The Spanish Civil War and the Aesthetics of the Ominous in *Els nens perduts del franquisme*

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> From the familiar phantoms composed, reconstructed, and scrutinized […] by an implacable camera, […] run the traces of a process of knowledge. Or what is the same: that open wound in the body of fiction, through which History flows.
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> Víctor Erice, *The Dead*

> Race de Caïn, dans la fange
> Rampe et meurs misérablement.
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> Baudelaire, *Abel et Caïn*

> Chi mi ha condannato al carcere, cioè, a fare questa determinata vita in questo determinato modo.
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> Gramsci, *Lettere a Iulca*

In August 1936 Amparo Barayón, a militant anarchist and the wife of Ramón Sender, was arrested while protesting the assassination of Ramón's brother, Antonio, by Falangist military forces. Two months later, in the prison of Zamora, a guard snatched her child from her arms while telling her that 'los rojos no tienen derecho a criar hijos.' That was a clear signal of the few hours of life she had left, as the same thing had happened to other republican women who had lost their children in an identical way. That very night Falangists drove her to the cemetery of Zamora. She asked for confession but a priest refused to absolve her because she had not married under the aegis of the Catholic Church. Miguel Sevilla, her brother-in-law, had

denounced her; and Segundo Viloria, who had courted her years before, executed her. Before her death, she wrote a letter to Ramón Sender: 'No perdones a mis asesinos, que me han robado a Andreína, ni a Miguel Sevilla que es culpable de haberme denunciado. No lo siento por mí, porque muero por ti. Pero, ¿qué será de los niños? Ahora son tuyos, siempre te querré'(quoted in Casanova, 2007: 235).
In Franco's dictatorship, military psychiatrists in search of the 'red gene' experimented on prisoners. Purification and purging were fundamental concepts in 1940s Spain, as they had been in all the episodes, ethical or political, that inhabit Europe's dark mid-twentieth century. Among the victims of this worldview were the 'lost children' of Francoism. These were children who, after being removed from their imprisoned mothers, had their names changed and could thus be adopted by families congenial to the Francoist regime. In addition, many thousands of working-class children were sent to state institutions because their own Republican families were considered unfit to raise them. There were also cases of child refugees being kidnapped from France by the regime's external repatriation service and then placed in Francoist state institutions. *Els nens perduts del franquisme* (2006), a documentary made by Montse Armengou and Ricard Belis and produced by TV3, has gathered the work of one year of research to unveil one of the darkest periods of Spain's recent history: the incarceration and annihilation of Republican women and the disappearance of their children by the Francoists. This television documentary, as a form of audiovisual testimony about an event of social suffering, seeks to express both the political and ethical potential of audiovisual testimony to further initiatives to achieve justice, while it also seeks to elicit recognition of the Civil and post-war periods from broader audiences.

In this article, I shall argue that *Els nens perduts del franquisme* represents this painful aspect of the Spanish Civil War and the post-war period through what I call an aesthetics of the ominous. By the 1980s, the Catalan thinker Eugenio Trías had proposed the presence of the ominous in the art of his time, that is, post-war Spain,

as a category that creates both beauty and pain (2009: 867).[1] The aesthetics of the ominous in this documentary is formed by its mnemonic technique –composed by a collage of divergent, antagonistic images of the past and the present, pierced by time– that recovers a hidden aspect of Spain's history, which makes the documentary a form of embodied memory.

Such retrieval has to do with what Walter Benjamin describes as the task of the historian. For Benjamin (1969), the historian (the writer and the artist too, I would add) is a collector that reassembles the debris left by the events of the past in order to create a constellation with the historical events that have been left unvoiced in an earlier era. In this way, the collage of images in *Els nens perduts*, as a new constellation made by the fragments of two different symbolic universes, creates new meaning through a dialectical confrontation of images that are usually separated. The formal technique of the documentary –a promiscuity of heterogeneous images of newsreel footages, talking heads, voice-overs and haunting reconstructions of prisons– creates the abovementioned mnemonic technique of the documentary. In my view, the aesthetics of the ominous is, precisely, the new meaning that this documentary creates with regard to the Spanish Civil War by means of the dialectical union of images.

In his text of 1919 whose title in English is *The Uncanny*, Sigmund Freud (2003) remarks that the ominous is an aesthetic experience that finds in language the space for its formation. He also indicates that the ominous responds to that which, having been hidden and secret, is brought into view. As Rosemary Jackson has remarked, 'The uncanny combines these two semantic levels: its significations lies precisely in this dualism. It uncovers what is hidden, and by doing so, effects a disturbing transformation of the familiar into the

[1] In his essay 'Lo bello y lo siniestro' Trías asserts that 'La forma artística más característica de nuestra época (el cine), gravita en torno a la categoría de lo siniestro y logra desprender, del trabajo de esa categoría estética, el efecto de belleza que corresponde a una categoría artística, ganando para el placer la elaboracíon de una situación máximamente angustiosa y dolorosa' (2009: 867).

unfamiliar' (2009: 38). Marsha Kinder also reminds us that for Freud the uncanny is 'that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of the old and long familiar' (2003: 13). To Nicholas Royle, the uncanny 'consists in a sense of homeliness uprooted, the revelation of something unhomely at the heart of home' (2003: 1). In other words, the uncanny is an interruption of our everyday certainties or familiarities, a distancing and estrangement from what seemed to be ours. As Anthony Vidler has remarked, in its aesthetic dimension the ominous is, 'a representation of a mental state of projection that precisely elides the boundaries of the real and unreal in order to provoke disturbing ambiguity' (1992: 11).

