

*THERE WAS A TIME,
NOT SO LONG AGO...*
ACCOUNTS AND
AESTHETICS OF
MEMORY AND
IDEOLOGY OF
RECONCILIATION IN SPAIN

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Abstract || In the last decade new cultural styles have taken hold in Spain with which to represent the recent past, closely related to the emergence of the debates on the so-called historical memory and to the contemporary development of the cultural industries. Those styles have caused a series of composition procedures and textual effects to become standardized and allow for the public to identify them with the aesthetics of memory. Testimony, as a paraliterary form and civic discourse, has reached an exceptional place in that standardization process of the aesthetics of memory, but its mechanical use has privileged its dramatic profitability over its potential for criticism.

Keywords || Memory effect | cinema and literature in Spain | Civil War | Francoism | testimony.

0. Memory and cultural industry

In the last years we have witnessed a process of important repercussions in Spanish society: the Civil War and the violence of Francoism have reached a situation of public centrality in which very diverse cultural actors have been involved. It can be argued that already in the decades of the eighties and nineties there were reparation policies towards the victims, attempts at the dignification of the defeated, a vast and very exhaustive historiographical research and, most important, a cultural production that proposed continuous representations of the War and repression.

There are, however, different elements that give a singular nuance to the actual process. Firstly, their newest aspects are being played out by a new generation –that of the grandchildren of combatants and victims of reprisals– with specific demands and a very different sensibility from those belonging to previous generations. Secondly, we are dealing with a process in which the cultural industry and the mass media have taken part, incorporating to their production means and their sense logics much of the work that a wide array of researchers and historians had been carrying out for several decades.

The last years in the decade of the nineties were, in fact, witness to the appearance of a new aesthetical, political and cultural sensibility that lies in the origin of that effervescence and that relates to the remembrance of the War and the repression in a new way. On the one hand, it turned it into the center of a political vindication: that which fights for the moral rehabilitation of the defeated and against the so-called “silence pact” of the Transition. But at the same time, simultaneously, it linked the public memory with a process of affective reconstruction that publicly valued the subjective resonances of the War, giving them legitimacy.

It is in that crossroads, which ambiguously articulates very different intervention paradigms and almost opposed representational ethics, where the cultural industry has been able to move around comfortably, finding in the representation of the recent past a very valuable streak. Sure enough, in the last decade, cinemas, bookstores, exhibition galleries and even televisions have been flooded with stories, images, testimonies and discourses that had the Civil War and the Francoist violence as their explicit object of representation, through the matrix idea of memory. From serials like *Amar en tiempos revueltos* or *Cuéntame*, to the different revisions of the case of the Trece Rosas and the new forms of historical divulgation, affective memory appears to be the fundamental paradigm from where to recover a recent past marked by violence and repression.

It would be, however, ingenuous to link, as it has been done from different sectors, the origin of such tendencies with a parallel growth of the historical awareness or with a better general knowledge on the historical processes in which those texts inscribe their plots. In that sense, Antonio Gómez López-Quiñones, in his study titled *La Guerra persistente*, points out that the present reappearance of novels, memories, history books, documentaries and fictions on the War cannot be thought of as just an unavoidable symptom of the resurgence of a historical-political conscience in Spain. On the contrary, he warns against a first order paradox: the progressive and vindictive remembrance of the Civil War and Francoist repression takes place within a society that metabolizes such conflict into a consumer good. Thus, Gómez López-Quiñones wonders whether, in such context, the War has attained a main space in Spanish culture precisely because “the said event does not anymore pose a threat (its revulsive potential has been deactivated) or else because some representational modalities which are currently being proposed limit such potential” (2006: 15).

This article tries to deal with such a delicate question. It will try, on the one hand, to interrogate some of the cultural devices through which that threatening potential of memory has been deactivated and, on the other, to analyze some of the representation strategies that maintain what we could call the cultural styles and aesthetics of memory dominating nowadays. In order to do that, we will link the analysis of some cultural tendencies and literary and cinematographic texts with the processes described by contemporary historians and sociologists who have reflected on the conflictive relation, management and use of the recent past in contemporary Spanish society.

1. The privatization of memory

In his wonderful studies on the relations between the State and the memory of the recent past, Ricard Vinyes has identified the main dimensions of the new forms of memory in such different contexts as Spain, Chile, Argentina or Central Europe. Although each country may present a different historical path, different conflicts and diverse symbolic fights, it is true that in all of them can be discerned, in different degrees, similar global logics: ideology of reconciliation, privatization of memory, institutionalization of the subject-victim and creation of ecumenical museums (2010).

