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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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ALBERTO BARAYA'S DECOLONIAL AND POSTTRAUMATIC PHOTOGRAPHY: DISPLACED DIFFERENCE AND CULTURAL TRAUMA

In dialogue with ongoing discussions about decolonization of trauma theory that account for cultural trauma and sustained and long trauma processes, this paper discusses Alberto Baraya's series: *Service Included* (1997) in order to identify decolonial challenges and possibilities for posttraumatic photography. It argues that this series is a performative work that proposes a critical and decolonial revision of trauma culture, by appropriating the symbolic dimensions of Spanish-Catholic motifs of sacred violence historically and currently employed as cultural mechanisms for representation of cultural trauma in Colombia. This paper recovers and discusses Baraya's early, forgotten work and original appropriation of analogue photography operations with analogue photography, and proposes that the challenges *Service Included* offer for posttraumatic photography consist in both retracing symbolic active processes for dealing with trauma, and retracing photography's history as a medium of expression of cultural trauma, in order to create spaces for "displaced difference" within cultural trauma and trauma culture.

Introduction

Alberto Baraya's oeuvre is one of the most interesting among Colombian artists born in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It traverses various mediums and deals with historical and theoretical issues on representation. Art critics have touched upon his most exhibited work *Herbarium of artificial plants* (2002–2006), but have unfortunately ignored or, at best, superficially discussed his photographic and conceptual operations and experimentations in the nineties. This is particularly true for his series *Service Included* (1997), briefly commented in a few pages by Sol Astrid Giraldo, and Álvaro Medina^{1,2} both adhering to a tradition that mainly asks and answers iconological questions of what we can know about images/pictures of violence, while

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ignoring how this series simultaneously interrupts that order of understanding. Said commentators of Baraya's work never recognized this dimension nor how the series proposes a critical approach to traditional representation of violence (in photojournalism, printed media, TV news, religious imagery, and popular and fine arts, etc.) in which Catholic-colonial motifs of violence have always been the central iconographic and cultural referents. Leaving Colombia in 1994 to live in Spain and Europe as graduate student, once again granted Baraya the opportunity to recognize, this time abroad, the enormous historical and cultural influence of those motifs of sacred violence previously referred to in his 1995 *Observation of stigmata*. Commentators have also failed to notice his appropriation of analogue photography operations and his photographical approach to cultural trauma.

It is worth noting, for readers unfamiliar with Colombia in the 1990s, that there was a spirit of change in society at that time and there were high expectations that a plebiscite to reform the 1886 constitution would grant a participatory democracy that would engage diverse political forces and end a long history of violence dating back to the period known as *La Violencia* (The Violence, 1948–1960).³ Said period is particularly key for the history of photography in the country because it became essential for recording massacres and highly political, religious, and symbolic post-mortem mutilations, helping society to begin to become aware of and to grasp the sheer magnitude of violence in the country. In 1991 the new Constitution was successfully adopted, transforming the Republic into a social state under the rule of law. Yet, despite the substantive democratization promoted, in the second half of the 1990s there was a resurgence of even more alarming post-mortem mutilations, photographic records of which also dramatically increased nationwide around 1997, particularly in popular newspapers like EL ESPACIO (See [Figure 1](#)).

By then, Baraya had understood that a critical revision of what Estalisnao Zuleta described in 1991 as a myth of the national trauma of violence, and its symbolic dimension was now required. This meant a resignification of the culture and memory of violence, in which Catholic-colonial motifs of sacred violence had predominated for defining an ethos of practice and representation of violence both inside and outside of the art world⁴; myths and motives that have been basic references for dealing culturally and visually with violence since the 1950s⁵ (symptomatically, Baraya's work was associated with and constrained by this tradition in Medina's exhibition *Art and Violence In Colombia since 1948*, held in Bogota's Modern Art Museum in 1999). These motifs remind us that colonialism's repercussions are still present today as part of a "trauma process" that gives shape and meaning to "harmful or overwhelming phenomena" that affect the collective.⁶ They also underlined that, as Achille Mbembe put it, the mythical violence related to these motifs was still regarded as "an original scene which does not merely occupy a space of remembrance [... but has rather become] one of the significant matrices of language" and visibility of violence and death.⁷ Therefore, when discussing *Service Included* one needs to take into account a visual culture for representing violence and trauma and how cultural trauma resides in visual and trauma culture, and inhabits what Jeffery Alexander might refer to as visual and narrative acts of collectively and culturally (re)constructing traumatic experiences. Along these lines, one can hardly ignore the profundity



Fig. 1. Front page of the daily newspaper EL ESPACIO, 24 May 1997. Credits to: Isabel Londoño (photographer), Diario EL ESPACIO (currently running newspaper) and Biblioteca Nacional de Colombia (holder of the exemplar). The author uses this frontal page for review and has altered it by means of sepia and blurring filters in order to soften the main picture's explicitness.

and pertinence of Franz Fanon's insight on trauma and cinema, which may be transferable to visual culture and photography, and according to which culture is also a site of trauma.⁸ The "cultural message encountered on the screen",⁹ and arguably in images and newspapers, "has the effect of reactivating those never entirely assimilable signifiers", which at times rear up as entities that one might "be required to bind through the laborious reconstruction" of self-image and self-representation. This binding, which never means a total control of the figuration of cultural trauma, in our case refers to an inquiry in which the artist performs and addresses figures of cultural trauma in order to deal with and work through what we cannot control yet still affects us.

Bearing all this in mind, this paper pays attention to technical and conceptual processes and references present in *Service Included*, and develops a symptomatic approach that shows how the series is a set of pensive images that blend painting and photography, exchanging their logics and powers, interrupting and metamorphosing traditional, powerful iconography and sacred violence motifs — what Fritz Saxl might describe as a heritage of images for representing trauma and violence —

and performatively opens up spaces of “displaced difference” within trauma culture. The series is originally made of seven cibachrome prints and dozens of invitation flyer-coasters exhibited in 1997 in the Galería Santa Fe, then Bogotá’s largest public art gallery, located on the first floor of the city’s Planetarium, one of the city’s two main cultural centers at the time, visited by gallery-goers as well as by students and the general public. Given the relatively large number of panels and the fact that many of them are very similar, this paper only studies four panels and the flyer-coasters to provide a clear idea of the series.

