

Simone Michelin: the depth of the virtual world

Introduction

The strategic and perverse action of Simone Michelin is an affirmation of an artistic project that builds on what has emerged and consolidated itself over almost four decades, like advanced technology. Resulting from modern science, optical technology—its transition from the analogical to the digital, the variety of inventions, its applications in information science and its rapid obsolescence—has been taken on in its apparently neutral state to be converted into a mechanism of crisis or a sign of it. Michelin's oeuvre suggests the building up of a particular cartographical dimension of semantics and movement. Few artists in Brazil have dedicated themselves so much to the linguistics of the new technological state of contemporary society. The deliberate politicization of neutral technology in Michelin's discourse is unswerving and unrelenting. It is in this crux – this central dilemma – that a signal (a pixel or a laser beam) is turned into a sign and, more precisely, a sign that has some depth in the realm of *poiesis*. The optical as the guiding principle of art is associated with post-industrial technological society. “I understand artistic creation as a moment in the production of sensible and symbolic knowledge/happenings/content that derives meaning from the extent to which it causes dislocation.”¹ Since her early days as an artist, her experimental focus led her in the direction of installations, image projection and mail art, and then to the complex optical-technological apparatus of contemporary society. Just as the philosopher, Edmund Husserl proposed a phenomenological return to “the things themselves”, Michelin always aims to appreciate technological things in themselves, in their manifold and unexpected inventions and re-inventions, and to scrutinize their inner workings through her work.

Michelin's epistemological approach requires that technological media no longer be a Plato's cave blinded by obsolescence in the face of the fast-paced time-frame of communications in a globalized world – communicability and liberty overlap.

¹ MICHELIN, Simone. Para explicar o projeto Michelin. 2011. Artist's files.

Michelin's work extracts what little transparency is possible from the opacity of the power of contemporary communications. The artist avoids the truisms of the state of technology to legitimize art and plunges herself into the risks of experimentation. She thus produces anti-Platonist work that invests in a kind of crisis in the practical utility of her media and appeals to the cognitive faculties of the viewer. Michelin's phenomenology of the range of technology therefore focuses more on the development of critical perception in the audience rather than contemplation of the technological sublime. She invests in technological education in order to achieve *poiesis*. Her technologies are counter-euphoric, since they emerge in the realm of silence and uncertainty. They are thus the instruments of a skeptical episteme. For Michelin, the place of the subject lies between two abysses of social communication. It lies between the lack, insufficiency and modern corporate control of information criticized by Virilio in *The Information Bomb*² and the excess of Jacques Derrida's *Mal d'Archive*.³ In response to Virilio's question regarding the choice between civil and military science, Michelin counters with an artistic-civilian act, at the risk of annihilating communication and obliterating the subject itself in this schism. Likewise, Michelin's work has something in common with that of Rosângela Rennó, who regards the unbridled abundance of photography as a way of obliterating the subject.

Her installation, *Prato feito* (1986), involved the occupation of the O Aleph restaurant in Rio de Janeiro, and was regarded by Michelin herself as an "immersive environment" with photographs designating the locus of the perceiving body. The libertarian aim, the artist says, was to use various media to convey "thoughts and attitudes made concrete in various visual languages, but also an expression of our desires at this point in time and space – a free-flow of emotions."⁴ This *bricolage* of channels and manifestations of desire and thought, of action and articulation of the other cannot be dissociated from its historical context, since 1982 was one of the years

² VIRILIO, Paul. *The information bomb*. Trans. Chris Turner. London: Verso, 2000.

³ DERRIDA, Jacques. *Archive fever, a freudian impression*. Trans. Eric Prenowitz. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994.

⁴ MICHELIN, Simone. Primeira fase de trabalhos. Email correspondence with the author 16 November 2011.

in the long draw-down of the dictatorial regime that was installed in 1964. This art that aimed to break with the political aphasia and to become a channel of expression attains the status, according to the aphorism of Mário Pedrosa, of “an experimental exercise in liberty”. The artist is thus the agent of an art that, despite knowing that it is powerless to change the political system, is capable of perceiving the possibility of a transformation of our perception of the world.

12 horas de trabalho pela Constituinte (1987). This piece is always situated in a public place, reflecting the urban dynamics of Rio de Janeiro: the Carioca Metro Station, the entrance to the MAM and the beach front. It does not aim to create fetish-like objects, but to establish dialogues and exchange ideas. Michelin chooses specific spaces that are used for socializing because of the friction of the meanings that come from the street, from institutions and the official organs of culture. Art is the place for the announcement of political change, a field for spurring the re-democratization of the country. Michelin understands that an agenda is not enough for art, but that collaborative work and its engagement in social issues are required by participatory democracy.

The Unconscious

The Brazilian modernists, from Eliseu Visconti to Tarsila do Amaral, spent their childhood and early youth in a country without radio, without photography – which posed a challenge to the immediate survival of painting and led it to transform into a visual process that had less to do with representation and more with viewing as a phenomenon. However, some of the modernists already knew the cinema. Only the second generation of modernists had radio in childhood. When considering the genesis of the work of Simone Michelin, it should be remembered that, born in 1956, she was a member of the first generation of artists to have grown up with television and to have seen the current acceleration of technological development. At the time of Michelin’s apprenticeship as an artist, Waldemar Cordeiro published an article in 1971 in which he set out a clear program.

...concrete art is a synthesis of all the tendencies in modern art that have developed quantitative methods for structuring images, based on the communications media provided by industrial progress; it presents a vast repertoire of ways of manipulating images using the language of machines.⁵

One might, at first sight, think that Michelin's work contains an unconscious side that we could call technological, which would be a modern empirical dimension of Frederic Jameson's political unconscious or optical unconscious of the image. It would therefore have as much a televisual quality as a photographic or cinematic one. It deals with the possibility of permanent productive absorption by the art of advanced technology, as explained by *Porque sim: fragmentos de multimedia* (1982). From the outset, Michelin chose to work with the social space of the art of *homo digitalis*, as a feature of a symbolic animal.