Accordingly, the aesthetics of the ominous invoked in this essay is necessarily ambiguous in the sense that it combines aspects of fictional and historical manifestations that act, historically or culturally, as representations of estrangement. The documentary, for instance, is embedded in archived images of Francoist socio-political propaganda and the celebration of the Nationalists victory, as well as in the testimonial form of the talking head, both of which belong to antagonistic forms of body politic. From this point of view, what constitutes an aesthetics of the ominous in *Els nens perduts del franquisme* are the following polyvalent manifestations: (1) the poem written by an incarcerated Republican woman, a poem in which sorrow and dignity are intermingled; (2) the diaries of the priest Gumersindo de Estella, written in one of the prisons for women in Zaragoza, in which he exposes how religion and the sacred have incremented violence; (3) the juxtaposition of the regime's rationality and political rhetoric –characterized by discourses of friendship, family, generosity and prosperity– with narratives of terrible atrocities and brutal acts of punishment committed against Republican women and their children; and (4) women's recollections that speak of memories that are continuously haunted by ghosts. In this last manifestation, the aesthetics of the ominous gains a political connotation as the very condition of continuous haunting.

Rationality and Violence

> De conformidad con su mencionada propuesta, autorizo la creación del gabinete de investigaciones psicológicas cuya finalidad primordial será investigar las raíces bio-psíquicas del marxismo.
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> Remite, El Generalísimo Francisco Franco Bahamonde.
> (*Els nens perduts*, 2006)

On August 23, 1938, the military man and psychiatrist Antonio Vallejo Nájera, who was minister of Psychiatric and Military Services in Burgos, received an important letter from General Francisco Franco authorizing him to initiate a project that would constitute the consolidation of his career as a psychiatrist. From that day on, he was free to conduct experiments on all Republicans who were sent to Francoist prisons and concentration camps. For Vallejo Nájera, Republicans offered excellent evidence to confirm his thesis that Marxism was a disease. Accordingly, the new regime would have scientific proof to back up destroying the vanquished without compassion. These were the analyst's words:

> Tenemos ahora una ocasión única para comprobar experimentalmente que el simplismo del ideario marxista y la igualdad social que propugna, favorece su asimilación por los deficientes mentales. (*Els nens perduts*, 2006)

Vallejo Nájera's observations not only lay bare the dialogical underpinnings of *Els nens*, but also show part of the quality of abjection that emerges from the documentary in that his remarks forecast the exclusion of what disturbs a form of social rule and order in Franco's Spain. His words emerge among the sounds of prison gates and the echo of footsteps registered on the documentary's soundtrack, which produce a sensory image of dissonance; an indeterminacy between life and death. To Vallejo Nájera, Franco and his followers represented the ideals of race and Hispanism that he had

defended in his previous writings.[2] In my view, his experiments on Republicans constituted what might be termed a scientific organization of fear. His scientific and, hence, rational discourse – masked by a rhetoric of purity, prosperity and imperial value– allowed the institutionalization of brutality, violence, and terror. Vallejo Nájera's ideas represented a pseudo-logic found in institutional behavior and in political relations that seeks to normalize all human actions through rationality. It was a kind of rationality closely related to violence. Regarding this relationship between rationality and violence, Michel Foucault pointed out that

> [i]n even the most violent forms of normalization there is rationality. What is most dangerous in violence is its rationality. The deepest root of violence and its permanence comes out of the form of the rationality we use. The idea has been that if we live in the world of reason, we can get rid of violence. This is quite wrong. Between violence and rationality there is no incompatibility. (1991:17)

Nájera's ideas, alongside Foucault's theorization, once again raise the question of the intersection between the enlightenment and modernity. While it is true that modernity is a product of an age of enlightenment that dramatically changed the face of western culture by proclaiming the autonomy and supremacy of human reason, this attitude has also created many of the contradictions that define modernity and the antinomies of its culture: the blindspots of the Enlightenment. The great western political principles related to the dominance of reason are also, paradoxically, responsible for different kinds of violence and social exclusion. This kind of rationality characterized Franco's regime; thus, the idea that Spain did not enter into modernity until the transition to democracy needs to be continually critically reconsidered. What happened in Franco's Spain is that rationality was tightly fused with a Sacred logos and a religious

[2] Mainly in *Eugenesia de la Hispanidad y regeneración de la raza* (Burgos: Editorial Española, 1937) and *Política racial del nuevo Estado* (San Sebastián: Editorial Española, 1938).

idearium that was at its very core.[3] In the documentary, the image of a ceremony in *El Valle de los Caídos* exemplifies this fusion.[4] In a black and white background, at nighttime, with lighted torches and the enormous cross in the middle of the landscape, along with Falangist symbols, one hears two grandiloquent voices:

> Falangist: '¡Caídos por España!'
> People: '¡Caídos por España!'
> Falangist: '¡Viva Franco!'
> People: '¡Viva!'
> Falangist: '¡Arriba España!'

