

MEMORY IS MOVEMENT


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On a December-day, already bathed in the hot summer of Rio de Janeiro, the bodies that go up and down buses look limper, immersed in the energy that the end of the year seems to exhale little by little, drenching the city in a silent and somewhat sore ecstasy of another year. We prepare the wheat paste for the posters under a blazing sun and it evaporates too quickly. Moving the ladder here and there, the top right of the photo is coming off, where's the paste again? Careful, it'll rip; it needs more paste; you have to remove the air bubbles with the tips of your finger; careful, I'll do it; there are still eight photos to go; can you go to Beta to get more water for the mixture while we go down the street to ask the market owner to flypost the picture of the bride on that green wall; okay, take the ladder with you so we can glue the images that will go on the water tank's wall; okay, let it drip.

Tonight is the inauguration of the exhibition and there will be a barbecue and the screening of a movie. The screen is already up there in the courtyard of Azul, while the meat and soft drinks for the grill are arriving and we are setting up a table with postcards printed with archive images from the residents of Azul. One of the pictures is of six women, all dressed in pink, at a carnival party of the Jaca Samba School, the *Unidos do Jacarezinho*. Another is a black and white photo that shows a soccer team, the ones standing have their arms crossed and the ones crouching are all embraced. There is a white soccer ball waiting patiently on the grass. Still another photo, this one colored, is of a birthday party. The people stare at the camera, posing from behind a birthday cake, snacks, and soft drinks, which



come in glass bottles, as the beer bottles still are today. All these images are part of personal archives that, when shared, become collective, and evoke various times. As Didi-Huberman (2012) said, the image is a footprint, a cut, a visual trace of the time that it evokes, but also of other times.

A month prior to the exhibition, we organized another event named “Tent of Memories”, also surrounded by many images. It happened in front of João’s bar, the pub of a former resident of Azul next to Aunt Beta’s house, who was Léo’s mother, and received us. On the day of the event, João’s bar was essential in providing beer and music, next to two tables full of pictures. There were still more pictures hung by small wooden pegs on clothes lines on the walls. Whoever walked by almost always lingered on some image or other. This movement of coming and going was filmed by Léo and Gê and was photographed by Dudu and myself. Everyone drank and talked, there were people dancing, and the afternoon slowly went by.

Memory is movement is a photo essay about the power of sharing personal and family archive images. Its starting point was the exhibition *Outro olhar*, held in the streets of Azul, upper part of the Jacarezinho community. The event was the result of cooperative and decentralized artistic practices of the collectives Norte Comum and Cafuné na Laje, both active in the city of Rio de Janeiro at the time. The essay documents the collective process of organizing the exhibition, which consisted of working with the visual memory of Morro do Azul and with images of resident’s own archives, their stories, and memories of the territory. This project was also an unfolding of Cafuné na Laje’s research to shoot the film *Favela que me viu crescer*, released in 2015.

Having the exhibition’s process as a starting point, the photographs in this essay focus on how the mobilizing of visual memory of personal archives promotes the encounter and the sharing of these portal-images as a way of perceiving and experiencing photography collectively. This strengthens community bonds and validates the territory’s historical importance from within, emphasizing how it signifies itself visually. Thus, the recognizing and valuing of these archives is a necessity for the contemporary debate about photographic images and their participation in the construction of a collective memory.

The photo essay is about the encounter with images from personal but also collective archives that reveal the history and memory of Azul, in Jacarezinho. It is about the ties of family images, of albums, with the streets. The emphasis here is placed upon the relationship people have



with their memories, and the power to mobilize them: in each bond set of by the images, the territory is restored and strengthened.

The favela Azul is situated in Jacarezinho, in the North Zone of Rio de Janeiro. Between the walls of General Electrics, the river Jacaré, and the train tracks, Jacarezinho was Rio de Janeiro's second largest industrial park. Léo Lima, photographer born and raised in Azul and member of Cafuné na Laje, describes Jacarezinho:

Localized in the North Zone of Rio de Janeiro, Jacarezinho originated in the Vieira Farm, the perimeter of which went from the lower part of the favela up to the highest point of Morro Azul. It was surrounded by industries and factories. On the path that begins on the trainline crossing, there are wattle and daub houses next to masonry ones, Umbanda and Candomblé houses of worship next to evangelical churches, soccer fields and narrow bars. All this is connected by countless concrete stairs, tireless kites, children always moving and still and steady water tanks.

The former Titica Hill was slowly shaped over time, by the desire or the need of its residents, young and old, to what it currently is today: an overlapping of dreams, desires and necessities, houses, bars, sport fields, stores, and rooftops.

What is extraordinary about Jacarezinho? I'm not sure. What I know is that when you ask a Jacarezinho resident to describe a happy life, he always imagines a favela like his own, with his people, with soccer in the GE sports field and samba in the Samba School Unidos do Jacarezinho.

