

*Edward James and Plutarco Gastélum in Xilitla*  
*Critical Paranoia in the Mexican Jungle*

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One day in 2004 my husband Joaquin and I found ourselves captivated by images on the monitors at the Mexico City airport (Figs. 1, 2). One could see a man in his sixties, a foreigner who spoke in English. He was rather fat, with long white hair as messy as his beard. He wore a malicious smile; his eyes had a mischievous look. Reminiscent of *Robinson Crusoe*, he carried a tropical bird on his shoulder. He was walking in an enveloping jungle, in the midst of strange architectural shapes and beautiful waterfalls.<sup>1</sup>

A long and fabulous journey eventually took us to the slopes of the town of Xilitla. Here we could see and feel *Las Pozas* (the pools), where Edward James had lived—an extraordinary site hidden in the depths of the Huasteca mountain range in the state of San Luis Potosi (Figs. 3, 4). It is still a remote place, even for Mexicans. This fabulous journey had brought such eagerness to our souls that our desire to visit the place became stronger than our fatigue. Surrounded by the vegetation and the buildings, our ascent and descent allowed the labyrinth to unfold progressively before our eyes, with its corridors, walls, enigmatic gates, and bridges without railings (Figs. 5, 6). We stopped suddenly at the foot of a case of stairs that lead nowhere, mesmerized by the sight of flowing water, the spray and the portentous sound of the green-blue cascades, the heavy and damp air, the unending sounds and hums. All this excited and charmed us as the incarnation of the jungle that inspired the European painters of the late nineteenth century like Ruggendas, Gauguin or the Douanier Rousseau—the latter was one of the painters James most admired. The landscape of the jungle in the north of México also fascinated the surrealist travelers and exiles of World War Two, specifically, Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varo, André Bretón, Antonin Artaud, and Gunther Gerszo, among others. It is the tropical America that also awakened my uncles' and aunts' passion for México when they arrived in the country during the war as Austrian Jewish refugees. This same jungle captivated us.

Edward James was a kind of Scrooge McDuck of European descent (Fig. 7).

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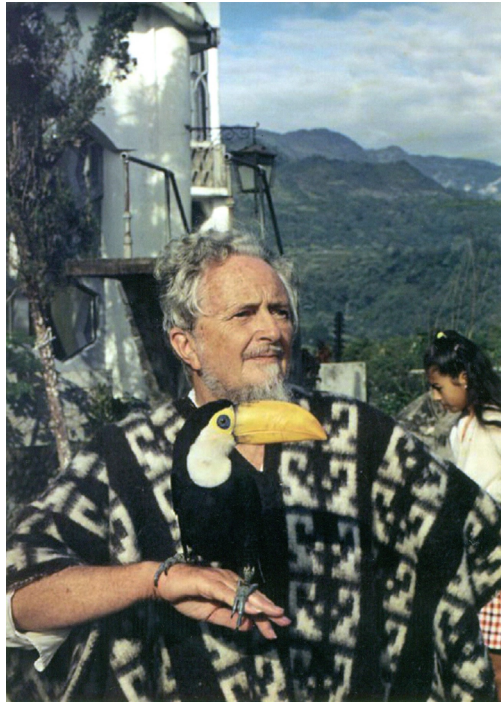


Fig. 1. Edward James with his toucan, n.d. Photo: Inés Amor, Galería de Arte Mexicano Archive, courtesy of Mariana Pérez Amor



Fig. 2. Las Pozas. Photo: Jack Seligson, 2007

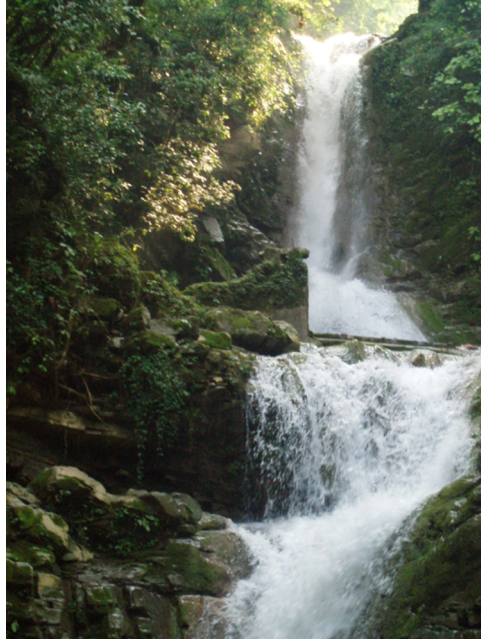


Fig. 3. Las Pozas. Photo: Irene Herner, 2008



Fig. 4. Edward James in a pool, n.d. Photo: Inés Amor, Galería de Arte Mexicano Archive, courtesy of Mariana Pérez Amor



