UNSTABLE GEOGRAPHY: THE DOUBT ABOUT IMAGE AND ITS PHOTOGRAPHICAL PROCESS

Eriel de Araújo Santos

Professor Doctor of Fine Arts School of the Federal University of Bahia, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil.

ABSTRACT

This present research aims to bring about theoretical reflection and discussion of contemporary photographic images. It is well known that the history of images follows man history, whose representation is related to reality. However, contemporary period, with its plurality aspect, opens this field to many kinds of visual practices, and the artists adopt procedures that do not follow the traditional concept of this kind of representation. Besides, the sprouting of the photography area, puts the observer very near the image of its represented object, but, at the same time, can move us away from it. Due to the advance of digitalization technology along the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, image started to be researched with a close relation with the atemporal and geographic stability, that is, a sort of trans-historical dimension. Hence, many concepts can be approached, mostly, as the relationship between contemporary photograph with place and time, and visual cultural.

Keywords: Photographic image, process, dislocation time-place, visual culture

The images remain stored in our memory even before we perceive them. Thinking this way, we are able to confirm the importance of the technology applied to photographic processes and its relation to rescue, storage and encoding of a pre-existing situation, from the produced image. In an attempt to represent what is seen or imagined, man developed visualization methods, such as painting, printmaking and drawing. But, it was the photographic process that has brought the real, setting a fragment of the dynamics inherent in life.

From the first meetings with his own image reflected in a water puddle, and nowadays, the possibility of cloning human beings, man is faced with mirroring a process of recognition of self, thus aiming for a state of permanence.

Being in front of his own image is not a unique feature of human, because nature offers many other ways of mirroring conditions, revealing its dynamics under our eyes. In turn, man develops methods of purification and sintering of some materials, favoring a high degree of mirroring on their surfaces, either by crystals or polished metals, or even to create systems to simulate it on a virtual reality.

The identification of an image or its geographic meanings allows us to build several readings. And failing to identify immediate geographical origin, mentioned in this text as a visual Ageography, is to look at an image and do not find references to connect it to geographic areas or known identities, or even capable of existence, those present in dreams.

Trying to represent impossible spaces, for example, was one of the ideas explored by the surrealist painting, which did raise many questions about reality. Today the theme is presented in digital altered images, following paths for an undefined and doubtful space. A new reality from a fictional look. When setting it up on a flat surface, we move from a pictorial and graphical representation to that related to digital technology, commonly associated with cyberspace. To understand this newfangled term, first applied to the set of relations established in computer networks, we can think of many expressions found in any other digital interface. Thus, we can suggest an update present in the activities developed by artists who seek to relate the real and the fictional space.

Given the operations seen in works developed during this research, using the interpolation between a still image and its dynamics in a moving language, I bring to this text an analysis of the possibilities of interactions on a fixed image of the real and its dynamics presented on video-installation.

The surrealist painting by René Magritte, for example, gives us some assumptions about the creation of impossible worlds designed from a certain reality known as "one of the main functions of art is to capture fleeting reality and thus prolong its existence". (ERNST, 2007, p.67). But there is also the possibility of making seemingly impossible situations, as the dynamic interaction between the visual data found in the same surface, when using means capable of causing fusion between different spaces and times, building up what we could assign to an ageographical image, or an undefined location.
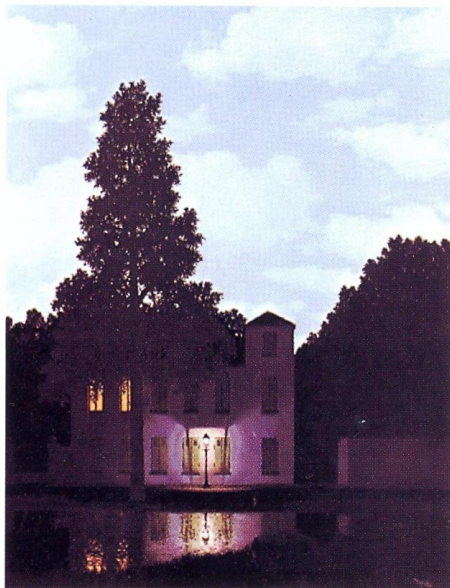

Figure 1 and 2. René Magritte. Empire of Light, 1950. M. C. Escher. Still Life and Street, 1937.

