

Photography as conversational data practice. Spatialization and digital sociability in the use of Instagram in squares and parks in the city of Salvador¹

A fotografia como prática conversacional de dados. Espacialização e sociabilidade digital no uso do Instagram em praças e parques na cidade de Salvador

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Abstract: *This paper aims to empirically investigate the new photographic practice through Instagram application. We studied 305 images associated to four urban spaces (squares and parks) in Salvador, Bahia through the sociability process, the production of space and the self-portraits (including selfies). The analysis points out that the use of meta-texts (hashtags, subtitles and emojis), as well as the geolocation data indicate that the photographic practice is based in a data-driven conversational communication. This practice deploys an extensive network of objects and agencies (artefact, image editing and manipulation, meta-texts, geotags, algorithmic procedure, sharing practices...). We are dealing with an “actor-network” based in an algorithmic performativity very different from the photographic practice with analogical cameras or even with digital cameras prior*

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the boom of digital social network. Users are now able to create a new discourse / narrative and a practice of data related to the photograph.

Keywords: *photography; urban space; Instagram; mediation; Salvador.*

Resumo: *Este artigo investiga empiricamente a prática fotográfica através do aplicativo Instagram. Foram analisadas 305 imagens associadas à geolocalização de quatro praças e parques da cidade de Salvador. A análise foi desenvolvida através de três aspectos: processo de espacialização, processo de sociabilidade e processo de produção de si (retratos e selfies). O uso de metatexto (hashtags, legendas e emojis) e de dados de geolocalização indicam que a prática fotográfica se dá, hoje, como uma prática conversacional de dados. Ela convoca uma ampla rede que passa pelo local escolhido, pelo artefato utilizado, pelas formas de edição e manipulação da imagem, pelos metatextos, pelas geotags, pelo procedimento algorítmico da rede social, pelas formas de compartilhamento... O uso da fotografia em redes sociais é um ator-rede, performativo, algorítmico, muito diferente da prática de produção de fotos analógicas ou mesmo digitais antes dosurgimento dessas redes. Isso possibilita aos usuários a criação de um discurso/narrativa e de uma prática de dados relacionados à fotografia inédita até então.*

Palavras-chave: *fotografia; espaço urbano; Instagram; mediação; Salvador*

Introduction

While we observe the daily movement in urban public environments, it is possible to realize the constant presence of mobile devices working as mediators of interaction between people and places, most of the time with the aid of a social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, just to name a few). More than with cameras or even tablets, it is through smartphones that the activity of photography takes place (SMARTPHONES, 2016; 700 MILLION, 2017; LENSVID EXCLUSIVE, [2017?]). These devices make the act of taking and sharing photos increasingly ordinary, transforming it in an activity associated with data practice (LUPTON, 2016), with the production of georeferencing and metatext, such as subtitles and hashtags. From analogic photography of archiving in family photos (BOURDIEU, 1965), we went through a photographic practice performed predominantly as the vector of communication and sociability, proved by the prevalence of contact with the other – in detriment of the preoccupation with the technical quality of the image – and the creation of new layers of information through geotagging, texts, hashtags and emojis.

Digital photography produces a meaning of co-presence and emplacement through the movement and relationships among people, images and artifacts (HJORTH e PINK, 2014). In this intertwining between experience, locational shapes and representation (HJORTH e HENDRY, 2015), social media geared towards photography, especially those linked to smartphone apps, such as Instagram – become mediators in the formation of new visualities and interactions. This research will prove that this intertwining is given through the photographic practice linked not only to image, but to different textual interactions with data registered through subtitles or comments, hashtags added to the post or likes given by those who viewed and reacted to the photo.

The photography in social media becomes an actor-network (LATOUR, 2005), supported by the algorithmic performativity and by the practice of data production. It differs, thus, from forms of specialization and sociability promoted by the photographic activity performed

through analogic cameras or digital images without interaction of social media in the internet. As we will analyze in this article, the processes of production of self, spatialization and sociability are transformed in a way to add a conversational practice of narrative-producing data – guided by the photographic practice of users and by the reading and performatization of the system – through networks of multiple agencies of humans and non-humans.

