

# MEDIATIZED CULTURAL ACTIVISM

CONJUNCTIONS:  
TRANSDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL  
OF CULTURAL PARTICIPATION

AFFECTIVE POLITICS OF SENSATION:  
ANONYMITY AND TRANSTEMPORAL ACTIVISM IN ARGENTINA

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CONJUNCTIONS, VOL. 2, NO. 1, 2015, ISSN 2246-3755, <https://doi.org/10.7146/tjcp.v2i1.22276>

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## KEYWORDS

*Representation, media ecology, affect, El Siluetazo, hapticality, Madres de Plaza de Mayo*

## ABSTRACT

*This article deals with the aesthetic mobilization of anonymity in Argentine activist practices. Focusing on the specific intervention of El Siluetazo, the public drawing and placarding of nameless silhouettes during the military dictatorship from 1976 to 1983, anonymity will be explored as instigating an affective politics of sensation. Different from the human rights discourse on disappearance, which is concerned with politics of identification of the disappeared and the repressors, anonymity offers forms of affective relaying beyond identity. The logic of identity will be discussed in relation to a “distribution of the sensible” that takes aesthetics of sense perception as the target of control (Rancière, 2004). Through investigating the silhouettes not as a universal signifier of disappearance but as an aesthetic expression potentially moving across space and time, I will unfold a media ecological conception of activist practices and their capacities of activating transtemporal forms of resistance.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Opening the second page of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* some weeks ago, an image stood out showing a woman writing with chalk on one of two stand-up black silhouettes (Marti, 2015, p. 2). The image accompanies a short article entitled “Columbia excavates mass grave”, reporting on the findings of former killings of civilians by paramilitary groups and revealing the corpses of up to 300 disappeared individuals. The caption of the images says “ceremony for the families of the disappeared of Medellín”. The actual text of the woman writing translates “we are the sound of silence”. Silhouettes symbolizing the disappearance of individuals under various repressive regimes in Latin America are recurrent figures throughout recent history, particularly in Argentina and Chile. The disappearance of individuals considered dissident to the regimes of the latest military dictatorships reigning between 1976 and 1983 in Argentina and from 1973 to 1990 in Chile has caused the death of thousands of people, their torturing, and clandestine imprisonment.

The silhouettes have become one of the most iconic symbols in human rights movements addressing the disappearance of family members, friends, and loved ones. Their iconic quality as symbols of an ongoing human rights activism concerned with the disappearance and the struggle for identification makes the nameless silhouettes a complex figure of political and aesthetic practices of resistance. While the silhouettes’ capacity to give a visual expression to someone absent hints at a collective bond among disappeared individuals on a global scale thereby unveiling the despotism of state violence, they also might overshadow a deeper-seated problem of the politics and aesthetics of identitarian and symbolic forms of representation. On the one hand, the human rights activism in Argentina has been exemplary in its persistence and endured struggle until this day for creating (partly forensic) evidence of the whereabouts of disappeared individuals (Keenan, 2014, p. 50). On the other hand, the deployment of several aesthetic techniques, such as the silhouettes, point at a more spectral (Gordon, 2008) and collective bond held by an anonymous force constitutive of an affective politics of sensation (Massumi, 2009).

Beyond a dialectic opposition of a politics of identity versus anonymity, I will emphasize the silhouettes of Argentinian origin as exemplary of the affective relaying of activist aesthetic practices across space and time. For a public intervention on September 21, 1983 known as *El Siluetazo* under the direction of *Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo* – the most prominent and still active human rights group in Argentina – people drew thousands of body silhouettes on craft paper and placarded them on the walls of governmental buildings surrounding the public square. Conceived by an artist group (Rodolfo Aguerrberry, Julio Flores, Guillermo Kexel) the actual execution of the intervention took place with *Las Madres* and hundreds of participants engaging in a performative act of lending their bodies to the bodies of the disappeared and thus creating what I will further explore as hapticity (Harne and Moten, 2013). The role of the silhouettes as an anonymous mass of individuals who have actually disappeared uncovers a tension immanent in activist

practices and their aesthetic dimensions: how to deal with expression in order to achieve a degree of recognizability (Reestorff, 2014) and a common horizon (Holmes, 2008) while avoiding over-identification and thus capture by the dominant regime, thereby disabling an ongoing differentiation of a practice?

Anonymity defines the critical nexus for outlining an affective politics of sensation and affective activism (Reestorff, 2014) facilitating the relaying of practices of political resistance while affirming their respective differences. Viewing anonymity as affective relay allows for a media ecological (Fuller, 2005) approach, which contracts different elements such as media technologies, aesthetic activist practices, and conceptual developments into the fabrication of singular events and their networked consistency over space and time (Salovaara, 2015). The initiators of *El Siluetazo* state that one of their main foci was to renew media attention (Aguerreberry et al. 2008, 63) through an aesthetic technique. The relation to media and the aesthetics of activist practices provides the extension of a primary struggle around anonymity in *El Siluetazo* into a continuum of specific media activist practices in Argentina until today, problematizing the function of “communication media” (Zuckerfeld and Garin, 2006). I will further discuss the conceptual development of anonymity as part of an affective politics of sensation in resonance with the more recent activist practices known as *Escraches* and the specific involvement and development of the artist group *etcétera*. In tracing the figure of anonymity I develop a media ecological and affective approach to activism that privileges the power of affect, difference, and relation over identification and representation. In my final remarks, I suggest the notion of transtemporality as a mode of relaying activist practices across different times and spaces.

