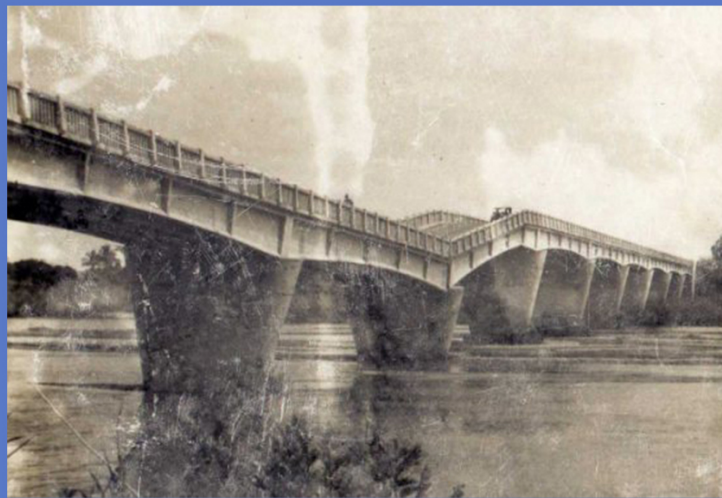


POLITICS AND IMAGE



Edited by Constantino Pereira Martins
and Pedro T. Magalhães



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Politics and Image

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*To the shining laughter of my son Guilherme
my only sun.*

May God always be by your side.

Psalm 27, 30

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I. New media, new politics?

1. *The polarized image: between visual fake news and “emblematic evidence”*

Emanuele Arielli (IUAV – University of Venice) 23-35

In this paper, a particular case of deceptive use of images – namely, *misattributions* – will be taken in consideration. An explicitly wrong attribution (“This is a picture of the event X”, this not being the case) is obviously a lie or a mistaken description. But there are less straightforward and more insidious cases in which a false attribution is held to be acceptable, in particular when pictures are also used in their exemplary, general meaning, opposed to their indexical function in referring to a specific event. In fact, the boundary between referential use and symbolic-exemplificative use is not always clear-cut, and it often becomes the subject of ideological dispute.

The main point that this paper would like to do is that in some circumstances there is a deep-seated belief that images that are clearly misattributed could still be legitimately used to refer to the fact, even if this is not the case. This twisted epistemological stance, that I will summarize under the oxymoronic concept of “emblematic evidence”, is both the product of political and tribal polarization in the ideological debate, and the result of a shift in our understanding of what photographic images should do.

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Nataschia Mattucci (University of Macerata) 37-46

The contemporary world, especially at a political level, features historic turning points that political theory—which has been increasingly relegated to be the ‘maid’ of the social sciences, and less and less their ‘lighthouse’—has sought to describe through a new lexicon; this signifies a symptomatology that has not yet been configured in a philosophical diagnosis of prospective nature. Just think of the use of expressions such as ‘Post-truth’, ‘Hate speech’, ‘Politeinment’, and ‘New populism’, to name a few, which have been used to indicate changes in progress in more recent years. However, to *what tangible changes are we usually referring* when we point to ‘changing times’? In political terms, and especially in European countries, we refer to transformations in political representation and in the public sphere, whose most obvious sign is the crisis of intermediate bodies. When the latter phenomenon needs to be described, political and social science practitioners consider the financial crisis of 2008 and the effects of globalization as the reference points of their analyses.

Without ignoring the effects of those phenomena, the current study aims to discuss the indispensable contribution that a criticism of commercial media can offer to a diagnosis of contemporary political changes. In the absence of critical philosophical support, an analysis of current politics—and especially of its relationship with the image—would deprive the diagnosis of both a background and a perspective. A prophetic analysis of the centrality of the image paradigm, within a reflection on mass media, is found in the well-known philosophy of technique developed in the 1950s by Günther Anders. His critical philosophy of the media is part of a broader — and, clearly, Heideggerian-flavoured—reflection on the imperatives of technology, and on the Copernican revolution wrought by the use of technology in human lives.

3. *All images are political*

Luca Siniscalco (University of Milano) 47-62

With this radical title we would like to establish a brief itinerary in the history of Western philosophy, showing how from a strict philosophical and theoretical perspective all images have to be considered political because of their ontological and relational nature. Beginning with Plato's famous critique of images (*mimesis mimeseos*), we'll try to explain that both history of arts and philosophical reflection constantly pointed out that images, in their symbolical structure, have a strong political implication. This topic will be considered in referral to the political and social influence that images exercise, especially in our postmodern and digital 2.0 society; the main focus will however always be purely theoretical: images have a political nature depending on their ontological structure. This thesis proceeds from the etymology of the Greek world politics (*politeia*) and the belief that every symbolical human expression is related to an intersubjective – therefore political and communitarian – meaning.

The analysis of the concept of simulacrum theorized by Jean Baudrillard (*Simulacres et simulation*, 1981) and the Heideggerian reflections on images, gnoseological process and truth will conclude our paper, helping us to understand that our contemporary time is “an age of simulacra and simulation, in which there is no longer any God to recognize his own, nor any last judgment to separate truth from false, the real from its artificial resurrection, since everything is already dead and risen in advance”. At the same time, we are presenting alternative paths to modernization, based on a mythical and symbolical hermeneutics, in which images can achieve again their philosophical dignity.

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Marianna Capasso (SSSUP Sant'Anna, Pisa) 64-85

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In the first section, Spinoza's political philosophy provides a definition of democracy that has imagination as one of its fundamental defining elements. Thus, I show how according to Spinoza imagination can sustain an emotive interaction among citizens and can orient them towards the creation of a shared political space. Then, an interpretation of Spinoza's political theory as a third way beyond contractarian and contractualist theories is attempted, along with an analysis of the notion of *respublica* and political equality in his works.

In the second section, the relation between politics and imagination is analyzed with the help of sociological studies. Again, the philosophy of Spinoza is used as a theoretical framework: I draw a comparison between the figure of the prophet, who has a "potentia vividius imaginandi" (TTP II), and social/political movements of recent years. As a result, I argue that imagination contributes to the development of a shared *cum-afficiere*, that is a collective interpretive system of meaning.

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5. Seeing Violence: images and critique

Adriana Zaharijević (University of Belgrade) 87-100

The main question this paper raises is what the images of war produce. What is our response to the images of horror and, further, can seeing them make us want to stop wars? To answer these questions, I propose we examine several levels of what constitutes a response. The frames of horror re-present violence in different ways, thereby exercising a certain form of violence over us. Where does that violence take place – within our understanding or in our bowels? What is the nature of our affective reaction – is affect ever raw or is it mediated and 'trained'? Does our understanding help in reworking our affects in such a way as to help us become critical of what we see and also perhaps develop a strong politico-ethical stance? Do images speak or do they only haunt us? The paper demonstrates our complex entanglement with the framed reality of an image, only to show that there are no easy, Manichean answers, since our response to the images of horror is the response of a social being whose eye has been always already framed by the frames themselves.

6. *Another scene for political recovery: theater's usages of death images published on social networks*

Ervina Kotollosi (University of Paris 3-Sorbonne Nouvelle) 101-118

The material and function of digital images, captured by a mobile phone and composed of the same binary code, completely change from the analogue predecessors. In just one click, the digital images appear on the network, then they spread massively from one user to another, from one community to another, revealing to the world somebody's experience of the world and somebody's engagement to the reality. In the same way, the digital culture and the binary code are blurring the boundaries between the captured and the created image and are complicating the relationship between digital images and the truth. In order to analyze the role of digital images published on social media sites and projected on the theater stage, we have taken the performance-lecture *The Pixelated Revolution* as an object of study. Rabih Mroué, the performer and director of this performance, interrogates and examines the images of death, taken by protesters during the first period of uprising in Syria, their mechanics of fabrication and dissemination on social media sites. He analyzes the digital images that demonstrate the political as well as the digital engagement and resistance of ordinary people toward the reality they are living.

7. *The Class of Images*

Sérgio Dias Branco (Coimbra University) 119-124

The concept of class has been progressively erased in contemporary discussions about art — and other topics. The explanatory power of this economic and social category, as articulated by Karl Marx, has been annulled precisely at a time when the contradictions of late capitalism are growing, composing an ideological background that creates conditions for the perpetuation of this system. From a Marxist point of view, class is neither a product of Marx's invention nor of anyone who thinks with him, but reflects existing social relations and the dynamics of everyday life. By isolating art production from historical processes, by privileging the inner workings of languages, by favoring an aestheticist approach to art, postmodernist cultural theory has relinquished critical knowledge about art as a phenomenon irremediably pertaining to the social fabric. If in this theoretical framework, cultural differences replaced class antagonisms as the driving force of society, then one must ask how these differences emerge and operate,

what determines them and what do they produce, thus recognizing the fundamental importance of their material basis. To think critically about art to its foundations is to re-materialize it as a production process instead of analyzing works of art in an idealist manner. The same may be said about religion. In order to tackle these matters, I will focus on film images understood as material, creative, and symbolic productions, and in the way they evoke class antinomies, expose class marks, and use Christian concepts and imagery in the portrait of working-class life in American cinema.

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Tacitus writes in the *Annales* for the survivors of tyranny, innocent victims of oppression, for those who have suffered punishment and defamation at the hands of a tyrant like Tiberius. His craftsmanship as a historiographer is not a form of distraction or entertainment. It is an accusation making it possible to take precautions and set up prophylactic measures so that the horror does not have the opportunity to rearise. That said how can we understand Tacitus' *Germania* as one of the "one hundred most dangerous books ever written" (Arnaldo Momigliano) *Germania* was a textbook taught in German schools. It was widely spread in Nazi pamphlets. It fueled with enthusiasm all sorts of people, from foot soldiers to high ranking leaders. *Germania* was an intellectual epidemy (Krebs). Therefore, we will try to detect its symptoms, its aetiology. How can we come to terms with demagoguery embedded in rhetoric?

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Paulo Reyes (Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul) 150-167

This paper starts with a reflection on the "act of designing" as a construction of ideas about the contemporary city which is aesthetical and political. It is intended to reflect critically on a notion of city thought from a concatenation of consensual images, easing the differences. And, more particularly, how urban design organizes itself to serve to appease the socio-spatial

conflicts through the images. The design in the architectural field is organized as a resolute act. In the face of a problematic context, it presents itself as the creator of a consensual future that from its beginning is already being outlined by a set of images. These images, taken for "architectural references, force the existence of a consensus that eliminates dissent. This paper, thus, aims to make a reflection about the images, not taking them as synthesis and appeasement of the differences, but rather as producers of critical and political thinking. The search here is for a set of multiple images that can be thought of only from a dialectical perspective. Therefore, we do not speak about an image, but about images, in the plural – dissimilar images that speak beyond themselves, in their intra-images.

VI. The politics of senses

10. *Politics of Perception: Imagination and Information, Reality and Artificiality*

Michael Mallory (University of Wollongong Dubai, U. A. E.) 169-178

Governments and political bodies have long been the creator and implementer of the definition of, and perceptions surrounding, societal purpose. These definitions and perceptions are constantly evolving, but rarely have dramatic or revolutionary changes occurred in the beliefs societies have about the way life is to be lived. The reality that exists, or, as we may also begin to think of this as the artificiality or imagined, is one of power, inequalities, deception, manipulation and control. Rather than questioning this reality, societies have generally accepted the political institutions and processes in existence. Or, if questions do arise, they are often discussed briefly and dismissed as being part of the societal purpose. It is the ‘we know but pretend not to know’, or, as Slavoj Zizek calls it, “disavowal.” (Zizek, *Examined Life*, 2008). This paper will look at the instruments and methods used in political perception, and analyze, or imagine different possible realities that may be possible. How have perceptions created through political means been used to control and manipulate society? How have the methods used in these creations change? How has the growth of media, technology and the use and creation of data impacted/changed these processes? Especially with the almost daily advances in technology, we are living in societies that can be seen as much more advanced, and likely better off,

than was seen in the past. But, because of this, it may be the case that societies are actually becoming less self-directed, and, contrary to conventional thinking, people have less say in the choices they face in their daily lives.

11. *Digital images, what's the matter?*

Colette Tron (Independent Researcher) 179-187

This proposition would like to contribute to a critic of digital images, from their conception and production to their diffusion and use. What is the purpose of these images, considering their environment: technological, social, economical ones? Which politics support their aesthetics, if automation, artificial intelligence, big data, and intensive calculation still allow a sensible dimension?

To this goal, we will refer to the history of art and to philosophy as some possibilities to think and to interpret the role of technics and their functioning in the conception of images.

And we will call to some artists and their artwork as aesthetic and political positions, in relation with historical and social context in which they take part as a critic of the making of images.

We would like to have a practical and theoretical structure to think and to make some poetics for an art of making digital images, as an art of (hyper)control. This is a political project for a «non inhuman world» (B. Stiegler).

12. Bio-academics of the authors 189-199

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Constantino Pereira Martins

FOREWORD

1. General remarks

This volume on *Politics and Image* aims to provide a basis for reflection within the framework of Political Philosophy on the central role of the image in the current political landscape. However, this does not exempt the history of thought and other related academic disciplines from issuing their verdicts on this old dilemma between ideas and action. If the most visible face of this meeting is located in the territory Political Communication, the background rests on the concepts that ground our reality, dispersed and hidden, in the multiple screens that mediate life. But what are these concepts? In short: all the traditional schemes of thought that used to frame political phenomena in terms of representation and figuration, power and communication, politics and imagination, performance and aesthetics, all the categories in the history of political thought are now hostages at drift, castaways and shipwrecks at the mercy of one simple idea: *immediacy* and the realm of first impressions, *i.e.*, the kingdom of surfaces, perception and *naked-images*¹. This corresponds to a new strategy of desertification and isolation, a new *Ars Politica* based on mediation processes and layers of layers of layers of images and meaning. Some might say it is just a strategy of distraction anchored on the old precept of *panem et circenses*, but perhaps one is also witnessing a fusion between politics and entertainment, pioneered by the Hollywood star system, that could be foreseen a long time ago. Regardless of the details, where the devil dwells, we are now faced with the vertiginous speed of the present, constantly surfing the new thing in an endless surface. The image has become the key factor. There is no room for concepts such as substance, consistency, truth, morality, etc. The wind is now the primordial element. The age of fire and earth is over at a great cost, and the bill is still to come. As a result of this new-old centrality, the merging of politics and image in a massive game of the politics of perception² metamorphosed into a war of images, basic double-edge conflicts, friends and enemies in the battle of opinions. A Platonic cave dead-end. No exit signs in sight. And we all know that in life one should always have an emergency plan.

1 See Gil, J. *A Imagem-nua e as pequenas percepções*, Ed. Relógio D'Água, 2005, Lisboa.

2 Like a children's binary game, the game of opinions only admits two sides: to be in favor or fall in disgrace.

2. Image and symbol

The complexity of our philosophical topic ranges from its formation to its dying bed, from idea to form, mimesis to synthesis, imagination to representation, hand to eye, from Politics to Aesthetics. In the impossibility of covering the vastness and density of the concept of image in the history of Philosophy³, we will try to briefly map the main operators, and to pinpoint some particularly relevant questions for our modern age. First of all, a brief word on Benjamin's thought-image. Benjamin's notion invokes the multidimensional depth of the concept, freely associating the circuits of memory, ideas, sensations, and intellectual experience, in an intricate web. His is a long-standing urban form of writing life. As we all have forgotten, and it might be helpful to remember, Philosophy is a way of relating to life, and also a way of writing life. There are different kinds of writing because there are different forms of living. Wittgenstein understood this very clearly. In his writings we can see a clear shift in his way of thinking the problem of the image. He throws away the ladder of meaning in its understanding of the image as an atomic part, as a piece of the puzzle of the world enigma, to embrace a broader, but at the same time slimmer, form of perception. In a certain sense, like Benjamin, he fuses the micro and the macro in a subtle art of correspondences. An art of plasticity and transmutation. Fluidity⁴. Most that could be said about this, and in the most elegant form, was already said by Professor M. Filomena Molder in a little book called *Symbol, Analogy and Affinity: "Man is, by excellence, the being that is in between"*⁵.

In the eternal struggle between form and matter, Hegel also knew the strength of symbolic power and the magic in the invocation of superior forces. Image and violence⁶. It is not just an old myth. It has grown from the beginning of times, from hand to rock, image to symbol: the crumbling twin towers from September 11, Nazi concentration camps, Hiroshima and Nagasaki. They are more than just iconic images. What could we call them better? The concept of total-image seems useful because it could apply to different categories and forms. The total-image is a new sort of breed — a killer breed.

How is an image of something formed? From micro-perceptions to the construction of the perception of X, the minuscule miniature-image, the gigantic image-symbol. And now

3 I would like to point out that the relation to Theology, so important in this regard, will not be addressed. Apologies in advance for this insufficiency.

4 We must leave to another occasion the possibility of interpreting Wittgenstein from an Oriental perspective (see specially Haikus).

5 Loose translation. Molder, M.F., *Símbolo, Analogia e Afinidade*, p. 43, Ed. Vendaval, Lisboa, 2009: "O homem é, por excelência, o ser que está entre".

6 Nancy, J.-L., *The ground of the image*, p. 16, Fordham University Press, New York, 2005.

a total-image. Design and advertisement. Full of hunger to devour the whole world, time and space. Capitalist holocaust and orgasm.

3. *Ars Politica* and image-world

When we approach the fictional foundations of the political phenomenon, we discover the image as a surface where we anticipate a depth.⁷ Such idea was at the heart of Warburg⁸ enterprise. To discover a connection, a correspondence, placing images side by side, against each other to show their force, their inherent abyss that escapes the unarmed eye. So, probing the relation between Politics and Image is, in a certain sense, like capturing a lost image, or retrieving an old, half-erased map of different regions and continents so that might offer a global glance at the problem. The texts in the present volume show a variety of possible approaches. If we reduce that big cartography to the specific relation to Aesthetics, we will see a long courtship between Arts and Politics through painting, sculpture, theater, etc. In modern times, Situationism and the dominant role of cinema and television are paradigmatic cases. Politics is at the center of photography, architecture or literature. And recently we have been witnessing the strange emergence of a new form: Visual Rhetoric.⁹ Everything becomes a potential object of design and reconfiguration, erasing the painful work of art, and of life in general, as transcendence and overcoming. Nietzsche asserted this with extreme clarity and sharpness: Life as struggle and overcoming. And that means that what is substantial is not the looks, *l'air du temp*, but the vital forces that sprout from innermost depths of the world.

But Politics itself can be seen as a form of art. An *art of death*¹⁰. Nowadays, to be more precise, an art of management, distraction and social peace peacekeeping. No more passion. In contemporary political representation, there seems to be theatrical agreement between rulers and ruled, where obedience constitutes a new sort of citizenship which establishes the lines that must not be crossed. In the heart of this historical transition process are the Media. From television to Twitter, and all myriad of apps that try so hard to take over our time, we can glimpse the new future ahead where politics is at the fingertips of everybody,

7 We should now turn our attention to Wittgenstein and his studies on Psychology. And, in that regard, Nancy's work on the image. Cf: Nancy, J.L., *The ground of the image*, p. 13, Fordham University Press, New York, 2005.

8 Cf. <https://warburg.sas.ac.uk/> ; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fuZFGCg178o>.

9 This is the odd case of Joana Vasconcelos. Like a new Leni Riefenstahl, she understands politics as a stage for her artistic talent, or for the lack of it. Obedience is well rewarded where art supposedly mixes with advertisement.

10 Cf. Pereira Martins, C., *A Arte da Morte*, SK Publisher, Lisboa, 2019.

eluding the complex relation between words and images, brain and hand. It's all just too fast. And too far. Bodies are old and out of fashion. Like in that marvelous scene in Woody Allen's *Manhattan*¹¹. In this regard, when it comes to image and the public sphere, there is nothing like the cine-humor-activism of Michael Moore, an exalted political troll who deconstructs the iconography of the *status quo* and the basic procedures of power relations. Because our biggest fight, right now, is with nature. And, as some of us know, in the end nature wins. Ecology is already, the 3rd WW. No P.O.Ws. this time. And that is only one side of the new image of Politics in the 21st Century. Political decisions are now taking place as if there was a second nature already in place.¹² And there is not. The rhythmic cycle of the seasons persists, as Japanese art, poetry and thought so superlatively understand. We must not forget the musicality of life and of this earth. The risk is immense. The reward scarcely any.

4. Politics and performance

The relation between Politics and Aesthetics is traditionally one of contemplation or performance. In the process of mediation, or communication, aesthetics in politics is commonly an instrument but could also be read as a weapon. Of propaganda, vanity, and rhetoric. Fundamentally, the process of aestheticizing politics can be either a hideout or a place of full exposure. In the most absurd manner, it might even be a mix of both, depending on the strategy. Sometimes the most spectacular gesture¹³ can hide another one of the most vital interest. From Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* to Baudrillard, Stiegler or Lipovetsky, the politics of deception in the era of the *homo spectator* could have never prepared us for the big crisis that hit most of us¹⁴ in the beginning of the 21st Century. Although some economists and theologians predicted that the logic of greed, predation, fetishism, and immorality could not hold the line,

11 "JERRY *Ha-has anybody read that the Nazis are gonna march in New Jersey, you know? (Helen and Polly shake their heads no) I read this in the newspaper. (Waving his fist). We should go down there, get some guys together, you know, get some bricks and baseball bats and really explain things to 'em. JERRY There was this devastating satirical piece on that on the Op-Ed page of the Times. It was devastating. IKE W-e-e-ell, a satirical piece in the Times is one thing, but bricks and baseball bats really gets right to the point down there. HELEN (Overlapping) Oh, but really biting satire is always better than physical force. IKE But true physical force is always better with Nazis, uh ... because it's hard to satirize a guy with, uh, shiny boots on"*, CF: http://yanko.lib.ru/books/cinema/ScreenplayManhattanbyWoodyAllen_sl.htm.

12 All the Cyberculture and Cyberpolitics that are shaping the future and the human condition are taking its form but it's not complete yet. Not all the internet (cyborg, robots, etc that technology, and all its forms of impact) is creating will deliver us from any major natural catastrophe. So, we are all still living aboard, and depending, on our natural and common planetary vessel.

13 Usually, common pickpocket robbers use a twofold gesture: one for distraction, and the real one for stealing.

14 In different forms and scales. The major innovative operator was the absence of war between countries.

and the lie, forever, the truth is that the elites were making money and that was enough to keep the Western world going. There has been, truth be told, a sort of Politics of illusion and entertainment since the very beginning of the world. That might be a problem sometimes, but in essence it is not, for the main goal of Politics is to postpone death and violence. A sort of chemical-praxis-drug, a paradoxical *pharmakon*. Politics as a means to solve problems, as a remedy, is a modern idea. The political performance is, in that peculiar form, a theatrical gesture blended with magic potions, or, as the song so eloquently suggests, it's *just an illusion*¹⁵. An old game of Japanese folding screens¹⁶, where you could play the seduction game of undressing or dressing. A place where bodies are transformed, where you are allowed to see something and forbidden to look at others. All theater forms take part in this game¹⁷, from Italian *Commedia dell'arte* to Japanese *Kabuki*. There are plenty of masks in the theater of politics, a tale *told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing*. For a moment, that could be an accurate description of the political phenomenon if we did not have history and memory. And above all, if we did not have the clear perception that the foundation of the question is war.¹⁸ This much is undeniable: like it or not, the main political paradigm is imperial. Since its creation, in Europe and throughout Western culture, we have never left Rome. This is the internal logic that feeds the drive. There is a neurotic flavor in this deepness of the problematic dimension of politics and image, playing hide-and-seek, a question of nerves impossible to trace here.¹⁹ The political performativity of the present is however, strangely and paradoxically, founded in Platonic terms, and in its binomial coexistence, where the real is now also a shadow expression of our anonymous digital lives. But without the hierarchy of substance it is all a matter of style, what is cool, who is in and who is out.²⁰ Fashion and performance, reassertation of arbitrary

15 Imagination, *Just and illusion*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZqiSBSFI7KM>.

16 *Byōbu* in Portuguese *Biombo*. Cf. https://artgallery.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/Exh_2014_byobu_brochure.pdf.

17 Even Politics through social images. See André Gunthert.

18 There are, of course, different scales and typologies of war. Time and space are categories of analysis that still work. China is now a great example of politics on a long term basis at the same time, whereas Western Democracies rely on short term strategies. At the same time, religious wars are now in place, and let's not forget the question of simultaneity of all the problematic situations described above, and all the others we have no space here to elaborate on. The common ground is always the fight for supremacy: to win. Although this is not pleasant to recognize, we know that, beneath the surface, the state of necessity is always there, waiting, omnipresent. And that is in perfect accordance with the inescapable fragility of life.

19 Perhaps one could follow this line of inquiry linking Walter Benjamin and Deleuze. A neuro-image, as Patricia Pisters has pointed out. In Portuguese the expression carries a more powerful tonality: *Uma questão de nervos* [A matter of nerves].

20 In the present the key factor is the *viral* phenomenon. That means a logic of scandal, opposed to the shame and decorum of the past, built on concepts such as cool, buzz, sound bite, white noise, etc. Strangely enough, it is a gray area where sound and image blur. Shock tactics and psy ops. Or maybe just too many lawyers and journalists. Or a little bit of both.

fictions. Again, that could be an accurate description of the political phenomenon if we did not have history and memory. Godard showed this remarkably in *Notre Musique*, the most powerful film ever made on Politics. Cinema has, at least, this strange and magical quality: it merges the phantoms of the past, present and future. Godard's film goes beyond the inherently hypnotic identity of cinema and exhibits the most radical hypothesis of cinema as political thought in motion. And again, it shows the vital problem of memory and repetition, but also the main problem, i. e., that Power is an end. Or simply: *the end*. Politics, like war, is just a means.

5. Word-image: fiction and emotion

What does the concept of politics mean? It means, first of all, “*to perceive in its event a process of visibility shattered in its own excessive condition in all forms*”²¹, constituting the need to be “*thinkable as a joint excess over State and civil society*”²². Its excessive being is identified in its immediacy as a millennial response to danger, that is, to death. What does the constitution of a visibility process mean? As Badiou suggests, the initial problem is the condition that politics has entered into the “*appearance of its absence*”²³, i.e., a process of visibility that implies a rediscovery of the fictional movement in “natural” opacity. This means that if, as a condition of political reflexivity, we have the fixation of an image, then politics is the fixation of a historically created fiction, “*politics was always fiction*”²⁴. Paradoxically, as Badiou points out, to perceive the fiction of the politician as a “*funeral fiction*”²⁵, is to propose an ontology of the event where one perceives the brutal apparition of the real (danger), but it is also, on the other hand, to show the tension of absolute failure where the conditions of access to the political are given through the catastrophe of history²⁶. It is, however, fundamental to recover the political nature of the problem. Thus, a problem that lies in appellations means a crisis of correspondences, a confrontation between Technique and Thought. In this sense, the relationship between politics and image couldn't be anything else but a problematic space *par excellence*. Thinking about the current political paradigm requires a reflection on Technique. This ambiguous space of cyberpolitics leads us not only to think about politics in relation to its devices of representation,

21 Miranda, J.B., *Política e Modernidade*, Ed. Colibri, Lisboa, 1997, p. 28.

22 Badiou, A., *Peut-on penser la politique?*, Ed. Seuil, Paris, 1985, p. 20.

23 Badiou, A., *Peut-on penser la politique?*, Ed. Seuil, Paris, 1985, p. 11.

24 Badiou, A., *Peut-on penser la politique?*, Ed. Seuil, Paris, 1985, p. 12.

25 Badiou, A., *Peut-on penser la politique?*, Ed. Seuil, Paris, 1985, p. 15.

26 Miranda, J.B., *Política e Modernidade*, Ed. Colibri, Lisboa, 1997, p. 24, 38, 43.

management, and control, but also, in a more profound way, to inquire on how they play a role in the re-foundation of the public space. A first essential move would be the realization of the superfluity of the present identified as a movement towards the creation of the new in and through the destruction of legal, social, and political traditions. In this way, from fiction to the will of stability and security, the movement seeks its fluidity in a new legibility and order. In what terms could we read the near future and its new silhouettes? According to all the elements available at the moment, the cyberpolitical movement grounds itself in the transition between two radically different paradigms of politics: a) politics-reason, and b) politics-emotion.

My understanding is that the study of emotions in politics will be at the center of the 21st century. Images, as Wittgenstein noted, can only be read in a form of life. What form will intellectual life assume in the near future with the breakdown of the University, of the library, of the very notion of community, and with the uprising of the virtual, given the complex relation between words and images? Certainly, new forms will appear, some with a truly innovative potential and others harking back to an ancient drive to magical and tribal thought. But as Woody Allen puts it: whatever works, right? Given the general atmosphere of social numbness, soon we will be facing the first wave of shock, where politics rides thrives on strong and shocking emotions²⁷: hunger, misery, ecological disasters, massacres, genocide, etc. Of course, all these phenomena are extremely important *per se*. What is different, nowadays, is their use and application in the field of political combat. If we take an event *x* of this type to the limit, and by *reductio ad absurdum*, the current political mentality would be more interested in taking a *selfie* and getting lost in online and offline discussions rather than solving the problem. Politics is on the verge of ceasing to be a collective problem-solving endeavor to become a *fait divers* which disguises and obscures causes and effects. A means of masking and postponing. A new politics of procrastination, which is fertile ground for extremisms. In fact, this accords with the passion for extreme emotions that marks the current age. If one of the greatest paradoxes of political theory has always been blind obedience or voluntary servitude, we are now confronted with a new phenomenon: voluntary stupidity. This is a new global value. Absurd and ridiculous, for sure, but a true reflex of the perversion that corrupts our culture. Is this state of affairs merely a consequence of the hypertrophy of self-interest, of atomization, as Arendt would say? Have we gone from “mere” selfishness to the ultimate exponent of solipsism? A more far-reaching interpretation of the problem is suggested by Bernard Stiegler, who diagnoses a neural-chemical castration of the youth by the psycho-technologies of the empire of advertising, whose aim is to dismantle the cognitive apparatus, and in particular, to dismantle its capacity for attention

27 The hole palette of excitement. No room for careful deliberation, serenity or patience.

and focus. A battle for intelligence is underway, as the manifold psychological disorders of our age (hyperactivity, attention deficit, etc.) clearly show. How will the notions of pain and suffering be interpreted in the future? What we see now is a huge apparatus surrounding solitude, from prosthetics to all the technologies of fun and pleasure, which so often lead to laziness or to the curious phenomenon of self-alienation. These are all serious and complex masks for the problem of pain and suffering²⁸. It seems to be the old logic of *ennui et divertissement*. A general *theory of indifference*, with greater vigor amongst the youth, is anchored in apathy and passivity, and consummated in its solipsism, between crying and laughter. Today we are not surprised to see the radical emergence of the consumer-spectator, with its cannibalization of memory and affection, as an accomplished fact. Self-cannibalization. We are before an infernal triangulation: from indifference, through anesthesia, to desensitization. Numbness and downfall. Dreams can become nightmares really quick. Perhaps the worst-case scenario is already in place, for desensitization implies a devitalization: Nietzsche's last man is a walking zombie, and they are everywhere. The present epidemic of solitude and narcissism is but the natural conclusion of the process. We are far away from the Kantian Ocean of the categorical imperative. Maybe laughter could constitute a sort of resistance, a tenuous shield. Maybe silence could become our wall of protection. But we will surely need courage and faith by our side to face all the grief and pain ahead. No fear.

Constantino Pereira Martins

Ericeira, São Lourenço, April of 2019

Non erit vobis in Deum non erit vobis in gratia Dei

28 See the extraordinary study by Professor Nuno Ferro on suffering and Kierkegaard: "Kierkegaard e o Tédio", *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia*, Vol. 64, 2008, pp. 233-260.

I. New media, new politics?

1. *The polarized image: between visual fake news and “emblematic evidence”*

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1. Trying to get away with misattributed pictures

For most of the twentieth century, photography has been seen as *indexical* evidence depicting events and objects without bias. As it has been widely discussed, with the emergence and popularity of digital photography and the ease in manipulating images, its evidentiary objectivity is no longer assumed (Lister 1995; Richtin 1999). However, there is no ontological peculiarity in digital technology as such (Osborne 2010): manipulations of images have existed since the origins of photography, and digital pictures are still dependent on capturing an existing visual source, even though the technological means of post-production, filtering, alteration and retouching have increased and made manipulation a simple task. The problem of photographic reliability, therefore, does not necessarily depend on the technological means of image production, but rather on the “visual trust” concerning the level of credibility of a source (Fetveit 2016), and on the different *uses* that emerge from the wide diffusion of photographic images in everyday communications. The variability of uses of a picture (that is, the *purpose* with which a photo is deployed in a message) is a more complex matter than the question of real vs. fake: establishing if there is a deceptive intention in the publication of a photograph is often subject to debates concerning the use of images in the news media, advertisements, and political and scientific communication.

In this paper a particular case of deceptive use of images – namely, *misattributions* – will be taken in consideration. An explicitly wrong attribution (“This is a picture of event X”, when this is not the case) is obviously a lie or a mistaken description. But there are less straightforward and more insidious cases of texts only implicitly suggesting a false attribution through a pragmatic inference or through pictures that are shared many times without being checked for their authenticity and continue to be used and accepted as an illustration of a different event (see also Arielli 2018a).

The following provides an example: during the 2017 German election campaign, a political advertisement by the right-wing AfD party circulated in social media and showed a

close-up of a woman hassled by Arabic-looking men with the superimposed caption: “Do you remember...? New Year’s Eve!” and the hashtag “go vote”. The reference was the infamous 2015/16 New Year’s Eve night at the Cologne central station, where groups of men with immigrant backgrounds targeted passersby and harassed women causing a media uproar against chancellor Merkel’s recent refugee policies. The ad enjoyed vast circulation, in spite of the fact that the picture had nothing to do with those events, since it was taken in 2011 during the Tahrir-protests in Egypt, where an American journalist was harassed. Moreover, the original woman in the picture had been replaced with the portrait of a model. The AfD spokesperson answered the accusation of “fake news” stating that there was nothing wrong with the use of that picture (“What counts is that it’s getting the right message over”)²⁹, firstly because it is not asserted that this is a picture of a scene in Cologne (thus ignoring the intuitive pragmatic inference based on a relevance assumption), and secondly and most importantly because the picture, according to his view, should only be taken for its symbolic and illustrative value. The intention, so the argument goes, was not to show a picture of a (specific) hassled woman but simply a “hassled-woman-picture” (cfr. Goodman 1976).

The boundary between referential use (a photo as an indexical image of a specific event) and symbolic-exemplificative use is not always clear-cut. On the contrary, it could become the subject of ideological dispute, a matter of negotiation concerned not with the real/fake question (which is in this case undisputed: the picture is misattributed), but the legitimacy of this kind of image-use. Similarly, a picture circulating among German extreme right-wing social networks showed a composite image of various battered faces, blaming Muslim aggression against women. In reality, all those depicted people (including a person who was actually a man) were mostly victims of domestic violence³⁰. Again, the argument adduced to justify the picture’s circulation asserted that those pictures have purely an illustrative value, *like stock photography*, alluding to “real” violence perpetrated by immigrants.

Taking another example from the other side of the political spectrum, similar rationales were given after a picture of a small boy in a cage was used to document Trump’s inhuman policy of immigrant family separation at the US-Mexican border. In the original sources it is possible to see that the fence is only a symbolic installation used during a demonstration, in which activists show signs of protest against the policies of the White House. One of the activists shared the picture on Twitter with the caption “This is what happens when a government believes people are “illegal”.

29 <http://www.neuepresse.de/Nachrichten/Politik/Deutschland-Welt/AfD-hetzt-mit-gefaelschtem-Foto-im-Internet>

30 See <https://www.mimikama.at/facebook/ueberfallene-frauen/>

Kids in cages”³¹. On Facebook, the same post was shared almost 10000 times. It should be noted that the attribution, again, is not completely explicit, since the caption doesn’t assert that the picture was taken at the border and was a document of a real scene. Still, most commentators and many press agencies took the picture as evidential material. The activist later realized that the image was misleading but defended his decision to disseminate it to make a point: “Telling me that I shouldn't post an image that, as it happened, was from a protest that staged what is actually happening at the border is like saying actors shouldn't portray characters and situations based in real life. This is not a 'cause' for me. This is real”³².

In both cases, the general opinion was unanimous in asserting that this use of images was inappropriate and misleading and should be reported, since a photograph is usually seen as evidence and does not simply illustrate a fact (like, for instance, a drawing), rather it *indicates* a fact. The defense argument contending that these should be seen as symbolic illustrations is usually considered a weak excuse - and rightly so -, since pictures, if not explicitly stated otherwise (such as captions pointing out that we are dealing with an archive image or a stock photo), are dominantly interpreted as being evidential, not illustrative or emblematic. But in an era of political polarization and diffusion of "fake news" and "alternative facts", these occurrences are far from being rare and are often given credibility in online communication (see Shen et al. 2018).

In sum, these examples could be interpreted as following: a) they are simple cases of lying and manipulation, aimed at deceiving those members of the public inclined to believe in the message without applying any critical filter; b) they are the result of a trivial error by authors not trained in carrying out the fact-checking work that an expert journalist is usually supposed to do; c) since they are usually ideologically charged messages, where the purpose is not to reach the truth, but to propagate a political position, there is a substantial disinterest on the truth content of the sources. Harry Frankfurt (1986) famously called this attitude of indifference towards the epistemological value of information *bullshit*.

The main point that this paper would like to highlight is that all these readings would not offer a comprehensive view of such cases if one last aspect were overlooked: d) at some level there is a *deep seated belief that those images could be legitimately used to refer to the fact*, even if misattributed. This would be, of course, a twisted epistemological stance, both the product of political and tribal polarization in the ideological debate, and the result of a shift in our understanding of what photographic images should do. This kind of visual manipulation

31 <https://twitter.com/joseiswriting/status/1006541329399271425>

32 <https://twitter.com/joseiswriting/status/1007459539942178817>

could be deemed as acceptable because of the convergence of two factors that I will briefly present: firstly, the effects of ideological “ingroup-outgroup” polarization may lead individuals to see illustrative or symbolic images as actual evidence. Pictures should be interpreted either as illustrative or as evidential, but not both at the same time. However, polarization contributes to the paradoxical use of images as “illustrative proof” or “emblematic evidence”. Secondly, the abundance of photographic material, amateur production, stock-photo databases, stills from movies, etc., weakened the traditional indexical value of photographs. That is, photos are increasingly used in their exemplar, general meaning, and less as evidential documents of specific events. An exemplary case is the diffusion of stock photos, or the practice of manipulating images in the production of so-called *memes*.

2. Tribal epistemology and images as “emblematic evidence”

As the examples show, misattributed pictures arise mostly in texts that express ideological or political confrontation in which there is no desire to assess truth and objectivity, but to assert a worldview and pursue a rhetorical battle against opposing sides. When information is subjected to forces trying to boost identity and reinforce one’s own ideology, a “tribal epistemology” will occur³³. In this situation, self-interest gets in the way of objectivity, the need of confirmation becomes weaker when a message matches one’s ideological assumptions, and disconfirming evidence is willfully ignored. An example is a study by Dan M. Kahan et al. (2007) that confirms how pieces of evidence do not resolve disputes if people already have a strongly ideological conviction. In this experiment, subjects were asked to analyze data related to various scientific questions: when problems were neutral for them (for example, they concerned information about the effectiveness of a drug), people showed excellent statistical skills in evaluating the data and knew how to draw accurate conclusions. On the other hand, if the information touched topics upon which the subjects had a strong opinion (for example, the right to keep arms and their safety, or phenomena like global warming), their responses showed a tendency to deny the evidence of the presented data and to confirm their pre-existing opinions. This blindness to the data, according to Kahan, lies in the fact that we are evolutionary geared to protect the worldview we hold and would explain why we are compelled to follow the truth accepted by our group and reject opposing views.

33 David Roberts coined this expression (see <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/3/22/14762030/donald-trump-tribal-epistemology>); see also <http://www.ctrl-verlust.net/digital-tribalism-the-real-story-about-fake-news/>

Human belief formation is not free from motivated and opportunistic impulses: an audience willing to accept some facts as real will do so no matter if those facts are proven to be unreliable. The truth, instead of being the goal of a neutral dialogue and dispassionate exchange of information, is guided by mechanisms of tribal affiliation by virtue of an instinct toward *identity protection*: what confirms one's own vision of the world, is for this reason true. Tribal epistemology also intervenes in the degree of acceptability and (lack of) vigilance in using images with dubious sources or even in the belief that deception is justified for "Machiavellian" reasons.

Besides contributing to bias, ideological polarization leads to radicalization in the perception of opposing parties, which are seen as the "enemy", and is accompanied by changes in how facts concerning them are perceived and interpreted. Social psychology has long investigated how the contraposition between *ingroup* and *outgroup* membership, that is the dynamics of "us" vs. "them", often lead to a radicalization of reciprocal perceptions, so that differences between groups are emphasized, internal similarities are accentuated, but most importantly, the outgroup is perceived as internally coherent and homogeneous ("out-group homogeneity effect", Quattrone and Jones 1980). A consequence of this bias is the fact that a behavior of a single member of the opposing outgroup, when negative and confirming the ingroup's prejudices, is immediately seen as a confirmation and manifestation of the qualities of the whole group: for example, a case of aggressive behavior in a socially stigmatized group (eg. immigrants) is seen as a confirmation of its allegedly general aggressiveness and unlawfulness of this group. Moreover, uninvolved members of the group are somehow considered guilty as well, if a completely unrelated member of the same group commits acts that the ingroup perceive as reproachable. For example, when news about a theft is broadcast, if the culprit is a local (say, an Italian in Italy), he is simply a criminal and will be, individually, the subject of his behavior's blame. But news of an Italian thief in Switzerland could contribute to the strengthening of potential prejudices by people cultivating common stereotypes about their southern neighbor. An unrelated Italian in Switzerland would not only feel the embarrassment of this situation, but for ingroup local people cultivating those stereotypes, he would be somehow perceived as blameworthy. A historical and more radical example of this mechanism is the fate of Jews in Nazi-Germany: every (alleged) misdeed by a Jew was blamed on every other person of Jewish descent. Similarly, and this is one of the main point of this paper's argument, a document (like a picture) showing a misdeed of a Jewish person would *ipso facto* become a piece of evidence against any other Jewish person, since they are aggregated together in an outgroup in which every action of a single member reverberates and become an action of the entire group, and then, consequently, of any other single member of it.

