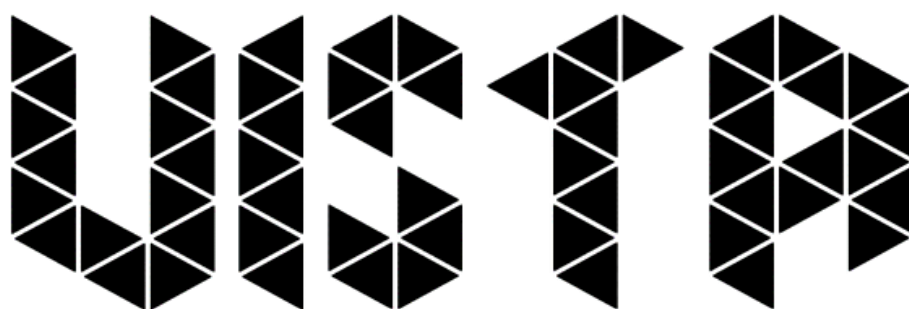




REVISTA
DE
**CULTURA
VISUAL**

e-ISSN 2184-1284

No. 16 | 2025

***Architecture of Disappearance: Black Self-Portraits
and Counter-Visuality as Reparative Aesthetics***
*Arquitetura do Desaparecimento: Autorretratos Negros e a
Contravisualidade Como Estética Reparativa*

<https://doi.org/10.21814/vista.6583>
e025019

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Vista No. 16 | July – December 2025 | e025019

Submitted: 31/05/2025 | Reviewed: 04/08/2025 | Accepted: 04/09/2025 |

Published: 23/10/2025

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This article analyses the self-portrait series *Arquitetura do Desaparecimento* (Architecture of Disappearance) by Brazilian photographer Roger Silva. Silva's

photographs are presented as an aesthetic and political expression of decolonial counter-visibility produced by Black photographers from peripheral contexts. Through self-portraiture, the artist articulates a gesture of re-existence that challenges normative regimes of visibility, identity, and representation. The study draws on decolonial theory (Azoulay, 2021; Fanon, 1952/2008; Maldonado-Torres, 2020), image studies (Campt, 2021), representation (Hall, 2006, 2013/2016) and reparative aesthetics (Best, 2016) to interpret Silva's images as symbolic devices of resistance to racism and of the reconstruction of subjectivities. The captions accompanying the photographs are incorporated into the analysis as discursive extensions of the visual work, revealing invisible layers of the experiences portrayed. The article demonstrates that contemporary Black self-portraiture, particularly that developed by Black photographers from the peripheries, constitutes an activist practice of meaning-making, fabulation and symbolic healing, creating new visual grammars that subvert the logic of the coloniality of seeing and knowing. This article argues that these images contribute to strengthening a counter-visibility established through the language of Black peripheral photography.

Keywords: self-portrait, Black peripheral photography, reparative aesthetics, counter-visibility, Roger Silva

Arquitetura do Desaparecimento: Autorretratos Negros e a Contravisualidade Como Estética Reparativa

O presente artigo analisa a série de autorretratos Arquitetura do Desaparecimento, do fotógrafo brasileiro Roger Silva. As fotografias de Roger apresentam-se como expressão estética e política da contravisualidade decolonial produzida por fotógrafos negros das periferias. Através do autorretrato, o artista articula um gesto de reexistência que tensiona os regimes normativos de visibilidade, identidade e representação. Este estudo fundamenta-se na teoria decolonial (Azoulay, 2021; Fanon, 1952/2008; Maldonado-Torres, 2020), nos estudos sobre imagem (Campt, 2021), representação (Hall, 2006, 2013/2016) e estética reparativa (Best, 2016), a fim de perceber as imagens de Roger como dispositivos simbólicos de enfrentamento ao racismo e de reconstrução de subjetividades. As legendas que acompanham as fotografias são incorporadas à análise como extensões discursivas da obra visual, revelando camadas não visíveis das experiências retratadas. O artigo demonstra que o autorretrato negro contemporâneo, especialmente o desenvolvido por fotógrafos negros das periferias, constitui-se como prática artista de produção de sentidos, fabulação e cura simbólica, criando novas gramáticas visuais que subvertem a lógica da colonialidade do ver e do saber. Acredita-se que essas imagens contribuem para o fortalecimento de uma contravisualidade que se estabelece através da linguagem da fotografia negra-periférica.

Palavras-chaves: autorretrato, fotografia negra-periférica, estética reparativa, contravisualidade, Roger Silva

Introduction

To speak of photography is to speak of visual ways of representing the world. Photography, therefore, is far more than a technical depiction of visible reality; it plays an active role in constructing visual reality. This process is technologically mediated, making it crucial to acknowledge that technology is never neutral. Technology is power. Photographing is, in essence, the creation of visual narratives that reveal not only how we perceive the world but also how those behind the camera seek to portray reality. It is also essential to recognise that photographing, like any form of visual recording, arises from relationships that are often asymmetrical. Some individuals possess the technological means that confer legitimacy to observe and record reality according to specific imaginaries and ideological frameworks. Berger (1972/1999) clearly highlighted the asymmetries inherent in the observer-observed relationship. The history of photography is, in this sense, shaped by relations of power and dominance that produced images of the other(s), who were positioned as marginal to political and cultural hegemony. For example, the role of photography in the service of colonialism has been widely documented (Pinney, 1996). The White gaze over non-White bodies dominated colonial visual representation.

Within contexts of visual exploitation and confinement, photography as a technological image assumes the imperial ideological function of documentation, reinforcing the foundations of the imperialism of coloniality (Azoulay, 2021). For long periods, Black individuals adopted Whiteness as an ideal model of identification, seeing it as a possible pathway to be recognised as part of society (Souza, 2021) — striving to approximate the hegemonic standard, with its White, colonial aesthetics.

