

## **We are deserts, but populated by tribes, flora and fauna.<sup>1</sup>**

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*There was one Mexican guy in Rio de Janeiro who became a member of RhR. He lived in the Favela da Maré; he was respected as he walked around wearing the RhR drawing-uniform on summer days. Nobody wears an RhR Uniform in Rio de Janeiro where it's over 40°C...<sup>2</sup>*

- *RhR's territories*

RhR was an organism that was invented as a territory populated not only by subjectivities, but also by a variety of other organic and non-organic elements. What mattered was not its borders or its defense mechanisms that could have protected it from outsiders or determined its identity as a work of art; on the contrary, what mattered were forces that emerged after each RhR encounter with other people, movements, ideas and events. This territory was divided into “fields”, such as psychiatry, engineering, art, medicine etc. Every RhR member belonged to one or many such divisions, according to how she or he experienced society, its ideological and religious aspects and so on. Therefore, RhR could not be defined simply as art, performance, a happening, choreography or even a participatory event. In reality it was far more complex than that. But since there exists a certain similarity between constituting a territory and making art, inventing RhR also meant inventing art itself at the same time.

RhR was initiated in its First Movement<sup>3</sup> by Laura Lima who was, at that time, assigned as its administrator: “Laura Lima in the service of RhR.” This did not mean she was its author, because the notion of authorship was erased under the auspice of RhR’s organism and its members. RhR was an “instance”, which referred to both the instance of thought and the set of actions launched during the process. Lima worked with the production of a collective body that continually reinvented itself in the landscape by way of recomposing various bodies in new, experimental couplings and collectivities. It was not about creating work as such, but was a question of leaving one’s territory and entering another; finding another possible language within the established art language. Through the specific need to invent “barbaric

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<sup>1</sup> Deleuze, Gilles and Claire Parnet. *Dialogues*. New York: Columbia University, 1987, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> All commentaries in italics are by *RhR* members.

<sup>3</sup> Within RhR, the notion of time was not described in terms of years, months or days, but in movements. The “First Movement” happened in 1999.

words”, the realization of new concepts with unpredictable wording would enter a new territory as a construction “between poetry, reason, madness, existence and power”, as she put it.<sup>4</sup>

*Copacabana. Laura Lima's apartment is full of people talking, moving around, gesturing to each other, dancing, drinking, playing music, smoking. Somebody is preparing caipirinhas. It is a meeting of the RhR organism in its Third Movement. Everyone is wearing drawing-uniforms. This unusual scene involves the whole space: the apartment, the bodies, the senses, the objects within it, which puts everything in another perspective; and suddenly there is a very intense feeling, an experience of utopia, as everyone looks the same and it is difficult to distinguish one from another. And time ceases to exist as such, since everything comes together in a single moment.*<sup>5</sup>

An important aspect of RhR, which to a large extent “defined” its territory, was the drawing-uniforms. Members designed and wore drawing-uniforms, which could also be shaped for things and animals. The uniform was made out of a fabric that provided many possibilities of colour and texture, following the shape of one's body, with sleeves, neck and a long section like a cloak. It could also be altered according to a member's desire to create a new shape. Members contributed to the RhR organism according to the expertise they brought forth from each of the divisions they belonged to. For instance, as an artist, the member Laura Lima contributed to the RhR organism with the proposal of a drawing-to-become-uniform. The drawing-uniform was made from a two-dimensional plane, a fabric cut with scissors, then folded and glued together to gain a real space and be filled by a body; it became the architectural space of the body. Each manufactured uniform was imprinted with an insignia and a still-blazing flag, which represented the passage of time and indicated different movements of RhR. Wearing the uniform meant integrating RhR, but also disintegrating it at the same time; to undo the drawing, so to speak, because the body had no rules or final objectives. What the body did have was an intention to becoming-other, to invent new trajectories, new circuits of response, as well as new virtual landscapes. Such becomings enabled “(...) an indefinite movement of invention opening wider and wider zones of

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<sup>4</sup> A conversation with Laura Lima, May 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Moments were something very much connected to RhR; not any kind of moments but moments that were eruptions of spontaneous creativity, flashes of liberation, utopian consciousness that escaped the daily programming and calculation. They left certain traces, since they broke with habits and repetitions. They are instances that intensified the vital productivity of everyday life, in this way introducing a sense of freedom from categorical thought, discipline, common structures, restraints.

autonomy populated by more and more singularities.”<sup>6</sup> As Lima said, it was not a work of art: it was just a drawing-uniform with no artistic function or objective to it.

