

MONOGRÁFICO 4. 2020

ISSN 2531-159X

VERBEIA

VERBEIA

VERBEIA

VERBEIA

VERBEIA

JOURNAL OF ENGLISH AND SPANISH
STUDIES

REVISTA DE ESTUDIOS FILOLÓGICOS

MONOGRÁFICO

LANDSCAPES OF LOSS

PAISAJES DE PÉRDIDA Y NOSTALGIA



FACULTAD DE EDUCACIÓN

COMITÉ EDITORIAL. EDITORIAL BOARD

Editora

Editor

Sonia Sánchez Martínez

(Universidad Camilo José Cela)

Editora adjunta. Sección Lingüística

Co-editor. Linguistics

Cristina Calle-Martínez

(Universidad Complutense de Madrid)

Editor adjunto. Sección Literatura

Co-editor. Literature

Emilio Cañadas Rodríguez

(Universidad Camilo José Cela)

Secretaria

Secretary

Isabel Morales Jareño

(Universidad Camilo José Cela)

Consejo Editorial

Editorial Board

Brendan de Bordóns O'Mongain

(Universidad Autónoma de Madrid)

María Guadalupe Dorado Escribano

(Universidad Camilo José Cela)

Ana M. Martín Castillejos

(Universidad Politécnica de Madrid)

M^a Dolores Moreno García

(Grupo de Investigación GRIMM. UCJC)

M^a Jesús Perea Villena

(Universidad Camilo José Cela)

Natalia Rodríguez Nieto

(UNED)

Gustavo Sánchez Canales

(Universidad Autónoma de Madrid)

Decana de la Facultad de Educación

Carmen Sánchez Ovcharov

ISSN 2531-159X

Verbeia®

Journal of English and Spanish Studies

Revista de Estudios Filológicos

Monográfico AÑO IV. NÚMERO 4

OCTUBRE 2020

Lugar de edición:

UNIVERSIDAD CAMILO JOSÉ CELA

Facultad de Educación

Urb. Villafranca del Castillo

Calle Castillo de Alarcón, 49

28692 Villanueva de la Cañada

Madrid

editoraverbeia@ucjc.edu

linguisticaverbeia@ucjc.edu

literaturaverbeia@ucjc.edu

secretariaverbeia@ucjc.edu

<https://journals.ucjc.edu/VREF/>

MONOGRÁFICO 4

LANDSCAPES OF LOSS PAISAJES DE PÉRDIDA Y NOSTALGIA

EDITORIA

Ana M. Martín Castillejos

COLABORADORES

Ignacio Castro Rey

Carlos Lacalle García

Asunción López Varela-Azcárate

Juan Orellana Gutiérrez de Terán

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ÍNDICE

LANDSCAPES OF LOSS

PAISAJES DE PÉRDIDA Y NOSTALGIA

Preliminary Words

Ana M. Martín Castillejos.....5

Wielding Your Own Perdition. Empuñar la Perdición

Ignacio Castro Rey.....12

Framing the Disordered Landscape. On Reading Robert Smithson: *Architecture as Eological Construction*. El Encuadre del Paisaje Desordenado. Leyendo a Robert Smithson: *Arquitectura como Construcción Eológica*

Carlos Lacalle García.....31

Paisajes de Tiempo: Ventanas al Mundo. Landscapes of Time: Windows to the World

Asunción López-Varela Azcárate.....52

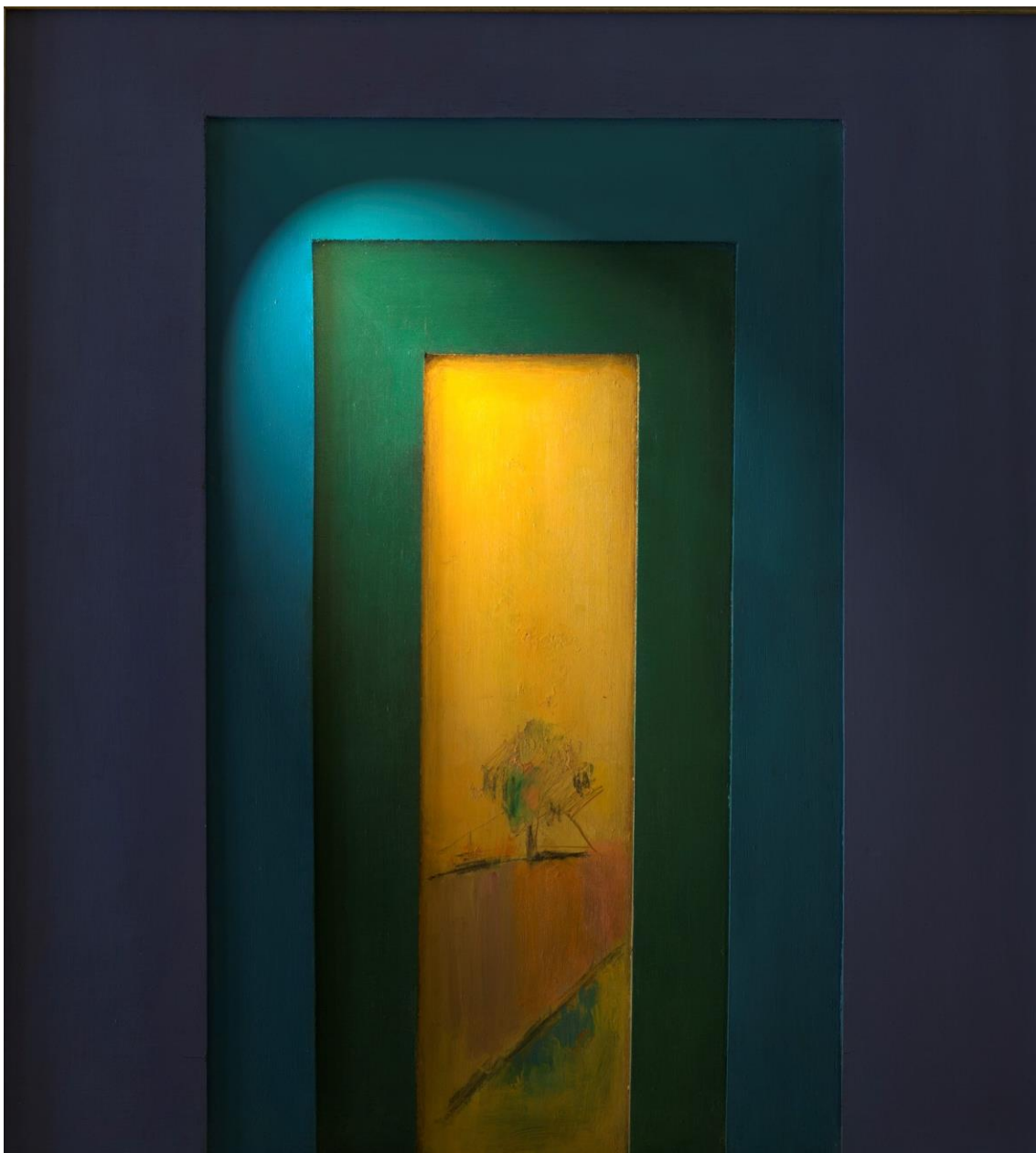
Past, Loss and Nostalgia in Louise Bourgeois' and Sylvia Plath's Oeuvre. Pasado, Pérdida y Nostalgia en la Obra de Louise Bourgeois y Sylvia Plath

Ana M. Martín Castillejos.....64

The Absence of the Father in Contemporary Independent Cinema. La Ausencia del Padre en el Cine Independiente Contemporáneo

Juan Orellana Gutiérrez de Terán.....84

Contributors..... 99



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 pandemic 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 pandemic 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 Portuoso 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 ecocritics 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.



Alberto de la Rocha

Wielding Your Own Perdition

Empuñar la Perdición

Ignacio Castro Rey
Philosopher, writer, editor
eyeless@ignaciocastrorey.com

Resumen

La clave para resistir el peso atonador de la historia es poner un pie en la potencia *atemporal* que siempre está en el origen, de un individuo y de un pueblo. Al menos desde Nietzsche, que recoge ecos estoicos, una especie de *subversión por aceptación* es una de las obsesiones del pensamiento. El ser humano es libre cuando se hace cargo del destino fatal que le habita, una verdad que jamás será traducible a la voluntad pública del saber. Es significativo que sea cierta *potencia femenina*, de Simone Weil a Clarice Lispector, la que ha marcado una senda difícil para algunos varones. Aquellos que la han recorrido, de Benjamin a Agamben, han pensado y resistido al precio de escuchar un haz de tiniebla, una pérdida originaria, para la que la mujer siempre ha tenido mejor *oído*. Y más acerada la retina.

Palabras clave: atemporal, destino, potencia femenina, subversión por aceptación.

Abstract

The key to resisting the thunderous weight of history is to set foot in the *timeless* power that is always at the origin of an individual and of a people. At least since Nietzsche, who gathers Stoic echoes, one of the obsessions of thought is a kind of *subversion by acceptance*. Human beings are free when they take charge of the fatal destiny that inhabits them, a truth that will never be translatable to the public will of knowledge. Significantly, it is a certain *female potency*, from Simone Weil to Clarice Lispector, that has set a difficult path for some men. Those who have travelled it, from Benjamin to Agamben, have thought and resisted at the price of listening to a beam of darkness, an original loss, for which women have always had a better ear. And a steelier retina.

Keywords: timeless, destiny, feminine potency, subversion by acceptance.

Renunciar tiene que ser una elección. Desistir es la elección más sagrada de una vida. Desistir es el verdadero instante humano. Y solo ésta es la gloria propia de mi condición. La renuncia es una revelación. (Clarice Lispector 151)

1

No lejos del mundo paleocristiano del mejor Pasolini, con una delicadeza y un lujo de detalles que a veces encogen el corazón, Paul Virilio establece en *Estética de la desaparición* un estrecho vínculo entre la pérdida de la conciencia, una crisis de *ausencia* que se asociaba a la enfermedad sagrada de la epilepsia, y la percepción extrasensorial que solamente los seres frágiles, melancólicos y perdidos son capaces de tener. El libro de Virilio tiene otros registros, también el referido a la velocidad de la vida moderna como estrategia para *desaparecer* y no ser tocado por ningún paisaje. No obstante, las páginas que le dedica a las apariciones que suceden ante los chicos pobres, enclenques y un poco atolondrados, esos adolescentes abandonados por el éxito social en distintos siglos, son inolvidables (Virilio 41-43). En realidad, Virilio desarrolla en esas páginas una antigua leyenda que ha recorrido distintas culturas, del budismo al cristianismo. Según ella, la verdad pertenece a los elegidos por la desdicha, los seres vulnerables que nunca acaban de salir de la desgracia. Bastantes años antes Simone Weil se quejaba también del misterio que representa en este mundo el tormento de los inocentes (51). Pero también tenemos razones para pensar que si, por un milagro, hubiera algo de justicia en este mundo, tendría que ver con una dialéctica secreta que se establece entre el sufrimiento y la sabiduría, entre las pérdidas y la fortaleza; entre la angustia sentida en el cuerpo y la audacia de las visiones con las que una mente se sueña y se libera.

2

Es así en los paisajes de tristeza helada de Edgar Allan Poe o Georg Trakl. Sin embargo, no siempre la geografía de la nostalgia, la senda de los pasos perdidos, está ligada a las lágrimas o a una tristeza desfalleciente. Existe también, hermanada al paisaje antropológico de la pérdida, una *mala salud de hierro*. A veces los parajes del espíritu, cierta fortaleza de ánimo y un reguero de delicada orfebrería pertenecen a quienes

mantienen una relación solidaria con la pérdida, incluso con la angustia. Femenina y masculina, existe una intrínseca fortaleza en quien se niega a olvidar la fragilidad de la especie. No es casual que en uno de los libros señeros de la filosofía del pasado siglo, *El ser y el tiempo*, se llegue a afirmar que la angustia está más presente en el humano que pisa fuerte en el mundo, en quien se atreve a la libertad de "elegirse y empuñarse a sí mismo", que en el que se pasa la vida quejándose (Heidegger 208). Y "empuñar" (*ergreifen*), precisamente lo más inane del corazón, es una palabra que Heidegger emplea mucho para hablar de una reversión *desde dentro* de las pérdidas; reversión de la angustia en resolución, en fortaleza. Una y otra vez, ha resonado una promesa: solo quien se pierda logrará encontrarse a sí mismo. Un "sí mismo" que entonces tiene, con frecuencia sobre un cuerpo endeble, la anchura de un nuevo mundo.

