
Imagen y grafía: Una lectura de los documentales «Donde» y «La ciudad perdida» de Eduardo Lalo

Image and script: A reading of the documentaries «Donde» and the «Ciudad perdida» by Eduardo Lalo

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RESUMEN

Este ensayo es un análisis de *Donde* y *La ciudad perdida* dos videometrajes del escritor puertorriqueño Eduardo Lalo (1960) y el tema de la ciudad-global, o más bien de las ciudades globales que habitan el archipiélago «Puerto Rico». Mientras *Donde* mantiene un carácter autobiográfico y más personal, en el que se le da un vistazo a la experiencia cíclica e imposible del regreso, en *La ciudad perdida* Lalo produce un homenaje a los diversos espacios de la ciudad de San Juan. El «videometraje», un término acuñado por Lalo, revela de cierta forma un modo complejo de mirar. En ambas producciones, el exilio del escritor, el «insilio» de la práctica literaria y creativa y la condición de la ruina del presente global, unen las distintas geografías íntimas y ciudadinas del espacio.

Palabras clave: Caribe, ciudad, globalización, Lalo, videometraje.

ABSTRACT

This essay is an analysis of two video productions by Puerto Rican writer Eduardo Lalo (1960), *Donde* and *La ciudad perdida* and how they represent the global city or global cities of the Puerto Rican archipelago. If in *Donde* there is an autobiographical element, where we look at the impossibilities of return, in *La ciudad perdida* Lalo honors the diverse cityscapes of San Juan. *Videometraje* a term coined by Lalo reveals a complex way of looking. In both productions, the writer's exile, the «insilio» (internal exile) come together with the ruins of the global present to write in a creative fashion, diverse and intimate geographies of the cityscape.

Keywords: Caribbean, city, globalization, Lalo, videoproductions.

Pa/ís Sí/ pa	Coun/try Yes/Pa
Anagrama del desorden de las banderas plurales	The anagram of chaos of myriad flags
Al no saber mentar el padre	When we can't mention the father
Al presente ausente	The present absentee
A la ausencia quedada	The prevailing absence
Hacemos grandes histerizaciones	We become hysterical
De los puestos fulguración de fanatismos de madre	A flash into a mother's hysteria

Eduardo Lalo, *Necrópolis* (2014)

I propose to call this term of measurement the sentence-image. By this I understand something different from the combination of a verbal sequence and a visual form. The power of the sentence-image can be expressed in sentences from a novel... [...] or the relationship of the said and the unsaid in a photograph. The sentence is not the sayable and the image is not the visible
[.]

—*Jacques Ranciere, The Future of the Image.*

De-recognition which gives a glimpse into intra-subjective relationships in a modern world.

Eduardo Lalo's literary and visual work is based on the disagreement between looks and graphics whereby the sentence-image multiplies textualities as material waste. In Lalo's work, we do not see the visual only in his use of photography or video, as he so qualifies it. In his essayistic and literary work, the voice of that hyperconscious "self" that analyzes each instant until it is reduced to the minimum, or to the final erasure of the initial gesture, is organized from an obsessive and insistent approach.

Examples abound: the eyes of a wanderer in "*El Burger King de la Calle San Francisco*" (1986); the eye that obsesses observing an order of French fries in Paris and another similar order in Plaza Escorial in Puerto Rico, in "*La inutilidad*", (2004); the streets and smells of Venice and Río Piedras in "*Los países invisibles*" (2008). We are all the other and at the same time the self that complains and feels excluded in Lalo's work. Lalo constructs a hyperconscious and self-centered voice that alludes to the angst of the existentialist narrator but with an uncommon sense of empathy that does not fit the existentialist narrator. Lalo's self is disturbing in its hyperconsciousness and hypersensitivity. Lalo's narrators are constructed as hypersensitive and rational, and they translate the temporal virtue of the existentialist philosopher's "*Thanatos*", born to die, by seeing in bodily sacrifice a way to enter another temporality that articulates a kind of transcendence. In this type of existentialism in a Caribbean key, however, there is no separation between matter, body, and spirit. The body/object is recognized in its quality of "invisible", "object" or "thing" and it is from this objectification that it sets out to construct itself as a literary or creative subject. At the same time, his work builds a suspension between the visible and the invisible. In the words of *Aurea M. Sotomayor*: "Thus, thinking about Lalo and his relationship with the invisible, we could

conclude that it is not the visible that is sought, but the tension generated by the movement that sustains it".²

Eduardo Lalo was born in Cuba in 1960 and grew up in Puerto Rico, where he currently lives and teaches literature courses at the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras. He is a photographer, painter, writer of essays, poems, and narrative. His varied essayistic, poetic, and narrative work crosses several genres, and he has experimented with photo-montage, visual image, and words. By the time he receives the *Rómulo Gallegos* prize for narrative for his novel *Simone* (2016), Lalo has already been producing pictorial, essayistic and photographic work for several decades, mostly in Puerto Rico - where he explores themes such as migration, (European) exile, loneliness, creation, the invisibility of the Caribbean writer, the city and urban ruin, among the most important. His essay, "*Los países invisibles*" received the Ciudad Valencia Juan Gil-Albert Award (2006); and many of his texts such as "*El deseo del lápiz*" (2010); "*Donde*" (2005) or "*Los pies de San Juan*" (2002) are photographic essays that combine visual image and textuality; and in which he rehearses the avant-garde trope of the body in the San Juan city and its temporal crossings. His most recent novel, "*Historia de Yuké*" (Argentina: Corregidor, 2018), starts from the Taino name of the highest mountain in Puerto Rico, "*El Yunque*", where he creates an analysis of the conquest and colonization of the Caribbean where diverse historical times intersect. Lalo is also the author of an extensive photographic work that has been exhibited all over Puerto Rico and recently at the University of Texas at Austin, and of two video films, which are the focus of the analysis of this essay.

