

Self-Framing As Experiment

By Renato Osoy

“When we intentionally reproduce empirical evidence found by earlier researchers, contemporaries, or ourselves, when we re-create natural or artificial phenomena, we speak of this as an experiment.” “The Experiment As Mediator Between Object And Subject” J.W. Goethe

I.

Goethe, an artist, a poet, a thinker, a scientist, but most clearly a man of sublime sensitivity, tells us in somewhat of a paradoxical fashion, that our emotions, but more clearly our imagination is one of the most unreliable values that we can introduce into the process of experimentation. That is of course when we are considering experimentation as a means to develop reliable knowledge and acquire concise theory. “For here at this pass, this transition from empirical evidence to judgement, cognition to application, all the inner enemies of man lie in wait: imagination, which sweeps him away on its wings before he knows his feet have left the ground; impatience; haste, self-satisfaction; rigidity; formalistic thought; prejudice; ease; frivolity; fickleness—this whole throng and its retinue.”¹ The paragraph continues, and ends with the following warning sentence, all the while still referring to the *inner enemies of man* which *lie in wait* to betray our acquisition of knowledge through the scientific experiment, “Here they lie in ambush and surprise not only for the active observer but also to the contemplative one who appears safe from all passion.” Nevertheless and possibly against all odds manifested, I must add that I wish to start this argument by suggesting that the first step of inquiry on my proposition: ‘*self-framing as experiment*’, must in any case be and begin by engaging in active *imagination* throughout the statement.

Let us imagine then, that a straight line is drawn on a piece of paper with a pencil, going from one extreme to the other. It creates a division, a separation. A line, yes, a line, a simple line. Then, somehow, the line becomes a border between one side and the other, it delineates spaces, it forms two territories. Think of a line again, a simple line. But this time a line that forms itself in space, a place of our fancy, a place we imagine. This line, it curves, it angles, at times it might intersect with itself, or perhaps it can close or open a shape, a frame. A line, yes, a simple line opens up the

¹ “Part 1.- Methodology and General Scientific Topics” From the essay: “The Experiment As Mediator Between Object And Subject” J.W. Goethe, *April 28th. 1792*. The Scientific Studies. (D. Miller, Trans.). Goethe: The Collected Works, Princeton University Press, 1987.”

possibility of definition. The line as a frame, the frame as a forming concept, framing as defining, framing as stating what is to be *inside* and what is to be *outside*.

Framing starts with the formation of a cell, the division of the sexes, there is an inside an outside, a male a female, as pointed out by Elizabeth Grosz, we separate, we form, we have boundaries to contain and differentiate. “The frame is what establishes territory out of the chaos that is the earth. The frame is thus the first construction, the corners of the plane of composition. With no frame or boundary there can be no territory.”² Following on this Deleuzian notion of *territorialization as framing* exposed by Grosz, let me point then as Deleuze mentions, to the *plane*, a *plane of composition*, where we can arrange and frame the chaos of information and thoughts that surround us, in one specific place. “The plane of composition, which cuts across and thus plunges into, filters and coheres chaos through the coming into being of sensations, is thus both an immersion in chaos but also a mode of disruption and ordering of chaos through the extraction of that which life can glean for itself and its own intensifications from this whirling complexity—sensations, affects, percepts, intensities—blocs of bodily becoming that always co-evolve with blocs of the becoming of matter or events”.³ For our case of concern, being that of constituting frames as devices in the process of experimentation, we will recur consistently to the notion of *a plane of composition*, as the place to contextualize and delineate frames.

