


THE SUAPE MUSEUM: REFLECTIONS ON THE COUNTER- MUSEALIZATION OF VISUAL COLLECTIONS

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Videos



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Abstract

The discovery of a collection of Super 8 films recorded in the 1970s documenting the construction of the Suape Port in the state of Pernambuco, Brazil, is the focus of this article. The films were accidentally found during community-focused extension projects aimed at the local community affected by an oil spill. The need to preserve the content of the collection, which was initially meant to be forgotten, became important. The digitization of the images and the creation of an experimental museum were proposed to make these films accessible to the public. The Suape Museum emerges as a counter-narrative, seeking to recover and reinterpret these images within a context of reflections on the present and future of the region. For the community affected by the transformations and impacts of port construction, the collection brings up traumatic memories. Through a collaborative approach to musealization, the aim is to produce new meanings from these images.

Keywords

museum, archive, Suape, port, visual history

El Museo Suape: reflexiones sobre la contra-museización de las colecciones visuales

Resumen

Este artículo se centra en el descubrimiento de una colección de películas Super 8, grabadas en la década de 1970, que registran la construcción del Puerto de Suape, en Pernambuco. Estas películas fueron encontradas accidentalmente durante proyectos de divulgación dirigidos a la comunidad local, que se había visto afectada por un derrame de petróleo. Inicialmente destinada al olvido, la colección despertó la necesidad de preservar y difundir su contenido. La digitalización de las imágenes y la creación de un museo experimental fue la forma de hacerlas accesibles al público. El Museo Suape surge como una contranarrativa que pretende rescatar y reinterpretar estas imágenes en un contexto de reflexión sobre el presente y el futuro de la región. Para la comunidad afectada por las transformaciones e impactos de la construcción del Puerto, la colección representa memorias traumáticas. A través de un enfoque colaborativo de musealización, buscamos construir nuevos significados a partir de estas imágenes.

Palabras clave

museo, colección, Suape, puerto, historia visual

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Accidental encounters

The object of the study that was being developed was a collection of Super 8 files that portrayed marriages of some of the most influential families in the city of Recife, Brazil, and the surrounding region. The collection, which was filmed in the 1970s, was, however, “embargoed”; it was not given permission to circulate because the protagonists of the films were members of the local elites, according to the Pernambuco State Attorney’s office. The administrator, however, perhaps in a mediating stance and considering this an imposition linked to the capital of the elites in question, proposed for us to consider another collection that needed intervention for its preservation. It was at this time that we came into contact with the collection that constitutes the main subject of this article.

Some wooden boxes filled with Super 8 films were brought to us. Stickers with the logotype MISPE and the word SUAPE were on the outside of the box. We had accidentally found something that could become part of another ongoing study. The finding of collections is often the consequence of accidental events. In 2019, we were dialoging with the Museu da Imagem e do Som de Pernambuco (MISPE), which is a space of fundamental importance for the preservation of film and sound material that do not fit any of the restrictive definitions that mold the “official” history of cinema. At the time, the museum was a provisory headquarters occupied since 2008 to where it was transferred with the promise of having its original headquarters renovated, which never happened. Like several other image and sound museums in the country, MISPE operated under infrastructural and human resource conditions that we may define as very detrimental to the heritage that the museum was intended to preserve and promote.



Figure 1. Box of Super 8 films conserved at MISPE (Author: Júlia Morim, 2020).

In 2019, an oil spill impacted the coast of the state of Pernambuco. Together with colleagues from the Department of Anthropology and Museology, we were working on extension programs directed at giving support to the communities affected by the oil spill and were also conducting studies on the event. At the time, our attention was directed at the community of Vila de Suape, the closest community to the largest port in the region, which was first conceived in the 1970s. The extension project was focused on image production in response to requests from members of the community involved in the study. It was necessary for them not only to think about the impact of the oil, but also map the past to consider other processes that had negative consequences, including the

construction of the Suape Port, which was considered the most harmful. This accidental encounter with a collection that had never been exhibited publicly became filled with expectations.

Speaking with the administrator of MISPE, we found out that the films were recorded by Recife filmmaker Carlos Cordeiro in the period between 1977 and 1982 in color Super 8 without sound. Examining the museum catalog, we found minimal information on the content of the collection. It was composed of 75 Super 8 films of an average length of three minutes each, with raw footage of various phases of the construction of the Suape Port as well as cultural manifestations, aerial shots, wedding ceremonies, visits from authorities and other themes.

In order to constitute a collection, it is necessary for someone to organize a set of materials and conceive it as such. In the case of Super 8 films, there was concern for storing, preserving and understanding them as deserving of such actions, even if it was not possible to know in detail the trajectory traveled by the images until reaching the MISPE. For more than 40 years, these images had rested forgotten, but stored and preserved—in technical terms, this is perhaps questionable. By chance or by fate, they were, as we will describe in this article, “rescued” and publicized at a time in which there is strong public debate on the impacts of the Suape Port in both the neighboring communities and the region that composes the municipality of Cabo de Santo Agostinho—a time in which there is mobilization against the implantation of a mineral iron terminal on Cocaia, an island in Suape Bay created artificially to enable ship traffic. Such events put into question the role of a collection that is extroverted beyond memory.