Although the images of these mail art projects took the form of drawings, *Pequenas considerações sociais* and *Devemos ser otimistas* (1978), they deal with the condition of being a woman in consumer society. Since then, the technological reproduction media used by Michelin have included photography (analogical, 1975, and digital, 1993/2006), metal-engraving (with a special interest in the chemical processes involved, 1977), photo-etching, screen-printing (the photographic process, 1975), photocopies (black and white, and color, 1978/1979) and off-set (black and white, 1978). A pioneer in the use of advanced technology, Michelin has employed analogical and digital video to capture images without recourse to an external referent, using only code (1993). In *A noiva descendo a escada* (1998), her cybernetic eye also employs an HTML system to explore a Duchampian programming of hypertext language and hypermedia. Taking the specific case of video, it is known that, in a society numbed by the brainwashing of commercial television and the permanent assault of advertising and political propaganda, video art breaks with this ideological circuit. Furthermore, in line

⁵ CORDEIRO, Waldemar. Concretismo. In: *Enciclopédia Abril*. n. 38. São Paulo: Editora Abril, 1971. p. 1,046.

with Wittgenstein's speculations on the limits of language, technology, as soon as it becomes commercially available, is confronted with the difficulty of producing poetic discourse. While, for Vilém Flusser, "the photographer can only photograph something than can be photographed",⁶ some artists, such as Michelin, are only interested in recording the unrecordable, photographing the unphotographable, filming the unfilmable. This is the point where electronic media meet the unsayable, Wittgenstein's metaphysical limit. The numerical excess of death in *Qualia* is a way of confronting the unthinkable in contemporary violence.

Video art can sometimes be quasi-cinema or non-cinema. Video art can also take on cinema and its artificial devices. In Michelin's work, even though an outdated technology may not appear to have expressive potential, it can behave as a visual fact, establish an agenda and video can take on painting. However, video does not make painting up-to-date, but rather re-emphasizes its old-fashioned nature, the fact that it does not depend on contemporary conditions to justify its existence. In the historical context of the 1980s, painting held tyrannical sway over the conceptual processes of art. The multi-media artist was interested, however, in paintings such as Francis Picabia's *Music is Like Painting* (c. 1913-1916). Michelin painted pieces such as *O umbigo é o centro do mundo* (1987) precisely so as not to become a painter, but rather to work with Deleuze's desiring machine. Simone Michelin is likewise drawn to Deleuze & Guattari's question of the refrain (*Mille Plateaux*):

How can we think of art in this field of the "public domain", which covers the body and language, the local and the global, the singular and the crowd in the world of today? These pairs of qualities or categories are just some examples of the tensions that we could confront as a way of illustrating an anxiety that appears to find in art alone a last instant or space of existence outside of us, so that we can see it and organize ourselves and make our choices in relation to it. The truncated, extended, created, constructed space or the event arranged by the artist would lie "between" two poles, two privileged models of knowledge of the

⁶ FLUSSER, Vilém. *Filosofia da caixa-preta*. Rio de Janeiro: Relume Dumará, 2002. p. 31.

world—philosophy and science—as a third alternative, or *binding medium*.⁷

The task is to make technology the substrate of political discourse. Video art is thus a microphysical act demonstrating the power of the artist, not with the romantic or utopian aim of changing the world of the big information corporations, but of transforming our way of perceiving it through a technique that is the same as that which may be producing the greatest lack of ideological transparency in the modern world: the television commercial. Video art, as a microphysical act of power, calls into question the power relations of social communication. It is no tautology to say that the agenda of the microphysics of power is language itself and that the symbolic power of video now has the status of a territory occupied by art. Michelin's projects are constructions of situations as heterotopic spaces—an idea raised by Michel Foucault in *Des espaces autres*—which exist under non-hegemonic conditions in the university she works for, in the market, in collections, and Brazilian institutions. Their non-hegemonic nature opens them to alternative physical and mental spaces.

As of 1998, the use of Java Script C, which was launched in 1995, has allowed her to operate with aspects of the syntax of programming language, such as interaction and intelligence, real-time response and image processing. In homage to Ada Lovelace (1815-1852), who worked with Charles Babbage on the development of “analytical machines,” the precursor of the general-purpose computer, Michelin uses real-time video in *ADA – Anarquitectura do afeto* (2004, Itaú Cultural). Three cameras are attached to the bodies of museum guides, and one to the architecture. This results in a play of alterities, between the artist, passers-by, museum-goers and guides as a paradigm of the production, distribution, circulation and appropriation of information. The vitality of the circuit requires that one distance oneself from the banking model of accumulation of information and accept the drifting nature of information in real time. The artist does not refuse to use communications and information technology resources such as live image (1998) “mobile media”, CCTV (closed circuit TV), cell phones (1998/2005), lasers and LCD (liquid crystal display). However, such technological

⁷ MICHELIN, Simone. Para explicar o projeto Michelin. 2011. Artist's files.

transmigrations have linguistic consequences “such that it seems that, in the time of my work, I move out of the image, out of the object, into 3D space, from the immobile to the mobile, from the passive to the active, from the macro to the micro, from the hybrid to the synergistic”, Michelin explains.⁸ As in paronyms, where nexuses are established between two or more words with different meanings, because they are pronounced or written the same, Michelin’s work frequently relates subjectivities, historical agents and technologies as information that could be a newspaper lead on a small LCD device in *Qualia*. These are her technological paronyms.

Michelin is faithful to the social communications and information media of contemporary society in order to use them to establish her own plans for the political appropriation of these media. At the very start of her career, working with post-cards (*Pequenas considerações sociais*, 1978) led her to imagine that the movement of language was the driving force behind society. In *Porque sim: fragmentos de multimedia* (MARGS, 1982), she used installation, publications, slide projects, public television and video, along with her own custom-made T-shirts (which, according to Michelin, act as collages of ideas) to present ways of finding connections between her work and everyday city life. Waldemar Cordeiro had proclaimed his more extreme utopian view of the modern world by arguing that “the means of production and of communication should be the same for everyone, everywhere”. Simone Michelin put together a group of experimental artists who, up to a certain time, occupied a relatively marginal place in the history of art, by staying on the margins of the art market, such as Daniel Santiago, Leticia Parente, Montez Magno, Paulo Bruscky, Regina Vater, Sonia Andrade and Vera Chaves Barcellos. Furthermore, few Brazilian artists have applied themselves, from the very start of their careers, to the development of technological media, such as Simone Michelin, Lenora de Barros and Lucas Bambozzi, among others, without their art being subordinate or subsidiary to the emergence of new media in the market.

⁸ Simone Michelin in an email communication with the author dated 31 October 2010.