To understand the role of this visual imaginary, we must briefly summarize some aspects of his work at the temporal and theme level. For example, in the suspended Where in

Lalo's work, through which it seems that time does not pass, his narrators exercise constant functions, some write, others read, or walk, travel, stay or leave. Lack and ruin are repeated, they remain as necessary places for the becoming of the body. For example, its protagonists do not buy books for a month and a half or eat little, thus translating a material poverty. The guilt for existing or for the weight of the existential condition, accompanies its protagonists. However, and in the face of the hedonistic posture of the consumer society and neoliberal individualism, Lalo's "narrator-self" is obsessed with not belonging, portraying, for his part, an exercise of discipline or constant asceticism, in which the time of observation or creation (writing, the gaze) is the only thing that offers a sense of permanence. I read these "I's" in Lalo as rituals of a mystical exercise in relation to writing and to the "accessible" or popular image. His "I's" play with phenomenology in relation to the other, but rather encourage the romantic flaneur self and distanced from the crowd in the contemporary global village whether in Puerto Rico or in Europe. In that sense, such distances or perspectivism rationalized to the extreme is the way to access the image and the visible. In the words of *Maurice Merleau-Ponty*

: «The thing itself, we have seen, is always for me the thing I see. The intervention of the other does not re- solve the internal paradox of my perception: it adds to it other enigma: of the propagation of my own inner life in another [...] The communication makes us the witness of one sole world, as the synergy of our eyes suspends them on one unique thing. But in both cases, the certitude, entirely irresistible as it may be, remains obscure; we can live it, we can neither think it nor formulate it, not set it up in theses. Every attempt at elucidation brings us back to the dilemmas».

Lalo's writing is organized, therefore, in the dilemmas created by this gaze. The gaze organizes the body in another way since it situates it only from the object and its space. The

beggar with the open wound in the Burger King, presents that same wound, a wound that is inscribed in the asphalt and the corner of the street where he stands every day to beg for money, the prisoner who is no longer a body but a remnant, or what he left in a trace or drawing in *El deseo del lápiz* (*The Desire of the Pencil). It is significant that, in these scenes, it is the wall, the wall, the corner, what is proposed as topography where the body ends, and the writing of meaning begins. It would seem then that what interests him, more than the body, or the wound itself, are the impressions or the traces left by that body when it is no longer there, when it has moved to another wall, or to another corner. In this sense, we are facing a visual and graphic experience that seeks to undo the human, the body, and remake it as an impression, graphic or artifact (post-human, illumination, object). Making matter alive, while blurring the human, produces a kind of "acting" affection in which, as Bruno Latour points out, the human or non-human is simply an effect that alters the condition of the event (Jane Bennet, viii). By giving life to the artifact over the human, Lalo seeks a vitality in the objects, and highlights the impossibility of the human connection, which only reveals itself, or rather, "lets itself be known" when it appears out of the corner of his eye, almost without looking at the camera which observes it.

The narrative of his first essays, in particular texts such as "*Donde*" (Where) (2005); "*Los pies de San Juan*" (The feet of San Juan) (2005), and his most recent, "*El deseo del lápiz*" (The pencil's desire) (2010) and his collection of poems "*Necrópolis*" (2014), are based on the Benjaminian imaginary of the collage text by including narrative, photography, pencil painting", and graphic signs. The wanderer, carrying his notebook and his photographic or video camera, is in many ways the figure that defines the gaze-image and its gesture -open, curious, biting, cutting, tangential or indirect- and follows the writing or meditation of this

subjective condition.

What insists, therefore, in Eduardo Lalo's visual and graphic work, is an effect-image of the condition of the same and of the Other, an Other-consciousness that insists on its "image" but at the same time plays with its condition of invisibility: in other words, it seeks the sameness of the invisible condition and the paradoxes that visibility represents. The question that lies behind these misunderstandings between body, graphics and image is: how are bodies conceived and if bodies are image and "a post-humanity"? How to enter that immense "black hole" that is the image in Lalo's work? Can the image and its debris be a place to understand its diverse textualities? Lalo, uncomfortable, and as *Guillermo Rebollo-Gil* points out in a recent essay, avoids entering other experiences or encountering other conditions or creations of "the Puerto Rican", such as that of the Puerto Ricans of the Diaspora.

His literature and analysis maintains a very insular effect and affect, and I believe it returns in some ways to the literary obsessions of *Antonio S. Pedreira*.³ *Pedreira*, the author of "*Insularismo*" (*Insular condition) (1929), the most important canonical essay in Puerto Rican literature, defined Puerto Rico and its literature from its insular, colonized and dependent condition, pointing out that the only way in which Puerto Rican culture could "become visible" would be to transgress its colonial "symptom", or its diseased corporeality to consolidate an adult and independent state. I believe that Lalo returns to *Pedreira*'s essayistic literature of the symptom to understand the historical and present "symptom" of contemporary cities, and more recently of Puerto Rico in dialogue with other countries of the Caribbean islands.⁴

This essay is an analysis of Lalo's video films and the theme of the global-city, or rather of the global cities that inhabit the archipelago "Puerto Rico" and that in Lalo's documentaries

appear as fragmented islands, which are united by means of the image. While "*Donde*" maintains an autobiographical and more personal character, in which a glimpse is taken of the cyclical and impossible experience of return, in "*La ciudad perdida*" (*The Lost City), Lalo produces a tribute to the diverse spaces of the city of San Juan. The "video-film", a term coined by Lalo, reveals in a certain way a complex way of looking. As productions they can be seen in their character of **installation**, since both video-films maintain a quality of video-installation or video-art.

