

## Seminários Internacionais Museu Vale III Edição

[Museu Vale's International Seminars 3rd Edition]

"... and why poets in indigent times?"

Table title: Why art? – March 2008

WHY ART TODAY? THE **SUWUD** INQUIRY.\*

Tadeu Chiarelli† – 2008

Despite having enthusiastically accepted to participate in this 3rd edition of the *International Seminars*, promoted by *Museu Vale*, the event's title seemed odd since I sense in it a bit of hopelessness regarding art's current situation. This feeling is made even stronger by the themes of each discussion: "The indigence of our time" and "Why art today?". If these themes were meant to mobilize debate, in my case the target was hit.

Having been a professor for almost three decades, it would be paradoxical if I believed poets are useless, in indigent times, be they present or future. If I believed in it, then there would be no reason to continue instructing new generations of artists and art scholars and I would have already stopped thinking about the artistic field, especially the Brazilian one.

Thus, as a response to the "provocations" incited by these Seminars I have chosen as the object of this lecture the production of a young collective from Sao Paulo, formed by three youngsters aged 23 to 24. That is why I called my talk "Why art today? The **suwud** inquiry". I hope that this title reveals that I don't see myself living in indigent times, despite all the indigence around us all. I don't see myself in them because, working with youngsters, and being by their side, the light that they radiate illuminates my professional

\* I thank Roberto Winter and Pedro Terra for their availability in discussing **suwud**'s production with me, as well as my colleague from the Departamento de Artes Plásticas at ECA-USP, Gilberto Prado for his reading suggestions.

† Translated with consent from the author from the portuguese original (available as PDF online at [http://www.seminariosmv.org.br/textos/tadeu\\_chiarelli.pdf](http://www.seminariosmv.org.br/textos/tadeu_chiarelli.pdf) and [http://rhwinter.com/tadeu\\_chiarelli\\_pt.pdf](http://rhwinter.com/tadeu_chiarelli_pt.pdf)) in May 2008 by Roberto Winter, who is grateful to Jeffrey Jon Shaw and Larissa Rebello for having carefully reviewed it (this translation can be found online at [http://rhwinter.com/tadeu\\_chiarelli\\_en.pdf](http://rhwinter.com/tadeu_chiarelli_en.pdf)). This text was originally written for the occasion of Tadeu Chiarelli's speech at Museu Vale's "Seminars".

path, making me see less obscure perspectives for the future.

To contextualize this collective I shall consider some subjects regarding art from the past few decades that are not yet very clear. This contextualization, however, must not make one assume that by the end of this speech the members of the collective should be raised to the level of heroes. I am not enthusiastic about art writings devoted to artists' glorification. **Suwud** is studied here as an evidence, among many, that while my generation – and those before it –, discuss and get depressed – and sometimes become desperate when facing the apparent chaos that surrounds us –, young people throw themselves into the world trying to understand it and transform it. In the vast field of contemporary art these youngsters keep producing, and in this production, primarily non-conformist, reaffirm crucial postures that make me believe in the relevance of art in our times. At least in the kind of art that **suwud** and part of its generation produce.

Given these premises, I begin my talk.

\*

The current art panorama presents two general trends: on one hand those productions that insist on the uniqueness of the art object, the importance of authorship – and hence all the institutional apparatus that surrounds them (galleries, museums, collectors, etc); on the other hand, we have productions that make a hodgepodge of these concepts so dear to western art, diving more and more into areas that are further from any art concept connected to the – still hegemonic – European aesthetic tradition that formed us and, to a large extent, dismissing all the institutionalized apparatus established by this tradition.