*People just started wearing uniforms, sometimes for the pure pleasure of it, sometimes to attend art exhibitions, go to the cinema, walk through a military parade, a carnival, a supermarket, in various places around the world and in all sorts of RhR rituals, such as taking pills (with empty capsules), being at silent dinners and so on.*

*This one time, some neighbours in the apartment building in Copacabana where RhR was housed opened the door, and there were four RhR members standing outside wearing drawing-uniforms with insignia. On another occasion, a RhR member was travelling on a plane wearing the uniform and was asked if she was a member of a religious or esoteric sect. People seemed to think that RhR was a secret society due to the way its members dressed and behaved when, in fact, the intention was exactly the opposite: to contaminate and be contaminated.*

- *RhR's barbaric words*<sup>7</sup>

The hyphen – as the letter h in the acronym *RhR* – was understood as an abyss of sorts, which enabled the construction of a territory, and therefore its function was to make a specific trajectory between elements and that territory; more precisely, between R and R in a Representative-hyphen-Representative relationship, so a dynamic encounter between different modes of action could happen at any time. The h rendered a guttural sound and bridged an invented language and bodily gestures at the same time (“barbaric words”). As Lima pointed out, any experience, any mode of action that made such a shift, could also transform itself into art. This enabled *RhR* to get out of art while remaining within it, not necessarily producing anything like a story, a narrative or an object. *RhR* was something amorphous, not quite defined and bound to disappear. For that reason, it was considered to be an organism and not an art collective or a group.

An important word in the glossary was “instance”. Instances were “things” that simply happened. And since *RhR* did not make hierarchical distinctions between objects, animals,

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<sup>6</sup> Massumi, Brian. *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. A Seventh Edition. Cambridge, London: MIT Press, 1992, p.102.

<sup>7</sup> See under A (Animal) in Deleuze, Gilles; Claire Parnet and Pierre-Andre Boutang. *From A to Z*, DVD. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2012.

plants or people, every instance could at any moment construct a universe of its own where the line of flight always began with a question: “What is it that begins to speak through you in a given situation or context?”<sup>8</sup> Instances of thought, in turn, allowed for its own form of autonomous thinking. Some instances were orchestrated into a single event that happened in various festivities, appropriations of everyday situations and rituals (candomble, of uniform-making, military parade, religious events); others were opened to the idea of daily behaviors such as bodily rhythms: walking, dancing, talking, singing, carrying something, eating; various gestures: with hands, with an instrument, wearing a drawing-uniform, carrying a flag; various sounds: silent dinners, speaking in tongues, singing; physical transit: airports, buses, trains. Other instances formed non-verbal assemblages where communication occurred on the level of the body (i.e. somatic knowledge, affects) and where organism could also function as a message – where any form of energy (smell, sound emissions etc.) propagation could transmit a message, similar to some animal worlds, such as those of bees and termites.

*There were members from various divisions: artists, janitors, lawyers, poets, freelancers, actors, psychiatrists, Catholics, Candomblé people... even Sebastiana, who was our housekeeper and couldn't read or write, was a member. And the glossary kept coming up and taking shape – with no exact answers – out of this togetherness.*

- *RhR's* trajectories

*RhR* experiences were “corruptible”, which meant that fixed concepts or identities that might have started to form a certain context around those experiences had to be corrupted at once. However, certain trajectories could be made with various artistic or non-artistic collectives, groups and characters. In a way this process of crossing with other groups was similar to the idea of the “zigzag” as a movement, which was also the idea of how to bring disparate singularities into a relationship. For Deleuze zigzag (as in letter Z) represented flashes of lightning that made the dark world visible that brought potentials from the chaos into life in a way similar to how it brought singularities into a relationship or potentials into a relationship. It often happened that the *RhR's* way of operating was interpreted as a participatory event, which is a completely misleading notion. The debates on the topic of participation have stimulated the construction of a hegemonic canon – as if it were universally valid – that does not take into account other principles of knowledge, and other epistemologies within this

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<sup>8</sup> Guattari, Felix. *Soft subversions: Texts and Interviews 1977–1985*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009, p. 25.

territory of thought. Theoreticians Walter Mignolo and Anibal Quijano, for example, in the context of de-colonial epistemology, emphasized a necessary shift towards the delinking of knowledge. In other words, a shift towards a kind of thinking that would be coming from our own bodies. In this way, delinking could be a move beyond the pretended universality of the so-called participation in art and beyond a corpus of knowledge that was being created around it. But what actually is participation? The basic idea of participatory art is that the artwork is constructed as a situation, a collective process, which includes different approaches towards authorship, good or bad models of collaboration and final outcome. The participation of the audience allows the possibility for the work to actually happen. In general, all these could hold true for *RhR* as well, but with essential differences. *RhR* had never considered its encounters as art, even though it was always on the lookout for new ones where art could be just another possible source of operating. Each *RhR* member and crosser<sup>9</sup> contributed in a variety of ways to his or her own division. There were no spectators or audience in the sense that they would be the ones to complete the work. In return, participation was only a meaningless word that had to be overturned by an epistemological vigilance. So what *RhR* was really about was the desert with flora, fauna and different tribes: about experimentation on founding epistemologies. In this regard, other curious trajectories can be established with various movements and collective processes; not only from different temporalities but also from different geographies.

