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The Feminist Agenda and the Brazilian Art System between the 1960s and the 1970s

Abstract

The reception of second-wave feminist guidelines in the Brazilian artistic system has been a recurring theme of inquiry in feminist historiography because of its peculiarity: a country that propagated its international image as a place of delight and sexual experience, but crystallised in conservative and colonial values, in conjunction with a highly experimental artistic scene, but under the yoke of violence from a civil-military dictatorship. To show what kind of relationship was established between some of the cultural agents of the period and the feminist agenda that arrived in the Brazilian scene, this essay takes some case studies that point out the strategies and negotiations regarding feminism, even though those concerned were not militants.

Keywords: Latin America, feminism, Brazil, art system

A very specific scene to “receive” the feminist word

On 14 April 1971, the lobby of the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro saw the launch of the book *The Female Mystique*, by the American feminist journalist and activist Betty Friedan, which had recently been translated by Editora Vozes (directed by the editor and feminist Rose Marie Muraro).¹ First published in 1963 in the United States, Friedan’s study revealed a veritable epidemic of female dissatisfaction with the post-war North American conservative project. The so-called “American way of life” implied a return

1 Feminist editor and writer. Mostly connected to a libertarian feminist Christian militancy, Muraro was an important figure to non-institutional politics to women rights in Brazil.

of middle-class white women to the nuclear family model – and the “shock bomb” was such that the book, initially ignored, and then intellectually rejected by the (male) critics of the time, became a kind of “Bible” to second-wave feminism over the years.²

The eight years that separate the original publication from the translation is not something peculiar in the Brazilian editorial and cultural context, especially with regard to material of a feminist nature. The book *The Second Sex* by the French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir, for example, released in 1949 and having a direct influence on Friedan’s text, was only translated into Portuguese in 1960 by art critic Sergio Milliet. Both cases demonstrate the fragility of Brazilian publishing and the belated interest in the theme.³

In addition to the considerable delay in translation, Friedan’s reception in Brazil for the launch of her book is of interest here, due to its symptomatic character as a political thermometer. The particularities of her reception will

2 “Since its publication, Friedan’s book has been castigated not only by antifeminists who describe it as anti-family, but by feminists and other liberal thinkers dismayed by, among other things, Friedan’s homophobia, her failure to take men to task for their complicity in the repression of women and her blindness to the experiences of women outside the white middle class, who labored in factories, secretarial berths and domestic service. More recently, feminist writers like Linda Hirshman (‘Get to Work’) and Leslie Bennetts (‘The Feminine Mistake’), alarmed by the (statistically questionable) trend of high-powered women leaving careers to return to the homes from which Friedan helped free them, have reclaimed her as radical muse”, R. Traister, “Mad Women”, *New York Times*, 23 January 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/23/books/review/Traister-t.html> [accessed 15 March 2022].

3 Joana Vieira Borges comments on the perspective of Brazilian research concerning Beauvoir’s book: “Despite being commonly mentioned in the speeches as one of the key readings carried out in this period of engagement with the feminist cause, some of the interviewees do not place *The Second Sex* as the most relevant reading, since they were experiencing other situations at the time of reading. Qualifying it as ‘sick’, ‘boring’, ‘cerebral’ and ‘too psychoanalytical’, certain readers did not attribute to Beauvoir’s text the status of a ‘historic landmark’ for the feminist movement. Some speeches presented the first impressions of reading *The Second Sex* as a difficult text to apprehend: some started reading and did not finish; others say they didn’t like it, but that as time passed, they returned to reading and felt ‘enchanted’; and there are still those who have denied any and all influence of the text on their lives. However, most insisted on recognizing the relevance, pioneering spirit and uniqueness of the author and the text for the international feminist debate. It is necessary to pay attention to the fact that not only intellectuals and researchers had access to Beauvoir’s arguments about the formation of female identity. Over time, and due digestion of the author’s extensive arguments throughout the two volumes, other women, both researchers and laypeople, made use of her speech, sometimes more faithfully, sometimes more distantly”, J.V. Borges, “Da (des)Construção do ‘Clássico: O Segundo Sexo e Mística Feminina no Brasil e na Argentina”, in: *Seminário Internacional Fazendo Gênero 10 (Anais Eletrônicos)*, Florianópolis, 2013, http://www.fg2013.www2017.eventos.dype.com.br/resources/anais/20/1381836121_ARQUIVO_joana-vieira-borges.pdf [accessed 10 February 2022].

help us to understand the unique relationship between second-wave feminist agendas and the Brazilian artistic system⁴ in the 1960s and 1970s, a period marked by both cultural effervescence and political violence.

It is important to note that the time of release of Friedan's work was during one of the most bloodthirsty periods of the civil-military dictatorship, established in Brazil on 31 March 1964 and ending only on 5 March 1985. Profoundly violent and reactionary, the policy of the civil-military regime was also disastrous from an economic point of view. It weakened the country's financial structures over the years with an immediate economic plan and "draining" of natural and monetary wealth, plunging the country into a situation of hunger and unequal concentration of income.⁵ The year 1971 was General Emilio Garrastazu Médici's third year of term, a violent governance with censorship, imprisonment and torture of those resistant and disruptive to the regime, with methodological support from the North American government of Nixon – a period that took the nickname of "Years of Lead".

In this context, Brazilian feminism found a very specific shape.⁶ The majority of feminist militants declared themselves as feminists while participating in the resistance against the military state, aligning themselves with left-wing organisations and connected with the progressive sectors of the Church, which was one of the most radical forces against the military regime – Rose Marie Muraro is an example of this.

Nevertheless, in the core of these left-wing movements, the general anguish and concern about the absence of a democratic state subjugated women's claims in favour of a political struggle focused on issues of a so called "greater urgency" – and feminist topics were painted as a bourgeois problem.⁷

4 On the use of the art system as a social category to understand the art world, see: N. Heinrich, *Le triple jeu de l'art contemporain. Sociologie des arts plastiques*, Paris, 1998; R. Moulin, *L'artiste, l'institution et le marché*, Paris, 1992; H. Becker, *Art Worlds*, Berkeley, 1982; P. Bourdieu, *Les règles de l'art*, Paris, 1992.

5 For further information, see: C. Lessa, *A estratégia de desenvolvimento 1974-1976: sonho e fracasso*, UNICAMP. IE, 1998; J.P. Macarini, *A política econômica da ditadura militar no limiar do "milagre" brasileiro: 1967/69*, IE/UNICAMP, 2000, 99.