No solo en *El ser y el tiempo*, concretamente en la página 210 de la edición citada, Heidegger relaciona esta experiencia *afirmativa* de la angustia con la teología cristiana. Fijémonos incluso en que el colmo de todas las pérdidas, la experiencia radical de la *falta*, de un *real* que es para el hombre *imposible*, aparece relacionada en Lacan, un sabio vinculado excesivamente al "retorno a Freud", al pensamiento más audaz que el hombre pueda tener sobre la consistencia del mundo. A pesar del sectarismo de tantas escuelas que viven a su costa, se puede decir que una de las ventajas del gesto *antifilosófico* de Lacan es resucitar una filosofía olvidada por la tradición dialéctica o racionalista que entonces imperaba en el continente. En *La angustia*, Lacan afirma:

Un objeto oculto está en el origen de la fe otorgada al primer motor de Aristóteles, que hace un momento he considerado sordo y ciego a aquello que lo causa. La certeza que acompaña a lo que llamaré prueba esencialista que no solo está en San Anselmo, porque la encontrarán ustedes igualmente en Descartes, basada en la perfección objetiva de la idea para fundar con ella la existencia de esta última, esa certeza, tan discutible y siempre sujeta a la irrisión, precaria e irrisoria a la vez, si se mantiene a pesar de toda crítica, si siempre nos vemos llevados, por el camino que sea, a volver a ella, es porque es la sombra de otra certeza, y esta certeza la he llamado aquí por su nombre, es la angustia... les he dicho que es preciso definirla como aquello que no engaña, precisamente en la medida en que todo objeto se le escapa... ¿Qué implica esto? Seguramente el cuestionamiento más radical que jamás se haya articulado en nuestra filosofía occidental de la función del conocimiento ("Kant con Sade" 731).

Exiliados de una regalada fortaleza diurna, de la espontaneidad de la dicha, una fragilidad armada y temible parece ser el patrimonio de algunos elegidos. Como si el dios de los parias les donase en visiones lo que les hurta en abundancia, en riqueza, seguridad o

imagen pública. Pongamos provisionalmente como hipótesis, para ver qué resulta de ella, la idea de que la *promesa* de un territorio, un reino mental y físico propios, brota de una buena relación con la pérdida, una hemorragia existencial que siempre vuelve. Son las pérdidas, un bajo de fondo que no nos deja, empuñado hasta convertirse en herramienta, las que configuran el contorno de un paisaje propio. Ernest Hemingway solía decir que tenía la autoridad moral de sus derrotas. También él, igual que el autor de *El Principito*, era uno de esos elegidos que unen un cuerpo aventurero a un alma desfalleciente, atenta a todas las sendas perdidas. Un corazón femenino alimentando un cerebro masculino, una sensibilidad de mujer alimentando una fortaleza viril: tópicos aparte, ¿es éste el secreto de la androginia de algunos seres que nos hechizan con sus hallazgos?

No nos molestaría resucitar la vieja sabiduría según la cual, a cierta clase de experiencia radical del dolor, de la pérdida que es vivir, solo se la vence *abrazándola*, concediéndole un rostro, una forma flexible capaz de resistir la crudeza del día. Existe en la poesía, en filosofía y en la literatura, un sinuoso reguero de mujeres y hombres, condenados o no como *herejes*, que han tenido el valor de sostener esta osada afirmación¹. En la cultura contemporánea, pocos creadores como Clarice Lispector, a la vez escritora y pensadora, han tenido el atrevimiento de llevar tan lejos esa tesis según la cual la bondad de Dios no es más que la serpiente del mal querida, abrazada, asumida. Escribir, pensar, crear, sostener una creación *ex nihilo* que ningún ser humano puede evitar, simplemente para vivir con soltura una vida mortal, es lo que nos permite hacer de la muerte algo soportable. En suma, que el agua envenenada de la colectividad moderna pueda ser bebida. Como decía Lispector "Yo soy mi propia muerte... *No saber*, ¿era así entonces como sucedía lo más profundo? Estar aparentemente muerta para que lo vivo se produjese"(37).

¹ En el final de la *Fenomenología del Espíritu*, con un Hegel cercano al *Deus sive natura* de Spinoza, podemos volver a recordar estas líneas: "El saber no se conoce solamente a sí, sino que conoce también lo negativo de sí mismo o su límite. Saber su límite quiere decir saber sacrificarse. Este sacrificio es la enajenación en la que el espíritu presenta su devenir hacia el espíritu, bajo la forma del *libre acaecer contingente* (*freien zufälligen Geschehens*), intuyendo su *sí mismo* puro como el *tiempo* fuera de él y, asimismo, su *ser* como espacio. Este último devenir del espíritu, la *naturaleza*, es su devenir vivo e inmediato; la naturaleza, el espíritu enajenado, no es en su ser allí otra cosa que esta eterna enajenación de su *subsistencia* y el movimiento que instaura el *sujeto*". G. W. F. Hegel, *Fenomenología del espíritu*, trad. Wenceslao Roces, F. C. E., México, 1978, p. 472. Pero, sobre todo, esta reversión del *abismo* en *cumbre* es el eje de la *Ética* de Spinoza y recorre de parte a parte el *Zaratustra* de Nietzsche. Cfr. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Así habló Zaratustra. Un libro para todos y para nadie*, trad. Andrés S. Pascual, Alianza, Madrid, 1980 (8ª ed.), "El viajero", pp. 219-221. También Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce homo. Cómo se llega a ser lo que se es*, trad. Andrés S. Pascual, Alianza, Madrid, 1978 (3ª ed.), p. 57.

El día más normal del mundo está, para algunos seres elegidos por la fortaleza de la pérdida, lleno de sombras animadas. Si repasásemos con detalle un poema llamado *Valium 10*, de la mexicana Rosario Castellanos, que no es más conocida por pertenecer al universo hispano de los perdedores, veríamos cómo en el universo moderno la firmeza del día puede convivir con el eco de cien sendas perdidas.

3

Por lo pronto, parece inevitable asumir que la antigua cuestión de la pérdida (lo que nos traicionó, lo abandonado y olvidado, las heridas, las derrotas) ha de tener alguna relación con lo que más tememos, esa elemental finitud que siempre, incluso bajo esta idiota consistencia civil forjada en el consenso electrónico, atormentó a la condición humana. *Somos* mortales, aunque algún día el delirio de la ciencia moderna haya soñado y siga soñando con vencer a la muerte o prolongar la vida humana indefinidamente (Arendt 16-20). Es en este horizonte de pánico latente, en este "horror fundamental" (Lacan, "Kant con Sade" 731) que es el suelo de la especie, donde el término de la vida no nos espera solo en un futuro indeterminado, en el que una eutanasia técnicamente limpia pueda instalar una solución indolora. Lejos de esta ideología social consoladora, la muerte, madre de todas las pérdidas, nos sigue en cada momento de intensidad vital, a semejanza de una luna nocturna que latiese en la consistencia del día. Y esto también en las grietas de la mañana más clara, como un fuego oculto en la luz diurna.

El oro se acrisola en las pérdidas. Lo cual explica que el orgulloso *animal rationale* jamás pueda librarse de un fondo de zozobra, de angustia o inquietud. Luchamos, amamos, odiamos. Nos entretenemos, jugamos incluso a divertimos puerilmente, pero un fondo neurótico o psicótico de pérdida nunca nos deja. El final de la vida puede ser un temor, una penumbra reprimida o una certeza serena, pero siempre está en el aire su *cuándo*.

Al poco de nacer, antes ya de la primera pérdida, los niños ya saben mucho de la muerte². Si no hay cuento infantil que no gire en torno a la Gran Dama es porque el *infans*, quien todavía no habla, tiene muy cerca las aguas oscuras del útero. Después, cuando el humano crece, parece probable que cierta entereza anímica ante este fondo sombrío sea una de las

² "Tan pronto como un hombre entra en la vida, es ya bastante viejo para morir". Si al poco de nacer el hombre ya puede morir, recuerda Heidegger citando a Jakob Böhme, también es cierto que mucho después de haber nacido el hombre sigue siendo un niño ante la muerte. Cfr. Martin Heidegger, *El ser y el tiempo*, op. cit., § 48, p. 268. Sobre la vitalidad de la muerte, fuente de cualquier sentido de las pérdidas, son impagables las "Doce tesis sobre la economía de los muertos". John Berger, *Con la esperanza entre los dientes*, trad. Ramón Vera, Alfaguara, Madrid, 2010, pp. 13-15.

cuestiones cruciales que decide en la vida quién es quién, el modo de ser, el carácter, la fortaleza y el encanto o la miseria moral de cada ser humano³. Y tal entereza mortal, por la cual alguien puede poner incluso su vida en juego, probablemente pesa más que las manidas cuestiones de índole sociológico, como la suerte natal, el entorno económico y cultural de nuestro crecimiento o la competencia en el posterior destino laboral y profesional.

No obstante, es posible que la media aritmética de nuestro progresismo urbano se confunda en cuanto al alcance de palabras como *seguridad*, *bienestar*, *capitalismo* o incluso la idea de *Occidente*. Quizá la ilustración contemporánea, heredera en distintos sentidos del discutible giro filosófico que se encarna en Marx, hacia lo que podríamos llamar una diurna y pragmática *ideología inglesa*, siga pensando nuestro universo antropológico en términos fatalmente *económicos*. Entendamos por *economía*, ante todo, ese ideario según el cual el hombre es un ente aislado que depende del entorno que le rodea por fuera, en el que ha de competir para labrar su suerte, directamente proporcional a su esfuerzo. Tal darwinismo cultural es, además, una ridícula copia de un universo animal profundamente deformado, extirpado de la *espiritualidad* laberíntica del instinto. Existe, sin embargo, otra amplia línea de pensamiento no muy atendido, línea que iría de Nietzsche a Weber, de Heidegger a Foucault (de Simone Weil a Ivan Illich, a Jonathan Crary), que se orienta a entender el capitalismo occidental no según cierta infraestructura económica, sino según una voluntad férrea de *separación* que, usando a la economía como instrumento de una cultura de *apartheid*, toma distancias y establece un cordón sanitario con el espíritu de cualquier inmediatez terrenal, imperio de los sentidos o comunidad mortal de la especie. Según Max Weber, ciertos atavismos milenarios, presentes en los arquetipos antropológicos de la especie y, por tanto, en sus comunidades afectivas, es lo que la Modernidad ilustrada ha intentado dejar atrás desesperadamente (18).

De ahí la sospecha de que, precisamente ante el irremediable paisaje de la pérdida, del cual el capitalismo nada quiere saber, el neurótico afán de progreso económico y técnico del norte protestante sea una astucia de la razón histórica moderna para *secularizar* un viejo afán salvífico de la religión. En nuestro caso, tal vez más de filiación judaica que cristiana

³ Queriendo interpretar a Hegel, Byung-Chul Han comenta: "Lo que induce al esclavo futuro a someterse al otro es el miedo a la muerte. El esclavizado prefiere la esclavitud a la muerte amenazante. Se aferra a la *mera vida* (...) Quien no tiene capacidad de muerte no arriesga su vida. En lugar de 'ir a la muerte consigo mismo', permanece 'en sí mismo dentro de la muerte'. No se entrega a la muerte. Así se convierte en *esclavo y trabaja*". Byung-Chul Han, *La agonía del Eros*, trad. Raúl Gabás, Herder, Barcelona, 2013, p. 34. Cfr. G. W. F. Hegel, *Fenomenología del espíritu*, op. cit., pp. 117-119.

(Steiner 295-300). Acaso hace tiempo que el Progreso es el opio del pueblo, administrado desde las nuevas clases dirigentes, y no un cristianismo que hace mucho ocupa entre nosotros un lugar relativamente residual, por no decir melancólico. Excepto en algunas activas sectas evangélicas que perviven en el imaginario posmoderno.

Según Nietzsche y Weber, no son tanto los abusos despóticos de un "antiguo régimen" como cierta incómoda inmediatez simbólica del universo sensitivo, una desnuda vida en *común* ante la cual nuestra cultura siente desde hace siglos una aversión creciente, lo que explica la fuerza con la que se desarrolla la voluntad modernizadora de Occidente. Fuerza *evangelizadora* que nos permitirá además invadir, colonizar y saquear muchas otras naciones. Las cartas que Marx publica en 1853, en el *New York Daily Tribune*, sobre los derechos de Inglaterra en la colonización brutal de la India son un documento progresista desolador en apoyo de los argumentos más *raciales* que dirigen la ideología mesiánica de avance occidental. Marx habla claramente de la *misión* modernizadora de Inglaterra, y no tiene empacho en citar en una de esas cartas a Goethe en favor de la actitud despiadada que ha dirigido la *liquidación* occidental en múltiples esquinas de la tierra: "¿Quién lamenta los estragos/Si los frutos son placeres?/¿No aplastó miles de seres/Tamerlán en su reinado?". (cit. Marx www.marxists.org)⁴

Al margen de Marx, precisamente si queremos re-aprender a vivir, no debemos apartarnos un ápice del territorio de la pérdida. Es preciso insistir en que la modernidad occidental no soporta ningún horizonte cercano que recuerde la pobreza inherente de la especie. De ahí la fuerza política, militar y económica con la que Nosotros imponemos nuestros designios en todo lo que consideramos un orbe *atrasado*, que necesita ser salvado. Y precisamente *atrasado*, hay que decirlo, en virtud de su superioridad *moral*, de la riqueza simbólica de esas culturas a la hora de convivir con las pérdidas enraizadas en los límites terrenales de la condición humana. La ferocidad con la que hasta hoy, también en esta pandemia primaveral del 2020, el norte europeo sigue imponiendo sus dictados al sur, sea en España o en Italia, en Portugal o Grecia, es significativa del odio a la comunidad de la pobreza que, desde el frío, dirige los dictados de los fanáticos del bienestar (Roca Barea 460-475). Antes en nombre de Dios y ahora en nombre del Desarrollo y los Derechos Humanos, la labor liquidadora occidental es imparable. Es tal vez especialmente sintomático que Grecia, en

⁴ El poema de Goethe está citado por Karl Marx, C. Marx La dominación británica en la India [1] (1852) Escrito: Por Marx el 10 de junio de 1853. Primera edición: Publicado en el *The New York Daily Tribune*, núm. 3804, del 25 de junio de 1853. Fuente: C. Marx & F. Engels, *Obras Escogidas*, en tres tomos, Editorial Progreso, Moscú, 1974; t. I. Esta edición: Marxists Internet Archive, 2000. Enlace: <http://www.marxists.org/espanol/m-e/1850s/25-vi-1853.htm>.

cuya cuna nació lo que hoy llamamos Occidente, en un resumen tal vez abusivo, haya sido una nación especialmente castigada por la apisonadora de la UE en la última década.

