

# SMALL RITORNELLOS IN SOUND PIECE METAL JUNGLE



MARION VELASCO ROLIM

This paper discusses the process of creation of my sound piece *Selva de Metal (Metal Jungle)*, which comes from mechanical manipulation of two works of art: metal sculptures (replicas) – series *Bichos (Critters)* by Lygia Clark – and ping pong balls – Series *Ping Poem* by Lenora de Barros. The noises and sounds that make up the base material for the production of the electronic sound piece, in combination with the voice in live action, were presented at the Mobile Radio – radio art web installed at the 30<sup>th</sup> Bienal de São Paulo - Brazil, in 2012. Handled artworks, the split in the propositions of artists, the correspondence between actions, operations, procedures used, mix of means of expression and dissemination, as well as the hybrid nature of the Performance Art, highlight the concepts of territory, desterritorialization and ritornello, as designed and proposed by the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze.

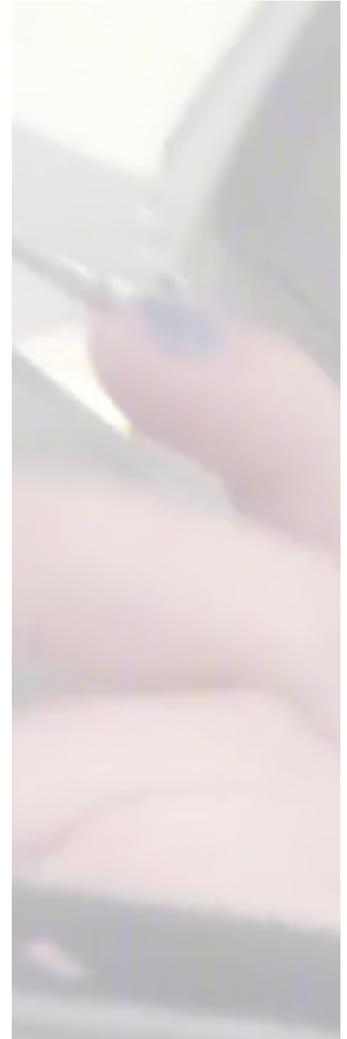
## SURPRISE ENCOUNTER AND CONTEXT

In September of 2012, I was in São Paulo when I received an invitation to work on three radio shows<sup>1</sup> at Mobile Radio – an artistic project of a temporary radio art created by the English Sarah Washington and the German Knut Aufermann which was taking place in the Ciccillo Matarazzo pavilion during the 30<sup>th</sup> Bienal de São Paulo.

It had been a year since I had moved to this city – probably the largest in Latin America – from Porto Alegre – my hometown, located in the extreme southern of Brazil. During the time I lived and worked in São Paulo, I was aware<sup>2</sup> of its loud daily life. I paid attention and captured it during walks<sup>3</sup> and public transportation rides, as well as at home, through various apartment windows in the many neighbourhoods I resided. The results of this documentation (photographs, texts, poems, videos and soundscapes) were presented in many ways. An interesting work to be mentioned in this paper was the live *mash up* what I did in one of my web radio shows - *MaisonM*, with the sound of my video *Aurora / Audiopainting* with a soundscape of a noisy corner of São Paulo city, recorder in 2010 and sound pieces *Pulse Persephone* and *Nestea* by the English composer Daphne Oram<sup>4</sup>.

When I was invited to work at MobileRadio, I reactivated what Murray Schaffer (2011) defines as “focused listening.” I started to listen to São Paulo in order to notice the soundscape during those days and to try to find “potential sounds” that would inspire new pieces. However, it was in an indoor situation – my visit to the exhibition *Lygia Clark: uma retrospectiva (Lygia Clark: a retrospective)*<sup>5</sup> – that I found sonic material for the making of *Selva de Metal (Metal Jungle)*.

