ONE TIME BECOMING ANOTHER: AFTERLIVES OF THE SEEN, FIGURES OF THE YET-TO-COME*

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These are troubled and troubling times. So writes Georges Didi-Huberman in his book *Les anges de l'histoire. Images des temps inquiets* (2025). We are living in a time of change and transformation, with the emergence of a new visual paradigm shaped by the current geopolitical crisis and the consolidation of the alliance between technology, economics and warfare, informed by an ideology of radical accelerationism of events (Boucheron, 2024) and their representations.

We are watching one time become another, and we are witnessing it in real time. But it is not just something changing; there is also something unexpectedly returning, in the form of the unresolved afterlives and moods (Didi-Huberman, 2025) of authoritarian political leaders and techno-oligarchs who adopt the words and gestures of dictators, emperors or even the super-villains of fantasy and science fiction films.

The 21st century has been characterised by a flood of apocalyptic images that blend different cinematic codes, "image spam" (Steyerl, 2014) going viral on social media and an increasingly frenetic collision of public and private spheres. With the war in Ukraine, the genocide in Gaza and Donald Trump's second term, a new visual regime is being forged, based on neuro-excitation, cognitive colonisation of the attention and the erasure of any discourse inconsistent with the purposes of a post-liberal "finitude capitalism" (Orain, 2025) aimed at the systematic hoarding of resources, from Venezuelan oil to rare earth minerals to Greenlandic ice. The fact that other world leaders and major conflicts (such as the war in Sudan) have been effectively rendered invisible reflects a progressive loss of nuance in our visual conception of the world.

As the philosopher Éric Sadin (2024) and the artist and researcher Hito Steyerl (2025) have pointed out in relation to the anthropological rupture brought about by AI, in addition to being exposed to an endless stream of "phantom images" (Sadin, 2025) or random, stochastic "poor images" (Steyerl, 2025), we are entering an "age of indis-

tinction" that makes it increasingly difficult to determine the origins of images and texts, while the great repository of the web, whose energy consumption continues to increase exponentially, is effectively a "dead internet" that has delegated the creation of images to large-scale production by computers.

One aim of this issue of *L'Atalante* is to affirm the vital importance of the cinematic image as a refuge, as an active tool for analysing the images flooding the public sphere and as a way of laying claim to a future denied by extractivist politics. The "Gaza Riviera" reel posted by Donald Trump on his social media platform, Truth Social, in February 2025 constituted what was not only an exercise in cynicism and colonial violence but also the imposition of a seemingly inexorable present. In this context, only the reassembly of other images through an exercise in editing, repolarising and recontextualising can offer a different way of thinking by directing our gaze to places where the interminable social media feeds seem to prevent us from looking.

In addition to contributing, as Harun Farocki (2013) might have suggested, to the "destruction of the world", the "Gaza Riviera" video clip represents a radical change to the "civil contract of images" (Azoulay, 2008), adhering to a model for presenting a business project and an "omnipresent militarised gaze", to borrow a term used by the filmmaker Sanaz Sohrabi in this issue's "Discussion" section, which breaks with any notion of politics as relationality (Arendt, 1950). In its historical plurality, cinema has had the function of "showing" and staging modes of relating between individuals, communities and spectators, who can also potentially become protagonists. How can we "show" these modes and redirect the gaze in the age of AI? How can cinema be used to contravene the geographical and cognitive hyper-colonialism that permeates every aspect of civil and political life?

"[I]t is not enough to 'show what is hidden'" argues the filmmaker Sylvain George in the "Dialogue" section of this issue of *L'Atalante*. "Such a conception continues to assume that cinema is a mirror of reality, a simple device for revelation or restitution. [...] It is important, then, to shift the coordinates of this approach. Because what is at stake today is not just the absence of representation of certain existences but their very production as mutilated representations. The act of filming, consequently, cannot content itself with a reparative or illustrative function. It supposes an active disarticulation of dominant regimes of visibility."

