

## Editorial

# Challenges *between* images: methodological work with/alongside visualities

### Behind the scenes, a tribute to Mexico?

WE CONSIDER IT APPROPRIATE TO BEGIN by telling the behind the scenes of this edition, since this issue began to be ruminated and discussed in September 2023 during a trip to Mexico in which we went as organizers and exhibitors of the *VII Congress of Visual Studies and Views to Come*, organized by the Latin American Visual Studies Network of which we are a part. In that context, very enriching exchanges took place, not only professionally, but also and, fundamentally, emotionally. During that itinerary we also had the interesting opportunity to work in the Department of Educational Research (DIE, for its Spanish initials) of the Center for Research and Advanced Studies of the National Polytechnic Institute (Cinvestav-IPN, for its Spanish initials), together with the group coordinated by our dear Ines Dussel. It was on that trip that we met all the authors of this dossier. Our varied origins: Mexico, Brazil, Colombia and Argentina, and our inter/trans/in/disciplinary training enrich the plurality of approaches presented in this issue. We can say that it was a journey of visualities and reflections that led to this constellation of texts as possible nodes of articulation to continue sharing and imagining potential approaches. It is suggestive, then, that this material is published in the Mexican magazine **INTER DISCIPLINA** considering that the territoriality, colors, flavors, smells and magic of Mexico sheltered and supported some of the encounters that are stated here to be shared with those who want to read.

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### Visualities and methodologies

In this dossier we have gathered writings that feel-think about visualities in relation to their research and teaching work. The articles compiled here seek to created other methodological possibilities to articulate disciplines, knowledge and becomings with/alongside visualities. The authors of the articles, as well as the members of the *Ayllu* Collective whom we interviewed, ask themselves, and in some cases also creatively compose, visualities that are necessary in the face of the mainstream normativity of bodies, practices and affects that are plausible to be seen and shown. Our intention as compilers has been to place the emphasis not only on visuality as regulator and co-producer of social meanings and practices, but also to record the ways in which we feel-think about the regime of visuality in our research, in its (aesthetic)ethical political and epistemological di-

mensions. And the potential counter-visualities that are cultivated by artistic collectives, artists, researchers, challenging the comfortable intelligibility of gazes, generating counter-visual or counter-colonial proposals, as proposed by the *Ayllu* Collective, or the possibility of creating devices to escape the plantation of visuality as proposed by Iki Yos Piña Narváez.

Why with/alongside? Seeking to detach ourselves from an understanding of the with as an objectification of visualities, and its limitation as an element of capture, we dare to speculate on its possibilities. It is notable that this compilation of works brings together various investigations linked to different disciplines that work with/alongside images: with this we have sought to (re)affirm this trans/in/end disciplinary proposal (Brea 2005; Barone Zallocco 2023; Barone Zallocco & Capasso 2024) from which we feel-think the potential of visual studies and their narrative, (aesthetic)ethical, political, epistemological and ontological (de)construction. This proposed inter or trans/in/end disciplinary intentionality is evident, for example, in the powerful and sensitive political (a) esthetic work proposed by the *Ayllu* Collective in an interview that makes up this compilation, and allows us to interrupt (flores 2017), corrupt and intervene in the highly oriented (Ahmed 2019) and habituated theoretical frameworks that often structure our research in square, rigid, stable and condescending formats with a white, heterocentric and colonial academy. Exiling oneself from these borders brings suspicion, persecution and sometimes many wounds (Barone Zallocco & Diaz 2023). These transformations bring discomforts typical of a modern colonial education that is perpetuated in a system of (re)production of knowledge that seeks to extirpate territorial knowledge that does not nest in categories or proper names.

