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Castrating Image

(Some "political" reflections with regard to the unknown *Temores*¹)

It was some decades ago when we surpassed that "no return" point in which mankind "decided" – without any chance now to reconsider or revise its consequences – that Technology, as a continuation or maximization of the rational thought, would run and manage our lives. We could mention the heideggerian fears about the expansion of a Technical reality in which every meditative reflection and every thought not determined by purely objective interests – economic benefit or calculating control on nature – were immediately obviated as "no productive"; as lacking, as a last resort, any interest. We could also recover, although with a very different historical perspective, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's different approximations to the problem of this *instrumental reason* whose main goal was to reveal the fallacy of the initial promise progress had planned: "mankind fulfilment". And, however, an analysis demarcating the said certainties, clearly unquestionable nowadays, would not have to assume a reactionary tone², but to understand that Technique, as a historically founded certainty, has to be questioned, revised and, whenever it is necessary, also subverted and attacked from attitudes coherent with contemporaneity itself³. We can assume with Nietzsche the negative character of the historical thought, but we cannot get rid of the agonies, discomforts or miseries of our reality; anxieties that can only be accessed by means of the resources and languages understood and comprehensive in our present time.

It is no less right, and Heidegger himself pointed it out in a text whose *compromise* solution turns out to be disconcerting⁴, to certify, as it has also been done in the last decades by Paul Virilio or Jean Baudrillard, that the telecommunication generated from an ubiquitous visuality – heir to the McLughian conception of "Global Village" – has reached the position any ontology would have reached in the past. We are living in the *speculation*

¹ Temores = fears (Note of the translator)

² We should not forget that the word "reactionary" has been stigmatised with a negative characteristic that should be, sometimes, reconsidered. The historical (and progressive) conscience of reality assumes that every social process comes from or ponders on an evolutionist linearity whose process of development cannot, neither must, ever be retained or reverted, something that, after the crumbling of the lineal regularity of the historical process and the loss of confiding in the progress project, cannot go on being simply assumed.

³ José Luis Brea has mentioned this necessity in one of the most correct books about this subject published in Spain. See: José Luis Brea: *Las auras frías*, Anagrama, Barcelona, 1991.

⁴ It turns out to be not very attractive Heidegger's solution about the relationship humankind has to establish with Technique in his text *Serenity*. Certain more coherent reflections, under my point of view, are established in some of the texts compiled in *Holzwege*. See: Martin Heidegger: *Serenidad*, Ediciones del Serbal, Barcelona, 2002.

era⁵, the time of the image as a specular reality that has been able to substitute, as Baudrillard pointed out, any valid notion of the real; the sight has been substituted with a double without a subject⁶, with a sham whose “objective” relation – or plurisubjective – with that aspect it referred in the past – the world as a “real” space of life – is unfounded. As he wrote referring to Borges in a classic text⁷, the map has substituted the territory; nowadays, as the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* also pointed out⁸, we observe and coordinate our ways of talking, walking, gesticulating or loving (*Inside.v01, Networking.v01*) according to codes previously established in those representation and communication spheres. Nowadays the personal experience is just a sub product of sham, of that aspect that, in a way, and as one of José Carlos Casado’s most interesting works (*Impotence*) emphasizes, always leaves us in a situation of libidinal expectation, always waiting for something to fill our longings, waiting for something that maybe once we called Life to be accessible as intensity. Maybe our real conviction, and here the kafkian precision about the ignorance of blame and punishment in our societies is still valid, is to keep the illusion of a desire we see systematically unsuccessful, an illusion that, although is not failed for us, is stressed by the most clear-headed artists, writers or philosophers as a political disaster, like the promise – the right of Liberty and of our existences’ plenitude - that is systematically broken or postponed for a future time. In this regard, a video installation such as *Impotence* not only emphasizes this erectile longing we never reach and refers to an existential satisfaction/feeling unattainable in the mediatic flux because the specular image delays it eternally⁹, but, recovering some Jean-Luc Godard’s cinema resources, like the actor in the panel on the right who is laughing in an inadequate moment of the sequence or who is looking at the camera out of the script’s demands, reveals that the mediatic sphere and the cinematographic representation are only fields for the *fictionalisation* of the world; territories in which, because of their own formalization – what is seen has nothing to do with what it really “is”¹⁰. However, we should not forget that this work, in which an intense anxiety is generated in the viewer by means of the different sounds and the heart throbs – recurrent in other works such as *El Huevo y la Gallina*¹¹ or *La Caja de Pandora (revisitada)*¹² – also mentions, through the succession of the images in the panel on the left (where we see the young guy who is struck by another one in the panel on the right, walking through the city carrying a box containing a bomb

