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En movimiento: las (im) posibilidades de las imágenes flagradas entre múltiples (im) previsibles

In motion: the (im) possibilities of images caught among multiple (im) predictable

TIPO DE TRABAJO: Comunicación.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Lazló Moholy-Nagy, arte cinético, Ballet Triádico, cuerpo, el espacio, imagen.

KEY WORDS

Lazló Moholy-Nagy, kinetic art, Triadic Ballet, body, space, image.

RESUMEN

Las primeras experiencias con cinetismo aplicado a las artes visuales ocurrieron en las primeras décadas del siglo XX, cuando composiciones con objetos y estructuras en movimiento fueron elaboradas, con la intención de explorar, usufructuar, controlar y multiplicar los efectos que estos elementos y recursos generaban para la vivencia estética en ambientes y espacios destinados a interacciones corpóreas.

Los espectadores que vivían tales experiencias, aunque intentaban memorizar los vestigios de la escena en movimiento, sabían que era una imagen imposible de ser aprehendida por completo, y nunca definitiva. Las sensaciones experimentadas y las reflexiones generadas sobre lo que habían presenciado, aunque impactantes, se mostraban imprecisas y ambiguas.

Entre los pioneros de este género de arte encontramos el artista multimedia Lazló Moholy-Nagy, autor de innumerables producciones experimentales, cuya naturaleza abstracta sirvió de referencia para artistas interesados en explorar la manipulación de soportes y técnicas no convencionales, en el campo de la pintura, escultura, fotografía y cine, como estrategia para la investigación artística y científica.

Sus estudios sobre imagen incluyeron el uso de la luz como medio para generar composiciones, posibles de ser aprehendidas sólo en movimiento. Por lo tanto, exploró la fotografía y el cine, no como medios para producir imágenes, sino que los experimentó como áreas transdisciplinarias, imbricadas, cuya superposición altera la percepción sensorial de los observadores, permitiéndoles imaginar, a través de la desmaterialización de los efectos luminosos, como "ver en movimiento".

Este artículo es uno de los productos del proyecto de investigación bienal (2018-2019), que estudia el Ballet Triádico de Oskar Schlemmer, en diálogo con la producción de los demás docentes de la institución de enseñanza alemana. Discutimos inspirados en los curadores y teóricos del arte, como los supuestos y el empirismo exploratorio de materialidades de Moholy-Nagy contaminaron a artistas contemporáneos como el estadounidense Bill Viola.

ABSTRACT

The first experiences with kinetics applied to the visual arts occurred in the first decades of the twentieth century, when compositions with objects and structures in motion were developed, with the intention of exploring, usufruct, control and multiply the effects that these elements and resources generated for the aesthetic experience in environments and spaces destined for corporeal interactions.

The spectators who lived such experiences, although tried to memorize the vestiges of the scene in movement, knew that it was an image impossible to be apprehended completely, and never definitive. The sensations experienced and the reflections generated on what they had witnessed, although shocking, were imprecise and ambiguous.

Among the pioneers of this genre of art is the multimedia artist Lazló Moholy-Nagy, author of innumerable experimental productions, whose abstract nature served as a reference for artists interested in exploring the manipulation of non-conventional media and techniques in the field of painting, sculpture, photography and cinema, as a strategy for artistic and scientific research.

His studies on image included the use of light to generate compositions, possible to be apprehended only in movement. Therefore, he explored photography and cinema, not as means to produce images, but experienced them as transdisciplinary, imbricated areas, whose superposition alters the sensory perception of observers, allowing them to imagine, through the dematerialization of light effects, like "see in movement".

This article is one of the products of the biennial research project (2018-2019), which studies the Oskar Schlemmer Triadic Ballet, in dialogue with the production of the other teachers of the German teaching institution. We discussed inspired by art curators and theorists, how the assumptions and exploratory empiricism of Moholy-Nagy materiality contaminated contemporary artists such as the American Bill Viola.

INTRODUCTION

This article is one of the products of the biennial research project (2018-2019), which studies the Oskar Schlemmer Triadic Ballet, in dialogue with the production of the other teachers of the German teaching institution.

The research "*BAUHAUS- Body, Space, Object: Modern Legacy and Contemporary Perspectives (1919-2009-2019)*", which this group of researchers have been developing since 2018, intends to investigate the material produced in a project developed by researchers, teachers, students and employees of the SENAC University Center, between the years of 2007-2010, close to the 90th anniversary celebration of the German school. We have chosen this object of study to process the documentation, retrieve records filed in raw material, which belong to the collection of the Institutional Research of the SENAC University Center and to expand the scope of the discussion including principles and contributions of the Bauhaus school for teaching and learning architecture, audiovisual and design in the contemporary context.

