RAREFACTION: IMAGETIC PARADOXES

(CROSS-BREEDING IN THE PICTORIAL POETICS OF A RAREFIED VIDEOGRAPHIC IMAGE)

Ricardo Perufo Mello

Translated by Ana Carolina Azevedo

ABSTRACT: This brief essay was based on the subject “Processos Híbridos na Arte Contemporânea” (*Hybrid processes in contemporary art*), lectured by professor Sandra Ray in the Post-Graduation course of Visual Arts, UFRGS. Here will be presented some of the main ideas of the research on visual poetics that is being developed in the course, punctually considering the concepts of cross-breeding and hybridism and their respective applications as theoretical instruments. The research encompasses photography means (as the producer of images that, through a precise process, are faithfully painted) and paintings means (as the result) in its intersections, being its main historical referential the Hyperrealist movement.

KEYWORDS: contemporary painting, cross-breeding, hybridism, photography, videographic image.

The research I am currently working on in my Visual Arts doctorate's (with visual poetics as its main point) has been temporarily named “Rarefação: Paradoxos Imagéticos” (Rarefaction: Imagetic Paradoxes) and encompasses — in terms of a practical work — the means of photography and painting.

My main goal is to investigate determined imagetic transpositions between video, photo and painting, its final destination. Such transpositions have been called translations in my research. That is because it comes from the understanding of the notion of translation, which indicates the presence of some level of interpretation and alternation is more suitable than not. This term is understood as such in the following quote:

(...) first, we have to grasp the senses of products of another culture; then, we must recreate them in the terms of yet another

one. We find that there is no univocal correspondence between many cultural systems, just like there isn't between different linguistic systems. As a consequence, we may never be able to reach perfect transparency in the results of translation, leaving in the end a somewhat opaque and thus *untranslatable* remanining between cultural formations or confronting languages. (ANJOS, 2005, p. 20)

With effect, the imagetic translations operated by research involve procedures that make semantic adulterations in the image. These adulterations are evidenced by the increasing perceptive detachment regarding the represented referential — the person and the scene that figurate in the process' main image — until it edges its own loss.

Such translations comprehend crossings between different visual medias. They can be considered as much from the concept of *hybridism* than from that of *cross-breeding*. This essay's guiding thought is the (possible) appliance of such concepts in the above mentioned research. However, to understand this thought, a recapitulation of some of the main processual aspects that constitute the research is in order.

Initially, a wide series of *appropriated* images of cinematographic scenes was built. These scenes were uniquely photographed in front of a television screen. The photography cuts a piece in the original field of the specific kind of scene that was chosen for this proposition: the *closeup*.

The utilized films were taken from a drain of intense cinematographic production transformed into video during the last three decades (in this specific case, into VHS), and are labeled “film-excess” in the research. Found in stores that commercialized video rental shops' cast-offs, such videos are situated in the core of proper unfoldings for the flow of current images. This is an already familiarized overview in the flow of current images' unfoldings and it determined consequently automatized perceptions.

Indeed, this research's hypothesis has as its premise the fact that nowadays the narrative experience for the largest part of us is permeated and determined by photography, by cinema and by television in its mediatic insertions and conjunctions — or, as Paul Virilio ponderates, permeated and determined according to the subsequent eras of the different kinds of imagetic devices.

This unfolding, this superexposition, this detachment of the eye in regards to direct perception of the real world and its respective representation in painting is precisely my research's starting line. I identify such *detachment* as translated in the works of some

contemporary punctual painters such as Gerhard Richter and Chuck Close. This reading is based mainly (but not only) upon in the fact that such artists use photographs as foundation for the imagetic construction in their paintings.

This research attempts to draw on paintings that copy the image of a photograph in the current days, and from its point of view, the pictorial technique used by Hyperrealist painters represents the culmination of technical and historical imbrication between the means of painting and photography. It does so because it proposes a radicalization of the systematic pictorial figurative in its visual approach to photographic means (apparently and superficially corresponding to the complexity of observable reality) on transposing a photographic image to the pictorial plane, considering and being attentive to all the idiosyncrasies of the photographic optic construction (such as a series of asymmetries in the pictures, not to mention planes brought out of focus, characteristic of the *deepness of field*).

