

Marks of the Real, Marks of the Phantasmagorical. Tomasz Żaluski talks to Regina Silveira.

Tomasz Żaluski: Do you think there is something like “the Latin Condition”? What is it for you? How would you define it – in existential, political and artistic terms?

Regina Silveira: In 1997 I made an artwork about Latin America, *Quebra Cabeça da América Latina (Continua)*... [Latin American Puzzle (To be Continued)...] which is an ironic commentary on the knowledge of Latin America, what is known or not known about it.

It is a kind of “touristic” piece, a commentary on the view of Latin America from the outside, but also from the inside, because even as neighbors we know very little about the other countries on this continent. My puzzle was formed by more than one hundred stereotypical icons of Latin America, present as fragments of black-and-white images. The iconography is vast and could continue indefinitely: from soccer to mariachis, from Carlos Gardel to guerrillas, from cannibalistic Indians to military chiefs, llamas, Sugarloaf Mountain, Machu Picchu, tango and much more. It came out of encyclopedias, tour guides, embassy coffee-table books, historical prints by travelers, magazines, books and newspapers, and everything I could gather and apply, in a true “predatory” operation of images. Unlike in normal jigsaw puzzles, where the pieces fit together to form larger, coherent figures, in my work this never happens. No piece has continuity, the junctions mix fragments of distinct geographies and histories, times and spaces, fictional images and documents, to form nothing but mixed, totally arbitrary and open narratives.

The intention was to create a paradoxical cartography for this Latin America that does not exist. Reflecting on the social, political, economic, cultural and artistic scene of Latin America as a whole implies not having any perception of the immense differences of our histories, art and culture.

T.Z.: How would you describe the development of your art up to date? What periods or tendencies can we talk about in your artistic career?

R.G.: For an artist like myself, who at the beginning of her career, back in the '60s, left the path of painting to take up other conceptual directions, it is very difficult to make a synthesis of this course, after fifty years of intense work.

In poetic terms the response could even be synthetic, since my consistent interest, in any medium, has been the nature of the image and the politics of representation, with a focus on the modes of perception and intermediation between the images and the world.

In terms of media and supports, the summary could be more extensive. But briefly I can state that throughout all these decades, a constant has been my curiosity for the means of production, from the most artisanal to the technologically most advanced, making me resort to a wide range of resources, according to the needs of the artworks, aims and meanings.

To go into some detail, I would say that during the '70s I was operating mainly with new graphic media, making video art, artist's books and mail art, while in the '80s I made objects and large-scale installations, which were generally ephemeral and painted directly on panels and walls of architectural interiors. In the mid-1990s, I began using digital resources to construct artworks and installations, thus lending them characteristics of permanence and repeatability. In the same period, I began my continued interest in the urban context as an unprotected and anonymous space, for ephemeral laser-generated projections of images and animations. The ability to dialog with increasingly extensive architectural spaces and the opportunities for conceiving and realizing interventions in specific architectures is a trend in my work that began in the 1990s and has continued until today.

T.Z.: Let's go back to the '70s. In what configuration of Brazilian artists, tendencies, interests, issues, strategies and practices of the '70s would you situate yourself and your work?

R.G.: In January 2009 Gloria Ferreira published a bold and careful critical study on the '70s in Brazil, entitled "Anos 70, Arte como Questão" [The '70s, Art As a Question], in the exhibition catalog for the anthological exhibition on this decade, which she curated at Instituto Tomie Ohtake, in São Paulo. My participation at this exhibition was related to the artistic practices of the '70s, with graphic works, artist's books, and publications in alternative magazines, as well as being a member of a small group of pioneers of video art in Brazil. This multimedia phase as well as some realizations of a more technological nature that I did soon thereafter led to my work's being also considered among the first manifestations of art and technology in Brazil. But actually, my course ranged far outside these configurations and classifications, when I began to make environmental installations and to invest in other poetic possibilities, as early as the mid-1980s. This happened with me and with other artists of my generation, when we left the '70s behind. We were left without a classification, which I thought was just fine, but certainly we continued taking the language in other directions.

