

**Giseli Vasconcelos, Tatiana Wells
and Cristina T. Ribas**

**TACTICAL ARCHIVES
CARTOGRAPHY: TWO
DECADES OF TACTICAL MEDIA
AND ART IN BRAZIL ENHANC-
ING A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE**

Abstract

This article narrates our work through archive and cartography to discuss a body of research that runs throughout our lives - as producers, developers, non-artists, artists, archivists, researchers. We have been engaging in networks that develop the internet, tactical media, and free knowledge since the beginning of 2000 in Brazil, in a series of festivals, projects, platforms and other forms of gatherings. A lot of this history is lost in databases and we have been putting our efforts together to bring this digital and material archive together, republishing, editing and re activating it. At the same time, it is inevitable that we bring our own perspective to building the archive, what we identify as a feminist perspective, a weaving of histories (*reinventeceduras*) and modes of production that are also a “maintenance” of technical infrastructure as a practice of care, connected to the reproduction of our own lives. Cartography is a concept and tool that allows for the gathering of the polyphony of the voices engaged, a cartography that is not total, opening up for collective analysis and for the intervention in the present and future.

Complete diagram: *Tactical Archives* (2018), https://midiatatica.desarquivo.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2020/02/diagrama_Santos-1.pdf

**APRJA Volume 9, Issue 1, 2020
ISSN 2245-7755**

CC license: ‘Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike’.



Cartography and archives can be approached in many different ways. With the work of Tactical Archives, we propose a visual cartography that (un)covers a constellation of publications, events, and festivals around tactical media, the internet and free knowledge in Brazil that took place between 2002 and 2018. The political dimension is also woven into this cartography, aiming to give substance towards a pluriversal future. We chose cartography as a research method because it allows for collective thinking, and because it works as a tool to open up a range of analyses and approaches to a particular Brazilian internet culture. We understand that individuals are not solely in the world and that subjectivity is not produced individually: it is produced collectively. In addressing ourselves to this history, we decided to approach it from our perspective — a feminist perspective.

In this work we engage with feminist narratives, for they hold the capacity to reclaim a technology of care and repair, a technology that we situate ourselves within. As Maria Puig de la Bellacasa maintains, the maintenance of technical infrastructure is a

practice of care, creativity, and the reproduction of life. We think of the archive in terms of recombination and extension, producing it as a poetic/political tactic. Design or curatorship, from a feminist perspective, confronts the discourses of mainstream techno-narratives (Wells), especially considering that much of the thought around singularity and care is often marginalized, cast aside in technological practice and theories. Hence, we invoke border epistemologies, a tradition in Latin American feminisms and decolonial theory, put forward by the work of Gloria Anzúza. Border epistemologies take inspiration not only from the hybridity that comes from Chicana and Latina geographical areas, but also a material experience through the lens of gender, identity, race, and colonialism.

This cartography and archive is a body of research that runs throughout our lives as producers, developers, non-artists, artists, archivists — people situated within digital production networks, the internet, tactical media, and free knowledge. In 2018, gathering at an exhibition in São Paulo where the online archive was created as an installation, we (Cristina, Giseli, Tatiana) realized it was

necessary to set up a larger gathering in order to share our experiences. We organized a laboratory for a group of ten women[1] who are active in the common groups and networks in Brazil. The idea was to cultivate broader collective experiences in relation to this production and nurture feminist perspectives that were not previously organized.

Tactical Archives is based on the idea of intellectual generosity, an idea that runs not only through the content (based on publications) but also presents a fundamental political commitment. The political and ethical attitude of sharing starts roughly at the beginning of the Brazilian internet in 1996. Led by the academic environment, it has shifted along with shifts in Brazilian political eras, and also influenced public Internet access. From the amalgamation of materials, research and literature we have designed visual cartography, a cloud of concepts, that is contrasted amid this digital garbage and enclosures that we have today — including censorship, alt-right captures (Gilroy), server seizures and deliberate *apagamentos* (erasures). Our main concern with the archiving, preservation (maintenance) and organizing of this data is, above all, a political preoccupation that is, indeed, about the present itself.

Archive is here thought of not as a procedure that aims only at organizing and preserving, but also as a way of creating forms of access and relation to a specific material and its histories. It was from this thinking that Cristina Ribas (in 2008) created the concept of 'de-archive' also to name the platform Desarquivo.org. It wants to endorse that as important as preserving is the act of reading, interpreting and other forms of agency that a specific content might ask for. Literally, moving something out of the place where it seats. This is also thought of in relation to the pace and to the other connections an operation of de-archiving launches: archive/de-archive is

done *extensively*, as well as *intensively*.

