Bridging Modernities in Brazil: Progress and Violence in the Work of Rosangela Renno

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Recommended Citation
Kath, Francine, "Bridging Modernities in Brazil: Progress and Violence in the Work of Rosangela Renno" (2013). CUNY Academic Works.
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Bridging Modernities in Brazil
Progress and Violence in the Photographic Work of Rosângela Rennó

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts of the City College of the City University of New York

July 2013
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgments 03

Introduction 04

Chapter 1
*Atentado ao Poder* and *Candelária*: Tackling Rio de Janeiro Street Violence 14
The Earth Summit and the Candelária Massacre: Urban Violence in the 1990s 23
*Atentado ao Poder* and *Candelária*: Artistic Convergences 29

Chapter 2
Building Modernity: *Immemorial* Memorial 34
The Construction of Brasilia and its Workers 45
Brasilia in the 1990s: Collor’s Rise and Downfall 53

Chapter 3
The Institutional Archive: *Cicatriz* and *Vulgo* 57
Carandiru in Context 66
Carandiru in the 1990s 72

Chapter 4
The New Millennium in Context 79
*Série Vermelha (Militares)*: Military Portraiture and Dictatorship 82
*Corpo da Alma*: Disappeared Bodies in Early Portraiture and Photojournalism 90

Conclusion 101

Bibliography 103

Figures 114
Acknowledgments

I am greatly indebted to my advisor Professor Dr. Anna Indych-López for her inspiring teachings, enlightening comments, and thoughtful guidance and availability throughout this research and writing process. I am also deeply grateful for her enthusiasm about my work and encouragement to continue improving my arguments and defending the ideas in which I believe. Additionally, I would like to thank Professor Dr. Ellen Handy for her invaluable criticisms and suggestions in the second stage of this thesis.

I am also grateful to the artist Rosângela Rennó, who welcomed me in her studio in Rio de Janeiro for an interview and was always available through her assistants to share information about the works and answered the multitude of questions I had during my research. I would also like to thank the cooperation of the following institutions for receiving me and arranging viewings of Rennó’s works in their collections: Itaú Cultural, Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro, Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, and Guggenheim Museum.

Lastly, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my friends and family for their understanding and encouragement in my moments of distress and absence. I am forever grateful to my parents for their unconditional love and support throughout my life-long quest to discover my true calling. I dedicate this thesis to them as a proof that I have found it at last.
Introduction

After twenty years of dictatorial rule, which started in 1964 and culminated in a decade-long process of political overture, democracy was reestablished in Brazil in 1985. It was only in 1989, however, when the government of Fernando Collor de Mello, the first president elected by popular vote since the military coup, that Brazilian citizens regained full civil rights. A year before, the new Constitution of 1988 established the rights and duties of citizens based on principals of freedom, equality, and welfare, aiming to create a democratic, multicultural, and fraternal State, committed to harmony and social justice.¹ Yet, instead of consolidating human rights and resuming modernization in politics, economy, and culture, the 1990s became a traumatic transition marked by corruption and violence, inscribing deep scars in Brazilian society.

While Collor de Mello was impeached and removed from power two years after his inauguration due to accusations made by his brother of illicit use of power and public money, urban violence erupted in the early 1990s, bringing distress to Brazil’s two largest metropolises: Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. Between 1992 and 1993 military authorities from these two centers executed civilians and marginal figures, such as street children and male prisoners, in a series of massacres that had strong national and international repercussions, causing human rights organizations to intervene and Brazilians to demand justice.²

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² The first massacre happened inside São Paulo’s Carandiru Detention Center in October 1992, and became know as the Carandiru Massacre. To contain a rebellion, army officers murdered at close range a hundred and eleven detainees. In July 1993, five policemen opened fire against forty homeless children who slept on the sidewalk adjacent to Candelária Cathedral in downtown Rio de Janeiro. Eight children were killed, and the tragedy became know as the Candelária Massacre. The third massacre happened in August 1993, when
It was within this tumultuous context that contemporary artist Rosângela Rennó (b. 1962) created a group of photographic series that appropriated imagery from newspapers, public archives, and portrait studios to explore present as well as past events of Brazilian history. In works such as Atentado ao Poder (Outrage to Power) (1992) and Candelária (Candelaria) (1993) she culled current images and texts from the media to address contemporary urban violence, while in series such as Imemorial (Immemorial) (1994), Cicatriz (Scar) (1996), Vulgo (Alias) (1994-1999), Série Vermelha (Red Series) (1996-2003) and Corpo da Alma (Body of Soul) (2003-2008) Rennó looked to the past to discuss social injustice, power relations, progress, and modernization, issues that consistently marked the history of the country throughout the twentieth century.

In Cicatriz and Vulgo Rennó recuperated archival photographs from the Carandiru Penitentiary Museum in São Paulo. Taken in the 1930s and 1940s, when Carandiru was considered a model prison, the images portray close-ups of the inmates’ bodies. In Imemorial Rennó appropriated identity photographs of adults and children who worked – and often died – in the construction of Brazil’s new modern capital, Brasilia. Lastly, in Série Vermelha and Corpo da Alma Rennó addressed issues of power, loss, and repression that closely related to dictatorial regimes. It is noteworthy that the artist particularly examined these moments through the point of view of vanquished and forgotten characters, those who have been continually excised from Brazil’s official

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3 Rennó creates her works from various photographic sources. In the beginning of her career, she appropriates family albums and photographs, while in the end of the 1980s, she gathers discarded negatives from portrait studios and starts collecting prints and negatives she finds in second-hand shops and flea markets or is offered as gifts from friends. In the 1990s, Rennó incorporates images from the mass media and recuperates photographs from archives that are in advanced stage of decay. Rennó always enlarges the original images, often altering their surface by digitally adding layers of color or reducing their contrast and intensity, rendering them almost transparent. Rennó’s techniques are further developed in relation to each work discussed in the following chapters.
I claim in this thesis that by exposing the violence and oppression historically inflicted by State power on minorities and disempowered citizens, Rennó’s photographic series of the 1990s engage and challenge the various official attempts that repeatedly failed to implement modernism in Brazil. I argue that the works, conceived in the midst of the 1990s turbulent period, yet informed by past events that date back to the 1920s, can be understood as pieces of a narrative that retrace the history of Brazil’s modern project through the lens of the oppressed.

Although scholars and critics have discussed Rennó’s 1990s photographic series in regard to their commitment to social justice and the politics of memory and identity, they have never looked at them as inserted within a narrative that rebuilds the successive failures of modernist projects in Brazil through the point of view of the marginalized and the oppressed, the majority of whom are Afro-Brazilians and northeastern migrants who relocated to the large centers of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro in the 1940s-1960s. Furthermore, this is the first reading that places this body of work in the socio-historical context of the 1990s.

I incorporate in my analyses of the works texts by pivotal theorists and art historians, such as Paulo Herkenhoff, Annateresa Fabris, and Charles Merewether, reviewing their crucial arguments that since the 1990s have permeated the discourses in the literature about Rennó’s oeuvre. Herkenhoff’s literary interpretations of Atentado ao Poder, Candelária, Imemorial, and Cicatriz became foundational to the understanding of these works and have been constantly cited in secondary sources, especially in relation to
issues of identity, pain, and social amnesia. Fabri’s exploration of theoretical notions of power and state control developed by Michel Foucault inform the historical contextualization of works such as Cicatriz and Vulgo. Her understanding of the representation of the body as a political symbol in Atentado ao Poder and Série Vermelha is also crucial to the reading of these works as part of a State discourse that imposes power and oppression. Lastly, Charles Merewether studies of the use of archives in contemporary practices provide theoretical support to Rennó’s archival appropriations. His analyses of the role of Latin American artists in unearthing mummified and purposefully obliterated official records as a means to liberate repressed memories is key to my reading of Inemorial, Cicatriz, and Vulgo, which Rennó created with documents and photographs from public archives. Based on their analyses and research I construct my thorough socio-historical contextualization, which examines Rennó’s works in relation to various modernizing projects Brazilian governments put forward throughout the twentieth century.

Beginning in the 1920s and 1930s artists, anthropologists, sociologists and economists, among other scholars and the intellectual elite debated the ideas surrounding modernism, modernity, and modernization in Brazil. The term modernism is most commonly associated with the arts. Here, it refers to artistic expressions that, influenced

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by the European avant-garde movements of the turn of the twentieth century, aimed to
break with academicism and tradition. Modernization, in the other hand, closely relates to
the political, socio-cultural, and especially economic evolvement of a certain area; while
modernity, in the case of Brazil, represented the desired outcome of a successful
integration between modernism and modernization. In particular, these terms quickly
became intertwined as part of a unified official discourse that advocated for progress,
development, and industrialization in all sectors of society. Specifically, the Modern Art
Week of 1922 was the departure point that institutionalized modernism in the country,
even though Brazil’s cultural production of the turn of the century already presented
modern traces. In a week of cultural events and presentations that occurred between the
11th and 18th of February in 1922 at the São Paulo Municipal Theater, a group of writers,
painters, composers, and intellectuals assembled to read poetry and manifests, exhibit
works of art, and play music that were heavily inspired by the European avant-gardes.
These early manifestations, however, were not radically modern; on the contrary, they
were tamed and formally immature. Rather than forming a cohesive visual language,
modernists of this first period were mainly concerned with opposing the academicism of
art, liberating the country from past traditions, and actively theorizing modes of
expression that incorporated the new urban scenery.

Paradoxically, in the second phase of modernism that occurred between 1924 and
1929, tradition became the center of the modernist project, triggering the search for an

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10 Fabris, “Modernidade e vanguarda,” 18.
authentic national culture.\textsuperscript{11} Modernism then embraced nationalism, aiming to discover the elements that constituted the country’s true \textit{Brazilianness}. In the search for a national image, however, modernists disregarded the antagonism that existed in being universal and traditional at the same time. Nevertheless, the idea of the national that this generation put forward suited the populist government of Getúlio Vargas, who in 1930 overthrew an oligarchic republic and assumed dictatorial powers for twenty years.\textsuperscript{12} Renouncing the movement’s rebellious spirit, Vargas immediately co-opted the modernist discourse, which envisioned the construction of a modern national culture, to support his authoritarian platform that had modernity and modernization at its forefront. In this updated context, modernity was meant to reform society as a whole, transforming an agricultural, oligarchic, and provincial country into a nation economically modern and industrialized.\textsuperscript{13} In practice, however, the State occupied a strong regulatory position, imposing changes that primarily benefited the elites.

The construction of a new capital in the center of Brazil in 1955-1960 represented the pinnacle of the modernist program, not only because of its radical architectonic plan but also because it favored the occupation and modernization of the interior of an essentially coastal country. Nevertheless, Brasilia’s subsequent failure as an egalitarian urban model followed by the military coup in 1964 proved that the project was dependent on the capitalist system, for it reinforced social exclusion and political and economic inequalities.\textsuperscript{14} Although the dictatorship implemented one of the highest and fastest

\textsuperscript{11} Moraes, \textit{A brasilidade modernista}, 73.
\textsuperscript{12} Sílvio Castro, \textit{Teoria e política do modernismo brasileiro} (Petrópolis, Brasil: Editora Vozes, 1979), 133.
\textsuperscript{13} Luiz Guilherme Piva, \textit{Ladrilhadores e semeadores: a modernização brasileira no pensamento político de Oliveira Vianna, Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, Azevedo Amaral e Nestor Duarte} (1920-1940) (São Paulo: Departamento de Ciência Política da USP, 2000), 64.
infrastructural and industrial modernizations in Brazil’s history, positioning the country as one of the most modern economies in the world, the period also dramatically deepened social differences, accentuating the separation between rich and poor into unprecedented proportions.\textsuperscript{15} In sum, the same capitalist system that promoted economic progress was responsible for inflicting social injustice and misery.\textsuperscript{16}

Artistically, the 1950s represented the real entry of Brazil into modernity. The development of the concrete and neoconcrete movements, which essentially devoted themselves to experiment with geometric abstraction, exhausting the possibilities of the picture plane, finally established modernist principles within Brazilian art.\textsuperscript{17} In the following two decades, although artists from both concrete and neoconcrete movements were still active, art radically changed, abandoning nationalistic tones as a means not only to resist both dictatorship and censorship, but also to oppose officially-sponsored modernism.\textsuperscript{18} Works created during the military regime dematerialized into new artistic languages such as performances, installations, and objects that were revolutionary in form and rebellious in content.

Rennó came of age in the 1980s, when the democratic opening had been initiated and the modernist project had been dissolved, giving way to a neoliberal and globalizing program in economy and culture in general, and to individualized and postmodern initiatives in art specifically. While the 1980s saw a strong movement toward the return to painting, Rennó connected more deeply with the 1960 and 1970s generation, which introduced archival and media material in works with conceptual takes. Artists such as

\textsuperscript{15} Octavio Ianni, \textit{A Ideia de Brasil Moderno} (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 2004), 90.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 111.
\textsuperscript{17} Fabris, “Modernidade e vanguarda,” 14.
Cildo Meireles, Waltercio Caldas, Antonio Manuel, and Regina Silveira developed artistic strategies to disseminate works that otherwise would have been censored by the regime. They conceived alternative forms of message circulation, such as publishing advertisements in daily classifieds or stamping comments on banknotes. Their methods deeply influenced Rennó to also strategize about image circulation when creating works from found imagery. In the early 1990s, the artist became interested in the life cycle of photographs; that is to say, she started to study the processes behind the construction and elimination of images and the roles they occupied while navigating various circuits during their lifetimes.¹⁹ Rennó stopped photographing and started to appropriate discarded images, materials that had fulfilled their functions and were abandoned.²⁰ All the works investigated in this thesis were created from photographs culled from the media or public archives, revealing a trend in her practice of the period that explores the social use of images and values narratives that not only originate from marginal materials, but also deal with marginal subject matter.

Significantly, Rennó’s series were also in consonance with Latin American practices of the 1980s and 1990s dealing with issues of trauma, memory, and identity in the wake of democratic overtures. In incorporating archival photographs, objects, and

²⁰ Rennó was deeply influenced by the writings of the theorists Andreas Müller-Pohle and Vilém Flusser, who investigate concepts of information production and image circulation. Müller-Pohle writes about the excess of photographs in the world, and the need for an “ecology of information,” or the recycling and reuse of existing photographs. Flusser discusses people’s inability to decode images in a society saturated with photographs, and proposes a re-education of the act of looking at images. Such ideas were instrumental in influencing Rennó to stop photographing and begin collecting and using found photographs in her works. In doing so, she aimed to recuperate images that have been discarded or forgotten and whose original contexts have been exhausted, consequently allowing her to draw new meanings and narratives to those images. For more on the importance of Müller-Pohle and Flusser on Rennó’s work and their relationship to appropriation art and postmodern art theories see Mariana Bartelli Pagotto, “Opacity and Re-Enchantment: Photographic Strategies in the Work of Rosângela Rennó” (master’s thesis, University of New South Wales, 2010).
documents, works by Alfredo Jaar, Eugenio Dittborn, Milagros de la Torres, and Oscar Muñoz shared formal and thematic similarities with Rennó’s. They all had a strong commitment to recovering and saving from oblivion histories of years of pain and repression. According to art historian Charles Merewether, in coming to terms with their past by exposing the politics of forgetting, this generation of artists was confronting the core idea of modernity, which radically denied memory and remembrance of any sort in the name of progress and national identity.\(^{21}\)

This thesis is structured in four chapters in addition to this Introduction and the Conclusion. The chapters follow the chronological order of the creation of the works and investigate the historical moments that provided the springboards for the images from each series. In other words, the series are examined not only in relation to the context in which Rennó created them, but also in relation to the historical period in which their images were originally taken. In the first chapter I analyze *Atentado ao Poder* and *Candelária*, works that Rennó made with images of her own time, against the urban and police violence that erupted in large urban centers in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The second chapter is entirely dedicated to *Imemorial*, an installation composed of archival portraits of the workers who built the modernist city Brasilia in the second half of the 1950s. I examine *Imemorial* in relation to the living and working conditions of the workers and in relation to the turbulent political environment of the final stage of Brazil’s return to democracy. The third chapter discusses the series *Cicatriz* and *Vulgo*, which Rennó conceived from photographs of inmates found in the archives of the São Paulo penitentiary. Here, I address the daily life of Carandiru prisoners in the 1920s-1940s, the period when the original images were taken and when the prison followed the principles

of the Positivist School of Criminology. Informed by this context, I also look into the violent and inhumane living conditions that characterized Carandiru in the early 1990s and that resulted in the barbaric massacre that exterminated 111 inmates. Lastly, the fourth chapter is devoted to the series Série Vermelha (Militares) and Corpo da Alma. These works represent the switch in artistic strategies within Rennó’s body of work, a moment when she went from addressing punctual episodes of the history of Brazil, as seen in chapter one to three, to developing subjective approaches that deal with memory and violence more broadly. I also investigate both series, whose iconographies represent Rennó’s homage to the history of photography, in regard to Brazil’s dictatorial period.
Chapter 1

Atentado ao Poder and Candelária: Tackling Rio de Janeiro Street Violence

The early 1990s were tough years in the history of Brazil; especially the first half of the decade, when Brazilians not only had the arduous task of solidifying democracy after a long period of military dictatorships, but also experienced severe economic hardship. The direct consequence of such struggles was the significant increase of mass poverty, social segregation, and criminal violence in the country’s largest urban centers, which by then had outgrown rural areas and comprised metropolises with over a million inhabitants. In the specific case of Rio de Janeiro, urban violence grew to unprecedented rates after the late 1970s, when drug trafficking spread quickly through its favelas (slum areas). The attempt to contain drug-related crimes as well as muggings, kidnappings, and rapes provoked the empowerment of official and unofficial forces, such as death squads, that replicated the brutality committed by criminals. While the military police commonly broke the law practicing extrajudicial executions, barbaric paramilitary groups proliferated throughout impoverished areas of Rio, engaging in killings of marginalized individuals and the criminalized poor. In the 1990s, Rio de Janeiro sadly became the stage of daily confrontations and countless carnages that wiped off from its streets not only criminals but also civilians and children, deaths that generated a state of terror and fear characteristic of civil wars.

In 1992 and 1993 respectively, Rennó responded to Rio’s exacerbated wave of violence with two works: *Atentado ao Poder* (Attack on Power) (Figure 1.1) and *Candelária* (Candelaria) (Figures 1.2 and 1.3). While *Atentado ao Poder* portrays the brutality of murders that became common in Rio de Janeiro’s periphery, *Candelária* focuses on a specific massacre, namely the Candelária Massacre, that killed eight impoverished children who lived on downtown Rio’s streets. Having moved to the city in 1989 from Belo Horizonte, Rennó was compelled to address the violent environment she encountered:

> In the 90s, the social context was complex. It was the year of the Vigário Geral Massacre, Candelária, Carandiru, it was altogether. A zillion massacres happened. … I remember working all night long on the terrace … hearing gunshots. I used to live behind the Coroa Hill, there were shootings every night. It was impossible not to incorporate that in the work in some way. … Things were pretty brutal.25

With these two works, Rennó’s practice gained significant political overtones. She not only began to investigate her own social context, but was also inspired to look back to the past in search of the causes that have created and aggravated Brazil’s inequities. *Atentado ao Poder* and *Candelária* can thus be seen as triggers, or points of departure, that motivated Rennó in the following years to revise some of the various official attempts that succeeded in implementing economic modernization, but failed to diminish social disparity. She would then depart from the horrific events of the 1990s to demonstrate in subsequent works that throughout the twentieth century violence and social inequity against minorities have persistently undermined the country’s modern project.

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Both *Atentado ao Poder* and *Candelária* are unique works of art, whose pieces are exhibited and sold together, differently from other series by Rennó. Only a few scholars, such as Paulo Herkenhoff, Annateresa Fabris, and Marguerite Harrison, have discussed them in a certain detail. Significantly, none of them have juxtaposed the two works nor considered them in relation to the insurgence of urban violence in Brazil, and in Rio de Janeiro more specifically, at the turn of the 1990s. The seminal publication *Rosângela Rennó* (1996), which compiled most of Rennó’s works of the 1990s, is the only title that has published an image of *Candelária*’s original installation. Until now, no other book or article has illustrated the work.