Most importantly, a document doesn't even need to be an actual piece of evidence, but simply an illustration of attitudes and beliefs that are stereotypically held toward the external group. As a consequence, in the mind of the mob, documents such as a drawing, a staged photograph or a clearly propagandistic leaflet are also perceived as a kind of evidence of deeply held and preexisting beliefs against this group of people. This also explains why a social group could negatively react to *fictive* depictions of their members, like the frequent controversies around a stereotypical representation of a group in movies or books: as an example, the acclaimed tv-show "The Sopranos" was criticized along these lines because it would stereotypically depict the Italian-American community. Even though it is clear to all that this movie focuses only on the life of a fictitious family with a mafia background, the negative reaction by some Italian-Americans revealed the concern that this depiction would be perceived as evidence or an illustration of the typical life of any other family belonging to this group. A movie is not an indexical document, but through the social-psychological mechanisms we have just mentioned, it could still be seen as a cue concerning the characteristics of unrelated people.

What we have here is a particular combination in which a sign (like an image) could be a simple figurative illustration or a staged representation and at the same time, acts as evidence referring to specific individuals or situations. We could name this paradoxical combination of representation and confirmation *emblematic evidence* (or "illustrative proof"). Even though the propagandistic drawings against Jews or the caricatures in popular tv-shows do not show anything that specifically refers to an actual uninvolved individual, since they are fictional, an ideologically polarized stance could handle them as evidentiary cues regarding this individual (and not simply as descriptive illustrations). Similarly, even though a photograph may not depict a fact x (since it is the image of a different fact y), if they are seen as belonging to the same category of facts, then the photography of y could also be used to refer, in an evidential way, to the event x (in the same manner as documentation of a person's guilt becomes "illustrative evidence" of another person's guilt). Basically, through ideological glasses the misattribution is being intentionally overlooked in favor of the belief that both events are instances *of the same thing*. For the right-wing AfD voter, the picture of a harassed woman in Egypt in 2011 is an occurrence of "Arabic looking men against defenseless white women", a general phenomenon of which Cologne 2015 was also an example: in this sense, the picture does refer to Cologne not simply as an abstract illustration, but as a case in which the events in Cairo in 2011 and those in Cologne in 2015 belong to the same category of events and thus *are basically the same*. In the same manner, a picture of a full boat of Albanian immigrants landing in Italy in the 90s has been used as a misattributed image of contemporary Syrian immigrants crossing the Mediterranean Sea. For supporters

of anti-immigrant positions, both are instances of “third-world people entering our borders illegally”³⁴: in this general category, they are both manifestation of the same type of group behavior. Each image of it could be used, according to this kind of generalization, to refer to every other similar case.

One important point is that this use of falsely misattributed pictures differs from a simply emblematic or descriptive use of the image. The emblematic use of a picture is not deceptive, but is clearly used as a symbolic and abstract illustration: a stock photo or a drawing does not make us believe that we are looking at the specific scene described in the text. In contrast, a misattributed picture tries to act as *emblematic evidence*, as we have called it, with the creation of a deep link between two unrelated events: the image of men harassing a woman in Egypt in 2011 is also an image referring to men harassing a woman in Cologne in 2015; their difference becomes negligible.

3. Photography’s loss of indexicality

In order for an image to be flexibly used as a depiction of a different event, two shifts should take place: first, the image should lose or weaken its indexical reference to a specific event or person; second, the image should acquire a general, abstract value that allows for a use that is different to the image’s original destination. Keeping in mind Peirce’s semiotic distinction between index and icon, photographs are images that are primarily connected to a scene through an indexical connection, and only secondarily depict this scene iconically (Peirce 1931-58). That is, it is not the iconical similarity that allows photographs to refer to the scene they depict, but on the contrary, it is the indexical relation (the scene optically “causes” the photograph to be produced) that determines the reference. Drawing and painting, on the contrary, are icons since they could refer to a scene thanks to similarities between representation and actual events: for an observer, a painting depicting the coronation of Napoleon as Emperor of the French can refer to that event that took place on Sunday December 2, 1804 at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris thanks to a reasonable degree of similarity of what is depicted to the actual historical scene³⁵.

34 <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/reluctantinternationalists/blog/europes-fake-refugees/>

35 We could of course think of an abstract painter realizing a non-figurative canvas that refers to the coronation: in this case the painting could refer to the scene only through the artist’s declaration that create the symbolic link between the canvas and the historical event.

Photographs referring to events that are not the ones depicted by them suspend their indexical reference and keep only their iconic value, depicting a scene that is similar to what is referenced. The question then arises: how could a photograph be subject to a loss of indexicality? Several reasons could be mentioned here:

1) A typical argument concerns the fact that digitalization and the subsequent ease of post-production and manipulation weakened the indexical referentiality, making way for a mostly iconic relationship between photography and reality. In this sense, photography becomes similar to painting, as it is the product of an intentional construction and not primarily the effect of a physical trace.

2) A further consequence of digitalization is that the massive amount of image production and diffusion causes a wider distance between the original source of a photograph (the depicted scene) and the final users and viewers. In analog photography, printed images were directly produced from the original film or were at most copies of the first prints. Today, the degree of separation between original source and final pictures could be widened without limits, since there is no quality loss in duplication of digital images, allowing for long chains in which photos are copied, shared, reutilized and decontextualized.

3) Following Benjamin's famous stance on technical reproducibility (1935), the referent in a photograph is always decontextualized from its unique spatial and temporal existence, becoming an exchangeable visual material in the potentially limitless world of images. The growing distance between a photograph and its source also means a loss of the causal and historical reference that enables the connection of a photo to a specific event. Historical links to the original context is usually made possible by documents and information surrounding the image or through cultural knowledge and cues that allow one to pinpoint the specific event depicted in the image. A portrait or a family photo could lose its specific reference because all information surrounding the family is lost, as when we search old pictures mixed up in a box at a flea market, but also, today, when we search Google for a certain category of image and copy it without investigating its origin.

4) A different, but for our purpose central, reason behind the weakening of indexicality is the fact that a photograph could be produced not as a trace of some specific event, but as a representation of general or abstract scenes. All *staged* visual images, in movies, advertisements and stock photography are not meant to indexically show actors, models or set designs in the instant in which they were produced: as observers we have to abstract from the specific context of scene production and to see something (a love scene, a smiling couple, a generic product etc.) beyond the indexical presentation of the image.

4. Images as generic visual material: the case of stock photos and memes

We should take a further look at this last point. Not only in Peirce's theorization about indexes (distinguished from icons), but also in the well-known views of Benjamin (1980 [1931]: 202), Bazin, Sontag, Barthes, (Bazin 1980 [1967]: 242; Sontag 1977: 155; Barthes 1981: 88) photography is associated with its direct, indexical relation to its referent. Slater (1995) calls it the "ontological realism" of photography (p. 222), which is, like a fingerprint, a co-substantial trace or emanation of what is depicted (Peirce 1931–58). On the basis of this physical relation, we attribute to photographs an evidentiary function that allows us to determine the existence of a referent. This aspect is famously argued by Roland Barthes in his *Camera Lucida*: "What the Photograph reproduces to infinity has occurred only once: The Photograph mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially [...] it is the absolute Particular, the sovereign Contingency, matte and somehow stupid, the *This*." (Barthes 1984: 4). From this perspective, photography extracts an instant from the flow of unrepeatable events and crystallizes it. In Susan Sontag's words: "The force of a photograph is that it keeps open to scrutiny instants which the normal flow of time immediately replaces" (Sontag, 1977: 11).

The absolute determination of the relationship between image and referent has been put in question in image theories asserting that the meaning of photography is the product of the encounter between images and viewers in their cultural and historical context (Tagg 1988). Moreover, as we saw in the last paragraph, it is false to consider photography only as a collection of rigid traces or documents of specific past events. In contrast to paintings, photographs are based on indexical traces, but they also can refer to general and abstract ideas, as is the case of staged, illustrative and emblematic photos. This is the case, for example, of advertising images (the ad photo of a family in a holiday resort does not want to show a specific and real family, since they are actually staged images of a generic family), fashion pictures (a model wearing a dress is not intended to show that individual in a specific time and place, but to only show a generic person wearing a dress and, possibly, create an iconic image that represents a series of concepts such as femininity, grace, luxury; see Arielli 2018b), and illustrations (for example in a book on driving rules, a parking maneuver could be illustrated with a staged photograph of a car rather than a drawing showing it). In all these cases, the photographic image does not extract and fixate a unique moment from the temporal flow of life, that is, it is not the representation of a "*This*", as Barthes called it. Along Benjamin's theorization, photography is an act of decontextualization from the spatio-temporal *hic et nunc*, the transformation of the image

into a reproducible, fungible and consumable visual material. According to Paul Frosh (2004) photography would in this case refer to a temporality which is different from the linear sequentiality of existence, in which single events string together one after another, and would rather refer to a "mythical time" in which no event is contingent and individual, but each is an expression of archetypal universals (the happy family, the fashion model, the perfect car parking). Frosh refers here to the theorization of Mircea Eliade (1954) according to which, in archaic societies, consciousness "acknowledges no act which has not previously been posited and lived by someone else [...]. What he [the archaic man] does has been done before. His life is the ceaseless repetition of gestures initiated by others... The gesture acquires meaning, reality, solely to the extent to which it repeats a primordial act" (Eliade 1954: 5, cited from Frosh 2004, 161). Unique and contingent events are meaningless, an object or event "becomes real only insofar as it repeats an archetype. Thus, reality is acquired solely through repetition or participation; everything which lacks an exemplary model is "meaningless," i.e. lacks reality" (Eliade, 1954: 34).

From the background of these theoretical observations, Frosh considers stock photography³⁶ a paradigmatic example of this use of images: "based strategically upon the interminable and overt production of imitative, generic photographs, is perhaps the most faithful to mythical temporality: it erases indexical singularity, the uniqueness of the instance, in favor of uniformity and recurrence – the systematic iconic repetition of image types" (Frosh 2004, 162). Stock-photography's versatility is demonstrated by the fact that an image could be sold several times and be used for different purposes. The potential meanings and uses of stock photos is summarized by the bundle of keywords that define them, a set of conceptual and verbal categories associated with the photo and used to make them traceable in search engines: "In all these classificatory systems, however, the indexical connection of the image with its referent, and the specific context of its production, are replaced by a principle of generic similarity and iconic equivalence between images" (Frosch 2004, 92). In the digital context, what exists must be definable and captured by the bundle of research keywords. A combination of keywords defines and identifies an event / a phenomenon / a thing or a person as "real". Stock photography, therefore, is a typical example of *standardization* and *pseudo-individuation* of the culture industry, as notoriously described by Adorno and Horkheimer (1979, 120-4; cfr. Kalazić 2015, 194).

36 Stock photography (professional images of common situation, people, events or places that are used for commercial design purposes) exists from the beginning of the 20th century, expanded in the 80s and 90s in huge image archives that allowed clients to find a specific looking photo in an already existing database of possible images: "[Stock photography] creates a substantial proportion of the photographs encountered in commercial and consumer culture, supplying a majority of the images used in US advertising, marketing and graphic design and acting as a key provider of images for multi-media products and professional website design." (Frosch 2004, 7).

This explains why it is possible to use the same stock photo to represent different situations and places: for example, the same image of fashionable young people laughing in a bar could be used on a web page or an advertisement magazine to describe young people's life in Berlin, Sidney, Belgrade or Seattle, without incurring the accusation of being a potential misattribution of scenes whose real origins (the photographic set in which it was produced) are totally irrelevant.

Stock images could be reproduced and loosely reinterpreted as long as they fulfill their iconic function. Based on a similar mechanism, misattributed pictures used as emblematic evidence make use, tendentially, of this “mythical” quality of images that are at the same time expression of archetypes concerning the behavior of the outgroup (the “invading stranger”, the “violent foreigner”) and photographic documentation of a specific instance of this behavior.

A further step along similar processes of visual re-appropriation is constituted by so-called “memes”: witty contents that quickly make the rounds among users and in which images (taken freely from any possible source) are combined with captions that constitute an ironic comment, a joke, but also a political commentary. Images in memes are almost used as if they were stock pictures, since their function is to offer a visual and iconic background for messages that liberally reinterpret and contextualize them. But memes go a step further than stock photos, since they not only suspend the idea that a picture should indexically refer to a specific event or person, but deliberately violate this principle for satirical purposes. Even though memes could freely play with images and captions making systematic misattribution (e.g. attributing a funny remark in a famous person’s mouth), they could also be employed in political and ideological struggles, as a means for creating visual and semantic associations, supporting a critical thesis, denigrating the opponent and expressing innuendos (see Hancock 2010, Milner 2016)³⁷. Cases of clearly open misattribution are not even considered worth noticing, like the case, for example, of a popular meme that blamed anti-Trump activists for violence by showing a protest scene implicating them³⁸, but actually depicting an older image of violent clashes in Greece. In those cases, memes cannot even be said to be misleading, since there is no real expectation for this kind of message to be indexically reliable, even though the boundaries that distinguish a serious from a satirical use are not always clear. The referential violation can occur blatantly and deliberately, appearing just as an emblematic representation of “violent demonstrators”, but still at the same time conveying a message with an evidentiary function (“*This is the behavior of the anti-trump activists*”).

37 https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/xyvwdk/meme-warfare

38 <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/anti-trump-protesters-destroy-america/>

5. Conclusion: image use as aesthetic battleground

Versatility and re-usability are properties of images that are not restricted to stock photos or to the diffusion of Internet memes. When we conduct an image search in Google, what we get is a huge archive of images that are semantically linked by search keywords and visually associated by similarity. Although they originate from different sources (personal web pages, newspaper, real documents, etc.), within this homogeneous display they are all indifferent visual raw material that could be easily re-appropriated for further transformations, uses and circulation. From this perspective, the indexicality of *any* image is weakened and gives way to their mere iconic value and generic denotation. In this context, images could refer to reality by means of their ability to convincingly depict a state of affairs through their visual power, not in virtue of their indexical and evidentiary value. The ease and speed of re-appropriation and re-elaboration of visual signifiers have made images a fungible and versatile material for rearrangement operations that are in many cases perceived as acceptable.

Unlike fabrication and manipulation of pictures, misattribution specifically threatens the indexical mechanism of the photographic image, as outlined in the case of “emblematic evidence”. While the manufactured or manipulated image falsely refers to a reality that does not exist, the misattribution of a photo transposes the ontological reality of a scene in order to illustrate a different event: the false attribution then connects unrelated scenes creating an association based on analogy and similarity, constructing and making visible a link between images and events according to a certain world view: two different events are shown to be the expression of the same phenomenon.

Misattributions and the twisted use of “emblematic evidence” are an example of visual conflicts that are conducted by efforts in constructing semantic and symbolic associations, attempts to appropriate the most effective imagery and create narratives that serve a specific agenda. Being able to associate an image, no matter if misattributed, to a given event, allows one to expand and strengthen the range of ideological representations in one’s own favor. The struggle for appropriation of the visual exemplarity of images, and the legitimacy claims over the use of pictures takes place on a perceptual, aesthetic and rhetorical level. Visual exemplarity, along with the propensity to be shared and to become viral (as in memes), is a way of defining and structuring the visual and textual discourse around a worldview, regardless of the reliability of any factual claims.

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II. The political nature of images: philosophical approaches

2. Anders and the politics and image paradigm, through the philosophy of technology

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1. Introduction

The contemporary world, especially at a political level, features historic turning points that political theory—which has been increasingly relegated to be the ‘maid’ of the social sciences, and less and less their ‘lighthouse’—has sought to describe through a new lexicon; this signifies a symptomatology that has not yet been configured in a philosophical diagnosis of prospective nature. Just think of the use of expressions such as ‘Post-truth’, ‘Hate speech’, ‘Politeinment’, and ‘New populism’, to name a few, which have been used to indicate changes in progress in more recent years. However, to *what tangible changes are we usually referring* when we point to ‘changing times’? In political terms, and especially in European countries, we refer to transformations in political representation and in the public sphere, whose most obvious sign is the crisis of intermediate bodies. When the latter phenomenon needs to be described, political and social science practitioners consider the financial crisis of 2008 and the effects of globalization as the reference points of their analyses.

Without ignoring the effects of those phenomena, the current study aims to discuss the indispensable contribution that criticism of commercial media can offer to a diagnosis of contemporary political changes. In the absence of critical philosophical support, an analysis of current politics—and especially of its relationship with the image—would deprive the diagnosis of both a background and a perspective. A prophetic analysis of the centrality of the image paradigm, within a reflection on mass media, is found in the well-known philosophy of technique developed in the 1950s by Günther Anders. His critical philosophy of the media is part of a broader—and, clearly, Heideggerian-flavoured—reflection on the imperatives of technology, and on the Copernican revolution wrought by the use of technology in human lives.

2. Philosophy of discrepancy

For quite some time, the academic world considered Anders' works peripheral. Nevertheless, translations of his works into other languages (albeit proceeding at a slow pace), as well as the interest that scholars and students have recently shown in him, may be signals of a change in perspective. In this brief discussion, I would like to show how Anders' thought could offer an important contribution to contemporary political philosophy, especially to the contemporary connection between politics and image. This discipline has featured great twentieth-century protagonists: just think of the political theory of Hannah Arendt, for example. However, in recent years, scholars who study the effects of globalization, risk society and—perhaps even more relevantly—the relationship between evil and power, images, and emotions, have found in the writings of Anders many elements worthy of reflection. I will try to explain, through the words of the foremost Anders scholar Konrad Paul Liessmann, what makes Anders an 'outsider' of philosophy. First of all, let us consider his writing style: Anders writes stories, fables, novels, and even tales, as well as academic essays. Consider also his inter- and transdisciplinarity: he deals with aesthetics, literature, music, politics, and anthropology. This fact alone places him outside the established disciplines. Last but not least, consider his life, 'As a Jew in Germany, as a European in America, as a remigrant in Austria (...) [and] as an atheist in Judaism' (Liessmann 2014, 73).

According to Anders, the original cosmopolitanism of the Jew who feels at home in different parts of the world is characterized as being 'the salt of the earth' (Anders 1978, 74). Being the proverbial salt in flour rather than flour itself is the role that Jews have long played in Europe and America—a role that Anders continues to claim for himself. That concept is reiterated in a philosophical stenogram entitled *Salz und Brot*, in which he emphasizes within a few words how being Jewish potentially creates philosophers, as it exposes the individual to the habit of being part of a minority, to bearing ridicule, to holding beliefs different from those of others, and to being 'salt' where everything is 'bread' (Anders 2002, 124). What characterizes Anders is the need to be eccentric with respect to schools of thought, disciplines, categories, identities (especially national), and institutions, despite the obvious traces that multiple crossings left in his work. This eccentricity was characteristic of his existence and thought, similar to an impressionist painting whose meaning lies in the representation of objects not as objects, but in their situationality, which often blurs the boundaries. Reading Anders' unsystematic production, we have the impression of being fully immersed in the present, in the contemporary world. He truly cared about the future, and especially about the possibility

of a post-human world. The issues raised by Anders have an urgency that is at once current and final (i.e. a final issue), and which is common to his and our times.

There is another aspect to Anders' role as an outsider, however. Liessmann points out that 'The subjects [Anders] dealt with often ran counter to the philosophical and political mainstream debates of his time (...) He wrote his groundbreaking essay on television at a time when hardly anyone made use of this technology' (2014, 73).

Anders' reflections on the mass media are prophetic, and require a brief review of his view of the technique. Analysis of the centrality of the image paradigm, within a reflection on mass media (i.e. television and radio), is contained in his philosophy of technique (Schröder, 1992). The extermination of European Jews and the use of the atomic bomb against the Japanese population gave his writing a political character that led him, from the 1950s until his death, to look at reality and denounce the risks humanity faced. At the core of Anders' thought is the obsolescence of human beings in a world ruled by machines.

Tracing the technical itinerary may derive some nihilistic results, as seen in the transition from *homo faber* to *homo materia*. While *homo faber* represents the attempt to use the technique as a tool to change the environment and make it more suitable for the survival of human beings, *homo materia* suggests the possibility of manipulating and exploiting the same human nature, as is done with any energy deposit. It seems that humanity is projected towards a blind technicization of its existence, as seen in the strenuous struggle against the deficient characters of the body, by the full assumption of the logic of instant use, and by the prevailing imaginification in every living space.

Many historical events tragically mark the path of the twentieth century, from death camps to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, to the war in Vietnam, and these events showed how the world could be rendered uninhabitable. In essence, it became clear that humanity could be expropriated of its future. In the first and second volumes of his work devoted to humanity's obsolescence, Anders makes his aim clear: to propose a critique of technology in its technocratic deviation. Criticisms of technology do not connote that progress should be sabotaged; instead, they suggest the need to consider that technology today is no longer a means to shape reality: rather, it is the condition in which history unfolds. Technology is the subject of the world (Anders 1980, 9). We know from an interview that his work experience in a factory in Los Angeles was important for Anders, in that it brought into focus his critique of technology (Anders 1987). Philosophy needs to concern itself with the possibility that humanity could eliminate itself through its own products.

Anders, in considering the three industrial revolutions, retraces the production of humanity's own destruction. The third revolution speaks to the possibility that a product will cause

the extinction of humanity. The last stage seems to be one in which technology shows an almos-metaphysical perspective, as it could lead to an end of history (i.e. humanity becomes ahistorical). The progressive colonization of technology on humanity leads to its obsolescence and subsequent replacement. What is the essence of technology? The fixed idea of the third industrial revolution—in which the essence of technology is disclosed—consists in considering that everything, including human beings, are completely usable, without drawing a line against possible effects. The world is not something in itself: it is raw material. This observation introduces the metaphysical thesis of industrialism, that *being* (*Sein*) corresponds to *being raw material*. Humanity's technical situation is defined not only by what it dominates but also by what it is incapable of dominating. In any case, we are in an apocalyptic situation, marked by the possibility of humanity's self-destruction (Anders 1959).

In his analysis of technology, the German philosopher investigates humans' frustration with their products. At first, this sense of inadequacy takes the form of shame, of disgust towards oneself, as humans inevitably feel inferior to machines. This feeling is called 'Promethean shame', and it describes the discomfort that humans experience when they face the greatness and perfection of the objects they have made, which confer upon them an ontological superiority (Anders 1956, 23). Human beings attempt to overcome their sense of inadequacy towards things by trying to adapt to them and to become a part of the machine. It is inevitable that this desire will be constantly unfulfilled, as the raw materials comprising humans is perishable and short-lived, compared to those of products that can be substituted and mass-produced. The ontological superiority of devices opens up a scenario in which humanity is overthrown and technology becomes the subject of history. The feeling of shame that humans feel when faced with their subordination towards machines highlights the gap between human bio-psychological endowment and the artificiality of products—a gap that Anders analyzed in many of his works from a philosophical perspective. Anders himself points out how his works appear as persistent variations around a fixed topic—namely, the philosophy of discrepancy, intended as a gap between humans and the world of products, or, extensively, between imagining and making (Anders 1980, 14). The spirit cannot keep up with production. The unlimited Promethean freedom of creating new things induces us to follow the created products from a distance—furthermore, with the awareness of being outdated. Anders calls the growing disparity between humans and a world of products the 'Promethean gap', and according to him, it exercises ever-increasing oppression. The term *Diskrepanzphilosophie* (philosophy of discrepancy) describes his focus on the increasing divergence between what has become technically practicable (e.g. a worldwide atomic holocaust) and what a human mind is capable of imagining.

This discrepancy is indicative of the leap forward in technological development—namely, the automation of production processes and the destructive potential of products—against which human abilities appear obsolete. We can plan the destruction of a city, but we cannot adequately determine through imagination the effects thereof. This discrepancy among the faculties entails that, as much as we are able to know the effects of a bomb that can be realized, this competence will never be adequate compared to actual realization. Feeling and regretting appear inelastic, and humans are unable to grasp even the idea of an apocalypse. The limited performances of feeling indicate that humanity does not ‘measure up’ with the products it is able to produce—that is, with its inner Prometheus. While the volume of making and thinking is dilatable, that of feeling and imagining is much less so. In a more radical way, we could affirm that the performances of feeling—such as regret and anguish—seem to attenuate with the power of actions. The dramatic effects of our technical abilities are so great that we cannot possibly understand them, or make them truly ours. It is not only the greatness of the products that puts limits on our imagination, but also the unlimited mediation of our work processes: as soon as we become part of a productive process, we lose interest in the whole of the mechanism and its finalities, and we are deprived of the opportunity to derive an idea of it. When the world escapes the imagination, it becomes more obscure. When Anders talks about the inadequacy of our feeling, he does not mean that our feeling has decreased, but rather that its tasks have increased. There is an ever-growing gap between the tasks of our feeling (which have increased) and our ability to feel (which has remained constant): our feelings are inadequate, relative to our actions. If what we must react to is too great, our ability to feel becomes ‘stuck’. The unmeasurable leaves us as indifferent, *emotional illiterates* (Anders 1988, 28).

3. The existence between technology and mass media

The *Medienkritik* of Anders, which he declared an effect of the domination of technology on the human condition, serves as an important interpretative key vis-à-vis contemporary politics. One of the most widespread objections to any criticism of mass media and technology is that the goodness, sociability, and humanity of these tools depend on how we use them. This view presupposes that individuals retain the freedom to dispose of the technique and that it is still possible to make a distinction between means and goals. The Andersian criticism focuses precisely on this structural inversion between means and aims, which is typical of the technique and its mass media declinations. The *Medienkritik* is one of the central parts

of the *Antiquiertheit des Menschen*, and it can be read as a declination of the effect of technocracy on the human condition. In a century in which the political dimension consists mainly of a communicative experience, an analysis of mass media phenomena—albeit necessarily contextualized at the time of its elaboration—can constitute a criticism of the alienation generated by a reality that has become a *spectaculum*.

The radio and television industries provide mass products at home, either in the family or among individuals. This production targets a mass hermit who, like millions of others, sits in solitude and consumes the world of images (Anders, 1956, 101–102). This production achieves a degradation of individuality, with a consequent ‘leveling of rationality’ and without a need to resort to mass strategies, as Le Bon wrote. To cancel the personality, it is not necessary to use mass: it is sufficient to employ a discrete treatment, through individualized conditioning that succeeds in the separation of millions of solitudes. This process of standardized individuality leaves the illusion of freedom within the private environment. It is an illusion because the real house becomes a ‘screen container’ through which the external world enters the form of a transmitted image—a sort of phantom that becomes real. The family, in fact, now resembles a miniaturized audience that, united in sharing a show, unconsciously works on its disintegration. From a political viewpoint, the proliferation of images has as a consequence the confinement of freedom to the private (intimate) sphere and a reduction of ‘being together’ solely to being side-by-side (Ibid., 105). In this context, political freedom—understood in Arendtian terms as a space for action in the public and the ability to build relationships—is lost.

The Andersian criticism focuses precisely on the structural inversion between means and aims, which is typical of the technique and its mass media declinations. Images of foreign things and people come under the form of intimate, pre-familiarized visitors, and have an almost magical power that produces a significant metamorphosis in the relationships between human beings and the world. One of the most important consequences of the familiarization produced by mass media is the reduction, almost to the disappearance, of the strangeness between human beings and the world—a strangeness that, in the form of distance, measures the degree of human freedom. Behind the familiarization, there is the law, all economic, of the democratization of the universe (Ibid., 121). It is a law according to which everything has an equal right to be accepted, not to be a stranger, and to be felt as close as possible. This familiarization refers, according to Anders, to an economic neutralization that considers every phenomenon in terms of goods, including radio or television transmission. For this reason, the products must be simplified if they are to be better assimilated: they are deprived of extraneousness, to stay on the same level as the recipients.

Read in these terms, the familiarization of the mass media, produced by technology, is not an antagonist of alienation. In reproducing images that make the universe a single large domestic environment, the familiarization of the mass media hides the alienation itself.

From an ontological viewpoint, the image transmitted—the *phantom*, for Anders—is ambiguous, because it is ‘real and apparent’. The phantom presence sent by the mass media does not widen the horizon of the senses but rather disperses the attention of those who are daily fed with phantoms. This loss of attention to the world produces an ‘inoperative multi-labored’ individual who is reduced to a set of tasks. That individual’s freedom coincides with time removed from consumption. The world disappears behind its image, and the impotence of an imagination unable to confront the enormity of the facts appears. The television is emblematic in this sense: apparently, it offers us a total vision of the world by distorting what is immeasurable, and it informs us by deceiving.

Briefly, the Andersian criticism proceeds from the ontology of the phantom (produced by the media) to the alienating effects on human behavior. The long reflection on the effects of mass media on the world and on human beings is condensed in some axioms.

1. Seriality: ‘Reality is produced by reproduction, “being” is only in the plural, only as a series’. Anders, who never averts his eyes from the concrete life, underscores how tourists perfectly embody the inversion of the relationship between reality and reproduction: they are not interested in photographing what they see; rather they want to see only so that they may have images.
2. Exploitation. ‘What cannot be used is not’. In the technocratic era, the dignity of existence is attributed on the basis of an economic situation that rewards what is producible, replicable, and exploitable, and condemns to become waste that which is not. This implies that the real must be adapted and transformed according to its possible copies.

From the reality of the unreality of the copies derive consequences that characterize our technical age.

- First of all, the world and humanity are reflected in each other;
- Second, the world, as a stranger, is disappearing;
- Third, when events become shows, ideologies become superfluous;
- Fourth, the human–world relationship is transformed into a matter between preformed entities;
- Last but not least, there is the loss of freedom as a capacity to take a position.

In fact, in the transmitted phantoms, the sense and the reaction that could generate within us are already included, depriving us of a personal interpretation. This removal has the appearance of ‘soft terrorism’.

4. Symposium on the mass media

The link between imagination and illiberty is at the core of the symposium on the mass media, composed in 1960 and included in the second volume of the *Antiquiertheit des Menschen*. This connection is presented in the form of synthetic theses on the consequences that the new media have on our lives. According to Anders, the image represents the main fatality of our existence. (Here, by ‘image’, he means any representation of the world or world’s pieces, beyond a possible form.) The image is the main category of existence because from being an exception it has become the norm. If in the past there were ‘images of the world’, today there is—and on the internet age even more so—‘the world of images’ (Anders 1980, 250). The world has become a wall of images that constantly captures our attention. Anders tries to deduce some possible consequences of observation—not at all obvious at the time he wrote—that the image has become the main category of our lives. The imaginification of existences is measured in terms of progressive capacity defrauds. First of all, there is the loss of experience and the ability to take a position: if we consume the image of an atomic explosion in the form of a tiny domestic event, we can scarcely conceive of it and take a stand against it (Ibid., 251–252). The hyperproduction of images that ceaselessly invade the sphere of existences compromises the ability to distinguish between reality and appearance. Moreover, the television show has a boomerang effect that pushes reality to transform itself as a function of images, in a sort of inverted imitation: such was the case with Kennedy and Nixon, who played their political chance contending the scene to the TV stars.

The most significant effect is on individual freedom, which Anders expresses in terms of passivity and infantilism. Human beings become permanent consumers trained to the unilateral dimension of seeing without being seen and listening without being listened to, and they are fed incessantly by shows. Passivity is the effect of an ideology induced by an overabundance of images that prevents everyone from obtaining an idea of the whole. Understanding the contemporary world risks is compromised by a proliferation of explanations that obscure human faculties (i.e. ‘we are overwhelmed by such an abundance of trees that we are prevented from seeing the forest’) (Ibid., 253). The most effective way to continue this system at home is to offer conformist goods, with a mass appeal that makes it easier to assimilate what they propose.

For Anders, our lifestyle habits are so deeply influenced by the media that even the freedom to imagine a world of different objects seems impractical. Distance and extraneousness, presuppositions of freedom, are canceled by the hypertrophy of images that saturate the space in which one might otherwise think and imagine. His denunciation of the media apocalypse does not contemplate a dialectic of the medium itself; rather, it is an alarm against the progressive passivity of individuals. Media and technology risk are no chance things, but a destiny that erases old human conceptions. Anders' diagnosis anticipates the post-ideological era of 'pop politics', connoted by hybridization with the world of entertainment, *iconomania*, marketing, and business in the public sphere, and by the progressive mediatization of individual lives. It is a world in which politicians play the role of new possible icons.

In conclusion, the denunciation of the mass media as a quintessence of technology and capitalism, responsible for a profound change in human–world relations, has recently become almost commonplace. However, we must not forget that Anders' criticism, developed in the 1950s when television was not yet so widespread, is certainly pioneering, especially in comparison to the subsequent reflections of Jean Baudrillard, Guy Debord, Marshall McLuhan, and Paul Virilio. Anders' considerations are useful in analyzing today's relationships among politics, media, and emotions. Consider the use of the term 'post-truth', which was chosen in 2016 as *Oxford Dictionary's* 'Word of the Year', given its prevalence in the context of that year's Brexit referendum and the media coverage of the U.S. presidential election. Post-reality politics is a political culture in which debate is framed largely by appeals to emotion; in its essence, 'post-reality' is an adjective defined as 'relative to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping opinions than appeals to emotion and personal belief' (<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/word-of-the-year/word-of-the-year-2016>). In the post-truth era, reality disappears behind seriality and exploitability, as Anders had presumed.

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3. All images are political

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The “bridge” power of images. A brief introduction

The history of the philosophical role of images is too broad to be properly discussed in a paper or a brief conference. In fact, this genealogical process is probably too much extended to be considered even in a whole textbook. Our thesis is therefore based on two main remarks. First of all, the importance that the topic of images – and the connection between images and thinking – has acquired in the entire history of Western philosophy, so that we can hardly find a thinker that has not been provoked by the fascination of this philosophical matter. Secondly, the intrinsic connection between the process of ideas generation and the iconic world related to images, symbols, visual and imaginative skills. This second remark directly concerns not only the philosophical field but all disciplines that somehow involve the relationship between human subjects and the external world through a gnoseological – and not just practical – act: to reflect on something, to understand something, to acquire knowledge on something always means, without exceptions, to have, or achieve, images of something.

This basic and to someone obvious assumption is, however, at least in our opinion, fundamental in order to point out the theoretical and ontological nature of images. We have in fact to declare that to philosophically speak about images means, first and foremost, to speak about the bond that we, as humans, establish between ourselves and the external world. Images are fundamental structures in order to create – or find –³⁹ the link between the chaotic and pluralistic process of “becoming” and some fixed and emblematic paradigms. They are also necessary to understand diversity and variety not just as synonymous of dualistic opposition, but through the light and clarity of *Logos* (conceived as ontological unity of language and being). From this perspective the entire reality can be understood as a concrete and multidimensional net: images are the poles of its dynamic development.

39 A deep theoretical distinction occurs between the process of “creating” or “finding” ideas. The first expression refers to the premise that the subject somehow creates – or radical transforms – reality (a position we can find, although many inner differences, in idealism, nominalism, empiricism and postmodernism); the second expression describes the human act of discovering the intimate structures of reality – as long as they exist in themselves, not ontologically depending on a subject (a position we can find in objectivism, naturalism, rationalism, realism). Of course many philosophical attitudes stand in between: phenomenology and hermeneutics, for instance. This problem cannot however be discussed in this paper. We leave the question open for other researches.

Returning to our methodological remarks, we would like to assume the difficulties already expressed as a positive and stimulating basis to proceed in a more specific path. If images are so much important in men's relational life and their essence is not just purely artistic neither aesthetical, but deeply ontological, we can analyze their role in the political field. Namely, we can observe that images detain an intrinsic political nature, in so far as politics detains an intrinsic imagery nature. Therefore, with the radical title of this paper we want to point out that from a strict philosophical and theoretical perspective all images have to be considered political, because all images are ontological structures that can establish a connection between individual subjects and external world; they allow men to communicate between themselves within the "community of language".

If it's commonly accepted that politics – and above all contemporary postmodern and digital politics – is openly based on media and visual communication, our aim is to show that at the same time images have a substantial political function that is not directly related to their content. We are not interested in studying specific political or ideological symbols and pictures, that directly embody political messages, but to explain that the political function of images depends on their pure essence. All images are political.

Towards this theoretical path, it is important to define the notion of "politics" in order to better understand the meaning of our definition. Referring to the Greek etymology – from the word *polis*, "city" – the concept of "politics" is usually defined as the sum of "activities associated with the governance of a country or area, especially the debate between parties having power" or as "the activities of governments concerning the political relations between states" (Oxford Dictionaries). This common use, that respects all methodological requirements of political science, doesn't express the most authentic philosophical aspect of the political field. If *polis* is the original community of men and if human relation to the world can not be understood without considering the intersubjective tie that links the member of a community⁴⁰ (the *Gemeinschaft* of Ferdinand Tönnies)⁴¹, the images used by men are part of the political relationship between them. Imagination and images development are culturally, socially and politically influenced. At least from a political perspective, we can, therefore, declare with Thomas Mann that "everything is politics" (1955, p. 515).

40 This assumption is given for granted, because we can't discuss here this important topic, that involves not only philosophical questions (is the political community a natural or artificial pattern? Which is the best political government?), but also anthropological definitions (can men exist outside a community? Which is the relationship between individuals and collectivity?). Here we just clarify that the idea of the original involvement of men in their community is a current image in Western political history, from Aristotle to the American communitarians (see, for example: MACINTYRE, A. (1981) *After Virtue*. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press) passing through the maverick position of Georges Bataille.

41 TÖNNIES, F. (1887) *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*. Leipzig: Fues's Verlag.

Political is everything that concerns and affects the community and its social and existential life.

Political is the entire world of *polis* or *civitas* (the Latin translation of the same concept), not just in their concrete urban dimension, nor in their institutional and administrative structures, but above all in what regards the aggregated existence of men. With the language of Martin Heidegger, we could point out that human existence is authentic just when it takes place in a specific historical, cultural and geographical place, into his *Heimat*. It is a linguistic fatherland (or, better, “motherland”) that can be achieved through images. Language is actually expressed through images, dynamic representations that create connections: the intention is not to close reality into static and reified apparatuses, but, on the contrary, to open spaces full of meaning. The language embodies a specific ontological role: it includes – and it is included in – the movement that calls and constantly recalls men (*Anruf*), creating connections between “Being” (*Sein*) and “existences” (*Dasein*).

Language is therefore not an instrument, a technical structure that allows achieving a fixed goal, but rather an area of Being in which men are addressed to the *Sorge* (“care”) towards the same Being. Language is the event (*Ereignis*) in which Being and the world are historically given to Men; it is at once the home of Being and men’s residence; it is the place of the self-revealing of truth.⁴² *Heimat* – or community – is therefore the place where politics, conceived as relations between human authentic lives, and images, understood in their ontological power, grow up together.

We could state that a community, at least in the communitarian perspective, is also a *community of images*. This pattern is currently more evident in our postmodern and digital world, a social and political dimension where images are day by day more relevant. It is clear that a contemporary analysis of politics cannot avoid reflecting on the images through which the modern – or postmodern – political power has been established and developed. Every political act or perspective grows thanks to imageries and myths spread across the community, through cultural references that belong both to high and low culture. Apart from the insights coming from mediology⁴³, sociology and political sciences, a philosophical – for instance hermeneutical – approach can offer many explanations and perspectives in order to clarify the connection between images and political dimension,

42 On Heidegger perspective on language, see: HEIDEGGER, M. (1982) *On the way to language*. New York: HarperCollins.

43 A fundamental contribution to this method came from Marshall McLuhan, that since the '60 has understood how deeply the new media had already influenced all the different sides of human life (sociology, culture, economics and politics). See: MCLUHAN, M. (1962) *The Gutenberg Galaxy*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press; MCLUHAN, M. (1964) *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

as well as the relationship between images and their ontological structure. These are two kinds of relations that according to our research have always existed in every culture. The political importance of images – we’ll see if true or fake – is still more evident in our world. We could refer, for example, to the analysis offered by Vincenzo Susca and Derry De Kerkhove; according to them, currently politics has just one opportunity to survive in the postmodern (post-political) world: taking control of the figures of our imagery and becoming a pure show of power, by imitating the social dynamic movements of the digital world⁴⁴. Apart from the radical consequences of this perspective, that seems to suspect of the possibility that politics will survive to the postmodern digital world – and we don’t agree with that –, the most important and interesting point expressed by Susca and De Kerkhove is the certainty that politics need images to feed itself and to appear in human consciousness as something authentic, linked to our deep symbolical and archetypal perception. This position has perfectly been expressed by the Italian researcher Guerino Nuccio Bovalino, that wrote: “Politics feeds itself of imagery and it is a dimension, likely the others that compose society, in which can be tracked down and recognized some archetypes, sublimated and reconfigured as images and mythical structures that belong to the medial dimension of our age. These archetypes are sublimated in ideas-world that, although they are still part of modern dialectics, take inspiration from imagery and mythical categories that still work as effective vectors in world creation and interpretation” (2018, p. 21)⁴⁵.

It is now clarified that images have from both an ontological and political side a “bridge” nature: they detain a role of mediation between immanent and transcendent worlds, between earth and sky, matter and spirit, individual and community. This function was evident and religiously perceived in all traditional cultures and civilizations, but it can be always identified in all historical periods and contexts as the ontological nature of every image in itself. From the ancient civilizations of Western and Oriental worlds⁴⁶ to our postmodern dimension, images have always worked and operated as functions – or, better, *irradiations*⁴⁷ – of “something beyond”, as *media*, therefore as “something in the middle” (*inzwischen*, Heidegger would have said) between “here” and “there”.

