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Soap

Fabio
Morais



reading and
translation
groups on
independent
editorial work:



For artworks and expressions in this text that ignite your curiosity, please resort to your most trusted sources of knowledge production and distribution for further inquiry.

!

The epigraph *soy yo*.

This is not a text that defines or concludes anything (do these possibilities even exist?), but moves thoughts in an honest exercise of labyrinthitis: gym, pirouettes, unbalance, falls and exposed bones. Maybe the act of its reading be like passing through those car-wash rotative brushes – writing it was just like that. If you get dizzy by reading something that leaves various untied threads that ensures the possibility of a life through gaps, pop some pills before – there must be some, I can't recommend any, because I don't pop pills – or read it dancing slowly to the samba *Porque é Proibido Pisar na Grama* – past few years, I've had a relapse and got addicted to this song again.

1.

The point from where I write, in this text, is from the Brazilian visual arts and its historical narratives.

There is not in Brasil any great studies about what has been happening with the publication “boom” nowadays. To measure what we do using standard rulers from the hegemonic north is a colonized juggling exercise to theorize ourselves by a model we just don't fit in. This could be the classical attempt of sticking a t-shirt printed with Mick Jagger's tongue on it in our legs and trying to convince us that the “universal” history, that one between NYC and Europe, tells our story too. It determines, but doesn't tell. In regard to this matter, I wonder how much Anne Moglin-Delacroix and Phillipot don't mean absolutely anything here.

Or even determine. *Rien. Nada.* Unless as a reading of general cultural knowledge, at best, or something more like a colonizing evangelization we can blindly attempt, by endorsing what the north says as an absolute truth to be dubbed by our mongrel complex.

The official history of the Artist Books usually tells that the US citizen Ed Ruscha was important – sure, a US citizen chosen as the most important and, so, chosen to guide the history – by, on the 60's, making books by a disesthetized, neutral and dumb photography – words used by the conceptual US citizens – shifting the place of photography by freeing it from the modern technical preciousness, operated by the museum, and by downgrading it way down to the editorial zone of book production: from the photographic paper and its silver grains to the halftone dots of large-scale printing. That Moment, in Brasil, photography barely existed from what concerns our modern discourse, besides some Geraldo de Barros – I'm not lettered in photography, so if someone could or wants to correct me in this item, write to me. Much less was there a conscious use of the large scale printing techniques as a potential field for art. If there wasn't here a modern photography tradition or even a graphic inclination of artistic production, I suppose Ed Ruscha means nothing to us. as simple as that. This would be the same as trying to convince the north that if the anthropophagus attitude is one of our Modernist roots, it should also be a standard to the north. Does it happen? No. The north looks at the anthropophagus attitude as an peripheral exoticism in regard to the modern art centralized in NYC.

So, Ed Ruscha is, to us, an exotic bird. Is it possible to study the Brazilian fauna over exotic birds?

In 1968, as a response to the censorship of *Navalha na Carne*, by Plinio Marcos, the play was published in book format, whose censorship

proceeding was slower. The staging was photographed in an aesthetic dialogue with the comic books, with the photonovels, and with the marginal cinema, moving, through these aesthetically plotted languages, the tridimensional place of the theatre to the book production field. This is the book-fact in my DNA as a Brazilian artist that lives in São Paulo, the city where Plinio Marcos lived. This guerrilla photography trying to deceive the civil-business-military dictatorship, and at the same time, mixing various aesthetic matrices of the era interests me, and not the standard and dumb photography by Ruscha, serving behaved, neutral and balanced criticism to the US car-ocracy. If Ruscha was portraying a Fordist aesthetic and reality, “*Navalha na Carne*” was experimenting with a marginal aesthetic – from the *udigrudi* sense of the term – and throwing away an authoritarian reality. *Navalha na Carne* is one of the centimeters of the ruler I use to measure what we did in regard to artists’ publications.

“Oh, but *Navalha na Carne* isn’t a book edited on the visual arts scope, then how would you use it to talk about Artist Books?” would ask a lonesome, tearful and resentful purist, suffering through a miscegenated reality.

In Brazilian visual arts there has never been such a thing as an Artist Book, this is a French and English theorizing thing for the United States eyes/point of view: (in) here, we’ve always had, and still do, people from the most variable “artistic languages” who publish in a mixed, miscegenous and guerrilla-inspired form/way/method. Or those who take their esthetical-formal experimentations further until they achieve, for various reasons, graphic, editorial and “bookish” vocabularies.

Here, there’s *Navilouca*. Graphic mishmash. Everything is made with tooth and nails.

Stamping *A Ave*, by Wladimir Dias-Pino, Mira Schendel's albums or a *gibi* by Raymundo Colares with the term "artist book" is the same as saying that Frank Sinatra's jazz (quotation marks) is an important influence to bossa nova. The hegemonizer game of so-called universal history and their so-called universal terms is played, which the north imposes on us even in retroactive mode. A retroactive colonization is the height of being a scoundrel, it's offering our historical examples in a silver platter, after they're emptied and decontextualized from ourselves, so that hegemonic history can insert them with their discourse and strengthen itself even more as the hegemony. In order that we accept this passively, without any political negotiation, that naming things in a retroactive mode is something natural, the "universal" history of art should move, with all the naturalness of a history that considers itself to be moveable, the possible initial date of performance to 1931, to the day that Flávio de Carvalho walked provocatively against a Corpus Christi procession. Or even assuming that the famous relational art already existed in the Brazilian neoconcret movement, without that name. Will the "universal" history of art do that? No, the political negotiation that shifts the hegemonic axis is always off the question.

Ave, Mira's albums and Colares' *gibis* are works to be studied within the narrative of Brazilian art, and art that didn't care a lot about the "Artist book".

"Artist book" sounds to me like a peacemaker and good boy – an attempt to get a United States visa – also for being a term whose use tries out conceptual and formal definitions of something which its randomness relies on not being defined in order to continue living the state of: orgy. Besides, I forgot to mention that for years I've avoided the term "Artist Book", which not only pushes down our throat a history that's not

ours, but also reduces to a codex something that's way wider and more complex – codex, too, with its expensive production in Brasil one of the factors of its inviability. I'm habituated to the term "publication". And I avoid as much as I can the crutch of the term "artist", unless I punctually need to locate a standpoint. And if someone calls my writing "artist writing," I'll write down their names and plan my revenge, sooner or later.

