



LIGHT HABANA

Cuban sci-fi dialogues through Site
Mariana Cabello Campuzano
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Light Habana:

Overview

Light Habana (2013) is an artistic research I carried out in Havana, Cuba during 2013 with the support of the fund Konstnärligt Utvecklingsarbete (KU) and Havana University. The project investigates the work of Cuban science fiction writers through Installation-Interviews. Light Habana (2013) is composed of three main parts that complement each other: 1) Light Habana: **Installations-Interviews** 2) Light Habana: **Essay** 3) Light Habana: **Documentary**. I will briefly describe each of these parts:

1)Light Habana: **Installations-Interviews**

I created three site-specific installations in Havana. These artworks were inspired by Cuban science fiction stories and their connection to the city. The writers of these stories were interviewed inside and *through* the installations.

***Out of Light*, 2013**

Mariana Cabello Campuzano

Steel bars, rubber wheels, nail polish (2.20m x 3.50m x 0.75m)

Out of Light was installed in the Pizzeria Pa'la Pizza in downtown Havana. The work was inspired from the novel *El Lazo y la Trampa* written by Enzzo Hernández. The installation was specifically related to one type of Hernández's characters: neon submarine creatures called Morianos.

***Subred Bebe*, 2013**

Mariana Cabello Campuzano

Steel bars, steel sheets, t-shirt textiles (1.20m x 1.80m x 0.80m)

Subred Bebe was installed in the market Pais Viena, a recently legalized private commercial area in Havana's main square. The work was inspired from the fiction novel *Habana Underguater* written by Erick J. Mota. The installation was based on the dark overtones found in both the environments and commercial relationships of Mota's story.

***Cine 3D (Olga the Hologram)*, 2013**

Mariana Cabello Campuzano

Metallic paper, adhesives, truck wreckage (2.20m x 3.50m x 0.75m)

Cine 3D (Olga the Hologram) was installed in a domestic 3D cinema in one of Havana's central neighborhoods. The work was connected to the fiction novel *Dioses de Neón* written by Michel Encinosa Fú. The installation was inspired from the holographic and retro-futurist elements of Encinosa's stories.

Besides these authors, other writers were also interviewed within/through the installations: Desiderio Navarro, translator and literary theorist, Alberto Garrandés, renowned essay-writer and Italo Calvino Prize winner, and José M. Sánchez Gómez, the leading Cuban sci-fi theorist and writer.

2) Light Habana: **Essay**

The essay Light Habana threads the science fiction novels, current changes in Havana City and the installation works. The essay can be understood as a stroll through the different contexts and situations explored and created during the project. It explains the relation between the installation's site and the sci-fi novels. The installations appear in the essay as story fragments. The second part of the essay Light Habana: **Places as Questions** explains the findings reached through the methodology Installation-Interviews. It details the questions, suggestions and digressions actually proposed by the place (installation and context). Finally, Light Habana: **Places as Questions** discusses the project in terms of contemporary art concepts and debates, as well as discussing my own positionality throughout the project.

3) Light Habana: **Documentary**

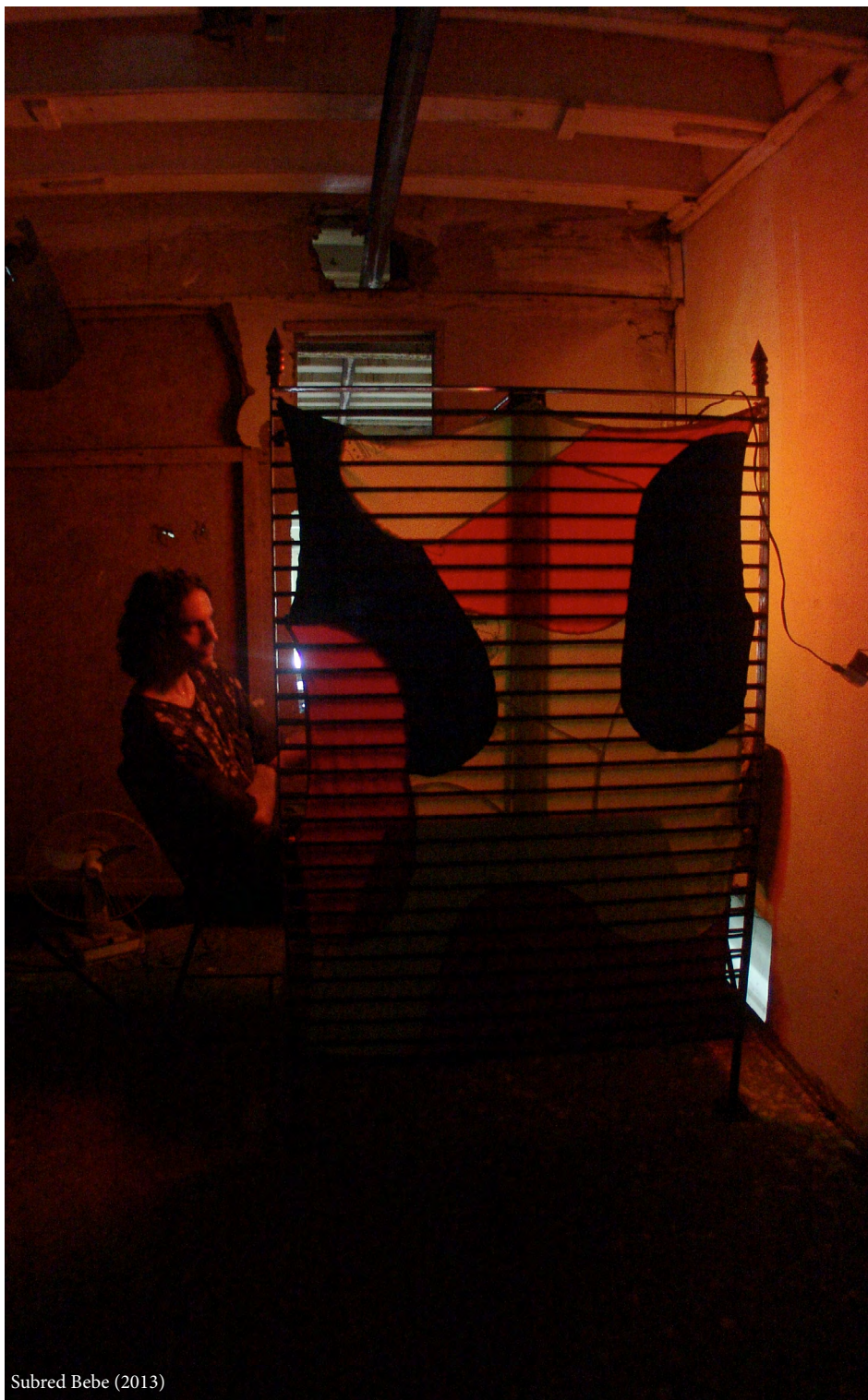
Similar to the essay the Light Habana: **Documentary** is composed by polyphony: a narrator, the direct recording of the interviews and the installations story. The 30 minute documentary was written and directed by Mariana Cabello, photographed by Cuban filmmaker Lázaro González González, co-produced with Cuban artist Alejandro Benitez and co-edited with Mexican artist van-Hugo. The Light Habana documentary trailer can be seen at: www.marianacabello.com/Light-Habana



Out of Light (2013)



Cine 3D (Olga the Hologram) (2013)



Subred Bebe (2013)

Light Habana:

Essay

Science fiction literature in Cuba has a unique history. Like the island, the sci-fi genre has been through diverse ideological and political environments. Its first golden age occurred in the 1960's and was highly influenced by Soviet science fiction and Futurism. In the following decades Cuban sci-fi literature suffered two production crises. The first one in the 1970's was related to the censorship of stories that were critical to the socialist system and ideology. The second crisis in the 1990's related to the extreme scarcity and paper shortage that derived from the Soviet Union dissolution (Sánchez Gómez).

