

In Spite of Everything, to Appear

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Received: 15-07-2015
 Accepted: 6-10-2015

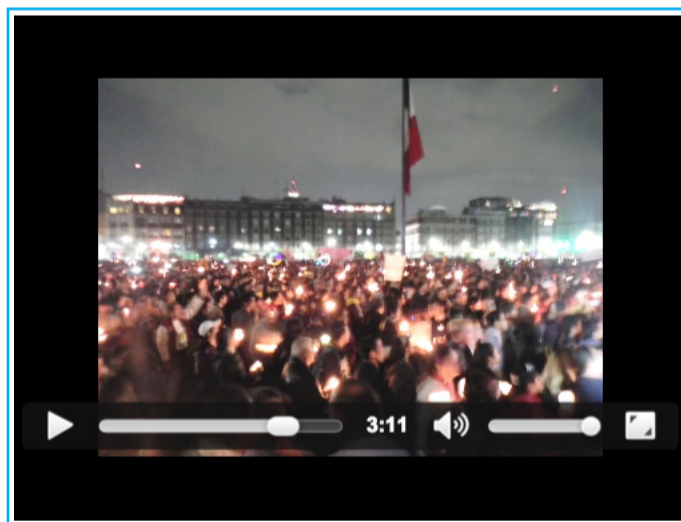
Abstract

This article examines the notion of appearance in the context of the violence and terror exemplified by the mass disappearance of 43 students from the Raúl Isidro Burgos Rural Teacher-Training College. This case will help to explore the conditions of politics in zones where the state has transformed itself into a war machine and the practices in which, in spite of all, the common can be made to appear. Revisiting a project of the Teatro Ojo collective, *What is to come*, the paper articulates approaches of Hannah Arendt, Georges Didi-Huberman and Jacques Rancière to think of the notion of appearance as an aesthetic operation that is also political.

Keywords: Appearance, Ayotzinapa, forced disappearance, aesthetics, politics, common, stage, public.

Text note [1]

I



Zócalo of Mexico City, 1st of July 2012, Francis Alÿs/animación Rafael Ortega.

Since 2010 I dream of waves. Enormous, gigantic waves. On waking up, the fear is no longer of the wave that has just passed but in knowing that there is always another one, to come.

II

In 1975, a few months before his brutal murder, Pasolini wrote an article known as “The Disappearance of the Fireflies”, in which he declared that the culture of resistance and vanguard had disappeared. This was, according to the arguments of Didi-Huberman in the book *Survivance des lucioles*, in the nature of a funeral lamentation on the moment at which those creatures disappeared from Italy, those human symbols of innocence, annihilated by the night—or by the “ferocious” light of the floodlights—of triumphant fascism.

Pasolini's diagnosis manifests a mourning for politics, a kind of lamentation over the conditions that, since the arrival of later capitalism, have made any form of resistance impossible. A critique of the way in which everything, even—or perhaps even more irresistibly—art, has been absorbed by spectacle, making impossible any form of appearance that proves to be contrary to the forms of submission. This text by Pasolini—which takes on an implacable significance in the light of his last film, *Salò or the 120 days of Sodom*—is a cry of desperation at the impossibility of generating a representation that might enable one to organize other forms of existence. By seeing how violence takes hold, not only of history, but of each one of us, generating in its brutality an apathy that leads to boredom where even torture becomes nothing more than a background landscape against which to dance. Where what has remained off-stage—in light or darkness—is space, the “with”: in the final instance, politics.

III

During the night of September 26-27, 2014, 43 students of the Escuela Normal Raúl Isidro Burgos Rural in the village of Ayotzinapa disappeared while in the city of Iguala in the State of Guerrero. This college is part of a system of public teacher training college, whose origins go back to the Mexican Revolution, where students are trained for work in rural communities. As it happens, it was at this particular institute that both Lucio Cabañas and Genaro Vásquez studied, two dissident community leaders who were later to become leaders of the armed struggle in Guerrero in the early 1970s.

In late September 2014, students from several rural colleges gathered in Ayotzinapa in order to set out for the October 2 demonstration in Mexico City in commemoration of the massacre of students during the mobilizations of 1968. [2] The young students commandeered two buses of a commercial company and went in search of a third. [3] One of the buses, after agreement between the driver and the students, went to the town of Iguala in order to leave the passengers already on board but, on arrival at the bus station, the driver reneged on his promise to hand over the vehicle to the students and left the vehicle with the students locked inside. The students called on their companions who were waiting on the outskirts of the town; these answered the call for help and, after liberating the locked-in students, commandeered another three commercial buses. After leaving the Iguala bus station in three different directions, the *normalistas* were attacked.

The following day, in a state of informational chaos, with several students injured or dead, the worst was confirmed: 43 students were missing. Nobody knew where they were or where they had been taken.

