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FLÂNEUR

NEW URBAN NARRATIVES

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4 **INTRODUCTION: NEW URBAN NARRATIVES OF FLÂNERIE?**
Margarida Brito Alves, Pedro Costa, Giulia Lamoni,
José Luís Saldanha, Ana Isabel Soares, Mirian Tavares

8 **WALK&STOP**
Francesco Careri

RETHINKING THE CITY WALK IN MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY ART

Coordination: Margarida Brito Alves, Giulia Lamoni

16 **THE SHELL AND THE OYSTER: ON MAKING DOMESTIC SPACE PUBLIC**
Margarida Brito Alves, Giulia Lamoni

26 **THE "AESTHETICS OF PEDESTRIANISM" AND THE POLITICS
OF BELONGING IN CONTEMPORARY WOMEN'S ART**
Basia Sliwinska

48 **FEMALE FLÂNERIE, MIGRATION AND AUDIO WALKS**
Johanna Steindorf

64 **FINDING A PURPOSE IN THE ACT OF WANDERING:
THE SCULPTURE OF EVERYDAY LIFE**
Luísa Sanchez Salvador

76 **DEVIATION AND DRIFT: CRITICAL, ARTISTIC
AND CURATORIAL PRATICES IN URBAN CONTEXTS**
Sandra Vieira Jürgens

**CITY, PHOTOGRAPHY AND CINEMA:
THE REPRESENTATIONS OF THE FLÂNEUR IN THE AUDIOVISUAL**

Coordination: Ana Isabel Soares, Mirian Tavares

88 **CITY, PHOTOGRAPHY AND CINEMA:
THE REPRESENTATIONS OF THE FLÂNEUR IN THE AUDIOVISUAL**
Ana Isabel Soares, Mirian Tavares

92 **MEASURING WITH OUR MEMORY, THINKING WITH OUR FEET:
PATRICK GEDDES AND RICHARD SERRA, TWO WORLDVIEWS
WITH WALKING IN THE CENTRE**
João Soares

104 **WALKING IN THE GLOBAL CITY: EDSON CHAGAS' FOUND NOT TAKEN
SERIES AND OTHER WORKS**
Ana Balona de Oliveira

120 **WHEN THE MASSES ENTER HISTORY: PHOTOGRAPHICAL WANDERINGS
WHITIN THE URBAN WEB OF SALVADOR, BAHIA (BR)**
Cláudia Albuquerque de Lima

**TERRITORIES OF THE FLÂNERIE:
EXPERIENCING URBAN PUBLIC SPACES TODAY**

Coordination: Pedro Costa, José Luís Saldanha

138 **THE FLÂNEUR IN HIS TERRITORY(IES):
FROM MODERN TO CONTEMPORARY MILIEUS**
Pedro Costa, José Luís Saldanha, Ricardo Lopes, Nuno Rodrigues

148 **THE TERRITORIES OF FLÂNERIE- THE CURRENT EXPERIENCE
OF THE URBAN PUBLIC SPACES**
Álvaro Domingues

160 **FLÂNER WITH WALTER BENJAMIN'S GHOST IN THE ALTERNATIVE
CULTURAL SPACES OF LISBON**
Leticia Carmo, Yves Pedrazzini

178 **THE INCORPORATION OF THE RAGMAN-COLLECTOR OR ANOTHER
POSSIBILITY OF CONTEMPORANEOUS URBAN SPACE APPROPRIATION**
Ricardo Luís Silva

188 **THE STREET ARTIST- A FLÂNEUR ADRIFTING IN THE CITY**
Teresa Lousa

197 **AUTHORS**

203 **FLÂNEUR, NEW URBAN NARRATIVES - THE PROJECT**

WHEN THE MASSES ENTER HISTORY. PHOTOGRAPHICAL WANDERINGS WITHIN THE URBAN WEB OF SALVADOR, BAHIA (BR)

Cláudia Albuquerque de Lima

In 1932 in Paris, two young sons of bourgeois European families perambulate through trivial places such as the Parisian galleries, by bric-a-brac shop windows, abandoned parks, architectural spaces in danger of abandonment, and they feel sensitive about these urban ruins, as they catch a glimpse of obsolete daily objects — much as the surrealist attitude of photographer Eugene Atget, refusing the official city map and standing for a fulminating criticism against modern triumphalism. In this *flâneur* attitude both have only death as companion. Guided by the tragic spirit that Nietzsche (2011, 21) referred to as “in the world, life cannot satisfy us completely”, they break off as suicidal travellers on a quest for survival that bourgeois Paris no longer fulfilled.