Thus, if we concentrate on the Spanish case, the transition was supported on the *ideology of reconciliation* and the consensus to socialize a memory of the recent past the Francoist dictatorship and the Civil War- voluntarily depoliticized, based on the moral

comparison of both sides of historical actors. Such ‘good memory’, as Vinyes has called it, tried to portrait the War as a fratricidal fight, emphasizing the military techniques and its supposed irrationality, rather than the historical causes and political projects that were confronted in it. A film like *La vaquilla* (García Berlanga, 1985), in which the soldiers on both sides totally ignored the reasons why they were fighting and could even change sides for personal reasons, constituted a brilliant cultural support of that conceptualization of War as an absurd, cainite and ahistorical confrontation.

In that logic, the transition to democracy was presented as a group of brilliant administrative reforms which gave a technical aspect to the change of political model and left those social movements that since the seventies had fought for democracy in Spain in the dark. According to Vinyes “the causal sweeping affected the foundations of democracy, which were left installed in an ethical void” (2009: 37). In that context, a part of civil society has used the metaphor of *oblivion* to refer to this process of depoliticization, decausalization and dehistoricization of the representation of our recent past. This does not mean, of course, that historians were not able to investigate Francoism and the Civil War, nor that access to archives, the publishing of monographs or to the production of films on the subject was in any way prevented. It means that the State and important pressure groups have made a determined representation of recent history official which, far from helping us to understand its meaning, tends to obscure it under the cloth of myth and affective valuation or, at the very least, to devoid it of political meaning.

The case of the exhumations in mass graves in the last decade constitutes an unequivocal symptom of this. The State does not formally oppose their aperture, acknowledging the right of the families to honor their elders, but it does not involve neither the judicial system nor the machine of the State in the complex endeavor of disinterring the bodies and studying them with forensic techniques. It is understood, then, that the search for those disappeared during Francoism, has a sense when done privately, but has no public importance or political meaning. That stance is totally coherent with the processes of privatization of memory that, starting with the Transition and up to the present have turned the public policies about the past into a matter of private reparation, and not of collective elaboration of its historical meaning.

A great deal of the representations deployed by the cultural industry has consolidated that conception of memory, endowing it with a narrative and visual syntax. We are not dealing here, of course, with a uniquely Spanish phenomenon, but with a tendency of globalizing aspirations which can be found, albeit with different nuances and intensities, in diverse countries.

In a European context at the beginning of the decade, a film like *Good Bye Lenin* (Wolfgang Becker, 2003) was quite successful in its way of working with memory. With a brilliant and ironic narrative, the film narrates the fall of the German Democratic Republic and the complex process of reunification from the perspective of a youth who tries to hide from his sick mother, a communist militant, all the events that are finishing the world with which she has identified herself for decades. Several aspects of the film, however, contribute to situate the problematic of the representation in the universe of family affections rather than in the reflection on the extraordinary process that serves as stage. The sentence that closes the film, highly significant, offers a clue of the way in which the film views the past and its analysis of the GDR: "The country my mother left behind was a country she believed in; a country we kept alive till her last breath; a country that never existed in that form; a country that, in my memory, I will always associate with my mother".

That gesture goes hand in hand with an elaborated work on the point of view from which especially at the beginning of the film- the images of communist Germany are commentated by the voice of a narrator the hero of the movie- now an adult who remembers the vision of reality he used to have during his childhood. Thus, an ironic contrast is created between the narrator's view, who reduces the complexity of the world to a series of childish formulas, and the images of a reality that the spectator can glimpse as much more complex and arid.

That infantilization of the point of view is, no doubt, brilliant in narrative terms, but it consecrates a look that abdicates from its capability of understanding the past and which, on the contrary, finds its value in the fact that it presents us with a consciously mythicized world, which voluntarily distances itself from any attempt to understand the historical situation further from its affective echoes. The importance given to the objects in the plot (the *Trabant* car, the *Spreenwald* pickles...) is explained, in fact, by their ability to evocate in the characters of the film the affections experienced in a world that no longer exists.

On that line, all the aesthetics of the film, its visual tonality, its impeccable facture, affect the representation of the contradictory affective relation of the characters with their past: if, on the one hand, they understand clearly that the authoritarian system of the GDR is not compatible with a democratic and modern sensibility, on the other, the past appears as a comfortable stage, identified with the simplified world of childhood in which the characters feel secure, comfortable and affectively satiated. It was unavoidable that, in spite of the irony, that sensation would affect the viewer deeply.

