

FLOWS AND PATHS IN VISUAL CULTURE

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Over recent years, image-making practices (e.g. photographing, filming, editing and drawing) have undergone multiple transformations – driven by the expanding dialogue between digital visual technologies, social network platforms, videos/websites and image-sharing apps. This dialogue has made it possible to develop new forms of visibility and thereby new practices within, and across, a variety of online and offline fields.

In this issue we analyse the scope and dimensions of these changes, how they have been incorporated into society and everyday life, their social, political, cultural, aesthetic and poetic implications, and their impact on the continuous redefinition of the functioning of visual communication and its place in contemporary societies.

We included the concept of “flow” to designate the theme of this issue, which is dedicated to visual culture, since flow is a key metaphor for life. Flow and life tend to develop in a constant tension between balance and imbalance, and between harmony and disharmony. Life experiences are stages over the course of a lifetime.

Contemporary visual experience, in the present technological era in which we are deciding what it means to be human (Martins, 2007), increasingly involves a “flow” of light and sensibility. But the continuity of a flow can never guarantee stability. Whenever we achieve any sense of balance, the threat of renewed instability immediately raises its head. In fact, a flow has no *continuum*. Just as life has no *continuum*.

We have separated this issue into five main sections. The first section includes articles offering a theoretical analysis of visual communication, but which also apply visual communication to tangible visual cultural forms. The second section combines personal testimonies and accounts of artists linked to the fine arts and visual arts in Brazil. The third section presents a short overview of the oeuvre of a Brazilian fine artist and two critical reviews of books about visual images. The fourth section consists of an interview with a Mozambican film director. The fifth and final section, entitled *Varia*, includes two essays on different topics.

The first section’s thematic articles are divided into three groups. The first group discusses the social and cultural implications of the presence and daily uses of electronic images. The second group addresses issues of recording, study and creation in the visual arts and the digital/computer arts. The third group explores visual culture in the contexts of education and childhood.

It is a well-known fact that episodes from day-to-day existence stand at the heart of contemporary social existence and that visual communication has acquired a central role in this experience of the world, as a result of the social and technological changes taking place in contemporary global society. In particular this concerns the intimate connection

between contemporary visual culture and the intense dynamics of globalisation, technologicalisation and digitalisation of everyday life.

The first of the thematic articles is a text by Fábio la Rocca, in which he recalls the troubled trajectory of the image and the role of film and photography in the creation of a new vision of the world. He argues that we are experiencing a new type of image-based civilisation, in which social life and practical everyday experiences are increasingly affected by the presence, and mass use, of images. Based on this theory, he shows how this new practice or way of seeing and thinking via images has altered our processes of understanding and perception of our relationship with social reality, with others and with ourselves. He focuses on the case of Instagram and selfies.

Vincenzo Susca takes us into a private realm, concerning what happens when eroticism enters everyday life, propelled by a new sexual economy and promoted by “the sizzling screens of pornographic websites”, which he argues are “simultaneously laboratories and slaughter houses for fresh meat, in constant renewal and substitution, turned upside down and re-assembled piece-by-piece”. As José Augusto Mourão pinpoints in another context, “it seems ironic to talk about ‘fresh meat’ when we’re actually bidding farewell to meat. Ultimately being ironic is not a form of lying. (...) Saying farewell to the body isn’t equivalent to saying that the body has disappeared, it’s probably just changing its appearance or figure” (Mourão, 2002, p. 82). Vincenzo Susca states that today “meat has been transformed into logos” and has become the main meaning of the contemporary imaginary. To assess this shift, which the author believes is anthropological in nature, he analyses the characteristics of the pornographic landscape, between its basic patterns and current identity-based features. He highlights pornographic and erotic social networks – such as Youporn.com – and considers the various updates that emerge from this context, in articulation with software and apps, such as Tinder or Happn, and geo-localised techniques that enable a broad scope of movements, between metropolitan flows and the creation of affinities mobilised by eroticism. The researcher considers that the pornography of web 2.0 – an exclusively visual form of pornography – shouldn’t be viewed solely as an entertainment industry but instead as an “existential paradigm of our day-to-day life: a lifestyle forged in flames of pleasure”.

The changes in the way that images are recorded, generated, processed and distributed establish a direct dialogue with the way that we perceive them and such changes have effectively reprogrammed our watching habits. Popular diffusion of internet videos, the rapid spread of mobile technologies, in particular smartphones, and ubiquitous broadband networks, have opened up new forms of image creation and use of audiovisual products (e.g. interactive video clips, Barboza, 2015, or fanvids, Costa-Sánchez & Piñeiro-Otero, 2012). In their article, Humberto de Campos Rezende and João Victor Boechat Gomide highlight the example of binge watching of TV series – a phenomenon made possible by global platforms such as Netflix. According to the researchers, this behaviour is nothing new, but is now exploited professionally by broadcasters, who are dedicated to the industrial production of “addictive” series precisely aimed at binge viewers. In relation to this phenomenon, which, like any new trend, has received positive and

negative attention in the media, there has been discussion of the active behaviour of binge viewers, and the changes that have been introduced in the way that stories are told.

