

# **Stony Brook University**



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**Sleep is Just a Bad Habit**

A Thesis Presented

by

**Luis Fernando Ramírez Celis**

to

The Graduate School

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements

for the Degree of

**Master of Fine Arts**

in

**Studio Art**

Stony Brook University

**August 2011**

**Stony Brook University**

The Graduate School

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Abstract of the Thesis

**Sleep is Just a Bad Habit**

by

**Luis Fernando Ramírez Celis**

**Master of Fine Arts**

in

**Studio Art**

Stony Brook University

**2011**

Modern architecture is dead. The spirit of modern architecture has evaporated. These two ideas, raised by critics such as Charles Jencks<sup>1</sup> were at one point generally believed to be true. This thesis, in part, explores the ambiguity that exists around these issues and its relationship to my own work. The modern spirit refuses to disappear completely and modern architecture survives in many parts of the world. My work as an artist is not intended as a nostalgic review of these alleged losses; through images borrowed from modernity, through fictional stories, texts and cultural hybrids, my work considers the possible meanings of this hybridized, polluted, yet still desirable modernity.

Using these topics, I will discuss the specific research carried out during the development of four installations exhibited over the course of the last two years at Stony Brook University galleries and other venues abroad: the project *Sleep Is Just A Bad Habit* has strong ties to two projects by Buckminster Fuller and his obsession with progress, time and the future; *Closer Than We Think* connects futuristic architecture and design from the 50s, 60s and 70s with a circular idea of time and with imagery of the future imagined in those years; the death of modern architecture and the iconic

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<sup>1</sup> Jencks, Charles. *What is Post – Modernism?* Academy Editions, London, 1986. P. 15

housing project *Pruit Igoe* by Minoru Yamasaki are the basis for the piece *Superbloques* in its different versions; *Circa 1954* allows me to explore the relationship between text and art after Magritte's *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* and the idea of authorship and the author's signature.

## **Dedication Page**

To Carolina and Guadalupe, with all my love and gratitude.

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## Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude to my adviser, Professor Stephanie Dinkins, whose expertise, understanding and patience added considerably to my graduate experience. I would like to thank the other members of my committee, Professor Emeritus Mel Pekarsky, and Artist in Residence Gary Schneider for the assistance they provided at all levels of the research project. My gratitude also to Rhonda Cooper, Director of the University Gallery, for her support in the MFA Thesis Exhibition. I would also like to mention Professor Hugh J. Silverman, Assistant Professor Zabet Patterson and Assistant Professor Lena Burgos Lafuente for their truly exciting courses, which were fundamental for this thesis.

Very special thanks to all my fellow MFA students for their support and friendship.

Finally, I would like to thank my family for the support they provided throughout this process and, in particular, I must acknowledge my wife Carolina and my daughter Guadalupe, without whose immense love and support I would not have finished this program and thesis.

This research would not have been possible without the financial assistance of *Colfuturo*, *Banco de la República de Colombia*, University of Stony Brook Graduate School and Department of Art and Fulbright – *Ministerio de Cultura de Colombia* Scholarship for Artists. I express my gratitude to those agencies.

**Introduction**  
**Modern Spirit**

The body of work I have assembled over the past two years has focused on architecture and a certain modern spirit experienced in the mid-20th century in the western world, and its relationship to Latin America. This spirit appears in my installations, which include techniques such as video, drawings, photographs, texts and objects, as ambiguous and often contradictory. I see this spirit from the perspective of a Latin American artist but can also put aside my awareness of my origins and speak in a more *international* tone, a term applied to modern architecture. I recognized and admired this spirit for the first time as a student of architecture. My professors and the architects in my family brought the great Swiss architect Le Corbusier to my attention and he became a heroic character who still fascinates me. My work, however, is defined in part by the demystification of such authors and by stories about modernity. The work and iconology of masters such as Le Corbusier, Marcel Breuer, Minoru Yamasaky, Robert Buckminster Fuller and Carlos Raúl Villanueva is malleable material incorporated into my practice along with fictional stories, tropical songs, mock exhibitions, imaginary architects, altered documents and text.

I define this spirit as a kind of faith in technology, architecture, urbanism and design; in theory, all of them were important tools to improve the quality of life for mankind. One of the authors who interested me, and who became the basis of the project *Sleep Is Just a Bad Habit*, was Robert Buckminster Fuller. In the first part of this thesis I will explore Fuller's ideas exhibited in two main projects: *Dymaxion System of Sleeping* (1943) and *Dymaxion Chronofile* (1925 - 1983). These projects arose out of my interest in Fuller's fascination with time and his ideas about the future and progress. For the installation presented at the MFA show in February 2011, at Stony Brook University's University Gallery, I made a large-scale drawing of Fuller's geodesic structure, which became the installation's central space, and set up other pieces around that drawing. My previous research on Fuller's work is the context for the new links I made within this system to authorship, progress and modernity.

### **Why Modern Architecture? The Modern Spirit**

I imagine going back to my childhood home, in fact two houses, one designed and built by my father in 1972 and the second designed by an uncle in Venezuela and built by Colombian architects in Bogotá in 1954. I measured the first house inch by inch while I was studying architecture. I did hundreds of mental exercises modifying the house, removing walls, adding terraces or more rooms and designing different versions of the house on the same lot. I lived in the second house for only a year but still visit it and keep it in my memory: brick walls and vaults, furniture from the 50s, abstract paintings on the walls, and the humidity of the mountains in Bogotá. This architecture by Luis Carlos Ramírez Ardila and Carlos Celis Cepero was the first modern architecture I had contact with.

I do not intend to write an architectural autobiography, but I want to point out that my interest in modern architecture came from the modern spirit I experienced directly in the houses where I lived, through family interests and the stories I heard about modern architects, buildings and design.

This heroic spirit was diluted over time. As a student of architecture I sought this spirit in the architecture of Bogotá from the 50s, 60s and 70s and in books by the great masters such as Le Corbusier and Mies Van der Rohe. I designed architecture in a modernist style; I regretted the loss of the tradition of modern architecture in Colombia. I imagined Le Corbusier's arrival in Bogotá through my uncle's stories and his modern epic tales with Carlos Raúl Villanueva in Caracas while projects such as *23 de Enero* were being designed (1958). If I had been born in the 30s or 40s I would have been Le Corbusier's most ardent follower. However, as someone born in the late 60s who longs for the modern spirit and the security of the great metanarratives defined by Jean-François Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition*,<sup>2</sup> I decided to raise these questions in my artistic practice instead of addressing architecture directly.

### **The Body of Work; The Research**

I will present the research I did while developing the four projects shown for the first time at Stony Brook University's Lawrence Alloway Memorial Gallery and University Gallery: *Sleep Is Just a Bad Habit*, *Closer Than We Think*, *Superbloques* and *Circa 1954*. The four main issues running through my recent production form the main theme in this essay: Buckminster Fuller and time projects; the future of the past in architecture and design; the death of modern architecture; and the relationship between text and art since René Magritte's *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*, and the role of the signature and authorship in the work of art.

I will apply the same analytic structure that helped me contextualize my recent body of work to each of the projects included in this thesis. This structure spans descriptive information and concepts within the projects:

- Descriptive Label: Year, dimensions, technique and elements used in the piece, and its installation and staging.
- Sources
- Background and Previous Research: This essay focuses on background and research as part of the creative process. This research connects authors, references and selected topics to the projects.
- Extended Label: The relationship between the visual work and the research, links to other works, other authors, context of production, the local and the global.

The body of work selected for this thesis was developed between the fall of 2009 and spring of 2011. The projects presented here are cultural hybrids and reflect both the new context of production (USA) and my Latin American origins. In *Superbloques*, American imagery is mixed with elements of Venezuelan popular culture such as music.

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<sup>2</sup> Lyotard Jean Francois. 1979 *The Postmodern Condition* [1979]. tr. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984

*Circa 1954* is also a hybrid: a project in which the design of New York's Whitney Museum raises a question about authorship and originality.

## Chapter 1

Time projects: *Sleep Is Just a Bad Habit and Closer Than We Think*

## 1 BACKGROUND: BUCKMINSTER FULLER'S TIME PROJECTS

I am fascinated by two projects about time and the future by Robert Buckminster Fuller (July 12, 1895 - July 1, 1983): *Dymaxion System of Sleeping* (1943) and *Dymaxion Chronofile* (1925 - 1983). In this chapter I will elaborate on Fuller's fascination with time and technology. I am interested in the ambiguity that exists in the essence of technology as seen by Heidegger: on the one hand it can be a "*supreme danger*" and on the other a "*saving power*".<sup>3</sup> Technophilia, chronophilia, chronophobia, the concept of syntropy<sup>4</sup>, systems theory, futurism and utopia are terms prevalent in Fuller's work.

### Systemic Worldview

Fuller was a prolific author. His projects switch easily from architecture to poetry, design and philosophy. His work is trans-disciplinary, being of interest to and having influenced many people from different disciplines around the world, particularly in architecture, engineering and the environmental sciences.

