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The skin of the image: trauma and melancholia in photographic folds by Severo Sarduy, Pedro Lemebel, Alair Gomes and Hudinilson Junior¹

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Abstract

This study analyzes the poetics of the photographic expressions of Severo Sarduy (Cuba, 1937-1993), Pedro Lemebel (Chile, 1952-2015), Alair Gomes (Brazil, 1921-1991) and Hudinilson Júnior (Brazil, 1957-2013). Through the body and the artifice, sensibilities are found across artistic productions that revisit not only the baroque, but the neobaroque in its aesthetic dimension. Through a folding, we look at queerness and photography to think of the performative aspect of the body as image by means of melancholia and trauma. What we call the "skin of the image" is the texture of the shared gaze which comes into contact with us, like a surface that extends from one skin to another.

Keywords

Queer; Baroque; Photography; Aesthetics; Body.

Introduction

Among the ephemeral and the unfinished, the baroque vision anchors its perspective of history through decomposition, by refusing eternity and the stability of the symbol, through the allegory as ruin, it produces an aesthetic experience— considering that in the allegorical structure of the baroque drama, the ruins are formal elements of the artwork, while the image appears as a fragment. Thus, it is worth thinking of the fragmentary aspect of this dramatic vision of the baroque through the dialectics of allegory, because "ambiguity, the multiplicity of meanings is the fundamental feature of allegory. The allegory, the baroque, prides itself on the richness of significations" (Benjamin, 1984, p. 199). If the images communicate within the ambivalence of the past and the present, the fragments lead us to "occasional sparkles" (Benjamin, 1985) that allow glimpses of the photographs by way of coup d'oeil. Therefore, Sontag (1986) describes the Benjaminian style as the "baroque of fixed structure", having as its main motivation the spatialization of the world, where to understand means to map and to know, above all, how to get lost. "The baroque refers not to an essence, but above all to an operative function, to a trace. It does not stop making folds" (Deleuze, 1991, p. 13). In such a way, we get lost among the photographic traces, because in Deleuze's (1991) terms, the trace of the baroque is the fold that goes onto the infinite, like a labyrinth of incessant force, with the body having a complex centrality because of its own capacity to redouble. "It is the moment in which the depth created by the one who looks back at us opens up " (Didi-Huberman, 1998, p. 77)

When looking at the folds, we find in the perspective of Lopes (1999) a starting point in the approach of the Neobaroque as an operational category that can be used to understand the contemporary world, considering that this category, besides hyperbolizing the possibility of the Baroque, recreates it in the dimensions of/for the present, emerging from the simultaneity of worlds, stemming from its importance in Brazilian and Latin American cultures. "The neo-baroque constitutes itself in a poetics of deterritorialization, adequate to the crisis of individualism in which subjectivity explodes in schizoid flows, putting itself permanently adrift" (Lopes, 1999, p. 42). For the author, the recovery of the Baroque brings playfulness and spectacularization into social relations, having the artifice as a fundamental element which leads to play and seduction. As such, in each photographic fragment, we are interested in sensorial relationships, precisely at the moment in which we grasp the fragment through glimpses, revealing imprecise and brief appearances of the object. In the Baroque, through the metaphor of the world as theater, we understand artifice as an aesthetic category (Lopes, 2002) constituted by individual and collective experiences, here marked by the performative accounts of LGBTQIA+/queer¹ bodies in the photographic field.

As we explore these images, we observe the areas in which the photograph "un-folds", as Lissovsky (2009) remarks, in the creases of the images which vibrate among themselves and fluctuate with others, nurturing a sensibility that comes from this very vibration and leads us to a visual and tactile surface that develops as a result of the shared gaze. If this texture can be seen as a space created by the folds, it would be fitting to highlight what Fatorelli (2012) refers to as the "images affects," among perception and action, arising from the ability of affects to point to the interior of the body which "can produce a singular experience, create new habits, awaken new dispositions" (Fatorelli, 2012, p. 49). In an effort to broaden the relationships between queerness and photography, we perform a refolding of the affects — all while keeping in mind the sensibilities of affect and artifice in Latin America, as presented by Lopes (2016). "This protoqueer sensibility is articulated with a poetic production linked to a re-reading of the Baroque, a fundamental moment of a genealogy of the artifice and that is updated as Neobaroque, which was already placed under a queer dimension (...)" (Lopes, 2016, p. 4). Thus, these "queer affects" allow us to touch

¹ LGBTQIA+ is the abbreviation used for lesbian, gay, bisexual, travesti, transexual or transgender, queer, intersex and asexual.

images of the artists' skin, the surface of their bodies, which leaves behind vestiges to be captured by the visual impressions and the poetic aspects of each photograph.

As such, when looking at the photographic work of Severo Sarduy (Cuba, 1937-1993), Pedro Lemebel (Chile, 1952-2015), Alair Gomes (Brazil, 1921-1991) and Hudinilson Junior (Brazil, 1957-2013), this study recognizes mutual affects that are produced by shared glances. When we think about the poetic expression of these bodies, while considering the relationship between the artifice and the Latin American cultural context, through folding, we find a way of perceiving the entanglements of the past in the body of the present (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2012). Through Rolnik (2018), we witness the activation of scenarios that are given motion and propelled forward in the present. "And even if such pulsation refers to art movements of the past, the possibility of there being such effects extrapolates their time and even the restricted space of art" (Rolnik, 2018, p. 96). In these scenarios, we try to think of the image as a gesture of creation through the body, in which "they are bodies - and bodies are images - that stubbornly emerge" (Resende et al., 2019, p. 497). If the affects reveal encounters that allow for the theatrical, as Colling (2021) suggests, we present two acts and multiple scenes. In the first, we will observe the relationship between body and trauma in the works of Sarduy and Lemebel and, in the second, we will observe the relationship between body and melancholia in the works of Alair and Hudinilson, considering the artifice as a perspective of aesthetic form in the photographs.

