

ZUM Magazine: excitement in Brazil's cultural scene

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Translated by Roberto Cataldo Costa

Abstract: This is a review of *ZUM*, a semiannual magazine published by the Moreira Sales Institute. Aspects such as production, distribution, editorial line and the importance of the publication in Brazil's art and culture scene will be addressed under a critical and historical approach.

Keywords: Contemporary Art. Photography. *ZUM Magazine*.

In October 2011, a new medium emerged in Brazil, intended to speed up circulation of images and information about the universe of contemporary photography: *ZUM*, a semiannual magazine published by the Moreira Salles Institute (IMS), an institution dedicated to developing and promoting cultural programs in the areas of photography, literature, libraries, visual arts, and Brazilian music.

In its first editorial, *ZUM* presented itself as a space for debates on contemporary photography, promising to focus on critical reflection and intersecting photography with literature, film and other forms of artistic expression. It met the expectations. From the outset it brought authors' voices to the foreground, whether they were established or novice photographers, editors or articulators of opinions who at some point were able to produce unique points of view among mass-produced opinions circulating in the media or even in the halls of cultural institutions.



Figure 1. Covers of the 12 editions of the semiannual magazine *ZUM*, dedicated to Photography and published by the Moreira Sales Institute in Brazil.

Its semiannual editions are released in April and October, with nationwide distribution in bookstores, newspaper stands or the so-called Culture Points spread all over Brazil. It can also

be purchased directly on the IMS website. After twelve editions published with an average of 180 pages each – elegantly organized and printed to a high standard – the magazine has a recognized staff of collaborators from various perspectives within today's international visual arts. Its editorial line shows clear predilection for current themes, but it also focuses on research and publication of historical, unpublished or little-known essays and interviews with names such as Jeff Wall, Miguel Rio Branco, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Richard Avedon and Rosângela Rennó, only to name a few.

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Figure 2. Even though they were not focused specifically on photography, magazines *O Cruzeiro* (1978-1975), *Manchete* (1952-2000) and *Realidade* (1966-1976) were very important for the establishment of the Brazilian visual culture in the 20th century.

ZUM's peculiar feature is precisely its investment in historical research, criticism, and a sense of experimentalism – all competently brought together. Whether it is addressing the classics or the new generation, photographic and written critic essays are presented in a free way, often in the first person, from the voice of a fictitious narrator or under the shadow of an anonymous interlocutor. Formal temporalities are conjugated in the poetic sense so characteristic of the universe of art, where past, present and future are mixed as disjunctive cinematographic planes. Alair Gomes's 1976 essays *The non-history of a driver*

1. *ZUM's* editions: http://lojadoims.com.br/ims/categoria.cfm?id_categoria=42

(*A não história de um chofer*) and *Critical and candid reflections on photography (Reflexões críticas e sinceras sobre a fotografia)* (published on ZUM #6) are excellent examples of how it is possible to present novelties in the work of deceased authors, in addition to demonstrating how artistic theory and practice are not disconnected, thus showing artists' still current look and the originality of their critical spirit.

Another arrhythmic example of edition is the late but fortunate Portuguese translation of Henri Cartier-Bresson's classic, provocative and iconic "The Decisive Moment", published in the first issue of the magazine. Originally published in 1952 in the book *Images à la sauvette*, Bresson's testimony is a milestone in the history of world photography and its re-edition somehow updates the debate about objectivity and fictionalization in photographic image, at a time when the documentary value of photography is clearly being challenged.

To what extent what we see is independent from what we believe in? It is by stripping photography of the many statements attributed to it over almost two centuries that ZUM calls on names such as award-winning American photographer Robert Frank – now a self-declared recluse from the world of images – and invites him to present his daily Polaroids. At the same time, writer Geoff Dyer discusses the honorable mention given in a photojournalism award to the series of images made by Google's automated car devices, clearly confronting an emotional point of view and the impersonal perspective (ZUM #1).

With the statement that "False ideas adhere to photography like flies to flypaper", Errol Morris screams to the rooftops about the nomadism of ideological certainties that insist on adhering to photography as though they were irrefutable truths. Terry Castle, in turn, tries to extract a spark of humor with an improbable search for the Barthesian punctum in his collection of anonymous photographs (ZUM #2).



Figure 3. Covers of magazines *IRIS Foto* (# 1 of 1946) and *Novidades Fotóptica*, which were dedicated to Photography and influenced generations of photographers in Brazil.