In this case, the body as a place to form compositions, the body as a laboratory, the body as a place to produce knowledges. I mean a body, that could be anybody's body. Perhaps then we could bring a bit more clarity in conceiving the idea of the body as the point of departure by borrowing on Spinozian bodily notions, “The body in question is the human body; and its corresponding idea is the human mind or soul. The mind, then, like any other idea, is simply one particular mode of God's attribute, Thought. Whatever happens in the body is reflected or expressed in the mind. In this way, the mind perceives, more or less obscurely, what is taking place in its body. And through its body's interactions with other bodies, the mind is aware of what is happening in the physical world around it.”⁴ Hence, for the purpose of this argument I will adopt the idea that the body can become the point of departure for making compositions, and that the body then becomes a possible place to experiment in and with. Accordingly then, I want to refer to the notion of self, as that of *the self* who uses its own body, not only as a framing place to compose, but also as an instrument and as material to experiment with. The idea of *embodied cognition* calls for the need to situate a place for experimentations to come about, in this case I wish to position the body as the laboratory.

²“Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth”, Elizabeth Grosz, ch.1. Columbia University Press, 2010.

³ Ibid.

⁴ “Baruch Spinoza”, Nadler, Steven. First published Jun 29, 2001; substantive revision Jul 15, 2013. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2013 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2013/entries/spinoza/>>.

II.

A laboratory possesses many instruments, and a researcher aids himself by selecting the necessary devices in order to perform the desired enquire. Consistency and efficiency are crucial aspects to keep in line, in this case Goethe reminds us, “The main value of an experiment lies in the fact that, simple or compound, it can be reproduced at any time given the requisite preparations, apparatus, and skill. After assembling the necessary materials we may perform the experiment as often as we wish. We will rightly marvel at the human ingenuity when we consider even briefly the variety of arrangements and instruments invented for this purpose. In fact, we can note that such instruments are still being invented daily.”⁵ As I explore further the concept of a *laboratory*, I have chosen more precisely to think of the use of the photographic camera as the apparatus which aids my experimental investigation. the camera it is, because besides its many uses it is certainly known as an accurate and commonly used device for registration purposes. The photographic camera most certainly allows one to efficiently record *consistent repetitions* when one is tracing processes and documenting results.

Certainly not anybody *can make* a picture, but most certainly I would dare to say that almost everyone knows how *to take* a picture. With today's technological advancements it is a simple matter of *point(ing) and shoot(ing)*, you *frame(it)* and you *click(it)*. This apparent *ease of use*, makes the medium of photography extremely popular and accessible in a variety of circumstances and uses. But as suggested before, it might require skill and intention to actually *make* a photograph. When I refer to *the making* of imagery in photography, I mean images that function as containers of information, images that encapsulate an specific and deliberate message within them, images that want to speak to us. Making an image involves an outline, a plan to follow, most certainly in the end it involves acquiring an specific outcome with them. Throughout this process, the maker has to first begin by entering into a *trial and error* mode of experimentation, in order to achieve a successful system. By system I mean, that which would allow him to be consistent and efficient in order to have the instrument at his service, the experimenter needs to first develop the skill to master the tool if he is to have the tool to the service of his experimentations. I want to propose then, the use of photography as a means to experiment and theorise on the self, while using Goethe's notion of *the experiment as mediator between object and subject* as conceptual catapult. First, for this matter I want to focus on the use of photography into a more specific genre, that of portraiture it is, but more precisely that of self-portraiture.

III.

⁵ Ibid. “The Experiment As Mediator Between Object And Subject”

Before jumping directly into self-portraiture as a means to experiment, I need to first briefly define my method of analysis, and second I need to find out how the activity of *portraying*, meaning the making of portraits, relates my consideration to *the photographic*. In this case I am implementing the use of a *method-machine*, to propose and expose the possible mechanisms at work, when we consider the use of the photographic image as experimental tool. I have chosen then for this case, to apply the Barthesian machine, '*studium/punctum*', as a means to survey the *photographic portrait*. Barthes particular contribution as a theorist in the visual field regards us with a concern into the production of dichotomies and values between the subjectivity and the objectivity of a photographic image. "This view was given exemplary formulation in Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida* where he counterposed the force of pensiveness of the *punctum* to the informative aspect represented by the *studium*."⁶ Rancière tells us, as he makes a point of value on *pensiveness* (more on this further on) concerning the photographic image using Barthes method.