*Atentado ao Poder* (1992) comprises thirteen 35 x 20 cm (13.77 x 7.87 inches) black and white photographs of crime scenes showing gruesome dead bodies that lay outstretched on the street (Figures 1.4 to 1.9). Placed on the floor below the title “The Earth Summit,” the prints are arranged in a single horizontal line against the wall. Rennó positions two black rectangles on the edges of the sequence, which she illuminates from the back with a green fluorescent light, giving them a transcendental appeal. Art historian Annateresa Fabris is accurate in indicating that the green halo creates a disturbing tension between the images and the title above them. She believes the juxtaposition is paradoxical, since the environmental conference to which the lettering makes reference was precisely committed to discuss the future of men on the planet. In addition, Rennó displayed the images in such a way that the bodies depicted are positioned vertically rather than horizontally, provoking a subtle movement of the bodies from one image to

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27 Ibid., 421.
the other and alluding to what Fabris appropriately called a “macabre ballet.”

Rennó appropriated the images from two Rio de Janeiro tabloids, *A Notícia* (The News) and *O Povo na Rua* (The People on the Street). She collected one photograph per day between June 2-14, 1992, the period when Rio hosted the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), also known as The Earth Summit or Eco 92, in Portuguese. Although some of the bodies are severely mutilated, the subjects can be identified as males. Beyond that, the viewer can infer very little information of the context in which the images were taken. Who are the victims? How did they die? Why were they killed? And who killed them? Theorizing about the act of looking at photographs of human suffering, philosopher Susan Sontag points out that “photographs of an atrocity may give rise to opposing responses. A call for peace. A cry for revenge. Or simple the bemused awareness, continually restocked by photographic information, that terrible things can happen.” She stresses, however, that the pity and disgust that one feels when looking at gruesome photographs “should not distract you from asking what pictures, whose cruelties, whose deaths are not being shown.” In *Atentado ao Poder*, Rennó purposefully omitted information about the violence the images depict as a means precisely to engage the viewer in reflecting on the context of those victims, inciting reactions that could turn into actions against so much brutality. One is certainly forced to ponder not only about the photographs, murders, and victims that Rennó disregarded when conceiving the work, but also about those that did not even made to the pages of the tabloids. Alarmingly, *Atentado ao Poder* represents only a small sample of the barbarism

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28 Ibid., 419.
31 Ibid., 14.
that inundated the streets of Rio de Janeiro and other Brazilian urban centers at the turn of the 1990s.

By enlarging the original photographs, Rennó enhanced the printing dots of the newspaper, emphasizing that the images have circulated in the media before her appropriation. The artist chose to portray assassinations published in tabloids in order to call attention to the change that most middle class newspapers made to their editorials during the conference. Art critic and curator Paulo Herkenhoff rightly points out that while most of the mainstream newspapers changed their profile to report a more polished and less violent reality, popular tabloids continued reporting crimes and assassinations, proving how disconnected most of the population was from the political debate as a result of such subtle forms of censorship that reinforced status quo power relations.  

Furthermore, in choosing to appropriate photographs from tabloids, which commonly report death squad executions, Rennó was also suggesting that the subjects of Atentado ao Poder were victims of such groups. She implied that military policemen were involved in crimes that happened on a regular basis with or without the presence of international government officials in the city.

Rennó included roman numerals, from II to XIV, at the bottom of each image. Scholars propose opposing interpretations of this visual element of the work. Professor Marguerite Harrison claims that each photograph corresponds to one of Christ’s Stations of the Cross. Harrison even includes “Via Crucis” in the title when she references the work in her article, arguing that the Christian symbolism alludes to sacrifice, treason, and

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brutality, sentiments also present in the images and the victims’ lives.\textsuperscript{33} Conversely, Fabris protests that the numerals do not allude to the biblical story mainly because Rennó opted to start numbering the sequence from the black prints. Thus, the image that supposedly depicts the first station holds the number II instead.\textsuperscript{34} She explains that, if Rennó had added a fourteenth photograph, pairing the number of images with the standard number of the \textit{via crucis} stations, the work could then gain a religious tone. In spite of that, Harrison’s argument is more plausible than Fabris’s. It seems unavoidable to recognize the religious traces of \textit{Atentado ao Poder} when one considers that the poses of the dead bodies mimic crucifixions in almost all of the images. Even though the first and the last prints are blackened out and do not contain any representation, they should be counted as part of the final sequence of photographs. Thus, rather than thirteen, fifteen prints compose \textit{Atentado ao Poder}. In skipping the first and the last stations, which represent Christ’s condemnation to death and resurrection respectively, Rennó suggests that the victims depicted in those gruesome tabloid photographs did not have the chance of a trial – even if to be condemned – nor will ever have the opportunity of redemption. The artist does not necessarily sanctify or absolve the victims; instead, she reinstates the spiritual in each corpse, reminding the viewer that those individuals, despite their marginalized condition, are above all human beings. In the midst of a conference that precisely discussed the future of men on the planet, Brazil attempted to show the world it had the infrastructure necessary to host and lead an international event. \textit{Atentado ao Poder} is the proof that the country’s apparent peace and progress were still illusory.


\textsuperscript{34} Fabris, \textquotedblleft O Corpo Como Território Político,	extquotedblright 421.
While the military momentarily kept touristic areas safe, the same military retaliated with more violence and a wave of criminality continued to rise in the periphery due to the country’s failing economy and the government’s lack of social plans for this portion of the population.

In 1993, one year after Atentado ao Poder, Rennó created Candelária as a response to the killing of eight street children in Rio. The work is composed of four double panels (Figure 1.3) containing brief texts printed in white. Made of acrylic, each panel is square in shape, becoming rectangles when assembled in couples. Rennó installs them in a dark space, lighting them up with a purplish UV-A light that she positions in the center of each double panel. The light reflects the fluorescent varnish that Rennó applies on the wall at the back of each rectangle.\(^{35}\) It is through the contrast of the black light on the fluorescent coat that the white texts become legible. The light tubes thus represent the pieces’ spines, the structures that connect the two square panels and bring the white texts to life. The panels are also attached slightly off the wall, as if floating in the air. Herkenhoff sees angel figures in those shapes.\(^{36}\) For him, the rectangles are winged forms that, embedded in a dim blue environment, resemble angelic creatures. He also claims that the chords that hang from the light tubes perpendicular to the rectangular panels are threads of flying kites, a popular toy in Rio’s favelas. In addition, one can surely find other forms in Candelária, such as fragile butterflies or the shape of an open book. Ultimately, all examples, namely angels, kites, butterflies or books, reference elements that should be part of a child’s universe. Candelária, however, alerts that children, especially those from disenfranchised families and environments, are still

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\(^{35}\) Installation specifics described by the artist to the author in interview on January 24, 2013.

\(^{36}\) Herkenhoff, “Rennó ou a Beleza e o Dulçor do Presente,” 25.
deprived of this magical world and often forced to inhabit a domain where they are the
target of adult violence and social abuse. In contrasting poetic and lighthearted forms
with somber and painful contents, Rennó speaks of the fragility of childhood, specifically
the childhood of Brazil’s lower classes that, in the wake of the 1990s, was being ignored
and left to strive on the cities’ streets.

_Candelária_ comprises eight texts in total, one for each child killed in the massacre.
It is one of the first works that Rennó created using material from her _Universal Archive_,
an ongoing collection of news excerpts that she has compiled from the media since
1992.37 Rennó defines it as a collection of “latent images,” since all the texts directly or
indirectly relate to photography and photographs.38 She eliminates all the information that
can disclose the origin of the news, such as names, places, and dates of subjects and
events. In doing so, she rejects the real images at the same time that she suggests new
ones, which the viewer must then recreate. In keeping only the textual description of the
scene, Rennó subverts the notion of truth commonly associated with photographs. She
challenges the indexical nature of images by alerting the audience to the fact that what
their eyes see is as constructed as what they read. By forcing the viewer to consider
photography’s mechanisms, namely composition, angles, and lighting, while mentally
reconstructing the images, Rennó ultimately inscribes photography in the realm of
language, exposing it as a form of communication that, like language, is made of signs
that require decoding to be fully understood.

In the case of the Candelária massacre, she not only divorced the work from the

**37** Information given by the artist to the author in interview on January 24, 2013.
**38** Rosângela Rennó, “Cicatriz: fotografias de tatuagens do Museu Penitenciário Paulista e textos do
Arquivo Universal,” in _A Fotografia nos processos artísticos contemporâneos_, ed. Alexandre Santos e
Maria Ivone dos Santos (Porto Alegre: UFRGS Editora, 2004), 223.
horrendous images of the killing, but also replaced journalistic accounts of the event for different stories of violence against children. It is as if Rennó was searching for the causes that prompted the expulsion of kids onto the streets of Brazil. Although the artist today finds these texts puerile and oversimplified, they undoubtedly report disturbing facts of child abuse.

The DPCA arrested yesterday afternoon Joseph, 45, his son John, 23, and her stepdaughter Maria, 27, accused of sexually abusing the girls M.N., 8, and N.N., 11. The DPCA found the group through a photographic film delivered at the end of last year to a Kodak representative in downtown area. In the photos printed and sent to the police, the two girls appear practicing oral sex on John. Joseph and Mary also appear in the film.\(^{39}\)

P.F., 41, is electrician. Carrying many pictures of her daughter, taken a few hours before her death, he remembers that the girl never knew she had AIDS. "She asked us to take these pictures as if she knew she would die that day," says P.F.\(^{40}\)

In an atmosphere of great anger and strong emotion during the funeral, everyone chanted for justice and demanded punishment for those responsible for the death of M.N., 11, victim of medical malpractice after a via crucis of more than fifteen days by various hospitals. The mother was visibly distressed and, very emotively, showed her friends the picture of his dear son.\(^{41}\)

In including cases of pedophilia, a child victim of AIDS, and a medical negligence that ended in death, Rennó finds in various sources and in various types of violence the reasons that impel children to find refuge on the streets. One can only wonder what hope can a child have for his or her future when the present is so abominable.

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\(^{39}\) DPCA stands for Delegacia de Proteção à Criança e ao Adolescente, which is the police department that cares for the protection of children and adolescents. Translation mine from the original: “A DPCA prendeu ontem à tarde José, 45 anos, seu filho João, 23 e sua enteada Maria, 27, acusados de abusarem sexualmente das meninas M.N., 8, e N.N., 11. A DPCA chegou ao bando através de um filme fotográfico entregue no fim do ano passado a um representante da Kodak, no Centro. Nas fotos reveladas e encaminhadas à polícia, as duas meninas aparecem praticando sexo oral com José. João e Maria também aparecem no filme.”

\(^{40}\) Translation mine from the original: “P.F., 41 anos, é eletricitário. Com diversas fotos da filha, tiradas algumas horas antes de sua morte, ele lembra que a menina nunca soube que tinha AIDS. "Elas pediu para que tirássemos essas fotos como se soubesse que iria morrer naquele dia", afirma P.F.”

\(^{41}\) Translation mine from the original: “Em clima de muita revolta e de forte emoção durante o enterro, todos gritavam por justiça e pediam punição para os responsáveis pela morte de M.N., 11 anos, vítima de negligência médica após uma via-crucis de mais de 15 dias por vários hospitais. A mãe era o retrato da dor e, muito emocionada, mostrava para as amigas a foto do filho querido.”
Funai will require in court that the company E. compensate the native girl I., 15, raped and made pregnant last August by technicians of the Company who were prospecting on the Indian reserve. Funai employees were appalled by the indifference of the Company, which sent only a list, without photographs, of technicians working in the area at the time to I., who is deaf-mute and mentally disabled, identify the perpetrators.\textsuperscript{42}

Through these paragraphs, Rennó also exposes the anomalies that characterize an ill society. They stand as proof of the country’s disrespect for human rights and disregard for its infancy. The artist blames society, specifically the middle and upper classes who frequent museums and art galleries and have access to her work, for failing to provide assistance to those who represent the progress and future of Brazil.

\textbf{The Earth Summit and the Candelária Massacre: Urban Violence in the 1990s}

In the period of June 3-14, 1992, the world’s attention turned to Rio de Janeiro, where government officials of 178 countries met to discuss sustainable alternatives to the future of the planet and its populations.\textsuperscript{43} The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development brought together leaders of industrialized as well as developing countries in an attempt to consolidate a common agenda that aimed at promoting sustainability, control of the environmental impact, and the value of human life in the world. In addition, another 2,400 delegates of non-governmental organizations created an informal popular forum, called Global Forum, to debate similar environmental

\textsuperscript{42} Funai is the government organization responsible for the care of rights and well being of native populations and their territory. Translation mine from the original: “A Funai vai exigir na Justiça que a empresa E. indenize a índia I., de 15 anos, violentada e engravidada em agosto passado por técnicos da Empresa que faziam prospecção na reserva indígena. Os funcionários da Funai ficaram revoltados com o descaso da Empresa, que enviou apenas uma relação, sem fotografias, dos técnicos que trabalhavam na área na época para I., que é surda-muda e deficiente mental, identificar os autores do crime.”

concerns of the official summit although in a more realistic and urgent manner. During the eleven days of the conference Rio de Janeiro bustled with debates, lectures, meetings, social manifestations, and artistic presentations with people from the five continents in an energized, democratic, and peaceful Rio de Janeiro.

Peace, however, was only apparent, and those who lived in Rio experienced a disrupted city. In order to contain the wave of criminality that hit the city’s poorest favelas, the federal government sent the army to patrol the streets. Veja magazine dedicated half page about the military operation in an article titled “Eco 92 and urban chaos,” reporting how the obsessive concern for safety created chaos in the city’s most accessed areas. The police closed and redirected part of the transit, allowing only official cars to pass. Air space was also limited to commercial flights, being forbidden to fly over the city in amateur planes. More than 15,000 military men in tanks, cars and on foot guarded upper class regions and favelas of Rio. Rennó demonstrated that, if violence diminished in touristic parts during the period of the conference, it continued assaulting poor neighborhoods. Ultimately, the armistice that the middle class media suggested was fallacious and unreal. The military operation during the conference was formalized and carried out until 1995. Considering that death squads had been active in the country since the 1950s, one realizes that the military had been uninterruptedly in control of Brazil’s social spaces for at least thirty years.

Violent clashes between minorities and the police persisted throughout the 1990s.

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45 “A Eco 92 e o caos urbano,” Veja, June 3, 1992, 56.
46 Koonings and Kruijt, Societies of Fear, 229.
According to the Human Rights Watch report, 1992 was a record year for military killings in São Paulo.\textsuperscript{48} In October 1992 policemen from the shock division invaded São Paulo’s penitentiary and executed 111 inmates in what became known as the Carandiru Massacre. Between 1990 and 1993, at least four child carnages happened in Rio; in total 424 children were murdered in 1992, while another 320 kids died in the first semester of 1993.\textsuperscript{49} In 1991, eleven youths were kidnapped and disappeared in Magé, a city in the municipality of Rio. Finally in 1993 the Candelária Massacre and the Vigário Geral Massacre gained the headlines of the national and international press. They occurred within a month from each other, increasing trauma and distress to a country already deeply bruised.

The Candelária Massacre happened in the first hours of July 23, 1993. About fifty children slept around Pio X Square, nearby the Candelária Church in Rio’s downtown area, when two cars carrying at least four men pulled over.\textsuperscript{50} One of them got close to a group of youths, inquired their names, and immediately fired at close range. A witness mentioned that the men arrived shouting “it’s the police!,” aiming their guns at the children.\textsuperscript{51} Three of the boys instantly died. Another two were killed after having been forced into a car and taken to a deserted area about two miles away from Candelária. In total six children and two young adults died and only one survived. Six policemen were captured and trialed, but only three were condemned. The defendants never confessed their motivations, however the media speculated the killing was an act of revenge against

\textsuperscript{48} Cavallaro and Manuel, \textit{Police Brutality in Urban Brazil}, 13.
\textsuperscript{50} “Sete crianças morrem em chacina no centro do Rio; policiais são suspeitos,” \textit{Folha de São Paulo}, July 24, 1993.
some youths who had vandalized the policemen’s cars the day before.\textsuperscript{52} Although they were still active in the army, the State did not recognize its responsibility, arguing the men were not on-duty in the evening of the event.\textsuperscript{53} In presenting stories that did not directly relate to the Candelária event, Rennó inscribed \textit{Candelária} in a broader criticism of violence against children in Brazil. \textit{Candelária} thus is not only about the massacre but also about the hundreds of children who had their infancy violated, being forced to grow up in the streets of the country as their last resource of survival.

It was also a paramilitary group that slaughtered, a month later, twenty-one civilians of Vigário Geral \textit{favela}. On the eve of August 30, 1993, thirty hooded men stormed streets and alleys of the slum, randomly firing against people on streets and in their homes.\textsuperscript{54} Most of the victims were workers and students. Eight were members of the same family, another seven were killed in a local bar. Again, the motive was said to be an act of revenge to honor four policemen who were shot by drug dealers the night before. The following day the \textit{New York Times} reported this was Rio’s worst massacre and the third one committed by military men.\textsuperscript{55}

The chain of tragic events caused a sense of hopelessness and failure in a country that had too recently regained its democratic status. In another article, the \textit{New York Times} discusses the culture of impunity that erupted in Brazil.\textsuperscript{56} Despite the long-running series of police crimes that prevailed in large urban centers, especially Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, justice failed to punish its perpetrators. Disturbingly, impunity was not only

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 18.
\textsuperscript{54} “Policiais matam 21 por vingança no Rio,” \textit{Folha de São Paulo}, August 31, 1993.
the result of Brazil’s flawed legal system or weak governments. Society, especially conservative portions of the middle and upper classes, also shared part of such responsibility, since they became highly tolerant of abuse against criminals, ignoring or even supporting those illegal executions. Forty-one percent of respondents of a poll taken after the Carandiru Massacre approved of the police invasion of the prison.\(^{57}\) In the wake of the Candelária Massacre, a large portion of the population celebrated the killings. “They should have killed all of them,” stated a caller who contacted the hotline available to receive information about the case.\(^{58}\) This reaction reflects the lack of understanding that Brazilians have about their own social formation, since they tend to criminalize marginal individuals for their own misery. It is, according to Brazilian sociologist Octavio Ianni, as if the poor and the illiterate were responsible for its own poverty and ignorance.\(^{59}\) Furthermore, the belief still persisted within the middle and upper classes that criminals were born deviant, a biological argument that stemmed from positivist criminal theories from the turn of the nineteenth century.\(^{60}\) They claimed that criminal behavior was a psychological anomaly, therefore it was the individual the only one to blame for his or her violent acts. It was a discourse with racist and sexist overtones that justified eugenics and state control through force and violence of the impoverished mass of non-whites who lived in the poorest areas of the cities and constituted the biggest percentage of the population.\(^{61}\) It exempted the favored classes to take responsibility for a problem that was not psychological but essentially a social one.

Ianni calls attention to the lack of interest in unveiling the reasons and relations

\(^{60}\) Elizabeth Cancelli, *Carandiru: a prisão, o psiquiatra e o preso* (Brasilia: Editora UnB, 2005), 41.
that interconnect social and economic indicators. For him, poverty and marginality are the intrinsic consequences of an unjust and oppressive economic system. His Marxist approach, although dualistic, explains why Brazil had a discontinued modernization project, which intensely developed the country’s industry and economy, but was unable to support social growth and equality. If on one side Brazil was the eighth biggest economy of the world, on the other side, it had fifty million Brazilians suffering of starvation and malnutrition, and lacking health and housing assistance. It is a paradoxical situation that allowed the coexistence of two distant worlds, the modern and the retrograde side by side.