Frictions, more than fictions, are welcome or appreciated at ZUM. Francesca Woodman's self-referential and gloomy images are close to the pilgrimages of Pará-born Guy Veloso in search of religious penitents in deep Brazil (ZUM #3). On the other hand, Rosângela Rennó's family travels, Barbara Wagner's wanderings in Pernambuco or the occasional notations of German filmmaker Win Wenders create panoramic webs in timeless metropolises (ZUM #4).

Driven by the popular uprising of the protests triggered by the *Passe Livre* movement in June 2013, the fifth edition of the magazine joined the political debate of the time in a way that was totally different from mainstream press coverage, opening room for images that emerged from voluntary photo coverage of demonstrations. With photographs that highlighted individuals in the crowd, the group Cia de Foto obtained the violent records that banalized the coverage of street demonstrations in the mainstream press and published one of their last works as posters (ZUM #5 insert).

In the critical vanguard typical of revolutionary channels of thought, Mauricio Puls's essay *True or False (Verdadeiro ou Falso)* exposes the press's centuries-old ideological manipulation by analyzing the discrepancies between images and subtitles that changed recent historical facts, illustrated by examples of Brazilian Presidents Dilma Rousseff and Getúlio Vargas and even 1970s football idol Rivellino. "Veracity in photographs is a dogma of faith", the author sustains, and certain beliefs are strengthened by the fact that the eyes corrupt themselves with subtitles (ZUM #12).

Challenging thinkers such as the Catalonia's Joan Fontcuberta or early critic of new digital photojournalism such as Fred Ritchin postulated more doubts than certainties about the directions of computer image. But there is also room for decisive conversations such as the rare interview by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu at the end of his life, when he commented on how photography helped him to define the core of his sociological understanding of the world. Grain by grain or pixel by pixel, photography spreads pieces of an infinite puzzle about man and his time. ZUM has made a valuable contribution to the current sociopolitical and cultural panorama, fueling a timid tradition that is just over 40 years old, in which a series of publications by illustrated magazines was responsible for what I consider some sort of photo-affective legacy of the Brazilian people.

Historically, although material on the subject is scarce, the influence of periodicals – magazines, newspapers or institutional catalogs – on the formation of several segments of Photography in Brazil is recognized by virtually everyone, especially with regard to production outside the so-called Rio de Janeiro-São Paulo axis, where a printed publication was still a portable and relatively easy form of circulation. Through these media, it became possible to access information on exhibitions, new equipment and materials, publications, fads as well as the forms of presentation and plastic expography in vogue at different periods.

According to researchers Angela Magalhães and Nadja Peregrino, illustrated magazines gained relevance in Brazil's cultural scene in the first half of the 20th century, bringing photography and text together, although without intentionally building visual narratives. *Revista da Semana* (1900-1959) played a pioneer role and is cited by authors as the magazine that took the best advantage of photography's expressive power at the time, both by producing on site and by simulating in-studio scenes to convey their stories. Other publications listed are *Ilustração Brasileira* (1901-1902), *Kósmos* (1904-1909), *Sombra* (1940-1960), *Careta* (1908-1960), *Fon-Fon* (1907-1958), *Para Todos* (1918-1932), *A Cena Muda* (1921-1955) and *Cigarra* (1914-1956). However, *São Paulo* magazine, published in 1935, featured photography under an innovative graphic design “in which photomontages, subtitles and small texts are interconnected by a modern layout similar to the influential Russian Constructivism (1917).”² In that historical context, the authors indicate that photoessay-like articles first appeared in Germany between 1928 and 1930 and would only influence Brazilian publications with Jean Manzon's unforgettable articles for *O Cruzeiro* (1928-1975), a magazine edited by Assis Chateaubriand's media group *Diários Associados*, which also featured talented photographers such as José Medeiros, Pierre Verger or Flávio Damm. The weekly magazine *Manchete* (1952-2000) published by Bloch Editores also opened room for photoreports, focusing on visual material over text and following the editorial line of American magazine *LIFE*, which dictated the rules for visual narratives in newspapers around the world until the late 1970s. To close the segment of the most influential journalistic publications in the Brazilian scenario until the 1970s,

we highlight magazine *Realidade* (Editora Abril). According to Magalhães and Peregrino, it was a memorable editorial experience for Brazil's journalistic field. Launched in 1966 and inspired by French magazine *Realité*, it provided an unusual approach to the country's historical moment, “showing its professionals' sharp skills and their ability of to delve into fiction without ever losing their inventiveness and humor”³.