In the realm of imagery, the logic of coloniality employed symbols, images and racialised bodies to enact the erasure of these existences, rejecting, killing and exoticising their bodies (Maldonado-Torres, 2020). In the social construction of the Black figure, this produces an embodiment of the condemned individual, who was colonised even in their own mind, “dominated by stories and ideas that compel them to confirm the coloniality of knowledge, power and being” (Maldonado-Torres, 2020, p. 47). In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon (1952/2008) seeks to develop a line of thought aligned with decolonial practice, in which the condemned can and should engage with the project of decoloniality.

In this way, his forms of artistic representation are imbued with self-reflection, critique and proposals for different ways of conceiving and experiencing time, subjectivity, territory and community, as observed in the work of the Brazilian Black photographer Roger Silva (<https://www.instagram.com/rogersilvafotos/>).

Roger Silva was born in 1979 in the city of Barreiras, located in the interior of Pernambuco state in northeastern Brazil. His interest in photography began in childhood, when he observed people photographing one another. Until the age of fifteen, Roger lived in Barreiras with his grandparents; after that, he moved to the capital, Maceió, in Alagoas, where he earned a degree in History from the

Federal University of Alagoas. For a period, due to financial difficulties and the early death of his father, he had to step away from photography. However, he always viewed the art of photographing as a space for activism and social critique. In 2019, Roger decided to invest in photography as a tool for social change. Currently, in addition to the photographs he produces and posts on his social media, the historian, filmmaker, photographer and lecturer is also the founder of the social project *Click Niggas*, which provides training in photography for young people from the peripheries of Maceió.

Following an activist logic, enacted both through his images and through the training of other photographers — who are taught to use photographic art as a tool in the fight against racism — photography is employed by Roger as a decolonial instrument, a form of resistance to the violence suffered by Black bodies. The self-portrait series entitled *Arquitetura do Desaparecimento* (Architecture of Disappearance), published on the photographer's Instagram page, presents an artistic-reflective process exploring the Black body and its positioning within a White racial standard. This article focuses on reflecting upon this series of self-portraits, particularly on how this photographic practice engages with self-representation and establishes a critique of the image of Black people in contemporary society.

The methodology adopted in this article is anchored in decolonial thought and critical image theories, understanding self-portraiture as a field of symbolic and political contestation. The analysis of Roger Silva's *Arquitetura do Desaparecimento* series is guided by a perspective that conceives the image not as a mere representation or repository of fixed meanings, but as a dense communicational phenomenon, shaped by historical, affective, racial and cultural structures. Thus, the image is approached as a visual and performative artefact, capable of functioning both as testimony and as a device for subjective and collective reconfiguration. The theoretical framework draws on authors such as Ariella Azoulay (2021), Tina Campt (2017, 2021), Stuart Hall (2006, 2013/2016), Susan Best (2016) and Janaína Damaceno Gomes (2024), whose contributions enable an understanding of photography as a technology of power, as well as a tool of resistance and self-inscription.

The analysis of the self-portraits is constructed through the articulation of the visual, formal and symbolic elements of the images with their contexts of utterance — particularly the captions written by the artist on social media, which function as discursive extensions of the visual work. This approach allows for an interplay between field and extra-field, understanding the images as utterances that mobilise gestures, temporalities, performativities and narratives concerning the Black body in contemporary Brazil.

The selection of Roger Silva's work as the *corpus* is justified by its critical and aesthetic impact in confronting the visual logics of coloniality, particularly through strategies of self-representation that challenge normative regimes of visibility and identity. Accordingly, the methodology does not aim to interpret the images as merely illustrative or descriptive, but to reveal how they construct

meaning, reorganise affective registers and function as aesthetic practices of re-existence and fabulation. The captions accompanying the posts are treated as discursive extensions of the visual works under analysis. They are also integrated into the methodology, as their examination allows access to layers that are not immediately visible in the images.

Traces of Imperial Violence of Photography on Black Bodies

The imperial violence of photography has been embedded in society throughout history, beginning when subalternised populations were depicted through the photographic lens of colonial aesthetics. Photographic portraits revealed the representational framework constructed by colonisers, positioning these individuals in roles that facilitated the exploitation and objectification of their bodies (J. de S. Martins, 2019). In this way, photography functioned not only as a technology reinforcing the foundations of colonial imperialism but also assumed an ideological role, documenting in support of the logic of Whiteness (Azoulay, 2021). Cameras penetrated territories, operating primarily within social spaces inhabited by subalternised populations, and became instruments of the colonising gaze. As Rinelli (2021) observes, “the lens is still a powerful technology that can similarly identify, classify, and neglect certain human beings” (p. 106).

In relation to decolonial thought in photography, Sealy (2016) argues that decoloniality in photographic images emerges from the intention to decolonise the camera. The aim is for the production it facilitates to promote values that detach from stereotypes and “move away from crystallised representations of violence or socially established hierarchies” (Oliveira & Amaral, 2023, p. 105).

According to Sealy (2016), the decolonisation of the camera enables a form of distancing from the aesthetic and visual practices of capture imposed by the colonising gaze, empowering subjects to engage in a liberatory photographic practice beyond the forces of control and discipline inherent in colonial lenses. In this sense, decolonising the camera involves fostering a culture outside the colonial matrix of power, thereby destabilising its mechanisms for creating the *other* as exotic (Oliveira & Amaral, 2023). By refusing to perceive themselves as animalised beings, these individuals generate ruptures in the visual experience, challenging both supremacist perceptions and the dominance of image-making that had previously positioned them as objects of visual fascination.

The major shift in representation within this context occurs precisely when these individuals take ownership of capture devices — cameras and smartphones — subverting colonial logics and transforming erasure and silencing into forms of representation. The very lens that had neglected them for years becomes a decolonial instrument against an aesthetic and image-based regime that had objectified them. In this way, when they perceive themselves as subjects of their own narratives, they “make the enemy’s weapon their defence” (Viviani

& Noronha, 2021, p. 273) and begin to construct a shared collective imaginary through images, producing a visibility of belonging and representation — a form of activist practice asserting agency and re-existence within society.

