



Celebration of the Imperfect: a study of the imagistic gesture as determinant for experiencing images in the contemporary world.

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to undertake an analysis of the value of the imagistic gesture as a catalyst for renovation of experiencing images. In order to understand this issue, we set up a creation laboratory on the "Celebration of the imperfect" theme, in which one searches to grasp the experience of image construction as road of access to the imaginal, narrowing the possibility of an encounter with what is new.

In this study, we analyze the meanings of experiencing images, what makes them become meaningful and what is their potential to influence actions as they interact with the world. In addition, we also investigate the imaginative processes of the contemporary artist focusing on the capacity of creation of new images, which are able to cause surprise due to their magnetism and by the establishment of an intersubjective relation with the audience.

KEYWORDS

Imagination, Art, Experience

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Imagination is a form of capture and recreate reality that stimulates thoughts in order to enhance the capacity of creation from where a “new” image emerges, the unexpected, in accordance with Vilém Flusser’s study. Presently, studying the mystery of creation is extremely important in view of the high superficiality of the society. The omnipresence of repetitive technical images is a threat to the construction of a visually reinvigorated world, a vital scenario for human dignity itself. Thus, the study of imagination opens a door to a necessary unknown, in which reactivating the potential of the psychic productivity inherent to all creators is vital to the renewal of images on the contemporary scene. Faced with all this profusion, we must ask how the production of contemporary visuality stands in relation to the construction of meaningful experiences.

IMAGE AND EXPERIENCE

The research by Nathan Shedroff¹ on what characterizes an experience as memorable, and in what manner those who work with images may try to reproduce this impact suggests that what is most important is the repercussion of the images in the minds of those who experience them. According to this author, it is essential that the audience to which the experiences are addressed is able to remember and to highlight them among the enormous series already stored during their existence. When magnetism indeed occurs between experience and audience, some psychic events perpetuate the experience. For example, following new directions, repeating or retelling the experience or passing it along in a transforming attitude are expected movements that rise from such encounters with a real magnetism.

¹ Shedroff, 2009

This issue may also be understood through the work of Ron Burnett (2004), who acknowledges that society remains dependent on images and worlds made possible by them². In his point of view, seeing is not a passive attitude. The complete experience reflects a state of real interaction between audience and image. Burnett believes that humans establish a symbiotic relationship with images, a real dependence. The symbiosis of men in relation to images can be better understood through a list³ presented by Burnett, in which contains several possible analogies for the image. He analyzes the performances that might be assumed by them, such as for instance windows, mirrors, entertainment, information, truths, lies and dreams, among others.

Shedroff sheds light on the power of the complete set represented by experiences. For instance, a page on the internet does not compete for public preference against another page similar to itself only. Actually, when one searches the value of the experience above all, virtuality competes against any other visual experience. In conclusion, the most important thing is not the media itself. It would be risky to rely on the power of brightness of a screen in order to be able to establish a profound communication with a certain audience. Internet pages with no capacity of creating an intersubjective relationship with the audience can lose ground to a rich interactive exhibition, for example. People choose experiences that inform, regardless of the class they belong to.

Here we can compose with the concept of “seduction”, presented by Shedroff, not as a harmful enterprise⁴, but as a stimulating element of the construction of significant experiences for the human being. The word “seduction” may be misunderstood, if confused with the sense of masking something in order to deceive and persuade. However, for Shedroff, when drawing seduction to format this quality of experience, the creator of

² Burnett, 2004:41

³ Burnett, 2004:41

⁴ Shedroff, 2009:8

images would contribute for an enrichment of the greatest experience of all: life itself. Shedroff suggests that, when identifying what makes experiences meaningful, we may, as image producers, try to reproduce them.

To do so, Shedroff suggests some guidelines First, the commitment to elaborate experiences that are surprising, reaching beyond those already stored in the society. The challenge established is characterized by the dismantling of pre-established principles, by testing them, and bringing them closer to what is new. Then, the value of the novelty over reality would be the first positive point in order to establish a powerful connection with the one who sees them. However, it is necessary to expand the concept of seeing, to avoid a superficial analysis of the whole process. Flusser brings the concept of *scanning*⁵ – a way of observing that, at the same time in which the image structure is followed, it is also oriented by the intimate impulses of the observer. Thus, images would offer an interpretative space to their observers. The concept of scanning leads to non-linearity, or the possibility of eternal return. In other words, the action of looking does not follow a defined movement, it returns to the selected moments in a continuous transformation. Hence, we have the time of magic, as proposed by Bergson: the time lived is a time that, despite being multiple, may be perceived as being cohesive, raw material for imagination. It is different from linear time. According to the author:

“... There is no perception that is not impregnated with memories. To the immediate data present in our senses we mix thousands of details of our past experience.”⁶

Back to Shedroff, more important than the means by which experiences are developed, is their capacity to transform. For example, after an audience experiences a certain process, it is possible to notice an engagement towards, the formation of a new opinion or the development of an attitude, then this can be

⁵ Flusser, 1985:7

⁶ Bergson, *op.cit.*: 30 – For the author, in “Matter and Memory”, memories perform a displacement of the objective perception of objects.

considered a superior experience. Shedroff cites values such as intensity, duration and the completion as key elements in establishing such quality of experiences.

Since the whole process is important, Shedroff draws attention to the conclusion of the events. For him, it is important that the experience presents duration and completion. At the end of what has been experienced, the audience needs to consolidate a group of emotions. According to Deleuze:

“A monument does not commemorate, does not celebrate something that has already happened, but it transmits to the future the persistent sensations that embody the event.”⁷

Thus, after a significant experience of encounter with an image, the desire to experience something similar again would remain alive. Hence, if something is not materialized in the internal space of the observer by the time the experience is finished, the vacuum sensation leads one to feel that the entire process can be quickly forgotten. The of what has been experienced is key to a positive archiving of the experience. To Bachelard, imagination never ceases to imagine. Therefore, the soul dreams, and then, imagines⁸. The seduction carried out by the image would occur to the extent that we identify ourselves with the artist's being, and dreams, thoughts and memories form one single tissue:

Indeed, this is a matter of determining, through the impact of a single poetic image, a true awakening of the poetic creation in the reader's soul (...). But the image has reached the depths before stirring emotions on the surface⁹

Here we can draw a bridge with Bergson's thinking which, in his work *Matter and Memory*, concludes that images do not necessarily have a difference of nature, but are covered by an external perception that can be both superficial and conscious. For Burnett, living in a world surrounded by images does not

⁷ Deleuze & Guattari, 1997:229

⁸ Bachelard, 2008:181

⁹ Bachelard, 2008:7

mean being suffocated by them¹⁰. The author believes that there is a process that involves casting an eye over the image, decoding it through the mind and transforming this set into action, a cycle that tends to repeat itself with the same steps in reverse order. Thus, images are simultaneously loved, desired and feared, but remains essential for human activity.

In “What is Philosophy”, Deleuze cites Lawrence and his description of poetical messages: tearing up the umbrella of conventions and opinions invented by men to protect themselves from chaos. What is this image that the artist who becomes capable of opening the slit searches to frame? To us, this is the true brave voyage, which saves us from imitation and opens the possibility of novelty. The new image is that which rises from the risk of remaining under an apparatus of protection that does not protect anymore, but still exists, not completely throwing us into chaos. Deleuze speaks of the eternal struggle of art with chaos, and of how only one instant is necessary to at last erect the block of sensations that exists by itself. This monument does not depend on the creator, and much less on the one who experiences it. By the self-position of the created, this being of sensation stands by itself, for as long as the materials of which it is composed last. Never celebrating a nostalgic past that no longer exists, but rather wishing to project to the future the whole set of sensations that inhabit the poetic happening.

CELEBRATION OF THE IMPERFECT: THE PRODUCTION OF IMAGES

In this study, we worked with images without a purpose, abandoning the metaphor in order to dive into the impulse of poetic imagination (Figures 1 and 2). This approach was based on the idea of Bachelard that one should not study the phenomenon of imagination as merely metaphorical, for if it were so, it would lose its main feature, the impulse of freedom. The metaphor “is at best, a fabricated image, with no profound, true or real roots.” It is an ephemeral expression or that should be ephemeral, employed in transition. One must be careful not to

¹⁰ Burnett, 2004:42

think of it too much. We must fear that those who read it really think about it. On the other hand:

.(...) Unlike the metaphor, we can give our very selves as readers to an image; it is a donator of beings. The image, pure work of absolute imagination, is a phenomenon of the being.¹¹

For Bachelard, a metaphoric image is almost lazy, in the sense that it only captures the surface of the being: “it is dangerous to transform it into thought” for “the metaphor is a false image.”¹² Considering this analysis, our visual experiences seek to follow this non-metaphorical look.