The word *Dymaxion*, used by Fuller in different projects and designs, is a blend of three words: dynamic, maximum and tension. An advertising expert created this brand name in 1928 for Fuller's first house design, the *Dymaxion House*. Fuller then used the term several times in different projects: *The Dymaxion Car*, *the Dymaxion World Map*, *Dymaxion Sleep Method* and his large scrapbook, the *Dymaxion Chronofile*. The fact that Fuller used this term repeatedly in several of his projects emphasizes the fact that all his work was conceived within a general system designed to improve the living conditions of humanity. That was his life mission: The definition of the world as a spaceship with limited resources in which we are all crew members, or the image of the earth as a single massive island floating on the sea (a concept that is evident in the development of *Dymaxion World Map*<sup>5</sup>) correspond to his own image of the world and the universe as an interconnected system in which the behavior of the whole depends on the behavior of the parts in a synergistic relationship. Fuller popularized the term synergy, as applied in other areas of science such as chemistry, to define his general systems theory. Synergy, which literally means working together, occurs when the result of the parts of a system is superior or better than expected in its individual components:

One of the modern tools of high intellectual advantage is the development of what is called general systems theory. Employing it we begin to think of the largest and most comprehensive systems, and try to do so scientifically. We start by inventorying all the important, known variables that are operative in the problem. But if we don't really know how big "big" is, we may not start big enough, and are thus likely to leave

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<sup>3</sup> Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, Harper & Row publishers, NY, 1977

<sup>4</sup> Term invented by Buckminster Fuller as the opposite of entropy

<sup>5</sup> The Dymaxion map is a world map projected onto the surface of a polyhedron, which can then be unfolded in many different ways to show the world as a unique island.

unknown but critical variables outside the system which will continue to plague us. Interaction of the unknown variables inside and outside the arbitrarily chosen limits of the system are probably going to generate misleading or outrightly wrong answers. If we are to be effective, we are going to have to think in both the biggest and most minutely-incisive ways permitted by intellect and by the information thus far won through experience.<sup>6</sup>

Fuller was one of the first theorists to spread the systemic worldview. On the basis of science, he proposed to do more with less -- *potentiating to the maximum* existing resources to create a sustainable environment, a concept which he called *ephemeralization*. His projects are essentially sustainable, although he favored industrialization. The prototype for the *Dymaxion Car* is one of the first vehicles designed with the environment in mind and incorporating the concept of saving resources, in this case, fuel. The *geodesic dome*, a project that was developed later, is a decisive example of architecture and engineering ephemeralization. With minimal resources, structures achieved maximum area coverage at low cost and with high resistance. The *geodesic dome* became a symbol of his theories on renewable energy sources and also a symbol for environmental and counterculture groups.

### **Dymaxion Sleep (1943), Dymaxion Chronofile (1925 - 1983)**

The raw material in these two projects is time. Time from a pragmatic point of view, as a resource to be exploited to the maximum; time also as raw material to be quantified in terms of ideas and experiences; time as a basis for projects to be designed for the good of humanity's future generations.

In 1943, *Time* magazine published an article in the science section devoted to *Dymaxion Sleep*, a method popularized by Fuller based on the earlier *Sleep Polyphasic Method* developed at the beginning of the century. Fuller's method consisted of a series of daily naps that totaled two hours of sleep every 24 hours. Fuller was trained to take naps whenever he felt fatigued, achieving a successful rest with 30 minutes of sleep every six hours. The method, applied during two consecutive years, led him to describe his condition at the time as "the most vigorous and alert condition I have ever enjoyed"<sup>7</sup> Fuller abandoned this method due to conflicts with the sleep schedules of his business partners but recommended that humanity's key thinkers use the method to eradicate war. As in the development of the geodesic dome, Fuller applied his ephemeralization theory. However, in this experiment time is the raw material. The consumption of time or the expense of non-productive time (in sleep) is minimized in order to achieve maximum daily productivity.

Likewise, in his ambitious life project the *Dymaxion Chronofile*, Fuller carefully measured time through events, thoughts and projects. He began collecting information about his own existence on earth while still a child, collecting clippings and artifacts from

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<sup>6</sup> R. Buckminster Fuller, *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth*, Lars Müller Publishers, 1968

<sup>7</sup> Ibid



the age of four. At 22 he began a formal diary that included newspaper clippings, notes, sketches and invoices. In 1925 he began documenting his activities, inventions and thoughts every 15 minutes in a scrapbook, and continued until his death in 1983. This file was later called the *Dymaxion Chronofile*, again incorporating the brand name used recurrently in several of his projects and inventions. The *Dymaxion Chronofile* is considered the most comprehensive documentation of a human life in history. The complete archive rests in the Stanford University Library along with documents, video and audio recordings, and thousands of models and artifacts.

If somebody kept a very accurate record of a human being, going through the era from the Gay '90's, from a very different kind of world through the turn of the century - as far into the twentieth century as you might live. I decided to make myself a good case history of such a human being and it meant that I could not be judge of what was valid to put in or not. I must put everything in, so I started a very rigorous record.<sup>8</sup>

## Essence of Technology and Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth

These two projects share a common characteristic that could be called *chronophilia*<sup>9</sup>, a common ground connecting them with the instrumentalist definition of technology in two different ways: "Technology as a means to an end."<sup>10</sup> On the one hand, time is seen in both Fuller projects as a raw material and a standing reserve. Time is no longer the Rhine River described by Heidegger in *The Question Concerning Technology*: a raw material that produces hydroelectric energy<sup>11</sup>. For Fuller, time is a raw material allowing for production of projects and ideas that will end war and poverty and improve the quality of human life as well as a river to be measured, calculated and exploited. His *Dymaxion Chronofile* is an instrument that measures the course of time in an obsessive way, recording every event in his life every 15 minutes over a period of 58 years. Accordingly, time is no longer the river that flows; it is a raw material to be fully exploited to produce and collect information that will benefit humanity, from the time of the *instrumental conception of technology*. However, the essence of technology, according to Heidegger, lies not in its instrumentalist conception but in what he defines as *enframing*: "...the gathering together that belongs to that setting-upon which sets upon man and puts him in a position to reveal the real, in the mode of ordering, as standing-reserve."<sup>12</sup> The danger of technology lies in this revelation of the world as *standing reserve*, not in its instruments.

The danger of *enframing*<sup>13</sup> is the fact that it denies humanity any possibility of a different revelation of the world other than the *standing reserve*. However, the essence

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<sup>8</sup> Applewhite, E.J., Ed., *Synergetics Dictionary: The Mind of Buckminster Fuller*. New York: Garland Pub, 1986

<sup>9</sup> Lee, Pamela, *Chronophobia: on time in the arts of the 1960s*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004.

<sup>10</sup> Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, Harper & Row publishers, NY, 1977

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 15-16

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p 24

<sup>13</sup> *Enframing* or destining and danger, two words that Heidegger gives us to think about *enframing*.

of technology harbors not only the danger of disclosure of the world as *standing reserve* but also the opportunity, the *saving reserve*. "Human activity can never directly counter this danger. Human achievement alone can never banish it. But human reflection can ponder the fact that all saving power must be of a higher essence than what is endangered."<sup>14</sup> Thus the essence of modern technology involves both danger and opportunity.

We said earlier that time in Fuller's work seems to be also a *standing reserve*, referring to time not in an abstract and general way, but specifically related to human activities: 24 hours in the day divided by four, a half hour nap every six hours for a total of two hours of sleep; time divided every fifteen minutes to record personal activities in the *Dymaxion Chronophile* scrapbook. Thus it seems that the terrible prediction in Heidegger's essay exists here in both of Fuller's works: the scope of *enframing*, getting into the essence of man himself, and man himself as a *standing reserve*.

The destining of revealing is in itself not just any danger, but danger as such. Yet when destining reigns in the mode of *enframing*, it is the supreme danger. This danger attests itself to us in two ways. As soon as what is unconcealed no longer concerns man as object, but does so, rather, exclusively as *standing reserve*, and man in the midst of objectlessness is nothing but the orderer of *standing-reserve*, then he comes to the very brink of a precipitous fall; that is, he comes to the point where he himself will have to be taken as *standing-reserve*. Meanwhile, man, precisely as the one so threatened, exalts himself to the posture of lord of the earth. In this way the impression comes to prevail that everything man encounters exists only insofar as it is his construct. This illusion gives rise in turn to one final delusion: It seems as though man everywhere and always encounters only himself.<sup>15</sup>

However, there seems to be a contradiction in Fuller's work between the two different positions in Heidegger's definition of the essence of technology. Heidegger raises an ambiguity in the concept of *enframing*: on the one hand it blinds man, who can only see the world as a *standing reserve* and endangers his relationship with the essence of truth. On the other hand, mankind could be the chosen one, to be used as safekeeping, to keep and save or to preserve the revelation of this truth (which is the essence of technology). This truth must be an alternative to the *standing reserve*. Fuller's vision of the world as a spaceship with limited resources commanded by man incorporates an alternative view of the world: *power saving*. Fuller defined mankind as the crew and their captain, traveling in the *Spaceship Earth*. Man as the chosen one, the captain in charge of managing earthly resources in an efficient and sustainable way for future generations.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p 33-34

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 26 - 27

## Cronophilia, Cronophobia, Utopia

Pamela Lee in her essay "Chronophobia, On Time in the Art of the 1960's"<sup>16</sup> spent most of the book examining artists whose work in one way or another views the combination of time and technology with suspicion, refusing even to use them in their work, and explains why she uses the word chronophobia in her text: "But why chronophobia, one might reasonably ask? Why not chronophilia, an almost erotic absorption with time? No doubt there is a fine line between a phobic obsession with time and an almost perverse fascination with its unfolding, as if the brute gravity of that unfolding demanded a respect of equal but opposite weightiness to the anxiety time produces."<sup>17</sup> The line between the two can be very thin, but clearly Fuller stands on the chronophilia side of the equation. Lee mentions him as one of the most influential futurist authors of the 60's, both within popular culture and the academy.<sup>18</sup> This kind of chronophilia can be defined by a progressive view of the world with regard to technology, a viewpoint also shared by modern architects during the first half of the 20th century. In this sense, Fuller is still inscribed in what Lyotard defines as '*the grand narrative*'.<sup>19</sup> Fuller is a modern man who sees science and technology as a tool to achieve utopia. Yet this epic struggle against time devoted to safeguarding humanity can also be seen as the opposite, as chronophobia. The term chronophobia is connected to technophobia and entropy. Nothing could be more an opposite of these terms than Fuller's philosophy regarding faith in technology and syntropy. However, his task in life could be seen as a race against time, an effort to stop it in order to achieve the accomplishments that can improve the quality of life on Earth. Fuller believed that in the 70's, mankind had reached a point where standing reserves were being rapidly exhausted. Arrival in the future under these circumstances would be catastrophic; consequently all efforts should be directed toward winning the race against time: To somehow stop the flow of time in order to achieve a better quality of life, intelligently and through the use of scientific tools, before the future arrives. The future prospers through technology, but time must be stopped in order to build the future in the present. To achieve this task, the *Dymaxion Sleep Method* races against the clock, against time, as if it were better not to sleep in order to fight time itself.