The expansions of my work into specific architectures, which began in the '90s, after I'd lived for a longer time abroad (in New York, on a fellowship from the Guggenheim

Foundation and afterwards from Pollock Krasner), coincided with my decision to close my long career as a professor in order to become a full-time artist. In recent years my work has located me in a sort of transgenerational situation, in which I am almost always associated with younger artists, to whose training I contributed, and who wound up forming very open genealogies due to a purely conceptual affinity...

T.Z.: You were also a part of the Brazilian alternative culture movement in the '70s. The movement formed a part of a bigger, international, if not global phenomenon. But what was it like in Brazil, what was specific about it there and then? Why did you decide to engage in it?

R.G.: In Brazil, the counterculture years coincided with the worst times of the military dictatorship. It would be complex and excessive to narrate attitudes and events of an alternative culture that kept dynamic pace with the international scene, in theater, music and the visual arts, despite the repression, the tortures and the exiles. The specifically Brazilian character was perhaps the intense voltage of the poetics, which remained high without slipping into pamphleteering or the merely factual.

These are also years during which I left Brazil for an extended time, living first in Spain with an academic fellowship and afterwards in Puerto Rico, to teach at the University of Puerto Rico at Mayaguez. Altogether, I spent more than five years outside the country. It was not an exile, but rather a time of being in the world to get to know and experience new media and languages, as a training in art and for professional growth. Setting off down more conceptual paths was more a question of poetic cross-influence and the experience of life than a deliberate engagement. At this time, I was already traveling a lot in the United States and Europe, and could experience and participate in countless alternative manifestations, which a little later I myself was helping to promote and produce – when I returned to Brazil in the early '70s.

T.Z.: You mentioned the military dictatorship. In Brazil it lasted from 1964 until 1984. In what way did the experience of living under the dictatorship mark Brazilian art, especially the Brazilian avant-garde of the period? How did it mark your art?

R.G.: In my answer to the previous question, when I spoke of the characteristics of the alternative culture in Brazil, in the '60s and '70s, in the context of conceptualism, I already advanced some information on that period, since it fully coincided with the military dictatorship.

Vitality, imagination and poetics is what I mentioned, and I reaffirm these as political and creative responses of our most radical vanguard of that period: poetics/politics, in the best sense. Living under a dictatorship, with censorship of the press, tortures, persecutions, arrests and informants on all sides is always a very bad and violent experience at any latitude on this planet.

In my own case, the political mark of the '70s appears in a more incisive way in graphic works like those of the series *Executivas* [Executives, 1977], *Destruturas Urbanas* [Urban Destructures, 1975–76] and *Dilataveis* [Expandables, 1981]. In these series I worked with images appropriated from the press, in order to construct virtual metaphors meant to function as ironic commentaries on the various forms of power present in the politics of images and of representations disseminated in the mass media and the political world at that time.

T.Z.: In one of your texts you wrote: “When I returned to Brazil in 1973, constitutional rights were still suspended and denunciations, arrests, torture and a general sense of vulnerability continued to corrupt the realms of public and private life and work. Popular music, the theatre and the visual arts constantly responded to this situation with politically charged messages, although their content could not manifest itself freely but only in the form of subtle or highly poetic metaphors that often managed to avoid being censored. I think that the first pieces of mine to be really influenced by the political and social events of that period were the series of *works* made with the new graphic media of the 1970s. The images they feature were almost always critical representations, some focusing on political power and others on the media and urban deterioration. Even so, there is virtually nothing overtly political in these series because I always preferred to filter my images with irony. Once, I even converted a bland recipe for coconut pudding into an ironic comment about the most politically commented Brazilian painting of the period, which never aspired to anything more than adorning the walls behind the bourgeoisies’ most expensive sofas”. Now, is the allusion, the metaphor and the irony always a better way than the literal and the explicit, or does it depend on a situation and a local context? Is such “indirectly” political art less prone to appropriation than the thematically political painting? What is the function of the art that engages in the political – I mean its political and artistic function?

