

A Brazilian perspective on artistic mobility

Written by Ines Linke and Tininha Llanos

Artistic mobility plays a unique role in Western art. Journeys, travels, expeditions, itineraries and residences permit different experiences of place, offering contacts with other ways of seeing, doing and living. In general, these processes are perceived as forms of apprenticeship, professionalization and artistic investigations.

Those who speak of artistic residencies speak of displacement. Artistic residency programs, in their genesis, propose the mobility of professionals of the arts as a means to create favorable conditions for research in foreign contexts, literally promoting deterritorialization as the basic condition of creation. (PACKER, 2014, p.26)

The search for the experience of deterritorialization has turned Latin America into one of the main destinations for artistic residences. We can even say that the quest for difference, motivated by the search of an authentic "tropical experience", mainly by artists from the northern hemisphere who seek to find in the culture of the southern hemisphere an inspiration for the renewal of their artistic practices. However, these creative processes, often centered on an ethnographic approach, are configured as neocolonial models of consumption, mainly due to the status of the artist, related to the flow of capital and the circulation of information. In many of these cases, the local context becomes an object of investigation and appropriation for artistic works that, in different ways, raise questions about the relations between the subaltern and the hegemonic, the colonized and the colonizer, margin and center.

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Since the 1960s, dozens of residences have emerged in Brazil ~~offering possibilities for the foreign artist to get in~~ touch with Brazilian culture and produce site-specific art works. The proliferation and affirmation of these modes of production characterize them as the new neoliberal modes of contemporary production.

On the other hand, there have appeared also other proposals for residences that affront these hegemonic neoliberal models, establishing themselves as an option of counteracting the status quo, placing artists face to face to direct forms of engagement and political discussion: How can one work in the context of adversity? Is it possible to create collective practices, experimental works in and with local contexts, while participating in the decentralization of artistic production and the horizontalization of relations between people and places?

To address these issues we will present three case studies involving Brazil(ians): the experience of Virginia Medeiros in the occupation of the Movimento Sem Teto do Centro - MSTC at the Hotel Cambridge in São Paulo (1), the video "the photographer" of Argentinian artist Nicolás Testoni, created during the Residence Sacatar (2), and the artists' residence organized by Capacete, a Brazilian residency program, which integrated the public program of Documenta 14 in Athens (3).

At the Hotel Cambridge, occupied on November 23, 2012, Brazilians, refugees and immigrants from Latin-America, Africa and Asia live together; they inhabit the 119 apartments and claim for housing rights. The social and collective organization maintains social, educational and cultural services in favor of the collective. In this situation, within a context of social struggles, a long-term residence experience has been developed, bringing forth issues such as housing, work, migration, lawlessness and the commons. Within the challenge of daily life in this

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situation, the artists do not present themselves as agents
of gentrification or as part of an hierarchy, but a resident
/ collaborator, even if, in a certain way, the presence of
an artist establishes some sense of difference within the
larger group of residents. The artistic work joins the
residents of the occupation, to share and to reflect about
the experience of diversity and collectivity.

Virginia Medeiros is an artist in residence living in the
Occupation since October 2016. During her stay, she has
participated in all the processes of management, decision
and action, also taking part in new occupations of other
abandoned buildings in the center of São Paulo.

According to her, to live in a “residency” under an
occupation is to live with the subject in movement and not
with its representation: the residence becomes a place for
creating subjects by "creating new subjectivity". Would the
other artists from the circuit of artist residencies live
under these conditions for several months, based on the
convictions that they are defending an act of resistance in
the current political and economic situation in Brazil?

Another example is the Sacatar Residency in Itaparica,
Bahia. Going to Itaparica Island, near Salvador, to
participate at an artistic residence, has other
implications, because of the island's characteristics as a
tourist destination. This is reflected in the flow of
international artists who represent their countries of
origin and/or work places, which "invest" money in their
artists.

During his residence, the Argentinian artist Nicolás Testoni
produced the video "O fotógrafo" (the photographer), that
comments the predatory practices of the artistic/touristic/
ethnographic actions at the island, filming his room mate
and also resident, taking pictures of the locals in an
invasive way. In a seemingly contradictory manner, Testoni

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also formulates his critique through touristic/ ethnographic
~~experiences at Sacatar, and as he says he lived rare~~
privileges with a view of the sea at a "very special place
of the world".

