

PATHWAYS AND THE SOUND OF CRACKLING TWIGS:
THE CHALLENGE OF UNIVERSITY PRESS PUBLISHING
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ABSTRACT: The article raises some discussions about scholarly publications in the field of arts presenting the journals as special places to make public art criticism and questioning their suitability for academic parameters, which often preclude the journals to develop his true vocation.

KEYWORDS: Journal. Critics. Publication.

The recent release of an English journal,¹ which dedicated a special issue to Brazilian art and included in it a talk with the editor in charge of the culture section of a large circulation newspaper,² inspired critic Paulo Sérgio Duarte to compare the current critic scenery and that from the last ten years, stating that, in the past, we only had nowadays extinct *Gávea* journal (PUC-Rio), and today we have the currently printing (although not in large scale) *Concinnitas* (UERJ), *Arte & Ensaios* (UFRJ) and *Ars* (USP). As the editor of *Concinnitas* for eight years, his mentioning UERJ's journal is something that gives me much joy, once I understand the journal as the public knowledge of a very arduous and persistent work, albeit its financial or academic obstacles and its need for much dedication and creativity to surpass them. Although, in his declaration, two matters in question must be discussed.

The first is the proximity of art criticism with university press journals, a paradox in development in the Brazilian academic circle, once you have on one hand the recognition from the university,

the widest open space to exercise art criticism,³ on the other these are restricted places, once they are academic institutions, mostly disconnected from the art production rhythm, turning criticism unable to produce an immediate and agile response, even though it was, since Denis Diderot⁴ and Charles Baudelaire,⁵ characterized by the theoretical/philosophical reflection concerning the object. This ambiguity puts the function of university press journals in check. In Brazil, the university press is not effectively a means of critic publishing, that is, they cease to publicize ideas and reflections as reactions to what is presented in the circle.

It is plausible to claim that national art criticism has its line of descent marked by Araújo Porto Alegre's work and, overall, Gonzaga Duque's⁶ production, who, following Baudelaire, brings criticism in its modern sense to Brazil and publishes in many newspapers and periodicals his ironic and contemplative observations on the works of artists from the end of the XIX century and beginning of the XIX century. Other artists to be noted as participating in Brazil's yearning for modernity in the beginning of the century are Mario de Andrade, Lourival Gomes Machado⁷ and Rodrigo Mello Franco. However, it is possible that national criticism may have reached its most scathing and effective form in the decades between 1940-80. Then, through specialized, non-academic large circulation journals and newspapers that bore pieces on event information as much as articles sporting opinions and discussions, national criticism has made possible the public, wide space for discussion, albeit sadly in the decades of 1990 and 2000, but which are now, in the second half of the new millennium, being shyly continued.

Large circulation journals such as *Módulo* and newspapers like *Correio da Manhã*, *Jornal do Brasil*, *O Globo* and *Folha de S. Paulo* kept pieces and special sections where Mario Pedrosa, Ferreira Gullar,

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See number of undergraduate and graduate programs in Arts recognized in the last years by the Ministry of Education.

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Guinsburg, 2000.

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Baudelaire, 1995.

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Duque, 2001.

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Machado, 1941.

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Third Text. Londres, no.114, January 2012.

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Suzana Velasco, *O Globo, Prosa & Verso*. Rio de Janeiro, March 3, 2012.

Frederico de Moraes, Ronaldo Brito and others wrote true essays, discussing works of art theoretically and critically, and also pointing out the possible implications and unfoldings of this production to Brazil's artistic and cultural environment's formation.

The second question that Paulo Sérgio's declaration made me think of is in the reference he makes to the university journals published only in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. Certainly, the critic made reference to the art circuit, and, even though it has changed much in the last years, it still predominantly exists in Rio-São Paulo axis. Paulo Sérgio, who has published in *Concinnitas* and *Arte & Ensaios*, doesn't know of the existence of other university journals whose biggest issue is, too, as identified by the critic, the unprofitable publishing, and that certainly keeps him from quoting *Porto Arte* (UFRGS), *Marcelina* (FASM), *Palíndromo* (UDESC), *Visualidades* (UFG), *VIS* (UNB), *Studium* (Unicamp), *Poiésis* (UFF) and many other university press journals on art throughout the country.⁸

