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► **To cite this version:**

Catherine Bernard. “Affecting / Re-affecting Vision: the Experiential Politics of Contemporary English Art”. *TIES. Revue de Littérature. Textes, Images et Sons*, 2021, Pouvoirs de l’image, affects et émotions, 5, pp.30-43. hal-03572546

HAL Id: hal-03572546

<https://hal.science/hal-03572546>

Submitted on 14 Feb 2022

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Revue TIES

5 | 2021

*Pouvoirs de l'Image,
Affects et Émotions*

Affecting/Re-affecting Vision: the Experiential Politics of Contemporary English Art

Catherine Bernard

RÉSUMÉ. Alors que le « clonage » viral (W.J.T. Mitchell) des images et leur épuisement concomitant semblent désormais dominer la circulation et la réception critique des images, l'art fait aussi souvent le choix de prendre la saturation visuelle à son propre jeu. Se réappropriant le langage du choc, l'art contemporain choisit souvent de faire de l'expérience son matériau premier. Expérimentant avec un langage qui retourne la logique de la médiation artistique contre elle-même, il vise à parler directement aux sens et aux émotions. En se tournant vers l'art anglais contemporain, et plus spécifiquement vers les œuvres de Mark Wallinger, Marc Quinn ou Jeremy Deller, cet article tente de comprendre comment l'expérience visuelle se fait le lieu même d'une pratique incarnée et critique qui met en question notre relation visuelle à l'art comme expérience. En redéfinissant radicalement les limites de ce qui peut se définir comme une image, les œuvres de Wallinger ou Quinn s'approprient la langue critique de l'art conceptuel pour imaginer une autre politique des affects visuels. En interrogeant le corps politique du cœur même des institutions culturelles – le musée ou la galerie –, ils redonnent sens à la conviction, héritée des avant-gardes, que l'art peut se faire expérience critique, praxis incarnée.

ABSTRACT. In an age when the viral “cloning” of images (W.J.T. Mitchell) and their concurrent depletion seem to be the cultural and critical order of the day, art often opts for a language that takes visual saturation at its own game. Reappropriating the language of shock, contemporary art often chooses to take experience as its raw material. Often experimenting with and elaborating on a language that turns artistic mediation against itself, it intends to speak directly to our senses and emotions. Turning to contemporary English art, and more specifically to works by Mark Wallinger, Marc Quinn, or Jeremy Deller, the paper aims at understanding how visual experience becomes the site for an embodied and yet critical practice that questions our visual relation to art as experience. Radically redefining the very remit of what qualifies as an image, Wallinger's or Quinn's works enlist the critical language of conceptualism for a politics of visual affects. Confronting the body politic from the very heart of its cultural institutions – the museum and the gallery –, they reactivate the avant-garde belief in an artistic praxis grounded in the critical effectiveness of aesthetic experience.

MOTS CLÉS: art anglais contemporain, affect, Mark Wallinger, Marc Quinn, Jeremy Deller, praxis

KEYWORDS: *contemporary English art, affect, Mark Wallinger, Marc Quinn, Jeremy Deller, praxis*

The power of images, their capacity to affect us have long baffled theorists and critics. To paraphrase W.J.T. Mitchell's famous words, "pictures want" (Mitchell 2005) something from us, they do not let us be, they worry us, just as we worry them as we might say of a scar or a minor wound. They entail a specific form of engagement in which intellection, the hermeneutics of images is woven with affect, in such a way that it becomes impossible to distinguish between affect and its hermeneutics. To a great extent, the affective power of images is what also fuels the suspicion still attached to them. Combined with their irresistible circulation – their "cloning" –, this affective power has also become what haunts the visual from within. In his 1984 Mari Kuttna Memorial Lecture, Jean Baudrillard was to lay the foundations for what is still to some extent our understanding of the power of images, a capacity to engulf the present in a hypermediality that supersedes reality itself and thus also makes images deviously immoral.