This view of the past has been very present in Spanish culture in the last decade, with very different results. A television series such as *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (TVE, on the air since 2001), which tells the ups and downs of the Alcántara family in the last years of Francoism and the transition, presents, in fact, an enunciative structure and visual texture enormously similar to the one which consecrated *Goodbye Lenin*: the infantilized enunciation, the denouncing of an authoritarian world which, however, contrasts deeply with the comfortable universe of the representation, the delectation on the objects, the textures and visual aesthetics of the recent past... Vicente Sánchez Biosca has written in the evocative texture of such productions:

While researchers present us with a cold, analytic and ever more complete conception of the ins and outs of Francoism, the massive images of those very same years that pour forth from the media and the consumer books are as warm as a family picture (2003: 47).

In fact, the case of *Goodbye Lenin* has been associated, by its critics, to the cultural tendency known as *Ostalgie*, which in a cunning wordplay unites the significant *Ost* (East in German, in reference to the GDR) and *Nostalgie*. The same happens with many of the cultural operations that, under the main idea of recovering memory, turn the recent past into a privileged stage for the representation of a simplified and comfortable world that favors the projection of affections.

As it has been pointed out by the same Sánchez Biosca, the cultural contradiction lies in the fact that this new scenography of memory is based on provoking an emotion, nostalgic and acritical, against which there is no possible defense. Not that these texts –*Cuéntame cómo pasó*, *Goodbye Lenin* or may other similar examples– pursue a political identification with the political regimes they represent, nor even less attempt to defend them. What happens is that, on the contrary, they “make their comprehension and rational analysis irrelevant by emphasizing the affective” (2003: 47).

2. The memory effect

That emphasis on the affective constitutes, in its multiple variants, the way in which cultural texts model that privatization of memory which, for decades has modified the relationship of Spanish society with its past. But in order to do it effectively, the cultural discourses have developed a series of formal procedures which, through the years, have come to be identified by the readers and viewers as the main identifiers of that comfortable yet distant universe, mythicized and violent, at the same time one's own and yet alien, which is the

universe of memory. At the heart of those procedures, and if our terminology is accepted, lies what we could call the *memory effect*¹. Allow me a brief digression to explain this.

In an article published in 1968, “The Reality Effect”, Roland Barthes made some reflections on elements present in the realistic narration that apparently lacked narrative functionality and that thus escaped structural analysis. He pointed out that when Flaubert, while describing Mme. Aubain’s living-room, said that “an old piano carried, under a barometer, a heaped pyramid of wooden and cardboard boxes” (Barthes, 179) it was relatively easy to find a functional meaning for the old piano –related to a social class in decadence– as well as to the boxes –indicative of a certain domestic disorder– but that the presence of the barometer did not contribute any meaning whatsoever; it was neither incongruent nor meaningful and thus turned out to be, apparently insignificant. Barthes concluded, however, that these kinds of “useless details”, of superfluous appearance, actually carry out a paramount function in Western stories: to let the reader know that beyond the narrative content and its meaning, there is an extradiscursive reality, a referent external to language. It is what Barthes called ‘referential illusion’².

Thus, in multiple novels, films, photographs and cultural discourses of the last years which deal with the recent past we find something similar: formal elements (words, approaches, tones...) which lack apparently any narrative value and which could be considered useless or superfluous details but which have actually a very clear textual function: that of inscribing the representational universe in that magmatic and sometimes indeterminate space halfway between subjectivity and referentiality, between myth and history, which is the space of memory. We could therefore argue without betraying Barthes’ reasoning that those formal elements –the use of a specific term, the toning of a picture to sepia, an intentional lack of focus, a determinate rhythm of a sentence...– serve to generate a textual memory effect, analogous to Barthes’ reality effect but inscribed in a very different aesthetics to the one he analyzed: what we could call the ‘illusion of memoriality’.

In fact, the memory effect such as we are conceptualizing it here would lie at the heart of the cultural aesthetics to which we are referring, although no doubt many of its constituents were already present in previous texts, films and discourses. What is new is that the texts from last decade have articulated procedures that before were dispersed in representational forms more or less consolidated and recognizable by viewers and readers and which operate fundamentally by pointing out that the universe they describe is the world of memory.

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1 | We came upon the idea of a “memory effect” in texts on the Civil War and repression on several conversations with Eugenia Monroy leading to the preparation of her MA thesis (2008).

2 | Barthes writes: “The truth of this illusion is this: eliminated from the realist speech act as a signified of denotation, the ‘real’ returns to it as a signified of connotation; for just when these details are reputed to denote the real directly, all that they do, without saying it, is signify it; Flaubert’s barometer, Michelet’s little door finally say nothing but this: we are the real (...); producing thereby a “reality effect”, base of the unmentionable credibility that conforms the aesthetics of all the most common works of modern literature” (Barthes, [1968]: 186).