To illustrate two situations in the ageographical state, the images above show the coexistence of different times and spaces, on a single image (Figure 1 and 2). We observed the fictional possibilities attributed to compositions that come from known realities.

> What is represented in a painting is what the eyes see, the things that the viewer already has an idea. Thus, what is seen in The Dominion of Light are things that were known to me: a nocturnal landscape with a sky lit by daylight. I think that a joint evocation of the day and night has the power to surprise and enchant us. This force is what I call poetry. (MAGRITTE Apud ERNST, 2007, p.69)

When applying an impossible world, the artists propose a kind of extension of the idea of reality. Even with the advent of photography as a kind of mirroring reality, when it shows a compelling idea of documentary value, we head to constant questioning of what we observe, either through an image, or directly through our eyes. And about the images, we should remember that:

> Such images are able to usurp reality because, first of all, a picture is not just an image (such as a painting is an image), an interpretation of reality, it is also a trace, something directly modeled on the real, as a footprint or a death mask. While a painting, even when it matches the photographic standard of resemblance, is never more than the manifestation of an interpretation, a photograph is never less than the record of an emanation (light waves reflected by objects) - a material vestige, in a way that no painting can be. (SONTAG, 2001, p.170)

In the artistic context, reflection on the photographic image leads us to a more complex discussion because of this outpouring of the real information that can redirect our perception and find impossible worlds. Thus, our attention will be affected by transient relationships between what we see and our memory. The work done with still images and their relationship with time, brings questions and provokes a state of transition to what we see and what was recorded photographically. My interest in these procedures between a photo and relational time is to discuss their interaction with materials and situations that may stretch their meaning, reaching interactions with video and interactive systems, providing the appearance of studies that establish the doubt in a moving image, as well as geographical identification - an ageographical picture.

Readings from a certain photographic image, for example, show a reference site, identify a geographic region, architectural style, inhabitants, and related symbols, when identified as a part of history. So, when you purchase a postcard of a city, the image represents something established, that seeks to "define" the place.

Altough, to think about places not experienced, in a photographic image, the belief is part of an image defined as "that was", pointed by Roland Barthes. When he speaks of death in the photograph, he drives our thinking to a difficult task in which "the photographer has to fight hard to show that the picture is not Death." (BARTHES,1998, p.28) But how can we think of photography as something that looks like a living life? The visual experience, whether promoted by the physical applied materials, or the procedures of union between the moving image, and allows us to discuss what we see and what can be an exercise of a daily experience.

After obtaining the research items and workshop analysis of the current productions, we find a dynamics between an image and the geographic reference, a match played by the visible and the imaginary, the invisible poetic elements that are present in the work, but not decoded immediately.

The use of ageographical images on video-installations has generated several poetic ramifications, creating situations in which the image is related to the place where the work is inserted or associating with spaces that the framework distorts the geographical identification. Hyun-Ki Park is a Korean artist whose work is focused on the video-installation, seeking to investigate the relationship between videographic image and the materials used to build his poetry.

Figure 3. Hyun-Ki Park. Water reflection. video installation. 1997.

Water Reflection (Figure 3) is a video installation that alters, among other things, the provision for the presentation of the moving image, in this case it consists of an extract of surface water in its resting state, accompanied by small changes caused by wind and ambient light. Here, the artist proposes a provision for submission near the state that it was in the image of the real, i.e., in a horizontal position, contrary to the standard of presentation of an image. The media used to reflect the projection approaches the minimalist thinking, in which he appropriates two parallelepipeds constructed from wood and painted in white color, based on the ground.

> Park is known as the founder of Korean Minimal Video Art, and he has been using video monitors displays with moving images as part of his sculptures, which provides another way to use traditional materials like wood and stone ... The artist does not intend to directing their work for social and technological aspects of using video technique, but use it widely for aesthetic purposes, and ordered to represent the harmony of material and immaterial word, located somewhere between nature, man and technology. (NUSSER, 2001, p.12)

In some way, the work of Hyun-Ki Park approaches those developed by Nam June Paik, for exposing the relationship between materials and their projected image in the same space where they are. However, Park is closer to a video sculpture than a video-installation, but we can not forget that these are facilities with the use of moving images, objects and materials that relate to each other. But what can be said about this movement found in the work of both, since the moving image is an inert object?

