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Cuerpo, espacio y tiempo: (in) visibilidades en las obras de Kusama, Salat e Eliasson

Body, space and time: (in) visibilities in the works of Kusama, Salat and Eliasson

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PALABRAS CLAVES

Cuerpo, espacio, tiempo, Yayoi Kusama, Serge Salat, Eliafur Eliasson.

KEYWORDS

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RESUMEN

Las relaciones entre imagen, cuerpo y espacio teniendo en vista el interés creciente que la articulación entre tales dimensiones adquirió en la contemporaneidad, evidencia el papel de estos elementos en la interacción manifestación / destinatario o producción / público objetivo. El contexto actual reconoce la visibilidad como objeto de valor, y la imagen como protagonista y como medio para estudiar tal visibilidad, teniendo en vista las nuevas formas de interacciones relativas al cuerpo y al espacio, por ella elaboradas y reveladas. Sin embargo, teóricos del arte, estudios desarrollados a partir de las semióticas greimasiana y peirceana, de la antropología de la imagen, y de las artes visuales aplicadas en otros campos del conocimiento, revelan que algunos eventos estéticos modifican las nociones de tiempo y espacio en las salas de exposiciones, permitiendo al receptor una experiencia atemporal y desconectada de la habitual relación que el cuerpo establece con el espacio. Estas transformaciones derivadas de las vivencias cuerpo / espacio / tiempo, en las obras de artistas Yayoi Kusama, Serge Salat, Olafur Eliasson, exploran los límites de la visibilidad para crear campos de invisibilidad, en que las nociones de temporalidad y / o espacialidad se abstraen convirtiéndose rehenes de la experiencia subjetiva, parcial e imperfecta de cada espectador de sus instalaciones. Nuevas posibilidades de significados son descubiertas por los interactores al reconocer la imperfección como analogía para amplificar sus sensibilidades a los fenómenos que estimulan y desplazan la atención y los sentidos. Para esta reflexión investigamos a autores como A.J. Greimas (*Da Imperfeição*, 2002), E. Landowski (*Presenças do outro*, 2002 e *Interações Arriscadas*, 2014), Jochen Volz (*Olafur Eliasson: Seu corpo da obra*, 2011). Serge Salat (*Les labyrinthes de l'éternité*, 2002) Philip Larratt-Smith & Frances Morris (*Yayoi Kusama: Obsessão Infinita*, 2014).

ABSTRACT

The relationships between image, body and space, taking into account the growing interest that the articulation between such dimensions acquired in the contemporaneity, demonstrates the role of these elements in the interaction of manifestation / addressee or production / target audience. The current context recognizes visibility as an object of value, and the image as a protagonist and as a means to study such visibility, taking into account the new forms of interactions related to the body and space, which are elaborated and revealed. However, art theorists, studies developed from the Greimasian and Peircean semiotics, the anthropology of the image, and the visual arts applied in other fields of knowledge, reveal that some aesthetic events modify the notions of time and space in the exhibition rooms, allowing the receiver a timeless experience and disconnected from the usual relation that the body establishes with space. These transformations derived from the experiences body / space / time, in the works of artists Yayoi Kusama, Serge Salat, Olafur Eliasson, explore the limits of visibility to create fields of invisibility, in which the notions of temporality and / or spatiality are

abstracted becoming hostages of the subjective, partial and imperfect experience of each spectator of their installations. The interactors discover new possibilities of meanings when they recognize imperfection as an analogy to amplify their sensibilities to the phenomena that stimulate and displace attention and the senses. For this reflection, we investigate authors like A.J. Greimas (*Da Imperfeição*, 2002), E. Landowski (*Presenças do outro*, 2002 and *Interações Arriscadas*, 2014), Jochen Volz (*Olafur Eliasson: Seu corpo da obra*, 2011). Serge Salat (*Les labyrinthes de l'éternité*, 2002) Philip Larratt-Smith & Frances Morris (*Yayoi Kusama: Obsessão Infinita*, 2014).

