

PRINTED MATTER, NOMAD MATTER: ON THE IDEOLOGICAL POSSIBILITIES OF ARTIST'S PUBLICATIONS

MATÉRIA IMPRESSA, MATÉRIA NÓMADA: SOBRE O POTENCIAL IDEOLÓGICO DAS PUBLICAÇÕES DE ARTISTA

Márcia Oliveira*

marciacoliveira@gmail.com

In a dictatorial or repressive context, movement can be said to be one of the most fundamental and disruptive forms of (aesthetic) resistance. Through exile, migration, travel or correspondence, bodies, ideas and objects are permanently displaced, searching constantly for lines of flight that are impossible to pin down by any political regime. When associated with art, the elusive and ever-changing nature of movement can transform objects in events, creating an affective network of images, words, objects, ideas and relations. The ideological potential of movement can be found acutely in artist's publications, or in art in the form of printed matter, such as artists' books or mail art, which have the potential to circumvent physical limitations imposed by repressive apparatuses. In addition, movement triggers imagination to put together all the elements of the collaborative network thus constructed and set it in motion. This article takes a closer look at the material and historical circumstances of these art objects that become deeply imbedded with ideology. By looking at the triangulation movement-time-space, I aim to investigate some of the ways women artists used printed matter to revise, confront and debunk totalizing narratives, such as women's role in society, capitalism, slavery, colonialism, etc., narratives that sustained and were themselves sustained by the repressive and dictatorial regimes that operated in Portugal and in Brazil.

Keywords: Artists' publications. Movement. Ideology. Dictatorship.

Em contextos de ditadura e repressão, o movimento adquire enorme potencial em termos da sua capacidade de disrupção e de resistência (estética). Através do exílio, da migração, da viagem ou da correspondência, corpos, ideias e objectos são permanentemente deslocados, numa procura incessante de linhas de fuga impossíveis de fixar por qualquer regime político. No campo das artes visuais, a natureza elusiva e mutável do movimento tem a capacidade de transformar objectos em eventos, criando redes afectivas de imagens, palavras, objectos, ideias e relações. O potencial ideológico do movimento encontra-se de forma bastante vívida nas publicações de artista, ou na arte em forma de matéria impressa, tal como livros de artista ou *mail art*, os quais conseguem contornar as limitações físicas impostas por aparelhos repressivos. Da mesma forma,

* Institute of Arts and Humanities (ILCH), Centre for Humanistic Studies (CEHUM)/ University of Minho, Braga. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2995-2158>

o movimento activa a imaginação, impele-a a juntar elementos de uma rede de colaborações que é assim construída e posta, também, em movimento. O exercício a que nos propomos com este artigo implica olhar mais de perto certas condições materiais e históricas inerentes a certos objectos artísticos, condições essas que os impregnam de camadas ideológicas diversas. Assim, ao considerar a triangulação movimento-tempo-espaço, tenho o objectivo de investigar a forma como várias artistas, mulheres, usaram diferentes tipos de matéria impressa para rever, confrontar e pôr a nu certas narrativas totalizantes, tais como o papel das mulheres na sociedade, o capitalismo, a escravatura, o colonialismo, etc., que foram sustentadas e simultaneamente sustentaram os regimes repressivos e ditatoriais que vigoraram em Portugal e no Brasil.

Palavras-chave: Publicações de artista. Movimento. Ideologia. Ditadura.

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1. Introduction

The exercise of looking back to a certain period in history is an exercise of looking into the narratives of that period. But it also implies that we look at current narratives that, in different ways, help to question or to better understand those same narratives. Those narratives are, thus, (re)told using different tools and in different arenas. Some of the most frequent and common tools in the (re)telling of history are words (more specifically the written word), objects and images. Stories written and told then and now, objects made then and now, images seen then and now. Such an exercise of ‘looking back’ is not an innocent one: it is an action motivated either by the need of understanding something we have not yet grasped or by the urgency to unveil the characteristics of a historical event or moment that we suspect might not be as straightforward as we are often told. The central question underlying such an enterprise, I believe, is what survived from that event or moment in history, and how it survived.

Art can be an important tool to bring forward the survival of several myths in history, namely nationalist myths of a patriarchal nature whose totalizing narrative many women artists have revised, confronted and debunked throughout the decades. In this article I will analyze how apparently outdated mediums like books and other printed matter such as postcards¹, serve as ways of shedding a different light into issues such as women’s role in society, censorship, slavery, and colonialism, issues that were sustained by and themselves sustained many repressive and dictatorial regimes. This is a story of the lives and afterlives of material objects that, made into art, overcame the constrictions of autonomous art, becoming deeply saturated with social and political traces. As Walter Benjamin said, “to articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it ‘the way really was’ (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory, as it flashes up in a moment of danger” (Benjamin 1969, p. 198). So, in this article I will be looking at artists’

¹ For the purpose of theoretical and critical considerations I will generally refer to the term artists’ publications as encompassing books, postcards and multiples. When referring specifically to certain art works I will refer to them accordingly to their material characteristics (either books or postcards, for example).

publications produced in times of dictatorship, and others produced in present times, that function, following Benjamin, as an ‘afterlife’ of materials (such as postcards, for example), and that ‘illuminate’ alternative narratives to those produced by dictatorial and repressive regimes.