The image of a rock represented by a video monitor makes us think about the static characteristics present in a photo. This translates into a "petrification", "freezing" of a space-time imprisoned in a given rectangle as a framework for image, the same as the image found on a monitor used by Park.

The examples explored by artists that use video as an object for their operations along the poetic images that can interact with materials, concepts, spaces and objects, point to an animation of what is in inanimate state, as a photographic image.

The concept that I use to answer questions relevant to the work developed in this research, is from a work done by myself. This concept directs the thought to the failure to identify or decode what appears to us in this particular case, the image.

The shift between the unknown spaces favors certain strangeness in our memory, accustomed to the same places and situations encountered in everyday life. Looking at a picture we can recognize people and places. Although, by accumulating such visual information, are possible overlaps in some aspects in different times and places, resulting in a state of condensation of facts.

By adopting procedures established to construct a poetic speculation in the visible, using the photographic image covering various modes of presentation, the video Insituável is a work that combines some elements present in the issues assigned to the appropriation of images, displacement of visual meaning, references to precarious, the everyday, visible instability and time. The time allocated for an image is always associated with the photographic act when the image was performed. Nonetheless, it is important to note that it is possible to intercede in the affirmative, for the application of simple measures can shift our perception of time when re-present the image in a cyclical way, as in an ever returning video.

Insituável, the video work that I created, was produced to discuss the moving image from the still image. This project is related to physical movements, travel accompanied by photographic records and consequent formation of a file, later used in art projects that go through choices:

> Mad or sensible? The photo can be either: sensible if its realism remains relative, tempered by aesthetic or empirical habits (leafing through a magazine at the hairdresser, the dentist); mad if this realism is absolute and, as it were, originally, by turning loving and terrified consciousness to the very letter of Time: revulsive movement itself, which reverses the course of the thing and what I will call for closing of photographic ecstasy. These are the two ways of Photography. It is up to me to choose, submit your spectacle to the civilized code of perfect illusions or face the awakening of the intractable reality. (BARTHES, 1998, p.175)

By assuming a certain image to compose a work, I try to create a transitory between what we see and what is happening with the image and environment. Therefore, when facing the reality of a photographic image, we go through physical paths present in its structure and psychic pathways operating in the "photographic ecstasy", defined by Barthes.

The chosen image to compose the video Insituável (Figure 4, 5, 6 and 7), refers to a building in a state of abandonment in the center of the city of São Paulo, Brazil, known as Treme-treme, São Vitor Building. The structure of its facade leads to an aesthetics of the precarious, where you can see details of objects used in place of those usually found in buildings occupied by people who have sufficient economic power to have a decent home. The composition draws attention when comparing the organic elements used by the occupants of the spaces and the geometry defined by the apparent architectural structure.
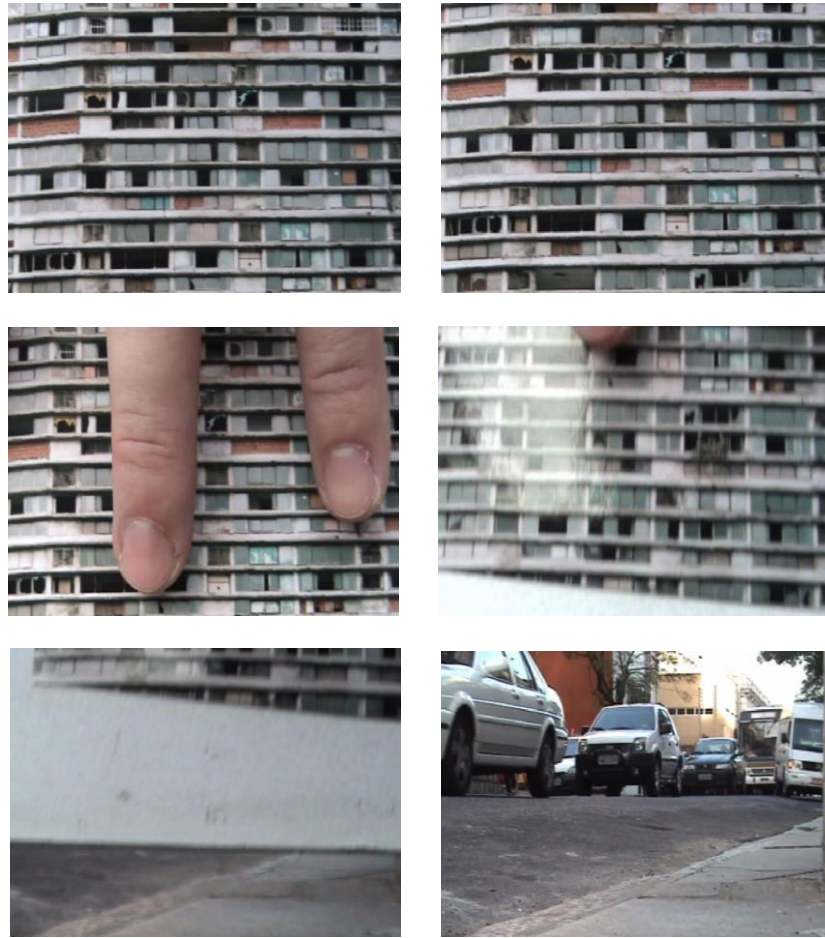
Figure 4, 5, 6 e 7. Eriel Araújo. "Insituável" (vídeo frame). 2005. Video. 1' 54".

