

Panel *Tomorrow Peeks at the Present*

Tatiana Cuevas— Moderator

We are here with the *“iconoclasistas”*, Fran Ilich and Yoel Díaz Vázquez. In this session, we find the future manifested in the transformation of the present. The future in the practice of these artists is not manifested as a projection, a fictionalization or a constructed image of the future, though these are all attitudes that emerge out of a desire for change, in other words, from the dream of a different world. Somehow, they use strategies to encourage a collective consciousness of the here and now, as well as of the effects that our present actions may have on the future. In all three cases, art is used as a means of resistance and consciousness-raising through a critical gaze at everyday existence, which seeks to avoid the mechanisms of control in order to interfere in collective consciousness.

The work of Yoel Díaz Vázquez involves documentation of several figures who have assumed a posture of protest. From a social standpoint (in the case of this piece), he has worked with the visions and aspirations of rappers in Cuba’s underground scene.

Fran Ilich’s practice usually disregards the borders between art, media and political practice through online and offline re-interventions that draw attention to new forms of economies.

The *“iconoclasistas”* duo is a collective that defines itself as a laboratory of communication and free counterhegemonic resources. It is geared toward activating new forms of resistance and influence on social imagery through proposals for transformative actions.

Iconoclasistas—

This text is about a collective mapping and mobile device workshop. The problems generated during the process, reflections upon the tool’s output, analysis of collective work and results of the overall project will be touched upon.

We use the term *“collective mapping”* for the appropriation of mapping techniques (mural-mapping, mapping on-the-go or interview map) developed in workshops held in a range of spaces designed for encounters or creating and with various social actors: students, neighborhood organizations, social movements, artists, communicators and anyone who feels challenged by the idea of approaching his/her territory collectively. While stemming from hegemonic representations (like a cadastral map with

pre-designed borders), the construction process, exchange of knowledge and wide variety of viewpoints involved in the space generate particular views.

We also map senses, perceptions and subjectivities, based on work about the individual and social body. We build graphic devices for mapping “hegemonic plans” —collective discussion platforms that enable organizing socialized knowledge; “what’s said on the streets” —the level of common sense that penetrates the social milieu and is expressed in naturalized phrases and comments, and the “emancipated territory” —enabled through a graphic device that encourages a collective body to intervene by means of dreams, desires, achievements and contributions for reaching them.

The workshops help to build a collective story, a reinterpretation of the territory “as the crow flies”, seen through conversation and relating experiences, knowledge and opinions. One of the challenges of working with maps is opening up a space fit for discussion and creation that does not close with itself but sets itself up as an available starting point for others: a device that builds knowledge, enhances the organization and provides transformational alternatives.

Collective mapping workshops, as a construction process and as a result, at first work as ludic facilitators and later become autonomous through the self-management of each group’s desires and needs, to re-create a challenging protagonism seen in the heterogeneity of the participating collective voices.

A collective map does not create new borders but rather links what is “common” through the establishment of temporary communities. It is not based on separating but on creating a shared horizon of meanings, practices, problems and forms of resistance that do not overshadow particularities. In fact, an important thing about this kind of collective construction is the possibility of articulating diverse subjectivities to activate the construction of emancipating, disruptive or inclusive stories.

For whom are we mapping? Does it help resolve problems? How and when is this knowledge spread? What do we do and demonstrate with our maps?

Maps show a snapshot of the moment in which they were made and do not represent all the complexities of that specific time. They transmit a specific collective idea about an ever dynamic and constantly changing territory in which the borders (real and symbolic) take on a relational and fluid nature and are continuously altered by the movement of bodies and other subjectivities.

Collective mapping is a recreational-political tool, which is not free of ambiguities. It is crucial that subsequent publicizing of collective stories be carried out through mutual agreement so they cannot be re-appropriated and used in ways contrary to those originally planned. Maps are created from the multiplicity of participants and must take the shape and objectives of their creators in order to reflect the needs, stories and concerns of the participating communities, organizations and movements.

Maps are part of a larger process. They are another strategy, a “means for” reflection, socialization of knowledge and practices; the drive for collective participation; working with strangers to exchange knowledge, argue about hegemonic spaces, foster creation and imagination, engage with specific issues, visualize resistances and high-light power relationships, etc.

We think that one of the goals of learning how to reflect and visualize a territory (not only geographically, but also in its social, cultural, subjective and economic dimensions) is the possibility of getting distance from it to decipher connections among aspects that seem isolated in order to build knowledge that questions institutional issues and allows us to develop tools that encourage transformational practices.

Yoel Díaz Vázquez—

*Tomorrow will be a good, good day,
Tomorrow will be a better day
Let's sing together, listen up,
Tomorrow will be a better day*

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*There'll be no police or corruption
No lethal injections or firing squads,
No cynical politicians in the country
Because tomorrow will be a better day*

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*No elections, or prisons, or rubbish in the alley,
No reason for discrimination
Because tomorrow will be a better day*

*Tomorrow will be a good, good day,
Tomorrow will be a better day
Let's sing together, listen up,
Tomorrow will be a better day*

*Before I die, I want to fight,
I'd like to see no more kids with guns
But a thousand unarmed loves
And no vile hunger
Among the citizens*

*Nothing but love
 Healing the wound
 Nothing but love, ok
 No more worries on this matter
 Because tomorrow will be a better day
 To start, to change, listen up,
 Tomorrow will be a better day*

*Tomorrow will be a good, good day,
 Tomorrow will be a better day
 Let's sing together, listen up,
 Tomorrow will be a better day*

The song “Tomorrow Will Be a Better Day”, by Cuban rapper Zekou from the band Anónimo Consejo (Anonymous Advice), can be seen as a paradigm of Cuban urban poetry.

