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Documents for Brazilian Concrete Art: Dialogues between the library and archives of Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo

[Documentos para a Arte Concreta Brasileira: diálogos entre a biblioteca e o arquivo da Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo]

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Abstract:

This paper describes some perspectives on the exhibition archive and the role of libraries and archives in the process of documenting art. The first section of this article provides an overview of current discussions on the intersections between libraries, museums, and archives. The second section gives an overview of documentation about the Concrete Art exhibition carried out at the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo in 1977. Exhibition records pose challenges to the documentation standards of museum, library and archives. This section describes how evidence of past exhibition activity documentation can contribute to providing art information sources for Brazilian art history and how libraries and archives can work together to provide access to this material.

Keywords: Exhibition documentation, archives, libraries, museums, Brazilian Concrete Art.

1 INTRODUCTION

In libraries, archives and museums the presence of material that can be cataloged as archive document, bibliographical collection or museum artifact is not uncommon, using, for this purpose, cataloging standards specifically developed for each type of collection. Taking into account that the discussions around cataloging and the description of cultural heritage have favored approaches focused on the possibilities of usage and access to these collections, such as information sharing using *linked open data* for example, it has become necessary to revise some of the standards used to make them adequate to the new challenges for information registration.

In this context the questions put forward are: In what manner have Archival Science, Library Science and Museology developed their cataloging and/or descriptive representation instruments? Are they applicable to documents that transit between archives, museums and libraries? How can the access to information be improved as a result from the usage of these instruments in these three environments? What are the practical and conceptual convergences and divergences produced from the descriptive treatment of the documents through the prism of Archival Science, Library Science and Museology?

In order to explore some of these questions the first section of this article brings a general overview of the current discussions on the intersections between libraries, museums and archives. The second section presents the case study of a project that was carried out by the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, the oldest art museum in the city of São Paulo (founded in 1905). The Pinacoteca maintain a Library (founded in 1959) and a Documentation and Memory Center (founded in 2005). The case study examines the treatment of documentation referring to the Projeto Construtivo Brasileiro na Arte (Brazilian Constructive Project in Art), held by the Pinacoteca in 1977, and in the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro, which constitutes a mark in art historiography in Brazil. We build on this analysis to identify the various methodologies used for the description of the collections and the documentation of exhibitions and how they can contribute to the study of the institution's history.

2 ARCHIVES, LIBRARIES AND MUSEUMS: BREAKING BOUNDARIES

The boundaries between LAMs—*Libraries, Archives and Museums*—have received recent approaches in literature, both by professionals of the archive area and of museums and libraries. The term LAM was presented by Hedstrom and King (2006) who approached some issues related to the role that these institutions have had in the construction of knowledge. The authors also point out the convergences between the areas that come up with the use of information technology.

Other denominations found for the concept of LAM: ALM—Archives, Libraries and Museums—Finland (Huvila, 2014); GLAMs—Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums—New Zealand (Lim & Liew, 2010); MLA—Museums, Libraries and Archives—Sweden (Dahlström, Hansson, Kiellman, 2012); and ABM—Arkives, Biblioteker and Museums—Denmark (Hedegaard, 2003). We can also mention the initiatives: OpenGLAM of the Open Knowledge Foundation, which aims to help

institutions in sharing their data and content on the web; and the project GLAM-Wiki, which supports projects of GLAMS and other institutions that wish to work with Wikimedia¹ to produce open content. Let us now analyze some factors that have expanded the dialogues between them.

2.1 New technologies

The publication of collections catalogues on the web modifies the exchange of cultural content information, which takes place on a broader and universal level. When speaking of similarities between libraries and archives, Hedstrom and King (2004) affirm that the approximation between the areas in the digital context is inevitable:

We argue that the articulation of libraries as collections of published works and archives as repositories of unpublished primary sources is a relatively recent aberration that developed as a consequence of industrial rationalization and specialization and that is increasingly difficult to sustain in light of the potential for digital convergence.