Is there anything more ominous than El Valle de los Caídos? A monument and mausoleum constructed by Republican prisoners as redemption –forced labor– for their deeds.[5] Embedded in this

[3] A few literary examples of this sacred logos are Agustín de Foxa's *El almendro y la espada* (1940) and José María Pemán's *La Pelea de la Bestia y el Ángel*. (1938). Cecilia Enjuto-Rangel has remarked that these Falangists literary texts: 'dibujan la deshumanización de los republicanos con la representación de la Bestia como la máquina, el tanque soviético, la ciencia, la materia que se opone al ángel fascista, rubio por supuesto, que es el epítome del espíritu, el ideal de la fe y la poesía.' Enjuto Rangel also remarks that Agustín de Foxá's poem titled *La espiga*, 'reitera esta visión caricaturesca del enemigo republicano triturador de flores, sueños y hadas, y muy cómodamente encuentra la pureza espiritual en las muchachas desnudas o las notas de un salmo, como si éstas fuesen abstracciones sinceras sin connotaciones eróticas, políticas y moralistas' (2009: 37-39).

[4] The monument was designed by Pedro Muguruza and Diego Méndez on a scale to equal, according to Franco, 'the grandeur of the monuments of old, which defy time and forgetfulness.' See the electronic archives of the World Association of International Studies (WAIS) at Stanford University. 'SPAIN: The Valle de los Caidos.' By Ronald Hilton (7/31/03). Web. 17 March 2010. http://wais.stanford.edu/Spain/spain_1thevalledeloscaidos73103.html

[5] This inscription is ominously familiar to the one that was written on the gates of Auschwitz: 'Arbeit macht frei (Labor will make you free)'. Moreover, 'Only prisoners with a record of good behavior would qualify for this redemption scheme, as the works site was considered to be a low security environment. The motto used by the Nationalist government was 'el trabajo

architectural space, also inhabited by colossal angels with swords in their hands, the continuous presence of the war and its victors provokes a disturbing ambiguity between peace and violence. Moreover, Republicans executed by Falangists at the beginning of the Civil War were later buried, without their family's consent, in this monument that Franco built to commemorate the Nationalists' victory and to pay tribute to the dead of the Nationalist faction. During the Civil War Republicans were thrown into mass graves by groups of Falangists. Some of them were exhumed more than twenty years later (by the same group of Falangists that had followed the orders to execute them) in order for their remains to be transported to El Valle de los Caídos.[6] They ended up there because many widows of Falangist soldiers refused to allow their husbands' remains to be

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ennoblece'. The official inauguration of El Valle de los Caídos on 1 April 1959, the twentieth anniversary of the end of the Civil War, was an occasion to rival the 1939 victory celebrations. The entire cabinet, the Procuradores of the Cortes, the full membership of the Consejo Nacional, representatives of all of the regime's institutions, military and civilian authorities from every province, two cardinals and a panoply of archbishops and bishops, and members of the diplomatic corps filled the huge basilica. The Generalísimo, in the uniform of a captain-general, and Doña Carmen, dressed in black with a mantilla and high comb, walked up the center aisle under a canopy to their special thrones near the high altar. Thousands of workers were given a day off with pay and a packed lunch and were brought in coaches to Cuelgamuros free of charge. His speech, about the heroism of 'our fallen' in defense of 'our lines,' was triumphant and vengeful. He gloated over an enemy that had been obliged 'to bite the dust of defeat'. The controlled press described the inauguration as the culmination of his victory in 1939.' See the electronic archives of the World Association of International Studies (WAIS) at Stanford University. 'SPAIN: The Valle de los Caidos.' By Ronald Hilton (7/31/03). Web. 17 March 2010. http://wais.stanford.edu/Spain/spain_1thevalledeloscaidos73103.html

[6] In 2008 judge Baltasar Garzón authorized the exhumation of the remains of eight Republicans executed in August 1936, from El Valle de los Caídos. In the collective tomb were the remains of Valerico Canales, Celestino Puebla, Emilio Caro, Flora Labajos, Pedro Ángel Sanz, Román González and Víctor Blázquez. See 'Garzón ordena exhumar del Valle de los Caídos a ocho fusilados' *El Pais* (Madrid), June 11, 2008.

moved to Franco's monument. The regime, thus, needed bodies to feed that enormous crypt, whose construction lasted for twenty years. The Ministry of Government, in a letter to all of Spain's city councils, requested bodies, begging as well for a timely answer. Many municipalities responded that they did not have bodies of the Nationalist soldiers but they did have mass graves of the 'red' army. That is why Franco changed his initial criterion.

The implementation of Franco's ideas bred the most brutal violence and social exclusion. Franco's institutional apparatus, for instance, succeeded in destroying the joint initiative for Republicans to leave Spain under the protection of the Mexican, Cuban and French consulates. *Els nens perduts* depicts how the vessels supposed to pick them up at the port of Alicante at the beginning of the Civil War, never arrived. Franco's army did not let them arrive. Certainly, there was political rhetoric that justified this obstacle: 'mujeres, ancianos y niños son metidos [by marxists] como fardos en barcos inútiles,' Franco would say (*El nens perduts*, 2006). The port of Alicante thus became a trap for those who believed that leaving Spain was their only salvation. The propaganda of the new regime portrayed Republicans that wanted to escape as victims of Marxism: victims that Franco's Spain would feed and protect. The truth, however, was different: as soon as they left the vessels, they were accused of treason against the regime for having wanted to leave Spain. As a result, men, women and their children were sent to prisons and concentration camps.