For some time now, in the dialectical relation between reality and images (that is, the relation that we wish to believe dialectical, readable from the real to the image and vice versa), the image has taken over and imposed its own immanent, ephemeral logic; an immoral logic without depth, beyond good and evil, beyond truth and falsity; a logic of extermination of its own referent, a logic of the implosion of meaning in which the message disappears on the horizon of the medium. (Baudrillard 1987, 21-22)

Baudrillard was here elaborating on the analysis of the precession of simulacra he had developed a few years before in *Simulacres et simulation*, more specifically in the first chapter of the essay in which he introduces a radical distinction between the "good appearance" that "reflects a profound reality," and is of the order of the sacred, and a "bad appearance" that masks reality (Baudrillard 1981, 17). Eventually images sever all links with reality and become their "own pure simulacrum" (Baudrillard 1981, 17). Although her perspective is different, Marie José Mondzain was also to insist on what she perceives as the dangerous triumph of a mass regime of images in which we fall hostages to "spectacular productions" whose effect is to annihilate our agency as spectators (Mondzain 17). Images trouble us. For some, their immediacy and their spectacular proliferation threaten us. For Baudrillard and Mondzain, what is specifically at stake today is the capitalistic regime of images, the depletion of their referentiality or indexicality and – Walter Benjamin's mourning of the lost aura of images is never far away – their sacred heuristic agency. Rather than sustaining a subject "in his/her relation to others" (Mondzain 132) mass images produce new "pathologies" (Mondzain 135) that leave the subject both destitute and wanting for more. As we will try to show, it is also from the heart of such vacant hypermediality that a different form of visual agency may be defined, one that resubjectivizes the gaze as praxis.

Needless to say, it is impossible to speak of "images" as such, as if they all belonged to the same category and worked upon us in the same way. Speaking of images in bulk risks essentializing their grammar and their reception. In the field of contemporary art, the visual turn of our culture has entailed a different form of

proliferation that has displaced the indexicality of images and their strict grammar. Images can no longer be defined as reflecting reality transitively. They remain reflecting apparatuses, but their capacity to reflect is a self-reflexive one; it carries its own critical praxis.

Such critical self-reflexiveness has become central to the affective power of images in the field of art, where the very definition of what qualifies as an image has borne the full brunt of another turn, that to artistic pluralism. The power of images has been both jeopardized and enhanced by such formal pluralism and it might be useful to point to some of the concepts conditioning our reception and understanding of images in contemporary art, prior to turning to an analysis of specific works. Arthur Danto insists in his essay *Beyond the Brillo Box. The Visual Arts in Post-Historical Perspective* that we should learn to “live with pluralism” (Danto 1992, 217-231); and his insistence seems more than ever to the point today. Responding to Clement Greenberg’s advocacy of medium-specificity and his objection that the post-Abstract Expressionism period produced no genuinely new art, he was to rework the notion of pluralism in his 1997 essay *After the End of Art. Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*:

To say that history is over is to say that there is no longer a pale of history for works of art to fall outside of. Everything is possible. Anything can be art. And because the present situation is essentially unstructured, one can no longer fit a master narrative to it. Greenberg is right: nothing has happened for thirty years. That is perhaps the most important thing to be said about the art of the past thirty years. But the situation is far from bleak, as Greenberg’s cry of “Decadence!” implies. Rather, it inaugurates the greatest era of freedom art has ever known. (Danto 1997, 114)

Danto focuses on the aesthetic regime of images, but his iconoclastic reading may apply to images at large, in their infinite variety. Other critics and theorists were also trying, in the late 1990s, to come to terms with the waning of the hegemonic history of modern art that had had the upper hand since the second half of the 19th century. The long and dominant history of the inexorable progress of painting, especially as moving towards self-reflexive “truth to the medium” was, according to Danto, at last being questioned as the master narrative of art; a master narrative that had also conditioned the distribution of the sensible and cultural hierarchies between “good” and “bad” images, or, to use critic and artist Hito Steyerl’s word, between rich and “poor images” (Steyerl 2012, 31-45).