This affirmation reinforces the idea that, in the context of the so-called society of knowledge,² the sharing of information is one of the factors that contributes to the approximation between the areas. One practical example that we can mention is the case of the joining of the National Library and the National Archive of Canada in 2004, which gave origin to the *Library and Archives Canada* (LAC), which would be a new kind of “knowledge institution”, of a public and national character (Given & Mctavish, 2010, p. 8). However, it is worthwhile to remember that in a first moment the focus was directed on technology, as if this would be capable, by itself, to address the issues involved in the planning of information systems, which did not happen. We can also affirm that there was no appropriate interaction between Computer Science and Information Science.

In this context, the current digital portals and repositories reflect the convergence between these institutions, considering that this kind of service is created as part of their mission of preservation and access, and the boundaries between them have become foggier in the last decade, mainly “in the eyes of the citizens that may not be familiarized with the territory divisions that mold the storage and access of cultural and informational materials” (Given & Mctavish, 2010, p. 22).

Marcondes and Campos (2008) had already mentioned this trend when they affirmed that “never has humanity found so much information accessible and at the same time never has it been so difficult and problematic to find relevant information”. Facing this problem, he cites the semantic web, proposed by Tim Berners Lee, which introduces a new way of searching on the web, where it is possible to establish semantic relations between the contents represented that can be understood by machine. One of the technologies that make this interoperability possible is called *linked open data*,

¹ Global movement that aims to take free content to the world. By means of projects based on the structure of the Wikimedia Foundation, it aims to create an environment in which each human being can freely share the knowledge produced. Source: <http://www.wikimedia.org>

² Concept developed by the economist Fritz Machlup in 1962, which allowed to observe the existence of a field of production of knowledge, in which knowing played a central role. (Carvalho, Caniski, 2000).

which enables us to glimpse “the possibility of interlinking collections in digital archives, libraries and through the Semantic Web technologies” (Marcondes, 2012, p. 173). To make this possible the data must be standardized with the usage of metadata that allows for data exchange in the digital media: “making the resources of cultural heritage accessible demands or comprises of the adoption of schemes and/or standards of metadata” (Castro, 2012, p. 34).

It is possible to glimpse the impact that metadata has exercised on the description norms of bibliographical collections, as can be seen, for example, in the *Resource Description Access* (RDA), which is “a new standard to describe the metadata of resources kept in the collections of libraries, archives, museums and other information management organizations” (Castro, 2012, p. 140). This idea is confirmed by Ortega (2009, p. 200), who affirms that the Internet is the “backdrop of these approximations” between the areas, as it brings possibilities for using informational resources available within and also the possibility to use this environment and of related technologies for the referential activity of information resources.

The history of museums, archives and libraries reveals that the mission of collecting initiated under the same principles that make sense of the evident convergence between the three institutions, which have as a common activity the treatment and organization of information (Marques, 2010, p. 7)

2.2 Archives, Libraries and Museums: some notes

From a historical approach, it is perceptible that in antiquity the distinction between these institutions was not very clear and in the case of the Library of Alexandria, for example, the reading room was divided into two parts, one being in a museum, and the other located in the temple of the divinity Serapis³ (Thiesen, 2009).

Guarnieri (2010, p. 47), while tracing an evolutionary frame of the museums in the West, cites the example of the Museum of Alexandria, which would be the prototype of the moment when the “museum arises as a universalist pretension, seeking to portrait and synthesize the surrounding universe” The author affirms that this universalist philosophy is reflected on the “close relationship between museum, historical archive and library” of that time, where the museum was also seen as a research center and a socializing center.

When mentioning the case of the hybrid institutional genres, Botallo (2011, p. 149) gives as an example the personal archives and business memory centers that come close to museums as far as their collections are formed by “non-conventional sources” (Botallo, 2011, p. 151). The author further argues that, in this sense, these institutions come closer to them than to the archives, as they house documents and objects that were constituted with the purpose of becoming memory registers. “There

³ Divinity that was the maximum religious political expression of the City of Alexandria, and of all Egypt, during the Hellenistic and Roman period of its history—323 a 30 b.C, and from this date until 365 d.C. (LOBIANCO, 2012)

are in the business memory centers collections, for example, shirts, buttons, printed ads, posters, product packaging and even the products themselves.”