What was not being sought was found. With the collection in our hands, the idea of not losing it, of preserving, viewing and disseminating the content drove the digitization process, which was the first step to be executed. Returning the images to the community in an act of restitution for the building of a joint narrative about them, the second step. Making the images available to a broad public by means of devices that enable reviving them, such as the constitution of a museum that uses virtual support, the third.

Genesis

In his classic text on archives, Achille Mbembe describes the “archive as an ‘instituting imaginary’ that largely originates in this trade with death” (Mbembe, 2002: 22). This quotation is particularly interlaced with the processes described in this article, because the material we are analyzing was not destined to a process of eternalization that museal and archivist institutions seek to provide. In the various conversations that we had with the filmmaker who recorded these materials, it became evident that these films were the result of improvisations with the camera at Carlos Cordeiro’s own initiative and, in practice, disconnected from the work of press agent that he did at the port.

Carlos Cordeiro was a public servant who worked for the Department of Roads as a journalist when he met Jomard Muniz de Britto, one of the most relevant and intellectual filmmakers in the city of Recife at the time, at a film course promoted by the Pernambuco Tourism Company (EMPETUR). He dedicated himself to film in his free time. In the 1970s, he already owned a Super 8 camera and had a 16 mm camera at his disposal. He soon began to develop projects with Muniz de Britto. As filming in 35 mm and 16 mm was not accessible, Super 8 was the available material and could do the job of filming and editing. Developing the film was performed in Rio de Janeiro. Carlos Cordeiro soon saw that films with Jomard Muniz de Britto were improvised, with no scripts, beginning with a line of thinking that came from Gláuber Rocha, with just a camera in hand and an idea in mind. Together, the two men participated in the 1st Super 8 Film Festival of Recife in 1977, where they received an award.

The life and work of Carlos Cordeiro, like those of many other filmmakers of Recife, are important to revisit due to his participation in the so-called “Super 8 Cycle”, which was a fundamental moment for cinematographic production for bringing considerable experimentation and “drive” to productions in the region, according to Muniz de Britto. At a troubled time as the 1970s, years governed by the Brazilian military dictatorship, Cordeiro and Muniz de Britto used cameras as a space of freedom, circumventing censorship and the difficulties imposed by the times. They also worked as film clubbers, showing and discussing films of the era.

Starting in the mid-1970s, Carlos Cordeiro was “loaned” as an employee to the company that conducted the first phase of construction of the Suape Port. It was in this period, between 1977 and 1982, that he filmed the collection that is the subject of this article. He stresses, however, that it was his personal initiative, with visits to document the important work that the infrastructure of the port was providing, complete with promises –which are common– of the preservation of the environment and local culture, which, however, did not come to pass. When it became clear that the promises would only remain on paper, Cordeiro distanced himself from the project. In his mind, the idea of a port as a sustainable infrastructure was fading away.

A second trade with death, always relating to the reflections of Mbembe (2002), is the necropolitical nature of the images that the collection enabled preserving. The vivid images bring to the present day the political and social dynamics that were mobilized with the construction of the port. Speaking with Cordeiro, it became clear how the images constituted a part of the materiality of the port for him in a very incisive way, like the concrete that allowed ships to dock on the Brazilian coast. The moving images of the collection are part of the port infrastructure and were produced to document the transformations, but, above all, to be a support to them, influencing the imaginaries that were being constructed on the port.

The transformations that we describe are of ample size. The area was previously dominated by the sugarcane industry, and the local economy was largely directed at fishing and extraction activities. The first consequence of the port project –developed beginning in the 1970s– was the displacement of numerous residents, who were relocated to Vila de Suape. Construction implied the arrival of a large number of workers from other municipalities, a presence that led not only to the conversion of the local economy, but also, according to the residents of the Vila, to an increase in drug trafficking, pregnancies of “native” women¹ and, lastly, the establishment of an atmosphere of systemic violence that continues to the present day (Scott, 2018). Fishing activities were very much impacted by pollution stemming from the port, the periodic dredging and the prohibition of fishing in many important areas. In relation to Vila de Suape, the installation of a luxury resort built in the 1990s created numerous conflicts on the local level with regards to the use of the mangrove and beach. Moreover, the economic impact of the port on the lives of the residents of the Vila was very residual. The infrastructural improvements were more directed toward possible tourists than the residents. Looking at the sea from the beach of the Vila, one sees the horizon filled with ships in transit and the artificial reef as a barrier, somewhat of a slash in the panorama. The difference between the old images of the collection of which we are speaking and what one sees today is very striking.