In between these dark stages, there were short and intensive production periods where brilliant and acclaimed publications were made. In the last decade, Cuban science fiction literature entered its third and most productive golden age, while at the same time Cuba is in the midst of a historic moment of change in its commercial and social activities.

Havana and science fiction have fluorescent lights and deep darkness in both of their current stories. Throughout Cuban fiction, the element of darkness has been a recurring figure. Darkness has taken many shapes and appeared as many substances. For instance, the abyss, the darkest and deepest layer of the ocean, is a repeated element in popular Cuban science fiction books. *La Ciudad Muerta de Korad* written in 1964 by Oscar Hurtado is one example. This surprising and odd book is actually the second science fiction poem ever written. In the prologue Hurtado develops his view on the origin of poetry. He explains that "the activity of poetry comes from the abyssal flora and fauna of men's inner life" (Hurtado, 17). Another example is the fiction novel *El Viaje*, written by Miguel Collazo in 1968.

The book is an intense philosophic take on science fiction. Collazo narrates the vague journey of several generations in a diffuse world without known origin. He describes the sky of this world as an “abyssal sky” (Collazo, 36).

Abyssal zones are also important in the first novel project *El Lazo y la Trampa* by Enzzo Hernández. Hernández is a young literary talent that belongs to the new generation of Cuban writers. The story of a missing lover and a stranger develops in a partially flooded Havana. Hernández proposes a scenario where dark waters have flooded the city and abyssal zones appear in the urban-marine landscape.

In the story, life underwater emerges and the drowned inhabitants found in the abyssal space transformed into submarine creatures called Morianos. These characters have glowing neon bodies and appear as specters of fluorescent light. Morianos are also creatures of renovation and transcendence; they have turned all sorrow into pure light. Even the melancholy of living in a ruined city has drowned and disappeared in the catastrophe, leaving the inhabitants without remorse from the tragedy (Hernández).

Currently, neon colors have actually appeared in Havana. Neons appear as colors of novelty and birth. Fluorescence is connected to *alumbramiento*, a word that in Spanish means both to give birth and to shed light on something. Fluorescence is a reality in the presently changing Havana where neon colors have emerged and spread in the island’s streets and urban landscapes.

After half a century of strict control over the private sector, small businesses were legalized in Cuba. In 2010, the state gave commercial licenses to private merchants. The most common form of private businesses are little shops; or *cafeterías*, which sell a scarce variety of homemade fast food and baked goods. Cafeterias have multiplied and agilely spread in the past months; it is now common to see more than two of them in one single downtown street. These little shops use fluorescent neon signs as a commercial language to create a recognizable identity that can compete with the other businesses. They are usually set up by families and ran at their own houses and porticos.

Porticos themselves have been through several transformations in the last half-century of Cuban history. During the Spanish and United States colonization, porticos were grand entrances to

neoclassic mansions. Their arcades and columns were an elegant welcoming to wealthy homes. This wealth was not maintained after the Cuban revolution and during the 30 years of USSR support, but the porticos remained as a place for social congregation and convivial gatherings. However, after the Soviet dissolution in 1991 scarcity and criminality rose and porticos were fenced in every possible way. Arcades were filled in and all kinds of protecting substructures were installed. Also, due to poverty and overcrowding, many porticos were subdivided and fragmented. Nowadays, the usage of porticos has changed again. They are frequently used as little shops and cafeterias. Although their fences must remain, porticos intend to be welcoming and attractive for customers. These fences are highly symbolic and heavy, but they now change along with neon and florescent lights.

In the dark abyssal waters of flooded Havana, not only the inhabitants transformed themselves into creatures of pure light but also houses, porticos and even dense iron fences evolved into florescent beings. The submarine architecture of Havana's dark waters slowly transforms into neon lights.

Although they are authorized entities, cafeterias are very fragile. Official regulations and restrictions for micro-enterprises change constantly and without notice. Frequently, new guidelines are not helpful for the business. For example, small coffee shops are allowed to have tables but not allowed to have chairs. As a result, cafe owners are forced to create *invisible* seats. Chairs are disguised and blended into the architecture as low-rise walls for apparently placing flower-pots. Another solution to sit customers is to welcome them into the actual kitchen. Clients take turns at the family's own dinner tables.

Restrictions are even more rigid and at the same time ambiguous for the cafeterias located on Linea and Paseo Avenue. Both are official roads, used by high authorities who refuse to see the cafeterias on their way. Although obscured by this legal uncertainty, the emerging shops still manage to glow through their neon signs.

The fluorescent signs are usually imported products. The 'Welcome' and 'Open' signs of cafeterias usually come from Ecuador; fluorescent light-strips and colorful bulbs come from Mexico and The United States. Locally produced neon signs do not exist and con-

sequently, neon paint itself is very hard to find in Havana. When I started the neon paint hunt, it was suggested that I ask myself “Where will I find the light in Havana?” When searching for neon paint in state-run shops it is common to find the exact opposite of customer service, a disdain for inquiries. However, neon paint can in fact be found in Havana. It exists only in Galerías Paseo, a shopping mall with overpriced imported goods. The place has a decadent elegance and its clients are tourists and Cuba’s rapidly growing upper class. Here, neon paint is found only in small and expensive quantities as imported nail polish.

Other kinds of imported goods are found in Monte Street, a commercial avenue in Havana’s main downtown square. Traditional 1950’s department stores have now imploded into numerous private shops and are no longer the single centralized retail establishments they once were. Space has been sub-divided into multiple small stands belonging to private merchants. Like cafeteria owners these vendors are called *cuentapropistas*, which could translate as “on-their-own merchants”. They are also popularly called *los particulares*, or the particular ones.

The market of *cuentapropistas* has deep and shady interiors. Since the space was originally one single store, it has only one entrance and often lacks any windows. Their stands already have a typical configuration: a table with a frame holding a light bar. These tables display different made-in-China products shipped from other countries within the Americas that enter Cuba through illegal packages.

The writer Erick Mota proposes a dark setting similar to these markets in his fiction novel *Habana Underguater*. Mota describes a future dystopian scenario in which the Soviet block won the Cold War and kept supporting the island. For protection, Soviet authorities raised the height of Havana’s famous wall along its pier. However, this backfired. During a hurricane, water came in and never drained back out again into the Caribbean Sea. A deep lake was left inside the island and the inhabitant’s lives quickly adapted to this new condition (Mota, 71). In tune with this *underguater* complex lifestyle, Mota lays out a plot characterized by an extremely violent power fragmentation, disputed territories and an obscure set of human and commercial relationships.

In Habana Underguater, Mota sits on a table that seems to be both an interrogation desk and commercial stand. He is in the storage compartment of the former store Pais Viena; the place is now a cuentapropista market. This table is specially designed for secret and shiny activities. A fabric wall corners Mota's conversation. This neon fabric is fenced, and this fence is proudly crowned.

Among the imported products sold in the dark cuentapropista market, there are fluorescent t-shirts. According to one of the salesman, neon is very fashionable in the summer of 2013. Shiny messages like 'Babe' and 'Guest' are embroidered or bejeweled on fluorescent pink, orange, and yellow garments. These neon shirts are seen throughout the city, a small shining symbol of the black market's chain; the tip of the iceberg poking out above the water.

