

# INTERTWINED FIELDS: PHOTOGRAPHY AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY

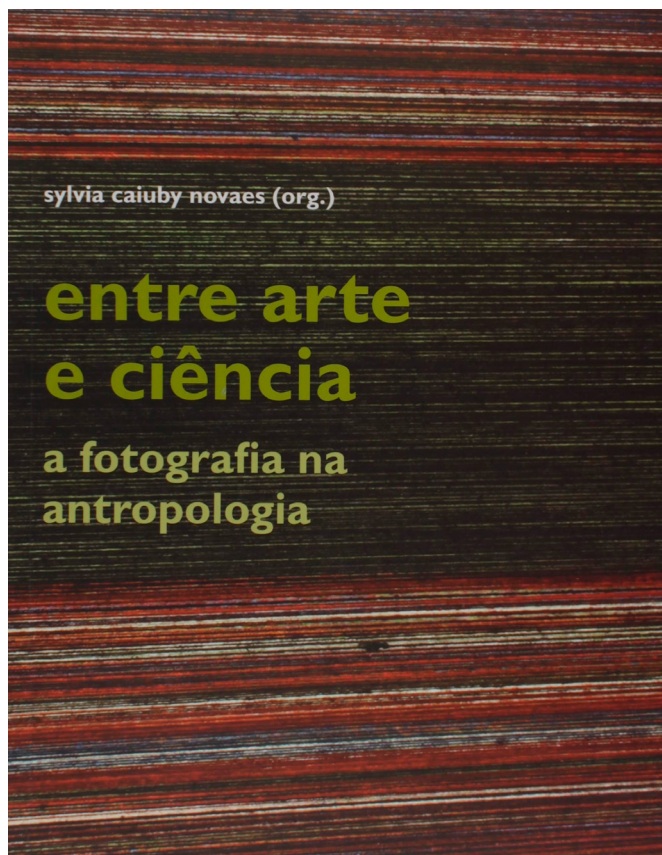
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Since the first half of the nineteenth century, the histories of anthropology and photography had intertwined chapters, showing a proximity relation along their trajectories. Currently, considering the saturated universe of the image world, referred by many authors as “post-photographic”<sup>1</sup>, as a kind of confidence between photography and anthropology, which subscribes it as a scenery of critical reflections on “the uses” and “the thought” of photographic images in their anthropological perspectives. This scenery also produces a range of problematizations over a knowledge that belongs to the images, raising questions such as “what is the place of images?” and “what do we want from them?”.

*Entre arte e a ciência: a fotografia na antropologia* (Between art and science: photography at anthropology), a collection of nine articles written by Brazilian researchers organized by the anthropologist Sylvia Caiuby Novaes (2015) is a set of works that elicits evidence to testify the pressing need of enhancing intersections between art, literature and sciences on the development of anthropological studies. The work reassures, in the present, a necessary vision to dismiss historical divisor lines that had set art, literature and sciences apart, creating “disciplines” and “boundaries”, hindering the establishment of a place for images on anthropological thinking during the twentieth century.

In the dawn of the twenty-first century, which was troubled by a scenery of visual storms and excessive imagistic appeals, other urgent, imperative challenges were presented to an anthropologist-photographer, urging reinvention, new methodologies and visual experiments.

Anthropologist-photographers interested in producing photos conveying the senses of the images must consider, among other reinvention factors, the challenge of making the “small lights” survive. Denis Roche, describing his experience as a poet-photographer, in his work *The disappearing of fireflies*, published in France in 1982, writes that photographers<sup>2</sup> are similar to wandering bugs, travelers, with big eyes sensible to the light. They form “a troop of aware fireflies. Fireflies that are busy with their intermittent light, flying in low altitude in the misguidances

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1. The so-called Post-Photographic Era is recognized mostly in the twentieth century, after the Second Digital Revolution, characterized by the internet, social network and mobile phones. Juan Fontcuberta wrote, in his book *The Fury of the Images* (2016) a “manifesto” in which he highlights the reflexes of this post-photographic context to the operation of a photographer. He points out in his manifesto that to the photographer it is more important prescribing meanings to the images than taking pictures. According to the author, the decisive value of creation is not only manufacturing images, but knowing how to manage its function whether in new or old photos.