1 As in other contexts related to fishing activities (Vailati & Godio, 2020), the term “native” is used emically, in identitarian terms.



Figure 2. Video 1. Aerial view of the area where the port would be installed (Direction: Carlos Cordeiro).

The relationship between the collection and death —materialized here whether by the necropolitical nature of the project eternalized in images or by the constant demise of the promises that mega-infrastructure like the port convey— is evident. In its genesis, the set of relationships that led to the production of images marks their future path made from an oblivion that lasted nearly 40 years, during which the images remained submerged with no possibility of being seen.

The digitization process of the collection

Throughout the year 2020, the search for images on the Suape region became a more structured research project that was not limited to the material produced by Carlos Cordeiro.² A survey was conducted that enabled discovering numerous image collections on Suape Port at the time of the project and construction as well as successively over the years. A relevant example was the collection of the Ecological and Cultural Program of the Suape Port Industrial Complex (PECCIPS), produced concomitantly to a sociopolitical movement structured by intellectuals from Recife against the implementation of the port. In response, the state of Pernambuco funded an ample socio-anthropological study on the natural, cultural and archeological heritage of the region to demonstrate its relevance and attempt to prevent the implementation of the port.

PECCIPS was also shelved and practically forgotten over the last 40 years. However, the study enabled finding a set of images composed of approximately 7000 photographs produced by Sidney Wiseman, a photographer from Rio de Janeiro. Like the collection produced by Cordeiro, these images remained for decades in museum collections without being exhibited until the project revitalized them, as we can see in this video (figure 2) that materializes at a time of protest against the expansion of the port and reconnects it with the older images of a popular festivity conducted at the location.

2 The project entitled “Decolonizing Infrastructures: An image ethnography of the Suape Port” was funded by the National Council of Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq; Edital Universal 2021) and proposed an analysis of infrastructural transformations from the numerous image and sound artifacts produced over the last 50 years for and as a consequence of the port, also exploring how the port infrastructure transformed the imaginary of the communities involved, their perceptions of the future and their temporalities.



Figure 3. Video 2. *Ouriçada Cocaia Vive!* (Direction: Alex Vailati).

The PECCIPS collection is only one example among numerous that were found and are in the process of analysis. The digitization of this material is—in contexts in which it is not difficult to make copies of the original material and ensure its integrity—the only possibility for its preservation and restoration. Thus, the team was able to approve a project financed by the Pernambuco Incentive to Culture Fund of the state government, which enabled the digitization of the MISPE collection in high-quality formats by scanning frame by frame.

The regional panorama of film preservation is an incipient context, as no laboratories were found in the north or northeast regions of the country that had the technical infrastructure and skills to develop the work of digitization. On the national level, in 2021, when the material was digitized, public institutions that could develop this work, such as the Brazilian Film Library of São Paulo and Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro, also did not have the technical possibilities to perform the digitization.

Thus, digitization was performed by a private company located in Rio de Janeiro, and the process was carried out in steps. Cleaning and sanitization of the material was performed first, followed by frame by frame scanning of the Super 8 films and, lastly, the postproduction phase of color grading and the digital cleaning up of the images. The cataloging of the collection was performed in parallel. As data available on the films were practically nonexistent, it was necessary to mobilize various social groups to conduct a shared inventory. First, some residents of the communities adjacent to the port provided an initial reading of this material. Second, the director Carlos Cordeiro was invited to map the dynamics of the creation of the films. Thus, the inventory was the result of the study directed at the content of the collection as well as an ethnography of its production aimed at highlighting the dynamics by means of what films were produced (Vailati, Zamorano, 2021). Third, several journalists who worked for the press in the 1970s were mobilized for the identification of the people in the images. Thus, it was possible to identify numerous personalities that appeared on the job site of the port, particularly in recordings of public visits.

Throughout the inventory process, several public showings of this material were held at both the Visual Anthropology Lab of the Federal University of Pernambuco and in the communities around the port. In particular, we highlight a public viewing held in 2022 in Vila de Suape, the community most impacted by the construction of the port, which mobilized 400 residents to watch the films. These moments were extremely important for us to understand more about the possible relevance of the collection and to begin researching the effects of the restitution of these images to the people who live in the region.



Figure 4. Recording of the launch of the project in Vila de Suape (Authors: Alex Vailati, Rennan Peixe).

Several participants of these viewings highlighted two points that were essential for them: the absence (or lack of access) of images of the region prior to the construction of the port, and how the restitution of the collection was fundamental to rethinking those times. The images enabled reflecting on that specific conjuncture of the implantation of the port and the advance of an infrastructure that is still in expansion today. We should reiterate that the communities around the port are once again facing a dispute, contesting the installation of a mineral iron terminal with high pollution potential.

