

Julião Sarmiento. The Photographic as Perversion

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Abstract

Instead of stabilising the poles of stasis and non-stasis, and narrative and non-narrative, in the 1970s, Julião Sarmiento plays within a concomitant scheme: photography and painting, photography and film, stasis and narrative are merged. What is at stake is the possibility of challenging the modernist tenets of photography canonically defined in opposition to painting and cinema. The perversity is not only in the content of some works but also in the very logic underlying the approach to the medium in Sarmiento's oeuvre, whether through a perversion of the boundaries between the media or by the assertion of the medium itself as perversion. This paper presents a case study that reflects upon the replacement of a structural and negative system with an unsystematic difference (in the sense less of *expansion* than of the medium's *deconstruction*). New dimensions concerning the issues of contamination and hybridisation in contemporary art are also brought into play.

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Introduction: Julião Sarmiento and the Problem of 'Expansion' in the Field of Photography

What happened was that I was working at the art school, and I was painting. And at the same time that I was making paintings, I found myself doing photography, but photography as a photographer, you know? Like a photographer does, not really connecting photography with the visual arts. Gradually I found myself using more and more photography in the work that I was doing as a painter. Learning from photography, copying photography, and I suddenly started to think that that was really stupid because I was using two mediums, and was using one to reach the other, when I could simply use it in the first place. [...] It didn't happen abruptly; the shift was not from one day to the next. Suddenly, these two things started to merge together, and the moment I started to work with photography as an artist, I stopped painting completely, and I stopped doing photography as a photographer. I just

*worked and was making films, Super 8 films. I did lots of things; I worked with sequences, but not really in the sense of what people then considered sequences. I created very few works from a unique photograph.*¹

*I remember having chosen to title the first interview I did with him (for the magazine La Luna in Madrid in the early 1980s) with the statement "I'd like to be more perverse".*²

[1] Considered the "most international of his generation",³ the Portuguese artist Julião Sarmiento (born in Lisbon, 1948) has received full critical and institutional recognition, both nationally and internationally, over the last two decades. In this regard, the exhibition *Trabalhos dos anos 70 (Works from the Seventies)* in the Chiado Museum, Lisbon, 2002/03, curated by Pedro Lapa, is particularly significant. Focusing on "media that have expanded the boundaries of the artistic field"⁴ – photography, text, film, installations and sound – the show granted an exhaustive and systematic insight into Sarmiento's conceptual production in the 1970s. As such, we must bear in mind that the exhibition took place after a decade in which photography and video had returned to the centre of artistic production, especially in 'neo-conceptual' practices, after the return to pictorial order in the 1980s. Thus, *Works from the Seventies* definitively "exhumed"⁵ Sarmiento's experimental photography⁶ and demonstrated that his art was fully integrated within the main currents of the 1970s international art scene: the reconsideration of the art object and the expansion of the field of art.

[2] Despite this exhibition – and some scattered references that preceded and followed it, mainly with different concerns⁷ – there is not any study exclusively devoted to the

¹ Julião Sarmiento, "Julião Sarmiento: a Sensuous Revelation (essay/interview)", in: *Julião Sarmiento*, eds. Alexandre Melo and Germano Celant, Milan 1997, 45–191: 85–86.

² Alexandre Melo, "Julião Sarmiento: querría ser más perverso", in: *La Luna de Madrid* 13 (issue entitled *La Luna en las Ciudades*) (December 1984), 8.

³ Cf. João Pinharanda, "Julião Sarmiento", in: *Lusitanies: aspect de l'art contemporain portugais*, exh. cat., Albi 1987, 35; Eduardo Paz Barroso, "Por uma presença maior de Julião Sarmiento...", in: *Jornal de Notícias*, Porto (11 December 1988), 1.

⁴ Pedro Lapa, "O desejo para onde o desejo aponta: os trabalhos de Julião Sarmiento da década de 1970", in: *Julião Sarmiento: Trabalhos dos anos 70*, exh. cat., ed. Pedro Lapa, Lisbon 2002, 4–35. There is also an English edition of the catalogue: *Julião Sarmiento: Works from the 70s*, exh. cat., ed. Pedro Lapa, Lisbon 2002.

⁵ From the 1990s onwards, some of the anthological exhibitions dedicated to the work of Julião Sarmiento already make known, even if in a non-systematic way, this (post-)conceptual phase in the use of photographic concerns. They are: *Julião Sarmiento* (Serralves Foundation, Porto, 1992), *Julião Sarmiento* (IVAM, Valencia, 1994), *Julião Sarmiento: Werke 1981–1996* (Haus der Kunst, Munich, 1997) and *Flashback* (Palacio de Velázquez / Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, 1999).

⁶ Cf. Bartomeu Marí, "Julião Sarmiento", in: *Julião Sarmiento: Trabalhos dos anos 70*, exh. cat., ed. Pedro Lapa, Lisbon 2002, 38–45: 44.

⁷ With the exception of Bruno Marques and Miguel Mesquita Duarte, "Narrativas da Imagem e (Anti)Expanded Cinema em Julião Sarmiento", in *Aniki: Revista Portuguesa da Imagem em Movimento* 2 (2015), no. 1, 49–72, we still do not know of any text that takes an in-depth look at the matter of the medium (and its 'expansion') in Julião Sarmiento's oeuvre. Moreover, only recently does effective attention appear to have been paid to his photographic output by some

question of the medium used in Sarmiento's work. For this reason, it is crucial to study the new dimensions that Sarmiento's passage from the 'post-conceptual' to the 'postmodern' brings to photography and its articulations with the expansion of the medium in the artistic and, in particular, the photographic field.⁸

On 'Photography's Expanded Field'

[3] The very possibility of a history of the medium attests to its contingency. This history can be summarised in three moments or schemes. In a first, classic, moment, the medium is a means to an end: a means of representation that stands between the subject and the object and, by rendering its own mediality invisible, allows the becoming-present of the sense. Modernity reverses this situation and takes the medium as an end in itself, making its specificity the centre, the essence and the limit⁹ of the artwork.¹⁰ In the contemporary moment¹¹ we are confronted instead with the pure mediality of a means (apparently) without an end, topologically situated in a 'space-in-between' (between its own lack and its own excess).¹²

studies and exhibitions. Among the written works are: (the above-mentioned) *Julião Sarmiento: Works from the 70s*, exh. cat., ed. Pedro Lapa, Lisbon 2002; Bruno Marques, *Julião Sarmiento dentro do texto: reflexões sobre os encontros e desencontros da crítica com a sua obra (Julião Sarmiento Within Discourses: Reflections on the Encounters and Disencounters of Criticism with His Work)*, PhD thesis in Art History submitted at FCSH, Nova University Lisbon, 2011, available on <https://run.unl.pt/handle/10362/6272>; and Filippo De Tomasi, *Telling a Story*, Master's dissertation in Visual Arts submitted at the University of Bologna, 2014. Exhibitions on the subject include: *75 photos 35 women 42 years / Julião Sarmiento* (Contemporary Art Centre Graça Morais, Bragança, 2011), curated by Sérgio Mah, and *Index: Works by Julião Sarmiento* (Museum of Contemporary Art of Elvas, 2013), curated by João Silvério.

