



***Portraits of
identification: the
image-archive as
memory protection***
***Retratos de identificação:
a imagem-arquivo como
morada da memória***

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Abstract: *Portraits of identification* (2014) offers, from its archivist and cinematographic montage, a new historical readability for the images made by the Brazilian military dictatorship. In case, the *mugshots* (the famous “prisoner photos”) and the images clandestinely captured by the military agents to accuse the then “enemies” of the regime. Displayed through time, transformed into archives, these images prove the deep violence and perversion perpetrated by the military organs from 1964. Thus, the article will probe the gesture of survival of the images-archive that, displayed through time, became historical inscriptions of the crimes committed by the Brazilian military regime.

Keywords: *Portraits of identification*; images-archive; mugshots; military dictatorship; memory.

Resumo: *Retratos de identificação* (2014) oferece, a partir de sua montagem arquivista e cinematográfica, uma nova legibilidade histórica para as imagens realizadas pela ditadura militar brasileira – no caso, os *mugshots* (as famosas “fotos de prisioneiro”) e as imagens capturadas de maneira clandestina pelos militares para acusar os então “inimigos” do regime. Alçadas ao tempo, tornadas arquivos, estas imagens comprovam a profunda violência e perversão perpetradas pelos órgãos militares a partir de 1964. Assim, o artigo sondará o gesto de sobrevivência das imagens-arquivo que, elevadas ao tempo, tornaram-se inscrições históricas e comprobatórias dos crimes cometidos pelo regime militar brasileiro.

Palavras-chave: *Retratos de identificação*; imagens-arquivo; *mugshots*; ditadura militar; memória.



Actually, don't we also feel
an explosion of air that involved those from the past?

Actually, the voices that we listen to,
don't they resonate the echo of other voices
that stopped sounding?

Walter Benjamin

Introduction

In 1989, Arlette Farge (2009), one of the most important French historians of the 20th century, evoked the profound and complex experience of the archives she attended. She called this experience of living *inside* the archives of *Le goût de l'archive* (the flavor of the archive), title of a precious essay in which the author digs up archived documents – and for so long forgotten – of those who lacked history, or, to use the words of Walter Benjamin (2012a), of those whose fates did not account for the official history, of those who shared in the obscurity of the world a *defeated history*, for being overcome by a gradual violence. Thus, Farge granted a possible physiognomy giving voice to the delinquents, illiterates, and garbage pickers of the 18th century in Paris, to make emerge from the darkness those men and women whose silhouettes were only projected in the judicial archives of the French 18th century.

Now, this vital experience – from within – that Arlette Farge describes seems primordial to us as an introduction to discuss the Brazilian documentary *Portraits of identification* (*Retratos de identificação*) (2014), directed by Anita Leandro, filmmaker and professor at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. Being an important researcher of the history of the archives of the Brazilian military dictatorship, Leandro, in her film *Portraits*, as Farge, follows Benjamin's wish: to rescue the names, physiognomies, places, and affective mark of three men and one woman (two living and two dead) deeply censored by the dictatorial horror, making the images-archive a stain of blood in time and, simultaneously, a fundamental testimony of the violence and humiliations carried out by the military agencies of that time.

Thus, this article will aim to find a gesture of survival of the archive in the film's mugshots: from the place they occupy in the national memory up to the aporetic issue of these images carried out by the perpetrators of military violence – the mugshots, photographs that would originally serve to record, document, and condemn the political resisters and that, over time, end up materializing the definitive proof of the crimes committed by the Brazilian military. Then, the article will propose

an investigation of the clandestine pictures taken by the military when they spied on people considered as “enemies.” Finally, the text will broadly discuss the question of the complex and fruitful game between cinematographic and archivist montage, showing the fundamental question that presents itself to films scholars from images and archive documents – to legitimize, indeed, that the archive will always tell us something about our history and origin.

The *archive affect* experience

In a text titled “Exploración, experiencia y emoción de archivo,” Vicente Sánchez-Biosca (2015) addresses the archive along with history and memory, inferring that the experience of any visual archive from the past has as inevitable consequence the encounter with death. It is the latter that always lies in the archives: the disappearance of those represented, of the visible places, of the beings whose images were frozen and that today can only be restored to our historical time thanks to the work of the archivist, the editor, or the artist. Sánchez-Biosca also proposes that the archive is not a mere “neutral repository of material,” even a “dormant deposit,” because an archive in fact, either because of its fragility or because of its tenacity, always imposes something on us:

An archive is not a neutral repository of material, a dormant deposit of information, apt to be consulted by historians and those interested in the past. An archive, from its mere constitution, speaks, expresses itself, imposes itself. The order in which its parts are structured is never casual or sudden. An archive does this by its omissions, since not all past units that have been registered will have been retained at the end to be part of the archive. [...] The omissions, the silences, the classification are manifestations of power [...], [the] archive determines the limits of the speakable, the recent turn that happened to be called “archival turn” insists that an archive is always a place of production of knowledge. (SÁNCHEZ-BIOSCA, 2015, p. 220)

This archival turn that Sánchez-Biosca mentions is undoubtedly connected to what Jaimie Baron (2014) called archive affect: the archive as turn and as affection, but also as material inscription of time and as historical memory. Thus, *Portraits of identification*, both for its director Anita Leandro and for its still alive witnesses (Antônio Roberto Espinosa and Reinaldo Guarani Simões), comes to legitimize and trigger the presence of the archive as a decisive factor, helping to tell an unofficial history – precisely a history of the defeated. In the archivist presence that the film

imposes on its witnesses, something is inscribed: the confrontation with the images of the past that Antônio and Reinaldo face opens the inescapable scars of traumatic memory. From the images-archive that they hold – feel – in their hands, a series of unpredictable events is triggered: recorded instants (of themselves or friends) in photographs that they until then were unaware of, a fissure of memory, therefore, that allows the non-recognition of those moments frozen by the photographic act, enabling the emergence of the recollection and its impossibility – as pointed out by Todorov – to fully restore the past:

Observing the first two phases of the remembrance effort, there is another conclusion: that memory is not absolutely opposed to oblivion. The two terms that form a contrast are deletion (oblivion) and conservation: memory is, always and necessarily, an interaction of both. The full restitution of the past is something impossible. [...] Memory is forcibly a selection: some marks of the event are preserved, others will be disregarded, at once or little by little, and subsequently forgotten. That is why it is so confusing to call *memory* the capacity that the organizers have to conserve information: this operation lacks a constitutive mark of memory, namely, oblivion. (TODOROV, 2002, p. 153)

The experience of triggered memory was only possible, for these witnesses, because the haptic experience in feeling the images-archive was present. In this gesture of granting the image-archive touch to Antônio and Reinaldo, Anita Leandro finds elsewhere in memory, in other archive documents, the living proofs of the past, the pronounced words, the gestures, the strength, the intention of resistance; and in the posture of the bodies – in their expressions of pain – the events experienced by those lives whose only way out was to respond with their body.

Mugshots as records of violence: images performed by perpetrators

The mugshots are pictures taken by the perpetrators – in the case of *Portraits of identification*, the images produced by the Brazilian military dictatorship to represent its “enemies” as soon as they were arrested and taken to the police stations or to the torture centers. The mugshots are also known as the famous “prisoner pictures,” in which the recluse individual is photographed in at least two distinct angles: frontally and in profile. Being a material made by the agents of violence, the mugshots in Anita Leandro’s film have the fundamental role of recording and identifying the images and times of torture, humiliation, and death perpetrated from 1964 by the Brazilian dictatorial regime.

Chael Charles Schreier (Figure 1), a medical student, along with Antônio Roberto Espinosa (commander of VAR-Palmares), Maria Auxiliadora Lara Barcelos (also a medical student and VAR-Palmares militant), and Reinaldo Guarani Sobral (member of the armed group ALN), is one of the four protagonists of *Portraits of identification*. The mugshots of Chael may be, among all the pictures present in the film, the most emblematic because they announce, from his face and body, an experience of *resistance* and *annihilation* simultaneously. Experience of *resistance*: Chael Schreier under a radical regime, before being incarcerated and tortured, decides to eat only a single leaf of lettuce and drink two cups of water a day during his period as a fugitive from the military dictatorship and, in a few weeks, loses around 40 kilos – Chael's resistance occurs through the degradation of the body as the only possible corporeal response to the torturers. Experience of *annihilation*: with his body weakened by the lack of nutrients and mainly by the constant “beatings, kicks, sexual abuse, and electric shocks” (LEANDRO, 2016, p. 112), Chael does not resist the first night of torture and passes away. On this specific episode, Anita Leandro, in her research, had just uncovered one of the many lies of the military murderers:

The body (Chael's) was taken to the Central Army Hospital, autopsied under the order of the hospital director, the physician and general Galeno Franco, and handed over to the IML. Without knowing what had happened at Vila Militar, the IML handed over the body and autopsy to the family, and the death of the student was immediately disclosed in the national and international press, frustrating the expectations of those responsible for the student's death to cover up the crime. It was the first public denunciation of torture in the military regime, disclosed in the cover story of Veja magazine, no. 66, of December 10, 1969. Captain Celso Lauria, in charge of the IPM of VAR-Palmares and one of the leaders of the torture team that killed Schreier, forged at the time a document stating there was “a need for the use of physical energy to effectuate the prison, resulting in the lethal injuries verified in the militant's body.” The document, signed by Captain Lauria on February 27, 1970, three months after the student's death, omits the existence of the autopsy record, which verified 11 broken ribs, rupture of the mesocolon and mesentery, bruises throughout the body, several internal bleedings and even, implicitly, medical assistance to torture, by reporting “six suture stitches in the chin region.” (LEANDRO, 2016, p. 112)



Figure 1: The frontal mugshot of Chael's face.

Anita Leandro discovers the truth inscribed before the already dead face of Chael. And, by this revelation, thanks to the archive, she makes the hitherto forgotten story of a man come out from the darkness and touch us. This exit from darkness could only exist because of the archivist gesture of the director and researcher, who, by finding the documents issued by the military agents responsible for the death of the political resister, discovers the true history of this brutally annihilated human life. The truth about Schreier's death culminates in the comparison by the montage that Leandro makes in her documentary (Figure 2).

Thus, the perpetual gesture of the military lie emerges, breaks, and the truth is finally able, thanks to the cinematographic montage, to say what kept it silent for 45 years:

Captain Lauria had no idea that, 45 years later, another police document, besides the autopsy report, would join the prosecution dossier and definitively disprove his false version of the facts. Shortly before being taken to the Vila Militar, Chael had been photographed in the DOPS/GB, frontally and in profile, with bare torso, in an approximate plane at waist height. The negatives of these photographs were located at APERJ during the research for the film *Portraits of identification* and, once turned into positives, showed that the student had no injuries waist upward [...]. Confronted with these negatives, the document forged by the torturers testifies the very methods of repression, bringing to light the official history that they attempted to manufacture then.

