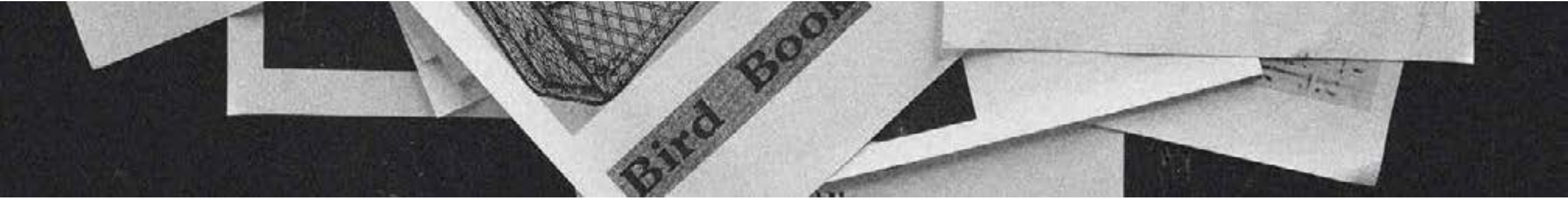


END NOTES

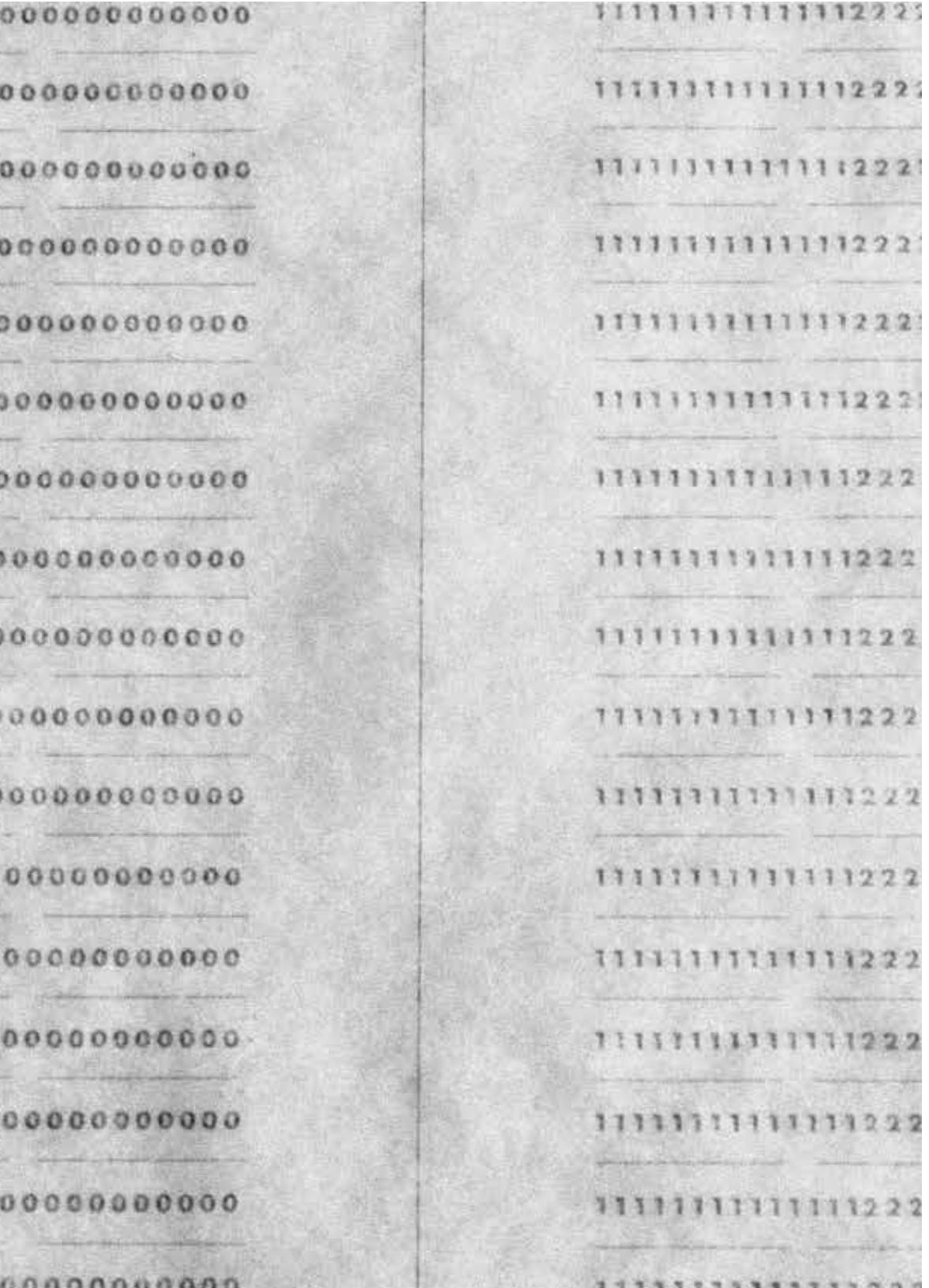
- End Notes At The Beginning.
- Preamble
- The Stage
- Epistemological Events And How To Treat Them
- The Island, The Sea, And The Cinematographer. The Arrival Of Film To Bogotá.
- Lady Lynden And Her Concert Of Canaries
- The Last Universal Variety Show Company Presents:
The End Of The World
- Addendum. Final Thoughts.

