Media Culture and Heritage: Curating Outsidership

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Abstract

This article looks at current and future issues in the field of art, science, and technology—from the challenges of its own historicizing process to the curatorial exclusion of cultural heritages usually located at the margins of mainstream research. It argues the need for "other" histories and knowledge inclusion from overlooked sources such as oral cultures. With a few curatorial examples coming from Brazil, the paper emphasizes the social inequities in that country, as well as a deep-rooted colonial mindset, unfortunately still dominant in many circles. By emphasizing critical and original examples of artists, critics, and curators who uphold contemporary art alongside heritages from black, indigenous, folk and outsider groups, the paper examines strategic uses of technology, for instance, in the phenomena of the *rolezinhos*, and that of a nomad museum.

Keywords

Brazil, Heritage, Margin, Mário Pedrosa, *Technophagy*, Technological Disobedience, *Rolezinhos*, Virtual Museum.

Introduction

In a recent message to the art, science and technology community, Roger Malina, the executive editor of *Leonardo*, celebrated the 50th anniversary of this significant publication by asking us to reimagine the next fifty years of the organization. In this paper I address the future by reflecting upon past exclusions of knowledge and heritages. How can one envision a future that is less socially polarized and weaponized, in which identities are hybrid and fluid, agency distributed, and colonialist mindsets rendered obsolete? The follow excerpt from Malina's email points out to how much has been accomplished since 1968:

> Leonardo will be celebrating its 50th anniversary soon, marking the first published issue in 1968. How the world has changed. And with those changes, many goals of Leonardo's founders have been achieved. The international art/sci and art/tech communities of practice are thriving; university programs for hybrid art-science-technology professionals have emerged; companies are hiring "T-shaped" experts who bridge art, design, science and engineering disciplines; and artists can now write professionally about their own work, bypassing the art critics who insisted in the 1960s that "if you can plug it in, it can't be art." … But our community still faces many problems and new opportunities have arisen in a world that is being disrupted by life-enhancing and life-threatening changes, from digital culture to climate change.[1]

Certainly gone is the new media optimism of previous decades, when artists and theorists such as Vilém Flusser in the 80s, hoped that the two-way exchange of telematics would bring about an added freedom. But, as the curators of the exhibition *Without Firm Ground: Vilém Flusser and the Arts* pointed out, Flusser's hope for a global telematic community based on dialogue "has its back to the wall at the beginning of the twenty-first century"[2]. Nevertheless, there are multiple examples of curatorial and critical reflections that expands the field while envisioning less dystopian future developments.

Media Histories and the Pursuit of the New

For those with access to the latest technology, cultural production has entered a new stage of remix in which the never-ending archive of digital material can be employed in ever more generative ways that did not exist prior to the time of new media.[3] This idea of the

[1] Roger Malina, "A Special Message from Leonardo", email from *Leonardo/ISAST*, November 17, 2016.

[2] The exhibition, *Bodenlos — Vilém Flusser und die Künst* [*Without Firm Ground — Vilém Flusser and the Arts*] was curated by Siegfried Zielinski and Baruch Gottlieb in cooperation with Peter Weibel, and showcased by two German venues: the ZKM in Karlsruhe, Aug. 14 and Oct. 18, 2015, and the Akademie der Künste in Berlin, Nov. 19, 2015 to Jan. 10, 2016; in addition to one Dutch venue, the West Den Haag, from March 19 to May 7, 2016.

[3] Eduardo Navas, "Regenerative Remix." accessed October 23, 2016,

constant generation of new material, increasingly in real time, is not, however, without its own paradoxes. Consider, for instance, the difficult task of preserving media art from the 1990s.

The ambitious archival project "Net Art Anthology," being developed by *Rhizome* in partnership with the New Museum, faces many challenges in its goal to preserve Web art from the 90s decade (when the World Wide Web was a new unconstrained medium, an anti-hierarchical, utopian, uncharted space). Among the trials of revisiting these artworks are technical and ontological questions faced at every step of the restoration process. They mostly relate to system upgrades, as "browsers from fifteen or twenty years ago won't work on today's computers, and computers from that era are hard to come by and even harder to keep working."[4] Recreating these artworks for today's computers and browsers inevitably changes them, as well as the way one experiences them.

