Formation and Dismantling of a Brazilian Visual System

Nations, What for?

Can national sentiment have any meaning in the current experience of art? Can the current experience of art somehow constitute national sentiment? What reciprocity still exists in such relations? With the fall of cultural barriers, with increasingly unstable and indistinct exhibitions, with free consumption, what is the sense of supposing national histories in the arts?

And yet, the historical scene counts. A recent exhibition at the São Paulo Museum of Modern Art – MAM-SP, Concreta 56. The Root of Form, remembering the First National Exhibition of Concrete Art, presupposed a specific and definite history for the fine arts in Brazil, very distinct from today's situation, mixed in with the situation of other countries.

There are other exhibitions in the same situation: the First Exhibition of Neo-Concrete Art; Opinion 65; Brazilian New Objectivity.

Incidentally, some of these were recently re-presented, like cinematographic remakes. They have market value and circulate today as settings for sale, fetishes of an already distant and hazy process, which once seemed to have its own pace. In the recent re-presentation, the goal was to mirror the original exhibition. The only contradictory thing was the public which, unlike the first, 'couldn’t care less' – but such a public nevertheless '[is] everywhere', and circulates all the time.

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3 Exposição de Arte Neoconcreta, Rio de Janeiro, Museu de Arte Moderna, 22 March 1959 [start date].
6 A result of the expansionist greed of a process which is already devouring its own history, the
New Circulation

Where does this circulation come from and where does it go? It reflects a long-standing boom and denotes the new economic structure. The field of the fine arts has expanded and become professionalised; the milieu has become euphoric and glamorous, like the circles of advertising and investment. A diffuse feeling that everything is possible is added to that. The linguistic norms that the avant-gardes faced have been discredited, as has the censorship that existed during the dictatorship. Production has significantly increased and it has become varied; differences prevail, which is to be welcomed.

But the productive, financial, and institutional idyll of the arts in Brazil includes a contradictory aspect: the current insignificance of art. Nevertheless, a tight circle of silence closes in around this issue; the malaise is discarded and does not obscure the euphoria. In fact, the merry-go-round of tax incentives runs wild. There is no self-respecting bank, economic group or manager today that does not have consultancies, initiatives, and institutes for the fine arts.

Consensus, Money, Current Gaze

The insignificance translates into the lack of impact of art, except for publicity or in financial terms. The subjective experience of art is ephemeral; production and consumption are fast. The public has grown in size, given the aforementioned expansion, but it is largely indifferent. Only traces of labile curiosity, hustle and bustle proliferate. And soon comes the next show. Inflation, so well-known, has moved from the realm of currency to the arts – or do the arts play the role of second money?

Let it not be alleged that the public have always been oblivious to the production debate. It must be recognised that there are no disputes, discussions on poetic doctrines or structural critical exercises. The media opens up spaces for art. But these are social or business chronicles, records of quotations and operations, equivalent to investment and transactions analyses, made by financial

specular-show constitutes a genre. The Orangerie Museum in Paris, for example, presented at the beginning of 2007, the exhibition Orangerie, 1934: les ‘Peintres de la Réalité’ (Paris, Musée de l’Orangerie, 22 November 2006–5 March 2007), a virtual reconstitution of an entire 1934 exhibition. In addition to some original works that were part of the first exhibition, external aspects were also included, namely photographs of the curators and of the repression against demonstrations that occurred in the vicinity of the museum, even though they were not directly related to the exhibition.