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Regimes of (In)visibility and Peripheral Vision

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Visual Culture in the Digital Era

- 1 At the dawn of the twenty-first century, the sense of sight, the image, audiovisual communication and the media are undeniably predominant in many aspects and dimensions of human life, and this applies across cultures and for most of the world's population. However, visual culture is also an extraordinarily wide, diverse and heterogeneous field, both when observed comparatively in different societies and within a single cultural tradition, as well as in its many transformations throughout its long history.
- 2 Twenty years ago, Giovanni Sartori (1998) suggested that the human being, particularly after the invention of television, was becoming a kind of "Homo videns" possessed of a voracious appetite for images, yet also with a passive and uncritical gaze and increasingly subject to the political and media-driven manipulation of a teledirected society. This situation is distinguished by two phenomena: hypervisuality, understood as the multiplication and omnipresence of images for the purpose of entertainment and advertising; and alienation, in the form of isolation, individualism, and also indifference, mistrust or fear of the other and what is different.
- 3 Sartori could not have imagined what the twenty-first century would bring in terms of the power of the image, of the links between image, identity and power, and the close connection between visual culture, subjects' agency and the power of institutions, states and large multinational corporations. More than an alienated, apathetic and uncritical multitude addicted to images, as Sartori gloomily predicted, what we can observe in today's world is an overwhelming effervescence and diversity in the composition of audiovisual culture, as well as a deep structural imbalance in terms of its production, dissemination and consumption. In the world of images as we know it today, we are faced

with unbridgeable chasms and radical polarisations between people's experiences: across gender, generations, social-economic categories, rural and urban populations, northerners and southerners, citizens of the first and third worlds, centres and peripheries, those privileged and those living on the margins. This inequality crystallised in audiovisual regimes reveals grave and growing frictions, contrasts, and social injustices among other such dystopias. However, it also evidences new struggles, movements, recognitions and emancipations that are increasingly being created and delivered through visual media.

- 4 This situation requires a thorough analysis of the epistemology, ontology, ethics and politics of images and visual culture, a multidimensional and interdisciplinary understanding of the gaze, of the processes of audiovisual representation, communication, production, circulation and consumption. We therefore need to construct a broad, open and flexible visual anthropology, one that connects to other fields, such as art history, psychology, philosophy, contemporary visual arts, critical film and photographic studies, among other disciplines.
- 5 This disciplinary flexibility that I suggest visual anthropology should assume, highlights and reinforces anthropology's own interdisciplinary nature, which brings it closer to humanities and arts, way beyond its original positivist vocation, transcending the boundaries between academic anthropology and other fields of cultural expression (Zirión, 2015). Of course this article does not pretend to achieve this goal by itself. Such a task requires enormous collective work and discussion among scholars, filmmakers, and the communities with which we work. Such efforts need to be constantly nourished and updated from multiple perspectives. I simply suggest a couple notions that could contribute to a better understanding of the scope, extent and importance of this assignment.

The Power of the Image and the Imaginaries of Power

- 6 What forms are adopted today at the intersections between visibility and power, image and politics? How does the hypervisibility found all across today's world mix with new global flows, twenty-first century geopolitical and social (dis)orders, and increasing inequality around the planet?
- 7 Power in Mexico, as in many other Latin American countries and almost the world over, is largely exercised by manipulating imaginaries. But invisibility is also a form of violence. Erasing, hiding, censoring and manipulating the image of something or someone is a means of wielding power, maintaining control over society and public order. Social exclusion almost always implies, as one of its fundamental aspects, cancelling the image of others, or representing it in a way that is distorted, fragmented, over-simplified, commercialised or objectivised.
- 8 The exercise of power is closely connected to the act of seeing and being seen, or of not seeing and not being seen. The image is a double-edged sword: it can be used as a tool to oppress and subjugate, or alternatively to give visibility and empower. Acts and ideas such as social exclusion, discrimination, violence and repression, as well as resistance, self-determination, autonomy, sovereignty and dignity, are all imbued with a powerful symbolism. They also have a visible quality, a graphical identity, and occupy a place in the collective imaginary, taking shape through complex games of audiovisual discourses

and representations, emblems, signs, icons, logos, memes, and so on, which are most often crystallised in visual images.

