Between threat and empathy

By Adrian Scribano

This issue of RELACES presents a set of articles that configure a variable geometry of emotional ecologies stressed by practices of feeling associated with the other as a threat and the instantiation of empathy. In this direction, one can read narratives about the distance and the proximity; about rejection and acceptance among human beings who go through pain, addiction, disease, coloniality, and compassion.

Threat

One of the central features of lives of every day in the continuing experience of "the other as a threat" that involves the least three dimensions:

First, is associated with emotional ecology chaired by accompanied fear of mistrust and bounded by terror. The other is preceded by a reaction of aversion, in a complex plot of politics of sight and forbidden sensibilities, the other appears as a signal to change course, as an indication for avoidance. Now, in this sense, the potentiality of the threat lies in the distrust of the arbitrariness of the other's power, the other can be my executioner, the other can be the one who oppresses me. It is in this context that fear, and mistrust are transformed into a fright, leaving frightened in the presence of the other is ultimately the clearest consequence of fear.

In this context, it is interesting to note the importance of what Warren TenHouten maintains about surprise concerning fear:

> "We have defined disappointment as a mixture of surprise and sadness, shame, as fear and sadness. This means our final secondary emotion must be a mixture of surprise and fear. Plutchik's (1991 [1962]:118) definition, "surprise + fear = alarm, awe" is defensible. Setting aside awe, we simply define "alarm = surprise & fear." Alarm is an adaptive reaction to danger, pain, and the prospect of social estrangement (Eisenberger and Lieberman 2004). More generally, it is an affective signal of response to aggression or other potential

dangers. It is an orienting response to violation of, and threats to, one's selfhood, reputation, and territory. Such an orienting response defines surprise and is interior to alarm; the individual's self-protective reaction to the impending threat or challenge is definitive of fear. (TenHouten, 2016: 447).

Second, the "other as a threat" relates to a political economy of morality that colonizes and devalues the common; which emphasizes the self-centred action of isolation and commercializes all the bridges of contact between the persons.

Third, the other as a threat consolidates the fragmentation of ideas linking a geometry of the person where individual, actor, agent, subject and author are subsumed to the predominance of the individual's will to power as strength and dependence.

The perception of threat is built in the daily life of a politics of sensitivities where the logic of disposal, the politics of perversion and the trivialization of the good consecrate isolation, encapsulation and the form of invisibility of the person how to be autonomous. They also enthroned the power of pain and suffering as a consequence of the individual's reign, disinterest and disconnection with others.

In the context of what we have just synthesized, the processes of self-blame, stigmatization and abjection, discrimination and ridicule can be included. How the emotional ecology is associated with shame and made up of anger, hatred and anger also imply an expulsion of the geometries of shared bodies that elaborate guilt and shame before the power of those who threaten and exile. As Thomas Schef argues,

> "The awesome destructive power of secret shame might be explained as a feedback chain. Being ashamed of being ashamed is the first step. Such loops can go further, being ashamed, being ashamed of that, and ashamed of that, and so on. Or shame in a loop with anger: angry that one is ashamed, ashamed that one is angry and round and round. The

idea of an unending cybernetic loop seems to explain how shame, fear, or other emotions might become too powerful to bear and/or control. " (Schef 2015:709).

Empathy

As McCaffree recently argues:

"The sociology of empathy is as old as the discipline. Ibn Khaldun in the Middle Ages and Auguste Comte, born just after the French Revolution, for example, were both founders of sociology and perhaps equally preoccupied with the ways in which weakening social bonds increased the risk of societal collapse. For Khaldun, 'asabiyyah', or the capacity for social connectedness, undergirded markets, politics and culture, whereas for Auguste Comte the degree to which society was capable of expanding individuals' sphere of moral concern determined social stability and societal flourishing (Alatas, 2014; Comte, 1975 [1830–1842]; Khaldun, 1958 [1377])". (McCaffree 2020:550)

We propose to understand empathy from three convergent processes of three moments each: as closeness, sharing and connection; as affinity, understanding/comprehension and co-experience and "face to face", co-living, and feeling-thinking

1.- Closeness, Sharing and Connection

Experiencing **closeness** is a band from Moebio's tape that implies empathy between two or more people, closeness is the property of the geometry of bodies that makes proximity visible as an emotional redefinition of distance, difference and inequality. **Sharing** is another point in the folds of life that involves empathy among common dividing what is theirs, in this sense empathizing is offering the other being one place among those with whom he/she shares. Empathy takes for granted the predisposition to "**make connection**" with the other and the others in such a way that "being" becomes the result of the reflexivity of the action; where the participants get involved beyond the coincidence of time/space and make the relationship an opportunity to know/feel with others.

