

Splintering Time, Fragmenting Space

**The Video Works of
Jorge Lozano**

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On Time and Space

Lisa Steele, Creative Director, Vtape

Vtape is deeply honoured to present the first major survey exhibition of the video works of Jorge Lozano. A key figure in the independent media arts scene in Toronto and Canada for several decades, Lozano's narrative and experimental works have shown in many prestigious festivals including the Toronto International Film Festival and Sundance.

A founder of aluCine: Toronto film + media arts festival, Lozano has mentored scores of young artists, providing an exhibition platform for their highly experimental works as well as conducting workshops for marginalized youth in Canada and Latin America. All the while he continues to develop and expand his own practice which circles the deeply associative relationships between people of different cultures and classes as they intersect in the *realpolitik* of daily life.

With an eye to representing the broad range of Lozano's prolific—often collaborative—practice, Deborah Root has assembled an impressive cross-section of works drawn from his three decades long practice. Root is a well-published writer and critic, author of numerous articles and reviews as well as a seminal text on colonial power and cultural exchange, *Cannibal Culture: Art, Appropriation and the Commodification of Difference*. This exhibition, *Jorge Lozano: Splintering Time, Fragmenting Space*, is her first foray into curating. Her elegantly crafted essay on the work of Jorge Lozano written for this monograph has been expertly edited by author and artist Shani Mootoo.

Splintering Time, Fragmenting Space is the 10th edition of Vtape's Curatorial Incubator™, an award-winning mentorship program providing support to emerging curators of video art. Since its inception in 2003, this highly competitive training program has attracted applications from scores of aspiring curators seeking to hone their curatorial and writing skills while working within the creative cauldron of an active artist-run media arts centre such as Vtape.

The Curatorial Incubator™ provides participants with workshops in practical and theoretical issues pertaining to curating time-based

media as well as access to the extensive on-site Vtape resources and professional editing for their written material. Finally, the Incubator provides an exhibition venue at Vtape, with promotion and a promise of public engagement for the emerging curator, an important aspect of a developing practice.

Applications to this competitive program are carefully juried—this year by me and Assistant Curator at the Power Plant Julia Paoli—and the award reflects not only the quality of the proposed project but, in this case, the crucial nature of the proposal. We felt that the time was absolutely right for a major exhibition of the work of Jorge Lozano, one that would bring together some of his impressively complex multi-channel installation works with his equally rigorous single-channel pieces, providing viewers with the full canvas of his aesthetic and philosophical investigations.

Again this year, three Vtape Fellowship Awards were designated from amongst the submissions. These awards provide recipients with a full range of research support as well as editing of their essay by professionals working in the field of media arts. The 2012-13 Vtape Fellowship Award winners are: Vanessa Dion Fletcher whose essay on the work of Thirza Cuthand and Ariel Smith has been edited by imagineNATIVE Executive Director Jason Ryle; Chase Joynt whose essay on Mirha Soliel-Ross will be edited by artist, author and media art historian Mike Hoolboom; and Fraser McCallum who will delve into the complex visual world of Geoffrey Pugen and work with curator Jon Davies as his editor.

Workshops for the 2012-13 Curatorial Incubator participants were conducted by Julia Paoli (now at the Power Plant) along with independent curator, writer and organizer cheyanne turions and Vtape Outreach Coordinator Erik Martinson. Finally, Distribution Director Wanda Vanderstoop shared her wealth of experience in providing research and exhibition materials to curators and programmers with the Incubatees.

Again, I thank all the staff at Vtape for their assistance and support for the programming activities undertaken in this and other programming ventures throughout the year. I extend my special thanks to Vtape's Mark Pellegrino and Kim Tomczak who provided important technical and installation support for this exhibition.

Splintering Time, Fragmenting Space

The Video Works of Jorge Lozano

By Deborah Root

Once, due to an odd chain of events, I found myself standing in a bamboo forest on the outskirts of Salvador, Brazil. I was being cleansed of bad medicine. It was serious business. The bruxa and her assistant spat rum, blew tobacco smoke, threw herbs at me and rubbed my body with a live dove, which was then released. A black rooster had already been sacrificed and distributed to the poor. When we went back to the bruxa's home, we offered flowers to the helpful orishas, or spirits, while a drum invited these into the bodies of visitors. I felt much better than I had earlier in the day.

Looking around the bruxa's house, I noticed assemblages of objects, altars that to my Northern eye looked like installation art. I saw images of the orishas, who were mostly African but, as is typical in the Americas, had attributes mixed with indigenous and Christian symbolism. One of the spirits making an appearance that afternoon was a Portuguese farmer; others were of indeterminate gender, or combinations of both.

The metaphysical system underlying a candomblé ceremony like the one I attended in Brazil informs many other religious and philosophical traditions. Much of this way of seeing focuses on the multiple realities that lie between the borders separating things, ideas, and categories. This is because the edges of things is where energy is generated, and it is through a deliberate fragmentation, such as a ceremony, that barriers fall to pieces.

Such a system resonates for an artist like Jorge Lozano. A willingness to affirm multiple, seemingly contradictory realities runs through Lozano's practice, both narrative and experimental. When orishas, or spirits, inhabit human bodies, as I experienced and as depicted in *Wemilere*, Lozano's video about Cuban santería, they break down the distinction between human and spirit, or rather reveal the artificiality of this distinction. The orishas themselves manifest complexes of energies that shift and recombine. For instance, Ogun displays a certain kind of in-your-face masculinity involving metal, fighting, politics, and so forth, but these qualities have little to do with the gender of his initiate, as women can have access to and embody Ogun. The intrinsic queerness of this kind of thought makes sense to Lozano, and informs his approach to questions of identity.

If we accept that reality is made up of constellations of shifting fragments, then paying attention to how the various elements combine and recombine can reveal hidden truths. In a recent work, *Stratigraphies*, Lozano uses precisely this strategy of deliberate fragmentation to twist together different moments in time and space, different points of view, different kinds of movements, and different ways of inhabiting space in different cities. The fragments that comprise this work form a rhythm that generates a kind of assemblage or entity that is always on the move, like stars wheeling across the sky. These are held together by the figure of Alexandra Gelis, who circulates through *Stratigraphies'* splintered universe something like Spider Woman, or perhaps one of the Fates, weaving the world together.

