

"Projeto Terra", or Revisiting the Work of Art in the Age of Ecological Exposability?

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Image [modified]: Documentation of Projeto Terra at Lagoa das Bestas, 1984. Courtesy of Juraci Dórea.

"Projeto Terra", or Revisiting the Work of Art in the Age of Ecological Exponability?

"Projeto Terra", ou: Revisitando a obra de arte na era da exponibilidade ecológica?

Lucy Steeds*

ABSTRACT

This essay presents thinking about art and ecology as learnt through study of work originating in the rural northeast of Brazil in the 1980s, which then featured in biennials at the end of that decade. While drawing on the writing of Walter Benjamin, Denise Ferreira da Silva, Carolyn Merchant and Anna Tsing, it centres the sculptural assemblages of *Projeto Terra* as situated in the Bahian sertão by Juraci Dórea. Reworking academic conventions, it experiments with art historiography and offers some emergent heuristics.

KEYWORDS

Global Art. Art historiography. Ecology. Art biennials. Juraci Dórea.

RESUMO

Este ensaio apresenta uma reflexão sobre arte e ecologia a partir do estudo de obras originárias do interior do Nordeste brasileiro da década de 1980, que passaram a figurar em bienais no final daquela década. Ao se basear na escrita de Walter Benjamin, Denise Ferreira da Silva, Carolyn Merchant e Anna Tsing, centra-se nas montagens escultóricas do *Projeto Terra*, realizado no sertão baiano por Juraci Dórea. Retrabalhando convenções acadêmicas, o texto discute a historiografia da arte e oferece novas interpretações sobre a obra.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Arte global. Historiografia da arte. Ecologia. Bienais de arte. Juraci Dórea.

I seek to emulate the wild ambition, careful folly and unassuming openness of the artwork at the centre of this essay. In some ways, the title of this work says it all: *Projeto Terra – Earth Project, or Project Earth*. What might it mean to make earth (ground, land, soil) – and simultaneously the Earth (world, globe, planet) – one’s project? The ephemeral assemblages of leather on wood staged in rural north-eastern Brazil by artist Juraci Dórea during the early 1980s, in the name of *Projeto Terra*, have inspired a decade of research on my part. I have studied this work art-historically and – in terms of exhibition histories – reviewed its participation in three biennials at the end of the 1980s (São Paulo 1987, Venice 1988 and Havana 1989). Just as significantly, it has encouraged me to investigate aspects of the colonial history and now global industry of cattle rearing and tree cultivation, together with their ecological impacts. Moreover, I have found myself probing my family’s stories in order to situate and implicate or unsettle myself in connection.

Since my aim is not to argue for *Projeto Terra*’s belated inclusion in any national or international art canon (although I watch pursuit of such tasks with some curiosity), I should be clear as to where I think my contribution may lie. I seek to offer heuristics more generally useful for the making or study of art that crosses places and times. As I shall go on to demonstrate, these heuristics prioritise sustained focal attention, yet also a scrutiny of this focus that involves transdisciplinary, transhistoric, translocal and transcontinental meanderings – with as much disorientation entailed as discovery. I respond to Carolyn Merchant’s call for an “ecosystem model” of historiography ([1980] 2020: 57), while learning from *Projeto Terra* how to tune into the “more-than-human rhythms” that “landscapes enact”, after Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, Elaine Gan and Nils Bubandt (2017: G12). I acknowledge that my role – as both student and author – is not neutral and, thankfully, that my path has been navigated with myriad companions, to whom this essay is dedicated.

Study of *Projeto Terra* has encouraged me to rethink and interweave my use of some simple but freighted terms. The meanings I start out by

elaborating below, which lean on the articulations of others, have emerged as anchors through and for my research. A fragmentary glossary is proposed here, at the beginning, as something of a speculative compass: not necessarily as a body of prose to be read as a narrative whole, beginning to end, but as an amplifier used to increase the resonance of certain words then used when the crux of the essay is addressed, *Projeto Terra*.

