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The images we will never see

Notes on visualisation and pandemic

When the first photographs of the empty streets of Wuhan due to the pandemic hit our screens, few believed that those images, apparently so distant, would acquire an anticipatory dimension - and almost predictive (March, 2021) - and that, by the end of a few weeks, they would be reproduced, as if it were a game of mirrors, in our towns and cities.[1] Nor could anyone imagine that the visual representation of a previously unknown virus (I mean the paradigmatic image of the virus responsible for Covid-19 illustrated as a "sphere surrounded by coloured suction cups") would become a ubiquitous icon in our lives, giving SARS-CoV-2 a visual identity that no other infectious agent had until then. Finally, at the beginning of March 2020, we could not have imagined that a large part of our social interactions would be done through visual devices, and that for more than fifteen months we would have to resign ourselves to seeing our friends and family virtually, that is, *through images*.

The examples I have just presented highlight the determining role that images – as well as the so-called "visual data" –[2] have had in the different ways of imagining, living and managing the pandemic. And so it is that the outbreak of the virus has coincided with a moment of transformation of vision devices and of the roles and meanings of visual signs in our society - in other words, of what some authors have called our "regime of visuality" (Jay, 1988). The experience of the pandemic is inseparable from the popularisation of social networks and mobile image processing applications, from the debate around *fake images* and the mechanisms of *iconic verification* (commonly known as *image-checking*),[3] as well as the intensification of government systems of social control based on visual data (such as *face-tracking*). To all this, other factors must be added – unfortunately, nothing new – that have determined the role and circulation of images within the pandemic, such as the censorship exercised by certain states or government bodies on the work of researchers and photojournalists who sought to take and publish images that showed the most uncomfortable effects of the disease.

As Pintor (2020) says, in visual terms, what the pandemic has done is to accelerate some changes in representational logics that had already been brewing for some time and that basically have to do with the uses of visual data as mechanism of social control and with the emergence of "post-photographic" images based on simulation, calculation and prognosis.

In this short text I would like to point out some considerations about the relationship between visuality and the pandemic, emphasising the photographs and videos that have circulated about the virus's impact around the world. My analysis will be based on a *relational* approximation to the images, focused on the relationships we establish with them and through them, understood as visual signs. I will also refer to the performative role of images (that is, to the power they possess as social actors) and to the relationship between image and memory (more specifically to the issue of visual forgetting). Now, instead of focusing on analysing what

the images have taught about the pandemic, I would like to emphasise precisely the opposite, that is, on all those many aspects of the disease and its effects that the images have *not* shown us and that they will never be able to. Based on this, let's call it *defective*, analysis of images (Didi-Huberman, 2003), I would like to criticise the idea that the pandemic has been an overrepresented event, which has given rise to an *excess* of images and visual representations. We might be inclined to believe, indeed, that this was the first hypervisualised pandemic (of which countless images have been taken that have circulated around the world). But that is just *partially* true. The images have shown us many things about the pandemic, but there are others that have remained hidden. With this argument I do not want to diminish their value or importance, quite the opposite: what I am claiming is precisely the need to take and look at more images, as varied as possible, and to approach them in a critical and informed way. It is for this reason that I end the text with a reflection on the potential

Les imatges han tingut un paper clau en la percepció, l'experiència i la gestió de la pandèmia de la Covid-19. Des de l'inici de la crisi, hem vist (i fet) imatges de naturalesa molt diferent. Tothom ha vist desenes de fotografies d'hospitals, de carrers buits o de gent interactuant amb mascareta. Però la Covid-19 també ha deixat imatges "científiques" (com ara la representació del virus), imatges "coercitives" (com les indicacions per mantenir la distància de seguretat) o imatges "humorístiques" (com ara alguns mems). En aquest text presento un apropament antropològic a les imatges en temps de la Covid-19 basat en el concepte de "relació". Aquest concepte remet tant a les relacions que les imatges mantenen entre si com a les relacions que establim amb i a través seu. També poso en relleu la importància de pensar en tots els aspectes de la realitat que les imatges no ens han mostrat (ni ens mostraran mai) i argumento que part de la força de la imatge rau precisament en la seva capacitat per evocar allò que no pot ser directament representat.

