



The Expanded Field of Printmaking: Continuities, Ruptures, Crossings, and Contamination

Maria do Carmo de Freitas Veneroso
PPGA-UFGM/CNPq

Changes in the statute of printmaking, processed throughout the 20th Century and continued in the 21st Century have enabled the approach of printing practices from the perspective of an **expanded field**, in which printmaking dialogues with other languages. The existence of this expanded field of printmaking brings to this discussion the concept of sculpture in the expanded field, of Rosalind Krauss. In a text published in 1979 in *October Magazine*, Krauss states:

Over the last ten years rather surprising things have come to be called sculpture: narrow corridors with TV monitors at the ends; large photographs documenting the country hikes; mirrors placed at strange angles in ordinary rooms; temporary lines cut into the floor of the desert. Nothing, it would seem, could possibly give to such a motley of effort the right to lay claim to whatever one might mean by the category of sculpture. Unless, that is, the category can be made to become almost infinitely malleable (Krauss, 2008, p. 129).

I agree with the author when she points out that the expansion of the field that characterizes the territory of postmodernism has two implicit aspects: "one of these concerns the practice of individual artists; the other has to do with the question of medium" (Krauss, 2008, p. 136). With regard to individual practice, it is easy to realize that many artists found themselves occupying, successively, different places within the expanded field. Krauss points out that there was a suspicion of the part of the critique of an artistic trajectory that moves continually and erratically beyond the domain of sculpture. According to the author, it derives:

...obviously from the modernist demand for the purity and separateness of the various mediums (and thus the necessary specialization of a practitioner within a given medium). But what appears as eclectic from

one point of view can be seen as rigorously logical from another. For, within the situation of postmodernism, practice is not defined in relation to a given medium – sculpture – but rather in relation to the logical operations on a set of cultural terms, for which any medium – photography, books, lines on walls, mirrors, or sculpture itself – might be used (Krauss, 2008, p. 136).

One can draw a parallel between what happened to sculpture because of the changes brought by Minimalism, leading to the expansion of its field, and what happened to printmaking, considering both the impact of Pop art on the production of the printmakers, and that brought by Conceptual art, which led to an exploration of the use of verbal language in prints and artists' books, produced from the late 1960s and early 1970s. All this would allow a more experimental and libertarian use of graphic media by artists. Thus, the postmodernist field of printmaking would involve a similar expansion to the one of sculpture's, around a different set of terms like the architecture / landscape binomial related to sculpture – probably involving uniqueness / reproducibility and even high / low culture binomials.

The frequent exchange that has existed between the artistic languages when they interact with each other contributes to a rupture with old parameters that preserved the autonomy of the disciplines, thus requiring new approaches to occur. Discussing the crisis of Art History, researcher Maria Lúcia Kern (2005) affirms that contemporary art is produced from substantial changes in relation to modern art. According to Kern, "these changes no longer fit the criteria of traditional historiography, of original and eternal works of art, of evolution and progress, of a monolithic universal art, or restricting the categories such as painting, sculpture, printmaking and drawing" (2005: 7). I agree with the author, when she states:

The links of contemporary art with other fields of knowledge and cultural activities accentuate the crisis of Art History, which back then used to work with specialized knowledge. Besides, the instability of contemporary art, the internal polemics of its field and thrown outwardly of it, as well as its constant formation hamper its definition (Kern, 2005: 7).

Thereby, art from the second half of the 20th Century has been forwarded toward a questioning of its basic concepts. Seeking new parameters, the artists experience different trends in order to extend the artistic field beyond a pure visuality.

The issues on which we intend to speculate in this text involve, therefore, the tendency of current printmaking to enlarge its field of activity. It is also relevant to this study the problematic relationship between artistic and commercial printmaking, involving the relations and intersections between printmaking as a craft and printmaking as a means of expression.

It can be considered that the technical procedures involved in printmaking and graphic printing, in general, near the artistic and commercial prints through the printing processes used by artists and designers or advertising.

The traditional boundaries of printed art are themselves not as clear as they were. In the popular imagination, the quintessential print might be a delicate black and white etching, but there is actually no such thing as the quintessential print. Artists are continually redefining parameters (Wye, 1996, p. 7).