Exposure

To talk about art's exposure, in tandem with its exhibition, is to highlight how art can galvanize a public situation, while simultaneously being shaped by these circumstances. Exposability names art's capacity to shape – while being shaped by – a particular durational field; its capacity to be exposed and simultaneously to expose. Individuals are exposed to each other and to broader possibilities via art; they reshape their worlds, while being reshaped themselves. The thinking and imagining here is resolutely situated – taking place in the company of art, in the throes of a given context – and an openness to being implicated and potentially transformed is demanded. There is no simple presenting to view, or disclosure of truth, only a palpability of unpredetermined change.

Elsewhere, I have argued at some length for nuancing Walter Benjamin's concept of art's *Ausstellbarkeit* not as *exhibitability* in English – or, as more commonly translated, *the capacity to be exhibited* – but as *exposability*. I have long sought to highlight exhibitability, which Benjamin quietly introduces as the antithesis to aura in the now-famous essay drafted and redrafted in 1930s Paris: “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility”. And I have variously sought to repurpose this concept for our present, globally capitalised, era. Most recently, I have drawn on Anna Tsing's writing about matsutake mushrooms in order to effect some shifts of emphasis, responding to “the challenge of thinking with precarity”, which

she poses, through embracing “temporal polyphony”, which she encourages (2015: 41,viii).

For me, art’s exposability maintains something of the magical and ritual possibilities of aura, but it refuses aura’s cultic manipulation by power. Where aura relies on art’s unique existence, originality, authenticity and command of a fixed here-and-now, exposability allows for art’s circulation, migration, or shifting situatedness – with a new existence to be negotiated every time it is exhibited, or exposed, potentially ever elsewhere. If aura suggests the quasi-eternal or timelessness, exposability flags instead the iterability of space-time, or art’s needing to resprout in new situations of public engagement in order to survive. As well as flagging potential future instantiations for an artwork, exposability points back and away, to the past and elsewhere; making insistent connections throughout history and across geography. Where art’s aura is measured by “cult value”, which is determined on the basis of mystical ritual, or the norms ordained by an elite, art’s exhibition value, or better, *exposure* value is grounded in politics, or bottom-up discursivity and negotiated possibility. Moreover, where art’s aura can only be experienced individually, as “contemplative immersion”, art’s exposability socialises this, with criticality conjoined with affectivity.

More broadly, exposability foregrounds the vulnerability of both art and life, flags threats as well as more positive or neutral change. To be exposed is to be laid open, if not to be left without shelter or defence. Privileges and prejudices may be exposed productively. There is also exposure to the elements, to matter at its most basic, to the implacability of – or embrace by – forces beyond us. Exposure gives entry into worlds beyond that which might be called one’s own, or anyone’s own. A here-and-now is temporarily co-convened and mutually negotiated: a durational field collectively formed.

If modern technology of the early twentieth century countered the traditional European aura of art, then might it be global ecology that sparks art’s exposability across far flung but interrelated locations today?

Exposability insists that art can take place anywhere, while conscious that everywhere is not the same, even while everywhere is now connected. When involving *here* in enmeshed *elsewheres*, and the *not now* in an enmeshed *now*, art's exposability encourages a tending both to embeddedness and distribution. It may resonate with – without suggesting mastery of – the dynamic and imbricated complexities of planetary life on Earth. The role for art here lies in its sharing of material wealth: without implying use or exchange value, nor societal health (as wholeness); instead, catalysing wealth as welfare across bodies – recognising that lived materiality is interdependent in its fragility. Art on this basis can implicate people in lives beyond their own, without necessarily centring humanity.

Raw materials

Even Wikipedia (last time I looked) explains raw materials in terms of primary commodities and, at the same time, with something less anthropocentric, specifically giving the example of twigs used by birds in building nests. The point here is that planetary life includes organic, as well as mechanistic, production. More particularly focused on the mechanistic, I follow Carolyn Merchant (1980/2020) in seeing how life (or as she frames it, nature) has been reduced to little but raw material for capitalism. More actively, I seek to embrace the raw materialist perspective applied and articulated by Denise Ferreira da Silva (2016, 2017, 2018a).