Curiously enough and for the benefit of my argument most of the photographs discussed by Barthes in *Camera Lucida*, happen to be portraits. The same occurs in Rancière's afore mentioned essay "The Pensive Image", where he constantly alludes to the photographic portrait. Another case that draws on the use of the Barthesian *method-machine* with essential concerns towards the photographic portrait, is read in Félix Guattari's essay "Keiichi Tahara's faciality machine", Guattari adds, "We are now in a situation in which the ensemble of faciality traits has been destabilised by the deterritorializing treatment of lighting and framing." I am drawn to the possibilities that the *studium/punctum* machine can facilitate when exploring the photographic portrait. "Henceforth, the structural key to the image no longer adheres to the 'photographic referent' such as Roland Barthes defines it (I call 'photographic referent' not the optionally real thing to which an image or a sign refers but the necessarily real thing which has been placed before the lens, without which there would be no photograph). It finds itself transferred to the imagining intentionality of the spectator". Perhaps what draws my interest to explore this particular method, is that I find that it is in the portrayed human face, that the whole presence of the self intensifies and becomes manifest. It could be perhaps because the visibility of *punctum* accentuates with more drama in photographs where the human face is present, but for that I have no precise ground of discussion. Although later on the text Guattari briefly opens up this matter by pointing to Barthes theory once again: "It is thus on the basis of a fracture of sense that this existential transfer of enunciation is set off, the portrait's capturing gaze. Roland Barthes has apprehended this phenomenon through the opposition he makes between the '*studium*', in which the

⁶ "The Pensive Image" Chapter 5, *The Emancipated Spectator*, Jacques Rancière. Translated by Gregory Elliot, Verso Editions, London 2009.

signification of the photo is coded, and the ‘punctum’ ‘sting, speck, cut, little hole—and also a cast of dice... that accident which pricks me’.⁷

I won't go in to much detail to specify on how this system might have been constituted, rather, I will attempt its application as a system to study and feel photographs. Let me then simplify the way in which I understand it, and into how I will apply Barthes's method to my own experimentation process. First, we could assume that the *studium* refers to the image as a self-contained whole which permits readability through its own semiotic code. The *studium* is surveying and decoding the image by the means of its indexicality. In this sense, photography had the claim, and for some people it still does, that it tells some sort of truth, or at least that it tells the truth of what is indexically contained within the image when we look at it objectively, that we could say is the *studium*. The *studium* enables the reader with a sense of approachability, it allows the image to be assimilated in somewhat of a coherent way. The *punctum* on the other hand inspires an intensely private meaning, it escapes language, the image becomes a temporal hallucination. The *punctum* in this case is a cut, a puncture. As mentioned before, there is no universality in the reading of the message, rather there could be particular or collective conventions on certain codes contained in the image which viewers would agree upon. In the end, an image might carry its own thing which only affects the individual for a very particular reason. Singularity and the vibrating subjective exceptionality of the photograph could be referred to as the *punctum*. To think further on, I want to consider Ranciere's notion of *pensiveness* as it opens up the possibility of considering the *studium/punctum* approach not necessarily as two separate matters. Say, as an *a or b* approach, but rather as *a and b* simultaneous operating possibility. “It might be characterised as an effect of the circulation, between the subject, the photographer and us, of the intentional and the unintentional, the known and the unknown, the expressed and unexpressed, the present and the past. Contrary to what Barthes tells us, this pensiveness stems from the impossibility of making two images coincide... that one produced by the *punctum* and on the other hand, that one produced by the *studium*.” It seems that what remains slightly uncertain and open for interpretations, is if it is the actual activity of surveying the image, meaning engaging in the *studium*, which allows us to find the *punctum*, or if it is that we actually find the *punctum* because we immediately feel something at a glance when we look at an image. Is it the *punctum* then an intrigue perhaps, or an inexplicable feeling which is produced in us the spectators, which urges something in us to explore the image further and engage on a *studium*. to come to grips I want to cite Ranciere's pensiveness again, “Pensiveness in fact arrives to thwart the logic of the action. On the one hand, it extends the action that had come to a halt. But on the other hand, it puts every conclusion in suspense. What is interrupted is the relationship between narration and expression. The logic of

⁷ Keiichi Tahara's faciality machine”, Schizoanalytic Cartographies by Félix Guattari, translated by Andrew Goffey. Bloomsbury Press, 2012.

visuality no longer arrives to supplement action. It arrives to suspend it or rather to duplicate it.”⁸

III.

