



About the Restlessness of Rebellious Minds: Flow and Confluence in the Work of Paulo Bruscky: Interview with the Artist

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(With the strategical-logistical help of Itamar Morgado¹)

The work of Paulo Bruscky cannot be reduced to styles, much less themes. For forty years, the artist has painted, created objects, installations, performances, artist-books, postal art, audio art, video art, audio-visual art, xerographic art, movies... and clearly, I must have forgotten some resource used by him during his trajectory to express himself, without any type of hierarchy, within the multiple forms or concepts he has employed.

His artistic being knows no borders regarding thinking, questioning or execution, behaving as a form of resistance to limits imposed by artistic legitimization. Nothing has held him back, not even fantasies or dreams. He projects them, not always constructed, but leaving them stored waiting, maybe, for another dreamer to come along and fulfill them, bringing to fruition, finally, his imagined "dream filming machine" or that programmable aurora Borealis for performance events.

Bruscky was a pioneer in the way he used new media, basing his art on experimentation and sharing. Respected for his work as a whole, his pieces constitute a spatial continuum of transit and contagion. He believed in exchange and sharing in artistic production. During two decades, he worked with Daniel Santiago in the team Paulo Bruscky & Daniel Santiago (B&S) that only stopped producing pieces in 1992. The practice of Mail/Art (Arte/Correio), for example, being conceived as a process of creative interference over "medium," translates his concern to build dialogue that would include other artists, partners, and accomplices, besides San-

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tiago, coming from the most varied geographies, such as: J. Medeiros, Ângelo de Aquino, Regina Vater, Leonhard Frank Duch, Unhandeijara Lisboa, Regina Silveira, Samaral, Ypiranga Filho, Ismael Assumpção, Cláudio Ferlauto, Falves Silva, Ivan Maurício, Maurício Fridman, Gabriel Borba, AnnaBella Geiger, and Bené Sourceles, among many others.



Image 1. *Arte Postal / Postal Art*, 1976. Source: Paulo Bruscky, personal archive