Ghosts and monsters

In “A Glossary of Haunting”, Eve Tuck and C. Ree write of the roles ghosts play, or the responsibilities they may bear: “Haunting aims to wrong the wrongs, a confrontation that settler horror hopes to evade” (2013: 642). If

I may switch to an ecological perspective, without renegeing on the call for retribution, I find related hauntings in *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene* by Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, Elaine Gan and Nils Bubandt:

As life-enhancing entanglements disappear from our landscapes, ghosts take their place. (...) Ghosts remind us that we live in an impossible present – a time of rupture, a world haunted with the threat of extinction. Deep histories tumble in unruly graves that are bulldozed into gardens of Progress. (...) Whereas Progress trained us to keep moving forward, to look up to an apex at the end of a horizon, ghosts show us multiple unruly temporalities (2017: G4-G8).

Following these authors, I see monsters drawing contrast with ghosts since they are real in the way that you and I are currently: pulsing with life; physically and bodily present. I find this in conjunction from “A Glossary of Haunting”: “Monsters show up when they are denied; yet there is no understanding the monster” (2013: 649). And, again, I find environmentally inflected complementarity in *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*:

Monsters are the wonders of symbiosis and the threats of ecological disruption. (...) We need both senses of monstrosity: entanglement as life and as danger. (...) This is one of the challenges of our times: entanglement with others makes life possible, but when one relationship goes awry, the repercussions ripple (2017: M2-M5).

This is how the same authors relate ghosts to monsters:

While ghosts help us read life’s enmeshment in landscapes, monsters point us toward life’s symbiotic entanglement across bodies. (...) Against the fable of Progress, ghosts guide us through haunted lives and landscapes. Against the conceit of the Individual, monsters highlight symbiosis, the enfolding of bodies within bodies in evolution and in every ecological niche. In dialectical fashion, ghosts and monsters unsettle anthropos, the Greek term for “human”, from its presumed center stage in the Anthropocene by highlighting the webs of histories and bodies from which all life, including human life, emerges (2017: M2-M3).

However, I also feel the unpredictable mingling if not merger of ghosts and monsters after Tuck and Ree. The last entry in their glossary hounds me, as well it should. I defer the conclusion of my own glossary to that of theirs:

Wronging wrongs, so reviled in a waking life, seems to be the work of nightmares and hauntings and all the stuff that comes after opportunities to right wrongs and write wrongs have been exhausted. Unreadable and irrational, wronging wrongs is the work of now and future ghosts and monsters, the supply of which is ever-growing. You'll have to find someone to pull on your ears to bring you out of the nightmares, to call you home and help you remember who you are, and to hope that the ghosts will be willing to let you go (Tuck and Ree, 2013: 654).



FIG. 1. Documentation of *Projeto Terra* at Lagoa das Bestas, 1984. Courtesy of Juraci Dórea.

Projeta Terra

To speak about earth (ground, land, soil) today is to speak of seedlings, roots, shoots and cultivation, also ownership and exploitation. Add Earth, on a global scale, and plantations and cash crops, racialised enslavement and industrialised agribusiness come into view. *Terra*, in Portuguese, has spiritual as well as material connotations, while – for instance, linked to territory – there is political suggestiveness that interlocks the colonial and national. In the context of Brazil in the 1980s, when *Projeto Terra* was initiated, landlessness also comes to mind, especially under the banner of the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST): the political union of heterogeneous rural workers who jointly identified as lacking land and therefore possibilities, mobilizing to become the biggest social movement in the country. Underlying this situation, and drawing on hundreds of years of history, is “the colonial resident question”, as Ferreira da Silva puts it (2018b) – posed here in recognition of the ancestral custodians of so-called *terras devolutas*, or lands deemed vacant by aggressive settlers from afar.

In the Sertão

The elements of *Projeto Terra* that captivate and productively trouble me were made throughout the 1980s in specific sites in the sertão in northeastern Brazil. Each element involved a cluster of stripped branches – gathered locally, typically sisal stems – lashed into a conical structure and loosely clad with cattle hides. Each also involved its location (for want of better words: the natural and cultural history of its site), also any passers-by who stopped to watch the process of construction or responded with commentary. None of the sculptures from the 1980s survive now: while some apparently stood for years, others did not last beyond the day of construction. There are tales about the leather used being recycled: cut and repurposed by those living

locally in the repair or manufacture of everyday items; for sandals, for example, or the seat of a stool. This reuse went undocumented but, along with the sculptures themselves, it is remembered.