Introduction

Since the establishment of the installation as an artistic language in the 1960s, the notion of "epocal" work of art has been adopted to name such works whose meaning can only be consummated if and when the event is seen and analyzed in the experience in its time-space. In the installations, the request for the presence and performance of the spectator's body was amplified, being more appropriate to use the term *interactor* or *participant* instead of the first. This is because it is no longer an exhibition for the public to observe, but a synesthetic relation in which the body is called to move in the spaces, that is, to move to seize the work and become part of it. According to A. J. Greimas (2002: 70): "The apprehension of something else, of that which is non-subject for the subject, is effected on the sensorial plane. The organized space of perception becomes a biomechanical extension in which all kinds of synesthesia are possible."

In addition, it is necessary to take into account the proxemic relationship established with the elements arranged by the artists, which may include three-dimensional images and / or objects of all order and / or sounds, giving the artistic phenomenon a mutant and unstable condition, (as in the cases selected for this article), so that: relations of proximity and proportionality, experiences of the order of haptic¹ sensitivity and hearing are sensed triggered in the production of other and unexpected meanings in the spaces where each work is and in the relationship of these with other people also frequent in the art installations visited.

If the installation is a type of artistic manifestation that absorbs the space in which it is implanted, sometimes building another space around it (while deconstructing the original space), thanks to the transient presence of interactors, also the notion of time needs to be contemplated in this discussion because it has immediate consequences in the apprehension of the work. According to Peccinini (s.d.):

"The sense of time, in the case of the aesthetic enjoyment of the Installation, is non-time, where this fruition takes place immediately upon the appreciation of the work *in loco*, but remains in its full fruition as a remembrance. Stiring the senses of the public, instigating it, almost obliging it, experiencing sensations, being pleasant or uncomfortable, makes the Installation a mirror of our time."² Peccinini, D. (2019). *Arte do século XX/XXI visitando o MAC na web*. Retrieved 3 March, 2019 from <http://www.mac.usp.br/mac/templates/projetos/seculoxx/modulo5/instalacao.html>

This interaction between image, body and space is precisely what interests us in this study. In the current context, where visibility has become an object of value since everything and everyone is represented through images, it is necessary to look at the meaning of what is presented invisibly in some works of art. The field of invisibility can only be contemplated with the presence of the body in space. We can get in touch with works designed to be experienced physically and with our bodies in a virtual way, accessing them through the WEB or opening a catalog of an exhibition, but in this way, much is lost. The body / space scale relationship that the work provides in the *here and now* is not given in the virtual environment and, in the case of works with resources and audiovisual information or audios, much is lost. It is important to remember that the time of the body to go through a space contributes to the production of meaning of the work, since this displacement implies in differentiated rhythms that generate pauses to enjoy a singular or privileged angle of vision, attention to an unforeseen sound detail, unforeseen loss of sharpness or surprise stimulated by an unexpected luminous or chromatic excitation. To reflect on this, we have selected some works by contemporary artists Yayoi Kusama, Serge Salat, Olafur Eliasson.

1. Infinite Image

Yayoi Kusama (1929) is known for being the artist who suffers from obsessive compulsive disorder. Her obsession is presented visually by dots or polka dots, found in all her artistic productions. At the *Infinity Mirrored Room* (2011) installation, the audience entered a dark room covered with mirrors with spots of light throughout. These points of light, along with people, were infinitely mirrored throughout the enclosure (Figure 1). The place referred to the image of a starry sky. As one crossed it, the interactor lost the notion of the spatial dimension due to the infinite multiplication of the elements present in the reflexes. Mirrored entrance and exit doors also

¹ See: PARRET, Herman. (2019, March 3). *Loeil qui caresse: Pygmalion et lexperience esthetique*. Retrieved from http://hermanparret.be/media/recent-articles/4_Loeil-qui-caresse-Pygmalion-et-lexperience-esthetique.pdf

² Translated by the authors.

made the space a sort of labyrinth. The color change of light spots seduced³ the participant wanting to stay longer in space, to see the other "skies" that would present themselves. The invisible concerns what was beyond the visible, for what was seen was completely misleading. The power to see and not know how to precise the size of the space, where the entrance or exit was located, the number of people, number of points of light moved the audience to an indefinite space and time, whose poetics consisted in making the participant to be in the "sky".