Presented by: Alejandra Bonilla Restrepo
Sponsored by: Fonderie Darling
and the Conseils des arts de Montréal
2018



END NOTES At The Beginning

- 1 Few days after my arrival to Montreal I went to visit the Mccord Museum without knowing a thing about Illusions: The Art of Magic, the exhibition that presented the acquisition of more than 600 posters from the golden age of magic. This encounter was revealing in the complexity and powers of graphic approaches and developments of images used as mediums to seduce and reach large audiences: evolutions in graphic exercises seemed to work as well as mesmerizing acts.
- 2 Among people, especially raised an interest in artists and their practices. Long before the residency, I felt moved and intrigued by processes and anecdotic situations inside artists practices, but I never thought of it as a material to incorporate into my own projects. I had the opportunity to talk with many artists during my residency, all of them with different and exciting perspectives, decisions and processes that worked for me as a mirror, allowing me to face and get more interested in my own decisions.
- 3 In conversations with Ji-Yoon, my most persistent interlocutor during the stay, I mentioned something that stood longer inside my thoughts: the ethics inside the aesthetic decision of assuming scale and the idea of the world or the planet as a whole. I made a connection between the idea of relativism and the feeling of empathy; to me, relativism is all about being able to embody the place of the other, or as Jhon Wilkins explains in his treatise of the moon the capacity to understand: “That as their world is our moon, so our world is their moon”.
- 4 This idea came up during a conversation with Alejandro Barbosa, Argentinian artist that lives and works nowadays in Montréal. The conversation occurred in Spanish in which a distinction between ‘el yo personal’ (the singular self) and ‘el yo histórico’ (the historical self) was developed. This words explained to me the complexity in inhabiting while trying to break barriers of difference. This conversation dug deep into my thoughts.
- 5 This words -spectacle and illusion-, were the actual words that took me to Montréal in the first place since were the keywords that I put in my motivation letter as the project to develop during the residency. I acknowledge their power and appreciate their influence on me keeping them close as lights to follow.
- 6 The images unveiled in their shows were the same used in Edinson’s kinetoscope, small events recreating the real to be seen one person at a time. Now the images were displayed on large screens for many individuals to see them together.
- 7 There was a moment in which I asked my self severely about the decision of going few days to another city in Canada or remaining inside Montréal till the end of the trip. I received many suggestions, recommendations, and proposals but I decided to stay. The idea of enlarging my map with another city was tempting and terrifying at the same time. I needed the depth, the feeling of security that time and boredom give. Even when the limit of knowledge is always moving and you will never reach anything completely, I wanted the illusion of it.



PREAMBLE

In the frame of the Residency for the Americas hosted by the Darling Foundry and supported by the Council of Arts of Montréal, I take the first coordinates in which I inscribed myself: fiction, spectacle, technology, and illusion as a point of departure to describe this journey both through information and geography, both through the lands that I crossed and the decisions I made inside my practice. With this essay, I try to retell the paths that appeared when I decided to follow my intuition lead by those concepts, and with it, explore and explain some encounters related to my fervent interest in what I now call epistemological events.

In these pages, I allow myself to understand my journey to Montréal, not necessarily as an adventure that may be narrated with all its anecdotes and particular situations, but as a simple game of alternating positions, and with them their relative distances. So here I am, using a magnifying glass walking forwards and backward in order to change my states of perception, at the end of the longest-farthest travel I have done, comprehending what we call distance, its relationship with scale and its effects in my practice.

THE STAGE

During the first research-creation project I made -the OBSERVATORIUM/speculum-, I found a word that remained resonating inside my skull much longer: fiction. Games of imagination and skepticism allowed me to propose the sky as a stage with carton stars and blue velvet curtains on the bottom, exploring in the meantime the notion of the sky as some sort of construction built by human beings. With it, I discovered in fiction an intuitive methodology used by us to go through life; the changing of scales, direction, and the decision of representing the sky, informed to me about the means that were there for us to counteract our feeling of vulnerability.

After this first approach to the concept of fiction using the sky as a first setting, I wanted to follow the inquiry from one side to the other, especially wondering myself about its technologies; ergo, the field and ways in which fiction is developed, created, narrated, accepted and incorporated into daily life scenarios. From writing strategies as the Penny Dreadfuls or One Dimes, to architectures and events as the magic and illusion shows, I started to follow superficially the endeavors of fiction: how it worked, what kind of permissions it gave to itself and what sort of possibilities it drew for humans to comprehend their existence. Illusion shows from the late 19th century

with all its paraphernalia started to become relevant; the way they flirted with the body and their proximity to science and nature, plus the spectacular approach to visual enterprises took me to the edge between curiosity and snobbery, or what can be understood also as two dispositions in the oncoming to knowledge.