The project of images presented here was developed aiming at clarifying the place of the imaginal that was researched. Our main question as artist-researchers was this human pursuit for a possible completion. We somehow inhabit in this anguish of an eternal search for the golden castle where we shall lack nothing. From this place we imagine ourselves several times. Through effort or magic, one would finally reach an organized and potent dimension of existence. It does not concern us to assert this feeling here, not as a personal feeling nor as inherent to the human condition. It delights us just to imagine it. And, even more, to try to dress it up with images.

We share Flusser’s view presented in the chapter *Imagining of* his work “The Universe of Technical Images”, “to always imagine more densely, in order to escape the abyss of nothingness.”¹³ For Flusser, the key is to make the technical images denser, avoiding the fascination and idolatry that may rise from the simple enchantment that it emanates. In this effort to admit the existence of the veil of superficiality, not in the sense of tearing it up, but weaving it, one may draw a parallel with the attempt to recreate reality taken from our photographic gesture.

¹¹ Bachelard 2008:88

¹² Bachelard 2008:89

¹³ Bachelard 2008:44

We also acknowledge, following the reasoning of Deleuze, that creation, despite always being a struggle against chaos, turns into a composition made up of fragments of its own chaotic origin. However, in order to build the Being of Sensation, the work must be capable of restoring the infinite¹⁴ The need to preserve, contemplate and extract, as studied by the philosopher, is what we seek from the beginning of our experience with composing images. Aware of that demand, we understand the risk of falling back on clichés that have nothing to add visually, with no power to actually create new sensations.

Through a series of photographs that initially sought to replace the Children's Toy in adverse situations, we were driven to pretexts of images far from the initial ones. Why return to the universe of children, and why insist on desecrating it? The interest in this symbolic location can be supported by Bachelard, in his text about "Reveries Toward Childhood."¹⁵ In an excerpt of the poem by Jean Rousselot's, we read: "And I lived without knowing that I was living my fable."¹⁶ For him, it is within the fable of own creation that resides the dreamy child, not in the hardened fables that are told to him/her. In addition, this has no relation whatsoever with memories, which also is not our research interest. More precisely, we seek the vivid imagination, that which operates to beautify and then restore the ability to rebuild¹⁷. One does not reach this beauty through the rescue of simple memory. Only reverie retains the power to evoke scenes from the past, overlaying it with the élan of sensation. For Bachelard, it is within the reverie that resides the possibility of aesthetic composition, to the extent that with such access, as reality is surrounded by a distinguished light. Likewise, Deleuze perceives the ability of art to capture a piece of chaos in a frame¹⁸, thus activating the artistic place: to preserve and contemplate, then extracting the monument of sensations.

¹⁴ Deleuze & Guattari, 1997:260

¹⁵ Bachelard, 2009:93

¹⁶ Bachelard, 2009:113

¹⁷ Bachelard, 2009:110

¹⁸ Deleuze & Guattari, 1997:264

But why embark on the Celebration of the Imperfect? Why not build an apology to any other imaginal place? It seems exciting to examine the Limits of Life in a moment when offerings to the Unlimited Belonging appear to overflow. Unlimited range? Of people, things, feelings. As if, somehow, we were all in a move that would lead us to the perfect. One could magnify, extend, enlarge up to the limit this search for an essence of life, until they tear what is solid. It is the opposite movement to construction: in the anxiously frantic search, the tissue that would fabricate the perfect mantle simply crumbles. It tears itself to show the body, which was always naked.

But what about life, that insists on remaining? Now a new poetic unfolding emerges, this time sweeter. It is related to the Power to Act as a regulator of Happiness. The possible happiness, one that restricts and embraces the limits. This is the reason for the word celebration. After travelling through the bridge of stones that crosses the torrential river of the imperfect, one notices the Possible. It is our place of imagery, even though possibly transitory: The Celebration of the Imperfect.



figure 1 Group of photographs arranged together, some with drawings and digital manipulation. This image is a smaller version of the original pannel: 3,7 x 4m.



figure 2 This image also integrates our project, although it is to be seen separated from the pannel. In our view, it brings a consolidated speech over our theme. Original size: 1,5 x 1 m.

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