Our growing ability to archive everything—every image, sound, and text—and to use data to generate multiple forms, is nevertheless continuously haunted by pervasive surveillance and porous boundaries between private and public realms, remembering and forgetting, transparency and opacity, fact and fiction. It is worth emphasizing that media are not transparent, whether in the form of verbal language, html code, or photographs, any medium, simultaneously reveals and conceals, enables and constrains. What should be preserved? Which cultures and species can or will be combined through molecular engineering? Who gets to decide?

Choices to preserve, create, reenact, or transform cultural artifacts, as well as life forms, are contentious, whether we are examining the relics of past modernities, the extinction of species, or attitudes towards the use of wireless communication by poor communities, which traditionally did not have access to digital technologies.

For more than a century we have been celebrating the new and the now. For instance, when enamored with technology in 1909 Filippo Tommaso Marinetti proposed in the Futurist manifesto the destruction of museums as a way to get rid of the weight of tradition. The history of modern avant-gardes is full of beginnings, abrupt ends and restarts in pursuit of the new man and a new social order, ironically envisioned equally in high or low resolution, and by capitalist and communist societies, fascist and socialist countries alike.[5]

How can practitioners, curators, and historians of contemporary art approach collective memory and collective traumas while forging less fractured futures? How does one have equal access to cultural artifacts, knowledge, and wisdom across diverse traditions and generations?

Other Histories and Lost Lessons

In "The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum," Rosalind Krauss pointed to the institutional changes produced by the 1980s art market, when museum directors began to talk about collections in terms of assets, as economic investments, instead of the traditional notion of the museum as the guardian of community memory and the public patrimony.[6] The practice of institutional critique, according to Krauss, originates mostly with minimalism, conceptual, and feminist art in the 1960s. But her analysis, largely based on Euro-American developments, ignored innovation from elsewhere.[7] Indeed, the role of the art market in assigning value to contemporary art is paramount and it is redesigning the boundaries of the art world with implications that are not only economic and political, but simultaneously ethical and conceptual, technological and methodological.[8]

http://norient.com/tag/regenerative-culture/

[4] Frank Rose, "The Mission to Save Vanishing Pixels," The New York Times, October 23, 2016, p. Art-18.

[5] In architecture, for instance, two sobering examples of modernist failure are the abandoned Nakagin Capsule Tower in Tokyo, a mid century project for a new society; and the housing projects, such as the Cabrini Green, the last one in the U.S., which was recently demolished in Chicago.

[6] Rosaling Krauss, "The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalism Museum," *October*, Vol. 54 (Autumn, 1990), 3-17.

[7] See the MoMA New York series, which is expanding the Western canon with translations of important twentieth century art writings into English. The first volume in 2002 was
Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art. It was followed by a trilogy of key personalities and moments in the history of Latin American art: the anthology
Listen, Here, Now! Argentine Art of the 1960s: Writings of the Avant-Garde (2004); *Alfredo Boulton and His Contemporaries: Critical Dialogues in Venezuelan Art, 1912-1974* (2008); and *Mário Pedrosa Primary Documents* (2015).

[8] The literature on museum ethics, curatorial and media histories is ever growing. Examples include Giselle Beiguelman and Ana Gonçalves Magalhães, *Possible Futures: Art, Museums and Digital Archives* (São Paulo: USP, 2014); Terry Smith,*Thinking Contemporary Curating* (New York: ICI, 2012); *The Routlege Companion to Museum Ethics* (London: Routledge, 2011); and Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on*

In Brazil, public policy towards art and culture has traditionally been discontinuous and characterized by short-term cycles.[9] Original and critical approaches to mainstream culture in the twentieth-century, which challenges binaries such as self and other, subject and object, include the contributions of Oswald de Andrade's Cannibalistic Manifesto from 1928; the media performances of Flávio de Carvalho's *Experiencia #3* in 1956; concrete and neoconcrete movements of the 1950s; Lygia Clark's and Hélio Oiticica's legacy of participation and interactivity from the 1960s-70s; the leadership of curator and critic Walter Zanini in the promotion of electronic and experimental art in the 1970s; Mário Pedrosa's engaged criticism and visionary projects such as the *Museum of Origins* in 1978; and Paulo Herkenhoff's use of "Cannibalism" as the organizing principle of the São Paulo Bienal of 1999. Further decolonial perspectives today are coming from the ancient knowledge of indigenous cultures, which are joining discussions of the anthropocene, and other examinations of human action and impact on the environment and other species.