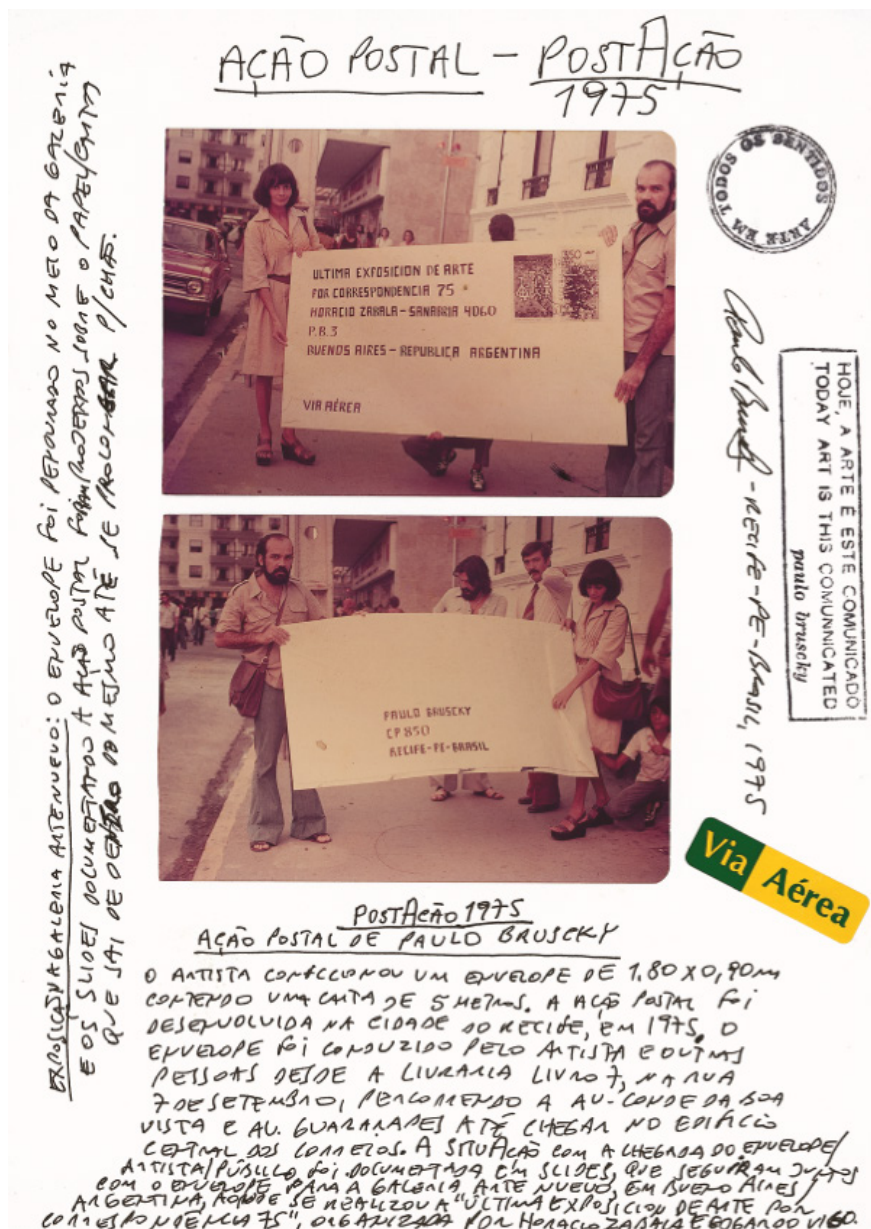


Imagem 2 – Arte Postal /Postal Art, 1975. Source: Paulo Bruscky, personal archive²

2 Trans. note: The following is a translation of the text of Image 2. **Below:** *PostAção / PostAction* 1975 Postal Action by Paulo Bruscky The artist decorated an envelope of 1.8m x .90m containing a 5m long letter. Postal action was developed in the city of Recife in 1975. The artist and others took the envelope from the bookstore Livro 7, on Rua 7 de Setembro, running along Avenida Conde da Boa Vista and Avenida Guararapes until they reached the central Post Office. The situation with the arrival of the envelope/artist/public was documented in slides, which then went along with the envelope to the Arte Nuevo (New Art) Gallery in Buenos Aires, Argentina, where "The Last Exhibit of Postal Art [poetry] '75" was held, organized by Horacio Zabala and Eduardo Vigo. **Left Side:** Exhibit at the Arte Nuevo Gallery: the envelope was hung in the middle of the gallery and the slides documenting the postal action were projected onto the paper/letter, which unfolded from the envelope all the way to the floor.

Throughout his whole life Bruscky has made contact with those who shared his necessity to experiment. He has exchanged correspondence and ideas with members of Fluxus and Gutai, entered into contact with artists from the most diverse regions of what was then still a vast world from his own space/place - from the world of his atelier in Recife, the city where he was born, lives, and from where he connects to the planet.