It is worth remembering that the work of Simone Michelin post-dates Marshall McLuhan, but is contemporary with Paul Virilio's *Information Bomb* and *The Aesthetics of Disappearance*. While a generation of artists older than Michelin, such as Rubens Gerchman and Claudio Tozzi, were devotees of McLuhan's dictum that the medium *is* the message, it fell to Michelin's generation to politicize the media and remove them from their status as sufficient condition and governing end for the artistic task of moving from syntax to semantics. For her, the task is to take the medium out of its asymbolia, to dislodge it from its discursive inertia and its closed codification and, finally, to oppose its political neutrality. Just as, according to J.-F. Lyotard, seeing, listening and reading do not coincide,⁹ according to the political economy of the sign in Michelin's *Vivi viu o vídeo* (2004), seeing things through advanced digital media does not coincide with critically reading information and the world. The alliterative title was taken from a well-known Brazilian reading book for children, "Eve saw the grape". "Eve saw the grape" and "the wing belongs to the bird" are two supreme examples of what Paulo Freire criticizes in education. "The great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed—to free themselves from themselves and from the oppressors, he wrote in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.¹⁰ Freire suggests that words have a special generative power in the dialectical process of emancipation.¹¹ The irony of *Vivi viu o vídeo* creates a proliferation of signs that generate awareness that one "can see that one didn't see", another phrase used by Freire, in the social circulation of television as a factory of social and political subordination.

Michelin's work is guided by the semanticization of territories of technological language and proposes tactics for converting this into poetic language. In the juxtaposition of phenomenology and psychoanalysis—it is in his *11th Seminar* that Lacan meets with Merleau-Ponty—the optical object may be the blind spot. From video to LCD, Michelin deals with the contemporary reconfiguration of temporality. For instance, almost everything is fluid in the advanced process of technology, and it is

⁹ LYOTARD, J.-F. *Discours, figures*. Paris: Éditions Klincksieck, 1974. p. 217.

¹⁰ FREIRE, Paulo. *Pedagogia do oprimido*. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1987. p. 30.

¹¹ FREIRE, Paulo. *Ação cultural para a liberdade e outros escritos*. São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 2011.

for this reason and from this that attempts to have a productive impact on the logic of the liquid nature of fleeting modern society can be seen to derive, to borrow the metaphor developed by Zygmunt Bauman. Michelin knows, however, that it is art that can remove the common man from his drifting through meaningless modern technologies, which could then become a Saussurean linguistic fact.

Simone Michelin is one of those artists who expose the contradictions between predatory and ecological ideas, the position occupied by technology in society, neocolonialism, and liberation movements from civil society or the complementary nature of relations between languages and the locus of subjectivity. One can thus imagine that it is the task of the technological unconscious, as it moves into the realm of cybernetics, to confer depth on the sign, which is another issue raised by Lyotard. Video is the deft and ubiquitous eye of the artist who works with the recognition of political territories, from the most global to the most personal and intimate, from the most fluid and fleeting to the most stable and ancient.¹² The laser beams in *Qualia* not only stimulate the eye, thirsting for visual sensations, but pass through the body itself.

The “wild frontiers”, which is the expression Michelin uses to refer to some of her works, which are always prospective, operate in the highly unstable place where advanced technology becomes available in everyday life. She starts out from the binary opposition of structuralism in order to implode it. In *La Pensée Sauvage*, Claude Lévi-Strauss discusses the relation between art and science, between the model of *bricolage* in so-called savage, “primitive” thinking, and the logical standards of engineering. One possible way to view Simone Michelin’s oeuvre would be to view her career as a chart of shifting territories, breaking boundaries and opening out new fields of action. In fact, each technique opens out a new field of action for her, requires a dislocation from the utilitarian to the poetic in a media *bricolage*. One first task is to make visible the virtual existence of sensations and of the cosmic immensity of the virtual world. The metalinguistic intention here is plain: the work expands the field of language across wild frontiers, into areas that lie outside or on the margins of the history of art. A

¹² HERKENHOFF, Paulo. *Atlas América*. Rio de Janeiro: Oi Futuro, 2008. p. 7.

technique always emerges in a non-linguistic, non-graphic, non-symbolic state. This characterization of the frontier may be based on the 18th century Mexican *casta* paintings (the representation of the indigenous cannibal in first or last place, but always outside of the “civilized” space of the colonial structure, represented in a hybrid fashion according to a scale of social status), the Hegelian idea of the savage as being outside of history, the “forest of signs” in the crisis of representation¹³ and Georges Bataille’s concept of un-knowing.¹⁴ For Michelin, it is a “domain of translation”, in which the sociability of the subject crosses from image to knowledge, between art, science, and technology.¹⁵ Un-knowing is the extreme point of Michelin’s subversive game, since logical knowledge implies the stability of known things, while the technological rush only problematizes the state of constantly going beyond its own advances.

Simone Michelin’s concern regarding new technological media does not derive from any fear of the new, but from the need to understand the rapid process of invention that is driving the contemporary culture of the image. The artist rejects the idea of progress in art, not by demonizing it, but because it does not fit into her historiographical logic.¹⁶ Suzi Gablik sheds light on Michelin’s position in the historical context of the spread of electronic media, when she argues that “whereas most people readily accept the idea that history of science demonstrates progress, in art they are unwilling to accept the idea of anything but change. Science, it is claimed, continually outgrows its older ideas, but the validity of great art remains permanent.”¹⁷ From this perspective, we can see that Simone Michelin is casting doubt on the idea of technological progress, since, for her, the recourse to new digital media does not necessarily imply progress in the language. A technical medium treated in an artistically inadequate way is useless, since

¹³ This is a reference to the exhibition, JACOBS, Mary Jane et al. *A Forest of Signs*. Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, 1989.

¹⁴ BATAILLE, Georges. Un-knowing and rebellion. *October*, Cambridge, n. 36, Spring 1986. p. 86-88.

¹⁵ MICHELIN, Simone. Diagrama 1. Domínio das traduções. Artist’s Collection.

¹⁶ See LEWIS, Wyndham. *The demon of progress in the arts*. Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1955. p. 86-87. In disagreement with André Malraux, he writes of demonic effects in modern art. Lewis’s analysis is not as critical or substantial as Suzi Gablik’s.

¹⁷ GABLIK, Suzi. *Progress in art*. New York: Rizzoli, 1977. p. 9.

many artists merely dress up the old in the clothes of the new. The artist is attempting here to replace technical novelty in a state of aphasia with the poetic quality of the discourse.