A premonitory head

The first panel (see [Figure 2](#)) intentionally recalls iconic representations of the decapitated head of Saint John the Baptist, which Julia Kristeva correctly regarded



Fig. 2. Alberto Baraya, *Head from Service Included* series, Cibachrome Photomontage, 30 × 30 cm, 1997. Credits to: Alberto Baraya. Image taken for review from: Álvaro Medina, *Arte y Violencia en Colombia*, Bogotá: Museo de Arte Moderno 1999.

a “theme par excellence” on which a figurability or quality of being figurable “specific to the fate of the West” was built.¹⁰ The decollation of the Baptist, which precedes and presages Christ’s sacrifice and has also functioned as a “preventive coping mechanism for cultural trauma” so “what had been prophesied could be justified”,¹¹ is the Figure and crystallization of resemblances throughout human history (i.e., the “rehabilitation of the Old into the New” and a way of submerging the New in the Old), and the Figure that reconciles sacrifice and resurrection, past present/death and promise/future-life.

Even if Baraya does not remember having been inspired by any particular depiction of the saint’s head, there is an astonishing resemblance, in appearance and size, with a key work produced by Aelbert Bouts around 1500 in Leuven (see [Figure 3](#)). It is a great example of the type of rendition of the decollation of the Baptist created towards the end of the fifteenth century in Northern Europe and deeply influential in the Spanish empire and well beyond the seventeenth century.



Fig. 3. Aelbert Bouts, *Head of Saint John the Baptist on a Charger*, Oil on poplar (Diameter: 28.3 cm, 1500, Credits to: The Metropolitan Museum, public domain, CC0 1.0 Universal. Accession Number: 60.55.2.

This type of composition, probably derived from a “prototype” presumably made by his father, Dieric Bouts, was created for private devotion and displayed at home as a “charger” on a table. It “can be understood as a hybrid of the miracle-working Amiens relic [i.e., the relic of the head of The Baptist] and a literal icon presenting the head as it was offered by Salome to her mother”.¹² In this sense, it exemplifies the *figura rerum* (“figure of substance”¹³) that establishes the aforementioned figurability as the relationship between body and representation.

Head shows a head lying on a simple circular white plate that barely contains it, and gives little information on the context. Apart from the table knife, which already introduces a plot twist to the depiction of the relic, Baraya’s apparently unsophisticated panel hardly shows signs of violence. In addition, a sense of awkwardness is experienced in relation to three facts that point to Baraya’s departure both from iconic depictions and from the idea of photography emulating painting which happens, for instance, in Oscar Gustav Rejlander’s pictorialist *Study of the Head of John the Baptist in a Charger* (c. 1855), or in the contemporary practice of appropriating historical paintings that relocate the principle of the *tableau vivant* to the photographic image. In *Head* there is an irregular shadow next to the mouth that could be initially assumed to be dry blood but actually has the same color of what mostly appears to be hair; the neck stands out quite unnaturally and does not fit the head depicted; there are paintbrush marks everywhere except parts of the face, beard, ears, neck and even in part of the cut where we can actually observe two necks for the head. Baraya produced this by resorting to double exposure and a controllable, handmade, double-mask paper filter, which made it possible to insert his photographic self-portrait — with a black turtleneck sweater — in the center of the photography of a painting depicting a plate, a tablecloth and a knife.

Within the context of art in Colombia, Baraya’s work apparently recalls Beatriz González’s playful paintings or “representations of representations” produced in the 1970s and 1980s. González, who was his painting teacher at the Universidad Nacional towards the end of the 1980s, appropriated photography both for recording and as part of a graphic art system that allowed her to cross borders between the “center” (Europe) and the “periphery” (Colombia),¹⁴ and between fine and popular arts. In *Klonk* (1974) she manually transferred onto a metal tray, a detail of a European painting found in *Salvat Encyclopaedia*, showing Salome holding a tray with the head of the Baptist. González exaggerated the contrast of colors, flattened the image, overlapped planes and mismatched unions emulating inaccurate printing systems used for popular religious stamps. *Klonk*, title which renders the sound of the metal tray when struck, puts the server in the role of Salome and humorously disrupts and subverts aesthetic contemplation, while ridiculing the social and cultural practice of mystifying paintings common among dilettanti and the middle class of the time.¹⁵ In a sense, González also achieved what Pop Art (which she has been partially linked to) had accomplished years before: to justify a “reliance on painting precisely because it was the medium [most celebrated and already established in the art world, and therefore] most able to concretize, [even if by

means of irony, manual transference, etc.] the contemporary image world" of popular culture and aesthetics.¹⁶

For its part, Baraya's *Head* nurtures a more photographic relationship between photography and painting, and between the artist and the cultural role of the sacred motif. Baraya converted the camera into a small laboratory and created a metapicture that "re-frames or recontextualizes the inner picture as 'nested'".¹⁷ In fact, Baraya produced a double folding by photographing a painting and photographically nesting his head in it. With this, Baraya created the experience of a historical low-tech uncanny that may be understood in contrast to Laura Mulvey's "technological uncanny". She adopted Ernst Wilhelm Jentsch's uncanny in order to describe her experience of encountering in Wall's *A Sudden Gust of Wind (After Hokusai)* (1993) an unknown or still "unmapped" digital world for restaging a past image. Wall's mastery, evidently preceded by Rejlander's virtuoso analogue photography (*The Two Ways of Life* (1857)), hides photographic montage and incompatibilities,¹⁸ melds "the photographic and the digital" and "movement and the inanimate". Baraya's, on the contrary, acts much in line with late 1990s art trends in Latin America that use low-tech operations not only due to technical constraints, but also for analysis and resignification.¹⁹ Baraya uses an already "mapped" world of images and historical techniques of analogue photography for staging an uncanny and complex repetition of the trauma motif. In order to "cannibalize" (as Oswald de Andrade would say) and "defeat" (as the artist himself characterized the process²⁰) Christian culturally instructed and internalized visual and corporeal figuration of trauma, *Head* recalls the Baptist's head but also *re-traces* it to the figure of Epimenides of Knossos. This ancient and profane reference of the decapitated prophet, was described by Diogenes Laertius as the man who, after unexpectedly sleeping for fifty-seven years,²¹ woke up with a super (Gr. *epi*) mind (Gr. *menos*) and the gift of prophecy (*propheteia*) i.e., the divine gift of interpreting the will of the gods. Yet, in this photographic retracing, Baraya seems to be asleep while comfortably wearing eyeglasses. These latter are not only a sign pointing to the low-tech operations utilizing the lens of an analogue camera, but also sign of the artist's shortsightedness. In other words, the eyeglasses affirm photography as a profane medium for interpreting the will and power of memories and cultural images of violence. At stake is the photographic *re-tracing* of figurations of trauma that are not under human control, and need a critical interruption since they have become referential for dealing with and communicating trauma and for the cultural circulation of images of trauma.