## DISTRIBUTIONS OF THE SENSIBLE AND SENSATION AS HAPTICALITY

The ceremonial use of stand-up silhouettes to be written on, as in the above example of Columbia, shows how such silhouettes have become a global symbol for disappearances during mostly state-sponsored terrorism (Gordon, 2008, p. 63). In the Columbian case, the silhouettes become part of a reconciliation practice of moaning through the standard signifier of the silhouette and its appropriation of official politics. Put differently, they have become *universal* and by that an integral part of a human rights discourse with designated visual codes. On the other hand, as unnamed black silhouettes, they remain an affective and open device for activist practices using anonymity as a technique to enable modes of belonging based on their singular differences, not their unification.

Both elements, the visual signifier and its anonymity, underline the struggle over what Jacques Rancière (2004) has termed the “distribution of the sensible” as a “system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it” (p. 12). For Rancière (2004) the distribution of the sensible defines a set of practices

policing what is common and who can “have a share in what is common in a community based on what they do and on the time and space in which this activity is performed” (p. 12). He contests this consensus and establishes an “aesthetic regime” as “a sensible mode of being specific to artistic products” (2004, p. 22) with a primordial insistence on dissensus (2010, p. 140) through which art reveals its potential to offer a “future emancipation” (2006, 17) and thus “reconfiguring the distribution of the sensible” (2010, p. 140). The struggle against a dominant distribution of the sensible defines Rancière’s political program: “The important thing is that the question of the relationship between aesthetics and politics be raised at this level, the level of sensible delimitation of what is common to the community, the forms of its visibility and of its organization” (Rancière, 2010, p. 18).

Rancière proposes that modern art and contemporary concepts of aesthetics tend to ignore the primordial existence of representation at the basis of a dissensual struggle of “rendering visible what has not been” (Rancière, 2010, p. 140). This representational order can be disrupted through art, while art, if not aware of the representational context from which it emerges, is devoid of any political potential. I wonder how such redistribution, moving through the sensible, presumes both a solely sensuous function of art and assumes a defined relation between perceiving subject and perceived object? In focusing on anonymity as an imperceptible yet affective force, I want to acknowledge Rancière’s observation of a new aesthetic regime and at the same time extend its operation beyond sense perception.

The silhouettes become a material universal signifier for the disappeared, mark a historical context, and render visible what was absent, but they risk being reduced to a mere decipherable symbol whose political capacity diminishes as part of a consensual aesthetic regime that is synonymous with the quest for justice and truth.<sup>1</sup> The sensible, on the other hand, defines not a coupling of art and perception but rather an aesthetics based on *sensation*, a mode of experience that relates to sense perception but exceeds its bodily confinement (Massumi, 2002, p. 271). If the silhouettes manifest a specific meaning, it is due to their identification as representational signifiers in a public discourse. Sensation, on the contrary, is non-representational. It cannot be contained by one single entity or symbol but always exceeds confinement, moving across different materials, bodies, and relations. It creates a feeling “that no individual can stand and no state abide” (Harney and Moten, 2013, 98). In the following I will develop the aesthetic not as a form of art leading to emancipation through sense perception, as Rancière suggests, but as what Stefano Harney and Fred Moten call “hapticality” (Harney and Moten, 2013, p. 98). For the authors, hapticality defines not a unification of a group or community as consensually feeling but rather an affective relay as “capacity to feel through others, for others to feel through you, for you to feel them feeling you” (p. 98). Sensation as a non-consensual form of hapticality allows us to conceive of anonymity as that ephemeral yet consistent enough relational quality through which the silhouettes activate a sense of belonging beyond identification.

## PRIOR POLITICS OF IDENTITY

When the first *siluetazo* occurred in 1983, toward the end of the military dictatorship, Argentina had undergone state repression and violence of which the abduction, incarceration, and killing of up to 30,000 mostly young people and entire families led to the formation of Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo. This group, which consisted of family members of disappeared individuals, soon became the leading figure of human rights activism in Argentina with their relentless protests and marches addressing the disappearance of their children. Before the occurrence of El Siluetazo, *Las Madres* deployed several visual strategies to make the disappearance of their children visible in the public sphere and in order to be recognized by other mothers: first carrying a carpenter's nail, later white head scarves, then using family photographs while searching for their children at police stations, hospitals, government offices, and churches (Longoni, 2010, p. 5-6). Finally, the photographs of the disappeared were enlarged and carried as posters during the weekly protest marches. They were first underlined with names and dates but later displayed without names, allowing parents who had no images and other supporters to join (2010, p. 6). The primary goal was to gain visibility and a degree of identification by having the mothers be seen and recognized in public by the state, its media apparatus, and the general public (2010, p. 5). Alongside this primary distribution of the sensible, which created a community of parents, the choice of anonymizing images and circulating them among participants allowed for new forms of belonging and solidarity to arise.

