



Le livre by Arlindo Machado

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Abstract: This article reviews the circulation and transcendence of Arlindo Machado's journeys in Latin America, particularly in Argentina, because of his influence on the audiovisual praxis. His critical contributions to media, considering creative and experimental uses, were decisive in academia and in the field of Media Art. Machado's trips to Buenos Aires made him an indispensable presence in the academy, as his involvement and participation in lectures, seminars and master classes revealed several discursive and enunciative strategies, both oral and written, always through a precise and eloquent Spanish. Machado's influence on film students and cultural institutions is significant, as well as on Latin American artists, professors and filmmakers.

Keywords: landscape; media; transcendental thinking; aura; Latin America.

Resumen: Este artículo revisa la circulación y trascendencia de la obra y figura de Arlindo Machado en América Latina, y particularmente en Argentina, debido a su influencia en la praxis audiovisual. Su pensamiento sobre los medios, considerando los usos creativos y experimentales, fue determinante en la academia y en el campo de las artes mediáticas. A su vez, los periplos a Buenos Aires lo convirtieron en una presencia imprescindible en Argentina, ya que su participación en diversos claustros ponía de manifiesto variadas estrategias discursivas y enunciativas, tanto orales como escritas, en un castellano preciso y elocuente que viene impactando, desde hace varias décadas, en estudiantes de las carreras de cine y centros de formación audiovisual, así como en artistas, profesores y realizadores latinoamericanos.

Palabras clave: paisaje; mediático; pensamiento trascendente; aura; América Latina.



Figure 1: The collected works of Arlindo Machado.

Source: Assembled by the author (2021).

It was at the Encuentro Latinoamericano de Video Montevideo 90, which brought together audiovisual managers and producers from Latin America, when word spread about the magnificent lecture “Notes on video and language” delivered by a Brazilian guest: Arlindo Machado. The comments pointed to a virtuous and eloquent display on the phenomenon of video, and the uses of the technical image. The event, held in Uruguay, was transcendent for the debate and dialogues that placed the video image at the heart of audiovisual creation. Then, the urgent task was to obtain the book *A arte do vídeo* (*The art of video*, 1988), by Arlindo Machado, which was already in its second edition. It is a reference work on the electronic arts that transcended the interest of its novelty, and pertinently explored the essence of the video medium, its technological ontology, and the languages resulting from its appropriation by artists.

With a fine pen and original arguments, this overview of the videosphere considered the origins of the television medium, live transmission, its reception values, and its ideological support as a mass medium. Other chapters dealt with the synthetic image and its hybridization with other media, for example, in what Machado called “electronic cinema”. It was clear that this early work made a clear statement about what could be considered media art. The prevailing discourses that came later around the so-called “new media”, which were focused on the computer, proposed a dubious approach

that gradually left aside this central movement in the history of contemporary visual arts. However, Machado's discourse considered an integrating panorama of audiovisual media. The urgency with which his texts were read led to the need to disseminate them in Spanish and so, after making remote contact via fax, we published "Videos y lenguajes" (MACHADO, 1991), which marked the beginning of an editorial sequence that continued over the years.

This first text by Machado coincided with the beginning of our activities at the Universidad del Cine (FUC), and in our chair at the Facultad de Arquitectura, Diseño y Urbanismo of the Universidad de Buenos Aires (FADU/UBA). The syllabus of the early subjects delivered comprised the texts and references to Machado's books. His way of thinking about the media, comprising their creative uses, was deeply rooted in both faculties in the respective careers of Cinematography (FUC) and Graphic Design (FADU), an aspect that is still valid today.

Years later, we were in São Paulo, invited to the 9th edition of the Festival Internacional Videobrasil (1992), in the emblematic space of SESC Pompéia, invaded by the video world through the presence and works of Jean-Paul Fargier, Carlos Nader, Luis Nicolau, Eder Santos, Gianni Toti and Bill Viola, when we personally met Arlindo Machado. From that moment on, there were many activities, meetings and projects in which we matched or coincided throughout the following decades. His trips to Buenos Aires made Arlindo an indispensable presence in courses, training laboratories, seminars and various presentations.