R.G.: I would never refer to this type of approach as “indirectly” political, I only wanted to say that it was not literal. From my point of view, irony and allusion can be more refined tools for advancing political meanings than the excessive rhetoric of “engaged” images, which rarely have all the layers of signification necessarily implicated in the ambiguity of art. They wind up being “shallow,” with little ability to provoke a political reflection, and they

don't manage to change the world... However, everything depends on degrees and on context – how was I not going to admire a good art, even one “dripping” in rhetoric, when quality and meaning are joined? The function of art tout court is its use function, with a philosophical and phenomenological foundation, which has to do with its capacity to transform the perceptions of our relation with the world. This includes political art.

T.Z.: Could you briefly describe some works of yours with a political import?

R.G.: *Paradoxo do Santo* [Paradox of the Saint, 1994] is a paradoxical combination of the giganticized shadow of an equestrian monument and of a small wooden popular saint, riding a horse and set atop a small wooden pedestal, from which part of the large shadow is projected, toward the walls. The shadow is a distortion of the silhouette of the equestrian monument by modernist Victor Brecheret, located in a public square in downtown São Paulo, depicting the mounted Brazilian military hero Duque de Caxias, the commander-in-chief of the armies of the Triple Alliance, which in the 19th century united Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay against Paraguay, whose crushing defeat left immense impacts on the country, until today. For its part, the little wooden saint, a popular sculpture from Guatemala, represents Santiago Apostolo, until today the patron of Spain's military, also known as Santiago Matamoros, invoked for centuries in the expulsion of the Arabs from the Iberian Peninsula, and patron of Spanish America as well, having also been invoked in the colonial wars that decimated indigenous populations and their cultures. In the work, the difference between the shadow and its origins as well as the paradox of the double absence (the monument that generates the shadow is not present, nor is the shadow present that should be cast by the wooden saint) aims to emphasize the shadow as the dark and perverse “other” of the apparently ingenuous wooden saint. By approximating the two figures trans-historically and paradoxically, I sought to comment on the recurrent and always renewed relations between power, militarism and religion in Latin America.

In the installation *Mundus Admirabilis* (2007, at the Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil in Brasília) I used giganticized images of insect pests to occupy the interior of a large glass box, in the exhibition *Jardim do Poder* [Garden of Power]. The giant insects compose a double site-specific work: one for the glass box, another in the relation with the city, the headquarters of the government and center of political power in Brazil. Transformed into a garden pavilion shot through by light, the 20 x 20 x 7m (h) glass box became the dwelling of conflicting species as well as the place of their devouring; in Brasília, the insect pests had their connotation more focused, as a deliberate allusion to the political world. The scale of the insects is the phantasmagoric datum that makes the glass box perceptible as a giant cage, where images of incompatible species, out of proportion in relation to each other, seem to live in magnificent isolation. When the spectator is either looking at or

actually inside the lighted box, he or she is provided with not only the exercise of observing the species, but also the “marvelous” effect of seeing the hyperbolic pests finally caged.

Rerum Naturae participated in the exhibition *Mundus Admirabilis e Outras Pragas*, (Galeria Brito Cimino SP, 2008), whose theme was the updating of the old biblical, historical and mythical plagues, based on the hypothesis of their possible transposition to other territories of signification.

In *Rerum Naturae*, to comment on the deterioration of day-to-day life, I took numerous images of insect pests taken from treatises on natural history and applied them by means of third-firing techniques to pieces of white porcelain for everyday use. The porcelain pieces were arranged on a dinner table, ritually covered by a linen tablecloth on which the same insects, on a much larger scale, were embroidered in cross-stitch, in great detail using black thread.

Per Capita, at the same exhibition, is an audio work that considers urban violence as a contemporary pest. In the form of a tubular object placed on the wall as a listening device, it allows the viewer to hear a gunfight, similar to the sound of stray bullets, accompanied by a small flash of light that escapes from the wall, through a thin crack.

T.Z.: You said that in the '70s you had taken interest in conceptual art. During the last two decades it was often pointed out that conceptual art was a diverse, heterogenic phenomenon, with its different “versions” in different regions and local cultural and socio-political contexts. There was also a “re-discovery” of Latin American conceptual art, which was praised for its early critical involvement into social and political issues, prior to an analogical interest on the part of USA and Western Europe conceptualism. Do you agree, as an insider at the time, with this view? What was conceptual art in Brazil? What did it mean to you? What chances and opportunities did it seem to offer you at the time?

