

Molior presents *Contrainte/Restraint*
New media arts practices from Brazil and Peru

Curators : Julie Bélisle (Montreal), Kiki Mazzucchelli (São Paulo) and Miguel Zegarra (Lima)
Production of Groupe Molior

Essay – Julie Bélisle

On Dissemination

Without constraint, there is sometimes great risk of being set adrift. In any event the existence of constraint quite often proves to be a powerful stimulant for the imagination. In the face of the teeming diversity of artistic practices in Brazil and Peru, we wanted to sketch a picture of media art in these countries. Constraint enters into play, first of all, in the use of new technologies, and then in restricting ourselves to the young generation of artists we wish to highlight. A generation, it quickly seemed to me, that is anti-Romantic, technological, chaotic in its organisation and at the same time socially committed in its art. These artists' work is little seen in North America. The constraint, therefore, was not so much to look at work that reveals a coercive production context or whose subject matter is, necessarily, that of oppression—although this does appear in some of the work we have chosen—but rather to bring together work which makes apparent a multiplicity of constraints, from technological challenges to blocked memories, from social control to urban paranoia.

It must be said that the cities of São Paulo and Lima, with their dizzying numbers, both have effervescent artistic scenes. The former is sustained by its financial sector and by a significant network of museums, one-off events and commercial galleries,¹ while the latter draws its support from individual and collective initiatives and from the private galleries and institutional structures that have arisen since the late 1990s.² São Paulo, whose population density rivals that of Mexico City, has an international-calibre artistic scene, unquestionably the largest in South America. Brazilian artists, however, remain dependent on the support of private galleries; although collective structures emerge occasionally, it seems to me that there is less solidarity in the artistic community than there is in Lima. There the artistic scene, which has grown gradually, remains fragile on the level of its structure of events and is dependent on the will of the government of the day. Another thing that weighs heavily on the Peruvians is the country's pre-Columbian past. The exotic image of the Incas persists in Peru,³ a country whose contemporary culture is of much less interest to locals and tourists. This, nevertheless, has the effect of generating artistic resistance, which manifests itself in the exploration of new technologies. The choice of non-traditional media⁴ acts as a sign of self-assertion.

These facts, offered here as a glimpse of the situation, are quite partial and incomplete, but they unquestionably modulate artistic production in each case. It is interesting to note also that the topic of globalisation frequently recurs in each country in the discourse of artists and critics alike, attesting to the emergence of a "common culture". No culture shock thus awaits us when approaching Brazilian and Peruvian media art, something that may be due to the sharing of references brought about by the availability of the Internet, cable television and computers pretty much everywhere on the planet. While some people see globalisation as a threat, one that carries the risk of erasing our differences, a shared planetary culture could instead be synonymous with an opening up, in which each of us unavoidably contributes our own specificity.

The connections among the works chosen for *Contrainte/Restraint* are many and indicative of a plurality of practices. Although political commitment was associated with Latin American art throughout the twentieth century, this is not the dominant element of the work selected here. The themes of surveillance and violence are more often explored as a way of addressing the paranoia and danger that mark the reality of urban life. Beyond social concerns, however, today the city is a subject of fascination in itself; given its dimensions it becomes a space that cannot be taken in by the naked eye. This is the perspective from which Nicole Franchy models it, using various electronic circuits to construct a veritable network-city, none of whose zones communicates with the others. Rodrigo Matheus' videos, meanwhile, grasp urban space

through the use of digital technology. His abstract aerial views, assemblages of Google Earth satellite photographs, play upon the effects of distance, juxtaposition and scanning. Surprisingly, these two works do not take the South American continent as their subject, but rather even faster-growing cities in Asia. Juxtaposed with these images of sprawling cities are landscapes untouched by any human civilisation, the South Pole and the Grand Canyon, which act as a counterweight.