- 9 In parallel, censoring, silencing, and repressing the freedom of expression continue to be used as highly effective political strategies of (in)visibilisation. In Mexico today, after more than 10 years since the start of the “war” on drugs and organised crime, launched by former conservative president, Felipe Calderón, journalists who file complaints or bring into the open hidden aspects of reality are regularly threatened and killed, both by State actors as well as by members of organised crime groups. Meanwhile, distraction and disinformation are some of the most frequently used and elaborate mechanisms which are nowadays taking on surprising new forms through the language of the social networks and digital communication. In brief, both (in)visibilisation and overvisualisation, as well as distorted representations, are now more than ever unequivocal, effective and powerful political strategies which deserve to be analysed in their renewed and sophisticated formats.

Over-Exposed and Darkened Images

- 10 On this point, I would like to reflect upon specific situations in which the regimes of hypervisuality and over-exposition are subverted, disputed, reverted, confronted or interrupted by the other extreme: by invisibility, concealment, blindness or effacement; by areas of darkness, shadow, under-exposure, blurriness or backlighting. Images are never fully lit or completely blacked out, as these two qualities are also mixed or blended using different levels of darkness and light, to produce a subtle grayscale or a high-contrast picture. Reality is almost always filtered through shadows in the middle of a well-lit panorama, or through chinks of light against a darkened background.
- 11 But how does this power of the “unseen” actually act? How can we measure the strength of the censored, the presence of the missing and burden of the forgotten? When we cannot actually make a visual note of something, our mind chooses instead to clear up any doubt by triggering a process of imagination within the subject. Something’s invisibility does not imply any lack of meaning or importance; on the contrary, often what is concealed, subliminal, or off-limits is—by virtue of its very invisibility—more freighted with meaning and significance. Religion, magic, the past, the future, for example, are all intangible aspects of the human experience that nevertheless lie at the heart of richly complex visual narratives and imaginaries. Culture and art are largely created and reproduced on the basis of the invisible, in the ungraspable territory of the imminent future or immediate past; they consist of what we cannot see but can sense significantly and share through the collective memory, myths and social representations.
- 12 The brackets in “(in)visibility” are used precisely to refer to the ambiguity created when both conditions—visibility and invisibility—exist together or at the same time, when they overlap or happen intermittently, when a clash takes place between the two, or when they are combined harmoniously. The result is what we could call the “out-of-focus” effect, a notion that contains various meanings. It can refer to an ambiguity or ambivalence in audiovisual culture, the untimely crossing of intersubjective and intercultural gazes between different disciplines or different dimensions of reality. It can also be applied to the fact of seeing but not seeing, or seeing without observing, of not seeing well or only half-seeing, but imagining the rest. Totally acute and sharp vision is practically impossible. The reality is that we are always condemned to only glimpsing,

glancing, vaguely discerning or trying to bring things into focus, in the face of saturation and over-exposure on the one hand, and darkening and obscurity on the other. Ultimately, we always see with the help of the imagination, with our own audiovisual baggage and its unavoidable political dimension.

- 13 This web of visible and (in)visible images everywhere in the real world combines to form our imaginary and visual culture, which is closely tied to memory and identity, shaping our social life and constituting a peculiar, immaterial, increasingly ephemeral and shifting heritage. In the face of the overwhelming complexity of imaginary worlds, and the social inequality and cultural diversity expressed in our collective imaginary and visual culture, we only have the option of seeing things sweeping across our field of vision in a blur. Hence we must constantly strive to identify what clouds and conditions our gaze; not necessarily in order to correct it, but simply to recognise its slant and understand it as only one particular way of seeing, a single point of view among many possible perspectives, in the vast and complex networks of images and gazes that form our contemporary visual culture.