Body and trauma in Severo Sarduy and Pedro Lemebel: act one

Emerging from Latin American Boom writing, Severo Sarduy's work often mediates between the writers of the 1960s and 1970s and those of the post-boom.² As such, when publicly presented, the author's body of work often resembles the masculinist and elitist image portrayed by the writers of the time.³ By obeying the codes of conventionality and the practices of normalization, the author creates a marketable identity that attracts collegiate alliances and future readers.⁴ Severo Sarduy, born in the city of Camagüey, Cuba in 1937, is considered one of the most important writers in the contemporary Latin American context. He is the author of several novels that show trans expression embodied within the word, such as *Escrito sobre un cuerpo* (1969) and *Cobra* (1972). For him, the baroque contains dialogical and intertextual elements that interact with what would be the "neobaroque of disequilibrium, a structural reflection of a desire that cannot reach its object, a desire for which the logos has organized nothing more than a pantheon that hides the void" (Sarduy, 1987, p. 178). In view of this, gender and sexuality enter a state of baroque crisis which now represent the social and the political, including the marginalization of difference. Taking this into account, we will turn our attention to a series of photographs that appear in *El Oriente de Severo Sarduy*, an exhibition of the artist's visual work curated by Gustavo Guerrero.⁵

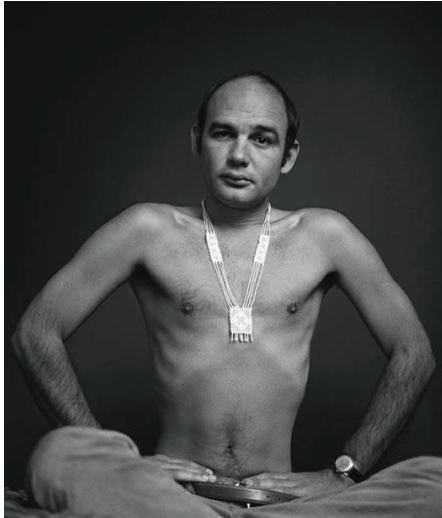
² For a deeper understanding of the writers and the two movements, see Echevarría et al. (1987).

³ According to Shaw (1998), the boom writers would be closer to a privileged class which did not represent the majority of the average person in Latin America.

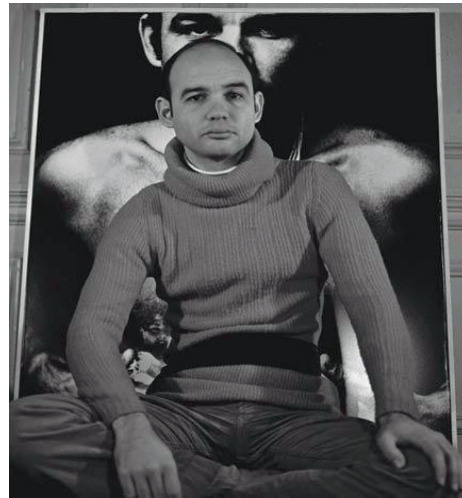
⁴ We come to this conclusion after reading newspaper articles found as clippings in the González Echevarría Collection on Severo Sarduy and other Latin American writers in the Firestone Library at Princeton University, New Jersey, as part of the Manuscript Division. Retrieved from <https://findingaids.princeton.edu/catalog/C1543> on September 09, 2021.

⁵ The exhibition was inaugurated in Madrid in 2008 before traveling to Paris, Fes, Tangier, Tétouan, Casablanca, Rabat, Pekin, New Delhi, and Manila. Subsequently, the Virtual Cervantes Center created a digital space of free access to the public. Retrieved from: <https://cvc.cervantes.es/literatura/escritores/Sarduy/> on August 03, 2021.

Photographs 1 and 2 – Entitled *Severo Sarduy en casa de Antonio Gálvez* (1971), they appear in the essay *Severo Sarduy: una necesaria relectura* by Juan Goytisolo and in the essay *Sobre una tumba, una rumba* by Guillermo Cabrera Infante, respectively



1



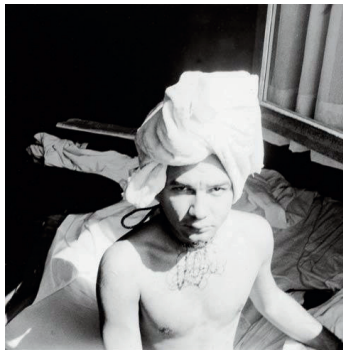
2

Source: Centro Virtual Cervantes / Antônio Gálvez Collection

As the title suggests, *El Oriente de Severo Sarduy* turns its attention to Sarduy's interest in Eastern culture. We would like to start with a series of images taken by Antonio Gálvez (2018), a Catalan photographer widely recognized for his surrealist photomontages. He is the author of *Mes amis les groses têtes*, a collection of 75 portraits of significant cultural, literary, and philosophical figures, in which Sarduy is included. In Photo 1, Sarduy draws attention to the plasticity of the body. The camera focuses on his face and upper torso as he looks directly into the lens. When looking into his immovable eyes, we may ask ourselves what could be looking back at us (Didi-Huberman, 1998). Perhaps, we feel observed by the long necklace that adorns his aroused body which straightens gracefully as his hands grasp onto his waist. This pose, along with Gálvez's surreal photographic approach, makes his skin glisten along with the surface of the photograph. In addition, the increased contrast of the portrait, which darkens the shadows of the image, highlights the flesh.