Las imágenes han jugado un papel clave en la percepción, la experiencia y la gestión de la pandemia del Covid-19. Desde el inicio de la crisis, hemos visto (y hecho) imágenes de naturaleza muy distinta. Todo el mundo ha visto decenas de fotografías de hospitales, de calles vacías o de gente interactuando con mascarilla. Pero el Covid-19 también nos ha dejado imágenes "científicas" (como la representación del virus), imágenes "coercitivas" (como las indicaciones para mantener la distancia de seguridad) o imágenes "humorísticas" (como algunos memes). En este texto presento un acercamiento antropológico a las imágenes en tiempo de Covid-19 basado en el concepto de "relación". Este concepto remite tanto a las relaciones que las imágenes mantienen entre sí como a las relaciones que establecemos con y a través de ellas. También pongo de relieve la importancia de pensar en todos los aspectos de la realidad que las imágenes no nos han mostrado (ni nos mostrarán jamás) y argumento que parte de la fuerza de la imagen radica precisamente en su capacidad para evocar lo que no puede ser directamente representado.

Images have played a key role in the perception, experience and management of the Covid-19's pandemics. Since the beginning of the crisis, we have seen (and made) images of very different nature. Everyone has seen dozens of photographs of hospitals, empty streets or people interacting with masks. But Covid-19 has also left us "scientific" images (such as the representation of the virus), "coercive" images (such as those regulating interpersonal safety distance), or "funny" images (such as some memes). In this text I present an anthropological approach to images in times of Covid-19 based on the concept of "relationship". This concept refers both to the relationships that the images maintain with each other and to the relationships that we establish with and through them. I also emphasize the importance of thinking about those aspects of reality that the images have not shown us (and that will never show) and I argue that that part of the strength of the image lies precisely in its capacity to evoke what cannot be directly represented.

of images when investigating and *imagining* the world we live in, as well as the future that awaits us. Simply put, my argument is that much of the power of images lies precisely in evoking what it cannot represent by itself.

The pandemic in pictures

Since it broke out in 2019, the pandemic has left us with all kinds of images: we have seen (some) photographs of hospitals and cemeteries, *selfies* of health personnel, scientific images of the virus and diagrams of the evolution of the pandemic, memes, historical images of previous pandemics (such as the Spanish flu), home-made drawings of encouragement and hope or photographs of empty streets. How can the study of this heterogeneity of visual representations be approached? From an analytical point of view, we can take at least three different angles: first, we can analyse images based on their *nature* or ontology (that is, taking into account the type of images that *they are*); secondly, we can emphasise their *agents of production and circulation* (in other words, in those who have taken them and who have distributed them); thirdly, we can classify the images based on their *modes of reception* (that is, in the ways we have perceived and interpreted them).

Regarding the nature of the images, the first thing to recognise is that the pandemic has given rise to ontologically very diverse images. A "documentary" photograph taken by a photojournalist *on site* is not the same as a "scientific image" made in a laboratory, just as an anonymous "meme" circulating on social media is not equivalent to a government poster aimed at "pedagogy" on how to safely relate to others in and out of our bubble group. We call all these visual signs "images", but they are clearly not images in the same sense: they have not been taken in the same way nor do they serve the same purposes. Nor do they maintain the same semiotic relationship with the world they seek to "represent" or "evoke". In fact, some images do not have representative value, but are clearly "didactic" or "coercive", such as the institutional images I mentioned above. So, while it is true that all these images have

Several workers place a mask on the head of the "Meditator", the central figure of the Falla of Valencia City Council, after the previous day the authorities cancelled the celebration of the Falles, declared intangible cultural heritage in 2016 of Humanity by UNESCO on, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Throughout its entire history, the festival had only previously been cancelled five times, the last in 1940. The Falla of the artist Escif is entitled *Esto también pasará [**This too shall pass**]*. **March 2020.**
GERMÁN CABALLERO

a certain *symbolic* component - in the sense that they convey a meaning and refer to something that is found *beyond* themselves – not all do it in the same way.