⁸ On the occasion of the 40th Anniversary Conference & Bookfair, Royal College of Art, held at the Royal College of Art, London, between 10 and 12 April 2014, an entire panel dedicated to 'Expanded Photography' brought together papers from authors such as Lucy Soutter, Olivier Richon, Astrid Köhler, Sandra Plummer, Ruth Pelzer-Mounted, Helen Westgeest, Olga Smith and Mel Jordan.

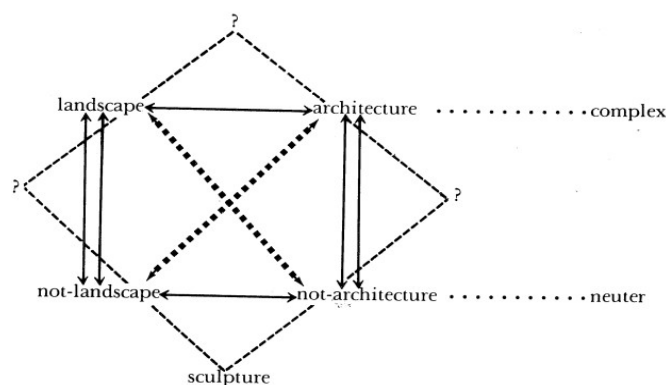
⁹ "Thereby each art would be rendered 'pure', and its 'purity' finds the guarantee of its standard of quality as well as of its independence." Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting", in: *Art in Theory 1900–1990: Anthology of Changing Ideas*, eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, Oxford and Malden, Mass., 754–760: 755.

¹⁰ "This idea of a self-regulating structure, one whose ordering operations are formal and reflexive – that is, they derive from, even while they organise, the material givens of the system itself – can clearly be mapped onto the modernist conception of the different and separate artistic disciplines or mediums." Rosalind Krauss, "Poststructuralism and Deconstruction", in: *Art since 1900. Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*, ed. Hal Foster et al., New York 2004, 40–48: 40.

¹¹ "Pledged to purity, the mediums have reified – hence, postmodernist art exists between, across, or outside them, or in new or neglected mediums (like video or photography)". Hal Foster, "Re: Post", in: *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, New York and Boston 1984, 189-201: 191.

¹² On the one hand, the medium has become what has no specific essence, which is always marked by a lack or absence (differing therefore from a modernist definition). On the other hand, given its threshold position, the medium can correspond to all, making it absolutely present (thus differing from a classical definition). Cf. Jacques Rancière, "What Medium Can

[4] The passage from the second to the third moment is historiographically signalled by Rosalind Krauss's influential article *Sculpture in the Expanded Field*.¹³ This essay, published in 1979, became the landmark of a new paradigm that changed the focus from the identity of the medium to the 'expanded field' of art. Based on objects produced (especially between the years 1968 and 1970) by artists such as Robert Morris, Robert Smithson, Richard Serra and Walter De Maria, among others, Krauss proposed a purely negative concept of sculpture, based on a "combination of exclusions":¹⁴ the sculpture is neither architecture nor landscape, but is directly correlated with the *non-architecture* and *non-landscape* (Fig. 1). This logical expansion of a set of binaries is transformed into a quaternary field that mirrors the original opposition and, at the same time, opens it into a "logically expanded field" without a centre; an expanded field made possible in marginal places whose articulation undermines the binary system.



1 Rosalind Krauss's diagram of postmodern sculpture, based on a mathematical concept called the Klein group (reprod. from: Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field" [1979], in: idem, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge, Mass. 1985, 276-290: 283)

Krauss's proposal had a major critical impact and was extensively used over the years both as an interpretive grid applied to a historical moment and as a conceptual stimulus for new formulations of the artistic (post-)medium.

[5] We can see an example of this expansion of the very concept of 'expanded field' in its application to photography by George Baker.¹⁵ Baker argues that since the 1970s – with a special focus on the so-called 'post-modern' era – the photograph was transformed into something so different that it cannot truly be classified as 'photography'. Although there is still a 'photographic effect' on art, photography becomes not only "an insufficient bridge to other, more compelling forms", but also "outmoded technologically and displaced aesthetically".¹⁶

Mean", in: *Parrhesia: A Journal of Critical Philosophy* 11 (2011), 35-43: 23.

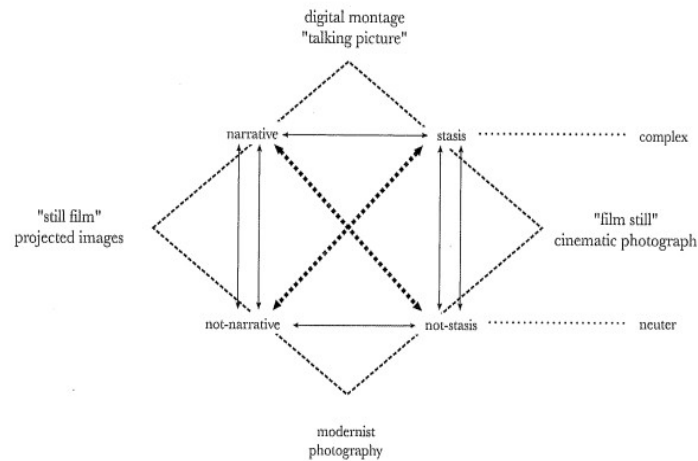
¹³ Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field" [1979], in: idem, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge, Mass. 1985, 276-290.

¹⁴ Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field", 283-284.

¹⁵ George Baker, "Photography's Expanded Field", in: *October* 114 (Fall 2005), 120-140.

¹⁶ Baker, "Photography's Expanded Field", 122.

[6] According to the author, photography had been "reconstructed" for nearly 25 years – since the time when, in the postmodern context, it opened up to a plurality of fields or "sets of oppositions and combinations".¹⁷ Baker draws attention to the fact that photography is a "contradictory field", difficult to define, to map, or to be reduced to a single oppositional system (Fig. 2).



