Visibility: Practices of Seeing and Overlooking

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> Before me is a picture… framed and at the centre of a museum. I try looking at this landscape, this scene, this composition. But as soon as I look carefully at the painting – if I no longer consider the room of the museum that the work belongs to – I am no longer very certain of *truly seeing* it. I am seized by doubt. I plunge into the painting. I examine a mass of significant or seemingly insignificant details – distant characters, scattered objects, movements, layers, shades, and so on. By examining the varnish, I perceive coloured matter and its tiny waves on the surface of the canvas. I follow the brushstrokes. I approach an area where there is a subtle overlapping of an almost transparent sienna and Bismarck red, and so on. *I see* the object closer and closer, but in so doing I have *lost sight* of the object as such.
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> – Garcia (2014: 128-29)

Seeing things – *really* seeing them – is difficult. In *On Constructing a Reality*, Heinz von Foerster (2003: 212) provides the neatest physical and/or physiological example of this by asking us to "hold Figure 1… with your right hand, close your left eye and fixate [the] asterisk of Fig.1 with your right eye. Move the book slowly back and forth along [your] line of vision until at an appropriate distance, from about 12 to 14 inches, [and] the round black spot disappears. Keeping the asterisk well focused, the spot should remain invisible even if the figure is slowly moved parallel to itself." The blind spot here is produced due to the absence of photoreceptors at the point on the retina where fibers converge to form the optic nerve. This phenomenon is well known. It's just a little mind game. But what leads likewise to possibly more serious blindspots is the same practice of picking particular points of focus.

Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot (2011a: 3) have led a call within International Relations (IR) that seeks to develop the concept of 'practice' as a conceptual "*focal point*" around which empirical and theoretical work of an otherwise eclectic mix can meet. As they suggest, "the notion of practice… [makes] interparadigmatic conversations possible" (Ibid). Already, their claim has been amply proven by the vitality of the ongoing work of the International Practice Theory (IPT) programme within IR.[3] But consider the origins of their use of this term: *focal point*. For Adler and Pouliot, it emerges from Thomas Schelling's study of military practices:

Figure 1: *Heinz von Foerster's Blindspot*

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[3] For theoretical work see, *inter alia,* Adler and Pouliot (2011b); Berling (2015); Bigo (2011); Bueger (2013a); Kustermans (2016); Leander (2011); McCourt (2016); Neumann (2002); Pouliot (2008); Ringmar (2014). For empirical applications see, *inter alia,* Acuto (2014); Adler-Nissen (2014b, 2014a, 2015); Adler-Nissen and Pouliot (Forthcoming 2014); Austin (2016, Forthcoming 2016, Forthcoming 2017); Autesserre (2014); Bueger and Bethke (2013); Bueger (2013b, 2015); Leander (2013, 2016); Neumann and Pouliot (2011); Pouliot (2010, 2016); Sending et al. (2015).

> Schelling calls the locus of convergent expectations, which rely on both competent performance and tacit communication, a 'focal point' – basically, a fallback position of the form: if not here, where? (Ibid: 10)

These focal points, Adler and Pouliot enumerate, are a) related to background knowledge, b) intersubjective in nature, c) infused with power, and 4) stem from the patterned nature of social practices (Ibid: 11-12). Ultimately, focal points are performative and communicative. These criteria for the emergence of a focal point all suggest, in the older terms of Donna Haraway (1988), that any focal point – including focusing on the very notion of social practices themselves – are partial in the perspectives they bring to view. And so the question becomes what taking practice and IPT as a focal point for interparadigmatic conversations within IR may or may not be leading us to overlook in the study of world politics. How, in other words, does IPT help or hinder us in developing practices of seeing the world differently and/or risk introducing its own blind spots into social scientific inquiry?

