

Home for Foundling Images

David Oubiña

There is a pathway that history always draws in the memory. Like a furrow opened by relentless traffic. It passes to and fro, back and forth, delivering and transporting memories, printing them in the end.

But images are no more than phantoms in search of a home. They are there to bear witness to what is no longer there. Like the *pseudo witnesses* of Agamben: those who speak for those who can no longer speak, replacements, there through delegation. That is why images are not only what they show, but also what they fail to show. And what is this thing that is missing? Is a body not a body? An image is registered to mark what it has lost, like a shroud. Like attending a seance: a communication with the beyond or with what was at some time there. Especially, when the movements that are repeated are those of a vagrant, and as such, the gesture only draws the silhouette of absence in the air. A mechanism of the memory. What does it convene? Another time, another body, another occupation? All preterite. What is lacking in the movement is the tool, the instrument applied to its end. Without that it is an absurd mime. A desolate task, without any sense. Like Sisifo, condemned to drag a rock to the summit only to see it roll down again. Until the end of time.

Not all gestures are social gestures. The attitude of scaring a fly away is not, in principle, a social gesture; however, the attitude of scaring a dog away could be, if for example, it represents the fight that a badly dressed man must engage in with guard dogs. The social gesture (the *gestus*) is that which results as relevant for society, the gesture that permits conclusions to be drawn about certain social circumstances.

Bertolt Brecht

What Brecht denominates *gestus* is not only the physical action which reveals a character, but implies also, a conscious effort of the actor to dramatize the political conditions that underpin that action and that determine a social identity. It is an activity and an attitude, an action and a commentary about it. The *gestus* represents body language critically, just as the Brechtian actor interprets his character critically. It acts like that, but it doesn't admit to being completely transformed so that it becomes that. There is a *kinetic persistence* of the gesture, just as the *afterimage persistence* is used to refer to the marks that a beam of light leaves upon the eye in the absence of the stimulus that has provoked it.

The images of Golder want to capture the wake of that movement. As if they want to build upon a ruin. The gestures of a vagrant or of a drifter are ruinous. They can only be displayed in the void. Because they are what is left after the catastrophe has come and gone.

What does a vagrant, an old worker in a house of pompous funerals, a drifter and an illegal worker have in common? None of them has a house where their gestures(their remains) can be sheltered. If all of their trade fits into the *gestus*, this is because everything that they do constitutes a claim, whether voluntary or involuntary (it matters little), that refutes the false, good behaviour of a community that only receives them to then banish them, to leave them out like the refugees that Golder shows searching for ways to enter The Promised Land. To go away is to leave home, but this home is what has been or will be abandoned. It can be said that those places are the only ones that can enumerate what they once had. Their memory. That is an inventory of assets. A place is nothing more than the stories that inhabit it. It can be the ex-jail of

Miguelete, The Central Hotel or an abandoned building. What evanescent prints can the traveller leave in places like that? The woman that licks the floor boards in The Hotel of Immigrants must be a recent arrival, an exile. It is said: “to clean the floor with the tongue” so that it gleams and eliminates every trace of dirt. Does the woman who licks the floor clean it or erase it?

A schibboleth, the word *schibboleth*, if any exists, names in the broadest sense of its generality or of its use, every insignificant, arbitrary mark. For example, the phonetic difference between *shi* and *si* when it becomes discriminant, decisive and incisive. This difference makes no sense by itself, but becomes that which needs to be recognized and especially marked to move forward, to cross the frontier of a place or the threshold of a poem, to see it concede the right of asylum or the legitimate room of a language.

Jacques Derrida

Some manage to cross a threshold where one exists, while others cannot. Every foreigner has to pass that test. It is necessary to pronounce the word *schibboleth* well. The slight, almost imperceptible difference between one sound and another is what the outsider exposes, which determines if he can pass or if he is sent back to the other side. Grammar is always violent. So, children are political prisoners and their school is correctional . The school(like the factory and the jail), is a mechanism of self-reproduction, of self-repetition and of self-preservation. But all of that collapses if the right questions are posed.

The *conversation pieces* that flourished in the 18th Century constituted a type of painting to show the repose of the inner bourgeoisie: the figures converse in an informal manner, against a neatly detailed set as if they wanted to invite

the observer to share their domestic happiness. No conflict, no disagreement, no controversy. But Golder's *conversation pieces* do just the opposite: that is, for example, *The Communist Manifesto* explained to children, or rather, questioning children that demand explanations to *The Communist Manifesto*. No dogma resists interrogation. And then, when the irritating doubts appear, the police always appear: they are the ones who know how to pronounce *shi* when they say *shibolleth* and there are the others, those who hardly let out a languid *si* which betrays them. Language is normative. It is on one side, or the other. And not everyone can pass: a frontier only makes sense if it allows a few to be selected.

