

A kiss in the midst of a riot: community, impact and persistence

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Abstract

An apparent contradiction arises when, despite the shared life in community of images, one of them stands out from the rest. In June 2011, in an insistent context of photographs arising from street disturbances, one photographer achieved space on the front pages of numerous media outlets. In that image, we saw what appeared to be two young people kissing, lying in the street, surrounded by a violent situation. We will analyse the reasons, in their context, for which this image stood out from the others, and to what point the inertia of the reiterated visual offering extends.

Keywords: Community, riots, impact, media

Images appearing in the media possess two aspects apparently contradictory: on the one hand, they exist in community, a circumstance which exercises a uniformising and levelling influence on them, and on the other, it happens that occasionally one of them produces an impact, this being quantified in terms of presence in those media.

That is to say, we rarely see the images on their own: they are always accompanied, extended, externalised, placed in common, and not just from an external point of view, where some are presented recurrently and simultaneously among others, but also from an internal point of view, where the constructive processes that conform them are always collective. Nevertheless, and contrary to this horizontal presence, it so happens that sometimes one stands out over its neighbours, and one image appears to flood all the screens in the world.

The objective is to analyse, through a specific case, the possible tension generated between the miscellaneous existence of the images and the occasional prominence of one of them. We will seek the conditions that must hold for one image to be converted into one that, rebounding a countless number of times, outgrows the phenomenon of mere accessibility to become an image that appears to be omnipresent for a certain period of time. Likewise, as happened in the case looked at, it may happen that the image extends and persists, above a corpus of visual events derived from it.

With the aim of drawing conclusions from this paradox, I have selected an image arising from confrontations with the police in the street, which recalls mobilisations, multitudinous protests, large crowds, group demonstrations and other encounters or marches by discontented people. The choice of this one is not arbitrary. rather, in the first place, this is due to the great number in this family of images, and secondly, that they usually carry the baggage of well-founded suspicion that they appear out of strategies of control directed at diluting or amplifying aspects which have little to do with the demands of the convocation itself, but on the other hand, are to do with the handling of parameters relating to fear, compassion, victimisation, etc.

Therefore, images of hostility in the street are fertile ground for reflecting upon the contextual factors and demands holding at the moment of their appearance, because they are -and are not the only ones- exposed to a maelstrom of different interests, represented by the distance between two prioritizing poles: that of concealment and that of maximum publicity.

Faced with this highly instrumentalised panorama, the questions which I will try to answer are the following: first: what are the reasons why one image taken from a riot stands out from other similar ones, propagating itself easily and eluding the mechanisms that would submerge it in the sea of other images? and secondly: to what point does the inertia of having been the object of a, let us say, persistent, presence extend?

Before starting to try to respond to these questions, it is necessary to state briefly two of the characteristics of the condition and nature of images these days: the fleetingness and the instantaneity. The unceasing circulation of images means that they are fleeting: „they are in the world, leaving, vanishing. They are here for moments, but always on their way“ (Brea, 2010, p. 67). And images are also instantaneous: they pass before our eyes and evaporate, almost without duration, borne along by the speed of a stream which increasingly insists on our being informed immediately of whatever happens. On this point, Paul Virilio speaks of the “acceleration of the real” (Virilio, 2012, p. 24), where the transmission of the data about an event takes place at the same time as the event itself, playing

[A] primordial role in the elevation of fear to the category of global setting, as it allows people’s emotions to be synchronised around the world. (...) it is possible to experience the same feeling of terror at the same moment in all places in the world (p. 24). -Back translation from Spanish-.

Nevertheless, there are times where, for a few minutes, a few hours, or days, one finds the same image upon accessing different websites or news pages, giving the impression that an image has left off being fleeting and instantaneous to appear perennial and survive the supposed fate of images these days.

Also, before starting this exercise, it is not out of place to insist on two points about the setting of reception. The first of these is taking into account that visual access is always partial. In visual terms, the bounding takes place in a sort of foreshortened confluence. In the traditional study of

representation, we would say that

[F]oreshortening is a kind of perspective projection which, when viewed, is interpreted in spatial depth; it is vision from a point of view which yields as outcome a reduction in the true magnitudes of the object-model (Aho, 1993, p.6).