4

¿Pérdidas, melancolía, tristeza? Finitud y espectros nocturnos. Para combatir esos fantasmas, nuestro paisaje favorito es el diseño gigantesco, el escenario perfectamente liso de una radiante ciudad de luces perpetuas que expulsan a la noche. Los países "emergentes" han captado bien nuestra *episteme* salvadora: entre otros enclaves, Dubai es una buena caricatura del ideal prometeico que queremos. Escala gigantesca, brillo, estruendo. Todo lo que sean silencio o lágrimas lo abandonamos a un despreciado *romanticismo* que, con cierta condescendencia, reservamos para el fin de semana, la Navidad o algunos ídolos oscuros de nuestras secretas horas tardías. Que incluso la revolución moral que emprende el utilitarismo, al menos a través de Bentham, entienda lo moral como *ganancia* y lo inmoral como *pérdida* no deja de ser indicativo de qué tipo de mentalidad comercial implacable dirige la supuesta superioridad moral de Occidente. La rodilla blanca sobre el cuello de George Floyd, que no va a aflojarse mañana, hace mucho tiempo que se viene preparando con toda clase de argumentos de progreso. Y esa presión asfixiante seguirá, pues una sociedad que no puede mantener ninguna relación afirmativa con *la pérdida que es vivir* ha de justificarse en constantes enemigos externos que encarnan la finitud que es preciso superar. Dejaron de ser los judíos. Algún día dejarán de ser los negros. Pero es preciso que otras razas y culturas encarnen el atraso terrenal que es necesario mantener a raya.

Desde hace más de un siglo, con distintos acentos, Nietzsche insiste en que la nuestra es una inmisericorde cultura *platónica* de la elevación (51). Del mismo modo que la abstracción del concepto "hoja" debe librarnos de la suciedad irregular de *esta* hoja, también la geometría urbana, el orden jurídico y civil, más tarde los rascacielos, las redes de comunicación electrónicas (remedo popular de una anterior ilusión elitista de aventura orbital) deben librarnos del laberinto de los ásperos caminos terrenales, sentidos crecientemente como un obstáculo para la velocidad de nuestra teleología histórica. Esta requiere de la ligereza de las líneas bien trazadas y calculables, aunque sean curvas, no de una irregularidad geográfica y territorial que, con su dolor lacrimógeno, es un bulto sentimental que nos hace lentos. Desde hace al menos dos siglos, para que la tierra no sea un pecado imperdonable en la macroeconomía ha de ser sobrevolada, superada, dominada

desde arriba⁵. De ahí el privilegio creciente de lo *aéreo* (misiles balísticos, satélites artificiales, comunicación *on line*) en todas las tecnologías civiles y militares posteriores a la Primera Guerra. Para empezar, trazar el mapa de un territorio, bien sea para explorarlo, invadirlo o bombardearlo, requiere elevarse a un altozano. Al menos, elevarse a un esfuerzo imperial de imaginación para ver todo desde fuera, en una visión panorámica que mira desde arriba. No podemos desligar el nacimiento de la aviónica de esta voluntad celeste de sobreponerse a la inseguridad de los territorios, al laberinto de sus más que probables pérdidas.

En nuestro fetichismo de la movilidad, todo debe circular sin fin para convertirse en mercancía. Hace tiempo que en esta imparable liquidación capitalista Marx ha hecho obsoletos a todos los Papas, igual que el consumo hace prescindible la religión. Hace mucho que el avance civil, de Chicago a Berlín, de Milán a Barcelona, no hace más que prolongar de manera silenciosa los anteriores dispositivos militares ideados para sobreponerse a la incertidumbre terrenal, a la geografía de los límites, al laberinto de fronteras y sus sendas perdidas. Cualquier buen gestor de ese campo de ficción espectacular que hoy llamamos *política* ha de ignorar las anfractuosidades del terreno, los rostros y el sufrimiento singular de cuerpos y paisajes, el latido de los seres que los pueblan. Se podría pensar incluso que la lista interminable de enemigos que nos inventamos para sentirnos más seguros (negros, judíos, comunistas, rusos, musulmanes, chinos), demonios sin los cuales no puede vivir la religión del progreso, mantiene como alimento sumergido una verdad que no se puede reconocer a la luz del día. El verdadero enemigo de Occidente es el *atraso* penoso de la tierra, ese valle de lágrimas que no acaba de ser radiante, una existencia *cualquiera* (Agamben) que solo tiene la potencia del desamparo como tecnología punta para sostener su singularidad.

No olvidemos una verdad inconsciente y reprimida, que en el fondo seguimos temiendo. Es ley de vida que no haya avance aquí sin retroceso allí, pues las pérdidas son precisamente indispensables como precio y combustible de cualquier avance real. Éste no es nunca hacia una meta lejana que nos pueda librar de lo que somos, sino hacia completar la ardua e impagable tarea de alcanzarse a sí mismo. El tiempo de la vida es circular, la pérdida es nuestro paisaje, una pérdida convertida incesantemente en fuerza de vida. Y es

⁵ Martin Heidegger, "La época de la imagen del mundo", *Caminos de bosque*, trad. H. Cortés y A. Leyte, Alianza, Madrid, 2010, pp. 63-90. El Prólogo de Arendt a *La condición humana* está también dedicado al sentido metafísico de esta mundial voluntad de *elevación* sobre la condición mortal y terrena.

de esta estoica verdad oriental de la que ante todo huye el *espíritu* del capitalismo. No es la naturaleza la que huye del vacío, sino la Historia.

Todo ello, esto es lo grave, en un tiempo circular que jamás deja atrás las caídas, los accidentes o las derrotas, que son una bendita maldición que siempre vuelve como materia prima de nuestra fortaleza. Es como si partir una y otra vez de cero fuera el principal acicate del creador que es cualquier ser humano, aunque nosotros solamente lo reconozcamos en la figura del *genio*. Genio del lugar, genio de las pérdidas, del paisaje habitable. Vivimos en un desierto enormemente poblado, habitado por fantasmas que tienen en la pérdida su hueso. El primero de sus poderes es la constante reversión del dolor en fortaleza renovada, la metamorfosis de la pérdida en ganancia, en un nuevo reino conquistado.

5

Resulta entonces que, al abandonar los sucios territorios de una pérdida que es nuestro suelo natal, abandonamos también el único paisaje desde el cual podíamos ejercer una fuerza. ¿Es entonces como si hubiéramos dejado el *corazón* a los bárbaros, abandonando la cultura de los afectos a los seres marginales que, algún día, pueden acabar *vengándose*? Lo cierto es que la infelicidad, el crimen, la violencia doméstica, el terrorismo y toda clase de horrores se han multiplicado desde la caída del Muro, que nos protegía frente a un enemigo fácil. Tal vez la ventaja de los Otros, parias de la Tierra, es que tienen el conocimiento y la complicidad con los territorios, algo que nosotros (por temor a la inseguridad y a las pérdidas) hace tiempo que hemos perdido. El mal conoce los meandros del bien, pero no ocurre lo contrario. La humanidad de las afueras, que todavía se mantiene frente al mal de vivir, conoce el laberinto de las ciudades y de una nación entera. Mientras nosotros somos una patética élite urbana que se limita a sobrevolar las pérdidas de los otros a vista de pájaro. Lo cual, dicho sea de paso, le otorga un nuevo tipo de impunidad al delito, sea éste cual sea. Lo que explica tanto el pánico de las poblaciones a lo desconocido cuanto un amplio género de terror doméstico sin el cual no podríamos vivir, pues ese género exorciza el mal fuera, en otros. Al satanizar la naturaleza que creemos haber dejado atrás, en un paisaje abandonado donde la pérdida es el primer maná, el género de terror *blanquea* nuestra mala conciencia. Por un lado, con la información parece que a los otros siempre les va peor; por otro, nuestro maniqueísmo establece el simulacro de que todavía mantenemos alguna inteligencia emocional para el mal, un mal que otros encarnan. En conjunto, difícilmente los occidentales han conocido

una cultura más moralista que este laicismo contemporáneo, tan políticamente correcto y prohibicionista como nuestros acristalados edificios. Ninguna pérdida deja su huella sobre el cristal.

Psicosis, Poltergeist, El exorcista, Funny games, Joker. Recuerden los detalles. ¿Qué película de terror no comienza a partir de una fatal *detención* de la velocidad que nos salva, esa celeridad que nos libra de un paisaje terrenal siempre poblado de espectros? La liquidez capitalista vive contra la lentitud, ya no digamos la parada. ¿Por qué? Porque en todo momento de detención resuena el eco de las pérdidas, anteriores incluso a las primeras derrotas. Como nuestro eje cultural es el nihilismo del vacío, ello da lugar a un fundamentalismo doblemente histérico que no puede vivir más que de un llenado perpetuo. Tamaño, estruendo, efectos especiales, conexiones, espectáculo. El capitalismo vive de la ilusión de una *superación* (*Aufhebung*) continua del peligro, y de las inevitables pérdidas de vivir, a través de una expansión continua, una velocidad incansable, un remozamiento perpetuo. El estrés nos salva de los demonios del reposo. La obsolescencia programada de objetos y personas busca que no tengamos que ser fieles a nada, ni a la pérdida ni a la muerte de ninguna cosa. Ante todo, se busca que no tenga lugar la fidelidad al *sentido* de las pérdidas. Se puede decir que hace mucho tiempo que hemos elegido la metástasis de la expansión continua antes que una parada donde todas las pérdidas pueden volver, con su hilera de ecos.

Es muy posible que la actual fascinación por la visibilidad en las redes sociales esté también anclada en el miedo ancestral al laberinto de la finitud, esa vida *analógica* poblada de invisibilidades, secretos inconfesables y pérdidas imprevisibles. Ese devenir real sin ningún teclado con botón de *pausa* o marcha *atrás*, nos aterra. Cada uno prefiere vivir en su Matrix. Aparte de ser un escenario ideal para la balcanización sectaria en la que se basa su ideología de la identidad, siempre erigida (con su fanatismo de *haters*) contra *algo otro* que uno no es, la ventaja *existencial* de las redes es su cronología fluida, libre de la suciedad del espacio, de los cuerpos y sus pérdidas inesperadas. El privilegio actual del tiempo numérico, de una cronología medida y calculada, en menoscabo de una geografía espacial cuyos meandros son excesivamente inesperados (no solo para los negocios, sino también para nuestro puritanismo mental de origen protestante) le otorga una inmensa ventaja ontológica a la ingravidez virtual. Las líneas *on line* son siempre algo ligero y llevadero, compatible con la seguridad y el narcisismo, cosa que no siempre ocurre con lo que existe *on land*. Si podemos elegir, preferimos seguir flotando. Pues nada es cercano para quien flota, ni el paisaje ni sus pérdidas.

Esta vieja aversión al paisaje real, que Nietzsche ya diagnostica como infraestructura cultural de Occidente en el siglo XIX, podría ser también uno de los sentidos ocultos de aquella legendaria frase de Margaret Thatcher, una mujer mucho más compleja de lo que parecería a primera vista: "La economía es el método; el objetivo es cambiar el corazón y el alma". De ser así, sería implícito a Occidente un *racismo* teórico con respecto a todo lo que permanezca cercano al subdesarrollo, a la penumbra y la lentitud de la tierra. Fíjense que nos pasamos el año buscando y encontrando enemigos a los que castigar, todos ellos símbolos del atraso terrenal: cuando no son los judíos son los afroamericanos; el día que estos dejen de ser el blanco (el negro) de nuestro racismo, otras etnias o culturas ocuparán su lugar. Y, además, es curioso, siempre culturas *comunitarias*, lentas, profundas, que viven *frente a la pérdida*, en general excesivamente oscuras y complejas, poco aptas para la fluidez del inglés. Los chinos, los rusos, los musulmanes ya no están en la lista de espera, pues hace tiempo que su supuesta maldad despótica nos sirve de chivo expiatorio. El peligro amarillo, el peligro rojo, el peligro negro: parece que odiamos los colores telúricos del paisaje terrenal. Nuestro ideal es la piel traslúcida, aunque sea a golpe de maquillaje. Aceptamos con facilidad los colores codificados de la moda, de ningún modo la salvaje policromía de la tierra, que asusta al esquema binario que, en un fácil maniqueísmo en B/N, rige nuestro sistema de valores, desde lo informático a lo informativo.

