

Network of discourses

Monitoring of speeches in social networks on the 33rd Biennial between September 7 and 21, 2018. Research conducted by the Image and Cyberculture Studies Laboratory (Labic) of the Federal University of Espírito Santo (UFES), Brazil

A Bienal for Whom?

An analysis of the first two weeks of the 33rd Bienal de São Paulo on Twitter

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When we accepted the challenge of exploring which discourses reverberated in the social networks concerning the 33rd Bienal de São Paulo, we already knew that it would not be an easy task. This proposal was outside the themes we are used to dealing with, that is: online politics and activism. We initially thought that these questions would remain on the fringe of the main subject: art. Insofar as Brazil was in the lead-up to elections, however, the political debate occupied the center of the discussions. Further ahead, in our results, we demonstrate the difficulty – and even the impossibility – of isolating the artistic and cultural production from the political crisis our country is passing through, especially at election time.

In light of the two main questions that were proposed to us (namely: “What do the nonspecialists have to say about the Bienal?” and “What reverberates based on the Bienal?”), we have our first methodological challenge: to identify who these “nonspecialists” are, and to identify the contents that they “reverberate.” We are therefore interested in understanding and analyzing the various networks and flows of information by which the discourses, opinions and interactions about the Bienal, and with the Bienal, are manifested on these platforms.

The Data Speak, We Try to Understand Them

The first choice made to understand what the “nonspecialists” reverberate

about the Bienal was to investigate the social network Twitter. This choice was based on two main aspects. First, that it is currently one of the most important social network sites. Twitter is a platform created in 2006 for the sharing of short messages, initially with a maximum of 140 characters. That limit was later doubled, but the idea is still to tell a story in a few words. This characteristic is the reason for the social network's name, as defined by one of its two cofounders, Jack Dorsey: a "tweet" is brief and intense like the chirping of birds (Davis, 2013). Twitter aims to be a reflection of the conversations that occur outside the social network (Harvey, 2018).

This velocity of communication is one of the network's strong points. This is why Twitter has been used as a mechanism for the spreading of information in large social movements. This could be observed in the protests in Brazil during June 2013, a movement known as the June Days uprising; in the Arab Spring, in 2010 and 2011; in the 15-M movement in Spain, beginning 2011; or in the Occupy movement, especially in the United States, in 2011 and 2012 (Gomes, 2016). For its capacity for communicating widely with brief texts and at high speed, Twitter is also used as a communication strategy for famous personalities or media vehicles to speak directly with their audiences.

This interactive capacity of Twitter can have a "transmissional" or "conversational" character (Bentivegna, 2016), the former being only the result of a replication of information produced by another person, while the conversational aspect is richer from a qualitative point of view, though less frequent on the network. Regardless of the sort of resulting interaction, whenever a Twitter profile publishes or republishes something that interacts with or mentions another Twitter profile, this relation creates a link. And it is precisely this path that we investigate in this study: how the interactions on Twitter about the 33rd Bienal de São Paulo construct an overview about who is speaking on the social network, and what they are speaking about.

To investigate these paths (Bruno, 2008; Latour et. al, 2015) we used a sort of data access through an application programming interface (API). This is a set of tools made available by certain sites and software services which enable independent developers to create secondary applications for those softwares. This allows for

an exchange of experiences between developers and the collective construction of solutions for complex problems. The use of an API also serves for commercial purposes, the most emblematic case being the use of data of Facebook users through an API based on an application constructed by Cambridge Analytica (Cadwalladr, Graham-Harrison, 2018). That scandal demonstrates the great value of the information produced and circulated in the social networks.

The Path Taken to Arrive at the Data

To begin our exploration, we collected our first data in the period from August 21 to September 3, separated in two collections. The collections were extremely “contaminated” by other events, especially the Book Bial that took place in São Paulo between August 3 and 12. We can also underscore the contamination in the last collection, made between September 11 and 17, due to the change of venue for the book fair in 2020, the year in which it will return to being held at Expo Center Norte. Moreover, the preparations for the XII São Paulo Architecture Bial, which will be held in 2019, also contaminated our data set. The challenge was therefore to clean up the data and keep the essence of the content that refers to the Bial de São Paulo. Amidst the conflict of tweets about the various other instances of the word “bial,” related to other events, the researchers needed to apply the methodology of data modeling to make the content analyzed more assertive in regard to the proposal: identifying the players and the reverberations linked exclusively to the Bial de São Paulo.