Playing with this definition, we can say that visual access to the circulation of images turns out to be fragmentary, and so, it is necessary to state a specific date and an exact location; in this case, these coordinates are: 16 June 2011, and I was in the city of Madrid.

The second element to take into account is a consequence of the first, and is to do with the fact that, continuing with the metaphor of foreshortening – and guided by the postulates of phenomenology- it could be said that perception belongs to the side that is seen, where it is deduced that the invisible sides are co-present in the experience of perception (Husserl, 2004, p. 83).

The image

On 16 June 2011, the image of a kiss [fig. 1] was propagated, repeating itself in a multitude of media outlets, with the appearance of ubiquity. It showed a blurred foreground of a policeman dressed in black with a helmet, with a truncheon in his right hand and a transparent shield in his left hand. He appears facing the position of the camera. In the background, and with their backs turned, a group of security agents with fluorescent jackets seems to be going towards a group of people situated further away. In the centre of the image, in the only plane in focus in the whole photo, we can see two young people lying on the ground kissing each other. He is lying on top of her, while she has her hand placed tenderly on his neck. The scene is surrounded by warm colours, a whole range from pinks and gentle violets to unsaturated oranges. The chromatic context is produced by the unfocused blend of the street lighting and the smoke that seems to fill the street.

Together with the image, and at a glance, you could read the epic headlines that accompanied it: “the lovers of Vancouver”, “a kiss on the battlefield” or “the kiss in the middle of the riots”. On English-speaking websites, the words *riot* and *kiss* were conjugated in different ways. Even today, if you introduce these two words in the search engine, that image, or others related to it, appear over and over again [fig. 2].

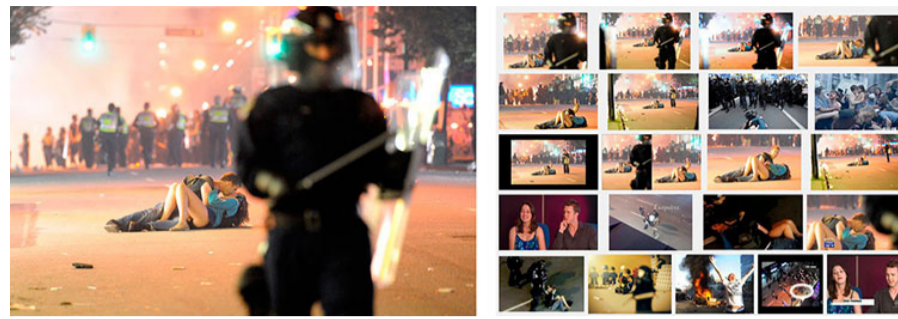


Fig. 1 Photograph by Richard Lam for the agency Getty, 2011.

Fig. 2 Capture from www.google.es upon entering the search term “riot kiss” on 7 July 2015.

Community

As I said at the beginning, the community nature of images can be addressed from external and internal factors.

The external ones have to do with how the image was presented: that is, what other images were around it. Access from Madrid to the media during those first days in June 2011 offered, among other things, different news items about demonstrations, street protests, confrontations with the police and riots, for instance: in the Madrid district of Tetuán, there was an attempt to prevent the eviction of the family of an unemployed Lebanese baker, and two days earlier there had been the images of the mayor of Madrid jeered by a large group of people because of a decision by the Council relating to noise measurement; in the city of Barcelona, a crowd had blocked the accesses to the Catalan parliament as a response to the policy on cutbacks; in addition, we saw images of riots, for different reasons, which took place in Libya, Algeria, Tunisia and Ukraine, while the so-called „Egyptian Revolution“ had got under way already many weeks earlier. In other words, television and web news servers were saturated with images of street altercations in which police agents and citizens confronted each other.

