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'Here everything appears to be still in construction and is already a ruin': rethinking 'brasilidade' in the work of Cerith Wyn Evans and Laercio Redondo

by Alice Heeren • [November 2024](#) • Journal article

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Abstract



This article examines how the artists Cerith Wyn Evans (b.1958) and Laercio Redondo (b.1967) explore the myth of *brasilidade* (Brazilianness) as a doorway to critique the fiction of the 'unfinished' project of modernity in Brazil. Focusing on Evans's firework sculpture *Aqui tudo parece que é ainda construção e já é ruína, a partir de 'Fora da Ordem'* de Caetano Veloso (*Here everything seems to be under construction and left in ruins, from 'Fora da Ordem' by Caetano Veloso; 2004*) and three installations by Redondo: *Paisagem impressa* (*Printed landscape; 2013*), *Venda-jogo da memória falha* (*Sale-faulty memory game; 2013*) and *Lembrança de Brasília* (*Memory from Brasília; 2012*), the present author argues that these works address the way in which the myth of Brazil as the country of the future – intrinsically modern, lusciously tropical, racially democratic and economically and culturally rising – is a poignant contemporary theme, as it has long been a symbol of utopianism, resisting deconstruction even in the tumultuous first decades of the twenty-first century.

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Introduction

In 2009 at the 31st Panorama da Arte Brasileira, São Paulo, the Welsh artist Cerith Wyn Evans (b.1958) showed the work *Aqui tudo parece que é ainda construção e já é ruína, a partir de 'Fora da Ordem' de Caetano Veloso* (*Here everything seems to be under construction and left in ruins, from 'Fora da Ordem' by Caetano Veloso*) **FIG. 1**. One of many firework sculptures by Evans, the work speaks to such important aspects of Brazilian contemporaneity as the myth of futurity in Brazilian national discourse, which is at the core of the idea of *brasilidade* (Brazilianness). The myth of Brazil as the country of the future – intrinsically modern, lusciously tropical, racially democratic and economically and culturally rising – has, for over three centuries, been a symbol of utopianism and an engine in the reproduction of colonial relations of power. Although the phrase was coined in Stefan Zweig's book *Brazil: Land of the Future* (1941), the narrative of Brazilian futurity long predates this and can be traced back to Portugal's myths about its own predestined future.¹ Its fundamental elements – Edenic and developmentalist motifs, celebrations of Brazil's tropical destiny and its peoples' racial tolerance – have continued to feature in the twenty-first-century nationalist discourse, especially with the ever-growing reliance on a fiction of modernity that relentlessly propels the country's resource extraction economy and the exploitation of its most vulnerable populations.

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FIG. 1 *Aqui tudo parece que é ainda construção e já é ruína, a partir de 'Fora da Ordem' de Caetano Veloso (Here everything seems to be under construction and left in ruins, from 'Fora da Ordem' by Caetano Veloso), by Cerith Wyn Evans. 2004. Chromogenic print, 50 by 63 cm. (© Cerith Wyn Evans; courtesy the artist and Fortes D'Aloia & Gabriel, São Paulo).*

Inescapably, these myths make up the contours of *brasilidade*, a system that works in tandem with the inextricable relationship between colonialism and modernity that the sociologist Aníbal Quijano highlighted in his work.² The myth of *brasilidade* has in turn been instrumentalised by such Brazilian artists as Laercio Redondo (b.1967) to challenge its embeddedness in the national imaginary and its continuing impact on the social, political and economic relations in the country. Taking into account Evans's *Aqui tudo parece que é ainda construção e já é ruína, a partir de 'Fora de ordem' de Caetano Veloso*, as well as the song it references, and three of Redondo's installations – *Paisagem impressa (Printed landscape; 2013)*, *Venda-jogo da memória falha (Sale-faulty memory game; 2013)* and *Reparo (Repair; 2012)* from the series *Lembrança de Brasília (Memory from Brasília; 2012)* – this article examines the layered and contradictory nature of *brasilidade*.