Social Exclusion at First Sight

- 14 I would like now to shift from the analysis of power on the imaginaries and visual culture to its more concrete expression, in terms of urban culture and living conditions for residents of large cities. Following up on the ideas of French urban sociologist Gérard Althabe (1996), I will focus on the problem of social exclusion from an anthropological perspective, understood as a negative or pathological construction of others. It is about a conflictive coexistence of a series of intercultural agreements and disputes in everyday exchanges and relationships. Subjects considered outsiders are excluded from regular social interactions. At stake is a stigmatisation of the other, a figure burdened with numerous prejudices, labelled and inserted into rigid categories. A symbolic, yet insurmountable barrier is erected between us and others; they are placed at a distance, seen as a danger and separate in another world different to our own, with their own culture, customs, rituals and languages.
- 15 This is clearly the case of what happens with the impoverished inhabitants of urban peripheries, and the thousands of street dwellers who inhabit the interstitial cracks in the heart of the city. Poverty is not only defined as material precariousness, or even the lack of stability or social welfare; it is the result of social exclusion, the violence implied by being side-lined by the rest of society. It is important to note that at the very centre of contemporary urban societies, such as in the large Latin American cities, this group no longer constitutes a minority: in quantitative terms, it forms a majority in society, although qualitatively speaking they are segregated as second- or third-class citizens.
- 16 In the analysis of social exclusion of migrants, for example, victims of exclusion are almost always the focus of studies. But according to Althabe (1996), we should really begin by looking at the population that considers itself autochthonous, original, legitimate. That is where the crux of the problem exists. In other words, apart from trying to understand minorities, subaltern groups and marginalised members of society through studies, maybe we should also be examining ourselves – as privileged scholars and/or filmmakers – in an attempt to comprehend how we conceive these subcultures and act in relation to them. We need to recognise that the origin of the problem lies mainly in the dominant culture and is inherent in all contemporary societies.

Mexico City's Urban Subcultures

- 17 Over the years, Mexico City's urban society has created various forgotten areas that tend to be ignored or marginalised. In these underworlds or highly marginalised neighbourhoods a particular urban subculture develops that runs counter to the predominant, central culture. These are subcultures in two senses: as subdivisions of a larger culture, and because they are seen as inferior cultures (Hebdige, 1979).
- 18 This marginal urban subculture is notable because its members' behaviour is not only distant from, but also opposed to and transgresses the norms and values imposed by the hegemonic or central culture. The existence of this type of subculture can be considered a result of failed economic policies, social injustice, overpopulation and an absence of efficient demographic strategies, as well as an insufficiently organized society, a housing shortfall, a lack of education, broken family ties, and so on. Grave cultural conflicts between the ways of life reproduced in these places and the values expressed by the dominant national culture are clearly persisting. This is evidenced by certain conduct such as violence and crime, a part of people's daily lives in these barrios, highlighting the conflict between hegemonic cultures and marginal subcultures.
- 19 Within this field we are particularly interested in the young, who are doubly marginalised on account of being both poor and young. The social construction of urban youth is a highly complex issue. Rather than simply a question of age, several social conditions and factors come into play which define this urban youth. In her book *La construcción juvenil de la realidad*, Maritza Urteaga (2011) raises the question: What do we mean by "young"? What is the age range in this classification, and what attitudes or levels of maturity characterise youth, and what are the working conditions for these young people? There is also another underlying question: Which new social configurations and cultural patterns are generated by those marginalised youths who live in low-income neighbourhoods, on the streets or in prison?