It can be seen, for example, that many contemporary artists have made use of commercial printing processes. While this appropriation of commercial techniques approaches their work of advertising, the messages conveyed in them often subvert this use.

My investigations on printmaking are based on my own experience as a printmaker and also on statements of authors such as Walter Benjamin, who with his text "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", lays the foundation for discussing the changes brought about with the technical reproducibility of the image, on issues such as authorship, the concept of originality and authenticity, as well as the anachronism of printing.

Resuming these issues in the contemporary context, Georges Didi-Huberman contributes to this discussion, especially with the text originally published in the exhibition catalogue of *L'Empreinte*, which occurred in 1997 at Beaubourg, in Paris, and gave the book *La ressemblance par contact. Archéologie, anachronisme et modernité de l'empreinte*, in which the author discusses printing, a basic concept for this study, in a broad and comprehensive manner.

Andreas Huyssen is another important partner in bringing the discussion about the end of the great divide between high art and mass culture, which also feeds my questions about current printmaking.

From these preliminary statements, this text discusses the expanded field of printmaking, focusing specifically on the relationship between artistic and commercial printing, their crosses and contamination, focusing on the newspaper as a metaphor of modernity and of art's contamination by commercial language.

High art x mass culture

Three moments of rupture can be pointed out that profoundly affected printmaking in a particular way, and printing, in a broader sense: the

development on the press in the West from the Renaissance, and later, in modernity, the invention and development of photography, followed by digital revolution/proliferation, which is also deeply affecting art and printmaking.

Among the highlighted moments of rupture, the invention of photography (1826) can be considered decisive for the arts as a whole, and for printmaking in particular, since photography would revolutionize the printing techniques. If until that moment, brands, posters, maps, and other commercial ads were printed with printmaking techniques such as woodcut, engraving and lithography, with the emergence of new printing techniques based on photography, they started to be printed with the use of *clichés* and off-set. From there, the printmaking techniques started to become obsolete for commercial use becoming appropriated by artists, the same occurring with typography. That is a process that continues to happen given the constant obsolescence of commercial printing techniques.

In the 20th Century printmaking expanded its field of activity, exploring the dialogue with other artistic languages, mainly from the 1960s, when there was a real revival of printmaking in countries like the United States and Brazil, among others, after a relative withdrawal. One can seek the reasons for this rebirth in the emphasis given to the printing processes during the 1960s, when there was a great development of the mass media and popularization of the graphic image. The outbreak of Pop art was a determining factor on this revival of printmaking in new terms with the breakthrough of the "Great Divide" between high art and mass culture. Andreas Huyssen explains that what he calls the **Great Divide** is the kind of discourse that insists on the categorical distinction between high art and mass culture (1987: viii). The breaking of this Great Divide explains the contamination of art by mass media and vice-versa. According to the author:

...the boundaries between high art and mass culture have become increasingly blurred, and we should begin to see that process as one of opportunity rather than lamenting loss of quality and failure of nerve. There are many successful attempts by artists to incorporate mass cultural forms into their work, and certain segments of mass culture have increasingly adopted strategies from on high. If anything, that is the posmodern condition in literature and the arts. For quite some time, artists and writers have lived and worked after the Great Division (Huyssen, 1987, p. ix).

Artists and poets have contributed and continue to contribute to the dialogue between high art and mass culture, by incorporating strategies that break this dichotomy between high / low culture. Undoubtedly, the development and

popularization of new printing processes strongly contributed to make the graphic image to dominate even the public space, in the form of urban interventions. The appropriation of pre-existing images, collage, photographic processes, the pursuit of the three-dimensionality of the print are some of the factors that collaborated to the expansion of the mode of operation of printmakers. There has been a clear rapprochement between printing, text and image, which dialogue can also be analyzed from the common origin of writing, drawing and printing, and its developments through the ages, culminating in his being taken back by contemporary artists. For all these mentioned factors, the boundaries that defined printmaking began to blur.

