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TRACES OF A PHOTOGRAPHIC DIARY

My pleasure was neither sociological nor directly anthropological.

In February, 1997, when reading Elizabeth Chaplin's book, *Sociology and Visual Anthropology*, the project came into being. I wanted to make a photographic diary for sheer pleasure and, in hindsight, as I believe today, out of necessity as well.

For sheer pleasure, since the endeavor would not result from any demand. It would not be the personal diary which I wrote between 1955 and 1975. It would have nothing to do with a visual autobiography or with a photobiography.¹ It would not be a portfolio, nor would it be a visual register of the adult looking over childhood memories.² Indeed, it would be like an assortment of small disconnected inscriptions which we throw in a note pad. No pre-defined theme: the photographs would be nothing more than the simple register of objects, things, places, and people which mark daily life. No conscious aim beyond the daily pact to take a piece of reality by surprise so as to

keywords

Visual diary; Visual anthropology and art; Text and image; Image and memory; Visualization of time.

1. Regarding this subject see the collection *Tempos, narrativas e ficções: a invenção de si* (Edited by Elizeu Clementino de Souza and Maria Helena Barreto Abrahão. Porto Alegre: EDIPUCRS, 2006), with special attention to articles of the editors and of Denice Barbara Catani, Remi Hesse, and Christine Delory-Momberger.

2. I have in mind the work of Raymond Depardon, *La forme du Garet* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2006). In this case, however, it would be worthwhile exploring the visual works of the author as a whole.

grind it. I accepted, in this way, the workings of chance, allowing my emotions and imaginary to bud amidst future documents.

However, it was also necessary to observe more closely passing time and, with it, all that it takes away and carries along. The desire to take by surprise and place in suspension the ephemerality of life. At the time, we lived in a world in which things were exorbitant, and images excessive. I needed to give myself time to look, to visualize time, internalizing it and allowing myself to question. In other words, I wanted to gather (not capture, but elect), in the passing of each day, one of these small moments of existence, apparently unimportant.

I had at my disposal an analogical Minolta camera. I used Kodak films – Gold – ASA 100.

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Almost twenty years went by. Today I reencounter two albums with hard covers. A total of 113 photographs in sequence – one on each page of the albums – from February 23 to June 17, 1997. Except for the dates on which the photographs were taken and for the numbers of the film to which they belong, no comments are written next to them.

The experience lasted for four months and shipwrecked. How to explain?

In the beginning, it was a type of game, a ride through human time, a discovery, an adventure. However, I soon found that I could not easily follow the cadence, that is, carry out the promise to take a picture before nightfall. There were various reasons: lack of time, trips, professional demands, labor of the journey or simply forgetfulness. In fact, other questions loomed each day: what to choose and register? Without seeking the extraordinary, how to deal with everyday life, with its repetition and apparent banality?

It is astonishing today to remember what it meant at the time to work with the analogical. Visual business was both pleasurable and demanding. Besides having required of myself the taking of a single photograph (although I once took various of a single subject), it was necessary to await the end of the film and of its revelation (a magical and always confidential moment) so as to then find time to put the photographs in chronological order and fix them to the album.

The happiness of the moment, however, was mixed with a certain form of disenchantment, a type of frustration, insofar as I could not

remember half of the revealed photographs. Even worse, I could not remember the moment of taking the photos, my motivations or what had led me to select them. In other words, the photograph had in a way imprisoned within itself that which had notwithstanding made it come into being. It could surely say many things, but it could not express that which I thought to have confided in it. I felt that this photographic diary would never really be mine, unless words could accompany it. For this reason, I quickly began to connote these photographs so as to situate them by means of an independent text. I wrote. This was another diary.