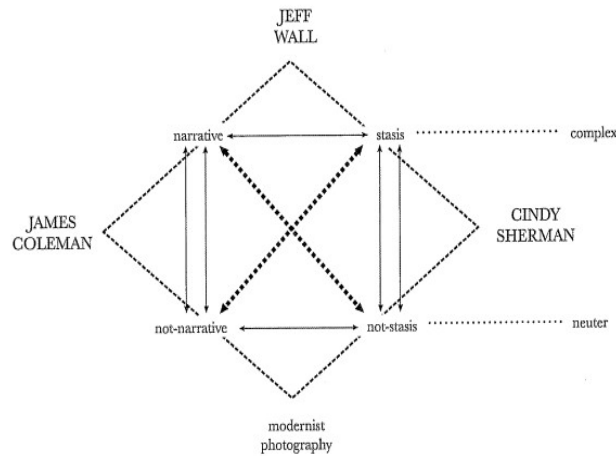
2 George Baker's diagram (a) (reprod. from: George Baker, "Photography's Expanded Field", in: *October* 114 (Fall 2005), 120–140: 131)

One of the main difficulties in "generalising the structural condition of modernist photography" stemmed from the fact that it remained "suspended between the conditions of being neither narrative nor fully static".¹⁸ The gradual relaxation of the photographic suspension between not-narrative and not-stasis culminated – following the shift of paradigm in the late 1970s – in a photographic expanded field.

[7] Baker applied this claim to new uses of photography in Cindy Sherman's 'film still' (or 'cinematic photograph'), James Coleman's 'still film' (or 'projected image') and Jeff Wall's appropriations of large advertising lightboxes that sought to restore the tradition of history painting (Fig. 3). As such, while Sherman and Coleman deviate from the modernist ideology of exclusion only obliquely, Wall reverses it in a paradigmatic way.

¹⁷ "Perhaps, indeed, photography's expanded field, unlike sculpture's, might even have to be imagined as a group of expanded *fields*, multiple sets of oppositions and conjugations, rather than any singular operation. [...] And yet it is striking how consistently photography has been approached by its critics through the rhetoric of oppositional thinking, whether we look to the photograph as torn between ontology and social usage, or between art and technology, or between what Barthes called denotation and connotation, or what he also later called *punctum* and *studium*, between 'discourse and document' (to use an invention of Benjamin Buchloh's), between 'labour and capital' (to use one of Allan Sekula's), between index and icon, sequence and series, archive and art photograph. One could go on." Baker, "Photography's Expanded Field", 124–125.

¹⁸ The static nature of a photograph is the characteristic for which this medium is better known, but we cannot escape a narrative aspect when looking for a "referential grip on real conditions of history and everyday life". Baker, "Photography's Expanded Field", 124–125.



3 George Baker's diagram (b) (reprod. from: Baker, "Photography's Expanded Field", 130)

[8] Despite his clear debt to Krauss's concept of the 'expanded field', Baker tends to agree with Hal Foster when this author signals that the very notion of field,¹⁹ in the 1979 text, maintains a structuralist logic²⁰ of structural and negative difference:²¹

*The problem is not to 'return' to a medium that has been de-centred, if not expanded. The problem, as Foster remarked upon Krauss's essay now quite a long time ago, is to resist the latent urge to 're-centre' implicit in the expanded field model of the postmodern in the first place: in "Expanded Field", Foster wrote, "the work is freed of the term 'sculpture' ... but only to be bound by other terms, 'landscape', 'architecture', etc. Though no longer defined in one code, practice remains within a field. De-centred, it is re-centred: the field is (precisely) 'expanded' rather than 'deconstructed.' The model for this field is a structuralist one, as is the activity of the Krauss essay... "The Expanded Field" thus posits a logic of cultural oppositions questioned by poststructuralism – and also, it would seem, by postmodernism.*²²

¹⁹ "Postmodernism is thus posed as a rupture with the aesthetic order of modernism. And yet the concept of the field remains – even if only as a term for its own dispersal". Foster, "Re: Post", 196.

²⁰ "The field transformed is the first condition of postmodernism. [...] To Krauss, they break with modernist practice, and cannot be thought of in terms of historicism. Here, art-historical context will not suffice as meaning, for postmodernism is articulated not within the mediums but in relation to cultural terms. These forms are conceived logically, not derived historically, and so must be regarded in terms of structure." Foster, "Re: Post", 191.

²¹ It should be noted that Rosalind Krauss's approach to these questions is far from static. Twenty years after her article about the 'expanded field' [1979], Krauss published a new text entitled *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*, London 2000. Here she analyses the roots of our contemporaneity in art (conceptualism), mass culture (television) and theory (post-structuralism) and – following the work of Marcel Broodthaers – notes that: "the specificity of mediums, even modernist ones, must be understood as differential, self-differing, and thus as a layering of conventions never simply collapsed into the physicality of their support." Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea*, 53. According to Krauss, it is precisely this "differential specificity" that proffers the possibility of going beyond the old forms without falling into a merely intermedial state.

²² Baker, "Photography's Expanded Field", 138.

Hybridity and *Mobility* as Markers of Photography's Specificity as a Medium

[9] In his introduction to the 2011 English edition of the book *Between-the-Images*, Raymond Bellour writes about the growing "confusion" with the rise to power of the Internet, virtual access to all types of images, and "an ever-increasing incapacity to differentiate between them":

*We can see that such an explosion, with the inventiveness it assumes, was likely to increase the number of connections and contaminations between the various modes of images, as well as between images and words. [...] So we can also imagine that between the works by one group and the other, filmmakers and artists, the points of contagion have grown exponentially, and the ambiguities as well – both when as a result they have tried to remain faithful to their presumed respective roles, and when they have amused themselves by blurring the borders. An unprecedented expansion of intermediate operations has thus found itself affecting – together or separately – both films and visual artworks, each side attracted to the other by subtle yet powerful bonds.*²³

[10] The idea of expansion appears, here, associated with a series of "intermediate operations" that are developed through "connections", "contaminations" and "points of contagion". One example of this 'expansion as hybridisation' is constituted by the intersection between film and photography. Since the 1980s this intersection has gained a growing interest in film theory (Bellour, Metz, Dubois, Stewart, Mulvey), cultural studies (Barthes, Burgin) and, more recently, art criticism and art history.²⁴ For instance, David Company's *Photography and Cinema* and Karen Beckman's and Jean Ma's *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photograph*²⁵ explore the relationship between forms of still and moving image. Both books address not only different temporal regimes of cinema – such as photography, film still, 'motionless film' and film itself – but also the emergence of the photographic from cinematic narratives.²⁶

[11] However, the very idea of hybridity is also subject to different interpretations and contestations. In this regard it is worth mentioning Jan Baetens' and Heidi Peeters's essay *Hybridity: The Reverse of Photographic Medium Specificity?*. In this text the authors propose a reformulation of the relation between specificity and hybridity that cannot be summed up to a binary opposition between the two terms.