2. Movement as medium

In this section I hope to make clear why and how artists’ publications, or art in the form of printed matter, is so interesting and productive in terms of re-viewing historical moments through the critical lens of feminism. Its political and ideological potential is deeply connected to several historical facts of this art form but also with formal and processual specificities. In brief, they have a democratic nature, being easy and cheap to produce independently from the art system; they are very effective as a vehicle to convey and disseminate critical positions, spanning a wide geographic range and circulating easily; they work as alternative spaces to museums and art galleries, being the perfect locations to explore different perspectives and aesthetic experimentation undervalued by the art world. Democratic, cheap, portable, independent, art in the form of printed matter has the potential to conflate politics and poetics like any other art form, for these are objects that are deeply grounded in practices of inscription of the real into art.² In formal terms, these objects establish a particularly close relationship to the viewer/reader, because they are objects that move, easily circulate, but also that need to be put into motion by someone. So, in a sense, the creative process happens as collaboration, starting with the artist, but being continued by the viewer/reader that handles the object, relates with it, and brings its’ plasticity, sensitivity and affectivity into lived and corporeal experience, often in an intimate and personal surrounding (inside the home, for instance, instead of a public space, such as a museum or a gallery). These are also, in my point of view, impermanent objects, and the impermanence of the object naturally summons imagination, working as a process of montage. As Georges Didi-Huberman says, “(...) imagination has nothing to do with personal or gratuitous fantasy. On the contrary, it gives us a knowledge that cuts across – by its intrinsic potential of montage consisting in discovery – the very place where it refuses the links created by obviated resemblance, links that direct observation cannot discern” (Didi-Huberman 2011, p. 5). This particular process is what transforms printed matter from objects into events, that is, something that continues to happen and can never be repeated in the exact same way, a *fluxus*, something impossible to pin down and, ultimately, impossible to control. It is interesting to think of art objects in the form of printed matter that engage in an interplay with its surroundings.

Given these specific traits, artists’ publications in general are particularly suited to the expression of women’s reality, sensitivity and aesthetic, as well as to critical reflection. Besides the material and conceptual characteristics of the medium itself briefly sketched above involving the use of paper and ink or other writing pigment that leaves an

² This thesis was explored briefly in the short essay “Entre palavra e imagem: sobre uma possível abordagem política ao livro de artista” (Oliveira 2014).

imprint in the paper, i.e., visual elements such as words, images or other types of signs, it also involves an interplay between object (material and form) and person. Therefore, one cannot look at it simply as something to be ‘viewed’, but as something to be lived, experienced. This interplay, in my view, is akin to the ‘plasticity of material’ Georges Didi-Huberman identifies when articulating the distance between matter and form in the realm of the plastic arts: “‘Plastic art’ means first of all plasticity of material, which in turn means that matter doesn’t resist form – that it’s ductible, malleable, can be put to work at will. In brief, it humbly offers itself to the possibility of being open, worked, carved, put into form” (Didi-Huberman 2015, p. 43). Even though Didi-Huberman is referring to materials such as clay or wax, I sustain that the ‘plasticity’ of materials is also what is inherent to sheets of paper, or postcards bound in a book, or pieces of paper circulating around from house to house, from city to city, from country to country, from a significant space to another, or from the past into present or contemporary artworks.

Still, at this point, I believe it is necessary, before anything else, to go back to thinking about the medium that can refer to both the type or the material of an artwork: the medium’s specific qualities are those unique characteristics that will enable us to go further in understanding its potential and the reach of certain objects and processes that are deemed ‘artistic’ (‘artistic’ differs from other types of political cultural and social interventions and/or productions, therefore it is indispensable to acknowledge these differences) and, as such, as ‘art’. As Deleuze and Guattari make clear, art can only use the means at its disposal, and those means are aesthetic, that is, those means correspond to the sensation (Deleuze & Guattari 1992). Why is the medium that relevant, when considering a process of communication, especially when looking at art within a political and ideological frame? Why should the medium take precedence in such a context? How does the medium influence the process and, therefore, the message? The medium, of course, is not reducible to art’s material form, as Rosalind Krauss makes clear (Krauss 2000). So, looking at artists’ books and publications, it would be erroneous to see the paper, or the folio, or the rectangular piece of card that makes a postcard, as merely the medium. In an extrapolation effort, and similarly to Krauss, who sees narcissism as the medium of video when making considerations about the “post-medium condition”, that is, when thinking of art objects beyond the materiality of their support (Krauss 2000), I believe we can consider movement as the medium of artists’ publications. This becomes clear if we think about the book as being a “time space-sequence”, according to Ulisses Carrión (1985, p. 32). This definition is easily extended to other publications, such as postcards, that are made specifically to be sent anywhere across the globe, or that are integrated in a mailing network. Therefore, unspecific as this may sound, one can say that the ‘plasticity’ of these materials resides in movement and movement is here taken as the medium inherent to artists’ publications. As Rosalind Krauss makes clear when thinking about the medium,

First, that the specificity of mediums, even modernist ones, must be understood as differential, self-differing, and thus as a layering of conventions never simply collapsed into the physicality of their support. ‘Singleness’, as Broodthaers says, condemns the mind to monomania’. Second, that it is precisely the onset of higher orders of technology (...)

which allows us, by rendering the older techniques outmoded, to grasp the inner complexity of the mediums those techniques support, in Broodthaers hand, fiction itself became such a medium, such a form of differential specificity. (Krauss 2000, p. 53)

In short, by looking at artists' publications as an artistic genre in itself and movement as the medium of the genre, one can see these objects as having a strong signifying potential across spaces and temporalities, for, as Gwen Allen makes clear "(...) maybe rather than dying out completely, the potential of artists' books remains latent, still waiting to be realized. If anything, it seems we are experiencing a kind of renaissance of artists' publications today. (...) As Walter Benjamin pointed out, it is only when a technology is threatened with obsolescence that its true potential is finally released" (Allen 2014, p. 21).

