



Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Tower of Babel*, 1563

Unfolding, displaying images: writing.

Aurora Fernández Polanco

La perception elle même fût déjà une expérience de trace. Autrement dit que dans l'invention la plus sauvage, dans la parole auparavant la plus imprévisible, imprudente il y avait déjà le compte tenu d'une autre trace.

J. Derrida, in *France culture*, 28 December 1994.

For this era a kind of writing is appropriate: «it suffices to manipulate [...] (tricks, sleights of hand, intrigues) -to cut out, glue, and set going or parcel out, with hidden displacements and great tropic agility».

J. Derrida. *The post card. From Socrates to Freud and beyond*.

Everybody appears to share the view that images are completely at our disposal. We enlarge, reduce and edit them, convert them into GIFs; niceties and frills that far outstrip the techniques of high modernity, when montage was proclaimed to be a «weapon for the people» (Didi-Huberman, 2014). Now we increasingly tend to use them as an affective device, they resemble toy weapons. Just look at what we get up to with them on our mobile phones and on the social networks. All the grassroots chanting of the 15-M movement made us think that old images too (if their only reference is representation) were condemned to be washed away with the waters of the 20th century. And not just because of the fact that 99% of them are constructed by machines and for machines, collaborating, as it were, in post-human documentary, as Hito Steyerl puts it.

They might be made of plastic, but ultimately they're still weapons. There are poisoned ones too, because they are as powerful in their action (image act, runs one theory), as they are sinister in some of their linkages with the real. However, it doesn't make much sense any more to regard them as objects kept in an archive to be made available to humans, a store of representations of something earlier and original, because there is no archive without an outside and, besides, we no longer know where they begin or where we end. Image as a quasi-object, like Michel Serres' rugby ball (2008) which, on the playing field, he considers to be a tracker of relations (*traceur de relations*), an author of the social bond. Or perhaps it is not worth talking of subjects and objects, but rather of actors, or acters, hybridizations of humans and non-humans that create collectivities and situations.

Assuredly, Iván Gómez would agree. Which is why he can afford the luxury of championing an active exercise of writing, a proposition that would previously have been interpreted as «fantastical», but I reckon that in these times it has a propositive, performative force, it develops the finest quality of the imagination: it harnesses what is heterogeneous, the intimate invisible relations between things, it postulates worlds and makes them possible; it is the power of a talking-without-knowing that, when it is written (as Deleuze would say), in a reduced language, always proves beneficial; because not-knowing does not imply impudent ignorance, sham, or represent lack of preparation, of study or thought. Someone who, in images, says what he does not know is certainly not a scholarly person, or a specialist in the field; he is not disciplined, but bent on working with a visual not-knowing, a gay science that is merry and untimely since it messes with times and spaces. Writing that is in a process of constitution and proceeds in and through the surface of appearances. Nietzsche (2007) already said it, against Plato: he who improves style, improves thinking; and he went on to say: he who is unable to recognize this in the twinkling of an eye, will never comprehend it.

The visual essay

Between Adorno's *The essay as form* and Godard's «forms that think», there stretches a span that encompasses a whole Benjaminian tradition and it becomes strained in the «free» exercises that Susan Buck-Morss often conducts or in Didi-Huberman's insistence on an epistemic vindication of montage, when he gives the same treatment to Walter Benjamin, Aby Warburg, Eisenstein, Georges Bataille's Documents or Harun Farocki himself. Although Hito Steyerl (2011) put on the agenda the question whether this kind of essay (open, fragmentary, based on collage/montage) might today be the perfect model for post-Fordist subjectivity and, despite her trying to find a solution to the material conditions (today) of knowledge production, we know that she inherited from Farocki a taste for thinking with images and the modern tradition of articulation. Iván Gómez has worked as an editor with María Ruido, who also considers all these references that a very broad generation still shares (if that's not so, just look at María Cañas and her endearing admiration for Basilio Martín Patino). They have all visited dialectical montage through feminism. Understood in this way the cut is connected with the clapperboard in the cinema. It's a tradition that has also been added to by the semantics of the exhibition display where the actual frame, or border, is rated as an open possibility so that the interstice, the disjunction of seeing, can occur.

Text/fabric

The textual as textile was all the rage at all the funerals that Roland Barthes and disseminating post-structuralism organized for the author-genius figure and his all too faithful companion or, rather, child: the work. The textile metaphor was very useful for understanding the subject of the writing as one more thread in the weave of the fabric, a way of avoiding the legacy of dark romantic depths and releasing l'écriture from being a mere tool for the inner voice. Instead of exteriorizing what was already thought (beforehand), the text-fabric-patchwork worked as a perfect metaphor for claiming the surface as the best place of displacement of writing (itself).

In this French area, but in a shift of his own, the book by Iván Gómez inevitably leads me to Derrida, who directly ruptures the linearity of discourse to get to the woven strata (in what the text wants to say) and understand it without preconceptions as

interweaving between present and absent elements. Although exordium, 'the beginning of an oratory discourse', comes from 'ordior', which means 'begin a fabric', Derrida has shown the possibility of starting to weave and at the same time avoid an authoritarian discourse because it lacks origin and foundation, for not only is the actual word in itself writing, but the intertwining of what is woven (the text) is such that the fabric of the warp cannot be discerned: «beyond the philosophical text there is not a blank, virgin, empty margin, but another text, a weave of differences of forces without any present centre of reference» (Derrida, 1998).