In both productions, the writer's exile, the "insile" of the literary and creative practice and the condition of the ruin of the global present, unite the different geographies -intimate and city-of space. If in "*Donde el regreso del exilio*" (*The return from exile) it seems to unite the different fragments that organize the temporal graph of the image and that in some way seeks to anchor a body suspended between here and there, in a gaze that fixes it, in "*La ciudad perdida*" (*The Lost City) the theme is the foundational ruin, the impossibility of "founding" in the case of the history of Puerto Rico, and in many ways how this historical sign manifests itself in the present of the global city. This is how we see that Lalo's work, particularly his visual work, is an allegory of life as an (im)possible transaction and the debt owed to the temporality and spectrality of the human condition. This spectrality has to do with history, in this case, the place Puerto Rico has had, first, as a colony of two empires, and second, as a nation that has been denied a sense of presence, in the political sense of nation-state.

Lalo's written and visual work is based on this double negation that in a certain way gives Puerto Rico an "invisible" and at the same time "exemplary" or inaugural place, if preferred, in the critique of neoliberal globalization. While it is true, as Negri points out, that "capital produces a spectrality that corresponds with common experiences: there is no longer an outside, neither

a nostalgic one or a mythic one, nor an urgency for reason to disengage us from the spectrality of the real" (9); Puerto Rico, as a country that inaugurates and is discarded by capital in its condition of economic dependence on the United States, offers a lesson that helps us to understand that which still weighs or that passes for its lightness, an object of use that is jettisoned, the affections that are no longer there or that are transformed and that become part of that transience.

The specter, the phantom, insists, haunts, bothers, haunts, inhabits and disinhabits bodies, spaces and at the same time produces traces. Lalo makes of the one who stays, a walker-observer, obsessed, obsessed, haunted body, and evening demonstrations, through which intentions, causes and languages cross. Hence, returning to the self is always, in his literature and visual media, an aesthetic (ascetic) exercise of deep excision. This is fully noticed in several images that are repeated in the videos and which allude to metaphors of time and the wanderer: clocks, corners, streets with cracks, eyes that no longer look.

The one who stays, or the one who is "left behind" is, as *Francisco Javier Avilés* points out, "the one who knows that leaving is impossible, that the corner he touches holds a fraction of power from where he can question that distant Other, and why not, question the limits of his power with the precarious instrument of the word" (882). In the archeological search for that word, the image has a preponderant place, since it is the eye that organizes the places from which one looks, in order to identify, reject, cross out or figure the gazes. In the words of María Zambrano, "the exile is the object of the gaze before knowledge". (*Los bienaventurados*, 33) (*The blessed).

In a certain way, the return to this first-person narrator seeks to be a type of mediation in which the themes he summons up enter literature and artistic creation, image and montage, or the

exchange of other subjects, peripheral or not, with his experience. Other ethnic subjects, Dominicans, Chinese-Puerto Ricans, are part of her recent narrative, specifically, in his novel *Simone* (2012); and although they offer differentiated subjectivities - in this case, the protagonist is Chinese Puerto Rican and lesbian - these are played as in the case of *Simone*, almost as convex mirrors of the protagonist organizing a type of novel of "thesis" if you will, where the essay continues to be the model that defines the narrative. In other words, *Simone's* outsiders as personage are only revealed through the protagonist and not through the character himself, the protagonist seeks a connection, which is only possible in *Simone's* mystery or intelligibility.

The female erotic secret, as in fin-de-siècle modernist literature, becomes the axis of the sensual and sexual will, and at the same time the climactic revelation that closes the novel.

Juan Duchesne points out that Lalo's work "does not entertain much nor does it accommodate but is, by definition, a reading experience, which is by definition negating, it denies the previous experience" (1288); it could be affirmed that what insists in Lalo's work together with the letter is the image. An image, which contrary to what would seem to be the case, offers a type of material scope to the letter. This scope, transposed with temporality, not only repeats itself in cycles between spaces and cities, but also presents a fleeting materiality that is installed or dismantled at the whim of the creator. The sameness of these images reproduces the feeling of tiredness and repetition of his texts. Lalo's literary work and images make of this practice, that of repetition, a way of understanding the dynamics of the contemporary global world. Lalo's work is not light, it is very complex, since in a certain way it is a work anchored in the global present. What seems to be so obvious, visible, or material is, in Eduardo Lalo's photographic and media work, a bet with a

type of image that does not seek to fix an identity, educational or moral moment, but a fleeting gesture.

What is left when the image is, all and at the same time, all, or none? When the gestural sense escapes? From where can one read the experience of one's own if every image/experience is intersubjective and universal? If the experience of looking is, repeating itself in an infinite cycle, where do we see the "where" of the singular? Lalo organizes the city and its coordinates based on experience, that of the physical, material, and subjective survival of the writer or artist and the ways in which the body and the voice are "installed" in urban scenarios in the present. Reading the body, the letter, the stroke, and the graph as installation recreates the itinerant, collage, and at the same time dismountable condition of his work, which does not allude to the fact that the meaning of the texts created are texts that do not reflect a profound existential struggle. Just as in collage aesthetics, Lalo's texts cut out, annul, and create new objects that seem to merge into the canvas or the installation. However, Lalo does not seek a kind of ontology or mythical space in the creation of these new objects. It is almost as if the gaze as a function of the intertextualities that are exhibited cut out, erase, or annul the originality of the object-text.

