

Using Art Terms to Refer to Community Organizing *Artistic Research, Durational, Platform, Site-Specificity*

A lunch talk for KTH Architecture School (Stockholm) using the example of Lanchonete.org in São Paulo.

What I'm doing with the title is attempting to quickly call-out and partially reduce the distinctions that heavy, disciplinary orientation—and related vocabularies—can place on a hybrid practice. I believe that the overlap I'm pointing to will be evident in these notes and our discussion. So, let me first pose the primary question for the talk: What is the role of an urban artistic intervention? Or, another way to ask it: With whom is the intervention in dialogue ... who are the audience-cum-participants?

Let me start with what I think Lanchonete.org is, which is an artist-led, cultural platform focused on how people live and work in, navigate and share the contemporary city with the Center of São Paulo as our outlook. It gets its name from the ubiquitous lunch counters—convivial, fluorescent-lit, open-walled, laborious, points of commerce—that populate almost every street corner. Lanchonete.org is about the issues that big cities face, the different forms of 'urban power', and the *Right to the City*, but not insomuch as to define these constructs...rather to stretch the platform as far as is necessary to consider diverse viewpoints.

What's special about right now? We've been making Lanchonete.org for four years already, and we're at the transition point between its first years as conceptual platform and having our own physical space and community context at Rua Paim 235 to anchor our observations and actions. We're about to start working with a professional evaluator and a team of artist researchers, and allow our project an extra year—2018—to take a deeper look at the networks that have formed through Lanchonete.org and the impact they may have on/at the physical site of the lanchonete. In order to do so, we're creating a regular workshop series with the community, celebrating and experimenting with different forms of creativity and communication over the next two years. The understanding (of the city) by the platform, its five-year duration, as well as its practical, activity-based production approach—creativity workshops, nutrition and food programming, communication and alternative media focus—are all conscious gestures of exchange, openness and seriousness.

From the introduction of [Dialogues in Public Art](#), discussing the 70s and 80s 'failures of the planning establishment' in New York City, the present Department of Cultural Affairs Commissioner, Tom Finkelpearl (2001) points out that:

Just as architects were demonized as the destroyers of the city, artists were unrealistically asked to salvage it. At some basic level, there was a hope that art

could revive an old idea of the city. It is not so much that people wanted art on their buildings. Rather, they wanted to return to the sort of urban environment that they imagined was present at the time artists were regularly included in architecture. The initial impetus was conservative—a nostalgia for the premodern rather than any sense of the Postmodern. The laws were spawned in an effort to attract people back to the downtown areas that they were abandoning. And, in fact, urban redevelopment is still a primary motivation in many public art programs.

Right after his intro chapter, entitled ‘The City as Site,’ Finkelppearl details a few controversial public art projects, including Richard Serra’s Tilted Arc sculpture that was commissioned by a NYC federal office building and later removed from the site by the same governmental agency, and another when artist, John Ahearn was commissioned by NYC to create three bronze sculptures for a police station in the Bronx—where he lived—that Ahearn later asked to be removed due to community protest. One cannot always discern artistic intention in such urban interventions*, nor can it be argued that all site-specific artworks—whether material, processual or both—have community organizing as a tacit goal. And, in some cases, the artist might explain his overall approach to goal-setting and utility, such as Thomas Hirschhorn did with *The Spectre of Evaluation*¹, then refusing to answer much about his intentions on specific art projects, such as The Gramsci Monument in the Bronx, NYC.

*[*In the above section, I’m conflating somewhat the public art forms of sculpture and site-specific, or rather broadening ‘intervention’ to include them both.]*

Richard Serra’s reaction to the aforementioned 1980s situation—quoted from Andrea Liu essay²—was to come up with a set of three tenets that are now widely accepted, which are:

1. Antagonism towards a site is a crucial component of site-specificity;
2. Inseparability: Against the notion of ontologically hermetic, ‘portable’ sculpture that could be circulated and plopped anywhere at any time, oblivious to its context, Serra insisted that site-specific work had to be inseparable from its site;
3. Unrepeatability: Not only against the notion of portability, Serra insisted that site-specific work had to be unrepeatable.