The latter of these questions may perplex when, indeed, the very introduction of the study of practices to International Relations and other social scientific disciplines is intended to extend the array of phenomenon that scholars pay attention to. It seeks to return to our view the quotidian and everyday, the mundane and seemingly simple. It seeks – indeed – to avoid overlooking practice. In doing so, IPT is seeking to move beyond what it sees as countless 'misrecognitions' (*méconnaissance*) of what world politics constitutes and its constituted by. It does so by claiming, ultimately, that all world politics is really about is people doing things that perform the world and the political. Politics is practice. As the title of Von Forester's essay indicates, practices are sets of actions that work to '*construct*' or '*do*' one particular reality. He introduced his little mind game and its foregrounding of the concept of the blind spot in order to note also, however, that: "*perceiving is doing*" and "*if I don't see I am blind, I am blind; but if I see I am blind, I see*." For a reality to get 'done' it must be perceived – seen – and performed, communicated intersubjectively, and iterated such that it becomes a patterned part of our background knowledge. But as his choice of the singular article – on constructing *a* reality – indicates, he was aware that we are blind to a multitude of other realities.[4] In evoking the non-representational logic of practicality, IPT has made visible – 'opened our eyes' – to some of these multiple realities. And it keeps doing so. The work of Christian Bueger and Frank Gadinger (2015), for instance, extends the earlier programmatic focus of IPT on the critical sociology of Pierre Bourdieu towards incorporating the insights of pragmatist sociologies like Actor-Network Theory (ANT) or Luc Boltanski. Increasingly, scholars are seeking also to *combine* these two strands of IPT rather than applying them in isolation from one another (Eyal 2010; Leander 2013). And work elsewhere is abundant.[5] There can be no doubt, then, that IPT has brought into view a whole array of non-representational logics of social action. It has expanded our vision. Nonetheless, the risks of blindspots remaining even within IPT are gradually themselves becoming an area of discussion.

[4] Notably, Von Foerster's claims here foreshadow far more contemporary social theory and its focus on the concepts of 'multiplicity' and/or 'performativity' as constitutive of social realities. See, *inter alia*, Bryant (2011); Deleuze and Guattari (2004a, 2004b); Law (1999); Law and Mol (2001); Law et al. (2013); Mol (2002).
[5] See note number three, above.

David M. McCourt (2016), for instance, has recently compared the evolution of IPT to that of Constructivism within IR. As he notes, although IPT has sought to avoid the question of becoming an 'ism' it seems quite true that "a practice theoretic perspective would view IR itself is a practice: a distinct arena of social competition with its own practical logics" (Ibid: 482). As a result, the arguments surrounding IPT "have to be made against or in relation to some other approach. *Knocking down one ism therefore will constitute another, whether labelled an 'ism' or not*" (Ibid). McCourt's point here is not to critique the *goal* of inter-paradigmatic conversation but its *practicality*. Indeed, he notes how Constructivism itself was once a far 'broader' and more 'open' research paradigm – albeit with stronger outright political and epistemological claims against other research traditions – that gradually became 'narrowed' down into a focus on, today, identities, norms, and culture. This *narrowing* down of approaches that are originally hoped to stand as broad and open schools of thought is the risk faced by taking any focal point as the departure of social scientific inquiry:

> Retracing constructivism's narrowing suggests that a similar trajectory awaits… [IPT]: first come novel theoretical treatises and quirky empirical work, then texts that consolidate the new approach's position, then works that are solid but unspectacular, followed by a re-emergence in a different guise. My hope is that to be forewarned is to be forearmed: both constructivists and non-constructivists should recognize the space of constructivism's cyclical tendencies… [Scholars in IPT] must continue to develop the new approaches discussed here and others, in full knowledge of the disciplinary dynamics that work to weaken claims to theoretical innovativeness (Ibid: 483).

Hereafter, we argue that *visibility* – as a social and social scientific category – is a crucial tool that can work to 'forearm' us against the risks of IPT becoming unnecessarily narrow as a research programme. In particular, we suggest that the *visibility* or *invisibility* of *particular* social practices is irreducibly related to politics. Our ability to 'see' the world and its realities is governed by certain 'fields' (Brighenti 2010) or "regimes" (Heinich 2012b; Van Winkel 2005) of visibility that 'focus' our vision on some things rather than others. These fields or regimes of visibility are infused with power and politics in both obvious and less obvious ways. Basic propaganda is implicated in any regime of visibility, for instance, but so are the many "great divides" (Latour 1993) of world politics: violence, gender, religion, and culture are all intersected by regimes of visibility that establish dichotomies, hierarchies, blockages, and further 'misrecognitions' of the world in both its differences and its similarities (Austin Forthcoming 2016). More than this, visibility involves aesthetic sensibilities. It therefore also always implicates affect as well as perception. It is a 'double' that combines both perception and affect (Deleuze and Guattari, 1991). As Andrea Brighenti (2010: 44) puts it, visibility is "an aspect of social life that enables us to introduce thresholds of relevance and selective attention" linked to this double and, so, "as a property of subjects, sites, events… rhythms" and – indeed – practices "visibility is employed as a means of sorting, classifying and ranking…" Because of this:

> Visibility cannot be reduced to traditional sociological categories like actor, organisation, system, class, gender, race, and so on, although it meaningfully intersects all of them (Ibid: 38).