Smit (2012, p. 91) affirms that “the distinction between institutions in function of the kind of documents kept by them” is outdated and that the distinction must be based on the function attributed to the documents. Camargo and Goulart (2015, p. 23) point out the similarities that these institutions may have if they are understood as “centers of knowledge propagation,” but reinforce essential distinctions between some of the functions attributed to them: the primary function of the archive is administrative, whereas that of the libraries and museums are related to leisure and education,; the formation of collections of these entities happens in a selective way, as opposed to archives that accumulate documents produced by the entities that produce them. The authors affirm, however, that this function of the archives changes in the case of permanent archives, when providing “subsidies that allow the reconstruction of the trajectory of corporate and physical persons whose documents have been preserved.”

This approach occurs from the function of each entity and the ways of constituting each collection. This focus is pertinent in the case of archives, which depend on “archival principle of provenance” Some points listed by the authors, however, diverge in relation to some concepts found in literature, at least in the case of the libraries and museums, as exposed in Chart 1:

Chart 1 – Entities and Collections - Definitions

	Archive	Library	Museum
ENTITY	<p>BELLOTTO (2014): “By definition, archives have as basic functions the management of the organization and of the usage, safekeeping and propagation of the information contained in the documents produced/received accumulated by the different public or private entities along their functioning also being in charge of assisting in their production and managing their usage, taking into consideration the distinct possibilities for such, related to the first, second and third ages of the documents.”</p>	<p>IFLA (2014) “LA (2014) esivede of provenancnses/by/3.0/nses/by/3.0/" \h hat connect people with global and local information resources. They provide access to ideas and creative works and make the richness of human expression and cultural diversity available to everyone”.</p>	<p>ICOM (2009): “Museums are permanent institutions, without profit ends, at the service of society and of its development, open to the public, which acquire preserve, research and communicate and exhibit, for study, educational and leisure purposes, the material and immaterial testimonies of people and their environments.” (ICOM, 2009).</p>

Source: Chart compiled by author

The chart above synthesizes similar concepts for libraries and museums, which are considered collecting organs with an educational function whereas archives have administrative functions and are organs that accumulate documents.

However, we must point out that the catalogues created by libraries and museums have the finality of disseminating the information related to their collections, as well as approximating them to the user or researcher. Such an approach determines that the catalogue records should be created in order to attend to the information needs of the users, also contributing, in the case of museums, for the preservation of the collective memory of society, as the dissemination of this memory contributes effectively for its preservation. In an interconnected world there is crucial to share information and, consequently, satisfy user needs (Yassuda, 2009).

2.3 Museum Archives and Libraries

Museums present a particular situation, as they can be bestowed with libraries and archives. In this sphere, Seren, Donohue and Underwood (2001) present an example of cooperation that occurred in the documentation program of the Guggenheim Museum, which involves the Archive, Library and Museum Registry departments of the Museum. The program seeks to outline directives to assist in the documentation and registry of museological objects in a way as to make the objects visible and accessible. This fact exemplifies the importance of sharing knowledge between the areas, as if, on one hand, libraries are very experienced dealing with description instruments and search for information, on the other hand the documentation practices of the curators, collectors and researchers bring up complexities that are not present in the descriptive representation of bibliographical collections.

Another issue present in the routine of the practical activities of the museums refers to the absence of communication between the systems that coexist in these institutions, as generally a system for each typology of collection (library, archive, museum) is used, elaborated according to the specificities of each. However, when published on the web in an isolated manner, these catalogs do not always guarantee the access to information. Franklin (2007, p. 33), who is from the National Gallery of Canada, comments on the question of the coexistence of several databases within a single museum and the fatal consequences to the access of these objects. Although some fields are common to all databases, such as name, category, and subject, among others, the presence of standardization for entry of this data is rare, which brings difficulties for the recovery of information.