The *Dymaxion Chronophile* scrapbook is another time-stopping device. Recording life events every 15 minutes is somehow to pause, to stop time metaphorically for a moment, four times every hour, 88 times a day (in the two years when he slept only two out of every 24 hours). Pamela Lee suggests that Jean Tinguely's self-destructing works are a critique of the advent of a technocratic era. His self-destructive machines are in some way the result of anxiety produced by the arrival of a technocratic era: chronophobia. In Tinguely, this type of art in motion denies time by self-destructing its parts; in Fuller I would suggest that the anxiety represented by the passage of time toward an uncertain future is revealed in projects and devices that fight time, attempting to ensure at least a few more minutes and a quicker arrival at a utopian

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<sup>16</sup> Lee, Pamela, *Chronophobia: on time in the arts of the 1960s*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004,

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, P. XIV

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 267

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 262, Lee quoting Lyotard on *The postmodern Condition: A report of Knowledge*

future. Undoubtedly, Fuller's major scientific and technological efforts, his inventions, devices, and experiments, are ultimately a great epic struggle against the passage of time, against death; a symptom of chronophobia.

## **2 SLEEP IS JUST A BAD HABIT**

### **Descriptive Label: Sleep Is Just a Bad Habit (Illustrations 1, 2, 3)**

Description: The installation's main piece is a drawing on the gallery wall and floor made with blue vinyl tape. It represents the structure of a geodesic dome, which becomes the space for my temporary studio. During the exhibition, I make drawings on a drafting table, playing the role of a modern architect. A text is projected on one wall: an article from *Time* magazine that tells the audience about the sleeping method invented by Robert Buckminster Fuller. The name Lucio Celis replaces the name Fuller in the text. I take sporadic naps on the bed in the installation. There is a video projection on the wall of the round frame glasses worn by the fictional Lucio Celis. There are printmaking plates on the wall taken from drawings I create during the exhibition based on geodesic structures.

Year: 2009 – 2011 (photographs of me playing Lucio Celis and the video of his glasses were made in 2009; the main installation was done in 2011.)

Dimensions: Approximately 750 sq. ft. Dimensions vary depending on the space. The project was installed at Stony Brook University's University Gallery.

Technique and elements used in the piece: A large scale drawing made with blue tape applied directly to the wall and floor; a drafting table with a light box and drawing materials including mylar, ink, brushes and a pencil; solar plates made from drawings on mylar with blue chalk applied to the surface; 7 x 5-inch black and white photographs of Lucio Celis mounted on cardboard and homasote; overhead projection of *Time* magazine article; silent video projection of Lucio Celis's round frame glasses. In each corner of the projection area blue tape simulates a sheet of paper hanging on the wall; a mattress made with blankets and a pillow rests on the floor; an envelope with the Buckminster Fuller commemorative US postal stamp; different activities are in process (drawing at drafting table, working with the solar plates and chalk, hanging solar plates on the wall and occasional naps on the bed, dressed as an architect from the 50s).

Installation and staging: The idea of the drawing was to create a performance space that would serve as my temporary studio. The drawing is the center of the installation and is placed in the middle of the wall. The section of the floor is warped with respect to the original circumference so, depending on where the viewer is standing, he or she has a perfect view of the circumference of a geodesic dome. Other installation elements are displayed symmetrically in relation to the dome: the text about sleeping, the drawings and the solar plates are placed to the left of the drafting table where I am working; the bed, video projection of Lucio Celis's round glasses and the envelope are

to the right. The audience can speak to me and look at the pieces on the wall, the large drawing and the projections. This is an ephemeral installation. After the exhibition I keep the drawings on mylar, the photographs and the digital information. The rest must be made again for each different venue.

I consider this work site specific for the Stony Brook University Gallery. The dimension and scale of the drawings were arranged for this gallery space. Also, as explained further in the extended label, Buckminster Fuller is an American icon with an important presence in New York State and is relevant to the local audience.

Sources: The main sources for the project are geodesic domes by different authors. The central drawing is based on Fuller's patented drawings of his geodesic dome from 1954.

### **Extended Label: Chronophobia in *Sleep Is Just a Bad Habit*.**

This project is a thematic exhibition within an exhibition. The thematic exhibition is a show about Lucio Celis, a fictional Latin American architect and artist. There is no information about his life, just the text in the exhibition telling the audience about the sleep method he invented. The rest of the exhibition seeks to create the tone of a thematic exhibition centering on this character and his inventions. The space is Celis's studio, or an open interpretation of his workspace: a geodesic dome. This studio contains a drafting table where, dressed as Celis, I draw. It is important to me to make it clear that I am the artist *dressed as Celis*, not the actual architect Celis presented in the exhibition. When I talk to the public I am clear about that. I am the artist Luis F. Ramírez Celis and my work consists of recreating the workspace of this modern architect and artist using the exhibition space to display a visual essay of his ideas. The display in the gallery space also includes a bed, where I take occasional naps to demonstrate Celis' sleep method. The video projection near the bed shows Celis's round frame glasses and their shadow as a blueprint. "Architecture is the masterful, correct, and magnificent play of volumes brought together in light." Le Corbusier wrote in his 1928 book *Toward An Architecture*. The video represents the play of light but also an architectural blueprint. I wanted to quote Le Corbusier in the video, since Celis is a composite of different modern architects. His glasses are a cliché, worn by many architects around the world since Le Corbusier, and a symbol of the vision architects are supposed to have.

One of the strategies used in this project is appropriation. But for me it is an appropriation in the third person; I am appropriating ideas from Buckminster Fuller but in the name of a third person, Lucio Celis. When I take the *Time* magazine article and change the name of the author of the sleep project, the appropriation is literal. The structure of the geodesic dome is also taken directly from Fuller's Drawing Number 1, for his patent of the geodesic dome obtained in 1954.<sup>20</sup> What I find interesting is the game played in the gallery space and its relation to the idea of truth. A gallery or museum space gives credibility to the information displayed in an exhibition. I am offering the audience fictional information displayed as real. Part of my interest in this installation is the use of exhibition tools such as text, labels and visual information to

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<sup>20</sup> U.S. Pat. No. 2,682,235 was granted to Buckminster Fuller in 1954 for geodesic domes.

create ambiguity between truth and fiction. Within the installation I am interested in the contradiction between chronophobia and chronophilia in Fuller's work. The pieces in the installation show structures and images relating to modern architecture. Geodesic domes are used here to symbolize progress and utopia. The structures are just drawings on paper and the wall, and a blue copy from the video projection. They are as yet unbuilt projects and ideas in the context of fiction within an exhibition. The exhibition within the exhibition is then a place frozen in time, in the 50's or 60's. As we all know, this type of structure was not the panacea many people thought it would be. The installation portrays a specific time in the history of this utopia, the time after its failure. The drawings I make on the drafting table include quotes from a humorous film about the future: Woody Allen's *Sleeper* from 1973.

The workspace where I create my drawings stands to one side of the gallery space. This device registers the passage of time, like Fuller's *Chronophile*. The drawings are the chronophile of the gallery installation. On the other side of the space, the bed is obviously the place to demonstrate the sleep system. An obsession with taking advantage of every worldly material, even time, results in just two hours of sleep per day. The bed creates the illusion that the artist in the installation is actually applying the system of napping every six hours.

*Sleep Is Just a Bad Habit* works in the general context of America but is also site specific for me in the sense that Fuller is part of what I recognize as local, pertaining to New York State. I had an opportunity to talk with gallery viewers, many of whom told me stories about domes in New York. One of the most remarkable structures, a fiberglass sculpture 33 feet in diameter designed by Buckminster Fuller called *Fly's Eye Dome*, is located in the Long House Reserve. Another version of this same sculpture is located in Beacon, New York. Fuller also projected a dome over New York City to control the weather. And so I think the installation works locally because most of the audience easily recognizes the imagery of the geodesic dome. The general gallery audience perceives the ambiguity of the authorship of the installation projects. I include a drawing of Fuller's sculpture as part of the collection of drawings I made for the installation. The caption is: "MY BRAIN? THAT'S MY SECOND FAVORITE ORGAN."<sup>21</sup>

The project would work differently in Colombia where there were there are no important examples of this kind of structure. This installation would take different forms depending on locale and context.

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<sup>21</sup> Allen Woody, *Sleeper*, 1973

### 3 CLOSER THAN WE THINK

#### Description Label (Illustration 4)

Description: *Closer Than We Think* is a video projection about the future as seen in the past. Ten video sequences are edited from re-photographs of images of futuristic architecture and designs from the 60's and 70's. There is a clock in the middle of the video that counts the years towards the future, 500 more years; then goes back to the beginning before continuing with the next sequence. Each sequence begins with the year in which each of the designs was conceived. The project takes its name from a futuristic cartoon published weekly in the *Chicago Tribune* called *Closer Than We Think*. The project was developed under the advice of Professor Gary Schneider.

Year: 2010. The project started in the summer of 2010 as a series of photographs and finally took the shape of a video, which became the main piece for a solo exhibition at Stony Brook University.

Dimensions vary; the piece was shown originally at Stony Brook University's Lawrence Alloway Gallery along with the piece *Pop Corn*. It was shown as an installation with a sofa, a big coffee table and the video projection inside one of the gallery's narrow housekeeping closets. The project was shown again in Bogotá at the *Museo del Banco de la República* in 2011 as part of the exhibition *Documentos Para Un Futuro Imperfecto* curated by Esteban Álvarez. The second show did not include the installation. In this thesis I will explain the project without referring to the second piece included in the solo show *Pop Corn* at the Alloway Gallery.

Technique and elements used in the piece: 5 minutes and 40 seconds video projection, stereo audio; sofa or beanbags and a dark grey wall.

Installation and staging: The video is projected directly on the dark grey wall in front of comfortable furniture such as a sofa or beanbags.

Sources: project sources include images from futuristic architecture and design from the 50s and 60s. One of the images I chose at the beginning of the project was *Fly's Eye Dome* by Buckminster Fuller, which I used later in *Sleep Is Just a Bad Habit*. There are ten images, one for each of the sequences. The sequences are made from hundreds of stills that zoom in and out at the original image. Some of the images were taken from printed material and I took others myself on site at Stony Brook University; the rest were taken from the Internet.

