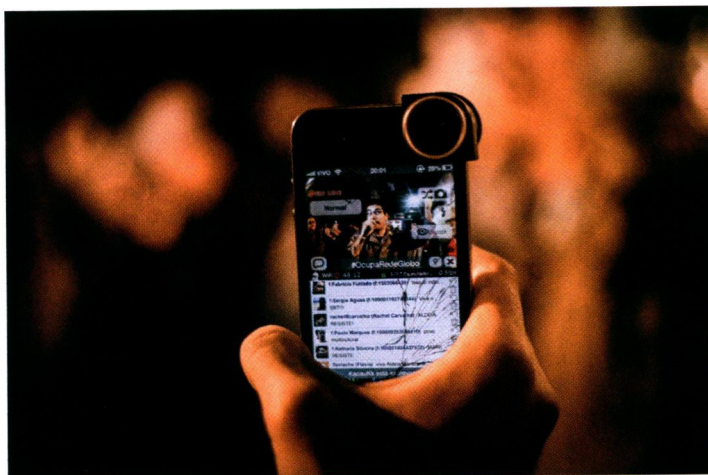




DISPATCH

Live Streaming

IRENE V. SMALL ON DOCUMENTARY STRATEGIES IN BRAZILIAN ART AND ACTIVISM



Left: Protester sharing live footage via TwitCasting, Rio de Janeiro, July 3, 2013. Photo: Mídia NINJA.

Right: Cachorro Vinagre, *Os brutos* (The Raw Takes), 2013, digital video, color, sound, 22 minutes 25 seconds.

