

# Riviera

Coco Fusco

**Coco Fusco**

January 9 – February 6, 2016

Alexander Gray Associates

## Coco Fusco

The exhibition Coco Fusco presents work by interdisciplinary artist and writer Coco Fusco, screening for the first time together a survey of her seminal videos created over the past two decades. Also presented is the mixed media installation *Confidencial, Autores Firmantes* (2015), which examines Cuba's systematic censorship of key literary voices during the 1970s. Featuring works from the early 1990s through the present, the overall exhibition focuses on Fusco's critical examination of the politics of identity, military power, the history of racial thought, and post-revolutionary Cuba.

Presented for the first time in New York, Fusco's most recent videos on Cuba, *La Confesión* (2015)—created for the 56th Venice Biennale, Italy—and *La botella al mar de María Elena* (2015)—premiered at the 2015 Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art, Sweden—explore the cases of Cuban poet Heberto Padilla and writer María Elena Cruz Varela, respectively deconstructing official narratives of political oppression. Cuba has been a subject of study for Fusco for three decades, during which she has produced videos; exhibitions; performances; cultural exchanges and numerous texts, including her recently published book, *Dangerous Moves: Performance and Politics in Cuba* (2015, Tate Publishing).

Fusco's research on Cuba led to her collaboration with Dr. Lilian Guerra (professor, University of Florida), which resulted in *Confidencial, Autores Firmantes*. Through this work, Fusco further explores the Padilla affair by presenting twenty-one facsimiles of official memorandums and letters from 1971; found by Dr. Guerra in the archives of the Cuban Ministry of Culture. The documents detail orders and methods by which to censor publications by intellectuals deemed "anti-Cuban" due their open disagreement with the government's detainment of the poet Heberto Padilla, and their skepticism regarding the motives of Padilla's ensuing "confession" that he had betrayed the revolution. The documents are presented alongside original Cuban editions of books by authors such as Julio Cortázar, Gabriel García Márquez, and Mario Vargas Llosa who signed two open letters to Fidel Castro that were published in *Le Monde* in 1971 in protest of the Cuban government's treatment of Padilla. This room-size installation is an archive of a key historical moment that redefined the Cuban Revolutionary government's relationship with progressive intellectuals of that era out and inside the island, and cast a long shadow over its relationship with its literary cadre. *Autores Firmantes* mirrors a moment

in time both past and present, in the artist's words, "A state may produce the absence of its own archive while retaining its own contents for a future exercise of force."

With equal doses of research, humor, and irony, Fusco tackles complex subjects including race, ethnicity, identity, xenophobia, violence, and objectification of minority cultures in her videos. In works such as *TED Ethnology: Primate Visions of the Human Mind* (2015), *Operation Atropos* (2006), and *The Couple in the Cage: A Guatinali Odyssey* (1993), she uses the body as the basis from which to question and destabilize enforced binaries of hegemony and otherness dictated by doctrinarian voices, which she describes as "conditions of uncurbed power that are present in so many warring scenarios" in today's societies. Videos such as *The Empty Plaza* (2012) and *Y entonces el mar te habla* (2012), foreground her exploration of memory, history and place: in them she considers the hegemonic control of official histories of Cuba and the ways that unofficially recognized flows of bodies transform the meaning of iconic elements of the Cuba landscape.



*Y entonces el mar te habla (And the Sea Will Talk to You), 2012*

### **Mi esqueleto**

*Un poema de José María Fonollosa con música de Albert Plá*

Al nacer me asignaron  
como a todos  
un frágil esqueleto  
muy pequeño.

Le acepte  
y cuide  
año tras año  
y creyéramos los dos  
al mismo tiempo  
y así convivimos juntos.

Él procura no hacerse notar mucho  
mi esqueleto es muy modesto.

Yo procuro que él también se sienta a gusto  
incluso me lo llevo a visitar países extranjeros.

Procuro que no sufra ningún daño  
que le cause privarse de algún hueso.

Le hospedo deferente,  
hasta le animo  
a que haga el amor con otros esqueletos.

Y esto es lo que a él más le gusta,  
mayormente  
y luego descansar,  
y hacerse el muerto,  
y hacerse el muerto...

Me place imaginar que cuando muera  
mi esqueleto va a quedar al descubierto;  
representara entonces lo que fui  
mientras viví  
y entonces creo,  
creo que así,  
se sentirá más cómodo,  
completo.

### **My Skeleton**

*A poem by the Catalán writer José María Fonollosa set to music by Albert Plá*

When I was born I was assigned  
as we all are  
a very small  
fragile skeleton.

I accepted  
and cared for it  
year after year  
we grew together  
at the same time  
and so we lived together.

It tries not to be noticeable  
my skeleton is very modest.

I also try to make sure that it feels good  
I even take it to visit foreign countries.

I try to make sure it does not suffer the damage  
of the loss of a bone.

I remain deferent with it  
I even urge it to make love  
with other skeletons.

And that is what it likes to do,  
most  
and then rest,  
and then play dead,  
and then play dead...

It pleases me to think that when I die  
my skeleton will be discovered;  
and will represent what I was  
while I was alive  
and then I think  
I think that that way  
it will feel more comfortable,  
complete.

The ironic and polemical singer Albert Plá's song *My Skeleton* is one of my favorite songs. It aptly describes my own relationship with *mi otro yo*, my Cuban self. Although I was born and raised in the United States, Cuba created the conditions of my existence and the revolution was my induction into political subjecthood. My Cuban mother conceived me as an act of resistance against a deportation order she received in 1959, and birthed me in Greenwich Village before she was forcibly returned to the island with me the following year. I was her ticket out of a revolution that she viewed with skepticism and I soon became the means by which my extended family would be able to emigrate. The original intention was for the family to move in only one direction—northward—but by the 1980s, the dynamic of the flow included points south, east and west.

During my infancy, my mother carried a letter in her wallet with instructions in case of an emergency that should anything happen to her, I was not to be sent to Cuba.

But the pull of nostalgia, the shock of exile and the ideological battle between the island and the United States that turned Fidel Castro into public enemy number one during my childhood made Cuba into something my family could never leave, even if we were not literally there. Cuba was an overpowering symbolic presence in my home, in the media, and in my dreams. I grew up shuttling between two languages, two cultural dispositions and radically different world views. I was surrounded by people who worried about being hijacked to Cuba and also by others who feared that they would never go back to the Cuba that was their home. Cuba was hell on earth and paradise. America was a safe harbor and brutally cold and overly rational where children showed no respect for their parents. When I was away from home, I was constantly grilled as to my opinions about Castro and Communism even though I was years away from being eligible to vote. Long before I would come to understand Cuba as a Cold War construct and a myth for the international left, I lived with it and it lived in me.

More than thirty years ago, as I was beginning to chart my course as an artist, I received an invitation from Cuban artists to pay them a visit in Havana. I accepted and with that began a new phase of my lifelong dance with my skeleton. I walked right into that mythical enemy territory and crossing the line brought the shivers of pleasure that breaking taboos engenders. I met peers who were startlingly like me, family who I had not known existed, found humor in word play that brought deeper laughter out

of me than I had ever known, and enjoyed a scintillating sense of complicity that comes from transgression in the company of friends. And I felt fear, real fear of disappearing at the hands of authorities that can act with impunity. Fear of saying or doing something that could hurt people I cared about on the island who had to stay behind when I could leave. I wrestled with those fears and learned the most profound lessons about cultural politics and social engagement that I have ever had in my life.

It took me more than ten years of traveling to Cuba and traveling the world with Cuban artists before I felt I could create my own works about the place and people that shaped me. I didn't want to make work about being a hybrid, about being a child of immigrants or about my experiences in the United States. I was looking for ways to imagine the aspects of Cuba that are not readily apprehensible but that inform the culture. I wanted to let the skeleton that I care for but hide so well be discovered. Could I make the emptiness of the plaza into something sculpted by people through a collective choice to be absent? Could I show how a dehydrated migrant adrift in the Florida Strait hears voices in the water? Could I find the traces of silenced literary figures whose words were prescient warnings of the direction that Cuban revolution would take? Can I imagine a different future for the culture by rethinking the past?

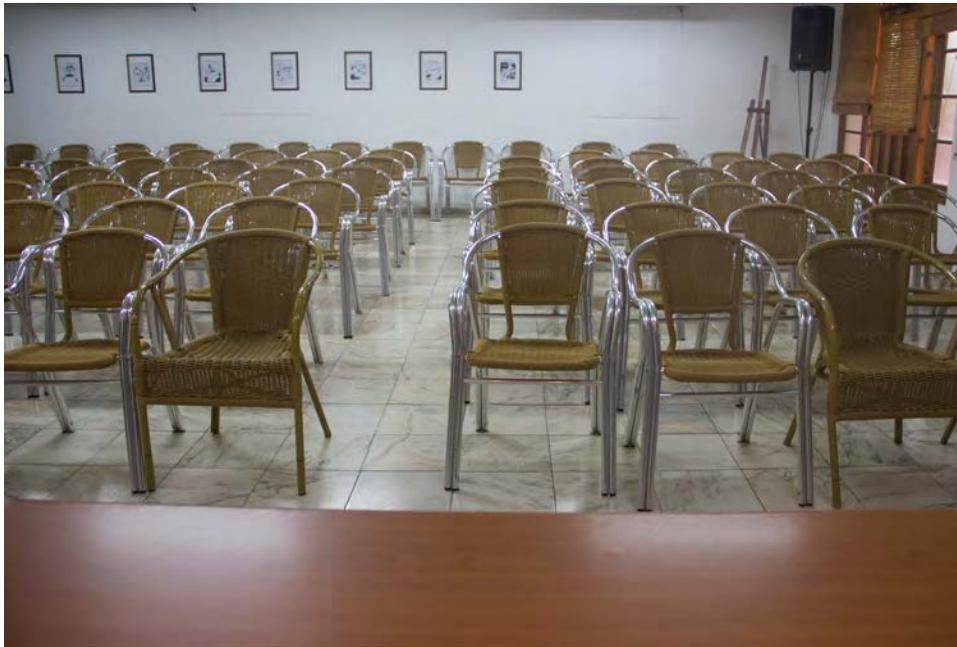
Coco Fusco, New York, November 2015

### **Interview with Dr. Lillian Guerra**

**Coco Fusco:** Artists have many reasons to be interested in documents and have many ways to work with them. Some create fictitious documents to elaborate on the relationship between representation and history or the relation between visuality and truth. Others hone in on the deadpan and fact-laden formal quality of documents to embrace an approach to art making that eschews embellishment or decoration. And some artists are principally interested in documents as a means of making historical information that has been ignored or suppressed visible, as was noted by art historian Hal Foster in his essay, *An Archival Impulse*.