The marches with nameless images, Ana Longoni argues, enabled a process of *collectivization*, extending protest from being a private concern to a new "visual politics" that constituted a *common sense* of injustice (2010, p. 7). One can understand the visual politics of *Las Madres* as a general struggle of the human rights movement against the official denial of the killings – a dissensual aesthetic act against a dominant aesthetic regime, according to Rancière. Dissensual techniques relate to a disruptive function of art or aesthetics, which have played a role in Argentina since the 1960s, most prominently cast by avant-garde artistic interventions and guerrilla communication strategies against the closing down of sugar mills by the group *Tucumán Arde* (Tucumán is burning) (Longoni, 2006). *Tucumán Arde* is one of the earlier collective experiments that merged aesthetics or art and politics and certainly informed the aesthetic strategies taken up by *Las Madres*. In these early stages we can perceive the mobilization of aesthetic techniques as a means by which to achieve mutual recognition but also as a more collective stance against a dominant aesthetic regime of the state and its control over the media. The intimacies between such counter-communication through art by *Tucumán Arde* and the activist practices of *las Madres* emphasize the power of aesthetics to mobilize collective action. However, as Rancière points out, the relation between aesthetics and politics functions through delimiting the sensible and thus determining what is common to a community. If this common characteristic becomes representational, I argue, the rise of a universaliz-

ing signifier, like the silhouettes in the Columbian example, eliminates other understandings of aesthetic elements potentially escaping such unification. The visual politics prior to *El Siluetazo* define a need for constituting a new community, but it is only through the slow turn towards anonymity that the problem of a politics of representation and the struggle against it become apparent. The crucial question is: how to generate a sense of belonging that resists forms of collectivity based on pre-defined individuals and their attachment to an identitarian regime of the state?

## CONTESTING REPRESENTATION

The photographic visual politics prior to *El Siluetazo* bear further complications, as Nancy Richard points out. Some of the images that were used were taken from official ID cards where pictures did not refer to a disrupted family context but inserted themselves into an “impersonal register” of the state (Richard, 2006, p. 168). Longoni writes: “These photographs ... are evidence of the way individuals have been numbered, registered and prejudged by mechanisms of the state apparatus before, during, and after the dictatorship” (2010, 7). The images illustrate an intrinsic rupture of the representational politics of the human rights movement concerning the disappeared and its framing of memory politics (Kaiser, 2002, p. 500). Longoni’s remark hints at the continued practice of registration after the dictatorship, which goes hand in hand with the continued denial of the crimes and impunity of military functionaries marked by several laws and decrees granting amnesty or even pardon to formerly sentenced military functionaries (2002, p. 501-503). *Las Madres’* militancy resides in their ongoing activism, which has been persistent ever since the military coup started and continues to inspire many activist practices today. Their struggle for the recognition of the disappearance (of the disappeared?) and the uncovering of their physical whereabouts continue partially through forensic work and DNA tests at excavation sites of mass graves. While the need for identification provides one strategy in the visual politics of the movement, the problem of identification as the state’s continuous execution of power defines its antagonistic opposite. Longoni, on the other hand, believes that *Las Madres* used these generic images explicitly to address the paradox between the “state’s machinery of control and the state’s machinery of extermination and disappearance of its subjects, between identification and destruction, control and denial” (2010, p. 7).

In relation to activist practices struggling with political regimes, the techniques of identification are closely entwined with representation or representational politics (Aristarkhova, 2007, p. 260). For such a representation to operate as political body, it requires and claims the power to identify, classify, and number the members of its *community* and thereby establish regimes of inclusion and exclusion. Michel Foucault reminds us that this mechanism of individualization has moved from the “state as centralized form of power” into “power techniques oriented toward the individual” becoming what he calls

governmentality (1979, p. 227). The state does not recede in its controlling function but makes the individual the addressee of his/her own actions, a part of a community, while maintaining “obedience, guidance of oneself” and instigating continuous processes of (self-)“examination” and policing (1979, p. 239). The phrase “we didn’t not know, we didn’t realize” (Welscher in Gordon, 2008, p. 80), as a common expression of a general amnesia, functions as such an individualizing yet collective form of power. Its double denial makes the general concern of disappearance disappear from one’s memory and requires other forms of collective activation, like anonymizing images or the mass of silhouettes haunting the visual sphere of the city.

Contesting representation cannot only, as Isabell Lorey underlines, be performed through visual strategies of naming, representing the disappeared, but also through finding techniques suitable for the immediate situation of struggle (Lorey, 2011). In other words, while a contextual capture of the representational prevails, its reworking through the constitution of situations, such as *El Siluetazo*, opens up micro-differentiations of the contextual. In the case of *El Siluetazo*, the context of disappearance remains a critical issue of repressive regimes to which the aesthetic and activist techniques have to adapt. For Masumi, context provides a possible objectivity (or factness) due to its relative stability, while situations move across a context that potentially shifts its stability (2002, p. 212). The ambiguity of the visual strategies in the photographs and later in *El Siluetazo* emphasizes the differentiation of the representational grid of the political context through an aesthetic situation, which Lorey refers to as a crucial element of contemporary forms of protest (see also Holmes, 2007). In her view, these new forms refuse representation on three levels: “1) the manifestations of representative democracy (government, parties, and participatory pacification through elections), 2) Representation as speaking of behalf of others ... , 3) forms of organization that form a unified ‘we’, and identitarian collective subject” (Lorey, 2011). We can trace a certain continuity between the struggles against representation and identity, as in the case of Argentina, but also anarchist practices and more recent events, such as the movement of the squares (Arab Spring, Occupy, M15), EuroMayDay, MayDay, the Zapatist movements of the 1990s, and anti-globalization movements and their specific circulation of aesthetics as part of their geopolitics (Holmes, 2005).