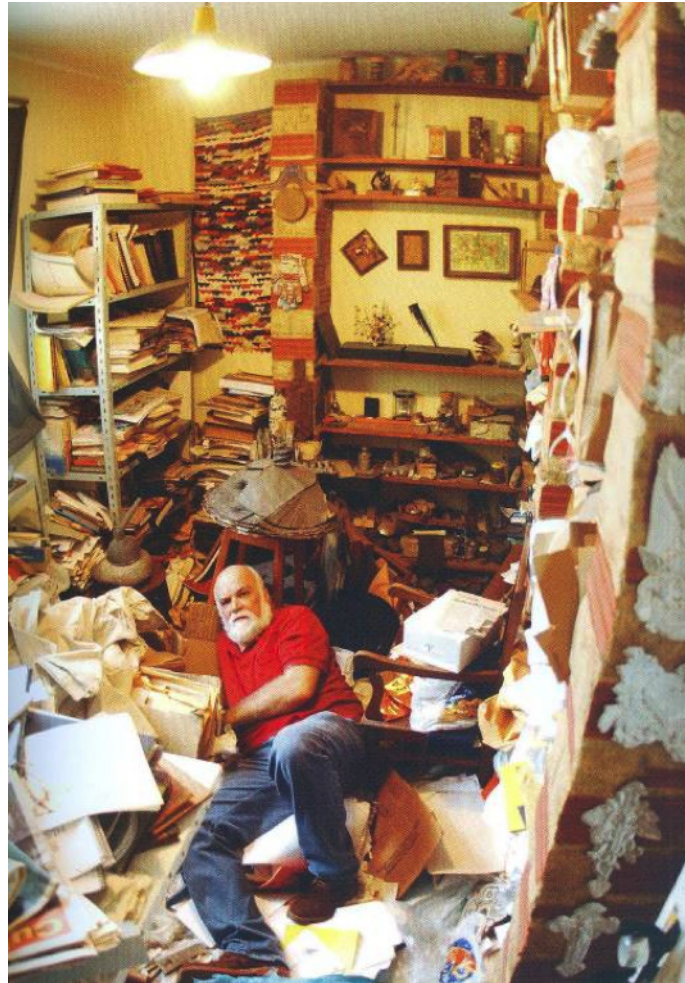


Image 3 – *The artist's atelier*, 2004. Source: Paulo Bruscky, Personal Archive

Conceptual freedom - imaginative and perceptive as an artistic practice - involves the politics of putting oneself beyond the servitudes and barriers that bureaucratize and regulate art and life. The '60s and the dictatorship in Brazil, for example, didn't hold him back. Bruscky made use of Postal Art, collages, artist-books, visual poetry, and news paper interventions to launch his criticisms about the political situation in the country, sometimes getting into head-on conflict with the repres-

sive system of that moment (for which he was arrested several times) for actions such as putting coffins in the Capibaribe river, in Recife, with messages considered subversive on the caskets that drifted along until police managed to haul them in. His resistance strategies, involving art and politics, questioned the power, or lack of power, of artists' intervention in the system of symbolic values, like the art circuit, for example. There is a sensitive and sensible quality to his work, inherent in the accessibility of artistic experiments so spread out through the urban space, as the work takes to the streets proposing questions, dialoguing with the indifference that people feel living their automatic daily lives. "What is art? What is it good for?" is one of the questions he asks, using publicity resources that are familiar to the daily routine of the anonymous multitudes: people paid to wear signs and stand on the corner all day, still common in Brazil. He answers his own question, affirming that "Art is still the last hope" in one of his pieces that composes and entitles his retrospective exhibited in 2013 at the Bronx Museum, in New York.

Art always pulls magic along as its shadow, the enchantment of the enigmatic, the restlessness of rebellious minds, the incompleteness of the established, the search for transcendence, the will to surpass what has been achieved. That, in itself, constitutes a refreshing breath in this world of little hope. The artist opens worlds, resisting and isolating himself from the surrounding noise, the great promotional spectacle, and generates new proposals and resonances. Jointly with Daniel Santiago, Bruscky brings back this libertarian perspective about art's capacity to create and modify the people and things that it comes into contact with and, optimistically "produce a vaccine for boredom." Art is the anti monotony antidote for all of us.



Image 4 – *Confirmado! É arte / Confirmed! It's Art*, 1977. Source: Paulo Bruscky, Personal Archive

His work is also his workshop, his atelier. Archiving the vestiges of his art actions and of the artists who were part of his utopia has generated a work-archive that also represents his way with dealing with creativity, of creating relationships and gathering creative acts. Everyone and everything is found within his walls: from his past to present works; pieces of innumerable other artists from the most distant and diverse places; remains of old installations along with projects that were never executed, or plans for concretization; documents from the 20th century about already forgotten artists (Fedora do Rego Monteiro, so sought after by me in Paris, resides in his shelves) and all the art of objects that attracted his attention during his strolls through the world's streets.