Moreover, scholars such as Irene Rizzini, R. S. Rose, and Kees Kooning, who have notably tackled the matter of urban violence in Brazil, argue that violence is embedded in the history of the country since its discovery. One can go back as early as the conquest period, when colonizers decimated indigenous populations and subjugated slaves, to find the origins of oppression and social control. Koonings argues that not only Brazil but also Latin America has a legacy of terror and fear that is experienced through the threat of its various military dictatorships, death squads, and drug gangs. Despite the restoration of democracy, little changed in relation to arbitrariness and insecurity; on the contrary, for the author, the perception of violence increased in the 1980s and 1990s. Rizzini points out that the fear of violence made the population have ambivalent opinions about the vigilantism of death squads. They justified their operations as a means to “keep the city safe,” and for that reason many people applauded

62 Ianni, A Ideia de Brasil Moderno, 91.
63 Ibid., 90.
64 Rose, The Unpast, 1-2.
65 Koonings and Kruijt, Societies of Fear, 2.
66 Rizzini, “Children in the city of violence,” 266.
the mass killings.

*Atentado ao Poder* and *Candelária* are thus tragic reminders that not only the democratic process was not over but also did not include all portions of the population. Despite the predominant discourse of insecurity disseminated by the media and the elite, these works demonstrate that violence had deeper social roots whose origins were not solely responsibility of the criminal. Even though the aggression of drug-related organized crime cannot be disregarded or diminished, it was not only the drug dealers that death squads were killing at the time. In reality, it was the disenfranchised minorities who were massively dying in the hands of paramilitary groups. The apathy and lack of support of upper classes and decision makers to support justice in favor of the victims not only reinforced impunity but also encouraged the perpetuation of such atrocious practices.

**Atentado ao Poder and Candelária: Artistic Convergences**

Rennó was not the first artist in Brazil or Latin America to deal with issues of violence and image circulation. For example, Chilean conceptual artist Alfredo Jaar is contemporary of her and also investigates the role of photography, i.e. its modes of distribution and efficacy, when dealing with traumatic events. His six-year series “The Rwanda Project – 1994-2000” comprises twenty-one works that deal with the type of information, such as mass deaths, that society in general prefers to ignore.67 Similarly to Rennó, Jaar often replaces image for text, suggesting trauma through visual absence. In *Real Pictures* (1995) (Figures 1.10 and 1.11), Jaar seals in 372 black boxes photographs

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of the genocide in Rwanda. On top of each box, the artist describes their content, illustrating with words each picture. *Real Pictures* shares the principles of Rennó’s *Universal Archive*, and consequently *Candelária*. Both works suggest rather than show depictions of violent events, engaging viewers in the metaphorical reconstruction of such images, provoking them to take responsibility for what they visualize.

Rennó’s photographic practice is also rooted in artistic strategies developed during the Brazilian military regime as a means to subvert censorship. She credits Cildo Meireles, Waltercio Caldas, Regina Silveira, and Antonio Manuel as significant influences during her formative years. Hélio Oiticica is certainly another artist whose work from the dictatorship period strongly resonates in Rennó’s early series, particularly in *Atentado ao Poder*, as Herkenhoff and Fabris have also noted. In *B33 Bólide caixa 18, Poema caixa 02 – Homenagem a Cara de Cavalo* (B33 Box Bolide 18, Box Poem 02 – Homage to Horse Face) (1966) (Figure 1.12) and *Seja Marginal Seja Herói* (Be an Outlaw, Be a Hero) (1968) (Figure 1.13), Oiticica explored the cruciform iconography, which he employed to pay tribute to two outlaws from the periphery who had committed assaults and murders and had been killed by the police. In both works the artist depicted the victims’ bodies laying outstretched on the floor, with arms extended to the sides, replicating the shape of a cross. Their position resembles those of the victims of *Atentado ao Poder*, who probably are also outcasts killed by the police. As Oiticica, Rennó pays homage to the victims and criticizes the indiscriminate executions of marginalized figures

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68 Interview with the author on January 24, 2013.
by official forces. Differently from Oiticica, however, Rennó does not elevate them to the status of heroes nor vindicate them; instead, she lets the viewer ponder about the origin as well as fate of those corpses brutally violated.

In addition to Oiticica, Antonio Manuel’s body of work, which incorporates images and texts from the media, creating alternative forms to communicate and disseminate messages, are comparable to Rennó’s series from this period, even though Rennó states that Manuel was not her strongest inspiration.\textsuperscript{70} In Repressão outra vez – eis o saldo (Repression again – here is the consequence) (1968) (Figure 1.14 and 1.15), Manuel drew photographs from local newspapers of a violent student confrontation with the police. He enlarged them as silkscreen panels which he coated in red, a visual resource also found in Rennó’s Red Series, analyzed in the fourth chapter of this thesis, of 1996-2003. In the series Flans (1968-1970s) (Figure 1.16), the artist mimicked the layout of the newspaper page, eliminating parts of the text and highlighting only certain words and sentences that denounced the repression of the regime. Analogously, this is the base of Rennó’s Universal Archive, which contains texts the artist collects from the media, also altering information as a means to emphasize critical facts. In sum, both artists, Manuel and Rennó, demonstrate a strong commitment to expose social injustices the large media fails to condemn or tends to simply ignore.

Furthermore, Manuel’s Semi Ótica (Semi Otics/Optics) (1975) (Figure 1.17), a seven-minute black and white film, also resonates in Atentado ao Poder. Calirman offers a brief description of its scenes:

The camera … reveal[s] a series of newspaper photographs of victims of the death squads, made up of policemen ‘unofficially’ sanctioned to kill criminals. Superimposed onto each photograph is a short inscription indicating the person’s

\textsuperscript{70} Interview with the author on January 24, 2013.
fictional name or nickname, age and a ‘semi-color’ associated with them, taken from the colors of the Brazilian flag (green, yellow, blue, and white) along with black. … The images reveal ‘quasi-peoples,’ pariahs from society, individuals who lack civil rights and are considered to be only partial citizens. Made during the most repressive time of the dictatorship, the film poignantly captures the many contradictions of the period – for example, that the dictatorship counted on and was supported by many segments of the population, including the lower classes, who benefitted from an economic boom and the growth of domestic consumer goods. … Behind the scenes, the death squads were targeting not only marginalized sectors of the populations but also political opponents of the regime. In this short film … Antonio Manuel vividly presents the current state of violence through the cuts, cracks, and fissures, communicating what has been censored or effaced.71

The similarities of content and form between the two works are certainly remarkable. One could claim that Rennó found direct inspiration in Semi Ótica, celebrating as well as updating it in Atentado ao Poder. Both works address urban violence in Rio and depict murder victims of paramilitary squads. While Manuel presented the state of military violence of the 1970s, Rennó translated that to the 1990s, a period supposedly of democratic reform, but that Rennó specifically links back to the military violence of the dictatorship. The argument of art historian Guilherme Bueno that the victims depicted in Semi Ótica symbolize the corpses of Brazil’s modern project can be extended to understand Atentado ao Poder and Candelária.72

In displaying the savage outcomes of police killings, these two works stand as evidence that in the 1990s the idea of modernity had been assaulted and lay moribund. The deaths of those represented in Atentado ao Poder and Candelária are the deaths of the various government plans that throughout the decades have privileged economic growth over social equality, advancing the country to a future where the largest part of its

population was physically and morally eliminated. While the works researched in the following chapters investigate punctual tragic episodes of the history of Brazil that successively interrupted the development of social causes, *Atentado ao Poder* and *Candelária* stand for the failures of their own time, violence and oppression of a post-dictatorial country that still struggled to prove its own modernity. They demonstrate the massive disparities that separated the Brazil that was able to host an international conference from the Brazil that incriminated and killed its own children. *Atentado ao Poder* and *Candelária* are also the beginning of Rennó’s politicized works of the 1990s and early 2000s, when she looked back to the sources of such failures as a means to challenge elitist and power discourses in favor of marginalized and underprivileged individuals. The works analyzed in the following chapters reconsider the place of such characters within Brazilian society.
Chapter 2

Building Modernity: *Immemorial Memorial*

Juscelino Kubitschek ascended to the presidency of Brazil in 1956 promising to advance the country fifty years in five. A charismatic and populist leader, Kubitschek, also known as JK, based his government plan on the premise that Brazil’s underdevelopment could only be surpassed with progress and rapid industrialization, which had not yet been completed, although initiated by Getúlio Vargas in the 1930s.\(^73\)

The pinnacle of his progressive plan was the construction of Brasilia, an audacious and radical project that envisioned the change of the capital from the coastal Rio de Janeiro to the country’s central plateau, which was a vast, unpopulated, and dry region in the middle of Brazil. Brasilia became Kubitschek’s highest priority and most important achievement, the symbol of a modern and forward-thinking country that was finally coming of age.\(^74\)

In 1994 Rennó delved into the archives of Novacap\(^75\), the government contractor responsible for managing the building of Brasilia, and found the files of thousands of workers, also known as *candangos*,\(^76\) who helped erect the city from scratch. The files

\(^74\) Ibid., 168.
\(^76\) Originated from the Angolan dialect, the word *candango* was early employed to designate the colonizer Portuguese. It had a negative connotation that was transferred to Brazilian Portuguese and identified Brasilia’s pioneers, these first thousands of workers who arrived in the city mainly coming from impoverished areas of the northeastern region of the country. They were mostly illiterate migrants, from simple and agrarian origins, and had very little knowledge of construction work and engineering. These workers became stigmatized as uneducated, dirty, and, unprepared. The word *candango*, thus, during Brasilia’s construction perpetuated the demeaning connotation of its original meaning. In Reinaldo de Lima
contained the workers’ identification records, which often included ID photographs. Inspired by this material, the artist created *Imemorial* (Immemorial) (Figures 2.1 and 2.2), a photography installation comprised of head shots of laborers who worked and many of whom died during Brasilia’s construction. In *Imemorial* Rennó re-configured Brazil’s most iconic symbol of modernity through the perspective of its builders. Through these photographic portraits she created an anti-heroic funerary monument for those characters who became records of a dead archive once Brasilia was inaugurated. By bringing to light an episode of Brazil’s official memory that has been purposefully obliterated from the country’s history by government officials, *Imemorial* became painful evidence that Kubitschek’s project had, at least partially, failed. Created in a time when Brazil lived through a wave of street violence and police brutality, struggling to stabilized its recently-gained democracy, *Imemorial* attests that not only Kubitschek’s model had failed but also that the larger project of advancing the country toward modernity had not yet been completed by 1994.

Rennó selected fifty photographs from the Novacap archives.⁷⁷ Forty of them portrayed adults, both men and women, while the other ten were portraits of children (Figures 2.3 to 2.6). Rennó was especially impressed by the extensive amount of children catalogued in the archive. She pointed out that children older than nine years of age could

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⁷⁷ After the city’s completion, the contractor company closed and its records were filed in the Public Archive of the Federal District, which was institutionalized in 1985 and contained, among the Novacap’s files, general documents of the construction of Brasilia. It was to this material that Rennó had access. The artist emphasized that Novacap was not the only contractor during the city’s construction; however, it was the only public one, and the only one whose archives probably still exist or allow access to the general public. Rennó also called attention to the extensive work that going through the files required. She researched sometimes with the assistance of three or four archivists. Rennó only used files and portraits that had a clear indication that their constituents had died. She came across many records that, other than the portrait and the record number, did not contain any information. Information provided by the artist in interview with the author on January 24, 2013.
register to work in the construction sites, an indicative of the widespread use of exploitative child labor sanctioned at the time. She wondered about the type of tasks they were given, since many looked considerably young for heavy construction work. On a particular image of a boy she noted that “the only thing you know is that he was Novacap’s employee, and therefore had worked in the construction of Brasilia. He is so young, what was it that he used to do? Carried stones, cement bags, was a messenger... you can put in him the story you prefer.”

The archival images that Rennó appropriated were mugshots, originally printed as 3 x 4 cm (1.2 x 1.6 inches) and used on identity cards, passports, and driving licenses. Rennó re-photographed them, making enlargements measuring 60 x 40 cm (23.62 x 15.74 inches) that were placed in iron trays. She arranged the images side by side, in three rows on the floor, forming a long rectangular shape. The adults’ images were back-painted in black, which gave them a reflective quality. Because the children who worked in the construction sites did not necessarily die, Rennó printed their portraits in a dark tin tone, arranging them on the wall rather than on the floor, thus differentiating them from the photographs of the adults’ workers who did not survive. She attributed a number to each photograph that related to the employees’ registration number. Since Rennó did not have authorization to disclose such information, she subtracted one unit from the original number, but maintained the same order of the worker’s entry in the archive and in Brasilia. By creating the prints with a mirror-like quality, Rennó included and

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78 Interview with the author on January 24, 2013.
79 From the original in Portuguese: “a única coisa que você sabe é que ele foi empregado da Novacap e, portanto, trabalhou na construção de Brasília. Ele é tão pequeno, o que será que ele fazia? Carregava pedra, saco de cimento, era moleque de recado... você encaixa nele a história que preferir.” Rosângela Rennó, Fernando Pedro da Silva, and Marília Andrés Ribeiro, *Rosângela Rennó: Depoimento* (Belo Horizonte: Editora C/Arte, 2003), 21.
80 Interview with the author on January 24, 2013.
implicated the viewer in the narrative, who literally saw his or her portrait reflected in the portraits of the workers. Furthermore, since Rennó did not offer any information about the source of the photographs, she allowed the viewer to recreate the context that originated the images. Rennó thus resurrected the laborers’ identities as a means to engage the contemporary citizens of Brasilia in part of a history that not only unearthed the city’s past, but also recreated their own memory.

*Imemorial* was originally part of *Revendo Brasília* (Reviewing Brasilia), a group exhibition commissioned by the local Goethe Cultural Institute to commemorate the city. It included six photographers, three Brazilians and three Germans, who were invited to look poetically and subjectively at Brasilia thirty years after its construction.\(^{81}\)

Significantly, Rennó was the only artist to submit a critical response instead of a celebration of the city. Instead, her memorial paid homage to Brasilia’s first deceased, those men and women who often died on duty and in whose bodies, in the words of the artist Evandro Salles who contributed to the catalogue of *Revendo Brasília*, “were exposed all the marks of coarseness, sadness, and violence to which they were subjected.”\(^{82}\) For Rennó, the building of Brasilia constituted a massacre. She estimated that over five thousand workers died during its three years of construction, although the dead were never officially counted.\(^{83}\) She ponders: “Why should one remember? Why should one pay homage to the disappeared *candango*, why? The goal is to build Brasilia,

\(^{81}\) Mário Cravo Neto et al., *Revendo Brasília neu gesehen* (Brasilia: Goethe Institut; Fundação Athos Bulcão, 1994), 48.

\(^{82}\) Ibid., 50.

the end justifies the means.”

*Imemorial* is one of Rennó’s most discussed works. An extensive list of national and international scholars, critics, and curators, such as Moacir dos Anjos, Paulo Herkenhoff, Adriano Pedrosa, Charles Merewhether, Jacopo Crivelli Visconti, and Urs Stahel have written about *Imemorial* and its relationship to memory, appropriation art, and archival material. None of them, however, have thoroughly investigated the identity and living conditions of the individuals depicted in the images or considered them within the modernist city they helped to build. Moreover, no scholar until now has juxtaposed the context of the construction of Brasilia in the 1950s to the evolvement of the modern project in the midst of the 1990s political turbulence, an analysis I develop in the third part of this chapter.

Herkenhoff claims *Imemorial* is a funerary monument that celebrates the workers at the same time that criticizes their obliteration from history. For the critic, Rennó dissolves established discourses that perpetuate single visions of history, combating social amnesia and imposed forgetfulness. Herkenhoff understands *Imemorial* as a monument for mourning the oppressed and the dead who, as Rennó mentioned, were never counted. In addition, he calls attention to the paradox of archival practices that photograph individuals to immediately file their pictures and records in archives. “The sitter is photographed to be forgotten,” he points out. Undoubtedly Rennó works with the medium that in its essence is dedicated to produce evidence. She is, according to

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84 Interview with the author on January 24, 2013. Translation mine from the Portuguese: “Por que ele vai lembrar? Por que ele vai homenagear o candango desaparecido, pra que? O negócio é fazer Brasilia, os fins justificam os meios.”
85 Herkenhoff, “Rennó ou a Beleza e o Dulçor do Presente,” 32.
86 Ibid., 31.
87 Ibid., 32.
Herkenhoff, imbued in finding social transparency. Yet, the artist darkens the prints, leaving what the critic calls “a constellation of black holes.”

Herkenhoff’s thoughtful reading set the path to future scholars, who have consistently drawn from this foundational text. The idea of social amnesia is a strong concept that can be applied to most of Rennó’s series of the 1990s, and certainly to all the series investigated in this thesis. In digging through archival and media material that have rarely circulated or made public, Rennó is re-appropriating, deconstructing, and re-writing part of Brazil’s official history. In addition, Rennó’s visual strategy of darkening the prints in order to “bring the image to the limit of its visibility,” that is to say, to the limit when the image is almost translucent, recurs in her oeuvre and will again appear in the works Série Vermelha (Militares) and Corpo da Alma series, examined in the fourth chapter. It is a resource that contests the principle of transparency or evidence in photography. When Herkenhoff calls the prints “a constellation of black holes,” he alludes not only to the visual dark spots that Rennó installs on the floor of the gallery, but also to the gaps that exist in the archives and history of Brazil.

If Herkenhoff briefly mentions Rennó’s concern with archives, it is the art historian Charles Merewether who is the first to develop more thoroughly the artist’s connection to such concepts. Merewether brings to attention the “archival effect” that is inherent to photography. The ability of photography to capture a moment of reality, visually recording a fact, gives the medium the quality of archives, which is, according to

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88 Ibid.
89 Rennó, Depoimento, 16.
the writer, “[of] apparent neutrality, whereby difference is either erased or regulated”. 91

French philosopher Jacques Derrida, however, points out that rather than a depository of
documents and historical artifacts accumulated inadvertently, the archive is essentially
authoritarian and implies regulation over the gathering, and not only the housing, of signs.
That is to say, the manner in which archives order, classify, divide, store, inscribe, and
preserve public and private memories is the result of deliberate control and power. 92

Therefore, the use that Rennó makes of archives, in the opinion of Herkenhoff and
Merewether and a vision that I also adopt here, aims to challenge the authoritarian voice
of Brazilian public archives by resurfacing obliterated and mummified official accounts,
consequently combating recurrent forms of social amnesia.

Merewether nicely summarizes Rennó’s archival appropriation, linking her
strategies with those of Chilean artist Eugenio Dittborn and Peruvian photographer
Milagros de la Torre:

Through their work, they seek to rezone the cartography of memory and to restore
a past that has been erased from historical record. … They use photography
precisely to destabilize its authority as a technology of remembrance, a
technology that participates in constructing seamless narratives of identity. Each
of these artists works with the notion of unsanctioned or unlawful body of the
nation as a way to address the violence that characterizes the inscription of history.
They use photographs that represent the moments before which the body becomes
absent. In doing so, they question how and what it is that photography remembers
and forgets and for whom and what purpose. 93

With Imemorial, thus, Rennó questions the means by which the government
memorialized the construction of Brasilia. In digging out photographs of workers that

91 Ibid.
93 Merewether, “Archives of the Fallen,” 45.
have been disposed in the dark drawers of a public archive, the artist not only calls attention “to the violence that characterizes the inscription of history,” as Merewether puts it, but also reclaims the crucial importance of the role such workers played in the development of the project. If the identity photograph is created to be forgotten, as Herkenhoff noted, *Imemorial* is an act against what Merewether called “the politics of forgetting,” a conscious effort to “uncover repressed memories.”94

In addition, Merewether explains official techniques of memorialization vis-à-vis power discourses that defend the country’s implementation of modernity and progress. The belief that the concepts of modernity and the past are “inherently antagonistic,” and that in order to advance toward the future all ties with the past must be eliminated, represents, according to him, a State ideology committed to the elimination or recreation of memory.95 In other words, governments and official discourses consciously excise memories that very frequently are of violence and repression against minorities and oppressed communities. What is left is a faulty account that is justified in the name of development and modernization. In Merewether’s coherent point of view, Rennó combats this logic by producing what he calls an “aesthetic of redemption.”96 The artist not only reassesses and exposes the violence, but also reclaims the place in history of those obliterated, coming to terms with Brazil’s own past.