Significant in this regard is the work of artist Ernesto Neto with indigenous rituals, and the books *Metafísicas Canibais* [Cannibal Metaphysics] by Eduardo Viveiro de Castro, and *A Queda do Céu: Palavras de um Xamã Yanomami* [The Falling Sky: Words of a Yanomami Shaman] by David Kopenawa and Bruce Albert, both books entering the cultural debate from an anthropological perspective that allows one to see contemporary culture through the eyes of the other, in this case, a millennial culture from an area deep in the Amazon region between Brazil and Venezuela.[10]

Cultural loss can be the result of the neglect of public policies, and also of natural disasters. An example of an original project in response to a natural disaster is the *Museu of Origins*, conceptualized by the art critic Mario Pedrosa, which unfortunately never left the drawingboard. I find it worth describing in detail because of its lesson. It rethinks historically marginalized cultures and curates outsidership as part of contemporary art.

Pedrosa's proposal was created as a response to a devastating disaster: the large fire that consumed the Museu de Arte Moderna of Rio de Janeiro on July 8, 1978, destroying 90% of the museum collection, along with the exhibition *America Latina: Geometria Sensível*. This important exhibition included an *eighty*-painting retrospective of the Uruguayan Joaquím Torres Garcia, the artist who created and theorized the *School of the South*, promoting a constructive universalism rooted in the geometric traditions of the ancient cultures of the Americas. Like Torres Garcia, Pedrosa was a cosmopolitan visionary and cultural activist who promoted a decolonial aesthetics in place of Eurocentric attitudes that positioned Europe as *The Brain of the World's* Body, and Latin America on the receiving end of a one-way cultural traffic.[11]

Pedrosa's new model for the Museu de Arte Moderna was explained in an interview titled "Indigenous Art: The Choice of the Critic Who Grew weary of the Avant-Garde."[12] He designed the reconstruction of the MAM-Rio as the *Museu das Origens* [Museum of Origins], integrating five cultural traditions: indigenous art (in line with research developed in Peru and Mexico); black art (Brazilian and African); virgin art (outsider and self-taught art along with the art of the unconscious and children's art); folk art (from all regions of the country); and modern and contemporary art. If realized, this museum could have promoted in the visual arts, what

the Other (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1986). In relation to Latin America, see also my chapter "Post-Periphery Performances: Reclaiming Artistic Legacies, Histories, and Archives" in *Performing Brazil*, eds. Severino J. Albuquerque and Kathryn Bishop-Sanchez (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2015).

[9] From a Brazilian perspective, examinations of outsidership include, *Outras Histórias na Arte Contemporânea*, Cauê Alves, Simone Osthoff and Priscila Arantes, orgs. (São Paulo: Paço das Artes, 2016); and Adriano Pedrosa and Lilia Moritz Schwarcz, *Histórias Mestiças* (São Paulo: Cobogó Edt. and Instituto Tomie Otake, 2015). Emphasis on a hesitation towards the future include the exhibitions "Live Uncertainty" the São Paulo Bienal 2016, and "Insecurities: Tracing Displacement and Shelter" at the New York MOMA in 2016.

10 Eduardo Viveiro de Castro, *Metafísicas Canibais: Elementos para uma antropologia pós-estrutural* (São Paulo: Cosacnaify, 2009), published in English as *Cannibal Metaphysics* (Univocal, 2015). David Kopenawa and Bruce Albert, *A Queda do Céu: Palavras de um xamã yanomami*, Beatriz Perrone-Moisés, trans. (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2010), published in English as *The Falling Sky: Words of a Yanomami Shaman*, trans. Nicholas Elliott and Alison Dundy (Belknap Press, an imprint of Harvard University Press, 2013).

[11] Donal Preziosi, *Brain of the Earth's Body: Art, Museums, and the Phantasms of Modernity* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

[12] *Mário Pedrosa Primary Documents*. Glória Ferreira and Paulo Herkenhoff, eds., translation Stephen Berg (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2015).