If it is true that photographs do not need words so as to exist, so also words are inseparable from images when one meets up with them. It is probable that, with digital photography and current possibilities opened up by computing, we may partially resolve the problems which have here been posed and, especially, create other approaches (notably artistic) for the making of a visual diary, the so-called English *Art Journal*.³ Current publications of *selfies* on social networks should make us, in turn, more attentive to their uses for creation of social identity as well as for the search for social recognition.⁴

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Up to a certain point, reinvesting today in these traces means to set loose small boats which got stuck and which, almost twenty years later, reemerged covered with other sediments left by time. I chose 12 photographs according to the temporal sequence of the diary. At first, appealing to my memory, I attempted to situate myself in respect to them. I did not get far. I then reread the written comments and the photographs came back to life and, even more, confronted me with questions. The short texts which follow arise from this double movement.

translation
John Cowart
Dawsey
text received
07.05.2015



3. Holding back time and seeking to inscribe oneself in it is sort of the dream of all mortals. As reading suggestions, I would indicate, among many others, some of the artistic works which go in this direction: Robert Frank (*Story Lines*), Sophie Calle (*Douler exquisite and M'as-tu vue?*), Frank Horvat (1999, *Un journal photographique*), Roman Opalka (*Opalka 1965/1. Autoportraits*), Dominique Goblet (*Chronographie*), Anne de Gelas (*Une journée (Presque) tranquille*, in www.annedegelas.com).

4. As incentive, I call attention to the recent research of Gisleine Gomes Nascimento, entitled *Auto, foto e grafias: a construção do autorretrato no Facebook*. Master's thesis presented in the Programa de Pós-Graduação em Multimeios do Instituto de Artes da Unicamp, 2014. Accessible at following address: <http://www.bibliotecadigital.unicamp.br/document/?code=000928308>



THE PHOTOGRAPHS:

MAURICIO AND HIS FATHER

(24/02/97 – Film 1) (Photo01)

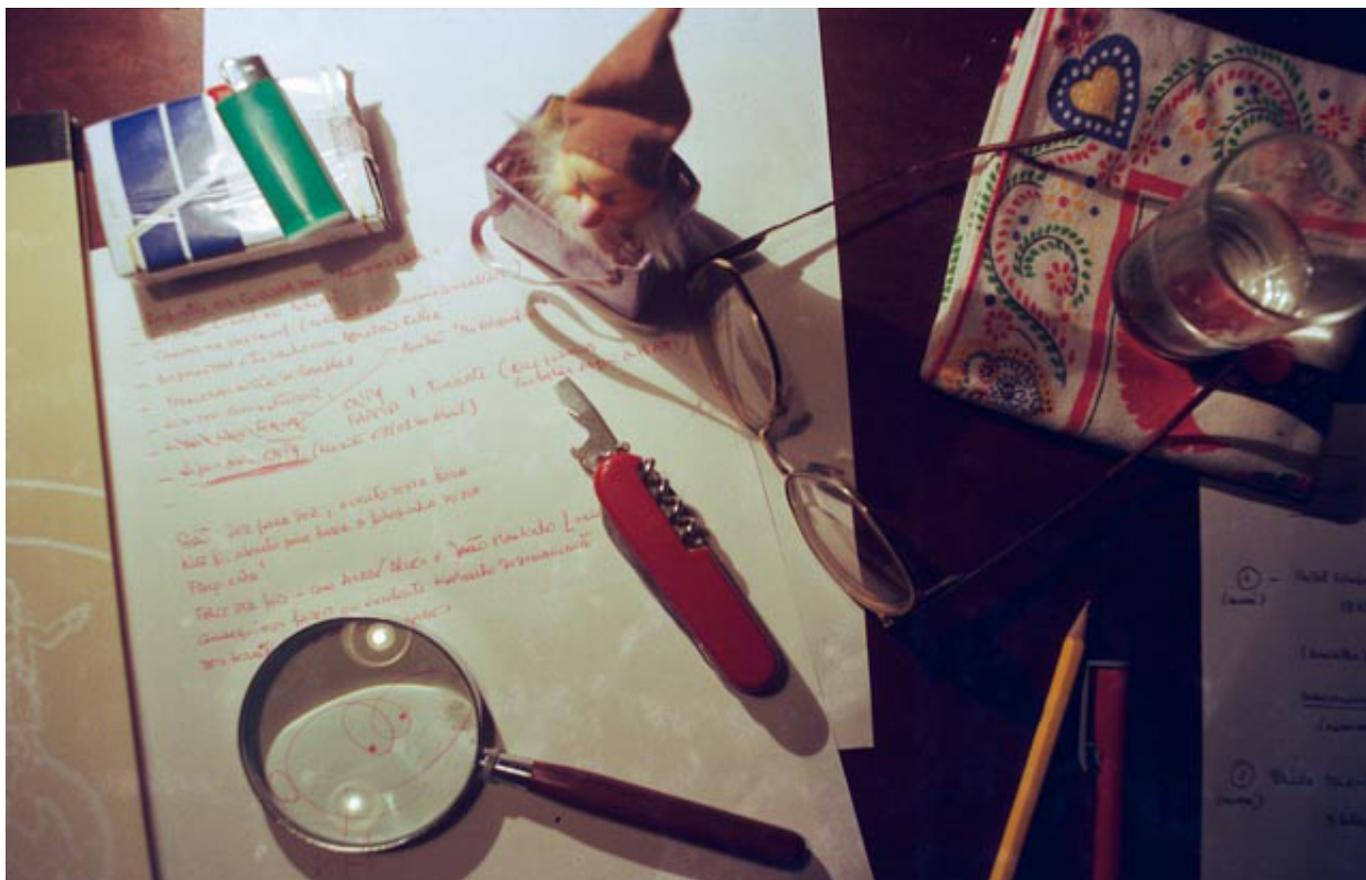
Mauricio and his father had just repaired an iron railing with molten lead. I did not imagine that Mauricio would die a month later. I had not noticed the uneasiness of his countenance. At the time, I amplified the photograph, which I gave to his old father Antônio.



