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Assembly, photography, mirror: Waldemar Cordeiro after concretism

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Abstract: In search of new possibilities for concretism, Cordeiro becomes interested in the “brutal realism” of the urban landscape, in which he detects a creative principle rooted in the dialectical process of the montage. Resulting of this new moment (1964-1965), the “popcretos” are often characterized by the use of photographic images, presented as rhetorical and ideological operations. Used also in later works, photography becomes an instrument to challenge traditional ideas about art, having the transformations arisen by the presence of mass media as horizon.

Keywords: Photography. Collage. Waldemar Cordeiro.

In December 1963, Waldemar Cordeiro publishes two articles in which he challenges the concrete platform to demonstrate the ability to surpass the “pragmatic moment”, marked by the relationship between the signs and the interpreter, to the “semantic period”, characterized by the relationship between the signs and the things. If the artists couldn't identify with new and creative aspects of contemporary art, from the “communicative, independent and direct nature, and the forever ongoing quantitative and qualitative changes” of the concrete proposal, it would definitely be surpassed, becoming a manifestation of the past. The counterpoint of historical concrete art resided in the “new figuration”, presented in terms of assembly as an expression of anti-dogmatism and anti-style; of open work, that is to say, not univocal object, which no unambiguous signs, linked by relationships not unique; of critical view of society, since it denounces the forced collectivization of the individual by the mass media, “benefitting a financial oligarchy increasingly eager to profit”.¹

The artist does not fail to stress the existing link between the informal languages and the new poetic which was shaping up in the early 1960s. Although obsolete as concretism, informal art had made an appeal for a “return to things”, the substance and staining, meaning “ambiguity, undefined, possibilities of choice and of reading direction, movement, instability and randomness”.² The idea of informal art as transition zone to the emergence of the new figuration had been used by Giulio Carlo Argan in his text for the presentation of Italy's representation in the VII Bienal Internacional de São Paulo (1963). In it, the historian epitomized the trajectory of Enrico Baj in terms of a transposition of

the historical experience of informal to the domain of the image. Sergio Dangelo, in turn, was presented as an artist who, within the informal experience, had opened “new zones of the self to exploitation and revelation of the image”.³

The coexistence of gestural violence with figure elements, when not anthropomorphic, is in fact a feature of numerous informal Poetics, as the examples of the Cobra group and of artists such as Nicolas De Staël, Jean Dubuffet, Emilio Vedova, Wols and Jean Fautrier show us. The idea of “homeless representation”, coined by Clement Greenberg in 1962 to set the *Women* series (1952-1955), by Willem de Kooning, and some works by Franz Kline after 1953, is also part of this reference framework, since it designates a type of painting which, although applied to abstract purposes, suggests representational goals.⁴

If such experiments can be placed within “new figuration”, the term, however, is rather ambiguous and complex, because it encompasses all the trends that restore the iconic representation. Thus, the concept of “new figuration” applies to every work that posits the relationship with an object's shape, based on a relationship of similarity. Since this varies according to individual perception, it is possible to assert with Simón Marchán Fiz that the criterion of similarity is relative, determining the existence of varying degrees of iconicity.⁵ Names such as Francis Bacon, Antonio Saura, Baj, Valerio Adami, and trends such as the neo-Dadaism, *pop art*, new realism, fantastic figuration, psychedelic art, hyper-realism, the *shocker pop*, narrative figuration and critical realism of the Decade of 1960 all fit within the label “new figuration”.⁶

The idea of montage used by Cordeiro to characterize the “new figuration” present at the Biennial of 1963 deserves some consideration, starting with the definition given by him. If the montage is characterized by the introduction of the “thing”, converted into information, sign and constructive message on the artwork,⁷ the

3. Argan, 1963, p. 288-289. Cordeiro may have also found echoes of that attitude in some participants of the show, such as Pierre Alechinsky, in whose language surrealist suggestions and an eastern gesture mixed, and Ivan Serpa and Flávio Shiró, who were distinguished by the coexistence of abstract structures with figurative substrates in their canvases.

4. Greenberg, 1995, p. 124.

5. Marchán Fiz, 1997, p. 19-23.

6. The term “new figuration” is also used as the title of an exhibition held in Florence in 1963. The display, which involved Sergio Vacchi, Giannetto Fieschi and Giuseppe Guerreschi, among others, is considered by Maurizio Fagiolo Dell'Arco (1966, p. 13) a “chain born old”, as it proposes an association between the last echoes of informal painting and a resumption of surrealism. Argan (1963, p. 289), in turn, applies the term to artists such as Rodolfo Aricó, Aldo Bergolli and Concetto Pozzati.

7. Cordeiro, 1986, p. 119.

1. Cordeiro, 1986a, p. 119; 1986b, p. 123.

2. Id., 1986b, p. 123.

concept does not apply to most neo-figurative works presented in the exhibition. Do not fit within the montage concept the symbolic compositions by Alan Davie, characterized by a surrealist-oriented figuration; Dangelo's sign-gesture demonstrations, also of surrealist derivation; the free and elegant lines of Rodolfo Aricò; the geometric structures bathed by a shadowy light and populated by ambiguous figural presences of Aldo Bergolli; Concetto Pozzati's images, derived from the mass media, but prepared in fantastic way; the sculptures of Eduardo Paolozzi, which are presented as mechanical fetishes, although inspired in the rational order of technology.