The change wrought in the statute of printmaking generated at least two equally important trends. While several printmakers remained faithful to traditional printing techniques, others began to extend their limits beyond those generally accepted. The 1980s and 1990s were very conducive to printmaking, because of its freedom and diversity and at that moment:

While some artists began to use the medium's potential for interacting directly with society through commercial techniques, others brought a new generation's commitment and energy to the traditional techniques practiced in established workshops (Wye, 1996, p. 14-15).

And yet:

Those whose strategies involved a breaking down of the barriers between art and life usually came to printmaking as a means to an end, and in the natural course of their work's development, while the traditional printmakers were selected to work in the medium by print publishers (Wye, 1996, p. 15).

From that time on it began to be a coexistence between traditional printmaking techniques and other less orthodox. Some artists continued to address printmaking from the perspective of painting, a practice that often leads to the use of traditional printing techniques. For others, whose art is based primarily on the concept, printmaking becomes a medium used more experimentally.

Printing/word/image

Recently it is noticeable a close relationship between word and image in the arts, often involving printing procedures. However, these relationships have existed since the remotest times, whereas the prehistoric art can be considered the writing of prehistoric man. This dialogue between word and image was continued until the Renaissance, and with the invention of the printing press by Gutenberg

the relationships between printing, word and image suffered concussions and transformations, been reconciled from the late 20th Century and early 21st Century, in the work of poets and artists such as Stéphane Mallarmé and Pablo Picasso, who began to approach the writing as image, in their works.

It is noticed that the use of visual text by the artists from the 20th Century is linked to a strong trend in that century: the usage of non artistic supplies and materials, mainly the printed ones. This is present from cubism, in Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque's *papiers collés*, and on Kurt Schwitters' collages, also emerging in the work of Marcel Duchamp with his ready - mades. This pop trend was resumed in the work of many artists, especially Robert Rauschenberg and Andy Warhol. If artistic printmaking had trodden his way without significant changes until the 1960s, when techniques and graphics stormed the art world artists began to associate the traditional techniques of artistic printmaking with others based on photographic reproduction and other media already used commercially. Pop art is an especially fruitful time in this context, continuing to bring numberless unfoldings.

This points to the contamination of printmaking by commercial printing processes, such as the daily newspaper, posters on the streets and advertising, making an important point: the relationship between artistic and commercial printing. It can be said that there is still a dialogue between the two, and it may be possible to assert that the impurity and contamination characteristics are inherent to the graphic activities, not making sense to seek for a purity of graphic media. One can cite many examples where this dialogue is explored by artists, adding meaning to the works, such as the use of the newspaper as a support or reference, street posters, stickers, etc.

The newspaper can be used as a metaphor for the contamination of printmaking: in the beginning, prints were used to illustrate texts and drawing cartoons in newspapers and magazines, such as those printed in lithography by Honoré Daumier. Later the newspaper began to be used by artists as a support for the prints, and also as a vehicle for the transmission of ideas. The process of contamination of artistic printmaking by commercial processes continues through other graphic media, such as digital printing. It does not make sense, anymore, to try to preserve a supposed purity of printmaking, as this dialogue between art and non-art can be exhilarating.

Thus, this study concerns the fact printmaking, historically, have not been used for artistic purposes, been part of circuits that are not recognized as "art". It is exciting to think that this kind of "impurity" of the print is something inherent to it and should not be hidden or overcome, but on the contrary, be explored and brought into focus by the printmaker. Ie, it may be challenging not seek to differentiate between commercial and artistic printmaking, but something in the opposite direction, that questions, puts in check, and causes a short-circuit in the differentiation, as is already being done by various artists.

The daily newspaper as a metaphor of modernity

In the late 19th century to the 20th century, along with a move toward a poetry that uses increasingly plastic elements in its works, a similar situation occurred in the fine arts, with artists using increasingly writing resources in their works. One can state that the word first appeared in the space of the painting, in a more systematic way and integrated to the artistic discourse, in the production of Cubist painters in the 1910s. The ideas of progress and modernity would replace the worship of nature and fascination with landscape, present in the pictorial production of the 19th century. By appropriating fragments of urban reality, with the use of printed material such as typographical texts, newspapers, musical scores, packaging, subway tickets, Cubist painters introduced the word in their collages. As already pointed out, the relationship between printing and writing are historical and now one can note a resumption of this vocation of printing in dialogue with writing. This has occurred in several ways: some printmakers created intertextual dialogues with literature, advertising appeared often being subverted in the work of different artists working with various forms of printing, the text appeared as image in a series of works, artists convey political messages through their visual texts, discussing issues of gender, race , etc.