Little by little reports began to appear in the newspapers regarding what had begun as a confrontation and was beginning to look like a massacre. Images started to circulate; in Facebook that of a dead *normalista* without a face. The skin and eyes had been removed. His name was Julio Cesar Mondragón, and his wife learned of his death after recognizing the clothes he was wearing in the image that circulated in the social network.

With the municipal president in flight—he had requested temporary leave of absence the day after the attacks—investigations began. Different versions came and went. A week after the events, under pressure by student organizations, a video was published, amid increasing public outrage, in which the detained young people were seen in vehicles of the municipal police. Later, the police officers, who were now under arrest, stated that the students had been handed over to a group of drug traffickers known as Guerreros Unidos.

In a climate of social uproar, unprecedented in the whole convulsive period since president Calderón declared the war on the *narcos*, the government, forced by international condemnation, began the search. Clandestine mass graves appeared one after the other; it seemed that wherever you dug corpses appeared, but they were not those of the students.

On November 7, 2014, the then General Attorney of the Republic, Jesús Murillo Karam, gave a press conference to present what he described as the “historical truth” of the Ayotzinapa case: the *normalistas* had been attacked by the “Guerreros Unidos” group of drug traffickers who confused them with members of a rival group, “Los Rojos”. The students had been taken to a rubbish dump in the municipality of Cocula, where they were murdered and then cremated; the ashes were subsequently thrown into the San Juan river. They had completely disappeared, there was nothing left—not even a bone to tell the tale. [4]

Nearly a year after the disappearance of the students, and with a new General Attorney replacing Murillo, the results of an investigation carried out by the Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts (GIEI) were published: the “Ayotzinapa Report, an investigation and initial conclusions on the disappearances and homicides of the Ayotzinapa *normalistas*”. [5]

This group was convened by the Inter-American Human Rights Commission with the agreement of the Mexican Government and the representatives of the victims in order to collaborate in the investigation of the crimes. Thanks to this report several things at least were established beyond doubt.

On the one hand, between September 26 and 27, what took place was a coordinated attack on a large-scale in which 43 students disappeared; 6 individuals were criminally executed—in the case of the *normalista* Julio Cesar Mondragón with evident signs of torture—and three more persons died including the driver and a passenger in a bus transporting the football team, Los Avispones, which was attacked presumably because it was mistaken for one of the vehicles taken by the *normalistas*; 40 persons received serious injuries, one of them is still in coma, and 110 individuals were subject to pursuit and aggression or attempts on their lives during those hours.

On the other hand, what the report demonstrates is that concerted attacks took place in several different locations. In a process of sustained violence, ambushes, roadblocks and pursuits continued throughout the night. Unlike the previous investigations that assured that the students had taken four buses and had been attacked on the orders of the municipal president, José Luis Abarca, for having deliberately interrupted the governmental report that his wife had delivered the same day, the

investigation by the GIEI pointed to the existence of a fifth bus, references to which had been eliminated from the official files. The investigation leaves open the hypothesis that this last bus may have been what detonated the violent attacks. The students may, unawares, have taken a bus in the control of Guerreros Unidos that was transporting heroin to the United States. [6]

The report reconstructing the different attacks shows clearly the direction and coordination of the police. From six o'clock in the evening of that September 26, all the movements of the students were being monitored by means of a coordination system (C4) linking the three levels of government and including the National Defence Ministry. This implies the presence of federal, state and municipal agents as well as military personnel in all scenarios, whether as perpetrators or observers.

The report also points out that there are no conclusive forensic data to confirm that the incineration of the bodies could have taken place in the rubbish tip at Cocula. The conditions of the place, according to the evaluation of the GIEI, do not uphold the viability of the destruction of bone as was affirmed by the government.

Thus the Attorney General's "historical truth" fell apart and the students returned to the limbo of the disappeared, with the mixture of hope and fear that this implies.

IV



Iconoclasistas, 2014.

"It was the state". Doubtless the phrase that appeared in the mass protests at the disappearance of the 43 students from the Ayotzinapa rural college put a name to something the Mexican government was intent on denying, namely that what happened was a crime of state. Even assuming the attack was not ordered and organized at the highest level of government—as was indeed the case of the massacre of 1968—it is a fact that it was both perpetrated and observed by agents belonging to the three levels of government.

"It was the state" points to the responsibility of the Mexican government in the case of Ayotzinapa and identifies it as part of an accumulated history, a "palimpsest" of violence. However, if the genealogy of violence enables us to bring back to memory a whole history of horror, what gets lost under all this repetition are the differences, and what is missing from the picture is the present configuration of politics.

V



Sin título, Siempreotravez, 2010.

We must not lose sight of the fact that the situation of violence in Mexico is not only a consequence of the narcotics business but is, rather, linked to the political and economic model currently prevailing in the country: the deregulation of the economy, the “flexibilization” of the labour market, the weakening of governmental infrastructures, impunity and corruption, the breakdown of the social fabric, have all contributed to establishing the conditions for an orgy of plunder in which what has disappeared is politics.