Fig. 5. Las Pozas. Photos: Jack Seligson and Alejandra Fernández, 2007



Fig. 6. Las Pozas. Photo: Jack Seligson, 2007

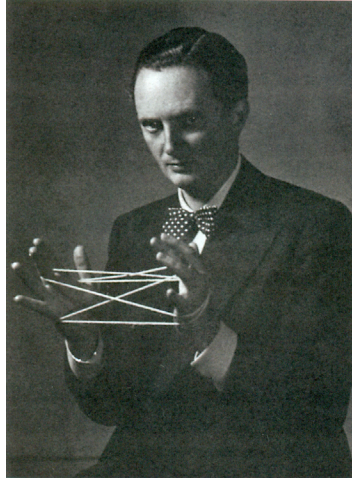


Fig. 7. Anonymous, photograph of Edward James, dedicated to Piti and Antonio Souza, ca. 1942, from Edward James, *In Despite of Death* (unpublished manuscript), courtesy of Guadalupe Souza

Born English/American, he inherited a fortune during the economic crash of 1929. It seems he could have bought anything he desired, but his desire led him down the path of art, especially poetry. He became a great friend and supporter of surrealist artists, including Salvador Dalí, René Magritte and Leonora Carrington. James met his future partner in México, Plutarco Gastélum, in Cuernavaca, Morelos, at a time when Gastélum worked for the local telegraph office (Fig. 8). He was of humble origins, born in the state of Sonora in northern México to an impoverished family. His mother kept her indigenous Yaqui culture alive; his father died when he was a boy, as had James' father.

Xilitla challenges, both as a locale and as a subject of research. Its complex iconography and history seemed to multiply exponentially when I was confronted by the voluminous autobiographical writings that are part of James' legacy. Some lay in oblivion in suitcases and trunks that fill a humid storage room in the middle of the rain forest. The richness of the written materials was confirmed when I had the opportunity to examine the extensive correspondence between James and Leonora Carrington in the private archives of West Dean College, the Sussex castle where James had lived with his family.<sup>2</sup> What did Edward James do with his considerable wealth and power? In collecting orchids and animals in the Sierra Potosina he found his own mythical vision. He did not want to be remembered as a multimillionaire collector and patron of several of the most important Surrealists. I found a testimony of that in his correspondence with René Magritte.<sup>3</sup> His correspondence and other literary work are confessional; he played with the idea that seen from the distancing panorama of time, his poetry would surprise the world. Ironically, James'



Fig. 8. Anonymous, photograph of Plutarco Gastélum in Europe, 1947, courtesy Plutarco Gastélum Llamazares

own heirs presented rather poorly this work by a man who considered himself a writer and a poet. The situation encouraged me to discover and analyze James' and Gastélum's motivations for construction. What rooted them in this particular geographic location in México? What thoughts and questions did they raise in Las Pozas, an extraordinary surrealist simulacrum of a romantic ruin?

I decided to research the papers contained in this documentary legacy, where I found prose and poetry, as well as postcards, photographs, etchings and drawings by James, together with photographs by Gastélum. Many are unpublished. Most are autobiographical and relate to James' Mexican experience. They include a number of letters to important personalities of the time, such as his correspondence with Carrington and with Inés Amor, the well-known Mexican modern art dealer, and also with the surrealist Hungarian photographer Katy Horna, with Igor Stravinsky, Salvador Dalí, René Magritte, and various members of the Gastélum family—James' Mexican family.<sup>4</sup>

Before I had access to James' archive, what I had read about the buildings at Xilitla conveyed a stereotypical impression of extravagance. Yet his concept of architecture built into the jungle caught my attention. Typically one has to clear vegetation in order to build. Here the opposite was true. Their architectural intervention in nature served to highlight its fertility and variety. Without knowing from the start what they were going to construct, James and Gastélum built this

architecture with a clear sense of their desires and their imagination.