Rosalind Krauss was, famously, to insist that ours was a “post-medium condition.” To contextualize this “post-medium condition,” she borrowed from Fredric Jameson’s chapter in *The Cultural Turn*, entitled “Transformations of the Image in Postmodernity,” a chapter in which Jameson denounces the aestheticization of culture at large, with its “random and yet wide-ranging sampling of sensations, affectabilities and irritations of sense data and stimulations of all sorts and kinds” and “the permanent inconsistency of a mesmerizing sensorium” (Jameson 112). We might here ponder Jameson’s distrust of “sensations,

affectabilities” that he perceives as mindless “irritations.” His choice of words evinces a profound distrust of the affective work of images, as he chooses to speak of “sensations” rather than of affects and emotions. Post-Deleuzian materialism was, on the contrary, to enlist sensation to a neo-empiricist analysis of images. One needs here briefly to mention Brian Massumi’s *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* which, far from disowning sensations, reads them as the driving force of art’s experiential hermeneutics. For many contemporary artists, the empirical and affective power of images is closely entangled with the shift away from a medium-oriented reading of art. It necessarily sublates the modernist advocacy of art’s autonomy, the affective reempowering of images being, from a wider perspective, inherent in our “post-medium condition” as described by Rosalind Krauss: “One description of art within this regime of postmodern sensation is that it mimics just this leeching of the aesthetic out into the social field in general. [...]” (Krauss 56). A radical shift or transformation in the status and effect of images is at work in contemporary art that she, among other things, ascribes to technological evolutions and the displacement of film by newer media among which video:

[Video] occupied a kind of discursive chaos, a heterogeneity of activities that could not be theorized as coherent or conceived as having something like an essence or unifying core. Like the eagle principle, it proclaimed the end of medium-specificity. In the age of television, so it broadcast, we inhabit a post-medium condition. (Krauss 31-32)

What Jameson, Massumi and Krauss perceived as our new postmodern sensorium necessarily redefined the language and pragmatics of images. The general aestheticisation of culture and the triumph of a visual language of “intensities” thus made it necessary to rethink the Image/Picture dyad. As we know, W.J.T. Mitchell had already gone a very long way in that direction. In 1986, in the opening chapter of *Iconology*, “What Is an Image?,” he distinguishes between Image and Picture, “Image” acting as a core or root term whose activation or implementation can be “Graphic/Optical/Perceptual/Mental or Verbal” (Mitchell 1986, 10). Mitchell’s chapter then goes on to denounce “the tyranny of the picture” and the narrow conception of image-making it imposes. I would thus like to argue with Mitchell that artistic pluralism and our post-medium condition impose we undo the Image/Picture dyad and think the pragmatics of contemporary images as working beyond the “tyranny of the picture,” to bring us to rethink the affective work of images, as well as the remit of what we understand by the term “image.”

Re-imagining the collective

The artists I will turn to produce images whose affects and effects cannot be restricted to the sole pictorial regime, images that enlist a complex visual language building on collective emotions as much as on private emotions; a visual regime that harnesses the ubiquity of contemporary images, i.e. the postmodernity of images as defined by Jameson, in order to question the effects of such ubiquity. For Mark

Wallinger, Marc Quinn and Jeremy Deller, images address us – *elles nous regardent*, we might say in French –, because they tie in directly with a visual regime that is not only artistic, but that addresses a complex, boundless visual culture.