In our day-to-day life we constantly interact with ontologically very different images and we are not always sufficiently aware of what *distinguishes* them. This is what has happened during the pandemic in relation to the image of the virus. Many people interpreted the multicoloured image of the virus *as if* it was "a photograph" - that is, applying a realistic interpretation scheme based on the idea (all said, very problematic) of referentiality -[4] despite the fact that it was, in fact, an image generated almost entirely by computer (Andreu-Sánchez and Martín-Pascual, 2020). That said, and as I will explain later, the fact that there are images of a very diverse nature does not mean that they are not intrinsically *related* to each other.

This set of heterogeneous images have been made by very diverse agents. Some have been the work of photojournalists and reporters, others have come from scientific laboratories or government health departments. One of the most unique aspects of this pandemic is that, due to the aforementioned visual transformation, the population itself has become an engine for the production and circulation of images. We have seen *selfies* of healthcare staff and the sick, as well as countless images of domestic scenes that took place during the lockdown (games with the kids, cooking recipes, home furniture renovations). On the other hand, home-made short film festivals and online photo exhibitions have been organised. The pandemic has also spawned countless memes and visual jokes designed by professional or amateur illustrators.[5] In short: the pandemic has brought multiple examples of *visual creativity* (Canals, 2017).

What these examples show is that behind every image there is always the *will* to communicate something. In other words: every image is a message, a mode of meaning. Every image has an initial semiotic purpose

Placard of thanks to health personnel during the hardest time of the Covid-19 pandemic. March 2020. RAFEL FOLCH MONCLÚS

that may vary, but throughout its "social life", that is, throughout what I have called in another text its *iconic itinerary* (Canals, 2021). For example: during the last weeks of June 2021, images of tourists visiting the cities began to emerge. We can think that these images had the initial *intention* of showing the cities as safe destinations and spurring the arrival of more visitors. This does not mean that everyone interpreted them in the same way (someone could see them, precisely, as evidence of a reckless and dangerous political decision for the local population).

This brings us, finally, to the question of the *reception* of the images. In the course of the pandemic, we have not interpreted all these images in the same way. In *ethical* terms, there are images we have come to trust (consider them a reliable means of informing us about the world), while others we have considered dubious or outright false. Some images have made us laugh (like the aforementioned case of memes); others have scared us. Certain images have stirred our compassion and empathy, while others have provoked us to anger. This shows that we do not establish a merely intellectual relationship with the images, but above all an *affective* one (Coleman, 2013). There are

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For a discussion of the concept of referentiality, see Fontcuberta, J. (2010). *La cámara de pandora*. Barcelona: Gustavo Gili.

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One of the most famous and anthropologically interesting images has been the one that shows wild animals roaming around the cities while humans remain locked in their homes, and which updates the old mythological theme of the ontological reversal between humans and non-humans.

images that have probably conditioned our actions in our day-to-day life (such as the posters that indicate the mandatory use of masks); others have precisely helped us to escape from everyday life (the consumption of television series has increased during the months of lockdown). There are, in short, images that we preferred *not to see*.

From the point of anthropology we pay special attention to *contexts* of receiving the images. And the meaning of the images is not found in the images themselves but is generated at the moment when the image is an image for someone, that is to say, at the moment when the image is perceived. This interaction with the image always occurs in a specific place and time, it is socially and culturally determined. For example: if, in the context of a conference, a doctor comments on an image of the virus, we will tend to give him credibility. If we see the same image on an anonymous blog suspected of containing fraudulent images, we will probably be inclined to distrust it. The reception, therefore, depends to a great extent on the *transmission channels* of the images.

I propose to analyse the abundance and heterogeneity of the images we have seen (and, in some cases, taken) during the pandemic from a theoretical perspective based on the concepts of "relationship" and "performativity".

The concept of "relationship" is the most fundamental and defining category of Anthropology. So is the so-called "visual anthropology". Lévi-Strauss (1993) formulated it particularly clearly: *tles termes ne vaulent pas par eux-mêmes; seules importent les relations*.[6] Any being – whether human or non-human, living or inanimate – is defined by the relationships it maintains with other entities. These relationships can be of an "organic" and "functional" nature - as indicated by the concept of "ecosystem", according to which all the species and resources of an environment subsist thanks to their mutual interactions. The relationships, however, can also be

One of the notions that has most penetrated our society following the pandemic is that of "safety distance". April 2020. RAFEL FOLCH MONCLÚS

of a symbolic and, let's say, cognitive nature: the meaning of linguistic signs, for example, depends on the relationships they maintain with the external "world", but above all *with other signs*. The act of meaning is an act of relationship. Relating involves establishing links of complementarity and opposition, of identity and difference.