The shared fantasy of both artists was to build a place that sprouted like vegetation. Their collaborative imagination combined James' cosmopolitan culture and Gastélum's discovery of his own Mexican culture. James introduced the treasures of European art to Gastélum. With this new refinement Gastélum could appreciate the treasures of the Indian past of México. Both were fascinated by the Mayan ruins of Chichén Itzá. In his relationship with James, Gastélum began to see himself through the lens of (western) aesthetics. He left behind a dream to become a boxer; after the years in Xilitla, he abandoned his ambition to become a Hollywood actor, a hope he had nurtured due to his good looks. James and Gastélum became architects who identified with the builders of ancient sites. Together they first dreamed about the existence of a place like this in 1947, upon their return from a bombarded, ruined and hunger-stricken Europe.

The actual construction of Las Pozas is crucial to appreciating the full power of the place. James and Gastélum explored their talents and possibilities through trial and error. Their work was a process, an experiment, and an exploration, in a renewed spirit of archeology, and with a sense of mystery inspired by abandoned ruins in the midst of marvelous gardens. Las Pozas transmits the romantic tradition of English Gardens. Xilitla's construction refers directly to the relationship between Edward and Plutarco. Following their own fantasies and dreams, both spent more than 30 years designing and producing this work of architecture. They created a place in which imagination builds strange, useless forms that are as real as conventional dwellings.

James and Gastélum built innovative forms inspired by Gaudí's spiritual constructions, Rodias' sanctuary in Los Angeles, as well as by the Ideal Palace built by the mailman Cheval in nineteenth-century France. These magical spaces demonstrated that architecture can be absolutely useless in practical terms and still give a sense of existence to life. Xilitla's Las Pozas activates the desire to coexist with birds, water, plants and animals, among them wild tigers and boa constrictors. It reveals the wish to inhabit a place where humans interact with and honor nature. Edward and Plutarco constructed a space that would evoke the aura of historical and magical sites such as Delphos, Chichén Itzá and Machu Pichu. James summed up in verse their mutual artistic statement:

Return! Return warm breathing god!  
Speak—and if it please you, tell me now  
of what we have well planned together! How  
the secret castle in the tropic hills  
shall from the cliffside flower, and how our pools  
shall rival the dark lakes of deities  
who lived here in the Mayan past before.

But to its cascades, clear and tall and cool  
will never come the teasing jungle flies...<sup>5</sup>

Xilitla's Las Pozas is an artistic installation that tells a love story. Always in love with love, James gradually convinced Gastélum that the construction could be a means to build an elusive intimacy, a relationship between two discrete individuals. Over the years Las Pozas became an unexpected creation in the Spanish-speaking world. It establishes a dialogue between the fertile Mexican Sierra (the Sierra Madre Oriental), the Gothic ghosts of England and Europe, and pre-Columbian remains. All this is seen through the lens of Romanticism. It was given new life by Surrealism and embodied in the refugees who came to México fleeing Hitler.

I found a new way to envision the Tarzan myth in James' and Gastélum's constructions and discovered their actualization of the myth of Noah. I was able to confirm the clear relationship James established with patterns of thought in *Robinson Crusoe's* characters. The setting offered by Xilitla corresponds to the mythical virgin island, an unknown space in the middle of the ocean. In lieu of an ocean, it is a site surrounded by the green Sierra, as James envisioned it at the end of World War II and at the start of the Cold War in 1945. The isolation of the place puts into question the ethical, aesthetic and sexual principles of western culture. This was a society in a state of decomposition, from which it was good to escape. James seemed to think that an ultimate hideout needed to be found. A synthesis of European culture had to be forged elsewhere.

James and Gastélum are not exactly similar to the characters Robinson and Friday. As Hegel would say, they are identical in their difference. Their architectural creation is unique and special. It is emotionally moving because it reconfigures the conventional story of master and slave, of lover and loved. In Socratic terms, James is the man pregnant with Eros' virtues—linking divinity with everyday life in order to attain beauty, wisdom and goodness. He is a man capable of dematerializing love in order to guide the beloved toward it. Eros is the energy that connects souls in search of meaning beyond daily life. James' energy was exiled from the world and charged with a desire for beauty, wisdom and goodness. Beyond the reproductive Eros, love is a desire of the soul; it is portrayed not only as a body, but as an object of beauty. The Socratic teacher provides his pupil's education so that they can climb the ladder of beauty together.<sup>6</sup> Seen from the perspective of an ideal of love, the question becomes how to sublimate sexual desire in order to channel that energy along unexpected paths. Nonetheless, sexual desire is mysterious and uncontrollable. As part of nature Eros will always be an unpredictable temptation.