Your work as a historian is deeply involved with documents of many kinds, from government records to personal ephemera to films and literature. Can you talk about how your approach to working with documents differs from that of an artist? And how does your approach change in relation to the nature of the documents that you deal with?

**Lillian Guerra:** One story—regardless of its source—is never representative of the multiple dimensions of any lived reality. As a historian who has spent a lot of time listening to old and young Cubans as well as folks like myself who were born elsewhere (i.e. “eternally aspiring Cubans”), I have often best understood a period, political culture, or simply a point of view through humor. Humor is perhaps one of the best examples of how human expressions of an individual experience or a shared, collective interpretation of a reality can be disseminated, conserved but also—within just a generation or a period of time—lost. Keeping lists of jokes, taking oral histories on everything that might occur to the interview subject regardless of my own agenda puts archival documents and other primary sources such as the press and movies or plays into conversation with each other. More importantly, that conversational process includes us, the historian/interpreter observers: it makes us part of the past and the past a part of us. That is what I consider essential to the crafting of historical texts. I also consider the gathering, deciphering and reproduction of such “documents” critical to the creation of art, whatever its form and whatever the intention of the artist. When art is meaningful to those to whom



La Confesión, 2015

it is directed (and Cuban art has traditionally been about explaining “us” Cubans), it speaks to our knowledge, our desire for greater knowledge, and our soul in a language we understand, a sign language to be precise.

**CF:** I consider your book *Visions of Power* to be the most detailed and trenchant account of the political struggles and projects of the first decade of the Cuban Revolution. What was the most challenging aspect in relation to the documentation of that history, which is so contested?

**LG:** Frankly, the greatest challenge was not gathering the sources. It was the absolute and total disbelief on the part of my friends, family and fellow intellectuals that I would actually write about them in the way that I did. I don’t consider my interpretations particularly original: in hundreds of conversations since I started going to and living in Cuba in 1996, I learned about the way in which the revolutionary state made citizens complicit in processes that did not benefit them. For example, the elimination of the independent press, a process effectively carried out by militias categorically characterized as “el pueblo uniformado” by the state, just as the army had been. Neither armed force represented the people. They represented the desire on the part of leaders to use force to intimidate, convince, empower citizens and thereby make citizens feel they were responsible for its uses. This process was fueled by the euphoria that accompanied the dream of radical and just change in 1959. Later, it was policed and enforced with the creation of watchdog groups like the block-by-block Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR). Originally supposed to have been a temporary measure meant to block the United States from backing successful counterrevolution within the island, the CDRs became permanent soon after the triumph of Cuba against the CIA-trained invaders at the Bay of Pigs/Playa Girón in 1961. Membership became a requirement of revolutionary citizenship in 1968. In short, Fidel had prophesied in the early 1960s that one day there would be no need for a state intelligence service that mimicked those of the past because citizens would all be voluntary intelligence agents, willing even to rat on themselves. By the late 1960s through the 1980s, that was true yet complicity, compliance, culpability of the citizenry in its own repression was managed, encouraged, expected by every agency of the state and the saturation of public spaces and discourse by the state. By 1975 when the new Communist Constitution eliminated autonomous civil society and mandated unanimous votes on the part of all representative bodies of the state such as the National Assembly, there were only two ways to be: either an obedient revolutionary committed to “unanimity” or a traitor. The paradox that clearly distinguished obedience and unanimity from the values of any logical idea of revolution was not addressed; it was ignored. Citizens were asked to blind themselves to the limits of their liberation and the prevalence of





*Y entonces el mar te habla (And the Sea Will Talk to You)*, 2012  
Video still and installation views, Brooklyn Academy of Music, NY, 2012

oppression; they were asked to justify both whenever challenged, especially by a foreigner. I wanted to explain the origins of this paradox and this blindness, define their meaning to the hegemony of the Cuban state and reveal the painful betrayal of the dream that the majority of Cubans had for their country in 1959.

**CF:** Obtaining access to government records in Cuba is not as straightforward a process as it is in many other countries. What restrictions are openly acknowledged? What restrictions only become apparent upon entering the libraries and archives?

**LG:** One must have a research visa approved and supported by a government institution specifically charged with one's disciplinary field. For me, that is history. The best way to do historical research in Cuba is do it as one would in any other country of Latin America—or so my non-Cubanist doctoral advisors believed. That is, to be there for a very long stretch of time, so long that bibliographers, neighbors, fellow historians and the local fruit peddler will come to trust you. Personal archives can be gold mines when they become available as are intimate, oral history interviews that last hours. However these are not only rare but need the bulwark of traditional written sources so they can be fully comprehended. The Cuban revolutionary state produced, for instance, dozens and dozens of magazines that have hardly if ever been used to access the citizens' experience or even how policies of the state were justified and explained. Examples include *Muchachas*, Cuba's equivalent of *Teen Magazine* in the 1980s, *Cuba Internacional* for the "Soviet era" of the 1970s and *Granma Campesina*. This latter publication was a version of *Granma*, the Communist Party organ specifically published for peasants from 1964–1983 during the height of small farmers' resistance to Communist economic controls and the criminalization of an autonomous market. In addition, many officials' speeches were no longer transcribed and published in unedited form in the government daily, *Revolución* (1959–1965) and *Granma* (1965–present). For this reason, magazines aimed and distributed specifically for militants of the Communist Party are extremely important: they said what could not have been said publicly and included many statistical and other survey data never released publicly. There was also no "hiding" or attempt to gloss the government's commitment to surveillance and the use of informants in the official magazines of the CDRs like *Con la Guardia en Alto* and *Vigilancia*. Here the true and honest face of official endorsement of repressive tactics comes through in articles with titles such as "Un Millón de Tapabocas [A Million Mouth-Shutters]." For my work, I mesh as many of these kinds of sources together with the rare archival variety and the rich, deep memories that many Cubans have of particular moments, speeches, policies, fashions, attitudes. Ultimately, I find those memories are not only accurate but they prove so important to a process or period I am researching that, without even trying, I find references

to them in my published or archival sources: the “proof” of their centrality, accuracy and meaning, for a conventionalist. The stakes in Cuba have always been very high for forgetting and most citizens know this, especially those over the age of 35. It was only in 2001 that Cuba’s National Assembly finally passed the first law authorizing the need for the conservation and declassification of government archives since 1959. Before that point, much (possibly most) post-1959 ministries’ documentation went straight to “material prima” [recycling] every five years. If it was valuable to national security, it became what professional librarians call a “dark archive,” hidden from researchers or simply unknown, unprocessed and unused. Cuba is and has been a national security state for far longer than that term has existed in this country. Consequently, if those dark archives were ever to open, one can only imagine the history inside! Every historian I know, both on and off the island, is dreaming of that day; and of being the first in line. Fields like anthropology were entirely eliminated in Cuba in the late 1960s and 1970s when anthropological researchers whose work was supported by Fidel Castro succeeded far too well in documenting the everyday forms of dissent and dissidence that no Cuban official was willing to acknowledge. In specific terms, one can date the turning point in the state’s view of anthropology and its methods as detrimental to national security to 1971: in that year, a scandal erupted after the Cuban Ministry of the Interior declared Oscar and Ruth Lewis’ Cuba project interviewing average citizens the work of the “CIA.” This was not only a false but utterly absurd claim meant to justify domestic repression of social science methods that might make public all the state needed to deny in its search for and surveillance of the goal of “unanimity” behind its policies among citizens. Critique, particularly informed critique, and access to information about how other Cubans think and feel without state mediation or intervention in the voicing of those opinions have always been the greatest threat to the stability of the Communist Party’s monopoly on power.

For all of these reasons, the political culture and state policies have combined to make researching very difficult. Knowing that an archive exists, that it supposedly renders its contents to researchers, having a research visa and then having a letter of introduction to the archive’s staff does not necessarily make any difference: you may not get to see anything in the end. However, persistence counts as does the human building of trust between researcher and purveyors of archival, library and other such sources. In the end, I am an idealist. Many people may want to deny the past but when injustices have been committed and either impunity or indignity reign, the dead are never truly dead and they are always looking for someone to bring that forgotten past back into life.

**CF:** The Padilla Case has long been an obsession among Latin American intellectuals. I was drawn to the story of the poet’s “confession” because of the mysteries around the documents pertaining to the case. There was a mad attempt by the Cuban government to film, transcribe and photograph Padilla confessing so as to “prove” that he chose to do so. It seems that the state first sought to produce a political drama for a foreign audience but then pulled the production from circulation. What do you think was going on with all that documented production?

**LG:** In the late 1960s through the 1970s Fidel Castro and his ministers maintained consistently that in Cuba there was neither a need for official censorship nor secret government censors along the lines of the Batista dictatorship and any other right-wing dictatorship so common to Latin America before and during the Cold War. Instead, as Castro and others repeatedly said, Cubans “self-censor” because they want to “protect” the Revolution from internal doubts and creeping fissures in citizens’ commitment. According to Raúl Castro, Fidel Castro and the entire pedagogical infrastructure of the Communist state during and after the late 1960s, it would be through such weak points that imperialist propaganda would do the dirty work of undermining the Revolution from within. Starting in 1968 through 1984, doubts in the legitimacy of Communism or the policies of Communist rule expressed themselves through an array of rebellion. These included styles of dress, individual critiques of policy, homosexuality, interest in foreign music, “selfish” material discontent with rationing, resistance to unremunerated “volunteer labor,” and expressions of racial consciousness that defied the state’s claim of having defeated racism. Understood as forms of counterrevolution, these attitudes and behaviors were termed “ideological diversionism” by Raúl Castro in 1968 and persecuted accordingly through purges led by the Communist Youth at academic institutions, neighborhood courts and sanctions that relied primarily on forced labor as a means of “re-education.” One’s political compliance with party dictates, officially approved discourse and volunteer labor demands also determined the distribution of rewards such as advancement at the university, the right to purchase luxury items such as home appliances and promotion at the workplace. For this reason, when Padilla’s arrest hit the world news, the state carried out massive damage control by attempting to refute the accusations of hypocrisy and outrage to which so many leading intellectuals of the world subjected it. Until then, in fact, the majority of those who protested—including Gabriel García Márquez and Susan Sontag—had been “incondicionales del sistema,” willing to justify and gloss over its abuses as “excesses” and “errors” rather than the violations of human rights that they really were. Calling a spade a spade in Cuba then—and, to a certain degree, now—put one in the position that the Cuban state and the United States government both created simultaneously during the Cold War: political bi-polarity, either you are with