This research points towards the materiality of the use of Instagram and the communicational character of photos in social media. With that, we confirm that the practice of digital photography in social networks means less about the fixation of a memory of important moments, about care with the image, and more a contact with the other, sharing immediate feelings, explicit forms of sociability with metadata that go beyond the image. In one of the most popular types of photography today, the selfie, the photo itself matters less, the moment, the sharing and the relationship with the space and the other matters more. That works not only for self-portrait but for all photographs circulating in social media. Photographing with a cellphone and linking pictures in social media evokes another network (different from the analogic photo or even the digital photo before social media) in which data becomes a fundamental element, not only as digitalization and controlling algorithm of apps and the internet, but also as metatext put voluntarily by users (hashtags, subtitles and emojis).

Methodology and first results

The Instagram posts were collected between January 21st and 31st 2017. We used places in Salvador that presented an average of, at least, three photos posted daily and that had free, public access, in order to capture a more ordinary use of a space. We identified four places: City Square, Pituaçu Square, Ana Lúcia Magalhães Square and Dique do Tororó. For our analysis, we selected every publication within this period available in a public manner and registered with the respective geotag. The

timeframe, therefore, allowed us to work with a wide range of different practices of sociability, interaction and representation of space.

An extraction⁴ of all the posts was made, including, in addition to the image itself, subtitles, comments, likes, emojis, tags, geotags and hashtags. The only starting point in common, for each place, was the information registered in geotagging format. We identified a total of 305 posts: 39 at the Dique do Tororó, 162 at the City Square, 64 at the Pitu-açu Park, and 40 at Ana Lúcia Magalhães Square. After the extraction, all the images were imported to the software of qualitative analysis Atlas.ti, through which we developed codes⁵ in different levels.

In a first general analysis, we grouped three main types of photography: object (any form of still life or object), landscape (natural and/or urban) and portrait (individual, collective or self-portrait). The photos of objects were the less numerous (13), followed by landscapes (42) and portrait (253). A post can present more than one image through collage. In this case, it was related to more than one type of photography. Then, posts were identified regarding themes⁶ or items present in images, such as physical activities (54), children (50), nature (45), animals (21), family (16), etc. Portraits were identified with more specific characteristics, such as individual (107), selfie (88), group⁷ of people (82) or couples (56). These codes help us in the perception of relationships and descriptions performed through the analysis of the collected material.

In a second step of analysis, we dealt with metatexts linked to images. Initially, therefore, a list was made with all the hashtags used in the posts of the sample. The 10 most common ones, followed by the number of appearances, are: #parquedacidade (16), #salvador (13), #bahia (10),

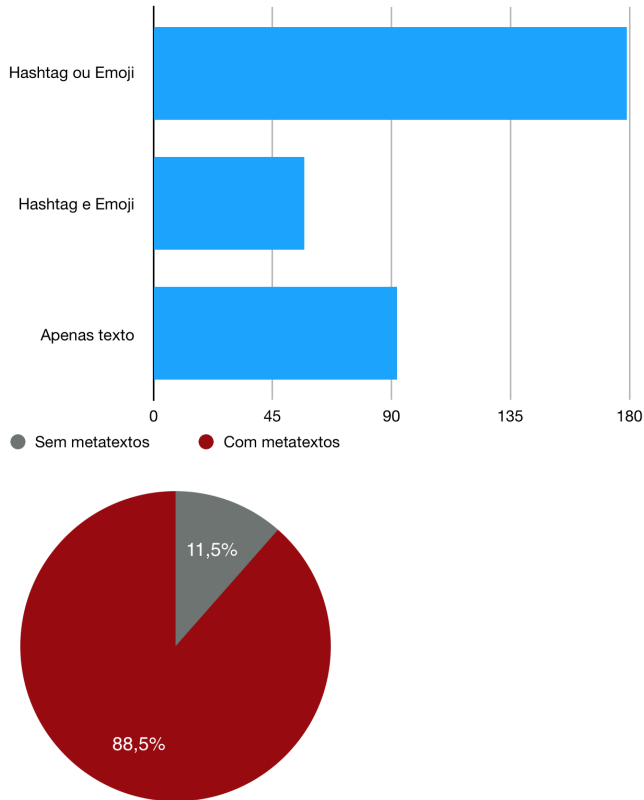
4 The posts were extracted in PDF form, allowing us to see both the image and the identifiable texts. To ensure a backup of textual information, we also used the Data Miner extension for Google Chrome, applying it to each place we selected (<https://data-miner.io/>).