Despite my awareness of the prejudicial aspects of some arguments by authors such as the Northern American Arthur Danto or the German Hans Belting<sup>1</sup>, I am inclined to agree with both when they substantiate the end of

---

<sup>1</sup> I refer here to their lack of ability in realizing the developments that the concept of art had outside the United States and European countries, a problem which, belonging exclusively to the kind of tradition that both represent, just remains to us, Latin-Americans and other "excluded", lamenting (for them). BELTING, Hans. *O fim da história da arte*. São Paulo: Cosac & Naif, 2006.; DANTO, Arthur. *Después del fin del arte*. Barcelona: Paidós, 2002 – **Translator's note:** Hans Belting's book referenced here is known in English as "The end of the history of art?", Arthur Danto's is known as "After the end of art".

the traditional western art concept. Both Danto and Belting attest this situation after many authors – maybe with less power to spread their ideas – have, decades ago, drawn attention to this fact. I am referring to the Brazilian Mário Pedrosa<sup>2</sup> and to the Italian Giulio Carlo Argan<sup>3</sup> who, in spite of not having explicitly declared "the end of art", had already detected the collapse of the universalist's concept of western art.

When we consider these authors' ideas, we realize that what motivated them to create these "finalist" concepts were artistic productions that, between the 60s and 70s, de-structured those concepts so dear to western art, some mentioned before (uniqueness of the art work, authorship, specificity of language, etc.). These productions, destructive of these almost sacred assumptions, elevated the common object to the condition of art, minimized authorship and emphasized behavioral and theatrical matters related to contemporary art. These authors, effectively compromised all of contemporary art's basis.

Restricting the problem to Mário Pedrosa's contribution, we can say that, considering propositions by Hélio Oiticica and Lygia Clark, he deduces that it would be impossible to continue defining these and other artists' productions' framed by the parameters established by modern art (understood as the continuation of the "grand" western art). Thus, by the early 70s, he coins the term "postmodern" to identify and distinguish these artists' proposals from modernist tradition.

If we compare the productions of Oiticica and Clark to those of other Brazilian artists of the 60s, we realize that, due to their radicalism, they complicated even further the premises that structured the concept of western art. Both minimized, or even overcame the matters of the art object's authorship and uniqueness, above all through the emphasis given on the spectator's participation in their proposals. Another fundamental aspect is that, in these proposals, precisely because of this emphasis on the old spectator – now a 'participant' –, the art object, or the thing which could be

---

<sup>2</sup> "Por dentro e por fora das bienais", in PEDROSA, Mário. *Mundo, homem, arte em crise*. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1975, p. 300.

<sup>3</sup> ARGAN, Giulio Carlo. *L'Arte moderna. 1770/1970*. Firenze: Sansoni, 1980.

seen as such, ended up in a secondary role, merely 'relational', that is, a simple instrument to establish the relationship between the individual – the 'participant' –, and the other and the world of experience.

If we gather the *parangolés* and other proposals by Oiticica to the concept of "relational objects" – term coined to understand certain objects used by Clark in her proposals –, we will see that both her objects and Oiticica's were nothing more than instruments without any cult value, and, thus, less important than the individuals that used them to carry on the actions. The objects used in their proposals were not intended to be perpetuated as works that could be reduced to the condition of merchandise – a strike on all the capitalistic art circuit<sup>4</sup>.

\*

References to the mentioned authors and to the productions of Oiticica and Clark were established with one intention: begin to demonstrate that, from the 60s up to now, the concept of art has become even more complex, opening up unsuspected possibilities by that time. If in those years nearer the end of the Second World War we saw the parameters of the "grand" western art weaken, today we live in a situation where everything can be considered art.

Today, even those instruments created by Oiticica and Clark intended to reduce the sacredness of the object, have already been absorbed as "aesthetic" objects. Oiticica's *parangolés* and Clark's relational objects certainly resist being absorbed as such. Removed of their original functions and recently shown in glass and acrylic domes (or worse, in hangers!), they bravely express a refusal to the market's aesthetic consumption. But the market, much like Clark's and Oiticica's sidekicks, do not care about this refusal, and absorb them without pity nor mercy.