Matilde Matos has described the sertão as “an enchantment and a challenge” (1985: n.p.). It has inspired numerous artists (musicians, poets, storytellers and filmmakers) – many of whom are more internationally famous than Juraci Dórea, and many with only localised renown. The word sertão translates into English only poorly – as “outback”, “backlands”, “hinterland”, or “wilderness”. Losing both the mythical allure and the entwined sense of radical political resistance, these English words point only to a colonial imposition, naming a peripherality relative to the points of entry maintained by the conquerors arriving by sea. Cattle and sisal are also colonial introductions to this land.

In conversation, Ana Lira gently points out to me that there is not one sertão but many sertões. I come to realise that each element of *Projeto Terra* needs to be considered in its particularity. I shall give just one example – revisiting the seventh sculptural iteration. This was staged on the banks of a river in 1984, close to the former village of Canudos, now covered by the waters of Cocorobó Dam. Photographs show the artist at work here, with an attentive audience of local children. With the sculpture finished, I have the impression that the artist is withdrawing, leaving the work for these children. The eye-contact made with the photographer in one picture reminds me that they know they are observed, until the camera departs and they no longer are.

The Portuguese name for the river, Vaza-Barris, indicates the dual state of usual dried-up wispieness and occasional full-bodied flow. The indigenous name, Irapiranga, has been translated as “vermillion-coloured honey” (da Cunha 1902, trans. Putnam 1944: 19), suggesting reluctant but also powerful fluidity through hotly hued viscosity. Although now strategically flooded, leaving no trace, the village of Canudos remains famous for the peasant rebellion led there by a mystic in the late nineteenth century, which ended

brutally with the republican police of Brazil slaughtering the community.

Here is the testimony of Evaldo Pereira, at the age of fourteen, almost a century later, as regards the sculptural assemblage of *Projeto Terra* near the site of Canudos:

Acho qui parece cum vaquêro incorado. Num faiz medo. A gente vê uma coisa dessa ai, num faiz medo. No sertão a gente tá costumado a vê muitas coisa... (1987: 27).

I think it looks like a cowboy in his leathers. It's not scary. We see something like that, and it's not scary. In the sertão we are used to seeing many things... (my translation).

The Portuguese term *vaquêro* or *vaqueiro* gains an awkward US intonation when translated as cowboy, just as *sertão* acquires distracting, while telling, Australian overtones through the use of the English word outback.