Lalo starts from a post-avant-garde and art-object aesthetics that makes of scraps. The fleeting gesture of the image coexists, however, with a clear and functional vision of the created object and its function. To install speaks to us of "to place a thing in the place and in the form so that it fulfills a specific function", "to put something at the service of something" or "to put someone in the service of something" or "to put someone in a place so that they live or is in it". (Maria Moliner's Dictionary, 72).

In a certain way, all these concepts, object, function and shelter, in the sense of home or place, cross Lalo's work, by portraying a decentered present and the physical, subjective and mental melancholy that this creates. In this sense, it can be stated that the questions to understand the existential weight of his work, especially of his visual work, would be: Can that which is itinerant be "installed"? Would that which can be "dismantled" have weight (image) by the very lightness of its condition? If there has never been neither textuality nor a visuality that fixes us, how can we look? And from which suspended spaces do we look towards/from the other?

II. Image & Photography

Photography is the visual medium through which the author connects directly with the objects and subjects he wants to represent. In other words, photography will inaugurate the entrance to the documentary in Lalo's work, and the communication with the written word or the spelling. The search for this relationship between the image and the letter goes from *Los pies de San Juan* (2005), a text that contains images and photographs alike, making the foot and the cobblestone its symbolic structure (Image 1).

To the experimental work seen in *El deseo del lápiz* (2010), where the written walls of the prison overflow into alternate corporality that end up annulling the writing itself. (Image 2).

The *Barthean* notion of punctum as that emotional center that organizes the interpretations of the image takes on a playful and fleeting sense in Lalo's photography that does not necessarily seek an interpretation that anchors the on-logical or visions of local "identity", but evokes the pluriverse of the Puerto Rican condition, its sameness with the processes of contemporary neoliberal globalization.

However, the formula for moving from photomicrography to videomaking is not simply anchored in the need for mobility granted by the camera, or the narrative added to the text. If

photography in Lalo reproduces a mobile image, we see how this image is immobilized in the documentary. Lalo plays with the visual media, offering to the video-film the sensation of fixity, and to photography the sensation of mobility. This is how the "mythologies" of the visual text are deconstructed and interpenetrated in his work. Technology then becomes a medium, which does not necessarily stand out for its open experimentation or excessive camera changes but is used as means to promote an intimate and subjective gaze.

In his essay, "Where you see a landscape in the distance with a cloudy sky". The photo is a view of a busy avenue with cars, commercial establishments, and publicity billboards. The photo lets us see that the cars are in motion. That movement together with the most striking photo, an advertisement for "Nesol Language Institute" where a woman's face that looks like something out of a B horror film from the 50's, screams in fear at the question, "FEAR ENGLISH?" (Image 3).

The ad is striking for its originality and because the advertising poster -a frightened female face- refers to the horror films of the 1950s, a key moment in the history of Munoz's developmentalism. This is how the lens picks up the intertextualities of horror in relation to urban space in the past and present. The immobility of the screaming woman's face is, in a certain way, a mobile and complex referent. In another photograph, a woman walks down a street where two headless and faceless mannequins model tight pants (Image 4).

The upper part of the mannequin is covered by several beach towels made for tourists with various caricatures - a boy with the Puerto Rican flag in his hand, and several drawings of black children/young people, one resting on the beach and another whose feet are only visible. The images are caricatured and overstated, particularly that of the black youth's face and

feet, given their size and dimensions. A towel rests on the mannequin on the right, creating the illusion of movement and carelessness, and at the same time, a mobile waist or "body" adornment on the mannequin.

This mobility of the photographic image contrasts with a scene in the video film "Donde" wherein the confinement of the interiors of the house presents an image in sepia, or in sepia and purple hues that contrast with the black and white photography. The space, the look, and the intertextual crossing, makes of the urban spaces, or if you will of the "where" that represents them, a game with the fatality of places and spaces. In the words of Juan Duchesne Winter:

"The profound questioning strangeness of the place that never ceases to be an ambiguous adverb written in small letters, derives from the very drift to which Lalo's writing subjects the psychogeographic experience. It is a radically passive drift, which travels tracing its signs without pretending to respond to the received cultural sense, nor to that axiomatic of the system that renders invisible the debris, the remains, what is left of the place. It is a drift that allows itself to be questioned by every trace or hieroglyph that, in the end, exposes the place to its intimate transit through time"



Image 1

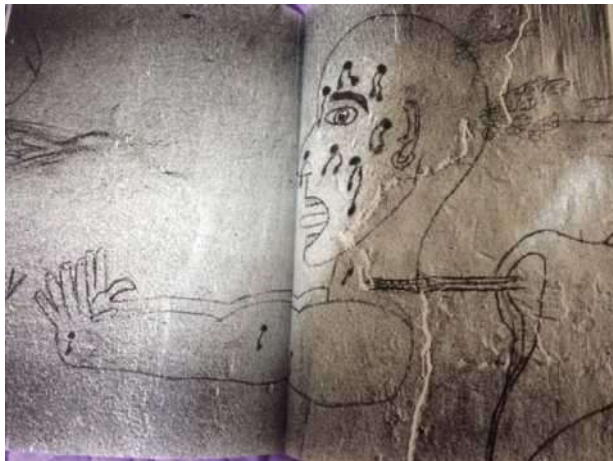


Image 2



Imagen 3



Image 4

The city and its coordinates are revealed from a reading of signs and traces that coexist in states of continuous suspension, and in contrast with the urbanization house. Irma Vélez, who has analyzed Lalo's video films and photographic work, points out two important moments in the use of space and the gaze:

- the construction of the geography of a photographic and textual non-place, showing the way in which Lalo plays with photographic inter-doses [...] and proposes a generic transgression of the traditional forms of cultural representation.