Take an Artist Book guide and try to detect one of those, at print art fairs that have been happening for ten years in various cities across Brasil. You'll find it difficult because this type of graphic production has such a capacity for hybridization that it's already made an "artist book" into a boring and conservative object. It's easy to use the term "artist book" as a stamp. The complexity relies on living with works of art whose nature demands that, instead of creating terms that describe them in an essentialist and classifier form, layers and layers of aesthetic, historical, contextual and formal regimes rest over them, recombining and relativizing themselves every second into possible definitions. I prefer this second option to stamps, registry objects and bureaucracies. The second option is the one that sees any artistic manifestation as a live being, complex and in its full metabolism, and not as a dead and mapped guinea pig. In my opinion, more than in the term "artist book", "A Ave", Mira's álbuns and Colares' *gibis* fit into this second option.

Please, wipe your feet in the doormat that says *Livre d'Artiste & Artist Book*, come outside, give me your hand and let's digress.

Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* was published in 1897. That is, the printed page was barely 90 years old in Brasil, because up until 1808 all typographic activity and book publishing were forbidden by Portuguese law. The few existing libraries during colonial times in Brasil

were formed by editions that came from Europe and had their access restricted to an elite of members of the catholic church and the colonial administration. With the absence of typographies in the country, the rare published works by Brazilian authors were sent to Portugal, in order to be printed there and later return to the nation territory in an official and access-controlled form. The importing of books was also forbidden. But then, off course, it didn't stop the smuggling that, for example, allowed the *inconfidentes* of Minas Gerais to have a good Enlightenment library.

Only with the arrival of the royal family in 1808 was a printing press implemented in Rio de Janeiro to meet the graphical demand for paper and reports – the administrative capital-bureaucratic of the Portuguese empire became Rio – and also the recently arrived idle Portuguese court's need to read. Gradually, the editorial activity was being released, but its interdiction was already a Brazilian structural trauma that confined it to an elite.

I wonder then about the relevance of Mallarmé – frenchly universal – so that we understand the Brazilian page if here the page as a discursive and aesthetic space was something so recent in 1897. Were we familiar with the page? Was it natural and minimally democratic among us, so that we treated it already under formalist and modern precepts? Did we already have a literate population? Or was it that we had to conquer the space-page na marra, in the slap, in the contraband, steal it from an economic-intellectual elite the way enslaved gold miners diverted and stole the gold that, accumulated in a hidden way, would buy their freedom?

In Brasil, editorial activity seems to me a guerrilla act in relation to the history of an authoritarian country founded as a capitalist company where, instead of citizens, the inhabitants were/are just workers-slaves alienated from the international division of labor – this statement, until a

few years ago, it would have sounded faded, but the 2016 coup revived it. Our relationship with the page, with the public space it is, goes through the act of stealing it from a literate and monopolistic elite, and this is what I see in the current print fairs: small publishers and self-publishers challenging the monopoly of publishers who act not only arbitrating and legitimizing what should be published, but reinforce our editorial prohibition by placing books on the market whose price is close to one tenth of the monthly minimum wage. Hence my laziness, in the field of art, with the term and the discussion about Artist Book in a country whose book object is, economically and socio-structurally, an elite article that is not part of the Brazilian average daily life.

A century before Mallarmé, in 1798, *The Inconfidência Baiana* lit its fuse when Salvador woke up covered with posters and pamphlets – called seditious bulletins – glued to busy points of the city and that, in a mostly illiterate population, they were read aloud and passed from mouth to mouth. They served literate and illiterate people. Under the typographical prohibition, the bulletins were handwritten and called for the end of the monarchy, the death of the king, the freedom of the people: the proclamation of a Bahian republic. Handwritten leafleting was common at the time and even after 1808 the typographical practice followed restricted, so that, for example, during seven months of the year 1820 the newspaper *O Conciliador do Maranhão* was “published” in handwriting.

Let's remember that Gregório de Matos wrote his work at the time of the Portuguese editorial ban and remained handwritten manuscript until the beginning of the 20th century, when it was first edited. What came to us, from his poems, were the handwritten copies made and remade at the time by friends and then admirers, a fact that even puts in doubt the authorial fidelity of many poems attributed to him. Would

the act of creating handwritten pamphlets to be spread around the city – proto-postering or proto-graffiti – added to the resistant and petulant page – and perhaps of mixed authorship – of Gregório de Matos would not be more relevant to us than the aesthetic page of Mallarmé? On resistant and petulant pages: if even with the portuguese ban on the press, the *Inconfidência Baiana* relied on scattered pamphlets and posters, handwritten, contaminating the whole of Salvador, I wonder if this would not be the data point that matters, the resistance and improvisation, when thinking a possible history of the page in Brasil. To realize how much editorial activity was responsible for the diffusion of Enlightenment thought and to try to reproduce it here, in a subversive and improvised way, handwritten, before the prohibition, is not what in fact illustrates our relationship with the page? Would not this feeling of guerrilla pamphleteering and contempt, not to the page as an already institutionalized form but to its prohibition as an agent of the public sphere, carry the same weight as rolling up the sleeves and building an editorial utopia as, for example, Flávio de Carvalho did upon self-publishing his *Experiência n°2* in 1931? Or a Rogério Sganzerla, at the age of eight – amazed –, going alone to a printing house and asking to print his first book, *New Tales*, in 1954? Or a Wladimir Dias-Pino editing *A Ave* by hand in 1956? Or the play *Navalha na Carne* circumventing theatrical censorship when it was published as a book in 1968? Or even – what do I want to get at – the scene, which we see today at the fairs, of small publishers and artists self-publishing by tooth and nail?