1. The first sequence presents the title of the piece. The image is taken from the *Chicago Tribune* cartoon *Closer Than We Think*.

2. This sequence was created using a photograph from the catalogue for the 2006 Barbican Center exhibition *Future City*<sup>22</sup> in London. The image is Alison and Peter Smithson's *House of the Future* from 1956.
3. The Monsanto House or *Home of the Future* (1957) was a Disneyland attraction built in California by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the Monsanto Company and Disneyland Imagineering.
4. The Encounter Restaurant at the Los Angeles Airport was another project by Disneyland Imagineering. Completed in 1961, the project was renovated recently.
5. In this image Buckminster Fuller poses next to his *Dymaxion Car* in front of the fiberglass structure called *Fly's Eye Dome* built in 1967. The picture was taken in Snowmass, Colorado in 1980. Several copies of this structure are located throughout America including the one I mentioned in Beacon, New York and the other in East Hampton, Long Island, NY.
6. This small building is a lifeguard tower in Binz, Germany built in 1968 by German engineer Ulrich Mütter and German architect Dietrich Otto.
7. *Futuro House*, a prefabricated structure designed by Matti Suuronen in Finland. About 100 of these were produced; many are still standing in places around the world.
8. *Automodule* designed by the engineer Jean-Pierre Ponthieu in 1970
9. The structure in this sequence was developed at Stony Brook University's Department of Marine Sciences in 1970 and remains a permanent campus exhibit.
10. Woody Allen chose this house for a scene in his 1973 film *Sleeper*. Architect Charles Deaton built the house on Genesee Mountain, Colorado in 1963.
11. This series of photographs I shot around the Stony Brook Medical Center using the camera's zoom to add movement to the image became the beginning of the project. The building was designed by architect Bertrand Goldberg and built in 1976.

I am not concerned with whether or not the audience recognizes the buildings or the authors in the piece. The images were selected to show a type of futuristic design, a kind of imagery whose rounded shapes, oval windows, and in some cases plastic or fiberglass elements are easily recognizable.

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<sup>22</sup> Alison, Jane, Marie-Ange Brayer, Frederic Migayrou, Neil Spiller, *Future City, Experiment And Utopia In Architecture*, Barbican Center – Thames and Hudson NY, 2006, p58.



## **Extended Label: Future, Time and Progress in *Closer Than We Think***

The images in this project share a common vision of the future. Almost all of them use the word future in their titles: house of the future, future house, etc. They also share a characteristic style, as I said before. But there is something else that interests me: a certain sense of chronophilia is present in all of them linked to the ideas of progress, a fascination with the future and blind faith in technology. These architects, engineers and designers projected their ideas into the future and most of these ideas were initial experimental steps with new materials such as plastics, fiberglass and new structural ideas for construction. They did not, however, achieve their purpose of changing the world for the better.

Nowadays we know what the future they dreamed of in those years really is; we are living in the future they tried to project. It is easy for us to recognize now the future of the past. More than 50 years have transpired and I now recognize the nostalgic tone of those images: nostalgia for the future.

Buckminster Fuller also projected into the future. I have already mentioned his obsession with time and the future as a symptom of chronophobia, unlike his obsession with chronophilia. In the video, an ambiguous relationship exists between the clock and the image, which also represents the dual ideas of chronophobia and chronophilia. The image is in constant motion but nothing really happens, because this movement is provoked by a sequence of different photographs of the same image. The clock advances 500 years toward the future and then returns to the initial year. The ambiguity resides in the circular progression of years and the fact that this video is really a projection of still photographs with no movement at all. So the movement towards the future never occurs and what I show the audience is basically a still image, a photograph frozen in time in the past or, perhaps, in the exhibition's present.

I wasn't able to attend the showing of this piece at the *Museo de Arte del Banco de la República* in 2011 but it was originally intended to be specific to the context here in Stony Brook. I included two sequences with images taken directly on campus at Stony Brook University to create a link with the closest context, but the broad context refers mainly to America and Europe. I realize the project requires certain changes when exhibited in Latin America because my research revealed that futuristic architecture was not part of the architectural and engineering agenda in Latin America. Experimentation there was more related to the development of new technologies to lower housing costs. Specific research and experimentation focusing on the future is very rare in Latin America and practically non-existent in Colombia, which explains why Colombian audiences probably didn't connect in the same way as audiences in America or Europe.

**Chapter 2**  
***Superbloques* and the Myth of the Death of Modern Architecture**

## 1 BACKGROUND: THE MYTH

In his book *What is Post-modernism?* Charles Jencks defines the main reason for the emergence of postmodern architecture as "... the social failure of Modern architecture, announced its mythical death repeatedly over ten years".<sup>23</sup> One of the examples mentioned by Jencks as evidence of the death of modern architecture is the collapse of the Pruitt-Igoe housing complex blocks in St. Louis, Missouri. However, the postmodern style he defined was short-lived if we take into account the free neoclassical side. Today it is difficult to find an architect using neo-classical forms in architecture as literally as in the 70s or 80s (except in the framework of scenography architecture or commercial mall façades). However, many architects still produce work in the "modern" vernacular: clean volumes painted white or made of glass and steel, applying Mies' style and materials to interiors occupied by modern furnishings; furniture designed by Mies Van der Rohe and Le Corbusier in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century appears in decoration magazines and is copied and sold in department stores. What was once avant-garde mass production and democratic design is now a status symbol for the upper classes.

Jencks defines postmodern architecture as "the combination of Modern techniques with something else (usually traditional building) in order for architecture to communicate with the public and a concerned minority, usually other architects." It's interesting that what defines postmodern architecture is *something else*. *Something else* lying somewhere between *modern* and the ability to communicate with people. Hence postmodern architecture responds to modern architecture's inability to communicate with people. However, I seriously doubt that this ingredient, this *something else*, could be any kind of neoclassical revival. The neoclassical revival is incapable of universal communication with people; Greco-Roman ornaments mean different things in different places and in different cultures and contexts. For example, shops along the highway connecting Bogotá with neighboring vacation towns sell concrete Greco-Roman ornamentation used to decorate weekend homes in the area. This kind of popular ornamentation, however, refers not to Greece and Rome but to the homes of television and film stars symbolizing wealth and luxury: architecture delivered via television and mass media deriving more from Las Vegas and Miami than the Mediterranean. On the other hand, institutional buildings in Bogotá such as libraries and museums draw heavily on the modern architecture of Alvar Aalto or Mies van der Rohe.

Jencks mentions a '*something else*' that links architecture with people and seemingly not in the style of the building itself. Katharine G. Bristol in her essay "The Pruitt-Igoe Myth"<sup>24</sup> speaks of how architects attribute the failure of Pruitt-Igoe to architecture itself by ignoring the socio-economic context and the racial and segregation issues that affected construction of the postwar project. "Pruitt-Igoe was shaped by strategies that did not emanate from the architects, but rather from the system in which they practice. The Pruitt-Igoe implosion and the death of modern architecture therefore

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<sup>23</sup> Jencks, Charles. *What is Post-Modernism?*,. P. 15

<sup>24</sup> Bristol, Katharine G. "The Pruitt-Igoe Myth." *Journal of Architectural Education* Vol. 44, No. 3 (May, 1991).

not only inflates the power of the architect to effect social change, but it masks the extent to which the profession is implicated, inextricably, in structures and practices that it is powerless to change."<sup>25</sup> It seems then that this *something else* lying between architecture and communication with people is something that binds people to their own space and is strongly linked to tradition. However, this ingredient is not possible without the right political decisions and in an appropriate public context where architects are able to design. Postmodern architecture no longer controls decisions regarding quality of life. Without politicians, economists and investors, architecture has a very limited range of action. Modern Architecture was built on great metanarratives: the belief in progress, science and technology, and the emancipation of the proletariat. Heroic architecture sought to use the tools of design and urbanism (one and the same) to liberate humanity. Lyotard defines the postmodern as incredulity or skepticism toward the totalizing nature of metanarratives. And here we do well to clarify a point made in Jencks' essay when critiquing Lyotard's thought. Postmodernism refers strictly to a style defined primarily by the architecture of Charles Jencks in his own essays devoted to postmodernism. Postmodernity refers to the historical period beginning with postmodernism and includes a break. Postmodern, on the other hand, refers to a way of thinking clearly defined by Lyotard in his essay "The Postmodern Condition"<sup>26</sup>. This way of thinking appears within the modern, not after. Charles Jencks' text mixes the problem of style, which would be *Postmodernism*, with the *Postmodern*. How then is it possible to speak of architecture in the Postmodern?

Architecture in the Postmodern refers to a skeptical and ironic view of the *grand narratives*. Architecture is no longer the universal tool that will solve humanity's major social problems, nor is it the search for something new as in the Avant-garde period. The myth of the new is no longer valid in architecture. Le Corbusier's white prisms, so controversial at the time, are reproduced everywhere today as standards of good architectural taste and a lack of ornamentation is assumed as a minimalist gesture, to use a word absorbed by the commercial design world.

Contemporary architecture cannot be defined in any single way. It is a multiplicity of forces acting from different points, places, cultures, technologies and contexts. The concept of Critical Regionalism developed by Kenneth Frampton in his essay "*Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six points for an architecture of resistance*" arises from a critical view of modern architecture. Frampton defines postmodern architecture more assertively than Jencks, pointing out how Critical Regionalism integrates modern architecture with local and regional techniques and architectures without adopting a specific style. According to Frampton, Critical Regionalism is best exemplified by architects from the modern tradition such as Alvar Aalto, Rafael Moneo and Tadao Ando.