English artists have placed such a visual entanglement of seeing and seen at the very heart of their work, in order to make visibility visible, to make us see what processing the real visually means and the way visual hermeneutics is always already an embodied politics.¹ Marc Quinn is one of them. Marc Quinn's *Irises* on-going series, initiated in 2009, offers a radical instantiation of such critical neo-empiricism. In one of the sections of the series entitled *The Eye of History*,² Quinn maps the globe onto a human eye. Each oil painting in the series offers a decentered perspective, our ethnocentric projection of the world map being each time reinvented, and Europe or Northern America displaced to the periphery of the ocular map. Literally reorienting the gaze to produce a displaced vision of the world, the series confronts our cultural ethnocentrism with alternative perspectives on our planet. More disturbingly of course, it produces a form of visual conceit in which the ocular globe turns into the terrestrial orb, as in his 2012 *Where the Worlds Meet the Mind (TC280)*³ that simply depicts a blood-injected ocular globe, with possibly in the far distance a ghostly sun shining through the eye's tissues. Gazing back at us gazing at the world, the irises force us to a dizzying experience of reflexive and embodied vision. Gradually, space itself expands into geological time as in *The Inner Eye (Beginning of the Ice Age)*⁴ where the immeasurable time of geology itself folds into the inner eye of timeless vision. As conceptual as the visual conceit might be, it all comes down to experience, to the physical stimulus of our eye, to the response of our globe, that little orb in which the world is caught and framed, that little orb "where the worlds meet the mind" in truly empirical fashion. Quinn's choice of oil painting is of paramount importance here, since it grants the works body where the choice of acrylic would, on the contrary, have resulted in a greater sense of transparency, thus contradicting the physicality sought by Quinn.⁵ The concreteness of the medium works counter-intuitively to inscribe our contemplation in the long time of the history of art and thus give even greater aesthetic and hermeneutic depth to the image.

With this thought experiment, we are both confronted by images and the way they convey and relay the ideological constructedness of visibility. The image here

¹ I use the adjective "English" as all the artists I will turn to in the present paper were born in England. Although this is not the central topic of my analysis, one must point out the fact that their take on contemporary forms of imperialism offers a critical reflexion on England's political domination within the union.

² <http://marcquinn.com/artworks/single/the-eye-of-history-atlantic-perspective-ts2001>, last consultation 03/05/19.

³ <http://marcquinn.com/artworks/single/where-the-worlds-meet-the-mind-tc2801>, last consultation 03/05/19. Needless to say, such a conceit evokes the conceits imagined by the likes of John Donne, for instance in « A Valediction: of Weeping », a poem in which the tear is transmuted into a globe on which the world can be deciphered. In Quinn's work, the logic of the conceit remains Metaphysical and brings together idea and sensation. I would like to thank the anonymous reader who kindly noted the relevance of Donne's conceit to Quinn's work.

⁴ <http://marcquinn.com/artworks/single/the-inner-eye-beginning-of-the-ice-age>, last consultation 03/05/19.

⁵ Here again, my thanks are due to the reader who encouraged me to emphasize Quinn's choice of medium.

functions as a conceptual conceit generating critical capacities that are also enmeshed in the physicality of the paintings and of our aesthetic experience. Quinn obviously remains aware of the lasting legacy of Duchamp's reflexive and critical take on aesthetic emotion. He works with and from within the postmodernist language of allegory as it was influentially defined by art critic Craig Owens in his two essays entitled "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism":

In allegorical structure, then, one text is read through another, however fragmentary, intermittent, or chaotic their relationship may be. [...] Allegorical imagery is appropriated imagery; the allegorist does not invent images but confiscates them. He lays claim to the culturally significant, poses as its interpreter. (Owens 54)

In his second essay on the same topic, Owens was to add that

Postmodernism neither brackets nor suspends the referent but works instead to problematize the activity of reference. When the postmodernist work speaks of itself, it is no longer to proclaim its autonomy, its self-sufficiency, its transcendence; rather, it is to narrate its own contingency, insufficiency, lack of transcendence. (Owens 85)

Such "lack of transcendence" does not imply renouncing the critical agenda of the avant-garde; on the contrary, it revitalizes it by probing art's praxis and its entangling of experience and experimentation.

The reorientation of the gaze is of necessity also a critical reorientation. The return of/to materialism recently witnessed in theory testifies to the urgency of that critical necessity. As already briefly mentioned, in the wake of Gilles Deleuze's neo-empiricism, such different thinkers as Brian Massumi, Rosi Bridotti in *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* or, from a different perspective, Jane Bennett in *Vibrant Matter. A Political Ecology of Things*, have all stressed the critical effectiveness of sensation, of affects and bodily emotions. More broadly even, theory has, since the years 2000, taken a renewed interest in the political and transformative performativity of emotions. One may merely mention Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's 2003 *Touching Feeling* or Lauren Berlant, for instance in "Thinking about Feeling Historical." In that essay Berlant insists on the necessity to track "affective intensities politically" and to rethink "the sensing of history, and of the historic" (Berlant 4). Reading "affective intensities" as the seat of agency and of critical performativity implies of course we also reorient our critical gaze away from canonical takes on criticism largely inherited from textualism. This is the object of Rita Felski's latest essay *The Limits of Critique* in which she ponders what she considers to be the dominant "hermeneutics of suspicion" and speaks in favour of a "post-critical reading," and although Felski's corpus is a literary one, her words to a great extent may also apply to visual performativity:

Rather than looking behind the text – for its hidden causes, determining conditions, and noxious motives – we might place ourselves in front of the text, reflecting on what it unfurls, calls forth, makes possible. This is not idealism, aestheticism, or magical thinking but a recognition – long overdue – of the text’s status as coactor: as something that makes a difference, that helps make things happen. (Felski 12)

Interestingly, eschewing the “hermeneutics of suspicion” does not entail a re-subjectivation of vision. Borrowing both from Eve Sedgwick’s vision of reading as “reparative” and from Bruno Latour’s notion of “actor-network” theory,⁶ Rita Felski does not consider that questioning the uses of critique means giving up on the collective intent of creation. On the contrary, she speaks for a transcension of private emotion in order to understand how literature/art speaks to us and probably speaks us, intimately, because it speaks to us and speaks us collectively. In her essay *Cruel Optimism*, Lauren Berlant insists similarly on the necessity to fully grasp the way affects are produced by and in turn articulate a shared present; in her case that of globalised liberalism, a political reading of affects that Marc Quinn’s *The Eye of History* also captures and reflects.

One can see how crucial such affective turn is if we want to understand how contemporary visual arts think through the collective body and speak the collective body through. The polis does not solely reside in a set of laws and regulations. It is enacted through collective affects and is instantiated through a collective experience. The body politic does not pre-exist its enactment via the co-presence of bodies, affects, thoughts, works and their becoming visible. As Henri Lefebvre also insists in *La Production de l’espace*, we do not so much inhabit space as produce it even as we live it. We make space visible even as we enact it. Ultimately such collective emotions are the very matter of art and through them our collective sense of self is made visible to itself; it enacts its own historicity.

Needless to say, some of the most powerful collective affects, some of the most effective ones remain those pertaining to collective memory. The “imagined communities” delineated by Benedict Anderson, the *Theatre of Memory* explored by historian Raphael Samuel, capture something of the agency of collective memorial affects. In *An Anthropology of Images*, Hans Belting also points to the embodiment of cultural memory and the way images travel through our always already cultural bodies. But rather than turn to the way collective affects are rearticulated through collective memory and its palimpsest of emotions, one may want to turn to the way these affects are enacted in the here and now, at the heart of the *polis* or the city, to the way art thus embraces the present and generates affects that make our collective body self-sentient.

⁶ Felski engages in a sustained dialogue with Bruno Latour, and specifically with *Reassembling the Social. An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Images at war

English artists have recently experimented with shock – as inherited from the avant-garde – and with self-reflexive experience precisely in order to materialize collective affects in all their contradictions. In this exploration of the plural affects of images, installations and performances – two formats or media that have unhinged the grammar of images – have played a central part and allowed artists to probe the self-reflexive performativity of the visual.

The protracted wars Britain has been involved in, in Afghanistan and Iraq, have offered a particularly apt *topos* or site to make us see and make us feel the dark materiality of collective affects. Here, right away, one must insist on the way images are not mere reflections of their context. One should not turn to these representations of England's wars as providing a coherent visual language producing a stable historical interpretation. The works I will turn to address us in a plural way and, as Lauren Berlant suggests about affect, “open [the works and us] to all sorts of consequences”: “Our current view of the communication of affect and emotion is too often simply mimetic and literalizing, seeing their transmission as performative rather than as an opening to all sorts of consequences.” (Berlant 4) In order to achieve a complex, open form of performativity whose outcome remains uncertain, artists have harnessed the complex economy of representation to an embodied experimentation with aesthetic experience as political experience.