This principle can also be applied to the study of images. Every image is relational. This means at least two things. First, that images do not make sense by themselves but only by the relationships they establish with other images. The images establish among themselves iconic constellations, networks of meaning, systems of signs. This forces us to study them by series or, as Latour would say, by *cascades* (2014), and not in isolation. Thinking about the images entails, therefore, the *framing* of the images (i.e. looking for connections between different images). Applied to our case study, this means that we have to understand the set of images of the pandemic as a whole, due to the fact that some make sense because of their relationships with others. An example: the images of birds recovering natural ponds until recently occupied by bathers or constantly flown over by airplanes contrast with the images

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"Els termes no valen per si mateixos, tan sols importen les relacions" (author's translation).

Concentration of remembrance by one of the nursing assistants of the Peset Hospital in Valencia, who contracted the coronavirus and died during the first wave of the pandemic. April 2020. GERMÁN CABALLERO

of empty streets or with the pollution graphs that showed the improvement of air quality. At the same time, the photographs (for many people, unacceptable) of illegal parties in times of lockdown must be interpreted in relation to the images of hospitals saturated due to the uncontrolled advance of the disease. More or less consciously, we establish *visual narratives* between the images we see, that is, we carry out cognitive exercises of visual *framing*.

Secondly, affirming that every image is relational implies understanding that there are no images "in themselves" but only modes of relationship with and through images. Here lies the specificity of the anthropological approach to the study of images. Throughout our lives we produce images, destroy images, and constantly interact with images. Images do not exist "in the abstract": there are only ways of perceiving and relating to and through images (and these ways are always historically and culturally determined). The images of the Spanish flu have taken on a new force in being *compared* with the images of the pandemic. We n have related to these black-and-white photographs in a way that no one could have glimpsed just two years ago, and they

have been given an unexpected validity and, in some cases, a strange familiarity with the masked faces that appear.

When analysing the images of the pandemic it is also important to take into account their performative nature, that is, the ability to influence events. Images should not be conceived as "reflections" or "traces" of the external world, but rather as "living signs" (Mitchell 2005) or, as Paul Christopher Johnson (2020) would say, as *near-humans*. In other words: images do not (only) represent the world, but *they make it*. This is precisely where their power comes from. The painted circles in public parks that indicate where people can sit are obvious examples of performative images, but there are also more subtle ones. The (supposedly fake) image of a fork or a coin stuck to the arm of a person who had just received the Covid-19 vaccine caused some social panic. The authorities, aware of the performative power of the image, feared that the image would trigger a wave of rejection of vaccination methods and rushed to discredit it. Another example: in times of isolation, the images of relatives and friends who "dwell" in our domestic space acquired renewed importance, reinforced

their quasi-sacred or transcendent character and acted as devices to maintain *contact* with those people with whom we could not relate directly. These facts highlight the "emotional" value of images, their power to shape reality and modulate moods.[7] The performative theory of the image suggests that, from now on, the management of pandemics will also involve the management of their images.

Finally, we have all communicated during the pandemic through visual devices. We have, therefore, affected the world *as an image*. In our interactions we have been able to see what in anthropology has been called "the paradox of mediation" (Meyer 2015). All mediation is a relational device that simultaneously connects and separates. It allows an interaction while certifying a distance. So, for example, talking through screens, we had the feeling, both frustrating and happy, of being close to and far from each other. Sartre (1940) said a long time ago that every image is the presence of an absence.

The concept of "absence" connects with the question of what the images do not show, on which I will offer some reflections in the following section.