R.G.: In this part of the world the different forms of conceptual art and new modes of artistic communication certainly carried more of a political charge, everywhere from Mexico to Argentina, including the contingent of “Latin” artists in the United States, all of them adherents to a less “cool” conceptualism. Perhaps because in that period the artists of these latitudes responded to a more heavily charged and conflictive social scene.

On the other hand, the forms and modalities of conceptual art, especially in Argentina and Brazil, were very much informed by the manifestations of the Fluxus group and other dadaist legacies, which greatly influenced not only the visual arts, but also music, performance and poetry. It must be remembered that, mainly in Brazil, the trends of art

and technology that derived from the concretism of the '50s were blended in an extremely fertile way with the conceptual trends and investigations into new media, imparting a desirable interdisciplinarity to the more radical scene of the '70s.

I always rejected the label of “conceptual artist,” along with that of painter or printmaker. I preferred to be classified as a “multimedia artist,” believing that it gave me greater freedom of action and movement in alternative means of production, circulation and exhibition of my work, almost always a difficult-to-classify “hybrid.”

T.Z.: Conceptual art has often aimed to reflect on and criticize artistic institutions as well as the institution of art as such. Is there an aspect of institutional reflection or even critique in your art?

R.G.: There is no institutional criticism in the direct political sense. But I could cite works from the conceptual years that discuss the system of art as a whole – like *Pudim Arte Brasileira* [Brazilian Art Pudding], a very politicized recipe that I distributed anonymously at an exit from the São Paulo subway system in the late '70s, and a questionnaire about the art system elaborated and distributed by myself and Julio Plaza to the participants of the performative event *Mitos Vadios*, in an abandoned parking lot in São Paulo, in 1981. As a criticism on the art in the museums as well as of the museums themselves, especially those that allow architecture to play a key role, I planned the (unrealized) project *Todas las Noches* [Every Night], for the Museo de Monterrey, New Mexico, in a building designed by architect Ricardo Legorreta. In that project, which provided the basis for many of my later works, I aimed to cover the entire interior of five rooms offered for an exhibition with extensive black shadows, projected by the furniture, exhibit cases, and benches already existing in those rooms, which I would have left totally empty. In short, totally empty yet with shadows of the interior architecture being cast on itself. I wanted to critically lower the shadow and the night on the museums. This work has remained alive until today, awaiting its realization...

T.Z.: It's been said that Brazilian art of the '60s through the '80s seems to look like an alternative version of the Western art world: all the latter's elements are present in it but in diverging configurations, with other functions, meanings and evaluations. How would you comment on that – is it a plausible view? Do you think this “local divergence” is still present in your work? Or did you have to – and to what degree? – suppress it in order to make your art enter the Western art world and be appreciated there?

R.G.: You should know that it was after the '80s, with the more affirmative presence of the curators from outside Brazil and the intensification of international travel and exchange

that the Brazilian art of the '60s and the new generations of the '80s began to gain an international presence, at exhibitions and in publications. This took place slowly and has been growing ever since, initially in the context of practically no knowledge about what one was seeing, based on simplified reviews concerning languages and artistic filiations which until today run counter to the view held by those who really know our history, from the inside.

In relation to the world of Western art, and the entrance of Brazilian art – or my own – in this world, I should say that to me the argument seems at least a little strange, since there is no way to confuse the quality and originality of Brazilian art (our “local divergence,” as it were!) with an opportunity or strategy to be inside or outside of a mainstream that was already giving signs of decreased vitality in the '80s... It should be remembered that since 1951 the Bienal de São Paulo, without a doubt the world's second most important international art biennial after the Venice Biennale, has been our most important “window” for exchange with the exterior, and a precise instrument for the professional training of our artists, art theorists, educators and art historians – as well as having provided, over the years, a relative improvement in the repertoire and proximity of a public already more open to the manifestations of contemporary art.

T.Z.: Among other things, your work since the '80s, at least, has been about transforming the Western conventions of visual representation – first of all, geometrical perspective with its correlative system of light and shadow. You seem to convert what passes as the mechanism of “natural” perception into a means of creating highly artificial, strange, enigmatic, uncanny and paradoxical effects – both in perceptual and conceptual terms. Now, what configuration of aspects – as I am sure it is not a single aspect that counts – is important for you in this enterprise? Which aspects get stressed?