JUNKYARD AT A UNIVERSITY

(12/03/97 – Film 1) (Photo02)

On November 29, 1995, a tornado with winds up to 180 km/h chopped off the roof of a sports gymnasium at Unicamp (The State University of Campinas), a metallic structure of ten thousand square meters weighing approximately 250 tons. Fifteen months later, when passing by each day, it made me unhappy to see this heap of rusting twisted iron.



TEN TILL TEN AT NIGHT

(24/03/97 – Film 2) (Photo03)

Beneath the pack of cigarettes, a list of tasks and this text: “It is ten till ten at night; the wind blows outside. I was not attentive enough to take the photograph of the day. I take this one. A happy day, so – with André Alves and João Martinho/ [Two student advisees at the time], we were able to do excellent work demarcating territories”. A magnifying lens will help to discover the rest.



THE DAWN OF EASTER

(30/03/97 – Filme 3) (Photo04)

At the dawn of Easter, 1997, my daughter looked for chocolate eggs which were *hidden* on the edge of the garden in Campinas. She was 11 years old at the time. She is now 29 years of age and lives in Drvar (in Bosnia), where Tito, in caverns, lay in *hiding* from Hitler in May 1944.



THE PYRAMID

(15/04/1997 – Film 4) (Photo05)

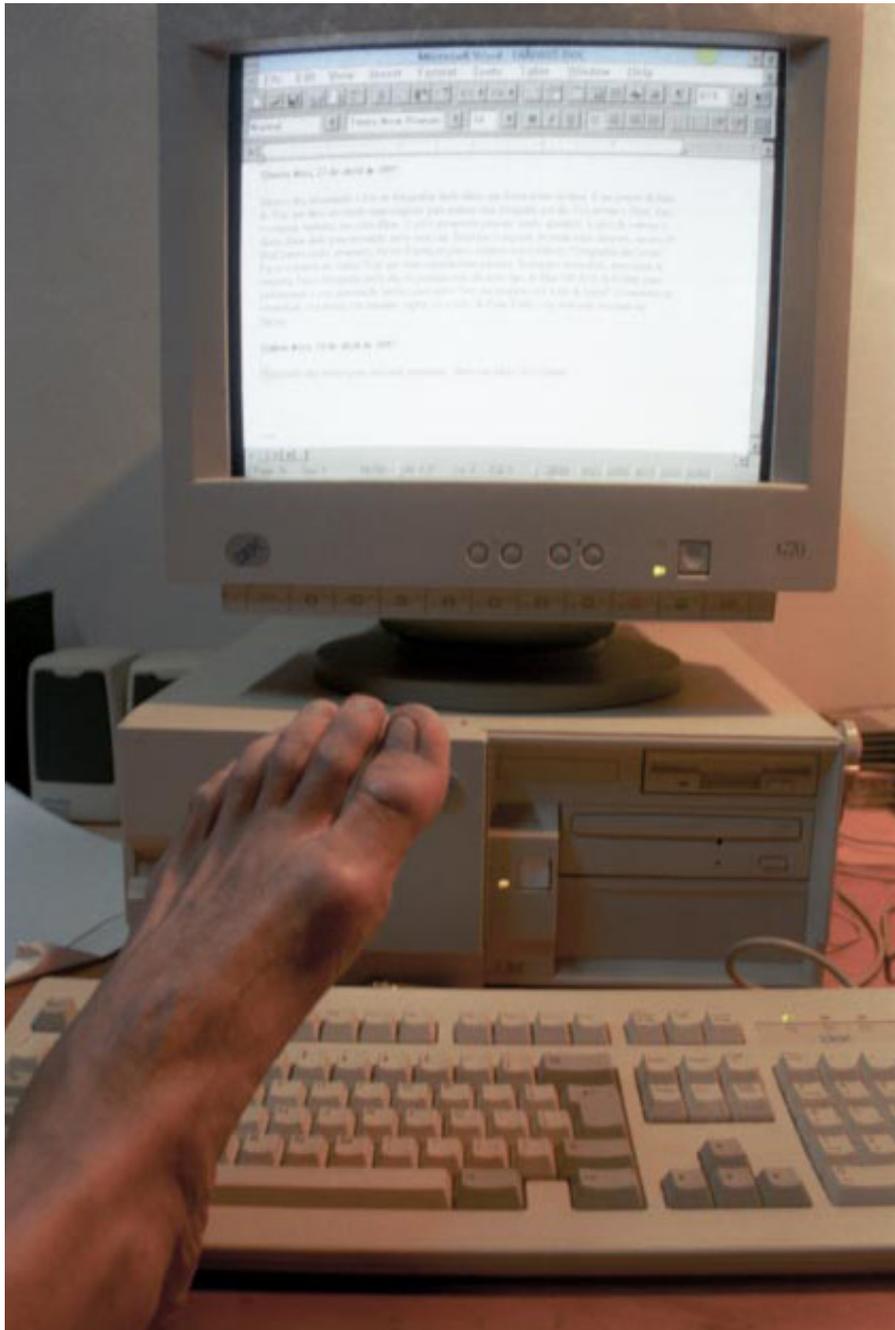