5 Atlas.ti allow a research work based in the creation of codes that can be developed through Reading or observation of the material collected, either images or texts, widening the possibilities of analysis..

6 We identified possible themes, items or specific relations that each photo can presente. We found 24: friendship, animals, birthday, art, physical activity, drink, baby shower, food, children, dance, special effects, Family, photography, Reading, fashion, music, nature, part of the body, fishing, picnic, sunset, love relationship, religion, work.

7 We considered a "group" when more than two people are in the picture.

Image 2 – Metatexts in subtitle per publication.



We performed a general list of the written marks (metatexts such as hashtags, symbols and emojis or simple texts) registered by users in the field destined to the subtitle in each post. Such marks compose the current photographic practice and indicate one of the ways of understanding photography as a practice of data as it is possible to see in the graph of Image 2, the use of metatexts is a common practice: 270 posts (88.5% of the sample) present textual information, hashtags or emojis. An expressive number (58.6% of the sample, 179 occurrences) of posts counts with hashtags or emojis, however, the simultaneous appearance is noticed in only 57 posts (18.6%).

Research points towards the photographic practice in social media is configured as a practice of writing, describing and interacting through

symbols, texts and narratives built conjointly with the image in a wide network with human agencies (voluntary insertion of text, choice of object and place photographed, etc.). and specific algorithms. The production of metatexts is a characteristic form of new sociotechnical conformations in digital social media, altering aspects in relation with the space, social interactions and the development of narratives of self. We presented an analysis of Instagram posts following three aspects: 1. Process of spatialization; 2. Process of sociability; 3. Process of production of self (portraits and *selfies*).

Spatialization process: relationships with the space

Spatialization processes are social technical relations in the constitution of territories, places and spaces. The human action, through symbols and artifacts, creates forms of control (territory), that, in an extensive and temporal dynamic, constitute the spaces. These, by association, produce the space. The human action is intrinsically spatializing. The media, as artifacts of action of the human presence in time and space, allow forms of reading and writing in space, inscribing social relations. As Michel de Certeau (1990) considered walking a type of language, we can think of media developing their own grammar in the production of space. In case of photography in social media, the components for geotagging and metatexts are fundamental elements for the creation of action and discourses that build the imaginary of place.

The capture of images for analysis was given within a universe restricted to publication in a public character and associated to geotagging. As we've seen, this is not the only way of identification. In the sample, there are 402 references to the urban space (either in image, or in textual terms). There is an average of 1.3 indication of place in each post beyond geotagging, that is common to all of the posts. There are also 14 posts that present, at the same time, three or more forms of reference to the space. The indication of the relation with the place is made through different strategies, sometimes redundantly. It is the case of the publication made in the profile of a child, in which the subtitle says, "let's go", with hashtags

saying #rollerblades and #citysquare. Or, in another case, using the geotag of Ana Lúcia Magalhães Square, in which we see an adult holding a baby in his lap with the subtitle “Enjoying the park with Zezo”. Or a post in which a young woman is standing in the grass of Dique do Tororó, with hashtags #corridinha #lifestyle (physical activity) and #diquedotororo #corridanodique (place) In a similar way, in another post, we see two photos showing the lake, the orishas and the football stadium at Dique do Tororó and a selfie with the face of the person in part of the frame, with the sculptures and the lake in the background. Beyond the indications in the image, there is a subtitle: “Meeting #dique and the orishas today and #arenafontenova from far away haha. #salvador #bahia”.