Generally speaking, we could point that the elements which produce a textual memory effect are those which inscribe the diegetic universe in an ambience or atmosphere which the recipient clearly identifies with a representation of the past which is not direct, but sifted through memory. In the cinematographic and television discourse therefore we would be dealing with elements that contribute to create a certain visual and sonorous atmosphere, from the wardrobe, the scenography and lighting to the interpretation register and the music. In the literary discourse, this atmosphere of memory would be achieved through a certain usage of an obsolete vocabulary and the reference to objects from a past world; the construction of a paused and diffuse temporality; the recreation of codified spaces which imaginarily concentrate the socializing forms of the past (the haberdashery, the rural house, the wine cellar...); a descriptive tonality that emphasizes environmental elements such as light (or the absence of it) and silence; and, finally, a voluntary verbal morosity, which would seem to translate to the syntactic and narrative time the temporal experience of past times.

All these elements do not constitute, sure enough, an exhaustive catalogue, but just a series of procedures that, when isolated, lack meaning, but which have integrated into a more or less codified syntax which is recognizable as belonging to a representation of the world of memory. Those atmospheric elements, purely discursive, articulate with other basic procedures in the construction of plots, which have occurred with different subtleties in different texts and which somehow tend to turn the idea of memory into a metaphor on the very argumentative level.

A good example of this is the brilliant and influential novel *Soldados de Salamina* (Javier Cercas, 2001), in which an unsuccessful writer becomes interested in the character of the falangist writer Rafael Sánchez Mazas, and one of the enigmas of his biography takes him onto a detailed research on his life and, especially, on the dark days of the Civil War. To do so, the hero and narrator (a reflection of the same Cercas) analyzes documents and interviews real witnesses, on a path that takes him to meet Miralles, an old militiaman of the Fifth Brigade who will give his version of what happened during the War and the silencing and oblivion into which the Republican combatants fell after the War and exile. Thus, the very same development of the plot narrativizes the memory process and turns it into a metaphor, but not as presence of the past in the present, but as a work in search of the keys to the past in a social environment that has forgotten or silenced them³. The articulation of the plot therefore turns into a metaphor for the personal functioning of memory, and introduces the reader into its logic.

3. A standardized memory

A recent novel such as *El club de la memoria* (Eva Díaz Pérez, 2008) reveals, in diverse textual levels, the extent to which that way of constructing images has become standardized in the last decade and has become a repertoire of procedures that the reader is able to recognize, and that, rather than shaking his conscience or trouble his relationship with the past, install her in the nostalgia for a way of life that has been lost, through an accumulation of memory effects.

After finding a photograph, a restorer at the film library embarks on a research on a group of the Republican Pedagogical Missions, which leads her to look for writings, letters and diaries.

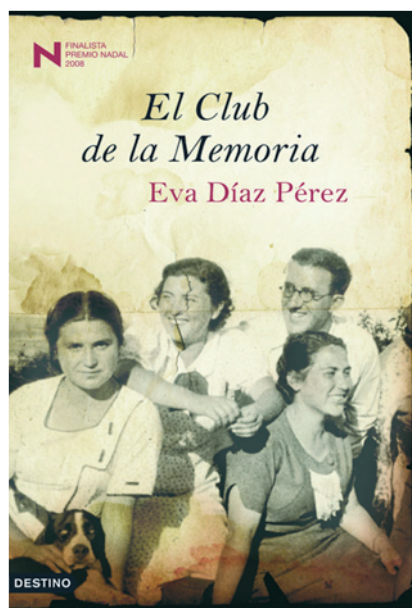
The photograph was shabby, worn, dog-eared; some faces seemed blurred and worn-out. It was like one of those little images of saints, almost misty from the impatient rubbing of the believer, chapped by time... (Díaz Pérez: 2008)

This quote, from the promotional reviews included in the novel, condenses a form of creating images of memory ever more standardized in the present culture and which can well serve as a metaphor of the way the cultures of memory work nowadays, not just in their best examples, but also in the coarsest. What matters is not so much the intrinsic nature of the past world as the difficult inscription of its memory in the actual moment. With textual procedures inherited from melodramas and serials, only refunctionalized, the voice dwells on the traces of the past: the past world appears as a distant reflection in the present, and what the narration cares about is the emotional impact that produces its discovery and emergence in the present.

In the most brilliant examples, that strategy has produced complex and fruitful explorations on the way in which the subject can try to understand the past or form an always incomplete image of it. In the coarsest examples, the representation of that complex relation has been substituted by an accumulation of procedures with the goal of achieving that “memory effect” which we have previously discussed. The cover of *El Club de la Memoria* stands as a successful example of the said accumulation strategy, which goes hand in hand with the previously quoted passage: photograph in sepia, dog-eared, stains and chapped paper... everything introduces us into a recognizable atmosphere intensified by the very same title.