The exhibition, as indicated by its name, showed an overview of the works of Lygia Clark (Belo Horizonte, 1920-1988). Clark – who would rather not be referred to as an artist – was a pioneer in the relational art or *relational*



**1** The three shows named *MaisonM* were edited, produced and presented live by me at MobileRadio - BSP on November 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

**2** I resided in São Paulo from March 2005 to January 2011. There I took my Master's Degree in Design (Design, Art and Technology) at UAM and taught classes about art, design, music, and urban culture at cultural centers, technical schools and universities.

**3** Travelling and walking through the city streets are the strategies and methods I use to find visual and aural material for artistic creation. They are also aesthetic experiences that compose my work and base the research that is interested in common gestures and the poetics of everyday life.

**4** The generated documentation was published on academic journals on Design, and are available on blogs such as “Na Orelha” and “Empilhamento”, and social media websites such as Facebook, Youtube, and Soundcloud. “MaisonM” was a radio project with nineteen programs, one hour weekly, edited, produced and presented by me, with live guests held in web radio minima.fm between 11/11/2011 and 03/16/2012.

**5** The exhibition *Lygia Clark: uma retrospectiva* was held at Itaú Cultural in São Paulo, in partnership with the cultural association “O Mundo de Lygia Clark,” and was curated by Felipe Scovino and Paulo Sergio Duarte. The exhibition was held from September 1<sup>st</sup> to November 11<sup>th</sup> 2012.



*aesthetics* – a term coined by Nicolas Bourriaud in the 1990's, worked with propositions and “performing,”<sup>6</sup> when handling the works transform the viewer into participant and art in life experience.

In investigating body and space, Lygia Clark created an open, organic and sensorial work that desterritorialized the art field with timeless ideas and attitudes that are extremely relevant to the art history worldwide.

## FINDING THE REPLICA CRITTERS

The first floor of the exhibition held works that created a sonic vibe due to their participatory dimension and their materials. Examples of this are *A Casa é o Corpo (The House is the Body)* (1968) – installation that invites the audience to go inside the human body – and *Bichos (Critters)* (1960) – the original objects on display inaccessible to the public and nine different replicas available for manoeuvring. The systematic school trips that fill the room with young students also left the space “alive.”

In this surprise encounter with the noisy exhibition, I identified the juxtaposition of sounds provoked by the livingness and participation in the artworks, such as the balloons (elements present inside *The House is the Body*) that would burst now and then when someone passed through and the different noises produced in the handling of the replicas of *Critters*. Also, there were the overlapping sounds made by visitors, such as laughter, shouts, conversations, steps, and movement around the artworks. However, I focused my attention on shrill hullabaloo caused by the replica *Critters*.

## THE ORIGINAL CRITTERS AND THE REPLICA CRITTERS

In the late 1950s, Lygia Clark, who worried about issues related to medium, broke away with painting and proposed creases in the plane that would be cast in space. The concept of living organism was used on *Casulo (Cocoon)* (1959) and in the series *Critters* (1960), which was awarded the best national sculpture at the VI<sup>th</sup> São Paulo Biennial in 1961.

The *Critters* are objects made from “polished metal” of different sizes, which planes/faces are articulated by hinges. These structures unfold in their space and acquire different shapes when manipulated. Currently, the original parts cannot be manipulated when exposed. However, replicas were created so that the audience can handle the pieces and understand what was proposed by Lygia Clark.

While handling the replicas, I understood what Lygia Clark meant about *Critters* having “a life of their own” and the movements they could make (Clark apud Brett, 2005, p. 98). *Critters* are a living, receptive work that needs activation. In contact, it establishes an intimacy with the subject (participant) and vice versa. In action, its faces react: they fold, unfold, beat, slide over one another, open up – the inside becomes outside and the outside becomes the inside –, they hasten, stumble on their own until they find the “best” position and go into a state of rest/standby.