The interstitial position of visibility as a category through which to understand the world rests, precisely like that of practice itself, on its *grounded* nature. More than this, however, and against a potentially 'naïve empiricist' view of the 'ground' of practices or visibility as a pure space of inquiry, directing attention to visibility demands an acknowledgement of the frequently less tangible place of aesthetics and affects in its grounding. The visual rests at the granular level of the 'doings' of the world and its politics but introduces the crucial question of how observation, interaction, and *blindness* are associated with aesthetics and affect in how we see what is getting done. And it necessarily implicates, when we shift to social scientific inquiry, *ourselves* as scholars and practitioners into that world. Thinking in terms of visibility, we thus suggest, can work to more effectively *sensitize* us to the politics of practice(s) and/or IPT in a manner that that locates perception and aesthetics at the core.

In this paper, we begin by exploring the contributions that practice theory, broadly conceived, has already made to the transdisciplinary discussion of visibility. In doing so, we suggest that if social practices are to be taken as a conceptual focal point in IR then visibility a) must be acknowledged as lying at the core of the very possibility of practice and b) can be converted into an *afocal ode of sensitization* raising our curiosity to the latent multiplicity of the worlds or 'realities' we see, think, imagine, feel and experience through the concept of practice. As a mode of sensitization, thinking in terms of visibility would not mean disrupting the task of interparadigmatic conversation but – rather – to amplify silenced voices, views, and visions across paradigms. It would mean to appreciate the full array of world political practices and most centrally, we think, the place of aesthetics and hence of both perception and affect in these. The practices that comprise these voices, views, and visions are – we suggest – the central blind spot of IPT as it is currently constituted. Indeed, it is most important to stress that visibility as a mode of thinking about practices has *positive* potential in unpacking the 'hinterland' (Law 2004), 'mangle' (Pickering 1993) and/or 'shadows' (Nordstrom 2004) of practice in a way that nourishes its breadth as a research programme.

Indeed, the goal of this paper is not to critically discuss what IPT cannot see but, rather, to suggest that acknowledging the centrality of visibility and rethinking its implications for IPT is central for bringing certain practices, and their politics, into view and for taking the current efforts to give further impetus to the wish to consolidate/deepen its current theorizing. Following, Von Foerster, if *perceiving is doing* and this always involves affect, then drawing on an understanding of visibility as a mode of sensitization will allow us to both understand how we are 'doing' IPT at the moment and how we might move forward towards 'doing' IPT differently as the approach evolves. As we will see, this proposition will often be an uncomfortable one (c.f.: Austin Forthcoming 2017; Leander 2016: 16-17). It forces us to acknowledge the place of aesthetics/affect in the political practices we observe as well as in our observation and such an acknowledgement will often call radically into question assumptions of the 'reasoned' or 'rational' nature of social practices by articulating a less scholastic view of world political practices (Crone, 2014).This is true both in the classical realms of world politics: diplomacy, military cooperation, International Organizations, global governance, European

integration, international law, or international political economy. But perhaps more centrally, the realm of world political practice not only falls far outside the borders of these institutions but also encompasses an array of counter-practices carried out by people and things in direct response to the activities ongoing within these traditional world political spheres. The challenge, today, is to extend IPT to studying also the practices of marginalized and disenfranchised actants whether these be humans like torturers and terrorists or activists and artists, or non-humans like the sea currents and asteroids or drones and algorithms and to acknowledge the place of aesthetics and affect in these practices. The challenge is to *see the world differently*.

In what follows, we make a first movement towards this effort to 'see the world differently.' We do so by highlighting the ways in which visibility is politically crucial to IR. As we show by drawing on recent work in social theory on visibility, who and what is seen or inversely can remain unseen is essential for establishing both local and world political hierarchies, including formal political hierarchies, and broader than that, for the "division" of the sensible: for carving up what can be seen, heard, and felt about the world and its sense-making. Visibility thus emerges here both in terms of the practices of its own creation – practices of making certain things seen or unseen – and in terms of the (affective) after-affects of these regimes of visibility upon the way in which we as social scientists or lay observers come to 'detect' the world afterwards. As we move forward with this argument in later stages, we will seek to argue that visibility itself can serve a positive (political) role for IPT. We propose that a cognizance of visibility as a concept can emerge as an 'afocal' *mode of sensitization* for the manifestation of what is taken for granted, goes unsaid, and passes unseen in world politics. Here we move away from advocating for a study of the practices of visibility in and of themselves and towards taking visibility as a *methodological* precept with *positive* and *productive* potential as a concept within IPT. We argue that work within IPT should strive to enjoin studies of practice with a meditation on visibility as a methodological device for expanding its universe of empirical and theoretical concern.