3. Movement through space

By definition, movement implies a dislocation in space. As Anne Moeglin-Delcroix notes, "one reason for the development of the artist's book in the years 1960-70 was the desertion of the studio, characteristic of contemporary art at its birth" (Moeglin-Delcroix 2015, p. 5). At a time when the de-materialization of the art work was a ubiquitous practice (*vd.* Lippard 1997), and emphasis was given to performance art, happenings and action-related art, it is striking that the book and other publications, totally 'outdated mediums' *per se* to use Krauss's formula, became so popular and prominent. According to Moeglin-Delcroix, "artists moved into the urban or natural space to create works that were often ephemeral, and the book (among other media) retained the traces of it all" (*ibidem*). Even though not exactly ephemeral, for artist's publications are indeed objects that circulate and, as we know today, survive as valuable artifacts³, they are objects that move, which is even more pressing when we consider practices that have an ideological ground, or that are being read in relation to contexts of political repression.

One of the main consequences of dictatorships or repressive regimes ruled by censorship is the amount of people that move, or are driven to move, not just as a form of escaping repression, imprisonment or even torture, but as a way of searching for lines of flight. This was most certainly the case of many Portuguese and Brazilian artists and intellectuals that were not just escaping the lack of freedom (freedom to move, to act, to think, to speak) but also that were looking for spaces of creativity not yet stifled, as well as searching for material ways of exploring and disseminating this experience of being on the move. Movement is here seen as idea, as metaphor or as matter of fact, particularly using artists' books, postcards and other types of publications. That is the case of Irene Buarque born in São Paulo (1943), who lives in Portugal since the early 1970s, having left Brazil to escape the dangers of the military repression that she encountered as a young

³ Artists' Books have indeed become valuable objects and the subject of specific collections in major art museums around the world. MOMA, in New York, and Tate Modern, in London, hold extensive and all encompassing artists' books collections with a particular focus on this genre's production since the 1960s. In Portugal, significant collections may be found in the Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art and in the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (FCG) Library.

artist. She has since been developing a body of work focused on ideas of movement and escape, which is something that can clearly be linked to her own circulation across different geographies and cultural scenarios. The format of the book, as well as representations of windows, walking surfaces and feet are recurring tropes in her work, as we can see in *Pisolivro* (1983), *Vias* (1983) or *Estudo. Janelas-Etiquetas* (1978). In fact, she has been consistently researching the window in her bookworks, starting with the 1978 exhibition *Leitura e Contra Leitura de um Espaço Limite: Janela*⁴, at Quadrum Gallery, in Lisbon. Buarque has also been a big promoter of the ‘book arts’⁵ in Portugal, organizing several exhibitions that focused on the medium and establishing collaboration among artists from different geographies.⁶ In 1973, after graduating from the Faculty of Plastic Arts Fundação Armando Álvares Penteado (São Paulo), Buarque arrived to Portugal with a Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation grant⁷, under the guidance of critic and curator José-Augusto França, and she immediately started making small books. *Etiquetas-Estética e Etiquetas-Janela* were the first examples of these books in which she used commercial labels with different colours collaged onto the book pages in order to suggest the image, form and idea of a window. One may read such books as movements of the imagination, in the terms suggested by Didi-Huberman (2015), or forms that grant us a transversal knowledge: the window as page makes clear its “intrinsic power of montage” (Didi-Huberman 2011, p. 13) as object-spaces that can be either open or closed (and that need a collaborative effort to change this status), both window and book serve as communicating vessels between an enclosed body and the outside worlds (encompassing all the analog referents that enclosed body and outside world may have). *Janelas-Objecto* (1978), for example, is a book in which Buarque uses the window as landscape and as a ‘natural element’. Here, an actual wood window is out in tandem with water, earth, air, while in other works the window is both a photographic representation cut as a square (the square as frame and the frame as window) or an element such as labels collaged onto the page (also a window and a frame in itself). It is quite meaningful that this window, the primary object used in the photographs that are included in many of these earlier books, resurges decades later in the book-sculpture *Ventura e Desventura de uma janela-objeto* (FCG collection, 2017): the actual window that was used in the books of the 1970s and 1980s is the central element of this enormous, overwhelming ‘book’ with acrylic pages.⁸

Movement triggers imagination to assemble all the elements of a network thus constructed and put into motion, and which also entails collaboration, such as in the case of Brazilian artist Regina Vater. Collaboration was for sure one of the most productive

⁴ Reading and Counter Reading of a Limit Space: Window.

⁵ The term ‘book arts’ is used by critics such as Richard Kostelanetz instead of artists’ books.

⁶ In this sense one must emphasize the work she developed at Cooperativa Diferença, where she organized exhibitions such as *O Livro de Artista* (1983).