In this regard, it is not coincidence that the head barely "encircled" by a white rim ironically rearticulates dignified representations of authority and power found in bas-relief portraits on Medallions and (Sp.) *monedas* or coins. In this sense, *Head* is like a "premonitory" panel of a set of images that create and take advantage of the ambiguity of resemblances between photography and painting and recording and depicting, and of the instability of dissemblances of the figurability of trauma, while also critically rearticulating an economy of memories and cultural images of violence.

Cultural trauma and creative repetition

The series includes two panels that have the same dimensions as *Head* and offer a similar background as if recalling Freud's idea of the double as motif connected to the fear of death (see Figures 4 and 5). Like *Head*, they distance themselves from Catholic-colonial representations of sacred violence where relics are conceived as fragments of bodies witnessing Christ's passion and are ascribed to his mythical and hierarchical body. This is why there is always the need of naming the witness whose body has become such a locus, and of a hierarchy where lower parts of the body are less significant and influential.²²

In this regard, *Service Included* not only recalls the "democratic" power of photography, but also the fact that what is anonymous conveys a specific force in a redistribution of the sensorium, and offers itself as a "distancing process" constantly questioned, opening a space of free identification and difference. This is why it is also notable that two separate panels depicting a foot share the same title, instead of being called *Foot #1* and *Foot #2*, for instance. It is as if through a tongue-in-cheek adherence to the idea of only presenting on canvas those figures

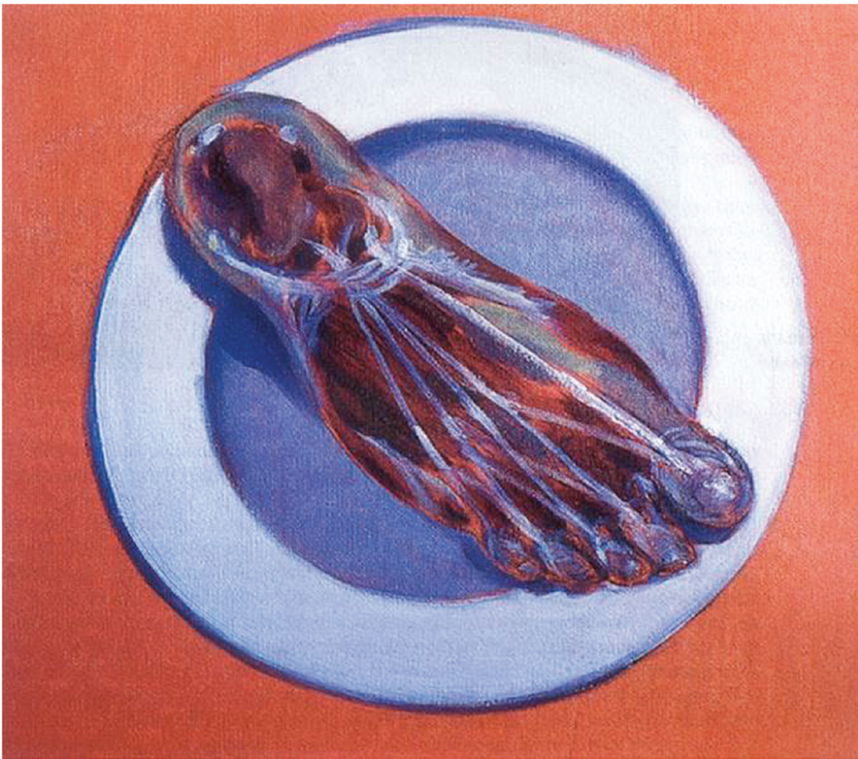


Fig. 4. Alberto Baraya, *Foot* from *Service Included* series, Cibachrome Photomontage, 30 × 30 cm, 1997. Credits to: Alberto Baraya. Image taken for review from: Álvaro Medina (ed.), *Arte y Violencia en Colombia*, Bogotá: Museo de Arte Moderno 1999.



Fig. 5. Alberto Baraya, *Foot* from *Service Included* series, Cibachrome Photomontage, 30 × 30 cm, 1997.

This is a photo of the framed panel. Credits to: Alberto Baraya.

everyone identifies in order to avoid confusion about the subject matter represented, Baraya also implies a potential for confusion and falsification through representation. Even if *Service Included* appears unimpressive at first sight, it slowly blooms and reveals itself as a set of pensive images/pictures that repeat and perform the often-observed figuration of trauma in a different manner; “figuration [that] denotes our aesthetic expectation — the anticipated resolution and arrangement of clichés that contributes to our modern classification of ideas and realities” and images.²³

In this direction, Baraya’s performative photography may be better described by resorting to Deleuze’s understanding of difference and repetition which, in turn, has finally entered photography discussions and performance philosophy, at least in the English speaking world,²⁴ since in Colombia it was already being discussed at the time by Consuelo Pabón, one of Deleuze’s students. According to Deleuze “art does not [have to] imitate, above all, because it repeats; it repeats all the repetitions, by virtue of an internal power”. This repetition of all repetitions describes the “power of beginning and

beginning again” via figures of clear expression of condensed events,²⁵ or as Pabón put it, via “the mask as subject of repetition”.²⁶ In this sense, while double masking in Baraya’s work is also a performative and dynamic process of “differentiation” (i.e., process of actualization),²⁷ repetition is less a matter of representing a distressed subjectivity, and more a process “to be embraced as perspective on a space of ‘displaced difference’”,²⁸ which critically and performatively re-articulates figures of cultural trauma.