English artists and novelists have been among the most committed to invent a language of affect that would try and come to terms – violently, radically – with the collective experience of being a nation at war, although the wars in question might be distant and somewhat illegible. Interestingly, the imprint left on collective consciousness by these wars is also to be found in more popular genres and formats. J.K. Rowling, aka Robert Galbraith, makes of the hero of her Strike crime series a war veteran turned private investigator and one may remember that in the BBC1 adaptation of the Sherlock Holmes universe, Sherlock, Watson is also a war veteran. As often, popular culture has been very prompt to incorporate and work upon the collective experience of war.

In the field of art, one of the first and most direct explorations of the political affect of images was to be found in Mark Wallinger's *State Britain* (in 2007).⁷ The installation was to be awarded the Turner Prize and constituted a major intervention in Britain's collective reflection on its involvement in Iraq. The format of the work also forcefully materialized the ongoing debate about the post-medium status of contemporary art. Wallinger's installation consisted in a painstaking studio recreation of a protest camp that had been slowly elaborated by peace-activist Brian Haw on Parliament Square against the economic sanctions imposed on Iraq and then against the war in Iraq itself. The protest was to be seen on Parliament Square between 2001 and 2006 when Haw's camp were dislodged by the police. Installed in

⁷ <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/wallinger-state-britain-t14844>, last consultation 03/05/19.

the neo-classical Duveen Galleries of Tate Britain, Wallinger's reconstruction of Haw's activist occupation blatantly flouted all kinds of established laws. It mocked the frontier between art and non art. One was expected to wonder whether it qualified as art or whether the recreation invalidated creativeness. It also violated a more rigid if just as intangible law; in 2005, the Blair government had passed the "Serious Organised Crime and Police Act" which prohibited "unauthorised demonstrations within a one kilometre radius of Parliament Square." Quite aptly, one may say, the outer reach of the zone cut across the Duveen Hall, thus bisecting Wallinger's installation, thus questioning the very status of Wallinger's installation even further: if Wallinger's installation was indeed a work of art, then it escaped the remit of the law and was hence politically ineffective, and if it was true political activism, then it could no longer qualify as art and had to be removed, as Haw's camp had been removed.

Like the Occupy Wall Street movement was to do only a couple of years later, Haw and Wallinger's interventions occupied the sites of power.⁸ Their eye-sores forced us to see. They could hardly be ignored. They relentlessly reminded the visitors of the concrete reality of war and tore at the heart of the urban, political and cultural fabric of the polis. The questions raised by Wallinger, in the wake of Brian Haw, were not new. They were those which Judith Butler already asked in 2003 in *Precarious Life. The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, the essay inspired by Georges Bush's "Shock and awe" war of retaliation. As we know, the questions her essay raises are both simple and infinitely complex: "Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? And, finally, What makes for a grievable life?" (Butler 20)

To many a Tate Britain visitor the installation must have been confounding, in its paradoxically de-aestheticized take on art and on aesthetic emotion. Its disturbing mixture of Duchampian conceptualism – Wallinger's installation is after all but an elaborate ready-made – and in-your-face physicality, some of the pictures of dead babies being barely bearable. Such a disturbing mixture must indeed have seemed baffling, but as Butler argues being "confounded" by the other may be the first step towards a painstaking rebuilding of a tentative "we":

For if I am confounded by you, then you are already of me, and I am nowhere without you. I cannot muster the "we" except by finding the way in which I am tied to "you," by trying to translate but finding that my own language must break up and yield if I am to know you. You are what I gain through this disorientation and loss. This is how the human comes into being, again and again, as that which we have yet to know. (Butler 49)

Under the pressure of the other – the unseen victims of the sanctions, and then of the war in Iraq – the language of art "breaks up." It breaks up to allow what no cultural exclusion zone may contain. Needless to say, such a pouring forth is only rendered possible courtesy of a cultural institution that also functions as a strategy

⁸ On the relation of art and the various forms taken by the "Occupy" movement, see Yates McKee.