44 SUSCA, V., DE KERCHOVE, D. (2008) *Transpolitica. Nuovi rapporti di potere e sapere*. Milano: Apogeo.

45 All non-English citations in the paper are translated by the paper’s author.

46 Important studies on the traditional art of East and West, in the *Sophia Perennis* perspective, are: BURCKHARDT, T. (1958) *Principes et Méthodes de l’art sacré*. Lyons: Derain; COOMARASWAMY, A.K. (1977) *Selected Papers. Traditional Art and Symbolism*, edited by R. Lipsey. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

47 We use this expression in the symbolical and metaphysical perspective adopted by Ernst Jünger in his diaries (see: JÜNGER, E. (2017) *Sämtliche Werke, Band 2, Tagebücher II: Strahlungen I*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta; JÜNGER, E. (2018) *Sämtliche Werke, Band 3, Tagebücher III: Strahlungen II*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta).

The bridge of images – the bridge of *imag*-ination – stands as a metaphysical *pharmakon* against all dualistic philosophical position: not only the “here” dimension exists, not only the “there” dimension – neither matter nor spirit – but just one reality with more, infinity dimensions. Images can put this ontological plurality in connections, serving as a gnoseological bridge between them.

The very ambiguity of the concept of image, that can refer to a subjective perception (the image of something perceived by a subject), but also to an objective description (the picture of a shape or an object, his *Gestalt*) could be seen in a positive and fruitful way as a representation of the images power to unify the different and opposite poles of reality. Authentic images – we’ll consider the difference between images and simulacra – are in fact symbols, structured in order to *symballein*, “reunify” what was divided. In fact, we have to remember, according to Benedetto Croce, that “intuition is truly artistic, truly is intuition and not a chaotic accumulation of images, only when it has a vital principle which animates it and makes for its complete unity” (1965, p. 23).

Ernst Jünger explicitly claims the “bridge” role of images stating that: “All visible images are sacrifices, a liturgical service offered in the ambulatory that leads to an invisible image” (1963, p. 227). Therefore, all created and imagined images – also the ones just dreamed or forgotten – are still part of the same, huge plot that links together all men and world phenomena. Our paper is precisely not devoted to the analysis of any specific image, but to this fruitful network or plurality of pictures that characterizes every relation between inner and external world.

The life of the visible and that of the invisible play daily together on earth, showing the unity of the *kosmos* – *die Ganzheit*, according to German philosophical tradition. Images can, therefore, become instruments of a real *metanoia*, an authentic “heart transfiguration”. Pavel Florensky has explained it with the following fascinating religious expression: “The face and the spiritual aspects of things are visible for those who have seen in themselves their primeval face, the image of God or, in Greek language, the idea: by illuminating, it sees the idea of Being, itself and, through to itself that reveals the world, sees our world as an idea of the higher world” (2018, p. 20).

Plato: the first *hostis imaginis*

The iconophile approach we tried to summarize and present through many incomplete and rhizomatic features and examples has not always received support in the successful mainstream paradigms of our philosophical tradition. Although the specific ontological and political role of the images can be justified and transmitted thanks to many valid theoretical assumptions – what we have not systematically tried to do in the first introductory section of our paper – the iconoclast tradition has at his disposal some significant insights too. Remaining in the Western experience,⁴⁸ we could recognize Plato as the main father of this position. His famous critic to the concept of imitation (*mimesis*), discussed in the 10th book of *The Republic*⁴⁹, can be in fact considered outside the specific philological context where it was born and evaluated as the inauguration of the philosophical approach devoted to the refusal of the “bridge” power of images and the celebration of intellectual and dialectical skills as the best ways to overcome the surface of things. Dialectic is, for instance, the philosophical maximal act: *dialeghesthai* means “to discuss”, as a concrete and dialogical art of speaking and analyzing *logos* in order to go through reality until the limits of visibility. Supporting philosophy against poetry, Plato has proposed a conceptual and rational approach as the main world view, rejecting the Greek mythical tradition, based on the contrary on symbols and images.

After having presented the theory of ideas, in the 10th book of *The Republic* Plato comes back to the artistic question, reflecting on this already touched problem through the innovative interpretative light of his metaphysical paradigm. Sensible objects are all imitations of the real ideas; if artistic creations are imitations of sensible objects, we can assume that all artistic images are just a sort of “imitation of imitation” (*mimesis mimeseos*). Nevertheless, artistic pieces are affected by an additional flaw: artists work in order to reproduce what they copy as it appears, not as it really is.

The Platonic critic to images is incredibly relevant because it is a deep and strong form of ontological criticism: it’s not a general cultural or aesthetical comment, neither a specific moral issue, but a theoretical position that grasps the inner essence of reality – or, at least, what is by Plato considered such. In Plato, the “radical ontological difference between ideal beauty and his sensible manifestation” (Zecchi, Lacchin, 2012, p. 11) is the emblematic position that states his opposition to the world of images: Plato as the first *hostis imaginis* (enemy of image).⁵⁰

48 Muslim artistic tradition, based on geometric and floral pictures, embodies an iconoclast perspective too (founded on a metaphysical approach that could be fruitfully compared with the Platonic speculation).

49 In PLATO (1969) *The Republic*, translated by B. Jowett, with a critical and biographical profile by R.S. Brumbaugh. Danbury: Grolier Enterprise Corp, pp. 431-75.

50 To deepen the moral, pedagogical and political side of the platonic disapproval of traditional art (that is not at the centre of our research, but runs simultaneous to the ontological criticism), see: TRABATTONI, F. (2010) *Platone*. Roma:

The Platonic position can be extended from the artistic field to every dimension that includes images. It is not, of course, a direct transfer. But in so far as sensible objects are a sort of copy too – although they belong to a higher level of imitation – all empirical objects are pale images of the unique true reality that we should try to reach. All forms we perceive – in art but also in nature – are just light, vague manifestations of a metaphysical not sensible (instead, intellectual) principle. This form of reasoning works because it is based on the monotonic equivalence: image = representation/copy.

According to these premises, the criticism expressed by Benjamin Fondane⁵¹ to the Platonic position is based on a correct hermeneutical interpretation of *The Republic*. The poet, *three degrees* far away from the truth, loses his traditional prominent position. The vital and irrational world of images is neglected. The theoretical justification of this defame, that appears at least systematic in Plato's paradigm, will change in the history of Western philosophy, flowing into inconsistent forms of moralism, but the spiritual iconoclast approach will come again, many times, to light.

It is also true that the Platonic position concerning images is more complicated and ambiguous than it seems. His iconoclasm is not evident for all researchers. First of all, what Plato saved from the positive role that tradition attributed to images will survive in the notion of "idea", that comes from the Greek *eidos/idea*, whose etymology is linked to the visual dimension and to the act of seeing (seeing = knowing, in the Greek traditional perspective). Therefore, despite expressing a specific concept that is strongly metaphysically characterized, the notion of "idea" still pertains to a linguistic dimension referring to sight, view, vision, optical experience.

The "bridge" nature of images is translated into the structure of "idea" itself, a bond between the metaphysical unity and the world of phenomena, a tie that is made possible thanks to the notion of *methexis* (participation, communication) and *parousia* (presence), through which Plato tried to overcome in the last dialogues his original radical dualism (for example in *The Parmenides*)⁵². The images of reality, in order to exist, must be not just forms of *mimesis*, but they have also to stay in communication with the ideas, they are a sort of sensible presence of the suprasensible ideas.

Carocci (especially pp. 79-83, for the epistemological considerations on *doxa*).

51 See: FONDANE, B. (1938) *Faux Traité d'esthétique*, edited by L. Orlandini. Paris: Denoël.

52 PLATO (1998) *The Parmenides and Plato's Late Philosophy*, edited by R. Turnbull. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

This approach, based on a metaphysical mediation that saves the relation between immanence and transcendent and is more open to the dimension of symbols, will be deepened and spread by neo-platonic thought.

This Platonic symbolical inclination has survived through many centuries, until our modern age. One of the last members of this philosophical trend is Hans Georg Gadamer, the father of 20th Century Hermeneutics. Although this comparison should be discussed in a specific paper, we would just point out that Gadamer interpretation of Plato was an important source of inspiration for the development of the hermeneutic circle model. His ontological foundation of aesthetics and his interesting insights regarding the notion of image (*Bild*) are parts of this dynamic. In fact, according to Gadamer, “the concept of picture goes beyond the concept of presentation (*Darstellung*) used hitherto, because a picture has an essential relation to its original” (2004, p. 132). This thesis is clarified through this explanation: “That the picture has its own reality means the reverse for what is pictured, namely that it comes to presentation in the representation. It presents itself there. It does not follow that it is dependent on this particular presentation in order to appear. It can also present itself as what it is in other ways. But if it presents itself in this way, this is no longer an incidental event and occupies the same ontological level as what is represented. By being presented it experiences, as it were, an *increase in being*. The content of the picture itself is ontologically defined as an emanation of the original” (2004, p. 135).

Unfortunately, we can't discuss here the various interpretations of Plato. We have however to report that the *Wirkungsgeschichte*, the “history of effects” of the Platonic thesis on images had different destinies and led to different paths. What is sure is that his political opposition to the traditional domains of images and his logic and dialectical attempt to found a new knowledge, based on philosophy instead of myth and poetical tradition, has deeply affected the Western culture and the political relation between men and symbolical domain. His iconoclast perspective disappeared in the Christian culture, where all theological structures have a strong iconic essence.⁵³ It would have appeared again, with new embodiments, in the postmodern digital world.

53 It is the theological result of the Second Council of Nicaea (AD 787). This metaphysical thesis is evident in the Orthodox world (see all works by Pavel Florensky, especially: (2002) *Beyond Vision. Essays on the Perception of Art*. London: Reaktion Books) but is valid also for the Catholic tradition – on the contrary Protestant tendency has a more iconoclast approach.

Iconoclasm: the best of all possible worlds

It seems a paradox, but our age, characterized by the strong and constant presence of images in daily life – from television to internet, from commercials to smartphones – has not created a fertile iconophile (or iconodule) context, but instead an iconoclast society. This thesis, firstly expressed by the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard, can be easily understood if we notice the strict connection between the concept of “iconoclasm” and the notion of “idolatry”.⁵⁴ Usually we think that iconoclasts act against idolatry, refusing to worship idols instead of spiritual principles. But we can state, with Baudrillard, that a radical iconoclasm pushes also to the opposite direction: it lets men forget all the positive attitudes towards images and their function because it makes men to think at all images just as reified idols. Therefore, an iconoclast is not just someone devoted to the destruction of or opposition to images, as it was in the historical genesis of this notion.⁵⁵ Iconoclast is also a polite and gentle domestication of the ontological power of images. The idolater worships images as objects, in a process of reification that denies the “bridge” power of images, their symbolical nature, and level out their ontology on the immanent level. Without perceiving images as structures of relations and mediations – this is their main political aspect – pictures start to vanish in the liquid postmodern society. They are just superficially perceived as pure mimetic and representative concepts, validating Platonic criticism.

“In the visual profusion in which we are immersed, the image seems everything, everything gives an image and everything seems nothing but an image. This visual overabundance, however, seems to correspond to a great theoretical (from *theorein*) and imaginative poverty, a real lack of ability to “see” (read, hear, understand) the same images that hurried flow in front of our eyes. They do not seem to want to say anything other than their own proliferation and for this very reason, they do not seem to be anything anymore. In our visual empire, in which everything can and must be seen, ‘the image has become a metastasis of the world as pan-visibility’” (Patella, 2001).

54 We found this enlightening parallel in MITCHELL, W.J.T. (2005) *What do pictures want? The lives and loves of images*. Chicago: Chicago University Press (although the theoretical perspective adopted by the author on the interpretation of these concepts is different – and sometimes opposite – to ours).

55 We’re especially referring to the “Byzantine Iconoclasm” (see: BRUBAKER L., HALDON J. (2016) *Byzantium in the iconoclast era (ca 680-850): the sources. An annotated survey*. Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Studies. Vol. 7. London-New York: Routledge).

In this perspective, the political role of images is just a negative expression of the modern alienation that is ruling our contemporary society. Modern pictures – “simulacra”, in Baudrillard language – act in the society as vacuum and spectral bonds between atoms: they pretend to mediate between men, hiding in themselves a nihilistic power.

In the contemporary “society of the spectacle”⁵⁶ all authentic human experiences are reduced to the representational images typical of mass media. Within this post-historical dimension, “equality of opportunity turns into equality of the contemplation of opportunities” (Dugin, 2012, p. 151). It doesn’t just mean that we live in a strong optical and visual dimension, but more properly that the images have become technical and electronic, automatically reproduced by digital instruments and devices, and self-existent: images become an autonomous reality.

This is why, on the contrary, Marshall McLuhan could state that with mass media we overcame the “eyes civilization”, based on books, documents, written laws, and we created a tactile or auditory world, founded on radio and television, where the creation of meanings is an open process that actively involves the audience, breaking all distances.⁵⁷ In postmodernism we are always thrown in a paradoxical and dynamic dimension: the more images we perceive, the less aesthetical and ontological quality we appreciate. The process described by McLuhan is not negative in itself: it could be even seen as a new democratic type of involvement. But linking this position to Baudrillard thesis, we come to a complementary definition of our age that allows us to judge it as intrinsically “unfriendly” towards images.

According to Jean Baudrillard, the domain of simulacra is nowadays completely pervasive. In fact, abstraction – or “simulation” – is now realized through “the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal” (1994, p. 1). If we refer, for example, to the relation between a real space and a map (his picture), we can say that “the territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory – *precession of simulacra*” (ibidem). It means that we just live in a hyperreal world of images where all the structures of mediation between the different levels of reality have disappeared. It is a dangerous assault to human existence itself, considering that history and politics, the authentic human domains, are under attack. We are just walking into “the desert of the real itself” (ibidem). The metaphysical structures are in danger too: “No more mirror of being and appearances, of the real and its concept. No more imaginary coextensivity:

56 See: DEBORD, G. (1970) *The Society of the Spectacle*. Detroit: Black & Red.

57 See: CRISTANTE, S. (2010) McLuhan mistico della rete, in Web 2.0. Un nuovo racconto e i suoi dispositivi. *Aut Aut*. 347, pp. 65-76.

it is genetic miniaturization that is the dimension of simulation. The real is produced from miniaturized cells, matrices, and memory banks, models of control – and it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times from these” (1994, p. 2). Baudrillard thesis is complex and deep. He doesn’t want just to tell us that we live in a “fake” world, in an artificial reality. Since what is fake or artificial needs, however, something authentic to be copied and false represented. The main point of his theory is that the world of images and symbols has been completely replaced by the postmodern reality – a reality that is however just an artificial and digital matrix: “It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real, that is to say of an operation of deterring every real process via its operational double, a programmatic, metastable, perfectly descriptive machine that offers all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes” (ibidem).

Theoretically expressed, simulacra kill the ontological difference. We live in a world of simulacra that precedes both reality (that is transformed into hyperreality) and images (that are deprived of their reference and meaning). Visible and invisible don’t exist anymore, all the symbols are broke down into pure signs. According to the Italian Professor Mario Perniola, “simulacrum is not a pictorial image, that reproduces an external prototype, but an effective image, that dissolves the original” (1983, p. 20).

If images are no more reproducing a copy of an original prototype, why should we live in an iconoclast society? The answer is, of course, paradoxically: if the iconophile approach is devoted to the veneration and respect of the images, in their ontological nature, a society based on simulacra worshipping is openly iconoclast. This kind of society doesn’t physically destroy images, but reject their existence itself. In a community based on simulacra imagery, the relationship between politics and archetypes is mostly destroyed.

We can, therefore, ask: are still “driving-images”⁵⁸ in our postmodern world? Can they exist in our contemporary culture?

Ontological images: (also) a matter of politics

Even the pessimistic – no less than tragic – above-described situation embodies ways out.

The research of a path in order to overcome the postmodern world and configure a new cultural, political and existential asset has generated – at least in the last century – several theories

58 MOHLER, A. (1950) *Die Konservative Revolution in Deutschland 1918-1932: Grundriss ihrer Weltanschauungen*. Stuttgart: Friedrich Vorwerk.

and perspectives, of course depending on the different methodological approaches adopted. In our paper, we don't have the ambition to give an efficient comparison between these theories neither to propose a solution to the problem. We agree with Martin Heidegger: "Questioning is the piety of thought (*Frommigkeit des Denkens*)" (2008, p. 443).

We are however interested in showing, by recollecting different sources and approaches, that the ontological structure of images can be personally experienced and theoretical considered also in the recent Western consciousness. It is probably a minor philosophical tendency, not the mainstream paradigm. But we can refer to many authors that recognized the authentic meaning of the notion of "image", reconnecting themselves to a long and authoritative *fil rouge*: it is the cultural paradigm rooted in the mythical-symbolic tradition that, starting from the religious and esoteric pre-philosophical meditations, crosses the various neo-platonisms, passes through medieval mysticism and alchemy, reappears in Romanticism – particularly in the one of Heidelberg –⁵⁹ and is revealed in the twentieth century by the reflections of the "thinkers of Tradition" (represented among others by René Guénon, Julius Evola, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, Attilio Mordini, Elémire Zolla, Henry Corbin and Frithjof Schuon). This analogical and mythical-symbolic hermeneutics allows to positively rethink the nature of images and therefore their political role – i.e. their position and function of mediation in the community. It is a symbolical light enlightening different roots in the modernity.

The symbolical use of the image of "light" allows Heidegger to connect again the act of "looking" to his ontological dimension. It is interesting that clearest formulation of this philosophical insight has been conducted in his notes on Plato's *Parmenides*. Here Heidegger writes: "The light, understood as brightness, first bestows the possibility of the look and therewith the possibility of the encountering look as well as the grasping look. Looking is an act of seeing. Seeing is a power of the eye. Herewith we seem to reach a point that could entirely explain *aletheia* as the essence of truth for the Greeks, i.e., lighting and the open as the essence of truth" (1992, p. 144). The enlightening vision is the experience of truth. Greeks related themselves to the world through the direct vision of the truth. But this gnoseological process is available for all the *Dasein*:

"Because the essence of truth holds sway as *aletheia*, the open and lighted determines what appears therein and makes it comply with the essential form of the look that looks into the light. In correspondence to this appearing look, the disclosing perception and grasp of beings, i.e. knowledge, is conceived as a looking and a seeing" (1992, p. 147).

59 See: MORETTI, G. (2013) *Heidelberg romantica. Romanticismo tedesco e nichilismo europeo*. Brescia: Morcelliana.

Heideggerian reflection on the relation between “looking” and knowledge refers to the original ontological relation that men can establish with “Being”. It is a kind of existence that in our modernity (or postmodernity)⁶⁰ is under attack. On the opposite side of this dimension stands the modern image of the world, based on a scientific – and therefore, according to Heidegger, completely subjective – paradigm. Before modernity, there was no global “representation” of the world, because the world was considered as a dynamic relation to be preserved and not as an object to be depicted. “Here to represent (*vorstellen*) means to bring what is present at hand (*das Vorhanden*) before oneself as something standing over against, to relate it oneself, to the one representing it, and to force it back into the relationship to oneself as the normative realm” (Heidegger, 1977, p. 131). That means that “the fundamental event of the modern age is the conquest of the world as picture” (1977, p. 134), and furthermore, “that the world becomes picture is one and the same event with the event of man's becoming *subiectum* [subject] in the midst of that which is” (1977, p. 132). The idea itself of the existence of a man’s “worldview” expresses the Enlightenment humanistic restrictive concept that tends to consider the world as the creation of a productive subject and no more as a self-giving process.

The similarity – but not identity – between this “Age of the World Picture” considered by Heidegger and the age of simulacra studied by Baudrillard is evident. In the first picture, we have the modern subject that represents the world through his scientific and technological lens; in the second one, we have the disappearance of reality into the process of simulation. In both cases, images have lost their ontological and symbolical quality⁶¹.

Heidegger opens the possibility for men to conquer again the original relation with Being itself, “whose truth will be given over to man when he has overcome himself as a subject, and that means when he no longer represents that which is as an object [*Objekt*]” (1977, p. 154).

This could be a renovated foundation of the relationship between men and Being and therefore between the poles of reality, that shouldn’t be considered through reductionism just as fixed subjects or objects, but as dynamic poles of the same process. Is it possible,

60 In this paper we didn’t have the opportunity to openly discuss the notions of “modernity” and “postmodernity”. We used them as different but sometimes complementary concepts, because we think that postmodernism is a significant concept, that embodies many aspects not yet presented in modernity (at times the reversal of modernity itself), but we can currently perceive some phenomena that are still products or footprints of modernity (and not yet postmodern). On this topic see: SINISCALCO, L. (2017), *Maschera e volto del postmodernismo contemporaneo. Filosofia e nuovi sentieri/ISSN 2282-5711*. [Online] Available from: <https://filosofiaenuovisentieri.com/2017/02/26/maschera-e-volto-del-postmodernismo-contemporaneo/>. [Accessed: 9th of October 2018].

61 It could be interesting and theoretically fruitful to consider Heideggerian reflection on the “Age of the World Picture” and Baudrillard thought also in comparison with Günther Anders analysis of the “Models of Enticement” (that according to him characterize the contemporary hyper production of images, by compromising the ability to distinguish between reality and fiction). See, for example: ANDERS, G. (1956) *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen*. München: Beck.

by introducing this image in the contemporary hermeneutical circle, to radically change the relationship between men and reality, reinforcing again the ontological – and therefore political – nature of images? It is probably not an act of will. Is it still possible to switch the vectors of the postmodern disintegration of all the meaningful communities and to give again significance to the postmodern tribes (so well described by Michel Maffesoli)⁶²? Against the *Heimatlosigkeit*, the nihilistic “homelessness” that according to Heidegger characterizes the non-authentic life of modern man, what can we do?

Here again, the only answer we propose is not a specific solution to this tragic problem, but just the underlining of the existential and political importance of images. Their power is day by day evoked by contemporary art, that, in the middle of the consumption of abstractionism and minimalism, returns to claim a role in the mediation between immanence and transcendence, reconnecting itself to its archetypal essence. Therefore, art demands a cultural iconophile context, the most suitable to fruitfully work. It is thus set against a contemporaneity full of images – commercials, advertisings, television, digital pictures – that have paradoxically emptied the very image of its evocative essence, reducing the symbolic dimension to a pure reified allegorical sign.

Also in philosophical fields, many authors – as we have seen through our research – have recently tried to grasp again the invisible essence of the image. Between them, we can count also the Italian Andrea Emo. Art was clearly understood by him as “the knowledge of an appearance of the being that manifests the Absolute [...] and, therefore, it has the traits of a hard initiatory path at the top of which the artist and the beneficiary, naturally in different ways, can live the immense moment of the original *disenchantment*”. In fact, “at the time of creation, the past *oblivion* converges in the present together with the *memorial* future: this is indeed the place of the ‘always possible’, of the eternal ἀρχή-τέλος, of the Origin-End” (Sessa, 2014, p. 184).

Reflecting on these philosophical deep insights could be an attractive starting point for a different modernization. By rediscovering the imaginative, symbolical and transformative heritage of our European tradition within the most radical technological and extreme components of our age, it will be possible to live in the best way our “imago-craze”, the contemporary government of images⁶³.

62 See: MAFFESOLI, M. (1996) *The time of the tribes: the decline of individualism in mass society*. London: Sage.

63 See: BOVALINO, G.N. (2018) *Imagocrazia*, preface of A. Abruzzese. Milano: Meltemi.

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III. Democratic imagination

4. Re-imagining democracy: How to create a shared political space

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Introduction

In many national settings and diverse cultural contexts, negative and aversive emotions such as fear and widespread rage are supporting a new and more insidious form of politics, within the very core of representative democracy. Examples of this upsurge of emotional politics can be found in the rise of populisms in Europe and in other parts of the world, and in the consequences of the referendum for Brexit in the UK. The latter has shown that the political can be entwined with overwhelming and exclusionary emotions and attitudes on both sides of the debate.

How can we describe this advent of emotional motivations among voters, whose impact is evident in political decision-making? In which ways is this impact changing our way of doing politics and the aspect of our democracies?

Because we are living in changing democracies, it is a fact. From the US to Europe, we have witnessed a transformation of the way the political body conceives itself: in many cases, purely national, subject to social exclusion and inequality, inclined to the erosion of public trust and skeptical about the legitimacy of political institutions. If it is not a temporary situation, but rather the first result of an incremental process of these recent years, we may wonder whether and to what extent democracy will be forced to transfigure its aspect into something else. One could see in this process an underlying demand for more participatory and inclusive forms of democracy; or, conversely, with a more pessimistic belief, one could see in this process a first step towards progressively authoritarian and repressive regimes.

Citizens can freely express their preference for candidates with an overall undemocratic agenda. Even if the procedure seems democratic, can we consider the government democratic? From a formal point of view, our answer could be affirmative, but this solution leaves many questions unanswered and also unasked.

A definition of democracy should go beyond a democratic electoralism, to include other elements, such as the respect for the civil, political, social and economic rights of the citizens and, more fundamentally, the separation of powers, a system of checks and balances

and other principles and mechanisms. Here I am not interested in classifying different types of democracy, or in defining a normative theory of democracy, in order to draw or smudge a precise line between democracy and authoritarian and illiberal regimes. Instead, the aim of my *excursus* is to highlight the fact that we can find embedded in our actual political world some grey zones, often without critically thinking or looking at them.

What interests me most in all these cases is the motivation behind the citizens' votes. And that is where imagination comes into the picture. As a matter of fact, we cannot deny the complex interplay between emotions and imagination in the shaping of our decisions. We respond emotionally to certain circumstances and this response is often sustained by our use of imagination, which in turn can be the source for other emotional feelings and behaviors. Emotion and imagination are at work also in the public realm and in our political motivation and decisions. Thus, a political analysis should not underestimate their contribution to political outcomes and should but rather encourage a deeper understanding of the role they play in citizens' lives⁶⁴.

The questions I will attempt to answer in this paper are: has politics an emotional and imaginative component? If so, how can we understand it? And, finally, what can we say about a possible positive role of imagination in the political realm?

But before that, some methodological premises are required. Under the heading of "imagination in politics", we can find a very wide array of different moral, political and sociological issues. However, this versatility could be a danger, not a resource as one may argue *prima facie*. In fact, if we are not aware of the different levels of analysis at stake in the term, our approach to imagination may risk a detrimental overlapping of points of view. Hence, before I start my analysis, I deem it fundamental to identify through which lens I look at the term.

When we talk about imagination in politics, we have a theory/practice issue. As a real-world phenomenon, imagination can be seen as the modality through which political and social actors

64 Currently, there exists a new wave of attempts to study emotions in general as well as, more specifically, in politics. The attempts were made not only by philosophers, but also by social scientists, anthropologists, historians. For example, Hochschild started from the same starting point - the issue of voters' motivation - but she developed it with an anthropological and sociological approach, see Hochschild [2016]. Instead, a philosophical approach can be found in Nussbaum [2018]. The difference with Nussbaum's approach and mine consists in the fact that she analyses emotions mainly with a psychological lens and with the use of Greek and Roman sources. Moreover, she appeals to a "rational faith" in society, established through "self-examination, personal risk, and searching critical arguments" (p. 94), which appears to me as a way of psychologizing and moralizing politics, leaving aside the issue of grounding a political equality to be enacted by political actors. Her proposal of a compulsory national service in the US for instilling the sense of civic responsibility seems to me not a realizable political solution, but rather a sort of moral call for the citizens.

express themselves and produce their narratives. It is within real-existing democracies (REDs), in the political arena, that these narratives take place.

Nonetheless, prior to this, the conceptual and argumentative frameworks in which these narratives and debates are set have a theoretical significance: they force us to reconsider and test the principles upon which our REDs are built. The level here is not that of REDs, but of democracy as a normative ideal. This happens because real-world issues – such as immigration, economy, national sovereignty and all the unstructured policy problems⁶⁵ of great social importance - lead us to be confronted with the problem of how to reconcile different sets of demands, different principles. In this scenario, reconsidering the role of imagination from a theoretical perspective is one way to foster the discussion on the principles we want to follow and implement in our political life as political actors.

Because of this twofold distinction, my aim in this paper is (a) to analyze the role of emotions and imagination in politics from a theoretical perspective with the help of Spinoza's works and then (b) to link the philosophical framework analyzed in the first section to the role of new political and social actors of these recent years.

Hence, I want to investigate imagination in politics first (a) in normative political discourse, as an essential element of democracy as a normative ideal; then, (b) as a descriptor of social-political phenomena and public discourse within REDs.

When I say normative discourse, a clarification has to be made. In fact, I am not referring to a moral and abstract justification of political concepts; rather, in the first section, I would like to give an example of “reconstructive political philosophy”, as Cerutti defined it⁶⁶. According to him, it consists of the investigation on the reasons and motives under which human beings construct and maintain a political community. This sort of philosophical anthropology could serve to understand what politics is, rather than what it ought to be, and to connect it directly to the question of how it works in the minds of political actors, and to the issues we have to face nowadays in our democracies, which will be the object of the second section of the paper. Starting from this approach, a discourse on political normativity can follow, whose proper task is to define what is the “good” in politics, without the interference of other normative frameworks, whether moral or legal. In this sense, it is of primary importance struggling on concepts such as equality or democracy and, finally, to propose political and practical modalities through which we can enact and maintain them.

65 “Unstructured policy problems”, as Bovenkerk [2015] pointed out, are issues in which we have no consensus, no agreement on facts and values, no clear definition of the problem itself.

66 Cerutti [2017], p. 36.

1. Imagination *within* and *towards* politics. An overview of Spinoza's philosophy

1.1 Imagination as a bridge

«*Tollitur quidem error, sed non imaginatio*»⁶⁷: Spinoza with these words states something very interesting about imagination, namely that it is necessary and indispensable.

In our everyday lives, we are used to defining the role of imagination as the ability to make up stories and pictures in our minds, regardless of their truthfulness. We tend to consider it as a faculty strictly connected to the production of fanciful inventions: that is to say, a sort of solipsistic game with ourselves. Nonetheless, in the long run, this conception could lead us to conceive imagination as a depotentiated form of knowledge, more susceptible to mistakes and less capable than rational thinking. Like a second-class and limited faculty, it seems to have no utility if we need to conceptualize and understand the world outside our mind. However, this is exactly a biased way to look at it. Imagination has nothing wrong in itself.

Now I will briefly introduce Spinoza's theory. According to him, human beings are fundamentally unequal: relying on different powers, all they can do is implement and promote the flourishing of these powers, as far as they can, depending on the circumstances. Ontologically speaking, the "power, or striving [*conatus*]" is the "*rei actualem essentiam*", the essence inherent to the existing individual⁶⁸.

The power of acting [*Agendi potentia*] is the attempt of a thing to persist as it is⁶⁹ and to increase this power with the help of the best use of its capacities. Thus, the dynamics of the *conatus* can be seen as a flexible, mobile and open-endless process that must be always re-affirmed and re-actualized, towards the goal of a greater proportion of power, of a best version of ourselves. Striving is not just preserving a *status quo*: it is rather strengthening and increasing our power to do things and change ourselves for the better.

Having said that, what does it mean for a mind to strive? The *conatus* of the mind is the idea of the body and is one with the body's *conatus*⁷⁰; the idea of everything that increases or diminishes

67 E 4 p 1 sch, p. 323. From this point on, E refers to Spinoza's Ethics (trans. Shirley; Spinoza 2002, 213-382); TTP refers to Spinoza's Theological-Political Treatise (trans. Silverthorne, Israel; Spinoza 2007); TP refers to the Political Treatise (trans. Shirley; Spinoza 2002, 676-754).

68 E 3 p 6-7, p. 283.

69 *Ibid.*

70 E 3 p 28, p. 293.

the latter, simultaneously has the same effect on the former and vice versa⁷¹. Mind and body are strictly correlated and linked in their striving.

It is now time to focus on the role of imagination in this framework⁷². However, before that, we cannot fully understand the *imaginatio* without factoring in Spinoza's account of the affects, which comprises the complex interaction between desires, emotions and our striving. Humans are always affected by things outside them and the *affectus* is the desire and feeling they experience when this encounter happens, through which the power of acting of the body and the correspondent idea in the mind can be increased or diminished⁷³. Affects can be passive when individuals are acted on by external things, or active in the case where they cause their actions and behaviors from their nature alone. When this happens individuals are adequate causes, according to Spinoza⁷⁴. Thus, in a few words, affects are transitions to a greater or lesser power, and more importantly, they are both physical and mental.

Imagining is based on experience, according to Spinoza: it is the modality through which humans represent bodily affections and perceptions⁷⁵ and connect themselves – in their mental and physical nature – to the world outside them. Moreover, imagination is characterized by analogy: it is the capacity to evoke the absent as if it was present⁷⁶.

To the extent that we perceive the world through ideas of the affections of our bodies, we have “confuse ideas”, because we have just the appearance of things that our senses present to us. For example, we imagine that the sun is about two hundred feet away from us because it is exactly the way it appears to us. But for Spinoza, the error and the falsity does not consist in this image of the sun, but rather in the privation of knowledge that accompanies the image, in the fact that we may not know how distant the sun is in reality⁷⁷. When *conatus* is guided by the senses and the imagination, individuals can pursue those things that they believe to be good and to increase the power of acting, although in reality they do not. Then, they are acted on by other things, resulting in being an inadequate cause of their actions. This is exactly a passive way of acting, as we have seen before.

71 E 3 p 11, p. 284-285.

72 On the analysis of the three kind of cognition, i.e. imagination, reason and intuitive knowledge, E 4 pr 37 sch. 2., p. 340-341.

73 E 3 def 3, p. 278. The underlying Latin is *affectus*. I prefer to use the term “affect” for adherence to text, but often it is translated into “emotion” in English, as in the Shirley's translation.

74 On the distinctions between active- passive states of mind and adequate-inadequate ideas, E 3 pr. 3, p. 282.

75 Affections are ideas of the ways external things affect our bodies (E 2 p17, p. 256).

76 E 3 p 27 sch., p. 292. In fact, imagination makes present the ideas of external bodies, as if they were actually present, although in fact they are absent (E 2 p 17, sch, p. 256).

77 E 2 p 35, p. 264.

But does imagination lead necessarily to passivity and subjection to external causes? The answer, as I will try to show, is negative.

What is fundamental to be reminded in Spinoza's cognitive view, is that imagination is not a faculty to be transcended through the use of reason, which is able to correct the imaginative representation of reality with an adequate one. Even if images are inadequate knowledge and do not succeed in grasping the cause that generates them⁷⁸, they are not mistakes *stricto sensu*: they could lead to mistakes, but it is just a possibility, not the necessary outcome of their use. Moreover, images are the expression of a real event, that is the interaction between the individual and external world. They are the only way through which the human mind has knowledge of itself, of the body and other external bodies⁷⁹. And when the human mind is conscious of the analogic mechanism through which it operates, imagination could even be a virtuous faculty:

“For if the mind, in imagining non-existing things to be present to it, knew at the same time [*simul sciret*] that those things did not exist in fact, it would surely impute this power of imagining [*imaginandi potentia*] not to the defect but to the strength of its own nature, especially if this faculty of imagining were to depend solely on its own nature; that is (I. Def. vii.), if this faculty of imagining were free”⁸⁰.

Having awareness during our imaginative acts and not presuming that our representations express real-existing things external to us: this is the basis for a more active and virtuous self-understanding of the human mind⁸¹. Here the term “strength of its own nature” translates the *virtuti suae naturae*, which is used by Spinoza not in a moral sense, but rather as a notion rooted in his ontological conception. In fact, *potentia* and *virtus* are by definition the same thing and being more virtuous is equivalent to having an increased power to act⁸². In this scenario, rather than just an adequate knowledge through reason, self-understanding and awareness in the imagination – *imaginandi potentia* - are particularly relevant to the life of the *conatus*, providing a possibility for human cognitive and bodily enhancement.

78 E 2 p 16 cor. 2, p. 256.

79 E 2 p 23, p. 260.

80 E 2 p 17 sch., p. 257.

81 In E 4 p 4 sch, p.: “Each of us has, in part at least, if not absolutely, the power to understand himself and his affects, and consequently, the power to bring it about that he is less acted on by them”. Self-understanding involves the power of mind and is a source of joy (E 3 p 53). See on this Capasso [2017].

82 E 4 def 8, p. 323.

Humans are not monads: they constantly represent interactions with other things and these representations/images are the *condicio sine qua non* for defining the essence of their *conatus*, in providing the possibility to strengthen or to weaken it. We need what is external for the conservation of our being⁸³ and imagination can serve as a transition towards it:

“The mind, as far as it can, endeavors to think of those things that increase or assist the body’s power of activity [*Mens, quatenus potest, ea imaginari conatur, quae Corporis agendi potentiam augent, vel juvant*]”⁸⁴.

An imaginative *conatus* [*imaginandi conatus*] exists: it is an imaginative striving that can increase or decrease our *conatus agendi*. We can see in that an active effort to organize our perceptual material: if we are conscious and aware of the analogy that underpins the mechanism of imagination, we can become adequate causes of our affects and make them active. Our affects and images are not *mala in se*, it is quite the opposite: they could be positive means through which we can increase our power of acting.

Our feelings and emotions depend on how we imagine the interactions between us and the world, in our experience, memory, and anticipation. The two primary affects are joy [*laetitia*] and sadness [*tristitia*], and are characterized by Spinoza as transitions to a greater power to strive, or perfection, and vice versa⁸⁵. Spinoza uses the term *imaginor* for the description of conscious states of joy or sadness⁸⁶; therefore, it is imagination that creates an emotional space, in which we can choose either to feel and depend on external things or to moderate the passive influences on our being⁸⁷. Moreover, imagination could serve also as a passage towards other human beings:

“If we conceive anyone similar to ourselves as affected by any emotion, this conception will express a modification of our body similar to that emotion. Thus, from the fact of conceiving a thing like ourselves to be affected with any emotion, we are ourselves affected with a like emotion. [*ex hoc, quod rem aliquam nobis similem aliquo affectu affici imaginamur, simili cum ipsa affectu afficimur*]”⁸⁸.

83 E 4 p 18, p. 330.

84 E 3 p 12, p. 285.

85 E 3 p 11 sch, p. 285.

86 E 3 p 28, p. 293.

87 On the role of imagination in the increment of active affects and joy, see Cristofolini [2009].

88 E 3 p 27, p. 292.

Spinoza uses the expression “imitation of affects” to describe this *cum-afficere* with the help of imagination, which is a way of nourishing and strengthening the ties among individuals and groups. In the third part of the *Ethics*, he describes the social and inter-individual aspect of a huge variety of affects, that are different kinds of passions or emotions derived from the primary two. Human sociality is built upon this process of abstraction and universality operated by imagination and on the recognition of the *similia* it entails. Nothing is more useful than another human being and imagination helps us to grasp this truth⁸⁹.

The natural place of politics is exactly this space created through the dynamics of affects and images when we are related to and affected by others⁹⁰.

In the *Political-Theological Treatise*, this imaginative sociality that emerges from the ontological framework of the *Ethics*, receives a more practical application when Spinoza analyses the role of the *prophetia, sive revelatio*. Prophets are certain individuals endowed with a particular and more vivid power of imagination, a “*potentia vividius imaginandi*”⁹¹. Their imaginative language encourages not only devotion among common people but also introduces civil order where there is none. In fact, prophets could set in motion a process of strengthening the realm of the political within the whole community. In doing so, they increase the *agendi potentia* of the whole society. Imagination works as a bridge on a double level: between prophets and society and between irrationality and rationality.

While one can recognize in the second transition a passage in our cognitive behaviors, the first one – between prophets and the people – is a passage that happens on another level, i.e. the level of the public sphere, namely inside the society for the creation of a much more solid *civitas*, citizenry. Imagination – for both the prophet and the people – here works in shaping the universe of meanings of social actors and in sustaining a grid of interaction between them. As a result, each of them recognizes oneself in and through the behaviors and actions of the others. Moses stabilized the conflicts and debates among the people with the image of the pact with God, which was a means for the creation of a common power, and also with the help of affects, such as respect and deference, and images⁹².

89 E 4 p 18, p. 330; E 4 p 35 cor. 1,2, pp. 337-338.

90 TP 1 §5, James [2014] points out that human dependence on external bodies can also have a positive role, especially in political community, where the dependence on other political bodies can help us to direct our actions appropriately.

91 TTP 2, p. 27; TTP 13, p. 172.

92 TTP V. See on the prophecy Bostrenghi [1996].

What Spinoza was trying to highlight here was the positive role imagination can have in the shaping of the political community. In fact, images can produce the same effects as rationality, in the practical recognition of the common interest of society⁹³. Thus, the *modus imaginandi* could be a bridge between a social space, dominated by passive and divisive affects and emotions, and a political space, where everyone has the possibility to agree in the political community and to enact a mechanism of self-understanding of their emotive and mostly passive behaviors.

1.2 Democracy and imagination

Before moving on, it is fundamental to clarify some terms of the lexicon of Spinoza, especially the ones related to his political theory.

First and foremost, Spinoza defines *multitudo* as the plural ontology of social being, in which the *conatus* of everyone is comprehended and connected to the others, in the imaginative web we have examined before. When multitude gives itself *jus*, a system of common rules and laws, it becomes *civitas* – citizenry - within the *imperium*⁹⁴, that is the level of government, of the political order. Unlike Hobbes, Spinoza argues that in the *civitas* individuals do not lose their natural rights even after transferring it to a sovereign power, however, they are empowered by the natural rights of other citizens⁹⁵. The natural right is inalienable because the *conatus*, the actual essence of an individual, cannot be taken away.

Individuals rely on different powers of acting and this creates differences among them: some are more powerful than the others and some are more inclined to passivity because they can judge in wrong ways how to pursue their own advantage. When Spinoza argues that the multitude increases its capacity to preserve itself [*potestas sese conservandi*] in becoming a *civitas*⁹⁶, he affirms that the creation of a political space is a creation of a whole, in which there is the possibility for everyone's power of acting to be strengthened by the union and sum with the others and to be considered as "equal" by the others, regardless of their differences⁹⁷.