After decades, the current art circuit wants to make us believe that

---

<sup>4</sup> It is noteworthy, even if briefly, that while in pop art, Arthur Danto sees the transfiguration of the ordinary object into an art object, in proposals above all by Clark, we can notice a reverse transfiguration: by transforming the art object into devices that simply provoke a relation between subjects or among them and space/time, the artist overcomes the concept of an "art object" in a simple way (If, later, some of her followers, will firmly endure on the process of re-sacralization Clark's relational objects, producing "quasi-relational objects", that is another story).

anything can be art, even those relational objects, originally thought as proposals to deny the established concepts of art. From a painting framed in the most strict modernist rigor to a pile of photographs sealed between glass; from an intervention in a large city like Paris to an abstract sculpture made from marble; from a delicate embroidery showing rape scenes to an internet production, dealing with racial matters, and transmitted on the internet itself, everything can be absorbed as art.

\*

This situation has puzzled many scholars and, facing the endless possibilities, many take refuge in one or another niche, not trying to understand – not even partially –, what goes on in near niches and in the countless cases of inter-contamination among them and among the conservative or radical positions that infuse them.

Trapped in these little territories of specialty, most do not reflect, for instance, on how newer generations position themselves face to the complex scenario that they did not create, but confront and interact with, reaching stimulating results a number of times.

To position **suwud's** actions, I do not intend to map the production of all young artists, despite the fact that this text assumes that at least a part of this generation will bring a novel focus to the field of art, especially concerning the creative use of new technologies.

Setting out from conquests reached by artists that, in the 60s and 70s, broke with museums' walls to realize their productions (associated with site specifics) and with the dictatorship of the art object closed in itself (associated with dematerialized conceptual art, mail art, and those who started using cutting edge technology)<sup>5</sup>, this new generation tends not to produce more of what we understand as "art objects", but "situations", which are hard to classify according to the parameters established by the conventional artistic system.

However, even working on the borders of the established art circuit, their productions update and, to my mind, can, finally, fire the mercy shot that

<sup>5</sup> Refer, above all, to: BREA, Jose Luis. La era postmidia. Acción comunicativa, prácticas (post)artísticas y dispositivos neomediales. Salamanca: Editorial Centro de Arte de Salamanca, 2002.

many artists connected to the vanguards and neo-vanguards wanted to direct to the art object and its merchandise condition.

If in earlier times these attacks were little by little being neutralized by the gradual recovery of these objects into the domains of established art, "situations" such as some proposed by these artists, above all related to the internet, seem to make impossible any future attempt to rescue them as "art objects", in the traditional market sense.

\*

Based on the multi-faceted character of the current artistic production field, and mapping the arrival and institutionalization of a phenomenon given by the merger of artistic production and new technologies for the production/distribution of images, this text will consider **suwud**'s practices on the internet, from the perspective that the collective produces alternatives for the creative use and at the same time critical of this tool. More specifically, the aim here is to discuss one of its productions conceived and distributed over the internet: *Googorama*<sup>†</sup>.

Not too long ago, Google, the owner of softwares such as Google Earth, added to their webservice 'Google Maps' a new functionality called Street View. It consists in the photographic documentation of (until now) a few North-American cities, made through the use of cars that, on their hoods, carry a device containing a number of cameras that, while the vehicle moves around the city streets, automatically document every aspect of the streets, avenues, squares, alleys and, even, passers-by, without any direct human intervention. Both Google Earth and Street View are explicit exercises in vigilance that, despite that, are "sold" to internet users as another address finding service. Despite this strategy of presenting themselves as a pacific service, they emanate an undisguisable totalitarian aspect.

Through the appropriation of images from San Francisco, USA, **suwud** created a virtual portfolio containing 18 images.

The images' appropriation and the portfolio's configuration clarify a typical characteristic of all the images chosen by the collective and all of the other images contained in the website in question: they obey

---

<sup>†</sup>**Translator's note:** googorama is available online at <http://suwud.com/googorama>

the aesthetic patterns of modern photography's tradition connected to a genre of straight photography<sup>6</sup>, known as street photography<sup>7</sup>.

Once the portfolio was ready, it spread on the internet, where it gained certain resonance in photography discussion forums.