An artistic collaboration that bonds two people together in time usually involves and attracts many others. In addition to the team of laborers who carried out the Englishman's and the Mexican's fantasy, a third role is played in this story by Marina Llamazares. Born in Xilitla, she married Gastélum in a huge wedding



where James insisted that the entire village recognize Gastélum as the manager of his land and his possessions. Ultimately the mother of three daughters and a son, Llamazares gave unstintingly of herself to bring a practical, day-to-day continuity to this herculean creation. She thought of it as an inheritance for Gastélum's children, who sold it in 2007 to the Fondo Xilitla for its preservation.

On his first trip to México in 1944 James shared with the other surrealist artists a fantasy of being the castaway in time, albeit with a twentieth-century mentality. He desired to find a wild space where he could exist in freedom and without guilt, repression, or imposition. His writings openly identify with the biblical myth of Noah's Ark, an important antecedent to the oceanic myth of the colonial western world represented by the figure of Robinson Crusoe and in other maritime adventurers such as Edgar Allan Poe's Arthur Gordon Pym, who James also admired. This identification is expressed in Magritte's portrait of James (Fig. 9).<sup>7</sup>

Myth actualizes an unconscious flow of images of perfect places in which sensuality plays a central role in the realization of a mystic communion between man and nature, where nature is the embodiment of the sacred. The connection between Surrealism and the colonial mentality revises the romantic relationship to "primitive" man and to archaic prototypes. Colonialism contrasts a fascination with "foreign parts"—the poetic nineteenth-century expression for other lands and for the exotic—with a distaste for ordinary life, especially in the industrialized world and its consequent wars.

Colonialism furthermore appropriates the notion of the modern utopia from the biblical model of paradise. The colonial adventurer is always in search of extraordinary sites. Sometimes he finds them through a shipwreck or as a castaway. The colonial adventurer's ideal place revives the story of Noah. It has to do with the idea of realizing society differently somewhere else, yet in accordance with the European ideals of value, well-being and beauty. The painful dedication of oneself to the finding or building of a new Shangri-La is also at the core of the narratives and artworks produced in Latin America by European surrealist exiles, the refugees and immigrants of the Spanish Civil War and World War II.

One finds nostalgia for origins in Mexican popular art, pre-Columbian art, and in modern art—as, for example, Picasso found in the masks of colonial Africa, and that Gauguin found in the young women of the French colonies of the South Sea Islands. Leon Trotsky, Diego Rivera and André Breton agreed upon this at the start of World War II. The catalogue of the 1940 "International Exhibition of Surrealism" at the Galería de Arte Mexicano, organized by Breton, Wolfgang Paalen and César Moro, and directed by James' close friend and supporter Inés Amor in Mexico City, established just how deeply the refugee-surrealist artists venerated the Mexican landscape, pre-Columbian art and mestizo culture. This was a culture they understood (as did D.H. Lawrence before them) as the expression of an unconscious mythological force, pulsating wildly at the foundation of modern art in México.



Fig. 9. René Magritte, *Not to be Reproduced* (Portrait of Edward James), 1937, oil on canvas, Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam, Holland © RENÉ MAGRITTE/ADAGP/SOMAAP México/2014

On one of the walls of the primitive wood and bamboo cottage (ark) that is mounted inside an imposing stone structure lined with columns—known as *la Cabaña de Don Eduardo* that he built as a refuge surrounded by the jungle in Las Pozas—James composed a pair of allusive verses. Time has begun to erase the words:

My house grows like the  
Chambered nautilus.  
After a storm opened a larger room...

The deluge comes; and it is after me,  
after my light... It comes to swallow up  
the flame of my identity.  
The house is all assuaged and waiting for its Lord...

