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PHOTOGRAPHIC POIESIS: TRANSFORMATIVE KNOWLEDGE
OF AFRICAN PHOTOGRAPHIC PRACTICES

Thesis submitted to Universidade Católica Portuguesa
to obtain a PhD Degree in Culture Studies

By

Alfredo Brant

Faculty of Human Sciences

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ABSTRACT

This doctoral dissertation explores the production of transformative knowledge through creative practices in the realm of contemporary African photography. It draws on visual culture and postcolonial studies as its primary theoretical framework, and decolonial praxis as a guide for concrete interventions in the social sphere. In its analytical framework, the thesis employs the notion of *the affects of images*. The affective and sensory experiences embedded in the conceptualization and production of photographs are investigated via an experiential relationship with the research subject, an artistic residency for emerging photographers from the PALOP countries¹. This was realized by combining a participant-observation approach with interviews conducted using the method of *photo-elicitation*. The research aims to contribute to the discipline of visual literacy as a strategy of cultural action (Gil 2011) that impacts the construction of visibility through photographic practices.

The discipline of visual literacy is founded on the interdependence of the verbal and visual fields in the production of meaning through images. However, such articulation is mostly explored in the ‘reading’ and the circulation of images, whereas the cultural and subjective perspective of image production is given little attention. In consequence, the thesis argues that the cultural meanings of the visual narratives depend also on their *poiesis*, which points to specific production protocols and attitudes towards image-making that counter established hegemonic discourses of art and photography history.

The principal question posed by this investigation is: How can the strategies available in photographic practices afford transformative knowledge? In addition to shaping society through engaged modes of image production, photography enables practitioners to visually decode the world in a unique way. To that extent, it provides access to the subjective sphere, assisting individuals to cope with personal experiences, emotions, and desires. Moreover, photographic practice produces transformative knowledge when it operates as a mechanism for self-learning. Therefore, it is argued that ‘photographic thinking’ is an empowering tool that promotes a *decolonial aesthetics* (Mignolo and Vazquez 2013) by challenging restrictive

¹ The “Catchupa Factory - Novos Fotógrafos” is an annual initiative organized by the Association AOJE and primarily funded by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. It brings together young photographer-artists from Portuguese-speaking African countries (PALOP) and has been held in Mindelo (São Vicente Island - Cabo Verde) since 2016.

Western notions – such as aesthetics and poetics – and allowing a space for micro-narratives to emerge.

In approaching the Catchupa Factory residency as a space for learning based on an emancipatory conception of education, we propose the notion of *photographic poiesis*. It seeks to establish a more dynamic connection between the discipline of visual literacy and photographic production. Such a linkage leads us to a reflection on the pedagogical aspects within the institutional framework of an artistic residency devoted to emerging African photographers, and how it can effectively generate non-hegemonic visual knowledge, social change, and self-actualization. The results are expected to contribute to visual literacy by providing new tools for artists, educators, curators, and practitioners working with photographic images.

Keywords: visual literacy, contemporary African photography, visual narrative, affects of images, transformative knowledge.

RESUMO

A presente investigação explora a produção de conhecimento através de práticas criativas no âmbito da fotografia contemporânea Africana. O trabalho se apoia nos estudos de cultura visual e nos estudos pós-coloniais como principais referenciais teóricos, e na práxis decolonial como guia para intervenções concretas na esfera social. Em seu enquadramento analítico, a tese utiliza a noção dos *afetos das imagens*. As experiências afetivas e sensoriais presentes na conceitualização e produção de fotografias são investigadas no contexto de uma residência artística voltada para fotógrafos emergentes dos PALOP². Assim, o estudo combina uma abordagem envolvendo a observação participante da iniciativa artística e entrevistas usando o método de *photo-elicitation*. O principal objetivo do trabalho é contribuir para a disciplina da literacia visual como estratégia de ação cultural (Gil 2011) que impacta a construção da visualidade por meio das práticas fotográficas.

Um dos pressupostos da disciplina de literacia visual é a interdependência entre os campos verbais e visuais na produção de sentido através das imagens. No entanto, tal articulação é explorada sobretudo na ‘leitura’ e na circulação das imagens, enquanto a perspectiva cultural e subjetiva da produção de imagens necessita de maior atenção. Como consequência, a tese argumenta que os significados culturais das narrativas visuais dependem igualmente da *poiesis*, ou seja, protocolos e atitudes específicas envolvendo a produção imagética que contrariam discursos hegemônicos estabelecidos pela história da arte e da fotografia.

A principal pergunta que este trabalho visa responder é como as estratégias disponíveis nas práticas fotográficas podem possibilitar a produção de um conhecimento transformador. Além da transformação social através de modos engajados de produção de imagens, o conhecimento transformador proporcionado pela fotografia permite uma decodificação visual do mundo que é única para cada praticante. Tal disposição permite acesso à esfera subjetiva, auxiliando os indivíduos a lidarem com experiências pessoais, emoções e desejos. Ademais, a prática fotográfica produz conhecimento transformador quando funciona como

² A “Catchupa Factory – Novos Fotógrafos” é uma iniciativa organizada pela Associação AOJE e financiada principalmente pela Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian. Realiza-se anualmente desde 2016 em Mindelo (Ilha de São Vicente - Cabo Verde), reunindo jovens artistas-fotógrafos dos Países Africanos de Língua Oficial Portuguesa (PALOP).

um mecanismo de autoaprendizagem. Portanto, sugere-se que um “pensar fotográfico” atua como ferramenta de empoderamento que promove uma *aesthesis decolonial* (Mignolo e Vazquez 2013) ao questionar noções artísticas ocidentais – tais como a estética e a poética – e proporcionar um espaço para micro-narrativas emergirem.

Através da abordagem da residência Catchupa Factory como um espaço de aprendizado baseado em uma concepção emancipatória da educação, propomos a noção de *photographic poiesis*. Esta visa estabelecer uma conexão mais dinâmica entre a disciplina da literacia visual e a produção fotográfica. Tal ligação abre uma reflexão sobre os aspectos pedagógicos dentro do quadro institucional de uma residência artística dedicada a fotógrafos africanos emergentes e como esta pode efetivamente conduzir a um conhecimento visual não-hegemônico, transformação social e autorrealização. Espera-se que os resultados do trabalho contribuam para a literacia visual, fornecendo novas ferramentas para artistas, educadores, curadores e o público geral da fotografia.

Palavras-chaves: literacia visual, fotografia Africana contemporânea, narrativa visual, afetos das imagens, conhecimento transformador.

*We had the experience but missed the meaning,
And approach to the meaning restores the experience
In a different form, beyond any meaning [...]*

*That the past experience revived in the meaning
Is not the experience of one life only
But of many generations – not forgetting
Something that is probably quite ineffable:*

*The backward look behind the assurance
Of recorded history, the backward half-look
Over the shoulder, towards the primitive terror.*

T.S. Eliot, "The Dry Salvages" (II)

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INTRODUCTION: THE VISUALITY BETWEEN PROCESSES AND DISCOURSES; PRACTICES AND LANGUAGES

A visual culture is the relation between what is visible and the names that we give to what is seen. It also involves what is invisible or kept out of sight. In short, we don't simply see what there is to see and call it a visual culture. Rather, we assemble a worldview that is consistent with what we know and have already experienced.

(Mirzoeff 2016, 15)

RELEVANCE OF THE THEME AND STATE OF THE ART

To the cliché formula ‘a picture is worth a thousand words’, Dutch computer scientist pioneer Edsger Wybe Dijkstra replied in 1996: “A picture may be worth a thousand words, a formula is worth a thousand pictures” (Dijkstra 1996). At that time, digital photography was slowly reaching the general public, but for technology companies, scientists, and manufacturers it was already clear that the binary code had a considerable potential to supplant the physical support of the traditional photographic medium. Indeed, the new technology would permanently change people’s relation with photographs. The impacts are felt above all in the cultural field, since it shakes modes of representation, challenges political and social relations, and offers new possibilities for cultural investigations. However, if a formula is worth a thousand pictures, there is still no formula that accounts for the full range of sensory experiences, emotions, feelings, and memories that make up human consciousness and that can be conveyed by different sorts of images.

The range and the speed of circulation of images in digital formats is one of its most distinct features in the current world. Some scholars argue that the current circulation of images is as important as their content and how they are produced. Consequently, we experience images in a constant state of movement and intangibility. One of the problems with this argument is that it puts the ordinary image producers in the background, depriving them of agency in their subjective relation with image-making. Indeed, the recent academic production in visual studies focuses mainly on the circulation and the reception of images but much less on the individual perspective of the image producer. Furthermore, focusing solely on the abundant flow of global visual information often ignores the local expression of identities and the individual experiences that arise from creating images³. Hence, to deepen the relations between image and knowledge in a cultural perspective, it is equally important to encounter people and exchange impressions about how they see the world.

The democratization of the means of images production and its circulation has made photographs even more significant in political and social debates in the public sphere. Yet, at the same time that images become fundamental in the diffusion of ideas and of new forms

³ Gillian Rose (2016) defines four sites from which images can be analysed: the production site, the image itself, the audiencing site – related to the reception of images by its public –, and the circulation site. The individual image producer is located in the site of production, sharing this space with all technological aspects responsible for the construction of the image’s meanings. However, in most accounts, the technical aspects take over the production site, leaving little space for the producer’s subjective choices.

of existence in public life, the reflection on photographic practices and visual languages requires more attention. Although important, the impact of digital information technologies does not supersede the affective potential of photography as a visual language capable of producing meaning. Therefore, the present study takes a different direction and considers how cognitive processes utilize visual and textual technologies to generate knowledge through photographic creation.

In common sense, photographs are associated with what is visible. Lines, forms, colors, and shapes are core elements related to what one can see in an image. Moreover, a photograph carries design elements such as proportion, rhythm, balance, and movement. In combination, these elements provide aesthetic information that has an effect on the human consciousness. However, the scope of these effects is often framed within symbolic categorizations created by Western art history. In the case of photography, since its official inception in 1839, these categorizations have been indistinctly applied to decode and interpret photographs. With a few exceptions, the first attempts to deal with the history of photography endorsed the European art-historical perspective and denied the medium the development of its particularities.

Consequently, in the academic context, scholars have attempted to define the essence of photography, but have forgotten to let photographs speak by themselves, somehow still following art history's models and periodization's. It was only in the late 1970s and across the 1980s, that a different theoretical perspective claimed that photography should not be defined by a pristine essence, but rather by the cultural knowledge it can afford⁴. In common, many of these works have questioned photography's truth-value, addressing not only the memorial and the author's subjectivity but also the present and the political (Neier and Pedri 2019). These original approaches established significant connections with the development of Visual Culture Studies during the 1990s.

As a field of research, Visual Culture has emerged in the last three decades offering new tools to analyze the realm of contemporary images. Contrary to an exclusive aesthetic approach, it reflects on the visual as a phenomenon and aims to connect it with social and political realities. By considering images as cultural artifacts, visual culture proposes an

⁴ About the wealthy literature about photography that emerged in the late 1970s and during the 1980s, see Gisèle Freund's *Photography and society* (1974), Susan Sontag's *On photography* (1977), Alan Sekula's article "The Traffic in Photographs" (1981), *Thinking Photography* (1982), edited by Victor Burgin, Vilém Flusser's *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (1984), John Tagg's *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (1988), and John Berger's *About Looking* (1988).

approach that is complementary to art history and additionally encompasses mass media images, such as amateur or commercial photographs, television, publicity, and visual archives. In the humanities, Visual Culture Studies is generally affiliated to three main theoretical traditions: poststructuralism theory, cultural studies, and visual communications (Elkins 2013). Despite their different perspectives, these founding fields share an interest in a certain notion of visibility as a situated phenomenon located between practices and discourses, blurring distinctions between popular culture and high culture.

At first, in an attempt to find a common ground for a theoretical framework, Visual Culture Studies drew on sources from different fields of knowledge and different authors from the Western tradition.⁵ For instance, particularly relevant are the works of Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, Walter Benjamin, and Jacques Lacan. These authors and their landmark texts paved the way for Visual Culture to claim a new commitment between culture and visibility. Among them, one can highlight Michel Foucault's undertaking on the relations between archives, surveillance, and power structures (1995; 2015), Jacques Lacan's paradigm of the gaze (2004), Walter Benjamin's affects and dialectics of historical images (2007; 2017), and Roland Barthes's semiotic investigation of contemporary visual mythologies (2014).

These groundbreaking works have been crucial to visual studies, as evidenced by their presence in a number of textbooks on visual culture published over the past three decades. Edited by names such as Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall (1999), and Nicholas Mirzoeff (1998), and Ian Heywood and Barry Sandywell (2011) these compilations have the virtue of offering a theoretical overview for the newcoming reader. However, they do not establish any chronological grid for Visual Culture Studies, since some reference texts can go back further to the seventeenth century, like Descartes' *Optics*, written in 1637. Moreover, they come from different Western knowledge traditions, such as psychoanalysis, sociology, or media studies⁶. In short, the sources are as diverse and dispersed as the field's ambitions of reach.

In any case, what appears groundbreaking in the adoption of these various viewpoints is the desire to extract knowledge from everyday visual objects rather than from classical oil

⁵ James Elkins estimate that a common feature among these authors is that they have been underestimated by traditional art history (Elkins 2013).

⁶ For instance, Sigmund Freud's essay "Fetishism" (1927) in psychoanalysis, Pierre Bourdieu's sociological approach of photography in the book *Un art moyen, Essai sur les usages sociaux de la photographie* (1965) and Marshall McLuhan's approach of advertising in the article "Woman in a Mirror" (1967).

paintings and sculptures of the European tradition. Unlike Semiotic studies, Visual Culture Studies do not systematize any analytical grid to inquiry about images. Hence, the notions around visual culture have evolved differently according to the national context of research, academic departments, and scientific journal's editorial lines. Thus, since the 1980s, subfields of visual culture have developed in different geographic and linguistic contexts.

In Germany, *Bildwissenschaft* [Visual Science] emerged under the influence of the German arts and culture intellectual Aby Warburg (1866-1929) and focuses more on the technical conditions of the medium than on the construction of social identities. In *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, and Body* (2011), Hans Belting proposes an anthropological perspective where images do not *exist* by themselves but *happen* through transmission and perception in our bodies. Images are physical but also mental representations that can only be grasped by a thorough analysis of the media in which they move, primarily involving the body (Belting 2006).

In the context of the English language, W.J.T. Mitchell inaugurated another thread in the field with *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (1986). The scholar proposed an innovative account of visual culture which remain relevant to understand the current production of images. Drawing from the idea that there are no pure visual media, he argues that all media are multimedia, mixing sensorial and semiotic elements (Mitchell 2014). In *Picture Theory* (1995), Mitchell proposes the concept of *imagetext*, as a critical and pedagogical tool that is to be used neither as a single master theory of images nor as a symbolic system based on the textual. On the contrary, *imagetext* is a concept that enables images to be incorporated into a plethora of sensory perceptions and historical conditions, allowing visual knowledge to emerge from social realities.

Taking an interdisciplinary approach, Belting and Mitchell are interested not only in art history or aesthetic theory, but also in the mechanisms of seeing and being seen. Thus, Visual Culture manages to address the everyday practices of seeing, blurring the boundaries between media, art and non-art, and encompassing scientific images, documents, memories, and texts. The visual knowledge afforded by this approach offers tools for understanding non-hegemonic cultural practices. It combines the idea of visibility with a cultural perspective in an attempt to include all actors involved in the production, circulation and perception of images. Relying on the statement that “visual culture is the visual construction of the social, not just the social construction of vision” (Mitchell 2002, 172), Visual Culture

Studies are conducive to knowledge in a multiple perspective through its affiliated fields such as postcolonialism, gender and queer studies, and feminism. Moreover, related literature will also underline that social practices of human visuality are not restraint only to Western models.

Among an array of different perspectives afforded by visual culture field, this research is sensitive to ideas from postcolonial studies, especially concerning the concepts of decolonial aesthetics (Mignolo and Vazquez 2013) and Social Imagination (Appadurai 2005). Such a stance is important to the extent that our subject comprises people with strong links with the African continent and its manifold realities. Hence, our study looks towards visual practices that are undertaken by people which identities are directly and indirectly tied to a colonial past. As noted above, visual culture is contextual, moving between discourses and languages that convey important cultural aspects. Therefore, our analysis moves from the local to the global, analyzing singular experiences with photographic production to offer a broader perspective on cultural issues involved in image-making processes.

The contextual layer provided by postcolonial studies is important for our research insofar as it help us understand how the ‘coloniality’ underlying the subject of our investigation affects the scopic regimes in which it is embedded. Only with the contextual element, one can understand how the authority of the Western gaze over indigenous communities has prompted the deployment of an “countervisuality” (Mirzoeff 2011) of resistance and affirmation. As a historical backdrop, this investigation is particularly interested in how the photographic processes imposed by Western settlers were appropriated and transformed by the native peoples of the African continent. They are responsible for the production of cultural objects that, as suggested by Mignolo and Vazquez, “decolonize the senses” (Mignolo and Vazquez 2013).

Contemporary African writers and curators have contributed to the development of decolonial practices in photography and in contemporary art. In “Photography and the Substance of Image”, Olu Oguibe presents a reconsideration of the ontology of photography by showing how local African populations have adapted and used photography for their symbolic practices with images (Oguibe 1996). Others such as Okwui Enwezor (2003; 2017) Azu Nwagbogu (2021b) and Mark Sealy (2019) underline the importance of unmasking the

colonial gaze that was established by the history of photography in the moment of making, displaying, and reading photographs⁷.

Artists have also played an essential role in the decolonization of the gaze by intervening in visual colonial archives, exploring the construction of postcolonial identities, and engaging with non-Western worldviews. Afro-American artists such as Lorna Simpson (b. 1960), Kara Walker (b. 1969), and Angolan artist Kiluanji Kia Henda (b. 1979) have employed colonial archives to reconsider hegemonic historical narratives. Non-binary and contemporary black identities have emerged as central concerns in the work of artist-photographers such as Cameroonian Samuel Fosso (b. 1962), South African Zanele Muholi (b. 1972), and Afro-American Deana Lawson (b. 1979). Additionally, decolonization efforts in visual practices have led to a resurgence of African cosmologies that are grounded in different conceptions of time, space, and social relations. Aspects of these works were recently highlighted at the FotoFest 2020 photographic biennial.

Titled “African Cosmologies - Photography, Time and the Other”, the exhibition featured thirty-two artists who offered a “cosmological exploration of Africa and the African diaspora (...) that defies easy categorization and spatial and temporal boundaries”⁸. In addition to the pioneering work of Nigerian artist Rotimi Fani-Kayode in the 1980s, which explored the intersection of Yoruba cultural imagery and black queer identity, the exhibition also showcased photographic work from contemporary artists updating African wisdom and traditional culture through Afrofuturism aesthetics, such as Wilfred Ukpont (Nigerian, b. 1971), Aida Muluneh (Ethiopian, b. 1974) or Sethembile Msezane (South-African, b. 1991).

⁷ For the work of Mark Sealy see the book *Decolonising the Camera* (Sealy 2019). Azu Nwagbogu is a curator and founder of the association “African Artist’s Foundation” and founder and director of Lagos Photo Festival (both based in Lagos, Nigeria). He has been curating important exhibition and private collections over the past 20 years promoting African visual arts. Okwui Enwezor (1963-2019) was a Nigerian curator and writer. Since the 1990s, he has curated exhibitions and presented artists from Africa and its diaspora. Enwezor was the first non-European artistic director of the contemporary art exhibition Documenta 11, in 2002, and was director of the Haus der Kunst in Munich from 2011 to 2018.

⁸ See “African Cosmologies: Photography, Time, and the Other,” In FotoFest Biennial 2020, curated by Mark Sealy. Collective exhibition. March 8th, 2020 to April 19th, 2020. Museum of Fine Arts of Houston: Houston.

THESIS THEME AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Drawing from visual culture studies and the postcolonial field as its primary theoretical frameworks and decolonial praxis as a guide for concrete interventions in the world, the present investigation aims to develop the discipline of Visual Literacy as a strategy of cultural action (Gil 2011) impacting on the construction of visibility through photographic practices. Essentially, visibility engages in three interrelated operations: 1. the production of images, whether physical material images, immaterial images (such as digital media), or mental images; 2. the circulation of images through various media (including the body) and the reception of these visual objects; and, finally, 3. the process of visual perception in collective and individual perspectives. Essentially, these three events are intertwined, and together they are responsible for the visibility of a given socio-historical context. This investigation addresses the first process. While the procedure of image production is initiated by photographic technology, it continues through the transposition to different media, where the original image is subjected to editions, manipulations, appropriations, and reframings.

Besides the way images circulate and how they are processed in our minds, the knowledge one can get from them is related to how they are produced. Whether mass-media images, amateur photographs, archives, artistic images, or surveillance videos, images carry with them the circumstances of their production. The “site of production” (Rose 2016, 27) provides important elements for understanding how the technology used to create images impact their assimilation. Still, our perspective is slightly different. We also want to understand what kind of cognitive operations lie behind the act of making an image. In other words, what do practitioners learn by making pictures of the world? More specifically, this thesis investigates how photographic practices can afford a *transformative knowledge*. We argue that transformative knowledge within photography not only aims at the social transformation of the world through engaged modes of photographic production, but also allows for a visual decoding of the world that is unique to each practitioner. In doing so, it provides access to the subjective sphere and assists the individual in dealing with personal experiences, emotions, and desires.

Photographic practices generate transformative knowledge at both social and subjective levels, for they can function as a self-learning process analogous to a way of thinking through images. Thus, our primary motivation is to understand how to *think photographically* in

terms of a social engagement that “move[s] beyond the obsessive individualization of western art practice whose style of self-reflexivity is limited to the personal, rather than to the relevance of the personal in relation to the collective and to larger systems of power” (Gamedze 2015). Therefore, our main research question is: what are the strategies available in photographic practices that enable transformative knowledge?

To frame our investigation, we focus on the production of images in a particular space of reflection where knowledge production and aesthetic creation intersect: that of the artistic residency. Such a context favors our research because of its creative and experimental disposition, the immersive nature of the practice, and its pedagogical character. This approach aims to examine how the pedagogical strategies of the residency are attuned to photographic practices and how they can contribute to the discipline of visual literacy as a strategy of cultural action. In other words, how can an artistic residency contribute to the engagement of people with their communities and the fulfillment of individuals as independent cultural actors?

Artistic residencies can be very dissimilar regarding their pedagogical dispositions. They are undoubtedly a place of learning, but with a number of different propositions. Our interest points to artistic spaces oriented to emergent and young image producers. These spaces offer a more specific framework for our objectives, as they are circumscribed by an educational endeavor. Such a configuration raises the question of how the artistic residency, as a pedagogical space, can influence both the production strategies and the resulting images, and thus the knowledge generated by the entire creative process. These reflections on the production of knowledge within the pedagogical space of artistic residencies have provided the rationale for the selection of our research subject.

The “Catchupa Factory – Novos Fotógrafos” is an artistic residency and workshop dedicated to emerging photographers and artists from the PALOP⁹ countries. The initiative took place annually from 2016 to 2022¹⁰ in the city of Mindelo, located on São Vicente Island in Cabo Verde. During three weeks of intensive work, participants from different African countries are guided through the conception and creation of a photographic project based on a narrative structure. Alongside and in addition to the visual production,

⁹ Países Africanos de Língua Oficial Portuguesa [Portuguese-speaking African countries] is a group of six African countries (Angola, Cabo Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, São Tomé and Príncipe and, since 2011, Equatorial Guinea) where Portuguese is an official language, and which have established international cooperation protocols.

¹⁰ The residency did not take place in 2019 due to the restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

participants will attend classes on artistic practices, participate in discussion sessions on their work in progress, and explore themes related to contemporary African photography. The program concludes with a public presentation of the resulting works in a cultural venue of Mindelo, where the photographers also participate as curators for a collective exhibition. For each edition, a tutor is invited as artistic director of the residency and is responsible for articulating practical activities with conceptual and critical content. In 2021, as part of the fieldwork for this thesis, I was in Mindelo from June 14th to July 13th to participate in the 2021 edition of the residency.

As mentioned above, emergent photographers and artists working with photography in Portuguese-speaking countries in Africa form the target of the program. Seeking to bring together the most diverse group as possible, the residency selection process considers aspects such as ethnicity, social class, nationality, and gender. As put forward by Diogo Bento, the main responsible for the initiative, “although important, the artistic merit is less relevant than the artistic potential”¹¹. Such a position acknowledges the pedagogical vocation of Catchupa Factory as a space of learning and creation. Another singular aspect of the project is the spatial context of São Vicente Island, which takes an important place in the development of the projects. As each of the participants brings their background and artistic concerns to the island, they search for local aspects where they can develop their own approaches¹².

The specificity of Catchupa Factory lies in the many layers of visual and cultural analysis available for in-depth investigation. In this sense, our main goal is to grasp the cultural knowledge that emerges from local practices of image production through critical, interpretative, and contextual analysis. Three directions will guide our investigation and its objectives. First, the interrelationship between textual and visual realms, exploring the entanglements between (photographic) processes/practices on the one hand and (visual) languages/discourses on the other. Second, the cultural narratives that emerge from the visual production of the residency participants. Finally, the attunement between the pedagogical strategies of the residency and the subjective aspirations of the photographers. In this way, the project aims to contribute to the discipline of visual literacy by developing new methods and tools for creating knowledge through photography.

¹¹ Diogo Bento, e-mail message to author, December 12, 2019.

¹² Of the eleven participants, only two are Cape Verdean. Of these, only one is from the island of São Vicente.

METHODOLOGY AND INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

The questions raised in the previous section will be answered through a methodology defined as *participatory observation and critical analysis of modes of production and conceptualization of photography*. Such a methodology is driven by a restless curiosity to understand photographic practices from different angles and will be deployed through two distinct lines of inquiry. The first is a participatory observation survey during the activities of the residency. Second, a series of interviews with its eleven participants that looks after diverse types of cultural narratives arising from the visual practices performed in São Vicente Island. Additionally, interviews with the organizer and the artistic tutors from the residency will explore how the pedagogical principles embedded within the creative/artistic workflow can serve as an effective strategy for cultural action. Subsequently, the gathered information will undergo critical and interpretive analysis, utilizing an interdisciplinary theoretical framework, as will be developed below in this section.

Both approaches are inextricably linked to my active participation in the fieldwork. Embracing interaction as a methodological asset is key in that I participated in the residency as a researcher, but also as a participant in the discussions and collaborator in the production dynamics. To that extent, my fieldwork position was oriented by an ethnographic approach as defined by Marcus and Fisher. According to the authors, the fieldwork method is “the process in which the anthropologist closely observer, records and engages in the daily life of another culture” (Marcus and Fisher 1986, 18). Therefore, we used an ethnographic approach to closely examine the participants’ visual production and the collective discussions revolving around this process. Moreover, through the use of visual research methods we gathered qualitative data about the photographic practices and protocols as they unrolled during the residency activities.

Since the 19th century, social sciences have used Visual Research Methods (VRM¹³) to inquire about different topics related to sociological and anthropological investigations. These procedures were used even before anthropology was a consolidated academic field and aimed to collect data on cultural patterns and behaviors through the production of films

¹³ The term Visual Research Methods (VRM) will henceforward be used to refer to any methodology involving the production of visual objects by the researcher or by the participant. It encompasses photographs, videos, drawings, maps, diagrams, collages, among other visual objects.

and photographic documentation¹⁴. The tradition known as ‘visual anthropology’ had a fertile development throughout the 20th century and is still employed in different investigations today. However, in the mid-20th century, some anthropologists have shifted from a faithful attachment to the medium truth-value to “incorporate contemporary approaches that engage with subjectivity, reflexivity and the notion of the visual as knowledge and [as] a ‘critical’ voice” (Pink 2003, 179).

As a research tool, photography was originally used by ethnographic investigation, where researchers would take pictures during the fieldwork to analyze cultural aspects of a community. In the past thirty years, as “anthropologists realized the fallacy of essentialized biological racial differences” (Shankar n.d.) and as social science research have increasingly incorporated new visual materials, traditional methods evolved to become more collaborative. To that extent, research participants ‘were allowed’ to depict their own lives and concerns by selecting images that best represent themselves¹⁵. Today, these methods are popular in different fields such as sociology, health sciences, urbanism, pedagogy, and human geography. Their asset is to provide complementary data to traditional interviews and ethnographic fieldwork observations. (Rose 2016, 307).

Among the established VRM that employ photographs, one particularly relevant for this research is photo-elicitation¹⁶. The method is broadly defined by the use of photographs to engage conversations with participants to create social and cultural knowledge. By inserting a photograph into a research interview, this methodology is said to uncover additional layers of information and perception of the subject that are not reachable with conventional interviews. Discussions can be supported by images produced by the participants and are believed to offer more detailed accounts that are sometimes difficult to achieve in verbal or

¹⁴ The use of ethnographic film and photography in Africa began in the 19th century as part of the colonial project. It was based on the imperial ideology that enforced racist constructions, sexist stereotypes, and “the quest for totalizing knowledge” through the notion that media is objective. Under the guise of modern science, visual ethnography played a significant role in constructing biases, including dichotomies like ‘civilized’ and ‘primitive’ or ‘modern’ and ‘ancient’, which were instrumental in the formation of oppressive scopic regimes. See Shankar, Arjun. n.d. “Primitivism and Race in Ethnographic Film: A Decolonial Re-Visioning.” In *obo* in Anthropology, <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199766567/obo-9780199766567-0245.xml> (accessed 21 November 2023).

¹⁵ Two of these methods are autophotography and photovoice. Both usually ask participants to take photographs of their environment and the result is used as data for the research. Photovoice is more focused on social issues and the empowerment of community members. It aims to assess how the images produced by participants can contribute to social action and to shift adverse social configurations. For examples of research employing autophotography and photovoice, see Wang and Burris (1997) and Glaw et al. (2017).

¹⁶ About the use of photo-elicitation in visual research projects see Harper (2002), Robertson et al. (2016), Bendiner-Viani (2016), Rose (2016) and Glaw et al. (2017).

written form. Although the framework for the production of images is usually set by the researcher, it nevertheless encourages “the participant to reflect on the taking of photographs as a process, rather than focusing solely on the content of the photograph” (Rose 2016, 322). The discussions around the images prompted by photo elicitation allow the cultural meanings and narratives embedded in the images to emerge in a collaborative space of exchange between participant and researcher.

Likewise, at the Catchupa Factory, the processes of image production and their subsequent discussion are already integrated into the activities of the initiative. During the residency program, participants produced images, exploring the local environment according to their subjective concerns. In parallel, their production was the object of discussions involving the photographers, a tutor, the organizers, and myself. With this framework, I first employed participatory-observation to collect data and assemble information. The goal was to offer an introductory overview of image production practices within the residency environment. Thereby, the inquiry assembled technical information, thematic categorizations, and protocols of actions performed by participants. By attending the discussions around the images, we were able to disclose conceptual strategies of photographic production, thus, offering additional layers to understand participant’s motivations, beliefs, and interests around photography.

The discussions around the residency activities have provided insights into how the images were conceived and why they were produced. However, they are mainly related to the content of the images. In effect, images also carry narratives and cultural aspects that are embedded in the production process but are not apparent at first glance. In this sense, we also sought the broader perspective of images as cultural objects that are representative of discourses and languages. Therefore, an additional level of analysis was needed to shed light not only on the visual aspect of images, but also on the contemporary visualities they carry.

As put forward by Rose Gillian, traditional visual ethnography methods are based on the visible, but much less concerned with the notion of visibility. From the point of view of visual culture, the idea of visibility represents an approach to specific contexts of production, and to “the effects of contemporary visualities on the processes of making and interpreting visual materials” (Rose 2013, 30-31). Moreover, the notion of visibility considers images as symbolic and communicative activities. Images are symbolic artifacts when viewed as the result of social practices that give cultural meaning to particular visual objects. And images

are part of communicative activities when they point to other variables, such as the “widespread use of digital technologies for creating, editing, distributing and audiencing texts of all kinds” (ibid., 37).

Therefore, it was necessary to link the data collected via participatory-observation to specific ways of doing things, often located on the boundaries between art and everyday practices and crossing global and local configurations. The ‘knowledge’ we are looking for resides precisely in what culture theorist Henry Jenkins (2013) calls “convergence culture”. It does not lie in a precise medium or technology, but rather in complex relations between media consumers and media producers. Convergence takes place in a participatory culture where there is no longer a systematic coherence between a medium and its content (ibid., 269). His position endorses the idea of images as symbolic and communicative artifacts. Hence, it calls for a more collaborative mode of production as a condition for images, information flows, and narratives to emerge. According to Jenkins, within a *convergence culture*, the singular experiences people have with digital media have to be situated to demonstrate how specific groups create knowledge out of new technologies.

To that extent, our second methodological approach focused on in-depth individual interviews with each of the participants supported by the photo-elicitation method. As suggested above, photo-elicitation enables another layer of exchange that access other parts of human conscious, allowing to “communicate more holistically and through metaphors” and to “capture the ineffable, (...) help[ing] us pay attention to reality in different ways” (Bagnoli 2009, 548). Thus, during the interviews, questions based on visual culture notions were posed to directly link the participants’ images to their singular experiences during image-making. This approach aimed to position the photographic practice as an affective one that engages multiple senses.

As Mirzoeff (2016) suggests, visuality encompasses all the senses and is experienced collectively. A multi-sensory engagement with images can provide insights into the participatory nature of digital images, strategies of production and communication, and intersubjective processes that are not easily accessible through participatory observational research alone. Hence, conducting interviews using photo-elicitation helped to understand how concepts such as counter-visuality, emancipatory pedagogy, decolonial aesthetics, social imagination and cultural knowledge are articulated with photographic production.

With the findings of participatory observation and interviews, this research employs a set of concepts to provide a situated, critical, and interpretive analysis of the articulation between photographic production and knowledge production within the configuration of an artistic residency for emergent artists-photographers from the PALOP countries and their diasporas. When visibility is recognized as a social construction (Mitchell 2002), this articulation demonstrates how cultures can be understood through the diversity of their visual practices. Thus, in order to reveal *the practices of looking* embodied in our subject, our research is less concerned with the materiality of visual objects than with how “their materiality is linked to social and historical processes of *looking*” (Pink 2003, 187). Accordingly, “it is the possibility of performing acts of seeing, not the materiality of the object seen, that determines whether an artifact can be considered from the perspective of visual culture studies” (Bal 2003, 11). Such an approach underlines the interdisciplinary vocation of visual culture and the will to use tailor-made methods, since each research is unique and context-specific.

The interdisciplinary contributions for the field of visual culture make it possible to understand how images impact the social field. The inclusion of different perspectives allows for the creation of “traveling concepts in the humanities” (Bal 2002). These are concepts that cross different disciplines to explore interstitial sites of research, such as the movement between local and global cultural perspectives, the connection between art and social life, the interplay between identity and identification and the relation between words and images. In *Visual Essentialism and the object of visual culture*, Mieke Bal defends that the interdisciplinarity of visual culture lies in the object of analysis, rather than in the simple clustering of different disciplines around an object. It “consists of creating a new object that belongs to no one” (Bal 2003, 7). In other words, it is the object of visual culture that should require different disciplines to analyze it and not the other way around.

According to philosopher David Alvargonzález (2011), interdisciplinarity fosters interactions and associations among multifaceted concepts. Sometimes, the convergence of concepts can lead to new independent disciplines that are eventually institutionalized by academia. However, it is important to emphasize that although interdisciplinarity operates an interplay between concepts, the convergence will only take place if there are operational and material conditions that are analogous to both (or more) disciplines. Within the scope of this thesis, the term interdisciplinary is justified since a movement of convergence is key to

understand images as symbolic and communicative artifacts. The transitive actions that occur between a subject and an object entail a body of knowledge that requires concepts that apply to philosophy, visual arts, history, narrative, image science, cognition, and pedagogy.

For W.J.T. Mitchell, Visual Culture is an “inter-discipline” from its inception. As a hybrid discipline, it links art history, literature, philosophy, mass culture, and anthropology. Its originality lies in an innovative way of analyzing images where perception, cognition, feeling, and affect are essential tools for uncovering meanings at social and subjective levels (Mitchell 1995, 540-541). However, Mitchell is interested in interdisciplinarity as a form of ‘indiscipline’, meaning the rupture with certain traditional practices for the study of images. He uses the term “indisciplinarity” to refer, in his own words, to “that moment (...) of chaos or wonder when a discipline, a way of doing things, compulsively performs a revelation of its own inadequacy. This is the moment of interdisciplinarity that has always interested me” (Mitchell 1995, 541).

Such an interdisciplinary approach is primarily based on the cultural construction of visual experience. To achieve this task, visual culture is structured around two converging groups of disciplines. On the one hand, disciplines concerned with socio-political movements such as gender studies, ethnic studies, critical theory, feminism, postcolonial studies, and cultural studies. On the other, disciplines focused on theoretical objects such as semiotics, aesthetics, art history, linguistics, and psychoanalysis (Mitchell 1995, 542). According to Mitchell, visual culture is an outgrowth of these complementary disciplines. In this sense, the convergence and transitivity between the social domain and the cultural objects, as afforded by the specific configuration of the residency, allows our study to call for an interdisciplinary approach.

Even before visual studies became a growing movement in the Western humanities, the specificity of visual objects had received attention from scholars in various fields. In his article “Visualization and Cognition: Drawing Things Together” (1986), French philosopher of science Bruno Latour drew attention to how science and art have created their own kinds of visual inscriptions for specific artifacts, and how the knowledge derived from these inscriptions is enmeshed in broader political and economic systems. This articulation is responsible for the creation of what have been called *scopic* or *visual regimes*, in which the specificity of objects is central to critical analysis.

Modern science, for example, employs specific visual strategies to present its objects, which in turn are responsible for the cognitive perception of ideas¹⁷. Describing how the invention of linear perspective created an *optical consistency*, Latour argues that technical innovations as such have changed the way images are perceived without the viewer being aware of it. Likewise, artistic objects are embedded in genres, styles, or canonical representations created by technologies of representation owned by a privileged few. Often these technologies limit perception in favor of the purposes of political, economic and cultural dominant forces. They are characterized less by objectivity than by their optical consistency with standardized representations (Latour 1986, 10). For the individual viewer to break free, the crucial moment is when the same eyes that passively observe images of the world begin to see them as representations of the world.

A similarly critical view of the *scopic regimes* is shared by the American art critic Hal Foster, who edited the volume *Vision and Visuality* (1988). According to Foster, vision (as a physical operation) and visuality (as a socio-cultural fact) are intertwined in the processes of perception. For example, hegemonic scopic regimes have defined what is visual art and what is not. As a result, they hinder the distinction between images and their underlying discourses. In this volume, contributors such as Martin Jay and Jonathan Crary propose ways to overcome the authority of the scopic regimes of Western modernity. In common, they attempt to socialize the vision by pointing to the intersubjective potential of visual practices (Foster 1988, IX).

More recent discussions, however, highlight the necessity of dialogues with different epistemologies that are not solely grounded on the perspective of European modernity, but also incorporate other cultures. Commonly, they rely less on elitist intellectual perspectives and include other voices outside academia. Arjun Appadurai, for example, calls for action-oriented research “[that] is not confined to university or professional elites and can be part of the lives of ordinary people” (Appadurai 2006, 173). In this sense, there is a crucial need to apply theory to empirical social reality in the entanglement between culture and visuality. Since the 1990s, the experience of empirical research in visual culture has arguably been carried out more by artists than by academics. Relevant projects related to with relational

¹⁷ To put in Latour’s own words, “the rationalization that took place during the so-called ‘scientific revolution’ is not of the mind, of the eye, of philosophy, but of the *sight*” (Latour 1986, 7).

aesthetics (Bourriaud 2002) and participatory art practices (Bishop 2012) emphasize the importance of integrating theory and social change through empirical methods.

In the scope of this project, another aspect to consider in the analysis of visual practices is their potential as a cognitive process. In this respect, photography has received particular attention from scholars in recent years (Didi-Huberman 2011; Elkins 2011; Mirzoeff 2016). As an accessible and widespread technology of image creation and reproduction, photography can build bridges between memory, information decoding, and perception, thus facilitating the production of knowledge. Nicholas Mirzoeff (2016) examines the implications of the exponential production of digital photographs on the way we see the world. According to him, visual culture operates more as a mental process than a visual one, encompassing not only the perception of visual information but also what we do with that information. In this regard, the relationships between visual information, past experiences, and other sensory systems are responsible for making sense of what we see.

Contesting oppressive scopic regimes through cognitive operations is a recent and significant notion in cultural studies, as evidenced by the emergent *politics of affects* (Berlant 2011; Massumi 2015, Grossberg 2018). In turn, the *affect of images* has become a common term in the field. It considers perception as a multisensory tool that must be activated as a qualitative combination between what we understand and what we feel (McGuire 2013, 22). Therefore, affect is necessarily linked to cognition (Bal 2003, 11) and allows us to consider the perception of images (and the affects they evoke) as an autonomous operation of knowledge creation.

Unlike aesthetic logic, affective logic is “a particular embodied disposition that establishes a habituated set of practices and feelings” (Lorimer 2005, 122). In the experience of images, affective logic occurs before rational thought and is responsible for the knowledge afforded to the spectator¹⁸ or creator. Such knowledge is embedded in the aesthetic experience but goes beyond it, as it reaches the political and cultural spheres through what is not visible in an image, that is, its *sensible* space. In *The Politics of Aesthetics*, Jacques Rancière (2000) approaches the entanglement between visible and sensible spaces from a political perspective. Relying on the analysis of distinct artistic objects, he argues that it is

¹⁸ From the Latin, *spectator* means ‘who watches, observes’ and is associated with the verb *spectare* (to look at, watch). Since the idea of gaze is embedded in the word, we will employ the term instead of *audience*. From Latin *audire*, the last is mostly related to audio and hearing. In the original sense, audience is used in the context of people who are gathered in a public event, while spectator finds more affinity with the relation one establishes with the visual as a subjective experience.

in the negotiation between the visible and the invisible (or ‘sensible’) in a work of art that the political can be felt as a sensorial experience.

Empirical research in the field of visual culture (Pedri-Spade 2017; Robertson et al. 2016; Bendiner-Viani 2016) attests that the affects of images are directly related to the cognitive potential of photographic practices. In the affective logic, the resulting knowledge is not only informative, but also transformative in that it can enable political engagement and self-realization. This is a crucial point for our research, as our goal is to connect the knowledge that emerges from photographic production with visual literacy practices in order to promote transformative knowledge.

Nevertheless, the interactions between visual culture and visual literacy at the site of image production have not been fully examined in the majority of research. This shortcoming can be attributed to a superficial concern with the individual perspective of the image producer. Most studies on visual culture focus attention on visual objects rather than on how they are subjectively produced. Yet visibility is situated between practices and processes, and between languages and discourses, and the site of image production is a privileged space for cultural investigation. Thus, the relationship between visual culture and visual literacy is a crucial topic that deserves more attention and is the central impulse of this dissertation.

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS STRUCTURE

The structure of the thesis consists of an introduction followed by two main parts and concluding remarks. The introduction situates this study within the field of visual culture from a postcolonial perspective. In this sense, our theoretical framework is based on an approach that considers the affects of images through a decolonial praxis. As such, it employs concepts from visual studies, postcolonial theory, and the discipline of visual literacy. Furthermore, the introduction emphasizes the relevance of interdisciplinarity as a methodological tool to achieve our objectives. In an effort to maintain a constant dialog between theory and empirical reality, theoretical discussions and case studies are interwoven throughout the chapters.

The first part is entitled “Transitivity” and is inspired by the actions that occur between a subject (people producing photographs) and objects (the resulting photographs). In the idea

of transitivity, there is always an active movement of transmission, resulting in effects that go back and forth. In other words, the agency of the photographers over the images is manifested in parallel with the power of the images to theorize themselves¹⁹. Including chapters one, two, and three, it reflects on photographic production through complementary approaches. To provide a historical context for the research, the first chapter explores the cultural history of photography in the African context. First, it looks critically at the first uses of the medium on the continent during the colonial period. It then extends to the ways in which African practitioners have appropriated photography for their own social and representational needs, reflecting the cultural reality of the continent and its diversity. It analyzes the symbolic experiences and social uses of photography in key landmarks, such as the widespread practice of studio portraiture in the major urban centers of sub-Saharan Africa since the 1950s. These “experiences with modernity” (Appadurai 1997) allow for a “phenomenology of the non-mimetic” (Oguibe 1996) that destabilizes Western representational categorizations. Nevertheless, the primary concern of this chapter is to answer the question ‘What is African photography?’ and to interrogate the validity and relevance of the term.

Chapter two examines the processes that underlie African photography and how they are structured around specific practices. Distinguishing between established photographic processes and individual photographic practices allows one to consider the act of making photographs rather than simply taking them. The chapter suggests that making photographs can be considered an affective practice because it encompasses subjective intentions and singular actions performed in the world. We contend that an affective disposition, from the point of view of the producer, provides an interface for the translation of mental images into photographic images. Consequently, we investigate how personal experiences of image-making during the residency relate expressive intentions to tangible actions.

However, these intentions cannot be fulfilled by the mimetic capabilities of the photographic medium alone, as they also rely on symbolic relations to images. Thus, the chapter explores ‘making photographs’ as a cultural action. Since every intention carries with it the possibility of action, we use examples from our fieldwork to understand how making photographs operates in cultural processes of documentation, communication, self-

¹⁹ The idea of images as subjects capable of self-reflection is developed in W.J.T. Mitchell’s book *Picture Theory* (1995). According to the author, “it expresses an imperative to ‘picture’ theory rather than to construct a theory ‘of’ pictures” (Mitchell 2000, 2).

representation, and alterity. Drawing on Hanna Arendt's (2016) distinction between public and private spheres, it demonstrates how photographic production functions as a cultural action when it allows for plurality and dialogue in the public sphere.

If visibility emerges from the interrelation of standardized processes and individual practices, it also relies on discourses and languages. Therefore, chapter three explores the languages and discourses that underlie our subject, as this semantic field testifies to how cultural, political, and socioeconomic constructions are intertwined in the way images are constructed and perceived. The chapter demonstrates how the decolonial discourses manifest themselves through the visual languages employed by the residency participants in their photographs. Drawing on the cultural studies approach to discourse as the production of meaning through the use of non-verbal languages (Hall 1997a) and postcolonial theories of the discursive construction of reality (Bhabha 1994), we analyze how such articulation occurs within artistic practices and provides an understanding of the ways in which individuals reflect and make sense of social experiences within their cultural groups.

In this sense, it was necessary to look critically at the PALOP rhetoric as another discursive layer underlying our subject. Therefore, we examine the discourses about the PALOP within contemporary art production by analyzing publications and catalogs featuring the work of artists from these countries. While the framework of Lusophony appears as a political project that perpetuates the "coloniality of power" (Quijano 2007), the use of intertextuality in image-making and the valorization of the creolization of languages as spaces of resistance point to other possible discourses. In general, these discourses criticize the use of geographic labels to categorize non-Western artists, as this restricts the interpretation of their work and often conceals a patronizing and uncritical relationship between the artwork and the artists. These discursive constructions that emerge from our critical analysis point to a third space of enunciation (Bhabha 1994) where visual languages and decolonial discourses are articulated around sensible (and not just visible) spaces of intersection. The chapter explores two of these spaces through the works produced at the Catchupa Factory: the interplay between identity and identification, and between aesthetics and politics in the fictionalization of the real.

While the first part of the thesis focuses on photographic production and intends to show how it can convey the "affective materiality of social life" (Rose 2016, 316), the second part addresses the immaterial realm of cultural narratives and knowledge production. Entitled

“Convergence”, it is based on the knowledge that emerges from the multifaceted experiences offered by conscious modes of image production. In chapter four, we propose the notion of *visual-cultural narratives* to examine the corpus of images produced during the residency. Narratives are not limited to the textual media and are related to how humans experience reality, giving meaning to our social and subjective experiences. In this sense, the notion of micro-narratives is helpful in understanding how visual narratives resist and subvert Eurocentric history and represents a powerful strategy for meaning production at the subjective level.

This chapter uses two tools to organize a heterogeneous corpus of photographs and extract micro-narratives. First, the process of montage, as it allows for the cognitive exercise of revealing relationships between different images by different photographers. Second, the ability of imagination, as it allows one to channel different fragments of reality into narratives as mental representations. In this way, we propose the strategy of *imaginative montage* to explore selections of photographs through a curatorial approach as an autonomous method for creating and revealing *visual-cultural narratives*.

First, we look at three examples of recent exhibitions in Lisbon that brought together visual artists from the Global South, working primarily with photography, to understand how the curatorial project can convey narratives of prospective futures, speculative narratives, visual fabulations, and non-linear temporalities. At the end of the chapter, we propose a curatorial approach that applies the notion of *imaginative montage* to the production of the residency. Between extended geographies and heterogeneous temporalities, these narratives rely on the notion of *imagination as a social fact* (Appadurai 2005), allowing for the deconstruction of the past and the speculation of the future. We conclude by suggesting that *imaginative montage* is a relevant curatorial strategy for the visual translation of cultural narratives, and we highlight three of its effects in the cultural field.

As we approach the final reflections, the fifth chapter analyzes the outcome of our empirical and theoretical investigation from a perspective informed by the discipline of visual literacy. In the context of this investigation, visual literacy represents a way of *thinking photographically* in which “imagination is interwoven through the idea of being ‘critical’, and reasoned responses are combined with affective and imaginative [ones]” (Bamford 2003, 5). It introduces the topic by offering a critical perspective on Western epistemologies in the visual field that have operated the “coloniality of knowledge” (Quijano

2007), negating intersubjectivity and colonizing the imagination (Mignolo and Vazquez 2013).

A decolonial approach to knowledge production must be adopted in order to recover forms of relating to reality that are not beholden to European sciences and philosophies. Such a perspective entails a critical analysis of the concepts of *aesthetics* and *poetics*, along with their socio-political implications in shaping the perception and interpretation of artistic objects. In this sense, we revisit the concepts of *aesthesis* and *poiesis* as alternative ways of thinking about how artworks make knowledge possible. In this sense, a *decolonial aesthesis* (Mignolo, 2011a) is conducive to an *embodied knowledge* in which performative and imaginative acts are articulated with a political engagement. On the other hand, we posit that while visual representations produce specific affects on the viewer through poetic forms, the *poiesis of photographs* can resituate these affects from the perspective of the image producer.

Furthermore, the chapter explores knowledge not as an exclusive property of artistic objects, but rather as a series of exchanges between different individuals and worldviews mediated by the artwork. This perspective leads to the dissolving of the traditional educational constructs of teaching and learning. In this vein, we explore the ideas of the critical pedagogy movement, particularly Paulo Freire's theory of pedagogy as an emancipatory practice (2005; 2013). By transposing Freire's method of verbal literacy as a strategy of visual literacy, the production of photographs becomes a process that affords emancipation at the social and subjective levels. This process is referred to as *emancipatory artistic education* and is reflected in the position of the artist Akinbode Akinbiyi, who was the main facilitator of the creative and critical development of the participants. For Akinbode, creating knowledge through artistic photographic practices must transcend the mimetic relationship between images and the world and instead move towards a deeper understanding of the multisensorial and affective aspects of photographic production.

Lastly, we propose the notion of *photographic poiesis* as a tool of visual literacy, encompassing the potential of visual production to promote social engagement and the fulfillment of the individual as a cultural subject. Ultimately, we intend to offer new perspectives and propose practical initiatives that guide photographic practices toward the promotion of transformative knowledge that impacts the visual construction of the social. Our final remarks will concatenate the main findings of the thesis and reinforce the relevance of an active and engaged attitude in the way we produce images. Therefore, we hope to

promote and develop visual literacy as an accessible ability for extracting cultural knowledge from images.

PART I

TRANSITIVITY: PHOTOGRAPHIC PRODUCTION

1. A BRIEF NARRATIVE ON THE CULTURAL HISTORIES OF AFRICAN PHOTOGRAPHY

1.1. OPENING REMARKS

In recent years, cultural discussions in the public arena demonstrate an increasing concern about the biased character of so-called official history and how its construction impacts social justice and perpetuates situations of inequality at a global level. In different parts of the world, the first years of the 2020s have seen an outbreak of political movements contesting street names, colonial monuments, and statues in the public space that are considered to sustain a univocal reading of history. For instance, these movements contest the place granted in the public space for figures involved in the slave trade, such as the statues of Edward Colston in Bristol (United-Kingdom) or Borba Gato in São Paulo (Brazil). Their statues are said to perpetuate the memory of men responsible for subjugating and killing indigenous populations as heroes, whereas these monuments provide no critical reading of history.

These are a few examples among other heated debates that include gender discrimination, systemic racism, and LGBT+ rights. The relevance of these discussions lies in the deconstruction of systems of thought and beliefs as a first step to improve social equality, inclusiveness, and representativeness. The fundamental problem with the grand narratives recognized as the official History is that they are often reproduced without a critical stance and are mostly monolithic since they do not afford other perspectives (micro-narratives) to take place in the way we experience reality. On the other hand, as defended by postcolonial (Said 1984; Spivak and Harasym 1990; Bhabha 1994) and decolonial studies (Mignolo 2000; Quijano 2007; Burocco 2019; Afolabi 2020), the confrontation of different views and positions can provide perspectives that emancipate readers and viewers. In different ways, these theories approach concepts as “historically situated” (Mignolo and Velazques 2013), aiming to produce “local subjectivities” (Appadurai 2010). To correct a storyline full of plot holes, these “south epistemologies” (Santos 2016) provide alternative narratives that impact history, shaping the discipline of history as a discursive space that must include voices that are invariably silenced.

As a scholarly discipline, history was mainly built upon written documents that afford a specific visuality of a given time and a space. However, such visuality is often built from the perspective of the dominant Western classes. When Walter Benjamin claimed that “there is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as such a document is not free of barbarism, barbarism taints also the manner in which it was transmitted from one owner to another” (Benjamin 2008, 225); he meant that history is not simply the cumulating of documents but an ongoing knowledge construction that imparts specific dominant discourses. These discourses are built not just by the archives alone, but rather by the “whole system or apparatus that enabled such artifacts to exist” (Bate 2007, 3), which in turn creates an enclosed experience of reality.

With broader access to visual documents and archives, history’s regime of truthfulness can be challenged and apprehended in the Foucauldian sense of history as the archeology of knowledge. This is understandable since visual objects – more than texts – are susceptible to different interpretations, and the ambiguity of visual objects is frequently at odds with notions of purity that permeate the grand narratives of cultures and nations. Instead, visual objects offer a confrontational space for divergent discursive regimes. Consequently, they carry the ambivalence of history and the potential to disclose singular cultural stories on the condition of a close reading of the contexts of production, the spaces where images circulate, and how the spectator perceives them. Ultimately, the uncertainty of history is present in the images themselves, as a site where different meanings can emerge from each subjective experience with the visual objects (Rose 2016).

Hence, what is the relationship between photographs and this perspective of history as knowledge construction? More importantly, how can photography uncover cultural (micro) narratives? The present research is interested in the contemporary visual narratives and cognitive processes arising from the photographic practices taking place in the African context. Naturally, in such an investigation, my western cultural references interrelate with an array of other cultural perspectives, and it is crucial to promote the interaction of these different standpoints. For Homi K. Bhabha (2019), such articulations have a pivotal role in constructing narratives and knowledge. Considering the relevance of cultural hybridism, the author sees the social articulation of cultural differences as fundamental for the emergence of meaning in the present. Nevertheless, instead of voicing “cultural diversity” (which is, after all, a comparative category that separate cultures as they remain protected and trapped

by a mythic memory or an inaccessible collective identity), Bhabha claims for the promotion of “cultural difference” as a “discursive condition for the circulation and recognition of a politicized subject and a public *truth*” (Bhabha 2019, 53). Likewise, photography’s cultural histories are likely to emerge in contrasted spaces of discussions and exchanges.

Accordingly, this research does not intend to universalize concepts, running the risk of undervaluing local knowledge but to consider a shared space of interactions from multiple perspectives. Firstly, it is a matter of acknowledging the intellectual tradition where one comes from (since our knowledge construction also has a history that determines the way we think) and contrasting it with other epistemologies. In our case, assuming that the hegemonic history of photography and its theories were built upon the European intellectual tradition, we must critically select the ideas that allow access to other singular perspectives and shed light on narratives and experiences from other cultures – sometimes up to the point where the same theories employed need to be adapted and transformed. The reflexivity required of researchers is not just an ethical tool to avoid faux pas throughout the writing of texts. It might be seen as a robust tool for fostering the development of new forms of knowledge production since it emphasizes the importance of the difference as a necessary element in the construction of meaning. Consequently, rather than a monolithic block of static knowledge, the discipline of history can be apprehended through its cultural nuances, opening a space for fruitful interaction between different cultures.

This chapter is based on conversations with two artist-photographers – Akinbode Akinbiyi (the United Kingdom, b. 1946) and Eustáquio Neves (Brazil, b.1955) – during a public dialogue around contemporary African photography. Our goal is to connect local experiences with a discourse that conceives the notion of history through its singularities and nuances. Alternatively, a concept of history that is not defined by its continuity but by its disruptions, invisibilities, and silencing processes that come to light in what Walter Benjamin calls the *dialectic image*. Echoing Benjamin’s ideas, contemporary scholar and curator Ariella Azoulay defends that the origins of photography history are associated with the political project of imperialism, dating back to the 15th century. Accordingly, she calls for a “potential history” of the medium (Azoulay 2019) as a way to include its ordinary practices and political implications.

Consequently, a cultural history of photography will not be grounded in the medium’s technical history or subordinated to the tradition of art history. As a cultural and inclusive

practice, photography recovers and highlights the relevance of social uses and symbolic experiences with images. It not only provides a discursive context for our research, but it also suggests essential notions towards a definition of African Photography that will be developed throughout this first chapter.

1.2. SOCIAL USES AND SYMBOLIC EXPERIENCES OF PHOTOGRAPHY IN AFRICA

On July 1st, 2021, a public event around African photography took place in the municipal cultural center of Mindelo. Located in São Vicente – one of the ten volcanic islands of Cabo Verde –, the city annually receives the participants of “Catchupa Factory – Novos Fotógrafos”, a photographic artistic residency dedicated to emergent African artists working primarily with photography. As an immersive artistic and educational space gathering emergent artist-photographers, the residency holds activities taking place in a collaborative setting where participants help each other to conceive and carry out their productions. Besides, a follow-up of their projects is provided during critical sessions with invited tutors. During my fieldwork research in the city²⁰, I proposed and organized the event mentioned above within the context of the residency program. The discussions unfolded around two special guests: Akinbode Akinbiyi and Eustáquio Neves. Both are internationally recognized artists in the field of contemporary photography and were the invited tutors of the 2021 edition of the residency. Titled “Dialogues around African Photography: Akinbode Akinbiyi e Eustáquio Neves”, the encounter was an opportunity to open the residency activities to the local public of Mindelo. It was also a moment of discussion for the eleven artists-in-residency, in addition to the development of their projects.