⁷ Even though there was a dictatorship in Portugal, as well as in Brasil, Fernando Lemos advised Buarque to seek ‘refuge’ at the ‘oasis’ that was the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. Buarque describes this in a interview available at <http://tipo.pt/index.php/pt/irene-buarque>.

⁸ According to the information provided by the artist, this is a book-sculpture formed by a set of seven acrylic panels articulated in the form of a book. The acrylic panels are used to hold the wooden window, a photographic print of that same window and a mirrored surface that is on the opposite side of the original window. This description can be read in the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (FCG) Library catalogue.

aspects of the circulation of bodies, ideas and materials that marked the art world in the 1960s and 70s, frequently motivated by the action and consequences of ideological apparatuses. Vater's 1973 series *LUXOLIXO* 8 [luxury/garbage] (1973-75), for example, made during her stay in New York, confronts two irreconcilable realities that are concatenated with consumption and economic development. Guy Brett emphasizes the movement inherent to these works, by saying: "with luxu/lixo we move from one word to two words, words which embrace and are also in contradistinction. We move from the Third World, Rio de Janeiro, to the First World, New York, at a time when those terms were still current" (Brett 2015, p. 42). The photograph and video-installation, inspired by the poem *LUXO LIXO* by Augusto de Campos, evolved into a series of handmade postcards with photographs of New York's garbage on the front and serigraphs made by the artist on the back, following the formal design of postcards; these cards were later sent to friends and art professionals. Later, in Paris, Vater also used mail art to cope with her isolation in the French capital, and the solitude she experienced from being away from her cultural matrix. *Parisse* (1973), a pun using the French word *paresse* (laziness) and the pronunciation of the word Paris in Brazilian Portuguese, is part of a postcard series created with photographs from the rooms and beds Vater occupied when travelling around the world; the artist in transit (a nomad? a traveler?) never ceased to put the uneasiness of being the lonely other in a foreign land into play. But, also, she is bringing forward her intimacy, focusing on a representation of the feminine that is marked by the absence of the body, instead of showing it. So, in her work, the body was not to be appropriated – surely a relation can be established between these postcards and the headless and limbless bodies of the *Tropicalia* paintings (1963); bodies that, as Talita Trizoli says, "stand out for curtailing subjectivity (...) and as an erotic embellishment of the tropical landscape, immersed in the paradise lost and in advertising campaigns that glorified nationalism".⁹ Carlos Drummond de Andrade participated in *Parisse*, replying to Vater; such collaborative element would be explored by the artist a few years later with the series *Give me your time* (1981); this consisted of postcards sent to artists and friends asking for their collaboration using TIME as a central theme – which can also be seen as another development of Vater's interest in exposing social inequalities, or the consequences of political and creative control that marked Brazilian society in the years of the Military Dictatorship (1964-1985).

In the 1960s and 70s, not just Paris¹⁰, but also London¹¹ was a destination for artists,

⁹ "Estos cuerpos destacan tanto por un truncamiento de la subjetividade (...), como un embellecimiento erótico de un paisaje tropical, inmerso en sueños del paraíso perdido y campañas publicitarias de exaltación del nacionalismo." (Trizoli 2014, p. 169). All translations are by the autor unless other translator is identified.

¹⁰ Paris was the epicentre of artistic migration, and, more specifically, Portuguese artistic migration, in the first half of the 20th century. Paris was the city where artists such as Amadeo de Souza Cardoso met Brancusi, Modigliani, Picabia and Sonia and Robert Delaunay, among many others; where Maria Helena Vieira da Silva and Arpad Szènes welcomed Lourdes Castro and René Bertholo in the 1960s, and where these two artists developed the magazine *KWY*, a serigraphed publication edited collectively between 1958 and 1963 by Castro and Bertholo, as well as Christo, João Vieira, Costa Pinheiro, José Escada and Jan Voss.

¹¹ Many artists such as Paula Rego, Cesariny, Menez, Bartolomeu Cid dos Santos, João Vieira, Sá Nogueira, Ângelo de Sousa, Jorge Vieira and João Cutileiro went to London, which they saw as an alternative to Paris, the historical destination of Portuguese artistic diaspora (Dias 2008).

and, specifically, Portuguese artists. This was the case of Ana Hatherly, who made a series of drawings on postcards when in London in the 1970s (whilst she was studying cinema at the International London Film School).¹² These works reveal the influence of an era marked by student and feminist political movements, rock music and pop art, a landscape that was completely off-limits to artists in Portugal, in the context of the most long-lived dictatorial experience in Europe throughout the 20th century (1925–1974). Situated across the borders of national, political, social and cultural contingencies, Hatherly drew on postcards, not in conventional sheets of paper, contradicting the ‘proudly alone’ position of the Portuguese regime before democracy was reinstated in 1974. About these works, Hatherly said in an interview: “all of this was nothing other than a sort of dissertation around the ludic component of the image. It worked out pretty well because the artistic medium – postcards of the British postal services –, and the inks also, were really good”.¹³