The circulation of aesthetic techniques, I suggest, produces affective, less individualized, and more differential, activist practices. Such aesthetics, based on the affective field of sensation, pushes a context to its limits without ignoring it. Through specific aesthetic techniques, the context of disappearance is transformed into a practice of emergent collective activation. Similarly, Avery Gordon (2008) states that the proliferation of photographs and copies of “faces, eyes, moths ... is in no way animated ... but animates me and others” (p. 109). The animating quality of the diffused and anonymous images creates a relaying of sensation based on hapticality, that is, the circulation of feeling without attachment to one singular identity or meaning. In any case, through images or silhouettes, the recurrent insistence on anonymity is not a denial of representation but an



affective register that representation cannot account for – the feeling that no individual can stand and no state abide. Affect in this sense is less of an intersubjective nature (i.e. affectivity) but defines the autonomous relational field of sensuous co-emergence in experience beyond unification (Massumi, 2002, p. 35). In its autonomy, affect denotes the immediate constituent power (Negri, 1999) of assembling, of co-emergence, and mutual activation that Lorey terms the “intensive present” or “presentist democracy” formed by a “multitude, the crowd that cannot be bound, tamed, and standardized by representation” (2011). The crowd of nameless images or silhouettes might be less a representation of the disappeared and rather an expression of the untamable presentist quality of anonymity capable of collectivizing differentially. Against Rancière, for whom the individualizing operation of policing lies at the heart of the formation of a distribution of the sensible, I follow Lorey and Massumi in perceiving anonymity as a constituent power that activates modes of sensation that are primordially and differentially collective and not dissensual.

### THE SINGULARITY OF ANONYMITY

When hundreds of people transformed the Plaza de Mayo into a “vast, improvised outdoor workshop” in September 1983, people of all sorts engaged in the constituent aesthetic act of *El Siluetazo*. The drawing of thousands of body silhouettes and their placarding on the walls of government buildings in Buenos Aires served as an “aesthetic capture” of the public sphere in a “repressive and hostile city”, which produced an “offensive in the appropriation of the urban space” (Amigo in Longoni, 2007, p. 181). Most of the literature and accounts of *El Siluetazo* contextualize the event in relation to artistic interventions and activist aesthetics in Latin America and its political elements (Longoni and Bruzzone, 2008; Druiolle, 2009; Preda, 2012). For Longoni (2010), *El Siluetazo* can be referred to as “aesthetic actions of political praxis,” while the acts of the intervention became “a collective action whose becoming dilutes (or even forgets) its ‘artistic’ origins” (p. 14). For her, “El Siluetazo achieved the socialization of a visual tool that opened a new ‘social territoriality’” (2010, p. 14). The decoupling of art and what Longoni calls a “collective action of political practice” defines a crucial shift in the way the event and its legacy can be framed beyond the aesthetics-art coupling and its attachment to sense perception. In refusing to either call it art or a political intervention, the initiators of *El Siluetazo* composed a strong expression of what I call an affective politics of sensation. Such an affective politics positions aesthetics as emergent-relational activities beyond human sense perception and the objecthood of art.

Such a politics resides in the constituent power of assembling in the immediacy of a situation. *El Siluetazo* forms an “affective environment,” which allows heterogeneous tendencies and forces to co-compose the making of the event (Reestorff, 2013, p. 489). This becomes clear in the several techniques deployed by *El Siluetazo*. In using their own bodies as “marquettes” for the drawing of silhouettes on Kraft paper, a simple technique

of bodily relaying was effectuated. The relay of “lending one’s body to the disappeared” (Longoni, 2010, p. 14) not only turns the body into a “technology of memory” (Navarro, 2008, p. 351) but also materially activates an “elementary aesthetics” which everyone can engage with (Warley et al., 2008, p. 185). It is this immediate, presentist appropriation of the urban space by bodies, and their distribution of silhouettes in the city, which creates an aesthetico-affective fabrication of an event exceeding its compositional parts, e.g. the disappeared or their names. Longoni (2010) writes, “although it was born in the midst of the human rights movement and under the leadership of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, its irruption was far from assimilated into prefix political project. It is precisely that indeterminacy which grants the *Siluetazo* its singularity as an event” (p. 14). This indeterminacy moves across bodies as “material quality” and functions as “activation not only of the body but also the body’s tendencies as they move into situations ... It is the sum total of the different ways of being interpellated by the same event that will define what it will have been politically” (Massumi, 2009). Sensation enables an event to arise collectively across bodies without any prior identification or finite unification. By means of affective capacitation and propelling tendencies of an entire environment it activates more than just the individuals involved.