Let us look at this apparently simple portrait then. First I will try to describe the picture somewhat objectively, at a glance. “*The photograph is a black & white image. In the frame we see that there is a man taking a picture of a woman against a backdrop that depicts a scenery. The setting is situated in front of some buildings in ruins, there is snow in the background, they are outdoors, possibly in a city.*” This brief and concise description indicates what is depicted in this particular photograph, it describes without much elaboration its indexical attributes.



“Untitled”, random photograph found on the internet.

As I ease into my description, I will adopt a *first person voice* to look further into the image, I will try to describe it as subjectively as possible according to what I am seeing and feeling, in order to express why it produces such an impact on me in an attempt to find the *punctum*. I will attempt then, to read this photograph careless of any discursive approach that might already exist, and indifferent to the value that my

⁸ Ibid. “The Pensive Image”.

interpretation can represent to an audience. In this case, I will engage in a deep *studium* in order to reach the image's *punctum*. "The theory of the *punctum* intends to affirm the resistant singularity of the image."⁹ This is an attempt to manifest the *punctum* in this particular photographic portrait, hence, the amplification of singularization in its interpretation is not only permitted, but encouraged as a form of producing knowledge. According to Simondon, "Individuation must be grasped as the becoming of the being, and not as a model of the being which would exhaust its signification."¹⁰ Let me elaborate then on the particularity of this image.

"This picture was taken probably in the aftermath of WWII, it looks like some eastern European city, Warsaw maybe, those buildings remind me of Warsaw, I somehow want to believe it in this way, it is there for sure, there is something in the smile on that woman's face that reminds me of the Polish, people I have met before and after I was in Poland.

Strangely enough, I noted that she appears to smile at the person taken the picture of herself, but actually at close look, it looks like she is smiling at the person looking at her being photographed, or more clearly, at the person that is making the photograph of the photograph. In this case, it appears that the two photographs are shot simultaneously just at the moment of the 'click', we can suspect that this moment is taking place because the photographer is pressing on the lens, holding the camera, directing his gaze at her slightly lifting his left foot, arching his arm, somehow this movement suggests to me that he is in the action of doing something, which is obviously 'taking the picture'. It certainly gives me the impression that she is smiling at the other camera, or say, the camera-spectator, that automatically gives me the impression that she is smiling at me in this case, the viewer, rather than at the photographer before her. It is her smile which puzzles me and which makes it to be something unique for me on this picture. To me that is the 'punctum' of the image, it tenderises the roughness of the situation, those recently bombarded buildings appear to be much more of an interesting setup, than the actual improvised background with the spring scene painted on the cloth, and again, I feel her smile overpowers the presence of the surroundings.

At first, I felt at odds looking at this image, it is her smile that keeps me at odds. Although this picture encapsulates many aspects, like a certain documentary quality to it, we still lack more access to information about it, in the case we need it to use it as a provider of facts, like it would tell us about a war, about destruction, about certain people, a picture that depicts the human condition at a certain time in a certain place.

But in this case I look at it plainly as a picture of a picture, of someone making a picture. This circularity I mention, keeps a never-ending flow in occurrence and constantly validates itself, because she is looking at the viewer, at the person with the second camera, and she is smiling at him/her, and this causes the level of complicity to intensify, making me feel a bit uneasy towards the picture. In a sense, this portrait evokes me to consider the ambiguity posed by Rancière's thoughts on the pensiveness of the image. "In pensiveness, the act of thinking seems to be encroached upon by a certain passivity. Things become complicated when we say of an image that it is pensive. An image is not supposed to think.