However, some artists offer to explicitly articulate goals—social and otherwise—for their artworks. I am attempting to do that with Lanchonete.org, something I’ll explain a little later on. In an October 2004 essay³, Simon Sheikh asserts that “the counter-public is a conscious mirroring of the modalities and institutions of the normative public, but in effort to address ... other imaginaries.” There have been numerous moments over the past four years when Lanchonete.org was the platform on which these other social, economic, political and cultural imaginaries became

¹ http://www.gladstonegallery.com/sites/default/files/FlashArt_2011_e.pdf

² *Theorising Art Interventions: Manifesta 6 and Occupy 38*

³ *Representation, Contestation and Power: The Artist as Public Intellectual*

more familiar to me. And, this is what Lanchonete.org aims to do in the broadest sense. Therefore, it can use these aforementioned tenets of site-specificity as an 'art historical barometer', while also attempting to establish a question or value, such as ours on 'A Right to the City' and offer to get to know deeply the community in which it seeks to learn and do things together. This perhaps assures 'inseparability' in a different way. For this, I'd like to talk about two topics together—intentions and research.

Entering into a relationship with a community is a high-responsibility proposition. This likely no different for the fields of art, architecture, planning and so forth. If one wants to gain trust, then it stands to reason that there is responsibility embedded in the relationships that form over the course of a project. In fact, I find that I can best 'check' my intentions—holding them to some accountability as I may set out in my writing—by setting an end-date for the project. It does not mean that I will stop being involved abruptly at the end of a project, but that by having a milestone, those involved may know when a project will be assessed, modified, transformed, taking on bigger risks, changing leadership, etc. This may differ between different types of participants, as not all new relationships will require official membership to the project in order to flourish. I expect this will be the case with the 25-year manager of the lanchonete, Tarcisio, who is much more interested in milestones laid out by a continued lease and any rent increases he might expect.

I use the word 'platform' to describe the evolving activities and colliding networks that comprise Lanchonete.org. It's a clever word, but what does platform mean? To date, we are 30+ people, including an architect, journalist, radio maker, chef, designer, gardener, a publishing collective, a street artist and videomapper, but to name a few. Together we are developing a methodology via our workshop series. For Lanchonete.org, the goal is to remain an open process for its 5-6 year duration, inviting ideas and projects into the 'mix' until it culminates in various forms feedback, including book on what we learned ... sometime in 2019. Perhaps it is only by looking back at 'what happened' that a platform can be described. And, this is what I mean by 'research'.

The Modernist 'Treme Treme' (as it is pejoratively called) in which the lanchonete is located is the lone hold-out reflecting the previous economy of the neighborhood on a small, yet very connected, street in the Center; there are seven new high-rise, luxury apartment buildings going up (or already up) on the street; the cumulative 'purchasing power' of the streets' inhabitants is changing drastically/quickly. We have joined forces with at least two other organizations—FICA (Associação pela Propriedade Comunitária) and GastroMotiva, which focuses on nutrition and food justice—to further develop the social and economic aspects of the overall project on Rua Paim with Lanchonete.org.

In early 2015, I listened in on a discussion between University of Leuven students planning the Insurgent Cartography workshop at Hotel Cambridge Occupation and

Raquel Rolnik, FAU-USP professor and former UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing in which she observed the pronounced role of cultural agents as a newer development in the housing and public space movements of São Paulo. Nazaré Brasil, who manages the São João Cultural Center, once told me that collaboration with international artists and cultural producers lends credibility to their approach and use of cultural strategy to 'build a bridge' between people who came to the center when it still had abandoned buildings seeking convenience and those who now 'come down from Paulista' and often hold negative impressions of occupiers, ethnic enclaves, informal groups and low rent payers. By explaining their strategy she helped Lanchonete.org find its 'footing' in São Paulo's urban issue landscape, and through repeat partnership, co-curating artist residencies and public programmes, we have slowly developed a mutually beneficial relationship between our projects.

It is important to acknowledge others who have attempted similarly irregular projects, such as Nelson Brissac Peixoto's *arte/cidade*⁴, BaixoCentro, Ocupeacidade⁵ and others, as well as the impact of mainstream cultural production and usage, which can be effectuated by longer hours on the Minhocão, more bike lanes and accessibility in the Center (under Haddad) and even the street party scene as discussed in this crassly named article, *Reclaiming the Jungle*⁶. I excerpt one of my favorite references, however from the publication *Extradisciplinary Spaces and Dedisciplinizing Moments: In and out of the 30th São Paulo Biennial* (2013):

One of the first meetings between the original members of Equipe3—Francisco Iñarra, Genilson Soares and Lydia Okumura—took place in the context of a collective proposal, the performance 'Lanchonarte', centered on the idea of 'art as food for consumption' and Offered to the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro in 1970. The proposal was rejected, but it ended up being expanded in the Hall of Contemporary Art of Santo André in 1971, with the title of 'Restaurarte'.

Since beginning the Lanchonete.org project, I've become friends with Genilson Soares and Lydia Okumura, the two surviving members of Equipe3.