The affective politics of sensation immanent to *El Siluetazo* moves through the material domain of “life support” for action as much as through an abstract realm of potential relaying across different forms of sensory matter (Longoni, 2010, p. 16). In the context of the movement of squares as “supported action”, Judith Butler (2011) addresses what Longoni terms “life support”. She writes: “We see some way that bodies in their plurality lay claim to the public, find and produce the public through seizing and reconfiguring the matter of material environments; at the same time, those material environments are part of the action, and they themselves act when they become the support for action” (n. pag.). Butler proposes a radical extension of the constitutional power of collective and emergent interventions, such as *El Siluetazo*, making a public that is not just based on inter-subjectivity and discourse but relies on the material capacities of bodies and matter. Put differently, she points at the compositional affective forces constituting situations as an intrinsically aesthetic concern. In relation to *El Siluetazo*, this material level of composition is crucial. The body that gives life support does so not only by lending his/her own bodily features but also by activating the material capacities of the situation, the square, the media presence, and the city as re-appropriable matter (not just a public sphere). On the basis of this support for action, the figure of anonymity doubles the physical activation with a more abstract but not less constitutional field of relations.

Sensation defines the domain that ties the bodily and material support of activist action to a more abstract but nevertheless crucial sphere of experience. According to a logic of the event, any aesthetic situation of collective emergence transcends its own occurrence, making its potential for future becoming felt in its immediate activity. The affective relaying of sensation in *El Siluetazo* activates through the sensible matter of visual expression

but also crystalizes the potential of anonymity as an aesthetic political technique. For Massumi (2002), sensation converges around the concept of becoming: “Sensation is the mode in which potential is present in the perceiving body ... In that sensation, a heterogeneity of levels contract into the body from which they reissue in *an* action – in a unity of movement through which their multiplicity is singularly expressed” (p. 75). Sensation, in other words, is potentially sensed but not yet captured as finitely perceived. In sensing this potential before its perceptual actualization (the after-effect of a prior affective cuing) depends on a belonging to a shared field of potential. The field is the heterogeneous multiplicity of potential becomings, which allow for different forces, bodies, and perceptions to relate while not synthesizing. The relation between field, body, and sensation produces what can be considered the “dynamic unity” (Massumi, 2011, p. 4) of experience or the “fusional mutual inclusion” (p.143) of heterogeneous elements into the singularity of an event. From the unifying vision of the individual that haunts Rancière’s critique of the consensual aesthetic regime, a primordial differential and dynamic account of experience arises.<sup>2</sup> In belonging through sensation, the process of assembling a collective mode of expression, such as *El Siluetazo*, resists representational capture through a form of *belonging in becoming* (Massumi, 2002, p. 76).

#### AESTHETICS OF BELONGING ANONYMOUSLY

Initially, the artists and *Las Madres* intended to leave the silhouettes unnamed in order to include “all the disappeared without a name” (Kexel, 2008, p. 110-111).<sup>3</sup> The idea was to generate a *graphic fact* targeting mass media attention (Aguerreberry et al., 2008, p. 63), while including all the disappeared and activating the general public, paralyzed by the violent repression. In that sense, the anonymous silhouettes were described as “gazing back” (Fernandes, 2008, p. 406) from the walls, and the press wrote about the “mute cry” of the silhouettes doubled by the silent presence of *Las Madres* in the square (Longoni and Bruzzone, 2008, p. 30). Longoni (2010) describes how the initial plan of uniformity of the silhouettes was turned into a process of collective construction where some people started to give the silhouette identitary features, including the names and dates of their disappearance (p. 10-11). At the same time, Julio Flores (2008) writes that every silhouette was different, depending on the body that was traced, which in turn resulted in a multitude of differences, beyond the necessary finite identifying sign of a name (p. 91). Ironically, the placarding of the silhouettes as an “ephemeral but vivifying” act (Buntinx, 2008, p. 278) provoked a double disappearance, which became apparent when the police took down the silhouettes, making the disappeared disappear once again. Through their ambivalent status, the silhouettes become a threat to the repressive state and a vehicle for the resistance of the people. Beyond a mere sign, the silhouettes create a bodily, contagious, and affective hapticality, which moves from the people making the silhouettes to the ones encountering them in the public sphere. From that point of view, when taking

down the silhouettes or protecting the walls of public buildings, the police are sucked into the affective vortex of anonymity as much as the people making them in the square.

Anonymity, I suggest, is not opposed antagonistically to identity and its representational regime. For Érik Bordeleau (2012), who develops the term in relation to Foucault, anonymity defines a zone of the *outside* of any contained individuality or form, may it be an object, language, or body (p. 43). Foucault (1990) describes the outside not as a spatial exterior to a form or body, but as defining a *milieu* that resonates with and co-produces any form of subjectivity. It is an anonymous yet active force that provides a milieu for the emergence of *El Siluetazo* as a singular event, while transgressing its capture as a unified historical moment of human rights activism. In other words, the milieu of anonymity allows both for an activation of an excessive force that cannot be captured and the possibility of an immanent collective practice without ideological synthesis. It is a singular event whose singularity, nonetheless, is in excess of its many modes of actualization. The circulation of a milieu of anonymity surfaces on other occasions, such as the wearing of white masks and the fabrication of paper hands hung on a string during the march in memory of the ninth anniversary of the military coup on April 25, 1985. Here “anonymous body parts [function] as the bond between the disappeared” (Druliolle, 2009, p. 84).