*Imemorial* is not the first work in Rennó’s oeuvre made of identity photographs. In 1991 Rennó created a group of works composed of hundreds of ID portraits, whose

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95 Ibid., 1019.
96 Ibid.
discarded negatives she gathered from private photographic studios in downtown Rio de Janeiro for the exhibition *A Identidade em Jogo* (Identity at Play) (1991), presented at the São Paulo Cultural Center the same year.\(^\text{97}\) The series comprise six works, namely *Amnésia* (Amnesia), *Puzzle (Homem e Mulher)* (Puzzle (Man and Woman)), *Obituário Transparente* (Transparent Obituary), *Obituário Preto* (Black Obituary), *Irmãs Siamesas* (Siamese Sisters), and *O Grande Jogo da Memória* (The Great Game of Memory). In appropriating identity photographs of anonymous sitters, the artist is not trying to define Brazilian identity in the manner that did the artists from two earlier generations who were invested in characterizing the “Brazilian type.” On the contrary, according to art historian, critic, and curator Tadeu Chiarelli, the generation of artists of the 1980s and 1990s denied any attempt to delineate the identity or establish the typology of the Brazilian, mainly because within Brazil’s unequal social context the marginalized classes were rarely identified or recognized.\(^\text{98}\) Chiarelli notes that artists such as Rennó, Paula Trope, Cris Bierrenbach, Hélio Mello, and Cristina Guerra, whose work *Retratos* (1997) (Figure 2.7) is also made of a multitude of identity photographs and visually resembles Rennó’s *Obituário Transparente* and *Obituário Preto* (Figures 2.8 and 2.9), aimed to combat the idea of “erasure” of these individuals. In the case of *Imemorial* and some works of *A Identidade do Jogo*, such as *Amnesia* (Figure 2.10 and 2.11) and *Obituários*, the artist renders transparent the images of workers and anonymous citizens, illustrating the allusive obliteration of Brazilian bodies and identities through the dematerialization of their photographic representations.

\(^{97}\) In her interview with the author on January 23, 2013, Rennó revealed that the show opened at the São Paulo Cultural Center in 1991, but after a strong rain that destroyed part of center’s roof, it closed and had to be removed to a different space. The organizers reopened it in a pavilion of the São Paulo Biennial.

Chiarelli discussed the emergency of issues of identity and non-identity specifically in the context of Brazilian art of the 1980s and 1990s. International artists, however, have also worked with identity photographs and investigated the positivist apparatus that created the standardization of such documents at the end of the nineteenth century. German artist Joachim Schmid coincidentally visited Rennó’s hometown Belo Horizonte in the early 1990s and also collected negatives of identity photographs that had been discarded. Differently from Rennó, Schmid did not search in studios, but in public squares, where popular photographers, using very simple camera and materials, served a clientele who could not afford to be photographed in studios. Schmid’s *Belo Horizonte, Praça Rio Branco* (Belo Horizonte, Rio Branco Square) (1992) (Figures 2.12 and 2.13) and *Belo Horizonte, Parque Municipal* (Belo Horizonte, Municipal Park) (1993) (Figures 2.14 and 2.15) depict rows of black and white portraits in the manner of *Imemorial* and *A Identidade em Jogo*. All these works are not only similar visually but also share similar content. In photographing Brazilian citizens and workers who needed ID photographs for administrative purposes, Schmid represented the same characters Rennó was investigating in the early 1990s. Formally, the images in the four series are interchangeable, representing not a specific Brazilian type, but an anonymous universal type that symbolizes the face of the Brazilian worker at that time. According to Rennó, the two artists only met years later, when Rennó was already living in Rio de Janeiro, and their similar appropriation of materials was indeed a coincidence and speaks to this artistic period that Chiarelli addresses.

Schmid’s contemporary and fellow countryman, German photographer Thomas


100 Interview with the author in January 24, 2013.
Ruff, is another artist who explored identity photographs. In his extensive series of *Portraits* (1981-2001) (Figures 2.16 and 2.17), Ruff created monumental plain head shots of friends and acquaintances, always employing similar lighting and poses. He requested his sitters to remain as neutral as possible, avoiding emotions and facial expressions.\(^{101}\) The result is an extremely homogenous and timeless twenty-year series of deadpan faces and blank stares similar to those in the works of Rennó and other Brazilian artists of the same generation seen above. Ruff was openly dealing with the impossibility of a photograph to summarize a person’s identity. In appropriating the procedures developed by nineteenth-century taxonomic systems that employed photography to scrutinize and identify deviant faces, Ruff was contesting the paradigm in which identity is still framed and understood in contemporary societies.

Nineteenth-century positivist systems such as those created by Alphonse Bertillon, Francis Galton, and Cesare Lombroso strongly relied on the scientific nature of photography to extract and classify unique features of a criminal’s face as a means to facilitate its recognition in the case of recidivism. The mugshot (Figures 2.18 and 2.19) turned the face into evidence, and after being disseminated in police departments around the world, it quickly became the standard format of any type of ID photograph. Passport, driving licenses, and identity cards, all assimilated the frontal objective gaze of the mugshot, which gained the authoritative status to establish a person’s identity. Furthermore, identification systems are nowadays part of a larger surveillance scheme that serve to classify and control social transit. Faces are objectified and categorized in benefit of a homogeneous visual language that is understood universally. However,

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devoid of any contextual or psychological content, the ID face becomes the representation of no one and at the same time of everyone. That is to say, when the ID photograph is detached from its identifier, it symbolically becomes the image of an anonymous individual, consequently also standing as an image of any individual. When compared to Imemorial, Portraits does not contain the direct and specific social and historical commentaries that Imemorial does by presenting ID photographs of workers of Brasilia. Nevertheless, both works are of anonymous citizens and represent the group rather than the individual. If in A Identidade em Jogo Rennó was, like Ruff, investigating more broadly the implications of the new democratic period in issues of identity and anonymity, in Imemorial the artist employs similar material to discuss a precise event that not only contested the context of her own time, but also challenged one of Brazil’s most symbolic projects of modernity.

The Construction of Brasilia and its Workers

Brasilia was built between 1957 and 1960. Although the idea to move the capital from Rio de Janeiro to the interior as a means to integrate and explore the entire territory originated in the nineteenth century, it was Kubitschek who seriously embraced and developed the project. The initiative, however, was not only an attempt to populate the hinterland of an essentially coastal country, but also represented a radical transformation in Brazilian society. Considered a monument to modernity, Brasilia symbolized a leap into the future, a daring statement that Brazil was able to quickly get rid of its colonial

103 Ibid., 3 and 18.
past through progress and modernization. Furthermore, in raising the city from scratch in less than three years, Kubitschek also attested that the country had enough technical authority and capable workforce to accomplish the task.

Brasilia was an aesthetic as well as political move that perfectly suited Kubitschek’s populist developmentalism. The city’s monumentality became the main reference of his government program, which fostered State-oriented industrialization, accelerated economic growth, and the ascent of the country in the world trade.\textsuperscript{104} Kubitschek explored with enthusiasm the public support of Brasilia, disseminating the image of Brazil as a country of great power destined to be a world leader of the future.\textsuperscript{105} Although it is unquestionable that he expanded Brazil’s infrastructure and basic industries as never before, finally establishing the supremacy of urban centers over rural areas, he did so in a manner that deepened the economy’s dependence on foreign capital. His intense industrialization program allowed international investments and cost the country constant crises, such as escalating inflation, pressure from the International Monetary Fund, debt, and increase of political opposition.\textsuperscript{106} Kubitschek thus relied on the success of Brasilia to prove his own success.

When Kubitschek selected Lúcio Costa’s design to become Brasilia’s Master Plan he confessed he was still unsure of the city he was going to construct.\textsuperscript{107} Anthropologist James Holston suggests that Kubitschek never discussed with Costa or Oscar Niemeyer, who was the architect responsible for designing the buildings, his political intentions behind the construction of Brasilia. The result was the creation of a plan with two very

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 18.
\textsuperscript{105} Skidmore, \textit{Politics in Brazil}, 167.
\textsuperscript{106} Lima Reis Júnior, “Cidade, Trabalho e Memória,” 20.
\textsuperscript{107} Holston, \textit{The Modernist City}, 93.
distinct proposals. While for Kubitschek Brasilia represented monumentality, technical innovation, industrialization, growth, and national development; for Costa and Niemeyer it became a chance to design for the collective, creating an egalitarian city capable of social transformation through its spatial organization.¹⁰⁸ In conceiving a plan that eliminated the vices of capitalist societies, such as street corners and narrow streets, and designing buildings and blocks that presented similar height, façade, and facilities, Costa and Niemeyer envisioned a communist city, in which all its inhabitants would share the same life together.¹⁰⁹ Consequently, social inequalities would not exist, and the division between low and high classes would be abolished.

This apparent paradox is only understood if both proposals are considered in light of notions of modernism and modernization that permeated the project. For Kubitschek, modernism related to modernization, since it was the most suited style to represent the break with the past and the entry of the country into modernity.¹¹⁰ In this context modernism was, according to Holston, an “aesthetic of erasure,” since it ideologically intended to efface and rewrite national histories in the name of progress and modernization.¹¹¹ For Costa and Niemeyer on the other hand, modernist architecture was inherently concerned with social causes, and the city’s modernization was a means to organize social space in benefit of the collective. Because both proposals were so radically distinct, one can only agree with Holston’s claim that Kubitschek was either unaware of the architects’ social intentions or simply convinced that they would not be

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 88 and 96.
¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 20.
¹¹⁰ Ibid., 95.
¹¹¹ Ibid., 5.
put in practice once the city was populated.\textsuperscript{112} However, since its foundation on May 3, 1957 Brasilia has accentuated social inequalities and class segregation. Those who were allowed to live in the city were the military, bureaucrats, politicians, and the newly rich, while the civil servants were expelled from the master plan to the periphery. Brasilia quickly became an elitist city that saw the explosion of its real state and the speculation of its land. This elite ended up altering the architecture of Niemeyer’s communist plan by enhancing the commercial blocks and employing doormen and guards or adding gates, fences, and intercoms in residential buildings not only for protection but also, as the anthropologist José Jorge de Carvalho points out, “to negate the public side of the city.”\textsuperscript{113} In attempting to repeal the rest of Brazil’s uneven and underdeveloped conditions, official discourse quickly denied the reality of Brasilia’s construction years, literally expelling from the city, as soon as it was finished, the workers who had built it.\textsuperscript{114}

On inauguration day, April 21, 1960, Kubitschek unveiled an empty and gleaming Brasilia, as if the concrete structures had miraculously materialized from the soil. In the president’s new civilizing order, Brasilia’s original population of builders was not included.\textsuperscript{115} Because they were mostly uneducated, declassed, impoverished, and of mixed origins, the workers were left out of the city’s history as well as the city’s physical space. Brasilia’s first laborers were never allowed to live in Niemeyer’s buildings they had raised. Instead, they were excluded to the outskirts of the original plan, subjected to

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 94.  
\textsuperscript{114} Holston, \textit{The Modernist City}, 5.  
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 199.
Inadequate living conditions. In denying them the right to be citizens of the city, Kubitschek ended up undermining his own populist project.

In 1957 Kubitschek launched in the national media the first recruitment campaign, calling volunteers from all corners of the country to migrate to Brasilia and participate in the construction of a new Brazil. His rhetorical legitimated the pioneers, the *candangos*, as heroes. In official campaigns, their image was that of a titan, a key character responsible for the forging of a new national identity. They were the anonymous figures whose hard work and commitment were leading Brazil toward the future. Most of them were migrants from the northeastern region of Brazil, an area of constant droughts and extreme poverty. In practice, however, the *candangos* were poorly treated, and although the government expected them to leave the city once the construction was over, almost none of the workers returned to their original homes, a situation that forced the establishment of satellite towns in adjacent areas of Brasilia. If in November 1956 Brasilia counted with 232 employees to initiate the construction, by July 1957 this contingent had jumped to 12,283 workers. In May 1959, a year before its completion, Brasilia employed over sixty-four thousand workers in various sites and activities.

Upon their arrival in Brasilia, migrant workers were supposed to register at Novacap’s Institute of Immigration and Colonization (INIC) office, where they received an identification card that was also a work permit, which allowed them to work for different contractors. These are the identification records that Rennô found in Novacap’s archives. Workers were divided according to their skills, but only educated professionals,

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117 Holston, *The Modernist City*, 207-211.
such as engineers and architects, had access to suitable living and working conditions. The largest mass of migrant workers lived in precarious shared accommodations with little privacy, comfort, or hygiene, and usually distant from the construction sites.\textsuperscript{120}

Their daily schedule usually exceeded twelve hours a day, often reaching fifteen or sixteen hours of work. Accidents were constant, since safety equipment, such as gloves, helmets, or safety cords, were nearly non-existent.\textsuperscript{121} Employee Manoel Pereira da Silva denounces that casualties were also frequent, though local police quickly intervened, trying to conceal the deaths from spreading to the news:

[Accidents] were often. We saw people falling from [the scaffolding structure] above, but we could not touch them. … We only knew a worker had fallen, we would run to see him, but they had a rescue team … that did not allow us to get closer. … They isolated the place, covered the person with a cloth, with clothes, anything, and removed him. At that time, there was no investigation, so no one knew who the worker [who had died] was. But then the suitcases remained, abandoned, and the bed was abandoned. Sometimes we knew through the beds, since their occupants never returned.\textsuperscript{122}

Furthermore, conflicts contesting the poor living conditions were not uncommon.

On the night of February 8, 1959, Brasilia’s workers started an argument with the cafetería staff over the poor quality of the food.\textsuperscript{123} The staff called the police that allegedly entered the place shooting. Novacap’s official version reported only one fatality, while the workers denounced that over a hundred men were killed.\textsuperscript{124} Therefore,

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 59.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 66.
\textsuperscript{122} Translation mine from the Portuguese: “Era constante. A gente via só o pessoal cair de cima, mas nós não podia encostar, … A gente só sabia que tinha caído operário lá, a gente corria pra ver, mas eles tinham uma equipe de bombeiro, … que não deixava ninguém encostar. … Eles isolavam o local, cobria o pessoal com um pano, com uma roupa, qualquer coisa, e tiravam. Naquele tempo nem perícia existia. Aí ninguém sabia qual era o operário. Mas sempre apareciam as malas, abandonada, e cama abandonada. Às vezes a gente sabia através das camas, que o dono não aparecia mais.” In Lima Reis Júnior, “Cidade, Trabalho e Memória,” 67.
\textsuperscript{123} Lins Ribeiro, \textit{O Capital da Esperança}, 228.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid.
Inmemorial not only accounts for the killings of workers while on-duty in the construction sites, but also comments on a second type of massacre, such as the cafeteria massacre, that calls attention to the appalling conditions that workers were subjected to endure. It demonstrates that, as Kubitschek announced, workers were indeed heroes and titans, although for a different reason: for having to survive the daily routine of Brasilia’s construction years.

Significantly, even before Brasilia was inaugurated, art critic Mário Pedrosa had already predicted its future. He anticipated that geographical isolation would lead to social isolation, transforming Brasilia into a separate entity within the country that lived off of its own bureaucratic apparatus and disregarded urgent matters.¹²⁵ For him, Brasilia was doomed to its own authoritarianism. With time, he came to understand Brasilia’s modernist project as a total work of art, whose isolation could also give national problems a much bigger dimension, potentially provoking politicians to overlook their private matters and concentrate on what was urgent for the nation.¹²⁶ Nevertheless, in a visionary prediction, Pedrosa concluded: “But if [Brasilia] fails, revolution will come, as punishment, with blood, catastrophes, ... and everything. In this vast historical context, are Brazilian politicians, starting by Kubitschek himself, … aware of the step we are giving?”¹²⁷ For Pedrosa, the failure of Brasilia was the failure of the whole country as a nation.

The critic could not have been more precise. From the start Brasilia presented

¹²⁶ Ibid., 54.
¹²⁷ Ibid., translation mine from the Portuguese: “Mas se ela mesma fracassa, a revolução, como um castigo, virá, enfim - com sangue, catástrofes, barba e tudo. Nesse vasto contexto histórico terão os políticos brasileiros, a começar pelo próprio JK, consciência do passo que vamos dar?”
contradictions that transformed it into a completely different city from what was originally planned. Holston points out why Brasilia was rapidly considered a failure of modernism: “the paradox of Brasilia’s development is not that its radical premises failed to produce something new, but rather that what they did produce contradicted what was intended.”  

In his review of Holston’s book, Carvalho explains the quote above emphasizing that the originality and magnitude of the endeavor of building a new capital in an extremely inhospitable and deserted area in the middle of the country was, and still is, revolutionary. However, it was its utopian project, which envisioned “communal and egalitarian conviviality (a sort of tropical *communitas*)” that proved to fail. As seen in the case of the laborers, Brasilia immediately absorbed the problems and vices of other major Brazilian cities, such as Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. Carvalho mentions the following characteristics: “ever-growing impoverished population of migrants and squatters, uncontrollable real state speculation, increasing social injustice, marginalization of the poor, and concentration of political decision making and economic wealth in the hands of a small part of the city’s population.” He notes that the plan promoted its anti-utopian side. In other words, the exclusivity of its architecture ended up reinforcing elitism and social and economic inequality. Furthermore, the monumental axis and lack of corners and squares added to the anti-utopianism, and later on in the 1970s would enable the military regime to centralize the power and control any sort of manifestation against the regime. Kubitschek’s industrialist aims prevailed over Costa and Niemeyer’s socialist plan after all.