Michelin knows that the recourse to advanced technology is no guarantee of the contemporary pertinence of art, just as a painter who reworks the legacy of Manet, Matisse or Barnett Newman does not thereby necessarily win himself a place in the history of art. Her work is concerned, above all, to deal with the original semantic shortcomings of the media and to expand their potential for polysemy. This is similar to the conclusions drawn by the film-maker, Andrei Tarkovsky, for whom a script with literary qualities “is only useful as a way of convincing those you depend on to be able to make it of the validity of the film. Not that a script is, in itself, any guarantee of quality.”¹⁸

The strategic permeability of Simone Michelin’s discourse with regard to technological advances is a way of searching for a possible phenomenology of that which, making itself excessively visual, tends, however, to reduce itself to the platitude of the immediate when a discourse about art is lacking. She sees the technological transformation of reality as a problematic expansion of the visual field. Her interest is in establishing a dynamics of poetic appropriation of these technologies, of their way of aesthetic affecting contemporary modes of incorporating information and communications networks. Every invention, from the laser to the LCD, brings an image that is empty of poetry. Her work is on a permanent state of alert and readiness for the expansion of digital media as the external part of an expanding language. Michelin’s dynamics leads her to wonder whether every technological invention might not introduce a kind of blind field empty of signs. If one image affects another, as Wölfflin claims,¹⁹ and this is a more important feature of style than observation of nature, for Michelin, one technology affects another as a process of information and establishes

¹⁸ TARKOVSKY, Andrei. *Esculpir o tempo*. Trans. Jefferson Luiz Camargo. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2010. p. 151.

¹⁹ WÖLFFLIN, Heinrich. *Principles of Art History*. Trans. M. D. Hottinger. London: G. Bell & Sons, 1932. p. 230.

the way its formal and political agenda is structured. Before inventions die of obsolescence, the history of the image as the history of rapid technological development must, therefore, establish itself as an artistic language that opposes the original speechlessness of the digital signs. Michelin's method, if we apply to it some of Ernst Gombrich's observations in *Art and Illusion*, would seem to be a process of "schema and correction". At first, Michelin takes a technology as a way of anthropophagically absorbing the physical nature of the apparatus that allows the signifier to be enunciated. This is the schema stage and lasts until she has developed a poetics, including a repertoire of signifieds, to correct the immediacy of the discourse. This may be what Gombrich calls "making and matching".²⁰ To think about Michelin's work, one therefore needs to deal with the passage from the analogical to the digital, from the schema to the correction, from the failure of expression to aesthetic discourse. This is a poetics that is in a permanent state of technological flux, as a substantive condition of the sign and its concepts. In contrast to the way the technique determines the language,²¹ the possible phenomenological movements and the subversive efforts against the media are tensely inscribed within the codes of the very apparatus of *homo digitalis*.

There is a body whose poetical diction in the last four decades has been shot through with electronic, analogical and digital technology. Michelin's art is enunciated by way of a technological "in-formation" – a term Heidegger used to describe the process of creating art—of the body. The process flows in two opposing streams, as it is at once incorporation and dematerialization. This leads to the emergence of a media body in Michelin's work. The painter lends his body to the painting—Paul Valéry and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.²² For Michelin, the artist lends her body to the new electronic media. The *corps morcellé* of modernity, as Linda Nochlin puts it, thus finds a new *modus operandi* in her work. Michelin does not choose to physically tear her body apart, as do

²⁰ GOMBRICH, Ernst. *Art and Illusion: a study in the psychology of pictorial representation*. London: Phaidon Press, 1962. p. 73.

²¹ Vilém Flusser wrote that "the photographer can only photograph that which can be photographed." FLUSSER, Vilém. *Filosofia da caixa preta*. Rio de Janeiro: Relume Dumará, 2002. p. 31.

²² MERLEAU-PONTY, Maurice. *L'oeil et l'esprit*. Paris: Gallimard, 1964.

Hans Bellmer, Louise Bourgeois and Cindy Sherman, but to share it virtually in a technological fantasy. At times, it is more like a body being subjected to a medical examination or a diagnosis involving high-tech visual equipment than like Sherman's photographic images of a vile and vilified body.

Phenomenology

Early on, Simone Michelin described herself as working with the phenomenology of the light of industrial objects. *Registros da Memória*, which was her first exhibition (Espaço N.O, 1979), dealt with fragile technologies for copying documents through contact with light, such as carbon paper and heliographs. The technical precariousness of a fleeting image read according to an imagerics of disappearance to deal with evanescence and dislocation in time, with the tensions between the fleetingness of possible memory and the cogent problematization of history. When technology works with the opacity of that which is expunged by time, Michelin creates friction between the impossibility of forgetting, subjective marks of the trauma of the political and economic subject and difficulties of retaining memories, between the art of the era of technical reproduction of Walter Benjamin, the seminal author on the development of the aesthetic status of photography in the 20th century,²³ and Derrida's epidemic of archives. What is done with light or what is hidden by light was the basis of the phenomenology of the advanced technology of the cathode ray tube (CRT), the laser and the liquid crystal display (LCD). Simone Michelin is not searching for a digital sublime, but rather the possibility that the crisis of seeing involved in the process of becoming digitally literate may be a dimension of the aesthetic vocation of the machine-light of the mass media. She takes up the challenge that Benjamin saw in the early days of photography, of clearing away the fog that envelops technologies at the time of their invention.²⁴

²³ BENJAMIN, Walter. The work of art in the age of reproducibility. In: JENNINGS, Michel W. (Ed.). *Walter Benjamin: selected writings*. v. 3. Trans. Edmund Jephcott e Harry Zohn. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003. p. 101-133.

²⁴ BENJAMIN, Walter. A Little History of Photography. In: JENNINGS, Michel W. (Ed.). *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*. v. 2. Trans. Edmund Jephcott & Kingsley Shorter. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003. p. 507.

The electronic media alter the Gestalt between the brain and the image, condition the new digital visual literacy, and introduce a new axis of time and space and social communication. Here, Michelin's program establishes the need for metalinguistic objects in production. In this process, she works with the visually "paronymic" relations between the digital media themselves or their consequences. In the case of perception, Michelin, as in *Qualia*, understands that perception is an act of the political unconscious, an idea introduced by Fredric Jameson.²⁵ Her concerns include the phenomenology of technological images as a critical instance of discourse.

Michelin: the media unconscious and the anti-spectacle

Between 1994 and 2000, Simone Michelin worked on three artistic triads using various procedures. These works are the prose of Michelin's art world. Maurice Merleau-Ponty reflects on how individuals are constituted by their personal name.²⁶ However, the artist does not appear as Simone, but as the first letter of her last name. Calling her Michelin seems to indicate a focus on her profession, just as Monet is not called Claude or Mapplethorpe Robert. Apparently, the triads are like tongue-twisters, with alliterations and occasional coincidences, since they are all names that begin with the letter M. The logic of the letters in Mira Schendel is the hallelujah moment of the discovery of the primal sound referent of language. In Michelin, the M represents an encounter with history and living language. History slides in various directions; it does not appear to move one way or even to be bipolar. Because the names in the titles of the triads are not in alphabetical order, the artist likewise does not have a fixed position in the order of discourse, appearing first (*Michelin, Miller, Mapplethorpe*), second (*O intervalo entre as coisas: Muntadas, Michelin, Moholy*) or third (*Monet, Manet, Michelin – Acquatinta, variação n.5*). This is therefore a process of situationist questioning of the

²⁵ JAMESON, Fredric. *The political unconscious: narrative as a socially symbolic art*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981.

