

One, Two, Three, Testing Possible (Hi)stories

We who are necessarily obliged by borders of water to adopt a teleology.
José Lezama Lima

Every islander is an island within another island.
Ventura Doreste

All islands represent an eternal copulation between the earth and the ocean—terms which are respectively feminine and masculine in Castilian. The corporeal island welcomes the phallic urge of the sea in its eternal cycle of penetration and withdrawal, leaving behind the possessed soil as it draws back. Cuba is one of those islands which embodies this infinite possession. From its land, fecundated by the sea, emerged cities bearing traces of their progenitors. Its bay—the uterus of the island—marked out the emplacement of the capital city. The buildings, stripped naked by saltpetre and the profusion of colonial wavy eaves roofs and ironwork arabesques, are woven together into the mirage that salty waves produce on terra firma through daily conquest of the city. It was precisely during the 17th century that the *Castillo de los Tres Reyes Magos del Morro* and the *Castillo de San Salvador de la Punta*, the military enclaves that guarded the two extremes of the Bay's entrance, were joined up with a copper chain meant to prevent access to attacking parties. We could say that the port wore a "chastity belt" as protection from maritime intruders.

The first of these fortresses housed—as part of the 7th Havana Biennial (2000)—the work entitled *One, two, three, testing*, by a social intervention and project art group known as DUPP Gallery (*Galería DUPP*).¹ This piece, which consisted of a set of large steel microphones placed at the fortress' edge, offered—among its multiple perspectives—an approach to the conflict of communication in relation to the insular condition. Its location, a borderline in more than one sense—geographical, cultural, linguistic among others—created a paradoxical image in that the microphones, an

¹ DUPP Gallery was founded in 1989 with the name From a Pedagogical Pragmatics (*Desde una Pragmática Pedagógica*) and it consists of an unconventional art teaching programme designed and taught by the artist René Francisco at the Higher Institute of Art (ISA). DUPP Gallery does not have a specific headquarters. It is more of a street university that aims "to play an active role in Cuban society and Cuban art" through socio-artistic interventions and performances that are thought out collectively and seek to incite reflection and dialogue. It trains "topic hunters" and explorers of contexts with a view to achieving deeper understanding of the self and its surrounding circumstances. DUPP Gallery is also integrated by Alexander Guerra, Inti Hernández, Iván Capote, Juan Rivero, Yoan Capote, Duvier del Dago, Beverly Mojena, David Sardiñas, Omar Moreno, Wilfredo Prieto, James Bonachea, Ruslán Torres, Mayimbe, Glenda León, among others.

incitation to converse with the ocean, were inserted into a fortress, monologuing preservation of the land. Moreover, these microphones are totemic images of a phallic nature replicating the ocean's founding role. However, this phallic symbolism bears not only a seductive nuance, but also an authoritarian one. The microphone symbolizes imposition: the amplification of one voice above all others. An authority reinforced by the fortress itself, the unassailable podium that preserves it. But at the same time, by presenting the microphones as just another dysfunctional rusty décor, like the cannons or the embrasures, they are turned into a symbol of silence. Hence the true power of the piece: infinite silence multiplied by the sea. The silence of time, which makes us feel the weight of history. And emerging from the silence, the utopia of an impossible, aborted communication; or if any, of a self-reflecting communication that bounces off the oceanic immensity. The sea is but the space in which time leaves its sediment; that same time which used to be measured in the period when the Morro was built by means of sand clocks, in a way, ocean-made time.

Every night at nine o'clock the bay performs its self-evidence ritual.² The cannon's boom announces the closing of the imaginary wall. A wall that surrounds a city we do not see, whose inhabitants are trapped in the inescapable circumstances of time. Some of them also try to proclaim their self-evidence and wander over to the microphones of DUPP Gallery tirelessly repeating: "one, two, three; one, two, three; one, two, three ... testing."

² During the colonial period, a salvo was fired from a piece of ordnance at the Morro fortress in Havana Bay every night at nine o'clock, announcing the closing of the city walls' nine gates. The city then enclosed itself within new limits. The custom of the "Nine O' clock salvo" has survived to the present day.