The Fugitive Image: Colonial Terror and Contemporary Art[1]

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Abstract

As colonial visual culture now fully integrates the mainstream of historical research and artistic practice at a global level, one subset of imagery still remains woefully unaddressed: the atrocity photograph. This essay provides a brief historical contextualization of the role of photography in decolonization wars and the concurrent emergence of critical theorizing on violent images, and why it still remains exceedingly difficult to analyse graphic pictures in the colonial context; then, honing in on the case of the Portuguese colonial wars in Africa (1961-1975), it examines the rare appropriation of a shocking photograph in Daniel Barroca's work *Circular Body* (2015).

Keywords**:** Visual Culture; Atrocity Photography; Colonial Propaganda; Decolonization Wars

> It is a black kingdom that the eyes of men avoid, because this landscape does
> not attract them at all. This shadow, which he calls for in order to describe
> the light, is the error with its unknown characters, the error that, only, may
> prove to him who has been taken into consideration as such, the fugitive reality.
> Louis Aragon (1926, p. 11)

> I had the feeling I was going back into the wall, or straying into a thicket of
> flint. The worst thing was the sudden, shocking cruelty of the day; I
> could not look, but I could not help looking. To see was terrifying,
> and to stop seeing tore me apart from my forehead to my throat.
> Maurice Blanchot (1981, p. 11)

I

When one attempts to make headway through the uncharted and vexing relationships between the visual image and the Portuguese colonial war in Africa (1961-74), the fundamental reference might still be two verses by Fernando Assis Pacheco in his book *Catalabanza, Quilolo, e Volta* (1976): "You think that I took, that one takes photographs? / One goes there, comes back, and hush-hush." (1976, p. 48) This Portuguese poet conscripted into the colonial army in Angola was the first soldier flown out from the warzone for psychiatric reasons. Like so many others distressed by their participation in this extreme violence, he denounced it for unfolding beyond the purview of images and always refused to hush hush, obstinately turning to writing instead for catharsis and solace. Such an impossibility to show also entailed an impossibility to see, as rhapsodized in the best-known wartime poem by Manuel Alegre, another Portuguese writer conscripted into the war in Angola, who sought to convince himself after coming home, in a prayer-like recitation: "You saw nothing in Nambuangongo / You saw nothing in that long long day / the severed head and the bombed flower / you saw nothing in Nambuangongo." (1967, np). It is telling that those rhymes resonate like a credo among so many ex-servicemen. One of them, for instance, Francisco Marcelo Curto,

considered them to be the most fitting words to describe the collective experience that over half a million Portuguese soldiers lived through, and entitled his early war memoir *You Saw Nothing in Angola* (1983) to reinforce that sense of a war which, for many reasons, had never been and is still not available to the gaze. Winnowing through the mountains of scholarship generated by these wars one quickly notices that, as instantiated, the insistence on (not)seeing and (not)showing is recurrent, even as the prime symbolic arena to articulate those violent experiences was ultimately the written word – letters, memoirs, novels, poems – as the visual image has always been assumed to be fundamentally estranged from and foreign to this large-scale conflict. The war, so the argument runs, has been kept from the field of vision by a complex security network of prohibitions and propaganda governing what could be showed, and still cannot be seen today because it keeps being absented from both photographic histories and art historical textbooks. Literary studies on the topic have been legion, on the other hand, and duly point out that writers were forced to bypass censorship by disguising the war as Vietnam (Ribeiro, 2004) – Assis Pacheco's book, for instance, had to be released originally as *Câu Kiên* (1972). Yet the flipside of this argument – the emphasis on the primacy of visual communication and the critical implications thereof – still rests unexamined. What would it mean to view rather than read these late colonial wars?[2] Therein lies the crux of my essay: a modest bid to seriously reconsider photography's role in shaping both the historical imagination and individual memory of those events, so that we may finally begin to productively distinguish the larger and fraught dynamics of image making within and between many decolonization wars, rather than define them all negatively against Vietnam.

It is no accident that so many of these writers explicitly alluded to an imageless world, and yet insist on conjuring referents from visible conflicts. The recurrent analogy with Vietnam largely owes to its visual prominence, which made it unmissable and unforgettable in the public imagination, elevating it to a standard against which any other conflict is perceived as invisible. In his early collages on the war, for instance, Portuguese artist Manuel Botelho was forced to address it vicariously through Vietnam partly to evade censorship, but mainly because he could not find pictures on the press – after 1968, even anodyne images of troops leaving or arriving in Portugal stopped being printed in newspapers (Idem, p. 26). This was, after all, a new era: the dawn of image culture. Images gained supremacy and authority over text, and the wars on the ground increasingly matched those waged by visual means. The spectacularly violent sights of Vietnam on mainstream media then turned it into the rule of thumb for debating the potential of images to shape the outcome of conflicts. But the exceptionalism of that case, when pitted against the concurrent wars of decolonization, has precluded us from addressing the topic at hand. In 1961, Ralph Austen noted this on his foundational study on European decolonization:

> how ill-adapted [the US] system is, in certain respects, to the successful waging of a colonial-type war. The French in Algeria did not distribute to the world pictures of their harkis torturing prisoners; British reporters covering Mau Mau had plenty to say about Mau Mau atrocities but little or nothing about atrocities committed by the suppressors of Mau Mau. But American wire services do distribute to the world pictures of "Viet Cong suspects" being tortured by America's

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[2] It is interesting to note the extent to which the new wave of literary and cultural studies now devoted to the Portuguese colonial wars has fully espoused the concept of "post-memory" developed by Marianne Hirsch, but rarely acknowledges the explicit centrality of the photographic image for this analytical model (Hirsch, 1997).

Vietnamese allies […] Critics of American imperialism can buttress their case with abundant and horrifying detail supplied by impeccable American sources. (Austen, 1969, p. 187)

Though troubling in many ways, the critique still has purchase half a century later. Only in the last decade, after all, did the sheer scale and brutality of the counter-insurgent campaigns by European colonial powers to maintain the rebellious overseas territories became known, along with the radical cover-up attempts to keep such operations under wraps. This begs the question: what if similar horrific pictures of decolonization wars had enjoyed wide circulation? What would have been the public reaction to photographs of torture, mass killing and napalm bombs by the same European colonial powers that condemned any such practices in Vietnam? How does this continue to affect or shape the memory and history of dirty colonial campaigns? This paper explores the scandalously overlooked relationship between decolonization wars and visual culture by focusing on a specific type of image: the atrocity photograph. What follows is structured in two parts: a brief historical contextualization that considers the visual cultures of the wars of decolonization and the nascent critical theorizing about violent images, and why it has remained exceedingly difficult to analyse graphic images in the colonial context; and, as a specific example of the profusion of archive-based work in relation to war, an analysis of a multimedia installation based on two photographs, Daniel Barroca's *Circular Body* (2015), an aesthetic experiment involving a rare appropriation of a graphic colonial photograph within the museum context, advancing a model for its intermedial remediation – an interface of sight, sound, and motion, through which to confront the schisms governing the late colonial archive, an intimate presentation of death from which to rethink the relation between self and world.

II

In Edgar Allan Poe's known short story, *The Purloined Letter* (1844), the object of crime lied in front of everyone's nose, yet everyone failed to recognize it. It was hidden in plain sight. The same applies to the decolonization wars and their evergreen myth of visual scarcity. The images are right there. Consider two recent examples. A popular feature film in Portugal, *April Captains* (2000) by Maria de Medeiros, tells the story of the revolution in Lisbon which brought colonial wars in Africa to an end. It begins with some of the grimmest scenes ever presented to a mainstream public: archival footage showing several corpses of identifiable black children and adults lying on the ground, as birds peck on their rotten flesh. Astonishingly, this opening scene had no warnings, context or explanation. At no point did critics remark that this archival footage was taken out of the world's largest campaign of atrocity images in the second half of the twentieth century, the shock propaganda tactics of the colonial war machine, reproduced here without a single comment (Dias Ramos, 2014). Consider then one of the most acclaimed documentaries on liberation struggles across Africa, Göran Hugo Olsson's *Concerning Violence* (2014). The most shocking sequences, it turned out, also came out of Portugal's conflict. Yet, this remains the least-known decolonization war in visual terms, and the nation most resistant to acknowledge any past wrongdoing (these two aspects, I argue, are intimately bound). This footage allows us to speculate on the possible effects, past and present, of visualizing colonial violence, since they were never watched by those in whose name such acts were perpetrated. The scenes are the following: first, a woman and a crying baby on a hospital bed, bleeding out

of freshly mutilated limbs after a colonial air raid in Mozambique (1972); second, Portuguese troops are ambushed in Guinea-Bissau (1969), the young men shook up as one of them slowly bleeds to death. The reception was telling: the first images have been criticised for exploiting the vulnerable, violated, and naked body of black women as hopeless victims, thus pandering to European voyeuristic appetites for African woes; the second ones have been criticised for being juxtaposed with the former, thus presupposing some moral equivalence. But one must recall that these pictures – not uncommon in the context of the Vietnam war – never reached audiences at home and still do not remain readily available. In fact, the visual records of attacks on Portuguese soldiers are so exceptional that, forty years later, when this footage was found in France, a television channel in Portugal launched a special broadcast to reveal them to the general public, for they had always been kept from mainstream audiences, and this was only one of several documentaries to re-use them since (Silva, 2017). To gauge the importance of these forbidden images, one must recall that even after the two attacks on camera, this is how the Portuguese ruler Marcello Caetano described the 13-year long war underway – the largest military effort of a Western country since World War II – in his weekly address to the nation:

> Some speak of a colonial war. A colonial war?! The Overseas Provinces are at peace and nobody contests the integrity of the Portuguese Nation. One traverses Guinea, covers the vast Angolan lands, crosses all of Mozambique, and finds no one in revolt. […] Everywhere life unfolds calm and normal, in a state of exemplary work and understanding (Cited in Saraiva de Carvalho, 1977, p. 108)

Such a grotesque doublespeak epitomizes the state-sanctioned disavowal and amnesia around the violence on the ground in the late colonial era, the hallmark of the decolonization wars that were always denied as such officially, effectively silenced, rendered invisible, refused representation. Arguably, the Portuguese colonial regime took the efforts to keep its extreme violence inaccessible to the gaze farther than any other European power. Its paranoiac control over the visual image during wartime was an extreme case of asymmetrical relations, with the political regime controlling and policing what could be seen and shown, striving to ensure that visual practices always support the official version and set in place a single regime of truth. In this sense, there is a strong case to be made for the reproduction of these pictures, even if, inscribed within them, there is a violence they still enact. To withhold them, thus perpetuating their omission, is to play into policies meant to keep the whole affair out of sight, naturalizing their absence. We have yet to deal with the large yet hardly accessible archives of horror that necessarily haunt every readily available aseptic image of the time, since the critical literature hitherto has neglected the radical extent to which colonial propaganda depended on atrocity photographs – Britain, France, and Portugal all poured millions into these campaigns, none of which has ever been studied so far –, and conversely the radical extent to which photographs of their own atrocities were stymied, kept away and neglected – the exceptions are telling, in light of what they omit and the little attention they command, like the beheading photographs from the Malayan Emergency (1948-60), Angola (1961), Mozambique (1973), and the torture snapshots in Algeria (1960). Only then may one surmise why, in mainstream historiography, it remains so easy to finds examples as that of a recent best-selling history of Portugal, which defined the colonial war as "not very deadly", because the only victims that are accounted for – that is to say, deemed worthy (Chomsky and

Herman, 1988) and grievable (Butler, 2010) – are on the side of colonial forces, even though the death ratio on the opposite side was twenty times higher (Ramos et al. 2009, p. 685). This naturalization of a differential treatment is key to understand the extreme schisms of the late colonial archive, and the enduring representation of the long cycles of violence and counter-violence that characterized the decolonization wars through a double bind, whereby insurgent atrocities were awarded broad publicity, detailed reports and a wall-to-wall coverage – aware of the political windfall, colonial regimes had no compunction in circulating explicit pictures – to change public opinion and justify retribution, while counter-insurgent atrocities faced draconian measures designed to render inexistent, unavailable, or marginal any compromising footage. Taken to the limit, this visual logic sanitises colonial violence by turning it into self-defence, leaving the overriding and still prevalent idea that decolonization wars were a defensive strategy to restore law and order, and not violent campaigns involving extra-legal and disproportionate means. Indeed, critics have been unable to come to grips with the fact that the imperial endgame could also be thought of, in essence, as an image problem, and that the defining photographs of colonial archives may ultimately fall under the three rubrics proposed by Ariella Azoulay: untaken; inaccessible; unshowable (2020, pp. 781-790).

III

> "History is what hurts."
> Frederic Jameson (1981, 102)

One of the crucial quandaries in dealing with the proliferation of images of violence in contemporary thought – its genealogy trails back to Nietzsche and exploded in France in the 1960s – is that its foundational moment occurred against the backdrop of decolonization wars which it nevertheless failed to take into account. Georges Bataille's last book, *Tears of Eros* (1962), for instance – banned by André Malraux, French Minister of Culture, as an outrage to morality –, launched the most systematic investigation on photographs of excessive violence, in this case of a Chinese torture, as evidence of the proximity of contradictions, sex and death, agony and ecstasy, religion and law. But just as Malraux's "museum without walls" assembled images by cross-cultural formal affinities, foregoing historical and cultural specificity to present a universalised representation of humanism abstracted into photographs of objects shorn of context, thus eliding colonial violence and enabling selective history (Gombrich 1994, Belting 2003, Feldman 2014), Bataille's theoretical elaborations fell prey to the same ahistorical and apolitical tendencies, wholly oblivious to the fact that those atrocity images from China were largely staged for the camera by French photographers, and utilized by colonial propaganda to justify European rule (Brook, Bourgon, Blue, 2008). But Roland Barthes's case is even more paradigmatic. While he has offered the most popular model for deconstructing visual culture in support of imperialism – the classic critique of the photograph of a black boy in uniform presumably saluting the French flag on the front cover of *Paris Match* (25 June 1955) –, it has gone completely unremarked that he simultaneously dismissed the brutal images of repression in Guatemala (those he famously called "shock-photos") as meaningless because they were over-constructed and hence left nothing to be extracted from them (Barthes, 1971). This is symptomatic of the state of visual studies, for we have become experts in