Show and hide

During the last year and a half, we have seen countless photographs of hospitals saturated with patients, of empty streets, of queues at supermarkets, of funerals with only two or three people, or of pyres and mass graves, images that we have interpreted as to symbols of overcoming, solidarity or punishment. The large amount of images we have interacted with over the last few months could lead us to conclude that the pandemic has been (and still is) a hyper-visualised and, even more so, over-represented historical episode. More or less consciously, we can think that, thanks to the images (or, perhaps, because of them), we have already "seen everything" of the pandemic.

This is, however, a theoretically wrong and politically dangerous premise that does not contribute to a better understanding of images or our world, on the contrary: what granting images an absolute representational power - that is, a kind of unlimited capacity to duplicate the world – does is impoverish our perception of the present and (paradoxically) *reduce* the transformative and critical potential of images.

The first thing to remember is that images (like any other type of sign) can never exhaust the complexity and heterogeneity of what is real. Images (especially photographic and cinematographic images) always show concrete facts and situations and, as I explained in the first section, they do so from a certain point of view and with a certain intention.

Image of the interior of a bus in the city of Barcelona during the first months of the Covid-19 pandemic. April 2020. RAFEL FOLCH MONCLÚS
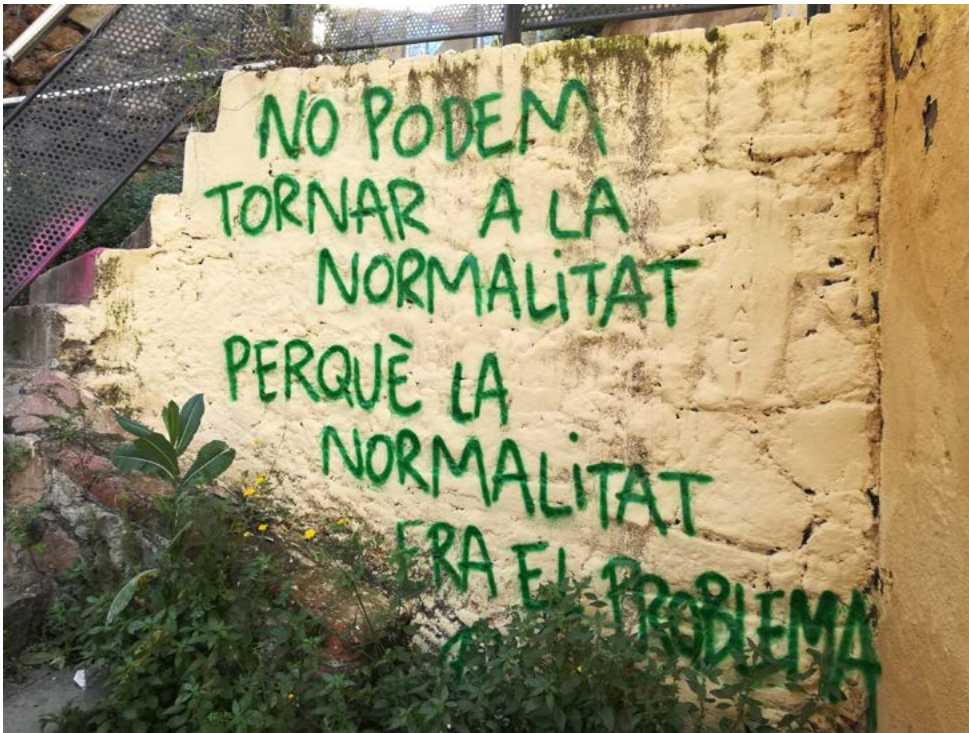
Painted over the "new normal" appearing on a wall in a street in the Vallcarca neighbourhood from Barcelona. May 2020. RAFEL FOLCH MONCLÚS

This principle is particularly clear in the case of photographs, although it can be extrapolated, with different nuances, to any image, regardless of its purportedly figurative or representative nature. An image is always an image *of something*. The image always allows us to see. But *what* the image makes visible is always, in one way or another, partial, limited or incomplete. Thus, every image points to something that *cannot be seen* (Lynch, 2021:67).

