



## SHAPING TIME

Possible images for an epoch

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INTRODUCTION: TIME THROUGH MEDIATING  
PRACTICES AND APPARATUSES

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INTRODUCTION

# TIME THROUGH MEDIATING PRACTICES AND APPARATUSES

PAULA RIBEIRO LOBO (ED.) 

Circulation, aggregation, computation or commodification are increasingly used terms when discussing current image-based artistic production. With temporal continuities and discontinuities being explored through the use of digital tools or purpose-built mechanisms, artists and researchers have been reflecting upon photography's timely and untimely nature by, among other strategies, questioning categories and (re)addressing post-photographic practices.

From the framework presented in *Archivo Papers Journal 2:1*, within a volume dedicated to the theme "Shaping Time", the present issue gathers a selection of papers and portfolios that we can relate to the Agambenian broad definition of apparatus<sup>1</sup>. Simultaneously, these proposals configure conceptual and visual perspectives that delve into mediation practices, both informing and transforming our relations to present time.

In the interview that opens this issue and approaches a few topics explored further on, W.J.T. Mitchell, distinguished professor of the University of Chicago, shares some thoughts on the conception of *epoch* and on his metaphorical concept of the present as an ever expanding and shrinking "accordion", thus perceived differently when experienced from a personal or from a collective position. Acclaimed for his works on iconology and having dedicated a substantial part of his research to the problematics of time, Mitchell proposes anachronistic critical reflection as a methodology to tackle this "historical present" marked by multiple enduring crisis, from pandemics and disinformation to endemic racism and climate change.

Considering that a new sense of temporality has emerged from today's *accelerated stasis*, W.J.T. Mitchell finds in Cacasenno riding a horse backwards a more pragmatic model than Benjamin's *Angel of History*, to help us deal with pres-

ent challenges. Currently finishing his new book entitled *Seeing Through Madness*, he maintains that democratic constitutions are mental health documents, that we need more utopias and dystopias, and that we should remember the past without being enchained by it. Other discussed topics include metadata and digital photography's contribution to contemporary visual literacy, as well as the arts as a scene of testing, mobilisation and experimentation – all of which seem particularly relevant when, as he argues, our sense of time is becoming more planetary and the need to slow down is ever more evident.

The ability of images to transform previous notions of time and space is discussed by Adriana Oliveira in her essay "Moments that never happened, Visualising high finance". Theoretically anchoring her reflection in referential authors like Mitchell, she addresses the timeliness and ontological status of the images resulting from digital practices. Focusing on digital constructions of globalised stock markets by Andreas Gursky and on a controversial series by Edgar Martins, her study explores the tensions between the documental and the pictorial in contemporary photography, while bringing to the fore the dynamics of performativity, market systems, and the ambiguities of time perception.

Cláudio Reis reflects upon different dynamics in "Slow imagery: photography sharing as a self-contained aesthetic practice". The digitisation of photographic processes and the everyday ubiquitous networked images available through phone screens lead him back to the modernist tradition of photography, particularly the minimalist approach, in order to discuss the current search for atemporal renditions. In quasi-cinematographic idealised compositions, as Reis points out, "designed" photographs in influential Instagram accounts represent the cultural ephemera of our time, while proposing a different relation to time.

The essay "Beyond the decisive moment: Latent Spaces and Sustained Exposure in Photomedia", by Sonia Mangiapane, debates how temporal processes contribute to the time-space of a photograph or photographic image-object. Drawing on her concept of "sustained exposure", the author advocates three temporal registers – the time of post-production, the time of the public gaze, and the time of the dormant archive – and explores photomedia practices as possibilities to interfere with the idea of indexicality and the *continuum* of time.

Artist Fernando Marante opens the second part of this issue with applied examples of how photomedia practices may be used to expose time shapes. For him, the question is how to capture movement so as to reveal the lingering of things, the supposed images in-between that can be sensed but barely grasped in the flow of time. In a visual essay entitled "The Search for a Hypothesis-Image", Marante presents his work process and some of the apparatuses he creates to push further an experimental practice that takes photography as a tool to investigate visibility, while at the same time examining conceptual topics such as repetition, variation, distension and accumulation.

In Joachim Schmid's portfolio, "Picture Library", we can also find repetition, variation, distension and accumulation, though the processes and iconographic

approaches result in a body of work substantially different from the previous proposal. Schmid takes from everyday objects, gestures or habits captured in vernacular photographs, and creates serialised images on how the contingent and ephemeral can convey recognisable patterns and categories. Digital photographs available in online platforms not only reflect the democratisation of practices and exhibiting processes but also the accelerated expansion of common perspectives. Virtually encyclopaedic in its premises and presentation formats, with this series the artist has been experimenting with the notions of imitation, routine, reproduction, dislocation or deterioration, in compositions of societal scope where the time's textures stand out.

"Since you were born", by Evan Roth, addresses the accumulation process from a different angle, by transforming his own Internet cache memory into raw material. The uncensored streams of images result from the artist's online activity during the last decade, exposing his private interactions with social media friends, search interests, or corporate advertising. Assuming these algorithmically produced compositions as a self-portrait in construction, Roth confronts us with the storage and permanency of incidental memories through apparatuses that escape our control, at a time when browsing habits are continuously being tracked for data monetisation and surveillance.

Similarly searching for traces of the image flow produced by digital connections, but with another scope, Viktoria Binschtok creates photographic sculptures to relate different visualities and today's picture consumerism. In her series "Networked Image" the artist tests referentiality and attention span to induce communication processes, through the association of found images and staged reproductions. Binschtok's work, thus, closes the portfolio section and this issue of *Archivo Papers Journal* with an open question: how is our perception of the present being shaped by the gaze during screen time and off-line time?

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<sup>1</sup> Agamben defines apparatus as "anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviours, opinions, or discourses of living beings." Giorgio Agamben, *What is an Apparatus? and Other Essays*, transl. by David Kischik and Stefan Pedatella, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009, 14.