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IMAGES AND THE POWER OF ENCOUNTERS

Andrea Barbosa et al. (org.).
2016. *A experiência da imagem
na etnografia*. São Paulo:
Terceiro Nome. 335 p.

I begin reading the book by its films - visual objects, as thought by Catarina Alves Costa, resulting from diverse ethnographies. Even without knowing where will progress the theory, the films give us clues, propose deviations from the purely scientific, flood us of images, sounds, people who give visibility to the relationship established between researchers and the subject researched, while making this separation a mere cloudiness, since the simplistic and colonizing idea of subject and object disperses here, to give place to *encounters*.

The book and films are about encounters. Encounters, through research, of people, of countless possible relationships, of multiple looks. The filmic-textual object, inside the edges of a conventional book also carrying two DVDs, is divided into nine films and fourteen articles, in addition to the presentation of the organizers and the preface and afterword from invited authors. This book is one of the results of three thematic projects funded by FAPESP over 18 years and developed in the Department of Anthropology of the University of São Paulo, more specifically in the Visual Anthropology Group (GRAVI). Since its beginnings in the mid-1990s, this group has been researching the most diverse uses of the image within an anthropological view, looking for new languages and visual possibilities for ethnography.

Divided into three sections, the text covers the following core themes: *movie and anthropology; photography and ethnography; transdisciplinary experiences*. From the fourteen articles, ten were written by GRAVI researchers, half of them coauthored, which was desired by the group itself as a way of greater interaction among the thoughts. The other four articles

are from authors studied by the group and that served as reference and inspiration in their researches. Aiming at “combine the text to a new experimental poetics centered in the image” (p.10), all the articles evoke the use of the image as a powerful and transforming tool in the ethnographic process. Having before it a double dimension of contact and contagion, anthropology summons here other areas of knowledge - photography, movie, theater, music, the visual arts - to establish new bonds with them, but bonds that remain essentially moving, unstable.

To enter your texts and films, let's take the book in more detail in its order, beginning with thematic sections. In the first one, “*Cinema e Antropologia*”, we started with a short text by Trinh T. Minh-Ha, Vietnamese filmmaker and writer, acclaimed for her work that renewed the documentary idea in the contemporary cinema. In “Mechanical eye, electronic ear, and the attraction of authenticity”, the author makes a dense criticism of the tradition of ethnographic films built with the idea of accessing a cinematic naturalness, or an “ideological neutrality of the image”, “in the search of a scientific use of the film” (p.29). Opening the present collection with this article is to immediately dismantle the ethnographic image as the pure, neutral, produced by researchers/filmmakers/photographers who are also neutral. Here, we soon know: it is about being present, together, researchers and the subject researched, trying to break, moreover, these denominations, these separations, in favor of an image that talks about the *encounter*.

The following article “*Etnoficção: uma ponte entre fronteiras*”, by Alexandre Boudreault-Fournier, Rose Satiko Gitirana Hikiji and Sylvia Caiuby Novaes, approaches the production of the film “Fabrik Funk”, present in the collection, at the same time evoking a scathing reflection on the cinematographic making in anthropology, disorienting the notion of truth towards fiction as a potentially constitutive element of the ethnographic image. Taking forward the echo of the considerations of Trinh T. Minh-Ha, here there is not even a trace of that supposed scientific neutrality/naturalness of the image. We are, on the other hand, in the ethnofiction sandy soils. Jean Rouch's voice still resonates saying that “making-believe we stay closer to reality” (p. 43). The authors, immersed in the shared production of the film, report the experience of meetings, collaborations, collective creation, improvisation, among other elements that emerged during the process. In the film, the protagonists, residents of Cidade Tiradentes, the largest housing complex in Latin America, play their own roles, building a plot about funk and the social settings that are established around it.

Paul Henley, in his article “*Narrativas: a verdade velada do documentário etnográfico?*”, engages in dialog with earlier texts by evoking the ways of doing and the narrative structures of ethnographic films. The text

sounds like a kind of manifesto against “a persistent residue of positivism” (p. 64) that makes the director think that the establishment of a narrative structure in the ethnographic film would not, in fact, be legitimate. But Henley is precise and emphatic in saying that all ethnographic films are representations, not mirrors aimed at the world, and it is from this irrefutable realization that he will think the narratives, the plots and the interventions in the chronology of the film.