In this sense, Riess maintains

"Empathy plays a critical interpersonal and societal role, enabling sharing of experiences, needs, and desires between individuals and providing an emotional bridge that promotes prosocial behaviour. This capacity requires an exquisite interplay of neural networks and enables us to perceive the emotions of others, resonate with them emotionally and cognitively, to take in the perspective of others, and to distinguish between our own and others' emotions." (Riess 2017:74)

2.- Affinity, Understanding / Comprehension and Co-experience

The **affinity** that seeks a relationship enhances empathy, giving participants the power to put themselves on the horizon of life of others, cultivating connection, a way of experiencing life is achieved in a similar proportionality, in the linking of two or more is the key to the knowledge captured. **Understanding/ comprehension** is one of the modalities of empathy by which two or more capture the expression/ narration of the other regarding life, facts; It is a modulation that allows "to catch" what is expressed/ narrated, making it possible to sustain the identity and autonomy of those who listen, in this sense, human beings are s hermeneutic beings. Empathy is also **co-experiencing, it** is living the experience in the first person of experiencing what was lived in the dialectic alone / "accompanied", in a broad sense going *through a state of feeling* knowing about that same experience in others.

3.- Face to Face, Co-living, Feeling-Thinking

As Szanto and Krueger argue

"(…) empathy is a robustly situated practice, one that is bound up with a rich array of processes that encompass not only the dynamics of our face-to-face engagements but also the complex environments in which these engagements develop and take shape. To be sure, it is not controversial to say that these fundamental dimensions of our sociality, which can be broadly subsumed under the labels "empathy", "shared emotions", and "social identity", are variously and massively interconnected." (Szanto, and Krueger 2019:153)

Empathy supposes an act of co-presence (sensu Giddens) being able to be **face-to-face**, being with someone is a way of also being part of him and vice versa, empathizing is in this sense an encounter an act of "letting go and passing with permission", it is in this direction that empathy is feeling a look. The **co-live** as a life "side", "next to" life co-lived is the school for empathy as the breakdown of insulation in both reverse of misunderstanding, the being-being with another is the gateway to knowing what others feel, that rainbow involves their multiple horizons of experience. **Thinking while feeling and feeling thinking** is the privileged way of knowing / feeling / thinking what others feel/think as partners

of emotional and political ecologies of sensitivities; an undifferentiated movement between thinking, reflexivity, affectivity, emotions and sensibilities is what enhances empathy.

In this sense, empathy is an opportunity to re-assemble the metabolic fracture that the current situation of colonization of the inner planet supposes (Scribano 2021).

In the perceptual horizon that the threat and empathy configure beyond the reissue of any aporia, this number de RELACES provides firm clues to think of these tensions as one of the nuclei of an immanent critique of the current political economy of morality.

In the first place, **Cristián Andres Busta Cornejo (Chile)**, in his article entitled *"Relating to the pain of others: The experience of those who are linked to patients with fibromyalgia in the city of Santiago de Chile"* analyzes the experiences and beliefs of relatives and friends of people who suffer from fibromyalgia, a disease that does not have a location in any specific area of the body or an objective marker in the body's biology. After recovering six thematic axes that define and construct the experience of said people (diagnosis and causes of fibromyalgia, performance and fibromyalgia, reactions towards pain, future perspectives, treatment costs and learning), it is concluded with a series of conditions that are necessary for the pain of those who suffer from fibromyalgia to be experienced by those who are linked to these people as a legitimate experience of suffering.

Perla V. De los Santos Amaya and **M. Concepción Arroyo Rueda (México)** in their writing entitled *"Moral emotions and power: voices of senior returnees"* … focus on recovering the emotional experience of older people who migrated to the United States of America in the He was one of the undocumented (decade of the '80s) and who decided to return to their communities of origin in Mexico in recent years. Based on this, this work aims to analyze moral emotions (shame, humiliation and fear) in the migrant trajectory of elderly returnees from Durango, Mexico. The approach is carried out from a qualitative-phenomenological perspective based on in-depth interviews and observation. Among the main results, it is noted that shame, humiliation and fear are intense emotions that are built in the migratory journey, and that is embodied from the power relations present in the North American context. Consequently, in the participants' speeches, the domination of some social groups over others is manifested, whose position of disadvantage contains processes of marginalization, exclusion, and violence towards these human groups.

For their part, **Idonézia Collodel-Benetti** and **Walter Ferreira de Oliveira (Brasil)** present a descriptive and exploratory study about the experiences of people who suffer from a type of bone cancer called osteosarcoma, based on an investigation of the narratives of eight Brazilian bloggers who live with the disease. The work is titled: *"I decided to write a blog …": narratives about falling ill and surviving cancer – diagnostic, coping, empowerment, body changes and a new human being"*, and its objective is to present the emotions that are expressed from the narration the experiences and pain of people with osteosarcoma in digital space. Taking into consideration for the analysis the feelings of loneliness, anguish, social isolation, the notion of empowerment and self-esteem, the relationships that occur in cyberspace, among others.