Attempting to avoid an origin is not to duck the question: where am I writing from? That is why Iván, after an ironic Freudian game, takes us at once to a 16th century Bruegel, and makes it vault among the clouds. A Babel-beginning, as is only natural, announces a text as tactile texture with hinges, cracks and clefts. What Derrida tried out with writing (collage, montage and parergonal comments) is required from the thread, the overcasting. Writing means to graft, he says in *Dissemination*: «Grafts, a return to overcasting». There's room for us all here, is the lucid opening that Derrida managed to glimpse: for critical feminisms, the postcolonial, or queer theory.

Championing the «scriptural», where every element is significant, is a way of decentering and displacing phonetic writing as the single repository of critical thought in a different sense from the tradition that we have termed Benjaminian. It is true that, as in the latter, nothing is argued and nothing is shown. If in that tradition it is "shown", I like to think that here it is "displayed", explained, in the sense of the first meaning of the Latin word *explicatio* as the 'action of unfolding or displaying what was folded and is not visible'. In this visual essay by Iván Gómez, we do however note with Deleuze (1989) that «unfolding is thus not the contrary of folding, but follows the fold up to the following fold».

**«The poor man spends more on thread
than the rich man on fabric»**

Despite the fact that the visual essay has capitalized greatly on the *scriptural process* (which I am reluctant to call hypertext, even though it is written in cursive), I don't know whether this generation, from Barthes to Derrida or Hélène Cixoux, -or Derrida's translator, Spivak!, including Foucault, Deleuze & Guattari, sensed the possibilities it had. One had to wait until the digitalization of the world or the new economy of the image radically displaced the forms of writing associated with the old mnemonic devices, and the metaphor of fabric gave way to a network of threads, made of precarious fleeting images. Writing that today definitively defends the new economies of distribution, but also claims attention, is now incapable of turning to prior knowledge, learned and cherished, and it unfolds with the symbolic energy of RAM memory (Brea, 2009): producing knowledge at the time it enunciates itself, surprising itself, formulating and performing (concrete) situations yet to come.

This visual essay has an additional challenge. In «Proxy Politics: Signal and noisy», an article that appeared in early 2014 in e-flux, Hito Steyerl (2014) points out that we can no longer even believe in the indexicality of images taken by cameras. The ones built into mobile phones are small, basically garbage, and half of the data is noise. The camera analyses the paintings we have saved on the telephone or in the social networks and, guided by that, generates an image that never existed but is that which the algorithm feels you would have liked to see. This kind of photograph is speculative and relational.

Whatever the status of images might be, the digital visual essay *-the scriptural-* has lost its nature as an object, it doesn't

smell, you can't touch or print it, but it affects as a «sensor», as it is transforming dynamically: condensation of elements, accumulation of folds, wrapping (Prestel, 2011).

Whoever is unable to recognize this in the twinkling of an eye, will never comprehend it. And whoever manages to do so, will succeed, wherever that might be, in unfolding it. That is to say, in displaying it.

Thanks to Bulegoa for providing the opportunity to meet Iván Gómez.

References

- Brea, José Luis (2009). *Cultura RAM. Mutaciones de la cultura en la era de su distribución electrónica*. Retrieved from http://librosabiertos.org/bitstream/001/535/1/c_ram.pdf
- Deleuze, Gilles (1993). *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*. Trans. Tom Conley. Minneapolis, U. of Minnesota P.
- Derrida, Jacques (1982). *Margins of Philosophy*. Translated, with Additional Notes, by Alan Bass. University of Chicago Press.
- Didi-Huberman, Georges (2014). *Pueblos expuestos, pueblos figurantes*. Buenos Aires, Manantial.
- Harizius-Kluck, Ellen (January-June 2013). *Hilos, bordes, flecos y nacimiento divino: Los textiles como pasaje a lo sobrenatural* (n. 29, p. 53-72). Tópicos del Seminario, Puebla. Retrieved from http://www.scielo.org.mx/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1665-12002013000100004&lng=es&nrm=iso
- Nietzsche, Friedrich (2007). *Humano, demasiado humano. Segundo volumen, fragmentos póstumos* (p. 161). Madrid, Akal.
- Prestel, César (March 2011). "El sensor fluido. La narrativa de una etnografía de laboratorio." Athenea Digital. Retrieved from <http://atheneadigital.net/article/viewFile/823/548>
- <http://psicologiasocial.uab.es/athenea/index.php/atheneaDigital/article/view/823>
- Serres, Michel (17-06-2008). Michel Serres : *Horaces, Curiaces et rugby. Regards sur le sport - Michel Serres, philosophe*. [Video archive]. Retrieved from <http://education.francetv.fr/matiere/philosophie/quatrieme/video/michel-serres-horaces-curiaces-et-rugby>
- Steyerl, Hito (2014). "Proxy Politics: Signal and Noise". e-flux. Retrieved from <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/proxy-politics/>
- Steyerl, Hito (2011). "The essay as conformism? Some notes on global image economies". In Sven Kramer and Thomas Tode (2011) *Der Essayfilm. Ästhetik und Aktualität*. Konstanz: UVK.
- Ulmer, Gregory L. (1981). *The Post-Age*. Published by the John Hopkins University Press. Translation to English of quote from Derrida, Jacques. *La carte postale: de Socrates à Freud et au-delà*. p.3.