⁹ Ibid. "The Pensive Image", Jacques Rancière.

¹⁰ "The Genesis Of The Individual" By Gilbert Simondon. Translated from the french by Mark Cohen and Sanford Kwinter. In: Incorporations: Zone 6. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter (Eds.). New York: Zone Books, 1992.

It contains unthought thought, a thought that cannot be attributed to the intention of the person who produces it and which has an effect on the person who views it without her linking it to a determinate object. Pensiveness thus refers to a condition that is indeterminately between the active and the passive.”¹¹

Curiously, to me, this specific image also points dramatically to the paradoxical fake-ness of the photographic medium and its ambiguous entrapment with evidential truth. For example, this particular images depicts the deliberate construction of a scenario, of false scenarios in the midst of war. One comes to think that after all the tragedy, images of happiness and possible landscapes get quickly constructed and promoted to heal and forget the wounds of war. The destroyed city in ruins, poverty and desolation are covered up by the falsity of a constructed depiction of an unachievable future, hope is what we are longing, we still don't know if the war is over at the moment this picture was taken, but the picture being made inside the picture struggles to cover, or maybe, somehow, it tries to decontextualize this fact, but by doing so it only makes it more evident, it magnifies the event, it only brings the horror of the situation to a further intensity.

But after all, all of this as a form of meaning, becomes dubious, it fades into nothingness in a fraction of a second. Because this singularization, is just a particular interpretation, it is just one-other, another reading of this one portrait by me, the individual. As I read the image, and as I relate all matters that concern me inside and outside the frame, I think and believe that the punctum is located in that woman's smile. I am sure the punctum is there, right there; it is there where it punctures me.”

V.

The self as personal laboratory, poses the idea that the self with its own particular interior, becomes a potential producer of knowledges as it manifests its interiority outwardly through a projected appearance. As mentioned before in the process of self-framing as experiment, the body becomes the frame, but also the frame captures the body. As framing or rather self-framing is discussed further, I will like to point again towards photography and its possible role with experimentation. Photography is a medium that allows one to experience all sides of its integration: one can make a picture, see a picture and be in the picture without much effort or skill. Besides its impeccable accuracy for reproducing reality, photography can certainly function as a versatile tool as a means to experiment. Primarily I think, it is do to its innate framing qualities. Besides the point, we must also consider that currently, photography is quite a practical and accesible medium to handle. These rather facile ease of use makes photography now, an extremely popular device for portrait making, hence, a favourite tool for self-portrait making, ranging from *selfies* to artistic images. The interest on self-portraiture which I seek to discuss in this text, concerns more precisely with a self-portraiture that proposes its use as a means to create platforms for knowledge production, using *the self as experiment*. While I read Goethe's title “*The Experiment As Mediator Between Object And Subject*” once more, I iterate thoughts, I am thinking now of this text's own title “Self-framing as Experiment” and

¹¹ Ibid. “The Pensive Image”, Jacques Rancière.

I try to position both self and experiment in one frame of thought. I realise then how thinking possibilities open up, and an unmeasurable amount of information is revealed through imagination. Without a doubt for me, Goethe's concept has somehow transposed me to the idea of considering the self further, the self as a place to experiment; the self as knowledge producer.

As the proposition of *the self as personal laboratory* continues to unfold I must first bring attention to the place-space where these events occur. The body, but not only in its corporeality, the mind but not as separation from body, I mean to say the mind and the body as a self. Possibly, we can start to understand that on the one hand there is a *self* which delineates a specific frame outside of itself in order to produce experiments. On the other, there is a *self* which becomes itself the frame, using its body as a *place* to perform research on its own self to produce knowledges. In this sense Deleuze brings us to the edge of such a thought, as he highlights some essentials in Spinozian philosophy pointing out that, "Spinoza offers philosophers a new model: *the body*. He proposes to establish the body as a model: 'We do not know what the body can do...' This declaration of ignorance is a provocation."¹² Thus, the body becomes a source, a point of departure, a point of reference. What the body says, what the body can do, what the body can touch, what the body can feel. The body occupying space, the presence of the body. But there is a recognition of a body and of the body, *a here and a there*, hence an inside and an outside. These defined sides are precisely what might allow us to build a position on the use the body as point of departure in experimentation.