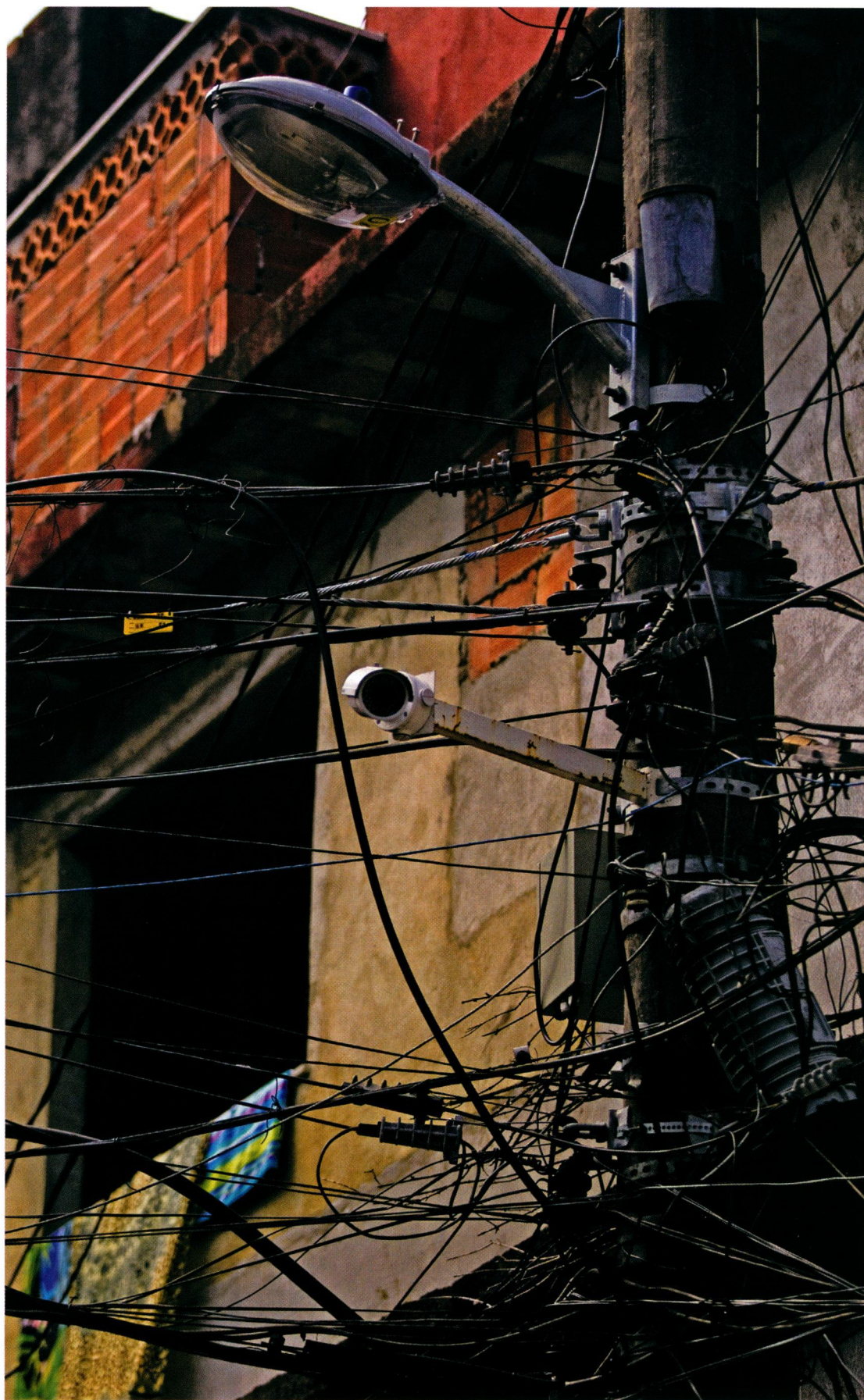


Opposite page: A police officer viewing surveillance cameras monitoring favelas, Rio de Janeiro, May 2, 2013. Photo: Daniel Marengo.

Right: Security camera, Favela da Rocinha, Rio de Janeiro, May 2, 2013. Photo: Daniel Marengo.

AN UNREMARKABLE SIGN conveys a remarkable occurrence: SMILE, YOU ARE BEING FILMED. Alerting visitors to the presence of security cameras, the notice echoes an infinite number of similar placards that have proliferated in banks, stadiums, prisons, casinos, airports, and malls—the countless sites where visibility is harnessed for the purposes of management and control. Every such sign corresponds to a vast archive of footage recorded and stored on tapes, disks, hard drives, and digital clouds. These archives' images unfold in real time, but their *longue durée* is short-lived, since they are overwritten by other images as data storage is depleted, recovered, and redeployed. In 1966, Pier Paolo Pasolini proposed that film registers, as if by writing, the language that reality “speaks.” “By living,” he wrote, “we represent ourselves, and we observe the representation of others.” In a perverse logic, surveillance tapes are the dystopian enactment of this lived cinema: a cinema of boredom and pure disciplinarity, in which events count only if something goes wrong.

The banality of the aforementioned sign—printed on office paper and slightly tattered, its imperative to SMILE a peculiar combination of sadistic wink and hackneyed cheer—is one symptom of such a cinema. Yet it also figures within a filmic register of a different sort. Taped to a glass door that barricaded a throng of protesters at the city hall of Belo Horizonte, Brazil, the sign itself was recorded many times over, as a still from *Os brutos* (The Raw Takes), 2013, attests. Compiled by the collective Cachorro Vinagre, *Os brutos* consists of a series of unedited single shots that document a demonstration in which several hundred civilians gathered outside the government building, demanding that their concerns be addressed by the legislature bunkered inside. The protest was part of a stunning wave of manifestations that swept Brazil in June of last year, due in no small part to social media, and to viral video in particular. Incited by an increase in bus fares, the manifestations quickly targeted rampant political corruption, lack of public services, police brutality, LGBT discrimination, favela-pacification policies, and, not least, excessive spending on World Cup and Olympic preparations in Rio de Janeiro and elsewhere. During the demonstration





Two stills from Cachorro Vinagre's *Os brutos* (The Raw Takes), 2013, digital video, color, sound, 22 minutes 25 seconds.

An ethic of authenticity has recently surfaced among contemporary artists and activists in Brazil, who have witnessed unprecedented social unrest over the course of the past year.

Screenshot of Mídia NINJA's Tumblr showing a photographer documenting protests in Rio de Janeiro on July 22, 2013. Photo: Mídia NINJA.