The photographic image appropriated in the research's process is, then, faithfully, manually and thoroughly copied in painting, from dot to dot of the video-graphic image, through the painting process — which uses only paint, pencils and a canvas. However, the utilized canvas here was an iron plate, which is mechanical and industrial, such as the (acrylic) paint and the utilization of the slide projector that supplies the photographed image as a guide for the painting. The painting is done — during all the process's time — only when the projection of the photographic slide is turned on, which forces the projector to stay on during every hour that compose the painting's elaboration. That results in the slide suffering little by little degradations from light and heat from the projector's lightbulb. That is to say, the slide will literally melt during the whole process (fig.1). This way, the visual referential that I use for painting images also disappear in the course of painting it. This diversion from what should have been initially planned and imagined in the instance previous to the whole process is what determines a de-saturated (faded) appearance in the finished work (fig.2). Among many implications, such a process deliberately promotes a break from the illusion and visual deepening, thus pointing the interference from video and photography means over the cinematographic image.

Thus, accounting for the fact that photography invariably carries with it its referential, when a photo is transposed to painting, its original character is fundamentally altered in its semantics. While photography shows tangible representation of a previous reality, painting is here considered inexorably as a manual creation.

Again, a paradox is established, in which the photo appropriated

from the video does not privilege what was visualized. That is to say, the re-presentation of the original cinematographic referential (once the interferences and noises from the video are added to the photo invariably) is the visually immersive experience occurred during the act of videographic register.

This photograph's referential is not the same of the cinematographic camera (which is, in this case, the actors' and actresses' faces), for it becomes the television apparatus itself, more specifically its screen. What the photograph thus reveal is not only a piece of the film's image, but mainly the moment of direct contact with the exhibition of the same film (my action as a photographer facing the television in a private place).

As previously observed, with this processual stage in mind, video films used for the capturing of images utilized in this research (fig.3) constitute a condition that I will hereby call "film-excess". In this sense, some specificities were taken into consideration: these videos did not arrive at the Brazilian market with statutes identical to their exhibition and commercialization in their original cinematographic market (and, in this case, it constitutes another specificity of the appropriated object to its north-american origin). In the first place, this change in the original statute the movie had is due to the quantitative disparities between the huge cinematographic production and the consumer market already existing in Brazil. It was (and still is) quite common that most part of the cinematographic movies filmed and exhibited in the United States is available in Brazil only as VHS (in the past) and DVD (nowadays). That is because there is not enough consumers in Brazil for such a great amount of cinematographic production.

In the second place, for the national audiovisual market to make possible the transposition of a foreign narrative production into the Brazilian market, the need for translating it into the country's spoken language is established. Thus, the original movie is dubbed by voices that replace the former ones. Another way is to input subtitles, which will translate to Portuguese each sentence uttered by the movie actors, or each written word that may be in the scene. This way, as subtle as such changes may be, in regards to the comprehension and interpretation of the movie, it is observable that even tiny marks and insertions provoke modifications in the semantic integrity of any visual work — or audiovisual work, in this case. Such particular aspects are not understood here as arbitrary. Much to the contrary, it comes from a notion that, besides impregnating the image with visual strengthening characteristics of the "film-excess" notion, such aspects also show and manifest political senses. For, according to Virilio, "today, who would be to deny that the

POLIS, which lent its etymology to the word POLITICS, belongs to the realm of perception facts?" (1993, p.22). Being the substantive of Greek origins, "polis" is a synonym for *city* — as understood in the sense of organized community, formed by citizens.

It seems to become clear that the intercultural role taken by cinema and its situation in the globalizing process in which the cultural industries' flow act among worldwide markets. Upon that, as said by Néstor Canclini, to the "classic modalities of fusion, derived from migrations, exchanges, commercial exchanges and integrating educational policies pushed by the national states, cultural industries-generated mixtures are added" (2000, p.XXXI)

It is precisely this vast world market established by cultural cinematographic industry that, as was formerly pointed out, rose that which I identify as "film-excess". A very predictable and repetitive cultural product in its aesthetic and script-wise solutions because of its condition of product elaborated from guidelines overriding marketing, once:

The aesthetic innovation is day by day less interesting to museums, editors and cinema; it was dislocated to the electronic technologies, musical entertainment and fashion. Where once were painters or musicians, there are designers and discjockeys. The hybridization, in a way, was made easier and became multiple when depending not of lengthy time, artisan or erudite patience, but of the skills to generate hypertexts and quick audiovisual or electronic editing. (2000, p.XXXV-XXXXVI)