Becoming Suape Museum

As we may perceive, one of the most relevant categories in this process was temporality and its relationship with the historical imagination: the “temporality of a society is related to that which the archive creates and the contents on which the archive is supported to transmit a certain view of time”³ (Kummels, Koch, 2020: 33). Likewise, we found the issue of time in multiple theoretical frameworks (Carvalho da Rocha, Eckert, 2015; Larkin, 2018; Mbembe, 2001). The collection implicitly questions time, like in the classic work by Derrida (1995), in which, starting with the practice of the destruction of the collection, the notion of the permanence of features that oscillate between the private and the public is questioned. It is in this instituting dimension (Castoriadis, 2008) of the collection that the problem of temporality is inserted.

As we saw, the collection that we are analyzing was initially destined to be forgotten. We have no detailed information on how or why the collection was taken to MISPE, but we have heard reports of various collections that were “saved from the trash” —to use the words of Geraldo Pinho, the manager of the museum at the time. According to Carlos Cordeiro, the films were not made to circulate, and the company that managed the port reprimanded the filmmaker after he filmed the accidental sinking of an imported dredger. Cordeiro himself was surprised when he saw this sequence. He thought that the company had destroyed the material. These images remained hidden under the shadow of other narratives that were being produced and disseminated.

We may consider that all these sets of images produced by the port are modules or parts of its very infrastructure (Star, 2020; Vailati, in press). Studies of other archives enabled finding additional material, such as a film made in the 1970s that projected Recife and the port industrial complex as attractive for tourists and foreign investors. Moreover, the port itself produced a periodical that was translated into several foreign languages, and one can currently find an abundance of videos related to the keyword “Suape” on YouTube.

3 Our translation of “*La temporalidad de una sociedad se relaciona con aquella que el archivo crea y con los contenidos en que se respalda el archivo para transmitir cierta visión del tiempo*”.

The images of the films produced by Carlos Cordeiro form a set that, from many standpoints, needed to be forgotten. The very Super 8 format propitiates this by the difficulty in finding a functioning projector in the city of Recife to view the material. Digitization emerges as a radical intervention aimed at preservation, but substantially transforms the esthetic dimension and materiality of these films.

Looking at the field of contemporary visual anthropology, we perceive how the study of digital image collections is a fundamental space of dispute. A starting point that crosses many studies is the need to revitalize images, as the field of film preservation necessarily passes through digitization and the production of new collections.

Notwithstanding the interesting content of the Super 8 films, the total duration of approximately four hours comprised of numerous films with an average of three minutes each made the viewing of the material a difficult practice, particularly for a public that is not familiar with raw film in this format. This issue opened the doors for a very important reflection on what to do with the collection, problematizing the idea of depositing the digitized collection in institutions that ensure its safeguarding and access as well as a permanent restitution of this material by means of an experimental museum. The ideal of musealizing the material emerged as a necessary step.

The collections of museums are the object of the current thriving discussion on what to do with them (or how to deal with them), as new looks are being cast and diverse demands are being created (Moutinho, Primo, 2021). The origins, reasons and way in which these collections are stored and presented are being questioned. The responsibility that a collection imposes on an institution —from its preservation to its treatment, narrative and exhibition —is an issue that needs to be problematized from a contemporary perspective. Human remains, objects and images that speak of violence and the extermination of peoples as well as ransacked objects of art and sacred objects and photographs, for example, integrate museum collections throughout the world and for a long time were shown from the salvationist, preservationist, colonizing angle in museums, which themselves are the fruit of colonial enterprise and thinking (Chagas, 2020).

In recent years, other views on the role of museums, collections and exhibitions stress the need for other orientations in the safeguarding policy and curatorial policy as well as a critical reflection on their place and meaning in contemporary society. Researchers, scholars, militants, artists, members of indigenous communities and *quilombolas*, groups and representatives of countries that were expropriated guide the discussion and point out the problems imposed on museums. In a certain way, whether as a reaction or a response, there are different levels of concern (individual, institutional and governmental) and commitment to the revision/visitation of narratives, collections and property.

Some examples of this process are fitting. In December 2022, the Dutch government officially apologized for its involvement in the trafficking of enslaved people, implicating itself as a State in the current consequences of the slaveholding past. The extremely rare formal apology was accompanied by the complaint of the insufficiency of the action and the demand of former colonies, such as Suriname, for other forms of reparation. Some institutions presented timid attempts of the revision of their collections and narratives on objects, such as the Rijksmuseum, the national museum of the Netherlands in Amsterdam, which proposed to “shed light on its permanent collection” by the addition for one year (February 2021 to February 2022) of 77 new captions/plaques alongside objects and paintings related to the enslaving colonial Dutch past. At the end of the period, the museum would assess the pertinence of assimilating the information “in order to do greater justice to the Netherlands’ complicated history” (Rijksmuseum & Slavery).

