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- 1 I am writing in Brazil, and this detail is significant in relation to the topic I am addressing. A week before our country was officially invaded by Coronavirus, I was lucky enough to visit Lá Da Favelinha, a cultural centre situated in Brazil's second largest favela, *Aglomerado da Serra*, in Belo Horizonte. The space was created in a private property on a busy street, initiated by residents who understood culture not as a privilege but as a right and above all as a tool for community development. Recently, together with people who support their projects in the areas of music, fashion, dance and visual arts, they renovated the venue and painted it with vibrant colours that stand out in the local landscape. It is a self-managed space that effectively transforms its surroundings and all those who participate in it, through natural social insertion, openness to neighbours, clarity of political purpose and educational experimentation. Should they be referred to as artists or simply as citizens? Although in antisocial art institutions the preservation of the art field and the authorial merit of the artist prevail, in *Lá Da Favelinha* more urgent socio-spatial conflicts are at play, *with* and *beyond* art.
- 2 What is public about public art and what is political about political art? With this question, Oliver Marchart¹, rather than simply challenging the autonomy of the art field, urges us to work deeply into a political history of art rather than a history of political art. Given that "public art", "socially engaged art", "community art", "collaborative art", "street art", "creative placemaking", "relational art", among others, have proliferated in recent decades with practices that oppose the comfort of museums and galleries, it is necessary, as Isabelle Stengers² phrased it, to create a space for hesitation about what we –artists, curators, scholars and directors– are doing.
- 3 With our feet firmly planted on the ground in order to displace our point of view, we can observe that since the fifteenth century, Imperialism and Colonialism have delegitimised and destroyed ways of life and ways of art in order to build the fiction of

Modernity. On the other hand, since the last century, global turns have tried to reterritorialize the connection between art and life: "spacial turn", "ethnographic turn", "relational turn", "ethical turn", "social turn". But what is conflictual about contemporary art? What produces disturbance, indistinction or ambiguity in the functioning of the art field when faced with the challenges of daily planetary life?

- 4 Marchart contrasts well-known "relational aesthetics" with "conflictual aesthetics". Concerned by the disturbances and radical openings of the art field, the author situates political theory as a new paradigm of aesthetic reflection and reacts not only to Nicolas Bourriaud, but to ontological *versus* ontic propositions for possible political art in the works of Michel Foucault, Jacques Rancière, Chantal Mouffe, Doreen Massey and Claire Bishop. For Marchart, the notion of antagonism would be the basis of political art (in opposition to Mouffe), since it is the condition for the emergence of the public sphere. In its contingency, antagonism could not be relational (as opposed to Bishop) because it precedes the relational sphere. Political art attempts to compose strategies for taking up a position (the genuine *ex-positions* mission) for the organisation of public spheres which, as we know, cannot be organised. In its triple strategy –propagate, agitate and organize– "This political function of art consists in the paradoxal attempt to organize a public space."³
- 5 While Marchart reminds us that, analogous to art, revolution is the political event *par excellence* through which we update our ability to start something new, Eric Schruers and Kristina Olson depart from Gil Scott-Heron's 1970s song "The revolution will not be televised" in order to ask: where is the revolution in recent artistic practices? Graffiti, communication, architecture, food or music compose the constellation of live case studies produced by SECAC Conference papers (2013-2017) that tear to pieces any simple answer to that question. If, on the one hand, these studies seem to follow the paths of relational aesthetics too placidly, on the other hand they pose questions which, in the pragmatic effort to organise something impossible, can be more important than answering them. "What can food teach us about art, community and culture?", asks Seitú Jones; "How do we produce an environment that actually becomes fecund and powerful and pedagogical?", provokes Nato Thompson. But it is Pablo Helguera who concludes, in the polyphonic transcription of *Bad at Sports*⁴: "Art has a degree of ambiguity that cannot possibly be pinned down, what's powerful about art is its ambiguity"⁵. In desiring to be a social practice, the value of art lies in the recognition of the potential ambiguity that can create disturbance and radically open up the field's functioning.
- 6 But planetary experiences teach us that it is impossible to simplify when we say "social practices". Society is not an unchanging feature, it is intentionally put into play, shaped by each group, each place. If a certain art history has been sovereign in the production of knowledge about art, its geography still needs to be developed, accepting the emergence of space as a historical protagonist. And this geography necessarily implies the recognition of other epistemologies, other cosmologies and other globalisations. Globalisation not as an extra artistic romanticism but as perversity (which in fact impacts every single way of life, every place, every coexisting world).
- 7 In the era of Anthropocene and the emergence of ferocious right-wing governments, the collection of texts edited by Maria Hlavajova and Wietske Maas is dedicated to listening to other worlds and ways of life that were systematically invisibilized but that have always existed – or *re-existed* – as resistance. How to live not merely against

fascism but in spite of it? If fascism is not finished, what is stopping us from recognizing its coming from the future?, ask the editors. Unlike dominant narratives that prefer to see fascism as something from the past, this "critique-as-proposition" essay starts with current fascisms in order to question and expand the political notion of the public sphere towards the notion of cosmopolitics. Marchart's "political turn" is complemented by the "cosmopolitical turn". Who should be included? Who shall be called "we"? Once we perceive the forest as a polis, how could more-than-human assemblies act as proposals for a non-fascist living?, asks Shela Sheikh. How can it be possible to make the dead count and not just be counted?, asks Mick Wilson. How to turn machine learning into a form of critical pedagogy?, asks Dan McQuillan. Ways of life that are not subject to the compulsory "common" world are what Stefano Harney and Fred Moten call "undercommons": not as a "collection of individuals-in-relation" but "something underneath the individuation that the commons bears, hides, and tries to regulate."⁶ These questions enable us to inhabit cultural spaces in another way, as critical pedagogy or "complementary forums", as Eyal Weizman points out.