In the catalogue of the Biennial, the term "montage" is used by Michael Middleton to characterize the latest works of Paolozzi, including both versions of *Hermaphrodite Idol* (1962). Since 1961, the British artist was experimenting with new elements, "designed & made for direct montage in many combinations and permutations, by welding and similar methods of structuring".⁸ It's not about the meaning of montage used by Cordeiro. The Brazilian artist is closer to the poetic of Robert Rauschenberg's *combine-paintings*, while Paolozzi, even resorting to objects he found, insisted on translating them into a material like bronze, demonstrating the limits of its opening to the new universe in which the art was entering.

The idea of montage as interest in the "thing" can be applied to pieces by George Segal, real sculptural frames in which ghostly molds of plaster and real objects merge. You can also consider montage the four collages made by Paolozzi and the eleven works of Baj, who makes use of heterogeneous materials to propose an unusual figuration through monstrous, but deeply expressive characters. That's what the four works devoted to the theme of the generals, presented as grotesque and horrifying mannequins covered in medals, fringes and currencies, show.

The artist who responds more closely to Cordeiro's idea about the existence of a "brutal realism, whose creative possibility is guaranteed by the dialectical process of assembly" is the Italian Mimmo Rotella, which features five *décollages*, considered by Argan "evidence" or "sociological documents", in which was fixed "the image of the ephemeral modern cities' mythologies".⁹ Artist in residence at the University of Kansas City (1952), Rotella had discovered in the United States "the value of the social conference with men by means of posters," which would take him to the practice of the *décollage technique*, in the wake of Enrico Pampolini experiences with different materials and Kurt Schwitters's *merz*

compositions.¹⁰ After a first informal moment (1953-1958), in which the torn sign imposed itself by the chromatic and material values, the artist becomes interested in the ready-made image, present in the walls of the urban environments (1958-1963). Fashion, advertising, film icons, all become part of a universe in which the values of art meet those of the entertainment industry, giving life to private mythologies through the process of a technique able to agglutinate a variety of temporal moments. The torn poster, which the artist appropriates, is then glued to the screen and subjected to a new process of laceration, which brings up the value of the fragment, in addition to proposing a chain of new meanings. This operation resulted in a synthesis that reshapes the ephemeral character of the image, taking it to the context of the mnemonic procedures.

References to the book by Umberto Eco, *The open work* (1962), and the critical vision of the "new figuration" cannot help but arouse a question about Cordeiro's intentions when configuring this framework of issues. The artist goes beyond Eco's formulations on "meaning" as a synonym for a message based on the order, in the conventionality and in the redundancy, and "information" as opening for the improbability, the ambiguity and the unpredictability. When reporting the first to the "content" and the second to the invention of new formal structures, Cordeiro ends up dismissing the positive value which the "new figuration" seemed to enclose. He presents it, in fact, as an "art of meaning", while trusting the mission of creating unprecedented forms to the new trends in concrete art.¹¹

The following year, although still talking about "new figuration", relating it to the sartrian concept of "intending awareness",¹² in order to emphasize the "objectification of things" designed as "semantic units",¹³ the artist shows his own conception of what should be a new way thanks to a series of works, presented in the form of "semantic concrete art"¹⁴, which became more known as "popcreto"

10. Maurizi, 1981, p. 17; Vettese, 2002, p. 11.

11. Eco, 1967, p. 159-160; Cordeiro, 1986b, p. 124.

12. Cordeiro is referring to the idea of consciousness as intentionality, that is, as movement toward the world, to things and to others, that Sartre had derived from Edmund Husserl (Souza, 2010, s.p.).

13. Cordeiro, 1964a, s.p. Published in *Habitat* (May-June 1964), the article *New trends and new figuration* is a response to *The abstraction-figuration dilemma*, published by José Geraldo Vieira in the issue number 75 of the same magazine. Vieira's extensive argument ends in contraposition between Vieira new figuration and concrete art. The critic asks himself how the figurative art could coexist with the concrete strand, exhorting its representatives to be interested not only in research, but also in the search for a "lasting solution". To survive, the figurative art should "use of hormone magic, unconscious flow, of inspiration, of intuition, of fetishism, Mystique, ancient forces". The concretism should, then, "abandon the scheme and trigonometry for the random" and insert itself in contemporary times, "becoming practical and not theoretical." Cf. Vieira, 2012, p. 96-97.

14. Before reaching the "semantic concrete art", Cordeiro, in the early 1960s, had

8. Middleton, 1963, p. 241.

9. Cordeiro, 1986a, p. 119; Argan, 1963, p. 288.

with the definition proposed by Augusto de Campos.¹⁵ The term “popcreto” means a set of works dating from 1964, designed as assemblies of heterogeneous elements suitable of reality and transformed into signs thanks to changes in their original structure and to new groupings, arranged in the frame according to the geometric patterns of the concrete composition.