Also in the Netherlands, the exhibition entitled “Alkmaar Plantation. Alkmaar in Suriname 1745-present”⁴ held at the Stedelijk Museum in Alkmaar between November 2022 and March 2023 intended to address the slaveholding past of the town (and its townsmen) that gave a name to a plantation system of large landowners in the then colony of Suriname and its relationship with the Dutch West and East India Companies. The history of the enterprise, daily life, the naming of some enslaved people and a presentation of current life in the location composed the show. However, an enormous painting was placed at the entrance of the exhibition in the style of portraits from the 16th and 17th centuries of one of the men responsible for the occupation of Suriname. The temporal leap from the period of occupation to the current day does not problematize its impacts and consequences. The way the exposition was put together (who contributed and who led) was not presented. To some extent, the attempt to speak about this past is a trap for the museum, as the narrative seeks to declare the suffering and harm caused by involvement in the colonial enterprise but does not go into the issue with sufficient depth.

In our case, we are not dealing with a collection that is strictly a colonial legacy, but that was constituted in a context in which developmental thinking operated together with a dictatorial political system. Through the possibility of creating virtual exhibition spaces, the idea of forming a museum consolidated, and we constituted the “Suape Museum”, in which different collections on the Suape region are available and can serve as the basis for reflections on the consequences of the port, which are minimized by some sectors of society but are of considerable importance to the community that is directly impacted.

At an exhibition of the MISPE collection with residents of Vila de Nazaré held at the Visual Anthropology Lab of Federal University of Pernambuco, one man pointed out that the very word “Suape” is perceived as problematic by many residents. He even suggested that the museum could have another name because the “Suape” category is indissolubly linked to the presence of the port. The issue of how to re-politicize the images of the collection was a path replete with traps, as occurred in other exhibition experiences. The poetic aspect of the museum —understood here as intrinsically linked to the political dimension (Larkin, 2020)— then became a central theme of the process.



Figure 5. Site of Suape Museum, available at www.suapemuseu.com.br (Accessed: June 20th, 2023). The text stated: “The Suape Museum seeks to collect and publicize images of the Suape region on the coast of Pernambuco, where one of the main port infrastructures of contemporary Brazil was installed”.

4 In the original: “Plantage Alkmaar. Alkmaar in Suriname 1745-heden”.

Infrastructures of memory

What do the images say? What do they hide? As ideas are circulated in these images, we start with the premise that they are infrastructures of the port and can be contested —seen through another prism. Narrated by other groups rather than those that had the developmentalist and economic interests of the state or the company, but affective, ecological, community-oriented. At the beginning of the process described here, the collection was something hidden because no one knew what it actually contained beyond the words that were indicated on the list available from MISPE and the little that we could project prior to digitization.

After digitization, the collection continued to be material that needed to be reinvented in order to have a politically stronger role. We were able to discover sequences that could be viewed. For instance, many of the aerial shots of the coast enable seeing how the region was before the port; the visits of politicians and businessmen, whose movement underscores the interests involved in the construction project; sequences that reproduce folk celebrations, events of the villages situated in the area and the material heritage of the region, which stands out as one of the first regions invaded and colonized by Europeans. How to put together and give new meaning to the monumental quantity of moving images?

Some examples used as references were found in that transdisciplinary field between anthropology and museology. Practices of the extroversion and resignification of collections are being experienced in recent projects and proposals, such as the exhibition “The Photographic Impulse to (dis)Arrange the Colonial Archives” at the *Museu Nacional de História Natural e da Ciência* (MUHNAC) linked to the University of Lisbon in Portugal. The exhibition proposes the reorganization or rearrangement of the photographic collection (GODINHO et al, 2021) of two Portuguese scientific missions in Africa (geodesy and anthropology). The result of a research project of the New University of Lisbon in partnership with MUHNAC, which safeguards the collection, the exhibition questions the use of the images, points to the function of control, classification and domination originally conceived/destined for that collection and proposes, as reparation,⁵ the perspective that other interpretations are possible. Thus, it imposes —by means of (dis)arrangement— new meanings and raises other issues for the collection through a collaborative curatorship performed in a shared way with multiple viewpoints (Andrade, Elhaik, 2018).

By rearranging and re-narrating also through artistic interventions based on the same photographs, “counter-visualities” are proposed, by which the images are treated as witnesses/evidence. These images, which would have remained hidden/stored/asleep, are now placed before the public with a different presentation. The origins of the images, their modes of production and functions for which they were originally proposed (as a means of fostering the colonial agenda) are put into discussion. What once served to establish frontiers and geographic limits and propagate the notion of racial hierarchy is now taken as “proof of the crime”, as the African artists participating in the curatorship call it. This retelling, displacing conceptions and opening spaces for disputes is something singular and daring for the local reality, considering the horizon of Portuguese museums, museological institutions and memory.