picking apart images to expose how they fail, but not in grasping the work that they actually do.[3] We have become obsessed with decoding ideological messages, but inept at figuring out the effects and affects of images, their affirming power. In another instance, Barthes demolished the photo-exhibition "The Family of Man" for its universalizing rhetoric by countering with two examples: the racist lynching of black teenager Emmett Till and the colonial repression of Algerians. However, at no point did Barthes acknowledge, let alone address, the explicit pictures that instrumentally brought both cases into public awareness. And neither did Susan Sontag, the formidable critic of photography who pontificated on the waning impact of shocking photographs while the last colonial empires launched propaganda campaigns of atrocity images to sway public opinion, as military strategists, political figures and public relations officers rejoiced at how efficiently they turned the tide of anti-colonial sentiment, at the same time that the image of Till (which she never referenced) asserted itself as the single most consequential photograph in US history. This theoretical corpus laid out the still dominant frameworks for thinking about photographs, but it is notably unhelpful in tackling burdensome colonial archives, especially those of graphic violence. Susie Linfield (2010) recently and rightly arraigned that generation of visual thinkers for overrelying on and misappropriating insights forged in a widely different historical context, the Weimar-era – drawing freely from Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer or Bertolt Brecht. A more pressing task, in my view, is to consider the ways in which the work of the doyens of theoretical discursivity, although enduringly productive and generative in endless critical ways, often rested upon the disavowal of the dirty decolonization wars raging on in the background, a fundamental erasure enshrined in the misnomer "postwar" to describe an era of European-led conflicts worldwide (Feldman 2014). We must turn, or return, to those archives of terror which critical theory failed to engage with and focus on why they matter, rather than squander all critical energy in decoding the work of propaganda. Such a return ought to take Jameson's epigraph at heart, in its suggestion that history must be saved from the grip of deconstruction and poststructuralist critique in their view that history is but a text, a discursive construction that bears little or no relation to what really happen. This means insisting that, although history is an absent cause, its bodily effects and psychic wounds can incarnate and be reckoned with.

On the effects of atrocity images, the paradigmatic example is Susan Sontag's account of her shocked discovery in 1945, as a 12-year old, of pictures from Nazi concentration camps:

> One's first encounter with the photographic inventory of ultimate horror is a kind of revelation, the prototypically modern revelation: a negative epiphany. […] Nothing I have seen - in photographs or in real life - ever cut me as sharply, deeply, instantaneously. Indeed, it seems plausible to me to divide my life into two parts, before I saw those photographs (I was twelve) and after […] When I looked at those photographs, something broke. Some limit had been reached, and not only that of horror. I felt irrevocably grieved, wounded, but a part of my feelings started to tighten; something went dead, something is still crying. (Sontag, 1978, pp. 19-20)

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[3] A clear indication, in my view, of the insufficient heed still paid to the haptic or somatic work of photographs in comparison with Barthes's semantic and semiotic approach, is how little the concurrent writing of Georges Bataille and Maurice Blanchot on the image impacted visual theory, especially in view of their focus on internal and extreme experiences as correlates, and their theorizing of pictures as both transgressive and inassimilable.

Sontag followed it with a sorry epitaph: "After thirty years, a saturation point may have been reached. In these last decades, "concerned" photography has done at least as much to deaden conscience as to arouse it." (Idem) This is one of the most widely cited passages on photography ever since, because it taps into the two most entrenched assumptions about the medium: the notion that our present visual landscape is awash with violent imagery, which, in turn, has depleted our very capacity to be shocked. Critical theorists have ardently disputed these suppositions over the last decade, rendering the particularity of Sontag's own encounter endlessly problematic.[4] It posited an inaugurating instant that could only result in diminishing effects in its wake, condemning viewers to "live out our existence in a numbed and exhausted afterlife" (Luckhurst, 2010, p.11). This is easily disproven by shifting the axis towards those who lived through the decolonization wars, which is precisely the temporal hiatus in Sontag's tale, the missing clause, which account for a deluge of horror images that has never been seriously considered, kept from public view for the most part, shunned by historians and theorists, and yet, I argue, at the dark dead centre of colonial history. This is also relevant since, among the ground-breaking scholarship which has emerged in the last decade, the new impetus for taking atrocity photographs seriously – along with its firm moral imperative to look at "intolerable images" and look again – has been centred on images of the Holocaust (Didi-Huberman, 2008).