The personal experiences of the participants and the perception of their own life trajectories, from the political moment that Brazil was living through to the one it lives now, forms the *intensive* part of the cartography. The *extensive* part refers to the capacity of touching other lives and sharing the knowledge produced throughout these years. So, we see cartography as a tactical tool for the present, and as a means of examining technopolitics today. Looking at this production of digital culture, this fountain of free knowledge, allows us to reorganize the present in order to project new futures.

From the year 2000 onwards, collectives, self-organized spaces and individuals in Brazil have been producing a body of initiatives that put into practice the development of tactical media, inspired by marginal and hybrid perspectives that have sprung from counter-cultural associations and low-tech (re)inventions. This followed the media culture of the 1990s that has influenced digital arts practices — from the Zapatista appropriation of the internet, to the Western concept of tactical media. In the years that followed, unseen connections were created between the artistic production and digital culture in the realm of public policy, as well as proposals from arts and media groups, and social struggles in direct relation with vulnerable groups — for example, groups with no access to media at all (indigenous, *quilombolas*[2], peripheric groups in favelas and more).

Given the state of the internet today, with the massive rise in the use of corporate social networks and even the declaration by some regarding the death of the original internet's project (Geert Lovink and Ned Rossiter), it is time to join the concepts of art, media, network, internet and archive all together, and instigate a research method that looks at the possible effects and fallouts

of the past 20 years. It is not the intention of this text to delineate other genealogies than a provocation-ontology of a southern tactical media intervention, from a feminist and peripheric perspective.[3]

Tactical media has been a practice present in Brazil for a long time, evident by the strong previous network of free radios, free software movements, and *tecnogambiaras*[4] of daily existence in peripheral areas. The Tactical Media Brasil manifesto is a 'détournement' of the anthropophagic and the communist manifestos (Rosas et al).[5] It does not confront or assimilate, and as such, wants to do both. The festival took place as a collective occupation of an art space in the city of São Paulo, and was quite successful to make visible and popularize the tactical media concept.

From our past material experiences with media laboratories with recycled equipment (low-tech), collectively constructed by its own communities (*metareciclagem*),[6] through the times of operating free software programs and open licenses as autonomous spores of social networks (nomadic and decentralized), to the actual state of artificial (un)intelligence where apps and mobiles operate on neocolonial captures feeding up ever more capitalist and fascist algorithms, the question we ask ourselves is 'what forms did previous networks take to rethink institutional structures and create new forms of cooperation, public participation and artistic action?' The question recalls Clemens Apprich in his article "Remaking Media Practices – From Tactical Media to Post-media." He writes: "the practices of tactical media have not disappeared but have been incorporated to everyday life (post-media)." Where can we (re-) find such practices?

How to de-archive

We initially listed a large amount of digital content, which included websites, publications, discussion lists and wikis. This content enabled us to identify guidelines, so through this history we could draw along our own engagement in these practices. The substantial content for the visual cartography is based on a chronology that made sense for us and our personal histories, building up this archive dedicated to the compilation and restoration of the digital material. Our first step was to organize all publications related to the periods and then connect them with all other references associated with the books, such as concepts (tags) and reviews. Developed mostly by artists and activists, these publications have had a fundamental role in independent and academic research in Brazil.

Our departure was from two independent projects that accompanied us throughout this chronology, adding to our personal and collective production. The first is Midiatatica.info (2003), maintained by Giseli and Tatiana, which gathered the independent art and media projects that launched the tactical media movement in Brazil, sharing a list of publications related to the actions developed for open online access. The other is Desarquivo.org (2011), organized by Cristina, that was produced from another archive, the Archive of Emergency (2005), which organized printed material, projects, researches and key-words associated with Brazilian political contemporary art, art made collectively, community-oriented art or art that reclaimed public space. The concept of 'de-archive' was further developed in her master's research (2008). Both works are part of our personal/collective initiatives to host and share these productions, and as such are also offsprings of our militant online and offline lives.