²⁶ MERLEAU-PONTY, Maurice. *A prosa do mundo*. Trans. Paulo Neves. São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2002. p. 26.

history of art based on the linguistic position of the subject, which is frequently transformed into an object in the society of spectacle.

Michelin's morpho-syntactic work is a counter-grammatical operation involving technological signs and, as already mentioned, the linguistic positions of the subject. It is not a matter of shoe-horning signs into grammatical categories, but of perceiving them, on the basis of the activation of the linguistic subject, in their primordial lexical instability lost in the forest of contemporary technologies. As the viewer is destined to be situated in this uncomfortable place, Michelin thus proposes a gentle path towards knowledge of the advanced. At root, it is the process of building up public consent, to which art is a co-signatory, regarding the new emerging signs of the technological mutation of contemporary society. The thinking of Charles Sanders Peirce plays an overarching role in this.

At this point it is therefore worth reflecting on the way in which Michelin's work addresses some of the same linguistic issues raised by Peirce, especially the logic of the trichotomy. Peirce's semiotics addressed the analytical bases of trichotomous logic, which included psychological, physiological, biological, physical and sociological dimensions. Peirce understood the meaning of the trichotomy in mathematical logic: the first should be totally separate from any conception or reference to any other thing. Michelin alternates from the primary to the secondary or the tertiary communicational position, which, in the last analysis, correspond to the search for a shifting place in the development of questions of visual art.

The second is that which cannot exist without the first. It is the other, relation, compulsion, effect, dependence, independence, negation, occurrence, reality and result.²⁷ In Michelin's triads it indicates the historical field of art. For Peirce, the primary is the agent; the secondary, the patient; and the tertiary the action through which the first marks the second. The irony of two precursors of the triads suggests the

²⁷ PEIRCE, Charles. A guess at the riddle. In: HOOPER, James (Ed.). *Peirce on signs: writings on semiotic by Charles Sanders Peirce*. London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992. p. 187-202.

gender politics that is on Michelin's agenda. In her triads, the historical artists are always men. Michelin frequently presents herself as the other of history in terms of geopolitics and gender politics. *A noiva descendo a escada* (1989) is an ironic allusion to the work of Marcel Duchamp, while *4 Estações* (1993), described by Michelin as an "Identity Manifesto", examined the place of women in the history of art and was already working with proper names (last names). In short, in so far as she is sometimes the tertiary element, Michelin proclaims the status of the artist as the agent of the history of art, driving it in the direction of the present.

Porque sim: fragmentos de multimedia "heralds the end of the idea of modern art" in Michelin's work. In her performance *1'22" de glória – Mondrian, Malevich, Michelin* (1994), the triad can be seen from the point of view of the constitution of modern space. However, from a point of view closer to the Brazilian experience, Malevich and Mondrian provided the basic references for neo-concretism which have found their way into Michelin's project. In *Manifesto neoconcreto*, Ferreira Gullar realizes that the elimination of the object of modernity went deeper and came up against obstacles to production in the work of Mondrian and Malevich: "the object that is fractured in the cubist painting is the painted object, the represented object. Finally, painting lies there in pieces, waiting for a new structure, a new mode of being, and a new meaning", Gullar wrote in *Teoria do não-objeto* (1959). Michelin realized, from her experience of neo-concretism, that the artist inventor can only work with the field of unresolved problems inherited from the history of art.²⁸ "Malevich, by recognizing the primacy of the 'pure sensibility of art'... was already expressing, within 'geometric' painting, a dissatisfaction, a desire to transcend the rational and the sensorial, which is now manifesting itself in an irrepressible manner" (*Manifesto neoconcreto*). For Gullar, "Mondrian could see the more revolutionary meaning of cubism and take it forward... With the elimination of the represented object, the canvas—as a material presence—becomes the new object of painting. It is the painter's job to organize it, but also to give it a transcendence that takes it out of the obscurity of the material object" (*Teoria do*

²⁸ On this, see HERKENHOFF, Paulo. Princípio da historicidade da invenção pessoal. In: *Pincelada: pintura e método no Brasil, projeções da década de 1950*. São Paulo: Instituto Tomie Ohtake, 2009. p. 287.

não-objeto). If, according to this text, “the struggle against the object continues” with Mondrian, Michelin assumes that, historically, certain artists have used performance to completely eliminate the dependence of art on a relation with the materiality of the object. *I’22” de glória – Mondrian, Malevich, Michelin* is thus concerned, beyond its perturbing opacity, with time and wandering. This glorified fame, far from being a Narcissistic act, addresses the transitory world that Andy Warhol foresaw in the pop future, when everyone would have fifteen minutes of fame, which in fact rescues no-one from obscurity. Warhol’s era of glamor was overturned by the web, by the daily avalanche of e-mails, by the “agreed truth” of Wikipedia, by the mass communication of YouTube, by “net-behavior”, by the synthetic instantaneity of Twitter, by the political efficacy of social networks and the excessive Narcissism of Facebook, and will be further overturned by what is to come. From the outset, however, Simone Michelin’s work always sought to plunge headlong into this on-going cybernetic tsunami.

The Spirit of Rio

Michelin’s *O espírito do Rio* (2007) is an ode to Rio de Janeiro. “The truth about Rio may lie in its spectacular nature, the very question of the image in its manifold dimensions. It is also, generally speaking, imprecise—it is more a sensation than a certainty”,²⁹ she remarks. Against the hegemony of asymbolia and the mere idea of communication, there is a need for semiotic productivity in these media. For Michelin, everything should become material for art: the time of the subject, a utilitarian anxiety for efficiency, the speed of communication, color and light, the physical and conceptual malleability of video, the expansion of the material sign of art, the focus and the point of view. The video gaze, where the process of the invention of the image begins, has installed itself in the black box of the video. Post-production folds being in time. At times, Michelin comes close to something like a “dis-assemblage” as a deconstruction

²⁹ In an email to the author dated 12 June 2007. All the quotations from the artist without a source were taken from another email, dated 19 December 2007. This section presents a summary of the author’s arguments regarding this work (*O espírito do Rio*, digital video, NTSC, color, sound, 10’43”) published in the catalogue, *ATLAS: Américas*. Rio de Janeiro: Oi Futuro, 2008. p. 89-95.

of production, moved by a videological desire to destabilize representations of the real. The phenomenology of video proposes an intertextual meeting of media and languages, such as performance, theater, television, music, carnival and video itself.