6 Professor Maria Lygia Quartim de Moraes comments on this particular period in a footnote: "In the seventies, it was agreed to distinguish two currents within the women's movement: the first of them would be that of socialist and/or Marxist feminists, for whom 'women's liberation' was closely linked to the emancipation of workers and the struggle for socialism. The second current, 'sexist' feminism, favoured the category of sex (or gender) as an analytical axis and flag of struggle. Roughly speaking, it can be said that in France, Italy and Brazil socialist feminism assumed hegemony while, in the United States, it is the 'sexist' current that assumes the forefront", M.L.Q. de Moraes, *Vinte anos de Feminismo, livre docente thesis*, Department of Sociology of the Institute of Philosophy and Human Sciences, State University of Campinas, 1996, p. 3.

7 As the problem of the pejorative perspective of the left movements to the feminist agenda is something that has already been investigated, not only in Brazilian history, but as an

But let's return to publishing. The translation by Muraro⁸ included among its strategies a series of interviews and meetings, as well as the official launch⁹ of the book in the two great economic and cultural capitals of the country at the time, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo.¹⁰ What draws our attention in this

important subject in social studies, here are some references: H. Hartmann, *The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive union*, in: *The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism*, ed. L. Sargent, London, 1981, pp. 1–43; M. Cisne, *Feminismo e consciência de classe no Brasil*, São Paulo, 2015; C.R.J. Pinto, "Feminismo, história e poder", *Revista de sociologia e política*, 2010, 18, no. 36, pp. 15–23; M. Rago, *Epistemologia feminista, gênero e história*, in: *Masculino, feminino, plural*, eds. J. Pedro, M. Grossi, Florianópolis, 1998; H.I.B. Saffioti, *A Mulher na Sociedade de Classes: mito e realidade*, Petrópolis, 1976.

8 "In 1971, Editora Vozes celebrated its seventieth anniversary, and the idea was to celebrate it with everything. [...] I wanted to invite either Nornan Brown, who was very successful at the time, Michel Foucault, or else Betty Friedan. Mother Cristina, from São Paulo, gave me Betty Friedan's book to read, and I liked it so much that the translation was ready. I spoke to her on the phone, and she offered to come just for the ticket, the stay and whatever happened, mainly [...]. *O Pasquim* did a preparatory interview with me. There were Glauber Rocha, Paulo Francis, Ziraldo and the whole gang. That's when I realised what feminism really meant to men. I'm sure I 'joined' them, because they didn't know anything about the links between women's oppression and the economy... They only thought about the fear that the new women caused them. This was enough to get the attention of all the media. When Betty Friedan arrived, things exploded. Journalists climbed trees in front of the house where she was staying. [...] Those were the hardest times of the dictatorship. No matter how much I warned her that the things I said would compromise me and not her, she always said that she could say whatever she wanted because she was a free American citizen. And I'd be damned. [...] She spoke ill of the military and told Millôr Fernandes to fuck himself in a memorable interview with the macho men of *Pasquim*. When she left, not a stone was left unturned. She was very ugly and aggressive, and from then on, she became part of the Brazilian collective unconscious as the model of woman to those others, who wanted to remain feminine, should not imitate", R.M. Muraro, *Os seis meses em que fui homem*, 3rd edition, Rio de Janeiro, 1991, pp. 16–18.

9 Betty came to a double launch in the country: at the Museum of Modern Art, in Rio de Janeiro, and at the Mário de Andrade Municipal Library, in São Paulo [...] A busy schedule would complement her stay in Brazil. She met the women who marched in '64, for family, God and property, visited favelas, where she would meet 32-year-old grandmothers and women who supported their families alone, causing her to soon relate to the residents of black American communities. She met torturers, had lunch with big businessmen in the area of communication such as Roberto Civita (Grupo Abril) and Adolpho Bloch (Bloch Editores). With the latter, she became friends when she found out that the families were from the same place in Ukraine, A.R.F. Duarte, "Betty Friedan – morreu a feminista que estremeceu a América", *Revista Estudos Feministas*, 2006, 14, no. 01, p. 291.

10 "In São Paulo, the launch took place on 16 April at the Mario de Andrade library, in the centre of the capital, around 6:30 pm. Before the autograph session, Friedan, who was staying at the old Hotel Jaraguá, opposite the library, received local journalists, and debated with Brazilian writers the themes of womanhood, namely Lygia Fagundes

myriad of events, over half a century ago, are the misogynistic rejections and disqualifications offered to both Friedan and Muraro, for years on end, mainly by the left-wing press, summarised by researcher Joana Vieira Borges as follows:

“When researching the newspapers *Jornal do Brasil*, *Correio da Manhã*, *Opinião* and *Diário de Notícias*, and issues of *Veja* magazine, published between 1970 and 1985, we found a considerable number of references to Betty Friedan, especially in 1971. Often referred to as the ‘leader of American feminism’ or ‘feminism’s most important theoretician’, there are also a number of pejorative adjectives used to characterise her appearance and personality: ‘ugly’, ‘loose’, ‘aggressive’, ‘speaks in a loud voice’, ‘gets excited easily’, ‘arrogant’, ‘exaggerated’, ‘when she speaks, she gestures a lot, it seems she wants to fight’, ‘angry’, ‘sexually inappropriate’, ‘unfriendly’, and ‘infamous’ to name a few examples. If before the author’s visit periodicals limited themselves to associating her name with the organisation of a ‘sex strike’ and the ‘burning of bras’, scheduled for 26 August 1970 in the USA, after 1971, they began to follow her steps and statements and, most of the time, described her conception of feminist struggles and her appearance”.¹¹

From this misogynistic critical reaction referring to Friedan’s passage through Brazil, the one offered by the newspaper *O Pasquim*¹² stands out. And not only because of the nature of the informative vehicle and its relevance among the leftist and counter-culture movements in Brazil, but also because of its level of mockery in relation to Friedan, exclusively – even though no woman was unharmed by the jokes, irony and provocation of the “boys” from *Pasquim*.

Let us remember at this point that humour is not just a device for leisure and enjoyment, but it is an indication of the social fissures of a society.¹³ More

Telles, Maria de Lourdes Teixeira and Lourdes Bernardes”, “A líder prega apoio à greve”, *O Estado de São Paulo*, 16 April 1971, p. 16.

11 J.V.B., *Trajetórias e Leituras Feministas no Brasil e na Argentina (1960-1980)*, PhD thesis in history, Center for Philosophy and Human Sciences, Federal University of Santa Catarina, 2013, p. 08.

12 *O Pasquim* was an independent weekly publication, published between 1969 and 1991, founded by cartoonists Jaguar and Ziraldo, and journalists Tarso de Castro and Sérgio Cabral, and counted on its team figures such as journalists Paulo Francis and Ruy Castro, and cartoonists Henfill and Millôr Fernandes, to name just a few. It was initially a publication of a behavioural nature, addressing varied subjects and curiosities – however, with the tightening of censorship and the arrests carried out by the civil-military dictatorship, the weekly newspaper gradually became politicised, transforming itself into a symbol of resistance against state violence and opposition to democracy, M. Pinheiro, *Rato de Redação - Sig e a História do Pasquim*, São Paulo, 2022.