The influence of the international boom of US rap has also been felt in Cuba, especially in recent years. Far from a pale tropical imitation on the island, young Cuban rappers have created a genuine aesthetic of protest, committed to recording critical relationships with the local context.

Since Cuban rappers represent the “voiceless” people, among whom they live, they provide an autochthonous channel of communication, a kind of social scream through which they express their aspirations and needs as an active part of Cuban society. They show, once again, that art is an everyday means of resistance and awareness, battling constantly, through their art, to mock the ruling mechanisms of control and censorship. They thus comprise a popular and artistic offensive against the new “socialist” consumerism, discrimination, fraud and double standards, with an ethical outlook that continues to believe sincerely in the possibility of transforming society through their music.

Their consecration within the rich Cuban cultural sphere takes place in a public atmosphere shocked daily by new and arbitrary packages of measures dictated by the Cuban Communist Party (PCC). The scenario is that of a political dynasty struggling to delegate powers and perpetuate the system, given the physical and political leader’s deterioration, as well as the times of serious ideological and psychological disappointments that deepen the current crisis of the Cuban revolution.

The fall of the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc in the 1990s, the tightening of the US economic blockade against the island and the economic ineffectiveness of the government (regarded by Cubans as an “internal blockade”) threw Cuba into a socioeconomic crisis commonly known as the “special period in peace times”. At that

time, the government took a series of radical measures to come through the disaster. Outstanding among them was opening the country up to international tourism, as the main engine of the domestic economy, eliminating the few rights and privileges Cuban citizens had at the time to enjoy the island's main tourist spots and introducing the vices associated with the tourist industry into the weak Cuban society: prostitution, drug trafficking and other ills. Also, the dollar began circulating freely and unstably, with arbitrary exchange rate fluctuations eventually leading the state to impose a double currency policy. Likewise, a chaotic and aggressive market economy was introduced, resulting in noticeable social differences and income inequalities that are still present today. This extremely complex situation hit Cubans abruptly and significantly influenced public subjectivity. Both intimately and publicly, the people began displaying their disappointment in the failed socialist experiment.

In this socio-political environment, analysts find the most probable causes of the emergence of political rap on the island.

In the mid 1990s, various institutions set up and supported hip hop festivals, which a few years later, would be completely banned due to the growing number of protest songs (content wise) by many of these rappers. And as censorship always produces resistance, this motivated these groups to go further in their transgressions against institutions and society. By 2003, a true revolution had taken place in the Cuban rap movement: rappers' lyrics gradually became more daring, the message more concrete, more direct, more reflective, and thanks to that, they are now established (always through art) as the "voice of the voiceless".

Rapper Raudel explains:

My songs are songs to make you reflect, to think about the spiritual evolution we should have, the need for a social transformation by a revolution in our own space.

There must be some need for freedom, understanding, tolerance, participation in your own realm, to then begin thinking about universal problems. We live on an island with many problems, truly stressful, sad situations; and we have to start with that. That's my idea.

About My Work:

Ruido (Noise) is a project I began in 2006, with the collaboration of nine young Cuban rap artists. In 2010, the project continued with an invitation for another 32 rappers from the Havana underground scene to express their opinions on life in present-day Cuba through songs performed and filmed in domestic surroundings. The resulting discourse is always critical and expresses the thoughts of a broad section of Cuban youth, whose voices convey unhappiness, frustration, powerlessness and lack of

prospects in today's Cuban society (the images are shown on dozens of screens set up tower-like, each one playing the performance of one rapper).

My work involves individuals —some professional and some not—, especially urban poets, storytellers, deaf poets, frustrated singers and others, who I often film. In these videos, I do not only record the situations that will be filmed but also come up with the ideas in collaboration with artists who are invited to make their own creations. I deal directly with the artists' reality, intervening in the preparation and creation of the settings for their portraits, within their own environment, and I film their actual performances. The artists invited to take part in my videos turn their opinions on contemporary social and political life into artistic products through their performances.

My main objective is to spotlight the critical stances and poetic demands expressed in the work of certain social and artistic groups, to make them immediately and physically present in the visual arts scene. This work with artists from other media has gotten these groups of young people to start to see their own potential more clearly.

I am interested in humanist ideas and in the thinking and discourse that these artists support: equality of opportunity for everyone; personal and cultural diversity; freedom of ideas and beliefs; their condemnation of discrimination due to racial, ethnic and cultural differences, and their rejection of physical, racial, sexual, religious, moral and psychological violence.

I'm also interested in the contemporary social impact and the significance of these groups and movements within society. In Havana, for example, some of the rappers who are most outspoken in their protests, such as Raudel and Los Aldeanos (The Villagers), have become famous and popular, turning into cultural heroes of sorts due to the marginality and censorship resulting from their solidly critical lyrics. This deserved popularity is not limited to their young fans, who illegally copy and circulate their albums, but has spread throughout diverse generations of the Cuban population.

To the question: "What would you like the future of our people to be?", the rapper Raudel answers:

I, personally, think I'd like to see the future of our people not as it is now. I'd like a future where real tolerance exists, with true participation of everybody, a society for everyone, because it's there in all the government documents: I mean the Constitution of the Republic and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

We all create society, and therefore, we all have the right to make a contribution. They cannot censor you or massacre you for thinking differently; they cannot make you live a totally alienating life for that.

I would like us all to work together in the future, thinking about our family's wellbeing, peace, harmony and above all, freedom.