²⁰ As part of the fieldwork research for this thesis, I have been to Mindelo from June 14th to July 13, 2021.



Figure 1. Alfredo Brant, *Akinbode and Eustáquio - São Vicente Island, July 2021* (2021).

When one speaks about African Photography, it suggests a common historical and geographical background of this practice related to the African context. However, how can local practices and symbolic experiences with images in Africa be included in the term if they have been historically overlooked, despite their significance for the field of visual culture? By emphasizing that every history is framed by everyday practices and specific cultural aspects, my aim as the conversation facilitator was to question the assumption of photography's history as a reflection of Western narratives. Rather than relying on the canonical history of photography – built upon the model of Western Art History and under the context of positivist ideas about technological progress and science development – the aim was to emphasize the importance of listening to singular and local narratives to pave the way for a more inclusive – and truthful – cultural history.

The main motivation for these reflections is to question whether 'African Photography' is a useful category to include the diversity of practices and cultures of the continent. Is it possible to characterize a given photographic production by its geographical origin? Considering a space as broad as Africa, does the term 'African photography' hold a unity? The issue will be discussed at length throughout this chapter, with the field of visual studies supporting the theoretical discussions and examples from our fieldwork.

As an intersection between cultural studies – interested in social movements – and art history – organized around theoretical objects – (Dikovitskaya 2006), visual studies borrow

methods from visual anthropology, communication studies, and sociology (Derek 2021). It decenters the semiotic interpretation of images to the knowledge afforded by everyday visual practices and moves it towards visual objects' multisensory qualities (Mitchell 1995). For photography, it represents an approach that is not only interested in the inner meanings of an image but also asks "how an image was produced and how it is made meaningful by its viewers" (Pink 2003, 186). Moreover, it stresses the cultural relevance of social practices related to the production, circulation, and perception of photographs, reflecting the specificity of these practices in different cultural and social contexts (Rose 2016). Within this theoretical framework, I suggest an approach of social uses and symbolic experiences of photography in the African context. Although conscious that the African context is not just one, it seemed coherent to take this direction during the conversation with Akinbode and Eustáquio because the audience was partially mirroring the cultural diversity of Africa, with people from Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Cabo Verde, and Mozambique among the attendants.

Africa and photography have a long-shared history. The inception of the first photographic experiments at the beginning of the 19th century is closely related to the events occurring in the African continent. Our conversation begins with Akinbode precisely reminding us that the history of photography in Africa begins almost at the same time as it started in Europe. Indeed, it started precisely three months later. On August 19th, 1839, the French government accepted and acquired the daguerreotype process, and it was made a public invention by the *Académie des Sciences* (Freund 2017, 27). In November of the same year, photography arrived in Egypt by European travelers seeking to record ancient monuments such as the pyramids. One of them was the French painter and amateur photographer Horace Vernet. His local benefactor in Egypt, known as the khedive Mehmet, is believed to be the first African to have employed the medium. He quickly appropriated the technique from Vernet, aiming to reproduce images of his spouses (Oguibe 1996; Hannavy 2008).

Undoubtedly, this is how history has been written down in documents and attested by the remaining visual archives of these expeditions that first employed photography in Africa. However, the question of what is 'African photography' is more nuanced and complex. In Akinbode's view, it is a complicated and problematic question: "There is what we call 'African Photography', especially in the last 20 or 30 years. But before that, many photographers photographing Africa were foreigners. They had a very arrogant and disabling

gaze on the African people (...) and thought of us as children, primitives, sometimes even animals” (Akinbiyi 2021b). Akinbode recognizes that even though things began to change in the last decades, the consequences of almost two centuries of this harmful gaze on Africa still frame many people’s understanding of what is African Photography and its history.

How can this problematic conception of photography history based on a depreciative gaze be challenged? To decolonize the gaze imposed over Africa requires an extensive engagement from artists, writers, scholars, cultural institutions, and the general public of photography. In recent years, the gaze issue was extensively debated by writers and scholars implicated in understanding the biases of visual representations created by the colonial project (Afolabi 2020; Poulain 2019; Andrew and Neath 2018; Mignolo and Vazquez 2013). But to understand what it means to decolonize a gaze, it is worth distinguishing between the theoretical movements that inform the terms postcolonial and decolonial.

Postcolonialism was the first academic movement proposing a critical view of the universalist character of European cultural, political, and economic influence over other regions of the world. Inaugurated with the publication of *Orientalism* (1978) by Edward Said, postcolonialism²¹ reflects on the ongoing effects of colonialism on the former colonies. The development of the field in the 1980s and 1990s around the pioneering works of Homi K. Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak explores central issues such as cultural hybridism, hegemonic narratives, and power/knowledge relations. These concepts are essential to the discursive analysis of knowledge production through photography in the African context and will be developed throughout the thesis. Overall, such a perspective understands the “post-independence period as being continuously constituted and affected by structures and institutions imposed during the colonial era” (Tsang 2015). Influenced by post-structuralist theory and using discourse analysis methodologies, the movement has focused mainly on the African, Middle-East, and South-Asia contexts.

On the other hand, decolonial studies are associated with the Latin-American context and emerged later, in the early 2000s. Besides the difference in the geographic center of attention and its chronology, the field also considers the issues of colonialism from a larger

²¹ It must be distinguished from the hyphenated term “post-colonialism” which is mainly related to the temporal feature, that is, the specific period unrolling after the political independence of the colony (See Tsang 2021).

time-frame perspective. Whereas postcolonialism refers mainly to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, decolonial studies considers earlier European incursions upon the Americas in the 15th century as the event allowing European imperial power to spread over territories but also over local mentalities (Bhabra 2014, 115). Indeed, while postcolonialism focuses on landmarks such as the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution to understand how modernity was paved as an ideological concept, decolonial scholars see the effects of imperial domination in the coloniality of indigenous knowledge and imagination. Accordingly, *decolonization* is instead an epistemological project rather than a political one (Tsang 2021). Therefore, it seeks to delink from the structure of knowledge imposed by the West and to reconstitute ways of thinking informed by non-European epistemologies.

Hence, as a verb, *to decolonize* suggests the action of rising up against hegemonic knowledge structures. To that extent, it means a more nuanced critique of what remains ‘colonized’, by “both resisting the reproduction of colonial taxonomies while simultaneously vindicating radical multiplicity” (L’Internationale 2015). As a noun, decoloniality implies the existence of coloniality in the present and refers to actions aimed at overturning its effects on collective and individual identities. Although initially associated with South American scholars, the term has become widely used in the African context. According to Olugbemiga Afolabi (2020)²², decoloniality arises from the conscience of pedagogies and systems of knowledge that still alienate African people and perpetuate a state of epistemological domination. Consequently, a decolonial approach is interested in the contemporary practices producing new languages in which the invisibility of colonial legacy is contested and transformed. Thus, decolonizing the gaze is a contextual, historically located, and future-driven practice. It compels an interpretation of visual objects that disclose their invisible features, be it the hidden colonial past that still lingers or an unforeseen future materialized through imagination and speculative accounts.

Arguably, photography was one of the driving forces behind the consolidation of the colonial gaze. The first photographic missions in Africa played a crucial role in identifying and interpreting the distant, the unfamiliar. But like any cultural construction, photography was not free from an ideological bias. Hence, the alterity of the gaze has contributed to the

²² According to the author, decoloniality is “a platform and (...) an Africanist agenda that seeks to transform various methods, pedagogies and socio-cultural influences that render Africans to second-class citizens in a globalized world” (Afolabi 2020, 97).

disempowering depiction of ‘others’ and has laid bare the socially destroying forces of colonialism and imperialism (Bal 2002). Nevertheless, the imperialist ideologies that underlie the so-called invention of photography existed long before its official announcement in 1839 in France (Azoulay 2019). The Portuguese and Spanish colonists who invaded the so-called ‘new world’ in the Americas already had a racist gaze on the local populations, which is revealed through other pictorial and textual records. In other words, photography did not create the colonial gaze; instead, it has improved it by creating visual archives and objects endowed with an ideological function.

Contemporary African writers, curators, and artists have provided crucial contributions to decolonize the gaze embedded in visual practices and art institutions. Afro-American writer Saidiya Hartman works with archival material to propose “critical fabulation” and “documentary poetics” by assembling and composing alternative narratives of Black existence (Hartman 2021, 127). In her study of the wayward lives of American back girls at the beginning of the twentieth century (Hartman 2019), she decolonizes the gaze by looking at photographs of these girls through a speculative gaze that breaks the photographic frame and seeks for an encounter: “We are inside the photographic encounter, and the aim of the reading is not to convince anyone not with the girl or bearing the burden of the gaze of anything at all. Rather the only concern is whether it is possible to annotate and transform the image and to liberate her and us from its frame”, she explains (Hartman 2021, 135).

Related literature in photography theories and practices have also contributed to decolonizing visual methods. Nigerian writer and artist Olu Oguibe provides a new reading of the ontology of photography through the way local African populations have adapted and used photography for their symbolic practices with images (Oguibe 1996). Additional works undertaken by curators and writers such as Okwui Enwezor (2003), Mark Sealy (2019), and Azu Nwagbogu (2021a) underline the importance of unmasking the colonial gaze through practices of appropriation of colonial photographic archives and the restitution of African cultural heritage.

For African artists, the clashes with the Western gaze prompted the deployment of an aesthetic of resistance and affirmation. Photographers-artists ranging from Rotimi Fani-Kayode (Nigeria, 1955-1989) to Santu Mofokeng (South-Africa, 1956-2020) have decolonized the colonial visuality using different strategies. The first delve into the cosmology of Yoruba deities to approach the cliché representation of African masculinity

through a queer aesthetic where virility appears as fluid and supernatural energy; whereas Mofokeng explores the archive of family albums of a dynamic South-African black middle-class thriving between 1890 and 1950 and then disappeared with the imposition of the apartheid regime. Both are responsible for producing cultural objects that, as suggested by Mignolo and Vazquez (2013), “decolonize the senses” by affording an African perspective of self and tradition. Likewise, Akinbode asserts that it is vital to acknowledge the non-Western photographers on the continent – especially those producing images after World War II – who were directly or indirectly engaged in the project of decolonizing the gaze: “You don’t even need to write another ‘chapter’ [of photography history], you just include that Africans were there, doing their work as well” (Akinbiyi 2021b), he concludes.

Reflecting on the recovery of local stories and photographic practices in the African continent to promote new discourses about the medium, Akinbode also considers the idea of ‘relearning’ with pre-existing images: relooking at photographs and rethinking about the context where they were made, and the intentions of the producer is a process of questioning and discovering something else that is no evident at first sight. As a result, photography fulfills a role of imperial knowledge deconstruction since it expands the medium’s potential beyond the dichotomy between its informative and artistic capacities. When the spectator establishes a cognitive relation with images from the past, the operation affords a knowledge experience that is critical and visually engaged. To that extent, the notion of African Photography can contribute not only as a new category of photographic history but also as a discursive space that enhances the cognitive strength of photography to extract meaning from symbolic experiences and social uses.

Regarding the social uses of photography in Africa, Akinbode calls attention to an inescapable inclusion in the cultural history of the medium: the news magazine *Drum*, published from 1951 in South Africa. Initially titled *The African Drum* – “a magazine of Africa for Africa”, the publication had a considerable influence on Anglophone Africa and later on the European, North-American, and West Indies Afro-descendant’s communities. According to Tom Odhiambo (2006), during its golden years (1951-1965), *Drum* represented a confluence between the traditional African world and new modern aspirations influenced by European urban culture and Afro-American music. “*Drum*’s significance appears to be its capacity to initiate, carry and disseminate debates and discussions on the very ‘idea of Africa’ in the form of both news and views” (Odhiambo 2006, 158), he

explains. The inclusion of *Drum*'s legacy in the debate highlights the relevance of photography's social uses for constructing autonomous cultural narratives.

A new generation of photojournalists published lively and vibrant images of African reality through the magazine's pages. Bob Gosani (South-African, 1934-1972), Peter Magubane (South-African, b.1932), and Jürgen Schadeberg (South-African/German-born, 1931-2020) were among the gifted photographers who contributed to the magazine (Enwezor and Zaya 1996). Their images countered the gaze usually associated with Africa's depictions during colonial times. *Drum*'s visual histories often focused on multiracial affairs, social issues (such as the racial divisions caused by apartheid in South Africa), the life of eminent African personalities, and cultural aspects of daily life in the growing urban centers of Africa. They provide alternative narratives for a cultural history of photography not aimed at Europeans and American spectators but for the African communities themselves. These images had an important function as a social bond for establishing a notion of Africa-ness. They represent a necessary move for a continent that was beginning to develop ideas of transnationalism and Pan-Africanism as a way to tell its own history²³.

While Akinbode sees the importance of everyday communication practices and photojournalism for constructing a historiography that does not replicate the Western visual models, Eustáquio Neves considers the search for an identity as the ground for understanding what African Photography is. Eustáquio explains that he can only speak about African Photography as a black photographer from the African diaspora. He points out that it is generally a matter of identity, be it African Photography, Brazilian Photography, or Latin-American photography. That is to say, "you need to adapt the photographic medium to your own culture" (Neves 2021a). As an artist and photographer, his works are engaged in creating singular narratives that relate to his origins, but which are also connected with the local reality in Brazil. Overall, the projects explore how different layers of memories have built up his own identity as an African. To illustrate this artistic process, he tells us an interesting story attesting how identities are made invisible by social structures and how their narratives remain on the fringe of the official history:

²³ For a more detailed account on the influence of *Drum* magazine see South African History Online. "Drum Magazine," accessed December 20, 2023, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/drum-magazine> and Michael Chapman's book *The "Drum" decade: stories from the 1950s* (Chapman, 1989).

Can you imagine me as a 17-year-old boy in Brazil, looking for my first job? Then you get a job offer in the journal with this simple sentence: ‘a good appearance is required’. In the structural racism, this sentence already disqualifies a black person for the job (Neves 2001a).

The story experienced by Eustáquio in his youth led him to develop the project *A Boa Aparência* [The good-looking] (2014). Through archives’ research, Eustáquio found old newspapers from the colonial times containing advertisements to notify runaway enslaved people. Some of these announcements used the same term ‘good looking’ to describe the target person. In the colonial context, to call ‘good-looking’ an enslaved person was a differential sign of value, denoting that the person was capable of hard work. Using archive photographs, self-portraits, interventions in photographic films, texts, and drawings, the artist created a series of identity portraits that question the two senses of the expression. At the same time, it connects Eustáquio’s own narrative with the history of the African diaspora and slavery in Brazil. In his artistic process, Eustáquio had to tell his personal history backward: only starting from a more distant history can he better understand his identity as an individual.

When individual identities are translated into visual representations addressing stories that evoke a sense of belonging to an unhealed past, photography can materialize symbolic experiences. The method can be seen as analogous to what Saidiya Hartman does in literature with her speculative accounts of the lives of enslaved descendants in America. In the article “Intimate History, Radical Narrative” (2021), she explains that her book *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* (2019) troubles the line between history and imagination through a critical fabulation that exceeds the archival violence. Regardless of working in prose, Hartman’s experiments are highly visual in which they evoke sensorial and affective experiences that are more tangible than the coldness of archives.

I endeavored to regard Black life from inside the circle and to recapture the wild thought and the beautiful recklessness capable of imagining the *with* and the *us* and the *we*, to see and be seen in this relay of looks, seeking love and trouble in the darkness of a tenement hallway and dreaming *something better than this* in the company of folks crowded into a kitchenette (Hartman 2021, 131).

Eustáquio explains that the process of understanding his personal history is always related to a broader history of African people. In his case, this symbolic move sheds light on hidden narratives. They provide visual stories not included in photography’s ‘official’

history, which is often understood as a progressive continuum of aesthetic/technical movements and periods. Instead, the symbolic move reenacts the invisibility of the experiences lived by oppressed people not only through the indexical potential of photography but also by its capacity to represent what is not visible. Arguably, it reveals techniques and procedures that claim to obtain ‘truth’ but which, in turn, create “regimes of truth” (Foucault 1994). As a consequence of this move, the photographs’ mimetic capacity is challenged, expanding photography’s potential to embrace the symbolic and the evocative. Ultimately, the knowledge offered by the visible is also to be found in the conditions that make objects visible²⁴, which are often invisible to the eyes.

Likewise, John Berger’s *Ways of Seeing* provides a critical approach to Western regimes of truth. Referring to the tradition of European oil painting, Berger claims that the way we see things is constructed by a cultural mystification of the past. He notes that the mystification of the past exists “because a privileged minority is striving to invent a history which can retrospectively justify the role of the ruling classes” (Berger 2008, 11). Similarly, the way images were produced in Africa during the colonial context reflects a project of exploitation and domination. However, while Berger’s focus is on the role of the spectator to decode these cultural and political constructions, our conversation is directed toward the role of the producer of photographic images. To that extent, our debate points to how *ways of making* photographs can shed light on practices of decolonizing the gaze.

Contemporary African Photography stands out by its articulations between historical events and the memories of those who were never the protagonists of the grand narratives of history. Regarding the new generation of image producers, Eustáquio believes that new ways of telling decolonizing narratives come out when photographers look for clues in their own culture. The construction of what he calls “memory fictions” (Neves 2001b) represents a constant effort to decolonize the gaze and promote the individual’s self-actualization. Despite working with images, his method is conceptually similar to what Hartman does in her book *Wayward lives...* Accordingly, the documents of history need to be reinterpreted through a subjective filter that approaches protocols of fictional narratives. From this movement of history’s deconstruction emerges a counter-history where the experiences of the oppressed come to the fore.

²⁴ The idea of the visible as discursive formation in the work of Michel Foucault is explored by Gilles Deleuze in the chapter “Strata or historical formation: the visible and the articulable (knowledge)” of his book about the work of Foucault (See Deleuze 2006).

Akinbode agrees and sees the dynamism of contemporary African photography related to this effort to display a local perspective through the construction of visual stories. When asked precisely how this process occurs more concretely, he points out that “it’s very much about personal narratives... narratives about family, about their homes, their countries... and it is in many ways changing the way non-African are seeing Africa” (Akinbiyi 2021b). Since many non-African photographers tend to see Africa “as a primal land”, related to wild animals, safari, and exotic landscape, the gaze on Africa still carries some assumptions from the first European travelers on the continent. Thus, decolonizing the gaze is to contest an essentialist perception of Africa visuality that remains.

During the conversation, I do my best to accurately translate my questions from Portuguese (Eustáquio’s native language and mine) to English (Akinbode’s native language) since the audience is mainly Creole and Portuguese-speakers. Indeed, Akinbode and Eustáquio do not speak the same language and have different cultural backgrounds. However, while translation is necessary for these cultural exchanges, their views on History and African photography are attuned. Their position in the debates suggests that both photographers share a distant (but similar) history²⁵.

Akinbode and Eustáquio had already met before in photography festivals and collective exhibitions displaying their works²⁶. However, this meeting in Cabo Verde seems especially symbolic for both. When one speaks about Afrodescendentes and Africa Diaspora, Cabo Verde is an emblematic place. Firstly, the archipelagic country was a crucial site in the imposition of the slave trade, serving as a support seaport to transport slavered people to Brazil during the Portuguese colonial empire. Secondly, the Cape-Verdean people have a long tradition of emigration, and the entanglements of the diaspora community represent an essential cultural aspect of the country²⁷.

²⁵ The two artists are both Afrodescendentes. Eustáquio’s origins go back to the slavered people trade in colonial times in Brazil. He lives in Diamantina (Brazil), a city born of diamond exploration through slave labor during the Portuguese colonial settlement. Akinbode’s history is related to a more recent diaspora. He is son of Nigerian parents and grew up in between Lagos (Nigeria) and England. In the 1970s he moved to Heidelberg (Germany) where he did a Ph.D. in Literature. Afterwards Akinbode moved to Berlin where he still lives.

²⁶ In 2020, Eustáquio and Akinbode were among the selected artists for the exhibition “African Cosmologies: Photography, Time, and The Other” (FotoFestival Biennial 2020, Houston – US). Curated by Mark Sealy, the show gathered some of the most relevant contemporary African artists working with primarily with photography. Available at <http://fotofest.org/biennial2020>.

²⁷ Cabo Verde has more citizens living abroad than in the country itself. This has impacted not only in the economy (Cape-Verdean economy is historically dependent on the diaspora transfer of funds) but also culturally, as attested by the imaginary of ‘sodade’ [nostalgia] present in the popular music and literature. The notion of diaspora is directly attached to a “national character” (Gorjão Henriques 2015).

In their photographic works, Akinbode and Eustáquio reflect on the condition of diasporic identities and the heritage of their African origins. While Eustáquio's projects are interested in the articulations between memory layers and his own identity, Akinbode's focus is on the global diasporas of the world's biggest urban centers, offering a social and political reading of megalopolis. Despite their very different aesthetic strategies, they share some common concerns in their practices. In a broader sense, both deal with the question of belonging: they aim to represent how a culture resists a process of distancing, displacement, and historical invisibility.

In this sense, I asked them about the significance of being in Mindelo and how they – as Afrodescendentes artists – were experiencing the encounter. For Eustáquio, being in Cabo Verde is especially relevant insofar as he is still trying to grasp the cultural meanings of his diasporic condition. He has been to different African countries, and it is recurrent that people recognize a close relative or a friend in him. He recounts that this happened again the day before when a man showed Eustáquio his father's photograph. Somehow these events make him feel at home. Affective experiences like this one endorse the diaspora as a state of mind, a condition that people carry with them. Even though it was their predecessors who undertook the original displacement, individuals live up with a latent diasporic condition responsible for modeling their identities.

Besides this affective connection, a solid historic link also connects the Brazilian photographer with Cabo Verde. Eustáquio's predecessors may have transited through the islands of the Cabo Verde before arriving in Brazil. However, the traces of this connection were lost due to the lack of personal documentation. Eustáquio calls attention to the fact that the slavered people came from Africa and arrived in Brazil without any personal belongings. "There are no documents or objects of these people" (Neves 2021b), he explains.

In his latest project, *Retrato Falado* [Mugshot] (2020), Eustáquio reacts to the fact that he never saw a picture of his grandfather. In order to contest the obliteration of his ancestor's memories and create a sense of belonging, he rewrites the history of diaspora, creating a visual archive that never had the chance of existing. From interviews with older relatives who have met his grandfather, Eustáquio draws a visual template of the grandfather based on his own photographic portrait when he was 17 years old. Three years before, Eustáquio had acquired the archives of a local photographer in his hometown containing portraits in glass-plate negatives, the oldest images dating back to the 1920s. Stored in lousy condition

for decades, the glass plates were broken, preventing facial recognition. Working with analog techniques (paintings, collages, stamps, and photographic darkroom) and a digital scanner, he recovers the damaged images from the archive and uses the template image to bring up the grandfather's face in a series of portraits. Besides, he also includes textual information related to the interviews he undertook.



Figure 2. Eustáquio Neves, *Retrato Falado* (2020). Cover with image printed on rice paper, box with image printed on cotton paper, 19 x 14 cm.

Therefore, the diaspora condition is present in the idea of belonging or in a continuous quest for home. Yet, the concept of home is not solely tied to a distant location or physical space. It can also be found in affective configurations such as social activities like gathering, storytelling, sharing meals, listening to music, and dancing. The idea directly reverberates in Akinbode's experience of being on the island. "Each island has its specific way in their people, their culture, its landscape, its light" (Akinbiyi 2021b). Being on a volcano island brought him back forty years ago. It cast his mind back to images from Africa he saw when he was younger and the music of jazz pianist Horace Silver (1928-2014)²⁸ that he discovered

²⁸ American-born, Horace Silver is son of a Cape Verdean father who immigrated to the United States. As a jazz pianist and composer and one of the founders of the hard bop style in the 1950s, he has introduced the folk music of Cabo Verde into some of his most famous compositions.

in the 1960s. “For me [being here] is coming home. It’s my first time [here], but I was thinking yesterday and the day before... life is very much about finding one’s place, home, so to speak. And home is everywhere if you want to accept it. And I accept the islands; I accept their people” (Akinbiyi 2021b), he concludes.

1.3. COLONIAL PHOTOGRAPHY AND AFRICAN PHOTOGRAPHY

After these exchanges between the artists, the debate opened to questions from the public and ended in a convivial atmosphere. The examples of symbolic uses and social practices provided during the discussion underlined how the notion of identity is vital to shedding light on the singular stories of African experiences. However, our initial question remains open: is there a common historical background for African photography and, if so, how can it be defined? To provide a definition of what African photography is (and understand why such definition makes sense), we first need to untangle some historical events that happened in the continent. In doing so, it becomes clear how photography is directly related to the recent history of Africa. Moreover, it extends the idea of African photography beyond a close set of practices determined by a linear vision of art history. This section explores how photographic practices were adapted to the African context to represent singular positions that are frequently absent in the ‘official’ history of photography.

Nevertheless, to understand photography’s potential to trouble traditional history’s foundations, we should first distinguish between Colonial Photography and African Photography. The two terms are often mistaken with each other. As said above, photography was quickly incorporated into the reality of Africa since its arrival on the continent. However, in its beginnings, the dominant use of photography was not under the control of African practitioners but in the hands of the European settler. Consequently, the visuality of Africa was mainly built from a foreign perspective that does not take into account the cultural histories of the medium in Africa. Today, this body of images is commonly known as colonial photography. On the other hand, African photography is related to how the photographic medium was adapted, appropriated, and transformed to the cultural and social needs of African people.

But even the designation colonial photography is undoubtedly disputable. Filipa Lowndes Vicente has problematized the designation using instead “photography in the

colonial context” (Vicente 2014). She argues that “colonial photography” normalizes a one-way view of photography applications in the colonized regions. Accordingly, it naturalizes the medium ownership and the oppressor perspective as the only possible within the colonial context. Although this is a reasonable argument, we maintain the use of colonial photography in our research. As our focus lies on the production processes and the perspective of photographers, the term at least differentiates who was the producer of the images, that is, the European settler. As Eustáquio reminds us during the talk, “African photography was born decolonial, because one can only speak about African photography if it is made to meet the needs of African people” (Neves 2021a). Therefore, distinguishing between ‘colonial photography’ and ‘African photography’ is essential in the present thesis as it differentiates the producer²⁹ of the images.

Photography had a significant impact on the colonial project and was paramount to the colonization of Africa in many aspects. According to James R. Ryan, photography has reflected the colonial realities as much as it has built them (Ryan 2014). Colonial photography has shaped social, political, and economic configurations; it has collaborated to draw an artificial geopolitical map and foster the exotic as an aesthetic category; it has subjugated local cultures by transforming people in data for scientific research. The amplitude of its impact shows the role of mechanisms of representation to ensure the imposition of power. Likewise, it also reveals some wrong assumptions about the medium, especially concerning its objectivity and the supposed neutrality of the camera.

In the 19th century, Europe saw the emergence of Positivism and its related ideas of progress and science development. In this context, photography was created to meet European cultural requirements of providing detailed, reproducible, and permanent visual representations of objects and people (Ryan 2014, 33). The compilation and circulation of visual information employing photographs found many applications. From new forms of judiciary control like forensic photography (Amorim e Sá 2018) to body scrutiny – such as the visualization of nervous disorders – (Didi-Huberman 2003; Pichel 2019), the first social uses of photography in Europe were related to classificatory, typological, and comparative

²⁹ As it will be later discussed, contemporary photographic practices employ colonial photography archives and/or appropriates its aesthetics for conveying completely different ideas. Hence, we will rather use the term ‘appropriation of colonial photography’ when photographer-artists critically use colonial photography to counter the very history it has produced. Again, our goal is to stress the role of the producers and how they conceptualize their work in a way that challenge a monolithic perspective of history.

goals. In parallel, with the expansion of the colonial enterprise, these same applications were deployed in the African context to control distant lands and the people inhabiting them.

As put forward by Filipa Lowndes Vicente, from its very onset, photography was built upon established relations between the owner of the technology and those who were its target. Historically, these relations tend to be uneven, mostly in favor of the photographer (Vicente 2014). For colonial photography, it represented the institution of new uneven power relations and the maintenance of these relations for more than a century, with effects still present today. During colonial years, European photographers in the continent used the medium for different applications and intentions. Overall, colonial photography was employed for three main purposes: it was used as propaganda for the imperial power, as a religious conversion instrument³⁰, and as scientific data for anthropologic and ethnographic studies. Additionally, amateur photography would later become a popular activity in the colonies and was also employed by the settlers in the sphere of their private life. Even this subtle form of colonial photography was responsible for constructing a biased visuality of Africa. To that extent, it is worthy of untangling the different uses and applications of colonial photography.

Initially, European explorers used photography to catalog lands and people in Africa. Publications and photographic albums depicting ancient monuments, the social organization of indigenous people, and natural landscapes have widely circulated in European urban centers like Paris, London, Lisbon, and Brussels. These images were perceived as proofs of the extension of the empire and contributed to shaping the romantic figure of the intrepid adventurer, very popular in Europe in the 19th century. From the first daguerreotype-travelers, like the aforementioned Horace Vernet, to complex expeditions organized by the colonial government, the camera was employed as a supposedly objective instrument. These images served as testimony of the heroic will of these explorers and to attest to the magnitude of the empire and were passively consumed by the European public.

According to Teresa Castro, the images from these expeditions tell more about the photographer's intention than the condition of their subjects. They convey a narrative based on the construction of a difference, be it racial, ethnic, or sexual (Castro 2014, 300). Focused on the Portuguese colonial context, Castro explores how scientific expeditions participate in

³⁰ Religious missionaries have used photography to evangelize populations in Africa. One of their strategies was the before/after comparative photographs: the first picture shows a person as a godless savage; the second shows the other as a good, converted Cristian.

the space's visual and symbolic appropriation. When referring to a scientific expedition undertaken by Portuguese colonizers in the actual territory of Luanda (Angola) between 1884 e 1888, Castro points that “the photographs attest the use of image as documentation and record, but also as a “visual cartography”, that is, as a way to occupy and seize a space that was still devoid of representations and meanings (Castro 2014, 298). Moreover, the images' presumed objectivity has assisted not only in the control of territories but also as a means of analytical survey of people.

Portuguese expeditions with ethnographic goals in Africa have inspired the artist Ângela Ferreira (b. 1958) to react to the issues of representation during colonial times. Drawing upon theoretical research and extensive exploration of the colonial archives in Portuguese ethnographic museums, Ferreira's artistic works reflect on the memory of colonialism and the postcolonial condition in contemporary society. Her installation *A tendency to forget* (2015) is an expanded sculpture that combines architecture, audio-visual archives, and photographic documents. Renewing the practices of Land Art and Minimalism, she tackles the ethical responsibility of European ethnographic museums to provide a critical reading of their collection of cultural objects taken from other cultures. These objects were mainly collected (or stolen) during colonial times. In Portugal, these collections helped to promote the figure of the ‘navigator’ as a historical representation of the ideal Portuguese hero, which disregards the direct connection between the exploratory will of the Portuguese empire and the imposition of modern slavery.

To counter this tendency to forget the past, she calls upon the “return of the gaze”. As a reflexive strategy, it represents the consciousness that when you observe someone, that someone also looks back. Therefore, it reassesses the responsibility of Western colonial politics of representation concealed in scientific and exploratory undertakes. Using audio and video records from two ethnographers from the colonial period – where scientific accounts are intertwined with personal stories –, the work prompts a reflection about who has the right to represent the other and what this representation implies. Arguably, *A tendency to forget* is an attempt to grasp the political bias around ethnographic representation, but it also contemplates the cognitive power of these visual and audio documents to foster a sensory experience for the actual spectator. Such experience lies in the work's spatial and tri-dimensional nature that affords the contemplation “of a close and uncomfortable relation between science and politic” (Ferreira 2018).

Likewise, other ‘scientific’ applications of photography were deployed in Africa during Colonialism. One of its most ominous applications was to establish body cartographies through anthropometric depictions of people through the practice of portraiture. Relying on the possibilities of the medium to produce serial and comparative images employing clear, frontal, and detailed imageries, African people were literally cataloged. These images were used as data for pseudo-scientific trends (namely, physiognomy and phrenology) that related people’s facial and body features with their moral character³¹. These typologies, together with landscape photography, forged an idea of what Africa was for the Western viewer. Altogether, colonial images have helped create a visuality of a distant exoticism where exuberant nature, mysterious lands, and available bodies were to be consumed by European spectators without any critical perspective. Exotic depictions came to be rapidly associated with the idea of human evolution and served as data and arguments for theories of racial superiority.

Additionally, other forms of colonial photography were employed in Africa during colonial times. They are less related to the official missions of the ruling authority or the scientific surveys but attest to other social uses of photography. Commercial photography had quickly spread over Africa from the second half of the 19th century. Many European photographers undertaking activities in the continent were producing portraits in studios or architecture and landscape views. From the early 20th century, with the technological improvement of the camera’s portability and the sensitivity of films, photography became a mass media product on a global scale. The development of printing technologies impacted the rise of a fruitful post-card industry that spread the aesthetic of distant exoticism over different social classes in Europe.

Around the first half of 20th century, the popularization of photography has reached the lower European classes implicated in the processes of colonization. Ordinary settlers like public agents, civil servants, soldiers, and bureaucrats now had access to personal cameras to document their lives. Amateur images were produced to record affective memories, travels, and the new life in the colony. For James Ryan, this private use of photography as a social practice represented an effort to create a sense of home in a new place and share these experiences with relatives and friends in Europe (Ryan 2014, 36). Although these images

³¹ These pseudo-sciences are directly related to the invention of criminal anthropology using identity photography in the 19th century in France and had strong influence on ethnocentric and racial thesis during colonial times (Baqué 2007).

are not deprived of a Western gaze over the territory and people from Africa, can we put them in the same category with images that are part of the official colonization project?

If private images do not participate directly in the process of colonization, they are at least indirectly related. In parallel to the official colonial photography, these images contributed to creating a form of knowledge over colonized people and consolidating the position of the European settler. From staged photographs of Western families in their habitation with the father occupying a central position in the frame, portraits of white children playing under the care of a black woman servant to the same black woman carrying a bucket of water, these are just three examples of typical visual clichés that evidence the power of a patriarchal family system. The subjection of women and indigenous servants is suggested not only by indicial clues but also by the absences and silences present in the photograph. Together, they build the colonial visuality in all its levels and nuances.

According to Nicholas Mirzoeff, visuality is not only what is visual, but it embraces general information, ideas, and mental images. Originally from the 19th-century vocabulary, visuality was related to the “visualization of history”. It represents complex knowledge constructions operated by an authoritarian (colonial, patriarchal, or religious) regime that makes its authority appear as self-evident. Visuality (like the gaze, the Foucauldian panopticon, or the Renaissance perspective) is a discursive practice because it organizes and regulates the perception of reality. Mirzoeff states that it operates by three steps: first, it classifies things and people in categories; then it separates groups “to prevent them from cohering as political subjects”, and finally, it makes the classification “seem right and hence aesthetic (...) and ultimately even beautiful” (Mirzoeff 2011, 476).

To counter the hegemony of visuality, Mirzoeff claims for the autonomy of the “right to look”. The right to look is not only about demanding freedom to see. It requires a participative and collaborative relationship with the other to reach a “political subjectivity” within the collective life (ibid., 473). In the practice of the right to look,

(...) you, or your group, allow another to find you, and, in doing so, you find both the other and yourself. It means requiring the recognition of the other in order to have a place from which to claim a right and to determine what is right. It is the claim to a subjectivity that has the autonomy to arrange the relation between the visible and the sayable” (Mirzoeff 2011, 474).

Within the clashes between the self-evident (and imposed) visuality and the right to look, the notion of African photography emancipates itself from colonial photography. In the colonial context, the contestation of the medium's ownership and exclusivity represented a first step towards the autonomy of African Photography. From the 1860s, a counter-visuality took shape in embryonic form through the development of portraiture in professional studios owned by African practitioners. It reaches its peak between the 1950s and 1970s in a very particular context of optimism and great hope brought by the progressive independence of African countries (Zannier 2011, 32) and the growing influence of Western culture in the music, fashion, and in a new liberal urban lifestyle.

In the mid-1840s, the first permanent photographic studios in Africa were established by Europeans in commercial hubs in South African coastline cities and some settlements inland. From the late 1860s, in East Africa, due to the increasing circulation of people from the British protectorates around the Cape of Good Hope, many of the early permanent photo studios were taken over by Indian photographers. At the same time, West Africa saw the establishment of the first studios run by African photographers. The expansion of commercial relations, the growing immigrant population, and the diffusion of European cultural habits contributed to a rapid increase in photographic studios business in Africa (Killingray and Roberts 1989). These spaces were initially specialized in identity and group photographs and *cartes de visite*. Photographers would also cover events, public ceremonies, photograph landscapes, panoramic views, and new constructions in the growing towns. Usually, the images were intended and purchased by European settlers and a local elite (Hannavy 2008; Serani 2011).

Initially, the production of African photographers in studios was driven by the production of commercial imagery and was significantly influenced by Western codes of representation. The effective appropriation of the medium started from the 1950s when African photographers turned photography into a more meaningful practice within their local culture. The change happens in the context of movements for independence contesting colonial domination. Africa was undergoing political changes that reflected in the growing urban centers, where a dynamic local class wanted to forge a new representation of themselves. Influenced by a new nationalist will, the Pan-Africanism³² movement, and

³² Pan-Africanism is a "back-to-Africa" movement that draws to the roots of African nationalism and reclaims a sense of African unity after World War II. It started as a network between important African and African descendants' intellectuals from scattered geographies, such as W.E.B. DuBois, Leopold S. Senghor, and C.L.R.

postcolonial ideas, the favorable context allowed the development of a singular aesthetic in portraiture photography reflecting particular social uses and symbolic experiences relevant to African people during that moment.

Economic factors have also impacted the success of studio portraiture in Africa. Due to the lack of printed publications in the African countries, the job market for photographers was much more restricted, and the surer occupation was to open a permanent studio specialized in portraits. Secondly, the tradition of professional portrait assignments was losing ground in Europe due to the arrival of popular and affordable automatic cameras. As amateur photographers could now take pictures of their families, holidays, and special celebrations, European studio photographers were losing clients and looking for other professional branches for the *métier*. However, in Africa, the popularization of amateur photography came later as people would still rely on the studio photographer to record different kinds of events.

The monumental archive of images produced in those years remained relatively obscure until the 1990s, when the work of two major names of Malian portrait photography came to light. Seydou Keïta (1921-2001) and Malick Sidibé (1935-2016) paved the way for the recognition of other Malian precursors like Abdourahmane Sakaly (1926-1988) and Mamadou Cissé (1930-2003). In Senegal, the forerunner Meïssa Gaye (b. Guinea, d. Senegal, 1892-1982) was followed by Mama Casset (1908-1992) and his brother Salla Casset (1910-1974). Other important names from Benin (Joseph Agbojelou, 1912-1999), Ghana (James Barnor, b. 1929) and Ivory Coast (Cornélius Azaglo, b. Togo, d. Ivory Coast –1942-2000), as well as photographers from urban centers such as Kinshasa (R.D. Congo), Nairobi (Kenya), Freetown (Sierra Leone) and Cape Town (South-Africa), attest the dynamism of photographic portraiture in Sub-Saharan Africa during the second half of the 20th century³³.

James. Together, they wove an international network engaged in actions for the complete independence of Africa. In Cabo Verde's case, this place was occupied by Amílcar Cabral, a fundamental figure in the movement for independence (Lobban 1995,88). Pan-Africanism was an operative strategy to foster a sense of community and belonging. The movement aimed to put an end to European domination in Africa, whether through social mobilization or armed struggle. Thought as a political ideology by African intellectuals and future politicians, it was organized by figures inside and outside the continent, drawing important African-diasporic interconnections (Odhiambo 2006, 161). According to Mark Sealy, Pan-Africanism also sought liberation "from the psychology of the colonial mindset that had been ingrained in the black subject whenever the encounter with the European occurred" (Sealy 2019, 144).

³³ For more information on the precursors of African portraiture photography see *Anthology of African and Indian Ocean Photography* (1998) and the Archive of Malian Photography (available at <https://amp.matrix.msu.edu/>).

Portraits of couples after marriage, pictures of religious groups, solo portraits of distinct women and men, and children's baptisms were among the events documented by the photographers. Besides, the younger generation would also visit the studio before going to parties or other social events. Wearing their best suits and props, people used the studio as a convivial place of meeting. During these encounters, the relation with the photographer was relaxed and informal. Regardless of being in the context of religious ceremonies or amusement, the portrait session was a joyful ritual (Serani 2011), and such a particular relation with the medium impacted the photograph's aesthetic results.

At first glance, these choices are visible in the attention given to the studio space. Tissues with traditional African motives were used as backdrops, as well as the careful selection of objects indicating the social position of the subject. The revaluation of African fabrics and traditional outfits represented "an affirmation of a notion of self as a cultural subject" (Ryan 2014, 41). Other backdrops were painted illustrations of urban views fostering a modern identity for a new urban elite. Furthermore, the photographic protocols in the studio can be seen as a subversion of Western hierarchical portrait codes³⁴: young clients would also interact with this environment through the choice of the outfits they wore. Influenced by the lifestyle of Afro-American artists (especially those of the Black Music scene of Soul and Funk styles and the Blaxploitation movies), they present themselves to the camera wearing sunglasses, elegant suits, bell-bottom pants, tight dresses, and shirts often printed in traditional African pattern. In such a reinterpretation of the traditional outfits, they were also performing within a hybridized genre between praising the local culture and embracing western influences in lifestyle.

For Arjun Appadurai, this apparent paradox represents how photo studios were experimenting with Modernity. In his article "The colonial backdrop", the author notes that "photographic backgrounds and props play an increasing role in the work of the imagination, in consumer-driven images of subjectivity and in socially mobile practices of self-representation and class-identification" (Appadurai 1997, 6). These portraiture practices underline the importance of photography for the post-colonial world as a medium where

³⁴ According to Ryan (2014), since the European visual tradition is based on realism, the photographic portrait was initially conceived to capture the uniqueness and the truth of a personality. Whereas in the African photographic studios, photographers felt free to manipulate gestures and poses to forge an idea of individuals based on their aspirations and desires. The post-production production processes (collages, picture insertions, interventions on the negative) have also contributed to creating images that are not ontologically based on the individual's essence. Rather, they attest that individuality and community exist closely linked.

local and global cultural aspects are interrelated. More than an indicial sign, these images have a double social function: they reassert individuality within a community perspective.

These eccentric experimentations with Modernity created not only a new aesthetic but a new relation with the photographic medium less based on the tropes of realism than with an awareness of the self as a cultural subject. The production of African photo-studios is a crucial landmark of African photography because it draws on different paradigms of European photography. Historically, the meaning of portrait in the European tradition is closely connected to a search for the essential individuality of the subject, and its aesthetic primarily relies on realism.

As suggested by Jean Loup Pivin, the notion of the “social individual” was present in Europe until the 18th century but has progressively disappeared at the end of the 20th century. However, in Africa, this notion persists. The author draws a parallel between the figure of the totem and the tradition of photographic practices in Africa. The totem is an icon with social and cultural functions. Conversely, the photographic image carries collective values, and the portraitists are mediators or social interpreters (Pivin 1998). Their role is not to produce art, but to produce totems, that is, to “materialize in two dimensions the twofold nature of the individual. Their asset is to listen to what the actor wants to convey from its own image and help to carry out this performance” (Pivin 1998, 27). Hence, for the African practices with images, the portrait is not directly associated with objectivity and representation, but it also bears social and symbolic functions.

Research on African imagery reports the influence of oral narratives and complex cosmologies (such as animism) in the production of cultural artifacts (Zannier 2011; Oguibe 1996). Referring to the long tradition of image-making in Africa, Olu Oguibe demonstrates that the truth of an image is not based (only) in its transparency to evoke individual memories or events but in its efficacy to afford a collective cultural experience. Drawing upon the visual traditions of the Yoruba ethnic group in West Africa, the author posits that their notion of representation should be understood “as a space between faith and faithfulness, between reflection and projection” (Oguibe 1996, 240). To illustrate this, he recalls the tradition of funerary effigy produced by Owo people in the 16th century (Western Nigeria) and how

photographic portraits adapted it³⁵. Unrestricted by any notion of referentiality, an image is 'true' in the Yoruba tradition as long as it fulfills its cultural purpose.

While Oguibe sees the "phenomenology of the non-mimetic" in the way Yoruba's cosmology has adapted to the photographic medium, the practices of studio photography in Africa from the 1950s recall Mirzoeff's *right to look* when he claims that "countervisuality's realism is not necessarily mimetic" (Mirzoeff 2011, 477). The manipulation of the pose and gestures and the addition of props and backdrops all contribute to a practice that is not only based on a mimetic relation with the referent but on the idea of a coming together between imagination and reality. As put forward by Celeste Pedri-Spade, the studio space blurs the lines between reality and imagination because "people are not interested in coming out [of the studio] as they are but coming out better" (Pedri-Spade 2017, 110).

The paradigmatic case of the photographic medium appropriation demonstrated by the African photo studios attests that reality translation is not solely based on indexical realism. The knowledge afforded by photographs also relies on multisensorial and affective processes present during the image's production. Photography can afford multisensorial and affective knowledge if apprehended as a complex "event" (Azoulay 2008), that is, when it is used as a relational tool, revealing the relations among producer, subjects, and audience. To that extent, images can then prompt a space of conviviality where the photographer and model work together to construct the image, and the spectator is offered with images providing the perspective of both. Hence, these experiments attest to the relevance of participatory practices as a meaning-making tool for photographs and artists.

The approach of participatory practices in the conceptualization and production of photographic portraits in the 1950-70s African studios also blurs the lines between art and document. It does so precisely by including everyday life and symbolic experiences into the figurative potential of the medium. In addition to its referential content, the legibility of these images can be seen as related to three main factors. Firstly, it owns a lot to the configuration of the space where the image is produced. As a dialogic space, the hierarchical position of the photographer in the studio is attenuated, affording a more collaborative relationship between the participants of the photographic event. Secondly, the photographer's position is

³⁵ If there were no remaining image of the deceased person to make his/her funeral effigy, the community could use a photograph of living member of the family who looks like the deceased to represent him/her. According to Oguibe (1996), Yoruba people associate photography not with objectivity but with the possibility and the necessity of illusion (ibid., 243).

analogous to that of a community adviser. According to Nigerian curator Azu Nwagbogu, traditional African photo studios can be seen as a place of consultation with a spiritual guide (Nwagbogu 2021a). There, people would engage with the photographer to work together to extract their best representation. In such configuration, the photographer was responsible for creating a particular universe nourished by people's aspirations and dreams. As a ritual, the consultation with a photographer was an important habit that informs about photography's social function in the African context. Finally, and as a consequence of these two factors, the studio portraits attest to the importance of a symbolic (rather than referential) relationship between the image producer, the pictured subject, and the circulation of these images in the community.

1.4. (RE)WRITING HISTORIES OF CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN PHOTOGRAPHY

The phenomenon of studio photography in the growing urban centers of the continent had an important influence on the further developments of African Photography. These early portraiture practices have impacted the production of modern photography and are an essential landmark for photographers of the next generation. In the 1980s, the works of Rotimi Fani-Kayode (Nigeria, 1955-1989) and Samuel Fosso renewed the portraiture tradition in Africa, adding other discursive layers related to queer identities and social engagement in a postcolonial approach. But if African photography has successfully appropriated the medium to produce its own symbolic and aesthetic forms related to the cultural reality of the continent, other forms of appropriation – this time related to a rereading and subversion of the colonial image archives – will continue the process of decolonization in contemporary times.

As seen previously, the role of photography was crucial in establishing the colonial experience by systematically reducing subjects to racial typologies and, thus, reinforcing domination. Several investigations in social science, arts, and humanities have contributed to a better understanding of the scopic regimes created by the colonial project, affording a less naïve approach to the medium based on the paradigm of scientific objectivity. Nonetheless, photographs are very unstable objects, and their meaning is dependent on an array of different factors. The context where photographs are shown, and the subjective

perception of the spectator also play an essential role in the understanding of images³⁶. Therefore, a recent parallel line of research is interested in the reinterpretations and translation of colonial photography through a subjective perspective (Andrew and Neath 2018; Poulain 2019; Pedri-Space 2017). These studies analyze the work of artists from previously colonized regions who appropriate and update archives and collections of colonial photography to produce contemporary images. In their practices, the image's meanings are often ambivalent. It points to an understanding of images as dependent on "the social-technical relations enacted as images are produced, reproduced, displayed, transported, modified, stored and destroyed" (Rose 2021, 201).

In these contemporary interventions, the same images once used to institutionalize unbalanced relations and to control populations can have a disruptive function depending on the discursive context where they are activated. Hence, the work of reinterpretation of photographs produced in the colonial context and for colonial purposes becomes a crucial site for counter-visibility that emancipates the public by providing supplementary meanings for the images. In this sense, these translations must be considered as a distinct form of appropriation art and, hence, an essential attribute of African Photography. The work of contemporary Afro-American artists like Lorna Simpson and Kara Walker fills this space as they explore colonial archives through a reconsideration of historical narratives. They question the narratives shaped by ethnographic museums, mainly based on photography's classificatory uses. Out of these biased contexts and through the artists' interventions, these images allow alternative reading of these documents and new narratives to arise.

The appropriation of colonial archives to unveil alternative narratives is also present in the practices of Angolan artist Kiluanji Kia Henda (b. 1979). He makes up protocols to create visual narratives of Angola that transits "between History and fiction" (Kia Henda 2016, 7). In his case, new stories arise from a reinvention and reenactment of colonial photographs in the present. In the series *Homem Novo* [New Man] (2012), Kia Henda questions the legacy of colonial monuments and points to a possible future. In 1975, after Angola's independence, the statues of colonial leaders were removed from the streets of Luanda, but their pedestal remained empty in the public space. Seeking to fill such void through imagination, the artist presented colonial images of the original monuments beside pictures of the empty pedestals.

³⁶ For example, referring to the private images produced by settlers, Filipa Lowndes Vicente considers the affective and emotional potential of these images as being equally important for their interpretation (Vicente 2014).

A third image of the same view completes the sequence, in which Kia Henda invited people from Luanda's cultural scene to be photographed on the pedestal as a portrait of an optimistic time. Keeping the same framing for the three images, the artist allows a comparison between past, present, and future, contrasting these different temporalities. Accordingly, the work calls upon imagination in "a constant fabrication of memory through the production of images that are simultaneously documental and fictional" (Kia Henda, 2016, 68).



Figure 3. Kiluanji Kia Henda, *New Man* (2012). Triptych, photographic print mounted on aluminum, each 120 × 80 cm.

To make unspoken narratives emerge, these artists employ strategies where the memories and traces recovered in photographs reframe history in a critical perspective. Borrowing the indexical qualities of photographs, they challenge the way we have been taught to read colonial photography. However, the process of appropriation goes further, as the indexical qualities of photographs may be enhanced "by enlarging, cropping, surface manipulation through printing technologies, (...) assemblages, or juxtaposition" (Andrew and Neath 2018, 235). Likewise, the work of Eustáquio Neves plays with these distorted levels of referentiality. In the series mentioned above (*Retrato Falado*), he adds other layers of information to archive images and selects the shreds of evidence he wants to highlight in his artwork. These strategies are relevant since they confront the linear conception of history (which is often supported by the Western photographic tradition). Moreover, they evoke

Walter Benjamin's method of rewriting history through the recomposition of elements and the notion of dialectic images.

Benjamin's project was based on the non-linearity of historical events and in their potential of self-actualization. The philosopher calls attention to the danger of a conception of history based on the notion of continuity and progress (Benjamin 2018). In Europe, these ideas were consolidated in the 19th century through the inventions of new technologies (such as photography). The uncritical development of sciences and the faith in unlimited progress was countered by Benjamin's conception of history as an incidental *constellation* of events (Benjamin 2002). According to Rolf Tiedemann, Benjamin lucidly noted that "the object of history goes on changing; it becomes 'historical' only when it becomes topical in a later period", that is, when "the past coincides with the present to such an extent that the past achieves a 'now' of its 'recognizability'" (Tiedemann 2002, 942). In short, his method invites us to rewrite history by including the singularities of the events, their exclusions, and their invisibilities. The work requires excavating in the crevices of history, so the experience of the whole event can be translated and reenacted in the present.

As put forward by Georges Didi-Huberman, Walter Benjamin has pleaded for an articulation between the legibility of history and "its concrete, immanent, singular visibility" (2018, 19). The legibility of history in images is related to what one can directly see in the images but equally to what one can learn from images, that is, its knowledgeability. Didi-Huberman points out that in Benjamin's methods, using images to 'read' history means to "taking the trouble (...) to analyze them, to decompose them, to reassemble them, to interpret them (Didi-Huberman 2011, 36). As a result, it emancipates images from the "linguistic clichés" that they might evoke if they are read as "visual clichés" (Benjamin 2017). Accordingly, images should not be dependent on any linguistic system to convey their visual knowledge. The originality of Benjamin's thesis lies in his claims for a 'History of Images', rather than a 'History supported by images'. For in a history of images, one can attest how the image's discursive space is malleable and unstable over different historical periods, audiences, and contexts. Since images are ambiguous and fluid entities, they cannot be fully interpreted by previous written documents and theories. Therefore, images act like independent concepts, affording a discursive space where history can be experienced in the present.

To articulate the legibility of history with its immanent visuality, Benjamin resorts to the principle of montage, which is expressed in this well-known excerpt from his unfinished *The Arcades Project*.

The first stage in this undertaking will be to carry over the principle of montage into history. That is, to assemble large-scale constructions out of the smallest and most precisely cut components. Indeed, to discover in the analysis of the small individual moment the crystal of the total event. And, therefore, to break with vulgar historical naturalism. To grasp the construction of history as such. In the structure of commentary.
■ Refuse of History ■ (Benjamin 2002, 461)

Through the montage principle, the historical process's wholeness became accessible through what Benjamin calls the "dialectic image". Dialectic images allow the recovery of singular narratives that are not visible in the discipline of written history. Here, the past is constantly being updated in the present; historical images are only meaningful if their knowledgeability is connected to the present, that is, if they can act out and transform the present. Benjamin notes that articulating the past is not only knowing what happened before, but also

(i)t means appropriating a reminiscence (of the past) as it flashes at the moment of danger. It is up to historical materialism to fix an image of the past, as it presents itself to the historical subject in moments of danger (...). Danger threatens both the existence of the tradition and those who receive it. For both, the danger is the same: surrendering to the ruling classes as their instrument. In each era, it is necessary to wrest tradition from conformism, which wants to take possession of it³⁷ (Benjamin 2008, 224).

In Benjamin's Marxist standpoint, the moments of danger points to a malaise in the tradition, where the oppressed try to subvert the order imposed by the oppressor. Thereby, it represents an awareness against the conformism of an uncritical linear history, and thus, an engaging tool of subversion for artists working with colonial images. Likewise, alternative narratives of African realities can emerge when these images are not just passively visualized but used to connect the now and the former. Such operation appears in the work of the aforementioned contemporary artists appropriating archives of colonial photography. Likewise, it is equally present in the portraiture practices of the 1950s-1970s studio photographers in Africa. As dialect images, they do not evoke an immobile tradition but

³⁷ Translation by the author.

offer “tradition as something alive, not sealed in the antiquity” (Enwezor and Zaya 1996, 34). Instead, these images reenact the tradition by showing the complexity of cultural layers present in hybrid identities. Moreover, they amplify the ethical and political essence of the image’s inner cognoscibility.

1.5. KEY NOTIONS TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF AFRICAN PHOTOGRAPHY: A POLITICAL, DELOCALIZED CONCEPT FORGED ON PRACTICES OF APPROPRIATION.

While Benjamin’s ideas allow us to reflect on the history of photography as a source of transformative knowledge, his perspective seems to lack an active place for the non-western voices. Listening to others is not only about stating their positions, beliefs and describing local practices. It is literally putting into debate the multiplicity of words, expressions, and local knowledge, as the dialogue between Akinbode and Eustáquio prompted it. To that extent, the concept of African photography must be elaborated from the perspective of African people rather than from an outsider’s viewpoint. This is a first step to establishing further dialogues connecting specific experiences with images and the cultural field. It is also a challenging task as it requires a dialogic terminology that allows us to move forward and ask what its contributions are to the related field of visual culture. Henceforth, the discussion around African Photography is hoped to surpass the postcolonial and decolonial studies fields and collaborate to produce meaning about a medium in a global perspective. If the singularity of experiences and narratives can be appropriate by a comprehensive system of practices with images, cultures will not be locked in their histories, but they will mutually build common futures.

Such a view is shared by Nigerian writer and art critic Emmanuel Iduma in an article on ARTnews magazine. In “Post-continental: Contemporary African Photography”, he suggests that the idea of African Photography under a geographic clustering is controversial. Drawing upon the key projects that made the 1990s a turning point for African Photography³⁸, he asks, “what kind of contributions individual [African] artists are making

³⁸ These turning points includes the creation of the *Rencontres Africaines de la Photographie*, a biennial exhibition in Bamako (Mali), in 1994; the exhibition *In/Sight: African Photographers, 1940 to the Present* (The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York) in 1996, and the growing presence of African writers, curators and thinkers on the discussions about photography in the continent.

to the [photographic] medium globally?” (Iduma 2021). His argument raises the question of the utility of keeping the continental label when referring to these artists instead of considering them together with artists from other parts of the world with similar political and aesthetic concerns.

According to Nigerian curator Okwui Enwezor (1963-2019)³⁹, the definition of the term is an issue of disciplinary boundaries. Enwezor is not against the idea of grouping artists under a geographic label, since he acknowledges that African arts, literature, and ideas are part of a larger disciplinary field, and as a discursive field it has to be respected as such. Accordingly, only as this field becomes consolidated will it be possible “to recuperate African artists and thinkers into a global field” (Enwezor 2017). Put that way, African visual practices find themselves in a paradoxical position where the ongoing consolidation of the field somehow prevents its development on a broad global scale. However, there is still room for reflecting around local practices and narratives that are not dependent on the consolidation of a theoretical or aesthetic field to provide relevant visual knowledge.

Eustáquio and Akinbode see the notion of African Photography as a kind of political manifesto rather than a specific aesthetic. But how does the political identity of African Photography renew the common and outdated assumptions about photography? For Eustáquio, it is a more “humanist” photography because it is concerned with restoring the subject’s cultural origin. Such concern is not alien to European and American photographers, but the relation between memory and history in these regions differs radically from the African experience. Since the 19th century, Europe went through many traumatic events such as wars, pogroms, and the holocaust. However, these traumatic events were largely documented – through texts, images, or monuments – and artists have since given their visual interpretation of history. On the other hand, the traumatic stories in Africa have long been neglected and sparsely documented by the native population. Consequently, African artists, writers, and thinkers are still dealing with colonial archives. Through new representations of the African historical events, they are attempting to create knowledge by re-signifying these sources.