13 “The joke or witticism – even if the thought it contains is not tendentious, that is, serves merely theoretical intellectual interests – is actually never without bias; it pursues the second aim of helping the thought along by strengthening it [Vergrößerung] and securing it against rational criticism. Here again the joke reveals its original nature in its opposition to an inhibiting and restrictive power – in this case critical judgement”, S. Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, translated by J. Crick, New York, 2003, p. 149.

than a strategy of political criticism, the intertwined content between sender and receiver in humour is an index of the values present at different contingencies, and is perpetuated as a memory, often traumatic.¹⁴ Hildete Pereira, a feminist activist from the 1960s, in conversation with researcher Crescencio, recalls that “the great beginning of the indignation is over the heavy joke with Rose Marie Muraro, saying that she was ugly and all, having a scythe fight in a dark room, that was very unpleasant, it shocked us. But we didn’t have a political answer to that, regarding the issue of humour”.

The misogynistic episode between Friedan and *O Pasquim* denotes the nature of the problems faced by Brazilian feminist militancy. These adversities extend it to other authors of the genre, such as Rose Marie Muraro, Friedan’s interlocutor in Brazil, but also to Heloneida Studart, militant journalist from the left, feminist, politician and friend of Muraro and Carmen da Silva, columnist in the women’s magazine *Claudia*.¹⁵ All of these authors are the ones that the Brazilian artistic class at the time consumed; therefore, the public discussion offered to them reflects the perspective of this class in relation to the feminist archetype.

The archetype of the feminist in Brazilian version (some of many)

Muraro, for example, with her books *The Woman in the Construction of the Future World* and *The Sexual Liberation of the Woman*, from 1966 and 1971, respectively, discuss the changes in the consumer society and the new possible role of women. In addition to marking its historical place as one of the feminists’

14 “The joke will allow us to turn to good account those ridiculous features in our enemy that the presence of opposing obstacles would not let us utter aloud or consciously; again, that is, it will get around restrictions and open up sources of pleasure that have become inaccessible. It will, further, bribe the listener with his own gain in pleasure into taking our side without probing very far, just as on other occasions we ourselves, bribed by an innocuous joke, usually overestimate the content of a statement if it is wittily expressed. Our language has a saying, ‘to have the laugh on one’s side’, which hits the mark exactly”, Freud, op. cit., p. 123.

15 *Claudia* magazine from the Abril Publishing House is a Brazilian publication that, since 1961, is dedicated to female readers. The editions have been the object of feminist studies for decades, since it presents women’s issues of the times, in a mix of fashion, behaviour, health and eventually, feminism. See: D.S. Buitoni, *A mulher de papel: a representação da mulher pela imprensa feminina brasileira*, São Paulo, 2009; C.B. Pin-sky, J.M. Pedro, eds., *Nova história das mulheres no Brasil*, São Paulo, 2012; M.P. Costa. *Entre sonhos e consumo: as representações femininas na Revista Claudia (1961-1985)*, MA thesis in history, Faculty of Sciences and Letters, Universidade Estadual Paulista, Assis, 2009.

key authors (occasionally also as an object of mockery¹⁶ by both the conservative wing of society and the so-called progressive, left wing),¹⁷ Muraro was able to negotiate her public image in a more fluid way, as the Brazilian researcher Anna Maria Barabará Pinheiro notes.

“The main points raised in ‘Women’s Sexual Liberation’ are exposed in the printed media, contributing to building of the image of ‘a feminist who is friendly to men’ [...] and ‘a feminist without ulterior motives’ [...]. It is worth noting that this image was often reinforced by Rose herself, according to the statement she gave to the Lux newspaper: ‘I think men are admirable, I always got along very well with them. I was married, very happily married, today I am separated, well separated... I like being a woman, being the mother of my five children: I like being flirted with’.”¹⁸

Muraro’s speech – which today may sound strange to us in light of the unfolding concepts of womanhood, gender, desire and beauty – is extremely consistent with the current thinking of her Brazilian contemporaries in relation to feminist guidelines.¹⁹ Even though there was a feeling of dissatisfaction

16 Still with the *Pasquim*, during an interview with Muraro prior to Friedan’s arrival, the author and her interlocutors (journalists Paulo Francis, Sergio Cabral and filmmaker Glauber Rocha) spoke about the Oedipus complex, and in the best example of the practice of interrupting female explanations, Muraro showed her displeasure, and received the following response from Glauber: “I think the problem with the interview is that you are in the middle of men wanting to take a very big man. You better stay as a woman and things will get better” (*O Pasquim*, 07 April 1971, 91, p. 04). Muraro was also the subject of parody by cartoonist Millôr Fernandes in issue 170 of 9 October 1972, p. 21, and mockery by the cartoonist Jaguar in issue 287 of 6 January 1975, p. 12, during an interview with actress Cidinha Campos. In issue 295 of 1 March 1975, in Elice Munerato’s review of the play by the aforementioned actress Cidinha, once again the names of Muraro, Friedan and Heloneida Studart are invoked as synonyms of “unloved feminists”. This attitude recurs once again, in Muraro’s interview in issue 623 of 10 June 1981, with Chico’s illustration that places her in a position of an ugly, second-rate woman. Interestingly, Heloneida Studart, who systematically collaborated with the weekly, was a lesser target for jokes

17 R. Soihet, “Preconceitos nas charges de O Pasquim: mulheres e a luta pelo controle do corpo”, *ArtCultura*, 2007, 9, no. 14, pp. 39–53.

18 A.M.B. Pinheiro, “O Feminismo Midiático de Rose Marie Muraro”, *Seminário Internacional Fazendo Gênero 11 & 13th Women’s Worlds Congress (Anais Eletrônicos)*, Florianópolis, 2017, p. 06.

19 In two journalistic fragments about feminist developments, with an interval of 8 years between them, it is possible to verify that, even though the guidelines are validated in the scope of social justice, there was the counterpart that feminists should maintain their femininity: “After the issues of international interest discussed during the Conference, that charity party was, in a way, like proof that women can be feminists and, at the same time, remain charmingly feminine”, *Correio da Manhã*, 25 June 1961, p. 03; “Many feminist militants are in fact violent and even seem to be repelling other women than congregating around a cause, hundreds learn karate, make violent pamphlets against ‘male chauvinism’”, *Correio da Manhã*, 27 November 1969, no pagination.

with the limited possibilities of existence (the “evil without a name”, as Friedan called it) and the trivialisation of gender violence, the socialisation of a traditional femininity was still a very strong driving force. It coordinated attempts to constrain women within an ideal model of femininity²⁰ – an aspect that allowed them to move socially and obtain certain privileges.