Consider the following examples. French writer Michel Zink, for instance, still recalls the moment when he was made to see images of FLN atrocities in Algeria as a child: "I froze in horror. […] Plunged in a kind of raging nausea, I thought, surely inspired by conversations with my parents, that showing those photographs to the forces of order led to neither calm nor restraint. For us, kids, those photographs were literally unbearable. Until then, I had never understood how much the imagination of violence could ruin the spirit of a child." (Zink, 2018, p. 148). Portuguese journalist Diana Andringa also recalls her childhood in colonial Angola thus: "The first memory is that of photographs, terrible photographs, of the mutilated corpses […] photographs had done their job, the violence of images took over rationality, it impaired the capacity to think. […] those supporting independence in the colonies, readers of Fanon and Césaire, would take part in the civilian militias and invoked self-defence" (Andringa, 2009, np). A similar tale befell Marnus Erasmus, the 11-year-old white South African boy in Mark Behr's novel *The Smell of Apples* (1993) set in the 1970s. When his father, an army general, gathered the family to enjoy a slideshow in the living room, this included pictures of classified visits to Angola, hunting tours to Tanganyika, family outings in South Africa, yet all of this was shown interspersed with graphic images of tortured black soldiers in Rhodesia. Such a disconcerting blend of home entertainment with atrocity images included in their private album, in a format generally kept for the niceties of family life, reveals the banalization of extreme violence across southern Africa since the 1960s. The narrative plot not to implicitly equates the slaughter of black bodies with the killing of animals, in the dehumanizing and racialized language that shaped anti-terrorism, but inserts it into the familial narrative, with young Marnus describing corpses in intimate detail, at one point covering his eyes as his dad shows "a soldier holding up a black arm with pink meat hanging out where it was cut from the body" (Behr, 1995, p. 176). Even as he sees what he does not want to, Marnus is already implicated in processes of knowing and disavowal, looking and not seeing, as such heinous acts of violence are exclusively exposed to and rationalized by those privileged to witness that injury from the safety of their positions. Indeed, for all

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[4] These two diagnoses are ubiquitous in contemporary theory. A host of theorists have of late disputed the compassion fatigue theory, and the axiom of too many images of violence (Kennedy and Patrick, 2014).

the morbid hold that colonial violence exerts upon contemporary art, it is hard to find artists willing to implicate themselves and foreground explicit images that result from a privileged access to any such personal or familial archives. One notable exception is William Kentridge, whom, as a 6-year old, mistakenly took a yellow Kodak Box in his father's desk for a box of chocolates, and inside found explicit photographs of the Sharpeville Massacre (1960), when South African police opened fire on black protesters. "It was one of those moments", Kentridge recalled, "when one's understanding of the world turns a sharp corner." (Tomkins, 2010, p. 55). This cutting encounter not only redefined the moral compass of the child but held long-lasting artistic repercussions, as Kentridge still returns to the transformative wounding brought about by these pictures – some of them, unpublished in the home country, galvanized the global anti-apartheid movement – to probe how they exploded his sense of self and world.

The ever-enduring shocked discoveries of images of political violence in the latter half of the twentieth century, and the life-altering power of photographs to one's sense of identity, refutes Susan Sontag's axiomatic assumption about their withering status, and recently served as catalyst for Daniel Barroca's series of artistic interventions into images of the Portuguese colonial war (Dias Ramos, 2015). As a child, he browsed the banal portraits of his father's war album, from his time as a Portuguese conscript fighting in the colonial army in Guinea-Bissau. One day, while fiddling around with it, he noticed an unusually thick picture, only then to find another hidden one, tucked behind it: it showed an unknown black man, beaten into a bloody pulp. This image of someone battered to death concealed behind the banal snapshots of his father's war album is the necessary double to the innocuous group portraits of conscripts that rule our visual imagination of this conflict. They were the so-called trophy photographs (war porn or military propaganda) that enjoyed wide circulation among those in the battlefield, but are exceedingly hard to source today. This actual image had been passed around soldiers in the warfront to taunt the newcomers. As Daniel Barroca recalled,

> I was 10 when I saw it for the first time and the explosion of emotions caused by the confrontation with that image was immediately swallowed in silence. I kept silent. It's an irreversible event in my life that conditioned my perspective on what an image is and then on everything that has to do with colonial history in general. The fact is that we stayed together until today. (Barroca, 2015, np)