Keeping this idea of creative and performative repetition in mind, it is worth noting that both panels entitled *Foot* arguably recall a *Schattenbild* (“shadow-image”) drawn by Albrecht Dürer (see Figure 6) i.e., a shadow projected on a plane through a pyramidal illumination where the sun is modeled as a point in space. While one may initially assume that axial, frontal, and lateral “shadow-images” were intended for accurately recreating the three-dimensional object, Dürer was rather guided by theoretical interests, as suggested in his famous statement: “because art is truly in nature, whoever can tear (*reißen*) art out from (*heraus*) nature, has it”.^{29,30} *Herausreißen* means extracting from (or “drawing out from”) nature and bringing something forth (*herausbringen*) with the drawing-figure. In line with the almost obsessive idea of measuring the figure (evident in his *Four books* and *Underweysung der Messung*), the “shadow-image” belongs less to the realm of the practical rules for geometrically copying from nature, and more to the realm of speculative inversion of mimetic logic and an artistic-driven research into how things or bodies appear once and again *within* the creative drawing-figure.

In this order of ideas, even if Baraya did not insert his right foot photographically into one of the panels titled *Foot*, he interrupted and traced the apparent depiction of a sacred relic back to Dürer’s “shadow-image”, highlighting the status of the series as

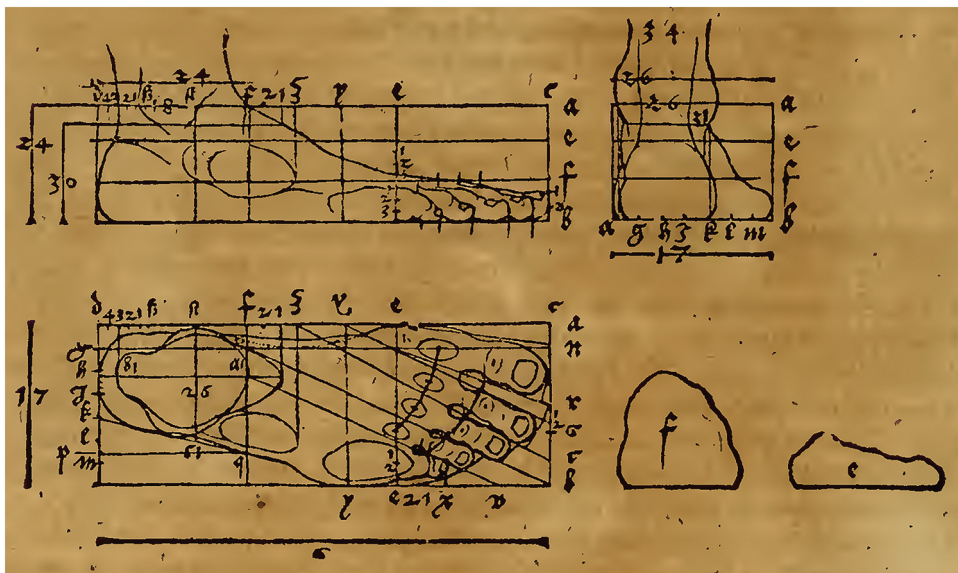


Fig. 6. Albrecht Dürer, [*Schattenbild*]. Taken from: Albrechten Dürer, *Hierin sind begriffen vier Bucher von menschlicher Proportion*, 1528, folio 25r. Credits to: Learning resources, glasgow school of art. CC BY-SA 3.0.

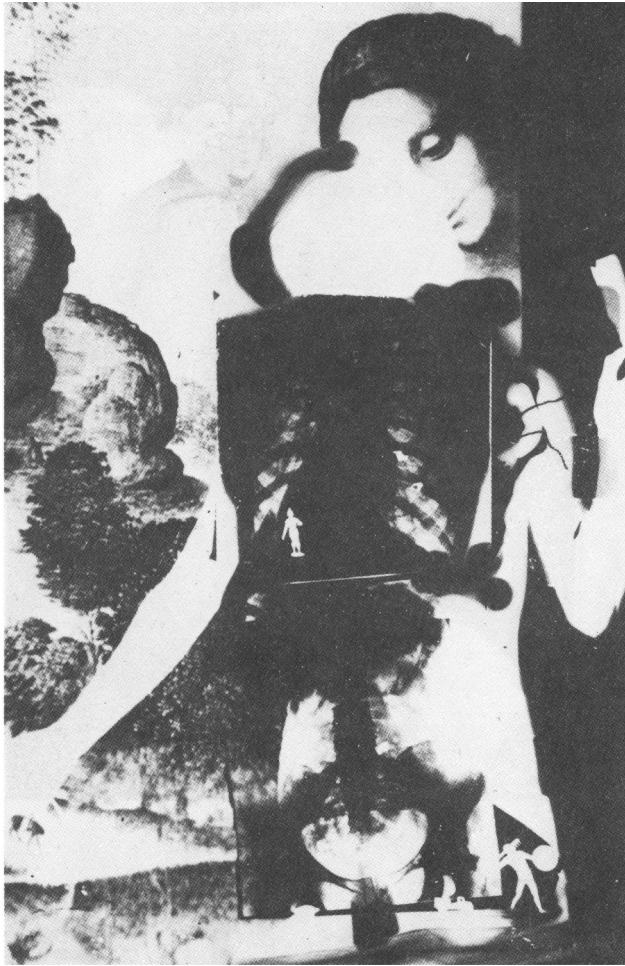


Fig. 7. Alberto Baraya, *Flowers for Leda*, Photography, photogram and chemical photography, 132 × 104 cm, 1992. Credits to: Alberto Baraya.