Although it is now considered a new trend, neon aesthetics actually relate to Cuba's past. Specifically to the idea of the future that Cuba had imagined in the 1950's. Back then, florescence equalled progress and productivity. Havana nights were full of neon signs, which connected to the idea of a fully functioning capitalism and a bright future (Navarro). Neon now is a way to hang on to the past's future; the only future that many consider possible.

A similar kind of retro-futurist nostalgia is perceived in Michel Encinosa's writings. His book *Dioses de Neon* is composed of short stories situated in Ofidia City, an alter ego or perhaps extrapolated version of Havana. Similar to the environment of *Habana Underguater*, the city is an obscure place with numerous and intricate urban and social formations.

Encinosa's characters are extremely particular. Many are genetically self-modified. Some have implants such as feathered wings or vegetables that grow from their skin. Other sordid and proud characters have metallic prosthesis and transparent skin patches. They all seem to search for autonomy, originality and self-determination; they seek to shine with their own light. Holo-tattoos also make many of these characters unique. Throughout the story, Encinosa extensively explores the possibilities and modes of Holograms. The plot and the interaction among different characters are highly determined by holo-presences, holo-landscapes, and holo-barriers (Encinosa, 19).

Although Michel Encinosa wrote these stories in the 1990s,

the book wasn't published until 2006. This occurred due to a delay in the Cuban state-run printing press. For readers who just discovered this story, holograms might still be a sign of progress and future technology. Like neon lights, holograms are also elements of a past's future.

However, there is actually some kind of holography happening nowadays in Havana. For example, some of the usual flat images that are typically seen on screens have an apparent third dimension. Domestic 3D Cinemas are spreading in Cuba. In the past year, more than 30 domestic 3D-cinemas have appeared only in the city's downtown neighborhoods. Their tropical domestic style contrasts with the usual cold and futuristic 3D cinema's emplacement. In Cuba, a room in an apartment is adapted and meticulously decorated. The 3D equipment usually comes from relatives in Miami and the family dynamics change in order to participate in the business. Family members take turns to serve the audience and the grandmothers usually make the popcorn. Some of these 3D cinemas also share the space with other domestic businesses such as cafeterias or car garages.

The 3D experience is considered luxury entertainment for Cuba's emerging high class. It is also a source of curiosity for everyone else. Although they are numerous and constantly busy, 3D cinemas are also very fragile. Like cafeterias, 3D cuentapropistas also fear state restrictions. Their 3D signs advertise something that might soon be prohibited.

Olga prepares popcorn to serve the audience. Sweet and welcoming she opens the living room. While her grandchild sets up the 3D equipment, Olga sits and tells clients her life story. Days later, it becomes evident Olga was just a hologram. She was there but she was not. She disappeared suddenly, as if she feared being real. Consequently, a monument is raised to Olga, to Cuban holography and 3D. The monument is a car wreckage with a holographic tattoo.

Light Habana: Places as Questions

Installation-Interview

In the following lines I will write about my methodological findings. With these I refer to the information and discoveries I reached through my research method and that I would not have been able to obtain under conventional inquiry and white-room interviews. I will then discuss the findings that comply with the following assertion: “Arts are granted the authority to formulate and address such basal and yet complex issues in their specific ways (...) [and are] capable to gain specific knowledge that could not be delivered otherwise” (Klein, 5).

In order to explain these findings I will firstly describe what I mean by the method: **Installation-Interview**. As an installation artist and architect, I not only believe that places narrate and talk but I also believe they can *ask*. Places can in fact act as interrogations in ways people might not. Therefore, in order to investigate a specific subject, Cuban science fiction, I chose to set up the inquiry through specific sites. To clarify, I created site-specific installations in different parts of Havana. I chose a market, a pizzeria and a domestic 3D cinema. These sites, both the artwork and its context, asked the questions. The interview was essentially carried on *through* the place.

There are two main issues regarding this methodology. The first one relates to the following question: Why are these installations not simply taken as the interview’s scenography? There is a thin yet definitive line between these two practices. I see art installations as elements that change the dynamics of the place and bring to the sur-

face invisible components of the site. But most importantly, in this case what distinguishes them from scenography is the fact that these three installations were meant to change the course of the conversations and ask the questions. I visualize a dialectical relation between site and dialogue; one re-creates the other and vice versa. Conversations are malleable masses; they can deform, twist and unfold in indefinite ways and through multiple sources. I call this *the plasticity of conversations*. Conversations are shaped by the numerous elements of a place. Consequently the site is also re-created and re-signified through dialogue.

This conception partially derives from Bruno Latour's understanding of spaces as consequences and not as frames. In his conception, space is not conceived of as "an unshakeable frame of reference inside which events would occur", but as "consequences of the ways in which bodies relate to one another" (qtd. in Bingham and Thrift 289).

In my understanding and experience, both spaces and words are consequences, and in this project they are consequences of each other. This is why it differs from a scenographic practice, which tries to create a setting, to dress the place in order to support the idiosyncrasy of the topic. My exercise of site is more discursive and directed.

The second important aspect of the Installation-Interview method sets on the belief that different regions of the subject can be reached, touched and walked through only by means of carefully crafted locations. External landscapes have ways of connecting to internal ones. These inner places hold unspoken words and particular reflections. Creating a specific situation is a way of reaching these.

In sum and according to the points mentioned above, Installation-Interviews work as a way of interrogating Cuban science fiction writers and also as a way of entering their internal fictional worlds. Yet the most important question would be: What was in fact asked by the site? Which were the site's questions, comments and digressions? This question dovetails with the following: What was reached through Installation-Interviews that would not have been reached otherwise?

I will answer these questions through seven specific situations that occurred during the course of the Installation-Interviews.

1. Pizza Intertextuality

Enzzo Hernández, writer of the novel *El Lazo y la Trampa* was interviewed inside the work **Out of Light (2013)**, which was installed in the Pizzería Pa'la Pizza. During the time of the interview, passers-by and the pizzeria clientele commented on the artwork. One of the clients referred to the luminous arch as something “A lo cubano”. This translates as “made the Cuban way”. The stranger crossing the arch’s space and commenting on the nature of the piece changed the course of the conversation and proposed a new issue. Hernández picked up on his comment and integrated it in his own reflections:

The man that just passed by made a comment on this piece being ‘a very Cuban way’, very much a Cuban way from our days. And this made me think of something: I thought it was in fact the current Cuban way. Cubans nowadays have the need to be noticed, to glow and show fluorescence in that sense. The need to be an active presence and the need to be noticeable. (Hernández)

The customer’s remark of how he interpreted the style of the piecemade Enzzo reflect on the connection between the artwork, his novel, and the current reality of Cuban’s needs and desires. Similar to this example, other spontaneous interventions threaded in and out during the course of the dialogue. Since the interventions came from very different sources and perspectives, I visualize the event of Installation-Interviews as a verbal and unpredictable intertextuality. This intertextuality was formed because it was sited at a pizzeria, and launched and sustained by the specifics of the situation.

2. Interviewee Interviews

During the interview with Enzzo Hernández inside the piece **Out of Light (2013)** an unexpected change occurred. Occasionally, Hernández decided to shift from being the interviewee into being the interviewer. In doing so, he could intentionally collect other impressions about my installation, which were also indirect impressions about his story. He was investigating how a part of his novel interacted with the inhabitants of the real Havana. The relevant insight about this shift is that his questions were in fact additional answers.

Several issues became evident in his choices: who to ask, how to ask and certainly, what to ask.