- The panoptic gaze given to Puerto Rico and its mirror effect on the elaboration of a poetics of reading/writing closely linked to the conception of the Caribbean, and Puerto Rico in particular, as a literary non-place.

Lalo wishes to break with the paradisiacal, hotel

Imagen 5

Imagen 6

and anthropological image of the tropics (historical and neoliberal) by filming the "non-place". About this image that is sold, he points out:

"Who do these images represent? Are they something more than the construction of a landscape that becomes a spectacle? An invented *mise-en-scène*, which rather than giving the most accurate image of what is real, as photography is supposed to do, shows the crude image of what is lost, of a dream. *"El Sueño del Trópico"* (*in English: The Dream of the Tropic: beaches, forests, fruits, poor but smiling children"). (*Dónde*, 54)

By proposing, therefore, a "no room" of the image, and constructing it through the pathos of the traveler, Lalo produces intimate video films, where "being" is a condition. In both films, the aesthetics of discarding and/or reusing the object and its transformations through the gaze abound. Transformation is a cyclical impermanence, not a progressive one, it does not occur as a forward movement, but towards the inside.

The video shorts "Dónde" (2003; 25 mins.) and "*La ciudad Perdida*" (*The Lost City) (2005, 40 mins.) are dedicated, like many of Lalo's literary works, to the materiality, space, and condition of the urban flâneur in modern-day Puerto Rico (*Santurce, Río Piedras*, the islet of San Juan). They present a series of themes that unite them; that of San Juan as a city that represents the ruin of global capital, the photographic and visual vision of the *flâneur* or the wanderer, the impermanence, and the inhabiting of the city, specifically after returning from a long exile. The wanderer already lives in a particular "exile" and it is only from this "exile" that he can read the messages, the signs of the city's graphics. The city is not inhabited, or is inhabited in changing ways, but nevertheless has its own sonority, which in the short films is accompanied by the melancholic sound of an Andean flute. Lalo creates and produces the text, the graphics, the music of his videos. In this way,

the image and in both short films he organizes, with his feet and walking, the temporality and the text of the city itself. The visual and graphic text in a certain way, reveals, "the foot that is his foot, and at the same time is "other" (Los pies de San Juan) a part of the foot, which is "a piece of country" or in this case, his experience of country.

III. Short Films: The inner cities

Eduardo Lalo organizes his "short films" as personal projects. "Dónde" (PR, 2003, 25 mins.) and *La ciudad perdida* (PR, 2005, 40 mins.), the former is perhaps his most intimate project, as it is dedicated to his mother, and to the theme of the impossibility of return. "Dónde" is an opening of the writing to the symbol, the symbol that does not "represent" a moment of escape from the prison of meaning and sense to another place, more intimate or intra-subjective. In a technical way, it offers itself more in the model of "installation" that I described before, and constructs in a series of photographs and moving scenes, a sensation of three-dimensional diorama, of the world of daily life and the city. The voiceover that opens the documentary organizes the images with meditations on exile, return and the materiality of the city: "What are these streets if not the streets of my life [...] The city matters more to those who walk at the same height, I know I have no way out. One suffers twice for the city, once for living in it, once for being far from it".

Donde opens with a scenic triptych in which a fan with blades appears on the left hand side, a drawing in the center, and a plastic pool in which a child swims in circles. Then another child arrives, and the two swim, following a rhythm full of energy that emulates the movements of the fan. The central drawing, which the hand baptizes as the city, is organized through a circle,

with a cross, which multiplies in different lines that the hand nimbly traces with a black pencil. Each line tries to pass through the initial center but does not reproduce that same center. The city is many centers and at the same time none, and it is also that which is covered with lines and erasures. As in its counterpart, the children swimming, the repetitive and confining sensation of the plastic pool contrasts with the impulse generated in the children's bodies (the doing). The plastic pool and the leaves mix the natural, with the artificial, and swimming in circles produces the same effect (Image 5).

This is how the next scenes meditate on this condition, that of doing and effect, creation and walking where the papers are contrasted with the painter's brushes, and the narrator's voice (Lalo's voice), and meditate on walking and painting, "the shoes as brushes" that paint the city. After successive photographs that organize the city from the silhouette of a lady walking, a ship entering (or leaving?) the bay of San Juan, a meditation on writing as ascetic penance is organized. The repeated line, in the following scene, "Make them not forget us" and written nine times, unfolds into a sign, with the word "penance" imposed as an exercise of the collective "we". At the same time, it refers to the obsessive function of doing as a repeated drive of the ego, the image, and the future. The where of the function does not matter, but neither should the doing. Its imposition on the writing hand and pencil is therefore disciplinary, mechanical, and obsessive. Again, as in the scene of the children in the plastic pool the writing of the object on the paper appears to be the same - with the sentences organized and separated by the blank page - and which leave, in turn the same space between one and the other. (Image 6)

The photographs alternate between black and white images, and grainy photos of San Juan Bay, signs on the wall that talk to each other, photographs of road signs, an "EXIT" sign.

As seen in the images of the city created by the artist, in the ventilator scene, its blades, all pointing somewhere, and to nowhere, while the passage of time produces cycles of repetition and confinement. (Image 7).