While visiting the Caribbean on a cruise in the early '50s James wrote one of many letters to Leonora Carrington, a fundamental friend with whom he shared a surrealist and magic vision of México, along with a mutual love/hate for the country so different from his own. He told her, "How Henri Rousseau would have loved Xilitla, with its fantastic tropical leaves. Because this artist really saw the jungle and recognized the magic of Tropical America."<sup>8</sup> In another letter he writes, "I was too busy dreaming about having a house on stilts like a Noah's Ark, or something of that sort, and now I have got one and can be unpunctual in it to my heart's content. Unfortunately, at the moment it is beyond four impassable rivers—and may even have floated away, with all my animals in it."<sup>9</sup>

In my early research on Las Pozas I found that the autobiographical literature on James persists in emphasizing issues of sexual identity. In Xilitla I was confronted with the taboo regarding his relationship with Plutarco Gastélum. The burden of silence made me aware of the ghost of homophobia.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, Las Pozas is not a spontaneous creation. On the contrary; the relationship that Edward James established with art—as he and Gastélum expressed it in Xilitla—is directly connected to the statements and artworks of different artists, especially Magritte and Carrington. More specifically, the artwork is a consequence of James' friendship with Salvador Dalí between 1928 and 1939. It seems to me that Las Pozas is an interpretation of Dalí's "critical-paranoiac" method, since the quest to systematize unconscious sexual desire lies at the root of this famous method.

By the late twenties Dalí was well acquainted with Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. On July 19, 1938, Stefan Zweig took Dalí and James to meet with the aging and ailing Dr. Freud, who had recently taken refuge from the Nazis in England. The next day James wrote to his friend Christopher Sykes about this encounter:

“Yesterday, the afternoon after the ball, I went with Dalí to visit Dr. Freud. That was a very moving experience and a great deal more interesting than Audrey’s party...I must only add that Dr. Sigmund Freud, aged 82, is adorable. He is full of sparkle though a little baffled at moments by having newly become a bit deaf. He talked to me for a long while, during which Dalí sketched him hastily but accurately into a drawing book...”<sup>11</sup> Dalí recounted the meeting with Freud from his own point of view. He told Freud that he thought James was indeed crazy, that this was his best asset, and that Freud should psychoanalyze him.

Ernst Jones published Freud’s letter to Zweig in his biography of Freud: “I really owe you thanks for bringing yesterday’s visitors,” Freud wrote. “For until now I have been inclined to regard the surrealists, who apparently have adopted me as their patron saint, as complete fools (let us say 95%, as with alcohol). That young Spaniard, with his candid fanatical eyes and his undeniable technical mastery, has changed my estimate. As to your other visitor, the candidate (the poet, Edward James), I feel like making it not easy for him, so as to test the strength of his desire and to achieve a greater measure of willing sacrifice. Psychoanalysis is like a woman who wants to be won but knows that she is little valued if she offers no resistance. If your J. spends too much time in reflecting he can go to someone else later, to Jones or to my daughter...”<sup>12</sup>

Dalí never recognized the artist in Edward James. For him James was only a super-rich friend—a friendship shared with Garcia Lorca—and a collector of more than 190 of his works. Yet James’ personal contact with Dalí, and his possession of and life with the artist’s paintings, deeply touched all levels of consciousness. James shared the concept of *los putrefactos* (the putrefied) with Lorca and Dalí in a series of drawings and texts that expressed the putrid face of old moral and aesthetic conventions. A new and open way of life sprang from the putrefaction of the dead, from chaos and from decay.<sup>13</sup> Dalí stressed: “My shit is an integral part of myself.”<sup>14</sup> Dalí did not relate as much to the aging Freud as he did to the much younger French psychoanalyst Lacan, who also admired Dalí’s innovative way of thinking and painting. Lacan recognized that Dalí’s point of view opened a way to understand paranoia, not only as a psychotic disease treated by psychoanalysis, but also as a way to systematize delirious thought through the production of works of art.

Describing Lacan’s doctoral thesis of 1932, *Of Paranoid Psychosis in Its Relationships to Personality*, Dalí wrote that

[Lacan] threw a scientific light on a phenomenon that is obscure to most of our contemporaries—the expression: paranoia—and gave it its true significance...The delirium itself is a systematization... All I had to do was to organize the conquest of the irrational in function to my gifts of genius. I always go straight to the heart of the problem in all my thoughts and in all my actions...All my

art consists in concretizing with the most implacable precision the irrational images I tear out of my paranoia. I have perfected the most systematic and evolutionary of surrealist methods for the conquest of the irrational...The surrealist artist-poet must materialize in the concrete the forms of the delirium which is the secret road leading to the unknown world of paranoia.<sup>15</sup>