The Capacete, one of Brazil's pioneer residencies, founded 20 years ago in the city of Rio de Janeiro, established itself at the first moment as an independent artistic residence; but due to incipient financing after the recent crisis, reformulated its proposal, transforming itself into a partial state?-funded training program that seeks to offer micro-scale interdisciplinary dynamics as an alternative to large-scale global contexts. After 19 years of receiving artists from Brazil and around the world, in 2017, for the first time, the residence moved to a European context, establishing itself in Athens for 10 months, integrating the public programming of Documenta 14: Learning from Athens.

If at a first moment of the stay in Athens, the residence Capacete proposed "an understanding of the tangled relationship between Kassel and Athens, within the framework of document 14." In a second moment it intended to "react to the questions provoked by the given situation. There has been no utopia to resolve conflicts, but a wish to raise questions and discussions through the problems that were raised by artists. But, at the same time that the program intended to work in the context of adversity, is has been associated with the flows and interactions promoted by Documenta that left "No way out for the Greeks". Or as the former Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis said, "Documenta supposedly came to Greece to spend, but instead they sucked up every single resource available for the local art scene. The few resources that Greece's private and public sectors make available to Greek artists, like the Aegean Airways sponsorship, went to Documenta." (Note)

Some reactions intended by Capacete, should come, theoretically from individual experiences of self learning

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of the residents, brought from South Hemisphere. In her ^{aasd} ~~article for artseverywhere website about the residence in~~ process at Documenta, Jota Mombaça, artist, reflects about the contradictions in loco, while prisoner of the place you intend to criticize. The imprisonment seems to weaken the critics, overwrite the experience and make impossible some actions and developments of the initial project.

In this case, artists have become not only consumers of culture under the motto "learning from Athens", but they have also received local financial support to feed the neoliberal market of international art, in detriment of the local art system. Something that looks familiar. In addition to this "side effect", financing of residences and individual trips also has contributed to the precariousness of the artists' working conditions. It is a temporary job, without mid- or long-term responsibilities. A kind of award with validity. What would it be like to live in artistic residences, to become an adult artist? Is this possible in Brazil?

As they have become increasingly present forms of contemporary art production, some countries offer their citizens, financial support through public and private programs to participate in artistic residences abroad. In Brazil, the call for Intercâmbio e Difusão Cultural (Exchange and Cultural Diffusion), offered by the Brazilian Ministry of Culture between 2009 and 2015, granted financial-aid for Brazilians to participate in exhibitions and artistic residences abroad with so-called "social counterparts" upon return. But in 2016, after the financial and political crisis that culminated in the impeachment of the President of the Republic and concomitant changes in its executive staff, including the Ministry of Culture, the public funding was suspended.

Although there are still some possibilities of obtaining financial assistance in order to participate in foreign

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programs and events, the conditions for Brazilians to participate in residences in their own country are diverse, or better, adverse. In a few cases they are free of charge for the participants or offer resources for the artists' participation by covering expenses with transportation, lodging, food, besides workplace and curatorial orientation. But the vast majority of residences in Brazil do not even cover the travel or living expenses or even still charge for the duration of the stay, and the candidate is obliged to self-finance or seek sponsorship, since a large part of the values are established in dollars, a palatable currency for future residents from foreign countries, that turns the participation of Brazilian artists unfeasible.

While Brazilian institutions and local artists suffer from political and economic instability, the residences managed with foreign capital have generated territories that are independent from the current catastrophic situation. But at the same as they guarantee continuity, they generate exclusivity. That way, the financing of residences by foreign capital carry strong geopolitical implications that reflect directly and indirectly in the relations between markets, institutions, transnational and local agents. Displacements and flows of people, money and commodities participate in the neoliberal transnational arts market, in which the "centers" increase their cultural capital in a way that one has seen before; a way in which the exchange between different places and cultural environments does not create interchanges that balance the relations but reinforces or recreates the existing relations of power in a globalized world.

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