These discussions around the politics of images can be seen from a global perspective. Eustáquio calls attention to the fact that photography has become a discursive space to deal

³⁹ Enwezor was the director of Munich’s Haus der Kunst, and former director of the 56th Venice Biennale and the Documenta 11. He was one of the curators of the aforementioned exhibition *In/Sight: African Photographers, 1940 to the Present*.

with social, cultural, and political questions. Photography is no longer only a place for exclusively aesthetic judgment or passive information consumption, and it occupies a discursive space that echoes individual and collective voices, claims, and aspirations. With the democratization of the means of production and the increasing circulation of images, the relevance of photography in the context of cultural and political debates has increased. It is no longer restricted to the sphere of visual arts or the information industry. To that extent, the first fundamental notion towards a definition of African Photography is that it represents, above all, a political concept⁴⁰.

While one can refer geographically to Africa as a continent, culturally, it assembles very different spaces bearing a multitude of realities. Thus, the understanding of African Photography only as a geographic concept – that is, all photography produced in Africa by Africans – would bring us to a flawed definition. It risks creating an impermeable category that narrows people’s discourses, locking them up in a kind of identity label that imprisons rather than freed. Moreover, African photography should not be defined only by aesthetic concerns but also by its political and historical implications through the medium. In fact, there is a colonial and post-colonial experience shared between the different cultures and realities of Africa. Our involvement with African photographers has shown that they share a sense of belonging to the continent’s colonial history. Not only are they aware of the colonial and postcolonial paradigms, but these experiences are embedded in their visual productions.

Nonetheless, the colonial and postcolonial experience is not something exclusive to those born or living in Africa. Once again, a geographic definition would not encompass the scope of its claims. The African condition is deeply defined by expatriation and, as a result, “the cartography of its photography [has] undergone metamorphosis and expansion” (Oguibe 1996, 234). From a decolonial perspective, African photography is not only the result of processes and practices carried out by Africans in the African continent. Although Eustáquio and Akinbode were not born in Africa, both are African photographers because their political engagement in rebuilding the continent’s history and recovering identities that were erased is present in their images and artworks. The same is true for other afro-

⁴⁰ Mark Sealy endorses the idea of African Photography as, above all, a political concept. According to the author, it represents an engaged form of decolonization concerning the Other, which “considers the history of photography from within a politics of representation (...) revealing the specific or latent political implications of a given photograph's production (...)” (Sealy 2019, 6).

descendant artists and photographers mentioned in the current study, like Lorna Simpson and Kara Walker. Therefore, African Photography reveals itself equally in the resulting images, concepts, and narratives produced by African descendants and people from the African diaspora. This second key notion allows us to push the boundaries of the definition, delocalizing the production from a single geographic area, and opening it to a broader space of cultural production. It detaches the concept from a geographic perspective and includes a broader (and delocalized) reading of what it means to be African.

A third essential notion of African photography developed across this chapter is related to the practices of appropriation of photographic medium. Photography has undergone a series of adaptations to the local reality of Africa and its cultural singularities. Instead of relying on the classificatory and referential capacities of the medium, African photographic practices disarrange the categories of art and document, including the practice of everydayness into the cognitive potential of the medium. This is best shown by the phenomenon of photographic studios that spread in Africa in the second half of the 20th century. The way in which these photographers have subverted the classical Western genre of portraiture to their own social and symbolic needs reveals another relation with the medium based on practices of conviviality. Here, image construction is based on collaborative and participatory protocols between photographer and sitter. Overall, through their *ways of making*, these portraits demonstrate that the identity representation was often enmeshed into the collective. Protocols of appropriation persist the contemporary art practices and are even more directly engaged in decolonizing the gaze imposed over African culture. When using colonial photographs and documents to problematize the truth regimes forged in colonial times, these interventions attest to and consolidate new roles for photography.

These three fundamental notions around African Photography are a necessary foundation for continuing our inquiry around the processes and practices of a visibility. They attest how the social and symbolic uses of photography are essential to promote knowledge construction through the production and conceptualization of visual narratives. They underline that the history of photography is above all a cultural history, and being so, it must include different perspectives and positions. Furthermore, these notions also offer insights into innovative models for pushing the boundaries of the photographic medium.

2. VISUALITY I: PROCESSES AND PRACTICES

2.1. OPENING REMARKS

In the first chapter, we have seen how different processes underlying the practices of photography in Africa have progressively evolved from the imposition of colonial photography to the appropriation of the medium by local practitioners. While colonial photography was a process based on the establishment of unbalanced power relations involving the control of populations, support of racial theses, and religious conversion, the appropriation of the medium opened new ways for African people to subvert the uses of a medium impregnated with Western ideology. Although this transformation is far from being homogeneous in a continent as vast as Africa, one can attest to how new uses of photography – from portrait practices in popular studios in the 1950s to those employed by contemporary artists – rely on different intentions for the medium as those of the colonial photographer.

The new applications for photography in Africa have inaugurated a new paradigm where the image of the Other has to be apprehended as a broad cultural experience. Rather than implying the association of the medium's distinctive capacity to depict reality with a 'taken for granted' truth, the making of these photographs relies also on the everyday uses and the symbolic experiences afforded by photography. As a consequence, instead of a mere functional tool used to convey discourses supported by its mimetic relation with the world, photography started to be employed for its capacity to communicate or to afford a collective cultural experience that was not exclusively associated with objectivity but with the "possibility and necessity of illusion" (Oguibe 1996, 246).

Visual culture studies attend to the material properties of images but also to "how their materiality is linked to social and historical processes of 'looking' (...) and as objects in which humans have a pleasure-seeking interest" (Pink 2003, 187). Accordingly, visual meanings depend on broader social and political contexts, as well as the affective relationship that humans have with images. Furthermore, display technologies mediate processes of looking that mirror social constructions and power relations. Thus, they reveal how images use the medium to impart discursive meanings. To that extent, processes of photographic production are inevitably contextual and historically determined and will impact on society's visual regimes.

The collections of colonial artifacts held in European museums are a good example of how the political and cultural configurations determine the reading and the meanings of pictures and objects. Kept in these institutions they are often unlocked in a frame that constrain the perception and assimilations of these artifacts. Photographic collections of this kind are embedded in a Western paradigm that normalize the photographic process as straight reproductions of reality, disregarding their context of production. The dominant paradigm is still a reflexive approach of representation that goes without questioning how, where and by whom the meanings are determined (Rogoff 1998; Hamilton 1997). The actual debate about the restitution of colonial images to their places of origins sheds light on the necessity of perceiving visual artifacts as constitutive rather than reflexive of cultures. Through repairing and reconfiguring African people's relationship with these photographic archives, one can possibly resist the categorizations that stem from a Eurocentric paradigm (Pedri-Spade 2014) and disclose the role of technologies and institutions in mirroring social constructions and power relations.

However, processes are also structures capable of conveying meanings at an individual level since they are the results from specific practices and everyday uses employed by individuals. Thus, their meanings equally depend on local cultural factors (Rose 2016, 30) and the affective relationship with the production of images. Together with the aspects outlined above, processes are responsible for what W.J.T. Mitchell called "the visual construction of the social field" which is complementary to "the social construction of the visual field", connecting social and subjective attributes in the construction of meaning. Mitchell proposes a nuanced and balanced approach between images as an instrument of manipulation and social-political control (the social construction of the visual field) and as "an apparently autonomous source of its own purposes and meanings" (Mitchell 2002, 175), which stands for the visual construction of the social field.

The proposition unfolds in two consequences. First, that the study of visual processes is not confined to modernity or exclusively to Western's visual paradigms. In other words, that we should be careful when pointing to the ideological attributes embedded in visual processes without considering how images are produced and seen by non-Western cultures. After all, these ideological analytical frames often rely on a Western tradition of thought. Secondly, it suggests that images are self-theorizing objects that are fed by "everyday practices of seeing and showing" images and, therefore, concerned "with their lives and

loves” (ibid.,170). The independence of images to communicate meaning is what connects them with non-visual fields such as desires, imagination, affects and emotions. Such interconnection is crucial for decolonial practices since it resituate the colonial past in the present (therefore, opening a space to heal from the past) but also projects to the future, towards the images that are still in a latent state and will replace images of oppression that once defined a culture.

The present chapter deals with the processes underlying African photography and how these are structured around specific practices performed by individual image-makers. Aiming to show how a particular *photographic disposition* – both concerning the social world and the subjective life – can be a privileged site for knowledge production, it investigates the actions related to ways of making photographs. By approaching the affective potential of these practices, we seek an understanding of photography as a cultural action having perceptible social and individual outcomes. However, before exploring how individual photographic methods relate to a broad cultural perspective, we need to distinguish between processes and practices since both terms tend to overlap in the discourses about photographic production. By making this distinction, we aim to stress that the medium is not an enclosed entity since – as put by Hans Belting – images use the medium to become meaningful, and “how” images are produced is more important than “what” it shows (Belting 2014, 22).

2.2. DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN PROCESSES AND PRACTICES

First, it is essential to address a distinction when discussing processes in photography. The term ‘photographic processes’ commonly refers to the technical developments of photography, meaning their formal results and applications. For instance, the daguerreotype is usually known as the first photographic process. However, considering the dictionary definition of process as “a series of actions which are carried out in order to achieve a particular result”⁴¹, a subtler analysis is required. In the definition, the idea of *actions* calls not only for the history of technical innovations but also for the whole context in which a technology or a medium is used to convey meaning.

⁴¹ Collins Dictionary, s.v. “Process,” accessed May 9, 2022.
<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/process>.

Science and arts employ specific visual strategies to present their objects of study. Both certify visual consistency to representations that legitimize ideas associated with certain discourses (Latour 1986). The same applies to photography technology, where aesthetic effects are embedded in genres, styles, and canonic representations that often direct and constrain the assimilation of visual information. Bruno Latour claims that technologies often restrain perception in favor of the purposes of the political and cultural elite that controls the technology. Hence, for the ordinary consumer, the crucial moment to break free from such a conditioned framework is when the same eyes that passively observe artistic and scientific images begin to look at them as representations of the world. Likewise, the ordinary producer – who inevitably uses the technological processes previously set up by the dominant power – can consciously operate on the edges of the medium, questioning its formalism and biases and finding crevices in the systems of representations.

Therefore, the processes of representation are characterized by the technological aspects that determine ways of looking at things but are also indebted to specific ways of using the medium. Accordingly, every process depends on a hierarchy of actions, and it is crucial to look at what these acts are and how they are performed. The actions that account for a process rely on the multiplicity of individual practices performed in a given socio-cultural context. Practices are ways of making things that, despite being shaped by broader processes, invariably allow some agency to producers. Unlike the processes, practices are primarily determined by individual uses and offer relative autonomy for making artifacts. Therefore, photographic processes and practices are both responsible for creating meaning but at different levels. Moreover, what is important for our inquiry is to understand how individual practices resist overarching processes. In other words, how can specific ways of making counter the biases that underlie a medium? An example may clarify our distinction.

The *carte de visite* was a photographic process elaborated in 1839 by French entrepreneur André Adolphe Eugène Disdéri. In Europe, during the 1830s, photographic portraiture was going through a phase of great popularity, but it was still an unaffordable luxury good. With the idea of making photographic portraits a more profitable activity, Disdéri developed a process allowing to record on the same negative plate up to ten smaller images so that all the time and expenses required to obtain a proof were divided. These images were then cut out and pasted individually on the back of a business card containing the model's name (Rouillé 2006, 61-63).

At the dawn of the 1860s, the visiting card was already a successful phenomenon and became a fashion among the bourgeois classes. The process is responsible for turning photography into a popular medium (Freund 2017, 60). The *cartes de visite* were not properly a new invention but rather an adaptation of the photographic portrait to the laws of the market. With a simple layout, an easily identifiable format, and stereotypical poses performed in studios, the *cartes de visites* became one of the most emblematic cultural objects of the 19th century. Disdéri developed a technical procedure and an aesthetic form to adapt the photographic portrait to the social and economic conditions of the moment (Rouillé 2006, 61-63). Unwittingly or not, he reinforced the dominant social position of the European bourgeoisie by making these images circulate and, consequently, consolidating the visuality of a modern and triumphant class.

The processes of the *carte de visite* expanded globally and rapidly reached the North-America in the 1860s, a period marked by intense struggles for racial justice in this country. In such context appears the figure of Sojourner Truth (1797-1883). A former slavered, she became the first black woman to publicly engage in debates for the abolitionist cause and was a crucial figure in the women's rights movement in the U.S. Known for being an impassionate orator, Truth militated in conventions and meetings held in North America by different equal rights' associations. To support her cause, help other women, and raise money for her own survival, she created several *cartes de vistes* featuring her image in simple but thoughtfully staged scenarios. In the images, she presents herself with poses and elements of white "middle-class femininity and domesticity" (Cutter 2020, 14), such as hanks for embroidery and bourgeois garments. In such a parody of upper-class symbols, she aimed to gain control of her image as a black woman.

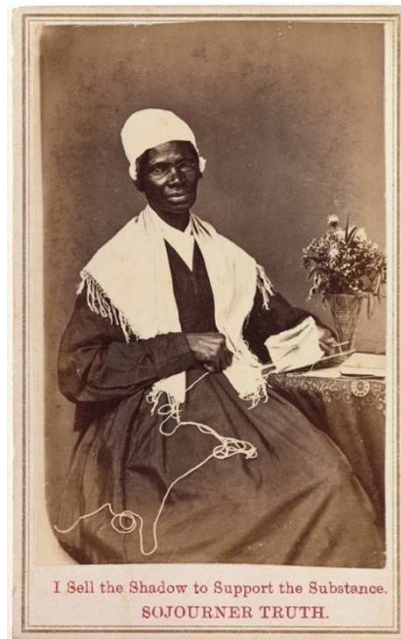


Figure 4. Sojourner Truth, *I Sell the Shadow to Support the Substance*. (1864). Albumen silver print from glass negative, 8.5 x 5.4 cm.

Some of the prints produced by Truth included an enigmatic caption under the image: “I Sell the Shadow to Support the Substance” (figure 4), followed by her name in capital letters on the line below. Many readings are possible in such a singular *carte de visite* carrying this emblematic message. The ‘substance’ may stand for an internal soul seeking the visibility of her black identity; the shadow could suggest a mere byproduct of the photographic simulacrum, nothing more than a biased representation of reality encapsulated by the futility of bourgeois life. While other readings are possible, what is indisputable is the way in which Truth subverts an elitist and westernized photographic procedure. She does so by appropriating the *carte de visite* process within an individual practice of self-affirmation and political engagement. Interestingly, like Disdéri, she also takes advantage of the process’ commercial potential to raise money. However, their intentions are diametrically opposed: Truth undertakes a practice of self-representation that uses the visual codes of the bourgeois portrait to counter the very oppressive and racist visual regime imposed on Black populations in North America at that time. She appropriates the process through her active engagement with the photographic medium.

Unintentionally, Truth uses the notion of substance in a similar way to writer and artist Olu Oguibe when he employs the term “the substance of the image” (Oguibe 1996, 231) to analyze the tradition of ancient image-making in West Africa and its relationship

with photographic practices developed in the continent. Referring to the tradition of funeral effigies sculpted by Yoruba people during the *àkó* ceremonial rites, Oguibe points out that while the Western portraiture is related to verisimilitude and referentiality of a past moment, in the *àkó* tradition, it is the notion of anticipation that stands out. The effigy – as the representation of a deceased person on a life-size painted wood sculpture – occupy a space between reflection and projection that “is not based in transparency, but on efficacy” (Oguibe 1996, 240). Accordingly, such understanding leads to what he calls the “substance of image”, whereby an image is ‘true’ as long as it “efficaciously meets the specifications of its particular applications within an intricate matrix of cultural expectations” (ibid.).

The *àkó* procedure later appropriated the photographic medium, whereby photographs of deceased persons in life would replace their sculptures in funerals (Abiodun 2014). Moreover, these images could be freely manipulated or even replaced by photographs of their resembling living relatives if there were no pictures of the deceased available. Such understanding of photography, whereby evocation overcomes transparency, was central to the development of photographic portraiture in Africa⁴², as we have seen with the popular photographic studios. But it also applies to how Truth subverts the *carte de visite* process to evocate something that goes beyond what the picture shows. With her singular practice, the substance she supports is this meaningful essence that does not take a solid form but is similar to an invisible fluid that has to be inhaled and absorbed to afford another level of visual experience.

These comparative examples remind us that the representations afforded by a medium entail the agency of producers, which includes their choices, presence, and actions. Therefore, understanding the interrelatedness between processes and practices is critical since it discloses meanings that are not solely dependent on technological aspects or on broader social-political configurations but rather on the appropriation of the medium. While processes rely on an established order that often remains without being questioned, practices are based in flexibility: a way of seizing opportunities from inventive adaptations to convey the poetics of the ordinary producer.

⁴² It has been suggested that the introduction of photography in Yoruba communities has transformed the *àkó* effigy tradition. Rowland Abiodun counters this conception by arguing that it was rather the photographic tradition of portraiture that was adapted to the Yoruba culture. The author contends that “the introduction of photography, a Western invention (...) was neither an interference nor a termination of the *àkó* legacy of portraiture and its attendant values (...). We should interpret Yoruba photographic portraiture in terms of *àkó*-graphy rather than the other way around” (Abiodun 2014,179).

2.3. HOW TO MAKE (AND NOT TAKE) PHOTOGRAPHS?

If practices provide a certain agency for the producer to bypass the rigidity and the authority of processes, how does it occur with photography? Such a broad question calls for a thorough reflection on the procedures of photographic production. The idea that the photographer's autonomy allows spaces for political and cultural action was evoked by the Chilean artist Alfredo Jaar (b. 1956). In his installation "You do not take a photograph, you make it" (2013), he borrows a quote attributed to American photographer Ansel Adams (1902-1984) to reinforce the importance of the decisions taken by the photographer in the production of meaning. The installation consists of a pile of posters simply displaying the work's title. Spectators are invited to take a copy and spread the message outside the art space.



Figure 5. Alfredo Jaar, *You Do Not Take a Photograph. You Make It.* (2013). Printed matter, 70 x 70 x 70 cm.

The message the installation intends to transmit is that the verb 'take', in the lexicon of photographic practices, does not comprise all the medium expressive possibilities. Above all, 'to take' implies that photographers subtract something from reality that will become the

resulting image⁴³. On the other hand, ‘to make’ bears a different sense when it comes to the fabrication or the creation of a photograph. Making photographs implies an engaged attitude towards the photographic act. It involves not only extracting what is available in the world but also transforming the visual information recorded to make it equally meaningful at a non-referential level.

Likewise, visual literacy is defined by the transformative operations humans undertake with images to make sense of the world around them. Such operations are crucial and demand an active disposition (Mirzoeff 2016)⁴⁴. They imply decoding visual information into meaningful concepts insofar as human beings rely on images to establish a relationship with their surrounding reality. As a cultural practice, the notion of visual literacy includes not only the perception but also the production of images – be they mental, digital, analog, physical, or virtual – and the relations they established with the cultural system (Gil 2011, 22). Therefore, a cultural analysis of processes and practices within specific visual regimes must consider the diversity of images’ manifestations and how the production context determines their significance.

As suggested above, images are not only what is materially rendered on a bi-dimensional surface – such as illustrated pages in a book –, or through a digital code – like an image on a mobile phone screen. First and foremost, images are immaterial entities produced through mental operations that decode the available visual information for our assimilation. In other words, seeing is an ongoing process of creating *mental images* since it implies translating optical information into something meaningful to our minds and bodies. Accordingly, seeing is rather a mental process than a visual one because it involves not only the perception of visual information but what we make with such information (Mirzoeff 2016, 18). Moreover, humans unconsciously connect the images they see with the images they already carry within themselves. The production of mental images – as the manifestation of something immaterial – is closely connected with our background knowledge, which includes memories, experiences, and aspirations⁴⁵.

⁴³ The same logic prevails in other languages. *Tirar uma foto* in Portuguese, *prendre une photo* in French or *tomar una foto* in Spanish: all suggest the same action of extraction, removal.

⁴⁴ According to Nicholas Mirzoeff, “seeing is not believing. It is something we do, a kind of performance” (Mirzoeff 2016, 23).

⁴⁵ Hans Belting defends that images are not only a product of a specific medium (be it photography, painting, or video), but also “a production of ourselves because we generate images of our own (dream, imaginations, personal perception) that we confront with other images in the visible world.” (Belting 2014, 10).

Since our investigation focuses on image production, it is paramount to recognize mental images' role in photographic practices. To grasp the *substance of images*, one has to acknowledge that “part of their fundamental ontology [is] that they are both material and immaterial, simultaneously embodied in particular objects and places and constantly migrating across different bodies and media” (Mitchell, in Melo Rocha and Portugal 2009, 6). As W.J.T. Mitchell (1986) pointed out, due to this ambivalent nature, images function as an interface between the external world and the mind, that is, between socio-political and subjective spheres. However, the connection between what one sees in the world and the underlying cognitive assimilation of that information is not automatic. On the contrary, it requires an active commitment from viewers to decode the visual world and turn the intangible nature of mental images into something meaningful. Such a process of transmutation can be mirrored by specific strategies of photographic production when photographers translate a mental image into a photograph. In other words, when they *make* and not just *take* a photograph.

Photography, as a procedure of image creation, implies such a decoding process because the creation of a photograph is dependent on the visualization that takes place prior to the technical fabrication of the image through the light-sensitive medium. When operators look through the camera viewfinder, the image they see is firstly decoded in their minds. Whether the photograph is made or not, a mental image of the object, person, event, or whatever is facing the camera is previously created in the photographer's mind. However, even when the photograph is produced, there is no guarantee of perfect correspondence between the initial mental image fabricated in the operator's mind and what was in front of the operator's eyes. One can only state that the resulting photograph is simply a reference to this mental image or, at best, an attempt to reproduce a mental concept into an image. In any case, from the producers' perspective, there is a desire that the mental image aroused in their body match as best as possible to the image-object produced by the photographic camera.

Regardless of the photograph being digital or analog, virtual, or having a material form, it is expected to correspond to that which was conceptualized through mental operations and sensorial reactions occurring at the operator's body level. Such intention of correspondence is virtually present in all kinds of photographic production, be it commercial photography, amateur practices, photographic documentation, or the artistic field. In other words, we want photographs to evoke what we felt, thought, and experienced. Therefore, photographic

practices always bear a *representative intention*: to convey meaning through the use of visual language.

In summary, the making of a photographic image always depends on the fabrication of a mental image, which is, in turn, nourished by the photographer's experiences, memories, aspirations, and objects of desire. And we could go further and infer that the 'accomplishment' of a photograph depends on the level of correspondence level between the representative intention (sustained by mental images) and the resulting picture (the photograph). However, such inference goes beyond simply transposing the formal attributes of a mental image into a photograph. The equation between the producer's intention and resulting visual representation is far from being an instrumental and a straightforward system (Hall 1997a). It goes much further since intentions seek to convey an array of sensory experiences, concepts, political positions, and emotions aroused in the photographers' bodies when they look at their subjects.

An approach of visual representations focused on the producer's intentions points to an affective relationship with image production practices. It suggests that *making (and not taking) photographs* requires an affective disposition that connects the emotions, memories, and experiences underlying the processes of seeing with the fabrication of photographs. Accordingly, the context for (re)producing mental images is this affective space where volition and representation blend. As for a discursive approach to representation theories, Stuart Hall claims that any meaning conveyed by different types of representations (be it written texts, speech, images, films) is always partially understood and constantly an unequal change: "[meanings] mobilize powerful feelings and emotions, of both positive and negative kind. We feel their contradictory pull, their ambivalence. They sometimes call our very identities into question" (Hall 1997a, 10). As for a visual representational system, it is between shortcuts, accidents, coincidences, and delights that resides the affective space of photography.

Before entering in an analysis of image-making practices driven by affective dispositions, it is important to acknowledge the roles a medium play in the translation of mental images to photographs. Hans Belting (2014) proposes an anthropological approach of image production whereby the body is apprehended as the fundamental medium through which images circulate. To that extend, it is necessary to understand not so much what an image is, but rather how is it transmitted. He contends that the body is the primary imagetic

medium because images are supported by two symbolic acts that both imply our living body: the act of fabrication of internal images and the act of perception of external images (Belting 2014, 12). Hence, photographs should be seen not only as the product of a visual medium (photography) but also of a *body medium* as their production implies the association of mental images to exterior images. Therefore, Belting proposes an anthropological understanding of images which puts the human in the central place around which images of all kinds (mental and physical, internal or external) circulate. Nevertheless, he recalls that *an anthropology of images* is only possible within an intercultural frame (ibid., 66), that is, one that acknowledges the conceptual definition of images as being supported by the cultural conventions from which these images become visible.

Accordingly, if the human body is (also) a medium for images, it has to be extended not only to the producer's body but also to other bodies that participate in the processes of image production and circulation. As a cultural practice, photography 'makes sense', because its meanings circulate and are shared among a community of people. Likewise, in a literary work the whole cultural sense does not depend solely on the author's intentions but also on the community of readers that will expand the text's significations. In photography, such community is composed by photographers, photographed subjects, and spectators and is governed by what Ariella Azoulay called *the civil contract of photography* (2008). Such contract governs (and constrains) the relationships between different bodies implicated in the production, circulation, and perception of photographs. Nevertheless, it also offers the possibility of a political space of plurality, action and speech.

In Azoulay's perspective, photography is an event which is continuously unfolding even after the picture is made. Photography is not the interruption of a moment in the past but a series of infinite encounters (Azoulay 2012, 26-27) that can manifest through different forms and in different temporalities. As an event, the *civil contract of photography* affords "the emergence of an imagined arrangement regulating relations within [a] virtual political community" (Azoulay 2008, 22). Therefore, photographs do not afford meaning only through the body-medium of producers: "alone, they do not decipher a thing" (ibid., 25). Azoulay's new ontological and political understanding of photography has two main consequences: firstly, it takes into account all the participants in the photographic act (the camera, the photographer, the photographed person, environment or object, the different spectators); and secondly, it suggests that any approach of meaning in photography has to

consider the unintentional effects of the encounters between all of these participants in the photographic event (ibid., 23).

As we have seen in chapter one, photography was used as an “apparatus of power” (ibid., 81) that regulated the relations between colonized and colonizers’ bodies to build an oppressing visuality. Such instrumentality of photography was possible because it involved not only the production of pictures, but an array of different actions related to the photographic event. For instance, the distribution, exchange, display, and consumption of photographic images are also actions contributing to the establishment of unbalanced power relations. Nevertheless, actions are unruly forces and carry the possibility of a space for political action and plurality. That is because actions can always be restored when looking at a photograph:

(...) although photography may appear to be a distinctive object of the contemplative life, a moment in which all movements have been eliminated, it is actually deeply embedded in the active life; it attests to action and continues to take part in it, always engaged in an ongoing present that challenges the very distinction between contemplation and action. The photograph always includes a supplement that makes it possible to show that what “was there” wasn’t there necessarily in that way (Azoulay 2008, 90).

Therefore, if the reading of image production can be culturally determined (as in Belting’s anthropologic approach) or politically framed (in terms of Azoulay’s civil contract of photography), it is equally important to understand how images find a subjective definition in the producer’s bodies and minds. Since the photographer is the one who witnessed the image’s first appearance as a mental concept, and the context of production of these images is located at the affective level, we can explore the actions performed to convey meaning through photographic practices. To do so, one has to pay attention to the correspondences and intentions present in the affective practices of making photographs and, finally, how they can result in forms of cultural action.

2.4. MAKING PHOTOGRAPHS AS AN AFFECTIVE PRACTICE

The field of affect theories has primarily developed around debates concerning the nature of perceptions in time-based media. Its core foundation goes back to the works of Gilles Deleuze (2005; 2015) about film media and the effects of moving images on film

audiences. He sought to restore the place of sensibility from the potential experiences aroused by images by moving the approach away from art history's limited categorization of experiences into rigid aesthetic concepts. Deleuze reflected on the potential of moving images as addressing a non-representational field evoking sensations, energies, and flows. In an inclination towards the experiential and the body, affect theories are less concerned with representation theories based on linguistic modes⁴⁶ than with investigations that replace the typified model with the singular (Marks 2002, xi). To that extent, it does not aim at grasping an overarching meaning connected with prior political or philosophical discourses. Instead, it tries to articulate perception, experiences, and senses through specific practices and singular materials (Beugnet and Ezra 2009).

Nourished by these ideas, different authors and scholars have developed innovative approaches to analog and digital media where the affective disposition is crucial to fully grasp the power of images and generate theory from the encounter with them (instead of imposing previous theories on existing images). For example, Laura Marks uses the term "haptic visuality" to "restore a flow between the haptic and the optical that our culture is currently lacking" (Marks 2002, xiii). She explains that post-Enlightenment rationality has relegated vision as a disembodied practice that draws primarily on symbolization as a form of representation requiring analytical distance. To reconcile mimetic representation – a form of depiction originally based on being close enough to the object – with symbolism, she defends that it is more productive to look at the particular pleasures and affectional states involved in the production and perception of cultural artifacts (*ibid.*, xiv).

Similarly, Jamie Lorimer defines an "affective logic" as a "particular embodied disposition that establishes a habituated set of practices and feelings" (Lorimer 2015, 122). In the affective logic, the sensorial reactions to images precede rational thought and are largely responsible for the knowledge afforded to the viewer. In a similar perspective, Latham and McCormack argue that:

the force of images is not just representational. Images are also blocks of sensation with an affective intensity: they make sense not just because we take time to figure out what they signify, but also because their pre-signifying affective materiality is felt in bodies (Latham and McCormack 2009, 253).

⁴⁶ For an elucidative overview on representation theories see the chapter "The work of representation" by Stuart Hall (Hall 1997a).

These theories represent an innovative approach to visuality since they reveal a symbiotic connection between the aesthetic and the political fields (such an approach will be developed at length in Chapter 3). Nevertheless, the affect theories have mainly been employed to explore moving images and from the spectator's perspective, who perceives and assimilates these images. Differently, our inquiry points to the affective singularity of still images and from the perspective of their producers. We must therefore ask: how can the affective relation photographers have with the production of images be translated into their images? In other words, what strategies do they employ to convey a set of affective states through photographic images?

Our fieldwork investigation offered multiple insights into the affective relation photographers establish within image-making practices. For the participants, the artistic residency is a space where they can connect emotions with conceptual thinking through artistic processes. For instance, Kimberly Dias (Cabo-Verde/Netherlands - 1992) developed the project *Bo tem cara moda bo mãe* [You got your mother's face] where she explores her kinship roots with Cabo Verde. During the residency, she worked in Santo Antão, a neighboring island to São Vicente, where her ancestors came from. Constructed around the figure of her mother, Kimberly's visual narrative uncovers the layers of memory and identity that remained unexplored due to her condition as an Afro-descendant born in Europe.

In this operation of recovery, the memories she evokes had to be transformed to become meaningful. To that extent, Kimberly had to create situations for renewing family ties, especially concerning Kimberly's relations with her mother. As she puts it: "if I want to understand myself better, I must understand my mother better" (Dias 2021). Speaking about the distressing nature of such a work, Kimberly refers to a photograph of her mother made for the project. In the picture, her mother is sitting, quietly reading the bible. Framed from her back, in a small room filled with the blinding day light from outside she seems unaware of her daughter's presence. Kimberly's furtive gaze on her mother is enhanced by the scene's intimacy, with her mother in underwear absorbed by the reading.



Figure 6. Kimberly Dias, *untitled* (2021). Digital photography.

When asked why she made this image, Kimberly points to a “sadness [that] is also beautiful”. Such complex hues of emotions shed light on non-representational elements that the artist had to deal with during the making of the image. She depicts a singular moment of intimacy and proximity. But it is a kind of closeness between mother and daughter where neither one sees each other, and each seems to be focused on its own universe. As an affective practice, she made the image because this ordinary event has aroused an intense emotional charge. Here, the affective disposition evoked an intergenerational experience of simultaneous distance and proximity, which was a fundamental part of Kimberly’s inquiry after her African roots.

An important notion in *affective methods* of photographic production is that images are not only produced by the camera but also in the producer’s body. For example, before the residency, the participant Tina Krüeger (Germany - 1988) developed a series of images about childbirth labor in a maternity hospital in Maputo (Mozambique). The first image shows a pregnant woman waiting in a hospital room just moments before labor. The next images alternate representations of moments “of serenity and anguish, glimpses of fragility, delicacy and at the same time strength and perseverance”⁴⁷. Close views of the birth labor showing medical objects and visceral details of woman’s bodies are followed by images of a newborn

⁴⁷ Krüeger, Tina. 2019. “Motherhood.” Unpublished PDF presentation of the project.

crying, an exhausted woman resting in the bed, and another holding the baby and smiling at her son/daughter.

According to Tina, the motivation leading her to produce these images was to propose “a more honest and personal perspective”⁴⁸ on the usual representations of motherhood. She explains that the attempt to photograph the emotions involved in the labor makes her deal more naturally with the idea of being a mother one day (Krüeger 2021). This attempt to *deal with inner emotions* is a recurrent motivation and appears in other participants’ works. It is as if they use photography to revive an affective experience and create a visual translation of their inner states. These procedures suggest that the body is also a technology responsible for attaching meaning to images and that photographic practices cannot be explained solely by the rules of an overarching system of visual representations.

These examples reveal that an affective approach to photographic production must consider the pleasures and love involved in the making of cultural artifacts. In photographic-making, the pleasure is related to a sensuous disposition of producers towards their objects instead of a quest for mimetic faithfulness. Within this disposition, love becomes a concept required to translate the intensity of the experience. As Laura Marks (2002) puts forward, mimesis is a form of representation based on proximity with objects affording a sense of reality, while symbolization requires rational distance and interpretation. However, the aim is not to choose between the two perspectives but create a dialogue between a “sensuous closeness and [a] symbolic distance” (ibid., xiii) as a methodology to grasp the affects of images. In the case of photography-making, affective representations involve a series of rooted intentions that shift between the more objective/descriptive purpose of mimesis and a desire to convey symbolic meanings. Therefore, it is essential to look at intentions and motivations that lead to specific actions related to photography-making since they allow associations between visual representations and multisensorial experiences.

2.5. INTENTIONS AND ACTIONS UNDERLYING PHOTOGRAPHIC PRACTICES

To identify the actions related to photography and how they carry relevant cultural aspects is essential to listen to the producers and discover their intentions behind the

⁴⁸ Ibid.

photographic act. Intention relates to volition and determination⁴⁹. Moreover, it is a disposition directed towards our experiences with existent and non-existent objects; thus, it relates to how we represent these experiences⁵⁰. The desire “to go out and make some photographs” seems to be the initial impulse shared by the participants. As photographic practices function as a bridge to interact with the world, it allows individuals to connect their subjective sphere with each one’s social reality. In closely examining interviews and conversations with the participants, some specific intentions stand out, attesting to desires and aspirations fulfilled by photographic practices.

A primary motivation might be to *record, keep a trace, capture something*, and “make something ephemeral last” (Mairoisse 2021). Overall, all the participants mention such intention as the first spark that leads them to photograph. They say they want to record or capture moments and memories to make them durable. The impulse to record is in tune with the mimetic capacities of the medium. Indeed, for some participants, recording involves a natural pleasure related to simply using the medium. Accordingly, they testify that: “I simply enjoy photographing what I’m seeing” (Salomone 2021); or “when I’m photographing, I’m in my world, I’m feeling that pleasure” (Rocha 2021). Participants have also mentioned the relevance of the photographic register for “preserving the past”, as for family albums, for the recording of changes in the urban landscape, or for keeping the memory of historical events, “otherwise, we would only have oral and written stories” (Baldé 2021).

For example, one participant highlights the importance of photography as a recording tool for the constitution of photographic archives depicting the colonial war in Guinea Bissau. He points out that the images showing the contact between Portuguese and African people in Guinea Bissau allow the viewer to presume and anticipate the consequence of that encounter. Two other participants declare that a fundamental impulse to photograph is to record changes in their cities’ landscapes. Filomena Mairoisse (Mozambique - 1992) recalls

⁴⁹ The dictionary defines intention as a “disposition of mind, an interior movement by which a person proposes, more or less consciously and more or less firmly, to reach or try to reach a determined goal, independently of its realization, which may be uncertain, or under conditions which may not be clear” (see National Center for Textual and Lexical Resources [online], s.v. “intention,” accessed December 19 2023, <https://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/intention>).

⁵⁰ Intentionality is a fundamental concept of Phenomenology. In a simplified definition, it states that every human act is intentionally driven towards different objects. Hence, “every act of consciousness, every experience, is correlated with an object. Every intending has its intended object” (Sokolowski 1999). The consequences of human experiences being consciously directed towards objects is that mental things are also part of intentionality’s representational target. Presumably, concepts that are true of mental things are logically more complex than concepts that are true of non-mental things (Jacob 2003).

her practice of photographing trees in Maputo (Mozambique): “for some reason, I think those trees should not be forgotten because this space belonged to them before it was ours” (Mairosse 2021). She explains that by photographing trees, her representative intention points not only to the existence of these trees but to the scarcity of green spaces in the city due to the growing removal of green areas. Silasse Salomone (Mozambique - 1990) had a similar motivation when he photographed the construction of the Maputo-Katembe bridge, inaugurated in 2018. He points out that the erection of the bridge has completely transformed an area of the city: “it removed people (...) living in the city’s fringes to areas even further away. Unfortunately, I don’t have the pictures of the houses (that were destroyed), but whoever made them created a memory of something that no longer exists” (Salomone 2021), he explains⁵¹.

Therefore, the idea of keeping a trace of what will no longer exist permeates these motivations for documenting the local environment. To that extent, photographing represents a preservation act that is closely related to the idea of the durability of past experiences. Nonetheless, the record alone is neither enough nor a guarantee of making the past last. The act of recording is instead an attempt to keep a trace of the moment, which is, by definition, a unique manifestation in space and time. One strategy for preserving an event and making it last after its occurrence is transforming it. When an event is reshaped, it will not remain stuck solely into a locked moment in the past but will extend its temporalities to the present. The operation provides a ‘second life’ to the event, weaving affective relationships that can restore its original strength.

Fabricating cultural artifacts involves modifying the natural matter into something new (Arendt 2016). To that extent, fabricating is related to ‘taking’ something out of nature and then ‘making’ something else with it. At first, it relates to the above-mentioned photographic impulses because participants employ photography to *take* something from the world. For the emergent artists of the residency, the next stage is to *make* an artifact that is more than the sum of referential qualities of objects and events it refers to. The aim is to convey not only objective documentation but also the producers’ engagement and position, offering a

⁵¹ These images are part of projects that the participants undertook prior to the Catchupa Factory Residency. Their descriptions are based on interviews, as access to them during the fieldwork was not easy or in some cases impossible. For these reasons, we have chosen to show only the photographs made by the participants during the residency.

singular perspective of past events. In other words, they must add other layers of complexity to the visual content from a personal perspective.

In the context of our artistic residency, another common motivation put forward by the participants is to *express oneself* or to *deal with personal experiences*. This position is also persistent in the participant's answers, attesting that the subjective sphere is also very relevant as a trigger for the production of photographs. Indeed, photographing helps them build self-confidence by dealing with experiences such as fears, traumas, and emotional states. In addition, it assists practitioners in understanding themselves better as it offers a space for investigating their identities. In these cases, a strong affective inclination drives the photographic practice. The attempt to represent these affective dispositions seems to trigger the act of photographing.

A relevant number of participants declared they had started with photography as a reaction to their emotional states, mainly through the practice of self-portraits. For instance, Tina considers the exercise of photographing herself as a form of self-investigation. In previous photographic projects, she raised questions about the freedom of her body in society. During the residency, she undertook a similar approach to inquire about the relation between her body and a new natural environment. Similarly, Filomena uses photography as a tool for self-knowledge production. Her first contact with the medium was via self-portraiture, when she felt the need to create images to illustrate the texts she published on Internet blogs. She explains that self-portraits helped her be more confident about her image in society. By grounding her own concept of beauty, Filomena could confront the inconsistencies of her thoughts concerning harmful and exclusionary patterns of feminine beauty. Self-portraiture practices have enabled her to: “find a truth that I consider more solid”, she underlines. Filomena explains that to be the person in the photograph allows her to see that person as a beautiful one and, therefore – she concludes: “I am a beautiful woman, even though in my mind there is still a thought that says I am not” (Mairose 2021).

In addition to self-representation protocols, the attempts to express and understand oneself better often rely on the symbolic capacities of photographs. Related to the codification of elements through which representation, meaning, and language can operate, symbolization requires a distance to see reality from a different angle (Hall 1997a, 24). Thereby, participants point to allusive elements in their images, which seemingly convey their thoughts and subjective states. The use of symbolic elements in this type of practice helps to

represent (and thus, deal with) complex feelings such as fears and traumas. However, to have access to emotional states, one has to reenact memories with an analytical distance that enables them to process memories and learn from this experience.

The creative processes of Stephanie Silva (Cabo Verde - 1992) illustrates the use of symbolic elements and the need for an analytical distance to learn from past experiences. She employs a singular photographic practice to process deep emotions and personal traumas, but her approach encompasses a broader social and political perspective. During the residency, her work tackled the problem of sexual harassment toward women. The motivation to undertake this project lies in the abusive situations she underwent and her will to expose the seriousness of the issue to society. For her, photography-making is vital because it goes beyond simply talking about a social issue: As she explains: “verbalization turns out to be temporary information; it enters one ear and leaves the other. But with photography, it ends up being eternalized, even if it’s only for a certain period and up to a certain point... but it’s there” (Silva 2021).

To overcome the experiences of being a victim of harassment, Stephanie highlights the use of symbolic elements in her images. Focusing on the architecture of the dilapidated houses of São Vicente, she associates the doors and windows with mouths and eyes, respectively, or the inscriptions and graffiti on the walls to covered voices claiming to be heard. These elements function as visual codes to confront two antagonist speeches in the public space: the words of harassment that are spoken out loud by men and the silenced speech of women facing these attacks. She will start by organizing selections of doors and windows’ snapshots of the same house to create a ‘portrait’ of the house. An assembly of these fragmented houses is printed and fixed in a dilapidated wall in a street of high circulation in Mindelo. The panel is completed by images of other photographs showing details of ruinous houses and a reproduction of Stephanie’s notebook where she took notes of verbal harassment directed at her in public spaces. Over this loaded mosaic, she made graffiti interventions and doodles. The title of the work, *Nhe Nome Né Psit*⁵² is also spray-painted on the side of the wall.

⁵² From Cape-Verdean’s creole, it can be translated as *My name is not ‘hey’*.



Figure 7. Stephanie Silva, views from the installation *Nhe Nome Né Psit* (2021).

The result is an anarchic urban intervention that confront passers-by that may be the speakers or the listeners of the verbal aggressions. With a complex array of symbolisms and analogies, Stephanie uses photographs to codify a visual language and confront it to the public space. Her project touches on a personal trauma that had to be codified to be processed. It underlines that the issue of the male gaze (Mulvey 1989) is not only visual but also depends on a verbal component: *what is said, what is heard, and what can be replied* mirror an active/passive dichotomy present in male/female relations that perpetuates sexual imbalance (Rose 2016, 157). Stephanie proposes to disrupt this *verbal gaze* by extracting its visuality and inserting it in the public space.

A third relevant motivation observed in the fieldwork experience was *the desire to interact with the world*, confront what is unknown, and learn about something on a deeper level. Participants are stimulated to observe attentively by using the camera as an instrument for a thorough investigation of the world. As put by Tina, “to photograph is a very good exercise because you have to look attentively. I don’t want to produce meaningless things. Even if this is meaningful just for me (...), that meaning has to be there” (Krüger 2021). Another participant, Sueki⁵³ (Angola - 1981), states that observation is crucial during the photographic act but also afterward: “by observing the resulting photograph, we can find other elements” (Ferreira 2021). Filomena reinforces the idea of learning and explains that: “when we simply exist in the world, we look at things but do not observe them. However,

⁵³ Sueki is the artistic name of Ronaldo Jorge Martins Ferreira.

when photographing, I am forced to slow down and seriously observe the object I am photographing and sometimes even what I have not photographed” (Mairousse, 2021). Thus, ‘looking attentively’ is a strategy of learning through the different temporalities of a photograph (before, during and after its production) and requires an active disposition for seeing things in the world. The comments above reinforce the idea that photography enhances observation capacities and allows one to discover extended layers of meaning throughout photographic practices.

This impulse to establish *a better understanding of the world* is primarily present when participants want to photograph other people. When reciprocal relations are drawn with human subjects, participants seem driven by a desire to acquire knowledge from alterity processes. Such *curiosity* towards other humans and their ways of life is supported by reflexive accounts where participants mention that the exchange with other people in a photographic encounter has led them to think about themselves. As put by Samba Baldé (Guinea-Bissau - 1993): “you talk to people, and you photograph them. In this process you know them better. It allows you to learn with others and that may help you to reflect about other situations in your life” (Baldé 2021). Magno Daniel (Angola - 1995) also underlines the potential of intersubjective encounters. Attracted by the movement of people and their gestures, he is interested in how people react to different situations in the urban space. He believes that the inclination toward people is part of a broader desire to be accepted and appreciated by others in society (Daniel 2021).

In summary, for the informants of our study, the motivations for making photographs account for a broad range of aspirations and expectations regarding the representational potential of photography. Overall, they indicate a desire for engagement with their social reality and a quest for individual self-actualization. Interestingly, these intentions cannot be fulfilled only by the mimetic capability of the medium. For that reason, they allow an analysis of photographic practices where affects and cognition, mimesis, and symbolism are all interconnected. In our investigation, the reiteration of intentions described above brought me to think about the actions performed by the participants to meet their aspirations. Comparing their answers with the production undertaken in Cabo Verde, I realized that participants perform four main actions to achieve their primary intentions:

- To document.
- To (self) represent.
- To communicate.
- To interact with the world.

Although unevenly distributed across the participants' projects, these different actions indicate modes of appropriation operations of the photographic medium to create knowledge through signifying practices. These four actions (or active dispositions) are integrated in a broader one that could be stated as the promotion of cultural action through photographic practices. Nevertheless, how can action be defined in cultural terms? Moreover, what are the contributions of photographic practices developed by African producers to understand its potential as a cultural action? In the next section, we attempt to clarify the notion of cultural action.

2.6. MAKING PHOTOGRAPHS AS CULTURAL ACTION

The “cultural turn” in the human sciences has put forward a new paradigm underlining the importance of meanings emerging from cultural activities or behaviors. As a consequence, culture is not only material or related to objects but can also be grasped as a process and a set of practices (Hall 1997a, 1). To that extent, cultural analyses must look at how we use technologies to attest meaning to objects, people, and events. Photographic practices are a form of cultural action not only because we assimilate the outcomes of its procedures but also because the ways we use the camera to document, self-represent, communicate and interact with other people are representative of cultural constructions.

If the production of photographs starts from an intention of correspondence between a mental image and an object or concept, it implies a potential action. Intentions motivate a virtual act preceding the undertaking of a given activity. Thus, every intention brings the possibility of action in itself. Therefore, to conceive photographic practices as a potential cultural action would provide an understanding of the producers' subjective motivations and their social-political contexts. This is because the operation connects intentions of correspondence (related to the subjective space of mental images) to representational procedures (related to photographic processes and cultural behaviors). The next step is to

define what human actions are and at which levels the ‘acting’ operates in the cultural processes of communication, documentation, self-representation, or intersubjective relationship.

Human actions depend on other activities that make up what Arendt called the *Vita Activa*. In *Human Condition* (1958), she defines the three essential activities for the existence of human life on Earth: the labor activity, the fabrication of durable artifacts, and the actions among people (Arendt 2016). These three activities coexist, and Arendt is interested in the plurality of senses emanating from their mutual relations. Based on the premise that *being unique is what we have in common*, she takes the human as an object of knowledge in itself to culminate with a reciprocal relationship between human actions and the emergence of plurality in the public sphere.

Firstly, the labor activity is related to humans’ biological needs for survival. Labor produces things that must be consumed and discarded almost as quickly as they appear in the world. The second activity – the fabrication – differentiates artisans, inventors, artists, and writers from workers. Since their task is to fabricate works⁵⁴, such activity provides an artificial world of durable objects. The fabrication of artifacts gives material stability to the constant flow of nature and life. In turn, the third activity – action –, is the only one that does not produce material things. Instead, it is the activity that puts people together without the mediation of matter or objects and away from any biological need. Arendt claims that actions create a subjective space among humans constituted of acts, discourses, and speeches. Although this space is intangible and does not crystalize in specific forms or objects, it is as real as the world of things. Moreover, actions are the substance of the political realm because they connect people directly, allowing humans to reveal their identity in the public sphere.

While the human condition of labor is the continuity of life itself and the human condition of the work is the attachment to an enduring world, the activity of action is conditioned to the notion of plurality. Because each human being is unique, actions among people are indispensable. If we were not distinct from each other, we would not need discourses, speeches, and acts to communicate and relate to one another. That is why actions unfold in a context of plurality, always including different outcomes from the interactions, always bringing out something new. As a consequence, actions are unpredictable,

⁵⁴ In Arendt’s thesis, the term ‘work’, as a countable noun, stands for something produced as a result of a handcraft activity or the outcome of artistic production. The correspondent term in Portuguese is *obra*, and in French *oeuvre*.

irreversible, and fragile. In spite of that, Arendt recalls that it is only through actions that humans can genuinely experience freedom. This is because actions provide a space where humans are aware of each other and can reveal their uniqueness by directly exposing themselves in the public arena.

Arendt does not create a hierarchical relation among these three activities. On the contrary, she reveals their interdependence as essential to the flourishing of human life. To this extent, the interdependence between the fabrication of cultural artifacts (works) and human actions mirrors the photographic practices of our investigation. In Arendt's sense, photography-making is related to fabrication through two approaches. Firstly, when it aims to produce durable cultural artifacts. Of all artifacts produced by humans, works of art are those which stand out the most for their durability. Their main feature is to grant stability and permanence to objects (Arendt 2016, 207-208). The argument is replicable to photographic practices, precisely when it aims to produce works of art. Secondly, Arendt claims that the fabrication is oriented by a "model or a mental image" that not only guides the processes of fabrication but precedes it and "does not disappear after the product is finished but survives intact" (ibid., 176). Arendt concludes that the criterion of excellence of an object is the "adequacy or inadequacy to the *eidōs*, the idea, the mental image, or the image seen by the inner eye that preceded its arrival in the world" (ibid., 215). Accordingly, a parallel can be drawn between Arendt's assertion and our approach to photographic representations as related to the level of correspondence between mental images and the resulting picture.

A simultaneous approach to photography practices as a fabrication of cultural artifacts and as a human action becomes more evident in artistic practices. According to Arendt, the primary source of an artwork is the human capacity of thinking. Producers relying on photographs to make artworks will extract elements from the world and transform them through reflection and meditation, intending to convey meanings through a medium of representation. However, by its nature, the process of artistic thinking is open to the world and yearns for exchanges with other people because it "transcends and releases into the world a passionate intensity that was imprisoned in the self" (ibid., 209). Hence, the producers of photographs only regain the worldly experience of being together with other people when they exchange and share their works. Photographic practices can only reach the world of actions when images are shared and visible to other people.

Besides being narrowly connected with the fabrication of cultural artifacts, photographic practices participate in the realm of actions because they can generate encounters, debates, and exchanges among humans. Moreover, these interactions are the base (and the condition) for the existence of a public arena since they afford the emergence of plurality within the codified and hierarchical dimension of photographic processes. Therefore, to fully explore the potential of photographic practices as cultural action, one must operate in multidimensional dynamics, addressing the material and immaterial substance of images and culture's social and subjective dimensions. Photography in its material dimension provides cultural artifacts that are part of people's everyday life, such as archives, documentation, and works of art. On the other hand, photography in its immaterial dimension provides access to the mind of the producers by disclosing "codes, values, patterns, and scripts which allow for acting within the social dimension and making a proper use of its material manifestations" (Hananberg 2018, 104). Hence, the idea that photographic practices account for the fabrication of works of art and actions connecting different cultural dimensions allows our investigation to analyze the tactics photographers employed to perform these cultural actions in the scope of our object of study.

2.7. CATCHUPA FACTORY'S PHOTOGRAPHIC PRACTICES: TACTICS TO PERFORM PHOTOGRAPHIC ACTIONS

Based on Hannah Arendt's investigations on human activities as objects of knowledge, we have seen that photographic practices operate as cultural actions when they afford the emergence of plurality in the public arena. Such consideration raises questions about the photographic tactics employed to perform these actions. From the perspective of African photographers-artists, what are the conceptual tools used to mobilize affects and promote discussions and exchanges in the public space? What follows is an account of photographic methodologies that meet participants' intentions concerning knowledge production via (photographic) acts of communication, documentation, self-representation, and interaction with their social realities.

Photographic procedures of knowledge production analyzed in this study are driven by the fabrication of mental images that participants will attempt to represent through photography. Mental images are forged by what one sees through the camera but are also

contingent on concepts, desires, emotions, multisensorial memories, and other images cumulated in the photographer's body. From these shapeless images, there are different tactics to achieve photographic images, and some of these operations start before the technical production of the image.

When asked about their procedures of conceptualization and production of photographs, eight out of eleven participants reported they proceeded through some previous research on the theme they want to explore. They underline the importance of writing beforehand to image production since it helps them organize ideas and search for concepts with “more intentionality” (Krüeger 2021). As Tina reports: writing is likewise a “dialogue with myself that allows me to follow my conceptual process” (ibid.). She adds that at the same time, writing provides a beneficial distance from the object of interest, preparing mental images to be transcoded into photographs.

‘Pre-production’ operations also include exploring specific themes through readings, conversations, and interactions with people related to the project's subject. Additionally, three participants usually draw sketches before photographing as a visual aid for the images they want to create. All of these operations intend to give an initial shape to mental images, but still without resorting to the camera. To use their own words, the procedure is analogous “to photograph with the mind” (Buite 2021; Tavares 2021) or “to photograph without the camera” (Silva 2021). These statements stand for the skill we call ‘photographic thinking’, which will be further developed in chapter five. Afterwards, during the photographic practice, the mental process will be resumed. Indeed, Suekí explains that “having all these elements inside my head, there is a kind of automatism when I go out to make pictures” (Ferreira 2021). Therefore, these previous experiences – especially writing practices – are essential insofar as they facilitate the translation of a mental image into a photographic image.

The *automatism* evoked by Suekí suggests that much intuition is involved in translating mental images into photographs. While this is true for all participants, some recurrent operational tactics occur when photographers consciously associate different (but related) concepts with photographic images. Suekí explains that he has to convert his feelings and ideas into objects and transpose such conversion into a photographic image. Kimberly's experience endorses this operation. When she wants to make an image, she will start by writing about the idea: “I make a web of words and try to connect them... association, that's

the word. I make different associations, and after I want to photograph these associations” (Dias 2021), she explains.

To photograph the association of concepts or mental images is a remarkable suggestion of how to make (and not take) photographs. Nevertheless, how does one photograph an association of concepts? Examples of our fieldwork reveal that the representation of associated concepts is not attainable within an instrumental relation with photographic practices. Far from a pragmatic activity, photographing has to connect different layers of meaning embedded in objects, people, and events. In the context of the artistic residency, participants reported an attempt to adhere multiple senses to their images. Here, the whole is greater than the parts and what stands out in the resulting image is an underlying notion rather than a set of utterances. For instance, one can photograph associations by shedding light on the different signifying elements of their images, preparing the viewer for a destabilizing experience which, nonetheless, calls for active participation in the assimilation of the image.

The image below illustrates the complexity of the approach. The photograph is part of Silasse’s project about fishers in São Vicente Island, which he has developed in the scope of the residency. After relating with members of the fisher’s community, he learned about specific cultural codes embedded in their practices. For instance, the position in which the boat is parked on the beach or the sand’s firmness indicates whether it is a good day for fishing. He draws attention to the fact that among these and other cultural codes, no one knows precisely what denotes knowledge from empirical observation and what is pure belief.



Figure 8. Silasse Salomone, *untitled* (2021). Digital photography.

In the image, the boat's shadow takes more space than the boat itself. Silasse noticed that the shadow's form evokes the shape of a church, but upside down, or yet a cartoonish fish with a tiny tail. The church and the fish are signs offering additional layers for the shadow's perception. But for Silasse, it also represents that which is invisible to people at first sight: "It is the 'behind', what nobody knows, what nobody imagines about them... because there are a lot of things: a lot of suffering, a lot of language, a lot of myth... and there is a lot of truth as well" (Salomone 2021), he puts. Thereby, the signifying richness of the image lies in this intricate set of meanings that Silasse managed to weave. Although the choices may come from the photographer's intuition, they obey a conceptual logic of building layers of significance.

Another protocol to photograph associations relates to two opposing formal operations. Procedures for decomposing one image into two or more, or procedures for merging multiple images into one are employed to connect different layers of meaning. For Stephanie, photography is a tool for "defragging existing images to find new ones" (Silva 2021). For instance, an image of a house can be decomposed into lines, textures, and patterns. With these layers as elements, she will build another representative system independent of the original concept of a house. On the other hand, participants who merge images will mainly integrate already existing images into the framing of their photographs. Kimberly and Janeth take advantage of this procedure to include framed pictures lying on a table or hanging on

the wall inside their photographs of empty spaces. Since both explore the topic of family ties, the representation of an empty room acquires another layer of significance when for instance existing family pictures are included in the space of their photographs.

Besides taking what is available in the world to associate it with different concepts, a second tactic to perform photographic actions is to employ (or even manipulate) elements from reality to create fictions or new narratives. At first, the strategy can be achieved by photographing staged scenes to build visual fictional narratives, as was the case of Cleudir Rocha (Cabo Verde - 1998), who directed two actresses and staged representations drawing upon cinematic aesthetics. However, the use of elements of reality can act in a more subtly way. For instance, some practices assimilate the concept of *imagetext* (Mitchell 1994), which stands for the multimedia nature of each system of representation. The concept supports the idea of vision blending with other senses, where the visual experience is considered as a composite construction since different media inform its singularity. These practices probe the space between words and images as a “third-space where ideas, passions, narratives, and representations emerge” (Mitchell 2017, 111). The notion of *imagetext* is present in photographic practices when participants allow the verbal media underlying an image (written or oral texts, speeches, linguistic aspects) to expand its meaning.