⁵ The *speculation* referred to the specular of the image in our time must be connected with the common speculation in the contemporaneous economy, in which, as we know, it is the rise or fall of the stock-exchange (not necessarily coinciding with the real value of the companies) what determines the obtained profit or losses.

⁶ Not referring the subject mentioned before, obviously, to a strong idealist idea of itself that, nowadays, is inconceivable, but to a multiple subject, fragmented, untacked. But this does not assume this fragmentation – exactly postmodern – as the most “positive”. It is maybe necessary to think nowadays about the subject as a fragmentation that is trying to delimit itself; to generate unity spheres never accessed, but with a path in which we found its real “sense”.

⁷ Jean Baudrillard: “La precesión de los simulacros” in Brian Wallis (ed.): *Arte después de la modernidad. Nuevos planteamientos en torno a la representación*, Akal, Madrid, 2001.

⁸ Theodor W. Adorno y Max Horkheimer: *Dialéctica de la ilustración*, Trotta, Valladolid, 1998.

⁹ This constant longing for expectations fulfilment – unconscious -, as if something definitive was about to happen, is one of the characteristics that, although it has not been enough explained, reveals the addiction generated by the television programs. A libidinal aspect (*coitus interruptus*) that, sometimes, is strengthened to the limit, where the spectator is always expecting (maybe after the advertisements) something demolishing to happen.

¹⁰ We do not understand “is” as an ontological defence of a first substance that was cognoscible in the past and could have been camouflaged by the world of sham, but as José Carlos Casado and Harkaitz Cano do, as another unreality understood by every subject, in his approximation to the world, as real: “La caja de Pandora revisitada”, *Leonardo*, Vol. 33, Nº5, p. 381-385.

¹¹ *El Huevo y la Gallina* = The Egg and the Hen (Note of the translator)

¹² *La Caja de Pandora (revisitada)* = Pandora’s Box (revisited) (Note of the translator)

that seems to explode in his hands), the presence of Death and self-immolation. Casado has highlighted in some of his works and reflections this link between Eros and Thanatos – between Love as an erotic, pleasant and moving experience, and Death as an extreme reality of pain and suffering – a relationship that, in a way, it is also a revolutionary attitude against the annihilation of the existential feeling generated by the mass media and the Power. Carrying to extremes the experiences of pain and pleasure on the body maybe is, and not going into psychoanalytical studies, a way of granting – and sadomasochism has got to the extreme – real feeling of Freedom, corporality recovering and vitality when facing dissolution.

This ambiguous feeling of diffuse limits between pleasure and pain, subjection and freedom, power and subjugation, is clearly seen in a work like *El Huevo y la Gallina*, where two scenes projected in parallel videos cannot be determined by the viewer if they are the same or not but in different moments. A man sitting on a chair and with his eyes covered, is tied and untied by a woman dressed up in a military and sexually dominant way in a constant loop that impedes, once again, the possibility of rigorously establishing what is going on, if the woman is freeing or constraining the sitting man. In a way, this work, made with basic technologic devices – to give a sensation of cotidianity – again generates a geography different to the interpersonal relations; the most relevant characteristic is not who is enjoying or who is suffering (because the man is not offering resistance), but to understand that between both poles, it is only the representation what lets an “unified” approximation. Casado, when destabilizes this territory of the sight – by means of temporary sets (the loop), as well as the fixed framing or the image duplication in two screens – reveals the impossibility of taking a firm decision and, therefore, morally closed. As we know only too well, moral prejudices and representation prejudices of a society are always the basic criterions it is perpetuated on, different ways of enclosure of its own identity revealed by this artist’s work, not only with a comprehensive sense but profoundly critic. It is not surprising that almost with an ironic tone (present in a lot of his works) it is written on the floor of the *Temores* room this sentence: “...they are bad, we are good”; a sentence that not only talks about strong criterions of exclusion and categorization of the world, but also refers in an explicit way to the maniquean statements of the most aberrant and recent politics.

