

THE VISUAL DIARIES OF JOAQUIM PAIVA: 128 DIARIES PROJECT

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In an essay about the body inscribed in the personal diary, I developed the notion of a diary as an extension of the diarist's body (Barcellos, "O Corpo"). This assertion was provoked by Michel Foucault's reflection upon "self-writing" in *Antiquity*, more specifically by his explanation of the letter as a means of creating "presence." Foucault argues that

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[t]o write is thus to "show oneself," to project oneself into view, to make one's own face appear in the other's presence. And by this, it should be understood that the letter is both a gaze that one focuses on the addressee (through the missive he receives, he feels looked at) and a way of offering oneself to his gaze by what one tells him about oneself. In a sense, the letter sets up a face-to-face meeting. (206)

This concept of the "face-to-face" meeting can be applied to the relationship between diary and diarist, since the diary is a repository of immediate impressions of life experiences. Moreover, the reenactment of pleasures and pains in the diary creates strong ties between the diarist and his/her writing practice. According to Emmanuel Levinas's concept of hospitality, the subject is morally compelled to accept the stranger or the other within his/her personal space. French theorist Alain Montandon unfolds Levinas's concept of the subject as a host (*hôte*) into the idea of self-hospitality (*auto-hospitalité*) by arguing that the term

refers to this phenomenon which is the reception, the reception of oneself, of oneself as another, which presupposes this founding distance of subjectivity as self-consciousness [...] If *hôte* designates the one who hosts and the one which is hosted, the subject is obviously defined by what it is not him or her. The subject is, thus, self-consciousness of both himself or herself and the hosted one. This relationship with oneself as another opens the perspective of the otherness. (7)

Montandon sees the writing of the self as a way of objectification of the subject that, in this relation to oneself as another, recollects and reunites the self through writing. The argument I proposed in the aforementioned essay was that the diary can be regarded as a body that is formed alongside the body of the diarist. I wrote of

[a] body that is nothing like an avatar or a clone. This body would have its own life, laws, and rules distinctive from those applied to the physical body. If the diary is another body, a replicated body of the diarist, how can physical pain and pleasure be represented through writing? The gathering of bodily experiences through verbal and visual signs is a possible way not only to represent but also to give life to this second body. (82)

It is in this sense of “the gathering of bodily experiences through verbal and visual signs” that Joaquim Paiva’s *128 Diaries Project* can be understood as a proper and more complete example of a diary as a second body.

664 I first met Joaquim Paiva in 2009 after publishing an article about diaries in the culture section of the Brazilian newspaper *O Globo*. Paiva wrote to me and invited me to meet him and to view his diaries. Back then, I had seen only a few examples of visual diaries, Frida Kahlo’s being the one I remember now, but nothing like this almost literal “second body” of Paiva. We spent several hours discussing the future of his diaries, of whether they should be donated to an archive or an art museum. If any original manuscript or rare document is subject to concern about its fragility, Paiva’s diaries were twice a concern. They are, in a sense, a less textual material and therefore have less of a possibility of being transcribed and published into book form without losing their essence. They also carry the stigma of the art object, the “Do not touch!” admonition blinking in bright lights.

Sixteen years ago, Paiva, who is a diplomat, photographer, and art collector, was stationed in Buenos Aires, where he participated in group therapy sessions. The group members were recommended to keep diaries. Even after Paiva moved on to different diplomatic posts, his habit of diary keeping continued. The current number of notebooks is in the hundreds, each one different not only for the obvious reason of referring to different periods of time but also for their material structure. The notebooks are made of different kinds of papers of various colours and textures, with both homemade and industrial bindings.

The diaries are composed of fragments of daily life in the form of photographs, newspaper clippings, food packaging, transcripts of letters and other texts, and traditional textual diary entries. These traits contribute to making each of his diaries a singular object whose value derives from its unique textual nature, in addition to the elements that make each one an art object. If diaries are unpublishable or unprintable, as Philippe Lejeune asserts, Joaquim Paiva’s diaries are twice unpublishable in book form due to the eloquence and uniqueness of their material constitution (31, 226).