His atelier is relevant to the artist's aesthetic mastery in the sense that it goes beyond its own history, serving as a source of inspiration and dialogue for him. His work needs interchange and dialogue in order to exist, which is indeed what happens between the walls of this space where the artist lives and works, a space that serves as an archive for memories of the dialogues that he sought along his path as an artist. However, his proposed re-education of sensorial perception through art flies beyond the confines of his atelier and takes over the historic streets of the Boa Vista neighborhood, in the heart of Recife, with graffiti that invite

those passing by, even the most absent minded, to look around, (re)live the city and see it as Bruscky does, a RECIFELIZ.³



Image 5 – Paulo Bruscky, Madalena Zaccara and Itamar Morgado during the interview in the artist's atelier, Recife-PE, May/2015. Source: Madalena Zaccara and Itamar Morgado

Interview

MZ: Paulo Bruscky, the artist, has and continues to work with multiple artistic languages. A multimedia artist and poet, he uses performance, xerox-art, postal art, artist-books, audio art, video art, and billboards, among other forms of expression. How do you situate your particular poetics of plurality, of interdisciplinarity, influences and confluences, at the end of the 60's, in a city like Recife, which at the time was so conservative and poorly equipped in relation to the visual arts. Was there dialogue with your partners and the public?

PB: *As for my Experimental Actions (ExperimentAções) in Recife, since the '60s, with participation in Poema/Processo (Poem/Process), up to now, I've always had more friends that work with literature and music. In part, my isolation was always a personal option. Art criticism in Recife is very recent, which is great, because we analyzed and wrote about our own work.*

³ Trans. note: RECIFELIZ: a upbeat neologism that conflates the name of the city, Recife, with *feliz*, 'happy.'

*Recife was always a traditional and conservative city, but at the same time it was a stage for revolutionary and pioneering initiatives, not only in politics, but culture as well: O Gráfico Amador (Amateur Graphic) was the most important graphic art movement of the 20th century in Brazil. The Popular Culture Movement (Movimento de Cultura Popular / MCP), created in 1961, was so significant that it influenced the creation of the Popular Centers of Culture (Centros Popular de Cultura / CPCs) in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, among other states. In 1930, Percy Jan, Soares and Augusto Rodrigues organized the Surrealist Ball of Recife. Rodrigues did all the decorations for the ball with labels from well-known medications: from Santo Antônio cough syrup to laxative pills. The chairs were glued to the ceiling and the ball shut down before the scheduled time. Also in 1930, Vicente do Rego Monteiro, with the collaboration of Geo-Charles, brought the exhibit "The Parisian School"/"A Escola de Paris," to Brazil. The exhibit went to Recife, Rio de Janeiro, and São Paulo and included nearly fifty artists, amongst them; Picasso, Léger, Braque, Gris, Severini, Marcoussis, Lhote, Joaquim de Rego Monteiro and Foujita. The first Ecological Garden of Brazil, designed by Burle Marx, in 1937, was implanted in Recife. In 1952, anticipating the Concrete Poetry Movement, Vicente do Rego Monteiro published his book *Concrecion*. To wrap it up, I must mention the Manifesto/Boycott of the Pre-Biennial of São Paulo, held in the FECIN Park, in Jaqueira, Recife, in 1970. The Manifesto was organized by the Association of Professional Plastic Artists of Pernambuco, and signed by 25 artists who rebelled against the event: Josael de Oliveira, Thiago Amorim, Anchises, Ypiranga Filho, Paulo Bruscky, Bernardo Dimenstein, Silvio Hansen and Wellington Virgolino, among others.*

MZ: Collectives are a common praxis in Recife. Bruscky and Santiago were the precursors. How do you view this exchange of knowledge, this thinking and manner of producing together that artists from Pernambuco have - yesterday and today?

