

Images think, thinking with images

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PRESENTATION

Re-Visiones was conceived in order to gather the main topics discussed on each of the annual seminars developed through the R&D project Images of Art and Rewriting of Narratives in the Global Visual Culture. Our zero issue contains a common departure ground: “Images think / To think in images”, which was the topic of the 2010 seminar.

This was also the year of the MNCARS’ exhibition Atlas. How to carry the world on one’s back?, curated by Georges Didi-Huberman and based on Aby Warburg’s Atlas-Mnemosyne project. Not by chance several articles of that zero issue instinctively echoed some of Didi-Huberman’s ideas, especially that of Atlas as a “visual form of knowledge”. Nowadays we can not rely on the epistemological capacity of dealing with images without Warburg’s figure hovering over us, as we are also aware of working after “the age of its technological reproductibility”.

For everything said so far, the works by Fernando Baños could not be understood without a fondness for assembling and disassembling of heterogeneous moments, of crossed spaces; without a concern about time’s own visuality. In the text that Yayo Aznar writes with Baños, in a format specifically chosen by them, Yayo puts it very well: “Urgency as a value of the image, as one of its latencies”. Natalia Ruiz contributes with an indispensable work on one of the most lucid figurations of what we today call visual essay: J. L. Godard’s “thinking form”, that has been lingering for some time. Santiago Lucendo, past technological reproductibility, opts for an immersion in global digitalization, questioning about the status of poor and blurred images. Diana Wechsler brings Warburgian methodology to the artspace and shows us how the curatorial narratives that have to do with history and memory are written in a way that is of little use to the homogenizing discourses of power and their symbolic pressures. For his part, Jaime Vindel not only comments on the concept of the exhibition set up by Wechsler in Berlin, but also asks himself, honestly and in depth, about an art history that he, with Walter Benjamin, wishes to understand as necessary and inevitably political. My presentation of the seminar sums up, in a way, all this state of affairs. The conversations with Ernest van Alphen, who was invited to it, are reflected in all the above mentioned texts.

Lastly, we pay tribute to our dear colleagues who have left us this year: Juan Antonio Ramírez and José Luis Brea, two people committed to the transversal knowledges that images offer us if we pay special attention to the possibilities they have as “thought forms”. Miguel Ángel García Hernández and Carlos Jiménez have generously devoted themselves to the criticism of our colleagues’ last books: *El objeto y el aura. (Des) orden visual del arte moderno*, in the case of Juan Antonio Ramírez, and *Las tres eras de la imagen (The three ages of the image)*, in the case of José Luis Brea.

Re-Visiones is born out of the need to come back once and again to objects, texts and images. Re-reading is a necessary

option that allows the possibility of starting together new and different narratives, while we take more time for reflection and criticism within of our enthusiastic operations of image capture and the findings of new and complex elective affinities. A time of constant repetition of motifs that appears with a lucid perseverance in the works that we must consider master, but rather ignorant masterpieces that invite us, after J. Rancière, to start afresh again.

Due to our commitment with research, innovation and development, we will try to make the most of this desiring machination allowed by electronic mediation – an ever enthusiastic and imagining form of life among us.

EDITORIAL

In times -even nowadays- of the division of knowledge, the artistic field found itself separated from the historiographic discourse whose relationship with artworks consisted in: assessing, classifying and exerting criticism upon them. We, as professors and researchers, have decided that it is not about reading the image but to gear along with it towards entering into *legibility* (W. Benjamin), whether we are artists or theorists. We may approach the Warburgian suppositions and think that the image does not work as a module of simulation or referentiality, but as an instrument, in the pragmatic sense of the term, as an active force” [1]. We may even get to endow the image with a potential that, in Mieke Bal’s words, will allow us to extend “the subjectivity of the object as other with whom the knowledge is being performed” [2].

In any case, sharing this method of ‘thinking with images’ we are moving within a special cognitive regime, one that is not very accepted in habitual academic practice, more accustomed to quotes or the exemplification of discourses. In actuality, we have progressed from collecting our slides so that they will accompany the written script, to the preparation of classes according to the order suggested by the images that are generated by the PowerPoint [presentation], a magical mosaic work where there is always room for a last image which is claimed and welcomed by the rest of them. Therefore everything happens ‘in between’ those images. The rewriting of our histories gets in motion.

