

Excursions

Volume 11, Issue 1 (2021) | (Re)Connect



Cover Photo: (Re)Connect by Charlotte Esposito

Essays: *(Re)Connecting Academia*

Manuela Salazar
Reconnecting through Publishing

www.excursions-journal.org.uk

Reconnecting through Publishing

Manuela Salazar
University of Sussex

From the beginning of my academic career, I have been continuously interested in understanding the world through the perspective of ‘ordinary’ people. As a photography scholar and later as an everyday life researcher, I have always tried to engage with the realm of the vernacular – that is to say, with practices that escape the more ‘academic’ or ‘canonical’ nets set out by scholars to understand the world. And in that perspective, in my way of understanding vernacular photography, I have always tried to escape the discourse of the amateur or the unskilled by understanding it as a genuine practice, embedded in its own framework of technical and intellectual skills.

When I started to investigate Instagram, I saw content creators as makers in their own right, even though the general discourse surrounding social media photography is one that deals more with ideas of excess, repetition and meaninglessness. Instead of comparing such operations to better established photography practices, such as photojournalism or art photography, I viewed them as an integral part of visual culture, which could be as influential as it was (seen as) influenceable. Like scholar Anabella Pollen, who tried to understand the individual reason behind sunset pictures, I tried to see every seemingly banal image of, let’s say, a cup of coffee posted on Instagram, as a picture taken with intention and purpose, as I attempted to trace its connections to different fields of knowledge, such as art history, sociology and visual culture.

My methodological perspective was thus directly connected to non-academic realms of knowledge. It was only natural then that when I decided to publish my work, I would do it through a less conventionally academic route. Back in Brazil, I got to know an editor of a small literature publisher, Sálvio Kotter, who became interested in my dissertation. I had spent four years, from 2013 to 2017, looking at Instagram images and writing about them, and I did not want such reflections to stop at conferences and journals. I decided to rewrite the work to better cater to the audiences I was writing about. This was then printed by Kotter's publisher in 2018 as a book titled *Mundo Mosaico (Mosaic World)*, available in an easy and accessible paperback format. It can fit in anyone's backpack, and it is a short read with a little over a hundred pages, which made it relatively affordable in the context of scholarly books in Brazil, retailing for under 5 pounds.

Since publishing it, I have heard of people using it to contextualise Instagram for undergrad students and school pupils. I have even heard from individual readers through the Instagram direct message system. This was some of the most rewarding feedback I could get about my academic work, especially because it has continuously been funded by Capes Foundation, a Brazilian government institution that finances higher education through the Ministry of Education, which means that giving back is an essential part of my career as a scholar.