That monument studded with exposed brick and windows "protected" by dirty blankets and wet and moldy cardboard is a remembrance of redundant decay of the old center of an abandoned city. The Treme-treme building is a giant scar, which highlights the fragility of an urban center. Its location seems to create discomfort for making decisions, because while it could be recovered and occupied by public or private companies, its demolition makes room for nature so scarce in developed cities like São. Paulo. A dissonance is represented in the video Insituável from the moving image of a static scene, a photograph.

According to Milton Santos, "when nature becomes a social nature, it is peer to geography expose that the conscious use of space can be a vehicle for restoring the dignity of man" (SANTOS, 2004, p.267). Dignity which is liable for individual, and collective actions in the society. The deplorable situation of many architectural equipment found in cities favors a big reflection on the use and administration of these places. Among many possible explanations, the maldistribution of income in some countries favors the emergence of dissonant images of the general composition of the state, even in apparent postcards produced by those who visit such places.

What is the difference between a frame and a photo? In this work, the boundaries are blurred, because the registered time in a scene disagrees from the reality it presents, in a time past, set in a photo. The surprise factor in this video production makes us wake up to the scene. So when the real situation unfolds in video recording, we face the disappointment generated at work, where time, image and sound are participants in a story located in an ageographical image.

The video work, Insituável, also discusses the importance of scale in the production of an image. The video has a direct relationship with the scale of a standard photographic image, enlarged to 10 X 15 cm, from which the video was made. The revelation of the true situation found at the site of recording, initially indicated by the sound environment is promoted by the appearance of the fingers that suspend the image, in front of the giant scale size of the building recorded in the photo.

When approaching the size of the photo to the video projection screen size, we find an ideal solution to complete the work, as a videographic image, this project fits the conditions inherent in the poetic thought of the work. For this, the use of a portable DVD player 7, (Figure 8), typically used in transport systems is the chosen element to complete the work. The proposed mitigation and adaptation approaches the image on the scale of the hand, used as an element of surprise during the execution of work. The presentation may take anywhere from a small area of the exhibition space into its presence alone in a large area, thus it creates a dialogue between visual and spatial scales. The procedures established for the preparation of this work are consistent with some words written by Michel de Certeau, because:

> Escaping the entire imaginary look, there is a strangeness of daily life that does not come to the surface, or whose surface is only a limit put forward, one that stands out on the visible. In this set, I would like to detect the space strange practices related to visual "geometric" or "geographic", panoptic or theoretical. Those practices refer to a specific form of "operations" ("ways of doing"), the "another spatiality" (an experience "anthropological", poetic and mythic space) and an opaque and blind mobility of the city inhabited. A transmuting city, or metaphorical, insinuates itself so clearly in the text of the planned city and visible. (CERTEAU, 2008, p.172)