By rebelling against colonial photographic practices, they reinscribe the colonial modes of gazing and capturing images of the subalternised and peripheral “other”. In contrast to images that personify colonial fantasies, the decolonial camera (Sealy, 2016) enables photographers outside the colonial visibility to perceive themselves beyond the moments in which they are wearing the mask (Fanon, 1952/2008). In this sense, image-based activism is constructed through the possibility of recreating their existences via smartphones and cameras, which establish a counter-visibility that escapes the colonising gaze.

As previously noted, possessing technological means and the capacity to use them constitutes a form of power. It is therefore crucial to acknowledge that this movement towards decolonial Black photography is part of a broader process of democratising access to the means of visual production and dissemination. This occurs within the context of a visualist culture (Campos, 2013) and an ocularcentric paradigm (Jenks, 1995), in which the image assumes an increasingly central role in how we conceptualise the world, represent it, and, by extension, perceive and represent ourselves, whether as individuals or groups.

The visualisation of existence (Mirzoeff, 2015/2016a) is strengthened through technological expansion and democratisation. This democratisation enables the emergence of logics of emancipation and empowerment for groups that have been historically disadvantaged, subalternised, or stigmatised, granting them the capacity to construct their own narratives. The expansion of digital technologies adds a new dimension, making it virtually possible today to possess the means to communicate globally using basic and accessible resources. It is therefore no coincidence that a significant portion of contemporary activism and activism operates in a hybrid mode, within a continuum that overlays the online and offline spheres (Campos & Simões, 2024).

The field of the arts, particularly the visual arts, has been fertile ground for proposals that challenge dominant narratives and visions (Sarrouy et al., 2022). Especially significant when addressing tensions related to racism is the articulation of image and body as both a communication tool and a device for creating counter-narratives (Hines, 2020; J. C. F. Martins & Campos, 2023; Rice et al., 2021; Souza, 2021). The body symbolises historical oppression and, as such, should also serve as an emblem of symbolic processes of emancipation. Historically, bodies that deviate from normative standards have been repeatedly construed as dangerous or contagious, justifying processes of surveillance, regulation, or containment. Female, Black, and queer bodies have been interpreted and controlled through the lens of hegemonic Whiteness and patriarchy. Consequently, skin colour, hair type, and bodily posture serve as fundamental markers for the affirmation and cultural valuation of subalternised communities. This explains why activism, which unites image and body as a field of practice, research, and communication, has assumed an increasingly significant role.

In recent decades, particularly since the 1990s, we can observe the emergence of representations of Blackness produced from within Black representation itself, through both individual and collective initiatives by Black photographers (Meirinho, 2022). All manifestations of Black activism during this period have played, and continue to play, a fundamental role in this turning point. The gaze of Black activists upon Black bodies, supported by the photographic camera as a decolonial instrument of agency, proposes a visual grammar that facilitates the reconstruction of narratives.

As Rinelli (2021) asserts, “we are primarily what we remember” (p. 106), underscoring the importance of constructing a counter-visibility that reinforces what we genuinely represent as a people and culture. Today, through the use of the camera as a decolonial tool in contemporary Black photography, we witness a liberatory manifestation of activism that fosters the creation of new images of the self, challenges the colonial gaze and aesthetics, and generates new ways of seeing, being, and existing in the world.

Contemporary Peripheral Black Photography

The term “periphery” underwent a long process of acceptance among residents of Brazilian communities. Faced with the many stigmas and prejudices reinforced by the media in relation to peripheral populations, there was initially a refusal to identify with the term. In Brazil, the term only came into use in the 1980s to describe communities located on the margins of large urban centres, marked by conditions of dehumanisation and denial of rights. However, in the early 1990s, it gained increasing visibility through the hip-hop movement. Consequently, residents and activists began to reclaim the word “periphery” through significant cultural production emerging from these communities (D’Andrea, 2020).

Another significant milestone, as Tiaraju D’Andrea (2020) notes, in the search for identification and recognition of *favela* (shantytown) residents with the term periphery occurred in the early 2000s with the production and distribution of the film *City of God*, inspired by the novel of the same title by Paulo Lins; scripted by Bráulio Mantovani and directed by Fernando Meirelles, with co-direction by Kátia Lund. Beyond this audiovisual work, the music of the rap group Racionais MC’s also contributed to constructing a narrative about Brazilian peripheries: their lyrics are laden with denunciations and address a wide range of issues experienced by residents.

Over the years, the periphery has forged paths of identification, recognition, and the pursuit of a peripheral consciousness. The visibility of its own productions (Figure 1) has, since then, been a powerful ally in this process. Ivana Bentes (2012) argues that this process of identification through the culture of the peripheries originates and gains strength from a political discourse that does not come from academia, the State, politics, or the media; instead, it emerges from the new mediators and audiovisual producers emerging within the *favelas*.



Figure 1: *Photobook on the periphery, co-authored by Roger, featuring his images*

Source. From *Quando eu era pequeno, deitava no quintal da casa da minha vó a noite na beira do Rio Una, olhava* [Photograph], by Roger Silva [@rogersilvafotos], 2020b, Instagram.

(https://www.instagram.com/p/CF-1CCQJsSQ/?img_index=1)

These peripheral subjects are formed through the combination of shared cultural codes, shaped by their lived experiences and modes of existence within the *favelas*; a consciousness of belonging to a place (D’Andrea, 2020; hooks, 2022), which fosters an understanding of their shared urban position within a specific territory; and political agency (Bentes, 2012; D’Andrea, 2020). They become political subjects in the ongoing process of asserting their territories. In this way, they “move through the city and ascend to the media in ways that are often ambiguous, potentially occupying a space of urgent and transformative political

discourse within an information-driven capitalism” (Bentes, 2012, p. 54).

Consequently, Black photographers from the Brazilian peripheries have, over recent decades, been constructing a Black-peripheral counter-visuality engaged in a collective decolonial project, through which they seek “a world where other worlds can exist, and where, therefore, different conceptions of time, space, and subjectivity can coexist and also relate productively” (Maldonado-Torres, 2020, p. 36).

