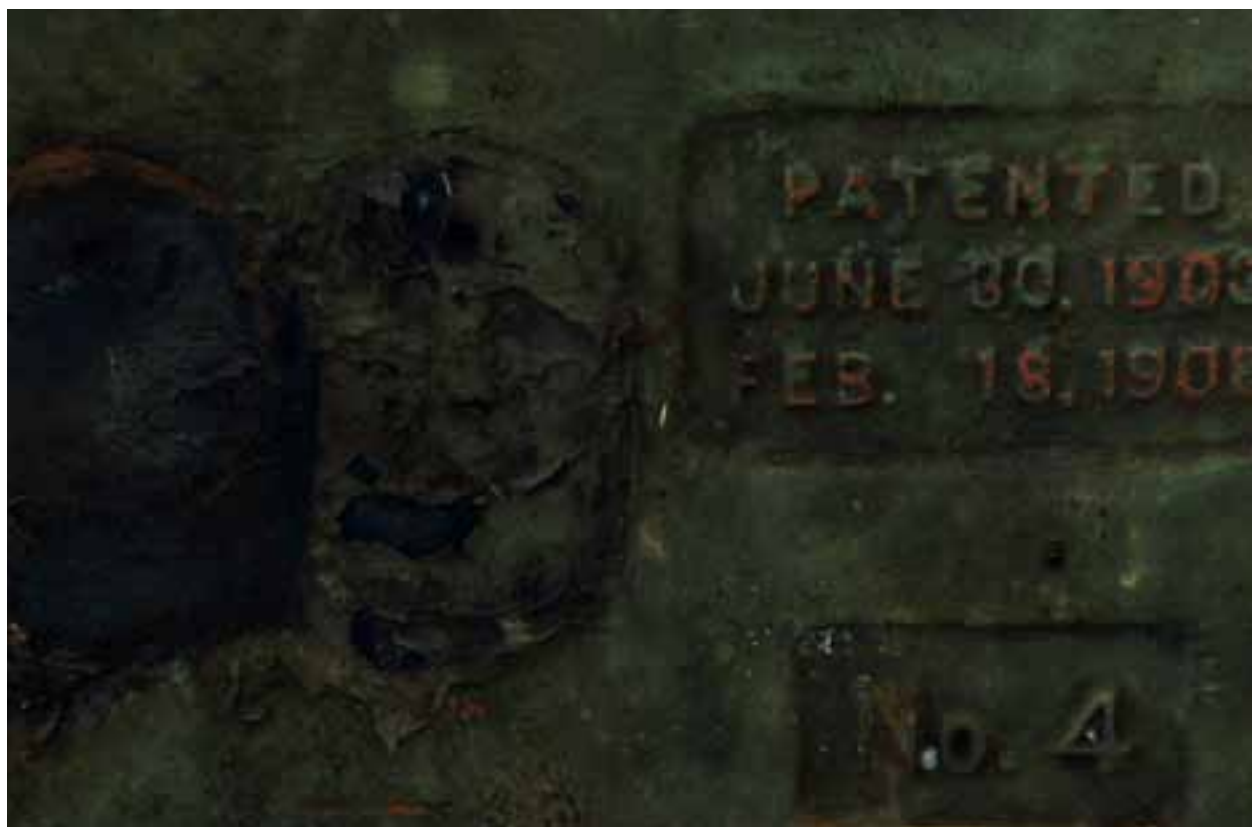


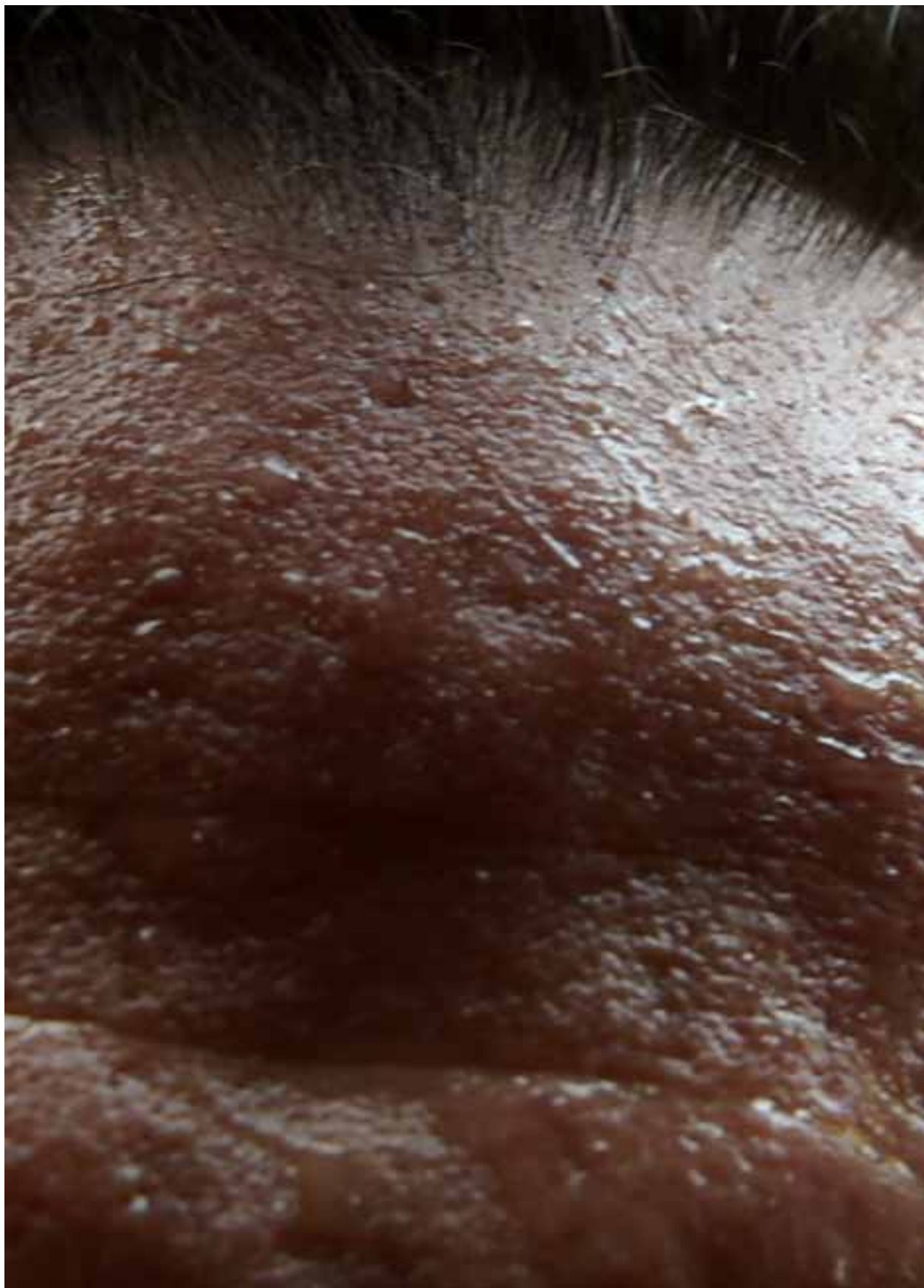
















Company prior to Mr. Flanders' entry into the picture. Everitt was the general promoter of the company, I would say. Motmer was the sales manager and Flanders the manufacturing man.