Three Collaborative Documentary Experiences with Marginalised Urban Youth

- 20 Searching for answers to these questions I have set forth on several anthropological research projects through audio-visual media, working with different urban youth subcultures that coexist in Mexico's capital city (Zirión, 2013). Here I will briefly expound three collaborative documentary projects that I have coordinated together with other colleagues from the Homovidens collective:¹ *Chido mi banda, chido mi barrio* (Zirión and Rivera Kohn 2001), *Voces de la Guerrero* (Zirión, Arce and Rivera Kohn, 2004) and *Fuera de foco* (Zirión, Arce 2013).² These experiences provide a direct understanding and confirm the enormous cultural wealth of these marginalised youths, as well as enabling us to grasp the importance of these processes for the transfer and appropriation of audiovisual media, self-representation and reflexivity, visual sovereignty and the autonomy of the gaze, as strategies to resist social exclusion and reverse invisibility.

***Chido mi banda, chido mi barrio* (Zirión and Rivera Kohn 2001).**

- 21 The documentary *Chido mi banda, chido mi barrio* is the result of a long-lasting ethnographic immersion in street culture and among urban street dwellers in one of the most infamous low-income barrios in the center of Mexico City: El Cuadrante de la Soledad (Zirión, 2002).
- 22 Accompanied by various stray dogs, the members of the street gang who gather at the Plaza de la Soledad are almost always lying around on cardboard and newspaper, or inside small shacks ingeniously made of recycled materials. The most visible trait of this group of young people is their constant drug use: they inhale solvents from a scrap of paper which they hold in their fists and constantly keep close to their nose and mouth. These addictions are the outwardly visible results of complicated life stories and deep-rooted, significant problems that are highly revealing about the state of our society.
- 23 Still photography was the first method of audiovisual intervention I used in the Soledad neighbourhood. After several months of fieldwork, and as I built up familiarity and trust, I was able to take many photographs of these young people, especially portraits, and I also lent them the camera for them to play at creating images. Then I would print the photos and show them to all of those involved, recording their reactions when seeing their own images.
- 24 Subsequently, when my colleagues and I were preparing to record a documentary in the neighbourhood, we found out that the young street dwellers were eager to learn how to use the cameras themselves – in fact they would literally snatch them from us in order to experiment with them, thus initiating our first (unplanned) experience of “media transfer,” which in this case was actually more of a “media takeover.” At the end of each day, when we were looking at our takes, it was obvious that what they talked about among themselves was much more interesting than what they told us; they looked more fresh and spontaneous, direct and natural. This accidental discovery was a watershed moment. The filming took place in the context of the Day of the Dead, when these street children paid homage to their friends who had died over the previous year, recording images of their religious imaginary, rituals and altars, and their peculiar vision of death.
- 25 This initial short documentary participated at various film festivals, was well received by critics and obtained some recognition. Audiences were excited to hear the testimonies as told directly by – and for – the street children themselves. This alerted us to the promise of this participative and collaborative approach, and we reapplied the idea – the same methodology, spirit and proposition – in a different neighbourhood, only this time in greater depth and more systematically.

***Voces de la Guerrero* (Zirión, Arce and Rivera Kohn, 2004)**

- 26 La Colonia Guerrero is one of Mexico City’s oldest and most traditional neighbourhoods. Located in the capital’s historic centre, within the Cuauhtémoc borough, it is a densely populated area in which many local residents have few real opportunities to develop. It is also notoriously dangerous, rife with social problems such as crime, drug addiction, alcoholism, family disintegration and abandonment, prostitution, street selling, homelessness, street children, gangs, and violence. Yet equally the Guerrero neighbourhood still maintains a deep-rooted identity and a popular culture boasting

some very positive aspects, such as a strong identity, local solidarity and pride for their heritage.