These negatives are what historiography calls “unwritten, involuntary testimonies,” “testimonies, despite them.” (LEANDRO, 2016, p. 113)

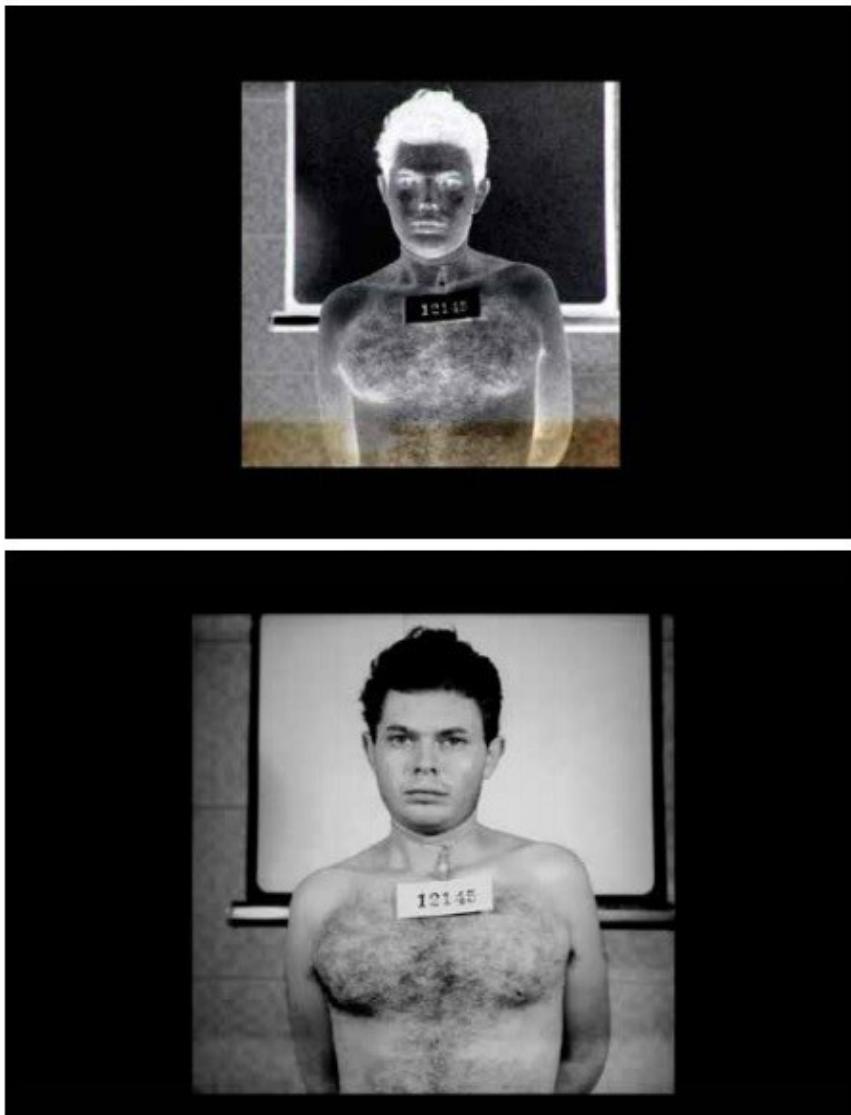


Figure 2: the negative and the photograph of Chael’s frontal mugshot taken at DOPS/GB.

What Marc Bloch (2002) in a posthumous book calls “unwritten, involuntary testimonies,” “testimonies, despite them” is the case where the negative and the photograph of Chael’s frontal and bare torso (Figure 2) breaks

the veil that covered this historical and mortal lie, in the endless exercise that the archivist has of verifying the historical sources of an event that points or weaknesses or falsehoods: “there where the indication is, one must verify it: because experience proves that it can lie. Is it missing? It is important to restore it” (BLOCH, 2002, p. 95). Leandro actually reestablishes the truth, or rather seeks at all costs to inscribe it in our present to annihilate the farce from an archivist and archaeological excavation through the images-archive that the Brazilian military dictatorship hid for so long.

These mugshots of Chael are images taken by the perpetrators and, as such, record an enemy that takes this role fully from the moment when his “photographic vestige” is incorporated into a record. Documenting is, for the perpetrators, contributing to repression and, for this reason, these images of detainees are impregnated with the gaze and intention of their captors” (SÁNCHEZ-BIOSCA, 2016, p. 55). But, in the light of time, these images recorded by the military perpetrators end up *leaking their reason*, that is, end up going against the real reason for their manufacture (the proof and record that the political resisters were criminals, terrorists) and become historical and legitimate documents of torture, humiliation, and murder. The image-archive in *Portraits of identification* performs the gesture that Walter Benjamin (2012a, 2012b) so strongly wished: to give a possible name and physiognomy to beings belonging to a history of the defeated, because the true historical construction is aimed at those who have no name (the *Namenlosen*).

Another mugshot that calls our attention is the one of Maria Auxiliadora, or Dora. As Chael, she was also a student of medicine and one of the two characters already deceased. Perhaps knowing about the deaths of Chael and Dora (she committed suicide by jumping in front of a train during her political exile in Germany in 1976), perhaps because they were only *present in the film as archives*, is what makes these moments of photographic record – for both, a kind of perpetuation of their compulsorily violated, humiliated, exhausted physiognomies – touch us in such an eloquent and gruesome way. Perhaps because these two characters, despite the powerful and present testimonies of Antônio and Reinaldo, are the real reason for the existence of a film as *Portraits of identification* – that is: the reason for giving a name and physiognomy, whatever the cost, to lives destroyed by the Brazilian military dictatorship.