Referring to the current news dispensers, it is undeniable that the image in question was accompanied at each media outlet where it appeared by a host of written and visual information -other news, ads, logos, etc.- and analysing every single case would go beyond the purpose of this article, not just because of the detailed study required of each outlet where the photograph appeared, but because in addition, in the digital media, the interface is a highly variable place, where the display time of any specific set of signs, statements and images is so short-lived that it would be a very onerous –impossible?- task, if one wished to reconstruct the visual inventory of those days, more than four years afterwards.

From an internal point of view, this image shows a disparity: two people kiss in the midst of altercations. In other words, the image brings together two very distant concepts, tenderness and violence. It could be stated that this finds its place within a tradition of this kind of image (Fontcuberta, 2011), because finding photos of people kissing in the midst of a riot is nothing new. There are many examples earlier and later than the selected image.

In March 1990, the photographer David Hoffman took a photo in London of a couple kissing in front of a police officer during the riots prompted by the “Poll Tax” [fig. 3]. In 2010, in Toronto, a couple kiss in front of a large group of riot police protecting the place chosen to host the G-20 summit [fig. 4]. In September 2011, in Santiago, following weeks of confrontations with the police, an unusual kissing marathon was convened as a form of protest against the educational policy of Chile -“Kiss for forty minutes for education“ was one of the slogans that could be read at the demonstration-. In March 2014, a curious image of a kiss appeared out of the anti-government demonstrations in Caracas, in which you can see how the woman is holding an enormous stone in her hand [fig. 5]: once more aggression and caressing juxtaposed in the same image.



Fig. 3 David Hoffman, kiss in the London riots of 1990.
Fig. 4 Couple kissing in front of the police, in Toronto in 2010.
Fig. 5 Kiss in the Caracas demonstrations in 2014 Reuters.

The agents also get kissed. Ever since those images of 1967 in which flowers were offered to the police during the anti-war protests, there have been many examples of tender gestures towards the security forces. In 2001, in Bogota –Colombia-, a student protesting about the educational reforms kisses a police officer [fig. 6]. During the same protests, a student embraces a different riot officer. In the same year, an Egyptian woman kisses a policeman during the demonstrations against the government of Mubarak [fig. 7] Also, in 2013, during a demonstration against the connection of a high-speed train in the north of Italy, a student was photographed trying to kiss a riot officer [fig. 8] -later the police union stated that the student should be charged with „sexual abuse“ (Text: BBC Mundo, 2003)-. And we should not forget that it is more and more common to see kisses, as gestures of protest, against those who take decisions or speak so as to sow homophobia.



Fig. 6 A demonstrator kisses a police officer during the student protests in Bogota in 2001.
Fig. 7 A demonstrator kisses a policeman in Egypt.
Fig. 8 A police officer is kissed during student protests in Italy in 2013 AFP.

There even exist examples of protests against a prohibition on kissing, where the kiss is used as a tool of response. This happened in March 2013, in Ankara (Turkey), when a large group of

people met at the metro station of Kurtulus to kiss as a sign of protest against the imposition of a ban on kissing within the metro network [fig. 9]. Or in November 2014, in the city of Cochin, in the south of India, where the social networks were used to convene the protest *Kiss of love* in support of public kissing [fig. 10]



Fig. 9 Protest kiss in front of a metro stop in Ankara (Turkey) in 2013 Getty Images.
Fig. 10 Announcement for the convocation *Kiss of love*, in Cochin (India) in 2014.

As I said at the beginning, the images of riots appearing in the media bear suspicion, as explained by Naomi Klein when she use titled a short text as „Capitalizing on Terror. The police give a horrifying image of the protests. Who would want to participate in them?“ (Klein, 2002, p. 149). Along the same lines, Carlos Taibo writes that the objective of what Max Weber called „legitimate violence“ (Weber, 2002, p. 667) in a multitudinous protest are principally two:

Violent protest, intended and inexorable attribute of the entirety of a universe of response, turns into the focus of interest of the media (Taibo, 2003, p.301); it gives a warning to possible sympathisers of the movements so that in the future they will think twice about it (p. 301).