The Politics of Seeing Practice

Politics is visual. Who and what is seen or – inversely – remains unseen is essential for the establishment and maintenance of hierarchies, including formal political hierarchies and, more broadly in the terms of Jacques Rancière (to whom we will return) for the division of the 'sensible.' To first see this, let's begin by going back a little in time. Ethnomethodology has studied practices empirically and systematically (Garfinkel 1967; Liberman 2013). In one of its classic texts, *Notes on police assessment of moral character*, Harvey Sacks (1972) describes a problem faced by police officers: inferring the 'goodness' or 'badness' of a person walking down a street or hanging out on a street corner without knowing anything about them. Sacks (1972: 284; 80) describes how police "learn to treat their beat as a territory of normal appearances" based on the idea that "being noticeable and being deviant seem intimately related." The procedure for spotting potential criminals thus relies on an "incongruity procedure" that scans individuals and environments for abnormalities as they are conceived in comparison to a "normal ecology" of a territory which is "normative" in the sense of not being noticeable (Ibid: 286). These specialized practices of surveillance are real-world examples of what

Rancière (2004) called the 'police order' of society. Rancière's thesis is an extension of Sacks localized observations and theorizes the presence of a set of largely unconscious or implicit norms and social practices that determine forms of social exclusion and the distribution of power. Ultimately, these norms and practices are themselves based on the "distribution of the sensible" which is a means of controlling or ordering what becomes visible or invisible, speakable or unspeakable, and noticeable or not. In this, exclusion and silencings are necessarily implicit. And more than this, if the social order is a police order refusing the possibility of flux and contestation then the social is, to a large degree, an *anti-political* form of order in the sense of both "translating political controversies into technical objectives" and encouraging a "non-identification" – a making *in*visible – certain political issues (Walters, 2009: 116) Thus, we can go further: politics is about vision, and the anti-political is about making-invisible. Following this, a truly *politically* sensitive IPT must develop a set of methods, practices, and theories that work to make more 'sensible' practices like those described by Sacks.

To that end, social theory and IPT have recently made much headway.[6] We introduce this discussion by pointing to two theorists – Nathalie Heinich (1991, 2001, 2012b) and Andrea Mubi Brighenti (2007, 2008, 2010) – who have both, in distinct and helpful ways worked specifically on re-theorizing practices by placing visibility at its core. Heinich introduces a focus on objects. She discusses how a certain 'visibility-capital' (***capital de visibilité)*** is accumulated alongside what Pierre Bourdieu would have enumerated as social, economic, cultural, and symbolic capital. Visibility in this sense refers to celebrity: to 'being known' and being known because one is seen. Heinich is particularly concerned with celebrity culture in general and the shifts it has seen in the morphologies of politics, economics, art, and beyond. For her, the mass reproduction of images and the asymmetries in the distribution of who or what is seen in these images has produced a new *social category* and, in turn, a new social class or, rather, 'elite' who gain positive social capital from their *capital de visibilité* (Heinich 2012b: 66). In her view, however, an increase in the visibility of a person is not related to that person themselves: "ce n'est pas la vedette qui est à l'origine de la multiplication de ses images (car à l'origine, il n'y a qu'une personne dotée de certains talents), mais ce sont ses images qui en font une vedette" (Heinich 2012b: 21). Heinich's words here move towards attributing 'worth' or 'value' to (artistic or otherwise) objects (c.f.: Gielen 2005). This marks a departure from a prominent earlier view that aesthetic practices (including those related to visibility) are mere social conventions. As Rancière (2005: 15) criticised this point of view vis-à-vis Bourdieu (who is but one prominent example of this line of thinking):

> Bourdieu… staged 'aesthetics' as 'social distinction' concealing itself under the veil of the Kantian 'disinterestment' of the judgment of taste. He set up the whole matter as a matter of disguise. He conceived the modern idea of the autonomy of the aesthetic sphere as the denial of incorporated social judgments, which transformed an economic and social capital into cultural capital. Aesthetic difference thus turned out to be a mere sublimation and concealment of social difference.