The immediate responses of the *Critters* when in a state of relationship with the participant and the hybrid movement between machine and the Critter are described by the critic and Brazilian art researcher Mario Pedrosa (2005). The author notes that,

*(...) In many of them, due to their complexity and structural superposition, a kind of internal gear results in a plane in space, or its simple displacement, immediately impacting on the whole, and all the parts start moving on their own in search for a*

**6** Concerning the opening of new possibilities in Performance Art, we find the spacial idea of *performance*, thought by Regina Melim (2008), which focus on participation – a relational or communicational (instruccional) condition.



*new position. The work moves sometimes as an insect, or the idea of a strange machine for building space is then suggested (...)* (Pedrosa apud Brett, 2005, p. 119).

A lot is written on the works of Lygia Clark, mainly about the series *Critters*. Every article I have found until now, makes reference to the sensorial dimension of the series, focusing on its spatial, visual, tactile, interactive and participatory characteristics. However, the aural dimension of *Critters* is neither mentioned in its original objects nor in the replicas.

In one of these articles, Sueli Rolnik (1996) reflects on Lygia Clark's poetical thinking and applies it to contemporary subjective issues. In order to do that, she uses resonant words such as: *murmur* and *gaggle*.

In a Portuguese language dictionary, *gaggle* names the use of the voice by birds and suggests a metallic emission of a voice. *Murmur* concerns the *overlapping of sounds and rustles during conversations*. In the article, the author does not submit those words to the meaning of sound production, but apply them as a metaphor of "making noise" in other instances. According to Sueli,

*(...) our body-critter has been kicking more than ever: with the new technologies of communication and information, each individual is permanently inhabited by flows of the entire planet, which multiplies hybridizations, accordingly sharpening the engendering of differences that vibrate in the body and make it gaggle. (...) many flows, much hybridization, production of heightened difference but, paradoxically, very little listening to this murmur, little fluidity, potency of enfeebled experimentation. In this world of marketing subjectivities, minimal tends to be the permeability between art – where, and only where, the gagging is heard as an appeal to creation – and the rest of the planet. Outside art and the artist, each gagging of the critter, each death of a figure of the human tends to be lived as the annihilation of everything (...)* (Rolnik, 1996).

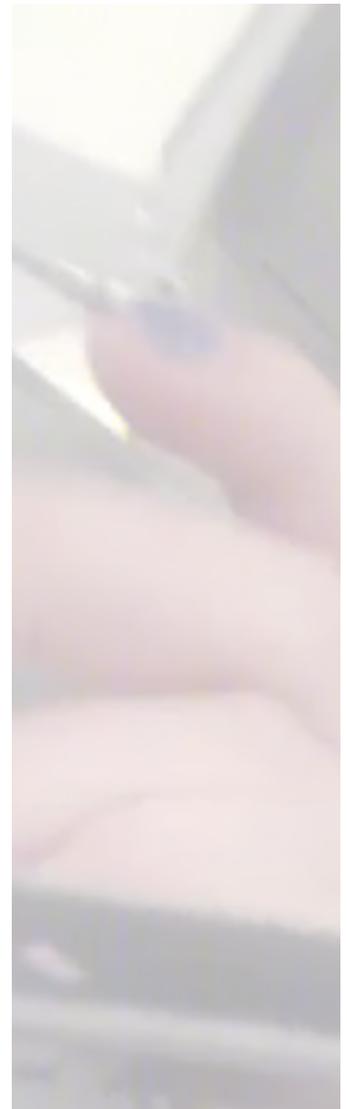
The difficulty to manipulate an original object from the series today, but in order to know if the *Critters* by Lygia Clark produced as intense and strident noise as of her replicas, I decided to interview the carioca musician Joaquim Pedro about an original *Critter*<sup>7</sup> that his family collects. Pedro says,

*I have a Critter, yes, and it was the object of the first video I ever made in life... In this video, I just threw a soundtrack over it... but you can at least see how 'he' is and something of its moving... this sculpture is on a glass table (80's) and, since it is made of metal, the pointed ends scratch the glass and produce great high sounds... but the hinges make very little noise, even if they are old... It is very delicate, but 'playing' it alive would be fantastic...* (Dos Santos. October 2012).

