

REVIEWS



Mailyn Machado, *Fuera de revoluciones: dos décadas de arte en Cuba*, Leiden: Almenara, 2016, pp. 234

Jacqueline LOSS

Latin American Literary and Cultural Studies
University of Connecticut

Fuera de revoluciones: dos décadas de arte en Cuba (2016) by Mailyn Machado was recently published by Almenara Press, an innovative publishing venture founded

by Cuban writer, Waldo Pérez Cino, in 2014 in Holland. Earning an honorable mention in Casa de las Américas essay prize (Cuba) in 2015, this first book by Cuban critic and curator, Mailyn Machado, is a treasure-trove of creative theoretical musings and artistic revelations that illustrate the extent to which the realms of art, history, sociology, politics and everyday life are inseparable in the last two decades of Cuba. With an introduction and ten chapters, divided into three parts, *Fuera de revoluciones* captures readers through its combination of personal anecdote and deep understanding of a visual arts archive, implementing “Inter/personal/net”—a topic that Machado thoroughly investigates—to link together the chapters, which can also be read as separate essays, written over a ten-year period from 2000–2010.

Machado, in almost “new historical” fashion, has the gift of using the anecdote as the basis for uncovering broader contextual facts and of encountering the perfectly accurate tone to vividly render even recent history. In Chapter 6, Machado breathes new life into Eugenio Valdés Figueroa’s concept of the rumor (*Trajectories of a Rumor: Cuban Art in the Postwar Period*) that he elaborated to explore the shifts, in the aftermath of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, in the constitution of Cuban art once the institutions could no longer support it. Machado goes a step further to show how rumor or *la bola* in the *criollo* argot, was armed by the “video” wherein Cuban artists could document the everyday, saying goodbye to the formal education and its expectations, and operating in a very “real” yet mediatic mode. For instance, as exemplary of this transformation, Machado takes Jesús Hdez-Güero’s *Informes de hechos vividos* (2006–2007), a simulation of television reports of occurrences that were not covered by the local news. In this case the Cuban rumor gets to highlight the gaps in the official state apparatus. But it is not just this very literal “fake news” that Machado highlights as part of this artistic rumor. Videos such as *Buscándote Havana* (2006) by Alina Rodríguez and *Model Town*

(2007) by Laimir Fano, *Zona afectada* (2005) by Alex Hernández and Asori Soto, *Almacén* (2001) by Henry Eric Hernández and *Café con Leche* (2003) by Manuel Zayas also implement the accessibility of video cameras, DVDs, and the likes, and can more easily intervene as the visual testimony of issues and people omitted from official history.

Machado convincingly states that so involved with everyday problems and people were these videos and films that they almost abolished the line between art and life, making it difficult for consumers to be conscious that they were in fact viewing art. While Machado equates this process of the new millennium to a new de-aestheticized or aura-less art, these new contributions to Cuban art, supported by new and yet still rarified technologies on the island, could be seen as the culmination of what Julio García Espinosa back in 1969 called “imperfect cinema”. The transformation from the socialist world to the world of the Occident has meant not only the implementation of diverse technologies and experiments to populate the Cuban television and cinema, such as the pirating of U.S. American films for the Cuban theater, but also the proliferation through digital copies of Cuban films from distinct periods that had been censored, creating what Machado casts as “anachronic streaming”.

Where Machado reaches some of her most brilliant and passionate moments is in her close readings of artists such as Jorge Luis Marrero, in chapter two, and of Reynier Levya Novo, in chapter eight. Such close readings are always immersed in a very precise contextualization—a contextualization that is itself, the fruit of the artists’ works. Machado examines the process whereby Marrero turns his childhood comics into works of art through transubstantiation, making both “transubstantiation” and “intertextuality” crucial categories within the body of work she explores. Machado illustrates how Marrero re-baptizes his childhood art with its barbarous aesthetic through a sophisticated process into ironic commentaries on Cuban and world art and on Cuba’s positioning within the socialist globalization of the COMECON. The tone of Reynier Levya Novo’s inflections on history, according to Machado, is not ironic, but rather affective. His pieces rely on spectators’ reactions to history by stimulating their affects; they decontextualize and then recontextualize monumental sounds, making them new again, or providing spectators with scents to recast the monuments of history as intimate.

In *Fuera de revoluciones*’ last chapter, Machado details how multimedia pieces by Celia-Yunior sophisticatedly dialogue with the transformation of the economy instigated by Raúl Castro’s presidency and even return to familiar trajec-

REVIEWS

stories of the early part of the revolution to shed light on how the urban space has been affected by state decrees over five decades. Moreover, the book, as a whole, delineates what happens once the institutions retreat to art and artist who even through the 1980s relied on them. In their absence, Machado suggests that artists take on new roles—from archivist to curator, critic, “pirate” and even gallerist, some of which they learned from the socialist world that schooled many of them. In so doing, Machado observes, they affect not just the new post-Fidel economies, but likely the nation’s political structures.