At some point in the interview Hernández playfully decided to ask questions to a street-sweeper who was just outside the pizzeria, facing the arch. Hernández asked the man about his impressions and thoughts on the glowing structure. Strangely, the sweeper defined the piece as a “colonial artwork”. However, for us it remained unclear in which way it was colonial, other than the form of an arch. The man continued and shared his impressions on the color and on the way it was, according to him, fulfilling its function: to attract customers.

What was important about Hernández decision was the fact that he chose a character that was apparently more different from him in age and in socio-economic status than any one else present. The sweeper represented the opinion of an apparently naive and unprepared audience from the street. I interpreted his choice as something very distinctive of his generation. His generation feels distant enough from this social class to exoticize it and to search for its folkloric contribution. This shows a lack of connection with the legacy of the once socialist and homogenous society. Like other young Cubans, he has a fading empathy with the working class and with the generation of Cubans who were not educated in social differences. These new attitudes lack connection to the country’s history. They certainly define Hernández’s relationship to the city and most importantly his way of making new literature out of it.



Out of Light(2013) Installation-Interview with Enzzo Hernández



Out of Light(2013) Installation-Interview with Enzzo Hernández

3. Reggaeton Conflict

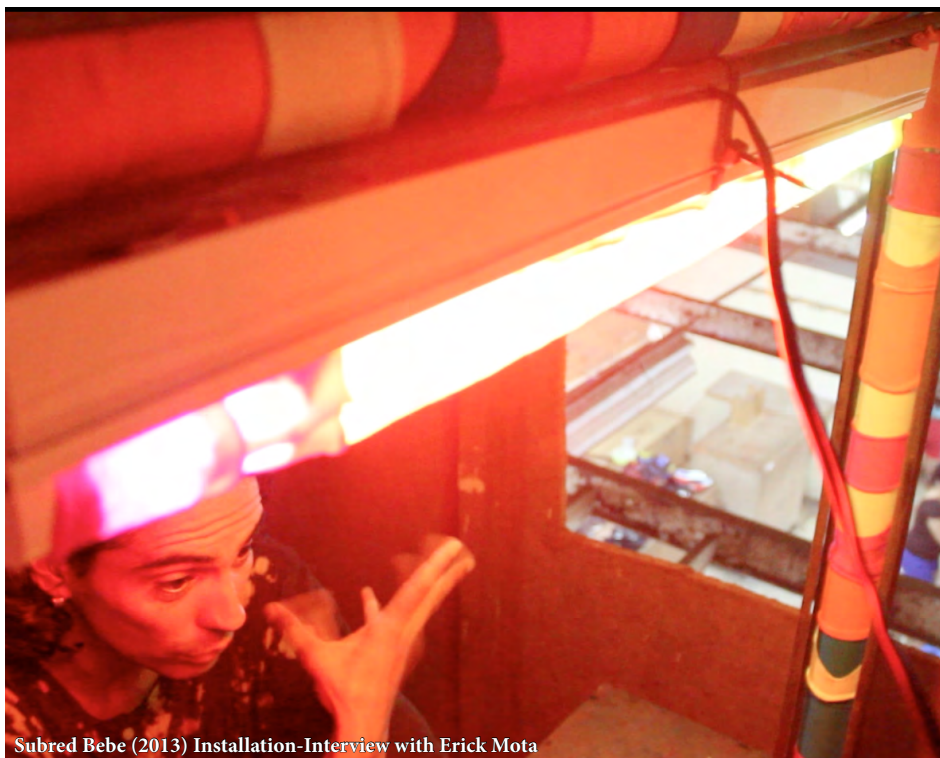
Writer Erick Mota was interviewed inside the installation **Subred Bebe (2013)**. The artwork was located inside the market Pais Viena. Specifically in the storage area, an unfinished upper mezzanine. There are numerous individual stands inside the market, and each of them sell their very own products. However, they all share one thing: music. Two large loudspeakers are located in the ceiling and there is a central control with a programmed playlist mainly made up of reggaeton hits. The loud music never stops filling the market with sound during the opening hours.

In order to record the interview with Mota, we kindly asked the man in charge of the sound to silence the music for one hour. However, the interview with Mota went longer than expected. Exactly after one hour had passed, several interruptions occurred. The first came from an anonymous voice from within the market below. The voice shouted: “Music! I want music!” Following that, the man in charge came up twice to tell us the people were getting upset about the silence and they were asking for the music to play again. The shouting and the man’s intervention in the dialogue created a new branch in the conversation. This branch actually reinforced what Mota was describing.

Mota was commenting on the fluorescent colors of the t-shirts sold in the market below. These bright colors were also part of the installation **Subred Bebe (2013)**, which was in fact partially made out of the market’s t-shirts. Mota suggested that these colors were a reaction to the previous ‘gray’ environment of the city. He argued that they are a way of showing off a new joyful attitude, which is not just cheerful but “cheerful in a polluting and intoxicating way” (Mota).

When the shout for more reggaeton interrupted Mota’s observation, he came up with an accurate parallel between the t-shirt and music issues. Regarding the market merchant’s obsession with the music, Mota mentioned:

There is this trend: Its not enough for people to be just happy, they push themselves and everyone around them to appear happy all the time. This issue is closely related to the demands for loud music we hear just now. This is music that is compulsory cheerful, cheerful as an obli-



Subred Bebe (2013) Installation-Interview with Erick Mota



Subred Bebe (2013) Installation-Interview with Erick Mota

gation. We have lived too many years with impositions, not only ideologically speaking. These issues are part of a whole conditioning: we are all conditioned to impose. (Mota)

4. Unknown Influences

When writer Erick Mota climbed the stairs into the storage space of Pais Viena looking for the installation **Subred Bebe (2013)** he realized an important issue about his novel *Habana Underguater*. The compact labyrinthine stairs lead into a second story that was only half-built. This meant he could see the market below through the ruinous structure of dusty metal beams and cracks in the floor. In the near distance was the interrogation desk. From above he could also see the colorful market stands. Mota stood there for a few moments, taking in the view and realized that this ‘scene’ was certainly connected to one of the sci-fi stories he once read: *Ghost in the Shell*. This story is a science fiction manga created by Masamune Shirow. It belongs to the cyberpunk sci-fi genre and it can be seen as a futurist espionage thriller. Mota recognized Shirow’s story in the market setting: “This reminds me of a scene in *Ghost in the Shell*. It is exactly like this. But this is our [Cuban] version.”

Mota had climbed the dark twisted stairway; first coming up some poorly built concrete steps to reach a small level that opened into the final rising flight of stairs. At the top Mota recalled a story he had been fond of because of this route. The most important thing to take away from this is that he realized through the site what had been an important influence in his writings. Specifically, an influence in the fictional environments he constructed. The artwork of **Subred Bebe (2013)** and the site confronted Mota with an important reference and his literary influences crystalized through the situation.



Subred Bebe (2013) Installation Interview with Erick Mota

5. Unfathomable Heat

When Mota entered the market storage room where the installation **Subred Bebe (2013)** was sited, he noticed an object lying in the corner; an electric fan that was missing all of its rotating blades. It was there by chance, and was not intentionally part of the installation itself. However, the fan certainly became part of the situation later.

Inside the storage room, as the interview went by at the 'interrogation market table', the temperature rose uncomfortably until the heat became intense. There were several reasons this occurred. The market has a possible depth of 50 meters and there is not one single window in any of the walls for ventilation. Warm air always rises, and at that moment it settled in the room of the upper mezzanine used for **Subred Bebe (2013)**. This combined with the natural 35 degrees of the tropical Cuban humidity created a sweltering atmosphere. The intense feeling of the site spawned a new question for Erick Mota.