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3 | That argumentative structure, in which a present-day character progressively delves into the study and reconstruction of the recent past, can be found with slight variations in many novels on the War and the first Francoist period. Among them, we can number *Mala gente que camina* (Benjamín Prado, 2006), *El nombre que ahora digo* (Antonio Soler, 1999), the hybrid text *Enterrar a los muertos* (Ignacio Martínez Pisón, 2005) or the recent *El club de la memoria* (Eva Díaz Pérez, 2008).



It can be argued, without being untrue, that those memory effects, dispersed in multiple cultural texts from the last years, have given discursive and cultural centrality to the question of historical memory and also that, in some way, they have built an effective and recognizable syntax for a problematic that was lacking in *cultural styles* with which to express itself. That is true, but it is no less true that in most cases, that style based on the rhetorical production of memory effects has tended to standardize and to displace a problem of deep historical and political significance to a sentimental rhetoric in which the whole conflict appeared sifted through nostalgia, melancholy or, as in the extreme case of the cinema of José Luis Garci, the 'murria'.

Vicente Sánchez Biosca has pointed out how, in *You're the One (Una historia de entonces)* (José Luis Garci, 2000) the keys of classical melodrama completely dominate the reflection on memory, translating the historical situation of the postwar period into a rhetoric of loss "that turns the repression, death, and sordidness of an epoch into a feature of style, a landscape of memory, but one which is the essence of human being, separated from any contingency whatsoever" (2006: 304). In that paradoxical but now already common way, the rhetoric of memory contributes to the dehistoricization of the period it represents, displacing the political conflicts and their historical effects to the representation of nostalgia and pain of metaphysical dimensions, where the historical processes are no more than the visual context that gives them credibility.

We are dealing, above all, with a texture of representation that voluntarily takes syntactical weight off those elements potentially loaded with historicity of enunciative violence. That is the base for what the same Sánchez-Biosca calls a "standard of memory" (2003:

48), which, even though it tries to take responsibility for the self-proclaimed 'duty of memory', it does so from a conception of discourse and history which do not differ in anything from the representation approaches, dominating the cultural industry. On the contrary, it stems from within them no matter how untiringly it proclaims its dissidence.

Two novels by Isaac Rosa have brilliantly and directly attacked that tendency. *El vano ayer* (2004) carried out a systematic deconstruction of the standard of memory about Francoist repression: the novel showed the reader the different choices the narrator had to face when telling an event related to the student movements of 1965; it specified the repertoire of situations typified in previous novels; it showed its historiographical sources and commented ironically the fictionalization work he undertook from them; it commented the usual resources of the rhetoric of memory and tried to consciously avoid them, thus breaking deliberately any memory effect. It was, altogether, a novel which, in his deconstruction of the usual procedures of the narrative of memory, reached a point of no return in which the possibility of the representation itself seemed to be blocked. Nonetheless, it managed to tell its story, even if the blueprint with which it did so appeared totally naked to the reader.

¡Otra maldita novela de la guerra civil! (2007) took this exploration of codes and conventions of the aesthetics of memory a step further. In an unprecedented gesture, Rosa reissued his first novel *La mala memoria* (originally published in 1999) adding to it the comments of a reader, who dissected pitilessly and with a sharp critical scalpel the compositional procedures on which the novel was based. The voice of the fictitious reader, which was inserted with the real chapters of *La mala memoria*, detected, made visible and criticized the textual elements through which the original novel tried to produce memory effects as previously described: the morose rhythm of the sentences, the use of obsolete vocabulary, the creation of ambiances frozen in time, the representation of a mythicized rural space, which slowly reveals its passionate and irrational hatred, the accumulative strategy of its "swollen lyricism" (2007: 366).

Thus, Rosa's novels do not introduce the reader into the conventionalized universe of memory, but face him with cultural and discursive mechanisms through which that universe is, ever in a more standardized way, constructed, and which can be identified with a group of textual effects consciously organized. Aside from the value we ascribe to Rosa's texts, too complex to generate consensus, his deconstructive project proves that, in fact, there exists a style more and more consolidated and with less formal variants, that the cultural industries have adopted as the appropriate way of representing memory and the recent past to present day society. Any dissident representation of past and memory must, thus, keep in mind that

process.

4. The era of the witness and the institutionalization of the subject-victim

A central aspect of the new narratives of memory is the centrality that in almost all of them, in one way or another, have the direct witnesses of the events, the survivors of War or repression, or, in general, anyone who can contribute their personal experience of the events. In fact, many of the novels of the last times have consecrated as one of the crucial moments of the story the meeting of the researcher / historian / writer with the direct witness who, in one way or another, will give her the missing key to understand some aspect of the events she is reconstructing.