I focus on this work for two reasons: first, because it is of my interest to understand how this collective can bring about, comment and de-structure matters so dear to modern art (and still very present in the institutionalized universes of art and fine art photography) – authorship, the gaze of the artist, the importance of craftsmanship in art, etc –, reutilizing strategies that are esteemed to certain past century art movements. I refer to some strategies that are typical of dada and neodada, such as the principles of appropriation and displacement, which corrupt the order of art's hegemonic discourse, demonstrating how it can be understood as an authorities' discourse manifestation.

Many will claim that the strategies used by **suwud** have already been recovered and institutionalized in post-war art. Even I have drawn attention here on how Oiticica's and Clark's proposals have been avidly absorbed by the market. However, I would like to draw attention to a fact that, from my perspective, is crucial, since it brings a new relevance to the use of these strategies in the contemporary scene: originated, developed and disclosed on the internet, *Googorama* gives new force to the critical strategies inherited from dada and neodada, precisely because of the difficulty, or even the impossibility of reducing this proposal to the quality of object and, therefore, merchandise – a process that encompassed dada photo manipulations and Lygia Clark's relational objects, just to mention two examples.

Secondly, I am interested in the collective's proposal for the following:

---

<sup>6</sup> Straight photography – a tendency that arose in the field of North-American photography at the beginning of the last century and which, attempting to escape from academic pictorial stereotypes exhausted by photographers who wanted to grant photography the status of "art", had as a goal the production of a direct photography, with no stylistic or technical artifices. For some authors, this "direct" photography in some way simply replaced the pictorialist patterns: if that which preceded it searched in academic painting its parameters, this tried to base itself in a modernist rule book, always attentive to the avant-garde painting of its time.

<sup>7</sup> Street photography – led the proposal of straight photography outside of studios, directly documenting life in big North-American metropolis' streets. The two tendencies strongly influenced international photography, acting even until today.

*Googorama*, comprised only of information, with no material existence, when distributed over the internet, immediately becomes a source for debate; the result of these initial receptions becomes new information that couples to **suwud**'s original proposal, which immediately will receive more information, also added to the ones before, and then adding another, and another, and so on.

We can understand, through *Googorama*, that thinking art as information on the internet, is to experience in "real-time" what, a few years ago, Giulio Carlo Argan wrote about the fact that an artwork is its reality and everything that all generations have thought about it throughout history<sup>8</sup>. In an accelerated time such as the one in which we live today, works that no longer possess material support – comprised solely of information in an ongoing transformation process –, update the Italian scholar's definition.

These new works configure a challenge to all who, coming from a formal tradition in the field of art history, face these new possibilities on thinking art.

\*

There are two kinds of professionals working with recent image production/broadcasting technologies. There are those whose discussions do not show a thorough interaction with the technologies they explore, so to speak. It is as if they operated "from the outside", always far from a complete connection with these machines.

Many of these artists still aim at clarifying the "aesthetic potentials" of these new tools as if they were new, but as traditional artistic modes (which would thicken the traditional group led by drawing, painting, sculpture...) and their productions have difficulty escaping the universe of clarification or illustration of certain effects, of these new media's "expressive" character, pointing at what can be artistically added to art's already stereotyped universe.

Further from these production which already configure a certain kind of "tradition" – already established by the institutional apparatus into which many

---

<sup>8</sup> ARGAN, Giulio Carlo./FAGIOLLO, Maurizio. *Guida a la storia dell'arte*. Firenze: Sansoni, 1977.

of them are produced –, there is a second group of producers which brings out other matters to thinking art today, having new technologies as an interest.

Composed mostly by young artists, what sets this group apart is the fact that their members have practically been born already using these new instruments. Since they were children these devices have been a part of their lives, and handling them, in many cases, was part of learning and acquiring the most general codes to communicate with the world.

The dissemination of cell phones, digital cameras, internet, and other tools, found many producers who were already socially established and recognized as artists, which led them, many times, to initially explore the "aesthetic potentials" of these new devices, even before they were a real part of their daily lives.

For a youngster, however, using a camera, taking pictures with a cell phone or browsing the web never had the same weight that it had to their predecessors. Before entering the field of creative explorations known as "art", these activities helped them understanding the world and interacting with it. This familiarity enabled, or have been enabling that, in many cases, these youngster's production is articulated with a surprising degree of intimacy between user and machine, in the same natural way with which artists in the past used the pencil to draw.