I see Xilitla's surrealist installation as a work of precisely such redeemed delirium. In his only novel *The Gardener Who Saw God* (published in England in 1937), James refers to the gardener in the story, Joseph Smith Frankenstein (sic), who worked for a "surrealist milord who had a Gothic castle in Leicestershire...a gentleman of a very thick and sanguine appearance who had even posed for the cover of *Le Minotaure*..."<sup>16</sup> In phrases like these James actually describes himself as a member of the French Surrealists. Amongst other things, he was a patron of the famous journal *Minotaure*.

In the 1930s, Dalí and James remodeled Monkton, the hunting lodge at West Dean castle and James' English home, according to a surrealist mind set. They converted some of Dalí's painted images into furniture pieces, like the sofa in the form of lips that was included in the 1934 *Portrait of Mae West*. Yet they never realized their original interior-decoration fantasy of converting the living room into a simulacrum of the innards of a dog, where one could listen to the animal's organic noises and beating heart, an image equivalent to fantastic stories about characters who had survived inside the belly of a legendary whale: a return to the womb. Xilitla gave him more opportunities to develop critical paranoia in a material sense.

In Xilitla as well as in the text of his novel James made the connection between the mindset of Dalí's simulacra and the English tradition of "follies" that were built into famous English gardens. In his novel James wrote that "In his extensive grounds and gardens, on the elms of his park and among the fountains of his pleasure lawns, the surrealist peer had lavishly practiced and installed the theories and emblems of the new movement; grand pianos carved in marble might be seen perched in the upper branches and colossal poached eggs of painted alabaster swam or seemed to swim like nenuphars in the pools."<sup>17</sup>

Dalí confessed: "I define the critical-paranoiac method as a great art of playing upon all one's own inner contradictions with lucidity by causing others to experience the anxieties and ecstasies of one's life in such a way that it becomes gradually as essential to them as their own...Creating a controlled delirium gave me the upper hand over my terrors and allowed me to fascinate the others..."<sup>18</sup> Visitors sense such a fascination at Xilitla's atmospheric site. Dalí continued, "I created surrealist objects of symbolic connotations...The point was to invent an irrational object that as concretely as possible would translate the raving fantasies of a poetic mind."<sup>19</sup> James agreed that the artist had to possess this type of vision.

Dalí as well as James regarded the architect Gaudí “a great wizard of the future... He appeals to all of our senses and creates the imagination of the senses. Through him, everything is metamorphosis, nothing is taboo nor set any longer, the Gothic rejoins the Hellenic, which in turn merges into far Eastern forms. He calls forth paranoiac vision and multiplies all interpretations...”<sup>20</sup> James’ and Gastéllum’s built forms are similarly an eclectic appropriation of a multiplicity of styles (Figs.10, 11). As understood by the Las Pozas architects, by way of Dalí’s way of thinking, visual art can produce double images, show one thing that is something else at the same time; it can invent realities, refusing conventional, socially accepted ones. The surrealist artists believed that their works were a consequence of “man’s right to his own madness.”<sup>21</sup> Art is an activity that produces objects, the perfect space to deconstruct and reconstruct the world according to unconscious desire.

In 1939 James collaborated with Dalí on a show commissioned for the New York World’s Fair. The subject matter was the goddess Venus. The artist presented a giant icon of Botticelli’s *Dream of Venus*, along with a contrasting image of a siren composed of a fish’s head and a woman’s body, instead of the traditional fish body without genitals. John Lowe, James’ biographer, wrote, “Dalí had been invited to create what the press release described as a three-dimensional phantasmagoria in the amusement area of the World’s Fair, opening on the 16<sup>th</sup> of June. Edward had put up nearly half the money and soon became deeply involved. Yet, the dream of Venus turned into a nightmare when nothing worked and the American promoters vulgarized it” by asking the live Venuses—invited by the artist to swim naked in the pond—to wear bikinis.<sup>22</sup> Dalí and his wife Gala returned to Europe, while James was left in New York to pay the cost of this unfortunate surrealist undertaking. Yet in 1979 James’ desire to build installations and simulacra was still very much alive. He wrote to his friend Mae that he would like to rescue Leonardo’s famous colossal horse, the biggest plaster sculpture of its time, which had survived for only a few months and was destroyed during a war against France.<sup>23</sup> He told her, “if I were as rich as certain myths like to pretend I am... this is what I would do: as there is no sculpture of a horse by Leonardo in existence, the nearest thing to it...is an equestrian statue in bronze by Verrocchio. This is in Venice, in a *piazzetta* in one of the narrow canals. It is quite splendid, and must be very near to what Leonardo da Vinci’s horse must have been...Well, I would get this bronze horse copied exactly (without the rider, of course) and blown up in exactly the same proportion as the original...five to eight times larger. The entire statue would resemble a miracle of reconstruction or restoration... Then...I would take ...it to the jungle at Xilitla and place it on the summit of one of my waterfalls, where it could be seen from many hundreds of yards away...The site showing both the cascade, the sheer rock precipice crowned with ... tropical vegetation, giant primordial forest trees and trailing lianas, among vivid ferns of every conceivable variety, over carpets of