It’s still significant that among the “things” that Cordeiro appropriates to perform an operation of “disintegration of the space of the physical object”, of “destruction of conventionalities” to reach the “semantic construction”, the “building of a new meaning”,¹⁶ are photographic images found in the press. This choice brings the evidence that for him there is a fundamental difference between painting and photography. While the first is guided by the representation of the likeness of the object, the second has as main feature the presentation of the object itself, devoid of any form of subjectivism. Conceived this way, photography responds closely to the search of a “realism built within the objective language of contemporary art”, to the defense of an art based on the presentation of reality and no longer in its representation.¹⁷

That’s what posited one of his theoretical references, Pierre Restany, advocate of the “objective look”, of the “camera’s eyevew”. The French critic found the presence of an actually new figuration only in the “mechanical arts”, that is, in the set of research carried out by Rotella, Alain Jacquet, Gianni Bertini,¹⁸ Pol Bury, Nikos, Serge Bégulier, who tended to the restructuring of the two-dimensional image thanks to the most modern broadcasting techniques and the mass media. Among the new procedures, which had nothing to do with the classic means of painting, the following began to gain more space: press photography, batik, frameworks

conducted experiments with stains and organic forms “of tinged geometry”, called “informal concrete art”. Cf. Fields, 2015, p. 262.

15. According to the poet, the works presented by Cordeiro at the Art Exhibit at IAB (São Paulo, June, 1964) had as main feature a concrete structure, which had “swallowed critical and anthropophagously, in the Brazilian way” the experience of American pop art. This perception arose the term “popcreto”, but Campos acknowledges that perhaps it would be better to use either “pop concrete art” or “semantic concrete art”, as Cordeiro himself proposed. Cf. Peccinini, 1999, p. 51.

16. Cordeiro, 1964b, s.p.

17. Cordeiro, 1986b, p. 56.

18. Jacquet and Bertini participated of the Opinion 65 exhibit, organized by Ceres Franco and Jean Boghici and presented at the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro between August 12 and September 12, 1965. In the presentation of the show, Franco (2015, p. 49-51) highlights the “socialization of the work of art” made by Jacquet thanks to the photographic reproduction process, the “bertinization of the woman figure” in the gouaches-collages of Bertini, also debtors of the technical image, and the “Baroque delirium” of Cordeiro, which “takes hold of everyday objects, transforming them, cutting them relentlessly with the saw, to reveal to us through the straight line the inner secret of these same objects.”

and photographic transport, enlargements of telephotos, decals of clichés, amid others. Is to the research of mechanical art that Restany trusts the task of rooting the modern realistic consciousness in an original iconography, “able to adapt itself to the screen support plan, without renouncing to the revolution the look it embodies”.¹⁹

The hypothesis that Cordeiro conceives photography as “thing” is reinforced when we remember the presence of Jean-Paul Sartre’s *L’imaginaire* (1940) in his library. When referring to the photographic portrait, the philosopher presents a definition of photography as “thing”, as a paper rectangle which has specific quality and color, with shadows and light patches distributed a certain way. Matter which acts as an *analogon* of perception, photography, as all image, requires an intent to constitute itself, to become present to the perceptual consciousness.²⁰

By taking ownership of photographs published by the press in works such as *Liberdade (Freedom)* and *Jornal (Newspaper)*, dated 1964, Cordeiro proves he is moved by a precise design: deconstruct the image and restore it in a disjointed manner in order to hamper its immediate apprehension. Privileged by the communication industry because of its objective possibilities of record, which get confused with the criterion of authenticity, photography is part of a mechanism and a network of complex meanings which invest directly in its interpretation. As a witness to the event, the press photographer works within the limitations imposed by the newspaper to which his production is intended, leaving aside any artistic whim and emphasizing aspects such as the capture of the action, the use of certain “symbolism” which are able to enhance the informative load of the image, the production of “an effect on an object”, among others. Creator of mentalities, myths and knowledge, photojournalism contributes to the setting of an aesthetic of the image shared by an entire society, for interiorization and unconscious acceptance of certain types of information.²¹

19. Restany, 1966, p. 53. Although in the article Restany refers to the torn posters of Rotella, it should be remembered that, from 1963 onwards, the artist begins to work with the transportation of photographic images to emulsified screens, mechanically colored by a turning process, based on chemical baths. After taking ownership of a real element – which Raffaella Perna (2009, p. 33-34) points as the only moment of realization of a personal activity – the artist mechanically registers objective forms of reality. It is especially because of this new process that the artist is mentioned in the “Manifesto of the mec-art”, released by Restany in October, 1965. In it, the critic highlights two possible paths for the new strand: the *assemblage*, which corresponds to an act of modern life; and the art of “ascertainment”, where we can place Rotella, which proposes a “paging of objective reality itself”.

20. Sartre, 1940, p. 34, 72.

21. Boltanski, 1979, p. 187, 193, 195, 200-201; D Autilia, 2001, p. 61, 73.

Cordeiro deconstructs this rhetorical mechanism of meaning with the transformation of the news in decontextualised and ambiguous fragments, making room for the imaginative participation of the observer. In *Liberdade (Freedom)*, the image of former President Juscelino Kubitschek integrates a montage in which stand out a cut pan and a hubcap. Cut in winding lines, the page on which the image had been published loses its informational load to acquire an ambiguous meaning, reinforced by the presence of the words "President" and "Buñuel". Fabricio Valerio Nunes, who realized such terms in the montage, speaks of imaginative associations between the figures of the former President and the Spanish film maker, a logic of strangeness that transforms an actual object into an abstract shape, into an element of the composition.²² The operation carried out in *Jornal (Newspaper)* is even more radical [Fig. 1]. The artist takes ownership of a front page of São Paulo Edition of *Última Hora* and cuts it into vertical strips. The reassembly of the fragments of texts and images is guided by the illegibility and hence the impossibility to provide them with a meaning, putting in question the idea of the newspaper as an objective means, bearer of accurate information.