By drawing onto postcards, without a doubt, emphasized not only the inherent potential of mobility, but also the drive to communicate and the will to demonstrate how art can always find a way out of any type of limitation. A minor art, one might say, like a minor literature, as expressed by Deleuze and Guattari (1986) when considering the work of Kafka. A minor literature, they explain, is a literature marked, among others factors, by the *deterritorialization of language*. Thus, a minor literature, or art, for that matter, is one that is revolutionary because it implies the construction of a minor practice against a major one, against totalizing and dominant discourses, something that can be equated with Hatherly’s practice overall; as the artist says about the book *O Escritor* (1975), an exploration of the formal and conceptual syncretism between word and image, this is “a necessary representation of a state of extended repression”.¹⁴

The postcards Hatherly drew when in London emphasize the freedom she experienced from the physical and intellectual constrictions of the Portuguese dictatorship, and are manifestly dialogical exercises set between the individual perspective of a woman artist, and a wordly artist that lives and works amidst a web of affects, relationships and influences that go beyond, and therefore defy, the rules, the borders, the limits of the authoritarian regime. Looking at *Self-Portrait* and *Self-Portrait à la Matisse*, two drawings on postcard made in 1971, we can see how these two dimensions – individual and collective – are made clear. In *Self-Portrait*, in which we can read the inscription “na moldura o combatente Mondrian e o mundo mítico-maniaco das Tisanas 1971?”¹⁵, the portrait of the artist herself assumes center-stage in the composition, around which elements related to the literary work *Tisanas*¹⁶ are placed as if they were a frame. Catherine Dumas notes the relationship between the drawing and the book, by identifying a process that is not just artistic but also ontological: “both the drawing of the torso with

¹² In 2005 these works were shown at Centro de Arte Moderna da Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian (Lisbon) and at the Centre Culturel Calouste Gulbenkian Paris in the exhibition *Ana Hatherly – Dessins, Collages et Papiers Peints*.

¹³ “Tout ça n’était qu’une espèce de dissertation sur l’aspect ludique de l’image. Ça a bien marché parce que le support – des cartes postales de la poste anglaise – était très bon, ainsi que les encres.” (Vasconcelos 2005, p. 13)

¹⁴ “Uma representação necessária dum estado de repressão prolongada.” (Hatherly 1975b, n.p.).

¹⁵ “In the frame the combatant Mondrian and the mythical-maniac world of *Tisanas* 1971?”.

¹⁶ Ana Hatherly published her first *Tisanas* in 1973 (Hatherly 1973a). They can be briefly described as prose poems, aphoristic, short, concise texts that are at the core of Portuguese Experimental Poetry.

the concentric circles pointing to the core, as well as the extremity of the hair that emerge from the outside of the picture, point towards the ontological exercise (self-analysis as feminine and creative subject) undertaken in *Tisanas*".¹⁷

4. Movement through time

During the period she was abroad in the United Kingdom, away from the confines of the regime (she would return to Portugal exactly on April 25th 1974, the day of the Revolution that put an end to Salazar's dictatorship), Hatherly made yet another series of small works on paper and postcards called *A Metamorfose da Romã* (The Metamorphosis of the Pomegranate). The series comprises a total of 23 drawings, created with collage, ink and crayon, all of which depart from a 16th century pomegranate painting that was reproduced onto a postcard. These exercises expose a process of experimentation around an array of variations on the pomegranate (variations in colour, shape, size, volume, etc.), departing from a representational referent and reaching the total dissolution of the image into abstraction. Just like words in her deeply gestural work¹⁸ become something 'illegible' – as the artist stated in an interview with Ana Vasconcelos, "I want to show the writing, and not what is written"¹⁹ – so too the image of the pomegranate transforms itself, metamorphosing into pure colour and formless matter. The image, reconfiguration(s) of the pomegranate that 'survived' and travelled through centuries until reaching the hand of the artist, incorporates the radical potential of movement through time, or the movement of something that appears to be standing still. This series of works is also something Hatherly was doing in ludic moments, pauses in her life and work; one can call them generative 'interludes'. Between the ludic and the flow of time, one can foresee the importance of the Baroque in Hatherly's work that also serves as a tool to uncover the present:

during the baroque, a period in which everything was heightened and burst with excess, time, as Emilio Orozco puts it, became "the protagonist of the Baroque drama", the "nerve of its feeling, becoming simultaneously an expression of triumphalism and denial, of materialism and spirituality, a vehicle for affirming both continuity and change, convention and experimentation. But above all, the perception of time as duration became the key expression of authority. (Hatherly 1997, p. 9)

¹⁷ "O desenho do tronco com os círculos concêntricos até ao cerne, assim como as extremidades das madeixas de uma cabeleira vinda de fora do quadro remetem ao exercício ontológico (auto-análise como sujeito feminino e sujeito criador) levado a cabo em *Tisanas*". (Dumas 2016, p. 33)

¹⁸ Author of one of the first concrete poems in Portugal, published in the newspaper *Diário de Notícias* in 1959, Ana Hatherly explored the visuality of the written image with her deeply experimental work. *Maps of Imagination and Memory* (Hatherly 1973b), for example, is the result of a research undertaken by the artist on the visuality of the written text, that begun precisely with the academic research on visual baroque poems and other forms of visual texts such as Chinese calligraphy. "The visual poem – visual-text, image-text – is literal and literary silent", she says (Hatherly 1975a); Hatherly started copying the forms of the Chinese archaic alphabet and called this process her own private painting school. The act of copying the forms of an alphabet without knowing the meaning of the calligrams made explicit the importance of the process and the physicality of the process; the centrality of movement, the movement of the body, of the hand, that, according to the artist, became an "intelligent hand". (Hatherly 2003)

¹⁹ "Je veu montrer l'écriture et non pas ce qui est écrit". (Vasconcelos 2005, p. 10)

The pomegranate has many symbolic ramifications, among which are fertility, sexuality and sin. In Greek mythology, the pomegranate is associated with Persephone, who ate three pomegranate seeds after being liberated from hell, an act that granted her a ticket back to the underworld. Sexuality and sin, laughter and ludic play all emerge in the metamorphic representations of the pomegranate by Hatherly, a pomegranate that survived time as a mutable form, only to become the repetition of difference, hence a force countering authority in many different ways.