This tactic can be employed at different levels. For instance, in a project developed before the residency, Hélio Buite (Angola - 1992) created fictional accounts through straightforward photographs he made of abandoned industrial buildings raised in Luanda during the colonial period. The images strangely adhere to the sense of the text he wrote to accompany the images, granting the artist the creation of his own ‘truth regime’. The outcome is a dystopian narrative offering a decolonial reading of how unfair economic relations have shaped urban occupation and the architectural landscape of Luanda. Similarly, another possibility is reprocessing the textual information already present in a photograph to propose other layers of interpretation for the whole image. For example, Stephanie impels the written words in her images to provide extra layers of meaning for the assimilation of the entire picture. Finally, Sueki’s practice pushes the intervention even further. By painting texts and words in his photographs, he explores not only the materiality of the words handwritten but the visuality evoked by the semantic field of the word. Altogether, these practices result in the emergence of a “third space” where different mental images constantly

negotiate representations with texts, communicating ideas and fostering unexpected meanings.

The third tactic underlying the photographic practices analyzed points to the representation and transfiguration of memories. As Magno puts it: “normally, when I decide to go out to photograph, it is because I want to make memories” (Daniel 2021). For him, creating a memory is an attempt to record his particular state of mind in a given situation. To that extent, an essential operation to transform or create new memories is the attribution of symbolic elements in the image. Raised in a family of evangelical tradition from which he progressively moved away, Magno explores the symbolism of religious elements in the urban context. In the project developed during the residency, he focused on religious markers (such as crucifixes, inscriptions on street walls, monuments, and religious representations). His project combines such iconography with a documentary register of the São Vicente Island. Landscapes, empty spaces, desert streets, and abandoned constructions evoke the meditative wanderings of the photographer in an unconscious quest for meanings. As for the symbolic elements, the goal is to recall memories and feelings in a way that stimulates affects and sensations. Somehow, this is also a tactic for self-representation, allowing viewers to experiment with the photographer’s emotional state.



Figure 9. Magno Daniel, *untitled* (2021). Triptych, digital photography.

Kimberly equally resorts to symbolic elements, although her goal is to transform her family memories. She started by placing together amateur photographs from family albums with the images she produced during family encounters. For example, she made images of an aloe plant she got as a gift from her uncle. In her cultural tradition, the plant is inherited from a relative, and the person receiving the gift must take care of the plant and pass it on to the next generation. During the residency in Cabo Verde, she looked for the same plant in her relatives' gardens. The connection she has drawn between the plant as a symbolic element and the family history rewinds to the family album pictures. These images gain a renewed interpretation that connects cultural codes with an affective approach to photographic practices.

The last tactic observed in the scope of this research relates to the establishment of performative procedures during the photographic practices. In this approach, the potential of photography as an action with unpredictable consequences is most evident. Starting from interactions with objects, spaces, people, or social configurations, the tactic consists of stirring up reactions and photographing the effects of these interactions. Performative procedures permeate different photographic actions, from self-representation to the documentation of a social configuration. They require an inclination to create situations, propose interventions, and cultivate proximity with the subject. A performative photographic practice succeeds when it creates a space of reciprocity between producers and their subjects. As a result, photographers temporarily relinquish their authority as producers and grant some autonomy to other people, spaces, and objects to communicate through the image.

For instance, Tina explores the environment of São Vicente Island by interacting with natural elements using her body as a medium and photographing the results of this interchange. In her practice of self-portraiture, she performs in nature, using gravels, twigs, bushes, and animal bones. The interaction with these elements affords an intense haptic sensation, where muscles, skin, hair, bones, earth, dry leaves, and rocks all seem to be part of the same physical domain. On the other hand, for Hélio, Samba, Janeth, and Silasse, it is their presence in a community that will arouse situations and reactions that uncover social, political, and economic layers. Therefore, they developed their projects in close proximity to the communities of São Vicente. To get knowledge from these alterity processes, they must actively participate in the cultural processes unfolding in the communities. The participatory disposition is based on constant interaction with people and can include

discussions, listening to people's stories, sharing meals, and participating in activities, among many others. The images they produce are the result of such exchanges with the community.

Evidently, these four tactics to perform photographic actions are unevenly distributed in each one's practices. According to the action they want to perform (communicate, self-represent, document, or interact), they will gradually employ one or more tactics. Overall, these non-linear tactics are close to artistic protocols since they use photography not as a tool to get new answers but as a tool for asking original questions. As Stephanie commented: "in practices [with images], you have to learn how to self-transform yourself instead of being transformed by the practice" (Silva 2021). Her comment highlights the importance of an active disposition and a will for open-ended experiences within creative photographic practices.

Since photographic actions afford cultural meanings, they are part of a representational system allowing producers and spectators to communicate by sharing a common language. Therefore, we can analyze our subject's photographic languages and understand how they carry relevant cultural aspects. As Stuart Hall recalls, the production of meaning through languages is always dialogic. Accordingly, meanings should be analyzed "less in terms of 'accuracy' and 'truth' and more in terms of effective exchange – a process of translation which facilitates cultural communication" (Hall 1997a, 10-11). Now that we have explored how practices resist overarching photographic processes, we can examine how specific cultural discourses embedded in the practices negotiate with visual, affective, and artistic languages.

3. VISUALITY II: DISCOURSES AND LANGUAGES

To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization.

(Fanon 1983, 17-18)

3.1. OPENING REMARKS

The previous chapter clarifies the distinction between photographic processes and practices and how their interplay affords knowledge production. We aimed to show that photography is an unstable tool in the hands of its practitioners since its ways of making are affected by broader processes related to the medium's history and its technical deployments. Nonetheless, a space of creative freedom is to be found in local practices that subvert formalized processes, as in the examples of decolonial practices employing photography to counter the oppressive visual regime imposed over the diversity of African populations. Now, this investigation proceeds to another signifying layer of photography which is also built in the negotiation between two interrelated aspects of the medium. Our central argument is that photography conveys discourses about the world, and these discourses are only visible and understandable because they rely on visual languages that are developed by amateurs, professional photographers, and artists.

While photographic practices and processes are more related to the production of meaning through how photographs are formally produced, discourses and languages relate to how their meanings are shaped in the public sphere to become relevant and convey

worldviews, narratives, and affective states. The epistemic value of photographs can be approached from these two interrelated semantic fields. On one side, we have processes and practices relying on protocols photography uses to create images. Conversely, on the other, we have discourses and languages attesting to how cultural, political, and socioeconomic contexts influence images' meanings, construction, and perception.

It is difficult to escape an analogy with linguistic practices when relating photography with discourses and languages. In verbal communication, discourses are always mediated by our statements, however unintentionally. They carry not only the complexities of the self but also the social, economic, political, and cultural reality of subjects expressing their ideas. Furthermore, discourses are not automatically conveyed between interlocutors: they need a codified system of representation; in other words, they need a language. Mastering a (oral or written) language does not provide control over discourses, but it grants more flexibility to the speaker (or the writer) to communicate their ideas. It also affords freedom to speakers to add complexity and nuances to their statements, thus allowing more agency and consciousness upon discourses. On the other hand, listeners/readers mastering the language have more elements to discern the discourses underlying the communication.

In a similar vein, photographic processes convey discourses about the medium because they communicate ideas, perspectives, and worldviews that are behind the intentions underlying the invention and the development of the technology. For practitioners, they may not consciously think about discourses while producing photographs. However, in specific historical contexts, the accumulation of purposes behind the use of specific photographic processes sheds light on the social, political, economic, and cultural conditions underlying the production of photographs in such context. Nevertheless, these constructions are only possible because they rely on consistency in the usage of different visual languages. As a system of representation, photographic language conveys meaning through the agency between the formal aspects of the medium and their aesthetic effects. Thus, the framing, colors, lines, shapes, textures, and volumes are similar to words that – once combined in a sentence – will form statements having an aesthetic effect. For instance, the combination of the above-mentioned formal elements can provide aesthetic results such as balance, harmony, movement, proportion, disproportion, unity, rhythm, presence/absence, and variety.

Despite illustrating a fundamental relationship between words and images, the analogy does not exhaustively illustrate how discourses and languages create meanings through photographic practices. Firstly, mastering any language does not guarantee that the message will be perfectly conveyed. As underlined in the previous chapter, meanings are dialogic (Hall 1997a). Our interlocutors must “speak enough of the same language to be able to ‘translate’ what ‘you’ say into what ‘I’ understand, and vice-versa” (ibid., 10). According to Stuart Hall, the same applies to visual languages but also to music, gestures, body language, and ways of dressing, to name a few examples. In addition, some codes need to be roughly shared to be read and understood by others. Therefore, we also need a cultural and dialogic approach to languages and discourses to understand how photographic processes and practices create knowledge.

In this chapter, we explore the interrelation of these domains of signification in locus, that is, in the discussions, activities, and photographic production unfolding during the Catchupa Factory artistic residency. The following question has guided the investigation: what are the discourses conveyed by the photographic practices of the residency, and how do they manifest themselves through the visual languages employed by the participants? Before analyzing the examples from our subject of investigation, we look at theoretical distinctions and interrelatedness between languages and discourses. After that, we investigate the decolonial discourses conveyed by two recent contemporary art publications focusing on PALOP artists. While it became clear that decolonial discourses permeate the majority of the artistic practices in the residency, how do their articulation promote not only visual knowledge but a transformative knowledge via photography? Such discussion is approached in the last part of the chapter.

3.2. DISTINCTIONS AND INTERRELATEDNESS BETWEEN DISCOURSES AND LANGUAGES

Discourses and languages are differently related to the ways in which meanings are built, shaped, and shared in public sphere or via interpersonal communication. Both concepts illustrate the paradigm of culture as the sum of social practices and everyday experiences shared by society and their capacity to afford cultural meanings (Hall 1997a). Initially, it is essential to distinguish the particularities of both discourses and languages to understand

how they act differently in constructing meaning. However, it is their interrelation that allows citizens to consciously convey worldviews, narratives, and affective states. Grasping their interrelation provides an understanding of how individuals reflect upon and give sense to these shared experiences inside their social groups. Moreover, it undermines an essentialist perception of culture that homogenizes discourses (namely race and nation) to define identities.

In a Western sense, the term ‘discourse’ is primarily associated with politics. The commonplace states that politicians make speeches and political parties elaborate discourses. These statements are supported by positions, values, and worldviews that formalize how different topics and subjects are addressed in a common discursive space. Such perspective binds the idea of discourses to a political arena that impacts the lives of citizens. It considers discourses responsible for the construction of social reality, but one which is imposed top-down and does not offer nuance and flexibility for people to express their individualities. Thus, at first sight, discourses are located in this broader level of signification, representing ideologies and values conceived by a selected group of people but not necessarily conducive to subjectivities or popular participation.

Political rhetoric seems to be the natural habitat of discourses because they are closely linked with the notion of power. The interrelation between discourse, power, and knowledge was developed at length in Michel Foucault’s work⁵⁵. His approach is groundbreaking since he adds complexity to this articulation: power is not merely something imposed by the social elites over the oppressed class. On the contrary, power relations are omnipresent since discourses spread through all kinds of social and cultural exchange (Rose 2016, 189). Discourses impose power precisely by their association with knowledge; that is, because they claim their knowledge to be true (ibid., 191). Foucault understood that discourses create particular kinds of knowledge that are defined by institutions, traditions, social practices, and subjects. Therefore, they determine what is seen as truthful and reliable and, thus, impact our sense of self as cultural subjects.

In short, Foucault’s approach to discourses can be defined as “groups of statements that structure the way a thing is thought, and the way we act on the basis of that thinking” (Rose 2016, 187), thus, shaping a particular understanding of the world. Foucault’s ideas had a

⁵⁵ The articulation between discourse, power, and knowledge permeates much of Foucault’s work. The subject is investigated more concisely in “The Archeology of Knowledge” (1972) and “Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison” (1977).

significant influence on cultural and visual studies because they inaugurated a new methodology where these groups of statements could be analyzed from a cultural perspective. From the 1960s, the *cultural turn* in social sciences and humanities has shed light on the linguistic aspects of discourses. Besides the way knowledge is institutionalized, shaping social practices, and putting new practices into operation, a discourse can be seen as the production of meaning through the use of languages, including non-verbal languages (Hall 1997b). Such a focus on language and signification has led to a gradual dissolution of politico-social and psychic domains in social sciences and humanities (ibid.). Hence, the political legacy of Marxist tradition underlying class struggles, economy, and ideological discursive formations had to share the space of cultural analysis with signifying social practices coming from everyday practices, self-representation, or local manifestations.

With contributions from fields such as French structuralism, semiology, media studies, and the different branches of post-structuralism (such as feminism theory and psychoanalysis), researchers from various fields provided innovative ways of considering the relation between discourses and languages. Such a turn had a considerable impact on the emergence of postcolonial studies. In this new paradigm, discourses do not only stem from the knowledge produced by Western intellectuals and their dominant class. They are also present in the use of languages by minorities, colonized populations, and ordinary citizens, allowing the expression of subjective states and social realities.

The epistemological shift allows a *discursive construction of social reality*, which relies on the texts, images, music, behaviors, poems, stories, and everything else that makes up a non-Western culture (Bhabha 1994). Hence, postcolonial studies have inaugurated a new analytical line for social and political theory engaged in *counter-hegemonic discourses*. For instance, bell hooks reflected on the space of resistance occupied by marginalized people as a crucial site “for the production of a counter-hegemonic discourse that is not just present in words but in its habits and the way one lives (...)” (hooks 1989, 20). hooks defends that such a shift offers “the possibility of a radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternative new worlds” (ibid.). As a result, counter-hegemonic discourses begin to emerge and occupy the debates about culture.

Such openness to new discursive constructions of social reality has shed light on the diversity of languages and their applications as an important place for producing different kinds of knowledges. Moreover, it has put forward the potential of languages as

representational systems encompassing all sorts of signs, including various written and oral texts but also objects, images, sounds, television programs, sports, publicity, etc. With this new approach, the focus of analysis is less on the content of representational practices (that is, their material qualities) than on their symbolic functions (Hall 1997a, 26). Ultimately, such a constructionist approach has impacted the traditional sense of language: rather than a direct and neutral representation of reality, language conveys meaning because words, images, and sounds represent (or symbolize) a *cultural conception* of the object in question. Therefore, the symbolic meaning of cultural objects is not to be found in the object itself but in how it is culturally constructed.

Stuart Hall defines language as a shared code that carries a representational potential through its symbolic function. Hence, the rules governing a language must be shared by a group of people. This condition allows individuals to codify their actions and, conversely, to understand the actions of others. The critical point in this conception is that language ceases to be seen only as a direct representation of reality and starts to be seen as a tool for constructing realities, for it provides autonomy to interlocutors to use language's symbolic potential of representation. Such symbolic potential connects languages with culture and knowledge and, thus, with discourses. Therefore, if languages offer a space of flexibility to create meanings, it is vital to investigate how individuals use linguistic codes to construct realities⁵⁶.

As a code based on conventions, languages carry formal attributes that enable the code to be read. This is true for textual linguistic systems, where phonemes constitute units of sounds that are combined to differentiate one word from another. Thus, morphological rules are responsible for a first layer of meaning. Subsequently, syntax – the hierarchical agency of words with different functions in meaningful sentences – will grant formal features to the texts, thereby 'sculpting' the information from the same 'raw material'. Accordingly, different styles and genres of texts can be created using the same set of phonemes, words, and syntax.

Similarly, the notions of genre and style are also part of the vocabulary used in visual languages when one points to the formal aspects differentiating visual objects. Although the conventions governing the creation and reception of visual artifacts are more fluid, they also

⁵⁶ Such approach is commonly shared by the methodologies of Discourse Analysis for analyzing verbal and textual images (See Tonkiss 2012).

rely on the symbolic meanings of the object in a given cultural context. For instance, when referring to the Congolese sculpture tradition, Okwui Enwezor points to the “sheer variety of styles, forms, complexity, genres, plastic distinctiveness, stylistic inventiveness, and complexity of sculptural language” (Enwezor 2003, 66) with no equivalent in other sculptural traditions:

These traditions of sculpture (...) are unique as they are historically different in their morphological conceptions of sculpture. The expressive and conceptual possibilities in *the language of artists* working within each group have produced sculptural forms of such anthropomorphic variety and complexity (...). (Enwezor 2003, 67)

Employing a *linguistic* vocabulary to speak about a set of particular sculptural practices is useful insofar as it affords other viewers access to the formal features of these objects. However, the meaning of these objects depends equally on their symbolic function since they also carry discourses, values, and worldviews of a culture. Indeed, Enwezor puts forward the example of Congolese sculptures to criticize how cultural artifacts from Africa are displayed in many Western museums. In these cultural institutions, the object’s original symbolic function and its complex matrix of cultural formations are often overlooked. And – even more problematic – the original cultural values and worldviews are erased by civilizational discourses based on binary oppositions forged by classical Modernity thought (ibid., 58).

What prompted Enwezor reaction was the way in which a Congolese sculpture was exhibited in the 2001’s new curatorial display of Tate Modern Museum’s permanent collection. The sculpture in question was a small figurative piece sharing the space of an ‘ethnographic vitrine’ with casually scattered postcards from West Africa. Untitled, undated, and un-authored, the only information provided by the object label was that the sculpture belongs to Jacob Epstein⁵⁷ collection. Yet, in the same room, the museum displayed two films⁵⁸ shot in Africa in the first half of the 20th century – both fitting in the ethnographic film category, displaying a patronizing gaze over African people, fraught with exotism interest and “allegorical differentiation” (ibid., 64). According to Enwezor, this mode of

⁵⁷ Sir Jacob Epstein (1880-1959) was an influential 20th century British sculptor. He was a leading figure promoting modern art in England. See Encyclopedia Britannica, s.v. “Sir Jacob Epstein,” accessed November 6, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jacob-Epstein>.

⁵⁸ The two films are: Michel Allégret and André Gide’s “Voyage to the Congo” (1928), and an anonymous archival film titled “Manners Customs of Senegal” (1910).

exhibition perpetuates oppositions such as primitive/civilized, handicraft/autonomous art, regressive/advanced, or avant-garde/outdated, which prevails in Western Modernity discourses.

The example above illustrates how a hegemonic curatorial discourse can undermine a visual language and create a biased visuality. Hence, the entanglements between discourses and languages puts forward the relevance of intertextuality to examine how specific visualities can convey oppressive discourses⁵⁹. Although located in different discursive spaces, discourses and languages cannot be understood separately because “(d)iscourses are articulated through all sorts of visual and verbal images and texts (...), and also through the practices that those languages permit” (Rose 2016, 88). Thus, despite being external to individual practitioners, cultural discourses are contingent on the convergence of individual utterances to become knowledge about the world. Therefore, visual weave a symbolic relationship with reality, which impacts the broader construction of discourses.

In the scope of this study, the constant negotiation between languages and discourses to convey meanings leads to two main consequences. Firstly, it shows how the interplay between discourses and languages impacts on the notion of identity. Stuart Hall (1997b) recalls that identity is constructed through a dialogue between concepts and definitions that are embedded in the *discourses of a culture*. Accordingly, they allow *identification* within cultural discourses and the possibility of subjectivity inside these discourses. Secondly, it provides theoretical tools to analyze the visual languages present in photographic production and how they impart cultural discourses. Acknowledging visual culture’s relevance in social life construction allows us to connect the external dimension of discourses with the internal dimension of language. This operation yields an analysis of our subject where the outcomes of the photographic practices developed in the context of the artistic residency can be examined in terms of identity construction and awareness of the self as a cultural subject.

At this point, reflecting on how we intend to analyze the visual production through a textual approach is essential. We should be alert not to directly transpose linguistic concepts to photographic practices at the risk of creating simplistic analogies. For instance, Paul Gilroy defends that black diasporic cultures should not be analyzed exclusively based on textuality since their epistemologies are distinct from Western knowledge production

⁵⁹ As put forward by Gillian Rose, “intertextuality refers to the way that the meaning of any one discursive image or text depend not only on that one text or image, but also on the meanings carried by other images and texts” (Rose 2016, 187-188).

systems, mainly based on textual inscriptions (Gilroy 2020, 163). He highlights the importance of orality, dramaturgy, enunciation, and gesture as fundamental elements of the “pre-discursive and anti-discursive” forms of black culture’s meta-communication (ibid., 162). In turn, Walter Mignolo proposes the concept of “colonial semiosis” to untangle the complex semiotic interactions between different media. The notion seeks to challenge an exclusive language-based approach to colonial studies and “incorporate the oral and non-alphabetical writing systems as well as non-verbal graphic systems” (Mignolo 1989, 335). These theoretical perspectives understand that it is vital to go beyond the concept of verbal language as the fundamental analogy to understand signifying practices that do not have only textual equivalents.

Hence, the attempt to go across other ‘pre-discursive’ and ‘anti-discursive’ dimensions of knowledge production should guide the discussions around the visual languages developed by Afrodescendentes and diasporic communities. This is key for expanding the very concept of visual language since it remains modeled by Western aesthetics – a discourse that affiliates the categories of genre and style with the essence of the group producing the cultural artifact (Gilroy 2020, 163). Such an operation requires attention to the affective potential of images. Rather than relying solely on their formal and visual aspects, it should include multisensorial modes of perception based on non-Western epistemologies. As suggested in the previous chapter, a multisensorial approach to visuality brings mental images, dreams, aspirations, emotions, and imagination to a discursive arena. Hence, it connects subjective and sociocultural aspects in the signifying potential of images.

Drawing upon a textual approach to photography between visual languages and cultural discourses does not mean simply making analogies between what the image ‘says’ and the visible object itself. Instead of creating analogies based on mimetic realism, it is necessary to probe the metaphors of the visual language. Metaphors are representational spaces through which a conceptual entity is designated using a term that means another through an analogy but one that exceeds the ordinary meaning of each term. Together, the meaning of both terms is merged into a new concept⁶⁰. Metaphors blur the borders between words and images because they rely on the multisensorial aspects evoked by one or more words to convey an idea. In turn, a metaphor cannot be “literally” translated into an image since the words are

⁶⁰ For the definition of ‘metaphor’ see Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales – Dictionnaire Électronique de Synonymes, s.v. “métaphore,” accessed 19 December 2023, <https://www.cnrtl.fr/lexicographie/m%C3%A9taphore>

not being used in their ‘referential’ sense. Put another way, the conceptual relationship between words and images does not rely solely on the representative function of mimesis⁶¹.

In *The Location of Culture*, Homi K. Bhabha defends that the language metaphor allows to “personify” cultural articulations, transforming the subject of culture into an “enunciative practice”. Culture as an enunciative practice is more dialogic, capturing “antagonisms and articulations – subverting the rationale of the hegemonic moment and relocating alternative, hybrid sites of cultural negotiation” (Bhabha 1994, 177-178). As a representational space, language metaphors are important insofar as they provide a space of articulation between contrasting movements and disjunctive temporalities in history and culture (ibid., 176). In other words – and as the saying goes -there’s always more to the picture than meets the eye.

But how can this approach be applied concretely to the analysis of photographic production? Bhabha suggests one possible direction: “Perhaps we need to change the ocular *language* of the image to speak of identification or social and political representations of a people” (ibid., 30). Such a proposition claims that images do not communicate meaning only through their visual codes and conventions. Therefore, addressing photographic practices as broad cultural practices performed by post-colonial subjects allows this epistemological shift that accepts other forms of knowledge impacting meanings and processes of symbolization with images.

Thus, to go beyond the ‘ocular language of the images’, we must avoid a simplistic and binary relationship between visual languages and cultural discourses and reflect in terms of their articulations. In what follows, we present an extended analysis of these articulations within the context of the photographic residency. We looked specifically at the articulations between decolonial discourses and visual languages underlying photographic practices. In the fieldwork research, collective discussions around the participants’ works and individual interviews revealed two places where these articulations occur. First, in the interplay between identity and identification; second, in the interrelation between politics and aesthetics. The investigation of these places of convergence is not without friction and resistance since they do not follow the logic of synchronicity and evolution. Instead, they illustrate the multifaceted processes by which people make sense of their cultural practices.

⁶¹ For instance, in the expression ‘flames of passion’, we know that passion does not ignite a fire in a literal sense. To that extent, to grasp the idea of the expression, we need to consider the concept of ‘flames’ not only mimetically but equally in terms of its power of both devastation and rapture, of the wellness of its heat and its destructive violence, of its lack of control and its function for the survival of humans.

Nevertheless, they all collaborate with essential elements to answer our question of how photographic practices can promote a transformative knowledge.

3.3. ARTICULATING DECOLONIAL DISCOURSES AND VISUAL LANGUAGES

3.3.1. A critical perspective of the PALOP's rhetoric

A discursive approach to image production should be tailored for each research context and the manifold realities involved in creating knowledge through image-making. Concerning our research subject, we follow Bhabha and focus on the cultural differences between a group of photographers rather than the often-condescending notion of cultural diversity. The notion of cultural diversity is problematic insofar as the difference *per se* can be taken as the manifest identity, defining the condition of “the other” by its “outsideness” (Foster 2017, 163) and risking a superficial approach to the group. Thus, first of all, the institutional context of the residence and its commitment to ground-up practitioners from Portuguese-Speaking African Countries need to be scrutinized.

The “Catchupa Factory – Novos Fotógrafos” project is mainly funded by the Gulbenkian Foundation’s Partnerships for Development⁶². Included in the “Art Internationalization” category of Gulbenkian’s partnerships, the residency gathers participants from the PALOP countries focusing on photography and visual arts with a dual objective: the internationalization and professionalization of artists⁶³. From the start, such a configuration represents a site of cultural, geographic, and institutional intersections. There is a convergence of the institutional space of an important cultural foundation based in Portugal with an initiative located in a small insular country in the Atlantic Ocean. Such geographic crisscrossing is potentiated by the gathering of individuals living in African countries (as well as their diaspora) that Portugal formerly colonized and the significant cultural aspects they bring to the fore.

⁶² The Gulbenkian Partnerships for Development Program “aims to help build a more just, egalitarian society by seeking to meet the social and economic development needs of the Portuguese-Speaking African Countries (PALOP) and East Timor”. See <https://gulbenkian.pt/en/initiatives/partnerships-for-development/>.

⁶³ About the Catchupa Factory – Novos Fotógrafos, see <https://gulbenkian.pt/projects/catchupa-factory-novos-fotografos/>.

At first sign, one may think that the spoken language is a relevant aspect among all these complex intersections, making the exchanges between this group of people and the institutions where they circulate somehow more fluid. However, although important, this was not the central aspect providing elements to start our textual analysis. Generally, participants do have a strong relationship with the Portuguese language. However, as it will be argued in this chapter, the Portuguese language provides only a superficial level of identification for visual practices, and it does not function as an element for the convergence of their practices. Furthermore, the use of a common language does not guarantee the elaboration of a shared discourse underlying photographic processes and practices.

Six of the eleven participants in the residency do not have Portuguese as their mother tongue. Although ten speak Portuguese fluently, their local realities have shaped how they use the colonial language. The tonality and nuance of the accent, the expressions, the words, and the linguistic constructions of the Portuguese spoken in the different African regions are distinct, and the same is true in the diasporic context. Therefore, we must relativize the weight of the idiom in shaping a specific visuality associated with the Portuguese language. Indeed, Portuguese is not even the most spoken language in the PALOP countries. Despite being the official language, it is outnumbered by speakers of native or creole languages in these countries⁶⁴. Hence, the idea of a homogeneous Lusophony community must be questioned.

For Diogo Bento, Lusophony is a political project disguised as a cultural one that aims at preserving the cultural hegemony of Portugal over their former colonies: “This is my reading of the PALOP project: the language is used as an artificial link (...), it’s a purely pragmatic issue”. (Bento 2021) He underlines that in countries like Cabo Verde, Portuguese is not spoken in daily life. And even in countries where Portuguese is commonly used, like Mozambique and Angola, it is always a different Portuguese, which employs local words and has an evolution of its own. Bento states that he has always tried to fight the idea of a

⁶⁴ Among the PALOP countries, only in São Tomé e Príncipe is Portuguese the most widely spoken language (Hagemeyer 2009). In Angola and Mozambique, Portuguese is used as a lingua franca in daily life and coexists with many native languages and dialects. In Cabo Verde, Guinea Bissau, and Guinea Equatorial, creole languages are spoken in daily life, and the use of Portuguese is limited to administration, education, the press, and relations with other countries.

homogeneous Portuguese-speaking community because “the PALOP project (and even in a certain way the CPLP⁶⁵) is in its essence a political project of control and power” (ibid.).

Accordingly, the PALOP project creates a fictional unity between Portugal and the African countries. Instead of collaborating with the cultural autonomy of these countries, the Lusophony project can be seen as a form of neo-colonialism. To that extent, behind a discourse of cooperation, it hides political and economic interests. Such a position is endorsed by the researcher and cultural promoter António Pinto Ribeiro. In an article⁶⁶, he lays bare the discourses behind the promotion of the PALOP project. For the author, the idea of Lusophony is a continuation of the notion of “Luso-Tropicalismo⁶⁷”, a discourse that sought to soften the violence of Portuguese colonization. Ribeiro argues that even after the 25th April revolution⁶⁸, the notion persists.

[T]he trauma and mourning for the loss of the last colonies were made through relativizing the Portuguese violence against the Africans (...) What would be a common culture – whose matrix was Portuguese – was imposed, and for which the confusion between language and culture was opportune and based on the mitigation of violence (Ribeiro 2018, 221).

The imposition of the Portuguese language as a form of violence is present in the experience of some Catchupa participants. Although raised in a Portuguese-speaking environment, the native languages are part of their cultural identities. For example, the first language of Magno Daniel, from Angola, is Portuguese. However, he recalls that both his parents speak national languages: “the maternal family, from Kwanza North, speaks Kimbundu, and the paternal speaks Nhaneca” (Daniel 2022). Filomena Mairose shares a similar experience. Her mother is from northern Mozambique and speaks Makhuwa, while her father is from the central region and speaks Cena. She was born and raised in southern Mozambique, where Changana is the most spoken language. Hence, even between their parents the common language became Portuguese to facilitate communication. However,

⁶⁵ Community of Portuguese Language Countries (Portuguese: *Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa*; abbreviated as the CPLP). Includes the PALOP countries plus East-Timor and Brazil.

⁶⁶ The article is an updated version of a text originally published in Público newspaper on January 18, 2013.

⁶⁷ The term Luso-Tropicalism was coined by Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre (1900-1987). It defends that Portuguese colonization would have been milder than those of other colonizing European countries.

⁶⁸ On April 25th, 1974, in Lisbon, the most prolonged European dictatorship regime of the 20th century (beginning on March 28th, 1926) was overthrown by a military coup d'état. Known as the 25th April Revolution or the Carnation Revolution, the movement enabled a democratic regime in Portugal and the progressive end of the colonial regime in African territories under Portuguese rule.

Mairosse recalls that her parents are from a time when “they were discouraged from teaching us traditional languages – or ‘dog languages’ as the colonizer called them – and speaking only Portuguese was seen as a symbol of social progress” (Mairosse 2022), she explains. The legacy of this policy of cultural erasure – which Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2016) designates as *epistemicide* – was that many were not taught to speak local languages in her generation. Regardless of the use of the colonial language as a practical tool for communication among people from different linguistic environments, it does not conceal the violence of forcing people to renounce their native languages and, therefore, their historical identities. To that extent, and despite being beneficial for communication matters, the Portuguese language is directly articulated with a colonial discourse.

Indeed, another relevant point in the debate around the notion of Lusophony and the political framework of the PALOP is related to how languages and discourses’ interchanges impact the notion of identity. Ribeiro claims that one of the most violent consequences of the imposition of the Portuguese language in Africa was the erasure of a pre-colonial history in the colonies as if native people only started to have a cultural memory from the moment they were ‘found’ by the colonizer (Ribeiro 2018). As a reaction, along with the independence processes in the African continent, writers, artists, and intellectuals had to work to reconfigure their identities as cultural subjects in a post-colonial context⁶⁹. This constant construction of post-colonial identities calls for a revaluation of native and creole languages as a space of resistance, allowing knowledge production from decolonial systems of representations.

In Cabo Verde’s case, the Creole language as an instrument of resistance to colonial domination stands out. Since the arrival of Portuguese settlers in the 1460s, the archipelago has been a major point of circulation for several cultures in the Atlantic Ocean. Prompted by the Portuguese slave trade, such intense circulation impacted the synthesis of a *Crioulo culture* (Lobban 2018, 16). Having its sources in African groups speaking Fula, Mandinka, and different Senegambian languages, the Cape Verdean creole is a mixture of these African languages with elements of Portuguese (ibid.). Despite the imposition of Portuguese as the official language and its impact on culture and politics, the *Crioulo culture* has resisted as an indigenous system of representation, supporting the struggles and aspirations of colonized

⁶⁹ Conversely, the notion of Lusophony also represents the crisis of Portuguese national identity. By supporting the nostalgia and the illusion of the “Great Portuguese empire”, it prevents a work of serious reflection on the contemporary identity of those who live in Portugal (Ribeiro 2018).

people. The relevance of the *creolization of languages*⁷⁰ as a tool of resistance is vital for decolonial practices and discourses and reverberates in the artistic production of the residency.

The Cape-Verdean participants – including those born in the diaspora – use creole, a language that survived the dislocation of families and communities worldwide. One of them, Kimberly Dias, born and raised in a Dutch environment, used creole to name the project developed during the residency. Interested in the multiple diasporic and ethnic formations of identity, she titled her series “Bo tem cara moda do mãe” [You got your mother’s face]. The title is a phrase that was repeated to her over and over again by a woman she met in Cabo Verde who knew her mother (Dias 2022). Trying to weave these cultural layers, Kimberly’s work focuses on her family histories as examples of social and cultural crossings between different geographic spaces.

Another participant, Stephanie Silva, born in Cabo Verde, explored the creole language in her work during the residency by doing written interventions in creole over photographs displayed in public space. But even more representative of the paradigm of the creolization of languages as a space of resistance was Stephanie’s choice to use her mother language in the press conference that preceded the beginning of the residency activities. Regardless of whether the journalist asked the questions in Portuguese and the interviewers (which included the residents, the organizing team, and Akinbode Akinbiyi) replied in Portuguese or in English, she chose to speak in creole, claiming that this is the true language of Cabo Verde.

Hence, in the context of our artistic residency, the diversity of cultural backgrounds should not be homogenized into a shared familiarity with the former colonizer’s language. On the contrary, as put forward by Diogo Bento, the Portuguese language should be seen as a practical tool. Indeed, it has played a functional role in communication dynamics during the residency. The activities unfolded in an English-Portuguese environment⁷¹, but the common usage of Portuguese was handy since it was the most spoken language during the activities and allowed interactions among participants from different countries. This was not only convenient but essential for developing convivial, educational, and creative processes.

⁷⁰ About the process of creolization of languages see Édouard Glissant’s *Poética da relação* (Glissant 2011).

⁷¹ English language had to be employed because Cape-Verdean-Dutch artist Kimberly Dias and the tutor Akinbode Akinbiyi (U.K. born-Nigerian) do not speak Portuguese. Interestingly, Kimberly understands Cape Verdean creole, but this would only allow her to communicate with participants from Cabo Verde.

Besides, sharing the Portuguese language was vitally important for me and the tutor Eustáquio Neves, the two Brazilians participating in the activities.

But if we insist on a linguistic approach to visual practices, it is because language – in a broad sense – permeates practices with images and provides elements to grasp cognitive aspects through photographic production. The textual domain is present in different practices that affect the production of images. For example, when participants write about their ideas before making photographs, they deal with the rules governing a textual language but in a way that allows them to pre-visualize concepts and ideas in the form of still non-existent images. Similarly, music and literature also inform the processes of image-making. In our interactions, participants often mention musical references ranging from hip-hop to rock music as relevant to their creative processes as photographers. The lyrics and rhythm of music have their own visuality, impacting the development of visual languages. Likewise, literary works evoke mental images in the readers' minds. Hence, language as a comprehensive representational system can generate ideas and emotions and stimulate sensory perceptions that often cut across different media. Besides, in such cultural intertextuality, musical or literary languages will also bear discourses that impact the production and perception of other types of texts or images.

The dynamic of intertextuality finds relevant examples in the personal experiences of the Catchupa Factory participants. In a conversation with Hélio Buite, he points out the importance of literary works for his creative process as an artist. One of the readings that most impacted him was “‘Mestre’ Tamoda e outros contos”, a book of short stories by Uanhenga Xitu, first published in 1974⁷². In the short story “‘Mestre Tamoda’”, the use of the Portuguese language by colonized people is the plot's background. It illustrates how the practices of reappropriation, adaptation, and subversion of the original function of the Portuguese language in the colonial context have forged a counter-hegemonic discourse. (Pina and Pina 2006). It also shows the language's potential as a polyvalent means of representation, blending orality, music, and gestures.

“‘Mestre Tamoda’” tells the story of a young man who seeks to escape colonial oppression in Angola by incorporating the codes of the colonial language. At a young age, he leaves his village in the countryside and goes to the capital Luanda to work as a domestic servant of the colonial elite bureaucrats. While in the city, he develops an obsession with the

⁷² See Xitu 1989.

Portuguese language. Self-taught, he learns to write and read and compulsively devours books of laws, a manual for writing letters and memorizes difficult words in the dictionary. Years later, he returns to the rural area as a dandy dressing in European clothes. Mestre Tamoda considers himself superior to the native population and ends up being despised by both the colonial power and the native population.

However, the main characteristic of his persona is the obsession with the appropriation of the language that inspired some sense of subversion among the children of his community. Mixing the native Quimbundo language with a pompous Portuguese and creating neologisms, Tamoda unwittingly provides the village's kids with critical tools and an autonomous attitude concerning the language learning process, "which, despite reproducing the colonial order, is not unalterable" (Kandjimbo 2010). According to Luis Kandjimbo, in the short story, language subversion is associated with the use of orality strategies in which the rules of everyday speech predominate, "such as musicality and the kinetic code that governs the narrator's movements" (ibid.).

Likewise, our linguistic approach looks after transpositions from different linguistic sources into visual languages and the discourses conveyed by such operations. To that extent, rather than looking for a uniform visual language of PALOP photographers, we will analyze how the diversity of approaches points to cultural discourses, with their particularities, convergences, differences, and frictions. We suggest that rather than a visual language, what gives cohesion to the photographers' production in the residency are the cultural discourses allowing the emergence of a transformative knowledge. We contend that this knowledge is transformative since it fosters an engaged awareness of the world and the self as a cultural subject⁷³.

The cohesion of a cultural discourse became apparent even before the participants started working on their projects. During the press conference mentioned above, they highlighted the importance of a dynamic relationship between cultures to achieve knowledge production through photographic practice. In this shared discourse, they assert that "despite our cultural differences, we're kind of all brothers" (Catchupa Factory 2021) and that "we share many similar things despite our different cultures" (ibid.). Nevertheless, the interrelation between differences and similarities as a strategy of knowledge production is only possible because of a common history of resistance. As Samba Baldé concludes, "we

⁷³ The notion of *transformative knowledge* will be explored at length in the fifth chapter of this thesis.

have a shared history which is the history of colonialism, but which can also be a new history of sharing and collaboration between us” (ibid.). Hence, there is a common ground to start analyzing how visual languages set up cultural discourses in the experiences of the Catchupa Factory.

3.3.2. Contemporary discourses about PALOP artistic production

Before closely examining the articulations between discourses and languages in the circumstances of the Catchupa Factory 2021 edition, it seems vital to contextualize their visual-artistic production in contemporary art. In doing so, we aim to understand to what extent the discourses conveyed by this field impact the understanding of artistic protocols developed by the participants. Furthermore, since contemporary art is a powerful vector of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses, it is essential to realize how values, positions, and worldviews embedded in the field draw affiliation with photographic practices and, hence, with visual languages developed by the artists in the residency. In recent decades, the art world “has become aware of how it has mediated the cultural narrative in close alignment with broader socio-political hegemonies and has eventually authorized ‘other’ perspectives to enter into the fold in the name of inclusivity” (Haq 2015, 10). However, it still remains a system based on Western modes of knowledge construction and dissemination.

Such reflection is suitable because the art world operates through strict codes, hierarchies, and protocols that define what is pertinent for debating at a given historical moment. These choices are not only based on what is relevant to spur social change or aesthetic innovation but also on a global market of cultural goods and institutions wherein visibility, potential buyers, public funding, and recognition are all-pervasive terms underlying their interests. Such notice is relevant insofar as an instrumentalist approach to African artistic production may attenuate the impact of decolonial discourses. In light of the current all-embracing interest in African contemporary art, casting a skeptical eye on buzzwords like inclusion, representation, and visibility is essential.

As Nav Haq (2015) underlies, geographically marginalized artists had been included in the art world but on the condition of fulfilling specific roles, namely that of the Other. The issue dates back to debates around identity politics in the 1980s, mainly in British and North American art circles. At that time, the Western art system gradually accepted geographically

marginalized artists. Bringing to the fore the notion of identity as related to different sorts of marginalization (gender, race, sexuality, peripheral), these artists inaugurated new visual languages that were absorbed by artistic institutions. Nevertheless, such admission was not without some ethical issues. For example, the acceptance was often conditioned to the representation of their oppressed identity. Even more problematic, the underlying curatorial discourse was that just “giving visibility” to these groups would be enough to promote social justice and political change. These positioning can lead to a harmful set of *monocultural* practices and processes that imprisons subjects in a conception external to them instead of providing tools leading to transformation and empowerment⁷⁴.

Today, the issue persists, but in different terms. According to Nav Haq, while in the 1980s marginal identities were related to race, gender and sexuality, they “could now be replaced with regionalism (...) of those practicing [art] in the non-Western context” (Haq 2015, 12). To that extent, the proliferation of exhibitions in the national or regional format, “which ultimately positions artists as regional representatives, and thus their art being intrinsically linked to their national culture” (ibid.), reduces the scope and effectiveness of decolonial discourses. From this perspective, framing non-Western artists under a geographic label may restrict artworks’ readings, constraining them to an uncritical and even condescending experience.

Such contradiction is present in the initiatives gathering PALOP artists when a mere opportunistic approach of decolonial discourses supported by a biased geographic unity prevents an affective reception of artworks. Therefore, the many artistic projects, residencies, collections, cultural events, and exhibitions organized under the label of the PALOP (and to a certain extent under the label ‘African’) must be critically examined to distinguish the projects that allow a move from looking cultural artifacts as reflective of a culture to perceiving them as constitutive of a culture (Rogoff 1998).

In the context of our research, two recent Portuguese publications grouping PALOP artists are illustrative examples of the attempt to avoid standardization under an alleged common visual language shared by PALOP artists. Both depart from common ground based on the colonial discourses arising from the works of different artists from the former Portuguese colonies. The first is a publication from PLMJ Foundation, a corporate

⁷⁴ About the notion of monoculture see the lecture given by Luísa Santos and Ana Fabíola Maurício at the “Considering Monoculture conference”, Brussels, February 28, 2020 (Santos and Maurício 2020).

contemporary art collection founded in 2001 by a leading Portuguese law firm. Published in digital format⁷⁵, *Territórios: Espaços de Pensamento e de Diversidade* (2020) “is dedicated to the plural universe of artistic creation in Portuguese-speaking countries, comprising a wide geography that has developed over the last six decades” (Oliveira 2020, 10). It showcases artworks from the foundation collection, with particular attention to artists from the PALOP. The second is a series of three books by Hangar, a center of artistic investigation based in Lisbon. Titled *Atlantica* and organized in three volumes, it spans the landscape of contemporary African art in Portugal’s former colonies. The first book is dedicated to Angola and its diaspora (2018), the second to Mozambique and its diaspora (2020), and the third to Cabo Verde, Guinea Bissau, São Tomé and Príncipe and their Diasporas (2021). Although having very different missions and goals –an independent art space managed by artists and curators, on the one hand, a cultural foundation of a traditional Portuguese law firm on the other – these institutions share a will to promote art and artists from the PALOP countries.

Both projects hold a discourse dismissing definitive views on the artistic production of the group of African lusophone countries. For instance, *Atlantica* “discards monolithic notions of identity, considering them unfixed and unstable” and instead “sets out to investigate the artist’s point of view and cultural narratives” (Miranda 2021, 17). In turn, in *Territórios...* the introductory text asserts that the publication goal is not to make any exhaustive analysis or to present a “panoramic views, inevitably partial” but, on the contrary, “to avoid any risk of simplistic homogenization” (Oliveira 2020, 70).

The overall idea underlying both publications is the notion of coloniality, that is, how the colonial past continues to impact the reality of African countries, fostering inequalities and unbalanced relationships between Western and Non-western actors and institutions⁷⁶. Such an idea is illustrated by the artworks presented in the books. In the accompanying texts⁷⁷, several examples of artists investigating Africa’s colonial history are analyzed in parallel with a critical look at the actual social/political/economic situation of their countries. Furthermore, both publications defend a cultural approach to the artistic production under

⁷⁵ See “Territórios: Espaços de Pensamento e de Diversidade”, Fundação PLMJ, 2020. Accessed October 25th, 2023. <https://fundacaopl.mj.com/publicacoes#cbp=index.php?mod=publicacoes&id=2076>

⁷⁶ In the visual field, coloniality is related to the idea of worldview. According to Poulain, it represents “the living legacy of colonialism in postcolonial societies in the form of a worldview which perpetuates hierarchies and forms of discrimination and oppression first produced under colonialism” (Poulain 2019, 5).

⁷⁷ A particularity of the *Atlantica* series is that each artist chose the author who wrote about their practice.

scrutiny. The cultural perspective is endorsed by a critical view of the Eurocentric conception of knowledge construction and a will to promote different epistemologies related to cultural narratives, spirituality, folk customs, everyday life, and diverse social practices.

These publications are curatorial undertakings insofar as they select artists and artworks to build a specific worldview. As a process based on selections, they shed light on what one chooses to show but equally on what one chooses to hide. Therefore, they impart a curatorial discourse present in these choices. Nevertheless, in the scope of our subject – an artistic residency with emergent artists working primarily with photography – it is more complicated to distinguish how the convergence of visual languages and practices performed by such a heterogeneous group of artists can account for a set of cultural discourses. The task would be more evident in the case of an established artistic movement, within a more specific geographic area, or with a wider temporal distance for the analysis. Even so, there must be a coherence between what curators write in publications and what young artists want to say. Thereby, we must closely look at the articulation of discourses formulated by curators and theoreticians and the visual languages developed by artists since they depend on each other to create knowledge.

As been said, the paradigm of coloniality and the revaluation of non-Western epistemologies are the main rationales for grouping African artists within the framework of the PALOP. In both publications, these threads lead to a constellation of decolonial discourses. In the foreword of *Atlantica*'s third volume, Nigerian curator Azu Nwagbogu explains that the ideologies and movements that shape and promote colonialism today are rooted in language and visual culture (Nwagbogu 2021b). Conversely, he argues that if there is a common thread among African lusophone countries today (including East Timor and Brazil), it is the legacy of significant racial disparities left to indigenous people and descendants of previously enslaved peoples (ibid.,8). From this starting point, the recognition of coloniality allows the emergence of different decolonial discourses in the work of such a diverse group of artists.

The most predominant discourse arising from these publications is that of the *diasporic condition*. It is built upon the idea that the “homeland does not exist as a physical geographic space” (ibid., 9). In the artworks featured in the books, migration and diasporic stories are recurrent and they disturb stable and essentialist notions of ‘Africanity’. Yet, at the same time, they reaffirm the African continent as a central place where these artists build bridges

to set up dialogues (Oliveira 2020, 73). The direct consequence of this paradox in the diasporic discourse is the proliferation of artworks problematizing the notion of identity.

The complexity of diasporic identities and their links with affective experiences of nationhood and belonging are widely discussed in the texts. Since the diaspora involves “interstitial spaces” (Nwagbogu 2021b, 13) where different cultural formations, geographies, and linguistic aspects meet, diasporic identities tend to be interchangeable and multiform. Such a perspective calls for an approach to cultural identity based on movements, displacements, and constant epistemic reconfigurations. The influential work of Paul Gilroy, *Black Atlantic* (1993), provides the theoretical base for this discourse. Using the idea of the *middle passage* to explore the “temporal and ontological rupture” (Gilroy 2020, 414) in the conception of Modernity represented by the slave trade through the Atlantic Ocean, Gilroy highlights the limitations of essentialist ways of conceptualizing culture, identity, and identification. He argues that, far beyond the social lament over the rupture of exile and the violence of forced separations, the diaspora can provide a climate of indetermination and estrangement capable of producing creativity and pleasure (ibid., 20).

Hence, the diasporic condition has contributed to perceiving cultures as fluid entities in constant movement and resistant to categorizations. Such a view is related to another frequent discourse about the artistic production of PALOP countries, that Ana Balona de Oliveira calls an “African critical cosmopolitanism” (Oliveira 2020, 70). It can be defined as a worldview forged by the stories of anti-colonial solidarity among distinct African cultures. The recovery of these stories is a common theme in the works of artists featured in the publications. They look at how the discontinuities caused by colonialism manifest themselves in contemporary African societies. Although inheriting some conceptions from the Pan-Africanism movement, the discourse is not built on a worldview related to a national post-colonial narrative. Instead, it is mainly influenced by the more recent concept of Afropolitanism, which refers to a new kind of cosmopolitanism with African roots.

First introduced by the writer Taiye Selasi in her 2005 essay “Bye-bye Babar (Or: What is an Afropolitan?)”⁷⁸, the notion of Afropolitanism was further re-elaborated by Achille Mbembe in his text⁷⁹ for the catalog of the exhibition *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a*

⁷⁸ See Selasi, Taiye. 2005. “Bye-bye Babar.” In *The LIP Magazine*, March 3. Accessed November 22, 2022. <https://thelip.robertsharp.co.uk/2005/03/03/bye-bye-barbar/>.

⁷⁹ See Mbembe, Achille. 2005. “Afropolitanism.” In *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent*, edited by Simon Njami and Lucy Durán, 26-30. Johannesburg: Johannesburg Art Gallery.

Continent (2004)⁸⁰. In this text, the author draws the lines of a new African way of being in the world. It is defined by a generation of Africans whose lives are characterized by mobility across different cultural poles, working in creative industries, and speaking other languages. Selasi and Mbembe use the term “to describe a new transnational ‘African modernity’ that seeks to give up an essential ‘Africanness’ in order to dissolve Africa in the world” (Burocco 2019).

Although the notion has been the object of many criticisms concerning its elitism, lack of political engagement, and commodification (Gehrmann 2016), it has been widely adopted in contemporary art discourse. Critics point to the unrestricted use of expressions such as “international circles” or “international art scene” without a critical reflection of what it means (for African artists) to be part of the art world in a global sense. Despite that, the cosmopolitan discourse has pushed curators to adopt a transnational perspective of cultural-artistic production (Goodwin 2018). In such an approach, knowledge creation is directly associated with the potential of artworks to travel across different geographies and cultural contexts.

Parallel to the knowledge afforded by the geographical-cultural circulation, a third relevant discourse relates to the connection of different temporal layers of meaning in knowledge production. In the publications, the crossing between imagined futures and ancient indigenous knowledge is considered characteristic of contemporary artistic practices in the PALOP context. This creative line is based on reimagining a new connection between non-Western epistemologies with a speculative future for African societies. It also evaluates the technologies of the margins and how they impact the construction of forms of knowledge that are not dependent on Western thought.

Such discourse is mainly illustrated by cultural manifestations under the label of Afrofuturism. They allow the emergence of “abstraction in geolocation as a fictional space for the imaginary where utopia has agency and is possible” (Nwagbogu 2021b, 9). Azu Nwagbogu defines Afrofuturism in terms of refusal of the ideologies that neglected African technologies to the margins:

⁸⁰ The exhibition *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* first opened at the Museum Kunst Palast, Düsseldorf, Germany, from June 24 to November 7, 2004, and toured for three years to London, Paris, Stockholm, Tokyo, and Johannesburg. Chief curator Simon Njami worked with an international team of curators from the host institutions.

This movement and refusal is manifest in the work of artists that may be classed as rejecting AfroPessimism, and then we are offered its immediate and natural follow-up in AfroFuturism; (...) A disconnect with the present reality and a need to spark the visual intellect through fantasy literature and various imaginaries is at the core of Afrofuturism. This refusal of formalism and various normative ideas rooted in the modern art movement, exemplified by the freedom in line, colour, texture, and landscape, for the Black artists was manifested as an obsession with identities, futures, and narrative arcs dominating the contemporary Black and African movement (Nwagbogu 2021b, 8-9).

Another discursive approach is found in texts about the work of black women artists. Similar to the diasporic condition, it relates to issues of identity and subjectivity but from a gender perspective. Here, the body emerges as a crucial element in building non-hegemonic discourses. The notion of decolonial intersectional feminism⁸¹ is at the core of these works. It is based on the idea that “different layers of identity can contribute to one’s exposure to social prejudices” (Aboim 2018, 119). Intersectional Feminism elaborates a discourse where gender and sexuality cannot be separated from their historical intersections with race and class (Oliveira 2020, 78). In *Atlantica*, the texts point to artistic strategies for countering the stereotypes associated with black women’s bodies and the entanglement of racism and sexism in contemporary societies (Sales 2021, 96). Hence, the political is at the core of these practices providing a scathing critique of patriarchal social formations, the capitalist system, and the dominant male gaze.

Finally, his brief overview of two Portuguese publications offers a very condensed sample of four relevant discourses that support contemporary artistic production in the PALOP countries: the diasporic condition and the notion of fluid identities; Afropolitanism and its transnational perspective; Afrofuturism and its overlapping temporalities, and the decolonial intersectional feminism with its political approach of gender issues. While these discourses are embraced under the umbrella of decolonial discourses, it is important to look critically at the institutional contexts in which they are used in contemporary art debates.

For instance, in the *Atlantica* series, the inclusion of Mozambique can be seen as incongruent. This is not only because the region is far away from the Atlantic Ocean, which is the common ocean among all the other countries included in the project (and undoubtedly the reason for the series title). Mozambique, bathed by the Indian Ocean, is the scene of a

⁸¹ The notion of intersectional black feminism was first posed by Kimberlé Crenshaw in the article “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics” (1989).

distinct cultural context. Its proximity to the Indian subcontinent has forged numerous cultural exchanges over the centuries that differ from the cultural configuration of Western Africa. Furthermore, bilateral relations between Mozambique and South Africa make this country a particular case. Therefore, its inclusion in the book series only makes sense when assuming that the institutional PALOP project is the main point driving the editorial project as a whole. Although Angela Ferreira justifies the inclusion of Mozambique in the publication series due to its deep relationship with the Indian Ocean (thus, mirroring the oceanic relationships that other PALOP countries have with the Atlantic Ocean), this argument is not convincing.

Despite this note on the inconsistency of its title, *Atlantica* fulfills its objective of highlighting practices “that engage with contemporary discourses and debates, rather than present the work as solely dependent on geographical, historical or national characteristics and traces” (Ferreira 2020, 9-10). Moreover, the discourses put forward by *Atlantica* are coherent with the institutional mission of Hangar of promoting interdisciplinary collaborations and fostering a space of research for arts and collective consciousness.

On the other hand, the case of *Territórios: Espaços de Pensamento e de Diversidade* is problematic insofar as the decolonial discourses promoted by the corporate collection are at odds with the inclusion policy of PLMJ, the law firm owning the artworks. A brief look at the employees’ section of the PLMJ website⁸² shows 269 collaborators, ranging from senior associates to trainees. Among all these, there are only three black employees. Needless to say, this proportion does not correspond to the ethnic composition of the Portuguese population. While promoting a discourse of inclusion, representativeness, and plurality with its art collection, the company does not seem concerned with putting the same discourse into practice through greater racial equality among its staff.

Thereby, the institutional coherence of any project under the term PALOP should be put under scrutiny, and this is not different for our object, the Catchupa Factory artistic residency. Rather than promoting African artists in the international art scene, the residency’s primary goal is to create a network among the PALOP countries. On the institutional aspect of the project, Diogo Bento explains that “honestly, it is not related to the [Portuguese] language, but with a common historical path” (Bento 2021). The initial premise is that these countries have a similar access to culture, sharing the scarcity of

⁸² See PLMJ. n.d. “Quem somos”. Accessed January 12, 2023. <https://www.plmj.com/pt/pessoas/>.

investments in artistic formations, and of opportunities for emergent artists. Thereby, over the years, Diogo Bento and the residency team started to consider not only PALOP's nationals and people from the PALOP diaspora but artists from other nationalities having strong links with a given PALOP country. In the 2021 edition, this was the case with Tina Krüger, a German-born white artist living and working for many years in Maputo (Mozambique).

Her involvement in the residence has provided elements, positions, and references that contributed to the dynamic of the group. The mixture in the core of Catchupa Factory is not based on blending different elements to create a homogeneous substance, like a soup. Instead, the 'recipe' is based on mixing different ingredients to create a combination where each component keeps its singular taste. This culinary vocabulary is not an exercise in style. Instead, it recalls the name of the residency: Catchupa is the Cabo Verde national dish, a plate based on a mixture of ingredients that can change each time the plate is prepared and, nonetheless, keep its particular features. Depending on the region, who has cooked it, and the available ingredients, every Catchupa is different.

The case of Tina exemplifies the importance of cultural differences and breaking initial assumptions of a supposed unity of a group. To that extent, decolonial discourses underlying the residency are only effective insofar as they afford dialogues between different worldviews and people. Above all, discourses must mediate the perception of artworks and not restrict it. The perception of artworks includes their political-contextual significance but also their multisensorial affects. Hence, one must also look from the perspective of the visual languages and how they articulate themselves with the discourses. Instead of looking at languages as fitting into pre-established discourses, we suggest that languages keep their independence, affording unexpected experiences and cultural meanings. As we will see, these experiences of knowledge production are not exclusively bound to a representational system based on its mimetic relation with the world. In what follows, we investigate these complex articulations in the photographic practices developed during the Catchupa Factory artistic residency.

3.4. PLACES OF ARTICULATION: THE *THIRD SPACE OF ENUNCIATION* IN THE CATCHUPA FACTORY RESIDENCY

Next, we probe into the places where decolonial discourses and visual languages converge in the photographic practices developed through the residency. As put by Stuart Hall, a visual language is defined by a shared, cultural, and dialogic code bearing symbolic functions for creating meaning through images (1997a). Although providing tools for understanding images' social and cultural impact, Hall's definition is still very dependent on the idea of representation as something related to the symbolic content of cultural *énoncés*. Following Homi K. Bhabha, the weakness of this thesis is that it still perpetuates the logics of "synchronicity and evolution which traditionally authorize the subject of cultural knowledge" (Bhabha 1994, 36). For Bhabha, cultural knowledge dwells on a zone of instability where "there is a disjunction between the subject of a proposition (*énoncé*) and the subject of enunciation" (ibid.). He proposes articulating such disjunction in a "third Space of enunciation". Bhabha's third space challenges the symbolic aspect of the language because it refuses any representation system as static. For him, codes and symbols remain restricted to their representation system and, at times, overlook the singularity of events.