R.G.: That's a long story, but I can go into it briefly. The questioning of perspective as an optically-based system able to produce “correct” and “normal” representations of the visual field is a doubt that arose in the West almost simultaneously with the establishment and apogee of the conventions of geometric perspective as a scientific instrument for representing the world. This was before Leonardo made that small anamorphic drawing and discussed the marginal aberrations of perspective and his well-known diagram of the columns, in which he denounces the limits of the system's applicability and of the use of a single vantage point. Now, centuries later, there is no longer any question about the “naturalness” of this system of representation. However, an important consideration today is the genealogy that this system of perspective shares with photography, with cinema, with virtual reality, simulations and other categories of digital illusionism.

As for me, I discovered the optical phantasmagoria and the visual enigmas of Mannerism, which very clearly affirmed art as magic and invention, when I became interested in Duchamp, in the early '70s, but more specifically in his ironic *Opticeries* that the artist himself often referred to as perspectivist essays, which not only fed his imagination but also underpin many of his most notable works. I was always interested in this difference between the perception of the real and its representation, intermediated by codes and conventions of similarity. But I always opted for the deconstruction of these codes, from within, to tension the limits of both perception and representation. Certainly I embraced art as artifice and language.

T.Z.: When did you take up the issue of geometrical perspective understood as a conventional means of representing, or rather constructing a “normal”, commonsense vision of reality? Why did it attract your interest?

R.G.: My first reflections in regard to the conventionality of representation in perspective were manifested in the series *Anamorfás* [Anamorphs], consisting of prints and drawings, concluded in 1980. This was when I began to explore the possibilities of reverting the understanding of perspective considered as “normal” visuality and a supposedly scientific way of looking at the world, and I entered the realm of phantasmagorias and metamorphoses allowed for by this shift. In *Anamorfás* my favorite tools were the distortions that I produced in geometric grids. They invariably included the photographic contours of common, small-format objects. In this first questioning of the conventionality of the means of representation, I believe my posture was above all metalinguistic, the focus was on the nature of representation and the modes of depiction, which gave rise to the extensive sequence of the series *A Arte de Desenhar* [The Art of Drawing], done practically simultaneously with the *Anamorfás*, as well as videos, prints and artist's books. But perception was also a question, coupled with my urge to probe the limits of the recognition of these representations, when shown in radically perspectivized or topologically distorted ways.

T.Z.: Now, let's go to the very roots of your artistic practice. From January to April this year, in Philadelphia, you took part in the artistic festival Philografika. The idea of the venue was best stated, I think, by the title of the main exhibition, namely, “The Graphic Unconscious”. The curators wished to examine the more or less hidden, underlying workings of “the graphic” in contemporary art – in terms of concepts, practices, ways of thinking and operating that can be somehow traced back or associated with the graphic or even with printmaking in a broad sense. Now, printmaking was one of your primary artistic preoccupations and points of departure, and watching your “errant grafias” I think that something like “the graphic unconscious” has been continually informing your art since the beginning

till now. Or maybe it is not an unconscious drive or impulse? Maybe it has been a conscious strategy all the way? Can your art be described – on a certain level, of course – as “the graphic” in the “extended” or “transmedial” field?

R.G.: This classification is very possible for a large part of my work, but I wouldn't say that it has been a planned strategy – I only think that producing graphic marks, in the wide sense, was the best instrument that my imagination ever had for realizing intentions, creating new configurations, and inventing visual paradoxes. “Producing graphic marks,” which includes drawing and marking, on any support, whether paper, porcelain, tapestry, architecture interiors, extensive façades or even the urban fabric, for me is always the initial operation for any work. This is followed by the stage in which I am able to plan the steps of the work's realization – practically as is done in traditional printmaking, with which I was connected for many years, in my work as a professor.

But beyond this graphic aspect I would also mention another very important source for my work, which is the photographic image and its nature as an index for the real. Since the '70s, photography has impregnated my imaginary, in many ways, but I have decidedly never done photography as an end in itself or as art. I only make extensive use of this type of image, which I have appropriated and transformed since I made a series of silkscreens entitled *Middle Class & Co*, in 1971.