Nadja Marin and Paula Morgado, in “*Filmes indígenas no Brasil: trajetória, narrativas e vicissitudes*”, address indigenous audiovisual production through the remembrance of their trajectory, their history, projects and films. From the first video experiences among indigenous populations in Brazil, in the 1980s, through the acclaimed “*Vídeo nas Aldeias*” project and the television show “*Programa de Índio*”, to the first questions about indigenous presence in cyberspace, the authors discuss the political perspectives of the use of the image, the indigenous production of self-image, the transmission of knowledge. Here, incidentally, the text progresses to an interesting and fundamental point in thinking about ethnographic images and their power of transmission. If, before, in several groups, the transmission was only oral and gestural, now the video becomes the great mnemonic file. Not being more moving in performance, in the permanent body transformation, the memory offered by video, static, brings to indigenous groups a new form of transmission of knowledge, and it will be necessary to understand how both memory forms are affected and transformed.

Bruna Triana and Diana Gómez, in “*A análise fílmica na antropologia: tópicos para uma proposta teórico-metodológica*”, take as reference for analysis the film *Hunger*, by Steve McQueen. Thinking cinema as an anthropological object and problem, the authors evoke Walter Benjamin and his reflections on experience, narration and mimesis, to undertake the analysis of the film within a “dual theoretical-methodological perspective” (p. 113). Going through reflections on spectator, montage, affections, bodies, the authors seek a dialog in the text despite the mentioned difference of places that they occupy as spectators. They will say that, between both, “there is a certain mismatch between interests and ways of watching the film” (p. 116). However, this divergence of analysis is not clear throughout the text, which might have been interesting to sketch more clearly the many ways of experiencing the image.

In the last article of the section, “*O corpo no cinema*”, David MacDougall proposes to think about the various bodies present in the cinematographic experience. The bodies in question are the body of the spectator, the body of the filmmaker, the body of the film itself. The extensive and magnificent analysis of the author makes us think of

cinema as something that provokes our encounter with what we are, as if the film made other bodies emerge from ourselves, while these bodies permanently change the bodies of the image and, therefore, the image itself. We are all - spectators, filmmakers, films - interspersed, mixed, disturbed by each other. "The film may be a fiction, but the bodies are not" (p. 133), says MacDougall, taking us to the dimension of impregnation, experience and transformation that cinema produces.

We then proceed to the next section, which discusses the meeting between "*Fotografia e Etnografia*". Elizabeth Edwards's text "*Rastreando a fotografia*" proposes to think and trace the photograph used in an anthropological context. Edwards explores the diverse functions and uses of photography for anthropological discipline over time, from three snapshots - which deal not with specific images but with historical instants - and with the categories of *evidence*, *power* and *agency*. The article, in a certain evolutionary tone of photographic practice in anthropology, runs through the ideas of photographic truth, scientific apparatus, power, pose, exploration of the body/image of the other, and the contemporary aspects of the use of the photographic image, such as a new appropriation and commitment, who wish to "find a gift for historical photographs" (p.176), or to collaborative and community projects around the production and use of the image. Despite the entire "tracking" of the enterprise by the author, it leaves open, in the end, the fate of photography within the anthropological practice, considering the permanent transformations to which both are subject.

Andrea Barbosa, in the article "*Fotografia, narrativa e experiência*", reports the work process in a neighborhood of Guarulhos/SP in which she held, for four years, several photographic workshops with the residents. Based on an approach to the uses and functions of the image and its role as agent of social relations, the author investigates photography based on her own ethnographic experience in the community, in which she proposed to the residents the photographic exercise of their own experiences in the neighborhood's life. Beyond the merely visible in the image, what Barbosa intends to bring to analysis is the relation between experience and memory, as one of the many and possible realities of photography. The author proposes to the reader a look at the images produced, or, more specifically, a lurking, which she imagines as exploratory movement by the images. The text brings some photographs and this gesture of looking at them, analyzing them, entering them, making us notice the life that inhabits the image, the life that exceeds it. See what the photo does not show, "plunge into other layers, other depths (...)" (p. 198). The film "*Pimentas nos olhos*", present in the collection, is also one of the results of the work of Andrea Barbosa carried out in the mentioned region. With more television visuals effects and a musical soundtrack, the film reports stories of common life in the neighborhood from four central voices.