Although they opened space for high-quality visual essays whose historical value is now recognized, none of the magazines cited was specifically aimed at artistic and authorial production, as *ZUM* is. The publication that probably comes closest to this essayist trend was the defunct and iconic *IRIS Foto*, marketed in Brazil by Editora Iris Ltda. Between 1947 and 1999. Despite its longevity, however, *IRIS Foto* was not able to establish itself as a publication with convincing editorial standards. It oscillated between technical and institutional articles illustrated by portfolios of rather irregular topics and quality, many pages and commercial advertisement footers and some occasional critical or conceptual text. This might be a result of its very diverse consumer public, which, being so large in a country with continental dimensions such as Brazil has made it difficult for the magazine to define its line of action.

IRIS Foto saw its heyday between 1980 and 1990, when it featured critics like Stefania Bril – according to historian Ricardo Mendes (2003), she was crucial to present to the general public, in a more continuous way, the critical thinking of authors such as Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag, Vilém Flusser, and even citing ideas that are references to the field such as Benjaminian concepts still debated today. Names such as Rubens Fernandes Jr., Boris Kossoy, Thales Trigo, Ivan Lima and Simonetta Persichetti also contributed articles, translations and stories in that period.

Around the 1960s, *IRIS Foto's* portfolio section even opened space for many photo clubs, and later, already under the contributors cited, it published visual essays by young artists such as Cassio Vasconcelos and Fernanda Magalhães – not necessarily authors from the professional field, whether in journalism or advertisement.

Closing the list of publications that, according to historian Ricardo Mendes corresponds to the “first dentition in the

2. MAGALHÃES & PEREGRINO, 2004, p.54.

3. Idem, p.60.

History of Brazilian Photography”,⁴ the magazine *Novidades Fotóptica* (1979-1996) was considered an evolution in the type of periodical publication focused on photography and perhaps the one that bears most resemblance to *ZUM*.

Founded in 1930 by the Hungarian family Farkas, Fotóptica is a company focused on the retail of photographic and optical equipment and materials in Brazil. After the death of his father, in 1969, Thomaz Farkas took over the company. At that time he was already highly active in São Paulo's cultural scene, being linked to photography in several art, photo club, and professional movements. Considered as one of the pioneers of modern photography in the country, Farkas was also a teacher and critic, and served in curatorial boards of the Pirelli MASP collection, and curated exhibitions for the São Paulo's Museum of Modern Art, MAM-SP. He worked as a producer, sponsor and film director on documentaries about popular culture, including the award-winning project known as Farkas Caravan, which brought together professional and amateur filmmakers such as Paulo Gil Soares (1935), Maurice Capovilla (1936), Eduardo Escorel (1945) and photographer Affonso Beato (1941), still seen as a reference for Brazilian cinema.

Taking advantage of the success of the *Fotóptica* brand, Farkas launches, along with the company's new product catalog, the magazine *Novidades Fotóptica*, in 1970. Nine years later he opens Galeria Fotóptica in São Paulo – Brazil's first gallery specializing in photography. Because it is a publication with no direct profit purposes linked to the private company, Fotóptica's magazine enjoyed full editorial freedom and opened space for photographic works that featured more investigative, authorial and poetic texts. Another company that launched a semiannual magazine in the late 20th century was Good Year (1985-1992), with beautiful quarterly issues with several pages dedicated to images and paying its guest artists very well.

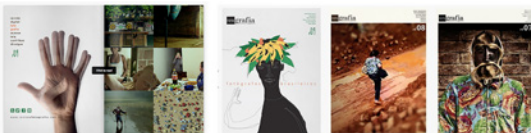


Figure 4. With nine editions published since 2009, the digital magazine *Foto Grafia* is a highlight among the initiatives focused on the diffusion of authorial photography produced in Brazil.

It is important to note that, in the 1990s President Fernando Collor opens up market reserves for foreign

products and services, and a large volume of publications of different brands enter Brazil at more competitive prices and with wide distribution. Disastrously, the government establishes an administrative reform that extinguishes cultural foundations such as *Funarte*, *Fundacen*, *Brazilian Cinema Foundation* (FCB) and *Embrafilme*, dismantling an already consolidated network of programs that fostered and aggregated Brazil's photography and film segment across states, with special emphasis on regional events such as FUNARTE's Photography Weeks, promoting several exhibitions, workshops, round tables and occasionally some modest photographic publications. The most harmful consequence of such abrupt rupture generated by President Collor's few months in office was a perverse cycle that judged and condemned state culture agencies, ascribing them a biased label of inefficiency and declaring that the cultural area "could be self-sustaining and the market would decide on it as the highest judge of the quality of artistic production".⁵