The reason a cultural text or system of meaning cannot be sufficient unto itself is that the act of cultural enunciation – the place of utterance – is crossed by the *différance* of writing. (...) This has less to do with (...) the content of the symbol or its social function, but [with] the structure of symbolization. It is this difference in the process of language that is crucial to the production of meaning and ensures, at the same time, that meaning is never simply mimetic and transparent (Bhabha 1994, 36).

Hence, the third space impacts visual language and its underlying discourses since it embraces culture's ambivalence and instability. Moreover, it "destroys the mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as an integrated, open, expanding code". (ibid., 37). Ultimately, symbols should not be seen as a 'higher-level' type of code. Although they are not based on fixed linguistic conventions, they also seek stability, coherence, and immutability. Bhabha argues that the symbols of a culture are not secured by absolute unity or fixity, which implies that meanings are also located in the unrepresentable or the unspeakable. For visual languages, the consequence of this unsettling argument is that it pushes one to find new words and metaphors to analyze images. Once the non-visual aspects of visual languages become essential for their perception and interpretation, one can

delve into the articulation between visual languages and their underlying discourses. In our investigation, we explore two ‘third spaces’ where this disruption occurs: the interplay between identity and identification and the debates between aesthetics and politics.

3.4.1. The interplay between identity and identification

Due to the diversity of intentions and heterogeneity of cultural backgrounds in the residency, participants employ diverse ways to convey meaning through photographic production. Having different levels of mastery of photographic processes, their practices are first and foremost informed by individual concerns with the world around them. Thereby, looking after unity in the visual languages of the group would be unfruitful. To that extent, we focus on each visual language as “beyond the canonization of the ‘idea’ of aesthetics” to engage with a “symbolic textuality” and as an “empowering strategy of emancipation” (Bhabha 1994, 171-172). Whether on a social-political level or a subjective one, strategies of emancipation are visible in an interstitial zone where notions of identification and identity overlap. In this context, photography emerges as a conducive medium for exploring the articulation of these concepts. According to Eustáquio Neves, photography is about constantly trying to adapt the photographic medium to one’s own culture (Neves 2021a). Indeed, one paradigmatic space where these articulations take place is when participants try to approach their diasporic identities through photographic production.

In the residency production, visual languages exploring diasporic conditions always move between interstitial zones and through disjunctive temporalities. Time and space became vital elements to convey a sense of identity that cannot be simply defined by geographic borders or political configurations. The textual complexity of these visual languages lies in a permanent conflict between the identification with a culture and an identity attached to a country. But how to define oneself without relying on a country? Is it possible to assume a hybrid identity that counters the notion of a nation-state?

Suekí approaches the issue by questioning his condition as Angolan-born living in Italy. The series developed during the residency – *Camaleão e o Cão Rafeiro* [Chameleon and the Stray Dog] – is a reflection on how the environment where one is inserted models the perception of one’s identity. Hence, identity becomes something changeable: it is not an innate character but something that can be transformed depending on the locality in which

one is found. Being in São Vicente Island and confronted with aspects of a colonial past was the spark for Suekí's project. One important visual element for his exploration was the statue of Portuguese explorer Diego Afonso, a figure involved in the colonization of Cabo Verde.



Figure 10. Suekí, *Camaleão e o Cão Rafeiro* (2021). Series, digital photography.

At first, Suekí chose to engage with the statue through self-representation. By staging photographic self-portraits in front of the monument, he appears reading a newspaper. The photograph framing shows only the monument's legs and feet over the pedestal as if Suekí was bearing the weight of a colonial past. He explains that the statue has the symbolic function of showing the power structures, while the newspaper – which is held upside down – means that “I’m looking for an answer, but I’m still very confused” (Ferreira 2021). The other images of the series add different elements that ‘complexify’ the visual grammar: rocks, stray dogs, the tar texture on the streets, and words in street signs. In the series title, the chameleon is a metaphor for adaptation, which underlies the diasporic condition. At the same time, the stray dog stands for the wanderings, the impossibility of race definition, and the conflict between freedom and confusion that such a condition imposes. What he says about this constant in-between zone clarifies his symbolisms:

I use myself as an example. Identities are fluid and unfixed things. In some places, I'm considered a black person; in others, I'm not. I've always been in the middle of the road for many things. I don't have the privileges of white people, but I'm certainly more privileged than most black people (Ferreira 2021).

The interpolation between identification to a place and one's identity is also present in Kimberly's project but through the prism of family memories. Her visual language includes an archive of family photographs, portraits, and views of houses in Xôxô, a small village in Santo Antão island where her great-grandmother was born. In the visual construction of her series, there is an uncanny feeling of simultaneous proximity and distance. She employs a documental style – frontal and direct gaze, sobriety, formal balance, thematic continuity – as a tool to move back and forth from what is close to her everyday life (the story of her mother and Kimberly's own diasporic condition) and what is distant – or even unrepresentable through images –, that is, the affective history of Cape Verdean migration to the Netherlands.

Regarding the affective potential of images, other participants have employed visual languages to translate meanings located in the body. Primarily found in the work of women artists, it is remarkable how these visual languages articulate a feminist decolonial discourse. However, these photographic practices do not see the body's emancipation only in a political sense but also aim to convey a haptic knowledge. While the intersectional discourse is not directly claimed throughout these experiences, other strategies are put into practice to afford an enhanced multisensorial experience through photography. To the extent that these languages seek pleasure and the sensuousness of signs, they are equally emancipatory in affording a cultural experience.

In her untitled series developed during the residency, Filomena uses the water as a symbolic connection to her body. The articulation appears less in terms of water's physiological function as a liquid flowing inside the human body. In her work, the substance relates to a worldview where natural elements (like fire, earth, wind, and earth) are concepts outside of Western epistemologies but nevertheless essential to knowledge construction (Santos 2016, 40-41). During her photographic practice in Santo Antão Island, water was first associated with fearfulness to be progressively turned into an element of empowerment. Filomena had to find visual strategies to convey such transfiguration through her photographs. Trying to embrace the complexity of an essential natural element, she played with images, assembling several pictures of the coast and creating photographic mosaics.

The visual language had to overcome conventional modes of photography exhibition⁸³ to convey a visual experience that is not only based on the mimetic potential of each photograph individually. In the mosaics, the water became an island surrounded by the coast rocks, as if containing (and overcoming) her initial fears.



Figure 11. Filomena Mairosose, *untitled* (2021). Montage, digital photography.

In turn, Tina has investigated the place of the feminine body in the interplay between personal identity and identification with nature. While in previous works, she explored the issue of the feminine body as constrained by the male gaze and trapped by beauty standards, in the project developed during the residency, she focused more on the body's spiritual connection with nature. Titled *Breath*, her series is based on a performative disposition and self-representation. Her artistic protocol involves spending time alone in isolated places in the mountains of São Vicente to experience direct contact with natural elements. While Filomena chose water, Tina was interested in the earthly matter. The soil, rock formation, and stones are persistent objects in her photographs. To these elements, she adds her body that merges with a desolate landscape. The practice is performative because of her self-portraits interacting with the natural environment and also because of her gesture of

⁸³ The tutors have noticed the exhibition potential of Filomena's work. While Akinbode saw the work in the form of an artist's book, Eustáquio suggested that she could make a video installation with the images of water.

collecting elements such as animals' bones, dry leaves, twisted twigs, and wooden sticks. These objects are photographed afterward in a very different aesthetic register: she sets up an improvised studio with controlled light and plain background. The whole set gains coherence through the images' pastel tones and a constant connection between the flesh and a certain mysticism of the inanimate world.

Tina's photographs roam in an enigmatic territory as if depicting the preparation for a shamanic ritual. Her identity cannot be framed by any alleged transparency of the medium. On the contrary, it is only through identification with a mystical knowledge that one can grasp her subjectivity. Tina says that these images address the state of loneliness in a positive fashion. Her visual language sounds like meditative talking with oneself, which is mediated by natural objects. Such introspection is the basis of her structure of symbolization and requires not only interpreting the relation between objects but *trusting* that they are metaphysically related.



Figures 12 and 13. Tina Krüger, *breath* (2021). Series, digital photography.

The epistemological shift in visual languages introduced by forms of knowledge based on spirituality has been found in other examples in our fieldwork. They are relevant insofar as they open the space for an analysis of how religious cosmologies manifest themselves in photographic practices. Religion is a very explored topic in the literature about decolonial discourses but mainly through the perspective of traditional African religions that have been silenced by colonial power. However, the impact of Christianity on people from the African continent – during and after the colonial era – has resulted in hybrid spaces of cultural negotiation that are much less studied in specialized literature or in contemporary art. These

spaces are essential since they rely on an interchange between identity and identification, allowing the crossing of conflicted epistemologies in a shared area of signification.

Reflecting upon the possibilities of radical forms of copresence, Boaventura de Sousa Santos proposes an *ecology of knowledges* where different epistemologies are in dialogue. He recalls the philosopher Ortega y Gasset's (1942) distinction between beliefs and ideas where the first is deemed an intrinsic part of our subjectivity and identity, while the second is exterior to us. Accordingly, "(...) our ideas originate from uncertainties and remain associated with them, [while] beliefs originate in the absence of doubt" (Santos 2016, 191-192). Given these claims, religion, as a form of belief, is an integral part of identities. But, on the other hand, our ideas rely on an unsteady and variable identification with the things in the world. To that extent, identification helps to deal with the unknown, with new information that has to be processed to make sense.

As an example of this articulation between ideas and beliefs in the residency production, Magno relates his landscape photographs with a spiritual cosmology without directly resorting to a religious discourse. He explains that "landscapes evoke a feeling that we are here, but we will not last as long as they" (Daniel 2021). It is through this metaphysical approach that he explores the idea of spirituality during the residency. In this sense, the symbolic elements of his black-and-white images of desolate places are all the more effective, as they are more open to different interpretations and less dependent on mimetic relationships with the objects in the photographs. In his visual language, nothing is literal; it always goes through metaphors. The island and the city of Mindelo appear as the setting for a spiritual journey. His images are enigmatic and silent, and they require a solemn respect as if we were in front of mystical apparitions in the urban environment. The spiritual permeates the images through a hybrid cosmology that connects Magno's beliefs and the knowledge he grasped through his experience on the island.

Another instance where the juxtaposition of identity and identification makes the boundaries between belief and knowledge porous was found in the work of Janeth Tavares. During a portfolio presentation session at the beginning of the residency, she explained that her relationship with photography is guided by how she relates to herself, to others, and God. In the series developed in São Vicente, she investigates stories of single fathers in Mindelo and their struggles to raise their children. On the formal aspect, her practice owes much to the photojournalism tradition. The impact of this visual language is evident in the descriptive

quality of her images and in the attempt to build a linear narrative about the life of different single parents. Janeth stresses that the primary motivation behind the project is her belief that the “family is the basis of the society” (Tavares 2021). When commenting on the series, she addresses the issue of social mobility in disadvantaged contexts. Yet she also underlines the importance of the moral values of correct conduct and of what is socially accepted within a conservative perspective of the role of men and women in society.

There seems to be a relationship between the descriptive language of photojournalism and a mistaken idea of identification that is confused with representativeness. While identification involves an exchange with the other within experiences of alterity, representation assumes a position of authority. As we will see in Chapter Five, the category of representation is external to the subject, limiting exchanges by being based on an aesthetic model that differentiates the image producer as the holder of knowledge. Consequently, those portrayed become passive subjects with restricted freedom to claim the complexity of their existence in the image. This is particularly visible in photojournalistic visual language, where pre-established visual narratives seem to seek subjects who certify them instead of granting *the right to look back* as an equally relevant strategy in the construction of image knowledge.

In any case, Janeth’s case is notable because it makes unstable some contemporary art discourses. Her beliefs appear to have shaped her identity in a Christian tradition. She binds such heritage to her visual practice, especially through photojournalistic language. For our research, it is relevant to understand how a discourse based on spiritual values impacts visual languages and photographic practices. This discussion raises some timely questions. For instance, is there room in contemporary visual art for artworks bearing a traditionalist religious speech? Finally, does this type of discourse conflict with decolonial discourses?

As a matter of fact, a Christian religious discourse certainly has less space in contemporary art structures. This tradition is seen as retrograde and associated with a worldview limiting the diversity of identities and choices. However, the Christian religious matrix also carries a conception based on living together and relational values. Like other participants, Janeth resorts to symbolizations. However, the structure of symbolization in Janeth’s work lies less on metaphors than on the relational qualities of her images. More than other participants, she connected with the local people of São Vicente Island. Such proximity is felt in her images, and it is an essential aspect of her practice. Through interpersonal

exchanges with the people of São Vicente, her visual language explores alterity as the symbolic domain of social and psychic identifications, offering a hybrid space of cultural negotiation. The example shows that the idea of identity is, at the same time, dependent on our beliefs and our identification with the world.



Figure 14. Janeth Tavares, “Mãe é mãe” e pai é pai? (2021). Series, digital photography.

3.4.2. The interplay between aesthetics and politics in the fictionalization of the real

Equally related to the cultural potential of alterity processes, the second place of articulation between visual languages and decolonial discourses can be found in the interrelation between aesthetics and politics. At first, the notion of aesthetics can be defined as a system of forms providing sensations through how one experiences artworks. However, according to Rancière (2000), the aesthetic is one specific way of relating to art. This *regime de l’art* starts from the assumption that people share a common sensitive space that establishes what is “thinkable” about a given reality. Along with other sensations, aesthetics includes politics as a “sensible” experience since it concerns the discourses elaborated on the basis of what is commonly seen and experienced in the society. This means that politics can be considered an aesthetic experience as it organizes how things remain seen or unseen and, thus, what can be said about them. According to Rancière, from the moment a *sensible*

is shared, it is possible to reflect on the ways in which artists make this common space visible and thinkable.

To aesthetic regime of the arts is opposed the representative regime. Based on the coupling poiesis/mimesis, the representative regime does not provide a way of “thinking through the arts” but is primarily a regime of visibility among others. It is based on orthodox modes of seeing subjects which is analogous to the overall hierarchy of political and social occupations. In this regime, “the representative primacy of action over characters or of narration over description, the hierarchy of genres according to the dignity of their subjects (...) come into analogy with a whole hierarchical vision of the community” (Rancière 2000, 30-31).

In turn, in the aesthetic regime, art is detached from a hierarchy of subjects, themes, genres, or styles. Besides, it represents the insufficiency of mimesis to articulate the visibility of a subject to a pre-established modality of thinking (ibid., 33). For Rancière, this detachment from mimetic representation operates more evidently in the strategies of fictionalization of the real. Accordingly, for the real to be thought of, it is necessary to make it fictional (ibid., 61). Nevertheless, the strategy does not lie in a simplistic opposition between imagination and reality but about ‘forging’ realities. In turn, what was previously established as the *indisputable real* acquires other nuances and interpretations that impact our political experience of the world.

Such a shift in perspective allows a new engagement with reality through a reorganization of the sensible and the visible; thus, “things that were not thinkable become so because the order of the visible is transformed” (Rancière 2021, 56). Politics and art, as convergent knowledges, constitute “fictional experiences” to the extent that both operate rearrangement of signs, images and texts, constantly weaving new relationships between what is said, what is done and what can be done. (Rancière 2000, 62) For our purposes, we will look at three photographers of the residency that chose to deal with reality as a political experience but with very different visual approaches.

In their works, Hélio Buite, Samba Baldé, and Silasse Salomone describe their surrounding reality using the symbolic properties of photographs to tell singular stories. However, it is interesting how these realities become a hybrid place of cultural negotiations when we look at them as constructed fictions. Such an approach allows one to see where the discourses conveyed by the images intersect with the visual languages employed by the

photographers. We can start by exploring the enunciative character of their works, that is, what they initially had in mind and wanted to convey. They began by defining their themes: the notion of resistance in cultural manifestations in Mindelo (Samba), the history of a fishing community in São Vicente Island (Silasse), and the informal market in the city of Mindelo through a parallel with the same topic in the city of Luanda, in Angola (Hélio). In common their thematic approaches share the same background: the city of Mindelo as connected to the island's general context. Conceptually, their focus is on the transformative potential of alterity processes: their presence in a community will arouse situations uncovering social, political, and economic layers of meaning. Hence, the move towards an unfamiliar reality is essential as it triggers the aesthetic experience. In this sense, alterity, as a space of encounters with other people, can never be passive. In these shared spaces, photographers must negotiate the visible and the sensible to afford the political as an aesthetic experience.

For Samba, politics were at the foundation of his project. It is from an image he made of a girl in a red-light district at night in Mindelo that came “the motivation to do a work that has to do with people” (Baldé 2021). He produced three small series addressing the idea of cultural resistance in the Cape Verdean context. One of them focuses on the activities of a carnival association. He photographed a series of adaptations to social precariousness situations to convey the idea of resistance. Patched instruments and musicians playing in improvised places illustrate the concept. He also refers to the literary group *Claridade*⁸⁴, which played an essential role in Cape Verdean cultural resistance in the first half of the 20th century, through the portrait of a man holding an anthology of the group's texts. Samba's visual language alternates between spontaneous recordings of everyday life and portraits of people from the community, to which he adds formal effects such as double exposure, motion-blurred pictures, and saturated colors. Throughout the series, there is an impression of urgency, as if the images evoke the feeling of walking through the streets of a busy city in the frantic flow of action. For example, when discussing the symbolism of double-exposure photos, Samba says, “it's like I make time last longer” (ibid.). But beyond the symbolism suggested, what is interesting is how the formal aspects are at the service of a

⁸⁴ *Claridade* was a political-cultural movement supporting the *Crioulo* identity and literary autonomy in Cabo Verde. It was founded in 1936 by a group of Cape Verdean intellectuals and writers. Through the literary journal of the group, *Claridade*, they sought the “sources of Crioulo culture, to develop an original Cape Verdean literature, and to seek freer cultural expression” (Lobban 2018, 78) under colonization.

broader discourse that he defines as “the inexorable continuity and circularity of things” (ibid.).



Figure 15. Samba Baldé, *Resistência* (2021). Triptych, digital photography.

A discourse of circularity and repetition also appears in Hélió’s project. His attempt to address the connections between Mindelo and Luanda starts from a more subjective questioning of how one experiences spaces. He mentions the naturalization of a certain precariousness of things and wonders how to represent it: “I wanted to talk about my experience in Luanda in this new space... it is about the things that remain static in this constant and unchanging cycle” (Buite 2021), he explains. In the final presentation of his project, Hélió showed vertical diptychs of urban scenes. In their formal aspect, the photographs have a snap-shot aesthetic, with a displaced and unstable framing that evokes movement. Next to these images, he intersperses horizontal portraits, with characters well contextualized in Mindelo’s urban environments, conveying a sense of immobility and waiting. In the presentation, Hélió explained that, after all, his project is about space and temporality and that he intended to present the flow of movements in the city of Mindelo. It is as if inertia and mobility were not opposite physical states, as both constitute ways of inhabiting spaces as distinct as Mindelo and Luanda.



Figure 16. Hélio Buite, *untitled* (2021). Diptych, digital photography.

In turn, Silasse, who at the beginning of the residency had defined his style as ‘street photography’, also reports having been stimulated by what he saw and felt in Mindelo. Despite saying that his projects do not carry political connotations, the experience of alterity established with a fishing community was fundamental for him to extract a political sensibility through the way he structured the visible. As discussed in the previous chapter, by photographing the very elements of the fishermen’s visual communication, he develops a visual language that is not directly mimetic but based on complex symbolizations. Realizing that his project was too ambitious, he decided to tell the story of the fishermen’s community by focusing on the single story of Mr. Carlos, a 61-year-old fisherman from the locality of São Pedro.

Silasse stands out for the poignancy of his visual language. In the rawness of high-contrast black-and-white photographs, the textures of an old buoy and of a fisherman’s calloused feet compose the semantics of a sensitive space through which he visually communicates. Close-up shots of details such as these alternate with contextual elements such as ocean waves and fishing nets. The tactile impact of the images is enhanced by a photograph of a drawing on a wall depicting a man wearing a hat. The graphic simplicity of this childish image disguises an extra-sensorial layer of meaning embedded in the photograph. According to Silasse, this rudimentary portrait presents another version of

himself. He made the images out of his belief “that things say something to me, they communicate with me” (Salomone 2021), as he puts.



Figures 17 and 18. Silasse Salomone, *untitled* (2021). Series, digital photography.

Silasse photographs reality as more ‘real’ than ordinary reality, and things adhere to this excess of representation, in other words, to this sur-reality. This fictionalized reality is reconfigured in the last two photos of the series. First, an image of a fisherman registration document held by Mr. Carlos is photographed in the foreground, hiding his face. And the last photo: the only portrait of the fisherman, in a composition very similar to the picture of the document (frontal, with a dark background that prevents the reading of other information in the image). Carlos’ portrait is dense and profound. During one of the discussion sessions, Diogo commented this image can convey both an impression of experience and concern.



Figures 19 and 20. Silasse Salomone, *untitled* (2021). Series, digital photography.

Silasse says he could not represent all the complexity of the fishermen's universe: "there are things that stayed inside me and didn't turn into a photograph" (ibid.), he puts. As an example, he mentions the precariousness and poverty of their lives. The articulation of visual language and discourse is evident when he talks about a troubling paradox: "there are days when they go hungry, but at the same time, they feed us" (ibid.). Indeed, this paradox is not easily represented in a simple photograph or a sequence of images. But Silasse manages to reach another enunciative level that goes beyond the representative regime of the arts. The paradox cannot be seen, but it is possible to feel it through how reality was fictionalized. Together, the use of haptic visuality, auto-biographical elements, attention to the autonomy of the objects, and the documental/informative property of the photographs provide an array of sensations. Charged with political meanings, these sensations allow sharing the "sensible" of a tangible and shared place.

In this chapter, the present investigation focused on cultural analysis by exploring the points of articulation between decolonial discourses and visual languages. In the images produced at the Catchupa Factory residency, these intersections appeared more palpably in the interplays between identity and identification and between politics and aesthetics. Of course, other points of articulation could also be explored. However, our main intention was to show that in these articulations, the production of knowledge goes beyond the symbolization of images. It is in the structure of symbolization that the creative process manifests itself, raising the potential of photographic practices to represent the non-visual and the affective. Decolonial discourses are at the base of these cultural practices, but they become more effective when they strengthen the enunciative potential of visual languages. One of the consequences of this paradigm shift is the production of new cultural narratives, the next chapter's subject.

PART II

CONVERGENCE: KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

4. VISUAL-CULTURAL NARRATIVES: STORIES FROM SÃO VICENTE ISLAND AND BEYOND

4.1. WHAT ARE VISUAL CULTURAL NARRATIVES?

We have analyzed so far how the production of photographic images creates cultural artefacts that carry a dual function. *Photographic practice* allows individuals to develop their own *visual languages*, facilitating the communication of their subjectivities and socio-cultural positions. At the same time, such practices are associated with broader *processes of production* that draw on the characteristics of the medium to convey *cultural discourses*. By inverting the four terms of this equation, as it was depicted in the two previous chapters, on the one hand we have production processes and photographic practices – that is, aspects linked to *visuality* –, and on the other hand languages and discourses – terms linked to *textuality*. Thus, in our approach, the interrelationship between text and image appears as fundamental to understanding how photography can be an instrument of knowledge production. To deepen this relationship in a constructive way, the idea of visual narrative is of crucial relevance because it manages to include in the same object both textual (language and discourse) and visual (photographic practices and processes) aspects. This chapter therefore explores what we call Visual Cultural Narratives, a concept that allows cultural knowledge to be extracted from the corpus of work developed by the artist-photographers during the residency.

However, to define the concept of visual cultural narratives, it is necessary to explain what we mean by narrative and how the term relates to the domain of images. The reflections around the concept of narrative are part of a long history that dates back to Plato's *Republic* (429-347 BC), where he distinguishes in the representational systems the figures of *mimesis* (when the poet speaks as if he were another) and the *diegesis* (when the poet speaks as himself). Plato is critical of *mimesis*, considering it misleading as a strategy to represent reality through literary figures. His disciple, Aristotle (384-322 BC) opposed his ideas by proposing that *mimesis*, as an imitative strategy, is a gift innate to human beings. Accordingly, in artistic representations such strategy manifests itself autonomously, especially as an operation capable of combining aesthetic pleasure and cognition (Schaeffer and Vultur 2010). When literature resorts to *mimesis*, it does so not to confuse the categories

of reality and fiction, but to assert itself as a particular way of representing reality. Thus, in *Poetics*, Aristotle defines the early narrative genres – epic, drama and dithyramb – as a variable combination between *diegesis* and *mimesis* (Jong 2010, 19-20).

It is from these first discussions that sought to define the essential constitutive elements of stories and, consequently, the genres in which they would fit that narrative theory developed in the Western tradition. Primarily linked to the literary field, early narratological studies were particularly interested in the narrative potential of different genres. These works sought to discover patterns and establish models that covered the different types of texts to standardize and consolidate analytical tools that could be used in a universal and comprehensive way.

However, the exclusivity of this textual approach was overcome in the second half of the 20th century due to the theoretical contributions of French Structuralism, which emancipated the narrative form of literature and fiction and recognized it as a semiotic phenomenon that transcends disciplines and media (Ryan 2010, 344). The new paradigm enabled other media, such as films, television programs and photographs, to be equally interpreted in terms of their narrative potentials. Furthermore, such an epistemological turn enabled an attention to non-Western narrative traditions that rely on sound as their underlying medium.

The last applies particularly to African narrative traditions, in which orality is considered fundamental for the construction and communication of stories, even influencing the expressive resources of written narratives (Garuba 2010, 8). The relevance of orality as a mode of non-Western knowledge production is visible in the way in which the forms of conveyance and the figure of the *story-teller* combine performance and audience participation in the story construction. For instance, during residency, the tutor Akinbode Akinbiyi referred to the oral traditions of the Wolof ethnic group, from the northwest Senegal, as fundamental for the construction of complex cosmologies and as a particular way of circulation of knowledge in this culture⁸⁵. But if, on the one hand, the emancipation of the authority of the written texts allowed a less Eurocentric conception of knowledge

⁸⁵ Akinbode explains that through a performative disposition of *call -and-response*, the Wolofs have the habit of repeatedly greeting each other every morning as a way of occupying the space audibly. For example, a person will call his/her interlocutor's name and hear his/her name as a response. This process may take a few minutes, so that the sound of the voices is modulated in order to convey the state of mind of each individual (Akinbiyi 2021a).

production through stories, this openness made the ontological definition of narrative an even more complex task.

According to the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* (Herman, Jahn, and Ryan 2010), it is currently possible to separate two theoretical lines in the attempt to define the concept of narrative. The first one, influenced by the precursor theorists of narratology, is based on the definition of the formal and conceptual elements that characterize narratives. In this perspective, the fundamental aspect of a narrative concerns the representation of temporality, that is, how a sequence of events is represented and transmitted. For example, establishing a causal relationship between the different events occurring in a story is a strategy for the representation of temporality. Another characteristic notion is the manifestation of a disruption in the natural order of things caused by external forces. This means that the feeling of the narrative is triggered by an experience of instability that implies substantial changes in the usual course of events (Ryan 2007). In addition to these, narrative studies propose other attributes that will be more or less adaptable to different literary genres and different media.

A more contemporary line of analysis is interested in describing the impact of narratives on human experiences. Connecting the field of Narrative Studies with other disciplines such as ethnography, anthropology and cultural studies, this current examines narratives “in terms of their functioning in maintaining the social structure and stabilizing society” (Garuba 2010, 9). In this sense, narratives are responsible for creating and passing on cultural traditions, both from a social perspective of a group and in relation to the values and beliefs that define individual’s cultural identity (Ryan 2010, 345). This socio-cultural focus on narrative is valuable to our research because it provides access to the antagonistic forces that permeate the production of photographic images. That is, narratives are a means by which dominant ideologies and instruments of power are imposed on people; at the same time, however, they can also be instruments of self-realization and social engagement at the disposal of individuals. Likewise, photography can serve the same roles.

The ideological potential of narratives is illustrated by the concept of *Grand Narratives*, elaborated by Jean-François Lyotard (1984) in his work on the postmodern condition. In relation to the impact of narratives on human experience, Lyotard identifies the *grands récits* [grand narratives] as sociocultural forms of interpreting reality originating from the intellectual tradition of the Enlightenment. These models are based on a belief in infinite

progress and a faith in modern science – through its models for certifying truths that become incontestable. (Bamberg 2007, 287). Constructed according to the interests of Western hegemonic groups, grand narratives are based on the imposition and maintenance of a power relation. They are sustained by the maintenance of difference (racial, ethnic, sexual, gender, among others) as a form of political and psychological domination.

In parallel, postcolonial studies also contributed to the analysis of the ideological potential of cultural narratives. For example, Edward Said (1984) described the impact of grand narratives on the unfolding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Through a rhetoric that builds negative stereotypes, such as associating Palestinians with terrorism, these narratives work as a means of subjugating ethnic groups. From the perspective of the dominant group, they “justify everything ‘we’ do and, to delegitimize as well as dehumanize everything ‘they’ do” (ibid., 36). However, postcolonial studies will also consider the emancipatory potential of narratives in the articulation or reconstruction of histories and identities that have been progressively eliminated by projects of subordination and domination of cultures.

Sometimes referred to as alternative narratives⁸⁶ (Pedri-Spade 2017; Andrew and Neath 2018), as they place values of social justice, tolerance, and freedom in the foreground, the emancipatory approach of narratives often resorts to colonial photographic archives to propose other possibilities for a hegemonic reading of history. The aim is to subvert the initial intention of these images (i.e., to dominate, subjugate, classify, and hierarchize the races) and propose a decolonial reading of the material. Celeste Pedri-Spade defines five functions of photographic archives in decolonial practices: 1. Cultural revival and continuity; 2. Mourning and healing; 3. Truth-telling and reconciliation; 4. Restoring relationships among people, ancestors, and places; and 5. Dreaming and visioning (Pedri-Spade 2017, 108-110). In this sense, photographs function as fragments of memories and a connection to ancestors. To this extent, they can be accessed and employed by decolonized peoples to reconstruct and reinvent their histories through an emancipatory perspective.

In decolonial cultural practices, grand narratives can be further contested by micro-narratives. Defined as individual stories that question, resist and subvert the Eurocentric

⁸⁶ The term is distinguished from *counter-narratives*, despite being used often indistinctly. While *counter-narratives* try to deconstruct and present themselves as reactive to the narratives in effect, an *alternative narrative* positions itself “in a more positive, proactive and independent way from its own values and structure” (See Council of Europe. n.d. “Alternative narratives and inclusive communication,” <https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/alternative-narratives-and-inclusive-communication>, last accessed April 5, 2023).

narratives, they seek to restore the plurality of the contemporary world in which we live (Santos 2021). At the same time, these stories also function as strategies of meaning production on a subjective level. This second aspect of micro-narratives is relevant because it suggests another approach to the concept of narrative within the theoretical line concerned with its social functions. This is about considering the cognitive role of narratives⁸⁷ present in the way human beings relate to the production of stories. In this sense, narrative is conceived as a mental process that helps us interpret the world, besides allowing us to build our own individual history.

The perspective of narrative as a mental process is associated with the oldest Western meaning of the term. The etymology of the word ‘narrative’ comes from the Latin *gnarus*, adjective meaning *knowing, experienced*⁸⁸. While the relationship between narrative and knowledge has a long history that is difficult to trace, Cognitive Narratology studies will be the first academic field to formalize this relationship. It became a fruitful line of study due to the contributions of the structuralist current in France, in particular the work of Roland Barthes (1974) and his notion of writerly text, in which the reader abandons a passive position in front of the text to play an active role in the production of meaning. In parallel, the cognitive sciences started to recognize the ‘storied’ nature of perception, sense-making, memory, and identity formation (Jahn 2007, 67).

The scope of narratives as a mental process is fundamental for people, regardless of their cultures, to organize and give meaning to their subjective and social experiences, making them more tangible. However, as Jerome Bruner argues, narratives “not only shape the ways we communicate with each other and the way we experience the world, but also shape what we imagine, our sense of what is possible” (Bruner 2010, 45). Thus, by shaping our external conception of the world and our internal processes, narratives are intimately connected with the way in which we experience reality. According to Bruner, the perception of reality lies between the physical-natural world and the human symbolic realm, and “reality” is apprehended when our experiences and memories are organized through narratives (Bruner 1991, 4). Thus, the cognitive character of narratives lies both in their

⁸⁷According to Marie-Laure Ryan, from the perspective of narrative as a cognitive process, “stories can exist in the mind as pure patterns of information, inspired by life experience or created by the imagination, independently of their representation through the signs of a specific medium”. (Ryan 2007, 27)

⁸⁸ Derivative forms of *gnarus*, include *ignarus* (having no knowledge, ignorant) and *narrate* (to report, to tell). See Vaan, Michiel de. 2008. ‘gnarus’. *Etymological Dictionary of Latin and the other Italic Languages*. Lieden: Brill.

function of framing reality and in their potential for producing cultural knowledge through symbolizations. However, in order to be apprehended as a cultural object, it is necessary to understand how the mental process underlying narratives is represented.

The perspective of narrative as a process involving mental representation has important consequences for our study. The first is to bring up the notion of mental images in the discussions around narratives, thus putting the field of visuality in dialogue with concepts initially thought of in the context of textuality. Although the notion of mental image has accompanied the discussions about representation in the literary field since the seventeenth century, indicating the visuality evoked by a text (Williams 2007, 219), the innovative character of narrative theories consists in analyzing how these mental images are represented. Therein lies the difference between story and narrative: while the story is a sequence of events, the narrative is the mental logic behind the representation of these events (Abbott 2008, 19). The second consequence is that if we consider mental representation as a non-exclusive property of the textual medium, narrativity is not limited to verbal or oral texts and will also be present in imagetic representations (Ryan 2010, 347). Thus, if every story provides a mental representation, narrative is nothing more than the way this story is represented, independent of the medium. According to Marie-Laure Ryan,

As a mental representation, story is not tied to any particular medium, and it is independent of the distinction between fiction and non-fiction. A definition of narrative should therefore work for different media (though admittedly media do widely differ in their storytelling abilities), and it should not privilege literary forms (Ryan 2007, 26).

The multimodal perspective of mental representations opens up the possibility of exploring visual narratives conveyed by photographic images. In this perspective, the narrative potential of photographs manifests itself both in their internal and external dimension. According to Marcus Banks (2001), images function as narrative devices not only because of what they show (i.e., the objects they refer to directly or their content) – that is, their internal narrative. The narrative potential of images lies equally in what they evoke: stories of muffled voices, silences, invisibilities, affective textures, and a whole range of emotional states. These elements make up the external dimension of visual narratives that refers “to the social context that produced the image and the social relations within which the image is embedded at any moment of viewing” (ibid., 11-12). The field of Visual Culture studies pay attention to both narrative dimensions in the realm of images, also investigating

how technically produced images relate to mental images (memories, dreams, and aspirations) and the cognitive potential resulting from this relationship. In relation to photography, this means that a visual narrative goes beyond the mimetic relationship that images establish with what they represent. Although the referential relationship is always present in a photograph, it remains only one regime of representation among other possible ones.

Thus, from the perspective of Visual Culture studies, a visual narrative has a dual function: to make sense of subjective experience in the world and to reveal the cultural and social aspects that permeate the production of images. In such an approach, the focus is directed toward the materiality of the images and how such materiality is associated with social and historical processes of visualization (Lister and Wells 2000). Thereby, the meaning of visual narratives will depend on both the individual's subjective relationship with images, as well as the wider cultural context through which images circulate and are absorbed (Pink 2003, 187). Therefore, a visual cultural narrative would be defined by the strategies of visual representation employed to connect the internal and external narratives of images. In this definition, subjective experiences of perceiving reality manifest simultaneously with the representation of a particular cultural context, though neither being fully absorbed by it nor attenuating it to the point that the external dimension becomes insignificant.

This chapter explores visual cultural narratives through the photographic production of the artist residency Catchupa Factory 2021. However, before proceeding further, it is necessary to define the methodology employed to investigate the cultural and the narrative potential of these images. By analyzing the series of images of each participant in the previous chapters, we sought to better understand how photographic practices were articulated with visual languages in each artist's work. These series carry a certain homogeneity, as they represent the universe of each photographer. Therefore, they convey specific micronarratives that point to both subjective interests and broader worldviews. Differently, in this chapter, the focus is on a corpus defined by a pre-selection of images produced by the participants of the residency. Within this heterogeneous set of images, we will seek to uncover visual cultural narratives permeating the collective production as a whole. This approach has the advantage of providing an analysis of the relationship that

images by different artists establish with each other. However, it represents a greater challenge.

In a heterogeneous visual corpus such as that of the residence, the conceptual relationships between the participants' images are virtually infinite. If, on the one hand, this abundance allows to investigate new micronarratives through a multiplicity of points of view that shared the same space and the same temporality, this method can disperse us in many directions, making the cultural analysis superficial. Hence, it is key to employ curatorial tools to organize the multitude of subjectivities and positions that potentially exist in such a varied corpus of photographic images.

Furthermore, our aim in curating this material is to give meaning to a whole that is not closed to univocal interpretations. On the contrary, the operation seeks the active participation of the viewer in the creation of meaning as a way of expanding the concepts and affects of each work individually. As a consequence, the geographical borders of the island of São Vicente become porous, expanding notions of identity and identification to different geographies. At the same time, temporalities become more fluid: pasts and memories are re-actualized in the present; the future is speculatively reconfigured in the present.

4.2. MONTAGE AND IMAGINATION AS TOOLS FOR THE FABRICATION OF NARRATIVES

To unveil a visual narrative, a curatorial approach with heterogeneous visual objects (whether photographic or of another nature) has to organize them coherently. A visual narrative with a corpus of photographs is not only an ordered sequence of objects. The curatorial process is first of all an incision in a vast universe of possibilities. Thus, in the process of formal organization the intention is not to establish a single reading or a totalizing or definitive vision. It is, above all, about organizing an entanglement of relationships between images (i.e., analogies, temporal relationships, complementarities, ruptures or friction between them) that asks for interpretation. This cognitive exercise of deciphering relationships between visual objects, which, in turn, enables a cultural reading of visual narratives, can be framed by the montage process.

The introduction of the term montage in the universe of images has its origin in film editing techniques. It refers to the different ways of constructing a sequence of moving images and the effects that these combinations have on the spectator. The Soviet cinema of the 1920s is considered the milestone in which montage techniques began to be consciously thought out by filmmakers. In these pioneering productions, the aim was not only to evoke psychological sensations, but also to stimulate social-political engagement through the montage of moving images. The great thinker of this movement was the Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein (1898-1948), who developed a theory of the different types of montage. It states that different techniques could emphasize dynamism or discontinuities, resulting in syntheses capable of conveying sensations of rhythm, emotional states, or intellectual reflections (Keating 2010). These techniques evolved in parallel with technological innovations (especially the appearance of sound in cinema) and today are encompassed by the more common term of *editing*.

From the expansion of cinema as a mass medium, theories about montage will develop and feed debates on the representation of reality and time through cinematographic works. For instance, realistic approaches will denounce the montage practiced in Hollywood cinema as manipulative by inducing the spectator to passively accept the narrative (Bazin 1967). However, it is the work of Gilles Deleuze (1985) that will deepen more radically the relationship between narrative and montage in cinema. Deleuze considers that montage goes beyond a simple technique to represent reality. It is above all a method of experiencing time. Thus, he sees the new the relations between montage and narrative in modern European cinema not only as a result of technical innovations but as a rupture in the way of conceiving time. The perception of time in narrative is no longer based on the linearity of past-present-future but becomes a simultaneity⁸⁹. Evidently, these reflections move beyond the purpose of our research, which deals mainly with still images. However, it is important to highlight the transition from montage as a technical notion to montage as a dialectical method.

Continuing this conceptual move, philosopher and historian Georges Didi-Huberman explores montage as a dialectical method for extracting knowledge from processes of historical rupture, expanding the concept's application to other types of images. Based on

⁸⁹ In this new regime, the narrative complexity increases, and it moves away from pretensions of verisimilitude with reality, functioning above all as a sensorial experience of time and movement (see Veigas, Susana. 2012. "Filosofia do Cinema: processos de criação de uma nova imagem do pensamento." PhD diss., Universidade Nova de Lisboa).

the theatrical and poetic work of Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) and on Aby Warburg's *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne* project (1866-1929), he argues that the montage method goes beyond the function of displaying images. Instead, it is about perceiving the language of images not as a consolidated semiotic system that could be applied indiscriminately to different situations, but as a constant process of cuts, framings, and interruptions in the grand narratives of history (Didi-Huberman 2009). From this perspective, the meaning of the images depends mainly on how they are arranged with other images to provide a more profound reading of socio-political configurations in history.

As a dialectical method, montage can be employed through diverse artistic operations. In Brecht's theater, montage is configured through the imposition of a conscious *distance* between representation and spectators that highlights the heterogeneity of gestures and actions (ibid., 65). According to Didi-Huberman, this operation disarticulates the usual perception of things, inviting the spectator to establish unprecedented relationships between different elements. More than a simple arrangement of visual elements, it is a *redisposition*, which allows us to see things "as if for the first time" (ibid., 73). The same applies to Brecht's poetic work, where the text evokes heterogeneous and seemingly unconnected images. Amidst a sensation of strangeness, it is up to the reader to establish new relationships between the poetic images in order to forge a visuality that goes beyond what the text describes. Therefore, distancing, as a tool of montage, has the potential to stimulate the production of meaning through the experience of alterity with images or poetic texts that evoke images⁹⁰.

In relation to Aby Warburg's *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*, the role of montage as a way to produce non-hegemonic narratives is even more relevant to our approach. Aby Warburg, a German art and culture historian, developed a pioneering work that influenced diverse fields such as art history, cultural studies, visual studies, film practices, and graphic design. The most significant project of his life was the composition of an atlas of images on which he worked from 1924 until he died in 1929 and is therefore considered unfinished. It consisted of panels installed on wooden canvases measuring 1.5 by 2 meters, covered with black fabric. On these panels were fixed reproductions of various images, such as copies of

⁹⁰ In Didi-Huberman's approach, *distancing* bears the meaning of a repositioning allowing a sharper look and a more accurate view of the object. He contrasts this understanding with the idea of distancing as a "moving away from" or losing sight of the object, thus making it impossible to establish any relationship with it (Didi-Huberman 2009, 66).

paintings from the European classical tradition, drawings representing the myths of ancient Greece, photographs of current affairs, images taken from periodicals, as well as various graphic materials.

This whole collection was organized based on thematic axes, such as “Irruption of antiquity”, “Dionysian formulas of emotions” or “Coordinates of memory”. Arranged on the walls of his library, these visual montages did not respect any linear or chronological organization (Campos 2020). They can be seen as constellations of images “that explode the self-proclaimed certainties of science, as sure of its truths, as of art, so sure of its criteria” (Didi-Huberman 2011, 13). Viewing the collection suggests a complex web of relationships between the images that transcends categories of thought and academic disciplines.

Warburg’s ambitious project consisted in writing a history of culture without resorting to words. To that extent, the associations between images should function as a cognitive operation allowing the connection of different representations of the world according to “their intimate and secret relationships, their correspondences and their analogies” (Didi-Huberman 2011, 15). In this sense, Warburg’s atlas represents an ‘out of time’ object insofar as these secret connections can intertwine heterogeneous temporalities and spaces (ibid., 17-18). According to Didi-Huberman, certain “correspondences” provide a “transversal knowledge”, capable of representing the “inexhaustible historical, geographical and imaginary complexity” (ibid., 20-21) of images.

Based on the *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*, Didi-Huberman’s theorization of the montage process provides a curatorial method for unveiling and creating narratives through visual projects. Through this bidirectional method, curators and spectators enjoy the freedom to create narratives through associations between diverse elements. Moreover, in such a curatorial process, the cognitive activity is directly related to producing signifying relations between images. Thus, similar to the definition of narrative as “a cognitive style or mode of thinking” (Ryan 2007, 27), employing a dialectical montage in a visual curatorial project can also stimulate thinking and knowledge production. Analogously, we could say that texts that evoke an intense visuality, such as poetry, also resort to the method of dialectical montage to organize the mental images produced by the text. In this sense, the perception of the textual narrative would also be linked to an organization of the visible space.

Among the characteristics of dialectical montage with images, Didi-Huberman (2009; 2011; 2012) highlights four crucial consequences of this operation on narratives: 1. The

apparent randomness of associations can reveal profound questionings; 2. Through images, montage has the potential to reconfigure memories; 3. Montage work does not seek a global understanding of politics and aesthetics, but rather an interpretation through fragments. For this reason, it is incompatible with a totalizing vision of art history and represents political events as unfinished processes, full of structural flaws and inconsistencies; and 4. The political function of montage is to break down the barrier between text and image as separate forces in the production of meaning. By appealing to the text to explain relationships not evident at first glance between the images and, concomitantly, by providing a visual experience that has the consequence of stimulating new ideas, the montage reorganizes the relationships between politics and aesthetics.

There is also a fundamental aspect that connects the montage procedure to the construction of narratives. As a knowledge production tool and a cognitive style, montage and narratives are closely linked to the faculty of imagination. In stating that “there is no image without imagination”, Didi-Huberman underscores imagination as a “*realization capacity* [founded on an] intrinsic potency of *realism* that distinguishes it (...) from fantasy or frivolity” (Didi-Huberman 2012, 208). In this sense, imagination is seen as an active disposition in the construction of meaning. Therefore, imagination has nothing to do with subjective reveries. On the contrary, it is a concrete tool that, enhanced by dialectical montage, allows discovering connections that mere visual observation cannot reach. Thus, a configuration between montage and imagination occurs because,

[the] imagination welcomes the multiple and constantly renews it to discover new ‘intimate and secret relationships’, new ‘correspondences and analogies’ which are themselves inexhaustible as is inexhaustible any thinking about relationships that a new montage is likely to spur on each occasion⁹¹ (Didi-Huberman 2011, 14).

The plurality of imagination and its virtually infinite potential to establish cognitive relationships between images are tools for not only the historical revision of grand narratives, but also for the construction of social reality through small stories connected to the present. Narratology studies have focused on the ability of media to convey stories that shape our worldview and affect our behavior. These studies state that stories do not need to be about the real world to produce real behavior (Ryan and Thon 2014, 2). In the case of visual

⁹¹ Translation by the author.

narratives with collections of photographs, the construction of social reality takes place not because each image is an autonomous description of reality, but because the constellations of images reveal different fragments of reality that ask to be connected through an imaginative work of mental representation that results in a narrative. Thus, the narrative emerges when the author's intention underlying the organization of images meets the viewer's ability to weave relationships between them⁹². Both the intention to organize and the disposition to establish relationships depend fundamentally on an exercise of imagination.

These reflections allow us to advance and investigate cultural visual narratives conveyed by constellations of images organized in curatorial projects. Ultimately, it is about conceiving the curatorial process itself as a form of narrative that incites the cognitive processes activated by the representation and communication of stories. To arrive at these curatorial narratives, we will use the concepts of montage and imagination together as tools for building new worlds. At first, the *imaginative montage* method will be used to investigate the narratives from the viewpoint of the spectator who experiences a constellation of images through a conventional exhibition. Then, we will propose a curatorial practice with the images produced during the artistic residency, seeking not only to convey the micronarratives that emerged in the space-time of the residency, but also to connect them to other decolonial practices in the cultural and artistic fields.

4.3. THE NARRATIVE DISPOSITION OF CURATORIAL PROJECTS

In a comprehensive definition, a curatorial process concerns the set of activities involved in the selection, organization, and presentation of objects in a coherent manner in a physical or virtual space. These activities involve a variety of strategies that seek to convey an idea underlying a group of artifacts that goes beyond the sum of the conceptual particularities of each object. In the artistic field alone, numerous curatorial practices can be identified. In addition to the traditional format of the exhibition, curatorship can take place in archives, in public or private collections, through the production of texts and publications, in the editing

⁹² In narratology studies, the model of mental representation that is stimulated when the reader articulates the plot elements of the story is called the *storyworld* (Bruner 2010; Ryan 2007). The notion of storyworld connects the narrative with the spectator's perception of reality by creating a mental model that makes the stories be assimilated.

of visual materials, in the organization of a film exhibition, and even through pedagogical practices (Pedrosa 2013).

In the last decades of the 20th century, the concept expanded to encompass activities that include the immaterial properties of artistic processes. In this sense, the curatorship began to explore activist initiatives, participatory practices involving communities and to deconstruct and subvert the original space and function of cultural institutions, besides a series of other collaborative proposals. In general, these innovative practices seek to organize and give meaning to political sensibilities and create dynamics of conviviality in society and in public spaces. In the 2000s, curators and scholars began to use the term *the curatorial* in contrast to the previously prevalent *the curating*⁹³. While curating is primarily associated with a mode of representation, the curatorial is seen as a presentation. As such, it favors philosophical and ethical approaches to reflexivity, self-criticism, and knowledge production⁹⁴. Accordingly, the production of knowledge occurs not only through the concrete materials resulting from such initiatives, but mainly through the experience stimulated by processes, collaborations and interactions.

However, even in a conventional visual exhibition, the curatorial process deals with different possibilities surrounding the production of knowledge. For instance, an exhibition project may focus on the work of one artist or on the production of a group of artists. In both cases, it can be organized thematically, chronologically or involve a concept combining different categories. These choices depend fundamentally on the nature of the project and the material at hand. For example, the curatorial strategies involved in organizing a retrospective exhibition of the work of a living artist differ from those involved in a thematic exhibition on a past artistic movement or those elaborated for a group exhibition with the production of contemporary artists. Finally, a conventional exhibition may also display the presentation of ephemeral performances or events that will complement the perception of exhibited objects.

If we look for a common ground in all these different curatorial approaches and practices, perhaps it lies in their intrinsic purpose. It can be said that these processes seek to provide new modes of knowledge through the organization of visible and sensitive spaces

⁹³ For different approaches on the notion of *the curatorial*, see Lind (2009), Rogoff (2013) and Von Bismark (2022).

⁹⁴ See the article “The Curatorial Thing” by artist, writer and curator Hongjohn Lin at *Curatography Issue 5: Curatorial Episteme*. Available at <https://curatography.org/5-2-en/#>.

and that, ultimately, they do so through the conveyance of narratives. According to art historian and curator Marta Ponsa, “all exhibitions suggest a narrative discourse in which pieces establish a dialogue with the curatorial stance or with each other, as well as with the spaces in which they are shown to the public” (Ponsa 2009, 57). For the sake of developing our argument, we will frame our reflection in the field of visual arts considering images by different authors presented in the same physical space (collective exhibitions, books, atlases, posters). Therefore, the narrative discourse in this type of curatorial project can be considered in ways that will depend on the web of relationships established between visual objects and their relationship with broader categories such as the theme of the project and the space where images are shown.

In a simplified way, we can identify the narrative functionality of a curatorial project of this nature in two levels. First, the curatorial project aims to enhance and communicate the stories evoked by the work of each artist present in a group exhibition. A second level is present in the way the curatorial project imparts an autonomous narrative, which comes to be more than the sum of the individual narratives that each artist seeks to convey. It is in this sense that Ponsa refers to the narrative discourse of an exhibition as simultaneously dependent on the relationship between the displayed works and on the relationship of each of these with the overall theme or concept of the exhibition.

Considering the narrative function of curatorship within this second level means addressing the relationship between institutional decisions (regarding the choice of the project’s theme) and individual decisions (that is, the strategies employed by the curator, by the artist(s) or through a collaboration between them) to sew relationships between artworks in a given physical space. To these factors one must also add the social, cultural and political context in which the exhibition is presented. Thus, curatorial projects will reflect discussions and trends that reveal the narrative attributes of a given time and place, as well as particular positions of institutions and individuals.

In this sense, it is important to remind that the origin of the curator’s function is historically linked to the European aristocratic practice of the *cabinet de curiosités* and the figure of the collector during the Renaissance. Later, in the 19th century, with the establishment of public museums, curatorial activity was impersonated by the figure of the connoisseur, that is, the expert or specialist. In European museums, their role was closely linked to strategies for imposing and sustaining bourgeois ideologies and values. These often

materialized in the transmission of narratives that naturalized the colonialist project and solidified the histories of European nation-states (Morgan 2013, 15). The circulation of these grand narratives was linked to the historical and political context of their time. However, it is no exaggeration to state that their effects are still felt in contemporary times. They are visible mainly through the maintenance of the notion of a teleological history, of linear conception of time (Filipovic 2013, 63) and in the articulation of the concepts of nation and culture that are often communicated by cultural productions in museums.

From the second half of the 20th century, these notions were gradually contested by other practices and innovative projects, despite not having gained much visibility at their time. A more substantial shift can be noticed from the early 1990s onwards, when the contemporary art circuit in global centers of power opened up to include works by artists and curators outside the European-North American axis. In this new paradigm (which is still in full development), “there is no longer a single, Eurocentric, universal master narrative, but several polyphonic, pluriversal *stories*” (Pedrosa 2013, 118). Such a critical disposition aims to dissociate the great historical and political narratives from curatorial projects. Moreover, according to Juan A. Gaitán, the *dissociative factor* present in contemporary art exhibitions also seeks to represent the discontinuous nature of reality instead of functioning merely as a confirmation of common sense (Gaitán 2013, 29). These new arrangements have authorized the visual arts and, consequently, the curatorial processes to investigate the universe of micronarratives and insert them in the history of art.

If micronarratives are thematically, discursively, and ideologically distinguished from grand narratives, it is still worth investigating how they are characterized in formal terms and the methods enabling their manifestation in a curatorial project. Taking as an example a heterogeneous set of images that represent an exhibition or collective publication with contemporary visual artists, the construction of curatorial micronarratives owes much to the relationship that the works establish with each other when occupying the same space. A collective exhibition of artworks is not limited to the sum of the particularities of artworks presented, but also “the relationships they establish with each other, the dramaturgy around them and the discourse that frames them” (Filipovic 2013, 64). In this sense, it can be said that this exhibition format has affinities with the essay format⁹⁵ (Gaitán 2013, 29), as it

⁹⁵ The ‘essay’ is defined as a “[p]rose text, usually not very long, whose theme the author intends to treat in an analytical, speculative, or interpretative way, but not exhaustively”. For our investigation, it is interesting to note the speculative aspect in definition of the essay as a literary genre. This particularity connects with a

allows experiencing a set of works such as “a current of thought” (Chong Cuy 2013, 56). Therefore, the experience depends on the very narrativity of the exhibition through non-definitive arrangements, unexpected connections, and fragments of speeches talking to each other, often pointing to a work of historical revision.

The emphasis on the impermanent and multiple nature of the relationships between artistic artifacts assumes that these non-definitive arrangements are essential to a political consciousness-raising process. According to Gaitán, provisional arrangements “are vital contributions to the dialogues that are taking place in the public sphere, which potentially oppose (...) to what is being articulated in the spaces of official politics, religion and economy” (Gaitán 2013, 29). Hence, micronarratives will manifest themselves in curatorial projects⁹⁶ through a dialogical form, often non-linear, speculative, experimental, sometimes irreverent, or evoking a disturbing atmosphere.

Next, we use the method of imaginative montage to analyze how three collective exhibitions recently organized in Lisbon between 2021 and 2022 construct and convey narratives. Within the scope of this thesis, the choice of these projects is justified by the fact that they bring together contemporary visual artists from Angola, Nigeria and South Africa, who largely use photography in their works. However, it should be stressed that these are not ‘collective exhibitions of African photography’. The proposals we will analyze go beyond this essentialist and standardized category that is still recurrent in contemporary curatorial projects. In fact, besides a majority of African artists, this group of 16 artists includes an Afro-descendant (Angolan-Portuguese), two Brazilians, a Peruvian and a Cuban. In addition, although photography is the predominant medium, the exhibitions also present paintings, videos, installations, sculptures, an artist’s book, and a performance made during the opening of one of the initiatives.

The three exhibitions stand out for a curatorial drive that highlights the particular narratives conveyed by the projects (individual works or series) of each artist, as well as an

conception of narrative that does not intend to be a closed and definitive knowledge, but that can be constantly reinvented. See Dicionário Priberam da Língua Portuguesa [online], 2008-2021, s.v. “ensaio,” accessed February 2, 2023, <https://dicionario.priberam.org/ensaio>.

⁹⁶ These projects encompass global contemporary art exhibitions such as Documenta and the Bienal de São Paulo, as well as efforts in independent art centers and galleries outside the major art market, and contemporary art collectives. According to Maria Lind (2009) argues that these projects are primarily characterized by the unorthodox spatial organization of the exhibition venues, which is closely related to site-specific and context-sensitive practices. Lind argues that these projects are strongly connected to the traditions of institutional critique and the idea of artwork as the starting point of knowledge production. This perspective views the artwork as the beginning of a cognitive process that enables one to think within, beyond, and even against it.

underlying narrative that condenses the micronarratives of each artist in a more comprehensive alternative narrative. Indeed, these approaches are interconnected and reflect broader debates that go beyond the artistic field. Accordingly, there is a decolonial discursive line that conceptually sustains the three exhibitions. Besides, it is interesting to note that the initiatives share not only political positions, but also curatorial methodologies. In the three projects, notions of imagination and prospective futures are present as strategies to give meaning to the group of works presented.

These notions are present in the exhibition “Just My Imagination (Running away with me)”⁹⁷, which opened at the Hangar artistic research center in November 2021 and was conceived by curator Nigerian Azu Nwagbogu. In thirteen works by the two featured artists, the practices of *black portraiture* are the common thread. For example, Zanele Muholi (South Africa – 1972) uses photography to explore black queer visibility through performative self-portraits in black and white. The strong contrast of the images where the dark tone of her skin stands out, and the symbolic precision of the *mise en scène* are characteristic elements of her work. On the other hand, Ayogu Kingsley Ifeanyichukwu (Nigeria – 1994) uses the hyper-realistic painting technique to recreate situations where notable characters from black culture (such as Malcom X and Jean-Michel Basquiat) are represented occupying the Oval Office of the White House in Washington. Despite the omnipresent portrait genre in the works of the two artists, there is no intention to associate the exhibition’s theme with this process since the approaches, subjects, and techniques employed are widely different.

According to Nwagbogu, the show alludes to the idea of a *postmodern blackness* which manifests itself through the nostalgic recovery of fragments from the past that guide and nurture a relationship with the present, in addition to functioning as a stimulus for imagination (Nwagbogu 2021). Imagination as a method of constructing narratives is suggested by the very title of the exhibition, which refers to a song by The Temptations, a celebrated American soul music group from the 1970s. The lyrics highlights the potential of imagination to fuel aspirations for a serene and secure family life:

⁹⁷ “Just My Imagination (Running Away with Me)”, curated by Azu Nwagbogu. Artists: Zanele Muholi and Ayogu Kingsley Ifeanyichukwu. November 25, 2021, to January 29, 2022. Hangar: Lisbon.