In my way to trace fiction inside one fiction's stage, the question about information in this specific area arrived at me as a whisper or an incantation. What kind of strategies were used in order to maintain uncertainty? What kind of behaviors were embodied inside and outside the theatre? And more, my furious interest in the importance of secrets and rumors as the key to protect and reproduce one kind of knowledge enchanted me hopelessly.

The strategies developed back in the golden age of magic to advertise illusion shows were revealed to me as magic itself¹. In opposition to traditional theatre, technical construction of images in illusion shows was developed not in service of some complex linear narrative, or even the attempts to recreate the real, but in order to extract the most passionate sighs off the public. It had perhaps more intentions in defying physics than psychology, and at this juncture, fiction was shaking harder than ever. Secrets were the right way to maintain their theatres full of audiences, and rumors were the way to build expectation to call them. The stage was a platform in which to exhibit faculties, discoveries and talent, expanding possibilities of knowledge and its manifestations, but the performance and fiction itself incarnated by the participants were alive both sides of the stage and even outside the enclosure.

EPISTEMOLOGICAL EVENTS

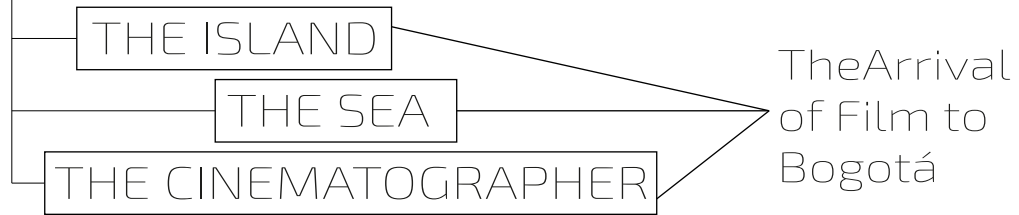
and How to Treat Them

The possibility of changing my position inside planet earth brought with it the confusion of somebody who's trying to focus the letters at the optometrist. The simple act of taking a plane to cross huge amounts of land and water destabilized me. Without any clue of my actual position, I was looking through the window at night from my plane, and sky seemed to be both above and under my body; physical distance to earth masses made scale change and in the process, the perception of my own presence in comparison to the American continent. I felt far away from home, but somehow big and small.

This relocation necessarily changed my plans. I had in mind my coordinates -fiction, spectacle, illusion and technology-, and the expectation that they would take me somewhere interesting. But my physical map already had changed, and so, my relationship with information. The privilege of having days full of interesting readings and conversations, having the time to process a different kind of materials, the possibility of visiting libraries, archives, exhibitions, thrift stores, and definitely the fact of being away, marked divergent directions that blurred at first the assumptions I had in mind.

But all above the drifts I took, started to emerge something that all of those paths had in common. During

