
“S-PUNTI DI VISTA”: ADOLESCENCE AND VISUAL NARRATIVES IN THE PROVINCE OF MILAN

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ABSTRACT

These photos are the result of a workshop held at CPIA (Provincial Center for Adult Education) in Cinisello Balsamo (Milan), from March to December 2018. This work reflects on the imagery of twelve kids coming from different countries and backgrounds. Participants developed a path for research, narration and analysis of the contemporary overuse of images, taking their distances from it with the help of an alternative medium: disposable cameras.

KEYWORDS

Participatory photography, visual anthropology, youngsters, migration

BIO

Erica Belli is a photographer and educator with a degree from the Italian Institute of Photography (Milan) and a master in iconographical research (CFP Bauer, Milan). Her work concentrates on migration, marginalization and family, through a vernacular eye and analogical techniques, she tells us stories of the uneventful everyday. She is passionate about art therapy and believes in the contemporary need for a broader education on the meanings and uses of images.

Paolo Grassi (Polytechnic University of Milan and University of Padua) is a social anthropologist with a specialisation in development. He has also worked as a youth worker, a teacher, a project manager assistant, and a street educator. Over the past eight years, he has developed interests in issues relating to urban segregation, violence and marginality.

Matteo Spertini is a photographer and graphic designer who likes to tell stories with images and words. His work often concentrates on social, economical and geographical marginalization. He studied at the Academy of Brera (Milan) and has a master in documentary photography from the Kaverdash Photography School. In 2016 together with the anthropologist Paolo Grassi and the still-life photographer Christian Parolari, he published “Europe deports: Asylum seekers in the web of the Dublin Regulation” by Ombre Corte, Verona.

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Some call it “generation Z”, born between 1995 and 2012, smartphone in their hands. Born in an historical moment when the TV and the publishing industry was already on the rise of its decline, and social networks were boldly establishing as the new centre of media communication. The theme of expressing oneself through images (seen and produced) takes on a central role in the culture of teenagers and youngsters, regardless of their background.

The photos are the result of a workshop taking place at CPIA2 (Provincial Centre for the Education of Adults) in Cinisello Balsamo (Milan), between March and December 2018. The course wanted to reflect on the imagery of a group of twelve adolescents and youngsters age 14 to 24, coming from different countries (Ecuador, Egypt, Gambia, Nigeria, Peru, Salvador, Senegal, Sudan, Togo and Mali): a very heterogeneous group, pooled by the fact that all participants had the need to learn Italian and obtain their grade eight diploma (Diploma di Terza Media). Under the guide of Erica Belli, photographer and teacher and Matteo Spertini, photographer and graphic designer, and thanks to the scientific supervision of Paolo Grassi, cultural anthropologist and educator, participants developed a path for research, narration and critical analysis of the contemporary “hyper” use of images, taking their distances from it by using an alternative medium: a disposable camera. This kind of camera requires patience. The shots cannot be edited, deleted or filtered. The resulted narration is much more “honest”, less concise but more homogeneous in the language (everyone used the same kind of disposable camera). In this way, single work has become a collective project, a visual diary of a group.

The narration starts from the subjective choices of the participants, in response to simple “stimulating questions” (Where are you from? Where do you live? Who would you like to be tomorrow? Which objects better represent yourself?) The final result seems to underline the discrepancies, as well as similarities and converging lines, along their biographical trajectories. There are bedrooms and school rooms, urban landscapes, music and phones. Some comments, collected with the technique of photo elicitation, are addition to the images: “In 2030 I am in Turkey. I walk with a friend in a beautiful place” says M., an Egyptian girl. “I like calm places, where there’s peace. Because it is important to be able to relax”, adds E. from Bolivia. “Money is important, it has to be enough to go by and then, that’s fine” says O., 18 years old. “In 2030 I live in Paris, I have a wife, many kids, a good job and I earn good money”, keeps imagining a Malian guy. Some other comments reflect on the path endeavoured during the workshop: “I enjoyed photographing nature!”, “It has been as if looking better”, “It was interesting to look for the right framing, it is changed the way I look at things”. Photos reflect on the habits and personal stories of the participants. A Koran or an Andean purse, for instance, have marked some different cultural references.

These photos are an account that investigates in the plies of everyday life. They are an ethnographic account, if doing ethnography essentially means grasping the point of view of our interlocutors and formulating interpretations in a dialogical way. Regardless of the homogeneity of the artistic language, these photos try to challenge the monolithic category of “foreigner/migrant”. The facilitators of the workshop do not disappear from the final product, but they co-construct it, giving participants a direction, forming them on the use of the camera, on composition and editing of the photos. The teachers were involved in the social networks of the participants, thanks to the share of pieces of their imaginaries.



FIGURE 1: V. 16 years old, Peru.



FIGURE 2: M. 22 years old, Salvador.



FIGURE 3: 13. S. 21, Togo. An **automated teller machine (ATM)** is an electronic banking outlet that allows customers to complete basic transactions without the aid of a branch representative or teller. Anyone with a credit card or debit card can access most **ATMs**. I decided to take this picture because when I was little I always had in my thoughts to work in a bank. Often I asked myself how to become a banker? But in order to do it you need to be able to have secondary degrees and since I have not got them, in time, I became discouraged. Until this day I still try to always know how banks work and their importance.



FIGURE 4: M. 16 years old, Egypt. I love looking at the sky from my balcony, because it looks close to me. I even love its purity. I also like how those things on the roofs look like, and that bird.



FIGURE 5: 17. O. 19 years old, Mali. This guy is called I., he comes from Gambia and he is 29 years old. He lives in a emigration shelter, with many other guys in Cinisello Balsamo. He is a migrant, we met each other there. I shot this picture because living in community is not easy.

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