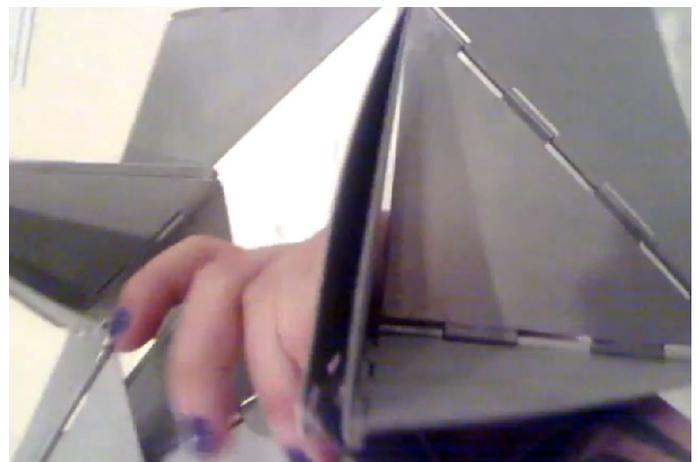
In this statement, Joaquim lets us know about some sound qualities of the original *Critter* when he highlights the din "comes from outside" and it is created by the friction between the object and the material that holds it. Also, when he distinguishes it from a lower sound, produced inside the gears (hinges), in spite of its long life.

In the Lygia Clark exhibition, perhaps the material used, so much vibration and friction made the replica *Critters* noising with intensity and in different ways, especially the hinges, but also by the planes and tips when tumbled, scratched and or were supported on wooden bench.

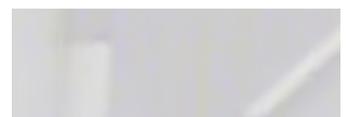
The gaggle of nine replicas – each with its own timbre and sound level – when manipulated by the audience at the same time, created a murmur that built some kind of "aural brick wall" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2007, p. 116).



<sup>7</sup> The interview was conducted through the Internet. In search for the *Critters* original pieces, I also came in contact with Art Foundation of my state – which possesses one original piece, but its manipulation and recording were not authorized.



Marion Velasco, handling the *Critters* replica, 2012. Photo video still  
Image of the artist.



The materiality of the voice, in the sense used by Paul Zumthor (2007, p. 82-85), is the reason the multiple voices from the *Critters* mark their presence and create Ritornellos “*establishing a center and designing a place*” (Ferraz, 2005, p. 77). When they gaggled, roared, growled, chirped, tweeted, croaked, what we heard in the exhibition room was a (Metal) Jungle territory.

The strength of these noises motivated me to visit the exhibition again, to capture the sounds with a high quality recorder. This meant planning another trip from Porto Alegre to São Paulo. I also had to go through a lot of bureaucratic procedures with the communication, public relations and events sector of Itaú Cultural<sup>8</sup> to have an authorization to use the exhibition’s image and sound.



Marion Velasco, handling the *Critters* replica, 2012. Photo video still  
Image of the artist.

## THE POPPING OF PING POEM

During this second trip to São Paulo, I stayed at home of artists, where I found another work that was potentially sonorous: the pieces *Ping Poem*. These are ping-pong balls with words printed on them, created by the artist Lenora de Barros (São Paulo, 1953) who works with issues related to identity in association with words through photography, video, performing actions and sound exhibitions since the late 1970s.

These poem-objects have a variety of versions, one of which dates from 2006. The words written on the surface also vary – the ones I handled had the name *Ping Poem*. In calling to the game (playful and poetic), this work can be inscribed as a proposition to *perform*.