The hyper-valuation of female beauty as a primordial element of the sign “woman” for this generation²¹ (but not only) was something systematically reproduced by Muraro when commenting about Friedan on several occasions, in a disastrous attempt to distance the archetypal figure of the feminist from adjectives such as ugly, badly loved, frustrated, etc. Such strategy is just one of the countless contradictions of this feminist generation with wide public prominence, in its effort to reach the various social strata with a female presence. I take as an exemplary case here the feminist production of Heloneida Studart, Muraro’s literary colleague at Editora Vozes (but also in other feminist projects, such as the Brazilian Women’s Centre).²²

Studart, who was a writer and journalist, and later a politician, had three feminist essays published at the invitation of Editora Vozes: *Woman, Toy of Man*² from 1969; *Woman, Object of Bed and Table*, from 1975; *Woman, to whom does your Body Belong*² from 1989. The three books were editorial successes and became a kind of manual of a specific Brazilian feminism (white, middle-class, straight,

20 “The transformation caused by the times, by education, by modern life, is more in the mentality in the culture, in the ideas, in themselves, than in the ridiculous exteriorization of a one-eyed feminism. The woman remains a woman, a reason for enchantment and inspiration for the man, an ideal of purity and sweetness for the child, and must always act as such. Men love a very feminine woman. Just don’t confuse futility, *denguice* and lack of personality with femininity. It is up to her to curb exaggeration, to take care of harmony and delicacy in gestures, words, attitudes. I never get tired of repeating that, more important than beauty, than culture, than an elegant wardrobe, for a woman to be attractive, is to be a woman”, Clarice Lispector as Helen Palmer, *Correio da Manhã*, 19 February 1960; “This is yet another victory for feminism; a well-understood feminism, which finds full support, even from those who claim to be anti-feminists. Kind, smiling feminism, like a good fairy who puts the house in order and returns it perfect to its owner. Feminism that wins without the demands and without the aggressiveness so much to the liking of the disciples of the bellicose Mrs. Pankust...”, *Correio da Manhã*, 21 April 1963.

21 See: M. Zimmermann de Andrade, *Rebeldia pronta para o consumo: a construção da cultura juvenil no Brasil dos anos 1950-60*, PhD thesis (doctorate in politics, memory and city) – Institute of Philosophy and Human Sciences, State University of Campinas, Campinas, 2016.

22 “Feminist association created in 1975, which operated until 1979, with leftist tendencies. The association was an articulator of important discussions on women’s rights, as well as a place of support for the female community in Rio de Janeiro, where its headquarters are located”, R. Soihet, F.C. Esteves, “O Centro da Mulher Brasileira (CMBRJ) e suas experiências nos anos 1970 e 1980”, in: *Revolução e democracia (1964...)*, eds. J. Ferreira, D.A. Reis, Rio de Janeiro, 2007.

and conciliatory²³ – it is important to emphasise it here),²⁴ even being applied in schools. Nonetheless, the tone and the content of phrases with imperative assertions mobilised by Studart ridiculed women already adapted and suited to the traditional model of femininity, that is, dedicated to home and family.

“Adapted from childhood to the home environment, the woman is busy all the time, without creating or producing. And the domestic environment is culturally very poor, not requiring the use of the mind. Intelligence that is not challenged and does not respond to challenge becomes dull and limited. Without being able to achieve the development that originates from production relations and social exchanges, the female IQ ends up suffering the same decrease that is seen in the IQ of miserable children...”

This is, in a way, the situation for women. In the world of crochet, dishtowels, unwashed diapers, without courses, without libraries, without seminars, without congresses, without any decision-making capacity, how could they stop being a little mentally weak?”²⁵

Muraro was also not far from these paternalistic adjectives in relation to the “queens of the home”,²⁶ and both she and Studart had, throughout their

23 There are a considerable number of adjectives to classify the different and fragmental types of feminism in Brazil. The artist and researcher Roberta Barros, defined Brazilian feminist art as something “sweet” and “sneaky” (R. Barros, *Elogio ao toque ou como falar de arte feminista à brasileira*, Rio de Janeiro, 2016, p. 25). To the approach applied here, the expression “negotiable feminism” is more accurate to understand the complexity of the relationship between the art system and the feminist agenda in Brazil (T. Trizoli, *Trajetórias de Regina Vater: Por uma crítica feminista da arte brasileira*, MA thesis, University of São Paulo, Museum of Contemporary art, Program of Aesthetics and Art History, 2011; T. Trizoli, *Atravessamentos feministas: um panorama de mulheres artistas no Brasil dos anos 60/70*, PhD thesis, University of São Paulo, Faculty of Education, Program of Philosophy, 2018).

24 Concerning this synthesis on the part of the feminist movement in Brazil, I’m referring to the analyses of two major researchers on the subject, Céli Regina Maria Pinto and Rachel Soihet – Pinto uses the expression “well-behaved” and Soihet applies “tactical”. Both historians referred to a particular angle of the institutionalised feminism of the 1st wave, related to the figure of the militant and biologist Bertha Lutz, a Brazilian suffragist that operates through conciliatory negotiations between social groups that were deeply resistant to the feminist agenda, such as the Church and the Government. Bertha Lutz believed in the creation of one solo organisation that would be allowed to represent the voices of Brazilian women, one of the many aspects of her feminist militancy that was criticised in the years to come. See: M. Karawejczyk, “O Feminismo em Boa Marcha no Brasil! Bertha Lutz e a Conferência pelo Progresso Feminino”, *Revista Estudos Feministas*, 2018, 2, no. 26, pp. 1–17.

25 H. Studart, *Mulher, Objeto de Cama e Mesa*, Petrópolis, 1976, p. 40.

26 Muraro assigns and advises Brazilian women, after an arduous awareness of their devalued condition, the role of “Mother of the Nation”, constantly reaffirming the great capacity of female affection in the advent of the new Utopia due to its “natural” ability to care. In excerpts from the book: “Here, the role of women is, in our view, the most important: woman, mother of men, mother of the human race is, by definition, the one who keeps in herself everything that can, biologically, psychologically, serve

careers, an obvious difficulty in broadening their audience spectrum, mainly towards factory workers and women of colour. In this sense, Jaguar's provocation issued in 1981, in an interview shared with Alberto Dines,²⁷ Haroldo Zager²⁸ and Reinaldo Azevedo²⁹ at *Pasquim*, "Have you ever Managed to Attract a Maid?" is consistent, as it denotes the almost insurmountable fission of the class and race divide in the country – even though both Muraro and Studart believed that their speeches triggered other social classes.

"Haroldo Zager – Is the lower-class woman able to swell the ranks of feminism? Because the upper class is very involved in exacerbated consumerism.

Muraro – Only to the extent that feminism enters the class struggle [...]. Let's look at peasant women. They do the housework for free, saving the system some money, they grow their subsistence food, saving the system more money, and many of them also work on other crops, and for half the price of man. Only there are three types of surplus value. Can you imagine the fantastic capitalist accumulation that is on top of this work? I think that only when lower-class women become aware of this will the problem of capitalist accumulation, which is the basis of the class struggle, be reversed.