93 E 4, pr. 35 cor. 2, p. 338: *potentia* increases the most when rational capacity intends the collective utility as the perfect realization of the individual utility.

94 TP 3 § 2, p. 90.

95 E 4 pr. 37, p. 339-341. For the difference between Spinoza and Hobbes: Spinoza, TTP, chap. 16. See also letter L to Jelles, 2 June 1674; TP III §3.

96 E 4 pr. 37 sch. 2, p. 341. Shirley's translation adopt the term "State" for *civitas*, while the term "cizitens" for the Latin *cives*.

Civitas composed in such a way is defined as the *imperii corpus*, the body of the government, while *respublica* is equivalent to the *communia imperii negotia*⁹⁸: that is, the common participation of citizens in the construction of the common good⁹⁹. Nonetheless, if we examine some passages from his works, Spinoza defines also *respublica* as *imperii corpus*¹⁰⁰. Is it just a small oversight or rather an appeal to a much more complex issue? I definitely opt for the second alternative.

In defining *civitas* and *respublica*, Spinoza considers both the subjective side of the citizenry and the objective side of the common good indispensable elements for the existence of any fixed government. They could be considered to some extent as a pre- and post- condition for the civil state: that is to say, as the necessary logical condition for the creation of the political space, and also as a trigger for its transformation. They both represent the target and the very core of government, regardless of the existing form of the latter.

As I have just said before, the level of government, *imperium*, is defined as the level of juridical institutions and constituted political systems (*jus*) that is determined “by the power of [...]a people which is guided as if by one mind [*potentia multitudinis, quae una veluti mente ducitur*]”¹⁰¹.

What is really interesting in this definition is the analogy present in it: in the political realm, the real conduct of the multiplicity of social being is directed as if it was a mind, a unique element, although, in reality, it is not.

In this definition I recognize a model for the political system, that can be grasped through an analogy. Indeed, in a meta-reflection about the multitude, as readers, we use imagination for conceiving it. Moreover, on the level of content, this image also says something about the multitude: its absence as a unified whole. What is intelligible for us as a defining element of the multitude is just a transition, a striving towards something.

Apart from the use of analogy, some questions remain on the content. In which condition a multitude is unified as if it was a mind? And, as a mind, is it possible to think of a corresponding body? Before answering, let me summarize the relational dynamics between these notions:

97 TTP 16 §15, p. 203. See also Lord (2014), who provides a very insightful analysis on the notion of civic equality and proportionality in Spinoza.

98 TP 3 §1, p. 689-690. *Civitas* in Shirley’s translation is “commonwealth”, while *respublica* “common business of the state” and “affairs of state”.

99 See also Cristofolini [1998] on the definition of political notions in Spinoza.

100 TP 4 §2, p. 696.

101 TP 3 §2, p. 690. *Una veluti menti* appears also in TTP 3 and E 4 pr. 18 sch. A lot of scholars have focused on this expression, among these Matheron [1969] and [1994], Rice [1990], Negri [1981], Moreau [1994] and Balibar [2007]. Apparently, none of them concentrates on the meta-analogy; and only the last two have stressed the imaginative and affective dimension present in the expression, which is my main focus here.

the citizenry and the common good compose the body of government, while the multitude – as a mind – grounds its effectiveness, its stabilized juridical-political order.

Conceived in this way, the political system, as a natural individual, is made up by aggregates and by the modality through which they combine their parts.

My hypothesis is that multitude should not be associated to a collective homogenizing mind in the analogy, but to something that makes its effects visible through the dynamics of the citizenry, in an open-endless strengthening of unanimity and convergence. And, as mind and body, multitude and citizenry can be seen as strictly correlated and linked in their striving.

In this scenario, the conditions upon which multitude/citizenry can strive towards a greater power of acting are described by Spinoza in his analysis of the democratic *imperium*. It emerges when “a people [*multitudo*] will unite and consent to be guided as if by one mind [*una veluti mente*], not at reason’s prompting, but through some common emotion”¹⁰².

These affects for Spinoza are a common hope or a common fear, such as the fear of isolation¹⁰³, or a desire to avoid common harm, vindication. But it can be seen as a non-exhaustive list of the kind of affects that can be considered “communi”, common. What I want to point out is that each of these affects has a peculiar characteristic: a shared way of being affected. And between them, some receive a more positive assessment than others: for example, “a free *multitudo* is guided more by hope than by fear”¹⁰⁴. Again, imagination plays a central role, because the fact of being affected is sustained by it and its process could be a source either for passive and anti-social behaviors or active and social ones, as in the case of hope¹⁰⁵.

As a result, democracy has imagination as one of its fundamental defining elements, in the sense that it sustains the interaction among citizens. However, the modality through which the multitude becomes socialized and politicized is not already given. Two issues arise here: firstly, the issue of how to conceptualize a good form of government, able to channel different, conflicting and emotion-driven individuals towards more inclusive and cohesive communities. Secondly, the issue of how to build these communities from the bottom-up, from the subjective side of civil society. A healthy democracy depends on this double effort.

102 TP 6 §1, p. 700. See also Kwerk [2015] on this. Unfortunately, TP was not finished by Spinoza, and we do not have all the key chapters on democracy.

103 *Ibid. Solitudinis metus* is an *hapax* inside Spinoza’s works.

104 TP 5 §6, p. 700. Again, Shirley’s translation is “people”, but I prefer to cite the Latin.

105 On hope as an active affect in politics see also TTP 5 and TP 5 §6.

Firstly, political institutions could stabilize behaviors inside the multitude for living *ex civitatis instituto*¹⁰⁶, that is the mechanism of regulation of social behaviors/affects by means of other affects¹⁰⁷, as we have also seen in the case of prophetic imagination.

If on the one hand active affects and imagination could increment the mirroring between *imperium* and *potentia multitudinis*, on the other they could also promote the self-recognition of the *multitude* as *civitas*. Indeed, both modalities, in order to be implemented in a more democratic way, should be based on a virtuous collective process of imagining, which requires the decisive moment of self-understanding.

Thus, this means that political institutions should take into account the plurality of individuals, the political community, as their fundamental element, but also that individuals have to recognize and understand that they are embedded in a web of interconnections as citizens. The latter point has to do with the relations that citizens have in a given community and in a given polity. Besides using its rational capacity to understand the common utility¹⁰⁸, citizenry has another resource: the self-understanding of imagination, which is an emotive way for not being guided by disruptive impulses and for conceiving and creating a shared political space, based on mutual recognition and support.

Democracy is a task, and as a process, it could be conceived as a transition towards the full realization of democratic *conati* within a form of government. In this sense:

“The ultimate purpose [of the *respublica*] is not to dominate or control people by fear or subject them to the authority of another. On the contrary, its aim is to free everyone from fear so that they may live in security so far as possible, that is, so that they may retain, to the highest possible degree, their natural right to live and to act without harm to themselves or to others. It is [...] allow their minds and bodies to develop in their own ways in security and enjoy the free use of reason, and not to participate in conflicts based on hatred, anger or deceit or in malicious disputes with each other. Therefore, the true purpose of the state [*reipublicae*] is in fact freedom”¹⁰⁹.

106 TP 3 §3, p. 690.

107 TP 10 §6, p. 749: “*iis ducantur affectibus, ex quibus Reipublicae major sit utilitas*”. Also, laws are protected by affects, not only by reason alone (TP 10 §9).

108 TP 3 §7, p. 692.

109 TTP 20 §6, p. 252.

Silverthorne and Israel's English translation adopts the term "state", but in the original text, we find *respublica*. The argument associated with fear is the one often used in classical social contract theories by contractarians: since people are unable to live peacefully together, they give up their natural right through the social contract in order to live safely. Nonetheless, Spinoza adds an element to fear, namely the element of "the freedom of the *respublica*".

Fear is a sort of rudimentary form of affect in the generation and maintenance of a citizenry¹¹⁰. If the need for protection implies the institution of a political and juridical order (*imperium*) that has security as its own primary goal, the need to strive towards *jura communia* and to increase the individuals' power of acting implies a level of cooperation between them. Thus, beyond the need for protection, individuals strive towards the encounter with others and are naturally led to converge and unify, regardless of their specific differences, which still remain and are crucial. According to Spinoza, individuals cannot live outside a *commune aliquod jus*¹¹¹. The natural right of individuals exists only if it is common, inside both the state of nature and the civil state.

The aggregation and convergence of the multitude remain inside the political-juridical order and express themselves mainly in the moment of *consultatio*¹¹²: by listening and discussing with others, individuals enter into contact and eventually "find means to the things they want which everyone approves, and which no one had thought of before"¹¹³. So, this process can also contribute to the expansion and enrichment of the community, through the creation of new and unforeseen possibilities.

A free and adversarial exchange of opinions, feelings, beliefs is what grounds a democratic political system, at the end of the day. Again, it is imagination that forms the basis of language and communication among individuals¹¹⁴. In this picture, imagination gives to the realm of politics a potential of diversity that must be preserved for its correct functioning. The *communis libertas* in the preface of *Political Theological Treatise* is a target and expresses exactly the active participation of all the parts in the construction of that exchange.

In conclusion, the political order has as its own goal the maintenance of security, but this is not enough: Spinoza adds that it should not be an enemy of freedom.

110 See also TP 5 §4, p. 699.

111 "Nam homines ita comparati sunt, ut extra commune aliquod jus vivere nequeant (TP 1 §3, p. 681). See also TP 2 §15.

112 TTP 16 §11, p. 200-202.

113 TP 9 §14, p. 746.

114 Language is a form of knowledge for signs and is a product of imagination, E 2 pr.40.

Hence, there is in politics a public space where freedom is a meaningful product of the citizens' understanding of common good. Within this philosophical framework, what I want to argue is that the legitimacy of political action cannot be exhausted by the establishment of a constitution, of a legal framework, but it is always a question that emerges from multitude/citizens that live within the complex dynamic of the *respublica*, whose aim is freedom, and the *Imperium*, whose aim is security¹¹⁵.

1.3 A third way? Beyond contractarianism and contractualism

As I said in the last section, Spinoza adds an element in the contractarian approach to the genesis of the civil state: our strive towards *jura communia* and realization of freedom. Here I would like to suggest an interpretation of Spinoza's political philosophy as a third way in the theory of justice, beyond those of contractarianism and contractualism. It will be just a brief attempt, but it could be useful for the rest of my discourse.

Before doing that, I have to introduce in short the two distinct views, which provide us with two different perspectives on the principles that ground democracy and political life in general. Contrarians, like Hobbes or Gauthier, argue that all moral and political norms are the product of a mutual agreement or a contract. On the other hand, contractualists, such as Kant or Scanlon, appeal to a prior moral norm external to the contract that affirms we are embedded in a more general frame of moral commitments between moral equals. De facto, it is this external norm that justifies a fair contract or agreement. The difference here explained is also the difference between institutional-practice dependent theories of justice and institutional-practice independent ones.

Contractualism has a meta-ethical principle of universalization that can take into account more easily our obligations towards the others. According to this view, moral agents are motivated by a desire to justify themselves to others. On the other hand, contractarianism often fails to give an account of universalistic or more abstract or diachronic relations: we have no obligations to people with whom we cannot interact, because morality, like politics, is itself an agreement.

If we follow this distinction, Spinoza, like Hobbes, can be considered a contractarian. However, he is a particular kind of contractarian:

115 TP 1 §6, p. 682: "*animi enim libertas, seu fortitudo privata virtus est; imperii virtus securitas*". The free space of *respublica* can be considered also a place on which *imperium* cannot extend its power, that is why probably here appears the term *privata* in correlation with freedom.

- a) Indeed, as a contractarian, he believes there is no such thing as natural, essential or moral equality (unequal *conati*) and equality itself is a contrivance of the agreement in the civil state. Moreover, the reasons that justify the fairness of the agreement are internal to it (i.e. fear, *metus solitudinis*) as we have seen before;
- b) Nonetheless, as a contractualist, Spinoza affirms that the justification to the others in the agreement is an intrinsic principle of the agreement itself (share powers through *jura communia*, as parts towards a whole).

With b) I want to focus on a very innovative point in the philosophy of Spinoza. As a matter of fact, contractarians usually argue that justification to the others in the agreement is merely instrumental: it enables us to get others to do what serves our interests. Furthermore, they are interested mostly in the outcome of the agreement, i.e. the political norms that regulate our being-citizen. In my view, Spinoza differs from other contractarians in that, according to him, our striving towards the others is not merely instrumental, i.e. having individually better proportion of power, but it is an intrinsic and prior principle, which plays a role similar to the “moral agent” principle of contractualists - without being moral and without being a logical prerequisite of political reality.

This principle is the natural convergence and proportion of “share of powers” in the multitude towards the construction of *jura communia*, as analyzed in the previous section. This principle is grounded on a prior ontological level of the agreement, but realizes itself completely only if embedded in a political realm, in the citizenry, when this proportion is ordered and “established” (*formari*)¹¹⁶, so when it is co-extensive with a fixed government. Furthermore, this principle does not coincide entirely with the level of civic formal equality, but transcends it, in the notion of freedom of the *respublica*.

Now we should take a step back and look at the big picture. We usually tend to focus on “relationships” in cases where people coexist, live within the same communities, and share the same space and time. Or, on the other hand, we think about moral or quasi-moral relationships, based on solidarity, love, or other quasi-moral motivations.

Spinoza’s relational conception of the social being indeed has a basically ontological grip: it bears no reference to the actual presence of the other or to any special moral motivation. The fact of desiring an intrinsic justification to the others in ontological and then political terms (as parts towards a whole, towards *jura communia*) is part of what a *socius/civis* is. And imagination plays a crucial role in the creation and support of this principle of acting

116 E 4 pr. 37 sch. 2., p. 340-341.

towards a union. Indeed, the instauration of *jura communia* can be felt and enlivened as a known condition of the group and it means the ability to share imaginatively the position of the other parts, which “with me and not against me” contribute to sustain and define the whole in which we are all living.

Political equality – which comprises both civic formal equality and the natural right of the individuals towards *jura communia* - is a category that must be always enacted and supported by social and political cohesion as well as the interconnectedness of individuals and institutions. It is an open-endless practice, such as the striving of our *conati* towards more active way of realization.

The political form of imagination in the *respublica*, even if it does not take part in the institutionalized side of politics, represents a first step towards the redefining of the purpose of politics, as a politics not directed by particular and self-directed interests, but rather by a universalistic obligation.

Here I am talking about a subjective side of politics: namely, what motivates us as political actors to treat the others as equals and to create a net of reciprocal relations. And this type of equality is different from the civic formal equality present in laws and institutions because it has to do with social interactions in the citizenry, whose sanctions have neither a legal and external character nor a moral and private one¹¹⁷. Emotions are different from what here I call a universalistic obligation, but they can sustain and activate it, especially in cases where a self-understanding of our emotional reality can promote more rational and cohesive behaviors.

To sum up, Spinoza’s philosophy could offer a relational and institutional-based approach to politics, equipped in the same time with an intrinsic and compelling reason for adopting and considering a universalistic principle of political equality. And this reason is neither the principle of fairness of the distributive justice paradigm, nor any kind of moral principle external and prior to the political realm as in the case of contractualism, but rather the principle of the striving towards *jura communia* in the *respublica*.

117 As Kant describes them, the moral legislation is an “*innern Gesetzgebung*”, while the legal is “*äußerlich*” (Kant I., MS AA VI 220). The political legislation is neither moral nor legal, but it could and should be something else.

2. Mereology of powers. An analysis of political actors

It is now time to return to the beginning of the discourse, when I said that my interest lies in the motivations behind citizens' votes. Blaming a political victory based upon aversive and exclusionary emotions on the irrationality of voters is a poor and biased way to look at the recent debates in our democracies.

The real truth is that we are all *affectibus obnoxii*¹¹⁸. We are always influenced by external things, as humans, even the wisest of us. Rationality and affects are not opposite poles, in the same way as the emotion-driven mass is not opposed to a rational elite. The political and real issue of the fulfillment of democracy – of the best form of government, *de optima republica*, as it has been called since Machiavelli – lies in the middle, in the different levels and grey zones between these two, where the hybrid rational/emotional individuals and collectivities are located. Moreover, emotions and imagination are necessary for our social and political lives, because they connect us with others.

Both the parts in recent debates commit a mistake in judging their own positions without critically looking at the broader picture¹¹⁹. They are both driven by self-interest and the desire to interpret their own power as if it was the whole power of the citizenry. This mechanism is at work also on another level, that of the political parties and politicians; in fact, they are just a part, even if that of the majority: they do not embody the general will of people, which they often claim to express and represent. These divisive sides are characterized by a vicious imagination, because they are not conscious of the wrong interpretation they made of their feelings, expanding them and creating pathological political identities.

Here the real danger for the endurance of democracy is not emotion in itself, the fact that human beings feel and imagine certain states of affairs, but the interpretation they give for this kind of feelings and images. This latter is influenced and shaped by cultural, social, economic circumstances and real-life experiences of citizens.

In this situation, the lost element is the sense of community, of stable democracy. This situation has led to a process of de-democratization: in the citizens' minds the democratic institutional framework has been losing credibility, and passive affects have prevailed.

118 TP 1 §5, p. 681.

119 My discourse here is similar and owes much to that of Lord [2017], who gives an insightful analysis of political disagreement in Spinoza and connects it to recent political events in US and elsewhere: “voters rejected their parthood of a larger whole, and instead affirmed the sovereign wholeness of themselves and the group with which they share the same experiences and feelings. This reflects how the feeling of inequality can perversely lead to the affirmation of inequality, and therefore its persistence” (p. 77). What I am trying to add in this section is the other side of the coin, that is the role of positive affects in the construction of the political agreement.

The mereology of powers is a delicate equilibrium within the public sphere, where citizens and institutions enter into contact.

States (what is *imperium* in Spinoza's terms) should intervene on the circumstances, on the fact that citizens experience inequality. This is because a good state is a place where these experiences of inequality are recognized, along with the changes they have stimulated in the political participation, voting behaviors, and also through the rise of social mobilization and protests. They are all political implications of certain relevance.

Last but not least, a good state does not eliminate conflicts; it rather seeks to prevent conflicts from degenerating into a disruption among the citizenry, and into an erosion of democratic institutions. And it does not instill in citizens *imaginationis deliria*, superstitions that increase citizens' fear and subjection¹²⁰. A healthy democracy depends on a collective capacity to connect and on the ability of institutions to ensure unity and cohesion and give anyone the opportunity to improve their conditions.

The divisive debates of these recent years can be seen as an example of the detrimental influence of passive affects in the citizenry. However, in this section, I would like to say something about the other side of the coin: that is, the possible positive influence of affects and imagination in the political arena. Because of that, this last section will be devoted to some results of recent studies in sociology. Nonetheless, Spinoza's theory of imagination will not be left aside, but re-elaborated and re-affirmed in the light of the sociological analysis.

A huge number of studies in sociology have expressed a keen interest in the movements of the squares of these recent years. In this notion, we can include all Occupy movements, including Indignados, the Arab Uprisings, anti-austerity protests across Europe and all the movements that are the result of a double crisis: an economic crisis and a political one, a crisis of representative democracy. As some scholars¹²¹ have recently noted, these movements are different from the previous anti-globalization movements and their neo-anarchist and anti-statist narrative. In fact, the movements do not invoke an anti-representational democracy beyond institutions as the previous ones, but rather see in the re-appropriation of the state and institutions a necessary structure for social cohesion. In their protests they occupy squares, reclaim the invention of more participatory mechanisms for the citizens, such as referenda or electoral reforms, and represent themselves mainly with narratives and images of "citizens", in order to ground a more inclusive source of collective identity.

120 TTP preface. See Hippler [2011] on this.

121 Among these, Della Porta [2015], Gerbaudo [2017] Fominaya [2017] as examples.

Despite the different national settings and the different aims, composition, discourses, and practices they have, scholars have found in them a common pattern of action, in which the central goal was not to tear down the institutional order, but rather to re-formulate it from the within. All of these movements are not anti-democracy or anti-politics (some of them even transform themselves into parties, such as the case of *Podemos*)¹²², but pro-politics in a very concrete sense. In fact, they want to start a reflection on the meaning and functioning of institutions and, on the other hand, on the ways the concept of citizenry can become more powerful and inclusive in a world of increasingly exclusionary forces.

The practical results of these movements were diverse and maybe not so promising, but what interests me is – again - the motivations that brought their claims into existence.

They are *indignados*, as the name of one of them, against the abuses of the states. However, if I can say it through the words of Spinoza, they choose not the type of indignation that leads to a state of hostility and revolt and ends with the dissolution of the ties among citizens, but rather the type of indignation whose aims are the conservation of the political body and the reaction against the injustices within the polity¹²³.

They operate a self-understanding and a re-direction of a potentially passive affect like indignation and use images, discourses and practices not to guide a bellicose and destructive mass mobilization, but rather to canalize their fear and hate into something useful for the whole community, such as the claim for a more inclusive right to citizenship¹²⁴. Nonetheless, it is a very hard task, whose results are still uncertain.

Apart from this, their collective political action can be regarded as an attempt to create an emotional web¹²⁵, civic shared values and a political will among citizens. And this last one is conceived as open to criticism towards existing government, policies, laws, but not towards them as targets *per se*. Finally, in a more fundamental way, these movements function as *collective processes of re-imagination*¹²⁶: they set in motion a debate about the very nature of democracy and instigate a general re-politicization of civil society from the bottom-up.

122 Because of that, I do not agree to ascribe them to the notion of multitude, a counter-power against sovereignty, as Hardt and Negri [2017] describe it. Their analysis does not take into account that the principles expressed by these movements are often channelled through conventional forms of political representation and do not appeal to radical changes in the existing political configurations.

123 E 3 pr. 22, p. 290: indignation is considered as hate toward someone who has done evil to another. Regarding the two ways: the first TP 4 §4, p. 697; TP 4 §6, p. 698. The other way: TP 7 §2, p. 709-710; TP 10 §8, p. 750. Rebellions can never dissolve citizenry, but rather change its form, TP 6 §2, p. 701.

124 “To prefer public right to public advantage, this is the real task, the arduous work” (TTP 16, 4, p. 211).

125 For Gerbaudo [2017], these movements used a prefigurative/emotional argumentation and were “moments of collective emotional effervescence”, in which the camp was seen, as some protesters described it, a “microcosm of society [...] in which one could see on a smaller scale both its contradictions and potential”, p. 176.

126 This expression is used in their sociological analysis by Fominaya [2017] and also by Kaldor and Selchow [2013].

Once again, Spinoza could be useful: we can draw a comparison between the prophet, who has a “*potentia vividius imaginandi*” and these social/political movements. Both exemplify a social-political power: they build a common space between them and the other part of the people through their use of images and their slogans. In this way, they contribute to the development of a shared collective *cum-afficiere*, or a collective interpretive system of meaning.

They strive for achieving a common unity in diversity and inequality and I see in these movements manifestations of “performative acts of citizenship”¹²⁷, as Isin characterized them: in the struggling for their rights, the rights of others, and the rights to come, they express a claim for the right to claim and have rights, that is a fundamental prerequisite for constituting themselves as citizens.

In sum, these movements express acts of self-reflection of the political body, in its struggle for democracy, for more democratic institutions and more inclusive and cohesive relations among the citizens.

Conclusion

Spinoza expressed in his works a very powerful reflection on the preconditions upon which democracy can work and preserve its significance, in particular in his analysis of the dynamics among individuals as citizens. Because of that, in this paper, I have decided to highlight certain features of Spinoza’s philosophy as I understand them, in an attempt to show how they can still provide us with an insightful perspective on the meaning and use of our imagination in the realm of politics. Spinoza does not presuppose homogeneity, non-characterized social equality. The presence of the conflict and inequalities remains in our polities. Nonetheless, as we have seen, he describes the notion of the citizenry as a flexible and open-ended practice whose goal is enacting political equality. Imagination and emotions are fundamental in sustaining this particular practice, because they provide the possibility to create a shared common space between individuals.

In conclusion, recent events in our democracies, such as extremely divisive debates, the upsurge of an emotional politics and the rise of protests and mobilizations, cannot be fully understood without considering the role imagination has in political actors’ minds, in creating either pathological political identities or struggles and appeals towards a more inclusive conception of citizenship.

127 Isin [2017].

Imagination can be a source of either freedom or servitude and domination. We have to distinguish between these two modalities in the public realm because in the choice of one of them we define our way of doing politics.

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IV. Images of violence and the violence of images

5. *Seeing Violence: images and critique*

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This text is indebted to the reading of Susan Sontag's *Regarding the Pain of Others*. The front cover blurb – “a brilliant analysis of our numbed response to images of horror” positioned almost as a subtitle – prompted me to start thinking what it means to become numb before an image, to become critically benumbed, insensate or paralyzed by it? Of course, Sontag's little book is not the only possible entrance into the world of images. The domain of photography has been filled with debates since the first introduction of the frame into our optical and discursive reality. The same is true for the other dimension the text refers to, violence, an endlessly discussed theme in its own right. However, *Regarding the Pain of Others* posits two significant questions for reflection, coupling images with critique, providing precise, if debatable answers. The first is, from where do we respond to images of violence? The second, articulated in a slightly Manichean fashion, is, what do the images do: do they only haunt us or do they have an ability to make us understand, perhaps even produce a critical response?

Thus, my main interest here is in what images of horror produce. What happens to reason when confronted with an image of something that surpasses the powers of explanation or rational reconciliation with the seen? Surmising that the frames of horror – which re-present violence in different ways – equally exercise a certain form of violence over us, I wonder in which part of us this violence takes place. But what if we want, as indeed many have, to use precisely these images as the means for a critique or, further, for the development of a strong ethico-political stance? Is it possible to be both numb *and* critical? What is critique, and what are our critical capacities, when sifted through violent images – images of violence and images exercising violence? What role do affects play in our being ‘seized’ and what – if anything – propels us to act against violence by being exposed to it?

Raw messages to the eye

Let us begin, following Sontag's steps, with Virginia Woolf's very long response to the question "How in your opinion are we to prevent war?" Written in 1936-7, at the height of the Spanish Civil War, the letter begins with certain faltering perhaps pertinent to a representative of "daughters of educated men", a class formed at the beginning of *The Three Guineas* in order to introduce difference into an emphasized 'we'. The difference has to be emphasized, since "scarcely a human being in the course of history has fallen to a woman's rifle" (Woolf 2012, 6), which then impacts on the way 'we' can *reason* on war. But if one were to turn from reasoning on war to seeing it, maybe then the difference would be abrogated? "Let us see then", says Woolf, "whether when we *look* at the *same* photographs we *feel* the *same* things" (Woolf 2012, 10, italics are mine).

"They are not pleasant photographs to look upon. They are photographs of dead bodies for the most part. This morning's collection contains the photograph of what might be a man's body, or woman's; it is so mutilated that it might, on the other hand, be the body of a pig. But those certainly are dead children, and that undoubtedly is the section of a house. A bomb has torn open the side; there is still a bird-cage hanging in what was presumably the sitting-room..." (ibid).

One such image is not an argument, but a raw message addressed to the eye, says Woolf. In its rawness, it is so powerful that its receivers – whoever they were, whichever class or sex they belonged to – have the very same reaction to it. What one thought one knew and what one now feels merge, and in this coalescing of the past and the present only an affect remains, an affect equal to all and for all equally potent. An initial argument may then be: if we were collectively exposed to the images of facts, to corpses which might have been children or pigs framed by crushed bird-cages, we might be able to prevent the war. Not this or that war, but war in the generic sense.

Such an assumption may rest upon the fact that the images we see simplify – they indefinitely dissolve the complexity – historicity, sociality – of the seen. Some mutilated body is nothing but an evidence of what once was living, a former person of whom we know and need know nothing, who vanishes in front of our eyes as something devoid of duration outside the frame. In an endless string of similar images,

the singularity of the displayed is lost. Each new demolished building is only one in a series of demolished buildings – the view is iterative, featureless, and empty. Being exposed to seeing repetitive demolition almost urges us to un-reason it. It makes us admit that the horrors of war are horrors, and we spit this out due to some unbearable emotion, which only lacks in moral monsters.

We may also be willing to put this assumption into historical context and say that in 1937 photographs had the power to group, produce a ‘we’, to exclude and decry moral monsters. Photographs were scarce, themselves being events. The new media through which wars came to be registered had only begun to shape perceptivity. Although we can hardly speak of the structurally new types of affects (anger, stupefaction, disgust, fear, empathy, outrage, pity are indeed affective protocols of humanity), singular depictions of a body immolated, torn apart, mutilated – the image of a fact – have doubtlessly given a novel structure to our affective relations. Photographs have enabled the crafting of a different response to something imaginable, but not necessarily seen or see-able.

Trying to understand what a photograph meant for Virginia Woolf in 1937, Sontag defines it as a means for those who have the option to choose to pass over the reality of the event (Sontag 2003, 6). The choice need not be a decision, but rather an effect of ignorance, non-exposure to the immediate experience, a happy privilege that we were not there. But, if we have seen, if that is now part of our visual field, no justification can be provided for our being exempt from witnessing. When we know, that is, according to Woolf, when an appropriate emotion has been produced, we cannot be absolved of a critical relation towards the reality of the seen. It is only as moral monsters that we can remain indifferent to it.

The point of departure is thus that once we are exposed to the images of war violence, we are – all of us except the miscreants – immediately equipped with a strong ethico-political attitude. Seeing war makes us want to prevent it. History, however, teaches us that images have by now neither stopped wars nor have they, by definition, generated a (widespread) pacifist attitude. Thus, if we are to avoid the conclusion that we are all in fact moral monsters, the relationship between reason and affect, how knowledge impacts feeling, needs further elaboration.

Feeling or knowing?

Let us recall an image of a building, a common, indistinguishable one, a generic building turned to ruin due to war-related actions. One such frame might animate a generic kind of empathy: we feel with the other whose home that was, for the other whose home is irrecoverably lost, regardless of who the other was. Now let us recall a building which acts as a symbol, an edifice which provides us with an unambiguous location which is not only spatial but also meaningful in terms of our relation to the given symbol. Even if the image went without a title, the symbol itself acts as a heading, an explanatory description of the scene, which can stir strong affects. For example, if one sees the image of the destroyed Mostar bridge, which stood firm from the 16th century until 1993, the response to the image would largely depend on what one knew about Mostar, the war which took place there, the fact that the war was taking place in Europe in times of its unification etc... A person born in Yugoslavia would most probably have far stronger emotions to this particular image than one born elsewhere, while a person of Bosnian or Croatian origin, especially if forced to flee the war, would feel not only different emotions but also their many different grades.

It seems then that someone's response to the image is not entirely determined by one's mere proneness to affect. Our sight has already been grafted upon certain bits of knowledge and previous affective responses, even before the "raw message addresses the eye". Were that not the case, no one would ever care if the lifeless body captured by some frame belonged to an Albanian or a Serb, a French or an Algerian, an Israeli or a Palestinian. Simply, the utter horror would lie in the fact that human life has been forcefully extinguished.

We may then say that affects are always in a concatenation of a sort, shaped, as Roland Barthes put it, by the rational intermediary of an ethical and political culture. Feelings derive from "an *average* affect, almost from a certain training" (Barthes 1981, 26). The unusual choice of the word (in French, *dressage*) points in an important direction: what we feel is never immediately related to a simple, 'raw' act of seeing. *Dressage* refers to a process of leveling the past and the instant present, to a complex undertow of existing bits of knowledge, to what we have rationally processed by then, and maybe consciously accepted as a defined code which conditions our perceptive responses. If what we see has already been framed by non-affective training of the eye, perhaps then there is certain infra-knowledge which directs our affective response, such that when we see a fallen body, some of us would see a dead human, while others a body defined by its color, nation, gender, etc.?

The clutter of images and revulsion

What we see and how we feel about it molds our critical stance. A particular critical position may arise as an effect of seeing, in which a previously received history of affectivity and reasoning has already been ingrained, even if we tend to interpret it as our raw response. But when the images surge into our eyes, when their quantity, availability and endless circulation is of such proportions that we lose sight of what we see, how do we then remain critical? Contrary to Woolf's era, we live in a time of constant exposure to frames. They are a formless heap, they overlap and merge cutting into one another, they chisel themselves into our memory, unravel and stitch it in places of which we no longer seem to have control. We often find ourselves in the midst of an unbearable clutter of images, where what we see can be passed – or swiped – over without thinking. In our time, the abundance of snippets of reality is so vast, that their mere presence cannot serve to anticipate *any* reaction – affective, rational or ethico-political.

Let me offer an illustration. In 2014 a close friend who has a long activist history in fighting against violence shared some photographs of Maidan in Ukraine on a social network. They captured the fallen bodies and were taken by someone who had, probably by phone, registered an activity of shooting, probably by a shotgun. The photos went viral: they spread fast, like a virus. My immediate reaction to the shared photos was a bodily one: apprehension, misgivings, diffidence – various ways to distance ourselves and possibly become critical – came only later. The first reaction was sheer revulsion, although the images showed no blood and no disfigured bodies that would in themselves be symbolic in any recognizable way. In many respects, the images had an uncanny resemblance to the frames from the shooting-games: the faces were indiscernible and it was hard to tell where the passive act of falling had taken place. The first sharer of the pictured data entitled it – gave it a name, a place and a time – in a certain way automatically producing at least a potential relation of its receivers to the image. But, before the relationship has been constituted as known and decided, that is to say, before *the response* has been produced, the immediate reaction was a visceral one.

This vignette takes us back to Virginia Woolf, but only to a certain extent. Here we also seem to have a raw message, lacking in symbols to navigate our previously received histories and trained affectivity, and a very raw reaction to it. There is also a shoreless 'we' this message to the eye can reach, the one Woolf could have only hoped for in her own time. Due to the nature of today's media and the possibility to endlessly 'share' a pictured virus,

we can potentially all participate in the seen. Therefore, we may become a crowd whose intestinal reaction may prevent war.

But being a crowd who feels without thinking does not necessarily lead to critical response. It was already Gustave Le Bon who ascribed the suggestibility and credulity of the crowd to the prodigious perversions of thought, because “a crowd thinks in images, and the image itself immediately calls up a series of other images, having no logical connection with the first” (Le Bon 1895). Referring to the then-popular science of hypnosis, but also to the Victorian fears of contagion, Le Bon presented ‘image-thought’ of the crowd as the model of ‘unthinking’ of hypnotized automatons whose thoughtless exaltation infects anyone nearby. Those puppets of instinct think *from* the body, and these ‘thoughts’ are not more than collective hallucinations that have the power to obliterate “the faculty of observation and the critical spirit” (ibid). Today, when due to the constant exposure to images thinking becomes inextricable from seeing, when thinking is thinking in and through images, we are all infected to an extent, susceptible to hallucinatory effects of the image, halfway between a reaction from the bowels and a reasoned response. Indeed, there is some ‘we’ Woolf posited; but it is debatable whether in the midst of the pictorial clutter and immediate revulsion produced, we ever become critical of what we see.

In a short article written during the Ukrainian crisis, Sarah Kendzior spoke about the apocaliptization of the experience of seeing conflict. Taking place in a country for which there was little to no interest in her part of the world, the images of the crisis conveyed next to nothing. The apocalyptic effect produced for a far-away audience turned Ukraine in a singular mixture of scenes from Bosch, Breughel and movie sets reviving the Second World War *somewhere* in Europe. Sitting comfortably in US, Canada or, for that matter, Serbia, exposed to the images titled ‘conflict’, ‘crisis’, ‘war’, turns us into an extraordinary crowd, indeed into participants of a remote apocalypse. Kendzior is right to reverse a familiar metaphor: instead of a thousand, a picture is now worth zero words. Because a person exposed to it, overwhelmed by the images that in fact say nothing, the frame produces a single effect. Even if it generates revulsion, in the times of click, share, and swipe, it might be very possible that we would simply swipe along. Instead of forcing us to ask *what* and *why* whatever happened in Ukraine, or anywhere else in the distant world, and how it could have been prevented, the infinite possibilities of staring into bewildering reproductions of a Ukrainian doomsday, in the end, produce only a numbing *whoa* (Kendzior 2014).

Again, we are faced with the split between mere seeing, the raw message to the eye, and understanding, *what* versus *whoa* effect. It seems that becoming more knowledgeable about a particular place and violence particular to it would be sufficient justification for the existence of an image. It would probably also strengthen our “faculty of observation and the critical spirit”, turning one into a critical observer who stands out of the crowd. Yet again, would that not lead to an obliteration of (strong) revulsion – in a sense, a bodily sensation comparable to a numbed *whoa* – which could make all of us want to prevent the war? Taking a cue from Woolf, the raw exposure to the frame, the non-narrative, the fragmentary, the generic, is what promises the strongest critical reaction – the utter and final condemnation of war. We might imagine an enormous crowd whose one especially revulsive *whoa* has the power to turn all of us into truly radical critics of violence. And it is precisely a flood of images of our own time which may possess enough force to make us see a generic apocalypse. To see to that, we may now have to turn to the nature of the frame rather than to our response to it.

Framing the felt and the known

The frame has come a long way since Baudelaire’s fear of the idolatrous multitude’s cry for an exact reproduction of nature (“An avenging God has heard the prayers of this multitude: Daguerre was his messiah”, 1980, 86), to Brecht’s suspicion towards the critical powers of photography. The question of reproduction and the truth of reproduced reality is, however, not the only metaphysical question raised by the frame. In the context of images that may also serve to prevent war, one has to wonder what it is that the photograph says. Is an image anything but silent evidence, a stamp of existence, taciturn in Brechtian terms and inane in Barthian, or does it have the power to address either the mind or the bowels, sometimes even irrespective of the photographer’s primary intention?

In an essay on the ambiguity of photography, John Berger claims that the frame offers unquestionable evidence on existence, but it never gives reasons why something existed. Simply put, photography has no language of its own. It is a reference, a quotation, but never a translation. “A photograph arrests the flow of time in which the event photographed once existed... Every photograph presents us with two messages: a message concerning the event photographed and another concerning a shock of discontinuity” (Berger 1982, 86). Barthes refers to an almost absolute mimetic quality of the photograph and its seductive promises

of certainty. The frame tells us that it is certain that the object *was there*, that it *existed*. “Impotent with regard to general ideas (to fiction), its force is nonetheless superior to everything the human mind can or can have conceived to assure us of reality – but also this reality is never anything but a contingency” (Barthes 1981, 87). The photograph thus becomes an emanation of a past reality, the confirmation that refers to time, such that it conserves rather than presents – “false on the level of perception, true on the level of time... (on the one hand ‘it is not there’, on the other ‘but it has indeed been’)” (ibid. 154). The frame conserves time, gives us the certainty that the past is discontinuous from the reality of the present, without a language of its own which translates, acts as a bridge between what certainly was and what is now. And whatever the intention of the one who put the frame into circulation – to inform, shock, produce an artwork or an ethical intervention – the only thing that the frame actually says is: this frame is made, someone was there, and someone captured the moment. With photographs there is no need to leave a signature, something, for example, Goya did in his *Disasters of War* when he felt necessary to confirm that he was actually there to witness (*Yo lo vi, Esto es lo verdadero*) (Sontag 2003, 41).

Discontinuity, the certainty that something was unquestionably there, fragmentarity – isolation from a continuum, accompanied by someone’s decision to cut and insulate precisely that part of the continuum –, are the main features of the frame. By its nature, the image frames and delimits, organizing our visual experience by way of isolation and conservation. The moment captured, isolated and preserved outside of the continuum to which it belonged, remains silent on the continuum, but assumes it. What is shown evokes what is not shown, it always functions as a reference to it (Butler 2009, 9). The boundary between the two is contingent, as is the reality conjured by the frame. What we see is framed and founded on exclusion, sundering, and dismembering – which in itself proves to be quite useful for the production of specific affective responses, for it is precisely these selective snippets of the real that enable specific concatenation of our previously received histories with what we see now.

The power of the photograph – especially in the era of hyper-production of frames – lies in the fact that time-scrap, fragments of what certainly was real, become the real as such. We often do not think, do not have to think (and maybe are no longer able to think) without photographs, which troubles the critical elaboration of the contingency of the frame. It is almost as if the photograph becomes a given display of what is, as if all that is becomes exhausted by the displayed. As Sontag says, we no longer remember through photographs – we remember only photographs (2003, 79), ‘remembering’ collected experiences which belonged

to other people, collected affects, the intensity of which abates with the constant rise in the number of frames, swarming the area of the eye. In 1927 Sigrid Kracauer wrote that “the flood of photos sweeps away the dams of memory... the resemblance between the image and the object effaces the contours of the object’s ‘history’”, hence “in the hands of the ruling society, the invention of illustrated magazines (sic!) is one of the most powerful means of organizing a strike against understanding” (Kracauer 1995, 58). Although Kracauer believed that it need not be that way, in his time, which from our perspective looks like a time with almost no images, “the blizzard of photographs betrays an indifference toward what the things mean” (ibid). The world and its meanings are being structured for us through the frame: our perceptions, affectivity, memory and the way we critically process the contents available to us, have been continuously sifted through the discontinuous scraps we unwittingly take to be the world itself.

A horrible repetition

Frames have the power to organize our perceptivity. If images have become intermediaries in our perception of the real, then perhaps they also have the power to structure our understanding? According to Sontag, the answer is decidedly negative:

“Harrowing photographs [even in the times of hyper-production of the images of horror] do not inevitably lose their power to shock. But they are not much help if the task is to understand. Narratives can make us understand. Photographs do something else: they haunt us” (Sontag 2003, 80).

The expression Sontag uses, *to haunt*, is a likely companion to the frames, even to the most common ones, those which at first sight have no horrific quality to them whatsoever. Kracauer spoke of the ghostly in the photograph, simply because it preserved what no longer existed for eternity (Kracauer 1995, 56). Also, thematizing what is outside of the frame, Judith Butler described it as that which haunts the boundaries of the frame, making them porous, questioning the confines that define the very nature of the boundary (Butler 2009, 6). As the discontinuous fragments evidencing the past real that cut through the invisible yet present continuum, frames haunt us: they frequent us,

as if they are coming home, but uninvited; they remain with us, although we shun them; they are with us, but only in a spectral form, as mute phantoms arousing dread, horror, of whose presence we cannot free ourselves.