In the light of these publishing experiences as acts of inconfidence, and not as mere graphical experience, self-expression or formal speculation, doesn't the term "artist book" become a classifying and anemic knickknack in relation to what really matters in the publishing Brazilian activity, that being to avoid our structural and economical publishing prohibition? More important than talking of artist book, shouldn't it be

to realize in self-publishers and current fair publishers, their publishing activity as an artistic practice in itself, whose performative and active nature, detaining means of production and circulation, is much more relevant than the possible “artistic” result of its graphical objects?

If the *Livre d'Artiste* and the Artist Book find their great grandparents in the etching albums and illustrated books from the 18th and 19th centuries, couldn't we find our great-grandparents in the walls of 1789 Salvador, analogues to a public album of political urgencies, since we'd have to dismiss illustrated books as books were forbidden here?

I believe it's only possible to talk of publication in Brasil pushing the term “artist book” to some footnote and letting the main narrative be guided by our sociopolitical history, by our publishing history and by what we mean in the geopolitical field. If the hegemonic-north bases their publishing activity on a dialogue with its booksome tradition – from Mallarmé (literature) to Rusch (visual arts), to stick to the landmarks and references I use in this text – here the booksome tradition deals with its structural and historic prohibition to publish joined with the difficulty of making knowledge circulate in a country where illiteracy – real and functional – is a political project applied by the old oligarchies and books cost absurd 5% to 10% of minimum wage. None of this is little when one thinks that making knowledge circulate beyond restricted circles where it is authorized in Brasil was one of the factors that insufflated the banging of pots and pans from the protest-puppet family enraged with black people's access to public university, a contradictory redoubt, at all ashamed, of the upper-middle class, exemplified in a Universidade de São Paulo supported for the most part with the taxes paid by class Z so that only classes A and B can study, through the meritocracy of those who are already born a few steps away from the finishing line.

(You do remember I warned that this was a rotating brush tunnel, don't you? Did you pop your pill? Lit a cigarette? Do not go missing an earring.)

Let us speculate with an “s” of story, history is also about that. Leaving the term “artist book” as a footnote on our narrative, what would the main text say? In the Brazilian context, there is no doubt Concretism is the one who will, in the 1950s, speculate the book format aesthetically and start a certain tradition of editions that question and reinvent this format. If *Inconfidência Baiana* spread hand-written pamphlets around Salvador at a time when printing was forbidden in Colonial Brasil, doesn't it make sense that a Brazilian concretist edition icon, such as *Caixa Preta* (1975), of Augusto de Campos and Júlio Plaza, would have the formal aspect of a graphical spreadable explosion which physical dismembering is able to scatter collectively its own information, instead of the bound-unit-book-someness that asks for a lonely reader parted from any idea of polis? If reading a book alone at home is natural, wouldn't it be frustrating to manipulate *Caixa Preta* alone, at home? Doesn't it incite the will to be with others, to show it to others, read/see it with others? Doesn't having *Caixa Preta* generate the will to throw a party and scatter it around the house? Isn't this fragmentation that asks for otherness instead of inwardness – in relation to reading, but also to the own publishing activity, the case of collective magazines that replace the traditional idea of an editor for an otherness/collective edition – present in a good part of what of the most important was done in Brazilian publishing activity especially in relation to the graphical experiments between literature and visual arts, like magazine *Artéria* or *poema/processo* publications? By the way, isn't this graphical fragmentation visible at art book fairs today, and on posters and stickers scattered on walls and light posts of major Brazilian cities?

I then question whether Brasil is part of the historical narrative of the Artist Book or not. Honestly, I don't think so. This narrative is a little bit tight for us who, for much of our history, had to cheat the book for authoritarian and economic reasons. In the Black Box's 70's, what the Artist Book was doing on the US-Europe axis – Ruscha, Weiner, Peter-Feldman, Roth, etc. – had absolutely nothing to do with us, even because the Brazilian visual arts had little interest in the codex format. There is little or no correspondence between the Artist Book produced in the hegemonic north of the 1960-70s and what was produced in Brasil at the same time. However, the fragmented magazines edited by Edgardo Antonio Vigo in Argentina, for example – a fusion of Latin American conceptual art between artists and poets –, not only has to do with the graphical experiments practiced here, but had established a real dialogue by publishing Brazilian artists of the poem/process, of conceptual art, of mail art. To study art of graphical nature in 70's Brasil is definitively to look at Latin America and, through Latin America, look again to Brasil, and not to the north. From the northern fauna, for example, I like Lawrence Weiner, but if I stop to think about my love, it is love for an exotic animal. In Brasil, Weiner is a koala, as simple as that, whose 1968 paradigmatic *Statements* meant nothing here. Their practices resonate here more today, already as history, than at the time when it established the parameters of American conceptual art.

What about our parameters?

I believe that it is up to us to assume our stand as cannibal guerillas, as an academic more at the service of the samba school than of the academies of the hegemonic north that propagate their knowledge of themselves as something universal. It is quite subservient that in Brazilian universities one learns art history on the one hand and Brazilian art history on the other, without mixing one thing in the other, a fact

that makes the hierarchy very clear: there is a history that happens, that governs humanity, in which Brasil is not inserted, and we are left with a sub-history, ours, which we study slightly. During college, I spent days with fauvism and German expressionism. For what? I have no idea. And my class spent weeks reading Greenberg, without reading a line by Mário Pedrosa. The book adopted as a base was Gombrich's, and not Walter Zanini's.

Is it possible to write our history without bowing to the centers, but seeing ourselves in a network, whose place in which we find ourselves is just one of the nodes in the web, just as it can be NY or Mexico City? Let's see. What if these nodes exchanged their local rulers with each other? Utopia? But why not? If history was reborn after 2008, and has been heavily crashing down on our heads, let us talk about utopia again, giving it a new meaning in relation to what it meant – from murders to innocence – in the 20th century.

Brazilian art has always little looked at Latin America – as if Brasil were not Latin America. Our floor cloth complex has always preferred to flatter and address to Europe, and after the postwar period, to the USA. The official history of Brazilian art follows this “not considering itself Latin America”, with Max Bill inaugurating as the abrealas. But, yes, in the field of publication this can be different. In the graphic branch of what can be called Brazilian conceptual art, in the 1970s, there was a real exchange between Brasil and neighboring countries – the Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo collection proves it. Perhaps this is symptomatic.

