

Bacurau — On Blood, Maps and Museums

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Abstract: The museum has a central role in the Brazilian film *Bacurau*, directed by Kleber Mendonça Filho and Juliano Dornelles. Inserting the small village of Bacurau in a long and ongoing history of colonial resistance in the backlands of Brazil, the museum holds the iconography of popular struggle in the region, as well as the weapons used on past confrontations, which remain available for future ones. This essay broadens the discussion of *Bacurau*'s museum to present-day Brazil in the aftermath of the presidential elections of 2018—when the far-right got into power. Arguing for a museological stance similar to the one in the film, this essay proposes that such a stance is a way to respond to the rise of authoritarianism in the country. A 'museological stance' is thus presented as an alliance between the living and the dead as a means for conjuring up new futures. It presupposes the cannibalization of the stories of violence in aesthetic, political and psychological ways. Completed in November 2019, a post scriptum was added to the essay in April 2020; reevaluating the meaning of an alliance between the living and the dead after COVID-19.

Keywords: *Bacurau*; sertão; museum; violence; Brazilian Film and Art.

Bacurau, the Brazilian film directed by Kleber Mendonça Filho and Juliano Dornelles, starts with a warning. "Bacurau 17 km/ If you go, go in peace" can be read on a road sign right after the film's opening credits, when an artificial satellite approaches the northern region of the Brazilian territory, known as *sertão*. If we are to believe the threat, made implicit by the conditional clause, "if you go, go in peace", both the spectator and traveler are warned about the bravery and belligerence of Bacurau's people. Between the road sign and the village, there are still other strange signals of its population's warrior temperament: from coffins piled up by the roadside to the carcass of a gunned-down police car. There are enough bullets and coffins to confront and bury those who do not come in peace.

As part of the movie's marketing strategy, a similar sign was positioned at the entry hall of a few film theaters in Brazil, serving as a challenge to the spectator. Placed in the film and in the real space of movie theaters, this sign suggests that *Bacurau* is a physical territory (a town) as well as an imaginary and fictitious one (a film)—much like the *sertão*.

To Be and Not to Be on the Map

Untranslatable, the term *sertão* refers both to a specific semi-arid region in the northern part of Brazil and to a set of often contradictory imaginary and ideological constructions. Condemned by its barren weather to hunger, misery, and underdevelopment, *sertão* has always

been the uncivilized Other to the project of a developed, urbanized, and industrialized nation. In Brazilian popular culture and art, *sertão* is often associated with the notions of indomitable insubordination, resistance, vitality, and creation. It escapes its geographical specificity to become a state of mind, a space of symbolical and unyielding existence.

“The *sertão* is where you least expect it”, writes João Guimarães Rosa in one of the great Brazilian novels of the 20th century, *Grande Sertão Veredas* (*The Devil to Pay in the Backlands*, 1956). From this perspective, the *sertão* cannot be spotted by a satellite or located along the 17 kilometers that connect two points in space. It transcends the borders of the map, to inscribe and assert itself where least expected. “You know, sir, it is in the *sertão* that one’s thoughts have to rise above the power of the place,”¹ says Riobaldo, the character in Guimarães Rosa’s novel. Erased from the map, the *sertão* continues to exist beyond it. Similarly to a film or a memory, it exists in another dimension. “Neighbor of the fifth cardinal point, and friend of the fourth dimension—it is the third margin... Where amazement, escape, and creation combine, there is the entrance to the *sertão*”², writes Rondinelly Medeiros, a Brazilian historian who researches ways of life and thinking in the *sertão*. Both *Bacurau* and the *sertão* are and are not on the map.