- 8 In Brazil, the last country in the West to abolish slavery and the only country to forgive dictators and their minions without holding them accountable for their crimes, several recent exhibitions have attempted to establish themselves as complementary forums. This is the case of *AI-5 50 anos : ainda não terminou de acabar = AI-5 50 years: it still isn't over yet*, at Tomie Ohtake Institute, São Paulo, in 2018 and *Meta-arquivo: 1964-1985: espaço de escuta e leitura de histórias da ditadura*, at SESC Belenzinho, also in São Paulo, in 2019. Facing the fragility of institutions in Brazil, the search for and availability of information, documents and archives may become an even more decisive challenge. Both exhibitions confront everyday fascism within the archives and its gaps. The archive, a theme already exhaustively discussed in the art field, is reexamined in its political precariousness and historical temporariness.
- 9 Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, in her recent book *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism*⁷, invites us to unlearn imperialism by refusing to look at the archive as the locus of history. The archive is not the depository that recruits us to explain what is and it is not there but it is an imperial technology. This assertive argument is usually missing in the wide ontological inventory of the archive made by art history and aesthetics. With this ontology, we could be able to practice potential history.
- 10 *AI-5 50 anos : ainda não terminou de acabar = AI-5 50 years: it still isn't over yet* focuses on the revision of art history within the broader history of society. Reflecting on the role of art institutions in Brazil, the exhibition's theme is AI-5, a decree from December 1968 that suspended the basic guarantees of free speech in Brazil during the military dictatorship. Under political, behavioural and moral censorship, how did the experimental artistic production of that period –cinema, visual arts, architecture, music, literature– handle the need for expression when it is hindered by necessary codification? Through exhaustive archival research, documents produced by the National Truth Commission (2011-2014), artists, artworks and museums, as well as recent interviews by curator Paulo Miyada, the 587-page catalogue is a breath-taking historical survey which suggests its melodramatic present-day relevance, faced with the evidence of fascism that *still isn't over yet*.
- 11 In a prospective sense, the exhibition *Meta-arquivo: 1964-1985: espaço de escuta e leitura de histórias da ditadura* does not set up an inventory but rather imagines a kind of narrative game that takes place in the encounter between art and archives. Curator

Ana Pato sets the artists the challenge of appropriating public archives by creating connections with their artistic research. Dealing with stories that are still poorly elaborated in collective memory, the exhibition's pedagogical character resides in a non-linear understanding of the past, through art. As a tour guide, the catalogue privileges the brief description of the artists' investigative journey, rather than the exhibited works. If "justice is built through mediation"⁸, the publication-guide operates together with the publication-artwork of the collective Contrafilé, *School of Testimonies: material of studies for class-performance*. "We have learned that one of the most important issues in this approach is that part of the archive is not in the documents, but in what each one reads, sees or hears in them, and from them,"⁹ explains Contrafilé, experiencing in practice the potential ambiguity of art: how to speak and listen as art?

- 12 "Victims need 'witnesses' capable of making their presence exist, those whose world could dramatically change. Perhaps this is a role that would suit those who commonly call themselves 'artists,'" writes Stengers in *The Cosmopolitical Proposal*¹⁰. Can art as a pedagogical action transform, when least expected, the spectators into actors of their time? Should they be referred to as artists or simply as citizens (remembering that the forest is also a polis)?

NOTES

1. Marchart, Oliver. *Conflictual Aesthetics: Artistic Activism and the Public Sphere*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2019, p. 144

2. Stengers, Isabelle. "A Proposição cosmopolítica", *Revista do Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros*, no. 69, April 2018, p. 446

3. Marchart, Oliver. *Conflictual Aesthetics*, op. cit., p. 151

4. <http://badatsports.com/>

5. *Social Practice Art in Turbulent Times: The Revolution Will Be Live*, New York: Routledge, 2020, p. 170; p. 211 ; p. 203. Edited by Eric J. Schruers, Kristina Olson

6. *Propositions for Non-Fascist Living: Tentative and Urgent*. Utrecht; London: BAK/MIT Press, 2019, p. 53. Edited by Maria Hlavajova and Wietske Maas

7. Azoulay, Ariella Aïsha. *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism*. New York; London: Verso, 2019

8. *Meta-arquivo: 1964-1985: espaço de escuta e leitura de histórias da ditadura*. São Paulo: SESC, 2019, p. 19. Edited by Ana Pato

9. Contrafilé. *Escola da testemunhos: material de estudos para aulas-performance*. Flyer distributed during the exhibition *Meta-arquivo: 1964-1985*. São Paulo: SESC, 2019, p. 74

10. Stengers, Isabelle. "A Proposição cosmopolítica", op. cit., p. 462

AUTHOR

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