It is important to note that despite being half-naked, Sarduy looks at us fully aware that he is being observed, while expanding his own bodily presence through a graceful, feminine appearance that contrasts with his naturally robust, masculine body. In Photograph 2, sitting cross-legged and with his torso covered, the viewer participates in an interplay of looks that is offered by the image. Instead of presenting the bare chest and handmade necklace, Sarduy now wears a long-sleeved shirt. Instead of the graceful pose that makes the body rise, we now find lowered shoulders. This time, however, what may be most striking is that which emerges in the background of the portrait. Behind him, large and imposing, we find what appears to be another portrait of Sarduy looking back at us from behind the author's gaze. The use of *mise en abyme* encourages us to reflect on the artist's corporeality, the folds and reconstructions captured from photo to photo, each one presenting a pause in time and space of a body that always begins anew in the moment. The plasticity of the body is revealed by the artifice of Sarduy's femininity as a "space of conversions, of transformations and disguises" (Sarduy, 1979, p. 48).

Photographs 3, 4 e 5 – Entitled *Severo Sarduy disfrazado* (1968-1972), they appear in the exhibition *Notas sobre el Oriente de Severo* by José Rubén Gallo, in the exhibition *El Oriente de Severo Sarduy* by Gustavo Guerrero (2018), in the exhibition *Viaje al país de "Las mil y una noches"*, respectively



3



4



5

Source: Centro Virtual Cervantes / Antônio Gálvez Collection

Apart from those taken by Antonio Gálvez, In *El Oriente de Severo Sarduy* we find photographs in which the artist, while traveling East, interacts with his own body through surfaces, whether those of his own skin or of the places in which he appears. By focusing on three photographs, all taken at different times and places, we find Sarduy by windows or among balconies, often overlooking Moroccan cityscapes. Photograph 3 shows Sarduy looking directly into the camera lens as the light from an open window shines, flickering on his bare chest, which is adorned by a choker necklace. While in Photograph 1 and 2 he looks at us from above, here he does so from below. Photograph 4 shows his body covered by a large yellow cloth, which acts as a disguise within the landscape composed of a palm tree-lined street in Tangier, a Moroccan port city centered on the Strait of Gibraltar. Photo 5 shows Sarduy in the foreground taking in the sun which contrasts with the buildings in the background. Now, with a necklace (the same as in Photo 2) and a blanket, he covers himself up to his neck as if assembling the staging of the body. In the images, the fabrics which adorn his body take on different forms - imitating (without replicating) tunics, turbans, and veils. Thus, repeatedly, Sarduy gains a regal and sophisticated charm through the poses and decorative accessories that allow the body to interact with the setting. Among captured moments and textures, the photographs present the body as an artifice capable of composing scenes by reinventing itself.

When we see ourselves through Sarduy's eyes, we are drawn to the body due to its pose and gesture. It is important to note that the photographs are taken outdoors, in cities visited by travelers and tourists. This being a place of mobility and anonymity, it allows for differences to fade within the familiar and the strange. Thus, Sarduy makes use of spatial liminality and baroque decentralization to produce a moment of tension and contradiction. Standing by the windows and on the balconies, which connect the interior to the exterior, Sarduy finds liminal spaces that make use of the mutability of the body, this being a space for staging. Like other neobaroque performance artists, Sarduy engages in playful, spontaneous, and subversive actions that allow him to enter the "liminoid space, a space for transformative theatrical play and invention, a space which becomes a laboratory of new ideas possessing the potential for eventual socio-political transformation" (Austin, 2011, p. 141).

In the realm of performative acts, we continue with Pedro Lemebel. Born in Santiago, Chile, in 1952, Lemebel was an essayist, novelist, and performer. His manifest *Hablo por mi diferencia*, recited as a political act in the Chilean capital in 1986, distinguishes itself as a highlight of LGBTQIA+ activism, as are many of his works, such as *La esquina es mi corazón* (1995) and *Adiós mariquita linda* (2004). In his literary work, he defends the marginalized and the feminine, the underprivileged and the vulnerable, the

forgotten and the repressed. This no doubt carries over into his performance work which brings forward a poetics of political engagement and bodily confrontation. Before becoming a renowned author, Lemebel gained notoriety working alongside Francisco Casas in the collective *Yeguas del Apocalipsis*.⁶ As part of this group, he conducted a series of performative acts that had a significant impact in the 1980s Chilean cultural scene during and after the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. In addition to using the camera to document these acts, Lemebel and Casas delve into performance photography, creating a series of autonomous artworks. Among them, their reinterpretation of *Las dos Fridas* is their most acclaimed work. In the form of a tableau vivant, the artists recreate one of Frida Kahlo's works, finding themselves mirrored within it.

Photograph 6 – Entitled *Las dos Fridas* by Pedro Marinello (1989)



6

Source: *Yeguas del Apocalipsis*' Collection

In Photograph 6, we find the bodies of Lemebel and Casas replacing that of Kahlo's. Seated on the left, Lemebel wears a typical Mexican skirt while Casas, seated on the right, wears a common Victorian skirt. As they look at us, we witness their attempt to resemble Frida, imitating her eyebrow and hairstyle. In the photograph, their chest appears open, literally, showing each heart as a painting. Connecting them, we find an IV line running through both bodies. At one end, Casas clamps the line with a surgical hemostat that controls the bleeding while Lemebel connects the other end of the line to a small hand mirror that reflects our own image. The two bodies reproduce the same bleeding image.

The traumatic experience, as understood by Cvetkovich (2003), forges evident connections between politics and emotions. She explains how the AIDS crisis offered evidence that, for some, certain deaths were more important than others. This way, insisting on the militancy of mourning, queer activism

⁶ Their work has been digitally archived and publicly released. The project, which took three years (2015-2018) to complete, worked closely with members of *Yeguas del Apocalipsis*. The digital project provides titles, dates, descriptions, and photographs for each artwork. Retrieved from: www.yeguasdelapocalipsis.cl/ on September 20, 2021.

reconstructs and reutilizes trauma differently. "The formation of a public culture around trauma has been especially visible in the queer response to the AIDS crisis" (Cvetkovich, 2003, p. 5). Indeed, in Lemebel and Casas, the gaze disrupts the presence of Kahlo through the artifice of the scene. Using makeup, wigs, and skirts, we see how the artifice constructs other possible ways of living not only by parodying gender, but by resignifying the body through mourning, closely related to what Taylor (2013) refers to as the staging of traumatic memory.