In *El Siluetazo*, anonymity becomes a force of activation, where the conventional concept of activism, through counter-strategies of resistance by means of representation, shifts towards different forms of immediate composition. The immediate compositional quality of a situation moves through the haptic capacity for the feel of anonymity. Such affective activation happens directly through the bodily engagement in the making of the silhouettes, but also through the active inclusion of the materials and the materiality of the silhouettes themselves occupying the urban sphere. Navarro casts *El Siluetazo* as an “excess that cannot be reduced to a demand”, as an activating force of anonymity capable of re-actualizing sensation (Navarro, 2008, p. 337). Anonymity here can be understood more as a limit of an emergent situation, which has multiple modes of (re)actualization through the emergence of a shared and felt experience across bodies. Anonymity is not just the potential promise of a “more-than”, but it becomes operable once it is amplified, as is the case with *El Siluetazo*; a singular expression through a process of collective emergence held together by affect. The power of anonymity emphasizes the force of a people who have been effaced in their existence, physically and discursively, by allowing them to reshape the sphere of politics both through visual expression and a non-sensuous but felt stance against state violence by manifesting their absence.

## TECHNIQUES OF EXISTENCE AND MEDIA ECOLOGIES

What I consider the aspect of anonymity in *El Siluetazo* is its environmental activation, which renders its action a singular event. Massumi (2011) calls such a singularity through heterogeneous convergence a *technique of existence*: “Each technique of existence brings

into singular-generic expression a relational field that is in principle infinite in its diversity. A technique of existence is defined less by the catalogue of its elements, than by the relational manner in which it eventfully effects fusional mutual inclusion of a heterogeneity of factors” (p. 142-143). Anonymity as a technique of existence informs the relational field of the struggle with identity that forms the heterogeneous event of *El Siluetazo*. For this field to be affective, we have to consider it as a problematic field (Massumi 2009). Affect here means the relational interplay of bodies in movement and rest infused with the capacitations of affecting and being affected; that is, with different degrees of relational-fusional potential (Deleuze, 1988, p. 126). Affect defines the process of a co-composition of the event through the very way or manner in which its heterogeneous elements relate. The field of affect provides this very capacitation of the technique of existence, in this case anonymity, to activate an expressive process that problematizes. *El Siluetazo* allows us to see how anonymity as a technique of existence emerges from an affective field, rich in potential for problematizing the struggle over identity. Instead of assuming that such affective politics give preference to the immediate, eventful situation of an aesthetic play (a point for which the Occupy movement has been criticized), it points at the power of belonging in becoming. Through its collectivizing capacity, *El Siluetazo* makes sensation that very force of continuous becoming. The field of such becoming is *El Siluetazo*’s activation of anonymity. On the identitarian scheme, a consensual distribution of the sensible prevails and consequentially its contestation through dissensus. In a mutually inclusive account of experience, sensation as belonging in becoming defines an affective politics seeking “the degrees of openness of any situation, in hopes of priming an alter-accomplishment” (Massumi, 2009).

*El Siluetazo* gained its impact due to its direct activation of the urban fabric as its medium for expression and its affective capacity to generate media attention. The use of an anonymous visual threat or cry against the atrocities of the state proliferates as part of a series of techniques, like the Guy Fawkes mask by *anonymous* or the carnivalesque forms of protests as part of the anti-globalization movements (Holmes, 2011). Mainstream media remain a viable target for the re-distribution and appropriation of sensible regimes usually co-opted by repressive ideologies. I propose to see anonymity as having the potential to activate entire media ecologies of sensation composed by their material-infrastructural as much as their expressive capacities. Such media ecologies, understood as assemblages of heterogeneous relational capacities, use technological powers of diffusion while priming their expressions as alter-accomplishments to the habit of redundant sense making. In these media ecologies, “parts no longer exist simply as discrete bits that stay separate; they set in play a process of mutual stimulation that exceeds what they are as a set” (Fuller, 2005, p. 1). Matthew Fuller (2005) further explains: “in the dynamic and nonlinear combination of drives and capacities that, stimulating each other to new realms of potential, produce something that is in virulent excess of its parts. Indeed, such parts can no longer be disassembled, they produce an ecology” (p. 173). The continuation of the struggle with

identity in Argentina shows how anonymity modulates through different medial constellations beyond any finite containment. Anonymity emphasizes the relational capacity for heterogeneous fusion-affects *and* exceeds any mode of expression by including material and temporal processes beyond the present scope of action. A media-ecological approach to *El Siluetazo* allows us to account for sensation not only as a more-than-individual fusional process but also most crucially as a folding of different temporalities (Deleuze, 1993, p. 86). Anonymity becomes itself a refrain that haunts more contemporary forms of activism in Argentina and activates processes in a present instance by multiplying different pasts. Media ecologies do not so much define the structure through which expression occurs and gets diffused but rather are themselves platforms for relational affective emergence in the re-actualizing situational shifts of a repressive context. Similar to forms of “affective activism”, these media ecologies are heterogeneous sets capable of enduring beyond the present (Salovaar, 2015, p. 476). *El Siluetazo* relies on mass media as much as the medial or mediating qualities of its materials, movements, and gestures. The mutual inclusion of material support and their media diffusion create an affective ecology as “relational generativity” where the activating elements cannot be reduced to their “objecthood” (Munster, 2013, 183-184). The immediate generative processing of differential relations in sensation modulates feeling as a haptic quality among bodies through the differential power of anonymity.