If the problem was the difficulty to publish these journals in and outside the country, then such problems are directly linked one to another, that is, it concerns the lack of financial sponsorship to secure regular publishing, which would in its turn make easier to hire publishers and press houses as much as the subscription upkeep. There are, however, programs that support university press journals and periodicals, overall those connected to graduate programs. Federal and state agencies call for submissions to support periodicals, but the agenda is almost always unpredictable and the calls are mostly not as current as the journals need them to be. Besides that, there is the uncertainty of request accepting, aggravated by the problem of specificity in art journals, which need to be in accordance and contend with all other so-called scientific journals.

Thus, the biggest obstacle of university art journals, the ones that mainly aim to spread the current concerns of the art discussions, directly connected to the exercise of art criticism, besides spreading history and art theory studies, is the institutional limitations they need to comply with to survive. Certainly, journals tend to gain institutional recognition, besides financial aid, not as much for the critical intensity and conceptual relevance of what they communicate, but for meeting academic guidelines determined by formal demands of standardization and structural functioning, defined in the agencies. In the last evaluation, done in 2009,⁹ the criteria referred not only

to online disponibility and guarantee of access and preservation of its issues, but also the existence of a responsible editor, an editorial board affiliated to the institution, ISSN registration, editorial guideline, submission rules, periodicity, authors affiliated to the institution, article abstract and peer review.

Some of these were also asked from any academic press periodical, and they guaranteed their quality, the best for this end being peer review, considered widely to be exaggeratedly coercive. However, what could be understood as the biggest contribution made by these guidelines is not between the criteria: the guarantee of public calls for articles. I believe in the need of public and democratic character in university and academic-level article publishing. I consider essential and ethical for all researchers and artists in the field to have a chance to bring forward their reflections, pushing forward the debate of ideas in a context of dissension, just as described by Jacques Rancière.¹⁰ As they are all academic journals who wish to spread the word on the development of researches, be them artistic or theoretical, once released the public calls, I agree that collaborations sent in reply should be regulated through evaluation made by peers (peer review), before they're published, guaranteeing thus the editorial line of the journal. During the time I was in the editorial board of *Concinnitas*, all contributions we received were sent to the consultors ad hoc, arising, sometimes, resentment from my peers. *Concinnitas* has kept its objective standard as an academic publication, although there is the need of an enormous discussion so as for us to clarify the way an arts journal can compete for financing with other considered scientific publications without leaving behind the concerns of the art world.

When Mario Perniola¹¹ quotes the essay *O Surrealismo e a cultura*, he corroborates with the need to go beyond the limits of the individual rebellion of the vanguard, in order to seek a historical perspective, one able to problematize the system of institutions as a means to recognize and transform cultural institutions, overall those referring to university communication and organization, which he identified as permeated by a pretense of neutrality and objectivity. What the author requested was that, by opposing to the already established game, one could elaborate more precise rules between aesthetic theory and practical theory, and, thus, acquire a transforming speech that is able to develop a public act.

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Qualis, 2012.

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Idem.

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Rancière, 2005.

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Perniola, 2008.

I understand the changes that occurred in the last decades, nevertheless it seems to me that if we want to think of art publications and their relations with the university we must yet to think of the university, as proposed by Perniola in the 60's, by wishing to see it as a place for critical production in a political sense, that is, as a public place of sense production in dissense,¹² jeopardizing the false showiness of "neutrality" of the university publications without jeopardizing both artistic act production and the act of criticism?¹³