In a bold move, in the installation *Circular Body* (2015), Barroca did not keep this image out of circulation – the norm when displaying war albums in public, usually removed for fear of offense, and the rule with contemporary art's re-working of these archives, which tends to avoid graphic images of colonial atrocity. Instead, he glued reproductions of two photographs together, back to back: the black-and-white picture of the nameless blood-soaked dead fighter, and one of himself, in colour, as a 10-year-old, posing on a beach while vacationing in Portugal. Suspended from the ceiling by a cord attached to an engine, this dual image spins ceaselessly at the eye-level. The rotation both automates and animates the still picture, thereby spelling two visual effects that function as a structural analogy for the visual cultures of this war: when sideways, they seemingly vanish for one split-second, as if there is nothing to be seen; but in gyrating, they also leave a lingering afterimage in the air which conflates both, as in a flipbook. This alternating strategy evokes the schisms that define the late colonial archive, between the innocent stereotype and the brute

display of terror, too little and too much to see all at once, a contrast inscribed even at the chromatic level, in opposing the black and white with colour. The shifting images hold in tension, intermittently, those two poles of the late colonial archive, the uneven tensions of the conflicted past as they play across the field of visual representation in the counterpoint between the winsome family memoirs and the catastrophic war deeds.

This demonic pas-de-deux evidences that all images are contaminated and contagious. This material apprehension of photographs in mutation not only refuses to let them congeal into rote familiarity, but occurs over a cacophony of indistinct metal noises that come out of a loudspeaker nearby. Vision is therefore paired with other sensory modalities, exploring the importance of sound in relation to photographs, cognizant that they are usually used as objects to tell stories and form histories. This strategy harks back to his early experiments as in *Soldier Playing with Dead Lizard* (2008), a work in which Barroca compiled every moment of silence in the tapes that his father sent his mother during the war, as the viewer gazes at fragments and close-ups of one single picture. But here, however, rather than the silence of muted histories, one hears the crackling of stories whose communication seems to be jammed, as if the sound and fury of a past that is full of static. Like Sontag (1978, p. 21), "something went dead, something is still crying": the clatter and commotion bespeak of the sensuous and affective onslaught that the image, that never-ending affair, can elicit above or beyond any verbal communication. The revolutionary event of photography might, after all, not be so much about the technological ability to fix an image of the world but the experience of unfixing the latter through the former – such is the much fabled "tremendous shattering of tradition" that it brought about (Benjamin, 1969, p. 221) –, the splintering of the self and the world, breaking the flow of things and smashing parts of recorded actuality, as shards and scraps, left fractured or entering new constellations.

Chilling in its combination of cold-blooded violence and playful mobile aesthetics, their co-dependence brings together both minor and major events, the ordinary and extraordinary, along temporal dislocations. Welded together, they remind us that every image embraces its opposite – as Allan Sekula famously claimed "Every proper portrait has its lurking objectifying inverse in the files of the police" (Sekula, 1986, p. 7) –, with an innocent boy about to pass into disturbed knowingness of violence, but also the production of unknowability on the dead man by the innocent semblance of this archive. There is more here than the togetherness of the specific event of the child confronting, irrevocably, extreme violence. As Freud (2004) long pointed out, repression as a mental mechanism also parallels repression as a historical process.

There is something in these "negative epiphanies" which should be taken into account, as a way to work out the apparent disjuncture between the knowledge production about the violent images, and a violent context of decolonization they insistently refuse to acknowledge. But how does one work out a capacious way of wrangling with these issues? In suturing the two disparate events together, Barroca uses his privileged access to photographs to subvert the inherited narratives and dominant modes of visualizing the conflict, but, by the same token, he also opens himself to the accusations of gratuitous voyeurism, narcissistic identification and aestheticizing suffering that haunt the display of violent images of the colonial era in the public realm, surrounding the violation of depicted subjects, induced second-hand trauma in viewers, and the reproduction of violence. The fundamental question, in this regard, is left unanswered, perhaps unanswerable: who has the right to the image? And yet, in a way, the mobile structure spinning

the images on a fugitive path foregrounds the image's potential to attack the supposed stability of the everyday, its ability to obviate paralysis and trigger a re-cognition of the present.

These entwined images incorporate, or even fold, distance and difference into its own motion, pivoted on a cut and a passage, a fugue and a revenant, a vanishing and a transgression, which disturb and perturb any fixed stability to the archives. They testify, in other words, that there is no end to images such as these, and that such images themselves never end. The intermedial activation disassembles, transmutes and retrieves the originals, and thereby unleashes aspects heretofore unseen, new configurations of the visible and sayable, the sensible and intelligible.