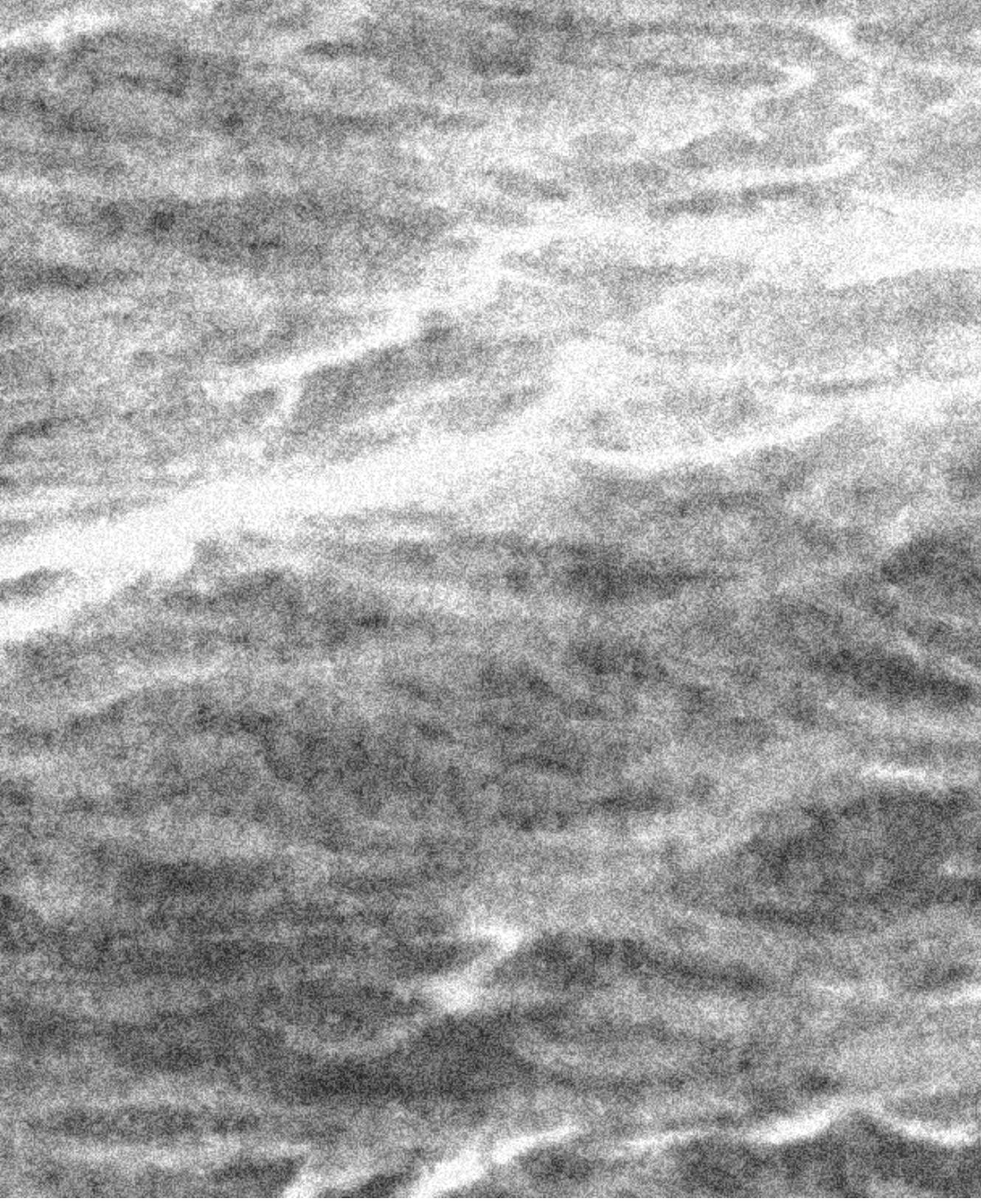
my residency, it began to be clearer for me, my interest in people² and their connection with life and therefore information. The most important encounter is one's own fascination with the capacity to arrange, classify, divide and recognize decisions and routes inside the research process; it is related to the acknowledgment of scale and understanding that knowledge, information, and life are larger and more complex than myself. Here I rediscovered and reaffirmed my most fervent interest in what I decided to call "epistemological events", which is basically each moment in which us human beings, get in contact with information in its many forms and develop a special bond with it. I like to quote William Kentridge as I follow his words, "how we make sense of the world".



I arrived at an island; since the first moment that my feet touched the ground I started to think about Bogotá, my point of departure, current home, and the place in which I have created all my relationships with life and knowledge. As I explained in my motivation letter, I thought that being away from home would enable the chance of enlarging my perspective of the world; I discovered later on that my own idea of the world was problematic because of scale and the principle of relativism³. I wanted to explore the construction of an image of the outside, or the imaginings of radical otherness that are built where the impossibility to reach which is far prevails, but I ended up getting closer to a reconstruction of one's self at distance; in the game of scales and distances Bogotá represented a metaphor for my historical self⁴.

Following the words spectacle and illusion⁵ I decided to read again a book on the history of cinema in Colombia; a piece of home that I brought with me to hold in case of homesickness. The book displayed historically the relationships between new means of transportation at the end of the 19th century in the north part of South America, with the arrival of the film: the technology that changed in many ways our perception of the world, the image itself, reality and at the end, the understanding of ourselves.





Bogotá was far. The book described how it was really difficult at that time for foreigners to reach the central part of the country. The travel implied many days by ship all through the Magdalena River, and then at least 3 days by mule carrying all the belongings on the back. This picture of human beings making such amount of effort to arrive at the capital city, made me think that Bogotá was in some ways an island itself, not surrounded by water but by mountains, making of it an isolated territory. The journey of information was extensive and dislocated, so distance was even longer, and the encounter with the outside -and in many ways, the other-, unusual and curious.

In the reading exercise, two things made my heart beat especially. On one hand the discovery of the platform that allowed the first arrival of vitascope to Colón and on the other hand an anecdote related to the first presentation of the cinematographer in Bogotá. With an improvised screen inside the Teatro Municipal, Enrico Viecco displayed some views taken by the Lumiere Brothers, among them the short film called “La Mer”. The response to this image of a far and unknown reality -ignorance imposed by geographic masses and many kilometers of distance, but also because of different scenarios of opportunities-, portrayed the ultimate feeling of alerity, mystery, surprise and even doubt between Bogotanos. Being able to relate to this virtual presence of the sea through cinematographic images, made me think about the possibilities and layers of information that were handled in this simple act of watching a movie. A new question arrived: How and when does imagination appear as an active force of knowledge?

BALABREGA

LADY LYNDEN

And her Concert of Canaries

La Compañía Universal de Variedades was the one and only company that brought to Colombia the first film projector. It arrived on April 13th, 1897 to the city of Colón. This variety show company traveled all through the American continent presenting their prestidigitation, music and dance acts along with the new film projection technology: the vitascope patented by Thomas Alba Edison, the American version of the cinematographer. The story of Balabrega and Lady Lynden involved shipwrecks and many troubles that a nomadic group of artists had to face while traveling with their spectacular numbers. They suffered several losses of equipment and the necessity of reinventing their show on the road, causing an intense search of new strategies and performances to delight the audiences. The vitascope among those, represented for me a special case.

