

## Zona Franca: Making our people happier

...and it really did; during 52 consecutive weeks an event created and coordinated by artists was held in a room, previously empty, at Fundação Progresso, promoting a gathering 'very close to classical anarchy' (1). Artists, non-artists and artists non-artists mingled in the hot and dirty warehouse, where a group of friends, mostly alumni from the Escola de Belas Artes, challenged the art market presenting a more spontaneous structure to it. It started to happen in the beginning of 2001, after conflictive meetings at the artist Edson Barrus' house. Barrus, alongside Aimberê César and Guga Ferraz had begun talking, as early as the year 2000, about producing a multimedia event which would include experimentations not only in the fine arts, but would also favor other artistic procedures.

When I arrived from Portugal, in the beginning of 2001, it had a name already: Zona Franca. Very good. I called Roosivelt(2) and Adriano(3), set up a meeting with the other three, and in that same night we started contacting people for what would be the ZF opening. First, the confirmation of Marcia X, then Terence, Xico... Rubinho agreed upon editing a video showing urban actions (which was still a fresh phenomena then) and we left the meeting feeling that it was happening already. I believed the whole thing would last three or four weeks, since producing a weekly event would be hardcore, but I was always in favor of a weekly and consecutive format- the process would naturally conduct itself forward or it would not. The project seemed exciting and to a certain point, pioneer. We all knew CEP 20000, stage of memorable experiments, but it was precisely this little

word- stage- that we wanted to eliminate. This spacial context which locates and separates the artist from the audience. There were not many hints of when or where something was to happen (or even if it was going to happen). Only a small wooden stand that we borrowed from Fundação suggested a possible indication- maybe that's why we changed its place so many times along the year. Anyway, CEP 20000 was an important reference alongside other events we had produced before: Aimberê was coming from the "Segundas Urbanas", poetry event he had co-produced with Samaral at Castelinho do Flamengo in 99, Roosivelt was producing the "Atelier Aberto" and Guga the "Prata da Casa" at EBA, plus the "Festas do Baco"- one of which made official the occupation of the space at Fundação Progresso. In that same space we produced the "Atrocidades Maravilhosas" in 99/00, collective work of urban action, before the room started hosting the ZF.

The natural thing to be done would be to create a new space for experiments. The early editions still involved some curatorial concerns attempting to balance performance, music, poetry, video, fine arts, etc. The audience started to form itself and little by little became producer as well. The space was evocative and although no financial support was offered the total absence of restrictions liberated the creativity.

The invitation was made like this: - if you could not execute a piece of work in any institution (for any reason), do it at ZF. It was likely that, in face of this prerogative many works carried out experimental and radical ideas. The environment helped as it could, an attentive audience- the beer was cheap and the cannabis enhanced the senses. The events always happened on Mondays, a dead night at Lapa but a

pretty vivid one in Exu's lineage. It worked on a "at any cost" basis, Christmas, holidays, new year's eve... More than 200 artists and groups performed there and the orgiastic environment conditioned the power of the works. *Whoever spoke loudest would be the winner*, and that promoted a change of perspective within the otherwise solemn fine art production. Many times two or more pieces interfered in each other. I remember Carlos Fefferman's work, in fact criticizing the proliferation of video works, breaking one of the walls with a *sexta-feira*(4) in the middle of a film screening. The work sought to discuss the assertion of the representational plan instead of the actual plan. The action caused an actual quarrel involving the authors given its direct interference upon one another. Other such incidents followed, like when Sandrigo Monteiro set his sculpture on fire, a car tire hanging from the ceiling. That night, a fully crowded Zona was waiting for the screening of a *Super 8* by Antonio Manuel and the audience (which included the prominent artist Lygia Pape) nearly panicked after Sandrigo locked the way out. Works like these purged the need for ceremony in what could be done and what to expect from those nights. Spontaneous participation became crescent in an openly consented state that imposed itself naturally and which offered no preset guidelines. Quite the opposite, it encouraged any and every unpredictability. The artists were their own curators and the production flew within the anarchic context, often self-destructive. The "Hapax" industrial-beat concerts endorsed that spirit cathartically when everything became percussion and everyone became a percussionist. An above ground, "Tony" swimming pool was adopted as "Piscinão do Zona Franca", in reference to the "Piscinão de Ramos" which had been recently

opened by Rio's governor, Garotinho. From this same government we appropriated the logo for ZF, using its subtitle as well: Making our people happier. The contexts merged inspiring the creation of a solution, not alternative but affirmative to the circuit and for the circulation of the artistic production in that year and for that generation. The whole thing lasted exactly one year ending with the announced death of ZF in April 1<sup>st</sup> (which made many people disbelieve it). The last ZF was held in a hot evening culminating with the total ruin of the space and of the tolerance of Fundação's administration with us. The irony lies in the effective ideological construction caused by a self-destructive phenomena. Already in that year there were many events created by artists in the city which became a trend in the following years, maybe as a reaction against the ceremonial atmosphere of the official art shows. House occupations by artists, like the "Orlândia" emerged simultaneously with the urban action phenomena - 'urban interventions' and activist art (the later being motivated by the new political context established in September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 and even before in Genoa and Seattle). The 'carioca' Art, characterized by its flaccid market, was rewarded with galleries owned by artists such as Espaço Bananeiras, Ed.Galaxi, A Gentil Carioca, as well as the Agora/Capacete project, former to ZF. Finally, after some recognition from the press we were invited to occupy a warehouse at the docks and produce a new event in the shape of ZF which we called "Alfândega". This event lasted two editions, in 2002 and 2003, gathering 40 to 50 artists per edition. The high financial cost of this experience compromised its

prolongation after the City Hall, sponsor of the event, gave up on the project.

Notes:

- (1) Excerpt from Luis Andrade's declaration for the documentary film "A (Re)volta do Zona Franca".
- (2) Roosivelt Pinheiro.
- (3) Adriano Melhem.
- (4)** Type of sledgehammer.