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<sup>25</sup> Eggen, Keith. *American Architectural History: A Contemporary Reader*, Bristol, Katharine G, The Pruitt-Igoe Myth. P. 170

<sup>26</sup> Idem

## 2 SUPERBLOQUES

### Descriptive Label (Illustrations 5, 6, 7)

Sequences of the demolition in 1972 of Minoru Yamasaki's modernist *Pruit Igoe* housing complex are accompanied by the song *El Superbloque* composed by Venezuelan Simón Díaz to commemorate the construction of the *23 de Enero* housing complex in Caracas, Venezuela. The song, slowed down here to 40% of its original speed, tells the story of a resident whose love for this Superblock goes beyond his love for a woman. The demolition sequences are taken from the 1982 film *Koyaanisquatsi*, Godfrey Reggio's critical work on progress and civilization. The project has three different versions:

- Performance: The video is projected on the wall. A man sits on a bench watching the video. A slide show is projected on the man's back. The man drinks rum while getting a virtual tattoo; his back is gradually covered with projected black ink tattoos about his love for the Superblock. Tattoos include the name of the building, a portrait of the architect (Carlos Raúl Villanueva) and iconic American tattoos about love, women, gambling, and alcohol, all of them rededicated to the Superblock. The man's back at the beginning of the sequence is completely bare and by the end, after 15 slides, is fully tattooed. The sequence then reverses, removing the tattoos until the man's back is bare once again.
- Installation: The video is projected on a wood construction resembling a Superblock. Blue chalk lies on the floor representing the dust from the implosion. A series of photographs of the performance can also be shown as well as drawings of the Superblock.
- Video: The video is projected directly on the wall.

This project was developed under the advice of Professor Emeritus Mel Pekarsky and Professor Stephanie Dinkins.

Year: 2010. The project was shown for the first time at Stony Brook University as part of the performative version of final MFA program presentations. It also appeared as an installation in Bogotá where it was awarded the FGAA *Premio Bienal De Artes Plásticas y Visuales*. It will be shown as a video projection at the 2011 *Video Brasil* biennale, in the exhibition entitled *Southern Panoramas* In Sao Paulo.

Dimensions: Dimensions vary depending on the venue and the project format.

Technique and elements used in the piece's different formats include:

- Performance: Video: 5 minutes and 37 seconds with mono audio. Slideshow: Fifteen 35-mm slides. Slide projector and programmer. Can be performed either by the artist himself or by an actor. Performer drinks rum.

- Installation: Wooden construction, blue chalk, video projection, Duratrans color copies with back light of 15 images of the performance, black ink drawings on rice paper.
- Sources: Selected sequences of the Pruitt Igoe housing complex implosion taken from the 1982 film *Koyaanisqatsi* by director Godfrey Reggio. The video is edited to fit the music.
- The song *El Superbloque* was included in the album *Caracha Negro* by Simon Diaz and the Hugo Blanco Ensemble.
- The building in the drawing is the *23 de Enero* housing complex located in Caracas, Venezuela. The text in the drawing quotes song lyrics.

### **Extended Label: Problems and Questions in *Superbloques***

The *Superbloques* project explores the myth of the death of modern architecture and its possible meanings in Latin America. Modernity was characterized by the formulation of grand narratives: a belief in progress, in science and technology, and in the emancipation of the proletariat. Heroic architecture, along with the tools of design and urbanism (one and the same) sought to liberate humanity. Modern hope and the utopian spirit that existed during those years have now vanished. This epic adventure of the Modern architects is now viewed with nostalgia. The time of the great metanarratives and truths of modernity has passed. I am interested in the lost spirit of that time.

Both Pruitt Igoe and the *23 de enero* housing complex (*El Superbloque*) were conceived in the light of modernity's grand narratives with the difference that Pruitt Igoe was demolished when it failed whereas the *23 de enero* complex still stands despite all its attendant social problems and poverty. The death of modernity in Latin America never occurred because modernity there always met with resistance and never fully arrived in that part of the continent. To demolish such a large-scale structure in Latin America is a luxury local economies cannot afford. Modernity replaced a past erased by colonialism and conquest and was seen as a new tradition and a chance to start again from scratch. The man in the *Superbloques* installation clings to this new tradition, tattooing himself with its architectural symbol, the object of his love. The portrait of the architect on his back is the portrait of a family member representing this new promise to replace the lost past. But the promise of modernity was never the answer to the lost past. The *Superbloques* installation addresses this contradiction and the duality of rootedness and rootlessness.

**Chapter 3**  
***Circa 1954, Text and Authorship***

## 1 BACKGROUND: TEXT IN CONTEMPORARY ART

### Magritte's Signature

The different versions of *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* have a feature not mentioned by Foucault in his essay on Magritte<sup>27</sup>. All versions are signed on the bottom left or right. The signature is also a text on the canvas in a painting where the text is an essential part of it. Is this signing of a painting so common that it deserves no comment?

How important then is Magritte's signature? Somewhere between modern and contemporary art the practice of signing a work of art began to disappear and the relationship between artwork and text based on the legacy of *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* developed to the point of completely denying the image and the traditional media of representation.

Foucault defines two main principles of Western painting from the 15th to the 20th century: verbal signs and representations never appear simultaneously. The order of this hierarchy runs "from the figure to discourse or from discourse to the figure". Paul Klee breaks with this principle. The second principle, "the fact of resemblance and the affirmation of a representative bond"<sup>28</sup> is broken by Kandinsky, by colors, lines, shapes, improvisation and composition.

According to Foucault, Magritte comes close to this type of rupture. They all share a common system. "Magritte knits verbal signs and plastic elements together, but without referring them to a prior isotopism. He skirts the base of affirmative discourse on which resemblance calmly reposes, and he brings pure similitudes and non-affirmative verbal statements into play the instability of a disoriented volume and unmapped space"<sup>29</sup>

*Ceci n'est pas une pipe* is therefore one of contemporary art's key paintings because it breaks doubly with western traditions. It binds text and image without subordinating one to the other and disrupts the play of resemblance and representative bond in different ways, denying what the image appears to be: a pipe. However, Magritte's signature remains subordinate to the image and to the painting's main text. The signature is not part of the *broken calligram*, as Foucault calls it. *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* in its different versions marks a turning point between traditional painting and contemporary art.

Art, after this painting, moves step-by-step away from the image toward radical cases such as the work of Josep Kosuth or even the work of Art and Language. But art also returns to the image in the work of artists such as Baldessari or Ed Ruscha. Interestingly, nowadays on the contemporary art scene a piece of art is rarely signed.

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<sup>27</sup> Foucault, Michel. *This is not a Pipe*, University of California Press, 1983

<sup>28</sup> Idem

<sup>29</sup> Idem



## Magritte Did Not Sign a Painting: The Painting on the Easel

In the 1929 version,<sup>30</sup> René Magritte's handwritten signature, as in most cases, uses the same type of calligraphy as the text in *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*. The signature located on the lower right side is very small, in an attempt to avoid invading the canvas, to avoid interfering with the exercise taking place in the painting, and indeed does not interfere. At that moment in Western painting the signature has no visual, discursive or tautological content.

In this second version, Magritte seems to use the painting on the easel to represent his own early work, *The Treachery of Images*. The viewer is accustomed to seeing the signature as an element that identifies the author. In the second version mentioned by Foucault, the drawing shows a pipe drawn and framed on an easel and a second pipe floating in space at the top.

Foucault assumes that what is on the easel is a blackboard. And because of the scholarly handwriting and, perhaps, the absence of the author's signature, the image and text could be interpreted as an educational poster. (In fact, Magritte's signature does resemble that of a young student). But since the object in reference appears on an easel and we are referring to the work of an artist who uses an easel every day, I dare suggest the object is not a blackboard but a painting. In the painted version of 1966, the pipe on the easel is represented as a color painting while the pipe floating in space appears to be made of plaster or a gray stone. This material also suggests this is not a blackboard that can be erased with a rag. We have a self-representation of *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* within this painting, finished, resting on the painter's easel, but without the author's signature.

Why did Magritte not sign the painting resting on the easel? If this work within the work had been signed the meaning of the game would have changed. It would not be an ambiguous representation of a painting or a blackboard but clearly a self-representation of Magritte as the author of the first version of the pipe. *The Two Mysteries* would also have been a commentary on his first work, but it is not signed. Magritte would not change the meaning of the work by signing twice; he was aware that by signing the painting on the easel he would in many ways have affected the meaning of the work. To sign this painting would have meant elevating the signature to the level of the other elements in the work: the image of the painting, the room with the pedestal, the second pipe and the text *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*.

A second signature could not be part of this unraveled calligram; the unsigned work on the easel is possibly one of the first modern pieces using text and images deliberately unsigned by the artist, who knew that his signature was also a text capable of affecting the meaning or the intent of the artwork.

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<sup>30</sup> *The Treachery of Images (This Is Not a Pipe)*, 1929, oil on canvas, 60 x 80 cm, Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

However, this rupture with traditional western painting is not complete. The pipe is tied to the past. It is the signature that confirms the painting as an image with a subordinate text (the signature). But this is a delicate thread that other artists would soon break.

## **The Signature, Other Meanings**

Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917) in the Tate Gallery's permanent collection in London is one of the replicas authorized by the artist in 1964 and includes the original R. Mutt inscription. The story of how this "sculpture" was rejected by the Society of Independent Artists' 1917 exhibition is well known. The original work was lost and what at the time was an anonymous gesture is now displayed on a pedestal as a modern sculpture. The inscription on the urinal is now more than just the signature of an unknown author. The ready-mades are anonymous objects that the artist's gratuitous gesture, the mere choosing of them, converts into works of art. At the same time this gesture does away with the notion of the art object. The essence of the act is contradiction; it is the plastic equivalent of the pun. As the latter destroys meaning, the former destroys the idea of the value.<sup>31</sup>

The urinal is chosen by Duchamp but signed by R. Mutt. This fact perhaps underlines the anonymous nature of the object. Since we now know that the author of the work is Duchamp and that R. Mutt is an alias or an undeciphered text, the signature becomes a text that is part of the object and equally as important as the urinal itself. If this were also an unraveled calligram, R. Mutt's signature would have the same meaning as the urinal, which is that the pieces are anonymous objects. R. Mutt is not just a name or a pseudonym; it is a text to be deciphered, a name that perhaps merely means "anonymous".

Magritte decided not to sign the painting on the painted easel as an act in which he states that the text has the same value as the object. Duchamp invented a name to reinforce the anonymity of the found object. Signing a work of art gradually became something to consider for artists influenced by the works of Magritte and Duchamp.