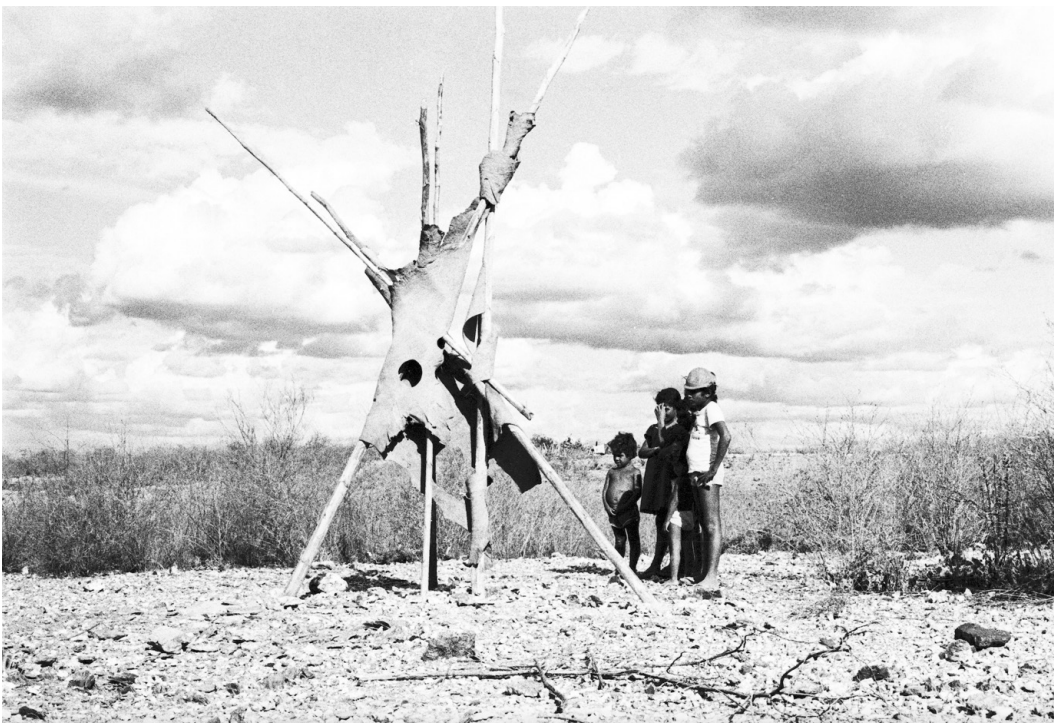


FIG.2. Documentation of *Projeto Terra* at Canudos, 1984. Courtesy of Juraci Dórea.

In his now classic account of the military attack and reconquest of the rebellious village of Canudos, Euclides da Cunha describes the “russet-gray of tanned hide” (93) worn by the vaqueiro of the sertão as: “fine leathern armor” (157). This is the Samuel Putnam translation of 1944. Elizabeth Lowe, in 2010, gives us: “handsome leather armor” (164). Both English-language renderings of the book describe local religion around 1900 as missionary Christianity elaborated through “an extravagant mysticism” (110; 117), which combined indigenous beliefs with those brought from Africa through nearly four hundred years of slavery, together with a multitude of imported Portuguese superstitions atavistically anchored in the late sixteenth century.

Third World, First Sight

Through the curatorial research work of Lilian Llanes, *Projeto Terra* was included in the main show of the third Havana Bienal, which took place at the National Museum of Fine Arts in the Cuban capital in 1989. Indicative of an avowedly Third World curatorial ambition, this core exhibition united the work of hundreds of artists from the Caribbean, Latin America, Africa and Asia or, if living elsewhere, then diasporic from these regions. *Projeto Terra* was displayed in this context in compact form: as a montage of panels showing photographs, maps and commentary, assembled into a rectangular display conveying the project as carried out in Brazil. This was presented on one of the Museum’s gallery walls, propped up from the floor on seven wooden legs.

It was in London in 2010 that I first came across an image of *Projeto Terra* – as shown in the Havana Bienal. The look of Conceptual art immediately snagged me: an “unaesthetic” or information-based aesthetic seemed reassuringly familiar, given my Anglophone and European understanding of the roots of so-called global contemporary art, such as I was confident

discussing it at the time. Glancing – and later peering – I could not read the prose that was evidently included in the work, nor understand the ideas this presumably conveyed, in tandem with the imagery, but I trusted the conceptual style: the use of photography, maps and words, quasi neutrally presented.



FIG.3. Documentation of Projeto Terra in the 3rd Havana Bienal, 1989. Courtesy of Juraci Dórea.

The installation photograph showing *Projeto Terra* that I first saw was taken by Luis Camnitzer: a hasty snap made as an aide memoir that would help him write a review of the Bienal for the art journal *Third Text*.

This close-up shot sat among many others showing different individual contributions to the show at the National Museum of Fine Arts in Havana, making it easy for me to flick through and zone into this work in particular, given my geo-aesthetic formation and lack of visuals indicating adjacent works that might make me work harder. Looking at an image of *Projeto Terra*'s isolated display and seeing documentation of a situated art project, I could imagine it being heralded a decade later within the umbrella of "Global Conceptualism" in the exhibition of this name at Queens Museum of Art in New York in 1999, or indeed as 'contemporary art... in a dialectical relationship with global culture at large' for documenta11 in Kassel three years later (Enwezor 2002: 40).