In another meeting of video art and music, *DesConcerto* (2003) subverts the spaces where culture circulates by way of an unpredictable polysemic and multi-sensorial phenomenon. *DesConcerto* is a form of perceptual interaction that is better fitted to the new visual languages of live-image real-time video processing (by Elaine Thomazzi Freitas). Michelin organizes the process around the disorganization of the accepted canon of musical practices and the disconcerting juxtaposition of different times and places. Perceptual interaction and the chess-game of stimuli shuffle the new songs, narratives, displacements and the topology of sounds. One is disconcerted when there is no time for a program or space for a recital, by a piece which operates inside or outside the concert hall, disorients the position of the “listener” watching, and sets up an insipid polyphony as a way of exploring a placeless place for the music of our time. Disconcerted by the (de)composition of Vania Dantas Leite, the audience is incorporated into disparate musical practices; each one occupying the center of an experience that is unique, because it is individual and unrepeatable.³⁰

The way the plasticity of the image is built up in *O espírito do Rio* also draws on a range of technical tools. However, the plasticity of this work resides in Michelin’s ability to use the technique and adapt the characteristics of the medium to a phenomenological correspondence with the conceptual agenda. The four episodes of *O espírito do Rio* seem to be low-quality films, home video shots, the records of an amateur that are out of focus. But Michelin’s subtlety lies in an erudition that demystifies the history of video and the accelerated pace of contemporary technology. Language behaves like a cognitive semiotics wandering through the cultural weft of the metropolis, which is at once atavistic and experimental. The breakdowns in sound and

³⁰ Vania Dantas Leite has done important work in collaboration with visual artists, such as Anna Maria Maiolino.

visual lapses in the acts or between them establish synopes and counterpoints in the thumping rhythm of *O espírito do Rio*.

As a counter-documentary, *O espírito do Rio* is structured in post-production around a conceptual axis focused on the relations between art and truth and the counter-cultural critique of the society of spectacle. The gaze is the problematical matrix of contaminated truth, “a possible lack of a boundary between fiction and reality, when I claim that it is a documentary”.³¹ Moreover, “there is a character/characteristic of spectacle that is at the same time asserted and contradicted. This is a spectacle, but it is also a real event”. The aporia envelops notions of truth. Michelin is moving towards Leonilson’s postulate that “there are so many truths”. She shifts the question of truth of Western philosophy to the treatment of truth as something than cannot be reduced to the reality of the documentary. *O espírito do Rio* develops awareness of video as a producer of “fictional truths”. The possible poetics here comes from treating the video as a pseudo-documentary. Michelin’s epistemological method includes Bergson’s intuition (as with the neo-concretists and in Deleuze’s review)³² and Bataille’s un-knowing.³³ *O espírito do Rio* tells a cross-cutting history of Brazilian art, including the baroque, the phenomenology of the senses (of Mário Pedrosa and Ferreira Gullar and the neo-concretist work of Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica); the “constructive will” of Oiticica³⁴ and the deep Brazil of Guimarães Rosa, Clementina de Jesus, Oiticica, Caetano Veloso and Emmanuel Nassar. The neo-Baroque, Omar Calabrese claims, works with organized differentiation, polycentrism and rhythm,³⁵ basic elements of the Baroque that pervade *O espírito do Rio*. Michelin’s digital metalinguistics reconfigures the cultural melting pot of Rio: Baroque and performative, tradition and

³¹ In an email to the author dated 12 June 2007.

³² DELEUZE, Gilles. *Bergsonism*. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson & Barbara Habberjam. New York: Zone Books, 1991. p. 35.

³³ BATAILLE, George. Un-knowing. *October*, Cambridge, Spring 1986. p. 87.

³⁴ OITICICA, Hélio. Esquema geral da nova objetividade. In: _____. *Nova objetividade brasileira*. Rio de Janeiro: MAM, 1967.

³⁵ CALABRESE, Omar. *A idade neobarroca*. Trans. Carmem de Carvalho. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 1988. p. 57.

experimentation, syncretism and carnival, connections between different art forms, relations between art and life, the integration of divided classes and the tensions between reason and emotion.

Qualia

Qualia, at Oi Futuro, brings together three spaces that share the same political focus. A larger zone comprising a video installation using 3D technology (stereoscopic video viewed using glasses with red and blue lenses) enfolds the visiting artist in the vastness of her cellular interior. At another point, laser beams are fired at a kinetic structure, slowly perforating the surface of a conveyor belt. The two places are joined by statistical data on narco-trafficking in Rio de Janeiro between 2002 and 2010 (the volume of drugs in circulation in the capital, the number of homicides, and the amount of money laundered) provided by micro-processors and displayed on LCD monitors. The light lends a certain enchantment to the menacing communications.

“Qualia [singular: quale, in both Latin and English] is a term that refers to the subjective qualities of mental experiences” and aspects of phenomena. Simone Michelin’s *Qualia* is a history of the body and of regions of the mind. Here phenomenology includes Gestalt and the concept of qualia itself. The work does not imply any taxonomy that follows a strict logic, but the conceptual emergence of many instances of the body, including a philosophical debate on the question. It contains the cybernetic body, the body as spectacle, the body as light, the body as phenomenon and the proprioceptive body. Simone Michelin draws on philosophy, statistics and science to establish a metaphor with the power to affect the urban viewer by addressing the issue of life in contemporary metropolises and the problem of violent crime. The polarizing liquid of the LCD light, which is electronically controlled, is compressed in cells between two transparent polarizing slides. The polarizing axes of the two slides are aligned perpendicularly with one another. In Michelin’s *corpus* such a technical description of LCD operates as a metaphor for the social compression of the “divided

city” of *Qualia* in the urban war of social exclusion and the absence of government intervention.³⁶

Simone Michelin’s project consists of taking “technological semantics” and launching them as an experimental field of the “post-human” in works such as *Qualia*, a concept that has been worked on by Jeffrey Deitch at the FAE Musée d’Art Contemporain de Lausanne in his exhibition, *Post-human*, in 1992, following on from *Artificial Nature*, the previous year. In Deitch’s view, new frontiers had been established between interpersonal behavior; the idea of control over one’s own body and inherited social circumstances, transformative social and scientific paradigms, biotechnology, and other such factors, have resulted, in a transformation of the self and a change in what it means to be human. “The convergence of rapid advances in biotechnology and computer science with society’s questioning of traditional social and sexual roles may be leading to nothing less than a redefinition of human life.”³⁷ Michelin uses all this to forge a kind of space that is already electronic, which moves at a pace that is speeded up by the simultaneous. The pieces share the same linguistic unit formulated with the discourse of light in the installation: the medical examination using laser beams and the statistical information provided by LCD monitors. In this case, more precisely, the technological tools used envelop the audience in a luminous discourse produced by the hypothetical and potential fact, since no-one is exempt from social violence. *Qualia* is not a simulation of something identical that is blown up, but an experimental hypothesis regarding a scientific fantasy ruined by a social nightmare. The installation situates the viewer in a diagram of socio-biological semantic systems,³⁸ since the homicide statistics affect the life expectancy of young people in the most violent parts of Brazil. More remotely, *Qualia* is akin to Waldemar Cordeiro’s *Autorretrato probabilístico* (1967), with its bodies defined by chance occurrences, like stray bullets.