Todd Lanier Lester for Lanchonete.org

⁴ <http://www.artecidade.org.br>

⁵ <http://popupcity.net/brazilian-situationism/>

⁶ <http://www.brasilwire.com/reclaiming-the-jungle/>

Biography:

Todd Lanier Lester is an artist, writer, and cultural producer. He lives and works in São Paulo, where he is developing Lanchonete.org—a project focused on the right to the city—with a group of fellow city dwellers. He has worked in leadership, advocacy, and strategic planning roles at Global Arts Corps, Reporters sans frontières, and Astraea Lesbian Justice Foundation. He founded freeDimensional, a network that helps artists in danger by providing safe haven in participating artist residencies. Todd is a Senior Fellow at the World Policy Institute where he directs the Arts-Policy Nexus; an editor and co-curator for ArtsEverywhere in Canada; and serves as a board member for arts, rights and literary organizations in India, Mexico, Brazil, and the US. Todd is currently writing the biennial update on 'Artistic Freedom' for the UNESCO 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. He coordinates ArtistSafety.net, a hybrid consultancy and volunteer network that provides case management for artists and culture workers at risk due to their work, as well as information services to projects and organizations in the arts, free expression, journalism, and human rights fields.

An evolving Bibliography:

- a) SARAI Reader #9, *Projections*⁷
- b) Making Art w/ Purpose (MAP) catalogue interview with Kathleen Bitetti⁸
- c) Interview by Lorena Vicini in BOMB Magazine⁹
- d) Flier from 2013 São Paulo Architecture Biennial¹⁰
- e) Proposal text, e.g. Goethe na Vila (standard text), ArtsCollaboratory (application)¹¹
- f) Proposal to the 2014 São Paulo Biennial¹²
- g) 1st zine (by artist, Thiago Gonçalves) for the 2014 Tijuana Book Fair¹³
- h) Documentation between Lanchonete.org & Associação pela Propriedade Comunitária¹⁴
- i) Links on Paim, the street of the lanchonete¹⁵
- j) A collective project on rights to the city in São Paulo¹⁶

⁷ http://lanchonete.org/old_site/pdf/saraireader09-projections-web_extract.pdf

⁸ https://artfuladministrator.files.wordpress.com/2013/12/map_fieldofaction.pdf

⁹ <http://bombmagazine.org/article/7236/>

¹⁰

https://artfuladministrator.files.wordpress.com/2013/11/pdf_lanchonete_preview_20131108_a.pdf

¹¹ Available upon request.

¹² Available upon request.

¹³ https://artfuladministrator.files.wordpress.com/2014/08/final_menu_zine_no1.pdf

¹⁴ Available upon request.

¹⁵ Internal road: <http://f.i.uol.com.br/fotografia/2013/09/13/317248-970x600-1.jpeg>; Rua Paim: <http://fotografia.folha.uol.com.br/galerias/19111-paim-ontem-e-hoje>; Apartment Buildings: <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/saopaulo/2013/09/1341682-com-499-apartamentos-treme-treme-da-rua-paim-coleciona-lendas-e-moradores-ilustres.shtml>

¹⁶ Available upon request.

- k) *Anatomy of a Durational Project: Lanchonete.org, 2013-2017*¹⁷ (in both Routledge book, Contemporary Perspectives on Art and International Development and on InterArtive online magazine as *A collective project on rights to the city in São Paulo*¹⁸)
- l) Member Update #1¹⁹
- m) Sample Client Brief²⁰
- n) Course, walk, presentation notes for academic engagements: Princeton, New School, Columbia, NYU, KTH Architecture School, FAU-USP (Outros Laboratorio) and Escola da Cidade / HABITACIDADE²¹
- o) *Occupation Cultural Centers & Cultural Agents in São Paulo: A limited perspective from 2011 until present*²²
- p) For the Queer City Reader²³
- q) Contributions to The Nature of Cities²⁴
- r) *Urban Vignettes from São Paulo, Part I* (article on WPI)²⁵
- s) *Urban Vignettes from São Paulo, Part II* (article on WPI)²⁶
- t) Residency Unlimited DIALOGUES (blog series)²⁷
- u) Publication for *concreto amado: habitar e conviver no centro de são paulo* with Escola da Cidade (São Paulo) and KTH Architecture School (Stockholm)²⁸
- v) Results from Hotel Cambridge Residency—Publication Studio collaboration²⁹
- w) *What is Queer City ~ Cidade Queer?* (article on ArtsEverywhere; Reprint from Borda Journal)³⁰
- x) *What Does a Queer Urban Future Look Like?* (roundtable on ArtsEverywhere)³¹
- y) Cidade Queer (subdomain)³²
- z) Zona da Mata (subdomain w/ two zines)³³
- aa) Episodio Haiti (subdomain)³⁴
- bb) *Soul Food* (article)³⁵

¹⁷ Enclosed.