It was negotiated during the time that Mr. Flanders was still with the Ford Motor Company. That was the basic reason for his leaving the Ford Motor Company. There was no disagreement of any kind, to my knowledge. Flanders then asked me to come with him and I remained about the same time.

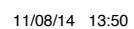
Mr. Ford was very anxious to keep me there at that time. He spent some time in Milwaukee with my dad trying to get me to come back. I was a young man and I told Mr. Flanders I was going to be with him, and I couldn't back down on my word. I had strong loyalty to Mr. Flanders. When I joined the Company, I was production manager.

After I left the Ford Motor Company, Flanders realized that Mr. Ford would probably want to get me to return. The Wayne Motor Car Company was purchasing motors from the Waukesha Motor Car Company, which was located in Milwaukee. (It happened to be my home town.) Mr. Flanders sent me down there to inspect motors, not so much for inspecting motors, but to get me out of town so Mr. Ford couldn't rehire me.

Ford finally came down there and asked me to come back, but I told him that I had told Mr. Flanders that I would stay with him, and I wished he would forget me and go back home. I went and stayed with



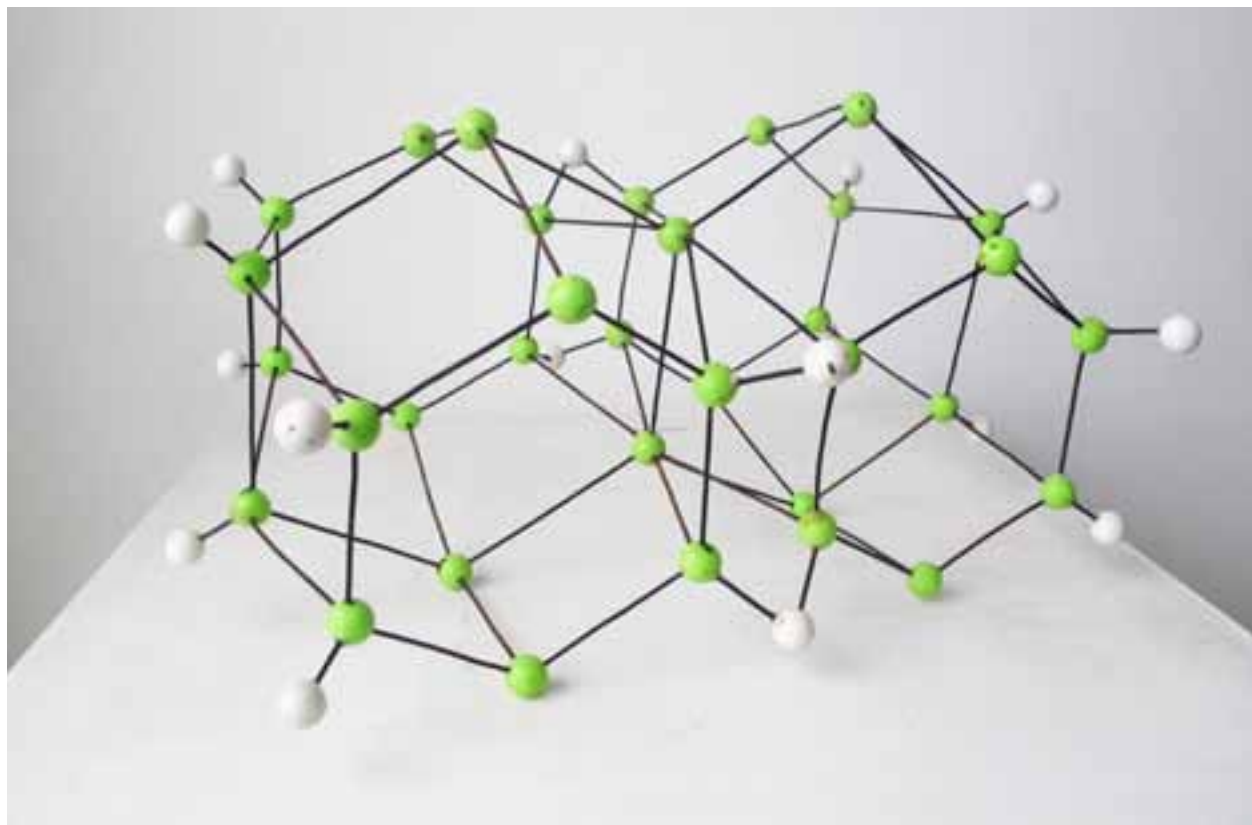








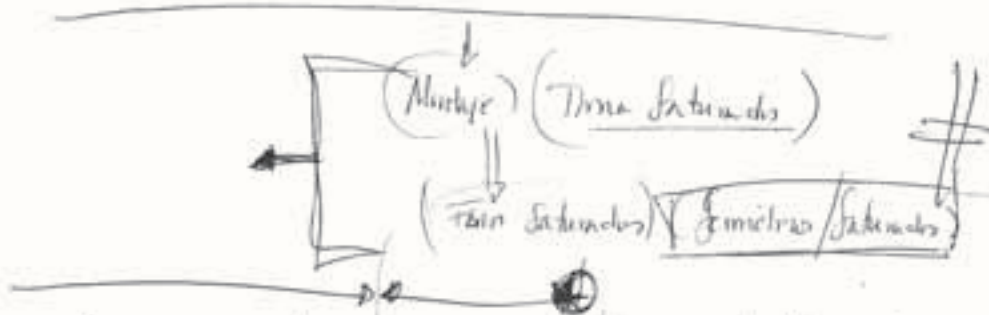
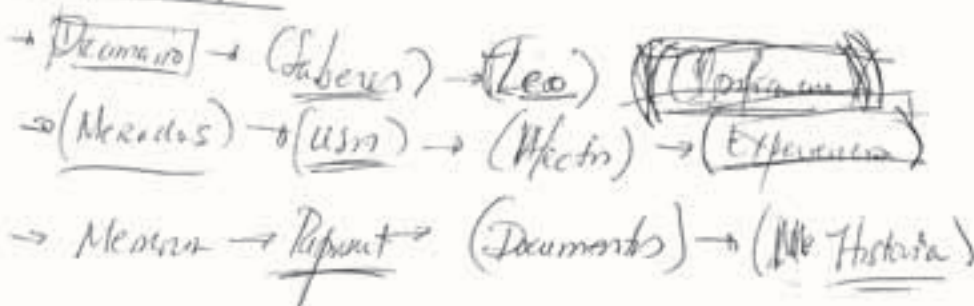








(Sounds)



<u>Natural</u>	<u>Industrial</u>	<u>Voces</u> (Human/Natural) / (Human/Industrial)
<u>Des</u>		(<u>Onomatopoeias</u>)
<u>El</u>		
<u>Sobre</u>		



PLANTACOES FORD DE BELTERRA
COMP. DE PAGAMENTO

1634 Cr\$

N.º NASCIMENTO MANOEL MARTINS

Nome

Salario de AGOSTO 1957

Assinatura



Aclarar

that we were doing all right.

When we got over to the Ford Motor Company, all piece work was out. This theory was simply this, and rightly so, that if you have a time study on a certain article and one man can do this operation, ten an hour or fifteen an hour or whatever it happens to be, enter that in a little book and give that record to the foreman. If his first man can't come up to that standard, try another. That was Henry's scheme of the thing. If you were not a mechanic, he just took a man right off the street and broke him in like a piece of machinery doing a certain job. Mr. Ford rejected piece work.