Then, in *Video cuadernos V: parabolic Kogut* (1993), we published his text "Múltiples pantallas de Sandra Kogut," and shortly after *Video cuadernos VI: textos de Arlindo Machado* (1994), the first compilation of his writings. Television was still at the heart of the scene and, after the Gulf War, the media's role in the transmission of live broadcasting and the construction of truths, the retinal massage of the zapping effect, the culture of surveillance, the relationship between cinema and video, the digital image and its imaginaries were highlighted. The compendium continued the analysis of Sandra Kogut's emblematic video with the study of alternative video groups in Brazil, which offered a different view of the environment in Brazil concerning the approach of themes that included television itself. These reflections matched the global vision on communications with the status of cinema and video that always involved considering its manifestations in Latin America, strengthening a bridge of collaboration on the theme among the countries of the region.

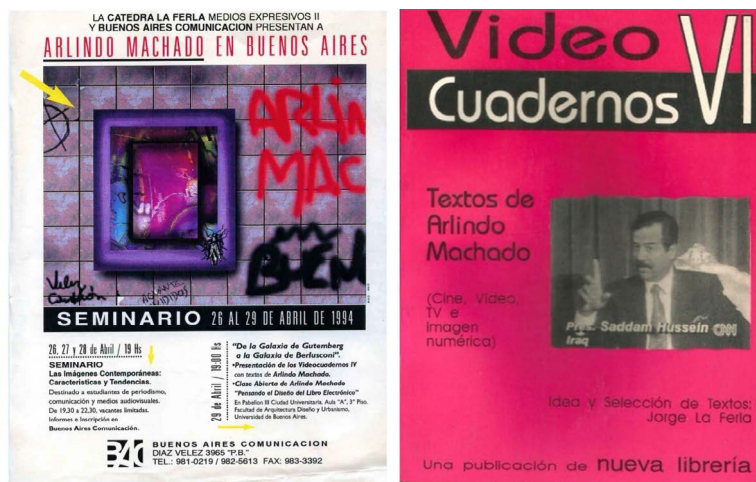


Figure 2: On the left a publicity piece for Arlindo Machado's seminar in Buenos Aires (1994); and on the right a cover of *Video cuadernos VI: textos de Arlindo Machado* (1994).

Source: Assembled by the author (2021).

When the Lampadia Foundation, through its affiliates – Andes Foundation in Chile, Antorchas in Argentina and Vitae in Sao Paulo –, started carrying out activities to promote visual arts in the region, Machado participated by delivering a series of lectures in Buenos Aires. It was a projects lab called Incubadora aimed at young Argentine filmmakers, for whom these master classes had a strong impact. The subject of the image-video was at the heart of the scene, with drifts toward the supports and languages of cinema, television and computer image. These inflections departed from the purist approaches to experimental video that disregarded cinema, photography or television, and that Machado nevertheless studied in all its dimensions, developing discursive strategies. These inscriptions, both oral and written, were in a very correct Spanish that would have an impact on the students of cinema careers and audiovisual training centers of the continent. His presentations were accompanied by new publications that enabled the formation of a priceless *corpus* of readings and mindsets. A model to understand the media conceived in their uniqueness and hybridizations and, as Machado explained, in their convergence and divergence, placing their expressive possibilities in the foreground. The author provides us with an anecdote that illustrates this understanding.

During a trip I made in Argentine Patagonia some time ago, I was struck by the incredible and infinite variety of greens in the landscape. Back home, after developing and enlarging the photographic negatives taken in Patagonia I could see,

quite frustrated, that all that chromatic spectacle of nature had been drastically reduced. In spite of having used a professional camera, an independent photometer, and film with a wide spectrum of response, the variation of greens of the photographed landscape seemed too poor to me, as well as banal and predictable. (MACHADO, 2000, p. 40, our translation)



Figure 3: Arlindo Machado in Camping Musical Bariloche (1998).

Source: 1998 photo.