On the way to Unicamp, a strange pyramidal construction made of glass with blue reflections affected me at the time. Today, the gigantic number 424 at the front calls my attention. Thanks to *Google*, I discovered that the *Empório Egípcio* pyramid (located on Avenue Professor Atilio) was a restaurant which presented on Saturdays a belly dance show. The obelisk can be easily identified for its symbolic capacity: the aspiration of an individual (pharaoh) to become equal to gods, with phallic references. But who was Professor Atilio whose name seemed to have been lost... I searched. I have not yet been able to find his footprints.



NIDO

(26/04/97 – Film 5) (Photo06)

Nido, who was born in Bahia: on the day of his birth received this magnificent social register: he is “Marc Anthony of the Kings of the Hour”. With him, I learned to do with great cares small things of nature and of life. He has the dignity of a Marc Anthony, the consul of the Roman Republic. In regard to his dominions, he is with his family, always in search of them.



LEFT FOOT

(30/04/97 – Film 5) (Photo07)

My own derision: know how to relativize what we think we have in our head. The end of day is especially propitious for this type of exercise.



THE NORTHEASTERN HAT

(03/05/97 – Film 5) (Photo08)

Next to a bathroom exit hanging on a clothes line, I fastened this cowboy hat and, with it, my experiences of five years living in the Brazilian Northeast (Natal).



