

ANOTHER ROADMAP SCHOOL

BRASILIA/ SAO PAULO PROJECT

### **Political-imaginary dimensions of publics activities**

**Coordinators:** Cayo Honorato (Brasilia, UnB) and Luiza Proença (Sao Paulo, MASP)

**Participants:** Cayo Honorato (UnB), Danilo Piermatei (UnB, HFA), Luiza Proença (MASP), Naria Skeff (UnB), Wandré Silva (UnB) e Yuri Farias (UnB).

This project intends to identify, describe, understand and share in which ways the publics make use of art museums and exhibitions – particularly of the Museu de Arte de Sao Paulo (MASP) and the Museu Nacional de Brasilia (MuN) –, giving special attention to uses that, in their gestures, expressions and narratives, come to demonstrate a political-imaginary dimension of those activities, once they can suggest other uses and meanings for those spaces. At the same time it will investigate in which way the fact that the investigators are situated inside (that is the case of MASP) or outside (that is the case of MuN) the museum influences their investigations. For doing so, a variety of methodological tools can be used (observation, interviews, ethnographies, etc.), having as theoretical references: the studies of the everyday life (Certeau, 2014), the sociology of the rejections to contemporary art (Heinich, 2010), the studies in culture and communication (Martin-Barbero, 2009), the concepts of counternarratives (Giroux et al., 1996), counterpublics (Warner, 2010) and perspectivism (Viveiros de Castros, 2015), amongst others, besides researches in the field of post-critical museology (Dewdney, Diboisa & Walsh, 2013), considering its approach to the conflicts between cultural authorities and distributed cultures in the setting of cultural institutions.

We will have the ethnographic case study as a main tool, for its capacity to work with non structured data and to detail a small number of cases, for its interest in the form of describing such cases, for its adhesion to a *general attitude* of investigation, more than to previously conceived methodologies. In data collection, we will employ a variety of strategies: non participant observation (secret, flexible, in natural situations), participant observation (public, selective, schematized) and semi structured interviews (aiming to correct any self referred observations and to incorporate internal perspectives of the field), besides varied forms of records and documentations. We expect, in a first phase, to record the uses, practices and appropriations by the publics in their own dynamics of production, in relation to the museum programme and exhibitions contents.

We intend to intervene in a particular state of the art in relation to cultural mediation in Brazil. In the setting of relations between art and education, cultural mediation has emancipated itself from the denomination of tutoring, questioning the strictly unidirectional orientation attributed by the term to that activity, so that the publics would not anymore be taken as a receptacle of institutional offers. However, although its purpose as instruction has been replaced by dialogue, a unidirectionality seems to persist, to the extent that its current functions invariably assert the

directive of cultural democratization (which prioritizes the distribution for many of what have been produced by few) instead of fostering cultural democracy (which implies the articulation between many of what have been also produced by many). The limits of such unidirectionality have already been marked (Donnat, 2011). However, it is not enough to confront the problem of “symbolic barriers” and obstacles to access. It is also necessary to consider the “prominence of consumption” – as a structural change of cultural dynamics – and the questions raised by such phenomenon to the typically self-identitarian constitution of institutions.

Particularly in Brazil, the socioeconomic changes in the last 15 years, which allowed a new social position – if not a never heard self-confidence – to at least 30 millions of people (Souza, 2012), associated to some popularization of recent media technologies, have made possible not only the access to certain consumer goods, but the emergence and circulation of an infinity of practices and productions, from memes to manifestations, including also gifs, hashtags, occupiers, etc.; in other words, a kind of *distributed cultural hyperproduction*, largely participative and conflictive. It is a very heterogeneous phenomenon, that seems not only to introduce a “polemological analysis of culture” (Certeau, 2014), but also a context in which situations of “local deficiency” (with which the cultural action is traditionally committed) begin to coexist with the politization of peripheralized communities, associated to the emergence of increasingly open and interdependent creative processes, that cannot be ignored anymore.

In face of such problematics – that at the same time circumscribe (critically and reflexively) a persistent unidirectionality of institutional mediations and acknowledges a recent complexity of cultural dynamics –, we understand that mediation should not be anymore exclusively conceived as a *cause* of democratization, but also as a specific cultural practice, interested in the *effects* of cultural democracy. In order to assess the limits and possibilities of such idea, this project intends to investigate the “contact zones” (Clifford, 1997) between cultural authorities and distributed cultures in the setting of art museums, giving special attention to the events that are constituted through what Martin-Barbero (2009) calls “conflictive interlockings”, or still, through what Hall (2003) calls “subaltern proliferation of differences” – events and processes in which not only the publics are learners, but also the educators, curators, artists and institutions.

For doing so, this project will be guided by the following group of questions: (1) What readings do the visitors make of the works on display, the exhibitions and the museum itself, whatever they be? What are their reactions, attitudes, opinions, appropriations? What references and meanings do they mobilize or produce, be them wise or ordinary? Which interpretive paradigms or “value records” (Heinich) would they be connected to or could suggest? (2) What points of contact (or distance), what counternarratives do they established in relation to the art specialized discourses? How do they refer to “cultural authorities” (Dewdney, Dibosa & Walsh) of art and art institutions? (3) How do the knowledge, experience or response of the publics come back to the institutions, transforming their programme and contents? How could they be enrolled in the aesthetic and political debate on that authority, developing the idea of a cultural democracy?

In this process we expect (1) to try and develop educational, methodological and

eventually technological tools, suitable to a “dense description” (Geertz, 2012) or a “good description” (Latour, 2012) of publics activities, considering the chain of actions that goes from their observation to their communication; (2) to advance the studies on publics activities, considering the description of splits, articulations and interlockings between cultural authorities and distributed cultures; between the concept of visitors and the concept of counterpublics (Warner, 2010); to question the persistence of a unidirectionality in the way mediation refers to the publics, considering that the transformative purpose of that activity, invariably, takes the publics as the media for its actions, but not the institutions or the cultural policies for instance; (4) to identify and question in the so called visitors studies the consequences of conceiving them, predominantly, as measurable empirical data, through categories such as “spontaneous publics” and “scheduled publics”, or still, “layman publics” and “specialized publics”.

## **Participants**

Cayo Honorato is professor at the University of Brasilia (UnB), in the field of Theory and History of Visual Art Education. He has a PhD in Education from the University of Sao Paulo and a first graduation in Visual Arts from the Federal University of Goias. Since 2007 he have been researching issues related to cultural mediation in Brazil.

Danilo Piermatei is pursuing a graduation (currently interrupted) in Visual Arts at the University of Brasilia. He also is a pharmacy technician at the Army Hospital in Brasilia.

Luiza Proença is curator for mediation and public programme in Museu de Arte de Sao Paulo (MASP). She was associate curator at the 31<sup>st</sup> Sao Paulo Biennial (2014) and editor of the 9th Mercosul Biennial (2013) publications. She is graduated in Visual Arts from the State University of Sao Paulo.

Narla Skeff is a teacher of Visual Arts for High School students and graduated in Visual Arts from the University of Brasilia. Since 2014 she have been researching about cultural mediation and working as an educator in many museums and other cultural spaces.

Wandr e Silva is pursuing a graduation in Visual Arts at the University of Brasilia. Since 2014 he have been researching about cultural mediation and working as an educator in many museums and other cultural spaces. He is also a visual artist.

Yuri Farias is pusing a graduation in Theory, Criticism and History of Art at the University of Brasilia. Since 2013 he have been researching about cultural mediation and working as an educator in many museums and other cultural spaces. Currently he supervises the educative programme at the Marcantonio Vilaca Cultural Space in Brasilia.

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