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AFFECTIVE OBJECT: SOCIAL USES, TIME AND COMMENTED PHOTOGRAPHS

Dorrit Harazim. 2016.
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What makes a picture publishable? This seems to be the core question in *O Instante Certo*, the first book by the journalist Dorrit Harazim (2016). The work brings together articles originally published between 1995 and 2016 in magazines such as *Zum*¹, which cover the author's multiple interests: visual arts, wars, politics, fights for civil rights, gender. The volume tells stories of images and people and can be read in three ways: as an exhibition, as a documentary evidence of a personal file and as a family album.

¹ Available in: <<http://revistazum.com.br/en/revista-zum>>. Accessed in: December 5, 2017.

PHOTOGRAPHERS ON EXHIBITION

Seen as a photo exhibition, the book shows a series of images (iconic or not) that have surpassed the moment of their production. Seen as a document in a personal archive, his textbook reflects moments in the professional life of the journalist, who received awards such as Gabriel Garcia Márquez's on Journalism in the Excellence category². As a family album, it presents a sequence of commented photographs, which lead us to think about the presence and participation of images in social life, when certain photos show themselves capable of leading important changes in history.

Each of the 38 articles included in the volume can be freely dismembered from the whole without loss to the understanding of Harazim's thought on the photographs and their life histories: production, publication, circulation, social uses and disposal. Although speaking of photos, *O Instante Certo* is not a book in which we are called to compare different images, as in the disturbing *Big Book* by W. Eugene Smith. It is not a coincidence for Dorrit Harazim to discuss the author's work in "O triunfo de W. Eugene Smith" (2016, 211-220), article in which the *Big Book* figures as a radical act of autonomy and creative freedom in form and content.

To Brazilian "Assisinho" (as he calls the photographer from Minas Gerais), Harazim dedicates the essay "O clique único de Assis Horta" (Ibid., 31-45), stating that he "gave face, photographic identity and visibility to the worker. He has taken him from anonymity, revealing him as a class and as an individual in the country's visual history" (ibid., 34). Simple people, many of those portrayed are black, a fact that points to a process of social integration by means of the photographic visual consumption still little known by the history of photography in Brazil. There is still a common sense that tends to suggest that black people, even in an urban setting, would not have access to photography as important visual goods, especially at the level of family narratives. Thus, the collection of Horta's negatives shows how the compulsory 3x4 portrait served as a gateway to the consumption of other individual and collective images, transforming the ways of expressing and memorizing the affective bonds between people.

The relationship between black people and photographic studios also appears in the essay "Estúdio Malick" (Ibid., 311-320), in which the author discusses the work of the African photographer Malick Sidibé. The Malian portraitist produced portraits of an era in which his country had become a young and euphoric independent nation, from 1960 on. Also a

² For archival theory, personal records documents reflect the activities of their holders, among which, in the case of certain professionals, their intellectual production. See in this regard Travancas, Rouchou and -Heymann (2013) and Campbell and Goulart (2007).

black man, the South African photographer Koto Bolofo photographed not the fullness of life, but the expression of violence in the images he made of the old Robben Island prison, where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned. In the essay “Retrato invisível” (ibid., 289-294), Harazim takes these Bolofo’s pictures as material to discuss the horrors of apartheid also visually, making reference to the moment when photos of the leader were forbidden to circulate. This repression of images makes one think about the conditions in which a photograph becomes unprintable. Harazim teaches that the absence of images of Mandela arrested shows how the photograph could safeguard the truth of his incarceration, hence the concern with the visual erasure of the black leader memory.

In “A Cor de Gordon Parks - Parte I” and “Gordon Parks na catacumba - Parte II” (Ibid., 175-192), he comments that this famous American black photographer worked for years for Life, when he carried out, in 1956, the colorful series *Segregation Story*, which documents the day-to-day life of the Thorntons, a black Alabama family. In view of the large volume of sales, 13.5 million copies, Harazim shows that the success was due to the impact of the magazine among the white public who was offered to see a black family as “essentially equal to their own” (Ibid., 179)³.

A FAMILY ALBUM: OBLIVION, MEMORY AND WOMEN

If *O Instante Certo* can be seen both as an imaginary exhibition (yet to inspire future exhibitions in Brazil), and as a personal archive (as because it reflects and allows the reader to follow some moments of the author’s professional career), peering at it corresponds to leafing through a family album, device in which each photograph, when shown by those who hold their guard, is often accompanied by speeches that turn oral what is seen⁴. This act of speaking of the images reveals that they are not objects made exclusively for passive eyes, willing to contemplate them in silence. Such images mobilize other senses, so that we can write about them, and this writing interferes in how they will be seized. In leafing through *O Instante Certo* as an album, we learn about the plans, materials, and procedures of Nazi architecture constructed from 1943 to 1945 in “A Muralha Esquecida” (Ibid., 169-173); about why a museum

³ Two other black photographers cited are the Nigerian Teju Cole and the American Roy DeCarava (2016, 129).