Taken as a “condition” and a “state of mind,” a symbolic territory of fabulation and invention, the *sertão* and *Bacurau*, as its allegory, transcend their geolocation to carve and project themselves onto another map and another episteme: affective and prospective. They create counter-mappings that reposition and reclaim forms of existence from the realms of possibility and of becoming, beyond dominant representations. However, precisely because they affirm the prospect of creating and existing in other territories, they must be “taken off the map.” There is always a moment when the colonial powers must wash the *sertão* off the map, as the submerging of Canudos reminds us.³ Reasons are always given and frequently enforced with battalions:

1 Guimarães Rosa 1963, p. 19

2 Medeiros, 2019, p. 58.

3 In 1883, a wandering preacher, Antonio Conselheiro, gathered thousands of followers around him and settled an autonomous community in the backlands of Bahia, in what became the village of Canudos. The community attracted impoverished peasants, landless squatters, runaway slaves, Indians and all sorts of people oppressed and marginalized by the ruling classes. It expanded rapidly, thus becoming the second most populous settlement in the state of Bahia. In the midst of a dispute between groups scrabbling for control of the country, the new republican government rapidly saw in Canudos and in Conselheiro, who was a monarchist, a menace to its order. In the rise of eugenics and hygienists policies, the intervention of the armed forces was invoked to save the country from its own people. From 1896 to 1897, during the course of three expeditions, the *sertão* was invaded by battalions fiercely repulsed by the inhabitants of Canudos. The fourth expedition, however, succeed in exterminating the entire population of the village, killing approximately 25000 people. Canudos was burned down and dynamited afterwards. Seventy years later, during the Military Dictatorship, a dam was built on the ruins of the city, in what seems to have been a deliberate effort to erase the memories of the suppression of the popular revolt by the republican army in 1896–97.

expanding territories, combatting backwardness with the myth of progress, and last but not the least, suppressing its mystery from seducing and contaminating what is on the outside—what would become of the world as we know it (capitalist, individualist, and expansionist), if all were to enter a state of becoming *sertão*.

In Dornelles’ and Mendonça’s film, such double condition—amid the constantly renewed menace of erasure and the repositioning of existence by counter-mapping—is staged and updated by the relationship of the museum with its exterior. In this essay, I intend to examine this condition through the case of the Historical Museum of Bacurau (HMB), as it combines a past of oppression and resistance with a call to arms.

Phantoms and Museums

Although impenetrable and mysterious to the very end, the museum is the most important symbolic space of *Bacurau*. When two strangers, coming from the southern part of the country, arrive at the village to obstruct its mobile signal—an operation needed to remove it from the map—the locals believe the museum is the reason of their visit: “Did you come to see the museum?”; “Aren’t you going to visit the museum?”, they ask. For the people of Bacurau, the museum puts the village on the map.

Nonetheless, it is only close to the film’s ending, when foreigners invade the village to begin a hunt for its inhabitants that we’ll enter the museum space to find out what it holds. In an antechamber: newspaper clippings and photographs referring to the iconography of popular struggle and resistance in the *sertão*—Canudos, Cariri,⁴ cangaço.⁵ In the following room: pistols. These, however, are solely recognized by the placards and the white stains held on the dirty wall. When we finally enter the gallery, the pistols are already in the hands of the people.

The Historical Museum of Bacurau is not a metaphorical site of resistance but a literal one, the guardian and supplier of weapons needed for the confrontation. Alongside the school, it is also one of the first places to be attacked during the invasion.

With no windows and reinforced by a secondary layer of wooden beams, this museum resembles a bunker. Perhaps, the people of Bacurau already knew what most Brazilians only learned in 2017: that schools and cultural institutions are the first ones to be attacked and taken off the map when certain forces—intolerant, rather than merely

4 From 1683 to 1713, the Cariri people, an indigenous group native to the *sertão*, fought against the Portuguese colonizers. It was an organized and united resistance, similar to a confederation, opposed to the occupation of their land, as well as to slavery. The Cariri resisted the colonizers for 30 years.

5 Cangaço was a social bandit phenomenon of the *sertão* in the late 19th and early 20th century. The “cangaceiros” performed robberies for both political and economic reasons. Seen as common criminals by the State, they were perceived as popular heroes by many of the local population.

conservative—and armed with moral schematism, decide to take power by manipulating affect.

It may be useful to recall some recent events: in the city of Porto Alegre, a cultural space decided to shut down the exhibition, *Queermuseum—Cartographies of Difference in Brazilian Art*, when online protesters accused the show's organizers of inciting pedophilia and zoophilia. Soon after, a video of an artist, who was watched by and interacted with the public (including a child) while performing in the nude, at the opening of an exhibition at the Modern Art Museum of São Paulo (MAM-SP), went viral.