For this reason, hacking the system of cultural extractivism imposed by the technology that sustains generative AI is a task that falls not only upon the technology itself or upon the use of social media, but also—crucially—upon cinema and

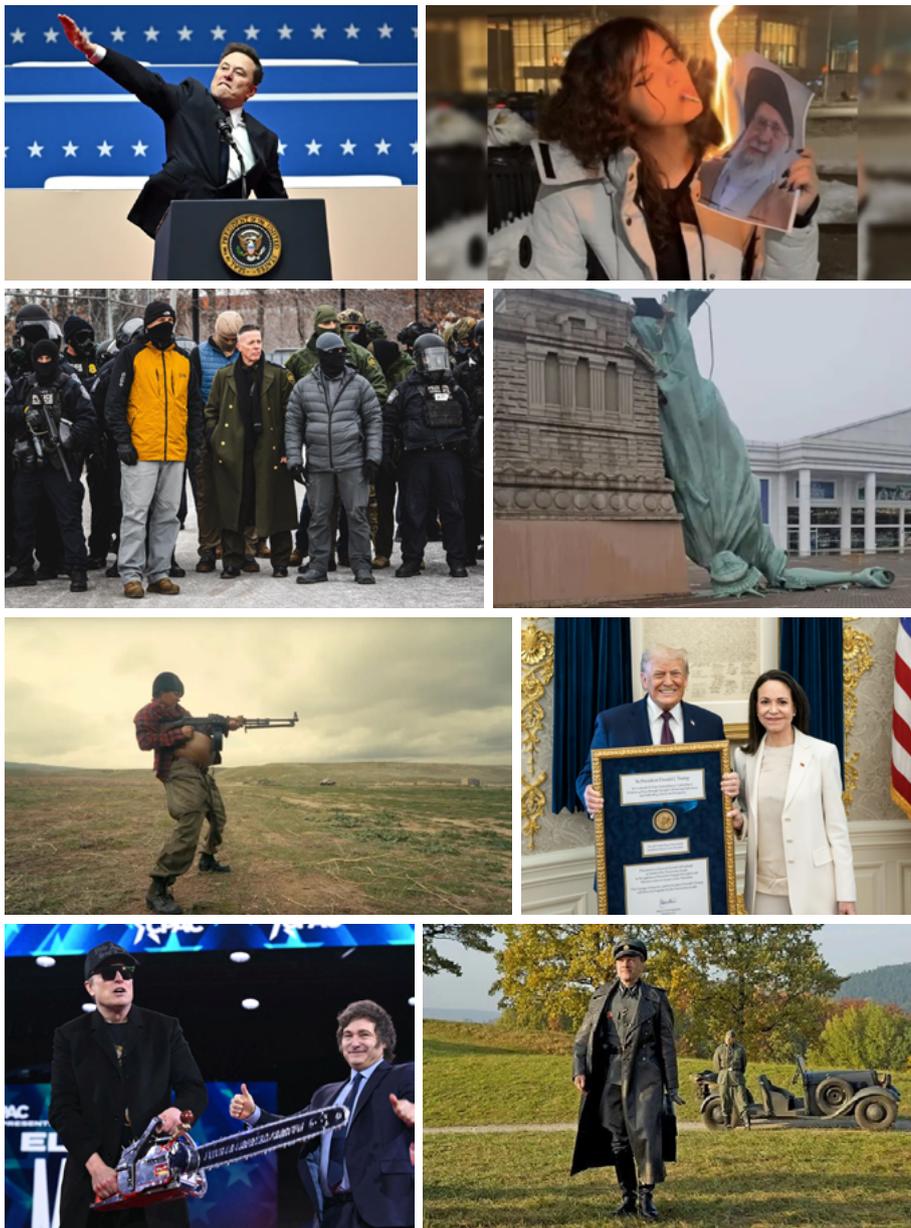Imagen 1. The shadow of a post–democratic future

Image 2. Afterlives of a different time

Exploring opacity without preconceptions while integrating contexts and genealogies is also the basis of an iconographic and iconological approach (Panofsky, 1982; Warburg, 2010) that can be used to reconfigure the political self-representation of contemporary populist leaders in a genealogy that can be traced back to Silvio Berlusconi, as Daniele Comberiati argues in the first article of this special issue. It can also serve to study the post-colonial framework of films by Mati Diop, Alice Diop, Bernadette Vivuya, Kagoma Twahirgwa, Théo Court and Felipe Gálvez, among others, as some authors do in this issue, based on the contemporary experience of a hyper-colonialism that can expose the tensions in the regime of visibility as an omnipresent border and authentic hypodermic biopolitics of moving bodies.

Cinema's power to support, defuse and trigger different contexts is evident in recent films such as *One Battle after Another* (2025), Paul Thomas Anderson's adaptation of the Thomas Pynchon novel *Vinland* (1990), which highlights the effects of allowing a militarised body to act with impunity in a democratic country mere months before ICE (US Immigration and Customs Enforcement), initially under the direction of Gregory Bovino, began wreaking havoc and murdering civilians in Minnesota. By transposing the original story (set in California in the year of Ronald Reagan's re-election in 1984) to the present, Anderson is able to use the anachronisms to outline

its ability to expose these mutilations that exacerbate the phenomenon of invisibilisation. "It is not about illustrating a cause, nor denouncing a state of affairs," Sylvain George continues, "but about instituting a zone of undecidability: there where faces are no longer assigned to a function, there where bodies are no longer obliged to signify. There where, perhaps, something still holds itself up in the night, not as darkening, but as reserve of meaning, as irreducible opacity."

a dissection of the visual forms and motifs that shape the contemporary regime of visibility.