This view can be generally applied to social theory and IPT, and a failure to grapple both with issues of perception and issues of affect, which though at play in all practices is at the heart of specifically

[6] Within IPT and IPS, broadly speaking, see *inter alia* Abdelnour (2014), Böhme (1995), Bleiker and Butler (2016), Hutchison (2014), Mitchell (2011), Kopper (2012), Kunstmann and Stein (2015), Methmann (2014), Mirzoeff (2011).

aesthetic practices that are not action or reason/interest orientated but self-referentially orientated towards aesthetic experience (c.f.: Hansen, 1997, 2000). It is thus that Heinich places great importance on the modes of reproduction, diffusion, and asymmetries of the distribution of visibility and also on the medium of visibility in and of itself: the visual, which much as later discussions in Science and Technology Studies and pragmatist sociologies (now employed in IPT) attribute a certain form of 'agency' to such non-human objects (c.f.: Heinich 2012a). The image itself does 'work' in her account: *ce sont ses images qui en font une vedette*. In these two movements, in which visibility is both a form of capital that individuals possess to greater or lesser degrees and which enables them to act to greater or lesser degrees, and is a property of particular objectified mediums, Heinich allows us – interestingly – to understand the importance of visibility in domains far outside those she is concerned with but which are central to world politics. By considering visibility as a social category, we are able to similarly see how certain states, actors, or groups in world politics are similarly asymmetrically endowed with visibility-capital to a degree that overshadows their practical activities and establishes a stark distinction between Self and the Other, as postcolonial theory has long explored. For example, consider images of violence. The fact that such images provoke 'shock' and/or 'horror' to one degree or another – whatever happens afterwards and however much we may become desensitized – reveals these objects not to be subject merely to the judgment of taste but to possess an autonomous aesthetic involving both perception and affect. Nonetheless, such objects are unequally distributed in terms of their visibility-capital vis-à-vis distinctly positioned actors (see the example below). It is here the political enters. Many societal hierarchies – those based on race, gender, class, etc. – are fed through an economy of visibility, constituted by certain practices of making seen or unseen, affecting how world political practices are seen. These practices are not pure perception. They mobilize "implicit schemata, patterns and selection criteria, culturally acquired competencies." [7] Therefore an execution by the militant group *DAISH* is 'seen' differently to an extra-judicial drone strike by the United States. The politics of this are clear, but the regimes of visibility enforcing them less so.

If Heinich's focus is on visibility as a social category that places objects at the centre of practice theorizing, then Brighenti's work is more fixated on converting visibility into a category that can be actively mobilized for political analysis. Drawing on philosophical texts that touch on visibility more or less explicitly - Foucault, Agamben, Berger, Deleuze, Goffman, Virilio - Brighenti lays out "three different types of visibility scheme" in his work: a "social" type, which is alongside Heinich an "enabling resource, linked to recognition", a "media-type… whereby subjects are isolated from their original context and projected into a different one endowed with its own logic and rules" and, finally, a "control-type" that "transforms visibility into a strategic resource for regulation (as in Foucault's surveillance model) or selectivity and stratification (as in Deleuze's society of control model), or both (as in Haggerty and Ericson's surveillant assemblage)" (Brighenti 2007: 339). Later, Brighenti (2010:

[7] Generell sind Perzeptionen und Affekte dabei keine Akte reiner, unmittelbarer Erfahrung oder reinen Fühlens, sondern in ihnen kommen wiederum implizit Schemata, Muster und Selektionskriterien, kulturell angeeignete Kompetenzen sum Einsats. Prakitken ästhetischen Wahrnehmens und Empfindens in diesem Sinne umfassen dann *auch* die kulturellen Manifestationen von Kants „interessenlosem Wohlgefallen" in der Betrachtung eines Kunstwerks aber sie gehen weit darüber hinaus." (Reckwitz, 2014: 26)

45-50) nuances these categories in terms of visibility as *recognition*, *control*, and *spectacle*. Brighenti draws out and conceptualizes an array of practices of making seen and unseen which together form a *field* of visibility. Importantly, he distinguishes clearly between the 'visual' and 'visibility' by noting how the visible is always *intervisibile*: it is about the crossing of gazes (Brighenti 2010: 44). Taken together, he provides a nuanced toolkit grasping the ambiguous relationships between politics, power and the visible and converting it beyond a social and into a social-scientific category, as he writes:

> Accordingly, the relationship between power and visibility is complex: power does not rest univocally either with visibility or with invisibility. In the moral domain, a fundamental tension between recognition and control has emerged. Both practices are connected to visibility. In other words, visibility is not correlated in any straightforward way to recognition and control, or to any specific moral value. As such, it does not constitute anything inherently liberating, nor, conversely, does it necessarily imply oppression. But, in the end, isn't this open range of possibilities what we expect from a sufficiently general descriptive and interpretive social scientific category? (Brighenti 2007: 340)