In short, if a protest is labelled as violent, the story carried the next day can convey it as a failure, muddying the real demands, but images of violence also serve to inoculate with fear, so that people take note and the protest is not repeated in future. This seems to be the situation that Susan George is thinking of when she argues:

Another world is within our grasp if... we practice non-violence (2003, p. 215).

Get angry, but be smart (p. 221).

I affirm that those on our side who participate in acts of violence are not only mistaken, but are working actively against the rest of the movement and the goals they say they support (p. 224).

Contrary to what the violent elements say, violence against people or property reinforces, instead of weakening, capitalism. (p. 227). -Back translation from Spanish-

Get angry but be smart, because tomorrow we have to tell the story again, review the images, and what we have come to do here is just as important as what we plan to do the next day. From this point of view, there might be a third way to those indicated by Carlos Taibo, as could be exemplified with what happened the day after the so-called *March for dignity*, which took place in Madrid on 22 March 2014, where there was a series of photos of attacks on police agents and

vehicles -incidents that took place at the end of the mobilisation-. One of the headlines recounting the tale the next day said: “At least 101 injured, 67 of them police officers, and 29 arrested during riots following the march for dignity ”(Durán, 2014). The shift appears evident: from a state of fear to a state of injury, which needs care.

Indeed, the proliferation of images of citizens protecting the agents during the mobilisations [figs. 11, 12], seems to have arisen to detract from and reduce the effect of this possible third use of images of violence produced by protests and mobilisations.



Fig. 11 Woman trying to prevent police from being attacked in Bogota (Colombia) in 2013.
Fig. 12 Citizen protects injured riot officer in Tehran (Iran), 2009

Returning to the gesture of a kiss in the midst of a violent situation, this could be included within another family of images grouped around the following heading: “comforting film endings” that beautiful end scene of *Nuovo Cinema Paradiso* with music by Ennio Morricone, and specifically, those ending with a final kiss after a plot filled with action and violence. In this case, the Vancouver image only lacked the words *The End* printed over the pair of survivors of chaos and destruction. Thus, this would be featuring a kiss in the centre of a world which is collapsing, in ruins, like a wink to victory, to hope and, in short, a happy ending. Indeed, in this case, images from the film industry and those from the audiovisual media overlap, complementing each other, despite the warning that seems to be found in the title of the book *Beware of the Media!*, by Michael Collon, where the author affirms:

The info-show transforms the citizen into a mere spectator. And the spectator does not have to decide or choose between two political positions: they just have to look. It’s about making you vibrate, moving you, drawing you in (...) (Collon, 1996, p. 239). -Back translation from Spanish-.

And finally, and also from the perspective of art, the *kiss* has been a motif of representation and has formed part of the strategies used by artists. This is the case, for instance, of Tino Sehgal -born in London in 1976- who in 2002 began to present his work *Kiss*, where two extras kiss each other inside the museum or exhibition room. From the opening of the exhibition until it closes, and as though it were a sculpture, different couples take turns every so often interpreting kisses from the history of art -Jeff Koons, Gustav Klint, Brancusi, Courbet, Rodin-. On entering the room, the spectator found two intertwined bodies, embracing each other, kissing each other slowly in a spectacle that has links with dance and theatre. In this case, the kissing gesture is not set within

a violent event, but rather this is a situation built up and directed at reflection upon the changing of positions between the spectator and the participant in the work.

In short, it could be said that it is not so much about community as communities. Therefore, among the endless possible groups and subgroups, some of those which could contain the image of the kiss of Vancouver might be: images shown in the media on 16 June 2011, accessing the same from Madrid, tradition of images of street protests, the contrast in images between the tenderness of people kissing each other and the violence represented by policemen with helmets, shields and weapons, images of kisses at the end of action films, and finally, artistic strategies. Different groups which are inter-related, and which define the visual context as tremendously permeable, where the production of emotions, including terror, shares space with other intentions.

Impact

As I said at the beginning, in this case the term impact refers to the reiterated presence the image had in the media. A news item which should have been half-hidden in a secondary section, got an unexpected slot on the front pages.