2. This quote is elicited by Georges Didi-Huberman in his book *Sobrevivência dos vaga-lumes* [Surviving of the fireflies] (2011) when he recalls, among his references, the text on “the disappearing of the fireflies”, by Pasolini, to consider political and aesthetic aspects of philosophy, history and image.

of hearts and spirits of contemporaneity. A silent tic-tac of errand fireflies, little brief illuminations [...]" (Roche 1982, 149-150)<sup>3</sup>.

In this sense, the collection reminds us of authors, researchers and anthropologists engaged with the decision of working with images, under the sensible effect of those intermittent lights of errand fireflies and their brief illuminations, among a world of strong lights. As reported by the book organizer, the bountiful meeting of photography and anthropology is due to the fact that the "photography expresses, far more than text, relationships" (Caiuby Novaes 2015, 18)<sup>4</sup>. She argues that proximity, field depth, and an attentive sensible look could summarize, with good photographic lexicon metaphors, the senses that are capable of permeating the fieldwork in anthropology.

The hybrid character of photography placed between art and science, as Caiuby Novaes highlights in the introduction of her work, opens alternative expressions and knowledge processes that are able to make a thicker ethnography by using other non-verbal narrative forms. Especially, as she argues, it allows the expression of a "sensible truth" resulting from an observation guided by the trained sensibility of the anthropologist.

Jacques Rancière, in *The Distribution of the Sensible* (2004), says that it is the representative regime that counterfeits the so-called aesthetic arts and the sensible regimes. Namely, an experience and a thinking of other species over things of the world or even other possible worlds.

In the aesthetic regime, artistic phenomena are identified by their adherence to a specific regime of the sensible, which is extricated from its ordinary connections and is inhabited by a heterogeneous power, the power of a form of thought that has become foreign to itself: a product identical with something not produced, knowledge transformed into non-knowledge, *logos* identical with *pathos*, the intention of the non-intended, etc (Rancière 2004, 22-23)

The collection addressed here elucidates two branches: first, it amplifies the two-decade debate, object of the endeavor of a generation of anthropologists from which Sylvia Caiuby Novaes belongs — and induces an attentive analysis on the current advances in the scientific anthropological production supported by the use of image and its intersection to art.

In the history of anthropology, the purpose of photography has different chapters due to its use as a "tool" or "registration technique", particularly with field journals. As Caiuby Novaes retraces in the first pages of the book presentation, Franz Boas was one of the first to work with photography in 1883, when he began his career as a geographer and headed

3. The excerpts from Roche's works quoted here were freely translated.

4. The excerpts from Caiuby Novaes's works quoted here were freely translated.

to Baffin Island, in a period that the use of photography belonged to the field of physical anthropology studies.

Even though authors such as Radcliffe-Brown lacked interest in photography, according to Caiuby Novaes, the photographic image had great relevance in Bronislaw Malinowski's monographies since 1922<sup>5</sup>, predominating from 1936 to 1939, when Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson, studying the Balinese, aimed to connect the fieldwork research data to a double register: the verbal and the visual. This ethnography originated the work *Balinese Character: a photographic analysis* (1942), considered the first work of the visual anthropology discipline.

As stated by the organizer of the collection, who wrote<sup>6</sup> an important article on Lévi-Strauss and the photography in 1999, the image also earned an important dimension in Claude Lévi-Strauss' work<sup>7</sup>, as a registration technique combined with his field journal, although the anthropologist had not affirmed — nor even directly recognized — the importance of the photography in his anthropological works.

Drawing special attention to a “transversal perspective”, the collection of articles neglect to solve the hybrid question of the photography between art and science. Actually, this perspective aims to highlight how this character creates effective invention possibilities and new ways of expression capable of taking anthropology closer to other areas, such as literature and arts, distancing, thus, the photography of a place of mere instrument or representation. As the organizer highlights, in anthropology, photography is what help us to reflect on the “processes of constructing reality”.

Therefore, the tone of the selected articles offers the reader the prolific possibility of visually immerse on the photos to understand how they compose the studies and how they are expressions and a way of knowing. The set of articles orchestrate a range of knowledge from the studies guided by the confidence on images (the photography), which inhabits and occupies places that go from “lyric expressivity” to the “exchange element on the study”, passing by the “way to give visibility to the people”, “power of agency” and “pathogenic object”, without forgetting the place of photography as “sacred image” or expression of “sensible states of visions, enchantments and magic”.

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5. On this topic, Etienne Samain wrote a long article called “Ver e Dizer na tradição etnográfica. Bronislaw Malinowski e a Fotografia” (To See and to Say in ethnographic tradition. Bronislaw Malinowski and Photography), published in *Horizontes Antropológicos*, Porto Alegre, ano 1, n. 2, p. 23-60, jul/set. 1995.