photographic-speculative and artistic research. This exploration was already taking form in Baraya's previous works like *Flowers to Leda* (1992) and *Observation of stigmata* (1995) where, in a practice akin to "rhizomatic photography",³¹ he produced metapictures that re-framed, nested, and recontextualized paintings and pictures (see Figures 7 and 8). In his method, the "shadow-image" is made to both resound with and distance itself from the desire that has permeated historical Western practices and discourses on analog photography, included Roland Barthes', of defining photography (as medium) via trauma; desire that Man Ray described in terms of the indexical image as something that "has tragically survived an experience", and is like "undisturbed ashes of an object consumed by flames".³² And yet, inspired by Dürer's inversion of mimetic logic in art history, Baraya experimented with photography in such a way that instead of tracing photography back to sacred relics and motifs of trauma, he traces sacred relics and motifs

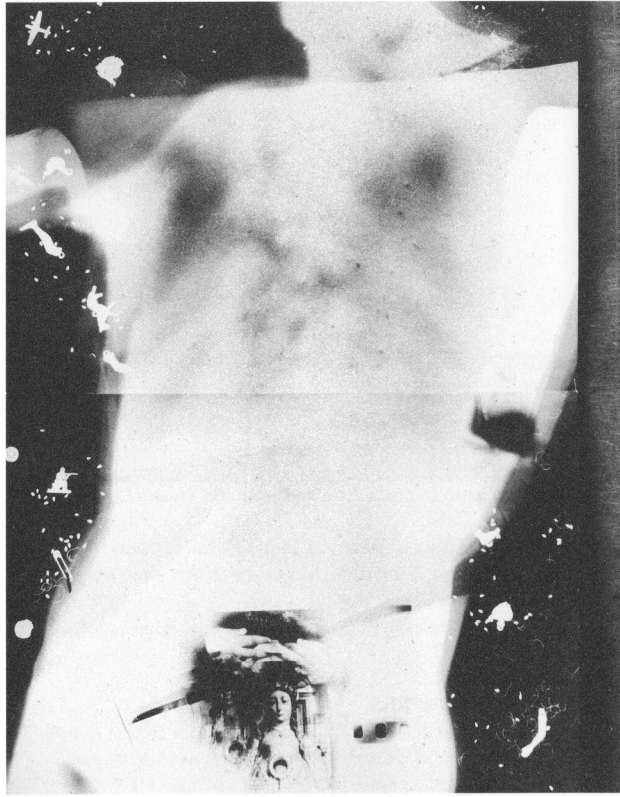


Fig. 8. Alberto Baraya, *Observation of stigmata*, photomontage, 132 × 104 cm 1995. Credits to: Alberto Baraya. Image taken for review from: *VII Salones Regionales de Artistas*, Bogotá: Granahorrar, 1995.

of trauma back to something like a desire for photographic operations; a desire that may enable us photographically think of trauma *within* a creative and decolonial repetition.

Relics and photography

Let us move to the next panel showing a left forearm in a glass jar, both placed against an enigmatic background that is more elaborate than those in *Head* and *Foot*. The panel shows an exterior space, apparently betraying Baraya's future interest in landscape (see [Figure 9](#)). It partially recalls René Magritte's enigmatic paintings constructed from photos, where there is a tension between illusionism and its self-subversion. Baraya creates an enigma by inserting an uncanny still life of an imposing forearm that formally links ground and sky and forces foreground and background to come together in counterfeit intimation. Are viewers then looking at a monumental arm and jar placed upon a flatland, or are they prey to an optical illusion with the set actually located on an embrasure? Whatever the case, one could use Deleuze to say



Fig. 9. Alberto Baraya, *Forearm in a glass Jar*, from *Service included* series, Cibachrome Photomontage, 38 x 30 cm, 1997. Credits to: Alberto Baraya. Image taken for review from: Álvaro Medina (ed.), *Arte y Violencia en Colombia*, Bogotá: Museo de Arte Moderno 1999.

that there is something like a continuous and vibrating region of intensities that obstructs orientation. Besides the fact of a forearm stuck in a glass jar, the panel gives away no narrative clues. Moreover, Baraya creates a folding and unfolding of realities within the photographic panel.

Nonetheless, one could be tempted to read *Forearm* as a mimetic representation of a forearm stocked for consumption, as per Medina's interpretation.³³ Similarly, Giraldo interpreted the panel as depicting a forearm for moral instruction as in post-mortem mutilations and Catholic relics. These interpretations recall what Deleuze named "organic" descriptions and narrations,³⁴ since they place the enigma outside of the panel — which ironically is partially why Deleuze himself understood

photography as mere representation. In addition, the aforementioned interpretations miss Baraya's reflection on and dialogue with the history of photography, and particularly his operative re-articulation of photography's indexicality.

In this case, let us notice the transparency of the container, which seems to have been metonymically transferred to the forearm. The panel seems to underscore the forearm as a crystallized body fragment and recalls Deleuze's idea of "crystalline description" as one that "stands for its object". When discussing this description, Deleuze adopted Gilbert Simondon's idea of a "seed crystal" that, when placed within a substance with certain conditions of internal resonance, communicates its shape to molecules of the substance, producing a process of individualization. One can read along these lines, the panel's enigma in terms of an "individualization" of each panel: apart from the centrality of the set forearm-jar (or foot-plate, or head-plate) as a "radiating" crystal seed, there is hardly anything else that can help the viewer to trace an order of intermediation between the outside or context-container (be that the landscape or the jar) and the inside or text (be that the forearm-jar set or the forearm itself, or even the title of the panel), nor help to discern the space and a temporal order for each panel. It is also worth noting that when looking closely at the hand in *Forearm* one sees that, through Baraya's "low-tech uncanny", his forearm and a skinned forearm initially painted on the canvas appear out-of-step in a way that shows the freezing of a process with no clear intermediation between the outside or container (i.e., skin) and the inside (i.e., bones and flesh) while suggesting a superposition of different temporal strata and spaces where there is no rejection of time but a suspension of temporal succession.