Fig. 10. José Aguilar, Wooden molds, n.d., courtesy Plutarco Gastélum Llamazares



Fig. 11. Left: Edward James, *Postcard to José Aguilar*, recto and verso, courtesy Plutarco Gastélum Llamazares. Right: Edward James, drawing, n.d., ink on paper, Irene Herner/Xilitla Archive

moss, richer than the richest green velvets. The whole effect would be, I feel, a bit reminiscent of Magritte.”<sup>24</sup> It seems evident that this way of thinking stems directly from Dalí.

After 1945 James sold many of his Dalí paintings; *Solitude paranoïaque-critique* (1935) was among them (Fig. 12). The painting presents a landscape in which the vegetation appears to be transforming into an old automobile. Is nature devouring or producing it? A metamorphosis takes place between nature’s creation and the man-made object. It is a double image of an enveloping nature and at the same time an image of the automobile destroying the flora. According to James’ ideals, artists could rebuild God’s creation. Edward and Plutarco were likely guided by Dalí’s painted simulacra in building an atmospheric space in Xilitla, both installation and an architectonic universe. To fill the void of decay that bad winters had caused in the garden, and that had killed many orchids and exotic plants—some of which James had brought from his many trips around the world—the two designed and constructed an impressive variety of peculiarly-colored cement columns and capitals in the form of trees and flowers. Death was then exorcised in building capricious artistic forms that survived for a time and then became ruins, enveloped by renewed natural vegetation.

Through his personal friendships with Dalí, Magritte, Leonor Fini, Carrington, Remedios Varo, Kati and José Horna, and Pedro Friedeberg, Surrealism inspired James. Perhaps he was most affected by Surrealism’s notion that unconscious thought and delirium can become a tool or a game of knowledge which transforms chaos into creativity. This could take place not only in painting, but also in planting building-objects in marvelous natural spaces. James related to Gastélum how impressed he had been by Dalí’s brilliance and by his ability to articulate in words and images what had not been expressible previously. His encounter with the Catalan artist left an indelible mark on James’ development and on his systematization of his own delirium. James liberated his fears by means of his erotically charged dialogue with Gastélum. The two discovered different means of expression and play. A magic spell is still cast today because of their ability to reinvent images of anguish into new forms.

In 1947 the dandy arrived in Xilitla—a lost village in the middle of the Sierra— driving an expensive car, and accompanied by the good-looking Plutarco Gastélum. The testimonials we have about Edward and Plutarco progressing into old age indicate a major shift in attitude.<sup>25</sup> Along the way James discovered that the putrefaction, mortality, and decay he had discussed with Dalí and Lorca had become tangible in his and his partner’s own decaying bodies, and was materialized as architecture. As Dalí did, James and Gastélum entered into their own delirium and thereby intervened in nature in Xilitla. They used their own unconscious processes to act upon nature. In an unending and inconclusive creation, they brought about rebirth after decay. A metamorphosis took place in James and Gastélum over the