The mind appears to be located in the inside of our body while simultaneously it is also connected to an outside of our bodies. We perceive our mind through our intellect, but we also feel the mind in our bodies through our senses and emotions, a situation which causes ambiguity as we try to intellect it with certainty, as we attempt to assure that the mind is alone our brain, our body. Rather, the mind appears to be something a bit more abstract, perhaps we can call it a force, a force from within, a certain type interior energy that needs to rise and liberate itself through us and in us. It seems that this force, this outpour, this desire for the mind to act, for *it* to be itself is a need, a need to become, to manifest. To manifest freely, out there in the outside. On this thought, Deleuze provides us with a powerful insight as he reflects on his Spinozian enquire, adding: "What defines freedom is an 'interior' and a 'self' determined by necessity. One is never free through one's will and through that on which it patterns itself, but through one's essence and through that which follows from it. Man, the most powerful of finite modes, is free when he comes into possession of his power of acting."¹³ It seems then, that it is through this power, the power of acting that the interior of the self outpours and articulates, manifesting itself through a body while simultaneously becoming an expression in the

¹² Chapter 2, "Spinoza: Practical Philosophy By Gilles Deleuze", Translated by Robert Hurley. City Lights Books, 1988.

¹³ Chapter 4, Index Of The Main Concepts Of The Ethics, "Spinoza: Practical Philosophy By Gilles Deleuze", Translated by Robert Hurley. City Lights Books, 1988.

world. Although it is certainly true that we cannot see a mind, we can certainly say that we can see a body. Hence, we could probably say, a mind that uses a body as an object to frame itself, to represent itself.

VI.

As a case study I have chosen the photographic work of Brazilian artist Renato Abreu. More Precisely I will focus on his self-portrait series “Revelations” presented at FOAM in Amsterdam in October 2011.¹⁴ To make sense of the self-framing as



experiment, I will point to a series of matters that might reveal some aspects of Abreu’s experimental methodology as a means to achieve knowledges. In this case I am not looking into mapping Abreu’s method in order to describe his artistic approach, rather I wish to explore in and around his work, in order to find traces that might lead me to make sense on the possibility of using Self-framing as experiment in order to produce knowledges. Besides noting down my own reflections and observations, I have also conducted a small interview/questionnaire with the artist in relation to his work and concerns which relate to these particular photographic series. I am looking into two essential aspects: his technic and formal approach *as tools and systems*, and his inspiration and motivation *as a setting of a topic of interest, and as a process of conceptualization to seek and produce information*. Perhaps by surveying Abreu’s photos under these considerations, traces and places where frames form and knowledges are produced will become manifested throughout the enquire on his work in relation to the concern of self-framing as experiment.

¹⁴ “Revelations” is a series of 8 typological photographs always presented as a set. Sizes and installations vary according to the artist’s purposes, including prints, monitors and projections.

Abreu's work, but more particularly his series "Revelations" become somewhat captivating because of his particular use of the portrayed face. In a way I feel like Abreu's self-portraits go further than just the making of a photograph of one's own face as an act of narcissism or memorabilia. Guattari's comment on Keiichi Tahara's portraits helps me take this notion further, "What is a photographic portrait? The impression of a face taken so as to produce a representation, but also the burrowing of a certain traits of this face for completely different ends, such as the denotation of a proper name, the evocation of a memory, the triggering of an affect..."¹⁵ It is in that last part I want to expand on right now, *the triggering of an affect* he says, not the affect itself in the portrait, but the photographic portrait containing a trigger in itself. In an interview conducted by Anne-Celine Jaeger with Renato Abreu she comments the following: "Your Revelations series is interesting. It made me sort of giggle in this slightly hysterical uncomfortable way because I thought: 'He looks funny. Oh wait, he looks sad, what's going on?'" Later she follows the statement with a question: "What was your intention for the series?" To which Abreu replies: "The series was born in a very spontaneous way. I saw that bunch of colorful clothes in my house and a day I was feeling sad I had the idea to make the self-portraits, to mix the happy colorful



