

Notes for a *Repentista* Manifesto. Ernesto Oroza, 2020.

The pollen of destruction floats in the air. (Antonio José Ponte)

Relation enferals, lying in wait for equivalence. (Edouard Glissant)

The machine that Christopher Columbus hammered into shape in Hispaniola was a kind of bricolage, something like a medieval vacuum cleaner. The flow of Nature in the island was interrupted by the suction of an iron mouth, taken thence through a transatlantic tube to be deposited and redistributed in Spain. (Antonio Benítez-Rojo)

Since this is a moment of irruption, an entrance, I am going to take advantage of it to throw, suddenly, into the center of this event these early notes of mine for the *Repentista Manifesto*. I borrow the term (*repentista*) from a long-standing rural musical practice in Cuba and The Americas,¹ whose basic resource is improvisation grounded in a metrical system and in rhyme. All of this is intensified by the competitive atmosphere of some of the forms of live performance, as in the cases of *Controversia* and *Seguidilla*; it's the audience that suggests, at the moment of the lyrical battle, the words that must be used obligatorily, or the "forced lines," which constrain the possibilities of meaning, creating a critical situation from which the rural poets can only escape by means of cleverness. But I should clarify, as I listen to *Controversia Imaginaria*² by the great *repentista* Leandro Camargo, that this text is not a musical manifesto. It's an urgent declaration about necessity, about disobedient improvisation, about critical re-use, about the existence in material culture of a *repentista* mode of survival. *Repentismo* is a productivist vanguard because it flows in relation to objects that are open, transformable. It's panoramic; it doesn't discriminate; it doesn't matter how much you turn your head, everything you see can be re-used. *Repentismo* is cannibal *Cut-ups*, provisional agreement, vertiginous and inventive montage that gives meaning to existence in a vital rhythm (of Andalusian and African roots). I'm not trying to split the improvisation of rural lyrics from the improvisation of survival; both forms are cast in the same mold and with the same mix. Both often live in the same marginalized spaces;

¹ In the northeast of Brazil, it's called *Repente*; *Payada* and *Paya* in Argentina and Chile, respectively. *Huapango* in Mexico.

² Leandro Camargo on *Palmas y Cañas* (Cuban Televisión): <https://youtu.be/FgxMp4nIWV4>

perhaps that's why there is a deep connection between musical *Repentismo* and the productive forms that I'm collecting for the *Manifesto*. Both practices have shared elements and are conditioned by some kind of urgency. The generative principle in both is improvisation; the constructive principle is an astute control over meter and pairing—in *Repentismo*, through the octosyllabic *décima* form; in *bricolage*, through metrical coordination. The success of both creations depends on the complexity of the mental index and the variety of resources they place in relation to each other. The *repentista* poet must have a vast knowledge of the language, of the rural culture and environment, of the politics of the day, of the history of *Repentismo* itself, as well as of poetry in general. The individual that appeals to improvisation in order to face the urgent problems of daily life spreads out their experience with objects like a map of their resources and their material culture. In other words, their knowledge of what they have at hand is completely filtered through necessity, and they come to understand their world as a vast territory of forms, principles of technique and use, solutions of combination and coordinated metrics: things assemble themselves together as if the designers of both pieces had agreed in the past for them to match up in the future. As if the Cuban designer of the INPUD pressure cooker had planned the meeting of his device with the tiny cap of a penicillin bottle, designed by a German. The original safety valves on the pressure cooker would disappear when they popped, and replacements were continuously needed. Their place, through reparation and *kairós*, was always taken by that small cap from the bottle of antibiotics that has a similar profile and dimensions.³ Rhythm is a notion shared by two edges, Deleuze would say. Repair, like re-use and reinvention, might be a *repentista* activity. I've already said that re-use should be considered a rhetorical figure; repair is one without a doubt. I conclude these notes of mine by declaring any improvisational productive mode that extracts, from an unjust reality, just the right fragments—which, articulated through a gesture and an instant, become meaningful in relation to our urgency—*repentista*.

³ When everyday Cuban creators, during the economic crisis of the 90s, succeeded in using plastic injection to make the safety valves to repair the INPUD pressure cookers, they did so using the same color as the penicillin bottle caps everyone used—so that the buyer in need would easily recognize the small orange part in the market.

*¿Puede la voz “repentismo”
ser útil para nombrar
el pensar y el fabricar
del que vive en el abismo?
Sin tiempo para el lirismo
partes en un gesto implica.
La necesidad le explica
cómo tiene que acoplarlas.
Las rima para empatarlas,
y un nuevo objeto fabrica.*

*Can “repentismo” be it—
The name never mistaking
The reasoning and the making
Of him that lives in the pit?
Time runs out on lyrics to be spit;
Parts together in a gesture he brings.
For it is necessity that sings
Of how to connect them.
He rhymes to cement them,
And makes a new thing among things.⁴*

⁴ This verse is not translating my poem. It is Yoán Moreno’s response to my invitation to improvise his own *décima* on the topic of the relationship of *Repentismo* to necessity.