Brazilian popular music had more easily accomplished, especially after the Tropicalist movement of 1968-9: the creation of a music of resistance that preserved regionalisms and combined international and national sources, with delicacy and inventive new forms.[13]

Pedrosa's original emphasis on indigenous, black, and mestizo cultures, as important overlooked roots of Brazilian civilization, was at the same time an ethical and critical position stated in a matter-of-fact and urgent way. For this remarkable critic, modern art was part of the imperialist expansion of the West, therefore, his project anticipated the discussions that would unfold in the 1980s around the issue of "primitivism," a debate that intensified after the 1984 controversial exhibition at the New York Museum of Modern Art titled *Primitivism in 20th Century Art: The Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*.

For Pedrosa, emphasis on indigenous, African, folk and outsider art, alongside modern and contemporary art, was an effort to counter a colonial and elitist mentality, unfortunately still dominant in large parts of the world, despite the hopes of new media theorists, such as McLuhan, Vilém Flusser, and Roy Ascott, that technology would forge alternative dialogical communties. Pedrosa shifted the focus of discussion in the early 1980s away from postmodern trends, which he saw increasingly as the production of luxury commodities for an international art market. For the critic, colonialist attitudes towards culture had important methodological, historiographical, and institutional dimensions that needed to be challenged then, and I argue, increasingly now, when the field of contemporary art continues to expand and art and tech developments become part of the mainstream art world.

Media and Margins in Brazil: Cannibalizing Technology

The São Paulo pioneer media artist and curator Giselle Beiguelman has been examining the social and political impact of new technologies in Brazil for almost three decades. An example is the media exhibition *Technophagy*, which she curated in São Paulo in 2012 at the Center Tomie Otake. It showcased artists who combined high and low technology in various mixtures of ancient and cutting-edge knowledge, often privileging a DIY aesthetics. The exhibition also focused on what she termed a "technophagic emergence"—a concept she developed in a paper presented at ISEA-Ruhr 2010, calling attention to the tendency of the digital culture in Brazil to devour and grind technology into new production modes for collective use.[14]

The term, *technophagy* updates Oswald de Andrade's influential *Cannibalist Manifesto* of 1928, a metaphor based upon the personal gain of eating the flesh of an enemy one admires, thus literally incorporating his/her strength and making it one's own. "Technophagic emergence" reflects on the economic changes Brazilians experienced over the first decade of this century when about eighteen million people rose out of poverty for the first time, in addition to another thirty-five million from the lower middle class, to whom the economic boom of the Lula government gave access to the market of commodities. Credit and mobile technologies were at the forefront of this transformation.

While Brazilians come to terms with a dramatic economic and political crisis in the second decade of the 21st century, the hope that the country could become radically modern is simultaneously accompanied by a growing doubt in the country's capacity to ever achieve that dream. And yet, the country's patriarchal and colonialist class system, which traditionally relegated creativity, at least for the poor, to the realm of carnival and soccer, is being challenged from below. Living in the poor outskirts and slums, many people are using and combining technology with a DIY improvisational and creative attitude while a heritage of racism, classism and misogyny is being discussed on social media for the first time.

Beiguelman is interested in the micropolitical effects of technology and consequently examines notions of citizenship, uses of technology on the streets, and practices of consumption in precarious contexts. By calling attention to a "technophagic emergence" she additionally engages the concept of "technological disobedience," theorized by the Cuban artist Ernesto Oroza,[15] in relation to the Brazilian political context.

[13] Continuing in the legacy of the *Tropicalists'* aggressive fusion of different genres is the series of podcasts titled *Brazil Music Exchange* focusing on new Brazilian sounds organized by the *Guardian* of London in 2016. It examines the country's rich sound and mixture of cultural and rhythmic heritages.

[14] Giselle Beiguelman "Technophagic Emergence: Creative and Critical Trends of Digital Culture.Br" was presented at ISEA2010 RUHR, the 16th International Symposium on Electronic Art, August 20–29, 2010.