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130 Ibid., 360.
Brasilia in the 1990s: Collor’s Rise and Downfall

It is symbolic that Rennó decided to access the history of Brasilia and Brazilian modernism at the start of the 1990s. In the years right before she created *Imemorial*, Brasilia experienced one of the most dramatic episodes of corruption in the history of Brazilian democracy.¹³¹ In September 29, 1992 president Fernando Collor de Mello was impeached two years after having taken office, accused of facilitating an elaborate corruption scheme set up by his campaign manager Paulo César Farias. Collor was the first president elected by popular vote since the military coup in 1960 and his victory as much as his defeat represented a challenging test to the country’s new democratic regime. For historian Thomas Skidmore, Collor’s impeachment signified both success and failure: a success, because it reassured democracy by unifying all areas of society to react against corruption in a nonviolent manner; and a failure, because it confirmed that corruption was still embedded and easily carried out in Brazilian politics.¹³²

After twenty years of dictatorship and a decade of economic recession and social tensions, the 1989 elections reinstated hope in the country, constructing the belief that only a strong public leader, directly elected by the people, could resume development and modernization.¹³³ The presidential campaign quickly became a spectacle that animated all areas of society, provoking national excitement and high expectations for Brazil’s advancement. Collor de Mello’s family and political roots were bound to the old colonial

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¹³¹ Cravo Neto et al., *Revendo Brasília*, 43.
oligarchies of the northeastern region. He joined the presidential campaign as candidate of a small party, practically unknown to the rest of the country. His opponent, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, initiated his career as a union leader in greater São Paulo, therefore representing the leftist discourse in favor of workers and minorities. Although the two candidates laid out similar proposals that opposed elitism and supported social change, the separation between right and left ideologies were mainly resolved through their visual presentations on television and public rallies.\(^{134}\)

Collor gained prominence and meteoric advantage in the polls by assuming a messianic discourse, supported by Globo Network, Brazil’s main media conglomerate. Young and good-looking, he explored his image of dynamic and charismatic leader, presenting himself as the only savior capable to rescue the country from inefficiency and archaism.\(^{135}\) In his programs, he attacked corruption, promising to “morally purify” politicians, especially Brasilia’s bureaucrats.\(^{136}\) Collor defended the start of a “New Brazil,” a modern country of reduced social inequalities and with a clean and efficient government.\(^{137}\) In addition, he referenced Kubitschek’s modernist plan, bridging his own modernizing project to Kubitschek’s *developmentalist* approach.\(^{138}\) However, rather than promoting State-protected industrialization, he implemented a neoliberal program that dramatically reduced State intervention. Collor opened the economy to international

\(^{134}\) Mario Sergio Conti, *Notícias do Planalto: a imprensa e Fernando Collor* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1999), 275.
\(^{135}\) Skidmore, “Collor’s Downfall,” 2.
markets, promising to save the country from a financial collapse.\textsuperscript{139} In exploring his neat image and eloquence, and by taking advantage of the profound atmosphere of hopelessness and disenchantment with previous administrations that pervaded the country at the time, Collor persuaded the Brazilian population that he was the only one apt to put Brazil back on the road to progress.\textsuperscript{140}

However, in his first year in Brasilia, Collor led the country to an even worse recession. While he did not implement any of his projects for modernization, inflation and unemployment rates raised, economic growth decreased, and social services deteriorated.\textsuperscript{141} The enthusiastic support of the campaign wore off, leaving the sentiment of disappointment and uncertainty throughout the country. Isolated politically, he consummated what Pedrosa had predicted for Brasilia’s future: he found the opportunity to become corrupt.\textsuperscript{142} In May 1992 the chain of corruption scandals arose. Denounced by his brother, Pedro Collor de Mello, Collor was accused of extortion, embezzlement, and mismanagement of public money. The case immediately gained the press, which, through the investigative work of journalists, incited public uprising that culminated in a series of civic mobilizations and mass demonstrations in all Brazilian states.\textsuperscript{143} In September 1992, Collor lost his political powers after an overwhelming and unprecedented decision of Brazil’s Chamber of Deputies. In December of the same year, Collor resigned.\textsuperscript{144} Although Collor’s downfall inflated the moral of the country as a nation, it aggravated economic and social problems. According to Skidmore, the consequences were various:

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\textsuperscript{139} Weyland, "The Rise and Fall of President Collor," 11.
\textsuperscript{140} Weyland, "The Rise and Fall of President Collor," 8.
\textsuperscript{141} Skidmore, "Collor’s Downfall," 15.
\textsuperscript{142} Weyland, "The Rise and Fall of President Collor," 3.
\textsuperscript{143} Weyland, "The Rise and Fall of President Collor," 5.
\textsuperscript{144} Lattman-Weltman, \textit{A imprensa faz e desfaz um presidente}, 99-101.
\end{flushright}
“endemic inflation, … insufficient investment, decaying infrastructure, … rampant street crime, continued high rate of illiteracy and ill health, and one of the world’s worst distributions of income.”

In this context, Rennó’s *Imemorial* becomes a cry against inequalities of both the past and the present. In unearthing the history of Brasilia’s workers to discuss some of Brazil’s crucial democratic moments, Rennó was returning to the source that originated the country’s current condition. She looked to the past not to simply exhume it, but also to come to terms with a distorted history. She bridged two failed modernist attempts, Kubitschek’s and Collor’s, finding the cause of the latter in the origins of the former. Essentially, Rennó was asking How does a country deal with the idea of modernity in the midst of corruption and social inequity? *Imemorial* thus represented not only a memorial for the deceased laborers of Brasilia, but also a memorial for modernity, which, in the first years of the 1990s, was once again interrupted and buried.

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Chapter 3

The Institutional Archive: *Cicatriz* and *Vulgo*

*Cicatriz* (1996) (Figures 3.1 to 3.3) and *Vulgo* (1998) (Figure 3.5 and 3.6) are two distinct series made with photographs from the same archive that is part of São Paulo’s Penitentiary Museum. In 1995 Rennó learned about the existence of this archive inside São Paulo’s State Prison, the Carandiru Complex. During her research, the artist found an extensive photography collection from the 1920s-1940s with thousands of negatives that portrayed the inmates of Brazil’s newest, most modern, and most popular prison at that time. Forgotten for over fifty years, the material reflected the disciplinary and cleansing practices that were implemented in Carandiru as part of the government’s efforts to set off Brazil’s economic and social modernization in the early decades of the twentieth century. Rennó re-appropriated photographs of tattoos and headshots to create the two series, revealing the body marks that identified and differentiated deviant individuals who did not fit in the standards of the new society. In addition, in dealing with the archive of an institution that went from being a model of penitentiary discipline in the 1920s to becoming the site of constant mistreatments and violence after the 1960s, Rennó called attention to issues that not only related to imprisonment, individuation, and

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146 The São Paulo Penitentiary Museum was inaugurated in 1968 with the mission to preserve documents, prisoners’ files, photographs, memorabilia, objects, and artworks, most of which created by inmates of the various penitentiaries located within the state of São Paulo. According to information provided on its website, the museum’s archives are currently being restored and will gain a new site. In Secretaria da Administração Penitenciária, “Museu Penitenciário Paulista,” http://www.sap.sp.gov.br/common/museu/museu.php?pg=15 (accessed June 22, 2013).

147 Upon her entry in the penitentiary archive, Rennó found the negatives and prisoners’ files in advanced stage of decay, literally abandoned and archived without any criteria. The selection of the final images of *Cicatriz* started thus as a nine-month long bureaucratic process to gain authorization to access and use the material in her work. Rennó performed the role of an archivist, sorting out, diagnosing, classifying, and restoring the negatives. Furthermore, the precise amount of negatives that comprised the penitentiary archive is unclear. To Herzog (2002), Rennó stated that she had found 20,000 plates; while to Herkenhoff (1997) she mentioned 15,000, emphasizing that it was a guess, for it was almost impossible to count them.
memory, but also attested to the failure of the modern project in Brazil.

The Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) in Los Angeles originally commissioned *Cicatriz*. Comprised of eighteen photographs of various dimensions of inmates’ tattoos, the pictures depict close-ups of the prisoners’ bodies, mainly of their chest, arms, hands, and legs.\(^{148}\) Even though Rennó enlarged the original prints, the new dimensions did not eliminate the sense of intimacy that is evident in all images. The closeness of the camera to the prisoner’s body, as emphasizes art historian Annateresa Fabris, reveals a potential relationship between the photographer and the sitter who, at first glance, appears to confide to the camera.\(^{149}\) In one photograph a man opens his shirt to reveal two little crosses on each side of his chest (Figure 3.7), while in another photo a different man rests his hands on a chair to show figures that cover his fingers and arms (Figure 3.8). The designs of the tattoos are simple and rudimentary, such as stars, crosses, female figures, or letters and names. Their forms are clearly codified, standing for personal symbols that recount the stories of their bearers.

Rennó does not include in the installation information about the making of the tattoo, such as date, place, and motif, specifics that often accompanied the prisoners’

\(^{148}\) It is also uncertain the amount of images of tattoos pertaining to the archive. While Maria Angélica Melendi (2000) stated that 3,000 photographs were of tattoos, scars, and diseases and anomalies; Annateresa Fabris (2005) indicated that 1,800 were of tattoos.

\(^{149}\) Fabris also understands this intimacy as an indication of the disciplinary use of photography inside Carandiru, a concept that stems from nineteenth-century scientific theories and that it is fully articulated by French philosopher Michel Foucault in his pioneering publication about the conception and development of modern punitive systems, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Fabris particularly associates Rennó’s appropriation of the penitentiary photographs to Foucault’s idea of “docile bodies,” bodies whose suffering no longer involves physical intervention such as torture, but whose confinement makes them subjects of total surveillance, scientific scrutiny, and constant control. In other words, “docile bodies,” once incarcerated, are symbolically dominated and disarticulated, entering a process of classification, discipline and punishment in the name of the prisoners’ transformation and regeneration.\(^{149}\) In Annateresa Fabris, “Identidades seqüestradas,” in *O Fotográfico*, ed. Etienne Samain (São Paulo: Hucitec/CNPq: 2005), 266 and 270.
Instead, the artist simply juxtaposes the photographs with twelve different news excerpts from her *Universal Archive*. Some of the accounts are ordinary and anonymous, while others are famous and recognizable, despite Rennó’s removal of all information that can identify her sources. They narrate cases of racial discrimination, lawsuits, religious missions, and police cases. Below are some examples included in the original installation at MOCA in 1996.

Y. says that the Mormons had a peculiar way of dealing with Brazilians. “They would arrive at their homes, and after some conversation, would say how much they enjoyed photographs, and ask to see the family album. Whenever they came across the picture of a black person, they asked who that might be. If it was a relative, the visit was immediately over.” It was in Brazil, however – the country where it has grown the most – that Church began to abolish racism. “Every time the Mormon God is put up against the wall, He changes His mind,” Y. explained.

The children had just left the tempo when the jets dropped four barrels of napalm and four bombs. The entire area was engulfed by a gigantic ball of fire. X. was hit by drops of napalm. Howling in pain and tearing off her burning clothes in agony, she ran towards the photographer’s camera and straight into history.

Y., the country’s favorite mystery man, only allows his photograph to be taken when he is masked. His most recognizable features are his protuberant nose, his shining eyes – which some reporters say are green and others, light brown – and his talent for writing. So far, all attempts at uncovering his identity have failed. On Monday, at the start of peace negotiations between the government and the guerrillas, Y. stole the show. Wearing his characteristic ski mask and ammunition belt, he stood up, unfurled the national flag, and kept it on the table, creating a fascinating patriotic image of the guerrilla.

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151 As seen in *Candelária*, investigated in chapter one, Rennó collects since the early 1990s newspaper excerpts that deal with photography or describe specific photographic images. *The Universal Archive* is an ongoing project which the artist calls “an infinite virtual archive of latent images.” From each excerpt Rennó removes information that can reveal the identity or details about the individuals, places, and facts mentioned in the news clip. In Rosângela Rennó, “Cicatriz: fotografias de tatugens do Museu Penitenciário Paulista e textos do Arquivo Universal,” in *A Fotografia nos processos artísticos contemporâneos*, ed. Alexandre Santos e Maria Ivone dos Santos (Porto Alegre: UFRGS Editora, 2004), 223.

152 In 2003, when Rennó published the artist’s book *O Arquivo Universal e Outros Arquivos* (The Universal Archive and Other Archives), she added images and texts to *Cicatriz*’s original selection. The texts in English mentioned here were from the original installation at MOCA.
Significantly, the texts above do not caption the images; instead, they complement them, offering independent stories that can be freely associated with any of the characters portrayed. Rennó explains her intention for contrasting image and text: “I was interested in emphasizing that those individuals were not anonymous. Even without knowing their names, my goal was to provoke the spectator the desire to learn more and share their pain. … That is the reason why I deliberately chose certain texts from the Universal Archive to ‘act’ side by side the images, to remove them from the sort of collective limbo of the prison.”

This strategy of implicating the viewer in the work is not new in Rennó’s practice. In all works studied in this thesis the artist invites the viewer to take responsibility for the individual as well as collective narratives that she exposes. In adding to Cicatriz texts that do not relate to imprisonment, but rather describe fait divers of everyday life, Rennó reclaims the humane qualities that also pertain to those convicted. She thus demands from the viewer compassion and understanding for those who are rarely remembered unless through their crimes.

In the MOCA installation (Figures 3.9 and 3.10), Rennó embedded the photographic prints and texts in the walls of the gallery. The artist literally carved the letters and words into the white plaster, giving them the tactility of scars. In addition, the prints also evoked skin texture. Rennó printed the images on a soft and matte watercolor paper, which gave them a sensorial appeal. MOCA curator Alma Ruiz points out that the prints’ “leaden look is achieved by printing a low contrast negative on a gray surface.”
and complements noting that “the skin’s topography is incorporated into the design with the magnified texture of the epidermis taking on the appearance of canvas.” Cicatriz’s prints indeed are coarse and heavy, and yet smooth and luscious. Rennó was able to contrast the slickness of the prints with the roughness of the content and rawness of the tattoos in the sitters’ skin. In addition, the prints convey a sense of uneasiness, leaving the viewer to deal with a subject that is visibly painful, yet beautiful at the same time. Rennó defined Cicatriz as an “epithelial installation,” since the embedding of the prints in the walls gave them the appearance of a membrane. As curator and critic Paulo Herkenhoff states, such visual strategy therefore rendered the gallery entirely empty, a physical absence that acts as a stark and silent contrast to the overpopulated galleries and cells of Carandiru and all other penal institutions throughout the country. Moreover, in scaring the gallery walls as tattoo artists scar the virgin skin of the detainee, Rennó is calling attention to the physical as well as metaphorical marks that authorities have imprinted in Brazilian prisons in successive decades of disregard and poor administration. In the various modernization plans implemented in Brazil, Cicatriz attests that projects to improve penitentiaries’ infrastructure and to support the reinsertion of prisoners into society were never seriously taken into account.

Following Imemorial, Cicatriz is another work that national and international scholars have greatly discussed. In addition to Fabris, Herkenhoff, and Ruiz, Adriano Pedrosa, Christopher Knight, Jacopo Crivelli Visconti, and Urs Stahel have written about

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154 Rennó and Ruiz, Cicatriz, 10.
156 Ibid.
Although their arguments have provided invaluable information to my understanding of the work, none of them have considered the implementation of the principles of the Positivist School of Criminology in Carandiru in the 1910s and how it impacted the daily lives of the prisoners who are portrayed in *Cicatriz* as well as in *Vulgo*. In other words, for the first time I contextualize the two works vis-à-vis the theories that motivated the construction of Carandiru and the living conditions of the prisoners inside the prison. Furthermore, I briefly investigate the increase of violence in Carandiru and the deterioration not only of the positivist model but also of the physical conditions of the prison until the early 1990s, the period when the artist created the two works. My historical analysis thus looks into Carandiru as a project born out of the desire to modernize the Brazilian penitentiary system in the early twentieth century and as a project that, at the end of the same century, proved itself a monumental failure.

In 1998 Rennó created *Vulgo*, a second series made with photographs from the penitentiary archive. *Vulgo* comprise twelve large 170 x 110 cm (66.9 x 43.3 inches) prints of the inmates’ heads: nine are of the back of their heads (Figures 3.11 and 3.12), while three portray their front (Figure 3.13). The sitters do not confront the viewer in any of the photographs. The focal point of all images is the men’s cowlicks, which Rennó emphasized by coloring with a saturated pinkish red pigment. Cowlicks are unique hair formations that, for being distinct in every individual, can also serve as an identification resource. The original archival images depict close-ups of the heads, also disclosing the

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ears and sometimes parts of the neck. In three photographs it is possible to see the sitter’s hands resting on the top rail of a chair (Figure 3.12), suggesting that he is seated while being photographed. The background is neutral and out of focus. By monumentalizing their heads, Rennó also heightened the damage marks of the negatives, which deteriorated due to the archive’s poor conservation.

The title of each work describes the shapes of the cowlicks and at the same time gives each sitter a nickname, such as Twister, Fire, Trockel, Volcan, Three Holes, Whipe, Phoenix, and Double-Crown. The adoption of aliases is a common practice when criminals enter the prison. While numbers replace their given names, they either choose for themselves or are given by their cellmates other pseudonyms that often describe a trace of their personalities. Vulgo in Portuguese is also an alias that means “common people,” “troop,” “crowd,” “pleb,” or “rabble.” In titling the series Vulgo, Rennó suggests a double entendre that associates the inmates’ false names not only with their physical and psychological traces, but also with their social origins. In addition to the tattoos, the cowlicks and the nicknames become elements of segregation and stigmatization. When the artist exhibits Vulgo she often pairs the heads with an extensive list of such nicknames that she collects in the Universal Archive. Vulgo/Texto (Alias/Text), which Rennó considers an independent work, is an animation of the prisoners’ pseudonyms that she projects in loop on the gallery wall next to the heads.

Vulgo has received little attention from critics and historians and it is usually

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160 Information provided by the artist during interview on January 24, 2013.
investigated alongside *Cicatriz*, due to its association with the penitentiary archive. On the occasion of the 1999 exhibition *Vulgo (Alias)* at the Australian Center for Photography in Sidney, however, art historians Maria Angélica Melendi and Adam Geczy wrote a more thorough analysis of the work. Geczy wonders about the destination of the records once the prisoners die, since the photographs will no longer be needed to identify them. He contends that the pictures, if not discarded, are sent to a limbo or a “state of namelessness;” in other words, they become part of a catalogue of types that supposedly revealed their predisposition to crime, deviation, and violence.\(^{161}\) Geczy rightly implies that prisoners again lose their names or any sense of identity once they become records in the penitentiary archive. Once they die, they lose their last resource of resistance, which consisted in changing their ID numbers for pseudonyms, thus being incorporated in the mass of anonymous prisoners that represented the Carandiru constituency in the 1930s and 1940s. This time, it is their photographic and not their physical bodies that are subjected to the scrutiny and control of the researcher. In this sense, Rennó is also exerting a position of power in investigating this material and selecting the final images that will compose *Vulgo*. However, in being aware of her own responsibility as an artist as well as conscious of photography’s compromise with reality, Rennó opts to restore those prisoners’ identities from their burial. Even though she does not associate the sitters to their real aliases, she attributes pseudonyms that relate to their physical characteristics. In sum, in order to reclaim these prisoners’ right to individuation

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\(^{161}\) Geczy alludes to scientific theories developed in the late nineteenth century that regulated the body of the prisoner and aimed at classifying deviant individuals through the identification of physical traces and biotypes. See subchapter 3.3 for more explanation and application of such theories within the context of Carandiru. In Adam Geczy, “A science of suppositions: Rosângela Rennó’s Archive Project,” in *Vulgo (Alias)* - Rosângela Rennó (Sydney: University of Western Sydney-Nepean, 2000) www.rosangelarenno.com.br (accessed August 1, 2012), 3.
and personification, Rennó employs in *Vulgo* the same method used by nineteenth-century criminologists. However, rather than identifying the marks that make them deviant, Rennó highlights in red those that make them invariably humane.

The ideas of limbo and a catalogue of types in Geczy’s argument have direct associations with archives. It is Melendi, however, when writing about the same show, who fully develops the concept of the archive in *Vulgo* and Rennó’s oeuvre more broadly. Melendi departs from Jacques Derrida’s *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, claiming that archives are repositories of signs, inscriptions, marks, and impressions. Yet, the need, or *fever* which Derrida describes, of recording, memorializing, and monumentalizing everything, damages the very act of archiving. In other words, archives are not only about the guarding of records, but also about the selecting of materials, a task that goes hand in hand with ideas of censorship, repression, and power relations.

Archives then, for Derrida as for Melendi, are places where memory can be distorted, annihilated, and consigned to oblivion. In her view, therefore, what Rennó does is to recuperate the fragments and gaps of this faulty memory. In an attempt to fight social amnesia, Melendi claims Rennó rescues parts of an archive that were destined to invisibility and forgetfulness. Melendi’s argument is similar to art historian Charles Merewether’s concept, as already seen in chapter three. The two authors, whose visions I also share here, see Rennó’s appropriation of photographs from Brazilian public archives, which they understand were purposefully neglected, as an act of physical as well as symbolic rescuing. In re-photographing negatives in advanced stage of

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163 Ibid., 8
164 See pages 39 to 41 of this thesis for Merewether’s reading of Rennó’s work in relation to use of archival material.
deterioration, the artist literally recuperates historical material that contains part of the country’s memory; while in unearthing facts and characters which the State power opted to excise, Rennó retrieves, rewrites, and re-inscribes these memories in the history of Brazilian art.

Carandiru in Context

Although Rennó’s intention to associate the sitters of Cicatriz and Vulgo with their original environment at Carandiru was only metaphorical, the poignancy of the two works is undeniably bound to the fact that those individuals indeed spent time in Carandiru in the 1920s and 1930s, a period when the penitentiary was a symbol of modernity and regeneration throughout Latin America. Fabris rightly points out that “if it were not for the context that is evidenced, the re-enhanced images could allude to other tattoos, other scars, … The proof of their provenience is, thus, indispensable.”