Going back to the Artist Book and the last digressions, Ed Ruscha's story doesn't really matter, let's leave it behind, it's already well told, officialized and authenticated by MoMA and its colonizing project. More-

over, MoMA's essentialist, classificatory and with all its Anglo-Saxon harshness, perhaps would have difficulty theorizing *Navalha na Carne* (I'm getting back to the subject too, ok? Where is your pill?) or to put it in a historical place, inside of an artistic publishing narrative/or setting it at a historic place inside the storytelling of the artist's publication. This is a problem of MoMA and whoever thinks by its rules. Even if in Brasil we didn't have such a narrative – nor a museum worried about detecting it – we could start to build the enlarging of its spectrum and establishing a ruler or a metric as mixed as what was/is produced in Brasil. If the rulers generally are straight and use the imperial historic ny-europe line, we can start here from a French curve (it's a pity that the French curve has the term "French" in the name... pero, voilà, listo, let's subvert it). If our more determinant ismo, the Tropicalismo, occurs in a territory whose elasticity extends from Mutantes singing in auditorium programs until *Ninhos* from Hélio Oiticica in the exhibition *Information* (in 1979, at MoMA, look at that), thus taking the miscegenation of languages and places to the extreme, wouldn't it be at least smart to add to this French curve the centimeter that corresponds to geleia geral?

The north is not going to understand geleia geral and the booksome will hold symposiums about samba even without knowing how to sambar. And they will be envious – envy the same size as the tiny Fernando Henrique Cardoso has of Lula – knowing the song Caetano made for Lygia. Does Dylan quote any north american visual artists? (If he does, I redeem myself here... I don't even know Dylan much). And on the day they learn that the basis of proto-geleia geral, in *Experiência n°2* (1931) and in *New Look* (1956) Flávio de Carvalho was already doing a *situationist act* and documenting it within the precepts of the site and non-site – don't get in now, Ruscha, wait a bit, wait in line with Smithson – they send an NSA drone to eliminate Flávio de Carvalho. Or they sponsor a coup in Brazilian

art, to put in power another Carmem Miranda artist who represents tropical exoticism.

To summarize, in the north's history a Flávio de Carvalho equals nothing. We are the ones who have to see him in our DNA. The worst of colonization is the conformed stupidity of the colonized who puts on Superman's red cape and tries to fly, throwing themselves from the eighteenth floor. A ridiculous dead person.

The history of art is written via geopolitical domination, the textbooks are sent from the "center" to the "periphery" as the MoMA/CIA did/does. However, to the official history of art publications are just a detail, an appendix that lasts three paragraphs, at most. A fact that perhaps gives the freedom to each place to write its own history, oblivious to the dominant narrative. Maybe it's an editorial nature to act in response to local scenes. And the production of our publications perhaps can only be historicized through historical models, as well as current, local ones.

Brasil: we have one of the most expensive graphic productions in the world, followed by a difficult distribution, which makes the book unfeasible for any mortal – read small and/or self-publishers. Seeing what is produced at current print fairs, perhaps this explains choices for cheaper and easier-to-circulate editorial formats rather than the industrial book, such as zines, posters, pamphlets, postcards, cards, etc., or even the tradition of fragmented magazines – a fact that doesn't eliminate the production of books, but puts toe to toe with print production in general, taking away the codex as a necessary flagship for small publishers. In this regard, to opt for the viable as resistance/insistence establishes a historical dialogue with the editorial urgency that occurred, for example, in the fact that a handwritten newspaper was edited in Maranhão centuries after Gutenberg or, still, in the fact that our greatest Baroque poet was

hand-copied for centuries, without being edited. It can only be this urge to accelerate our backward editorial history – in addition to wanting to steal this history from the hands of a legitimate economic-intellectual elite – that explains the publishing fairs today, and not the desire for an Artist Book. Our history may be based more on the editorial act than on the object produced by it.

I remember that we are not a country with an editorial tradition incarnated in the social tissue and maybe this is one of the consequences that we were never able to have an eventful art editorial circuit. Meaning that we measure ourselves by the way Ruscha subverted the preciousness of modern photography by incarnating it in the ordinary logic of publishing production, it doesn't stick here. We don't even have publishing production. It's unthinkable to have a Brazilian artist with the same number of publications Ruscha made in the 1960s-70s. If there were any, it was under the Latin American logic: self-publishing outside the circuit, cheap and/or home techniques of printing, collective magazines, graphic activity in the mail art network, graphic production as symbolic guerrilla act – exactly what is seen at the fairs nowadays, right? And even reading ourselves by the exposition lens as publication, from Seth Siegelaub, is unfair with us, being that we don't have an institutional circuit nor a national market that, by consequence, generates an editorial circuit, as there was in Siegelaub's USA of the 1960s.

For some minutes now, the tautologies of this pomba-gira-text sweeps around the dance floor to say that what was enrolled in the history of Brazilian art was the graphic-editorial act rather than the Artist Book. The act was always urgent, not the object. Talking about and discussing the Artist Book seems to me the same as discussing the nutritive values of caviar: a pedantic elitism. The Artist Book, as an art genre or category, doesn't interest me at all. A publisher that sometimes publishes an

Artist Book, doesn't interest me. What interests me is the quixotic and rude attitude of a publisher with graphic urgencies that answer to other urgencies: aesthetic, formal, political. I think that what we had since always – and still have, as in the publishing boom of recent – was the quixotic acts that, as isolated as it may seem and personified in people who do it for passion, when seen in perspective, or better, in a woven net, it's revealed that they are not isolated acts: they are HISTORY. Ours.

In a prohibitive colonization in relation to our editorial activity, before we had the “page” object we had the “pamphlet” act. This is not a small thing. And if, in Brasil, you talk about the Artist Book without getting deep into the editorial history of the country, I'm sorry, but...

The French curve of acts is my ruler to measure our publications.