Another two collections were therefore made. One between September 3 and 10, and another between September 10 and 17. This period encompasses the opening of the Bial and its initial repercussion. The data from September 3 to 10 suffered a political boom due to the movement held in the exhibition building in defense of former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. This movement, called the “Lulaço” by the participants, occupied the greater part of our data in that week. Of a total of 1,433 tweets, 917 of them were related to that event. In the next week, however, the repercussion of that event totaled just 18 tweets.

Reading, analyzing and categorizing the tweets is part of the process that we call “data modeling.” In this step, we seek to identify similarities among the messages

to form a set of texts that can be grouped in categories, thus facilitating the process for analyzing the tweets. With the modeling, we defined three main categories based on the reading of the tweets and on the first contact with the data, namely: “information,” “perception” and “others.” The first category, “information,” is defined by a set of tweets that ask questions about the Bienal, extend invitations and announcements to visit the space, and spread media publicity about the exhibition. We can cite as an example the special and constant presence, in the last collection, of a user named “Rádio Trânsito” that broadcasts information about the vehicle traffic around the event. The second category, called “perceptions,” encompasses tweets that demonstrate feelings about art, desires, impressions, art criticism and artistic appropriation, as well as the political view about how art should be seen and made in public spaces.

Finally, we identify as the category “others” the tweets that are unrelated to the Bienal, which use the hashtags as a way of communicating contents outside the field of art, messages that refer to the biennials of architecture, comic books, books and fandoms of singers. For the first two categories, subcategories were defined. The messages that were categorized as “information” were subcategorized into “recommendation,” “news,” and “invitation.” Those categorized as “perceptions,” were subcategorized into “emotion,” “artistic view,” and “political stand.”

Category	Subcategory	Considerations	total	Total per category
Information	Invitation	Calling people to participate, invitation to visit, “let’s do it?”	10	270
	Recommendation	Suggestion to other people to participate or visit the Bienal, means of transportation	27	
	News	Repercussion in the traditional or alternative media, or focused on art and entertainment	233	
Perception	Political stand	FreeLula, left, right, Brazil, Bolsonaro, three powers, judiciary, Marielle	918	1021
	Artistic vision	Art is life, expression of the soul, positive or negative view of art, descriptions of artworks	65	
	Emotion	I love it, beautiful, I liked it, I didn’t like it, expectation, sensations	38	
Others	Blank	Referring to the other category	142	142
			1433	1433

Table 1 – Thematic analysis of the first week (September 3 to 10)

Category	Subcategory	Considerations	total	Total per category
Information	Invitation	Calling people to participate, invitation to visit, "let's do it?"	4	137
	Recommendation	Suggestion to other people to participate or visit the Bienal, means of transportation	21	
	News	Repercussion in the traditional or alternative media, or focused on art and entertainment	113	
Perception	Political stand	FreeLula, left, right, Brazil, Bolsonaro, three powers, judiciary, Marielle	18	97
	Artistic vision	Art is life, expression of the soul, positive or negative view of art, descriptions of artworks	30	
	Emotion	I love it, beautiful, I liked it, I didn't like it, expectation, sensations	48	
Others	Blank	Referring to the other category	100	100
			334	334

Table 2 – Thematic analysis of the second week (September 10 to 17)

What Reverberates? First Week: Lulaço As a Main Theme

Since the June Days of 2013, Brazil has passed through political commotions of either a progressive or conservative bent. The June Days were followed by tight elections in 2014, the coup d'état of 2016, the arrest of the presidential candidate with the largest polling numbers, and the new election process now underway in 2018. This has made political activism inevitable in an environment considered by some as elitist, as a place for political expression, or as a space of artistic contemplation (art for art's sake).