Camnitzer summarised *Projeto Terra* in Havana for *Third Text* as representing "work made for and with the people in the Brazilian Northeast", that moreover "exists in an exchange with its environment" (Camnitzer 1990: 86). On this basis, I saw a productive enmeshment of Land art and Social sculpture. I could imagine that the Latin American setting, with which I was unfamiliar, gave Conceptual art a regional relevance in terms of the aesthetics of a specifically *colonial* administration, with the use of photography, cartography and European prose all mobilised towards ecographic as much as auto-ethnographic ends while operating mindful that the "exchange" with the environment would mean a lack of ultimate capture. Then there was the word "humble" in the *Third Text* description of the installation (Camnitzer 1989: 88), which was used to describe the form in Havana as indicative of the endeavour documented in Brazil. This humbleness kindled my interest too: maybe through exhaustion with the bombast shown by or used to celebrate those successful in so-called global contemporary art around 2010; maybe naming, to be frank, what imagery of rural life south of the equator looked like to my urban and northern eyes.

In other words, respecting First World agendas as regards contemporary *qua* postconceptual art (Osborne, 2013), I could easily

appreciate *Projeto Terra* in its Havana iteration, from my particular position two decades later. I could laud it – also assimilate and maybe patronise it – via master artworks (most of those responsible were male), landmark exhibitions and canonical theory in my head. However, this was only by looking at it in isolation, as well as from afar: in ignorance of the other works on display, the Third-World curatorial frame, the particular institutional context in Old Havana, Cuba, the Caribbean and Latin America.

Moreover, I was ignoring those seven wooden legs – the load-bearing square-planed timber that could have come from any city in the world but in this case came from Feira de Santana, gateway to the sertão. What if that timber might work as a metonymic fragment, indicating precisely the commodified wieldiness of so-called global contemporary art and, by association, the difficulty of triggering artistic *exposure* in this form, in this setting? In those wooden legs in Havana, I still struggle to see a specificity of Feira de Santana yet I nevertheless find an enmeshment of that Brazilian location within a global notion of commerce. I see the generality of wood that, courtesy of worldwide agribusiness, constitutes often an invisible yet fundamental raw material for art transport and gallery display. I see the museological wieldiness of coming apart nicely to slip into a crate, ready for storage when out of favour, or for transit on the basis of an indemnified loan agreement when in demand. The wooden props and backboard could even be discarded and then reproduced at the point of display. This is not me faulting the form *Projeto Terra* took in Havana but recognizing something of its unintended initial allure for me. Analyzing this allure, those seven timber props move to the fore: they are key to the work's portability as a so-called unique and authentic object, for wherever and forever; even while, in themselves, they are disposable and replaceable – dead wood. The seven wooden legs of *Projeto Terra* in Havana indicate generic rather than situated signification – or, my initial failure to be *exposed* by this artwork, in this form, in this context, which could equally be *any other* context.

Transatlantic Crossings, North-South Correspondence: An Epistolary Interlude

In one of my more recent emails to Juraci Dórea – that is, before I had fed this message through the algorithms of machine-translation, so that it would arrive in Portuguese – I wrote:

I am investigating a family connection I have to Brazil. It seems an uncle of my grandfather's left the North of England at the turn of the nineteenth century to work on a shipping line that travelled between Europe and Latin America, settling his family in São Paulo. It seems likely that the shipping company that he worked for grew out of a butchery business that added refrigeration technology to the steamships trading food internationally. So, I am having to negotiate my own place in relation to the cattle hides of *Projeto Terra*, somehow.

Ever prompt and generous by reply, Juraci told me one of his own family tales in response, here rendered back through the sausage machine of Google Translate (with his permission):

a long time ago, a distant relative told me that my grandfather came with a brother to live in Bahia, initially settling in Tucano, a town in the sertão that is 150km from [my home in] Feira de Santana, where he worked in a tannery. I was happy with that story, but I couldn't find out more about it.

It turns out that I enjoyed – or needed – the lightness of that last sentence. I had become a little impatient with my increasingly frail mother, when she confused our family stories as regards Brazil, and it was good to be reminded that fewer facts can sometimes be richer, and as importantly, kinder. I remain keen to bring a history to the privileges I enjoy, when writing about *Projeto Terra*, and to embody, even ensnare, the gaze that I bring. Yet learning to lessen my desire to master facts has become equally crucial.