Almeida (2007, p. 254) when speaking of art information affirms: “Due to the diversity of the types of documents, objects and works of art that constitute the art collections, the classical differentiation between library, archive and museum doesn’t always apply.” Marshall and Ivey (2009, p. 145) on the other hand mention the existence of a “grey area” in which these documents are situated. They give the example of a sketchbook that could be treated as a work of art, as a document belonging to an artist’s personal files, or even in the special collections. However, the authors reinforce that the prime question is that the cataloger must seek to understand which path the researcher will take in trying to consult the material, in other words, the final objective is to provide access to the document, whatever final internal treatment it may receive.

3 THE BRAZILIAN CONSTRUCTIVE PROJECT IN ART

The Pinacoteca Do Estado de São Paulo seeks to provide an exhibition program based on the construction of elements that can subsidize the historiography of Brazilian art. In this context, in 2014, the exhibition Concrete Art was held in the Pinacoteca de São Paulo, which brought significant elements of this moment when geometry was inserted into the art produced in Brazil, as from the 1940s, and in forms as intense as diversified.

This exhibition also sought to evoke an exhibition important for the institutional historic: the Brazilian Constructive Project in Art, held in partnership with the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro, in 1977, with the organization of Aracy Amaral and the artist Lygia Pape.

The Project sought to make a critical reevaluation of the concrete and neo-concrete movements of the 1950s. Besides the exhibition and the catalogue book (comprised of reproductions of works, anthological texts of the period, manifestos, etc.), the exhibition was accompanied by a number of lectures and musical concerts that aimed to connect with concrete poetry produced at that time.

Many Brazilian art historians consider the Concrete Art Project at Pinacoteca as a milestone in Brazilian art history. The review of these movements that began in the 1950s was indispensable activity in the late 1970s. Art historian and Brazilian curator Chiarelli (2012) says that:

Concrete Art emerged as an alternative to the modern, nationalist art that had held sway in Brazil since the 1920s and embraced three often overlapping purposes and themes: the formation of identity myths; the elevation of the worker as national symbol; and the condemnation of the country's social ills.

According to the author the artists wanted to drive Brazilian toward objective and universal paradigms instead of the localism so common since the 1920s. They were influenced by European artists Max Bill and Mondrian works on show at the I Sao Paulo Biennial in 1951. On the other hand some authors like the critic Mario Pedrosa affirm that Concrete art was also an opposition to Abstract Expressionism.

The Concrete Art Project's legacy is very rich and can help us to understand Brazilian and Latin American Contemporary art development from the 1950s. Despite that, the documents of the Exhibition were spread out in the many departments at Pinacoteca and the problems related to it will be presented in the next section of this paper. .

3.1 Archival collection

The Documentation and Memory Center of the Pinacoteca (CEDOC) opened to the public in 2006. Created with the support of the Vitae Foundation, it began its activities in 2005, the year of the celebration of the hundred-year anniversary of the institution, having as the main function of putting together and organizing the permanent institutional documents to constitute the historical archive of the Museum. Since 2007, the CEDOC includes in its mission the collection of sources for the study of visual arts in Brazil, and it started to acquire personal archives from artists, critics, curators and professionals that acted noticeably in the institution.

The absence of a database for the description and management of this collection left this

centenary documental set without an efficient research tool. Until 2014, all the description of the same was carried out in spreadsheets elaborated in the Microsoft Excel program, totaling more than 30,000 registers without adequate standards and descriptions.

The database of the archival collection of the Pinacoteca was created in 2015, in the same environment where the database of the bibliographical collection had already been installed. This fact enabled the unified search in both collections. The initiative, however, is recent, and some adjustments are in the implementation process, such as the standardization of controlled naming and event vocabularies, which will be a key tool for the information retrieval.