Indeed, in the pursuit of representativity as subjects and in escaping a racist and exclusionary reality, Blackness has found pathways of existence and resistance. Art, photography, literature, and other expressive forms have been employed as means of escaping subalternisation and marginalisation. As Bernardino-Costa (2020) notes, contemporary Blackness operates according to a logic distinct from that of Whiteness, which, rather than simply recognising itself as White, seeks to be regarded as the universal standard for all races.

Within the decolonial logic of Blackness, the Black body assumes its rightful place in the postcolonial world. In this context, unlike the self-denial previously required for acceptance under the White gaze, contemporary political strategy mobilises the affirmation of Blackness (Bernardino-Costa, 2020). Consequently, new routes of representation (Hall, 2013/2016) are being charted, strengthening the production of meaning regarding one’s own representations. Through photographic portraits, an aesthetic is proposed that connects and reconnects the Black self with itself, its ideas, concerns, and modes of being (Maldonado-Torres, 2020).

It is evident that the artistic and cultural image-making of Black people, once they took ownership of capture devices as a means of representation, seeks to ground itself in their own frameworks, reinforcing the ideal of belonging to their origins and recognising ancestry as a means of maintaining memory and existence as a people (Hall, 2006, 2013/2016; Souto, 2020).

Black and peripheral photographic production gives rise to “visions of the self, of others, and of the world that challenge the concepts of modernity/coloniality” (Maldonado-Torres, 2020, p. 48). According to Mendes Guilherme (2022), this postcolonial movement of “de(s)colonisation of images” (p. 154) should not be directed solely at the media (what the author refers to as “screens”), such as photography, but relates to everything that involves, and is involved in, language. Maldonado-Torres (2020) asserts that “thought and creativity alone cannot change the world” (p. 49). Thus, they must be employed as strategies to decolonise power, knowledge, and being. It is at this point that the condemned assumes the role of an agent of social change (Maldonado-Torres, 2020). In this context, the self-portrait functions as an essential tool of self-inscription for these photographers, proposing a subjectivity derived from the image of the self and an aesthetic that acts as a form of reparation.

The Self-Portrait as a Practice of Self-Inscription and Reparative Aesthetics

In this study, the photographic self-portrait is conceived as a modulation within the field of portraiture, shifting the traditional functions of both the technology and the act of capture, as well as the subject being captured — the portrayed — into a convergence within the same individual. This positions the self-portrait as a self-referential practice of negotiating subjectivity with the gaze, engaging the agency of both the producer of symbolic and material imagery and the observer, and thereby delineating a distinctive singularity in the visual utterance of the self in relation to the other. By turning the camera upon themselves, the individual inscribes their own body, invoking their subjectivity while simultaneously occupying the roles of both subject and author of the image (as shown in Figure 2). The body unlocks imaginaries of both physical/material and ideological nature, securing its presence on the photographic surface and thereby resisting erasure.



Figure 2: *Self-Portrait by Roger Silva (2020)*

Source. From *Série: Metamorfose – 07. Não seja pequeno. Quando eu era menor tinha vários preconceitos... Com o outro e comigo mesmo* [Photograph], by Roger Silva [@rogersilvafotos], 2020a, Instagram.

(https://www.instagram.com/p/B_V9HzeDXCy/?img_index=1)

According to Sontag (1977), if the act of photographing can be understood as a way of affirming one's own being and the surrounding world, the self-portrait

is embedded in a relationship of identity and presence. Drawing on Dubois (1990/1993), the photographic self-portrait participates in a strategy of self-writing, in which light explores the body and identity as visual material. This gesture has become foundational to contemporary photography, particularly in its performative dimension, which may be intimate, political, or aesthetic (Poivert, 2010), encompassing symbolic and conceptual forms of self-representation. As Soulages (1998/2010) argues, performativity becomes an inescapable process characterising the photographic aesthetic through what he terms “photographic staging,” in which theatricalisation transforms the Barthesian noema from “that-has-been” to “that-has-been-staged” (Soulages, 1998/2010, p. 74). “Noema,” or what could be translated as “essence,” is the term Roland Barthes (1980/1984) uses to describe what is signified or perceived from a photograph — in other words, the “that-has-been”. Barthes maintains that this concept applies to photographic images because a photograph carries a trace of the real, a vestige of what once existed.

In this way, the self-portrait is more than the mere capture of a body; it constitutes an identity play between being and representing oneself, extending beyond the performative staging itself, while revealing strategies of visibility and presenting an expressive complexity that blurs conventional notions of authenticity and representation, adopting a fabulatory stance (Glissant, 1990). The traditional exteriority inherent to the portrait becomes both blurred and complexified in the self-portrait, establishing a self-reflexive circuit in which the subject of the image also assumes the roles of author and symbolic mediator of their bodily inscription and representational performativity. Mimesis expands into performative, fabulatory, inscribed, and critically self-representational possibilities, realised through forms of storytelling that insist upon alternative ecologies of life (Campt, 2021).

Thus, the photographic self-portrait emerges as a contemporary political-aesthetic gesture and site of artistic experimentation, seeking to interrogate identity themes such as gender, race, sexuality, and ethnicity in their full symbolic impact. It is capable of condensing identity, memory bonds, visual erasures, and expanded temporalities. Rather than merely fixing a racial, gendered, or classed identity, Black, Indigenous, LGBTQIAPN+, and peripheral artists have claimed the self-portrait as a space for invention, free performativity, and radical fabulation — one that resists the constraints of identity labels, normative demands for discursive transparency, or the obligation to render oneself legible to the hegemonic gaze. As Édouard Glissant (1990) argues, the right to opacity is a principle of creative autonomy, whereby not everyone must be made legible according to the terms of the other in order to exist.