What happens is that, as receivers, we often tend to give images (and photographs in particular) an exemplary, paradigmatic and, in a way, abstract dimension. For example: we see a photograph of a hospital in Rio de Janeiro and quickly deduce that "all" of Brazil is in a similar situation (when, for example, the impact of Covid-19 on the indigenous areas of the South American country has been very different from what has happened in the urban centres). Or another case: we receive a photograph of the interior of a home where children are working telematically and we think that "all" homes in that neighbourhood or part of the world live in the same way, despite the fact that, in fact, until and even within the same urban areas, inequalities in terms of digital access are abysmal.

This way of relating to images is to some extent inevitable and, to some extent, justified. While photographs always show specific episodes, it is also true that nothing that happens in the world is absolutely different from the rest. Every social event maintains a certain analogy with other events and, in this sense, can legitimately acquire a certain value as a generic example. Moreover, part of the power of photography lies precisely in its ability to evoke, from concrete cases, principles or abstract ideas (sacrifice, love, war, among many others). This does not negate the need to be cautious when making this type of inference. The fact of granting *one* image or a (required) *limited* set of images an exemplary and all-encompassing status can make us forget the *different* ways of living and conceiving the human experience, always so diverse and surprising, under the mask of an apparent uniformity. This impoverishment of the visual experience has obvious risks on a political scale, due to the fact that it can

act as a mechanism (more or less conscious and intentional) of misinformation and deception.

What I have said does not diminish the validity of images when it comes to understanding the world, quite the opposite. We must leave behind the Platonic critique according to which images are nothing but appearances of appearances, deceptive copies of reality itself that distance us from the supposed truth of essences. Just because images aren't everything doesn't mean they're nothing. Images are a window from which to glimpse new aspects of reality and a potential device to transform it.

Of course, understanding that every image is defective, ambiguous and intentional, pushes us to approach the images in a more critical and informed way, investigating the *production and circulation process* (who made the images, when and how; and how they came to us), and ask ourselves about their nature or ontology (what kind of image it *is*). What you need to do is observe and *connect* more images as heterogeneous as possible. It is precisely when we relate *different* images (both in ontological terms, and in terms of their conditions of production, transmission and reception) that we realise their respective limitations but also their *potentialities*.

We have not seen everything from the pandemic and we will not see everything. To believe that we have seen everything is to forget an infinite number of stories and experiences that will never be represented and that the images we have seen can only, at best, suggest or evoke. And this is precisely the *quid* of the question: *paradoxically*, it is because the images are *defective* that they become epistemologically and politically relevant, that is to say, that they allow us to better understand the world and act to transform it. The power of images and their transformative potential does not lie *only* in what they show, but *also* in what they necessarily hide, that is to say, in what they do not allow to be seen but which they allow *to be*

thought about. In other words: the true power of the image lies in the fact that, through what it shows us, we can *imagine* everything that cannot be shown.

For example: the image of a hospital during the pandemic can be terrible. What makes it truly terrible, however, is not the fact that there are people suffering (or who suffered) from the disease, but that it allows us to imagine all those people who have suffered in hospital centres often punished by the shortage of resources and that will never appear *in any image*. Another case: we see a cartographic image made from a satellite

Announcement with thanks to healthcare staff, transport staff, etc., on an advertising panel in Barcelona metro stations. May 2020.
RAFEL FOLCH MONCLÚS

of the state of pollution in Europe during the pandemic. It is a simulated image that presents some colour spots on a silhouette. The image shows a situation, but hides something else that invites us to imagine: the quality of the air we breathe on a normal day in big cities and the measures we could take to improve it.[8] Let's take the case, finally, of a denialist and hermetic political regime that internationally disseminates supposedly true images of citizens relating to each other with complete normality to create a false impression of control over the pandemic. The image, taken in context, gives misleading information about the pandemic. Now, put in relation to other images, it becomes implausible (it is impossible that, in a context of a global pandemic, a specific country is immune to the disease). Suddenly the image no longer tells us about the pandemic but about what the image *does not show*: the existence of autarkic regimes that exercise strict control over information and the professionals who ensure a free and balanced press.

This example highlights how the act of imagination to which every image invites us should not be confused with the exercise of "generalisation" that I described above consisting of taking an image or a limited set of images for the set of that which is real. In fact, it is quite the opposite. It is one thing to assume, often uncritically, that an image (and specifically a photograph) represents an irreducible plurality of experiences, and the other is to dare to imagine, from the images, the *different* forms that we may have to live and conceive the world and that we will never see directly. The first exercise involves a reduction of heterogeneity to homogeneity, of alterity to identity. In the second, the image acts as a device to think otherness and imagine possible worlds.