There is a disorienting quality to the piece. We don't know where we are. Is it Toronto, Bogota, Buenos Aires; are we in a city at all? Intimate space and public space are inhabited differently, so does our experience in our own homes really have anything to do with what is outside? Or is Lozano telling us that we always/already inhabit many places at once? Or many moments in time, simultaneously?

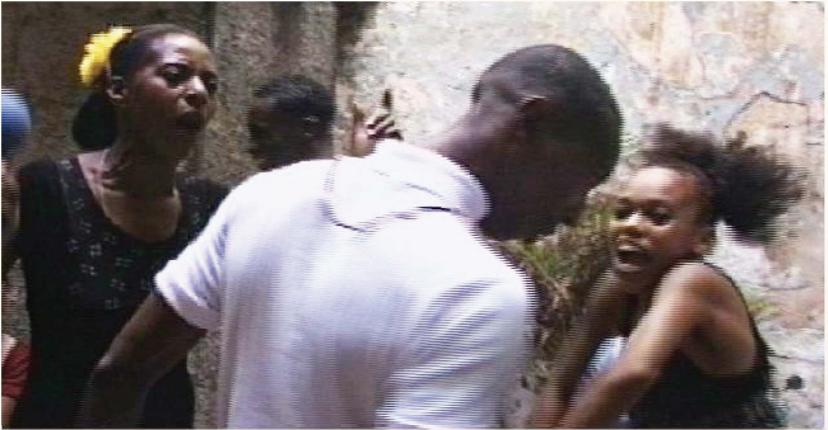
The quotidian is never exactly that, though. In the spaces through which Gelis moves, she is both an individual and a member of a crowd. And she weaves. Her hands hook a line of thread, which becomes a chain, then a bracelet, now a necklace, which she wears like armour as she lies in the grass. She weaves as a helicopter flies through the air; she weaves as drummers jam in a public park. She stares directly into the camera, a mode of address that forces us to recognize her.

Punctuating Gelis' movements across the Americas are clips of people speaking on TV, which Lozano found on YouTube. We hear Jorge Luis Borges and Gilles Deleuze, Julio Cortazar and the philosophers Francisco Varela and Beatriz Preciado.

Stratigraphies is really about memory, I think, and about longing and displacement both good and bad, what Deleuze and Guattari call deterritorialization and recoding, which subtends the condition of exile and diaspora. In one of the clips Cortazar, referring to the political wars that have displaced so many South Americans, defines an exile as someone "who lives outside and always returns." But exiles are so often unable to return to their countries of origin, and it would seem that Cortazar is telling us that, as an exile one is always and inevitably in a process of going home, but never arriving. In *Stratigraphies*, this collapsing of the "here" and the "there" expands to encompass many more than two spaces. As in much of his earlier work, Lozano shows us that we inhabit everywhere, all at once. While this would seem to be the nature of memory itself, the experience of dislocation can also be the result of trauma and political violence. In either case linear memory is impossible.

In *The Three Sevens*, an early piece made in 1993, Lozano lays out an assemblage of themes that have continued to inform his work, in particular a recognition of pan-American First Nations struggles and the politics of land and displacement that are so much a part of these. The effects of these violences on individuals is paramount, and so people's stories run through his work, sometimes narrativized and sometimes not.

Weaving together layers of history and memory across the Americas, Lozano frames his own displacement, both as someone fleeing political violence in Colombia and as a Latin American immigrant in Toronto, and connects this to the First Nations people he meets here, who have also been displaced from their lands. In *The Three Sevens*, figures appear from across the Americas, existing in the corners of the North American city, appearing when needed or



Wemilere



Stratigraphics



The Three Sevens

visible when you know what to look for. In a diverse city like Toronto a multitude of histories coexist; we just have to be willing to see them, and to see the magic that people have carried with them on their journey away from their homes and communities. In this way Lozano opens the layered reality of immigration to further reflect on the strata inherent in contemporary urban life. Floating through the streets of the city are people of all colours, some of whom we might think of as traditionally dressed and others not, some going about their unremarkable business and others engaged in more mysterious activities. The people we see are not always those we expect to encounter.

Each section of *The Three Sevens* opens with a traditionally dressed Anishnabe woman singing. She explains how the land is alive and therefore sacred. But Lozano knows that this knowledge can be hard to sustain, especially without community.

A Native man speaks to Lozano about alienation:

"No one talks to you in this town," he says.

"I know," Lozano replies.

The coldness of life in El Norte is something often discussed with some astonishment by people from other places, and immigrants to this place have to learn to endure what can seem like, and often is, a deep indifference. Sometimes survival is a matter of drawing on one's deepest roots. Lozano shows us a Toronto back alley, where we see an herb ceremony. Such things flourish even in the least promising circumstances.

Lozano is reminding us that, in so far as we inhabit this particular land, with its particular history, the specificity of our racial, national or gender identities becomes less important than our responsibility to where we are, as well as where we have come from. And all is underlain by the need to care for and protect the land, which Lozano frames through a First Nations' understanding of this responsibility.

By writing himself into the middle of *The Three Sevens*, as he does in much of his work, Lozano allows us to see how he is implicated in the story he is weaving, as indeed we all are. And the implications cut across space, as someone coming here to flee political violence carries with them a particular kind of trauma, and a fear of deportation that may well have death as its center.

In Toronto a man in a suit gives Lozano something wrapped in a banana leaf. What is it? In Latin America Lozano unwraps the package to discover a newspaper and photocopied images. He puts together a face of someone who's been killed in Colombia's wars and displacements.

"Mira, mi hermano" he says (Look, it's my brother).