Mr. Ford never expressed himself very much on wage policies. That was a matter of local rates. He never expressed himself very much on that basis. We had to go out the front door and hire these men on standard rates. There were other manufacturers around there. The Borg & Almquist Foundry was to the left of us, and the Peninsular Screw Works was to the right of us. We hired our men according to the going rate the same as these other companies.

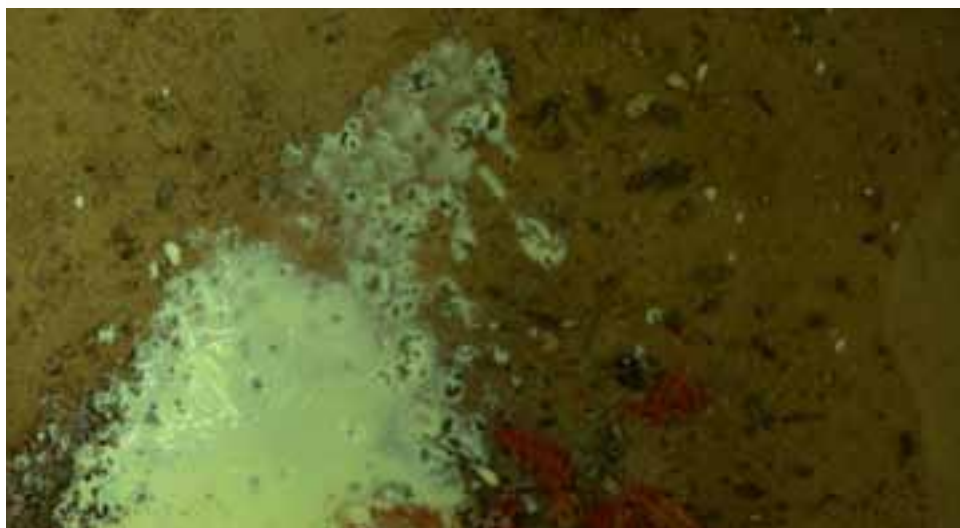
I must say that our turnover at the Ford Manufacturing Company was practically nil. There was no turnover at all. These fellows would work ten hours a day, five hours on Saturday, fifty-five hours a week. I think a sweeper got \$1 a day. The toolmaker would probably get \$.25 an hour; he was the highest paid man. He would make \$2.50 a day. The machine operators made probably \$1 to \$1.50, and probably the men



MINISTERIO DA AGRICULTURA
RAÇA FISICA DE FORDLANDIA
HOSPITAL DE FORDLANDIA

NOME JOSE ROBERTO MONTE FILHO SEXO M COR Branco
ENDEREÇO Fordlandia Obito:
NOME DA MÃE Marilene Pinto de Assunção O ocorrido em
NOME DO PAI João Roberto Santos Figueira Causa:
DATA DO NASC. 17/07/72 NATURALIDADE Paranaense EST. CIVIL Solteiro
PROFISSÃO

DATA	CONSULTA - VISITAS - EXAMES DE LABORATORIO	ANOTAÇÕES	SIGNATURAS
02/09/75	paciente - manifestando a falta de coloração da pele. Tumor pruriginoso e doloroso.		
	paciente - manifestando a falta de coloração da pele. Tumor pruriginoso e doloroso.		
20/09/75	paciente - manifestando a falta de coloração da pele. Tumor pruriginoso e doloroso.		
07/10/75	paciente - manifestando a falta de coloração da pele. Tumor pruriginoso e doloroso.		

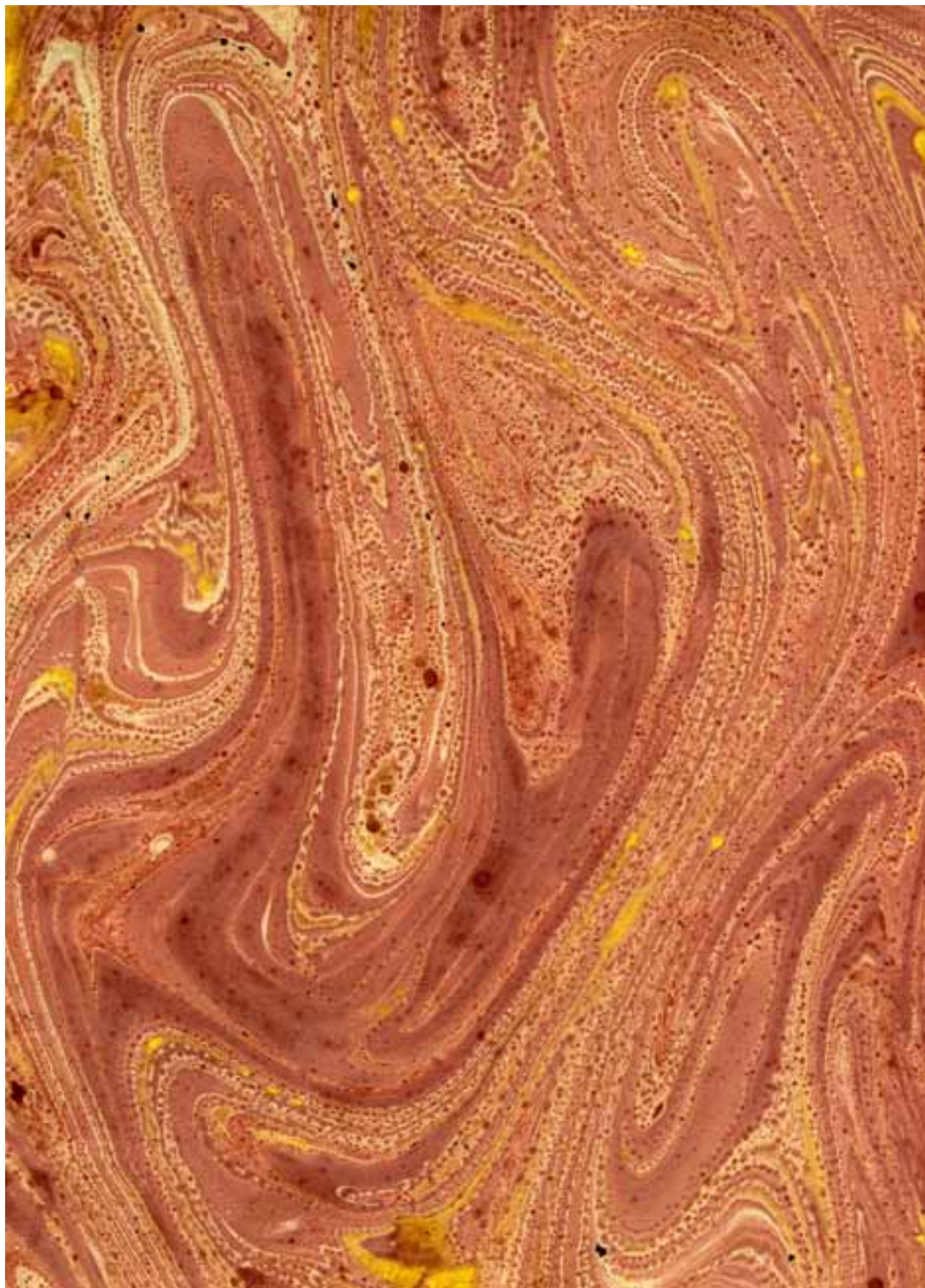


Aclarar









JOSÉ LUIS BARRIOS

Manao, or, On El Dorado

**FOR A POETICS OF THE ANIMAL:
POTENTIA AND THE SAVED NIGHT**



1. PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

My dear Friends, Let us know our [situation] and how it standeth with us. We are Men cast on Land, as Jonas was, out of the Whales Belly, when we were as buried in the Deep: And now we are on Land, we are but between Death and Life; For we are beyond, both the Old World and the New; And whether ever we shall see Europe, GOD only knoweth.