Again, *Soldados de Salamina* is one of the most outstanding examples of this narrative tendency: all the investigation on Sánchez Mazas lies, other than on the analysis of historical documents, on the testimonies of the surviving *friends of the forest*, who had helped the Falangist writer to hide until the storm passed and the end of the War came. But, above all, the final part of the novel is the search for the definitive testimony, that of the militiaman Miralles, who supposedly did not carry out the orders of his superiors and let Sánchez Mazas escape in a gesture of humanity. The novel plays with the indetermination of the fictional or real character of the said testimonies, but what matters is that, in a gesture typical of our contemporary culture, it turns the witnesses of the events, anonymous subjects who have lived history, into the possessors of an immediate and definitive knowledge, which is able to turn the conventional stories about the past around.

This gesture is no doubt coherent with a new form of understanding History, its writing and socialization, which has transformed the historiographical discipline, and, most of all, the cultural representations of the past in the last decades. At the center of this change of paradigm, the elderly witnesses of War and repression turned, on the one hand, into the privileged object of the new historiographic currents, which would summon their memory in order to analyze the subjective effects of violence and all that archival documents seemed to elude and which remains however adhered to the live word of the witness. On the other hand, their testimonies became the cornerstone of a new wave of documentaries which presented its relation to the War from considerably different parameters than those from the seventies and the eighties⁴.

As an example, the documentaries by Jaime Camino perfectly

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4 | We have dealt extensively with the enunciative position of the witness and her relation to the construction of memory in Peris Blanes (2005). We have likewise written extensively on the contemporary uses of testimony in relation to politics of memory in the paradigmatic case of Chile in Peris Blanes (2008).

exemplify the way in which Spanish culture has modified the use and value of the testimonies as carriers of history and memory. In *La vieja memoria* (1977), pioneer movie, he articulated a tense narration of War from testimonies of key figures in the conflagration such as Dolores Ibárruri, Federica Montseny, Enrique Lister..., whose value was directly related to the historical dimension of the witnesses and the possibility of listening to voices silenced during decades of dictatorship and silence. However, 24 years later, *Los niños de Rusia* (2001) included the voices of witnesses of unknown identity and political filiations, whose legitimacy did not lie in their activities or responsibilities during the conflict but, on the contrary, was derived from the fact that they had lived a certainly exceptional experience.

That change in the election of the witnesses and the value of their testimonial word did not come out, nonetheless, as anecdotic, since it modified profoundly the representation of the past that both movies proposed. Firstly, from a global vision of the Republican political process and the War, the attention shifted to an element of far less centrality to the development of the history of Spain, more linked to the vital experience of a few people. Secondly, the witnesses were no longer principal actors in the political and military process, but anonymous individuals, rather patient subjects (in the grammatical sense) of that process which they could have hardly influenced. Thirdly, the fundamental value of their voices shifted from the historical importance of a version of the facts that had been censored for a long time to the density and exceptionality of the experience of those anonymous subjects, and the peculiar affective relation that those imprinted onto their representation of the facts, totally subjective.

That change was closely related to the emergence of what Annette Wieviorka has called *era of the witness* (1998): the cultural stage in which he, who has lived the events, appears as the most legitimated to represent them and whose word, charged with affectivity, seems to present a degree of truth and interest, impossible to reach through the analytical discourse of historiography. An era, therefore, that has abandoned –without any liberating spirit– the old hierarchies between the discourses referring to the past, including them in a liquid space lacking in fixed points to which tie their legitimacy.

Camino's documentaries are a symptom of that process, but they show respect for the witnesses' discourse and its articulation in the global discourse of his documentaries, which distance them from the general *doxa* on the treatment of testimonies in the discourses of memory. In fact, at the origin of that vindication of testimony as space of production of historical truth lies, undoubtedly, the will to legitimate anonymous voices that can contribute knowledge on the historical evolution that traditional historiography does not take into account. In that sense, the valuation of the voice of the witnesses

and survivors constituted, at the onset, a gesture of wide political and cultural reach, which attempted to dismantle the official accounts on the past leaning on other unruly voices, silenced by the official memory. However, the way in which the recent cultural industry has adopted the testimonies as its own is far from that original drive, even though it uses its vindictive aura to award itself value.

On the contrary, the centrality gained by the testimonies in these last years in the cultural industry is directly related to their high dramatic profitability, given the fact that, beyond their historical interest, the testimonies present unavoidably a subjective representation, and very affectively marked by the events they deal with. No wonder, then, that the present proliferation of documentaries, television programs and newspaper articles that treat the witnesses as privileged elements of their syntaxes, pay less attention to the reliability of their data and the depth of analysis than to the possibility of producing a representation of the events with a high dramatic charge, one which will not represent the historical processes abstractly, but bound to their concrete –and, generally, painful– effects in a determinate subjectivity. In many cases, the events, their causes and their historical logic are left aside, overshadowed by the powerful emotions that their recalling causes in the witness.