Any attempt to decolonize these photographic albums necessarily resides in that very principle, and locates, in this instance, in the moment an innocent child passes to disturbed knowledge of violence, and recognizes the production of non-knowledge shaping the innocent and innocuous of the archive. It is necessary to investigate the visual economy at play, in order to underline the impossibility of telling histories from the multiple sides of war with parity and proportionality on the basis of images, given the asymmetries over which visual practices rely in colonial contexts. To decolonize means to realize that photography requires the elevation of the other half of its stories. The juxtaposition of the intimate domestic sphere (one signified by the family photograph) with a war atrocity brings together two fields which might, at first, appear antagonistic, but entertain an inextricably interwoven relationship. And in doing so, it also manifests the real effects and affects of the image, the sensorial shock they inflict on one's own life and perception of history. We need to sink back into what was a vast visual archive of decolonization wars in order to contest the interpretive orthodoxy of these brutal events.

One of the tiresome developments of archive-oriented contemporary art is how stale and circular the discourse became since the 1990s, rehashing by now predictable theoretical routines around Borges, Derrida, Foucault or Freud, through a proverbial roll-call of canonical artists, in order to adumbrate the same abstracting and psychologising axioms on the archive as an untimely paradox, unworkable aporia, unknowable rhizome, as a contradiction in unity with scrambled temporalities. On the one hand, such insistence upon the metahistorical and transhistorical comes at the expense of a more concrete engagement with the archives in question, eclipsing their specific genealogies and contested formations. On the other hand, this flight from the contingencies of history into art at an ontological level – through readings that privilege the formal and symbolic aspects of archive-based art – ends up entrenching precisely that "'comforting 'knowledge" which critic Douglas Crimp decried as "the deception to which art history is most deeply, if often unconsciously, committed" (Crimp, 1993, p. 56). The postcolonial turn has yielded noteworthy challenges to such paradigms, in a salutary opening towards uncomfortable historical knowledge, and resisting ideas of archive as a single abstract entity, one reified as a mere discursive token to be used in a given conceptual scheme, since one should engage with the historicity of archives in the plural form. It thwarts the unremitting quest for a master theory of the archive as such, reminding us that these overused discursive categories are not free-floating analytical tools detached from history, but forms of experience (Ross 1995). Yet, this also elicits ambivalent results, especially in terms of their reception, due to the widespread assumption that simply by virtue of tapping into colonial archives, artworks automatically insure their own criticality in that regard – this is patently not the case in most instances, all the more so since the majority of the photographic returns to these photographs originates from, is funded by, made for, and only circulates in the formerly colonizing nations.

Daniel Barroca is part of a generation of artists seeking in different ways to interrogate the contested memory and history of decolonization wars, appropriating the existing images to confront a thirteen-year long war that, contrary to Vietnam, never produced a single iconic photograph by which the historical event could be remembered, discussed, or contested in the public sphere. This does not mean, I hope to have made clear, that there were no images. Yet despite the emergence of archive-based projects over the last decade that have offered a historicising lens through which to re-engage with photographic archives of the war, this work by Daniel Barroca is unique it that it breaks the taboo against presenting unhindered violence, an atrocity. Anchoring the artist's portrait is a way of situating himself into this story. Barroca is emphatic about approaching history in the first person – "What is my story after all, and how can it be told?", he posits as a starting point (Barroca, 2018, p. 32) – against an exclusionary "we" that sums up and subsumes a population under totalizing narratives. This signals a larger shift in archive-based art. Indeed, artists working in the broader post-colonial context have rejected the post-structuralist deconstruction of the figure of the author by privileging their own biographies in their work (Gardner, 2011). This is a political and ethical gesture of the utmost import, in that Barroca assumes the role of an "implicated subject" (Rothberg, 2019). Having been no direct agent of harm – and thereby not falling into the familiar categories of victim, perpetrator, bystander –, he seeks an alternative account for a connection to injustices, not to denounce evil, but to flesh out one's own implication. At the same time, it foregrounds the idea that atrocity photographs operate life-changing ruptures that can completely change identities. These irruptions cannot be contained, for they unleash transgressions that overflow one's sense of fixed identity. In this sense, the perpetual motion which these still pictures are thrown into also serves to undo any fixed notions of identity between the two subjects. "Without relations of difference, no representation could occur", Stuart Hall argued (1999, p. 26). In other words, to be in representation is to be in relation to others, a relation never to be fully mastered or controlled, always forestalling any sense of closure. By putting viewers into intimate contact with the disturbing presentation of death, it subverts the semblance of propriety behind the normality of the other image. It reveals the monstrosity lurking behind trivial appearance, especially behind the image of a ritual supposed to express and secure the continuity of the generations but whose normality – in the Bataillean sense – is exposed as an operation which requires and also depends on a massive surplus of violence. This gyroscope, on the one hand, literalizes what psychotherapists call compulsive repetition until the original trauma is dominated. On the other hand, it destabilises a pathological attachment of the past and unsettles the apparent fixities of the photograph, thus reorienting the direction of readings with regards to atrocity images which tend to make viewers shudder in shock and look away.

