

The Power of Necropolitics: Affect Theory and Violence in Perspective

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Abstract. This article offers an overview of the central arguments and theoretical contributions of affect theory insofar as they are interrelated to and connected with feminist thought. Necropolitics or the right to kill or to destroy is the theme of this two-part essay. This first section points to how the affective turn presents a return of critical theory to bodily matter. Of special importance is the argument regarding the specific manner in which affective studies enable a strong grounding for social action and change by centering its theorizations on interpersonal and relational issues. Whereas the first part of this essay traces a panorama of how the affective proposes a new methodology for thinking about sentience and responsibility, the second section pays special attention to the entanglement of violence and heteronormative affections. The focus is on political violence, with particular attention paid to the Basque situation, on the inadmissible “right to kill” claimed by the warrior that involves a peculiar destructive (mis)understanding of community and of the self. Contrary to the necropolitical logic, the authors propose a feminist ethos linked to an understanding of the affective interstices that open up when emphasis is redirected from the anchors of social bonds/affects to those of direct interpersonal negotiation. In order to outline some of the affective movement entailed in the rethinking of identity in feminist terms needed for an undoing of the necropolitical energy in political violence –what Roland Barthes, terms “the neutral” (2005)– we focus on restorative justice and its affective universe.

Key words: Affect theory; feminist theory; necropolitics; Basque Country; ETA; restorative justice.

[es] El poder de la necropolítica: Teoría afectiva y violencia en perspectiva

Resumen. Este artículo presenta una visión de conjunto de las autoras y de los autores más relevantes junto con sus teorizaciones y contribuciones críticas a la teoría del afecto siguiendo una óptica feminista. La necropolítica o el derecho a matar o a destruir es el tema elegido en este artículo. En la primera sección, se señala cómo de vital importancia es para estas teorizaciones la recuperación del cuerpo y lo material para la teoría crítica. De especial relevancia en esta parte es apuntar cómo los estudios del afecto enfatizan no solo el valor de lo interpersonal y de lo relacional entre todos los seres vivos, sino también de éstos con su entorno, y cómo este aspecto relacional contiene formas específicas de intervención y de cambio social. Si en la primera parte del ensayo se traza una panorámica del giro afectivo como propuesta metodológica para pensar sobre la vida y la responsabilidad, en la segunda sección, se presta atención a cómo la violencia se enreda con afectos heteronormativos. Aquí se centra en la violencia política, en el inadmisibles “derecho a matar” reclamado por el guerrero, derecho que exige una forma peculiar y destructiva de entender la comunidad, de percibir a los otros y a uno mismo, con especial atención al caso de Euskadi. En esta parte se contempla un proceder feminista ligado a los intersticios que se abren cuando se presta más atención a querer negociar los anclajes sociales y afectivos con el otro, anclajes que suelen estar embrollados con la heteronormatividad y sus desastres. Así, para explicar el tipo de movimiento afectivo necesario para repensar la identidad en términos feministas y poder deshacer la energía necropolítica de la violencia política –lo que Roland Barthes llamó “lo neutral” (2005)– el análisis se enfoca en la justicia restaurativa y su universo afectivo.

Palabras clave: teoría afectiva; teoría feminista; necropolítica; País Vasco; ETA; justicia restaurativa.

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1. The Return of Critical Theory to Bodily Matter

1.1. The Return of Critical Theory to Bodily Matter

Since the mid-90's, "affect" has gained a high degree of centrality in debates over contemporary cultural theory, and it has become a significant site of reflection that allows a delineation of a more nuanced understanding of the social world. Moving away from a clearly demarcated subject/object epistemology that presupposes an active subject and a passive object of study, affect theory shifts attention to how social and political aspects emerge through multiple and dynamic encounters that subvert these distinctions. Thus, the "affective turn" seeks to depart from abstract categories of analysis that traditionally have been used to describe social realities as constituted oppositional structures, and instead it turns the focus to the heterogeneous connections that are made possible through sensations and intensities of life as they are experienced by sentient beings. In that regard, two major elements converge in the interest that affect has had for scholars of contemporary cultural theory: a concern for the *emotionalization* of public life as well as an effort to recognize the workings of affect in the production of knowledge (Lara and Dominguez, 2013, 101). The focus on the affective traces its origins to Baruch Spinoza's *Ethics* (1677) and the intimate relationship between affects and knowledge implicit in his philosophical project. The central arguments found in Spinozian ethics inspired Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's theory of the body as an "assemblage," whose function or meaning lies "in its relation to the various capacities to affect other bodies or to be affected by them" (1988, 4). Theoretically conceiving it in terms of an assemblage, the body:

"[i]s not an organic totality, which is capable of the wholesale expression of subjectivity, a welling up of the subject's emotions, attitudes, beliefs or experiences, but is itself an assemblage of organs, processes, pleasures, passions, activities, behaviors, linked by the fine lines and unpredictable networks to other elements, segments and assemblages" (Grosz, 1994, 120).

Accordingly, the fluidity of affective connections between bodies does not follow any order that can be rationally apprehended, but rather it creates open-ended and unpredictable networks. Of importance for affective theory is how this focus on relationality between bodies enables a different approach to social and political realities. By placing importance on affective encounters with others, affective theory brings to the foreground a concern for ethical considerations. Moreover, the complexity and multiplicity of affective responses prompts the question of what conditions trigger the specificity of an encounter, what circumstances can move us forward or away from others; in other words "How are specific bodies, lives and forms of life constructed as loveable, grievable and available to the normative culture of affective engagement, and how are others transformed into objects of hate and aversion?" (Athena *et al*, 2008, 6). Increasing awareness of the role that affective relationships between bodies play opens up the possibility to a renewed understanding of the social beyond what might normally be conceived as totalizing and conclusive identitarian narratives that are constructed on concepts of race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, and so on. Moving away from identity based politics, affective encounters instead place critical attention on the question of ethics understood as an answerability to others based on an "unconditional and responsible openness to be affected by others—to be shaped by the contact with others" (Athena *et al*, 2008, 6). As part of this redefinition, the concepts of assemblage and affect are able to reveal a plasticity and texture of the social that arises from the corporeal ability to establish multiple connections with other sentient bodies. In the genealogy of affect studies, the work put forward by Sarah Ahmed's *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), Laura Berlant's *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (2008), Rosi Braidotti's *Nomadic Subjects. Embodiment and Sexual difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (1994), Judith Butler's *Precarious Life: the Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004), Elizabeth Grosz's *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (1994), Julia Kristeva's both *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1980) and *Tales of Love* (1983) and Martha C. Nussbaum's *Upheavals of Thought: the Intelligence of Emotions* (2001), among others, have been crucial either in theorizing affect or in establishing the groundwork to connect theories of affect and emotions to political praxis and feminist thought. This list is by no means exhaustive, but the appraisal in the work of these scholars of the significance of affect, sentiments, sentimentality and emotion in the configuration of social, cultural and political processes has been essential for the consolidation of contemporary debates carried on by other key contributors, namely Brian Massumi's *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (2002), Eve Kosofsky Sedwick *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (2003), Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth's *The Affect Theory Reader* (2010). However, despite the current proliferation of scholars and studies around emotions and affectivity, there is still "[n]o single, generalizable theory of affect: not yet, and (thankfully) there never will be" (Gregg and Siegworth, 2010, 3).

Nevertheless, different theorizations of affect do share a point of departure located in what can be termed as a "post-structuralist fatigue around the notion of the subject" (Puar, 2012, 63 cited by Kennedy *et al.*, 2013, 46). Thus, the so-called "affective turn" of critical theory attempts to move beyond a binary model of thinking (ie rational/emotional, public/private, self/other, etc.) towards a more intersectional framework of inquiry,

whereby affect and emotional sensations are examined for their critical productivity. The focus on these intersectional aspects opens up new forms of engagement and of critical creativity, as affective encounters operate in ways that are “endlessly changing, permeable, and entirely unsusceptible of any definite articulation” (Sedgwick, 2003, 6). Another aspect that the above-mentioned scholars have in common is the idea that rational paradigms and linguistic constructions do not fully account for the myriad of relational aspects that bind us to one another. In other words, the deficit that the “affective turn” addresses in regard to previous cultural theories is in fact the inability of those approaches to account for “the messiness of the experiential, the unfolding of bodies into worlds, and the drama of contingency” (Ahmed, 2010, 30). This engagement with the relational means that the “affective turn” allows not only for the opening up of social interpretation in novel and innovative ways, but also for asserting connections or bonds as “what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values and objects” (Ahmed, 2010, 29).