One of them, driven by depression and coercion in his desperate attempt to escape to America, fleeing the Nazis, would fulfil his intentions in 1940 with a lethal dose of morphine on the Pyrenean border between France and Spain. The other, who decided to terminate his life at the age of forty, would fulfil this goal only metaphorically in 1946. Finally terminating his nomadic character and being re-baptized in the *Candomblé* religion, he was reborn with a new name and a new life at Salvador da Bahia, away from the city which had threatened to devour him.

The two would meet, only metaphorically, when the French photographer Pierre Verger came across the texts of the German philosopher Walter Benjamin, which introduced him to the aspirations of Surrealism. This “passage of Benjamin through the Paris of Breton and Aragon was irreversible in Verger’s intellectual path. He set the obsessions of the 1920s in conceptual, complex and of refined intelligence formulations” (Drummond, 2010, 8).

The Salvador that Verger began to show in his images was until then little known to the

great public. The cultural and religious manifestations, the daily life of poor populations, and the decadence of peripheral areas were nothing but folkloric issues debated in books and the media. This led to a breakthrough in the manner of acknowledging the city and its population in which its black and poor majority lived marginalized from a society still marked by an oligarch laden with the culture and the prejudice of the colonial period. The findings and the perspective of Verger, a photographer who “flânned” through the world and found the answers he was looking for in a city dedicated to All Saints, *Orixás* and other creeds, definitely influenced the vision and technics of other photographers awakened to this new world full of life and colours, but mainly pain and grief, and who would make Salvador famous as the capital of Afro-Brazilian culture. The *flâneur*-photographer in Pierre Fatumbi Verger would show the world a way of understanding itself and Bahia the manner of looking into Salvador.

This article deals with these visual narratives, initially created by Pierre Verger, which have influenced the visual way of representing the city of Salvador from the end of the 1940s. This narrative is impregnated in the stills of two major photographic exponents from the Bahia: Mário Cravo Neto and Adenor Gondim. Here we present a sketch of the research towards a doctoral thesis concerning the works of these three wanderer-photographers, which settled an authorial narrative of the capital of Bahia, a reflection that surpasses the new forms of understanding artistic expressions in contemporary time and space.

Initially, we shall develop a synthesis of the main questions regarding the concept of the *flâneur*-photographer, taking as reference Walter Benjamin’s *Theses of Experience and History*, and focusing on the elaboration of a new speech from the point of view of the masses; and Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s notion of Perception, developed in our understanding towards photographic thinking. Therefore, the concerns of the *flâneur*-photographers, and their relation with the topics that interest them are the main aspects we wish to debate, in order to see the behaviours these aspects signify and how they influence the cultural interactions of individuals in contemporaneity.

***Flânerie*: the photographer is a wanderer who gives life to the way of facing the world, its history and thought with his/her camera**

According to Walter Benjamin, experience is the basis of all narrative, as it is part of the process of understanding reality. The meaning of the world stems from the interaction of individuals in a society through mechanisms that coordinate the processes of collective life and struggle. The *flâneur* thus appears inspired in the texts of Baudelaire and as part of Benjamin’s allegorical mind for metaphorically explaining how changes caused by the modernizing rhythm of cities, like Paris at the beginning of the nineteenth century, create or terminate activities and ways of thinking that had built former societies. The *flâneur*, a character born to be extinguished together with the image of the city that will soon disappear, is a messenger who

arrives firstly to observe and then to announce the approaching catastrophe, and not to create roots or connections with the people and spaces where he circulates, and which he cannot turn around to help. Ana Isabel Soares (2003, 82) explains that this solitary attitude, absent of connections to other *flâneurs*, could be understood as the *flâneur* being on the edge or at the stage of transition — from the metropole and the middle class — for it exists beyond social and class conventions, and therefore “searches shelter among the crowd”.

As an uninspired poet, the *flâneur* drinks the fluids of passing strangers so to provide fodder for his existence and, by roaming the streets without destination, as a marginal observer or as a wandering isolated spirit, catalyses the signs of the catastrophic in objects and scenes. For each object behind shop windows, for each unknown face, the *flâneur* mentally formulates a narrative, realizing an optical operation of the city, telling a story of what he thinks he sees. Like a storyteller, he shapes his imaginary characters from what he perceives on the streets, narrating life aspects and creating fictions about observed facts in urban spaces.