David Simon carried out a similar exercise in his TV adaptation (HBO, 2020) of Philip Roth's novel *The Plot against America* (2004), which posits an alternate history where Charles Lindbergh becomes president of the United States in 1940, giving rise to a climate of racism and violence that poses a threat to American democracy. The anachronism here is present in the clash between the historical context of the story (1940), the historical context that inspired the novel (the possibility of George W. Bush seeking a third term) and the historical context that drove Simon to warn Americans of what could happen if Donald Trump were to win a second term (which in fact happened in the following presidential election).

The essential feature of Trump's second term, an assemblage of technology, the military industrial complex, the debt crisis, hyper-surveillance, techno-masculinity and the hubris of power recognisable in characters that caricature it, such as Colonel Steven J. Lockjaw (Sean Penn), effectively defines *One Battle after Another*, which even includes a transliteration of the quasi-theological foundations of corporations such as Palantir and Praxis in the white supremacist group known as the "Christmas Adventurers". The film thus performs a dissection as accurate as it is parodic of a present that cinema is destined to rewrite for the future, vindicating its status, as Sylvain George describes it, as a tool that occasionally allows us to glimpse what the language of power cannot name.

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Abstract

This article examines the configuration of a new visual regime in the context of today's "troubled times", characterised by geopolitical acceleration, the consolidation of alliances between technology, economics and warfare, and the radical transformation of the public sphere. Drawing on the work of Georges Didi-Huberman, Hito Steyerl, and Éric Sadin, it analyses how the proliferation of images produced and circulated with the help of artificial intelligence and social media gives rise to processes of cognitive saturation, neuro-excitation, and loss of traceability, ushering in an "age of indistinction" that facilitates the invisibilisation of conflicts and subjectivities that fall outside the interests of post-liberal extractivist capitalism. Particular attention is paid to the appropriation of the visual logics of cinema and fantasy by populist leaders and techno-oligarchs, as well as the rupture of the "civil contract of images", exemplified by the "Gaza Riviera" reel. This article thus affirms the vital importance of cinema as a forum for critical resistance and for reclaiming the future, with the ability to dismantle dominant regimes of visibility through editing, anachronism, and the creation of zones of opacity and undecidability that restore a politics of the gaze and of relationality.

Key words

Visual Motif; Visual Regimes; Artificial Intelligence and Images; Attention Economy; Political Iconography; Cinema as Critical Resistance; Extractivist Capitalism.

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UN TIEMPO QUE SE TRANSFORMA EN OTRO: SUPERVIVENCIAS DE LO VISTO, FIGURAS DEL PORVENIR

Resumen

Este artículo analiza la configuración de un nuevo régimen visual en el contexto de los actuales "tiempos inquietos," caracterizados por la aceleración geopolítica, la alianza entre tecnología, economía y guerra y la transformación radical de la esfera pública. Partiendo de las aportaciones de Georges Didi-Huberman, Hito Steyerl y Éric Sadin, se examina cómo la proliferación de imágenes producidas y difundidas mediante inteligencia artificial y redes sociales da lugar a procesos de saturación cognitiva, neuroexcitación y pérdida de trazabilidad, instaurando una "era de la indistinción" que favorece la invisibilización de conflictos y subjetividades ajenas a los intereses del capitalismo post-liberal extractivista. El texto presta especial atención a la reapropiación de lógicas cinematográficas y fantásticas por parte de líderes populistas y tecno-oligarcas, así como al quiebre del "contrato civil de las imágenes", ejemplificado por el reel de la "Riviera de Gaza". Frente a este escenario, el artículo reivindica la centralidad del cine como espacio de resistencia crítica y de reapropiación del futuro, capaz de desarticular los regímenes dominantes de visibilidad mediante el montaje, el anacronismo y la producción de zonas de opacidad e indecidibilidad que restituyan una política de la mirada y de la relacionalidad.

Palabras clave

Motivo visual; Regímenes visuales; Inteligencia artificial e imágenes; Economía de la atención; Iconografía política; Cine como resistencia crítica; Capitalismo extractivista.

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