Thus began a national crusade against artists and art institutions. Eyeing the following year's election, opportunistic politicians (the soon-to-be president of Brazil Jair Bolsonaro and the governor of the state of São Paulo, João Dória, among them), launched a cultural war, defending "family values," and advocating censorship of the arts. Meanwhile, other citizens, inflamed by such protests (and fearing their inner *sertão?*), turned to violence and attacked the museum's workers and visitors.

I'm not sure whether it is possible to analyze what ensued in the presidential elections of 2018 with adequate clarity. One or two scenes might suffice to demonstrate the surrealness of it all: images of erotic baby bottles, shaped in the form of a penis and allegedly distributed to young kids, as a way to educate them about homosexuality, informed some of the campaign discussions; photomontages depicting the progressive faction's vice-presidential candidate worshipping Satan and claiming that Jesus was transgender circulated broadly. All along, Bolsonaro, the far right's candidate who ended up winning the elections without ever showing up at a public debate, promised to free Brazil from cultural Marxists and gender ideology. Even though we cannot precisely measure the impact that the events of 2017 had on the following year's elections, one thing is certain: the phantoms of authoritarianism took to the streets and, to say the least, left their marks on our holiday family dinners.⁶

Perhaps, all this happened because those ghosts were never truly imprisoned, or psychologically processed and exorcized. Indeed, it seems that we chose to believe that a decree⁷ was enough to make torturers, and tortures by extension, vanish.

Some may believe that decrees, struck by pens, verdicts, and promises of imminent futures are enough to erase past aggressions.

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⁶The 2018 elections violently split the country in two. The electors of Bolsonaro accused the Left, and Left-Center voters of abetting corruption, of being "against Brazil" and degenerate; many times giving reins to racist discourses. One month after the elections, many people chose not to attend family Christmas celebrations, to avoid coming face to face with their family members who voted for Bolsonaro. See note 7.

⁷In 1979, a decree by the Dictatorial Regime absolved all political crimes committed during the dictatorship. The amnesty included the crimes carried out by the military.

But there might be another way to deal with the histories of violence: defunctionalizing them, taking them to the museum, where they must remain captive.

Boris Groys situates the origins of such a proposal during the French Revolution, when, instead of destroying the objects and regalia of the Old Regime, the revolutionaries chose to aestheticize them in museums. Groys argues that to transform the old politics into a purely aesthetic object of contemplation is an even more radical way to neutralize the past than iconoclasm. It is necessary to display the domesticated corpses of the past, to keep them in sight, so that their phantoms won't surreptitiously leave in the middle of the night to come and sit at our bedside or our dining tables, when we are busy being born and busy dying.⁸

It might be useful to revisit a not so unusual comparison between museums and mausoleums. Setting aside the moralistic horror of death, we should reframe the necrological tendency of museums and look for its positive aspects. Again, Boris Groys offers some insight:

Already during the nineteenth century, museums were often compared to cemeteries, and museum curators to gravediggers. However, the museum is much more of a cemetery than any real cemetery. Real cemeteries do not expose the corpses of the dead; they conceal them. This is also true for the Egyptian pyramids. By concealing the corpses, cemeteries create an obscure, hidden space of mystery and thus suggest the possibility of resurrection. We have all read about ghosts, vampires leaving their graves, and other undead creatures wandering around cemeteries at night. We have also seen movies about a night in the museum: when nobody is looking, the dead bodies of the artworks come to life. However, the museum in the daylight is a place of definitive death that allows no resurrection, no return of the past. The museum institutionalizes the truly radical, atheistic, revolutionary violence that demonstrates the past as incurably dead. It is a purely materialistic death without return—the aestheticized material corpse functions as a testimony to the impossibility of resurrection.⁹

In *A Night at the Museum* (2006), a movie that Groys references without naming it, the ghosts of pharaohs, dinosaurs, and Civil War soldiers come back to life, playing different roles and interacting with each other. Far less reluctant to take seriously the so-called entertainment cinema,

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⁸Reference to the 1968 song, *Panis et Circences (Bread and Circus)*, by Mutantes, which became a manifesto or emblem of Tropicalismo. The song is a satire on the conventions of a traditional bourgeois family plagued by immobility and mediocrity. The chorus repeats: "But the people in the dining room are busy being born and dying".