The members of this project recognize that artworks need a specific form of knowledge. This is the reason why we have proposed for the presence of Ernst Van Alphen here today. Because, for Van Alpheniii “visual art, precisely because it is experienced differently from intellectual debate, is eminently suitable to affect the way we think ” [3].

In addition, everyone who participates in this R&D project, who is involved in history and art theory as much as they are in artistic practice, has decided to think about the challenges that are imposed upon us by the changes that have taken place in the society of cognitive capitalism. To do so from the awareness of this state of things is to assume that the image with which we work is subjected to the effects that have been brought about with the development of information and communication technologies [as well as] the imminent *distributive economics*. “The Financial capital *manufactures worlds*”, Mauricio Lazzarato points out [4]. In these worlds, the image has an important role. An image that is in circulation, globalized at our expense. Artists, theorists, art historians, fabricate discourses with it. These discourses mediated by the image inevitably rewrite the inherited narratives.

What I have come to denominate at one point as ‘googleization’ [5] has to do with the globalized image-world in the sense given by Buck-Morss (2004) [6] where she sustains the concept of image surface. As long as in our classrooms or conferences we upload or download images from the Internet, and we take them out of context and relocate them in

our PowerPoint presentations, we are playing with the archives of collective memory and, in this editing game, we are producing new meanings. Thus, we are dedicated to a never-ending exercise of imagination capable of setting in motion this scope of images that we share in the global visual culture. This revelation isn't new, it was already there in Benjamin when he wrote about surrealism. And it is this text that I believe Buck-Morss recovers. Precisely because of this, and still in accordance with Brea in that the concept of Archive is "affected by the same technologies of knowledge", by "the access to a topicality of knowledge in permanent revision" [7], the question that I'm proposing is the following: Glancing around replaces the glance at the past? Paying attention to the collision that may be produced between *agencements* (Deleuze), fluxes and dispersions and that generates a new insight substitutes the other that had been inspiring the dialectic image and that fundamentally had time(s) as its fundamental reason of being? How is it that, in the horizontal communication of Internet social networks, we are more interested in the interaction ratios than in the 'clicks' on each image? Is it by any chance that traveling and shared images do not carry with themselves threads of memory to which one must necessarily attend to? Doesn't the memory recover the unconscious from the past and works from that scratch? (all Didi-Huberman). I would like to point out here the Benjaminian insistence in that "the historical index of images does not only indicates to what determined time they belong to, above all it mainly states that only at one determined time they reach legibility" [8].

Therefore we count with similar instruments to approach the construction of our discourses, a thinking along with the artworks that always maintains the statute of the image in a state of alert within the global visual culture. From all of this an agreement comes off where the artistic side will always be confronted by the visual side and by the representation, and it will do so from a transversal perspective where the political is unavoidably alluded.

Footnotes

[1] Sierek, K, *Images oiseaux. Aby Warburg et la théorie des médias*, París, Klincksieck, 2009, p. 68

[2] Bal, M. *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2002, p. 288

[3] Van Alphen, E, *Art in Mind. How contemporary images shape thought*, The University of Chicago Press, 2005, p. XIX

[4] Vid Lazzaratto, M, *Políticas del Acontecimiento*, Buenos Aires, Tinta Limón Ediciones, Buenos Aires, 2006

[5] Fernández Polanco, A: "Pensar con imágenes: historia y memoria en la época de la googleización" in *Arte y Política: Argentina, Brasil, Chile y España, 1989-2004*, Madrid, Editorial Complutense, 2010

[6] Buck-Morss, S. "Visual Studies and Global Imagination" in *Papers of Surrealism*, Issue 2, summer 2004.

[7] Brea, JL. *Cultura_RAM. Mutaciones de la cultura en la era de su distribución electrónica*. Barcelona, Gedisa, 2007, p. 216

[8] Benjamin, W, *Libro de los Pasajes* (Ed. R.Tiedemann), Madrid, Akal, 2004, p. 465