- 27 There is a large population of street dwellers, including children, in La Guerrero. It's a highly diverse group, with some very young members, from 6 or 7 years' old, who have recently left their homes to live on the streets. Many adults and elderly people also live on these streets, though there are mainly adolescents and young people aged between 12 and 25 years old. This population largely consists of young men, but there are increasing numbers of women too. Many young people living on the street in this neighbourhood are already veterans of street life, many having left home between the ages of 9 and 12, and some at an even younger age. There are new generations of street kids who are actually born homeless.
- 28 After living so long on the street, many of these street dwellers are firmly established in their street life and are often in very poor psychological and physical shape due to their constant consumption of toxic substances; this neighbourhood is known as a centre of drug distribution and consumption. Currently the most frequently consumed (and harmful) drug is crack or "piedra," which is smoked using a glass pipe with a fine wire mesh filter. It is inexpensive, costing between 15 to 17 pesos—just under a dollar—for a single dose called a "punto." The young people living on the street do not have much trouble finding enough money to buy it. At the entrances to the Guerrero metro station they just need to stretch out their hands and in less than 15 minutes they will have begged enough for their fix of crack, solvents or alcohol. This routine is the most common *modus vivendi* of the street dwellers in the Guerrero neighbourhood.
- 29 After an initial period of fieldwork, once we were good friend with some of these kids, we went on to train them how to use audiovisual media, so that they could learn to show their reality and daily experiences from their own perspective, and talk about themselves in their own words. Our project basically consisted of teaching one of these groups to use video and still cameras to make a collaborative film with them, in order to set up a creative exchange through photographs and videos. The young participants turned out to be highly motivated and enthusiastic about the workshop. Television and film are a part of their lives and create much of their imaginary. They are avid consumers of audiovisual products, and technology is a hook that grabs their attention. And so through the video workshop our idea was to place these audiovisual resources within their reach, meaning they were no longer merely passive consumers but also active film-makers.
- 30 The results of this research process and social intervention using video can be seen in *Voces de la Guerrero*, a documentary that garnered praise and had a much greater and longer-lasting impact than we expected. It was broadcast widely on television channels and screened at various film festivals in Mexico and abroad, earning it prizes such as the José Rovirosa Prize for Best Documentary, awarded by the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). Almost 15 years on, this documentary still looks as fresh and relevant as ever, and it is still shown and discussed at various documentary and visual anthropology courses in Mexico.

***Fuera de foco* (Zirión and Arce, 2013)**

- 31 When we tried to track down the characters in *Voces de la Guerrero* some years subsequently, we found that some had left the neighbourhood while others were reported dead or had been sent to prison. We always thought that it would interesting to do a

follow-up documentary in the jail. Ten years later this opportunity arose thanks to an invitation by Alas y Raíces, the department of Mexico's former art council (Conaculta), which was focused on art and culture for children and young persons. The idea was to offer a still photography and video workshop for young people in an old prison for minors, located in Tlalpan, south of Mexico City.

- 32 The result, *Fuera de foco*,³ is a collaborative documentary about the confinement, daily routines and culture behind bars, based on the exercise of giving these young people a voice and sharing their gaze. The film also documents a new treatment model that promotes artistic expression and cultural activities, with a community focus, as a means of achieving social adaptation.
- 33 Created in an observational and participative style, this ethnographic-type documentary shows the experiences of various young prisoners, who are given a voice to tell their life stories and experiences of prison. Thanks to a relationship built up with these young people over a period of more than six months, the documentary successfully transcends the superficial images of journalistic reportage and sensationalist stories appearing in the media about life in Mexico's penitentiaries. By going beyond the stereotypes, it invites the viewer to question their own visions and prejudices about prison culture.
- 34 The title *Fuera de foco*—"out of focus"—has a number of readings. Firstly it refers to the visual effect we use to "mask" the faces of the prisoners and thus conceal their identities, a requirement of international law. But mainly the idea of being out of focus refers to the fact that these young people are socially deviated, disoriented, marginalised, excluded, silenced, and live in a twilight zone, a kind of limbo in which they exist but are unseen, leading lives relegated to the second or third plane of the collective imaginary. With this documentary we tried to gain a clearer understanding and view of these young prisoners, whose relative (in)visibility normally keeps them out of focus.