⁹Groys 2014, p. 6.

Pedro França reminds us—in an article written at the aftermath of the fire at Brazil’s National Museum¹⁰—that the problem with the film starring Ben Stiller isn’t what happens inside the museum at night, but what happens when the “fragile pact that keeps the museum pieces within its walls is broken, and the past breaks free (dinosaur skeletons and giant, stuffed mammals running wild in the streets)”.

Contradicting the belief often inherent to the avant-gardes, according to which all of the museum’s objects are dead, it is possible to think (following França’s argument) that these objects are actually being held for later treatment. In this sense, the museum is a psychiatric clinic, designed for the collective elaboration of past traumas. In daytime, it shows the past as dead; at night, it is a prison that holds its ghosts captive and busy, deterring them from returning to the world.

Bacurau is a nocturnal bird; it flies during the time of “fear and terror” as “phantoms haunt the wake”—so Sérgio Ricardo sings on the film’s soundtrack. But as legend has it, Bacurau can also be a Phoenician scribe, transformed into a nocturnal bird by Tupã, the native Brazilian god of thunder. According to this legend, the Phoenicians arrived on the continent before the Portuguese. One day, a lost scribe was mistaken for a bird-god by the local indigenous population, angering Tupã. With the stroke of his lightning, the scribe was made into a bird, and this bird is Bacurau.

Bacurau is thus a nocturnal animal, as well as Brazil’s first “cannibalized” museologist, scribe, and librarian. In line with such double identity, Bacurau would be the museum’s guardian when no one’s left, as well as the “curator-psychologist,” in charge of organizing the living ghosts’ collective psychodrama. Perhaps this is one of the roles of a curator: to organize the worldly objects with the intent of dealing and processing emotions, collective memories, and traumas that eventually surface in our consciousness during the night. Another role should be to create small points of contraband to the outside, making the museum a prospective device for future struggles and revolts.

In *Bacurau*, a subterranean tunnel connecting the center of the village to the weapons’ room inside the bunker-museum bridges past and future. Used for access to the pistols during the invasion, this tunnel is also employed as a jail, imprisoning the sole foreign survivor of the attack (the character played by Udo Kier). Once buried alive, his ghost can only move towards the interior of the museum. Besides the bloodstains deliberately left on the walls after the attack, and close to the resistance’s fallen ones, he will be mentally absorbed and incorporated into the collective narrative. But before his burial and disappearance, he addresses the people of Bacurau and the film’s spectators in a threatening tone: “This is only the beginning.” Enunciated from within the hatch and directed towards the world of the living, such a prophecy repositions the history at play, and reminds us that victories are always partial and temporary.

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10 França 2019, p.6.

Insomuch as clinical psychoanalysis acknowledges the impossibility of definitive cures, the clinic-museum understands the limitations of its ambitions. First, it does not believe in the *telos* of salvation and liberation, to which the analyzing of past mistakes would eventually lead—to believe such *telos* would mean that there might come a time when museums (and analysts) cease to be needed. Secondly, it recognizes that imprisoning and treating phantoms from the past doesn’t stop the emergence of new monsters; the clinic-museum acknowledges the constraints of the tools at its disposal. Nevertheless, it claims dealing with the past as its function and responsibility, so that multiple and unknown futures may take place. The dislocation is subtle and decisive; the future is not to be built on the image and likeness of the past, on the fear of phantasmagorical reappearance, but rather on an immense unknown that must be invented. *A sertão*.

At this point in our history, when the untreated ghosts of our past are on the loose, we are faced with two alternatives. The first is to continue doing what we have always done: to leave them on the outside and hope they’ll someday fall asleep, so that life may once more normalize—this has been the choice of many museums and art spaces that, fearing the savagery of irrational moralism, have opted for self-censorship. Another alternative might be to *bacuralizar* [*bacurize*]: to cannibalize the stories of violence in aesthetical, political, and psychological ways; to reenact these stories with other means and for other ends; to invent disparate outcomes, so that we may then return them to the world. To *bacurize* is to assume a museological stance. A stance that depends on a radical alliance between the museum and the present, as well as between the living and the dead (or those that are absent).