²³ Raymond Bellour, *Between-the-Images*, Zurich and Dijon 2012, 10.

²⁴ Cf. Alexander Streitberger, "Photography and Cinema", in: *Image & Narrative* 10 (2009), no. 1, n.p.

²⁵ In the case of Beckman and Ma, the authors assume a radical assessment of the field through interdisciplinary hybridity. Refusing to establish a map based on "a clear theoretical paradigm", they observe the mutations, recombinations and migrations, attending to the "shifting contours" and "lines of flight". Karen Beckman and Jean Ma, eds., *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography*, Durham 2008, 9.

²⁶ As Tom Slevin writes, "Both books come at a moment of increasing academic attention to this subject, perhaps largely as a response to claims surrounding film's obsolescence as an analogue medium in the age of digital (re)production." Tom Slevin, "Photography and Cinema / Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography", in: *Scope* 18 (October 2010), 65–70, http://jules-spinatsch.ch/wp_live/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/David-Company-Scope_book_reviews_oct_10-p65-70.pdf (accessed 2 July 2015).

[12] In order to do so, Baetens and Peeters question the hegemonic definition of hybridity.²⁷ This definition establishes an equivalence between the specificity and the essence of the medium in order to reject both. Jan Baetens and Heidi Peeters, on the other hand, separate the specificity from the teleological definition of the essence and, in doing so, affirm an open and procedural understanding of the specificity in which hybridity can be included. In this vein, the authors state that:

A good example of such a non-teleological and anti-essential outlook of medium specificity occurs, for instance, in the writings of Jean Ricardou, who argues that specificity is not something that is given or predefined but something that is the consequence, the after-effect of a never-ending practice.²⁸ Medium specificity, in such a perspective, is then as much a matter of programming as of serendipity, and its status remains by definition open and provisory. A working hypothesis rather than a fixed essence, this view of medium specificity also affects the relationships between specificity and hybridity, for it should now become possible to make room for the latter in a theory and practice of the former. Some media may evolve toward hybrid forms, without any danger to the very idea of specificity. More precisely, one might say that medium hybridity implies a lack of essence, but not a lack of specificity.²⁹

If *hybridity* and *mobility* are global markers, which can now be shared by most contemporary – i.e. non-essential and non-de-historicised – visions of specificity, then we can paraphrase Jan Baetens' and Heidi Peeters's words by simply saying that photography is not defined once and for all and then progressively laid bare, it ceaselessly sprouts within the hybrid networks that make it possible.³⁰

[13] It is in relation to these (re)definitions of the notion of medium – both in artistic and historiographical terms – that we must situate the pertinence of Sarmiento's post-conceptual proposals. In the second half of the 1970s, Sarmiento's work creates intersections between various media, allowing photography to be crossed with pictorial, filmic and even sculptural issues. In this sense his work tends to dissolve the logic of binary exclusions such as suspension/movement, continuity/fixity, narration/irresolution, and to open up the possibility of inventive combinations and interplays, merging the static and the narrative. This leads to the question behind this paper: to what extent does Sarmiento's approach allow us to rethink the very notions of *expanded field* and of *hybridity* as the new markers of photography's specificity as a medium?

[14] Making use of the Latin word *perversio* – which "suggests a deviation which, notably, is logically dependent on the norm from which it deviates"³¹ – we argue that, in the context of Sarmiento's work, the perversity is not only in the content of some works but the very logic underlying the approach to medium either through a

²⁷ "Whereas hybridity was in the beginning strongly valorised as one of the short-cuts of and to multiculturalism (specificity, that flagship of Essentialism, being the villain of the story), critical theorists like Fredric Jameson and Rosalind Krauss have linked it to the dominant features of postmodern consumerism." Jan Baetens and Heidi Peeters, "Hybridity: The Reverse of Photographic Medium Specificity?", in: *History of Photography* 31 (2007), no. 1, 3-10: 6.

²⁸ Jean Ricardou, *Problemes du nouveau roman*, Paris 1967, and *Pour une théorie du nouveau roman*, Paris 1971.

²⁹ Baetens and Peeters, "Hybridity", 5.

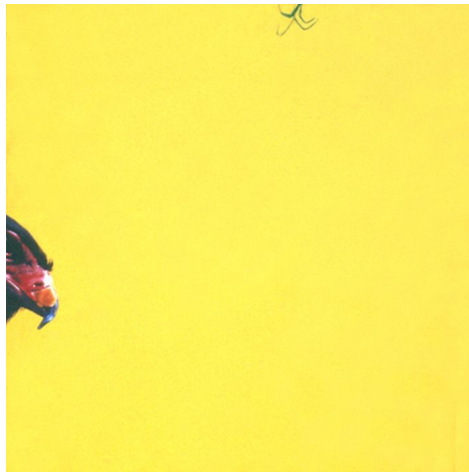
³⁰ Baetens and Peeters, "Hybridity", 5.

perversion of the boundaries between the media or by the assertion of the medium itself as perversion.

Cut(ting) and Photographic Fragmentation in Painting

[15] At an early stage of his career, in the first half of the 1970s, an anti-localist attitude and a desire for international dialogue led Julião Sarmiento to explore – without leaving the country – a disparate range of interests and research vectors updated in relation with the avant-garde tendencies (already present in a small but significant way in the Portuguese artistic context of those years).

[16] Sarmiento's singular adherence to a post-pop style of painting between 1972 and 1974 is marked by sharply cut fragments and a living and clean chromaticism reminiscent of graphic language. In these studies (Fig. 4) small heads of animals sneak through the screen edges, which leads Hubertus Gaßner to refer to it as a "film-making approach" because the artist handles the canvas "not in the traditional painter's manner, but as a movie screen across which the projected photographs glide".³²



4 Julião Sarmiento, *Untitled (Eagle)*, 1972, acrylic on canvas, 125 x 125 cm (Photo: Courtesy of Julião Sarmiento's Studio)

Amputated by the extreme limits of the frame – like a sudden cut typical of snapshot photography – these fragments approach the idea of empty "screen"³³ where something will suddenly enter or, in a reverse movement, is about to leave the scene. This creates the subtle expectation that the figures are moving through a possible reframing. The result: the figure is arranged in a corner in a pronounced asymmetry that collides with the traditional status of the canvas format. In this way, the artist

³¹ "[...] Throughout the vicissitudes it has endured since its derivation from the Latin *perversio*, the meaning of the term has pivoted around a notion of deflection from right or true course. Abstracted from its original military connotations into moral, indeed theological, ones, and acquiring in early modernity the properly sexual denotations from which sexology and psychoanalysis would eventually inherit, perversion suggests a deviation which, notably, is logically dependent on the norm from which it deviates." James Penney, *The World of Perversion: Psychoanalysis and the Impossible Absolute of Desire*, Albany 2012, 2.