Brasil had, in 1918, its proto-modernism drafted in *O Perfeito Cozinheiro das Almas desse Mundo*, a collective notebook attributed to Oswald de Andrade, edited as a facsimile in the 1980s. It had, in 1931, the edition of Flávio Carvalho's *Experiência n°2*. It had, in 1956, Flávio de Carvalho rascally taking advantage of the newspapers and magazines so they propagated in the mediatic tissue the walk he had at São Paulo's downtown with his *New Look*. Between 1957 and 1959, Brasil had Amílcar de Castro developing *Jornal do Brasil's* new graphic project, drawing according to the basis of concretism aesthetics that was being discussed and revisited by the neo-concretism exactly in the pages of this same newspaper – a very complex imagetic-discursive meta-reference, there, in the newsstand, dribbling the concrete creed and, later, wrapping up fish.

By the way, the tradition of meddling with newspapers is long in Brazilian art: Flávio de Carvalho's *Experiência n°2*, appropriates and reproduces an excerpt from *O Estado de São Paulo* as documents; in the late 1960s, the newspaper *Rex Time* was the graphic arm of Rex

& Sons, a gallery of the Rex Group; in the early 1970s, Antonio Manuel appropriated newspaper printing templates, changed them with counter-information and printed deviated and clandestine versions; in 1973, the same Antonio Manuel has a censored exhibition at Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro and transformed it into a graphic object: a six-page booklet published on 07/15/1973 within the edition of *O Jornal*, entitled *Exhibition Antonio Manuel – From 0 to 24 hours*; since the 1970s, the use of classifieds as a space for advertising works has been recurrent, the most prolific example of which is the Bruscky & Santiago team; at the end of the 1970s, Glauco Mattoso edits *Jornal Dobrabil*, a typed gay publication, at the beginning edited with xerox, whose geometrical aesthetic diagramming resulted in the rare ambiguity of combining marginal and constructivist aesthetics – minimal, just imagine a biba constructivist aesthetic sambando in the face of trash / luxury? (sorry, bi, this hairdresser diction was inevitable); still in the late 1970s, the group 3nós3 uses the media – print and television – as one of the spaces of its public interventions.

Brasil also had, from the 1950s, all concrete graphic production and its dissent, such as the poem / process. In 1967, it had *PanAmérica*, by José Agrippino de Paula, printed on a kind of kraft paper so that it could be read on the beach, under the sunlight, affirming reading as a public and tropical act: reading with the body on the street.

There was *Navalha na Carne*, in 1968 – look: if you are going to talk about the editorial environment as the performance documentation that, when translated graphically, becomes a work in itself, since in Brasil the idea of performance and documentation also comes later, how about seeing that not only in Flávio de Carvalho, but also in the book *Navalha na Carne*? In 1974, he had the magazine *Navilouca*, measuring the 1922-1972 bridge with a French curve, whose exit route and survival was going

to be the *desbunde*. There were sculptures, called *Book of Creation*, photographed next to public phones and bottles of drink, by an artist, Lygia Pape, who invented cookie packaging for Piraquê thinking of them as geometric solids, thus implanting concrete utopia on the shelf of the corner bodega, beyond the elitist and self-protected discourse of art. In 1977, at the exhibition *Poéticas Visuais*, by Walter Zanini and Júlio Plaza at MAC-USP, there were photocopying machines for the public to copy whatever they wanted and take a portable version of the exhibition with them – in an exercise of particular and constant reissue of the exhibition itself. About photocopying, Hudinilson Jr. had a sensual encounter with photocopying machines in the early 1980s that produced images of his body that would become books, zines, xerographs and billboards.

Since the 1970s, he has had works flying by plane or on wheels and crossing the territory via mail to join and form countless intermediate magazines, between visual arts and poetry: unbound, fragmented, collective – reminding Leminski: “Candidates, comfort yourselves. The greatest poets (writings) of the 1970s are not people. They are magazines”.

Brasil had, between the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, a series of monograph editions, *Arte Brasileira Contemporânea*, edited by Funarte that ranged from the catalog format (Rubens Gerchman, Antônio Manuel, Wesley Duke Lee) to authorial formats that would fit perfectly in the term “Artist Book” (Waltércio Caldas, Artur Barrio), including the artist’s authorial gestures that stretch the catalog format (Cildo Meireles, with two detachable dioramas of his *Espaços Virtuais: Cantos* that could be assembled; Lygia Pape, with two “pages” of her *Livro da Criação* reproduced three-dimensionally). The 1981 São Paulo Biennial exhibited mail art – a project by Júlio Plaza under the general curatorship of Walter Zanini – and made amends for this imposed institutionalization through an editorial gesture: publishing the list of participating artists

with their respective addresses in the catalog, providing thus, to anyone who acquired it, a gateway to the immense network of mail art. Etc.

Isn't it beautiful, the French curve of the last paragraphs, chaotic, twisted and full of possible metrics for publications and, why not?, for artist books made today in Brazilian art? If all of this, added to the etc. to which anyone can include, does not serve us as a model to measure our publishing production, we better clean our geleia geral with Perfex and go peel the potatoes of the dinner served in honor of *Livre d'Artiste* and the Artist Book up in the north.

I stopped the examples from the last paragraphs in the early 1980s to restrict them to the time when hegemonic history coined the term "Artist Book". Thus, I try to show that even if there was neither discourse nor production hinging upon this term here, there were plenty of graphic-editorial acts that cannot be overlooked by the simple fact that they do not fit the concept of an Artist Book, which must be just a chapter in a much bigger story. I believe that here this concept should not be used to chisel editorial models toward the essential of what the codex would be and thus leave out what does not fit in, but should be extended and fattened by our historical examples of editorial acts that did not fit in the codex until it exploded so that the word "book" breaks its limits and becomes "publication," a term more aligned with Brazilian art history. After all, in the history of Brasil we had handwritten pamphlets before printed pages. We had the viable.

Editing in Brasil doesn't seem to be summarized to an act of bookish nature. Here, editing is pixo on the wall and printing on the paper that ignites the molotov that will save us from military police in street protests against our structural and economic prohibition on editing books.

2.

