Rodrigo Gomes - O ESTIVADOR DE IMAGENS, 2017 [IMAGE DOCKER]
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An Automated Geography

Rodrigo Gomes' work is centred around the construction of three-dimensional models and structures. He is an artist with a strong propensity to work with different materials, modelling, carving, joining and transforming them. This brief description details the manufacturing involved in his work as a sculpture, a practice that emerges as a tactile and physical requirement, often similar to a sensory model, in which sound and images participate in his haptic approach. However, matter is not hostage to formal or technical issues that confine it to relationships between the work and the space. On the contrary: Gomes' sculptural constructions create spaces within other spaces, which sometimes unfold into other still, thus creating a stratified architectural appearance, all without making the architectural appearance, all without making the architecture itself the focal point of his work.

In *Estivador de Imagens* [Image Docker], some of the processes describes here establish devices that contribute to the organic nature of this artistic object. Another important element in the concept and experimental capacity of the artist's investigation is the mirror – as a temporal medium for storing an expandable space. But it is also the Other of oneself, as if we were in its place when we confront this surface/screen and recognize our inverted image.

This piece is therefore considered a work of architecture, comprising translucent platforms supported by acrylic glass columns, embedded with four sound speakers that emit a homogeneous sound much like the *Shepard Tone,* a chord that climbs the musical scale and seems to ascend infinitely and without end, creating a feeling of environmental instability that echoes the profusion of floating images projected onto these platforms/membranes. The images seem attached to the organic topography that supports them, but in fact it transports them through the overlapping spaces until the mirror reflects them as an indiscernible visual magma.

What images are these that we see projected here? What landscape are transmitted through their transmutation between overlapping membranes? Are these images familiar to us? From my point of view, these are the essential issues that Rodrigo Gomes addresses in *Estivador de Imagens*. It is not just a propagation of images formed by the self-supporting digital media that has become an extension of the human being, but instead, and in a more codified and reserved form, a network of images that serve as

instruments of war. The artist has designed a sculptural installation that questions how the image has been used throughout history to alter and expand the military capacity of those with a stronger power than my conventional weapon, whatever the time period. And this power is based on scientific research as the desire for perfection and progress of knowledge, because in the relationship between attacker and target, the distance between them also reflects the need to protect the former from the latter, as well as its degree of precision and thus, its mapping. It is an abstraction that unifies those that move on the ground and turns them into points of reference, sometimes indistinct, sometimes subject to indifferent decimation.

This need to expand the technical – and later technological – evolution, through the evolutionary changes that the devices of war have undergone, is recounted by Paul Virilio in the following passage: "During the American Civil War, the Union forces equipped balloons with an aerial-mapping telegraph. Soon the army was rigging together the most varied combinations: camera-kites, camera-pigeons and camera balloons predated the intensive use of chronophotography and cinematography on board small reconnaissance aircraft (several million prints were made during the First World War). (…) *Direct vision was now a thing of the past*: in the space of a hundred and fifty years, the target area had become a cinema 'location', the battlefield a film set out of bounds to civilians"[1].

From this perspective, which is crucial to this work, Rodrigo Gomes focused his research on how topography began to be rasterized and physically signaled si that it could be read by digital devices, establishing a panoramic and almost cinematic notion is reminiscent of the term "operational image", coined by Harun Farocki, describing how images are moving beyond simple visual records and becoming an operational mediator of real-time processing, affecting the human ability to decide on a moving image. In this way, those who see, observe and watch undergo a conditional change in the way they move from simple spectator to direct agent over those they observe. As if someone were so close, while proportionately distant, but subject to the effectiveness of the means that provide relative accuracy in observing and acting on the constructed landscape and the movement of the figures in the space.

From this point of view, we are presented with a work that confronts us with surveillance – in this particular case aerial surveillance, which the work portrays through its vertical projection on the sculptural structure. If on one hand the visualized boundaries of the field situate us at the level of an observer traversing a field of action, on the other, the image assumes an aesthetic and visually appealing dimension. It is a paradoxical

image, resulting not only in a descriptive perspective of a surveillance function (in this case military) and thus of one univocal leitmotif, but also enabling different interpretations and points of view that travel across the planes of the sculpture, redefining the voyeuristic experience of the observer under the aegis of the question, which resides in the movement of the camera and the visual drifts created by the sculpture. We are faced with a fictional and cinematic meta-narrative that is constructed in layers from its spatial stratification, obscuring the idea of a single screen displaying the image. But there is also a confrontation with the metaphor of technological media, which is composed of various devices that encode and calculate the image as digital information. The act of watching is not in itself a coercive act, but from the moment it is started and solidified as a permanent surveillance methodology, it is available for application and use under a reduced level of control. As noted by Marta Gili, "Any act of observation implies a certain detached alertness, the act of carefully watching, listening, and registering events and their context without intervening in them. Although it is not inherently innocent, observation in itself is not invasive; it is let loose upon that which is observed"[2].

From this perspective, installing the work in a dark room adds another psychological and immersive dimension, elevating the visual and sound context in which we find ourselves to its highest level. Rodrigo Gomes questions the trivialization of these images, which over the course of a little more than a decade have begun to circulate on the screens that are now part of a globalizing fabric that binds us to another order of information transferal. A communicational order that levels any event in a network of data converted into infinitely recurring images. The difference lies in how the artist regains the three-dimensionality of the medium, fully in sync with the reality of the space observed by the cameras, and how he constructs the visual effect of a deferred and virtual meta-reality. All the images that constitute this work were created digitally, as were the sounds, based on a file that he constructed during his investigation. The editing is thus one of the fundamental structural tools of *Estivador de Imagens*, a title that refers to the activity and work of Harun Farocki, an essential name in at in recent decades, whose influence is evident in this work.

However, Rodrigo Gomes does not limit himself to simply following Farocki's artistic legacy, instead following in his wake by re-approaching editing and research themes and processes in order to write his own narrative. Marta Gili highlights one process that the German artist developed during his work: "From 2001 to 2003, Harun Farocki compiled images taken by cameras placed in the noses of missiles known as 'smart bombs'. In his office, using his editing table, Farocki took the raw footage created for

military and propaganda purposes and analyzed, juxtaposed, and edited it to produce a new narrative"[3].

Through the sculpture and its modelling, the artist revels a diverse range of concerns, such as the level of processing to which the collected data is subjected and the various automated platforms that contribute to the construction of a landscape that is stratified and condensed in real time. Our position in the space makes us complicit in this voyeuristic process, which is continually broken down and reconstructed by the movement of the image between the planes/membranes, finally escaping us through the indistinct shape reflected by the mirror. The docker (estivador) is the work's process of construction itself, as well as its critical element, as model for redefining the technological matrices of the visual space, and thus of the perceptual capacities of the observer.

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[1] Cf. Paul Virilio, "Cinema Isn't I see, It's I fly" in *War and Cinema – The Logistics of Perception*, New York, Verso Books, pp. 16 and 17.

[2] Cf. Marta Gili, *Exposed* – "From Observation to Surveilance" in *Exposed – Voyeurism, Surveillance and the Camera,* United Kingdom, Tate Publishing, 2010, pp. 241 and 242.

[3] Cf. Marta Gili, *Exposed – Voyeurism, Surveillance and the Camera,* United Kingdom, Tate Publishing, 2010, p. 241.

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