Two things should be pointed out. Firstly, that the process that Wieviorka describes as the consolidation of the ‘era of the witness’ constitutes the cultural and symbolical dimension of a wider phenomenon, that affects institutional policies, social clashes and which Vinyes has described as the *institutionalization of the subject-victim*, based on the evaluation of the suffering of the victims as a fundamental gesture in order to manage the traumatic past from the parameters of the before mentioned *ideology of reconciliation*:

Rather than a person (a biography, a project), the *subject-victim* constitutes a meeting point with which the State generates the space of moral consensus based on the imposed suffering (...). A space which gathers everyone, according to the principle by which all the dead, tortured or offended are equal. Something that seems as empirically indisputable as useless and disconcerting to all effects of historical comprehension, since it dispels the cause and context that injured the citizen. That profiting from the *subject-victim* generates a space in which all ethical borders are dissolved (Vinyes, 2010).

Secondly, the scene of a survivor who narrates his version of the events has been incorporated and assimilated by the audiovisual sphere to the point that it has yielded to its own logic and production routines. The cinematographic version of *Soldados de Salamina* (David Trueba, 2003), took this gesture to its last consequences: in several scenes the actress Ariadna Gil, in her role of Lola Cercas –representation of Javier Cercas on the screen– interviewed real

witnesses like Joaquim and Jaume Figueras, Daniel Angelats and María Ferré, who had already contributed their testimony to the novel and who were, therefore, dramatizing and fictionalizing their own act of giving testimony. In this way, the witnesses were forced to simulate signs of spontaneity in their discourse, effects of improvisation and even their reactions to the questions of the main character. The cinematographic planning edited in continuation, establishing a perfect *raccord* between them, the images of a movie star interpreting a fiction character and those of the real witnesses Figueras, Angelats or Ferré.

That implied, definitively, including the testimonial Word into the logic of the show. It condensed, as well, the ethic of representation on which the film –though not the novel on which it was based– supported itself. The generalized praise the film obtained allows us to think that it is, moreover, the ethic of representation that supports an important part of our culture: i.e., there is no contradiction between the show business forms and those of the historical representation; moreover, there is no substantial difference between the face of a movie star and that of a survivor of the War, and no violence as such takes part, therefore, in the editing of its images.

5. The witness and the ecumenical museum

This is not to mean that the testimony and figure of witnesses and survivors cannot figure in critical and politically disruptive representations of the recent past. Examples such as the mentioned films by Camino or multiple documentaries produced by memory associations and social platforms suggest paths along which testimonies, establishing a dialogue with other discourses and knowledge about the past, can be perfectly integrated in complex representations of the recent past, that shed light on the historical phenomena they deal with as well as in the nature of the experiences these led to.

However, this is not the main tendency in the present cultural industry, in which the political value of the testimonies has been progressively overshadowed by their dramatic profitability and its high capacity for emotional impact. That main use of the testimonial sums up, in my opinion, an important part of the cultural tendencies that have been analyzed in this article: privatization and subjectivization of memory, creation of sensory effects, decausalization of events, hyper-affectivity... In a few words, the standardized use of testimonies concentrates and takes to extremes the general tendencies of that standardized memory, consecrated by the cultural industry and the institutions as the *good memory* (Vinyes 2009: 25), culturally linked

to the so called ideology of reconciliation.

It has been pointed out at the beginning of this article the confuse character of the paradigm of memory in the present culture, related to its double aspect, often asymmetrical: that of political vindication and that of affective reconstruction. Well then, the emergency of the testimony (be it real or fictionalized) as privileged discourse and of the victim as totemic figure has had the effect of unbalancing, even further, the scales between those two dimensions of cultural discourses on the past. Thus, the mere public enunciation of the witnesses' experience, in as much as it broke the 'silence' of Transition, and rehabilitated the voice of the forgotten actors of history, has been presented, in itself, as a civic, moral and political act linked to the 'duty of memory'.

Maybe as a consequence of that, an important part of the cultural discourses which attempted to represent the recent past have tended to a certain automation in the representation of the historical reality which they were dealing with, given the fact that the very same enunciation of the idea of memory –in whichever way it was presented– seemed to definitively legitimate them. In that context, the figures of the elderly witnesses of War or repression have been used to catalyze a type of representation that, avoiding the political lecture of conflicts, develops to the extreme the affective components that the War and dictatorship can evoke in present-day society, suspending any moral consideration on them.