But, talking so much about “north” – and trying to demystify it – I admit that there is an issue eating away at me, as if throwing a fit. Whenever I hear that stale “oh, it would have its worth abroad”, or “it would be crazy expensive in the USA”, or “in Europe they would understand”, passionate reaction takes over me and I wish I said: move there and marry a dyke friend to gain citizenship. The colonization of thought underpinning our mongrel complex should have limits. But, yes, there are moments – and many – when the “oh, abroad that would be valued” hits me in the face and I, like a proper mutt, agree, put my tail between the legs for a few seconds, but then I push the tail out again and I go out barking unabashedly on the gringo’s shin.

This is the case of artist publishing.

Quick digression: it intrigues me to realize that a country that has Flávio de Carvalho, *neoconcretismo*, Frederico Morais, Walter Zanini among other tons of etc, be, at the same time, excessively object-based (performance, for example, is still a strange animal, except when it is objectified in the domesticity of photography and video, or it is presented in thematic exhibitions), retinal and formalist (perhaps the remnant of our heavy concretist tradition, the retinal aesthetic is still decisive among us) and completely attached to fixed institutional models and happy with their own white walls suitable for the quick rotation of exhibitions and educational programming. (This paragraph begins with “a country that had...” and, of course, there is here the arbitrariness of thinking that the southeastern region of Brasil, or São Paulo, represents the whole country. No, it doesn’t. It thinks it does, but it does not. São Paulo is Alaska that dreams of being Miami. In a perverse way, São Paulo is the city that reproduces for the rest of the country the global north-south

hegemony. But, to situate this text: the contemporary art circuit I am referring to here is the one that operates in São Paulo, which is where I live and know of. In the same way, the Art Book Fairs that inspired me to write the first part of this text are those in the city of São Paulo that I attend.) Back from the digression.

In addition to the digression above, here is another local quiz: the contradiction that the market circuit here is light-years more experimental and daring than the institutional circuit – if there is a certain commercial quality to that, this would be another digression that I won't get into here... On this matter, for example, for some years now the market has been trying to shed light on a practice that the official history of Brazilian art has tried to make invisible – at the same time that it deified concrete and neo-concrete art –, a practice that I'd venture to include in a niche that could be called Brazilian conceptual art: a complex cauldron wiped out by the cult of the Carioca artists of the 1970s and the 1980s generation of painters, that encompasses publications, mail art, xerox art, graphic experiments between visual art and visual poetry, *poema/processo*, as well as the intersections of this field with the audiovisual field, new media and performance.

This production, which logic is editorial, which main support is the paper and which aesthetic vocabulary is the graphic, bumps in various typical Brazilian matters. We don't like books (and/or prints generally, the Portuguese prohibition really afflicted us), our publishing history isn't one of the strongest (just compare with Argentina and México) and, finally, we don't really read. Sorry for anything, as would say old uncles going away, but who don't read three contemporary literature books per month, for me, fits in the statistic that “we are a country that doesn't really read” – just think how much is possible to read a hundred pages book at the same 120 minutes spent in front of a cinema screen (I won't

even talk about Facebook and Netflix). Just go to Paris to see how the publishing activity is part of the urban relief – I cite Paris here to please Universidade de São Paulo and Fernando Henrique Cardoso – or, closer, Buenos Aires.

There's a lot spoken about functional illiteracy, but, in my point of view, there's also the aesthetic-formal illiteracy and I cite contemporary literature reading because I believe we read few "shape", and I didn't mean to bump into the bla bla bla of content and shape in here. Drunk's digression: a few years ago, I began collecting texts by Brazilian critics and curators, about art or contemporary artists, whose epigraphs – that minor name-dropping given in the beginning of a text – were from a non contemporary literature, in other words, anachronic in regard to the contemporary art discussed on the text (Clarice Lispector is a champion, followed by Guimarães Rosa; Manoel de Barros is bronze – ok, we can say that this last one is contemporary; but, in shape, I don't consider it.

Back from digression, all this added (to not like books + lack of habit of reading contemporary forms of writing + x), in my point of view, contributes to the Brazilian art circuit doesn't have an eye, and doesn't even worry about having it, to historic or current Brazilian conceptual art, nor to the circuits and spaces where conceptual art naturally establishes, like, for example, the graphic-editorial circuit of publication. Of course, there is also a financial matter (maybe the x of the sum I rehearsed above). The art circuit depends on the market and it's well known that the museum determines the history and who sponsors the museum is the financial elite that establishes the market which looks for intellectual endorsement in the museum. Yes, closed-circuit, pretty closed – where most of the artists consist of post-teenage outsiders who are born from wealthy families in this closed circuit and are successful based on that Brazilian meritocracy we know well. So, what ends up being coined as "good art",

and consequently goes down in history, is what became fashionable and was monetized within the closed game in which the institution intellectually endorses what the market forges as fashion, in order to become a commodity. And what about publications in this slippery mess? Sorry people, but conceptual little papers are hardly born with the possibility of being a commodity (I'll be back on that).

And then? Does history correct it? Sometimes.

In this economic matter, even to rewrite the history of art seems impossible: would history move the axis of the official narrative and debunk painting which, at least since 1950, gave way so that other practices to take forward the paradigm breaks that painting achieved only until the historical vanguards? Would the history of art assume that its aesthetic eye is also in tune for non-aesthetic questions, like certain discourses that can fuse financial speculation with intellectual aesthetic speculation (think about the '80-'90s)? Most likely not, after all, there are thousands of paintings and post-50's objects in property of banks of banks, corporations, and millionaires who heavily invested in these works as a durable asset that, like gold, never would be devalued. History can't dare to devalue these works. At most, it adds some items in its fringes – publications of performance art, for example – but without messing with its central pictorial-objectual axis. Thus the historical revisions, such as the museums' dispute for Fluxus collections from the '90s onward, don't demystify, let's say, a Fluxus enemy like Pollock.