*La botella al mar de María Elena, 2015*

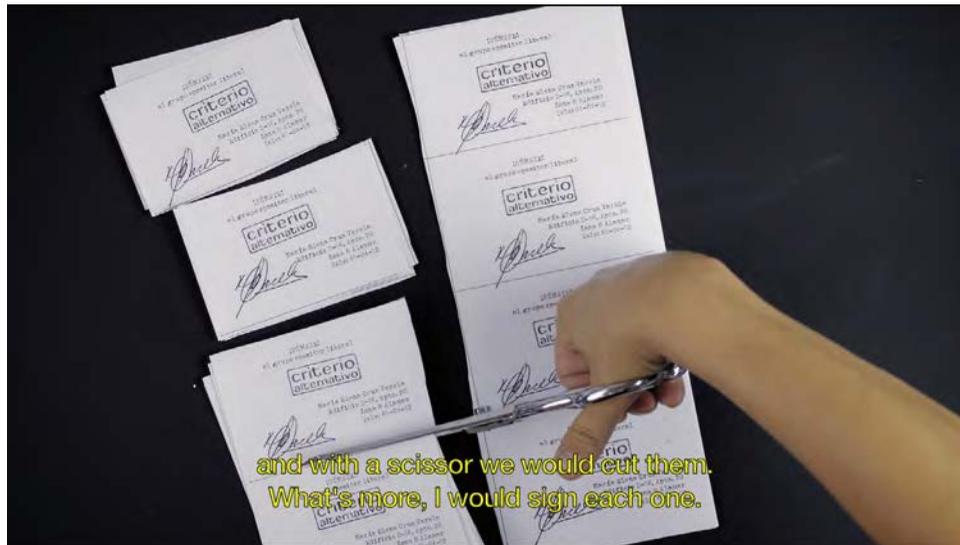


us or against us. If you criticized the Cuban state for violating human rights or for ruling through repressive means rather claiming its rule as a genuine expression of the will of the Cuban people, you were likely to be accused of being a defender of Latin American dictators, a pawn of U.S. imperialism, an agent of the CIA or simply confused ideologically. Indeed, it is the experience of most Cubanists like myself that few scholars of Latin America in the United States today feel comfortable criticizing the Cuban Revolution and/or Fidel Castro. They remain sacred because without them, it is as if the historical truths about the US-backed terror-driven regimes of Argentina, Chile, Guatemala, El Salvador and others are somehow diminished. I argue that Cuba's regime was essentially different than these regimes but it was no less guilty of many of the very kinds of crimes and processes of repression that we have traditionally only associated with the military dictatorships supported by the United States.

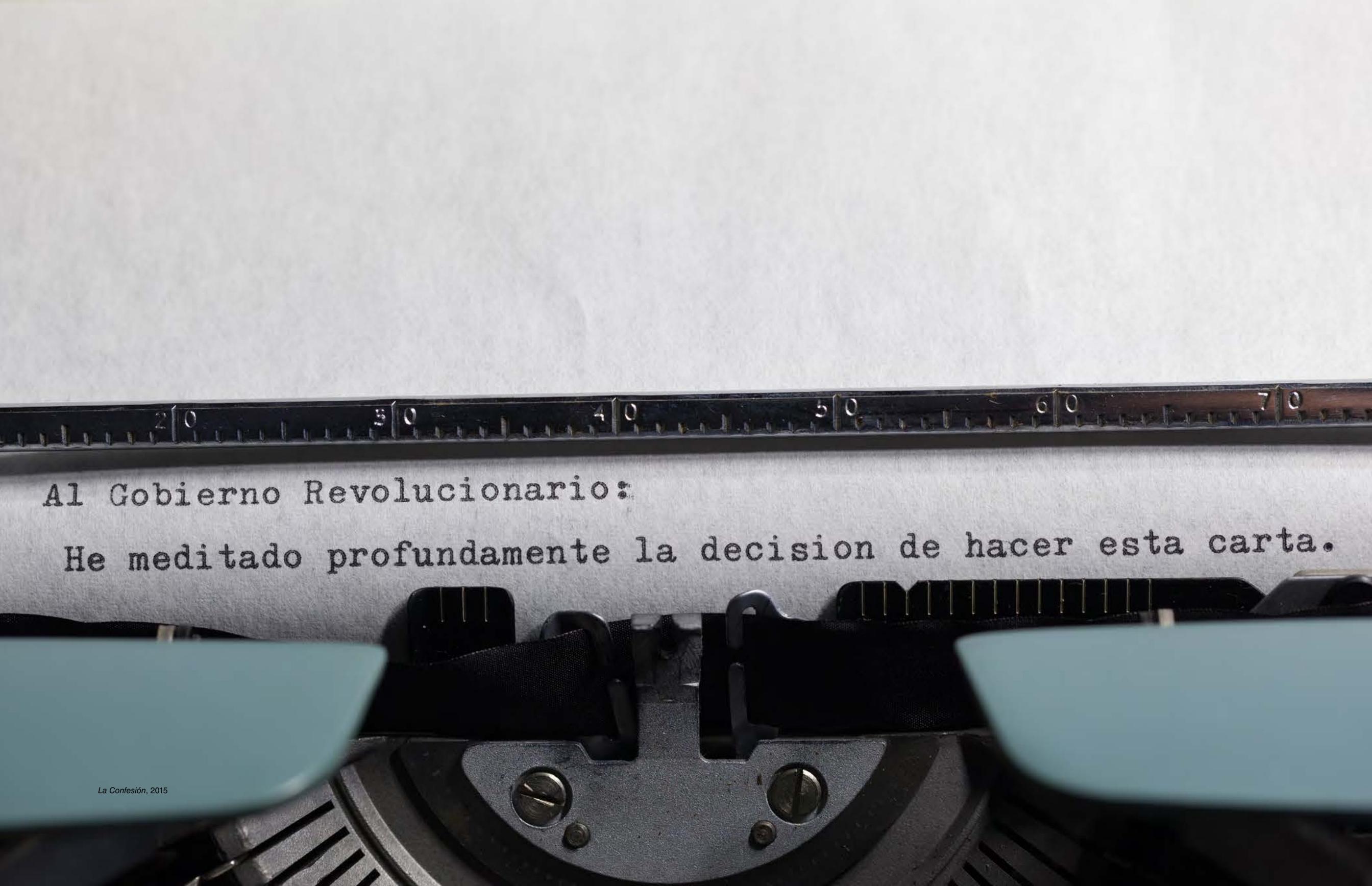
**CF:** How did you unearth the letters related to the Padilla Case?

**LG:** I found them by accident in the archive of the Ministry of Culture, then housed on the twelfth floor of the Biblioteca Nacional José Martí. How did I get them out of the archive in photographic form? Through the intervention of Saint Jude, of course. The Patron of Impossible Causes.

October 2015.



Above: La botella al mar de María Elena, 2015



Al Gobierno Revolucionario:

He meditado profundamente la decision de hacer esta carta.

*C O N F I D E N C I A L, AUTORES FIRMANTES, 2015*

Mixed media installation

Dimensions variable

Original documents discovered by historian Dr. Lillian Guerra in the Ministry of Culture, Cuba. Facsimiles created by Coco Fusco with the support of Alejandro Yoshii and Jennie Putvin. Translations into English by Coco Fusco, 2015.

To: Comrade René Roca      DGICL -- 2852      Date: May 21 1971  
Director Group III      CONFIDENTIAL      General Management Office

SUBJECT:

I instruct you so that you give the pertinent orders for the urgent removal of the following names and authors from international commerce and from the lists and catalogues of our organization. In the coming hours we will be adding new names and titles, and will also be making decisions regarding national circulation.

JEAN PAUL SARTRE

Sartre Visits Cuba  
The Captive of Venice, Tintoretto The Words  
What is Literature? Volumes I and II The Search for Method

MARIO VARGAS LLOSA

The Cubs

JULIO CORTAZAR

Hopscotch Stories  
About Julio Cortazar (Casa Notebooks)

JORGE SEMPRUN

The Long Journey

CARLOS FRANQUI

The Book of the Twelve

ITALO CALVINO

The Cloven Viscount

MARGUERITE DURAS

Whole Days in the Trees

LUIS (sic) GOYTISOLO

The Island

GABRIEL GARCIA MARQUEZ

One Hundred Years of Solitude Gabriel Garcia Marquez  
(Casa, Multiple Views)

INSTITUTO DEL LIBRO  
CALLE 19, 1002  
VEDADO  
LA HABANA  
TELF. 30.5531



**MEMORANDUM**

---

A: Co. René Roca      DGICL-2852      FECHA: 21 de mayo de 1971  
Director Grupo III      CONFIDENTIAL      "AÑO DE LOS 10 MILLONES"

ASUNTO:      DE: Oficina Dirección General.

Te instruyo para que des las órdenes pertinentes para retirar con -  
carácter urgente del comercio internacional, así como de las listas  
y catálogos de nuestro organismo las siguientes obras y autores, en  
las próximas horas agregaremos nuevos nombres y títulos, así como -  
tomaremos las decisiones con respecto a la circulación nacional.

JUAN PAUL SARTRE

Sarte visita a Cuba  
Tintorero, el secuestrado de Venecia  
Las Palabras  
¿Qué es la literatura? Tomos I y II  
Cuestiones del método

MARIO VARGAS LLOSA

Los cachorros

JULIO CORTAZAR

Rayuela  
Cuentos  
Sobre Julio Cortázar  
(Cuadernos Casa)

JORGE SEMPRUN

El largo viaje

CARLOS FRANQUI

El libro de los 12

CARLOS FUENTES

Aura

ITALO CALVINO

Las dos mitades del vizconde

MARGARITA DURAS

Días enteros en las ramas

LUIS GOYTISOLO

La isla

GABRIEL GARCIA MARQUEZ

Cien años de soledad  
Gabriel García Márquez (valoración múltiple, Casa)

DGICL-2852

VARGAS LLOSA, CORTAZAR, FUENTES, OTHERS  
Fifteen Stories from Latin America

JAN KOTT  
Shakespeare, Our Contemporary

NICANOR PARRA  
Poems

EDUARDO HERAS LEON  
The Steps on the Grass

NORBERTO FUENTES  
The Condemned of the County

If there are obstacles to or comments against carrying out these instructions I ask that you please inform me as quickly as possible, as well as letting me know about the measures to be taken with the warehoused stock of these works. These measures should be taken with the highest degree of discretion possible so as not to create a ruckus about the issue.