Marxism, then, was a social pathology not only for Antonio Vallejo Nájera, but also for all the followers of the new regime. The penitentiary system in Franco's Spain, along with a political rhetoric that embraced clear ideas of Evil and a rational scientific discourse used for the annihilation of those considered to be inferiors, brought about the vilest acts of social exclusion. In *Els nens perduts*, the Catalan historian Ricard Vinyes explains the relationship of political, religious, and scientific forces as follows: 'El franquisme no té sentit moral i, és clar, per això, per aquelles persones que actuen a favor del franquisme, que actuen per liquidar tot lo que ha pogut quedar de les restes del marxisme, del republicanisme, aquests [the republicans] són els portadors del mal.' In the documentary, Vallejo Nájera's final words are as follow:

> Agradezcamos al filósofo Nietzsche, la resurrección de las ideas acerca del exterminio de los inferiores orgánicos y psíquicos; multiplicad a los selectos y dejad que perezcan los débiles. Las íntimas relaciones entre marxismo e inferioridad mental ya las habíamos expuesto anteriormente. La segregación de estos sujetos, desde la infancia, podría liberar a la sociedad de plaga tan temible. (*Els nens perduts*, 2006)

To Nájera, 'el rojo' was a depravity itself: a plague that would kill the Hispanic race and thus it had to be destroyed. However, the only way of explaining the destruction on behalf of a superior ideal without incurring any coresponding guilt was by building an ideological edifice that justified such acts. Vallejo Najera's voice-over, as part of the documentary's *diegesis*, effects a duplication and a reiteration of his believes and his language, which creates the sense of something that returns again, namely, of a continuous haunting from the past.

The Destruction of the Enemy

Franco's regime was characterized by what has been called 'un universo penitenciario' (Vinyes 2003). This penitentiary universe was constituted by a web of elements such as a fragile civil solidarity with the prisoners, Catholic societies that besieged the prison and the prisoner's family with conspiracies about the welfare of state and Church and the psychiatric research performed by the Spanish army. Indeed, the constitution of this 'universe' was crucial in the process of institutionalization of Franco's regime. In my view, the institutionalization of the Francoist regime was integral what Michel Foucault called governmentality. Briefly, according to this perspective the state is viewed as an ensemble of institutions, procedures, tactics, knowledges, and technologies, which together comprise the particular form that the government has taken; that is a form of government which came to have the population as its object of rule.

Governmentality is a 'very specific albeit complex form of power' (1991: 102), Foucault writes. It is also the form of government that came to characterize modernity. The concern here with governing is linked to the process of what the French historian called

normalization; that is, the institutionalization of those disciplines, tactics, and knowledges that prepare the ground for the production of the normalized and self-controlled subject. The issue here is that normalization, during Franco's regime, came to be implemented both through violence and through other mechanisms of terror. In this way, terror was used as the means of controlling and normalizing. Violence and fear were instruments of political rule and vectors of progress. As a consequence, they instilled a profound sense of political despair. Uxenu Álvarez, whose father was a Republican from Santander, makes the following apposite statement in *Els nens perduts*.

> A mí me robaron todo, me robaron la infancia, me robaron la sociedad, me robaron el transcurrir de la vida, lo que hubiera sido. A mí me mataron en el treinta y seis, en cuanto a lo que iba a ser, soy un muerto, me mataron los traidores a la democracia.

His words represent the limits between homeliness and unhomeliness: he sees himself as one of the living dead or, reminiscent of Freud's terminology, he has been buried alive. Uxenu's unhomeliness, however, is not simply the so-called general state of the modern man. His state comes from specific circumstances: he was 'killed' by traitors to democracy. Hence, his unhomeliness has to do with the sense of estrangement felt by the vanquished, by those that saw their democratic political projects shattered by the institutionalization of terror and violence. There has been a loss, namely, the loss of a political project that empowered the Republicans and gave them a direction into the future. To this effect, the historian Julian Casanova notes:

> El terror militar y falangista destrozó las conquistas y aspiraciones políticas de esos sectores intelectuales y profesionales que habían desarrollado una cultura política común marcada por el anticlericalismo, el republicanismo, el radicalismo democrático y, en algunos casos el mesianismo hacia las clases trabajadoras. (2007: 228)

The vanquished are, without a doubt, figures marked by history and are the result of tragic circumstances. Regarding this

category, Ana María Amar Sánchez reminds us that: 'El perdedor es una figura atravesada por la historia de su tiempo, es el resultado de una coyuntura trágica y, a la vez, se constituye como tal por propia decisión, es decir, deviene perdedor a partir de una consciente elección de vida' (2006: 151). Thus, Uxenu experiences the unhomeliness that emerges after defeat and its political consequences.