In this sense, we consider the work methodology not as a procedural instrument with mechanical and invariant steps to follow, but as a reflexive and critical exercise, transversal to the research, education and teaching process: "a methodology that is driven by the question and not a model applicable to all circumstances" (Arfuch in Richard 2014, 35). In this sense, the formulation of the research question, the configuration of each object of study in particular and the course of the research require flexibility and rethinking for the analysis and construction of knowledge. The latter implies opening up to the possibility of reconfigurations, which is typical of critical research processes that do not assume a dogmatic stance. In this way, on the one hand, it is necessary to account for the construction of each object of study, since this is never given nor is it evident. And in turn, the complexity and multidimensionality of social reality (Schuster 2002) demands approaches that can permeate and overflow the different disciplines: a theoretical-conceptual articulation and deployment that is possible, but not necessary. Thus, against a restricted area of knowledge, it is necessary to

work in an expanded cultural field, in the oscillation between different disciplines, such as the sociology of culture and art, art history, visual studies, cultural criticism and critical theories, among others, in order to connect the artistic-visual with broader cultural processes. That is, with an approach that in research on artistic-visual objects and practices privileges intersections, borrowings and contacts between different perspectives from a transdisciplinary vision for a comprehensive understanding of this type of phenomena (Capasso, Bugnone & Fernández 2020). In this way, we agree with Richard that:

The transdisciplinary is the border zone in which reflection on art enters into a new flexible regime of proximities and transfers between mixed knowledges (cultural anthropology, sociology, literature, semiotics, philosophy, theories of discourse, etc.) that, uninhibitedly, interrupt each other with questions and answers that are always partial in order to avoid any totalization of knowledge: I value the transits, the “forking paths,” the margins, the interstitial, that which resists the enclosure of a restricted area of knowledge and therefore the authority of a specific domain. (Richard 2014, 18)

On the other hand, making conscious the preconceptions involved in the perspective and practices of research also means denaturalizing the social world and recognizing that our cultural and social formation and our position, both in a particular field of knowledge and in society, affect the way in which we see the world and its social phenomena.

In short, this issue of **INTER DISCIPLINA** brings together different approaches to the study of visualities, prioritizing views trans/in/end disciplined. The five articles that make up the dossier share a concern for methodological work with/alongside visualities and their compilation aims to share both approaches and objects of varied studies and to encourage thinking about potentialities, limitations and uncertainties. In this sense, one of the objectives sought is to socialize different works with/alongside visualities. This means not limiting oneself to a superficial or literal understanding of images, but rather focusing on their complex semantic structure, the visual logics and practices associated with them: their materiality, production, appropriation, reproduction, modification, resignification; what they allow us to open, think, feel and link.

Raíza Ribeiro Cavalcanti, in her article “Artistic agencies: rethinking the agency of artistic works from an interdisciplinary perspective”, starts from a reflective exercise on her doctoral thesis about the agency capacity of artistic work, to think about incidences not only within the field but beyond the discourses and intentions of its authors, thus identifying theoretical-methodological problems and challenges. As a result, from the sociology of art and from a shift from the discursive to the objectual/technical approach, Ribeiro Cavalcanti critically examines

the notion of artistic agencies and develops how today's art seeks to influence the creation of imaginaries different from the modern/colonial/capitalist and politically affect a certain order of visuality by analyzing different Brazilian cases.

The next article, "An approach to the historiography and countervisuality of Afro-American visual representations" written by Mauricio Sánchez Menchero, focuses on analyzing the concept of "historiophoty" and reflecting on the use of (audio)visual sources in research, focusing specifically on African-Americans portrayed, photographed or filmed. Likewise, the author proposes, for the analysis of his cases, the use of the notion of a device articulated with the conceptual pair visuality–counter–visuality. In this way, Sánchez Menchero examines different types of images (painted stills, photographic stills and moving images) that refer to black people and that construct different historiographical accounts of the visual representations of Afro-Americans.

In the article written by Ana Paula Nunes Chaves and María Flavia Barbosa Xavier, "Amazon in pictures: about visual education through *National Geographic Magazine*", we are invited to investigate those images that contribute to our productions of geographic imaginaries, peoples and cultures. In this sense, the authors recover visual narratives of the Amazon rainforest in *National Geographic* magazine from 1889 to 2021. Nunes Chaves and Barbosa Xavier investigate the way in which technologies impact the production and access of images and, mainly, focus on which are the authorized voices to narrate the stories of the Amazon rainforest, thus broadening the interpretations of realities. Considering the magazine's long history and cultural positioning with a community of readers of almost 3 million worldwide, this article/essay deeply questions the visual construction of the Brazilian Amazon. The social construction of the visual is granted by a publisher over time and according to power relations and rationalities in force at each era, it has exoticized native peoples and many of the forests and vegetation of Brazil, reinforcing the colonial view and the colonizing imaginaries about South America.