In *Forearm*, glass jar and forearm, photography and painting come together and even replicate each other enigmatically as if in a singularity (something similar happens between the painted foot and the plate). *Forearm*, like the other panels, photographically thinks of the crystalline regime and narrative at play in the referential image-object set for the material and visual culture of trauma: the sacred Catholic relic-reliquary set. Let us briefly explain this; first, by proposing a description of a crystalline regime and narrative for those sacred relics contemplated in the panels, and second, by discussing how Baraya's series breaks away from them.

The sacred reliquary (see [Figure 10](#)) is not just a container and a protective case for the sacred relic. It also becomes what the relic represents. When considering Voragine's account of the appearance of the relic of Saint John The Baptist's head in Marcellus' dream, and the violence and trauma associated to the story (in which, through contact with the pot, the head first mutilates the hand of a monk for not worshipping it and later heals it, again through contact, when the monk does worship it),³⁵ one notices an indiscernibility between relic and reliquary. This indiscernibility may be understood by appropriating Deleuze's ideas on the virtual and the actual,³⁶ and the crystalline description and narrative: while the reliquary is the actual image of that which passes (i.e., a supposedly human body that has passed), that is to say, the reliquary gives its actual presence and physical power to the relic, the relic is the virtual image of the past that is preserved within the reliquary, that is to say, gives its *virtus* (power and dignity) as Robert Bellarmine would say, to the reliquary. Moreover, and this is the key dynamic of the relic and the reliquary: the relic activates the reliquary as its container, armor, and medium of transmission and visual



Fig. 10. *Reliquary Arm of St. Valentine*, 14th century, Silver, partial gilt, sapphire (55.2 × 19.4 × 15.9 cm) Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917. Credits to: Metropolitan Museum of Art. Public domain, CC0 1.0 Universal. Accession number: 17.190.351a, b.

communication of blessing and violence, while the reliquary actualizes the relic's virtual power and authority via the former's physical strength and presence. The relic-reliquary set affirms two modes of existence combined in a circuit, in which the relic *qua* virtual image, and the reliquary *qua* actual image "exchange their roles and become indiscernible" through crystallization.³⁷ The latter is the case when the relic, not the reliquary, is assumed as "seed of eternal life",³⁸ and the reliquary becomes metaphor-metonymy of eternity.

This circuit and indiscernibility that may be described as a "crystalline regime" of the relic-reliquary set, takes place within and is grounded on a "crystalline narrative".

This is to say; the circuit and indiscernibility is substantiated by how worshipers make sense of a relic-reliquary set that apparently unsettles and forces them to find “a particular way to approach” it. Worshipers make themselves witnesses who cannot or will not react to the actual artificiality of the relic-reliquary set because they want to witness the enigma of crystallization that “poses inexplicable differences to the present, and alternatives which are undecidable between true and false to the past”.³⁹ It is the enigma of singularization and indiscernibility between an actual body part that has passed and the virtual body of Christ. Anomalies therefore become essential for worshipers instead of being accidental or contingent. In a sense, worshipers forge an impossibility in order to resolve the enigma by affirming its dogmatic truth. Here worshipers solve the fragmented relationship with God,⁴⁰ by assuming, on the grounds of a sacred text, that relics are “avatars of the signifier”,⁴¹ avatars of Christ’s body. The sacred text crystallizes the actual body that has passed and the virtual body of Christ. That is to say, the relic, in its double character as virtual image of the reliquary and the actual image of Christ’s body, may be regarded as the “seed crystal” of communication of Christian dogma, regardless of how paradoxical it may be.

For his part, Baraya thinks photographically and traces back the indiscernibility of the relic-reliquary set to the indiscernibility between an actual body in/of the painting-picture and the virtual body in/of the photographic image. Baraya converts said crystalline regime of relics into a photographic regime. He does so such that image/picture, actual and virtual body, come together as folding and unfolding of photography’s historical operativity. By going beyond postmodern appropriations, and keeping the cultural and symbolic context of violence in Colombia in mind (rather than Deleuze’s ontological and pre-social approach), Baraya’s series takes on a double memorial role. It does so not of the subjects it depicts (nor of distressed subjectivities or images) but of photographic techniques and history (including double masking, rayographs, etc.), and of photographic reproduction for singularizing the dynamic processes of photography and “differentiation”, and for disrupting figurations of cultural trauma and their circulation in trauma culture.

The set, the installation, the event

It is worth underlining that Baraya’s work is not just a set of enigmatic panels, but also an installation and solo exhibition. To be precise, *Service Included* is a performative set-installation-event for which the artist used circular flyer-coasters for the invitations. Here one may discern something akin to a “crystalline narrative” in Baraya’s work. On the recto, each flyer showed Baraya’s head as in *Head*, the title of the series and exhibition along with the event’s date and place (Figure 11). On the verso, Baraya’s CV was printed half-pretentiously for a young artist, but confidently affirming that the series-installation-event brought together his previous work and consolidated his photographic research on the intimacy between image and body. The invitation flyer-coasters, sent as invitations, exhibited as coasters on a couple of small dinner tables (as in a restaurant) and taken as souvenirs, are part of Baraya’s performative and communicational work, and may be regarded as another sort of



Fig. 11. Alberto Baraya, [Invitation flyer-coaster for the exhibition *Service Included* (recto)], print on paper, D. 9 cm, 1997. Credits to: Alberto Baraya.

moneda (“coin”) announcing a social ritual of circulation of images/pictures and memory of cultural trauma, and an exchange in which the artist himself performs roles of “Baptist”, artist-“executioner”, “commissioner”, and enchanting “Salome” serving and inviting the public to consume enigmatic photographic panels.