clothes with my sadness. I felt that this interaction could create an ambiguity that could be interesting." Coming back to Guattari's comment, I sense somehow that it is in that particular sense of ambiguity that Abreu deliberately produced using his portrayed face, where that *triggering effect of an affect* takes place. Later on Abreu tells Jaeger, "I think I work very conceptually and mostly I try to create a certain feeling on the spectator."¹⁶ Could it be perhaps that Abreu's "Revelations" reveal a

¹⁵ "Keiichi Tahara's faciality machine", Schizoanalytic Cartographies by Félix Guattari, translated by Andrew Goffey. Bloomsbury Press, 2012.

¹⁶ In an interview by Anne-Celine Jaeger with Renato Abreu about the series "Revelations". FOAM International Photography Magazine Issue #28, Fall 2011, page 124. Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

particular use of the portrayed face as the location of an affective trigger in artistic production. Perhaps we could bring to mind the words of Guattari referring to the particular use of the face in the photograph, the face in the photograph as a means to trigger meanings, “A deterritorializing cutting out of the face; a fractal rupture of the gaze—the attaching of an original proliferation of significations.”¹⁷ The gaze then becomes the point of departure, as is the case in Abreu work as he adds, “The essential component was sadness, I should make them in a day I was sad. And I was indeed pretty sad. Sadness is a shitty thing, I mean, not all sadness, but the sadness you can't control, and you just feel it.” Where else could one express sadness more dramatically if not through the eyes, in this case through a gaze full of sadness. This specific gaze setup against an antagonising context, according to the artist he was setting up both happiness and sadness in the same frame, “There was more or less a feeling of how I wanted everything. Colorful clothes for happy, and a sad poker face for sad, and a combination of the contradictory in an image.”¹⁸

In relation to using the self, photography and specific matters of inspiration as the means to experiment on himself Abreu adds: “I’m very much interested on still-lives and the daily life. I’m very inspired with the relation that William Eggleston has with color photography and I’m also trying to understand that relation to myself through practice.” Another matter that Abreu uses repeatedly with much intention in his self-experimentations is clearly color, “Color, is my biggest passion. I feel really connected to colors in a very intrinsic way, very deeply. Something that influenced me a lot, were the theories of color of Johannes Itten from Bauhaus, (his book on color is just beautiful!) and also his spiritual behaviour.”¹⁹ For Abreu color becomes not only an affective concern in the conception and materialisation of his work, but also a rational dilemma, “As i've read recently: ‘Color is not neutral. It has an emotional component. Certain colors have specific associations and induce certain responses. Learn what they are. When you use color, try to determine and understand the accompanying emotional response and how to use it effectively. Color has a visceral impact.’ I open here a parenthesis to say that on my development as an artist, one of my next steps is to try to look at the colors less passionately. I hope I can achieve this, because otherwise i will have a tornado inside of me anytime I come across colors.” It appears to me that somehow as Abreu explores and interacts with color it is not only the result of his practice that becomes affected but also himself in the whole process. It leads me to think that perhaps somewhat prematurely, through his series “Revelations” Abreu reveals far more than just colourful self portraits. In any case, and taking into consideration one of Rheinberger’s essential remarks on experimentation processes, “Every experimental scientist knows just how little a single experiment can prove or convince. To establish proof, an entire system of

¹⁷ Ibid. Schizoanalytic Cartographies by Félix Guattari.

¹⁸ On an interview / conversation I conducted with the artist in march 2014. First I send Renato Abreu a list of questions to which he reply, later on we had two *Skype* meetings were we discuss his work and his statements.