Figure 1 *Infinity Mirrored Room* [digital image]. Retrieved February 27, 2019 from <https://www.institutotomieohtake.org.br/exposicoes/interna/obsessao-infinita-de-yayoi-kusama>

The environment, immersed in infinite mirrors, reverberating luminous balls immersed in an ambiguous and continuous space, visited in the installation built in 2014 at the Tomie Ohtake Institute (Figure 1), belongs to the same category of that elaborated by Kusama in 2008, and present in the biggest retrospective of her artistic career exhibited by the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Copenhagen, also in 2014. "*Gleaming Lights of the Souls*" (Figure 2) has since then become part of the museum's collection.

The installation, dating from 2008, consists of a single space, four by four meters. The walls and ceilings are covered with mirrors; the floor is a reflecting pool; and you stand in the middle of the water on a platform. Hanging from the ceiling above you are a hundred lamps that resemble glowing ping pong balls. These lamps change color in a way that transport us into a special rhythm and pulse, almost as though we become one with the universe of the installation. *Gleaming Lights of the Souls* is a truly lyrical work of art in every sense. *In infinity*. (2015). Retrieved March 28, 2019 from <https://www.louisiana.dk/en/exhibition/yayoi-kusama>

The fascination for infinity, present in the artist's installations, is accompanied by a hallucinatory effect derived from immersion in a place without dimension, emptiness inhabited by points of variant and intermittent coloration, whose sensation is both seductive and pleasurable, distressing and intimidating.

The clash between the experienced and the artifice; the corporeal and the technological, present in these installations of incessant perceptions and stimuli, also marks the clashes between the organic and synthetic universe that the artist celebrates in sculptures of elements of the nature produced in gigantic scale like "*Pumpkin*" (2014), executed in bronze, revealing the conflicting conviviality of these "*doubles*" in her production (Figure 3). In this installation, the space where the work is located is not absorbed. In relation to the huge pumpkins, the space seems to have been shrunk, drawing attention to the size of the architecture and the bodies surrounding the work. The invisible shows itself as the three-dimensionality of what was already there and which, day-to-day, loses attention, and therefore, meaning.

The poles so constant in the work of Kusama gain extraordinary dimensions as invisible pores revealed in great projection. They thus create obstacles on the shiny metal surface of the sculpture, interrupting the brightness of the selected raw material, with reentrant black spots, opaque of light.

³ See: interaction regimes. In: LANDOWSKI, Eric. (2014). *Interações arriscadas*. Trad. Luiza Helena O. da Silva. São Paulo: Estação das Letras.



Figure 2 *Gleaming Lights of the Souls* [video frame]. Retrieved March 5, 2019 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7sVxo67sAd4>



Figure 3 *Pumpkin* [digital image]. Retrieved March 5, 2019 from <http://sharedesign.com/art/yayoi-kusama-louisiana-museum-modern-art-copenhagen/>

2. Continuous Body

The Icelandic-Danish artist Olafur Eliasson (1967) also created objects for his first individual exhibition in Latin America in 2011, in ten installations for three cultural spaces in the city of São Paulo: the Pinacoteca do Estado de SP, and the SESC Belenzinho and Pompeia. These installations integrated the 17th International Festival of Contemporary Art SESC_Videobrasil and, although dependent on singular materiality, were designed to establish a continuous dialogue between the inside and outside, the city and the architecture, deceiving the body that visits it with the limits and correspondences that the artist inaugurated between these two urban dimensions.

We selected for this study the four installations inserted in the classic Pinacoteca building (dated 1900), which had been the subject of a recent intervention (1998) by the Brazilian architect Paulo Mendes da Rocha, and the work *Its felt path* (Figure 4), SESC Pompéia.