Given this context, the subject that reverberated the most in the social networks in the first week of the Bienal de São Paulo was the pro-Lula movement, promoted by the activists of the Workers Party, and called "LULAÇO." In this action, supporters of former President Lula circulated through the space of the Bienal with signs, posters, whistles, trumpets and voices with words of order in defense of the former president. This content was shared by hundreds of voices, and it is what dictated the agenda of the comments about the first week of the 33rd Bienal de São Paulo.

Those who were strongly influential in the dissemination of the Lulaço event, which took place on September 7, at the opening of the 33rd Bienal, were basically alternative media profiles such as @midianinja, @dcm_online and @j_livres. These three together made a total of seven tweets and obtained 814 retweets until the end date of our data collection. For comparison, adding up the retweets of all the users present in the database, we arrived at a total of 1,163

retweets. Isolating only the influence of Mídia Ninja, Diário do Centro do Mundo and Jornalistas Livres, these three dominated 70% of the tweets collected.

The tweets related to the action in defense of former president Lula were assigned to the “perceptions” category, and in the “political stand” subcategory. In our understanding, the symbolism of the artistic space as a political field consists in the taking of a stand about the importance of art and of the artist in the process of political expression, mainly by considering Brazil’s current politico-social context.

Another theme that appears as a political stand, but with less intensity, is the relation created between the fire that destroyed the Museu Nacional, in Rio de Janeiro, and leftist leaders linked to the rectorship of the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, as well as questions concerning the funds allocated to Brazilian museums by the federal government, through the Rouanet cultural incentives tax law. Concerning this theme, there were only two tweets.

Who Dominates the Discourse of the Bienal: Traditional, Alternative and Specialized Media

Although we are in a polyphonic time in the digital social networks, the media vehicles continue to play a role in the broadcasting of news (Caminada and Christoflett, 2016). Considering the period from September 3 to 17, there were 346 messages identified as news, a set consisting of both tweets and retweets. These messages originated mainly from official profiles, but were also retweeted by common users, who reechoed the content of the press as it was originally published. The above cited total includes the traditional media, such as the newspapers Estadão, Folha de São Paulo, El País; the alternative media, represented by Jornalistas Livres, Mídia Ninja and Catraca Livre; and magazines and sites specialized in art such as Bravo!, Hipermedula.org and Revista Magenta.

We continued in search of tweets that reechoed the Bienal in a looser way or which were not contaminated by the curatorial discourse. We arrived at two possibilities that stand in contrast to one another: artistic vision and emotion. In the former, we identified discourses which, despite lacking the appearance of a news article, tend toward being a part of the art field and keep within the domain of the discourse of art. We identified that this group includes the profiles

of people linked to the art field and who use a lexicon in common with this field, sometimes seeking to express themselves through words and short phrases such as “Meanings and synopses in constant explosion,” “The human, the contact, the touch,” “Words that speak.” It should be noted that the artistic vision category included tweets only with hashtags or “Affective Affinities” in the description of the image. But they were classified as part of this order for containing links to Instagram images. We expect that the tendency throughout the run of the Bienal will be that these categorizations become more assertive.

On the other hand, the emotion tweets direct us to a spectrum closer to the response we sought for the question, “What do the nonspecialists have to say?” (about the Bienal de São Paulo). In this category, we grouped the tweets that apparently belong to social players driven by emotions, feelings, sensations, anxieties, etc., brought about by observation, who accepted the “invitation to attention” proposed by the 33rd Bienal in conjunction with the theme “Affective Affinities.” In a certain way, we believe we are on the way toward finding the nonofficial discourse about the event, about what is perceived by the visitors and, perhaps, not seen by those who planned the artworks. The emotion tweets were classified according to the presence of terms that refer to feelings, desires and sensations such as “sad,” “attracted me,” “love,” “I want to come back!” “money down the drain,” “wonderful,” “did not win me over,” “awesome,” “I wanted to go,” “really bad,” and others.

All together, emotions, in the sense proposed by our analysis, occurred on 86 occasions. Even though the total might appear small, it is a datum whose value is amplified since it is qualitative information, resulting from an analytic effort on large quantities. In the attempt to understand what and who reverberates the Bienal, we initially arrived at this number. The expectation is that with the passage of time, there will be an increase in the number of visitors as well as in the repercussion on the part of the “common people.”