In the following article, Angie Biondie focuses on another of the practices found in our day-to-day lives: digital self-portraits (selfies) and their sharing via social networks. Social networks are places where people interact and establish emotional bonds. In most cases this interaction involves a powerful visual component. Sharing images via social network apps is a recurring practice, which provides users with new contexts of social visibility and connection in their daily experiences. In its everyday banality, the selfie is an interesting object which allows us to understand the shifts that have taken place in forms of communication in the era of the internet and social networks. Taking an individual or group photo, whether in a public setting or in a more private, or even intimate location, and then uploading the picture onto Instagram or Facebook has become a social act. Lauded by some, and criticised by others, selfies have become a key part of the new communicative repertoires, focused on the production and management of identity. Biondie suggests that we should think about social network sites as conversation spaces, and she analyses recent images posted to Instagram between 2015 and 2016 via the hashtag of an international campaign against sexual and gender-based violence, in which the persons who posted these images confessed to being victims by sharing their personal stories of abuse and their respective selfies. The author is interested in showing the selective dimension associated to such exhibition, via selfies, as a form of legitimate and genuine personal validation. She demonstrates that selfies both confirm the sincerity of the declarations and foster interaction with, and between, other users.

The texture of day-to-day life is marked by the rapid flow of images, especially in urban spaces, where “in much of what we do and what is done to us, what we perceive and what we think, it is difficult to be able to detach ourselves from screens” (Neves & Pinto-Coelho, 2010, p. 6). But it’s also true that this dependence on technological and aesthetic devices is experienced in other contexts - in particular in artistic and scientific practices. The ubiquitous nature of technology and its increasing affordability have radically transformed artistic creation and digital production.

Adérito Fernandes Marcos discusses the emergence of digital art and its different variants – such as computer art and digital media art. He argues that the aesthetic of this art form should not confine itself to producing pleasure stimuli and fleeting emotions, but should instead aim to “foster questioning and reflection about key issues of our *raison d’être* as individuals, society, humanity and as a universe”. Assuming that the manner that we consume art and culture is heavily influenced by digital media, allied to the information and communication technologies that allow it to be processed and controlled, he presents three examples of digital/computer artefacts. First, he refers to the artefact *Tapete Interactivo “Óbidos/Oppidum”* [“Óbidos/Oppidum” Interactive Carpet], emphasising the fact that it establishes new lines of development and reflection in the area of fashion design and use of the body as a mediator of intervention in digital culture and art. He then refers to the artefact, *“Escultura Présence”* [Presence Sculpture], in which the user produces electronic sound compositions, that uniquely identify him on the basis

of his bodily movements, recorded in conjunction with the sound content. In relation to the third and final artefact, “*Entre o Sagrado e o Profano nas Festas de S. João d’Agra*” [Between the Sacred and the Profane in the Festivities of S. João d’Agra], Adérito Marcos demonstrates how a dynamic pictorial representation of a pilgrimage site is developed and how it changes over time as a result of interaction with the user/enjoyer.

In the wake of the gigantic communication network constituted by the Internet – including its multimedia resources and hypertext – and democratisation of access to digital image-recording technologies (mobile phones and photographic and video cameras), there has been unprecedented expansion of individual production of visual and audiovisual works, and their dissemination, thereby contributing to the emergence of new phenomena and new practices, inclusively in the scientific field.

Focusing on the figure of Charles Baudelaire’s “flâneur”, to illustrate their understanding of contemporary visual culture and of space and place, Maria da Luz Correia, Helena Pires and Pedro Andrade present “Passeio” – a platform of urban art and culture, conceived within the framework of the University of Minho’s Communication and Society Research Centre (CECS). The authors reveal various aspects of this platform in the context of the work of Walter Benjamin, Roland Barthes, Mirzoeff and Simmel, amongst others. They begin by identifying the subject matter – the city streets, in terms of architecture, graffiti, music, theatre, street entertainment, urban sport, handicrafts, traditional shops, advertising and window displays. The platform’s objective is to contextualise the day-to-day events that occur on the streets. The authors also discuss the theoretical and methodological options that have structured this platform of urban art and culture. And, finally, they stress its various action lines: research, training, archiving, dissemination, collaboration and expansion.