No image testifies to this haunting effect more than the frames of war. Not only because it is horrible to see bodies that are cadavers, and of such kind that it is hardly discernible if they belonged to a former man or a former pig. Nor because photographic capture of death displays an eternal death, death that potentially lasts forever. But because the circumstances of that death are fragmentary, discontinuous, unchosen – a life stopped, brought to a halt, framed by horrible material and symbolic violence – and the photograph shows that plainly and unambiguously, stamping that cessation. Horrorism, the neologism introduced by Adriana Cavarero as a conceptual counterpart of terrorism, refers to a particular form of violence that exceeds death itself (Cavarero 2011, 32). Seeing violence to which death is not a boundary may prevent understanding.

Contrary to terror, a total fear in anticipation of death, fright which makes us run from it in panic, horror implies the lack of movement, paralysis, seizure when confronted with something more horrible than death itself. “[T]he physics of horror has nothing to do with the instinctive reaction to the threat of death. It is rather to do with instinctive disgust for a violence that... aims to destroy the uniqueness of the body” (ibid, 8), a singularity guaranteed by the limits of the skin. The body that loses its figure becomes disfigured (monstrous, disjointed), deformed (even if it is not dismembered), fragmentary; it ceases to be only the symbol of the end of *vita humana* and questions the *conditio humana* itself. In this, Cavarero recognizes an ontological crime, the crime of war seen principally through the eyes of the helpless, those who have not chosen the war, who had the war thrust upon them, those who are by definition without arms (*inerme*), helpless in facing the horror of war.

What is it that we see when we look at the gaze of the helpless who see something worse than death, who look into the eyes of the horror (ourselves also helpless): an ontological crime of abrogation of singularity, or a generic horror of repetitiveness and repeatability that ontologically puts individuality in question? Although we may have never seen a war, as participants or immediate witnesses, there is something familiar which, finally, produces the horrible haunting effect. The famous war-reporter Martha Gellhorn describes this uncanny familiarity, the generic in war that denies the need for a title and attendant explanations, thus:

“There is a single plot in war; action is based on hunger, homelessness, fear, pain and death. Starving wounded children, in Barcelona in 1938 and in Nijmegen in 1944, were the same. Refugees, dragging themselves and whatever they could carry away from war to no safety, were one people all over the globe. The shapeless bundle of a dead American soldier in the snow of Luxembourg was like any other soldier’s corpse in any other country. War is a horrible repetition” (Gellhorn 1988, 6).

Not only is war a horrible repetition, but so are the images of war. They repeatedly represent the discontinuous fragments of the ontological crime and the generic horror, fitting in the frame. Nonetheless, Gellhorn, a self-declared member of the “Federation of Cassandras” (ibid, 7), insists that we can never be reminded of this repetition too much or too often. Having witnessed so many different wars first-hand, it is as if Gellhorn would want us to be exposed to a horrible, symbol-less repetition of images of war. If the raw message to the eye cannot make us will to prevent war, then perhaps if we are reminded, again and again, the haunting peculiar to the frame may become what structures our understanding. Maybe then *whoa* and *what* would become one.

Critical advocacy for non-violence

Seeing violence is not an easy matter. As an intermediary, the photograph structures the way we see. Second, seeing is always in a certain sense affective, although the quality and type of the affect cannot be determined in advance, especially today in a turmoil of images. Understanding, when and if it happens, can proceed due to our affective response, which is never entirely raw and is only questionably mine alone. When we see, we see as individuals, but also as part of the ‘crowd’. What we see is for us shaped by a certain *dressage* which helps translate affects into explanations. Bearing this in mind, we may now return to the question – can seeing violence make us want to prevent war? Do images of violence produce a non-violent response, one irreducible to benumbed insensitiveness? Can anger, fear or empathy be translated into a critique if we are exposed only to scattered quotations, fragmentary and illegible references, rather than the only truly translatable thing, the ‘text’?

Despite the fact that war is a horrible repetition with a single plot and an action monotonously predictable in its repetitiveness, there is still no generic war: wars do have names, however uninventive, that may function as headings, as explanations (the wars in former Yugoslavia had many names depending on the name-giver: liberation war, homeland war, civil war, Serbian aggression, NATO intervention, NATO aggression, etc.). It is for that reason that Sontag's claim from *Essays on Photography* rings so true: "Without a politics, photographs of the slaughter-bench of history will most likely be experienced as, simply, unreal or as a demoralizing emotional blow" (Sontag 1982, 19). The images can be morally effective only if accompanied by adequate political knowledge – by a critical reflection drawn from the narrative, or at least a heading, from words which furnish a mute image with a language it does not possess of itself. However, the possession of such a critical attitude may produce loyalty to a particular interpretation of horrors of war, turning persons stricken by them into such and such, and not into the generically helpless. In other words, when *whoa* becomes *what* there is no guarantee that one will want to stop violence.

Furthermore, photographs always conserve the singularity of the person – regardless of the generalizability of the situation, the persons are never generic, however indiscernible or mutilated they may be. This can produce an effect of identification, maybe one Virginia Woolf relied upon or hoped for (this might have been my dead body and my demolished home), but also an effect of distancing (this surely is not my corpse, I am here, alive and in one piece, in my unscathed building, and at this moment I can decide not to look any longer and perhaps to never again see the bodies which undoubtedly belonged to someone, but a someone who is not me in my own singularity). Contrary to the pacifist faith in the powers of affects, there are no guarantees that the horror in the eye of the helpless can be transferred to our eyes through exposure to the frame of horror. We could avert the gaze, abstain from complicity, or become anaesthetized, accustomed to the suffering of others. This 'custom', a protracted exposure, domesticates the effect of haunting – what we see is indeed horrible, but derealized; intimate, but spectrally remote; inescapable because it has been already recorded because it belongs to the code of a past event. By being exposed to the frames of horror we can also become moral monsters, we can become staunch supporters of war who read messages to the eyes in a very particular way, seeing in them rightful justification for a particular devastation of particular singularities; we can reject history, all knowledge, and interpretation, and remain paralyzed by a horrific repetition of certainty – the repetition peculiar to war, the certainty peculiar to the frame.

We cannot want photographs to disappear, just as we cannot will away the fact that we are, now, in particular, seeing through images. But maybe frames can help us understand that seeing, feeling and understanding do not exist in a vacuum and never belong to one alone, but to many. Our affects are part of complex webs of perceptivity and interpretative concatenations of frames that organize our visual experience. When I see, I am always also seeing as the one belonging to a 'crowd'. The 'raw messages' to my eye are molded in different ways (they are molded even as 'raw'), and these molds belong to me and not to me alone. The eye retains in itself layers of sociality, through and with support of which it becomes reactive – responsive to a certain reaction. The eye is an eye of a social being whose constant exposure to images may be used to make us critical of the sociality we are exposed to and produce.

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6. Another scene for political recovery: theater's usages of death images published on social networks

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The theatres of engagement

The performance *The Pixelated Revolution* that we will analyze in this article was created after the emergence of social media sites, the online platforms that facilitate the direct engagement of users with the immediate news and accommodate on their digital space all kind of publications, actions, and reflections on the actuality. A new generation of visually literate young activists is meanwhile using these platforms to campaign on different issues because social media sites provide visibility, sharing, feeling of togetherness between users and ability to act and react together to immediate events. The constant reaction and recirculation of news on social media engage ordinary people with actuality and imply physical and virtual participation, interaction and encounter between ordinary people.

Thus, a useful cathartic tendency is noticed where ordinary individuals, in their own way, decide to act and react on immediate events, express their own opinions and thoughts on social processes and political perspectives. In this sense, the participation of users on social media sites, used and projected on theatre's stage, bring to mind the *theatres of engagement* theorized by Andy Lavender (Lavender, 2016, p. 7). Theaters of engagement rely on everyday technologies, such as mobile phones and social media, able to mediatize every moment of everybody's life and contribute to a continuous daily news feed, ready to be commented, to be recirculated. After the emergence of digital culture, some performances open the stage to the real world and show the personal and political preoccupations of ordinary people. According to Lavender, this openness toward the world cannot be considered as an abandonment of the dramaturgical text rather than *a re-engagement with the real* (Lavender, 2016, p. 23). Although the daily engagement of the users on social media sites causes, among others, the rise of the banality on the virtual space, the theatre's usages of these platforms would be a quest of *genuineness* and *originality* of the production (Lavender, 2016, p. 28).

The multiplication of these personal and individual voices on stage can bring authenticity, originality to the production of meaning and can provoke a purely political action. The personal engagement with the real can bring political action on the stage:

“So while we knew (from postmodernism) not to trust individual truths, we learned (after postmodernism) that any approach to something that might have a claim to truthfulness was likely to be found in the personal. The personal, in this sounding chamber of public discourse, is political” (Lavender, 2016, p. 37).

The performance *The Pixelated Revolution*, directed and performed by Rabih Mroué, represents one of the most shocking examples of personal engagement with the actuality, one of the most striking experiences of reality. During this performance, Rabih Mroué analyzes the images recorded by protesters in Syria during the first year of revolution, images recorded with their mobile phones excluding the use of elaborate special effects and including originality and authenticity in the theatre. Thus, while protesters try to record and share with other social media users, their daily life during the conflict, they suddenly encounter and record their own death. The publication and the virality of this unexpected and dramatic event on social media tend to mobilize other users and civilians against the regime’s violence.

“They are recording a transient event, which will never last. Their shots are not meant to immortalize a moment or an event, but rather a small portion of their daily frustration, fragments of a diary that might one day be used in the writing of an alternative history” (Mroué, 2012, p. 32).

A political action/reaction between the weapons and the mobile phones

The Pixelated Revolution is a non-academic conference focused on the dissemination of the violent death’s images, a consequence of the development, the democratization and the spreadability of digital technologies. Rabih Mroué explains that unlike the other protests during the Arab uprisings, in Syria, the professional and freelance journalists were entirely absent from the scene of the important events. Since it is impossible to find professional sources,

there were only two possibilities to be able to be informed about what is happening: the official mass media sources and the protesters' images published on social media sites. Certainly, Rabih Mroué chooses the protesters' source, their *point of view*, their active role and engagement during the violent events (Mroué, 2012, p. 25).

Rabih Mroué comments on the images published by the protesters revealing the last acts of violence and transmitting to others their actuality, their own experience during the war. He examines these images uploaded and shared to social media sites and tries to extract the last moments of protesters, their last testimonies about what really happened there. In these protesters' life-risking and confrontation between mobile phones and real weapons, continues Mroué, we notice a new kind of aesthetic where mobile phones can be considered as aesthetic weapons fighting (shooting) against the real weapons of the regime. There is a *double shooting* between the social actors in conflict, the sniper holding and shooting with a rifle, aiming to kill; and the protester holding and shooting with a camera, aiming to bear witness the act of killing:

“Protesters, who have used the digital video recording capacity of their mobile phones to document demonstrations and conflict, have become the targets of government soldiers for doing so. There are two kinds of shooting, Mroué informs us: shooting with a camera and shooting with a rifle. «One shoots for his life and one shoots for the life of his regime.» The images captured by the protesters are testaments to their life-risking attempts to prove that what they saw actually happened (Mroué, 2012, p. 20).

Thus, protesters, who wanted to widespread and document demonstrations and conflicts, became the target of regime forces and lived the real danger of murder, arrest, etc. Their daily mobile phone's recordings were considered as acts of resistance and transgression by the regime. In order to eliminate these images, the regime's real weapons target the mobile phones' camera because they were considered as devices of resistance that could encourage the uprising and the revolution among people. Thus, in *double shooting*, Rabih Mroué makes a connection between weapons' and camera's language, both instruments that shoot, load, aim, etc. This resemblance of vocabulary between these different instruments reminds us of Paul Virilio's observation about the rise of *miniaturization* in the army and theatres of operation (Virilio, 1995, p. 354). According to Virilio, nowadays, all instruments and devices have to be managed and carried by an individual, this requirement

causes the generalization of miniaturization and portability on the battlefield. We are witnessing both miniaturization of weapons and miniaturization of media devices because there is a mutual relationship between them, the violence on the battlefield is always accompanied by media violence. The social actors operating on the battlefield publish on social media in order to influence public opinion.

“I assume that what the protesters in Syria are seeing, when they are participating in a demonstration, is the exact same thing that they are filming and watching directly on the tiny screens of their mobile phones, that they are using “here and now”” (Mroué, 2012, p. 29).

Thus, in order to testify their daily preoccupations in the ongoing conflict against the regime's forces, the protesters rely on the portability and miniaturization of mobile phones. They are engaged in the here and now of the revolution and want to reveal what the official sources aim to hide. According to Carol Martin, the confrontation between the different social actors involved in the double shooting is provoking an *aesthetics of resistance* or an *aesthetics of necessity* (Martin, 2013, p. 168-170). The necessity of documenting the on-site reality, the urgency of revealing the daily conflict and obligation of scrutinizing somebody's mobile phone in order to upload and publish what really happened, what the victim lived before dying. Since the publication of these images on social media sites is unauthorized, and the protesters and the snipers remain anonymous, this aesthetic of necessity has no authors. We, as spectators, we are full of doubts, we do not know who uploaded and published these images of real violence.

Furthermore, in this aesthetics of resistance and necessity, during the ongoing movement, the protesters broadcast a list of shooting's recommendations and instructions to avoid life-risking while they are participating in the event and shooting the conflict. Rabih Mroué analyzing these images finds some similarities between these videos and the *Dogma 95* manifesto, signed by the Danish directors Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg. This manifesto aims to avoid technological trickery and to counteract some tendencies that are so dominant in mainstream films today. They promoted some recommendations such as the shooting have to be done on-site, the camera has to be hand-held, special light and music added are not permeated, the sound and the images have to be produced at the same time and place, the murders must not occur, the filters and special effects are forbidden,

the event has to take place in the here and the now, etc. As spectators, we watch them participating and recording their personal experience and their commitment in the here and now of the revolution, we watch their desire to share a real experience's trace. Exactly like the *Dogma 95* manifesto, they do not choose the best gaze, the best camera angle, they act, and they record the actions in which they are participating.

Death, as the most extreme form of engagement

The Pixelated Revolution begins with Rabih Mroué bringing up that the inspiration's source of this performance was a phrase that a friend said to him a few months after the uprisings in Syria: *The Syrian protesters are recording their own death* (Mroué, 2012, p. 20). This phrase said and heard by chance awakened his imagination and reflection on the question. According to Carol Martin, after an online investigation work using search engines to find «*death in Syria today*», Rabih Mroué begins the performance-lecture by saying: *The Syrian protesters are recording their own death* (Martin, 2013, p. 167). The same phrase that inspired his investigation and documentary research.

“So I found myself inside the Internet travelling from one site to another, looking for facts and evidence that could tell me more about death in Syria today. I wanted to see and I wanted to know more, although, we all know that this world, the Internet, is constantly changing and evolving. It is a world that is loose, uncontrollable. Its sites and locations are exposed to all sorts of assaults and mutilations, from viruses and hacking procedures to incomplete, fragmented and distorted downloads. It is an impure and sinful world, full of rumors and unspoken words. Nevertheless, it is still a world of temptation and seduction, of lust and deceit and of betrayal” (Martin, 2013, p. 167).

During the performance, it is impressive to see how omnipresent death is on social media sites. Mroué considers these images as *digital memorials*, the last testimony of the protesters who are outside of the camera's gaze because murders must not occur (Mroué R., 2012, p. 20). Unexpected images of death recorded in real time, in the here and now of protests and revolution, images that remind us of the documentary *The Battle of Chile*, analyzed by Vivian Sobchack. In almost the same way, the cameraman of the documentary

The Battle of Chile followed actively with the camera the events and suddenly recorded his own death. Except that the camera used in the documentary *The Battle of Chile* is a professional instrument that can subsequently be examined by professionals, colleagues of the cameraman. In the case of the mobile phone, a private device, we can not stop thinking: Who published these images? Who wanted to reveal such a private violent event? What is the purpose of such violent publications?

Vivian Sobchack analyzes the representation of death in the documentary *The Battle of Chile*, noting that during the twentieth century in Western society we witnessed a decline of death's representation and presence in public places. During the last century, the experience of death in public and social life changes, we have been able to erase the natural death from common places and public life. Taking as a point of support *Western Attitudes towards Death* written by Philippe Ariès, Sobchack notes the rupture between social daily life and death, considered as a private event:

“Initially a social and public event, death has become an anti-social and private experience – all the more shocking when we are publicly confronted with the sign of it” (Sobchack, 1984, p. 245).

According to Vivian Sobchack, the consideration of death as a « *taboo* » subject and the eradication of the natural death from social and public places, caused a limitation of its representation in documentaries (Sobchack, 1984, p. 285). However, in the twenty-first century, death is no longer a forbidden subject just like during the last century where only the accidental, violent, unexpected death existed in the social and public places. The stage projections of these deaths' images prove that we are witnessing a generalization of death's representation on social media sites. The boundaries between the public and private space have become increasingly blurred in our everyday experience on social media sites, which consequently causes the return of death's representation and presence in the public and virtual space of social media sites. This is Fanny Georges' conclusion who notes that sometimes social media profiles remain after death, a deceased user continues to exist in the public space of social media sites through the implication and engagement of his friends. Their engagement on social media sites provokes a *delegated presence* of the deceased user:

“Regardless of the user’s will, the digital identity continues to be built, by a form of delegation of self-presentation, his online presence can be produced by the device and the community of his “friends”” [My translation] (Georges, 2014, p. 54).

According to Fanny Georges, death is present in the social media site’s space through online memorial pages paying tribute to the deceased user; the user’s profile on social media sites transformed by the entourage into pages of commemoration paying tribute after their death; and different online sites and services enabling users to manage *post-mortem* data, to choose the future of their data before dying, etc. (Georges, 2014, p. 51). All these forms of after-death presence in the public space of social media sites blur the boundary between the world of the deceased and the world of living users. As a result, on social media sites, we continue to live or share the same digital space with some deceased users.

However, in this article, we will focus on the protesters who record their own death as the most extreme form of engagement with the events and against the regime. In our opinion, the recording and the sharing of one’s own death during the participation in the revolution is the most poignant form of involvement during a real event. What do these images show us about the protesters' engagement in the here and now of the event? Why do protesters continue to record their own deaths? What motivates them? Is this an accidental act or a conscious life-risking? Who published these images on social media sites? Why did they share these violent images?

The on-site engagement of the protesters: between accident, life-risking, and intervention

Mroué appears on stage as a researcher, a speaker, an actor, sitting behind a desk with a lamp and a laptop, and reading his script. He addresses directly to the spectators, asking them to analyze carefully the images, breaking the imaginary fourth wall between the stage and the public, and showing the videos recorded by protesters. One of the videos projected onto a large screen is one minute and twenty-four seconds. We understand that somebody from the balcony or the window of his apartment,

located on the upper floors in a building, is filming the neighborhood. Mroué showing the images faces the spectators trying to understand the meaning of these gazes. At first blush, these images confirm Vivian Sobchack's and Bill Nichols' research, we have the impression that the recording of the protester's own death is accidental and unexpected. The mobile phone suddenly meets the death of its owner:

“[...] chaotic framing, blurred focus, poor sound quality – if there is any synchronous sound at all – the sudden use of a zoom lens, jerky camera movements, the inability to foreshadow or pursue the most pivotal events, and a subject-camera distance that may seem too distant or too close on either aesthetic or informational grounds” (Nichols, 1991, p. 82).

These images show us the unexpected encounter of the event because the cameraman's purpose was not to record his own death. What happened in front of the camera arrived *suddenly, randomly and unexpectedly* corresponding to Vivian Sobchack's observation about the *unpreparedness* of cameraman in the confrontation of reality, of danger:

“Unpreparedness is signified by the camera's unselective vision in relation to the death, by its conceptual and often literal «oversight»: its lack of focus and attention on the fatal spot and event, its intentional interest clearly located elsewhere” (Sobchack, 1984, p. 295).

During the performance-lecture, Rabih Mroué has the same impression as Vivian Sobchack and Nichols Bill that the protester behind his mobile phone lens is unprepared. The accidental gaze is evident: when the cameraman behind the mobile phone notices suddenly the sniper in the street, hidden behind one building wall, the image shakes:

“Suddenly, the eye spots a sniper hiding in the street, lurking behind the wall of a building on the right-hand corner. The eye loses the sniper. It tries to spot him again, it hovers left and right, above and down... Nothing. Nothing” (Mroué, 2012, p. 29).

Mroué continues to examine these images, observing that the cameraman does not stop recording even when he loses the sniper, he controls the neighborhood in order to find the place where the sniper is hidden. This documenting persistence of the protesters seems to confirm the affirmations of Bill Nichols who claims that in the accidental gaze of death, the duration of the recording depends on cameraman's *curiosity*. The desire to shoot and the duration of the desire to document depend on the curiosity of the cameraman. Bill Nichols continues to argue saying that the curiosity of recording cannot be separated from the *pathology*, it is a very fine line that separates the death's accidental gaze from *morbid curiosity* (Nichols, 1991, p. 83). In the same way, as spectators we continue watching these violent images, our curiosity is inseparable from the voyeurism. Therefore, it is worth asking ourselves if these images testify somehow our pathological engagement with reality on social media sites?

However, in the case of social and political conflicts, such as ours, it is not only the curiosity that motivates the duration of the recording. The documenting of the event is inseparable from a conscious willingness of risk-taking, they try to change reality by their active engagement in the events. According to Bill Nichols, in the context of high danger, the only thing that can motivate and legitimize this persistence of recording is the courage of the cameraman. The cameraman's engagement with reality represents a strong motivation - the cameraman is ready to overcome the fear of death just because he wants to change things. In our case, the risk-taking is motivated by an important social and political *priority*, which exceeds *personal safety* (Nichols, 1991, p. 84):

“Adventurism, professionalism, and commitment to a given cause can all motivate an ethic of courage. Like curiosity and sympathy, courage functions as an ethic that stresses our relation to the camera and filmmaker” (Nichols, 1991, p. 84).

Thus, it is more than an accidental gaze of death, the cameraman is willing to sacrifice his life in order to record the real, he surpasses his fears and tries to document what is happening. We notice that the cameraman does not stop controlling the neighborhood in order to find and surprise the sniper. Unfortunately, the cameraman is surprised because the sniper appears one second time and the image shakes. There is a short moment of suspense than the sniper without hesitating aims and shoots his target, the cameraman:

“And then there he is, in the street, still there, standing and holding his military rifle. The image is shaking, as if the eye of the beholder cannot believe what it is seeing. Suddenly, the sniper sees the eye watching him. A short instant, the eyes of the two men meet, eye contact, then without the slightest hesitation the sniper lifts his gun and aims at the eye; he shoots and hits his target” (Mroué, 2012, p. 29).

We can notice that the physical implication of the cameraman is obvious. He participates in the event, he insists on controlling the neighborhood, does not avoid the direct confrontation with the sniper. His physical engagement and life-risking constitute the most extreme encounter with his own death. This kind of direct confrontation with death corresponds to the *interventional gaze*, theorized by Vivian Sobchack as:

“Moving beyond the endangered gaze, it literally comes out of hiding; its vision is confrontive. It is more than visually active in its engagement with the event at which it looks. It is often marked with the urgent physical activity of the camera, and often the filmmaker’s voice – usually repressed or suppressed – adds spatial and physical dimension to the inscription of bodily presence and involvement” (Sobchack, 1984, p. 296).

According to both Vivian Sobchack and Bill Nichols, *interventional gaze* requires no real distance between the camera and the action. In such recordings, the cameraman is physically involved in the action and the camera becomes the physical embodiment of the person behind it. In our case, we notice that the protester is extremely involved because there is no sufficient protection between the two social actors: the cameraman and the sniper. Therefore, in such circumstances, the danger encountered is real, the consequences of this encounter are real. Bill Nichols observes the same thing when he argues that the danger in documentary is always real:

“Danger, in documentary, is real. Contingency abounds. There is, therefore, the possibility that risk will have real consequences: the endangered camera may even record the final moments of a fatally jeopardized cameraperson. One of the most compelling examples of this gaze, if we can still call it a gaze rather than a look or line of sight, occurs in *The Battle of Chile* when the cameraman

steps into a street only to be cut down by rifle fire. We see the killer and witness the moment at which the bullets are fired, their impact inscribed in every jolt and jostle of the falling man and camera before the machine stops running and the image turns to black” (Nichols, 1991, p. 84).

In our case, it is obvious that the danger is real, but we notice also the necessity to seek the danger experience. The protesters, from the roof or balcony of their home, hand-holding the mobile phone, want just to share the way they seek the life-threatening alternatives in order to change their social and political situation.

The lens’ extension

According to Rabih Mroué, there is no slow panning of the camera, these images avoid following an official version of the conflict. On the contrary, the protesters are filming in the middle of the event just like the cameraman of *The Battle Of Chile*; hand-holding their mobile phones in the middle of chaos, trying to present what meets their eyes. Béla Balazs analyzing the images of the documentary *The Battle Of Chile* observes a union between the cameraman and the camera. (Sobchack, 1984, p. 296) He notes that the movement of the camera transmits us the state of the human being behind it:

“Yes, it is a new form of consciousness that was born out of the union of a man and camera. For as long as these men do not lose consciousness, their eye looks through the lens and reports and renders conscious of their situation. ...

The internal processes of presence of mind and observation are here projected outwards into the bodily action of operating the camera... The psychological process is inverted – the cameraman does not shoot as long as he is conscious – he is conscious as long as he is shooting” (Sobchack, 1984, p. 296).

Similarly, Rabih Mroué pays particular attention to the blurring of the boundary between the mobile phone and the protesters. During the performance-lecture, he never talks about a mobile phone but always about an eye falling to the ground, turning toward the ceiling

of the room, etc. The mobile phone presents the eye, the continuation of the shooting represents the protester's conscience, able to continue shooting and documenting what is happening around him:

“The eye falls to the ground, turned toward the ceiling of the room, and we see what it is seeing. The voice of the cameraman who was hit is heard saying: “I am wounded, I am wounded.” Then nothing... Complete silence... The image stops... Is he dead? We don't know” (Mroué, 2012, p. 29).

Mroué continues to examine the blurring of the boundary between the protesters and their mobile phones. He speaks also about the optography, a theory developed in the eighteenth century that supports the possibility of extracting the last image from the deceased person's retina. Thus, according to him, the last image recorded by the mobile phone is the last image seen by them before their death. In this case, the last image is implanted in their hands because the eyes are implanted in their hands as a result of the hand-holding of the mobile phone:

“It is as if the camera and the eye have become united in the same body, I mean the camera has become an integral part of the body. Its lens and its memory have replaced the retina of the eye and the brain. In other words, their cameras are not cameras, but eyes implanted in their hands—an optical prosthesis” (Mroué, 2012, p. 30).

Analyzing these before-death images, Mroué has another idea about the motivation and the willingness of the protesters to continue shooting. Despite the violence and the murders, there is an apparent desire on the images to continue testifying what they really lived. They had enough time to escape the snipers, they saw them aiming their weapons toward them, but they chose to stay hand-holding their mobile phones. According to Rabih Mroué, they stayed because they left a kind of disconnection with reality. The mobile phone is no longer the same human eye, no longer endowed with all the senses:

“Is it because his eye has become an optical prosthesis and is no longer an eye that feels, remembers, forgets, invents some points, and skips some others? I assume that the eye sees more than it can read, analyze, understand, and interpret.

For example, when the eye sees the sniper lifting the gun towards it in order to shoot and kill, the eye keeps on watching without really understanding that it might be witnessing its own death” (Mroué, 2012, p. 30-31).

Thus, Rabih Mroué considers the mobile phone as a technological extension of the eye, no longer able to act and react. According to Mroué, the cameraman is not conscient that he is recording his own death since the mobile phone’s mediation transforms the real, *the eye sees the event as isolated from the real* (Mroué, 2012, p. 31). While Bill Nichols analyzing *The Battle Of Chile* considers the lens of the camera as an anthropomorphic extension that transmits us what the cameraman might think and feel acting in the middle of the real. He notes that shooting is about showing openly the one’s preoccupations about the world he is living in. All the opinions, the perspectives, the preoccupations and the political commitment of the cameraman are present in the way he shoots and testifies the reality (Nichols, 1991, p. 79).

Generally, in official or professional shootings, the social actors participating in a conflict are situated in front of the camera. In our case, the mobile phone is in the middle of the conflict separating the social actors who are participating in it. The protesters and the mobile phone participate in the conflict, without taking any distance from it. In this active participation, we, as spectators, understand directly their preoccupations, their engagement, their relationship with the events that they are shooting:

“As an anthropomorphic extension of the human sensorium the camera reveals not only the world but its operator’s preoccupations, subjectivity, and values. The photographic (and aural) record provides an imprint of its user’s ethical, political, and ideological stance as well as an imprint of the visible surface of things” (Nichols, 1991, p. 79).

In this kind of images, we, as spectators, understand easily the political and social commitment of the cameraman. We do not have to ask: Where is the cameraman? What is his role in this conflict? Does he have a say in politics and ethics? Does he show openly his preoccupations? Additionally, the on-site images reflect also the anxiety, fatigue, pain and even the enthusiasm that the protesters feel while shooting events. The mobile phone transmits not only the point of view, the political and social commitment of the cameraman, but also his state of mind and soul. Thus, the mobile phone becomes *an anthropomorphic extension of the human sensorium*:

“Still the protesters’ images are as anxious as their own anxiety, as tired as their own tiredness, as painful as their own pain, and as enthusiastic as their own enthusiasm. They shoot spontaneously, without any reservation, any editing, or any add-ons. [...] Their only concern is to record the event, as it is experienced in real time, in order to report to the world what they are going through over “there”” (Mroué, 2012, p. 31).

As a result, the mobile phone as anthropomorphic extension transmits us Syria’s immediate actuality and also the preoccupations, the political engagement and the personal values of the protesters who are shooting the ongoing uprisings. They record their direct engagement, their opinions, their considerations against the regime.

The unpredictable action of images

After the emergence of social media sites, every ordinary person can upload and share their own daily experience, their violence, their misery, their death in order to affect in distance. Through their personal sharings, they hope to change their conditions, spreading worldwide another version of their on-site reality and making things happen. Andy Lavender argues that we are living the age of witnessing, we are perpetually witnessing other’s sharing, other’s physical experiences, what we have not done or experienced. This age of witnessing is one of the direct consequences of digital technologies, including social media sites:

“The condition of witnessing, here, arises from communication systems that can capture and disseminate plurally in close to real-time; along with platforms and spaces for regular reiteration. This very intersection between the event and its simultaneous mediation points towards another defining feature of the quarter of a century that straddles the millennium: the rapid, pervasive and culture-changing growth of digital communications” (Lavender, 2016, p.13).

However, the users of social media sites cannot be simple witnesses of others' sharings. According to Helen Stuhr-Rommereim, the online relationship between the image and the network transforms the image from a simple representation of an event into action in itself. In the network, by generating emotional reactions, images are *actions, rather than mediations* or representations of an event. (Stuhr-Rommereim, 2018) Protesters publish and share images in the network as actors who are able to determine our affective relationships toward an event. It is in this sense that image is an active actor in a network.

“[...] an aesthetic of relationships, where images are understood as objects that are also actions, whose potential changes depending on the environment in which they are encountered, making them both powerful and unpredictable tools of persuasion. Their defining characteristic is their ability to be disseminated, shared, and presented in a wide array of contexts” (Stuhr-Rommereim, 2018).

Thus, the integration of mobile phone's images into social media sites transforms images into network's actors, combining the dynamics' of images with the dynamics of the network. These images are not just the documentation of the protesters' engagement; these images, encountering and interacting with other similar images in the network continue to act, transform themselves in action and can produce unpredictability. They are not just individual images recorded by ordinary people but digital images, having now the power to cross the network, to travel from one user to another, from one community to another, from one platform to another, producing unpredictable action. According to Zizi Papacharissi, these images shared on social media sites connect users directly to other people's actuality providing a sensation of *immediacy* and giving to other users the impression to be present, to be connected to the distant event. (Papacharissi, 2015, p.4). Social media sites allow users to stay connected, tuned with physically distant events and invite users to imagine what people are really living on-site. They help, just like other media, the protesters to coordinate and disseminate to a wider audience their images. The network set up a kind of *affective attunement* that allows other distant users to be emotionally aligned with an event and part of the developing event (Papacharissi, 2015, p.4). The images and videos shared can also evolve through the engagement of other online users who comment, share initial publications, etc. Images connect and act but users, through their individual commitment, can have their own place in the online development of the event. They have their own say in the event:

“As our developing sensibilities of the world surrounding us turn into stories that we tell, share, and add to, the platforms we use afford these evolving narratives their own distinct texture, or mediality. In doing so, media do not make or break revolutions but they do lend emerging, storytelling publics their own means for feeling their way into the developing event, frequently by making them a part of the developing story” (Papacharissi, 2015, p.5).

Thus, social media sites represent a rich environment for spreadability, for the development of action, by provoking *affective attunement* among ordinary people. It is the *affective attunement* of users that regenerates and revitalizes the images as action in the network. For this reason, we must be aware that images, as an active actor, can also be victims of manipulation. In the network, we can not control their real political action and other social actors can re_appropriate them and use them against protesters. It is not like in other media, like television, a physical environment easily controllable. Digital images are rootless and can set up unpredictable manipulated actions.

“Further, as images are shared, they build the network in which they exist. One cannot exist without the other. Once posted to Instagram, images appear in a stream—a time-based progression determined by the actions of the individual users any given user follows. This stream can be seen as not simply a mediation of documented events, but a collection of actions itself. [...] The image itself is action, not simply documentation of action; in encountering other images in the network it continues to act” (Stuhr-Rommereim, 2018).

Conclusion

This performance-lecture shows us that the protesters were aware of the importance of social media sites’ spreadability and ability of mobilization. The on-site physical and bodily engagement affect the virtual space of social media sites where these images become a viral action. The other online users, through these images, have the impression to confront the danger, to be more engaged with the event they are watching. Consequently, on the one hand, images act and affect users; on the other hand, this *affective attunement* contributes to the circulation of the action of images and to the engagement of connected audiences.

This chain reaction between action and affection contributes to the emergence of a new politics where the personal becomes political. The personal engagement of protesters shows us the violence of a divided world: between those who want the conflicts to remain local and those who want to spread the truth of local conflicts, unrepresented by the national official media.

As theater's spectators, we feel being part of this violent dialogue between social actors. The presence of the protesters and mobile phones in the middle of the conflict is very important for the spectator's engagement and *affective attunement*. When the camera meets the sniper's eyes, the spectators directly meet the eyes of people defending the regime. We have the impression to be part of the conflict, like the victim, becoming witnesses of his death. We understand that he is wounded or maybe dead by the movement of his mobile phone that suddenly falls on the floor. The risk-taking of the protesters directly affects the spectators despite they do not know anything about the identity of the victim his face, his injuries, his age, etc. The spectators are more directly tuned to this self-commitment of the protesters against violence. Thus, the use of social media sites in the theater would contribute to a direct connection with reality. Rabih Mroué concludes that the cameraman is not deceased, he was the only witness of what he simultaneously recorded. He witnessed the same scene as the social media users, as the spectators in the theater. According to him, the mobile phone's lens represents a more direct connection between what the cameraman experienced and what we as spectators experienced elsewhere. The images act and affect us more directly:

“This means that our eyes are an extension of the cameraman's eyes and, as we established, his eyes are an extension of his mobile phone's lens. This leads us to the logic that when the bullet hits the lens, then logically it should hit the cameraman's eye and should hit our eyes as well” (Mroué, 2012, p. 35).

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7. The Class of Images: Sketch for a Research Project

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The concept of class has been progressively erased in contemporary discussions about art — and other topics. The explanatory power of this economic and social category, as articulated by Karl Marx, has been annulled precisely at a time when the contradictions of late capitalism are growing, composing an ideological background that creates conditions for the perpetuation of this system. From a Marxist point of view, class is not a product of Marx's mind, but reflects existing social relations and the dynamics of everyday life. By isolating art production from historical processes, by privileging the inner workings of art languages, by favoring an aestheticist approach to art, postmodernist cultural theory has relinquished critical knowledge about art as a phenomenon irremediably pertaining to the social fabric. If in this theoretical framework, cultural differences replaced class antagonisms as the driving force of society, then one must ask how these differences emerge and operate, what determines them and what do they produce, thus recognizing the fundamental importance of their material basis. To think critically about art to its foundations is to re-materialize it as a production process instead of analyzing works of art idealistically. The same may be said about religion. In order to tackle these matters, I will focus on film images understood as material, creative, and symbolic productions, and in the way they evoke class antinomies, expose class marks, and use Christian concepts and imagery in the portrait of working-class life in American cinema.

This paper is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on the articulation between issues around class, including progressive aspects of Christianity, and art. The second part briefly mentions an example from American cinema in which the representation of the working-class employs Christian elements.

Class Analysis and the Relative Autonomy of Culture

The erasure of class is but an effect of the dominant ideology in capitalist societies. Problems regarding race and gender, unless they are connected with class consciousness, are integrated into the class structure of capitalism and leave it unchallenged.

That is not to say that fighting racism and sexism is less important than the struggle against class society. Or even these are *distinct* combats. Racism and sexism are obstacles to democratic development in the same way that other kinds of social oppression are. Marxist tradition has always tried to articulate these differences associated with discriminatory practices with class antagonism. Historically, homophobia and the oppression of LGBTI people, like racism and sexism, has only served to divide the working class and block social change and economic fairness.

Marxist theorist Barbara Foley has recently pondered over the ways these categories correlate in the contemporary debate about intersectionality in critical theory. Intersectionality may be understood simply as a method of crossing different perspectives that is quite productive and not a novelty. But it is more and more presented as “a way of thinking about the nature and causes of social inequality,” which “proposes that the effects of multiple forms of oppression are cumulative and, as the term suggests, interwoven”¹²⁸. Foley’s argument is that intersectionality usefully describes “the *effects* of multiple oppressions,” but “it does not offer an adequate explanatory framework for addressing the root *causes* of social inequality in the capitalist socioeconomic system”¹²⁹. A crucial distinction in her argument is between oppression and exploitation: for example, Muslims may be oppressed in the United States in a way that Christians are not, yet they are both exploited as workers. Exploitation is the accumulation of capital from the extraction of the excess of value produced by the labor of workers over their wages; the *surplus value* that Marx describes.

Class analysis is, therefore, less about experience and more about structural explanation. Foley reminds us that, for Marx, class is basically a relationship, a social relation of property and production that splits capitalist society into two basic groups. Being the owner of a car or even a home does not mean you do not belong to the working class. Yet being the owner of the labor power of others in exchange for wages does. This class structure and its supporting ideology constitute a context for the production of art for which it cannot be abstracted from. Nevertheless, the mechanistic model that considers art, in particular popular art, as a mere ideological effect determined by the economic system, without real influence on historical events, is clearly a legacy of the Stalinist distortion of Marx’s thought. Friedrich Engels warned against such economic one-way determinism:

128 Barbara Foley, “Intersectionality: A Marxist Critique,” *MR Online*, 22 Oct. 2018, <https://mronline.org/2018/10/22/intersectionality-a-marxist-critique>.

129 Foley, “Intersectionality”.

“The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure — political forms of the class struggle and its results, to wit: constitutions established by the victorious class after a successful battle, etc., juridical forms, and even the reflexes of all these actual struggles in the brains of the participants, political, juristic, philosophical theories, religious views and their further development into systems of dogmas — also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their *form*”¹³⁰.

Indeed, it is for this reason that art and culture are *relatively autonomous* from the economic base, even when their production is controlled or censored. This explains the existence of films shaped by a political as well as an artistic commitment to portraying the struggling life of the working class using Christian references. Such movies have been produced inside and outside the American film industry.

The Church on the Waterfront

One of the most well-known examples of working class cinema in popular American cinema is *On the Waterfront* (1954). The film was directed by Elia Kazan two years after his testimony before the House Committee on Un-American Activities at the time of the Hollywood blacklist. Kazan named eight people who had been fellow members of the Communist Party USA in the 1930s. The director was strongly criticized by left-wing friends and colleagues. The polemic continues to this day. Despite the betrayal of his former comrades, which he later explained as damage inflicted on friends so as to save his own skin and continue working as a director, *On the Waterfront* is a film clearly focused on the working class. Terry Malloy (Marlon Brando) is a member of a mob crew that controls the union of dockers. This is a corrupt union, a crime organization that has nothing to do with the advancement of dock workers' rights, but effectively controls the docking business on the waterfront. It has been involved in violent attacks and murders investigated by the Waterfront Crime Commission. Workers need to unite in a real union and they are helped by the parish priest, Father Barry (Karl Malden).

130 Friedrich Engels, “Engels to J. Bloch In Königsberg,” 21 Sept. 1890, *Marxists Internet Archive*, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1890/letters/90_09_21.htm.

Readings of the film sometimes heavily rely on the context of the hearings of the investigative committee of the United States Congress and the persecution of Communists and their allies. In fact, as Gerald Horne recalls,

“when the movies dealt ostensibly with mob influence within the unions, the force of the message was often subverted. For instance, *On the Waterfront*, which concerned the gangster-dominated longshore union in the New York area, was interpreted widely as a parable depicting the role of Communists”¹³¹.

This reading is connected with the idea conveyed by the director himself that Terry, a member of the criminal organization who testifies against the mob boss, somehow represents Kazan — and hence that the mob represents the Communist Party. The action of testifying is the same, but its implications are quite different. This is the reason why Horne talks about subversion, because the real problem that the film addresses is omitted or otherwise replaced in this interpretation.

The hiring process in the docks after the Second World War was known as the “shape up” in which men fought desperately for a chance to work every morning. Arthur Miller describes such a scene in vivid detail:

“After distributing the checks to his favorites, who had quietly paid him off, the boss often found a couple left over and in his generosity tossed them into the air over the little crowd. In a frantic scramble, the men would tear at each other’s hands, sometimes getting into bad fights. Their cattle-like acceptance of this humiliating process struck me as an outrage, even more sinister than the procedure itself. It was though they had lost the mere awareness of hope”¹³².