From this perspective, the self-portrait, under the representational control of racialised artists, ceases to be merely an image of the self and becomes a site of escape — establishing visual modes of existence that are not confined to the denunciation of racism or to the reaffirmation of a fixed position of utterance (Ribeiro, 2017). The term “position of utterance” refers to the idea that we

are shaped by the experiences we live and by the social positions we occupy. This concept is intrinsically linked to the structures of power, privilege, and oppression to which individuals are subjected within a society. Our historical and everyday experiences place us in specific configurations of social organisation that influence how we are represented or silenced in the public sphere. Djamila Ribeiro (2017) argues that we must listen to and value discourses that emerge from these subalternised experiences, for it is through them that we can, as a society, come to understand social reality in all its diversity of classes, genders, and other dimensions.

Considering photography as a technology of inscription of the subject, constituted through a socially mediated regime of visibility, we understand why the self-portrait has been one of the genres most frequently employed by contemporary Black visual artists and photographers. Deborah Willis, Dana Scruggs, Zanele Muholi, Samuel Fosso, Rotimi Fani-Kayode, Roger Silva (see Figure 3), Helen Salomão, Paulo Nazareth, Eustáquio Neves, among others, have employed self-portraiture in their work as a means of fostering self-esteem at a moment when images function as tools for producing archives and evidence in the face of absences and the symbolic violence of the expropriation of Black people's images (Mombaça, 2021).

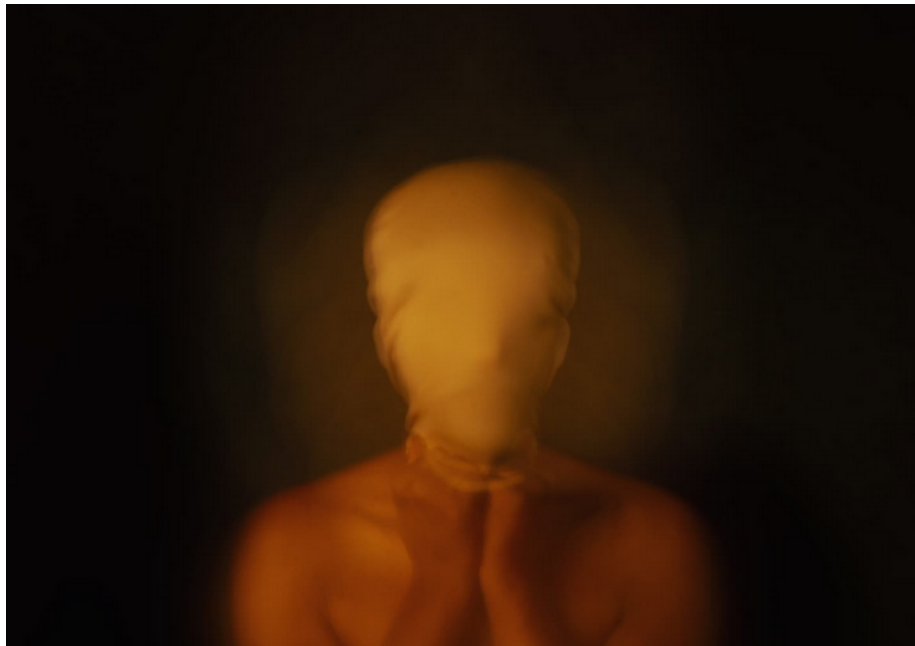


Figure 3: *Self-Portrait by Roger Silva (2022)*

Source. From *A vida? Que vida seu Zé? Aquela que tiram de você, que matam sem "querer"* [Photograph], by Roger Silva [@rogersilvafotos], 2022, Instagram. (https://www.instagram.com/p/CYuteOer_nE/)

According to Hall (2013/2016), the self-portrait, in this historical moment and in the practices of these artists, is linked to humanist celebration in a dual sense: both an exposure and, simultaneously, an exit, in which the “self” emerges within the racialised regime of representation. In this way, self-portraits have served as a visual response to previously unthinkable experiences and future existences (Campt, 2021), demonstrating how visual artists have used photography of themselves to construct new visualities, hitherto non-existent, by curating their own archives and creating while questioning how images shape their worlds. The beauty and injustices that permeate racialised individuals are perceived through the same lenses, producing a centrifugal yet centripetal movement in which they are compelled to look at themselves, their spaces, and their gestures intimately and reflectively. By exposing moments of vulnerability and desire, they document their anxieties, subverting socially consolidated notions of positions and places to which photography has confined them — reflections of racist stigmas and stereotypes that limit other imagined forms of existence (Azoulay, 2021).

The self-portrait functions as a device capable of generating meanings of self-recognition and of elaborating collective experience within a context of rupture. Through experiments in self-imaging, Black visual artists assert their subjectivities and reshape external representations of their identities, destabilising established forms of representation of their bodies. These works serve as sensitive records of contemporary tensions and affects that shape their ways of existing and imagining the world. This mediation unfolds as a conscious gesture of self-affirmation and self-inscription, which problematises questions of identity while simultaneously challenging the position of the camera — how it captures their bodies and gestures and constructs their narratives (Campt, 2021; Gomes, 2024). The photographs become enigmatic objects inhabiting our imagination as traces for perception, in a space oscillating between confession and fiction.

This group of Black artists has challenged a purported photographic objectivity through contemporary Black photography of a self-reflexive nature, producing new visual grammars of belonging and moving beyond the dominion of portraiture and representation. The photographic self-portrait becomes a space for the visibility of dissident subjectivities, contexts of stigmatisation, and historical erasures. They do not assume the role of outsiders, and their self-images blur the boundaries between self and other, spectator and subject, inside and outside. This practice acquires political and affective dimensions when enacted by artists operating within a decolonial engagement, as exemplified by visual artist Roger Silva. In his series *Autorretratos: Arquitetura do Desaparecimento* (Self-Portraits: Architecture of Disappearance), the images of the self function as a gesture of self-inscription (Gomes, 2024), challenging normative visual regimes and proposing a critical revision of colonial narratives in the representation of Black bodies, particularly in Brazil.