In the following article, by Norval Baitello Junior and Tiago da Mota e Silva, included in the final part of the thematic articles section, there is once again reference to Walter Benjamin’s writings. The authors extrapolate the meaning of the playful object in Benjamin’s thinking to the contemporary consumption of electronic media, in the supposition that the clash between the imagination and the imaginary occurs in the framework of use of tablets in the classroom. In a research conducted in a private school in São Paulo, involving first year primary school pupils, aged between 6 and 7, the authors observed and recorded ambivalent behaviour in the pupils’ use of the tablets. Use of the tablets and game-playing, not only reinforced the school’s social programme, it also reinvented it. To understand this conflict, the authors use the concepts of *ludus* and *paidia*. *Ludus* is presented as a tamed down form of *paidia*, in cultural playgrounds, and the concept of the magic circle is used to describe the experience of being in communicational environments, wherein the use of concepts of the imagination and the imaginary enable the imaginary to emerge as a taming of the imagination. Norval Baitello Júnior and Tiago da Mota e Silva suggest that the example of the children reveals aspects that can also be found in other media consumption contexts, in particular those of an addictive nature, since “screen dependency is not after all anything but a problem of imagination: to imagine with images that are not our own”.

In the next article, Anna Clara Marotti Magalhães and Leticia Maia discuss images of ourselves, i.e. images of ordinary people, and preservation of their memory in a digital format, as a form of cultural heritage, that can be used by professors working in the field of heritage education to foster integration and acceptance of diversity. The article is dedicated to the *Museu da Pessoa* [Museum of the Person], a completely digital project that fosters interaction and participation by internet users in the museum's collection, and therefore by implication enables anyone in the world to have their story portrayed on the website (Oliveira, 2007; Simões & Almeida, 2003). The authors underline the museum's importance in combating aspects of the colonial mindset that persists in certain segments of Brazilian society. This struggle involves resignification of the cultural inheritance of certain groups, e.g. communities of indigenous peoples and quilombolas (descendants of slaves), and ensuring their involvement in the process of constructing a national identity.

The final work in the section of thematic articles is a text by Fernanda Mendes Cabral Coelho and Adelaide Alves Dias about childhood and images of children, at the confluence between cultural studies, visual culture studies and the sociology of childhood. Using three image-based narratives, based on images of children incorporated into academic and scientific research, prominence is placed on the differences between two distinct situations: firstly, how children have been, and are, represented and, secondly, the repercussions these representations have on the understanding of childhood cultures in each era (from the Middle Ages to the contemporary era). By comparing the different childhood environments portrayed in the article, the authors underline that the idea of the child as a "homunculus", or "little adult", is still very evident in the visual cultures of the 21st century.

In the section entitled Personal Trajectories-Testimonies, we include two accounts concerning the panorama of the visual arts and fine arts in Brazil.

Based on the assumption that the artist must assume a political role and intervene in society, Jeanine Toledo narrates her personal experience, highlighting two of the exhibitions she organised in Recife: "Uns e Outros", in 2003, and "Lente Turva", in 2007, which demonstrate, in the words of Martine Xiberras (2010, p. 29), "the thick screen formed by archetypes connected to gender-based imaginary universes, which are invisible to the perspectives of the cultures that share them (Xiberras, 2010, p. 29)".

Maria do Carmo Nino describes her experience in different areas linked to the fine arts, where she has performed various functions – as producer, curator, analyst, teacher. She places special attention on two projects she developed as a curator: the "MAMÃE" Project and the "ContidoNãoContido" exhibition, held at the Aloísio Magalhães Museum (MAMAM), open to the public from March-September 2010.

Discussion of the questions raised by the central theme of this issue of the journal, is rounded off by two categories of critical review. One category is dedicated to contemporary Brazilian art, in which Ana Cármen Palhares profiles the artist, Jeanine de Lima Toledo. The other category is a classic feature of academic journals – a critical review of scientific works dedicated to the visual image – comprised by two articles. Isabel Macedo

reviews the work, *Teoria do acto icónico* (Theory of the iconic act), by Horst Bredkamp, a well-known art historian, published by KKYM and translated by Artur Mourão. Zara Pinto Coelho presents *A brief history of the image*, by the French librarian, Michel Melot. The book was published in France in 2007 by L'Oeil Neuf and in Portugal in 2015 by the Communication and Society Research Centre and Edições Húmus, and translated by Aníbal Alves.

In the section dedicated to interviews, Ana Cristina Pereira talks to João Ribeiro, a Mozambican film director, about his life and works, establishing a clear connection between these two dimensions and the complex history of Mozambican cinema.¹

We end this issue of the journal with two articles in the section Varia. Alexandre B. Weffort, in dialogue with Moisés de Lemos Martins, in the book *Crise no castelo da cultura. Das estrelas para os ecrãs*, published in 2011, writes about the topic of dialectics and questions some of the book's conclusions. Meanwhile, Joaquim Costa argues that, in the new market economics, religion and economics have become parallel universes that intersect in terms of their expansionist and universalist goals, and in the languages they use to construct the world, serving as “the somatic infrastructure of the societies they have conquered”.

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¹ For more detailed information on Mozambique's unique film policy, see Schefer (2016).

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

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