This environment also saw a change in tax relief legislation aimed to alter State participation in the culture field at federal, state or municipal levels, attracting private and business resources for the sectors related to the arts. Preceded by the somewhat uncertain experience of the Sarney Law (enacted in 1986 and repealed in 1990), the Rouanet Law was passed by Congress in 1991, and the National Commission to Incentive Culture (CNIC) was created afterwards, including government officials and cultural institutions focused on making the raising of financial resources from private institutions more rigorous so that it would be more transparent, with audits, publications in the Official Gazette, and accounting procedures monitored by independent audit firms registered in the Brazilian Securities and Exchange Commission (CVM). A large amount of funds starts to be injected into the cultural sector, although they are not distributed as equally and transparently as it was desirable.

It was precisely in 1990 that Walther Moreira Sales founded the Moreira Sales Institute, with an open preference for working with initiatives conceived and executed by themselves as opposed to the patronage that was common at the time. Since then, for over 20 years, the institution has focused on medium and long-term projects, including investments in

4. MENDES, 2003, p.195.

5. BOTELHO, 2000, p.20.

three Culture Centers (Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Poços de Caldas), four art Galleries (São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Curitiba and Porto Alegre), acquisitions of historical collections and contemporary audiovisual works. It also has works in storage in the areas of Photography, Music, Library and Painting in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, as well as an internet radio channel, a website and a blog, and of course, *ZUM*. The magazine was expected to give visibility to the institution's projects, exhibitions, artists, curators and partner critics, which actually happened. *ZUM* is also a channel that carried out IMS's actions for photography, without, however, automatically reflecting the institute's views.

Another novelty welcomed by producers in the area was the creation of the IMS Photography Grant, at 65 thousand reais each. In 2017, the award came to its fifth edition, providing the opportunity for two artists to produce and further develop new research for eight months. At the end of the projects, the works are incorporated into the Institution's Photo Collection, which, by the way, has become one of the most important collections of Brazilian and Latin American historical photography in just over ten years.

Many titles have appeared since the 2000s under the seals of established or independent publishers trying to attract the attention of photography lovers, but unfortunately the number of works launched is not directly proportional to their aesthetic or intellectual quality. Most printed publications previously devoted to photography have turned to the new emergencies created by the shift from film to digital support, focusing on event photographers and specially on the wedding line of work. Poetic essays, photoreports and opportunities for more subversive, experimental and even detailed work have lost space in image magazines to photographic product announcements, courses, promotional pieces for manufacturers' fairs and inputs from a market undergoing full change. Therefore, few online publications took advantage of the facilities of digital media to open space for production and circulation of independent contents, as in the case of *Revista Foto Grafia*, created in 2009 by a group of researchers and image lovers from Balneário Camboriú, Santa Catarina. Initially titled *Revista Acadêmica Foto Grafia*, it was produced by *LAPIS Comunicação e Cultura* in collaboration with the University of Vale do Itajaí (UNIVALI). The project is now carried out

collaboratively and encourages photography production with the aim of providing relevant content for studies and analyzes related to the field of photography and, consequently, anthropology and visual arts. All editions are available for free, not only for online viewing and reading, but also for download.⁶ Its most interesting aspect is that the magazine is open to receive articles and collaborative essays, besides publicizing events, conferences, exhibitions and publications within the genre.

In times of e-Books and free sharing of digital content, investment in print magazines is unlikely to be a good tool to popularize large-scale art production, since even large print runs will always be limited. The Brazilian publishing market is notably undergoing a crisis. An example is the closing of publishing company Cosac&Naify – a partner in the first editions of the magazine that did not have the strength to maintain the high standards of its publications in the current national scenario. It is for this and other reasons that *ZUM* has filled a gap between the few art publications – with more evidence for visual content – and books whose textual content and reflective character are usually not illustrated due to high editorial costs.

Since 2015, the magazine's editions (*ZUM* #9, #10 and #11) can already be viewed almost in full through teasers that provide a glimpse of the new editions on the IMS website, but its content is still not available on the institution's digital platforms, which would be very welcome by now since the first *ZUM* editions have been sold out for years. A printed magazine, especially one about art, remains an excellent alternative to renew our libraries, to serve as a reference for critical thinking through reliable and indexed sources, as well as to retain the interest of a demanding audience that still values consumption of quality information with the right to devote themselves to quiet visual enjoyment.

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