## **Other Marginal Texts in the Work of Art: The Label**

In 2008, *Behind the Facts. Interfunktionen 1968 -1975* curated by Gloria Moure and bringing together the work of artists from the late 60s, published by the German art magazine *Interfunktionen*, was exhibited at the *Museo del Banco de la República de Colombia*. The exhibition, presented initially at the Miró Foundation in Barcelona, presented 45 conceptual artists. Two works are of particular interest here: Laurence Weiner's *ONE FLUORESCCEIN SEA MARKER POURED INTO THE SEA*, 1969, and John Baldessari's *Ghetto Boundary Project*, 1969. Baldessari's work consisting of text

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<sup>31</sup> Paz, Octavio. *Apariencia Desnuda, La obra de Marcel Duchamp*. Alianza Forma Era. 1973, p. 31

only was installed on the museum's main façade, ten meters from the ground. The museum produced adhesive texts to be installed at the height established by the artist and Baldessari's work was installed on the street, according to the artist's instructions. The text outlined the limits of an urban ghetto, surrounding it with stickers attached to walls, signposts, etc. that read "...A section of a city, especially a thickly populated area inhabited by minority groups often as a result of social or economic restrictions." Both works were displayed, as originals, in English. Why not translate them into Spanish? Neither the curator Gloria Moure, nor the owners of the work allowed the piece to be translated. Naturally, a translation is never exact and is always an interpretation. However, not allowing the museum to translate the text in a work where the text is crucial, in a place where more than 95% of the audience does not speak English, seems very inappropriate.

Not allowing translation seems fair in traditional artwork such as painting or sculpture but not in conceptual art. *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* could not be presented in translated form because it is a unique original piece and the painter's brush mark is an essential element. Respect for the original, the main reason why these paintings must not be reproduced in other languages, makes no sense in this case, however. Baldessari's work rejects the idea of valuing a piece of art because it is an original, or the result of manual dexterity, or because of its aesthetic characteristics. His stickers are neither beautiful nor ugly. What is important is the piece's effect in a specific urban space. To install this piece in a foreign language in Bogotá effaces the effect of Baldessari's work.

We can imagine Weiner's work in Spanish: *UNA SEÑAL DE FLUORESCENCIA VERTIDA EN EL MAR*, or Baldessari's: *Proyecto límite para un ghetto*. An English-speaking museum translates the label to *This is not a pipe* and a Spanish speaking one to *Esto no es una pipa*, without any problem. We can even imagine the early work of Joseph Kosuth *One and Three Chairs*<sup>32</sup> (1965) even if the title were translated into French, Spanish or German.

This mistake now commonly made by museums and galleries now seems symptomatic; many art spaces and curators remain tied to traditional forms of displaying and preserving artwork and do not allow textual work to be displayed in a language other than the original when, in fact, they are working with non-traditional, mechanically reproducible pieces. In many cases a translated museum label is not enough, especially when museums and galleries display pieces in public spaces.

How should a work that is both text and image, and is both the title of the piece and the piece itself, be displayed by a museum? Joseph Kosuth's art investigations use the format of the museum label, leaving no space for the official museum label. The piece itself contains the title and the information reproduced in the official museum label is the subtitle. The titles of his 1960s photostats are dictionary definitions and the subtitles are "Art as Idea as Idea." Museums don't reproduce the entire definition as the title on a museum label for practical reasons. Still, conservation of conceptual art works

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<sup>32</sup> J. Kosuth made it when he was 20 years old.

and presentation techniques for conceptual and contemporary artwork texts in museums and galleries are still tied to the past, to traditional media, and it is important to remain aware that art is displayed for the audience and curatorship and museum conventions in some cases defeat the intention of the piece, thus denying the piece itself. As the Uruguayan artist Luis Camnitzer points out: “A museum is a school: the artist learns to communicate. The public learns to make connections.”<sup>33</sup> Curators and art spaces still have a lot to learn about artists’ intentions and audience responses.

Coda: Perhaps Duchamp's urinal has been shown on a pedestal encased in glass case to avoid more than one attempt by conceptual artists to urinate in the piece.

### **Just What Is It That Makes Today’s Homes So Different, So Appealing?**

Miguel Angel Rojas (Girardot, Colombia, 1946) takes the title of Richard Hamilton's collage and contaminates it with different meanings. Joseph Kosuth defines art by its special ability to provide information on the nature of art<sup>34</sup>, denying object and materiality. Contemporary artists such as Miguel Ángel Rojas, in his most recent work, alter the meaning of the text through the use of materials. Hamilton's title sounds like an advertisement for an appliance. The piece speaks of the 1950s consumer society. Rojas prints the title on the wall using dot pattern typography, an appropriation, and a ready-made title taken from one of the first pop art works to come out of the UK. As one approaches the work, it becomes clear that each dot has been cut from the leaf of a plant. The museum label provides a deeper understanding: the leaf in question is from a coca bush.

The procedures used in this work summarize the ideas presented so far:

- A ready-made title taken from a recognized work of art.
- Appropriation of Hamilton’s identity; taking the title of his work somehow appropriates his identity and his signature, which does not exist in the original work, but the reference to this piece of art is evident.
- Could this text be translated? This is not an original artwork. The work is recreated every time it is exhibited. However, using an English title is also a comment on the Hamilton piece and, therefore, a comment on Anglo culture.
- The museum label is a necessary resource. Without the information about the material (coca leaves) the artist’s intended connection between Colombia as a producer of coca leaves and cocaine and the consumer societies in developed countries like England or America would not be successful.
- The museum label is still a resource that ties the work to traditional art such as painting or sculpture. It is somewhat strange to see tiny dots of coca leaves on the wall creating a text with a rigid museum label next to it bearing a translation

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<sup>33</sup> The piece “A museum is a school: the artist learns to communicate. The public learn to make connections.” was shown on the facade of the *Museo del Barrio* in New York in 2011 as part of Luis Camnitzer’s solo show.

<sup>34</sup> Kosuth, Joseph. “Art After Philosophy and After”, MIT, 1991

of the same text.

The day will come when the written text in museums disappears and all information will be received as MMS via mobile phones.<sup>35</sup>

## **2 CIRCA 1954**

### **Descriptive Label: Circa 1954** (Illustrations 9, 10)

Description: This sculpture is part of an installation that includes information about the history of the piece. According to a fictional *New York Times* clipping displayed in the installation, the piece -- identical to the entrance of the Whitney Museum in New York -- was designed before the museum by Colombian artist and architect Lucio Celis.

Year: 2010. The project has been exhibited twice; first at Stony Brook University's Lawrence Alloway Gallery in 2010 and then at the *Fondo Nacional de las Artes in Buenos Aires, Argentina*, also in 2010.

Dimensions vary; sculpture dimensions: 15 x 27 x 10 inches; photograph dimensions: 7 x 5 inches

Technique and elements used in the piece: Model made out of laminated Homasote and blue chalk; ink on rice paper drawing, b/w photographs, facsimile press clipping from the *New York Times*, drafting table, overhead projector, video projector

Installation and staging: The installation changes depending on the venue. The first version at Stony Brook University's Lawrence Alloway Gallery in 2010 included the sculpture, photographs of Lucio Celis and the newspaper clipping. The second installation at the *Fondo Nacional de las Artes* in Buenos Aires, Argentina included the same elements used at Stony Brook and a variation on the newspaper article, which mentioned *Curutchet House* built by Le Corbusier in 1954 in La Plata, Argentina. It also included an overhead projection of the translated newspaper clipping and a video used previously in the 2011 version of *Sleep Is Just a Bad Habit*: a stop motion animation of Lucio Celis' round glasses' and their shadow. The round frame glasses are a cliché associated with modern architects such as Le Corbusier, Philip Johnson and Ming Pei who wore them and helped them become a modern symbol. The shadow seems to be another object moving randomly and erratically around the glasses. The white and blue negatives resemble the blueprints used by architects and engineers before the spread of digital reproduction techniques.

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<sup>35</sup> Multimedia Messaging Service, or MMS, is a standard way to send messages, including multimedia content. to and from mobile phones. (from Wikipedia)

Sources: The main source for this project is the architecture of the Whitney Museum of New York projected by Marcel Breuer in 1966. The article was written for the installation.

### **Extended Label: Text Signature and Authorship in *Circa 1954* and Other Works**

The first idea for the project was to incorporate fragments from buildings and tell fictional stories about them, exploring the use of text and its relation to the work of art. The first version of the piece was a blue sculpture and a museum label projected on the wall. The museum label contained information about the piece, its author, the year it was made, the technique used, and even its owner and the price paid to insure it. I was particularly interested in disappearing as an author, naming Lucio Celis as author of the piece. This version was shown during the final MFA presentation at Stony Brook University in the fall of 2009. For the second version I wrote a newspaper article (included in the following section of this chapter), which takes the story further. I included photographs of myself posing as the author Lucio Celis in front of a still camera (Illustration 8). The persona mixes cliché images associated with architects: round frame glasses, cigar and bowtie. The text is both a very important and a non-essential part of the installation: it is important because the audience will not understand the story by just looking at the pieces; the article must be read in order to understand who the man in the photographs is, as well as the story of the sculpture and the play involving the concept of authorship.

The text is also meant to be ironic on different levels: First, with regard to the museology practices; I think information techniques used by museums in exhibitions have taught audiences to regard labels and texts as sometimes more relevant than the work itself. A symptom of this disequilibrium is the groups of students who write and copy labels in the exhibition instead of looking at or enjoying the artwork. In an almost ironic way, *Circa 1954* has a long text that must be read to enter into the work is itself. It is not just comment on how information is displayed and used in curatorial practices but also about authorship and over-interpretation in art. I am very interested in the way the Argentinian writer Manuel Puig plays with text within the text of his novel *El beso de la mujer araña* (1976), translated as *Kiss of the Spider Woman* in 1979<sup>36</sup>. Footnotes are used ironically in the novel as a seemingly erudite parallel text explaining the novel's context but this explanation is full of fiction and irony. The text is an experimental novel from the 70s was adapted later for stage and film. This novel gave birth to a new kind of Latin American narrative that dealt with ordinary subjects instead of the characteristic epic themes of the Latin American Boom<sup>37</sup>. One of the characters in the novel, a homosexual convict, provides his cellmate with detailed versions of the love stories from films such as *Cat People* or Nazi propaganda films while the footnotes provide a

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<sup>36</sup> Puig, Manuel, *El Beso de la Mujer Araña*. Barcelona: Editorial Seix Barral, 1991.