The central element of the two works is, undoubtedly, in the determination of critically presenting mechanisms of knowledge of reality forged by mass media and to propose a critical reading of its rhetorical and ideological resources. If in them the idea of open work presents itself in the form of a field of interpretive possibilities,²³ other two works, which also use newspaper images, go beyond mental collaboration of the spectator, as they demand his productive complementation. *Distorções ótico-intencionais (Optical-intentional distortions)* and *Rebolando (Shaking)* require, in effect, the direct action of the viewer upon the work.

A photograph of the first work and the text *Arte concreta semântica* are the participation of Cordeiro in the manifesto *Novas tendências 3*, held in Zagreb in 1965. Text and artwork have a relationship of complementarity. In the text, there is a criticism to the European "new trends", term under which gathered artists of constructive tradition, whose research aimed at the core values of visual perception, as the examples of the Italian Gruppo N and Gruppo T, Nine French and Yugoslav Tendencie Groupe de Recherche d'art Visuel show. Cordeiro's criticism has targeted their adherence to a "new naturalism", which sees the participation of the spectator in biological terms. Their research still rooted in *gestalt*,

in the iconic dimension, in the "pure" stimulus, oppose the ideas of "seizure", derived from Sartre, communication and "associated" stimulus.²⁴ *Distorções ótico-intencionais (Optical-intentional distortions)*, which will be published alongside the programmatic text in the event's catalog, is a good example of the new attitude trumpeted by the Brazilian artist.

No longer an existing work, *Distorções ótico-intencionais* consisted of a kind of box with bottles full of water hanging from its top. These were placed in front of shreds of paper, one of which in the form of a revolver; it read news on a Russian bomb of total extermination. So that the work was complete, it was necessary that the viewer would boost the bottles in order to cause a deformation of letters and images. From this game emerged images, described by the Casa & Jardim magazine, April 1965, as: "A showgirl who dances crazily, Kruchev and a star of French cinema in terrible aspect, [...] the figure of President Johnson, of the United States".²⁵ *Rebolando*, which was not accepted by the jury of the VIII Biennial de São Paulo (1965), was composed of a jug full of water, standing on a base that contained a picture of Marilyn Monroe. The inscription "shake in this direction" was an invitation for the spectator to participate; if the requested action was carried out, the viewer would see the Hollywood star moving in winding way.²⁶

One of the clearest examples of Cordeiro's intentions by bringing together in a same work the principle of *ready-made* and a geometric structure is in *Popcreto para um popcrítico* (1964). Composed by a red plan on which is set a mattock, the work also presents fragmented photographic images of mouths, noses and locks of hair, which offer and don't offer themselves to the gaze of the viewer. The ambiguity of the images is determined not only by the impossibility of their reconstruction, but also by the presence of a grid formed by small circles, which complicates any attempt to determine a global apprehension. The presence of a wide open eye at the top of the grid highlights the ambiguity of the set, since this could be referred to a centralized control - as Helouise Costa²⁷

24. Cordeiro, 1964b, s.p.

25. *Gosto não se discute (você conhece a Pop art?)*.

26. When saying that in Cordeiro's poetic "a body and experiential participation of the spectator didn't matter, contrary to Hélio Oiticica", Paulo Reis (2006, p. 37) does not take into account the actions required for the effectuation as works of *Distorções ótico-intencionais* and *Rebolando*. If it is true that, in the "popcretos", Cordeiro does not surpass the dimension of "work", unlike Oiticica's Parangolés, which dissolve this concept and its materiality, works such as *Distorções ótico-intencionais*, *Rebolando*, *Seio*, *Indivíduo s/ massa*, *Autorretrato probabilístico*, in addition to the compositions with mirrors, demonstrate being carriers of an idea of opening not only perceptible.

27. Costa, 2002, p. 18.

22. Nunes, 2004, p. 170-171.

23. Eco, 1970, p. 160-161,163.

suggests - but also to power of the critical look on the fate of a work of art. If this hypothesis is valid, the grid could be considered a symbol of the alienation of the art critics in relation to the universe of politics, symbolised in the chosen color, liable to suggest communism, and in the mattock, which could evoke the struggle of Peasant Leagues (1945-1964) for land reform and its repression by the military regime [Figure 2].