This is the viral characteristic of images: this term, from its first definitions in the world of advertising, does not define so much a peculiar situation where all the media offer the same content or information or image, but referred to the capacity a file has to prompt its own exponential distribution (Rushkoff, 1994), by passing from one user to another. That is to say, the term 'viral' refers to shared files –through the different channels existing on the network-, more than to content that monopolises the space of the media outlets.

Nevertheless, some of the conditions necessary to confer the quality of viral upon a file may be useful for finding the reasons for the success enjoyed by the image of the kiss in relation to others, for example: it isn't boring and is fun, it transmits positive emotions, it refers to the building of community, it conveys nostalgia or allows the user to participate to complete the message (Dafonte, 2014, pp. 11-12). All of these conditions could be statements about the Vancouver kiss image.

In this sense, it seems that what lies behind its insistent repetition in the media is not so much a strategic motivation to modulate the message, but rather its force is concentrated in the fact that the image presented, at least, two contrasts: a formal one, where the elements like the kiss, the surroundings enveloped in gentle colours, the tranquillity of young people lying on the ground were placed alongside riot police, smoke, people running and chaos, and also a conceptual contrast, as though the image indicated the way out of an information context full of violent news. In this way, the kiss upon the pavement would work as a window through which we could access the "community" spoken about by Zygmunt Bauman:

A lost paradise to which we strive to return with all our efforts, and so we search feverishly for the tracks which might take us there (Bauman, 2009, VII). A community which lives in the midst of the contradiction

existing between the real sensation of safety and the yearning for liberty (p. IX).-Back translation from Spanish-

On the other hand, the image of the Vancouver kiss produced expectation: this seemed to contain a mystery to be solved, and you had to look on the back to see who and why. The attempts to answer these questions prompted a high level of interest which perhaps was also a factor that influenced its success.

On reading the body of the news story, you discovered that the event the image alluded to happened the previous night in Vancouver (Canada), after the final of the *Stanley Cup*, of the Professional Ice Hockey League, when the Bruins of Boston beat the local Canucks. A defeat which tastes of defeat, because the image did not come from an act of “sustained pressure upon persons, institutions and the ideas which get in the way [of change, or for things to change]” (George, 2003, p. 93), but all originated in an oversized tantrum following a sporting loss.

After the encounter, all kinds of altercations, confrontations, vandalism of cars, fires and breaking shop windows took place in the streets. A good number of photos came from those events (Times, 2011) where you could see, for example, two men in front of a fire pretending to play the guitar with legs of tailor’s dummies, burnt cars, a man trying to set fire to a cloth inserted into the fuel tank of a police car, sports fans jumping over police cars, smashed shop windows, other people emerging from the broken doors of shopping centres carrying stolen clothes, and in many of these images you can even see people posing for the camera in front of the chaos [figs. 13, 14 and 15], but it was the image of the kiss which concentrated interest.



Figs. 13, 14 and 15 Photographs of the altercations in Vancouver on 15 June 2011. L. to R., photographs taken by: Mark van Manen/Postmedia News Service, Gerry Kahrmann/Postmedia News Service y Anthony Bolante/Reuters

Finally, I want to add one more characteristic that this widely repeated image may possess, which I formulate with the following question: Could the image of Vancouver be confirming that the kiss is a new and useful weapon for street confrontations with the agents of authority, as the icon of a new strategy to stop violence?

It is true that the ways people demonstrate have changed much over recent decades. In the book *Artistic utopias of revolt*, by Julia Ramírez Blanco, reference is made to how, since the 1990s, the forms of public protest have been transformed considerably. During those years, the paradigm of a block demonstration with a clear head, linear, changes towards more dynamic

