

The reinvented spaces in the art of Elaine Tedesco

A set of photographs is opened in a series of links, exposing a continuous, and at the same time anachronistic process. These are images of a narrative sequence, since the structure of a trajectory can be perceived in them. However, in these works, images and spaces of other times return, now re-appropriated in new articulations of meaning. As though they could break the cycle that is previously joined in a series of links, but they do not reach this point, they simply break it up into advances and returns of these places and times.

Lonely landscapes or corners almost forgotten in the countryside of Rio Grande do Sul are perceived in these poetic photographs. But, at their core, long before they become photographs, they keep the intense experience of the artist in these spaces. She feels a vital communication with the world, which becomes present as a familiar space in her life. It is to it that the objects perceived, and Elaine as the perceiving subject, owe their thickness.¹ She travels obsessively through these regions, until she discovers these

¹ Cf. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Fenomenologia da percepção*. Rio de Janeiro e São Paulo: Freitas Bastos S.A, 1971.

territories, bringing with herself many of the objects already present in her work. The previous works, the current search itself, and the disclosure of new sites constitute a single process, which cannot be reduced to a passive, univocal perception of photographic images. It is molded on a marked complexity, and thus brings a plurality of elements that incite to multifocal understanding: one has contacts with different times, with diverse appropriations of spaces and objects, and with the varied connections that are structured among them. A work that proposes rethinking our relationships with the world in depth.

Under the dominance of a technical medium that is interposed between her gaze and her hand, Elaine shows indifference to the automatism of mechanical recording; on the contrary, she daringly questions the objects of her gaze. The latter is restless, and unveils alienation, facts that become visible in the production of these photographs. In the process of manufacturing her work, the artist knows how to make one see, not as an act of visible and unilateral evidences², but comprehending it as an operation with a subject, to which what is real revolves, in its instigating condition. She triggers tension by means of the images she recreates, in fictions that give the appearance of truth. These images witness that authorship comes not only from competent technical operation, but rather from the

2 Cf. Georges Didi-Huberman. *O que vemos e o que nos olha*. São Paulo: Editora 34, 1998.

interrogative proposal that engenders it. The quality of this production is found precisely in this aspect, in the way of making one see what is real, suggesting multiple meanings and, therefore, escaping the excess of sense.

In the most remote productions, Elaine seeks the evocation, in works such as *Aparatos para o Sono (Apparatuses for Sleep)*, of “a psychophysical state, in which the imagination comes to memory, something that is not in fact in front of us”³. In them she refers to artifacts to be used by the body for rest, such as mattress, pillow or sleeping bags. Later, her work deals with issues of place, without abandoning her previous proposals of rest and isolation, which are maintained in her work. This expands, because now space, and no longer only objects, propose the refuge and protection evoked. The evocation of the place or context, suggests a very specific reading of the work and contributes to the interrogations of the limits between art and life. Her production goes much beyond the previous evocation and renders the borderline spaces between living and producing art apparent.

Elaine builds shelters in public spaces, *Cabines para Isolamento (Isolation Cabin)*, in which she “works against the grain”, as she says, because she uses an intimate space (the cabin), as an indication of her protection against the stress

3 Elaine Athayde Alves Tedesco. *Passagens e desdobramentos entre o repouso e o isolamento na constituição de uma poética visual*. M.A. Dissertation, Programa de Pós-Graduação em Artes Visuais do Instituto de Artes da UFRGS, Sep. 2002, p.18.

provoked by contemporary life in large cities⁴. In this trajectory, the previous ideas of reclusion and rest remain, but they are configured at this time, as happens in cabins; they mark the issue of a place, confronting what is intimate and what is private with what is public and urban. By means of objects and spaces, Elaine's art spreads through daily life and demarcates its borders there, as in her installation in the Central Public Market of Porto Alegre, in 1999. It intervenes in the city space, by a subtle alienation generated by her work in the impersonal places where the urban crowds of today are found. Her doing marks this fact, bring beds or ladders without any mention of aspects of identity; on the contrary, they make one think of depersonalization. Someone's presence is indicated by the object that would be used in her action, but the lack and impersonality are central aspects in the work of these artists. It evokes solitude, human beings and their actions are reinforced by their very absence.