T.Z.: Yes, it's easy to see that you have been often working with what is called “the indexical signs”, signs that are traces, imprints or vestiges left in different ways by the “touch” of the real itself. What aspects, associations, meanings of this kind of signs are important for you, what visual and semantic energies count for you most in this case?

R.G.: Clearly I fully understand the nature of the images I have been preferentially using – photos, marks, shadows – they are images that live in the paradigm of indexes and vestiges, and refer to the real as a nearly physical mark – a posited or fictional real.

Some associations are known: the indices are linked with ideas of absence, the marks reveal an event that took place in time. Other associations that interest me are the totally magical ones or those involving artifices, which allow for the phantasmagorias and visual enigmas. I confess that I have a frank connection with the “marvelous,” this manneristic mark that extends through Duchamp, which provided the foundation for cinema and which currently lives in the many virtual realities of the digital universe.

T.Z.: Let's go back to “the graphic in the extended/transmedial field” What different forms of it could be found in your art at different moments of its development? What made you move out from the traditional printmaking towards where you are today?

R.G.: It was when I made my first silkscreens (in Puerto Rico, 1970), and I simultaneously learned some simple photomechanical operations, that I was able to undertake this movement toward a nontraditional printmaking, open to new procedures and attitudes. From silkscreen I moved to lithography with photographic resources, and from that to offset, to photocopying, blueprint, microfilm and video; in short, I entered the wide world of “other” de-artistified graphic procedures that were the “exchange currency” of those years...

At that time the photomechanical procedures were applied almost exclusively to industrial graphics and were repudiated – together with photography – by traditional printmaking. But for me they offered just what I wanted: a dry syntax that eschewed autographic aspects, that allowed for photographic appropriations of images from the printed media and much more. I did not reserve this opening only for myself; these potentials of the graphic image were always part of my program of teaching in the area of printmaking at the university.

Currently, this entire field has become greatly enlarged through the use of digital resources and through various ways that the image has moved into printing or cutouts.

Outside of paper or film, other usual supports throughout the course of my work have been white porcelain, tapestry, glass skylights, the walls themselves, façades, and later the city itself – other graphic media include videos, projections, laser...

T.Z.: I've come across the term “ideographs”, which is your coinage. How is one to understand it, what does it refer to?

R.G.: I frankly don't remember when I said that nor what the meaning might have been for this term, evidently invented in another context. However, I could think that “ideographs” is a good word-assembly, which speaks of written signs and ideograms. Ideographs have to do with graphic marks but also with the nature of the ideograms, insofar as a quality or meaning is born in the junction, sometimes completely unexpected, of two other terms.

Maybe I applied the term “ideographs” to what is apparently verified when a graphic intervention covers a building and irremediably semanticizes it, to the point where it can hardly be remembered how the building used to be before the intervention, and this for a long time... as though the intervention became “glued” to the building and to the memory.

Or it would describe the result of a shadow or track drawn on white porcelain: it will be very hard for us to imagine it being only “white” after we see it as a “porcelain-with-a-shadow.”

T.Z.: When did you start going “architectural” and site-specific with your work? Why did you decide to embrace the site and the monumental scale?

R.G.: The “architectural” started first, in the ’90s, as a graphic-objectual approach by which I produced works that were large-scale but still contained within the interiors and environments of art. The motifs of these works constructed as cutouts made of plastic or ceramic tiles were conventional architectural designs, taken from building blueprints, which I transformed into ambiguous and distorted configurations, by applying deformed perspectives and unsuitable points of view to the original drawings.

The site-specific work grew naturally, in quantity and size, nearly invariably in response to invitations for requests made for determined spaces, by institutions or curators, who very often imagined on their own how I would be able to intervene. On rare occasions I myself proposed the site-specific work and when I could choose the place and make the proposal, my plans have always been large and risky – but there is also a risk of their never leaving the drawing table... Actually it is just as complicated to plan works for small spaces as for large ones, but I like the large-scale challenges.

T.Z.: What is your point of departure when you’re about to prepare a monumental-scale project or “go architectural” with your art? In what terms do you think, on what basis do you approach architectural and urban spaces?

