

Technology, *the Study of Techno*

EDUARDO ROCHA LAURENTINO

I LOVED IT when we got broadband and started downloading music, movies and TV shows with ease. There was that P2P file-sharing program, “E-mule”, I think. And then came torrents, and we were living the dream. But then came that whole PIPA trip, and right after it the streaming platforms. And here we are now, renting everything and owning nothing. Not what I’d expected.

When my parents gave me *The Philosopher’s Stone* on VHS, there was, sure, a clear economic motivation, aimed at cutting back on video-store spending. Spending that had become redundant ever since my uncle Leandro had called me over to “watch a wizard movie” with him (and came out disappointed at not having been scared, since we used to rent horror films). But the gift also held a symbolic value being passed down. The value that the object has value. And that we should be able to enjoy our favorite works of art forever and whenever we want, independent of platforms that depend on paid passwords and, ideally, even of whether there’s an online connection wherever we happen to be.

So I was disappointed by the horror I found in Germany’s real technological life. While I lived there, in the city of Cologne between 2019 and 2020, I had to uninstall my torrent software. It was that, or fines and sanctions for piracy. And not only that: every resident has to pay a TV service fee. Even if, as was my case, they don’t own a television. And while public transport is hyper-punctual, you’re nobody without cash in hand to consume most of ordinary life around the city.

When I was in the United States, attending a Social Computing Summit at the University of Chicago in 2018, I didn’t have time to get to know the city’s truly ordinary life. We talked a lot about tech ethics, social technologies, and a more democratic and

collaborative techno-future. In one of the talks, we heard about the data science studies behind government proposals in areas like public health and prison policy. I'm not totally sure, but I think it was there, in English, that I first heard about causal inference and fell in love.

After the Summit was over, me and Artur, my friend who was there with me representing Brazil, visited a few museums. In one of them I saw a dinosaur fossil, a giant one, for the first time. That I found truly impressive. To me, dinosaurs are the proof here on Earth that extraterrestrial life exists. Like, if we're absolutely certain, with irrefutable empirical evidence, that this planet we inhabit was once ruled by another species so physically and intellectually different, then I really do think all it must take is water for matter to transform into evolutionary becoming, capable of creating even what doesn't exist by way of bodies and minds. But from that museum I really only remember the dinosaur fossil, because afterwards the stuffed animals made me a little sad.

But I do remember quite a lot from Chicago's Museum of Science and Industry. Mainly having seen an Enigma, the encrypted communication machine used by the Nazis during World War II, whose code was cracked by a team led by the atheist, homosexual father of computer science whose surname names my cat Turing. When I was in Europe, I made a point of visiting a hotel in London, on a spot where there had been a hospital before the war against the Nazis. A place where Sigmund Freud once lived and baby Alan was once born, two people who devoted their lives to figuring out what it means to think.

In Germany I came across a new kind of technological enigma with effects on my mind: techno music. It played even in supermarkets as background music, and more than once I got the chance to go to a party devoted to the genre, from a small clubber club in Cologne to a house party thrown by someone I met at the university there. At one of them, while I was waiting in line, alone, some German guys about my age struck up a conversation, asking where I was from. I find that interesting, being so different from the local norm that the fact you're not from there is already a doubtless certainty. Small talk here, small talk there, we got to what had brought us there: music. I thought it was funny that the first thing they asked me about Brazilian music was Marcos Valle, a famous singer I couldn't have named a single song by until then, and whose art-with-technology is a far cry from the kind of musical enigma people go looking for in techno, which was the reason we were there.

There's something that belongs only to techno, or only to a techno party. It's the self-avowedly singular never-before-ness of the experience of musical interlocation between the DJ-person, with their juggling of recorded sounds and synthesizers, and a pharmacopornographic crowd, with its alchemy of drugs taken for, because of, and in spite of every pain. But you can also just enjoy it the way you would any concert, and that's how techno was for me until I came back from Germany to Brazil. Since the pandemic,

finding out about the balance that has to be respected with whatever The Substance may be, as that body-horror film that captured one of the zeitgeists a few years back so well showed us with its mantra “respect the balance.” The study of techno, which I’ve been doing all this time, shows me that a drug can be used to treat pain, but on its own it doesn’t solve our life and its yearning. For that you need love, the most quantum of substances.

I was glad the Lula Government launched Tela Brasil. Besides a clear social motivation, as a harm-reduction program for lack of access to culture, there’s also a symbolic value being passed down. The value that a society’s artistic enigmas matter, and that access to the machines capable of cracking our artists’ encryption shouldn’t sit in the hands of a few platforms. I see this Tela Brasil policy as a form of love for the country. Culture as this entanglement of all our lives and their yearnings.

* * *