[...]

Haroldo – What is the reaction of working women to your intellectual discourse?

Muraro – I still don't intend to be accepted by the workers, I'm still trying to reach the outskirts of São Paulo to discuss with some women what they want. I won't say anything. I think they have greater capacity and intelligence than ours – what they don't have is information – and are capable of, based on their concrete situation, finding flags of struggle, in common or not with the middle class, capable of accelerating the process".³⁰

And Studart, in turn, also asserts in the same newspaper on another occasion:

"Pasquim – Is the Brazilian feminist movement a middle-class thing?

Heloneida – It is still predominantly a debate of more conscious, middle-class women. The others – the majority – are chasing a plate of beans and meat for the family. But, slowly, a certain number of poor workers, housemaids, slum dwellers are starting to move and notice that they are doubly exploited. And that's good. The participation of women, the action of women, is definitive for the transformation of society. Incidentally, the right wing has always understood this. When they want to give the workers a blow, cut them off, they immediately turn to the women. Then, it comes the pot walk".³¹

for the transmission of the life, the preservation of the person and the species as such", R.M. Muraro, *A Mulher na Construção do Mundo Futuro*, Petrópolis, 1966, p. 70.

27 Alberto Dines was a Brazilian journalist, university professor, biographer and writer.

28 Haroldo Zager is a journalist, editor and graphic designer. He was editor of *O Pasquim*, *Última Hora*, *Tribuna da Imprensa*, among others. He presided over Rio de Janeiro's Official Press for 10 years.

29 Reinaldo Azevedo is a cartoonist, illustrator, writer and comedian.

30 *O Pasquim*, 10 June 1981, 623, p. 9.

31 *O Pasquim*, 9 October 1978, 488, p. 6.

More than pointing out the misconceptions of a first generation of Brazilian feminists with a presence at informative media, such notes aim to highlight the ambivalences present in the Brazilian female mentality of the middle class – the social spectrum to which the artistic agents of the time mostly belonged, be they artists, critics, curators or managers.

About the use of the term middle class as an important social distinction, placing artists and other cultural agents in this category provides common aspects that unify them, such as the use of college studies to move between classes, work related to the services and bureaucratic categories, access to consumer goods, place of birth and living. Even knowing that those elements vary as definitions of the middle class, as already pointed out by the sociologist Maria da Gloria Bonelli and the economist Marcio Pochmann, they are still used as elements of the conceptual definition of middle class, changing according to the author and methodology applied.

A brief look at Brazilian women artists easily highlights their class. They are young daughters of the mostly white families, with a traditional formal education, relative access to consumer goods and spheres of production and culture. Many gain access to the artistic environment either through an existing family connection with the medium, or via the authorisation/social tolerance of access to the artistic environment – due to its proximity to the idea of female “gifts” such as embroidery, sewing, miniature painting, demands for the tasteful decorative arrangement of the house, music as domestic entertainment, dance as a requirement of grace.

Considering these values, it makes sense that the main feminist interlocutor with the artistic class was not exactly the duo Muraro/Studart, or even Beauvoir/Friedan, but the columnist for a female magazine (*Claudia*) with a background in psychoanalysis: Carmen da Silva.

Born at the Rio Grande do Sul state, a region in Brazil that borders Argentina and Uruguay, she studied psychoanalysis with Jorge Weil and Diego Garcia Reinoso while living at Buenos Aires in her youth, where she also worked as journalist and writer (it’s also at this time that she read for the first time Simone de Beauvoir’s work, which would impact her writing).

She returned to Brazil in 1962, since her life in Argentina as a foreigner became difficult with the political turmoil. In 1963, living in Rio de Janeiro, she wrote a letter with her resume to the editor of *Claudia* magazine, Luís Carta. The magazine was a publication of the Abril Group Publishing house, circulating since 1961, and the editorial project, very close to North American model” magazines, presented a mix of moral advice and friendly narratives to Brazilian women – written by women, but “adjusted” by a man. Thomaz Souto Corrêa, formerly the magazine’s editor-in-chief, comments about the procedures and structure of the magazine in its early days:

“If you exclude the art department, which was all male, when I arrived at *Claudia*, the editorial secretary was Micheline, the main editor was Fortuna, a caricaturist. I got

the position of editor in chief and we used to joke, me and him, that he was his own boss and I was my own boss. And we did almost the entire magazine. The vast majority of collaborators were women. I used to say that we were the transformers of the material. We turned that huge production into journalism. And there was Luís Carta who was sensitive to the subject, he knew the Italian and American press as well. We had a magazine guide there, technically speaking. But the production came from women, and we transformed".³²

The entry of Carmen had a very specific objective, which was to psycho-analyse perspectives on female problems that demanded cultural change. Strategic points at modern women's life were addressed by Carmen in a gentle way, aiming to adapt a new generation of women to the demands of capitalism (which would be their insertion as workforce), without departing from aspects of traditional femininity.

Carmen's column included "love consultations", where thousands of women wrote directly to her asking for advice. Published without interruption between 1963 and 1984, themes such as contraceptives, women working beyond the domestic sphere, the education of children, love relationships, emotional dependence and divorce. Those subjects at the time were taken in a different shape by the hands of Carmen, with a focus on subjectivity and female emancipation, in very colloquial and intimate language, together with psychological analysis.

As a profound critic of the model of "love clinic" that most female journalism applied (since it was written for non-specialists in the subject with no familiarity with women's issues and permeated with moralism and a generic optimism), Carmen used that structure to include feminist topics for readers already spooked by the stereotype of the angry, ugly feminist – a place that Friedan, Muraro and Studart occupied. The researcher Ana Rita Fonteles Duarte synthesised the profile of *Claudia's* readers, specially related to Carmen's columns:

"In her work on *Claudia*, Carmen closely observed reality and observed the passive behaviour of middle-class Brazilian women who wrote to her. On average, they were between 18 and 24 years old, and were married or wanted to be married, often 'accepting, with masochism, unions clearly destined for total failure'".³³

Cultural agents and the misunderstanding of feminism

It is precisely from this very complex social group, the so-called middle-class, that artists such as Anna Maria Maiolino, Wanda Pimentel, Iole de Freitas, Maria do Carmo Secco and Regina Vater belonged; therefore, it's very likely

³² Duarte, op. cit., p. 56

³³ Duarte, op. cit., p. 61.

that they were influenced by the feminist topics touched by Carmen – which also be true for the art critics and curators Aracy Amaral and Maria Eugênia Franco, and the gallerists Raquel Arnaud and Luisa Strina, for example.

