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Brazilian Art under Dictatorship: Antonio Manuel, Artur Barrio, and Cildo Meireles by Claudia Calirman (review)

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and executed in Saint-Domingue for allegedly trying to foment a rebellion prior to the 1791 uprising in the northern plain. Garrigus upends the received narrative of this famous incident, showing that Ogé probably did not want to lead a prolonged uprising, but that he sought instead to rally the free colored militia to take advantage of the ties between militia service and citizenship that were emerging in the metropole. Sidney Chalhoub shows how Brazilian planters used the 1831 law that putatively prohibited the Atlantic slave trade to their own advantage, creating a system in which they could easily seize and enslave free black Brazilians. But black Brazilians also used the law and assumptions of “natural” black slavery that emerged out of it to avoid military service, seek less brutal masters, and finally, after 1851, to contest slavery. Neither the law itself nor the legal regime that arose out of its evasion operated in a simple or straightforward manner. Scott and Hébrard provide an overview of the complicated transatlantic genealogy that they have reconstructed for the children of “Rosalie of the Poulard Nation,” an enslaved African who achieved freedom in southern Saint-Domingue on the eve of the Haitian Revolution. Her grandson became a Reconstruction-era Louisiana legislator and fought for racial and gender equality. That battle was rooted in his family’s history.

These essays, as Franklin Knight points out, underscore that the development of racial identities in the Americas was “a complicated process that varied according to time, place, and circumstances,” an understanding that helps to explain the equally varied and complicated roles that race continues to play in different American societies.

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CULTURAL AND LITERARY STUDIES

Brazilian Art under Dictatorship: Antonio Manuel, Artur Barrio, and Cildo Meireles.

By Claudia Calirman. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2012. Pp. xvi, 264. Acknowledgments. Appendixes. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. \$24.95 paper.

The usual assumptions regarding the relation between culture and repression are often represented by way of a notion of culture interrupted by censorship and violence exercised by the state. Claudia Calirman’s book describes a cultural scene (the Brazilian art world from 1968 to 1978) where intense experimentation had to deal with an additional dimension: the rupturing of established limits on language imposed by military norms. How can one say when language is under police surveillance? In recent years, different publications have advanced our thinking in terms of analyzing artistic practice during dictatorships, for example Nelly Richard’s work in reference to Chile, or the map of Latin American conceptualism delineated by Luis Camnitzer. Calirman’s investigation confirms and expands upon a statement that cultural critic Roberto Schwartz published in 1970, in which he refers to the relationship between Brazilian culture and politics between 1964 and 1969 by saying, “In spite of the dictatorship from the right,

there was a relative cultural hegemony of the left in the country” (p. 4). Calirman’s book proposes that this cultural hegemony of the left was maintained in the period that followed, even when the dictatorship acted on its script for interventions in the field of culture (the Institutional Act #5, in effect from 1968 to 1978). In opposition to the dictatorship’s methodology of terror—typified by technologies of repression, torture, the disappearance of individuals, and censorship—certain civil sectors (human rights organizations, political activists, intellectuals, and artists) deployed multiple creative strategies in order to impede the success of the repressive state’s primary pursuit: the eradication of critical thought.

Based on three case studies involving works by artists Antonio Manuel, Artur Barrio and Cildo Meireles, Calirman articulates an interpretation that takes into consideration both language strategies and their parallels to international art references and the political context that activated the works’ reception at the moment they were exhibited. This perspective indirectly endorses another proposal: from the post-War period onward, and especially from the 1960s onward, a mimetic or derivative relationship toward art and art centers outside Brazil can no longer be suggested. Order in the art world was no longer established on the basis of centers where novelties were produced and a receptive periphery. Instead, contacts develop in a parallel, simultaneous manner. Neo-avantgarde movements everywhere were revising the strategies of both historical and local avant-garde groups. Thus it was not only Brazilian modernism—particularly the Brazilian model of anthropophagy inaugurated by Oswald de Andrade and Tarsila de Amaral in 1928—that was being examined in *Río de Janeiro*, but also the modernism of Dada and Duchamp.

In accordance with this reading, contemporary art from Europe and the United States constituted additional information that existed in parallel, not as a source or an origin. Terms such as minimalism, conceptual art, and body art are insufficient to explain Brazilian art from that era. It is necessary to consider the productivity of notions such as the “experimental exercise of freedom” (coined by Mário Pedrosa in relation to the censored work of Antonio Manuel in 1970), the “Aesthetics of Hunger” (Glauber Rocha, 1965), or the idea of “Brazil Diarrhea” (Hélio Oiticica, 1970). These are just a few examples among many ways of naming the artistic practices that were emerging from a specific cultural, social, and political context. It is also indispensable to consider the productivity implied by the proposal of contemplating the marginal (whether in terms of poverty or schizophrenia) from a creative, heroic, and romantic perspective.

Claudia Calirman’s proposed analysis of Antonio Manuel’s work (repeatedly exhibited and censored) emphasizes cultural differences in inscribing body art. While in the United States and Europe such art was tied to notions of endurance, mutilation, and pain, in Brazil it was linked to an idea of liberating Dionysian celebration, in recognition of the body’s physicality. In this potency of the body, Marcuse was naturally present; he was read in Brazil just as he was in the rest of the world. Fundamentally, his references to the idea of the body as a form of resistance against capitalism could be activated on a global scale. It was also the militant body of the guerilla that Marcuse

made reference to, simultaneously in action in many Latin American cities. Finally, it was also the body that artists such as Lygia Clark, Hélio Oiticica, and Lygia Pape had activated in their proposals. There are other connections: Antonio Manuel related his interventions in the media to Malevich, Duchamp, and Mondrian, but at the same time entered into dialogue with photo novels or the political practices of the underground. Although he was unaware of the fact, his proposal for *Clandestines* (1973) shares certain points of contact with *Tucumán Arde*, developed in Argentina (1968).

