

**Back to Basics : The revenge of the low-tech**  
**Autolabs, Telecentros and Tactical Media in São Paulo**

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[http://www.tacticalmediafiles.net/mmbase/attachments/4926/Sarai\\_Reader\\_04\\_Crisis\\_Media\\_intro.pdf](http://www.tacticalmediafiles.net/mmbase/attachments/4926/Sarai_Reader_04_Crisis_Media_intro.pdf) and [https://mtb.midiatatica.info/mtb\\_ingles.htm#tactical](https://mtb.midiatatica.info/mtb_ingles.htm#tactical)

In Johnny Mnemonic, William Gibson writes about an obscure group of people, the Lo-Teks. Lo-Teks are people who live at the margins of a high tech society in the near future. Those people, as one can tell by reading the story, have their own peculiar weapons, even if they're made of discarded tech-residua of the overdeveloped society of their time.

But why talk about low technology nowadays? Tactical media practitioners mostly like to think about action when it's mediated by a very high tech device through which they can learn or teach others how to use it. That's how it works, as you can understand when reading Nettime or tactical media theories all over the web. But that only works if you are talking about a very rich country, that has a high rate of people who have access to the Internet or high tech gadgets. And what if the focus is an underdeveloped country like Brazil? As far as we know, the Next Five Minutes is a kind of overview of DIY, activist media producers. If the point is Brazilian DIY media and arts, then it is, as you'll see, basically low tech.

So let's begin with a cliché: Brazil is a land of contrasts. That's what everybody says, be it a foreigner, which comes here for the first time, be it a Brazilian theoretician in his comfortable seat at a university. Even in the richest city of the country, Sao Paulo, you can see beggars guiding their cars made of wood in order to carry garbage to be recycled, as they walk through the gigantic Paulista Avenue, with its impressive skyscrapers of glass and steel. That is a country where you can find very rich boys with lots of high tech gizmos, the latest ones made in Japan, living very near to a homeless family, which has nothing to eat. Yes, there is lots of net stuff here, lots of web designers, programmers, software experts, web writers, bloggers, and so. Our cyberspace is full of beautiful home pages, e-commerce, hackers, but, back to reality, if you keep your eyes wide open, if you walk a little bit (or a little more!), you can see violence, hunger, ugliness, all these things supposedly found in a third world country.

How could a Brazilian TML dialogue with such different cultures, the virtual and the real, and at a common space? One thing we had in mind while translating the Tactical Media Lab and its concept to a Brazilian reality was, throughout the entire process, never to close our eyes to such a context. And that would be even more difficult, if we had to talk about net art and net activism.

There is a "web-art" in Brazil. A very much alienated, self-referential kind of art, mostly related to technology for technology's sake. Here, the so-called "web-artists", as most artists in general, are much more worried about their own egos, and very distant from their everyday reality. Most of them don't even know about net art (in Nettime's terms), net activism, or tactical media. Activism and political issues are something totally ignored in their works. The situation gets a little worse when you discover that the ones who know about such things don't care too much about letting others know. It seems it's

just not interesting for their status quo. As people say, information is power. Why not be a privileged one?

On the other hand, Brazil is also notorious by the number of its hackers. Piracy also is a very hot issue nowadays, as pirated programs and music CDs are the easiest thing to find in the black markets on the streets, sold at the popular tents of "camelos". Besides, cyberactivism is something which has consistently grown since the appearance of the Brazilian Indymedia, in late 2001. Before then, there were very few sites producing independent news and information, one being Rizoma ([www.rizoma.net](http://www.rizoma.net)), which tried to establish a sort of digital counterculture in Brazil, much in the guise of Disinfo.com at its good phase. So, after our Indymedia started, its incisive media activism was responsible for the spread of a great network of leftist and activist web sites as never seen before on Brazilian cyberspace. There are also some hacktivist groups working on, for instance, Microphobia, which are very difficult to find or contact.

A few advances have been made in cities such as Porto Alegre and Sao Paulo (both cities governed by PT The Workers Party), in order to implant computer centers in the suburbs, all Linux-based. Those places are called Telecentros, and have surely been the first step in what could be a utopian virtual democracy in this country.

That said, what could be done for a TML here and now? The first thing we thought was not to call mainstream Brazilian "web-artists", which, by no means, were anything near to the very definition of tactical media. Instead, we tried to look out for groups whose logics of action were, yes, web-based, but, for all the circumstances explained above, were not exactly "high tech". Such groups, whose way of working deals with activism, arts and social or political issues, are spread all over the country. Their production is not

only prolific, or underground, but they're so different among themselves to the point that they seem antithetical, if only apparently.

As it was the first one of its kind in our country, we idealized this TML by firstly introducing the concepts on and around tactical media, and trying to be a little didactical to the Brazilian audience. Of course, it was free and open to all kinds of public, not a minority or elitist class of "connoisseurs". In a way, we tried to give a very "pop" approach to the festival - for it was really like a festival - in order to make it become sort of a "trendy" thing, a "hype" among youngsters. Call it "tactical marketing".

That's one of the reasons for which we chose so different groups in the same event. In a way, we tried to follow Lovink and Garcia's varieties of tactical media as mentioned in *The ABC of Tactical Media*, and for that reason we created something which included from art/activist groups and collectives to djs and street theater performances.