PB: *I have always participated in group projects since the '60s, following the example of Silvio Hansen, Unhandeijara Lisboa, Sérgio Lemos, Ypiranga Filho, Ulises Carrion, Flávio Pons, Marconi Notaro, Luca Mitti, Cláudio Goulart, Clemente Padin, Falves Silva, Jota Medeiros, along with a diversity of people. The Bruscky and Santiago team was the longest lasting, and we each had our own solo work as well as projects teamed with other artists. I think Recife is the Brazilian city that had the*

most collectives, since the Modern Art Society (*Sociedade de Arte Moderna*) in the '50s, going on to the *Brigadas Políticas*, and groups such as *O Grupo da Ribeira*, *Oficina 154*, *Guaiansases*, *Molusco Lama*, *Formiga Sabe que Roça Come*, *Camelo*, *Carasparanabuco*, *Carga e Descarga*, *Valdisnei*, *Aleph*, *Subgraf*, and dozens more.

MZ: During your entire artistic life of experimental incursions you have interacted with other trailblazing artists to map out new paths. How did you process this exchange with artists in different places around the world and with movements like Fluxus, for example, all from your atelier in the state of Pernambuco?

PB: *Ezra Pound said that you have to know your village well before you go off into the world. My whole artistic career has its foundations in Recife. Through Poem/Process, I already had some contacts in Latin America, and after 1973, when I joined the International Postal Art Movement, the world, envisioned by MacLuhan, turned into a Global Village. Postal Art is the only movement without a nationality, the subterranean erupts up into the whole world all at the same time. All the new technologies/new means of communication that were developed, were incorporated, up to the Fax machine ("Assim se Fax Arte," Brusky),⁴ which allowed transmission in realtime. The first transmission of Fax Art in Brazil was in 1980, between Paulo Bruscky (in Recife) and Roberto Sandoval (in São Paulo). The Postal Artists worked in conjunction and with the consciousness of a network. To us, the use of the Internet as a web connection was a logical consequence of all of this. Today, art is this communication. I have kept in contact with the Grupo Fluxus since the beginning of the '70s, following the examples of Ken Friedman, Dick Higgins, Robin Crozier and John Cage. I have nearly 1500 pieces from Fluxus in my Archive - correspondence, publications, documents. As for the Gutai Group, which started in Japan in 1956, I maintained contact with Saburo Murakami and Shozo Shimamoto.*

4 Trans. note: Assim se fax arte. Another play on words: Assim se faz arte, in Portuguese would be "This is how you do/make art." Brusky substitutes the 'z' for the 'x,' (which would have a somewhat similar sound in Portuguese), conflating the two words.