El Huevo y la Gallina, composed by this video as well as two photographs of the same action made with a high definition camera – able to reveal details the human look cannot access immediately -, does not only propose the reflection mentioned before about the body as a space for freeing against Power and as a territory for the exorcising of the limits that restrict our lives, but also a tight analysis about the way in which the contemporaneous visuality is a victim of values a priori that in fact are the formal structures of the mediatic configuration. When Casado contrasts the low quality video image with high definition photographs makes possible a comprehension that has its origin in the phenomenology of the look; to reveal the viewer that what we see is never an objective value, but just grades or ways of focusing on the world; comprehension and relation with the surrounding models, something that should be personalized by everyone if we want to be near the yearned independence. Thus, what this work emphasizes – and links it to an important part of the occidental artistic tradition – is also the look assessment as a territory to generate autonomy, reflections about a regulation of the visual in which the *end of millennium* societies support their power structures.

It is in the look, therefore, together with the articulation mode of the human relationship and its future development in the cybernetic era, where Casado locates some of his fundamental political worries. This artistic producer knows that a serious political discourse cannot be based nowadays on the signposting and demarcation of explicit

“injustices” or “tyrannies”; these realities – not a reason to be more acceptable – make evident, as Michael Foucault pointed out¹³, their own perversion in the way they are presented. What is worrying is to locate and to cartography the sinuous structure of Power, to point out the way it fluctuates, relocates and spreads itself to, this way, be able to subvert it in a constant way. The mentioned aim seems to get to the conclusion that, as it has been pointed out, in our post-industrial societies – where economy is based on the constant generating of desires and also on the always broken promise of a satisfied truth in a particular future object -, image, or look and vision, are definitive elements. It is basically in the way we look, look meaning location and fluctuation of signs – bringing it near the writing, painting, or any other intense linking process with the world – where our political or community relationship with reality is revealed. Thus, it would be a mistake to understand a work such as *Censura.v02*¹⁴ in a strictly explicit way; it does not pose a direct critic about the war in Afghanistan, something we could be induced to think after reading George Bush’s mentioned and written on the floor sentence, but is proposed as a reflection about how looking already is a political formalization. Casado underlines here the acritic assumption we usually accept a way of representing the events or the mediatic situations with by means of generating a distortion of the expectations. The assumed woman who takes the burka off while the frame of the photograph gets thicker generating a focalisation as a zoom on the masculine genitals, functions as an intensification of the deceit underlying the linking ways between significant and reality usually used in the mediatic fluxes and in our cognitive processes. In general we acritically accept that a bird daubed with oil during the Gulf War is the result of Saddam Hussein’s atrocities or that some children jumping happily in Palestine are celebrating the collapse of the Twin Towers (although the time difference makes this images to be impossible); the way we are connected with the world surrounding us is always *predisposed* to generate hurried associations that reveal our inability and laziness to make more precise analysis or to assume a more direct interrelation with the world. *Censura.v02* points out that every look predisposed to generate associations based on previous assumptions or experiences is a look inclined to the multiplication of mistakes, although it also assumes that the contrary is the permanent fluctuation of signs or, in simple terms, of craziness.