\*

What is noticeable in a significant part of these new generations' productions is, in the first place, the loss of interest in the need to reveal or analyze the "expressive" possibilities of these new media. Simply by not thinking from an exclusively traditional "artistic" perspective anymore – which would only be concerned with the formal integrity of the "finished" artwork – and much more concerned with the informational potential and critiques of their activities, these youngsters are looking for other problems to explore.

In their productions they clearly investigate the semantic and syntactic potential of these new technologies, but these questionings are always carried out in layers, since the use of a certain information production method (say photography) comes across, and usually penetrates, others (for instance the possibility of coupling sound to photographs), due to the hybridization that

joins them. Considering that the goal is not the production of a merely analytical work, typical of the modernism concerned solely with form, explorations tend to happen more freely, without the intent of making "art", in the traditional sense of the term.

\*

Created in late 2005, **suwud** is composed by two physicists who are USP graduates ("Universidade de São Paulo") and by a student of the "Departamento de Artes Plásticas" of the "Escola de Comunicações e Artes" in the same university<sup>†</sup>. All three have varied interests that range from software programming to theater lighting, passing through philosophy, arts, woodwork, photography and other areas.

The collective is not characterized solely by works made for the internet, or other "immaterial" media (such as video, for instance), its interest in actions that involve interventions in real spaces is noteworthy, by creating specific places/situations, in which the public's participation is paramount.

Among these activities, I'd like to draw attention to a series of works – called Structures: Passarela [Walkway], Torre [Tower], Hotel Laboratório [Laboratory Hotel] e Ponte [Bridge] – in which **suwud** builds a kind of ladder-tower that molds itself to the spaces where it is built and then taken apart, and relies on the involvement of both the public and actors/dancers.

In this same universe, in November 2007 the collective presented, at an exhibition at *Galeria Emma Thomas*, an 'activity' called "Fato 1": **suwud** tattooed a tiny black spot on 49 volunteers, the body part where the tattoo was made was chosen by the person being tattooed. After the action, the collective distributed to each participant a document containing a schematic view of the front and back of a human body, with a mark on the spot where that person's tattoo was made. According to one of the group's component:

"That was fact "1". We intend to make a series of facts, all different. Thus, tattooing people is not the main subject of this work (other ideas for future "facts" are: meditation, barbecue, fighting, etc.). We don't consider this works as a performance [in the traditional sense] since what interests us is not the act of, for instance, tattooing 49 people; but the condition of the

---

<sup>†</sup>**Translator's note:** USP stands for "University of São Paulo", "Departamento de Artes Plásticas" is the plastic arts department in that university. The department is part of "Escola de Comunicações e Artes", the "School of Communication and Arts".

fact always existing in the past. Therefore, the proposal of creating a fact is paradoxical, since when we are performing the action the fact does not yet exist; and when the action is over, the fact is already memory. Maybe making facts is making memories. It is a work that only exists in the participant's memory, or in the document. The document also serves to validate and prove that the participant's memory is real."<sup>9</sup>

All of these actions are recorded in video by the collective itself, which – seen as raw material – may or may not be developed into specific editions, with a certain transcendence of the condition of mere register of the actions, to be seen as autonomous works<sup>10</sup>.

Parallel to that, **suwud** also produced videos from ideas/scripts without any proper documental basis, which can be shown on the internet or in installations at conventional exhibition spaces.

\*

Therefore it is in this varied field of activities that the collective's interventions on the internet can be framed, starting by the group's very site – **suwud.com**.