The projects consultancy and evaluation carried out by Arlindo at the Vitae Foundation broadened the exchange and knowledge of the Brazilian technological arts scene in Latin America. The initiative by Américo Castilla, of the Antorchas Foundation, gave rise to a series of seminars for Latin American artists. These seminars were held in Bariloche under the auspices of the aforementioned foundations of the South Cone, together with the MacArthur and Rockefeller Foundations. These meetings allowed knowing the work of Brazilian guests such as Lucas Bambozzi, Dulcimira Capisani, Rejane Cantoni, Inês Cardoso, Carlos Fadon, Malu Fragoso, Olga Futema, Kiko Goifman, Sandra Kogut, Daniela Kutschat, Teresa Labarrere, Silvia Laurentiz, Rosangela Leote, Artur Matuck, Lucila Meirelles, Carlos Nader,

Ulysses Nadruz, Joël Pizzini and Gilbertto Prado, who for a week presented their works and other ongoing projects, interacting with artists from Argentina, Chile and Mexico². We consider it relevant to mention the Brazilian participants in these events because the seminars in that isolated redoubt of the Argentine Patagonia, gave shape to collaboration and exchange networks between Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay and Mexico. Machado was a professor in two editions of these labs held in the auditorium of the Camping Musical Bariloche –surrounded by forests and mountains, facing the Nahuel Huapi Lake–, an ideal space where, paradoxically, an intense debate on arts, science and technology took place. The Brazilian author excelled in his presentations and consultancies, and stood out for the remarkable generosity in the exchange of ideas and information with participants. His journeys and influence spread throughout Latin America.

A lecturer with an accent

Machado used to start his presentations by apologizing for not perfectly mastering the Spanish language, a *boutade* that referred to his text “Todos los films son extranjeros” (“All films are foreign”) (2009). It was while attending the International Festival of Electronic Arts and Video Transito_MX (2005)³, at the Centro Nacional de las Artes in Mexico City, that we personally met Néstor García Canclini. That meeting brought together two ways of thinking about the Latin American continent. García Canclini’s concept of cultural hybridity was often quoted by Machado in his texts, which expanded to the technological audiovisual arts, and proposed to open the game to other ways of thinking both the continent and the media:

In any case, all this interpretative delirium was already exhaustively challenged and overcome by a strand of Latin American thought – Martin-Barbero (1993), Gomez (1991), Canclini (1998), for whom the effective role that the media operates in contemporary societies is not given a priori, through some irremovable historical fatality. (MACHADO, 2019, p. 78)

García Canclini invited him to the conference that preceded his presentation in Buenos Aires, and this enabled the publication of *Extranjeros en la tecnología*

² Xavier Berenguer, Andrea Di Castro, Leandro Katz, Antoni Muntadas, Lourdes Portillo, Margarita Schultz, Janice Tanaka, Edin Vélez and Fabián Wagnister taught at these seminars during the period 1990-1994.

³ For more information on the festival, visit: <https://bit.ly/3f2czaQ>. Access on: 5 Nov. 2021.

y en la cultura (*Foreigners in technology and culture*, 2009). Machado's text "Todos los films son extranjeros," included in this work, is a rarity for its approach to the issue of foreignness, considering the original version of the films in their translations into other languages. It is the linguistic and technical drifts of these inscriptions, typographic for the subtitles and oral for the dubbing, that operate the betrayal of the translations. Machado, in his speech and writing in Spanish, handled expressive intricacies whose eloquence and sharp analysis spread throughout Latin America. Thinking about cinema and technology in our continent takes us to a combination of concepts that links it to a transversal culture of works, technologies and contents to reflect on Latin America. Authors such as Jesús Martín-Barbero, Néstor García Canclini, Ismail Xavier and Arlindo Machado himself are pillars of theory and cultural studies, as they propose other classifications in relation to the firm categories established around technology and culture in the continent, thinking convergences and divergences that go beyond national borders.

As far as the audiovisual field is concerned, those classifications applied to movies – militant, political, pro-Indian, third cinema, the eternal return to the label of "new cinema" either national or Latin American – do not seem to respond to the richness of a hybrid production, since it exceeds such categories⁴. It is the proposal of hybrid cultures elaborated by García Canclini, and that of combined studies for the continent's cinema by Ismail Xavier that converge in Machado, as in his research he included the set of technological arts, i.e., cinema, video, installations and new technologies. Machado reviews Xavier's ideas on cinema and, at the time, commented enthusiastically on the latest version of *O discurso cinematográfico* (*The cinematic speech*, 2005), which expands contemporary criteria of the new paths adopted by cinema at the end of the last century.

