

Urupë or the (un)veiling of the image

Although the mechanical reproductions of the world are established on emulsified paper, such does not mean that the images have to be imprisoned indefinitely by the substance. A canonical narrative would say that the white western man needed to touch the images in order to mediate the link between the eye and the spirit and, through this gesture, raise the priority of perception. I would equally say that the photograph will have continued this same genealogy of representation by duplicating the images directed to the tactile look, thus abandoning the allure felt by the painter at the moment it is transfixed by the universe¹.

In other latitudes, the sacred relationship with nature is a striking component of the experience lived by indigenous people, and it is from this bond that the visions, the respect and deep wisdom emerge with regard to the forest as a transcendent body. On the one hand, the *Ayahusca* rituals (Peru) are well-known for the transmigration of the spirits of the forest, as well as their visions by shamans, through the incorporation of a spirit-image. In this context, the word "spirit" has no connotation whatsoever with the Catholic religion, it only signifies the vital principle that animates all living species - their vital impetus. In the words of the Peruvian artist, Pablo Ameringo, «a plant may not speak, but it contains a spirit that is conscious, that sees everything, that is its soul, its essence, which makes it alive» (Narby, 2004:95)².

Jeremy Narby, an anthropologist who lived with and studied the *ayahuasqueros* for decades, proposed as an explanatory hypothesis for this relationship - between the human mind and the natural environment - the existence of a bio-communication process between human and plant DNA cells. In short, Narby concluded that the shaman, by ingesting cells of a hallucinogenic plant, would make the neuro-receptors of his visual cortex sensitive to bio-photonic emissions (photons of a cellular origin), thus producing a kind of forest television or biosphere television.

In yet another antipodal conception of image, the Yanomami Indians ignore our relating modes with the light that emanates from things. Regarding the specificity of this indigenous Amazonian culture (Brazil), there are no materialized images, and each time you intend to access the presence of the "real", the images are brought down in the body of the shaman. It is through the incorporation of an "audiovisual device"³, dispersed in nature, that the descent is made into a social body of the virtual infinity of the 'being' of things. And, if for the Yanomami everything is image, it is because everything radiates energy (power gradients). *Urupë* is the name given to that image production process, resulting from the choreography of transfigured bodies and the fluidity of the figurations which escape our idea of representation.

When we contemplate the *Urupë* photographic series by Carina Martins, we can foresee that a vision and an aesthetics pervades in them, which we propose approaches a, let's say, universal sense of *Urupë*, translated into a certain ontological experience of nature or that of what Espinoza and Coleridge described as *natura naturans*: nature as a sentient being and an autopoietic organism. Also close to a synthesis given by the literary experience of *Deep Ecology*, in the pages of American naturalists like Ralph Waldo Emerson or Henry David Thoreau, or completely experienced in the nature philosophy of Aldo Leopold and Arne Naess.

On the other hand, in a patrimonial lineage of imagistic tools of (re)production regarding the experience of presence, where we, speculatively, integrate this set of photographs, we would, without a doubt, place a significant part of the work of the director, Andrei Tarkovsky. In one of his masterpieces, *Stalker*, it is clear that the *Zone*, while

1 «...I believe that the painter must be crossed by the universe, and not want to cross it...» (Citation by the painter André Marchand. Vide: Merleau-Ponty (2000). *The Eye and the Spirit*. Lisbon: Vega. P.28.

2 Narby, Jeremy (2004). *The Cosmic Serpent: DNA and the Origins of Knowledge*. Porto.Via Óptima.

3 This is the designation that the Brazilian philosopher Laymert Garcia Dos Santos applies to the Yanomami. Vide: Senra, Stella (2011). *Conversations in Watoriki: from the passing of images to the images of passing: capturing the audiovisual of shamanism*.

landscape with a life of its own, occupies most of the filmic space and is therefore a hyperaesthetic place and in constant mutation. In Tarkovsky, the human world is obsessively correlated with the four elements of nature. Nature communicates and intercedes with humans, therefore being a poetic metaphor of emotions and an icon of a paradoxical hypersensitivity.

The visual complexity of this series is not just limited to the kaleidoscopic game between the flora that inhabits a botanical garden and the textures that make up a diaphanous or ghostly cloak, a sort of a reticulated veil which covers the entire visual plane. Yet another architectural structure is added to this translucent membrane, composed of frames (of windows), which is concealed in a matrix that seems to serve as a framework for the plant universe of an inaccessible nature.

What we see in these images is, essentially, a structure by layers of visual elements, a stratigraphy comprised of woodstains, reflections and perpendicular lines in permanent interaction. In some of the photographs, the vibrant tension that emerges is more intensely resonant, producing, in these cases, a modulation of the visual perception that we would classify as hallucinatory. In this context, the author proposes we assume a veiled approach to the *Phýsis* ("Nature"), as if the ability to grasp the life that flows incessantly were inaccessible to human perception.

In a certain sense, the set of photographs that make up *Urupě* refer to a metaphysical quality of knowledge, i.e. to the transitional path that allows cognitive access to the original essence of what is to come. The veilings and the common reflections to the images that are part of the series, indeed, constitute a relevant metaphor, allusive to the philosophical construction of truth, in Plato. For the Greek thinker, the "truth" or the "reality" (*Aletheia*), would consist in a process of unclocking of the images - or the appearances - that coat nature of its own things.

But let us now recall the beginning of this text, so as to verify that Carina Martins' choice consisted of representing nature through a visual device that no longer corresponds to the fetishism of the tactile eye, nor to the contemplative pleasure (*gaze*) of a corresponding human that is too naturalized, nature objectively portrayed. Instead, the photographer's imagetic system is developed in a partially utopian territory, in other words, without the stability of a specific topology that would allow us to set up an effective mediation with the *punctum* of these images.

Therefore, in *Urupě*, it is not about the influence of the acuity of the visual field on the phenomenological perception of a certain object. Maybe because, in fact, if we want to access the *natura naturans*, the pictorial representation of nature will be of no use. How do we represent, how do we transform into an image that which by definition should be beyond representation? This would be the question that should be asked when dealing with the transcendence of the thresholds of image, of images without support and which are beyond representation – the images in its 'pure state'?

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