In an article where Kathy M. Newman also quotes this passage from Miller’s autobiography, she concludes:

“As much as Terry Malloy might represent Kazan, ratting on his former friends, it is also true that Kazan and Schulberg [the screenwriter] were trying to rat

131 Gerald Horne, *Class Struggle in Hollywood, 1930-1950: Moguls, Mobsters, Stars, Reds, and Trade Unionists* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 100.

132 Arthur Miller, *Timebends: A Life* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 147.

on capitalism, to call out American business practices as corrupt, and to argue that something drastic needed to be done to reform the docks”.¹³³

The fact is that the process of production began three years before. In 1951, Budd Schulberg was asked by a small film company, Monticello, to write a screenplay based on Malcolm Johnson’s Pulitzer Prize winning journalistic series, *Crime on the Waterfront*. Johnson introduced Schulberg to one of his main sources: Father “Pete” Corridan, the priest who sought to transform the port and the working conditions in it. He is the source for the ordained minister in the film. Father Barry sees the violence and the fear it instills, the death and the grief it sows, and at first retreats to the church and does not want to meddle. Urged to face the problems of his parishioners, he then becomes a kind of union organizer for the lack of one. He organizes a meeting in the church in order to foment action against the mob. Even in this place the group is violently attacked.

In this meeting, Father Barry promises unwavering support for the dockers. This encourages one of them, “Kayo” Dugan, to testify against the mob boss only to be crushed by a load in a staged accident. Father Barry is called and takes the opportunity to preach a sermon reminding the longshoremen that Christ walks among them when the “easy-money boys who do none of the work [...] take all of the gravy” and that every murder is a Calvary. When men loyal to the mob throw things at him and tell him to go back to his church, he tells them: “Boys, this is my church!” Terry finally reacts to his courage. The scene is staged as a resurrection: the priest raises his voice from the depths with the power of the Gospel and, in the end, is elevated with the deceased.

Concluding Thoughts

Much more can be said about how some American films construct a working-class perspective in conjunction with Christianity. These references may be indirect — as in the case of *Force of Evil* (1948), directed by blacklisted filmmaker Abraham Polonsky, that retells the story of Cain and Abel as a parable about the predatory relationships in capitalism — or they may be direct — as in the case of *On the Waterfront*. Films like these call attention to two aspects studied by philosophy of religion. First, the meaningfulness

133 Kathy M. Newman, “Revisiting *On the Waterfront*,” *Jacobin*, 15 Jul. 2014, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2014/07/revisiting-on-the-waterfront>.

of religious language, in particular its political meaning as well as the turning of religious language into political language. Second, the connection between religion and material culture, which includes images and practices.

I close with an additional example from a film directed by Herbert J. Biberman and produced by Paul Jarrico, both members of the Communist Party, both blacklisted by the time the movie was made. *Salt of the Earth*, released in the same year as *On the Waterfront*, was independently produced outside of the film industry with the sponsorship of the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers. “Salt of the earth” is a phrase taken from the *Gospel of Matthew* 5:13 when Jesus talks about the “saltiness” of his disciples who are called to be living proof of God’s love on earth. The film portrays the 15-month-long miners’ strike in New Mexico against the Empire Zinc Company for the racial discrimination of Latino workers in pay, safety standards, and poor conditions of company housing. Catholic faith is an integral part of these Latino workers’ culture and their family’s everyday life. One of the first buildings that we see in the film is of a Catholic church. Esperanza Quintero (Rosaura Revueltas) is the main character and the story’s narrator, a miner’s wife who along other women want to demonstrate their solidarity with the striking miners and, therefore, has to challenge the prevalent sexism in their community. Christianity is a source of strength for the struggle of both miners and women.

In an early scene, Esperanza’s voice-over talks about a day that looks like any other of her life. She is ironing while she takes care of the children with tenderness. But it is also her birthday and, of course, her saint’s day. She is pregnant and has a wish that she considers so sinful that she prays to the Virgin Mary for forgiveness: that the child she is carrying is not born into a world so broken and so unjust. Mary is a receptacle of human longings and also an emancipatory religious figure. Jean Pfaelzer argues that the film “aligns Esperanza with the Black Virgin of Guadalupe, an enduring Chicana image of an indigenous, unsubmitive, mysterious, and sexualized goddess who encourages the survival and resistance of Mexicans and Mexican Americans”¹³⁴. In this sense, Esperanza (*hope* in Spanish) relates to the Virgin as to a mirror. She confronts her thoughts and weaknesses, and finds hope without detaching herself from the pressing matters of motherhood and the condition of working class women.

134 Jean Pfaelzer, “*Salt of the Earth*: Women, Class, and the Utopian Imagination”, *Legacy* 16, no. 1, “Discourses of Women and Class” (1999): 125.

8. Tacitus and tyranny: propaganda (Germania) and denouncement (Annales)

António de Castro Caeiro (NOVA FCSH and IFILNOVA)

Tacitus' *Germania* is one of the “one hundred most dangerous books ever written”, as Arnaldo Momigliano considered it¹³⁵. “This is how we will become again, or at least some of us”¹³⁶. “The ancient Germans’ standard epithets” were: “simple, brave, loyal, pure, just and honourable”¹³⁷. *Germania* was a textbook taught in German schools. It was widely spread in Nazi pamphlets. It fueled with enthusiasm all sorts of people, from foot soldiers to high ranking leaders. *Germania* was held as an account of Germany and its past, widely celebrated as a magnificent monument. “However, unfortunately, it is not an account and nor is about Germany’s past”¹³⁸. *Germania* was an intellectual epidemy. Therefore, we will try to detect its symptoms, its aetiology. How can we come to terms with demagoguery embedded in rhetoric? As Krebs says, “to write an intellectual epidemiology means to visit the patients and to inspect the various historical and cultural contexts in which this innocuous yet noxious text figure”¹³⁹.

The description of the peoples of *Germania* by Tacitus is the same used by Greek historiographers for the Scythians and Egyptians. Ethnic purity, physical appearance, and military prowess, but also laziness and inertia are shared by many peoples. When the focus is on the peoples of *Germania*, clearly the description is circumscribed to these peoples. No other is mentioned, not even for comparison. The impression left on us is that the people of *Germania* is a second-best people, after the Roman people. Tacitus writes from the height of his high concept of himself as a Roman. We are going to start by presenting the features of the peoples of *Germania* that Tacitus invokes with regard both to their physical build, appearance, and strength,

135 Krebs, Christopher B. (2011) 42.

136 From Himmler’s diary, 24th September 1924. Quoted by Krebs (2011) 15.

137 Krebs (2011) 20.

138 Ibid. 17.

139 Ibid. 23.

and to their, especially military, worth and how the whole, the group or collective is valued above the individual. But we shall also have the opportunity to see moral qualities highlighted by Tacitus, such as monogamy, the value of the family or the importance of women in the family. Other ancient values, like hospitality and frankness, are highlighted. Along with the positive features, Tacitus lists some other negative ones, as we shall see. The history of how Tacitus' *Germania* was received over the centuries glossed over the Germanic peoples' negative traits and widened and increased their positive qualities. What could appear negative sometimes got transformed into something positive. What we want to understand is how the text got distorted to the point of serving as a propaganda pamphlet for the Teutonic Order and later for the German people under the Third Reich. How can *Germania* be called the most dangerous book of all books, when, in truth, the history of its interpretation is the history of a misrepresentation of the text? The peoples inhabiting Roman *Germania* are not the Germans since Bismarck. Their diversity is not based on the diversity of the German *Länder*. The cultures at that time, the languages, religion, habits and costumes, legal entities, mentality, way of being, way of living, everything was different, even very different from Germany, even with all its diversity.

In Tacitus' *Germania* we can find the elements of propaganda that promote a people. The list of positive features is based on the set of values of an author who is a Roman senator and general. This criterion is what leads him to interpret the history of the Roman people, its values, its aspirations in life in society and the rejection of actions carried out in the light of negative values. The peoples of *Germania* are described on the basis of the set of values with which a Roman sees himself in his world, and its empire. It is the peoples of *Germania* that are not entirely romanized and, for this reason, one can also understand the admiration with which they are contemplated. It can even seem that excuses are being sought for the Roman military lack of success over the centuries. But Tacitus' description is not entirely positive, as we shall see. What we want to understand is how a book like *Germania* can be used as propaganda, the book where the peoples of *Germania* find their pedigree or DNA, which grants them superiority. To this end, it is important to see how the negative features are erased, glossed over or interpreted positively by all those who reviewed the text over almost two millennia. What we are going to do here is present the list of first positive and then negative features, as found in Tacitus' text. After that, we are going to try and pinpoint a number of moments in the history of how *Germania*

was received, particularly by the Third Reich. Lastly, we are going to try and redeem Tacitus from this horrible situation, to which he is foreign, by discussing some of the questions regarding racial supremacy and political propaganda, but already in his *Annales*. It is here that we shall read several passages where Tacitus denounces arrogance, dictatorship as we know it in modern times, injustices and unfairness.

1. The features of the peoples of *Germania* listed by Tacitus

*“For myself I am disposed to side with those who hold that the German peoples have never intermarried with alien stocks, but have always stood forth as a race rooted in the soil, pure and unlike every other”*¹⁴⁰. *These people are only similar to themselves. No one else had their physical appearance, from which it follows that also “This is why, extraordinarily numerous as the Germans are, they all possess precisely the same physical characteristics, fierce blue eyes, red hair, and large frames which are good only for a spurt”*¹⁴¹.

What they no longer have is

*“they certainly have not a corresponding power of endurance for hard work, while, although inured by the nature of their climate and soil to hunger and cold, they have never learned to support heat and thirst”*¹⁴².

In the passage quoted above, we can see that the features are not entirely positive. At least on a first reading. The *Germanics* lack the ability to suffer¹⁴³ when performing work and crafts and are not good at enduring difficulties, thirst and heat.

140 *“Ipse eorum opinionibus accedo qui Germaniae populos nullis aliarum nationum conubiis infectos propriam et sinceram et tantum sui similem gentem extitisse arbitrantur”* Tac. Ger. 4.1.

141 *“Unde habitus quoque corporum, tamquam in tanto hominum numero, idem omnibus: truces et caerulei oculi, rutilae comae, magna corpora et tantum ad impetum valida”* Tac. Ger. 4.2.

142 *“Laboris atque operum non eadem patientia, minimeque sitim aestumque tolerare, frigora atque inediae caelo solove adsueverunt”* Tac. Ger. 4.3.

143 Patientia, -ae. [f].

But what Tacitus tries to underline are the features making the Germanic peoples brave, to such an extent that the Romans were never able to entirely subjugate all of them at the same time, but only partially and at different times. Their military bravery is described shortly afterwards:

*“to fall back, however, provided only a man comes on again, is held to be good tactics, not cowardice. Even in a defeat, they carry off the bodies of their comrades. Throwing away the shield is the crowning disgrace, and a man who has so dishonored himself may neither take part in the rites of religion nor enter the general assembly; many such survivors from the battlefield have been known to end their shame by hanging themselves”*¹⁴⁴.

The shame¹⁴⁵ and infamy resulting from military dishonor, retreat, relinquishing one’s shield, — metonymy for abandoning a military position and, thus, one’s companions in arms — involve a set of values corresponding positively to pride in military bravery, courage, honor, and fame obtained through military glory. These same positive and negative values make it possible to understand the boundaries, how military life provides honor and dishonor, glory and disgrace, pride and shame. These same values, even if exaggeratedly attributed to the Germanic people(s), could be easily found in various warrior peoples.

The election of their kings is the result of a meritocracy founded on military prowess or noble descent. Power is not discretionary. In fact, their military commanders gain their rank through fame and reputation. Only priests, as representatives of God, who is present in battles, are allowed to punish, and nobody else:

“They choose their kings for their noble birth, their generals for their prowess: the king’s power is neither unlimited nor arbitrary, and the generals owe their authority less to their military rank than to their example and the admiration they excite by it, if they are dashing, if they are conspicuous, if they charge ahead of the line.

144 “Cedere [loco](#), [dummodo rursus instes](#), [consilii quam formidinis arbitrantur](#). [corpora suorum etiam in dubiis proeliis referunt](#). [scutum reliquisse praecipuum flagitium](#), [nec aut sacris adesse aut concilium inire ignominioso fas](#), [multique superstites bellorum infamiam laqueo finierunt”](#) Tac. *Ger.* 6.6.

145 Flagitium, -i. [n]

But they may not execute, they may not bind, they may not even strike a delinquent; those are the privileges solely of the priests, and they do such things not as a form of military punishment nor at the generals' bidding, but as if such were the express commands of the deity whom they believe to be present on the field; and they carry with them into battle certain images and statues brought out of the sacred groves”¹⁴⁶.

The family is more important than its elements. The state is more important than the individual. The initiation of the young has a military form. No action, whether public or private, is performed without arms. Nevertheless, it is not usual for someone to bear arms without the city having demonstrated that they are qualified to do so. One of the princes, his father or one of his relatives equips a young man with a shield and a *frêmea*. Tacitus sees this consecration as being like the Roman ceremony where young men get their toga, the greatest honor of their youth. It is at this time that they begin to be considered part of the State, whereas, until now, they were just members of the family¹⁴⁷.

“Illustrious birth or great services rendered by the family may confer the rank of chief even upon mere youths; such youths associate themselves with the others whose strength is more matured and whose quality has been already put to the proof; nor is it considered to be any sort of derogation for them to be seen in a chief's body-guard. In fact, among the henchmen or retainers composing the body-guards there are varying degrees of rank conferred by the chief whom they follow, and there is an eager rivalry between the retainers for the post of honor next their chief, as well as between the different chiefs for the honor of having the most numerous and the most valiant body-guard. Here lie dignity and strength. To be perpetually surrounded by a large train of picked young warriors is a distinction in peace and a protection in war”¹⁴⁸.

146 “Reges ex nobilitate, duces ex virtute sumunt. nec regibus infinita ac libera potestas, et duces exemplo potius quam imperio, si prompti, si conspicui, si ante aciem agant, admiratione praesunt. ceterum neque animadvertere neque vincire, ne verberare quidem nisi sacerdotibus permissum, non quasi in poenam nec ducis iussu, sed velut deo imperante, quem adesse bellantibus credunt” Tac. Ger. 7.

147 “Nihil autem neque publicae neque privatae rei nisi armati agunt. sed arma sumere non ante cuiquam moris quam civitas suffecturum probaverit. tum in ipso concilio vel principum aliquis vel pater vel propinqui scuto frameaque iuvenem ornant: haec apud illos toga, hic primus iuventae honos; ante hoc domus pars videntur, mox rei publicae” Tac. Ger. 13.1.

148 “Insignis nobilitas aut magna patrum merita principis dignationem etiam adulescentulis adsignant: ceteris robustioribus ac iam pridem probatis adgregantur, nec rubor inter comites aspici. gradus quin etiam ipse comitatus

There is another set of features considered positive from Tacitus' moral point of view. Their marital faithfulness is extolled, even if the possibility of bigamy is allowed in some cases.

“For all that, the marriage bond is strict, and feature in their mode of life is more creditable to them than this. Unlike the great majority of barbarians, they are content with one wife: very few of them have more than one, and these few exceptions are not due to wantonness; they are cases of men of high rank, to whom several matrimonial alliances have been offered from motives of policy”¹⁴⁹.

Today's reader may appreciate Tacitus' politically correct observations about the women. There is an elevating and a consideration of women that has its ideal in the *Valkyries*. Their attributes are physical courage and military boldness.

“Their traditions tell that more than once, when a German line was wavering on the point of giving way, the women rallied it, urgently entreating the men to fight on, baring their breasts and crying out that their captivity was at hand. Captivity for their women is a thing the men abhor far more than for themselves; so that, as a matter of fact, we always obtain the firmest hold over those states which are compelled to include amongst the hostages they send us some maidens of noble birth”¹⁵⁰.

The high regard they have for their women appears clear, in the light of the women's marital obligations, in both peacetime and wartime. This is evident as regards dowries, the way women take their marriage vows, and how they bring up their children and give them what accrues to them through inheritance so that the latter also leave this to their descendants.

habet, iudicio eius quem sectantur; magnaque et comitum aemulatio, quibus primus apud principem suum locus, et principum, cui plurimi et acerrimi comites. haec dignitas, hae vires: magno semper electorum iuvenum globo circumdari in pace decus, in bello praesidium. nec solum in sua gente cuique, sed apud finitimas quoque civitates id nomen, ea gloria est, si numero ac virtute comitatus emineat; expetuntur enim legationibus et muneribus ornantur et ipsa plerumque fama bella profligant” Tac. Ger. 13. 2-4.

149 *“Quamquam severa illic matrimonia, nec ullam morum partem magis laudaveris. nam prope soli barbarorum singulis uxoribus contenti sunt, exceptis admodum paucis, qui non libidine sed ob nobilitatem plurimis nuptiis ambiuntur” Tac. Ger. 18.1. S.m..*

150 *“Memoriae proditur quasdam acies inclinatas iam et labantes a feminis restitutas constantia precum et obiectu pectorum et monstrata cominus captivitate, quam longe impatientius feminarum suarum nomine timent, adeo ut efficacius obligentur animi civitatum quibus inter obsides puellae quoque nobiles imperantur” Tac. Ger. 8.1.*

“Lest the woman should think that masculine courage and the perils of war lie beyond her sphere, these tokens remind her upon the threshold of marriage that she comes as the man's partner in toils and dangers; and that in peace and in war she must expect to suffer and to dare the same. This is the signification of the oxen in the yoke, of the harnessed horse, of the offering of arms. Thus is she bound to live and thus to die. She receives what she is to hand on to her sons, inviolate and unprofaned; what her sons' wives are to receive after her, and they, in their turn, to hand on to her children's children”¹⁵¹.

To be added furthermore to the above values is their hospitality. No other people indulge more generously in banquets and hospitality. It is considered a sacrilege to turn anyone away from one's door; each person receives a meal prepared in line with his possessions.

“No people in the world are more prodigal of hospitality, whether to friends or to strangers. They account it a sin to refuse the shelter of their roof to any human being. Every host provides the best entertainment that he can afford for his guest. When supplies fail, he becomes the guide and finds elsewhere a welcome for his guest. They enter, uninvited, the next house; no difference is made between them; both are received with equal courtesy; no one draws any distinction between friend and stranger as far as the rights of hospitality are concerned. On departing, it is customary to present the guest with anything he may ask for, and there is the same absence of embarrassment in asking a boon in return. They like gifts, but the giver does not consider them as scored to his credit, or the receiver feel that he is being laid under an obligation”¹⁵².

151 *“ne se mulier extra virtutum cogitationes extraque bellorum casus putet, ipsis incipientis matrimonii auspiciis admonetur venire se laborum periculorumque sociam, idem in pace, idem in proelio passuram ausuramque: hoc iuncti boves, hoc paratus equus, hoc data arma denuntiant. sic vivendum, sic pariendum: accipere se quae liberis inviolata ac digna reddat, quae nurus accipiant rursusque ad nepotes referantur” Tac. Ger. 18. 4.*

152 *“Convictibus et hospitibus non alia gens effusius indulget. quemcumque mortalium arcere tecto nefas habetur; pro fortuna quisque apparatis epulis excipit. cum defecere, qui modo hospes fuerat, monstrator hospitii et comes; proximam domum non invitati adeunt. nec interest: pari humanitate accipiuntur. notum ignotumque quantum ad ius hospitis nemo discernit. abeunti, si quid poposcerit, concedere moris; et poscendi in vicem eadem facilitas. gaudent muneribus, sed nec data imputant nec acceptis obligantur” Tac. Ger. 21.2-3.*

They are frank:

*“Not being a crafty or a cunning race they furthermore disclose their secret thoughts in the freedom of the feast, and so the minds of all lie open and discovered. On the morrow, the matter is debated again, and the double process justifies itself. They discuss when the disguise is impossible, they decide when too sober to blunder”*¹⁵³.

All these features we are compiling are positive, if one can say so. They describe the Germanic peoples as regards their mental and emotional dispositions. Tacitus describes with affection the nature of relations within families, how women are treated, community life, their favorable disposition towards hospitality and their humanity and frankness. On its own, this list, which stresses glory obtained in military action, physical courage, pride in courage and the nobleness of character that earns them honor, the abominating of cowardice, the ignoble and inglorious, the infamy and shame that result from this and lead to the prohibition of life in society, in the form of being banned from entering temples, excommunication, but also to suicide, show that Tacitus describes the peoples of *Germania* by stressing the qualities he exaggerates in the Roman people and turns them inside out in order to structurally interpret all other peoples either in their remoteness, strangeness and alienness vis-à-vis the Roman gens, or in their closeness and similarities to the Roman people, as if they were almost Roman. Without wanting them to be Roman, they are on the borderline of being able to become Roman. Tacitus is the main critic of Roman uses and customs, a courageous whistle-blower of the human bondage within Roman society, the rationale of terror, the loss of freedom, the way in which every totalitarianism also overcomes the pusillanimity of the oppressed and how it gives the latter *panem et circenses*, how it soft soaps him with entertainment, sport, shows, public buildings, public festivals and the maintaining of a Senate where the decrees passed and laws issued have the appearance of democracy, only because of the number of senators of which it is composed, but the majority can express only one opinion.

153 [“Gens non astuta nec callida aperit adhuc secreta pectoris licentia loci; ergo detecta et nuda omnium mens. postera die retractatur, et salva utriusque temporis ratio est: deliberant dum fingere nesciunt, constituunt dum errare non possunt”](#) Tac. *Ger.* 22.4.

Outlining the character of a people is like outlining the character and personality of a person. It has virtues and qualities and might even have all of them, but this is only an extreme in the range of possibilities. It has, for sure, defects, a bad or very bad lack of qualities, and this too is an extreme in the range of possibilities. Tacitus lists the negative qualities, once again from a Roman worldview standpoint. This means that being a “bad” German entails the same as being a “bad” Roman, even if the negative features listed constitute character traits of the Germanic peoples, rooted in their essence. A bad Roman is an exception to the existential and social project of being Roman. Certainly, however, it can happen that the exceptions stop being negligible minorities and become absolute majorities.

2. The negative qualities

One of the negative features is laziness. They do not like working.

“In the intervals of wars they spend much of their time in hunting and still more in doing nothing, without any sort of object except sleeping and eating, all the boldest and most warlike men having no employment whatsoever, while the care of the house and its belongings and the cultivation of the fields are abandoned to the women and old men and to the weaklings of the family. The warriors lie torpid. Amazing inconsistency! The same men love sloth and hate peace”¹⁵⁴.

The violence in their character may originate from this intolerance of work or from the ferocious element in them that leads them to aspire to war.

The Germanic people’s disposition is a mental or spiritual one characterizing deep down a way of living. The way of living in peace, living quietly and calmly, seems to be impossible to tolerate; it is tedious and sluggish. Only the way of living in war, with the exercise of violence or military activity, makes it possible to tolerate life in society,

154 “Quotiens bella non ineunt, non multum venatibus, plus per otium transigunt, dediti somno ciboque: fortissimus quisque ac bellicosissimus nihil agens, delegata domus et penatium et agrorum cura feminis senibusque et infirmissimo cuique ex familia, ipsi hebent, mira diversitate naturae, cum idem homines sic ament inertiam et oderint quietem” Tac. Ger. 15.1.

even the company of those who accompany them. Tacitus' notes are interesting for an analysis of the collective emotional disposition and mentality of a people or population, integrated into an appreciation that in truth living life, the essence of life, proves completely different when it concerns inaction, idleness, quiet and calm or, on the other hand, when one is involved in action, one is active and is occupied.

“If a State lies long resting in peace and inactivity, off go most of the noble youths belonging to it, of their own accord, to join other nations where a war of some sort is going on ; because peace is repulsive to the race, and the path to glory lies through danger, and also because a numerous band of retainers can only be maintained by war and rapine. For they claim from the liberality of their chief the coveted war-horse and the blood-stained spear of victory that they desire. As a substitute for pay they have repasts and banquets, coarse it may be, but abundant”¹⁵⁵.

They drink with relish.

“There is no shame attached to drinking steadily all day and night long; naturally among drunken men quarrels frequently spring up, and these seldom stop at angry words, but in the majority of cases end in wounds and bloodshed”¹⁵⁶.

3. The review of the most dangerous book of all¹⁵⁷

The stereotypes used to describe ancient peoples are freedom, courage, morality, and simplicity¹⁵⁸. These help to shape the national character of the future Germans¹⁵⁹. Loyalty, for example, goes beyond the circle of friends and family. *“To return from battle*

155 *“Si civitas in qua orti sunt longa pace et otio torpeat, plerique nobilium adulescentium petunt ultra eas nationes, quae tum bellum aliquod gerunt, quia et ingrata genti quies et facilius inter ancipitia clarescunt magnumque comitatum non nisi vi belloque tueare; exigunt enim principis sui liberalitate illum bellatorem equum, illam cruentam victricemque frameam; nam epulae et quamquam incompti, largi tamen apparatus pro stipendio cedunt” Tac. Ger. 14. 2-3.*

156 *“Diem noctemque continuare potando nulli probrum. crebrae, ut inter vinolentos, rixae raro conviciis, saepius caede et vulneribus transiguntur” Tac. Ger. 22. 2.*

157 Christopher B. Krebs. 2011. *A Most Dangerous Book. Tacitus' Germania From the Roman Empire to the Third Reich*. New York. W.W. Norton & Company.

158 Krebs. (2011) 45.

159 (Ibid.) 47.

surviving one's leader [was considered] shameful and a disgrace for life"¹⁶⁰. Almost two millennia later the members of the SS used the motto: *My honor is called loyalty*¹⁶¹. Tacitus shows a liking for the raw bravery, moral integrity and passionate yearning for freedom among the Germanic peoples¹⁶². If he is not mentioned hardly ever during late antiquity and the middle ages, later, at the end of 1425, Poggio Bracciolini discovers him¹⁶³.

When, in 1471, Pope Pius II makes the Turkish threat his priority, Giannantonio Campano, nephew of Pius II and, later, Pius III, is the head of the papal delegation in Regensburg. To incite the German leaders against the Turks, he appeals to the Germanic people's best moral features and qualities. Germanic military boldness, the strength, glory, nobility, freedom and bravery¹⁶⁴.

*"I beseech you by the most glorious shadows of our ancestors [per gloriosissimas umbras patrum uestrorum] make sure that Germany is Germany [Germania sit Germania] and that it commands those fighters now whom it commanded them"*¹⁶⁵.

The Germans are raised to the peaks of religiousness. Once they worshiped Mars, the Roman god of war, as their highest deity. Now, as Christians, they exceed all other peoples in faith and piety, with the building of magnificent churches.

The humanists considered that the Romans trusted the Germans more than the Romans themselves. In the Annals, Tacit writes that Arminius was "*without doubt the liberator of Germany*"¹⁶⁶. Perseverance was a Germanic national characteristic, whereas the Italian character was shaky: one of the stereotyped accusations against the Italians and evermore so against the French. Masters of duplicity and deception, they changed loyalties easily. Italians and French were portrayed

160 (Ibid.) 46.

161 "Meine Ehre heisst Treue". Quoted by Krebs. (2011) 238.

162 Krebs. (2011) 49.

163 (Ibid.) 56.

164 Ibid. 92-93.

165 "Per gloriosissimas umbras patrum verstrorum" Ibid. 95.

166 "Liberator haud dubie Germaniae".

with a character diametrically opposite to that of the Germans. The latter had preserved their loyalty with a merciful and steadfast heart¹⁶⁷.

Herder¹⁶⁸ also used Tacitus to inspire patriotism¹⁶⁹, by basing himself on Klopstock¹⁷⁰, when the latter defined German thinking, based on their history and general culture. For a people to be united around its own culture is an existential need. No greater harm can be inflicted on a nation than stealing its national character from it. A national character resides in the distinctiveness of its spirit and language. The German language and literature were all the German nation had in common¹⁷¹. The spirit of the Germanic people was in its people. The German word for people – “*Volk*” – changed with Herder from a predominantly sociopolitical term to an ideological one¹⁷². The requisites applied specifically to the Germans – the vigorous embracing of their words, myths and poetry and the right to self-determination – were applied to all peoples, united in Herder’s hopeful notion of humanity¹⁷³.

But if Herder rejects the DNA – blood and the notion of race, Friedrich Kohlrausch¹⁷⁴ goes on to stress the purity of the racial composition of the Germanic forefathers as members of the Caucasian, then Aryan and, finally, Nordic race. All this learned through the “mirror of honor and pride” supplied by Tacitus¹⁷⁵.

In his *Addresses to the German Nation*¹⁷⁶, Fichte¹⁷⁷ explicitly addresses himself to the German people. The characteristics of Germanic existence, conceived in Tacitus’ canon, made it possible to invoke: the seriousness of the spirit expressed as loyalty, seriousness, honor, and simplicity. With these virtues the Germans fought for their independence from Rome, under Arminius’ leadership, and, more than a millennium later for their independence from the Roman church,

167 Ibid. 118.

168 1744-1803.

169 Ibid. 177.

170 1724-1803.

171 Ibid. 178.

172 Ibid. 180.

173 Ibid. 181.

174 1840-1910.

175 Ibid. 183.

176 Johann Gottlieb Fichte. 1978. 1808: Reden an die deutsche Nation. In: *Philosophische Bibliothek*. 5^a ed. Vol. 204. Hamburg. Felix Meiner Verlag.

177 1762-1814.

under the Reformers' leadership. It now had to fight for its freedom, once again, to drive away the French yoke. Only in this way could all humanity progress¹⁷⁸.

In Chamberlain's view, "*the Germans were the makers of the history of the world (and, in the final analysis, the masons of 19th Century Europe). They founded nations, made humanity progress with their technical inventions, raised the human spirit with their art, to such an extent that a people's level of civilization was in direct proportion to the quantity of its Germanic blood*"¹⁷⁹. Based on Tacitus' account, "*freedom and loyalty were the two roots to Germanic nature.*" [...] *This race established the purity of blood as its governing principle.*" Chamberlain believed in "*racial differences, that race determined talent, and that races were the authentically*¹⁸⁰ *historical individuals*"¹⁸¹. The use of Tacitus made by Chamberlain resulted in a "*worldview of the popular movement (völkisch): racist, anti-Semitic, pan-Germanic. Germania was the book to study: over centuries the Germanic Aryan race had accumulated its virtues: pureness, physiognomy, rural peasant lifestyle, custom and mentality*"¹⁸²¹⁸³.

But there is no lack of resistance to the ideas of the Nazis and of Chamberlain. The archbishop and cardinal of Munich and Freising, Michael von Faulhaber¹⁸⁴, whose sermons were broadcast by a loudspeaker in two other churches, spoke against Article 24 of the National Socialist programme¹⁸⁵. Article 24 tried to explicitly debunk the New Testament, by stating that it was a moral offense against the decency of the Germanic race¹⁸⁶. In Faulhaber' eyes the admirable qualities mentioned by Tacitus – loyalty, hospitality, and faithfulness in marriage – did little to diffuse the impression that there was not a civilization, strictly speaking, among the Germans

178 Ibid. 185.

179 Ibid. 209.

180 "Eigentlich".

181 Ibid. 210.

182 "Gesittung".

183 Ibid. 211.

184 1869-1952.

185 Art. 24: "We demand freedom for all religious confessions from the State, to the extent that they do not endanger its existence or clash with the moral sentiment of the Germanic race. The party, as such, represents the point of view of a positive Christianity, without tying it confessionally to a particular conversion. The party fights the Jewish materialist spirit within and outside the Country and is convinced that a lasting recovery of our people can only happen from within. (24. Wir fordern die Freiheit aller religiösen Bekenntnisse im Staat, soweit sie nicht dessen Bestand gefährden oder gegen das Sittlichkeits- und Moralgefühl der germanischen Rasse verstoßen. Die Partei als solche vertritt den Standpunkt eines **positiven Christentums**, ohne sich konfessionell an ein bestimmtes Bekenntnis zu binden. Sie bekämpft den jüdisch-materialistischen Geist in und außer uns und ist überzeugt, daß eine dauernde Genesung unseres Volkes nur erfolgen kann von innen heraus)".

186 Ibid. 214.

of the pre-Christian period¹⁸⁷. Rosenberg¹⁸⁸, the Nazi party's ideologue, accused the cardinal of “severely attacking the process of self-reflection that was going on in the Third Reich”¹⁸⁹. Tacitus' *Germania* was, insisted the Nazis, the bible every German should possess, because “this booklet, written by the Roman patriot, should fill us with pride about the superior character of our forefathers”¹⁹⁰.

Education collapsed into propaganda¹⁹¹. The traditional schools were radically altered and ideologically aligned. It was in athletics and physical education that the master spirit was to be revealed¹⁹².

“Teachers fought as ‘brave combatants’ at the front of the revolution. [...] They received ideological guidance at conferences. [...] In discussing the famous little book, teachers were to focus their students’ attention on how to ‘fashion the German future in the ways of their forefathers’, a task made difficult since instructors ran the risk of getting carried away ‘out of sheer joy about the subject at hand’”¹⁹³.

The meaning of propaganda comes from the singular feminine nominative form of the gerund of the Latin verb *propago*, -are, -aui, -atum, with the meaning of propagate, reach out, expand, widen, increase. The concept primarily arose separately from the obvious biological connections linked to proselytism and propagation of the faith: *de propaganda fide*¹⁹⁴.

Propaganda cannot be considered solely a form of persuasion or dissuasion. Chomsky uses the term with the understanding that propaganda employs manipulative forms of persuasion or that it is not a persuasion without some form of manipulation. The actors involved in propaganda have various ways to interpret their activity. For some, the manipulation of opinions, beliefs, and behavior is intentional, even if, or especially until when, camouflaged. Others have incorporated a particular view of the world

187 Ibid. 215.

188 1893-1946.

189 Ibid. 216.

190 Ibid. 217.

191 Ibid. 221.

192 Krebs translates the German “Herrensinn” with “master spirit”. Ibid. 221.

193 Ibid. 221-222. The “little booklet” is *Germania*.

194 Fellows, E. (1959). 'Propaganda:' History of a Word. *American Speech*, 34(3), 182-189. With the bula *Inscrutabili Divina* (June 22th, 1622), Pope Gregory the XVth creates a Congregation, named after: *Propaganda Fide*.

to such an extent that they think they are telling the truth. Others think manipulation is part of life and it is impossible to get around its actions directed at others or avoid others' actions directed at us.

“The common feature across all of these self-perceptions is the organized, systematic and intentional manipulation of information in ways that either distort peoples’ perception of reality or pushes them to behave in ways they would not otherwise do”¹⁹⁵.

There seems to be the ancient sophistry principle: claiming the worst argument is the best and undoing the best argument as if it were the worst.

But there is an immediate link, almost, between the word and the sinister figure of Goebbels. In the diaries he wrote on an almost daily basis as a mirror for his activities, which were already known just after the war, we can read some of his directives regarding propaganda. Propaganda in peacetime mirrors propaganda preparing for war and wartime propaganda. And moreover: it has to not ingenuously anticipate the enemy's propaganda. There is, therefore, a complexifying of the notion of manipulation and counter-manipulation. *“Propaganda has to be planned and carried out by a single authority”¹⁹⁶. “For there to be an understanding of propaganda, an audience’s interest has to be awakened and it has to be transmitted using a means of communication capable of grabbing attention”¹⁹⁷. “Anyone talking first and foremost to the world is always right”¹⁹⁸. So to sum up. “A propaganda campaign has to start at the right moment. The slogan has to be repeated but not beyond the point where it loses its effectiveness. Propaganda has to label people and events with distinct expressions and slogans”¹⁹⁹.*

It is with the presupposition of the good faith with which different groups converse with each other in public that interest gets generated among an audience listening to the conversation among different groups. The purpose of promoting a public discussion

195 Robinson, P. (2018). Does the Propaganda Model Actually Theorise Propaganda? In *Pedro-Carañana J., Broudy D., & Klaehn J. (Eds.), THE PROPAGANDA MODEL TODAY: Filtering Perception and Awareness* (pp. 53-68). London: University of Westminster Press. 58.

196 Doob, L. (1950). *Goebbels' Principles of Propaganda*. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 14(3), 419-442.

197 Ibid. 426.

198 Ibid. 435.

199 Ibid. 435.

is to disseminate information, supposedly in good faith, even if the good faith only exists among those listening or the audience. Manipulation, nevertheless, involves the material being covert, with ulterior motives and insinuations. Bad faith. On the other hand, it is possible that, at a certain stage in the history of our relationship with propaganda, we become dogmatically skeptical and do not believe in anything. Worse still than someone telling the truth being disregarded as someone who is manipulating us. When we become aware of our influences, both the good and the bad, we enter the preconception domain. The preconception domain is a door opening onto superstition²⁰⁰.

Beatus Rhenanus²⁰¹, a friend of Erasmus of Rotterdam, gives Krebs his epilogue, with another reading of *one of the most dangerous books ever*²⁰². Krebs writes:

*“Rhenanus was not free of patriotic fervor either, but the occasional trip notwithstanding, he refused to submit his scholarly conscientiousness to his patriotism. Philologically rigorous and historically circumspect he focused on retrieving Tacitus’s own words: what he had written and what he meant. [...] The past, he advocated, should be understood on its own terms. ‘It is impossible to say how big are the changes that affected kingdoms and nations [from then until now]... Consider the following questions again and again: When was the text you are reading written, by whom and on what; then [only] compare recent times with old ones”*²⁰³.

4. Anatomy of Tyranny

When Tacitus talks of the Chatti, one of the Germanic tribes, it is with admiration but not without condescension. For example, when he talks of the ability the Chatti have of depending more on their commander than on the army itself. In spite of, in this list of good qualities, exclusively obedience to, and trust and faith in the commander being compared to Roman military discipline, all the others

200 Hoffer, C. (1942). *A Sociological Analysis of Propaganda*. *Social Forces*, 20(4), 445-448. doi:10.2307/2570877.
201 1485-1547.

202 Ibid. 245-250.

203 Krebs quotes *Commentariolus* (n.2), 70. Cf. Krebs. (2011) 285. n. 4.

are distinctive trademarks of the Roman imperial army, all of it depending on the commander of the commanders, the emperor. On the other hand, in this passage, we can see it would be unlikely for Tacitus' *Germania* to be Germany and the Germanic tribes the Germans. It would also be unlikely for the Germans of racial supremacy to identify themselves only with the Chatti, even if they considered the Scandinavians direct descendants of the proto-Germans.

“They are distinguished beyond their fellows by their singularly hardy frames, well-knit limbs, resolute eyes, and by a remarkable energy of spirit. For Germans, they have an unusual amount of method and skill: they choose leaders and obey them when chosen; they keep their ranks, discern the requirement of the moment, and can postpone an attack; they throw out pickets by day, and entrench their camps at night; they trust less to fortune, which is fickle, than to their own courage, which is proof; and, rarest of all, a thing characteristic only of a discipline like the Roman, they rely more on their general than on their army. Their whole strength is in foot soldiers, who, besides carrying their arms, are loaded with tools and supplies; other Germans come out for a single battle, the Chatti for a campaign”²⁰⁴.

When Tacitus writes in his *Annals* about the tyrannies of Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero, we can imagine what he would have written about the Third Reich. It is as an *anatomy of tyranny* that we try to read the *Annals*.²⁰⁵

Tacitus describes the changing of the principal position in the state²⁰⁶ as an empire, held by Octavius Caesar Augustus, into the tyrannical government of a sole person²⁰⁷: “*absolute government with the unrestricted power of a sole person, in contradiction*

204 “*Duriora genti corpora, stricti artus, minax vultus et maior animi vigor. multum, ut inter Germanos, rationis ac sollertiae: praeponere electos, audire praepositos, nosse ordines, intellegere occasiones, differre impetus, disponere diem, vallare noctem, fortunam inter dubia, virtutem inter certa numerare, quodque rarissimum nec nisi Romanae disciplinae concessum, plus reponere in duce quam in exercitu. omne robur in pedite, quem super arma ferramentis quoque et copiis onerant: alios ad proelium ire videas, Chattos ad bellum*” Tac. *Ger.* 30. 2.

205 Roger Boesche (1996): *Theories of Tyranny From Plato to Arendt*. Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania State University Press.

206 “Principatus, us. [m]”. Boesche (1996) 87.

207 “Dominatio, -nis.” [f]. Ibid.

with freedom”²⁰⁸. Tacitus thus describes the changing of a *Republic*²⁰⁹ into *private property*²¹⁰, the transformation of the State into a private domain.

The change was already being prepared at Octavius’ time. Already, even before Augustus died, Tiberius had a private army. It was a true para-military force. His soldiers escorted him to the senate²¹¹. In his litany of assassinations, executions, and suicides Tacitus responds to the spirit of the times. But the control of power was not limited to terror, accusations and the logic of suspicion that led to fearing enemies and supporters of different parties among friends, parents, and siblings. The control of the *situation* was also closely linked to the policy the Roman emperors always knew how to put into practice: *bread and circuses*^{212;213}.

Enticement is stronger than force. Nero was capable of tying down anybody important with generous presents²¹⁴. The emperors thus controlled the population through the corruption inherent to bribery and entertainment. Force, corruption and the control of the legal system, in particular, the *law against the crime of lèse-majesté*²¹⁵. This law, used without discrimination, made it possible to condemn everyone who was accused, with or without reason, since an informant system without precedent had been put in place.

He who, literally, occupies public space, holds the power. When the police and paramilitary forces occupy private places, we are in the presence of a tyranny²¹⁶. When it is bureaucrats and the civil service, we can perhaps talk about bureaucratic rule. Only when it is citizens who enforce public space, with discussions about rights and guarantees, do we find freedom. When, in Rome, violence takes over control of the public sphere, the political organization eradicates any possibility of discussion and, in particular, obliterates any political opposition. The State becomes virtually impossible²¹⁷. “*The existence of spies, informers (delatores)*,

208 “Liberty”. Ibid.