Ethical Dilemmas

- 35 The ethical question in collaborative ethnographic documentaries refers to the relationship established between filmmakers, protagonists (who often become filmmakers) and the audience. This ethical dimension raises a series of dilemmas, paradoxes, and crossroads that do not have a single or simple answer or solution. To be a good ethnographer and/or documentary filmmaker, one must be able to withstand some moral ambiguity. We must be flexible, adaptable and tolerant, making use of what Aristotle called *phronesis* (practical wisdom), which implies knowledge based on experience together with listening to our own instincts, following hunches and leaving space for improvisation and spontaneity.
- 36 If we are to analyse the ethical stance of a collaborative documentary it is not enough to watch the finished film, it is necessary to reflect upon the whole process of approaching and interacting with the subjects. To begin with, as ethnographers/documentarians we do not take the initiative to speak of or for the other, but with the other. First of all, we agree to listen. Making an ethnographic documentary is not about studying others, but learning from and creating along with others, with a respectful attitude, and a horizontal, front-facing, peer-to-peer gaze, based on the recognition that others—as Kant would say—should never be considered as means to our ends, but always as ends in themselves (Zirión, 2012).

From Homo Videns to Ethnoscopes

- 37 In these applied research experiences with young communities and urban subcultures, we shared the audiovisual authorship with subjects who were forgotten, ignored, excluded, who remained (in)visibilised, or rather were seen and filtered through multiple prejudices that stigmatised, distorted and fragmented them. Through a number of workshops these groups turned the image around and used it as a tool to record daily events around them and even to protest against acts of injustice committed against them. But above all, this exchange allowed them to see themselves recorded, taken into account and valuable; they observed themselves in the mirror of the image and were no longer invisible.
- 38 Self-representation using video turned out to be a positive therapeutic exercise to counteract the psychological effects of social exclusion, and to some extent it also helped to repair the damaged community fabric. Through their ability to represent themselves using the camera, these young people were able to face up to their reality, thus triggering a process of self-reflection and change. In some cases these experiences helped the young participants to take stock of their own identity and regain to some extent their dignity and citizenship.
- 39 By making collaborative documentary productions we try to use film as a means of reverting or mitigating the regimes of hypervisuality or effacement that are intrinsic in social exclusion. In these experiences we employ the documentary as a research methodology, but also as an instrument of social action. Sarah Pink (2007) refers to these experiences as “applied visual anthropology,” while others have called it cinematic activism. They are also exercises in shared anthropology, in the sense proposed by Jean Rouch (1974), strategies of participation and dialogue that seek to return to various subaltern actors their right to see and be seen, giving them back control over their own representation. The invisible or the excluded, the damaged or the victimised, reclaim their voice and agency. Ultimately they are attempts to cultivate visual sovereignty and recover the autonomy of the gaze (Raheja, 2010).
- 40 These workshops and films set out to inoculate a critical and reflexive visual culture through the experience of self-representation. The right and power of subjects over their own representation returns to them their dignity, responsibility and commitment to their own gaze, deciding themselves how they wish to be observed, listened to, and valued. When used in this way, the image ceases to be a form of control, alienation, and subjugation and instead becomes an instrument of release, a weapon to generate awareness, and helps transform unequal relations between social classes and diverse cultures.
- 41 An important aspect of these applied and collaborative visual anthropology projects is that the image has not only been used as a window but also as a mirror, to paraphrase Alan Berliner (2014). It has allowed us to peer into the lives of other subjects, but it has also enabled the subjects see their own reflection. Film is about reflections in every sense. It gives back the image itself and allows people to see themselves reflected in the eyes of others, recalling the words of Antonio Machado (2014): “The eye you see is not an eye because you see it; it is an eye because it sees you”.

- 42 An applied visual anthropology, one committed to the search for solutions to problems of contemporary societies, needs to abandon the production of *Homo videns*—subjects who are passive, alienated, manipulable, teledirected—in order to create true *Ethnoscopes*⁴, critical observatories of cultural diversity, directed toward mutual recognition, co-learning, collective interaction, empathy and reciprocity between different groups and communities.