On its first presentation in Colombia, the device functioned as an exhibition of a scientific breakthrough that allowed to see scale one to one some moving pictures representing far away realities. I believe that this collective encounter with movies -that used to reveal daily scenes from far territories⁶-, created a special relationship with the idea of the outside in terms of possibilities and geographic distances, and with it a complex association of self's understandings and localizations. I found very telling that this stage



of fiction was the one that allowed this ambiguity between scientific knowledge and the construction of an image of the other through diversions, emerge with all its power and confusion in the American continent. Amusement as a media to understand the other was again on the table, this time using virtuality both to educate and entertain.

The nearness between spectacular presentations from the 19th century to science and the incorporation of electricity along with magnetism into daily life revealed to me that it may exist more than one disposition in the relationship to the same kind of information. Knowledge could emerge in different forms that were not necessarily far from each other; while many scientific agents were trying to understand nature with the purpose of improving human life conditions -that can also mean, finding ways to exploit and bend the world to our supremacy-, the variety show company lead by Lynden and Balabrega operated in the same way with a less sophisticated resolution: to make the audience laugh, enjoy and get in touch with alternative experiences of life. Lady Lynden, Balabrega's partner both inside and outside the stage, was in charge of diverting the public with her talent to train canaries to perform a musical show that implicated wine glasses and instruments. The idea of birds being trained in order to perform a musical show astonished me; in this search for epistemological events, this example of a confrontation with the ability to control nature to create amusement interested me as some key to understand something fundamental about human beings. I started to trust and follow this insolence that laid beneath the act of sharing life experiences as fictional facts while defeating the real, personified by birds, light and gravity.

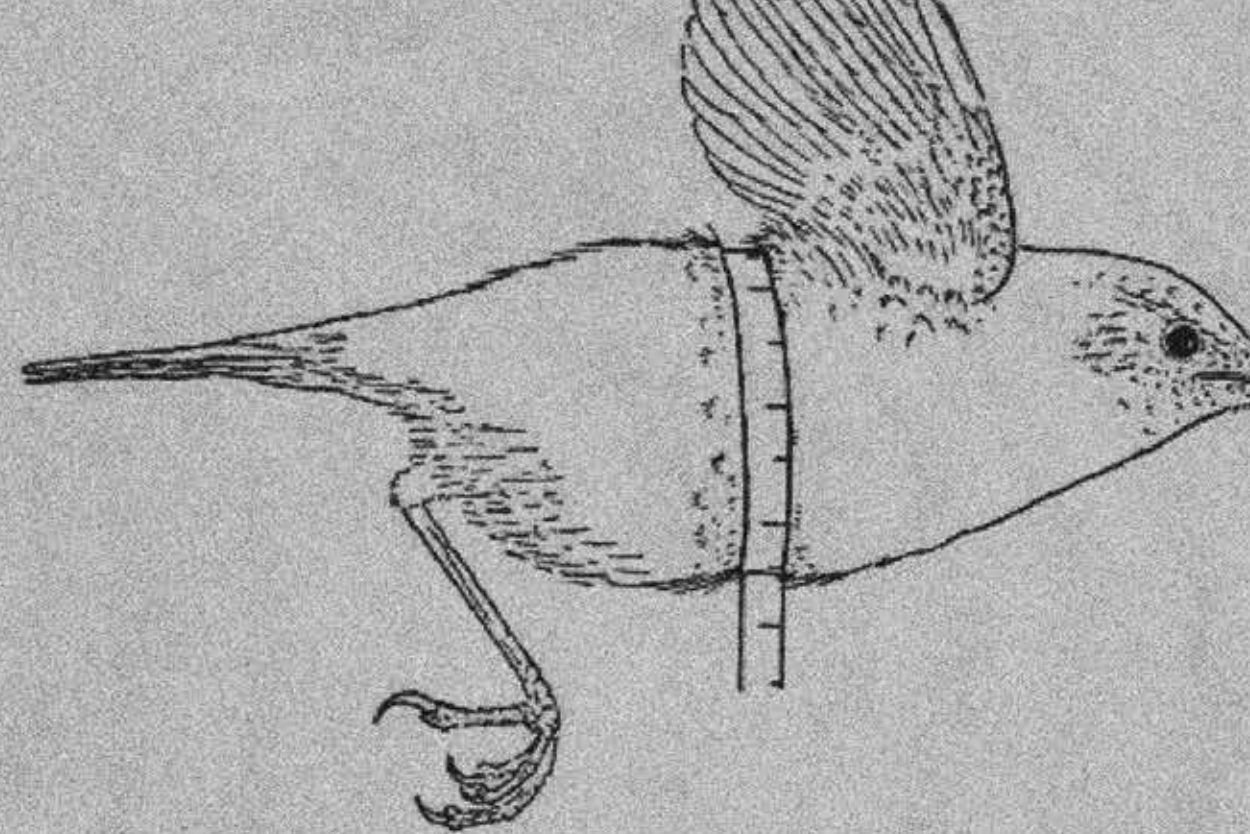
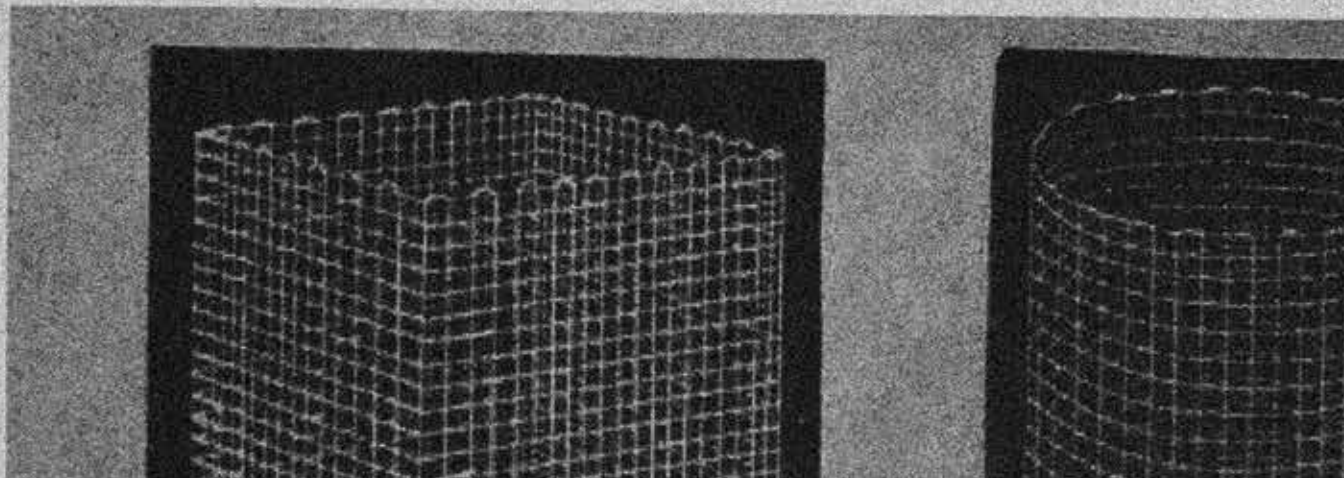