Gabriel Acevedo Velarde's work *Parálisis* re-introduces us to urban architecture. Using animation, it transposes the neurotic anxiety of the city's inhabitants onto its vegetation, turning weeping fig trees, the typical shrubbery of Mexico City and Lima, into characters of his video. His trees come to life in the midst of the city's concrete spaces, shaking their leaves and yelling at passers-by—the effect of the urban fabric also being that of constraining nature. José Carlos Martinat, in his installation *Stereo Realidad Environments 3: Brutalismo*, reproduces the authoritarian architecture of the Peruvian Defence Ministry, commonly known as the “Pentagonito”. In his structure, Martinat installed printers connected to software that carries out search sequences on the Internet to find episodes in recent Peruvian history marked by the brutality of its battle against terrorism. The accumulation of printed textual collages gives material form to the extent of repression in Peru. The country's history is also taken up by Rolando Sánchez, who recounts the horror of episodes in the terrorist guerrilla war or the 1980s by placing it at the heart of video games he designs, which are modelled on games from that time. His work *Matari 69200*—this figure being the number of deaths brought about by the conflict—recounts an episode in his childhood, when the arrival of colour television and the Atari 2600 video game console was accompanied by the dissemination of extremely violent images.

The video game aesthetic is also revisited by the duo Leandro Lima and Gisela Motta. In *Armas. Obj.* they pirate various games for their firearms. The resulting three-dimensional reproductions problematise our familiarity with images of violence, inserted here and there in playful situations. And we mustn't forget their piece *Alvo* in the same series, an interactive target with the viewer in its line of sight.

Several works in the exhibition thus make use of virtual images to create the “visual” out of video games, modelling, Google Earth, algorithms or animation software. Nevertheless, the work of Amilcar Packer and Lucas Bambozzi brings us back to the brute reality of things and, to a certain extent, to the physical laws governing it. Here the image is not obtained through transposition but following the experience of performative protocol and the programming of innocuous gestures. With *Video #15*, Packer puts a truck to use in new ways, turning it into the site of a performance. Naked and seated in the middle of the box while the vehicle is moving, Packer tries to bring the jolts which inevitably make him fall and lose his position under control. The two cameras capture an activity in which the danger resides in the physical risk to which he subjects his own body. Bambozzi's *Run>Routine*, meanwhile, is an installation that encodes the fall of various objects into a program that orders them by chance. The work thus takes the form of a repetitive interface that creates a dialogue between various individual scenes and whose fragments, while constrained by a program, remain unpredictable and chaotic. The language of computers thus becomes a tool for controlling and formatting incidents of domestic routine.

*

In the end, growth in the movement of goods and the flow of information gives rise, as we can see, to a feeling of complicity which manifests itself beyond borders. And it may be an essential aspect of the new media scene to promote the birth of new communities and new modes of expression in settings where technology proliferates. The experimentation associated with media art thus promotes exchange,

regrouping and dissemination of artistic endeavours, both on the Internet and via countless events around the world. It is as if the arrival of these technological “artefacts”⁵ contributed to dismantling borders.

Julie Bélisle

Montreal, August 2009

1. Agnaldo Farias and Moacir dos Anjos, *The Turn Generation 10 + 1: Brazilian Art in Recent Years* (São Paulo: Instituto Tomie Ohtake, 2007), 28-68.
2. Mauricio Delfin and Miguel Zagarra, “Electronic Art in Peru: The Discovery of an Invisible Territory in the Country of the Incas”, *Third Text*, vol. 23, no. 3 (May 2009): 293-301.
3. *Ibid.*, 293.
4. *Ibid.* See also the article by José-Carlos Mariátegui, “Peruvian Video/Electronic Art”, *Leonardo*, vol. 35, no. 4 (August 2002): 355-63.
5. A term used by José-Carlos Mariátegui in his article “Emergentes: Process-Based Works”, *Emergentes* (Gijón, Spain: LABoral Centro de Arte y Creación Industrial, 2007), 30-38.