Theorists of affect draw important tools from psychoanalytic theory as well as –and perhaps more importantly– from subscribing to queer theory and feminist thought and their long-standing critique of the Cartesian logocentric tradition, which eliminated the corporeal from the production of knowledge and forced a schism between emotion and reason in the Western philosophical tradition. Hence, while affect is nothing new and neither are the problematics that the affective approach is preoccupied with, the “turn” refers to the inauguration of a new epistemological trajectory which brings to the foreground sensations and desire as “social bonds” (Ahmed, 2004, 35). The examination of affective connectivities puts in dialogue several disciplinary domains, such as psychoanalysis, feminist and queer theories, philosophy, history and anthropology, in order to recuperate the sentient for the political with the intention of returning “critical theory and cultural criticism to bodily matter” (Clough, 2003, 206). As a result, attention to affect implies the opening up of cognition to the emotional investment necessary for connectivity and intersubjective relations involving both the human and the non-human.

1.2. What is “affect”?

Despite the solid scholarship on affect, there is a resistance on the part of its proponents to provide a concrete definition of what affect actually is due to its elusive nature. Affect defies representation as it speaks to a sensation, an “impression that is not clear or distinct” (Ahmed, 2017, 22). One can say that affects operate or mobilize situations in the same fashion as aesthetic or artistic terms. Because of this indeterminacy, however, affect, emotions and feelings are sometimes used interchangeably. In an attempt to establish some particularities of affect, Eric Shouse states:

“Although feeling and affect are routinely used interchangeably, it is important not to confuse affect with feelings and emotions. As Brian Massumi’s definition of affect in his introduction to Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus* makes clear, affect is not a personal feeling. Feelings are *personal* and *biographical*, emotions are *social*, and affects are *prepersonal*” (2005, 2).

To signal a distinction between and among all these different categories, affects tend to be associated with how the body registers an experience; in other words, affect is linked then to the pre-cognitive and visceral aspects of a given bodily response. As a result, unlike feelings and emotions, affect cannot be captured in language, it cannot be contained by it. This lack of concrete attributes of affect or the impossibility of its representation lies in its relational nature, in its “in between-ness” (Gregg and Seigworth, 2010, 2). Affect therefore cannot be considered the property of an individual but rather it should be understood as a social register, in that it refers to what connects us; in other words, affect resides at the interstice of connections and interactions. According to Hemmings (2005): “Affect broadly refers to states of being, rather than to their manifestation or interpretation as emotions” (551). Connectivity here is understood in ample terms, encompassing all of the possibilities created by potential affective attachments (i.e. the individual with the collective, the human and non-human, human and technology etc.). From this perspective, affect emerges as something different from individual emotions. Because affect is non-intentional, it cannot be regulated; its autonomy and contingency challenges not only control but also any formal causal order, and it even challenges a sense of agency that might be grounded in the concept of the subject. The unpredictable nature of affect not only defies its theorization, but also forces the critic who is concerned with its social implication to ask what is affect’s critical potentiality for ethical or social transformation? If affect, as Massumi (2015) has asserted, is “proto-political” or if it lies “outside of social signification” (ix), where then does its potential as a critical tool reside? What is the political efficacy of the affective turn?

0.3. Political Accountability of Affect

If in the previous paragraphs we have delineated how the “affective turn” is invested in revealing the non-intentional encounters and connections that occur between humans as well as between humans and non-humans, it is because those connections express social and ethical meanings. Affective connections, according to Clare

Hemmings, “[p]lace the individual in a *circuit* of feeling and response, rather than in opposition to others” (2005, 552).