209 “Res publica”. Ibid.

210 “Res privata”. Ibid.

211 Ibid. 90.

212 “Panem et circenses” occurs for the first time in Juvenal’s Satires. Cf.: Juv. S. 10.81.

213 Ibid.

214 Tac. *Ann.* 13.28, quoted by Boesche (1996) 91.

215 The *lex maiestatis* or *crimen maiestatis* was a crime of lèse-majesté or treason.

216 Boesche (1996) 93.

217 Ibid.

the atmosphere of mutual suspicion, the terror of the violence led to the psychological isolation that was chipping away at the Republic^{218;219}.

5. The denouncing of tyranny

Socrates' thesis in Plato's *Górgias* dialogue is that it is better to undergo injustice than to perpetrate it. Socrates does not say he wants to undergo injustice. Injustices are undergone through necessity and, therefore, inevitably. His second thesis is this: if someone is unjust they must render justice, that is, they must pay for what they have done and not remain unpunished. The logic of normality has its own interpretation of these things even if in the form of a primary reaction. If it is not me, it is another who does them; I am not the only one and doing them is better than them doing it. On the other hand, it seems more advantageous, even when one recognizes that it went wrong, to not pay for what one did and go on happily with one's life as if nothing happened. Defense gives rise to accusations. The defense of oneself gives rise to accusations of oneself, which appears to Callicles as a world turned inside out. Tacitus knows this dialogue of Plato's when he talks about Tiberius' disposition at the end of his life. Tacitus makes Tiberius talk in direct speech:

"The beginning of the emperor's letter seemed very striking. It opened thus: "May all the gods and goddesses destroy me more miserably than I feel myself to be daily perishing if I know at this moment what to write to you, Senators, how to write it, or what, in short, not to write". So completely had his crimes and infamies recoiled, as a penalty, on himself. With profound meaning was it often affirmed by the greatest teacher of philosophy that, could the minds of tyrants be laid bare, there would be seen gashes and wounds; for, as the body is lacerated by scourging, so is the spirit by brutality, by lust and by evil thoughts.

218 Ibid. 95.

219 It is in this framework of generalized high-handedness that the moralist Tacitus condemns the immorality and barbarity of his time. To make an incomplete list, we can read Tacitus mentioning: "debauchery, slavish obedience, orgies, subservience, homosexual improprieties, cruelty, gluttony, rape and loss of respect for family ties. Boesche (1996) 98 quotes, in no. 51: Tac. *Ann.* 2.33, 1.2, 4.67, 3.65, 5.3, 3.52.

*Assuredly Tiberius was not saved by his elevation or his solitude from having to confess the anguish of his heart and his self-inflicted punishment*²²⁰.

The anatomy of a tyrant is the anatomy of tyranny. Both tyranny and injustice need to be denounced. Tacitus' *Annals* are at the same time a denunciation of a tyrant's psychology from both the sociological point of view and that of the social ontology of a state under tyranny. The logic is that of denunciations, accusations and informing placed at the service of truth and freedom. Truth is the only condition of possibility for freedom²²¹. When Tacitus reflects about his task as a historian, he invokes the period about which he is writing. He makes a set of observations about the substance of the facts he invokes. He compares his work to that of the ancient historiographers. Different periods require different analyses. They require different perceptions, perhaps different historians too. In book 4.32 of the *Annals* we read:

*“Much of what I have related and shall have to relate, may perhaps, I am aware, seem petty trifles to record. [...] Still, it will not be useless to study those, at first sight, trifling events out of which the movements of vast changes often take their rise”*²²².

Tacitus' idea of history is at the service of action. It is not a literary style. There is an awareness (*non nescius sum*) of the apparently limited importance of the Senate's decisions, at least at first sight (*primo aspectu*). But the apparently

220 “*Insigne visum est earum Caesaris litterarum initium; nam his verbis exorsus est: 'quid scribam vobis, patres conscripti, aut quo modo scribam aut quid omnino non scribam hoc tempore, di me deaque peius perdant quam perire me cotidie sentio, si scio.'* adeo facinora atque flagitia sua ipsi quoque in supplicium verterant. Neque frustra praestantissimus sapientiae firmare solitus est, si recludantur tyrannorum mentes, posse aspici laniatus et ictus, quando ut corpora verberibus, ita saevitia, libidine, malis consultis animus dilaceretur. quippe Tiberium non fortuna, non solitudines protegebant quin tormenta pectoris suasque ipse poenas fateretur” Tac. *Ann.* 6.6. The passage of *Gorgias* that Tacitus has in mind is 524e.

221 Cf. NT, Jo. 8.2.: “Truth has to free you”.

222“*Pleraque eorum quae rettuli quaeque referam parva forsitan et levia memoratu videri non nescius sum. [...] non tamen sine usu fuerit introspicere illa primo aspectu levia ex quibus magnarum saepe rerum motus oriuntur*”. The interim text is: “*sed nemo annalis nostros cum scriptura eorum contenderit qui veteres populi Romani res composuere. ingentia illi bella, expugnationes urbium, fusos captosque reges, aut si quando ad interna praeverterent, discordias consulum adversum tribunos, agrarias frumentariasque leges, plebis et optimatum certamina libero egressu memorabant: nobis in arto et inglorius labor; immota quippe aut modice lacessita pax, maestae urbis res et princeps proferendi imperi incuriosus erat*” Tac. *Ann.* 4. 32.

limited importance of the recounted situations in Rome's internal life and foreign affairs is not without profit (*non sine uso*). They, at first sight, constitute the driving force giving rise to the great revolutionary movements (*ex quis magnarum saepe rerum motus oriuntur*). The formula can trigger the same feeling²²³ that Titus Livius had when writing his history of the foundation of the city: "moments of great importance often depend on the result of moments of little importance".

This feeling is vouched for in Aristotle's *Politics*: "Revolutions²²⁴ do not arise from situations of great importance but from situations with little importance". Tacitus contrasts the interest of history in usefulness for life with this, insofar as he tries to single out the seeds of revolution, the source from which change comes. Tacitus' idea of history is in contrast with that of the ancients. Perhaps even only because the Roman people's situation was different. Maybe because this very idea of history did not bear in mind its *usefulness* for one's own life and life in society, especially because the Roman people had not been subjected to the discretionary power of gangsters or exposed to unlimited oppression. History is the denunciation of injustice, oppression and the exercising of discretionary power over the population. The little things of daily life are neither separate nor anecdotal. They constitute the subject matter of days and the biographical content of societies and the women and men forming them. Rome's triumphal history derives from memory of the glorious period. It beguiles readers' spirits. The history Tacitus *narrates* derives from limited and inglorious work (*in arto inglorius et labor*). It is not an entertainment for refreshing (*redintegrare*) readers' spirits with the glorious past. It is the identifying of the seeds of revolution. Now, every revolution is a project, a shot in the future. It involves action. Reading and studying for taking action. Not for recreation.

In 4.33 Tacitus continues:

"All nations and cities are ruled by the people, the nobility, or by one man. A constitution, formed by selection out of these elements, is easy to commend but not to produce; or, if it is produced, it cannot be lasting. Formerly, when the people had power or when

223 Cf. Furneaux (1894) ad loc.

224 Cf.: Arist. *Pol.* 1303b17-30: "Γίγνονται μὲν οὖν αἱ στάσεις οὐ περὶ μικρῶν ἀλλ' ἐκ μικρῶν, στασιάζουσι δὲ περὶ μεγάλων." The *LSJ* translates *στάσις* with "faction, sedition, discord". But the verb *στασι-άζω* means *make revolution*. An explicit link with transformations and changes is found in 1307b24-25: "ὅθεν μὲν οὖν αἱ μεταβολαὶ γίνονται τῶν πολιτειῶν καὶ αἱ στάσεις." *Ibid.*

the patricians were in the ascendant, the popular temper and the methods of controlling it, had to be studied, and those who knew most accurately the spirit of the Senate and aristocracy had the credit of understanding the age and of being wise men. So now, after a revolution, when Rome is nothing but the realm of a single despot, there must be good in carefully noting and recording this period, for it is but few who have the foresight to distinguish right from wrong or what is sound from what is hurtful, while most men learn wisdom from the fortunes of others. Still, though this is instructive, it gives very little pleasure. Descriptions of countries, the various incidents of battles, glorious deaths of great generals, enchain and refresh a reader's mind. I have to present in succession the merciless biddings of a tyrant, incessant prosecutions, faithless friendships, the ruin of innocence, the same causes issuing in the same results, and I am everywhere confronted by a wearisome monotony in my subject matter. Then, again, an ancient historian has but few disparagers, and no one cares whether you praise more heartily the armies of Carthage or Rome. But of many who endured punishment or disgrace under Tiberius, the descendants yet survive; or even though the families themselves may be now extinct, you will find those who, from a resemblance of character, imagine that the evil deeds of others are a reproach to themselves. Again, even honor and virtue make enemies, condemning, as they do, their opposites by too close a contrast. But I return to my work”²²⁵.

225 “Nam cunctas nationes et urbes populus aut primores aut singuli regunt: delecta ex iis et consociata rei publicae forma laudari facilius quam evenire, vel si evenit, haud diuturna esse potest. igitur ut olim plebe valida, vel cum patres pollerent, noscenda vulgi natura et quibus modis temperanter haberetur, senatusque et optimatum ingenia qui maxime perdidicerant, callidi temporum et sapientes credebantur, sic converso statu neque alia re Romana quam si unus imperitet, haec conquiri tradique in rem fuerit, quia pauci prudentia honesta ab deterioribus, utilia ab noxiis discernunt, plures aliorum eventis docentur. ceterum ut profutura, ita minimum oblectationis adferunt. nam situs gentium, varietates proeliorum, clari ducum exitus retinent ac redintegrant legentium animum: nos saeva iussa, continuas accusationes, fallaces amicitias, perniciem innocentium et easdem exitii causas coniungimus, obvia rerum similitudine et satietate. tum quod antiquis scriptoribus rarus obtrectator, neque refert cuiusquam Punicas Romanasne acies laetius extuleris: at multorum qui Tiberio regente poenam vel infamias subiere posteris manent. utque familiae ipsae iam extinctae sint, reperies qui ob similitudinem morum aliena malefacta sibi obiectari putent. Etiam gloria ac virtus infensos habet, ut nimis ex propinquo diversa arguens. sed ad inceptum redeo” Tac. *Ann.* 4.33.

The movements underlying revolutionary transformation try to choose a type of state granting unity and harmony. But the best type of state, the best constitution can only exist in men's heads. It is difficult to find or invent, or put into practice. And, when it is found, it is not for very long. Says a realistic Tacitus. Both the ancient historians and political leaders thought a people's nature had to be understood (*noscenda uulgi natura*), and senators' and aristocrats' character traits had to be studied to perfection (*perdidicere*). Anyone understanding the nature of the masses could control them with moderation (*temperanter*). But the situation described by the *Annals* changed radically. The present situation has a sole man in power (*imperitare*). It is precisely about this situation, where an empire is under a sole man's power that it is important to seek seriously and investigate carefully (*conquiri*). Few have the ability to distinguish honesty from dishonesty, bad from good or the advantageous from the harmful. It is examining the destiny of the lives of the others who lived through terrible times that can teach us (*docere*). History is the biography at difficult times of individuals and legal entities. Its direction is the future. The goal of history is the transformation of reality, changing bad into good, the harmful into the useful, beneficial and advantageous. The destinies of the past lives of people who lived oppressed are not, nevertheless, pleasant (*minimum oblectationis*). What in truth ancient historians write about are situations that no longer matter. It does not matter if we would like the Carthaginians or Romans to have won the war.

What matters, however, is that there are survivors of tyranny, innocent victims of oppression. Tacitus writes for the survivors, for the descendants of those who suffered punishment and defamation at the hands of a tyrant like Tiberius. And even when entire families were wiped out and no descendant survived, Tacitus writes for anyone who feels in debt towards the destiny of those who suffered at the hands of a tyrant or of any one of its inventive ways of manifesting itself among humanity. Tacitus writes for anyone who pays attention to past lives and their destinies, as a form not of distraction or entertainment, but of accusation which makes it possible to take precautions and set up prophylactic measures so that the horror does not have the opportunity to rearise.

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V. Representing the polity, rethinking the polis

9. *The role of images in urban design thinking*

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A guideline: the image in urban design

This text discusses the city, and to discuss city, it talks about design. And, to talk about design, it narrates. And to narrate it makes use of images. These images build the narrative of the city. This narrative is always procedural. In this way, the images work as framers of the idea expressed in the design proposal – through the experience of the design’s narrative. This is the motto of this text: the role of images in the elaboration of thought about urban design.

We can think of urban design as a process put between enunciation and an answer. Something is demanded as the origin of a process and something else is formalized as a result of this demand. There we have a *not-yet* – a promise at the end of the process; and a *here-then* – the proper result, formalized and made visible.

In this procedural line, the images work as a constructor of the design’s reality. The enunciation produces the *first-image*. This image is still to become, a *not-yet*, expressed by a desire of resolution. Still vague, very incipient, it does not express itself with any formality. It is just the sketch of a mental image. This *first-image* functions as a tension point and as the capture of desire. We “stare” at this image. We stare like Narcissus, looking for sharpness. But we only have a cloudy image, not very clear. It is not possible to see its edges. It still appears to us as something blurred. And yet, we are looking at an image which presents itself as a goal. Something around it will gain form. We aim for it. We draw strategies to give form to this *first-image*, still very weak. We know we are still in the *not-yet*.

The *first-image* works as a point of desire. It is the one that will take form. So, it is “fair” that it will guide the design process. What does it mean to “guide” the process? It means to bring to it other images that will help us to visualize the design problem. This kind of survival strategy sustains itself in the search of similar images that reinforce with more clarity the outline of the *first-image*. It is like the *first-image* unceasingly duplicated to exhaustion. This is of the order of replication of equals. This is of the order of folding over itself.

Those images duplicate and fold over themselves, originating secondary images. These *second-images* are expressed as images that work giving modeling reference to the process. They “tell” us what to do. Tell where to go. In the architectural language, these are the “architectural references”. The *second-images* help to organize this path between the *not-yet*, given by the initial problem, and the *here-then*, organized by the architectural answer.

Urban design can be, at first, put this way: a process between a problem and an answer, presenting a view of the future guided into a temporal resolution process. This text is structured as a critical reflection on the role of the images in the *designing act* in the field of Architecture, more specifically, on the design of the city operated by images.

Urban design, therefore, most of the times, is conceived as a resolute act: in the face of an identified problem, procedures are organized in order to “solve” the initial question through a “concrete” answer which is expressed by the design. The design craves for solving. And, in this crave, it takes shortcuts. It searches for resources that allow building shortcuts and short answers. In this way, *second-images* work very well. They “organize” and delineate a thought about the design problem. This sort of organization occurs as to look for a common idea, a consensus. Then, in this process of producing an efficient answer to the problem, at first badly defined, the design starts to close itself to any possibility of divergence. These *second-images*, named “architectural references”, lead to the existence of a consensus, eliminating any dissensus.

The thesis here defended is that the images, normally enunciated as “architectural references”, cannot be taken as emblematic and representative of an architectural making which would induce to the stability of common sense, because that would exclude any difference. It is intended, in this text, to reflect critically about this notion of a city thought from an assemblage of consensual images, softening the differences. More particularly, it is intended to produce a displacement on a type of designing thought. That is to organize appeasing socio-spatial conflicts through images, given that, the urban reality is seen here as a complexity that expresses infinite interests, producing a field of dissensual and conflicting perspectives. In this way, here, we criticize a design posture that sees in similar images to induce consensus.

This text, then, seeks to reflect on the role of images not as synthesis and appeasement of differences, but as a producer of critical and political thought. The intention here is to think through multiple types of images that can only be guided from a dialectical perspective. So, we do not talk about *image*, but *images*, in the plural – dissimilar images that speak beyond themselves, in their *between-images*. It is exactly in the confrontation of different images

that the meaning may open itself, but never in synthesis, always as a symptom, as preferred by Didi-Huberman. And still, it is from a certain sense of aesthetics, as proposes Rancière, where the political sense emerges as the production of critical thinking. This notion is inserted in what Rancière announces as “sensitive sharing”.

For Rancière, politics is aesthetics due to the fact that it presents itself as a “mode of sensitive determination”, defining a division of spaces [real or symbolic] and producing ways of doing, of making people see and think. The way I do it; the way I do it in a certain way constitutes me, and that which I do and constitutes me is capable of being an expression of myself to be shared. In Rancière’s perspective, the polemical ways in sensitive sharing are directly related to its notion as a political act. The political order is in what escapes from pre-established identity order, places, and functions. That is the power of what comes to deconfigure what was established.

In this way, aesthetics have always been political and the *make-design* is also a political act. It is exactly in the sphere of aesthetics that we place the design act as a political making from its first sketches. Therefore, aesthetics is the production of thought through its devices in order to produce an act of political consciousness about a situation in the world. Thus, it will form a vision of design as one construction of thought about a contemporary city that, at the same time, is aesthetical and political. Within this perspective, images can help disassemble a vision of consensus reality, working more for its destruction than for its integrity.

In Didi-Huberman’s understanding, what substitutes the synthesis is the symptom. Because, instead of closing the sense, solving the differences like the synthesis does, the symptom opens what seems perfect and consecrated to evidence the underlying and intentionally forgotten differences. What Didi-Huberman proposes with this recovery of Bataille’s notion of harmony, is “to make forms ill” in order to communicate the malaise that has been erased by the consensual design. This posture allows us to look at a design thought that is not satisfied by any synthesis and cannot be fixed in any resolute accommodation.

This wish for reflexive writing is supported on these two theoretical and critical notions: on the “symptomatic dialectic” notion of Georges Didi-Huberman and on the “sensitive sharing” notion of Jacques Rancière. The text is organized into four parts: (i) A discomfort: the image as a stable figure – this section presents the logic of urban design as a resolution of problems, and the way images are used in the structuring of that as a consensual act, producing stability; (ii) A provocation: the image as a lacerating act – this section presents the urban territory as an act and the images as producers of an open reading that contemplates the differences and dissensual thoughts; (iii) The desire: images as an assemblage process – this section presents

the making up of images sets to talk about territory; (iv) A resolution that does not close: a *not-image* – this closing section summarizes the role of images as political constructs within the process of the production space.

A discomfort: the image as a stable figure

Within this design approach as a process guided by resolution, all procedures are contaminated by the same logic, that is, the search for stability. Between a *not-yet* and a *here-then* given by the architectural answer, the process is being constructed with the support of solid foundations, or, at least, a glimpse of stability.

The very term *design* carries in itself stability if we take it as a process of designation, in the sense that Flusser gives to the word. For him, what *design* does is “to inform” the matter in the sense that the form is the matter’s how and the matter the form’s what. Like this, Flusser affirms, the “*design* is one of the methods to give form to the matter and to make it appear as it does, and not in another way” (2005, p. 33).

This role of designation gets even more relevant when we add Nigel Cross’ notion of *design*. Cross (2010) believes it is possible to read the world from a specific logic given by the *design*. This logic differs from science methods – those control procedures like the experiments are, as well as analysis and classification processes. It also differs from humanities with their analogical, metaphorical and analytical procedures. To this polarization between sciences and humanities, Cross adds a third point of view as relevant as the previous two: the *design perspective*. According to him, there would be a way to see the world given by specific procedures of the *design project*. These procedures are the modeling, pattern formation, and the synthesis process. Thus, it would be possible to say there is a way to see the world that is only possible through the *design* field of knowledge, therefore, the “*designerly ways of knowing*”.

The designer, then, experiments the world, modeling and building patterns on which he produces reasoning that direct a synthesis. This reflection, as a procedure of understanding the world, was named “reflection-on-action” by Schön. Every reflective act in the design process comes from meta-stable situations that the design is modeling about reality. In his vision, the designer “makes an image – a representation – of something to be brought to reality having or not been conceived at first in visual, spatial or plastic terms” (Schön, 2000, p. 43). This “making of an image” forms the matter, or rather, in-form the matter, as Flusser would say, in order to make new things come into being.

Both Cross and Schön share the same vision: despite the initial problem, here called a *not-yet*, being considered unstable and, therefore, not fixed, the process forwards to a precise resolution. Even knowing that this is a tortuous, erratic path, it is always in the direction of awareness based on resolute certainties. Finally, the process is presented open, but always seeking closure.

It seems to be evident that the process involves complexity, as it is open, but let us not forget it is captured by the synthesis. What does this caption mean? It means that the process is born open and too complex to let it be closed by the synthesis. At every possible synapse of logic, a detour is lost towards resolution. Here it comes the *second-images* – the architectural references.

Considering that the design process is constituted as an open, complex process, it quickly loses the *not-yet* for the *here-then*, and here it is supported by the images. The name itself already induces to a path of synthesis and reduction – the references. The references are presented as models to be followed. The order is “do it as such”.

As the design needs to offer an answer as quickly as possible, it makes use of the resource of references as a way to anticipate the solution. The problem here is the construction of a semantic field produced by the images set of the order of equals, as in image 1.

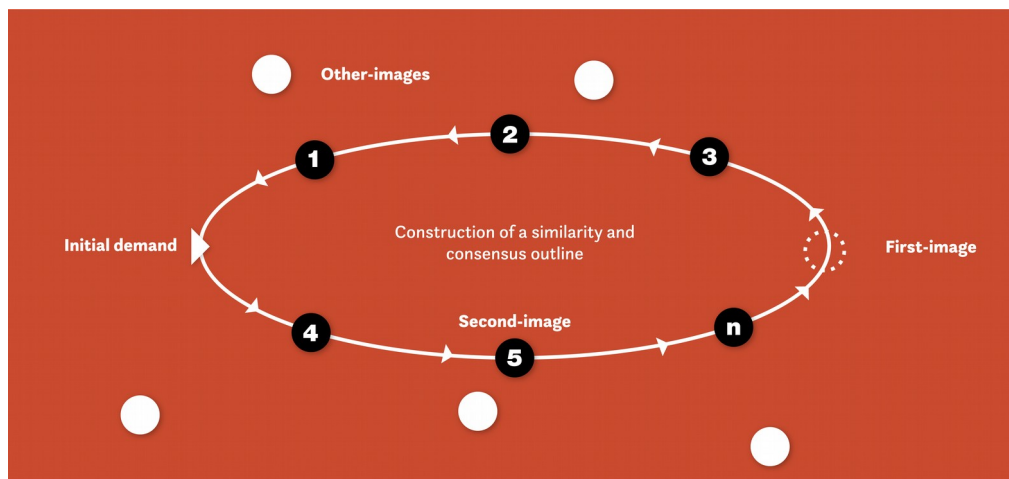


Image 1: consensual model. Source: author, 2018

All images work in the sense of “clarifying” the *not-yet*, but end up building a process of overlapping of the same as a sort of fold over itself, producing a referential image, from many similar images. Therefore, they end up producing a common image that induces consensus. The architectural references are chosen within a group of possible images.

However, the “chosen” are the ones which have already been consecrated as “successful cases” and can, therefore work as examples, maintaining the *status quo*. The images are taken as representative of a future to be achieved.

If this design logic can work for specific demands where the problem is well-defined and the levels of complexity are low, the same does not occur for complex situations. Let us see the case of urban design. The city is a collective construction produced by the difference, conflict, and dissensus in its base. There are countless interests in the city; hardly one solution would contemplate most of the population.

The procedure regarding the images [the architectural references] is in line with other principles that sustain a restrictive view of the design. Let us take some ideas accepted as “stable” in urban design processes in general, to guide a critique of this consensual view, reinforced by images. We can highlight some ideas: (i) a technical-scientific view of thinking based on efficiency and action through resolution; (ii) an operation of metaphorical language translated by the idea of organism and of certain functionalism; (iii) a belief in the existence of an essence of place expressed by terms such as *genius loci*, spirit of the place, strengths of the place, identity, vocation, character, etc.; (iv) the architect positioned as a “neutral” technical element, free of any ideological character; (v) lastly, a design operation through similar images – preserving the *status quo*.

As already announced, the technical-scientific view that points to an assertive design process works little in complex realities like the case of the cities, because it excludes quickly and easily all that does not correspond to the idea of “proper functioning” and urban “efficiency”. Sánchez recovers Marilena Chauí’s notion of a “competent speech” to affirm that “the competent speech operates through tools that promote a technical-material reading of the city problems” (2003, p. 139). This “competent speech” produces a sort of ideal city model that works within a globalized market logic, to install a world view that normalizes the city from “competitive city parameters, the company-city, merchandise-city, disregarding its socio-spatial complexity and the multiplicity of political projects in every urban territory” (Sánchez, 2003, p. 140). It is evident that what suits the market not necessarily suits the social set of the city.

We can add to this, the metaphorical language used in the city reading processes: organisms, urban arteries, urban tissue, city heart, vitality, diagnosis, urban surgery, etc. All these nomenclatures that appear to come out off medical books suggest that the city has a functionality *a priori* and if this operation is not going well, it is necessary to make a “good diagnosis” that will result in an intervention. The question is:

how to define “what” works? Who defines? The metaphor of “living being” imposes a city reading as a living organism that depends on an “organic” operation. However, this organicity is given, most times by the market and the capital logic. So, it articulates a speech that removes from the urban guide everything that does not interest the capital. Social problems that escape the economic order seem to not be an object of attention of this type of urban agenda.

Another aspect that comes to light is the strength of the place. Perhaps we could think that the urban *locus* would announce itself or let it be seen by its traits – a speech about the different historical time layers that build the history of the place throughout existence. This debate had relevance in the post-war period as a critical answer to the modern functionalist model of city understood as a *tabula rasa*. In this way, it has been built the notion of “*genius loci*” to oppose this modernist approach. The problem is: the *genius loci* notion does bring the debate to place and removes it from generality, from the *tabula rasa* idea, on the other hand, it allows to be taken by the one which announces the value of the place. In other words, every time the *genius loci* reading, of character, of vocation, whatever the strengths of the place are named, is done by a subject – a subject submitted to the demanding of the urban design, which most of the times is the strength of the capital. In this capital context, defining the strengths of the place is where the architect seems to be placed as a technical agent, therefore, free of ideological thinking. However, we must not forget that the design, after all, is a narrative about the city, and a way to see it. So, there is no neutral architect, supported by technique and free from a political position or sheltered by *genius loci*.

These ideas produce a city model guided by stability. This stability is expressed in the design process as an over-simplification of the urban problem. According to Sánchez “the normalization of cities, based on a world view turned to the global market, implies adapting it to the criteria and standards set out in this set, what means, at the same time and in an integrated way, production of space and production of sense” (2003, p. 555).

Among many possible entrances to this problem, of the city and its production processes, we choose here to cut out the dimension of the images in this stability context. From here we shift to a reading of images composing stability of the city’s design processes to produce discomfort, a slide of viewing. For this, we shall follow Didi-Huberman’s image theory from the reading of the images’ ripping in order to produce assemblage processes, disassemblage, and reassemblage.

A provocation: the image as a lacerating act

Let us return to the role of the images in the construction of thought about the urban design now to think about the image as a lacerating act. The idea of ripping the image appears in Didi-Huberman's text "Before the image". His intention is to propose a fissure crack in the "representation box" as a figurative figure [an image containing a sense to be later interpreted by a reader].

The ripping is constituted as an act of ruin of the representational object of stability that is the figure. Then, the image transmutes from "figurative" to "figurant". With that, it comes from the stability of the meaning and enters into a multiple meaning process. This ripping is the role of the symptom. For Didi-Huberman, "the symptom stops all the 'symbolic synthesis' and all the 'totalizing interpretation' (2015a, p. 208). And it is precisely the symptom that produces the image crack by opening the visible – presented before me as an image – instating a temporal dimension to the image.

The symptom produces a temporal space between what is visible and intelligible on the image on the plan of consciousness and the *still-unknown* on the plan of the unconsciousness and that is manifested as visible possibilities. This temporal process of the image is produced as an overdetermination between a conscious knowing and a not-knowing from the unconscious order. As in Didi-Huberman "The over determination *opens the time* of the symptom. It only gives access to the present in the element of a conflict or misconception, which in turn refers to other conflicts and misconceptions, past but persistent, mnemonic elements that come to deform the subject's present giving form to its symptom" (Didi-Huberman, 2015a, p. 232). In this sense, the synthesis is not constituted; on the contrary, we are facing a conflict, permanently reappearing.

The image does not completely show itself, perhaps only momentarily to be targeted by the ripping. "It will be necessary to admit before this perfectly *closed* form, and self-referential, that something else in it could in fact be *shut*" (Didi-Huberman, 1998, p. 118). It is a feeling that something is missing. Like we looked at something that is presented closed, but at the same time is reported as something incomplete. The incompleteness is manifested, as a promise of something yet to be discovered, revealed. As Didi-Huberman tells us, "it is a suspected latency, which contradicts once again the tautological security of *what you see is what you see*, contradicting the security of finding oneself before a "thing same" from which we could remake in thought the "same thing" (1998, p. 118).

This suspicion, this discomfort, this annoyance is what does not allow the image to be locked close in a meaning or symbolic synthesis, and would not make possible a totalizing interpretation. In this context, the image is not taken as a representational object, but as something that destroys any identity trait. So, more than conceiving the lacerated image as an object, Didi-Huberman places the image as an act, lacerating. Then, the image should be operated no longer as representation in the sense of a synthesis meaning. Quite the opposite, it must be seen as a potential opening, seeking relations beyond itself.

It is necessary to place the image in a state of strangeness. To find the image strange is to bet on multiple meanings that may come from its opening. So, it is necessary to break with the image. The breaking of the image is the symptom. And this symptom idea imposes on the ripping process a “not-knowing”. That means, it is necessary to come across the symptom as if we were facing an enigma – something to be decoded, and at the same time, there is nothing to be done. The symptom would be, in these conditions, to accept a “not-knowing”, moving the position of a subject that knows, Didi-Huberman tells us.

To provoke the symptom is not necessarily to find in the image a hint that something is out of place, but in fact *to produce* the symptom. To provoke the symptom is almost a “belief” act. It is necessary to believe that not all is given to my view when I look at an image. But that there is something out of my field of vision. Here some space is opened – space that carries time in itself. In other words, the symptom is a temporal action. It opens the image in two: the image before me visible and readable, on the conscious plan; and another image derived from the one presented to me as an unconscious trait that is shown in its visuality.

“To show that it is shown, that is not lying about the epistemic statute of representation: it is to make from the image a matter of knowledge not of illusion”, Didi-Huberman tells us (2017, p. 62). Following his reasoning, to search for distance would be a way to “show showing that it is shown”, to produce discomfort in what is being shown. Here is presented the dialectic image, that is, a double to strange itself. “In this sense, to distance is to show, that is, to break up the evidences to better unite, visually and temporarily, the differences. It is in the detachment that simplicity and unity of things become distant, while their complexity and their dissociated nature move to the first plan” (Didi-Huberman, 2017, p. 62).

There is, in this process, an overdetermination of the unconscious in the conscious. Therefore, the symptom is here understood as “the return of the singular on the regular, the ripped tissue, the rupture of balance and the new balance, the never seen balance, that will soon break up. What it tells us is not translated, but interpreted, interpreted to no end.

It puts us before its visual power as before the emergence of process of even figurability” (Didi-Huberman, 2015a, p. 212). Didi-Huberman draws attention to the fact that “figurability” does not mean “to produce or to invent pictures, but in modifying pictures, and therefore in effecting the insistent work of a deconfiguration of the visible [...] – what puts us once again before the images as before the disturbing power to over determinate, to be constantly strange” (2015a, p. 270).

This sort of dialectical process produced by images seeks to produce the symptom at the same time that it will not let it close, in order to visualize the conflict points. These conflicts are presented less to immobilize the process and more to increase its complexity so that a possible acceptance of the differences already in the design process may occur. “The *designation* that is on the foundation of the design process and expressed by the word *design* should be relativized and open. There is not a plan to be incorporated, but to be shared since the start as a sewing or a gap process” (Reyes, 2016, p. 96).

It is necessary then to produce new directions in this design process so that another type of thought can be supported by differences. Let us think of a new foundation with the help of Deleuze and Guattari: (i) the territory is an act and not a physical limitation; (ii) the territory is a process of machinic assemblages of desire and of collective enunciation assemblages that produce the difference; (iii) the territory is not an organism, but a *body-without-organs*; (iv) the territory is a dissensual space in conflict and composed of different narratives; (v) design process is a political act and the architect is a political being; (vi) design operates on an aesthetical territory that is political in its base; (vii) the operation through images is only possible if we take them as dialectical images in ripping processes, and they should be put in confrontation so that the symptom is produced.

To place the territory as an act, not as a physical limitation, means to look at it as something dynamic that is a result of disputes on the political field. That is, we are facing territory as an action – territory-verb, flow. And this flow is a result of the assemblage process of different bodies and desires to produce enunciations in the field of expression. The opportunity to see the territory in this way is only possible if we consider the urban territory as a dissensual field of dispute. Therefore, design can only be effective if it builds up procedures that acknowledge the conflict as a producer of urban expression, which is always political.

The politician, in Rancière, is the way the occupations are divided. For him, it is a certain division of occupations that is given on the sensitive plan which is manifested as relations among “the ways to *do*, the ways to *be* and the ways to *say*;

between division of bodies, according to their assignments and purposes, and the circulation of sense; between the order of the visible and the speakable” (Rancière, 2017, p. 08). This way, aesthetics have always been political. Precisely, in the ways the subject shares or separates on the sensitive plan, is presented the politician tied to the aesthetic. Thus, it is through the assemblage of processes that the politician is installed on the sensitive order of the urban sphere.

To think of the city as being this disputed space is to think of it out of the organism notion. It is to think of it as a *body-without-organs* – as a body that results from the multiple desires of different bodies that become effective as an assembled body. Inverting this logic, the idea of functionality and efficiency is removed from the city discourse, and a notion of arrangement and composition is inserted to it as a collective and always political act. This construction is made up of different narratives that end up weaving an urban plot not to produce identities, but above all to acknowledge the differences that occur on the sensitive field as political expression.

So, if it is possible to understand the city as a space of dispute and dissensus, it is fundamental to realign the procedures so that they have the conditions to operate this dissensus. The images have a significant role in this context. But here we think of the images no longer as a representation of a figurative object, but as images on ripping processes from dialectical understanding processes.

To break with the image is to seek its relation with other images, in the attempt to produce new senses, not only consensual but also dissensual, contradictory. When images are taken as an open contradictory set, the consensus has no chance of existing. The images must no longer produce consensus but above all discomfort. The bet on the images discomfort is a bet on the emergence of differences and contradictions, allowing new and less hegemonic senses to arise.

It is then, necessary to produce discomfort in this construction of urban thought overly marked by consensus and, therefore, excluding of differences. The idea here is to open, to find the cracks, to find the rests that can only come from a shock among distinct images and not by similar ones. To design in this way is to walk towards a distance which is not charmed by the image in its direct visibility, but which finds in it a symptom, as Didi-Huberman would say, to produce new visualities. It is necessary, above all, to break with the closed consensus circle, the eternal same, to allow that new images so often contradictory to produce new narratives. Let us try, then, a new way to look, no longer that look which seeks for similar references to reinforce the *status quo*, but other images

that can bring us discomfort. Let us rethink then, the reference “model” looking for new dissensual narratives, according to image 2.

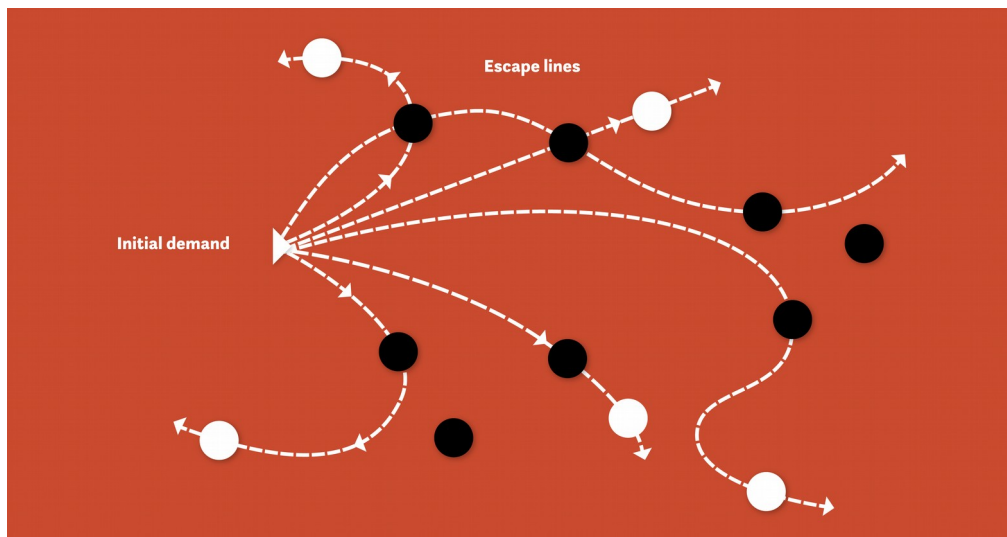


Image 2: Nonconsensual model. Source: author, 2018

These escape lines, which produce a process of deterritorialization, in the sense given by Deleuze and Guattari, can destroy the sense of identity and the sense of same, produced by the *second-images*. To analyze the territory on a nomadic route allows denaturing the process of using architectural references in the urban design process.

Let us think, then, these images no longer as units, but in groups, in sets. We continue to think of another way of looking at the architectural references less as a figure and more as an act that will produce sense out of them. Outwards, it means that the sense is always being built in the space in between images. So, let us turn to a transgression of the unitary forms in search of dialogue in the set of image.

The desire: images as an assemblage process

We are immersed in an all-dialectical process. This process is made up by logic of image against image, an image thrown against another, which allows itself to be crushed in order to produce another sense. We are dealing with images that are not completely closed. So, the image is never understood as a unit, but always as a dialectical act. “*To dispose* things

would be a way to understand them *dialectically*. But the question arises as to what should be understood here by “dialectic”. The ancient Greek verb *dialegesthai* means to controvert, to induce a difference (*dia*) onto speech (*lógos*)” (Didi-Huberman, 2017, p. 84).

Didi-Huberman draws a distinction between the notion of dialectic in Hegel and that used by himself in the assemblage. “There where the neo-Hegelian philosopher builds arguments in order to *pose the truth*, the assemblage artist fabricates heterogeneities in order to *dis-pose* the truth in an order which is not precisely an order of reasons, but one of “correspondences” or “elective affinities”, of “rippings” or “attractions”. It is a way to expose the truth disorganizing, ergo, complicating by implicating – and not explaining – things” (Didi-Huberman, 2017, p. 87).

We talk, then, about some kind of dialectical images – images that, by combining, disorganize each other. The dialectical image can be understood as that image which is capable of resetting itself on a game as a new picture, invented from the memory – the memory as an instance of losing and not of keeping. It is not presented to solve nor to synthesize, but above all to put into play a work of figurability, always playing with contradiction. It is, still, that image produced by a critical double distance: what is directly given to look as visible and readable and to what I am demanded to look at and is presented as a symptom producing new forms. This critical image carries on itself traces and remains of condensed history. It is always a work of memory not as retention of what is left, but above all, an act of confrontation between remains of what is left with what has been lost and is presented as emptiness.

Didi-Huberman affirms that the dialectical image always produces ambiguity, not an ambiguity of something that cannot be determined, but mostly as something that produces a shock. For him, “there is in fact a structure at work in the dialectical images, but it does not produce well-formed, stable or regular forms; it produces forms in formation, transformation, therefore effects of perpetual deformations” (1998, p. 171). The notion of a dialectical image can be understood as a process that occurs on the image while symptom, but it can also be understood as an act that agglutinates differences. It is like we have to extract the sense of an image in order to open it up to composition with another. This notion of a “sense to be removed” allows us to leave the image as representational identity and build new “*relations*” that is beyond the object-image. Here comes the notion of *transgression of the form*.”

“The form and the transgression owe one another the density of being”, Didi-Huberman says (2015b, p. 28). Therefore, the transgression can only be in relation to something instituted as a form – “it is necessary to say that not only the transgression is connected to the form or to the limit it transgresses, but also that the form may constitute less the object of transgression” (2015b, p. 28). With that, Didi-Huberman draws our attention to the fact that “the transgression is not the refusal, but the start of a close combat, a critical attack, in the very same place of what will end in such shock, transgressed” (2015, p. 28).

Then, he in no way affirms that “to transgress the forms” would be to abandon them. By posting the transgression on the debate of forms, Didi-Huberman introduces the term “*no-form*”. And by posting the term “no-form”, he reclaims an operation on the forms as being a work over them. Work this that would be an operation of agony, almost like to give birth process: “an opening, a laceration, a lacerating process which condemns to death and that, in this same negativity, invents something completely new, it gives birth, even if in the light of cruelty in action on forms and in the relation among forms – *a cruelty in the similarities*” (Didi-Huberman, 2015b, p. 29). For him, when forms “work” on each other it means they are being confronted one by one, in a mutually devouring process – forms against forms always in favor of a dialectical process of opening of meaning.

This no-form, on Didi-Huberman’s vision, is the ability forms have of always being deformed, crushed and delivered to dissimilarity with them, going from similar to dissimilar. The no-form is not only the crushing act but also above all, the implication of alterity. It is the opening to the other that the no-form proposes – this no-form ability “in which the form is agglutinated, at the moment when the dissimilar comes to touch, to mask, to invade the similar. And in which the form, thus undone, ends up by being incorporated to its reference form – to the form which it disfigures but it does not revoke –, to invade it monstrously by contact and by devouring” (Didi-Huberman, 2015b, 149).

It is important to highlight that the notion of no-form is not presented as a *without-form* but as a relation. In this sense, Didi-Huberman makes us believe that there are no terms to be qualified as if there were “no-form things”, but relations. Let us not forget, he reminds us, “the no-form is neither a simple denial of the form nor the absence of it” (Didi-Huberman, 2015b, p. 148). The image is, above all, dialectically denied.