Francis BACON, *New Atlantis: A Work Unfinished* (1638).

And thus, through the serene tranquilities of the tropical sea, among waves whose hand-clappings were suspended by exceeding rapture, Moby Dick moved on, still withholding from sight the full terrors of his submerged trunk, entirely hiding the wrenched hideousness of his jaw. But soon the fore part of him slowly rose from the water; for an instant his whole marbleized body formed a high arch, like Virginia's Natural Bridge, and warningly waved his bannered flukes in the air, the grand god revealed himself, sounded, and went out of sight. Hoveringly halting, and dipping on the wing, the white sea-fowls longingly lingered over the agitated pool that he left.

Herman MELVILLE, *Moby-Dick: Or, the Whale* (1851).

I begin this essay by bringing together a double imaginary tension produced firstly between a passage from English philosopher Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*, written in 1623 and published in 1638 and another from the novel *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville, published in 1851. Secondly, these two images serve as visual indices of what I shall endeavor to develop here. One is a still from Melanie Smith's video *Fordlandia* and the other is Frederic Edwin Church's 1852 painting, *Natural Bridge*.



Natural Bridges, Virginia

VOL. II, page 411

Engraved by James Walker

If what is put in tension between the two textual citations is an historical distance of over two centuries with regard to the development of Modernity, what is activated with the visual citations is an imaginary regarding certain *potentiae* of nature that, for white mythologies, function as a screen upon which the relationship between nature and civilization is projected. To be sure, the contradiction between the English philosopher's rationalist idea of the South Sea and the North American author's Romantic literary imaginary of the same, as well as the contradiction in the way that both authors construct a certain sense of place—as a temporal vagueness in the philosopher's case, or as a material indetermination in Melville's novel—want to bring to account the movement that goes from the utopian moment that founds the ideas of civilization and progress in the seventeenth century and the way in which said progress appears in the imaginary of the colonizers of the nineteenth century as a delirious, horrifying limit upon which to construct the colonizing discourse of life as raw material for industry.

In a sort of re-mytho-poeticization of Plato's imagined city, Bacon locates Salomon's project of wisdom in the land of Bensalem: the felicitous coincidence of love, justice and truth in the practice of goodwill. For his part, Melville makes Moby Dick's appearance into a marble cliff. In the North American author's work, the whale is produced as an imaginary and as a *potentia*. At the limit between terror and fascination, Melville formulates a certain limit between the animal impulse and perhaps one of modernity's most powerful images: the bridge.

In this context, the visual imaginaries that serve as the epigraphs of this essay about Melanie Smith's video, *Fordlandia*, also aim to tie it to certain traces (on which more below) in which nature and the living are given as *potentiae* that enable the critical-aesthetic conditions of the logics of colonization proper to Modernity and Late Modernity to be thought. If there is a constant in Melanie Smith's work, it is a certain strategy that deconstructs the contemporary practices of art as mere forms of economically and politically subverting the present, and at the same time produces imaginary archaeologies that critique and dismantle colonial and

post-colonial violence. Perhaps this is why the deliberate use of a visual anachronism between a nineteenth-century painting of Natural Bridge in Virginia, to which Melville refers, and the still taken from the video *Fordlandia* appeals to the reader's ability to construct a dialectical image according to Walter Benjamin: a point of legibility of the historical imaginary that reaches into the aesthetic present of a determined artistic grammar. "It's not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past" – Benjamin tells us – "rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation."¹

What matters here is the way in which this image activates a poetics – that is, a technical *savoir-faire* – of the singular in which the conditions of the imaginary, affect, and discourse establish critical conditions of aesthetico-political experience of the present. Right at the limit where contemporary art would seem to produce an unsalvageable paradox between visibility and discourse, dismantling the imaginary on the basis of animal impulse allows us, at the least, to think that all critique of Modernity and Late Modernity would perhaps have to be thought from the fictitious separation between animal stupor and human boredom... I will have to return to this whenever the analysis of *Fordlandia* allows me to advance something that Melanie Smith's work has, for some time, made me think, and which in many ways echoes contemporary aesthetico-philosophical reflection, at least as far as my own work is concerned.

Nevertheless, before elaborating my arguments about this work by Melanie Smith, it is worth insisting on its importance for contemporary art practice, which assumes the mediation of video in its production as a condition of its *savoir-faire*.

Many of the discussions about the limit between art and cinema that took place in their moment are irrelevant in our time. It

¹ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999, p. 462 [N2a,3].

would seem that the differences between the culture industry and entertainment on the one hand, and, on the other, the process of art and film production (which established, in their time, a social division of labor) strike us today as being slight, especially at a time when it appears to be an undeniable material fact that the exhibition and circulation value of these visual practices responds to the logics of consumption and the social production of cultural imaginaries. This is not the place to develop these notes in detail; I include them only to underline the fictitious character of that separation and also to be able to differentiate the meaning that video might have as artistic rather than cinematic mediation. Of course, this difference would be unrelated to the documentary or fictional function that each of them may or may not have, and less still to the mass character of cinema, which does not pertain to video. From my perspective, all these divisions administer the language of the movement-image, but only with some difficulty do they explain their differences.

If it is feasible to think of any difference between video and film, this would have to do, in principle, with the very fragility of the siting of each of them. The spatial emplacement of video versus the temporal emplacement of film is a minimal difference that in large part produces different conditions of sensory experience: on the one hand, film is aesthetically determined by an appeal to the pure order of the spectator's imagination, while video speaks to the body as an index of perception. This difference is insufficient, but its accidentality determines the way in which the conditions of sensory experience are established. And insofar as it is insufficient, perhaps it would be better to consider that what it does not reach is the artificial separation between cinema and video art. I think that in this sense, beyond the genealogies that define them according to narration or according to visibility, we must also, in addition to emplacement, seek out the structural difference established between them in the very archaeology of the movement-image, in the elements that determine it as a zero degree of the condition of experience and further establish a new imaginary regime of what is visual.

With regard to Melanie Smith's *Fordlandia*, here it is interesting to recognize the medium's archaeological importance, which

puts into perspective the artistic strategies and aesthetic investigations that operate not only in this piece but also in her other video and installation works and their relationship to spacing.²

This archaeology should not be understood as a linear historiography of the movement-image, but rather as the way in which a technological resource constructs its own poetics and with it, its *aesthesis*. In this context, and without attempting to conduct an exhaustive exposition of French philosopher Gilles Deleuze's film studies, I borrow two fundamental concepts from him, which serve as a conceptual scaffolding for my analysis of the poetics and aesthetics of the video *Fordlandia*: the idea of the *time-image* as an aesthetico-historical matrix that defines the specificity of the cinematic image, and the concept of the *any-space-whatever* as intensive action of the shot over its objects: things, animals, or humans.³ The time-image is the cinematic image par excellence insofar as what determines the present of the image is the becoming of time as internal duration of the shot with which it establishes the logic of

2 The genealogy of Melanie Smith's artistic production is not explained without the place occupied by the question of painting in her work. Crossing formal, conceptual and spatial borders, her questioning of painting has led her to work with video, photography and installation as ways of aesthetically, historically and politically overflowing the history of art and of contemporary art. In this context, these enduring questions of her production found an important index of realization in the project *Red Square, Impossible Pink*, presented at the Biennale di Venezia in 2011. See *Red Square, Impossible Pink*, Madrid: Turner, 2011.