This section will offer a review of some of the ways in which affective theory engages with a commitment to social intervention and transformation, presenting how affect studies move from abstraction to the particulars of lived experience and everyday life. Specifically, the focus will be on pointing out how affective encounters alter a “necropolitical” logic or the power to regulate life and death by granting human consideration to some while not recognizing the same in others. In that context, one should ask: how does affect become a tool for addressing the pressing questions of social justice, environmental degradation, violence, war, terrorism, and so forth? Is it possible to completely abandon identitarian categories and yet effectively challenge the dominant social order and its exclusions? In other words, what is the political applicability of affect? What can affect *do*? These are questions with multiple ramifications, but they are dilemmas of special importance for theorizations that are invested in changing the status quo and are committed to transformative collective political projects, such as feminism.

An important formulation of affect theory, as mentioned earlier, lies in the body’s unlimited capacity to affect and be affected. Affective processes produce unexpected connections and interactions and, in this sense, because of their unanticipated nature, one could say that they are transformative. Due to the unpredictable nature of affective attachments, though, these connections alter established social logics. On the one hand, they present new possibilities of thought, while on the other, because of their random nature, they defy dominant social paradigms and rational explanations. Moreover, affective encounters should be understood not as an interplay of dialectical binaries, nor “as the coming together of two separate entities, but as a process of entanglement in which boundaries do not hold” (Labanyi, 2010, 223). Thus, the affective process does not imply a conceptual division and dialectical movement between “self” and “other”, but rather the “entanglement” produces an undifferentiated *selfother*. This “entanglement” obscures the possibility of applying neatly defined or differentiated identity categories of gender, class, race, age, sexuality, nationality etc. to affective encounters. However, power relations and social narratives continue to emerge in these affective encounters because affective interactions are individually experienced and historically and socially situated. Affects are bodily localized and, as Elizabeth Grosz remind us, “the body is a cultural product” (1994, 23), which means that the body exists only as a result of very specific cultural productions (Grosz, 1994, 58). For feminism and queer theory, the body has been a central tool for thinking through political positions since the corporeal brings “[a]ttention to everyday experience rather than macro abstractions” (Hemmings, 2005, 559). To give a concrete example of the body-mind continuum implicit in affective encounters, let us consider the essay of the African American poet and social activist Audre Lorde, who in “The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism”³ illustrates the interpreting of “anger” in its political potentiality. In that essay, Lorde elaborates on her feelings of anger in the face of reactions to her black body and how indignation can propel knowledge and inform action:

My response to racism is anger. I have lived with that anger, ignoring it, feeding upon it, learning to use it before it laid my visions to waste, for most of my life. Once I did it in silence, afraid of the weight. **My fear** of anger taught me nothing. **Your fear** of that anger will teach you nothing, also. [...] My anger is a response to racist attitudes and to the actions and presumptions that arise from those attitudes. If your dealings with other women reflect those attitudes, then **my anger and your attendant fears** are spotlights that **can be used for growth** in the same way that I have used learning to express anger from my growth (Lorde, 1984, 125. Emphasis added).

This quote offers a concrete example of how the body and the social are intertwined and operate in a continuum, and how that relationship carries over to the production of a particular knowledge. As the quote shows, in affective encounters knowledge emerges not as complete, but rather as an evolving and growing process, necessitating the Other so as not to foreclose its evolving trajectory. In addition, Lorde’s text illustrates how affective encounters do not happen in a vacuum, rather they are impregnated with the corporeal and the material. The feeling of racism by the individual is an experience that carries with it the weight of social, historical and cultural structures. Thus, affective encounters do not erase different social positions; they are permeated by them. However, when affective encounters occur, they can develop a new knowledge based on the recognition of the mutual interdependence of self and other. This realization destabilizes boundaries and differential positions and moves them in different directions. Thus, one can say that the political promise affects have, or what affective encounters can *do*, is to shift perspectives and open up paths for new and divergent ways of thinking that have the potential to lead to different political actions. And this is of importance to feminism and its preoccupation with gendered positions: the political strength of affective encounters resides not so much in the preoccupation with understanding gender as a fixed identity or with static dialectical categories of self and other (i.e. masculine/feminine; mind/body etc.), but rather in challenging dominant modes of thinking about these categories by illuminating links and interdependencies. In other words, affective political strength revol-