The use of ping-pong balls is also part of the work from Manuel Rocha Iturbide (Mexico City, 1963), who created the *Ping-Roll* sound sculpture in the late 1990s. Unfortunately, I just met it recently. This work consists on seventy ping-pong balls displayed in a thin aluminium plate supported by four legs. The balls vibrate, jump, and ring producing noises when activated by three horns (subwoofer, medium, and high) disposed in under the plate.

Bruce Nauman (Fort Wayne, USA, 1941) was another important artist who threw balls against the floor in an action filmed in his studio. The action was called *Bouncing two balls between the floor and ceiling with changing rhythms* (1967-1968). In this work, Neumann draws the space using the balls, his body and a series of sparse noises.

Thus, in order to capture the sounds, my action was to play four *Ping Poem* balls on the flagstone floor from the house I was in. The lightness nature of the ping-pong balls, the popping, is naturally aural. That way the balls announce their routes in the space, indicate flight time and fall, jut, create turnabouts, take directions according to encounters (*starting ritornellos*) and, chaotic, may position themselves anywhere – “*Goodbye, I go without looking back...*” say Deleuze and Guattari (2007, p. 138).

Iturbide (2013), noticing what happened to the ping-pong balls in his work *Ping Roll*, turns to physics and acoustic in search for a contribution for his piece. Iturbide explains that



<sup>8</sup> The recording was authorized on an e-mail conversation I had with Luciana Cristina Silva Soares (from Itaú Cultural visual arts sector), Larissa Correa, and Bruna Bertolucci Camargo Silva (the communication, public relations and events sector of Itaú Cultural) in October 2012.



*Ping Poem* on the floor. Image of Marion Velasco.



*The tendency of the ping-pong ball is to bounce / jump in a discontinuous movement. The fact that a continuous frequency makes the balls to bounce and roll on a table is a paradox because the discontinuous sound of the balls do not produce any effect. The two states of the balls, the discontinuous and continuous peal are intrinsic to it and inseparable. This phenomenon is similar to the Quantum Theory in which the light may behave both as a wavy motion (continuous) and as shaped particles called photons (discontinuous). Acoustically speaking, the discontinuous bounce represents rhythm and the fast continuous bounce represents frequency. So we have a dialectics, the game established between two essential sound elements (Iturbide, 2013, p. 136).*

In the sound piece *Metal Jungle*, I believe that the hollow, fast and deterritorialized sound produced by the *Ping Poems* composed with the metallic noise of replica Clitters, has the aspect of ritornellos that, according to Deleuze and Guattari (2007, p. 117), opens, grafts or put to germinate “*wandering lines*” with spins, knot, speeds, movements, gestures and different sounds.

### **SAMPLES — VOICES OF THE WORK AS RITORNELLOS**

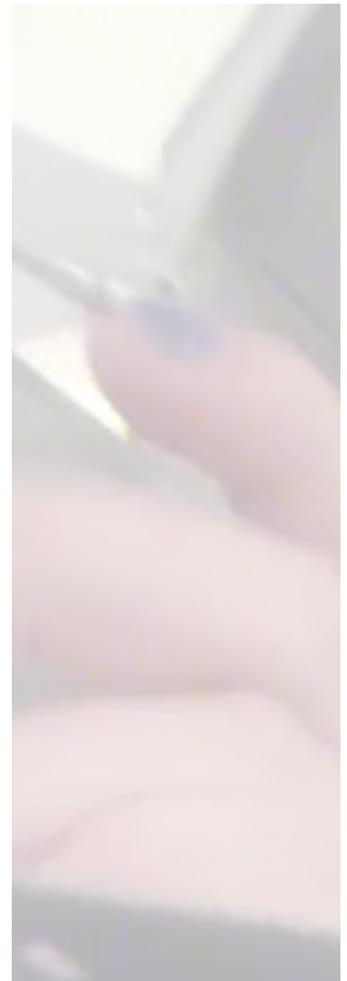
All the captured material indicates the duration of my action with each of the *Critters* – replicas plus the *soundscape* with ping-pong balls sound.

