The Mediation of Affect
Security, Fear and Subversive Hope in Visual Culture

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Akademisk avhandling

som med vederbörligt tillstånd av Rektor vid Umeå universitet för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen framläggs till offentligt försvar i hörsal D, Samhällsvetarhuset, fredagen den 25 november, kl. 08:30. Avhandlingen kommer att förvaras på svenska.

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Abstract
The overarching purpose of this study has been to problematise how visual practices and the mediation of affect is linked to the capacity to produce (new) perceptual realities, sensations and imaginaries, ultimately aiming to legitimate or counter-legitimate the hegemonic discourses and practices mobilised in the name of security. The first part of my thesis approaches this matter through an analysis of media cultures and discursive systems circulating within the court and the state military. Here, I discuss the impact of affect in the judicial-policial production of visible evidence (paper 1; published in the International Journal for the Semiotics of Law) and the state military (visual) narrative of threat (paper 2; published in MedieKultur: Journal of media and communication research). Additionally, as affect runs counter to hegemonic power relations as well as reinforces them, the second part of my thesis focuses on the way in which different resistance collectives cultivate affective dimensions through aesthetic practices in order to foster political attitudes that contest the established discourses of the (in)secure. Here, I examine the online activist group Anonymous' visual political communication (paper 3; published in TripleC - Communication, Capitalism & Critique, Open Access Journal for a Global Sustainable Information Society), and the Spanish movement Podemos' visual and verbal discursive strategies (paper 4; forthcoming in Cultural Studies). In terms of theoretical and methodological approaches, I have my roots in, among others, Mouffe's (2005) notion of conflict and (political) affect, Foucault's (1980) concept of power/knowledge, and Thompson's (1984; 1990) three-dimensional framework of ideology-analysis. In paper 1, my findings suggest that camera-produced images and technical and dramaturgical elements may have unintentional judicial consequences when they are read as evidence. I detail how this production of visible evidence can potentially stimulate and elicit emotional reaction, as well as discussing the degree to which pictorial crime evidence fails to be an instrumental and neutral representation of truth. In paper 2, my findings point in the direction where the military representation of the 'Other as threat' connects to aspects of economic globalisation and the (inter)national production of defence materiel. In article 3 (co-authored with Lindgren 2014) my findings suggest that citizen participation in public matters can be made engaging through the mobilisation of that which Anonymous calls 'the lulz'; a tickling joy/pleasure (also, a sense of meaningfulness) of standing against power abuse through, for example, online direct action and culture jamming practices. Paper 4 explores the relationship between the affective and the visual using a broader security framework. Here, my findings indicate that Podemos' discursive battle for social protection and economic security in a context of the crisis of political representation, is no longer framed through the traditional left-right conflict, but within the post-ideological (affective) articulation of 'the new' versus 'the old' and/or other discursive differences. I show how affect works as a potential for social change, by analysing the strategic production of a 'We-Them' discourse using Podemos' take on social media and the media logic of mainstream television.

Keywords
affect; emotion; aesthetics; visual culture; discourse; Otherness; power; security.

Language: English
ISSN: 1104-067X
ISBN: 978-91-7601-595-7
Number of Pages: 91 + 4 papers