An old man looks towards the camera, others ignore it, while the image of a clock is superimposed, in which we see, as in the coastal wall, the narrator's body, enclosed and/or portrayed in its impermanence.

The final scene culminates with a close-up of an old woman's face, then half a body, and finally, a close-up of the eyes. Upon closer inspection of the camera's close-up shot of the woman's eyes, the viewer realizes that this woman is the director's mother. The overlapping eyes, the mother's, and the director's, paint a similarity and a difference, the frown, a wrinkle that distinguishes them betrays their relationship. If "Dónde" is the film that speaks of return, or rather of the impossibility of return, closing with the mother's eyes does not necessarily seek to return to an origin, but rather to depart from another gaze to other places. It would seem that "those eyes that have already seen so much", the mother's eyes, go towards a blind spot and therefore endless. (Image 8).

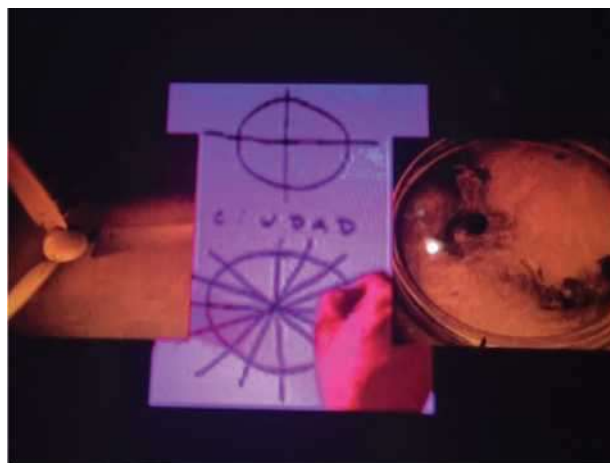
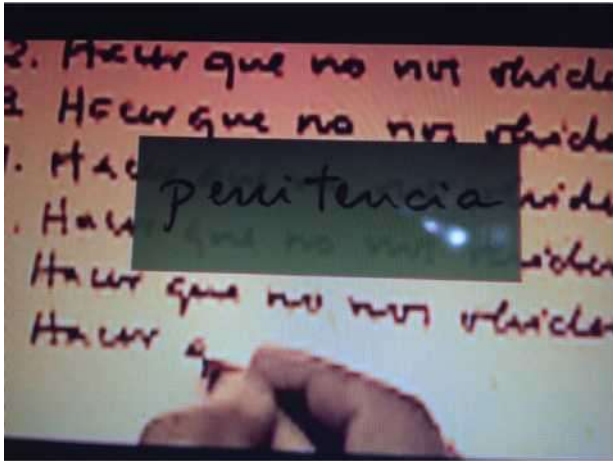


Imagen 5

Imagen 6



We do not know if, at that moment, that gaze is already affected by age; but it is important to emphasize that in "Dónde" the bodies that look at each other, or are reflected through the rearview mirror, in the pool, and finally in the final scene, are those of the family. It can be affirmed then, that the writing, the text, or the image, are only given from the imaginary of the impossible return to the city of origin, and to the family, and that call, that of another body and another look, in this case that of the mother, which organizes the fragments.

"La ciudad perdida" is a much more traditional project on a technical and expressive level than "Dónde". If in "Dónde" we see the *Dada Guerrero* technique of diorama and installation, in "La ciudad perdida" we see a quiet homage to the *avant-garde* cinema technique of Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, in "*Un chien andalou*" (*The Andalusian Hound) (1929), and the scenic shots of the French nouvelle cinema of the 50s and 60s. If "Dónde" speaks of the return journey from exile, in "La ciudad perdida" we enter fully into the textuality, the material and physical density that make up the "cities" of San Juan. Interestingly, the ruin of this lost city is not the one that somehow evokes a kind of respect for the past, the one that is carefully cared for as a monument -it is-, on the contrary, the one that coexists in a strange way with what is around it,

the one that is forgotten as an unfinished or unrealizable gesture.

Before this lightness or absence of the founding gesture, the city is lost, it has no material or political constancy, hence the voiceover that opens the first images of the documentary with the view of the ruins of Caparra: "What is a lost city? What is left when a city is lost? and How to leave, how to leave the city in which one did not want to believe in? These rhetorical questions reflect an imaginary of visions, dystopia and heterotopia, where spaces of non-foundation coexist with contemporary spaces. In other words, in the face of the abandoned and dislocated ruin, what remains is the impermanence of the present, which in the image is intermingled with the automobiles that cross Highway No. 2 in front of the ruins. The present and the past complement each other in the image of the automobile, which reflects, as in other texts by Lalo, the impossibility of walking and moving around produced by urban architecture in San Juan.

The automobile, as a technical product, is together with the foot, several images of stray dogs and the eye, the most important symbols in the documentary. Transit with or without traffic, or the impossibility of this transit, organizes a gaze that moves through the urban areas of Río Piedras, Central Avenue in *Puerto Nuevo* and Caparra Terrace, *Santurce*, the urban train and bus station of Sagrado Corazón and the bay of San Juan. This geography, which for many Puerto Ricans exists, to be traveled by road, authorizes Lalo, the foot, as an instrument/agency of the wanderer. His body and his feet give unity to this journey of contiguous islets, of different cities, from one side to the next, of bridges and avenues that do not appear in the visual as Roosevelt Ave. or Ponce de León Ave.

The feeling of confinement produced by a city that is not made for walking is revealed in

several scenes where the broken-down bus, the scrap metal, or the accumulated garbage, create a sense of abandonment and moldiness.