The cultures of oblivion

Every culture is defined, among other things, by its politics of forgetting. In other words: every society establishes what deserves to be remembered and what does not and in what way. Ritual, for example, is a strong

Poster that relates the social control raised during the Covid-19 pandemic with the novel 1984 by George Orwell. June 2020. RAFEL FOLCH MONCLÚS

mechanism of historical memory, a way of activating and updating the past. Prohibitions to mention or evoke certain individuals, ideas or events from the past are, on the other hand, strategies to force forgetting (although in many cases these end up in a clandestine reinforcement of memory as a result of their own prohibition). The debate around the politics of forgetting is very much alive today. In Spain, there is still discussion about what should be done with the past of the dictatorship. In the world of new technologies, there are more and more demands

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For a study on satellite images as "images of absence" during the pandemic see: Lynteris, Christos. 2020. "Emptiness and COVID-19 Cartography", *Theorizing the Contemporary, Fieldsights*, 15 December 2020. <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/emptiness-and-covid-19-cartography>

Postcards with children's drawings at a mass vaccination point against Covid-19, in the city of Lleida. September 2021. RAFEL FOLCH MONCLÚS

in favour of the right to digital oblivion, that is, our freedom to delete certain records of our past life from the web (photographs, comments, "friendships" with other people), which we consider no longer represent who we are or what we want to be. Similarly, on an individual scale we also establish patterns of memory and forgetting. At home we have objects and images that remind us of people and places that have been important to us. These objects and images are memory devices. Every time we see them, we renew the bond that ties us to those people and places. We make them present - in the double sense, both chronological and existential, of the word "present". Conversely, there are certain episodes of our existence that we do not want to remember and we strive to erase their traces. Often these efforts result in the destruction of images, that is, in a form of domestic iconoclasm.

What will be the politics of memory (or forgetting) of the pandemic? Will we want to turn the page or will we remain anchored in the memory of the tragedy? Right now it is impossible to know. Having said that,

I would like to end this text with a warning about the power of forgetting in our society. Paradoxically, at a time when so much is being talked about *big data*,[9] of security and storage records, it seems that the voraciousness of the present in relation to the recent past is stronger than ever. Informationally, we live under the principles of actuality and immediacy. What is new quickly becomes obsolete. Consequently, I would not be surprised if, in a short time, the experience of the pandemic fell into a certain collective oblivion. It is clear that there are economic and political interests for this to be the case. One could argue, and rightly so, that we must live and move on, that we cannot stagnate in perpetual mourning. But amnesia can lead to a weakening in political and social terms. Sooner or later it will be necessary to assess what has not been done well during this crisis and who has suffered the most in order to face possible pandemics in the future. Images, in this sense, can play an important role against forgetting. Historically, they have contributed to maintaining open social debates and established collective memories (Lewis, 2021). In this sense,

initiatives such as those of the *COVID File* which, updating the historical evolution of the images of the pandemic, becomes a real "time capsule".[10]

We have not seen everything from the pandemic and we will never see everything. But thanks to the images we have seen, we can glimpse the magnitude of a drama that, like any social event, cannot be visualised or represented in its entirety. Hence the growing importance of making, updating and resignifying archives, of going back to the images of the past, combining them with images of the present (ours and those of others) and with the images "of the future" (that is, with the predictive images that venture to visualise what tomorrow's world will be like). Hence

the importance of taking more critical and freer images, and of being able to circulate them avoiding censorship and legal or economic barriers. The pandemic has not been hyper-visualised. It has given rise, of course, to certain "visual clichés" to which we have given, often unconsciously, a general dimension. There are many aspects of our time that pictures will never be able to represent. But images, with all their aesthetic and sensitive qualities, remain a unique device for thinking about the contradictions and complexities of human experience and *imagining* realms of reality that we can never have direct experience of (such as outer space).

Through the game between showing and hiding, the images allow us to see with our eyes closed. ∎

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See:
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