The demand for revisions is also found in Brazil, notably by indigenous people, Afro-Brazilians and practitioners of African-derived religions (*terreiros*). Some examples are the creation of indigenous, *quilomba* and *terreiro* museums by the communities themselves as well as

5 Term used in the catalog of the exhibition.

requests for the repatriation of collections safeguarded by institutions considered oppressors. A recent case was the “Release our sacred objects” campaign, in which Afro-Brazilian religious leaders and activists of the Black movement demanded the “release” of sacred objects apprehended between 1890 and 1946 by the civil police of Rio de Janeiro at the Civil Police Museum of the city under the denomination “Black Magic Museum Collection”. After years of mobilization, the collection was transferred to the Museum of the Republic in 2020 and renamed “Our Sacred Collection”. Besides the movement of the objects to a place considered adequate by those for whom the objects have meaning, there was a process of resignification of the collection marked by the new designation, modifying its status.

Likewise, the problem/contestation with regards to colonial statues and monuments in public spaces was stressed in recent years through interventions and protests throughout the world (Moraes & Anjos, 2020). In Brazil, the statue of the *bandeirante* Borba Gato in São Paulo was covered with red paint in 2016 and set afire in 2021 by activists who demanded a critical stance with regards to the meaning that those statues and monuments propagate. This kind of action draws attention to narrated histories and facts that involve untold stories of violence, expropriation and exploitation related to these figures presented as heroes.⁶ In this discussion and speaking about Africa, Mbembe (2020) proposes removing all such monuments from public spaces and putting them together in an act burying colonialism in a type of garden/museum for future generations—a project that was partially materialized in the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg.⁷ With regards to Brazil, Moraes and Anjos (2020) argue that “in this context, questioning, contextualizing, vandalizing and, at the limit, toppling monuments can be acts of reparation and healing— acts of love.”

In this conjuncture of the reformulation of narratives, projects propose the (re)mapping, updating and registration of new interpretations of places of memory and—beyond museums and archives—the decolonization of cities themselves, such as the case of remapping⁸ in Portugal and Germany, which envisages a series of activities and productions, such as the construction of a new subjective cartography of the cities, or *Demonumenta*⁹ in Brazil headed by the School of Architecture of the University of São Paulo, which proposes a discussion and presents other narratives regarding “uncomfortable monuments and architectonic heritages related to the commemorations of the Independence of Brazil and the 1922 Modern Art Week and its reverberations in 1932, 1954 and 1972”. Thus, there is an international movement of contestation, reflection and action with regards to objects, collections, iconographies and monuments, their meanings and narratives that propagate and which are implicated.

That said, there is a more-than-urgent need for understanding that dealing with collections is to take on the responsibility of these collections and the communities that these collections address as well as the way of extroverting them. This is an ongoing discussion that passes through the fields of museology, archives/collections and anthropology and takes us back to the collection of films about Suape. Therefore, these reflections were the starting point for thinking about the next

6 See also actions of the group *Aparelhamento*, which promoted a series of interventions in the city of São Paulo: <https://www.instagram.com/aparelhamento/>

7 Apartheid Museum. Available at: <https://www.apartheidmuseum.org/>. Accessed on June 13th, 2023.

8 ReMapping Memories. <https://www.re-mapping.eu/pt/o-projeto>. Accessed on May 21st, 2023.

9 *Demonumenta*. <http://demonumenta.fau.usp.br/>. Accessed on May 21st, 2023.

step—the opening of the collection. As mentioned above, considering the possible interpretations, diverse actors were mobilized, who contributed to the building of the descriptive information as well as the meanings of these images. To detail this process, we will consider two case studies constituted by two different recordings that were featured throughout the collection cataloging process. The first is the filming of the visit from President João Figueiredo, the last military man of the era of the dictatorship in the presidency, and the second offers images of a case that became very suggestive among the residents of Vila de Suape— that of the dredger that ran aground and subsequently sank at the entrance of the port.