Revolutionarily,

Rolando Rodríguez  
General Manager

cc: Miguel Rodríguez, Editor in Chief  
Eduardo Neira, International Relations

INSTITUTO DEL LIBRO  
CALLE 19, 1002  
VEDADO  
LA HABANA  
TELF 30.5531

**MEMORANDUM**

AL: \_\_\_\_\_ DGICL-2852 FECHA: \_\_\_\_\_  
"AÑO DE LOS 10 MILLONES"

ASUNTO: \_\_\_\_\_ DE: \_\_\_\_\_

VARGAS LLOSA, CORTAZAR, FUENTES, OTROS  
Quince relatos de América Latina

JAN KOTT  
Shakespeare, nuestro contemporáneo

NICANOR PARRA  
Poemas

EDUARDO HERAS LEON  
Los pasos en la hierba

NORBERTO FUENTES  
Condenados de condado

En caso de existir algún obstáculo para ello o tener alguna observación en contra te ruego me lo informes a la mayor brevedad, así como las medidas a tomar con las existencias de los mismos. Estas medidas deben ser tomadas con la mayor discreción posible para no levantar "polvoreada" al respecto.

Revolucionariamente

Rolando Rodríguez  
Director General

cc: Miguel Rodríguez, Director Editorial  
Eduardo Neira, Relaciones Internacionales

CONFIDENTIAL

Comrade Rolando Rodríguez  
General Manager

May 22 1971  
The Year of Productivity  
Dept. of International Relations

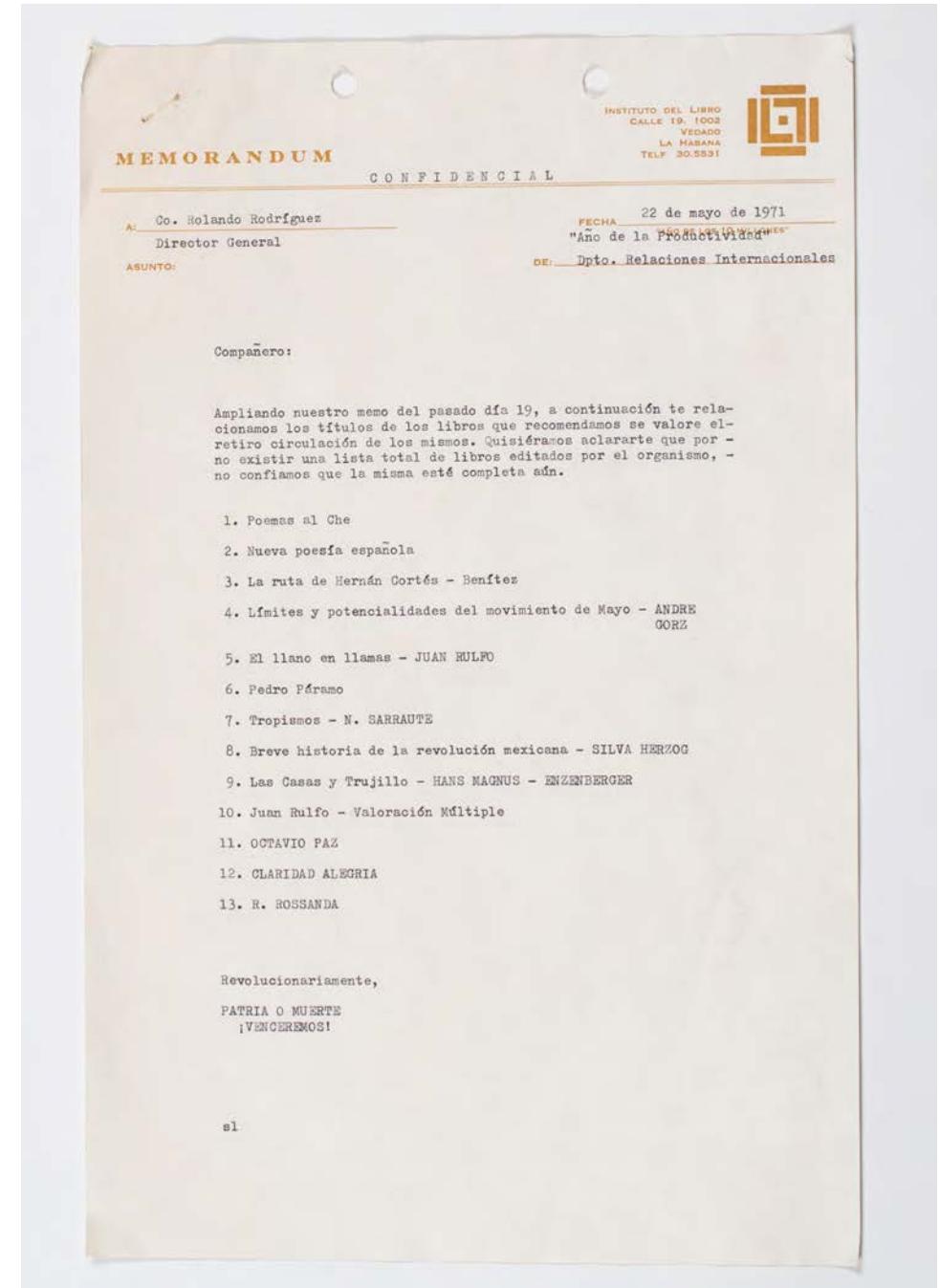
Comrade:

Expanding upon our memo from from May 19th, we continue with a list of titles of books that we recommend be withdrawn form circulation. We would like to clarify that since there is no complete list of books published by the organization, we cannot be sure yet if our list is exhaustive.

1. Poems for Che
2. New Spanish Poetry
3. The Route of Hernan Cortez - Benítez
4. Limits and Potentialities of the May Movement - ANDRE GORZ
5. The Burning Plain - JUAN RULFO
6. Pedro Páramo
7. Tropisms - N. SARRAUTE
8. A Brief History of the Mexican Revolution - SILVA HERZOG
9. Las Casas and Trujillo - HANS MAGNUS - ENZENBERGER
10. Juan Rulfo - Multiple Evaluations
11. OCTAVIO PAZ
12. CLARIDAD ALEGRIA
13. R. ROSSANDA

Revolutionarily,

Fatherland or Death  
We Shall Win!

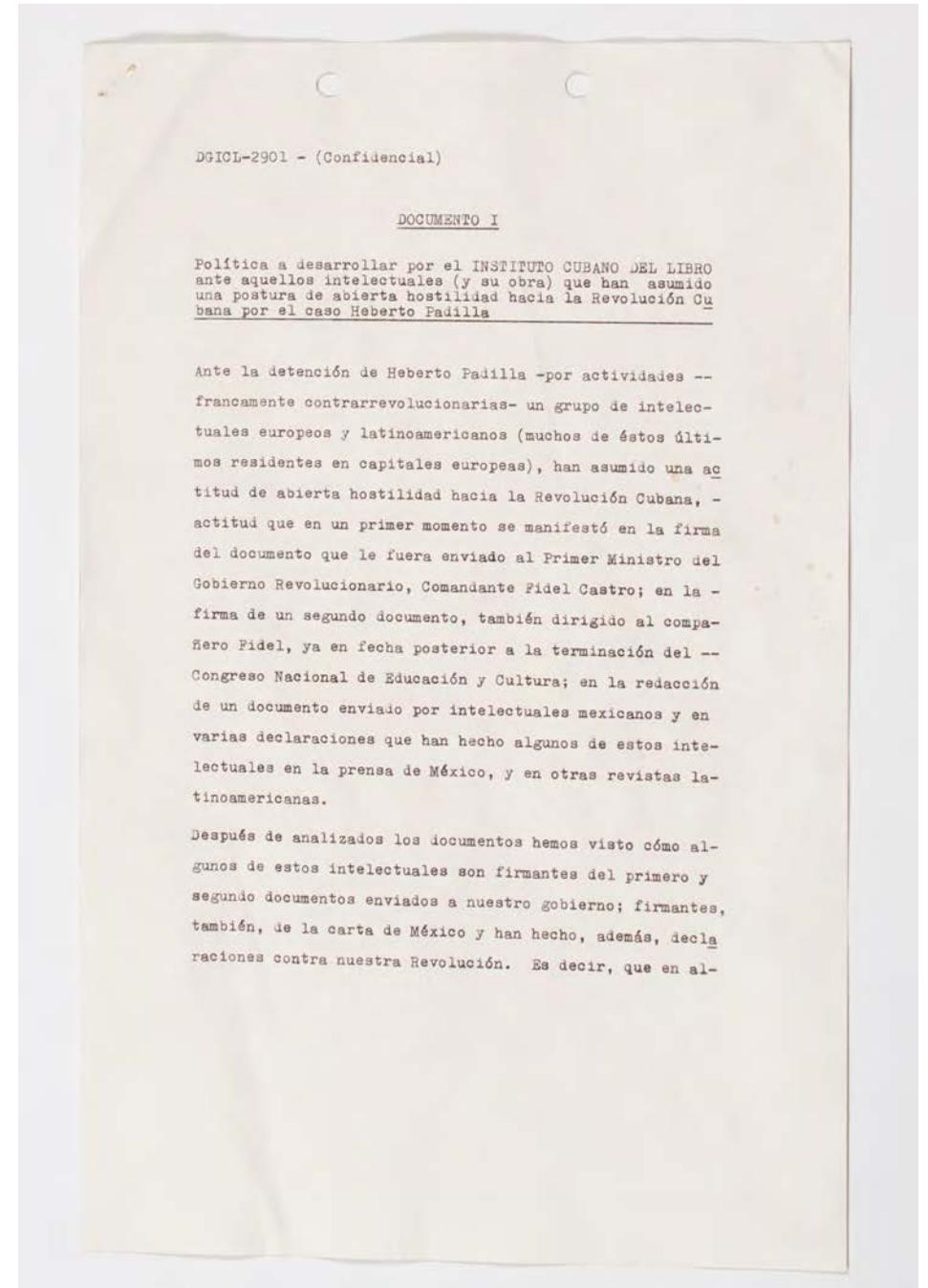


DOCUMENT I

Policy for the CUBAN BOOK INSTITUTE to carry out with regard to those intellectuals (and their works) that have taken a position of open hostility toward the Cuban Revolution due to the Heberto Padilla case

Due to the detention of Heberto Padilla—for frankly counterrevolutionary activities—a group of European and Latin American intellectuals (many of the latter being residents of European capitals), have assumed an attitude of open hostility toward the Cuban Revolution—an attitude that was first shown by the signing of the document that was sent to the Prime Minister of the Revolutionary Government, Commander Fidel Castro; and then by the signing of the second document, also addressed to comrade Fidel, dated after the end of the National Congress of Education and Culture; and the writing of a document sent by Mexican intellectuals, and in various declarations that some of these intellectuals have made to the Mexican press, and other Latin American magazines.