The chronology we adopted at Arquivos Táticos corresponds to a timeline of nearly 20 years of the internet that we divide by four major periods, analyzing transformations that occurred from roughly three to three years, based on the Brazilian arts, media, and technology networks and their political and social context. It starts from the beginning of the web 2.0 when participatory tools such as IRC, wikis and discussion lists were the main tools, fomenting effective exchanges of information and therefore essential to the launching of new research methods, festivals, encounters, and public debates. At that time, magazines, media articles and blogs announced the tendencies of the internet in Brazil, as Giseli notes:

At the interstices [...] some connected networks provoked situations in the social and political domain that mediated behaviors in the digital platforms, politics for the internet and of access, besides politics for the development of culture, aggregating the experiences of mobilization and of innovation of

technologies that were directly connected and attentive to the cultural behavior of Brazilians. (Vasconcelos)

Beginnings and endings

These networks and connected works around digital literacy, recycling hardware, free software, tactical media and critical art did not go unnoticed by progressive politicians that started to be elected around the continent (Evo Morales in Bolivia, Rafael Correa in Ecuador, Lula in Brazil). Especially when many independent groups, hackers and artists started to collaborate (not without internal ruptures) with some governmental projects, to generate initiatives addressing policies for digital culture.[7]

Different genealogies can be traced for this narrative of a possible Brazilian political techno-culture. In our case, the genealogy starts in the period between 2002 to 2003 with the Ação Global dos Povos (People's Global Action or PGA) influence on local media activists through protests such as

the one against ALCA in São Paulo (2001). Simultaneously, the horizontal and politically diverse World Social Forum was being conceived in the south of Brazil. The decade gave rise to festivals that in turn sparked radical and creative uses of technologies such as *Mídia Tática Brasil* (Brazilian Tactical Media, 2003), *Digitofagia* (Digitophagy, 2004), *Submidialogias* (Submidialogies, 2005-2010), platforms such as *Estúdio Livre*[8] and *Desarquivo.org* (2005), hundreds of *Encontros de Conhecimentos Livres* (Free Knowledge Encounters, 2005-2010), and other intersections of activist, arts and media production including immersions, performances and collective creation from libertarian inspiration.[9]

From 2006 to 2009, dissertations and theses engaged with the experience from previous years, marking a transition to the second decade of internet development and thinking in Brazil. This moment also saw the beginning of private social networks and the dissemination of cellphones in the country. Independent initiatives gained traction with programs such as *Digital Culture* (from the Ministry of Culture) and corporate institutional support, mostly from mobile private communication companies (Vasconcelos). From 2010 to 2013, we see the transition from Lula's government to Dilma's mandate. The Ministry of Culture chosen by this third round of PT in government was Ana Buarque de Holanda, who took off the Creative Commons license from the Ministry site – a mark of the achievements of the previous mandate of Gilberto Gil, generating a tinder for a series of changes regarding the support of the federal government to the digital culture networks. It was around this time that Facebook became the most accessed network in Brazil.

In the final period in our cartography, from 2014 to 2018, the Brazilian government approves the *Marco Civil da Internet* (Internet Civil Framework),[10] a remarkable

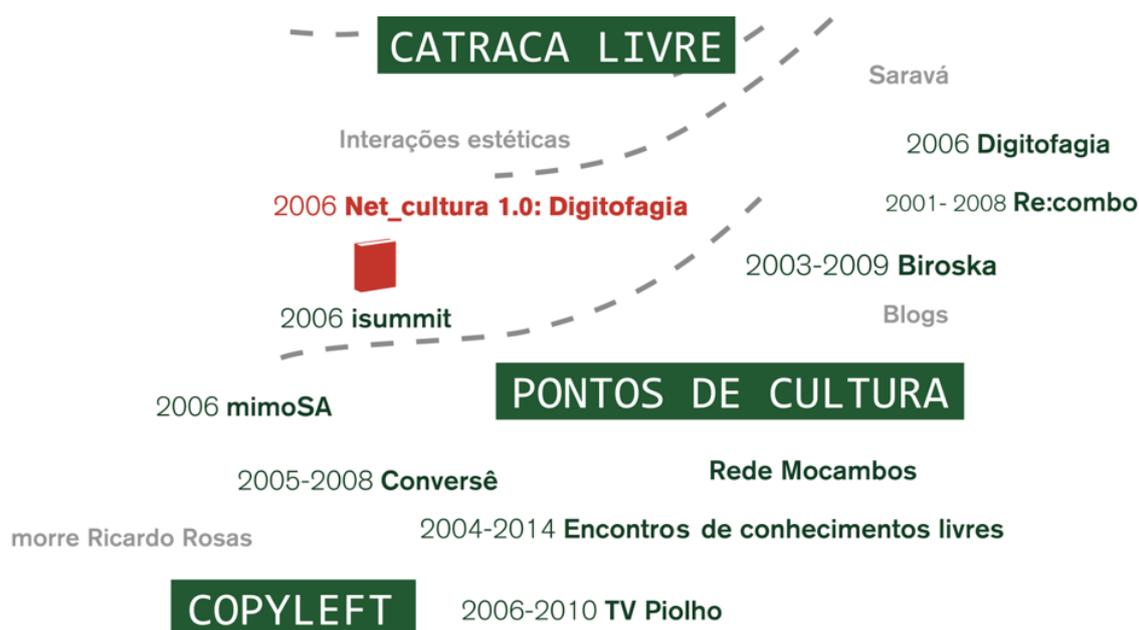
bottom-up collaborative process. During this time, smartphones spread throughout Brazil, and Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp proliferated, becoming the new organisational platforms for civil marches such as *Jornadas de Junho* (June Jornades), and *Primavera Secundarista* (The Secondary Spring). The effervescent streets and local mobilizations also signaled a growing disenchantment in the self-made tools, perhaps signaling the beginning of the end of free social networks.

