Images, shock, and the management of fear

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Translated by Arte Traducciones

At the beginning of 2015, we disclosed the dossier topic of this year's number of *Re-visiones*, Images, shock, and the management of fear. The year has been prolific in events which, as they unfolded, seemed to prove us right in our presupposition that there is an undeniable –and, again, urgent– need to rethink the politics of fear. There is no need to name these events, since doing it would point to very specific geopolitical strategies that have painfully settled in our bodies –depending on who reads these pages, and from where. Suffice it to check the social networks to see how geopolitics are organised when something breaks into the first pages of Anglocentric news, how everyday life, damaged in each experience, emancipates from the dominant signs of the media, and how the politicisation of affect takes their place. Still, despite their tension, the familiar and the distant can hardly be radically separated. In this issue's call we already warned, with Brian Massumi, that fear had become an ontogenetic concept.

As could only be the case, since we find ourselves within the frame of a University in the Europe of knowledge, the economic terror of numbers has been around for another year. Since certain behaviours (the example of Greece) awoke in us the phantom of the fear of impoverishment and ruin, we have felt the need to know what Europe we are actually talking about and to what rules we are subjecting ourselves to; what cultural differences oppose southern and northern Europe. These questions are debated in Schäuble's grandmother, an article by **Franco Berardi (Bifo)** commissioned by Re-visiones. In the same European environment, Alice Creisher, whom with we shared an interesting seminar after her participation in the XXI Conference on the study of the image at the CA2M, has been kind enough to send us a reflection that was commented and worked on at the meeting: a text on *Job Revolution*, by Peter Hartz.

A project such as this is committed to working from the concrete gesture. This is typical of images and of the emotional atmosphere they evoke. To take part in this means drawing up new diagrams where a political reading can be made not only of what the images weave, what they warp, what they prepare in secrecy, what (abstract) structure they spin in the neo-liberal capitalist society, but also of the way in which images act in each case. A *diagram-planisphere* where constellations will appear as crystallised time, so that we may be able to see how the past always irrupts in (current) moments of danger, far removed from the diagnoses based on the lineal and factual history of disasters. A narration deprived of a historic index will always be perversely interested in believing that the last episodes reach the highest bearable point of insecurity for westernised societies and hegemonic discourses –hence, surveillance systems become more sophisticated. The act of faith in the absolute novelty of the event is part of the management of fear.

Reading the articles of this issue's dossier, we find that canonical media are still fulfilling their role. So they are. Rooms are filled with gunshots and screams constructed in such a way that it is impossible to situate oneself in a position other than that of the military, the police, the control. The last Paris attacks –I am now taking a geopolitical position– have innervated our bodies in an information obscenity where the lights of XXth-century technological devices were prioritised. The 'news' in a loop, the social networks in critical murmur. In a post-representational system, does fear still function as a phantom inherent to the millions of bytes that circulate daily through the Internet, to which we have no access? Nevertheless, the socio-technological context in (with) which we live secures the new conditions of a visuality that we still admit today as the visual regime of the political, but now with many 'agents' implicated: packed with words, gestures, signs, numbers and sounds, it imposes itself as 'it is what it is' –our everyday existence. Then, in these rooms filled with gunshots and screams, the expanded and connected bodies contemplate not only the exercise of the old resistance, but also the challenge of carrying out their agency.

Therefore, in the face of what is imposed, of what comes in unconvincing excess (what we used to call spectacle), fireflies of concrete and shared experience appear, through small gestures among human and non-human actors that act, concern, affect, and are concerned and affected, in order to displace –at least slightly– the political and economical instrumentalisation of fear.

Two articles examine the management of images by the media, and they focus on the visual strategies of ISIS. **Jonas Staal** has kindly allowed us to translate his article on Empire and its double [1], where he reflects on borderless states that extend their domains of control by means of fear and terror (the Islamic and the Empire described by Hardt and Negri). While he elaborates on the meaning of a black image –which is no anti-image– fruit of hacking, **Kinda Youssef**, in ISIS from the dark fiction of Hollywood, highlights the points that –beyond a supposed iconoclasm–, conform the relation between Daesh and Hollywood.

Helena Chávez and **Cuauhtémoc Medina** address another type of images: those involved in the space of public communal demonstration that played a leading role in the outrage before the enforced disappearance of 43 Mexican students at the Teacher Training Rural College of Ayotzinapa. While Cuauhtémoc Medina reads an unbearable image that swept across the social media in order to show, through it, what he considers to be "a crime of state par excellence, a crime without statute of limitations: the enforced disappearance", Helena Chávez focusses her thought on how certain artistic practices work under such conditions of disappearance, to insist on forms of political appearance.

José Enrique Mateo, in his article A kiss in the midst of a riot: Community, impact, and persistence, invites us to do an exercise: he tracks and traces back, with other images, a brief and fleeting scene of a kiss in the midst of a demonstration, that went viral. In this way, he prevents the snapshot from appearing "monumentalised" or captured by a domesticated iconography –which would make it unable to account for festive gestures that open us up to a community. **Diego del Pozo** takes a step further and incorporates the fact that images are performative in their circulation, calling attention to the importance of referring to "affective economies", and deals with the production model of emotions that he defends,

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with Ahmed, as a criticism against their privatisation and psychologising. **Ana Pol** also insists on the affective approach: in Risk area: The firefly narration she builds bridges between the experience of modern shock and the current situation of over-stimulation in a non-stop society. Trauma, autism or sensory disconnection add up to the categories of the non-affective; how can one keep a state of vulnerability –in line with Suely Rolnik– in a society that demands of the subject an extra energy that leaves her exhausted?

   Tania Castellano, who has studied in depth the shock of high modernism, incorporates in Coming to blows with the audience a genealogical treatment and leads it to artistic practices that don't "give the spectator much of a breather", a homeopathic treatment of explicit violence intended to free the spectator from a "reactive numbness". In addition, **David Vázquez Couto**, in Images of social control. Fear and shock in the viewer of a world under threat, reflects on the coincidence between the strategies power employs to manage terror and the narrative construction of cinema, and he does so by establishing a set of references that, without being genealogical, manages to show a historical frame made of fragments to understand the construction of reality in the service of that power. In The butoh dance amidst the politics of fear, J**onathan Martineau** regards the same reality (or society) as a monster that regulates itself by feeding demons. We see, nevertheless, in what sense the creator of butoh, Tatsumi Hijikata, "invited his students to transform their solar plexus into terrorists" so that the individual would dynamite herself and the body would touch the ground, the "absolute movement", to prevent fictions –the phantoms on which terror thrives– from living at the expense of bodies.

   For the new section that we launched in last year's issue of the journal, **Suely Rolnik** has granted us generous time in an extensive interview where she develops her seminal thesis on the memory of the body, the resistance to humiliation, and the fear that phallogocularcentric culture has engraved with fire on our skins.

   And finally, the reviews of *The act of Killing and The Look of Silence – Barbarity as metaphor* by **Alba Giménez**, and of *Design and Violence*, by Santiago Lucendo.

Notas
[1] http://supercommunity.e-flux.com/authors/jonas-staal/

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