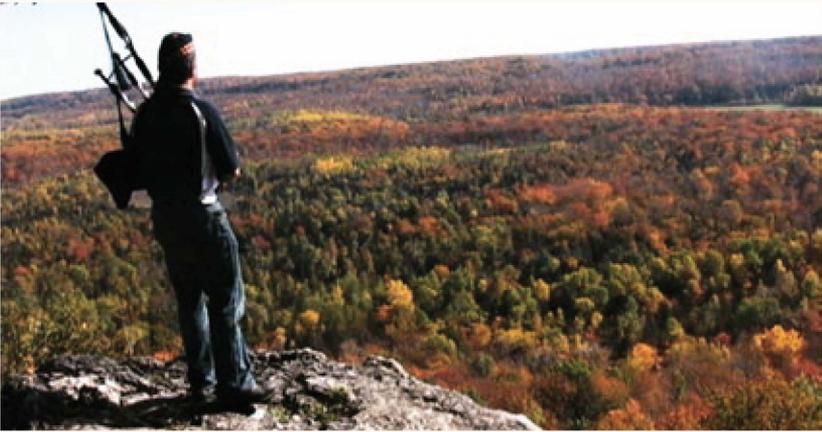
At different points in *The Three Sevens* we hear the names of the Latin American countries that have been the subject of US intervention, which are pretty much all of them. The wars and displacements of Lozano's homeland are connected to these interventions. People here and there continue to be displaced because someone wants the land they are already living on.

Near the end of the video the Anishnabe woman who introduced each section reappears in jeans in a Toronto office and reminds Lozano not to forget where he was born, and not to forget the people he left behind.

Lozano's understanding of his identity as an immigrant in Canada circles through his own histories, his coming of age in a violent and repressive Colombia, and through the First Nations and other experiences he encountered there and here. For Lozano, identity moves through layers of memory and history, and of landscape, and the spaces we inhabit. The land is always there, intertwined with human experience. The memory of the land of one's origin structures perceptions of the land one inhabits now and, while the awareness of one's exile can be painful, the experience of being in two or more places at once is not something to be denied.

When Lozano made *The Three Sevens* in the early 1990s he constructed immigrant identity in terms of his own relation to space, and in alliance with other groups, in particular First Nations people. Race politics was very much in the air at that time, and in Toronto—where Lozano was based—debates around identity tended to end up falling into essentialist categories. But for Lozano, identity is experiential rather than essentialist, and hence not reducible to morphology or DNA. Rather, identity intersects with location, class and gender, as well as with the particular histories each of us carry. *Tampon Thieves*, also made in the early 1990s, tackles immigrant identity directly, constructing a Latina/o presence in Toronto precisely through the differences within that community. Latina/os come in different skin colours, and have different relations to gender and queerness. Lozano is uninterested in papering over the various positionalities people are assumed to inhabit in a racist society, but rather plays these out through the experiences of his characters. A brown Latino tells a white woman friend, "When I walk down the street, they look at me as if I'm going to rob them, or sell them drugs, or seduce them." The white woman responds, "I feel self conscious because wherever I go the people in power are white." Her friend responds, "I love you the way you are."

In the recent short video *Reserved Territories* the camera pans the Ontario countryside from a moving vehicle. Trees, hills and small towns skim by as a bagpipe plays *Amazing Grace*. The road carries us further into the bush. The first hint that this is not a typical rendering of white Ontario is the Anishnabe word *neyaashiinigiiming*, which appears on the screen, untranslated. Finally we see a bagpiper standing on a hill, wearing a Scottish tartan cap. As the camera pulls back we see that he is a Native man. Here, the expected identities break apart and come together in different, perhaps surprising ways. Not only



Reserved Territories

is Lozano reminding us that we live on Indian land, he is showing how cultural forms—and ultimately identities—associated with some groups can be taken up and reconfigured, and in a way that can have subversive implications. And he forces us to ask ourselves why, if we live on these lands, we might not know what *neyaashiinigiing* means (it is in fact the name of a First Nations territory, or “reserve”).

Debates on race and identity circulating in venues like *Fuse* magazine during the time Lozano was making *The Three Sevens* and *Tampon Thieves* sought to construct a counter-narrative to mainstream discourses, and in so doing make room for previously silenced voices. At the time, the tendency to think of identity as a (relatively) fixed category was a way of creating a space in which issues of identity could be worked out, openly and in some depth, without these being immediately overcoded by the dominant culture. But essentialist narratives often left out different ways of understanding race and identity, for instance, communities that define identity in terms of history or values rather than colour. As well, some essentialist narratives judge those not looking a certain way as not sharing the norms and values of the group, of being “outside” the group. At every point Lozano refuses this move.

In fact the problem reflects a deeper issue, and points toward what we might call a metaphysical complication, what Deleuze and Guattari called the distinction between the molar and the molecular. These signify different kinds of organizations, and different ways of thinking. Molar categories are big, and are about fixing people and things in their places. These privilege stability and tend to be allied to the state. Molecular categories are perpetually fluid and shifting, and can involve assemblages of different elements. Lozano’s insistence that multiplicities reveal a deeper truth has deep roots in Latin American thought. The strategy of assembling historical and political truth through fragments was used by the radical historian Eduardo Galeano in his brilliant *Memory of Fire* trilogy on the history of Latin America. In this work, fragments of texts—poetry, government decrees, diaries, official reports—come together to create a field of discourse that includes the voices of both the colonizer and the colonized. For Lozano, creating assemblages of seemingly disparate visual and cultural material is both a philosophical position and a way of delineating Latina/o presences in a place like Canada, where Latin Americans are often newcomers.

There is an appalling legacy of racism in Latin America, and one that continues into the present, but—if I can generalize for a moment—there tends to be more awareness of these violent histories than in Canada, even though these things are rarely taught in the schools there. Streams in the arts and culture exist that have made it their business to consider the indigenous layers of the societies in which they live. This means that identity is recognized to be the result of many histories, many kinds of people, and where one stands on the political spectrum does not necessarily reflect what has been written on one’s body by one’s ancestors’ gene pool. Many Latin Americans are what Canadians would call mixed race, but whether they think of themselves as white or not can have to do with factors beyond genetics or morphology.

