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## DOSSIER TRANSLATIONS

### Technologies of Representation

Guest Editor: Stephannie Fell Contreras

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"In teaching us a new visual code", Susan Sontag wrote more than forty years ago, "photographs alter and enlarge our notions of what is worth looking at and what we have a right to observe" (Sontag, 1977, p. 3). Since the publication of Sontag's 'Plato's Cave', the most radical change in this visual code has been the pace and breadth of its reach. We carry image-making and image-sharing devices in a pocket. We can easily upload a photograph to a search engine and call up millions of images based on visual or conceptual similarity. But even with the leveling of tools for making and distributing images, Sontag's empowering 'ethics of seeing' is today a territory in dispute. Millions of image-makers and instant sharing capabilities are met by algorithmic filter-bubbles and widespread misinformation campaigns. The sheer quantity of image circulation did not amount to improved visibility, let alone mutual understanding.

After 18-O (18 October) in Chile and the Covid-19 pandemic, it became clear that any discussion on representation should address the unrealized promise of the 'ethics of images'. This implies not forgetting that, as Gayatri Spivak proposes, whenever we use the word 'representation' we are compounding its two meanings: to 're-present' as in art or philosophy, and to 'speak for' as in politics (1988, p. 275). Architects are familiar with images that 'do' things for us: renders pre-visualize, orthographic projections measure, collages hint at experiences of space. Architectural drawings can be translated, as Robin Evans (1997) put it, into buildings and urban plans. But what is architecture's relationship to other kinds of images, those which were never meant to become buildings? This issue of *Materia Arqitectura* was a call to explore the agency of images in the construction of realities, the imposition of borders and the narration of stories that are political. Not only because their object is the polis, but because they alter our relationship with the built environment and consequently, the way in which we understand, imagine and shape, as a society, the common territory that is at the base of the exercise of public power.

The essays in the dossier explore this agency from various perspectives. In Belfast's landscape of dividing walls –infrastructure of a conflict that is supposedly in the past– Maria McLintock encounters a seething network of murals, objects, images, and economic practices deeply

entangled in emergent identity politics. During the Covid-19 pandemic, data of life and death have become part of our daily visual imagery. Peg Rawes addresses discursive constructions on data and scientific visualizations and explores how graphs –meant to record and predict certainty– can represent poignant biological and political embodiments of vulnerability and uncertainty. Discussing the instrumentalization of architecture's image for political campaigns, Ecem Ergin forecasts the rise of the billboard as a new geopolitical territory of conflict in a post-truth digital city. Lucia Galaretto dissects the conflated aesthetic and political discourses in a historical media operation during the military dictatorship in Chile (1973–1990), which urged citizens to paint the city walls white. Lynn Spigel uses her collection of snapshots of people posing in front of their televisions to question received assumptions about the introduction of TV into the domestic space in the mid-20th century, as well as its relationship with gender roles, subjectivation practices and representation. Tracing the origins of an idea –and an image– of homogeneous race, Pedro Correa probes the connections between modern architecture and the construction of a racial imaginary in Chile during the government of Pedro Aguirre Cerda (1938–1941).

Scientific visualizations, family photographs, murals, billboards, public monuments. The manifold objects in this dossier illustrate the systematic use of representations that stand-in for something else, while also making claims to 'speak for' someone. From the lens of subjectification practices, ideas of visibility and erasure, urban or architectural history, images act as measure of the distance between political notions of public representation and actual events of representativity. A close look at the historical gaps between their acknowledged and unacknowledged functions might be useful to begin to unravel some of the conflicts of representation around us today.

### REFERENCES

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