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Construction and ruin

The phrase 'Aqui tudo parece que era ainda construção e já é ruína' is taken from the song 'Fora de Ordem' ('Out of Order') by the Brazilian musician and activist Caetano Veloso, which in turn is borrowed from Claude Lévi-Strauss's memoir *Tristes Tropiques* (1955).³ In 2009, the same year that Evans showed his firework sculpture in São Paulo, Veloso wrote in a local newspaper that 'the title of [Lévi-Strauss's] first book is not made up of tenderness as much as it is of contempt and hopelessness [...] Brazil is a large figure in the geography of *Tristes Tropiques*, but also part of a sombre vision covering the entirety of the tropical zone around the globe'.⁴ In this excerpt, Veloso evokes aspects of Lévi-Strauss's book that are brought forth by Evans in his work: the complex set of conditions that bind Brazil's modernity-coloniality structure to a temporal and spatial pairing of futurity and ruin.⁵

Evans has remarked that in his work, 'the shape and appearance of the words are very different although they have the same meaning or idea'.⁶ He has also spoken of his fascination with 'the gap that happens between the text and the picture, and specifically with what that gap is in relation to the kind of space that it allows [him] to occupy'.⁷ It is this gap between word and image, as well as those between different texts, images and sensorial experiences, such as heat or light, that he uses as the materials for his work. Furthermore, by exposing what he calls 'weak connections' between these elements, which often blur into one another, Evans forces the simultaneity of sensing and thinking, triggering an apperceptive process.⁸ In 'this slippage, this kind of elision of different texts', the artist argues, the viewer is able to see different angles. His works are intended to be labyrinths of sorts, in which one constantly misses the point, misses the connections and inhabits the voids. Evans hopes that these voids challenge master narratives and utopian ideals. They are also what places *Aqui tudo parece que é ainda construção e já é ruína* on the same axis as Redondo's installations.

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FIG. 2 *Aqui tudo parece que é ainda construção e já é ruína, a partir de 'Fora da Ordem' de Caetano Veloso (Here everything seems to be under construction and left in ruins, from 'Fora da Ordem' by Caetano Veloso), by Cerith Wyn Evans. 2004. (© Cerith Wyn Evans; courtesy the artist and Fortes D'Aloia & Gabriel, São Paulo; photograph Eduardo Ortega).*



FIG. 3 *Aqui tudo parece que é ainda construção e já é ruína, a partir de 'Fora da Ordem' de Caetano Veloso (Here everything seems to be under construction and left in ruins, from 'Fora da Ordem' by Caetano Veloso), by Cerith Wyn Evans. 2004. (© Cerith Wyn Evans; courtesy the artist and Fortes D'Aloia & Gabriel, São Paulo; photograph Eduardo Ortega).*

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The interplay between disparate texts and inputs that Evans is known for is a key element of *Aqui tudo parece que é ainda construção e já é ruína*, along with the work's performative dimension. Lévi-Strauss's phrase, repeated in Veloso's song, is written across a wooden frame using fireworks. The words are then lit and burn unevenly **FIG. 2 FIG. 3** until the entire text becomes apparent; it is legible at the precise moment that it begins to disappear. What is left – the ruin after this acme – is exhibited in a gallery environment together with photographs that document the event. Although the text remains, it is as an afterimage in the viewer's mind and as an imagined projection onto the ruin, the documentary photographs providing a mere simulation of the experience. These traces 'weakly' connect the ruin to the event and the relationship between the text and the palimpsestic nature of its referents is further weakened. These 'weak connections' expose the mechanisms through which ideologies come into being, and the way that such connections are disguised by their repetition and circulation.⁹

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Evans has stated that for him, 'utopia is a project that is bound up in mourning [and] dystopia and utopia are almost interchangeable as terms'.¹⁰ This semantic instability is echoed in the artist's use of the ruin. Ruins are often overdetermined to compensate for the loss that they materialise.¹¹ Similarly, *brasilidade* – whether tropical modernism or colour-blind democracy – as a catch-all descriptor for 'Brazilianness' is its own form of ruin, overdetermined by the country's promised future as a logical consequence of the abundance of its natural resources and a colonial system predicated on miscegenation. In the national discourse, therefore, *brasilidade* functions simultaneously as a smokescreen that obscures and as an engine that reproduces an asymmetry of power. Evans's installation is embedded with this suspended temporality. The work projects a future that fades as it comes into being, but also defers this failure through its continued legibility and accompanying documentation. Materially, the work is a ruin, a present trace of a past event, but rhetorically, it is a past trace of an imagined future. These formal connections, as well as those between text and image, hold in their seams the remains of the loss – the failure – of a narrative of the future presented in the idea of *brasilidade*.