³ Helena Lopez, in her essay “Emociones, afectividad y feminismo,” refers to the same essay by Audre Lorde to illustrate affect’s political potentiality. With the same intention, Clare Hemmings uses Lorde’s essays from *Sister Outsider* and *The Cancer Journals* as well as Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skins, White Masks*.

ves around its capacity to dismantle what Rosi Braidotti has termed “the illusion of unity” (1994, 12) and, by doing so, allowing new ideas to emerge and for different possibilities of action to surface.

The next part of this article examines how the paradigm of the affective can yield a new ethos, one in which the capacity of affecting and being affected does not offer categorical imperatives or provide concrete moral answers to complex realities, but rather how it could help restore a sense of connectivity in those places where violence has profoundly shattered it. In a social context fractured by violence, where does healing start? What are the implications/dispositions needed to turn individual and social emotional wounds into possibilities of repair and hope? How does gender and an alteration of heteronormative regulations affect the community? An analysis of restorative justice encounters in the political context of the Basque Country serves as a case study to illustrate how thinking through affect and relationality challenges a “necropolitical logic” in which an Other (‘You’) has been constructed as a radical alterity, dispossessed from the same considerations granted to the Self (‘I’). By closely examining the emotional power implicit in the restorative encounters, this analysis points to the different political imaginary that can be revealed through affect.

2. Toxic Fires and Empathic Beside-ness: The Basque post-ETA Context

In “An Inventory of Shimmers”, Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg (2010), map out several definitions of affect that will be used in this feminist exploration of violence and reconciliation. Most theorists of affect agree that affect is a very elusive concept, for it is a relation, a movement, not a “thing”. Likewise, affect is mostly invisible to the eye (however deeply felt) when it is invoked, mobilized, and/or materialized, only noticeable as an afterthought, a hidden (sometimes unconscious) motor or energy that guides us in the materialization of our individual and social identities, an energy whose location is as much internal as it is external to us. Affect is real, powerful, and binding. Affect is effectual, elusive, and shifting⁴. Nevertheless, Seigworth and Gregg offer some insights as to where to “find” it: “affect arises in the midst of in-betweenness” (1); “affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body” (human and nonhuman) (1); and in more explicit terms:

“Affect, at its most anthropomorphic, is the name we give to those forces –visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion– that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations, or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world’s apparent intractability” (1).

So, if affect is movement (change), suspension (doubt), or stasis (“overwhelmed by the world’s apparent intractability”) (1), if affect is “born in in-between-ness and resides as accumulative beside-ness” (2), affect, then, is interpersonal, social, and accrues power. It easily follows that affect should have an important explanatory role to play when thinking about both the “atmosphere” that enables and “justifies” political violence as well as the forces that facilitate its opposite: forgiveness and reconciliation. What kinds of affective ties link individuals to these spaces of in-between-ness? What type of energy fuels the toxic fire of terrorism or the reenabling power of restorative justice? The case study that will help guide these thoughts is that of political violence in the Basque context in Spain.

The Basque conflict (1959-2011) was Western Europe’s last site of internal political armed conflict until the rise of ISIS. The Spanish conflict stems from the outcome of WWII and the special socio-historical circumstances that governed the later years of the Franco regime in Spain (1939-1975). The end of the dictatorship was a contradictory ethical period of Spanish history. Many of those pushing for democracy looked the other way when political violence was deemed a legitimate avenue of action given the longevity and brutality of the dictatorship. This was the socio-affective “angle” (Ahmed, 2010, 36) that triggered a complex renegotiation of national identity for Spaniards and Basques alike during the country’s subsequent transition to democracy after Franco’s death in 1975. At the time, most progressives both in and out of the Basque Country joined in the Basque nationalist sentiment and equated *Spanish* national identity (the adjective) with the legacy of the dictatorship. In the Basque context, regionalism, whether nationalist or not, promised to correct the democratic deficit for which an excessively strong centralist Spanish state was held responsible. It was very easy to misalign ethics and politics, to not live the collective social space through the eyes of victims, or to not question the misguided institutional politics that officially condemned terrorism but that envisioned ways to render profitable the fight against political insufficiencies with fire behind closed doors. Victims of terrorism, both at the hands of ETA and at the Spanish state were the ugly price placed on the political demands of the separatists and the political stability of Spain. A toxic fire was camouflaged as a circle of love towards the homeland. Both hid