After analyzing the documents we have noted that some of these intellectuals are signatories of the first and second documents sent to our government; signatories as well of the letter from Mexico, and that they have made declarations against our revolution. This is to say, that

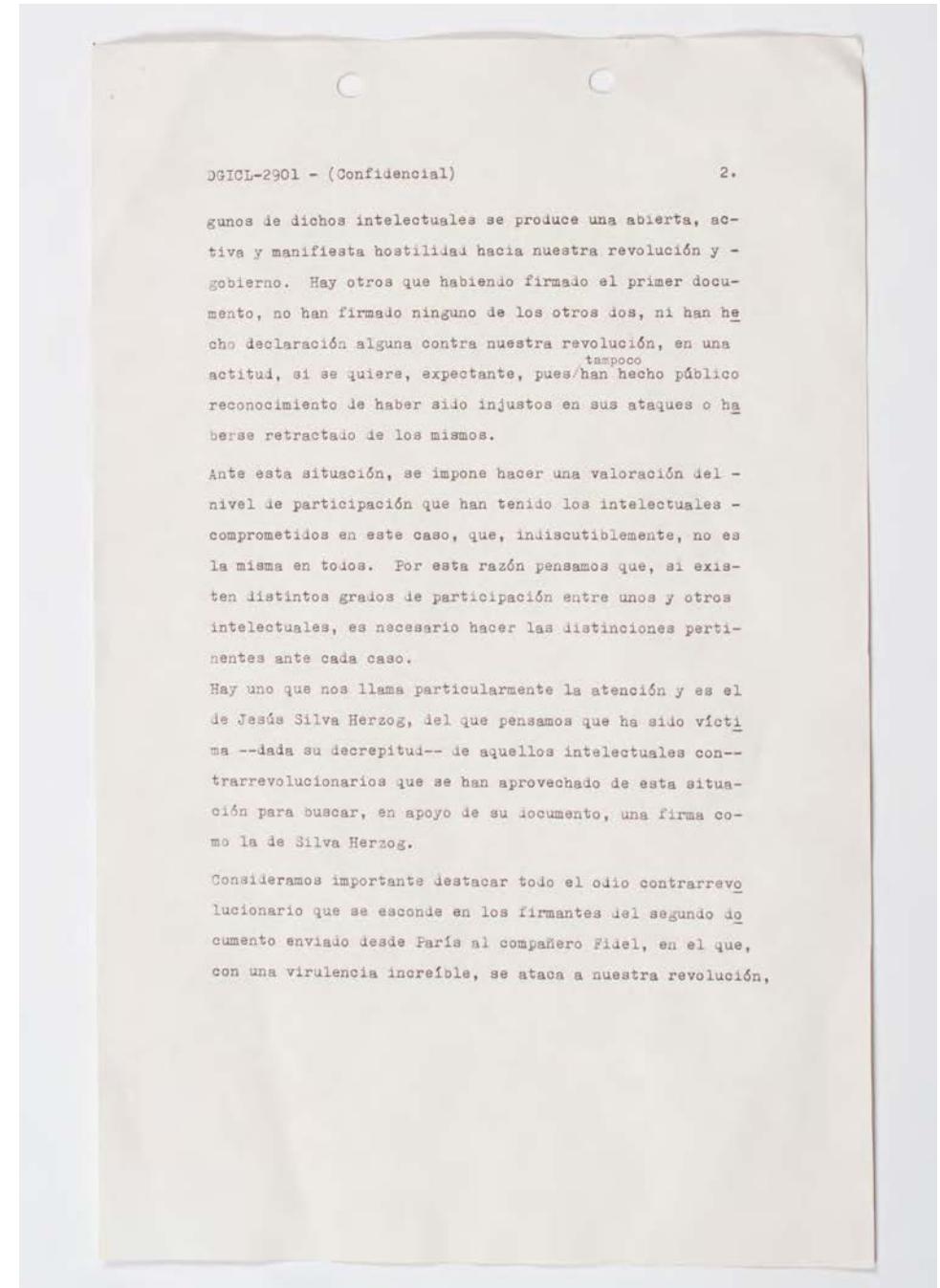


some of these intellectuals display an open, active and manifest hostility toward our revolution and government. There are others who, after having signed the first documents, did not sign the other two, nor have they made declarations against our revolution. This attitude is to be expected given that they have not publically recognized their having been unjust in their attacks nor have they retracted them.

Confronted with this situation, we are compelled to evaluate the degree of participation of these intellectuals—their degree of involvement is indisputably not the same in all those implicated. For this reason, we think that, if different degrees of participation exist among the said intellectuals, it is necessary to make pertinent distinctions with regard to this case.

There is one person in particular that draws our attention and that is Jesús Silva Herzog, who we think has really been a victim—give his state of decrepitude—of those counterrevolutionary intellectuals who have taken advantage of this situation to obtain a signature of someone like Silva Herzog appear on their document.

We consider it important to highlight all the counterrevolutionary hate that is hidden in the signatures on the second document sent from Paris to comrade Fidel, in which with incredible virulence, our revolution is attacked,

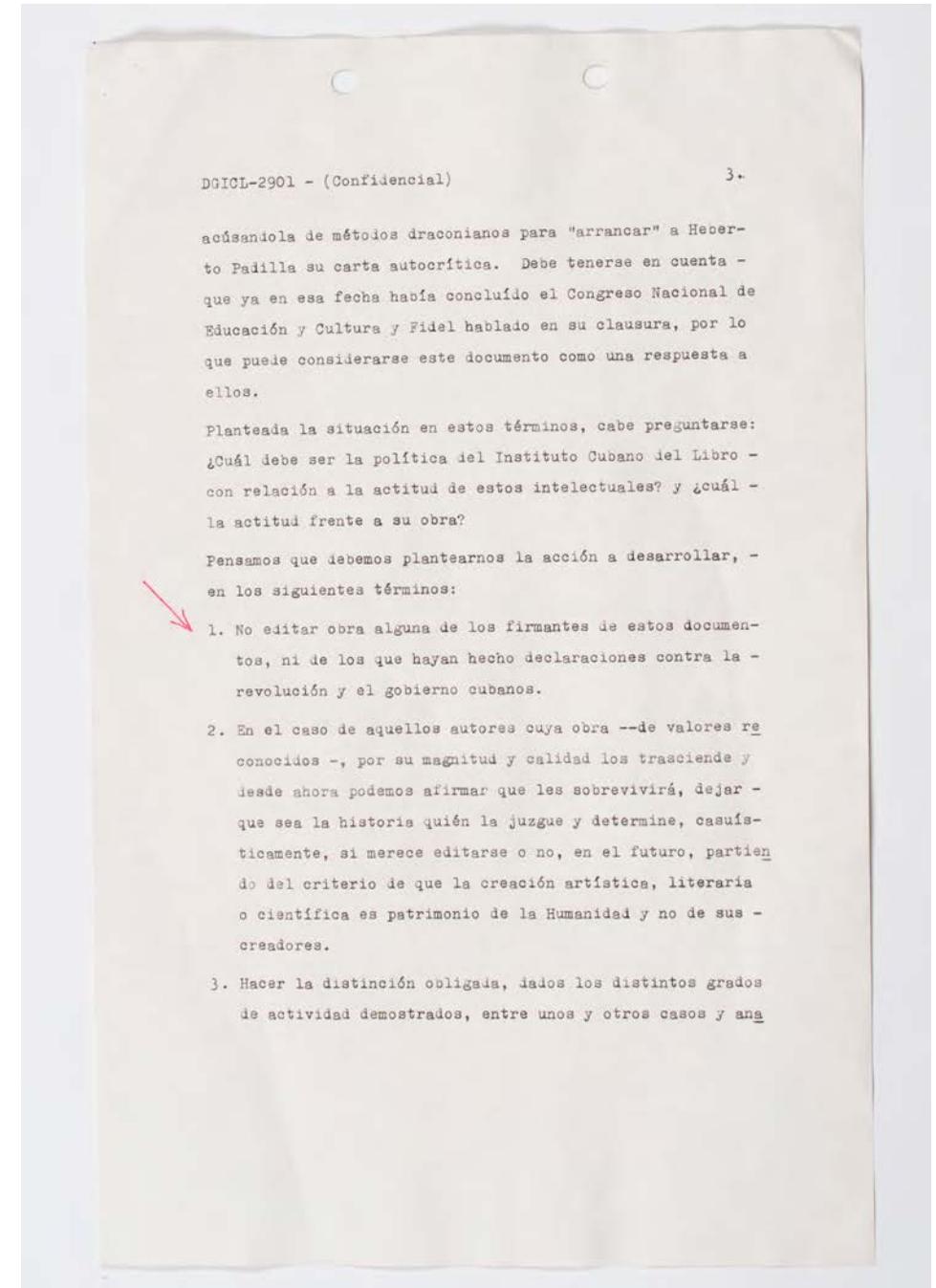


accusing it of using draconian methods to “extract” Heberto Padilla’s self-criticism letter. It should be taken into account that already on this date the National Congress of Education and Culture had finished and Fidel spoke at the end; hence the document can be considered as a response to these events.

Looking at the situation in this way we might ask: what should the policy of the Cuban Book Institute be with respect to the attitude of these intellectuals? And what attitude should be taken with regard to their works?