Who Are the Players Who Reverberate?

A preview about the players is found in the graph below, generated based on a .csv file processed by Ford Parse and visualized in Gephi software. The image

identifies the players who participated in the discussion on the Bienal between September 3 and 17.

As a way of identifying the most popular players with the greater diversity of relations, we used the weighted average parameter. The measures used considered the weighted indegree, which makes a weighted average of the number of retweets received, thus affecting the node size in the visualization. The node size represents the quantity of retweets that a tweet obtained. The use of the number of retweets as an analytic parameter considers the repercussion of the theme. This choice is aimed at measuring the dissemination of the text. This is to say, the larger the node, the more retweets it received. And the greater reverberation it had.

We thus perceive that the main characters in those first weeks of the Bienal were the alternative media, highly visible in relation to the reverberation about the Lulaço event that occurred at the exhibition's opening.

We have, therefore, the evidence of three media profiles (@j_livres, @midianinja and dcm_online) and a player that initially looks like a tele-guided profile (whether robot or human) in favor of the Workers Party and of former President Lula (@didi_forelsket), in light of the frequency of publications and the consistency of the message. For its part, the traditional media is perceived in the graph with a smaller size, being more to the left of the graph and shifting between the colors pink and orange. This group includes @cartacapital, @portalr7, @estadaocultura, @folha, @estadao and @jornaldagazeta. These users played a more pragmatic role in the sense of informing about the event and what could be found at it.

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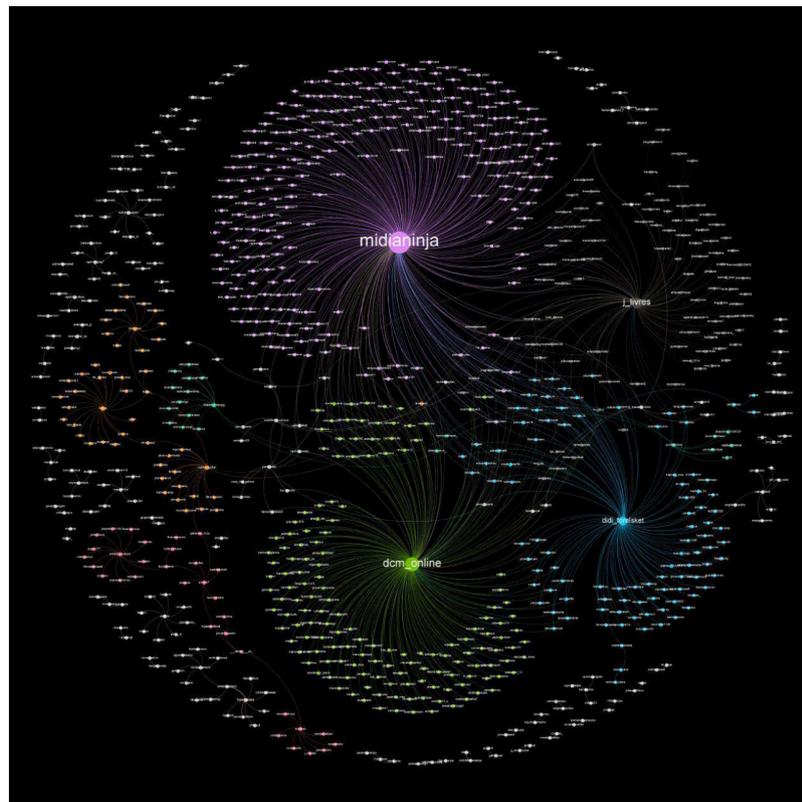


Fig. 1 – Graph with the visualization of the profiles based on the collection of data on the Biennial. Larger node (profile) sizes correspond to those with the larger number of retweets online.

The profiles in the social networks commonly include an area where the user creates a self-description. In our collection we managed to group the description of all the users that participated in the discussion about the Biennial on Twitter. With this, we organized a word cloud that shows how most of the visitors and enthusiasts of the Biennial describe themselves.