<sup>37</sup> Latin American Boom was a literary movement associated with authors such as Gabriel García Márquez or Carlos Fuentes.

psychoanalytical view of origins of homosexuality. This contrast between popular culture and erudite knowledge was a direct comment on the role of critics.<sup>38</sup>

I presented *Circa 1954* to the audience in the way a curator might present the Lucio Celis exhibition, instead of as an artist talking about his own work, thus reinforcing the idea of the author's death. The piece becomes a device linking different themes: text and art, Latin American art vs. mainstream art, authorship, appropriation and performance. The text on the wall, an explanation of the piece, is really a veil that questions its own existence within the exhibition.

The third version of *Circa 1954* included a projected translation of the text and the video of Celis's frame glasses. Interestingly, the third version was presented in a Latin American context: Buenos Aires, Argentina. For this exhibition I added information to the article about a commission offered Celis to produce a large-scale sculpture in La Plata, Argentina. This project linking two different contexts such as New York and a Latin American character requires some specific local Argentine context. Future versions of the project will include ads connected to the context in which the piece will appear.

### 3 TEXTS USED IN INSTALLATIONS

#### ***In Sleep Is Just a Bad Habit:***

WE'LL USE THE ORGASMOTRON. OH, THAT'S A GOOD IDEA.

I STILL THINK IT'S TOO SOON TO BRING HIM UP. WE HAVE NO CHOICE.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN, "DESTROYED"?

AND IF WE GET CAUGHT, WE WI'LL BE DESTROYED, ALONG WITH YOU.

[In woman's voice] I WOULD USE MY TITLE TO BRING PEACE TO ALL NATIONS IN THE WORLD.

MY BRAIN? THAT'S MY SECOND FAVORITE ORGAN.

I THINK WE SHOULD HAVE HAD SEX, BUT THERE WEREN'T ENOUGH PEOPLE.

*Sleeper*, Woody Allen script, 1973

#### ***TIME***

***Science: Celis Sleep***

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<sup>38</sup> A Fondo, interview with Manuel Puig, Radio Televisión Española with Manuel Puig: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1VUCTtI2nw&playnext=1&list=PL15BD62AF4E0B0207>

Monday, Oct. 11

*Sleep is just a bad habit. So said Socrates and Samuel Johnson, and so for years has thought grey-haired Lucio Celis Cepero, futuristic inventor of the Celis house (TIME, Aug. 22), the Celis car and the Celis globe. Celis Cepero made a deliberate attempt to break the sleep habit, with excellent results. Last week he announced his Celis system of sleeping. Two hours of sleep a day, he said firmly, is plenty.*

*Celis reasoned that man has a primary store of energy, quickly replenished, and a secondary reserve (second wind) that takes longer to restore. Therefore, he thought, a man should be able to cut his rest periods shorter by relaxing as soon as he has used up his primary energy. Celis trained himself to take a nap at the first sign of fatigue (ie., when his attention to his work began to wander). These intervals came about every six hours; after a half-hour's nap he was completely refreshed.*

*For two years Celis thus averaged two hours of sleep in 24. Result: "The most vigorous and alert condition I have ever enjoyed." Life-insurance doctors who examined him found him sound as a nut. Eventually he had to quit because his schedule conflicted with that of his business associates, who insisted on sleeping like other men. Now working for the Foreign Economic Administration, Celis Cepero finds his working and sleeping system out of the question. But he wishes the nation's "key thinkers" could adopt his schedule; he is convinced it would shorten the war.*

### **In Closer Than We Think:**

*Polar city*

*As Alaska joins the union, more rapid development of the vast open spaces of that new state can be expected. Experts are already studying the problems involved in creating the population centers that will be necessary for tapping the hidden-wealth of the area and building the defense outposts that may be required.*

*One possibility would be to construct arctic cities under great domes of transparent plastic or glass, where spring-like temperatures could be maintained. Such domes are already in use at the Glasgow Central Station in Scotland and at a big downtown plaza in Bogotá, Colombia.*

*How would isolated polar cities, ringed by icebergs and mountains, be supplied? Our armed forces have a solution - the dirigible. Recently, the Navy told how its blimp ZPG-2 successfully flew food and other supplies to an ice island team of scientists only 500 miles from the North Pole.*

The January 25, 1959 Chicago Tribune "Polar City of the Future", *Closer Than We Think!* Series.



## **In Circa 1954:**

### *Roots of Whitney Museum Architecture*

*On Wednesday the exhibition curated by Jose Roca entitled This Is Not America opened at the Museum of Art of the Banco de la República in Bogotá. The selection presents works of several contemporary artists from North, Central and South America that according to the curator question the meaning of being American. One of the most intriguing pieces of the exhibition is an abstract sculpture by Lucio Celis (Bogotá 1928, Rio de Janeiro 1969) signed and dated in 1954, made in pulp and blue chalk. The piece is currently owned by the renowned Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer who said that the piece was probably a model for a bigger sculpture commissioned by Dr. Pedro Curutchet in La Plata, Argentina, something that never happened. The most significant thing about the piece is that some years after its creation, in 1966, the Whitney Museum in New York opened its new headquarters with an access bridge identical to Celis' work. According to Niemeyer, Marcel Breuer, the architect of the Whitney met Celis in Casa das Canoas in Rio de Janeiro where the sculpture was on display in 1958. Breuer never recognized quoting Celis's sculpture in his own work and Celis never commented on that. Oscar Niemeyer is grateful to the curator about exposing this story to the public because he thinks that Celis deserves recognition. Jorge Roca, who participated in the Independent Study Program at the Whitney Museum, explained: "it is not about judging anyone. The piece is interesting because it reverses the preconceived idea that the culture of northern hemisphere countries is always the one that has influenced the South. That's why the piece in the exhibition dialogues with the work of Torres García, Our North is the South". The Whitney Museum has not officially commented but it is rumored they are interested in negotiating the piece for their collection.*

## **In Superbloques:**

*El Super Bloque  
Por Simón Díaz*

*Como yo vivo en Superbloque  
quizas por eso no me quieres  
eres igual a otras mujeres  
y una mas del bojote*

*Como yo vivo en Superbloque  
tu vives por el cementerio  
por eso cargas un misterio  
quieres que yo te provoque*

*Un Superbloque es lo mejor  
para poder vivir  
no vengas a decir*

*que hay algo superior  
Por que soy pana de Julián  
soy llave de Martín  
así como verás  
soy chévere de aquí*

*Por eso busca un novio de otro lote  
yo no te cambio por mi superbloque  
por eso busca un novio de otro lote  
yo no te cambio por mi superbloque*

English translation:

*The Superblock  
By Simón Díaz*

*Perhaps because I live in Superblock  
you don't love me;  
You are just like other women  
and just another among many*

*Because I live in Superblock  
you live by the cemetery;  
that's what makes you so mysterious;  
you want me to tolerate you*

*Superblock is the best  
place to live;  
Don't try to tell me  
there is anything better*

*Because I'm Julian's buddy  
I'm Martin's pal  
and as you will see  
I'm cool around here*

*So look for a boyfriend from another lot  
I'm not giving up my Superblock for you  
So look for a boyfriend from another lot  
I'm not giving up my Superblock for you.*

## Illustrations

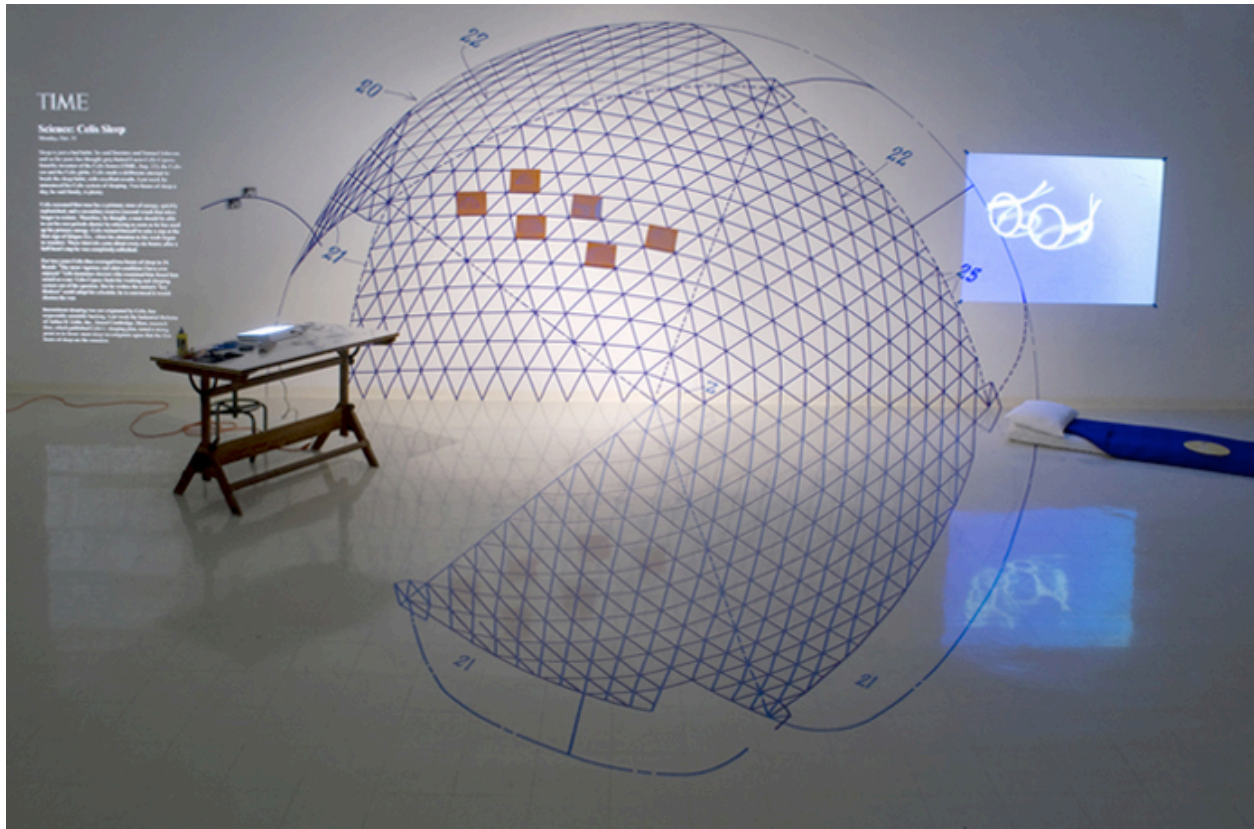


Illustration 1

*Sleep is Just a Bad Habit* / 2011

Vinyl tape, ink on mylar, projections, furniture

Variable dimensions (approx. 750 sq. ft.)

