

## ANACHRONISTIC DYSTOPIAS: CONSTRUCTIVE TENSIONS BETWEEN DIGITAL AND ANALOG IMAGING

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**ABSTRACT:** The processes of constructing images that take the intersection as artistic strategy encompass much of the current production in the visual arts. This article discusses the recent productions of Flavya Mutran and Jander Rama, whose practices move between the anachronisms of the processes of analog image production and the dystopian vision related to advances in digital images. The transition of these productions through printmaking, drawing and photography raises questions about the stresses and displacements of the subject in contemporary art, caused by the clash between old and new technologies.

**KEYWORDS:** Anachronism. Dystopia. Analog image. Digital image.

### INTRODUCTION

The intersections that cause tension in visual arts can be presented in several different ways, and one of the possibilities is in the frequently antagonistic relation between new and old technologies. This is possible through the temporal concomitance of several languages and supports derived from different periods of humanity. However, the regular and even more accelerated emergence of new image production mediums does not necessarily replace or void the previous techniques. Paulo Sérgio Duarte affirms:

As always in the history of art, when examining techniques, it is best to coordinate in the investigation a system of simultaneous coexistence of several languages derived from mediums of different ages with their specific problems than to think exclusively in an axis of replacements in which the old is always surpassed by the newer. (Duarte, 1999, p. 6)

The scientific and technological development applied to the market follows this logic of image production primarily connected to more efficient mechanisms of image diffusion. This is not the logic of visual arts, given that in art, all mediums become possibilities. Concerning this idea, Duarte also affirms that:

It is suitable to insist that every “evolutionist” perspective of art, when explaining the development at the light of the inevitable progress of science and technique, does not account for its historical dimension, much more complex than the simple unfolding of technology in the axis of time. (*idem*, p. 6)

Taking these issues under consideration, this article is about two different productions that are, however, similar in their research of hybrid processes of image construction. From digital impersonality to the marks of manual operations, the image is located outside of time, emphasizing the anachronistic content of these productions.

### (IM)PROBABLE: BETWEEN TECHNICAL DESIGN AND PRINTMAKING, BY JANDER LUIZ RAMA

The series *(im)probable*, part of a research I have been developing for my masters in visual poetics (PPGAV/UFRGS), has an intersection of languages, belonging to two different systems. These systems are industrial technical design and printmaking. Between them there is a tension between the digitally produced image (the technical design made through CAD)<sup>1</sup> and the analog image of printmaking. The focal point that potentiates oppositions and tensions among systems is given basically by the use/non-use of machines. Historically, blueprints and technical manuals have undergone several printmaking techniques, such as woodcut, metal engraving, lithography and heliography. This occurred due to the need to produce several copies of a blueprint for industrial purposes or due to the proliferation of manuals. In the transition of analog to digital, the machine assumed a preponderant role as image production tool. Machines overflowing with electromechanical, electrical and digital devices have generated gradual ruptures, finally leading to technical design being completely produced by digital tools and electronic printing processes. It is currently inconceivable to produce designs for engineering and architecture manually.

<sup>1</sup> Computer-aided design is the generic name of computer systems used in engineering, geology, geography, architecture and design to assist in projects and technical designs.

My interest in technical design (see figure 1) came from academic and professional experience. With technical training in industrial informatics,<sup>2</sup> having worked some years in the area, and having studied mechanical engineering, I wound up assimilating industrial technical design as a cognitive language and potentially poetic language. And printmaking emerged as a second interest, mainly in what lacks when dealing with the production of digital designs: time, artisanality and imprecision.

In *Implant for civil construction* (see figure 2), one of the works in the series *(im)probable*, the process begins with the construction of images through a CAD software and image editors. Some of the drawings that compose the project, such as the human figures, are made freehand and later digitalized. With the graphical elements finished and the blueprint ready, the later is printed inversely, a necessary part of the printmaking process. The printmaking technique used is linocut.<sup>3</sup> The inverted image is then transferred manually to the rubber mold with pen and carbon and then furrows are created with the gouge following the drawn lines. The following steps are respectively inking, using a rubber roll, and paper printing, through continuous movements of a wooden spoon, using the manual style of Japanese printing. Thus, at the time of the printing, the visual result is a board with white lines generated by the furrows.

In the works contained in this series, figuration and graphical elements such as lines, hatches, points and traces are brought from technical design and added up to the subtleties of the textures and marks left by the analog printmaking processes, more specifically linocut. Visually, in this case, printmaking does not contribute to the traditional game of dark and light, but with the textures and marks of the tools themselves of the printmaking and printing processes. Therefore, the analog printmaking process added to the digital image produced via CAD end up uniting the artisan and the engineer.

The artisan is antagonist to the engineer. The first deals directly with the reality of nature, with concrete objects. The second makes mental conceptions, dealing with abstract objects (Simondon, 1958, p. 107). Between manual operations and purely mental conceptions there

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A technician in industrial informatics is educated and trained to work in companies in the areas of project, implementation and maintenance of industrial control equipment.