The exhibition of the popcrete objects is fiercely attacked by Geraldo Ferraz, for whom they were a provincial echo²⁸ of the consecration that *pop art* had had in the XXXII Venice Biennial (1964), with the award of Rauschenberg²⁹, of a rehashed modality of the *ready-made* and of "everything that can be found for a long time booked and catalogued in the history of modern art". Ferraz disagrees strongly with the "ambiguous wedding" of concretism and pop art, which defines "created confusion." Unsuccessful at painting, Cordeiro tries "to go for a consequent naturalism", "seeks to get to the art of junk" with his semantic proposals on montages "that offer nothing, not even as surprise, shock or vulgarity". There's no

28. The awful provincial impact is not exclusive of Cordeiro. Ferraz also criticizes the "funny symptom" of that year's Instituto Torcuato Di Tella award, organized by the Centre for Visual Arts of the institution, whose Director was Jorge Romero Brest. The award, granted to Argentinian artists between 1960 and 1966, when it is substituted by *Experiências Visuais* (1967 - 1969), has an international development between 1962 and 1967. In 1964, the national award is granted to Marta Minujin for *Revire-se e viva* (*Turn around and live*), which consisted on a tent made of various materials (cloth, rubber foam and wood), filled with colorful mattresses on which the public should lie down and shake their bodies to accomplish the goal pursued by the artist: to merge art and life. As if that wasn't enough, there was a predominance of neo-figurative tendencies among competitors at the international award, which was won by geometric painter Kenneth Noland with his piece *Air*. The presence of names such as Arman, Baj, Alberto Gironella, Jasper Johns, Rauschenberg, Luis Felipe Noé and Joe Tilson was a clear testimony of the boom of the interest in new forms of figuration at that time. Cf. *Instituto Di Tella*, s. d.; *Instituto Torcuato Di Tella-Universidad Torcuato Di Tella*, s.d.; *National award Torcuato Di Tella Institute International*, s.d.; *Marta Minujin: "Todo es art, art, art, art"*, April 2014.

29. The awarding of Rauschenberg's is controversial, despite the efforts of the representatives of the United States to characterize him as an artist close to the European sensibility. Supported by Sam Hunter (United States), Julius Starzinski (Poland), Giuseppe Marchiori and Marco Valsecchi (Italy), Rauschenberg receives opposing votes by Franz Meyer (Switzerland), Murilo Mendes (Brazil) and A. Hammacher (Netherlands). Several expressions of displeasure caused by the award may be remembered: the refusal by the Italian President to attend the inauguration of the show; the veto to visit it imposed to ecclesiastics by the Patriarch of Venice; the reaction of the Vatican newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano*, which vehemently condemned the confusion between art and not-art in the name of "moral sensibilities". Can be highlighted, in the artistic field: the attitude of the French press, which expresses fear before the domain of artists who aestheticized mass media and commercial images; the critical stance of Argan, talking about the death of art to the face of the process of degradation and dissolution of the object; Renato Guttuso's enthusiastic point of view, which welcomes in pop art the "first real revolution after Cézanne", by detecting in it "the likely end parabola of abstraction" and "the return to reality and to concrete things, the beginning of a survey of language, even if partial and exclusive, which will focus on culture". Cf. Monahan, 1985, p. 80-104; Alloway, 1969, p. 149-150; Zatti, 1983, p. 13-14.

shortage of naysaying for Max Bense – author of the letter-preface published in the catalog –, defined "distinguished nutty critical (speedometer equipment of surface winds)" from Stuttgart, and Restany, named "travelling salesman of Pop Art".³⁰

An ambiguous reading of the popcrete proposal, not based on the works, but in the exhibition's catalog, is written by Jayme Maurício in Rio de Janeiro newspaper *Correio da Manhã*. The beginning of the article is quite aggressive, as the critic quips about the avant-garde pretensions of São Paulo, in saying that its artists "had neither denied or overcome the *pop*, and not even given the movement a new structure, more dialectic, philosophical or poetic, like they did with the concrete art". The popcrete had done that, as it connected the "somewhat destructive principles" of the American strand with the neo-gestaltism or programmed art. Cordeiro and Augusto de Campos are presented as the articulators of "a semantic realism mode, with elements of everyday life (newspaper clippings, furniture, household items, etc.), this miscellany that Americans call of *urban folklore* and the avant-garde from 50 years ago called other names". Despite the caveats, Jayme Maurício gives a vote of confidence to Cordeiro's research when considering it "necessary, actually fruitful" the "paulista wave around the *pop-art*", which he compares with the detachment and the dominant misinformation in Rio de Janeiro, with the possible exception of the comments "very vague and sometimes only speculative" in *Correio da Manhã*.³¹

Seeing in the critic a potential ally against the attacks in São Paulo, Cordeiro sends him a letter in which he rebates the accusation of Ferraz, to which he negates the condition of "artistic opinion" because "of the personal tone and evident bad faith". The important thing to retain from this document is the framework mapped out by the artist regarding the "long process of international adaptation" lived by the Brazilian art from the last post-war period. The first stage of this process (syntactic phase) has as inaugural mark shows organized by Leon Degand at the Museum of modern art of São Paulo (1949), in which geometric abstract art and concrete art played a very important role. If the abstraction introduced in country "the updated issues of the Paris school", the concrete art "had more indigenous characteristics", having been more radical in the creation of a universal language, in addition to offering theoretical contributions and covering fields such as poetry, design and typography. Abstract informal art, which brought a new vision (pragmatic phase) "through the practice of 'opera aperta', of the *random* and