Fear became legitimated in Spain through a combination of laws, elites, and institutions which all transmitted a doctrine of craven obedience. Salamanca –the first capital of the new regime– had a fundamental role in the creation of the New State in various spaces: the ecclesiastic, the academic, and the repressive. In this university city a commission was created and dedicated itself specifically to the repression of freemasonry and communism that would later absolve the military jurisdiction from the central role it had in the punishment of the political enemy (Fontana, 2003: 12). The Catholic Church, for instance, had a mission against those considered as their secular enemies; and, regarding the role of the Catholic Church in this penitentiary universe, historian Julián Casanova comments in the documentary: 'La entrada de la religión y de lo sagrado en escena incrementa la violencia en vez de mitigarla, y ahí hay una función fundamental, una misión histórica de la Iglesia.' In this way, religion and the clergy increased the violence as evinced in the documentary by the diaries of a priest from Zaragoza, Gumersindo de Estella, whose reflections are relevant here:

> Las víctimas eran despachadas al otro mundo sin tiempo para preparar su alma ni despedirse de sus seres queridos. Y me causaba extrañeza la euforia que expresaban algunos religiosos… Le di la última absolución con el alma llena de congojas. Cuanto más insensible y cruel se mostraba uno, era considerado como más adepto a Franco… Gritos de: ¡Hija mía, no me la quiten! ¡Por compasión, no me la roben! ¡Que la maten conmigo! Otra exclamaba: ¡matadla conmigo, hija mía qué será de ti! Los guardias intentaban arrancar con fuerza las criaturas del pecho y brazo de sus madres… Durante la marcha hacia la tapia del cementerio, los guardias se apoderaron de las criaturas, continuaban las mujeres sus gritos de angustia, ¡Que me la devuelvan! ¡Verdugos! ¡No tenéis derecho a quitarme a mi hija!

The documentary dramatizes the figure of Guimersindo de Estella walking on one of the halls of the prison of Torrero, a space characterized by dark, milk-blue hues, hovering in a constant lowering twilight. The priest's diaries create an experience of the limit between what is shown and what is hidden but appear in a sort of ambiguity, thus, underlying the ominous. Among the newsreel footages with images of the regime's propaganda –characterized by discourses of friendship, family, generosity, and prosperity– his speech elicits the images of the regime's dark side. Into the familiar world created by images and propaganda –of children singing, playing, studying mathematics, and happily brushing their teeth– appears the *unheimlich*, that is, the painful, undesirable, and unfamiliar.

The testimonies gathered in his journals are reproduced in the form of voice-overs in the documentary, including the piercing screams of mothers whose children were snatched from them before execution. His diaries, thus, have a double function: they are a counter-document to the Francoist political propaganda of the newsreel footages while, at the same time, they bestow the documentary the quality of a counter-document in itself. The disclosure of the link between violence, punishment and the sacred and the enlightened value of rationality in the Falangist's *idearium* allows a strong sense of the ominous to emerge from the film.

The doctrine of fearful obedience was also institutionalized by discourses of reason. Remo Bodei's words are relevant here when he affirms that 'la razón utiliza un modelo de despotismo teológico-político, en el que están unidos Estado e Iglesia, de modo que la fe en la patria y en las instituciones se una a aquella en el Ser supremo y en la inmortalidad de alma' (1995: 365). Indeed, this type of fear would have to be understood both as a tool of a dictator and as a form of collective life 'purified' by the conscious participation of individual subjects, authoritative elites in civil society, and institutions like the church and universities. As Cory Robin points out, 'teachers and preachers of fear would engineer a profound transformation in popular sensibility' (2004: 39). Such was the polity that gave rise to fear in Franco's Spain: a violent State crushing a civil society.

Certainly, fear in Franco's regime was a political tool and an instrument of elite rule, created and sustained by political leaders who

stood to gain from it, either because terror helped them pursue a specific political goal or because it reflected or lent support to their moral and political beliefs (Robin, 2004: 16). Once more, as Bodei pointed out, 'El miedo institucionalizado, burocratizado y nacionalizado, se metamorfosea en terror […] aplicado a las 'presentes necesidades de la patria'.' (1995: 364) Such was the nature of Vallejo Nájera's psychiatric experiments which were executed precisely *por el bien de la patria*.

The Civil War did not conclude on April 1, 1939. If that had occurred, the war would have ended when Francisco Franco took power. But Franco and his partisans had more ambitious plans. Since theirs was a 'movimiento depurador del pueblo español' their objective was to clean the country of all of those that believed in and formed part of the Second Republic's democratic projects. 'Hemos tenido cojones de ganar la guerra y ahora los tendremos para hacer una limpia en el pueblo,' (quoted in Casanova), said the mayor of Villarta de los Montes before killing twenty-three people without a war tribunal or any kind of legal apparatus: the time of victory - and not the time of peace - had arrived in Spain. In my view, part of the cleansing of the Spanish nation was achieved by means of what René Girard called 'the sacrificial substitution' (1981: 5). Followers of the Francoist institutional system, and believers in its ideology, exercised continuously over the children of republicans all the violence that had been exercised previously over the defeated. In this sacrificial substitution, the violence of the sacred entered the space of the symbolic erasing, in this way, a clear distinction between the sacred and the secular.