R.G.: First of all, I have to visit the place, see the context, get to know the story of the building and its environment, the points of view, the use, the flow – in short, the universe of characteristics and meanings I can ally my art with. A type of puzzle is placed before the imagination, with many elements to decipher and compose, often including a curatorial project to bear in mind.

In operational terms, what I always do is to photograph and afterwards draw on the photos, to discover the scale, the possible presence.

In the case of urban projects, such as the one with luminous projections in movement, I also take trips by car or on foot through the possible areas of the projection, which I afterwards note down, in order to form small indicative maps for the interventions.

Invariably I need to study maps and architectural plans, and sometimes I have to return several times to the place or building, before the work’s execution, to test data such as

scales, configurations, situations, colors. For distant architectures, I can work if I have a lot of information about the place, but it is nearly always necessary to visit the building, to understand it fully or to test elements, almost always in regard to the scale. For the intervention in Taipei I went there just once before the project's preparation and execution, to examine the surface of the building and test what would be the average size that I should give to those human footprints that I applied in a vast area outside the museum (Taipei Fine Arts Museum). Instead, for installation at Palácio de Cristal I had to go four times to Madrid, to perceive and experience the building's interior in order to solve very difficult problems in relation to scale, lighting and the transparence of the materials, as well as techniques/media compatible with the preservation of that architectural monument.

T.Z.: I noticed an interesting feature of your site-specific installations. Namely, your strategy is often to repeat some element of an architectural space and reproduce it within this very space but with a degree of dislocation, fragmentation and transformation. Instead of confirming the piece of architecture's identity and its narrative self-reflection, you seem to offer the place's confrontation with and exposition to its "ghostly" other, surprisingly materialised in your work. You seem to offer another perception, another way of navigating and narrating through the given place and space. Is it a good intuition on my part?

R.G.: I think that you perceived this strategy very well. There are various examples, but it became evident in the "catastrophic" installations I made in 2003 and 2005, respectively, at the exhibition *Claraluz* [Bright Light], at Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, in São Paulo, and at the exhibition *Lumen*, at the Palácio de Cristal, at Museo Nacional Reina Sofía in Madrid. They were "catastrophic" because they both involved an imaginary happening that was a rupture and splintering of the glass skylights, virtually falling as a luminous cascade and afterwards deposited on the floor.

Both installations were related, to the point where the title of the installation *Lumen*, which was part of the exhibition *Claraluz*, provided the title for the entire exhibition at the Palácio de Cristal where I called the artwork with the skylight *Memoriazul* [Memoribblue] to make the connection and reference clear.

In my view, these two pieces have an allegorical quality, due to the narrative that is unfolded in a fictional time, frozen in the fixed visuality of the fragments and splinters of the "broken" skylights.

At the Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil in São Paulo the gold color I gave to the projection of the splintered skylight set up a relation between art and gold and wealth, in the context of that building which was formerly a banking institution. The artwork continued on the floor

below, in the spaces where the institution's old safes were located. There, the pattern of fragments of the "splintered" skylight covered the walls and the interior of the safes, cabally reaffirming the intended meanings.

At the Palácio de Cristal, an ethereal building shot through by light and with great – and I would say even excessive – beauty and transparency, my intention in fragmenting the glass roof and depositing its splinters on the floor was to bathe the interior of the building with blue light. In *Memoriazul* I sought to deal with the transcendental meanings of light, which I related with enlightenment and the consideration of off-the-scale sublimity.

T.Z.: What is the general concept of the project you're preparing for Atlas Sztuki? Could you tell me what the points of departure were for working it out?

R.G.: Since my first direct intervention on architecture (*Simile*, 1988, at the old Centro Galileo, in Madrid) I have concentrated on the ambiguous and mysterious nature of thresholds. Windows, doors and arches are passages between, into and out of constructed spaces, which function as openings or thin skins that physically connect the spaces and allow for the passage of light, wind, and – more metaphorically – also shadow. I have often inverted this relation, using the shadows to instill uncanny situations or to create projections of totally out-of-place shadows. I have always been able to imagine thresholds as places for improbable and extraordinary happenings, as well as openings for the territory which can give rise to invasions and irruptions of every sort. They are also spaces of flow, and in this condition they can also allude to time and memory.