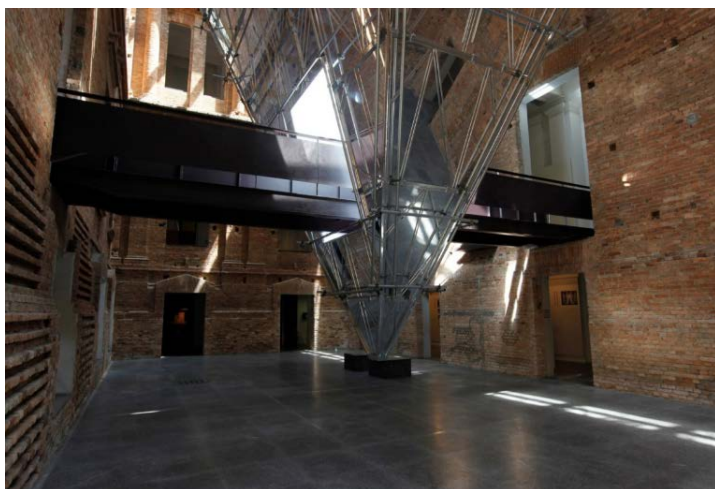


Figure 4 *Your felt path* [digital image]. Retrieved February 27, 2019 from <https://www.metalocus.es/en/news/olafur-eliasson-your-body-work>

The curator of the exhibition, Jochen Volz, highlights the artist's option to use the mirror as a mean to translate the rigidity of the orthogonal geometry of the Pinacoteca's building and to invest in illusions that disturbed the spatial orientation and the perception of color.

The use of the mirror, a common and recurrent resource in the artists' installations studied in this article, besides acting as an optical tool, explores laws of physics and neurology to make living in these environments a subordinate and conditioned experience to the sensibility of our sensory apparatus. Mist, reflexes, multiplied and replicated images constitute the repertoire used by the artist to create visible sensations, with colors and reflections that conceal the existence of the matrix of these projections. Volz (2011) clarifies this illusory character of the installations and the force of the effects that dribble the certainty of the body, lost in space and its ambiguities: "The blue and yellow filters of *His body of work* (2011), for example, create the green in our retina, not in space. His sculptures are like tools that modify our worldview; the playful pleasure of his work is nothing more than the pleasure of perception, of learning and of understanding ourselves."⁴

In *Microscopio para São Paulo* (2011) (Figures 5, 6 and 7) four inclined mirrors capture the outer light of the roof and as an oversized kaleidoscope direct the reflections from the mirrors filling the inner courtyard of the museum; in *Take Your Time* (Figure 8), already shown in 2008 at MoMA, NY, the octagon reflects its own structure and floor, in addition to the present visitors, in a sloped mirror hanging in the center of the museum's central space ceiling. *Seu planeta compartilhado* (2011) (Figure 9) proposed a spherical kaleidoscope on the museum's terrace facing the bustling avenue, which inserted the urban landscape into the fragmented image between glass with colored filter and mirrors, pointing to the possibility of building other landscapes from of reference: in observing the optical instrument on a human scale, the visiting body inhabited the art work and the city in a complex, continuous and indissoluble scenario (Figure 10). Without the presence of interactor (s) the work simply did not exist.



⁴ Translated by the authors.

Figure 5 *Microscópio para São Paulo* [digital image]. Retrieved March 1, 2019 from <https://www.metalocus.es/en/news/olafur-eliasson-your-body-work>



Figure 6 *Microscópio para São Paulo* [digital image]. Retrieved March 1, 2019 from <https://www.metalocus.es/en/news/olafur-eliasson-your-body-work>