The Francoist regime would claim it gave exclusive and positive treatment to Republican children. In one case the Falangist journal, *Redención*, informed of the inauguration of an 'un albergue infantil en la cárcel de Ventas' frequently boasted that 'la España de Franco protege y educa a los niños, esperanza de una nueva España' (*Els nens perduts*, 2006). However, in the prison for mothers in San Isidro, a completely different regime –one that coincided with Vallejo Nájera's ideas of separating mothers and offspring– was established by a director christened 'La Topete' by the inmates. The children, as Juana Doña recounts, were left for hours 'a la intemperie lloviera o

hiciera sol. Las madres no podían acercárseles. Cuando comían y vomitaban, les volvían a dar la misma comida que habían vomitado.' And she later adds that 'todas las crueldades se pueden hacer con los niños y 'La Topete' hizo todas las crueldades que pudo' (*Els nens perduts*, 2006). *Els nens perduts del franquisme*, portrays the children of Republicans as what I would call children of Cain, who were unable to erase their parents' mark and unable to escape from a place where violence and brutality were bred in the bone. The reality was that, for the regime, the children had to expiate their parent's sins. They were repeatedly told that they too were irredeemable; and, as such, they were frequently segregated in state institutions and mistreated both physically and mentally.

Soledad Real, a Catalan prisoner, lucidly points out that 'les mares tenien por [...] de que seus nanos les perdessin; perquè una cosa sabien, una cosa sí sabien i n'eren molt conscients: de que si no els perdien físicament, moralment els perdien, que poguessin ser un futur enemic del que havia sigut la vida dels pares.' (*Els nens perduts*, 2006) By separating children from their mothers, the Falangists intended to disrupt the Republican political tradition. The vanished children (*els nens perduts*) were removed both from their republican parents and from the body politic. Hence, the loss was multiple: it constituted a loss for the family and the loss of their political project and its promise, all of which, as Soledad Real says, represented the loss of the possibility for a future, since these children would become potential enemies of what their parents believed in and struggled for.

In the biblical legend Abel's race is the one received by God because he accepted Abels' offerings; Cain's race, on the contrary, is the one that was dispossessed and disinherited, suffering the violence of war, hunger, and punishment. In the documentary, both the biblical Cain and Cain's race are considered not as children of heaven but as children of the world. The emphasis on the biblical influence in the violence done to these children and women is extremely important for, as I have been arguing, a sharp division between the pre-modern sacred worldview and the modern secular one was never established in this regime. Quite the contrary: sacred categories of thought were constantly intermingled with the regimes' violence and rationality. In fact, the Francoist regime proclaimed itself as the sacred connection

that would unite all the people, the religion that would allow the Spanish people to carry on the myth of national union.

In this sense, Abel's race could be identified with Francoism and Catholicism while Cain's race was all the vanquished and vanished, for whom the dictatorship shattered not only their civil rights but also the rights of narrating their story. Memory in this documentary is a challenge, in the present, to the hegemonic political discourse created at the time in which these atrocities were committed.[7]

[7] According to some scholars, early interpretations of the Bible in Syriac Christianity combined the 'curse' with the 'mark,' and interpreted the 'curse of Cain' as having black skin. Relying on rabbinic texts, it is argued, the Syriacs interpreted the following passage in the book of Genesis ('And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell' Gen. 4:5) as implying that Cain experienced a permanent change in skin color. For Ephrem the Syrian (306-78): 'Abel was bright as the light,/but the murderer was dark as the darkness.' (qtd. in Golam Mowla 2008: 5). Also, according to Anne Catherine Emmerich, 'Cain's posterity gradually became colored. Ham's children also were browner than those of Shem. The nobler races were always of a lighter color. They who were distinguished by a particular mark engendered children of the same stamp; and as corruption increased, the mark also increased until at last it covered the whole body, and people became darker and darker. But yet in the beginning there were no people perfectly black; they became so only by degrees.' (qtd. in Golam Mowla 2008: 6). Among American Protestant groups, 'the curse of Cain' was also used as a justification for slavery United States. See, Regina M. Schwartz's *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism.* Illinois: Chicago University Press, 1997; David M. Goldenberg's 'The Curse of Cain,' in *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2003; and Khondakar Golam Mowla. *The Judgment Against Imperialism, Fascism and Racism Against Caliphathe and Islam*. Vol. 2. Indiana: AuthorHouse, 2008.

The Knowledge of the Wound

The stories of these Republican women create interstices in the univocal and constant narrative of goodness that the images of the Francoist propaganda construct. From these interstices an open wound comes into view. It is, as Víctor Erice puts it in his article, 'The Dead' (2003), 'that open wound in the body of fiction, through which History flows.' The wound disrupting and disordering such a narrative of goodness is memory, and the justice it claims. And this wound has knowledge. It is the knowledge of the accumulated pain, of time and death, of losses, of what has been disseminated and, thus, cannot be quantified at all. It can be acknowledged, however, since such a wound constitutes an instance of reckoning with the past and the present. Their stories bestow the images of Francoist propaganda with a different meaning. But how does meaning enter into images? Meanings, as Joan Ramon Resina noticed, 'enter into images by importing time, consciousness, and history into their formal patterns. And perhaps guilt as well, the weight of culturally accumulated pain' (2003:15). Images, thus, are never univocal, all images are, on the contrary polysemous.[8]

Other striking instances in the collage of images that creates an aesthetics of the ominous in the documentary include Teresa Martin's story of the woman branded on her breast with 'el yugo y las flechas';[9] the story of the child that was killed by officials of the regime because his name was Lenin; the experience of torture narrated by Petra Cueva; and María Villanueva's poem entitled 'El tren de los heridos.' All of these are juxtaposed with Tomasa Cuevas's sinister song –a mix of disturbingly sarcastic lyrics with a ludic musicality –