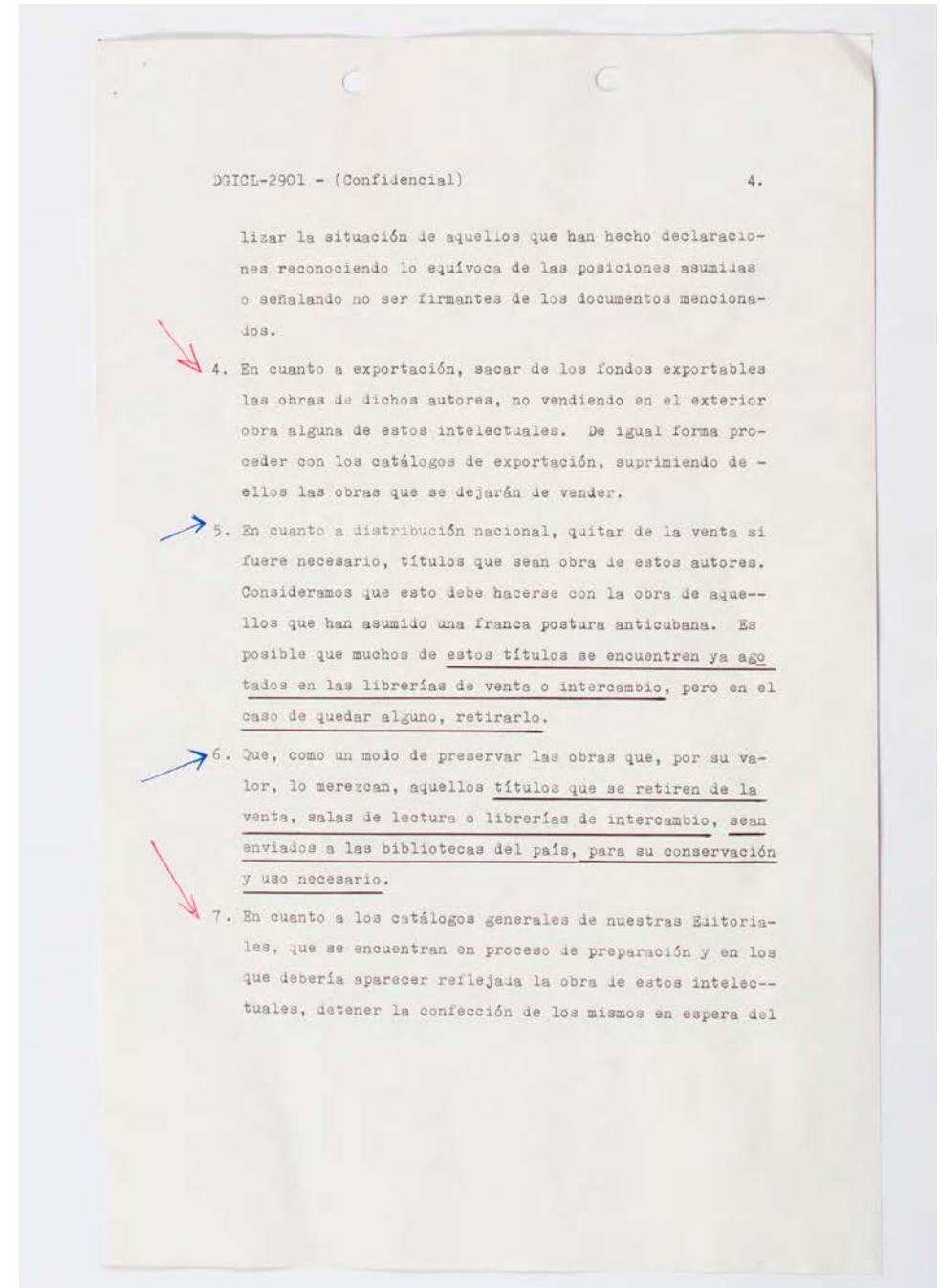
We think that we should outline the actions to be taken in the following terms:

1. There will be no publishing of any works by the signatories of these documents, nor of those who have made declarations against the revolution and the Cuban government.
2. In the case of those authors whose works—of recognized value due to their magnitude and quality—will transcend them and will surely survive them, we should allow history to judge them and determine, on a case by case basis, if they merit being published or not, in the future, based on the criteria that artistic, literary, and scientific creation is part of the patrimony of humanity and not that of its creators.
3. Make an obligatory distinction, give the different levels of engagement, among the many cases and



analyze the situation of those who have made declarations in which they recognize how mistaken the positions that they had assumed were or in which they have sent a signal by not signing the aforementioned documents.

4. With regard to export, we should not sell any of the works by these intellectuals outside the country. We should also remove their works from the catalogues we use for export purposes.
5. With regard to national distribution, we should remove titles by these authors from sales if necessary. We consider that this should be done with the works of those who have assumed an openly anti-Cuban attitude. It is possible that many of these titles are already out of stock in bookstores, but if any remain they should be removed.
6. As a means of preserving works that deserve to be saved because of their value, those titles that are withdrawn from sale and reading rooms should be sent to libraries for their conservation and use.
7. With regard to general catalogues from our publishing houses that are in the process of producing books by these intellectuals, that process should be stopped until further notice pending a decision about what other actions to take, which will be made when conditions permit it.



Havana, June 16 1971

THE YEAR OF PRODUCTIVITY DGICL:

2995 (CONFIDENTIAL)

Comrade Miguel Rodriguez Varela  
Editor in Chief

Comrade René Roca Muchulí  
Director Group III

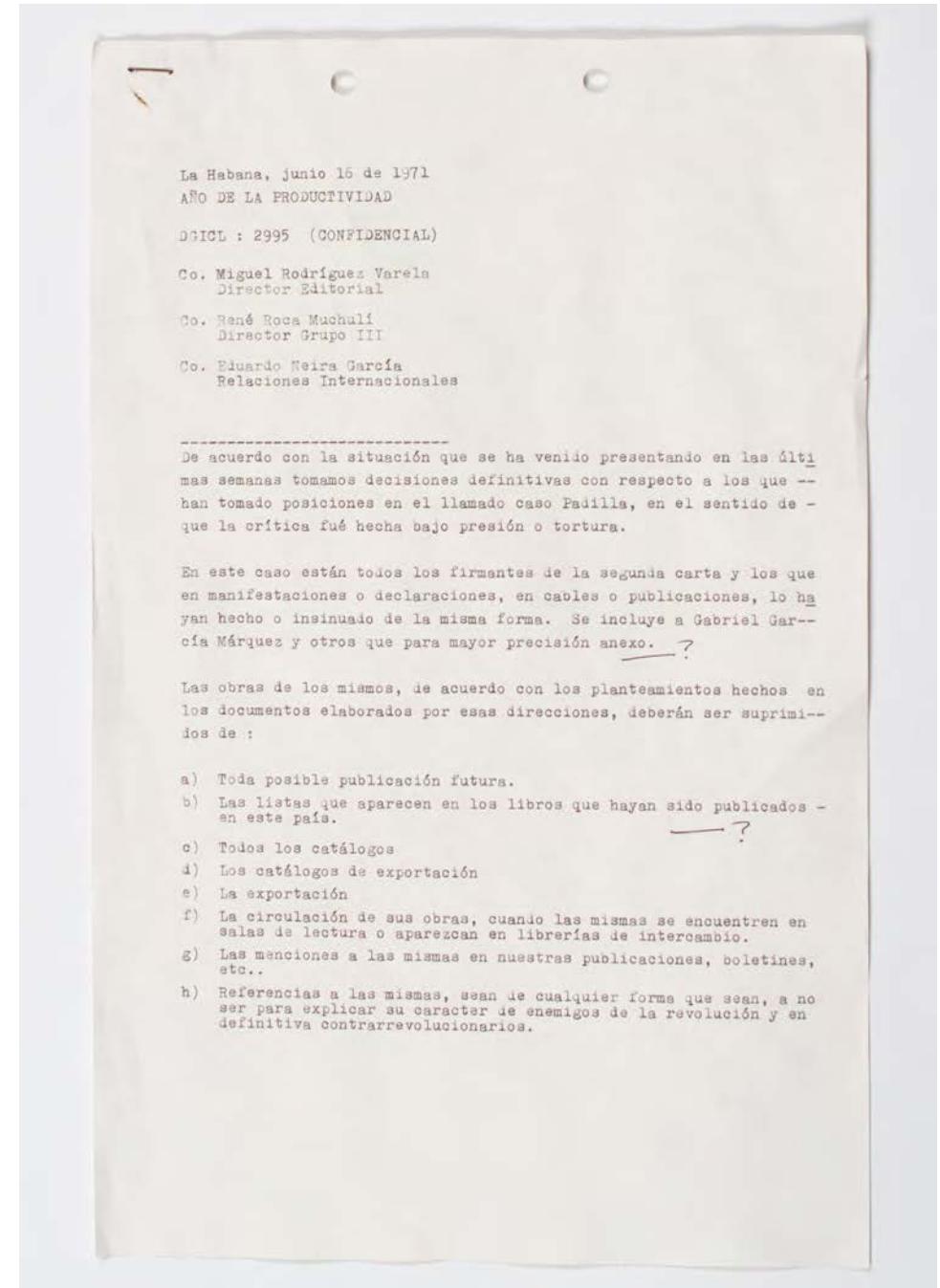
Comrade Eduardo Neira García  
International Relations

Due to the situation that has developed in the last few weeks, we have made a final decision with respect to those who have assumed positions relating to the so-called Padilla case, which is to say those who say that the self-criticism was made under pressure or as a result of torture.

In this case there are those signatories of the second letter and those that, in statements and declarations, in cables and publications, have insinuated as much. Among them are Gabriel García Márquez and others who for greater accuracy, I include in an attached list.

The works of these same people, in accordance with the approach set out in the documents produced by this office, should be suppressed in the following manner:

- a) All future publication possibilities.
- b) The lists that appear in books that have been published in this country.
- c) All catalogues
- d) Catalogues of titles for export
- e) Export
- f) The circulation of their works, when they are found to be in reading rooms, or in bookstores.
- g) The mention of these people in our publications, bulletins, etc.
- h) References to these people, whatever form it might take, other than to make explicit that they are enemies of the revolution and definitely counterrevolutionary.



