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## Post-walls architecture: the everyday experience of opening windows

Ivana Bentes

We started a conversation with Ivana Bentes. Director and professor at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro's School of Communication, coordinator of the *Pontão de Cultura Digital*<sup>1</sup> at the same school, she is a researcher on communication, aesthetics, digital culture, contemporary thought, social imagination, among others.

She is also a researcher who is not confined to the academy grounds, who does not remain within a comfortable distance of what happens around her. Transposing limits, passing an intense way through the different places where important features are outlined in this cultural scenery.

In this interview, through GTalk, we started an infinite and open conversation with Ivana Bentes. We share with the readers of V!RUS this pleasurable moment, inviting them to participate too!

**V!RUS:** Ivana, thanks for accepting our invitation! The theme of this issue is "Places of Living: Revisited". We want to talk to you about the role of communications in changing or even creating these places.

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<sup>1</sup> *Pontão de Cultura Digital* is an organ that intends to articulate and to support both technically and conceptually the Culture Points [*Pontos de Cultura*] of Rio de Janeiro State, hosted the School of Communications of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ). The Culture Points are a part of the Living Culture Program of the Brazilian Ministry of Culture. They are civil society organizations that develop actions of social and cultural nature in their own communities. They are financially and institutionally supported by the Government.

See: Ministério da Cultura. *Ponto de cultura*. website: <<http://www.cultura.gov.br/culturaviva/ponto-de-cultura/>> [Accessed 17 June 2011]; Pontão da ECO. Pontão de Cultura Digital Project website: <<http://www.pontaodaeco.org/>> [Accessed 17 June 2011].

The first question refers to social networks and their interfaces as a place to live. May we see these digital environments as expanded places of living?

**Ivana Bentes:** Undoubtedly, the theorists' initial idea and even the common sense that we should think a distinction between real and virtual proved to be unsustainable. The networks are, today, cognitive and affective territories, in which we want to be in more and more. They're places of flows and increasingly intense exchanges increasingly intense. In that sense this course are new places, highly stimulating hybrids of presence/absence highly stimulating. The idea of expansion, in the manifestation episode in Spain, for example, finished ended with the division: territory *versus* networks. What we saw was a collapse of the real/virtual distinction. I stayed three days, almost whole, following the Puerta del Sol virtual<sup>2</sup>, live broadcast of the camp in Madrid, and was an intense experience. While there was a territorial occupation, the networks mobilization was decisive.

**VIRUS:** This idea of "wanting to be more and more" may have a parallel with the notion of "oasis" or "refuge", often attributed to the living for people?

**Ivana Bentes:** It is a well-populated oasis. Nobody wants to be "alone", it is like being alone among many, a new way to share time and space. No doubt it is a refuge, but rather "lively". Today, I see many people "alone" in public places in the company of a mobile phone, or other connecting devices, immersed in "being" simultaneously within the territory and the network.

**VIRUS:** In this case, the idea of oasis gets a feature of a place from which we retreat ourselves, from an almost ideological point of view, or at least marked by a clear convergence of interests... Would it be an illustration of the Manuel Castells' concept of networked individualism<sup>3</sup> ?

**Ivana Bentes:** I like the idea of a singularity in flow. Yes, the networked individualism or the concept of "multitude" of Antonio Negri<sup>4</sup>, which joins the most singular and the common, the collective.

**VIRUS:** How would you introduce, in this conversation, the concept of co-presence?

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<sup>2</sup> Citizens' movement called 15-M which began on May 15, 2011 from the internet and social networks, and was extended to the streets of several Spanish cities, starting at the Puerta del Sol square in Madrid. They wanted to demonstrate young people's dissatisfaction facing the lack of employment opportunities and perspectives of the current Spanish political and economic model. The *www.solttv.tv* internet television channel broadcasted continuously images of the demonstrations, which have taken an itinerant character.