Machado was an avid reader and connoisseur of the wide range of books and theories surrounding culture in general, and the audiovisual as such. The curatorship, field study and writings emerging from the Visionarios⁵ project would mark a new turning point, as Machado proposed a historical reading of the continent's

⁴ In this regard, and as an example, it is meaningful what Xavier said about "the contribution of supranational comparative studies for the analysis of Latin American films," whose interest consists of "developing different examples of comparative studies [...] proposing a dialogue on alternatives for the building of a corpus for these studies, and on the issues of method that should be taken into account for them to be an effective contribution to the study of the Latin American cinema". (Oral information provided by Xavier at the intensive course at the Universidad del Cine, Buenos Aires, Argentina, in June 2019).

⁵ "Voces y luces de un continente desconocido" (Itaú Cultural, 2008), a project led by Roberto Cruz.

technological visual arts in a transnational comparative study that transversally addressed the history of media. This included experimental cinema, the television repertoire, and video art – the so-called new technologies. The text “Pioneros do vídeo e do cinema experimental na América Latina” (2010), published in the magazine *Significação*, highlighted the lack of comprehensive collections. In fact, it was Machado who finds lost works and recovers unknown pieces in this fieldwork.

A pending issue to decide where we include Machado’s own production in photography, film and multimedia.

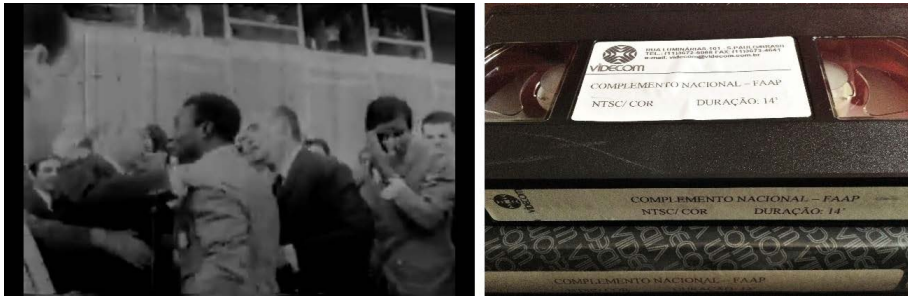


Figure 4: Frame and VHS copy of the experimental short film *Complemento nacional* (1978).

Source: Assembled by the author (2021).

Cinema as an expression of concept

Complemento nacional (*National complement*, 1978), by Arlindo Machado, is an experimental short film based on newspaper archives from the time of the Brazilian dictatorship, when rulers organized public events on the esplanade of the National Congress in Brasilia. The film’s title alludes to the newsreels that publicized government activity, whose exhibition was mandatory in Brazilian movie theaters from 1938 to 1985.

The government, which promoted the idea of the “Brazilian miracle,” was documented in the heroic celebrations, which were also broadcast on television at the time. The record of these official events, with their speeches and harangues, including the launching of public works, and the reception of national athletes who achieved triumphs, formed a saga that Machado appropriates and dismantles through various resources to make the short film. The epic of the Brazilian soccer team, after winning the 1970 World Cup in Mexico, where it was crowned world champion for the third time, was eloquently celebrated in Brasilia on the occasion of the team’s return to the country. The historic

images of Pelé and President Garrastazu Médici euphorically raising the Jules Rimet Cup constituted an almost religious event. The sight of the players with their backs turned, standing on a platform waving to the crowd, remained in the memory of the entire country.