If a place is always a puzzle of looks and permanence, and its perspectives are composed of simultaneous layers, whether temporal or relational layers that occupy the same territory, we suggest that photographs are portal-images that allow us to share and move through these layers of simultaneity, providing us with a journey adrift of time/space of a territory and of its *diverse pasts* (Rivera Cusicanqui 2018).

Therefore, the exhibition did not seek to tell a linear narrative of the territories' history, but rather, starting with the photographs, to share stories told on the edge of the favela, without separating or organizing the territory temporally in a traditional way. We were not interested in a cataloguing process like those of museums and institutions, but in a process of exchanging experiences and stories that inhabit a place of *tiempos mixtos* (Rivera Cusicanqui 2018), or mixed times, where family photos gather and replace a temporality mixed with the simultaneity of heterogeneous times activated by them. This refusal of linearity and

choice of simultaneity as approach of the residents' photographs seem to me an important step for the processes we were aiming for.

Outro Olhar gathered people around images that they themselves produced, narrating these memories together. It may seem trivial, but if we stop to think about the historic entitlements of visual memory in Brazil and the types of images associated with Jacarezinho in the mainstream media, it becomes evident that this encounter to celebrate the photographs that represent their stories is a form of resistance.

To face memory as an event is an important step to think about how the exhibition brought images opposing the characteristic fetish of the artistic visual arts environment. The whole process was developed around types of *mobilizing* and *paths* striving for *exchange*. The exhibition mainly exposed the relations themselves, instead of objects and products. The act of remembering together is a powerful practice, even as a collective ritual. It seems to me that, when memories are shared locally, reinforcing the bonds of collective memory, we reiterate the power of the community.

When we remember together, we access the many pasts of a territory, activating memories that reinforce the feeling of belonging. The demolition of a striking building in the neighborhood, the termination of a bus line, or even an accident during the soccer match, birthday parties, and other episodes are important collective events. In short, they configure embodied images with perspectives and ties that refer to a diverse temporality and simultaneous territories. In *Outro Olhar*, the exhibition of photographs was not stagnant, but involved moving the images around, which brought people closer to the photographs (instead of distancing, as is common in museums and art institutions). This approach strengthened the relation of self-representations in Azul. Therefore, it constituted an event dynamic, as it promoted movement.

Thus, if the exhibition focus was on the relationships and not the product, it happened truly in the conversations triggered. The photo essay *Memory is movement* is about those encounters and conversations with the by-passers that stopped to look at images of themselves, of their neighbors. They saw their relatives, pictures of cousins when they were children, of family members that already passed away, of old boyfriends and girlfriends, and of the neighborhood's soccer team. The exhibition happened in the movement of the photographs, which passed from hand to hand. It established the encounter with the flyposted pictures and did not orbit around products-objects to be exposed and commercialized in a restricted space.



Having the relationships as a starting point, this photo essay states that memory is movement. The archive images of Azul residents, along with their stories, manifest the narrative of a territory that is still changing. The territory is reborn through each word and image produced from the inside and that tell the many pasts of Azul. It seems to me that because memories are not stagnant, they configure an event. They are created in the encounter, in movement, they exist in conversation, in the core of stories, in a reverie/array that, as lonely as it may seem, is always moving.

TRANSLATION:
Alice Faria

More about Outro Olhar project: <https://navalhanaliga.com/Outro-Olhar-1>

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ABSTRACT

The photo essay *Memory is movement* is about the encounter with personal archive photographs of residents of Azul, in Jacarezinho (Rio de Janeiro), gathered by the exhibition *Outro Olhar*, conceived by the collectives Cafuné na Laje and Norte Comum. Having the exhibition's research process as a starting point, the photographs focus on the importance of mobilizing visual memory of personal archives. The aim was to approach and share these portal-images and promote a way of perceiving and experiencing photography collectively, while strengthening community bonds. The emphasis was placed on the historical importance of the territory from within, of how it is visually signified. Thus, the recognizing and valuing of these archives is a necessity for the contemporary debate about photographic images and their participation in the construction of a territory's collective memory.

KEYWORDS:

Visual
anthropology;
Visual memory;
Photography;
Archive; Visual arts.

Alice Nin is a photographer and researcher based in Rio de Janeiro. Graduated in Anthropology at the Universidade Federal Fluminense (UFF) under the guidance of Oiara Bonilla. Worked as a scholarship holder of the Institutional Program for Scientific Initiation Scholarships (PIBIC) in a project of mapping the Visual Anthropology centers in Brazil (2018), supervised by Professor Ana Lúcia Ferraz (CAV - ABA), resulting in the creation of a website for the Visual Anthropology Committee of the Brazilian Anthropology Association (CAV-ABA). With the collective Norte Comum she has developed several projects that sought to build existence through the right to the city and circulation in urban seams of Rio de Janeiro. Currently she works as a camera assistant in audiovisual projects, and continues to develop her work as a photographer and researcher in Brazil. E-mail: alicelimanin@gmail.com

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