Soon we'll be married and raise a family (oh yeah)
A cozy little home out in the country with two children, maybe three
I tell you I can visualize it all
This couldn't be a dream, far too real it all seems.⁹⁸

Therefore, imagination is seen here as a tool allowing the visualization of future scenarios offering a tangible and desirable reality. It is a speculation claiming its place not only in the construction of the future, but as a concrete experience in the way of existing in the present. According to Nwagbogu, blackness overcame existentialist anguish towards *realisms* that evoke emancipatory fantasies. This imaginative realism is visible in the exhibition through the symbiotic relationship between the two artists' works. The pictorial expressiveness of Muholi's monochrome portraits is balanced by the tonal homogeneity and impassiveness of the figures portrayed by Ifeanyichukwu. In both, a poignant realism (forged by the deep sharpness of the photographs and the high level of mimetic refinement of hyperrealist painting) seems to "question normative archetypes and patterns of behavior" (ibid.) to arouse emancipatory fantasies. Such effect is achieved once this realistic aesthetic depicts imaginary situations and events.

Thus, through this complementarity between the artworks, connecting the aesthetics of realism with the notion of imagination, it is possible to transit through a curatorial narrative where each individual becomes an autonomous cultural subject. To that extent, the nostalgia for dreams and aspirations of the past is revisited as a tool for building oneself. At the same time, such self-actualization affirms a cultural identity that is not fixed and does not fit into traditional categories of representation. In this displacement of subjectivity, we reassess standards of normativity and question representativeness in spaces of power. Ultimately, it is up to the spectator to imagine how the portrayed characters move and interact in the gallery space, complementing and enriching the curatorial narrative of the exhibition.

Just over two months after the closing of this show, a new group exhibition was set up in the same space in the Hangar research center. Entitled "Now that we found freedom, what are we gonna do with it?"⁹⁹, the proposal brought together eight artists (four from Angola

⁹⁸ Written by Norman Whitfield and Barrett Strong, "Just My Imagination (Running away with Me)" was released in 1971 and is part of the album "Sky's the Limit".

⁹⁹ "Now that we found freedom, what are we gonna do with it? – Narrative on post-colonial independence and decolonial processes", artistic director: Kiluanji Kia Henda; co-curator: Ana Sophie Salazar. Artists: Castiel Vitorino Brasileiro, Clara Ianni, Daniela Ortiz, Hélio Buite, Mussunda N'zombo, Mwana Pwo, Rui Magalhães and Yoel Díaz Vázquez. April 7, 2022, to May 12, 2022. Hangar: Lisbon.

and four from other non-European nationalities). The exhibition conceived by the Angolan artist Kiluanji Kia Henda, with the support of the Portuguese-Ecuadorian writer Ana Sophie Salazar, proposed an approach to “narratives about post-independence and decolonization processes” (Kia Henda and Salazar 2022, 1). The introductory text explains that the show is a broad study focusing on the narratives of peoples who gained independence after long centuries of colonialism. Still, the conquest of freedom was not without further setbacks, which led artists to ask themselves what to do now. Such introduction justifies the choice of works conveying micronarratives articulated to the postcolonial process and its consequences in the present.

Some artworks recover libertarian aspirations from the past and update them in the present. An example of this strategy is the video *Pelo Poder* (2021) by the artist Rui Magalhães (Angola, 1985) which uses the political slogan “For the power of the people” – associated with the context of the struggles for independence in Angola – to confront it with the current reality and the “dreams and life projects that were postponed indefinitely” (ibid., 3). The impact of colonialism in the present is also fictionally addressed in the work of Hélio Buite, whom we already know as one of the participants in the Catchupa Factory residency in 2021. In the installation *Inoxidáveis* (2020-2022), Buite uses photography and video to invent fictitious recycling companies that ‘sustainably’ exploit Luanda’s informal waste management sector. The precariousness of this activity, often supported by multinational companies, is responsible for keeping a large portion of the population in extreme poverty. The artist photographed factories and warehouses that were abandoned after independence (and which are common elements in Luanda’s urban landscape) to illustrate the facilities of fictional companies, to which he added a detailed factsheet. In this document, the ironic tone of ‘innovation marketing and sustainability’ makes his criticism even more scathing when contrasted with other images produced by Hélio, showing informal workers collecting waste in extremely precarious conditions.

Following this line of visual fabulation, Daniela Ortiz (Peru, 1985) elaborates narratives based on plant species kidnapped from Latin America by the colonizers to occupy Europe’s greenhouses and botanical gardens from the 19th century onwards. Ortiz reenacts the grand narrative – that disregards the exploitation, violence and racism that allowed these plants to embellish European gardens – by creating whimsical micronarratives. *The rebellion of roots* (2021 – ongoing) is a series of 55 acrylic paintings on wood presented in reproductions in

an artist's book, besides four original copies displayed on the gallery wall. Based on a speculative and imaginative disposition inspired by the practices and rituals of indigenous ancestry, these plants, possessed by powerful anti-colonial spirits, launch an insurrection against contemporary Western society. The gentle and 'naïve' illustrations show the violent results of this rebellion and are accompanied by captions that announce the sentence in a prophetic tone:

Green Roiboos that nurtured from the corpse of the colonial violence inflicted by Belgian colonial power will turn beautifully poisonous and make up the Belgian queen fall into the eternal sleep of anticolonial dreams (Ortiz 2021).

The temporality of the future is also addressed through a speculative counter-narrative by Mussunda N'zombo (Angola, 1973). The artist presents *2075* in the exhibition, a calendar illustrated by photographs to celebrate 100 years of Angola's independence in the year 2075. N'zombo collaborated with twelve artists asking each one to produce an illustrative photograph for each of the calendar months. In these images, N'zombo stages different characters that allude to the persistence of social relations based on patriarchy and the ostentatious visuality of the men who hold political power. In addition to these archetypes, he stages other identity allegories that question "the idea of uniqueness and immutability of identities" and where "categories of representation flow in a decentralized way" (Kia Henda and Salazar 2022, 1). Along with the photographs, in the calendar's graphic composition, the artist assigns fictional commemorative dates that will be celebrated in 2075. For instance, February 14 becomes the "Day of Loves and Disloves".

Three aspects stand out when analyzing the curatorial narrative underlying this exhibition project. First, the stories suggest an attempt to reorganize and redistribute power in former colonized societies. Such aspect is visible in how stories consider the meanings around the notion of freedom. Much more than something taken for granted, freedom is a concept that crosses temporalities and directly impacts the conditions of the present. Secondly, there is an intention to create a space for dialogue between Angola and Latin America through related decolonial practices since both postcolonial contexts share similar struggles. Third, the exhibition communicates a desire to probe *what wasn't*, *what could have been* and, ultimately, *what might be*. In this sense, a speculative narrative mode manifests itself as the common thread of the exhibition.

The way the works of different artists relate to each other in the exhibition space emphasizes this speculative narrative disposition, with the pieces together evoking a conceptual unity. In addition to the voices of resistance of those struggling to survive or exist, the show conveys something beyond political and social engagement. By requesting the imagination to connect the speculative stories, which often evoke fantastic realism, the ensemble transmits a certain familiarity with the absurd and the oneiric, sometimes even reaching a humorous tone. It is as if the spectator were allowed to participate in an open universe of possibilities, which can only be fully absorbed by perceiving speculative thinking as a concrete action with transformative potential in the present.

According to curators Luísa Santos and Ana Fabíola Maurício, “speculative thinking – the formal, structured and systematic consideration of possibilities other than the predetermined and pre-counted ones – is an act of resistance *per se*” (Santos and Maurício 2021, 47). This way of thinking about speculation – which differs its application to contentious economic activities – represents growing trend in contemporary arts. Unlike financial speculation, which explores the immateriality and the abstractness of the market, speculation in the arts seems to revalue a realistic aesthetic. A similar thesis is defended by the writer and visual artist Camille de Toledo (2016), who emphasizes the role of “speculative realism” in what he calls “potential art”. In art, this potential is at the service of a realism of possibilities that seeks a balance between *what could have been* and *what could be* (Toledo 2016, 25). Thus, the *potential thought* highlights the contrast between *what is* and *what could be*. This perspective welcomes “speculation as a belief that allows the translation of an artistic thought into a material fact that generates transformations” (ibid., 64) at the individual and collective levels. Consequently, a speculative stance can operate as a propeller for concrete action in the present.

If a speculative way of thinking is clearly a conceptual tool at the service of decolonial artistic practices, its perception depends significantly on an attunement to the curatorial project. This aspect is pivotal in group exhibitions. For comparison purposes, we also analyzed a third exhibition in which the speculative line of thought is equally present in the works but with a general curatorial narrative that differs from the exhibitions analyzed so

far. This is “The mechanics of the ephemeral”, a show that opened in November 2021 at Galeria Filomena Soares in Lisbon¹⁰⁰.

The exhibition brought together six Angolan artists and is thematically similar to the exhibition “Now that we found freedom...” in Hangar¹⁰¹. The concept revolves around an exercise in “self-criticism of what liberated peoples have done with their freedom” (Casimiro 2021, 1). Among the artworks presented, photography is the predominant medium. Only the works of two artists do not resort exclusively to photography. One is a series of eight collages with photocopies and archival documents by Délio Jasse, and the other a video and a series of sculptures by the artist Damara Inglês.

In “The mechanics of the ephemeral”, the future comes as a restless feeling, stating that “art, as a simulacrum of the future, refers to an inevitable dystopia” (ibid. 2021, 2). Moreover, the notion of coloniality is addressed as “a fantasy that perpetuates itself, fostering an imperialist, patriarchal and colonialist identity imagery” (ibid. 2021, 1). This fantasy is not only manifested in global relations between Africa and other regions of the world but also in how the black elite in Africa reproduces hierarchies, forms of discrimination and oppression initially produced under colonialism. According to writer Gisela Casimiro, the common denominator of the exhibition is the promise of progress and freedom that never materialized in the context of the African continent. Among the different stories conveyed by the artists, the general narrative evokes what the Angolan artist Suekí calls “the eternal provisional”¹⁰².

Such paradoxical temporality – of something supposedly temporary but never-ending – is frequently addressed by Angolan artists working with photography. This can be seen both in some of the works in this exhibition and in the production of artists from Luanda who participated in Catchupa Factory 2021, especially Hélio Buite and Suekí. There is an interest in “obsolete places portrayed in all their dysfunctionality” (ibid.), such as ruins, abandoned

¹⁰⁰ “The mechanics of the ephemeral”, curator Kiluanji Kia Henda, texto Gisela Casimiro. Artists: Flávio Cardoso, Kiluanji Kia Henda, Damara Inglês, Délio Jasse, Rui Magalhães and Sofia Yala. November 27, 2021, to January 15, 2022. Filomena Soares Gallery: Lisbon.

¹⁰¹ It is interesting to note the reciprocity between the two exhibitions, especially between Angolan artists. One of them, Rui Magalhães, is present at both. At the same time, the curator of the Hangar exhibition, Kiluanji Kia Henda, is responsible for selecting the artists exhibiting at Filomena Soares Gallery, besides presenting his own work in the show. Another interesting aspect is that both exhibitions presented artists who participated in the artistic residency Catchupa Factory. In addition to Hélio Buite, already mentioned above, the exhibition at Filomena Soares Gallery featured two participants from the 2018 edition: Sofia Yala and Flávio Cardoso.

¹⁰² “O Eterno Provisório” [The Eternal Provisional] was the title of a solo exhibition by the artist Suekí held at the Ainori gallery (Lisbon), between October and December 2020.

factories, projects that were not completed. In the exhibition, this visual language reverberates mainly in three works employing of black-and-white photography. Despite not being directly related in the exhibition space, it is possible to connect the three images through an imaginative disposition that reveals essential aspects of the curatorial narrative.

Kiluaji Kia Henda (Angola, 1979) presents an installation where three large photographs from the *Ópera da Dystopia* series (2013-2021) are fixed on metallic structures that resemble street advertising panels. Exhibited alone in a dark gallery room, the images depict wide shots of an amusement park that has been abandoned since the 1990s, in Angola. Next to the photographs, the artist set up a LED banner displaying anti-colonial and revolutionary phrases originally written on a famous street mural in Luanda. For his part, Rui Magalhães presents *Éden* (2020), a photographic image that also depicts an abandoned structure. It is a mysterious portal of monumental dimensions erected in the middle of the savannah. As ornamental elements, two imposing giraffes were built next to the portal columns over gigantic pedestals. However, the giraffes no longer have their heads, revealing all the inconsistency inherent in the sumptuousness of the unfinished project. Like the abandoned amusement park, this record evokes the atmosphere of a dystopian future, in which the absurdity of reality seems to approach the inventiveness of fiction. This apocalyptic atmosphere is complemented by a work by Flávio Cardoso (Angola, 1987). In the photograph entitled *ALiEN In Limbo* (2019), we are confronted with a landscape in an uninhabited area that is filled with the imposing dimension of an unfinished viaduct. At the bottom of the image, sitting in front of this lifeless infrastructure locked in an uncertain temporality, one can see a hybrid human figure where a computer monitor has replaced the head.

Relating the three artists' images through an imaginative montage makes such a desolate atmosphere more palpable. One can experience an apocalyptic feeling when wandering through a ghost amusement park, an abandoned viaduct escorted by an alien, or looking at eerie headless concrete giraffes. In this end-of-the-world environment, it is as if "the invisible ones could come out of their hiding place and observe what remains" (Casimiro 2021, 2). However, by connecting these images with other works in the exhibition, one realizes that the curatorial narrative is not limited to associating the feeling of abandonment and obsolescence in the present with the frustrated promises of a better future. Temporal displacement can occur in other ways.

In the works of Sofia Yala Rodrigues (Lisbon - 1994) and Délio Jasse (Angola - 1980), the use of archival images performs another temporal displacement, this time from the past to the present. While Rodrigues uses digital interventions in her grandfather's photo archives to reconnect scattered fragments of her family history, Jasse employs official documents, newspaper clippings, letters, stamps, seals, and typography to question the mechanisms that record and produce history's official version. Both works make it possible to retrace an alternative history of Angola, whether through an affective-familiar perspective or through a documental/bureaucratic one. Thus, together with the photographic works of the three artists mentioned above, the exhibition allows transit through different temporalities: recovering the past to reconfigure it in the present; or starting from the present to visualize a potentially problematic future. Similar to the exhibition "Now that we found freedom...", one notices a speculative line of thought that makes these temporal shifts possible, but in a less playful and certainly more pessimistic way than in the exhibition held at the Hangar.

Therefore, in the three projects, the practices of imagination and montage as a dialectical method are intimately linked and at the service of constructing the curatorial narrative. As a consequence of these associations, we are confronted with dissonant temporalities that allow the invention of new spaces of representation. Ultimately, it is as if the curatorial narrative arose from the experience of moving through these intersectional temporalities and spaces. Furthermore, by connecting the images and texts evoked by these photographs, one can feel emerging both the notion of coloniality and the forms of resistance to it. Suppose this articulation guides the narratives of the curatorial projects under analysis. In that case, it is also malleable enough for the spectator to imagine paths and shortcuts to connect his reality experience with the artworks' perception.

Concerning the multiplicity of temporalities, the curatorial narratives of the three exhibitions convey a non-linear conception of time that manifests itself in their micronarratives. They often assume a dialogic, speculative, and experimental form, from the satirical to the dystopian, tracing a connection with the supernatural or the spiritual. Furthermore, the non-linearity of time is a founding part of the cosmovision of several African cultural groups, such as the Nagô and Bantu civilizations (Teixeira 2022). Their conception of time is bound to the constant presence of ancestry as a relational category that implies "a temporality in which past-present-future are completely interrelated" (Teixeira 2022, 200) and in a continuous process of transformation. Since these three temporal layers

are inseparable and point to becoming, the notion of time in these cultures is neither linear (typical of Western modernity) nor circular (since this would imply a repetition of movement that would lead to the same starting point). Considering those particularities of the different time conceptions, Maria Leda Martins (1997) proposes the term spiral temporality, which implies a character of constant renewal and updating:

In this way, we understand that temporality would not be cyclical, because, with this character of updating, the circle never closes, [but] finds the moment of becoming and launches itself to form another circle (which is retrospective to ancestry) that will soon make the same movement, creating a succession of quasi-circles that can be thought of as a spiral movement¹⁰³ (Teixeira 2022, 200).

As we highlighted above, imagination is a crucial tool to speculate about the future and deconstruct the past, thus, impacting the present. However, it can be argued that its results are felt mainly at the personal level. After all, imagining is at first an individual and solitary activity. Each person can imagine a way to connect these images and, consequently, forge narratives resulting from their relationships. It is even possible that the resulting narratives contradict to the curator's or artist's original intent. As we mentioned in the previous chapter, in any kind of representation there is no way to ensure that the information will be communicated unambiguously (Hall 1997a) and the same applies to a curatorial project. Thus, to understand how photographic practices (and artistic practices in general) can simultaneously provide an engagement with the world's issues and an awareness of the self as a cultural subject, we must expand the concept of imagination as a social fact.

The importance of imagination as a "social fact" has gained projection in the context of globalization. With communication and transmission technologies making local and global borders more porous, local experiences and cultural practices have become widely shared via mass media. According to Arjun Appadurai, one of the consequences of this process is the "production of locality" and "local subjectivities". In other words, the regions of the world are becoming initial contexts for themes that generate variable locations, instead of fixed geographies defined by pre-established themes (Appadurai, 2000). Henceforth, the micronarratives are responsible for building the notion of locality (and, consequently, manifest subjectivities) and not the other way around. By producing a sense of locality, micronarratives offer a more horizontal and dynamic approach to cultural knowledge

¹⁰³ Translation by the author.

production. This perspective impacts our analysis of curatorial narratives, as it allows us to deconstruct categories such as African art or Angolan photography and, thus, address cultural imagery more broadly than any geopolitical definition that could guide the perception of a set of images.

This epistemological turn includes what Appadurai calls “the work of imagination” (Appadurai 2005). Accordingly, imagination is not an escape from ordinary life, a fantasy, or just an aesthetic dimension; it is a faculty that impacts the lives of ordinary people in many ways. In that sense, “the imagination is today a staging ground for action, and not only for escape” (ibid., 7). It is precisely in its collective dimension, as a fact social, that imagination becomes the basis for the plurality of ways of existing in the world. Favored by communication technologies and cross-border data sharing, imagination, in its collective potential, impacts on the notion of individuals as cultural subjects. Appadurai argues that the role of imagination in social life is a positive drive of globalization, as it encourages emancipation policies (ibid.). Imagination offers resistance to states of exploitation and domination, creates a collective consciousness to fight the inequalities of the neoliberal system, and cultivates new forms of collective life and identity existences (Appadurai, 2000).

Therefore, the imagination required for absorbing the curatorial narratives of the exhibitions mentioned above is also a “social imagination”, as it allows resistance to coloniality to cross national borders, expanding its impact and forging new forms of representation. In the conception of imagination as a social fact, different voices and perspectives are included in aesthetic and political debates. Moreover, it facilitates a cultural approach oriented by dialogues, interferences, frictions, complementarities between different images that encompass visible and sensible spaces in the realm of representation. Hereupon, we investigate the collective production of the Catchupa Factory residency through a curatorial proposal. Employing the method of imaginative montage, we seek to convey the visual and cultural narratives through an incision in the corpus of images produced by a group of artists on the island of São Vicente. To that extent, we hope to translate the multiple temporalities and spatialities manifested in the different modes of photographic representation as they converge and gain cohesion as a decolonial form of knowledge production.

4.4. A CURATORIAL APPROACH TO THE RESIDENCY'S VISUAL PRODUCTION

4.4.1. Insular visual narratives on the Island of São Vicente

The insular imagery carries within it a play of forces between interior and exterior. Because it is a portion of land enclosed by an external mass of water, the island exists within its interiority, surrounded by a fluid border. However, if we think of the insular narratives as resulting from this play of forces, the meaning of the relationship between the two spaces is not based only on an internal-external dichotomy, but above all on a relationship of interdependence that provides a third semantic space.

Reaching the island – a space disconnected from continental contiguity – makes the experience of displacement or traveling more concrete. The island is a reachable place. For the traveler, the sensation of arriving on a continental territory is not comparable to that of disembarking on an island in terms of the embodiment of the experience. On the other hand, from the perspective of those who were already there, the island is the isolated and protected territory, where belonging is also felt in a more palpable way. Thus, the insular experience can be defined by that third ambiguous space between interior and exterior, where isolation, belonging, refuge and seclusion seem to cohabit.

In the island nation of Cape Verde, the symbiosis between external and internal forces appears in an especially flagrant way through its complex history and unique geography. The volcanic archipelago is located in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean between the coast of Senegal and the northeast of Brazil, in a position that went from being extremely isolated to being of great strategic importance for the logistics of the colonial project. The nine inhabited islands that form the country – divided into two groups (Barlavento Islands, to the north; Sotavento Islands, to the south) – remained isolated and uninhabited until the 1450s, when they were sighted by Genoese explorers sailing on behalf of the Portuguese Crown¹⁰⁴. While the first official settlement dates back to 1460, on the island of São Tiago, the beginning of the occupation was extremely difficult and uncertain due to the extreme aridity of most of the islands, which made it impossible to develop agriculture and obtain water.

¹⁰⁴ Cape Verde is believed to have been previously visited by Phoenicians, Moorish Arabs and Lebou fishermen from Senegal, but at the time of the first Portuguese occupation in the mid-15th century, the islands were uninhabited (Lobban 2018, 10-16).

However, from the 16th century onwards, with the ‘maritime expansion’ and the development of colonial empires, the islands become the locus of an intense movement of people coming from Africa, Europe and America. According to Lobban (2018), most of the settlement of the islands was established by the trafficking of enslaved Africans coming from Portuguese colonies on the west coast of the continent (mainly from the upper coast of Guinea Bissau, Senegal and Gambia) between the 16th and 18th centuries. In addition to settlers of Lusitanian origin who established the domination of the islands with the boosting of the slave trade, the Cape Verde islands also received settlements of Jews forcibly converted to Christianity, Christian Lebanese, and even Chinese groups. With the development of navigation and colonial expansion, the archipelago became a busy passageway for Italian sailors, English, Spanish and Dutch merchants, and Brazilian slave traders, as well as the target of numerous pirate attacks.

Despite the infrastructure that emerged as a result of colonization, the population of African origin invariably suffered from the conditions of inequality and exploitation. Added to the social and political context of slavery, extreme climatic conditions caused terrible cycles of drought in the archipelago. Consequently, after the slavery abolition, a large part of the population of African origin was forced to emigrate to other parts of the world in search of better living conditions. Many of those who were unable to leave the islands met a sad fate. It is estimated that between 1747 and 1970, twelve droughts caused 58 years of famine and approximately 250,000 deaths as a result¹⁰⁵.

This unique configuration of external and internal forces – geographically unstable, politically imposed and in constant conflict – was historically shaped through a grand linear narrative written from a Western-European perspective. However, such a narrative does not include the interstitial zones, the nuances between power games, and the forms of knowledge that have emerged through resistance and adaptation to challenging situations. Much less addressed, local micronarratives remained latent, occupying an ambiguous third space between inside and outside, but claiming a cultural perspective on the events of history.

With the island of São Vicente as a backdrop, it is important here to understand how the social dimension of culture dialogues with visual narratives, and to understand them not through a classificatory system based on genres and styles, but rather in terms of their social

¹⁰⁵ See Meintel, Deirdre. 1984. *Race, Culture, and Portuguese Colonialism in Cape Verde*. African Series. Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University: Syracuse.

functions. To this end, we propose below a curatorial approach that aims to convey the micronarratives present in the photographic production of the artistic residency, where eleven artists connected their worldviews with the cultural space of São Vicente.

The importance of this curatorial experience is justified in that it allows us to look at our object of study from a different perspective. Focusing on the relationship between images reveals common themes, concepts and concerns, but also highlights readings of each image that are not accessible when viewed individually. Thus, by a curatorial approach of the corpus of images, we were able to reach what is invisible in the images, that is, what is located in a zone of non-visual perception: an affective space where senses other than sight can be stimulated. Furthermore, our curatorial work allows for a cultural approach that is not guided by pre-established and reductive categories since it does not start from an initial theme to be further illustrated by the images. Therefore, by showing how photographic processes are used to connect visual languages with decolonial discourses through photographic practices, the curatorial brings to light the cultural visual narratives that permeate a heterogeneous collection of images. This operation makes it possible to link the internal dimension of photographs (their referential content) with their internal aspects (the social context and subjectivities that permeate their production).

4.4.2. Heterogeneous temporalities and expanded geographies

The cultural visual narrative we wish to convey is a story of the multiple stories that have been photographically represented in the space of the island of São Vicente. Among them are stories of conversations with the people of the island, first-person accounts based on the cultural experience of each artist and even internal monologues that move between words and images. They are made up of photographs that engage in a dialog with those who produced them and that convey a narrative to those who see them. Ultimately, they are photographs that speak. Traveling between image and text, they are inserted into a hybrid space that is not fixed in a single temporality and that transcends the geography of the island.

To hear what these photographs have to say, we employed the method of imaginative montage. This allowed us to feel the materiality of photographic images through a *counter-visibility* based on concepts and cosmologies distant from those associated with the canonical history of photography. Taken together and curated, these photographs will be presented as

cultural micro-narratives. While such narratives are made more palpable through the construction of constellations of images, this method also considers the narrative potential of each photograph alone; not as a totality in itself, but as an image that punctuates and connects narrative sequences.

Inspired by the experimental potential of such a methodology, a corpus of 60 photographs produced by the residency participants was printed in small format and spread out on a large flat surface. This facilitated the curatorial work by allowing a more intuitive manipulation of the image collection, as well as providing a better awareness of the entire set that would not be possible with small thumbnails on a computer screen. In this way, we wanted to facilitate the search for relationships between these images, which were revealed as the montage process unfolded. Through constant repositioning, progressive reduction of the number of images and sequencing, analogies (some more obvious, others more hidden), the visual categories and relationships (complementary or contradictory) began to manifest. Words and short texts were also added to the images as a strategy to connect textual aspects to visual signs. The texts were intuitively imagined, taking into account the affective and sensorial impact provided by the images. The figure below shows a sketch of this imaginative montage operation.



Figure 21. Alfredo Brant, digital photo montage and text. (2023).

The first constellation of images started from an attempt to imagine the *strange force of cultural resistance*. If this idea was present in a diffuse way in the speeches of the participants, here we try to translate it into images. In four vertical photographs arranged side by side in a horizontal line, objects and figures search for relationships to create a zone of common sense (Figure 22). The first on the left and the last on the right represent female figures. In one, a full-body portrait of a woman from the rural part of the island; in the other, the outline of a Catholic saint painted in white on a dark wall, split by a crack. If these images can evoke questions of identity and belief, perhaps they can also suggest a cultural rootedness that is reinforced by the third photograph: an image of aloe vera plant and its symbolism as a family link¹⁰⁶. However, the fourth image comes to disturb the apparent serenity of the set. It is the image of a tense black hand holding an object composed of copper metal cables against a dark background. Even though we cannot identify the function of this object, the image evokes pain, punishment and violence. It disturbs, so to speak, the passivity of the Catholic saint, as it problematizes her presence in this insular universe. Consequently, it also relates to the image of the woman, suggesting more nuances in relation to her roots and cultural identity. The imaginative montage of this sequence of four photographs was the starting point of the curatorial exercise we present below.



Figure 22. Alfredo Brant, digital photo montage. (2023).

¹⁰⁶ For the relationship of aloe vera to family history in Kimberly's work, see Chapter Two, page 94.

In terms of the temporality that emerges from this photographic corpus, some of the visual stories refer to the past and how its consequences are perceived in the current visibility of the island. These consequences affect the present, but the ‘now’ is not limited to just that. It is also a present in itself, made up of experiences of self-awareness, otherness and, above all, a sensual connection with the natural elements of the island. Finally, this shared sensibility in a common space also points to narrative practices that use speculation as a tool to explore the future.

In relation to the updating of the past in the present, some groups of images operate through an affective recontextualization of documents. To illustrate such an approach, we propose here a sequence that begins with an image of an image of an image. In a photograph framed in an unstable manner, one can see a painted portrait of Cesária Évora hanging above a door. The image on the painting is a copy made from an iconic photograph of the major figure in Cape Verdean culture. In the next photograph, another image containing an image: in close-up, a hand in the shadows holds a fisherman’s identity card. Besides the handwritten information and a fingerprint – followed by the mention “does not know how to sign” –, there is an identity photograph, extremely worn out by time. Next, we look at a triptych of photographs showing, in order: a close-up of an elderly man’s hands; the same hands, also close-up, holding a frame of superimposed old photographs (including some identity photographs of children); and in the third photograph, in an even closer shot, one of the elderly man’s hands holding a smartphone on which an antique black and white image of a couple on their wedding day fills the screen.

The images in the triptych reestablish a connection between affective memories and the present, that will be reinforced by the two images that follow. These show single parents from São Vicente with their children, in everyday moments, photographed spontaneously. A punctuation-picture redirects the sequence. It is a portrait of a young participant of a traditional carnival group in Mindelo. Wearing fake wings of a carnival allegory, this *black Orpheus* is sitting on a bed in a room. He looks serenely at the camera, staring at photographer. At the back of the bedroom, an attentive eye will notice countless photographs of children and families pasted on the wall. It is here that such a portrait succeeds in giving a mythological connotation to all these memories. The dressed-up carnival hero is followed by an image of self-representation that also evokes the updating of the past in the present. It is one of the images from Suekí’s series where he photographs himself in front of a large

statue of the navigator Diogo Afonso in Mindelo. The colonial past, which remains visible in the monument in honor of the colonizer, undergoes a performative intervention. It is not an iconoclastic act, but rather a critical reconfiguration of the gaze that, through this performative act, creates a tension between the present and a past that insists on manifesting itself.

As a whole, the sequence provides a narrative of the role of photographic documents in consolidating an affective cultural memory. From the three-layered image (photograph of the painting of a photograph) of the icon Cesária, through images of personal documents and records of everyday life on the island, to the allegory of the carnival hero, and finally to a critical revision of the remnants of colonial visibility in Mindelo, it is possible to feel the manifestation of the past (and an attempt to update it) in the present. The hierarchy between iconic images, identity documents and everyday records dissolves allowing the whole to evoke a collective memory and the notion of culture as a social practice.

In turn, the present becomes even more palpable when its representation transcends the mimetic visibility of objects and stimulates other modes of sensory perception. This is expressed through the experiences of self-awareness and connection with the natural elements of the island that some groups of images suggest. The wind, the sea, the volcanic mountains were constant presences during the conduction of the activities. Some artists have been attuned to these elements of the island not only visually but as an expanded spiritual and sensory experience. If the notion of belief often blurs the categories of identification and identity, and if imagination is nothing more than a way of inventing realities, it is necessary to include here an experiential and metaphysical approach to images. They provide a more embodied grounding for photography, moving it away from European theoretical lines that focus on its problematic relationship with time in an attempt to arrive at an ontology of the photographic image.¹⁰⁷.

Rather, it is about absorbing the photographs with senses other than sight. And this can be achieved in another constellation of images where a collage of photographs transforms a portion of water into an island surrounded by a sea of rocks, confusing the logic of common

¹⁰⁷ Photography is not only “the presence of an absence”, as Barthes (1980) put it. It can also be a presence without relying on an absence. There is no imperative that forces the viewer to always see an inaccessible past in a photograph. By locking presence to absence, the photographic object becomes melancholic, limiting its sensory potential in the present and its openness to building bridges to the future. Moreover, it impedes the entire process of rereading and reinventing the past, because the past, being irretrievably absent, is condemned to immobility and inaccessibility.

sense; next to this image, a photograph of a naked body that blends into the island's rock formations; two images follow: one represents a rock and the other the texture of sea waves, both forming an almost abstract composition. At first, two images that have poor narrative qualities, but which are connected to a 'mineral' image by Silasse Salomone that follows the sequence, showing the detail of a fisherman's foot that resembles a petrified limb. This group still welcomes the sidereal images of Filomena, where another collage of photos of water reflections suggests galaxies in space; or even the delicate shapes of fish that emerge from the texture of a sandbank bathed in contrasting lateral light in an image by Magno Daniel. As he himself explains in one of the residency's collective discussions: "I was experimenting. Not just for me, but for you guys" (Daniel 2021).

This potentiality of images to go beyond visual representation is liberating in the sense that it also allows them to reach the temporality of the future. Here, the notion of imagination as a social practice (Appadurai 2005) becomes more palpable as we explore other constellations of images within the production of the residency. It offers tools for building new worlds that manifest in different ways in artistic practices. In our case, these speculative experiences with the future seem to be a prospective way of dealing with the present, dilating it in order to disturb the immobility of things. Contrary to Western futuristic logic, which is linked to ideas of economic progress and technological improvement, thinking about the future in this way means dealing retroactively with its manifestation in the present. It means intervening in the immobile order of things and events in order to propel a becoming. Sometimes it means accepting constant change, the inexorable mutability of objects, and a certain attachment to the new and unknown. More concretely, it means potentializing a transformative future by intervening in the imbalances of the present.

To illustrate this narrative, we propose a montage that begins with a photograph of a crack in a dilapidated wall. This image opens the way to penetrate the sequence of five photographs by Stephanie Silva. Her images represent a performative action by the artist in public space. It is an intervention in which photographic prints showing deteriorated house facades and textures of worn walls were affixed to a wall in a busy street in Mindelo. In addition to those, a photograph of a notebook containing a list of harassing phrases directed at the artist in public space (which was also placed in the street-wall) and another one

showing a message the artist has graffitied on the same wall¹⁰⁸. In our montage, we first see the images of this installation. But after a few days, the intervention was partially vandalized in the street, and another photo shows the result of this action, with the torn notebook standing out. This photo closes our sequence.

We can think of this set of images as a retroactive action in the future. Seen in sequence, these images subvert the linearity of the narrative, for it is in the degradation and the attempt at destruction that a ‘becoming’ emerges. By reversing the ‘natural’ order of events – production of images, exposure in public space, and destruction of images – the message of the inscription can be felt more eloquently, inviting us to imagine a future in which gender violence has been overcome, becoming as anachronistic as a wall with old layers of paint. Analogous to an urban archaeology, the inscriptions on the walls say as much about the possibility of resistance in the present as about intervention in the future.

The curator Azu Nwagbogu refers to future fossils (Nwagbogu 2021a) as cultural artifacts that must be unraveled in the present and that will only provide the full version of history in the future. In other words, it is a retrofuture that must be produced in the present. In this sense, the exploration of the visuality of non-Western urban centers, the richness of spontaneous inscriptions on walls, and other urban interventions are like oracles to be cultivated and consulted. They have an essential political function, as they deal with social problems that cannot be solved by the same Western neoliberal methodologies that have promised wealth and abundance at the expense of social and structural inequalities (gender, ethnic, sexual, economic) and the limits of the planet’s natural resources.

Besides temporality, approaching these visual narratives from a postcolonial perspective also allows us to transcend the geographical space of the island. The participants, especially those who do not live in Cabo Verde, have established cultural connections with the spatial configurations of the island of São Vicente and the city of Mindelo that resituate their political and aesthetic concerns in a new geographic space. This attentive gaze on the territory reflects postcolonial problematics that converge with their experiences of living in other parts of the world.

These narratives are latent in another constellation of images that begins with a human figure behind a wrought-iron grille inside a house. The name of the family that lives in the

¹⁰⁸ The message graffitied in Cape Verdean Creole next to the photographs attached to the street-wall reads “Nhe nome né psit” [my name is not ‘hey’].

house ('Djodja') has also been forged in iron and inserted into the grille. In the image, the face is almost imperceptible because of the high contrast between the sunlight illuminating the white wall outside and the dark interior. This photo leads to other images that also show people in the shadows and that evoke immobility: a man waiting seated in front of an extremely precarious house; a woman dressed in pink sitting on the sidewalk waiting for someone to buy the products she sells in an improvised tray placed on top of a bucket; a man in uniform, probably in charge of security, sitting at a table in his workplace (on the wall above him there is a reproduction of an iconic photo of Amílcar Cabral). This sequence can bifurcate towards a double-exposure image where construction workers blend with the green of dense vegetation. But it can take another direction, leading to the image of a percussion instrument from a carnival group that has been repaired in an improvised way so that it can continue to be used.

This constellation of images evokes a recurring narrative in African countries that is manifested in the way the participants photographed the island of São Vicente. The recurrence of a state of immobility in the midst of adverse social conditions, which challenges the ability of individuals to define themselves as cultural subjects, can be felt in these static images of people waiting indefinitely, absorbed by the vegetation, constantly having to adapt. However, what Suekí called "the eternal provisory" – suggesting a naturalization of perennial structural and social problems – also carries a connotation of resistance, as evoked by the image of the musical instrument or the reproduction of Amílcar Cabral's portrait in one of the photographs.

While these improvised solutions are forms of creative resilience, they remind us that structural precariousness is a legacy of colonialism. When photographing the Alto da Bomba neighborhood in Mindelo, Hélio Buite says he felt like he was in Luanda, his hometown. He relates the similarities between the two places to the vicious cycle of precariousness that persists throughout Africa: "My project speaks of my own experience in Luanda in this new space...it is about the issue of things that remain still and enter into this constant and unchanging cycle" (Buite 2021). These examples show how the geographical space of the island is expanded through the postcolonial experience of the participants and the images they produce as a result of this experience.

If we extend this constellation and add other images of Mindelo's urban space, some images will suggest movement. However, the movement seems to be limited to a certain

circularity of things. As if everything moves to return to the same place. Despite diasporic movements and the impact of a certain African cosmopolitanism on contemporary cultural productions, the prevailing narrative remains that of a great disconnection between African regions. This was evident in the reports of some participants who traveled from African countries to Cabo Verde. There are great logistical complexities (scarce and expensive flights to Cabo Verde) and bureaucratic ones (difficulties in obtaining visas to visit other African countries)¹⁰⁹. Hélio reports that his displacement between Luanda (Angola) and Mindelo (Cabo Verde) raised several questions, among which he highlights the logistics of the trip itself. As he puts it: “Why do I have to go through Europe to get to Cape Verde?” (ibid.).

4.4.3. Imaginative Montage as a curatorial method

In the curatorial exercise outlined above, we sought to demonstrate how imaginative montage can reveal visual cultural narratives in the corpus of images produced by the residency participants on the island of São Vicente. These insular narratives share a desire to distance themselves from narratives that naturalize nation-state histories, and to resist uniform and totalizing visions of universal history. Furthermore, they question representative categories of art history or even institutional configurations of the cultural field. By visually translating these narratives, imaginative montage functions as a curatorial strategy. I conclude by suggesting that this strategy can be a valuable tool in decolonial curatorial practices for three reasons.

An imaginative montage pays attention to the materiality of images. First, this means considering the practices that determined their production as an essential factor in their interpretation. In this way, materiality can be related to the social and historical processes of the gaze. However, the meaning of images as representations of the world is inscribed in broader contexts as well as in their subjective manifestations (Pink 2003, 187). Thus, the

¹⁰⁹ For example, Samba traveled by land from Bissau (Guinea-Bissau) to Dakar (Senegal), where he had to present several documents in order to board a flight to Praia (Cape Verde). When he arrived in Praia, he had more problems and was detained by the border police until they contacted the organization of the residence to release him. Finally, Samba made the final journey by sea from Praia (Santiago Island) to Mindelo (São Vicente Island). Regarding the process of obtaining a visa, Hélio says that he had to pay illegal bribes to administrative officials in order to obtain his passport and travel to Cape Verde. He also says that despite having a valid visa, he still suffered from the distrust of the agents when he stopped in São Tomé and Príncipe and almost missed his flight to Lisbon, from where he was finally able to board a flight to Mindelo.

materiality of images includes not only the social, political, and economic context, but also the affective relationship established during the production of images.

Second, imaginative montage allows us to think about a curatorial architecture in which the word-image relationship emerges in a non-hierarchical way. While rejecting the primacy of discourse over images, it considers that the meaning of images goes beyond the visual. As W.J.T. Mitchell puts it, an image can only be assimilated if we understand how it shows what cannot be seen (Mitchell 1984, 526). Such a statement refers to the narrative potential of the curatorial project since a collection of images can go far beyond simply illustrating a story. In this sense, the images will evoke (i.e., bring to mind by association of ideas) a narrative that need not be directly linked to the indexical or mimetic quality of the image (which is particularly relevant in the case of photography). On the other hand, the languages and discourses that stimulate the production of mental images can have their narrative potential expanded. This entails considering curatorial narratives as a cognitive process that only becomes fully perceptible when it stimulates thinking and the production of mental images.

Third, imaginative montage makes room for non-Western worldviews present in verbal expressions, metaphors in non-hegemonic languages, and singular conceptions of time and space. In this context, narratives must be considered in terms of their social function, as they contribute both to the affirmation of the individual as a cultural subject and to a more engaged awareness of the world. In the case of this research, for example, we can say that visual narratives evoke a conception of time that can be spiral rather than linear. In terms of the representation of space through photography, the cliché of ‘writing with light’ is subverted. Spatial representation is produced primarily through the absence of light, as evidenced by the recurrence of dense, high-contrast images and the predominance of dark tones. In other words, ‘writing with shadows’ can also be seen as a way of perceiving space.

Finally, these three factors lead toward a curatorial conception where the central issue is not how objects are defined but rather the affects they stimulate. A curatorial project is not defined so much in terms of its meaning, but by the way it builds and manages the experience of the items presented (Filipovic 2013). Thus, the imaginative montage in a photographic curatorial project must act to construct an experience around the images displayed and, above all, in the relationship between them. Consequently, their stories move away from grand linear narratives, becoming a way of apprehending reality and probing the future.

5. PHOTOGRAPHIC POIESIS AND TRANSFORMATIVE KNOWLEDGE

Até você chegar à origem de como você começou, para entender tudo. Para ter a oportunidade de se transformar de acordo com teu direito de se auto-transformar. Então é nesse sentido... é você ter a oportunidade de aprender a se auto-transformar e não ser transformado.¹¹⁰

(Stephanie Silva 2021)

5.1. OPENING REMARKS

This chapter investigates the relation between photographic making and knowledge production. This relation is already present throughout the previous chapters since this research focuses on photographic practices and how the production of images provides subjects with an engagement with social and political issues at the same time as a sense of awareness of themselves as cultural subjects. However, it is necessary to delve into the question of knowledge in a critical manner. This means defining the type of knowledge we are referring to and, mostly, how it is produced. By proposing that photographic production is an enabler of a knowledge that we claim is *transformative*, we seek to understand the concept of knowledge not as a volume of information, ideas, and established procedures that is simply transmitted through photography. On the contrary, knowledge is here approached as something experiential, embodied, and relational which is situated in specific contexts of

¹¹⁰ “To fully understand everything, you must trace back to the origin of how you started. This will give you the opportunity to transform yourself through your right to self-transformation. So, in that sense you have the opportunity to learn to transform yourself instead of being transformed” (translation by the author).

cultural exchange. In this way, it becomes autonomous inasmuch as it allows everyone to translate their reality through cognitive acts and communicate it to other interlocutors. Our hypothesis is that this translation of reality takes place intersubjectively through photographic making. In other words, through a mode of photographing that is analogous to a dialog between cultural subjects, marked by horizontality, plurality, and the respect for differences.

In order to analyze the production of transformative knowledge through photography in a residency with artists from the PALOP, it is necessary to begin by decolonizing some of the constructions of Western epistemology. The historical imposition of a universal paradigm of knowledge reflects an asymmetrical relationship between the people of the Global South and those who hold the knowledge that has been established as the only valid one. To that extent, specific ways of interpreting reality have become naturalized and have impacted the construction of a seemingly neutral visual regime. Behind this regime lies an authority (patriarchal, racial, economic, or cultural) that exercises power.

European epistemology has been built on a set of binary distinctions such as theoretical versus practical knowledge, universal versus situated knowledge, modern versus traditional knowledge, and rational versus non-rational knowledge (Santos, Nunes, and Meneses Nunes and Meneses 2007; Quijano 2007). These distinctions can be understood as a broader dichotomy between valid and invalid knowledge. Decolonizing these binaries, however, does not mean simply replacing what has been considered valid with what has been considered invalid and vice versa, at the risk of reasserting the original binaries but from the opposite angle. Rather, it involves understanding how different kinds of knowledge can engage in dialogue to create a more equitable, tolerant, and less violent global society. Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2016) argues that what is needed is a work of cultural translation that questions dichotomies and hierarchical frames between different knowledge systems. However, to enable this dialogue, concepts that organize and regulate the perception of reality must be stripped of any hegemonic, universalist, and indoctrinating character.

In our case, this means questioning the idea of knowledge that has been crystallized through concepts such as aesthetics and seeking a vocabulary that encompasses other systems of knowledge. Grounding ourselves on the foundations of the discipline of visual literacy, we will seek a framework for analyzing photography as a cognitive tool that allows

for a “photographic thinking”. Furthermore, this work entails an experiential and affective approach to photography that shifts the emphasis from the poetics associated with this technique to its poiesis.

In addition, we will look at the educational aspects of photographic production by analyzing the residency’s pedagogical line. The relevance of this topic is substantiated by Catchupa Factory’s proposal as a space for cultural exchange and learning about photographic practices. As it is set up in horizontal and collaborative fashion, the learning process is not based on the transmission of technical knowledge or even artistic procedures. Above all, it is about emancipatory learning through artistic practice, where knowledge is produced in a situated and contextual way. The theoretical contributions of critical pedagogy in the 1960-70s (Giroux 1997; Freire 2013; Illich 2018) are therefore of relevance to this study, since this movement sought to provide the tools for learners to pursue knowledge that is relevant to them through the transformation of the world, social justice, and empowerment. Thus, from the perspective of photography’s potential and limits, we propose the notion of photographic poiesis as a self-learning tool that allows us to “think photographically” in an autonomous and intentional way.

5.2. A CRITICAL APPROACH OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION AND THE VISUAL FIELD

The concept of knowledge defies any simple definition. The conceptual breadth of this term is so vast that any definition of what knowledge is will always be incomplete with regard to the various ways of understanding the concept. Because it is linked to cultural and historical aspects, knowledge is a difficult term to delimit, since these factors determine different ways of interacting with the world, which vary according to the era and socio-cultural context. Even within Western European culture, the meaning of the term has undergone significant changes throughout history. Furthermore, the idea of knowledge is so closely linked to our self-consciousness as rational beings that it can become extremely abstract and relative. However, the perspective of a form of action upon reality can provide a path to understand the issue of transformative knowledge through the production of photographic images.

From the Latin verb *scīre* ('to know') comes the noun *scientia* ('knowledge'). It is not by chance that the term science originated from this noun¹¹¹ and has come to represent a standardization of what is understood as *human knowledge* in the Western tradition. Initially, however, the first attempts to define the concept seem to have been grounded on dichotomies. In other words, in order to define what knowledge is, it was also necessary to define what it is not. For example, the Medieval English definition of *cnawlece* ('knowledge') refers to the ability to perceive or understand something as a fact or truth and as opposed to believing¹¹². Progressively, the concept of knowledge has become less rigid and more nuanced, despite the persistence of certain dichotomies.

Thus, during the 17th and 18th centuries, the idea of knowledge came to be based on a distinction between *experience* and *experiment*, "which supported a distinction between practical and theoretical knowledge" (Williams 2007, 79). Thus, while experience was related to practical and subjective knowledge, experiment was set apart by being based on methodical and objective observations. The association of the ideas of knowledge and experiment served as the basis for the development of Western scientific methods. It also underpinned the very definition of science as neutral, rational knowledge, focused on external objects and considered to be true (ibid., 80, 81). In 19th century Europe, this idea found such a favorable political and institutional context in which to develop that knowledge almost became a synonym for science. Or rather, science became a synonym for 'true' knowledge.

This brief overview of the history of the term in the Western tradition shows how complex and problematic the definition of knowledge is. Because it depends on practical and theoretical aspects and on objective and subjective criteria, it becomes necessary to adopt a position when we wish to approach what we call knowledge. In order to avoid dichotomies and propose a definition that is independent from the institutionalized categories of the European intellectual tradition, we shall explore the idea of knowledge from two angles. Firstly, as a faculty intrinsically linked to the relation we establish with reality. Secondly, through knowledge as a social practice with tangible effects on reality.

¹¹¹ See Vaan, Michiel de. 2008. 'sciō, scīre'. *Etymological Dictionary of Latin and the other Italic Languages*. Lieden: Brill.

¹¹² See 'knowledge (n.)', in *Online Etymology Dictionary*, accessed August 17, 2023. https://www.etymonline.com/word/knowledge?ref=etymonline_crossreference.

Our relationship with reality is mediated by systems that organize information so that we can absorb and interpret it. Traditionally, the systems that allow us to apprehend reality are differentiated between those that are natural, linked to the body and sensory organs, and social systems (Nicolescu 2014). The latter are those based on external rules and norms that will mediate our perception of the real, such as representations, descriptions, images, or even theoretical disciplines, from philosophy to mathematical formulas. However, according to Nicolescu, this conception is incomplete as it ignores the individual and cosmic levels of reality. According to the author, reality is *plastic*, in other words, it is something malleable, which changes according to our thoughts, feelings, and actions. Therefore, ultimately, everyone is directly responsible for what reality means (ibid., 25). Thus, the production of knowledge can be understood as an unstable process which depends both on natural and social systems of perception and on the unique relationship that each person establishes with reality.

As a result of this instability, part of the production of meaning is autonomous, allowing the subjective perception of reality and the creation of knowledge to feed off each other. According to Mitchell, perception is constantly moving between “illusion and reality, the imaginary and its symbolic interdiction” (Mitchell 2000, 20). In this sense, the experience of the real, he says, is a moment of rupture which, although it does not happen often, when it does occur allows us to recognize ourselves both as individuals and collectively and is therefore fundamental as a learning experience (ibid.).

Even so, if the experience of reality allows us to obtain knowledge both internally and externally, this is because this experience is mediated by arbitrary signs and representations which, as we mentioned earlier, make up the social systems for apprehending reality. However, as Mitchell points out, however conventional and arbitrary these signs and representations may be, knowledge “is better understood as a matter of social practices, disputes, and agreements and not as the property of some particular mode of natural or unmediated representation” (Michell 1984, 520). As a social product, knowledge is above all a matter of dialog between different versions of the world, including different languages and media, ideologies, and modes of representation (ibid., 525). Therefore, when investigating the relation between knowledge and the visual field, it is essential to discern the characteristics of the systems that encode visual information from the way this information is produced and transmitted in different cultures.

Mitchell uses the example of Leon Battista Alberti's systematization of linear perspective in 1435 to reinforce this distinction. According to him, perspective was invented as an artificial system aimed at a 'true' representation of the world. This intention of veracity preceded the experience of reality that the new technique made possible. Accordingly, "the effect of this invention was nothing less than to convince an entire civilization that it possessed an infallible method of representation (...) for the automatic and mechanical production of truths about both the material and the mental world" (ibid., 524). Today there is a consensus in academic discourse that the development of perspective was based on an ideology rooted on reason and the objectivity of the scientific method. However, the way in which it continues to mediate reality through the production of images persists on being confused with the individual experience of reality itself. Therefore, Mitchell concludes that in order to understand how visuality and knowledge are interconnected, it is necessary to conceive of vision as "a product of experience and acculturation that includes the experience of making images" (ibid., 525). Such a position implies, for example, questioning the 'objective' and 'direct' reality supposedly provided by the representation method of perspective. Understanding the production of images as something previously mediated by a system of representation allows for a clearer analysis of the relation between the categories of representation, perception, and experience of reality.

What Mitchell proposes is to disengage the idea of the scientific method as something that can account for the totality of ways of visually relating to reality. Although the sciences and technologies make data, events, and objects appear as unmediated through their modes of representation, some of the great scientific discoveries have deliberately ignored visible facts in order to seek explanations for what cannot be observed (Feyerabend 1993). This speculative way of creating knowledge – which Paul Feyerabend defines as the 'Principle of Counterinduction' – is what interests us in visual terms. According to Mitchell, the Principle of Counterinduction finds a parallel in the pictorial arts, including both the tradition of realism and illusionism. He argues that the knowledge provided by the production of images cannot be fathomed "unless we grasp the way in which it shows what cannot be seen" (Mitchel 1984, 526). This is because artists, like scientists, are as concerned with the visible world as they are with the invisible world.

Similarly, in "The persistence of vision", Donna Haraway argues for a reconfiguration of knowledge systems through points of view that cannot be known in advance. This means

that the production of visual knowledge lies between the imaginary and the rational, since “the visionary and objective vision hover closely together” (Haraway 1998, 194). The conjunction between objective vision and imaginative vision makes it impossible for any theory of visual knowledge to claim to be universal and applicable to all types of reality. As Haraway argues, it is only through an epistemology of partial perspectives that transformative knowledge can emerge (ibid.): a vision that is less determined by power relations and more open to the plurality of worldviews.

These reflections allow us to conceive of different types of knowledge not in opposition, but in a dialog that is enhanced by their different locations in the panorama of perceptual systems, be they natural, social, or subjective. In this sense, the knowledge provided by photographic production comes not only from the scientific method (with its optical-chemical and later digital basis) associated with the aesthetic innovation of perspective, but also from the possibility that this technology has opened up of establishing dialogues between different realities or perceptions of the world. In this way, producing knowledge through the fabrication of photographic images means not only to represent and extract information from specific contexts, but above all translating the perception of different realities and placing them into a dialog.

In the previous chapter, the approach of the visual narratives that permeate the corpus of images produced at the residency allowed us to extrapolate the mimetic nature of photography and its formal aspects in order to reach a cultural and affective perception of images. It is in this sense that visual narratives function as a way of experiencing the reality evoked by photographic images. This was only possible through work based on the specific contexts in which the images were produced and the dialogues they establish between multiple temporalities and different geographies. Therefore, these modalities of knowledge production require a contextual approach to the ways in which visual narratives are produced in order to manifest themselves.

The emergence of the concepts of locality and situatedness of knowledge in the epistemological field is the result of the development of cultural studies and its strands, especially feminist and decolonial studies. These two fields shed light on the relation of

power and domination that surrounds the Western model of knowledge production. In opposition to this model, the notion of the contextuality of knowledge aims to confront different cultural traditions and worldviews in a coexistent way. It concerns estimating the validity of each type of knowledge according to its distinct localities, particular horizons, similarities, and tensions with other worldviews (Mignolo and Velazquez 2013). Thus, by assuming that all knowledge is partial and situated, it is only possible to compare the different types of knowledge (including scientific knowledge) in terms of their social function in contexts governed by particular logics (Santos 2016, 200). This epistemological turn has made it possible to incorporate affective experiences, including situations of exploitation, injustice, and radical experiences of otherness as fundamental elements for the creation of non-hegemonic knowledge.

The contextual perspective of knowledge is explored by Stuart Hall in the relation between the concept of race and the politics of representation of blackness in the UK. In addressing the issue of black identity, he proposes a shift from the notion of race based on a mimetic theory of representation¹¹³ (i.e. a concept of race based on visibility that points out the differences between people's skin color) to the more fluid notion of ethnicity. According to Hall, reality does not exist in a disconnected state from the way things are represented (Hall 2005, 444) and this conditions the meaning of events, artifacts, images, and texts to the specific conditions, limits, and modalities in which they are produced. Therefore, another approach to cultural productions and identity representations lies in their "constitutive" (and not simply reflexive) function in social and political life (ibid.). By replacing the concept of race with ethnicity, Hall seeks to do justice to the forms of knowledge that emerge from black experience:

If the black subject and black experience are not stabilized by Nature or by some other essential guarantee, then it must be the case that they are constructed historically, culturally, politically – and the concept which refers to this is 'ethnicity'. The term ethnicity acknowledges the place of history, language, and culture in the construction of subjectivity and identity, as well as the fact that all discourse is place, positioned, situated and all the knowledge is contextual (Hall 2005, 447).

¹¹³ In *Race sans histoire*, Maurice Olender (2009) argues that the idea of race is constructed through a tension between the visible and the invisible. Phenotypical characteristics – in other words, visible characteristics – are associated with invisible characteristics. Olender employs the expression "l'âme raciale" [the racial soul] to describe the inscription of cognitive and psychological traits on certain bodies, thus determining a series of "racial identities". Nadia Yala Kisukidi (2022) explains that this tension between the visible and the invisible is a political construction that will authorize certain groups to judge others by racial criteria. In the case of racism, this tension "justifies" an unequal distribution of social and political rights in the world.

At the same time, feminist studies also claim knowledge production in a contextualized and localized way, which implies, above all, a critical reconfiguration of the ways of seeing. In this sense, Donna Haraway (1998) proposes a re-evaluation of the term objectivity in relation to situated forms of knowledge. She states that the observational sciences are based on a “disembodied view from above”, where those in positions of domination are “self-identical, unmarked, disembodied, unmediated, transcendent (...)” (ibid., 195). According to Haraway, feminist objectivity restores vision as an embodied sense. Consequently, “feminist objectivity is about limited and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and the splitting of subject and object”. In this way, she concludes that “we might become answerable for what we learn how to see” (ibid., 192). The idea of *embodied knowledge* is based on the fact that all knowledge arises from personal experience “and is the very means of transforming that experience” (Johnson 1989, 364). Therefore, the acquisition of knowledge can never be passive and always implies an action that intervenes in the visible and/or sensible world.

In this transformative relation with visual reality, feminist epistemologies question the idea of normative visual knowledge that is transmitted by modern sciences and the technologies of representation that have emerged from them. By examining the conditions and limits of scientific production, they reveal its connections with the socio-cultural and political context in which scientific knowledge is produced (Santos, Nunes, and Meneses 2007). Thus, since “vision is always a question of the power to see” (Haraway 1998, 194) – a power that has invariably been exercised by a white, heteronormative patriarchy that creates oppressive representative patterns – the feminist perspective seeks to create a collective subject position made up of various partial points of view. From this standpoint, the only way to extract truly transformative knowledge from the visual field is to focus on the particular, on subjective experiences of oppression and inequality, but also on acts of solidarity and contestation.

This conception of knowledge as a force and an action upon the world, which conveys partial and situated points of view, is defended by Boaventura de Sousa Santos. According to the author, the “realist and objective” point of view represents an awareness of the need to investigate the conditions in which knowledge is produced and to evaluate it on the basis of the consequences of such conditions (Santos, Nunes, and Meneses 2007, xxxi). In contrast to a relativist stance, the objective disposition allows for a rigorous assessment of the locality, partiality, and constructed character of the various types of knowledge. The new

critical perspectives opened up around this conception of knowledge are fundamental in the epistemological field, as they allow for the development of scientific research that does not perpetuate asymmetrical ideological positions and oppressive power relations. In this sense, decolonial studies have significantly contributed to denouncing the impact of colonization on local forms of knowledge production and the role of modern science in establishing forms of cognitive domination.