Groups like Bijari/Antipop and A Revolucao Nao Sera Televisionada (The Revolution Will Not Be Televised) work mainly with video-art and videoactivism, much in the guise of Candida TV, from Italy, and theirs is sort of an MTV collage aesthetics full of political and edgy art's issue. Rejeitados ("The Rejected") is a national "combo" of alternative artists which work with urban intervention and art outside the institutions. Formigueiro (Ant's nest) works with plagiarism and parody, and their exhibition played with fake biotech art. Museu da Pessoa (Museum of the Person) collects individual stories and photographs/videos of ordinary and anonymous people. A nomia (Anomy) works with culture-jamming, comics, zines and video, a lot based on psychogeography and sonic shock. A Cria (The Baby) is a "factory" of fanzines. The Nomads' collective work with architecture and popular solutions for living. Projeto Sid Moreira - whose

name makes a parody of an anchor reporter from Globo TV News Program - works with posters and culture-jamming. Metafora.org (Metaphor) recycles old computers for poor communities and has wiki-based projects concerning open publishing and group-based actions, like Recicle-1-Politico (Recycle-1-Politician), which re-used ad material from political campaigns that polluted the cities. Rizoma.net works basically in the Internet with a content which makes a recombination based on the variety of texts with different points of view talking about specif themes like activism, afrofuturism, neuropolitics and such, a sort of open-source-like treatment of ideas combined with a conceptual engineering in order to provoke changes in the subjectivity. Manufatura Suspeita (Suspect Manufacture) with its street theater using situationist techniques as psychogeography and detournements of classic authors. Latuff, a graphic artist, famous worldwide for his political agit-props and culture-jamming mainly about the Israel/Palestine conflict and anti-war bravados, who draw, live throughout the festival, a huge anti-war cartoon at the house. There were also rooms from CMI (Brazilian Indymedia, as explained before) , the "Telecentros" and Ocas, the Brazilian version of Big Issue, the street journal. Banda Paralela, a collective of designers and programmers, created a "media monster" all made of tech-detritus. Batukação, as a group of street protest which plays with drums, presented sort of a martial and activist "batucada". Radio Muda, a free radio station collective, also broadcasted its activist voices. LSD discos, a home-made music label that produces experimental electronic music with some political flavor, was responsible for the musical section of the TML.

All these people "settled" at Casa das Rosas (House of Roses), which is a space for non-mainstream art exhibitions on Paulista Avenue, something like a "castle" on Peter Lamborn Wilson's terms (see A Network of Castles, <http://amsterdam.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-9705/msg00118.html>). We had the house for four days, during which

we had not only the exhibition - that looked more like a weird fair or TAZ - but music pocket shows, performances, (unexpected) parties and a temporary pirate radio station broadcasted by Indymedia, one that defied on the web and live, that the Brazilian authorities should come to the festival to close them down - a protest against the repressive politics of free radios in this nation. This was a very symbolic act, once we were at Brazil's financial heart and that was impossible to hear, given the impressive proliferation of (legal) radio station antennas and multiple frequencies on the avenue. We also tried to make a free rave in the neighborhoods, but we were not allowed to do so by the police. That one was going to be held by a Brazilian free party group, Interfusion, which promotes raves for free in the poor suburbs of Sao Paulo. The music pocket shows explored Brazilian IDM and experimental/funky electronica bands, ones which have a very small and mostly non-commercial audience, and their reception was good.

At the same time, lots of Brazilian theoreticians, activists and artists made lectures, debates, conferences and workshops during the four days, all held in buildings next to Casa das Rosas. Among other things, they debated on independent media, art as tactic and resistance, the politics of multitudes, cyberactivism, copyleft, open-source logics, post-media sounds, free radios and independent music production. We had a debate with Richard Barbrook and John Perry Barlow in our opening night (a week before the TML itself), discussing digital inclusion and such. We also had the presence of Derek Holzer, who gave a lecture on tactical media, net art/activism and the Next Five Minutes. In retrospect, many issues discussed there generated some polemics, others not. Anyway, they produced a significant, if small, earthquake in the agitated cultural scene here, which had the merit to bring socio-political agendas to discussion.

The best thing about all this four-day fuzz was its good reception (even by the corporate media!) and great audience both in the house and the locations of the debates and lectures. If something, we made some noise. We brought critical theory and activism to the pop arena here in Brazil. And that was one of our intentions. Anyway, we sort of created a "network" of artists, designers, webmasters, activists and theoreticians which never had contact to or heard of each other before. And that was our logistics: the Internet was the means by which we made all this TML possible. It was an "open-source" movement, as thought by Felix Stalder and Jesse Hirsh (see Open Source Intelligence, <http://amsterdam.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-0206/msg00030.html>), where everybody gave their own contribution working in a logic of network-based groups. And, as we didn't really have the affordance to realize it, everyone worked as fellows for a major project, so we did it counting on the participants' and volunteers' own efforts and good will. And it worked.

Back to the point, most of its participants produce low tech works and actions, even if, paradoxically, most of them contact and link themselves, as we made, by using the Internet. In a way, most the groups were marginalized in relation to the arts or political mainstream. And, in a way, it was a revenge. A revenge against the Brazilian self-indulgent high tech web-artists and techno-fetishistic elite which only have looks to their own ego. A revenge of Low Tech.