On the stock exchange of art, the painting's still the perfect object of financial speculation, besides being a palatable genre to anyone. Painting behaves well on the house's wall and in the retina already made literate by tradition. This logic extends to sculpture and to the object that, like painting, has the unicity and the material consistency which respectively

assures the exclusivity of property and physical conservation that any durable asset liable of investment requires. But, conceptual little papers are hardly born with the chance of being a commodity (I've said I would be back on this question). In the art market, it's public and notorious that works on paper are worthless – any young painter in their twenties already enters the market with a settled place and a high value. That is, the printed paper of artist's publication is crushed by the steamroller that is the relation which art has with the luxury market of durable assets (paper has the fame of not being durable, especially in a tropical country), and maybe, this would be the karma that visual arts will carry forever: its establishment and circulation operates on a palatial logic whose so-called aesthetic values are arbitrated by marketing issues and material financial investment, and so, “democratically” exposes to the general public – museums, institutions, galleries – what is, both as object and aesthetic speculation, the property of a financial elite, results of the relationships of a luxury trade that, yes, says what ART is. Painting is ART. Printed little paper that, ordinarily, has a circulation and passes from hand to hand, being able to tear, is art.

I used the term “property”, 46 words ago, thinking that is what is linked to the capitalist idea of ownership, should be linked to the idea of possessing cultural artifacts that an individual has around him to demarcate his personal symbolic territory, and this is not about collecting – yes, my romanticism; let's dance a bolero but don't bring me flowers, I hate it. The art, as a luxury item inaccessible to the mere mortal, who lives outside the richest 1%, does not democratically provide this personal symbolic territory built in the home – that music or literature provides, for example. (I write this, in this blog, from within the personal symbolic territory I have at home: the *Bacanas Books*.)

This capitalist matter that is heavily inscribed in the understanding of what visual arts is would not be a problem – market is market, the game is crystal clear, it invests in what gives profit and prestige, it's simple – if we had artists concerned with making their poetics to pass democratically through the physical and symbolic constitution of lower-middle class homes, like mine, down – but I will not discuss here, each artist with his conscience – and even if we had a counterweight from our art institutions. But in relation to institutions, we do not have: they have more to do with the market than with artistic production. No need to look very far. Just look at the artists who participate in exhibitions at institutions: most are in galleries, which means, the institutions “research” artistic production in the market. And just look at the collections of our institutions: they are collections of objects – durable or not – and not of acts and ideas. In addition, institutions behave more like buildings than as poles, so curators always need to fill architecture in a spectacular way and, let's face it, publications are not there for that. Printed little conceptual papers hardly fill the exhibition spaces destined to the society of the spectacle.

Of course there are exceptions, but exceptions are those perverse things that serve the rule to put your hand on your hips and say “see, it's not like that, look at this case, you are being radical”, then turn their backs on you, go away and remain: rule. So let's celebrate the exceptions but keep trying to sabotage the rules.

From this whole equation, there is a result at the end: we live in the current contradiction of having part of the market focused on the Brazilian graphic-conceptual art of the 1970s – which our institutions still ignore – while there is a complete blindness in relation to current Brazilian graphic-conceptual art. Moral of the history / story: we live in a moment when publications in Brasil are only useful if the paper is yellowish. (The

other day a friend explained to me that the term “grilagem” [from *grilo* = cricket] comes from the fact that, in order to falsify deeds with which to sell land that was not owed by one, these deeds appeared to be aged, leaving the papers in drawers full of crickets, in order that the yellowing would support the fudge that the seller was a former owner... see, should I do this so that my conceptual works gain importance?)

Back to publications, the current scene and circuit that exist and gain visibility at fairs like Tijuana, Plana, Miolo(s), etc, don't pass by the big art circuit that barely knows what this production is. Whoever attends these fairs must have already perceived the strength of the print outside the railings of the passe-partout, the wall and the moldy purist circuit of the print as fine art. And who today focuses on the “rescue” of *poema/processo* will find it updated in the contemporary of an *ocupação*, for example. Not to mention the contemporary restart of the symbiotic relationship that Latin American conceptual art has always had with the graphic medium. This is all visible at these fairs. But the very few curators I see at these fairs, when I find them, they are almost always unison: “Cool, very cool all this, but it's confusing, a lot, a lot of information, I can't see it right”. But, in relation to SP-Arte or the São Paulo Biennial itself, they do not say the same.

I confess that the lack of interest of the big circuit bewilders me. Bewildering is their inability to hold a publication in their hands and look at the publisher or artist in the eye and try to understand... their inability to let themselves be touched by the publication, by the text, by that art. By “big circuit” I mean curators and agents who – for some time now – are the ones who bridge the artistic production and institutions. It's already been considered a historical negligence that some institutions – like MAC USP, by vocation – have ignored for at least 10 years the artistic production that manifests itself through writing and

publication in terms of collecting and acknowledgment. Meanwhile, other institutions catch the trend of this publishing and put on tons of fairs as frills of programming and spectacles; even if ornamental, there's indeed a positive side to it: it is a way to propel the scene even if these frillfairs seem to me as a volatile trend.

However, although, nevertheless, that's a contradiction that I happily admit: if I insist on the fact that the institution is oblivious with regards to the current graphic activities in the arts, I also highlight the fact that artist publishing must avoid institutions like the plague. The historical role that we inherited from self-publishing is precisely not to give in to the logic of the museum politics of production and display and thus circulate and affirm another possibility of artistic production that is not legitimated by an elitist agreement bound to the luxury object to be contemplated in the cathedral-palace-like-white-cube.

But as publications avoid the institutions like the plague, they (the institutions) should probe and reconfigure themselves so as to be able to indeed(!) absorb this production. Not only should art institutions be committed to collecting and archiving works that contain in themselves the dissent that undermine their (the institutions) historical and political framework, but also – and moreover – they should preserve dissensions as tools that will allow (art) history to be permanently revised and rewritten. This political conflict, however, doesn't seem to exist in Brasil. In a country that hates dealing with (its) history, it seems to me that institutions effortlessly deny archiving dissensions that in the future may refute the history that they are currently writing.

Let's turn to institutions that are exceptions, and that already have archives of contemporary publications? Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais' Library, Museu da Pampulha and Centro Cultural São Paulo (with

recent acquisitions but – note – not by the institution’s initiative), Projecto Múltiplo at Centro Cultural São Paulo, etc. What’s more, we need more. Otherwise we risk seeing history repeating itself and have but a few museums in charge of a particular historical collection. Such is the case of the Museu de Arte Contemporânea de São Paulo’s housing of the Brazilian and Latin American conceptual art of the 1970’s. And when something is exclusive to one single place, it generates the worst: power.

