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

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THE TECHNOLOGICAL LIFE OF THE SAVAGES

SÃO PAULO: TOPOGRAPHY OF EXCLUSION

With a population of over 10 million inhabitants and a chaotic urban fabric formed by clusters of high-rises and sprawling slums, São Paulo is perhaps the Brazilian city in which the contradictions at heart of the country's society are most pronounced. It is Brazil's financial and industrial centre and the largest middle class consumer market in Latin America, producing 40% of the country's GBP in a city where approximately one million inhabitants still live below the poverty line. This acute economic and social gap is the expression of specific forms of sociability prompted largely by private interests which, in their turn, have produced the deregulated forms of expansion and development that characterize São Paulo's contemporary cityscape.

In fact, the city's last and only major state intervention in urban planning was Francisco Prestes Maia's master plan, and even this was only partially carried out during the 1930s/40s. The plan proposed opening a series of large avenues connecting the centre and the outskirts, privileging automobile circulation over public transportation. It required a great amount of demolition and remodeling of central areas, stimulating real state speculation and driving out the working classes, who could no longer afford the increased rents. This contributed to the production of a physical translation of an extremely imbalanced economic and class system by establishing the centre-periphery model of urban segregation[1], where basic infrastructure and public services (paving, lighting, sewage, hospitals, schools, etc.) are predominantly concentrated in central areas; a model which prevailed until the end of the 1970s.

From the 1980s onwards, this model of segregation by distance would start to gradually change, as an upper class population began to migrate into the newly built fortified enclaves located on the outskirts of São Paulo, bringing together rich and poor into the same geographical areas for the first time. At the same period, crime rates in the city—including robberies, thefts, kidnappings and violent deaths—began to rise, and safety (or rather the lack thereof) became a major factor in the shaping of the cityscape. The São Paulo topography we witness today, with its ubiquitous walls, electric fences, CCTV cameras, private armed security guards, double-gated garages and bulletproof cars is the product of a historical movement of retreat of the middle and upper classes from public spaces—and consequently from public life—and their embracing of a lifestyle the core values of which are security and private, personalized facilities and services.

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[1] For an in-depth study on the relationship of fear, crime, segregation and urban development in São Paulo see *City of walls: crime, segregation, and citizenship in São Paulo*, Teresa Caldeira, pp.220-221. London: University of California Press, 2000.

THE AGE OF CONTROL AND SURVEILLANCE

At present we have a situation in which public spaces in general are largely neglected both by the state and by middle and upper class citizens at the same time as private spaces become increasingly controlled; with the security industry's degree of creativity often reaching comic proportions, such as in the widely popular apartment building gates featuring a rectangular slot where the anonymous and—following the elite's logic—potentially delinquent food delivery workers can hand over pizzas without having to enter the property. In the current scenario, according to social scientist Teresa Caldeira, inequality has become an organizing value. Caldeira maintains that the current model of fortified enclaves creates "a space that directly contradicts the ideals of openness, heterogeneity, accessibility, and equality that helped to organize both the modern type of public space and modern democracies," thus also transforming the way in which public spaces are perceived and used, "constituting the public as left-over space."[2] Consequently, the working and social lives of the elites are increasingly led behind closed doors.

It is in this extremely fearful, markedly divided and highly monitored context that the works of the São Paulo artists included in this exhibition emerge. The themes of control and surveillance are foregrounded both in the series of three videos created by Rodrigo Matheus, in which he uses images from Google Earth, and in the interactive installation by Leandro Lima and Gisela Motta, in which a projected firearm scope follows visitors as they move about the exhibition space. Each of Matheus' video pieces focuses on a different part of the globe, bringing to light distinct aspects of the program's functionality and scope and problematizing this modern type of surveillance technology and its connection with military and corporate control through the creation of obscure, cinematic, suspense-ridden scenarios. Lima and Motta's work deals more specifically with the paranoid feelings experienced by São Paulo citizens on a daily basis, which are possibly as much the product of real crime as of the ostentatiously aggressive security measures found in private spaces.

2006: WE ARE ALL IN HELL

In 2006 São Paulo experienced the greatest public security crisis in its history. The penitentiary system was shaken by rebellions, public and private buildings such as police stations, courts, bank branches and supermarkets were the target of bombs, grenades and shootings. Over two hundred buses were set on fire. Several policemen and penitentiary staff were killed. These attacks—which employed terrorist tactics—were orchestrated by a criminal organization known as the PCC (First Command of the

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[2] See Teresa Caldeira, "A contested public: Walls, graffiti, and *pichações* in São Paulo, inLagnado, Lisette and Pedrosa, Adriano (ed). 27ª Bienal de São Paulo: Como Viver Junto. São Paulo, Fundação Bienal, 2006.