For the nations that in the 1980s were referred to as “developing countries”, neoliberalism means continuing exploitation, but of a sort that is radically differentiated from past forms of domination. As the historian Adolfo Gilly describes it:

This new despoilment acquires a condensed expression in the wave of privatizations of public property and services that has taken place over the last thirty years: lands, communications media, transport and telecommunications, banks and financial services, public security and military services, petroleum and petrochemicals, mines and steelworks, social security systems and pension funds, ports, highways, drinking water systems, dams, energy, even the perverse process—imposed without frontiers the length and breadth of Latin America—of open-cast mining, destructive of nature and human lives. (Gilly, 2014, p.7)

The case of Mexico, which unfortunately is by no means unique, suggests that the correlate of neoliberalism is necropolitics. This notion put forward by Achille Mbembe explicates a type of organization in which sovereignty resides in the capacity to have people killed, and enables us to understand what goes on in spaces where politics becomes a work of death.

The growth of the narcotics business in Mexico and its complex relation with the state and structures of government was able to develop in the way it has owing to the conditions established by neoliberalism. In these conditions, the enclaves of extraction and circulation of valuable resources become privileged zones of death. The articulation between war, extraction and circulation of resources has generated a structure of sovereignty that is based exclusively on the distinction between those who carry arms and

those who do not. Here the monopoly of violence is articulated in a new configuration of power. Mbembe describes it as follows:

War machines are made up of segments of armed men that split up or merge with one another depending on the tasks to be carried out and the circumstances. Polymorphous and diffuse organizations, war machines are characterized by their capacity for metamorphosis. Their relation to space is mobile. Sometimes they maintain complex relations with state forms (from autonomy to incorporation). The state may, of its own doing, transform itself into a war machine. It may moreover appropriate to itself an existing war machine or help to create one. (Mbembe, 2011)

As Mbembe explains, the state is better conceptualized in our days by the image of this indefinite and indeterminate machine that facilitates the emergence of previously unheard-of configurations.

No doubt “it was the state”, but the state that is no longer what it used to be, but merely the sum of forces of exchange and negotiation that administer the territory and the population in a systematic exploitation made up of many machines that are difficult to put a name to.

VI

Fear was what drew us out of childhood. For generation born at the end of the seventies and the beginning of the eighties, 1994 was the year in which we began to be adults. The appearance of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional broke the spell of the promise of modernization and globalization by showing us the faces and letting us hear the voices of those systematically excluded. The possibility of a fairer world was articulated along with the hum of death. Political assassinations accelerated the alarm caused by an economic crisis that had left hopes of a better future looking far more precarious, and a decade of convulsions ended with the fiasco of a transition that never came.

In 2000, Vicente Fox became the first president of Mexico in 70 years who did not belong to the Partido Revolucionario Institucional. [7] He was awarded the possibility of putting right what had gone out of joint, of putting a name to what had been ignored, of putting on trial those responsible for various crimes of state, but preferred to do none of this.

This negligence provided ample room for all kinds of ills and the very worst slipped in along with them.

In 2006, Felipe Calderón, the following president, after an election that granted him power by a margin of 0.56%, declared war on the narcotics cartels. From then on it is calculated—although there are no official figures—that more than 121,000 people have died in the ensuing violence and more than 300,000 have disappeared. [8]

VII

How has your life been in the last six years?

What worries you?

What has changed in your life?

How is your family?

Do you have some presentiment at the moment?

Do you have some worry that keeps you awake at night?

Do you miss something from the past?

Do you remember any dream you have had in the last six years?

These were the questions that received the public at the entrance to the Galeón theatre in Mexico City, where the project *Lo que viene* [9] was being presented by the Teatro Ojo collective as president Felipe Calderón's sexennium of government (2006-2012) neared its end.

In the theatre no dramatic function was underway but, rather, ten hour daily sessions in which the stage was just a black box in which, on the floor, a newspaper library was arranged stocked with the periodicals for every day of those six years. An archive to be consulted, while on improvised tables the attending public drank coffee, played, drew, conversed, listened. A chair and a microphone remained available in the middle of the space for anyone who wished to respond to or speak about the contents of the above-mentioned questions. At the same time, a charge-free telephone number received live responses from people in other parts of the Republic.

A theatre devoid of theatre in which the stage was set for nothing more than talk: confused, broken, fragmentary, evasive, fleeting narratives, in which each narrator strove to articulate a story encapsulating his or her own personal experience, woven in the instability of first person narrative. By posing questions about the past, Teatro Ojo reassumed the forum, so as to open up the imagination to the future in that which is intuited, perhaps because it has already arrived, that is coming.