The development of modern science during the Enlightenment made possible the technological revolution that consolidated European political dominance over other parts of the world. In addition, the establishment of modern sciences is directly related to the destruction of types of knowledge considered non-scientific. (Santos, Nunes, and Meneses 2007, xx) Consequently, subjugated social groups were deprived of their ways of relating to reality. These include non-rational knowledge, artistic expressions, languages, philosophies, and religions. With the specialization of modern Western sciences, this knowledge was eclipsed as Eurocentric frameworks were imposed as the only valid ones. These models invariably reflect forms of domination based on class, gender, ethnic and racial differences (ibid.).

Historically, scientific discourses and disciplines have been aligned with a project of control and domination exercised by Western political and economic elites over both their local populations and colonized peoples. As Foucault (1972) argues, discourses function as a form of social coercion when they claim a particular piece of knowledge as the absolute truth. This paradigm manifested itself more acutely from the 17th century onwards with the development of modern European rationality. This process made possible the emergence of technologies that consolidated the political, economic, and cultural supremacy of the European bourgeoisie. Despite the positive socio-cultural impacts of these technologies in Europe, the rational-scientific mentality was also responsible for the devaluation and even destruction of forms of knowledge practiced by subaltern groups, especially in the regions colonized by European empires.

Aníbal Quijano describes the way in which European culture exported its images, beliefs, theories, and methods as a norm and an orientation for development to other cultures (Quijano 2007, 170). These cognitive processes were formalized by colonial power and established as a universal paradigm of knowledge, creating an ideal of humanity that conflicted with knowledge practices from other parts of the world (ibid., 171-172). During

colonialism, the main assumption on which these methods were based was Cartesian rationality, which preaches that knowledge arises through the subject-object relationship. According to Quijano, as a consequence of this assumption, all intersubjectivity is denied, preventing any possibility for communication between modes of knowledge production from different cultures. Furthermore, this perspective implies an insurmountable dualism between divine reason and nature. Thus, the ‘subject’ is the bearer of reason, while the ‘object’ is external, of a different nature. In the case of colonialism, it becomes ‘nature’ itself to be studied, exploited, and consumed (ibid., 172-173).

Although political colonialism has come to an end, domination has continued through the coloniality of power (Quijano 2007), which has reconfigured the economic and geopolitical relations between the former colonial powers and the young nations that have gained independence. In this new paradigm, coloniality no longer operates only in political and economic relations, but also in the epistemic, cultural, and aesthetic spheres. A large part of the effect of contemporary coloniality concerns what Walter Mignolo (2011b) calls the “geopolitics of knowledge”. Western epistemologies fail to recognize the geohistorical character and biographical conditions of knowledge production. As a result, Europe has become a universal cultural model, “and the rest of the world the object to be described and studied from the European (and, later on, the United States) perspective”¹¹⁴. The effects of this epistemological violence were acutely manifested in local modes of knowledge production, including the creation of images.

As we outlined above, the creation of knowledge is located between the real and the imaginary, between the visionary and the objective, prompting Didi-Huberman’s observation that “[j]ust like there is no form without formation, there is no image without imagination” (Didi-Huberman 2012, 208). Therefore, when colonization corrupts the native forms of knowledge production, it also operates a colonization of the imagination of the dominated (Quijano 2007, 169). As one of the most pernicious consequences of the colonial process, colonized peoples were deprived of producing images that conveyed unique ways of relating to reality. This epistemological violence operated both at the level of mental images and in relation to artistic images. For this reason, a decolonial approach must seek to

¹¹⁴ Mignolo, Walter. 2011. “Modernity and Decoloniality”. In *obo* in Latin American Studies, accessed May 23rd, 2023. <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199766581/obo-9780199766581-0017.xml>.

recover and re-establish modes of producing images that reconstitute the cognitive relation with reality through imagination.

In this research, it is important to understand how awareness of the effects of coloniality on the modalities of photographic production impacts on the development of a counter-visibility that recovers non-hegemonic images, perceptions, and concepts. It is a work of recovering ways of relating to reality that have historically been deprived of visual representations. These repressed relational modes often come into direct conflict with the ideologies that enabled the development of photographic technology and its first applications in the colonial context. However, photographic practices can be appropriated and subverted as a vector of situated knowledge. Thus, in the context of contemporary image production, visual literacy represents a fundamental discipline for critical action in the cultural sphere and is crucial as a mode of generating non-hegemonic knowledge through photographic images.

5.3. VISUAL LITERACY AND PHOTOGRAPHIC PRODUCTION

Visual literacy is a set of visual competencies and cognitive skills that refers to the ability to interpret and produce images (Serafini 2017). Based on this definition, visual literacy strategies will enable the visual construction of knowledge. Just like the notion of visual narrative, explored in the previous chapter, it is a concept that moves between the visual and textual universes. In a broad sense, *literacy* is defined as the ability to use reading and writing as a way of acquiring knowledge¹¹⁵. This ability is commonly referred to in Portuguese as *alfabetismo*. In this term, the link with the textual is even more evident as it presupposes a systematized writing system, i.e. the alphabet. In parallel, visual literacy concerns a transposition of this cognitive ability to the universe of images, including their perception and production, i.e. it allows us to ‘read’ and ‘write’ images. As a result, visual literacy is closely related to the human ability to communicate through images.

However, unlike the written alphabet, images do not fit into a rigid system of signs that have “a minimum unit of meaning, as is the case with literary texts” (Gil 2011, 21). Images can be interpreted in different ways that will vary according to the context in which they are

¹¹⁵ See Infopédia Dicionários Porto Editora [online], s.v. “literacia (n.),” accessed August 17, 2023. <https://www.infopedia.pt/dicionarios/lingua-portuguesa/literacia>.

received, circulated, and produced. As these contexts depend on cultural, historical, and social factors, it is not possible to determine a standardized *modus operandi*, or a ‘visual alphabet’. Therefore, on an epistemic level, their meanings are situated and contingent and will vary both in relation to different cultural groups and as a function of individual cognitive processes.

Visual literacy is therefore a discipline that produces knowledge from the visual in a localized and critical way. As such, its starting point is the conception that images are cultural artifacts that involve not only the objects to which they refer, but also the different visual configurations of distinct eras and cultures. It also includes the universe of images that manifest themselves mentally in the individual subconscious and the way in which the technologies of vision (whether in the body or in analog, electronic, and digital media) mediate visual perception. Because it encompasses all these aspects, visual literacy “is a strategic tool that requires multiple skills” (ibid., 25). This implies that, in order to be operational as a concept, visual literacy needs to be an interdiscipline, involving distinct but complementary fields of knowledge.

Among the domains of inquiry that offer approaches to visuality as a form of knowledge production are art history and aesthetics, philosophy, linguistics, sociology, cultural anthropology, pedagogy, communication theories, and semiotics. Although this list is long, it is not exhaustive and can also include cognitive studies and visual perception, optical technologies, and neurophysiology. Thus, visual literacy allows us to move through different knowledge systems, including those not formalized in the scientific disciplines and fields established by European modernity. However, in order for the discipline to be functional and applicable, it is necessary to delimit it according to our concerns regarding the production of photographic images.

The fundamental assumption of visual literacy postulates that images are not natural, transparent entities. Consequently, they cannot be marked by a direct relation with truth or with the idea of the ‘essence’ of what is visible. This perspective can originally be traced back to the work of philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein¹¹⁶ (1889-1951). By asserting that seeing is above all interpreting, he deconstructs the idea that the ‘truth’ or content of an image is exclusively linked to its referential/visual relationship with reality. In fact, when

¹¹⁶ Wittgenstein developed a theory of perception that involves language and visuality in “Philosophical Investigations” (posthumous, 1953). See Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 2000. *Investigações Filosóficas*. Lisbon: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

we look at (or imagine) images, what we are ‘seeing’ is the concept brought to our minds by the image¹¹⁷. Vision is therefore first and foremost a cognitive procedure that involves not only what we see, but also symbols, ideas, sensations (such as textures and sounds) associated with images. This multisensory aspect is mentioned by John Debes in the first formal definition of the discipline of visual literacy¹¹⁸. Thus, because it involves different senses, visual literacy is a skill that breaks with the supremacy of sight as the main sense for perceiving reality.

Another essential aspect of visual literacy is that as well as acting as a concept, it also involves practical skills. In addition to facilitating the production of knowledge at a subjective level through the reading of images, visual literacy also involves the ability to articulate and produce images for the understanding of others in an intentional way (Ausburn and Ausburn 1978). Thus, the discipline functions as a communication practice, enabling the construction of meanings, the transmission of ideas, artistic expression, and aesthetic fruition. In this sense, a “visually literate” individual is one who has the ability to use images to convey information effectively and intentionally. As far as photography is concerned, this skill can be required in activities that seem banal at first glance, such as selecting the images that will make up a presentation for an academic conference or sorting the images in a wedding album. In addition, such a skill is also exercised during the process of producing photographs. This is the aspect of visual literacy as a practical skill that particularly interests us.

Since this research focuses on the production of emerging artists who mainly use photography in their creations, it is necessary to understand the act of making photographs in terms of its potential for the creation of knowledge. As Enquist (2008) puts it, in the context of visual literacy “it is important to be able to ‘read’ images, but it is equally important to possess the skill to ‘write’ and share them” (ibid.,158). Enquist investigates the production of knowledge through photographic activities with hospitalized patients as a way of making sense of the subjective experience of medical treatment. He points out that the

¹¹⁷ Or, as Isabel Gil puts it, regarding visual experience according to Wittgenstein, “that which we see is fundamentally the representation of a culturally situated perception, and not a universal biological fact.” (Gil 2011, 24)

¹¹⁸ The term Visual Literacy was first used in 1969 by John Debes, the founder of the International Visual Literacy Association, as “a group of vision-competencies a human being can develop by seeing and at the same time having and integrating other sensory experiences. (...) The development of these competencies is fundamental to normal human learning. (...) Through the creative use of these competencies, he is able to communicate with others.” (Debes 1969, 27). Quoted in Avgerinou and Ericson 1997, 281.

content of the resulting photographs is not the most important aspect of the experiment, but rather the act of making them (*ibid.*, 156-157). Enquist concludes that, by stimulating cognitive processes and favoring communication, these photographic practices promote social action by translating the patients' experiences into a form of knowledge that can be accessed by others. Therefore, when visual literacy is put into practice through photographic production, it allows meanings to be created both subjectively and collectively. Thus, this practice-concept will be configured as an intervention in the real with a profound impact on the cultural field.

The main implication of visual literacy as a tool for cultural action is its impact as a citizenship strategy (Gil 2011, 28). This reveals another essential aspect that manifests itself in the political field. According to Elkins (2008), visual literacy is centrally concerned with the entanglements of politics, ideology, and history within images. As the author puts it, "our sense of self, both individually and collectively, is made and remade through the visual, and therefore it is fundamentally important to learn to understand images as social constructions" (*ibid.*, 7). Therefore, visual literacy acts simultaneously as a construction of the world and of individual identities, allowing for tangible intervention in the socio-cultural field.

The multiple actions of visual literacy operate as tools to delve deeper into the issue of producing transformative knowledge through photographic practices. We can say that visual literacy is a way of thinking with images and, in this way, transmitting ideas, worldviews and stories through the production of images. In the case of photography, visual literacy implies considering this medium in its discursive potential. As the artist Eustáquio Neves highlights, contemporary photography is increasingly a starting point for other discussions. He explains that "just as literature and cinema have done for a long time, today people discuss many things departing from a photographic work. Photography has also taken up this place of not only being an object of aesthetic appreciation, but also a place for discussion that goes far beyond that" (Neves 2021 b).

In the specific case of this investigation, the question is: how can we think photographically? And if this is possible, we must also try to understand how photographic thinking can be a source of transformative knowledge. Our hypothesis is as follows: thinking photographically is equivalent to exploring the cognitive aspects of the medium in such a way that photography operates as a process of self-learning. In other words, just as the ability to write allows us to articulate ideas, subjective states, historical data, descriptions, and

mental images to communicate something that we can only formulate through the act of writing itself, photographing also allows us to perform a similar operation through the creation of visual knowledge. Thus, by combining the subjective and sociocultural levels, thinking photographically makes it possible to create new understandings of the world that manifest themselves through non-hegemonic narratives and fluid identities.

However, the creation of knowledge through the production of photographs does not happen in the same way as writing a text. Because it primarily involves vision, it is based above all on a corporeal and affective relationship with the production of knowledge. According to Merleau-Ponty, vision does not think rationally, in a Cartesian logic, but rather with the body. Vision provides knowledge that “is born by virtue of what happens in the body and is excited by it” (Merleau-Ponty 2018, 43). It is therefore a question of considering the body as an uncoded medium in which images manifest themselves. Thus, human vision, in mediating the creation of images, does not involve rational thought, which “is in possession of its own premises” (ibid., 44). On the contrary, at the heart of the idea of vision is what Merleau-Ponty calls a “mystery of passivity” (ibid.). This passivity involves a more dialogical relation with the world and a more collaborative position between objects, subjects, and events.

The possibility of thinking through the creation of images challenged Western philosophers such as Wittgenstein and Merleau-Ponty to establish a non-hierarchical relationship between words and images. For Wittgenstein, thinking is not a hidden and private process, but the activity of establishing relations between verbal and pictorial signs. By placing the mental images evoked by a text on the same level as physical images, a space is created where logical propositions can show/communicate more than themselves when read literally. Thus, words become verbal images of concepts; in turn, concepts (or ideas) materialize into (visual or mental) images of objects and events.

This approach made it possible to understand literary descriptions as capable of producing mental images that could be more vivid than the images captured by sight. This is how the literature of Romanticism sought to go beyond precise and elaborate descriptions of narratives and objects to convey the spirit and poetic sensations of the stories and events of an era (Mitchell 1984, 516). On the other hand, the images produced by artists, freed from the obligation of verisimilitude, could explore concepts and sensations through the transcendent potential of visual signs.

In relation to the contemporary production of images, such a shift has influenced a conception of vision that involves a historical-critical positioning and an awareness of the power of images in conditioning perceptions of reality. Furthermore, the idea of representation has come to be understood not only in the sense of recording and describing reality, but of *making it present*¹¹⁹, as the poet Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen puts it with regard to theatrical representation. Secondly, this approach implies that for vision to assume its potential to transcend the visible, it depends above all on the faculty of imagination as a presupposition for the production of images.

Regarding this last aspect, Merleau-Ponty states that for vision to be able to show more than itself, it is necessary to highlight its imaginary potential. According to the author, “the transcendence [of vision] is not delegated to a reading spirit that decodes the impacts of the light-thing on the brain. It is not a question (...) of speaking of space and light, but of making space and light speak” (Merleau-Ponty 2018, 49). Similarly, Wittgenstein opposed the idea of the image as a window to reality or as a “transparent and perfect language that would give direct access to objects and ideas” (Mitchell 1984, 517). For the philosopher, imagination had the function of bringing mental and verbal representations into dialog in the work of perceiving the world.

How, then, can the production of images benefit from imagination in order to produce knowledge? The answer seems to lie in the very definition of the term as “the faculty of the mind to form and manipulate images”¹²⁰. Originating in Old French, the verb *imagine* means “to form a mental image of something”¹²¹. In turn, the noun *imagination* refers to the creative ability that involves the action of conceiving images. According to this definition, imagination allows us to “represent what is immaterial or abstract”; “evoke images of objects already perceived and represent the past in a form analogous to sensation”, or even “create images of non-real objects and new combinations of images”¹²².

¹¹⁹ In the poem “Landgrave ou Maria Helena Vieira da Silva”, Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen writes: “The colors are lit up like the lights of a theater at performance time. The world is “re-presented”, made present once again (...) The gaze that seeks the appearance of the world, the emergence of the world, the emergence of the visible and of vision.” (Breyner Andresen 2016, 90)

¹²⁰ See D. Harper, “Etymology of imagination,” in *Online Etymology Dictionary*, accessed December 19, 2023. <https://www.etymonline.com/word/imagination>.

¹²¹ See Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales [online], s.v. “imagination,” accessed August 17, 2023. <https://www.cnrtl.fr/lexicographie/imagination>.

¹²² Ibid.

This series of actions involved in the work of the imagination have the capacity to “make present” not only in terms of the visual, but also by calling up other senses and modalities of bodily perception such as memories and emotions. This leads to the conclusion that if imagination favors the production of non-visual images, photographic production benefits from imagination when it manages to approach the non-visual in a photograph. In this way, photography can make present that which is immaterial and invisible, such as affections, sensations, latent stories, non-real objects, imagined geographies, and multiple temporalities. Consequently, knowledge is produced autonomously through visual thinking, or a photographic thinking.

Our hypothesis, that thinking photographically is equivalent to employing photography as a tool for self-learning, should be examined in detail here. What is particular to photography, in relation to other means of image production, is that this technique is intertwined with human vision itself, especially at a time when access to image production has become practically unrestricted. While the first photographs were produced by bulky and heavy cameras at the beginning of the 19th century, today a simple mobile phone is enough as an instrument. However, this particularity was already present in the early years of photography. William Mills Ivins Jr., curator of the Department of Prints at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York) from 1916 to 1946, explains that at the beginning of the 19th century, the optical distortions of the first photographic prints caused great visual discomfort to viewers. As the medium gained popularity, however, it became normalized and confused with human vision itself. Ivins notes that people began to “think photographically” (Ivins Jr. 1953, 138), seeing without question what had previously caused them astonishment.

Nevertheless, the naturalization of photographic vision does not necessarily lead to autonomous knowledge nor actions upon the world. Paradoxically, thinking photographically would be the exact opposite of the naturalization of photographic vision, as it involves above all the awareness that what best defines photography is its constant (and failed) attempt to reach the real in a direct way. Thus, this visual relationship with the real as a way of producing knowledge will be all the more prolific the more imaginative the photographer’s relationship with the world around them. In other words, photographic thinking is directly linked to the ability to relate verbal and visual signs, to conceive

abstractions, to recover and manipulate the past, evoke sensations, and create non-existent objects.

In painting, this paradoxical relationship was observed by Merleau-Ponty in relation to the work of Cézanne. For him, the moment the painter's vision "becomes gesture", he "thinks pictorially" (Merleau-Ponty 2018, 49). Therefore, thinking photographically is less a process of incorporating an objectively photographic vision, as Ivins puts it, and more a conscious detachment from the restrictions of the medium. To put it another way, thinking pictorially is a practice of visual freedom that allows one to mentally manipulate what one sees, absorb intrinsic relations between objects and perceive hidden sensations and immaterialities that manifest themselves in the experience of reality. According to Merleau-Ponty, pictorial thinking is not rational thinking, but thinking that develops from the body in a synesthetic way. Vision does not imply thinking as conditioned by a system, as we experience when reading a text. It is first and foremost bodily knowledge. In this transcendence of visual signs towards other sensory levels, we conclude that imagination is necessary for non-rational knowledge to play its role of mediating our relationship with the real world.

Because it develops synesthetically, pictorial thinking is also articulated with the performativity of the body in specific cultural contexts. This occurs since imagination favors the production of non-visual images by stimulating senses other than sight. Thus, the body appears as a medium capable of producing and transmitting knowledge. Once embodied, the production of images happens not only through the eyes or the mind, but through the body as a whole. Initially, postcolonial studies explored this perspective departing from oral and performative cultural traditions. In these manifestations, bodily awareness is directly linked to a production of knowledge that claims a visuality of its own. However, unlike the phenomenological approach of European philosophy, the experience of the body in the postcolonial sense implies an awareness of the politics of the body that is absent from the discussions of Merleau-Ponty and others. This is because in such a context "the body itself has also been the literal 'text' on which colonization has written some of its most graphic and scrutable messages" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2003, 322).

From this point of view, the experience of social phenomena takes into account the specificities and the potential for the production of knowledge with the colonized body as a point of departure. As Frantz Fanon reminds us, the black body has historically suffered from

an otherness that associated distinctive visual traits (such as skin and hair) with a condition of inferiority. Therefore, colonized individuals experience a heightened bodily self-consciousness, leading to an *inborn complex* that sets up a dialectic between the (black) body and the world (Fanon 2008, 108). Fanon resituates Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology by placing in the colonial context the idea that when the subject is fully self-conscious, the body ceases to be merely the structure of consciousness and becomes its own object. Therefore, pictorial thinking in a post-colonial world aims towards a work of decolonization through image-making that is guided by this body consciousness. In the production of photographic images, this means above all re-signifying not only the representation of the black body in photographs, but also denouncing the very idea of direct representation in photography as incapable of conveying the bodily experience of (post)colonized bodies.

Through the concept of *corpoliteracy*, i.e. a literacy of the body, Boaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung points to “an effort to contextualize the body as a platform, stage, site and medium of learning, as a structure and organ that acquires, stores and disseminates knowledge” (Ndikung 2022, 14). The concept conveys the idea that the body is both synchronized with and independent from the brain, since its ability to produce, memorize and transmit knowledge also depends on a faculty that is performative and not rational (ibid.). Ndikung builds his arguments on examples of traditional and contemporary dance practices of African origin such as Agwara in Uganda, Coupé-décalé in the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, as well as cultural manifestations that have been taken to other geographies, such as candomblé, carnival, and capoeira in Brazil.

The approach to embodied knowledge from a decolonial perspective also differs in that it is understood as shared knowledge and not limited to individual experience. Consequently, it entails a collective way of thinking that affects how one acts in the world (Irobi 2006, 10). When considering oral and performative manifestations, these “only exist and acquire meaning in the possibility of an immediate and modifying response, existing therefore only interactively with its whole speech or movement event” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2003, 321). In this sense, dance “is not about the individual, but the community – the commons” (Ndikung 2022, 16). As a collective means of producing knowledge, dance can connect with the ‘other’. Thus, it functions as a non-verbal language that allows communication between people in a group. Furthermore, from a decolonial perspective, such “transcendental phenomenology” (Irobi 2006) as a philosophical and performative concept is only effective

when understood through “the experiential, physical dimension of embodied performance” (ibid., 3), which involves participatory and conscious actions.

In this sense, photographic practices function as cognitive operations when their making is conceptualized not only by the rational mind, but also by the performing body. Contemporary African and afro-descendant woman artists such as Zanele Muholi (South-African, b. 1972), Lorna Simpson (North-American, b. 1960) and Deana Lawson (North-American, b. 1979) have explored the question of embodied knowledge through performativity in photography. In Lawson’s work, she explores the idea of a “collective body” through pseudo-documental records of the everyday life of black communities in the United States. According to Gem Fletcher, “for Lawson, image-making is about being in communion (...) with Black diasporic identities and their collective histories. She grapples with equity, representation and the indelible trauma of racism embedded in the collective psyche. Intent on imagining new worlds, she creates rich and compelling modes of seeing, all the while affirming that the everyday is personal and political” (Fletcher 2021). Photographic practices such as this emphasize the importance of including a decolonial perspective in the development of visual literacy practices. They enable a critical and localized construction of knowledge through the production of images and facilitate the communication of performative and multisensory aspects of visibility.



Figure 23. Deana Lawson, *Baby Sleep* (2009). Inkjet print, 50.8 x 63.5 cm.

In short, the articulation between the imaginative and the performative makes it possible to discover relations between logical propositions, to assign meanings to sociocultural issues, or to conceive solutions to overcome a challenge. Lastly, this process can be seen as a practice of self-learning, as it depends essentially on one's subjectivity and perceptions of reality. The attempt to translate these perceptions into images requires cognitive work based on a strategy of knowledge acquisition from different sources. Therefore, concepts, discourses, desires, and sensations are elements that come together to be transformed into images. This is how, in the artistic field, the perception of reality is translated into images¹²³ and can be transmitted as a singular understanding of the world. When shared, these unprecedented and sui generis perceptions renew the very conception of our common existence, fostering a space of plurality and cultural dialogue between different visions that can complement each other by inhabiting a singular way of seeing.

5.4. ART AND KNOWLEDGE

In order to develop the concept that gives this chapter its name, Photographic Poiesis, we propose a review of two terms that traditionally permeate the production of meaning in the visual arts. The aim of this revision is to pave the way for the introduction of two other concepts, complementary to the first ones, in order to foster a space for the production of visual knowledge that is more plural and less guided by the Western perspective of art history. Specifically, by analyzing the attempts to renew the term *aesthetics* through the recovery of the notion of *aesthesis* and the co-relation between the terms *poetics* and *poiesis*, we seek ways of translating reality marked by a critical historical approach and based on the very dynamics of making. This implies attention to forms of knowledge production that move away from categorizations with universal claims and seek to include relational, sensorial and everyday practices as vectors of knowledge production.

¹²³ Most of the time, contemporary artists who work with photography will use not just one, but a set of images to translate and convey their subjective experiences of reality. Working in series allows for greater depth by facilitating the creation of visual narratives that develop both discursive and conceptual aspects more extensively, as well as aesthetic ones.

5.4.1. From aesthetics to aesthesis

In the Western philosophical tradition, the term aesthetics is commonly used to explore the effect of works of art on human consciousness. The modern idea of aesthetics emerged in 18th century Europe and was initially used in philosophical debates around issues such as visual appreciation, subjective taste, and the perception of beauty. In 1735, German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten (1714-1762) was the first to use the word to address these issues. In the two volumes of *Aesthetica* (1750-1758), the author relates aesthetics to the idea of the perfection of beautiful things (Williams 2007, 155). Towards the end of the same century, another German philosopher, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) solidified the modern use of the term aesthetics in *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764) and, later, with *Critique of Judgment* (1790).

Unlike Baumgarten, for Kant beauty is a subjective relationship and not a property of things (Martin 2003). In his philosophical project, Kant tries to reconcile two lines of thought from the aesthetic tradition of the 18th century. Between Baumgarten's rationalist tradition, which considered the judgment of taste as a cognitive act based on the intrinsic properties of objects, and an "empiricist" line in which aesthetic appreciation depends entirely on feelings and emotions (Ginsborg 2005), Kant seeks an intermediate place, where "the consciousness of the harmony of understanding and imagination" can be felt by any rational being and, consequently, become an objective judgment (Blackburn 2016, 10). His attempt to define the unity of consciousness was based on controlled experiments and in accordance with necessarily universal laws. These laws would be valid for moral and existential aspects, as well as for achieving the concept of beauty (ibid., 259). Thus, despite the influence of subjective appreciation, aesthetic judgment is based on a rational and objective authority. Later critics would repudiate Kantian idealism as illusory. However, his ideas remain relevant to the extent that they will provide the basic ground for the discussion of the relation between aesthetics and politics that will come to inhabit later philosophical debates.

Therefore, the concept of aesthetics had a profound influence on philosophical theories that sought to understand the concept of beauty "as a rational investigation about existence, knowledge and ethics" (Transnational Decolonial Institute 2013). However, it is important to emphasize that, in its earliest origins, the term derives from the Greek word *aisthesis*, which refers to the perception of sensory phenomena. From *aisthesis* comes *aesthesis*, which

refers to the way in which sensations are transformed into sensibilities. Indeed, even Kant considered aesthetic judgment to be an essentially sensory phenomenon. His definition of aesthetics was close to the original Greek term, meaning a science of the conditions of sensory perception (Williams 2007, 155). However, in his analysis, the work of art remains an autonomous and univocal object, which offers a controlled and universal aesthetic experience.

Yet the meaning of aesthesis goes further, as it encompasses the autonomy of each person's experience in relation to art. Unlike Kantian aesthetic judgment, this experiential regime cannot be reduced to questions of logic, reason, or morality (Bishop 2012, 27-29). Although Kantian aesthetics is associated with an individual perception of works of art, subjectivity is still mediated by the universal ideal of beauty. On the other hand, as Claire Bishop emphasizes, the renewal of aesthesis stems from the need to rearticulate the connection between the individual and collective spheres in the arts (Bishop 2012, 39). From this perspective, there is also room for a collective perception of artistic productions, as a way of sharing the political and social issues evoked by the works.

If we trace the history of the concept of aesthetics in Western culture, there is a clear disconnect between the way the concept has been consolidated and localized, cultural and subjective experiences. In its evolution, aesthetics became a term strongly associated with the discipline of Fine Arts, prioritizing the visual sense to the detriment of other forms of sensory perception. It has also become an adjective used to characterize creations that are the result of human creativity and are considered harmonious, beautiful, and consensual. According to Raymond Williams, this evolution of the term isolated subjective sensory activity "as the basis of art and beauty, [but] distinct from social and cultural interpretations" (Williams 2007, 156-157). Consequently, aesthetics was gradually removed from the political sphere to the point of becoming, in certain situations, its own antithesis¹²⁴. Thus,

¹²⁴ According to Ariella Azoulay (2012), in photography the judgment of taste blends the categories of *aesthetics* and *style* to the point of merging them into a single domain. As a consequence of this blending, the aesthetic and the political are perceived as inherent attributes of the images, when in fact they both depend on the entire configuration that led to the production of the photograph. This implies the creation of an illusory opposition between the categories of *aesthetics* and *politics*. This blending manifests itself when the public or critics consider an image to be "too aesthetic", denoting the image's inability to achieve a relevant political reading. Or, conversely, when an image is considered "too political", as if the aesthetic attributes were less relevant to its understanding. Azoulay argues that the two spheres will always combine, since an aesthetic realm exists from the moment an image or object is perceived by the senses. Reciprocally, the political sphere is also constantly present since the conditions of production of an image (and the power relations they imply) will always be an integral part of the image's perception.

the term became restricted to appreciations of visual patterns and artistic discourses that were validated as ideal and universal.

According to Walter D. Mignolo and Rolando Vazquez (2013), since the conceptualization of the Kantian ideal of beauty, art has solidified itself as a Western norm. As the norm of the beautiful and the sublime, art regulates sensibilities, determines affections, and directs perceptions. Aesthetics thus concerns a specific type of knowledge associated with a particular worldview. In other words, a worldview that is primarily Eurocentric, more precisely white, patriarchal, and heteronormative. It is not by chance that just like certain scientific categories and the positivist ideal of progress, aesthetics was easily appropriated by the colonial project in order to subjugate the native populations, since other forms of knowledge did not fit into the hegemonic conceptions of art and culture. According to Mignolo and Vazquez,

aesthetics became Eurocentered in 18th century Europe when it was taken as the key concept for a theory of sensibility, sentiment, sensations, and emotions, in contrast with the obsession for the rational. On the other hand, Kant mutated it into a key concept to regulate sensing the beautiful and the sublime. This was the starting point of ‘modern aesthetics’ that emerged from European experience and local history, and that became (...) the regulator of the global capability to ‘sense’ the beautiful and the sublime (Mignolo and Vazquez 2013, iii).

Since the 2000s, in the context of decolonial studies, the reinterpretation and renewal of the notion of aesthetics has become unpostponable. With the growing interest in the cultural productions of the global south and the knowledge systems that have been the target of colonial silencing, it has become necessary to approach the question of aesthetics in a localized and critical manner. Because it has served as a mechanism for producing and regulating sensibilities according to European imperial interests, aesthetics has become an inappropriate term for talking about cultural productions that do not fit into the genealogy and linearity of Western art history. With these concerns in mind the Transnational Decolonial Institute¹²⁵ launched the *Decolonial Aesthetics Manifesto* on May 22nd, 2011.

¹²⁵ The Transnational Decolonial Institute (TDI) is a network that brings together intellectuals from various countries, mainly Latin American, and includes the collaboration of artists, activists, philosophers, and curators. Since 2010, the group has promoted various meetings and publications seeking to deepen the concept of decolonial aesthesis in its practical and theoretical aspects. See <https://transnationaldecolonialinstitute.wordpress.com/>.

This text lays the foundation for the development of the term *Decolonial AESTHESIS* in the sequence of the group's research.

The transformation from *ics-* to *-esis* may seem like a detail in the new term, but this change is not without major consequences. While aesthetics configures an aspect of the colonial matrix as the norm for modes of knowledge production through artistic practices, (decolonial) aesthesis seeks to articulate practices that challenge and subvert the epistemic hegemony of Western modernity (Mignolo and Vazquez 2013). Since decolonial aesthesis “starts from the consciousness that the modern/colonial project has implied not only the control of the economy and the political and knowledge, but also control over the senses and perception” (Mignolo and Vazquez 2013, ii), it represents a critical movement that questions the political bias of the ways in which knowledge is produced.

In addition to this resolutely political sense, decolonial aesthesis recovers the original meaning of the Greek word as a sensorial phenomenon that exceeds the representational function in the arts. *Aesthesis* can be defined as “an unelaborated elementary awareness of stimulation” and, because it encompasses both sensory perception and its expression, it is “closely connected to the processes of perception” (Transnational Decolonial Institute 2013). This turn has a profound impact on the dissociation between the ideas of representation and reality in the arts¹²⁶. From this perspective, art does not only act as a vehicle for representing reality but is above all a means of experiencing it.

Therefore, decolonial aesthesis emerges as an important visual literacy tool for the photographic practices that are the subject of this study. Following the conceptualization of the term proposed by Mignolo and Vazquez (2013), it is possible to apply the notion through photographic practices that “decolonize the senses”. Firstly, these practices have the potential to make certain “decolonial subjectivities” visible and perceptible. In addition, they function as processes of reflection and action that make tangible forms of existence and identities that have historically been erased by the colonial project. Finally, Mignolo and Vazquez argue that the distinction between practice and theory on which Western modernity is based loses its meaning in the context of decolonial aesthesis.

¹²⁶ According to Rok Benčin, art begins to be thought of beyond the idea of the representation of reality when it acknowledges that mimesis is nothing more than a construction of reality among many other possible constructions. Truth in art, therefore, does not have to do with the expression of something ‘real’, but with the possibility of presenting something real that is not part of a mimetic construction of reality (Benčin 2019, 95-96).

Formally, decolonial aesthetics manifests itself not only in the visual arts, but also in music, poetry, speculative literature, religious beliefs, activist actions, education, and other forms of knowledge production. Among its manifestations, several authors highlight the relevance of the aesthetics of everyday life, of popular mobilizations of resistance, and of the struggle against the colonial heritage that insists on manifesting itself in the present. In common, these practices move through different means of representation to reach the sphere of non-representational sensibilities. Mignolo and Vazquez (ibid.) propose the following as pillars for a method of applying decolonial aesthetics:

- the subversion of the universality of Western concepts into historically situated forms;
- denouncing the colonial project of erasing, silencing, and devaluing knowledge systems that are considered incompatible with Western epistemologies and valuing other ways of relating to reality;
- the construction of the decolonial alternative as a non-normative space open to a plurality of identities.

These guidelines represent a concrete action project that finds in photographic practice one of its main media for intervention and transformation of the visible. As seen through the photographic projects that were carried out during the residency, decolonial aesthetics is practiced when participants use photography to reach the unrepresentable. In such an approach, a transcendental relation with the image is valued, where cosmologies and beliefs (often based on non-rational knowledge systems) will mediate the experience with reality. This includes a willingness to make explicit the constructed character of reality through micronarratives that address multiple temporalities and dissonant cartographies in the images produced. It should also be noted that the creation of meaning is based above all on a praxis, that is, on photographic making as an action with an impact on one's social reality, rather than the primacy of a theoretical discourse as the foundation of artistic work.

These considerations confirm the relevance of decolonial aesthetics as an instrument for liberating sensibilities and deconstructing the Western canons that have historically guided photography as a form of knowledge production. Therefore, from a post-colonial aesthetic to (decolonial) aesthetics, the site of knowledge production expands from a space of

representation based on an a priori visual norm (aesthetics) to a sphere that includes other forms of sensorial perception (aesthesis), as well as non-hegemonic languages and knowledge systems.

The combination of the terms ‘decolonial’ and ‘aesthesis’ is intended to emphasize the epistemological perspective present in the way works of art are produced, perceived, and shared. Regarding the experience of knowledge provided by cultural productions from the global south, it is important to emphasize the distinction between post-colonial and decolonial. While post-colonial aesthetics seeks above all to represent the complexity of post-independence reality in the former colonies, mainly through a political positioning, decolonial (aesthesis) seeks “to delink ourselves from the structure of knowledge imposed by the West, and to reconstitute our ways of thinking, speaking, and living”¹²⁷. The term decolonial, therefore, presupposes a work of self-reflexivity that results in the reconfiguration of practices as propellants for concrete actions (Santos, Nunes, and Meneses 2007, xxi). This propensity to act is found in the verb *decolonize*, which refers to the action of reflecting, acting, and learning through a “praxis of undoing and redoing” (Walsh and Mignolo 2018, 120). Due to this inclination towards *doing*, aesthesis will conceptually approach the idea of *poiesis* and, consequently, question the notion of poetics as it has been constructed in Western arts.

5.4.2. From poetics to poiesis

Parallel to the establishment of Western aesthetics as a field of study on the effects of works of art on human consciousness, poetics emerges as a systematization of the subjective perception of what has been defined as universally beautiful. In its general sense, poetics is defined as the laws and principles underlying an artistic work. In other words, poetics lies in the signifying logic that resides within an artistic object¹²⁸. Its development in the Western tradition seeks to construct a correlation between form and content through which the work is capable of conveying meanings. Originating in ancient Greece, the idea of poetics was first applied to the study of verbal creations (namely poetry, in its textual or oral form). Later,

¹²⁷ See Tsang, Michael. 2021. “Decolonial? Postcolonial? What does it mean to ‘decolonize ourselves’?”, accessed August 23rd, 2023. <https://blogs.ncl.ac.uk/decolonisesml/2021/01/21/decolonial-postcolonial-what-does-it-mean-to-decolonise-ourselves/>.

¹²⁸ See Borislavov, Rad. n.d. “Poetics.” The University of Chicago, Theories of Media - Keywords Glossary, accessed August 23rd, 2023. <http://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/poetics.htm>.

its use expanded to other manifestations such as the performing arts, music, and the visual arts. Regardless of the type of manifestation, the idea that the work of art is autonomous in relation to the transmission of meanings remained strongly attached to the concept. Later, in the logic of European modernity, this autonomy began to supersede the very individual experience of the work of art.

It's interesting to note that just like the concept of aesthetics, which was formalized from the older notion of aisthesis, the meaning of poetics also originates from a preceding term, the noun *poiesis*. *Poiesis* is a Greek concept meaning the activity in which a person brings something into being that did not exist before. The noun comes from the verb *poiein* (to make) and refers to the essence of acting as a way of creating something new (Scucato 2011). Because it presupposes creative action, *poiesis* is related to the notion of *techné*, which literally translates as technique or technology¹²⁹. However, *techné* is not directly related to the meaning of the work of art, but to the specific knowledge that guides an artistic production. As Fernando Santoro asserts, “whoever has an art has a knowledge that guides its production”, which configures *techné* as a human activity based on “knowing how to make” (Santoro 2006, 73-74).

In addition to technique/technology, *poiesis*, as an action that leads to making, also depends on a special will that is driven by the essence of acting, that is, by *praxis* (Castro 1999). Aristotle defines *praxis* as voluntary action directed towards pre-established goals (Blackburn 2016, 375). In other words, in *poiesis*, the intentionality of making (*praxis*) is as relevant as form and content, technique and technology. However, what best defines the concept of *poiesis* as an activity of making is its ability to “allow the passage from non-being to presence” (Zambrano 2019, 44). Through the work of Agamben (1970), Marcelo Zambrano explains that it is in this expectation of becoming that the possibilities of what can come to be are dilated, allowing the manifestation of “a space of truth” where the human being can overcome the aesthetic dimension. Thus, the perception of a presence to come is what differentiates *poiesis* from *praxis* in artistic production. According to Zambrano,

¹²⁹ According to Bent Flyvbjerg (2001), the term *techné* refers to a wide range of activities related to the skills needed to produce something within a technical dimension. Typically, the term is translated as art, technique, or craft and is based on the application of technical knowledge and skills that are linked to conscious objectives and rational principles (Cited in Zambrano Unda 2019, 7).

[e]sta producción, que separaría la convergencia entre poiesis y praxis y provocaría una suerte de liberación de la aísthesis, no tiene relación únicamente con la productividad racional (*techné*) o con la voluntad de acción (*praxis*) sino con ese todo mayor que permite el devenir de la presencia en la producción, fuera de los cánones estéticos modernos¹³⁰ (Zambrano 2019, 45).

Unlike poetics, which seeks to systematize forms of representation, poiesis favors the construction of new realities. In poetry such contrast between systematized forms of representation and creating worlds is evident. According to the poet E.M. de Melo e Castro (1932-2020), the transformations of the technical means of artistic production are indications of a new poiesis, that is, “of a new, hitherto unknown way of constructing reality” (Melo e Castro 1988, 12). Still according to Manuel Antônio de Castro, while poetics remains an external paradigm that gives meaning to the poem through the words of the philosopher or critic, the manifestation of poiesis is found in the word of the poet, “which originates in the dynamics of poetic making itself” (Castro 1999, 318). In general, *poetics* and *poiesis* represent strategies for reaching subjective sensibility through works of art. However, each implies different ways of artistically translating reality. In Greek antiquity, the first concept was associated with the norm of mimesis¹³¹, while the latter was related to the act of creation itself, i.e., the way in which poets conceptualized their production processes. These differences will establish different conceptions of the production of knowledge through works of art throughout the ages.

Until the 13th century, art had the meaning of “skill as a result of a practice”, which probably comes from an interpretation of the term poiesis (Mignolo Vazquez 2013). Therefore, poiesis is founded upon a practical action “that uses technical knowledge (*techné*) to realize the creative will” (Scucato 2011). Poetics, in turn, is defined above all by a mimetic relationship with reality, as systematized by Aristotle in *Poetics*, which established its use and reach in various artistic practices. According to Mignolo and Vazquez, in *Poetics* Aristotle reflects on the transmutation of *poiesis* into *poetics*. Following this work, mimesis

¹³⁰ “This production, which would separate the convergence between poiesis and praxis and provoke a kind of liberation from aisthesis, is not only related to rational productivity (*techné*) or to the will to act (*praxis*), but to that greater whole that allows for the becoming of presence in production, outside the modern aesthetic canons” (translation by the author).

¹³¹ This norm was built on the mimetic relation between works of art and reality and was first systematized by Plato. In it, the qualitative value of poetry is directly proportional to the ability of mimesis to represent the real (Castro 1999; Mignolo and Vazquez 2013).

gradually imposes itself as the norm and regime of visibility of the arts par excellence, eclipsing poiesis as a way of translating reality.

Therefore, poetics operates a transmutation of the idea of art as skill to art as a standardized system. Although *Poetics* inaugurated this line of thought (which reached its maximum formulation in the works of Kant in the 18th century), Aristotle built his arguments on the pair poiesis/mimesis. This argument is put forth by Paul Ricoeur (1983), who notes that the suffix *-sis*, which is present in both poiesis and mimesis, indicates the processual nature of these concepts. According to the author, in *Poetics* it is the idea of *poiesis* that guarantees the operational dynamism of the concepts involved in Aristotle's argument. For example, mimesis is not simply imitation, but a representational activity. Furthermore, the dynamism of *poiesis* represented a requirement of completion: in order to be meaningful, the action must be brought to its conclusion (ibid., 80). However, as it evolved, the concept of mimesis lost its procedural character in an attempt to ensure a certain stability in the interpretation of works of art through the pairing of poetics and aesthetics.

This conceptual revision seeks to clarify how the terminologies used in artistic productions have solidified Western constructions of knowledge, establishing specific modalities of relating to reality that do not allow for different epistemologies. Rancière (2009) notes that the dominance of mimesis in the fine arts disciplines caused the breakdown of the association between aesthesis and poiesis. From a Western perspective, art was primarily categorized based on its mimetic relationship with reality. This relationship established a standardized and rigid connection between a way of making (poiesis), and a way of being affected (aesthesis).

Therefore, by updating the concepts of poiesis and aesthesis, we seek for a decolonial alternative that “reconstitutes other ways of thinking, speaking, and living” (Tsang 2021) applicable to artistic practices. At the same time, such an alternative can contribute to the discipline of visual literacy by reconfiguring the modes in which photographic images are produced. There are two converging lines to consider in this regard. First, the recovery of aesthesis as a way of translating reality into sensibilities that go beyond the aesthetic norm in order to become a cultural and decolonial concept. Second, the restoration of poiesis as an alternative to the notion of poetics; that is, as a creative faculty that, conscious of its own process of making, emancipates itself from the mimetic as an imperative of representation.

By converging these two lines of thought, we seek to re-establish a link between aesthesis and poiesis, renewing the epistemological perspective in the way images are produced. Both concepts argue that the way we construct reality through photographic production alters the very perception of reality. Therefore, if *photographic poiesis* is a way of worldmaking, photographic thinking would be a way of reflecting on the construction of the world that is intertwined with its own production. Finally, photographic thinking becomes a philosophy of making.

The importance of renewing the notion of poiesis in these terms can be seen in the photographic production of the residency. Nevertheless, poetics – as a norm based on mimesis – remains the initial reference with which the participants make sense of their images. In the discussions around the photographic images during the sessions, there is a gradual shift away from aesthetic/stylistic issues and photography’s referential/mimetic relationship to objects towards a broader debate involving subjective, political, and social issues.

At the beginning of the residency, some participants will be excessively concerned with the formal aspects of the images and try to relate them to artistic concepts. This is evident in the way some of them use references from photojournalistic practices and established photographic styles to convey the meaning of the images. For example, some will rely on the stereotypical visuality that a generic label like ‘street photography’ conveys to justify a way of producing photographs. In the case of photojournalism, this is evident in the direct link they make between mastery of technique and the creative quality of projects. In these cases, *techné* only serves to feed a standardized aesthetic that restricts poetic meaning to a well-balanced proportion between form and content.

These aspects are addressed in the residency’s pedagogical approach, with the educators insisting that the photographers move away from these restrictive labels. The underlying idea here is to emphasize that the knowledge conveyed by photographs goes far beyond what they show. By also considering what the images evoke (or what they don’t show, but suggest), poiesis – as a way of making photographs – will be fundamental to articulating more subtle and deeper perceptions of the complexity of the world. In these articulations, the subjective concerns of the image maker can be linked to the socio-cultural context, promoting the dialogical nature of photography and revealing the multiple actors present in the production of a photograph.

Another factor that attests the relevance of the notion of *photographic poiesis* concerns the self-reflexive nature of this practice as knowledge production. By incorporating the notion into their photographic production, the photographer's position as a cultural subject is not as easily concealed by categorizations, norms, and styles as it is in the case of aesthetics. According to Boaventura Sousa Santos, what differentiates knowledge production from other social practices is its self-reflexive character, "which productively reshapes the context of practices into motive and engine of actions" (Santos, Nunes, and Meneses 2007, xxi). In this sense, *photographic poiesis* also functions as a self-learning process, since the knowledge produced by this process involves the fabrication of a version of reality in which subjective concerns and intervention in the visible world are combined. This creates new cognitive possibilities that depend on imagination, the invention of micro-narratives, and the re-signification of symbologies that traverse the diversity of languages and identities.

Because it involves "the experience of activating a personal interaction with the world" (Brückle and Fink 2019, 8) through the experience of making images, such poiesis is grounded in an epistemology that privileges the autonomous experience of individuals as a way of producing knowledge. At the Catchupa Factory, this aspect is directly linked not only to the way in which participants (independently) learn about the world through photography, but also to the pedagogical process in which they are inserted. Below we analyze how *photographic poiesis* relates to pedagogy in photographic production practices within the institutional framework of the residency.

5.5. PEDAGOGY AND PHOTOGRAPHIC POIESIS: LEARNING BY THE EXPERIENCE OF MAKING

Educational practices and artistic production are inseparable fields. In a first instance, this relationship represents the very condition of existence of the work of art, since the production of art implies the mastery of the techniques that enable the work to be made. In the context of *photographic poiesis*, the word technique should be understood here in the sense of its Greek origin, *techné*. As mentioned above, *techné* refers to specific knowledge that leads to creative action (poiesis). However, learning an artistic practice involves more than mastering procedures based on methodical and non-empirical scientific knowledge that

are used to achieve an expected result. Technique should be understood as providing a creative potential and not as an objective procedure, since it is a means and not an end. Making art is therefore akin to an investigation that poses a series of questions to a reality without, however, necessarily answering them. In this sense, when it comes to producing works of art, the way in which artistic questions are formulated is just as important as the final result.

Even so, the common conception of technique – as a set of applied procedures that respond to a specific goal or purpose – can also be closely linked to the production of the artwork. This aspect is most evident in the case of artistic practices that use mechanical, electronic, or digital technologies as the primary medium of the work, such as photography. In these cases, the technical question – in the instrumentalized sense of the term – is unavoidable. In relation to photography, I suggest that this has to do with photography's affiliation with a particular conception of technology that has been consolidated in Western thought.

Photographic technology, unlike other artistic techniques, is inseparable from the idea of scientific progress, innovation, and modernization. Historically, photography emerged in the context of a European bourgeoisie immersed in a positivist rationalism that preached scientific knowledge as the only thing capable of bringing redemption to humanity. To a certain extent, this logic has remained present in the technical development of photography, and this can be seen in the constant effort to perfect the medium. Whether during the analog era or today with digital technology, new camera models with unprecedented new functions are constantly being launched by the major manufacturers. However, the basic principle of photographic *techné* has changed little since its formalization in the early 19th century¹³².

Digital photography has mainly affected the way we photograph, but it does not represent a revolution in the intrinsic nature of images. What has changed (and is changing) is the way in which we relate to the images, especially in terms of the motivations that lead to their making (something like a transformation of praxis – as the intention to make – that has not been accompanied by a reconfiguration of poiesis – as the meaning of the making

¹³² According to Michel de Oliveira (2021), the raw material of photography has not changed, “it continues to be produced by the action of light fixed on a surface, which was once metal, glass, cellulose, paper, until it dematerialized into binary code (...). But light – with its inseparable companion, shadow – continues to be the primordial basis of the static images recorded by the camera, now digital”. According to the author, there is no new ontology of photography in digital times. What has changed are its uses, which “diversify and expand with each generation”, but the basic technical principle has accompanied photography since its inception.]

itself or the ways of making). In a way, the ‘digital revolution’ in the image does nothing more than reaffirm the initial promise of photography in the 19th century: to mediate reality in a direct and objective way. In the capitalist drive to create unnecessary needs through the constant improvement of cameras, accessories, and post-production software, such a promise now seems to be to offer an even more real reality¹³³. In other words, technology is easily confused with the quality (of the experience) of the real.

In a series of interviews conducted during the residency, all of the participants reported that they had been partially or totally self-taught in photographic technique. In general, the participants had their first contact with a camera spontaneously, often by handling a family member’s camera. Then their interest in the technique led them to manipulate the camera freely, and for some it was already possible to produce their first images using automatic analog cameras. Later, as a trivial interest in the medium evolves into a deeper curiosity, participants seek technical knowledge from a variety of sources. Often, they are spontaneously taught by other, more experienced photographers around them. However, most of this learning takes place on the Internet, on dedicated websites and pages and especially through YouTube videos that explain the specificities of the medium, such as how to use the camera in manual mode or how to achieve a particular stylistic or aesthetic effect. For digital photography, this third stage of learning also includes aspects of image manipulation using digital tools.

Obviously, this learning process is not systematized and is therefore riddled with gaps. As a result, participants will arrive at the residency with different levels of mastery of photographic technique and, consequently, of image production processes. In other words, even though they all have a certain familiarity with documentary processes, some are more adept at portraits or landscapes, while others are more adept at lighting techniques and directing models. Despite this heterogeneity between the skills of each person in the group, the aim of the residency is not to provide learning for their technical deficiencies¹³⁴. On the

¹³³ The Nikon D850 camera, launched in 2017, advertises itself as “I am the difference **maker**”. Its commercial says: “Welcome to the splendor of **full-image** FX [sensor] like you've never seen before. Whether in the studio or in the most remote location on the planet (...). Capture that **prized moment** with the ultimate combination of speed, detail, and precision. (...) Reveal the **hidden details in the darkest scenes and deepest shadows**. (...) By combining the power of ultra-high-resolution images with the flexibility to take pictures in any environment (...) **you can outdo yourself**”. (Emphasized by the author)

See <https://www.colorfoto.pt/loja/prod/d850-corpo/0018208954100/>, last accessed December 5, 2023.

¹³⁴ This choice is not without consequences. Because they are emerging photographers, in some cases the lack of mastery of a specific photographic technique will have a negative impact on the production of the image and, consequently, on the communication of the artistic idea. However, from a general perspective of

contrary, the residency will first provide an apprenticeship in artistic practices through photography. This pedagogical process is analogous to (and aims to stimulate) ‘photographic thinking’.

This pedagogical perspective has accompanied the development of photography as an artistic practice in recent decades. This position is shared by the artist Eustáquio Neves, one of the tutors at Catchupa Factory 2021. In his experience as an educator, he observes that in the past the discussions in a photography workshop revolved around technical issues, such as lenses and film. Nowadays, according to Eustáquio, this type of approach has lost a lot of interest: “I prefer to talk about the more philosophical side, about ‘thinking photography’”. Of course, in order to think philosophically or to master photography conceptually, you need the technique¹³⁵. But that’s a part that doesn’t interests me anymore. I prefer to provoke people (...) to make something with photography as starting point” (Neves 2021b). The positions, of “thinking photography” and “making something with photography as starting point”, extend beyond the first educational instance of the residency mentioned above. The focus is no longer solely on learning artistic practices which use photography. Equally important, photography making must be a transformative action, whether on a personal or social level, or both.

Taking a stand against the instrumentalization of photographic practice, artist and cultural producer Diogo Bento states that “technique hardly enters the vocabulary of the residency, except when it is relevant to each person’s project” (Bento 2021) Thus, in the pedagogical line of the residency, topics involving technical aspects derived from camera mechanics and optics, light capture conditions, specific techniques (e.g. use of flash, long exposures), and the particularities of digital photography (such as file quality and post-production, among others) will be given little or no attention during project discussions. On the contrary, the main focus is on learning how to develop and produce an artistic project through photography. However, as Eustáquio hints, there is also a more ambitious objective, which is to learn through the artistic practice. The question that arises could be formulated

evaluating the residency, the technical part does not seem to be the predominant factor determining quality and relevance in terms of knowledge production.

¹³⁵ From the perspective of the artist-producer, *photographic poiesis* implies mastering a technique and forgetting it during production. This is what Eustáquio Neves suggests when he uses Taoist philosophy to explain his relation between the ‘making’ and technique during the production of his work. For Taoist philosophy, it is necessary to forget in order to know. According to Eustáquio, it is a process of filling up and emptying: “you accumulate that knowledge and then empty yourself of it. So, you don’t have to think about what you’ve learned while doing. When you’re doing it, you have to be free of it” (Neves 2021b).

as follows: what is the difference between learning art and learning through art? And how can one idea be related to the other? Our hypothesis is that this relationship can be found in the concept of pedagogy as an emancipatory practice applied to artistic practices.

As the residency unfolds, parallel activities are proposed to facilitate conviviality and good understanding between the participants. For example, collective, recreational, and cultural activities such as guided walks on the island, a visit to a ceramic studio, spending a Saturday at the beach, and movie screenings at the end of the day aim to increase the dynamics of conviviality in the residency environment. These activities are also designed to dissolve the separation between organizers, educators, and participants. As Bento points out, “we are all one group” (Bento 2021). This equality between all the people involved in the initiative is a first step in the direction of an emancipatory pedagogical approach. In *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1987), Jacques Rancière demonstrates the emancipatory potential of an education that has equality between students and educators as its basic operating principle¹³⁶. According to Bishop, that perspective requires a principle of equality to be tested and constantly re-examined (Bishop 2012, 266). Similarly, the interaction between the parallel activities and the moments of discussion of artistic projects in the residency creates a space of exchange based on equal positions between participants, tutors and organizers. This space of equality is put to the test as the social, recreational, and artistic activities begin to merge from the very first days of the residency. Thus, the pedagogical approach of Catchupa Factory, by organizing itself in a horizontal and collaborative way, moves away from the idea of transmitting knowledge from those who have it to those who do not.

The first theoretical discussions around emancipatory pedagogy originated in the 1960s around a movement that became known as Critical Pedagogy. Influenced by the Marxist ideology of class struggle and, in the specific case of Latin America, by Christian Liberation Theory, the movement considers the role of education as a collective and participatory practice aimed at establishing social justice. Among the main names linked to the movement are the Austrian Ivan Illich (1926-2002), the North-Americans Henry Giroux (1943-) and Ira Shor (1945-) and the Canadian Peter McLaren (1948-). All of them cite as a major

¹³⁶ Rancière develops his ideas based on the work of French educator Joseph Jacotot at the University of Louvain (Belgium) in the 19th century, who created an educational method based on the premise that professors and students have the same level of intelligence. See Rancière (1991).

influence the precursor work of Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire (1921-1997), whose book *Pedagogia do Oprimido* (1968) laid the foundations for the movement.

According to Paulo Freire, education is an exclusively human activity due to the awareness that human beings have of their incompleteness (Freire 2013, 82). Therefore, thinking only makes sense if it is stimulated by a will to act in the world, transforming it and transforming oneself. In a liberating educational practice, “this will to act [praxis] implies the action [poiesis] and reflection of men on the world in order to transform it. Thus, reflection and action develop in unison with a view to acting upon reality” (ibid., 75). Based on these premises, Freire developed a verbal literacy method as a revolutionary strategy for human emancipation and social justice. According to Ernani Maria Fiori (2013), Paulo Freire’s method is based on a strategy of encoding and decoding the linguistic system. Verbal literacy, at first, makes it possible to integrate strategies for encoding meaning through the use of words. Next, it is necessary to decode language, that is, to grasp words in their existential context and “to become aware of the word as a signifying intention, coinciding with others that signify the same world” (ibid., 7). Once students understand the power of creation inherent to words, they become independent in creating worlds and subjectively densifying themselves.

Furthermore, in the process of encoding/decoding, the learners discover themselves as cultural subjects as they simultaneously reach “the place where they encounter themselves and others” (ibid.). In comparison, this method is analogous to certain educational strategies developed in the residency since it is not enough to just learn how to produce technically successful images. The practice only becomes liberating when participants incorporate visuality as a social construction, that is, within a historical, political, and cultural panorama. This awareness of the multiple significant layers of images has an impact on praxis, i.e. the intention that guides the making. The challenge here is to recognize how this understanding of images impacts on the making itself, that is, on photographic poiesis.

Another central aspect of Freire’s approach is to view education as a form of “shared communication” between learners and educators, which presupposes an ongoing dialogue between the two parties. As far as the educator is concerned, this dialogue means refuting the idea that ignorance is always to be found in the other. Thus, out of this shared intentionality in relation to reality, learners and educators, “in common action and reflection”, achieve a knowledge of reality and “discover themselves to be its permanent

remakers” (Freire 2013, 56-57). In other words, it means recognizing the pedagogical process as a bilateral exchange that produces autonomous, shared, and situated knowledge.

