

## Centrifuging history

—Peio Aguirre, 2016

Making artworks and short videos based on external images is usual today for the young artist. This recombination of the image has its equivalence in the overlapping of narratives and stories, in other words, in a game with and based on references. History, the historical, is content for the new work of art. The debate on postmodernism and the critique that it established with regard to meta-narratives and the so-called “grand narratives” of modernity seem far away. In the early nineteen nineties postmodernism was inextricably associated with some endings oracularly announced: the end of art, the end of history and so on. But fortunately art did not stop (nor has history done so), and this illusory happy ending brought, in return, a renewed and vigorous passion for everything to do with history and the historical. This obsession with the past or historicism was one of the traits of a postmodernism which we have not abandoned, despite the unwelcoming nature of the term and our preference for new substitutes: alter-modernism, capitalist realism, meta-modernity and other “white labels”.

But, could it be that the meaning of history or the very idea of the continuity of historical time got lost in a moment of history itself? And when did this loss occur? Postmodernism is now our modernity, and this amounts to a kind of archaeological antiquity. As inhabitants of the 21st century, we are “condemned” to living with the archive of the whole memory of modernism and postmodernity together. This memory has nothing to do with that which film maker Alain Resnais depicted in one of his finest short films, *Toute la mémoire du monde* (1956), in which he displays the inner workings of the National Library in Paris in a poetic and unique manner. This work becomes a meditation on the mystery brought about by the systematic accumulation of wisdom contained in hundreds of thousands of volumes of all kinds; the congregation of a world of specialists focused on the archive of history. The present is, however, an interconnected world of flashing frequencies and immediate and instantaneous inputs. It is never a bad idea to compare this relationship with the technical image maintained by the modern predecessors. Didi-Huberman, speaking of Bertolt Brecht and the technique of montage, captured what is today one of the paradigms of the image: not so much the production of new images but the creation of relationships, associations and endless recombinations. According to the French essayist, for Brecht, the “articulation of a relation”, in other words, the context of an image, meant everything. The truth lay in that “articulation of a relation”. He goes on saying that, in summary, the

appearance of the montage of heterogeneities does not exist without an interpretation of the underlying relationships: erratic surface problems do not exist without a questioning of the depths –in the Freudian sense of the term, although, philosophically speaking, “substance” has finally given way to movement, “work” and “placement”.<sup>1</sup> We could point out, without shame, that for the young artist “placement” IS work. Its use and resource also requires a mastership similar to that when, in the past, artists produced the “substance” of the work in a manufactured and technical manner.

But montage in the analogue era and the current digital era cannot be measured by the same yardstick (nor by a flattening of the content submitted to form, or vice versa). In this new-fledged postmodernism, the granted digitization of the image turns montage into a hegemonic and dominant technique. The previous libidinal coupling is, similarly, a source of gratification. But how long does gratification last? The increase in the speed of association is synonymous with its own dispersion. Without wishing to categorize, I dare say that montage is no longer radical, or at least it is no longer a privileged place where the subconscious “works”. Ernst Bloch, the philosopher of hope, also mentioned the simultaneity of planes contained in a single covered area, which he described as “the form of the journal”: “a thinker discovers them as accurately as possible, gives them a very clear seal, without saying, however, where this currency is legal tender (...) He imprints values which have no validity among the bourgeoisie or anywhere else. Only the anarchist meaning of those meetings, those emotions, is visible: it is collected, it rummages among the ruins, it is saved, but without any substantial adjustment. (...) Surreal philosophy is exemplary as a refined montage of fragments, but the fragments remain as they are, in a great multiplicity and without links with each other. This philosophy is (therefore) essential in such a montage...”<sup>2</sup> These words were written in *The Heritage of Our Times* and were recently recovered by Didi-Huberman. But what is the heritage of this age? What is the historicity of current art and how long will it stay and persist?

The observation made by Brecht regarding the visual arts remains valid, as he stated that artists should work, thenceforth, on “understanding what a document is”, multiplying the procedures for confrontation, comparison and montage of the document. Cutting, reframing, interruption and suspension. Let us repeat the question: What is a document? Centrifuging history

into a work of contemporary art would exploit the centrifugal force and energy to “separate” the components of the work of art in its different densities, opacities and fractures.

Any reader will deduce from the context of this publication that the subject of this brief introduction to the technical image is Ivan Gómez. It also follows that considerations regarding such a relationship with the technical image are an epochal condition and not just another particular detail. The individual is a symptom of the collective. “Writing with images”<sup>1</sup> is, however, a resource for the artist, that trait of the shape of the journal as a dialectic relation between text and image in the editorial layout. It is not simply that, like an Eisensteinian montage, a third image arises from the sum of the two (in what is now the ABC of film editing); instead, there exists here a will to spatialise the montage, either on a printed sheet or within the framework of an exhibition. The montage works here rather more like a film making stumbling progress towards the intersection of disciplines, stories and fiction. The title of this exhibition, *Rome and Remoria*, introduces the myth of Romulus and Remus as founders of the city of Rome into a word play in which memory plays a decisive role. What would Remoria be like and what would the cultural heritage left by the Remorian Empire have been like? This fiction is an artistic contribution to understanding our reality and the remains and sediments incorporated by memory into culture, covering its cultural and historical origins. Art is a powerful tool for the building of a fiction that contemplates history and lifts it from its lethargy, contributing to the centrifuging in which we, as inhabitants of the present, participate collectively and also in an individual manner.

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<sup>1</sup> Georges Didi-Huberman: *Cuando las imágenes toman posición*. Madrid: Antonio Machado Libros, 2013, p. 79.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.