To see what this all means for IPT, however, let us now move to taking an extended example through which we can draw out these theoretical considerations of the visual and the political more fully. Consider Figure 2 and Figure 3, below. Each of these figures depicts the process by which prisoners were 'rendered' from their point of capture to a detention facility, where they were typically tortured, by either the United States (post-2001) or the Syrian state (post-2011). You may already be familiar with Figure 2, which shows the early stages of the (extraordinary) rendition of prisoners from Afghanistan that began in 2002. Prisoners are bound to the floor by mesh cables, wear heavy-duty earmuffs, and in other pictures are seen to be masked with surgical-looking equipment such that they can neither see nor hear. They are then hooded. The goal is total sensory deprivation. An American flag is hung in the background. Soldiers can be seen either standing in the foreground, not interacting with the prisoners, or sitting, with their legs crossed over each other. These men seem – more than anything – quite relaxed with what's going on here. Nonchalant, calm, unwinding. Taking it easy.

Figure 3 will be unfamiliar. And quite hard to make out: pixelated lumps and colours splotched with blackness. It comes from a video, which when watched makes the image clearer, filmed in Syria. The lumps making up the picture are bodies, bent over – bowed forward. Their hands are tied behind

Figure 2: *The 'rendition' of prisoners by the United States*

Figure 3: *The 'rendition' of prisoners by the Syrian Arab Republic*

their backs and their faces are blindfolded. But this means of achieving the state of being blindfolded is improvised: the t-shirt of each prisoner wearing one is pulled forward above their eyes. Don't see what I mean? Try it. If you are wearing one, pull your t-shirt, now, upwards from its seam at your waist over your head. You'll see that you can still see. The fabric stretches out and becomes porous. It does not possess the capacity to block sight. Hence, prisoners must bow down. If you are wearing a buttoned shirt then this procedure will not work: the buttons will either not hold or will leave gaps in your vision. In this case, a blindfold must be fashioned from a piece of cloth, probably torn from your shirt itself. In either case, you will need to remain bowed to be truly *blindfolded*. And you can still hear, of course. The prisoners in this image do not wear earmuffs. In the video from which this image comes, a soldier therefore traverses the backs of the tightly squeezed together prisoners – sardines they call themselves – and whips them to enforce their bowed position. He shouts and curses and screams, and falls as the aircraft moves from side to side. This soldier does not seem at all relaxed.

These images depict military practitioners carrying out what seems a quite different set of activities: in one there is beating and whipping, and in the other there is mere infrastructure: a process of transporting prisoners. That's what we can *see* in both these images. Nonetheless, many of their *inter-visibilities* with ourselves as viewers and wider publics, or a host of even more invisible actants, are often left unsaid (Brighenti 2007: 326). When we describe the images, as I have above, we don't express exactly what we see or could be seeing. A certain regime or field of visibility is influencing the tenor of the description. At one level, this occurs because "looking at someone who looks back at you is, in a sense, the beginning of all society" (Brighenti 2010: 1) and, hence, though *all* "practical knowledge is unconscious because it appears self-evident to its bearer" (Pouliot 2008: 271), practices of making (in)visible are unusually deeply embedded within our corporeality as acting human subjects and, moreover, appear self-evident to us all, for we all bear them and so their enaction cannot be better discerned from an observing individual sitting outside this community of practice which is, in the end, the community of human practice at its broadest level. Practices of visibility or of making seen and making unseen (which refers not only to 'seeing' but 'sensing' more broadly) form the core

of the "bodily unconscious" of us all, the core of our experiential engagement with the world, the point where "the eye and the body of the observer merge, and in doing so merge with what they observe" (Taussig 2009: 86). If the logic of practice is non-representational, as compared to the others that exist in social theory, then the paradox – rarely mentioned – is that the practice with ontological priority in the emergence of an individual and society is a representational one: opening your eyes.

What – then – are the typical *inter-visibilities* of these two images? First, although the practices these images hint at – torture and killing – have been subject to great degrees of controversy in both cases, we would not usually find a symmetrical description of causation. Generally, the practices being carried out by the United States in this image were related back to a meta-discursive critique of the discourse of sovereign exceptionalism during 'states of emergency' as leading to the systemic production of bare life and/or a condemnation of the leaders of the Bush *regime* and/or the CIA as having made possible or 'ordered' rendition. Interestingly, this renders the 'cogs in the machine' – those relaxed looking soldiers – invisible in their actions as violence workers (they are - after all - transporting men for torture) but visible as professionals who do not beat or whip. Inversely, the bodies of the men being transported are transformed beyond seeing: they become monstrous cyborgs, wrapped in hoods and earmuffs. Things to be feared. Things it's best not to look at. More than all that, however, the ('Western') gaze upon rendition and its violence would later focus on leaders: not upon planes, nor upon the men in planes, or even – much – on torturers themselves.