According to Claire Bishop (2012), in Freire’s pedagogy the educator has the role of co-producer of knowledge. Their function is to promote student empowerment through “non-authoritarian collaboration” (ibid., 266). However, she points out that Freire does not imply that educator-student dialogue means the total elimination of authority. Collaborative processes within emancipatory educational practices are underpinned by a negotiation between the freedom promoted by learning and the rigidity inherent in any educational structure. In this way, it is through a form of self-discipline made possible by a framework that the student can achieve the freedom offered by learning.

Bishop notes a parallel between the principles of critical pedagogy and the emergence of artistic manifestations that, at the same period, began to consider education as a ‘medium’ for the development of artistic practices. Contemporary with the emergence of Critical Pedagogy in the late 1960s and early 1970s, participatory art experiences became known mainly through the figure of German artist and activist Joseph Beuys. In 1973, together with other collaborators, he established the Freie Internationale Hochschule für Kreativität und interdisziplinäre Forschung [Free International University for Creativity and Interdisciplinary Research], where the conventional concept of knowledge transfer was replaced by the practice of imagination and intuition (Brückle and Fink 2019, 7). His ideas were based on erasing the boundaries between life and art, so that every individual could become aware of themselves as a creative subject. This institutional model of learning, which seeks to bring art closer to the social field, has influenced the emergence of several contemporary initiatives in different geographical contexts¹³⁷.

In the proposals for emancipatory artistic education and participatory art, the focus is shifted from the artwork as a finished object to the procedural character of its making. According to Brückle and Fink (2019), one aspect of fundamental importance is the social role of artistic activities as “aesthetically motivated processes of collective consciousness and emancipation approaches” (ibid., 7). Furthermore, these initiatives will often involve the production of events (rather than objects) where social and aesthetic experiences are mixed (ibid., 8). Regarding the porosity between artistic, educational and social practices at

¹³⁷ Examples of these initiatives include the LungA School in Iceland, the Ghetto Kota Okola collective in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Arte de Conducta project in Cuba, which was conceived by Cuban artist Tania Bruguera.

Catchupa Factory these principles can serve as means for emancipating the artist-learner in two ways.

First, in order for art education to function as a form of social transformation, a pedagogical initiative in the field of the arts must seek to train students not only to make art, but also to experience and shape a civil society (Bishop 2012, 247). For this reason, the procedural character and the impact of actions tend to become as important (if not more) than the final object produced. A second strategy is present in the way that emancipatory art education can function as a cognitive tool at the individual level. That is, it provides a space where participants can come to the point of shaping their own experiences and assimilating the elements that interest them In order to create knowledge through artistic production. According to Brückle and Fink, such a creative process implies resisting a dominant discourse that standardizes the aesthetic experience (Brückle and Fink 2019, 9-10). Thus, a unique “experience of creative mental activity” is configured when individuals are able to create a particular *esthetic* universe through the production of images or objects. At the same time, this cognitive experience is linked to “the experience of freedom within a community” (ibid., 8) as it resists a dominant discourse by seeking autonomous forms of expression.

In photographic practices related to artistic creation, the use of visual languages and photographic processes to convey discourses and generate knowledge is an important concern. In the context of the artistic residency, this knowledge is produced by the participants, but it is also shaped by the configuration of the artistic research space and by those who frame the activities: educators, organizers, and producers. One of the peculiarities of Catchupa Factory is that it brings together emerging artist-photographers, i.e. young participants whose artistic practice is relatively recent. In this way, the residency also presents itself as a place for the artistic learning. Therefore, a key point of our research in terms of knowledge creation is the pedagogical aspects related to the photographic production during the residency. In what follows, we will develop these aspects through the artists’ educational experiences during their three-week stay on the island of São Vicente. Analyzing the discussions around their photographic projects, we will address the important pedagogical role of Akinbode Akinbiyi and the unique method that characterizes his work as an artist-educator.

The 2021 edition of Catchupa Factory presented some peculiarities compared to previous editions of the residency. Firstly, there was no specific pre-defined theme to guide the production of the works. Diogo Bento explains that even when there is an overall theme assigned to the residency, it is very broad so that each participant can adapt their concerns to a guiding topic. Alongside Diogo, who oversees the residency and acts as an assistant trainer during the sessions, there is always a visiting main tutor. In 2021, the second particularity was precisely the presence of two artist-educators during the residency: Akinbode Akinbiyi and Eustáquio Neves. A third feature of this edition concerns my own presence as a participatory researcher. Officially presented as a guest curator, I was able to actively participate in all the discussions and parallel activities, and also contribute to the production of the works through exchanges with the participants. In addition, I conducted interviews with the eleven participants, the two artist-educators, and Diogo Bento.

The residency is structured around a series of work discussion sessions that will take place at regular intervals. Thus, on the other days the participants can devote themselves exclusively to producing their respective photographic projects. The sessions typically last the entire day, with pauses for a shared lunch and a mid-afternoon coffee break. During these sessions, the participants display their current projects using video projectors¹³⁸. In the second week of the residency, they receive a fee for producing their work and are advised to print proof images of their projects. At the end of the third week, a final session is organized which precedes a screening open to the public with the results of the residency. Each artist's final series is projected in slide-show mode in an auditorium at the Mindelo Cultural Center at the official closing of the residency.

All the work sessions are coordinated by Akinbode, with the active participation of Eustáquio and Diogo and, and occasionally myself. In the room where the meetings took place, a library with dozens of publications by artist-photographers is laid out on a table for anyone to consult. References from artists and photographers are often shared through internet searches that are projected on the room wall, allowing the visualization of the works mentioned by educators. Due to the constant use of the video projector, the windows of the room were often closed to improve visibility, creating a dark environment that separated us

¹³⁸ An important point for the perception of the works is the fact that the visual projection allows a considerable enlargement of the images that the participants normally see within the size limits of their computer screens. Often details can be found that went unnoticed by the photographer. Akinbode reinforces this commitment to creating the best conditions for viewing the images by inviting the participants to print out the photos and stick them on the walls of their rooms so that they can look at them every day.

from the outside reality and sunny days of Mindelo. It was in this immersive environment that I made most of the observations and notes that make up this research.

This format is in line with the concept of the residency as a space for dialog and cultural exchange around photographic practice. In this configuration, Akinbode's role was certainly the most important in the creative development of the works and, consequently, in what we will try to define as a pedagogical line. Primarily responsible for guiding the artistic activities, Akinbode arrived in Mindelo a week before the start of the residency to observe the local context and determine whether proposing a theme for Catchupa Factory 2021 would be appropriate. Akinbode decided not to propose a theme for the residency but chose as the guiding principle "to develop one's inner abilities, or the inner eye" (Bento 2021). This principle was present throughout the activities from the first to the last day.

Diogo explains that Akinbode's purpose is to emphasize each participant's personal development. This means seeking out the intrinsic qualities of each of the participants, developing them artistically in order to take them to "a higher level" (ibid.). In addition, Akinbode seeks a coherence between what the participants have done before and new languages that they may explore during the residency. However, as Diogo reminds us, "it's not about having a rupture in the sense of doing something new for its own sake" (ibid.). He explains that the goal is for the participants to explore new languages, but always based on their expectations and previous experience.

Akinbode's method can be termed emancipatory artistic education¹³⁹. It is not a systematized method, but above all a disposition allowing cultural exchanges through intense dialogues between educators and participants in the residency. Although he asserts that he doesn't have a particular educational approach and instead relies on intuition and

¹³⁹ The method parallels the recent turn to education in the curatorial field. Since the 2000s, critics and scholars have identified an "educational turn" in practices of both curating and producing contemporary art (O'Neill and Wilson 2010, 12). This shift towards education is evident in art projects when "the educational process often becomes the object of curatorial production" (ibid., 13). While the educational turn is particularly prominent in projects emphasizing collaborative and pedagogical initiatives with communities or oriented towards curatorial initiatives aiming to produce new knowledge, common principles resonate with the dynamics of the Catchupa Factory residency. Kristina Podesva (2007) highlights that these procedures create a non-hierarchical learning environment, blurring distinctions between teachers and participants, and emphasizing experimental and non-hegemonic approaches to knowledge production. Another parallel aspect lies in the minimal emphasis placed on achieving masterful technical production as well as predefined outcomes. Thus, an emancipatory artistic education prioritizes dialogues and collective knowledge production by emphasizing the process over the object. It also aims to develop unique ways of engaging with the world. Although the Catchupa factory is not an individual artistic project, nor is it based on the conception of a curatorial project with the participants' works, its pedagogical dynamics share many of the principles of the educational turn.

conviviality, certain aspects can be underscored in his way of conducting the residency. Firstly, the artistic learning process is based on dialogue, listening, and careful observation of the images. In practice, this means that the discussions surrounding the images produced by the artists are long and in-depth, touching on various aspects ranging from the initial motivation to the personal history and experiences of each participant. Regarding this last point, a second aspect of Akinbode's method is the emphasis placed on everyday processes of relating to visuality and image production. This determines the articulation of the photographic production with a careful exercise of observation that seeks to translate the experience of everyday life into subjective images. This predisposition involves exploring visuality in its multi-sensory aspect, i.e. also including non-visual perceptions of reality that can manifest themselves through photographs. Lastly, it is important to emphasize that the focus is on the individual student's abilities and personal interests. There is no point in developing a project that is not closely linked to the artist's subjective and socio-cultural universe.

Based on this *methodology of spontaneity*, Akinbode will transcend the mimetic and informative relation between photographic images and external reality and move towards a deeper understanding of the multisensory and affective aspects of photography. This involves training the eye, which he compares to listening to music. He suggests that participants "keep on engaging with [images], on the books, on the wall, and then you begin to get it. It is like listening to music, the more you listen, the more you hear the differences". Therefore, his approach is based on a patient work of engagement with the visible through curiosity and attention to the details and affective layers of the images. Moreover, these details and layers are never exhausted in the formal aspects of the image. They also encompass the socio-cultural context in which the photograph was made and the historical and political aspects that manifest themselves in a deeper reading.

From this perspective, training the eye is fundamental for a critical perception of images, as it favors the autonomy of the objects represented, in such a way that images require a more active position from the viewer in order to be interpreted. As Isabel Gil points out, relativizing the authority of vision in relation to the independence of objects is one of the presuppositions of visual literacy, which applies not only to photography, but also to other types of images (Gil 2011, 14). This implies setting aside pre-established visual categories

in order to focus on images as autonomous objects that can not only stimulate our visual perception, but also elicit other sensations and emotions.

Akinbode makes no distinction between the way photography is taught and other visual arts. Despite the technicalities of using the camera, he believes that the most important thing is to encourage students to develop their skills through a conceptual and creative approach. Unlike the modernist and rational conception of photography, which prioritizes the specific aspects of the medium, the conceptual/creative approach allows for subjectivity to emerge through individually created protocols. In order for the individual to emerge, Akinbode considers that his main role is to listen to and encourage the students.

Therefore, the residency centers on collective collaboration where the emphasis is on the willingness to learn from each other and from students and teachers. Even so, Akinbode recognizes that the educator holds a position of authority when framing these exchange experiences, corroborating Freire's ideas about the freedom stemming from self-discipline that governs emancipatory educational structures. He also explains that because of the rigidity of the framework, students tend to break the rules all the time. On this point he comments: "You have a particular frame, but you push it all the time. This comes from your personal discipline and from your constant curiosity of learning something new every day" (Akinbiyi 2021a). Thus, self-discipline in practice channels curiosity and the desire to learn 'beyond', creating the conditions for the development the artistic project.

Akinbode's position on curiosity goes hand in hand with a willingness to explore the everyday micro-narratives of each participant's universe. He explains that large discourses are insufficient to address the question of the image as a means of producing knowledge. On the other hand, from the artist-photographer's perspective, "small stories" encourage a positioning in relation to a localized event. Akinbode illustrates this disposition with the following example: "Today you woke up and saw a butterfly. Then we got together, sat down and I asked you: How did you relate to this moment? What do you intend to do? Write a song about it? Go and look for the butterfly again? Or do you try to make an image that conveys what you felt?" (ibid.). It is therefore an experimental teaching format that involves activating a personal and dynamic relationship with the world as a strategy for eliciting micro-narratives.

Akinbode stresses the importance of paying attention to personal experience in order to reach other forms of knowledge. Delving deeper into the affective production of images also

opens up the possibility of addressing the political sphere. In this sense, absorbing the context of the residency is key. He points out that the residency functions as a space for creating knowledge, mainly because it brings together people with different cultural backgrounds in the same context on the island of São Vicente. Akinbode notes that “we become aware of the history of this place, its vibrations, and we can incorporate it into our work, into our knowledge production. We learn from each other, but also from our surroundings” (Akinbiyi 2021b). In reality, both spheres – the cultural difference between the participants and the sociocultural configuration of the island – are articulated and support the generation of knowledge through photographic practices and languages.

During the sessions, Akinbode frequently remarks that the constant presence of wind is the most remarkable natural feature of the island of São Vicente. Although invisible, the wind is perceived as a tactile and acoustic element which constantly fills the sensory experience. During our interview, Akinbode explains that this current of air not only shapes the territory (as can be seen in the vegetation, which grows curved in the direction of the wind) but is also integrated into the lives of the people. It was this wind, Akinbode comments, that made the slave trade across the Atlantic possible during the colonial era. So, it is therefore loaded with knowledge. “But how do you photograph the wind?” asks Akinbode. The wind can become visible field when we learn to relate it to the context and history of a place, which leads him to say that “you cannot see what you don’t know. Once you know, you begin to see it” (ibid.). This premise points to one of the most important functions of visual literacy which, as Elkins (2008) reminds us, concerns its intervention in the social field through a political approach that reveals how images can reflect ideologies and collective projects.

Thus, the suggestion that the wind must be understood not only intellectually, but also sensorially in order to be translated into an image is not just a metaphor. It is about prioritizing an experiential relationship with reality as a pedagogical strategy that operates individually and collectively in the visual field. In this sense, Akinbode’s pedagogy can be said to be closer to the idea of wisdom than knowledge, since wisdom is not a systematized rational method, but a knowledge based on experience of the world. As Manuel Antônio Castro puts it, the true interpretation of the world does not depend on pre-established concepts, because “the path of interpretation is the interpretation of the path” (Castro 1999, 318). By considering the subjective experiences of the world that are mediated by

photographic production as a way of thinking, Akinbode's methodology offers itself as a tool for self-learning.

Another crucial aspect of this pedagogy is the inclusion of different levels of knowledge in the discussions around the production of images. As Akinbode affirms, "there is no image which hasn't got some kind of knowledge deeply embedded in it" (Akinbiyi 2021a). Consequently, just as there is no distinction between a 'good photograph' and a 'bad photograph' in residency, there is no experience that is more relevant or less relevant than another. By this we mean that despite the great heterogeneity between the personal and cultural experiences of the participants, this is not an obstacle to the production of knowledge within the residency. On the contrary, the diversity of personal backgrounds, different degrees of technical mastery, levels of artistic experience, theoretical knowledge, and aesthetic languages is a positive point. These differences in experience mean that the knowledge produced must be translated more precisely so that it can be absorbed by the group.

There is still another aspect related to the diversity of knowledge that has a prominent place in Akinbode's pedagogy. Deepening the production of photographs in a way that is both affective and critical also means opening up to non-Western concepts and languages for image-making. In addition to valuing the localized cultural meanings of certain notions, this openness also implies a work of *intercultural translation* (Santos 2016) so that these concepts can be absorbed by a wide audience. In *intercultural translation*, concepts "such as land, water, territory, self-determination, dignity, respect, good living, and mother earth" (ibid., 41) reclaim their own poetics within the cultural productions of the global South. From this perspective, the role of the educator, as in the case of Akinbode, is to "facilitate the experience of conceptual thinking through interventions in the visible without the need of any defined art category to understand the cognitive processes" (Brückle and Fink 2019, 7). Thus, Akinbode advocates the use of knowledge systems and terminologies to discuss the question of the image that distance themselves from the precepts of Western art history. Sometimes, these notions are part of systems based on religious or non-scientific knowledge that transcend the idea of representation established by the artistic categories of the Western tradition.

During an open class on his artistic work¹⁴⁰, Akinbode showed images he produced in Nigeria which touch upon aspects of the animist tradition of African ancestral religions. He notes that religion is a distinct mode of thought that contains valuable insights that can be expressed through the creation of cultural artifacts. However, this manifestation often does not occur directly and consciously, possibly due to the very nature of religion as a system of knowledge based on a very subjective relationship with beliefs and foundational texts. It is therefore necessary to ask pragmatically how these concepts, cosmologies, and systems of knowledge can mobilize innovation in the panorama of artistic production. How can we avoid the risk of exalting an ‘African cosmology’ as a pure and exemplary system of knowledge and ending up reinforcing dichotomies such as conventional/magical, modern/traditional, realistic/abstract, rational/spiritual? Worse than the reinforcing of these antagonisms, there is the danger of automatically and uncritically attributing positive values to any artistic work that appropriates non-European cosmologies and knowledge systems.

This question arose during the residency because of the ambiguous relationship between religiosity and artistic practices. In the correlation between spiritual identity and cultural identification¹⁴¹, we realize that in some cases the religious overlaps with artistic notions. Spiritual identity challenges even decolonial methodologies that seem less receptive to certain spiritual practices. This is a problem that has not yet received enough attention in the context of emancipatory artistic education processes. For example, there seems to be a certain conflict between Christian and Muslim religiosity and artistic production, while the same is not true for other African religious traditions. This is a complex issue because, despite the historical violence and cultural erasure associated with the imposition of Catholicism, a significant part of the African and Latin American populations has adopted and practices the Catholic faith. Something similar occurs with Muslim culture, which – although widely present in Africa – does not receive the same attention when it comes to the need to introduce non-Western concepts and cosmologies into artistic practices.

¹⁴⁰ On July 26th, 2021, Galeria Zero Point Art (Mindelo) hosted Akinbode Akinbiyi for a presentation and talk about his artistic work. Open to the public in Mindelo, the event was organized in partnership with Catchupa Factory and was attended by all the residency participants.

¹⁴¹ This ambiguous relationship is explored in chapter three through the distinction proposed by Ortega y Gasset (1942) between beliefs and ideas. Beliefs are certainties and offer little room for adaptation and change. At the same time, they form an integral part of the concept of *identity*, providing individuals with stability. Ideas, on the other hand, are external and malleable, and therefore allow for *identification*. Unlike the concept of identity, identification is more open to the unknown, allowing us to deal with new information and situations. See the topic “The interplay between identity and identification” (Chapter 3).

As highlighted in chapter three, it is important to understand how a discourse based on religious values affects on visual languages and photographic practices. In this sense, pedagogical processes should seek methodologies that allow everyone to participate in the construction of the visual. This does not mean universalizing a moral judgment (which in aesthetics would be equivalent to replacing the concept of universal beauty with a universal ethic), but rather seeking certain experiences and sensations that people share, even if their moral values are different. Since the West has never fully achieved secularization (Lipovetsky and Charles 2023), it is impossible to ignore the significance of values such as religion, family, and tradition in the constitution of individual identities. What is needed is a work of cultural translation in which experiences with images can reshape our values rather than reinforce what we already believe.

The experience of photographic production at Catchupa Factory offers instances where the juxtaposition of identity and identification blurs the distinctions between belief and knowledge. One of the participants in the residency, Janeth Tavares, claimed to have a spiritual relationship with photography that sometimes manifested itself in a dogmatic way. Her discourse on spirituality merged with a religious narrative in which the virtues of a conventional idea of the family were extolled. When presenting a video work, Janeth explains that she tried to approach the concept of family through her relationship with God, while demonstrating how grateful she is to have her family. Akinbode reacted to the work by explaining that it is very difficult to photograph spirituality because the formal question is unavoidable. He then offers Janeth some advice: “Put your beliefs on the side. If you want to be religious, do it later. Take your beliefs as the starting point for your process, but now you have to think artistically”.

Janeth’s project during the residency was about the universe of single parents on the island of São Vicente. She justifies her choice by explaining that “women are always seen as victims” and that is why she wanted to show other perspectives (Tavares 2021). In this case, her idea was to show that women also abandon men with their children, and that the man has to take care of the household and raise the children. Something similar is manifested in Guinean Samba’s speech: He presents a double-exposure night photograph of a young woman in a prostitution spot. He relates the image – a portrait of the young woman in which her face appears duplicated by the double exposure – to the idea of the woman’s “dual personality”. Samba says that he felt a responsibility to stop this. There is an idea of

victimization in both Janeth's view of the single parents and Samba's view of the young woman prostituting herself on the street. At the same time, their approach to the practice of photography has its roots in the search for a transformative social experience. This is particularly evident in relation to the experiences of alterity they had while interacting with the people of São Vicente Island. More than other participants, Samba and Janeth looked to the local population for a socio-cultural theme for their projects.

However, in terms of the transmission of spiritual values, Janeth's work differs from the experiences of Magno Daniel, discussed in chapter two, who explored the symbolism of Catholic religious elements in the urban context of Mindelo. Magno examines these religious features (crucifixes, wall inscriptions, monuments, etc.) with a certain detachment, as if to allow the objects to speak for themselves. To approach the question of religiosity, Magno took long walks in a process of introspection that evolved (and transformed him) as he went deeper. He explains that "at first, the concept of the work was focused on religiosity. But I think it goes beyond that, towards the idea of seeking a path, like a pilgrimage" (Daniel 2021). Coming from a family of evangelical beliefs – a religion from which he distanced himself over the years – Daniel sought to convey not moral values or virtues, but a certain spiritual sensibility through his photographs.

To avoid any incompatibility between religious beliefs and the production of meaning through practices with images of all kinds, a decentralized, dialogical, and relational analysis of visual cultures in relation to each other should be sought. Something similar to what Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (1998) propose with the term "polycentric aesthetics". By considering the hybrid nature of every culture, knowledge and experience will coexist and feed off each other in a logic of co-implication:

Within a polycentric approach the world has many dynamic locations, many possible vantage points. (...) It is not a matter of 'extending the corpus' or 'opening up the canon' in an additive approach, but rather of rethinking the global relationalities of artistic production and reception. For us, art is born *between* individuals and communities and cultures in the process of dialogic interaction (Shohat and Stam 1998, 46).

Shohat and Stam analyze examples of polycentric aesthetics in cultural productions of the global South, particularly in Brazil. These have used the allegorical meanings of conceptions such as cannibalism, carnival, and the appropriation of discarded materials or waste to configure themselves as aesthetic movements. These artistic protocols serve as an

alternative model for analyzing visual culture in a polycentric way. References to knowledge from African-origin religions are frequent in these movements. According to Shohat and Stam (1998), artistic practices may correlate with African ancestral religiosity through shared notions such as ritualization and mythology.

The arts – costume, dance, poetry, music – create the appropriate atmosphere for worship. The arts also inform cosmogony and theology. (The figure of Olodumare, as creator of the universe, can be seen as the greatest artist, and many of the spirits (*orixás*) are not only artists (...) but they also have artistic tastes. (...) As poetic figures, the *orixás* now play an artistic role in Africa and the diaspora akin to the role of the classical deities of the Greek pantheon within literature, painting, and sculpture (Ella Shohat and Robert Stam 1998, 33).

Therefore, within the scope of a pedagogical process, this perspective can favor the production of transformative knowledge that is not dogmatic. In terms of educational initiatives, it is above all a willingness to transfigure art-making into a form of ritual, rather than trying to transmit spiritual values through art. This may relate to the notion of a poetic approach towards the arts, as suggested by Roberto Juarroz's assertion that, in the contemporary world, poetry is the only possibility left for human beings to replace religion (Juarroz 2021, 43). In this way, participants can create images through this ritualization of their own making, allowing for greater autonomy in relation to the external elements that influence the production of visual knowledge, such as personal beliefs, discourses, institutions, the image industry, and the artistic milieu itself.

Among the various external elements that impact on the production of meaning through photographic making, the image industry can have a preeminent influence on the way practitioners conceptualize their practices. By the image industry we mean the entire contemporary circulation of images through various media: press or institutional photography, advertising pieces, visual archives, videos, films, series, television broadcast content, and of course, the images we consume daily on the Internet. In the residency's pedagogical line, there is a distinction between these images and those made with an artistic intent through photography. In general, it is argued that the image industry and its categories can 'contaminate' the creative process, leading participants to reproduce styles and formats that are not the most appropriate for the artistic project. During the photographic process, however, these modalities tend to mix and affect the production of knowledge.

The example that best illustrates this situation in the residency is that of Cleudir Rocha from Cabo Verde. He chose to address the issue of gender-based violence against women in Cabo Verde. The inspiration came from a friend of Cleudir's who wrote a song on the subject, based on the story of her own mother, who was a victim of this type of violence at home. To produce the project, Cleudir organized photo shoots with a friend who acted as a model. Before the sessions, he carefully prepared the images using a *storyboard* that guided the sequence of a visual narrative. The sequence of images starts with the beginning of an affective relationship and ends when it becomes abusive and violent.

The first resulting images are almost literal representations of the story that Cleudir tells when commenting on them during a presentation session of the participants' work. In these reenactments, two women play the role of victims of conjugal violence. To convey this condition, they are made up to simulate the bruises from the assaults. In close-ups, tears run down their faces. Roses and a wedding ring are two elements that recur in the photographs, interspersed with images of women crouched in dark corners of a room or being gagged by a male hand. In these photos, the formal aspect of the aesthetic is excessive, almost suffocating. This is supported by a certain technical mastery that Cleudir exercises with skill in the use of an artificial light source, in his cinematic frames, in the direction of the models, and in the post-production of the images. His aesthetic is very close to the language of advertising, not only because of the excessive production of the images, but also because of the linearity of the narrative they convey. As in an advertising campaign illustrated by photographs, the message is easily conveyed.

During the discussion sessions, the presentation of the first images of Cleudir's project aroused many reactions from the tutors and the other residents. Akinbode comments that this story is much more complex than the content shown in the images. To convey this degree of complexity, Akinbode comments that in this type of project "less is often more". Indeed, the displacement of such 'advertising' visual language in the residency is obvious, since Cleudir's intention is not to sell a product. But the most problematic point, according to Akinbode, is that this kind of image can function as a way of perpetuating or apologizing for the aggressor's violence.

Cleudir was 22 years old during the residency and the youngest of the Catchupa Factory 2021 participants. With a degree in journalism and multimedia, Cleudir works as a graphic designer, photographer, and video-maker in various audiovisual productions. One of his

special interests is the aesthetics of music videos, especially those of hip-hop artists. It is evident that his method of conceptualizing and producing images is based on a mastery of technique and a functional perspective of the use of photography. The question for the residency tutors was how to encourage him to have a more poetic and less instrumental relationship with photographic practice. This posed a pedagogical challenge in that it required not only a different ‘photographic making’, but also *a photographic thinking*, so that he could subjectively deepen his relationship with the subject. In other words, he had to emancipate himself from certain visual categories in order to achieve truly transformative knowledge through practice.

Following the development of his work, Akinbode urged Cleudir to look for “an internal reason” for making the images: “we need to see more of you or your intentions in the images”, he explained. Eustáquio advised him to research and read texts on the subject of gender violence. Diogo commented that in projects of this kind, women should not be shown as victims. He says that “this kind of image normalizes the situation of violence. The images place the issue in a ‘non-disputable’ place, where women continue to be the victims and men the aggressors”. At the time, I commented that another problem with Cleudir’s approach was the presence of a certain voyeurism of violence, that is, an attraction to the representation of violence in contemporary visibility, the main source of which is found in film and television productions.



Figure 24. Cleudir Rocha, *VBG* (2021). Series, digital photography.

Among the theories that investigate emancipation through decolonial (pedagogical) processes, one line suggests that the process of learning involves unlearning certain concepts. One of the consequences of this proposal is the relativization of the concepts of knowledge and ignorance. According to Boaventura Sousa Santos, “all ignorance is ignorant of a certain kind of knowledge, and all knowledge is the overcoming of a particular ignorance” (Santos 2016, 189). Therefore, acquiring certain knowledge may involve the unlearning of previously assimilated information. This implies that ignorance is not always the starting point of the pedagogical process. On the contrary, achieving it can be the goal of learning.

Walter D. Mignolo (2011a) also sees the process of forgetting what has been learnt in order to learn again. He explains that the decolonization of Western aesthetics means realizing that art does not refer exclusively to the category of representation, as we have been taught in school. Unlearning this aesthetic category is equivalent to making the invisible visible by creating artifacts that are not co-opted and weakened by the concept of representation. However, the question of *unlearning* can go much further, as Ariella Azoulay argues in her book *Potential History – Unlearning Imperialism* (2019). For the author, it is necessary to unlearn the entire imperialist structure responsible for a racist and oppressive visual regime:

Imperialism lures us into accepting as given and irreversible its structures of violence and injustice, structures that are built on racial divisions. These divisions determine how people appear in the world, how they are identified and recognized, what they are allowed to be, do and have, the type of treatment to which they will be exposed (...). These divisions are inscribed in the technologies that we are using and operating, so rejecting them requires a proactive commitment to unlearning (Azoulay 2020, Correspondencias – Photography on Strike, Letter 2).

Returning to the pedagogical discussion surrounding Cleudir’s *photographic poiesis*, we came to the conclusion that it was necessary to unlearn certain imagetic categories and rethink the concept of representation in order to address the narratives of women victims of domestic violence. This required finding a photographic language that could convey Cleudir’s subjective experience of gender violence in a less referential and more poetic way. In other words, instead of using photography to certify reality as a self-evident and irreversible entity, it was necessary to *think photographically* in order to question it and, thereby, produce transformative knowledge through the production of images.

Over the course of the residency, Cleudir produced new images and presented a new edition of his series in the last working session. In the series entitled “GBV” [Gender-Based Violence], the new edition is no less directly related to the unmediated visual experience of gender violence. Some images, however, are more symbolic and evocative of the experience rather than attempting to represent it mimetically. Thus, the element of the ring disappears in the series as new ones appear. A ‘still life’ depicting a dried flower bud, a ruined window covered with boards and bricks, details of dried leaves and rusty nails scattered on the ground are interspersed with the previous images of women playing the role of victims of marital aggression. If the photograph of a rose filling the foreground, held by a woman who (un)appears out of focus, lying on the ground with her eyes closed still, seems stereotypical (figure 24), other images – such as that of a hand holding an unidentifiable object made of rusty metal wires¹⁴², but which nevertheless suggests a whipping instrument – come to disturb the linearity of the sequence. This particular image is related to that of the rusty nails due to the metallic material. The rusty nails image (figure 25), in turn, have a chromatic relationship to the photograph of the window because of the similar color palette. Moreover, some very denotative photographs – like the one of the man’s hand gagging a woman – were eliminated from the final selection.



Figure 25. Cleudir Rocha, *VBG* (2021). Series, digital photography.

¹⁴² Refer to the second photograph from left to right in figure 22 of chapter four.

While the images resulting from the work of other participants remained relatively in line with the residency's pedagogical line, we consider it more relevant to analyze the more controversial cases, such as those of Janeth and Cleudir. This choice is justified by the fact that they posed greater challenges to the educational approach of the residency and to the tutors who coordinated it. In these cases, learning through art can be even more transformative on an individual level. The point here, however, is not to quantify the degree of transformation of each participant. What interested us in these examples was to understand how the cultural denominator constantly confuses artistic categories, even when they start from a decolonial intention. Often, the production of meaning through photographic practices takes place through an impure hybridism that can mix religious values and visual references from advertising or video clips with political discourses and artistic concepts. Such 'interferences' are a challenge for emancipatory artistic education initiatives, forcing them to reflect on the issue of inclusion and access to knowledge production through practices with images.

5.6. PHOTOGRAPHIC POIESIS AS A VISUAL LITERACY TOOL: TOWARDS A TRANSFORMATIVE KNOWLEDGE

In this chapter, we attempt to converge some reflections on the production of meaning through artistic photographic practices by proposing an operational concept within the discipline of visual literacy. Thus, the notion of *photographic poiesis* was developed in order to provide a broader cognitive autonomy to the image producer in the translation of reality as a form of knowledge production. In addition, *photographic poiesis*, as an instrument of emancipation, seeks to achieve knowledge that is transformative on an individual and collective level. In order to be transformative, however, both levels must be in dialogue. The first step was to recognize the importance of (and how to operate) the *decolonization* of the concepts of aesthetics and poetics and, at the same time, recover the concepts of aesthesis and poiesis. In this sense, we have moved away from an established system that controls sensibilities toward a way of feeling and making that claims to be intersubjective and multisensorial.

Based on these creative ways of making, it is possible to envision photographic practices and languages that integrate different cultural contexts in a broader perspective of their

affective meanings. Because they are intersubjective practices, they claim the “place of each person’s encounter with themselves and with others” (Fiori 2013, 7). But in concrete terms, is this possible? We believe it is. By transposing Paulo Freire’s method of verbal literacy as a strategy for visual literacy, we seek to answer the central question of this research: how can photographic practices generate an engaged awareness of the world and of the self as a cultural subject? In Paulo Freire’s method, this happens when the ability to capture and understand the world ceases to be a static activity and becomes procedural, as a constant transformation of reality (Freire 2013, 81). As a result, thinking about oneself and the world occurs simultaneously, without dichotomizing this thinking in the (photographic) making.

Thus, *photographic poiesis*, as a visual literacy, has the potential to produce knowledge that we believe to be transformative. The transformative character (called emancipatory by Freire) is configured when knowledge is understood, first and foremost, as a quest (ibid., 65) that entails an “intentional consciousness” in relation to the world (ibid., 76). In our idea of transformative knowledge, there is a relationship between a way of thinking photographically and educational practices that facilitate this autonomous and critical thinking. Therefore, we view the pedagogical aspect of *photographic poiesis* as a strategy for visual literacy. According to Hortin (1983), visual literacy represents “the ability to understand (read) and use (write) images to think and learn in terms of images, i.e. to think visually” (ibid., 99). Thus, because it involves problem solving and critical thinking through the production and perception of images (Bamford 2003), visual literacy is also a pedagogical strategy that can be employed not only in artistic practices, but in different areas of learning.

Still in terms of pedagogical potential, we analyzed how an artistic residency for emerging photographer-artists from the PALOP can function as an institutional space aimed at producing transformative knowledge. This capacity concerns a reformulation of the conception and scope of learning structures. Irit Rogoff (2010) proposes two operational concepts to explain this reconfiguration, which are appropriate to the Catchupa Factory experience. In asserting the importance of learning that takes place in situations and places that are not originally intended for it, she uses the concept of potentiality as a possibility of action that depends more on a will or an impulse than on a specific skill that can be taught. Furthermore, any potential for action must include the possibility of failure. As in the case of Janeth and Cleudir, failure is not what didn’t happen, but what escaped the scope of the

previously established pedagogical framework. Fallibility drives the artistic-educational initiative to constantly restructure itself through inclusive dialogues and exchanges between participants and educators.

The need to include heterogeneity in artistic-educational dialogues leads to the second related concept: actualization. This refers to the fact that we are all part of “a complex system of embeddedness in which social processes, bodies of learning, individual subjectivities cannot be separated and distinguished from one another” (Rogoff 2010, 37). Actualization points to a paradigm shift that can guide artistic education initiatives (in residencies, cultural or artist-run spaces) and artistic practice itself by expanding the places that host these activities. Consequently, this expansion implies a greater interdependence between teaching and learning, which ultimately merges the two in the artistic process.

The practice of South African artist and writer Thuli Gamedze (1992-) points in this direction. In her reflections, she considers that artistic images are a symptom of this system of embeddedness to which Rogoff refers. Therefore, “when we engage with images, we are engaging with the status quo of society, and in this sense, we might think around art practice as a catalyst for the mixture of all disciplines and knowledges” (Gamedze 2015). According to Gamedze, this implies relating to artistic images outside the art institution and “engaging with the images that actually affect us all” (ibid.). The porosity between social, cultural, and artistic layers will have an impact on the visual regime, as “the gazer and the object of the gaze become far less distinguishable when we understand ourselves as creative beings, as thinkers and makers, and as respondents to creativity itself” (ibid.). In terms of art-making, she argues that the spaces of art-education and collective learning are probably the most relevant for the performance of the politically engaged artist. Thus, in the panorama of contemporary art, the greatest contribution of an artistic practice that claims to be political would be to promote exchanges and dialogues in an educational space.

Lastly, the experience of photographic production at Catchupa Factory indicates that these positions on the simultaneously pedagogical and transformative potential of visual literacy revolve around a photographic poiesis. By blurring the boundaries between affective experiences with images and artistic practice, photographic poiesis seeks to have a real impact on the construction of reality through an artistic *making* and the production of objects that are motivated by *acting in the world*.

Acting and *making* work together in the production of transformative knowledge. If acting (praxis) underpins emancipatory education through its intention to ‘act’, that is, to transform the world, making (poiesis) operates at an even deeper level. While praxis allows us to achieve a “knowledge of reality” (Freire 2013, 56-57), making allows us to create a reality. According to Ivan Illich, acting is not a form of making, nor is making the true acting. “Making always has an end distinct from itself, acting does not; for the good act is itself its end. Perfection in making is art, perfection in acting is virtue” (Illich 2018, 83). Photographic poiesis thus enables transformative knowledge, since its two principles – creation and emancipation – are put into practice together. In other words, they materialize in images something that goes beyond the representational field: a will to transform that is found in the very experience of making.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this thesis, we have sought to build a dialogue between experience and meaning across the artistic and cultural practices involved in the production of photographs. This dialogue represents an attempt to perceive the construction of knowledge through the visual, as a localized and contingent action shaped by the specificity of an artistic residency held in Cabo Verde for photographer-artists of African origin. To restore the experience and approach what T.S. Eliot (1981, 220) calls the meaning “beyond any meaning” in the experience not “of one life only but of many generations”, it was necessary to focus on poiesis as a capacity available to all, one that goes beyond aesthetic distinctions and points to the way in which reality can be signified through the “passage from the non-being to the presence” (Zambrano Unda 2019, 44).

Doing so involves developing an affective awareness of image production. Put another way, it requires a disposition to assimilate *the experience of the experience*. Such tautology is authorized by poetry and can be defined as an activity in which making and thinking become indistinguishable. It is not by chance that we resort to poetic and literary references, as these paradoxically allow for an affective distancing from the meaning of the images. By moving in this direction, the visibility of language is placed on the same level as the visibility of images. Such ‘distanced approximation’ comes to the fore when the act of reading images means decomposing and interpreting such images in a way that “dissociate them from ‘linguistic clichés’ that they evoke as ‘visual clichés’” (Didi-Huberman 2009, 36). Consequently, by directing the focus to the ways of making – that is, in the site of image production itself – the action of ‘writing’ images reveals certain “elective affinities” (Navas 2017) with the cognitive process of writing a text.

However, if words and images build bridges in the process of signification through photographic experiences, such a process does not rely on a symbolic unity or “an illusion projected by the hope of a master theory” (Mitchell 2000, 17). Unlike aesthetics, art history and semiotics, the study of visual culture is grounded in an ambiguous relationship between the visual and the other senses; it is, in effect, primarily concerned with a mode of cultural expression and human communication. According to W.J.T. Mitchell, this paradigm is as fundamental and extensive as verbal language but cannot be reduced to or explained by the

linguistic system (Mitchell 1995, 543). Such a premise calls for a collaborative relationship with the research subject, seeking the most relevant theories and approaches in its particularities.

Given this non-systematic relationship to visuality, it was necessary to critically analyze the research subject through the singularity of its discursive potential. This could not be done using a totalizing or self-sufficient theoretical approach; instead, and in order to select the theories best suited to its analysis, an interdisciplinary perspective was required. Cultural studies, primarily through the way they convey representative and symbolic values, provided the theoretical substrate to approach photography beyond the distinctive categories of art history and aesthetics. However, the metacultural perspective is not limited to the idea of representation. Owing to the 'social' and 'mental' dimensions of culture, it was necessary to extend cultural analysis to other modes of meaning-making that concern the ways in which socio-political and affective constructions are expressed through the production of photographs.

In this sense, postcolonial studies and decolonial practices offer the conceptual and methodological basis for translating manifestations that reach the realm of the non-visible within photographic practices. Above all, it entails analyzing artistic creation as a form of non-hegemonic knowledge production capable of invoking cultural constructions based on notions of resistance, fluid identities, and non-linear temporalities. Furthermore, by merging categories of social experience and imagination with non-Western cosmologies, artistic practices also address the pedagogical field by developing strategies for non-formal education¹⁴³.

In investigating how contemporary photographic practices can produce knowledge, it becomes clear that the notion of knowledge must be approached in a way that is coherent with the object. However, the term 'object' should itself be questioned, as it perpetuates a notion of knowledge based on a subject-object relationship in which the subject holds reason, and the object is something epistemologically separate and external to be studied (Quijano 2007). As a consequence, one is called on to explore the collaborative nature of knowledge: a faculty that can be cultivated, shared, absorbed, and applied.

¹⁴³ According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, non-formal education is an addition or complement to formal education within the process of lifelong learning. It includes projects and initiatives that contribute to adult and youth literacy, as well as programs on life skills, work skills, and social or cultural development (UNESCO, 2012).

Nevertheless, defining a conceptual and historical framework for discussing image production in the African context is unavoidable. In tackling this issue, we have proposed a definition of “African photography” that takes into account not only its aesthetic and conceptual peculiarities, but also the geopolitical forces that have shaped it. A critical and historical reading of the uses of photography on the African continent reveals how colonial photography was imposed as a tool of oppression and territorial domination, and was used to control bodies and minds. At the same time, procedures and positions have arisen in opposition to these initial applications of photography in Africa. An analysis of the formal and conceptual strategies of practitioners and contemporary artists shows that African photography has successfully appropriated the medium to produce its own symbolic and aesthetic forms related to the cultural reality of the continent.

The focus on photography’s cultural potential to extract meaning from symbolic and social experiences reveals the importance of procedures using pre-existing images produced in Africa during the colonial period. In this sense, the recovery, reinterpretation, and subversion of colonial photographs emerge as a primary strategy for knowledge production. By exploring these pre-existing images in the present, artists reveal silenced narratives and re-signify the past in the present. In this context, the recovery of visual archives involves both the exploration of “postmemories” (Hirsch 2012) and a speculative disposition through the construction of fictional narratives with these visual documents.

The appropriation of photography in the African context also involves its modern and contemporary production, understood as a communicative practice articulated with local cultural experiences. These images reclaim what Olu Oguibe (1996) refers to as the “phenomenology of the non-mimetic”. This implies that the primary purpose of creating a photographic image is not to testify to a given reality, but rather to serve a cultural purpose. With regard to what we define as African photography, the need to communicate and convey a cultural experience is related to another fundamental aspect, namely the pursuit of an individual identity that is interdependent with a cultural identity. Both realms of identity are interchangeable and fluid, as evidenced by the portrait studio practices that have proliferated in West Africa since the 1950s onward. However, such practices do not reflect a single African identity but rather a diverse range of meanings that extend beyond the continent’s geography.

The notions surrounding African photography are therefore related less to the medium or a geographical delimitation, and more to how the visuality constructed through photography translates the social sphere. By using the medium on the basis of its socio-cultural and symbolic functions, African photography undermines the classificatory uses and referential authority originally attributed to photography. Such visual autonomy was only achieved through a process of “cultural anthropophagy”¹⁴⁴, in which, beyond technology, other aspects of Western culture – such as music, fashion, and urban lifestyles – were ‘devoured’, ‘digested’, and ‘regurgitated’ as something new. Ultimately, African photography defines itself as a delocalized and borderless space of cultural production that incorporates images, concepts, and narratives produced by Afro-descendants and by diasporic subjectivities scattered around the world.

In considering the contemporary photographic production of the artistic residency “Catchupa Factory – Novos Fotógrafos” through a complementary approach that reflects the affinities and frictions between verbal and visual fields in the creation of meaning within images, one can examine the photographic processes that underlie contemporary African photography and how they are structured around specific ways of making. Beyond the technological implications that determine ways of looking, it is clear that photographic practices – when affectively related to a specific socio-cultural context – informs the production of meaning. This implies that individual practices may resist standardized processes. In this sense, while the processes are based on a certain rigidity (e.g. photographic genres or styles, visual mass media, visual clichés), the practices offer the producers more autonomy in shaping meanings.

A meticulous analysis of the residency participants’ creative protocols demonstrates that photographic practices involve associating mental imagery with a representational intent. In testing the hypothesis that the effectiveness of a photograph in conveying knowledge depends on an adequacy between this representational intention (supported by mental images) and the resulting image (the photograph), it was found that this relationship of correspondence extends beyond simply transposing formal attributes from a mental image to a photograph – for intentions are filled with sensory experiences, emotions and concepts, and require a visual translation. Thus, it is within the affective relationship to image

¹⁴⁴ About the “Antropophagy movement” in the context of Brazil’s cultural and artistic modernity see Ronilk (1998) and Shohat and Stam (1998).

production practices that one must seek to unravel meanings that extend beyond the visible realm. This implies that the context for the (re)production of mental images – such as dreams, desires, aspirations, and memories – relies on an affective space where volition and representation merge.

By focusing on the intentions and correspondences embedded in the affective practices involved in photographic production, the subjective perspective of the image producer assumes a position in the foreground. This perspective becomes evident when participants connect personal emotions with conceptual thinking through artistic protocols or translate multisensory perceptions into images. In this way, the affective relationship that photographers establish with the production of images can be grasped in their work. Such affective representations involve a set of rooted intentions that oscillate between a descriptive (or mimetic) purpose and a desire to convey symbolic meanings. These aspirations point to broad ambitions that allow individuals to become aware of themselves as cultural subjects and to engage with the social realm. Given that praxis (the intention to act) inherently carries the potential for poiesis (creative action), one can identify the tactics that enable the photographic translation of such symbolic and affective perceptions.

A second complementary approach for exploring the interdependence of the verbal and visual domains concerns the discourses that visual languages convey within the context of African photography. Having seen how practices resist processes through specific tactics, one can examine how visual languages negotiate (and transmit) decolonial discourses. Discourses generate meanings through the use of both verbal and non-verbal languages. Stuart Hall (1997), building on this interrelationship, showed how reality is discursively constructed, and the consequences of such an approach in framing the field of Postcolonialism. Understanding the potential of discourses to construct worlds means exploring the metaphors of language and how they create visualities. This is justified because metaphors reveal more than the words they contain. The metaphor transcends the arbitrary system of textual signs and at the same time depends on it for its existence. Applying this understanding to visual languages developed through photography, one can see that the process of image-making is grounded in visual intertextuality.

While the Portuguese language served as a common means of communication among PALOP photographers during the residency to verbally translate the visual, it did not however guarantee a uniform visual language; instead, what emerged were distinct visual

approaches that point to cultural discourses with their specificities, convergences, divergences, and frictions. It is true that PALOP photographers share the common ground of a Portuguese language that was imposed in these regions of the African continent, but the primary element of convergence among them is the legacy of colonialism.

Contemporary art provides fertile ground for the study of the discourses that permeate artistic practices. The institutional and historical configuration of the field has inspired a great deal of scholarship that reveals the sometimes hegemonic, sometimes counter-hegemonic nature of the discourses produced within the field. A review of the current literature on contemporary Afro-lusophone art production shows that the paradigm of coloniality and the valorization of non-Western epistemologies constitute the substrate for the emergence of various decolonial discourses in artist groups as diverse as those associated with the PALOP¹⁴⁵.

Similarly, far more than formal aspects, the artistic production in the Catchupa Factory residency shares discursive elements. However, it is important to consider how these discourses manifest themselves in the visual languages of the participants. Although there is no common visual grammar, there are shared spaces of articulation where meanings are conveyed through the unrepresentable and the unsayable (Bhabha, 1994). In this regard, two primary spaces of articulation can be distinguished. The first is located in the interplay between identity and identification; the second manifests itself in the interplay between aesthetics and politics in the fictionalization of the real. Through these articulation spaces, visual languages manage to transcend the visible, reach a political sensibility, and reveal borderless geographies and multifaceted identities.

Thus, the interdependence between ‘making’ and ‘thinking’ that arises from the articulation between photographic processes and practices on the one hand, and visual languages and postcolonial discourses on the other, exposes the nature of cultural production as simultaneously subjective and social. While the processes of photographic production lay bare the discourses they carry, revealing the layers of social and political knowledge embedded in the images, locale-specific practices and individual visual languages are combined to produce a cultural knowledge that addresses the internal dimension of culture, that is, the ways in which individuals give meaning to their existence in the world by forging

¹⁴⁵ Notable among these discourses are the diasporic condition, Afropolitanism, Afrofuturism, and decolonial intersectional feminism. Each of these discourses has a distinct approach and is not uniformly represented in current artistic production.

their cultural identity. This Intersubjectivity paves the way for reconsidering the duality of photography as an expressive or informative medium, conceiving it instead as a form of communication that, in addition to being critical and aesthetic, can also be cognitive and imaginative. This means that to democratize the use of photography as a communicative tool, its cultural purpose must be able to manifest itself autonomously. It is not enough to convey postcolonial discourses and decolonial practices if the creative energy of the inception is dissipated through the process of image construction and reaches the audience in a diluted form.

The manifestation of 'autonomy' in the act of creation is not solely limited to the visible; it requires an affective approach to images as well. Art as a socio-cultural action is therefore present in affective interventions, when artists work as artisans of sensitivities to bring forth what is absent. Their function is to communicate through sensitivities, using visual languages. These languages never reveal everything at first glance but must be translated, modestly inviting the viewer to actively participate in this process of interpretation. At this point, teaching and learning become indistinct in the way that meaning restores experiences. Moreover, such a paradigm invites a renewal of the oracular function of visual narratives, which involves approaching cultural-artistic practices as a collective ritual.

Accordingly, in examining the function of art from a cultural-cognitive perspective, we focus on how it contributes to the production of knowledge as a social and transformative process. In this sense, the concept of visual narrative is crucial, as it encompasses visual and verbal aspects within the same object, maintaining the reciprocal relationship between both fields while also expanding the scope of the investigation to other disciplines such as curatorial studies and narratology. Thus, by proposing the term *visual-cultural narratives*, we allow for a broader cultural understanding of the stories evoked by the corpus of images produced by the participants of Catchupa Factory 2021.

Narrative is a mental process, not only because it requires a logical understanding of a sequence of events, but above all because it evokes mental images of these events that merge with subjective experiences. The images thus evoked prove that narrative does not manifest itself exclusively in a logical-verbal way. Furthermore, the construction of social reality as a narrative does not occur through isolated images. Instead, it is the constellations of images that reveal different aspects of reality and invite us to connect them. Through this exercise of connection, the experience of reality becomes more tangible. The establishment of

relationships between images can be reached through an imaginative disposition that seeks a cultural narrative in the mental images evoked by a series of photographs. For this reason, it is appropriate to organize the set participants' images through a curatorial process we call *imaginative montage*.

In an imaginative montage, the narrative emerges when the organizer's intentions for the images are attuned with the viewer's ability to draw connections between them. Both the organizer's intention to make sense of a heterogeneous set of images and the viewer's disposition to make relationships within that set depend fundamentally on the imaginative exercise. Thus, an imaginative montage aims to make sense of a heterogeneous visual corpus and is a curatorial strategy for deciphering unforeseen relationships between images. This method allows for connecting the micronarratives evoked by each participant's work to outline a more comprehensive cultural narrative. In addition, the method explores the pedagogical nature of the visual arts, as learning through images requires an imaginative effort to see beyond what the images represent.

Such curatorial intervention in the images from the Catchupa Factory unveiled a series of micronarratives that appropriate the context of the island of São Vicente and the city of Mindelo, allowing them to traverse heterogeneous temporalities and an expanded geography. In terms of temporality, there is a noticeable trend toward reinterpreting the past and speculating about the future. This implies that past and future are intertwined in the present, articulating a non-linear temporality. Moreover, the speculative experiences with the future act as an extension of the present in a way that disrupts the immobility of things. This represents the potential to empower a transformative future through interventions in the imbalances of the present. With regard to spatiality, participants from other African countries transcended the geographical space of the island of São Vicente by resetting their aesthetic and political concerns through cultural connections to this territory. This brought to light common issues stemming from the legacy of the colonial period, which are still present today. Thus, despite the cultural differences between African regions, narratives of coloniality flow seamlessly between Mindelo, Maputo, Luanda, and Bissau.

These visual-cultural narratives address aspects shared by different cultures, offering non-hegemonic narrative models. They attest to a way of engaging with the world that is grounded in its own autonomous foundations. This singular mode of constructing reality, however, does not imply the erasure of cultural differences; rather, it highlights a form of

cultural production that is located outside the Eurocentric standard. The corpus of images from the residency participants provides a narrative that explores the recurrence of a state of immobility that challenges the ability of individuals to define themselves as cultural subjects. Often this immobility is rooted in structural and social precariousness. Yet the same narrative also carries a connotation of resistance or creative resilience.

By opening space for non-Western epistemologies and cosmologies, curatorial activity allows for a renewal of categories of knowledge production through visual narratives. They encompass languages, expressions, conceptions of time-space, and a set of embodied knowledges that respond to the social and symbolic function of cultural narratives. Consequently, they enable a curatorial architecture in which images evoke narratives that are not exclusively tied to the indexical quality of images, but rather include the affective relationship established during the practices of image-making. Thus, visual-cultural narratives have the dual function of making sense of subjective experience and revealing cultural and local aspects that permeate the production of photographic images. Considered in its cognitive potential, narrative, regardless of its media nature, functions as a mental process that helps us interpret the world and also empowers people to construct their own individual histories. These simultaneous and compatible capacities are essential to answering the question: how do photographic practices promote an engaged awareness of the world and of the self as a cultural subject? The answer lies in the capacity of these practices to create transformative knowledge.

From a critical perspective on the production of knowledge in the visual field that seeks to decolonize Western epistemological constructions, knowledge is approached as a social practice with concrete effects on reality. With regard to photography, such a perspective means not only representing reality, but above all translating and putting into dialogue different perceptions of reality. In this sense, it is claimed that *think photographically* is a visual literacy strategy because it allows one to think through images. But thinking through photographs should not be understood as naturalizing photographic vision as a privileged instance of access to visual knowledge. On the contrary, it means, first and foremost, being aware that the belief in an objective and direct access to reality through photography is an illusion. Thus, the relationship between photographic production and reality is based on an apparent paradox: the more imaginative the photographers' approach to the world around them, the deeper their connection to the real will be.

To advance in this direction, it is necessary to ‘unlearn’ certain ideas related to the representation of reality through art. Specifically, the concepts of *aesthesis* and *poiesis* may serve as a counterpoint to the traditional concepts of aesthetics and poetics. Aesthesis distances itself from the idea of art as a representation of reality. Instead, art is primarily a means of experiencing reality. As for poiesis, the transformative potential of artistic practices is not only related to praxis (that is, a voluntary action directed toward predetermined transformative goals); it also rests on the action of making itself, as an autonomous instance that carries the empowering expectation of becoming. Our research question, “How can photographic practices provide transformative knowledge?” points to a ritualization of the act of making photographs. By combining the creation of worlds and the emancipation of subjects, *making* becomes transformative.

This journey leads us to the notion of *photographic poiesis*, conceived as a tool for visual literacy oriented towards photographic practices. Photographic poiesis involves a *photographic thinking* that implies reaching the non-visual through photographic production. By accessing the realm of the sensory, this visual literacy strategy translates affects, sensations, desires, dreams, multiple temporalities, and speculative geographies through photography. Furthermore, as the action by which a person creates something that did not exist before, poiesis functions as a tool for constructing and interpreting worlds. Therefore, in its cognitive potential, photographic poiesis relies on the imagination to invent new narratives and reinterpret symbolisms that traverse identities. As a pedagogical strategy, photographic poiesis promotes thinking through artistic practices as a tool for self-learning. In other words, it affords a transformative learning that demands an awareness of oneself as a cultural subject. In this pedagogical strategy, teaching and learning occur simultaneously, because knowledge is not owned by anyone and is not transmitted unilaterally. Instead, it is created collaboratively and shared by all those participating in the plurality of the world.

On the basis of our research, we find there is a potential bridge between the curatorial field and the discipline of visual literacy. To achieve this, the curatorial, as a form of knowledge production, should be attentive to the meanings that emerge through the poiesis. This means organizing and intervening in visibility in ways that incorporate the meanings that emerge from the process of image production. Often this layer of signification is attenuated in the perception of visual cultural artifacts as they are co-opted by the cultural and political discourses of the artistic field, which mobilize pre-established categories of

perception. We believe that by facilitating visual literacy through a more balanced negotiation between the act of creation as an autonomous instance (poiesis), its signifying logic (poetics), and the potential for action in the world (praxis), curatorial practices can more effectively convey the affects of images.

Photographic poiesis can therefore be considered an *artless* approach – as in ‘being free of artifice or genuinely unaffected’. Claiming independence from the discourses underlying the photographic medium and the artistic field, it relies instead on the ‘visceral’ experience of images. Photographic poiesis is a valuable tool for visual literacy within contemporary artistic practices and decolonial praxis. But not only. It also promotes curatorial literacy as a shared skill among individuals: it frees the curatorial from its elitist connoisseur status, by valuing non-formal education, personal emancipation and social participation through an affective and multisensory engagement with photography.

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Collective exhibitions

“African Cosmologies: Photography, Time, and the Other.” *In FotoFest Biennial 2020*, curated by Mark Sealy. Collective exhibition. March 8, 2020 to April 19, 2020. Museum of Fine Arts, Houston: Houston.

“Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent”, curated by Simon Njami. Collective Exhibition. June 24, 2004 to November 7, 2004. Museum Kunst Palast: Düsseldorf.

“In/Sight: African Photographers, 1940 to the Present”, curated by Clare Bell, Okwui Enwezor, Danielle Tilkin, and Octavio Zaya. Collective exhibition. May 24, 1996 to September 22, 1996. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum: New York.

“Just My Imagination (Running Away with Me)”, curated by Azu Nwagbogu. Artists: Zanele Muholi and Ayogu Kingsley Ifeanyichukwu. November 25, 2021 to January 29, 2022. Hangar: Lisbon.

“Now that we found freedom, what are we gonna do with it? – Narrative on post-colonial independence and decolonial processes”, artistic director Kiluanji Kia Henda; co-curator Ana Sophie Salazar. Artists: Castiel Vitorino Brasileiro, Clara Ianni, Daniela Ortiz, Hélio Buite, Mussunda N’zombo, Mwana Pwo, Rui Magalhães and Yoel Díaz Vázquez. April 7, 2022 to May 12, 2022. Hangar: Lisbon.

“The mechanics of the ephemeral”, curator Kiluanji Kia Henda, exhibition text Gisela Casimiro. Artists: Flávio Cardoso, Kiluanji Kia Henda, Damara Inglês, Délio Jasse, Rui Magalhães and Sofia Yala. 27 November 2021 to January 15, 2022. Filomena Soares Gallery: Lisbon.