It was in this forum that I learnt that I was not the only person dreaming about waves. Apart from the constant presence of the fear of earthquakes, in the sessions of *Lo que viene* a recurring motif in the participants' dream was that of waves. I used to think that my fixation on waves was the result of the fascination they held for me when I was young. My parents, who had never learnt to swim, sent me to classes before I could even walk. Since then, every time we went to the seaside I used to swim off into the distance—for my parents' terror and my delight—until quite disappearing from sight. One night, however, when I was 16 years old, and camping with friends on the coast of Guerrero, a storm blew up. I was ready to brave the ocean when a fisherman who was sheltering from the rain next to us said to me: "in this sea you only have one opportunity to enter and one to leave". My desire to swim left me.

What I understood in the forum that day was that the presentiment of the irremediable was not just a personal sensation that troubled my sleep, and what was manifested in many of us by the image of waves was not the vastness of the ocean, but simply fear to what is coming. Teatro Ojo's operation of collective questioning about dreams was inspired by the idea of replicating a project of Charlotte Beradt, who—in Germany between 1933 and 1939—collected a corpus of dreams. These, as Didi-Huberman points out, were "a psychic document of totalitarianism, of political terror inasmuch as an obsessive—obsessing—process, even in the deepest reaches of people's souls". (Didi-Huberman, 2012, p. 104). Teatro Ojo intuited that in the memory of those years, in dreams and presentiments of the future there would be material to work on. With these "minimal earth tremors" they wished to return to the public, to give form to fear, so as to help the claim to emerge.



Lo que viene, Teatro Ojo, 2012.

VIII

While we who were present there stammered out our attempts at signifying, with or in front of the others, our experiences over those last six years, in one corner of the stage a screen showed a video of the progress made in the construction of a memorial that the government was erecting for the victims of the war against *El Narco*.

Only a few hundred metres separated *Lo que viene* from that “Memorial to the victims of crime” that the former president Felipe Calderón had had erected in the Campo Marte, a federal property until then under the jurisdiction of the Defence Ministry. The new park was unable to open its gates during Calderón’s mandate, the delay being due not only to the magnitude of the work involved but to the increasing unrest expressed by the Peace with Justice and Dignity Movement (Movimiento por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad). The latter, which was a social movement led by the poet Javier Sicilia, whose son was murdered in the city of Cuernavaca in 2011, had held a meeting with president Calderón to demand an end to the war on the drugs traffickers and, likewise, the elucidation of the killings and disappearances. At that meeting Calderón undertook to promote a General Law on Victims; yet once this had been passed by the legislators it was vetoed by the president himself. Instead of the agreed law, Calderón decided to erect a monument for the victims on military property.

The space had to wait for its inauguration until after Enrique Peña Nieto’s assumption of the presidency, and the gates were opened to the public under the invitation: “paint what you feel, express what you think”.

The “memorial” is a park adorned colossal steel sheets on which one can write or erase messages, memories, demands. In these stelae there are inscriptions with fragments and phrases from recognized writers as well as messages in which one can read comments such as “Alfonso *Arqui Medina*, we miss you!” or “Marcela, I love you”. The names that figure in these graffiti may or may not belong to victims of the violence of recent years, but there is no way to know that since there is no official register, nor does this “memorial” represent any kind of undertaking to stage a legal process to elucidate the deaths and bring to trial those directly or indirectly responsible for the crimes of this war.

Far from being a space for questioning state violence, whence one might consider what kind of memory would be possible—or whether any kind of memory at all would be possible—in line with the dialogue sought by the Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity, Calderón’s “memorial” expressed nothing more than a pious hope that the breakdown in justice could be resolved through a mere commemoration, effected in the public space through an exercise of the symbolic force of power: a kind of mausoleum, a space where what is lost and cancelled out is the possibility of *appearance*.



Lo que viene, Teatro Ojo, 2012.

IX

[10]

Appearance [11] is not only a problem involving vision, but the very possibility of politics—a necessary condition for constructing what Hannah Arendt calls reality, a common world, a world-in-common that unites us while it separates us. Beyond that, and breaking with any foundation of politics based on the nature of man, the social contract, family life or the origin of the community through the possession of language for describing the just and the unjust, the common world is that which is constructed as a space of appearance. This how Arendt herself describes it:

The space of appearance comes into being wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action, and therefore predates and precedes all formal constitution of the public realm and the various forms of government, that is, the various forms in which the public realm can be organized. Its peculiarity is that, unlike the spaces which are the work of our hands, it does not survive the actuality of the movement which brought it into being, but disappears not only with the dispersal of men—as in the case of great catastrophes when the body politic of a people is destroyed—but with the disappearance or arrest of the activities themselves. (Arendt, 1958, p. 199)

The *space of appearance*, following Arendt's argument, does not depend on a particular assignation of the public, nor on a configuration of the state, but is constituted in the coming together of human beings and can only be destroyed through the disappearance of the people.

One way of defining what is happening in Mexico is the idea of a domination of broad spectrum where war and crisis interlace. [12] These conditions of violence try to limit and disarticulate the social fabric with a power that is ever more authoritarian. Paradoxically, the latter is no longer in a particular body, but is disseminated in a multiplicity of uncoordinated bodies in which there is no longer a political calculation but a pure administration of profits. Hence fear and criminalization are part of a disciplinary device that seeks the end of all activity. In these conditions the question regarding the possibility of appearance becomes central since it is there that, perhaps, remains some possibility of doing politics.