As such, in their recreation of Kahlo's double portrait, they explore the individual and collective trauma of AIDS, showing appreciation for friendship and other forms of kinship and denouncing social and political neglect towards victims. In this photographic performance, an important element related to AIDS is the IV line. As a medical tool, it serves as a symbol of medical neglect and pathologization experienced by LGBTQIA+ people during the HIV/AIDS pandemic. In the photograph, in addition to the IV line, their holding hands underscore the bond created between these communities of resistance as they lived through the crisis. Through the reconfiguration of Kahlo, the artists declare their interest in social memory which intertwines communities and leads to the formation of sociopolitical subjects, that is, they point to a space that holds onto the voice of survivors which is then transmitted through embodied performances. "The body reacts to this violent occurrence, difficult to locate temporally and spatially, and communicates it" (Taylor, 2013, p. 281). The performances by Lemebel and Casas re-enact queer testimony, allowing the decimation of bodies to be remembered and thought of differently, even transforming them into a space through which these practices find a voice against erasure and violence. At this point, performance is not about returning to the past, but about keeping something alive, offering a path through the "trails of memory" that reenact trauma.

Photographs 7 e 8 – Entitled *Las dos Fridas en Galería Bucci* and *Cuerpos contingentes*, by Ulisses Nilo and Leonora Calderón, respectively (1990).



7



8

Source: Yeguas del Apocalipsis' Collection

In Photograph 7, we see the first and only live presentation of *Las dos Fridas*, which was held at Bucci Gallery. We find Lemebel and Casas sitting for over three hours staging Frida's painting, holding hands in front of the original painting, which is projected over and behind them. In Photo 8, the artists enter the *Cuerpos Contingentes* exhibition, held by artist Lotty Rosenfeld and writer Diamela Eltit at the Art Gallery of the Center for Social Studies (CESOC), in wheelchairs and naked bodies, covered by plastic and surrounded by barbed wire and stuffed birds. They make reference to the AIDS crisis through their own skin. Thus, by enclosing the bodily surface, as seen in Butler (2016), impenetrability is shown to be impossible without the subject's own disruptions and transmutations. "The boundary of the body, like the distinction between internal and external, is established through the ejection and transvaluation of

something that was originally part of identity into a soiled otherness" (Butler, 2016, p. 230).

Photographs 9 e 10 – Entitled *Instalamos pajaritos como palomas con alambritos* by Pedro Marinello (1990)



9



10

Source: Yeguas del Apocalipsis' Collection

Photographs 11 e 12 – Entitled *Lo que el SIDA se llevó* by Pedro Marinello/Mario Vivado (1989)



11



12

Source: Yeguas del Apocalipsis' Collection

In *Instalamos pajaritos como palomas con alambritos* (Photographs 9 and 10), Lemebel poses with ostrich feathers and Casas with a black veil on their heads. Both wearing makeup and tights as well as stuffed birds, which relates to Photograph 8. Mourning represented in black, and memory represented in white, show how bodies are marked by death and the memories of loved ones who are victims of disease. It is as if the artists carry the bodies of the dead with them while their living bodies serve as a mark of their own survival. In the celebration of life after death, mourning becomes a form of expression of the body as art, for it is worth "calling performative both this gendered exercise and the political claim of embodied equality, the protection from violence, and the ability to move together and within this social category in

public space" (Butler, 2018, p. 59). After all, if we understand these acts as a form of social gathering and advocacy coalition, that is, as a form of political performativity that places the possible life to be lived at the forefront of politics, then Lemebel and Casas find sexual and gender dissident bodies as nondisposable, even when they are silent. It is as if these performances are marked by necessity and resistance, above all, insofar as it marks a certain kind of solidarity that is both sad and joyful, in which each performative act reveals an artistic gesture that is capable of resisting necropolitics (Costa & Greiner, 2020).

Finally, we will explore *Lo que el SIDA se llevó* (1989), a series of 30 photographs in which we find trauma expressed in performance through the staging of death and mourning. In Photograph 11, Lemebel holds a bouquet of flowers and lies in the arms of Casas who cries out in pain and sorrow. Lemebel's lifeless body portrays the dead, while Casas mourns for the loss of his friend. In Photograph 12, we see Casas in a wedding dress kissing Lemebel who is wearing a skeletal mortuary mask. The kissing bodies reenact trauma while resignifying affection. If we consider these photo-performances to be disruptions in the discourse of hate, we can think of hate in an illocutionary way, producing wounds along the very composition of the subject, having a harmful effect upon it (Butler, 2021). In this case, the scream or the kiss reveal ways of filling the void through the act of recognition, that is, the act of composition that calls subjects into existence, because the traumatic event, while it is a prolonged experience, can challenge and bring forth representation itself. "Social trauma takes the form not of a mechanically repeating structure but of a continuous subjection, of the re-enactment of the injury through signs that simultaneously obstruct the scene and put it back into action" (Butler, 2021, p. 68).

Photographs 13 e 14 – Entitled *Severo Sarduy en casa de Antonio Gálvez* (1971), appear in the essay *Severo Sarduy: una necesaria relectura* by Juan Goytisolo



13



14

Source: Centro Virtual Cervantes / Antônio Gálvez Collection

In the photographic folds, we find ourselves in Lemebel's zigzag⁷ movement representative of his Neobarrocho⁸ style, in which he presents bodies that move within infinitesimal spaces of time while performing the photographic act of capturing (the image/body). Before joining Las Yeguas del Apocalipsis, Lemebel had developed his own performative acts. In 1986, we find Lemebel reading aloud his *Hablo por mi diferencia* at the Mapocho train station, a speech that he then takes to the *Congreso del Partido Comunista* with the hammer and sickle drawn with makeup on his face, as we see in Photograph 13. In speaking about such an episode, Richard (2018) explains that:

P. Lemebel's reading of his manifesto in high-heeled shoes destabilized the leftist composure of the Communist Party which, accustomed to the dry propaganda of the slogan and the pamphlet, assigned the character of literary sedition to a prose in which the allegories and metaphors of sexual carnivalization were enclosed like pearls in a necklace (Richard, 2018, p. 85).