Business of Spaces

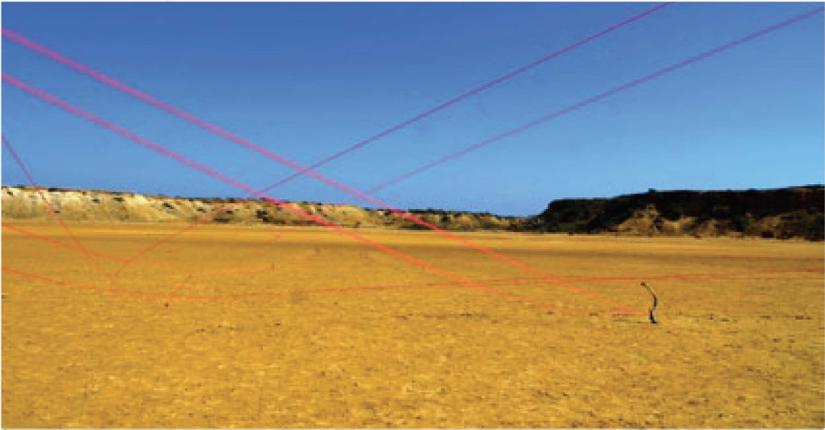
Business of Spaces II

Business of Spaces III

Lozano's work on Latina/o presences in Canada has refused the strict categories of racialized discourse, including critical racialized discourse. It's not always clear who a "person of colour" might be in the Latin American context. And who decides? In *Tampon Thieves* the characters are mostly Latin American, but are different colours, different combinations or accidents of histories. If we think of race as a social category that plays out in specific ways in racialized societies, we can see the difference between the United States of fifty years ago, where one African-American grandparent (or even great-grandparent) meant that you were black in the eyes of the law, and Latin America, where someone can look indigenous but, because of their social position, be considered white. Lozano's delineation of identity through difference is an important contribution to our understanding of these histories. Race becomes a question of affinity, which is to say, of politics, and of what British theorist Paul Gilroy summed up in his oft-quoted remark "it's not where you're from, it's where you're at."

Lozano's choosing to ally with First Nations, and to read his experience of immigration in films like *The Three Sevens* through an engagement with First Nations communities, is to insist that identity is a matter of affinity. This creates a much more fluid experience, and way of looking at politics. Similarly, reducing sexuality to the binaries "gay" and "straight" also enforces a kind of closure. Of course, in a homophobic society this choice is enforced from the outside and at least in part is also about choosing affiliation, which itself can also be provoked from the outside. But what if sexuality is many kinds of things, all at once? And what would the world look like if this were so?

The three videos *Business of Spaces I, II, and III* each speak to the relation of the land to the global economy, both with respect to how the land is imagined and utilized, and in terms of the effects of these economies on people living on the land. The first tape is a dual channel video that looks at the many ways people inhabit space, and struggle to survive. There are scenes from across North and



Kuenta

South America. At times crowds block the streets and, as in *The Three Sevens*, we see indigenous people, African people, queer people, white people. A displaced family in Bogota sits on the sidewalk next to its pet rabbit; elsewhere, wild birds with banded legs walk through a pond. Using the strategy further developed in *Stratigraphies* of assembling fragmentary material into a whole, Lozano's presence on many of these city streets, sometimes engaging with others and sometimes not, reminds us that we inhabit many places simultaneously, and necessarily have a connection to those we encounter. Natural spaces begin to emerge at the end of the video; there is the green of plants, the blue and white of a waterfall. Again, the land subtends everything human beings do, and, again, the here collapses into the there, telling us at some level we are all responsible for what happens.

Indeed, in *Business of Spaces II*, we find ourselves in a forest. The three channels depict a landscape apparently free of human activity. Nothing much happens, although over time the light changes. But then a fence bisects the land and as we gaze at it we hear wind, and what sounds like birds in the distance. The forest transforms into grassland, perhaps the result of deforestation, perhaps a different landscape altogether. The grasses are resilient and, although we begin to see the effects of "business" on space, the land survives. Finally, in *Business of Spaces III*, which Lozano made in collaboration with Alexandra Gelis, the focus is on salt production on the South American coast. In a landscape made alien, the elaborate process of salt making conveys a hectic sense of bustle and commerce. In a never-ending stream of activity we see the pools in which seawater dries, an enormous pile of salt, men carrying sacks of salt to and fro, sack-filled trucks speeding away from the site, all framed by a calm sea. Salt production has ancient roots, and the intersection of this activity with trade is attested to by a string of text: salt for gold, salt for slaves, salt for skins, salt for money, salt for jewelry, salt for kola nuts, salt for weapons. Here again, the then and the now collapse as the past informs and justifies the present.

Kuenta, also made with Alexandra Gelis, brings together indigenous land usage, the relation of landscape to economic factors, in this case salt production, and the metaphor of weaving as a way of constructing reality through small, everyday actions. Here, one side of a split screen depicts an enigmatic scene in which an old woman and child carefully position twigs on a mound of sand. The wind blows continuously as they work, and we see a shrouded woman roll down a dune. As the woman and child continue to create their sand sculpture, on the adjoining screen a weapon sight crosses the landscape, transforming it into a military target. At that moment someone begins to wrap strings of fuchsia thread around a mound of salt. For an instant we see salt shoveled into a bucket. The piece of weaving gets larger; the woman and child work on their mound of sand, the wind blows. Fuchsia filaments begin to enclose the salt and, eventually, to crisscross the desert landscape. A woman walks across the landscape and tends the plants she sees there. The act of weaving has created a kind of ceremony, which inscribes the land itself, and it is the small movements and endurance of the old woman and child that make this possible.

Burning House

Shot in La Guajira, Colombia, *Kuenta* shows us how seemingly insignificant, everyday acts counter political violence, and begin to heal the inevitable damage to the land that is the result of this. Again, it is indigenous people who show the way.

In several pieces Lozano has taken as his task Colombia's difficult history, the various manifestations of violence inherent in a slow burning civil war, the effects of the drug cartels and US intervention, the paramilitaries and displacements, the colonial legacy that is always about who controls the land and what is done with it. El Norte's insatiable appetite for cocaine underlies much of this recent history. For an artist to take on such complex and disturbing material raises the question—and the difficulty—of how to engage with political history and make work that allows people to put things together in a new way, of telling people something different, something that they might not see from reading the news or a position paper or going to a meeting or even taking up arms.

In order to remain politically engaged, but not doctrinaire, Lozano's strategy is to become something of a magician, by assembling and reassembling images and sounds that most of us have some familiarity with, if not with the specific events they refer to.

In *Burning House*, we experience a taste of the relentlessness of the war. Originally an installation that Lozano made with the Argentinean artist Guillermina Buzio, *Burning House* centres around a primary image anchored by six small screens, each set in a row below the larger image.