X

Aesthetics not only works with art but, going beyond objects and experiences, defines the conditions of possibility of the sensible and the sensibility. In this sense, aesthetics is the question about what appears, and about the way in which it appears. If it is clear that aesthetics is a very loaded category, it is also possible to trace a genealogy that may allow us to establish a critique of the conditions of appearance.

Following Kant's proposals on aesthetics, set forth in the first *Critique*, as revised by Foucault and re-conceived by Rancière, aesthetics is seen as a structure that determines the forms of appearing, from which the representations of what appears are determined, and from which the forms of the perceptible are distributed, generating a distribution of visibilities and enunciations that are already political.

It is important to understand fully the significance of these diverse aspects of the politics of appearing and to understand how it is that the perceptible configures a specific field of experience that establishes the frames from which distribution operates.

Under this schema politics is an aesthetic matter because it has to do with appearances: appearances that appear by a general law that determines the distribution of functions and roles in the community (what Rancière refers to as "*la police*") and, on the other hand, to appear that is generated as action, as a process of disagreement that challenges, on the basis of a subjection that is thought of as de-identification—that law of appearing which in Rancière is politics itself. As he himself defines it:

I now propose to reserve the term *politics* for an extremely determined activity antagonistic to policing: whatever breaks with the tangible configuration whereby the parties, and their parts, or lack of them, are defined by an presupposition that by definition has no place in that configuration—that of the part of those who have no part. [...] Political activity is whatever shifts a body from the place assigned to it or changes a place's destination. It makes visible what had no business being seen, and makes heard a discourse where once there was only place for noise; it makes understood as discourse what was once only heard as noise. (Rancière, 1996, p.45)

Under Rancière's distinction between *the political* (the law of appearing) and *politics* (disagreement over the existing distribution) it becomes clear that appearance is always aesthetic, but in the case of the *political* it marks a form of identification while, in the case of politics, a disagreement is generated with the existing forms of distribution that enables new political subjects to appear. Rancière's thesis on the "aesthetics of politics" is interesting, since in some way it lends a greater complexity to Hannah Arendt's proposal on the space of appearance; it allows us to think of two moments: one that establishes itself as a law, and the other that would be properly speaking the moment of politics.

In this sense, politics can be thought of as a manifestation that undoes the perceptible orderings of the police order by means of a series of interventions that, under the idea of the actualizing and testing of equality, permits the frames of appearance to be transformed in order to open other fields to experience. This notion of politics breaks with classical and modern political theory that seeks a basis of the

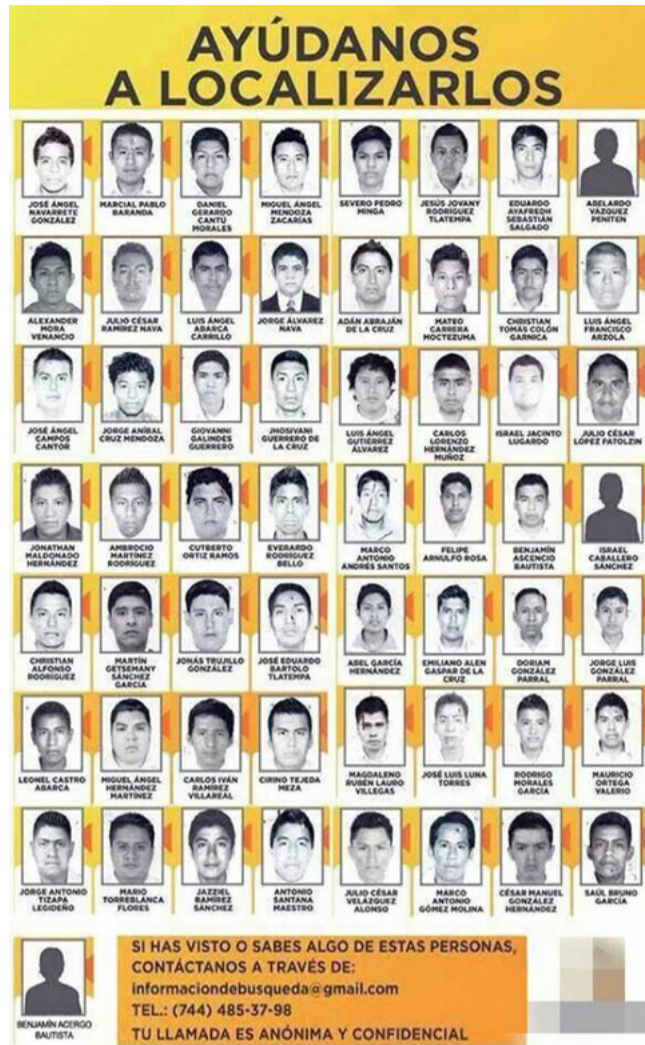
community; here the only principle is that this basis does not exist, and that politics in this sense is an activity that allows the distribution of the sensible to be questioned. Politics, therefore, occurs when, in spite of its unlikelihood, appearances surface.

