

Just an Image

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An editorial like this carries with it a betrayal and an inability: it is a volume completely dedicated to images. In other words, we opted to reduce the number of words as much as possible, leaving only the unavoidable and indispensable for the requirements of an academic journal on an OJS platform. In this case, it's the metadata and protocol information.

The betrayal is due to the obvious fact that it seems nonsensical to write an editorial for a journal composed only of images. Yes, indeed it is. But perhaps this editorial is insurmountable because there is a debate, considerably outdated by the history of art itself, which paradoxically is still in its infancy in academic journals and art research universes: the relationship between word and image.

This intense relationship of closeness and distance is generously part of a certain art historical imaginary, considering that it is a neuralgic point in the construction of the work's structural logic, capable of promoting a vortex of epistemological force. The same is not likely if we consider the publications that we currently have in Visual Arts and that are produced in Brazilian universities. Although editors are clearly endeavouring to establish the debate on the image as a source of research and a reference for other researchers, there is still very little space for visual essays.

Perhaps this difficulty in understanding the image as a process of research, knowledge and unfamiliarity is also due to our lack of ability and interest in reading such images, works and artworks as important elements of a different narrative that needs and will need an instrumentalisation to which we are not accustomed.

How do we cite a Visual Arts essay in a scientific article? How can we bring a scientific article closer to a visual essay, considering its originality and relevance to the community? How can an essay be highlighted in the indexes that help with the qualification metrics of academic journals? How do we produce a set of images that come close to structuring the thought of an article? How do we wander between these two regimes of inscription in order to precipitate the research event? Does an artist-researcher necessarily need to produce a considerable number of scientific articles in order to have their time fractured by the urgency of the visual art production process itself? What is the fair measure of the artist's poetic production and the ever-urgent need for written production? To what extent are funding agencies prepared to receive such proposals?

At the last forum for editors of scientific journals, held in Fortaleza in 2022, the editors' anguish and doubts returned in the face of such questions, or at least part of them: how do we get these productions included in the Lattes? Even though I was aware of the urgency of this demand, I was considerably surprised by the repetition without difference of the concern. I'll explain: In some previous forums, the same concern always came up. And in this case, suffering before producing the publication is innocuous.

Operationally, it is possible, as we are doing in this issue, to publish the necessary metadata and obtain the DOI so that the information is automatically taken into account in university collections, programmes and their respective systems. If the university doesn't offer DOI support, it's up to the editors, if they want to, since editing work in academic journals is rarely paid for, to tackle a bigger debate in the macrostructure, in order to problematise the absence of such a service which is, in principle, fundamental for the democratisation of research.

Although I know that we are a university located in a metropolis and that we still live in a country of irregular attention and concerns, and that precisely because of this, we may be in a privileged position, I am still surprised by our inability to excavate a broader and perhaps even international issue: the understanding of the visual essay, in its multiple forms, as a producer and provocateur of multiple knowledges. Such excavation will only happen, initially, through the interest and daring of publishers, the increase in production by artists and a widening of production in universities themselves. In a sense, this is a strategic increase in supply, which in turn will also require new editors in new publications that are not yet fully committed to the metrics. Or if they are, that they have the political freedom to choose.

Of course, a number like this will always be a wildcard, an extra, a plus and, above all, a bet on the near future. In a virtual-digital space on the page, where dribbling is still possible. Finally, it's important to emphasise that although we made a special call for this special issue, the amount of material received was not so generous. But we're only just getting started.