Images, materials, ideas, gestures that travel from afar (in space and in time) function frequently as constituent parts of the “machinic”²⁰ imagination of artists. In Ana Vidigal, for example, the artist’s creative process is triggered by the material and formal characteristics of some objects, such as postcards, that are intermingled with her own memories of dictatorial times, of family (his)stories and of the individual perception of history (that is, of time passing through historical events). It is as if Vidigal is searching for a way to “seize tha[t] (...) intersection of the self and history”, to borrow a formulation from Linda Nochlin (*apud* Broude & Garrard 1994, p. 137). Besides a dislocation in space, movement is also a dislocation in time: when something moves between two points in space, there is a time span between the departure point and the arrival one. From this simple observation I would like to bring forward the possibility of looking at printed matter as a time-based media. This is a very relevant aspect for the purpose of this article, for it implies that we look at the book or at printed matter as art objects that are not just imbedded in and filled with historical circumstances. They are also objects that “fold time back onto itself” (Lütticken 2013, p. 7), much like with moving image, that is, objects that incorporate time and historicity beyond ideas of linear progression and simple chronology. Also, besides the art objects themselves, we can consider a sort of deterritorialization of the original object, of the original printed matter (in this case, the postcards that served as the material basis for their construction). Deterritorialization implies movement, *fluxus*, not only of bodies, experiences and images, but also of materials, that come to acquire different meanings when placed in different contexts and temporalities.

Deterritorialization of language as message, but also deterritorialization of the material conveyor of the message, is what we can see in the work of Ana Vidigal, who takes a look back at one of the most defining characteristics of the Portuguese dictatorship: the colonial war. Using the letters and postcards that were sent by her father, an officer placed in Guinea-Bissau in the 1960s, in installations such as *Penelope* (2000) and *VOID* (2007), Ana Vidigal constructs a critical space departing from the objects that survived and moved across space and time, thus creating a contingent history that intersects the subjectivity of those initially involved in this transit (her mother, her father, herself) with those who look at these works and as a reflection of their own memories and subjectivities in relation to the colonial war (and the war memories activated). The circulation of materials across generations is also used by Ana Vidigal in a series that is still to be transformed into a book. This can be described as a series of interventions onto

²⁰ Or an imagination driven by a productive desire in terms of the desiring machine as theorized by Deleuze and Guattari. In this regard *vd.* Deleuze & Guattari (1980).

postcards that were brought from Africa by her great grandfather, who integrated the colonialist expeditions of Portuguese Mouzinho de Albuquerque, which resulted in the capture of tribal chief Gungunhana in Mozambique.²¹ Her great grandfather brought these postcards home, as Vidigal told me, to show his wife and children what Africa was like. The artist juxtaposed these postcards with colored interventions and added phrases that she took from a dictionary of proverbs that referred to black people. Here is one example of such proverbs, “*negra é a pimenta e todos comem dela*” [black is the pepper and everybody enjoys it] – pepper being the black woman.... The postcards that are used to form this artwork function as afterimages (if we think of them as a representation) or as remnants (if we think of them as material artifacts that have travelled through time and through different geographies) that are ‘deterritorialized’, made significant through the reconfiguration of the original image. Unlike Hatherly’s reconfiguration of the pomegranate, Vidigal works with the original postcards instead of recreating the image and adds layers of matter, colour and meaning, through collage and text, exposing the deeply imbedded ideological racism inherent to the images of Africans, as well as the original intention and function of the postcards back in the 19th century.

5. Epistemological movements

I now want to turn our attention to works by Anna Bella Geiger and Regina Silveira, who used postcards of indigenous Brazilians to question a certain narrative of national identity being constructed by the military dictatorship, spanning from 1964 to 1985. In those years, nationalist campaigns flooded the Brazilian public space and were based on nationalist narratives of progress and identity. The construction of a national identity in a country like Brazil, made of indigenous, African slave-descendants and descendants of migrants, is a matter not just of erasure, but also of assimilation and appropriation. Throughout the 20th century, and particularly during the period of the military dictatorship, three aspects were very clear in the process of disseminating the idea of a national(ist) identity in a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society, for Brazilians and for tourists alike: 1) the focus on the body – the female body; 2) the focus on nature; and 3) the focus on technological progress. The “Eden motif” [Motivo Edénico], or the “vision of the country as nature” (Murilo de Carvalho 1998, p. 1) has been largely identified as one of the main traits of Brazilian national imaginary, not just in the 20th century, but as a process that started when Europeans first set foot in the territory.²² As Murilo de Carvalho shows, the prevalence of the idea of the ‘paradise on earth’, or ‘natural beauties’ (in which the body and, more specifically, the female body, is also seen as a ‘natural beauty’) lingers on as part of this national identity and pride, and corresponds to a disbelief in the abilities of the people, or in the individual person, for the native American and later the migrant has always been seen as a ‘poorly prepared’ man. Even though the

²¹ Gungunhana, the king and ruler of the province of Gaza, part of what is today Mozambique, was captured and arrested by Mouzinho de Albuquerque in 1895, for being considered a threat to Portuguese political and colonial interests in Africa. In 1896 he was brought to Lisbon, and then transferred to Angra do Heroísmo, Azores, where he died in 1906.