6

En su *Carta a un religioso*, Simone Weil sostiene que el trasfondo de Occidente es la negación del tiempo de la vida, esa temporalidad sin historia que se concentra en cada paisaje espacial, en cada situación vital. Es el tiempo mismo el que no tiene historia, es el mundo mismo el que resiste toda mundialización. La historia es solo el conjunto de condiciones, prácticamente negativas, que permite eventualmente que surja algo nuevo, distinto a la historia. Pero si el eje del poder *masculino* (*falologocéntrico*, dice Judith Butler) de la historia es la "superstición de la cronología", es posible que el suelo de cualquier resistencia sea poner un pie en lo *acronológico*, ese tiempo que o bien se *acumula* en un instante o bien resulta imperceptible (Warburg 58 y Benjamin 188). Esto quiere decir que si cedemos a la oferta social y mediática de delegar en expertos el tiempo de vida, que solo a nosotros corresponde, cediéndole a gestores externos también las inevitables pérdidas, estamos cediendo en el único territorio desde el cual podemos ejercer la violencia que es necesita una vida cualquiera. En realidad, de lo que se expropia a la gente hoy en día es de su derecho a fracasar, de su derecho a la pérdida: vale decir, del

trozo de noche que nos corresponde. Se nos pueden quitar muchas cosas, jamás nuestra "nada", ese enigma que constituye el alma de cada forma de vida singular.

Tener un territorio, un paisaje propio con vistas, aunque uno viva en un angosto apartamento urbano y tenga una vida cuadrículada por la economía, depende sobre todo de haberse atrevido, contra toda la lógica social de la mediación, a darle *forma* a lo sumergido de una vida, ese subsuelo existencial que persiste bajo la infinidad de nuestras coacciones sociales (Sennett 79-102). Se trataría de reinventar el valor de convertir en *afirmación* singular, en "afirmación no positiva" (Foucault), las inevitables pérdidas que el tiempo de la vida impone. Vida singular y por tanto común, pues es la desgarradura de la singularidad, su abismo sin equivalencia, lo único que genera una comunidad. Comunidad (*Gemeinschaft*) que no necesita de ninguna pertenencia identitaria, pues le basta con el afecto de los seres en peligro que somos. La identidad siempre se erige contra algo, contra aquello que uno no es o que incluso desprecia. Por el contrario, una forma de vida singular no necesita enemigos, ni tiene por qué dejar nada fuera.

La tarea de resistir, de no *adaptarse* a las constantes presiones de nuestro medio social, es la tarea de convertir en rostro y carácter (lo que los psicoanalistas llaman *semblante*) una pérdida estructural que constituye la raíz del ser humano. Significativamente, cualquier salto hacia delante exige una profunda revisión del pasado. Es un poco el caso del velocista, de la nadadora, del saltador de pértiga: necesitan retrotraerse, retroceder unos milímetros y concentrarse en ese paso atrás antes de lanzarse a la meta. Igual que en las revoluciones, personales o colectivas, siempre se hacen reivindicando otra visión del pasado⁶. De algún modo, antes de una iniciativa subversiva o de crear un paisaje nuevo, es preciso habitar un tiempo *interior* a la historia, una sumergida constelación presente donde pasado y futuro están muy cercanos.

De ser así, la tarea vital, ética y estética de los humanos es construir un paisaje, un territorio propio que le haya dado forma al miedo y a las pérdidas, tanto natales como adquiridas. Ante todo, se trata de partir una y otra vez de una pérdida *a priori*, anterior a la primera derrota. Partir de una borrosa escena primitiva que jamás se acabará fijando en una imagen final. En toda persona de carácter, dice un Nietzsche aún no desangrado por la

⁶ Como la incertidumbre del futuro ya está aquí, en este temblor de lo que acaece, toda revolución en el campo de la cronología ha de hacerse cargo del *Jetztzeit* (Benjamin), ese halo de lo *ahistórico* que mueve desde fuera a la historia. De ahí que casi siempre los revolucionarios tiendan a disparar contra los relojes, para comenzar otra vez la cuenta desde cero y reiniciar el calendario, haciendo saltar el *continuum* de la historia. Walter Benjamin, "Tesis de filosofía de la historia", § 15, *Discursos interrumpidos I*, op. cit., p. 188.

sociedad que le rodeaba, "hay una vivencia típica y propia que retorna siempre" (*Más allá* 92).

Una mujer, un hombre que no miran de frente su irremediable modo de ser, esa traumática escena originaria de la que cada existencia proviene, no tienen, además, ningún territorio propio desde el que ejercer una *fuera*. Y no olvidemos que la felicidad de una buena cuna también entraña un trauma, aunque solo sea por el contraste posterior que le espera. Quienes no realicen ese gesto de metamorfosis, estarán probablemente perdidos cuando llegue cualquier revés serio. Sin empuñar su pérdida más originaria, de la cual vienen, abandonan la única herramienta capaz de resistir un poder histórico que sigue siendo implacable.

Como diría Lacan, no atreverse a hablar por cuenta propia es olvidar la fuente silenciosa del deseo, una inmensa meseta poblada de seres anómalos que nos constituyen. Abandonar esa enorme multitud sin imagen significa consentir *ser hablado* por otros. La única posibilidad para el ser humano consiste en entrar en esa zona central de indeterminación, donde la finitud y la deuda son constituyentes, para lograr desde ahí una *inversión de la separación*, una vegetación que beba en el agua oculta de ese desierto. Es aproximadamente lo que Heidegger defiende, siguiendo a Rilke, como un "estar desamparados vuelto hacia lo abierto" (287-289).

Al menos desde Nietzsche, retomando una vieja sabiduría estoica, esta *subversión por aceptación* es una de las obsesiones de la filosofía contemporánea. La idea es, lejos de nuestro maniqueísmo binario, vencer el mal abrazándolo. Morder la serpiente que nos amenaza, dice Zaratustra, y escupir su cabeza lejos (223-228). De ahí que Lispector llegue a hablar de que escribir y crear permite que el agua envenenada pueda beberse, como si no lo estuviera. *Haz de tu maldición un viñedo*, es la misma idea pronunciada en palabras del poeta Auden.

El ser humano es libre cuando se hace cargo de la *fatalidad* que le habita, de una verdad, un *absoluto* local que no será fácilmente traducible a nuestra voluntad pública de saber. Poco sospechoso de complicidades eclesásticas, Badiou pone en el origen de la universalidad cristiana una superación de la condición mortal *desde* la misma muerte. Se trataría de una tecnología de *reversión* de lo negativo, desde el interior mismo de la muerte hasta el otro lado, una orilla salvada. El *final* de los tiempos amenaza, también con su carga de promesa, en cada momento crucial, en cada encrucijada. La creencia cristiana es, según Badiou, una transformación escandalosa, una apuesta por la permanencia aquí de algo que no es de aquí. Por tanto, a diferencia de la anterior religión de los elegidos, creer es para

los cristianos apostar por una resurrección *después* de la muerte, creer en lo visible como *encarnación* de lo invisible.

7

Es cierto, como insiste una acusación habitual, que sin la muerte el cristianismo no sería nada. Pero ésta no es ninguna acusación particular, puesto que le ocurre a toda existencia, sea atea, agnóstica o creyente. Precisamente ésta es la ventaja de la escatología cristiana frente a un capitalismo que, en su espíritu, solo es sostenido por la ideología de una acumulación miedosa frente a la muerte. Lejos de esta pulsión adolescente, el cristianismo recomienza por el final común que tememos, que también es la trascendencia inmanente que une a los seres. Un final que Cristo desactiva atravesando su calvario en vida, según el ateo Badiou: asumiendo la cruz del tiempo, su perdición, desde el principio. Por eso los cristianos recomienzan por los excluidos de la antigua religión, por los lisiados, los enfermos, los niños, los pecadores y las prostitutas. El cristianismo puede decir: *La muerte ha sido vencida* (I Cor 15, 54). Pero esto ocurre *desde dentro*, insiste Badiou: Cristo ha sido *sacado fuera, de entre los muertos* (ἐκ νεκρῶν). Por "extracción, sustracción, pero no negación" (78). Es la misma inmortalidad la que nos hace mortales y exige partir, imponiendo un límite íntimo en todos los hijos, una desaparición *viva* que hace perdurable a cada cuerpo. Si cada Hijo tiene lo absoluto en su existencia, un reino que no cabe en este mundo, los hijos han de morir para confirmar su eternidad. Quien está traspasado por un absoluto que no es de este mundo, no puede terminar: muere para mostrar que puede volver. "Si yo no me voy no recibiréis el Espíritu" (Jn 16, 7). De ahí también la fraternidad cristiana, apiadada de unas criaturas que parecen condenadas a una muerte incesante.

Lo sobrenatural no es tan extraño, nos recuerda Whitman en *Hojas de hierba*: "Con el tiempo también yo seré sobrenatural". Es, a la vez, el posible significado de esta misteriosa frase de Cortázar en una entrevista tardía: "Parece una broma pero somos inmortales". Robert Graves susurra en "Come, enjoy your Sunday! ("Ven, goza tu domingo") ¿Temes a la muerte? "La muerte no es nada, solo el plomo que sella un frasco repleto" (154-155). Hablando de pérdidas, tal vez el único deber insoslayable de un ser humano es no ceder en cuanto a su deseo, vale decir: apurar su vida hasta las heces, de modo que la muerte, cuando venga, apenas tenga nada que llevarse.

En "I am what I am", el primer Círculo de *La Insurrección que viene*, se desarrolla la idea de que el fantasma de la libertad occidental es el desarraigo y de que lejos de esta mutilación capitalista para ser "libres" no hay realmente otra libertad duradera que se

atreva a darle forma a la fatalidad natal que heredamos.⁷ Por eso, insiste el Comité invisible, la raíz indoeuropea de *Freund* y *frei*, de *friend* y *free*, es la misma: ser libre es tener amigos, ser amigo de lo que ya eras... quizá de lo "desconocido sin amigos" (Blanchot) que está en la base de todo existir, en cualquier comienzo (Comité invisible 30) Es significativo que en cuanto a esta *metamorfosis* del mal en bien, un bien que entonces no resulta *banal* ni exactamente *construido*, sea cierta *potencia femenina* (quizá Weil más que Hannah Arendt, seguro que Clarice Lispector más que Judith Butler) la que haya marcado una senda difícil para los varones. No hay apenas en el pasado siglo libros comparables en densidad filosófica a *Aprendizaje* o *La pasión según G. H.*, esas dos temibles novelas de Lispector. Exceptuando, acaso, el oscuro linaje de algunos nombres masculinos muy lejanos del venerado e ingenuo Kant. Pero ellos, de Wittgenstein a Benjamin, de Heidegger a Agamben, han emprendido esa senda perdida al precio de escuchar un haz de tiniebla, una deuda natal, para la que la mujer siempre ha tenido mejor oído. Y más acerada la retina.

La industria, dice en cierto momento Deleuze, conserva las cosas añadiendo una sustancia que altera el original, convirtiéndolo en un artificio, un simulacro que sirve para la circulación consumista. La conservación implica en este caso una huida de la singularidad original, por eso se trata de un objeto de consumo rápido. Por el contrario, el arte *conserva* abrazando la caducidad de las cosas, entrando en su finitud hasta extraer de esa limitación algo incorruptible⁸. De ahí que haya una especie de eternidad, inaccesible al desaliento y a las pérdidas, en esa obra que abraza la perdición inherente a todas las cosas. Algo no puede morir si ya tiene la muerte dentro.

La lluvia, los rostros, los caminos. Una eternidad que bebe en la finitud no tiene nada que temer, pues ha asumido la muerte en su forma de vida, en el semblante de un rostro. Sean los cuerpos de Lucien Freud, los dibujos de Twombly, las figuras de Antonio López o los jarrones de Morandi. Cuando Lispector logra decir "Yo soy mi propia muerte", está realizando la misma operación de invertir la finitud desde dentro, alcanzando una inmortalidad que solo pueden *tener* los seres mortales. De ahí tal vez la legendaria envidia

⁷ Comité invisible, *La insurrección que viene*, trad. Yaiza N. Pichel, Melusina, Barcelona, 2009, p. 35. La referencia a la relación entre libertad y amistad la encontramos en Comité Invisible, *A nuestros amigos*, trad. Vicente E. Barbarroja, Pepitas de calabaza, Madrid, 2015, pp. 30-33.