Didi-Huberman proposes, then, that the images be operated on their deforming movement, towards this deformation, in order to produce a dialectic that is of the logic of the symptom, because by being assembled, images are visually displayed. That is “because each image only accidentally means that which is an image of (images are not “substantial signs”,

signs that mean substance). It is because a dialectic of image can only be a dialectic without synthesis” (Didi-Huberman, 2015b, p. 374).

So, we are assembling images. And to assemble images means to dispose them in a way to always leave space *between* them: space to think. The assemblage gained visibility with the Atlas Mnemosyne by Warburg. Aby Warburg [1866 – 1929], German art historian, constructed with his atlas a way to read images that parts with the sense of essence and of the closure of meaning, to be revealed by the reader. The images are organized on panels where the sense is not expressed on the image itself, but in the *relation* between them. Let us remember that the images on Warburg’s atlas can always be dislocated and recomposed with other images, always in a mobile process.

In Didi-Huberman’s reading of Warburg’s atlas, the assemblage works as a procedure that produces a cut. This cut does not allow for a reading of reality as something continuous. The cut allows not only the existence of the double in the image: the image presented and everything that escapes us but also as the opening between images. This “*between*” is the possibility of the existence of a net of relations, imposing an open reading to the observer, charged with different points of view. The sense is only produced interspersed in these constructed relations, so the assemblage lives off leaks and acts of distancing.

“The distancing creates intervals there where nothing but unity could be seen. [...] To distance is to demonstrate disassembling the relations between things displayed together grouped according to their differences. There is no distancing without assemblage work, which is the dialectic of disassembling and reassembling, decomposing and recomposing of everything. But, at the same time this knowledge by assemblage will be also known by discomfort” (Didi-Huberman, 2017, p. 64).

What is shown on the assemblages is not an image as a square to be appreciated as a closure of possible meanings; moreover, it is in displaying the differences, the conflicts and the confrontations that the assemblage gains relevance as new knowledge. With this, the atlas “form” shuffles both the science and the art logic, eliminating any sort of limit. The atlas blurs the borders, building interstitial areas of exploration and, by ignoring the axioms and certainties of both areas, it produces heuristic intervals, says Didi-Huberman. “It is a tool, not of the logical exhaustion of possibilities given, but of the inexhaustible opening to not yet given possibilities. Its principle, its engine, is nothing more than *imagination*” (Didi-Huberman, 2013, p. 13).

The atlas allows a comprehensive view, that is, it means that something is produced through the symptom as a nebula. As something that is presented quickly, both in its already seen and in “there is still something to be seen”. There is always a residue in the images. It is like we were always on Deleuze’s multiplicity $n-1$. Therefore, that which cannot be seen must be taken to the assemblages.

The assemblages work better than the iconic images in the design process because they open space for new interpretations. As previously seen, the architectural references reinforce excessively the unity of the image as a model to be followed. In the assemblages’ case, the unit is never possible. There is always a new meaning that is announced or something that cannot be captured.

A resolution that does not close: a *not-image*

The design project must be seen as the potential of something. It must keep this type of suspension of the act. So, let us not be seduced by Narcissus to the resolute act of the *here-then*. It is necessary to amplify the time of the process in order to include the not thought, to include what is still not presented as obvious. Let us position ourselves, then, on the *not-yet* to include other looks, other narratives. It is necessary to “remove” the design from its resolute anxiety to understand it as a thought. Let us think of it as a virtual being. The virtual is something presented as a potential, potential to upgrade. These virtual beings “are starts, sketches [...] the appearance of a range of new possibilities, dictated by some fragments only outlined” (Lapoujade, 2017, p. 37).

This notion of ways to exist that Lapoujade recovers from Souriau allows us to rethink the design exercise no longer as a resolution, but above all, as a production process of more complex thought. Souriau’s contribution by thinking the ways to exist with virtual insertion is the fact that all reality becomes unfinished, always in a process of incompleteness of things, Lapoujade tells us. “If everything becomes a sketch, it is necessary to deduce the imposed consequence: there are no more beings, there are only processes; or better, the only entities from now on will be *acts*, changes, transformations, metamorphoses that affect these beings and make them exist in another way” (Lapoujade, 2017, p. 61).

Here design recovers its nature: the one of being a sketch. This way, the design seen as a process, allows that other narratives come to compose the initial idea, not to confirm it, but to pierce all that tends to be impermeable. Perhaps we could “close” this text revisiting the text

“Bartleby, the scrivener: a story of Wall Street by Herman Melville to help us think the design in the *not-yet*. And as Bartleby, to be able to pronounce, “*I would prefer not*” to the resolution act.

Bartleby is an extremely competent scrivener in the accomplishment of his daily tasks, until one day at receiving the order to check a document, he utters, calmly, the following sentence: “*I would prefer not*”! And from then on, several disassemblage situations occur around him, with others, and fundamentally, with him. But we retain from this beautiful Melville story the meaning of “*I would prefer not*” to be able to transfer it to the urban design thought.

Bartleby’s apparent denial, by saying, “would prefer not”, does not place him as a non-accomplisher, but as someone who suspends all their competence to go back to a “maybe”. Agamben thinks like Bartleby as being “the extreme picture of nothing, from which proceeds all creation and, at the same time, the most relentless claim of this nothing as pure, absolute power” (2015, p. 26). It is like Bartleby could be, in this new way to exist, a blank page, a process to be.

“A being that can be and, at the same time, not be, is called, in first philosophy, contingent” (Agamben, 2015, p. 38). Let us, then, think, then, design on these foundations: the design as contingent. Design should be seen in its absolute contingent aspect. It can be and not be, in the same extent, without breaking with its structure, provided that it is considered beyond its resolute aspect. So, ripped, destroyed, dismantled and reassembled images contribute to this new, more inclusive view. “In its deeper intention, philosophy is, with effect, a firm claim of power, the construction of an experience of the possible as such. Not the thought, but the power of thinking; not the scripture, but the candid sheet is what philosophy does not want to forget” (Agamben, 2015, p. 20). Let us retake the design’s blank sheet, before any lines, before any designation given by an architect. Let us think of it as an open field of possibilities. And this field, in its way of being virtual, pointed not to the destination of the future-image result of the process, but to a shuffling of contradictory images announced as a path of possibilities.

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VI. The politics of senses

10. Politics of Perception: Imagination and Information, Reality and Artificiality

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Creating Perceptions

Human beings have, for quite some time, lived with certain perceptions about the way things are supposed to be. Perceptions about how to live, how to act, how and what to think, really any perception pertaining to living life in society. This isn't to say that these perceptions are all actually perceptions. Some things could very well be real. Love could be real, happiness could be real, and death is certainly very real. But even if we are to look at only these three examples, we can see that perceptions people have of their meaning will vary drastically across societies. Here I will be looking at 2 areas in relation to perceived realities, information, and artificiality.

Questioning the origin of these perceptions, Wolfgang Schirmacher asks,

“How do things stand with this perception (perceived realities)? Do we construct reality in our heads, is the brain the true creator of humanity and the world? The millennia-old argument between monists and dualists about the connections between matter and spirit, body and soul, consciousness and brain seems to have been settled conclusively by the progress made in brain research. From the brute fact that brain death determines the moment of death of a human being, scientifically as well as legally, one can infer that essence, spirit, and character are bestowed exclusively by the brain”²²⁶.

The tremendous power given to the human brain, along with the individualization of the construction of realities, brings to the forefront the question of where these perceptions are coming from. Certainly, the human brain is extremely powerful, and humans are able to think, communicate, create, imagine, design, and do many other impressive things. But, by questioning

226 Schirmacher, Wolfgang. *On the Inability to Recognize the Human Flaw. A Critique of Science's Conception of the Human*. P. 10.

the origin of perceived realities an attempt is made to not only find the sources of these realities but to also question how these realities are used to shape and control society.

A distinction must be made here between what can be called organic human thought, and perceptions that are instilled into human thinking. They are definitely quite different, but it can easily be seen how one can affect the other. At some point, however, it can be asked which of these came first, the thought or the perception. Because, even if the first thing was thought, after that, the perceptions that are acquired will influence the thought that is made. As these perceptions are created, it is almost possible to say that a portion of original thought is no longer original, but perceived. This doesn't mean that the inherent human trait of seeking reality no longer exists. Again, as Schirmacher points out,

“The pre-modern penchant for the ‘real,’ intensified in modernity to the extreme for the purpose of exploiting and exhausting nature, must in accordance with our responsibility to life be overcome and replaced with simulation in the sphere of artificiality. What we need for a human life is information alone, not as bytes, but in the strict sense of knowledge that affects us. It is from this vital information (all other information belongs to the category of environmental pollution) that our life world is built, and made depictable in the computer as well”²²⁷.

The line between reality and perception has become almost imaginary, making it difficult for humans to position themselves correctly in everyday living. The search for what is real doesn't necessarily cease to exist, in fact, it is almost the opposite. Rather the idea that ‘what we need for a human life is information alone’, gives society the *perception* that it is possible to seek out the knowledge, truth, or reality. This information can be seen as anything created by humans, from the most meaningless gadgets to the most complex computer device, and it has been made nearly transparent with the progression to the post-digital age. This transparency, while possible for all of society, is very well restricted to very few power holders. This limits the access to this information, which, by way of controlling the access, allows the power holders to shape the perceptions, or beliefs about behavior, of society. It could be argued that complete access to this information would eliminate perceptions altogether.

227 Schirmacher, Wolfgang. *Ethics and Artificiality*. Würzburg. 1991.

“To put it concretely: it should be mandated by law that all knowledge, whether acquired privately, by governments, or for economic purposes, should be deposited in the world database, so as to change constantly our depiction of the environment”²²⁸.

It is this space, the world database, that is at the center of modern-day control and serves as the facilitator of perceived realities. It is exactly this database, in the form of a series of supercomputers, making us, as Schirmacher says, ‘more depictable in the computer’. Even more so today, we are completely inside the supercomputer, but, most of the society has only partial access to this information. Schirmacher hints at this,

“Every person may retain the right to squander his or her time and means, and pursue inconsequential information or imagined pleasures. As we know, the very gods themselves struggled against stupidity. But no one has the right to encroach upon the rights of living creatures”²²⁹.

Unfortunately, if these rights of living creatures include the right to information, here in terms of access to the database, then the rights of living creatures, humans, have been encroached upon. These ‘rights’ however, are a perception in and of themselves. Part of what keeps society functioning is this so-called ‘fight’ for rights. Whether it be freedom of speech, the right to information, human rights, or any other supposed ‘right’, allowing a small amount of dissent or protests reinforces the belief that society is actually free, even if no change ever happens. What this shows us, on the other hand, is that there is this empty space between the seekers of information or protesters of rights and the holders of information or makers of the laws about rights. This is how humans begin to see themselves. Striving to bridge this gap and make it to the top. As Slavoj Zizek points out, “Our elementary sense of identity, is based on this gap between inside and outside”²³⁰.

228 Ibid., P. 11.

229 Ibid..

230 Zizek, Slavoj, Holdengraber, Paul. Surveillance and whistleblowers. International Authors’ Stage.

Det Kongelige Bibliotek. 19 May., 2014.

This gap between inside and outside, as inside is the access to information and outside is without, can also be seen as the space where these perceived realities exist. We have perceptions based on how we think we should act, inside, and how we think the outside world is supposed to be. What this does is put us squarely in the middle, at least in terms of our sense of identity, or perception. There is a great deal to be said about this space, what happens in this space, what technologies are used in this space, and how this space is no longer a physical space, but a virtual/orbital/artificial/eyed space, a space that is viewed by the masses through lenses, or media. Zizek continues, “Authenticity today tends to be staged, the only way to be authentic is to have a persona, and of course signal, I am not that”²³¹.

Even to be authentic in this way can still be seen as unauthentic. The persona we are supposed to have will be based upon what Zizek described above as the gap. This gap is, of course, a created gap. A gap where we are *given* a persona, making the possibility of authenticity in this sense very difficult. This gap isn’t something that cannot be seen. Rather this gap is portrayed in everything we see in society, making it very visible. Paul Virilio talks about this vision of the gap, saying,

“Screen against screen—the home computer *terminal* and the television *monitor* are squaring up to each other in a fight to dominate *the global perception market*, control of which will, in the near future, open up a new era both in aesthetics and in ethics”²³².

This ‘global perception market’ exists in the same space as the gap. They are one and the same. The computer terminal, television, or any other technological device is simply a communicator of information from this space. Through these actions, almost a cycle of information, an effort is made to keep this gap unreachable and unpassable.

“There is something else of great importance here: no information exists without dis-information. And now a new type of dis-information is raising its head, and it is totally different than voluntary censorship. It has to do with some kind of choking of the senses, a loss of control over reason of sorts. Here lies a new and major risk for humanity stemming from multimedia and computers”²³³.

231 Ibid..

232 Virilio, Paul. *The Information Bomb*. London: Verso, 2000. P. 112.

233 Virilio, Paul. *Speed and Information: Cyberspace Alarm!* CTHEORY. 27 Aug. 1995.

Precisely as Virilio says, this loss of senses misconstrues our perceptions about this gap. Talking about this as a space of deterrence, Baudrillard says, “This space of deterrence, articulated on the ideology of visibility, of transparency, of polyvalency, of consensus and contact, and sanctioned by the blackmail to security, is today, virtually, that of all social relations”²³⁴.

Rather than being an open space, or “world database”, accessible by all, this space has become a space of non-transparency and un-openness. A dialogue questioning this gap no longer exists. Communication is, instead, concentrated on the space outside the gap, where the majority of society exists.

“Rather than creating communication, it *exhausts itself in the act of staging communication*. Rather than producing meaning, it exhausts itself in the staging of meaning. A gigantic process of simulation that is very familiar”²³⁵.

The process of communication is crucial to the creation of the perceptions in this space. It is cyclical, in all aspects. It may not be possible to distinguish between the reality of humans first thought being original or influenced by some form of perception or perceived realities. The shifting in society to focus on this gap, this created, non-physical space, does not mean that we are no longer living in the ‘real’.

The ‘real’ here can also be seen as the virtual. It is the imagined space where the information is located. This is the ‘new history’. A history that is no longer a history, but a constant update of the present, possibly even a creator of the future. From a history that would tell about events, facts, and dates, to a history that was changing always, the facts and details become less important, as they can always be adjusted. If it were possible to see a picture of this gap, a snapshot of society could be seen. It wouldn’t be in the form of a picture, however, rather in the form of information. This information is stored in these ‘world databases’, or computers.

“Here the computer is no longer simply a device for consulting information sources, but an automatic vision machine, operating within the space of an entirely virtualized geographical reality”²³⁶.

234 Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulcra and Simulation*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press. 1994.

235 *Ibid.*, p.80.

236 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

Creating Artificiality

The question that continually arises is about what actually is real, and what is created, or artificial. On a very basic level, looking toward the natural or biological world generally leads to things that are considered real. Humans, plants, animals, and other things of so-called nature are possibly the most real form of things that exist in the world. But, it must also be noted, that these ‘natural’ things are very much created. This, of course, would be only in the pure state that it is possible to exist, without any of the worldly influences that undermine this sense of reality. Prior to all the technologies and inventions available to society, life was still possible, it was still a real experience.

“We experience ourselves as Homo generator and in thinking—intuitive, discursive, and active—we bring forth numerous worlds populated with their respective figures, we design the unexpectedly appropriate order that can be found with a retrospective glance toward chaos. This generating of worlds and unleashing the event in consciousness and thinking is, in accordance with its character, autopoietic, and autopoietic life-technologies are in and of themselves anthropomorphic, dedicated to the good life of the self and to nothing else”²³⁷.

The Homo generator referred to here tells us that humans, at least at one point, were capable of living this type of life. A life which is in a state of autopoiesis, being able to maintain and function on its own, without the necessity of new technology. It is at this stage of the development of society, and likely only at this stage, that humans can be described in this way. While humans are extremely intelligent and capable, it is also clear that the use of different methods and tools in the production of things is often done more efficiently by a created device. Because of this, it is possible to look at humans as being inefficient, which would inherently point to flaws that exist in human beings. These flaws, however, only come into existence because of the creation of artificial devices which coexist with society. These devices are supposed to make life better, and in many ways they do, but at the same time, they have led humans away from the non-artificial life that was once possible. As Schirmacher continues, this can be seen as leading us towards Homo compensator.

237 Schirmacher, Wolfgang. On the Inability to Recognize the Human Flaw. A Critique of Science’s Conception of the Human.

“Homo compensator sees itself as a being ‘not of nature,’ that with technology created a ‘second nature’ for itself and that secures its identity with cultural achievements. Homo compensator defines itself in dialectical differentiation from nature, always seeking a synthesis that unites nature and spirit”²³⁸.

The relationship between humans and nature no longer exists as a ‘natural’. Humans are separating themselves from natural, as the shift to artificial becomes more necessary for survival. The changing interaction between humans and nature clearly shows the manipulative aspect of human characteristics. Taking what nature gives isn’t enough, rather taking as much as possible has become the new way of survival. This ‘second nature’, as Schirmacher calls it, has taken away any differentiation that once existed between natural and artificial.

“Today’s people-breeders and post-humans may have moved beyond the old differentiation between humans and nature, operating as they do within a sphere of synthesis of the natural and the artificial, but if anything this has made the Homo compensator drive stronger”²³⁹.

This ‘Homo compensator drive’ has not only become stronger, but it has also become something that can be described as having become natural to humans. Societies are dominated with obsessions of progress and development, technological advances and economic growth. Humans identify these artificial actions as ‘natural’ for living a productive life.

In essence, humans, for better or worse, have been given the requirement of living a life as Homo generator. The failure to do this can be equated with not actually living. This is rather disturbing though, as the requirement would be that humans not only need to live an artificial life but also recognize this way of living as the best possible way. This isn’t only necessarily bad, many of these artificial aspects of living have greatly improved society. It has, however, created a human, artificial in its makeup, which can be seen as an artificial creator of things.

238 Ibid., P. 5.

239 Ibid..

“As Homo generator we generate worlds with materials whose “what” is given but whose “how” we must invent”²⁴⁰.

The possibility exists that society, as it functions today, lives in a way where both the ‘what’ and ‘how’ are given. New processes and technologies are being created constantly, but this ‘how’ is more and more being created by the machines and technologies that were created by humans. In many regards, a widening gap can be seen from humans to the creation of things. The process has become very automated, artificial, and in some cases independent. In a conversation with Wolfgang Schirmacher, Jean-Francois Lyotard touches on exactly this point.

“It is certainly possible to describe the human being as an artifact, for everything in the world is manufactured, and therefore artificial”²⁴¹.

The artifact of a human being can only be referring to previous ways of living and thoughts about human life. Humans can be seen as having passed through great transformations, and with each transformation, we can see some aspect of humans becoming extinct, reduced to an artifact. This has been the evolution of humans. If, we refer back to the human as a Homo generator, then yes, this is something that may be only an artifact. More so, however, the possibility is that living life as a Homo generator may have never existed in practice. Homo compensator is an understanding about the way the world is supposed to work, a perceived reality about what a human is supposed to be.

This Homo compensator model has cemented itself as the foundation of society. Humans, however, often times see themselves on the outside looking in. The space where the Homo compensator model is the strongest is the space society cannot access. The space of control, data, information, and the internet. This is the space where the Homo generator now exists as a computer, or machine, that creates things. Not only physical things are created, but creations about realities and artificialities happen in this space. For humans, we can say that the state of living is now one of artificial life. Yes, a certain biological, and therefore natural, aspect does exist. But, with even this becoming unrecognizable, or unimportant, humans have come to embrace this artificiality.

240 Schirmacher, Wolfgang. *Homo Generator in Artificial Life: From a Conversation with Jean-Francois Lyotard*. Canada: EGS Press. 2005.

241 *Ibid.*, P. 88.

“No identity, positivity, interpretation, but also no measure, value, not even a meaning can determine how my artificial life is to succeed. For this How of success—although and even because it is overwhelmingly there and exudes fascination as endowment—remains empty when it is boldly snatched up, transforms itself for the one in need into something unpalatable and dupes the theoretician with the legerdemain of its negations”²⁴².

While this may be a purely selfish relationship to artificial life, solely looking for personal gain, it reflects the actions of a human behaving in the way that is expected of him. By attempting to maximize personal gain, the human is acting according to the perceived realities that have been bestowed upon him, which shows the success of this process of manipulation. In fact, much of society has been taken out of the realm of creator or producer, and placed in the role of generated or produced. Humans have been categorized and filed as sets of information that is artificial in nature. Humans themselves contribute to this creation through the capitulation to the artificially created way of life that has been laid out before them. Obviously, as technology gets better and better, and maybe more important, *faster*, the ability to create this artificiality only increases. Humans seem to long have accepted this fate, not only the fate of existing in a state of artificial life but also one centered around perceptions, perceptions of being, thinking and living.

242 Ibid., P. 15.

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11. *Digital images, what's the matter?*

Automation, calculation, artificial intelligence, technologies of (hyper)control

Colette Tron, Independent Researcher

Introduction

I would like to propose a contribution to a critique of digital images, from their conception and production to their diffusion and use. What is the purpose of these images, considering the environment in which they exist: is it technological, social, economical? What politics support their aesthetics, if, indeed, automation, artificial intelligence, big data, and intensive computing still allow a sensible dimension?

To this end, we will look to the history of art and to philosophy for some possibilities of thinking and interpreting the role played by technics in the conception of images of this kind. And we will look to some artists and their work in terms of the aesthetic and political positions they adopt, and in relation to the historical and social context in which they take part in order to critique the making process of images.

How these artists trust or keep at a distance from the 'intelligence of the machine', to use Jean Epstein's formula?

The starting point of this analysis will be the *Kino-Eye Manifesto* (1923) by the Soviet filmmaker Dziga Vertov, in which he defends a cinema of truth, a realist cinema, where the camera becomes a "mechanical eye", more objective than human subjectivity. Vertov's context is obviously the project of the Soviet revolution and the invention of a new man it hoped to bring.

We will then examine the series of films by the German artist and critic Harun Farocki, called "Eye/Machine" (2000), leading to quite a different analysis of the relationship between eye and machine, with his concept of "operational images" serving a critique of total automation and, above all, of the project by which such technologies, in the service of industrial capitalism, become the operator of man, rather than the other way around.

The history of the apparatus associated with the visual organ that is eye has now reached a complete and unprecedented stage, with the development of digital technologies, where computing and calculation form and inform images. This is their reality and their truth. But which reality is involved with this truth, and is it that of the real world? And how, really, should we go about reintroducing the question of truth?

These cases would be related to the history and theory of images made by calculation, from the Renaissance to the virtual turn, and would involve the question of artificial intelligence, the intelligence of machines, compared to human perception and sensibility, amounting to a fundamental readjustment of the role of science and technology, and their end.

What we need is a practical and theoretical structure with which to think, and to lay the poetic foundations for, an art of making digital images, as an art of (hyper)control. To de-measure the world. This is a political project for a “non-inhuman world” (B. Stiegler).

*“I am kino-eye,
A mechanical eye.
I, a machine, show you the world as only I can see it”*

Dziga Vertov, Kino-Eye Manifesto

In his “Kino-Eye Manifesto” written in 1923, the filmmaker Dziga Vertov proposed a cinema of truth (Kino Pravda, cine-truth), a realistic cinema, objective – perhaps we could employ the term “objectivist”, borrowing it from the American poetic movement – through which the camera could show life in itself, everyday life and work, replacing the human point of view, its sensibility and subjectivity, with a “mechanical eye” bearing universal characteristics: *“Free of the limits of time and space, I put together any given points in the universe, no matter where I’ve recorded them. My path leads to the creation of a fresh perception of the world. I decipher in a new way a world unknown to you”*.

A new point of view on the world to serve the ends of revolution, and in order to create a new man, was the political objective of communism.

“We, wrote Vertov, that is the Kinoks, bring people into closer kinship with machines, we foster new people.

The new man, free of unwieldiness and clumsiness, will have the light, precise movements of machines, and he will be the gratifying subject of our films”.

Thus, “*Long life to life in itself!*”, cried the Manifesto, the camera expressing itself through Vertov, or replacing him: “*Long life to the kino-eye of the Revolution!*”.

Some decades after this history of cinema and “its revolutionary practice”, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the German filmmaker and critic Harun Farocki – a Marxist who had been a child during the Second World War, then grew up in the Cold War, witnessing and possibly involved in its coming to an end, conscious of the ideological and economic struggle that followed it, particularly after the fall of Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Eastern bloc that saw communism in Europe swept away (its specter having haunted it, according to Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifest*, whose first sentence was discussed by Jacques Derrida in *Specters of Marx*) –, so Farocki, with his “*Eye/Machine*” trilogy and with his concept of “operational images”, opened up a new question of the relationship between eye and machine: these new kinds of images no longer aim to show life and work, and have nothing to do with the work of revolution - unlike the project of cinematic truth of Vertov and the Soviet avant-gardes - but they are effective, in the sense of efficient, and also destructive. Farocki examined the relationship to the means of production with the means of destruction. His film series was born in reaction to the simulated images of the first Gulf war and showed how they were entering civil society and the economic world, finding applications for military operations or for automation processes in various domains of industry, and even in everyday life.

Machines, technology, don't they take control? And we could talk again about “societies of control” (Deleuze), or even of “hypercontrol” (Stiegler).

What is becoming the function of these images? What is the aim of technics?

The camera, this machine of vision, has become digital and “intelligent”, or “smart” – the term first appears with “smart weapons” – and decides and acts according to the dictates of a computer program and at an advanced stage of automation.

So, according to Farocki, images are no longer made by or for the human eye. Images with neither author nor spectator, they are merely technical operations or functions in a system of operations. They are (auto)generated, automatic and autonomous. They are no longer animated, put in motion by a spirit (*anima* in the Latin language means spirit), but are programmed and activated. The program and the “intelligence of the machine” (Epstein) record and treat the data of reality without the least human intervention. And they determine by themselves, as smart devices, what decisions to take and what actions to accomplish. That the machine undertakes such operations does not mean that they are related

to human faculties and abilities such as thought, reflection, or sensibility and sensation, or reason and knowledge. It means only that they are capable of recognition. “To recognize and to pursue”, or to control – this was what saddened Farocki: such are the aims and ends of these images.

The history of eye and its devices, and the history of cinema (as images in movement) and of its technological development, thus converge here through the digital (computer program, simulation, automation), where binary numbers and calculation are what form and inform images: these are what structure, program and give rise to images. Their truth? But in which relation to what truth of reality? This is what Farocki has tried to understand, to show, and in most of his films to critique and to do so via the history of the technologies of the image and their objectives.

Measures and images of the world

In Book I of his treatise *De pictura*, Leon Battista Alberti explained: “*To make clear my exposition in writing this brief commentary on painting, I will take first from the mathematicians those things with which my subject is concerned. [...] I beg you to consider me not as a mathematician but as a painter writing of these things. Mathematicians measure with their minds alone the forms of things separated from all matter. Since we wish the object to be seen, we will use a more sensate wisdom*”. When painters use their eyes, their organs, and senses of sight, to apprehend reality, and, with their ingenuity, mind, and instruments, to imitate it, reproduce it, represent it, interpret it, and even invent it or imagine it, meaning to put it into images. First into their mind, and afterward onto or into an artifact, where these, too, have a history, which is the history of art and technics.

For what knowledge, acknowledgment, perception, sensation, apprehension, comprehension of reality does each practice call, along with its technics?

A multitude of knowledges are required, particularly in the Renaissance and with the invention of perspectival drawing: arts and sciences support one another in the technical and aesthetic history of the relationship between eye and mind (or spirit), and with the mediation of instruments, which become the instruments of scientific knowledge.

According to Harun Farocki: “*The mathematician artists of the Renaissance*” are the pioneers of what will come to pass with digital technologies. He continues:

“Erwin Panofsky has written that we can interpret the conception of perspective both in terms of proportion and objectivity and in terms of chance and subjectivity”. About this visual order of the Renaissance, Farocki concluded: *“If we conceive an image as an instrument of measurement, we will be forced to lose touch with chance and the subject”.*

Objectivity and/or “objectality”: technics seems to embody, or to contain, a universal point of view. That was the wish, or the utopia, of which Vertov dreamed. The truth of the real. And in this way, Vertov seemed to trust in the machine. But for Farocki, this seems to have turned into distrust, in another age of the history of images and their technics, the age of their digital condition, which refers both to their materiality and their technological functioning. But this distrust is also a reflection of another historical and political context: the end of communism, the globalization of liberalism and the market economy, a market and marketing from which images cannot escape, especially since in this way they become one of the factors of production and productivity.

“To apprehend an image, wrote Farocki, as an instrument of measurement is to push it towards a mathematization, a calculability, and ultimately a ‘digitality’ of the Image world”. And in return, the instruments of measurement and calculation rationalize images, images of the world, and the world itself. Farocki has described the history of calculated images starting from the technics of photogrammetry: from their role in measurement and calculation, through to digital transcription applied to the devices of vision, from photography to virtual and computer-generated images, all these form a continuity in a history running from the invention of perspective, the modernity and beyond, through which the representation of the visible becomes the paradigm of its edification, where science and technology establish themselves as factors of objectivity, but also of truth.

This modeling, based on calculation, is valid up until the processes of digital simulation and automation, of increases in the capacity to store and treat data, of the development of artificial intelligence, and thus the feedback loops between the measurement of the world and its calculated representation all being to scramble reality itself, its existence, in a surfeit of simulation and simulacra, which Jean Baudrillard perceived as a loss of the referent and an evacuation of the real, becoming “the desert of the real itself”.

Yet, said Günther Anders, quoted by Farocki: *“Reality would have to begin”.*

For this, wouldn’t it be necessary to show of what this reality is composed, and how it is made?

To see or to measure

To see or to measure?

That is the question. And that was the problem introduced by Alberti.

In a commentary on Farocki's analysis of digital images, based on the technics of photogrammetry - invented by French engineers and developed by the German engineer Albrecht Meydenbauer (1834 – 1921) - the French philosopher Jacques Rancière wrote: *“an inhuman image that is only the effecting of a calculation and leads itself to inhumanity. It is here that the history of Meydenbauer gains its whole meaning, [...] the evil of images is the evil that subordinates them to the operation of mastery by excellence: the operation of measurement”*. And here is the shift, the overthrow in the order of things, and thus a revolution – but it is not one of a kind projected by Vertov –, because, Rancière continues: *“Meydenbauer doesn't see: he measures. And in this way his inventions announce a future where the images of the world will be numbers”*.

This sentence repeats Farocki's final observation in his film *“Images of the World and the Inscription of War”*. The military-industrial turn and its objectives, or ends, transform the project of a new man, discovering the world under a new eye, produced by the machine and specific to the apparatus, in a “process of the self-abolition of the human being”, according to Farocki, or of the “obsolescence of mankind”, according to Günther Anders, one of Farocki's references. The senses are obstructed, the mind is absent and the gestures are relegated. Man and his organs are inactive, unemployed. This autonomy of the machine perhaps tends towards complete automation, to a situation in which the system is closed and auto-produces itself. It is generative. Sui generis. As a technological autopoiesis.

We can perceive artificial intelligence as a paroxysm of this technical tendency.

And we may also perceive calculation as a technological paradigm, from the “measuring of the world” in the Renaissance to today's intensive and automatic computing.

Poietic

Tekhne, in its ancient Greek meaning, refers to making but also to production in a higher sense: this is art. “It is something poietic”, said Heidegger in his famous text “The Question Concerning Technology”, from 1953. It is also a kind of knowledge as an unveiling, an unconcealment. It creates “openness”.

About the means and ends of technics, he writes: “*We will, as we say, “get” technology “spiritually in hand”. We will master it. The will to mastery becomes all the more urgent the more technology threatens to slip from human control*”. Does the growth of the complexity of technology mean that it tends towards its own autonomy? Heidegger is questioning the implementation of technics and its causality as “what operates”. So, what is an “operational image”, and could we ask for Heidegger’s help in defining Farocki’s terms concerning the automation of the process of visibility? What activates the appearance, the unveiling, the unconcealment of an image? Could we not do so, given that technics is related to a “making appear”, according to Heidegger?

According to Heidegger, once again, every production, linked to technics, must be “an act to which we must answer”, which implies responsibility. To make come, to make appear, in a presence of the thing, of the object, of the production, that opens and reveals, “in the exactness of representation”. This exactitude becomes its truth.

Here is causality redefined, and the coming of “being there”, but which would vanish at the hands of modern technics. And let us save a place for spectrality (Derrida), or disappearance (Pérec). This is the “logic of haunting”, which led Jacques Derrida to conceive the term “hauntology”, beyond an “ontology or a thought of being”, absent, or coming back as a spirit, virtually, and of which the virtual and teletechnologies would be the production in the form of simulacra, without real opposition between presence and absence, “non-presence” wrote Derrida, “life and non-life”. But also “life and death of truth”.

According to the philosopher, these kinds of inscriptions would create a “spectrography”, and where it would be possible to invent a “spectropoetics” of new media and their technologies.

But let’s come back to Heidegger.

Making and unveiling are modes of production of technics, its truth. Well, Heidegger still worried about “modern technology”, which would be “based on modern science” and “motorized”. The human being itself is provoked by industrial technology born from this exact science. This human being no longer acts directly or fully on its milieu; for now, it is technics itself that is the operator. It is technics itself that transforms matter

for its exploitation. What Heidegger calls Gestell becomes the master and possessor of nature, undermining every anthropocentrism, and amounting to a form of rationalization.

Here, production needs to undertake many operations, through which technics is removed from poietics and from making, revealing the object by gathering the elements, matters, and parts, and transforming them, through a complex system that becomes a technology: the machine interferes, imposes its presence and its action, its operations, between man and production. “*Thus, according to Heidegger, modern technology is not a purely human act*”.

In a process, or a set of operations, which present themselves as the industrial production chain, or an assembly line – and this is also characteristic of the technics of cinema and its poetics – it becomes important to rethink the function of the technical dispositive (a dispositive, according to Foucault, being an organization that stands between knowledge and power), of the instruments, and of the causalities and above all the ends of technics; the relations of dependence and autonomy between man and technics; of tools with which to access knowledge; and of the modes of production of presence, appearance and disappearance, visibility and invisibility, of things and of being. The possibility or impossibility of their being-there, as a presence to the world. Or at least of its return. The aim is to rethink the formalizations, the ways of modeling reality, in relation to digital technologies that bring together data capture, algorithmic simulation, intensive computing, artificial intelligence, full automation and possibly autopoiesis, which could produce an abstract reality, where we can no longer understand who is the author or the controller, and maybe with no signification and no direction.

Hence concerning “what should be done”, to again cite Farocki: to (re)deploy the interactions between man and technics, science and art, towards a conception of co-responsibility in poietics. Towards a new art of making, producing “non-inhuman” forms of life (Stiegler). And, if possible, towards a poetic appearance of the truth: that was, according to Heidegger, the question concerning technics, the question concerning its essence, more than its aims, and the question of the meaning of the relation between art and technics. Art: as a domain both similar and different from technics (Heidegger).

“Such a realm is art, wrote Heidegger at the end of “The Question Concerning Technology”. But certainly only if reflection on art, for its part, does not shut its eyes to the constellation of truth after which we are questioning”.

Such questions should be asked anew if the aim is still to inhabit the world (Heidegger, Hölderlin), or to edify it (Arendt), and if, as Hölderlin wrote, discussed by Heidegger, “to poetically, man dwells on this earth”, and to access “the dimension”, which is to say the immeasurable measure, impossible to calculate, always to be evaluated by a poetic taking of measure, singular, neither generic nor systematic, not scientific, not “mere geo-metry”, and, “*by which only the human receives the measure suitable to the whole extent of his being.*”

“*Then, continues Heidegger, as Hölderlin says in his last poem – “the life of man” is a “dwelling life”*”.

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Translation realized with the collaboration of Daniel Ross.

BIO-ACADEMICS



Adriana Zaharijević is a senior research fellow at the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory at the University of Belgrade, and assistant professor of gender studies at the University of Novi Sad. She is the author of *Postajanje ženom* [*Becoming Woman*, 2010] and *Ko je pojedinac?* [*Who is an Individual? Genealogical Inquiry into the Idea of a Citizen*, 2014]. At the moment, she is writing a comprehensive introduction into political philosophy of Judith Butler.



António de Castro Caeiro is Auxiliary Professor of Philosophy at the New University of Lisbon. He has been a visiting scholar in the Albert-Ludwigs Universität Freiburg, U. of South Florida, Oxford and U. of São Paulo. He works on ancient and contemporary philosophy, phenomenology and classical philology. He has authored numerous articles and papers on Plato, Aristotle, Simplicius, Tacitus, Husserl, Heidegger, and Scheler. He has translated the Nicomachean Ethics, Rose's Fragments of the lost books of Aristotle and the Pythical Odes of Pindar into Portuguese. His most recent publications include: "Is There Any Theory of Value in Aristotle?" in: Aristotle and The Philosophy of Law: Theory, Practice and Justice, *Ius Gentium* (2013); and together with his colleague M. J. de Carvalho a collection of studies on Plato's Philebus: *Incursões no Filebo* (2012).



Emanuele Arielli is Associate Professor of Aesthetics at the IUAV University of Venice, Italy. MA in Philosophy in Milan, Italy; Ph.D. in 2002 at the Technische Universität in Berlin and Research Fellow of the Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung in 2004. His research topics include the cognitive and pragmatic aspects of visual communication, the dynamics of taste, the relationship between cognitive science and aesthetics. His latest publications, *The Aesthetics and Multimodality of Style* (with M. Siefkes, 2018), *Farsi Piacere*. (2016, in Italian).



Ervina Kotollosi Ph.D. candidate at the University Sorbonne Nouvelle Paris 3 working on the theater's uses of social media sites; member of *TMNLAB*, a research laboratory on theater and digital mediations, member of *Theater in Progress*, a research and creation association related to digital technologies. I'm also staying close to contemporary creation and writing reviews for theater news sites such as *La Galerie du Spectacle*. Some of my research interests are: the impact of new technologies and the transmedia storytelling practices in the theater.



Luca Siniscalco Graduated in Philosophy at the University of Milan (UNIMI), with an experience abroad at the Carl von Ossietzky Universität in Oldenburg (Germany), he collaborates with the Chair of Aesthetics (Milan), developing researches on various philosophical topics, with a particular interest in the intersections between Aesthetics, Symbolical studies, Hermeneutics and History of Religions. He is also ESE (European School of Economics) Milan lecturer of Study Skills, Creative Thinking and Research Methodology workshops. His articles have been published in many magazines, newspapers and academic journals.



Marianna Capasso is a Ph.D. candidate in “Human Rights and Global Politics: Legal, Philosophical and Economic Challenges” at Sant’Anna School of Advanced Studies (SSSUP), Pisa, Italy. She holds a BA and MA in Philosophy from the University of Pisa and a first-level and second-level diploma in Humanities from Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa. Her research interests mainly focus on political theory, History of Modern Philosophy, theories of justice, moral philosophy and ethics of robotics and artificial intelligence.



Sérgio Dias Branco is Assistant Professor of Film Studies at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Coimbra, where he coordinates the image and film studies in the art studies course and directs the MA in art studies.



Michael Mallory is an Assistant Professor at the University of Wollongong in Dubai, in the Department of Media and Communication. He received his MA from the European Graduate School with a thesis titled “Apparatuses of Control: An Inquiry into Control and Society.” He continued his studies and research at the European Graduate School and received his PhD for the dissertation titled “The Artificial Eye: Artificial Perceptions, Data, and Surveillance under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Schirmacher. His current research interests are focused on the interactions and relationship between society, technology, media and politics.



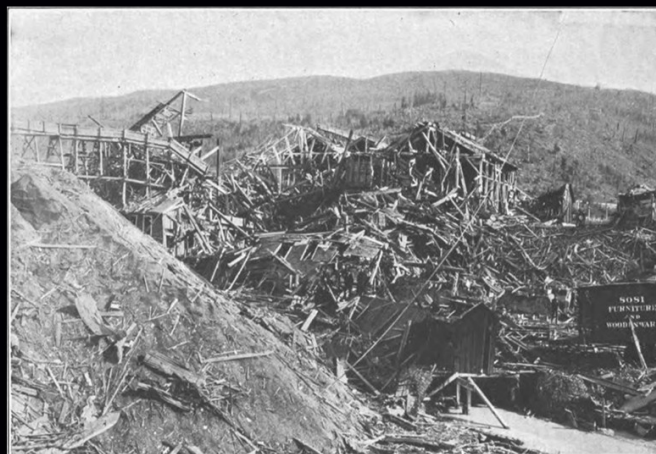
Natascia Mattucci is a professor of political philosophy at the University of Macerata (Italy), where she teaches philosophy of human rights, political philosophy and language and political communication. Research topics: public sphere, crisis of political representation, feminist philosophies and gender issues, philosophy of technology. Publications: She has written articles and books on the political thought of Kant, Tocqueville, Arendt, Anders, specifically on public sphere, political representation, racism, solidarity, effects of technology, political communication.



Paulo Reyes Architect. Specialist in Strategic Design. MA in Urban Planning. PhD in Communication Sciences. Professor at the Department of Urbanism of the Faculty of Architecture of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS); Professor and Researcher at the Post-Graduate Program in Urban and Regional Planning (PROPUR/UFRGS). Coordinator of the Research Group “The Contemporary City between Art and Philosophy”. Main research interest: urban planning from an aesthetic and political perspective.



Colette Tron Having an activity as a critic since twenty years, she is also working as a poet, using different media and languages, questioning their function by experiments and creations. By founding the association Alphetville (www.alphetville.org) in 2000, she has created a place of reflection around the relations between language and the media, technique and art, aesthetic and society, and tries to articulate the practice and theory in order to create a new critic and updated theoretical approaches related to digital transformations in the artistic production process, and by publishing the results of these researches. She has directed two books and published many papers.



POLITICS AND IMAGE

**Emanuele Arielli Natascia Mattucci Luca Siniscalco
Marianna Capasso Adriana Zaharijević Ervina Kotollosi
Sérgio Dias Branco António de Castro Caeiro Paulo Reyes
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