XI

Although Teatro Ojo has been working for over a decade on the questioning of how a theatre without theatre can intervene in memory in order to destabilize history, [13] in *Lo que viene* the operation implied the reassuming of the political conditions of the theatre in order, in a re-siting of the stage, so as to make the common appear. In its Greek tragic origins, the stage was the appearance space in which actors represented the conflict between *oikos* and the *polis*. In Teatro Ojo's appropriation, the stage marks the spatial and temporal opening of an appearance. What the theatrical dislocation seems to mark in this theatre devoid of theatre is that, the agora having been swept away, the stage can become the place of the political, and this can be set up in the street, amid ruins, a football field or the passages of the city.

In the case of *Lo que viene*, although the project had been mounted in a theatre, the space did not harbour any kind of theatrical performance. Following in the steps of the avant-garde, theatre of the absurd, of estrangement, of cruelty—it sought in art the possibility of the public. A place from which to leave the private sphere, of distancing from the world so as to bring our fears, our mutterings and stammerings into appearance, before others, among others, so as to assert, like Antigone, that if our mourning is public it is because it is political.

The fortress of the private, the intimate, the individual, the emancipatory sublimations in closed and exclusive communities are a way of making the common world disappear, of debilitating the possibility of antagonism, discrepancy, disagreement. It needs to be clear that to have a world in common, to appear to the others, is to affirm that although there is a world in common, there are a variety of positions, a total diversity of forms of comprehension and desire. The supposition of recognition in love or hate—in the figures of identification that, as friends or enemies, found modern political theory—cannot be the basis for being “with”. As Butler remarks, citing Hannah Arendt, “one does not choose with whom to cohabit the world” [14], the fact of one's being there, one's own appearing, is what establishes one's right to exist and to be there.



State missing students poster, Government of Guerrero, 2014.

At the beginning of October, 2014, a series of photographs appeared with the faces of the disappeared *normalistas*. The montage was composed of photographs of the size known in Mexico as “*infantil*”. In the portrait, the framing centres on the faces that appear against a white background. These photographs are used for official documents and their characteristics point to their having been taken in studios; for official purposes neither instantaneous or digital photos may be used.

In this series we see the faces of forty students of the rural teacher training college of Ayotzinapa. Three more are represented by a presumably male silhouette, always the same, with longish hair that contrasts with the hair of the photographed students, always short and slicked back with gel. Almost all look serious. Most of them still have a child-like appearance, although many show a severe expression.

Probably the photographs come from the college’s own archives; they were handed over to the authorities in order to begin the investigation as fast as possible. Inevitably their index –“that-has-been”- , is fixed in the institutional apparatus itself.

While this series was intended officially to facilitate location of the students as missing persons, it was also appropriated spontaneously during the protests in a variety of ways. Following this appropriation, it is not only a set of faces but a community of faces. In this community, along the lines traced by Didi-Huberman in *Peuples exposés, peuples figurants*, a parcel of humanity is figured which exhibits a people.

These images remind one of the clinical photographs of Philippe Bazin. These explore the faces of the new-born, women or old people, tensing in a radical way the clinical coldness of the framing with the *pathos* of the face. There it would seem that, as Bazin himself explains in the book by Didi-Huberman, “all these faces that advance upon us, that look at us, and whose flesh has an extreme presence, will reconstruct mentally the feeling of the people”. (Bazin, 1997-1998, p. 72)

The series of the *normalistas* is built of ID photos, made according to the requirements of a classificatory apparatus based on the knowledges and formats of forensic anthropology. The crudeness of the overall image, its technical and clinical aspect makes the series a mark of an aesthetic regime that made them invisible. The appropriation of this in the protests transformed the bureaucratic gesture into a political one inasmuch as the image became a denunciation of that same casting that excluded them as a party—that is to say, as the people—without a part to play.

The image of this community of faces contrasts with the *selfies* that circulate constantly in Internet and which establish an I by the medium of a face. This collective face shows something that has no representation. As Didi-Huberman has observed, what is generally referred to as “people” represents the rich and famous. “The people”, on the other hand, is an empty signifier that only acquires a face in the appearance of a “missing persons announcement”. The circulation of this series in the social networks, in the streets, accompanying protests, and in works of art has brought into appearance a people faced with disappearance.

The 43 are not the only ones; there are thousands of other nameless and faceless men and women who have vanished and that we have allowed to disappear. Because of the conditions described above, violence in Mexico falls mainly—and with the greatest brutality—upon marginalized groups: single and working women, young unemployed people, migrants and the rural population.