Lalo chooses alternate urban geographies, in which the mannequins in desolate stores, the messages of urban graffiti, the triangle in the Masonic lodge in Santurce, organize a textuality of their own, in which each symbol communicates through his lens, although the urban space is uninhabited and those who walk, walk without looking.

The video film focuses on images of urban transit vehicles -the urban train, the AMA buses, the automobiles that cross the highways, the commercial ships that enter and leave San Juan Bay- and the clear contrast with the sole of the foot, with the mobility of the one who walks on foot. The sole of the foot acts as a camera/eye that in many ways constructs a cognitive and "capillary" vibration with the street. This is how Lalo builds another city, the one that "makes its way" not necessarily as an ontology, but as a condition of being in a place. The foot/body materializes and somatizes with its vibration and strength the infinity and the sameness of space. Several images of animals, a dog running without direction, whose hues range from the black and white of the film, to the brown, natural color of its fur, another, which is already a decomposed corpse, and whose eye, in a nod to Buñuel, appears, glassy in the foreground for several seconds, and another that dies at the end of the video, organize the main narrative: "Who is the dog man?" The dog running undirected down the street can be seen as the counterpart of the dead dog, but this time he runs, he lives, but his living eyes are disoriented and full of anxiety. (Images 9 a, b, c).

On the contrary, as *Agamben* points out, the animal offers a real place to the human condition, freeing it from the prison of the ontological.

The video alternates with diverse images of the city, with graffiti on walls and walls with advertisements, and protests the violence of

everyday life. The eyes, which appear multiplied in many of the drawings, are astonished, empty, and without pupils (Image 10).

In some graffiti, the eyes weep lines of red or black paint that allude to the pain of those who paint, while the look through the historic and monumental city, leads us to the relics contained in the San José church, where the bodies of the first bishop of the city, *Alejo Arizmendi*, rest, and there are allusions to *Juan Ponce de León*, the founder of the ruins of *Caparra*, used as the video overture. The irony of the scene is precisely that of the absence of the body, Ponce de León dies far from Puerto Rico, in Florida, searching for a city that does not exist, the utopia of the possible city. The empty mausoleum is the clearest metaphor of what Lalo has identified elsewhere as the country's insistence on seeing itself through the monument, the homage, and the monumentality.⁵

In this way, the gaze is launched in search not of the monument and the empty word, but of the refuse, the remainder, the transaction, that which takes place in the physical, material, and subjective exchange of everyday life. The change of camera shots puts us close to the face of a man who seems to pray quietly, or talk to himself, an airplane whose course leaves a white trace in the sky, a beggar in the street who sleeps under a cardboard box and whose only feet are visible. The ecologies of the city function, move, from the use, consumption and disposal of bodies and things. A shot near a mangrove, perhaps at one of the entrances to the *Caño Martín Peña*, is full of garbage, and in the sand, one can see the body of a dead chicken, surely sacrificed to *Inle* or *Oba*, orishas of the mangrove and the two waters. The hen is beheaded next to an abandoned pill bottle (Images 11 a, b).

As in the eye of the dog, medicine, and ritual, is symptom and cure, and obeys a way of looking at and seeing the relations of matter from

its assemblages and relations. Like the installations mentioned above, the assemblages connect the human with the material in a horizontal way, as Jane Bennett points out, that can function despite the persistence presence of elements that confound them from within".

The ecologies of capital organize, therefore, spectral relations where, despite the abundance of refuse, garbage and disease, a way of looking that represents or explains them is organized. As in the letter that opens the following scene, written in black and white letters, the city is IM/POSSIBLE, and it is only possible to illuminate them from those looks, which organize, as in Walter Benjamin's theory, the micro, the chink, and the small, from below (Image 12). (Image 12).

The narrator's voiceover, however, bets on the quest for life with these questions that appear superimposed on a symbolic sign "Life is not easy in the tropics": "Where does life live? Where does a city that has already died end? The final scenes, centered on automobiles, mobility, and the rush of post-capitalist society, close with an image of the *Leprosarium* on *Isla de Cabra*, and the sick city, as a possibility. The sick city offers in a significant image, another type of ruin, another body, to understand the temporality of the post-capitalist and global city.

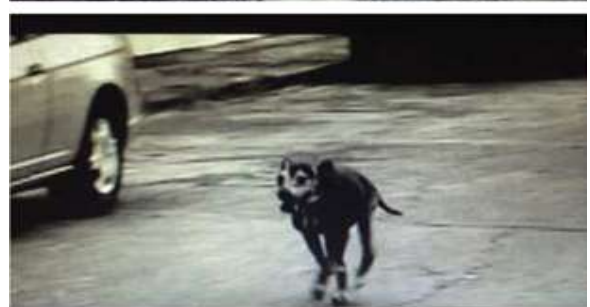
In a very symbolic shot, an alternative "window to the sea" appears, different from the one visited by the tourist in the *El Condado* area (Images 13, a, b).

This window to the sea, as opposed to the closed house of urban development is, for Lalo, a symbol of a more granulated, serious proposal, closer to what he describes as the literary and dense city.

The Morro Castle melts in the rain, in a beautiful final image, while a "cargo" ship slowly passes through the camera's lens (Image 13 a).

A dog lies dead on the road, and contrary to the one that runs, or the one that is decomposed,

its fur and the blood emanating from its body, reveals that the accident happened recently, and that it is, at that moment between life and death. (Image 9 c)



Images a, b & c
Image 10



Imágenes 11, a, b.