Behind each compiled image there is a story imagined by the *flâneur*, which realizes a logical and sequential reflexion of the taken path. His attitude is closer to that of the historian than to that of the tourist because he does not follow guides or itineraries, nor buys or sells, rather he circulates casually among the streets — for at any given moment he could face the essence and singularity of the space that he imaginarily builds or rebuilds. From an intuitive point of view, the *flâneur* only records the actions of others, roaming through the city without a clear purpose. Or else he acts as a neighbourhood vigilante who merely frames scenes, objects, faces, signs in a way of producing his major narrative of tragic announcement over the city which insists on modernization. The attitude of *flânerie* would therefore be a protest against the division of work and a resistance to the predominant industrial system of modernity. In an environment of idleness and vagrancy, the *flâneur* refuses to accept the modern impositions of urban centres, and the impacts that may have on his slow pace and contemplation of the marks left by his predecessors.

“Getting lost” almost always announces an interpretation related to the meaning of a detour (from a predetermined itinerary, from the norm), not necessarily involuntary and not always final. To wander implies an escape from what is established as a path from one point to another. However, the course run in that escape seems to also construct a meaning of its own, a logic, a path to be run. According to Walter Benjamin, to wander in vagrancy requires some learning which only a stroll through the city can provide: it is an art, just like that of the *flâneur*. The indolent wandering through the streets of the city follows a path established by the chance disposition of the appearing corners, by the randomness of conspicuous shop windows or insinuating patios, by the surprise of other passers-by. He is lost and he knows it (Soares, 2003, 84).

Nowadays, the photographer is the figure that best represents the *flâneur* spirit, because “while walking the streets like an active and observative camera, (the *flâneur*) becomes the screen

upon which he projects himself as an observed medium of modernity” (Soares, 2003, 16). The photographer, like the *flâneur*, wanders through cities searching for elements that may compose his visual perception of the world. In photography such composition is built from thematic elements arranged in agreement with the sense of rhythm, forms, shadows and light contrasts, reflexes, colours and lines (that only have visual existence) given by the artist in the moment he conceives and gives birth to its creation.

For Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the perceived presents itself as what it is, for perception characterizes itself as a reunion between subjectivity and things; it is therefore “original knowledge” (1999, 73). Thus, there are things to consider, there is a world in which we live and which shows itself to us in itself. It is in the merging of subjectivity with the world that perception is born. In his existential phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty will never account his work as objective, since upon the rising of the sensitive experience of the world it becomes the transfigurative expression of the data of perception, settling a sensitivity relation of the subject around the object. The previous conceptions, as an example, are limitation factors in the face of reality. In this exact moment, experience surpasses the bonds and challenges of the subject to consider other angles, establishing an opening to differences, to the new, to change, and to social transformation. We can thus note the marks and the style of creative work and of the creator’s creativity, since the work is originated at the meeting point between the artist and the world.

true philosophy means understanding the world once again, and in this sense, a narrated history might mean the world with as much “deepness” as a philosophy treatise. We take our destiny in our own hands, become responsible for reflection, for our history, but also thanks to a decision to which we commit our life, and in both cases it is a violent act that happens when it is committed (Merleau-Ponty, 2004b, 19).

According to Merleau-Ponty (2004a), the world is what we understand; more than simple receptors of light, lines and colours, our eyes are the compilers of this world, which is only possible from an interior gaze, or a “third eye” which sees a new work being born from mental images. Moving in this same direction, Walter Benjamin uses Schlegel’s sentence to build his own concept of subjectivity: “The thought of the I should (...) be seen as the internal light of all thoughts. All thoughts are only dismembered coloured images of this internal light. In every thought the I is the hidden light, in each one we find ourselves” (Benjamin, 1993, 46). In this sense, the photographic camera would become the absolute technique of materialization or exteriorization of these thoughts. And in this unconscious search for thought fragments and memory, the photographer develops a new way of experiencing, of understanding and of viewing the world and the history of the world with his camera, thus constructing a new model of contemporary narrative and an image bank of the history of human thought.

Creating a new history from memory constitution (of the defeated)