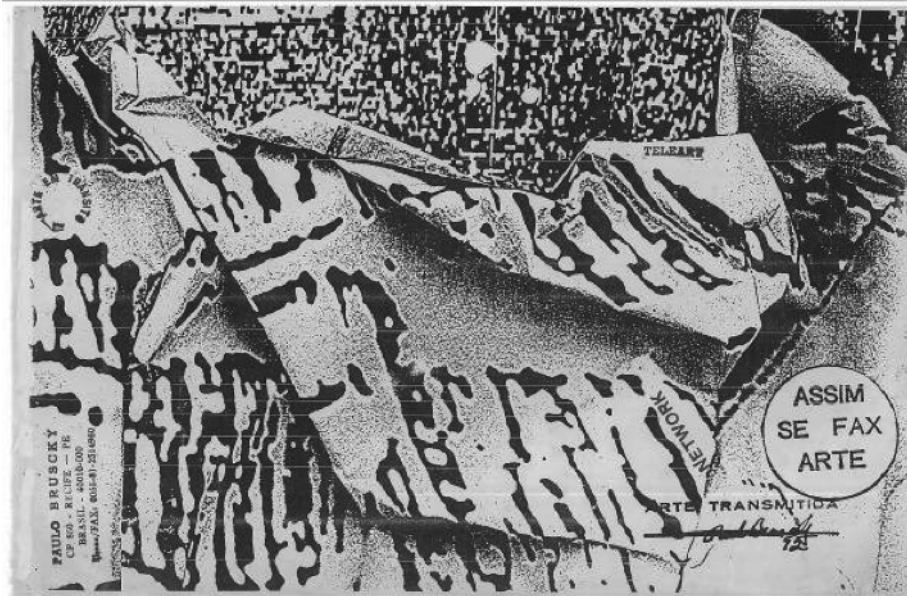


Image 6 – *Assim se Fax Arte [This is How You Fax Art]*, 1992. Source: Paulo Bruscky, Personal Archive

MZ: Paulo Bruscky is known for his personal archive, caring for what seems to you as relevant, as well as to others. How does your atelier-archive act as a mirror for your artistic work?

PB: *I maintain nearly 70,000 items of Contemporary Art, and 50,000 of Art from Pernambuco (from Nassau to 2015) in my archive. All this, mixed in with my own artistic trajectory: "VidArte."*⁵

MZ: In your work some research projects are considered "unviable," such as wanting to color the sky with the help of chemists and physicists. How did you manage the exchange of knowledges with possible partners in relation to projects that should remain in the imaginary realm?

5 Trans. note: As noted, throughout the interview (and in his work), Bruscky elides words to create a compiled word that approximates how he sees distinct elements as an organic whole - and to shock/question the perception of who's reading/viewing. Here, in the original Portuguese, "a misturAção com a minha trajetobra: é a minha VidArte, he elides: Mixture and Action; trajectory with his work; and Life with Arte.



Image 7 – *Ensaio* / *Essays*, 2008. Source: Paulo Bruscky, Personal Archive

PB: *Some projects were unviable at the time of their conception, but no longer. Santos Dumont has a saying that I like a lot "Everything that a man can think of, others can bring about." In a project similar to coloring the clouds - which is the tropical artificial Aurora Borealis, also from 1974 - and after finding out that NASA had successfully experimented with an artificial Aurora Borealis, I forwarded a letter through the American Consulate proposing to do some training with one of their rockets to make the project happen. I'm still waiting for a response to this day. I have a series of books called "Idea Bank" / "Banco de Ideias" in my atelier, which contain all of my projects, since the '60s. I'd have to live at least 200 years to execute everything that I've come up with.*

MZ: The process of globalization ruptures with the immediate association between place, identity, and culture. In this globalized contemporary reality, what power does art have to reestablish identities, and to strengthen them?

PB: *Art is Still the Last Hope. In terms of Recife, I will respond with this text:*

AR-RECIFES de POESIA de PBY

O Recife em Prova e Prosa

Roteiro I

O Recife da poesia sonora dos sapos franceses: ui, ui, ui, ui...;

O Recife dos ventos uivantes;

O Recife das Artes e dos Artistas;

O Recife da artdoor, transformando a cidade numa grande galeria a céu aberto;

O Recife do baixo meretrício com a boate Chantecler servindo de galeria e eu na prisão;

O Recife da pintura a óleo comestível;

O Recife da Geo/rádio/grafia: como parte e sendo a minha própria obra: poetiCidade;

O Recife do poema/processo ao visual da Poazia;

O Recife das minhas presepadas trazidas da infância para o ser infante;

O Recife dos mo(vi)mentos liberta/dores

O Recife das aspirinas de João Cabral de Melo Neto;

O Recife das assombrações de Gilberto Freyre;

O Recife das fantasias tropicalistas de Manoel Bandeira para o carnaval de 1938;

O Recife do modernismo de Ascenso Ferreira e Benedito Monteiro;

O Recife do multiartista Vicente do Rego Monteiro;

O Recife das entre/vistas de todos e do Nadaísmo;

O Recife da cheia, da des/grança (do bairro aos telegramas glub, glub, glub e obras de lama);

O Recife dos mercados (de arte) públicos por bairros;

O Recife das Personas sem sentidos;