THE GALICIAN LEMON TREE

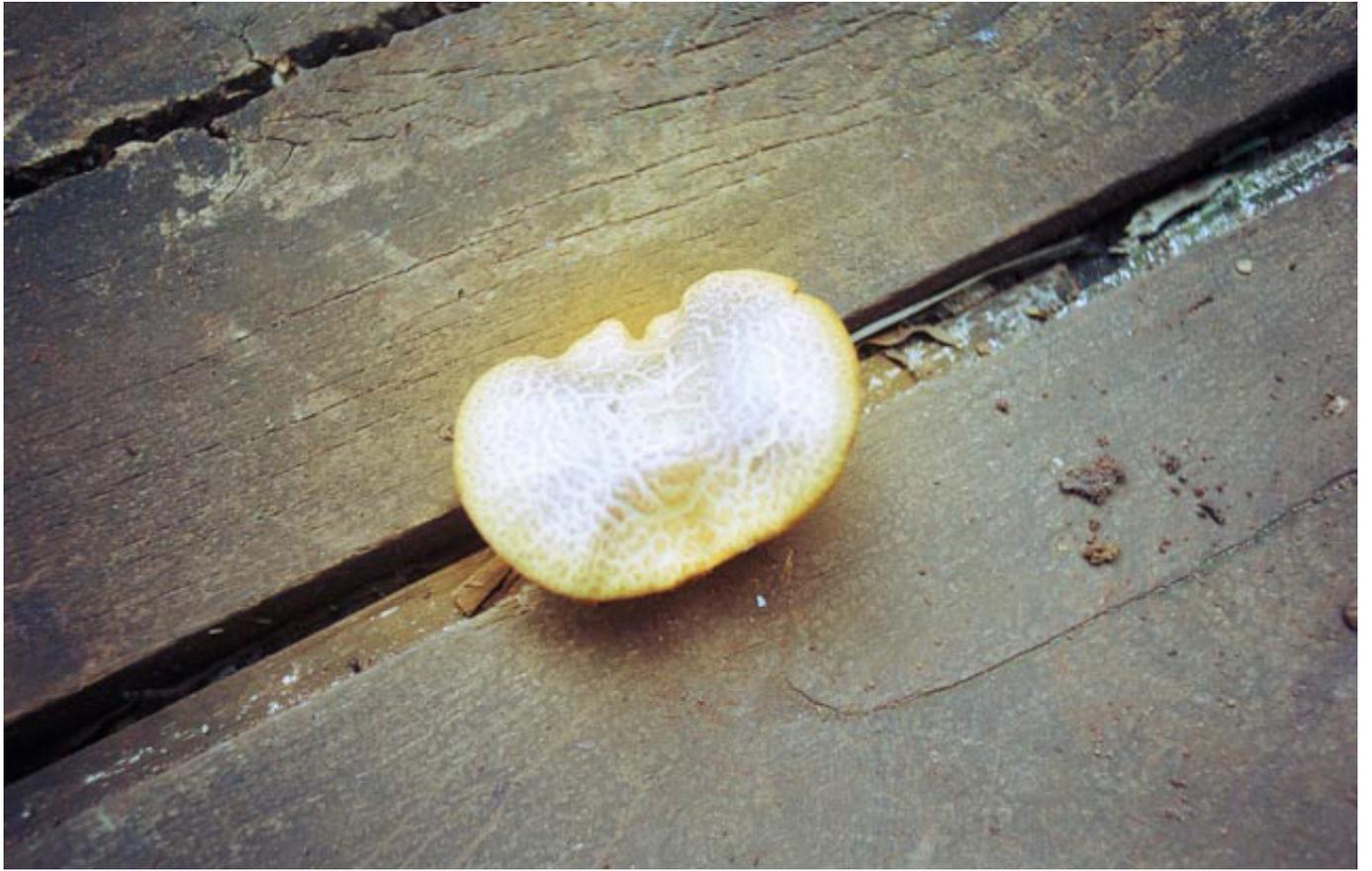
(12/05/97 – Film 5) (Photo09)

Two years before, after an unpredictable night of strong winds, the Galician lemon tree was torn in half by morning. With cloth (so as not to hurt the tree), tubes and iron (which I found in the house), Godelieve and I worked a long time so that it might survive. The effort paid off: in May 1997 three new lemons had just sprouted. Today, I look again at these branches, our common efforts surrounding the tree and, probably, our own history.