6. In the article “Lévi-Strauss, Razão e Sensibilidade” [Lévi-Strauss, Sense and Sensibility] published in *Revista de Antropologia* vol. 42, n. 1-2, São Paulo, 1999.

7. Part of Lévi-Strauss' photos produced during his ethnographic studies in Brazil were published in *Tristes Trópicos* (1955/1996), and on the album *Saudades do Brasil* (1994).

The first article of the book, “O objeto, a arte e o artista” (The object, the art and the artist), by Sandra Rosse de Araújo Costilhes, is a photographic essay on the manual weaving in Minas Gerais and Chincero (a weaving community in Andean Peru). With photos in double page sequences, the essay aims to emphasize a symbiosis between the body of the artisan/artist and the tool. The sequence of 34 images focuses on gestures and unveiled materials by an attentive and sensible loon on the weaving, the braiding and the netting. Thus, the photographic images go beyond the mere register, not only describing, but almost making us feel the materials by its colors and textures.

The next three articles cover the photography in anthropological study as a way to give visibility to certain communities and minority groups, namely, quadriplegic rugby players, Bangu II penitentiary inmates and older people in nursing homes. The photos by Joon Ho Kim, in the article “O rugby em cadeira de rodas: um breve ensaio sobre a (des)construção da imagem da deficiência física” (Rugby in wheelchairs: a brief essay on the (de)construction of the image of physical disability), were produced during a rugby game and instigate the reader to have another way of looking at quadriplegic people, who are almost invisible to society.

According to this researcher, who worked with the Associação de Esportes Adaptados de Campinas (Adeacamp — Adapted Sports Association of Campinas), photography was a way to join the studied groups, while answering, as a researcher and “official photographer”, the team demands. The visual language chosen by Kim is structured by the elements: strength, speed, tension and struggle, as they move with extreme ability on their chairs, almost as if the chairs have become extensions of their bodies. Thus, the 21-photo essay reaches a place of “deconstruction”, making the quadriplegic body a “visible body”.

Similarly looking to the social invisibility axis and to the place of the body as an image, Bárbara Copque writes the article “Fotografar: expor (e se expor) — a utilização de fotografia no contexto da violência” (To photograph: to expose (and to self-expose) — the use of photography in the context of violence), an essay produced with the photos of 15 inmate’s tattoos at Alfredo Tranajm (Bangu II), a maximum security prison. The photos translate the tattoos as an inscription of a codified and ungovernable silence, even if imprinted in an “imprisoned body” in the jail context. Assembled in diptychs by the author, the images figure as vertiginous grafts of photographic frames filled by body fragments (arms, legs, hands, bellies, mouths and chests). Bárbara had established a shared research process, dialoguing to gain the trust of the 15 subjects, who could decide together with the researcher what should and should not be showed as image.

The article by Clarice E. Peixoto, “As coisas não são como a gente quer...: viver e morrer em instituição asilar” (Things are not how we want...: to live and to die in a nursing home), comes after the photos of the anthropologist Bárbara Copque, who joined this study on family and institutional violence against older people. The black and white photos focus on the way older people live in a nursing home and show the tiniest gestures, as hair combing, listening to a portable radio or smoking hand-rolled cigarettes, thus creating compositions that highlight the ordinary and daily expressions, affecting us and making us reflect.

The fifth article of the collection, “Quando a imagem é a pessoa ou a fotografia como objeto patogênico” (When the image is the person or the photo as a pathogenic object), by Alice Villela, aims at thinking and rethinking the notion of “agency” of the images, recalling Alfred Gell’s (1998), applied to the notion of an Amerindian person in the asurini society in Xingu, a Tupi-Guarani group. From the relationships the society establishes with the images of their own people, reproduced in photos, the author argues that, for the asurinis, the photo can become a “pathogenic object”. The asurinis consider that the photo camera absorbs the *ynga* (vital principle or “shadow”) of the portrayed person, because it reproduces the person’s image, known as *ayngava*. Even if the photo is not a replacement to the person, it becomes an entity, which is part of the person. “This is the danger of the photo image: the uncontrolled agency on the body of the portrayed person, considering the fusion of the *ynga* between person and image” (Villela 2015, 119)<sup>8</sup>.