Hélio Oiticica, Lygia Clark, Flavio de Carvalho, Macunaíma, Os Mutantes, Xapanã, Olodumaré, Escolas de Samba, Situacionists and Dada. How was it at all possible for any kind of exchange or encounter to happen among those diverse groups, characters and *RhR*? After all, they appear quite different from each other and don't necessarily share the same vocabulary of thought, language, imagination and body. But at the same time, we should not forget the existence of other dimensions, other languages, the effects, the vibrations and resonances that travel through various channels and might not always be part of our known universe, of our imagination and experience.<sup>10</sup> Sometimes we simply encounter people without even knowing them or ever having seen them or their work.

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<sup>9</sup> A crosser was another word from the *RhR* vocabulary and it meant somebody, a thing or a person, who was not wearing the uniform, but who was involved in different *RhR* situations, regularly receiving information concerning *RhR*.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Laing, R. D. *The Politics of Experience*. London: Penguin, reprinted in 1990, p.103: "The process of entering into *the other* world from this world, and returning to *this* world from the other world, is as natural as death and giving birth or being born."

There exists, for example, a resonance between *RhR*'s bodily movements and the Situationists' concept of *dérive* (*drift*); both the construction of situations or territories was the creation of real time and space, which was also the context within which one could begin, experimentally, to create his or her own immediate experience. These environments could contaminate individual and group experiences, which in turn would be contaminated as a result. Another trajectory could be made through Flavio de Carvalho's *Experiences*, as, for instance, Experience N° 3, where he walked in the streets of São Paulo in 1956 with his eccentric outfit for the "men of the tropics". It consisted of a yellow and green striped blouse and a short green skirt, worn over ballerina stockings and displaying a kind of ventilation tube under the blouse. He entered a space and caused an immediate reaction. A curious similarity can also be traced to the cartographic work of Fernand Deligny who, in 1968, created a facility network for taking care of children with autism, asking the following questions: "What is the form of movement without perspective or goal? How do we engage with a world that is not our own, a world turned upside down, yet truly common, where acting cohabitates with our actions and the unknown with our forms of knowledge?"<sup>11</sup> Both Deligny and *RhR* referred to the idea of "errant lines", which characterized something other than dominant forms of production and exchange of knowledge and experience. Deligny referred to the drawings of autistic children making their own paths and journeys by locating their bodies in space using forms, colors, smells and rhythms. Similarly, *RhR* pointed to the insignia scribbles that indicated the passage of time and the movements of the organism through various planes and arrangements – the temporal references left in the body.

Another vector can be drawn with the *OHO* movement<sup>12</sup> of the 1960s in Yugoslavia. While *OHO* was concerned primarily with art in connection with life and with various utopian proposals being an essential part of everyday life and cosmic harmony, *RhR* was an expansion into life itself, "a stain that had spread in an organic geometry".<sup>13</sup> However, there are some strong similarities between *RhR* and *OHO*. For instance, the idea of a vector that connects dimensions, lost in the confines of space and time, with reality. In *RhR* it was called hyphen,

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<sup>11</sup> See Deligny, Fernand. *The Arachnean and Other Texts*. Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing, 2013.

<sup>12</sup> *OHO* were among the most interesting and important representatives of the avant-garde art of the 1960s and 1970s in central and eastern Europe. In the years of the *OHO*'s existence, its members and associates developed very different artistic strategies and approaches, from the co-called Reism (a concept of a non-anthropocentric world of "things") to particular forms of Arte Povera, Process Art, Performance and Body Art, Land Art and Concept Art. In the last period of their work, the *OHO* members created an original combination of Conceptual Art, ecological concerns and esoteric theories, using such means as telepathy to achieve a balance between the group members and harmony between themselves, nature and the whole universe.