of containment, according to the law of cultural re-appropriation analyzed by Fredric Jameson some twenty years ago. But the image and the experience are here to stay. They are embedded in our memories. They survive. They insist. They produce their unpredictable after-effects. Opening oneself to the other, to his/her pain and loss implies being confounded. It implies looking at the overlooked and re-affecting vision. Of course our approach to the visual has, since the two world wars, been informed by a specific concern with our capacity to sustain what no human eyes should have to see: from Henry Tonks' portraits of the *gueules cassées*,⁹ to George Roger's photographs of Bergen Belsen and Alain Resnais's *Nuit et brouillard*. Tonks, Roger and Resnais share the same experience of being confounded and yet of looking on, in spite of their being disoriented. As George Didi-Huberman explains in the first volume of his *L'Œil de l'histoire I. Quand les images prennent position*, any political visual positioning implies finding different, rather than new, visual constellations; constellations of visual signs that, as is the case in Brecht's *Kriegsfibel* (his *War Primer*) Didi-Huberman focuses on, use montage not so much with a view to reinventing aesthetics as to finding a *pathosformel*, a sensitive form, that would be fully accountable to the political sense of crisis while positioning that modern sense of crisis in a longer visual history.

The wars in Iraq were to inspire other disturbing encounters, among which a sculpture by Marc Quinn, rarely commented on, probably because of its ambiguous and disturbing nature. *Mirage* (2009),¹⁰ a patinated bronze sculpture, is the three-dimensional projection of the infamous 2004 photograph of the tortured prisoner of the Abu Ghraib prison that widely circulated in the social media and the press. The standard language of intericonicity does not in the least exhaust the transmutation at work here and the way it works on our collective affects. Quinn does not merely quote or borrow the image. The sculpture elaborates on our visceral outrage in order to force us to a reflection on the circulation of images, or what W.J.T. Mitchell defines as the visual "cloning of terror" in his 2005 essay *What do Pictures Want?*, that is the capacity of images not only to be fractally disseminated, but to paradoxically harness our primitive attachment to idols:

The power of idols over the human mind resides in their silence, their spectacular impassiveness, their dumb insistence on repeating the same message (as in the baleful cliché of "terrorism"), and their capacity for absorbing human desire and violence and projecting it back to us as a demand for human sacrifice. (Mitchell 2005, 26-27)

Every term matters here. Quinn's sculpture – and the use of patinated bronze is of cardinal importance – remains opaque to the eye. It inheres in the exhibition space

⁹ One should also mention Kader Attia's inclusion of archive images of *gueules cassées* in his vast installation to be seen in his *The Museum of Emotion* show at the Hayward Gallery (13/02/19 – 06/06/19). Here Attia reads these harrowing testimonies as part of a broader history of political suppression that, from World War I to the Khmer genocide both suppresses the legacy of political violence and inscribes it in the collective body of memory.

¹⁰ <http://marcquinn.com/artworks/single/mirage>, last consultation 03/05/19.

with a “dumb insistence.” Its dark patinated surface acts as a visual and symbolic absorbant. The task of the work is to place us in front of an oxymoronic image, that is both dumb and screaming back at us. And the complex visual palimpsest it produces intensifies the complexity of that visual oxymoron. Both a Christic figure and a figure of mercy, the image summons contradictory affects: discomfort, shock, repulsion, outrage at the subject being turned into a work of art. The fracture it opens with its environment returns to the language of shock privileged by the avant-garde in their questioning of the canon and the cultural infrastructure that sustains it. The shocking experience is almost Brechtian in its critical intent. What are we doing here “enjoying” the vision of this sculpture in the gallery or museum space? What kind of affect is the artist imposing on us? Interestingly the press release for a 2015 exhibition of Quinn’s works in Berlin entitled “History Painting,” and where *Mirage* featured, concluded on a 1939 poem by W.H. Auden, “Musée des Beaux Arts,” a poem in which the English poet wonders at the same cultural and experiential rift that suffering opens at the heart of experience:

About suffering they were never wrong,
The old Masters: how well they understood
Its human position: how it takes place
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along;
How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting
For the miraculous birth, there always must be
Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating
On a pond at the edge of the wood:
They never forgot
That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot
Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer’s horse
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree. [...] (Auden 79)