modes, where the „festival model“ prevails (Ramírez, 2014, p. 149). This book dedicates a section to the events of 2009 during the demonstrations in Prague prompted by the meeting there of the IMF -International Monetary Fund- and the WB -World Bank-. At that moment, a chromatic protest strategy was devised and coordinated, divided into three columns: blue, yellow and pink. The 'blues' came from the west and were responsible for the urban warfare, fighting with stones, direct confrontation with the police, and within this column there was the „Black Block“ which, dressed in dark clothes, was responsible for attacking private property. This column also contained the “Infernal Noise Brigade”, responsible for making noise with percussion instruments during the confrontations. The yellow column came from the north, and at the head were the „Tute Bianchi“ -White Monkeys-, a group dressed in white representing the invisible people in the system, the ghosts. These had prepared their own protection so as to be able to withstand, without responding to, a clash with the police. Their task was to produce an impression, in which some attacked and others received. And finally, the pink column, a group of about fifteen people dressed in pink who, coming from the east, carried out strategies of „tactical frivolity“ (Ramírez, 2014, p. 160).

So, was this kiss interpreted as a smart, brave, pacific and effective gesture for stopping the escalation of violence in this kind of event? Was there demand for an image like this in the context of June 2011, with a yearning for a friendly or loving gesture as a way to combat, paradoxically, combat?

Other actions might be situated within similar strategies and give an affirmative response to the preceding question, such as those which consisted in playing an instrument in front of the formation of riot police: for instance, that guitarist who set out to play in Turkey in 2011 [fig. 16], or the pianist who played that instrument in the city of Kiev in Ukraine [fig. 17]? Nevertheless, none of these recent images give the impression that they have resounded as much as the scene of the kiss of Vancouver.



Fig. 16 Guitarist plays in front of the police in Turkey in 2011. Fig. 17 Pianist plays in front of the police in the city of Kiev in 2013

Persistence

The presence of the image in the media gave place to a time of persistence based upon what that showed, and at the same time, concealed. For more than a week, the photograph of Vancouver

resounded in all kinds of ways in the media, and as we will see, its echo lasted much longer than that of the other news stories. It had left off being a ubiquitous image to become a lasting event.

It became known rapidly that the photograph was taken by the Canadian photographer Richard Lam, for the agency *Getty*. Two days later, he told *The Guardian* that he was a witness almost by accident. According to him, everything happened very fast. He was running away from where the couple were, when at a certain point he stopped, saw there was somebody on the ground and pressed the button twice. Later, his editor told him that he had captured a couple kissing each other. Lam was not able to speak with them, he did not know who they were, nor even, as appears to be clear from the photo, that they were kissing (Rushe D., 2011).

During that whole week, various witnesses came forward, and a second photograph [fig. 18] taken by Lam taken at the same time as the first came to light, in which a different woman appears standing, the police agent is no longer in the foreground, the kissing couple seem bewildered, and the epic has evaporated.

On Friday 18 June, the two stars of the photo, an Australian man called Scott Jones and a Canadian woman called Alex Thomas gave an interview to *CBC News* where they told, with smiles, how they had experienced the events at first hand [fig. 19]. It is curious how some of their responses seemed to be swimming in a vague amnesia, along the lines of „we really didn't know what was happening“ (CBC News, 2011). Were they thinking of their experience or the photograph that led them to appear on TV?