Each time that we see crowds, there are two sides. The band of police and the band of the others. Sometimes, the police are out of the scene; but the others are always there and always fill the screen. They form a mob: an organism that moves slowly, but systematically. Like a water hyacinth whose only objective is to disturb the order. It is what happens with compact groups of refugees: hot lava that spills into the streets consuming everything in its path.

It has already been said: the eye of the master fattens the cattle. But the hungry, butcher and eat them. It is like a bullfight but the other way round, because it isn't the bull who charges. It is like a bullfight without a torreador: no choreography, no elegance, no fiesta. Rather, as if the public would have jumped into the arena to claim their part in the spectacle. The public can only improvise. It is brutal and miserly and scatterbrained. It doesn't worry about behaviour. Could a crowd of hungry people attack a truck in which cattle travel tamely (without provoking anyone, without picking on anyone, without any mood of pendency) on its way to the abattoirs? Is it morally reproachable? What has happened to the noble art of bullfighting? Anatole France: "The law, in its equanimity, bans the rich and the poor from spending the night under bridges, from begging in the street and pilfering bread."

In those moments, when the crowd is out of control every camera is a security camera. That's why Golder doesn't look directly. That would be a denunciation. The observation of what the master sees is primary. To the

processing of those images and their distortion so that everything is seen from another angle.

It isn't about a window open to the world but rather television images altered by the twitch of a *flicker effect*, or images taken by a night vision camera or images slowed down until they remain almost stationary, or saturated images superimposed and repeated like a *loop*. Then what is shown appears to be another scene. And what remains in silence is so because it had been silenced. Paul Celan cited by Golder implies that this: "Is something that speaks in silence."/ something has fallen quiet / Something was left out." How is a horse filmed? And two horses together? And cows: how are cows filmed? Cows don't worry about looking at the camera. That's why they simply look as they pass by. What are they looking at? A cow isn't a dog. When a cow is observed by a camera does it feel observed by a camera?

A film maker takes that which constitutes the very material of his film apart and then resets it. The screen is populated with smaller images that vibrate, co-exist, mix together. Screams and confessions float upon a black background but this black background is perhaps the shadow of a house, with a roof, like one that children draw. Not a home for the characters but a home for the images "that now have no home": the cinema. *We can't go home again.*

Serge Daney

"I have seen everything; I haven't seen anything. It seems like Marguerite Duras, but it isn't. Although it could be. We read it on a video screen where old images in Super 8 pass. Argentina circa 1976: "This is no dream." No, no it isn't. It is horror seen through the eyes of a little girl. What can the eyes of a

little girl see? Nothing and everything. Therefore it is Duras: “In the eyes of the other, they *are* no one. They are place names, names that are not names. It is as if through them, *every Hiroshima was loved by all Nevers*. She tells him: Hiroshima, that is your name.” What is the little girl’s name? The name of the girl is that country and that atrocious dictatorship. Now we understand that it is possible to be inhabited by places that have been lost. Inhabited: like who says “possessed”. What is a house? Now we don’t know. But it is possible to inhabit the images and to be inhabited by them. Perhaps, as Homi Bhabha sustains, “to be without a home doesn’t mean being homeless.” It is rather a relocation of the familiar and of the unusual that could be denominated “non-domesticity”. That is: rebellious, insubordinate, indomitable. Once that has been left it isn’t possible to inhabit the old house again; but the nomad always frets about returning, even if now he doesn’t know why, even if he doesn’t remember where to go, even if he spends the rest of his life trying to find the way.

There are many itineraries to be returning (as in the gerund: to be returning). To inscribe the memory itself in the tracks of a video is one of them. It isn’t better or worse than any other. It is enough to be the memory itself which speaks. And here, when it speaks, it is conversing with us, or listening. Golder knows how to listen. But then which memory is speaking? Her own? Or others? Or is her own that of others? The others’ memory could have been appropriated? Expropriated? In the end it was certain that a camera could steal the soul. Now we know that Gabriela Golder isn’t an artist. She isn’t a film producer. She isn’t a video maker. She’s a journalist.