⁴ See Edwards’s (2012) review of the bibliography on the sensory appeals of photographic images, especially orality and touch. See Bruno (2009), who discusses the verbal-visual relationship in his study of photographic collections of older people. In a dialog with his interlocutors, the author makes visual arrangements based on the informants’ collections. In addition, Leite (2001) can be consulted in this sense, considering the oral narratives in his research on family photos.

decides to call a photographer to document its ruins; or we learn that the apartheid inaugurated in 1976, in a white area of Johannesburg, the 54-storey cylindrical building and 467 apartments - Ponte City - through the text "Autópsia de uma Ilusão" (ibid., 89- 95), around which Harazim comments on the monumental work of the photographer Mikhael Subotzky and the artist Patrick Waterhouse. Together, they collected and thoroughly documented the life of one of the greatest symbols of "white supremacy utopia" (Ibid., 91).

Still following the logic of a family album replete with stories and deeds of humanity, Harazim points out: Evelyn McHale was carrying "a bag of family photos" (Ibid., 15) before committing suicide. This attachment to affective images recalls Walter Benjamin's note of our relationship with photos: "No work of art is contemplated so closely in our time as the photographic image of ourselves, our close relatives, our loved ones" (1994, 103).

Those who, in some moment of life, got into photography are the subject of the Polish photographer Jerry Lewczynski, who, according to the correct title of the article "O catador de imagens" (2016, 203-210), became, sympathetic to unknown people in portraits, a particular type of garbage collector. Those who are gone, but who remain in the photos, seem to want to come back to life. The images that interested the collector, however, enjoy little social prestige when they are released from their owners. They are non-iconic images, usually serialized, without subtitles⁵, in a predictable and simple framework, sometimes blurred and, most importantly, refer to people with no notoriety⁶. They are men and women on whom remain as images that could be easily forgotten, as were the people described through their belongings in "Viagem sem volta" (Ibid., 67-75). This essay describes a project of Jon Crispin, who photographed 429 bags stored until 1995 in an attic of Willard Lunatic Asylum in New York. Both photographers are concerned about loss and forgetfulness, with garbage and memory. This number of "memory boxes"⁷ now advertised does not, however, make up 10% of the total number of individuals who have been there for almost a century.

A little more than 10% of Harazim's book brings at the opening of the essays two photos, such as "A história em preto e branco" (Ibid., 121-130), "Loving Story" (Ibid., 321-332), "A fotografia descobre a América" (Ibid., 333-340), "O cidadão Meeropol" (Ibid., 355-366) and, finally, "As novas

5 For Harazim, subtitles, when informative, such as those used by the photographer Joseph Koudelka, make it possible to "ver além da imagem" (see beyond the image) (2016, 286).

6 In my master's research, I worked with this type of image. Acc. Bispo (2012).

7 According to Assmann (2011, 125), the memory boxes are devices to store what is considered important, such as documents and treasures.

cores do império russo ” (Ibid., 147-154). Despite this, through a strategy of the written text, Harazim multiplies images by choosing one or two to open each text and by remission to many others. An example is the portrait of Leo Tolstoy (Ibid., 150) made by the pioneer of color in the already decaying Russian empire, Sergei Mikhailovich Prokudin-Gorskii. Another multiplication occurs with “Tomoko no seu banho”. The only photograph, according to the author, that W. Eugene Smith “took full pride” for having done. For Stefânia Bril (1987, 40), the photo of the girl in the bath was a proof of Smith’s victory in the fight, in Japan, in Minamata along with the fishermen. By arguing that a photograph goes beyond the instant selected in time, Harazim leads us through immersible stories, observing through the images the moments of production, circulation and uses, even contradictory to the intentions of producers and their portraits. An example in this sense is “Ruth Orkin fez primeiro e melhor” (2016, 131-137), in which Harazim simultaneously narrates the story of two women - the photographer Ruth Orkin and the model Ninalee Allen - and shows how the image of a woman being addressed by seductive men while walking freely by herself on an Italian street, published in 1952, became twenty years later a symbol of macho oppression in the light of the second feminist wave after the 1960s. It is a result of this reflection that, rather than restoring an essential truth to the image titled American Girl in Italy, what matters most, in following her argument, is that the photographs emerge with their own biography and trajectory, transcending the characters involved at the time of their production.