The series-installation-event intentionally recalled the ritual central to the famous iconography of Herod’s Feast, which has not only traditionally been regarded as “premonitory” of the Eucharist ritual but has also been a communicational structure of the aforementioned dogma. It is worth briefly dwelling on a pertinent case for comparison: Donatello’s famous bronze relief, where the executioner kneels in front of Herod and serves the head on a tray. In this panel, made around 1427, in which Donatello departed from the traditional script that placed the dramatic focus and guilt on Herodias and Salome,⁴² Herod recoils, awakes from drunkenness, and recognizes his part in the Baptist’s death. Remarkably, this small bronze was originally designed for Siena Cathedral’s baptismal font, that is to say, the setting for a ritual that

“awakens” new believers demanding they recognize the original and inherited sin-guilt. Interestingly, central to the consummation of this religious and moral ritual of “consumption” in Donatello’s bronze is one’s acceptance and compliance with what could be described as “becoming guilty without genuine guilt”. Meaning, to comply with a guilt that is both virtual and actual within a structure of resonance and communication of trauma in which participant subjects self-reference their current state to the original trauma (i.e., original sin).

In the particular case of *Service Included*, this ritual of compliance and ritual compliance with a “guiltless guilt” and the corresponding economy of trauma culture are both already addressed and problematized in the title. It is anything but capricious: it was — and still is — a Colombian expression used in restaurants for stating that a gratuity has already been added to the total, and for reminding customers to decide whether to agree with the total or not. Notably, as this expression demonstrates, the performative set-installation-event reveals guilt in a double sense of an already-given or actual gift (Lat. *gratuitas*) and the “guiltless guilt” that is virtually gratuitous, being both offered and/or identified by the motifs of cultural trauma and assumed or judged by the visitor. *Service Included* offers a sort of “crystalline narrative” that “allows insight into specifics of the colonial past as a pathway to integration of the traumatic memory”, and addresses, in a decolonizing mood as Mbembe suggested, the “entanglement of desire, seduction and subjugation”, “not only oppression” but also the “enigma of loss” in which people “have allowed themselves to be duped, seduced, and deceived”.⁴³

In this regard, *Service Included* seems to recall Baudelaire’s famous “Counterfeit coin”, where the writer criticized a friend who “confessed” to having given a fake coin to a beggar in exchange for 40 cents. Yet, as Baudelaire then admitted, his friend shocked him and interrupted his “reverie” and moral judgment with an even more shocking “confession”: “there is no greater pleasure than that of surprising a man by giving him more than he expects”.⁴⁴ Who then was the miserable man begging for a “gift”? The friend gave Baudelaire a doubly shocking confession that also revealed the poet’s gratuitous/given moral judgments. Baudelaire’s story is like a crystal narrative that creates a zone of indiscernibility, and offers inexplicable differences to the gift *qua* present, and undecidable alternatives between true and false to the past to the action of giving. Baudelaire gives us a paradox that, rather than resorting to a grounding text, offers a wide range of virtual gifts from which, as Deleuze would say, one may “derive one narration rather than another”.⁴⁵

Service Included may be considered a performative series-event of “counterfeit coins” in which Baraya gives less than iconological interpretations and visitors may expect, and more than they are culturally accustomed to. *Service included* serves panels and the corresponding sensory signs that interact and vibrate, offering a space of displaced difference and a range of gifts from which one may also derive one narration rather than another. In fact, *Service Included* may be regarded as a space of “displaced difference” where visitors may operate as subjects that, from their varied experiences and diverse relations to violence and trauma culture (relations which are always complex and rarely the same among a collective) may act out trauma culture, or rather assume the challenge of critically working through both cultural trauma and trauma culture by recreating and

interrupting the order of both understanding and desire of trauma culture itself. In this sense, and in line with the ideas of the “contingency” of the image’s truth in photography and the power and use of images/pictures,⁴⁶ *Service Included* points to a challenge and a possibility for posttraumatic photography.

Closing remarks

Ulrich Baer has identified, in discussions about posttraumatic photography, a dispute between those who believe that photography cannot give account of trauma because of photography’s illusive nature, and those who think that trauma cannot be recorded with photography. By resorting to Cathy Caruth’s ideas on trauma (dominant since the 1990s) and the crippling effects of trauma, Baer’s *Spectral evidence. Photography of trauma* (2002) transfers her ideas from the realm of writing to that of photography. In a similar fashion, Baer’s use of Mikael Levin’s series *War Story* (1997) for the cover and as key reference for his book, suggests that posttraumatic photography juxtaposes the “illusion of reality” and “reality imprint”,⁴⁷ since photography and trauma “both mark crises not of truth but of reference”, and “open questions not about their facticity but about the ways in which some events attain full meaning only in retrospect — or to use the Freudian term, *nachträglich*, or belatedly — and how this belated registration may facilitate or block remembering or forgetting”.

Margaret Iversen has also recently discussed posttraumatic photography in terms of the “unrepresentable”,⁴⁸ “invisible traces”, the indexicality as “trauma of representation”, and Freud’s *nachträglich*; notions that would easily apply, for instance, to Fernell Franco’s series *Bound* (1975–92), perhaps the most representative posttraumatic photography series in the Colombian context, but not to Barayas’ work. Baer’s and Iversen’s reformulations of photography’s indexicality under the assumptions of a Freudian reading of posttraumatic photography miss other key possibilities. This is especially true in colonial contexts and decolonial terms when, contrary to the canonical approach to trauma, there is no clear “historical sense of victims, perpetrators, and responsibility”, and when it is also needed to problematize, as Mbembe suggested, the complicity and the enigma of loss into which one has been seduced and deceived;⁴⁹ and into which a large part of the historical understanding of photography — here represented by Man Ray — has also been seduced. In this regard, one may appropriate Michael Rothberg’s recognition of correctly identifying the “need to supplement the event-based model of trauma”,⁵⁰ that, as others have also recognized, has assumed that the challenges for posttraumatic writing, and one may add photography, are to be basically located in the realm of the past, and that memory or the mnemonic challenge for writing and photography would be situated “entirely under the sign of post-traumatic melancholia”.⁵¹

Rothberg’s insight is still pertinent today as I write these lines. As Irene Visser has indicated, it “marks a clear start to the present ongoing discussion about the decolonization of trauma theory”.⁵² At stake is not a criticism that, as Rothberg described it, would naively accuse canonical trauma theory and photography theory of tending “to locate the trauma in the completed past of a singular event”,⁵³ as postcolonial studies were similarly accused of tending “to relegate colonialism to the past and thus block recognition of the

neo-colonial present". While it may be true that some European approaches to trauma since the 1990s tended to set aside "accounts for the sustained and long processes of the trauma",⁵⁴ the issue, as identified in *Service Included*, is rather one of reconsidering alternatives for the foundation of trauma studies and posttraumatic photography in Freudian psychoanalysis, in order to give account both of the long process of cultural/social trauma and colonialism, and of social/cultural structures and networks of communication and signification of the photographic image/picture.