⁸ Giorgio Agamben, *La comunidad que viene*, trad. José L. Villacañas, X "Irreparable", Pre-Textos, Valencia, 1996, p. 30. La referencia a esos dos modos de conservar, tan distintos en el arte y la industria, la encontramos en G. Deleuze y F. Guattari, *¿Qué es la filosofía?*, trad. Thomas Kauf, Anagrama, Barcelona, 1993, p. 174.

de los dioses a los hombres. Nosotros tenemos pérdidas, desde las cuales resurgimos. Ellos, los dioses, viven en una tediosa eternidad vacía, sin mácula.

Es posible que la intensidad no tenga derecho a durar y haya de afrontar la pérdida como su incesante punto de partida. La intensidad es temible, pues se traga la muerte. De ahí que la ideología del sistema sea *deconstructiva*, pues lo vivo, la intensidad original no construida, no es traducible a la articulación estable de lo histórico, social o institucional. Igual que el grito no es traducible a la articulación de un lenguaje normativo. El grito del inicio, ese sobresalto remoto del cual venimos, pervive en una tradición que es como el Guadiana, apareciendo y desapareciendo de forma imprevisible. El *trascendentalista* Emerson reconoce que una institución es solamente *el eco del paso de un hombre* (26). Como ven, lo más visible y poderoso proviene de un secreto que no duerme, siempre a un paso de la desaparición y la reaparición, de perderse y transmutarse en otra figura.

Tal vez por esta potencia inmanente de la pérdida, otra vez en una infraleve línea de sombra que tiene una tradición discontinua, Alan Watts recuerda que todos los escritos místicos son en realidad *instrucciones* materialistas. "No se trata de intentos de describir el universo, de describir a Dios... Todo místico sabe que eso es imposible. La palabra misticismo proviene de la palabra griega *myein*, que significa guardar silencio" (46).

Lispector escribe en *Aprendizaje*: "En aquella hora de la noche ella conocía ese gran susto de estar viva, teniendo como único amparo tan sólo el desamparo de estar viva. La vida era tan fuerte que se amparaba en el propio desamparo". La verdad resultante con la que vivimos la materia, una pulsación espectral que mantiene la desaparición en su núcleo, se parece entonces, en palabras de Hegel, a un "delirio báquico, en el que ningún miembro escapa a la embriaguez" (32). En definitiva, una pérdida que siempre retorna es lo que sostiene lo visible, alimentando el más cotidiano paisaje del mundo.

REFERENCIAS BIBLIOGRÁFICAS

Agamben, Giorgio. *La comunidad que viene*, Valencia: Pre-Textos, 1996.

Arendt, Hannah. *La condición humana*, Barcelona: Paidós, 1998, pp. 14-21.

Badiou, Alain. *San Pablo. La fundación del universalismo*, Barcelona: Anthropos, 1987, pp. 61-79.

Benjamin, Walter. "Tesis de filosofía de la historia", *Discursos interrumpidos I*, Madrid: Taurus, 1973, pp. 185-190.

Berger, John Peter. "Tesis sobre una economía de los muertos", *Con la esperanza entre los dientes*, Madrid: Alfaguara, 2010, pp. 13-15.

- Comité invisible.** *La insurrección que viene*, Barcelona: Melusina, 2009.
- . *A nuestros amigos*, Madrid: Pepitas de calabaza, 2015.
- Crary, Jonathan.** *24/7. El capitalismo al asalto del sueño*, Barcelona: Ariel, 2015.
- Deleuze, Gilles. y Guattari, Félix.** *¿Qué es la filosofía?*, Barcelona: Anagrama, 1993.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo.** *Confianza en ti mismo*, Barcelona: Ediciones 29, 1994.
- Han, Byung-Chul.** *La agonía del Eros*, Herder, 2013.
- Hegel, George Wilhem Friedrich.** *Fenomenología del espíritu*, México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1978, pp. 450-475.
- Heidegger, Martin.** *El ser y el tiempo*, México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1951, pp. 208-300.
- . "La época de la imagen del mundo", *Caminos de bosque*, Madrid: Alianza, 2010 (10ª ed.), pp. 63-90.
- . "¿Y para qué poetas?", *Caminos de bosque*, Madrid: Alianza, 2010 (10ª ed.), pp. 199-238
- Lacan, Jacques.** *La angustia. El seminario: libro 10*, Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2006.
- . "Kant con Sade", *Escritos II*, trad. Tomás Segovia, Siglo XXI, 1985.
- Lispector, Clarice.** *La pasión según G. H.*, Madrid: Siruela, 2013.
- . *Aprendizaje. El libro de los placeres*, Madrid: Siruela, 2008.
- Marx, Karl.** "El dominio británico en la India", *The New York Daily Tribune*, 10 de Junio de 1853, <http://www.marxists.org/espanol/m-e/1850s/25-vi-1853.htm>.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich.** *Así habló Zaratustra. Un libro para todos y para nadie*, Madrid: Alianza, 1980.
- . *Ecce homo. Cómo se llega a ser lo que se es*, Madrid: Alianza, 1978.
- . *Más allá del bien y del mal*, Madrid: Alianza, 1985.
- Roca Barea, María Elvira.** *Imperiofobia y Leyenda Negra. Roma, Rusia, Estados Unidos y el Imperio español*, Madrid: Siruela, 2018 (20ª ed.), pp. 445-479.
- Sennett, Richard.** *La corrosión del carácter*, Barcelona: Anagrama, 2000, pp. 79-102.
- Steiner, George.** "Los archivos del Edén", *Pasión intacta*, traducido por M. Gutiérrez y E. Castejón, Madrid: Siruela, 1997, pp. 293-303.
- Virilio, Paul.** *Estética de la desaparición*, Barcelona: Anagrama, 1988, pp. 39-45.
- Warburg, Aby.** *El Atlas de imágenes Mnemosine*, Volumen I, México: Instituto de investigaciones estéticas, UNAM, 2012, pp. 47-59.
- Watts, Alan.** *OM. La sílaba sagrada*, Barcelona: Kairós, 1983.
- Weber, Max.** *La ética protestante y el espíritu del capitalismo*, Barcelona: Península, 1994.
- Weil, Simone.** *Carta a un religioso*, Madrid: Trotta, 2011.



Alberto de la Rocha

Framing the Disordered Landscape.
On reading Robert Smithson:
Architecture as Ecological Construction

El Encuadre del Paisaje Desordenado.
Leyendo a Robert Smithson:
Arquitectura como Construcción Ecológica

Carlos Lacalle García
Department of Architectural Projects. School of Architecture
Universitat Politècnica de València
carlagar@pra.upv.es

Resumen

[...]
y no hay blancura (perdida) tan blanca como el recuerdo
de la blancura.
(William Carlos Williams, *El descenso*, 1954)

Este ensayo tiene como objetivo tejer la urdimbre donde podemos asumir la consideración de la arquitectura entendida como “ruina”, con la falta de completud. *Arquitectura como construcción ecológica* nos invita a considerar el espacio ‘en construcción’, una arquitectura abierta más allá de sus límites.

De esta manera, siguiendo a Robert Smithson (1938-1973) en *Landscapes of Loss*, nos permite revertir el sentido de “paisaje”, abierto, en continua construcción, donde se produce un diálogo con el pasado; pero asumiendo que el paisaje (arquitectura) ‘se despliega’ con nuestra *nueva mirada actual* (habitando el espacio), con nuestra intervención aún por venir (poema).

Los recuerdos no son más que números en un mapa, memorias vacías que constelan los terrenos intangibles en proximidades suprimidas. Es la dimensión de la ausencia lo que queda por descubrir. El color borrado lo que queda por ver... El Yucatán se encuentra en otra parte. (Holt 103)

Palabras clave: paisaje, desorden, Robert Smithson, arquitectura, Hotel Palenque.

Abstract

[...]

*and no whiteness (lost) is so white as the memory
of whiteness*

William Carlos Williams, *The Descent*, 1954

This essay aims to weave the warp where the consideration of architecture understood as a “ruin” can be assumed, but lacking completeness. *Architecture as ecological construction* invites us to consider the space ‘under construction’, an open architecture that is beyond its limits.

In this way, following Robert Smithson (1938-1973) in *Landscapes of Loss*, allows us to reverse the sense of “landscape”, open, always under construction where a dialogue takes place with the past; but accepting that the landscape (architecture) ‘unfolds’ with our *new current perspective* (inhabiting the space), with our involvement yet to come (poem).

*Remembrances are but numbers on a map, vacant memories constellating
the intangible terrains in deleted vicinities. It is the dimension of absence that
remains to be found. The expunged color that remains to be seen... Yucatan is
elsewhere. (Holt 103)*

Key words: landscape, desordered, Robert Smithson, architecture, Hotel Palenque.

1. INTRODUCTION

*Memory is a kind
of accomplishment,
a sort of renewal
even
an initiation, since the spaces it opens are new places
inhabited by hordes
heretofore unrealized,
of new kinds–
since their movements
are towards new objectives
(even though formerly they were abandoned).
(Williams, *The Descent* 28)*

There is a degree of abstraction in what we are going to talk about.¹ Ultimately it would be to have a smaller number of dimensions with respect to reality, and the codification of the

¹ According to R.A.E. (Royal Academy of Spanish Language) To *Abstract*, from the Latin *abstrahere*: ‘to pull/drag away’, ‘set aside, separate’. (1) Separate the quality of an object by means of an

existing relationship in a new system where the subject is absent and of which anyone of us could be a part. Abstraction opens the door to the incomplete, the unfinished and places us in front of the unknown. In other words, trying to find the right words...

Abstraction is linked to the essence as if it were a phenomenon of condensation; and although it changes physically, it contains the distillation material maintaining all its properties. At the same time, the knowledge is linked to the processes of abstraction; searching for its essence or discovering its structure. In a certain way, a system, a constellation.²

And of course, the creative attitude lies in abstract thinking; break, shatter... tear apart. Reconstruct the relationship between the existing fragments, deviate the meaning attributed to an object, generate a relationship between diverse elements, consider the void as an element... And of course, that this is not exclusively an intellectual matter, but it belongs to naturalness, to everyday life, to the complexity of invention,³ the simplicity of discovery.⁴

2. FRAMING THE DISORDERED LANDSCAPE

Robert Smithson (1938-1973) is one of the most relevant artists to make an appropriate approach to the contemporary landscape⁵. He died very young whilst photographing from a plane his latest work *Amarillo Ramp* (Texas, 1973) that he was examining from the air.

intellectual operation to consider them in isolation, or to consider the same object in its pure essence or idea. (2) Alienate oneself from sensible objects, not to deal with them for giving oneself over to the consideration of what one has in their thoughts. *Abstract*, adj. which means quality excluding the subject.

The meaning of 'abstract' that interests us refers to that which has been severed from its relationships, and the consideration that space is an 'abstract construction'.

² Walter Benjamin's lucid sentence "In the fields with which we are concerned, knowledge comes only flash like. The text is the long roll of thunder that follows" (Benjamin 459), is very close to the artist Wassily Kandinsky's concept about 'composition': a dynamic system of relationships formed by invisible lines between the different elements that are part of the composition.

³ The artist Francesca Woodman published in 1981, days before committing suicide, her personal notebook *Some disordered interior Geometries*. It was created from an old notebook of geometry exercises, where she superimposed photographs, added handwritten notes in pencil, glue stains, drops of white correction liquid, inked diagrams and mathematical formulas.

⁴ Robert Smithson makes, in his writings, various references to Kasimir Malévich, a suprematism artist who, at the beginning of the 20th century, linked new art with sensitivity (the access through art to a 'desert'). Here, 'abstraction' corresponds to pure sensation and non-objective representation (without purpose).

⁵ According to European Landscape Convention (Florence, 2000), *landscape* is understood as "an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors", and the field/scope specified "applies to the entire territory of the parties and covers natural, rural, urban and peri-urban areas. It includes land, maritime and marine areas. It concerns landscapes that might be considered outstanding as well as everyday or degraded landscapes".

Smithson and the artist-architect Gordon Matta-Clark (1943-1978) are two key figures in understanding the 'obsolescence' of architecture and interventions in the landscape, whose intentions were to work on the transformation of given situations; reuse existing buildings, intervene in degraded and abandoned landscapes, etc. At the same time, Smithson's attitude brought him closer to the essence of architecture and landscape, i.e. transformation and continuous change. In other words, architecture and landscape are alive, waiting to be activated and developed dynamically. In his work *Partially Buried Woodshed* (Kent State University, Ohio, 1970), Robert Smithson leaves the intervention just on the verge of its change, the situation on the point of collapsing, passage and change of state.