And in this attempt to offer a name and a physiognomy at all costs sought by the film, this mugshot of Maria Auxiliadora taken in 1969 (there are other

mugshots of Dora present in the film made in 1971, but we will limit ourselves to this one in this text) ends up granting what only seems to be possible at the moment when the time, from the brief instant of a gesture, of a human contraction is frozen by the photographic act. The “prisoner picture” taken by the military perpetrators to record and document the then medical student reveals to us a secret unknown until the moment when Leandro, in her work of historical and archival immersion, ultimately unravels it in this archive image: as in Chael’s mugshot, Dora’s mugshot (Figure 3), when looked attentively and approximately (Figure 4) ends up making us see the tears in her eyes.

It is then that Anita Leandro uses the film and archivist montage to accomplish not only a breakthrough – this tear that Dora has in her face, contracted tear, yes, tear whose natural flow she tries to inhibit after all, because she does not want to give the pleasure that her violators so much wished: to expose to the eyes of the criminals her cry of humiliation, of exhaustion, of torture – but also a dispute for the historical narrative alongside the images-archive:

Removing from the archives the photographs produced by the police during the dictatorship, therefore, engages the cinematographic montage in another dispute for the historical narrative, this time, with the images, that is, alongside them, in a solidary manner regarding the frailty of this type of document and the seriousness of the silence it includes. (LEANDRO, 2016, p. 107)

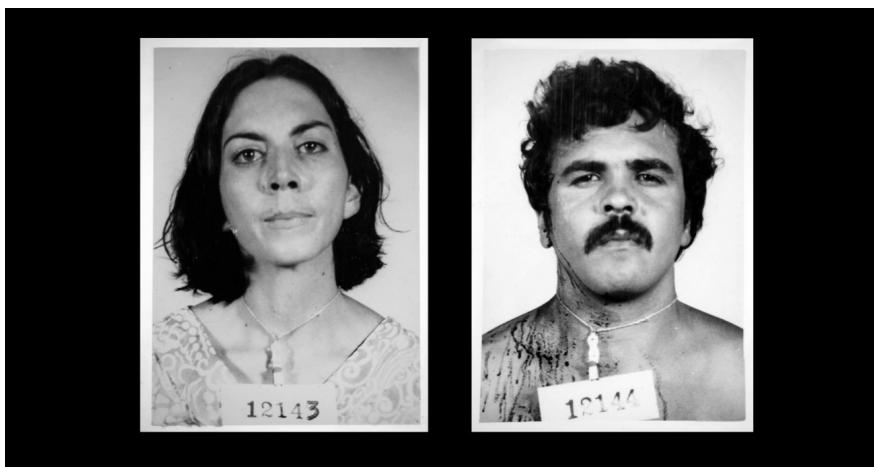


Figure 3: The mugshots of Dora dressed and of Antônio – naked and bloodied after another session of torture and beating performed by the military.



Figure 4: With the approximate photograph of Dora's face, the tears in her eyes become perceptible. Photograph taken at DOPS in 1969.

However poor and insufficient an image of a given historical time may seem, as an archive it requires of us a careful examination to understand its founding gesture: the look that engenders it. And if the photograph of Maria Auxiliadora is, in the light of its realization, a photographic act fixed by the perpetrator, from its survival, both in time and in memory, this look of the founders of violence is confronted with the look of this same image transformed in archive: the sudden collision of the one who now looks at this photograph as a crucial testimony of the violence of the Brazilian military regime. Thus, Dora's gaze can be read as one of many other “responses to the gaze of authority” (SÁNCHEZ-BIOSCA, 2014b, p. 99) that recorded it.

But this representation is not enough to explain the inexhaustible strength of the photographs; in them the body assumes a second level: the unrepeatable instant of a shock of glances; a spark that registers it, the beings that discover themselves in front of the camera expressed in a gesture, conscious or not, of the last time they were photographed, not for anything other than to die. Therefore, the photographic act, especially the images performed by the perpetrators of violence, has something of performative: more than discovering an enemy, it creates it; more than opening a record of the detainee, it is their condemnation to death or torture. The photograph retreats, then, the instant, but makes what will occur afterwards gravitate to it.

This is how, when writing about the mugshots that Rithy Panh countless times uses in his films, Vicente Sánchez-Biosca wonders:

how did this snapshot operate? What sequence of actions was it part of? With what purpose the image of detainees was documented considering they would be executed without hesitation? For what purpose was it preserved? What other documents completed the criminal file? [...] Without seeking an answer to them [the questions], it becomes impossible to discern the role of photography in the process and, therefore, we are unarmed before any alternative use of these images. (SÁNCHEZ-BIOSCA, 2014a, p. 122)

If in fact the mugshots once served to file and document the “enemies” of the military regime, today their function is completely reversed: to *identify* the images once “lost” (in fact, images that were always considered secret by the dictatorship agencies and therefore kept under lock and key from all public knowledge) that increasingly emerge and that will contribute to draw conclusions on the seriousness of this totalitarian crime that fractured the history of Brazil. These images – and the photographs and documents that Leandro exhibits in her film are nothing other than the tip of the iceberg – at the same time being urgent and fundamental, carry with themselves – by the thickness of the trauma, by the intensity of violence – the history of the political and human sinking of our country, thus crystallizing this historical Brazilian time of profound repression as a “stone of pain that escapes redemption” (SÁNCHEZ-BIOSCA, 2016, p. 59).