As Lemebel stages performance expressly for the camera, many of his photographic pieces are used as covers for his books. One in particular catches our attention: the untitled photograph used by the Seix Barral publishing house for its third edition *La esquina es mi corazón* (2004) (Figure 14). In Photo 14, we find the body staged as an object, through the use of a head ornament and a stuffed animal in the form of an alligator which rests on Lemebel's lap. He brings forth nudity while interacting with the reptile, wearing only a sheer pantyhose, and lying on top of a red dress that once covered his body. His makeup, although conventional below the eyes, adds elements that remind us of Amerindian face painting, and his helmet captures the presence of mythological figures such as the Greek God Hermes who was often depicted with winged helmets. In short, we observe a body that is neither male nor female. Unintelligible and unconventional, it personifies the artifice which conjures sensibilities beyond trauma including affections that traverse the photographic and develop new worlds (Rolnik, 2018). In the terms of Mombasa (2017), perhaps we could speak of rarefied affections capable of indicating a way out of something, above all, because they cross the political realm marked by speculation and memory.

Body and melancholy in Alair Gomes and Hudinilson Junior: act two

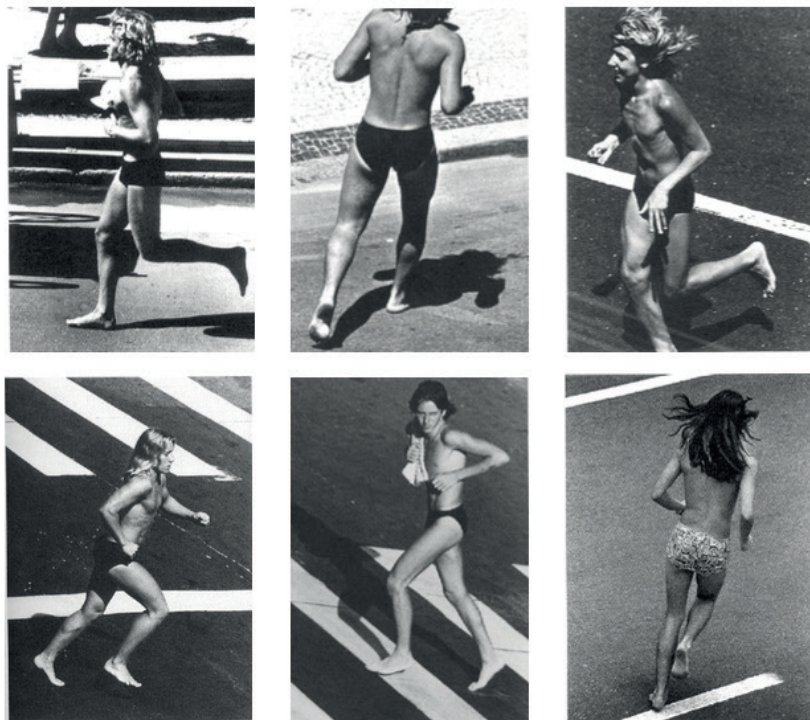
Still in Sarduy (1987), it is important to note that between the lost object and the metaphorical tension, eroticism in baroque rhetoric appears as a visual perversion that leads to a refiguration. In light of what Lopes (1999) points out about melancholia being a lens with which to see the world, we find through the fragments of the bodies registered by Alair Gomes' camera and Hudinilson Junior's own xeroxed body, ways of thinking of the images not as metaphors, but as traces that unfold over time. Thus, while Lopes speaks of melancholia as a fundamental element of current systems of simulation, he brings the baroque man as a contemporary entity in a world defined by moral values which are in crisis. As spectator or voyeur, the idea is similar to the reading by Santos (2002) who sees the work of Alair and Hudinilson as

⁷ When speaking of his own writing, Lemebel recognizes that "Instead of assuming a frontality with power, be it literary or political, I have rather tried to zigzag, to enter in profile and leave in profile, so that it is not known how one enters and it is not known how one leaves" (Lemebel, 2018, p. 36). It is a writing that we could call marginal writing, avoiding being "consumed and absorbed". Thus, Lemebel's (2018) writing is in constant motion, keeping readers and systems of power from grasping it and defining it, making use of its marginality to freely explore dissimilar spaces.

⁸ Bianchi (2015) coined the term neobaroque to speak of Lemebel's baroque style: the prefix neo alluding to his affinity for the neobaroque and baroque to reference the river which runs through the nation's capital. Other artists, contemporary to Lemebel, have been similarly linked to a form of Chilean neobaroque: Raúl Ruiz, Diamela Eltit, Rodrigo Lira, Raúl Zurita, Diego Maquieira, etc. As a result, The University of Chile has even established the first Grupo de Estudio sobre Barroco y Neobarroco en Chile of which Pedro Lemebel was a participant and which showcased the work of other Chilean neobaroque authors in its Barroco Fronterizo (2015). In Argentina, Perlongher (2008) speaks of a Neobarroso from his location.

examples of how the male nude, whose performative presence composes the transgression of codes and norms of behavior, explores the experience of personal life. To begin, we consider Alair's camera lens.