Subaltern Imaginaries in the Globalised World

- 43 The three film projects mentioned above are paradigmatic cases of peripheral cinema, closely related to the meaning ascribed by Faye Ginsburg (2010), visual expressions and narratives that remain in the shadows or run counter to hegemonic audiovisual culture, but which possess deep meanings, spark actions and sooner or later bring about transformations in the imaginaries and structures of social reality. The three experiences in question are visual ethnographies of different “urban black holes” (Ziri6n, 2002), in which strong regimes of (in)visibility prevail, while a rich vein of subaltern imaginaries emerge from the peripheries of visual culture.
- 44 This set of literally eccentric voices and gazes have assumed a particular importance in today’s world, by acting as a counterweight to predominant audiovisual culture. They constitute forms of resistance to the content of hegemonic media and prevailing forms of popular visual culture. The isolation facing this type of peripheral film has relegated it to specialised niches and denied it time on the big screens or on terrestrial television, requiring it to forge its own circuits of dissemination. Nevertheless, in recent years, in the midst of digital convergence, these marginalised gazes, along with a host of other oblique and tangential visual perspectives, have begun to multiply, interconnect and gain a stronger foothold in the transnational visual spectrum. As a result, subaltern gazes, while remaining peripheral, are becoming globalised: in some cases they form global networks and organisations for the production and distribution of indigenous film and video, such as *V6deo Nas Aldeias*⁵, or alternatively fill a crucial place in “the affective creation of community” through audiovisual media in the transnational context, as shown by Ingrid Kummels (2016), among others.

Peripheral Vision: Reversing (In)visibility / Prevention of Blindness

- 45 From an ophthalmological perspective, peripheral vision is the ability to take in a view of almost 180 degrees, in other words, a broad field of vision to the sides of our central point of focus. It enables us to locate, recognise and react to visual information reaching us from areas around the focus of our attention. In contrast to central vision—the one that enables us to focus our sight on a specific object—peripheral vision makes it possible to expand our visual spectrum so that we can receive stimuli from the margins, edges or peripheries of the globes of our eyes.
- 46 Peripheral vision takes place in the so-called peripheral retina, an area of the eye with less capacity for photoreception and lower resolution than the eye’s centre; the image it obtains is slightly blurred and diffuse, lacking the clarity and sharper focus of central vision. Nevertheless, peripheral vision plays a fundamental role in our perceptive and

sensorial experience, enabling us to orient and position ourselves in space, keeping us alert to movement around us, improving our balance and reflections, helping our motor coordination, giving us a sense of perspective and creating a wider view. Good peripheral vision broadens and enriches our field of vision; it makes us more receptive and sensitive to the world around us.

- 47 We can apply the principles of peripheral vision to the observation and visual representation of culture, and draw an analogy between this ocular condition and the anthropologist's gaze. Thus we can understand peripheral, uncentred or eccentric visual expressions, which come from the margins, the avant-garde and rearguard of visual culture, as stimuli that can only be captured from an Ethnoscope with strong peripheral vision. The peripheral gaze forms an essential part of our capabilities as visual ethnographers; it's important to exercise and cultivate an increasingly wide and inclusive gaze, broaden our horizons and push the limits of our visual spectrum. A well-developed peripheral vision is combined with depth of field to give a sense of proportion, perspective and the dynamic of elements within the visible spectrum.
- 48 Tests exist to measure peripheral vision, to detect and treat any deterioration in its quality, and there are exercises aimed at strengthening it. Anthropologists and social scientists—especially those of us working with images and imaginaries—must also cultivate and channel our peripheral gaze. It is essential to refocus or try to expand our field of observation, in order to keep sight of the phenomena created on the edges of audiovisual culture.

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NOTES

1. A multidisciplinary group founded in 2002 by Adrián Arce Fernández (social communicologist), Diego Rivera Kohn (filmmaker) and Antonio Zirión Pérez (visual anthropologist).