Ghosts in São Paulo

Looking at the display of *Projeto Terra* devised for the 19th Bienal de São Paulo in 1987, I am reminded of an architectural exhibition rather than an art show. I find generous quantities of information, in various different media, with some demonstrative elements. There is filmed documentation presented on a monitor. The panels, which would be used in later biennial outings, are grouped in clusters that suggest content, rather than form, is dictating the layout. Moreover, some of the raw materials for the sculptures in the sertão are presented without being assembled into shapes like those shown in the photographs. Postcards with such photographs on one side are free to be taken away – perhaps visitors to the Bienal will transcribe their own testimony regarding the São Paulo display on the other side, to share with family and friends.



FIG.4. Documentation of *Projeto Terra* in the 19th São Paulo Bienal, 1987. Courtesy of Juraci Dórea.

The artwork is not simply presented in the Bienal pavilion through reportage that is easy to assimilate to conceptual art. A material, physical, bodily, and lived engagement is lured by the propped and lashed wooden poles, alongside the pinned cattle hides, and invited through the postcards. To reiterate, the wood and leather elements are *not* set up for direct sculptural appreciation in the Bienal pavilion. The accompanying documentary resources direct us away to their assemblage in, and with, the sertão, for passing locals there. While bringing distant contexts in northeastern Brazil—and recent activity in these contexts—within reach, this display of *Projeto Terra* fundamentally points elsewhere: far away to those remote contexts. The physical presence of these dead tree parts and animal remains insists on yoking me, *here* in São Paulo, to the *there* of the sertão.

