

We Live, Weave Each Other and Have Our Being – The films and photographs of Hannah Collins

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## **Imagine**

Between the world and the eye there exists an insuperable distance. Crossing that distance is perhaps the incessant task of knowledge. Philosophy, science and art give different forms to this knowledge. Forms that weave themselves around perception, around the affections and sensations which impulse us into a tension: to fabricate the concepts that mediate existence with a possible world. Images are, like words, the substance that incarnates a becoming of thought into the things of the world.

Between the world and the eye, images live.

Thus, images are factories of the world. although paradoxically, they inhabit the interstices of a reality before which they never seem to appear. Rather the imaginary seems to pursue in order to substitute, supplant, a reality that will not be conjured up, and that persistently pressures in a violent friction of another dark side.

This permanent collapse is knowledge's way of being. But knowledge of and from images, offers more things to look at than what may appear. as well as lodging themselves in the gaps of the real, and perhaps because of it, they fundamentally activate themselves in the psychic life that exists behind the eye. this psychic life has layers and folds. To enter there is also to enter to see that there is much in what we see, that we don't see what we see. In these blind spots we will foresee a task of revealing the logics of operation of these factories of knowledge and about what we are as individuals and as forms of subjectivity, given that we have the face they reflect.

**Portraits in which we live, weave each other and are**

Hannah Collins seems to have a specific conscience of the imaginary condition of her work as an artist. Her eye is obsessed with itself. It seems to be very attentive to what it focuses on, what it registers. She comes back time and time again to what she is looking at, and attempts to see what she intuitively knows is not seen, what we have obstinately got used to overlooking. that which seems irrelevant, unimportant or perhaps imperceptible. In that she is powerfully attracted by the small stories of non-singular people and those who collectively but in silence, we have agreed to not see. The details of the intimacy of everyday lives and the particulars of the things and people that are there, on the lost horizon of what doesn't count. Even of waste.

Perhaps it is because of this that she prefers to enlarge the images she registers. To offer a gigantic size, if it's possible, akin to the thoroughness of her looking.

She grants to these characters giant dimensions, to their little things – sometimes parts of others, recycled for impossible uses such as utensils or the home itself – to landscapes, to the habitats of the battles for survival taking place and for the joy of their forgotten, unnoticed lives; as if they were full of a life we cannot discern. they become gigantic. It doesn't matter if they are intelligent, stupid, talented, clumsy, malicious, kind, ingenuous, or perceptive; or the things are old, withered, or brilliant and sumptuous; or the landscapes splendid, ardent, green, placid, unpleasant, nostalgic or convulsed; they turn into giants.

The search to succeed in figuring portraits predominates in Collins's art. These portraits are open, they do not end but are left in suspense. They seem abstract, in the end they will not be people in particular but perceptive and intuitive forms, charged with affection and sensations, of anonymous individuals, whoever, (ourselves?).

These characters, are weaving themselves their own portraits, through a dialogical dynamic between themselves as individuals and the situations and things they come across. Perhaps understanding a bit that we actually tend to become what others see in us, and what we see in others. To speak of others is to speak of one's self, to look at others is to see ourselves, and vice versa. and of course things look at us and reflect us.

Through this dialogic dynamic affective and perceptive blocks of individuals that Collins wants to make us see, imagine, begin to take form. a sort of existential space is generated that links these persons among themselves in a social tie, in which “we live, weave each other and are”, as san Pablo says in his speech to the aeropagus. In this common space one must count on the interpellation and the anticipation of things and persons. a care, occupation, commitment. In terms of what Peter Sloterdijk (1998) would call the sphere, a spherical context: “occupation would be what drags us towards tensions, to take sides and makes us come out of our own emptiness so as to go into the spaces we share with people and things”. There is always something that occupies us, worries us, affects us and takes us out of ourselves and that is what interweaves us with what we live and we are.

They are projected in films and photographs tinged with scripts that the characters themselves have wanted to write acting as themselves; surprised in the moments that most belong to their everyday in an – untimely? – register where the allegory of themselves is fulfilled in a secret surprise. The look over things is essential to Collins in the configuration of these existential spaces; she searches in them for traces of the marks left by her coexistence with people, as if she wanted to liberate the life and the signs which are captive in them.

All this framework of an existential space does not obey a horizontal narration in a physical plane and in a timetable, nor does it establish itself in absolute terms. It is taking place in a simultaneous superposition of places and ways of perceiving time. Many possible intuitions of sense are partially and simultaneously offered, although the reading realized by the spectator leads to the finding of a story. In fact conscience procures an ephemeral and blurred order to know that which is exhibited, and finds – although in an uncertain and faltering way – that beginning and end which incorporates itself in the spirit of the condition of that which is filmed, that ordered sequence of a mechanical time and its physical sliding in the apparently smooth space in the everyday life of the world. a condition that has been perverted in the editing work that Collins has done and in the disposition of a scene for the simultaneous and multiple projection where these existential planes that are offered open and diverging, will meet their receptors, our eyes.