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Linocut is an image reproduction technique in which the drawing is engraved (hollowed) in a plaque that resembles an eraser using gouges (small chisels) as tool.

is a place of tension for the subject. In a first moment, the role of the engineer is preponderant. In a second moment there is an extension of intellectual attitude, given by a commitment to manual operations, which lead to another experience of time, completely different than the previous operation. The artisan deals directly with matter, suffering the reaction of tools and the material used. The printmaker is an artisan. On the other hand, the engineer applies scientific knowledge, geometry, mathematics and physics in projects and ideas that purely permeate the mental operations.

But the intersection cannot be resumed to the field of techniques. In these works, intersections also occur in the field of figuration, mainly in the insertion of the human figure in the midst of the standardized codes of technical design. The human figure is a completely strange element to mechanical technical design, even when related to the design of human bone prosthetics. In these works, human figures and anatomic parts are not simply juxtaposed to mechanical figures, but are an integral part of the poetic, resonating with the intersections between artisanality of (biological) printmaking and (technological) digital image. The anatomic elements follow a descriptive logic of the traditional illustrated anatomy books. They are illustrations with some degree of detail that are a graphical synthesis of organs and anatomically classified parts. Thus, the cyborg<sup>4</sup> myth emerges as a hybrid subject between machine and biological being. The figure of the cyborg, hybrid, synthesizes the current nature of images:

[...] undoubtedly, digital art is above all an art of Hybridization; hybridization of the constitutive forms of an image always in process, between two possible states — dimorphic, metastable, self-generated. Hybridization between all images, including optical images, paintings, drawings, photography, film and television, from the moment they are digitalized. (Couchot, 1999, p. 46)

These image producing intersections can be in the core of issues related to the subject, the subject of art. The antagonistic positions between engineer and artisan can be a place of transit between experiences and feelings. Even possessing the advantage and access to computerized image production, I do not disdain the analog operations in my production, taking advantage of what each one offers, mainly for the possibility of experiencing two moments. In

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A cyborg is a cybernetic organism. In other words, it is an organism gifted with organic and cybernetic parts, generally for the purpose of increasing capabilities with artificial technology.

the omnipresence of assuming two roles — the place of the hybrid — I find a place between manual and technological, between man and machine.

(IM)PERFECT: SIMULATED IDENTITIES OF THE *BIOSHOT* SERIES, BY FLAVYA MUTRAN PEREIRA

The variety of techniques and resources currently available for all sorts of photographic image manipulation — even by someone who does not dominate the language — has become a fact. Dozens of free software solutions, games and apps are network shared as artifices of the multimillionaire market of digital photography to attract new users from all layers of society. At the same time in which digital processes have brought innumerable advantages and advances for the circulation of information in our time, one can also notice certain melancholy among lovers of photography in face of the imminent danger of disappearance of traditional processes, today replaced by new mediums and uses of the digital era.

The number of adepts of analog photographic processes is growing, clubs and research groups are established, within and outside the academy, interested in daguerreotypes, pinholes, lomographs, polaroids and so many other traditional supports derived from the artisanality of the author. This tendency seems to confirm a common movement in periods of great social and technological advances, in which techniques in disuse or past aesthetics are recovered as a way of rehabilitating or inventing traditions.

For Marshall McLuhan, there will always be pockets of resistance to technological advances in several fields of knowledge, for “all new technologies bring on the cultural blues, just as the old ones evoke phantom pain after they have disappeared” (McLuhan, 1971, p.16). There is in fact a sort of phantom pain that spreads out as a reflection of the change in usual procedures, as if they were part of the body itself. At the end of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, not only languages, machinery and photographic products of the past are recovered, but certain aesthetic styles have also been incorporated in digital tools that simulate these “body parts and phantom pains” mentioned by McLuhan.

A good example is the free software available in *yearbookyourself.com*, which inspired the image series *Bioshot*, which I developed for my masters in Visual Arts at PPGAV/UFRGS (2009-2010), during the research *Past perfect of moving territories*. The series was produced using software that enables digital manipulation of black and white portraits of 52 human types characterized by the period between the 1950s and the 2000s. It is an online gallery with male and female profiles disposed in the site as if they were costumes or masks for the user to play around with, changing their own appearance — or

of someone else —, generating different racial, temporal and gender combinations simply by feeding the app with the image of a face that fits the models.

I explored the potential that such apps have as fictional and recreational tools, helping the user to reinvent his/her own personal trajectory, in the (dis)simulation of identity, sexuality, social condition and even biological inheritance.

The idea of an interrelation between the photographic self-portraits and the notion of territory of subjectivity that is established from the use of the picture associated to its exhibition in the internet became evident, given that the use of programs such as *yearbookyourself*, besides confirming this “retro” fever of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, confirms the desire of self representation and self-inclusion of the individual in the public sphere, known as Web 2.0.<sup>5</sup>

I consider the digital files of the *Bioshot* series as multiples that can be worked according to the size and type of expository material. I produced a total of 156 digital molds that unfolded into several supports, from digital photography amplified in metal paper, to etched photogravure prints,<sup>6</sup> until finally reaching plots in adhesive stickers applied to mirrors. They are hybrid images, fruit of the combinations that simultaneously suggest the forgetfulness and remembrance that rewrites old themes in a new way, and vice-versa. The images resulting from this series also typify the current disengagement with the traditional documental and evidentiary value of photography, and are presented as a way of subverting the canons of honorific portrait.