⁴ Raymond Williams developed an earlier notion of affect in *Marxism and Literature* (1977) as a “structure of feeling”: “We are talking about characteristic elements of impulse, restraint and time; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity. We are then defining these elements as a “structure”: as a set, with specific internal relations, at once interlocking and in tension. Yet, we are also defining a social experience which is still in process, often indeed not yet recognized as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating, but which in analysis (though rarely otherwise) has its emergent, connecting, and dominant characteristics, indeed its specific hierarchies” (132).

the dirtiness of nationalist violence under the powerful emotional ties the communal space elicits. The affective core of “in-between-ness” was dead from the onset, for those called to become part of a community were legitimated in the name of birth rights and not so much on social citizenship, the affective glue of a healthy community. In Euskadi, this hermeneutical and moral confusion generated an incomprehensible tolerance and apathy towards the victims of ETA terrorism, an acceptance grounded, in part, on the resentment provoked by the excesses of the Spanish state in its anti-terrorist efforts and the weak exercise of democracy in that region: an eye-for-an-eye deadly indifference, an unhealthy legacy of the Franco dictatorship. The invisibility of the victims, their “inevitability” given the larger political goals, marked one of the lowest ethical moments of Basque and Spanish society. It highlights a mean-spiritedness or “souring of social conscience and compassion” (Rich, 2001, 157) that took years to overcome even as a new climate of reconciliation began to take root.

Basque writer Bernardo Atxaga has eloquently written about the attraction towards this fire in his 1995 novel *Gizona bere bakardadean* (*El hombre solo*-The Lone Man). There he focuses on what Sara Ahmed (2004) terms a “thickness of sociality” (28) or social glue that confers ETA militants, in this case, with an airtight belief system that, while inspired in the insufficiencies within the outcomes of democracy in the Basque Country, is better understood as being fueled by a particular model of heroic masculinity. Militancy in ETA demands toxic “homosocial bonding” (Sedgwick, 1985, 1), an identity that is imbued with necropolitical “rights,” i.e., with a license to kill driven by overdetermined feelings of hatred directed towards those elements of Basque society that have *injured* the collective romanticized nationalist I in both a figurative and/or literal sense. Hatred towards torturers, disgust towards “outsiders” (*maketos*), repulsion towards non-nationalists, animosity towards all ideological dissenters, heroic love for land and country, all driven by the urge to rid that society from elements that pollute this illusory social space. To use Lauren Berlant’s terms (2010), these militants share a “cruel optimism” or a scene of desire that “contributes to the attrition of the very thriving that is supposed to be made possible in the work of the attachment in the first place” (95). Their “optimistic” and heroic attachment to country and community can only turn to cruelty because it is linked to the affective space of toxic masculine empowerment of the warrior. This heroic subjectivity rests upon a particular way of enunciating itself that the nationalist mindset requires. Berlant explains that cruel optimism is no more and no less than a “fake present moment of intersubjectivity” (95), in other words, it requires a “projected possibility of a hearing that cannot take place in the terms of its enunciation (‘you’ are not here, ‘you’ are eternally belated to the conversation with you that I am imagining” (95). This creates a forged moment of encounter with an Other, in which, nonetheless, “a performance of address can take place” (95). If the Other is an empty site, void of material content and complexity, if the other is reduced to its interpellative capacities, the terrorist cultural psyche is free then to fill that space with the image of self and community that will justify the necropolitical privilege to kill in the name of that “imagined” community.