It is possible to see a similar behavior in other posts, such as the one performed in the Parque de Pituvaçu (Image 3). We see, in the left corner, part of a hand holding a piece of watermelon cut in the shape of a heart; in the background, a wide view of the pond and the surroundings filled by greenery. In the subtitles, there is reference about the type of specific place (a park) as well as the city, and even some type of demonstration of joy in relation to the season: “Summer heat + cool watermelon + Sunday at the park = Salvamor”, followed by an emoji representing a heart. In addition to the imagery and the text – involving summer, city and feelings related to Sunday at the park – there is a reinforcement in the hashtags: “#salvamor #sunday #beleza #cidadelinda #amor #ssalovers”.

In the sample, we perceive that, beyond the geotag, representations of place from the reference in the landscape, in the hashtag, in the subtitle or in the background of the image are common practices. We can perceive that the process of spatialization (SHIELDS, 1991), is not only given by the sharing of image or the moment of its production, but through the insertion of metatexts that work as a reference to place and the publication itself, in a narrative practice about a space that is materialized in a hybrid network. Thus, the sharing of photographs in social media constitutes today a photographic practice that is intrinsic to a practice of data. It is a modification in the spatializing processes of traditional photography. It is interesting to notice, in this analysis, how the materiality of the process of spatialization is constituted by a wide

network that goes through the place chosen, the artifact used, by the forms of editing and image treatment, by metatexts (hashtags, subtitles and symbols), by geotagging, by the algorithmic process of the social network, by the forms of sharing...

Image 3 – Different references to place in one post.



The photographic practice operates, consequently, as a performative actor-network, algorithmic, different from the practice of production of space in analogic photos or even digital photography before the arrival of social media. This new photographic environment allows users to create a narrative and a practice about the space through a wide network of human and non-human agencies (LATOUR, 2005). In different levels, the photographic spatialization is present, either by imagery, or by text, as a practice related to the logic of data production and the performativity of algorithms. As we've observed, the photographic practice does not end in the moment the image is made in the square or park, and is not only characterized by the sharing, but it is built through the logic of data production and algorithmic performances created through the interactions and insertions of metatexts. The processes of spatialization that also characterize this photographic practice performed in urban spaces are developed through a network of processes that necessarily include the production of digital data – geotagging, subtitles, comments, emojis, hashtags – and algorithmic procedures in social media. The photographic practice, therefore, belongs in a network of data practice.

Sociability process

With social media focused in photography, what we have today is widened spaces of socialization through the production, stocking and sharing images. Unlike analogic photography – that had other time of production and specific forms of circulation, that were slower and more centralized – or digital photography – made more quickly and with more ephemerality, but even so, with limited sharing – photography social media create conditions of sociability that were previously inexistent. Forms of sociability through photography became popular with the appearance of social networks dedicated to this area and contributed for the deconstruction of centrality of image. On Instagram, the reinforcement of sociability come from subtitles (simple texts, hashtags and emojis), widening the character of communication of contemporary photographic practices in social media.

In the posts analyzed, the forms of sociability in public space are developed in different ways.⁸ We find couples hugging, parents walking with their children, groups having a picnic, cyclists after a ride, families exercising, friends walking their dogs, etc. There are many examples, such as the selfie published by two friends celebrating the birthday of one of them (Image 4), in a post with the geotag Parque da Cidade and the subtitle “Clara’s Birthday– soon, videos with photos of this super cool b-day! Xoxoxox instafriends”. With different heart emojis, the subtitle reaffirms and produces a narrative continuity with the image representation of proximity. In a photo of two friends after an exercise at Ana Lúcia Magalhães Square (Image 4), the interactions through text complete the socialization. There is a montage with a new textual layer of information added to the photo, with the hashtag #AmigasDaCorreria written in pink, in addition to other information also included in the subtitle.

⁸ There is more portraits with two or more people (138) than portraits with only one person in the foreground (107). We see that, in the momento f taking a picture, there is a sociability that points towards na activity done in a group.

Image 4a – Selfie at the City Square.



Image 4b – Portrait at the Ana Lúcia Magalhães Square.