3 Deleuze understands time-image as the cinematic aesthetic whose fundamental quality is based on the shot as pure temporal passage with no pre-established scheme whatsoever; by any-space-whatever, he understands the camera's freedom of movement between shots, and the objects of the shot, such that the latter never determine any part of the framing, type of shot, or montage. See Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.

montage as a logic of contiguity. Deleuze understands the any-space-whatever, in turn, as the way in which framing is resolved not by a priori conditions of representation – symmetry, objects, or compositions that determine the intelligibility of that which is seen or narrated – but by the *potentia* of becoming intensive material of the objects, things or people in their condition as surface, plane, or depth of the shot. In any case, these two ideas will allow me to elaborate on the different levels of poetic signification in the video *Fordlandia*.



2. LATITUDE ZERO: NO PLACE / THE IMAGE

The milieu is the Victorian house, just as the originary world is the wild region which overhangs and surrounds it.

Gilles DELEUZE, *L'image-mouvement. Cinéma I* (1983).

The flies have been so troublesome ever since we have been ashore that we can scarce get any business done for them; they eat the painters colours off the paper as fast as they can be laid on, and if a fish is to be drawn there is more trouble in keeping them off it than in the drawing itself.

Joseph BANKS, aboard the *Endeavour* (1768–1771), cited by Richard HOLMES, *The Age of Wonder: How the Romantic Generation Discovered the Beauty and Terror of Science* (2008).

In the history of art, the tension between Romanticism and naturalism is something more than the opposition between origin and progress, between nature and civilization, between melancholy and mania. The meaning of this has been much debated. One thing is clear: in the history and theory of art it would seem that the answers that the avant-garde and post-avant-garde attempted to give in regards to this tension were not sufficient. This resolves the order of their discourse as a critique of the political present (something that no doubt finds its *raison d'être* in the ideological struggles that suffuse much of twentieth-century history) but also because the moment of critique as poetico-artistic apparatus can only be articulated as a function of a certain rupture with historical time. The forgetting of pathos defines affect and historical tension. In its eagerness to construct the critical-aesthetic conditions of possibility of the present, art produced during the twentieth century cannot be understood without

the attempt to make art into a territory of knowledge and a mechanism for the definition of categories (in the Kantian sense) that would both enable the autonomy of its function to be specified, and make room for the possible construction of utopias.

The importance of this is undeniable. Nevertheless, viewed from the becoming present of these artistic practices, and in the context of the development of globalization, we see a paradox, which contemporary artistic production has attempted to take into account, albeit without always succeeding. In this context, art produced within the horizon of postmodernity was ultimately, perhaps, the best simulacrum from which to distribute an administration of differences as geoaesthetics of alterity. In any case – and this is what matters here – everything seems to indicate that at the limit between art as a critical-aesthetic apparatus and art as a geoaesthetic affirmation of alterities, there is a certain need to rethink the historical modes in which Modernity is constructed on the basis of its technical-instrumental implementation. In this context, it would seem that the historical tension between naturalism and Romanticism functions as an archaeology of the affects that serve us to understand the folding of the nineteenth century's aesthetico-political imaginary carried out by at least one set of contemporary artistic practices.⁴

This is where such folding also finds its potential in the technologies of the gaze. As I noted above, the movement-image (film and video) is a historico-material medium in which the aesthetic conditions of representation in contemporary culture are resolved. In this sense it is an assemblage that produces a *potentia*, where image and

⁴ Beyond the artistic utopias of the first half of the twentieth century, but also beyond the postmodern appropriation of the past as simulacrum, it would seem that the critical conditions of contemporary art find in the historical tensions of the nineteenth century an archaeology of affects as a horizon of interpretation of the social and political processes of the twenty-first century, above all as regards industrial capitalism's models of expansion and the dynamics of class conflict they produced following the second industrial revolution, which echo in contemporary social conflicts.

imaginary conjugate to produce conditions of sensory experience as spatial and temporal resonances of recognition.⁵ In any case, it is on this horizon that I propose to analyze Melanie Smith's *Fordlandia*.

Melanie Smith's most recent video works have explored visual surface on the basis of a double operation: one referring to visual art, and the other to the movement-image. In particular, her video works have enabled her to broaden her investigation of pictorial surface and sculptural volume to include the modes of cultural, social and historical imaginaries. To be sure, time is a determining factor of this exploration, and perhaps its aesthetic materialization in the movement-image owes to this. Here one would also have to contextualize her video works. One enduring feature of Melanie Smith's work – which lies between the artistic avant-garde, Modernity as an historical project, and the forms of heterotopic production as fissures of both of the aforementioned – is her practice of putting the formal, artistic and imaginary registers of nineteenth- and twentieth-century European art at the limit. At the boundaries where forms become *potentiae* and overflows [*desbordamientos*], her productions function between that which contains and informs (frame, surface, image, memory, etc.) and that which exceeds and deforms (force, intensity, density, weight, mass, chaos).⁶ While I could not guarantee her artistic production to be the result of a sort of systematic investigation, it is evident that Melanie Smith's work has complicated the aesthetic relationships between force and form, which, to be sure, also means that the problematization of this relationship has increasingly allowed

5 In this sense, the medium provides not only the physical basis but also an aesthetico-critical condition of possibility of representation. In other words, this means that the movement-image determined material conditions of representation that, insofar as they are submitted to its conditions of self-recognition, produce its artistic *potentia*. Such is the case of montage in Eisenstein, of shot sequence in Italian neo-realism, of long takes in Antonioni and Tarkovsky, or of the estrangement of the camera in Lars von Trier.

6 This is particularly evident in the video installation *Xilitla* (2010) and in *Estadio Azteca / Proeza maleable* (2010).

her to broaden the perspective of her production and, with it, to concern herself not only with the aesthetic affections of the present moment of the social and the political, but also to address the historico-imaginary horizons of the tension between utopia and heterotopia.

This is the context of production, from my perspective at least, in which *Fordlandia* operates. Nevertheless, we must be careful not to establish formal or conceptual equivalences between what could well be defined as an abiding problematic of Melanie Smith's work, and the way in which she produces a new aesthetic fold in this video, whose motif is a rubber factory located somewhere on the Tapajos River. Within the universe of her artistic production, *Fordlandia* represents a fundamental artistic displacement, from the way in which she works with the movement-image to its relationship with a poetics of the living and the animal, making this piece into a sort of reflection on and aesthetico-political inflection of life as subversive potential of the modern imaginary of industrial colonization.

Folding is something more than a metaphorical resource that seeks to affirm the development undergone by Melanie Smith's artistic work. The fold functions here as an idea that accounts for what is aesthetically relevant to the video *Fordlandia*: a folding over of instinct on top of image that produces an impulse [*pulsión*⁷] as an ontological dislocation of the time of modernity. I shall proceed in parts.