I think I’m about to end this text.

And speaking of museums and circuits, as I’m moving towards the end, I’ll allow myself to pull the handbrake again – as a bootlegger in first person – in a new digression (can’t prevent it from being the last one, sorry...but it might be): it just occurred to me that with time I’ve become a bipolar artist; or bisexual artist, or bi-anything artist. My bi practice, which operates in between the editorial and exhibition spaces, has made me realized that the exhibition space, the big circuit, dialogues very closely with the editorial, which – by the way – is made by artists that frequent the big circuit, but – at the same time – the big circuit doesn’t even know what’s being produced there, and sees the editorial space as a distant and complex poor cousin. That’s when I realized I had to be bi. It seems that I have two ouvres, or two axes of production, since the big circuit separates wheat from chaff. And I won’t even mention here my other bipolarity: visual artist writer. I’m bipolar, or quadripolar. I never bit anyone on the streets, though.

End digression, bi.

I had already brushed over (oops, pictorial metaphor) that last subject when talking about the art circuit’s agents who care little about art book fairs. At the same time, this ignorance of the contemporary art circuit concerning the graphic production of its artists force me to think that

perhaps this production responds more to culture than to the economic and intellectual elitism of the contemporary art circuit. Only in an art book fairs environment, for example, an artist who adhered to the logic and narratives of contemporary art and protected by its shared code territory, will be side by side with a woodcut engraving cooperative, of a tattoo designer and skater, who makes posters, of an architecture magazine, of twenty-year-old artists who have barely graduated, of artists who work outside the legitimacy of academic education and outside the official art circuit: all of this in a horizontal environment of cultural exchange in which codes are created at the time of being shared. Immoral of the story: in this polysemy, maybe I found good resonance for my bi-bi-operation.

Getting contemporary art out of its palatial tower and make it circulate in an environment of cultural diversity – for me, that’s what art book fairs are: cultural events – it’s as challenging as convincing the big art circuit that what we do is a work of art and not a B-side draft. It’s a four-way challenge, bi-bipolar life, lightly biting.

3.

The good structural manners of a text say that in this item 3 I should talk about the current production of artist publications in Brasil, cause I’ve been hitting this key a lot. But, damn it, I’ve done it so much on this blog.

5.

I skipped to five because I don’t want to end this text with an even number. I don’t like even numbers. To end this soap, I choose here one of

the most important and daring projects of Brazilian contemporary art, in my point of view. The *Dupla Central* project, a partnership between Ikrek Publisher and *A Recreativa* magazine.

It is an exhibition space whose architecture is the central double page of *A Recreativa* crossword magazine, to which the Ikreks invite, every month, an artist to think and “install” a work. That is, there is an exhibition space on the central double page of *A Recreativa* magazine, just like there is the Octagon in the center of the Pinacoteca, as well as, there are several exhibition spaces in the various art galleries in the city, as there are at Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, Itaú Cultural and the like. With the difference that the central double page of *A Recreativa* is a mobile exhibition space and circulates outside the official art circuit – in other words, the type of space fetishized by any circuit, but ours (oops, it escaped!).

Bless me, grandpa Siegelaub. (Find out about how Hilda Hilst wrote in her newspaper chronicles.)

In the bus station, going to *Taubaté*, or before going down the *Serra das Araras* to *Rio*, someone goes there at the newsstand, buys *A Recreativa* to fill travel time, and suddenly, opens on a page that, like a *pop-up*, unzips an exhibition space for contemporary Brazilian art.

Going waaaaay back to the first paragraph of part 2, “it would be disputed through slaps abroad”. Here things are slower. But we don’t give up, like a kid playing in the street. Go, go, run, play! – and we will try to crack the glass that protects the central axis of art history, with a well-thrown stone. But, unlike the kid who runs away, we stand in front of the broken glass, admit that “it was me” and still sing:

Erring Much (while erring R. Mutt’s signature).

Soap_

Fabio Morais

This text was originally published on the artist's blog, as one of Fabio's works. In 2018, it was published as part of the URGENTE collection by publishing platform par(ent)esis. Soap is a kind of manifesto of independent publishing, written from a historical perspective on editorial practice in Brazil.

The group that carried out the collective translation was made up of 14 participants who translated the text from Portuguese to English with the advice of the author, Fabio Morais, and Stephanie Sauer, founder of A Bolha Editora (Rio de Janeiro/BR and San Francisco/USA).

Some words, generally colloquial terms and untranslatable, local expressions, were kept in the Portuguese language by the group's decision. To make these words understandable to an English reader, the group collectively wrote the following suggestion: "For artworks and expressions in this text that ignite your curiosity, please resort to your most trusted sources of knowledge production and distribution for further inquiry".

These words were considered untranslatable_ *Abre-alas, Bi, Biba, Desbunde, Geleia geral, Grilagem, Marra, Minina, Pixo, Sambando, Texto-pompa-gira, Udigrudi.*

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Acknowledgements_ Biblioteca | Centro de Documentação e Pesquisa da Escola de Artes Visuais do Parque Lage.

Translation from Portuguese to English, from 19 August to 25 September 2020.

In 2020 and 2021, facing a situation in which the possibility for face-to-face exchanges is far off, tijuana proposes virtual meetings to deepen independent editorial work, in which texts in Portuguese, English and Spanish form the basis for debates on what, how and why to publish. The exercise of reading extends to a collaborative translation of writings that put forward the essence of the act of publishing independently. Registration is free and open to all levels of Portuguese, English and Spanish.

Published in partnership with the platform par(ent)esis, the translations of the five publications will be available online, free to be downloaded, enjoyed, shared and printed in a simple and accessible way in your home.

Other texts read and translated in this project

Publicación independiente como plataforma de urgencia, Banca Carrocinha, Uma história de amor, Tia Blassingame, Mudar as perguntas, Nicolás Pradilla, Editora- Editora, Gabi Bresola.



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