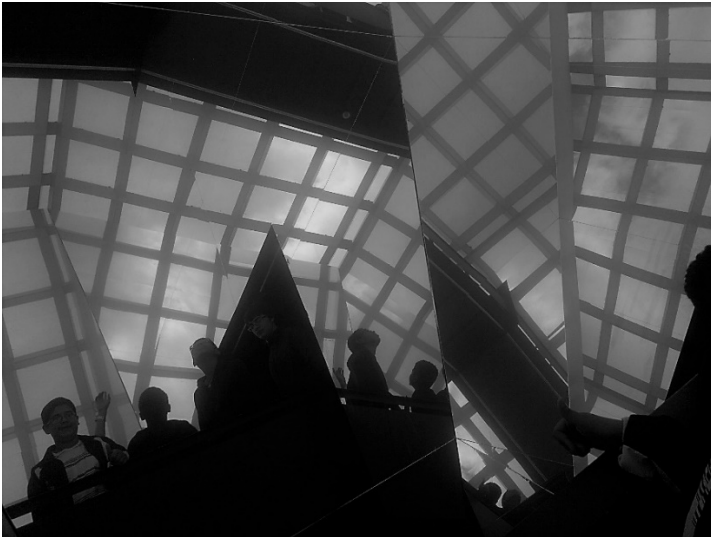


Figure 7 Digital image. “Microscópio para São Paulo” (2011). *Your body of work* exhibition (2011), 17^º Festival Internacional de Arte Contemporânea SESC Videobrasil, Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo. Photo by the authors.



Figure 8 Digital image. "Take your time" (2008). *Your body of work* exhibition (2011), 17^o Festival Internacional de Arte Contemporânea SESC Videobrasil, Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo. Photo by the authors.

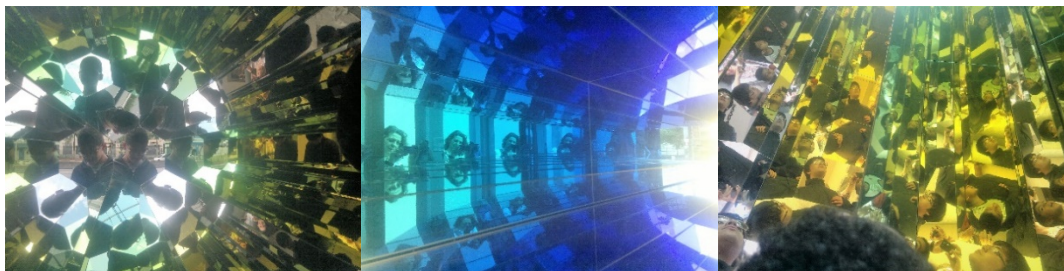


Figure 9 Digital image. "Seu planeta compartilhado" (2011). *Your body of work* exhibition (2011), 17^o Festival Internacional de Arte Contemporânea SESC Videobrasil, Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo. Photo by the authors.



Figure 10 Digital image. "Seu planeta compartilhado" (2011). *Your body of work* exhibition (2011), 17^o Festival Internacional de Arte Contemporânea SESC Videobrasil, Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo. Photo by the authors.

Other works of the show conditioned their enjoyment to the presence and interaction of the body as an essential element in its construction. We pay attention to *Your felt path* (2011), an installation made up of smoke and fluorescent lights by Olafur Eliasson visited at SESC Pompéia, whose analysis we updated in this study. Upon entering the room, the public could not see anything that was more than a handful away from his body. Only a dense fog enveloped the whole environment, so that the sounds produced by the bodies of other participants were that they gave the notion of distance between one person and another. The unknown, not knowing what was ahead, create a sense of insecurity for some people and excitement for others. At the end of the course, as if practically "blinded", the public was faced with a continuous wall and the lack of information about where to return or leave the place. Not being able to see something triggered the audition and made the interactor go through space very slowly, different from the daily walk. After all, it was possible to stumble into someone or something. The stranger excites the imagination, but it is also dangerous. Some would enter the space and leave immediately, others would take part in the course of the room, and still others would explore the whole space, motivated to go somewhere to discover what could be there.

In this room where the temporal and spatial notion was lost, the artist put the public in contact with the senses, sensations and feelings of each participant, bringing the invisible of each one to the surface: curiosity, fear, excitement, awe, peace, tranquility ... While Kusama put the public in the "sky", Eliasson inserted it in the cloud, nickname that the work gained from those who experienced it.

3. Ethereal Space

As in the works *Infinity Mirrored Room* (2011) and *Your felt path* (2011), the interactor does not discern the beginning and end of Serge Salat's *Beyond Infinity* (2019) (Figure 11). Everything that is there is designed for all sides and up and down, including the image of the public.