What was it in the case of the students of Ayotzinapa that made their disappearance visible? Without doubt it was the evidence of collusion, or even worse, the impossibility of differentiating between authorities and organized crime. But it was also the fact that these were students, a representation that arouses the emotions linked to a history of repressions that is impossible to silence. Were it not so, surely these 43 vanished students would be faceless and would have passed unnoticed, like most of the victims, among soon forgotten newspaper reports.

The force of the Ayotzinapa case lies in the fact that the community of faces that has made its appearance makes visible this exposed people that we have allowed to disappear.



Gustavo Ruíz Lizárraga.



Gustavo Ruíz Lizárraga.



Oswaldo Ruíz, 20th of November protest, 2014.



Oswaldo Ruíz, 20th of November protest, 2014.



Gustavo Ruíz Lizárraga.

XIII

Following this disappearance I made my appearance along with many others. We took to the streets to refuse to be this mere void that avoids death by being nothing. Being together did not remove my fear but it did break the enchantment. [15]

These have been instances that do not succeed yet in delineating a movement. But their appearance enables us to assume that politics is not entirely given and that the only way to imagine it will be by insisting. Once and again, here and elsewhere. As Didi-Huberman states:

It depends on us alone that the fireflies do not disappear. Now, for this we ourselves must assume liberty of movement, a withdrawal that is not a retreat, the diagonal force, the faculty to bring parcels of humanity, the indestructible desire, into appearance. We must, therefore, convert ourselves—in withdrawal from the reign and the glory, in the breach opened between the past and the future—into fireflies and form once again a community of emitted lights, of dances in spite of all, of thoughts that transmit. To say yes in the night furrowed by flashes of brightness and not to be content with describing the no of the light that blinds us. (Didi-Huberman, 2012, pp. 119-120)

It will be necessary to have the patience and the intelligence to know how to direct those emotions, to generate a critique that will maintain us, denying any naturalization. Because everything always *can* be different, although in fact that difference may never be realized. It will be necessary, as Benjamin once recommended, to organize pessimism, in opposition to the contemporary forms of isolation based on paralysis and submission, [16] And thence win energy for whatever is to come.



Street Intervention, Laser Contingent, 2014.

I still dream of waves.

Footnotes

[1] Translated by Christopher Follett. This text is based on a paper presented at SITAC XI. I take this opportunity to thank Contingente láser, Siempreotravez, Oswaldo Ruíz, Gustavo Ruíz Lizárraga, Iconoclasistas, Francis Alÿs and Rafael Ortega for allow me to use their materials; to Julien Devaux because the image of the firefly appeared to me for the first time in his work *Noche Buena*. Finally, I want to thank Teatro Ojo and Cuauhtémoc Medina because working with them helps me not to close my eyes.

[2] A march has been organized yearly since 1977 in commemoration of the violent crushing by members of the Mexican army of a student meeting during the mobilizations of 1968. An unknown number of participants were killed.

[3] At present there are 245 Public Teacher Training Colleges in Mexico. Seventeen of these are Rural Colleges, forming part of an educational project that arose from the Mexican Revolution and has played an important educational and social in extremely marginalized peasant communities. This is a field where educational, and pedagogical work has been indissoluble from political struggle that, in some cases, has given rise to movements of a revolutionary or guerrilla nature. For this reason the *Escuelas Rurales* have been subject to close political scrutiny and for many years have had tense relations with both municipal administrations and the state government over limitations in budgets and resources. In view of this situation, the students have developed strategies of pressure, such as the commandeering of buses and occupation of motorway turnpikes, which have led to increasingly violent confrontations. Indeed in December, 2011, several years before the disappearance of the 43 students, there was a confrontation between students of the Raúl Isidro Burgos Rural College with the Guerrero State police over the blocking of the *Autopista del Sol*, the main highway connecting Mexico City with the Port of Acapulco. In this clash a young man was killed and several students were detained. Hence, the whole matter surrounding the case of the 43 must be seen in the historical context of the Rural Teacher Training Colleges, which focus tensions between students, peasants and guerrillas with the police, armed forces and, more recently, organized groups of narcotics traffickers.

[4] Remains found in bags the San Juan river in the municipality of Cocula were sent to the Forensic Medicine Laboratory at the University of Innsbruck in Austria. From those remains, the only missing students that could be identified were Alexander Mora and Jhosivani Guerrero de la Cruz, the latter almost a year after the disappearance and with a result that was not entirely conclusive. Nonetheless, while the Equipo Argentino de Antropología Forense—which has been present throughout much of the process at the request of the parents and other representatives of civil society—accepts the identification, it has not certified the place of origin of the fragment presented, leaving open the possibility that the remains found at Cocula do not belong to the missing students and that the fragments that do may have come from another site.

[5] The Grupo Interdisciplinario de Expertos Independientes is made up of Alejandro Valencia Villa, Ángela María Buitrago, Carlos Martín Beristaín, Claudia Paz y Paz Baile, and Francisco Cox Vial.

