

Foreword

Photography and Urban Culture(s) is the main theme of the dossier composing this issue of *Varia História*. A result of urban culture at the end of the first half of the nineteenth century, photography is one of the few artifacts since then to register the variety of social practices emerging from and experienced in the public and private spaces of city life. With more than a century and a half of existence, photography today has a history that permits an analysis of its technical and aesthetic transformations as well as its social uses and functions.

One of its dimensions, the analogical, may induce many to insert photography in the world of the recognizable, that is, as linked to its referent. The growing volume of studies on its visuality connect it to the culture of the look. Guided by aesthetic, commercial, political, and cultural motives, among others, photographers metamorphize the real; they create their own social times and spaces. Thus conceived, photography is no longer seen as a simulacrum of the real; it becomes a cultural and intellectual space in tune with the systems of perception and representation historically and culturally conceived and produced. Not by chance is it said that photography belongs to the category of reductions; it is the symbolic representation of another object. Even more, it has an active social role: it can both erase the memory of an event and reinvent it.

If figurative photography is what most interests the historian, the existence of abstract photography, that which is created for conceptual ends, cannot be ignored. In the same way, it is important to take into account the uses attributed to photography originating from the decontextualized production of images. Whether or not they carry on a dialogue with artistic movements such as surrealism, hyper-realism, and others, professional and amateur photographers have the technical resources capable of creating uncommon objects and even imagined figurative realities. Even if a large part of such photographs are produced for specific ends, namely, aiming at creating strictly conceptual or formal objects, it is the case that their interactions with other fields of photography and visual culture are informative to analysts of socio-cultural questions proper to contemporary systems of visual perception. This means that



the analysis of photography, whatever its period, must interact with its own semantic field as well as those belonging to the “community of images,” to use an expression dear to Roland Barthes.

It is important to emphasize once more that although the power of photography’s penetration is not restricted to urban areas, it is precisely there that this image, hybrid by nature, encounters and continues to encounter territory propitious for the debate that most interests this dossier: to understand in what ways and why the different dimensions of photography have taken such a part in the formation and change of urban ways of life, both its forms and fields of knowledge.

The six articles that make up this dossier, three from foreigners and three from Brazilians, pose not only a variety of analytical questions but also indicate different possibilities to rethink the relations between *Photography and Urban Culture(s)*.

The article of Fernando Aguayo Hernández, professor and researcher of the Instituto Mora, Mexico, “*Los arrebatos del corazón*” [Raptures of the Heart] offers us a first-rate analysis based on a long reflection with two distinct but correlated points, showing how the Plaza Mayor — “the heart of the city” of Mexico — has been a space for producing socio-political-cultural identities and disputes. To make his point, Hernández unveils the existing connections between the photographs of the plaza and the socio-political uses and functions attributed to it by different segments of Mexican society. Amid reflections on photography and the urban, the article reserves space for another concern inherent in the work of the historian by leading the reader to methodologies concerning research on visual images, especially photographs.

In “*El retrato fotográfico en la Buenos Aires decimonónica: la burguesía se representa a sí misma*” [The Photographic Portrait in Nineteenth Century Buenos Aires: the Bourgeoisie Represents Itself], Andréa Cuarterolo — historian and researcher of the Centro de Investigación y Nuevos Estudios sobre Cine/Buenos Aires — shows the role of photography in the making of an urban bourgeois culture committed to the ideas of progress from the industrial era. For these and other reasons, readers will find in the pages of this article one of the most striking characteristics of the history of photography, especially of the portrait, of the nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth centuries. We refer particularly to the combination, on one hand, of the universalization of photographic visibility, and on the other, the search for individualization of the subjects portrayed. By combining visual and textual sources, the article allows one to evaluate the feeling of captivation of former authors before an image then considered a faithful duplication of the real.

While the first two articles emphasize the representations of a figurative world and give emphasis to photographed subjects, the essay of Juan

Fontcuberta, photographer and professor of the Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona, gives priority to the relations, especially similitude, present in the effort to denaturalize the real starting from photographic and textual signs. Interested in underlining the crucial role played by the culture of the look in the interpretation of reality, the author of "*Arqueologias del Futuro*" [Archeologies of the Future] calls into question the objective notion of landscape, proposed by those who believed or believe in the status of the documental and/or testimonial truth of photography. With this aim, he sustains the thesis that photographic writing, molded through the use of photograms, for example, can create imagined realities as convincing as those present in John Stathos' *The Book of Lost Cities*, or in Ítalo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*. This issue places the reader before the representative nature of photography.

The article of Maria Inez Turazzi — historian, doctor in architecture and urbanism, and researcher of the Imperial Museum — "*Paisagem construída: fotografia y memória dos 'melhoramentos urbanos' na cidade de Rio de Janeiro*" [Constructed Landscape: Photography and Memory of the 'Urban Improvements' in the City of Rio de Janeiro], like the first two articles, lies in the field of documental and/or historical photography. Among the specific analyses of the author are the close relations between power, science, professional photography, publicity, and the notion of urban progress reigning at the end of the nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth centuries. In order to unravel these complex connections, Turazzi begins with an aspect little studied by analysts of the history of photography and urban history of the period. From a specific scenario — life in the federal capital of Brazil — the author transports the reader to the world of the photography of public works. She shows, with a documental wealth and analytic astuteness, how the lenses of photographers, foreign and Brazilian, actively participated in the construction of urban memories, collective and individual, as regards the great engineering works that, within a few years, altered the center of Rio de Janeiro, model city of a nation that aspired to be modern.

Maria Beatriz R. de V. Coelho, photographer, sociologist and professor of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology/UFMG, is the author of the article "*O Campo da fotografia profissional no Brasil*" [The Field of Professional Photography in Brazil]. By privileging the photography done by professionals, foreign and Brazilian, in the Brazil from the second half of the twentieth century onward, the author histories the combinations between the internal and external variables of photography to show the constitution and changes in the field of photography and the training of photographers. Amidst so many novelties, this dynamic article also analyzes the participation of photography (especially photojournalism) in the organs of the public and private press interested in the production of



images and the imaginary in Brazilian identities. The presence of photography in museums, expositions and the Brazilian publishing market are also studied in this article.

Mauro Guilherme Pinheiro Koury — doctor in Social Sciences from the University of Glasgow, professor and researcher of the Department of Social Sciences/UFPB — is the author of “*O Imaginário Urbano sobre Fotografia e Morte em Belo Horizonte, MG, nos Anos Finais do Século XX*” [The Urban Imaginary on Photography and Death in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, in the Final Years of the XX Century]. His article is an original contribution to theme he has analyzed before: the uses and senses of mortuary photography of a private character in Brazil. In this essay, specifically, the author reveals the particularities of the case in Minas Gerais, in the present time of Belo Horizonte. To go beyond the theme, Koury uses a little used combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies as a form for his socio-anthropological and historical reflections on the re-significations that are today attributed to that type of photography. The conjunction of data analyzed encourages the reader to think about the themes related to the cultures of death, dying, and solitude in contemporary urban life.

It is hoped that the academic relevance of these six articles that make up this dossier, three by foreign and three by Brazilian scholars, offers the readers of *Varia História* motivation and interesting clues to continue the reflection and research that has photography and urban culture(s) as a privileged object of analysis.

Belo Horizonte, 2006

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