

PERSPECTIVES

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What perspective, or lack of perspective, do we have on Brazilian new media art?

2005 is the “Year of Brazil” in France; it is also a time for (re)discovering kinetic artⁱ and consolidating initiatives around the world to preserve, archive and document new media art. The historization of this entire chapter on contemporary art has (at last) truly begun. Technological art is often seen as having originated primarily in North America and Western Europe, followed by Eastern Europe, Japan and Australia. In other words, it is implied that technological art was born in industrialized “Western” countries. It is little known that Brazil, far from being a newcomer, has long been on the scene of new media art. Brazilian artists were in fact among the founders of these new artistic forms, movements and trends and have distinguished themselves in several areas: kinetic art, computer art, telecommunication artⁱⁱ and digital poetry, to mention just a few. The debates and seismic jolts that have taken place in contemporary art since WWII have, in Brazil, been intense and utopic, as well as dogmatic, and in any case have contributed to a new perspective and new thoughts on art. As a general approach, or on the contrary, focusing on one artist in particular, it is this history and contribution that are mentioned in articles by Arlindo Machado on "Pioneers of Electronic Art in Brazil", by André Parente on Sérvulo Esmeraldo, by Annateresa Fabris on Waldemar Cordeiro, by Simone Osthoff on Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica, and Eduardo Kac's interview of Abraham Palatnik back in 1986.

What perspective, or lack of perspective, do we have on Brazilian new media art? Is it a condescending one towards a

country of the “South”, “emerging” economically, violent and inegalitarian and entrenched in the cliché of exoticism? Does this not lead us to expect a certain type of artwork, which cannot be anything but *low tech*, despite the fact that some artists are actively involved in the aesthetic exploration of the most cutting-edge technologies, including robotics, artificial intelligence and artificial life, networks, immersive cinema, the CAVE system, etc.? Does this not lead us to expect artworks with a necessarily political and social content, whereas some trends explore formal language?.

Doesn't our perspective keep us from “recognizing” what we actually see? Simone Osthoff, in her paper on Clark and Oiticica brings up this question in a note. In 1969, comparing the work of Hélio Oiticica and Robert Morris, exhibited in London, would have been unthinkable. How does this type of comparison apply today to current artwork?

There is no *one* Brazilian new media art, or a French or American one, for that matter, but rather trends and movements. And, in Brazil, as everywhere else, using such and such a medium, or focusing on a specific content, or exploring such and such a language, is a *choice*, an artistic statement. Brazilian new media art, like any other, is part of the global-local dialectic, questioning art, its forms and languages, its immateriality or new materiality. It raises contemporary political, societal, aesthetic and conceptual questions about globalization and post-human issues, about their fitting in with the reality of this country-continent where the sign-city, the wired-city and public space, confronted with private space and cyberspace, hold a special place. Underlying this are the concepts and notions that Brazil has invented, such as anthropophagism and tropicalism, and which it is now revisiting, grounded in them and going beyond them. Christine Mello, in a more general approach, Paula Perissinotto and Solange Farkas, by focusing on a specific medium (Internet for Perissinotto and video for Farkas), and the texts written by the artists contributing to *://brasil* centered on their own work, pave the way for us to

understand the multiplicity of the current creation in new media art in Brazil. In complement to this is Paulo Herkenhoff's article on Eduardo Kac who, besides Sandra Kogut, is the most famous (yet misknown) Brazilian artist in France.

Women hold a singular place in the Brazilian artistic landscape. Feminism and gender theories and studies are marginal if not inexistent; there are no demands for equality or re-equilibrium in society between the genders (as there are in Anglo-Saxon countries); and, of course, there is no such an art that would be specifically "feminine". However, both historically and on the current art scene, there are a surprisingly large number of women, so many, in fact, that masculine over-representation, whether real or potential, in exhibitions or text collections, is not an issue when making a selection, regardless of the theme or topic. Perhaps because it is so far from being the case in other countries, including France, and certainly because they are all important artists, this catalogue features an article about them by Simone Osthoff, entitled "From Muses to Makers of Media Arts".

The texts brought together here are not exhaustive with regard to the history or current creation, or descriptions and theories of new media art in Brazil; this would be totally absurd. Instead, they are insights or perspectives offered by several art critics, theoreticians and curators from Brazil, together with texts about the Sergio Motta Prize and Itaú Cultural, two organizations supporting new media art.

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to extend friendly thanks to Jean-Luc Soret, without whom none of this would exist.

To conclude, I enjoy thinking that Brazil and France share a border, which runs through the Amazonian forest with the Oyapock river as its point of passage, a liquid highway, in a place where pristine nature, diverse cultures and a social fabric full of contrasts flow alongside one of the most advanced technologies, that which puts our communication satellites into orbit.

Translation from French by Novatrad

ⁱ See exhibitions on Nicolas Schöffer at Espace Electra in Paris and *L'Œil moteur* at the Museum of modern and contemporary art of Strasbourg, and numerous publications, including the catalogues for these exhibitions, on the topic.

ⁱⁱ After mail art, the fax, minitel, telephone, etc., telecommunication art has been revived with Internet and mobile telephony, both of which allow for other forms of artistic expression.