For Edmond Couchot, photography causes a change in the general model of representation. The digital era is not anymore about figuring the visible, but what can be modeled. Therefore, at each new unfolding of the series, these faces without organs and with a phantasmagoric appearance became modelable simulations that gave visibility to the exercise of faciality (*visagéité*) proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. For the authors, the face is a

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The expression Web 2.0 is used to refer to the internet's new stage of evolution, in which the main difference is that user himself “commands” the actions of content and information sharing.

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Granted with a Capes scholarship during my masters at PPGAV, UFRGS Institute of Arts, I carried out a teaching internship in the class *Graphical process lab*, under the guidance of Professor Maristela Salvatori. In this period, I was able to experiment hybrid processes that mixed photography and printmaking, applying *Bioshots* in electronic circuit boards through etching.

true territory of mobility that migrates according to flows of iteration and social tension. The *Bioshot* experience simulates in practice the hypothetic diagrams of Deleuze and Guattari, through the “white wall — black hole” exercise generated by the complex machine of faciality.

Only on your face and at the bottom of your black hole and upon your white wall will you be able to set faciality traits free like birds, not in return to a primitive head, but to invent the combinations by which those traits connect with landscapity traits that have themselves been freed from the landscape and with traits of picturality and musicality that have also been freed from their respective codes. (Deleuze; Guattari, 1996, p.59-60)

#### FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In each step of the creation process of the experiences here presented, it becomes evident that the choices of material, themes and forms of presentation were not done merely because of technical issues, but were motivated by fabulations of another order, of mental, almost organic nature.

The mixtures of languages and procedures — automated or manual — have overlapped and shuffled during the process of each research, and both are part of this intricate miscegenation that characterizes the coexistence of languages in the contemporary scene. Although the choices of each artist have been conducted by the friction between the extremes of analog and automated languages, each of them was determined by a cultural positioning, structurer of the discursive practices that define the roles of each artist within the arts system. This clash between old and new technologies is many times inserted in a dystopia of technological advances. The impersonality of digital images, portraits and other computerized creations generate nostalgia in regards to past technologies (manual, analogical) and that somehow seem more human.

The (im)probable and (im)perfect are some of the paths of research in arts, true speculative territory resulting from the combination of new and old ways of (re)inventing a place to deal with this unrest caused by the atavistic struggle between man and machine, between the body, the face and their representations.

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#### CAPTIONS FOR ILLUSTRATIONS

The images in this article are placed in its Portuguese version.

Figure 1: Jander Rama. *No title*, 2011, technical design of mechanical parts, nankeen and digital print on paper, 30 x 42 cm

Figure 2: Jander Rama. *Implant for civil construction (part 2)*, 2011, linocut, 78 x 55 cm

Figure 3: By putting together pictures with typical poses of documents or commemorative albums — mainly the pictures whose style became popular during the second half of the 20th century —, I question to what point the portrait is a fictional construction, albeit historical.

Figure 4: Examples of experimental deployments of *Bioshot* molds in several supports. To the left, digital mold in JPG as reference image for the photocopy, which in turn serves as mold for the photogravure in electronic circuit board by etching process to the middle; to the right, the first proof printed in paper and, finally, the image printed in adhesive sticker applied to a mirror.



FLAVYA MUTRAN PEREIRA: She was born in Pará and is a doctoral student in Visual Poetics at the UFRGS Visual Arts Graduation Program. The series *Bioshot* is part of her masters research *Past perfect of moving territories*, developed at the same university and awarded with the XI Funarte Marc Ferrez Photography Award in 2010 in the category Research, Experimentation and Creation in Photographic Language. She participates in the research group Expressions of the Multiple (UFRGS-CNPq) and performs in art and communication since 1989. She currently lives in Porto Alegre and can be contacted at [flavyamutran@gmail.com](mailto:flavyamutran@gmail.com).



JANDER LUIZ RAMA: He is a visual artist currently doing his masters in Visual Poetics at the UFRGS Visual Arts Graduation Program. He took part in the 9th Jataí National Exhibition in the State of Goiás, 2010; 40<sup>th</sup> IBEU Novíssimos Exhibition, Rio de Janeiro, 2010; 5<sup>th</sup> Latin Eye National Printmaking Biennale, São Paulo, 2011; XIII Goethe-Institut Competition, Porto Alegre, 2012. He was mentioned at the XX Atibaia Art Meeting, São Paulo, 2011 and was nominated for the V and VI Açorianos Award, Porto Alegre, in the Printmaking category, with the solo works *(im)probable*, 2010, and *Man-Machine*, 2011. He participates in the research group Expressions of the Multiple (UFRGS-CNPq), currently lives in Porto Alegre and can be contacted at [jander.rama@gmail.com](mailto:jander.rama@gmail.com).