My approach to the relationship between word and image starts from the consideration that a new way of addressing this dialogue emerged in the late 19th century, both in fine arts and in literature, resuming ancient links between word and image. The poet Stéphane Mallarmé caught the attention of artists and poets to the visuality of the written word and the importance of the surface of the page, calling attention to the white or gaps in the construction of the poem, while Picasso and Braque also started exploring the possibilities of the text as image in their works. Thus, from the Cubist collages of these two artists, the

poem *Un coup de des*, by Mallarmé and the calligrams by Guillaume Apollinaire, a new visuality of the letter and of the page emerged, which would extend throughout the 20th century and continued in the 21st century, in the work of artists and poets.

One important factor should be mentioned in the emphasis on visuality and materiality of the word in the poem by Mallarmé and the collages of Picasso: both use the printed newspaper as an important reference in their works. Despite the daily newspaper have arisen in Leipzig, Germany, in 1650, it was thanks to advances in printing techniques brought by modernity that it popularized. Also discovered in the 19th century, the commercial potential of journalism as a profitable business for entrepreneurs led to the emergence of the first publications similar to the ones we see in current days. Undoubtedly, the popularity of the newspaper, which was part of the new visuality of the period, was instrumental in the work of poets and artists.

Mallarmé in his poem uses the same kind of typographical irregularity typical of newspapers: the mixture of different font sizes, the use of combination of uppercase, lowercase and italic, the box and the creation of asymmetrical layouts and spaces visually motivated. In the collages of Picasso, references to the newspaper are evident, since he uses sheets of printed paper as important elements in them, as well as other printed materials second hand.

The appropriation of the newspaper and other printed materials second hand would be taken by various artists, and this aspect of the printing would be continued into the 20th century and early 21st century.

Yves Klein produces a remarkable work in November 27, 1960, in which a printed newspaper is used as a vehicle for his message. This is *Dimanche, le journal d'un seul jour*, in which he plays the iconic photographic montage in which he leaps into the void. At this time, Klein was immersed in the concept of immateriality, and after making the exposure *Blank*, in 1958, which left the gallery completely empty, he addressed the levitation with the sense of spirituality and to achieve absolute freedom.

The iconic work of Marcel Duchamp, the *Green Box* (1934), also refers directly to two major acquisitions of our culture: media and photography. Within this same approach is Fluxus, with *Fluxus Collective*, a briefcase which brings works

produced by the group, including a printed newspaper, and also the work by Arlindo Daibert, *Addresses*, 1992, a box containing clippings of pages of books and other references to writing and printing.

In the mid-1990s Antoni Muntadas began *On Translation series*, which currently consists of more than thirty-five projects. An example, *On Translation: Warning*, was released in Geneva and includes printed interventions in newspapers, on postcards and stickers. The printed material mass produced by Muntadas, bringing white letters on a red background, says "Warning: Perception requires involvement", and adhesives that are part of this campaign arise in unexpected places.

By adopting strategies of media and mass advertising and subverting them for his own messages, Muntadas reaches out a population that has learned to absorb and interpret the ubiquitous printed materials around it. His goal is to break through the numbing effect of information overload, providing new insight into the ways and means of media manipulation and calling for active involvement in the world at large (Wye; Weitman, 2006, p. 179).

The use of newspaper has reverberated in other works, in different contexts, such as the Croatian Ivana Keser's, more than twenty-five years younger than Muntadas, and who is part of a generation's alternative practices are common strategies. She took the newspaper format in her own works, having worked in a small office of a newspaper, where she learned basic techniques of design layout, editorial writing and advertising. She claims she sought a media type by which to express her ideas, a surface capable of receiving very different things. So far Keser conceived more than a dozen newspapers, including *Local-Global* (1995) and *Local Newspapers* (1997), often presenting them in collective exhibitions, where they are offered to the public in stacks. In them, the artist includes commentaries on social and political issues, and random personal reflections. Her journals become visual and textual collages full of poetic associations between words and images (Wye; Weitman, 2006, p. 180).