Robert Smithson was born in Passaic, (New Jersey) and during his childhood he showed a great interest in natural history and art, studying at the Brooklyn Museum School and the Art Students' League in New York. He was fascinated by the exploration and transformations of nature, and made frequent visits to the Museum of Natural History in New York City. His family encouraged his restlessness by nurturing his curiosity; in 1948 they moved from Rutherford to nearby Clifton (New Jersey), where his father built a zoo-museum in the basement of the house for his son's collection of reptiles and fossils. Since childhood, he prepared and organised family vacation trips to natural locations in the United States, such as Yellowstone Park, the Grand Canyon, Mojave Desert, etc. Initially, he planned to be a naturalist or zoologist, as his main interests were geology, natural history, archaeology and travel.

Robert Smithson's life is closely linked to his interventions as an artist, it is a continuous journey and resembles a *road movie*: travel photographs, road maps, travel notes, fragments of rocks, fossils... Between 1956 and 1958 he hitchhiked through United States and Mexico where he met various poets and writers (among them, Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg). In 1959 he returned to visit William Carlos Williams in New Jersey (the poet was his paediatrician during his childhood in Rutherford), and in the early 1960s he met various artists: Sol LeWitt, Donald Judd, Dan Flavin and Robert Morris. Between 1956 and 1962 he held several exhibitions with his first works: paintings, drawings and collages with anthropomorphic forms, and with mythological content. In 1961 he stayed in Rome where he expanded his references on the importance of history and time in the course of culture, and in 1962 he temporarily withdrew from the art world. A year later he moved permanently to New York (799 Greenwich Street), married Nancy Holt, and began to write and produce his first mature works as an artist, including sculptures and maps that emerged from reflections and interpretations of crystallographic systems and structures.

Starting in 1966, Smithson developed a growing interest in marginal landscapes, making frequent excursions to abandoned and disused places (quarries, mining areas) and as from declining urban sites (on the outskirts). On these trips he was accompanied by Nancy Holt, Michael Heizer and Robert Morris, and they would be the trigger for his works *Non-Sites*⁶ that he began to carry out from this date. In 1966 he gave the conference *Shaping the Environment: The artist and the City* at Yale University School of Arts and Architecture, and was invited to collaborate as artistic advisor to an architecture and engineering firm on the new Dallas-Fort Worth airport project, where he would also develop various ideas for *earthworks*.

Smithson shows curiosity about the major engineering interventions, and the infrastructures that transform the landscape (jetties, creation of artificial land, etc.). And at the same time, he focuses his attention on the evolution of construction processes and the different phases that make up the intervention of a dynamic art work, and even the transitory states of construction that disappear over time. This way of understanding the temporary process allows him to understand the transformation of the territory, and the gestation and maturation time of a work *in progress*, where an intermediate phase transmits continuity over time, and its unfolding. In an interview with Paul Cummings for the *Archives of American Art/Smithsonian Institute* in 1972, Smithson acknowledges “But I became less and less interested in the actual structure of the building and more interested in the processes of the building and all the different preliminary engineering things” (Holt 152).

The scale of the territory increased for Smithson from the un-built project of the Texas airport, where the importance of viewing from the air was taken into consideration after a flying experience. Geological maps where one could read history over time, topographic maps where it was possible to verify the transformation of its relief, samples from inaccessible explorations, aerial photographs, etc. His way of understanding *earthworks*, entailed the perception of the works in relation to terrain, establishing a network of continuity between places and people. Feeling and understanding the place, implied

⁶ From 1966, the excursions to abandoned places, mines, deserts, would lead to the *Non-Sites*. In these works, the relational acquires a special relevance (a multiplicity of relations), and it produces dialectic between *Site* and *Non-Site*; between the exposed fragments and the geological landscape to which they refer.

Site is a physical place inseparable from the context (located in the place).

Non-Site consists mainly in the conceptual representation of a place in an exhibiting space (spatial displacement, taken from the place). They are works ‘extracted from their context’ and together, they were composed in several parts: documents (a cutout plan, partial photos of the place, etc.) and geological fragments (rocks, sand...) arranged in a conceptual layout (a designed compartment whose concept relates to the place).

‘entering the circle of space transformation’. According to Smithson, “The process behind the making of a storage facility may be viewed in stages, thus constituting a whole ‘series’ of works of art from the ground up. Land surveying and preliminary building, if isolated into discrete stages, may be viewed as an array of art works that *vanish* as they develop” (Holt 46).

From 1966 Smithson was linked with the Dwan Gallery in New York, and began to collaborate with Artforum where he would publish his most relevant initial writings: *Entropy and the New Monuments* (1966), *Towards the Development of An Air Terminal Site*, and *A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey* (1967). His *Non-Sites*⁷ works evolved conceptually towards a complexity that incorporated the abstraction considered mainly as ‘abstract representation’. It showed stratifications and superimposed layers of data which, at the same time, were organized according to the geometry of crystal formations, trying to find a dialectical relationship between *site* and *non-site*, from the binomial organic/crystalline.

Throughout 1968 Smithson travelled through the deserts of California, Nevada and Utah with Michael Heizer and Nancy Holt, locating sites for new works and collecting rocks and materials for his work. He also visited the slate quarries in Pennsylvania and the Pine Barrens landscape in New Jersey, and travelled to Europe to participate in various collective art exhibitions, touring the Ruhr region alongside photographers Bernd & Hilla Becher.

In 1969, he created *Mirror Displacement* in various locations (Cayuga, New Jersey, etc.), and specifically in *Ithaca Mirror Trail* for the *Earth Art* exhibition at the Cornell University, where he would participate together with Dennis Oppenheim, and Richard Long (Gordon Matta-Clark collaborated with them in the exhibition). In these *Land Art* interventions they interacted with nature as a basis for their works of art, as well as questioning the physical and conceptual limits of the works of art. Many of the interventions were ephemeral in nature and became a contextual reference experience with the place. Smithson then visited Stonehenge in England and other prehistoric places, and completed various interventions such as *Asphalt Rundown* in a quarry on the outskirts of Rome.

He also carried out various works such as *Map of Glass (Atlantis)*, *Island of Salt Crystals*, *Glass Strata* in Vancouver, and executed his best-known intervention: *Spiral Jetty* in the

⁷ The *Non-Sites* are the result of conceptual thinking to represent *earthworks* on an exhibiting scale (a construction and production of three dimensional logical images), to find a way to transmit them. At the same time, they need the spectator’s gaze to give them meaning. Although the *Non-sites* could be considered conceptual works, some of them actually become formalist works, by simply ‘representing’ the place by means of an object (exhibiting agent). As a last resort, the *Non-Sites* would be spaces (open rooms) within the exhibiting spaces.

Great Salt Lake (Utah, 1970). In many of these works he used photography as a means of experimentation, as part of the work itself, including using formats that captured the movement and the construction process of the intervention (8/16 mm films formats edited according to storyboard scripts that were part of the work and extended the limits of the story).

Between 1971 and 1973 Smithson focused his attention on various projects and proposals for the recycling and recovery of sites exploited by industries (quarries, mines, wastelands) through artistic interventions; but he was unable to carry out any of these proposals where he sought to involve and link mining companies through art.

In his approach to the territory a double situation occurs: on the one hand, he captures a fragment of the landscape, suspending it in time and space, where that fragment condensed a memory, shows scars and reveals what was lacking; on the other hand, he feels the urge to intervene in the place and build an artistic work. This could explain the temporary difficulty of achieving the materialisation of a work integrated into the landscape, as well as the possible uncertainty about the intervention that 'seals' the place.

Actually, in Robert Smithson's career, the fundamental importance lies in the way he 'looks at the landscape', and to a lesser extent on his works in particular. Fixing the gaze is 'framing a fragment' that would establish the moment of the fixation of reality; delimiting the void, capturing the absence, leaving the landscape just before the solution overflows. The project is there, in the 'stadium' that allows us to link the past (pre-existing landscape) with the future (development over time). Therefore, it would never be a completed work, but "a work in progress", unfinished, in which time, the perception of others, and even the superimposition of new uses and new projects would act in a significant way.

The fragment contains the totality, it represents the whole. In an abstract way, it allows us to reconstruct the absent, or to imagine-project "the new" that completes it. The space emerges by fragmenting, when looking at the landscape. At the same time, it enables the juxtaposition of projects, or generates a situation to be discovered; that is, to enhance the reading of the initial situation, and enrich it with a new layer of meaning. Smithson's work is a reflection on time and entropy,⁸ on moving from one state to another and the transition between the phases of a system. There is a constant rationale that is essentially

⁸ Entropy (transformation, change) as a measure of disorder refers to the second law of Thermodynamics: the irreversibility of the transformation and the evolution process. An orderly system that will become random over time; disorder always emerges from order. Entropy always increases in a system that is not in equilibrium: as entropy increases, the energy decreases.

condensed in his work: the “spiral”,⁹ which to a certain extent we can consider conceptual: centrifugal-centripetal energy, continuity of movement, and the relationship between things.

Many of the concepts he raises come from science fiction, as a journey from the present to the future, or from the future to the past. Smithson experiments with reversals and changes in the direction of time: with an absence or dislocation of time. In addition, he develops the photographs in black and white, making direct copies on a photostat machine. In the film *The Spiral Jetty* (1970), Smithson narrates a situation or an event from close-ups to distant views, linking the different approaches: the salt crystals, the sheets of water, the moving views from the helicopter, etc. The narration moves dynamically backwards and forwards. If these images of 'landscape ruins', abandoned landscapes and residual spaces, with Smithson's gaze become future spaces, this would be similar to the 'change and transformation' that Gordon Matta-Clark proposes for architecture that has lost its initial function and to which we can give and discover a new meaning.

We begin to have 'a place' at the moment in which “we see what is there with a new vision”. Our new perspective is the one that can encounter the possibilities for transformation and change of a place. Therefore, an abandoned or residual place becomes a "new place" when a new architecture comes into being.

⁹ The work *Spiral Jetty* in the Great Salt Lake (Utah, 1970), is subject to the cycle and rise and fall of the lake's water level, flooding and disappearing, or the emergence of water during different climatic conditions and at different times. Smithson draws the map-diagram *A Surd View for an Afternoon* (1970) where the spiral extends-contracts in the straight-curve line 'abstract concepts / impending entropy', and the sketch diagram 'edge / margin' all of which are very close to Michel Foucault's thoughts on the conceptualisation of the *outside*.



Figure 1. Location: A_*New York*, B_*Rutherford*, C_*Passaic* and D_*Paterson*
[Superimposed 'Letraset' + image taken from Google Earth]



Figure 2. Aerial view of *Spiral Jetty* in the Great Salt Lake, Utah [Google Earth]

3. FRAGMENT Nº 1: *PASSAIC*

Robert Smithson combined the development of the artistic works, with his hobby of strolling along the outskirts of New Jersey with Nancy Holt. The attraction for abandoned places and broken landscapes, led him to distance himself from galleries and museums.

In 1967 he created the photo-essay *A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey* in the form of a suburban walk through the post-industrial "great monuments": residual spaces of the capitalist system that were found on the outskirts of the city. It dealt with the deteriorated landscape of the banks of the Passaic River, its bridge, the construction works for the new road, pumping platforms, industrial pipelines, etc.

That zero panorama seemed to contain "ruins in reverse", that is--all the new construction that would eventually be built. This is the opposite of the 'romantic ruin' because the buildings don't fall into ruin after they are built but rather rise into ruin before they are built.

[...]

Passaic seems full of "holes" compared to New York City, which seems tightly packed and solid, and those holes in a sense are the monumental vacancies that define, without trying, the memory--traces of an abandoned set of futures.

[...]

I walked down a parking lot that covered the old railroad tracks which at one time ran through the middle of Passaic. That monumental parking lot divided the city in half, turning it into a mirror and a reflection--but the mirror kept changing places with the reflection [...] If the future is "out of date" and "old fashioned", then I had been in the future.

[...]

I am convinced that the future is lost somewhere in the dumps of the non-historical past. [...] (Holt 54-56)

Smithson's gaze rested on 'fragments' of the New Jersey suburbs, located on a boundary that revealed an apparent destruction of the landscape; but at the same time, the resulting

debris and fragments made up a 'ruined landscape'. The search for quarries and degraded landscapes came again from that landscape that 'had no value', that was degraded and ruined but that contained a dormant potential, so that we could turn it into a 'new landscape'. Smithson was convinced that the most interesting places to take part in were those that had been altered by industry or devastated by nature.

With the help of a *map of Passaic*, and an *Instamatic* camera, Smithson began the tour-journey through this transforming landscape. His aim was to draw a cartography-map that allowed him to approach the landscape and understand its essence. Passaic's images were 'fragments of the landscape' detained in time. With respect to this he said: "In a way, this article that I wrote on Passaic could be conceived of a kind of appendix to William Carlos Williams' poem 'Paterson'" (Holt 187).

4. FRAGMENT Nº 2: PATERSON

William Carlos Williams (1883-1963) was born and lived in Rutherford (9 Ridge Road), the small town where he worked as a paediatrician and gynaecologist and who, at the same time became a poet. Throughout his life he would write the poem *Paterson*, which he would publish in five volumes between 1946 and 1958. Williams found in this atypical poem a voice of his own based on experience, and he arrived at an objective language, which he achieved, by the natural description of things, discovering the appropriate language. To be coherent, he relied on the relationship of fragments from everyday life. He alternated fragments of prose and poems (letters, events, descriptions, etc.) using a 'new' structure. It was a construction made from random situations and fleeting events, which he described as if they were instant photographs that captured reality.

