



Carmen Palenzuela. *Naturaleza Domada*

## PRELIMINARY WORDS

When the editor of *Verbeia* invited me to prepare a new monograph for this Journal I immediately thought about nostalgia. The rate at which our planet is transforming and the constant changes that ecologists, oceanographers, zoologists, environmental analysts, climatologists etc. tell us about, are of great consequence to experts and also to everyday people. However, in reality, as Alastair Bonnett states in his book, *The Geography of Nostalgia*, the limit of our nostalgia is not only our planet but also the entire universe:

*The scales of nostalgia do not stop at the earth. Nostalgia is able to fling itself forward to encompass not just our planet but literally everything. Perhaps the grandest scale where this currently occurs arises from the thesis offered by many astrophysicists that the universe will continue to expand until it becomes cold and lifeless. One day there will be no more life anywhere. (10)*

Probably the drama that this change implies is the reason why so many people negate global warming and its collateral effects. But whether we like it or not, our world is changing on a scale never seen before, and just the thought of it releases a deep nostalgia. The consideration that “humans have built, done and dreamed will come to nothing surely produces a nostalgia for existence itself, not just human existence but existence as such”, affirms Bonnet (10).

All of a sudden, when I was meditating on Bonnet’s words and thinking about the possible topics for this volume, news from China began to reach the Western world. There was one more concern to worry about, a virus born either naturally or artificially in the East was quickly spreading over the whole world. In a matter of days, universities, schools, churches and, in general, all types of meeting places were closed. Suddenly, we all were very much aware of the fragility and vulnerability of our own lives and the lives of those we love. Confinement was imposed almost globally and since then everything became more difficult than ever: we had to learn to teach and work online, to do physical exercise at home, we were able to speak only on the phone with those we love, etc. Very soon our fragility became blatant and even some of the people who have contributed to this publication, either lost family members or had to take care of the ones who were sick

Unexpectedly nostalgia invaded our own lives and we started to long for what we had been able to do only days before our confinement.

The original idea for the monograph was to present loss and nostalgia from different perspectives, therefore, I decided to invite specialists from fields such as philosophy, architecture, semiotics, literature and cinema, to offer their insights on the topic. The fact that the present pandemia affected all spheres of our lives helped me reaffirm this previous notion. In fact, nostalgia encompasses all our lives and it explains many of the decisions we make every day. In the present pandemia we have all lost something or somebody, either people we loved, our job, friends, time, projects we had. As Alastair Bonnett explains, “To recognise the enormous power of loss in the modern world is to seek to understand the role of nostalgia both in our lives and in the lives of others (1).

The first article of the monograph, “Wielding your own perdition” has been written by Ignacio Castro Rey, philosopher, writer and editor. Castro affirms that the key to resist the thunderous weight of history is to put one foot, at least one, in the timeless power that comes from our origins, both individual and common. Moreover, this is the only way to convert the inevitable losses that the passing of time imposes, into a single statement. According to the author, the resistance to adapt socially, as we are pressured to do so on all sides, demands to convert into *character* the vertiginous finitude that constitutes the heart of the human being. To exist as one *is*, means to inhabit a time *inside* history, a constellation where the past and the future become one, playing down the chronology that is imposed on us from the outside, and where the concept of nostalgia appears to be present. The ethical and aesthetical task of the human being is, in this sense, to build our own shelter and environment. For this, it is inevitable to use the material that fear and loss, to which we were born, was given to us. A woman, a man, who does not look directly at their irremediable way of being, the traumatic original scene from where each ones' existence comes from, will not have any grounds from which to exercise *strength*. In this case, they will effectively be lost, because they have abandoned the only tool with the capacity to resist the power of history that, yesterday and today, continues to be implacable.