In his daring construction or revision of the *Theses of History*, Benjamin — under a Marxist vision — claims the working classes were forgotten in the historical path drawn by historians. Under the author's vision, all elements, documents, objects, but especially people enriched by narrative experiences and traditions, are historical materials and witnesses of the main events and processes of humanity. The event participators, survivors of fields of hard labour, workers and mainly populations who suffered defeats and sadness, misery, oppression — the consequences of revolutions and transformation of civilization throughout the years; these are, according to this Benjaminian vision, the true narrator of life's universal symposium. According to this principle, ideas and history cannot be the sole reflex of the image built by the dominant social class. The speech and the ideological edification imposed by the "elite" cannot overrule the experience and the knowledge of the oppressed classes, which made them mere bystanders and objects of utility and exploitation throughout history. The *flâneur* is a bourgeois who enjoys living alongside the characters that live the true history of mankind: workers, poor, street vendors, drunks, prostitutes, different ethnic and religious groups. While wandering idly through the city he/she once knew, the *flâneur* realizes that by modernizing it the city begins to be part of a trajectory of several entities that lived in the hidden margins of the obscure, degrading landscapes of the miserable Paris that the *flâneur* had had no contact with up until then. As a consequence of this clarifying step, "the *flâneur* starts facing the city phenomena as a sign of a cultural deficit and starts understanding them as such, urban phenomena that constitute an aesthetics of modernity" (Soares, 2003, 107). Standing before him was a new social and cultural context that began to be a part of modern cities, a complex of persons and situations that made the wheel of history spin. Willing to attend to the wish of the population to participate in this new world, the so-called Cultural Industries used their means of mass communication to become moderators of events and to become responsible for history and culture transmission via artificial methods. Believing that media were producing a major revolution in the socialization and democratization knowledge, and that they had begun to reproduce the experience and the cultural rituals of communities, Benjamin observed that such transformations would cause a deep impact in the old ways of relating to and consuming these symbolic goods, and that new narrative proposals would emerge as in the case of cinema and photography.

If one of the economic functions of photography is to feed the masses with certain contents formerly kept from them — springtime, famous individuals, foreign countries — through a fashion-based elaboration, one of its political functions is to renovate the world as it is, from the inside — in other words, according to the criteria of fashion (Benjamin, 1994, 129).

As a consequence, technological advances allowed an "assembly line" production of culture to be born, devoted to a standardization that would be more easily accepted by social groups that

had formerly had access to absolutely nothing. From this context of the circulation of symbolic and cultural assets, the sensitive experiences of individuals suffered crucial changes which altered the means of signification and the sense of aesthesis in their dimension of sensitive perception in the creation or contemplation of an aesthetic object; this would allow the masses not only to get closer to material and symbolic consumer goods and to (bourgeois) arts, but also to assume power over these media and to become part of history. Walter Benjamin identified the *flâneur* character as an angel or a ghost from the past, who mingled among an anonymous and impersonal crowd, wandering in the midst of a metropolis, living the contradictions and uncertainties of modern life. In contemporaneity, the *flâneur*-photographer becomes this wanderer, who needs to identify other people's lives lived on the streets, and on the pavements to feed his narratives; he is not allowed to penetrate the subject's individuality and, therefore, he stays in the distance, awaiting the right moment to live the instant reserved for experience.

As a narrator of instants, the *flâneur*-photographer uses his camera to record the image just about to become the past. Starting from this principle, the photographer Pierre Edouard Leopold Verger (1902-1996) decided to travel the three continents for fifteen years to register the different populations of his era. After reading Jorge Amado's Modernist book *Jubiabá*, he decided in 1946 to establish himself in the city of Salvador da Bahia and inherited from that romance the will to detail the daily life of the popular classes in the city and point out the social injustices and political oppression. Upon arrival, he discovered not only the incomparable beauty of Salvador's natural and architectural landscape, but also the lifestyle, social and ethnic differences that were obvious in the city. "Bahia remained provincial and the rhythm of life was that of habits established in the beginning of the [twentieth] century" (Verger, 2005, 27). Amazed by, while simultaneously aware of, urban phenomena, Verger began to unveil the mask and discover the marginalized neighbourhoods. He registered the social distances between the individuals who circulated in commerce, at the docks, in popular and religious festivities, leaving a vast historical and photographic wealth of Bahian culture. The higher authorities of the *candomblé*, the *Babalorixás*, considered him to be a messenger between two worlds, because he could establish a connection between the sacred and the profane; his images gave voice to the gods of African religions and proclaimed the harmony and respect that their followers needed so much.

Just like Paris at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and other large cities that went along the modernizing process implemented by the bourgeois that were responding to the whims of capitalism, the city of Salvador was prompted to redesign its urban structure. The remodelling originated by the evolution of techniques, the political decisions and the private interests occurred without an adequate planning, or consideration the historical and human heritage, or the necessities of the neediest populations. As a result, the old centre — the focus of most of Verger's shots — was no longer the prime place for the public domination and the interests of the aristocracy whose buildings were left behind in ruins. Part of the poor population occupied a number of abandoned buildings; another part was removed to peripheral areas and

morros where they stayed in precariously self-constructed houses (the *favelas*). As a recorder of these passages of time and changes in space, photography served memory as a guardian of the populations, allowing the visualization of landscape changes and the deterioration of the urban tissue.