For her part, **Anamelva Olortegui Saldaña (Perú)**, with her work entitled "Living with Gambling: addiction to games of chance in gambling halls. A look from the Sociology of emotions ", presents an analysis about the emotions of adults who live with addiction to gambling in the city of Metropolitan Lima. The route presented from the sociology of emotions incorporates fragments of interviews with people with this problem, specialists, and testimonies of people who work in gambling halls in the city, as well as the records of the participant observation that they carry out. From there, some postulates are expressed about the environment of the gambling halls, the importance of the strategies that are deployed to stay in this activity, some indicators that favor the emergence of emotions related to the game, the premises that are adopted for justifying the permanence, among others.

The tour continues with the writing "**Evocative experiences of Kama Muta emotion in young Mexicans: feeling moved by love"**, by **Laura Nadhielii Alfaro Beracoechea and Karla Alejandra Contreras Tinoco (México)**, who describe the evocative events of the emotion of Kama Muta (defined as *feeling moved for the love of neighbour*) in young people from Jalisco, Mexico, while recovering the experiences and actors that are referred to from the description of said events. The most evocative events of this emotion were reunions, death scenes, acts of kindness or charity and acts of filial / couple love, while among the actors present, family and friends stand out.

In sixth place, **Nicolás Bermúdez's (Argentina)** work, entitled "**Social networks and the hyper mediatization of the political body",** studies the changes that social networks have produced in the public presentation of the bodies of politicians, especially in the Argentine sphere, taking the socio-semiotic as a theoretical-methodological framework.

For this, a preliminary description of the phenomenon is made and its production conditions are exposed, for which it is located in a historical series that allows circumscribing its particularities. On the other, it seeks to place it within the framework of a disciplinary dialogue that would optimize its conceptualization and the study of its effects. Based on socio-semiotics and the integration of current developments in the field of aesthetics, it is proposed here to analyze and establish a principle of classification of semiotization operations carried out by enunciators. The conclusions refer to the illustrative features of the media presentation of the body.

In seventh place, we find the article by **Alexis Padilla (United States),** entitled "*Decoloniality, Embodiment and Othering Emotionality: Decoding and Countering the Inter-Imperialist Foundations of Intersectional Abjection"*. This essay questions the intersectional place of disability, race, and the bodily dimensions of gender in the global north/south epistemological divide concerning the permissible domains of emotions and otherness. Its approach is carried out through LatDisCrit understood as a manifestation of super-diversity from the subaltern perspectives of diasporas and border crossings. LatDisCrit critically integrates LatCrit (Valdés, 1999) and DisCrit (Annamma, et al., 2013), two intersectional bodies of literature that focus on the confluence of race/ethnicity, diasporic cultures, the socio-politics of history and disability alongside multiple Transmodern Latino identities. The essay postulates that the global south is a space of emancipatory transgression, especially about emotions, which is why it is expressed through emotional epistemologies. As such, it demands that the power of its rich complexity and ambiguity be explored through decoloniality as a way to filter out dependence on knowledge anchored in purely rationalist mechanisms whose guidelines are imposed by the colonizers through various hegemonic strategies. The essay emphasizes post-human experiences of disability, interracial diasporas, and non-binary views of gender on a global level. Their nature as trans-regional modalities of precariousness is highlighted, aligning the epistemologies of disability, interracial diasporas, feminism and non-binary gender options in the global south with complex notions of identity such as superdiversity, a notion that even now it has been used almost exclusively to refer to urban contexts of the global north.

The issue ends with two significant reviews. The first, by **Guido Diligenti (Argentina)**, is entitled *"The COVID-19 pandemic through the media: between "risk communication" and "communication risk""*; and analyzes the recent publication: Mangone, E. (2021) Incertezza, Futuro, Narrazione. Fisciano, Italy: NaSC Free Press. The second offers a review of the book by Jaspers, J. (2018) The emotions of protest. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press and is written by **Juliana Esquivel (Argentina)** under the title *"An emotional typology for empirical research on social protest".*

The diversity of the writings points us in the direction of diverse journeys that serve as milestones to recognize emotional ecologies of the politics of sensibilities that allow us to understand, a little more, how social studies on bodies/emotions are a key piece to understand the current ones social structuration processes.

Finally, we thank the authors and all those who have sent us their manuscripts. We remind you that the call for articles is permanently open.

We must reiterate that from issue 15 of RELACES we began to publish up to two articles in English per issue. As we have been reiterating for a long time: at RELACES, its entire Editorial Team and the entire Editorial Board believe it is necessary to take up each article in our journal as a node that allows us to continue the path of dialogue and scientific/academic exchange as a social activity and policy to achieve a freer and more autonomous society. It is in the above context that we want to thank all those who trust us as a vehicle to initiate this dialogue.

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