Carlos Lacalle, architect and professor is the author of the second article, “Framing the disordered landscape. On reading Robert Smithson: architecture as eological construction”. In this article, Lacalle covers the career of the artist Robert Smithson (1938-1973), whose view of the landscape through fragmentation becomes contemporary. According to the author of the article, when reading Smithson's work you will find instant

photographs captured by the artist who considered them to be *ruins in reverse*, and that, together with the work of the poet William Carlos Williams, allowed him to reflect about the concepts of *absence and loss*. In order to do this, Lacalle analyses a series of his “fragments” works that are very closely related to each other, and he tries to place himself in the *construction* as a whole, where the fragment reveals “what is missing”. In this way, from poetry and landscape, Lacalle applies reflection to the *architecture*, understood here as a space “under construction” or a *ruin under construction*. Lacalle, whose research work revolves around the idea of “architecture as an artwork”, pays particular attention to relationships and interdisciplinary influences among disciplines.

In “Landscapes of Time”, professor Asunción López Varela emphasises the aural sensation for remembrance. In her own words, the aim of her paper is “to show that, beyond the experiences of longing and belonging, nostalgia is very much grounded in human neurophysiology”. López Varela alludes to the individual experiences of each person during the confinement caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, during which many of us have spent more time than usual behind window panes. Thus, by focusing on aural aspects of hypertextual telling, her paper, in López Varela words, “seeks to outline how quotidian sounds may contribute to our sense of place and memory, developing some insights on the theme of ‘landscapes of loss’”. To prove her thesis López Varela makes use of Katherine Norman’s project *Window* (for John Cage). John Cage was a composer, writer, philosopher and visual artist interested in the potential of ambient sound and Katherine Norman’s project explores the dialogue between location and time experienced from a window. The article reflects on the importance of sound and everyday noise as temporal experiences that contribute to our sense of place and memory. Norman developed some insights on the theme of “landscapes of loss” while arguing at the same time, that our neurophysiology contains, in fact, the seeds of nostalgia.

The article written by professor Ana M. Martín Castillejos proposes the study of the ‘weight of the past’ and the importance of the nostalgic sentiments that were authentic motors for the work of two women who, although apparently very different, had surprising similarities. They were the artist Louise Bourgeois (1911-2010) and the writer Sylvia Plath (1932-1963). The recreation of difficult moments in the life of Bourgeois is key to understand the major part of her work, including her famous “Cells”. In reality, the artist constantly needed to evoke her past to make sense of her present. In the case of Sylvia Plath, the death of her father and the subsequent breakdown of her own marriage, are translated into poems that are amongst some of the finest of her literary production. In

them, there is a clear evolution towards abstraction so that, whilst in her earlier verses we see a naturalistic description of the landscapes that surround her at the end of her life, her poems are a description of her own mental landscape (which Portuou classifies as “Innscapes”), where the sentiment of loss and death floods everything (Martín Castillejos 132). Finally, there is also a claim in the article that the feeling of loss is a powerful and creative tool that invites action. In this sense, reference is made to Alastair Bonnett’s point of view about the importance of recognising the feeling of nostalgia and about the real tangible existence of the natural world that surrounds us and which many ecocides deny.

Juan Orellana Gutiérrez de Terán, professor and film expert, presents an article in which he studies the father figure through a selective study of cases. In the end he arrives at the conclusion that contemporary cinema re-evaluates its existence, or at least independent cinema does so. The father figure had experienced a profound devaluation, to such a point that its striking absence was noticed in numerous films, and it was at the beginning of this century that a paternity death certificate was drawn up. As the article shows, the return or ‘restoration’ of the father does not consist in the return of the fatherhood model from classical cinema, but it rather suggests a different fatherhood figure with new characteristics. The films Orellana tells us about do not present an idealised father, the embodiment of domestic virtues and surrounded by a halo of unattainable authority. On the contrary, they offer us incomplete and hurt father figures, but at the same time enormously accessible and affectionately involved in the lives of their children. After the “expulsion” of the father that began in May 1968 there is a nostalgia for a father figure that leads us to understand that his return is allowed in films, although only after a personal reworking of his physiognomy.