And if the mugshots made by the Brazilian military from 1964 served to decide on the directions of humiliation, torture, and murder, they now force them to assume responsibility before History:

Made to identify, subjugate, and control the prisoner, these portraits now help to understand the very device of repression that produced them. A process of identification in a double sense is thus established around these photographs of prisoners. Today, they act as connectors between the past and the present, which is how Ricœur names the archives. (LEANDRO, 2015, p. 2)

Montage and testimony

Anita Leandro (2016, p. 104) says that the dissemination of the images of the dictatorship requires, today, from the filmmaker, a threefold position: the dispute *for*

the images, the dispute *with* the images, and the inevitable dispute that is established *between* the images:

The dissemination of the images of the dictatorship requires, today, from the filmmaker, a threefold position regarding these materials. First of all, one must undertake a dispute *for* the images, that is, for the right to access these documents, considered state secret for a long time. This also requires a dispute *with* the images, that is, in favor of them, apprehending them as objects, at the same time, aesthetic and political, irreducible, for this reason, to the role of mere illustration of historical content. Finally, the cinema must also know how to mediate the inevitable dispute that is established *between* the images, at the montage table, when the different documentary sources on the period are intertwined. (LEANDRO, 2016, p. 104)

Now, this requirement legitimately postulated by Leandro is simultaneously crystallized as a gesture of rescue (from history through the archives: documents, images, etc.) and montage (carefully selecting the archives that should be shown), thus imposing a decision making in the triple confrontation: for, with, and between the images. But what would be, then, “taking a position”? For Georges Didi-Huberman, positioning oneself is not an easy gesture:

to know, one must take a position. It is not an easy gesture. Taking position is locating oneself two times, at least, on the two fronts that entail every position, because every position is, necessarily, relative. For example, it is about facing something; but we must also consider everything that we move away from, the out-of-reach that exists behind us, which we may deny but that largely conditions our movement, and therefore our position. Taking position is wishing, demanding something, situating oneself in the present and aspiring to a future. But all this exists on the background of a temporality that precedes us, encompasses us, calls our memory even in our attempts at oblivion, of rupture, of absolute novelty. To know, it is necessary to know what we want, but also, it is necessary to know where our not-knowing, our latent fears, our unconscious desires are located. Therefore, to know it is necessary to rely on at least two resistances, two meanings of the word *resistance*: the one that dictates our philosophical or political will to break the barriers of opinion (the resistance that says *no* to this, *yes* to that) but, also, the one that dictates a psychic propensity to put other barriers in the always dangerous access to the profound meaning of our desire to know (the resistance that no longer knows very well what it consents to or what it wants to resign). (DIDI-HUBERMAN, 2008, p. 11-12)

Therefore, we can react to the question of the threefold position from the images postulated by Leandro by saying that this position is, first of all, a montage and, because it addresses the issue of the documents made by the perpetrators of the military regime, this montage requires the historical absorption of an experience of the testimony:

[The testimony] works for them [survivors] as a bridge out of survival and of entry into life. In this testimony, fragments are mixed, as shrapnel [metonymies] from their traumatic past, to an unstable and normally inaccurate narrative, but that allows the creation of the aforementioned “volume” and, therefore, a new fertile place for life. (SELIGMANN-SILVA, 2010, p. 11)

Knowing in this way that the cinematographic montage as experience of the testimony is, in *Portraits of identification*, a search crossed by the memory of pain, Leandro does not allow this emergence of the past through its images to be a type of veneration in which they elicit a melancholy use of the archive – by their distance from ours, by what they contain in their material aspect: their texture, their shape, the suspension of a time passed and completed that they suggest.

Walter Benjamin, in a 1930 essay, was already betting that the actual montage would start from the document (BENJAMIN, 1930), therefore, from the archive. But this start is, in our view, a start of unfailing dialectic. The dialectical montage occurs through an *opening* and there are at least two distinct meanings to understand the term “open” (opening): opening as a gesture of enlargement (we say “open the mind”), but “opening” is also hurting (lacerating), as a surgeon who, to perform a surgical procedure, needs to open – lacerate – the patient’s skin to find – and try to remedy – the pain/disease. Thus, to dialectically create a montage is to open (lacerate) the times of the archives in *Portraits of identification*, and, to open (lacerate) something, ones must, before, *touch* it – that is why Anita Leandro, when researching such images and documents from the past, ends up touching them, and, in this tactility, her experience becomes both testimony (showing the crimes perpetrated and revealing the lies created by the military dictatorship) and archaeological excavation (revealing to the world documents and images unknown until then, ignorance that even occurs among the perpetrators of such archives of violence).

It is then through this *opening of time* – rescuing the images of the past and granting them the chance to emerge in our present – that the cinematographic montage in *Portraits* exerts a power in its same function of merging (of inscribing) the times of its images. This reverberates as soon as Leandro decides to put, in the opening of the documentary, an excerpt from the testimony that Maria Auxiliadora

grants to the film *No es hora de llorar* (It's not time to cry, 1971), by Pedro Chaskel and Luiz Alberto Sanz (Figure 5). To this testimony, Leandro *pastes* images performed clandestinely by the perpetrators of violence (Figures 6 and 7), showing them following Dora and calling her “target,” that is, something that needs and will be “shot down” soon.



Figure 5: Maria Auxiliadora (Dora) in testimonial for the film *No es hora de llorar*.