Self-inscription, in this sense, is not merely an affirmative gesture but also a reparative one. When approached as practices resisting the exclusionary logic of the colonality of knowledge and vision, these images of self-inscription aim

to reconstruct imaginaries through a visual agency that is simultaneously self-recognising and self-positioning. Black self-inscription and reparative aesthetics (Best, 2016) offer a powerful lens through which to understand contemporary Black photographic self-portraiture as a space of re-signification and healing. Artists such as Roger Silva take control of their own narratives and images, challenging the colonial stereotypes that reduce them to subalternity. They aim to restore erased subjectivities, offering an experience of emotional and symbolic repair, transforming historically stigmatising representations into new modes of contemplation that promote dignity and self-agency — what Tina Campt (2017) terms Black “self-fashioning”.

The notion of “reparative aesthetics” does not refer to a medium or style, but to a way of seeing, thinking, and acting with intentionality through the symbolic construction of imaginaries. The term is anchored in a conceptual genealogy derived from Melanie Klein’s psychoanalytic theories, particularly her notion of the defensive position, which she terms “paranoid,” understood as a possibility for the symbolic restoration of internal objects fragmented by hate or by the projective defence mechanism that allows the subject to symbolically repair internal wounds and traumas.

For Susan Best (2016), the term “repair” is understood in terms of its capacity to assimilate the effects of destruction, past violence, losses, and damage through artistic practices, functioning as a creative means of engaging with complex histories. This “reparative” operation (Klein, 1984) underpins what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003) termed “reparative reading”, a model capable of generating pathways and possibilities even when confronted with hostile and discriminatory contexts. Reparative practice thus operates as a political strategy aimed at subjective reconstruction through engagement and the creation of alternative symbolic and aesthetic forms, producing an exit from the control of otherness via the multiple, novel existences that repair can enable.

This reparative turn finds particular expression in the field of contemporary art, especially photography. Within art, this paradigm challenges reductive, critically limiting readings marked by violence, proposing instead a complex articulation of pain and pleasure, recognition and displacement. According to Best (2016), to repair is to hold the negative and positive together in the capacity to assimilate violence. In this context, contemporary Black photographic self-portraiture can be regarded as a practice of testimony and counter-memory, linking the acknowledgement of racial traumas with the potential for the subjective and visual reinscription of Black bodies — not as a restoration of a previous representational totality, but, as bell hooks (1995) highlights, as a space and pathway for care, remembrance, and transformation.

Reparative practices, therefore, extend beyond the mere reconstruction of wounded identities, aiming instead at the creation of other, fabulatory worlds, propelled by a desire for escape, in which this aesthetic seeks to complexify the domains of representation, agency, and critique by incorporating fabulation. This approach posits that image, body, and testimony are not simply forms

of representation but devices for the materialisation of affects, histories, and subjectivities in a process of symbolic and visual recomposition (Best, 2016). Consequently, contemporary Black self-portraits, such as those by Roger Silva analysed here, function as a dynamic assemblage linking the racialised body being photographed, memory, and the desire for reconstruction — not merely to erase trauma, but to traverse it and imagine alternative modes of existence.

Within Brazilian contemporary Black photography, exemplified by the series *Arquitetura do Desaparecimento*, the self-portrait enacts a counter-aesthetic that subverts the colonial gaze and aestheticises resistance as a political gesture. The series constructs a visibility that positions the spectator as witness (Best, 2016), not only to historical, traumatic, shameful, and unsettling violence against Black bodies, but as a witness to their full capacity for re-existence. Roger Silva assumes a dual role as both subject and object of the image, narrator and figure, creating an intersubjective space in which the symbolic processing of racial trauma occurs. The previously silenced Black body becomes a living, visible archive, a sign of memory and denunciation, but also of reinvention.

Self-inscription and reparative aesthetics allow the Black self-portrait to operate not only within a new regime of visibility for erased experiences but also to intervene in the ways memory and belonging are constructed through photography. Roger Silva generates new modes of presentation with the deliberate intention of evading the classificatory logic of coloniality, enabling and reconfiguring modes of seeing in a claim to be recognised within a counter-visibility (Mirzoeff, 2015/2016a).

Roger Silva and the Camera as a Decolonial Weapon

Roger Silva was born in 1980 in the city of Barreiras, in the interior of Pernambuco. He lived with his grandparents until the age of fifteen, when he moved to Maceió, Alagoas, to live with his parents. According to an article published in *El País* (Magri, 2020), Roger recalled that when his father passed away in 2002, he had to relocate to Maragogi, on the Alagoas coast, where he worked for years in a video rental shop. It was only in 2014 that Roger decided to return to Maceió and enrol in the History programme at the Federal University of Alagoas. After graduating in 2019, he began teaching in private schools, yet photography had always been a path he pursued, one in which he found a means to denounce racism and the pains he had endured throughout his life.

On his Instagram account¹, Roger Silva states that he never accepted the devaluation of Black people in society. For this reason, he uses his images as denunciations of racial and social inequalities in Brazil. Viewed closely, Roger's photography strikes like a spear piercing the stomach. This deployment of

¹Post from 29 April 2024, available at https://www.instagram.com/p/C6XXVxKrErX/?img_index=1.

photography as an instrument of struggle becomes a way of contesting the image-based regime of Whiteness: it is the positioning of the Black body within a White world, an act of self-inscription of these bodies into a visual logic that marginalises them.

Figure 4 depicts violence experienced by Roger, but also shared by so many other Black people. Through a reparative aesthetic (Best, 2016), the photographer invites us to revisit a past that remains acutely present in the lives of Black women and men in Brazil. In this image, the technique of double exposure allows Roger to suffer violence while simultaneously enacting it. One might infer that this first image exemplifies the photographer’s self-inscription into a regime of visibility that subjectively exposes the racial violence faced daily by individuals with curly and coiled hair.