¹⁸ <http://interartive.org/2015/02/lanchonete-org/>

¹⁹ Available upon request.

²⁰ Available upon request.

²¹ Available upon request.

²² Available upon request.

²³ Available upon request.

²⁴ <https://www.thenatureofcities.com/author/toddlester/>

²⁵ <http://www.worldpolicy.org/blog/2015/07/21/urban-vignettes-são-paulo-part-i>

²⁶ <http://www.worldpolicy.org/blog/2015/10/08/urban-vignettes-são-paulo-part-ii>

²⁷ <http://residencyunlimited.org/dialogue/lanchonete/>

²⁸ Available upon request.

²⁹ Available upon request.

³⁰ <http://artseverywhere.ca/2016/05/27/what-is-queer-city-cidade-queer/>

³¹ <http://artseverywhere.ca/2016/03/31/queerness/>

³² <http://www.cidadequeer.lanchonete.org>

³³ <http://www.zdm2016.lanchonete.org>

³⁴ <http://www.episodihaiti.lanchonete.org>

³⁵ Available upon request.

- cc) 'Provocations' excerpt from *The Urban Planet: Knowledge towards Livable Cities* book³⁶
- dd) Lorena Vicini and Raphael Daibert presented *Developing identities to improve collectivity* at 'Cities as Community Spaces', a conference in Valletta, Malta (November 2016)³⁷
- ee) 'Hydrotropismo ... or The City as Dissolving Wave-Trough in the Image-Flood of Planetary Metamorphosis' curatorial statement³⁸
- ff) Article by Thiago Gonçalves (*Hydrotropism: Lessons from Ficus Elastica*) in World Policy Journal³⁹
- gg) Article by Gian Spina on ArtsEverywhere, *Qalandiya International — A Palestinian Biennial*⁴⁰
- hh) Article by Raphael Daibert on World Policy Journal, *Enclaves of Struggle*⁴¹
- ii) Artist-in-Residence interview with Lucia Nhamo in Contemporary&, *Ideas in Conversation with Lucia Nhamo: The Tangled Histories of Disconnected Places*⁴²
- jj) Artist-in-Residence interview with Jakub Szczesny on World Policy Institute, *Immersed in Context: Jakub Szczesny*⁴³
- kk) Media from Wander Symposium, Chobi Melo Photography Festival, 'Modes of Democracy' exhibit, Bamako Biennial, San Juan Triennial, ATAQUE, INLAND, 'Cities as Community Spaces', Beijing Theatre Festival, Tokyo Res Artis Conference, Montreal Res Artis Conference, Free Home University, Café Imaginario @ Centro Cultural São João, VideoBrasil, Casa das Caldeiras, etc.⁴⁴
- ll) All film content e.g. RU interviews (x2); Isabel and I in discussion for grant application; Coletivo Ghawazee @ PIVÔ; Jaime Lauriano @ Bamako Biennial; Zona da Mata (x6); 'Queer City' film
- mm) Polish-language articles⁴⁵
- nn) Queer City Reader⁴⁶
- oo) All press / 'links' list⁴⁷
- pp) Process drawing by Thiago Gonçalves⁴⁸
- qq) Next zine, *Cuiabá* by artists, George Ferraz and PogoLand forthcoming at Feira Plana 2017⁴⁹

³⁶ Available upon request.

³⁷ http://lanchonete.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/developingidentities_presentation.pdf

³⁸ http://kunsthalleesaopaulo.hospedagemdesites.ws/wordpress2/?page_id=4276

³⁹ <http://www.worldpolicy.org/blog/2015/04/03/hydrotropism-lessons-ficus-elastica>

⁴⁰ <http://artseverywhere.ca/2016/12/22/qalandiya-international/>

⁴¹ <http://www.worldpolicy.org/blog/2016/02/25/enclaves-struggle>

⁴² <http://www.contemporaryand.com/magazines/the-tangled-histories-of-disconnected-places/>

⁴³ <http://www.worldpolicy.org/blog/2015/10/15/immersed-context-jakub-szczesny>

⁴⁴ Available upon request.

⁴⁵ Available upon request.

⁴⁶ Forthcoming from Publication Studio, launches at Feira Plana (March 2017)

⁴⁷ Available upon request.

⁴⁸ Forthcoming (see also process drawings by artist, Adham Bakry in enclosed chapter)

⁴⁹ Link forthcoming, www.cuiaba.lanchonete.org