The paradox engineered by the visual conceit of *Mirage* allows the dumb sculpture to speak back at us. The private shock or outrage necessarily opens us to a collective questioning, not only – although this is crucial – about the remit of art, but above all about the articulation of private and collective affects. The work and the experience it imposes on us thus become, to return to Mitchell’s analysis, a critical “echo chamber for human thought”: “‘Sounding’ the idols by contrast, is a way of playing upon them. It does not dream of breaking the idol but of breaking its silence, making it speak and resonate, and transforming its hollowness into an echo chamber for human thought” (Mitchell 2005, 27).

The commemorations of World War I and of its ghostly remanence in the collective psyche elicited complex reflections on the affects of war, and of its memory, as carried over into art. Many of the works of art commissioned for these commemorations unhinged the language of images in yet another way by enacting a complex visual dramaturgy on the frontier of image-making and collective reenactment. Many of these works begged questions that had to do with the

stratified nature of images: both visual and textual, both physical affects and cultural constructs, maybe thus bringing together all the sub-meanings of the word “image” according to Mitchell.

Among these diverse works, one specifically testified to the way affect fashions our historical memory and our collective experience of visibility. The work was itself a collective endeavour that further confounded the status of the image. It was a performance imagined on a national scale by artist Jeremy Deller – the 2004 Turner Prize winner and Britain’s representative at the 2015 Venice Biennale – and Rufus Norris – the Director of the National Theatre –, in collaboration with Birmingham Repertory Theatre and The National Theatre, to commemorate, on 1 July 2016, the centenary of the Battle of the Somme on the first day of which almost 20,000 British soldiers were killed; the battle, which lasted five months, resulted in a million deaths on all sides.¹¹

The performance numbered over 1,400 young men from all backgrounds. All day they could be seen crossing shopping malls, waiting in stations, or walking down central streets. They throughout remained silent except when they sang “We’re Here Because We’re Here,” a song sung by World War I soldiers to the tune of “Auld Lang Syne” that gave its title to the performance. When passers-by stopped them to ask what the thing was about, they would simply hand out a card on which was inscribed the name of one of the British soldiers killed on that same day a hundred years before, with his regiment and age, a soldier they somehow brought back to life and embodied in a spectral way. The untimeliness of the experience is essential here for the contradictory affect it produces that is both melancholy and uncannily cathartic. The ghosts have come back to the heart of the polis; they are shown to be always already among us, and the performance materializes their repressed presence. Being silently re-embodied, they speak directly to an experience of the polis whose agency is above all affective.

But can we still speak of images here? What constitutes the image here? Can we still ascribe clearly-defined boundaries to the image? Or is the image somehow the very fabric of our collective sense of belonging? How does this polymorphous and ubiquitous image come back from the past to haunt us as the *Pathosformeln* defined by Aby Warburg haunt the history of visual culture,¹² to enlist visual affects to a historicized visual experience? Who produces the re-affected image here? The artist? The people witnessing the performance? Or, even more broadly, the body politic itself, in the way it works as an affective echo chamber? And who is the image addressing: the ghostly past, our now-departed forefathers? Or, even more eerily, the very trace they have left in our visual culture? How does our embodied understanding of the performance produce a form of visceral intellection of our historical presence? The questions address an image that exists beyond the sole

¹¹ <https://becausewearehere.co.uk/>, last consultation 03/05/19.

¹² On the visual and affective resilience of images and Aby Warburg’s theory of the *Pathosformel*, see Georges Didi-Huberman, *L’Image survivante. Histoire de l’art et temps des fantômes selon Aby Warburg* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 2002; *The Surviving Image. Phantoms of Time and Time of Phantoms: Aby Warburg’s History of Art* (trans. Harvey Mendelsohn, University Park, PA: Penn State UP, 2016).

visual regime of images, an image that cuts across time and memory, an image that is maybe the very material of our collective visual affect, that is both agit-prop and a collective enactment of visibility.

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