Felix Gonzalez-Torres had also approached the impression of a three-dimensional point of view, using the strategy of having the prints assembled in stacks, which resemble the minimalist volumes. His works, such as *Untitled (Death by Gun)*, 1990, are printed on newsprint, using a commercial offset process, and through them the artist discusses issues such as the multiple and technical reproducibility taken to infinity, since the idea is that the stacks are always refed with new proofs.

The exploration of the relationship between artistic and commercial printmaking in Brazil has been taken by Paul Bruscky, who has been producing since the 1960s, among other things, what he calls "experimental printmaking". The artist explains:

they are prints that arise from things I find on the street, that the edition will not be more than seven or eight copies in experiments that use different colors. There are experiences! The xerography, for example, is printmaking, the fax is a kind of a print that I have been developing (Bruscky 2011, p. 11).

The multiplication of the image permeates much of the production of Bruscky, including his artists' books. He claims to be interested his work "reaches a wide audience and not just a specific audience that goes to museums and galleries". He adds, "So I worked with various media and I think art is to circulate, so I did several projects / works within the movement Mail Art" (Bruscky 2011, p. 11-14). Also interested in the idea of the circulation of the artwork, the artist has created what he calls e-mail art, a kind of pun on Mail Art, considered outdated with the diffusion of the internet. The newspaper is also adopted as a medium in *Art Classified series*, in which he uses daily newspaper to convey his messages. This is a work in process, which started around 1973, in the *Journal of Brazil*, and with which Bruscky search "to reach a large audience, including people outside the art [...] Moreover, it is also a way to record an idea" (2011: 40). He explains that it is a return to the beginning of his work, to his concern with the multiplicity of his work, which, in this case, "is in every edition of the newspaper". However, he continues, "in 1977 the Federal Police censured it because some of my ads where said to be encrypted messages and I spent a period forbidden to publish in newspapers" (Bruscky 2011, p. 40). They were conceptual messages such as "how to color the clouds". In one of the papers in this series the artist appropriated, for example, the *Saudade* neighborhood in Belo Horizonte: "*Saudade* (Nostalgia) is not just a neighborhood in Belo Horizonte, is a feeling, a proposal: it is art" (Bruscky 2011, p. 41).

Printed flyers have been used by artists like Paulo Nazareth, whose work points to the same direction as previously mentioned, when he exposes printed material in stacks on tables, selling them at a symbolic price of R\$ 0.25 each, or when he distributes them for free on the streets to passersby. This artist, who also produced small runs of woodcuts, lithographs and photo lithographs in printmaking workshops, is interested in the reproducibility of the artwork as a way to circulate it. That is why he started using processes of reproduction and

commercial offset of low cost printed on newsprint, thereby considerably increasing the circulation of his works. Through P. NAZARETH EDITIONS / LTDA he produces his prints, which refer to the work of Yoko Ono, artist who participated in *Fluxus*, in the way both use the word to propose artistic and political actions.

Although not all recent works shown in this paper are *stricto sensu* prints, all of them use the graphical language and printing, first or second hand. In addition, they all in some way give sequence to the work of artists and poets from the early 20th century, in the way they approach the printing and the dialogue between word and image.

FINAL THOUGHTS

New technologies have been rapidly incorporated into artistic printmaking, and traditional printmaking techniques have been modified and sometimes facilitated by xerox, computer, and laser and inkjet printers. Many artists have combined digital printing and traditional printmaking processes, producing compelling works. As the coverage increases, some artists seek ways to pervert and explore the unknown potential of more traditional methods, either through different paper surfaces, working on an unprecedented scale, or simply producing in order to broaden the definition of "printmaking".

The rise of new media - seen by some as a threat to the future of printmaking - has just expanded the options available. Just as the invention of lithography did not let woodcut and engraving redundant, and photography not spelled the end of traditional graphic media, digital technologies also did not replace other technologies, but extended options and possibilities (Saunders and Miles, 2006).