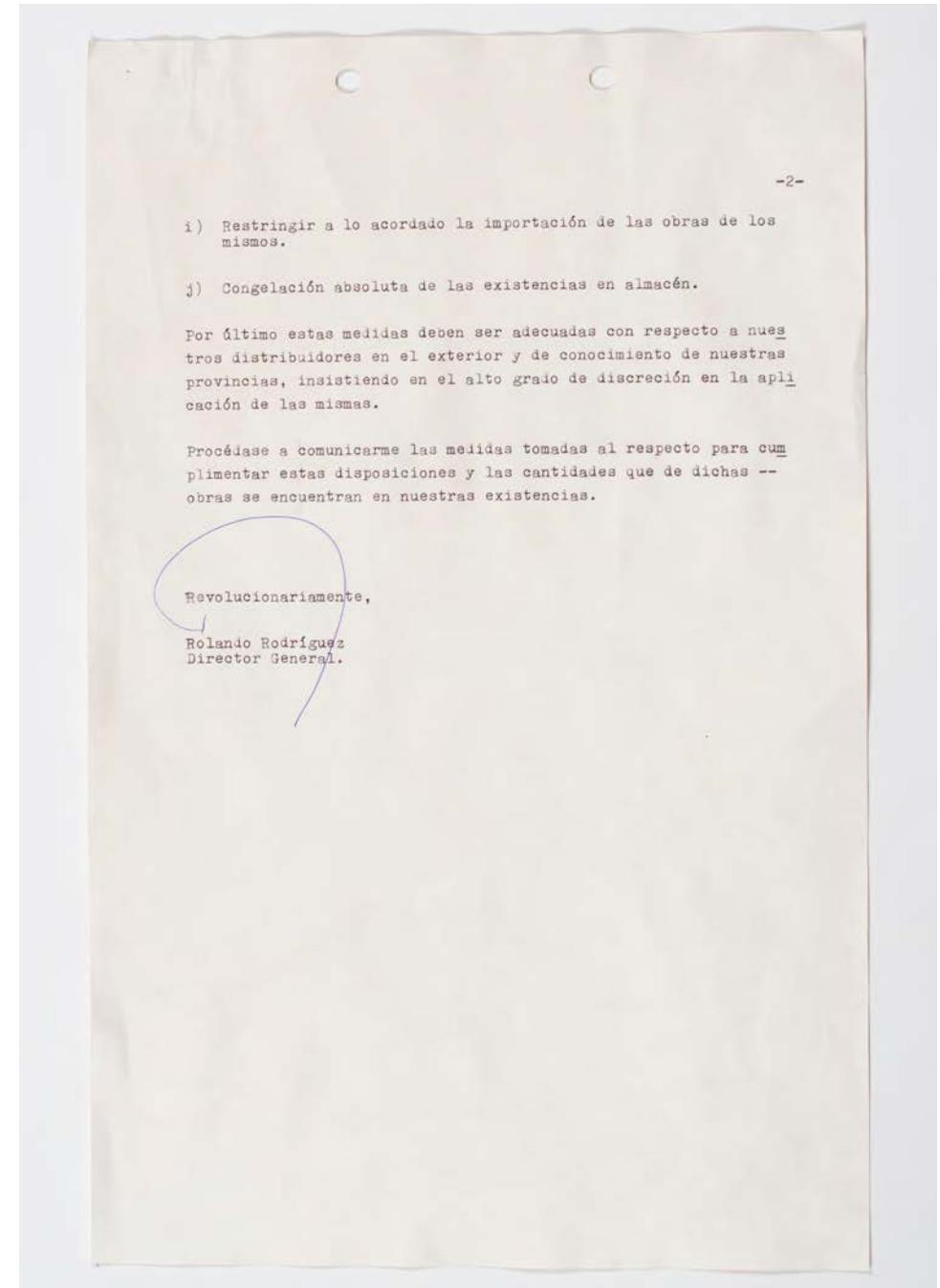
- i) Restriction on import of works by these same writers.
- j) Absolute freeze of any and all warehouse stock.

Lastly, these measures should be adequate with respect to our foreign distributors and should be known in our provinces, while we insist on a high level of discretion in their application.

Proceed with communicating the measures taken to fulfill these provisions and the number of pertinent works that are currently in stock.

Revolutionarily,

Rolando Rodríguez General  
Manager



There are other national authors such as:

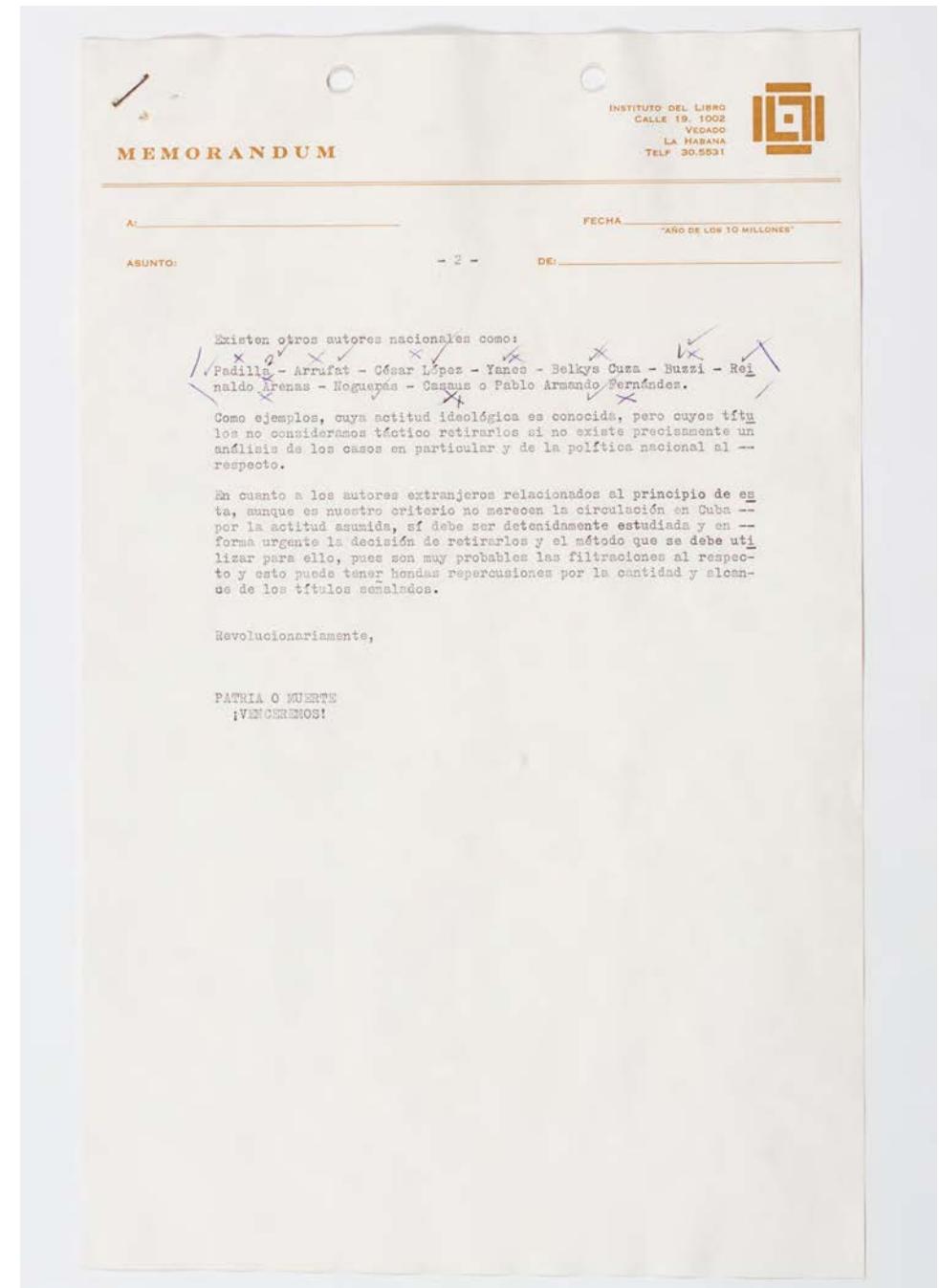
Padilla – Arrufat – César López – Yanes – Belkys Cuza – Buzzi – Reinaldo Arenas – Noguerras – Casaus or Pablo Armando Fernandez.

As examples, whose ideological attitude is known, but we consider that it would not be tactical to withdraw their books since we do not yet have precise analysis of those particular cases and the national policies with respect to them.

With regard to the foreign authors listed at the beginning here, although we believe that they did not deserve to be circulated in Cuba because of the attitude they have assumed, they should be carefully studied and it is urgent that the decision to withdraw them and of the method to be used be made, as it is probable that there will be leaks and this will have serious repercussions because of the quantity and the reach of the titles in question.

Revolutionarily,

FATHERLAND OR DEATH  
WE SHALL WIN!



## Checklist



*C O N F I D E N C I A L, A U T O R E S F I R M A N T E S*, 2015  
Mixed media installation, dimensions variable  
Installation view, Alexander Gray Associates, New York, 2016



*The Couple in the Cage: A Guatınai Odyssey*, 1993  
31 minute single channel video

*The Couple in the Cage: A Guatınai Odyssey* documents the traveling performance *The Year of the White Bear and Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit the West* (1992–1994) of Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez -Peña, in which they exhibited themselves as caged Amerindians from an imaginary island. While the artists' intent was to create a satirical commentary on the notion of discovery, they soon realized that many of their viewers believed the fiction, and thought the artists were real "savages." The video, a record of their interactions with audiences in the United States, Australia, Spain, and the United Kingdom, dramatizes the dilemma of the cross-cultural misunderstanding. Their experiences are interwoven with archival footage of ethnographic displays from the past, giving a historical dimension to the artists' social experiment. *The Couple in the Cage* is simultaneously a comic fiction and a reflection on the morality of the treatment human beings as exotic curiosities.



*Els Segadors (The Reapers)*, 2001  
22 minute single channel video

In 2001, the president of Catalunya decreed that the national Catalan hymn, *Els Segadors*, be taught in all of the region's public schools as a reaction to increased immigration from other regions in Spain, and other countries. Fusco's video, *Els Segadors*, depicts people who consider themselves Catalan singing the hymn and discussing their personal experiences with the language, their feelings about the intricacies of cultural identity, and their relationship to the song. The diversity of experiences expressed in the testimonials, as well as the range of styles in which the hymn is sung, illuminates the prejudice implicit in attempts to define a singular national identity. As Fusco states about regional nationalist movement, it "is extremely difficult to discern is the difference between a historically rooted defense of Catalan identity against encroachment by Spanish State and burgeoning Catalanist protectionism in the face of the hybridizing forces of globalization."



*Operation Atropos*, 2006  
59 minute single channel video

In July 2005, Fusco took a course led by former United States military interrogators designed for people in the private sector who want to learn their techniques for extracting information. Fusco took a group of six women with her and filmed their workshop. The video, *Operation Atropos*, is about the group's experience. The training involved an immersive simulation of incarceration as prisoners of war: the women were ambushed, captured, stripped searched, thrown in the pen and subject to several interrogations. Afterwards, in a classroom scenario, the tactics used against the group were analyzed and the women were taught to employ the same strategies.



*The Empty Plaza / La Plaza Vacía*, 2012  
12 minute single channel video

*The Empty Plaza / La Plaza Vacía* is inspired by the organized public protests in the Middle East beginning in 2011. Fusco took note of the communal spaces around the world being utilized and, in contrast, those left empty. The empty Plaza de la Revolución in Havana, Cuba becomes the protagonist in the artist's meditation on public space, revolutionary promise, and memory. Intermittent close-range views bring the plaza's architecture into focus and long shots documenting Fusco's passage through the vacant square are punctuated by vintage archival footage depicting scenes from Post-Revolutionary Cuba. Throughout the video, a Spanish narration, written by Cuban journalist Yoani Sanchez, describes what appears—and does not appear—in view. "The absence of public in some plazas seemed just as resonant and provocative as its presence in others," Fusco recalls. "Cuba's Plaza of the Revolution is one such place—a stark, inhospitable arena where all the major political events of the past half-century have been marked by mass choreography, militarized displays and rhetorical flourish. I decided to create a piece about that legendary site—an empty stage filled with memories, through which every foreigner visitor passes, while nowadays many, if not most, Cubans flee."