The first photographic evidences of Salvador date from the beginning of the daguerreotypes of the nineteenth century, and kept the characteristics of drawings, engravings and watercolours of the Brazilian landscape in which both artists and researchers represented the idea of the other, connected with the Eurocentric and positivist ideologies, marks left by the colonial period (Mendonça, 2008, 137). Just as it happened with the Asian, Pacific and African populations, some of these groups — for instance, black people and Indians — were frequently presented in connection with the idea of the exotic and their polytheistic religions related with a rather strange demonizing aspect present in the speech of Jewish-Christian prayers. By and by, members of the intellectual and artistic vanguards built a narrative of the self-representation of the Brazilian nation as a synthesis of ethnicities, the representations of which assumed new re-significations and gradually lost their awkwardness, *Samba*, *Capoeira* and *Candomblé*, previously refuted and repressed, began to be treated as national symbols. Presenting these spaces, objects and entities as sacred, and their strong nostalgic relation with the divine, as well as the possibility of contemplating them, the modernist artistic production of surrealist inspiration caused the growth in the tropics, specifically in Salvador, of an image of a utopic and mythicized city.

The creation of a new and amazing world full of Gods that depended on nature's manifestation was synchronized with the European Modernist vanguard that followed a movement of return to the primitive origins in the search for a naïve expressivity of the tribal arts. With the intention of producing with originality, the artists in contact with objects and ritualistic elements wanted to revive aspects they thought to have been lost: "intense expressivity, structure clarity and a linear simplicity in technique" (Gombrich, 1999, 563). Salvador worked as an inspirational motif to artists from several countries, which saw in the city the possibility of living an eternal Dionysian and Apollonian celebration — in a true state of dream and drunkenness. By reflecting the thought of resignification of the Greek tragedy, Friedrich Nietzsche evoked the true return to the origins when he realized that the world moved towards a theoretical-scientific universal celebration of serenity, imposed by Alexandrine philosophy with the consolidation of metaphysics, as opposed to the admirable naïveté of ancient Greece.

Greeks, in order to live, impelled by the most imperial necessity, had to create these Gods. How could that nation of such delicate emotions, of such impetuous desires, that nation so well capacitated to suffering have been able to bear existence? Had it not contemplated a radiant glory around their Gods? That is the same instinct that claims the art of life (Nietzsche, 2011, 39).

Without realizing it, while proclaiming themselves as founders of photography and cinema, the French overcame the Greeks while creating the Dionysian/Apollonian art of modernity, which bears in itself the modern tragedy (or better represents the human tragedy), since it makes us forget (or remember) life and death.

The *flâneur*-photographer and the urban poetics of Salvador

From the 1940s with the increasing urban and economic growth, Salvador arises as a constant theme of works from artists like Jorge Amado, Dorival Caymmi, Odorico Tavares, Caribé and Modernist photographers inspired in the photocubs (such as Diomedes Gramacho, Read, Gonçalves Janitzky, Trajano Dias, Jonas Silva, Voltaire Fraga, Anízio Carvalho and others; Fernandes Júnior, 2003), which besides helping to recompose the memoriographic Baiano landscape related to the consolidation of local communities around their colonial past, used their photos to protest against the Modernist reforms. Verger's work stood out through those characteristics that opposed those that had been presented to the world in the ways of representing the other, based upon the functional and evolutionary currents that saw the modern man as an evolution of the primitive man. Corroborating this idea is the photojournalism project *Brides of the bloody Gods*, by José Medeiros and Arlindo Silva for the magazine *O Cruzeiro*, dated 15 September 1951: "This is the work that we now publish, conducted by the two sole Brazilian journalists that have up until now seen the secret practitioners of dark religion professed in Bahia, and that reveals to the civilized world the strange story of the brides of the bloody Gods" (Coster, 2007, 15).

With a wider thematic under the modern (or Modernist) flag of the so called "new photography", Verger registered what the city was about to lose. His main focus, however, was not the physical landscape of the city. His lens turned to the places where the Afro-Brazilian populations were and that posed as places of the events experienced, the festivities and religiosity, such as the town centre, Pelourinho, the Port of Saveiros, the Tororó Dam, fairs, squares, places of the cults of African origin.

The photographs¹ of Pierre Verger display the movement of the population who lived in a sunny and rugged city where elegant passers-by and pure white linen dresses contrasted with hard workers, loaders, longshoremen and fisherman, mostly black people with bare feet and dressed in rags or even semi-naked, carrying on their backs the weight of ethnic and social unfairness, or their own furniture while retreating from a city that expelled them.

A deep and dense picture of its people, their joy, celebrations and beliefs, where the inhabitants of Bahia are always the first character of the drama, satire or farce at different moments of life. The background is the gorgeous Baiano architecture, its churches,

1. Seen on: <http://www.pierreverger.org/br/acervo-foto/fototeca/category/455-salvador.html>.

fortifications, the noble houses of popular neighbourhoods. Its sacred trees that, with their shadow, give strength to the clear water of the Umbanda “quartinhas” and its sea (Caribé, in Verger, 2005, 19).