In post-production, I edited this material with equipment and softwares created for musicians and DJs. One of the procedures used was to cut specific parts of the recording – samples – in order to play them and compose a piece. The captured timbres were not modified with plug-ins or other effects so that each sample is the sound of the replica *Critter* and the *Ping Poem*. The other noises captured in the exhibition room and those produced by the visitors were not edited out, remaining as *background noise*.<sup>9</sup> John Cage warned us about the nonexistence of silence, because “*there is always something happening to produce sound!*” (John Cage apud Schaffer, 2011, p. 118). And Murray Schafer (2011, p. 120) complemented by, “*behind every piece of music, another piece of music is hidden – the tiny world of sound events that have carelessly accepted as ‘silent’.* Noise is sound that we’ve been trained to ignore.” So, for me, the exhibition visitors created some space-time deepness and a homely sensation.

The sound piece began to shape up when the samples were put in the sound live controller, *Novation Launchpad* – a sensorial equipment (aural, visual, tactile), that allow us trigger, juxtapose, compose with samples by light keys, and played live. This kind of sonic assemblage lasted sixteen minutes.

The manipulation of the samples done on the *Launchpad* is related to those experiments I did with the *Critters* – replicas objects – and the *Ping Poem* in São Paulo. Now the *Critter* folds, unfolds, beats, slides, precipitates, falls, goes in and out and blends in popping of the *Ping Poem* when the electronic keys are pressed.

That way we have another aural dimension of the *Critters* replicas and *Ping Poem* with mechanical noises and digital voices that were summoned by their and by my gestures. The *Critters* and the *Ping Poem* return, show themselves, mark their territory every time a sample is repeated or each time a gaggle is identified. Even considering the fact that the voices appear in a disordered, asymmetrical way in the piece, their little *Ritornellos* are recognizable.



<sup>9</sup> For Murray Schafer, background noises are those sounds which we receive unconsciously and only notice when they stop (Murray Schaefer, 2010, XCI).



Marion Velasco at work with Novation Launchpad in the Rubino’s home studio. Photo by Vicente Rubino. Porto Alegre. RS. 2012.



Through digital technology, it was possible to unfold the works of these two important Brazilian artists. It happened in the editing and folding operations, which transformed the noises into samples, and in a conceptual operation proposition: *touching* works of art.

Furthermore, there is always the possibility of summoning the *Critters* and *Ping Poem* voices, adding them in other ways and new versions.

During the research and presentation of *Metal Jungle* at radio art web, three trips<sup>10</sup> between Porto Alegre and São Paulo were made.

I went to five distinct places to create and present this work. I acted and recorded the noises in São Paulo at Itau Cultural (replica *Critters*) and the home of artists Lucia Koch and Rodrigo Bivar (*Ping Poem*). The post-production of the material was done at Centro de Música Eletrônica (Electronic Music Center) - PPGMus/UFRGS (pre-editing) and musical producer's Vicente Rubino (editing/samples, composition/action, live, mixing) home-studio, with help from the visual artist Chico Machado, both in Porto Alegre. The live presentation aired on the Radio arte web MobileRadio, at the 30<sup>th</sup> Bienal de São Paulo, in the Ciccillo Matarazzo pavilion at Parque Ibirapuera, in São Paulo.

The equipment and softwares used for this work were: mobile phone Nokia Navigator (for sound clips, video photography), recorder Zoom H4, sound editing software Nuendo 4 - Steinberg, sound controller Novation Launchpad - Ableton Live.

The sound piece *Metal Jungle* and this article are part of my doctorate research in Visual Poetics, titled "ERRAGEM-Performatividade, Voz e Outros Sons (ERRAGEM<sup>11</sup>-Performativity, Voice and Other Sounds)", which provides an investigation of Sonic Performances with voice, sounds, artist's band, soundscape and radio art programs.