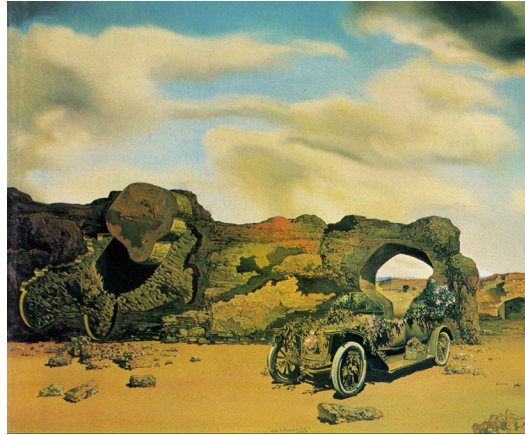


Fig. 12. Salvador Dalí, *Solitude paranoïaque-critique*, 1935, oil on wood. Private collection © SALVADOR DALÍ/ADAGP/SOMAAP/ México/2014



Fig. 13. Edward James in the midst of the jungle, n.d. Photo: Inés Amor, Galería de Arte Mexicano Archive, courtesy of Mariana Pérez Amor



Fig. 14. Plutarco Gastélum on the outskirts of Xilitla, 1978, Photo: Luis Félix, courtesy Plutarco Gastélum Llamazares

course of more than 30 years, between James' travels around the world and his returns to Xilitla. Moving beyond dandyism to artistic experience, and with the aid of nature in Xilitla, they transformed the trajectory of their personal lives into a creation that remains a poetic delight (Figs.13, 14).

Tepoztlán, December 5, 2013

1 This essay is based on my book *Edward James y Plutarco Gastélum en Xilitla. El Regreso de Robinson* (México: Facultad de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales, UNAM, Gobierno de San Luis Potosí, CONACULTA, Fundación Pedro y Helena Hernández, 2011). See this volume for more detail on the ideas presented here, as well as documents and other questions related to the subject. I thank Ellen Landau for her suggestions, as well as Barbara Fagan and Claudia Mesch, for editing the text in English.

2 Courtesy of Sharon Michi Kusunoki, West Dean College.

3 David Sylvester, *Magritte Catalogue Raisonné* (The Menil Foundation, Philip Wilson Publishers, London, 1992).

4 Surrealist photographer Katy Horna was born in Hungary. Her family name was Katy Deutsch Blau (1912-2000); she married the Andalusian artist José Horna. Both lived in México since 1939 as refugees from the Spanish Civil War. In December 2013, the Museo Amparo in Puebla, México, showed the first retrospective of her intriguing and sensitive surrealist images. I was able to study this material thanks to Inés Amor's daughter Mariana Pérez Amor, current head of Galería de Arte Mexicano.

- 5 Edward James, "Return warm breathing god," in *The Heart and the Word* (Tegucigalpa, Christmas Day, 1951), 78-80.
- 6 Bruce S. Thornton, "The Ladder of Erotic Beauty," in *The Myth of Ancient Greek Sexuality* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 210-212.
- 7 Edward James, *In Despite of Death* (1957). This book is about Gilgamesh and is written and painted by hand. The book was a gift to his Mexican friends Pity and Antonio Souza, owners of the Souza Gallery in México City.
- 8 Edward James, letter to Leonora Carrington. Edward James Foundation Archive, West Dean College.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 There are many documents, letters, photos and other material that give testimony to the close relationship between James and Plutarco, and to James' sexual notions.
- 11 Edward James letter to Christopher Sykes, reprinted in John Lowe, *Edward James, Poet, Patron, Eccentric: a Surrealist Life* (London: Collins, 1991), 144.
- 12 Ernst Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*, introduction by Lionel Trilling (New York: Basic Books, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, 1961), 523.
- 13 Rafael Santos Torroella, *Los Putrefactos de Dalí y Lorca. Historia y antología de un libro que no pudo ser* (Madrid: Publicaciones de la Residencia de Estudiantes, 1998), 17.
- 14 Interviewed by André Parinaud in *The Unspeakable Confessions of Salvador Dalí* (1973), trans. Harold J. Salemason (London: Quartet Books, 1980), 114.
- 15 Parinaud, 140-141.
- 16 Edward James, *The Gardener Who Saw God* (New York: Scriber's, 1937), 109.
- 17 Ibid., 110.
- 18 Parinaud, 17 and 91.
- 19 Ibid., 119.
- 20 Ibid., 146-147.
- 21 Ignacio Gómez de Liaño, *Dalí* (New York: Rizzoli, 1982), 30.
- 22 Lowe, *Edward James*.
- 23 Edward James, letter to his friend Mae; Irene Herner and the Xilitla Archive.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 James died in 1984 and Gastélum in 1990.