The same happens with groups of people. There are examples of meetings for celebrations of birthdays, baby showers, physical activities, work, family or religious gatherings. In the last case, we saw a post (Image 5a), in which a group of 12 people is sitting at the grass having a picnic. In the hashtags, there are references to the place (#parquedacidade) and the activity (#ldschurch #mormonchurch). Another example (Image

5b), at the City Square, is a montage with five different photos: a selfie alone, a selfie with three children in the back, a portrait of eight family members, an adult playing with a child, and, in the end, two elderly women interacting with themselves. The subtitle wraps up the image: “Because life is for the living”, followed by the hashtags #familylife #so-good #familyisthebasisofeverything”.

Images 5a and 5b – Examples of photos with groups of people.



There are also profiles created for dogs, simulating a possible autonomy of speech. Here, once again, the text is fundamental and the use of hashtags and subtitles to compose the processes of spatialization and sociability is evident. For example, in the post presented in the Image 6a, we see the picture of a couple sitting with Mike, the owner of the profile. In the subtitle, he says: “Because I love walking alongside my parents, it is a lot of play, a lot of treats, a lot of running and in the end, I am tired as a dog”, mixing a lot of emojis and hashtags. In the following post (Image 6b), we see Theo and his friends, without humans. In the subtitle we see: “When you meet your gang!”. In the comments, the interaction is performed by other profiles of dogs – maybe the ones that appear in the picture –, demonstrating sociability, implicit in texts of the owners through their dogs. The conversational practice of data, in these two examples, is essential to conduct narratively, in the interaction between image and metatexts, the presence and fictional relationship of animals in social media.

Images 6a and 6b – Profiles of Instagram created for dogs.



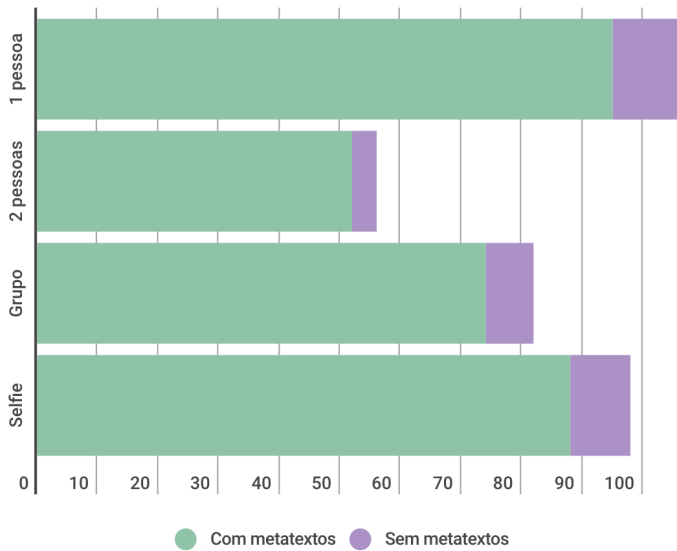


Thus, instead of incorporating a character of registration, aesthetic value or memory, the pictures of our sample translate in communicative terms, in relation with the other, of sharing and interaction of a wide network of agencies. This photographic practice is characterized not only for the production of an image, but for the sharing of a set of data – tags, comments, metatexts, symbols and geotags – created to propel experiences of sociability. Therefore, sociability, in this case, is supported by metatextual productions, by algorithmic procedures of the platform and by the interaction between different digital data. We argue that the photographic practice is placed as a conversational practice of data. It is inserted in a wide network of sociability geared towards a communication developed as a production of many metatexts that compose the photography itself. Thus, the use of hashtags and subtitles, for example, indicates an expressive direction, a confirmation of the communicative character of the contemporary photographic practice, pointing towards a bigger attention to the explicitation of feelings in a direct and unequivocal form. Here, an image is not worth a thousand words. The place matters, the photo matters, but everything must be sewn together by the text and the practice of data production – in subtitles, hashtags, comments, geotags and emojis.

Process of production of self: portraits and selfies

In 252 photos, people are the main object (82% of the total). The place and the forms of sociability appear both in pictures and in texts, even if they are associated, for example, to a certain portrait geared towards the self, as in the selfie. Even though it is a self-portrait, the selfie is developed as a practice of relationship with the other, of sharing a relational intimacy (PASTOR, 2017). Escaping the image, this relationship with the other is done through this conversational practice of data, in the constant production of metatexts. In the different types of portrait (individual, group or selfie), it is possible to perceive the dominance of the textual insertion (Image 7).