The central image depicts a house entirely consumed by fire, burning against

Body of Knowledge

a fading green landscape and pink sky. We are surrounded by the sound of gunfire. Someone's attacked a village and burnt out the inhabitants. Who did this? It could be anyone. In three of the six screens below we see three kinds of soldiers, all in different uniforms, all roaming the countryside and wreaking devastation on the population. And we see bodies, and crying women.

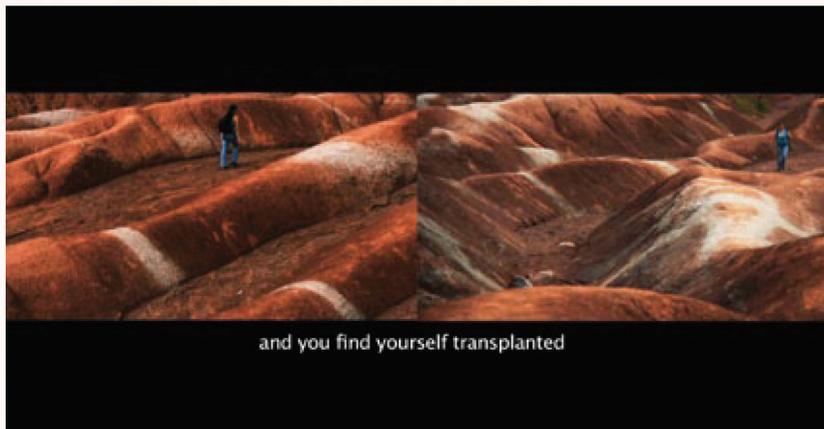
A text appears in the main frame about the relation of war to the cocaine trade in Colombia.

The piece is noisy, both visually and aurally; the six smaller screens all contain images with sound, and everyone's talking at once. There are interviews with different kinds of soldiers (in Spanish and English), news reports, a capioera-like dance, distressed women and the aftermath of violence, coca horticulture and the ceremonies surrounding traditional usage of this plant.

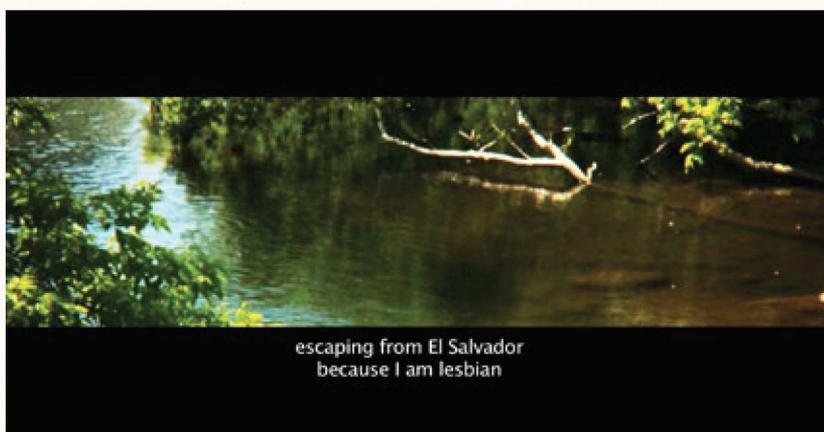
When the guns finally go silent we experience a kind of relief—but no, just as we are about to catch our breath, the gunfire resumes.

The house continues to burn, and then we read a text about what happened to a group of friends. Later there is another text about a coffee farmer being displaced. The images and sounds repeat themselves. In the small screen furthest to the right, someone begins to talk about the spiritual meaning of coca leaves. Then, in an instant, every screen shows houses going up in flames.

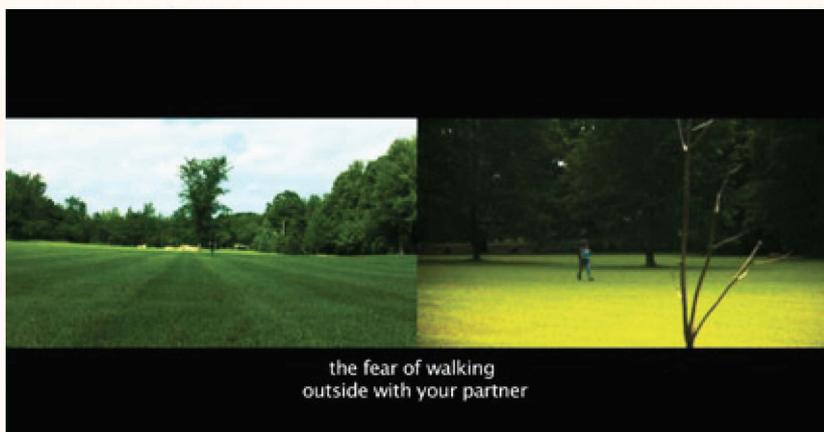
At the end there is a text about Colombia and the effects of the war on everyone. When I first saw this piece I wasn't convinced that it needed text, either the explanation of the coca wars or the stories of people displaced by the violence. The visuals are strong and the relentless use of gunfire, as well as the images



and you find yourself transplanted



escaping from El Salvador
because I am lesbian



the fear of walking
outside with your partner

Land(e)scaping

of different types of militaries, give what seemed to me to be a clear sense of a slow-burning civil war in Colombia, with all the factions and confusion and violent displacement of the population. The interruptions of text appear as heavy blocks that entirely obliterate the images. But I came to feel that the text is less a didactic device than a refusal to aestheticize the violence that is being depicted. When such images are abstracted from the precise context in which they are taking place, violence becomes something to be framed and served up as pure image. By grounding images of the war in individual stories, Lozano avoids the pitfalls of such aestheticizations, which have the added problem of speaking fully only to those already aware of the political or historical facts.

In the Body of Knowledge also refers to the recent history of Colombia, which is distilled to three central images: elaborate stenciled graffiti from Bogota, a wounded dog, and soldiers moving through the countryside. Here the three images tell us everything we need to know, at least for that particular moment, and become stand-ins for larger complexes of ideas and circumstances. The graffiti shows, among other things, soldiers with monkey faces, fighter jets, politicians and beautiful women with guns. The camera pans the graffiti, which appears outdoors, on a wall. However, the next two images are carefully framed. The moving image of the dog (this section is entitled "Latin America") is placed within an empty billboard; then, the soldiers appear in the same billboard. First there is one soldier, then three, then the camera pulls back to show a large number of them moving through the landscape. Finally we hear sound: gunshots from automatic weapons.