One could venture that this is affect theory’s rendering of an inverted version of Anderson’s coined term (1983). Here a “performance of address” is also the effect or outcome that underlies the idea of a community of nationals. However, in Anderson’s explanation, communitarian bonds are born thanks to a wide array of institutional and cultural sites that simultaneously enable the imagining of similar and/or dissident national others. In this formulation, community is the starting point and end result of these “utterances.” In terms of affect theory, this national bond is a “transmission” of affect (Brennan, 2004, 67-68), a connection lived not only as an outward psychic impulse, an I-We, but also as its reverse, of a We-I. This affirms that affect does not (solely) originate in the interiority of the I but rather is born in its social anchoring. Hence, if affect is transmission between interlocutors of different scales (social and individual), it behooves understanding the affective-logico operation undertaken by the terrorist who interpellates a very scrutinized “you” who then becomes its false and non-existent or distorted interlocutor. This is so given the extreme limitations placed on the space of the “you” in that conversation, i.e., on the actual multiplicity of the social body. There is no “you” in this logic, only an I that renders itself the mirror of a toxic idea of justice and national community in the name of which the terrorist speaks and acts (heroically).

One could say with Berlant that the terrorist enjoys, in this fashion, a “rhetorical animation” (95), a call or interpellation, a use of apostrophe, that puts him in contact with an imagined other. This method of approximation to the national other is “an indirect, unstable, physically impossible but phenomenologically vitalizing movement of rhetorical animation that permits subjects to suspend themselves in the optimism of a potential occupation of the same psychic space of others, the objects of desire who make you possible” (95). But it nevertheless is imbued in “cruelty” for there is no “Other” in the equation, only an alienated I, a “revolutionary consciousness [that] means feeling at odds with the world or feeling that the world is odd. You become estranged from the world as it has been given: the world of good habits and manners, which promises your comfort in return for obedience and good will. As a structure of feeling, alienation is an intense burning presence” (Ahmed, 2010, 168); it is the wind that pushes the sails of revolutionary sociality, a sociality that is “thick” (Ahmed, 2004, 28) for it allows very few spaces for a subjectivity other than the one that requires an intense heteronormative sacrificial paradigm. It is an I that evolves from a context, from an idea of Euskadi, that is “overdetermined” (Ahmed 2004, 32, 39), i.e., arising from a closed circuit of relations that get reaffirmed, performed, and reinstated through every new manifestation of hatred, justification for militancy, elimination

of dissidence, or inscription within a grammar of feeling that demands a self-righteous justification to kill in the name of the nation.

So, if the cruel optimism of the terrorist demands a projection and performative utterance of this necropolitical I onto a supposedly empty you, what happens when the falsified you actually responds? Or, more precisely, what kinds of interior and exterior affective shifts need to take place so that the empty you can become an actual interlocutor? Can the terrorist I withhold all scrutiny? Is there room within the grammar of feeling that feeds violence, within that deadly belief system, for a different kind of subjectivity to emerge? Can a different kind of context, one less tied to “truths” about people, land, culture or language, and more in tune instead with paradigms of “doubt” (Camps, 2016), with notions of “failure” (Halberstam, 2011), with the presence of the dead, liberate the terrorist I from its closed-circuit loop of self-mirroring? How else can there be room for an Other, i.e., for the other true complexity and messiness, for an internal space whereby the Other becomes a part of the I? How does one substitute the interlocutor that creates the positionality of the subject from the I-I to the I-you? The process of restorative justice might offer some answers to the Basque moment.