This kind of situation, which requires lengthy time and artisan patience, is what I intend to incite in the research's work process. Not in the sense of simply establishing a counterposition to the contemporary scenery described above, but as a situation of work inserted in the logics of the referred notion of hybridization — term that the author understands as processes that match structures or practices which generate new structures, objects and practices. Despite the hybridization concept's mentioning, the research opted by approaching its imagetic crossings between different medias through the concept of *cross-breeding*. This concept presupposes equally the idea of a mixture between two distinct and dissociated identities in their individual qualities responsible for generating a third entity, which carries aspects from both of its generators. Notwithstanding, in general terms, they may be considered correlated concepts, but it is observable that there is some discrepancy between theorists' ideas of the semantic particularities of each one of both terms. For example, whilst the critic Moacir dos Anjos understands that

the concept of hybridization "suggests the impossibility of complete fusion between different components of a relation" (2005, p.28), being thus the result of "an approximation of different terms that may never be complete" (p.29), the theorist Idéia Cattani suggests that:

The crossings that raise relations towards cross-breeding are the ones that lodge multiple meanings, remaining in tension in the work of art from a principle of aggregation that does not seek to join them into an unique totality, but to keep them in constant pulsation. These tense crossings are what constitute cross-breedings in current artistic processes. (2007, p.11)

In this sense, I believe that, as Canclini says, the concepts are relevant in the measure that the "epistemological operations (...) situate its explanatory fecundity and its limitations in the interior of the cultural discourses: should they allow or not to understand better something that as of today remained unexplained?". (2000, p.XXI) It is through the concept of cross-breeding in the context of contemporary art, as used by the critic and curator Idéia Cattani, that the concept will serve as an auxiliary theoretical tool by considering itself as a painting that integrates other means, but does not join them homogeneously or completely, let alone develops them as excluding. This choice is also due to theoretical trajectory affinities through which Cattani traces the range and limitations of the specific usage that suggests from the concept.

The referential historic foundation from which the research's work has initially developed — Pop art and Hyperrealist movements — was precisely known for operating, in an explicit manner, such tense crossings. For, "since the year of 1975, there was the progressive outbreak of languages and forms abandoned amidst modernity, accompanied by mixtures of elements which give way to cross-breedings or hybridizations" (CATTANI, 2007, p.22).

The theorist also affirms that this process was even more emphasized in contemporary times, saying that "in opposing nature, production (...) accepts the contaminations provoked by coexistence of different and opposing elements between itself" (p.22).

Notwithstanding, the concept of cross-breeding does not only refer to only different means, procedures and techniques inserted in the same work, but also to different species of situations of the sign (indicated and symbolic) dialoguing in a plane, as in the case of conjunction of textual subtitles and the image of cinematographic origin present in the paintings of this research. There is precisely the cross-breeding of "coexistence of images and words, whose sense

remains in between both universes, re-signifying and re-contaminating themselves, mutually” (p.22).

Still in regards to the conceptual divergence between hybridization and cross-breeding, there is another ponderation made by Candlini that considers that “maybe the decisive issue is not to establish which one of these concepts (...) is more fertile, but how to keep building theoretical principles and methodological procedures that help us to transform this world into a more translatable, that is to say, more prone to cohabitation, amidst its differences” (2000, p.XXXIX). Therefore, as previously said, in this sense I emphasize the importance of the specific cut made from the cultural production field here elected as a starting line for the elaboration of the research work. That is, the usage of true refuges found in the edges of production, resulting from a massive cinematographic industry — which here generates a deliberately cross-bred image, one that is not soluble in its final media statute.

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RICARDO PERUFO MELLO: Candidate for a doctorates in Visual Arts, majoring in Visual Poetics, by UFRGS Art Institute, is advised by Prof. Dr. Ideia Cattani. He is an assistant professor at UFPEL Arts Center. In 2002, he received a special commendation in the 59th *Salão Paranaense*. In 2008, he presented the individual exhibition *Paintings* at Instituto Goethe Porto Alegre. In the same year, he was selected by Itaú Cultural Institute *Programa Rumos Artes Visuais 2008/2009*, and through that having had exhibitions in 2009 in the cities of Sao Paulo, Brasília and Rio de Janeiro.