Of course, our focus and problematization of these four periods do not intend to encompass the entirety of online networks from the year 2000 to today in Brazil. Perceptual consciousness gives a predisposition to constituting consciousness (Martinez 229). As such, we prioritize our participation and history within and among groups, projects, and artist collectives as escape routes for reflections around cartography and counter-cartography, archives and de-archiving as a visual collective process, considering the perspective of co-production and articulations between multiple bodies of knowledge, subjectivity, aesthetic production and media.

Reinventeceduras

Another acute part of Tactical Archives is the awareness of the need to de-archive things such as domain names, hosting servers, and external backups. As time goes by, we see documentation disappearing from the web referring to digital addresses that don't exist anymore. Therefore, we started to call this work *reiventeceduras* (reinvent/reweaving) as patches of work, projects and content would be found isolated from each other, works without context.

From a feminist perspective, as ways of thinking and bringing to practice this weaving, we have taken inspiration from feminist



Latin authors as mentioned above, as well as authors situated in studies of subjectivity (Rolnik). Manuela Zechner, Austrian theorist/scholar based in Barcelona, is one of the friends we have been reading. She has been writing about collective processes, care, and micropolitics, generating subsidies, frameworks, and tools to investigate this history. Zechner, attentive to how we can critically reconfigure social reproduction and reproductive labor, refuses to see a separation between forms of thinking networks and our own subjective cartographies and our productive modes. She writes:

So what of the seeming disconnect between the network forms that structure our work, relations and economies, and our needs and desires to support, nourish and sustain our lives? Beyond and despite the long list of grievances against networks and their alienating dynamics – as well as beyond certain hyped affirmations of networks that have largely passed – as our everyday relational bases, networks are also spaces of life and of care. The network

is the paradigmatic form not just of economic and social organisation in neoliberalism, but particularly in situations of precarity and crisis, where new forms of conviviality, association and organisation are invented despite being attacked (by neoliberalism). (186)

The co-engendering between our immediate living relationships and our artistic production, software, and media (amongst other day-to-day and global events) produce our subjectivity. The composition of networks, and their way of functioning, have to be directed ethically. The technopolitics that govern our lives and relationships need to be thought of in contrast and opposition to what we have created in the past, and what makes sense to continue developing today — even to what we have left behind, that we can recover in order to go on. Our intention as artists, researchers and archivists is about creating open-ended narratives and making place-memory devices for the sharing of cultural knowledge: a form of re-appropriation for new generations.

The new productive relations that were being rehearsed from the year 2000 onwards did not defend themselves as total collectivization escaping capture (after all, collaboration and participation were also ‘pimped’ by cognitive capitalism); or, secondly, a reductionist affirmation of a certain process of media immediately as ‘art’ without mapping the complex richness of these unimaginable articulations. There is a production of value that happens at the singularity of the articulations, that occurs at the ethical symphony of our networks. The listening of our experiences — what was left behind — can now be reactivated to interfere in the present, projecting futures.

Ancestrality, cyclic narratives inspired by radical-border pedagogies, and “open wounds” (Anzaldúa) are all markers of our collective history, dramatic and intense, tools for both connection and disconnection, informing the centrality of our body-politics. As such, the reconfiguration of Western concepts such as tactical media and cyberfeminism (that we see that Brazilian feminists were reluctant to adopt, as Tatiana Wells wrote in her text “Cyberfeminism never arrived in Latin America”— can be seen through the immersive formats and ideas of some of these neglected, remade and invented concepts such as technoxamanism[11] and digitophagy.

