# Clinic 3
## South: Inequality, Crisis, War

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INEQUALITY, CRISIS and war are recurring situations associated with the "South". Such conditions have become cyclic and systematic along decades; entire generations and individuals have not known any other landscape. Such issues are, generally speaking, dealt with in a philosophical, theoretical, scientific and political manner. Inequality, crisis and war become mere speculative objects. Such a view is particularly evident in those discourses coming from the "North", although some positions from the "South" tend to move in the same direction. The level of experience produced by these situations —which, depending on the place, happen, are articulated and are understood in different ways— is left out in these revisions. Departing from what E. Gruner has written on this issues, the clinic aims to "critically question the foundations of those experiences and to evaluate the depth of their inscription in a logic and a praxis that truly questiondomination." The course will be focused on how have artistic practices and critical discourses in the South responded to such scenarios.

## Report: **Alma Rosa Martínez Amigón**

WHAT FOLLOWS is the product of participant discussions carried out at the workshop that emerged based on the bibliography presented at the end of this text. In particular, we reviewed the case of post-dictatorship Argentina as a first approximation to the problematic posited by the theme.

A fundamental consideration for analysis was the need to locate an historical moment and determined situation in which the artistic field operates, along with its contiguities, continuities and oppositional relationships.

## The Scenario

Crisis situations associated with the "South" (violence, war, inequality) occur to a large degree at the same time as an evident crisis in neo-liberalism; in Latin America during the 1970s, the brutal response on the part of the governing classes with regard to social mobility and political radicalization had the imposition of military dictatorships as its corollary.

The twentieth century presents previously unknown forms of political violence. The horror unleashed by genocide (between 1976 and 1983 Argentina operated some 400 concentration camps through which somewhere between 20 and 30 thousand illegally detained people passed) went beyond radicalized groups, reaching not just leftist political and social organizations, but expanding into cultural and daily life and thereby piercing the entire social fabric. State terrorism also generated socio-economic transformations, modifying the presence and social import of the working class.

## The Victims

As the figure of the "disappeared" person, whose negated existence (being neither alive nor dead/being a body but not a cadaver/the incarnation of the nullified subject/the unnamed [NN for *no nombrado* in Spanish]) leads to the disappearance of memory. A survivor's memory is brutally opposed, as he/she is a witness who condenses not only evidence of terror and death, but also the defeat that certain militant sectors refused to recognize.[1]

Placed next to the representation of the disappeared as a hero and martyr, its opposite, the survivor, is seen as a traitor. He/she carries and identity that must be reconstructed and is marked by an extreme trauma experience that becomes inaudible (or intolerable) for a society that resists hearing him/her, whether because of a collective self-justifying common sense: "we didn't know;" or because legal defenses hide or publically deny militant conditions that incriminate even after the fall of dictatorship; or due to a sort of social sacrificial pruning: an ethic that political militancy conceives on the one hand with an idea of indestructibility and

final triumph as part of an historical destiny, and on the other hand as a sort of total abandonment to the cause: death as the life of the Revolution.

The same construction of the victim and the hero, insomuch as it mysthifies the history of the militant and makes it uniform, demands total adherence and blocks criticism as well as analysis of actions, ideas and even the conception of acts themselves. This lack of critical questioning leads to de-politicization and ends up allying itself with ideological hegemony.

As produced by the functional logic of repression, the survivor's testimony is restricted to circulation in judicial instances; it legitimacy can easily be invalidated by the past's personal and subjective ways of discerning.

In such a context, how can the representation of this violence be posited within the arts "network"? The question points not only to the legitimacy of such an act, but also to its mere possibility.

### Representation

It would be far from impartial to take on these questions without acknowledging the Eurocentric and planetary paradigms[2] that turn the logic of colonialism into hegemony and which after the First World War posit the *forced diappearance* of a representation.[3] At the same time a collective disappearance of bodies, or violently removed bodies, exists, art abandoned the referent of the body and replaced it with a void figuration of that body. Genocide violence seeks to strip the subject of its right to possible configuration and the legitimization of its world.