The documents listed below were found in the Constructive Project dossier from the institutional archives:

- Administrative documents
- Letters between curators and artists
- Photographs
- Photographs of the exhibition opening
- Minutes of meetings
- Drafts of texts for books
- Invitation and folder
- Promotional poster
- Manuscripts

The access to this dossier enables the partial knowledge of the construction process of the exhibit and the publication of the book. However, some gaps were verified, such as, for example, the photographs of the exhibition area and final list of works. Part of the iconographic material is not identified making it impossible to contextualize or identify the people represented in the photographs.

We had access to the large sets of institutional documents, but it seems that there are still other dispersed documents. Another hypothesis is that some documents could be in the personal archives of curators, such as, for example, in that of Professor Aracy Amaral, director of the Pinacoteca in the period she was heading the project. The CEDOC possesses a part of her personal files; however, another part is still in her safekeeping, not being, therefore, accessible to research.

3.2 Bibliographical collection

The bibliographical collection of the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo consists of bibliographical material and of general printed collections, such as invitations, posters, cards, and mailings, among others. With the creation of the Documentation and Memory Center in 2005, several archival documents have been transferred from the Library to the new nucleus, responsible for the safekeeping of the archive and the preservation of institutional memory. However, there is still a considerable quantity of documents dispersed between the two nucleuses. This situation should change in the short term as, since August of 2014, the management of the Library and the CEDOC has been unified. This favors a wider vision besides facilitating the bureaucratic procedures of the transfer of documents between the two collections.

Following we list some documents of the Brazilian Constructive Project in Art found in the Library collection which will be incorporated to the archival collection in order to avoid the dispersion of documents and to make the dossiers more complete:

- 1) Set of photographic enlargements stuck on hardboard. They have been destroyed because they were reproductions.

This set corresponds to the photographic enlargements of photographic works that effectively took part in the exhibition. At the time, the material was cataloged in the bibliographical collection and stored in the Technical Reserve of the Museum, together with other works of the artistic collection, so that they could be kept in adequate environmental conditions for preservation.

In 2009 these enlargements were re-photographed and destroyed to avoid them being confused with the original copies of the works. These digital archives were sent to the CEDOC to become part of the Project dossier.

- 2) Newspaper articles

It became evident that in order to outline a more detailed panorama of the Project, conducting the search in both collections is indispensable. The clippings showed itself to be a secondary source that cannot be left aside since, in the 1970s art criticism in Brazil was published in newspapers. Although some of these articles are already available for online reading, the hemeroteque groups the articles in a thematic form, per exhibition, as opposed to the archive documents, which respect the order of origin and production context.

Evidence of the exhibition opening was found, as well as the list the guests, artists that attended the opening and even a letter from an artist protesting against the disposition of some works.

4 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The case study allowed us to bring up some issues related to the methods used for the documentation of exhibitions. It was possible to identify the fragility of the methodology of exhibition documentation. The rules of the *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules* (AACR2) were adapted for the description of photographic enlargements in the bibliographical collection, whereas the documents of the archival collection did not follow any known international norm. In addition the establishment of the Pinacoteca's Archives database only in 2015 made Museum's historical records be hidden from the researchers for a long time.

Despite having specific manners in the treatment of their resources, the communication between the areas permeates through the analysis of their objects and how to explain them individually, besides articulating them by means of the establishment of possible relations among the documents contained in the collections. Nowadays, the conceptual models that rule the descriptive processes in libraries, museums and archives tend to converge to a more inter-operational language.

As affirmed by Saorin (2011), the common characteristics of these memory and culture institutions, which manage the object collections that contemplate the individual, institutional

and collective knowledge, operate under a common base.

In this sense, the documentation of the ephemeral can be a fruitful field so that archives, libraries and museums may develop collaborations for the construction of a collection that can be a source for the history of art in Brazil. This paper tried to stress the need of collaboration not to mix technical procedures, rather as a way to construct resources for the Brazilian Concrete art history, which is constitutes in a very important moment in which Brazilian artists wanted to be more rationalists and inserted in the international traditional canon of art.

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