O Recife de Campo Grande ao Sossego, via Boa Vista, Graças e Oh, linda cidade;

O Recife do buraco de Otília, com de tudo um pouco e outros bares e lupanares: Venda do Seu João, Leitaria, Gregório, Tita, Gragantino, Espanhol, Samburá, Tepan, Gambrinos, Mangueirão, Chantecler, entre outros Eus;

O Recife da Palarva e da palavra;

O Recife da Poesia Viva e da Arte Cemiterial;

O Recife da Lógica x Acaso;

O Recife para Credelever;

O Recife do Arte/Pare e de Silhuetas;

O Recife do Humo(i)ronia;

O Recife da Cotidiarte;

O Recife da Arte em Trânsito e em Todos os Sentidos;
 O Recife em Recife: respirando o Recife, a primeira lembrança é arte;
 O Recife: hoje a arte é este comunicado.⁶

Paulo Bruscky
 Recife, 01/08/08

MZ: Artistic action identifies with the production of eventual subversiveness and systemic symbolism. Conceptual freedom, imaginative and perceptive of artistic practices that involve politics may shelter a re-conceptualization of the utopian word, an update of it's meaning? Is there a Brusckyan utopia?

PB: *Yes, it's like correcting the word ERRATA.*

MZ: Nicolas Bourriaud theorized the proposal of an art tied to a relational esthetic

6 Trans. note: Given the intentional graphic interplay, I've opted to maintain the Portuguese in the text. Below, a sketchy translation of Bruscky's poem. There are far too many plays on words in Portuguese, neologisms to account for here. Some will be apparent; some have been noted in [...]. The title, AR-RECIFES de POESIA puts together AR (air) with "arrecifes" (meaning 'reefs'), thus indicating a place/poetry fluid and enveloping. 'Recife,' the name of the city, refers to the reefs off its coast.

AR-RECIFES de POESIA by PBY / Recife in Proof and Prose / Script 1 / Recife of the sonorous poetry of French frogs, ribbit, ribbit, ribbit ribbit...; / Recife of the howling winds; / Recife of Ar [air] t and the Ar tists; / Recife the billboard, transforming a city into a great open air gallery / Recife with cheap prostitution with the Chantecler night club serving as a gallery and me in prison; / Recife of edible oil paint; / Recife of Geo/radio/ography: as a part of, and being my own art: poetCity; / Recife of my precipitousness, brought from infancy to the Infant being; / Recife of mov(i)ments of freedom / Recife of João Cabral de Melo Neto and his aspirin; / Recife of Gilberto Freyre and his fantastic apparitions; / Recife of the tropicalists costumes of Manuel Bandeira for Carnival, 1938; / Recife and the modernism of Ascenso Ferreira e Benedito Monteiro; / Recife of Vicente do Rego Monteiro, multi-artist; / Recife of the inter/vistas of everybody and of Nadaísmo; / Recife while flooded, of the dis/tress (from the neighborhood to telegrams glub, glub, glub, glub, and mud works); / Recife with its markets (of art), public by neighborhoods; / Recife of meaningless People; / Recife from Campo Grande to Sossego, through Boa Vista, Graças e / Oh, beautiful city; / Recife of Otilia's Hideaway, with a little bit of everything and other bars and brothels: Venda do seu João, Leitaria, Gregório, Tita, Gragantino, Espanhol. Samburá, Tepan, Gambrinos, Mangueirão, Chantecler, among other Eus(I's); / Recife of the Palarva [Word + larva] and the Word; / Recife of Live Poetry and Cementarial Art; / Recife of Logic and Chance; / Recife for Credelever; / Recife of Stop/Art and Silhouettes; / Recife of Humo(i)ronia [humor - irony]; / Recife of Cotidiarte [Quotidian art]; / Recife of art in transit, traffic going all ways; / Recife in Recife: breathing Recife, the first memory is art; / Recife: today, art is this communication.

that creates differences in a legitimate world consensus and reconnects lost social ties. An esthetic brought into being by inter-human relations. How does Paulo Bruscky see this possibility of the “other” as an object of artistic investigation?