A film such as *Extranjeros de sí mismos* (Javier Ríoyo and José Luis López-Linares, 2000) condenses, in my opinion, many of the problems and contradictions that we are forced to face nowadays by that type of representation. The film faced an apparently impossible challenge: tackling from the same point of view and sensibility three experiences of a very different historical significance: that of the fascist troops sent by Mussolini's Italy during the War, that of the International Brigades who supported the government of the Republic and, finally, that of the members of the Blue Division who took part in the II World War on the German side. The only way to endow such a peculiar association with aesthetical coherence was to represent their experiences through the remembrances of the ex-combatants, charged with emotions. The radical political divergence of their projects seemed to be dimmed, then, by a more or less homogeneous emotional tonality.

There was a time, not so long ago, in which many passionate or manipulated young people decided to make war. They arrived from all over the world, ready to die or kill at an age more opportune for love.

Over the abstract and indeterminate background of a dawn and the

melancholic music by Miles Davis, the warm voice of the actress Emma Suárez opened the movie with those words, giving the double key of meaning that would go through the whole film. On the one hand, it inscribed the Civil War into such a symbolically distant past that sometimes seemed unreal, from a mythical time. On the other, it attributed to the political experience of the young combatants of yesteryear a vital intensity that in our days would seem reserved to other kinds of experiences. In that way, the movie presented itself as a discourse that rescued a series of voices condemned to oblivion and that, at the same time, vindicated a form of political passion that would all but seem to have disappeared in these times. It is curious that, once it has legitimated itself with this gesture, the film would wash its hands of the nature of the political conflict it was dealing with, and would only attempt to track down the affective resonances that it had acquired on the conscience of the witnesses.

That evocation of another time, intense as few others, through the moved voice of the witnesses, allowed for the wiping out of the heterogeneity of the three experiences the film was trying to deal with. That explains why in certain moments, the film presented a strong empathy with the vividly fascist ceremonials with which the Italian ex-combatants celebrated in their commemorative meetings of the nineties. Sure enough, from the memory of the ancient fascists, those ceremonies had the same share of emotions and justice as those of the old antifascist fighters, who also narrated to the camera, with trembling voices, their moved remembrance of the War years.

This trivialization of the political options of the combatants by the hyper emotional remembrances of the elderly combatants would not be so important if it did not answer to a quite generalized cultural logic. That in which the standardized use of personal testimonies produces a glance charged with emotion toward the past in which, paradoxically, the political vindication of memory substitutes the analysis of the political options and positions with the exploration of their affective resonances in the present time. In many cases, such as the one exemplified by *Extranjeros de sí mismos*, it confuses elements of very diverse historical significance by looking at them from an emotive perspective.

The cultural success of this kind of representations of the past is without a doubt the consequence of the two processes previously described, and especially the centralization of the victim's pain as privileged subject of the representation, that substantializes the idea of violence separating it from the historical and social processes that went along with it and made possible. It constitutes, in fact, a perfect example of what Ricard Vinyes has called an *ecumenical museum* (2010), in which we find an attempt to summon the memory (emotional and not political) of all the confronted sides:

The stage of multiple formats in which the equality of all *confessions* is assumed and represented (options, ideas, ethics, politics...) with the result of the construction of a highly authoritarian space since, far from representing the plurality of memories, it dilutes them in the story of a collective success –the reconciliation, which has ceased to be a political project to become a mere ideological discourse- and which is presented as the only possible memory, the *good memory* (Vinyes, 2010).

That authoritarian space, which dilutes the different memories – politically confronted and with projects for a country that were diverging and mutually exclusive– in a unitary story of reconciliation, has managed to invade and modify the logic and the approach of the cultures of memory in Spain. Fortunately, not all cultural spaces have surrendered to its ever more standardized dynamics, but the truth is that that cultural industry has imposed in the last years logics for the representation of the recent past which, notwithstanding their appearance of neutrality, have carried out a profoundly ideological gesture which lies, precisely, in the erasing of historical causality and the dissolution of the political conflict.

Moreover, and as it has been shown throughout this article, re-reading the historical processes from the angle of their emotional and subjective impact, they have evoked the empathy of readers and viewers, insisting only on the affective drama and suspending the sensible comprehension of the presented historical situation. Only thus can it be understood that, in present-day Spain, the moved memories of a fascist lieutenant can have the same value as those of an elderly member of the International Brigades: what matters in them is their high dramatic functionality, the emotion that both testimonies convey to the viewer, the way both move her deeply. Very likely, the ethical void in which this tendency places readers and viewers should cause the present-day Spanish society to worry.

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