We assume as a primary source the 18 costumes and their design and construction process, led by the teachers Ernesto Boccara and Fernando Ramos, executed as research action of the master course in Fashion, Culture and Art, and exhibited in the library of the University Center SENAC in partnership with the Goethe Institute of São Paulo in 2013. The costumes mentioned were later donated to the Bauhaus Foundation based in Dessau and are part of its archive ever since.

The choice of this object of study aims, mainly, to create a field of reflection and production of knowledge through the analysis of the products (iconographic, models and prototypes) elaborated for the research carried out between 2007 and 2010. Thus, we prioritize studies that amplify the specific analysis of the costumes *making of*, creating hypotheses about possible analogies between the production coordinated in 1922 by Oskar Schlemmer and the pedagogical philosophy of the Bauhaus constructed and practiced by teachers of other subjects, in their strategies of teaching and investigative experiments. One of the objectives of this research is to disseminate the results obtained with the project of the Triadic Ballet, in digital platforms of public access, and contextualize such production in the theoretical and cognitive assumptions of the Bauhaus school, in its wide dimension.

We have adopted three approaches as guiding principles of the research discussed in this article: 1. speculation and innovation as a result of manipulation and intervention in materiality; 2. the correspondences between methodological and pedagogical procedures

of distinct fields of knowledge in the Bauhaus, which are manifested in specific but similar supports; 3. the unfolding of the results of the research in the experimental practices usually promoted and practiced by the authors of this article, in didactic activities and in research and extension projects.

In the Triadic Ballet, the costumes were designed to represent the transformation of the man inserted in the abstract space. The lines of planimetric and stereometric relations derived from the laws of cubic space define the field available to the mechanical and coordinated movements of the body, attuned to the fundamental principle of modern thought, designed to guide the way of being and dwelling of the inhabitant of the twentieth century, centered on universal and standardized parameters.¹

Space experiments in Moholy-Nagy's work point to more daring and complex views in discussing space created and deduced by an object which, although installed on a fixed basis, moves continuously, which in some way confronts the deterministic and redundant notion of the movement planned for the dancers in Schlemmer's costumes. The artificial body of objects conceived by Moholy, composed of improbable materials, transcended the expectations of the Triadic Ballet performances. By providing observers with abstract images projected on casual surfaces, observable by various points and angles, the phenomenon of light reflected in the planes, the lines and the leaked or textured plates reverberates in space, causing repercussions, other immersions and sensations, as Foster (2006, p.94) elucidates:

In *The New Vision* Moholy first rethinks painting in 'vivid contrast to the classical conception of the picture: the illusion of an open window'. Yet, he does not redefine it, as per modernist expectation, strictly as a flat surface; rather he conceives painting as both plane and picture, as the dialectical sublation of the two paradigms, at once two-dimensional and infinite [...] Moholy sees his *Transparents* as trajectories 'from pigment to light' And in fact they appear both materially flat and optical expansive-an effect due in part to juxtaposition of opaque and translucent areas in part to his use of experimental substances.

Motivated by the theme proposed by this congress, we discuss in this paper how the assumptions and exploratory empiricism of Moholy-Nagy materiality contaminated contemporary artists such as the American Bill Viola.

METHODOLOGY

The principal research has a theoretical-conceptual character, assuming in its methodological procedures: collection and documentation of primary and secondary sources on the subject (including interviews with teachers, students and employees participating in the first Triadic Ballet research cycle at SENAC); recognition and elaboration of criteria for organizing the available raw documentary material; empirical research, experimental procedures and applied research (in the products derived from the research, mainly in the elements and information that must compose the means of dissemination of the related material and the research as a whole).

However, for the approach chosen for this work, we opted for conceptual theoretical research in texts produced by authors discussing the unique nature of Moholy-Nagy's work, emphasizing the exploration of innovative media and materiality in the field of abstract images and "intangibles". The effect derived from the choreographies orchestrated by their kinetic structures and the representations generated from the results obtained, such as photographs, paintings and scenography, refer to techniques and images explored by Bill Viola in his works, as mentioned.

DEVELOPMENT

The catalog of the Moholy-Nagy exhibition, held between 2016 and 2017 at the Chicago Institute of Art, updates reflections on the work of the teacher and artist, bringing his production closer to a series of initiatives and experiences developed by contemporary artists who adopt in their projects similar interdisciplinary posture, and the fascination for transparency, color, shade and movement. As Barten, Pénichon and Stringari (2017, p.201) observe:

Although photography and film were the most natural media choices for composition with light, he pursued this vision across disciplines, experimenting with a wide array of unconventional media and inventing ways to undermine their materiality through intricate techniques that alter viewers' sensory perception. These dematerialized light effects may constitute the fullest realization of his utopian desire to produce vision in motion.