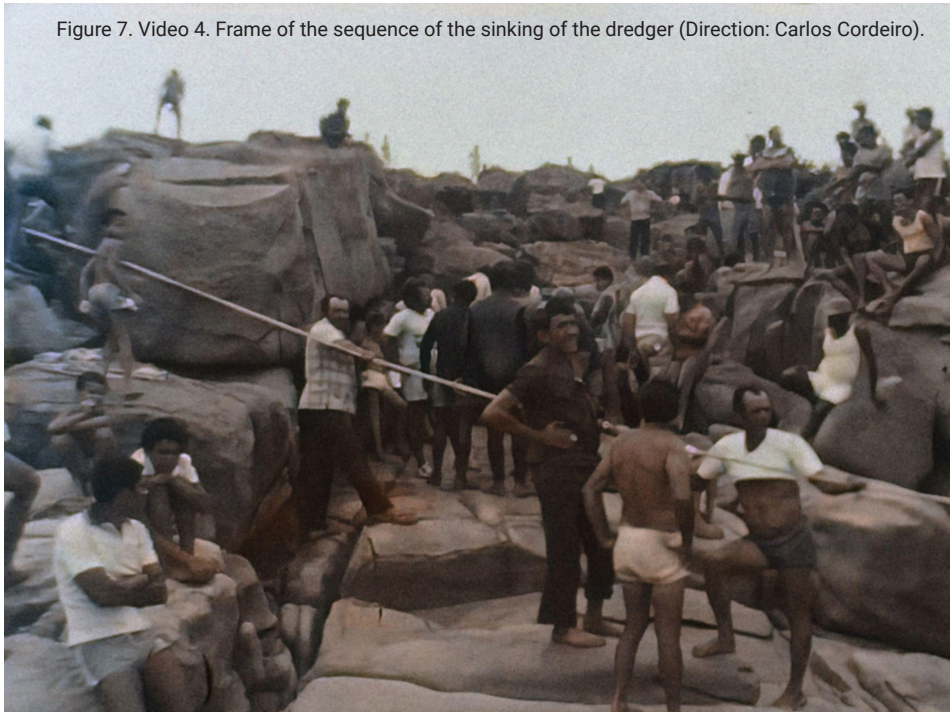
Figure 6. Vídeo 3. Frame from the sequence in which João Figueiredo speaks in Suape (Direction: Carlos Cordeiro).

As we can infer from the images, the visit by president Figueiredo was an event that included the presence of “authorities” and local residents. According to one of our contacts, the port on such occasions had a bus to transport students from schools to the event. In the images, we can see the hierarchical position between the authorities and residents, defined by a journalist active in the region at the time of the event as the “*povão*” [commoners], underscoring the subordination of these subjects to other political and economic capitals.

The images reveal signs of a division that interlaces racial and economic issues. They are atypical in the panorama of image production on Suape because they demonstrate existing divisions but also show that there is a mixing of the two groups and a mutual interdependence. By the way in which they were cataloged, these images become part of a reflection that can be defined as counter-colonial, that is, they seek to expose how the port

was constructed with a basis on these divisions. As many people underline, those images are quite atypical concerning the re-production of Port's image: they show both dominators and dominated. Contemporary Ports' narratives are usually based on green washing and "social washing" that try to propose a sustainable image and that exclude everything that does not fit in those representations. As we will show (figure 8), the reactivation of those images through editing can resignify them. Using iconic music and montage, those images have been perceived as something that can "eternalize" the modern genesis of those communities, based on a still ongoing conflict with port infrastructure.

Figure 7. Video 4. Frame of the sequence of the sinking of the dredger (Direction: Carlos Cordeiro).



The second case regards the sinking of the dredger. Once again, the images demonstrate considerable excitement among the representatives of the port, who are trying to save the vessel, which is inexorably aground at the entrance of the port, and the population that observes the events attentively. In this case, we once again have different interpretations. According to journalists present on the occasion, the sinking of the dredger fits into a narrative based on commercial disputes – in an attempt to win tendering processes by means of illegal acts, with the purposeful sinking of the vessel. In short, a commercial war that involved violent acts would support the destruction of the dredging equipment and, in more general terms, the practices that underpin the construction of the port.

On the other hand, the population that witnessed the event tells a different story, and these stories are also fundamental to understanding the practices that serve as the basis of the construction of these massive port infrastructures. At the time, people in general did not

perceive what was happening, as many stated that they “only knew that something was being built, but could not imagine its future impacts”. The dredger is one of the tools most historically used for the expansion and foundation of channels and, consequently, is currently considered the element that most causes destruction to marine and coastal environments. This fact is especially relevant in a context in which the sustenance of the communities around the port often comes from an economy based on artisanal fishing and small-scale tourism. It was thrilling to see the reaction of the people to the sinking of the dredger, reporting that “at the time, they were cheering for its salvation” and, with it, the project of the port. “We did not know what was coming, but we knew that something was coming” was one of the statements that this clip elicited. Reproposing these images to local communities has been perceived as a process of revitalization of these memories, something that implicitly contests Port’s erasure strategy.

These processes of the resignification of images —and of the past— serve as the basis of the Suape Museum as a tool for sharing and providing access to the images, an initiative that understands the museum “as technology, as a work tool, as a strategic device for a new, creative, participative relationship with the past, present and future” (Chagas, 2011:05). The museum puts this set of images in motion, propitiating its politization and the emergence of multiple interpretations —alternative narratives that question the practices that permitted the construction and continual expansion of the port.