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documented in *Os brutos*, participants managed to peaceably occupy Belo Horizonte's municipal headquarters for three full days. Among the compiled sequences are images shot through the glass doors, in which individuals inside and outside the building share a virtual space generated by the reflective surface of the partition, as well as images of the protesters finally gaining entry through these same doors, rushing past the security camera on their way in.

The Belo Horizonte demonstration would certainly count as a disruption within the governmental and technological regime that surveillance serves. Indeed, as the protesters chanted outside the city hall, they were making their own images. Training cameras and smartphones on the bureaucrats and guards who attempted to block their entry, they produced a counterdocument of the state's regulation of public space. Somewhere within this footage must be an image of a camera recording its own surveillance, a feedback loop of perfect simultaneity in which transgression takes the form of a lens returning its own continuous stare.

Such an obdurate optics strangely recalls the cinematic device of the long take, a sustained, continuous shot in which no edits or cuts are made. In 1948, the film critic André Bazin described the long take as a "fragment of concrete reality," because the duration of an action coincides with the time of its filmic perception. Indefinite and even erratic, the long take permits—indeed obliges—the viewer to formulate meaning on his or her own. Bazin contrasted this aesthetic with the coerciveness of montage, which follows an interpretive schema determined by a director in advance. Drained of the fundamental "ambiguity" of reality, montage can easily become a vehicle for ideological manipulation. For Bazin and others after him, the long take thus has a singular documentary charge.

An analogous ethic of authenticity has recently surfaced among contemporary artists and activists in Brazil, who have witnessed unprecedented social unrest and mobilization over the course of the past year. During the June 2013 manifestations, for example, the Brazilian media collective Mídia NINJA (an acronym for Independent Narratives, Journalism, and Action) made a direct appeal to a kind of digital vérité. Pitching their content as "live and without cuts," the group's members used smartphones and other mobile devices to document protests from within the crowds, often streaming video through apps such as TwitCasting and through the group's own site, PósTV. The raw and at times illegible character of this live footage departs markedly from the slick productions of corporate media. Internalizing the structural segmentation of advertising, commercial television privileges standardized narrative units

even when it broadcasts little content at all. By contrast, the material transmitted by Mídia NINJA is temporally unpredictable, lasting as long as the action in documents (or until the batteries run out).

Yet whereas the ethics of Bazin's long take hinges on the viewer's interpretive choice while perceiving the individual shot, the significance of Mídia NINJA's videos are bound up in their broader affective and archival capacities. The group's visceral transmissions and visual branding (the masked ninja of their online profile evokes black-bloc anarchists and action heroes alike) seem participatory, urgent, even dangerous. The collective's rapid generation of alternative media content, meanwhile, is ideally suited for dissemination through social networks. When the student Bruno Ferreira Teles was imprisoned for supposedly throwing a Molotov cocktail during a clash in Rio, he appealed to Mídia NINJA to recover and distribute videos from the event. The clips show Teles empty-handed and subsequently ambushed by police wielding stun guns, and even indicate that a police infiltrator may have been the one to throw the bomb. In this sense, Mídia NINJA's concept of truth is no more sophisticated than that of conventional media, even when it disrupts dominant channels of representation. The long take, it turns out, can be just as instrumentalized as it is aesthetic (the surveillance camera tells us as much). The deeper question posed by Mídia NINJA and countless other practitioners of *mídia livre* (independent, or free, media) in Brazil is instead about how we circulate—and circulate through—real-time images, about how we chart paths through representations of the immediate past.

The protests in Brazil, in fact, were all about circulation, albeit of a different kind. The initial demonstrations were organized by transportation activists who argued that free public transit is a right, not simply because it is required to access other rights (such as education and health care) but because inhabitants have the fundamental right to *use* their city: to traverse it for a purpose but also to wander, to get lost, to make of the city what they want. This seems self-evident, but Brazilian cities have long and complex histories of segregation and structural disempowerment. Two recent phenomena are cases in point. Earlier this year, working-class (and often dark-skinned) teenagers from the city's outskirts began to organize online to hang out at upscale shopping malls in events called *rolezinhos*, or "little strolls." When police used rubber bullets and tear gas to disperse such a crowd in January, they demonstrated that not all bodies may move equally through urban space. So while the early *rolezinhos* were apolitical, even affirmative in impulse, the right to circulate—and, by a reverse logic, the right to stay in place—remains a radical claim. At the end of



From top: Bruno Ferreira Teles, right, runs from police during protests, Rio de Janeiro, July 22, 2013. Photo: Ana Carolina Fernandes. Still from Midia NINJA's video footage documenting Bruno Ferreira Teles's involvement in conflicts between protesters and police, Rio de Janeiro, July 22, 2013.