Mota argues that his characters are solely based on actual people, and they depict deep truths of how Cubans adapt to their environment. His work is not to change the people he writes about to fit his story because these characters are real: they are, like all Cubans, making a dark celebration out of their adaptation to violent conditions. Also these characters hardly go through any emotional breakdowns. Mota's characters remain untouchable to everything and yet completely immersed in the dark environment he created. When explaining, Mota linked this idea with the feeling of his body at that very moment:

It is similar to this situation. You get along with it if you do not think too much. I am talking to you right now and I am not thinking too much about the heat I am feeling. Which is dreadful, by the way. But I do not complain and most of all, I do my best so you do not notice how uncomfortable I am. (Mota)

Besides the smothering heat, there was a growing tension in the environment: Merchants screaming, the man in charge of the music interrupting, and everyone uncertain about the nature of the encounter. There was also a vague fear by being in direct contact with our surroundings, which was in a way, a place of Mota's own novel. The simple conversation was forced into a hidden interrogatory for-

mat not only because of the installation, but also because of the site's pressures and confrontations.

There are three important things to notice about these findings. The first one is that Mota noticed during the course of the interview other elements that certainly belonged to the specificity of the site. Through his experience of this place –the tightness, abandonment and heat asphyxiation- he was led to notice the mutilated fan laying in the corner. Moreover, this element became part of the conversation and also a piece of the installation. I see this as the nature of location forcing him to realize elements of the place that then became the site and conversation itself.

Secondly, Mota linked his momentary bodily experience to his story, specifically to the nature and behavior of his characters. It was the size, temperature, dimensions, and obscurity of the place that allowed this matter to arise.

Third, it was evident that Mota's reflections and remarks were also quite influenced by the way the encounter happened. The journey through the market and up the stairs, the aggressiveness of the place, the movement and the voices, and the face-to-face interrogation under neon lit bars. He was changed by the growing tension and by the uncertainty. This all lead him to discuss in a more intense and truthful way the issues regarding impositions. I am certain his answers would have been different if the interviews form and location had been different as well. The encounter ended up being hidden and stressed, just like a scene out of Mota's fiction novel. And this precise fear interrogated Mota in a unique way.

6. Here are the Goats

Michel Encinosa was interviewed through the work **Cine 3D (Olga the Hologram)(2013)**. The art intervention was done in the front yard of a domestic 3D cinema. The 3D cinema shared the space with a car garage, each having their own room in the same house. The front yard had a 1950's truck wreckage lying in the middle. **Cine 3D (Olga the Hologram)(2013)** consisted of an intervention, using a holographic covering to turn the wreckage into a monument for Cuban 3D.

The neighbour next to the 3D cinema-car garage house was occasionally walking around in the front yard. He took his 20 goats to graze in the tropical field. During the interview, while sitting in the monument (the covered wreckage), Encinosa was suddenly surrounded by the goats. Around that time in the conversation, Encinosa was making an important remark on the illegal activities needed for survival. Specifically, he was commenting on the tolerance among neighbor's activities. He said that everyone tolerated everyone else's illegal activities as long as they were not 'too illegal'. The expression 'too illegal' is perhaps very representative of the Cuban's elastic notion of legality. In the strict sense 'legal' is an absolute quality. This means it can't have a scale or range: from 'little-illegal' to 'very-illegal'. As an absolute quality something is either legal or not legal. However, in Cuba's case this notion has become very flexible and diffuse, producing these degrees of illegality. This notion also highlights an unspoken understanding among neighbors. As Encinosa points out, neighbours know when something exceeds the implicit common agreement and becomes 'too illegal'. When explaining this issue, Encinosa suddenly decided to stop and simply pointed to one of the goats: "So concerning illegality itself... What can I say? Here are the goats."

The goats involved in fact several illegal actions: Owning them, allowing them to graze in urban areas and profiting from them. The owner milked the goats and sold the milk. Specifically, he offered it to newborn babies that had an intolerance to maternal milk. Goat milk, according to him, was the perfect nutritious substitute and newborns could in fact tolerate it. Plus, the official health system did not offer too many other options for these fragile infants. In Cuba, all the milk and health products are only provided by the government.

There are several things to reflect on through the goat digression. First, it is only place, with its chance elements and with its sudden interconnections, that pose and bring to the surface specific inquiries. In this case, the dynamics of the site confronted Encinosa with a concrete element: the goats. He became surrounded by the materialization of his thoughts. Encinosa incorporated the goats just as he incorporated new words and thoughts into everything he said. As he spoke, each enunciation was pulled from the elements that popped up around him.

There is another important insight regarding Encinosa's interview. This issue explains the title of the installation **Cine 3D (Olga the Hologram) (2013)**. While doing the fieldwork to find a 3D cinema and to choose a specific site to develop the work, I came across an important character. Her name was Olga, an 88 year-old lady living in a central neighbourhood of Havana. She lived in an apartment on the sixth floor of an old colonial building and shared the space with her grandson. Both had agreed to start a 3D cinema in one of the apartment's rooms. The grandson was in charge of setting up the equipment and collecting the movies. Olga was in charge of attending to the customers, welcoming them in the waiting room (her own living room), and preparing the drinks and popcorn. I visited the place, watched a movie like a regular customer and then talked to Olga about my ideas. She was excited about having an artistic intervention in her living room/cinema. I visited her a few more times to share some proposals and also to take notes and measurements. She was very optimistic and helpful up until that point. During the encounter she openly shared her life story and her hopes for the near future.

However, one rainy afternoon I called her to schedule my next visit. The person who picked up the phone said there wasn't any Olga living there, and that the place was definitely not a 3D cinema. In the following days I called repeatedly, and always got the same answer. Finally I received a phone call back from Olga; from the same phone number I had been calling. When I picked up I could tell it was Olga immediately. However, her voice was completely different: it was dark and dry. She was very quick and demanded that I not call her ever again.

I shared this experience with Encinosa during the interview. I told him that by the end of that phone call, I felt as if Olga had only been a quick hallucination; a holographic presence that suddenly disappeared. Encinosa was quick to explain the nature of Olga's holography: simple fear. He said she probably thought that I was a spy from the government trying to document the infringements of her newly opened business. It was very likely that the cinema was not fulfilling some of the state's criteria for private commercial activities.

Not only the site, but also the process of searching for it and the story behind it, steered the conversation with Encinosa. We created and established temporary terms that would link my story and

perception of Olga as a hologram, the artwork process, and Encinosa's novel (which actually involves many holographic elements itself). Encinosa coined new site-specific names and terms to better express himself: 'Holographic Rules' and 'National Holography'.

With these he could more accurately describe the wide range of virtuality in many aspects of Cuban society: things that are supposed to exist but are not visible, things that appear to be but disappear any second, and things that are in fact visible but assumed as invisible -like the goats.



Cine 3D (Olga the Hologram) (2013) Installation-Interview with Michel Encinosa



Domestic 3D cinema waiting room, Havana Cuba

7. The Fire

Literary critic, fiction and essay-writer Alberto Garrandés was also interviewed inside the work **Cine 3D (Olga the Hologram) (2013)**. In his unique fiction writing, that has been awarded the Italo Calvino prize, he mixes aspects of dirty realism and science fiction.