Although many women appear in *O Instante Certo*, few of them are photographers. The essay “As múltiplas Vidas de Lee Miller” (Ibid., 97-110) presents the model and later also the photographer who left a collection of “60,000 original negatives, 20,000 images in contact sheets or hard copies as well as manuscripts and documents” (Ibid., 110). Another figure is Maier, the photographer nanny, to whom he dedicates two texts: “O enigma Vivian Maier” - Parts I and II (Ibid., 221-233). Although socially withdrawn, when accompanied by portable Rolleiflex, Maier photographed a multiplicity of strangers on the streets of the urban centers near her workplace. Her obsession with photography was such that she left more than 100,000 negatives, hundreds of unrevealed rolls, 1,500 slides, and more than thirty 8-mm shorts (Ibid., 226).

The Mexican photographer Graciela Iturbide is presented in “Pássaro Solitário” (Ibid., 343-353) as a student of Manuel Álvares Bravo, with whom she learned to wait for the time to pass and, in the interim, something to happen. Known for erasing in her essays the boundaries between art and document, Iturbide’s work came to be known since the publication of her essay *Los que vive en la arena* (1979). This is a documentary work on the Seri Indigenous people that was well received by visual criticism,

but frustrated anthropologists who worried about the “emotional approach of images” (ibid., 345). For them, the subtitles used like *Mujer Angel*, name of the photo that brought fame to the photographer, did not report on what, after all, the images were. Iturbide replied: “I am neither an anthropologist nor a sociologist. I take pictures for the pleasure of doing them, I never photograph anything to document” (Ibid., 343).

While Miller was, as Harazim explains, dissected by the camera many times, including by his father (Ibid., 100), and learned from him notions of framing, perspective, and magnification - which led him to make many copyrights (Ibid., 102), Evelyn MacHale, on the other hand, has made herself eternal through her only published image, discussed the essay “Foto Imortal” (Ibid., 11-17). MacHale died at age 23 and her morbid portrait not only opens the book, but announces how human death is a subject for photography and a theme in Harazim’s book. Thus, there is no lack of touching scenes of death and deceased, reproduced or suggested in several of the texts.

The presence of death in certain photos helped to change the course of societies, such as *Execution in Saigon*, 1968, chronicled in “A chave” (Ibid., 303-309). For the South African professionals of the Bang Bang Club, whose group life is described in “Abutres ou Heróis?” (Ibid., 19-29), the slaughters became the central character of the end of the process of dissolution of the *apartheid*. Accompanying the narrative, the sensation is that the wars install a total confusion between people and things. At such times, humans become a sort of residue or garbage from the conflict, as one of the surviving photographers of the Club, Greg Marinovitch, put it: “Corpses are foreign objects” (Ibid., 25). This strangeness reappears in the essay “O Cidadão Meeropol” (Ibid., 355-366), in which one of the images discussed alludes to the social practice of black lynching that occurred almost without respite in many southern states of the United States, between the end of the nineteenth century and 1968 (Ibid., 359). The citizen referred to in the title is Abel Meeropol, white and Jew who wrote *Strange Fruit* (1938), song eternalized in the voice of Billie Holiday. The lyrics showed Meeropol’s astonishment at the naturalness with which violence against the black population was practiced.

In the same way, but focusing on the female experience of racism, the essay “Ódio Revisitado” (Ibid., 295-301) describes two women - Elizabeth Eckford and Hazel Bryan - who appear in a photograph taken in 1957, when both were only fifteen years old. The scene is a synthesis of American society in a combat that, more than sixty years later, did not guarantee full rights to the black American. Harazim says that “The photo gained strength, becoming a flag for an entire generation of athletes, lawyers, black teachers” (Ibid., 299). In bringing the image back and commenting

on it, the author reveals the current pains produced by racism as they enter the life trajectory of these women after the photo was released.

O Instante Certo ends with “Relembrações” (ibid., 375-382), an open dialogue with a photo of Dorrit Harazim made in Cambodia in 1970: the closing text in the book which could, nonetheless, work as an opening article. The author explains how she came closer to certain images, talks about her desire to comment on them, and to tell what she has discovered about them. Her pleasure in digging up stories, finding out who is the person portrayed, knowing about the environment that initially welcomed or refused a photo, peering beyond the click, has to do with her conception of what, after all, a photograph is. As she puts it: “when we look at a photograph, we see in it, too, the reflection of who we are” (ibid., 377).

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