³² Hubertus Gaßner, "Where Pain Rules", in: *Julião Sarmiento: Werke 1981–1986*, exh. cat., ed. Hubertus Gaßner, Munich 1997, 44–74, here 46.

³³ Gaßner, "Where Pain Rules", 46.

subverts the prerogatives of the painting medium. A sophisticated simulation of cinematic "découpage"³⁴ – which includes an awareness of point of view, basic elements of framework and perspective, the cutting device, the distance and the promise of narration – draws the inevitable question of photographic fragmentation, as Nancy Spector notes in relation to some of Sarmiento's works:

*Unlike film, the off-frame space in photography is entirely inaccessible and unknown; it speaks only of absence and fragmentation. The interior space of the photograph refocuses and empowers vision; it annuls the visible world beyond its borders.*³⁵

We can say here that painting moves away from pictorial determinations and takes, instead, the "structural system of framing and reframing"³⁶ that is associated with the photographic.³⁷

[17] Then Sarmiento changes his trajectory almost abruptly. Rather than translate the photographic prerogatives to the sphere of painting, he decides to use the first medium in an autonomous way, "without establishing a more independent relationship between photography and the visual arts".³⁸ This means that he starts working with photography 'as an artist', abandoning both the pictorial practice and the practice of photography 'as a photographer'. In doing so, he inscribes himself in a broadly rupturing movement, a double action of 'de-specialisation and re-specialisation of photographic practice'.

[18] Sarmiento's works from the second half of the 1970s come close to artistic attitudes surrounding post-conceptualist heterodoxy, attesting to his proximity to the main axes of international art of that time. The interplay of photography, film, performance, installation, sound and video expresses a new understanding of the artwork as project, document or process, pursuing its dematerialisation. Regarding

³⁴ Asked by Alexandre Melo about the influence of cinema on his work, Sarmiento said, "It has to do with the 'découpage' (cutting) in the cinema and the cutting in my work. In the paintings there is a cutting which is very much influenced by cutting in the cinema. It has to do with the very physical existence of a canvas which is similar, if you wish, to a screen; it is a rectangle where things appear." Julião Sarmiento, "*Everything* which surrounds a woman sitting on a chair" (an interview with Alexandre Melo), in: *Julião Sarmiento*, exh. cat., Porto 1992, 42–44: 43.

³⁵ Nancy Spector, "Julião Sarmiento's 'White Paintings': Unseeing the Seen", in: *Julião Sarmiento: Werke 1981–1986*, exh. cat., ed. Hubertus Gaßner, Munich 1997, 173–178: 175. As David Company writes about Christian Metz's attempt to map out the fundamental relationship between photography and film, concerning their different relations to time, framing and objecthood: "For Metz, the photograph belongs inextricably to the past, while film always seems to unfold in the present tense as we watch. Film is a virtual, immaterial projection, while the photograph is a fixed image and a fixed object. As such, the photo is capable of becoming a kind of fetish, standing in for the absent subject or moment. By contrast, film, in its orchestration of the viewer's desire through the fullness of its unfolding, is closer in structure to voyeurism." David Company, *Photography and Cinema*, London 2008, 11.

³⁶ Christian Metz, "Photography and Fetishism", in: *The Critical Image: Essays on Contemporary Photography*, ed. Carl Squiers, Seattle 1990, 157–164: 159–161.

³⁷ "While the instantaneousness of photography [...] cannot be replicated in painting, the dialectic of framing and deframing is ever-present." Spector, "Julião Sarmiento's 'White Paintings'", 175.

³⁸ Julião Sarmiento, "Julião Sarmiento: a Sensuous Revelation" (essay/interview), 85–86.

painting, the break was abrupt and programmatic.³⁹ While working photography in a 'different way', this experimental attitude announced the arrival of a new era – one that saw in the new media a whole set of new possibilities: redefining the art object, questioning the traditional media and exploring different ways of trans- and inter-disciplinarity.

Photography as Quasi-Cinema: *Montage* Operations and the Memory of the *Frame*

[19] By adopting experimental strategies of appropriated images and serial formats developed after the 1960s, Julião Sarmiento had joined a new wave of artists who had radically de-structured the use of photography in artistic contexts. This implied questioning modernist premises based on the affirmation of photography as an autonomous medium governed by formal achievements and stylistic concerns about transcendence and genius. Released from autonomy, completeness and originality, photography redirected itself towards what Germano Celant refers to as the "invention of alternative dynamics of images".⁴⁰ In the specific case of Sarmiento's work, this led to the production of serial compositions entailing incomplete and fragmented narratives (Figs. 5, 6 and 7). Some crucial features of these works are the "true storyboards"⁴¹ or "suspended micro-fictions"⁴² driven by a "desire for narration"⁴³ directly subsidiary to cinematographic language⁴⁴ and *montage* procedures.

[20] One of the first and most paradigmatic examples is the set of three works *Untitled*, 1973 (Fig. 5). Placed together they form a photographic sequence or a micro-event that can be interpreted as the theatrical exemplification of the 'failed love relationship' theorised by Jacques Lacan. After a subtle advance, a man reaches the point of an earnest attack, but he ends up in a bewildering loneliness. In the place of the woman is now absence. What seemed to be a presence was nothing but a fleeting mirage – a product of imagination, delirium and 'hallucination'⁴⁵ – an image of the 'impossibility of consummating desire'.

³⁹ "I left the army on 30 March 1974, one month before April 25. Only then did I begin to be able to take up my real artistic work. I did not just paint. In fact, between 75 and 80, I didn't paint or draw. I did not do anything that had to do with the use of my hands. I made the choice to use only cameras, video, film, sound recorders. [...] I confess that I sometimes wanted to draw but purposely did not do it. I was very determined, almost fundamentalist and, at the time, I saw this attitude almost like a belief." Julião Sarmiento (interview with Nuno Santos), in: *DNA* (supplement of *Diário de Notícias*) (26 August 2000).