Lozano uses the device of the billboard to link the dog and soldiers to the graffiti; all are framed, which means that what we see has already been arranged in a certain way, and all appear on a wall as a kind of spectacle. For those of us "here", such images can remain pure spectacle; "there", and to those who have left, they resonate differently.

But what happens to those who come "here" from "there"?

Land(e)scaping tells the story of Jessica Morales, who one day walked into Canada and claimed refugee status. This work exemplifies Lozano's strategy of illuminating larger social and political issues through individual stories. Here, El Salvador's legacy of civil war intersects with the homophobia that is the product of a certain kind of reactionary thinking, which necessitated Morales fleeing the country to save her life. The film's focus is the road itself, and shows Morales walking away from the violence of the past, and across the U.S. border into Canada, her route mapped out with the help of Google Earth. The simple visual structure of this work is effective: the camera stays on the road, which is at times empty, and at times occupied by Morales, and at times hilly and at times flat. The landscape is filled with Morales' voice. During this transformative and difficult journey Morales walked for many hours, and as she walks she tells her story, which begins with a reflection on the oddities of landscape, and the fact that you can inhabit one place while thinking of another.



At one point it rained, at another she fell asleep. At all times she had to be aware of the possible presence of border police, who would certainly arrest her and might well send her back to El Salvador. During her walk, Morales had a great deal of time to think, and her thoughts took her from the circumstances that brought her to the place in which she found herself, to El Salvador's civil war, to her larger philosophical concerns. And because she tells us what is on her mind, there is a part of us on that journey with her.

At the end of her crossing, Morales' face shows not the joy at arrival in Canada that is the stuff of government advertising, but exhaustion and sadness, and a profound disorientation. She is aware that the road is only the first step; she still has to go through another arduous journey—the refugee process upon her arrival in Toronto, and later a full hearing.

By focusing on the landscape traversed by Morales, Lozano allows this space to be occupied by her story, and as a result her intelligence shines through and she meets us as a complete and multi-faceted individual, not reducible to the categories of refugee, immigrant or lesbian.

We are reminded that people move through space in many different ways, and it is precisely the intersection of the individual with the wars and social and economic forces that surround him or her that make these events intelligible. Each story is singular, and in some way illuminates the larger narrative of "displacement" or "imperialism". And people are displaced for many reasons, among them long wars, economic changes, and the range of sexual violences that include homophobia. Again, for Lozano what is interesting is the way the here collapses into there, and vice versa. And yet, there is always a road,



Raw Memory

somewhere, even if people carry their histories with them.

An immigrant comes “here” from “there”, and works, inhabits space, and communicates, oftentimes, in a new language. S/he is here, in her body and in linear, “real” time. But the truth expressed in Lozano’s work is that there is no strict line of demarcation between the here and the there, the then and now. They bleed into and inform each other. The body is here, but consciousness is constructed from fragments, and so this scent plunges you back to another time, another place; that street reminds of a street you once walked down; this person smiles like your dead aunt; that sound generates terror. In this sense, we all simultaneously inhabit many spaces at once. Some places—or parts of some places—may seem like a clean slate (at least at first) and others do not. We are always/already what we are at this particular moment and everything we’ve been before, and this experience is not linear, as our experience of memory is never quite able to reproduce the sequence of what actually happened. Even if it wanted to.

Raw Memory begins with the double image of a pleasant park in Toronto on a summer’s day. Suddenly, fighter planes scream across the sky; it is the air show that takes place every Labour Day weekend. Those of us who live in Toronto know how disorienting the sound can be, both for us and the animals around us, and how shocking it is when we don’t expect it. But for those who lived through a war the sound of fighter jets have a different meaning. It is precisely raw memory that is provoked, where the here collapses into the there and the consequences are borne by the body.

Again, the here and there collide into each other, an experience more immediate and acute for immigrants, and especially so for those fleeing trauma. While this collapse can produce anxiety (as during the Toronto air show) it is also often



Black Box

able to generate a rich experience, in which a layered perception is colored by experiences from other times and places.

What is produced is not quite confusion, although at certain moments it can be disorienting, sometimes difficult, but an experience that can never quite light anywhere.

In *Anti-Oedipus*, and elsewhere, Deleuze and Guattari write about a process they call deterritorialization and recoding, which can occur within colonial, capitalist systems, amongst others. An example of deterritorialization might be people uprooted (for any reason) from their traditional village, with its comforts and sense of belonging, but also narrowness and policing, who then move to the city, where, at least in theory, they can decide for themselves what they



Situations

want to do or marry or be. They are “free,” but also float around, rootless, and at times subject to different violences than those they encountered in their traditional society. Deterritorialization is a function of modernity, but versions of this process have been going on since people began to move around, which is to say, always. Recoding has to do with their earlier identity being reconfigured by something new, sometimes nationalist ideology, sometimes consumer capitalism, sometimes something freer and more interesting. Usually, however, recoding is about shoring up borders and categories and making sure everyone remains in their proper place, to the benefit of existing power structures.

In expressing a reality that is constantly shifting, multilayered and, in the end, experiential, Lozano refuses this gesture. There is always a sense of movement

in time, nothing is static, everything is always in a state of becoming, but not necessarily becoming anything that has been decided in advance. In the Canadian context, where power is consolidated in a certain way, people can be quick to declare who they are, in part to gain space in the power structure. It even works for some. But because Lozano rejects fixed notions of identity, preferring to reveal the contradictions and complicities inherent in any position, his work manifests fluidity, and a way of inhabiting identity that assumes flux. Race and gender collapse and reconfigure; here transforms into there and vice versa. He remains engaged politically, but through a politics of assemblage and difference. In so doing, he generates spaces for many Latina/o presences in Canada and elsewhere, and in some profound way these presences are always queer.