Paterson uses a variable structure in which prose and verses are interspersed at a slower and more leisurely pace with more fluid fragments that adjust themselves as if they were breathing whilst ascending/descending a mountain. It is in a certain way, a set of poems linked by paths, by way of invisible lines.

Everything takes place in the city of Paterson, with the construction of a narrative based on fragmentation, by way of the narration of specific events of a transitory nature and anecdotes of anonymous or unknown people. Isolated fragments, memories linked to places, memory linked to a discovery. The work tries to 'find the right way' to present the facts, 'discover' the continuity of the story, and in a certain way, leave the work incomplete and 'open', to the movement and progress of the reader.

The first idea centering upon the poem, Paterson, came alive early: to find an image large enough to embody the whole knowable world about me. The longer I lived in my place, among the details of my life, I realized that these isolated observations and experiences needed pulling together to gain "profundity."

[...]

I took the city as my "case" to work up, really to work it up. It called for poetry such as I did not know, it was my duty to discover or make such a context on the "thought." To make a poem, fulfilling the requirements of the art, and yet new, in the sense that in the very lay of the syllables Paterson as Paterson would be discovered, perfect, perfect in the special sense of the poem. (Williams 391-392)

The features of the place define the landscape: the city, the river, the mountains, and the waterfalls. It deals with the story of a landscape where the events that take place are visually recorded. The poem tries to place itself in the present: *to start again*. Isolated observations and experiences are shown as if they occurred for the 'first time'; situations are repeated with variations that create a natural rhythm, whilst on other occasions they remain as an insinuation to remember again, to narrate 'again', to live again, to live anew. Paterson's landscape is an open space that 'unfolds', requiring and inviting the reader to become part of it with the aim of continuing the work. By focusing on 'chosen fragments', Williams concentrates every moment on the construction of a scene with an image that he captures and leaves suspended in time. It is a construction of the space 'formed by fragments' that are overlapping.

5. FRAGMENT N° 3: HOTEL PALENQUE

Hotel Palenque is at the same time a contemporary ruin and a construction site. In the conference given by Robert Smithson to architecture students at the University of Utah in 1972, the artist comments on the images of 31 slides taken on the trip to southeastern Mexico with Nancy Holt and gallery owner Virginia Dwan in 1969.

Robert Smithson draws the plan of the hotel Palenque, noting what he finds, provisionally naming spaces, and drawing the 'fragments' of spaces built in coexistence with nature's vegetation and the remains of materials stored in the central courtyard. Almost in a similar way to the guide through *Passaic monuments*, Smithson makes a tour of the architecture: in this case, a freehand sketch-plan, some images, and his account of that experience (that place, those spaces) in the conference. A ruin that is unfinished, open.

The artist carefully photographs the 'fragments' of the hotel. They all represent a presence, and at the same time an absence, and as Smithson describes, "they intertwine like a snake":

- A fragment of one of the building's facades, where broken cantilevers and bare steel bars are exposed: the image of a partially built structure. The image has a mirror effect; it shows architecture under construction that has been detained in time without being completed, and in the same way, it shows a 'de-architecture', which has been partially demolished and is incomplete.
- The central space of the hotel is an 'abandoned' courtyard where the vegetation overgrows is used as a temporary warehouse that ends up being permanent. Robert Smithson constantly asks himself about objects he finds in the space (a door, an isolated column...) and compares them to a 'man-made' geological space.
- A few rooms without a roof, where you can see modifications made to the walls, changes of slope, overlapping facades, etc. The image is taken from a balcony from where one builds a visual relationship. On the other side of the balcony, an unfinished room.
- An opening in an exterior wall that frames the landscape. At the same time, he describes the spatial field of the open air room.
- An empty pool unfinished, or dismantled... A small bar and a dance hall... It seems that the structure of the hotel has been superimposed on another structure, extension or a previously existing one. The modern part suggests it was abandoned during construction as it has scaffolding, ramps and props: provisional communications, overlapping facades, starter bars for columns, repaired cracks, collapsed stairs, half demolished rooms, etc.
- An unfinished roof awaiting its completion allows us to imagine the final construction of the space.

One of the issues that Robert Smithson insists upon is the uncertainty of the state of the architecture as an incomplete construction, also like a 'ruin in reverse'. Regarding *Hotel Palenque* he affirms, "[...] This is really the old hotel and you can see that instead of just tearing it down at once they tear it down partially so that you are not deprived of the complete wreckage situation [...] buildings being both ripped down and built up at the same time."¹⁰ The photograph as a fragment –remaining/reflection of the work–, evoking an absence but also a permanence.

¹⁰ Excerpt of the conference given by Robert Smithson: "Hotel Palenque" in the University of Utah, 1972. Written reproduction: Ortega, Damián, ed. *Robert Smithson. Hotel Palenque: 1969-1972*. Alias, 2011, p. 16.



Figure 3. Reactive strip "Architecture as eological construction" (2020) created from a 'folded' map found inside the publication: Ortega, Damián, ed. *Robert Smithson. Hotel Palenque: 1969-1972*. Alias, 2011.

6. ON READING ROBERT SMITHSON: ARCHITECTURE AS EOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTION

This is sort of the door. At first you notice right at the back that it's green, right? There's not really much you can say about it, I mean it's just a green door. We've all seen green doors at one time in our lives. It gives out a sense of universality that way, a sense of kind of global cohesion. The door probably opens to nowhere and closes on nowhere so that we leave the Hotel Palenque with this closed door and return to the University of Utah. (Ortega, Robert Smithson. Hotel Palenque 66)

Passaic, Paterson, Hotel Palenque... are 'passages' that bring us closer to loss, to the deterioration; they place us in the present, they confront us with bewilderment and astonishment, with an instant where time stops. A ruin of the future, a space under construction, a continuity of the narrative of the place. Above all, *Hotel Palenque* would be most emphatically 'architecture as a ruin': it refers us to a pre-existence, and at the same time, it is an interrupted, frozen, unfinished construction where we can sense that the 'architecture' is considered as a 'ruin under construction'. It is an incomplete and unfinished space where the 'void' is waiting to become space, filling the void, unfolding the space. Smithson states,

The steady hiss of the air-conditioner in the rented Dodge Dart might have seen the voice of Eecath—the god of thought and wind. Wayward thoughts blew around the car; wind blew over the scrub bushes outside. [...]. In the rear-view mirror appeared Tezcatlipoca—dimurge of the 'smoking-mirror'. "All those guide books are of no use," said Tezcatlipoca, "You must travel at random, like the first Mayans, you risk getting lost in the thickets, but that is the only way to make art".¹¹ (Holt 94)

All those 'mirror displacements' that Robert Smithson carried out in 1969, *Mirror Trail* (Cayuga Salt), *Mirror Trail in New Jersey*, *Ithaca Mirror Trail*, and *Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan*, are related to the layout of the place, leaving traces, marking the landscape. With the intention of interacting with the landscape, the artist experimented with lines of light, and footprints that came into being with the intervention. Smithson therefore intended to build a path and an evanescent space, inhabiting a space defined by reflections of light. In short, to create maps that gathered imprints on the landscape, sketches of the paths.

In *A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects* (1968), Smithson affirmed,

¹¹ Robert Smithson deduces in 'A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects' (Artforum, 1968) a relevant reference: "At this point I must return to what I think is an important issue, namely Tony Smith's 'car ride' on the 'unfinished turnpike'. *This drive was a revealing experience. The road and much of the landscape was artificial, and yet it couldn't be called a work of art.*' (Talking with Tony Smith by Samuel Wagstaff Jr., *Artforum*, December 1966). He is talking about a sensation, not the finished work of art, this doesn't imply that he is anti-art." (Holt 84)

Geometrical trenches could be dug with the help of the 'ripper'—steel toothed rakes mounted on tractors. With such equipment construction takes on the look of destruction; perhaps that's why certain architects hate bulldozers and steam shovels. They seem to turn the terrain into unfinished cities of organized wreckage. [...] These processes of heavy construction have a devastating kind of primordial grandeur, and are in many ways more astonishing than the finished project—be it a road or a building. The actual disruption of the earth's crust is at times very compelling, and seems to confirm Heraclitus's Fragment 124, "The most beautiful world is like a heap of rubble tossed down in confusion".

[...]

Words and rocks contain a language that follows syntax of splits and ruptures. Look at any word long enough and you will see it open up into a series of faults, into a terrain of particles each containing its own void.

[...]

It was as though one was at the bottom of a petrified sea and gazing on countless stratigraphic horizons that had fallen into endless directions of steepness. Syncline (downward) and anticline (upward) outcroppings and the asymmetrical cave-ins caused minor swoons and vertigos. The brittleness of the site seemed to swarm around one, causing a sense of displacement. (Holt 83-90)

A map, a sequence of images, a description of the place. Continuity is always there; each fragment is part of a whole in space and time. Each image is a fragment of space, and at the same time, of time.

And when we see that 'map, those images, the description of the place' –always from the fragment, the series of fragments–, we are all involved, the way we look at the landscape, our experience with space in architecture, our smooth slide in the description of the place; our thoughts are projected onto the territory, setting the place. The void left after an extraction shows us how space is a construction of air: the story of the empty space invites us to its deconstruction, to rebuild again. And the same happens with the fragment extracted from a landscape architecture: the fragment-image invites us to its reconstruction. In *A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects*, Smithson says "The abstract grids containing the raw matter are observed as something incomplete, broken and shattered" (Holt 89).

To be precise, one of the interventions that best reflects this architecture 'as a ruin' is *Mica Spread* (Great Salt Lake, Utah, 1970). *Untitled (Mica Spread)* are some photographs taken by Nancy Holt on the edge of the Great Salt Lake in Utah. They seem to have been produced like discovery, an encounter on the pathway, as if we were to find a forgotten *Land Art* intervention in the landscape.

The images are fragments of the place, where at the same time you appreciate fragments, pieces, remains and objects... In the main images, the foundation of a construction is

shown but its extent is not clear. This surface is level with respect to the ground, and fits into the topography that slopes gently down towards the lake, almost flush with the ground at its upper part, at the same time generating an unevenness on the opposite side. In the middle part, there is a wooden framework arranged in the form of steps, and at the end a provisional ramp.

If we follow the edges of the various images, we will discover shadows cast from a very vertical light, there seems to be a wooden building. Also you can see a small construction located at a certain distance and half buried in the ground... Stones emerging from the ground, vegetation scorched by the intense sun, mica flakes... They are photographs with hardly any colour, almost bleached by the sun, and the surface is covered with salt flakes. In *Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan* (1969), Smithson reflects:

Glutinous light submerged vision under a wilderness of unassimilated seeing. Scraps of sight accumulated until the eyes were engulfed by scrambled reflections. What was seen reeled off into indecisive zones. The eyes seemed to look. Were they looking? Perhaps. Other eyes were looking. A Mexican gave the displacement a long, imploring gaze. Even if you cannot look, others will look for you. Art brings sight to a halt, but that halt has a way of unravelling itself. All the reflections expired into the thickets of Yaxchilan. One must remember that writing on art replaces presence by absence by substituting the abstraction of language for the real thing. There was a friction between language and memory. A memory of reflections becomes an absence of absences. (Holt 100)

The attempt to understand the work *Untitled (Mica Spread)* leads us back to the fragments of *Hotel Palenque*. Whilst working Smithson discovers the 'transition' of an image. When photographing a fragment, he photographs the space in between events: *the space between*. He does not photograph the reality but the void, the transition. This is achieved with the 'fragment' making the 'object' disappear. By framing the fragment, he manages to abstract the 'transitional passage' from the reality, and captures the movement of space-time.

The image becomes a *poem*. It determines reality by choosing a fragment of the place (passage in time). The reversibility of a photograph shows the unidirectional continuity of time, and the continuous and constant construction. The photograph shows the reversibility, the continuous process of order/disorder, that is to say, that a system evolves towards disorder, and the 'fragmentation' reintroduces an order: it presents what

is lacking.¹² By fragmenting, the framing is activated, the *void appears, and the space unfolds*.

Noon-day sunshine cinema-ized the site, turning the bridge and the river into an over-exposed picture. Photographing it with my Instamatic 400 was like photographing a photograph. The sun became a monstrous light-bulb that projected a detached series of 'stills' through my Instamatic into my eye. When I walked on the bridge, it was as though I was walking on an enormous photograph that was made of wood and steel, and underneath the river existed as an enormous movie film that showed nothing but a continuous blank. (Holt 52-53)

The concept of 'Architecture as eological construction' is a clear allusion to Robert Smithson's interest in geology, and at the same time to his fixation of time (the place, by the traces of the routes, the reflections of light). Architecture as "eological" construction escapes from the concept that architecture is 'petrified', static and unmovable. Rather it understands architecture as an incomplete, unfinished ruin: an open void, *a fragment of space*. Eological construction responds to the encounter with the 'essence of space': the continuous transformation, the constant reconstruction, fluctuating with the current conditions, adapting to the changing situations...