Figure 4: *Screenshot of an Instagram post by photographer Roger Silva*
Source. From *Série de autorretratos: Arquitetura do Desaparecimento – 01*. A *Série Arquitetura do desaparecimento nasce a partir de reflexões sobre o corpo* [Photograph], by Roger Silva [@rogersilvafotos], 2024a, Instagram.
(https://www.instagram.com/p/C6XXVxKrErx/?img_index=1)

Roger writes in the caption of this image, which is part of the first post in the *Arquitetura do Desaparecimento* self-portrait series, the following text: “even after the end of slavery, we still live in a society where being Black, moving through the world in a Black body, is very dangerous. Racism hunts us down day after day, whether hidden or explicit — it makes no difference. It hunts us like prey” (post from April 30, 2024; https://www.instagram.com/p/C6XXVxKrErx/?img_index=1).

Thus, from birth, Black individuals are forced to wear white masks, as Fanon (1952/2008) argues. That is because racial determinations condition the right to move through social spaces, as the photographer exemplifies in the same post:

“being Black is not allowed — or it is allowed, provided that you straighten your hair, shave your beard, remove your braids, always dress neatly, and keep your documents at hand”. He goes on to describe behaviours demanded of the Black population as a form of control:

be docile and always say thank you, with yes, sir or yes, ma’am. Do not do *capoeira* [Afro-Brazilian martial art/dance], do not play the drum, do not take pride in your hair, much less in your skin. We were raised within a Eurocentric logic, where Black people are only valid when they serve. (post from April 30, 2024; https://www.instagram.com/p/C6XXVxKrErx/?img_index=1)

This colonial logic that imprisons Black bodies across the world constitutes a project of erasure of Black identity, as Roger demonstrates through the critique articulated in his photographic portraits and in the captions that accompany them on social media. Roger’s portraits convey a visual language of social denunciation, traversed by the intersectional markers of race, social class, and territory. The photographic portraits of this Black-peripheral counter-visibility (Mirzoeff, 2015/2016a, 2016b) establish themselves as a counter-attack on the visual logic of the colonial narrative through routes of re-existence.

Roger Silva’s photographic series denounces the violent process of Whitening to which Black individuals are subjected. In these images, self-portraiture is mobilised as a tool bound up with gestures of obedience to a visual logic of Whiteness. The first portraits in the series expose the violence and racism suffered by individuals with curly hair. The act of cutting represents the mutilation of an essential part of the construction of the individual and of the recognition of their Blackness. Curly hair is regarded by many as a symbol of resistance in a society that insists on controlling it, straightening it, or even cutting it. The very caption of the images (Figure 5), written by Roger, underscores the suffering exposed in the photographs: “to be Black is not allowed, or is only allowed provided that you straighten your hair” (post from April 30, 2024; https://www.instagram.com/p/C6XXVxKrErx/?img_index=1).



Figure 5: *Sequence of hair-mutilation photographs from the photographer's self-portrait series*

Source. From *Série de autorretratos: Arquitetura do Desaparecimento – 01. A Série Arquitetura do desaparecimento nasce a partir de reflexões sobre o corpo* [Photograph], by Roger Silva [@rogersilvafotos], 2024a, Instagram. (https://www.instagram.com/p/C6XXVxKrErx/?img_index=1)

Roger cuts his hair with expressions laden with suffering, revealing, beyond the image itself, a profound violence imposed through social pressure that normalises Whiteness. There is an internalised pain on Roger's face, stemming from the social rejection he has endured throughout his life and the feeling of non-acceptance that has compelled him to conform to White aesthetics as the norm. Thus, with his own hands, he cuts his hair with a distressed expression. These images document a performance that exposes the racialised pain of Black individuals attempting to conform to the racial norms of Whiteness through symbolic mutilation (Fanon, 1952/2008). Authors such as bell hooks (2022), Fanon (1952/2008), and Neusa Santos Souza (2021) discuss this pain as part of the everyday life and psyche of Black people. In this self-portrait series, as in society, this violence deepens with each image.

Roger Silva's *Arquitetura do Desaparecimento* series presents a powerful visual intervention that combines self-portraiture, self-inscription (Gomes, 2024), self-fashioning (Campt, 2017), and reparative aesthetics (Best, 2016). His body functions both as a canvas and a narrative agent, simultaneously witnessing the violence inflicted upon Black bodies in the Brazilian context while proposing aesthetic strategies of reinvention and resistance.

Returning to the previous image, the first sequence in the series of self-portraits *Arquitetura do Desaparecimento* self-portraits, the act of cutting his hair signifies

a rupture, with the artist performing the gesture tensely and repeatedly. The symbolic element of hair is positioned within a field of aesthetic dispute and cultural resistance. The photographic sequence stages, through a double exposure, the act of cutting his own hair in a harsh, improvised, performative, and staged manner (Soulages, 1998/2010). In this activist intervention, the artist rewrites his self-portrait in a contested space, going beyond an intimate act of protest, reflecting transformation and the loss of an identity marker that would signal and affirm his raciality in a process of de-Blackening. Roger blends his perception of identity into a survival strategy that becomes his point of racial vulnerability. By masking racial recognition through the cutting of his curly hair, the gazes that would fix upon his Black skin are softened and mitigated by the various shades of grey in the black-and-white photograph. The absence of the hair marker and the ambiguity of his skin tone emerge as possibilities of escape, while simultaneously engaging with the white surface, “also blending his perception of identity” (Carrera, 2024, p. 58).

This movement of disappearance, announced in the title of the work, signals a paradoxical operation: the construction of ways to erase oneself and make one’s markers of racial oppression vanish. The author’s self-portrait contrasts with the symbolic violence involved in making his hair disappear, creating a tension between his gesture of fleeing the brutal universe of race — where he acts as a reparative witness (Best, 2016) processing his identity trauma — and the demand of the gaze, which at times confronts him directly and at others withdraws from the racial context that frames the violence and control exerted over his body.