As soon as Alberto Garrandés sat down in the holographic truck wreckage he suggested there was something evidently missing in the artwork and in the site. Garrandés was certain that a fire was needed:

In that oxide structure just beside the truck wreckage there must be four torches on fire, like a kind of candelabrum. Four big flames burning just there (...) This artwork is only half real. I am completing it in my mind, and that is the same as it being real if some one can imagine what I say. I imagine that fire because of this precise hour of the day. It is a reluctance to face the night as the day ends. This fire does exist now, since I am naming it. (Garrandés)

Garrandés had completed my installation with his imagination. However, this additional element was not only a casual suggestion. The fire became part of the following discussions.

During the conversation, Garrandés actually pointed out to where the fire was supposed to be. His eyes seemed to actually see the fire right next to the artwork. When discussing retro-futuristic elements within the ruinous city that seemed to 'have been through war', Garrandés used the imaginary fire to make a point regarding the past-present of the work:

The place and the artwork has a lot of past within it. This wreckage is rusted and has been here so many years. But with the fire over there you have these ruins accepted into the present. Because the fire is the most present element you could have. Fire is always in present. Fire makes the wreckage come to the present. (Garrandés)

What is meaningful about this point regarding the method Installation-Interviews is that the real site suggested new elements to Garrandés. The site allowed him to 'create' new objects within it, which also allowed him to develop further his opinions. In this way, these imaginary elements of the site changed the notion of site itself

and in consequence, the conversation within it. This is relevant because the site (the night, the metallic reflection, the smell of the grass, etc.) indirectly asked the writer: What is missing? The immersive experience demanded from him an instantaneous work of fiction.

There are two other relevant points regarding this experience. The first one is a parallel that was confirmed to me. Garrandés imagined the fire next to my artwork and installed it just there. As he suggested, it doesn't matter if it is physically there or not. As soon as it is imagined and set into place it becomes a story. It becomes a narrative itself. This proves a conception that occurred to me during the whole artistic process: writing is a form of installation art. Although they might not materialize it, writers install their elements and spaces in the city. They use the streets, the fields, and the ruins as a canvas. They play along and confront the situational elements; going around installing their fiction.

A second insight on Garrandés' impressions relates to the connection between space and narration. When Garrandés described the site and the artwork, adding the element of the fire, he made an important remark. He claimed that describing a space is already a story, that it was possible to make a story just by describing a series of still objects and by detailing how light progressed and declined from one object to the other.

To further this point, he addressed the way German filmmaker Wim Wenders works. For Wenders the first thing before entering fiction is to create context of fiction; the space of fiction. In this moment it seems the story is not yet flowing, but it is. It is because space already 'tells'. But how does space narrate? Why does it have the virtue of narrating? "Because instead of narrating in a diachronic way, it narrates by entering the depth below, searching for the density of layers and stratum piled in the same place. It narrates in a synchronic way, because through synchrony you also move forward" (Garrandés).



Cine 3D (Olga the Hologram) (2013) Installation-Interview with Alberto Garrandés

Theoretical Discussion

Besides the methodology findings explained previously there are five other concrete reflections on this project:

- 1) Situation-Specific
- 2) Discursive Space
- 3) Artistic Research and the Textures of Interrogation
- 4) Installation as a Continuum
- 5) Positionality: an inverse metaphor

1) Situation-Specific

Rather than site-specific I consider Light Habana a situation-specific artwork. This term was recently explored by Claire Doherty as an alternative for the “exhausted notion of site” and site-specific. Doherty defines situation as “a set of conditions in place and time” (14).

I do not particularly believe that the notion of site is ‘exhausted’, but I do believe the term might be at times insufficient and narrow. Also, ‘site’ might sometimes refer to a stability that not all of the site-specific projects establish or even desire. Situation-specific is not a completely different category from site-specific. However, I chose to discuss the Light Habana project through this particular term because of three main reasons.

Firstly, because the term ‘situation’ emphasizes the temporary frame of site. This could be the historical dimension or temporary conditions of the artwork. This is evident in Light Habana because the locations and the artworks themselves belong to a very specific time frame in Cuban history. Summer 2013 was a period of private business proliferation. After decades of strict control on the private sector, in August 2010 the Cuban government legalized private enterprises and gave commercial licenses to private merchants. During the course of the fieldwork (April-August 2013) I witnessed more than five new shops opening in the neighborhood and another four of them closing. Among these was the Pizzeria Pa’ la Pizza where I installed the artwork **Out of Light (2013)**. The dynamics of these openings and closings were very specific to this timeframe’s political and ideological climate.

I worked with an even more temporary situation through the

installation **Cine 3D (Olga the Hologram)(2013)**. Domestic 3D cinemas emerged in Havana in late 2012 as a form of private business. Families converted a room in their apartment into a 3D cinema and opened it to the general audience charging between 1-3 dollars to enter. **Cine 3D (Olga the Hologram) (2013)** was installed in one of these cinemas. However, the 2nd of November 2013, the Cuban state prohibited the establishment of private 3D cinemas and ordered the immediate closure of the remaining ones. Instead of site-specific, my installation was more situation-specific; in the sense that it belongs to a specific convergence of policies, conditions, investments, decisions, expectations, and time.

The relation of specificity and time has already been explored by Douglas Crimp's analysis of Richard Serra's work. Although pointing out distinct conditions, Crimp already anticipated that the 'real specificity' of an artwork is not the material conditions of site; but rather the set of historical and political conditions, and also, the expectations of a particular audience, according to the artistic paradigm of that time. Crimp also discusses 'real specificity' in terms of Serra's particular contradictions and decisions during the artistic process. Similar to the political environment I describe as the situation of Light Habana, Crimps states that Serra "runs the risk of uncovering the true specificity of site, which is always a political specificity"(Crimp, 128).

I also discuss my project in terms of situation-specific (rather than site-specific) because I believe the term situation both explores and demands specificity in the interactions held within the location.

The aim of Light Habana was not to simply place a science fiction based art installation in a specific place of Havana. The installation itself was defined and visualized since the beginning as the specific encounter of the writer and the artwork. This encounter implied other things that were equally essential to the installation's configuration: the surprise of the writer when finding the piece, the site and context, the interaction with the customers and owners of the Pizzeria, market and cinema, the reactions and interventions of the passers-by and the nearby inhabitants, and most importantly, the conversations held inside the place. All together, these constituted the installation work. So the moment of the artwork was more closely related to a specific and temporary interaction: a created situation

rather than an intervened site.

Third, the term situation-specific makes reference also to a series of conditions related to the means of production of the artwork. The conditions of the manufacturing, available tools, materials, and labor force are also part of the situation; a situation which is certainly connected to the historic and political timeframe mentioned above. For example, in this project there were particular working conditions. Since Cuba has an embargo placed on them by the United States that does not allow them access to international goods, there is a very scarce variety of products. This includes paint of any kind. According to my plan and the concept of the installation **Out of Light (2013)** the arch needed to be painted in neon colors. After looking for neon paint in paper supply stores, paint shops, car painting garages, graphic studios and so on, I realized neon paint was only available as nail polish paint. This nail paint was imported from Brazil and cost 3 dollars each (10% of the Cuban official salary). They are sold in Gale-rias Paseo, a shopping mall with overpriced products for tourists and the Cuban high class. I bought nearly 200 jars and painted the arch with the small nailbrush. It took me one month to complete the work stroke by stroke.

Regarding the metal bars and frames for building both **Out of Light (2013)** and **Subred Bebe (2013)** there were also specific working conditions. Since there is not yet a proper supply store for private metal workers, the only way of getting the material was from second hand illegal sellers. The government is the owner of all construction material and controls all the transactions. Thus, the material that I used came from an illegal source: a government employee who gathered the material from the government's storage.

These two working conditions belong to the general situation of current import/export and public/private policies. This situation determined the creative process and conditioned my relation to hand-work, materials, work rhythm, and space.