Photograph 15 – Entitled A Window in Rio (1977-1980) by Alair Gomes



15

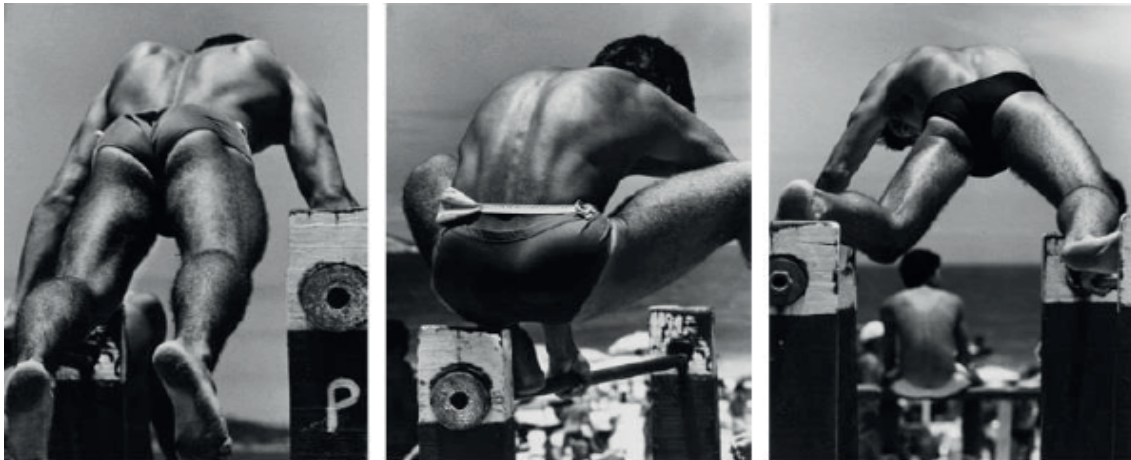
Source: André Pitol's work (2013)

In a conflicting coexistence, Vieira (2003) sees Alair's work as the one that brings forth the language of homoerotic desire. Born in the city of Valença, Rio de Janeiro, in 1921, Alair Gomes became interested in photography in 1965, after traveling through Europe with a Leica camera. However, 10 years earlier, the photographer sought expression of these desires in the writing of intimate diaries which, evidently, impacted his photographs by the way they show, in great part, sequences of male nudes and semi-nudes of boys taken from the window of his apartment, located on Ipanema beach, in the southern part of the city of Rio de Janeiro. As for voyeurism, Alair circulates through an interplay of looks in which "most of the time, young men, when they realized they were being photographed, accepted this fact in a kind of silent game of exhibitionism" (Santos, 2002, p. 9). In the terms of Garcia (2004), Alair recorded bodily practices by a vision of the "inevitable freezing of time in a trace, punctually, homoerotic" (Garcia, 2004, p. 209). This way, interested in these sequences of bodily practices, we observe from Alair's window the photographs that capture that which is forgotten and now being looked at from afar. As the photographer himself states, "I just stood there, forgotten, calmed, refreshed" (Gomes, 1962-63, p. 44).

"The photograph is, in this sense, a modern analogy of the dramatic content that takes the place, safeguarding its specificities, of the allegory in the baroque drama" (Santos, 2006, p. 37). As the author explains, the photographic sign appears as a means of expression of fragmentary nature, having interesting relations with the motif of the baroque ruin and the historical allegory found in Benjamin's thought (1985). In light of this, Santos (2006) speaks of melancholia in the wake of Lopes (1999), to situate both Alair's texts and his photographic work from a specific way of being in the world. If photography is a territory of melancholia (Santos, 2006) due to the experience of loss between the photographic act and reality, Alair's personal memory reassembles an imaginary of unfulfilled desire. By finding value in infinitesimal spaces

of time to capture aesthetic experiences, the images of male bodies find in the unpredictable melancholic desires for the unrecoverable, the fragile, and the performative.

Photographs 16 – Entitled Beach-Triptych, n.10 (1980) by Alair Gomes



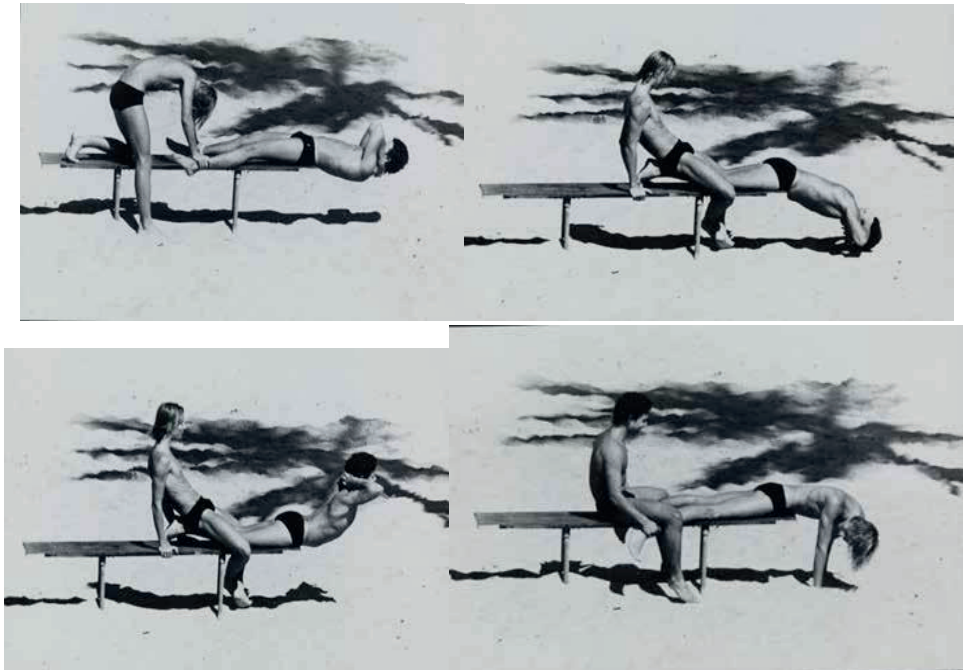
16

Source: National Library Foundation Collection – Brazil /Alair Gomes

What we find in Photograph 15, for example, are attempts to capture the movement of the bodies through what may be as sudden as a run on the beach, between the arms and legs that throw themselves back and forth with the impulse of the feet. Through the wind in the hair, the sunlight on the skin, or the traces of stiffened muscles in the body, Alair captures bodily strain through the visual fragments that appear within the flow of desire and move with the raw intensity of what used to resemble the quick tightening of muscles. The body seems to retain this tension when capturing the act itself. The six photographs show the movement of the Achilles tendons, as if he wants to emphasize the observer's interest in capturing the desire, which moves through the window and escapes. Alair does not act, he only observes and registers what he sees of the actions of the male bodies exercising on Ipanema Beach and in the streets near the beachfront.