These particularities concerning the social class of the Brazilian women artists and cultural agents offer certain indications about their understanding of feminist issues, and their rejection of the term. Beyond an understanding that a feminist would be a non-feminine creature, with desirability discarded, there was also a worry concerning rejection, a fear of being reduced to the status of a “pamphleteer artist”. That condition extended beyond the studio, going through to the curatorial/art critic milieu. Mentions of feminist topics at their work, or worse, if they declared themselves to be feminists, would be a professional risk that they were not interested in taking.

The majority of the art critics of the time, male or female, did not consider themselves as feminists – however, that didn’t stop the discussion about the presence of feminism in art. Occasionally, some art critics made comments about female artists related to feminist, exhibitions, and even about the feminist issues in the art field, such as Sheila Leirner, Aracy Amaral, Frederico Moraes, Jayme Maurício, Roberto Pontual and Heloisa Buarque de Hollanda – but for pragmatic reasons, we are going to discuss here only the females.³⁴

Sheila Leirner was an interesting case. Belonging to a Jewish family with deep roots in Brazilian art,³⁵ Leirner began her career as art critic at one of the biggest papers of the country, *O Estado de São Paulo*. Her columns, published

34 Both Frederico Moraes and Roberto Pontual had a couple of articles discussing feminism in the arts. I highlight here: F. Moraes, “Presença da mulher na arte brasileira”, *O Globo*, 8 March 1982; F. Moraes, “A mulher”, *O Globo*, 23 September 1976; J. Maurício, “Mulheres no Ibirapuera: 275 obras”, *Correio da Manhã*, 27 January 1961; R. Pontual, “Feminismo e Arte”, *Jornal do Brasil*, 03 December 1974.

35 “Born in 1948, in São Paulo, from the marriage between Giselda Leirner (Brazil, 1928–) and Abe (Louis Adams) – both from Jewish families who were refugees from the Holocaust, Sheila Adams Leirner spent her childhood and adolescence in the care of her grandparents’ mothers surrounded by an atmosphere of art collecting and contact with the São Paulo artistic circuit. Her grandfather, Isaí Leirner (Poland/Brazil, 1903–1962), collaborated with the founding of MAM-SP, and her grandmother, Felícia Leirner (Poland/Brazil, 1904–1996), was a renowned sculptor, apprenticed to Victor Brecheret (Italy/Brazil, 1894–1955). [...] From a previous career as an art critic for *O Estado de São Paulo*, she visited artists’ studios, exhibitions and conferences and evaluated them in parallel with her theoretical perspectives. She entered into a debate of ideas that could be presented more autonomously. Leirner assumed the curatorship of two editions of the Biennial – the largest international event for the exhibition of modern and contemporary art in Latin America – inspiring a network of major events around the world. Such critical autonomy was curtailed by every structure and economic dependency that the institution conformed with”, T.M. de Souza, “Arte como Medida: aspectos da autoria na mediação de exposições de arte – a 18ª e 19ª Bienal de São Paulo”, XVII Brazilian Congress of Sociology, 20–23 July 2015, Porto Alegre (RS).

between 1975 and 2019, paid particular attention to Brazilian and canonical European art, in addition to commenting on Brazilian artists.

Around 1977, Leirner started a survey about the condition of women in the arts, mostly moved by what she called a “movement of untampered feminists” and “women artists conscious of the peculiar problems” related to their sex. With these two sentences, Leirner already showed an ambiguity that would shape her arguments on this subject. She sent five questions³⁶ to six colleagues, the artists Renina Katz, Maria Bonomi, Yolanda Mohalyi, and the art critics Jakob Klimtowitz, Aracy Amaral and Paulo Mendes de Almeida. Mainly, the answers to the questions were a mix of misunderstanding about feminism: a defence related to the quality of art in their formalistic core, followed by a condemnation of the artists that decided to work with feminist issues, and a perception that even with discrimination, prejudice about the female condition was not an issue for Brazilian women artists.

The inquiry resulted in the publication of two articles: *Feminine Art and Feminism* in the 13 February 1977 edition, and *Feminism in Brazilian Art: Critic's Opinion* from 27 February 1977. In the first piece, Leirner presented a brief history of the relationship of feminism with the visual arts, focusing on the North America scene, commenting on Linda Nochlin, Lucy Lippard, Lawrence Alloway and some significant artists such as Annette Messager, Harmony Hammond, Rosalyn Drexler, together with Brazilians like Iole de Freitas, Wilma Martins and Yolanda Mohalyi, to illustrate her arguments.

It is evident in the article that Leirner wanted to introduce the problem in a didactical perspective, leaving the discussion of specific topics, such as the relevance to the local scene or the Brazilian critics at the next piece. At the end of the article, after discussing feminist organisations in the USA, feminist art and feminine art, stakeholders and the constituent elements of body art, Leirner presents her own definition of the contents of artworks related to feminism and women:

1 – Affirmations and claims of identity.

2 – Questions about sexuality, which include theses of dispossession of women as a sexual object, often against pornography.

3 – Criticism of living and working conditions.³⁷

36 “Is there a specifically feminine art? What are female images? How do you see feminist art? Do you see attempts, in our country, by artists to define this new problem in their works? How do you see the dialogues and struggles between a woman artist and the scheme traditionally built by male creators in the plastic field? When analysing an artistic work, do you think it is relevant to know the gender of the artist? Have you encountered any difficulties in your career because you are a woman?”, S. Leirner, “Arte Feminina e Feminismo”, *O Estado de São Paulo*, 13 February 1977, p. 30.

37 Ibid.

In the second article, Leirner presents part of the responses to the five questions, and we can perceive in these answers resistance to the subject, especially related to question four, which questions the existence or not of feminist issues in Brazilian art:

“Paulo Mendes de Almeida is categorical: ‘In Brazil, it doesn’t exist. And by definition, I would be against feminist art. I don’t believe in political art’ [...]. Iolanda Mohalyi thinks that in Brazilian visual arts, there is no need for feminist movements ‘sometimes with exaggerated claims and unfortunately many times for purely commercial or promotional purposes’ [...]. Klimtowitz, in turn, assumes that feminist art is an area of struggle, claiming, ‘a struggle for autonomy’. For this reason, he recommends caution, ‘as it has often been derailed by the fight for the liberation of upper-middle-class women’”.³⁸

In both articles, Leirner defends a confusing formalist perspective about the nature of art, imbued by an essentialist view about femininity, or as she says “the circumstances that are specific to women and that incontestably determine their creation”. Leirner believes that this particular position would be more coherent with the practice of art, even when she admits the inevitable presence of feminism in artworks. Even in a situation that would require an intersectional perspective, concerning the difficulty of agreement between black and white feminists in the USA, Leirner insists in her conclusion that culpability be attributed to the biological sex and does not consider any social implications:

“This situation is undoubtedly a consequence of the radicalism that characterises most female expressions. If, on the one hand, some activists do not consider art as a legitimate front of struggle, placing the aesthetic problem as secondary, on the other hand, feminist artists give away – as we will see later – too easily to the place of individual qualities to collective interests, in an attitude forced and therefore inadequate for common interests”.³⁹

But among the declarations and comments given in response to Leirner’s questions, attention is drawn to Aracy Amaral’s responses, mainly due to the fact that the critic, curator and professor at FAU-USP wrote at least two articles later in response to Leirner’s enquiries.