Image from Stony Brook University's Staller Center University Gallery exhibition, NY, USA



Illustration 2

*Sleep is Just a Bad Habit* / 2011

Image from the Stony Brook University Staller Center University Gallery exhibition, NY, USA

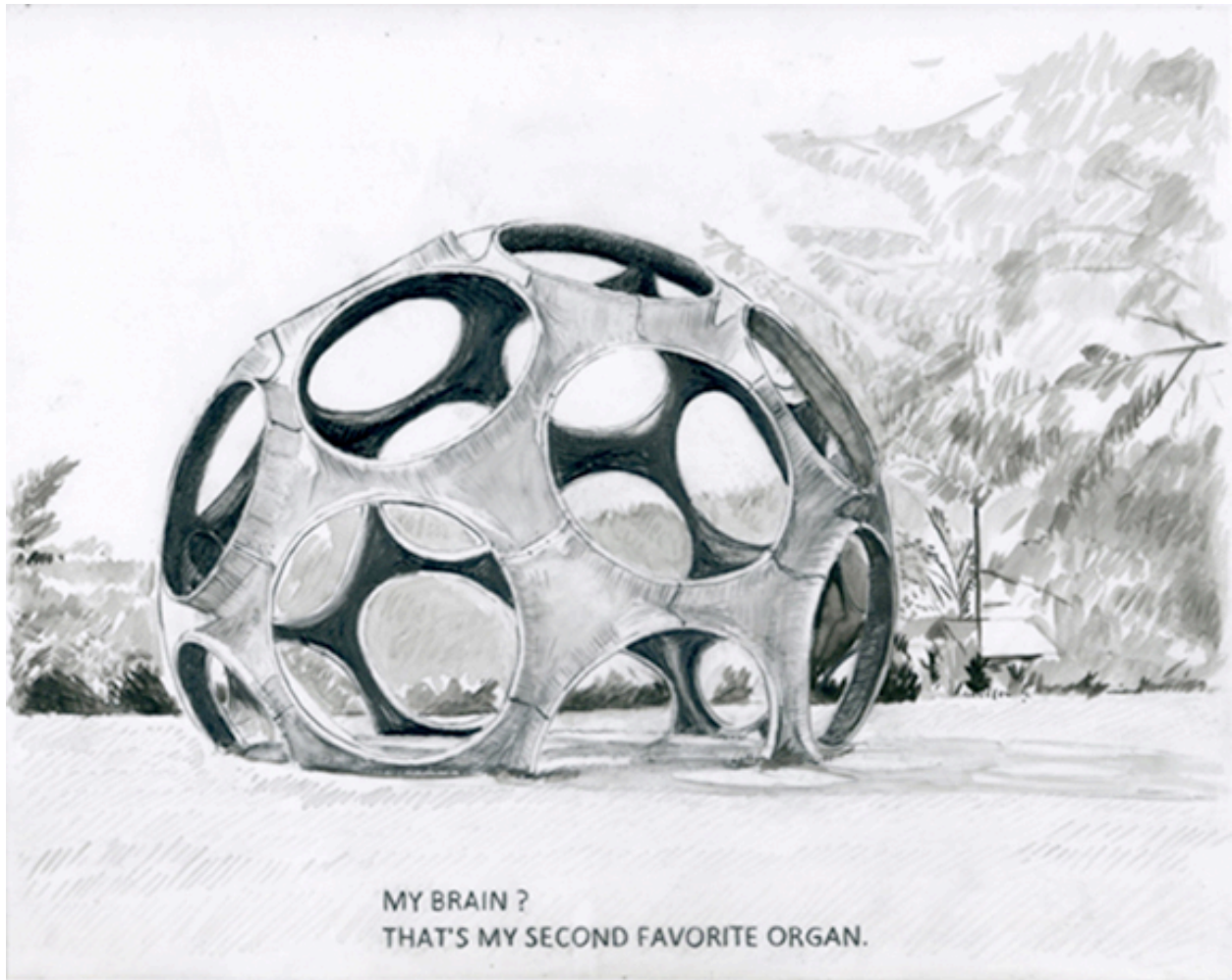


Illustration 3  
*Sleep is Just a Bad Habit* / 2011  
Ink and graphite on mylar  
8 x 10 inches



Illustration 4 (from left to right 1 to 11)  
*Closer Than We Think* / 2010  
Video projection, audio  
Variable dimensions  
5 minutes 40 seconds



Illustration 5  
*Superbloques / 2010*  
Video projection, audio  
Variable dimensions  
5 minutes 37 seconds

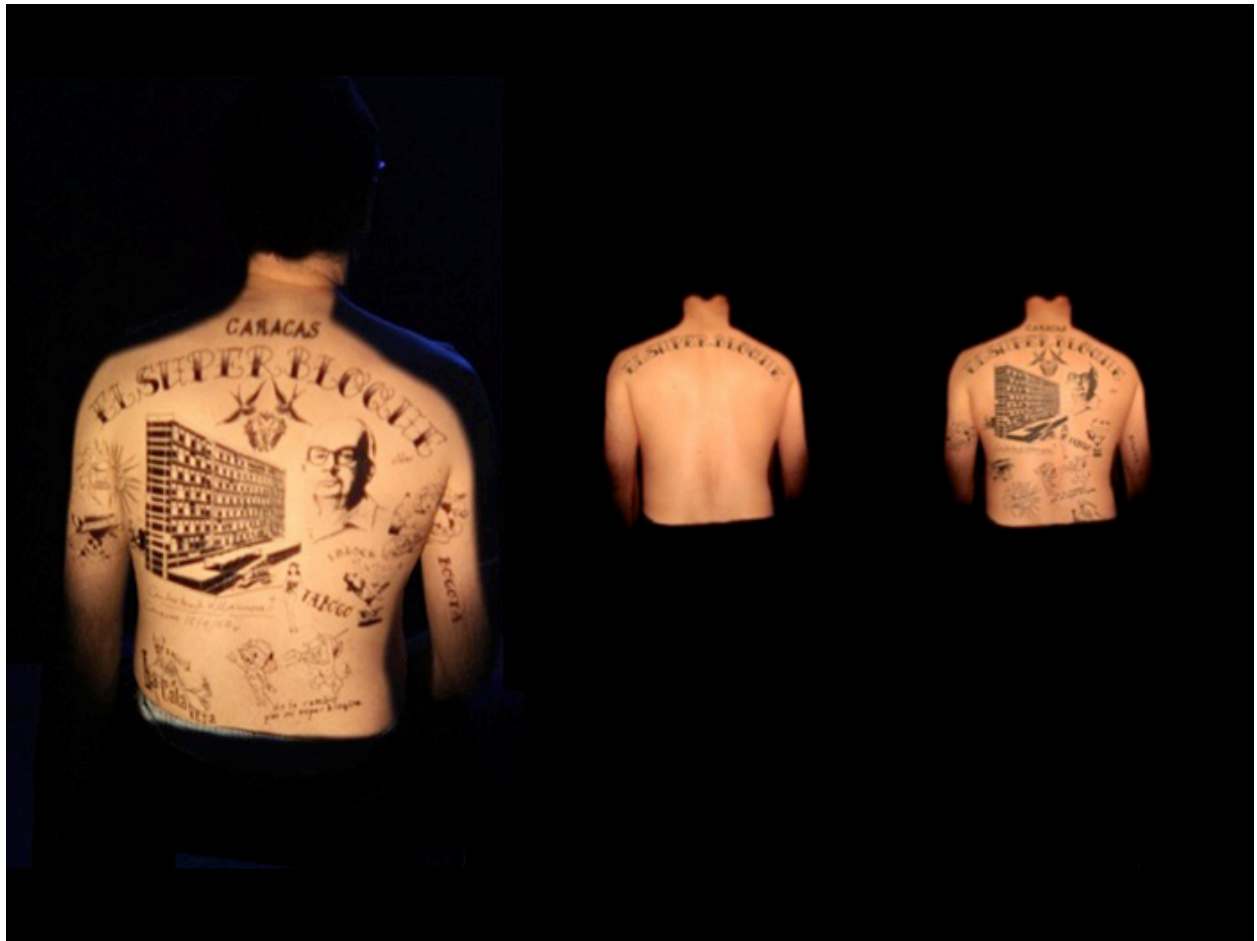


Illustration 6  
*El Superbloque* (from the series *Superbloques*) / 2010  
Performance, 35 mm. slide show, video. rum  
Approximately 6 minutes



Illustration 7  
*Caracha Negro* (from the series *Superbloques*) / 2010  
Ink and graphite on rice paper  
6.18 x 18.58 inch.





Illustration 8  
*Lucio Celis / 2009*  
Series of 12 b/w photographs  
7 x 5 inch.



Illustration 9

*Circa 1954 / 2009 - 2010*

Homasote, blue chalk, drawing, b/w photographs, documentation

Variable dimensions (15 x 27 x 10 inches) / sculpture

Image from the exhibition at Stony Brook University's Lawrence Alloway Gallery, NY, USA



Illustration 10  
*Circa 1954 / 2009 - 2010*

Image from the exhibition at *Fondo Nacional de las Artes*, Buenos Aires, Argentina

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