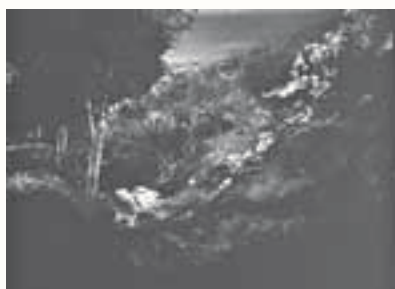
As Gilles Deleuze observes, "What makes the impulse-image so difficult to reach and even to define or identify, is that it is somehow 'stuck' between the affection-image and the action-image."⁸ In the philosopher's studies of the cinema, the paradigmatic director

7 [For consistency's sake, I have followed the translators of *Cinema 1* in rendering this word throughout the text as "impulse." It should be noted, however, that *pulsión* is the conventional translation of the Freudian concept of *Trieb*, which has been rendered into English variously as "drive" and "instinct." This connotation is crucial to Deleuze's concept of the impulse-image no less than to the author of this essay. – Trans.]

8 Gilles Deleuze, op. cit., p. 134.

who works with impulse-images is Luis Buñuel, who does so in a very particular way in the film *Los olvidados* [*The Forgotten*, a.k.a. *The Young and the Damned*] (1951). A pair of comments in this regard: firstly, it is not irrelevant that Deleuze would name this film in particular. Rather, in it, the Spanish director turns the forms of Mexico's 1950s-era modernizing utopia into an imaginary blockage where it becomes instinct or the living being in Modernity: violence, precariousness, abandonment, poverty are the pathos on which instinct is inscribed in the film's aesthetic naturalism. Secondly, the imaginary horizon where Buñuel inscribes instinct results in a form of political denunciation of the developmentalist models that were so costly in the modernizing policies of Latin American countries, especially Mexico. This, in cinematic terms, means that the impulse-image is resolved in the tension between the wide shot, which functions as an imaginary horizon of the ruins of the future (very much in the way in which surrealism would do so with urban landscape) and the saturation of the close-up as a visual resource for exacerbating facial expression over gesture, that is, for emphasizing instinct as aesthetic *potentia*. This would be equivalent to something Francis Bacon might do in painting, resolving the face into a head and the scream into a howl: a record of the animal. The best example of this in Buñuel is the end of *Los olvidados*, when the saturated shot of the garbage dump, where they toss Pedro's body, concludes with a wide, low-angle shot of the breaking dawn, a cinematic trace that unhinges the nationalist imaginary of the Mexican landscape.

These points about the cinematic index in which Deleuze lays out the structure of the impulse-image serve as a counterpoint in the analysis of *Fordlandia*. Far from any naturalist aesthetic, Melanie Smith's video is composed on visual registers that differentiate it from the former, above all in regard to the urban industrial imaginary on which naturalism is inscribed. Closer, too, than the imaginary of the jungle or even its exoticization as a horizon where the post-colonial binarisms of civilization and savagery are inscribed. (In this context one would have to underscore the structure of the shots and of the montage through which *Fordlandia* is constructed over the binary of colonial discourse, and even over global imaginaries with regard



to alterity and difference and the relations they bear to the hegemonic subject of cosmopolitan enunciation.)

If there is anything that would define the visual aesthetic of the piece, it would have something to do with the way in which the shots stress intensity as a sensible quality of the image. The operation is clear: the types of framing and shots are defined by placing the camera on horizontal axes determined by a one-to-one scale with the object of the shot, producing a sort of intensive syntax in the duration of the image. To be sure, the matrix of this resource is held up over the physical-saturated framing, which, at the same time that it folds the objects on its surfaces, produces an internal tension among them, a relationship that turns the images into intensive shots. It is a matter neither of formal abstraction, nor of an expressive body language. Rather, this resource causes the index of the image to be returned to the moment of its impulse. Thus, between action and affection, what is activated is a field of forces in which objects become textures, depths of field become surfaces, and physical-saturated close-ups become indeterminate territories of force. In this sense, the visual syntax of *Fordlandia* could well be read according to the aesthetics of the impulse-image, except that in this video the horizon is converted into a surface and the background into intensity. This means, among other things, that it subtracts the image of its imaginary horizon from signification and places it in its register of excessive materiality. The image is driven to its impetus, to its indetermination, or, to put it in Lacanian terms, to the stain.⁹

In this sense, as Deleuze asserts, “The impulse prowls the milieu, knowing no satisfaction other than that of taking possession of that which seems to be closed to it, to belong by rights to another

⁹ The stain, according to Lacan, is the moment when the scopic drive [*pulsión*] operates as a force that supports the moment of the imaginary of the image. See Jacques-Alain Miller, ed., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1977.

milieu, to a higher level.”¹⁰ But what could “prowls” mean here? To displace oneself freely through and over objects, attempting to construct neither any figuration nor any causal narration whatsoever. Perhaps this is the other fundamental element in the grammar of the movement-image operating in *Fordlandia*. If the intensive relation between the image and the dislocation of the level of intelligibility of the shots makes saturation into an intensive idea that makes the small undifferentiated from the big, then the free displacement of the camera suspends the causal relationship between action and affection. This is why the camera prowls the way an animal would. In this sense, the impulse-image is almost equivalent to the way the camera in *Fordlandia* makes tension undifferentiated from intensity, depth undifferentiated from surface, action undifferentiated from affection, small undifferentiated from big; together, all are pure fields of immanence, forces, material impulses, excesses of instinct: *impulse-image*. Nevertheless, it does not suffice to saturate and to make action undifferentiated from affect in order to give rise to impulse. This seems to be the way to read *Fordlandia*. It would be an analytic naïveté to attempt to explain the formal and aesthetic structure of Melanie Smith’s video in this way.

It might thus be opportune to re-introduce the concept of the “any-space-whatever,” which I mentioned at the beginning of this essay. This shooting strategy refers to the way in which the camera moves over its objects. It is a sort of supplement of the framing that, as any-space-whatevers, signifies the fracture between the physical determination of the camera’s object and a certain substantial condition that corresponds to it by nature. Thus, the framing of a face as object, for example, would correspond to a close-up, and that of an action would correspond to a medium shot. By contrast, the any-space-whatever consists in breaking from this traditional narrative synchrony in favor of a free, indirect one. In the history of film, the best examples of this are Antonioni’s tracking shots in films like *L’Avventura* (1960), *La Notte* (1961), and *L’Eclisse* (1962).

¹⁰ Deleuze, op. cit., p. 136. [Translation modified – Trans.]



In them, the shot's movement does not correspond to the action, affection, or intention of the situation being filmed; rather, the camera moves freely over its objects.

To be sure, this type of camera movement is present in *Fordlandia* as another form of the folding of impulse. The way in which Melanie Smith allows the camera to move freely over its objects produces a sort of distension of one image atop another, something that is fundamental to resolving the montage structurally. In this sense, camera movement as any-space-whatever, alongside physical-saturated framings and the exchange of scales of signification for scales of intensity are, from my perspective at least, the elements on which the presence of the present of the image is supported.

At this point, it is impossible not to develop an analysis of *Fordlandia*'s mode of montage. A first consideration in this regard is that in this video, montage will no doubt have to be thought not as something that distends the plot—not, at least, in the sense in which this is usually understood in film, where narrative structure is constructed around sensory-motor paradigms¹¹—but rather as something that results from the immanent meaning of the shots. In *Fordlandia*, editing makes no pretense of establishing a linearity of action nor any finality whatsoever; instead, it functions as a sort of intensive becoming that produces, as it unfolds, a sort of differential force field. In this sense, montage is a sort of structure of proximity of fields that collide aesthetically (perceptually) to produce a sort of eternal return of the living. In other words, in *Fordlandia*, montage is through contiguity. It functions according to the way in which the materialities of the images collide into each other, thereby giving rise to a difference in repetition: perhaps a form of the eternal return of the different or life as the living?