For her part, Yuri Constanza Páez Triviño presents the article "From theatrical performance to photography: methodological challenges of an investigation into Michoacan theater in Mexico", in which she proposes to investigate the relationships between theater and the photographs used for research. The author then asks about the contexts of image production as well as the bodies in the theater scene, revealing in her writing the questions that suggest not only working with images in research, but also considering the conditions of intelligibility that they arouse in those who see, touch or feel them and replace them. Páez Triviño shares part of her doctoral research in which she investigates the way in which communities are linked to theater and the pedagogy that she calls public; in this plot she proposes a reflection on the contributions of the photographic

image in ethnographic work. Through an exercise of reconstructing scenes in which she recovers the reactions of the public, the manifestations of bodies, silences and words, the author analyzes the pedagogical and public work of the theater. For this task, she carries out an ethnographic work with plays that sensitively address the problem of feminicides in the states of Mexico. Finally, she reflects on the possibilities that images have for the senses and pedagogies.

The last article from the dossier, “Researching with/alongside visualities: uncertainties and potentialities,” by Verónica Capasso and Ornella Barone Zalocco, deploys different transdisciplinary theoretical-methodological tools in working with visualities, recording the topographical marks that pull, interact, and interact in images as complex semantic narratives, and then presents two investigations that start from working with/alongside images. For this task, the authors maintain that the study and deepening of a work with/alongside images requires a transdisciplinary task, but also an in/end disciplinary one, seeking to understand visualities from various epistemological, ontological and (aesthetic)ethical angles. Each author explains her methodological approach, in line with her objectives and the conceptual tools adopted and woven for the interpretation and understanding of her themes: socio-environmental visualities and (per)formative menstrual visualities. Throughout the text, not only is the place of enunciation made explicit, but also the developments, uncertainties and potentialities of critical work with images are exposed. For this work, the authors appeal to images with a powerful charge as a trench for a new political-visual order, highlighting the dystopian, the strange, the abject, the rare or the queer.

Finally, the dossier is completed, on the one hand, with an interview conducted by Capasso and Barone Zalocco with the anticolonial artistic creation and research *Ayllu* Collective, in which there is an exchange that gives an account of the committed and sensitive political (aesthetic)ethical work that this collective has with its proposals. As a way of repairing the damage caused by the deep colonial wound, they propose works based on the reactivation of memories and the construction of counter-images, which aim to go beyond what the images show in appearance; challenging ocularcentrism to question and seek to escape the visual regime of the plantation —in the words of Iki Yos Piña Narváez. In the interview, the artists who make up the collective go through the composition of many of their works, sharing the behind-the-scenes of their intentions, as well as some reactions and interactions that their works have awakened. Also, by discussing the name of the *Ayllu* Collective, they refer to the recovery of what was stolen by the conquest and colonialism, building from the diaspora, from ancestral and community practices, from memories, with their dissident bodies in their words. From their displacements, their wounds and pain, the artists of this collective create images that propose a restoration of a form of organization

that is still in the territories, but in a way situated in Europe. On the other hand, the dossier includes a review of the book *Image and method. Theoretical backgrounds and methodological procedures of the science of the image* (2014), by Elke Köppen, in which a detailed enumeration of approaches and authors representing different theories and perspectives of image analysis is made.

In short, this issue of **INTER DISCIPLINA** and the dossier in particular build a space that we consider potentially plural in dialogue, which not only brings together researchers from different backgrounds and training, but also includes methodological proposals that clearly do not pursue the same interests, nor political (aesthetic)ethical positions, because they do not have the same situations of intersectionality. We therefore invite you to read the different approaches, reflections and meaningful contributions, both descriptive and theoretical and methodological, around this proposal to work and feel-think visual culture in our research, with a strong emphasis on Our America. □

Verónica Capasso and Ornella Barone Zallocco

*Guest Editors*

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