<sup>3</sup> According to Castells (2002), the *networked individualism* corresponds to a social pattern rather than to an gathering of isolated individuals. It is a social structure that embraces individual networks, whether they are online and/or offline, based on interests, values, affinities and projects. Castells, M. *The Internet Galaxie*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

<sup>4</sup> The concept of multitude has been described by political philosophers Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt in their books *Empire* (2000), and *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (2004). Roughly speaking, "the multitude, for these philosophers, would replace the concept of the proletariat as a category of analysis. Due to the current hegemony of immaterial labor, anyone [...] can belong to the new 'working class'" (Wikipedia). Wikipedia. Multitude concept. Available at: <<http://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multitude>> [Accessed 17 June 2011].

**Ivana Bentes:** Being here and there at the same time, this idea fascinates me and delights many. Not as a matter of "omnipresence", neither superpowers, but as an experience more and more daily in which we can open "windows" between spaces, making spaces communicate: through a web-cam, a Skype call, a GTalk continuously open. These are possibilities of living in co-presence. I have been doing experiments like these in the network. Endless conversations that never "end". They are simply "open".

**VIRUS:** It would mean to dwell in what we call hybrid spatialities, in which more and more people transit daily, often without realizing it completely.

**Ivana Bentes:** This idea of spaces connecting us instantly with others... We may think about a post-walls architecture. Which can work as open media-windows in a continuous flow, in co-presence with other cognitive, affective environments ...

Endless conversations, no need to say good morning or goodbye :)

**VIRUS:** No need to go back home too?

**Ivana Bentes:** Not going back home supposes a radical nomadism!!! Whenever I travel I just feel "at home" when I enter my Gmail and meet all people I know, all affections and problems of my emotional continent. It's magic! It's my "home" that accompanies me. But still there are many territorialized experiences that mark and call... we can not virtualize them so much...

Having a "home", somewhere, to return back! That's comforting. I think this is what you define as hybrid spaces, both mental/territorial. This is a great topic. I have studied some poetic concepts of space and found a wonderful one from [Lygia Pape](#)<sup>5</sup>, which comes from the seventies, the idea of "magnetized spaces".

She was fascinated with these clusters rising at a market, in the middle of the street, in a square. Suddenly, a space gets "magnetized", created by a temporary interest. A small community then arises, in the middle of the street, among anonymous people. I find this idea brilliant. The space built as in the network, a chat or an exchange of messages on Facebook, can create other magnetized spaces, provisional but intense ones.

Still about this relationship between collective and singular, between territory and network, I was in the [March of Freedom](#)<sup>6</sup> in São Paulo, with the presence of bodies, conversations, face to face interaction, a classic manifestation of multitudes, there were hundreds of people tweeting, taking pictures, posting them and playing in the network, intensely. Again, the two dimensions. There is no incompatibility between network and territories. Space and time are short-circuiting. We enter the flow.

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<sup>5</sup> Lygia Pape (1927, 2004) was a Brazilian artist connected to the Neo-Concrete movement. She was a sculptor, engraver, filmmaker, painter and teacher.

<sup>6</sup> March of Freedom. Demonstration for freedom of expression, in several senses, held on May 28, 2011, in the city of Sao Paulo.

**VIRUS:** The classic analytic categories of "public" and "private" would still be sufficient to understand (or explain) this notion of living?

**Ivana Bentes:** We can no longer completely separate the public sphere from the private one. In fact this separation has always been "artificial", historical, perhaps they are no longer useful to understand other types of culture and of being in the world.

But we have to go slowly... because other boundaries arise, new boundaries... A way for people to create the so called oasis is "unplugging", a luxury for a few people today. Who can afford to be disconnected a full day? "Out of coverage area"... We are more intolerant with the other's "absence".

**VIRUS:** Models of living simultaneously networked and in territories extend to digital media solidary ways of living, already present in their physical space, as it is the case of *Fora do Eixo Circuit*<sup>7</sup>. Their references are Marxist, implemented *via* telematic networks.

