

It is the thief who makes the opportunity

by Paulo Miyada (*)

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Introduction

In the last years of his career as a professional soccer player, the former striker of the four-time winner Brazilian national team, Romário, made his tactic all the clearer. He used to score at least one goal in each game, running very little in the field. Unlike the stereotype of a dedicated striker, Romário would let the game – and the ball – go by many times, wasting endless passes and feeding the defender assigned to mark him with impatience. The defender, almost always over ten years younger than the striker, had a lot of stamina and little sagacity. Half an hour into the game, and Romário had not sprinted towards the goal. Then there was half time, teams changed sides, fifteen minutes more and nothing. Sooner or later, the opponent marking him relaxed and stopped watching one of the greatest strikers in the world, all he could see was a veteran in the eve of retirement. Fatal mistake.

As soon as the young man let go of the marking and went to the attack, Romário asked for the ball. The pass came and he, after two or three touches, was alone facing the goal-keeper who could do very little. The saying ‘the opportunity makes the thief’ echoes the principles of deterministic beliefs. It is a lie. The thief, like Romário, makes the opportunity.

Extrapolation

In the case of contemporary art, – that is, the production of the past ten years, to which this book is dedicated – an updated version of the saying about thefts and opportunities is appropriate.

Explaining from the beginning: recent generational mappings, such as this book and many other cuttings from the youngest generation of talents all over the world, usually assume that the artistic production may have any form and be produced by anyone. Diversity became an implicit rule celebrated by the potpourri of character, ancestry and nature of the artists collected as samples of their time. Notwithstanding, the heterogeneity is not restricted to the arbitrary combinations of the differences.

There are some typical matrices to be filled in. First of all, the stereotypes: enfant terrible that is admired by making fun of the public that admires him; artist from the peripheral socioeconomic context, mixing techniques and materials associated to the folklore of his country with the hegemonic morphology of abstract art; activist engaged in disclosing conflicts and prejudice typically associated to “non-western” countries; consumerism disguised as criticism of the desire for consumption and capital accumulation; intuitive characters who evade explanations of formal works by moving into mystic and/or unconscious territories, etc.

Then, the techniques: abstract or graphic standard photography; performance based on the conflict between the artist’s physicality and the public; sketch or note of affective-confessional content; neo-pop sculpture based on the most iconic artifacts of the contemporary material culture; materiality of painting or precarious bill; exhibit based on the derivations of site specific art; contemplative videos in line with experimental cinema guidelines; conceptual works full of acid irony and/or extreme reflexivity; etc.

Or also, the census groups: white European man, North- American entrepreneur, repressed Eastern woman, humble Latin, eccentric Asian, architect/musician/dancer relocated to the field of art, intellectual and blasé British, African living in Europe, etc.

All you need is to skim the list of the artists gathered in this book to find one of the several possible ways to rematch these matrices in a young heterogeneous group, all of which, acclaimed by institutions and important events in the global art system.

It may give the impression that, actually, these are typical matrices of contemporary artists that result in the visibility fields which artists take advantage of. Consequently, one may believe that the stereo-

types make the opportunity to today's art production. It is the opportunity that makes the thief, and the system makes the artist.

Once again, it is not really true. Otherwise, the epigraph of this article could be paraphrased into a sentence of an oracle, "It would certainly seem ridiculous to make critical judgment about artists of a blind system". It may even be a fact that the globalized art scene uses standardized readings of the emerging artists, classifying them into typology with arguments and phrases of pre-made effect, but, from the point of view of creative processes, there are other problems.

Summarizing, philosopher Arthur Danto defines contemporary art as the activity with the ability to dialectally reflect on its own means, and moreover, to criticize the production chains of the meaning of human thought. If we wish to believe in this, summarizing the artists production in stereotypes implies losing focus on what matters most. By simply understanding the disguises that dress the artists, we forget the critic movement their works may bring about.

Just like the good striker, the artist needs to know how to move against laid expectations to escape marking and, then, he may achieve what is expected of him. The goal, or rather, the reorganization of the way things gain meaning and legibility.

Recalling the famous writing by Marcel Duchamp (The Creative Act, 1957), there is a hiatus between the intention of the artist and the works he actually produces – he named it artistic coefficient. Likewise, there is a need for a hiatus between the certainties of the argument that legitimates the production of an artist and what his works effectively bring to fruition – this we might name, for instance, the irreducible difference. It is still too early to say which of the artists with ascending career here compiled will remain in the books of Art History, but it is already possible to read the entries introducing them and compare them to the works that illustrate them. Where there is a void, attention, there may be a treasure.

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