Creative resistance was expressed in powerful ways in the urban context and it disrupted art's habitual circuits. The bloodied bundles of animal meat (along with bones, nails, hair, urine, excrement, toilet paper, tampons, used cotton, and film negatives) that Artur Barrio dispersed in the streets of Río de Janeiro were not dismantled by museum personnel, but by the police and sanitation department garbage collectors. The bundles were part of an abject aesthetic with scatological and political connotations. Calirman contrasts these practices with those of Arte Povera, land art, Joseph Beuys's concept of social sculptures, and guerilla tactics. Seen from this perspective, these Brazilian artists' works were more closely linked to Luis Camnitzer's proposals for rethinking Latin American conceptualism than they were to Germano Celant and the Arte Povera movement.

Born in the same context of repression, Cildo Meireles's works move from a stripped-down, minimalist scheme to brutal stagings of violence. *Tiradentes: Totem-Monument to the Political Prisoner* (1970) is one of the first works that portrays the violence of the dictatorship in an inescapable manner. It is also an example of the use of animals in Brazilian art from this era; the animals served as a metaphorical support that was extremely effective for articulating denunciations. Candomblé and political violence intersected in these live bodies as they were exposed and sacrificed.

Calirman's book explores an exhibition that served as a platform for this critical conceptualism: *Information*, at the Museum of Modern Art of New York (1970). The author interprets the show as an institutional response to the challenge formulated one year earlier by artists and activists participating in the Art Workers' Coalition (created in 1969 to protest against the Vietnam War and to promote human rights). This exhibition legitimized the artists' need to make a commitment to their immediate political reality. Interventions by various Latin American artists were also presented (Cildo Meireles, the New York Graphic Workshop, Marta Minujin, Alejandro Puente, and Hélio Oiticica), many of which could be read in terms of the critique of canonic conceptualism introduced by Benjamin Buchloh.

Calirman's arguments grant visibility to specific traits of the Brazilian scene. Here, the widespread anti-institutional spirit of '68 did not imply abandoning art in its political function, but rather an intense exploration of possibilities for critique from the radical standpoint of the works in an institutional context. Within this architecture, Frederico Morais, director of visual arts and coordinator for courses at the Museu de Arte Moderna do Río de Janeiro from 1967 to 1973, was curator for the largest number of exhi-

bitions analyzed in Calirman's book and a key figure. Her investigation provides materials for developing comparative studies of different strategies of symbolic resistance to dictatorships and post-dictatorships in Latin America. At the same time, it interrupts the affirmative modernist discourse that dominates several studies on Brazilian art.

Calirman reads vanguard experimentation in the context in which it was articulated, that is, within a violent dictatorship that intervened in the field of culture by way of vigilant censorship. She does not argue for explaining artistic imagination on the basis of context, but she does argue that the action of that imagination did have the power to erode the state's normative discourse.

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Olivier, José R., editor. *El caribe precolombino. Fray Ramón Pané y el universo taíno*. Catalogue of the exhibit organized by the Museu Barbier-Mueller d'Art Precolombí (Barcelona), with the collaboration of The British Museum, Ministerio de Cultura, Museo de América, and Fundación Caixa Galicia, 2008. Pp. 285.

The catalogue, edited by José R. Olivier, Colin McEwan, and Anna Casas Gilberga, presents Taino artifacts in the context of the culture that produced them. Although its title promises the reader research on pre-Columbian Taino culture, only one of the seven essays deals with pre-contact Taino practices from an archaeological perspective that does not move along the analytical axes of Spanish colonization or European collectionism.

There seem to be very different criteria and interests at play in the making of this exhibit and catalogue. Jean Paul Barbier-Mueller's essay deals with Columbus's travels in a celebratory manner. The well-known collector's thoughts appear Eurocentric in the context of the catalogue, insofar as he is mostly concerned with celebrating the figures of Columbus and the Catalan friar Ramón Pané. However, Barbier-Mueller appears to represent something of an isolated case with regard to the other authors. In his essay on Pané, Jaume Aymar i Ragolta brings out detailed information and images of the Barcelona monastery where Pané resided, Sant Jeroni de la Murtra, and general information on the Hieronymite monastic order. One goal of the catalogue is to highlight Pané's contact with the Tainos; in fact, we owe Pané the partial access we have to anonymous Taino voices from the contact period. Following Columbus's orders, the friar managed to gather information on Taino mythology and *cemis* (religious artifacts) from native informants, all the while dealing with language barriers and material difficulties. Consuelo Varela and Juan Gil, two specialists on Columbus, make a brief but worthy contribution to the volume, providing bibliographical and documental information that may be useful for those studying Pané's *Relación* and the specific circumstances of his arrival in the New World. Olivier's essay on Columbus's second voyage and his strategies for enslaving the Tainos presents a portrait of the admiral that contrasts markedly with Barbier-Mueller's admiring contribution.