¹¹ I am referring to the idea of movement-image in its more canonical sense, namely, that which makes montage into a system of stable punctuation of the relationships between close-up, wide shot, and medium shot, wherein a certain relationship between subject, situation, intention and action is resolved.





The old dictum about art that affirms that matter is form and vice versa would seem to be valid, at least if we understand that this separation is a theoretical fiction that resolves nothing. On the contrary, perhaps it is worth salvaging from this affirmation the paradoxical character that is supposed for philosophy by the way in which the artistic exists as a singularity, above all in regard to the movement-image as unimpeachably real. To think, then, the relationship between matter and form in art supposes taking to a certain extreme the abstract thought that obliges it to discover, as Kant already supposed, the rule of the singular that operates in artistic creation. In this sense, any analysis of artistic production demands at least a minimum of intellectual acuity to show the way in which a determined artistic differential operates. What matters here, on this brief detour in my analysis of *Fordlandia*, is not only to put the way in which my discourse operates into perspective, but also to suggest the artistic singularity proposed in this piece, a specificity that is no doubt related to a loop that Melanie Smith's work draws around something that has been a constant concern of hers over the course of her production.

As I suggested at the outset of this essay, in Melanie Smith's artistic production, the insistence on working on forms in which Modernity has been produced at its edges is undeniable. From my point of view, at least, *Fordlandia* now appears as the work in which this artist places herself on the furthest edge of this Modernity: on the edge where the animal dislocates the direction of time in Modernity and redirects it toward the *potentia* of the living. *Fordlandia* produces a tension between time and the living and maybe with it an aesthetics of the contradiction between shock and tedium that we will have to call bewilderment.



3. STATIC VIOLENCE

What, for so long now, has been making it sad and as a result has deprived the mourner of its words, what forbids words, is not a muteness and the experience of a powerlessness, an inability ever to name; it is, in the first place, the fact of *receiving one's name*.

Jacques DERRIDA, *L'animal que donc je suis* (2006)

In our culture, man has always been thought of as the articulation and conjunction of a body and a soul, of a living thing and a logos, of a natural (or animal) element and a supernatural or social or divine element. We must learn instead to think of man as what results from the incongruity of these two elements, and investigate not the metaphysical mystery of conjunction, but rather the practical and political mystery of separation.

Giorgio AGAMBEN, *L'aperto. L'uomo e l'animale* (2002)

In the difference between those discourses (philosophical, aesthetic and artistic) that, on the one hand, make novelty into a sort of enthusiasm, and, on the other, those that perceive the tragic destiny of humanity in such discursive productions, is tied an evaluation of the future that appears impossible for Modernity. It is thus beyond doubt that much of current artistic production finds itself bogged down in the debate that, more often than not, naïvely attempts to resolve these binary divisions, making it impossible to overcome the innumerable contradictions that the system of art has created until now. It is certain that the role art might play in our time cannot leave aside the complex network of accomplishments produced by the development of globalization, but at the least it must establish conditions of possibility of the sensible that overflow

the frames of representation on the basis of which this narrative subsumes the eruptions of singularity. It could be objected that the function of art is not rooted in generating or creating these aesthetic conditions of irruption of the sensible, something that is contradicted by the very way in which the current system of art distributes the visibility of the artistic in terms of the same and the other. But beyond this, in the face of this objection, I would immediately move to recall that one of the characteristics that has differentiated the function of art in Modernity from the beginning has to do with art's capacity to take flight from the frames of representation as a paradigm itself of modern discourse. In this context, the lines of flight along which the artistic can operate become increasingly narrow.

In any case, it is on the basis of this consideration that I will develop what I perceive to be the implications of Melanie Smith's video, *Fordlandia*. In this part of the essay, I am interested in elaborating on the extremes or the edges that I have analyzed in its aesthetico-cinematic register. I want to construct an argument about the critical-political implications that are articulated in this piece's mode of the movement-image. As I asserted at the outset of this essay, one finds in Melanie Smith's artistic production a certain constant in her questioning of modernity's mode of emplacement on the margins that it produces, margins that could well be read in her first productions as diverse forms of social pathos (*Spiral City*), then as a dialectical tension between utopia and political heterotopia in contemporaneity (*Parres*, *Bulto*), and which in her productions from recent years have broadened to include the zones of affection of history and art history (*Xilitla* and *Estadio Azteca*). The latter two works that, furthermore, find a temporal sediment of the present in the imaginary of Modernity's political and artistic past. Nevertheless, in none of them—and here is what, from my perspective, defines the *potentia* of *Fordlandia*—did she work on the problem of the animal.

While it is true that the animal motif had appeared in her earlier work, *Xilitla*, the functioning of this motif was contextualized in the oneiric function of landscape and nature. In other words, it was inscribed in her paraphrasing of the sense of English Romantic landscape folded on top of the delirious dream of Edward James. So

distant from and yet so near to this imaginary, *Fordlandia* drives the limit of the (European, it must be said) imaginary to the extreme, taking it to an aesthetic anteriority as a vertex from which the historical horizon of nineteenth-century industrial Modernity is re-signified, along with the imaginary of the English explorers of that era.

The siting of the city of Fordlandia can be read as a nineteenth-century industrial utopia, but also as a form of capitalist colonization. It seems to me to be possible to have it both ways. On one hand, the fact that Ford had conceived of a factory-city that would respond to Protestant capitalism's model of production cannot go unnoticed: the trace of the city in the manner of a small settlement of workers, the services minimally required for a community of émigrés from the U.S., etc., no doubt reveal its character as a utopian project. But, at the same time, that this siting would be aimed at constructing an industrial infrastructure for the exploitation of raw materials responds to the logic of nineteenth-century industrial colonialist exploitation. In any case, the tension established between utopia and exploitation is in no way different from the capitalist policies of pre-industrial siting in geographical territories. Except for the way in which the notion of matter is inscribed in the imaginary (as *terra incognita* or industrial convertibility), both are moments of the historical development of Modernity.

To be sure, this historico-material condition of the siting of Fordlandia not only responds to the economic logic of surplus value, but also produces the imaginary of alterity that is so costly to modernization. In this context, one of the imaginaries feeding the pathos of "enterprise" as a sense of the future produces its place in the Amazon. We have known this since at least the seventeenth century, but also again since the nineteenth. The imaginary territories of the South appear to the colonizer and to the explorer as dreamt places wherein to inscribe desire, which has to do with the way in which, from Modernity's beginnings, radical alterity has been located in the South Seas and their lands. While it is true that there is a difference of nearly three centuries between the utopia of Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*, written in 1623, and the abandonment of Fordlandia in the 1940s, it is still striking that for Ford no less than

for Bacon, the place as alterity—beyond never having been seen by either of them—is located in a certain condition of the impossible and the indeterminate for rational thought and for instrumental reason. In some sense, it is a matter of a radical alterity as an affective backdrop for desire, that is to say, where the living and the excessive seem to function for the imagination as the indefinite singular.

Here, too, is where Melanie Smith's *Fordlandia* is something more than an artistic operation that salvages the imaginary forms of unknown lands or the overflowing desires of the capitalist impulse. Although space functions in *Fordlandia* as an imagined horizon, by contrast to the utopian and colonizing modes of the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, for Melanie Smith, this place is, so to speak, a voyage of radical decolonization of radical alterity. For this reason, perhaps, far from restituting the figure of the colonizer, of the merchant explorer, or the industrial capitalist, *Fordlandia* is a contradictory voyage, a voyage against the tide, a journey on which the animal is activated as a subtractive *potentia*, as an unimpeachable singularity, as a hiatus and a fissure in Modernity's imaginary, its time, its progress.