Evans's incorporation of Veloso's song allows viewers to observe these mechanisms. As this author will argue, outlined in the verses of 'Fora de Ordem' are three pillars of *brasilidade*: tropicality and the Edenic motif, spatial-social integration at the core of the logic of racial democracy and the embodiment of Brazil's 'modernity' in architecture. These will be examined using Redondo's installations as examples.

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Tropicality and violence



FIG. 4 Installation view of *Laercio Redondo: Contos sem Reis (Tales with no Kings)* at Casa França Brasil, Rio de Janeiro, 2013, showing *Paisagem impressa (Printed Landscape)*, by Laercio Redondo. 2013. 77 plywood stools with silkscreen and 77 books, overall dimensions 231 by 363 cm. (Courtesy the artist; photograph Sergio Araujo).

In the third verse of 'Fora de Ordem', Veloso sings:

And the barrel of the pistol
that the children bite
reflects all the colours
of the landscape of the city,
which is much more beautiful
and much more intense
than any postcard.¹²

Here, both the myth of tropicality – the idyllic *terra brasilis* – and complex social issues come to the fore, as Veloso points to institutionalised violence and necropolitics in the history of the city of Rio de Janeiro.¹³ He calls attention to Brazil's social inequality by setting the violent experiences of Rio's vulnerable populations against the mythic landscape of the *cidade maravilhosa* (the marvellous city), as it has become known.

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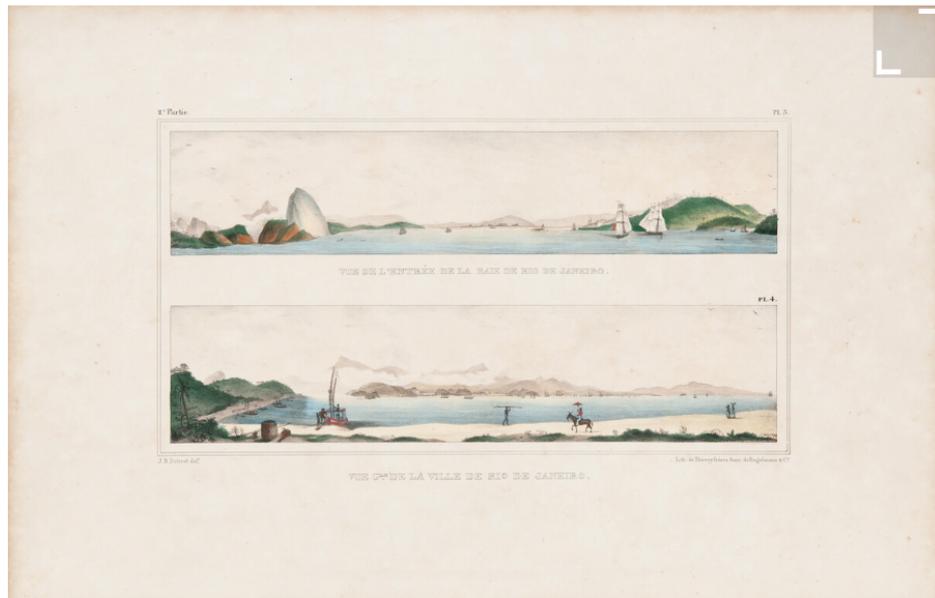


FIG. 5 *Vue de l'entrée de la Baie de Rio de Janeiro (View of the entrance to the bay of Rio de Janeiro)*, by Jean-Baptiste Debret. 1839. Lithograph, 17.2 by 33 cm. (Courtesy Brasiliana Iconográfica).

Tropicality and the Edenic motif as core aspects of *brasilidade* are central to Redondo's installation *Paisagem Impressa* **FIG. 4**. Here, Redondo appropriates two lithographs of Rio de Janeiro produced in the nineteenth century by Jean-Baptiste Debret **FIG. 5**, juxtaposing them with books that nuance our understanding of the city, while also exposing the strength of the Edenic motif in the Brazilian contemporary imaginary. For the installation, Redondo printed Debret's images onto a mosaic made up of seventy-seven square wooden stools. Below each is a publication, which the artist selected based on recommendations from collaborators. Here, Rio de Janeiro is represented by the poetry of Clarice Lispector, the literary texts of Machado de Assis and Nelson Rodrigues, the photography of Marc Ferrez and the work of Hélio Oiticica. But the questions that Redondo's work poses about the city, its urban fabric and its violent history also come to the fore in such works as *Testemunhos da Maré* ('Testimonies from Maré') by Eliana Sousa Silva and *Guia Afetivo da Periferia* ('Affective Guide to the Periphery') by Marcus Vinicius Faustini.¹⁴ All these juxtapositions are in