Bacurau is built upon a radical symmetry among characters. This symmetry is essential to what I call here as a “museological stance.” The film has no exceptional protagonists. Barbara Colen, Thomáz Aquino, and Wilson Rabelo are no less important than Sônia Braga. The former aren’t any more protagonists than the film’s non-professional actors—the only character that gains more notoriety than the others, Lunga (played by Silvério Pereira), doesn’t even appear before the story’s third and final part. But the lack of hierarchy among the actors (professional or not) doesn’t create an indifferent, uniform mass of equals. The film does not resort to the artifice of employing extras as a means of staging collectivity—notice, for instance, the number of close-ups, as opposed to wide shots (a safer and more frequent choice when filming extras). Almost all characters carry traces of differentiation, specificity, and concreteness in their portrayal—more so for the inhabitants of Bacurau than for its visitors: outsiders, southerners, or the mayor; the majority of which are characterized as archetypes. At least in the inhabitants’ case, we may assume that they are, in one way or another, protagonists, or else, distinctive and constitutive fragments of a collective body; a protagonist-village.

The symmetry can also be found between the present and the missing characters. The people of Bacurau tirelessly invoke the persons who are away: Ms. Carmelita's many children who, having left the town, weren't able to come back to her funeral; the fallen brothers and sisters, possibly never known, defeated and massacred in other struggles, *sertões* and *bacoraus*. Their names are conjured up during the funeral procession at the end of the film: Mariza Letícia, Marielle, Pablo Tavares Maciel, Francisco Assis Chaves, Adalberto Santos, Audilene Maria Silva, Mariza Letícia Roberto Ferreira Silva, Nelia Maria Albuquerque, João Pedro Teixeira.

Amid so many unfamiliar names, the fresh wound of recent events in Brazil allows us to recognize some, even if their last names were altered or omitted: Mariza Letícia [Lula da Silva], Marielle [Franco]. There is another one that stands out: João Pedro Teixeira, a peasant leader brutally murdered in 1962, during an ambush.

Teixeira—invoked last and the only person whose actual surname is preserved—isn't a mere accessory on that list: in Brazilian film history, Teixeira connects the pre-coup d'état era to the age of re-democratization. In 1964, the year of the military coup in Brazil, the filmmaker Eduardo Coutinho was in Galileia, a town in the state of Pernambuco, in the midst of the *sertão*, directing a film about the life of Teixeira, with his widow, Elizabeth, and other peasants as protagonists. The army invaded the set, arrested the peasant leaders and the crew, and confiscated the equipment. The negatives, however, survived. Two decades later, Coutinho resumed filming. He returned to Galileia to show the original negatives to Elizabeth and to the surviving peasants. The final film included their memories, revived by the projection. Coutinho's *Twenty Years Later* (1984) is therefore a film about a double erasure: of João Pedro, and of the interrupted movie. Also, it is a counter-history that reconnects a suppressed future (the life of a peasant man, the agrarian reform, the Cinema Novo) with the present, or presents.

November, 2019

As I complete this essay, I learn that a speech, against the new government's cultural policies, and made at the opening ceremony of an important Brazilian film festival, has been censored. Even more distressed, I follow the latest actions of the democratically elected government, which is trying to approve a law that, in practical terms, legalizes torture, and institutes martial law, by exempting from prosecution both the police and the military personnel accused of killing on duty.

Perhaps this is not 1964. Maybe, this time they [the politicians] will act in accordance with the law, with the approval of Congress and of public opinion, which has been hijacked by the WhatsApp alt-right groups. Maybe, they've already learned from the experience of 1964-81

how to protect themselves from future trials. But futures are certainly being repressed, and many more will be suffocated.