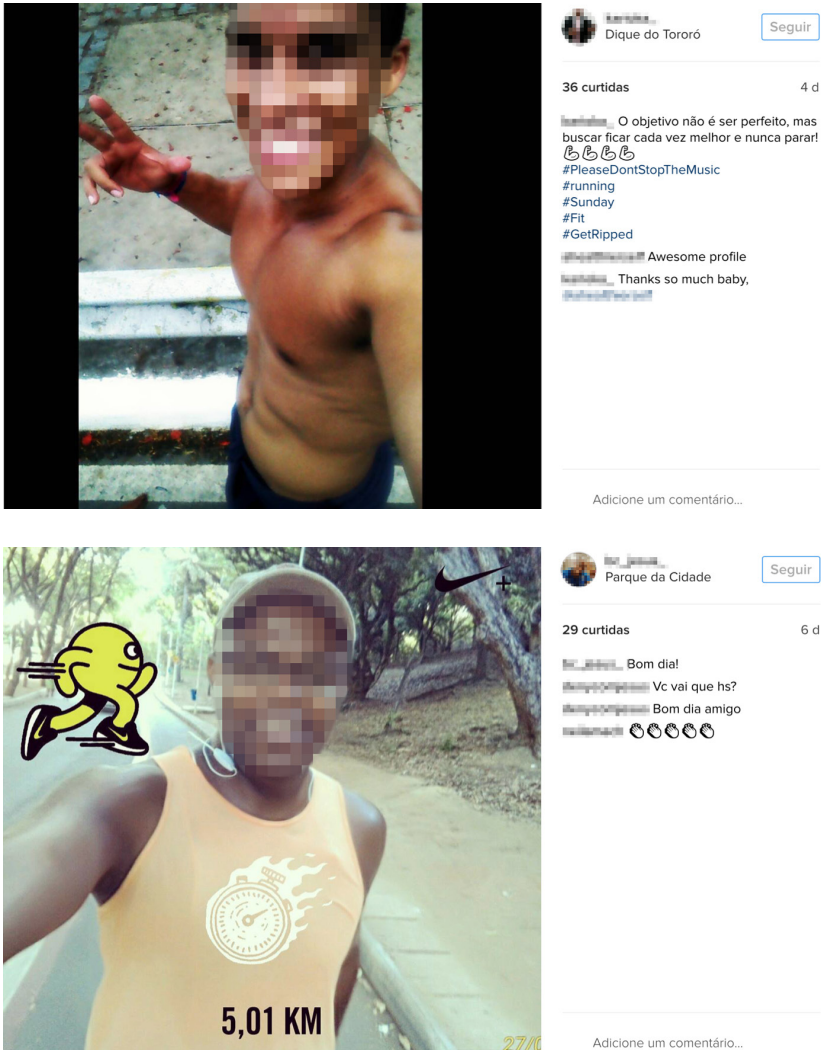
Image 7 – Relationship between types of portrait and metatexts.



Let's take as an example a selfie taken by a young man at Dique to Tororó (Image 8a). Taken before or after a running session – as the hashtag #running indicates –, the self-portrait is complemented by three types of metatext (hashtags, subtitle and emojis) all of them referencing the exercise. In another, geotagged at the City Square, we see a middle aged man with a hat, a sleeveless shirt and headphones, also running.

He adds to the picture the information of how many kilometers he ran and a drawing. We see, once again, metatext juxtaposed to the picture itself, processed through the algorithmic performativity of another app.⁹

Pictures 8a and 8b – Two selfies taken, respectively, at Dique do Tororó and at City Square.