²² In this regard *vd.* Buarque de Hollanda (2010) and Ventura (1991).

official propaganda of the military dictatorship was based mostly on the dissemination of the idea of progress by human action, the fact is that the focus on nature in order to represent the idea of greatness of the country prevailed in teaching television programmes and advertising. In this regard, Nina Schneider shows how the ministry of education and culture controlled a large section of the propaganda (Schneider 2017, p. 235).

Also, the entire action of the military dictatorship was based on the support of a capitalist regime, therefore widely supporting economic and market driven initiatives, as Schneider also notes:

private investment and free-market were supported as main pillars of the capitalist system. Film producers were hired and official, apparently apolitical campaigns produced. With regards to the content, they just pretended that Brazil was thriving, without any social conflicts or concerns whatsoever.²³

Therefore, the military dictatorship in Brazil invested widely in tourism as a vehicle of propaganda inside and outside Brazil, “glorifying [the country’s] beautiful landscapes and the unique characteristics of the Brazilian people’s mestizo nature”²⁴. This all falls into a propaganda strategy based on allegory and figuration, which differed a lot from European dictatorships, for, as Carlos Fico noted, the Brazilian dictatorship was not asserted with

(...) national anthems, flagships, or using a party’s program or the speech of a dictator, individualized in the person of some chief. All of this had been ridiculed, both in Brazil and abroad (...). The assertion of political promises by the militar regime’s propaganda (promises of a new time to come, full of riches and happiness) was made through allegorical and figurative mechanisms, as if in a family’s peaceful celebration.²⁵

It is in such a context that the hegemonic narrative thus constructed by the State is critically, aesthetically and formally reworked by Brazilian artists Anna Bella Geiger (Rio de Janeiro, 1933) and Regina Silveira (Porto Alegre, 1939). By dismantling the appropriation of indigenous’ images, they help to redefine the ideological ground of representation, which is used as a vehicle for disseminating the idea of Brazil as a nation

²³ “Apoiou-se a iniciativa privada e o livre-mercado como pilares fundamentais do sistema capitalista. Contratou-se produtores do mercado de cinema e produziu-se campanhas oficiais com um caráter desmobilizador e aparentemente apolítico. Em relação ao conteúdo, fingiu-se que o Brasil estava vivendo uma época de harmonia, sem conflitos sociais nem preocupações.” (Schneider 2017, p. 334)

²⁴ “exaltando as belas paisagens do país e as características únicas do povo (mestiço) brasileiro” (Gama 2009, p. 6). Patrícia Mariana Fino also notes how tourism was an essential part of the government’s strategy during the years of the military dictatorship, using stereotypes as a way to promote the ruling ideology and a positive image abroad (mostly via the activity of EMBRATUR, the Brazilian Tourism Company, created in 1966) (Fino 2016).

²⁵ “(...) hinos nacionais, com estandartes, ou a partir de um programa de um partido ou da fala de um ditador, personalizado na figura deste ou daquele chefe. Tudo isto já havia sido ridicularizado em outros momentos, no Brasil, no exterior (...). A afirmação das promessas políticas da propaganda do regime militar (promessas de um novo tempo, de fartura, de felicidade) dava-se através de recursos alegóricos, figurados, como a pacífica comemoração de uma família” (Fico 1997, p. 122). I thank Daniela Tega for pointing out the importance of Fico’s work on this theme, as well as other references.

and as a unified people, completely obliterating difference and a major part of society (be that indigenous, African slave descendants, poor, women, and so on).

Amid the exotic images of indigenous people and their cultural and social apparatus and the modern Brazil of the metropolis and big scale architecture (the idea of a ‘modern’ Brazil that was disseminated by the military dictatorship), Geiger and Silveira act upon these popular and current images to make clear the problematic nature of such representations. In the series *Brazil Today* (1979), Regina Silveira groups touristic postcards in four sets (four books) according to specific themes: ‘Brazilian Birds’, ‘Indians from Brazil’, ‘The Cities’ and ‘Natural Beauties’. She uses serigraphed interventions, like diagrams, cut-out shapes, geometrical forms, b/w photographs, etc., to add critical layers to the image displayed, as well as to the interventioned object itself (that is, the touristic postcard, meant for sale and global circulation). In this work, Silveira addresses the country’s image. An image constructed with images: polished, controlled, highly mediated images that produce the illusion of reality, truth, factuality and social and political impartiality.