If Leirner was the privileged daughter of a powerful Jewish family involved with art, Aracy Amaral’s family are not far from this profile. Beyond her sisters and brother, all involved in the art field,⁴⁰ and her mother, who was also an amateur painter, she had a cousin that sparkled in that familiar constellation: Tarsila do Amaral, the great modernist painter in the Brazilian scene.

38 S. Leirner, “Feminismo na arte brasileira: opinião da crítica”, *O Estado de São Paulo*, 27 February 1977, p. 27.

39 Leirner, “Arte Feminina...”, p. 30.

40 Antonio Henrique Amaral is an artist, Suzana Amaral is a moviemaker and director, Ana Maria Amaral is a theatre writer and director.

It is relevant to note that Tarsila and Aracy didn't have close contact through the years; they only became close when Aracy was already a journalist,⁴¹ and was looking for a research topic for her master's degree – and it is essential to state that, if the general public knows the work and life of Tarsila do Amaral; it is because of Aracy's research and effort in building her public image, as she is one of the most relevant art critics, curators, professors and directors of cultural institutions in Brazil.

"About a Questionnaire by Sheila Leirner: is There a Specific Female Art?" is the first essay in response to Leirner, published in the collection *Art and Artistic Environment: Between the feijoada and the Cheeseburger* in 1983⁴², but written in 1977. Divided in two parts, and taking Leirner's question to structure her argument, Aracy approaches some of the positions defended by Sheila, such as an essentialist view about femininity, which is used to exemplify the nature of a feminine art. For her:

"[...] the feminine in the arts has a 'rancid' air of 'needle art, embroidery and decoration' (AMARAL, 1983, p. 254), the critic already highlights a particularly reticent relationship with the theme, where the conception of femininity is seen from a pejorative view of subjectivity, linked to the concepts of futility, fragility and inferiority – characteristics that were devalued at the time within a context of reformulation of work and affection relations under the aegis of capital; after all, let us not forget that one of the guidelines embraced by this contemporary generation of second-wave feminism was the insertion of women in the labour market, in a world monopolised by the logic of the masculine, and where often the negotiation conditions for entering these spaces occurred via a masculinisation of the self. Thus, in this Aracy Amaral text, the feminine is directly linked to a conception of sensitivity, of an intuitive, magical nature, not rationalised and not militant [...] Brazil due to the wide penetration of women in the local artistic scene, unlike other cultural centres".⁴³

In the second essay, "Women at the Arts from 1993", Amaral resumes Leirner's inquiries, and highlights some names of female artists in Brazil dur-

41 "I knew that Tarsila belonged to a branch of the family, but not a branch that we had gotten along with. I knew she was from the same family. I mean, we are descended from one of Tarsila's uncles. So, it's a parallel thing. There was something familiar, and I admired her work from afar, although when I was a journalism student at Casper Líbero, I visited Tarsila at her house on Rua Caiubi. It was a dirt road, still unpaved. I took the tram and then walked down to her house, since, at that time, she was still living with Luiz Martins. That's when she showed me those amazing paintings she had. At that time, she still owned Brancusi, Delaunay and other artists that she later sold in the early 1950s to live in the apartment where she lived and died, on Rua Albuquerque Lins", A. Amaral, "Interview", *SESC Magazine*, April 2014, 202, https://portal.sescsp.org.br/online/artigo/7445_aracy+amaral#/tagcloud=lista [accessed 10 June 2023].

42 A. Amaral, *Arte e Meio Artístico: entre a feijoada e o X-Burger*, São Paulo, 1983.

43 T. Trizoli, "Um problema de gênero: Aracy Amaral e os ensaios sobre o feminino nas artes", 2nd International Symposium on Systemic Art Relations. *Art Beyond Art (Annals)*, Porto Alegre, 2020, p. 568.

ing the 1970s, but refrains from political and assertive definitions referring to feminism. As we can see in the fragment below, she still attaches herself to biological definitions on the representation of the feminine in the visual arts:

“In 1977, the critic Sheila Leirner carried out a poll on whether there is specifically female art. In my answers, I declared that, in fact, what seems to me to exist is a sum of characteristics of the feminine in art. Some artists show this feminine character, others do not. This ‘feminine’, for me, is linked to the delicacy of the woman’s sensitivity, in her condition as a promoter of life and, for this very reason, linked to nature more than her male companion, delicacy is implicit in her dealing with the fragility of the human being, a newborn son of her body, and whom she will protect for life”.⁴⁴

The position of Amaral on the definitions of feminine art, feminism and their relevance to the Brazilian art system has not changed much through the years – even with the new propositions and perspectives about feminism in Brazilian society after 2015, the year of the *Feminist Spring* in the country. In an interview in 2016, while she comments about the recent efforts of black Brazilian artists to be recognised as professionals and their investigations into African ancestries, the interviewer compares those movements to the women struggle for recognition, to which she replied: “But here in Brazil, I don’t think we are concerned about that. Because there are so many female artists, there has never been this problem of space for women. In the United States there was. Our great artists are all women”.⁴⁵

Even if Amaral guided herself to a more Marxist perspective than Leirner in her critical work, especially related to the social function of art in society, both share misconceptions regarding the potential of feminism in the arts and the misogynist structure of the field – and none consider themselves feminists. If two of the most prominent female art critics made such comments about feminism, how could some female artists be encouraged to pursue those topics?

Until recently, art historiography considered that the first art critic to debate in the public arena feminism and art in Brazil, while declaring herself as feminist, was Heloisa Buarque de Hollanda,⁴⁶ in literature and academia. She

44 A. Amaral, “A mulher nas artes”, *Textos do Trópico de Capricórnio. Artigos e Ensaios (1980-2005)*, V. 3: *Bienais e artistas contemporâneos no Brasil*, 2006, 34.

45 A. Amaral, “Vejo pouco grito na arte brasileira”, *Select Art*, 1 September 2017, <https://select.art.br/vejo-pouco-grito-na-arte-brasileira/> [accessed 1 July 2023].