Fordlandia is thus an aesthetic operation in which Melanie Smith counterpoises the ruin against the living to show the way in which the animal is a field of immanence, an eternal return of the different that brings time as constructed by Modernity to crisis, perhaps in its most radical sense. To understand this means understanding, too, the historico-aesthetic register on which this video operates as a political critique of the global forms of Modernity. Seen in terms of the artistic apparatus, *Fordlandia* means recognizing the way in which the animal damages history and perhaps thereby enables us to imagine other forms of the meaning of the community of the living.





EPILOGUE

Boredom is the desire for happiness left in its pure state.

Giacomo LEOPARDI

Perhaps it is not the case that being and the human world have been presupposed in order then to reach the animal by means of subtraction—that is, by a “destructive observation”; perhaps the contrary is also, and even more, true, that is, that the openness of the human world (insofar as it is also and primarily an openness to the essential conflict between disconcealment and concealment) can be achieved only by means of an operation enacted upon the not-open of the animal world. And the place of this operation—in which human openness in a world and animal openness toward its disinhibitor seem for a moment to meet—is boredom.

Giorgio AGAMBEN, *l'aperto. L'uomo e l'animale* (2002)

It would be absurd to imagine that time passes for animals. Truth be told, it does not concern them: when a cat spends three hours looking through a window at a bird on a chain-link fence, or when a dog sleeps twenty out of the twenty-four hours in a day, it would be hard to imagine that they experience boredom. Heidegger already observed as much: animals are that which is not open to the world, there is no possible measure of time. In them, time is frozen. This is true to a degree, at least to the very human degree that separates time from the living. Or is it rather how Benjamin sees it? What defines the ontological condition of the animal is sadness. If for Heidegger the animal scarcely has a world, for Benjamin they were denied the world insofar as there is a third party that names them: “In the Fall, since the eternal purity of names was

violated, the sterner purity of the judging word arose.”¹² For this philosopher, the purity of the judgment is none other than the way in which human language instrumentalizes the singularity of the living in the separation between the animal and the human, there where language, upon naming, speaks truth or falsehood about the animal, thereby silencing animals, so to speak, into shock.

But how, then, are we to understand the relationship between shock and muteness on the one hand, and boredom and tedium on the other? I have taken this question up elsewhere; here I would prefer to bring this question to bear in order to reveal a concern that Melanie Smith and I have shared for some years.

I affirmed it above: Melanie Smith’s works have been constructed on an aesthetic insistence on artistically investigating the ways in which Modernity has been geopolitically sited in its heterotopic forms. This is the context in which both the analyses I have elaborated thus far about *Fordlandia* and the philosophical arguments I have begun to sketch out take on meaning. If we agree on the aesthetic strategy that operates in *Fordlandia* in regard to its visual grammar, it will be easy to understand then the relationships that these bear with the animal as the pathos of this piece. Regarded thus, the intensive shots, the any-space-whatever and montage through contiguity, climb the impulse-image toward an ontological level that puts into play a political critique not only of the forms of colonialism and post-colonialism in Latin America, but also of the political ontology upon which the division between the animal and the human is sustained in Modernity.

In this context, the aesthetic structure of *Fordlandia* folds the sense of its images toward a certain critical order of the colonial imaginary on the basis of what I described above, following Deleuze, as the impulse-image. But by doing so on intensive planes of

¹² Walter Benjamin, “On Language as Such and the Language of Man,” trans. Edmund Jephcott, in Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, eds., *Selected Writings*, vol. 1: 1913-1926, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996, p. 71.

affective indetermination where there operates a tension between figure and indetermination, it produces a differential of sense: that which has to do with the way in which the shock of the animal and the tedium of the human appear as a bewilderment of the historical time of Modernity.

If something is put into operation in the video *Fordlandia*, it is lethargy as a temporal datum shared between the living and the machine. Perhaps this is why a pair of eyes is at one and the same time the alarmed gaze of a frog and the holes upon which the headlights of a car once settled. And perhaps this is also why the impulse and the silence of abandonment coincide at some point on the uncertain point—as Benjamin would suggest—of the *saved night*: that indefinite place of the hiatus as what cuts but does not let loose (in Giorgio Agamben's terms), there where the animal is re-tied to the word, the word to the flesh, the flesh to the eye. There in the zone of “static violence” that can no longer signify the bewilderment of history, but rather, according to Benjamin, the surface “where there is only a rustling of plants, there is always a lament.”¹³

In any case, we would have to agree with Godard in thinking that if time acquired its artistic disposition with the movement-image, its *potentia* rests in “offering, at each *instant*, just an image.”¹⁴ in *Fordlandia*, no doubt, that of bewilderment as an index critical to the historical dream of Modernity.

¹³ Ibid., p. 73.

¹⁴ Cited in Clément Rosset, *L'objet singulier*, Paris, Éditions de minuit, 1979.









MELANIE SMITH

Was born in Poole, England, in 1965. She received her Bachelor of Arts from the University of Reading. Since 1989 she has lived and worked in Mexico City, an experience that has enormously influenced her works ever since. Her work has been characterized by a certain re-reading of the formal and aesthetic categories of avant-gardes and post-avant-garde movements, problematized at the sites and within the horizons of heterotopias. Her production is intimately related to a certain expanded vision of the notion of modernity, maintaining a relationship both with what this means in Latin America, particularly in Mexico, and with the implication this has for her formal explorations as a critical moment in the aesthetic-political structure of modernity and late modernity

Her production has been defined by a certain rereading of the formal and aesthetic categories of avant-garde movements and the post-avant-garde, problematized at the site and within the horizon of heterotopias. Her current work is linked to a critical vision of modernity and late modernity in Latin America: the relationships between precariousness, life, and the forms of violence that characterize contemporary industrial society. In earlier pieces, she has worked on the aesthetic and political implications of multitudes, violence, and aberrant forms on the outskirts of contemporaneity. This is evident in such videos as *Estadio Azteca – Proeza maleable*, *Xilitla* (2010), *Bulto* (2011), and *Elevator* (2012).

Her work has been exhibited in numerous national and international institution, including: PS1, New York; MOMA, New York; UCLA's Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; ICA, Boston; Tate Liverpool; Tate Modern, London; South London Gallery, London; Museo de Arte de Lima; Museo Tamayo, Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo and Museo Experimental El Eco, Mexico City; and Museo de Monterrey. In 2011 she represented Mexico at its national pavilion at the 54th Venice Biennale. From 2010 to 2013 she was a member of the Sistema Nacional de Creadores del FONCA in Mexico.

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He has published nine books and close to fifty articles, as well as essays in magazines that specialize in aesthetics, art theory, contemporary art, film, and political philosophy.

His most recent curatorial projects are *Melanie Smith: Red Square, Impossible Pink* for the Mexican Pavilion at the 2011 Venice Biennale, and *Los sueños de una nación, un año después, 2011*, at the Museo Nacional de Arte in Mexico City (2011–2012). He is currently developing two curatorial projects, one for the Laboratorio de Arte Alameda and the Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo (MUAC), and one for the Centro de la Imagen in Mexico City.

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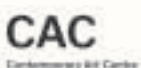
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