<sup>13</sup> In conversation with Laura Lima, May 2009.

in *OHO* it could be found in their “microcosmic creative processes” or more precisely, in the philosophy known as reism. Reism was an understanding of a no longer anthropocentric world but rather one where living forms and things existed in a mutually equal relationship. Reism meant that an artwork was no longer confined to the notion of the art object but could expand itself in the micro- and macro-dimension of space, becoming a thing with all its life and actions that would be inherent to it. Thus there was no longer any such thing as art because “a work of art is not necessarily recognizable as such, but can also take the form of certain action in changing relations, culture, existence, civilization.”;<sup>14</sup> in other words, it was about total liberation of thought. In this regard we should also mention a series of collective experiences from the mid-1960s by a group of Catalan artists,<sup>15</sup> entitled *Ceremonials*, where the borders between art and life, artists and participants, were entirely blurred. *Ceremonials* included all sorts of rituals, encounters, and sensorial experiences, comprising, for example, retina and tongue, visuality and taste, colours and food. *Ceremonials* were not art happenings, but were developed like collective actions demanding participation either in public or private spaces. It is worth mentioning that each *Ceremonial* emphasized some particular colour that determined its components, including coloured food, which was then swallowed in the process. The process was a ritual, a passage from participation to destruction where the work of art was destroyed by swallowing it.

- *RhR*'s organism

Like any other contiguous living system, the *RhR* organism was capable of responding to stimuli, to reproduction, growth, multiplication, and so on. What distinguished it from other living systems was that its members were always on the lookout for new encounters with something unrecognizable that provoked new ideas. Those encounters in return necessarily involved movement and desire: movement as becoming-another, and desire as a mode of production and the constructing of something: the will to live, to create, and to love, to invent another society, another value system. Even though the aims of the *RhR* organism were not overly political in the sense of bringing up new ideologies, they could nevertheless be observed as micropolitical poetical investigations<sup>16</sup> of various spatio-temporal realities. This

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<sup>14</sup> Pogačnik, Marko. *Umetnost življenja – življenje umetnosti = The art of life – the life of art*. Ljubljana: Moderna galerija, 2012, p. 38.

<sup>15</sup> The so-called Paris Catalans were Antoni Miralda, Joan Rabascall, Jaume Xifra, Benet Rossell and Dorothée Selz.

<sup>16</sup> See Suely Rolnik: *Archive Mania, 100 Notes – 100 Thoughts*, n° 22, Documenta 13, Hantje Cantz, 2012.

was done on two levels: on the level of the body and on the level of knowledge; or to be more precise, on the level of somatic knowledge, which is the way by which the body perceives reality through biological means.

*RhR*'s operating principles were, to a large extent, marked by the so-called "bureaucratic channels"; the fluid ways through which information regarding the organism – its meetings or other organizational elements – travelled through. Such "channels" included insignia, visas, seals, tags, didactic images and photos, a glossary, flags, declarations, *RhR* I.D., and so on. However, this did not mean *RhR*'s bodies were repressed, institutionalized or docile; on the contrary, the bureaucratic channels stimulated the creation of other kinds of knowledge, eruptions of spontaneous creativity, flashes of liberation, production of desire that escaped the daily programming and calculation. Everything against the normal: "What we call 'normal' is a product of repression, denial, splitting, projection, introjection and other forms of destructive action on experience."<sup>17</sup> All such moments, in turn, left traces in the body, since they broke with habits and repetitions. They were instances that intensified the vital productivity of everydayness and introduced a sense of freedom from categorical thought, discipline, common structures and restraints. This was precisely the idea behind *RhR*'s statement that declared the necessity "to have something corrupted". In a resonant way Mladen Stilinović, an artist from Croatia, suggested, "Neither left nor right, neither masses nor elite, neither apples nor oranges. Potatoes, potatoes, or cakes".

One might ask: what was it that was left from *RhR*? What kind of forces remained once those encounters ceased to exist? And what about now; have all the traces of previous experiences simply vanished? Even though there exist numerous "didactic images" of various *RhR* occurrences, what was important was not the representation of an event, but the intensities and effects that could at any time be reactivated as an affective memory within the body or as a recovery of intensities. This kind of knowledge that was being produced could not be commodified. Therefore the political-poetic potential of *RhR* was in the unleashing of the mind's most creative capacities and in reconnecting them with the body. The moving away from representation into experience, the becoming of the power of emergence into the open field of the relations with the unknown, the traversing the domains of an unlimited number of connections, where "communication was occurring at the edge of impossible crossings, or perhaps in the gap of potential contact", go against the instrumentalization of desire and even further, into an infinite future...

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<sup>17</sup> Laing, R.D. *The Politics of Experience*. London: Penguin, reprinted in 1990, pp. 23-24.

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