Within the Americas, indigenous and African metaphysics continue to circulate through many communities, sometimes proscribed and sometimes floating to the surface of the dominant culture. Lozano draws upon these older traditions, in which the external appearance of things, animals and people—although it is deeper than appearance, more like something we might think of as essence—is understood to be malleable, forever shifting. There are different versions of what this might look like in different places, but in general gender (and other “identities”) is understood as contingent, something that, inevitably, depends. As noted, there are gender-shifting orishas, notably Oshumare and Obatala, something like the Anishnabe Nanabush, whose gender can be slippery. The idea that gender fluctuates seems natural to many of the old traditions. (I remember seeing an image of Christ with breasts in an early church in Umbria.)

As I understand it, within the conceptual framework of, say, the candomblé I experienced in Brazil, people tend to assume that everybody is always/already everything, that different permutations emerge at different times, and that the particular envelopes in which we find ourselves are only that, a not particularly interesting surface manifestation of deeper energies. The categories that seem so stable within a Northern, mainstream conceptual framework dissolve, in part because they are not part of a reality that will help one negotiate the world. Yet people involved in these traditions are not naive about power, but rather see the trap in trying to emulate those in charge, and in the fixed, molar categories that make power possible.

Questions of political struggle, and how we might change repressive structures, run through nearly all of Lozano’s work, at times explicitly. In experimental pieces such as *Black Box*, colour and sound wash over fragmented images of people and places, many of which involve street demonstrations, here and in Latin America, and so, people standing up for justice become a site of flux and altered consciousness. In *Black Box* Lozano balances on piles of industrial waste, using his body to make the point that we are all complicit in maintaining the status quo. Yet such complicities ought not engender guilt, but rather generate reflexivity that calls into question the idea of a stable authority and authenticity.

The recent triple-channel *Situations* also utilizes an experimental aesthetic to show over twenty years of popular demonstrations, here juxtaposed with texts. We see people rushing through the streets, menaced by the police; sometimes they speak about the issues at hand, at other times we read their banners. The faded colours of older clips contrast with recent HD images from this year's student protests in Montreal. The texts frame the scenes, but appear in an elliptical, poetic style. Some of the older images speak to issues that are no longer live, and it's a bit jarring to see the passion participants brought to these. In this way, *Situations* becomes a record, not just of particular struggles, but also of a sensibility that migrates across time and space.

For an artist like Lozano, truth is inevitably found and revealed in fragments, and the lacunae that exist between entities are not to be ignored, but rather affirmed, as these are able to reveal something more. The symptomatic absences (to use Althusser's term) can illuminate the mechanisms of power, and what some would prefer to stay hidden.

In both recent experimental works like *Stratigraphies*, and earlier narrative pieces like *The Three Sevens*, Lozano expresses a reality that is constantly shifting and multilayered and, in the end, experiential. Because Lozano enacts this experiential quality through his presence in much of his work, he speaks directly to the viewer, and, in engaging with his reality we might be able to see our own, or parts of our own. Here, the artist is necessarily something of a magician, putting disparate images or objects together to make something else, creating a new way of seeing, a new reality. And underneath these ways of seeing, and underneath Lozano's fragmented and layered sense of reality, lies the land, always. The land is a place of deep memory; the land doesn't change; the land sustains us all.

Biographies

Jorge Lozano has been working as a film and video artist for nearly thirty years and has achieved national and international recognition. His films have been exhibited at the Toronto International and Sundance Film Festivals, amongst others, and his experimental work has been exhibited at many international festivals and galleries. His practice also includes organizing cultural and art events, in particular the creation of aluCine Toronto Latin Media Festival, and self-representations video workshops he facilitated for marginalized Latin and non-Latin youth in Canada since 1991, Venezuela in 2005 and Colombia from 2005-2009.

Lozano's practice as a video maker has evolved and revolved around spheres of trans-cultural social and political relationships with people from communities in different countries and different social classes. He has been involved in the creation of alternative spaces, cultural networks that examine the limitations of boundaries, and above all around his position as a subject in constant migration.

His work is a testimony of his "passing through" different social political cultural territories, and of his constant change in response to these circumstances. His work speaks in many tongues, and offers fragmented representations of a fragmented reality(-ties). Lozano accepts the impossibility of belonging, of being always in a state of fluidity, in an endless trans-cultural passage. This recognition of uncertainty and dualities has deeply affected his video work and his community involvement. He is constantly compelled "to critically rethink and redefine paradigms set in motion by centuries of colonialism neocolonialism, imperialism, racism, and marginality". (Diana Taylor).

Lozano is currently working on a Ph.D at York University in Visual Arts.

Deborah Root has written extensively on cultural politics and visual arts, both in Canada and internationally. Recent essays examine the work of Turkish artist Erdag Aksel for Art Papers, and Mexican artist Ximena Cuevas for Video Data Bank. She has served on the boards of Public and Fuse Magazine, and is the publisher of Good Red, Annie Holmes' memoir of growing up queer in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe. She is the author of Cannibal Culture: Art, Appropriation and the Commodification of Difference, which was named Gustavus Myers Outstanding Book in Human Rights. She has taught internationally and in Canada, and holds a Ph.D in Social and Political Thought.

Jorge Lozano

Splintering Time, Fragmenting Space

Curated by Deborah Root
for the 2012-13 Vtape Curatorial Incubator™ programme

JANUARY 26 – FEBRUARY 23, 2013

The Exhibition (in Vtape and VMAC Gallery)

Stratigraphies (with Alexandra Gelis) – 48:35; projected HD video; 2012

Kuenta – 19:15; 2 channel HD installation; 2012

Situations – 34:45; 3-channel HD installation; 2012

Watch My Back – 10:00; 4 channel HD installation; 1992-2003

The Three Sevens (Co-directed by Alejandro Ronceria) – 21:00;
single channel video; 1993

Compilation reel available on request:

Does The Knife Cry When It Enters The Skin? – 10:43; 1984

The Black Box – 4:42; 2005

In the Body of Knowledge – 3:59; 2006

Raw Memory – 4:00; 2009

Land(e)scaping – 18:10; 2009

Reserved Territories – 4:00; 2009

Jorge Lozano on *Watch My Back*

"Watch My Back is the result of my work with youth communities here in Toronto and in Colombia. I started the workshops in 1992 in Canada, as a personal response to the lack of access to technical facilities, and the language barriers the Latin American community was facing at the time. I continued from 1992 to 2003 within the context of aluCine: Toronto film + media arts festival. My initial intent was to make a documentary, focusing on the social, cultural, conceptual and architectural spaces Latino youth inhabit and their day-to-day existence and subjectivity.