2. The reader can watch the films in these links *Voces de la Guerrero*: <https://vimeo.com/114414651>; *Fuera de foco*. Alas y Raíces: <https://vimeo.com/51302352>; and *Chido mi banda*. Colectivo Homovidens (production). Link: <https://vimeo.com/160821349>

3. *Fuera de foco* (2013), co-directed by Adrián Arce and Antonio Zirión, received the award for Best Documentary at the 5th Festival of Ethnographic Films Recife, Brazil; it also won the prize as the Best Mexican Documentary Short at the 9th Shorts Film Festival. It was also screened at various ethnographic film festivals and events in Mexico and around the world.

4. As far as I am aware, the term *Ethnoscope* has not been formally established or discussed in academic circles. I borrow it from Bruce "Pacho" Lane, an American visual anthropologist who has worked in Mexico for many years. He named his production company *Ethnoscope Film and Video* (<http://docfilm.com/site/>). According to him: "'Ethnos' means tribe, nation, or culture in Greek, and 'skopein' (as in 'telescope') means to see or look. Looking at cultures is what these films are all about". If ethnography refers to the act of writing or describing cultures, then the device for observing and visually representing cultures could be referred to as *Ethnoscope*.

Perhaps we may call ethnographic films *Ethnoscopies*. I asked for Pacho Lane's permission to name *Etnoscopio* (in Spanish) the non-government organization that I founded together with other Mexican colleges.

5. Established in 1986, *Vídeo nas Aldeias* (VNA, Video in the Villages) is a pioneer project in the field of indigenous audiovisual production in Brazil. Since its beginnings, the project's goal has been to support indigenous peoples' struggles in order to strengthen identities and territorial and cultural heritages, through audiovisual resources and a shared production with the indigenous peoples *Vídeo nas Aldeias* works with. (www.videonasaldeias.org.br).

ABSTRACTS

Based on three ethnographic research experiences, this text begins by recognising the importance of the image and visual communication in the contemporary world to critically examine various interconnections between image and power in the digital era. Visual culture is the field in which meanings, values and symbols are queried, and where we find regimes of hypervisuality and effacement that play a defining role in establishing order and social exclusion. By organising photographic and video workshops attended by young, marginalised participants, and applying a collaborative methodology for documentary production, we have been able to develop creative strategies to question the meaning and contents of the hegemonic media.

Fondé sur trois expériences de recherche ethnographique, ce texte commence par reconnaître l'importance de l'image et de la communication visuelle dans le monde contemporain pour examiner de façon critique les diverses interconnexions entre l'image et le pouvoir à l'ère numérique. La culture visuelle est le domaine dans lequel les significations, les valeurs et les symboles sont interrogés, et où l'on trouve des régimes d'hypervisualité et d'effacement qui jouent un rôle déterminant dans l'ordre et l'exclusion sociale. En organisant des ateliers photographiques et vidéo auxquels de jeunes participants marginalisés ont participé et en appliquant une méthodologie collaborative au niveau de la production documentaire, nous avons pu développer des stratégies créatives pour questionner le sens et le contenu des médias hégémoniques.

Basado en tres experiencias de investigación etnográfica, este texto comienza reconociendo la importancia de la imagen y la comunicación visual en el mundo contemporáneo, y luego examina críticamente varias interconexiones entre la imagen y el poder en la era digital. La cultura visual es el campo donde se disputan significados, valores y símbolos, donde encontramos regímenes de hipervisualidad y borramiento que juegan un papel definitorio en el establecimiento del orden y la exclusión social. Durante la organización de talleres fotográficos y de video, en los que participaron jóvenes marginados, aplicamos una metodología colaborativa para la producción de documental, así pudimos desarrollar estrategias creativas para cuestionar el significado y los contenidos de los medios hegemónicos.

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Mots-clés: culture visuelle, politiques, (in)visibilité, vision périphérique, ethnographie collaborative

Keywords: visual culture, politics, (in)visibility, peripheral vision, collaborative ethnography

Palabras claves: cultura visual, política, (in)visibilidad, visión periférica, etnografía colaborativa

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