[15] Ernesto Oroza theorized "technological disobedience" in his book *For an Architecture of Necessity and Disobedience*, 2006 in which he explores the efficiency and ingenuity of Cuban citizens under the Castro administration and their approach to self-made solutions for everyday

An example of "technophagic emergence" employing social media is the disquieting phenomenon of the *rolezinho* [Fig. 1]. Wireless technology is central to the activism of a new generation, which employs social media to organize and denounce racism, misogyny, and other forms of discrimination and oppression.

Figure 1. At the Plaza shopping mall in Niterói, a suburb of Rio de Janeiro, young people gather in what is known as a rolezinho, or stroll. Photo credit: Yasuyoshi Chiba/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images.

The *rolezinho* is Brazilian slang for little stroll.[16] The *rolê* [stroll] was created by twenty-first century "*flâneurs"* who began to organize in large numbers and stroll through the luxurious shopping malls of Brazil's large cities. Coming from poor neighborhoods in the periphery, they are young, mostly black or mulatto, and organized "flash mob" meetings through social media. This young generation in Brazil claims access to public spaces to which historically they have been barred from, due to unspoken laws of "propriety." By simply moving through public areas traditionally "forbidden" to them, the *rolezinhos* challenged social and spatial hierarchies, while instilling class fears in shop owners and upper middle class shoppers alike.

On a theoretical level, in the early days of the World Wide Web, Brazil's original combinations of modern art and oral traditions were valued by a few scholars as a fertile mixture of technology and samba—as the work of Hélio Oiticica suggests, for instance—and seen as charged with transformative potential, with new ways of turning information into knowledge.[17] Today, however, the harsh social and economic inequities in the country continue to be at the heart of an economic, social, and political crisis, following an exceptional decade of growth and consumer expansion. Such profound changes are ongoing, complex, often violent, and without short-term solution.

Project *Ex-Paço*: Forging Alternative Curatorial Strategies

A second curatorial example of technology employed for survival in face of the oppressive political and cultural crisis in Brazil, comes from an institution, which recently became nomad. The *Paço das Artes*—a contemporary art museum connected to the cultural branch of the São Paulo state government, which has a unique characteristic: it does not have an art collection, but an important role in fomenting young and emerging talent.

Priscila Arantes, the director of that institution since 2009, is a media curator and historian who has employed new technologies to rethink archives, histories, and curatorial perspectives, and in the process, is creating more fluid connections between making, displaying, and historicizing media art. She first organized a comprehensive and accessible database, an archive of all the institution's memory and history—the exhibitions, publications, curators, artists, and scholars who worked with or passed through the *Paço*.

More recently, she created the innovative project *Ex-Paço*, in response to the political crisis that resulted in the loss of the Paço das Artes' building in 2015, located on the campus of the University of São Paulo. Therefore, as the director of an institution without a space, Arantes collaborated with 3D designers to create *Ex-Paço*—a virtual reality gallery for exhibiting media artworks, and also used to encourage new curatorial formats and to reflect upon public reception and interaction.

Conclusion

Although crumbling city infrastructures, social segregation, and the concentration of wealth in a few hands seem to be the political consequences of an

needs. Oroza's "Technologies of Disobedience" is a political and aesthetic attitude that echoes both the figure of the *bricoleur,* and more important, the *Cinema Novo* manifesto "Aesthetics of Hunger", written in 1965 by Glauber Rocha, which Oroza admires and quotes.

[16] Pedro Erber's "The Politics of Strolling" (unpublished article in preparation for submission to the Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies), examines a number of newspaper articles, both from Brazil and the U.S. from 2013-14 about the phenomenon.

[17] Gregory Ulmer, "The Miranda Warnings: An Experiment in Hyperrhetoric," in *Hyper/Text/Theory,* George Landow, ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994),367

economic system based on profit and accompanied by the normalization of war and surveillance, in addition to the growing privatization of the commons, a few media artists, curators, and historians continue to embrace technology looking for ways to oxygenate the public sphere. In this process, they envision alternative developments in the field of art, science and technology over the next fifty years. There is power in the margins, as Boris Groys reminds us: "It would be wrong to think that this kind of powerful outsidership can be completely eliminated through Modern progress and democratic revolutions" [18] . Among the challenges in the future decades of advanced research is our ability to integrate knowledge from these other margins, thus continuing the decolonization of thought.

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[18] Boris Groys, "Politics of Installation", E-Flux no2, January 2009.