In “*Alguns apontamentos sobre fotografia, magia e fetiche*”, Alice Villela and Vitor Grunvald wish to think of the photographic agency from the echoes of their personal researches, with quite different ethnographic fields. Noting that, despite this distance, “a strange affinity” was present, Villela and Grunvald investigate the relations between people and photographs. However, the article is not intended as the undertaking of a cultural comparison, serving, above all, to bring to light fundamental questions for the thought of the agency of things. Going through an extensive and dense bibliography, the article summons numerous theorists to make resound the relation among photography, magic and fetish.

In the last article of this section, photography is thought of in ethnographic work from another bias. Here, the use occurs especially as documentation/observation tool in the field. Ewelter Rocha, in “*Objeto, imagem e percepção*”, analyzes the domestic altars in houses of devotees located in Ladeira do Horto, in Juazeiro do Norte. The author investigates the structural similarities of several altars to understand the intimate logic that inhabits them, and their sacred meaning. From a reflection on images, such as the relation between perception and imagination, the author resumes the idea of an agency of the objects exhibited at the altars and in the affective relations established with them. The photographs produced throughout his research allow him to suspect of a basic form, a common order among the altars photographed, which the investigator gives the name of “*forma-altar*” [altar-form], and which he reconstitutes digitally as a simplified standard form. Ewelter’s film, “*Beata, uma santa que não sorri*”, present in the collection, shows the process of making holy images of blessed women in the same Juazeiro do Norte.

We have arrived at the last text section of the book with their “*Experiências transdisciplinares*”. Edgar Teodoro da Cunha, in “*A intermitência das imagens: exercício para uma possível memória visual Bororo*”, talks about his field research, carried out since 2000 in Bororo indigenous villages, which resulted in an ethnographic film and some photographic essays. The author calls Aby Warburg, especially through his Atlas Mnemosyne, and next to the voices of Agamben and Didi-Huberman, he thinks the images as vivid instances, creatures that arise in a permanent relationship with each other, with the world, with people, (des)assembled, (re)assembled, (re)configured infinitely. From his own visual material produced in field and archival images from different eras about the Bororo, Cunha intends to investigate the use and/or destiny that can be given to these materials. For the author, considering the low visibility of the group in question, becomes even more urgent the idea of considering the use of images produced and collected.

In “*Montagem, teatro antropológico e imagem dialética*”, Carolina Abreu and Vitor Grunvald take from the beginning the concept of montage, original

technique of the cinema, to go towards the anthropological experience. For this, the authors plunge into a dense anthropological bibliography, full of reflections about ethnographic cinema and the insurgence of the idea of the filmmakers' self-conscious presence in his filmmaking, which opens gaps for what Rouch prepared as "shared anthropology" and MacDougall as "participatory cinema". In these cases, the film becomes a meeting place, of disagreements, of questions posed, open, shared between the one who films and the one who is filmed, in interconnections that allow the access of some to the world of others. Calling also Eisenstein, Vertov, Benjamin, Taussig, Didi-Huberman, Brecht, among many, and permeated with dozens of footnotes, the text is an absolutely theoretical source of reflections on image, montage and anthropological experience.

Francirosy Campos Barbosa, in her text "*Somos afetados: experiências mágicas e imagéticas no campo religioso*", in addition to bringing to light an intimate and personal perspective of the research, which shifts us sharply from the dense previous theoretical article, also evokes her film present in collection, "*Allah,, Oxalá na trilha Malê*". In the film, the director produces the encounter - physical and conceptual - of Islam with candomblé, tracing a fascinating journey between both centered on the figure Malê, name given to the black Muslims who arrived in Brazil during slavery. Technically, the film has some problems, such as a visible dirt on the lens in certain planes. But this is not capable of undoing the charm of the film and the relationships it spells out. I feel the same charm for the researcher's article, in which she recounts her experience in doing ethnography, also calling it from other researchers. In the only photograph present in the article, we see Francirosy between the two main interlocutors of the film, the body of the director implied in the image, as in the text. Written in an intimate way, the text sounds almost like a letter, and, as a researcher, I am thrilled by what I recognize of what really affects and transforms us. Just as the body of the author is implied there, via text and image, the body of the reader is also summoned with all his experiences.