The works I am developing for the exhibition spaces at Atlas Sztuki pertain to this line of thresholds, and as a motif resort to the windows that circle the entire building and give it its unique look. In these spaces I aim to carry out a perceptive and poetic incursion into space/time and the memory of the building itself, based on two site-specific installations, couched in technical and conceptual polarities.

Abyssal is an image of an abyss constructed in vertical anamorphosis, in which successive lines of windows in great perspectival compression provoke the perception of a space in depth, which will function as a virtual hole able to provide uncanny spatial distortions. This large-format digital image also involves a temporal dimension – since through it I sought to recover, almost archaeologically, the memory of the old-fashioned windows of the market that used to operate in this building.

In *1001 Dias* [1001 Days], a digital animation projected as a video loop on a group of windows in another room, reaching the floor and walls of neighboring rooms, I resort to other strategies. The closed and sealed windows that paradoxically allow the entrance of

the world and time into the room should make the walls and everything solid vanish in the areas of the projection. As an overall effect, the infinite sequences of days and nights that infiltrate the room through the windows should displace the perception of space within it – and the viewer him/herself – to an open-air, limitless space. In this imaginary space/time, the days and nights in succession will be accompanied by the sounds of a strong wind, voices of children and various nocturnal noises, which are other vestiges of time, coming from my memory.

T.Z.: Shadow, absence, void, abyss, trace... – why have you privileged these very notions, which seem to form a systematic configuration, in your art, say, since the beginning of the '80s? Why promote these very notions? Is there a diagnosis of the contemporary culture implied in it?

R.G.: As I mentioned earlier, all of these terms (or nearly all) that together configure the more shadowy and mysterious side of the art/world relation in my work, participate in the nature of indices, this Peircean category of the signs of absence/presence and time. They always had the capacity to provoke my ideas and creations, and not only up to the '80s – this actually extends past the '90s.

I think that the tendency, the direction for the index is an almost magical question, or one of understanding art as magic or an enigma...

Whether or not cooperating with them responds to the successive – and for some, catastrophic – changes in the paradigm of culture over the last decades is an interesting topic for critically considering the whole of my production. Actually, not only mine, in light of the large quantity of works and artists who could be included, and the importance of indices in contemporary art.

For their part, the abysses and paradoxes certainly belong to another type of attitude, linked more to the fantastic, to games and to irony, among other data recurrent in my work. But please do not forget that in the last years the paradigm of the shadow has swung toward the other extreme, where its polarity “lives,” always being present: light, in its greatest intensity. Many recent artworks have taken light as a conceptual and semantic axis, a subject and a cause – in order to approach meanings linked to a sort of transcendence that only images can allow to the imagination.

T.Z.: You were a teacher in art school for several decades. What's your philosophy of art teaching? In what way is there a connection between your artistic and didactic work? Did you try to somehow transpose one into the other?

R.G.: I began teaching when I was about 25 years old, first at the Universidade do Rio Grande do Sul, and after that in Puerto Rico, and since 1973 consistently, in Brazil and sometimes abroad, at the undergraduate and postgraduate level. I did this until the year 2000, when I wished to get away from this “double life” to be the full-time artist that I wanted to be for as long as I had the energy for it.

Actually I had many hundreds of art students, a nearly uncountable total, and I remain in contact with many of them – professional as well as friendly contact – especially with those who evolved into the art scene; and I believe that our exchanges were and continue to be constant – I keep “connected” with the productions and careers of those whom I perceived right at the outset as being good artists. It is perhaps important to say what they think of me as a professor who was involved in their training: for them what I did was to make them develop their personal poetics, I returned their own questions to them so they could learn to seek answers and to go after ideas and modes of operating, even if very different from my own. On my side, I always considered the students as young artists of generations that would come after mine. As a professor I taught language, modes of operating, techniques and attitudes, seeking to keep all my cards on the table, when transferring professional experience. All with the greatest respect for the generational differences that we should maintain.

My students were not only artists, because they also included those who later went into other areas of the art system. Many of them today are educators, art historians, curators or even museum directors, in Brazil and abroad.

A sort of big, open and very liberal “family.”