[6] [While several reporters and researchers mentioned at the time the existence of a fifth bus, it was only with the appearance of the Report and the recommendation of the GIEI that the matter has received attention. On this basis, there has been speculation regarding the existence of a route of transportation of heroin between Guerrero and Chicago. The fifth bus has become a putative key to understanding not only the virulence of the attack but also its configuration and the involvement of the local and federal authorities.

[7] In 1929, in order to deal with the crisis generated by the assassination of Álvaro Obregón, the newly elected president, the Partido Nacional Revolucionario was founded; nearly a decade later, in 1938, it was transformed into the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana and finally, in 1946, underwent a new transformation, becoming the Partido Revolucionario Institucional. The changes of name were accompanied by modifications in the organization that enabled it to adapt to new times.

[8] These figures are based on the report released by the Centro de Investigaciones para el Desarrollo A.C. de Mexico on August 26, 2012. The report includes data that suggest that, in the first two years of the Peña Nieto administration, 9,384 individuals disappeared. Cf. Campa, Homero. Proceso, February, 2015: <http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=395306> (consulted: 29.10.2015).

[9] *Lo que viene* (“What is to come”) was presented in the Teatro el Galeón in Mexico City from October 18 to November 11, 2012. The members of the Teatro Ojo collective who participated in this project were: Héctor Bourges, Karla Rodríguez, Laura Furlan, Patricio Villarreal, Jorge Pérez Escamilla, Itzel Aparicio, Emanuel Bourges, Gisela Cortés and Elizabeth Pedroza.

[10] An earlier version of this section and that referring to Rancière were previously published in the article “Occupying the Space: the Battle for Politics” translated by Christopher Michael Fraga in the digital journal *The Salon*.

[11] The concept of “appearance” will be central to my arguments. I have borrowed it from Hannah Arendt’s observations in *The Human Condition* where she explores the problem of the “space of appearance”. The word “appearance” comes from the Latin *apparitio*, -ōnis (which originally meant “a waiting upon”). In the fourteenth century it came to be used in English in the sense “coming into view”, “becoming visible”, and also acquired the sense of “apparent form” or “semblance”. All these notions, along with that of “vision of a fantastic or supernatural being” (usually expressed by *apparition*) are still present today. This ambivalence of meaning complicates the use of *appearance* as a category since it brings with it suggestions, on the one hand, of the mystical and, on the other, of the original and related problem tied up with the dichotomy of truth and appearance. Nevertheless, and perhaps because of this imbroglio, appearance is of central importance for breaking those political configurations that affirm the existence of a natural order. What is problematized by appearance is the way in which what appears makes its appearance, it is thus a question of aesthetics as well as epistemology and politics.

[12] This description of the situation in Mexico has been articulated by Dolores González Saravia, Coordinator of Processes of Positive Transformation of Conflicts of the civil organization SERAPAZ, as presented at the 2nd and 3rd Forums on Culture and Social Emergency held respectively in December 2014 in the Casa del Lago and in January 2015 in the Centro Cultural Universitario Tlatelolco, both in Mexico City.

[13] In projects like *México mi amor, nunca mires atrás* a sound archive was generated in order to tense the project of modernization in the very space where some of the buildings of the high-rise housing project known as Multifamiliar Juárez collapsed in 1985. This space has been a cemetery, National Stadium, jewel of Mexican modernist architecture and, following the fall of some of the buildings in the earthquake, a recreation ground for local people. Teatro Ojo intervened in that space in order to open up the ruins and pose questions about the layers upon layers of history that have accumulated there.

[14] Filar, R. (2014) , “Willing the impossible: an interview with Judith Butler”, *Transformation*, available at: <http://www.opendemocracy.net/transformation/ray-filar/willing-impossible-interview-with-judith-butler> (accessed: 22.07.2015).

[15] While doubt is always cast on the efficacy of protests, and in effect it has not always been possible to articulate via that means a movement with definitive political consequences, it can hardly be doubted that this campaign in particular has achieved tangible effects, among them the mandate for an extended period for the GIEI to continue with its investigation. This opens the possibility of obtaining further elucidation and of maintaining pressure on the government to assume the recommendations that this body has proposed.

[16] Walter Benjamin’s famous reference to the organization of pessimism, which is also present in several of Didi-Huberman’s writings, comes from the short text “On Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia”. I think this phrase describes how Benjamin distrusted the optimism of the social-democrats, and this was the only way to save oneself from the anaesthesia produced by a discourse laden with optimism. The only way to offset the confidence that blinds men with the promise of progress was to distrust it; the only way not to fall prey to totalitarian fanaticism was to distrust, and Benjamin makes of his thought an art of distrust. In his distrust, he sees in surrealism a pessimism that contradicts the dream of progress, that turns its face towards the surrealist existence of reality. Surrealism, like communism, is organized pessimism, and for Benjamin this did not mean falling into a nihilism that would negate every possibility of positive action. In this sense, and under the new mechanisms of enchantment, it is possible to take up once again the idea of organization of pessimism in order to articulate other modes of existence.

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