The relations of control and use of geographic space also follow all the people in their walking through the city, a flaneur. Charles Baudelaire saw it as the key role for understanding the process of modernity of a city, urbanism and cosmopolitanism. So the participation of those affected by the design and the progress of it, engender new processes that all men are exposed to, image and objects.
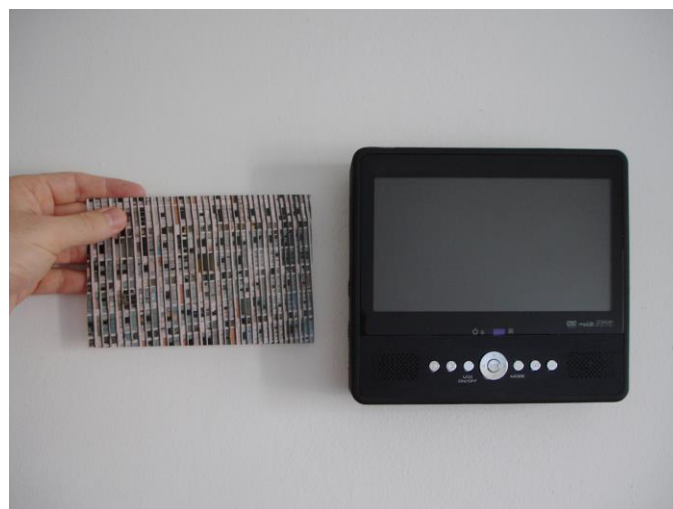

Figure 8. *Insituável.* Relation between size of the photographic image and the screen of the video.

To finish this text, I present an "open door" of this research, because if some procedures have been amalgamated into layers of actions which arise from mixed work initiated as combined with the observation of real events they will emerge from the materials and techniques designed to expand the photographic field.

To repeat, to restate or re-produce an image in the real part of the proceedings of those who propose something more to perception. So we can see the works of Cindy Sherman, Vik Muniz, Andres Serrano, David Buckland, Wang Qingsong, among others, a kind of "difference" in their photographic productions.

Dominique Baqué considers such procedures as a category called "plastic photo", while François Soulage points to a "photographicity", actions that fold and unfold from a pre-existing visual reality, an un-situ-action produced in the "library " of Art imaginary. A selection of images and procedures assigned to a particular project is essential to the attainment of results capable of expanding the scope of work when it comes to a presentation image, loss of aura, author, or even the traditional concept of originality in the work of art. The original is always present in the operations undertaken by the artist, but the "new" image leads us to re-cognition of reality. Thus:

> For more brilliant it is, the punctum is more or less virtually a force of expansion. This force is often metonymic... There is another expansion of the punctum (less Proustian): when, paradoxically, while it remains a "detail", fills the entire photo. (BARTHES, 1984, p. 73)

Subverting the order given by the classic photograph, in which the subject of the image should remain an asset to the enjoyment of something "dead", I propose to change the photographic representation of a space that will reflect this in the very physical structure of the displayed image. Then, the shadow spaces in the composition will be replaced by a silver layer, thus causing a restlessness of its visibility.

The raw image used as a reference for the preparation of this work focuses on the structure a profusion of multiplied environments provided by mirroring. The venue was a public toilet in a shopping mall located in Porto Alegre, Brazil (Figure 9). Upon entering the space, I identified an instability caused by the look given by the repercussions of multidirectional mirror images.

One of the things that caught my attention was the color composition of elements present in the scene, established almost in silver and white tones, either by metals and mirrors in silver color or the ceramic coating white as well as countertops and white marble floors.

Figure 9. Image of the interior of the toilet.

Several records were made in the space that was presented as a visual gap. Every movement in the room, I found new space reflected in mirrored surfaces of the four walls that made up the space. The framework has been defined mainly by the checkerboard tiles and objects pertaining to a white color.

When collecting experiences with words, images and materials develop a poetics associated with the accumulation of visual experiences on a single surface. This work is titled Private Space, contrasting the situation of intimacy exposed in a public space and its subsequent reconfiguration, when the image is displayed in silver on white, in which fragments can be seen in the reflection of where the work is exposed, reflected in halftones printed on white tile.