Particular subjectivities that, most often, abandon completely the use of high-tech gadgets that have become so popular amongst maker spaces and ‘fab labs’, concentrating instead on low tech, techno *gambiarras* radios, artisan production of zines and, of course, gigs and parties. There were many of these immersive occasions, of people cooking and living together, invoking other symbolic systems such as alliances and poetic fissures, precariously building impermanent structures.[12]

The concepts generated from initiatives developed by networks such as indymedia, midiatática, metareciclagem, submidialogia, coro coletivo, and tecnoxamanism have helped to build up the tissue of this cartographic *reinventeceturas*. Concepts such as gambiarra, technological appropriation, intellectual generosity, recombination, sevirismo, digitofagia, amongst others were being developed at a certain moment in time corresponding to specific works listed in the bibliography referenced in our archive.

It is crucial to note that although a large number of initiatives were independent and built collaboratively, following the tradition of the free software communities and communal participation, sometimes public and institutional funds have also helped to build a database of works that, for the most part, were not sold but digitally distributed and disseminated through the internet in the form of licenses such as copyleft, creative commons, free licenses or even poetic licenses.

Together with the narratives that have been produced, we look as well for material forms of archiving (resources, servers, forms of agency) thinking today conditions. The self-sustainability could not stop demanding for the public structures that were once there. So we ask ourselves which assemblages do these practices institute and differ from in terms of forms and norms to corporate media and networks? And how can those narratives transform and interact with current experiences in the field of art, activism and media?

This cartography, as an ongoing process, will then keep on feeding up forms of producing and approaching to this tactical media stories, attentive to forms of telling and perspectives (racial, class, etc.) that are still emerging, building up the polyphony of this experience and producing knowledge. As feminists, we refuse the narratives that privilege the experience of men in this story, looking for forms of narrative production that

can consider absences and disjunctures, while we understand that it is not necessary to reproduce gender polarisation when we speak of feminism. Recreating our networks, which effectively were never decomposed, we claim for more weaving together of the past and the future, more visual regimes that question, and more theories and practices that inspire and guide.

Notes

[1] Adriana Veloso, Fabiane Borges, Milena Durante, Tininha Lhanos, Inês Nin, Sue Nhamandu, Elisa Ximenes and the three of us.

[2] “Quilombo” (Portuguese pronunciation: [ki'lõbu]; from the Kimbundu word kilombo, “war camp”, a Brazilian hinterland settlement founded by African descendants including the quilombolas, or maroons, and others sometimes called Carabali. Most of the inhabitants of quilombos (called quilombolas) were escaped slaves.

[3] Tactical Media studies such as Rita Raley’s book *Tactical Media* and Eric Klutenberg’s *Legacies of Tactical Media*, reflect mostly on Western and US practices of tactical media (highly mediated by digital technologies) or from a western perspective (confrontational and overcoming the “problem” of temporality, even as they take the streets). The intersectionality of worldwide tactical media works is a research yet to be done.

[4] “Gambiarra is an improvised amendment to a dysfunctional artefact, normally by the means of its combination with another object. One of the most exemplary gambiarras is the use of wire wool in TV antennas

to compensate deficient signal reception.” (Menotti, 2010)

[5] Tactical Media Brasil was a festival organized by Tatiana Wells, Giseli Vasconcelos and Ricardo Rosas in 2003 as part of the 4th N5M festival. Rosas, Ruiz and Wells write about the specificities of a Brazilian media practices and the process of organizing the festival *Mídia Tática Brasil*, a “call to a new anthropophagy”.

[6] The ‘metareciclagem movement’ is a pedagogical media experiment and a decade of (low-)technological appropriations Site offline, online backup on GitHub. See <https://github.com/MetaReciclagem/MetaReciclagem.github.io>.

[7] The term “digital culture” when adopted by public policies in Brazil as the mainstream narrative for local new media projects, in a way, de-materializes the pertinence of a “tactics” in the sense of confrontation, re-doing from diverse technological possibilities and knowledge, from what you have.

[8] Estúdio Livre was a pioneer of Brazilian digital culture. In addition to the transmission of online video (streaming) and tutorials of free software multimedia production tools, even before the emergence of Youtube, an innovative platform with Acervo Livre, an online repository with multimedia media files from all the Encontros de Conhecimentos Livres (Free Knowledge Encounters) held in the first points of culture from 2005. The platform is still online but deactivated. See <http://estudiolivre.org/tiki-index.php>.