The power of agency, the sacred and cult state attributed to the photo is the issue debated by the researcher Ewelter Rocha in “Memória e verossimilhança nos retratos pintados da ladeira do Horto” (Memory and verisimilitude in the painted portraits of Horto hill). Rocha analyzes the mnemonic mechanisms of the painted portraits in the region of Juazeiro do Norte, Ceará, which shares the privileged space of the house as a kind of shrine. Portraits correspond to a fragmentary and inventive narrative “deprived from a actually lived real past referent”, which aimed to restore and modernize an old picture, for instance, a photo from a deceased relative, the house owners’ wedding or people gathered at the same image via an original photo lent to the photo painter as a visual reference.

This verisimilitude of the sacred is also what Rafael Hupsel proposes in his essay with eight black and white pictures in the article “Ayahuasca e visualidade: a expressão do sagrado na narrativa fotográfica” (Ayahuasca and visuality: the expression of the sacred in the photographic narrative), in which the images reflect sensations experienced in shamanic

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8. The excerpts from Villela’s works quoted here were freely translated.

rituals using *ayahuasca* in ceremonies of the Irmandade Beneficente Natureza Divina, to which he has been attending for the last ten years. Hupsel questions: “What is the capacity of the photo image to express the experience of the sacred and to report sensorial experiences related to the practice of faith?”

The researcher says that it is from the visual poetics, constructed by elements of photography, such as light, shadow, graphisms, focus, speed, perspective and framing, that the bridge between the indicial referent and the expression of the sacred can be established. “The visual poetics is the door through which the glance enters and experiences the sensation of the invisible” (Hupsel 2015, 149)<sup>9</sup>. Beyond representation, Hupsel aims at enhancing the capacity of the photos to show not only what is in a surface visually impregnated by a referent, but also what expresses sensations and emotions, going from one image to the other, enabling, thus, the imaginative, the magical or even “the invisible in the expression of faith” to rise.

Aiming to explore the same perspective, the work has two other articles — by Vitor Grunvald and Fernando de Tacca — problematizing the referential and indicial character of photography in anthropology. Grunvald in “Alter-retrato, fotografia e travestimento” (Alter-portrait, photo and *travestimento*) — begins with a portrait that does not mirror or imitate “the real”, the self-portrait by Duchamp travestied as Rose Sélary — proposes a reflection on the photo image as a place of “construction of the becoming”, which is placed in the desire and imagination. The author argues that Duchamp’s self-portrait can be understood as an “alter-portrait”, because what is at stake is the notion of simulacrum. In this article, Grunvald recalls several images of paintings and photo portraits — as a way to open visual possibilities to think and follow his reflections — until reaching an important photo by Man Ray, taken in 1920/1921, where Marcel Duchamp is travestied as Rose Sélavy.

The final article of the collection is Fernando de Tacca’s: “Fotografia: intertextualidades entre ciências, arte e antropologia” (Photography: intertextualities between sciences, art and anthropology). The author also states that the main feature of the image is that it has always been impregnated by “ambiguities and polyssemies”. Tacca debates about the expressive places of the anthropological work, claiming to the photography an “other standard of meaning, beyond its intrinsic ‘truths’” (Tacca 2015, 203)<sup>10</sup>. The author emphasizes the necessity of “allying the text strength of a thick ethnography to the parameters planted and seeded by Clifford Geertz with the photographer’s expressivity as creator, beyond

9. The excerpt is from Hupsel’s works quoted here were freely translated.

10. The excerpt’s from Tacca’s works here quoted were freely translated.

the method chains” (Ibid., 204). Tacca defends that visual anthropology must appropriate photography “beyond method and discipline”, heading to “the frontiers of art, in which the anthropologist can aspire to the artistic, making fiction and friction” and inspiring him or herself in the literary form to “let the photographic look free from words, without losing its anchoring, and the photographer-anthropologist shall seek a personal aesthetic, an authorship, not only by text” (Ibid., 204).


The collection of nine articles is also an invitation to the researchers interested in the anthropological production *with* the visual and *of* the photographic visual, triggering a necessary exercise, to go beyond the silent debate and to echo movements of studies anchored by the contribution of images in anthropological thinking. A reading to explore ways to see, think and show through images, guided not only by the “realist form”, but, as the organizer summarizes, “engaged in showing it from a point of view that is capable of expressing the visual poetic reality that carries its own truth” (Caiuby Novaes 2015, 18).

**TRANSLATION**  
Ana Letícia de Fiori

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