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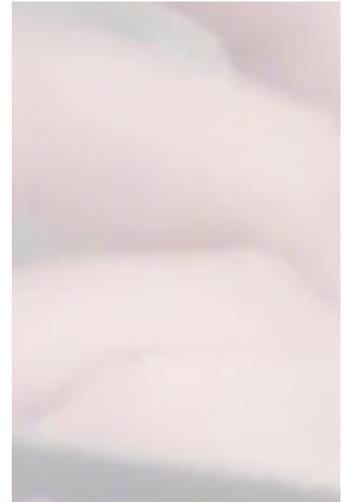
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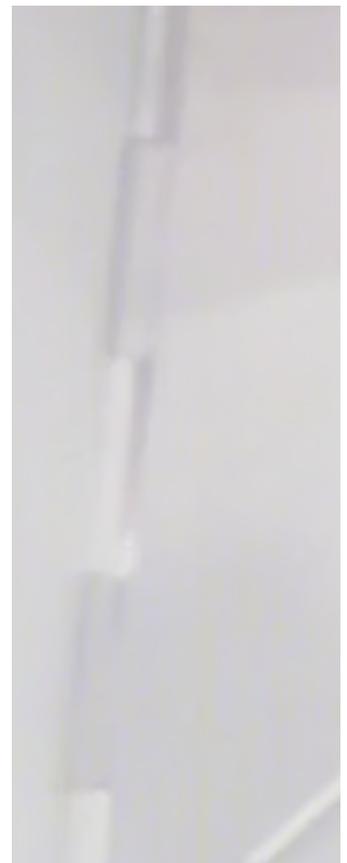
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**10** The third trip I made was to present the three MaisonM shows at Mobile Radio - 30<sup>th</sup> Bienal de São Paulo, and was financed by the Post-Graduate Program in Visual Arts – IA – UFRGS / Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil.



**11** Made up Word I found in a visual communication noise. The sign of a building supplies shop in my hometown was supposed to read FERRAGEM but the F had been ellipsed. That way, the word read ERRAGEM, which, in Portuguese, refers to the work error and the act of making a mistake.



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**Marion Velasco Rolim** is a multidisciplinary artist and researcher with experience in Visual Arts (performance, photography), Design, Sound Art, Music, Urban Culture and Education. She has is a doctorate candidate in Visual Poetics from the Post-Graduation Program in Visual Arts at Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), Porto Alegre, RS, Brazil – advised by Professor José Avancini (IA-UFRGS) and co-advised by Professor Mario Ramiro (ECA-USP). In 2015, she was an exchange researcher from CAPES/Brazil (BEX9954/14-7) in the Department of Sculpture at the Facultad de Bellas Artes de San Carlos, Valencia, Spain – advised by Professor Miguel Molina Alarcón. She has a Master's degree in Design from the Anhembi Morumbi University (SP, Brazil) and Bachelor's degree in Visual Arts at UFRGS (RS, Brazil). She is part of the following research groups in Art and Design: Inter-relations in Contemporaneity (zigzag-transversality and fashion design) of the Post-Graduation Program of the Anhembi Morumbi University and Art and Historiography at the Post-Graduation Program in Visual Arts at UFRGS. She has written articles for exhibitions and papers on art, music, fashion, and urban culture, which were presented in Universities in Brazil and abroad, and published in books, magazines and websites. As an artist, her work has been displayed in Porto Alegre (RS, Brazil), São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and on the internet. Between 1990 and 1996, she was responsible for the voice, lyrics, and executive production of pop rock bands and of an electronic music duo. From 1996 to 2005, she participated as a featured singer in songs from various bands from the south of Brazil. She has songs recorded on vinyl, cd compilations and K7 tapes. Presently, she works as an independent teacher in the Porto Alegre-São Paulo axis.