**Ivana Bentes:** *Fora do Eixo* is an experimental and brilliant circuit. The more I know, the more I get involved and impressed by what they are experiencing. I think it is a new "communism", post-hippie, techno-*odara*<sup>8</sup>, networks' communism. I think they are responding and creating new questions for a difficult issue: how to live together?

**VIRUS:** They are 24 hours a day connected *via* network, *via* Google documents, etc., and the circuit really would not exist in its today's shape without the communication *via* internet.

**Ivana Bentes:** No doubt, it would not exist before internet, with this viral capacity, of contamination. It is a radical experiment of trying to work, eat, rave, share, fable, within the houses or the collectives and in the flow. Making flocks, making multitudes among rustling singularities, such as those of *Pablo Capilé*<sup>9</sup>, one of "nodes" of the network.

**VIRUS:** To the question 'how to live together?' we might add another one: 'why to live together?' This reminds us the dilemma of communications' content compared to the ease of communicating?... Perhaps we can understand the quality of communication as a precondition to the quality of dwelling itself, compared to the mere possibility of communicating.

**Ivana Bentes:** It is a lot of "communication" for little expression... or sometimes much expression.

**VIRUS:** Yes, and their reflection on the daily lives of these people in communication.

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<sup>7</sup> The Off-Axis Circuit is a network created in 2005 by groups from the cities of Cuiaba, Rio Branco, Uberlândia and Londrina, which acts "as a multiplier of culture, not only in stimulating but also in encouraging the formation of its cultural agents." It works today on different thematic fronts as Solidarity Economy, Media Center, Free Technologies, Visual Arts, Music, Film Club, Theater, Party of Culture, University FDE, Off-Axis Letters. Fora do Eixo Portal. Site about Circuito Fora do Eixo. Available at: <<http://foradoeixo.org.br/institucional>> Accessed 17 June 2011.

<sup>8</sup> *Odara* is an african-brazilian word meaning good, beautiful and positive.

<sup>9</sup> Cultural producer, creator and co-founder of Espaço Cubo (Cube Space), in Cuiaba, which is one of collectives that founded the Off-Axis Circuit.

**Ivana Bentes:** You know, I was very attentive when Rene Silva, from Voz da Comunidade<sup>10</sup>, emerged in Twitter during the occupation of the Complexo do Alemão<sup>11</sup>, here in Rio. It was touching, a 17 years old boy telling, from inside the slum, what he was seeing. But after all, what he saw from his window, was too "little" in terms of information. Ninety percent of the "objective" information were his simple report, his singular manner to express what he was seeing at GloboNews<sup>12</sup> :-). He watched the same TV than us, who were watching from outside the slum. Nevertheless, it was impressive when he said: "there is a great silence, I only hear the crickets zi zi zi". Or, "I would like to eat some pizza, but there is an army tank down there" or "my mother doesn't let me go outside to see what is happening".

None of this would be a "matter on the TV" or information. He was only "communicating" affections, experiences, tiny perceptions that would never be "news". I think that is what we communicate on the networks. Everybody has enough of so much caffeine free information, without having a world aside...

**VIRUS:** He externalized narratives of his experience, perhaps in the Benjaminian sense?

**Ivana Bentes:** Yes, exactly, it was like the "anti-newspaper". But using a medium which can potentialize this subjectivity, this singularity. A moment post-mass media, post-"news"... Mass media clogged us with information, reducing the "worlds" that could singularize it. I think what we are experiencing, creating, a global laboratory of affections, of ways of affecting and of being affected. Where does the personal sphere end? For instance, on Facebook, my students, or unknown people, or yet a politician, can follow and/or share a part of my private life, free moments of mine, sensations, impressions, subjective states... And this, in a level of massification that can be quite huge. This is the subjectivity in the age of mechanical reproduction... I like this experiment...

**VIRUS:** Another issue we would like to discuss with you is the control of the network, such as the use of the Google Docs tool by Fora do Eixo, for example. The issue of the ownership of huge databases, just like Facebook's, but also of the communication channels themselves, which can simply be stopped by their owners... They can make disappear in seconds the so called 'extended living'...