¹⁹ Ibid. In an interview by Anne-Celine Jaeger.

experiments and controls is needed, set up according to an assumption or style, and performed by an expert.”²⁰ I take this remark as a warning, but I also understand that Abreu is no scientist, but an artist. In this sense I want to propose that the repeated experimentation on himself somehow suggests a means to produce and question the setting up of a conceptual detonator as a triggering effect of an affective nature, which can produce thoughts and questions in and on artistic procedures. When I proposed this precocious notion to Abreu he replied somewhat hesitantly by saying, “Whatever the answer is, it is just that it was very intuitive. I was guided by the material I had at hand, and my knowledge of things. Somehow I had to show what I did, what I was able to do, what I liked to do, what I paid attention at, what I cared for, etc. And they became those photographs.”²¹

VII.

The process of self-experimentation begins when the individual wishes to make a case of himself as a case for everyone else. When the individual wishes to make the frame or to be the frame, when the individual says I am the frame, you are the frame, we all become somehow framed by this reclamation. In this sense and according to Simondon, “The process of individuation must be considered primordial, for it is this process that at once brings the individual into being and determines all the distinguishing characteristics of its development, organization and modalities.” It is not the individual per se which brings value to self-experimentation then, it is rather the individual becoming individuated which opens a possibility to re-think the one as many.

Finally, as this argument comes to a conclusion, I would like to consider and recall Goethe's idea *the experiment as mediator between object and subject* as a conceptual catalyser in knowledge production. In this case a new questioning must be presented. For example two questions arise when considering the experiment as *mediator*, or the mediation between the two as an experiment. Before going further I want to evoke Simondon again against the thought of mediation, “The true principle of individuation is mediation, which generally presumes the existence of the original duality of the orders of magnitude and the initial absence of interactive communication between them.”²² In this case it appears that such indeterminate absence of communication might be located precisely where and when the mediation occurs, or where mediation takes place. Could we question then if it is the person's own body the object of study for its own mind, being the mind a subjectivity surveying a body, or is it that the mind as object only understands itself by looking at

²⁰ “Experimental Systems and Epistemic Things” Chapter 2, *Toward A History Of Epistemic Things*, Hans-Jörg Rheinberger. Stanford University Press, 1997.

²¹ Ibid. On interview / conversation I conducted with the artist in march 2014.

²² “The Genesis Of The Individual” By Gilbert Simondon. Translated from the french by Mark Cohen and Sanford Kwinter. In: *Incorporations: Zone 6*. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter (Eds.). New York: Zone Books, 1992.”

the body as a subject of its own body. Merleau-Ponty's statement brings a possibility to enter not the questioning itself precisely, but a way to consider the mediation of such questioning further by stating, "Nothing determines me from outside, not because nothing acts upon me, but, on the contrary, because I am from the start outside myself and open to the world."²³ I want to state then, that perhaps it is somewhere in between the movement; in-between the spaces of that oscillation amidst object and subject which occurs while experimenting happens, that unexpected knowledges are produced. By unexpected I mean, unknown informations. Basically I want to consider the possibility of thinking that the value of experimentation is not necessarily located in the final results that it produces, but that actually, its value is located in the moments where and when the mediation in it occurs. And in that sense self-framing as experiment becomes more interesting not in producing a result, but in producing evidence of processes. Perhaps Goethe's remark can help us ponder on such thoughts a bit lighter, while considering such consideration a bit further, "I venture to assert that one experiment, even several experiments combined, prove nothing; indeed, that nothing can be more dangerous than the attempt to confirm a theory by experiments; and that the greatest errors have arisen precisely because its dangers and its inadequacies were not realised."²⁴

²³ "Freedom" chapter 3, *Phenomenology of Perception* by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, translated by Taylor Carman. Routledge Press 2013.

²⁴ "Part 1.- Methodology and General Scientific Topics" From the essay: "The Experiment As Mediator Between Object And Subject" J.W. Goethe, *April 28th. 1792*. *The Scientific Studies*. (D. Miller, Trans.). Goethe: The Collected Works, Princeton University Press, 1987."