Situational then is more connected to a sense of meeting and temporary possibilities. Situation-specific might then be closer to "a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus" (Massey, 167). This temporary constellation described by Doreen Massey, defines the situational nature of Light Habana.



Out of Light (2013) Construction process



Out of Light (2013) Construction process



Domestic 3D Cinema, Havana, Cuba.



Domestic 3D Cinema, Havana, Cuba.

2) Discursive Space

It is clear by now that the installation is not only the installation itself (materials *in situ*). The installation is the convergence of the site, the writer and the intertextuality developed around/within the dialogue. Taking this into consideration I pose the following question: if the dialogue with the writer is the artwork itself, can this project be discussed as a form of participation?

If seen as participation, it would be interesting to note the specificity of the participant subject. The desired participation is that of the writer, and not a general audience. This particular interaction is the artwork itself. But then: Is this discursive interaction? Is it then a discursive space?

I believe it might in fact be discursive in a two-fold way. The first mode connects to the widely accepted usage of this term: Habermas theorizations of the “public sphere”. Habermas tends to define this sphere as a discursive space insulated from the oppression and inequality that constrain human communication in normal life (Kester, 109). In this discursive space “every subject with the competence to speak is allowed to take part in discourse” and “everyone is allowed to express his or her attitudes, desires and needs” (qtd. in Kester 109).

In this sense, Light Habana could in fact be discursive: it proposes a space for the convergence and temporal coexistence of several discourses. This space (the site of the interviews), could in fact be a discursive space, although not in the egalitarian and consensual way as proposed by Habermas. It can be considered a discursive space because it installs a space out of normal daily communication that allows for other kinds of confrontations. Secondly, it can be discursive because it allows not only the discourse of the writer but also other less evident and expressive discourses and subjectivities to be produced through dialogue (such as the inhabitants, customers, owners etc.)

I deliberately state “produced through dialogue” because I agree to some extent with the relation between discourse, dialogue and subjectivity that Habermas proposes and art critic Grant Kester develops. Under their conception “subjectivity is formed through discourse and intersubjective exchange itself. Discourse is not simply a tool to be used to communicate an a priori ‘content’ with other

already formed subjects but is itself intended to model subjectivity” (Kester, 112). In my project this would mean that the subjectivity of the involved discursive participants is produced in the actual activity of dialogue.

This “insulated discursive space” proposed by Habermas is reminiscent of the project “An Intervention to Aid Drug-Addicted Women” by art group Wochen Klausur (Kester, 99). This project originated in regards to the drug problem in Zurich. In a dialogue concerning this issue the policy makers and others were constrained and affected by the official spaces for discussion, mediation, and politicization of the problem. As a response, Wochen Klausur created an alternative discursive space: a meeting between all the parts in a floating boat. As Kester argues, this space was to some extent “insulated from this rhetorical effect (...) and key participants in the debate over drug policy could converse in another way” (Kester, 99). Light Habana did create a space for dialogue and discursive interaction, although it was not created in response to a specific problem. However, it was in fact an alternative and temporary space for discussion, where a direct confrontation between science fiction and the city produced otherwise unlikely reflections.

The second usage of “discursive interaction” is less accurate and popular but equally relevant for my work. I would like to understand “discursive interaction” not as the interaction between discourses through dialogue, but as a particular interaction proposing an artistic discourse. This would be better read as “the discourse of interaction”. Following this form, “discursive space” would then be understood as a space that proposes a discourse, and this is the kind of space that I pursue to create in my practice. A space that not only serves as a backdrop for site-specific artwork, but a space that altogether (site and context) creates a concrete discourse.

The space discourse would definitely not only be modeled by locality, but by who interacts within it and more importantly why they should interact. In Light Habana, the discourse of these spaces is about bringing fiction into an interaction with the city as a way to re-produce reality. But then again, it is not about the installation itself. This discourse is anchored in the encounter and dialogue; in the intersubjective discourse formed through interaction.

In sum, I could say this second meaning of “discursive inter-

action” strongly depends on the first. In other words: the artistic discourse of Light Habana’s interaction is precisely the convergence of specific discourses in the city.

3) Artistic Research and the Textures of Interrogation

I am interested in providing a way of understanding Artistic Research (AR) through Light Habana. There are several perspectives on AR I agreed with during the course of the project and few others that appeared inaccurate to what I was doing.

The first thing I reflected upon was my starting point. This first step determines the artistic process. According to Fernando Hernández, professor of AR from the University of Barcelona, it is certainly not the same when one starts an art project by thinking “What do I want to know?” than by thinking “What do I want to do?”. According to Hernández-Hernández there is a considerable difference between these in the way they establish their own premises and relate to knowledge during the development of the work (Hernández-Hernández and Fendler, 4).

This thought is closely aligned with the idea of articulation when Hernández said “the act of creating art constitutes a genuine form of experience, which becomes research when practices are articulated as inquiry” (Hernández-Hernández, 9).

These two reflections were important in my practice. However I realized that in my case it was in fact a combination of “what to know” and “what to do”. These two were articulated in an inquiry process. On one hand I had a clear research topic -Cuban science fiction literature- and I did want to know about current stories and their relationships to the changing city of Havana. But besides this focus, since the beginning I had a clear intuition out of my own artistic curiosity. There were several material and immaterial forms that I wanted to explore and create, such as sounds, textures, words, images. However, these forms preceded the actual logic of the project and were still a diffuse cloud of sensations and presentiments. Also, they were the prime source of motivation. Professor Fernando J. Pereira from the University of Porto reminded me recently how important it is to acknowledge and trust this creative impulse. An artist, according to him, is the creator of ‘form’, whether it being material or immaterial (Pereira). I re-identified myself with his perspective. So in this sense,

I believe the starting point is definitely a combination of clear questions and diffuse excitements about new forms. The artistic inquiry is precisely the effort to put together and articulate these elusive and concrete elements into one single plan.

Another important point regarding the relation of this project and the current debate of AR, is the nature of the word research itself. According to Julian Klein “research means not-knowing, rather: not-yet-knowing and desire for knowledge” (Klein, 1). I am interested in thinking of this word as something that doesn’t point out anything in particular. It is a word “in transition”. More than a concrete result, it captures an action, just as it is being carried out. It is a word that signifies a process, not a result. But most importantly, it encloses a wish; a desire for knowing. Yet, as I see it, this desire for knowing is as much a desire for creating, in so far as obtaining knowledge is actually creating it.

I propose this because I am also certain about Mika Hannula’s reflection: “We will not get any clear-cut, all-encompassing answers. What we might come up with are slightly better-articulated questions and contexts, in the form of ways of keeping the process up and running. There is no authentic essence, nothing ‘real’ to hunt down”(Hannula, 8).

The idea of not hunting a reality is evidence that there is no reality to discover. There is only a temporary reality to be created through research. This is closely connected to Habermas’ creation of subjectivity through discourse, cited in the section above.

In my practice, I do not consider that I uncovered or hunted down this reality: the relation of contemporary Cuban science fiction and the changing Havana. That being said, I certainly did offer others and myself the possibility of creating a series of reflections. These reflections stood as the most authentic, connected and truthful realizations that could be done in that very moment. I created reality not in the sense of inventing or making up a series of findings. It is about offering the possibility of re-creation through artistic experience and intersubjective discourse.