46 Recently, Heloisa Buarque de Hollanda started calling herself Heloisa Teixeira. After years of keeping the name of her ex-husband, the lawyer and art gallerist Luiz Buarque de Hollanda, a member of the family of artists and intellectuals, the Buarque’s de Hollanda. Heloisa took back her mother’s family name, in order to rethink her subjective trajectory as a feminist. This stance finally clarified the researcher’s dubious stance, who for years left her family connection with the Buarque’s de Hollanda hanging in the air, mobilising it when it benefited her. With this, her origins from a family of doctors

is probably the most prominent female figure in the area of feminist cultural criticism in a more recent period, since her activity began in the mid-1980s and is still ongoing.⁴⁷

As a cultural researcher, also involved in experimental and marginal poetry, Heloisa is one of the pioneers in feminist studies at the Brazilian academia, with study groups at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. Together with her students, she conducted a survey on women in the arts sectors, which inspired the publications *Quase Catálogo 1* about women filmmakers, and *Quase Catálogo 2*, about visual artists in Rio de Janeiro. Hollanda comments on the presence of the feminist studies in academia as follows:

“What definitively distinguishes and distances feminist theories from post-structuralist thought is the feminist commitment to articulating the critique of the hegemony of the identical and the legitimacy of absolute and universal meanings with the historical processes of construction and representation of the category ‘woman’. Cutting-edge feminist thought is marked by the demand for a theoretical and methodological approach in which the question of women, like all questions of meaning, is systematically particularised, specified and historically located, opposing any and all perspectives. essentialist or ontological.”⁴⁸

Beyond this, she has also ventured into the curatorial sphere, and together with the Brazilian curator Paulo Herkenhoff, she carried out a curatorial survey of Brazilian female artists in the exhibition *Manobras Radicais*⁴⁹ in 2006.

from the middle of São Paulo state became clear, as well as her easy access to financial resources, M. Fortuna, “Não vou morrer Heloisa Buarque de Hollanda”, diz uma das maiores pensadoras do feminismo brasileiro, que não quer mais ser reconhecida pelo sobrenome do marido”, *O globo*, 17 July 2023, <https://oglobo.globo.com/cultura/noticia/2023/07/17/nao-vou-morrer-heloisa-buarque-de-hollanda-diz-uma-das-maiores-pensadoras-do-feminismo-brasileiro-que-nao-quer-mais-ser-reconhecida-pelo-sobrenome-do-marido.ghtml> [accessed 5 June 2024].

47 “[...] still under pressure from the dictatorship, I worked with the resistance, or marginal, culture, so I felt particularly susceptible to women’s struggles. In 1982, before the movements for direct elections, I went to do a post-doctorate on the relationship between politics and culture at Columbia University, in the United States. Not three months had passed and the penny dropped. I discovered I was a feminist 7,666 kilometres from Brazil. My case was not the only one. Studies show that most so-called Third Wave feminists spent a period outside the country, either in exile, for studies or because of unfavourable circumstances of work and creation in Brazil during the lead years”, H.B. de Hollanda, *Explosão Feminista. Arte, Cultura, Política e Universidade*, São Paulo, 2018, p. 14.

48 H.B. de Hollanda, *Tendências e Impasses. O feminismo como crítica da cultura*, Rio de Janeiro, 1994, p. 9.

49 “The show was on display between 8 August and 15 October at the CCBB unit in São Paulo, and had little journalistic exposure, despite some paid advertisements and a brief television report covering the opening of the event – eventually, when a more analytical article appeared in the written press, it was immediately qualified in relation to the feminist agenda, excusing the show for such an omission, alleging ‘feminices’ and women’s

The project is the first art show in Brazil that put the word feminism in their curatorial stance and aimed to present a large variety of women artists in Brazil. Hollanda tells us in the exhibition catalogue that “the great legacy of feminism for the new generations was the privilege, previously denied to women, of expressing their anger. The art and literature of the 21st century is proof of this. Just as they discovered a strategy of radicalising this anger: they shouldn’t lose their tenderness”.⁵⁰

Herkenhoff has long defended the thesis that women did not contribute to the plastic arts in Brazil, but constituted it – however, if the inclusive assertion of Herkenhoff is true, the curator does not develop it critically, leaving Hollanda in charge of formal and social investigations on the subject, whether in the applicability of feminism as a method of cultural criticism, or in the explanations in the exhibition catalogue.

Incidentally, it is worth pointing out that it was that exhibition that recently established a certain visibility to the process of erasing the names and productions of Brazilian women artists from the national art canon. Assuming this iconic position at national level, a fearless nomination of a feminist project, some aspects were highlighted at the curatorial essays, with explanations and provocations by the curators, as we can see in Hollanda’s assertion: “Post-feminism 2 > The great legacy of feminism for the new generations was the privilege, denied to women for millennia, of expressing their anger. > HBH”.⁵¹

Furthermore, Heloisa Buarque de Hollanda was one of the few intellectuals at that time who re-elaborated her own perception about the feminist struggles and propositions through the years. If Leirner and Amaral got stuck in anachronical perspectives, Hollanda allowed herself to rethink and correct past conceptions:

“I listened, I was enchanted and wanted/want to record this moment. I am a third wave feminist. My way and my strategies are not what I see in the open scene. How am I going to speak for, or even about, this generation that took me by storm? Feminism today is not the same as it was in the 1980s. If at that time I was still discovering the differences between women, the intersectionality, the multiplicity of their oppression, of their demands, now the feminisms of difference have assumed, victoriously, their places of speaking, as one of the most legitimate disputes they have ahead of them [...]. Let the new feminists come and run me over, talk to me, tell me”.⁵²

culpability for the effective absence of feminist topics in the artistic environment (Lavigne, 2006), thus maintaining the sad tradition of the Brazilian media regarding female and feminist events in the arts: silence! – or at least that was the journalistic perspective until 2015, when the issue became weaponised, to the point of crystallising into an economic and symbolic market niche”, T. Trizoli, “Febre Feminista: paradoxos das exposições de mulheres no Brasil”, *MODOS: Revista de História da Arte*, 2013, 7, no. 1, p. 172

50 H.B. de Hollanda, P. Herkenhoff, *Manobras Radicais*, CCBB, São Paulo, 2006, p. 101.

51 Ibid., p. 146.

52 H.B. de Hollanda, *Explosão Feminista. Arte, Cultura, Política e Universidade*, São Paulo, 2018, pp. 10–12.

These specific examples on the definition of femininity and feminism, expressed by Sheila Leirner and Aracy Amaral, make clear the kind of “damage” caused by the poor reception of feminism in Brazilian territory. Even in the case of two intellectuals, with training and access to enlightened and cultural circles, the ghost of the feminist figure as a frustrated and complaining creature took on such proportions in the popular mentality, that it made it difficult for an entire generation of cultural agents to understand the relevance of cultural criticism with a focus on feminism.

The final case of this article, the one of Heloisa Buarque de Hollanda, is exemplary precisely because it shows the presence of a woman in the field of art criticism and curatorship, who does not fear naming herself a feminist. And that presence was only allowed because Hollanda appeared at a different moment in the reception of those propositions.

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