Busy collecting the visual signs of time’s memory, contemplating the public spaces and the urban routes, this *flâneur* character acts as collector of images, unaware of his role as major world history narrator. Verger said that to him photography was not a cerebral act but a rather intuitive one, mainly without intention, since the photographer is a “pure observer who registered what was there before his eyes” (Verger, in Drummond, 2009, 121). Besides giving voice to the marginalized population, Verger helped Salvador and Bahia to face themselves, to find themselves in the image that would give them an identity, and made other artists give credit to the urban phenomena present in society. With his images, such as the ones he shot years before, of the same ceremony that appeared in the photo-news of José Medeiros, he secured an understanding that religion was the link that still kept them connected to the land of their ancestors, their traditions, which, according to Prandi (1995/96, 79) was a “symbolic Africa, kept alive by the religious life of the inhabitants, as a way of resisting the white world, the world of work, of suffering, of slavery, and of misery”.

Verger’s gaze, which presented angles from the positional perspective of Rolleiflex angle from the waist up (low angle shots), was actually close to the perspective of the gaze of Mário Cravo Neto and Adenor Gondim. The photographs impose a vision of a haughty, virile black population, speaking of themselves with pride and beauty, aware of their role as social founders of a Baiano quality assumed to be of black and mixed blood, thus granting an empowerment they had been excluded from for centuries. The proximity of Cravo Neto and Gondim’s work to Verger’s is crystal clear mainly when it comes to their themes and to the appreciation of and respect for the spiritual rites of the *Candomblé* and its places. Nevertheless, those two artists tried to go beyond the technical and ethnographic to search for a confluence of the artistic, the spiritual and the trivial in a city suffering the problems of modernity and where Catholic saints and African gods coexist. The visual poetics of Mario Cravo Neto and Adenor Gondim amplify the repertoire of signification and subjectivity, since both — differently from Verger, but mainly because of him — had already acknowledged the black man not as “the other”, as the different one, newcomer or foreigner, but instead as themselves, or as a reflection of themselves in the dark waters of the Bahia de Todos os Santos.

In a similar, and at the same time reverse, path to that chosen by Verger, Mário Cravo Neto (1947-2009) was born into a family of aristocrats, amidst the fervent scene of Salvador’s Modernist culture. The proximity of his father, the renowned sculptor Mário Cravo Júnior, and his friends, mainly Pierre Verger himself, constituted the first influences of what would become Cravo Netos’s unique and authorial way of creating what he wanted to express. At an early stage he left for Europe and then North America and other continents, already having a pre-formed idea

of his homeland and his formative elements, to tell the world where he had come from and what his marks in time were. Cravo Neto was a photographer who also helped to build a vision of the Baiano capital, producing a work that expressed the unconscious of the mythical world. In 1964, he began to photograph as a way of plastic expression, strongly influenced by tridimensional sculpture aesthetics, a form of art that had stayed with him since the beginning. Assuming a *flâneur* attitude, his first themes addressed aspects such as human loneliness in big metropolises such as New York, which he related to the thought of Sören Kierkegaard in which “to live is to feel lost”, an idea recorded on his personal webpage: “the creation of an oneiric, utopic, delirious and powerful world that the art universe proposes puts a positive spell on man himself, since the impossible is reached by the absurdity of hope” (Kierkegaard, in Cravo Neto, 2015).

Besides “flanning” through the world like Verger did, Cravo Neto was also initiated into the Afro-Baiano cult, and became *Filho de Santo* and devotee of *Exu*, a messenger deity and interpreter and traveller of all paths, who wanders the world. Publicly expressing the influence of Pierre Verger in his way of exalting the African cult and daily life of the streets of Salvador, he interpreted the origin of the myth and the universe, sharpening his perception of what was more banal in this relation with the city and the connections between the inside and outside world. The strength of his thoughts that he transmitted between the imaginary of the sacred and the profane, of contemporary art and scholarship, from sculpture and photography is presented in images and in his acknowledgments in the book *Laróyé*: “In Bahia we can find what we tenderly have in common and not aggressively what we have different” (Cravo Neto, 2000).

Adopting the technique of image composition in colour and in black and white, and the exacerbated use of shadows and darkness with a closed framing and a critical focus, his images result in sculpture-photographies.