Secondly, there is no infatuation with the post-structuralist notion that language always falters and fails to deliver. On the contrary, instead of this ahistorical approach to the visual, with its concurrent downplaying of the materiality of objects in favour of the optical and the semiotic, the intermedial nature of this installation pushes for an embodied understanding of vision rather than a detached or exclusively optical experience. This slide towards the visceral and acoustic privileges the idea of subjective experience, rather than a fetishist attachment to the positivist historical object – the document. This sonic experience into which the image is immersed has become an important strand in postcolonial studies on the image, a way of listening closely to photography, to engage with lost archives of historically dismissed images (see Moten 2003 and Campt, 2017). This intermedial re-working allows haptic potentialities of the material object to be exploded open, calling us to listen to, rather than look at, images, thereby opening up radical interpretive possibilities

and alternative accounts of subjectivity not just determined through sight but also aurality. This sense of disoriented vision and sonic accompaniment leaves us with new and perplexing means to become attuned to the manifold frequencies across which images operate. This, in turn, calls upon notions of listening in terms of a "technique of nearness" or "closeness", in the sense given by Walter Benjamin (2002), as a model that functions sympathetically, promoting an intimate and proximate perception of the past which is attentive to its grainy detail and unbidden demands, "wakeful to other senses and capacities, especially the field of hearing, producing, and muffling sound" (Hunt, 2016, p. 43).

The image is split by a latent violence that is required to organise it as a stable image, but the overt violence also splits open the image. Thrown into flux, the still image then resists stable meaning, fixed identity, circulating in a movement which blurs subjects, causing them to run into each other (both collide and become merged). But this spinning encounter also resists giving into the semantic, and being coalesced and articulated around giving a meaning which is sabotaged by the muffling noise of a language that has broken down – a language that cannot express the violence, and a violence that always exceeds language. The continuous motion indicates that the image produces complex effects, implying an act of reading which does not try to appropriate it under sense and that does not impose a conclusion, but tried to negotiate a senseless sense. As Nietzsche points out, "what really arouses indignation against suffering is not suffering as such but the senselessness of suffering" (Nietzsche, 1998, p. 56). Brutality, injury, injustice, and even death, are tolerable once they can be converted into signification. We see, we know, so we understand. Barroca's work breaks the chain of signification between seeing, knowing, and understanding. The mosaic of relations that it entertains between the visible and violence is not stable nor linear, without a clear map of relations between beings. It serves no end and leads to no appeasement. It issues only in an absurd compulsion to repeat and to delve into the extreme violence of the decolonization wars again and again, torn apart by the double bind of its own contradictory requirements. It is impossible to stabilize as an image, it cannot be assigned a fixed place, nor formally circumscribe the event. A peculiar effect that, much like the extreme colonial violence which lurks behind it, offers no satisfying conclusions, no points of repose, and remains the more unsettling in that it refuses a closure. As such, the seeming simplicity of single photographs is reprocessed so that they stop fitting easily into schemes of understanding and representation, or conventional modes of historical analysis.

"It is more difficult to honour the memory of the nameless than that of the renowned", Walter Benjamin claimed. "Historical construction should be dedicated to the memory of the nameless." (2003, p. 404). Barroca experiments in different modes of production of images and their display, especially those including a forthcoming eruption of violence from decolonization wars, are such an attempt, especially since, as the crueller hallmark of the colonialist logic, the differential treatment accorded to human life is such that the body counts are usually reserved for the imperial armies, which paled in comparison to the number of their victims – in a ratio of 1 to 20, in the Portuguese case – often excluded from the war casualties. "The nameless", Benjamin further clarified, "are those who are not inscribed and who cannot be inscribed in historical writings" (2003, p. 404). Barroca not only brings out these bodies that hide behind the apparent façade of a non-war – the skeletons in the closet, so to speak –, but insists on setting them into a dialectical image that is always a fugitive one, where past and present crash into one another incessantly. This intermedial practice throws what is static and lies still in motion, encouraging recombinations and associative potentialities to unsettle distinctions between the dead and the living, oblivion and survival, popular memory

and official history, and to critically revise now-entrenched aseptic narratives on the decolonization wars as less-than-violent and fanatical attempts to control the truth of those events. In unpacking the modes of knowledge that such atrocity images authorize, and the deceptive appearance they dissent from fugitively, this means of addressing terror is a visual spur for reflection about historical continuities and potential relations of adjacency between subject positions. Less of a leap out of the ruins of the past – as Benjamin's dialectical images – this is a loop, in incessant feedback. For, as in this whirlpool of a work, images are never firmly in place, they continually happen. So is history. As Stephen Dedalus limned, "History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake." (Joyce, 2008, p. 34)

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