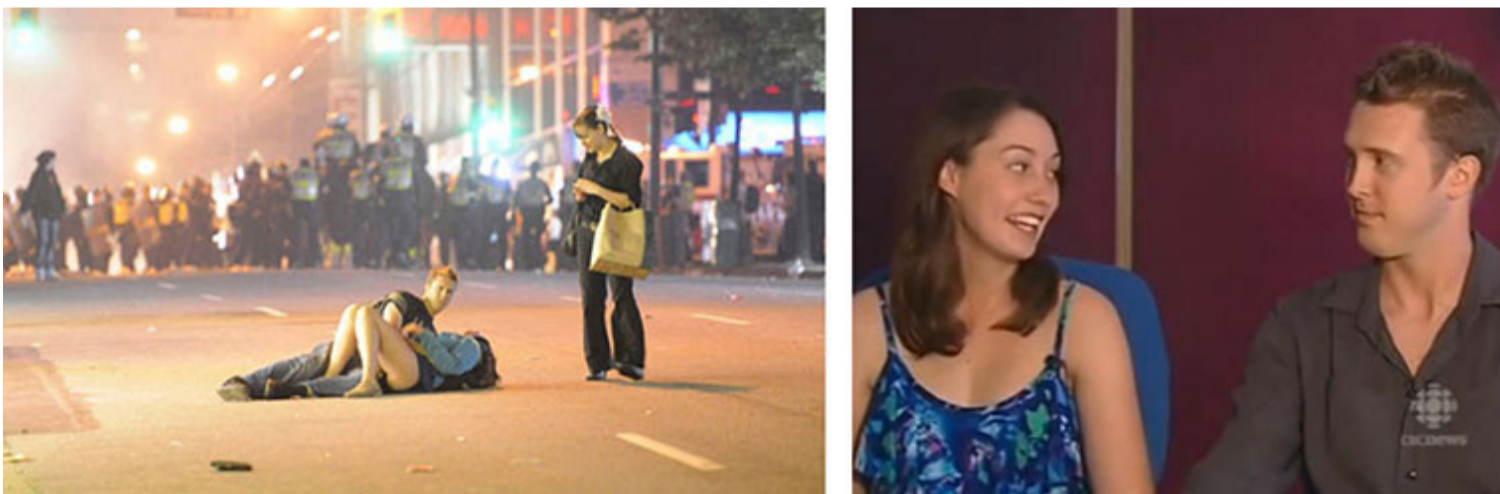
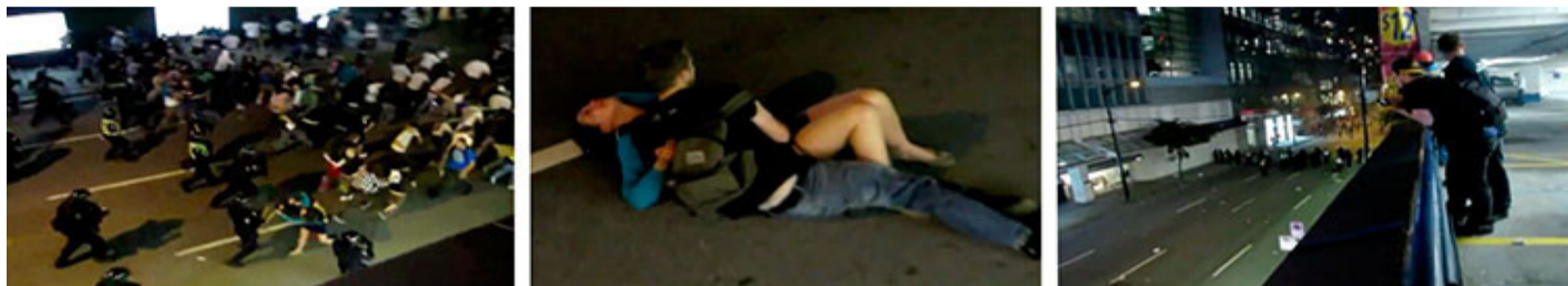


Fig. 18 Second photograph taken by Lam on 16 June 2011 at the riots of Vancouver. Richard Lam/Getty.
Fig. 19 Scott Jones and Alex Thomas in an interview with CBC News, on Friday 18 June 2011.

Eight days after the altercations of Vancouver, on 24 June 2011, the photo resumed its appearance in many media outlets, but with a different caption; in one Spanish outlet, it was entitled: “The true story of the mysterious kiss of Vancouver” (Antena 3 Noticias, 2011). A witness who was on the roof of a car park, and who identified himself as William, wrote to the *Vancouver Sun*:

What happened was that the police line fell upon the crowd and this couple, trying to stay together, didn't react in time and were overrun by two riot officers (Rushe, D. and Siddiquim H., 2011).

To prove this, William showed a video made with his mobile phone -the spread of mobile devices has meant that anybody, at any time and in any place, can capture an image or record a video-. In this, you could see how a crowd was running, pursued by what seemed to be a police charge, when two policemen collided forcefully against the couple and they both fell to the ground [fig. 20, 21, 22]. The complete sequence was disseminated rapidly. “The image in motion is capable of conveying human experience like no other medium” (quote found in Espiritusanto, 2011), written by Yvette J. Alberdingk Thijm, executive director of the project *Witness* -on her web, www.witness.org; the slogan of presentation is “see it, film it, change it”-.