As a cartographer of the imperceptible, Alair appears as a voyeur who not only pursues the act of desire, but the pleasure found in temporary performances. With this in mind, Pereira (2017) explains how Alair mapped the gray areas of masculine codes by capturing relationships between men in public spaces, insofar as he imagined in his photographic fold a new configuration of the body which stands out from the heteronormative context found in the history of Brazilian photography. The author explains how Alair did not seek to represent reality, but to create another reality by narrating the images through the artifice of desire, "and this aspect, (...), by itself, would already break the relationship established with the time in which the acts photographed by him take place, thus constituting the character of futurity of his work, as that which is not yet real" (Pereira, 2017, p. 69).

Photographs 17 – Entitled Sonatina, four feet nº 6 (198-) by Alair Gomes



17

Source: National Library Foundation Collection – Brazil /Alair Gomes

It may be that Alair has made through the use of distance a rediscovery of everyday life and the movements of bodies, since the photographs take place in a time of its own, slow, aleatory, and intimate space. In the sequences of figures 17 and 18, among triptychs and sonatinas, melancholy in Alair appears marked by the autobiographical in the writing of the self through the fragmented trace of the bodies. What interests us in these photographs would be to think of the intentional forgetfulness that runs through Alair's work as a space within everyday life. Such relationship between the photographer's self and the photographed object reflects the poetics of the artist in his "melancholic sensibility" (Lopes, 1999), when he captures the ephemeral beauty of what moves through the landscape with an obsession drained of desire, precisely because the interest in the trivial serves as a path between the experience of the photographic act and the memory of what was seen, as a way of talking about oneself through what is seen in others over the "unfolding" of the image (Lissofsky, 2009).

Certainly, Alair's work projects fetishism upon photography capable of capturing the present through the act of cruising, which can be seen as "melancholic cruising", in Santos' terms (2006). The cruising movement drifts from the window and into the camera in the precise moment in which temporality is registered by the inscription of the body in the photograph through affection and visual representation (Fatorelli, 2012). Even, the granularity, the distance from the object, the blurred vision of the movements, the lack of form and the contrast of the shadows reveal appearances that in a melancholic way bring a sense of loss to the images.

Photograph 18 – Photographic record of the performance *Exercício de me ver II*



18

Source: Select Art⁹

Also, in light of his own writing, Hudinilson Junior is considered by Santos (2002) as one of the Brazilian artists who also use photography in an autobiographical, transgressive, and confessional style. Born in São Paulo, in 1957, one of the main works of this pioneering artist of xerox art is the performance *Exercício de me ver II* (1982). Through the effort of writing the body onto the image, Hudinilson combines the corporal and the mechanical in a creative process in which he unfolds his own body onto the other. If on one hand Alair composed the images through fragments of the naked male body, Hudinilson composed the images through fragments of his own naked body, this work being a process of unification with the machine. Alair's erotic diaries may resemble Hudinilson's sketchbooks. In 1981, Hudinilson was censored because he placed a xeroxed image of his own crotch on a street in São Paulo, in the exhibition *Arte na Rua*. "Also in this onslaught, already marked by the presence of the *indicial image*, the artist made works that were not at all predictable, in performative acts where he makes love, metaphorically, with the reprography machine" (Santos, 2002, p. 10, original emphasis).

When mentioning the work of *Narcissus*, started in the 1970s, in which the artist created and recreated images of his naked body in amorous position with the photocopier, as we see in Figure 17, he highlights: "(...) I started working with Xerox, already based on the study that defines my work, which is this thing of the body" (Urbano Junior, 1985, p. 245). In the early 1980s, through the series *Exercise of Seeing Me*, Hudinilson seems to take as a reference the myth of Narcissus in his self-reflected image to think about his own artistic process. On the performance side, Hudinilson's photographs of himself naked on a typewriter copying parts of his body reveal his gestures in fragmented images of himself. Hudinilson's work appears within the turn of the photocopier as a neovanguardist tool which crystallized in the 1970s, during the most brutal period of the military dictatorship in the country. As such, Gilbert (2015) affirms that Hudinilson Junior was affiliated with the Porn Art Movement, which was based in São Paulo, whose work contributed to several publications for the group.

With the "Manifesto of Porn Art," Gilbert (2015) identifies with Eduardo Kac's premise that "art is penetration and enjoyment," highlighting how experimental expression was looked down upon by the Brazilian literary canon due to its exploration of the relationship between the body and language in the context of the military regime. At the core of the group, Glauco Mattoso, Leila Mícolis, Sandra Terra,

⁹ Retrieved from: www.select.art.br/adeus-a-hudinilson-jr/ on April 5, 2022.

Bráulio Tavares, Teresa Jardim, and Cairo de Assis Trindade lived in Rio de Janeiro and made Friday nights a locus of porn poetry in Cinelândia, Rio de Janeiro. Kac himself (2013) points out how this experimental art movement, which he initiated, lasted for two years, from 1980 to 1982. It was a latent pragmatic intervention of porn poetry, pornism, and the porn movement, starting with literature and expanding to other areas of artistic production, which subverted aesthetic norms and conventions of everyday experience.