In the case of the second image, our eyes immediately focus upon the man who (in the video) is jumping and whipping the bodies before him. This figure becomes a perpetrator of war crimes entangled with the leadership of the Syrian state, which – as a 'dictatorship' – is considered, in the end, a "pro-torture" regime in and of itself which has led to a corruption of all limits of moral restraint. He is not a professional. He is not even a violence worker: he is a criminal who can be seen in his criminality. By contrast, we can see more of the men he is harming: while they appear as lumps, we can still 'see' their screams and moans, and the patterns on their t-shirts: reflective of their personalities or their interests or their favourite football team. We can see the tortured as humans, for the moment at least, and the torturer as inhuman: a precise inversion of the first image. Here, the affective power of visibility is brought to bear upon the viewer, more so than in Figure 2.And while much of this has to do with the biases and prejudices of world politics against the non Euro-American world, we should remember that when we do see white soldiers torturing brown soldiers in a closer manner to that being depicted in Figure 3, they *must* be expelled from their relational constitution with ourselves. The perpetrators at Abu Ghraib did not seem to be perceived to have erred because of what they actually did but, rather, because they allowed for it to become visible. Because they punctured a careful regime of visibility presenting 'us' in one way and 'them' in another.

But we can look at these images differently. In the terms of 'French Pragmatist' practice theoretical toolkits that are now being employed within IPT, mainstream regimes of visibility within IR here are particularly blind to the practical work being undertaken here by the mundane "missing masses" of materiality (Baert and Da Silva 2010; Bénatouïl 1999; Bueger and Gadinger 2015; Latour 1992). In

Figure 2, much of the 'work' being undertaken to restrain and ensure the sensory deprivation of the prisoners is being achieved by material objects: hoods, cables, earmuffs, and shackles. These objects are 'working' in the background so as to allow the soldiers to rest and relax on the plane. And their work in ensuring the practice of sensory deprivation can occur is the result of decades of "congealed labour" carried out by the United States, and incorporating scientists, psychologists, and doctors, to discover the most 'effective' way to carry out these practices (Austin Forthcoming 2017; McCoy 2012). The significance of this only becomes clear, however, when we apply the same analysis to Figure 3. Here, the Syrian soldier is attempting to enforce *precisely the same practice* as his American colleague: sensory deprivation in terms of removing sight and sound from the prisoners being transported. But he lacks the "congealed labour" gifted to these latter violence workers and so must rely on improvised material props as well as be constantly vigilant that the prisoners do not raise their backs: hence the shouting and beating of the prisoners. Hence why he is not relaxed. But also thus why his involvement in rendition would likely be 'judged' more seriously when made visible in this way than that of his American counterparts: it is he who is acting to disappear these men, unlike those American soldiers who watch passively as one set of missing masses go about creating another. There are two issues at work here, then. First the difficulty of perceiving these "missing masses" – of 'seeing', simply put – and, second, the ways in which we as viewers and the men on screen as actors are distinctly affectively proximate or distant from the reassuringly regulated, legal, and 'clean' system of violence depicted in Figure 2. Indeed, consider, here, Edmund Clark and Crofton Black's (2016) reflections on their own attempts to put together the story of rendition through photographs, redacted documents, and legal documents:

> In piecing together evidence of rendition, our account includes *locations where nothing happened and people who never existed*. A flight crew, enjoying a rest and recuperation stop in Palma de Mallorca, travelled under *false names with no addresses* other than anonymous PO boxes. A plane filed a flight plan for Helsinki but *never arrived there*, going instead to Lithuania, then recorded its onward destination as Portugal while travelling to Cairo. A company registered in Panama and Washington DC gave power of attorney to a man whose address turned out to be a student dormitory where *no one of that name was known*… [Emphasis Added]

As they note, all these little misdirections are "masks, obscuring by design and revealing by accident" (Ibid). Hiding behind these masks lay a torture regime that was arguably as 'brutal' as that on-going in Syria today – albeit at a smaller scale – but also much 'cleaner' in its visibilities: luxury jets, holding companies, redacted text, and relaxed soldiers on planes. The power to mask visibility in these ways – to engage successfully in the "management of gazes" (Brighenti 2010: 51) – is intimately related to our ability to perceive what practices are, how they emerge, and what they mean. And so to consider practices in the absence of this understanding of visibility is always to risk loosing sight of politics. As Brighenti (2007: 324) writes:

> Visibility lies at the intersection of the two domains of aesthetics (relations of *perception*) and politics (relations of *power*). When these two terms are understood in a sufficiently broad meaning, it makes sense to say that the medium between the two domains of aesthetics and politics is the *symbolic*. A symbol is aesthetically impressive and semiotically relevant in social relations.