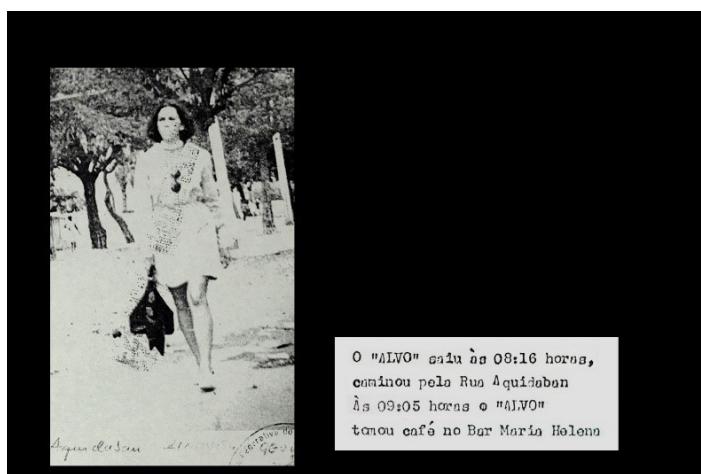


Figure 6: Dora being called “TARGET” by the clandestine perpetrator.



Figure 7: Another clandestine image of Dora taken by the military.

Let us quickly pay attention to the question of this *clandestine image* of Dora carried out by the perpetrators of military violence. This image-archive ultimately installs itself, from its intention, in an ideological position completely distinct from the clandestine images taken by Alberto Herrera (formerly known as Judeu Alex, one of the members of the *Sonderkommando* of Auschwitz – Birkenau) and by Claude Lanzmann in *Shoah* (1985), clandestinely registering the then former director of the extermination camp of Treblinka, Franz Suchomel. The images taken by Lanzmann and especially by Herrera (Alex) exist as a type of *terminal record* of the image as definitive testimony of the horror: they serve to bring to the visible world the definitive incrimination of a man (Suchomel by Lanzmann) and of a system (Nazism by Herrera). The image of Dora, in turn, shows the most perverse side of the clandestine gesture of the military: the incrimination of an innocent person – as far as it is known, there was no crime committed by her, but only her political resistance to the dictatorial regime. The “clandestinity” of the military regime, as we know, was not only limited to records of images: how many graves were not opened, how many bodies were not murdered in the light of a total secret, in the light of all clandestinity?



Figure 8: The photograph taken clandestinely by Alberto Herrera at Auschwitz.



Figure 9: Franz Suchomel filmed clandestinely by Lanzmann.

Thus, the montage coordinated by Leandro in *Portraits of identification*, thanks to its rigor and tactility, becomes the focal point of the narrative, enabling history itself to redefine what actually existed – and insists on existing with its falsehood – behind the networks of relations of the military agencies, therefore granting to the researcher, archivist, or artist the chance to heuristically multiply their points of view and achieve the reestablishment of the truth. Therefore, the montage offers one more possibility to read the images, to exercise their inadvertent legibility from them, because the meanings rigorously work in this dialectic, since “speaking of the *legibility of the images* is not only to say, in fact, that they claim a description (*Beschreibung*), a discursive construction (*Beschriftung*), a restitution of meaning (*Bedeutung*),” but that the montage is able to confer to the images “their inadvertent legibility” (DIDI-HUBERMAN, 2014, p. 17).

The montage as rebirth of historical legibility

The montage in *Portraits of identification* exerts a dialectical inscription in the bosom of its event. In other words, the montage (dialectical as all true montage; but also archivist, historical) of this film offers us, whatever the cost, the possibility of a new – and inadvertent – legibility of the history of some images of the Brazilian military dictatorship. Unlike Barthes (1984, p. 134), who said one could never *read* a photograph, Anita Leandro not only grants a reading, but also listens to this archival inscription from the past from the imagetic fusions, because the “montage makes one listen to the archive” (LEANDRO, 2015, p. 15).

Leandro thus *invents*, gives new meanings to the images of the military regime, which, merged, assembled, and reassembled to exhaustion, cease to be what could be merely considered banal images (a record number of a political prisoner, a simple signature of someone incarcerated) to be transformed into an imagetic testimony (Figure 10). The montage in *Portraits of identification* makes the image-archive live, granting it a new chance to *scream* its history.

In this montage (Figure 10), the signature of Maria Auxiliadora Lara Barcelos, Antônio Roberto Espinosa, and Chael Charles Schreier place alongside their registration numbers as prisoners. The signatures of the three placed alongside their registration numbers end up exercising, after all, a game of powerful images that Leandro chooses to merge into this *positioning*: where the numbering appears to normalize the prisoners, to grant them a status of quantity – of reification – rather than humanity, their signatures end up becoming non-transferable and unmatchable marks of memory – if the number can be “copied,”

the signature, even in the most perfect copy, will always be forged. Thus, Leandro contradicts in this gesture the question between the reification of human life as numbering and its resistance to disappearance, since the montage allows, by merging number and signature, a new historical legibility to be granted to these archive documents.

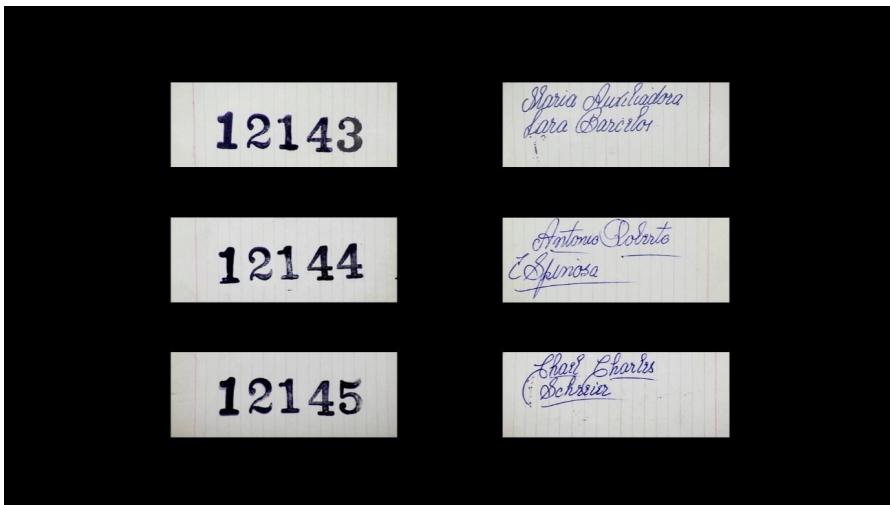


Figure 10: The numbers placed side by side with the signatures of the prisoners give a new meaning to these files.