**Ivana Bentes:** This is a very important issue, because the same network in flow, decentralized and horizontal, serves both the new freedoms and new means of control. They are "docile" and flexible as well. Invisible.

Most people do not "see" this control of their own data, their profile, their consumption habits nor how we are being tracked and monitored, even with our consent. It is a new kind of

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<sup>10</sup> Rene Silva created, six years ago, the *Voz da Comunidade* (Community Voice) newspaper that retracts the reality of Morro do Adeus community, where he lives and studies, in the Complexo do Alemão, Rio de Janeiro.

<sup>11</sup> Complexo do Alemão is a groupment of slums in the North District of the city of Rio de Janeiro. It was occupied at 28 November, 2011 by military forces and the police, in a struggle against drugs traffickers.

<sup>12</sup> Brazillian cable TV network.

surveillance, consensual, participatory surveilling, which could be difficult to imagine before the internet.

The political issue has to do with the new global, post-internet struggles: the right to anonymity in the networks, the preservation of one's data, the right to not being tracked, to non criminalization of new social practices as sharing files, remixing, making knowledge go around freely...

The case of Google, YouTube and Facebook, is really worrying because we are the content of 2.0 economy! And we negotiated our subjectivity, our privacy, in exchange for tools, applications and "digital land"...

**VIRUS:** Would recent events in the Brazilian Ministry of Culture regarding copyright and creative commons<sup>13</sup> licenses indicate an attempt of gentrification similar to what we perceive within the physical city?

**Ivana Bentes:** Yes, we can relate the regression in digital lands to the issues of urban space. The assault on symbols of the free culture, the creation of barriers to the reform of the Copyright Law has to do with an attack to the "commons", to what is in common, to everything pointing to the constitution of the common: public assets, flexible licensing, widening of common uses (educational, cultural) of cultural assets. Regarding the urban space in Rio, we have been noticing an attempt to privatize public spaces or to urbanize them for the elite, or still to remove the poors from the postcards places in the city, on behalf of the "Beta Global City"<sup>14</sup>. This is a Rio de Janeiro, a laboratory of cognitive capitalism<sup>15</sup>, of cultural capitalism<sup>16</sup> that can benefit only the elite. This is a real risk in this pre-World Cup and pre-Olympic Games.

**VIRUS:** Ivana, a last question: concerning everything we talked here about, from your point of view does the future look promising?

**Ivana Bentes:** The future is under contest! I believe in the construction of alternative futures! We are running for and building futures; we are living at a time when the dynamic of fights - as the cultural capitalism and in the flow, in real time, the network capitalism and communism - overlap. All we can do is to create new habitable worlds, real or virtual ones, mental ones. Another "lands" and places... to live in.

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<sup>13</sup> See: <http://creativecommons.org>.

<sup>14</sup> A metropolises classes proposed by the Globalization and World Cities Study Group & Network (GaWC) to categorize global cities, based on different criteria. GLOBALIZATION and World Cities Study Group & Network (GaWC).

See: Globalization and World Cities Study Group & Network (GaWC). Available at: <<http://www.lboro.ac.uk/gawc/>> [Accessed 17 June 2011].

<sup>15</sup> Cognitive Capitalism, also called Informational Capitalism, is part of a broad theoretical which seeks to cover the processes of restructuration of the capitalist mode of production. It considers that, in today's world, work is mainly linked to cognitive skills, and information and knowledge are main sources of wealth.

<sup>16</sup> The American author Jeremy Rifkin, by creating the notion of Cultural Capitalism, refers to the idea of culture of access, which is wrapped by informational and communicational flows made possible by digital media, which fosters the standardization of ways of living through marketing activities, for example.

**V!RUS:** Ivana, it was a pleasure! Thank you for your time.

**Ivana Bentes:** I enjoyed the experience... we have started an "infinite conversation".