⁴⁰ Melo and Celant, "Julião Sarmiento", 49.

⁴¹ Marí, "Julião Sarmiento", 41.

⁴² Delfim Sardo, "De Relance. Repetição e montagem na obra de Julião Sarmiento", in: *A Paixão em Apneia. Escritos sobre Artistas*, Lisbon 2011, 247-255: 250.

⁴³ Marí, "Julião Sarmiento", 41.

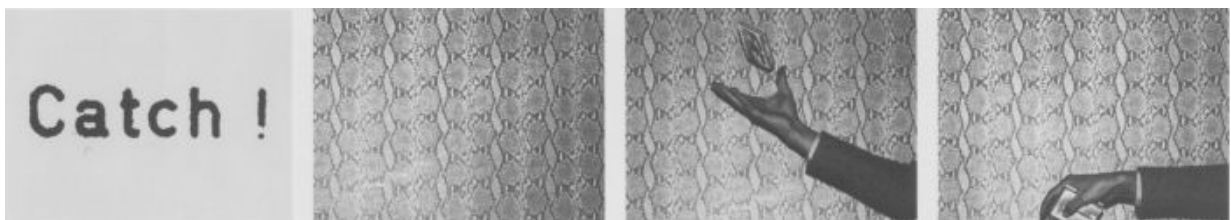
⁴⁴ Marí, "Julião Sarmiento", 40.

⁴⁵ Cf. Jacques Lacan, *O Seminário*, Livro 11: *Os quatro conceitos fundamentais da psicanálise*, Rio de Janeiro 1979, 147.

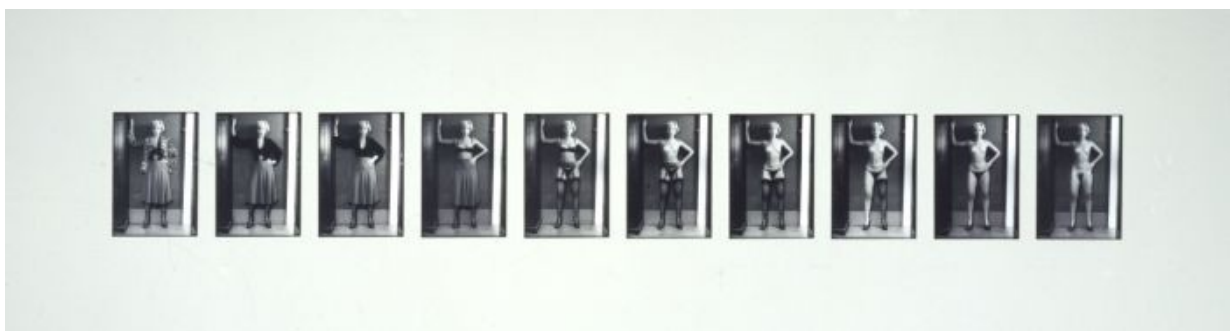


5 Julião Sarmiento, *Untitled*, 1973/2002, three b&w photographs mounted on PVC, each 19.7 x 29.3 cm, total size 19.7 x 88.5 cm. Collection of the artist, Estoril (photo: courtesy of Julião Sarmiento's studio)

[21] In this way, Sarmiento shows how the film frame is opposed to the film itself. This split does not result from an early and illegitimate withdrawal (the immobilisation of an extracted scene from the flow of time), but from a *perversion*. It violates the apparently absolute nature of figuration (that is, the 'decisive moment' of Henri Cartier-Bresson that fed one of best-known directives of modernist photography), and subverts the standard expectation system developed by cinema. After all, the film frame, by disconnecting the image of time from the operative nature of motion, gives us back the *framed* text as a network of exchanges enhanced by the operation of montage.



6 Julião Sarmiento, *Catch!*, 1975, three b&w photographs and one photo-text mounted on cardboard, each 17 x 23 cm, total size 17 x 98 cm. Collection of the artist, Estoril (photo: courtesy of Julião Sarmiento's studio)



7 Julião Sarmiento, *Untitled (strip)*, 1975/2002, ten b&w photographs mounted on PVC, each 29.3 x 19.8 cm, total size 29.3 x 233 cm. Collection of the artist, Estoril (photo: Divisão Documentação Fotográfica / IPM. Courtesy of Julião Sarmiento's studio)

[22] In his chapter "Paper Cinema" of the book *Photography and Cinema*⁴⁶, David Company examines the cinematic structure of photographs in illustrated books and magazines. Here, Company proposes that photographs are rarely insular or singular, but are contextually bound to other images or text. Graphic page design here appropriates cinematic devices such as montage, sequence, narrative and the close-up. One example is Company's statement regarding the "photo-story format... [that] borrowed heavily from narrative cinema in the 1930s".⁴⁷ As a technique and formal principle of both photography and cinema, montage has a central place in Company's book. In the first chapter the well-known analogy is stressed between descriptions of the modern city experience (Kracauer) and the avant-garde's use of montage, both of them based on fragmentary vision, kaleidoscopic sights and multiple perspectives (Moï Ver, Rodchenko).

[23] Produced in 1978,⁴⁸ *Quatre Mouvements de la Peur* brings together a series of nine photographs in black and white staging the harassment of a woman in *robe de chambre*, which ends with her supposed death among the bushes (Fig. 8). According to Pedro Lapa, this work maintains the idea of sequence developed in 1973–1974 in a set of photographic series that "feature image trajectories as if they were fragments of a film narrative", revealing, in this way, the "condition of frames as quotes for more global action".⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Company, *Photography and Cinema*, 36.

⁴⁷ Company, *Photography and Cinema*, 83.

⁴⁸ This work was exhibited for the first time in the eponymous exhibition of 1995 (Casa das Caldeiras, Coimbra).

⁴⁹ Lapa, "O desejo para onde o desejo aponta", 27.



8 Julião Sarmiento, *Quatre mouvements de la peur*, 1978/1995, nine b&w photographs mounted on foamboard in artist's frames, each 186 x 125.5 cm, total size: variable dimensions. Collection of the artist (photo: courtesy of Julião Sarmiento's studio)

[24] In the book designed by Sarmiento with the same title (Fig. 9),⁵⁰ the sense of cinematic movement is developed through a self-reference to the work. As Nancy Spector noted, the repetition of images in the second half of the book functions as a compulsory repetition of the spied scenario, but with an overwhelming difference:

*The insertion of shoes into the plot (a supplementary gesture, given the ordering of the two sequences in the publication) suggests that the story unfolding in the book is the photographic depiction of a fantasy, an erotic fantasy staged for the camera – one that could be repeated perpetually with minor revisions to the imagined scenario.*⁵¹

⁵⁰ Julião Sarmiento, *Quatre mouvements de la peur*, Coimbra 1995. Project and layout book model dated 1978, published in 1995 as part of the exhibition organised in commemoration of "15 anos dos Encontros de Fotografia de Coimbra".