These official images, almost sacred, are deconstructed by Machado through a wide range of resources. The sound composition, the long black frames in the image, the fragmentation of original sequences, and the absence of the voices of the official announcers offered a critical reading of the official propaganda of the so-called Fifth Republic, a euphemism intended to disguise the dictatorial government. During 1978, the year in which the short film was made, the Argentine national team won the Soccer World Cup at the worst moment of the military dictatorship. The disappearance of individuals, and the destruction of national production in the application of liberal theories marked a coincidence that is not an anecdotal fact, but a causality in the film's reading of the South Cone dictatorships. The theoretical thinking about this period, and the resistance to the authoritarian system and the ideology of the military system are revisited by Machado in *Os anos de chumbo* (2006). A compilation made up not only of political texts, but also of everything Machado could have written in that period about art and the media. The film *Complemento nacional*⁶ is part of these reflections that go from cinema to literature, in which the high political value is redefined in this third decade of the third millennium, considering the political situation in Latin America where the ideology of those dictatorial times returns to power through the popular vote.

What does writing about Machado in the face of his absence imply?⁷ An odd challenge proposed by the *Significação* magazine in issue no. 57, which continues with the tributes of the previous edition to allegorical writings on the work and figure of this author. The text by Lucia Santaella (2021) tells the story of a formation and dialogue that took place during her professor's time with her master, doctoral student and then colleague, which is analyzed from both the intellectual and affective sides. Marcus Bastos (2021) proposes a reading of Machado's writings on video art in Brazil to trace a possible genealogy of the media. Patrícia Moran (2021, p. 12, our translation), in "Apresentação," justifies the proposal of this edition partially dedicated to Machado: "His fruitful path, anchored in a fluid and elegant writing,

⁶ *Complemento nacional* was the conceptual trigger for the exhibition *Imagem não imagem* (2005), curated by Christine Mello, at Galeria Vermelho in São Paulo.

⁷ For additional information, consult "Arlindo Ribeiro Machado Neto: 17 July 1949-19 July 2020: A multilingual, collaborative memorial," by Tania Fraga, Gilberto Prado and Jorge La Ferla: <https://bit.ly/3F6vfAR>. Access on: 29 Oct. 2021.

as more than one of the articles highlights, moves away from academic pretension.” A figure whose career never resorted to self-promotion or academic branding.



Figure 5: Dossier Launch: Arlindo Machado (2021)⁸.

Source: Photo captured by the author (2021).

Chronotropic covers and anamorphosis

In issue 56, the *Significação* magazine reproduced on its cover an image of the work *Abyssal* (2010), by Regina Silveira, in which four characters float above the architecture that contains them. Silveira, over time, accompanied her friend Machado with collaborations, in which the designed mark gave clues to the concepts of the work's content. It is in this imaginary building that other characters of the aforementioned edition, that is, the authors of the texts, write their logbooks in face of Machado's physical absence. These illustrated bodies announce from the image their views and lines of reading about Arlindo. A collaborative intertext that, based on the visual, recalls the conceptual and friendly bond between Silveira and Machado.

⁸ This is how the issue of the magazine opens: “The 56th issue of *Significação: Revista de Cultura Audiovisual* is made up by the dossier “Arlindo Machado: Conceitos e processos poéticos nas comunicações e artes” in tribute to the researcher, writer and professor of reference in the areas of communications and arts in Brazil and Latin America, and by the section “Articles” that comprises cinema, television, literature and movie festivals, in approaches that privilege aesthetics and media theories”. (MACHADO, 2021, p. 12).