³⁶ An allusion to Zuenir Ventura’s *Cidade partida* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1994), in which he discusses the gaping abyss between the formal city and the slums as a process of exclusion in the urban social space of Rio de Janeiro.

³⁷ POLITI, Giancarlo; KONTOVA, Helena. Jeffrey Deitch’s brave new art. *Flash Art*, n. 167, 1992.

³⁸ Semantic Systems Biology (SSB), which uses semantic descriptions of knowledge of biological systems to facilitate integrated data analysis. See <<http://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=1988756>>.

The activation of *Qualia* thus implies contact with the real social world: the hypothesis of violence, and the chance and probabilities inherent in this. Modern science's promise of immortality and the prospect of an eternal body that medicine raises are roused from their fantasy and confronted by a reality that does not bear them out.

The *Qualia* installation addresses the phenomenological state of fear and dependency that is sprouting from the everyday social fabric. The qualia, according to the artist, point to “big problems” – which, in philosophy, would be “a category of problems to which there is still no solution –, in this case, of two orders: one internal, subjective, relating to personal experience; the other external, concrete, relating to collective experience and social behavior.”³⁹ So far as she can see, it would appear that no consensus is likely to arise in the near future, which makes this one of the most fruitful fields in the philosophy of mind. Some philosophers, such as the skeptical Daniel Dennett, deny the existence of phenomena such as qualia. In this thinker's view, the phenomenon is founded on the intrinsic properties of experiences that are also ineffable, not physical and “given” to the subject with no possibility of error, which means that they are “incorrigible”.⁴⁰ Qualia exhibit sensible subjective properties that accompany perception, and thus represent the “grand problem” of consciousness, “the greatest mystery of philosophy, neuroscience, and psychology. What is consciousness? How can we prove its existence? Ineffable, impalpable, non-quantifiable, and yet real”, Michelin writes. Her proposition contradicts the political project of modern medicine, which, according to Michel Foucault, “can no longer be merely a body of techniques for curing disease and knowing what these require; it will also involve knowledge of the *healthy human being*, a simultaneous experience of the *human being who is not sick* and a definition of the *model human being*”.⁴¹ Michelin thus announces the bankruptcy of medical knowledge in the face of social biology. Her model, different from that of

³⁹ MICHELIN, Simone. *Qualia*. 2010. Manuscript in the artist's files.

⁴⁰ TYE, Michael. Qualia. In: ZALTA, Edward N. (Ed.). *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. 2009. Available at <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2009/entries/qualia/>>. Accessed on 1 May 2011.

⁴¹ FOUCAULT, Michel. *O nascimento da clínica*. Trans. Roberto Machado. Rio de Janeiro: Forense Universitária, 2001. p. 39.

Lygia Clark, is not one of art that heals, but of art that warns us of the death drive in the midst of life.

The philosopher, Michael Tye, has analyzed mental states to which the concept of qualia might apply. He sums up the positions of Thomas Nagel, Christopher Peacocke and N. Block as being focused on visual experiences that indicate the occurrence of various visual qualia.⁴² Tye lists the intrinsic aspects of visual experience itself, such as accessibility to introspection, the possibility of varying without any variation in the representational contents of experience, the status of being mental counterparts of given visual properties of objects, and their unique role in determining the phenomenal character of experience. The obscure space of Michelin's *Qualia* projects forth meanings. Michael Tye discusses issues such as the "ability hypothesis", the "argument from knowledge" (which is similar to Michelin's) or "absenteeism behavior" as ways of shedding some light on qualia. In his view, qualia have contents that represent the properties of certain experiences. Everything participates in that which is subjectively irreducible. For Tye – as has always been the case for Michelin –, perceptual experiences imply specific operations of the senses, bodily sensations, emotional reactions and psychological states. Experiences and feelings are irreducibly subjective. He agrees with Galen Strawson that other sensations, such as memories that suddenly spring to mind, may also be qualia. In an article entitled "What is it like to be a bat?" Nagel claims that "consciousness is what makes the mind-body problem really intractable."⁴³ One could compare the visual phenomenon of the bat used by the philosopher with the work of Simone Michelin. The set of visual circumstances that make up *Qualia* cast doubt on the phenomenological experience of the gaze, by making it uncanny. The image of the bat and its night vision reminds us both of Plato's cave and Michelin's installation, in which epistemological experience comes from stimulating the idea of a "quale". The obscurity of *Qualia* requires of the viewer an instinct similar to that of Nagel's bat.

⁴² TYE, Michael. Qualia. In: ZALTA, Edward N. (Ed.). *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. 2009. Disponível em: <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2009/entries/qualia/>>. Acesso em: 1º mai. 2011.

⁴³ NAGEL, Thomas. What is it like to be a bat? *The Philosophical Review*, v. 83, n. 4, 1974. p. 435.

Qualia's small circles of colored light are like the laws of Gestalt regarding the perception of the spots on a Dalmatian: the eye is adrift in the irresolvable ambivalence between the representation of the dog and the "abstract" spots of paint that make it up. Michelin's equivalent of the Dalmatian is our own anatomical conformation at a hyper-microscopic scale, since the circles of light in *Qualia* amount to an experience of color that draws our own organism. In this installation, the fun of diving into the hypothetically anatomical inner world is juxtaposed with the light that tattoos the synthetic human skin with laser beams. Quite discretely, a little statistical information flashing up on LCD screens reveals in the shadows the horrible record of urban violence and brings us back to the real world and the sensorial attentiveness of proprioception.