We cannot seize much of complex reality; even so when looking to the images of the real itself. Collins' conscience of this abyss that opens up between the world and the eye is explicit, and some form of insinuation of that friction of the dark side of the reality that lies in wait, and of its own limitation of the speed of the look in perceiving that which could unfold before the eye of one's conscience. on all these screens the sonorous photographs in movement that are there projected – these dialogues, this life that happens –, pass by.

### **The revealing of time**

*He who has seen present things has seen all, both everything which has taken place from all eternity and everything which will be for time without end.*

Marcus Aurelius, (reflections, sixth book, year 170)

*And yet, and yet – to deny temporal succession, to deny the ego, to deny the astronomical universe, are apparent desperations and secret assuagements. our destiny ...is not horrible because of its unreality; it is horrible because it is irreversible and ironbound. time is the substance I am made of. time is a river that carries me away, but I am the river, it is a tiger that mangles me, but I am the tiger; it is a fire that consumes me, but I am the fire. the world, alas, is real; I alas, am Borges.*

J.I. Borges, (Other Inquisitions, 1948)

Film is the medium that Collins uses, that thin film which in the interior of a machine that imitates the workings of the eye attempts to capture the passing of time, to capture succession itself. the photographic camera and the film camera share their status as filmic machines. There isn't an essential distinction between photography and film. They are the capturers of time. layers and layers of images, sometimes of immobile movement, or terribly slow; as when Collins decides on the dragging capture of the camera obscure, or keeping the film camera still on a single shot which barely changes. The duration is registered on the image in movement, which is made of time: all movement in which something happens is present and is also a continuation that comes.

Images in movement are almost instantly forgotten, they are difficult to retain. sequences of instants captured. In this spirit of film– volatile and passing –, time is revealed.

This auto-awareness of the passing of time that Collins' images powerfully evoke, assaults us with a feeling of nostalgia, or rather melancholy, "... promise of impermanence and temporariness, occurring like vanitas, memory of sure death – memento mori –, strength of melancholy" (Brea, 2010); reminder that we ourselves are made of time, like all things. These existential planes that Collins develops in these projects of film and photography that I have allowed myself to call portraits, are constantly attempting to focus the look on the strange nature of time, with curiosity and care, intuitively allowing it in freedom to slide into the interior of a small cosmos, where as a tension manifests itself, disintegrates or appears transfigured. These characters, all together with the things and the circumstances that surround them seem to surge from an unperceived fold in time. Perhaps it's a crack in thought, of abyssal fall, – a blind spot of sight: – occurring in these characters singular extraordinary characteristics; inhabitants of an alien space and time, perhaps phantasmagorical images of the blindness of a sleeping consciousness, lethargic in the torpor of the machinery of clocks, and in the eagerness of our small-minded undertakings for capitalism's progress.

Perhaps the block of sense that overcomes us in these volatile scenes of Hannah Collins' fractured narrative, in the figure of portrait of what we are being and what we have been, facing the pulse of this flow of change that presents itself, forces us to imagine what "is not there" in the film. These are no longer images of "the things" captured by the eye and the camera but pure mental images pregnant with future, that make themselves owners of other time; owners of a strength in becoming-difference: images of something that has not yet been accomplished, that has not appeared in the movement of the past before the present of what we ourselves and the other that questions us, could turn out to be. A memory of memento, an inverted déjà-vu or unseen paramnesia. as Jose Luis Brea expresses it, (*Las tres eras de la imagen*, 2010) – when thinking memory... of difference, of the mental image or the electronic one: "(...) of it – of that difference to come that is the most proper content of the memory being of these images. What is given to us is little more than a coefficient (of artisticness, said Duchamp; of significance we say here) a mere contribution, an assignation – always waiting to be resolved, to be decided –. a consignment that, each time, still waits for

its receiver and the activework of reading that he will do. (...) a silent caress in that which speaks within, if it does – puts itself where it is not: prosopopoeia, pure allegory, necessarily – , nothing else says that the will to be listened to as if – there would be a voice there wanting to tell us something (a voice there, wanting to tell us something) –. and it is from this being-there of what-is-not-there like a wanting to speak (giving only the real testimony of the affective presence of a remaining of the will: that of producing or living or transmitting a something of sense) of what that drawn gesture a sign is, forward, memory.

Memento, I would almost prefer to say ...