"My use of a poetic structure instead of a traditional linear narrative documentary approach is rooted in my desire to create a work that aesthetically recognizes the creativity and spirituality of the youth and at the same time uncover deeper meanings in their socio-political reality. I chose to work with youth as colleagues, and both to acknowledge my position as outsider, and at the same time maintain a critical perspective, I invited them to work with me in the construction of the documentary, as advisors, associates, self-interviewers and camera operators."

Toronto, January 2013



WITHOUT RULES



WHY WE END UP IN JAIL

Watch My Back

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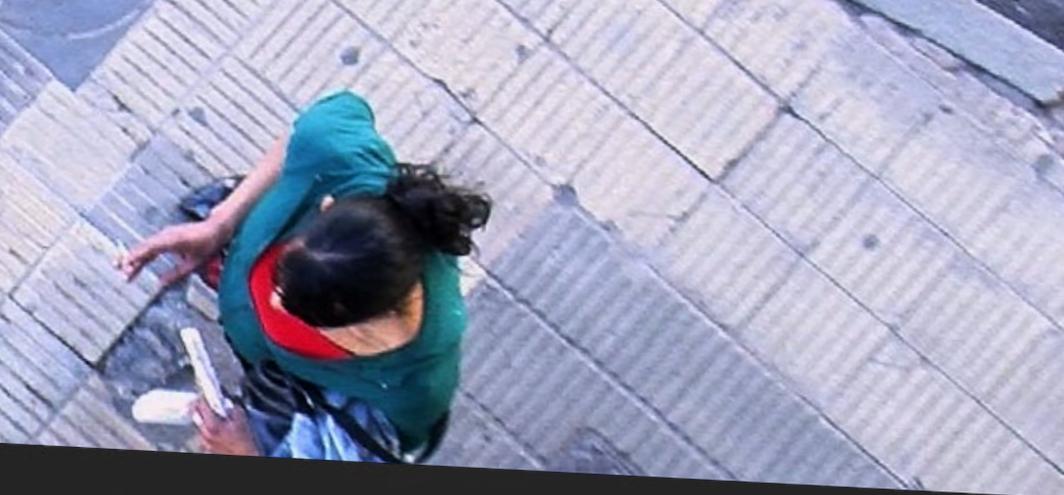
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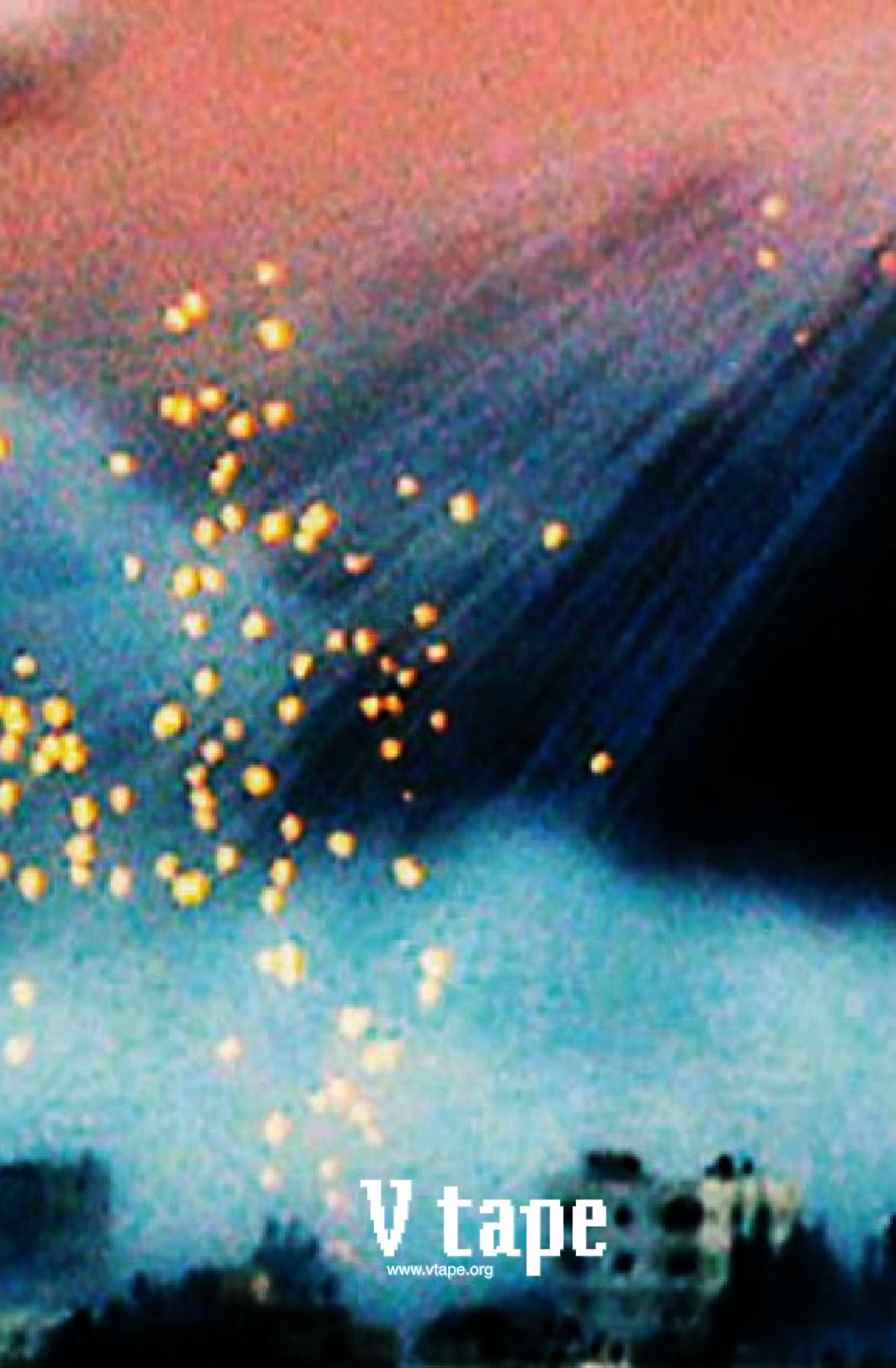
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