The montage of *Portraits of identification* is, without any doubt, a profound intellectual and affective exercise, and also an “ethical and aesthetic” one (LEANDRO, 2015, p. 14). It arranges and recomposes, thus interpreting by fragments instead of trying to explain the totality. It shows deep gaps instead of superficial coherences – at the risk of showing superficial gaps instead of deep coherences. One of its most powerful moments lies in the image of Chael Schreier’s death certificate issued by the Military Medical Board – and, as we have already seen, the reasons for his death were totally forged by the military. Crossed by the voice of Antônio Roberto Espinosa, who narrates the report of the military physicians in a detailed manner, the fusion conceived by Leandro from two images strictly follows the theory of Sergei Eisenstein: that the images act by “attraction,” and, through the “dialectical shock” between two images, a third one appears (EISENSTEIN, 1969).

And the third image produced by the montage carried out by Leandro from the “attraction,” the “dialectical shock” of two images – Chael’s frontal

mugshot (Figure 1) and the death certificate made by the military physicians (Figure 11) – ends up performing what might be the great *tour de force* of the film. First, the death certificate by itself (Figure 11) starts to be filled by a face, by an image captured by the perpetrators of violence (Figure 12), and finally, Chael's face takes the whole fusion, the whole montage, in an aporetic dialectical exercise carried out by Leandro (Figure 13).

Chael's face resembles what Adorno (2008) called “mutilated life” (in this face where a contact, a response, a gesture of altruism cruelly lacks). *Touching* this face mutilated by the insular violence of torture, these eyes frozen for a moment of indecipherable terror, this mysterious position that is being elaborated by Chael's face, this physiognomy that in its own resistance seems to cry as last wish only the truth of its history – of his political right to be a subject.

Chael's face crossed by his death certificate seems to be linked in a haunted manner to the idea of *punctum* theorized by Barthes:

This time, I am not the one who is going to pick it up [...], it is part of the scene, like an arrow, and it comes through me. In Latin there is a word to designate this wound, this sting, this mark made by a pointy instrument; this word would serve me in particular as it also refers to the idea of punctuation and the pictures I talk about are, in fact, as if punctuated, sometimes even mottled, with these sensitive points; these marks, these wounds are precisely points. [...] because *punctum* is also sting, small hole, small stain, small cut, and also dice throw. The *punctum* of a photograph is this chance that, in it, *stings* me (but also mortifies me, hurts me). (BARTHES, 1984, p. 46)

The *punctum* proposed by Barthes in *La chambre claire* also translates a value to the word “detail,” therefore, a point of singularity that crosses the surface of the photograph that hurts us, stings us, and perhaps even murders us precisely when we realize the dimension of violence that can exist in an image. Therefore, if the *punctum* is the vestige, the fissure of a photograph that *pulsates* before us – for its excessive pain, for its once unapparent stain now revealed – we could infer that Chael's face brings back, because of the fissure of his own death, the very idea of the photograph as the “return of the dead” – there where only human death can hurt us, sting us with such sharpness.

Thus, Chael's already mortified face does not seem, precisely and painfully, a type of resuscitation? The image of Chael's face overlapping his death document (Figure 11) turns out to become a ghost of truth that haunts the

lie present in his death record, the incursion of his ghostly trail, of the image-archive that survived, of the last image as an inscription materialization of his face, of his life.

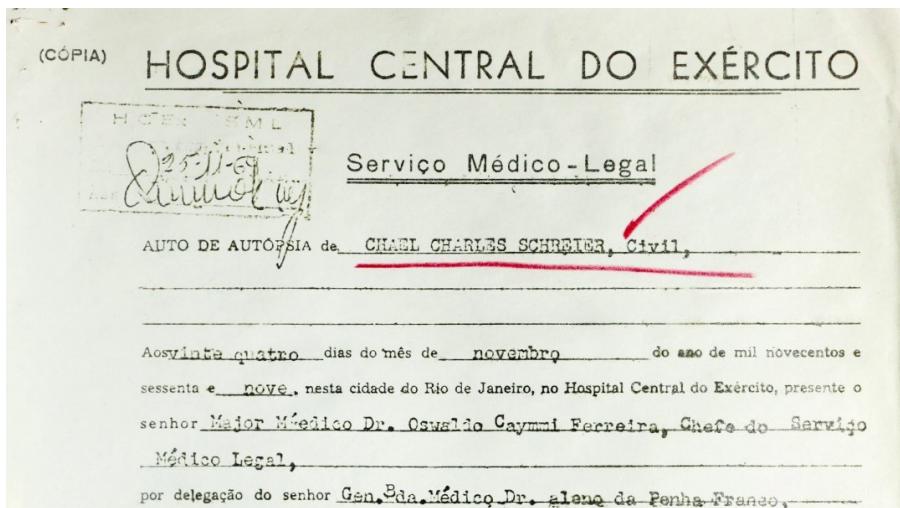


Figura 11: o atestado de óbito de Chael expedido pela junta médica militar.