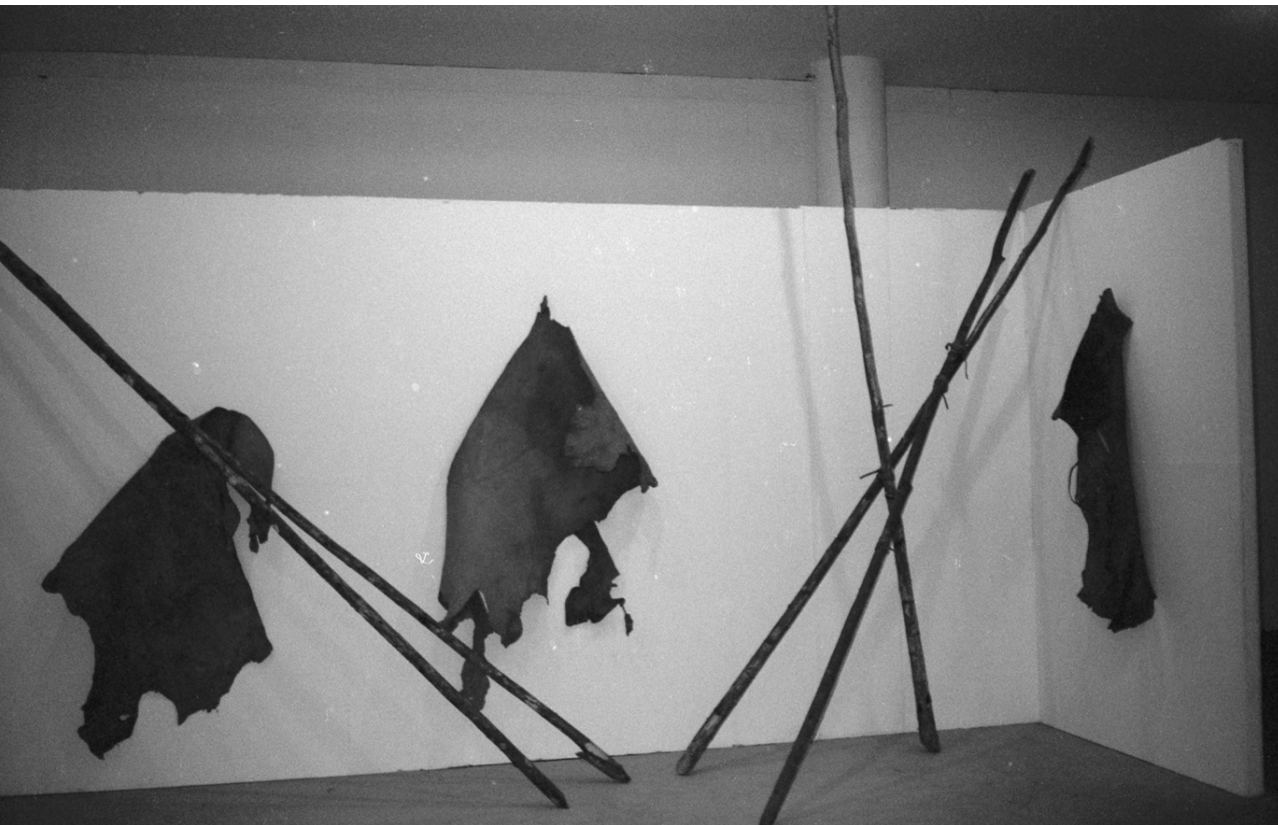


FIG.5. Documentation of *Projeto Terra* in the 19th São Paulo Bienal, 1987. Courtesy of Juraci Dórea.

Studying this artwork in the context of the Bienal de São Paulo, I have found it productively disruptive, rather than indicative. Its very installation mode disrupts the art context that nonetheless showcases it. Moreover, it seems to root itself less in the Bienal Pavilion and more in the wider situation of Ibirapuera Park, within the urban metropolis of São Paulo. Ibirapuera Park was created to mark four centuries since the Portuguese founding of the city. At the time of European colonization, there was already a village in this place. Indigenous populations were steadily decimated and, by the nineteenth century, farms and pastures predominated, with the cattle reared here driven to São Paulo's Municipal Slaughterhouse. The name Ibirapuera comes from the indigenous Tupí-Guaraní languages, meaning "old trees" or "decaying wood". The first step towards the construction of the park was to reduce the marshiness of the local floodplain through the planting of hundreds of eucalyptus trees, as introduced from the British colony of Australia. While chasing etymology, I will note that the word "park" comes from the twelfth-century French language, meaning "enclosed wood", or "heath land" used as a game preserve – where wild animals are hunted in a controlled way for sport.

Revisiting *Projeto Terra* in the Bienal de São Paulo of 1987, under the curatorial theme of Utopia versus Reality and the geopolitical organic context of Ibirapuera Park, brings all this swirling into view. The effect is humbling, inviting questioning while quietly insisting I come to new terms for my centrality in relation to the environmental problems of globalization and my own insignificance in terms of the outcomes. I am exposed – via settler colonialism turned globalized agribusiness – to an unresolvable reckoning with our shared planetary ecocide at the hands of human elites. I am made conscious of Earth as a history of arbitrary planetary events that exceed human signification, while finding my own current patch tethered more or less meaningfully to patches in Brazil and, between here and there, potentially everywhere else.

The display of *Projeto Terra* in São Paulo exposes me to ghosts: the

ghosts of animals and trees imported to service and die for colonisers of the continent. The ghosts of those unwittingly introduced here at the expense of indigenous lives, with their descendants now cultivated as raw materials for globalised agribusiness, are convoked by the installation of *Projeto Terra* Ibirapuera Park in 1987 and they haunt me still.

Back to the Sertão

Projeto Terra nests materially, socially, culturally, historically, politically, environmentally and imaginatively in particular sites within the sertão, where it also dissipates beyond trace, while not yet forgotten. Via the ghosts summoned by the 1987 Bienal in São Paulo, I now see the structural assemblages, *in situ* in rural Bahia, as pyres: as piles of combustible matter with funereal overtones. These pyres are dedicated to anonymous lives lost, human and more-than-human, which catch aflame when they are discussed.

What continues to burn me, visiting from the UK now, is the breath of *Projeto Terra*'s human-bovine-wooden *monsters*, the exhalations of monstrous hybrid creatures conjoining trees, cows and people. I am drawn in – and exposed – through the colonial past and the current networks of global trade, which nurture these monsters.

Coda

Having started with a glossary, which usually comes after a text, I wish to close with an epigraph, which would usually come first.

“Perhaps counterintuitively, slowing down to listen to the world – empirically and imaginatively at the same time – seems our only hope in a moment of crisis and urgency”. (Tsing, Swanson, Gan and Bubandt: M8)



FIG.6. Documentation of *Projeto Terra* at Raso da Catarina, 1984.
Courtesy of Juraci Dórea.

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