In her work, Silveira plays with perspective, both formally and conceptually, with the illusion of a single narrative, a single discourse, a unified epistemology, and does so by means of visual, instead of verbal, configurations, bringing forward the problematic nature of the images that are reproduced for the masses with subreptitious ideological intents. It is significant that Silveira chose to do this by means of reproductive techniques and materials such as serigraphs, Xeroxes, books, postcards, appropriated images and so on. Adolfo Montejo Navas identifies three issues that form the basis of this artist’s poetics:

The first one has to do with the real, with the ambiguous dimensions of this concept, with the inclusion of appearances as an inevitable component; the second with camouflage as a strategy, particularly its function of masquerading and its play with visibility and invisibility; and the third with a critical vocation, a certain ethical and aesthetic position.²⁶

The ethics beyond the aesthetics was for sure one of the main traits of Brazilian art at the time, and that was very clear in all of Silveira’s work of that period. If we take a closer look at ‘Indians from Brazil’, Montejo Navas’ quote reverberates in each image, bringing with it a vast set of questions: what is real and what is fiction? Whose reality and whose fiction are we looking at? Who and what is made visible and by whom?

Anna Bella Geiger, in the work *Brasil Nativo/Brasil Alienígena* (1976/1977) juxtaposes several portraits of indigenous Brazilian from the Bororo tribe (Mato Grosso), which also double as postcards for tourists, and her own self-portraits with family and friends performing the same activities, but now posing in their urban environment; in the work she wrote the comment: “me as a poorly prepared primitive man”.²⁷ This album, an

²⁶ “A primeira tem a ver com o real, com as dimensões ambíguas deste conceito, com a inclusão da aparência como componente inevitável; a segunda com a estratégia da camuflagem, sua função de mascarar e jogar com a visibilidade/invisibilidade; e a terceira com a vocação crítica, com certa postura ético-estética.” (Navas 2008, p. 31)

²⁷ “Com o meu despreparo como homem primitivo”.

ironic and critical exercise, aims at bringing forward ideological, political and social contradictions present in such cliché representations of the indigenous but it is also part of a larger artistic project, aimed at a more ethical practice. Instead of acting upon the image like Silveira, Geiger opts for the simulacrum in order to address the exact same problems. Also unlike Silveira's, Geiger's work draws upon the mechanisms of performance, and is thus more focused on the appropriation not just of the image, but also of the body and, therefore, of the person, the individual. As Guy Brett (2007) notes this work was made at a time when these postcards were being sold everywhere in Rio de Janeiro as part of the regime's propaganda strategy (conveying a somewhat 'positive' image of the indigenous, even though widely problematic as we have seen) and at a time when the indigenous were being persecuted and slain by local farmers. Aware of this contrast, and also of the limited reach art can have in such circumstances, Geiger opted for exposing the contradictions of the metropolitan 'carioca', who assimilates the indigenous life as a part of their own national identity. This performative act that presents itself as a failure, i.e., the artist failing to act as an indigenous, was, ironically, conducted under a veil of truthfulness, as the artist herself says:

Today, all of this could be made in a matter of seconds, using computers, but for me it all had to be true, witnessed. On the other hand, there was no underlying intention to be objective. I wanted to keep an alleged internal attitude, I mean... I was trying to act accordingly, but I was also aware that I was not suitable for such a role.²⁸

In the end, considering performance and image, and cultural and ideological constructions, the question "What is authentic?" is not what lingers. What lingers is the sense that "unresolved histories" are still here to be confronted, and that "the challenge of the appropriationist artist today is to discover new ways of dealing with these 'unresolved histories'" (Evans 2009, p. 22).

In my reading of these works by Anna Bella Geiger and Regina Vater, I noticed how the paths of colonialism and capitalism are deeply mingled with political drives, not just in the original images but also in the processes of appropriation therein. The original images appropriated by both artists explore the idea of the 'exotic other', for these are bodies being shown, manipulated, appropriated as the carnivalesque counterpart of the superior other: the white, powerful, repressive, dictatorial other. Although I must recognize the possibility that such critical reading may fail to account for some problems inherent to the appropriation of these images by the white, middle-class, urban artist, I contend that what is at stake in these works by Geiger and Silveira, as indeed in the works by Ana Vidigal, is not the appropriation of the indigenous and African bodies and/or subjectivities. What I see here being appropriated is the usage of these bodies, their culture and their subjectivity by repressive, authoritarian, imperialist and colonial dictatorships. In conclusion, I see the artists' appropriation of these images – the artists'

²⁸ "Hoje isto poderia ser feito em segundos por um computador, mas para mim, tudo tinha que ser verdadeiro, testemunhado. Por outro lado, não havia intenção de objectividade. Eu quis manter uma espécie de pretensa atitude interna, *i.e.*, tentando agir de acordo mas sabendo da falta de cabimento para este papel" (Brett 2007, p. 46).

re-appropriation of the image – as an ethical and self-critical stance that both highlights and debunks its underlying narratives of power. This movement of appropriation gains momentum when the original postcards are ‘displaced’ from being the locus of production of a certain national identity to the critical space of contemporary art. That being said, there are still many ‘ways of looking’ that can be accounted for. As Okwui Enzowor clearly explains, “Contemporary art today is refracted, not just from the specific site of culture and history but also – and in a more critical sense – from the standpoint of a complex geopolitical configuration that defines all systems of production and relations of exchange as a consequence of globalization after imperialism” (Enzowor 2008, p. 208).

As in the many dimensions of movement through space and time explored throughout this article, I would thus like to acknowledge this other movement: a (continuous?) epistemological movement between signifying spaces, which thus permanently re-signifies artworks.

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