MACHIARELLI (24/05/97 – Film 6) (Photo 10)

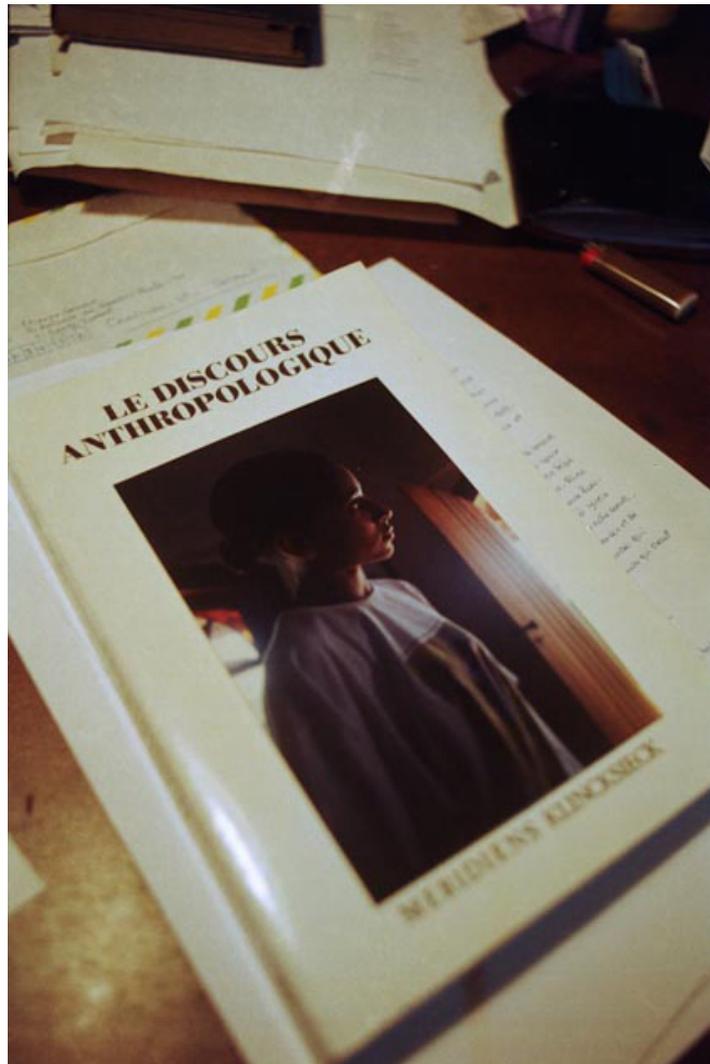
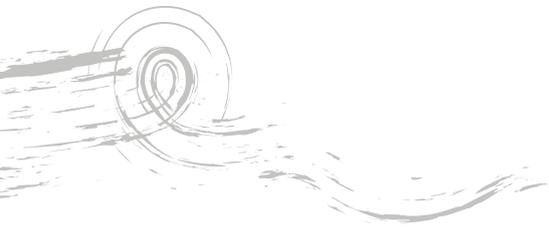
The encounter, on my work desk, of three things: a defunct computer mother plate, a school hand-out on Machiavelli and a promotional brochure of a bank, referring to a new telephone system [Visa Fone]. At a certain moment, the fusion of these three elements brings forth an idea: of a computer network as a universal voyage, directed by Machiavelli. The pieces of the mother plate became housing projects, the lines connected directly to the superior region of Machiavelli's skull, as the text of the brochure added something else, in the form of a universal passport.



THE MUSHROOM

(10/06/97 – Film 7) (Photo11)

At the juncture of two boards of an old abandoned gate, a mushroom took root.



THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL DISCOURSE

(14/06/97 – Film 7) (Photo12)

The anthropological discourse is effectively a montage, just like this photograph of Maíra (my daughter) whose picture – taken a little before – fit perfectly on the cover of a book (edited by J. M. Adam, M. J. Borel, C. Calame, M. Kilani) published in 1990. Incidentally, the original cover of the book is a self-portrait of Bronislaw Malinowski who, wearing dark glasses, in a sitting position surrounded by nine natives of Trobriand Islands, also stares into the horizon.