[9] Some writers identify at that moment – beginning of the year 2000 - the inauguration, and also a certain type of articulation between art and activism, curating the term

“artivism” (Monachesi). Most of the websites are currently offline, but Arquivos táticos brought back to the internet some publications related to these events: *Digitofagia book*, *Digitofagia Cookbook* (a compilation of the festivals discussion list), *Mídia Tática Brasil poster*, *Submidialogia#3 book* and the *Rizoma* series, from 2002 to 2007.

[10] Known as the “Internet Constitution”, law n° 12.965/2014 Marco Civil da Internet regulates the use of the Internet in Brazil by the establishment of consensual principles, guarantees and rights to whoever uses the net, as much as rules for the transparent role of the state in it. Conceived by public debate in 2009 the text was an open collaborative project between different actors of society and the text turned into the law.

[11] Fabi Borges calls the Technoxamanist interventions as “Ontology of Waste” (Sterling).

[12] “The decomposition of social rights and public institutions in times of accumulation by crisis and austerity make it urgent to build networks while at the same time ‘hacking’ them with care. Is there another way of thinking the network on the horizon, to do with the ways in which we reproduce our lives in relation to each other, in the context of our current impasse?” (Zechner 186)

Works cited

Anzaldúa, Gloria “Mestiza consciousness, and ‘feminism of difference.’” *Revista Estudos Feministas*, vol. 13 no. 3, 2005. http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0104-026X2005000300014. Accessed 1st May 2020.

Aprich, Clemens. “Remaking Media Practices – From Tactical Media To Post-media.” *Metamute*, 14 February 2013. <https://www.metamute.org/editorial/lab/remaking-media-practices—tactical-media-to-post-media>. Accessed 1st May 2020.

de la Bellacasa, Maria Puig. *Matters of Care*. University of Minnesota Press, 2017.

Gilroy, Paul. “Civilizacionismo, a “alt-right” e o futuro da política antirracista: um informe da Grã-Bretanha,” *Revista ECO-Pós* vol. 21, no. 3, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.29146/eco-pos.v21i3.22525>. Accessed 1st May 2020.

Klutenberg, Eric. *Legacies of Tactical Media*. Institute of Network Cultures, 2011.

Lovink, Geert; and Ned Rossiter. *Organisation after Social Media*. Colchester. Minor compositions, 2018.

Martinez, Jacqueline M. “Culture, Communication, and Latina Feminist Philosophy: Toward a Critical Phenomenology of Culture.” *Hypatia*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2014, pp. 221-236. doi:10.1111/hypa.12061.

Menotti, Gabriel. “Gambiarra and The Prototyping Perspective.” June 2010. https://freeze.sh/_/2010/gambiarra/#. Accessed 1st May 2020.

Monachesi, Juliana. "A explosão do a(r) tivismo." April 6, 2003. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/fsp/mais/fs0604200305.htm>. Accessed 1st May 2020.

Raley, Rita. *Tactical Media*. University of Minnesota Press, 2009.

Ribas, Cristina T. *Arquivo/Desarquivo: condições movimento monotipia*. MA dissertation. Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, 2008. <http://www.ppgartes.uerj.br/discentes/dissertacoes/dismestcristinari-bas2008.pdf>. Accessed 1st May 2020.

Rosas, Ricardo, Tatiana Wells and Ricardo Ruiz. "Digitofagizando." *Revista Global*, 2004, pp. 51-53. <https://midiatatica.desarquivo.org/2002-2005/digitofagizando/>. Accessed 1st May 2020.

Rolnik, Suely. *Cartografia sentimental: Transformações Contemporâneas do Desejo*. Sulina / Editora da UFRGS, 2011.

Sterling, Bruce. "Brazilian technoshamans", *Wired Magazine*, Jun 16, 2017. <https://www.wired.com/beyond-the-beyond/2017/06/brazilian-technoshamans/> Accessed 1st May 2020.

Vasconcelos, Giseli. *Antes, agora: O que há de vir - memórias e conexões entre arte e cultura de internet*. Unpublished master thesis. Universidade Federal Fluminense (UFF), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2018.

Zechner, Manuela. "A politics of network-families? Precarity, crisis and careful experimentations," in Plotegher, Paolo, Manuela Zechner and Bue Hansen. *Nanopolitics Handbook*. Minor composition/ Autonomedia, 2010.

Wells, Tatiana. "O ciberfeminismo nunca chegou à América Latina" *Labrys Estudos feministas*, 2005. <https://www.labrys.net.br/labrys7/cyber/tatiana.htm>. Accessed 1st May 2020.