**Suwud's** interest on the internet, as expressed by one of its components, did not arise from a specific desire to make something such as web art or "art via internet". The relation that this generation's producers establish with these media, as mentioned before, possesses a "naturalness" that is hard to verify on older artists' productions. About this subject, one of the collective's members says:

"Regarding **suwud**, I believe that our own histories are very indicative of the reason why we are interested in these technologies. Ricardo, and myself other than, of course, having been exposed to them a lot in college, [Roberto Winter and Ricardo Birmann studied physics at USP] had already great contact with computers since childhood. My parents are professors at USP and because of that (I believe) I had access to computers, internet and all these things from a very early age (the first webpage I created was in 1996, which amazes even me when I think of it). Ricardo had great interest in programming, which was greatly motivated by his mother (as far as I know) since before he entered high school. Pedro, simply for being in touch with Ricardo [Pedro and Ricardo are brothers] I'd also risk saying that was interested in these subjects very early. I think that, because of all this, we are not concerned in, for example, "making a work that deals with the internet" or something like that, it happens naturally because we are immersed in this environment".<sup>11</sup>

For a collective that, as I have already mentioned, manifests through several media, the issue of media specificity (still from a modernist

---

<sup>9</sup> Email statement by Pedro Terra sent to the author on february 22nd, 2008

<sup>10</sup> It is in this sense that a video called "Performance Hotel Laboratório" can be seen, made from the documentation of one of the ladder-tower's previously mentioned.

<sup>11</sup> Email statement by Roberto Winter sent to the author on February 3rd, 2008

perspective) is not contained amongst their main concerns, even though it appears as a certain "residue" in the conception/making of the works. Encouraged to answer about the fact that **suwud** is concerned with this matter, the same component answers:

"I believe the answer is, at the same time, yes and no. That is, we are not concerned about exploring the 'specificities' of a media since, primordially, it interests us (**suwud**) the specificity that things have in themselves and not specificity as that modernist program of exploration of a characteristic through an insistence in it (such as, for instance, a collection of works all devoted to comprehending the "canvas's surface").

I'll try to make it clearer with an example: in Structures we are not interested in showing or clarifying characteristics (specificities) regarding "structures", but the specificities of that structure (which is there, installed in front of you, through which your body moves, etc.). I think that in this sense, this specificity also contains the modernist one. It is as if it came attached to it and that is why I'd say "yes, we are, inevitably, concerned in exploring the media's specificities": when we show a structure whose interest is the structure itself we end up relating to aspects of "structures".<sup>12</sup>

When it comes to the use of the internet, the problematic of specificities gains countless critical possibilities, due to, mostly, the hybrid character of the media. At least theoretically, the internet compels those who operate it to confront with several "specificities" (that of photography, video, text, etc.), articulating simultaneous joint and/or sequential operations to reach – or find! – their objectives. However, to this new generation of artists – or at least to **suwud**'s components –, the main aspect regarding internet works is not this kind of specificity (despite its existence). What seems to interest them is the specificity of information that manifests through the mean with which the collective operates.

According to one of its components:

"Technology crates new problems to be faced. I think that our works explore some specificities of more basic things. For instance, communication, instead of communication devices. Technology usually just facilitates certain procedures that existed prior. A saw and a circular saw do the same thing, despite the fact that one is capable of cutting much faster than the other. Thus, it seems to me that the differences between technologies, which can be understood as each one's specificities, are rarely disclosed.

Going back to my example: a saw's movement is back and forth, but a circular saw's movement is circular. These functional details diverge from the mechanical perspective, but produce similar results. It is possible to deal with technology's specificity in this framework, but I believe **suwud** deals more with the result produced by a tool than with mechanic details. And this is maybe due to the fact that we have a certain intimacy with the tools we work with".<sup>13</sup>

About *Googorama*, the collective's components also have a peculiar point of view, seemingly unconcerned with whether it is or not considered

<sup>12</sup> Email statement by Roberto Winter sent to the author on March 4th, 2008

<sup>13</sup> Email statement by Pedro Terra sent to the author on February 28th, 2008

netart or even "art":

"... when we created it, the intention we had was simply revealing what Google *StreetView* was. And, by selecting some images, and grouping them it was possible to understand better what it was we were browsing, these very odd world of photographs. Google *StreetView* is a giant 3 dimensional photograph. Something totally new and incredible. Our initial intention was simply showing, understanding and discussing what that was which was in front of us. This maybe is a fundamental **suwud** characteristic. Most of the time we are only trying to understand things around us, without adding complexity to the enormous chaos that the world already is."