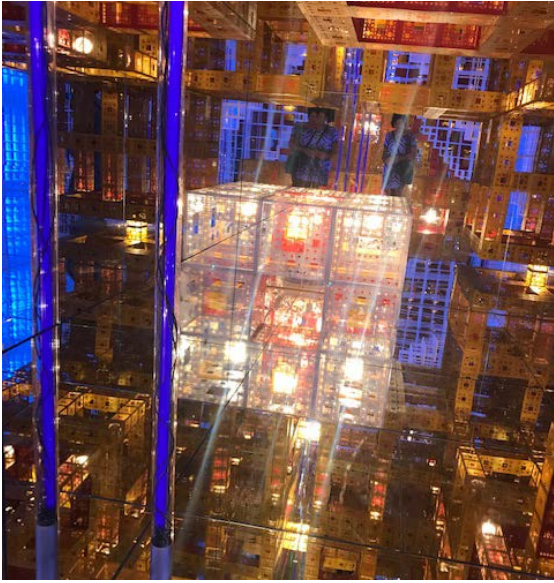


Figura 11 Digital image. "Beyond Infinity" (2019). Photo by the authors.

Impregnated with orthogonal images devoid of thickness on the mirrored surface of the walls, the installation space dissolves itself into countless possibilities, offering the body participant / actor a dubious and confusing role. An observer of its uninterrupted insertion, in the images reproduced incessantly in the multidimensional reflexes of the environment, the acting body gets lost in the absence of a single reference as perspective. Elastic, expanded, and volatile in the dematerialization caused by the expansion of its physical limits in the fragile and deceptive artifacts of the mirrored scene, the space of this installation places the body in suspension, available to the sonorous, chromatic appeals and to the constructed and simulated frames in the superposition of lines on infinite planes.

The Salat architect's formation is revealed in the structures exposed in various materiality: wood, metal, tubes of light, which dialogue with the presented chromatics added to the modular geometric forms, some of which resemble muxarabiés. The body is multiplied and three-dimensional structures scribe parts of bodies depending on which part of them the participant is in. This is because the interactor can circulate within structures that delimit some areas of the installation and, at the same time, allow him to see through them, revealing more or less of the participant, which, however, is multiplied. The space with few visitors is taken up by the Gregorian chant, whose soft and enveloping sonority contrasts with the geometric forms, rigid and well-marked colors that "scream" in space like blue and golden yellow. The contrast also appears in the tradition found in the "sacred" music, immaterial and in the innovation of the "profane" spatial conception, material where the bodies circulate. The game of shapes and colors puts visitors inside a three-dimensional abstract painting, where recognizable figures are multiplied bodies.

A relevant data on the facilities analyzed concerns the number of people in each space. The greater the number of them, in all cases, the more the visibility of the work itself was lost. The sonority also affected the construction of meaning of the works of Salat and Eliasson. In *Your felt path* (2011) people were shocked by the lack of visibility and, when many people spoke orally, prevented others from getting in touch with themselves. In the case of *Beyond Infinity* (2019), in addition to the reflections of the people, with the installation full of visitors, the Gregorian chant of the work was also lost, muffled by the voices, an essential element for the experience of temporal transport, since it refers to another time.

The use of the mirror in the cited works, the reflection, duplicating not only the spaces, but also the participants, points out the other alterity, both in the figures of the others present in the premises, of the others, and in the figure of the interactors themselves, who, when they are reflected in the multiple images, lose the notion of themselves. According to Landowski (2002, p.26):

"...being itself is not just being or affirming ourselves the Other. It is, at the same time, a little more than that. At the very least it is also simply 'existing' (more than not being), it is being 'someone' or 'something' (more than anything) or, in any case, having the feeling of being. It is 'living' giving, if possible, a meaning to what you do with your own life or, if not, trying to understand what life itself does about us. It is trying to grasp the minimum of coherence that gives sense and unity to the becoming that causes each one to be individually or collectively, that is it."⁵

⁵ Translated by the authors.

In these revelations of what we are or are not, the (in) visible lies in the values of identity constructions. In addition, art makes visible images that allow us to return to feel with the body in the age of virtuality.

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