¹ "This mathematics corresponds to that inherent in the human body. It creates balance by movements that, in their essence, are mechanical and conditioned by intelligence. It is the geometry of body, rhythmic, gymnastic exercises." (LIMA, 1999: 54). Retrieved 9 march 2019, from <http://www.seer.unirio.br/index.php/opercevejoonline/article/view/1362/1130>

Carol Eliel (2016, p. 299), one of the curators and collaborators of the book, mentions the connection between Moholy and Olafur Eliasson:

In Eliasson's view, "by engaging in experimentation, we can challenge the norms by which we live and thus produce reality...An artwork is fundamentally tied to its surroundings, to the present, to society, to cultural and geographic determinants. It activates the dense texture, thereby examining the world in which we live – and by doing so, it can ultimately change the world". (Eliasson, 2009, quoted by Eliel, 2016. Retrieved 9 March 2019 from <http://raumexperimente.net/meta/nothing-is-ever-the-same/>)

The spheres are machines that create space...some of them contain a light source inside the projects fragmented light out into the space where they are hanging...So it is not only , or primarily, the physical object in space that interests me, but the way the light and the shadows and the colors claim and create space together. They perform architecture, you might say. (Eliasson, 2015, quoted by Eliel, 2016. Retrieved from <http://designboom--02-16-2015>)

1. In the cameraless image, the latent space.

The artists who dispense the use of the photographic camera to explore images in another sensitive dimension, without the visual thickness of the usual iconographic records obtained by the photography of three-dimensional objects, produce signals graphed by light that reveal peculiar rhythms, displacements and overlaps. These frames assume imprecision and ambiguity as elements of image composition of the perceived phenomena, impossible to be explored on a static screen. Such records, when exhibited in space, produce visual echoes, which amplifies the repercussion of the imagery effects derived from the primordial artistic object. (Figure 1). Barten, Pénichon and Stringari (2017, p.188) highlight this aspect of Moholy's work, which will find resonances in the work of Bill Viola:

He often chose materials and methods that enabled him to transform light into a more tangible presence through refraction, reflection, mirroring, or the production of shadows. He exploited the properties of unconventional materials whose surface sheen, transparency, or malleability enabled him to engender hovering forms, shifting optical effects, and intangible spatial specters. [...] Many of these effects camouflage the physicality of the materials producing them, suggesting instead the intangible phenomena of time and movement. The quest to dematerialize his media and paint with light remained central to Moholy's process even, paradoxically, when his artwork became especially intricate and laborious to produce.



Figure 1. *Light Space Modulator*, Moholy Nagy. Retrieved 9 march 2019, from <https://www.google.com/search?q=vitra-design-museum-lighttopia-Light-Space-Modulator-L%C3%A1szl%C3%B3-Moholy-Nagy&oq=vitra-design-museum-lighttopia-Light-Space-Modulator>.

Not only do experiments with light and motion itself generate stimulating effects and abstract signs capable of moving the imagination of the teacher and scientist to assume and test possibilities of applying them in different contexts, such as images on posters, book covers and other purposes. Also experiences with new materials and techniques have produced unexpected and stimulating results as new matrices to produce images. (Figure 2)



Figure 2 *Papmac* (1943), plexiglass, Moholy Nagy. Retrieved 9 march 2019, from https://www.vice.com/en_au/article/3d5w9j/moholy-nagy-chemistry-experiments-conservation-lab

2. The expansion of the artistic device as a medium of art production.

Moholy's experiments with light, space, motion, matter and image were pioneering, focusing on synesthetic operations and the enjoyment of abstract elements, whose results were later experienced and tested in different media by contemporary artists, inspired by his discoveries and innovations. As Foster (2006, p.93) states, the most important aspect of Moholy-Nagy's work was its expansion:

With the photograph, his privileged instance of the medium, Moholy proceeds almost etymologically: its essence is light (*photo*) written (*graphed*) on a support; it thus combines the transparency of light with the indexicality of its inscription. The question then becomes how to develop these very different attributes, or, rather, how to demonstrate them (the two operations are never far apart for Moholy). A primary way is through the photogram, the cameraless image of transparent forms made when objects on coated paper are exposed to light [...]. Yet it is this nature, its principle of transparent light imprinted indexically, that is most important. And for Moholy it must be extended: the specificity of the medium is only the first step of the process; the crucial move is its expansion. This imperative of analysis-abstraction-extension made him the quintessential modernist that he is; it also made him, on occasion, somewhat tendentious, aesthetically as well as conceptually.