In another statement, the same component again manifests about

*Googorama*:

"Making a photograph of a photo is a particularly interesting procedure. The redundant gesture of taking a photograph of a photo empties the original visual meaning of the photo. The difference between the two photos is that one had the trouble of concerning itself with light, angle, framing, speed, etc. and the other simply appropriated the first. The important for the second photo is that it has appropriated itself of the first independently of the visual meaning present in it. Thus, the second photo is empty of visual meaning. The interesting thing about the second photograph is its mechanism of appropriation.

In *Googorama* a perversion of this mechanism that I presented occurs. The pictures that make the world of *StreetView* are blind photographs; there was no one looking behind the lenses, looking and choosing what was being photographed, that is, they are empty of meaning. And, in the case of the second photo, which should empty the visual meaning of the first, we are [**suwud**] choosing which is the best angle and the best subject for it, in a certain way, adding a visual value to what was empty before."

This seemingly cold attitude towards Google *StreetView*, cannot hide the collective's critical posture. After all, they, after selecting the 18 images captured in the website, choosing those with "the best angle and the best subject", almost "give back" to those photos which were created blindly (to carry on with the collective's component metaphor) a "visual value" lost by the very making process of Google *StreetView*.

The critical character of this attitude is evidenced, in the first place, when the collective declares that *Googorama* was their entry to "*Prêmio Porto Seguro de Fotografia 2007*"<sup>†</sup> in a category called "Recent Researches". Sending *Googorama* to "*Prêmio Porto Seguro*" – an award that usually celebrates traditional photography's persistence in Brazil – can be understood as another of the group's provocative actions – fact "2"? –, more so than, in fact, as a desire to run for the prize. After all, **suwud**, by evidencing characteristics typical of street photography (and, therefore, "straight photography") in photos captured from a website with "blind" photos, evidences, or bares the fragility of modernly oriented photography discourse,

---

<sup>†</sup> **Translator's note:** "Prêmio Porto Seguro de Fotografia" is a photography award sponsored by a Brazilian insurance company called "Porto Seguro"

led by the rhetoric of "the photographic gaze", the "decisive moment", etc.

It comes as no surprise that the Award's jury ignored the collective's proposal.

*Googorama's* negative reception by "*Prêmio Porto Seguro de Fotografia 2007*" indicates the resistance of certain sectors related to photography in facing attitudes that question modern photography tradition's deeply rooted assumptions.

The reception *Googorama* had in some sites and blogs on the internet, also dedicated to photography or webart, wasn't very different. However, *Googorama*, in these cases, was not simply ignored. On the contrary, at least in three of these spaces – a blog called monochrom (<http://monochrom.at/english/2007/07/googorama.htm>) and the sites photosig (<http://www.photosig.com/go/forums/read;jsessionid=aWaqqWBxvuEbv-ht-p?id=235570>) and photo.net ([http://photo.net/bboard/q-and-a-fetch-msg?msg\\_id=00LzqU](http://photo.net/bboard/q-and-a-fetch-msg?msg_id=00LzqU)) - *Googorama's* portfolio generated debate and controversy. The participants of these forums where not indifferent, or did not ignore the provocations made by **suwud** to modern photography's tradition.

Reading the debates generated after these forums participants' visited *Googorama*, shows how much several of the principles that structure modern photography's rhetoric are still alive, despite all the discussions that, decades ago, have been carried out on the subject. It is also noticeable the durability, among these virtual spaces of discussion, of traditional conceptions related to art, the artist, the art work, etc., demonstrating that there remains a lot to be done, if the goal is the problematization and overcoming these traditional concepts.

\*

I believe that is in place now to inquire into *Googorama's* very structure so that we can clear up some questions that, probably lead, both *Prêmio Porto Seguro* and aforementioned forums debaters', to receive *Googorama* negatively.

In one of the statements quoted above, one of the collective's member shows that, by appropriating Google *StreetView's* photographs, the collective gives "visual value" to "blind photographs" from the North-American website.