Seeing Practices Differently

The preceding discussion highlights, of course, the reasons why visibility is so closely controlled by the State and other centres of power. Indeed, consider, in felicity with the example we've just gone through, Rancière's (1998: 28) reflection on the "visibility and invisibility of repression" in reference to the 1961 massacre in Paris by police of peaceful Algerian and French-Algerian demonstrators. He notes how the "police cleared the public space and, thanks to a news blackout, made its own operations invisible" and:

> For us, this meant that something had been done in our country and in our name, and that it was taken away from us in two ways. At the time, it was impossible even to count the victims. A phrase used by Sartre in his preface to *Les Damnes de la terre* helps us to understand, *a contrario*, the meaning of that twofold disappearance: '*The blinding sun of torture* has now reached its zenith, and it is lighting up the whole country.' Now, the truth is that *this blinding sun never lit up anything*. Marked and tortured bodies do not light up anything. We know that now, now that images from Bosnia, Rwanda and elsewhere show us much more than we were shown in those days. At best, our exposure to them inspires moral indignation, a powerless hatred of the torturer. It often inspires a more secret feeling of relief at not being in that other's shoes, and sometimes it inspires annoyance with those who are indiscreet enough to remind us of the existence of suffering. *Fear and pity are not political affects*. (Ibid: 28) [Emphasis Added]

While it is colloquially expected that the 'visual' alone has the power to "blind" us with its reality, we all know this not to be true (Kilby 2013). The image has power, affect, an independent quality, but is also subject to this regime of visibility – its *capital de visibilité* – from which there is little straightforward escape. Visibility becomes a policing tactic for "the police are not primarily a strong-arm repressive force, but a form of intervention which prescribes what can be seen and what cannot be seen" (Ibid: 28). But what does all this mean, again, for IPT and world politics? Above all, it means that exploring the practices of making seen and unseen which constitute regimes of visibility will allow us to unpack how our very perception and processing of being affected by practice are intimately related to these *ontologically prior* practices in our modes of observation. And, in turn, we will appreciate how many world political hierarchies, binaries, and 'structures' are produced by these regimes of visibility and potentially reproduced if IPT analyses practices without due attention to their contours (Austin Forthcoming 2016). By taking, however, the granularity of IPT in its empirical form and combining it with the equally granular critical force of exploring regimes of visibility we come to the possibility of seeing uneasy symmetries between 'ourselves' – whomever we may be – and the practices of those we observe. Most disturbingly, it sometimes requires us to recognise that we might hold "commonalities with what is widely understood to be evil" (Leander 2016: 17; Ophir 2005).

We thus reach two points that are interconnected when considering visibility. First, there exist *practices of making seen and making unseen which together form a regime of (in)visibility*. These practices are not merely 'discourses' in the traditional sense, but materially embedded, technologically mediated, and – today – digitally and algorithmically structured. And they work largely through affect and emotion rather than through understanding and perception. Therefore, the distinction between 'visibility' as a mode of analysis and that of 'discourse' must be stressed. Both speak to conditions of enunciation within a social sphere. But visibility is distinct in the empiricism of its mode of study and the ways in which it does not privilege the ideational or the semiotic solely in terms of language but integrates an

understanding of materiality, affect, circulation, and beyond. Second, this first set of practices of making seen or unseen are – in effect – regimes that predefine the focal points of any (scientific or not) mode of observation or analysis. As a result, the study of any other set of practices are filtered through these regimes of visibility and hence: *practices of visibility translate the way we see all practices*. All practices – torture and terrorism, diplomacy and negotiation, kissing and sex, bombing and shooting, writing and reading – are made (in)visible by these ontologically prior practices of making seen and unseen. It is the practices that constitute visibility which convert the '*blinding* sun' of Sartre into the '*black* sun' of depression, non-recognition, and alienation once described by Julia Kristeva (1989).

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