The lucid and evolving vision of Mario Cravo Neto — maybe as a case of a projection of the collective unconscious — might be seen as an unsettling proposal for organizing an outer world, a community beyond the conventional reality, a journey to the depths of the human being. The strength of his humanity, his hallucinating visuality and the fantastic character of his images make us wonder: it would not be the Bahia a utopia? (Wilson Rocha in Cravo Neto, 2015).

Following these *flânerie* paths, the *Baiano* Adenor Gondim left his marks in the identification of a Bahia with the strong presence of popular culture and religious syncretism. Born in Rui Barbosa in 1950, his first steps in photography were as early as 1957 working at his father’s study in the State’s inland. Contrary to the two previously mentioned photographers, he came from the masses for whom photography was a way of life. This helped Gondim incorporate the many historical stages and techniques of photography, from black and white sketching to documentary analogical granular photography until the domination of the digital pixel image. At the beginning of the 1970s, and under the impulse of the awakening of photo-shoots for Reality Magazine, he



Fig. 1 - Adenor Queiroz Gondim, *Alagados*. 1979.
Courtesy of the artist



Fig. 2 - Adenor Queiroz Gondim, *Festa para Iemanjá*. 2015.
Courtesy of the artist

left on his bike, his (Rolleiflex-like) Voloflex camera on hand, to travel through the periphery of Bahia's interior and to photograph the poverty of humble populations. The struggle to leave the focus 3x4 in search of the movement of larger plans, his familiarity with portrait photography, as well as his myopia made him face people in a unique and personal way, and made him conceive of photography as a self-sketch. As he puts it: "everything you do as a photographer is building you, you are now facing your own fragment which was left outside." (Gondim, in Tandler, 2015).

Adenor Gondim has Bahia as his main and only theme in photographic composition. Questioned about this, he answered that it was enough for him, since the scope of the theme and its cultural richness would keep feeding him as he dedicates himself to unveiling the "manner of body and soul of the people of Bahia, their profane and religious celebrations" (Gondim, 2015).

For more than fifteen years he recorded, with enriched details and symbolic compositions, the picture of black women of the Sisterhood *Irmandade da Boa Morte* in Cachoeira, Recôncavo Baiano. Nowadays it is not possible to consider the Sisterhood and other popular Baiano manifestations without bringing to mind the images of Adenor Gondim. In Salvador, he mainly covered religious and popular festivities, displaying the transparent harmony and joy of the people in compositions that connect strength, authority and majesty. His "findings" on the streets are exhibited in his geometrically coloured and contrasting photos, making Salvador one of the most illuminated and happy cities in the world. His other mark is the recording of unexpected scenes (see Fig.1), where children appear in a game of hide-and-seek behind smoke in a degraded environment, with a background showing the city hills. As in an oneiric environment, the face of a young girl

appears at the centre of the photo, as if she were levitating. While transforming daily scenes into art, even if these scream out the differences and the human madness, Gondim dictates his sublime way of watching the world and carries with him the anguish and the doubts of a *flâneur*-photographer:

How often as I travelled through Bahia, in the middle of so many regions, communities of distinct nature, I asked: What am I doing here? Days, months, years after, the answer comes: Look where I came to (...) Again the question arises: What am I doing here? (Gondim, 2015).

Questioning himself about the reasons that got him to *flânerie*, Gondim uses the eyes of the angel of Paul Klee, *Angelus Novus* (1920), as he feels impotent while fighting against the devastating principles of a “development” that will not reach everyone. The recordings of Pierre Verger, Mario Cravo Neto and Adenor Gondim serve as an evidence of time passing and a narrative re-presentation from their vision angles and framings, since they act as attentive bystanders to the subtlety of daily life. The non-changing events occur in the phantasmagorical presence of the photographer, as can be observed in the scene of the girl in a mask at a Salvador carnival². There, an exchange of looks takes place between the photographer/spectator and the young boy leaning against the wall, smiling in his shyness, a witness of the spontaneous situation — just like the woman in the grocery store quietly leaning on the shelves as a sovereign of her own production on Cravo Neto’s picture, and maybe even like the pretentious boy in the right corner by Adenor Gondim.

In the images of Pierre Verger’s masquerade³, and on the other by Cravo Neto⁴ and Gondim (Fig. 2), there are elements that connect these female characters: the scarf on the head, the arm resting on the hips, the black and white contrast of the dresses or of the background, where even the cigarettes are a mere instant away from being consumed, as loneliness or lost companions. Other elements, even more symbolic, will establish the bond between ways of thinking of the photographers, since there is in these photographs a sense of waiting, of the expectation of something happening, a moment, something that cannot be foreseen. Unpretentiously, patiently, or in anguish, they are waiting. They are waiting for a client or a husband who will bring along the money to feed them as well as their family and children, in an almost servile dependence on the subtly evident image of the man (a political candidate?) in the pamphlet on the wall in Verger’s photo — hence the game’s subtleties of hide-and-seek of the sensual figure in a mask standing by a closing door. There is also a rather more subjective waiting, which is the desire for a life change not depending on the women, since in their way of thinking they trust saints

2. <http://www.pierreverger.org/br/acervo-foto/fototeca/category/467-divers.html>.