Photograph 19 – Sem título/xerox OCE (interferido) 1980



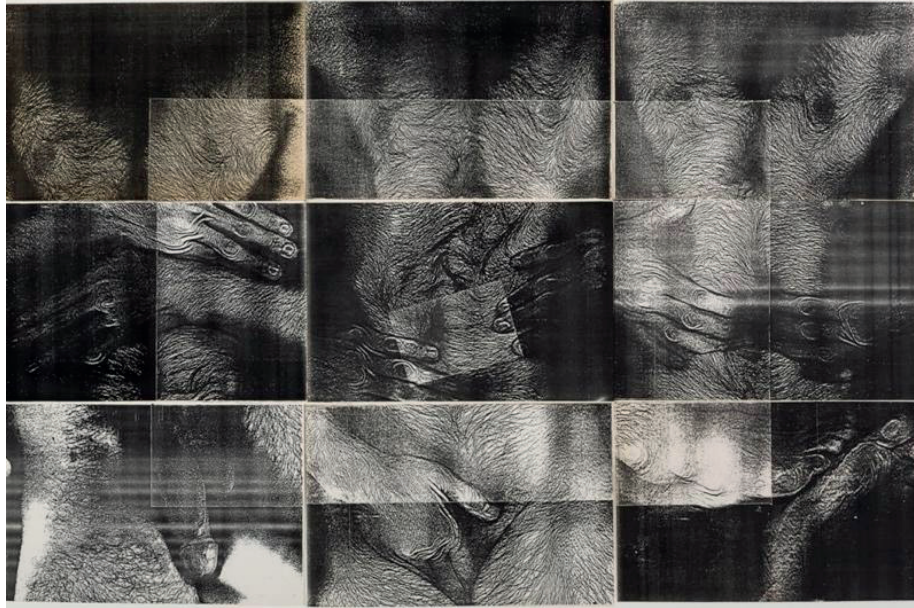
19

Source: Jaqueline Martins Gallery¹⁰

Thus, Gilbert (2015) realizes that Hudinilson's xerox art presents another way of accompanying the artistic process in which sexual relationships develop with other objects and media, capable of unfolding the body into itself. "For Hudinilson Jr., the machine was a tool for exploring his own queerness; he used the inanimate photocopier's "reproductive" mechanism to reflect on non-reproductive sexual encounters (...)" (Gilbert, 2015, p. 121). Through the work that cuts across the artist's house/apartment/studio, Oliveira (2016) highlights Hudinilson's use of fragments that unfold the images into others, while making the body and the homoerotic desire distinct marks of his artistic production. "The spaces that this artist inhabited say a lot about his self-image, because there much could be seen of his daily life, of these relationships between processes of creating and living" (Oliveira, 2016, p. 146).

¹⁰ Retrieved from: www.artequaeacontece.com.br/hudinilson-jr-explicito-na-pina_estacao on September 30, 2021.

Photograph 20 – Entitled Exercício de Me Ver (1980-1984) by Hudinilson Junior.¹¹



20

Source: Arte Que Acontece/Pina_Estação

What we see in figures 19 and 20 are fragments of Hudinilson's body through the collages of himself as the other, disidentified through a copy that reproduces what is considered the original, but recreates another body through the multiplicity of the artifice. This "thing of the body" to which Hudinilson refers is similar to a melancholic sign of detail, speculation, and fragment. Certainly, reflected in his own collages, in the traces of nudity we find a shattered vision of the body which serves as a cavity in which to reproduce other worlds and forms of existence. From the pink lipstick on the mouth to the hairs on the body in each xeroxed copy, we are not looking simply at craft paper, but what would be the craft of paper, this being a window that opens the infinite breaches of the photographic through the various folds found in every sheet of paper. By exploring Hudinilson's work, we touch his body as if each xeroxed fragment observes us from our own bodies, from the "image as body" (Resende et al., 2019). What are those nine copies of a single body on paper if not the reflection of our own bodies folding his? Here, the skin of the image may be paper, but it produces friction between the surface of the paper and the surface of the body and the mechanical, one which we look into in order to touch. Touching bodies in friction, an artifice of desire that escapes itself.

Final remarks

Through a brief exploration of frictions between images, we inhabit in the folds of the photographic a place for sensitivities. We do so, in order to see not only the works of Sarduy, Lemebel, Alair and Hudinilson, but the reflection of ourselves in each portrait, sequence and photoperformance, a glimpse of appearance through artifice. Out of affects, the body as image seems to be located at in-between worlds through a neo-baroque aesthetic that articulates the folds as possible encounters of the sensorial. If at each "unfolding", the body speaks and vibrates through the gaze, we find ways to perceive these works

¹¹ Retrieved from: www.artequaeacontece.com.br/hudinilson-jr-explicito-na-pina_estacao. September 30, 2021.

of art in their multiple possibilities, through affection and through the body, in the act of creating and awakening new arrangements, through the staging of affections and sensations in the interactions with each artwork. We are not only considering poses and gestures but seeking to think of the skin of images through photographic folds, upon the presence of desire and in the nuances of the body. What we call "skin of images" is a kind of texture found upon the act of glancing at the image itself. As if by looking, we can touch the image as an open, folded, and refolded body that looks back at us, or these images can touch our body and make our skin an added texture within the photographic realm.

Thus, when we speak about body and trauma through the work of Sarduy and Lemebel, we note that the artifice serves to develop aesthetic forms of life which allow the body's surface to move through the image by way of embodied performances and, above all, by the ability of bodies to perform social memory as testimony. These bodies glitter and shine among pain and glamour, in the presence of mystery and beauty which stages and re-enacts lived experiences by simulating possible worlds through the use of make-up, adornments, and clothing for the body in its folded surface, in the exterior as interior of an open and ambiguous landscape. Similarly, when we speak about body and melancholia through the work of Alair and Hudinilson, we find the artifice of these photographic landscapes in the other body that unfolds itself among fragments. After all, when we see these images, they look back at us, like an interplay of looks that does not end, but continues at each glance. They are images reproduced in another time, covered by a surface that extends from one skin to another and continues extending itself, in a bodily labyrinth that is woven by the skins of the images.

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