FIGURE 88.—GIRTH OF BODY



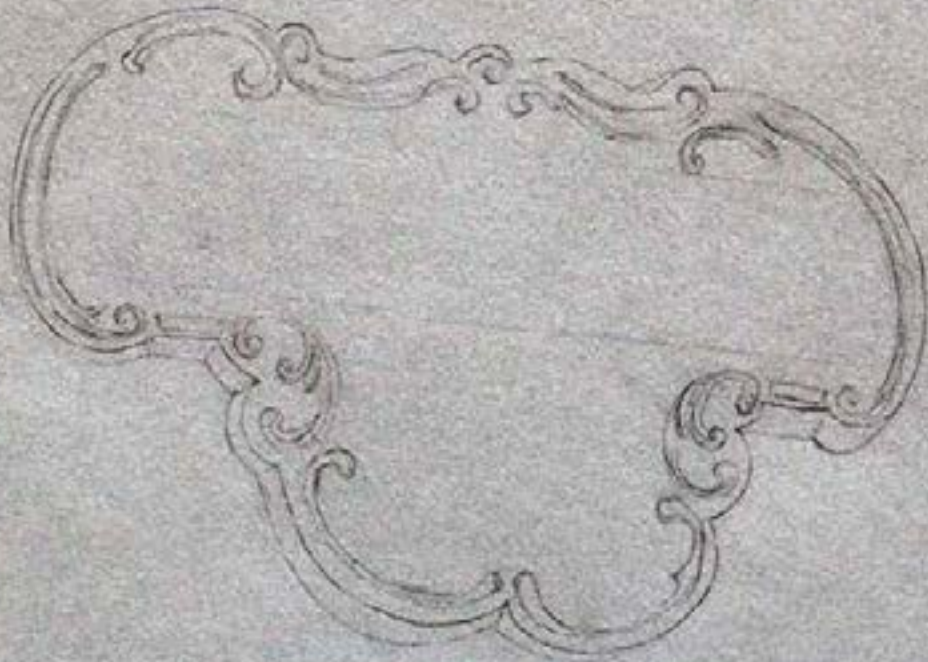
THE LAST UNIVERSAL VARIETY SHOW COMPANY PRESENTS

The end of the world

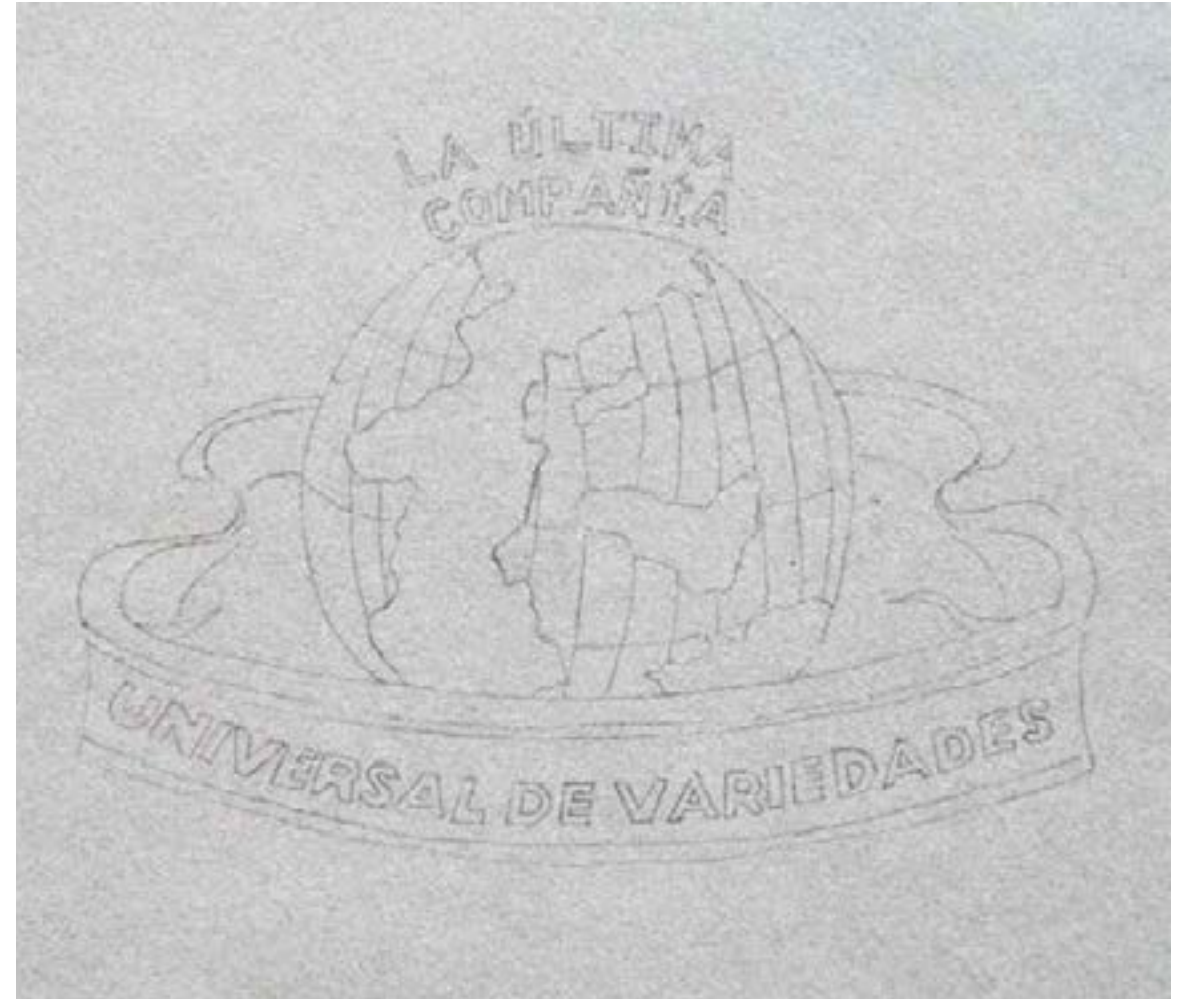
Before my travel to Montréal all that I could say about the world as the outside, as a whole, had a basis on my imagination: thinking and poetic processes lead by history classes in high school, readings, movies, conversations, music, and of course the internet. All transcriptions and stories told by other human beings, building the outside both strange and familiar, as an old tune hardened by time and repetition. One of the most naive and genuine hopes that I had for the residency were installed in the possibility of knowing the world at last. Perhaps, behind my obsession with fiction, was the desire of an encounter with the real.

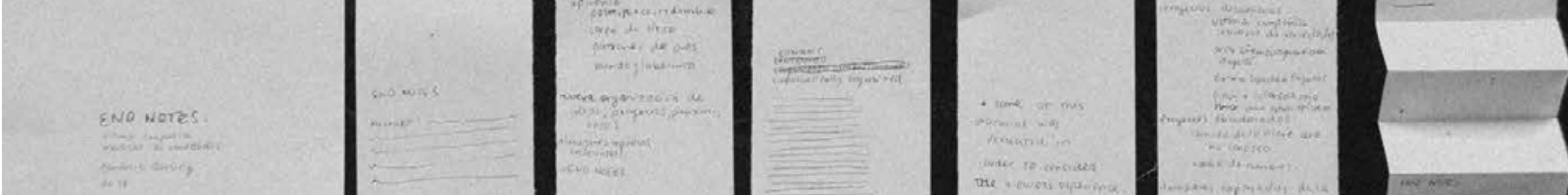
I attended to my rendezvous with the world, willing to reduce my own unconscious anxiety controlling the experience of being inside planet earth, holding as much information as it was possible in order to certify my position inside it; I early discovered that this endeavour of control and confrontation was more elusive than expected; as days went through, while more information I had about the world - personified by the city of Montréal- the main idea was expanding, escaping from my capacity to comprehend it as a whole. I felt that my feet were landed in the city, but my mind and sensitivity were here and there without staying. My own relationship with the concept of the world was growing in depth⁷, scanning each corner, store and street in Montréal meanwhile wandering through all the places I remembered from Bogotá. The scale was not only a tool but the only way to calm all my agitations and explain what “the world” meant inside my system of beliefs.