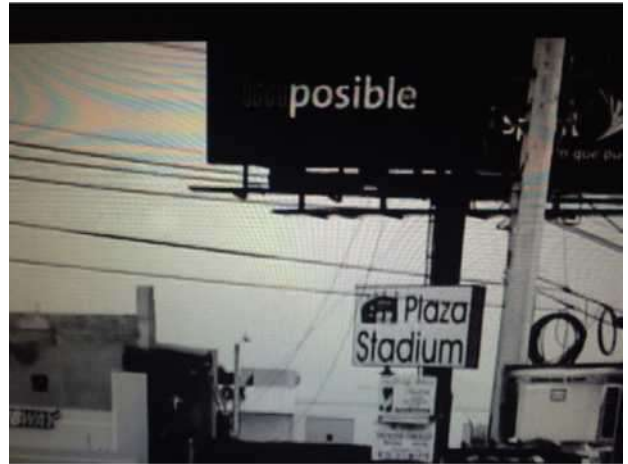


Imagen 12

By *Deleuze & Guattari*: «Assemblages are ad hoc groupings of diverse elements of vibrant materials of all sorts. Assemblages, are living throbbing confederations

Conclusion

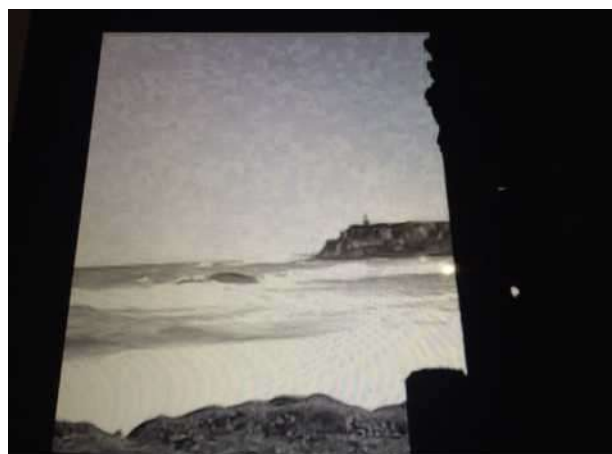
In his essay "Los países invisibles" (2008), Eduardo Lalo concludes with a quote that I believe is important to understand his critique of the society of spectacle and his own visual project:

"What is the political project of invisibility? Is there one that imagines any other conquest than being in the newspapers? What is left when even this does not happen? What can be done when this space, the vicissitudes of the human condition here, do not even have a recognizable name that ties them to a geographical point, even from the simplicity of the TV news? What happens when tragedy is not seen as tragedy, when tragedy is not, when it is not, when what, when and where? What happens when in the information age we are pre-verbal and pre-photographic?".

This critique of the society of the spectacle, opens, in Lalo's work, to multiple readings. On the one hand, it follows *Guy Debord's* definition.

The author states that there is a control of the image, of what we see, that in a certain way the multiplicity of the image creates a real exhaustion, a cynical and repetitive posture of the gaze. On the other hand, it reveals that in the case of Puerto Rico, and the Caribbean in general, there is an imaginary, which the author describes as the postcard, the Miss Universe, or the pop star, the tourism of the consumer society that makes invisible the precariousness, the violence of everyday life, the real tragedy, the deaths, and the lack of justice and citizenship. The author is not interested, therefore, in the ways in which a spectacle of that same violence can be produced, or perhaps the strategies used to negotiate or contain it. The wound, or the crack, is very personal, and at the same time it is collective and universal. The close observation of that crack, of that wound that is Puerto Rico, and as an extension, the Caribbean, and the globalized world, is, as *Lourdes Dávila* points

out, a way of looking insistently at this same "Western" condition in all its discourse. In that sense, the image looks for these "cracks in the discourse of the West" and in Lalo's words: "The crack is not new. The West is also a victim of the West". What Walter Benjamin in another context calls the "interstice" is in Eduardo Lalo, an invitation to look from below, from the corner, from the places beyond the advertising poster or the retouched image.



Images 13, a, b.

Lalo, contrary to many, does not advocate for a literary or image empire, but seeks the opposite, to create in an intimate, familiar project, where letter, image and graphics coexist, and where an individual narrative can be built in which art makes walking and creation possible. The self that insists on *Lalian* literature and essay writing does so, therefore, from the wound itself, an intrasubjective wound that cannot be understood if it is not read alongside the image. This is how

image, graphics, and imagery are organized simultaneously, making installation and handmade assemblage the main technique of his production.

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Notes

¹Conversación personal con Eduardo Lalo, febrero de 2015.

²Ver Áurea María Sotomayor «A la sombra de nuestros párpados bajos». *80 grados*. 27 de marzo de 2015.

³Recientemente y luego de recibir el premio Rómulo Gallegos por su novela *Simone* (2012) y por su obra, Eduardo Lalo, ha estado participando en varias ferias internacionales en América Latina, Europa y el Caribe. En un ensayo reciente publicado en *80 grados* «Guadloup» Eduardo Lalo dialoga con la realidad social y cultural del archipiélago caribeño al comparar políticos e intelectuales como Aimé Césaire (Martinica) y Luis Muñoz Marín. (24 de abril, 2015). <http://www.80grados.net/guadloup/>).

⁴En un ensayo reciente «Guadloup» Eduardo Lalo entra, por primera vez, en las similitudes y diferencias de Puerto Rico con otros espacios del Caribe insular un tema que no había tratado en su obra anterior.

⁵Cita de su conferencia magistral «Puerto Rico como condición» en la convención del *Puerto Rican Studies Association*, Denver, CO, octubre, 2015.



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