9 The app used is probably Nike+ Run Club. See <http://www.nike.com.br/corrida/app-nike-plus>.

Images 9a and 9b – Portraits with two or more people



 rafaelcsmira
Dique do Tororó Seguir

80 curtidas 3 d

rafaelcsmira: Cara de um 🐼, focinho do outro 🐼 #amordetio #tardeemfamilia
clínica_pombi Dupla de dois da zorra!!!!❤️
😂😂😂
rafaelcsmira: [clínica_pombi](#) kkkkkk ❤️❤️

Adicione um comentário...



 mairodultra
Parque da Cidade Seguir

68 curtidas 3 d

mairodultra E ontem foi o aniversário do nosso LUCCA 🥰❤️ #tiaMaiama #amizadeétudo #meusmelhores #obrigadatosos #amodemais
ou_daisy Foi maravilhoso ❤️
legandode1 #amizadeétudo obrigado mai 🥰
mãemagalhua21 Foi lindo
mairodultra @legandode1 por nada amigo! Lucca merece muito mais! ❤️
mairodultra @legandode1 @ou_daisy Graças a vocês! 🥰
mmarianamocreira Amei a iniciativa @legandode1 . Você é show!!!!

Adicione um comentário...

The great number of portraits – including selfies – spread on social media, such as these analyzed here, do not show a weakening of processes of spatialization or sociability, but rather a process of production of images of self that points towards a relational character.

Conclusion

The conclusions of this article find partial echoes in many studies of authors that talk about the relationship among photography, smartphones and social network. We can quote the emergency of new formats of interpersonal relationships through the image (RIVIÈRE, 2006); the hybrid character of connection and production of image linked to cell-phones (LEMOS, 2007); forms of intimacy and relationships between public and private (LASÉN, 2013; LASÉN e GÓMEZ CRUZ, 2009); the social-technical network supported by connectivity (GÓMEZ CRUZ e MEYER, 2012); the “conversational image” (GÓMEZ CRUZ e MEYER, 2012) the relationship between the photography and software, algorithms, metadata and the urban space (HOCHMAN, 2014; HOELZL e MARIE, 2016; MANOVICH, 2016), and others. There are changes in the relationship between places and the photographic practice mediated by apps (BOULLIER, 2014) and the interactions that are configured not only in the moment of the action of photographing, but also in traces of sociability and data generated and shared in a continuum of experience. The frontiers between image and data are blurred, transforming the urban experience and the city itself (HOELZL e MARIE, 2016; SCHWARTZ e HOCHMAN, 2014).

However, what seems to be left unsaid is how the new photographic practice is instituted as an actor-network that has the data practice, the algorithmic performativity of the system and forms of sharing in the social network one of their main elements. None of them attest, as we see in this research, the character of photography in the social network as a practice of algorithmic data and performativity through metatexts, with a complementary narrative to the image. The image is certainly important, but the process of mediation is given, from now on, in a wide movement of production of machine and data performances. Therefore, we call “photographic practice” this actor-network this performative sensibility (LEMOS and BITENCOURT, 2017) this communication of things (LEMOS, 2013), not only the moment in which an image is

produced in a click on a smartphone screen or even the act of sharing it in a platform.

All photographic action triggers agencies in a wide network of actors, since the analogic devices from the digital cameras. What we point here is not new of this photographic action as actor-network, but the emergency of a new photographic process that is given in a network of algorithmic performances associated to metatexts, supported by a practice of data production that works as one of the main elements in the communicational exchanges. i. e., a wide performatic network that goes through photo, through the experience of the relationship with the other, through the space, the algorithms that interpret them, comments and interactions in social media, in addition to the different materials that compose them – metadata, subtitles, hashtags, geotags, emojis, etc. Within this intertwining of data, a new photographic practice is developed, that is not comprised to the image and that has the sharing and production of metatexts its central moment.

The photographic practice on Instagram, therefore, constitutes an important mediator in the processes of spatialization and sociabilization, (in group, individually or in selfies) as a translator of communicational forms of photography today. The photographic practice is transformed into a capture of technically retouched images, working as a social memory for a wider communicational process, involving the place, the preparation – with the choice of poses and images, the ludic moment, the sharing and the informational reinforcement of subtitles, comments and hashtags. To use the term of André Gunther (2014), we have a conversational image, but in the logic of data and algorithms of the system in question. This conversational property surpasses the image itself, allowing us to think about the photographic practice as a set of production of digital data.

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