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Marcus Vinicius Faustini.¹⁴ All these juxtapositions are in turn framed by the idyllic fantasy of the landscape of colonial Rio de Janeiro. Furthermore, in his presentation of this work at his mid-career retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro **FIG. 6**, Redondo was able to add another layer to the work: the very site that Debret depicted, Guanabara Bay, the former capital's majestic backdrop.



FIG. 6 Installation view of *Laercio Redondo: O que acaba todos os dias* (*What ends every day*) at Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro, 2015, showing *Paisagem impressa* (*Printed Landscape*), by Laercio Redondo. 2013. 77 plywood stools with silkscreen and 77 books, overall dimensions 231 by 363 cm. (Courtesy the artist; photograph Sergio Araujo).

As the scholars Lúcia Lippi Oliveira and Sérgio B. Martins have argued, Rio de Janeiro is one of the most obsessively reproduced cities in the world.¹⁵ The use of its iconic landscape in the construction of the exotic and tropical American continent is probably only surpassed by its elevation to the ultimate symbol of *brasilidade*. The historian José Murilo de Carvalho traced the history of the Edenic motif in the Brazilian social imaginary from the sixteenth to the late twentieth century, highlighting its prominence in the

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letters of Pero Vaz de Caminha, Américo Vespuccio, and Cristovão Colombo to the European monarchs even in the early years of colonisation.¹⁶ It was also the central feature of Antônio Gonçalves Dias's poem *Canção do Exílio*, which is quoted in the Brazilian national anthem. Furthermore, recent studies show that 'the greatness of the future as guaranteed by the largeness of nature' is still a widely established discourse in contemporary Brazil.¹⁷

The ideal of tropicality is directly connected to the ubiquity of nature in national narratives. As a node in the affective economy of *brasilidade*, images such as Debret's remain powerful reservoirs for the circulation of this myth. Nevertheless, the perversity of this rhetoric is in how, as Martins argues, 'the hygienist discourse of Rio's press actively participates so as to contrast the landscape as idyllic fantasy with its supposed degradation by the favelas'.¹⁸ The hygienist and eugenic agenda for 'cleansing' the urban landscape in Brazil has a long and cruel history.¹⁹ This framing of Rio's deterioration as set against its Edenic potential serves as justification for the violence enacted against its most vulnerable populations.



FIG. 7 Installation view of *Laercio Redondo: Contos sem Reis Reis* (*Tales with no Kings*) at Casa França Brasil, Rio de Janeiro, 2013, showing *Paisagem impressa* (*Printed Landscape*), by Laercio Redondo. 2013. 77 plywood stools with silkscreen and 77 books, overall dimensions 231 by 363 cm. (Courtesy the artist; photograph Sergio Araujo).

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In *Paisagem impressa* Redondo juxtaposes these two registers: the idyllic landscape is placed on the same plane as materials that expose the brutality of the history of Rio de Janeiro and other urban environments across the Global South. These are spatially superimposed using the stools, as well as blurred together by the possibility of rearranging them and bringing new connections into sharper focus **FIG. 7**. Martins reminds us that 'between words and images – each raising or undoing totalizations that are more or less spurious – bodies, gestures, rituals, manners, and landscapes take on the contours of a conflictive lexicon in whose internal movement the writing of history is disputed'.²⁰ In Redondo's work, these contours become materials, exposing how they hold together the myth of Brazil as potential Eden. Kaira M. Cabañas has argued that 'Redondo superimposes grids of meaning to interrogate official histories and to question the particular exclusions and naturalized assumptions by which they often proceed'.²¹ The reference to grids is important here, as this form has a significant presence in Redondo's practice more widely, often used by the artist to both allow for a rearrangement of rigid structures and to highlight its impossibility. Along with the grid, two other formal strategies are commonly found in Redondo's works discussed here: the play between transparency and opacity and the challenge to the 'Eye' or 'I' structure of viewership in the context of the modern museum.²²