30. Ferguson, December 19, 1964.

31. Jayme Maurício, January 1, 1965.

'not univocal structure"', acquired in Brazil a feature of its own, since it served to the reaction, resulting in "a return to the eighteen-hundreds' landscape pictorialism and to the revenues of the academic cuisine". If the partiality of Cordeiro seems clear, you can't forget it targeted Ferraz, a leading advocate of informal poetics. This is contrasted with the proposal itself, presented as "an ethical-aesthetic attitude, based on the contradictions of a new reality." The conception of culture in accordance with technological and abstract terms only, which showed signs of crisis at that point, has as its counterpoint the emergence of a new humanism, from the urban industrial society, which had received different names: *pop art* (United States), new realism (France), *popcreto art* or³² semantic concrete art (Brazil). This new realism "is far from being an artificial product of American propaganda (the Venice Biennial), as naively believes Mr. Geraldo Ferraz". His bad faith in relation to the new panorama encompasses the "Premio Di Tella funny symptom", which "is not at all funny", if we remember that Buenos Aires was becoming "one of the most important artistic centers of the world." The marginalization and alienation state of current Brazilian art was the result of media concentration of cultural dissemination in the hands of a small dome, consisting of "individuals of anachronistic mentality, luddists", who confused their own personal interests with a greater cause.³³

The issue of new humanism will be resumed in two texts from 1965, in which it will be associated with a new realism and no longer

to the idea of new figuration. This change demonstrates how close Cordeiro was of Restany's idea, who had defined the new realism as a willingness to integrate the industrial technique on metamorphosis of everyday life; as a rescue of poetic visual languages produced by cultural industry; as the "recognition of the expressive autonomy of the object", from which resulted "its external projection" and "its resonances about the psychology of the artist who takes responsibility of his existence in the world". From these ideas, the Brazilian artist considers overcome "figurativism's representation quality", contrasting to it the "direct presentation of things from serial industrial production". The use of simple elements, which can be confused with the kitsch (when the object is consumed in a trivial manner) reaches a higher level, if on the basis of the work "a deep awareness" exists. Within this perspective, the *ready-made* allows the "reading of the art directly, in the world of things, without resorting to abstract representations". Abandoning the idea defended during the concrete moment which stated that art should be read by its own signs, Cordeiro offers a new way: reading art by the signs of life.³⁴

The idea of a new humanism reappears in the emphasis given to a "search for meaning", capable of detecting in real things not "mere abstract shapes", but the evocation of the "commonly used image", going from art to the social context. Far from simply presenting life, the new realism is "an attempt to explain it and judge it," as contemporary society is confronted with the phenomenon of a cultural industry "whose goal is to promote the service of venal or patriarchal interests". The new state of the art (no longer enjoyment, but consumption) makes the artist emphasize an important fact: the production "does not equal and simultaneously benefit all", determining different characteristics in the "culture for images", which takes unique aspects in each group. This results in a tension between local and universal: although art is global, recognition of specifics avoids "a cosmopolitan homogenization". This does not imply the appreciation of "regional luddists", since the national and/or continental features "can only be specified on the basis of a world art".³⁵

With the change from the new figuration to the new realism, Cordeiro starts using the photographic image in a more direct way. That's what the object *Seio* (*Breast*, c. 1966) shows: in it, a photo on which a magnifying glass is placed invites the viewer to perform a voyeuristic action, based on some properties of the photographic act, such as variations of framing and focus.³⁶ The same principle

32. In a way, Cordeiro is close to the thought of the Argentine critic Oscar Masotta (1967, 15, 52, 66, 69), for whom *pop art*, far from being an alienated manifestation, was a critique of the aesthetics of the realistic image, since their representatives took to themselves the task of "reporting on a preexisting information [...], representing the represented", i.e., "products of communications and of the mass culture". In this sense, the strand appears as a "semantic art" since it wants to "downgrade" the structure of the image to the 'status' of semiological sign; and that's with the goal of making problematic the relationship between the image and the actual object to which every image relates". The intention of the *pop art* is the "undertaking of bringing the 'structure' to the foreground, thought of as logical relationship between signs, and taking the 'shape' to the background, understood as the existing tension of the vectors and of the field dynamics". She could be defined as "a non-gestalt art of semantic intent", since in all pop artists "the idea and the feeling of 'codes', [...] that there are only languages" can be found. Ana Longoni (2005, p. 11-17) remembers, the *pop art* represents to Masotta the second major art movement of the 20th century, since it demonstrates the existence of a historical correlation between aesthetic manifestations and areas of knowledge. If the surrealism had been associated with psychoanalysis, the *pop art* has relations with the semantics, the semiology and language studies. Although one of his theoretical references is the idea of "open work", the Argentine critic departs from Eco (and Cordeiro) when condemning his association with the informal poetic which he rejected.

33. Jayme Maurício, January 10, 1965. The critic didn't publish the letter in full, leaving aside the final sections dedicated to Ferraz. Daisy Peccinini (1999, p. 55, 82) located the text, entitled "Da crítica em idade crítica" (The critical age critique), the Augusto de Campos's files.