Every look is always a selective look and Casado knows that it is utopian – although art has always worked in this sphere of what it is unattainable and ideal – to try to reveal a project of absolute look. Although one day the networking was able to reach the moment when we will be able to be what we want to¹⁵ and, therefore, to have always access to all the looks, it would only drive us to the loss of ourselves. When one looks – although one is always a multiplicity – with other’s look it is only that person he or she is looking through, that is why any multiplicity affirmation of his perspectives it is no more than an unrealisable utopian. However, Casado has underlined this multiplication of the perspectives in a work, under my point of view, that is also one of his best series. The groups of drawings – taken from 3D computer images and made afterwards with pencil or felt-tip pen – *Puntosdevista.v01*¹⁶ represents three different terrorist attacks from diverse locations: a man blows another man up with a remote controlled bomb, a man kills another one by shooting him on the neck and a third one runs away throwing the gun he has fired another man with, who is lying on the floor beside a woman and a boy. What it is questioned in these drawings, apart from the legitimisation or not of violence as a protest political method – not appearing as the main subject – is the way every reality is always framed by a selective look. What these Casado’s drawings bring up is not that

¹³ Michel Foucault: “El sujeto y el poder”, in Brian Wallis (ed.): Op.cit.

¹⁴ *Censura* = Censure (Note of the translator).

¹⁵ See: José Carlos Casado y Harkaitz Cano: Op. cit.

¹⁶ *Puntosdevista* = pointsofview (Note of the translator).

every scene can be visualized from a different point of view – which is obvious – but every point of view, as Heidegger said remembering Nietzsche¹⁷, is always a way of cognitive, discursive, moral, political and aesthetic valuing of the world. Mankind always abides by valuing criterions or points of view from which they structure and organize into hierarchies their predilections or ways of action, something stressed by these works in a poetical tone. Every event is always structured by thoughts and feelings with regard to the vital and cognitive expectations of the affected subject; something very easy to take to the political sphere as an ideological location. This series of works is completed with the enlargement of the drawing with the man lying on the floor beside a woman and a boy presented as a luminous installation on the wall where all the characters remain static excepting the wounded man, whose red light silhouette slowly flickers following the rhythm of a breathing on the verge of death. It is obvious the tragicomic characteristic of this scene, where is shown the banalized way suffering is presented nowadays by mass media as well as in the sphere of advertising. This luminous installation, inheriting the characteristics of the ones created by Bruce Naumann in the sixties, points out that death has been commercialised nowadays, that terrorism and politics have become corrupted in their magnified exhibition, something they had to resort to if they wanted to go on being *competitive* in societies reinstating everything as a Show.

Therefore, nowadays we can say that the critical gesture and the subversive attitude are not only placed in a non-submissive action against the already existing rules in our “democracies” (something that Foucault and Chomsky already thought in their historical discussion in 1971), but in the constant aim of relocating the place we occupy in a geopolitical wooden framework aspiring to make us remain relatively static in determined spheres of reflection, movement, sexuality or thought. A really lucid look nowadays requires artists – and this is the way followed by José Carlos Casado – to reveal and to take to a critical point not only the world and its organization, but its own analysis; as if its own assertions, conclusions and looks were always subject to be revised, perspectives that, if they solidify, would be quickly located and socialized by Power. Related to it, *Devorarme otra vez*¹⁸, where photographs of big fishes eating smaller ones appear together with 3D images of a post-human character devouring himself, the constant reconfiguration is proposed almost as an allegory. It is true that this work refers us to a new future conception of the temporal (Cronos does not devour his children any more but himself), but acquires more interest because it refers to the anthropophagic memory as an assumption of the strength and values of the “other”. Casado points out in this work that in politics, although it is evident that the big fish is still eating the small one, it is also necessary to insist on swallowing oneself, to relocate our own points of view and conceptions of the world. At heart, this artist’s work, when revealing those realities that are supposed to be hidden (*Censura.v03*) for the perpetuation of the rules, and generating distortions in the mediatic representation to show how our lives are configured, what tries is to generate poetic spheres of instability of the acquired certainties. His attitude not only has a direct and critical sense, but the aim of subverting the structures of Power where it can be damaged, that’s it, in the strong incentive of the performance of Freedom itself.

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¹⁷ Martin Heidegger: “La frase de Nietzsche «Dios ha muerto»”, *Caminos de bosque*, Alianza, Madrid, 1998.

¹⁸ *Devorarme otra vez* = Devour myself again (Notes of the translator).