Makeshift shelters in abandoned Oi office buildings, Favela da Telerj, Rio de Janeiro, April 9, 2014. Photo: Silvia Izquierdo/AP.

March, meanwhile, impoverished residents in Rio displaced by skyrocketing rents used social media to plan an occupation of a derelict building, formerly a site of the Brazilian telecommunications company Telerj, now owned by the cellular corporation Oi. Within days, the building and its environs were transformed into the new Favela da Telerj, with some six thousand inhabitants calling the pop-up settlement home. Yet less than two weeks after the favela's inauguration, riot police expelled these residents in a brutal three-hour operation, rendering them once more nomadic and politically disenfranchised, with several hundred camping out in protest across from Rio's city hall.

When, in 1970, the Rio-based artist Cildo Meireles initiated his *Inserções em circuitos ideológicos*

RENATA LUCAS

THERE ISN'T A DAY like another in Rio de Janeiro. First there were the construction sites, the forced evictions, and the devastation of entire blocks in the city's port area and surroundings. Now there is the building-and-implementation phase of the so-called Porto Maravilha, a major undertaking associated with such international corporations as Tishman Speyer, the Trump Organization, and Westfield Group: an ambitious plan to drastically change the architectural and human landscape of the city. The project is transforming an entire region of predominantly lower-class housing—neglected by the government for years—into luxury towers, hotels, and shopping malls. Rio is proud to announce that with money from the private sector, it has achieved what it couldn't have before. But the city seems to be acting as a lab for capital, where an accelerated process of privatization has meant a lack of public participation and a weakened civil society. Reacting to this hygienist policy of aggressive gentrification, the city has been swept by protests.

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There are also new museums in the redevelopment program. The Museu do Amanhã (Museum of Tomorrow), currently under construction, advances like an immense white body on the sea. Dedicated to technology, it has been designed by the Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava. The Museu de Arte do Rio, with its poetic

acronym MAR (sea), was designed to exhibit the main private art collections of Rio. Painted white, as if to match Calatrava's museum, MAR was the first to be completed; it is housed in a former bus station and police hospital constructed in the 1940s and a neighboring early-twentieth-century building. The decision to use these structures was made in only a few days, and many bus passengers were surprised by the unexpected disappearance of their station, which moved a few blocks away overnight. The new building is like a hologram: Looking at its white skin, recently applied, one still seems to see the old bus station made out of brown tiles.

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At the same time, a disembodied museum is built on air, for a body passing diagonally across the city, transgressing the orthogonal trajectories of urban movement, for a man who meanders through the cracks: the Museum of the Diagonal Man. It could be embodied according to the same method as MAR, falling into some existing architectural entity—from time to time, materializing itself in a corner or in a slot of any given space. MAR shows that white paint in itself already accomplishes the transformation of one thing into another. I am likewise looking for niches for fleeting and fractured acts: an entryway, a sidewall, a spiral staircase, a modernist window. Everything serves to compose a museum in fragments, which merges with the landscape itself. □

RENATA LUCAS IS AN ARTIST BASED IN RIO DE JANEIRO. THIS TEXT FORMS PART OF HER PROJECT THE MUSEUM OF THE DIAGONAL MAN (2013–).



Perimetral Highway, Rio de Janeiro, August 17, 2013. Photo: Renata Lucas.

The question posed by countless practitioners of *mídia livre* (free media) in Brazil is about how we circulate—and circulate through—real-time images, about how we chart paths through the representations of the immediate past.