We ought to salvage a prospect of a future—this could be another definition for *bacuralizar*, or another way to describe the museological stance that I've been defending as urgent. We must inhabit Bacurau. We must ally ourselves with the fallen (João Pedro, Marielle) and with those who resisted (Elizabeth Teixeira, the peasants, Eduardo Coutinho, *Twenty Years Later*), summon up different films and different struggles to conjure up new futures. As the museologist-scribe-angel-bird has done it, we have to summon the dead and the fallen to such a funeral procession, so that, with them, we may walk towards the time to come. This procession is nothing but a museum. Maybe we will fail. But so did they.

April 1st 2020

When I first finished writing this essay, in November of 2019, I liked the ambiguity of the personal pronoun in the essay's last sentence: "But so did they". Although most readers recognized our enemy—the Other of our horror (aka the dictatorship)—in that pronoun, the opposite was equally true; "they" could refer to our past allies, who were also defeated, and who also failed. Their "sacrifice" didn't make us a more just society; no future sins were absolved—which doesn't mean that they failed entirely. They left us the struggle for other futures, and the capacity to confront the oppression and the horror of our present reality with the imagination and desire for different outcomes.

But that was a Pre-COVID-19 world, in a country imprisoned and immobilized in a sort of psychological quarantine, caused by the trauma of the previous year's presidential election, when the alt-right candidate, Bolsonaro, called a "myth" by his voters, was elected with a racist, misogynist, homophobic, and openly authoritarian discourse, inflamed by a cultural war against the "cultural Left." My encounter with *Bacurau* was framed by that trauma, and the text I wrote was an attempt to deal with it from the point of view of the arts.

The trauma of 2018 was succeeded by another, still ongoing, and whose developments in the economic, political, human, and psychosocial spheres are yet immeasurable. Despite uncertainties about the future, the paranoid authoritarianism in—with its chimeric foes and so-called truths conspired by Twitterers-in-chief—has surely found a worthy antagonist in the virus.

When I returned to the text in this new context, to translate it into English, I was confronted by a series of new questions. Not so much about the film, but about what I meant in that text referring to a future, to alliances between the living and dead, and to a museological stance.

It's 10 AM. Open on my browser is the website of the Brazilian newspaper, *Folha de São Paulo*. Its cover story features a photo of four people carrying a coffin and dressed in suits similar to an astronaut's.

I click on the link, and among the available images, I find an aerial shot of new graves being dug. The news article mentions that the public cemeteries of São Paulo are burying between 30 to 40 bodies a day, as their cause of death is still to be confirmed by the COVID-19 tests.

The graves are now being dug before death, in its anticipation. The incoming bodies won't be allowed a funeral procession; the quarantine hampers farewell rituals. But even though bodies cannot be seen or touched, the "data" of death is visible. We follow, day by day, the "evolution of the curve."

Since Brazil *counted* its first death by COVID-19, death has been experienced as a variation of the curve. Unlike other recent (or not so recent) tragedies, this time *images are lacking*—even for the mediatic spectacle of necrophilia. Still, death isn't any less present. It is our relationship with it that has changed; having fears, anxieties, and grieving conditioned to and associated with a "graph's curve", not knowing if or when we'll become part of it.

In this reality, the difference between *us* and *them* is only signaled by the temporary, and continuously evolving, distinction between those that are and those that are not on the curve: the living/survivors and the dead and future dead. It is almost certain that, by the end of the pandemic, this difference will have clear racial and class outlines. However, as I write, the fear of becoming *one* or *another* traverses everyone equally, justifying the quarantine's defense by the same ones whose lives are within "*normal* situations of inequality," the most protected and preserved ones.

What does it mean to defend an alliance between the living and the dead when the dead pile up in front of me and not behind? And when the dead, fallen or to fall, are not united against a (bio/necro) political project of regulating life's forces? When there is no recognizable difference between *us* and *others*; when the enemy is not even an enemy in common parlance?

The virus is not an agent with intentionality. It has no desires or plans. It doesn't gain power as I lose my life force. It is indifferent to my symptoms, if I live or die. It only searches for a host.

The "war on the virus" narrative is not comical because it is tragic: this "enemy", which never truly declared a war, and could have continued as happy as it was, "made" us, the ones combatting it, its army. It's possible that a dead or dying body might carry, unbeknownst to me, a virus that reproduced and multiplied asymptotically inside me. It's possible that part of my "breath of life" finds its death in the body of another. I am as much prey as predator.