Over a period of sixteen years, and while living in at least seven different cities, Paiva wrote and built his unique diaries. His lived experiences in Buenos Aires,

Lima, Madrid, Houston, Brasília, San Francisco, and Rio de Janeiro are recorded in notebooks handcrafted from papers, fabrics, and diverse stationery material from several cultures. Their pages feature imprints of his professional and personal experiences, such as official passport pictures, and traces of his DNA from bodily fluid stains, strands of hair, or clipped fingernails. The body that is displaced from country to country is replicated within the diary. Transcendental and empirical aspects of his life are gathered in the pages of his diaries. In one of his notebooks, the textual record of his day is replaced by clipped fingernails; another page has only one word and a stain of semen. This attempt to recreate his body is recurrent as if, after each displacement, the subject needed to be reassembled. His notebooks are unique because they share something more than his lived experiences narrated in words. In their very materiality, they are second bodies, a term suggested by French scholar Françoise Simonet-Tennant concerning Frederic Amiel's agony about the possible destruction of his diaries (51).

Last year, Paiva contacted me and invited me to write the foreword for a proposed published volume of his notebooks. The foreword would attempt to preserve the integrity of the structure of his diaries: a limited edition of an art book, with high-quality photos of selected pages of the 128 notebooks. The book will have only five copies printed, and they will be shown permanently at five different institutions in Brazil. The project was inspired by a similar book by Ruth Troeller, *47 Diaries*, in which photographer Luiz Delgado compiled 80 years of diaries, notes, and papers in general into a book measuring 20 inches by 25 inches, with only 25 copies printed. The photographer and publisher present the book as for those who "like topologies, feminism, European history, philosophy and who will enjoy perusing the unfolding visual narrative of 80 years of handwritten memories, personal thoughts and philosophical musings in German, French, and English from a very personal point of view" (Delgado). The choice of an elegant, high-quality paper and high-resolution print preserves the unique artistic quality of the medium that could not be mass reproduced without the risk of losing "its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be," as articulated by Walter Benjamin (219).

Joaquim Paiva's *128 Diários*, consisting of 285 pages from 53 diaries, seems to condense these ancient movements of (self-)expression. All of these diaries, without exception, are singular, and not only because they contain records of unique life experiences. Even if blinking eyelids, contracting hearts, and wandering minds are recurrent events, each gesture in time is unique, and its record on paper, in words or images, is also unique. The lyrics of a song heard while in a cab in Lima, Peru or a collage of pieces of colorful paper disposed randomly on the page are what make Paiva's diaries an aesthetic gesture, and even though they are considered "unpublishable," these texts are, for Paiva, artistic manifestations that are needed to understand the greatness of personal narratives.

Paiva's "Scrapbooks" are full of bemusement in the face of the precarious nature of life. They include accounts in words and images, with fragments of mundane ele-

ments, raised to the highest degree of aesthetic significance, of human and historical experience. The convergence of references and referents in the same diary entry, such as “The Japanese colored pencil” and “Real pepper, real salt,” contradict Paiva’s warning, when he says he cannot “poke fun at r-eal-i-t-y.” If they were once idiosyncratic, they are transmuted into marble from which sculptures are made, gold that adorns altars, sounds that transcend, touches that revive, scents that inebriate, and flavours that eternalize.

Doubts and certainties, hopes and promises are disclosed in these pages. The decision to “not [...] experience a passion in the abstract” is offset against the conclusion that “life pricks, time is a needle.” The perception of the body and the space it occupies also appears often in the diary entries. Here, the senses are expressed and allude to the body and light, which reveals odour rather than image: “I can smell my sweat in the light of this lamp.” They are recognized as “many,” a multiplicity that, upon the fulfillment of the promise, will be scattered over the city: “I want my ashes to be
666 cast from the top of Corcovado.” Aside from their beautiful and sometimes striking visuality and chromaticism, or their sometimes luminous, sometimes oblique and halting words, such as when the integrity of the diaries (or personas?) is jeopardized (“I’ll rip up all these papers”), they echo other voices as they wonder about time, beauty, and life. “Time is always the ultimate limit,” they reflect, with Quiroga. They echo the words of Henry Miller, Antonio Cisneros, Léon Ferrari, Artur Barrios, and Guimarães Rosa, and they see the fractal tear of Captain Ahab join Pessoa’s “salt sea” as Paiva decrees: “Time defeats me.”

What we see in the publication of *128 Diaries* is neither victory nor defeat. The translation of Paiva’s journals into print media simultaneously signals the control and lack of control of time and its elements, and the figuration and disfiguration of the subject. It traces the artist’s and man’s voyage over sixteen years, the period covered in these selected diaries, encompassing Paiva’s movements around the world, between Buenos Aires, Lima, Madrid, Houston, Brasília, San Francisco, and Rio de Janeiro. It is an effort to enumerate and record what Barthes sardonically called a “collection of moods” (371), except that Joaquim Paiva constructs a second body for his experiences and reflections: an aesthetic, artistic, singular body whose aura and presence make it unreplicable. Therein lies its supreme value.

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