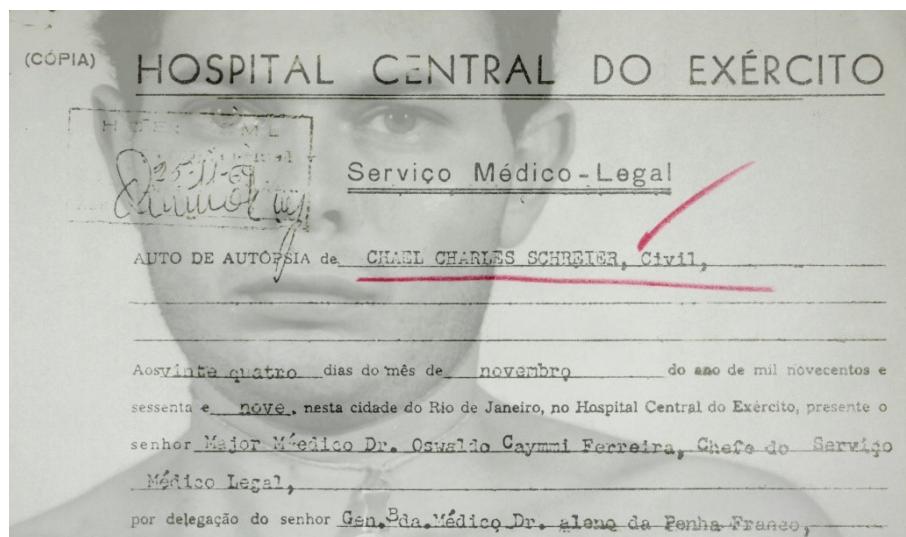


Figure 12: Chael's face starting to overlap the death certificate.

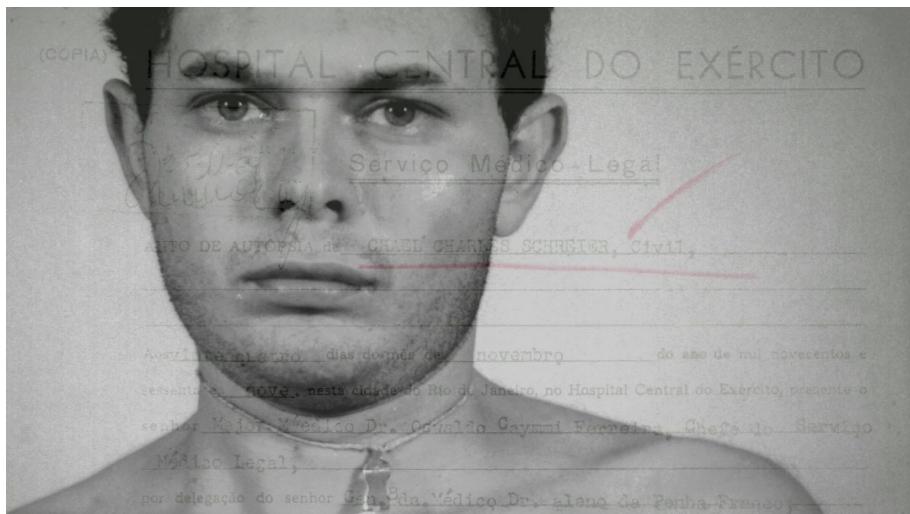


Figure 13: Chael's face almost completely overlapping the death certificate.

Final considerations: the archive and its path

In Brazil, the period between the late 1980s and the 1990s can be considered a milestone on the issue of the right of access to archive documents, and, as Michael Cook reminds us, in this period most countries proceeded towards a review of their legislation, especially countries such as Brazil, which have undergone a dictatorial political process (COOK, 1999). In this way the archive always seems to cry out for a gesture of path, for a movement that will recover in the present the past of its history, the real origin of its event.

Thus, *Portraits of identification*, at least what we did of this important film about the memory of the Brazilian military repression, was only a portion of the many reading possibilities that the film provides to those who truly want to discover a crucial part of our country's history. Anita Leandro's film is an archivist inscription in recent Brazilian history and is part of the growing and important proliferation of archive cinema around the world. Therefore, we can imagine a part of all the care and rigor that Leandro had to choose the archives that she shows in her film, since they "depend on the care of those who have the competence to question them and thus defend them, rescue them, give them assistance" (RICCEUR, 2000, p. 213). Leandro undoubtedly had competence to question, defend, rescue, and give assistance to the archives shown in *Portraits*.



Portraits of identification is a film that moves and unsettles – both the body and the memory. It is that type of “excessive meaning” that Arlette Farge (2009, p. 36) mentions: that when the archive is *read*, it haunts and emotionally unsettles its *reader* – this is the very idea of a new historical legibility that the image-archive makes possible to all the present. But these are fundamental astonishments and shocks, urgent because the images of repression “carry with them traces of crimes still unpunished and that need, for this reason, a minimally materialistic approach, to make the long ignored historical evidence now visible and/or audible” (LEANDRO, 2016, p. 111).

Finally, *Portraits* has the notion that talking about men and women from the past without taking the precaution of enunciating the body dimension on which their spirits and intelligences are placed is to forget a large part of themselves. Thus, Leandro’s film can also be interpreted as a relentless search for the *time of mourning* – by the elimination of its impossibility –, for the respect for the lives destroyed mercilessly, because as Jeanne Marie Gagnebin writes (2000, p. 110): the “impossibility of mourning responds to the impossibility of true birth, because only the recognition of death allows the fullness of life.” Thanks to Anita Leandro’s film, Chael and Dora were able to live again.

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