3. <http://www.pierreverger.org/br/acervo-foto/fototeca/category/467-divers.html>.

4. http://www.cravoneto.com.br/salvador/po/pag_17.html.

and *Orixás* with the responsibility of realizing the dream of a dignified life and the expectation of fulfilling the dreams sent out to the sea. It is the acceptance of a destiny in the hands of a superior spirit in matters of happiness and pleasure and also in cruelty and in pain merging strictly with the concept of “*amor fati*” pointed out by Nietzsche in his absolute acceptance of life and death subject to the forces of nature. For some, this life transformation might be spatially and temporally even farther since it still maintains the latency of the wishes of a possible return to the Africa of their ancestors. To these women time dictates the hours and rules, as it holds the keys to their future and their lives. Apparently the photographer is also dependent on the waiting, as he peeks in with the hope of a signal that indicates the moment of shooting the camera, corresponding to the image of his mental narrative.

Notes towards a possible conclusion

As Walter Benjamin observed, we have lost the power of dialogue with our ancestors. Consequently, we do not dominate questions that tradition and religion used to have the answers to and the function of which was to placate our anguished spirits. But in an attempt to answer some questions that have arisen in this article, we shall develop some considerations:

It would not be Salvador a utopia? Our understanding is that the creation of an oneiric, utopian, delirious, and powerful world that the universe of art proposes to Salvador is unreal and distant from what can be seen on the streets on an ordinary day. Closer to the images seen by the eyes of Klee’s angel than to the one idealized by Thomas More, the Salvador as created by the imagination of *flâneur*-photographers is based on the representation of a city built irrationally, where homes and goods belong to only a few and not all individuals are free or spend their leisure time involved with literature and art.

A society that is erected taking into consideration the interests of only a small part of its population, and of which the social fabric was sewn chaotically with threads of social and ethnic conflicts, cannot live peacefully and harmoniously. Meanwhile, as we are not analysing the photojournalistic, documentary images serving the interests of communication vehicles and social media (these are already present in excess in the drama of those conflicts), the photographers in their perambulations as *flâneurs* are updating the vision of the Baiano city from elements that visually narrate the existing poetics in their perception concerning life and death, faith and myth. In order to do that, they start from their expectations of a transformation in the existing social order which, according to the aesthetic sense and a modernly contradictory thought, grant us the vision of a balanced and happy people floating in the same direction as Nietzsche’s and Kierkegaard’s thoughts while observing that art has the power of positively enchanting man by giving him hope.

Would the photographers, then, have the knowledge and power of visual architects to rebuild cities and cause profound changes in the way cities are envisaged? What is more: would they be able to take part in the process of constructing world history? As we understand that

photography is but fragments of memory or pieces of ourselves, we can understand that we are developing a self-portrait of our cities, and therefore universal history. In this sense we believe that the image of Salvador — a provincial city, centred in the re-elaboration of the ruins of black culture and religiosity — such as the world conceives it today, was built with the help of peripheral visions of photographers like Pierre Verger, Mário Cravo Neto and Adenor Gondim, who under the perspective of Merleau-Ponty, enable, through their images the *rendez-vous* between subjectivity and things, or “originary knowledge”. In a clear reference to Benjaminian thesis on history we conclude that, while removing the “blockades” that covered misery and their forgotten characters, these photographers and their lenses reversed the order of the speech imposed by the Baiano elite, making us understand that urban phenomena are principles of an aesthetic of modernity. Another possible answer to this difficult question might be signalled in the words of Mirian Tavares: “Arts might save the world if they are useful in fomenting a wider and deeper discussion around creativity, creation and knowledge. And for this, they need to reconquer independence. The problem is in knowing whether artists nowadays are willing to visit the place that once belonged to their ancestors: the margins. And in a creative way to bring the margins to the centre.” (2014, 60). Thus, the new generation of photographers would have the responsibility to understand that former generations accomplished an extraordinary role in revealing determined struggles and visual aberrations, and, in doing so, to question which function they accomplish in cities, in history and which are their new sources of inspiration. Taking into consideration that modern cities are configured and have become a complex where people of different creeds, knowledge, ethnics and power coexist, young artists must understand that contemporary photography performs the recording of a reality through a different colour prism, and never again under a black and white chrome dichotomy.

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