Precarious integration

In another verse of 'Fora de Ordem', Veloso speaks of racial inequality and how it is obscured by a mythologising discourse that glorifies the exploitation of Black bodies:

Those dark hard thighs
Of yours, *mulata* acrobat
Your modern calf
The intrepid troupe in which you flow.²³

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The role of the *mulatta's* body in twentieth-century Brazilian ideologies of racial cleansing is evoked here.²⁴ In the highly miscegenated society of the late nineteenth century, theories of mixed-race degeneration were extremely unpopular.²⁵ Alternatively, the fact that the country's demography was dominated by a mixed-race population was seen as the key to building a national identity. The result was social engineering projects that aimed to 'whiten' the population.²⁶ 'Whitening' theories were premised on pseudo-scientific discourses, such as eugenics, to assert the race's genetic superiority; proponents argued that whiteness could acculturate Black bodies. In Brazil, this project was nothing new: the colonial system of sexual exploitation – by the white master of the enslaved Black female body – repackaged as a modern means of guaranteeing the future of the nation.²⁷ Thus, mixed-race women in their child-bearing years – and their future white children – became the ultimate symbol of *brasilidade* in the first half of the twentieth century, while the active Black progenitor became the most threatening for the body politics. These in many ways remain the contours of racial democracy in Brazil today.

This perverse appropriation and exploitation of Black bodies is manifested in Redondo's *Venda-jogo da memória falha* **FIG. 8**. In this work, based on 'spot the difference' games, screenprints of Debret's lithographs of wage-earning enslaved individuals are shown alongside images of present-day vendors on the beaches of Rio de Janeiro. The juxtaposition of nineteenth-century and contemporary Black bodies marginalised within the urban fabric of the city points to the continuing asymmetry of power in Brazilian society. The fragmented – 'out of place' – configuration of the bodies in Redondo's plywood grid structure points to a less facile notion of historical continuity, as suggested by the curator Fernanda Pitta when she writes:

The point is not to reinforce smooth continuities since the slavery of the past is not what explains today's precariousness [...] What the artistic procedure with these images allows one to see are not the permanencies but the phantasmagorias of permanence that makes us consider our history as natural history.²⁸

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Nonetheless, the similarities between the two sets of images hinders the viewer's understanding of Brazilian history and brings to the fore the silenced contradictions in the official narrative, which constantly looks to reassert the country's racial democracy.

Moreover, Pitta also speaks of the way the work engages the viewer in compelling them 'to commit to a position', as the plywood tiles can only show one vision – one temporality – at a time. As the images are printed on different sides of the boards, either the nineteenth-century enslaved labourers or the twenty-first-century informal workers are visible, not both simultaneously. Additionally, the cropping of bodies and the grey rectangles that make up the backgrounds create a sense of fracture, as the workers slip out of one tile and reappear in the next without ever being completed. This mismatched character nudges the viewer to attend to the violence experienced by these workers. As one spends more time 'playing the game', these vestigial figures, whose poses suggest that they are moving across the field of vision, even as they are weighted down by their wares, become increasingly haunting, the repetition of images working to further emphasise this never-ceasing labour.

Blurred monumentality

In the passage of 'Fora de Ordem' appropriated by Evans, Veloso explores one of the most prominent features of *brasilidade*: the notion of Brazil as perennially modern, which is emblematised in the country's architecture. Much like Evans's piece, Redondo's video installation *Reparo* **FIG. 9** from the series *Lembrança de Brasília* materialises the interplay of utopia and failure, of past, present and future, while also evoking the collapse and ruinous nature of *brasilidade*. A three-minute video is projected in a small Plexiglas box, which is set on a table and paired with a miniature version of Bruno Giorgi's public sculpture *Os Guerreiros* (*The Warriors*; 1959)

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better known as *Os Candangos*, the term that refers to the workers who built the city of Brasília **FIG. 10.**²⁹ *Os Guerreiros* is a large-scale work that sits in the Praça dos Três Poderes (Three Powers Plaza), the centre of Brasília's urban programme. Redondo recalls how ubiquitous photographs of this monument were in the media when he was growing up in the south of Brazil. Thus, his decision to appropriate *Os Guerreiros* as the protagonists of his video installation stems precisely from the contradiction in placing a symbolic, abstract representation of the body of the *candangos* at the heart of Brasília's scenography.³⁰