To think about the connection between periodicals — which Paulo Sérgio associates with art criticism — and the university, I consider to be important and necessary to establish a kind of genealogy, as a historical uptake of the art criticism and its public dissemination. I will choose here a non-historian practice, such as theorized by Michel Foucault,¹⁴ but archeological nonetheless — one that uses archives, in this case, of ideas and thoughts, in order to let the discussion to brighten in confrontation —, so it seems appropriate to me now to go back to the sense that the writings on art have taken since Diderot. The *Essays on Painting*, developed by Diderot for *Correspondence Littéraire* and edited by Grimm written to accompany his Salon of 1765, in Paris, are writings of a capital importance to the history of thought dedicated to art. It creates a kind of literary-philosophical genre, also found in Baudelaire, that begins his days as a critic in the Salons of 1845 and 1846, composing a reflection on the power of criticism as a thought capable of transforming the public sphere. It seems important yet to use the speech of German Romanticism poet Friedrich Schlegel's, to whom, as written by Walter Benjamin,¹⁵ it was in art itself that lived the fundamental energy he called *infinite reflection*. But maybe the biggest contribution to art university publications seeking the historic perspective Perniola spoke about is in the writings of Michel de Certeau, in *The Practice of Everyday Life*,¹⁶ in the end of the 70's, especially in the chapter

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Rancière, *op.cit.*

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V. Osório, 2005.

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Foucault, 2005.

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Benjamin, 1999.

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Certeau, 2007.

"Making Do: Uses and Tactics", which widens the concept of artistic act to the daily non-systematic act and establishing it as a public act and, thus, political. Thus, in order to solve the specificity of art in a field of academic objectivity, it would be necessary to think of art and art publications as art acts, which result in the admission of an anti-discipline and in manners of system independent acts. This takes us to another statement, one that is even more disquieting that regards the perverse logic of bibliographical production in the academic circle, generating anxiety within the graduate programs. When we release open submissions for articles and reviews we receive an enormous number of essays from graduate students, essays that sometimes are still immature, as in opinions that are not grounded by arguments, and generated within careless studies regarding the field's literary production. These students, as we know, are propelled to publish, which collaborates to the program's good performance regarding the assessment from the research field's coordinators, who need numbers to justify financing student and professor scholarships. However, supervisors are also pressured to show production, which leads us to sign articles with students. This practice is very common in biological science fields, as when students work partly in researches developed by their supervisors. That becomes a problem in the field of art and art criticism, overall when authority is still a question of institutional recognition, especially market recognition. After eight years editing the journal, I can say that I have encountered all kinds of difficulties, and that was one of the most embarrassing. Even so, I consider that, during this period, I have worked earnestly in order to build a journal that could collaborate not only with the strengthening of the art knowledge, but also to the promoting of issues that drive the critic field forward, always without conclusive answers.

In 2003, when I took over the editorship of *Concinnitas*, I had not thought of the specialized staff or print funds. The solution was, then, to register the periodical as an extension project and compete for scholarships for student extension and internship. I have also submitted the project for scholarship funds for support staff. The *Concinnitas* project thus developed, with help of an exemplary performance by the undergraduate students and one intern with superior technical understanding, the structure of a publishing lab, obtaining funds from state government funding agency Faperj for equipments, not to mention the support from the Institute of Arts's coordinators for its physical installation. The periodical started to be published also electronically, and its range, once regional, became national and even international after we made all published articles available for download. Through the website's hit counter, we have

recently found out that the journal receives about 6,700 hits per year, including 37 countries, such as Portugal United States, Argentina, Spain, China, United Kingdom, France, Mexico and Canada. It has also been verified that 41,12% of our users came to the website through web search engines.

As part of the project, we kept contact with 90 cultural and academic institutions, to whom we send printed versions, and aside from that we also exchange [in portuguese, *permuta*] with 13 academic publications, including foreign and national journals. This way, the journal is in as many libraries as it can. But I believe that the electronic version is currently the most favorable, not only because of its possibility of reach, but also because of its agility, both very important aspects to the art critic and research production flow. I feel as if I could have done more for *Concinnitas* as an agile and transforming place. However, just like the storm that gets the Angel of History caught in its wings, we go on knowing that new challenges will come, and just like in a foreign city, the best for us to do is to get lost in the streets and, despite our curiosity, which always gets us excited, we must keep calm without coming to a stop. As written by Walter Benjamin¹⁷ in *Berlin Childhood around 1900*: “Not to find one’s way around a city does not mean much. But to lose one’s way in a city, as one loses one’s way in a forest, requires some schooling.” The nets labyrinth seduces and frightens, but one must follow the pathways by listening to the sound of crackling twigs in order to recognize it. Hence, we must keep on going in new ways without disposing of already gathered knowledge.

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¹⁷

Benjamin, 1987.