Finally, I would also like to thank all contributors, not only the colleagues who kindly replied to my offer to write an article about landscapes of loss, but also my life long friend Carmen Palenzuela for her beautiful painting on the book’s front page that tells us about nostalgia in such an evocative way. The painting used to belong to her sister who died from COVID-19 earlier this year (2020). At the same time, I want to thank the writer and photographer Alberto de la Rocha, whose black and white pictures are so inspirational. He read our articles and tried to illustrate nostalgia and loss for every one of them. Being an award-winning writer himself, I truly thank him for the time spent thinking about this volume, a collective effort amid difficult times that has seen the light despite so many drawbacks. Last but not least, I would like to thank Karen Kukil, curator of Plath papers at Smith College (Northampton, Boston) as she helped me get a grant to stay in Smith College

last Spring Semester doing research even if the COVID-19 allowed me to be there only for a short period of time. I would also like to thank her generosity in editing my article in relation to Sylvia Plath's details.

To those who, like William Chaloupka and R. McGregor think that nature is just a mere construct, I invite them to read between the lines of the articles included in the present publication and see how tangible and inspirational nature is for different artists and thinkers. I also invite you to take nature as seriously as possible since we, human beings, depend on it. While preparing this monograph I came across asseverations like "[N]ature, like everything else we talk about, is first and foremost an artefact of language" (William Chaloupka and R. McGregor Cawley 5), "[O]ur true environment is the universe of communication" (Jean Baudrillard 200), or "Postmodernism is what you have when the modernization process is complete and nature is gone for good. It is a more fully human world than the older one, but one in which 'culture' has become a veritable second nature" (Frederick Jameson IX).

After reading those declarations I truly believe that the umbilical cord between human beings and nature seems to have been definitely cut. In many cases, our children cannot even recognise the most commonplace animals and plants. More and more people live in cities without hardly any contact with mother nature, although the nostalgia we feel for the "landscapes" of our lives, either real or symbolic is still there.

The fact that some authors consider nature as a product of thought and as something unreal can have fatal consequences. Somehow, the notion that nature is socially constructed and that it is an artefact of language has become accepted in the academic debate but, as David Kidner explains, "The intellectual dismemberment of reality is often a precursor to and a legitimation of its physical destruction, and academics as well as logging companies have contributed to the degradation of the natural world" (348). The present pandemia is just one of the side effects of this degradation. Many moments lived during the COVID-19 will remain forever in our memory. Visual memories and also aural ones such as online demonstrations, applauses addressed to health workers, choral balcony singing, anti-government casserole protests, etc., etc. are all part of the "Landscape of Loss" that the whole world lived in 2020. According to Jeremy Davies nostalgia looks to the past in order to imagine a liveable home in the future (265). It is our future so let us welcome nostalgia.

**BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

**Baudrillard**, Jean. *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, St. Louis: Telos Press, 1981, p. 200.

**Bonnett**, Alastair. *The Geography of Nostalgia: Global and Local Perspectives on Modernity and Loss*. London: Routledge, 2016. Kindle edition.

**Chaloupka**, William. and **Cawley**, R. McGregor. 'The great wild hope: nature, environmentalism, and the open secret', in J. Bennett and W. Chaloupka (Eds), *The Nature of Things: Language, Politics, and the Environment*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993, pp. 3-23.

**Davies**, Jeremy. 'Sustainable nostalgia', in *Memory Studies*, SAGE JOURNALS, 3, 3, 2010, pp. 262-268.

**Jameson**, Fredric. *Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1991, p. ix.

**Kidner**, David. 'Fabricating nature: A critique of the social construction of nature', in *Environmental Ethics*, 22, 4, 2000, pp. 339-357.

**Martín Castillejos**, Ana María. "Naturaleza Versus Individuo en la Obra Poética de Sylvia Plath", *ODISEA*, Revista de Estudios Ingleses de la Universidad de Almería, No. 2, 2002, pp. 119-135.

**Porteous**, J. Douglas. *Landscapes of the Mind. Worlds of Sense and Metaphors*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990.