[8] For an ample discussion on Roland Barthes's 'Rhetoric of the Image,' see Joan Ramon Resina's 'The Concept of the After-Images and the Scopic Apprehension of the City,' in *After Images of the City*, Ed. Joan Ramon Resina and Dieter Igenschay (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

[9] She recounts: 'Recuerdo que la vecina de enfrente de casa le enseñó a mi madre el pecho; con el pecho izquierdo marcado a fuego con el yugo y las flechas. Perfectamente marcado en morado. Eso si que no se me olvida, es una imagen que tengo grabada. '

about the Ventas prison.[10] In Villanueva's poem, the train is a destructive element; it is the engine of death, as it carries her and her child to a place where they are fated to die:

> Detened este tren agonizante
> Que nunca acaba de cruzar la noche
> Y se quedó, cuando tu hija, casi un bebé
> Con sólo el calor de tus brazos
> Y rodeada por las frías rejas de la intransigencia
> Murió de inanición.

The train, a miracle of man's handiwork, has become an agonizing vehicle that never stops crossing the night. This vehicle not only destroyed Maria's daughter's life but also the Republicans' life in favor of a brutal regime that lasted for so many years. It is a train that carries the afflicted, those wounded both physically and spiritually. María had constructed her fate, but the train of the wounded goes along on its fixed path to death and intransigence. She also suffered the loss of a political project that gave direction into the future. The train in her poem is time and the future is in the past. As María finishes reading her poem, the lonely whistle of a departing train wails, producing in the spectator that sense of the frightening which leads back to what is known of the old and long familiar.

Walter Benjamin's and Siegfried Kracauer's words seem appropriate here for their phenomenological understanding of film and its relationship with the spectator's corporeality. In 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,' Benjamin speaks of cinematic intelligibility in terms of 'tactile appropriation' (1969: 240) and, in the essay 'On the Mimetic Faculty,' he refers to the spectator's 'mimetic faculty' as a sensuous and bodily form of perception (1986:

[10] These are the lyrics to Tomasa Cuevas's disturbing song: 'Cárcel de Ventas, hotel maravilloso/Donde se come feliz y a to' confort/Donde no hay ni cama ni reposo/En el infierno se está mucho mejor/Hay cola atroz en los retretes/Vivo cemento dan por pan/Lentejas único alimento/Un plato al día te darán.'

333-336). Kracauer located the uniqueness of cinema in its essential ability to move us physiologically and sensually; hence, he understood the spectator as a 'corporeal-material being' and noted that 'the material elements that present themselves in film directly stimulate the material layers of the human being: his nerves, his senses, his entire physiological substance' (1960: 458). The sensual experience of the uncanny in the spectator's body undoes the clear demarcation between the spectator's externality and internality regarding the documentary narratives; and the carnal sensuality of the film experience also constitutes the meaning of the uncanny in *Els nens perduts*. In my view, such an understanding of film has a linkage with our response to the pain of others, and with the ways in which documentary images represent and materialize pain and suffering, since the structuring of images in *Els nens perduts* not only affects us but also provides us with an understanding of what we see.

Petra Cuevas's story of her encounter with torture conveys two of the main forces –the physical and the verbal– by which this act is sustained.

> Como no hablaba, por supuesto, te pegan y te preguntan, si no dices nada pues ellos se inventan otra cosa. Entonces me enchufaron a la corriente eléctrica. Me quemaron la mano, los dedos y la muñeca […] Uno que fue alcalde de Madrid…, ¡Arias Navarro!, fue a ver cómo me hacían declarar y cuando entró le dijo el policía 'mira esta cabrona no habla.' Entonces me enchufaron. Y dijo él [Arias Navarro] Ya verás como sí habla porque delante de éste hablan hasta los muertos, era Franco claro [la fotografía de Franco]. Y dije yo: 'yo ya estoy muerta y como estoy muerta ya no voy a hablar.'

Herein lies the problem with torture under the mantle of reason of state: I refer, of course, to the defactualization that it often brings about. In this case, it is entangled with the murky epistemology that characterizes it as an act: a murkiness inevitably created by means of the inversion of perspectives that sustains it. Elaine Scarry has captured this aspect of torture when she discusses how torture is primarily both a physical and a verbal act: physical, because it seeks to inflict pain, and verbal, because interrogation is its leitmotif; and the process is usually broken down in terms of a question and an

answer (1987: 35). But this verbal process is immediately overturned by the fact that the question becomes a justification for the act of torture, 'a motive'; meanwhile, the answer –that sometimes never comes– becomes 'a betrayal.'

This inversion of perspectives creates an ensuing murkiness in the normal meanings of words and things, one that becomes even more obscure when the tortured is increasingly less of a speaker and more of a body, while the torturer goes through the inverse process. Petra Cueva's story shows the effects of torture in the destruction of her world; it shows the destruction of her worldliness when she says: 'since I'm already dead, I won't speak.' Her story tells that whoever makes contact with torture seems to be unable to come out of this encounter and its 'ominousity' untarnished, since both –torture and the uncanny– are experiences that simultaneously escape language, and are thus intimately bound to its structure. Torture not only malformed language, but also it leaves on the body the trace of a trace. It leaves on the body the traces of the traumatic past, which in the present is physically embodied by the women themselves. Although we do not see actual images of torture reenacted on screen, the presence of that form of violence and brutality appears again and permeates the documentary through signs of war trauma and of interiorized scars, like the women's voices, gazes and expressions of despair.