*Y entonces el mar te habla (And the Sea Will Talk to You)*, 2012  
45 minute single channel video

*Y entonces el mar te habla* is Coco Fusco's exploration of problematic emigration policies between Cuba and the United States. In the film, Fusco weaves accounts of journeys from Cuba to the United States through the Straits of Florida, juxtaposed with a woman's description of her attempt to bring her mother's ashes back to Cuba from the United States. These poetic testimonial commentaries on the sea, and voices of Cuban exiles recounting their journeys are set against images of the Caribbean Sea and skies, which evoke the feeling of being adrift, culminating in a viewing experience reminiscent of the physical journey between countries.



*TED Ethology: Primate Visions of the Human Mind*, 2015  
49 minute single channel video

In *TED Ethology: Primate Visions of the Human Mind*, Fusco revives and embodies the chimpanzee animal psychologist Dr. Zira from the original *Planet of the Apes* films of the late 1960s and early 1970s in order to stage a simulated TED Talk. The chimp psychologist returns after twenty years in hiding to share her observations about the predatory practices of members of the homo genus. Dr. Zira's filmed lecture draws from primatology, neuroscience, and evolutionary biology to address human aggression and predatory behavior for the accumulation of resources in post-industrial societies.



*La confesión (The Confession)*, 2015  
31 minute single channel video

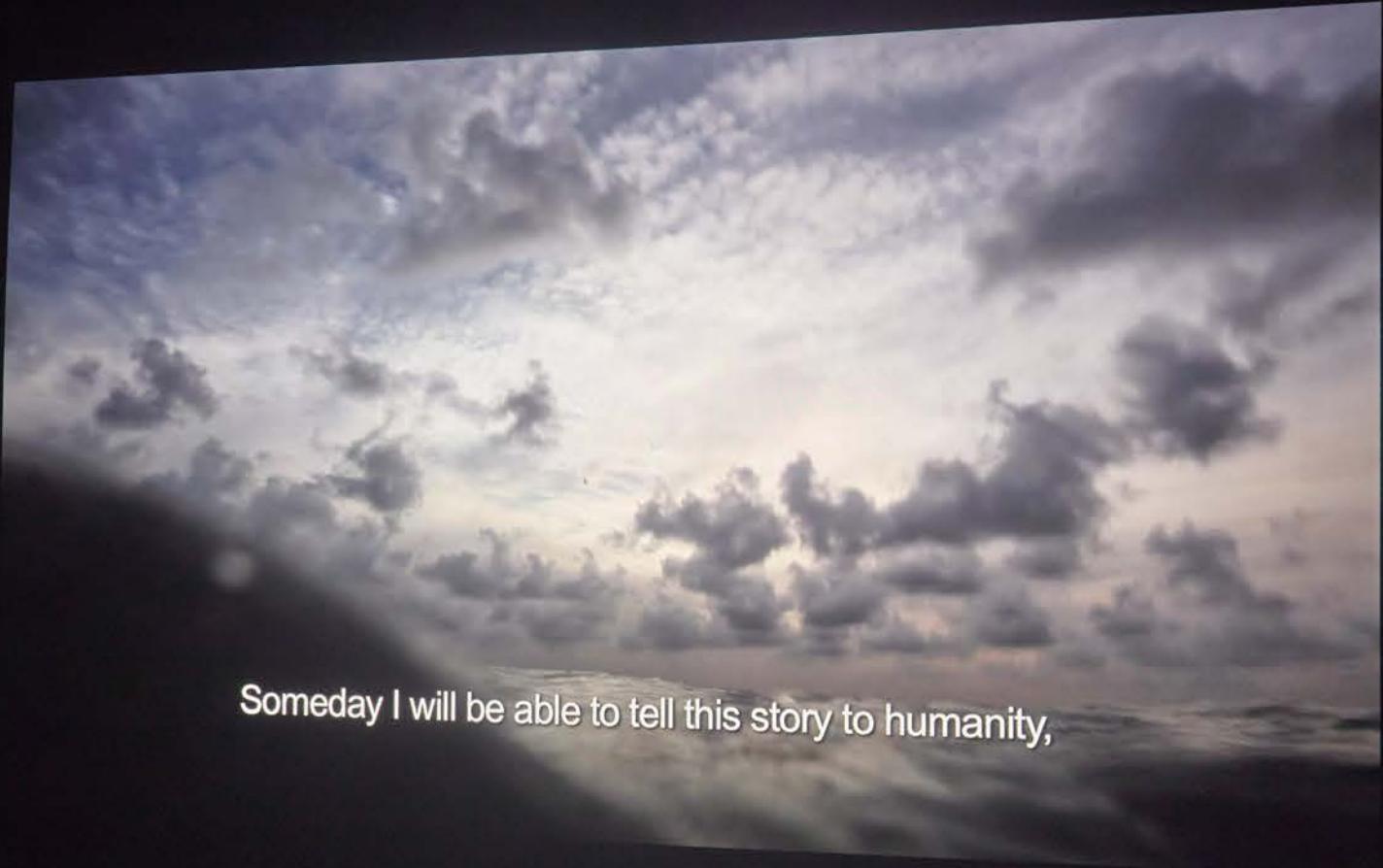
*La confesión* is Fusco's reflection on the most significant crisis in the intellectual history of the Cuban Revolution – the public confession by poet Heberto Padilla that he was a counterrevolutionary. Padilla's confession, which was pronounced in April of 1971 after the poet had been held for five weeks in Villa Marista prison, shifted the terms of the international leftist community and the role of culture in revolution, and reconfigured the relationship between European intellectuals and Cuba's nationalism. The video is not a dramatic reconstruction of the event, but rather a consideration of the ways in which Padilla's performance as a repentant counter-revolutionary reverberates to this day. Fusco concentrates on the documents that form the material residue of the case, including a fragment of the filmed confession that was made public only recently.



*La Plaza Vacía (The Empty Plaza)*, 2012  
12 minute single channel video

*La botella al mar de María Elena* examines the case of Cuban poet María Elena Cruz Varela, winner of the 1989 National Poetry Prize. In 1991, María Elena spearheaded an effort by ten Cuban intellectuals to issue a public declaration calling for political reforms. The Declaration of the Cuban Intellectuals alluded to the critical situation that Cuba faced with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe and the dramatic drop in imports and trade. Cruz Varela and several other dissidents were sieged by mobs and arrested for their efforts. In the video, Fusco contrasts the poet's recollections of the events with those of a Communist party militant who was involved in the mob attacks.

*However insignificant the data they contain, documents from state archives are valuable examples of lettered governance. State documents can signal the existence of evidence; but documents may also represent a state's effort to produce official accounts in order to mask the absence of evidence. A state may produce the absence of its own archive while retaining its contents for a future exercise of force. In that sense, documents, however old, are never dead matter: even when they are buried in unmarked graves.*



Someday I will be able to tell this story to humanity,

Coco Fusco (b.1960), New York-based interdisciplinary artist and writer, explores the politics of gender, race, war, and identity through multi-media productions incorporating large-scale projections, closed-circuit television, web-based live streaming performances with audience interaction, as well as performances at cultural events that actively engage with the audience.

Fusco's work was recently exhibited in *All the World's Futures* at the 56th Venice Biennale curated by Okwui Enwezor and at the Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art, Germany curated by Elvira Dyangani Ose (2015). Fusco's performances and videos have been included in the 8th Mercosul Biennial, Porto Alegre, Brazil (2010); two Whitney Biennials (2008 and 1993); VideoBrasil, São Paulo (2005); Performa 05, New York (2005); Shanghai Biennale, China (2004); Johannesburg Biennial, South Africa (1997); London International Theatre Festival, England (1995); and Sydney Biennale, Australia (1992); among others. Her work has recently been featured at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN (2014); Centre Pompidou, Paris (2014); New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York (2013); Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, TX (2012); Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid (2012); Tate Liverpool, England (2010); among others.

Fusco is the Andrew Banks Endowed Professor of Art at the University of Florida and author of *English is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas* (1995), *The Bodies that Were Not Ours and Other Writings* (2001), and *A Field Guide for Female Interrogators* (2008). She is the editor of *Corpus Delecti: Performance Art of the Americas* (1999) and *Only Skin Deep: Changing Visions of the American Self* (2003). Her most recent book *Dangerous Moves: Performance and Politics in Cuba* was released by Tate Publications (2015).

She has won numerous awards, including: 2016 Greenfield Prize in Visual Art; Guggenheim Fellowship (2013); Absolut Art Award for Art Writing (2013); CINTAS Foundation Visual Arts Fellowship (2014–2015); USA Berman Bloch Fellow (2012); and Herb Alpert Award in the Arts (2003). Fusco received her B.A. in Semiotics from Brown University (1982), her M.A. in Modern Thought and Literature from Stanford University (1985), and her Ph.D. in Art and Visual Culture from Middlesex University (2007). Since 1988, she has performed, lectured, exhibited, and curated around the world.



Coco Fusco  
Image: Gene Pittman/Walker Art Center

Published by Alexander Gray Associates on the occasion of the exhibition

**Coco Fusco**

January 9 – February 6, 2016

Publication © 2016 Alexander Gray Associates, LLC

Artwork © 2016 Coco Fusco / Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, or stored in any retrieval system of any nature without prior written permission of the copyright holders.

ISBN: 978-0-9861794-4-0

Cover image: *La confesión*, detail, 2015, 30 minute digital film

Design: Alejandro Jassan

Photography: Jeffrey Sturges, Amy Lin, Jenna Marvin

Alexander Gray Associates:

Alexander Gray, David Cabrera, Ursula Davila-Villa, John Kunemund, Peter Vargas, Amy Lin, Alejandro Jassan, Victoria Pratt, Carly Fischer, Jay Jadick, Jenna Marvin

Special thanks to Dr. Lillian Guerra, Raphael Lyon, Alejandro Yoshii and Jennie Putvin

Through exhibitions, research, and artist representation, the Alexander Gray Associates spotlights artistic movements and artists who emerged in the mid- to late-Twentieth Century. Influential in cultural, social, and political spheres, these artists are notable for creating work that crosses geographic borders, generational contexts and artistic disciplines. Alexander Gray Associates is a member of the Art Dealers Association of America.

Alexander Gray Associates

510 West 26 Street

New York NY 10001

United States

Tel: +1 212 399 2636

[www.alexandergray.com](http://www.alexandergray.com)