In the late 1990s, the artist group *etcétera* from Buenos Aires participated in the so-called *Escraches*. *Escraches* are exposure protests of “social condemnation” against the perpetrators of the dictatorship’s genocide. Since many of the former functionaries under the dictatorship have been protected by the so-called *Full Stop Laws*, the activists “disclosed the repressor’s identity, his face, his address and, above all, his past as a repressor to his neighbours and work mates” (Longoni, 2006, n. pag.; Colectivo Situaciones, 2004). The *Escraches* became a popular form of public protest and denunciation of criminals living unmolested among those who had lost family members because of them. Continuing the media ecological approach of activating new forms of encounter with the horror of disappearance, the *Escraches* function as “new communication strategy” (Kaiser, 2002, p. 500) – this time tweaking the relational field of anonymity towards its revealing capacities of identifying repressors. In the case of the *Escraches*, the force of anonymity became something to be revealed and uncovered by giving a subject *one* kind of individuality: a face, a name, and a list of the deeds he committed during the dictatorship. The interventions, while exposing a claim to execute vigilant justice, show how complicated the play of anonymity and representation is in relation to public media productions and the suppression of multiple truths. While *El Siluetazo* already problematized anonymity as both a collective force and as a technique deployed by the repressive state, here we witness another aspect, which involves clearly identifying the repressors.

The *Escraches* are based on the mobilization of a small group who stages and executes a public event. Usually, the organizers of the *Escraches*, in most cases the human rights

group H.I.J.O.S. (the children of the disappeared), diffused the time and place of their intervention to the mainstream media through newspaper announcements inviting the community to participate (2002, p. 504), which resulted in extensive media coverage. Different from mainstream media that officially supported the prosecution of former military functionaries without much political effect, or, as Kaiser points out, that are part of a process of “normalization” accepting their presence in TV shows and public life outside the frame of being assassins (2002, p. 502), the *Escraches* generate a micro-mobilization based on active interventions (Colectivo Situaciones, 2004, p. 16-17). The naming and personalization as part of the practice emphasize the continuum of anonymity in its different modalities. After the *Escrache*, most of the people accused are not subject to judicial consequences, but their environment shifts, so they can no longer rely on their habitus as an individual in their milieu. This process relates less to a discourse of justice, depending on whose side you are on, but rather generates an awareness of the ambivalence of truth as part of contemporary society. Taking the urban sphere as a medium and stage for the *Escraches* gives way to an activation of a material and bodily support for action similar to the one *El Siluetazo* initiated. Beyond the process of revealing deeds through identity, the affective politics of anonymity that generate media ecologies are the most relevant.

As part of the *Escraches*, the artist collective *etcétera* invented theatrical puppets, often grotesque and ambivalent figures of military functionaries, who were not just portrayed as evil but evoked sympathy for being ridiculous. The aim was to capture the attention of the mainstream media in order to garner affection and support for the intervention from a wider audience (Creischer and Sieckmann, 2004, p. 28). In an interview, *etcétera* emphasized their attentiveness to the particular timing of such media coverage with their very short and quickly shifting shots of different impressions. In their grotesque and ambivalent appearance, the figures suspended any straightforward refusal or affirmation of the political intervention that was broadcast all over the country. By inserting an element of ambivalence through laughter they reworked habit formation to either support or refuse the intervention. By working with the timing immanent in mass media coverage, *etcétera* modulated the temporal forms of television broadcasting by turning it into a media ecology in support of affective activation. The humorous and ridiculous puppets enter the screen through a gestural and bodily activation (i.e. laughter) rather than just supporting the content of the intervention as an act of justice. An entirely different bodily and haptic engagement occurs that eschews the logic of identification or de-identification. Their intervention is based on a rhythmic capacity for shifting a dominant distribution of the sensible and by that making sensation the sphere for political re-potentialization. It is the short interval of the camera's shifting shots that constitutes a sensation of a new process of subjectivation outside the grid of identity. In the gestures of the puppets and their grotesque appearance, a kind of hapticity reaches out through the media ecology, crossing bodies and their capacity to feel through others. These others are not the entire society or the victims but an endlessly differential field whose manner

of collective-relational emergence is anonymity. *Etcétera's* intervention dramatizes sensation as potential belonging in becoming against the possible policing of activist practices tied to a discourse of justice or finite truth. In the same way, Massumi (2009) defines this differential attunement through affective contagion in sensation as the becoming of the subject opposed to the individual: "What is in question is precisely the emergence of the subject, its primary constitution, or its re-emergence and reconstitution. The subject of an experience emerges from a field of conditions which are not the subject yet, where it is just coming into itself." As a technique of existence, anonymity defines a manner of resistance that relies on affective politics where we continuously return to a nascent subjectivity imbued with potential action.