And yet, Republican women and lost children claim the dignity of memory since, as Carles Feixa and Carme Agustí have observed, when the human being is dispossessed of everything, when the control of one's space and time is lost and one sees oneself reduced to indignity, the only thing that remains is the dignity of memory (200). 'Memory', Richard Terdiman affirms, 'is the name we give to the faculty that sustains continuity in collective and individual experience' (1993: 8). Recollection brings to our present the injustices of the past, and herein lie its political connotations. These injustices, however, have been hidden by modern discourses of legality (such as amnesty and forgiveness), as happened in Spain's transition to democracy (1975-82). And yet memory insists on bringing out the specters of the past, and the aesthetics of the ominous gains political connotations as the very condition of continuous haunting.

Cristina Moreiras Menor brings to light the line of continuity between the past and the present when she remarks that Spain's contemporary reality, 'está constituida sobre las ruinas precisamente de unos fantasmas que siguen vivos y sin enterrar: esos espectros del pasado cuya presencia de alguna manera imposibilitan tanto la total clausura con la anterioridad democrática como la libertad de mirar hacia un futuro esperanzador' (2002: 17). What is more, the words of one of the lost children of Francoism –a woman who is around seventy years old today, and spent most of her childhood in foster homes– are strikingly lucid to the spectator: 'Perdón no, pero cambiar la justicia sí. El perdón ya no me da mi nombre, el perdón no me dice cuantos años tengo, el perdón no me quita setenta años de injusticia que he pasado pero, sin embargo, que las cosas cambien, sí.'

These women not only show the knowledge of the wound. They are a special kind of vanquished: those that never gave up, that have decided to persist and defend their convictions. The stories of the children of Francoism in *Els nens perduts* produce a narrative discourse created by the contrast of these words: defeat, disgrace, resistance, compromise, failure, and antiheroic triumph. It is worth noting that, at a time when the category of political prisoner was not conferred upon females, these Republican women had a strong will to resist and oppose Francoism and actively opposed their de-politization regardless of the pain and atrocities suffered. For them the Falangists were not victors, but rather perpetrators. Their shared political views from the past allowed them to share a conviction of the need to remember and to do justice in the present.

Then, do we need to bury the ghosts that still haunt us? What might the ghosts need? I would like to recall what are perhaps the most poetic and profound words enunciated by a ghost of the Spanish and Latin American film history, Professor Cañizares' speech, at the beginning and the end of Guillermo del Toro's *The Devil's Backbone*:

> ¿Qué es un fantasma? Un evento terrible, condenado a repetirse una y otra vez. Un instante de dolor, quizá. Algo muerto, que por momentos parece vivo aún. Un sentimiento suspendido en el tiempo. Como una fotografía borrosa. Como un insecto atrapado en ámbar.

The character's words reveal the spectre's ontology: a terrible event being condemned to repeat itself, an instant of pain, something dead that at times seems alive, a feeling of being suspended in time. The way the character describes himself as a ghost exemplifies what Jacques Derrida termed 'the ghost's paradoxical phenomenality […] this non-present present, this being-there of an absent' (1994: 60). The spectre is 'something in between a person and something else, something unnameable' (1994: 60). What, then, should we do with that terrible event, with that pain, with time? What should we do with the ghost's ontology, with its continuous haunting?

Ghosts will haunt us at least until we recognize them as such and deal with them face to face. Should we turn our gaze backwards more frequently in an attempt to examine and to assess where we are in the course of time and what we have done with the ghosts of the past? Shall we confer them with the voices they have lost? As Teresa Martín reminds us at the end of the documentary, 'Muchas cosas *han desaparecido*, pero cuando alguien quiere que la memoria perdure… la memoria está ahí, no se tiene más que preguntar…yo estoy hablando. Tengo sesenta y dos años, es la primera vez que hablo, es la primavera vez que me preguntan.' (Author's emphasis) And yet, we must also grant them their narrative space. Indeed, a plurality of voices and narratives is opposed to the monumental narrative of the myth of the nation and national unity that characterized Francoism. Unfortunately, the plurality, more often than not, is sacrificed when the future of national unity is at risk.

In *Els nens perduts*, nonetheless, the promiscuity of images allows for leaks. And this seepage pertains to an aesthetic field –the field of the ominous– that is not contained in the official narrative of power; and thus, by refusing to remain in the context of this narrative, these leaks are disruptive. Better still, they disturb such a narrative. As Lesley Stern has suggested, 'cinema could bring into focus the unseen or previously unseeable, […] could make things appear and disappear, could conjure ghosts, could mutilate, multiply and reconstitute bodies –could mess with time and matter' (1997: 357). The promiscuity of images allows us to become aware –reclaiming once more Víctor Erice's words in the epigraph of these pages– 'of those familiar phantoms, composed, reconstructed, and scrutinized by an implacable

camera, through which run the traces of a process of knowledge' since images intensify experience by illuminating realities that otherwise would not be perceived.

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