(Insertions into Ideological Circuits) series by imprinting political messages on bottles and banknotes and reintroducing the items into public use, his imperative was to isolate the circuit of those objects in order to call attention to the imbrication of repressive political and economic power. Today, the question is one of occupying and redirecting such ideological circuits, be they the pleasure domes and telecommunications of late capitalism or the architectural ruins left in their wake. In July of last year, Meireles reinitiated his banknote project with a new message: CADÊ AMARILDO? (Where is Amarildo?), in reference to Amarildo de Souza, a bricklayer from Rio who had been abducted by police and was subsequently alleged to have been tortured to death. Meireles's message was stamped on paper money, as in the original project from the 1970s. But the new iteration circulated primarily as an online image, a viral meme proliferating in the absence of the literal body, which had disappeared.

How might we think about the circulation and occupation of images together with those of bodies in space? A video from artist Graziela Kunsch's ongoing work *Projeto mutirão*, begun in 2003, gives one indication. The piece documents an intervention in which transportation activists wrest open the back doors of a public bus in São Paulo, allowing a stream



Screening of Graziela Kunsch's *Queima catraca* (Burning Turnstile), 2005, from her *Projeto mutirão*, 2003–, Ananindeua, Brazil, February 24, 2012. Photo: Renata Lira.

of riders to enter without paying in front. The clip itself is brief—only thirty seconds—and was culled from extensive footage that Kunsch shot as part of her work with housing, free-transport, and independent-media movements. That such raw footage appears in *Projeto mutirão* in the form of long takes is key, and Kunsch is explicit in her debt to Bazin. But as Pasolini recognized, the long take inevitably entails the cut, which transforms the present tense of reality—in all of its excess and ambiguity—into a past that can accrue signification. From her raw footage, for example, Kunsch isolates moments that embody the concept of *mutirão*: a term that refers to acts of participatory mutual aid, often temporary in nature. Sometimes these extracts are climactic, like the opening of the bus doors or the burning of a turnstile. But just as often they are oblique, ephemeral, and indexed to moments of observation: the tacking of a tarp onto a jury-rigged shelter; a cleaning collectively organized in a squatter camp; a pair of young boys transforming a construction site into a makeshift playing field. All represent openings and hiatuses in which social orders are rethought.

These extracts form a mobile, open-ended archive that Kunsch uses as a catalyst for dialogues in schools, art exhibitions, workshops, community meetings, and public forums. She also includes footage shared

by other activists, as well as clips from prior conversations. The archive thus opens out onto multiplicitous repositories of images and actions, each with its own viewpoint, modes of visual apprehension, and political aims. Yet the archive functions as a self-reflexive device as well, revealing the work's highly mediated nature, the degree to which Kunsch becomes a protagonist herself. Because *Projeto mutirão* is realized only by means of discussion and debate, however, Kunsch's navigation through this video material is contingent on the social process of its reception within a given time and place. And because each encounter is recorded in turn, the project has a feedback mechanism that incorporates both critique and historicity. In this, *Projeto mutirão* diverges from the instantaneity of both surveillance and documentary counterinformation in favor of multiple temporalities that unfold unevenly in real time. Of course, as much might be said of a Facebook feed. But by insisting on the co-presence of archival moving images with talking, thinking, feeling bodies, Kunsch's project models—in terms of concrete experience—the ways in which we catalyze action by traveling between screens and space.

The filmmaker and writer Hito Steyerl recently asked whether the Internet was dead. Not because it has been superseded, but because it is “all over,” which is to say that it has infiltrated the epistemologies and operations of the offscreen world. The negative implications are too copious to catalogue. But Steyerl hazards a further question: “If images can be shared and circulated, why can't everything else be too?” What would it be like, in other words, if online behaviors migrated offline—toward the production of a lived commons? What if the virtual circulation of images really impacted the circulation of bodies in space? The Brazilian protests proved, once again, that this can happen. Kunsch's project, meanwhile, helps us comprehend the interval between these two types of circulation as a shared project of *mutirão*. □

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Left: Cildo Meireles, *Inserções em circuitos ideológicos 2: Projeto cédula* (Insertions into Ideological Circuits 2: Banknote Project) (detail), 1970/2014, ink on banknotes, dimensions variable.

Right: Graziela Kunsch, *Abertura de portas* (Opening Doors), 2006, digital video, color, sound, 30 seconds. From *Projeto mutirão*, 2003–.