So I decided to follow Balabrega and Lynden’s course, I decided to evoke their poetic and politic construction



of this idea of the world using fiction and magic to set a platform -a small stage of the world-, in which not to feel threatened but furious and joyous. Meanwhile migrating portions of information that are vital and fleeting, explore those experiences of local and imaginary solutions for daily concerns that are unreachable, validating this virtual technology of the motion pictures as the accurate ambiguous way to represent the already represented life -the nearest way to experience the existence with all its confusion, ambivalence, and relativity. La Última Compañía Universal de Variedades or in English The Last Universal Variety Show Company, presents The End of the World, a series of delightful essays in which I try to erase playfully this concept just to rewrite it. The World in this venture is a chain of tangible, sensitive, rational, imaginary, flexible, fluctuating, small and large relationships between diverse forms of existence. As an enterprise we believe not in the world but in scale, that is simply the distance where we look from and name it.





ADDENDUM. Final Thoughts]

I would describe my experience during the residency as extremely generous and challenging. From my own spectre of opportunities, the space that is given by this program is moving, as it shows high respect and passion. In this sense, The Darling Foundry sets a platform in which to feel as comfortable as possible, and takes care of every detail of the daily life, unveiling a microcosmos that resembles the welcoming of the city. As a Colombian artist, I found telling this importance and care that is given to artists in Montréal in an institutional level, that acknowledges them in their role of agents of thinking. It not only shows decisions but also the privilege of a society that is embracing this fundamental issues in human constructions of life. The artist manual with all the basic information about the city that is given to you at the beginning and the weekly list of recommendations that was delivered in due course were both keys that allowed the exploration of the arts scene in its several faces, institutional and independent along with the exploration of the city as a cultural being.

Living in a space surrounded by artists and cultural events inspires at the same time it creates and reinforces tolerance and companionship. Many of the occupants of the Darling were open to share their experiences inside their studio, making the work environment, friendly and nutritive; during my residency, talking with artists Pascale Théoret-Groulx and Yann Pocreau was decisive to get closer to artists conditions from the inside. As one of my questions during the residency had an ontological and existential quality related to the locations of myself as an artist, being able to mirror it in colleagues practices was very revealing. In this same line, how the residency opens a surface to elaborate relationships and conversations with different people involved with art, was crucial. I have to mention that the studio visits by international figures as the directors of Acme Studio, and national figures as Amber Berson, Veronique LeBlanc, Emeren García or François LeTourneux, represented a challenge and an exciting experience that was entirely new for myself.

One of the most important things for me was the constant conversation that occurred almost every week with Ji-Yoon Han, one of Darling Foundry's curator. I really think that being a foreigner and willing to be involved for a brief period of time with the new place's art scene, needs the support and guidance of somebody who's already familiar with the nodes that converge there. It was vital for my research, the openness she gave with her questions and feedback. creating for me a broad panorama of contemporary art and academic tendencies in Montreal, in Canadá and even worldwide. Therefore I believe it is vital for the Darling Foundry to conceive and accept the importance of a figure inside their own team that is particularly in charge of this



investigation, and interchange aspects inside residencies. I think this space of conversation with a passionate intellectual person, makes the process grow in depth, so it will make the artist career of the residents permeable by other aspects of human thinking. It was sometimes hard to arrange these meetings due to the intense work the team does every day, but I think it should be established and enhanced as something fundamental.

Above all, I have to say that I appreciate a lot the amplitude the residency gives to friendship and the building of human relationships. Meeting Alejandro Barbosa, Argentinian artist based nowadays in Montréal was definitely a gift; we had one of the most provoking and invigorating conversations that I've had, generating dramatic changes in my thinking. The complicity and nurtured interest that I felt in Ji-Yoon and her generosity really enriched my work. And without the support and presence of Marie-Ève Chagnon, my daily experience would have been completely different, her attention on my project and the logistic things made me feel home. The freedom that the program gives to its residents is definitely necessary and encourages you to discover and build your own rhythms inside the city and the creative process. I believe it is really thoughtful how it is arranged conceptually, so it understands the artist not as a productive machine, but as a reflexive being immersed in time, life, thinking and many other events, reassuring the importance of the process and the sharing of the process in contemporary art. This political bet is one of the things that I find more touching about the entire process. The residency allows you as a thinker creator, to consider and question your position and privilege inside the residency, and also inside the world. This is what is most valuable about art for me, and I felt moved to found that complicity in the program.