Eduardo Grüner[4] posits that absence and presence, memory and forgetting are not absolute terms but are rather the object of a political strategy, and proposes one that he denominates as *invisibility*, radically opposed to *forced image disappearance* policies (implemented by dominant sectors in examples such as the effacement of people from photographs during the Stalinist years) as well as opposed to those strategies used by resistance social sectors such as the *substitute representation* of images (as in silhouetting).

*Strategic invisibility* consists of a metaphor for the political construction of memory; it is an appeal to the active construction of an anticipated memory of redemption in the future. Instead of a loss, it anticipates an enrichment of reality, a reality that will be better when such images can be shown, when the "framed void" will be filled with collective praxis and will reconstruct its history.

In the construction of new concepts, it is fundamental to unseat the historicist idea that all violence is equal, that extreme situations come from the same causes and that the victims it produces are subject to like histories and as such are awaited by the same destiny.

Thus the violence that produces the erasure of *strategic invisibility* is a foundational violence for a new legality that counts on the permanent, forward displacement of the "auto-institution" of image, does not allow it to coalesce, since it is always held back with respect to its own movement.

## The "South"

The re(-)cognition of the "South" supposes the recognition of singularity. Faced with the concept of "periphery" (the natural consequence of center), the "South" maintains an orientation that looks "north" less and less.

Specific circumstances within the field of art allow it to unveil or break up what generalized narratives promote as a necessarily monolithic and impenetrable body. The value of singularity can be opposed to the hegemonic values of originality and unity in that they reveal an ontological richness that can contain the bases for dislocation of the power of capital.

In the area of social mobilization, neo-liberalism in crisis approaches the globalized scenarios it produces in a paranoid fashion. Paradoxically, both globalization and the crisis in the relationship of servitude that sala-ried work encapsulates make space possible for new types of struggles and can generate new capacities for the construction of knowledge and the emergence of the common.

Two examples are Argentina's 2001 protests and Social Forums against globalization, which opened up territory for social, economic and political experimentation and innovation.

The protagonist of these new struggles is not a unified entity but rather more like an active, organized social body, the incarnation of sin-gularities that also has a consistency that resists every generalization: the multitude.

In an analysis of the Argentine disaster, Tony Negri[5] sketches certain characteristics of this new social agent, whose potential resides in what is held in common: immaterial efforts (with their affective, intellectual com-municative and linguistic dimensions) as well as real cooperative work that is organized via the production of forms and lifestyles.

While "the people" are represented as a unity, the multitude is a singular multiplicity or a collection of singularities that reaffirms the

impossibility of being represented. In it, sovereignty cannot be divorced from the exercise of sovereignty. It takes resistance movements as an ethical reference and given that it does not function by being subsumed into capitalist accumulation, it is able to contain the bases for the dislocation of the modes of production.

The multitude, always productive and in movement, posits a political refashioning, in that it reveals the similarities shared by social sectors—a community neo-liberalism seeks to hide. At the same time it demands a new analysis of society's composition.

It is critical to reject a certain idea about the "naturalness" of the violence associated with the "South"; similarly, it is important to object to the supposed homogeneity of protests and resistance, and open ourselves up to hearing, one by one, the voices of victims in order to activate the art field's politicization.

It is also fundamental to work on the links between art and politics. The representations and images through which subjects symbolize their relationships to the societies in which they live are extremely political elements and the dialectic of visibility/invisibility can be decisive for their survival—for their politics of memory and forgetting. From there, the importance of a politics of memory and representation of the unrepresentable implies an ethical stance and not just an aesthetic one.

## Notes

[1] Ana Longoni proposes certain hypotheses about "social inaudibility" on the part of survivors. See Longoni, Ana. *Traiciones. La figura de traidor en los relatos acerca de los sobrevivientes de la represión.* Ed. Grupo Norma, Buenos Aires, 2007, 220 pp.

[2] See Dussel, Enrique. *Beyond eurocentrism. The world-system and the limits of modernity.*

[3] See Grüner, Eduardo. *La invisibilidad estratégica, o la redención política de los vivos. Violencia política y representación estética en el siglo de las desapariciones.*

[4] See Grüner, *op. cit.*

[5] See Negri, Antonio and Giuseppe Cocco. "El trabajo de la multitud y el éxodo constituyente o 'el quilombo argentino'", in *Diálogo sobre la globalización, la multitud la experiencia argentina.* Digital edition.