The *candangos* have been memorialised in Giorgi's sculpture, even if the word has a complex etymology. Some dictionaries trace it back to eighteenth century designations of Portuguese slave-traders, when it referred to a despicable, abject or treacherous person.³¹ It was still pejorative at the beginning of the twentieth century, used to refer to the mixed-race, lower-class workers who migrated to the Central Plateau to build the new capital. The shift from derogatory to celebratory was instigated in the speeches of Juscelino Kubitschek, president from 1956 to 1961. The term was instrumentalised in the proliferation of discourses of racial democracy and social integration, with which the government justified the human and environmental impact of their developmentalist policies.³² The *candangos* were celebrated as the first inhabitants of the Central Plateau and an idealised working-class. Giorgi's sculpture monumentalises this narrative by placing an abstracted form of the *candangos* at the forefront of the new capital's carefully crafted scenography, as shown in the iconic photographs of Marcel Gautherot (1910–96) **FIG. 11.**

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The prototypical images of Brasília are black-and-white frontal or birds-eye views, in which the sky complements the purity of Oscar Niemeyer's architecture. Most importantly, the body – especially the body that omits the act of its labour – almost blends into the outline of the architecture **FIG. 12.**³³ Writing about Gautherot's photographs of Brasília, Heloisa Espada has argued that:

in the omnipresent clarity of the Central Plateau, the artist sought the late afternoon light to photograph the recent inaugurated capital. Certainly, that appeared to him as the adequate luminosity to register the white volumes that composed the new modern and artificial landscape destined to represent the country. In his photographs, under the blazing sun, a world of geometric forms and limpid atmosphere inspires lightness and order.³⁴

In turn, the architect and writer Paulo Tavares has highlighted the structural role of colonialism in Brazil's ideologies of nation-building by noting that the 'Crucifix Square', a memorial that commemorates the first mass celebrated in the Central Plateau, can be thought of as the entrance to Brasília's scenography, which leads the way across the monumental axis of the city plan to the Praça dos Três Poderes.³⁵ It is here that the JK Memorial, a museum and mausoleum dedicated to Kubitschek, is found. Engraved in the tomb's granite is the epithet 'The Founder'. Next to it, the film *O Bandeirante de Hoje* (1958) by Jean Manzon plays on a loop, the title referring to the term for settlers in colonial Brazil. This configuration, Tavares argues, serves to didactically frame the former president as part of a long lineage of conqueror-heroes responsible for 'building' contemporary Brazil, an association that Kubitschek encouraged **FIG. 13.**

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The instrumentalisation of the *bandeirante*, which roughly translates as ‘flag-carrier’ or ‘frontiersman’, in Kubitschek’s mythology was aligned with the use of the *candango* trope. The *candangos* were the modernised conflation of two historical figures: the *bandeirante*, who first pushed towards the Brazilian hinterlands in the seventeenth century, and *cangaçeiros*, who dominated the inner plateau in the beginning of the twentieth century. However, the *candangos* were not seen as sharing the predatory greed historically associated with the *bandeirantes* or the criminal anarchic nature of the *cangaçeiros*. In a way, this recuperated both figures and opened the door for their resignification in the national discourse, as evidenced by Kubitschek’s identification with the modern *bandeirante*. The *candangos*, therefore, were the ideal peasants-turned-urban-workers, responsible for building the Brazilian future. In the origin story of Brasília, next to empty construction shots and compositions devoted to the ideal of a city erected in the empty hinterlands, the *candangos* were a main feature.

The *candangos* became so associated with the image of Brasília that as the inauguration of the capital grew closer, they became a problem. By 1959 it was clear that they would not in fact have a place in Brasília, instead being relegated to the slum-like satellite cities that surrounded the newly built capital. However, the disappearance of this figure from the space of the city disrupted the official narrative. Brasília was positioned as the epitome of the national discourse of racial democracy and social integration – a narrative that only worked if the *candangos* were a part of it. The solution to this dilemma was the reinsertion of the *candangos* as an abstraction in Giorgi’s monument, which featured prominently in the Praça dos Três Poderes. Thus, *Os Guerreiros* was meant to represent the ideal body of the *candangos*, memorialising the promises of integration of the large Brazilian territory and the breakdown of regional, social, economic and racial hierarchies. Its placement in the main square surrounded by Niemeyer’s most important buildings

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shows the significant role intended for this public sculpture in the emergence of Brazilian modernity. In other words, *Os Guerreiros* reinserted the *candango* into Brasília as an aestheticised body rather than a living one, its monumental form obscuring the erasure of labour and labouring bodies, and the denial of their right to the city.