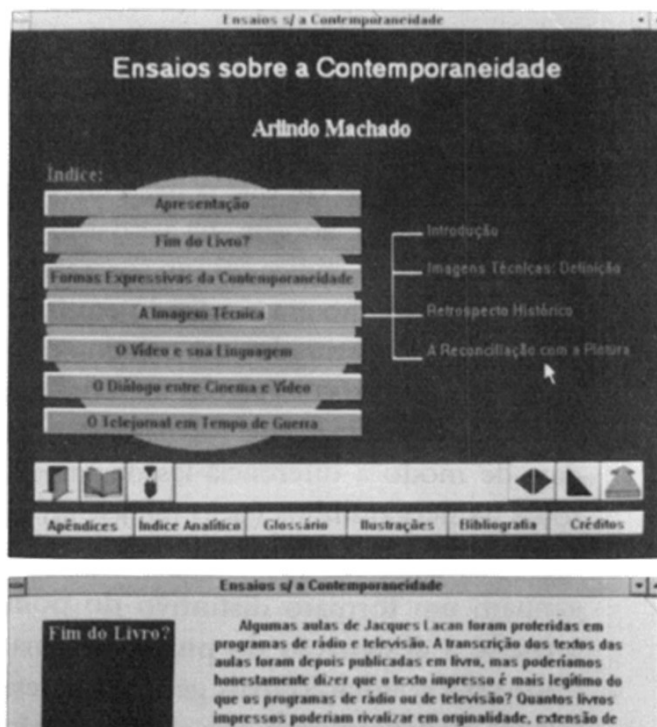


Figure 6: Cover and contents of *Ensaaios sobre a contemporaneidade* (1985/1993), by Arlindo Machado.

Source: Assembled by the author (2021).

Essays in the form of hypertext

Arlindo Machado's 5 ¼" floppy disk, which we treasure with the illusion of having an incunabulum, resists as a fetish in face of the disaffection of the floppy disk market or the imposition of the fallacy of the Non Fungible Tokens (NFT). Although the texts of *Ensaaios sobre a contemporaneidade: Volume 1* have been reproduced in many book editions, and circulated in multiple unauthorized versions on the networks, the object-based vestige is another remnant of the programmed obsolescence of supports and computer programs and, most significantly, it is testimony to other writings practiced by Machado. The first text "¿El fin del libro?", with an ironic rhetorical question, announced the author's intention to write on digital supports, setting programmed intertextual links, including images and sounds. A first hypermedia step that would be continued in the Eisenstein Multimedia project (ca. 1998).



Figure 7: Captures of the interactive project Eisenstein Multimedia (ca. 1998), by Arlindo Machado.

Source: Assembled by the author (2021).

The interactive Eisenstein Multimedia (ca. 1998), developed by Machado together with students from the Pontificia Universidad Católica of São Paulo (PUC-SP)⁹, had its genealogies in the Russian language studies by the young Arlindo and in his book *Eisenstein: geometria do êxtasis* (1982). The research on the form and ideology of the great artist and intellectual of Latvian origin continued over time in Machado, as he passionately reviews the twists and turns of the thought and creations by Sergey Eisenstein. Initially, these studies were intended to follow the expansive writings materially inscribed in *Ensaio sobre a contemporaneidade* (*Essays on contemporaneity*, 1985/1993), and that Machado thought of as an ambitious multimedia e-book project, which later gave rise to the aforementioned hypermedia proposal. That book of the 1980s was continued in the design of the interactive project, with an interface that proposed different paths based on analytical points of Eisenstein's films, of which it included numerous fragments in addition to music, scores, oral testimonies and virtual animations. All that was articulated in a navigation tree that offered "a new modality of discourse, where the oral text shares with other media the relevant role of the application as a whole" (MACHADO, 2000, p. 35).

The high-quality design of the typography, inspired by the constructivist aesthetics of the early 21st century, makes up a remarkable essay whose structure is given by the scheme, the variability of reading, and the design of navigation. This project on Eisenstein, written by Machado, could in fact be continued in various ways, and despite the difficulty in recovering it as such, at least the traces of its documentation remain. An unfinished interactive that resembles the unrealized Latvian intellectual projects, with the best-known case represented by the film *¡Qué viva México!* (1932/1979).

It is pertinent to recall that Eisenstein designed two other more complex proposals that were never recorded: *El capital* (1927) – based on Marx's work – e *La casa de cristal* (1926), which became the obsession of several scholars, and the inspiration for multidisciplinary projects. Cinematography, in its computer simulacrum, continues to depend on optical and figurative schemes in its institutional mode of representation, but it has only been able to elude linear structures through experimental cinema, video art and these hypermedia projects. Eisenstein and Machado transcended the mainstream narratives of both cinema and the academia.

⁹ It is a prototype designed by several researchers, mainly Fernando Fogliano, Silvia Laurentiz and Lúcia Leão, belonging to a lab led by Arlindo Machado at PUC-SP.



Figure 8: Cover of the book *El paisaje mediático: sobre el desafío de las poéticas tecnológicas* (2000).

Source: Photo by the author (2021).