The word cloud below represents the descriptions of the users who participated in the conversation about the Biennial between September 3 and 17. Based on this data and on the foregoing image, we can trace a profile of the visitor to the Biennial as someone linked mainly to the areas of “art” and “science.” “Citizen” and “Brazil” appear frequently in the profiles linked to the “Lulaço” event. For its part, the “news” is disseminated in the media portals that were the main broadcasters of information about the 33rd Biennial de São Paulo.



Fig. 2 – Word cloud taken from the description of the profiles active online and which were part of our database for the 33rd Bienal.

Image Analysis

The analysis of the images we collected involves two main processes. The first consists in the processing of the data in the script Ford Parse and, then, their visualization through the program Image J. This program generates the file “measurements.csv,” which is essential for analyzing and measuring the interaction of these images on Twitter, furnishing in its final visualization the quantity of times that a given image was retweeted. Once again with the help of the Ford Parse script, an interactive map of the images is generated, called the “ImageMap,” and we thus have the final version for visualization.

After the completion of all the processes, the map of the images is added to the Labic site (<http://labic.net/pulsao/?bienal>) so that it is possible to create the visualization and the sharing of the map generated, without the need for specific programs. This allows for simpler and more interactive access to the data. Some of the resources available in this visualization consist in the timeline in which the publications arose online, along with their respective days. The number of retweets of the image is also shown and this is reflected in the node size shown.

In this visualization, the colors of the images create a grouping, composing a set

of similar images that can correspond to a specific theme. Once we observe this dynamics, associated to the previously analyzed data, we perceive, once again, that the data are interlinked and that the “Lulaço” event at the Bienal was the action with the greatest repercussion online.

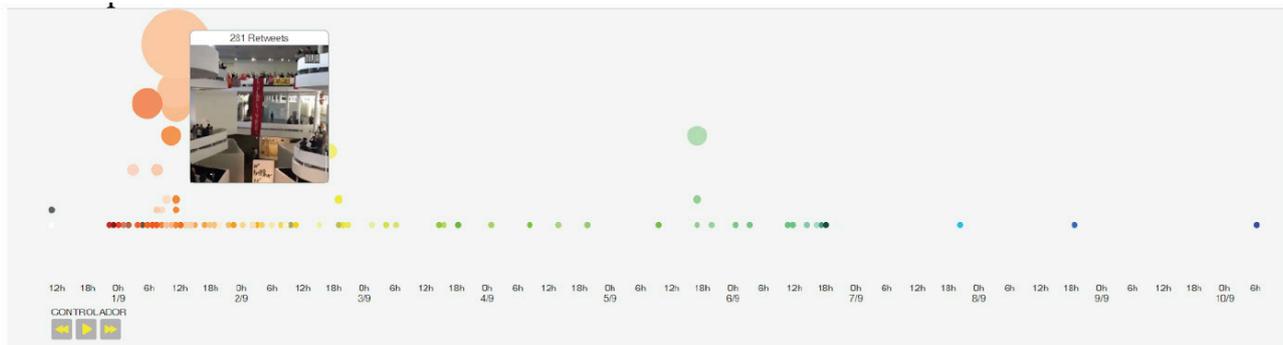


Fig. 3 – Visualization of the node sizes – timeline of the images. See more here: <http://labic.net/pulsao/?bienal>

Frequency of Tweets Per Day

Below is the frequency of tweets in the period of data collection and analysis. Here are messages published between August 31 and September 17. It is possible to perceive that as the event’s opening day approached, the tweet index gradually grew, though with low numbers. Between September 6 and 9, we identify a rapid increase, since coupled with the opening of the Bienal there was also the act in defense of former President Lula (the Lulaço event) within the Bienal building. Despite this abrupt growth, the themes “Bienal” and “Lulaço” wound up being little remembered. Mainly in what concerns the 33rd Bienal de São Paulo, the total of the mentions related to the event began to oscillate below 55 mentions between September 10 and 17.