⁵¹ Spector, "Julião Sarmiento's 'White Paintings'", 173.



9 Julião Sarmiento, *Quatre mouvements de la Peur*, 1995. Artist book conceived in 1978 but only published in 1995; 68 pages, 24.3 x 17 cm; 500 copy print-run. Encontros de Fotografia de Coimbra, Coimbra, Portugal (photo: by the authors)

[25] In the book *Quatre mouvements de la peur*, Sarmiento also shows that beyond the narrative ambiguity there are infinitesimal possibilities of *montage*. Several elements are repeated in an obsessive way, generating different combinations. Through this syncopated narrative we witness the emergence of disjointed resonances close to the ones attributed to the cinematic language⁵² – that is, particles arbitrarily disconnected from an atomised whole. This mnemonic reverberation on a microscopic scale ensures, on each page of the book, the convergence of a double structure or double movement, thus displaying an element that is never isolated.⁵³ The cohabitation of these partial miniatures and micro-extracts results in the implosion and dispersion of the spatial-temporal continuum. Images are in a constant discrepancy between the continuous and the discontinuous, the invisible and the visible. Rather than a unitary and linear narrative, the discourse is made from fragments, shattered repetitions and endless metonymies of small particles spread through the structural strand... as the decomposed movement (de)constructed by a filmmaker.

Stasis and Time Dilation Associated with the Voyeur's Condition: a Film that Looks Just Like a Photograph

[26] In the first chapter of the book *Photography and Cinema*, David Campany argues that stillness "became definitive of photography only in the shadow of the cinema".⁵⁴

⁵² Especially the cinematic language that appears in the cinema of the 1950s and 1960s, operating a reversal of its classic layout based on homogenous and spatial sequential plans, marking the regularised ordination of a before and an after.

⁵³ Sarmiento says that, for him, "It is an image which always exists between two situations and, as such, it is always the result of the relationship between one and the other, it is always an intermediate thing, a thing which stands in between. It is exactly there that one can mention the issue of cutting in the cinema. There is never an objective image, it is an image which exists together with all the others that envelop it, which exists in a much wider context." Sarmiento, "*Everything* which surrounds a *woman* sitting on a chair", 43.

This statement echoes his essay *Safety in Numbness*,⁵⁵ where he affirms that "the invention of stillness [was] as a sort of by-product" of the fact that the stillness of photography became apparent only in contrast to moving pictures. Elsewhere, he resumes his arguments of *Posing, Acting, Photography*⁵⁶ on the complicated interplay of 'posing' and 'acting' before a camera beyond the common distinction associating the former with the stillness of photography, the latter to cinema's unfolding time.

[27] Historically speaking, Company's suggestion of conceptualising montage (photography as fragment) and long take (photography as a unified whole) as two extremes in a dynamic socio-cultural constellation leads us to grasp a shift from the emphasis on speed and permanent change (montage in the 1920s and 1930s) to the embrace of the slow (long take) in vanguard films since the 1960s. On this point, Company claims that "speed and montage were degenerating from the promise of mass mobilisation into mass distraction"⁵⁷ and that the resulting "society of the spectacle" was responsible for the new orientation towards slowness in vanguard art and culture.

[28] Unlike the photo-works where time is suggested through montage-like processes, in Sarmiento's films from these years *time* is taken as matter of inquiry and produced by long sequence shots and by the extended or suspended duration of the (in)action. Following the new possibilities opened up to the moving image by experimental cinema, Sarmiento explores the homology between time delayed through technological means and the voyeur's gaze hypnotised in a mute contemplation that suspends the normal flow of time, eternalising the moment and freezing his object of fascination.



10 Julião Sarmiento, *Faces*, 1976, Super-8 film, colour, silent, 44' 22". Collection Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven (photo: courtesy of Julião Sarmiento's studio)

⁵⁴ Company, *Photography and Cinema*, 27.

⁵⁵ David Company, "Safety in Numbness. Some Remarks on Problems of 'Late Photography'", in: David Company, ed., *The Cinematic*, Cambridge, Mass. 2007, 185-194.

⁵⁶ David Company, "Posing, Acting, Photography", in: *Stillness and Time: Photography and the Moving Image*, eds. David Green and Joanna Lowry, Brighton 2006, 97-112.

⁵⁷ Company, *Photography and Cinema*, 36.

[29] The reductionism or "elementarity"⁵⁸ of works like *Legs* (1975) (Fig. 11), *Faces* (1976) (Fig. 10), or *Shadow* (1976) brings to mind the independent films of Andy Warhol, who invented a new set of genres marked by an impassive and contemplative indifference – *Sleep, Kiss, Blow Job...* – where the titles describe only the action we see without any narrative or symbolic dimension. *Legs*, a Super-8 film produced in 1975, is a long sequence shot taken by a fixed camera and focused on the pubis of a female body. Pedro Lapa writes about this work that:

Once again, the viewer determines the very duration of the film, which is projected in a continuous loop. We are dealing here with Deleuze's image-time concept, since it is a direct presentation of time. A pure optical image stops the movement to focus on something, always bringing it back differently to itself, infinitely. "What would enter into relation would be the real and the imaginary, the physical and the mental, (...) the actual and the virtual".⁵⁹



11 Julião Sarmiento, *Legs*, 1975, Super-8 film, colour, silent, 3' 45". Collection Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven (photo: courtesy of Julião Sarmiento's studio)

[30] *Legs* (Fig. 11) can be interpreted by connecting the tension between artistic media to the historical emergence and decline of social forms and technological processes related to eroticism. Chrissie Iles highlights the attention given by Sarmiento to a device threatened with obsolescence by the expansion of mass-media technology. In this context the English curator refers to the tribute made by the Portuguese artist to the "anonymous directness that had marked nineteenth-century pornographic photography" and mentions how the constitution of an "objectified erotic body" through the fetishisation of the female legs can be associated with the "intense social

⁵⁸ Miguel Wandschneider, "Julião Sarmiento", in: *SlowMotion. Julião Sarmiento*, exh. cat., Caldas da Rainha 2000.