Redondo's video for *Reparo* FIG. 14 focuses on *Os Guerreiros* and the corner of the nearby Supremo Tribunal Federal. Initially, these elements come to the fore because of their recognisability. This is subverted, however, by the low angle of the camera, which relegates the court and the sculpture to the upper right corner of the screen, while the rest is dominated by a stretch of waterlogged grass and a grey foggy sky. Furthermore, the miniature size of the Plexiglas surface onto which the film is projected, alongside the polyphony of sounds captured in the recording, overwhelms the landscape of Brasília. As the rain beats down on the lawn in front of the Supremo Tribunal Federal, a group of protesters clad in red and carrying banners can be seen marching across the horizon. Here, two iconic symbols of Brasília are set against a stormy, sombre landscape and – much like the elements in Evans's firework sculpture – shift from icons to ruins that make visible, and in some ways monumentalise, the fissures that permeate the mythological nature of *brasilidade*. The skewed angle that Redondo uses is particularly effective because, rather than show Niemeyer's building and Giorgi's sculpture at the centre of the composition as is traditional in images of this space FIG. 15, it gives prominence instead to the protestors and buses passing in the distance – reminders of the working-class labourers who migrate daily from the satellite cities to the centre of Brasília to maintain the manicured façade of the capital.

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Moreover, Redondo replaces the Portuguese-style stone pavement and iconic lawns that the city is known for, with a muddy, overgrown stretch of land. The clean atmosphere and picturesque clouds, which have become central pillars in the modern image of Brasília, are supplanted by a fog that expands amid torrential rain. The soundtrack is replete with rushing wind, rain and the blaring horns of protestors, which continue as the landscape becomes increasingly indistinct through the storm **FIG. 16**. While dynamic elements, such as colour, movement and sound, capture the viewer's attention, the sculpture and building remain static abstractions of the ideals of *brasilidade*. As the bodies of the protestors disappear into the fog, it is only through sound that the viewer knows they are still there. The red flags that are visible in the middle ground are a further spectre of contemporary collapse: the ambiguous narrative of rise and ruin of the Leftist project of the Worker's Party in Brazil, especially as tensions have continued to escalate in the last decade.

Because of diminutive size of the installation and the low pedestal on which it is placed, it is necessary for most viewers to bend down to view it. Although from some positions the small sculpture and its filmic counterpart can align, the traditional view of the city cannot be recaptured or recuperated here. The imposing monumentality of the city and the central role played by such buildings as the Supremo Tribunal Federal and public sculptures such as *Os Guerreiros* are overtaken by the material reality of the Central Plateau: the overwhelming nature of the hinterlands that Brasília, the lynchpin of 1950s developmentalist narratives, attempted to tame. As the protestors disappear, these architectural icons remain the only visible surfaces, but they are stripped of their monumentality and utopian symbolism by the muddied and blurred composition.

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The ultimate symbols of Brazil's fiction of modernity are made small and banal in the souvenir that stands at the forefront of the installation, echoing Redondo's own experience of Brasília. In a recent conversation, the artist recounted that when he first visited the city as an adult, the overpowering Brasília he had experienced growing up – in images that swarmed newspaper stands and television screens during the dictatorship era (1964–85) – looked small and dwarfed by the flat topography of the hinterlands.³⁶ In the end, the sounds of political labour and traces of the workers' presence in the distance are Redondo's challenge to the overdetermined visual narrative of Brasília in the national imaginary.

Conclusion

The inability to deconstruct the ideal of Brazil consolidated in the last century – made in the image of modernity through architecture and the embodiment of developmentalist economic policies – is a central characteristic of *brasilidade*. And yet, this myth was in ruins even as it was being constructed. It is to these contradictions – this spectral relationship of a present stunted by an introjected, deferred future and the perversity of its utopianism – that Evans's and Redondo's installations speak. That is, the brutality intrinsic to *brasilidade* and the silenced histories that are necessary to sustain it. These works of art suggest that it is in the folds, the contours and the gaps of Brazil's fiction of modernity that the breakdown of the myths of tropicality, racial democracy and futurity can take place, and that it is there that the Brazilian nation can be imagined anew.

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