The question to be put forward here is: (from) where does the "visual value" inserted into these photographs come from?

**Suwud**, by selecting some of the site's countless photographs to produce *Googorama*, shows everyone that, despite them being apparently blind, these images can be seen as "authorial", as results of a unique regard towards real. After all, some "unusual" shots, some original points of view can be noticed in them, denouncing an "eye" that controlled the capturing procedure.

However, when it is evidenced that the origin of these images is Google *StreetView* and that, therefore, they were not captured by any human eye, by no sensitive and creative gaze that was considering the "decisive moment", the collective evidences that the whole of street photography's rhetoric – which is, as seen before, a subgroup of straight photography and, therefore, a considerable part of modern photography – can be found within the camera's own mechanism.

To think that some of those shots, interesting precisely for their unusual framing, were captured by an ordinary machine on top of an automobile, effectively causes discomfort. Facing what is revealed by the collective, therefore, at least two actions are possible: ignoring the provocation or denying it in favor of supposedly higher values such as the "photographic gaze", "human creativity" and others.

Actually, **suwud** shows in practice, what philosopher Vilén Flusser had already brought up in the theoretical plane: the photographer photographs what is photographable, that which is already beforehand programmed by the photographic apparatus as a photographic "as yet to be":

"If we consider the photographic apparatus [...] we will notice that "being programmed" characterizes it. The symbolic surfaces it produces are, in some way, previously inscribed ("programmed", "pre scripted") by those who produced it. The potential is large, but limited: it is the sum of all photographable photographs by this apparatus. Every time a photograph is made, the potential shrinks, increasing the number of achievements: the program is being exhausted and the photographic universe becoming real. The photographer acts towards the exhaustion of the program and towards the completion of the photographic universe. Since the program is very "rich", the photographer attempts to find ignored potential. The photographer manipulates the apparatus, feels it, looks into it and to through it, so as to always find new potential. His interest is concentrated in the apparatus and the world out there only interests him as a function of the program. He is not striving to change the world, but to oblige the apparatus to reveal its potential. The photographer is not working with the apparatus, but playing with it. His activity resembles that of the chess player's: also looking for

a "new" move, so as to realize one of the game's program hidden virtualities."<sup>14</sup>

If still in this text, Flusser credits a minimum of possibility of action to the photographer – despite characterizing him as a sort of being subjugated to the photographic apparatus' program – the process of clarification proposed by **suwud** with *Googorama* reveals that, nowadays, programmers definitely leave the photographer out of consideration, since all of photography's aesthetic, pre-programmed more than a century ago, and now reinforced by the presence of digital, can directly take care on its own of the photographing act.

What effectively seduces about **suwud**'s action is its gesture, although it has some resemblance with Andy Warhol – who also tried to "just" disclose the reality of the Brillo Box, or a Liz Taylor photograph – does not tend to glamorize or transfigure the ordinary object, turning it into "art". The collective seems content in just pointing at the scheme that structure the photographic rhetoric, leaving to the receiver the processing of the information in whatever fashion he/she sees fit.

By turning the photographic rhetoric into something visible by just restating its existence prior to the experience of the human eye, **suwud** does not aestheticize its strategy for deconstructing traditional visual codes (which, in fact, precede the photographic camera by centuries), not producing, thus, an art object passive to the reduction of mere merchandise. On the other hand – and consequently –, satisfied in maintaining its intervention on the sphere of pure dematerialized information, the collective will hardly run the risk of finding its proposal on some collectors' room.

\*

In a moment in which most of the agents in the art circuit seem relieved in producing, or maybe overestimating, works which barely disguise their only desire of being a merchandise, a collective that compromises with the strategy of revealing power mechanisms that structure both the art world and the world of information brings out a certainty: we cannot affirm that our time is of pure indigence.

---

<sup>14</sup> FLUSSER, Vilém. *Filosofia da caixa preta. Ensaio para uma futura filosofia da fotografia*. Rio de Janeiro: Relume Dumará, 2002. pág.23. — **Translator's note**: Vilém Flusser's book is known in English as "Towards a philosophy of Photography".