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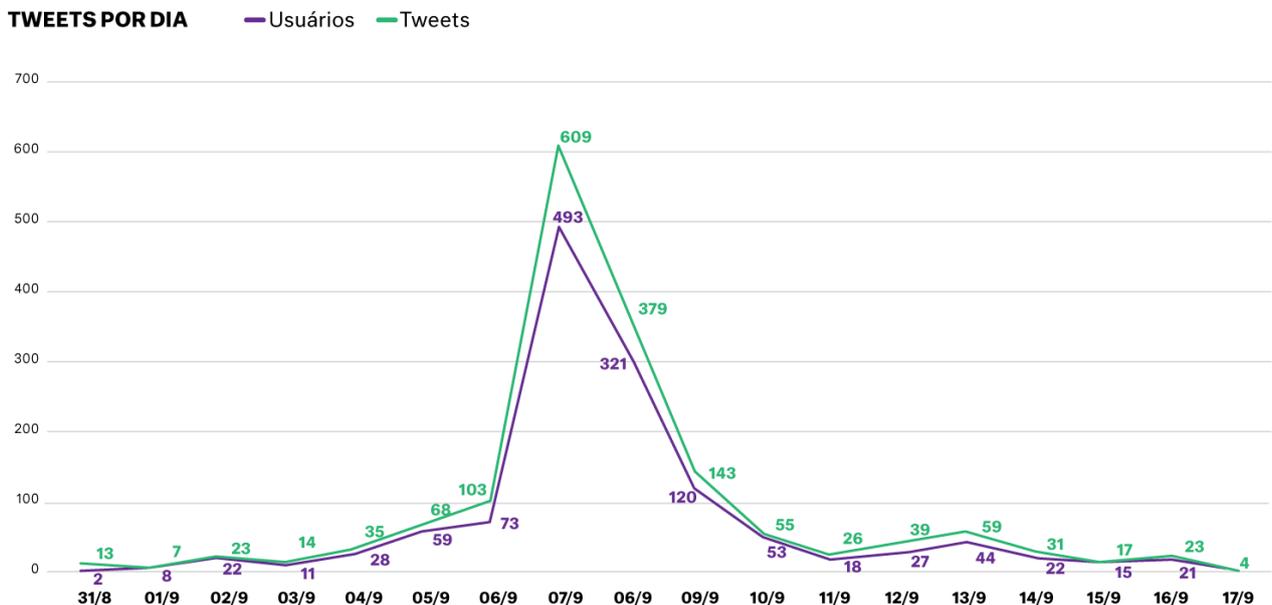


Fig. 4 – The graph shows a correlation between the growth of tweets per day and the Lulaço event

Final Considerations

This first report on the general analysis that considered the first two weeks of the 33rd Bienal de São Paulo provided us with some important findings to understand not only what reverberates about the Bienal in the social networks, but also about who the Bienal serves. First, there is a discussion about art as a form of political expression. There naturally exist people who are for and against the use of art for political purposes. Nevertheless, Brazil is going through an electoral process, and the city of São Paulo, being the country’s largest metropolitan center, carries the weight of the current political context. Thus, the appropriation of the spaces occupied by the middle and upper class is a form of resistance in face of what is understood as a “coup d’état,” after the 2014 elections.

Another question concerns who dominates the official discourse of the Bienal. According to our analyses, this role is closely linked to the press, whether traditional, independent or specialized. Concerning this pattern, who does the Bienal serve? Or, moreover, who is interested in the artworks of the Bienal? The popularization of these artistic spaces, in the broad sense of the term, has still not

arrived at the larger part of the population, and here I am talking about those who live in the lower socioeconomic districts in the city's outskirts. Why does so-called culture and art always circulate in the same spaces, for the same segment of people and for those who already possess an accumulated cultural capital?

On the other hand, there are still those who seek, as we see it, to subvert the logic of art for a few and enter these spaces and appropriate a sort of speech pulpit to describe art, emotion and feelings without being "contaminated" by the discourse preestablished by the professionals and appreciators of art.

Lastly, we presume that there is a long path that separates art from the "nonspecialized" discourses. But for it to be possible to hear, read and visualize this public, it is necessary to point our machines for the making and thinking about art at them. We continue with our studies. And with our radars capturing all the signals emitted on the social networks, expecting to be affected by various affinities.

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