⁵⁹ Lapa, "O desejo para onde o desejo aponta", 24–25. In the last sentence Lapa quotes Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Movement Image*, Minneapolis 1989, 46.

anxiety" opened by the "eclipse of painting's idealisation of the female body by the apparent reality of photography".⁶⁰

[31] Following this argument, we can say that Sarmiento pays tribute to nineteenth-century pornographic photography – at a time when cinema was threatening it with obsolescence – by producing a *motion photograph*. To this end he uses the Super-8 not as technology for producing moving pictures but as a photographic camera that creates an image outside the temporal flux and the narrative climax, i.e., an image marked by a photographic value: the *stasis*. In this process, cinema seems to deny itself in order to adopt one of the conditions of the photographic device: to be a *caesura* in time;⁶¹ a condition that poetically and literally embodies the idea of a psychological time, a voyeuristic and nostalgic time connected to something definitely *lost*.⁶²

Final Remarks

[32] Following these passages between painting, photography and cinema, we can return to the question at the centre of our essay: to what extent does Sarmiento's approach allow us to rethink the very notions of *expanded field* and of *hybridity* as the new markers of the specificity of the photographic medium?

[33] As we have seen, according to H. Foster and G. Baker, the expansion proposed by Rosalind Krauss is not supplemented by a deconstruction of the field. For this reason, her analysis remains halfway between a structuralist and a poststructuralist approach. The first approach reduces the understanding of the medium to a formal system where differences are established in a negative way. The second takes the very arbitrariness of the elements and demonstrates that they can always be repeated and moved to other contexts and/or media. Does this mean that any form of expansion is, necessarily, an extension of a structure whose centre, being nowhere, is everywhere (echoing the nostalgia of an absolute presence that was lost)? Or is it possible to reformulate the idea of expansion as a play of differences, a process of dissemination and contamination that does not require a presence, a centre and a structure?

[34] In order to answer these questions, some authors have tried to rethink the expansion as a set of *intermedia operations* between several media – photography and

⁶⁰ Chrissie Iles, "Julião Sarmiento's Secret Cinema", in: *Julião Sarmiento*, ed. Louise Neri, Barcelona 2003, 71-97: 77.

⁶¹ "Caesura refers to the act of cutting, of an incision, one of the immanent qualities of the photographic act, like something that makes a cut into the spatial and temporal dimensions of reality, creating a relationship (or an imagination) with the world that must initially be seen from the specific nature of photography." Sérgio Mah, "The Caesura Image", in: *LisboaPhoto. A imagem cesura*, exh. cat., ed. Sérgio Mah, Lisbon 2005, 14-20: 14.

⁶² On this subject, Raymond Bellour writes: "[...] critical gaze and creative desire come together in a shared gesture which, by encompassing the elliptical space between photograph and still frame, has become one of the chosen gestures of the image's conscience – of this destiny as well as its survival. [...] If the freeze-frame, or the stilled image – what could also be called a snapshot of the film, a pose or pause of the image expressing the capturing power of immobility – if this experience is so strong, it is obviously because it touches upon *l'arrêt de mort*, the finality of death: its vanishing point and in a sense the whole of the real (we all know that the dead became wax figures, a fragment of immobility)." Raymond Bellour, *Between-the-Images*, 15.

cinema, for example – whose connections and contagions have assumed the form of an *interdisciplinary hybridity*.

[35] Julião Sarmiento's work, especially during his post-pop and post-conceptualist phase (1972–1980), also defies the autonomy of each medium, using photographic prerogatives (cut, fragmentation) in painting, cinematic prerogatives (montage) in photography and photographic prerogatives (still image) in cinema. As a result of these operations, the modernist logic and its canonical forms are suppressed not by a structural and negative system (cinema or non-cinema, painting or non-painting, stasis or non-stasis, narrative or non-narrative) but through a continuous contamination and dissemination (for instance through the articulation between suspension and movement, continuity and stasis, narration and irresolution, totality and fragment).

[36] However, it should be noted that this de-centred approach is not based exclusively on what is exogenous to the medium's definition. On the contrary, it is precisely on what makes the definition of the medium problematic – its internal tensions – that the possibility of its repetition and expansion rests. And this process, once begun, cannot be stopped, leading to the reinvention of categories through unseen and unexpected relations. For this reason, the notion of hybridisation cannot be assumed unproblematically. A formulation of hybridity based on a mere opposition between contamination and purity not only continues to operate within a dichotomous structure but will lead to the paradoxical figure of a 'pure' contamination, that is, a contamination assumed as a new teleological ideal.

[37] As we have seen, Baetens and Peeters try to address this problem when they move away from the oppositional structure (hybridity versus specificity) in order to assert hybridity as a possible part of the medium's definition.⁶³ Consequently, what makes the medium be *what it is* is not its essence but its contamination. Or, to put it another way, the medium is already contaminated in its *origin* and, for that reason, its origin is permanently displaced.

[38] What contribution, then, does Sarmiento's approach bring to this rethinking of the medium's specificity? We can say that his contribution rests not so much on the relationship between the photographic and any other medium, as on the presentation of the *perversity* that characterises the photographic medium itself. The Lacanian understanding of perversion echoes and transforms, in a certain way, the Hegelian relationship between the master and the slave. As noted by Slavoj Žižek: "For Lacan, a pervert is not defined by the content of what he is doing (his weird sexual practices)",⁶⁴ while in another text the philosopher adds that "the pervert does not pursue his activity for his own pleasure, but for the enjoyment of the Other – he finds enjoyment precisely in this instrumentalisation, in working for the enjoyment of the Other".⁶⁵ In the works of the Portuguese artist the law of each medium is always,

⁶³ "Hybridity as a combination of media that are specific; it is not to be equated with hybridity as the result of a crossing (in the almost biological sense of the term). The same goes for specificity as a quasi-Platonic essence, or, on the contrary, as the permanent reinvention of what it might mean to 'be' a medium." Baetens and Peeters, "Hybridity", 3.

⁶⁴ Slavoj Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, London 2006, 116.

⁶⁵ Slavoj Žižek, "Pornography, Nostalgia, Montage: a Triad of the Gaze", in: *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*, Cambridge, Mass., 1991, 109.

explicitly or implicitly, subverted by another medium. This means that the perversion that flows through the works of Sarmiento is not related only to content or to form but to a continuous subversion of the barriers between disciplines. However, this does not equate perversion with a negation of specificity. On the contrary, it is precisely the perversion of the medium that brings specificity into play, re-enacting it, reinventing it and turning it around in all directions.⁶⁶ In other words: *the perversion is the medium*.

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⁶⁶ This means that contamination itself is contaminated by a certain idea of specificity and it is, precisely, this *contaminated contamination* that prevents any ideal figure of a 'pure' contamination.

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