Also an instant, while watching the trajectories of those lives in Collins' multiple portraits, we could feel the disintegration of time, see it become circular; a return of the same: Is one sole repeated term enough to ruin and confuse the series of time? "...a refutation of time, which I myself disbelieve, but which comes to visit me at night and in the weary dawns..." (Borges, 1946). Especially in these lives which transit in the calm sequence of the everyday where repetition is abundant: a horse cart and its gypsy crossing the same corner on its daily trip, we hear the train on its routine and the sweet gallop which clip-clops always with the same rhythm; the light of the same square where the children always play hopscotch that we ourselves have played – which is itself a numbered sequence – and always identical – of steps to heaven; the old familiar melody of a trumpet played by a gypsy at the break of the evening dawn in the joy of that square which is my home, which always makes me remember the same memory when I hear it – an elusive premonition of one music –...

### **Urbi et orbi**

The world is a sphere. "Five centuries have passed since Columbus' first voyage and the revolution of what we understand when speaking of space has reached its highest summits" (sloterdijk, 1994). Globalization would be that dynamic that establishes contacts, permanent communications of double life, with all the corners of that globe that is the planet; spanning people and their way of living, things that have been found, capitals and territories –. *urbi et orbi*, the ancient papal blessing which is still used in the persistence of the image of the middle ages' colonizer with his feet on the globe, represents this idea of being everywhere at

once; in the city and in the world. The europeanism of before which presents itself as the centre of the world towards where all the tides converge is today replaced by a group of circular centres coexisting, all inside multiple spheres at once.

This spherical condition of the world and its consequences were carefully observed two hundred years ago in a book of Kant's, forgotten until now when it is quoted by many historians: *universal History*(1). According to him we are all doomed to dwell and move in this sphere without having another space to turn to and therefore we are forced to always live in neighbourhood and company. This book touches upon the precise debate on current globalization: citizenship for all men, as their only real dignity. "The perfect unification of the human species beginning with our common citizenship, is the destiny that nature has chosen for us, the last horizon of our universal history that, originating from and driven by reason and the instinct of conservation, we are destined to pursue and with time reach". Derrida, in 1996, observes that Kant's proposals can be followed up with "hospitality is culture itself and not just a moral among many... ethics are hospitality".

Nonetheless what we have seen with the outcome of modernity is a determination to erect high borders, papers, passports, nationalities and an extended eternal fear about the immigrant. He who comes to introduce himself without having before or clearly taken part in the established constellation of the flow of globalized capital. Things get more complicated when the world is contracted and depleted: our space today. The places to turn to with the system's waste no longer exist, not one place remains to be invented, not one that opens up with promise as a destination for "those who have been unlucky". The immigrant is everywhere. there is a category of immigrant that is not visible to us, unwanted immigrants, – some without papers – who arrive in another territory or who are a part of a territory under value with very little to offer, (immigrants of the global system in their own land); territories closed on themselves in relation to its capacity to host; where unwanted immigrants don't easily meet citizens. the city could possibly be everywhere at once, *urbi et orbi*, but not the citizen. Many theoretical efforts have been developed to organize coexistence and the integration of "those who come" in culturally subordinate conditions; multiculturalism, dominant of the previous century, those machines of identity/ difference

that looks at race, and culture as bastions, hasn't perhaps been successful in understanding that those of us who "live, weave each other and are", are individuals, small personal stories who struggle for the capacity to act.

The portraits, the existential blocks that Collins works with, tend to focus on migrants. We have already said that the eye here insisted upon does not pause on differences, we forget now this obsession with difference, (we are all universal subjects, we are all exotic subjects). Instead we find these dialogues between people who search for the action that will take them to find a destiny for themselves beyond any situations, of any difficulty: the search for an agency of themselves that makes it possible for them as individuals to transform a series of lived situations into a history and into a personal project. a radical change of point of view, it is not about looking at cultures who go through encounters and disencounters on the journey of one culture towards another, of one society towards another – even inside the different societies which coexist in the same territory and in the same time frame –; but to observe how are formed or discompose these subjects who conceive themselves as actors, and the production of the themselves as the ultimately end of their actions. This would be the horizon that configures itself in the projects *La Mina* and *Parallel*. The idea of the journey of the lulos and the drawings and phrases that travel from the country to the city of Bogota are equally a part of this *urbi et orbi* that dynamize all these encounters.

In *Solitude and Company*, we find another singular situation: in the interwoven tapestry of times and places in this dreamlike climate of that territory under value, in the emptiness of that abandoned factory, we can also find the intuition of a distinction between the self and the subject. They are not synonyms. Alain Touraine quotes to comment on this distinction the work of Pirandello, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*: "the drama, for me is all there inside, to dream in the consciousness oneself has, that has everyone of us, to be 'one' when is 'a hundred', 'a thousand', when one is as many times as possibilities are inside of oneself". An idea that must be taken to the extreme according to Touraine: "only on the ruins of a broken ego an idea of a subject can be imposed, which is the opposite of an identification with oneself that would make us to vindicate each one of our thoughts and our acts as if they

belong to us like subjects, when we cannot size ourselves as subjects rather than making inside of us an emptiness which expels everything that comes from me.”

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