Another important point is connected to Lucy Leppard’s reflection which I found perhaps too instructive but certainly inspiring:

As ‘envisionaries’, artists should be able to make connections visible: to be generous, to provide an alternative to the dominant culture’s rapacious view of nature, to expose the social agendas that formed the land, to reinstate the mythical and cultural dimensions of ‘public’ experience and, at the same time, to become conscious of the ideological relationships and historical constructions of place. (Leppard, 156)

I could more or less disregard the rest and take out one single key word: generosity. It is not so common to speak of art in terms of generosity and vice versa. Especially, in the realm of visual arts. However, I have learned from Enrique Vargas, anthropologist and director of the theatre company Teatro de los Sentidos, that performing is an act of generosity, and this should not be understood as an act of condescendence or satisfaction for the others who “are in need”. It is an act of generosity for yourself and consequently for the other. To give yourself in a project, is an act of generosity to yourself, and it grows from being a individual act into being a collective sharing. I relate this thought very much to the reversed question posed also by Julian Klein: When is research art?

First, in the methods (such as search, archive, collection, interpretation and explanation, modeling, experimentation, intervention, petition,...), but also in the motivation, inspiration, in reflection, discussion, in the formulation of research questions, in conception and composition, in the implementation, in the publication, in the evaluation, in the manner of discourse. (Klein, 4)

I connect all of these actions to the act of generosity: performing carefully, consciously and intensively. It is perhaps that very moment of obsessively giving and taking, that also defines the artistic part of a research process. This takes us back to Hernández’s research point of departure where he adds the artistic research process is not the same when the artist tries to preserve the secret of an artwork’s production, than when he doesn’t try to do so. The second one is concerned in revealing and making public the process, the sources, the modes of relation that generate around the artistic process and “all this sharing sometimes becomes the artwork itself” (Hernández-Hernández and Fendler, 4).

What I connect the most to my own work is sharing the modes of relations generated during the artistic process. My intention is to share these not in a merely anecdotic behind-the-scenes way, but as an active component of the artwork itself. Take as an example my previous reflection on Olga the hologram and the goats.

Hernández's reflection is very close to my current feelings on AR. I do consider that the work is precisely composed of sharing and that the work itself might be a face-to-face display of the results and the process. This perhaps might be considered what Miwon Kwon describes in a slightly negative tone as "the return of the author". Yet for me it is certain that the "the intricate orchestration of literal and discursive sites that make up a nomadic narrative requires the artist as a narrator-protagonist" (Kwon, 86).

In my case, it does not come out as wishing to star in the artwork. It comes out of a wish to "stay true to particularism" (Hannula, 17). With this I refer to the wish to preserve the particular and very specific situations of this project, which involves the site, the artworks and the writers as much as my own feelings. I am part of the particularity of the created situation.

4) Installation as a continuum

Light Habana is a project that allows me to conceive in my own new dimensions of art installation. Through this experience, I understand the practice of installation as a continuum. Where does an installation work start and end? There is not a possible answer for me. Yet I am now more capable of tracing its origins and development in moments and places I couldn't see before. I will share some of these moments and describe their temporality and materiality.

Light Habana installations, being situation specific, were 'already happening' at the moment of my readings of the science fiction stories. As I argued before, the work of a writer is closely related to that of the installation artist. Writers install their fictional worlds in the canvas of the streets. However, there is something additional to this idea. The moment of reading is already also an installation. When going through the lines of the story, I do start allocating this world somewhere. I make use of the city as I know it and I am able to imagine it. I imagine an aesthetic experience out of the words, and this process necessarily deals and adapts to the places, inhabitants,

and materials I have at hand. They are already situation-specific, and I am already in a process of installation.

During the negotiations with place and time, the visualized artwork changes. The relations that are created upon the installed artwork then re-create the site, and the signification of the work continues circumventing. The construction of the installation continues through all the dialogues within it.

Subsequently, the installation ‘continues happening’ in the text; it is also constructed by text. In the essay and documentary *Light Habana*, the installation is also created through narration. In both of these documents, specifically in the documentary, there is an interlaced polyphony. There are three main voices: the narrator, the interviewees and a third voice: the installation. Although materially finished, the artworks (*Out of Light*, *Subred Bebe* and *Cine 3D Olga the Hologram*) were still being constructed through the script, and there is still a continuous creation happening. The artwork installs in the text, as text, and re-creates itself through its relation to the rest of the voices.

The installation voice allowed me also to experiment with metafiction. In this context, metafiction means writing about science fiction through science fiction. The installation voice, which is the installation itself, threads in the narration, introducing story fragments that describe the material work. In the essay, the installation stories, inspired in the sci-fi novels, are: the transformation of Havana’s architecture, Mota’s shiny-dark interrogatory and the holographic monument raised to Olga. These fictional fragments thread in the essay in order to study sci-fi through science fiction practice. These short installation stories defined and gave birth to the material work. (*Out of Light*, *Subred Bebe* and *3D Cine Olga the Hologram*). They were my way of creating the physical artwork, which was ‘already happening’ through its writing.

5) Positionality: An inverted metaphor

During the interview with writer and literary critic Jose Miguel Sánchez Gómez (Yoss), he described the following:

Anyone who has moved away from the (Cuban) coast in the night, and sees how the city lights disappear in the distance, for sure has also had the sensation that suddenly all the human activity, all the Cuban activities, the whole of the Cuban discourse of Cuba as the island of socialism, starts disappearing too. Fades in the distance too. Deep down, we are a sort of lost light floating in a sea of darkness. (Sánchez Gómez)

This very image constructed by Sánchez made me realize important issues regarding my positionality in the work of Light Habana. My position as a Mexican artist working in Cuba could also be explained partially through this light-in-the-distance metaphor.

However, I could use the same metaphor completely inverted. I explained to Sánchez Gómez, and other writers how Cuba is seen from Mexico. The island that Cubans see fading out in the distance as they travel away from it, is the same island that is fully glowing seen in the distance from Mexico. And as we (Mexicans) travel towards it, Cuba starts to fade.

For Cubans immersed in the island and completely surrounded by Cuban socialist discourse, these all lose its force once they take distance and put things in perspective. The light fades out in the distance, and so do the ideology and the socialist education. This is what Sánchez Gómez meant. However, for Mexicans the fading out occurs the other way around.

Cuba's system is idealized, even romanticized, by much of the Mexican left wing young generation. While Mexico is constantly abused and subjugated by the United States, Cuba seems to preserve its dignity. Mexicans see Cuba as a resisting and admirable light in the distance, of how a country can not only initiate but also sustain a revolution against imperialism. Cuba is a sort of glowing hope in the distance for Mexican decadent capitalist society. Generally speaking, these Mexican generations strongly idealize the living conditions on Cuba's apparently socialist society. But once they actually travel into the island, the light starts to fade. The idealized socialist system confronts Mexicans with all of its contradictions and ideological violence.

As a Mexican artist working in Cuba, I must admit I started by seeing the light in the distance. And I must admit too, that I was in fact confronted with Cuba's contradictions. However, I did not finish

this project with any particular posture towards the Cuban system, socialist reign or capitalist re-birth on the island. I do not support or favor any of the ideals, in the way they are being carried out just now. I do not believe that the rise of new private enterprises, such as cafeterias, markets and cinemas, is necessarily a sign of progress or a positive thing for the country or for the world. I did this project standing as a shocked observer, letting myself be slapped by the complexity of the situation. I accepted my shock and my silence regarding my political posture during the process. Still, there is one single thing I can in fact conclude and state as a posture or opinion regarding Cuba's situation. While many Mexican people idealize the socialist system in the distance, the new Cuban generations idealize the capitalist system that controls much of the rest of the world. Thus, I state my political posture as acknowledging the fear to answer this question: Which is more dangerous- to live-by or to idealize the capitalist system?

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