Capital) which was formed in São Paulo state prisons in 1993, and took place in three week-long episodes in the months of May, July and August, just before the governmental elections in October. From within prisons across the state of São Paulo, the PCC leaders used smuggled mobile phones to coordinate these actions, which started as a reaction against the transfer of several PCC inmates to high-security penitentiaries.

This unprecedented upheaval sparked intense media coverage, and fear spread to other Brazilian states where no attacks had taken place.[3] In the midst of the crisis, journalist and filmmaker Arnaldo Jabor published a fictional interview[4] with Rafael Peixoto de Paula Marques, a.k.a. Marcola, the main leader of the PCC. In the following months the text, in which the interviewee comes across as a very articulate critic of the inequalities of Brazilian society, making references to Dante and Hélio Oiticica, was widely circulated through emails and blogs, and often taken as a real interview.

Commenting on the emergence of a new class of citizens who choose organized crime as a way to escape absolute poverty and invisibility, the fictional Marcola stated that "post-misery generates a new murdering culture, aided by technology, satellites, mobile phones, the internet, modern weapons." With "Chinese products" now available in an unprecedented way, modern surveillance technologies and global communications were quickly embraced by a new generation of criminals. For a while, the city seemed to be in the hands of the PCC. Under the circumstances, "Marcola's" last sentences seemed to synthesize the feelings of apprehension of São Paulo's inhabitants at the time: "Leave all hope behind. We are all in hell."

DIVISION AS NORM

In a way, Jabor's story had the merit of giving massive visibility to the issue of daily violence committed against the poorer sections of São Paulo society, a subject that is largely ignored by the media due to its sheer banality.[5] The naked body presented by Amilcar Packer in his immersive video installation seems to evoke the bodies of those people who are left on the other side of the elite's fences and walls, bodies deprived of basic human rights and excluded from the judicial order instituted by sovereign power. Packer's body is presented in an enclosed dark space, subjected to external forces that throw it about violently as it tries to stabilize itself on a chair, highlighting both its vulnerability and resoluteness.

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[3] A survey commissioned by the newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo* and IBOPE, published on 29/08/2006, showed that 26% of the São Paulo population altered their daily routines because of the PPC attacks. Curiously, similar percentages (19 to 28%) were repeated across all regions in Brazil, although the attacks occurred almost exclusively in the state of São Paulo.

[4] The interview was published in the newspaper O GLOBO on 23/05/2006.

[5] However, it is important to note that the text also suggests a direct link between poverty and criminality, a contentious subject which I am not going to develop here.

Lucas Bambozzi's installation *Run>Routine*, on the other hand, proposes a more sarcastic approach towards the posture of self-centeredness assumed by a large section of the middle and upper classes in São Paulo. In this piece, Bambozzi associates several computer routines with domestic routines, pointing to the naïve and selfish belief that daily life could be completely controlled, programmed and free from the chaos represented by the public left-over space and its inhabitants.

TECHNOLOGY IS THE ANSWER, BUT WHAT IS THE QUESTION?[6]

São Paulo has always had a cosmopolitan vocation, and today it is more global than ever. However, its current levels of wealth concentration are shameful and security is used as an excuse to enforce exclusionary practices that guarantee the elite's social exclusivity. In this context, technology appears mainly as an instrument of control and surveillance, especially of private spaces. Curiously, it is very rare to find any type of social or political analysis of technological art in Brazil—a field which has rapidly expanded in the 2000s and which is, by national standards, generously funded.

Mirroring the topography of the city, several technology festivals and exhibitions are sponsored by the private sector and are primarily used as semi-free marketing tools[7] for major multinational companies. Surely, many people in the wider field of Brazilian culture have been developing extremely interesting projects—such as in the case of open source technology—but the new media sector still privileges the spectacular, blockbuster aesthetics over critical content. *Paulistanos* still aspire to a position of synchronicity in relation to the hegemonic cultures that they attempt to emulate, but as long as exclusivity and security, motivated by private interests, are the core values of this society, this will remain a distant dream.

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[6] Quote attributed to the architect Cedric Price.
[7] Under the current cultural incentive laws (Rouanet), the private sector can 'invest' in cultural projects of their choice, as long as these are approved by the government, although there is no clear cultural agenda. A percentage of the amounts invested is deducted from the company's tax.