Proprioception, the sixth sense, which recognizes and locates the body in space, was described at the end of the 19th century by the physiologist, Charles Bell.⁴⁴ It is an inner sense, at times unquantifiable, but capable of identifying the position and orientation of the body. Affliction and degradation upset proprioception, as in the razor scene in Buñuel's 1929 film, *Un chien andalou*. Fear, a metaphor for heterotopic social situations can be found in the work of Brazilian artists such as Cildo Meireles, Ivens Machado, Raul Mourão, as well as in Michelin's *Qualia*. According to Virilio, the relation between art and science is a kind of dance of death.⁴⁵ Meireles's *Introdução a uma nova crítica* (1969), consists of a chair with nails in it under a tent covered by a black veil. The piece aims, in the artist's own words, "to exercise a critique that occurs in such a way that the nature of the process and the material used coincide with the nature and the material of the object the critique is directed towards". During the dictatorship, following the 1964 coup, Machado's insidious *Mapa mudo* (1979) draws a map of Brazil in concrete with shards of broken glass set in it. A physical question introduced by work of this kind, including Michelin's, is that of the synapse.

⁴⁴ BAGOT, Jean-Didier; EHM, Christine. Proprioception. In: *L'ABCdaire des cinq sens*. Paris: Flammarion, 1998. p. 95.

⁴⁵ VIRILIO, Paul. *Fear and art*. Trans. Julie Rose. London: Continuum, 2003.

Synapses are located at the end of neurons and transmit nervous impulses from one neuron to another. The ends of neurons meet and the stimulus is transferred from one neuron to the next by way of neurotransmitters (chemical intermediaries). There is thus “contact” between the elongated transmission nerves (axons) and the elongated receptor nerves (dendrites), but without any real physical contact between them. It can thus be described as a space in between, a synaptic hiatus, which, in the case *Qualia*, is opened by fear. The eye that examines the shards of glass in Ivens Machado’s sculpture or reads Michelin’s statistics, activates the circuit of synaptic transmission and the corresponding defensive reaction. Vision, however, does not replace the proprioceptive system but sharpens it. Susanne Langer, the theoretical writer whose work was fundamental for the theory of neoconcretism, shows that the development of the language of signs occurred in parallel with “the physical development of the sense organs and the structure of the synapse. Its function is to transmit sensory messages to the muscles from the glands – to the organs for eating, mating, fight and flight – and, obviously, it works to promote the elementary biological requirements: self-preservation, growth, procreation, and preservation of the species”.⁴⁶ The now post-human multi-sensory body required by *Qualia* still harks back to the one addressed by Langer, Merleau-Ponty and the Neoconcretist Manifesto, when they deal with intercommunication between different art forms and the complexity of the way meanings travel through the perceptual apparatus. Michelin’s aim is to trace the route of the sensible between digital technology and mental and sensorial perceptions.

“The consolidation of progress by catalogues and television sets. Just machinery. And blood transfusions”, proclaimed Oswald de Andrade in the *Manifesto antropófago* (1928), pioneering words on the relation between technology and anatomy, the body-machine, which is now the central issue in Michelin’s *Qualia*. Oswald’s analogy goes on to claim that, when human beings “identify their habitat, understand the circulation and composition of their blood, create the machine and through the most terrifying experiments create an industrial society, then they will become international and enter

⁴⁶ LANGER, Susanne. *Filosofia em nova chave*. Trans. Janete Meiches e J. Guinsburg. São Paulo: Editora Perspectiva, 2004. p. 41.

the first stages of history”.⁴⁷ This is why *Qualia* should perhaps be classified as a phagic place, which devours the subject.⁴⁸ In Oswald’s terms, Michelin’s work is moved by a perverse voraciousness, because it clashes with the technology of machines. Pieces such as *I ’22” de glória – Mondrian, Malevich, Michelin* and *Qualia* are microphysical hypotheses of power, in which a biopolitics of technology is imagined, which was once virgin territory in symbolic terms. *Qualia*, however, is an ambivalent place. Art as a laboratory examination deals with the formation of the subject from the participatory presence of the body. The anti-Oedipal organ-less body of *Qualia* can only be seen from the marks on the synthetic skin and the laser light.⁴⁹ In Michelin’s symbolic economy, it is the clinical body of the spectator in movement that brings the parts of the installation together and gives them a totalizing connection. The body in *Qualia* parodies the clinic itself, now using the critical scrutiny of Foucault. Abandoned – anonymous and socially abused by the state and by violent crime –, this is also the legally invisible body – an urban version of Giorgio Agamben’s *homo sacer*. From this perspective, the only promise that *Qualia* makes is the impossibility of social health.

For Simone Michelin, state-of-the-art navigation between advanced technologies is a way of conquering new space and fields of discourse for poetry and fantasy. She has what Gaston Bachelard’s phenomenology described as a material desire, which, in her case, is digital and technological. She is one of those artists for whom communications technologies do not operate in a work of art solely as a neutral mirror, in which the artist, the viewer or the general public can find a mere automatic self-reflection. Michelin sees in this a procedural hypothesis regarding the genesis of the subject. However, much video art takes “the viewer to be an ego” – to paraphrase Merleau-

⁴⁷ Oswald Andrade, in a one-page untitled, undated manuscript from the author’s files. In: HERKENHOFF, Paulo; PEDROSA, Adriano (Curators). *Núcleo histórico: antropofagia e histórias de canibalismos*. XXIV Bienal de São Paulo. São Paulo: Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, 1998. p. 49.

⁴⁸ Term coined by Zygmunt Bauman based on the cannibalism in Claude Lévi-Strauss’s *Tristes trópicos*. BAUMAN, Zygmunt. *Liquid modernity*. Londres: Polity, 2006. p. 98.

⁴⁹ See DELEUZE, Gilles; GUATTARI, Félix. *L’anti-Oedipe: capitalismo et schizophrénie*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1995.

Ponty.⁵⁰ Michelin's *corpus* maps the human body, as can be seen in *12 horas de trabalho pela Constituinte*, *O espírito do Rio* and *Qualia*. The playfulness of *O espírito do Rio* critically builds up its own delirium; it does not just present a psychiatric diagnosis. Her work eschews the idea of the psychoanalytical mirror and the voice of the analyst in the social order that can invert the critical awareness of narcissism. Michelin's work, like the cinematic images of Ana Maria Maiolino, Sonia Andrade, Leticia Parente and Lenora de Barros, aims to be a field of action within existential territories that pass through the body. At times, her work reflects on what the subject was and is today.

⁵⁰ The philosopher wrote "the observer as an ego". MERLEAU-PONTY, Maurice. *Cosmologia del siglo XX*. Trans. Jacinto Luis Guerreño. Madrid: Gredos, 1971. p. 168.