The issue and challenge identified in Baraya's work also assumes a decolonial approach to cultural trauma that re-traces the symbolic active processes of working through trauma, or as Stef Craps puts it, "makes visible the creative" possibilities of trauma, rather than just the "pathological and negative", or the invisible and unrepresentable.⁵⁵ At stake is a decolonial aesthetic of photographically re-tracing motifs of cultural trauma (rather than "just" resorting to an "Aesthetic of recollection" of a "primordial event", as Mbembe suggests).⁵⁶ And this re-tracing is also a way of understanding photography not mainly in terms of crisis of reference (as Baer did for dismissing documentary photography), nor in terms of — primeval and mythic — events, but of events for the circulation of and operations of and with images in culture, striving to deal with cultural trauma and how it has permeated and disguised itself in canonical trauma culture and studies. Despite more than sixty years having passed since Fanon's recognition of both everyday forms of trauma and culture as sites of trauma, posttraumatic photography is still in need of sufficiently responding to the decolonial challenges he envisioned.

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Notes

1. Giraldo, "De la Anatomía piadosa," 225–227.
2. Medina, *Arte*, 52.
3. According to historians, *La Violencia* began with the assassination of Liberal Presidential Candidate Jorge Eliécer Gaitán (9 April, 1948), and ended in the first years of the "National Front" when Liberal and Conservative Parties agreed to share power in the Declaration of Sitges (20 July, 1957). Gaitán's assassination significantly increased tensions between both party elites and grassroots, which in turn have been understood as an extension and transformation of violence happening almost continuously since the independence from Spain in 1810. See: Sánchez, *Guerras*; Palacios, *Entre la Legitimidad*.

4. Guerrero-Hernandez, "Cuerpos en Dolor," 137.
5. Pécaut, "Presente, pasado y futuro," 32.
6. Alexander, "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma," 10.
7. Mbembe, "The Colony," 28–29.
8. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 130–131.
9. Christian, "Fanon and the trauma," 226.
10. Kristeva, *The Severed Head*, 58, 66.
11. van den Oever, "Cultural Trauma," 468.
12. Sprinson de Jesús, "57. Head of Saint John the Baptist on a Charger," 240.
13. Auerbach, "Figura," 45.
14. Traba, *Los Muebles*, 64 (my translation).
15. Jaramillo, *Beatriz González*, 100.
16. Wagner, "Tomorrow is here again."
17. Mitchell, "An Interview," 2.
18. Mulvey, "A Sudden Gust of Wind," 30–32.
19. Taylor, *Place and Politics*, 48, 165.
20. Interview with the artist. 15 February 2018.
21. Epimenides was honoured as god and regarded as a sculpture type of sleeping busts and heads denoting an introspective man blessed with foresightedness. Laertius, *Lives*, 109.
22. Giraldo, "De la Anatomía piadosa," 91.
23. Kramp, "Unburdening Life," 12.
24. Cull, *Theatres of Immanence*, 1.
25. Deleuze, *Difference*, 136 and 293.
26. Pabón, "Construcciones de cuerpos," 70.
27. Deleuze, *Difference*, 209 and 216.
28. Hoogland, *Violent embrace*, 79.
29. Kaufmann, "The Perspective of Shadows," 259.
30. "Denn wahrhaftig steckt die Kunst in der Natur, wer sie heraus kann reißen, der hat sie". Dürer, *Hierin sind begriffen*, folio 99 v (my translation).
31. Rhizomatic photography is understood as photographic exploration that emerges directly from "experience and full-engagement through sense-making with the singularity of each moment of experience". It interrupts paradigms of traditional representational practice, while researching into body practices, ethos, and cultural and social contexts of production and circulation of pictures/images. Sakr and Kucirkova, "Making the 'Here' and 'Now'."
32. Ray, "The Age of Light," 167.
33. Medina, *Arte*, 52.
34. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 126.
35. Remarkably, in de Voragine's account the saint-martyr's relic imposes veneration violently and exerts such violence "tactically" (which also means locally and tangibly) through its "fore" i.e., the pot. And the pot is not only affirmed as the head's extensive protection, but also as its weapon, which in Latin is said as arm. de Voragine, *Golden Legend*, 73–74.
36. Deleuze, "The Actual and The Virtual," 151.
37. See note 34 above, 123.

38. Since the relic is a seed, it is not rare that the “practice of dismembering or breaking the relic, far from being condemned, is cast as a natural act that envisions the relics as a sort of sustenance [...] Paulinus clarifies, ‘those bones of the saint’s body are not choked with the dust of death, but endowed with the hidden seed of eternal life’”. Hahn, “What do Reliquaries,” 295.
39. See note 34 above, 131.
40. Quevedo, *Un cuerpo para el espíritu*, 213.
41. See note 34 above, 137.
42. Lubbock, *Storytelling in Christian Art*, 193.
43. Mbembe, “The Colony,” 35.
44. Baudelaire, “Counterfeit coin,” 119.
45. See note 34 above, 137.
46. McCauley, “The Trouble,” 423.
47. Baer, *Spectral evidence*, 11.
48. Iversen, *Photography*, 1–9.
49. See note 43 above, 35.
50. Rothberg, “Decolonizing Trauma Studies,” 226.
51. Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, 210.
52. Visser, “Decolonizing Trauma Theory,” 251.
53. See note 50 above, 230.
54. See note 52 above, 252.
55. Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing*, 127.
56. See note 43 above, 39.

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