At these extremities of the Gutenberg Galaxy, Machado's thinking tries the ways in which his ideas could be inscribed in the media landscape on several platforms and supports. However, it is in the traditional book that a memory endures through a series of classic processes that were at the origin of the book with an anthological compendium of Machado's texts. It was the proposal of the publisher Libros del Rojas that, at the end of the 20th century, constituted a publishing achievement thanks to the enthusiasm of its author who selected versions of his texts, revising them in Portuguese from São Paulo. The writer Gustavo Zappa was in charge of the translation process and the publication coordination. From Buenos Aires, Zappa assembled a passionate team for this new publishing adventure. Once the first version was

finished and the layout was designed, Machado traveled on his own to Buenos Aires and, for a week, revised the entire book with his friend Zappa. This process and the compendium were analyzed in the introduction by Eduardo Russo. Thus, *El paisaje mediático: sobre el desafío de las poéticas tecnológicas* (*The media landscape: on the challenge of technological poetics* 2000) is currently the largest volume published with texts by Machado in Spanish, authorized and verified by the author.

Ribeiro

The high circulation of Machado's written work, in all scenes of audiovisual instruction and communication studies, exerted a notable influence on young artists and filmmakers of the Latin American continent, whose work responds to a model of creator that operates with the poetics inspired by the Brazilian author's discourse. That is to say, filmmakers whose work ranges from cinema to video and new technologies, and who emerge from a creative praxis with technical images considering a tension between the media machinery and its imaginaries. Machado's extensive saga of writings is continuous and fulfills the plan, as Vilém Flusser would say, of a seamless writing throughout half a century. His latest publications bear witness to this:

- *O olho, a visão e a imagem: revisão crítica* (*The eye, vision and image: critical review*, Ribeiro, 2019).
- *Discursos contra a insensatez: grandezas e misérias da comunicação* (*Speeches against folly: greatness and miseries of communication*, Ribeiro, 2019).
- *Análise do programa televisivo* (*Analysis of the television program*), together with Marta Lucía Vélez (Ribeiro, 2019).
- *Outros cinemas: formas esquisexóticas de audiovisual* (*Other cinemas: weird forms of audiovisual*, Ribeiro, 2019).

This new set of books by Machado, printed after his departure, is made up of little-known or previously unpublished writings, as well as previously published texts. The revisions and reprints that Machado carried out on his texts are significant, considering an intertextual reactivation of his work in new rewritings and publications. One of these books (perhaps the most provocative), *Discursos contra a insensatez: grandezas e misérias da comunicação* (2019), concludes with "O quarto iconoclasmo" ("The fourth iconoclasm"), a text that starts *El paisaje mediático: sobre el desafío de las poéticas tecnológicas* (2000); and which, at the time, initiated the book *O quarto iconoclasmo e outros ensaios hereges* (*The fourth iconoclasm and other*

heretic essays, 2001), which reproduced the original texts of the entire Chapter I of the Argentine edition¹⁰, which also had the afterword by Eduardo Russo¹¹, i.e., the aforementioned preface to the Argentine edition.

These rewritings, in Portuguese and Spanish, evidence a permanent return to one's own writings, and refer us to a meaning of the computer concept of compiling language, which translates writing codes between programming languages. In part, it can be understood as a metaphor for this action of rereading and revision of archives, and also as a description of the processes of inscription in word and media processing programs. A hypertext that constitutes a great book that we could call "Machado by Machado" whose conceptual party and ultimate meaning would reside in the publisher that brings them together: Ribeiro Edições, and its headquarters that coincides with the last residence of Arlindo Machado Ribeiro Neto. A privilege to have known him and maintained a friendship throughout the decades, even better his work and his memory.

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¹⁰ Appear in Chapter I: "El cuarto iconoclasmo y otros ensayos herejes": "El cuarto iconoclasmo," "Repensando a Flusser y las imágenes técnicas," "Cuerpos y mentes en expansión," "Ensayos en forma de hipermidia" and "La fotografía como expresión de concepto".

¹¹ For further information, please refer to: "Arlindo Machado en la Argentina: lecturas, impulsos y líneas de fuerza" (RUSSO, in press).

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