Carandiru was the first and only penitentiary built in Brazil based on the principles of the Positivist School of Law. Its project was so radical that it quickly became a very

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165 Elizabeth Cancelli, Carandiru: a prisão, o psiquiatra e o preso (Brasília: Editora UnB, 2005), 43.
166 Fabris, “Identidades seqüestradas,” 271. Translation mine from the original in Portuguese: “Se não fosse pelo contexto evidenciado, as imagens repotencializadas poderiam remeter a outras tatuagens, outras cicatrizes, … A prova de sua proveniência é, porém, indispensável.”
167 The Positivist School of Law stemmed from the studies of the Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso, who, in the last decade of the nineteenth century, created the movement called Positivist or Scientific School of Criminology. Lombroso claimed that social deviance was biologically determined; in other words, the criminal man was born deviant. This evolutionist premise transformed prisons in laboratories authorized to investigate, measure, classify, and control the body of the prisoner. Doctors, psychologists, anthropologists, and criminologists scrutinized the criminal man’s physical body, taking measurements of the limbs, bones, head, face, and overall structure. They also evaluated moral and mental conditions, and annotated abnormalities, such as tattoos, scars, and birthmarks. The data gathered was then filed and should aid in the identification of recidivists as well as in establishing the profile of the criminal type. Furthermore, in the Positivist system, penitentiaries became total institutions, whose mission was to mould, control, discipline, and regenerate criminals through solitary isolation, intense labor, and silence. Sentences and punishments were also individuated, being prescribed according to each individual’s crime. The ultimate
popular tourist destination that attracted local and foreigner visitors, including famous personalities.\textsuperscript{168} Contrastingly, the majority of prisons around the country were in extremely precarious structural and living conditions, with overcrowded unsanitary cells and shortage of staff to control and assist the detainees.\textsuperscript{169} Therefore, the construction of Carandiru served also to alleviate Brazil’s exhausted and dysfunctional penal system. Most importantly, however, it symbolized the entry of São Paulo, by then Brazil’s largest metropolis, into the modern era. At the core of the project were civilizing principles that should regenerate and reinsert deviant individuals in a society obsessed with ideas of progress and modernization.\textsuperscript{170}

Carandiru was conceived in the 1910s, but only inaugurated on April 21, 1920.\textsuperscript{171} Its scientific disciplinary proposal suited well the intellectual and elitist discourse that in the 1920s promoted the country’s modernization. It was in this decade that Brazil started to develop its industry and consequently to expand its urban centers. Large cities such as São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro saw the rise of new social groups that replaced the old agrarian organizations.\textsuperscript{172} Planning the new republican society, the emerging bourgeoisie supported the building of institutions that could “sanitize” and organize public space by removing from its streets the large contingent of vagrants, beggars, tramps, and unemployed individuals who had no active participation in the economy.\textsuperscript{173} Their

\textsuperscript{168} French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss and writer Stefan Zweig are among some of the well-known personalities who visited Carandiru. In Cancelli, \textit{Carandiru: a prisão}, 65.


\textsuperscript{170} Cancelli, \textit{Carandiru: a prisão}, 41.

\textsuperscript{171} Fernando Salla, \textit{As prisões em São Paulo: 1822-1940} (São Paulo: Annablume, 1999), 178.

\textsuperscript{172} Octavio Ianni, \textit{A Ideia de Brasil Moderno} (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 2004), 17.

\textsuperscript{173} Salla, \textit{As prisões em São Paulo}, 175-177.
ultimate goal was to institutionalize order and civility in the upcoming metropolises.

When Getúlio Vargas ascended to the presidency of Brazil in 1930 after an orchestrated military revolution that defeated São Paulo’s coffee oligarchies, he caused the definitive break that set the country on the path to urbanization and industrialization.174 Defending a strong and unified national State, Vargas quickly centralized the power, installing an authoritarian regime that became a dictatorship in 1937 after a coup d’état. During Vargas’s years, the police gained the status of one of the most important and most powerful institutions, with authorization to indiscriminately control the urban space and directly scrutinize citizens, removing from society those who did not conform to the system.175 Repression and incarceration thus were the means necessary to expunge inefficiency and set forward a new modern era in Brazil. However, as seen above, the majority of prisons around the country were not places of education and reinsertion; instead, they engendered pain and punishment, with reduced or nonexistent compliance with human rights regulations.176 They radically contrasted Carandiru’s project, which was conceived as a laboratory of regeneration where old vices were meant to be abolished and modernity could be scientifically proven.

Carandiru’s original plan comprised three long rectangular pavilions for detainees and included buildings for workshop rooms, kitchen and dining hall, laundry room, classrooms, an amphitheater, and a hospital.177 It contained 1,380 individual cells equipped with single beds, toilet and sink, table, shelves, linen, and cleaning supplies.178

175 Cancelli, O mundo da violência, 47.
176 Ibid, 180.
177 Cancelli, Carandiru: a prisão, 55-57.
178 Ibid., 65 and 82.
Everything was highly sanitized and aseptic. The inmate was responsible for maintaining his cell in proper conditions and following a tight routine that started early in the morning and included eight and a half hours of work, two hours of classes, four and a half hours for meals and personal hygiene, and nine hours of rest. All activities were highly controlled. For example, it was forbidden to stand up during the night, or lay down during the day. It was also interdicted to remain idle in the corridors or talk, even if in low voice, with other inmates. Silence was one of the main pillars of the disciplinary system and was to be respected at all times.\textsuperscript{179} Essentially, Carandiru’s physical hygiene and strict regime were the key elements that permeated the inmate’s physical and moral regeneration.

Once admitted at Carandiru, the prisoner was matriculated, immediately receiving a number that replaced his given name and identified him inside the institution. The identification process included the filing of two main folders, one called \textit{Bulletin of the Service of Medicine and Surgery}, containing basic medical information; and another called \textit{Bulletin of Criminology}, consisting of basic identification information and specific details about the inmate’s physical characteristics and body measurements, listing possible diseases, finger prints, and biographical notes. The file also comprised two photographs, in frontal and profile poses.\textsuperscript{180} If the prisoner presented tattoos, they were annotated in the \textit{Tattoo Archive}, which was composed of twenty-six leather-bound volumes with over six-thousand pages in total. They recorded the location, year, and color of the tattoos as well as the person who executed it and the reason why the prisoner acquired it.\textsuperscript{181} Historian Elizabeth Cancelli suggests that the collecting of data about tattoos was a personal interest of the Doctor José Moraes de Mello, the psychiatrist

\textsuperscript{179} Ibid., 97.
\textsuperscript{180} Salla, \textit{As prisões em São Paulo}, 257.
\textsuperscript{181} Ibid., 260, and Rennó and Ruiz, \textit{Cicatriz}, 9.
responsible for completing most of the prisoners’ records, including their psychological evaluations. Dr. Moraes de Mello systematically documented the tattoos of all prisoners, dividing the designs into twelve categories: ethnic, professional, love-related, political, criminal, passionate, obscene, hieratic, ornamental, affectionate, accidental, and therapeutic.\textsuperscript{182} In case he was not able to classify a design, he added a subsequent category.

Moreover, Cancelli argues that, because of Carandiru’s intense routine of work, strict rules and operation, and extensive control and isolation, it was impossible for inmates to develop any sort of counterculture that promoted the differentiation of individuals.\textsuperscript{183} For her, the tattoos in the photographs and those described in the files of the penitentiary archive were obtained before the inmates’ entry in the prison. Her perspective differs from curators’ interpretations of Cicatriz and Vulgo. Scholars such as Fabris and Ruiz, mention the creation of designs, but do not consider the time in which they were made, disregarding if all the tattoos Moraes de Mello photographed and archived did in fact date to the inmate’s imprisonment. Fabris states that, even though Rennó was not able to find thorough references about Dr. Moraes de Mello’s intentions for photographing tattoos, a different researcher, Dr. Corrêa de Toledo, published in 1926 a study that cited Dr. Moraes de Mello’s work and proposed that prisoners had tattoos done as a means to “imaginarily evade the prison,” leaving a permanent mark on their bodies, despite the physical pain.\textsuperscript{184} Furthermore, Ruiz notes that “prisoners rarely chose the tattoo design themselves, relying instead on the tattoo artist for its selection and execution, and the recurrence of certain designs attests either to the artist’s fondness for

\textsuperscript{182} Cancelli, Carandiru: a prisão, 135.
\textsuperscript{183} Ibid., 118.
\textsuperscript{184} Fabris, “Identidades seqüestradas,” 267.
particular motifs or to his limited skills. The tattoos in *Cicatriz*, then, arguably depict the [tattoo] artist’s memories, and not those of the individual prisoners.”185 Finally, Rennó herself implies that tattoos in prisons represent the prisoners’ resistance to the control and anonymity the system forces on their bodies.186

In all the statements above, the scholars demonstrate that the matter of dating the tattoos was irrelevant to their arguments, or in the case of Rennó, who purposefully erased information about the sitters and their tattoos, even unwanted. However, one must consider that if those tattoos had not been made inside Carandiru, but prior to the prisoners’ entering the jail, they were not necessarily an expression of their opposition to the system; rather, the tattoos symbolized a broader attempt of individuation and differentiation within a new society whose urban and bourgeois configurations already subjugated the presence and socio-economic roles of marginalized individuals outside the institution. Dr. Moraes de Mello, thus, in researching, photographing, and classifying the tattoos of inmates was not only investigating countercultural behavior developed inside the prison, but also recording conduct of resistance of a larger social stratum located in the margins of society that attempted to oppose official intervention and control.

Significantly, if for the marginalized individuals those were signs of opposition to the official order, for the elites and the government the body marks served to identify, stigmatized, and discriminate impoverished and deviant classes. Artist and theorist Allan Sekula in his seminal article “The Body and the Archive” speaks of the honorific as well as repressive qualities of photography. He alerts that the idea of the modern criminal is an invention that only exists in direct opposition to the image of the bourgeoisie, which he

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186 Rennó, “*Cicatriz: fotografías de tatuagens*,” 227.
also denominates the “law-abiding body.” The science of criminology stated that the law-abiding body is physically different from the one that is deviant. Biology, rather than sociology, explained criminal behavior. In this sense, Ruiz’s claim that tattoo designs were the responsibility of the tattoo artist, often recurring in different individuals, suggests that artists and prisoners shared a common vocabulary that most likely did not exist only inside but also outside the prison. That is to say, her argument implies the existence of a coded dialogue that not only differentiated but also segregated those who inked their bodies. Within the fast-growing bourgeois urban centers, those tattoos became stigmas used to identify and isolate impoverished and marginalized classes.  

*Cicatriz* and *Vulgo* thus expose the various contradictions of a penal system that officially aimed to impose discipline and regenerate but in reality promoted oppression and erasure of individuation. If on one side, Carandiru was conceived as an initiative to bring order and modernization to an overcrowded, violent, and inhumane penitentiary system; on the other side it ended up reinforcing repression through a scientific discourse that masqueraded control and discipline over prisoners’ bodies and behavior. The photographs of tattoos and cowlicks stand as evidence of these two aspects: the official surveillance over prisoners vis-à-vis their resistance to government control inside and outside the prison.

**Carandiru in the 1990s**

As Cancelli points out, Carandiru was a model prison. However, she is right when

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she says that the word *model* suggests a plan that can be replicated, rather than one that is perfect. In the early 1930s, Carandiru’s model already showed signs of inefficiency and failure. Disagreements with the penitentiary’s director prompted Dr. Moraes de Mello to criticize Carandiru’s operation and physical conditions. He condemned the administration for subjecting all prisoners to the same type of treatment, sometimes imposing harsh punishments, such as isolation and physical aggressions, for extended periods of time.\textsuperscript{189} Furthermore, according to Dr. Moraes de Mello, not only did Carandiru not offer suitable research infrastructure, but also did not possess personnel with the scientific knowledge necessary to identify, analyze, and classify the prisoners properly. In sum, his criticism concerned Carandiru’s inability to evaluate the criminal accurately, consequently failing to individualize his sentence or regenerate him.\textsuperscript{190} It is noteworthy that the clinic and laboratory of criminology were shut down in the 1940s, when Dr. Moraes Mello left Carandiru.\textsuperscript{191}

In 1956, the government of Jânio Quadros annexed a new seven-pavilion detention center next to the State penitentiary. The new House of Detention did not follow the same positivist principles that guided the original penitentiary; instead, it was built as a high-security prison, with capacity to guard 3,500 inmates.\textsuperscript{192} In the 1940s the State Penitentiary started to decline. By the 1960s, its workshops were outdated and lacked materials and equipment, and its buildings as well as the House of Detention’s new pavilions were already overcrowded. Seventy years after its inauguration, Carandiru had long lost its character of model institution and had become, what Cancelli called “an

\textsuperscript{189} Cancelli, *Carandiru: a prisão*, 131.
\textsuperscript{190} Ibid., 130.
\textsuperscript{191} Ibid., 105.
infernal model institution,” equal to other penitentiaries around the country. According to the Human Rights Watch report, living conditions inside the House of Detention were “exceptionally miserable and subhuman.” Its buildings were dirty, fetid, and deteriorating, and its administration did not comply with most of the recommendations regarding sanitation, care and safety of the prisoners. In the early 1990s, it held 7,257 detainees, more than double its capacity, becoming the most violent penitentiary in Brazil, a site of constant fights and rebellions between prisoners and against the guards, usually resulting in death. Instead of reeducation and regeneration, it was a place of idleness, hatred, vengeance, depression, loneliness, abandonment, and sickness.

On October 2, 1992 a group of prisoners started a riot in the ninth pavilion, considered the most dangerous and most populated of the detention center. The incident ended in a tragic massacre, the biggest and most violent in the history of Brazil. In order to restrain the turbulence, military police troops invaded the prison equipped with firearms, heavy ammunition, and trained dogs. Brazilian newspaper Folha de São Paulo speculated that about five hundred policemen utilized over two hundred guns and five thousand bullets during the invasion. They opened fire at close range, executing in cold blood a hundred and eleven inmates, according to State officials. However, the media of the period denounced that at least another thirty-six bodies disappeared during the shooting. News of the massacre quickly spread around the world, causing a backlash

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from the population and humanitarian organizations against Carandiru’s administration and São Paulo’s government.199

For weeks, the media reproduced photographs of the corpses shattered and mutilated lying naked inside rough pine boxes (Figures 3.14 and 3.15). Visible on their skin were the same tattoos, scars, numbers, and signs of violence that served to identify, classify, and differentiate the characters of Cicatriz and Vulgo. This time, however, their exposure served not only as an identification resource to literally recognize the brutally injured bodies, but also as evidence of the abuses that the police had inflicted on them. Although Rennó openly stated that Cicatriz and Vulgo were not direct responses to the massacre, the body marks they denounced are undeniably bound to the marks of the dead of the slaughter.200 While Rennó’s works reclaimed attention to scars of the past as a means to recuperate neglected memories of suffering, the newspaper photographs helped to construct the memory of a painful tragedy that should not be forgotten. That is to say, the work of Rennó and the media, though in different ways, served to memorialize similar tragedies. Rennó unearthed photographs of an abandoned archive as a means to denounce government and scientific systems of control that historically have engendered violence and oppression in marginalized and incarcerated individuals in Brazil; while the newspapers of the period were responsible for creating the photographs that illustrated the narrative of the event in the following days and helping to establish the visual memory that Brazilians kept of the massacre. With time, those photographs were also destined to the archives of the newspaper, potentially awaiting for another artist to come

re-appropriate them.

Even though *Cicatriz* and *Vulgo* are metaphoric tributes to the incarcerated of the Carandiru, the violence that subjugated prisoners and that erupted from them have resonated in the collective memory of the country and inspired various artistic manifestations. Historian Marcos Napolitano argues that it became a tradition within the cultural environment of the late 1980s and early 1990s to address social struggles through art forms.\(^{201}\) He emphasizes that books, movies, theatre plays, documentaries, music, and tv shows that discussed violence within marginalized groups became highly popular, reaching out to all strata of society. Napolitano particularly cites examples originated as a reaction to the massacre, such as the book *Carandiru*, by Drauzio Varella; the play *Apocalipse 1,11* (Apocalypse 1,11), by Antonio Araujo; and the documentary *O Prisioneiro da Grade de Ferro* (Prisoner of the Iron Bars). He fails, though, to mention significant fine art works.

Differently from Rennó, Brazilian artist Nuno Ramos created a straightforward homage to the 111 inmates who were executed in the massacre. *111* (1992) (Figure 3.16 and 3.17) was very likely one of the first artistic responses to the tragedy, since Ramos exhibited the work only a month after its occurrence. He was precisely inspired by those photographs of the corpses inside the pine boxes reproduced over and over on newspaper covers throughout the country. “There was a sort of *normality* in those images, anonymous, somewhat collective, as if they belonged to a sequence, ulterior and posterior to the event. Nothing seemed to end nor begin there,” elucidates Ramos about the impact

the photographs had on him.\textsuperscript{202} \textit{III} is a large installation comprised of 111 paving stones covered with tar and spread on the gallery floor. On the top of each stone the artist placed the name of a prisoner, a news excerpt about the massacre, and ashes of a biblical psalm. On the walls Ramos painted a poem and placed little boxes with ashes, other texts, and the names of the victims. Ramos employs in \textit{III} strategies that are found in various of Rennó’s works. The use of newspapers as source of material, for example, is the core of Rennó’s \textit{Universal Archive} and present as well in \textit{Atentado ao Poder, Candelária}, which is also a direct response to a massacre, and \textit{Corpo da Alma}, a series investigated in the next chapter. \textit{Cicatriz} and \textit{Vulgo} in particular not only share similar subject matters with \textit{III} but also exposes the crude marks of an inefficient penitentiary system that has historically inflicted more pain and violence than promoted regeneration and social reinsertion. While \textit{Vulgo} reveals the pseudonyms of prisoners whose individualities had been dismembered and scrutinized in the past, \textit{III} lists the given names of individuals whose bodies were literally assaulted and mutilated in the present. The two works, in addition to \textit{Cicatriz}, stand as an artistic act of resistance of Ramos and Rennó against official authority and police brutality that control the bodies and identities of institutionalized individuals.

In an attempt to erase the memory of the tragedy, São Paulo’s government decided to implode the House of Detention and deactivate the rest of the complex’s buildings, including the pavilions of the original State penitentiary reserved for male detainees. At the time of the implosion in 2002, the São Paulo newspaper \textit{Folha de São

\textsuperscript{202} Nuno Ramos, \textit{III} (São Paulo: Gabinete de Arte Raquel Arnaud, 1993), 38. Translation mine from the original in Portuguese: “Havia uma espécie de \textit{naturalidade} naquelas imagens, anônimas, algo coletivas, como se pertencessem a uma sequência, anterior e posterior ao acontecimento. Nada parecia terminar, nem começar, ali.”
Paulo considered Carandiru “the biggest symbol of failure of the Brazilian penitentiary system.” The title seemed paradoxical for an institution that once implemented the latest scientific methodologies to educate and reform individuals unfit for a new society. In 1996, when Rennó discovered the archive, Carandiru had already manifested itself as a failure, and the prison’s physical space could no longer exist. Its years of violence and deterioration had stained and stigmatized not only the complex itself, but the original positivist project as a whole. Thus, it comes as no surprise that the government purposefully obliterated the memory of Carandiru’s painful years to a chaotic archive that could barely guarantee adequate research conditions to the general public. As seen in Imemorial, Cicatriz and Vulgo are Rennó’s heroic attempts to reopen the discussion about modernity through figures that historically have only been included in the country’s modernization plans as subjects of official experiments.

Chapter 4

The New Millennium in Context

After the turbulent and violent transition to democracy in the late 1980s and early 1990s seen in the previous chapters, Brazil at last entered a period of political and economic stabilization in the second half of the 1990s. Fernando Collor de Mello was replaced by his vice-president Itamar Franco who, despite his lack of experience and political prominence, suitably appointed the sociologist Fernando Henrique Cardoso as finance minister in early 1994. Cardoso was responsible for implementing the *Plano Real* (*Real Plan*), which finally tamed hyperinflation and provoked the growth of the economy. If in 1993 the middle and working classes still struggled because of the 2,489 percent inflation rate, in 1995, when it was at 19 percent, consumers went on a buying spree. Cardoso’s plan proved to be a success not only for reducing inflation overnight but also for “inducing the public to think in real economic terms, and sanitizing a bloated financial system,” as historian Thomas Skidmore briefly summarizes. In aid of Cardoso, Brazil’s football team conquered the unprecedented fourth championship at the World Soccer Cup, a triumph that boosted the population’s morale and gave the impression the country was on the path toward a brighter and better future.