### PROPOSITION FOR TRANSTEMPORAL ACTIVISM (CONCLUSION)

From *El Siluetazo* to the *Escraches* and beyond, the relation to mass media and the rise of alternative or activist media have significantly shifted the global scale of circulating information. On the one hand, the material-relational activation of specific media ecologies and their situated effects extended the scope from local to trans-local contexts. The arrival of so-called new media can be seen as an integral aspect of a geopolitical activist mobilization and multiplication of resistance against the state-logic of representation. These media practices not only facilitate the relaying of local struggles trans-locally but also resist the dominant ideology of communicative capitalism, "that form of capitalism wherein democratic ideals are materialized in media in information networks" (Not An Alternative, 2015, n. pag.). With democratic ideals we want to think of a representational democratic ideal that Lorey contests and I see opposed to an affective politics of sensation. The geopolitical take on alternative media and their capacities to "employ or modify the communicative artifacts, practices, and social arrangements of new information and communication technologies to challenge or alter dominant, expected, or accepted ways of doing society, culture, and politics" (Lievrouw, 2011, p. 19) should not remain on the level of instrumental reason of media technologies. On the contrary, media ecological relational generativity resists the formalized use of infrastructures, not only re-appropriating technologies but inventing new modes of existence and subjectivities.

*Etcétera's* involvement in the *Escraches* and their delicate modulation of the media ecology emphasize the transtemporal nature of nascent subjectivity. Transtemporal in this case means a folding of tendencies moving through the matter and flesh of an affective environment and co-composing an event-in-the-making while accounting for the differential speeds of its field of emergence. Judith Butler (2011) expresses this process when she writes: "How do we understand this acting together that opens up time and space outside and against the temporality and established architecture of the regime, one that lays claim to materiality, leans into its supports, draws from its supports, in order to rework their functions?" In tracing the relational field of anonymity we enter a contested



field of the struggle of identity and subjectivity in relation to aesthetic regimes of state repression and their distribution of the sensible. However, as long as we account for the aesthetic regime on the level of structure, the re-potentialisation towards an affective “alter-accomplishment” is reduced to a representational grid of oppositions. Through media ecological relaying and the activation of the potential of anonymity moving across space and time we enter a haptic and gestural quality of affective politics, of anonymity as a technique of existence. The gestural in media ecologies “constitutes the scene in a time and place that includes and exceeds its local instantiation ... When the scene does travel, it is both there *and* here, and if it were not spanning both locations – indeed multiple locations – it would not be that scene it is” (Butler, 2011).

The implications of an affective politics of sensation emphasize a situational and transindividual power of activation across time and space, which I have explored here through the notion of anonymity. If sensation becomes the contested field of priming experience, its political implications explode the representational scheme. The relaying of anonymity as an activating capacity in activist practices in Argentina extends a continuum of struggles against state repression into a multiplicity of affective capacities beyond the present state of resistance. Rancière’s emphasis on the distribution of the sensible as a dominant form of control, especially in the era of communicative capitalism, is crucial for understanding *how* operations of power haunt every domain of existence. His recursion to human sense perception, however, is insufficient in order to understand the ecological inclusion of affective forces immanent to sensation. Sensation’s constitutive power as a belonging in becoming enables us to further explore and experiment with forms of expression that cannot be included or contained by representation. What is at stake, as Brian Holmes suggests, is a shift from a geopolitics undermined by communication capitalism to a *geopoetics*. Considered temporally, geopoetics fosters sensation as the milieu that composes platforms for relation, where the proliferation of difference moves hand in hand with situated action relaying across time and space – a polyrhythm of resistance.

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## NOTES

- 1 I certainly do not want to contest the crucial work of human rights activism focused on persecuting military functionaries and identifying the disappeared. A good summary of these processes can be found in Gordon (2008, p. 63-82) and with specific focus on the Mothers in Fischer 1989. However, the struggle of creating evidence on the whereabouts of disappeared in mass graves and endless military reports remains a struggle for truth which requires its very construction. In other words, the process of truth-making itself only partially relies on pre-given concepts of identity and justice (Keenan, 2013, p. 42).
- 2 The implications of a primordial notion of difference play a crucial philosophical role. Against the “identity of the concept” foregrounding a primordial differential account of existence based on becoming not on being (Deleuze 1994, 137). I refer particular to Deleuze’s development of the notion of difference in *Difference and Repetition* (1994). Overall one can consider the entire philosophical work of Deleuze and Deleuze and Guattari as attempt to replace the concept of identity with the notion of difference. For Deleuze identity forms a dominant “image of thought” that becomes the mayor critique in *Difference and Repetition*. In contrast to Ranci re Deleuze’s critique of Platonic forms and the notion of simulacrum demonstrate his problematization of identity (1994, 66-69, see also Deleuze, 1990, 253-279).
- 3 While many of the direct statements on the silhouettes are part of the publication by Longoni and Bruzzone (2008), I rely almost exclusively on translations in a brilliant review article of their book by Druliolle (2009).