34. Restany, 1979, p. 30, 89; Cordeiro, 1986c, p. 131-132; 1986d, p. 143.

35. Cordeiro, 1986c, p. 132; 1986d, p. 143.

36. Costa, 2002, p. 23.

is at the foundation of *Indivíduo s/ massa* (*Individual w/o mass*, 1966), in which the presence of a magnifying glass, associated with the movement of the observer's body, gives prominence to certain faces, proposing a reflection on the relationship between individual and anonymity in mass society. A similar operation had already been tested in *Massa s/ indivíduo* (*Mass w/o individual*, 1964), thanks to the associated use of a magnifying glass and images of rallies. According to Helouise Costa, when incorporating the principle of the magnifying lens and highlighting a face, the artist would be proposing a reflection on the importance of the individual in the collective and the historical role of the masses, having as a possible source of Antonio Gramsci's thoughts.³⁷

One could also think that in such works another photographic principle is mobilized: the monocular vision inherent in the camera lens. This would be evident mainly in the 1964's piece, in which the images contained in the magnifier showed varying degrees of magnification. Another hypothesis can be suggested from the association between photography and magnifiers: the artist could be putting on the agenda the fiction of a transparency inherent to the photographic image, that is, the inability to establish any distinction between it and the object it captured. The picture was often associated with the magnifying glass by scientists of the 19th century, who did not believe they were before an image, but the object itself, doubling the things of the world, mingling with them, taking their place. Perfectly identical to the thing, the image was no longer perceived as image, questioning the concept of representation, rooted in the duplication model and the difference towards it.³⁸ Considered from this perspective, *Seio*, *Indivíduo s/ massa* and *Massa s/ indivíduo* would affect the artist's reflection about the construction of the image by the means of mass communication and its supposed informative transparency, if the different degrees of approximation provided by magnifiers are taken into account.

In 1967, with *O beijo* (*The kiss*) [Figure 3] and *Autorretrato probabilístico* (*Probabilistic Self-portrait*), Cordeiro interrogates the photographic image in order to problematize it and remove it from its apparent naturalness. Dialoguing with Jean Tinguely's sometimes tragic, sometimes mocker machines, the Brazilian artist conceives a monstrous mechanism, which deconstructs the seduction associated with the act of kissing. When still, the work shows a fragmented mouth fixed in wooden boards, with edges painted red. When moving, the mouth shatters, evoking a grotesque and

undefined image, whose effect is enhanced by the use of photographic enlargement which changes the perception of the viewer. In addition, the idea of seduction vanishes with the presentation of the machine's mechanism, which operates naked. As Fabrício Valério Nunes points out, the red edges of the wooden squares intensify the effect of disintegration of the image. As the edges attract the gaze of the observer, they turn the various segments in independent objects, resulting in a decline of the image to the background.³⁹ Helouise Costa's hypothesis that the work was inspired by Brigitte Bardot's mouth can find support in the fame the actress enjoyed in Brazil after two trips to Búzios, in 1964, with boyfriend Bob Zaguri. Thanks to the presence of the actress, the coastal town, which had the reputation of being paradisiac, becomes popular and pictures of it become famous worldwide. If the association between the diva and Búzios could explain the Cordeiro's choice, it must be analyzed by a corrosive bias, since the grotesque transformation of the mouth would indicate an ironic look on the phenomenon of Bardotmania, which spread around the world, from the United States, as a result of Roger Vadim's film *And God created woman* (1956).

Autorretrato probabilístico summons another kind of questioning of the photographic image. As its title indicates, the artist could be playing with two possibilities of meaning for the term "probabilistic". He could be alluding to the field of mathematics and probability calculation, aimed at the study of random events and laws that govern it. He could be evoking the concept of "field of possibilities", applied by the Eco to works with a kind of mobility, an ability to restate continuously as new, as carriers of different perspectives.⁴⁰ This concept could be of Cordeiro's deep interest, since the concept of "field" brings the dimension of a rule from which the internal relationships of the work organize themselves, which will open to multiple interpretations without endangering the structure desired by the author. The work lends itself to two possibilities of viewing. If the observer finds out the point of view from which it was composed, the image may be reconstituted and enjoyed in its entirety.⁴¹ In the second case, three successive plans in which are affixed the fragments of a portrait of the artist, accompanied by the words "Yes" and "no" in various combinations, do not allow the immediate perception of a single image. It is up to the observer seek an interim type of completeness from the movements of the body and of a perceptive effort, able to convert the fragmentation in an almost unitarian field,

39. Nunes, 2004, p. 197; Costa, 2002, p. 24.

40. Eco, 1970, p. 159-161; 1967, p. 38, 50-51.

41. Costa, 2002, p. 25.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

38. Rouillé, 2005, p. 81-83.

having the spacing between the various plans in mind.

With this type of device, which will be applied to *Estudo de retrato probabilístico de Helena* (*Study of probabilistic picture of Helena*, c. 1967), Cordeiro demonstrates, once again, its proximity to Sartre's idea about photography. The fragmentation to which he subjects his own image seems to confirm the sartrean assertive that the photographic portrait lacks life and, thus, expression, even though it shows every detail of a face.⁴² The use of a photographic image does not dispel another possibility of analysis, which points to the search for a self-reflexive representation. Thus, Cordeiro would manifest his own will to be part of a long artistic tradition, characterized by the insertion of the self-image of the painter in a symbolic context that defines their role. Apparently, this context is lacking in the self-portrait of the Brazilian artist; however, he is present in a peculiar way, when focusing on the defining traits of his poetics, clearly visible in the work: geometric spirit as an articulator of different fragments and the choice of an unstable and elusive self-image. Exercise of corrosion of the parameters of the photographic portrait, the 1967 work denies the idea that this can provide information about the model when referring him to an uncertain and fluid zone closer to mental representation than to the speculative illusion.