After a one-year tenure as minister of finance, Cardoso was twice elected president of Brazil (1995-2002), handing over the office in 2003 to Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the Workers’ Party candidate who had run all elections since 1990, consecutively.

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205 Ibid., 232.
losing to Collor and twice to Cardoso. Lula was a former labor leader of modest origins and with a basic education. His victory represented a drastic shift in the conservatism of previous presidents, attesting to the fact that Brazil not only had once and for all established democracy, but also that it was ready to start tackling its pressing social issues. During Lula’s presidency, Brazil continued thriving economically, a situation that favored the emergence of a new middle class, which by the mid-2000s exceeded more than half of the population. Lula’s accomplishments included implementing practical measures, such as consistently increasing the national minimum wage, offering credit to low-income workers, and fostering welfare programs to minorities, that benefited impoverished families that historically had been left out of the consumer market.

However, despite the advancement of the economy and the development of such programs, sociologist Rudá Ricci claims that Lula’s modernization was also conservative and ideologically aligned with previous governments. More specifically, Ricci finds the principles of Lula’s social projects stemming from Getúlio Vargas’ developmentalism, and argues that the former completed the modernization initiated by the latter. In other words, Lula did not disrupt the old order in implementing his social version of national developmentalism; instead, he perpetuated the conservative model initiated by Vargas in the 1930s. Although Lula included the masses in his social packages, he did so under the tutelage of his government, which planned, delivered, and coordinated the projects. It was again a horizontal and paternalistic model, one that supported the economic interests

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207 Ibid., 15-16.
of the elite and excluded from control the minorities those initiatives served.²⁰⁸

In this steadier and more prosperous context Rennó became more subjective in her approach to the marginalized. If in Atentado ao Poder and Candelária, the artist appropriated images and texts from the media of her own time, and in Imemorial, Cicatriz and Vulgo she employed archival photographs that intimately related to the history of Brazil, in Série Vermelha (Militares) (Red Series (Military Men)) (2000-2003) (Figure 4.1 to 4.3) and Corpo da Alma (Body of Soul) (2003-2008) (Figure 4.4 to 4.6) the artist worked with images whose origins cannot be identified. Differently from the previous works, Série Vermelha (Militares) and Corpo da Alma do not derive from a single source; instead, Rennó detaches the series from particular historical references to allude, more generally, to those who maintain power and suffer oppression. In depicting military figures and families of victims who died or disappeared due to various acts of violence, Rennó is revising, without identifying specific perpetrators, some of the key issues she tackled in the 1990s in Atentado ao Poder, Candelária, Imemorial, Cicatriz, and Vulgo. The two series investigated in this chapter, thus, represent the break from Rennó’s overt political practice of the earlier decade and the beginning of a new period in her art. Due to the seeming improvement of Brazil’s socio-economic context, Rennó shifts toward more allusive and symbolic interpretations to discuss inequity and disparity, creating subsequent works that are less about punctual tragic episodes, and more about broad social concerns. Nonetheless, Série Vermelha (Militares) and Corpo da Alma act as reminders that, despite the promising economic growth and Lula’s inclusive projects, Brazil is far from reaching equality, and if modernization had slightly advanced, it is still part of a conservative and unfinished project.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 14.
Série Vermelha (Militares): Military Portraiture and Dictatorship

Rennó began developing the Red Series in 1996, when she enlarged three photographs of her collection of found negatives. “I wanted to use posed photographs with the most neutral background as possible. The [type of] portrait made to preserve [the sitter] from spiritual death,” noted Rennó in 2003. These first portraits depicted a baby, a boy, and a girl carrying lilies. In 1998 Rennó found in a flea market in Vienna portraits of a young male member of the Hitler Youth group (Figure 4.7). The images captured the change in physiognomy from youthful and tender, when the adolescent wore ordinary clothes, to rigid and self-assured, when dressing in the Nazi uniform. This transformation greatly impressed Rennó and inspired her to develop the rest of the series solely with photographs of military men. The final selection of Série Vermelha (Militares) (2000-2003) comprises sixteen 185 x 105 cm (72.8 x 41.3 inches) portraits, mostly studio photographs, of men of different ages and nationalities posing in military regalia (Figure 4.8). Rennó amassed this collection from countries as various as Brazil, US, Germany, France, Russia, and Argentina, usually gathering them in second hand shops or receiving them as gifts from friends and family. The photographs were also taken in different moments in time, even though similar poses and compositions unify them, making them visually cohesive. At least half of the portraits depict single individuals in full length and frontal poses, with arms resting on their sides or at the back of their bodies. They face the viewer with pride and confidence, as if showing off their ranks and assuring their

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210 Ibid., 19.
importance. A sense of power and distinction emanates from their severe postures that oddly contrast with the informal backgrounds of touristic sites in front of which they sometimes stand (Figure 4.9).

Rennó digitally retouched the images, eliminating white tones and heightening a red layer over them. In the artist’s own words, this overcoat pushes the image “to the limit of its visibility,” to the point in which the viewer can perceive shapes and forms underneath it, but needs time to be able to identify and make sense of what is depicted.\(^2\)\(^1\)\(^1\) Série Vermelha (Militares) in fact requires a bodily engagement from the viewer, who must pace around the gallery to find the right position to conjure up the full portrait. The sense of opacity here, as in many of Rennó’s works, is a purposeful act to contradict the belief that photographs are truthful reproductions of reality. In fainting the images and enhancing their physical transparency, she emphasizes that clarity is a concept rather than an attribute. In transforming the sitters in phantasmagoric apparitions, she is ultimately suggesting that their existence is not even guaranteed. In addition, Rennó intends to incite the viewer to bring his or her own associations to the work. “I remove the contrast, I erase information so you really have to participate in a construction. This is your construction. In fact, the image there is universal enough so you can read and project what you wish,” clarifies Rennó.\(^2\)\(^\text{12}\) The notion of archetypes implied in Rennó’s statement opens up to a range of possibilities that distance the uniformed men from direct associations with the army.\(^2\)\(^\text{13}\) One can argue that the idea that these individuals do belong to the army is already a construction, based on the preconception that links

\(^2\)\(^1\) Ibid., 16.
\(^2\)\(^\text{12}\) Interview with the author on January 24, 2013. From the original: “Eu tiro o contraste, eu apago informação pra que você realmente tenha que participar de uma construção. E aí a construção é sua. Na verdade ali a imagem é universal o suficiente para você ler e projetar o que quiser.”
\(^2\)\(^\text{13}\) Interview with the author on January 24, 2013.
uniformed men to the military.

Precisely, Rennó claimed to be investigating the status of the portrait bourgeois and the glorification associated with posing in uniform, rather than offering an overt criticism of the military institution.\textsuperscript{214} Her reference links the series back to the early years of photography, when portraiture became highly popular among the middle class, who could then afford to have their portraits taken.\textsuperscript{215} No longer a luxury item, portraiture also became available to military men of all ranks who wanted to memorialize their image before going to war or while in battle. Curator Jeff L. Rosenheim indicates that photography served as a bond between soldiers who faced real threat of injury in the battlefields and their families that waited for them:

What is uncertain is whether the desire to sit for a portrait was driven primarily by hope that the little photograph might help the subject and his family survive the war, or by fear that the sitter and his relatives would not live through the next battle. Regardless, the belief in the power of the photographic image during this period, in both field pictures and portraits, is astounding.\textsuperscript{216}

Rosenheim is particularly addressing the popularity of war portraiture during the American Civil War, one of the first combats to be extensively photographed. He claims that the intense military activity in the United States during the 1860s created a favorable context for the unprecedented development of photographic portraiture throughout the country. Private studios thrived, generating thousands of portraits that were cherished and stored in decorative leather albums by the sitters and their families.\textsuperscript{217} Speaking of the analogous European context, curator Alfons Hug recollects: “Most Europeans remember

\textsuperscript{214} Rennó, Depoimento, 20.
\textsuperscript{216} Jeff L. Rosenheim, Photography and the American Civil War (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2013), 46.
\textsuperscript{217} Ibid., 147.
those treasured photograph albums that used to be brought out at family get-togethers, a disabled survivor of the war reporting on the campaign at the eastern front.” Early compositions depicted plain studios with blank walls and simple columns as decoration. In time, photographers added props and backdrops, experimenting with poses that added drama and grandeur to those depicted.219

The portraits of Série Vermelha (Militares) are precisely inscribed in this practice described above. Portraying young and adult men in formal as well as relaxed environments, they attest the archetypical status of military portraiture mentioned by Rennó that, initiated in the mid-nineteenth century in Europe and US, was adopted and standardized throughout the world. De-contextualized from their original family albums, these sitters lose their particularities in favor of a collective image that insert them within the military tradition. As appropriately posited by scholar Graham Clarke, photographic portraiture discloses not the essence of the sitter, but the symbolic context in which he or she exists, capturing a constructed and ambiguous image of oneself.220 Thus, the posture, the outfit, the backdrops, the props, and the cropping seen in Série Vermelha (Militares) are conscious constructions that reveal how the sitter decided to be immortalized and remembered by his family. The fact that they posed in uniform is not arbitrary, and reveals that these men, independently from the time and place they lived in, are culturally as well as ideologically connected by the same organization. By coating all the prints with a dense red tone, Rennó emphasizes that this connection, even if metaphorical, is certainly not innocent.

219 Rosenheim, Photography and the American Civil War, 59.
In *Série Vermelha (Militares)* Hug associates the color red to natural elements of the Brazilian landscape, such as the laterite earth from the central plateau, the region where Brasilia was built, or the seeds of the tropical urucum fruit used in artworks of the Baroque period. Brazilian artist Regina Silveira offers a different interpretation. She believes the red layer brings forward a romantic quality not commonly associated with such a controversial subject. Silveira’s reading surprised Rennó, since the artist’s initial idea was to eliminate the usual glorification of the military associated with such portraits. Rennó claims the red layer, in fact, works as a filter to prevent a tender interpretation of the military, and yet, the print’s luscious red surface undeniably transmits a highly sensuous appeal that suggests passion and romanticism. Here, though, the red of *Série Vermelha (Militares)* represents above all the color of blood. It stands not only for the bloodshed during countless wars and urban conflicts more generally, but also for the blood of the victims of the dictatorial repression in Brazil, a theme that has not been thoroughly discussed by other scholars, since in her statements about the work Rennó has never overtly declared she was specifically addressing the military regime. Instead, the artist has repeatedly stated that her point of departure was the history of photographic portraiture, paying homage to early photography as well as aiming to ridicule the vanity behind men posing in uniform. Yet, the fact that Rennó adds a red

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222 Rennó, *Depoimento*, 20.
223 The 2003 Venice Biennial website contains a 2001 statement by Rennó about the series. Her opening sentence reads: “The starting point of Red Series (Military) is the ‘portrait bourgeois.’ In 2003, Rennó, in conjunction with the scholars Fernando Pedro da Silva and Marília Andrés Ribeiro, published the book *Rosângela Rennó: Depoimento*, which is an interview in which she discloses her ideas and processes behind her most significant series. About *Série Vermelha (Militares)*, the artist again asserts: “My proposal was a discussion about the bourgeois portrait.” Finally, when I interviewed Rennó in her studio on January 24, 2013, I specifically asked her about the link of the series with the Brazilian dictatorship, a connection she denied, again emphasizing her interest in discussing portraiture and the symbolism of the military in general. I understand that this consistent reference back to the history of photography drove writers to
layer over the portraits of military men is just too symbolic to be dismissed. The relation of *Série Vermelha (Militares)* to the dictatorship should not be overlooked, and here is at last investigated for the first time.\(^{224}\)

Nevertheless, Rennó acknowledges that the military period represented another stoppage and consequently another failure in the development of Brazil’s modern project:

> These failures I have always noticed them and they have always bothered me. I was born in the 1960s, I lived through the “economic miracle,” I am from the generation that used to hear that Brazil is the country of the future. It was a great sentence. However, this damn future never comes. I kid that Brazil is a country that went from ascension to decline without ever reaching the apogee, because the apogee was a lie, it coincided with the dictatorship. What type of apogee is this?\(^{225}\)

The economic miracle that Rennó mentions represented one of the most prosperous periods in the history of Brazil.\(^{226}\) The military in power promoted the rise of the middle class, provoking the growth of the national industry and opening the country to foreign investors. “Brazil: love it or leave it” was the slogan exhaustingly broadcasted, calling up the population to embrace the “miracle.” However, as Rennó also points out, the economic miracle was not followed by political or social change. Instead, while the economy progressed, in 1968 the military authority heightened the repression, institutionalizing violence through arbitrary prisons, torture cases, disappearances, and

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\(^{225}\) Interview with the author on January 24, 2013. From the original: “Essas falências eu sempre percebi e sempre me incomodou. ... Eu sou da década de 60, eu vivi o milagre econômico, e sou da geração que ouvia que o Brasil é o país do futuro. Era a grande frase. Só que essa porra desse futuro nunca chega. ... A brincadeira que eu às vezes faço é que o Brasil é aquele país que passou da ascensão ao declínio sem ter jamais tido um apogeu, pq o apogeu foi uma mentira, pq o suposto apogeu coincidiu com a ditadura. Que apogeu que é esse?”

It seems unavoidable, thus, to read *Série Vermelha (Militares)* in regard to its association to the Brazilian dictatorship. For the first time in Rennó’s oeuvre, a series depicts those in control of disseminating violence, rather than those who suffered the consequences of authoritarian governments. In the first years of the twentieth-first century, in the midst of Brazil’s new economic resurgence, Rennó holds accountable the men who again interrupted the country’s modern project. The repression of the military dictatorship represented not only the failure of democracy but also the confirmation that the large mass of Brazilians was not included in the “miraculous” modernizing process. Certainly, in dealing with archetypes and portraiture more broadly, Rennó is not highlighting particularities of the military figures. On the contrary, *Série Vermelha (Militares)* contests not individuals, but the dictatorial government as a whole. It indicates that military men, besides their participation in the dictatorship, have also been ubiquitous figures closely associated to coercion and violence throughout the history of Brazil. As seen in *Atentado ao Poder, Candelária, Cicatriz*, and *Vulgo*, military men, either belonging to the official police force or to illegal death squads, have consistently attacked civilians and minorities. Therefore, *Série Vermelha (Militares)* also serves as a reminder that although democracy has been reestablished and secured, Brazil is not yet free from authoritarian forces.

Rennó was neither the first nor the only one to portray the perpetrators of violence. Other Latin American artists, such as Iván Navarro and Arturo Duclos, created works in which they denounced the abuse of power and the disappearance of civilians during

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military regimes. In 1995, Duclos built a large Chilean flag out of seventy-six human femurs, alluding to the killings committed by the Chilean government.²²⁸ A decade later, Navarro conceived a more candid response to the same trauma. In Escalera criminal (Criminal Ladder) (2005) (Figure 4.10), the artist listed the names of six hundred Chilean representatives, members of the military, police, or secret service, accused of participating in crimes against human rights during the violent dictatorship period.²²⁹ In Joy Division (2004) (Figure 4.11), Navarro created a sculpture that mimicked a coffee table and whose base was in the shape of the swastika. The artist was calling attention to the close relationship that existed between Nazi ideology and the young military governments that took over Latin America around the same time in the 1960s and 1970s. He claims that this relationship was not subjective or inoffensive, but very much concrete, since many German Nazis immigrated to South America in the middle of the twentieth century and established real connections to politicians and members of the military.²³⁰

Although the criticism of the influence of Nazi ideology on Brazil is not at all explicit in Série Vermelha (Militares), Rennó did include the portrait of a Nazi soldier in the series (Figure 4.12), and even decided to focus the entire work on military men after finding the portraits of the young German sympathizer, a decision that proves the weight of Nazi symbolism in relation to military representation. In other words, Série Vermelha (Militares) would seem incomplete if it did not contain a recognizable image of a Nazi soldier. For an artist who has tackled issues of collective trauma, human rights violation, and pain, it feels almost mandatory to include a symbol that incites the recollection of one

²²⁹ Ibid., 67.
²³⁰ Ibid.
of the most tragic genocides in the history of the twentieth century and also links to similar atrocities in Latin America.

Corpo da Alma: Disappeared Bodies in Early Portraiture and Photojournalism

While in Série Vermelha (Militares) Rennó depicts characters of authoritarian power who engendered coercion and violence, in the series Corpo da Alma (Body of Soul) (2003-2008), the artist portrays individuals and families carrying portraits of loved ones who have died or disappeared due to violence and repression caused by the same military figures. That is to say, the subjects portrayed in Corpo da Alma are the victims of abuse committed by the subjects in Série Vermelha (Militares). The two series, created around the same time, investigate similar issues, intersecting with one another. They provoke a dialogue that scholars have missed when reading Rennó’s oeuvre, for this is the first time they are juxtaposed and investigated together. Because Série Vermelha (Militares) was originally exhibited in the 2003 Venice Biennial, it has gained more attention, even though scholars have dismissed its analogy to the dictatorship period. In the case of Corpo da Alma, however, little attention has been given to this series, which until now has not been the topic of a thorough analysis. Only the critic Paulo Herkenhoff and art history graduate student Mariana Pagotto have offered concise interpretations of the work.231 Other scholars, such as Susana Dias and Alik Wunder, do not provide more than brief mentions. Here I investigate Corpo da Alma and its iconography in relation to

the early history of portraiture and to the violence and loss also explored in the art of other Latin American countries, such as Argentina and Colombia.

Similarly to Atentado ao Poder, in Corpo da Alma Rennó again appropriates and enlarges photographs originally published in the media. This time, however, the images are not only of Brazilians or taken from Brazilian newspapers, but were also drawn from the international press, from places as various as Moscow, Istanbul, Cairo, Naples, Los Angeles, and Asunción. The series is divided in two parts: *Corpo da Alma* (2003-2008) (Body of Soul) and *Corpo da Alma (O estado do mundo)* (Body of Soul, The state of the world) (2006-2008). The first part contains thirteen stainless steel engravings that measure 158 x 110 x 3 cm (62.2 x 43.3 x 1.1 inches) each; while the second one is comprised of eleven inkjet color prints measuring 165 x 112 cm (64.9 x 44 inches) each. They portray individuals, sometimes surrounded by family members or in public gatherings, holding the portrait of a loved one. It is noteworthy that three photographs of Corpo da Alma depict people in public manifestations carrying portraits of military men and government officials (Figures 4.13 and 4.14). In such cases, the victims themselves denounce the perpetrators of violence and injustice they have suffered. Symbolically, it is as if Série Vermelha (Militares) and Corpo da Alma collapsed into one single work. Since this type of iconography is not as prominent within the whole series in comparison to images of families showing pictures of disappeared members, I focus my analysis on the latter representation.

*Rio de Janeiro (foto Camila Maia / Agência O Globo)* (Rio de Janeiro (photo Camila Maia / O Globo News Agency) (2003) (Figure 4.15) portrays a man and a boy, suggestively his son, showing to the camera the ID photograph of another man. The
picture embodies the spirit of sorrow and protest that characterizes the entire series.

Rennó has chosen photographs of fathers, mothers, siblings, and relatives that are clearly manifesting their love for the person in the photograph. Although the real motives that impelled them to share their stories in the newspaper are unknown, since Rennó only discloses in the title of the work the place of origin and the author of the picture, it is safe to state that most of them mourn the loss of the person represented in the photograph. For instance, in Rio de Janeiro (foto Jorge William / Agência O Globo) (Rio de Janeiro (photo Jorge William / O Globo News Agency) (2003) (Figure 4.16) a woman appears covering her mouth as if crying while she holds the snapshot of a man. At first glance, one does not know if the subject of the photograph within the photograph has died or suffered any type of violence. What is certain is that the woman is not only weeping for him but has also agreed to share her grief in public. Through this woman’s pain the viewer can infer that the man depicted has in some way suffered.