The image produced in silver on white denotes the reality of its origin, i.e., produced with the same material that rises to the picture. For this procedure, I seek the chemical possibilities for its technical development. It has been known for many years the process of transferring images to porcelain surfaces with the use of mineral pigments to print and set images. Seeking to transfer the mirror reflection of the camera to its own constitution, there has been some chemical and physical experiments, since the digital procedures, preparation reticular image and subsequent construction of an array, until his transfer to porcelain plates, replacement photo paper.

When you think of white as the possibility of "everything", based on Eastern philosophy, and the reflection in the mirror as the possibility of containing all that is around, this research seeks to contain two elements in the same area that have the characteristics of an infinite image.

The gap in the image achieved in this work unites two operational concepts: 1) the return of the image type of material present in its composition and 2) the investigation of new ways to present photographic materials. Thus, the photo paper is replaced by smooth, shiny surface of the tiles, bathroom in the image of the referent. The magnification and image transfer are performed using the technique silkscreen, in which the use of platinum paste favors its formation and fixation with the action of heat (740 degrees centigrade).

The crop produced in the recorded image corresponds to the bathroom space occupied by an ensemble of 36 pieces of tiles, measuring 15 x 15 cm each (Figure 11). The choice of frame photo from the bathroom mirror reflects the instability of the picture from the place.
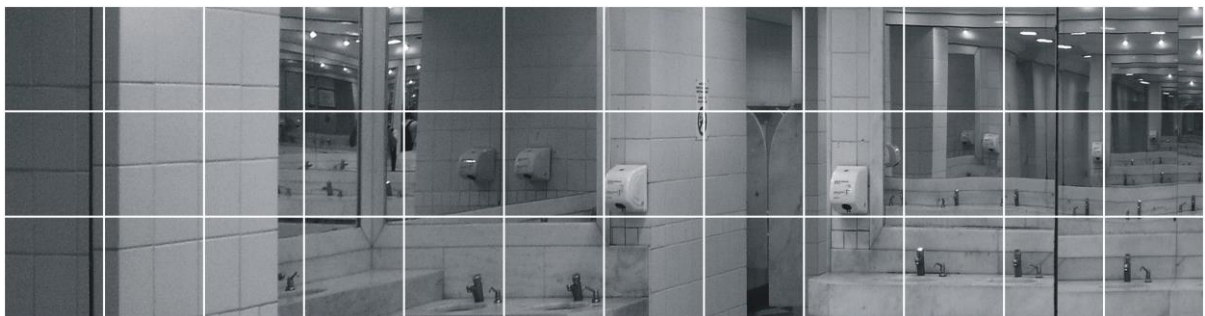

Figure 11. Structural sequence of the tiles used in the image-mirror.

The images on the white surface, either porcelain or tiles, are prepared by means of fixation that ensures a state of permanence, because its physical and chemical structure remains stable after the processes occurring with the action of heat. However, it means unstable, transient, in which the polished surface mirror and white brilliant tile add to the image

characteristics presented in platinum on its surface, to ensure continuity of the environment in its composition.

The photographic image sets the "Insituável" because the flat dimensions and deformations defined by the perspective lead us to a speculation defined by the traces on the surface of the photographic record (Figure 12). Research on various means of photographic presentation defines the paths for the construction of a poetic material inserted into performance and metaphors intended for viewing. As we remember the popular saying that "a picture is worth a thousand words," what can we say about an image that reflects the flow of life?

Figure 12. Photographic record of the surface in that is found an image in silver and White.

REFERENCES

BARTHES, Roland (1998). *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. NY: Hill and Wang.

CERTEAU, Michel de (2008). *A invenção do cotidiano: Artes de fazer*. Petrópolis: Vozes.

ERNST, Bruno (2007). *The Magic Mirror of M.C. Escher*. Köln: Taschen.

NUSSER, Uta (2001). *Lunapark: contemporary art from Korea*. Stuttgart: Verlag Das Wunderhorn.

SANTOS, Milton (2004). *Por uma Geografia Nova: Da Crítica da Geografia a uma Geografia Crítica*. São Paulo: EDUSP.

SONTAG, Susan. *On Photography*. NY: St Martins Press, 2001.