In the subsequent images (Figure 6), Roger’s body engages in confrontation with the symbolic pressure of Whiteness, which imposes violent and oppressive forms of existence. The use of the white substance functions as an invasion of the physical integrity of his body; it forms a layer that erases his identity, silences his existence, and oppresses the Black body until it can no longer exist.



Figure 6: *Self-portrait series: Arquitetura do Desaparecimento*
 Source. From *Arquitetura do Desaparecimento – 02. Perdido num mundo branco, morrendo de medo que ele não se torne vermelho por causa de* [Photograph], by Roger Silva [@rogersilvafotos], 2024b, Instagram.
 (https://www.instagram.com/p/C6Z6vsjRzzK/?img_index=1)

This sequence amplifies the symbolic power of the self-portrait. In a new narrative and symbolic stage, the artist covers his body with white powder and fabrics, progressively becoming an indistinct figure — fully veiled and, ultimately, merged into the absolute Whiteness of the background — subsumed into Whiteness. Removed from the cruelty and narcissistic violence of whiteness, the racial and gendered violence is attenuated, functioning as a technology of resistance. Roger Silva radicalises the reflection on the disappearance of Black bodies in Brazil's visual and social history by materialising powder, fabric, light, and the intense white background. Within this image-based architecture, disappearance is not

definitive; instead, it is made tense, visible, and materialised for confrontation.

In the fabulation of wrapping himself in fabric (Figure 7) and allowing himself to be engulfed by Whiteness, the artist constructs a visual metaphor for survival mechanisms, camouflage, and creative escape. These can be understood as acts of refusal. These movements recreate territories and living spaces, as well as sites of safety and refuge — an escapism towards a “free” territory, what Dénètem Bona (2020) terms the “art of escape”.



Figure 7: *Self-portrait series: Arquitetura do Desaparecimento*

Source. From *Série: Arquitetura do Desaparecimento - 06 – Fé. Você já se sentiu só mesmo em meio a uma multidão? Daí em um* [Photograph], by Roger Silva [@rogersilvafotos], 2024c, Instagram. (<https://www.instagram.com/p/C7Sf0-1xArF/>)

The disappearance aesthetic in Roger Silva’s work presents itself as a model for

a method of action, or a tactic of “de-capture,” which does not necessarily mean vanishing, but instead disappearing as being elsewhere. Escape can be an act of “letting go,” an abandonment of identity for the sake of recreation, constituting a strategy for coping with the trauma of inhabiting the indeterminacy and traversal (Mombaça, 2021) of a bodily space defined by race and mixed-race identity — constantly in flux and undermining the fetishisation of hunting and punishment as if they were normal or morally acceptable (Bona, 2020).

Roger Silva’s shift from an explicit bodily representation of presence to one of absence points to a complex operation of self-representation through his self-portraits. The photographic image functions within a regime of visibility, with its multiple layers of opacity (Glissant, 1990). Hiding does not imply truly disappearing but rather transforming absence into a sign for critical reflection and reconstruction. Thus, the disappearance in the series, which might otherwise suggest a metaphor for the absence of Black bodies within history, memory, and visibility, is not a completed fact but a field of aesthetic and political struggle — a space of self-inscription within new possibilities of being and being seen (Mirzoeff, 2016b). The images enact repair (Best, 2016), not only addressing the exposure of violence inflicted on racialised bodies but also envisaging and nurturing spaces of reconstruction, enabling the creation of new critical, fabulatory narratives of Black existence.

The materialised capacity to transform suffering into a poetic and political gesture allows the self-portrait to be understood as a strategy of symbolic healing and historical contestation, challenging invisibility, brutality, and the potential for agentic self-fashioning (Camp, 2017).

Final Considerations

Art, when allied with social struggles, has increasingly occupied a significant role in the public sphere. The democratisation of access to content production and dissemination technologies, along with a more diffuse, interconnected, and informal civic participation, undoubtedly contributes to these processes. What can be described as “image-based activism” — rooted in illustration, video, or photography, and often deeply intertwined with the digital world — constitutes a central means by which some communities express themselves, forge identity bonds, and advance a new public agenda. The body, as a site of historical oppression, simultaneously represents a site of emancipation. Thus, the body becomes a fundamental discursive object, a symbolic referent through which dominant representations can be questioned, claiming new semantic possibilities.

This article proposes a process of reflection on self-portraiture as a fundamental aesthetic and political practice in constructing a Black counter-visibility, based on the analysis of Roger Silva’s *Arquitetura do Desaparecimento* series. Beyond simply documenting the self, the artist’s self-portrait emerges as a technology of self-inscription, reinscribing his subjectivity and activating a regime of visibility

that refuses the normative demands of the hegemonic gaze, establishing in its place an aesthetics of opacity and fabulation.

The visual strategies present in the series — from the cutting of hair to symbolic erasure using white powder and fabrics — demonstrate photographic staging as a contemporary strategy in which the performative body of the artist gains strength. The performance in these self-portraits invites reflection on fiction and staging in photography, highlighting its capacity to fabulate worlds and enable fugitive strategies of experimentation and freedom. In this way, self-portraiture produces meaning and constructs contestatory narratives that function as devices of a reparative aesthetics.

In these works, the self-portrait not only documents the trauma and symbolic violence imposed on the racialised body in contemporary Brazil but also proposes pathways for its critical and poetic-fabulatory elaboration. Self-inscription thus becomes a gesture of resistance and healing: simultaneously a reconfiguration, exposure, refusal, assertion of visibility, and act of escape. *Arquitetura do Desaparecimento* seeks to create images that fabulate new possibilities of existence, transforming the image itself into a site of contestation. Roger Silva establishes a contemporary Black insurgent visuality in which the Black self-portrait asserts itself as a radical space of subjective reinvention.

Machine Translation Post-Editing: Anabela Delgado

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Acknowledgements

This study was partially funded by the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq) — Public Call Atlânticas MCTI/CNPq/MIR/MMULHERES/MPI, No. 36/2023, for overseas fellowships (SWE and PDE), Beatriz Nascimento Programme for Women in Science.

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