An analysis of Cordeiro's relationships with photography would not be complete if some works which evoke the use of mirrors on their surfaces were not included. Parting from Arlindo Machado's assumption that "photography's ideological vocation is the production of specular reflection"⁴³, seeing a tense dialogue with the technical image, by involving the ideas of mimesis and representation, in *Opera aperta* (1963), *Aleatório* (*Random*, 1963), *Ambiguidade* (*Ambiguity*, 1963) and *Luz semântica* (*Semantic light*, 1966) would not be over the top. The use of mirror fragments in the first three and a mirror associated with spotlights on the last one confronts the viewer with images that become signs when the reflection of an outer reality penetrates inside the frame. Even when acting as the lens of a camera, the mirror travels, however, against the photographic principle: instead of presenting still images, it offers a succession of dynamic signs generated by the movement of the observer. The works *Opera aperta*, *Aleatório* and *Ambiguidade* refer explicitly to thinking of Eco, especially the idea of information as unlikely, ambiguous and unpredictable structure, capable of multiplying the possible meanings and of shaking the conventions of the

language in favor of an unusual logic of images.⁴⁴ *Luz semântica*, in turn, convene additional issues, since the use of spotlight turns the possible referents into indistinct and deformed shadows, without, however threatening the ideas of reciprocal spatiality and shared temporality between work and viewer.⁴⁵ Ubiquitous motif in painting and photography, the shadow brings in itself the theme of absence/presence: absence of body, presence of its projection. With *Luz semântica*, Cordeiro seems to allude to the mimetic illusion generated by the photo, showing its reverse: a fuzzy image, which is not pure absence, but the eclipse of the iconic dimension, the impossibility of achieving representation in virtue of a technical accident that discusses the different degrees of reality produced by reflections.⁴⁶

A more complex operation, in which the mirror is presented as a "semiotic instrument",⁴⁷ is at the foundation of *Uma cadeira é uma cadeira* (*A chair is a chair*, 1964). In this montage, consisting of a chair sawn in half at an angle, a mirror that reflects a part of it and a collage with geometric motifs, the artist proposes to the viewer another kind of speculating experience. While repeating a piece of the chair, the mirror deletes the participation of the observer, since it does not refer to something outside the scope of representation. It offers, on the contrary, the opportunity to see a fragment of the object from another point of view, which generates an automatic sign, close to the logic of the specular reflection. Once again, Cordeiro highlights the issue of imitation, but does not take the side of the painting as interpretation to be opposed to the technical image as perfect copy. Playing with perception's data, he makes the reflected fragment, which could evoke the production of an image without a camera, a moment of questioning about the role of photography in contemporary society. Since, due to the angulation of the object, the mirror does not create any illusion of continuity,⁴⁸ the tautology of the title falls apart, introducing the dimension of estrangement and, with it, the realization that the meaning is not a unique process and that the "mirror of society" offers partial and/or distorted images.

When taking ownership of pre-existing photographic images or mobilizing the specular reflection mechanism, Cordeiro performs a double operation: confronts the viewer with visual stimuli known as waste and taken as natural; he proposes a reflection on the

42. Sartre, 1940, p. 30.

43. Machado, 1984, p. 87.

44. Eco, 1967, p. 160-161.

45. I am applying to Cordeiro's work Alberto Boatto's (1969, p. 8) thoughts on the use of mirrors by Michelangelo Pistoletto.

46. This reading is based on Victor I. Stoichita's (2011, p. 7, 189, 192) considerations about the shadow.

47. Stoichita, 1999, p. 250.

48. Nunes, 2004, p. 179.

meaning of such stimuli in order to unnaturalize them and bring them to their exact ideological dimension. Thanks to photography, the artist appropriates fragments of urban reality not to exalt it, but to subject it to a close examination, able to make out the deeper meaning of “machine vision” and its repercussions in the configuration of a particular perception of the world. Artificial sign, the photo becomes a powerful tool to challenge traditional ideas about representation and imitation, being an integral part of those assemblies to which Cordeiro had entrusted the task of setting up new artistic and ideological meanings in a society that was beginning to experience the impact of the mass media.

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SUBTITLES FOR THE ILLUSTRATIONS

This article's images are localized in their Portuguese version.

Figure 1. Waldemar Cordeiro, *Jornal (Newspaper)*, 1964, newspaper collage on paper, Cordeiro Family Collection.

Figure 2. Waldemar Cordeiro, *Popcreto para um popcrítico (Popcreto for a popcritic)* 1964, painted wood, collage with mattock on 82 X 82 cm, Collection Saul Libman.

Figure 3. Waldemar Cordeiro, *O beijo (The kiss)*, 1967, electro-mechanical object with picture, 50 x 45.2 x 50 cm, Cordeiro Family Collection.

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