In a different context, I have discussed the importance of Derrida’s “Law of Friendship” (1997) –the regrettable maxim that “one must go before the other”– to better understand the gravity of the terrorist’s violation of the triangle that exists between the I, a loved one, and Death⁵. He who holds a gun to the head of another, he who tortures to the point of murder, dispossess Death’s right in the law of friendship. The murderous individual intercepts and interrupts the triangle and legitimizes his actions to himself through negation, through a cruel optimism that, on the one hand, projects his I onto a falsely imagined supportive collectivity with his cause and, on the other, actually negates the part of the true Other in himself, in his own humanity. Blinded by political ideals, immersed in a twisted version of political struggle, fueled by a need for collective justice in the form of vengeance, and embodying a toxic model of the masculine I (the warrior), the terrorist subject is deprived of his humanity and becomes an instrument of war. Armed conflict unbinds the social contract, eliminates the law of friendship, and erases the material messiness of day to day life, its irregularities, inconsistencies, and unpredictability, and turns it into a clean and straight road towards self-negation and self-aggrandizement to the tune of war. Nevertheless, one must remember that the warrior not only intercepts and kills the Other in his/her triangle of life; the warrior is also a “casualty” of that same logic. The death of the Other is, in actuality, the beginning of a new murderous triangle between the deceased and the assassin, both of them forever linked in a necropolitical bond, one that underscores, interestingly enough, the supreme loneliness of the assassin. He who kills, or tortures, cannot embrace our collective responsibility to question hegemonic belief systems, to strive for what Roland Barthes (2005) terms “the Neutral” or that internal site that “eludes easy polarities and contradictions while also guarding against the accidental consolidation of the very meaning that the Neutral seeks to dissolve” (7). He points out that “the Neutral is this irreducible No: a No so to speak suspended in front of the hardenings of both faith and certitude and incorruptible by either one” (14). In terms of affect, the “Neutral” would facilitate the necessary “beside-ness” that reconciliation efforts strive to open, a disruption of the silence, of the muteness that surrounds both the suffering induced by terror and societal indifference towards victims.

Restorative justice encounters, if anything, unbind the triangle between the terrorist, the terrorist’s victim, and Death, and allow for reformulations of the I that bring the terrorist subject back to life. In the Basque context, the Nanclares de Oca prison project (2011-12) under the auspices of the Office of Peace, Coexistence, Human Rights, and Victims, directed by Txema Urkijo and Maixabel Lasa (an ETA survivor) was a civil society project whereby former ETA members sat face to face with victims, each offering the other a piece of themselves connected to the brutality that the terrorist act imposed on themselves and their families. These experiences entailed a highly scrutinized process lasting several months whereby victims met with mediators and psychologists in preparation for the encounter, and whereby victimizers had gone through a long internal process of reevaluating the logic that had governed their political and personal identity. The victimizers had renounced their militancy and its necropolitical logic, were trying to come to terms with the effects of this humanitarian disaster, and wished to speak face to face with victims in order to see themselves “in the eyes of the Other” (title of the book that discusses these encounters edited by the chief mediator, Esther Pascual). It should be pointed out that none of the former ETA members received special treatment, privileges, nor a reduced sentence. There was no “benefit” to the restorative justice encounters except for the what happens to the soul and how that irradiates externally. Both sides were brave and generous, though in very different ways. They offered each other, through the power of the word and of the ear, the priceless gifts of life, reconciliation, and even a version of forgiveness⁶. These highly complex encounters undid, through the work of mediation,

⁵ For a more detailed development of the triangle and its implications see Martín “The Future of the Dead: Reconciliation in PostETA Euskadi” (forthcoming 2019).

⁶ For more on restorative justice in the Basque context see Annabel Martín and Pilar Rodríguez (Eds.): *Tras las huellas del terrorismo en Euskadi: Justicia Restaurativa, Convivencia, Reconciliación* (2019).

the absurd notion that victims and victimizers had no shared humanity⁷. The discovery was overwhelming but it proved that a civil society worthy of its name needs to remember to put the vulnerable at its center for that is code to understanding that a true politics of well-being can only flourish when one acknowledges the vulnerable in oneself. This demands the questioning of nationalist narratives, the masculinist logics of power, superiority, and sacrifice, a dismantling of the model of heroic subjectivity governing the warrior, of finding a “neutral” space that wonders if the structures of feeling that bind us to culture, people, and to ourselves are worthy of being upheld or not. The affective turn makes us aware of how emotion and thought are inextricably linked together but it also makes us alert to the fact of the overwhelming power affect has as a motor of action both in positive and negative terms.

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⁷ See the work of mediators, lawyers, and psychotherapists in the excellent Esther Pascual Rodríguez (Coord.): *Los ojos del otro. Encuentros restaurativos entre víctimas y ex miembros de ETA* (2013).

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