In the last article of the book, "*Etnografia e hypermedia: a cidade como hipertexto e as redes de relações nas ruas em Niterói/RJ*", Ana Lúcia Marques Camargo Ferraz presents the research undertaken with residents of popular neighborhoods of Niterói, through which she wonders: "What can ethnography do in the hypermedia language?" (p. 307). Taking as its axis the idea of "seeing", through the net, what is on the streets under a dense layer of invisibility, the researcher sought to understand how ethnography becomes possible in multimedia, an ethnography that accompanies the metamorphosis that is itself City. Thinking of the city also as hypertext, "which contains portraits and landscapes, music and noise, narratives and mosaic performances" (p. 322), it is interesting and intriguing to imagine an ethnography capable of producing another

hypertext that spoke of this city, or rather, spoke of one of the many cities that inhabit what we call a city. In fact, there would never be a city in the singular - the ethnographic experience itself makes this clear. There will always be as many cities as there are different points of view. It is this dense and ambitious project, titled "*Cartografias da Margem*", which we are pleased to meet in Ferraz's text. From the same researcher, we have the film "*O aprendiz do samba*", in which she approaches another ethnographic experience. Here, young musicians present old sambas, in intergenerational musical encounters that stir all present.

In addition to the films already mentioned throughout this review, others are also present in the collection although they are not related to the articles. In "*Baile para matar saudades*", Érica Giesbrecht evokes, along with her interlocutors - black men and women between the ages of seventy and ninety - old gala dances in the city of Campinas, frequented mostly by the black community. These ladies and gentlemen are central figures in the black cultural movement of the city today. The researcher juxtaposes the old gala dances - which appear as a strong reminder among the interviewees - to the current musical scene of the community, essentially dedicated to Afro-Brazilian repertoires. Recreating, at the end, with the interviewees, a dance like those of old, the director makes the story move around the film, producing in it a space of experience for the people involved.

"*Danzas para Mamacha Carmen*", by Aristoteles Barcelos Neto, accompanies a ritual feast in the village of Paucartambo, Peru. This feast, which happens in the months of July, greets Our Lady of Mount Carmel in four days of dancing with nineteen groups of people dressed up and masked. The film follows a bit of all these groups and their dances, as well as testimonials from people involved in the party. This seems to be the best accomplished film of this collection, technically and conceptually, as well as being aesthetically seductive, both for colors, dances and fantasies, and for feeling the body that films in the middle of everything, as if through it we could project our own body within the image, through the dance.

"*Vende-se pequi*", by André Lopes and João Paulo Kayoli, a production entirely shared between indigenous and non-indigenous filmmakers, reverberates the text of Marin and Morgado, in which the production of the ethnographic film with the indigenous peoples was discussed. Here, Manoki Indians sell pequi by the roadside, and that is the motto for them to decide to investigate ancient myths involving pequi. From a video workshop, the young people go out in search of the old, instigating them to tell the pequi's story. Again, we have questions regarding intergenerational meetings and talks. The resulting film is beautiful, simple and thought-provoking. Through the artifice of what it wants to tell - the story of pequi -, so many layers are revealed, relationships, generations, memories, and the new, that inevitably transforms.

Vitor Grunvald's small portrait video "*trans_versus 1*" is a delight. Aesthetically impeccable and beautiful, the film sets in motion Lizz Camargo, responsible for an important cross dresser party in the city of São Paulo. Shifting the sound of the image, Grunvald produces an incredible audiovisual effect, in which we accompany Lizz's face, her gestures, and the whole movement of people in the dressing room where she is filmed, while her voiceover tells us stories of the feast and of its conception.

It is very clear the spirit of sharing, participation, dialog and movement between the articles and films of this collection. It is clear the origin of the material as coming from a group of studies. Everything crosses and adds up, which makes reading and looking a beautiful exercise in perceiving these many connections. The book we have in hand deals, above all, with encounters - we return to the essential word. To stand before the other is also to be in front of yourself and seen by the other, and it is in this encounter that all ethnography will make sense. This collection of texts and films speaks to us repeatedly of this, putting to the test word and image to give visibility to the powers of the meeting with the other and with himself. Still echoing a few words of Francirosy Campos Barbosa, in her beautiful text, let us imagine the encounter as that which potentially erases the boundaries between self and other.

I return to the title of the book, "*A experiência da imagem na etnografia*". I find it curious to note the textual possibility that the image itself is one who *experiences* something in ethnographic work. What would be the image's experience? The way it acts, receives, gives, communicates. This is to remember that we do not simply manipulate image-making devices. The image itself acts. It tries. It works, or not. It chooses, lies. It leaves clues, traces. And we, on this other side, we built with them, next to them, in their magic, never innocent, always in transformation.

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