Figs. 20, 21 and 22 Stills from the video, distributed to the media, recorded by “William” from the roof of a car park during the riots in Vancouver on 15 June 2011.

On the basis of this recording, some media recounted, not without a certain uneasiness, the following:

That couple’s gesture was not the passionate kiss we thought we saw, but rather just a man who was trying to help his injured partner (Antena 3 Noticias, 2011).

It seems as though progress in resolving the conundrum brought a certain disappointment with it, as for some hours, many of the information interchange nodes sent and received the image of Lam as a sort of hymn to courage. An image that juxtaposed, in those first moments, the yearning for a beautiful audacity speaking to us of freedom, with an unsettling safety cocooned by a community dressed for the occasion in pink and orange, as though Lam’s stroke of luck had managed to *frame* a welter of aspirations and dreams, lacking in the other images which appeared on that 16th of June 2011.

Nevertheless, the runaway world -in the Spanish translation, runaway was rendered as “desbocado“, also meaning “without a mouth“, and therefore also referring to a world unable to kiss- that Anthony Giddens tells us about, is a world without brakes (Giddens, 2000), and so when the declarations of Lam, the interview with the two participants, the other images, the witness testimony, the video with the complete sequence, all became known, by that time, inevitably, the image had already gone around the world, inoculating us with feelings of empathy and heroism. Sufficient reasons to arouse interest in the ins and outs of this marketing technique. In 2012, a well-known brand of sunglasses launched a poster for an advertising campaign based on an image in which two young people kissed each other tenderly in the midst of a violent revolt, with police, smoke, truncheons and clenched fists [fig. 23]. Of course, in this case, and despite the chaos shown and indeed finely calculated, nobody struck gold -no blows are struck at all-, but

planning, editing and postproduction.

In another twist, with the selling mechanisms of our modern consumer society making the most of broad spaces with long views, it so happened that in December 2013, more than two and a half years after the defeat of the Canucks in the final of the *Stanley Cup*, I found myself in the shopping area at Chamartin station in Madrid, and an ad for an Italian clothes shop caught my eye, which together with its window displays, bore the warm image of the kiss installed as image-brand within two layers of light which brought out the shine of the colours [fig. 24]. The advertising campaign culminated with the words *Love wins*, written in fine lettering on the pavement where Alex and Scott appeared fallen, not knowing where they were and scared to death.



L. to R.: Fig. 23 Poster ad for sunglasses 2012.

Figs. 24 Photo taken in the shopping area of Chamartin train station in Madrid at the end of 2013.

As we have seen, the polysemy contained in the image of the kiss satisfied different demands. On the one hand, its appearance was the culmination of certain necessities or needs which were related to that moment in society, and on the other, it fitted into the niches of the visual regime, producing input/output relationships with the communities where it was built up and which gave it refuge at the same time. This plurality of meanings gave rise, possibly, to many of the reasons that led the image to attain notoriety. From an internal point of view, the diverse contrasts contained in the image were the key to the door to the front pages of many media outlets. As though it were a beacon, or bait, the image of two young people kissing on the pavement worked like a magnet which attracted and concentrated different senses, offering the possibility of reinstallation and multiple readings.

It doesn't matter much what supposedly happened that night, but its durability in the media –as I said earlier, even today if you enter the terms 'kiss' and 'riot' in a search engine, Lam's image comes up over and over again– and its persistence do not speak to us so much about the riots after the match, nor strategies of confrontation between agents and citizens, nor even of kisses, but of a panorama where the images, in some way, are caught up in a maelstrom of desires, interests and ghosts. For this reason, on occasions, the force with which an image erupts at a specific moment, urges us to be suspicious not only of the mechanisms which drove its impact, but also not to lose sight of how it can endure through inertia, in an uncertain time full of opportunities, with all that that entails.

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