The recent exhibition of the artist Bill Viola, at SESC Paulista, allows us to think about the coincidences and resonances between these two artists, both denominated "artists of the Movement", and inspired by artistic installations that exploit effects, materiality and sensitive atmospheres. (Figure 3)

Petronio (2019) notes that:

Viola's work approaches the world and the totality of perception from the floating sign of moving images. The universe and the mind would be nothing more than motion-images beyond the Bergsonian and Deleuzian conception of this thesis, the artist's method of composition and research oscillates between phenomenology (the suspension of judgment on the data of experience) and ontology (exploration of the plurality of emerging worlds of the hidden strata of perception). For this reason, Viola relies on subtle images, thus seeking to reconstruct the representational layers of perception from the exploration of non-human and meta-human perspectives. (E4)



Figure 3. *Martyrs* (2018), *Visions of Time* (2018) Retrieved 9 march 2019, from <https://universes.art/en/specials/sesc-sp/bill-viola-visions-of-time/>

Although Viola's installations offer body experiences that reveal the transformation of the physical into a psychological, or trans-physical, as some critics suggest, the place of this confrontation between what you see and what you think about the image is the mind with all the symbolic contents since man realized his dependence on nature to survive, therefore, his fragility and the need for sacrifice. Thus, the artist himself claims he conceives the image of his works as a "naked conscience of the camera." (Petronio, 2019, E4)

The interference in the body's image with natural elements (earth, air, fire and water) explores the passage of time, thanks to the dynamicity of the medium (video) and the technological resources dominated by the artist. The moving image also serves to "shape and inform aesthetics," according to the art critic John G. Hanhardt.²

By creating a visual language from the medium, Bill Viola expands the possibilities of the exposed object, potentializing the effects and displaying an enigmatic image texture that becomes the matrix of his works. The notion of nature is altered by the expression of the projected elements in the human body, used as support, and the human bodies assume other meanings, from the innumerable changes they suffer, during the time in which they are subjected to continuous interventions.

As Bill Viola explains³:

The Greek word for martyr originally meant 'witness.' In today's world, the mass media turns us all into witnesses to the suffering of others. The martyrs' past lives of action can help illuminate our modern lives of inaction. They also exemplify the human capacity to bear pain, hardship, and even death in order to remain faithful to their values, beliefs, and principles. This piece represents ideas of action, fortitude, perseverance, endurance, and sacrifice. (Retrieved 9 March 2019 from <https://mag.rochester.edu/exhibitions/bill-viola-martyrs/>).

The ingredients of Bill Viola's work are technology, nature, process and time. Moholy-Nagy, on his turn, experiences technology, materialities, process and time (or, better, intervals of space occupied by overlapping images). In the work of the contemporary artist, emotional qualities are obtained from watching the videos, and these qualities take us to other places. In the work of the modern artist, dynamic visual qualities produced by the luminous effects of the moving object lead us to imagine an incognito but desirable future.

CONCLUSIONS

Bill Viola investigates how to obtain the totality of perception from the inaccuracy of moving images, and the impact of the ambiguous depiction of works such as *Martyrs*, hesitant between the representation of life or death; Moholy-Nagy places us before objects and experiences whose unpredictability is the most desired quality, due to chance and accidents. In his original investigations, the notion of time is instantaneous and transitory, inaccurate and shocking, and always refers to the experience of the recipient in the face of ephemeral and absolute work as a memorable experience

New media are gradually being conceived as machines of vision. They are means of creating a global art based on temporality. This search, whose matrices are modern secular spiritualities, seeks to reveal a truth to the viewer: the multidimensionality of time and space. This revelation is based on a cognitive and performative meta-strategy: the recurrence of images of construction and destruction. The gift thus becomes tangible to the viewer. Whereas the distant spaces synchronize, through a vision of simultaneity. (Petronio, 2019, E4)

Temporalities and spatiality constructed from materiality, abstractions and continuous movement. Moholy-Nagy's heritage transcends the modernist period from which it originates thanks to the availability of materials and technological resources still embryonic, multiplied by the artist, professor and scientist, in his constant investigation and his restless thought connected with the future world. The intangible and ephemeral images of the Bauhaus artist and his contemporary partners inaugurate a present time, dissolved in invisible yet sensitive images.

Let us now consider what could appear as being in the present instant where it utterly cut off from past and future. We can only guess; for nothing is more occult than the absolute present. (Peirce V:85 cited by Ferrara, 2008, p. 90)

² From an interview retrieved 9 March 2019 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gwCXwGLO8N4&feature=youtu.be>.

³ In the interview shown in the Memorial Art Gallery site of the University of Rochester, about Viola's "*Martyrs*" exhibition in 2017/2018, retrieved 9 March 2019 from <https://mag.rochester.edu/exhibitions/bill-viola-martyrs/>.

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