Thus, the Suape Museum is an example of a museological initiative that has the use and interpretation of images at its core and is in a territory where there are disputes. Some experiences in Brazil serve as reference. The Museum of the Removals in Rio de Janeiro makes use of initially private images, which are placed “on the streets”, thus creating a counter-musealization (Brulon, Peixinho, 2022) and a counternarrative of the expulsion of the residents of Vila Autódromo amidst the execution of large works, namely, urban reforms for the Olympics. The images enter the field of the dispute of narratives and “prove” what the community says in counterpoint to the speech of public authorities, in this case, city hall of Rio de Janeiro. By means of photographs, the museum not only narrates the past history but also the present and demands another future than that which the public authorities want to impose. There is the making of a counter-museology that “is based on the contesting experience of the museal order itself” (Brulon, Peixinho, 2022:21); it does not fit in canonical terms the ideal of a museum. In this experience, the images are the “main support of memory for residents who resisted” (Brulon, Peixinho, 2022:07), as the museum is made during the process of appropriation and the forced removal of the residents.

The *Museu da Beira da Linha do Coque* (Museum of the Edge of the Line of [the neighborhood of] Coque)¹⁰ in the city of Recife is another initiative using the audiovisual to insert itself in the struggle for remaining in the community, a central region of the city, and also to counter discourse on the location. The museum collection is composed of audiovisual records of residents of the community, narrating another story for the neighborhood different from that propagated by the media and public power, in which it is related to violence and poverty (Heitor, 2018). By means of a “Cycloscreen” (combination of bicycle and projector), the exhibition of the collection is performed itinerantly in and outside the community, echoing the museum as an instrument and political agent.

10 <https://historiasdocoque.wordpress.com/>. Accessed on: May 21st, 2023.

As mentioned, old, new and renovated collections have been strategic devices of re-writings in the realm of disputes for memory, territory and rights in recent years. We can therefore state that the Suape Museum emerges in the “void in devastated spaces” and the image of the support for the museum and the struggle of the communities that live around the port. The images also promote a discussion on the cultural landscape, which is destroyed by the public power and large corporations (Chagas, 2020:146).

The counter-musealization of the leftovers

In the case that we present in this article, we found positionings between research and extension located from the university in a perspective that places it alongside the community in order to reflect on the present and future through images. The path traveled was that of understanding a museum not in normative terms but in experimental terms. As stated, the collection on which we worked was destined to oblivion, to death (near death). It was asleep. The images, which were not produced to circulate, which were private, are now lifted to another place. They are re-elaborated in another context from an initiative that is self-titled “Suape Museum”, in which the MISPE collection is joined with others that were and still will be found and produced. With the Suape Museum, we are producing a new musealization from and with other points of view, understanding images not as mere unconcerned records. Multiple visions are converging for a musealization in which the images can be applied for the building of a counternarrative.

The Suape region experienced expulsions, appropriations and devastations for the sake of a developmentalist project. The public image records of this process were mainly charged with a narrative from the state’s “path to progress” standpoint. We may consider that we are in the realm of dealing with memories that may be considered traumatic for the community involved. We are operating between remembering and forgetting or how to remember and how to forget. The transformations and impacts of the construction of the port and its expansions are “traumas of development” that are not considered as such, perhaps due to its visible scale and the profile of the community that is directly affected. The Suape region may come to be understood as a place of memory associated with the developmentalist politics of large works as occurred and is occurring with the construction of hydroelectrical plants. The images demonstrate “the before” not experienced or recalled by many residents and that can be the starting point for thinking about the present day and glimpsing the future.

The temporal distance of the facts and events implies different choices in the treatment and approach. Taking into account our practice and the current context, the experience of a museum in which image collections are organized with the proposal of the collaborative building of meanings is the most correct path. We are dealing with a counter-musealization of leftover images, as Brulon & Peixinho (2022) point out in reference to Debary, for whom “the patrimonial and museal stance rests on this management of leftovers ” (Debary, 2017:85). As stated above, the MISPE collection was “saved from the trash”. These leftovers are what remained of what was recorded at the time and contrast what remains of the place.

The museum shaped here on this traveled path is in line with a perspective of an experimental museology built with a basis on regimes of non-hegemonic value that proposes “freeing the social experience from the disciplinary regimes of normative, oppressive museums and museologies ” (Brulon, Peixinho, 2022:21). It is a museological project in which there are social and

political implications that are also not exempt from conflicts, a museum designed as an aggregating space open to the constant incorporation of images and information and the meanings given to them, seeking to reveal visions of the region in the last 50 years, very often unknown due to the lack of publicization (did it need to be forgotten?), a lack of access or because they are dispersed in physical and virtual form.



Figure 8. Video 5. Clip of launching of the MISPE collection (Direction: Alex Vailati)

During the exhibition of part of the collection in the public square of Vila de Suape materialized in this video (figure 3) in October of 2022, commenting on the now revived and awakened images, community leader Rildo Plínio stated that the community was being eternalized and that the 2019 oil spill was only the tip of the iceberg, as “the community was impacted and is still being impacted”. Without the intention of radically changing history, as would be necessary, the Suape Museum is a space that mobilized the community and can be mobilized by it. **post(s)**

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