Later, when using photography to record her own work process, the artists exposes the fact that "photography also transforms work also into images of work"⁵. From this perspective her most recent artistic proposal can be understood, the one that operates between what is real, its representation and, at the same time, between fiction and illusion. However, it is not limited to describing it, nor even to evoking it, as she would have done in other times. Now it is interrogating,

4 Elaine Tedesco, *op. cit.*

5 Elaine Tedesco, *idem.*

as it inserts the cabin-niches, these anachronistic artifacts of her process, into the peaceful landscapes of the countryside of Rio Grande do Sul. Real cabins and real landscapes, but both now become images. Which would, therefore, be the current sense of an isolation cabin in a place that is so profoundly lonely? What would prevail, the reclusion of the cabin itself, as a created artifact, or that of the landscape in which it is? And wouldn't this cabin indicate, using the lack (of someone to occupy it) as resource, the action of isolation, doubly reinforced in the landscape, which is, in itself, one of the most intense abandonment?

Elaine wanders through other corners of the southern territories, and, in this itinerary she finds a rich source of artistic interest. A large construction of yore is maintained in the countryside of Rio Pardo, and it is an important place for her more recent works. On penetrating that space in a cooperative, the artist is surprised by a set of heaped-up rice sacks. But that is not all. Next to this, in nearby constructions, and as though they were interlinked places, silent, anonymous people sew up these textiles, compulsively lined up in rows in front of their sewing machines. Strange characters, since they work surrounded by heaps of sacks around themselves, as though oppressed by them. This scene brings to the memory of the artist, other works that she has done, in which she wove several of these cloth wrappings and filled them with various materials. The constant return of

these elements in her works, ranging from cabins, sacks to abandoned areas, are a constant presence in the work of Elaine Tedesco; they reappear at this time, and it is perceived that in these latter works the sacks are perceived in their own invasion of the environments, reaching as high as the ceilings. The author of this capture transforms them into works, her artistic action delimits them as such.

An ethereal light weaves these scenes silently, penetrating between the niches of arcs full of rice wrappings. From them emerge photographic proposals that incite us to go much beyond their narrative character. One of them projects the known cabin of other works over the wavy surfaces of superposed textiles, which makes it exist as an image. Lastly, the whole ensemble becomes an image via photographic art, and shows an essential issue, the deployment of an image over multiple images.

In other photographs, projections are also seen, no longer over sacks, but deep down within semi-obscure niches. These are rectangular-shaped projections, in which, in one of them one perceives a wall of rice which is insurmountable and impassively isolated. In another, the cabin over the abandoned landscape returns, but as a projection: a projected photograph, that phenomenon of luminosity which dramatizes the image and contains its own dematerialization within itself.

At the center of these works a new element emerges: a projector. As in every production by this artist, this one refers to the human absence that would carry out the action. Should we, the observers, be fated to simulate this projection, and to discover what else it can offer? Or would we be guests, following it from outside the image, as part of what is real, separated from the world of these art images?

Elaine Tedesco's photography at no time allows us to take on the position of spectator. When this artist gives one to see, due to the operational and non-informative conditions of the world present in this act, she brings one the status of author.⁶ He is incited to reflect and act on what is real, mixing on it the conscience of all the simulation that, as an image, each one of these photography propose. They are not what is real. They refer to it. The means of production of these works reinforce the dilemma on the idea of a work that is presented here. The artist simultaneously curbs reality and appearance, truth and illusion, objects and places, memory and currentness; and above all, the fantastic return of the images in time and in engendering their own images, always and infinitely, some deployed over others. One constructs and reconstructs within her proposal, sometimes relating objects to objects and places to places, at other times returning to the past, comparing it to the present, sometimes projecting the future. References are sought, signs are

6 Cf. Walter Benjamin. "O autor como produtor". Walter Benjamin. Obras escolhidas. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1994.

identified, and their resources of alienation: diverse possibilities of operating through these challenging works in relation to reality.

Based on the instigative aspect of this work, our relationships with the world are also rethought, as one performs a critical examination of what is real in this process. Elaine's production, in leading to this type of perception, reveals its special inventive capacity, through which it deals with the clashes of art itself in its contacts with life, proposed obsessively and at the same time in an essentially poetic way. Her experiences (loneliness, anxiety, searches and discoveries, the need for rest and protection, reclusion, appropriations..) are made into images and these are proposed as art.

Through perception and reinvention, research carried out as works and constant problematizations, Elaine Tedesco's production transfers all these issues to the symbolic world. It demarcates its contemporariness in going beyond the limits of any photographic art or records of an installation. It provides art itself with a special dimension, that of sharing an essentially lyrical mode that does not hide the valuable moments in which it is manufactured, the experiential focus of the material and the technical elaboration of her works. This leads us to ask about the true meaning of art, or rather, about the meaning of art in life, through the unusual spaces that it chooses or the artifacts that it engenders and appropriates. This is the greatest contribution of this artist,

indispensable to enable us to reflect about this complex and fascinating field of current art production; also on the sensitive exercise that we bring inherently within ourselves, regrettably so often omitted and even asphyxiated in our vital experience.

Mônica Zielinsky

May 2003.