PB: *I will respond with a piece of mine, where it is written on a mirror: CÓPIA CONFORMA ORIGINAL / THE COPY CONFORMS TO THE ORIGINAL.*

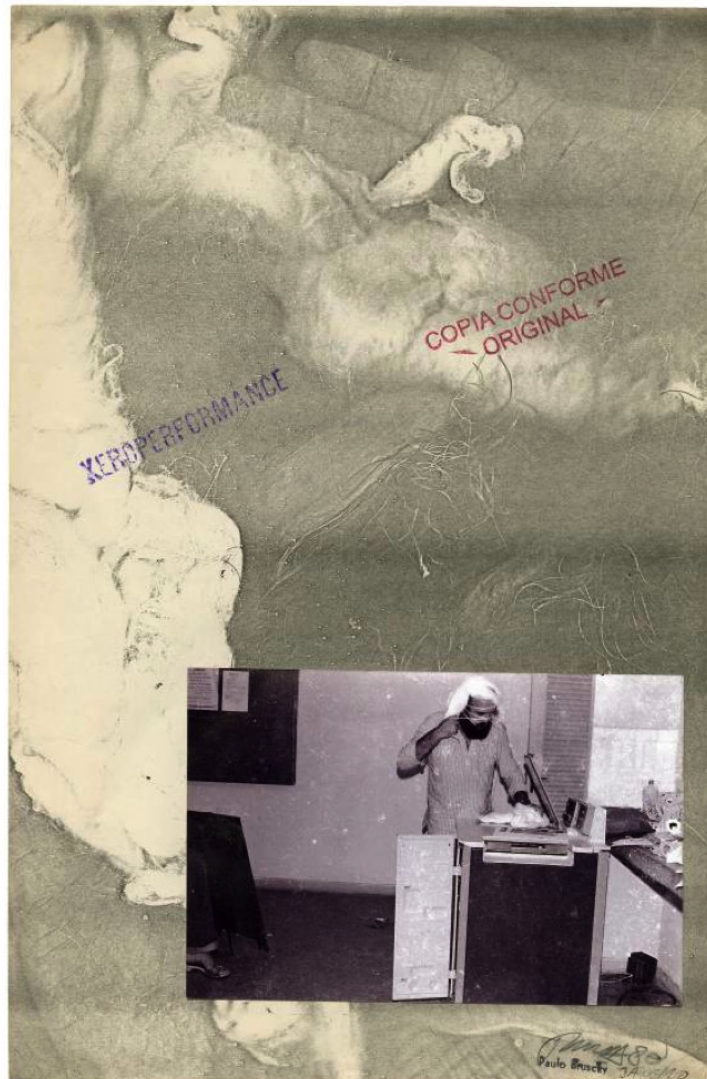


Image 8 – *Cópia conforma original [The Copy Conforms to the Original]*, 1980.
Source: Paulo Bruscky, Personal Archive

MZ: In the context of globalized homogeny, thinking collectively the “global collective” or “glocol” would be a form of reaction and transformation to growing homogenization. How was it to think “glocol” even before there was such a concept?

PB: *This matter is clarified in one of my answers above, when I spoke about*

Postal Art.

MZ: Could we close this interview with a textual self portrait of Paulo Bruscky, the artist?

PB: *My Alto Restrato [Self Portrait] is 5'8" and my Biographical Details begin with Mallarmé tossing the dice. Nobody follows me, because I'm not a soap opera.*



Image 9 – *Alto-Restrato / Artist at His Height*,⁷ 1980. Source: Paulo Bruscky, Personal Archive

⁷ Trans. note: This title is a play on words, where 'alto' (high/height) refers to 'auto,' and 'restrato' would seem to refer to 'retrato' ('portrait'), as pronounced in regional popular dialect (Pernambuco).