The dead will not become martyrs. Among them there will be allies and non-allies, oppressors and victims. The same is true for the living and survivors. If the virus has any power over us, it is to radically alter what we understand as *us* and *them*, as prey and predator, alien and local.

When all of this is finished we will have to bury the dead. If capitalism will be shaken, or if authoritarianism will have found new forms, it's impossible to know. Probably a mixture of both. Whether we'll have invented new futures, as part of the Left has been postulating and wishing for, is also impossible to know. But we will have to deal with this trauma.

In Brazil, the trauma won't have the face, voice, paranoia, of the negationist asinine in power.¹¹ Neither will it be caused by the phantoms of authoritarianism. Even worse, it is possible that authoritative measures, like the ones being implemented in China, might end up containing damage and, ergo, trauma.

With that said, a few questions should be raised: What can be expected from the museological stance, for which I've created and untranslatable verb inspired by Bacurau? What can we ask of this bird-scribe-museologist?

As I follow the world's intelligentsia throwing itself into a restless and vigorous exercise of provisional thinking, frequently getting things wrong (e.g. Giorgio Agamben) and stumbling on its own limitations, I see the art system diving into a manic, compulsive syndrome of producing visibility. As soon as the quarantine started, we were inundated by offers of virtual tours and audio-guides from museums. Galleries are even more active now than during art fairs, arranging virtual studio visits, online conversations between curators and artists, made available daily. On Instagram or Zoom, there is an infinite menu of lives, around the most diverse themes.

Some, following the example of the Market saw an "opportunity" in COVID-19. New institutions were created to offer "daily curatorships" of artist and experimental films, while existing ones offered "web residences," which are, to put it in very plain materialistic terms, a cordial trade of non-paid visibility.

Curators and film programmers feel impelled to post daily selections of films to watch, or of historical works they claim to have gained new layers of meaning during the quarantine. Suddenly, a rush to the most unknown work of mail art, phone art, has been started. Even web art has been rehabilitated.

Although late to the digital world, many of these initiatives deserve praise. Speaking from the perspective of someone living at the periphery of the international art circuit, I can only welcome the facilitation of access. Yet, the late and necessary democratization of access is not the issue here, but rather the pioneering drive that seems to underline many of these initiatives, the competitive push to see who gets first in the race

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11 From the outset of the crisis, Jair Bolsonaro has been diminishing the gravity of COVID-19. He has referred to it as a "small flu" and has insisted that the pandemic is being overestimated by hysterical news conglomerates. Against the quarantine, he has repeatedly defended the immediate return of all economic activities. If Brazil beats the virus, it will be despite Bolsonaro.

for the newest, smartest, and most groundbreaking response to our crisis (be it planetary or restricted to the art system).

When the economy itself acknowledges that the only thing to do now is to stop, the art system seems to take license to become even more productive, intensifying the authoring and the circulation of visibility. It ignores the fact that such productivity sustains and is sustained, feeds as it is fed, by the compulsive capitalist dynamic that brought us to the collapse.

But the anxiety is understandable and real. In two, three, five, or ten months there will be a world in which, along with our delayed bills, we will need to exist more than ever. For cultural workers, that means to be remembered and to be visible.

However, to continue as we were, to work to maintain the same dynamics as before, is to give up on any responsibility for the world to which we desire to return. I do not intend to suggest that art go on strike, or any type of creative or critical hibernation. But it seems to me that we must choose *what* and *how* we want to produce, now and afterwards: regardless whether it be our survival in a world that will either end or crash us, or alternatives for the future, including for art. In other words: if we wish to be the living ghost of capitalism or the bird-scribe-museologist.

We cannot truly defend the end of capitalism, “of the world as we know it,” if we continue functioning according to its logic and laws, thus making it stronger. If we want to topple capitalism, we need to start by preventing it from operating inside us.

This would be an appropriate task for the bird-scribe: to treat the ghosts of hypervisibility, the phantoms of an economy of the self-image. This bird will be given the task of taking our contemporary art system to the clinic-museum, where it shall be defunctionalized and transformed into an object of contemplation, ruin and relic of a world that used to commodify the struggle against capitalism.

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