Printmaking crosses the start of this millennium, in a phase of changes and uncertainties, which also characterizes much of the art that is being produced. In this context, it would not be appropriate to use fixed concepts, because it is an unstable and shaky ground, and therefore, exciting and challenging, which do not fit closed settings. Gradually, digital printing processes are being made available so that they can also be incorporated by the artists to their work, making the numerical matrix used and valued, alongside with the physical matrices, further expanding the field of printmaking.

References

- BENJAMIN, Walter. A obra de arte na era de sua reprodutibilidade técnica. In: *Magia e técnica, arte e política*. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1994, p.165-196.
- BRUSCKY, Paulo. RIBEIRO, Marília A. (Org.) *Paulo Bruscky: depoimento*. (Coleção Circuito Atelier). Belo Horizonte: C/Arte, 2011.
- DIDI-HUBERMAN, Georges (Org.). *L'Empreinte*. Paris: [s.n.], 1997. Cat. exp., 19 fev. - 19 mai. 1997, Centre G. Pompidou.
- DIDI-HUBERMAN, Georges *La ressemblance par contact*. Archéologie, anachronisme et modernité de l'empreinte. Paris: Minuit, 2008.
- FRANCA, Patrícia (Adapt. Trad.). *L'Empreinte Parte I e II*. [s/l.: s.n., 2000] Inédito. Do original: DIDI-HUBERMAN, Georges (Org.). *L'Empreinte*. Paris:[s.n.], 1997. Cat. de exp., 19 fev. - 19 mai. 1997, Centre G. Pompidou.
- HUYSSSEN, Andreas. *After the great divide - Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987.
- KERN, Maria Lúcia Bastos. Historiografia da arte: revisões e reflexões face à arte contemporânea. *Anais do XXIV Colóquio do Comitê Brasileiro de História da Arte*. Belo Horizonte: CBHA, 2005.
- KOSSOVITCH, Leon; LAUDANNA, Mayra; RESENDE, Ricardo. *Gravura: arte brasileira do século XX*. SP: Cosac & Naify: Itaú Cultural, 2000.
- KRAUSS, Rosalind. La sculpture dans le champ élargi. In: *L'originalité de l'avant-garde et autres mythes modernistes*. Paris: Macula, 1993, p. 125-126.
- KRAUSS, Rosalind. A escultura no campo ampliado. *Arte & Ensaios*. Rio de Janeiro: EBA, UFRJ, 2008. Ano XV, nº17, 128-137, 2008. Available in: www.ppgav.eba.ufrj.br/wp-content/.../ae17_Rosalind_Krauss.pdf Acess: 12 nov. 2012.
- NOYCE, Richard. *Printmaking at the edge*. 45 artists: 16 countries: a new perspective. London: A & C Black, 2006.
- SAFF, Donald et al. *Printmaking: History and Process*. New York: Holt Rinehart & Winston, 1983.
- SAUNDERS, Gill; MILES, Rosie. *Prints Now: directions and definitions*. London: V & A Publications, 2006.
- TÁVORA, Maria Luisa Luz; FERREIRA, Heloisa Pires; CÂMARA, Adamastor. *Gravura brasileira hoje: depoimentos*. RJ: Oficina de Gravura Sesc Tijuca, 1995. (v. 1 e 2).
- VENEROSO, Maria do Carmo de Freitas. *Caligrafias e Escrituras: diálogo e intertexto no processo escritural nas artes no século XX*. Belo Horizonte: C/Arte, 2012.
- VENEROSO, Maria do Carmo de Freitas. A gravura no 'campo ampliado': relações entre palavra e imagem na gravura, gravura e fotografia e gravura tridimensional na contemporaneidade. In: VENEROSO, Maria do Carmo de

Freitas; MELENDI, Maria Angelica (Org.). *Diálogos entre linguagens* Belo Horizonte: C/Arte, 2010.

WYE, Deborah. *Thinking Print: Books to Billboards, 1980 - 95*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1996.

WYE, Deborah, WEITMAN, Wendy. *Eye on Europe. Prints, books, & multiples/1960 to now*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2006.