Nápoles (foto Robert Capa / Magnum Photos) (Naples (photo Robert Capa / Magnum Photos) (2003) (Figure 4.17) is the only work of the series whose original context is known. It portrays a small group of women clearly in distress while one of them carries the portrait of a soldier. The renowned photojournalist Robert Capa captured this moment on October 2, 1943 during the funeral of twenty adolescents who had resisted the Nazi invasion of Naples, Italy, at the end of the World War II.\textsuperscript{232} Capa’s original photograph discloses a wider composition than Rennó’s. He framed not three, but a group of over ten locals who gathered at the funeral. Five of them use handkerchiefs to wipe their tears, while one carries the picture of one of the victims. This source reveals

that Rennó cropped the original image, making the woman holding the photograph the center of her composition. Moreover, in including this well-known reference by one of the first and more famous photojournalists, Rennó links the work back not only to the history of early portraiture, a subject discussed below, but also to the history of photojournalism, a field that since the mid-1920s has traditionally covered human tragedies, consequently disseminating the iconography seen in *Corpo da Alma*. In essence, Rennó is paying tribute to the media, namely photography and photojournalism, from which she appropriated the images to create the series.

Despite their similarities in composition and subject matter, *Corpo da Alma* and *Corpo da Alma (O estado do mundo)* are formally very distinct from one another. The difference resides mainly in the distinctiveness of their materials. While Rennó printed *Corpo da Alma (O estado do mundo)* on ordinary matte photographic paper, she engraved *Corpo da Alma* on stainless steel, a shiny and durable medium that resists tarnish and deterioration. *Corpo da Alma*’s enduring and reflective qualities allude to those of daguerreotypes, one of the first techniques to popularize photographic portraiture.233 They were unique objects, also made of a mirrored surface, and encased in little boxes for protection, since light could damage the photographic print. Scholar Alan Trachtenberg claims that daguerreotypes’ physical properties granted them the ability to come to life again.234 The flickering effect caused by its mirrored support made the sitter seem both dead and alive when one handled the daguerreotype. In 1912, writer Sadikichi Hartmann described his experience when holding a daguerreotype:

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What a strange effect, this silvery glimmer and mirror-like sheen. Held toward the light, all substance seems to vanish from the picture: the highlights grow darker than the shadows, … yet as soon as it is moved away from a certain angle, the image reappears, the mere shadow of a countenance comes alive again.235

Like daguerreotypes, Corpo da Alma’s images flicker, appearing and reappearing according to the position of the viewer in front of them. “The image is elusive on the steel, as if repelled. … With opaque and mirrored areas, the surface shines and ‘de-shines,’ the photographic image emerges and disappears,” writes critic Paulo Herkenhoff about his similar impressions in front of the prints.236 The closer one gets, the more the printed image vanishes. Corpo da Alma becomes a large mirror box that literally absorbs the viewer within the work.

Furthermore, Rennó makes the engravings faint to the point that they become almost imperceptible. The artist purposefully conceals the images, a technique also seen in Série Vermelha (Militares), requiring from the viewer an active engagement to find them. Again the comparison to daguerreotypes is appropriate here. Trachtenberg calls this engagement “the kinetic behavior of the viewer,” since the viewer must handle the object in different ways in order to read the daguerreotype’s metallic surface. He complements: “The effort simply to see the images implicates the viewer in the making, the construction of the image. The daguerrean image allows for an engagement between viewer and subject unique in photography; to see the image is to become an active agent in the picture’s ‘coming to life’ as a historical event.”237 In other words, daguerreotypes as well as Corpo da Alma’s engravings, in demanding the viewer to physically move to

235 Ibid., 174.
236 Herkenhoff, “Rosângela Rennó e a filosofia da instituição fotográfica,” 4-5. From the original: “A imagem é fugidia no aço, como se repelida. … Com zonas opacas e espelhadas, a superfície brilha e ‘desbrilha’, a imagem fotográfica emerge e some.”
237 Trachtenberg, “Likeness as Identity,” 177.
be able to grasp the fleeting image, imply not only the visual construction of the image, but also the reconstruction of the image’s subjectivity, even if little information is known about them. The viewer literally becomes part of the work, mirrored on the reflective surface, being invited to imagine the history behind the photograph. Rennó thus appropriates the language of daguerreotypes to engage the viewer in rewriting the meaning of the images depicted, including their own recollections in the work. And since the original stories are lost, the viewer is also free to restore collective memories, those that can explain the symbolism behind the iconography of photographs of people carrying photographs.

In addition to their resemblance in form, *Corpo da Alma* and daguerreotypes are also relatable in relation to their content. “The history of photography is loaded with images of people carrying photographs ... Photography has the power to save the individual from spiritual death,” explains Rennó in discussing *Corpo da Alma*’s subject matter and her inspiration drawn from early daguerreotypes. Since the beginning of photography, sitters were photographed carrying pictures of their loved ones (Figures 4.18 and 4.19). Art historian Donald D. Keyes addresses the verisimilitude of the daguerrean image, whose sharp details gave it “a mantle of magic and infallible truth.” He speculates that portraits of people carrying daguerreotypes denote connection and dedication between the two individuals portrayed, representing a memento of a lost love or a post-mortem commemoration. Scholar Geoffrey Batchen also investigates this common theme, which he claims was a memorializing resource used to make present

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238 Interview with the author on January 24, 2013.
those who were absent. In the example of a family photograph that together looks at another picture, Batchen suggests that the collective act demonstrates their desire to be remembered as a caring group that does not neglect their loved ones. In essence, only individual reasons can answer the need for people to hold photographs within pictures. Broadly speaking, these portraits celebrate those who were close to and missed by the sitter, who decided to celebrate their love and friendship with another photograph. In the case of the photographs of Corpo da Alma, however, the images gain a new meaning when considered within the context of violence that Rennó consistently addresses. It is noteworthy that she alludes not only to the victims of urban brutality, but also to martyrs, war soldiers, and even saints whom she claims have usually been part of the iconography depicted in Corpo da Alma. Nevertheless, once again it is unavoidable to link the symbolism of this series to the military dictatorship, particularly in relation to the representation of missing persons who were killed, or “disappeared,” during the authoritarian regime.

It was Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo, an association of mothers whose family members were abducted during the dirty war in Argentina, who initiated in Latin America the tradition of holding photographs of loved ones in public spaces as a means to protest against their loss. The group realized, according to scholar Silvia Tandeciarz, the “earliest and most widely recognizable use of photography to resist repression.” By displaying their pictures in a square in Buenos Aires (Figures 4.20 and 4.21), these mothers not only reclaimed the very existence of those who disappeared but also shared

241 Ibid., 10.
their pain with other grieving family members. In the absence of a body to mourn and bury, photographs became symbolic replacements that allowed the families to finalize the ritual of death. They acted as bonds between life and death, violence and justice, and were able to recuperate the notion of individuality and belonging lost during the extensive chain of anonymous killings that occurred in the dictatorial years. In addition, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo aimed to actively engage society in their claim for social justice. Tandeciarz notes that although it is impossible to recreate a true image of the genocide, it is possible to denounce it through the exhibition of multiple photographs that expose similar traumas. As part of a group, the images gain strength and make the cause to be heard. The viewer is called up to take a stand vis-à-vis the crimes he or she faces: “to remain silent … implied a certain cooptation by the repressive apparatus; to recoil from that form of capture implied staging resistance to the forces that generated it,” defends Tandeciarz.

Rennó demands a similar attitude from the viewers who face Corpo da Alma’s works. When seeing themselves mirrored on the metallic surface of the stainless steel, they are requested not only to recreate the stories of those individuals depicted, but also to sympathize with them and reflect on the causes that generated such violence. The series undoubtedly commemorate those who are missed, and yet they also extrapolate the simply representation of remembrance or homage. Alluding to enlarged daguerreotypes, the reflective gleaming images of Corpo da Alma become relics, treasured objects whose physicality literally replaces the physical body that went missing or was mutilated.

 Originated with the purpose to illustrate newspaper articles that denounced various forms

243 Ludmila da Silva Catela, No habrá flores en la tumba del pasado: la experiencia de reconstrucción del mundo de los familiares de desaparecidos (La Plata: Ediciones Al Margen, 2001), 129.
244 Tandeciarz, “Mnemonic Hauntings,” 139.
of repression, these photographs become symbols of the resistance that aim to bring awareness against brutal and unaccounted crimes. In posing for the photographer with the picture of a victim of violence, the sitter is not only stating that the departed is loved and missed, but also committing a political act, using the photograph of the absent body as a means to demand attention, reclaim identity, and call for justice. Like the mothers of the disappeared Argentineans, Rennó articulates a public collaboration against violence and repression, creating Corpo da Alma as a link between the sitters’ loss and society’s collective struggles for social justice.

Colombian artist Oscar Muñoz also shares practices similar to those Rennó invested in Corpo da Alma. He too depicts victims of violence and disappearance to discuss memory, mourning, and death, often employing visual strategies that confront the disappearance and oblivion of marginalized individuals.\textsuperscript{245} In Aliento (Breath) (1996-1997) (Figures 4.22 and 4.23), Muñoz appropriates, as does Rennó, photographs from the media, specifically from the obituary columns of newspapers. He collects pictures of the dead, also discarding any information that can reveal the identity or particular information about the portrayed. Similarly to Corpo da Alma, Aliento’s photographs fade or dissolve on the surface of the steel, the material that composes the small discs that comprise the work. The objects contain photo-serigraphs imprinted on the surface of the reflexive material, resembling not only the stainless steel surface of Corpo da Alma, but also the mirror-like quality of daguerreotypes. Approaching the work, the viewer sees his or her own reflection on the surface of the steel. The image only appears once one exhales on the discs, leaving a warm breath on the work and metaphorically bringing the dead of the photograph back to life. Although Muñoz’s work also demands from the

\textsuperscript{245} Reuter and Weschler, Los desaparecidos, 35.
viewer a bodily engagement, in Aliento it is one of a slightly different sort if compared to Corpo da Alma and Série Vermelha (Militares). In front of Aliento the viewer is the agent who activates the work, breathing on it. If one only stands in front of the steel discs, one is not able to grasp them in their entirety. Aliento is only completed once the respiratory cycle is also completed in front of the work. Moreover, in Aliento the living never coexists with the dead. When one appears on the steel, the other one disappears.

Conversely, in Corpo da Alma and Série Vermelha (Militares) the viewer is always present in the works, which concomitantly exhibit the fading archival photographs and the reflection of those who stand in front of it. Rennô’s images in Corpo da Alma and Série Vermelha (Militares) as well as Imemorial, are always there, forcing the viewer to squint and search on the photographic surface for hidden traces of those who disappeared.

By honoring the early history of photography in Série Vermelha (Militares) and Corpo da Alma, Rennô pays homage to the medium that revolutionized representation and whose technical qualities symbolized the entry of the nineteenth-century world into modernity. It is not fortuitous then that she looks back to early photographic portraiture traditions to address the violence and oppression that still mined the development of Brazil’s own modernity in the wake of the new century. Photography converged old picture making methods with new forms of expression, the same way Brazil presented extremely contrasting realities between the conservative and the modern, the old and the new. Furthermore, Série Vermelha (Militares) and Corpo da Alma particularly denounce the ubiquitous presence of the military within Brazilian society. The works depart from the dictatorship period to more broadly condemn the successive crimes committed by military men against civilians. They cry against all the disappearances discussed in the
previous chapters and seen in the works of *Atentado ao Poder, Candelária, Imemorial, Cicatriz,* and *Vulgo.* The anonymous subjects of *Série Vermelha (Militares)* and *Corpo da Alma* represent altogether the dead inmates of Carandiru, the dead children of Candelária, the dead civilians of Vigário Geral, the dead workers of Brasília, and all the dead marginalized and oppressed individuals who daily vanish from the streets, hospitals, schools, prisons, and disenfranchised communities of Brazil without ever being noticed or officially reclaimed. If *Série Vermelha (Militares)* points at the perpetrators, *Corpo da Alma* identifies the victims; both, though, summon the viewer to take a stand in regard to the country’s historic atrocities and disparities. Even though economic conditions have slightly improved in the early 2000s, these two series prove that power relations were still persistently uneven against minorities, engendering political and social exclusion across the country, claiming for social advancement.
Conclusion

In the seven series investigated in this thesis Rennó addresses more than eighty years of Brazilian history. Initiated in 1992 and created within a span of fifteen years, Atentado ao Poder, Candelária, Inmemorial, Cicatriz, Vulgo, Série Vermelha (Militares), and Corpo da Alma report episodes of urban and military violence, rural migration, social segregation, disappearances, surveillance, and loss of individuation that throughout these eight decades have consistently permeated the lives of mostly lower classes and disenfranchised communities. Nevertheless, the works also evoke ideas about the future of Brazil through various modernizing projects that expose the country’s desperate desire to attain progress, industrialization, and modernization, topics that since the early years of the twentieth century have marked the intellectual debate of governments, the elite, and leftist thinkers.

Rennó’s series thus call attention to the frightful paradox that until today persists between official discourses that defend Brazil’s evolvement toward modernity and the painful and enduring reality of the mass of workers, civilians, and marginalized populations that are constantly excised from such discourses. In essence, these seven works reveal individuals that, if they were ever included in the country’s modernization projects, such as the construction of Brasília and Carandiru, they were ultimately subjected to exploitation, exclusion, and control. In appropriating photographs of children, workers, civilians, families, and incarcerated and marginalized individuals who inhabit the impoverished outskirts of large urban centers of Brazil, Rennó reclaims their honorific place in the history of the various official plans that attempted to implement
modernity in the country. Even though Rennó reveals that such plans have successively failed, the artist claims that social transformation has been delayed for too long and is then indispensable and absolutely unavoidable in the recently instituted democratic context.

While I write this conclusion, Brazilians have stormed to the streets of hundreds of cities throughout the country as a response to all the injustices that Rennó has been pointing out since the 1990s. Protests that started due to a 20 cent bus fare rise have become massive manifestations that have been provoking hundreds of thousands of civilians precisely to demand government investment in infrastructure and public services which by 2013 have not considerably improved, despite Brazil’s economic stabilization, decrease of extreme poverty, and increase of the middle class in the last two decades. On the eve of hosting the next Football World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games, Brazilians start to demand modernization of those areas that have never been considered in the successive projects that Atentado ao Poder, Candelária, Imemorial, Cicatriz, Vulgo, Série Vermelha (Militares), and Corpo da Alma denounce. Even though it feels too early to grasp the dimension of the effects of the protests in official decisions and their practical impact on the country’s living conditions in the long run, it is safe to say that these manifestations, in addition to being part of the larger global movement that claims for the end of economic and political oppression and promotion of social inequalities, also represent on the local level the hope that Brazil’s historical failures, which Rennó has heroically unearthed and contested through her art, can become successes at last.
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Figures

Figure 1.1. Rosângela Rennó, *Atentado ao Poder* (Attack on Power), 1992

Figures 1.2 and 1.3. Rosângela Rennó, *Candelária* (Candelaria), 1993

Figures 1.10 and 1.11. Alfredo Jaar, *Real Pictures*, 1995
Figure 1.12. Hélio Oiticica, *B33 Bólido caixa 18, Poema caixa 02 – Homenagem a Cara de Cavalo* (B33 Box Bolide 18, Box Poem 02 – Homage to Horse Face), 1966

Figure 1.13. Hélio Oiticica, *Seja Marginal Seja Herói* (Be an Outlaw, Be a Hero), 1968

Figures 1.14 and 1.15. Antonio Manuel, *Repressão outra vez – eis o saldo* (Repression again – here is the consequence), 1968
Figure 1.16. Antonio Manuel, *Flans*, 1968-1970s

Figure 1.17. Antonio Manuel, *Semi Ótica* (Semi Otics/Optics), 1975
Figure 2.1. Rosângela Rennó, *Imemorial* (Imemorial), 1994

Figure 2.2. Rosângela Rennó, *Imemorial* (Imemorial), 1994
Figures 2.3 to 2.6. Rosângela Rennó, *Imemorial* (Imemorial), 1994
Figure 2.7. Cristina Guerra, *Retratos* (Portraits), 1997

Figures 2.8 and 2.9. Rosângela Rennó, *Obituário Preto* and *Obituário Transparente*, 1991
Figure 2.10. Rosângela Rennô, *Amnésia*, 1991

Figure 2.11. Rosângela Rennô, *Amnésia*, 1991

Figure 2.16. Thomas Ruff, *Portrait (A. Siekmann)*, 1987
Figure 2.17. Thomas Ruff, *Portrait (A. Roters)*, 2001
Figures 2.18 and 2.19. Alphonse Bertillon, *Mugshots of Suspected Anarchists From French Police Files*, 1891-1895

Figure 3.1. Rosângela Rennó, *Cicatriz* (Scar), 1996
Figures 3.2 and 3.3. Rosângela Rennó, *Cicatriz* (Scar), 1996
Figure 3.4. Rosângela Rennó, *Vulgo* (Alias), 1998

Figure 3.7. Rosângela Rennó, *Cicatriz* (Scar), 1996

Figure 3.8. Rosângela Rennó, *Cicatriz* (Scar), 1996
Figures 3.9 and 3.10. Rosângela Rennó, *Cicatriz* (Scar), 1996
Figure 3.11. Rosângela Rennô, *Phoenix* from the series *Vulgo* (Alias), 1998

Figure 3.12. Rosângela Rennô, *Scorpion* from the series *Vulgo* (Alias), 1998
Figure 3.13. Rosângela Rennô, *Number* from the series *Vulgo (Alias)*, 1998

Figure 3.14. Victims of the Carandiru Massacre, Photograph by Sergio Andrade, Folhapress, October 1992
Figure 3.15. Victims of the Carandiru Massacre, Photography by Epitácio Pessoa, Agência Estado, October 1992

Figures 4.1 to 4.3. Rosângela Rennó, *Série Vermelha (Militares)* (Red Series (Military Men)), 2000-2003
Figure 4.7. Rosângela Rennó, *Untitled (Red Boy)* from *Série Vermelha* (Red Series), 1996

Figure 4.8 Rosângela Rennó, *Untitled (Young Prussian)* from *Série Vermelha (Militares)* (Red Series (Military Men)), 2000
Figure 4.9. Rosângela Rennó, *Untitled (Mad Boy)* from *Série Vermelha (Militares)* (Red Series (Military Men)), 2000.

Figure 4.10. Iván Navarro, *Escalera criminal* (Criminal Ladder), 2005
Figure 4.11. Iván Navarro, *Joy Division*, 2004

Figure 4.12. Rosângela Rennó, *Untitled (Old Nazi)* from *Série Vermelha (Militares)* (Red Series (Military Men)), 2000
Figure 4.13. Rosângela Rennó, *Moscou (foto Agência Reuters)* (Moscow (photo Reuters News Agency) from *Corpo da Alma* (Body of Soul) series, 2003

Figure 4.14. Rosângela Rennó, *Cairo (foto Agence France Presse)* (Cairo (photo Agence France Presse) from *Corpo da Alma* (Body of Soul) series, 2003
Figure 4.15. Rosângela Rennó, *Rio de Janeiro* (foto Camila Maia / Agência O Globo) (Rio de Janeiro (photo Camila Maia / O Globo News Agency), from *Corpo da Alma* (Body of Soul) series, 2003

Figure 4.17. Rosângela Rennó, *Nápoles* (*foto Robert Capa / Magnum Photos*) (Naples (photo Robert Capa / Magnum Photos) from *Corpo da Alma* (Body of Soul) series, 2003

Figure 4.18. Unknown artist, Woman seated, holding daguerreotype, c1850

Figure 4.19. Unknown artist, Woman Holding Cased Portraits of Civil War Soldiers, 1861-65