That architecture is a ruin, signifies that even though it is physically completed, the 'architectural space' is open to its constant construction; to the interior layout, the way the space is occupied, the relationship it establishes with the exterior.

All this refers to the 'experience' of the space, and not only to that which is built, but to the need for 'building a new space'. To rebuild the space is to consider that architecture is 'to inhabit the fragment, and to unfold the space, continuing the traces and marks of that fold –of the memory–, or tracing with a new extension that builds the space yet to be imagined, yet to live (anew each time)'.

And finally, we can stop for a few moments with a couple of poems by William Carlos Williams, which revolve around the extraordinary and simple description of a 'fragment' of New Jersey, and the suggestive spatial story from a painting by Peter Brueghel the Elder, who invites us to 'to inhabit a fragment'... unfolding the space (building the space). Below fragments from two of his poems "Jersey Lyric" and "The hunters in the snow":

*View of the winter trees
in front of
a tree*

¹² Order arises by fragmenting the disordered system, by framing the landscape, like a fluctuation, like a new relationship. By fragmenting, the lack of an 'outside', is evident. And so there is a movement to restore the *loss* that is related to the story of the place (new, of what's to come).

*in the foreground
where
by fresh-fallen*

*snow
lie 6 woodchunks ready
for the fire.*
(Collected Poems, "Jersey Lyric" 531)

*The over-all picture is winter
icy mountains
in the background the return*

*from the hunt it is toward evening
from the left
sturdy hunters lead in*

*their pack the inn-sign
hanging from a
broken hinge is a stag a crucifix
between his antlers the cold
inn yard is
deserted but for a huge bonfire*

*that flares wind-driven tended by
women who cluster
about it to the right beyond*

*the hill is a pattern of skaters
Brueghel the painter
concerned with it all has chosen*

*a winter-struck bush for his
foreground to
complete the picture*
(Collected Poems, "The Hunters in the Snow", 502)

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Bargellesi-Severi**, Guglielmo., ed. *Robert Smithson slideworks*. Carlo Frua, 1997.
- Benjamin**, Walter. *Libro de los Pasajes*. Akal, 2005.
- Careri**, Francesco. *Walkscapes. El andar como práctica estética*. Gustavo Gili, 2013.
- Enzensberger**, Hans Magnus. "William Carlos Williams", en *Detalles*. Anagrama, 2006.
- Flam**, Jack., ed. *Robert Smithson. The Collected Writings*. University of California Press, 1996.

- Gilchrist**, Maggie and **Lingwood**, J., ed. *Robert Smithson. El paisaje entrópico. Una retrospectiva 1960-1973*. Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, 1993.
- Holt**, Nancy., ed. *The Writings of Robert Smithson*. New York University Press, 1979.
- Lacalle**, Carlos. "Los nuevos espacios (los pliegues del espacio)", en *Los lugares del futuro. Encuentro con Marc Augé*. General de Ediciones de Arquitectura, 2018.
- Lefebvre**, Henri. *La presencia y la ausencia. Contribución a la teoría de las representaciones*. Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1980.
- Maderuelo**, Javier. *La idea de espacio en la arquitectura y el arte contemporáneos 1960-1989*. Akal, 2008.
- Marot**, Sébastien. *Suburbanismo y el arte de la memoria*. Gustavo Gili, 2006.
- Ortega**, Damián. ed. *Robert Smithson. Selección de textos*. Alias, 2009.
- . *Hotel Palenque: 1969-1972*. Alias, 2011.
- Padgett**, Ron. *Cómo ser perfecto*. Kriller71, 2018.
- Pico**, Ramón. *Robert Smithson. Aerial art*. Universidad de Sevilla, 2013.
- Raquejo**, Tania. *Land Art*. Nerea, 1998.
- Reynolds**, Ann. *Robert Smithson. Learning from New Jersey and Elsewhere*. The MIT Press, 2003.
- Shapiro**, Gary. *Earthwards: Robert Smithson and Art after Babel*. University of California Press, 1995.
- Smithson**, Robert. *Un recorrido por los monumentos de Passaic*. Gustavo Gili, 2006.
- Tsai**, Eugenie, ed. *Robert Smithson Unearthed: Drawings, Collages, Writings*. Columbia University Press, 1991.
- Wigley**, Mark. *Cutting Matta-Clark. The Anarchitecture investigation*. Lars Müller Publishers with Canadian Centre for Architecture and the Columbia University, 2018.
- Williams**, William Carlos. *The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams*. New Directions, 1967.
- . *The Collected Poems of Williams Carlos Williams, 1939-1962*, edited by Christopher McGowan, vol. 2, New York: New Directions, 1991.
- . *Paterson*. Cátedra, 2001.
- . *Viaje al amor*. Lumen, 2009.
- . "The Descent", en *La música del desierto*. Lumen, 2010.



Alberto de la Rocha

Paisajes de Tiempo: Ventanas al Mundo

Landscapes of Time: Windows to the World

Asunción López-Varela Azcárate
Universidad Complutense Madrid
alopezva@ucm.es

Resumen

Paisajes de Tiempo: Ventanas al Mundo

Este artículo explora la dialéctica entre lugar, espacio y tiempo a través de la percepción auditiva experimentada desde una ventana. Durante la pandemia del Covid-19, muchos de nosotros pasamos semanas de encierro durante el estado de alarma. Las ventanas de nuestros hogares han sido la única forma de contacto con el mundo exterior. Hace unos años, Katherine Norman creó el proyecto intermedial *Window (para John Cage)* (2012), inspirado en John Cage, un músico interesado en explorar el potencial del sonido ambiental, cuyo centenario se celebró ese mismo año. El proyecto recibió el Premio New Media Writing 2012. Este artículo examina la fundamentación semiótica del sonido y sus estructuras afectivas.

Palabras clave: nostalgia, paisaje urbano, pérdida, Katherine Norman, semiótica, ventanas.

Abstract

Landscapes of Time: Windows to the World

This paper explores the dialogue between location, place, space and time through aural perception experienced from a window. During the Covid-19 pandemic, most of us have spent many weeks in lockdown. Our home windows have been the only form of contact with the external world. Some years ago Katherine Norman created the intermedial project *Window (for John Cage)* (2012), inspired by John Cage, a musician interested in the potential of ambient sound, on the year of the centenary of his birth. It was awarded the

2012 New Media Writing Prize. This paper examines the semiotic grounding of sound and its affective structures.

Key words: cityscape, nostalgia, Katherine Norman, semiotics, windows.

The term nostalgia comes from Greek *nostos* "homecoming," and *algos/algia* "pain, grief, distress", and signals a severe homesickness for the past that can apply to many contexts. It is interesting that it carries significant spatial connotations even when it also refers to a perception of temporality. This paper discusses these duplicities in the context of a volume entitled *Landscapes of Loss*, whose title also captures the ambiguity of spatiotemporal absences. If the etymology of the term 'nostalgia' points to spatial aspects even though it refers to temporal occurrences it is because time is an abstract concept that can only be represented as a quasi-spatial dimension, as the ground-breaking study on cognitive metaphor, *Metaphors We Live By* (1980) by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, demonstrated.

Let's start this paper with the reminder that every aspect of human life is fundamentally temporal. From the moment of birth to that of death, human experience changes in and through time. The preposition 'in' refers to the fact that physiologically, humans, like all biological beings, function in relation to circadian clocks that regulate all biological functions. Sleep patterns, metabolic rhythms, breathing, heartbeat and other motor functions, desires (hunger, mating etc.) are all time-dependent. Human chemistry is tuned to internal rhythms. The term 'through' indicates that there is an orientation, duration and succession, to time. Human cognitive operations, including our levels of attention and concentration, conscious and unconscious memory and, of course, speech, are also temporally dependent (Wittman, 2016: 80ff). The measuring of time in linear patterns seems to be a ubiquitous feature of consciousness, speech and writing; involving the location of events and actions in a temporal semiotic scheme, a signifying chain. This dynamism is inherent to the flow of conscious experiences; a time that is always 'tensed', relative to the perspective of a given subject, situated in the flow.

The unconscious brain, and its emotional content, seems to have non-linear, more episodic patterns, and experiences of temporality that adjust to the intensity of feelings. The order of time, its linear succession, is a particularly salient feature of conscious states and of discourse. Humans love orderly routines and their actions are oriented to the future, since it is not possible to change the past. The emotional brain can alter all these states and modify the experience of temporality, causing time to be felt differently when we are

enjoying ourselves or if we are bored. As we grow older, time seems to move faster, and this appears to be directly related to the amount of past experience in our brains. In any case, time is experienced looking back from the present (direct experience) to the past (memory), and from the present (direct experience) forward to the future (expectation).

Svetlana Boym, author of *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001), explained that nostalgia, unlike melancholia, is a product of both individual and collective memory, but that it can have past and future orientations. According to Boym, there are two types of nostalgia: “Restorative nostalgia stresses *nostos* (home) and attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home. Reflective nostalgia thrives on *algia* (the longing itself) and delays the homecoming—wistfully, ironically, desperately.” (“Nostalgia and Its Discontents” 13) Boym sees nostalgia as co-dependent on technology and as a defence mechanism against the accelerated rhythms of modern life.

It seems to me that this understanding of nostalgia can also explain the distancing that instrumentalizes the use of the prefix ‘post’ in order to modify the ‘modern’ so that the movement of progress, seem ‘other’. Linda Hutcheon has argued that “our contemporary culture is indeed nostalgic. Some parts of it—postmodern parts—are aware of the risks and lures of nostalgia, and seek to expose those through irony.” (206). These positions seem to defend a linear and irreversible construction of time, related to our instruments of consciousness. But we know that time does not always move forward. Time is more akin to music, in this sense. It can acquire depth and resonate in one position following recursive and replicable forms of organization; amplifying and growing, without advancing, as in techniques of mindfulness or in dreams. This is the kind of time experience and nostalgic encounter that many of us have experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic, and the kind also suggested by Katherine Norman in her project *Window (for John Cage)*.

My aim in this paper is to show that, beyond the experiences of longing and belonging, nostalgia is very much grounded in human neurophysiology. In this sense, I would like to explore the organicity of the concept; not necessarily related to a linear schema of return to the loss of some divine paradise and primal time, within a prospective and progressive ordering of events. I will argue that nostalgia can be explored as a non-intentional re-appearance, a ghost or re-visitation of the future; a symptom of human unconscious awareness of the simultaneity of all temporal experience, past, present and future. Since narrative is a form of telling that takes place in time, following our more or less conscious intentionality, I want to explore how postmodern avant-garde art opens narrative frameworks in order to reflect on the impact of sound and everyday noise as temporal

experiences. Thus, by focusing on aural aspects of hypertextual telling, the paper 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'.

As indicated, *Window* was inspired by John Cage (1912 –1992) on the year of the centenary of his birth. Cage was an American composer, music theorist, and thinker, interested in the potential of ambient sound. He was also a pioneer in exploring indeterminacy in music and electro-acoustics, and one of the leading figures of the post-war avant-garde. Katherine Norman's project explores the dialogue between location and time through aural perception experienced from a window. In her 2018 essay on the project, Norman explained that the project was an experiment in listening to everyday sounds and writing about sound environment. She spent a few minutes each day filming from her bedroom window, particularly interested in a tree which reminded her of a painting by Claude. She does not mention the surname. Perhaps she refers to Claude Monet and his poplar series. After all, Monet painted sequences of tree images at different times of the day and in different seasons, in a similar way to what Norman had in mind with respect to sound. The option Claude Lorrain, who inspired Théophile Gautier in defining ekphrasis or art-transposition is also very attractive because of Cage's relationship with the Flux movement, as we shall see below.

Norman's main aim in devising this project was to catch the presence of ordinary sensorial life experience and contextualize how the aural and the sonic are important in our lives. In the days of Covid-19 pandemic, we have all experienced sonic manifestations, such as evening applause in gratitude to coronavirus health workers, or singing and playing music from our windows as a sign of encouragement and mutual connection. In a 1957 lecture, "Experimental Music," collected in his volume *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (1961), Cage described music as "an affirmation of life – not an attempt to bring order out of chaos nor to suggest improvements in creation, but simply a way of waking up to the very life we're living." (12) In post-pandemic days, such an assertion is more valid than ever.

In collaboration with students from his classes on "Experimental Composition," Cage also created a number of short pieces called *Variations* that he described as life "happenings". Strongly influenced by Antonin Artaud's *The Theatre and Its Double*, and by James Joyce's novel, *Finnegans Wake*, Cage had been inspired to produce these happenings, short musical and theatrical events with no plot, and without a definite script, where everything was left to chance. Like in Katherine Norman's project, the pieces tried to capture the feeling of the passing of time, subverting any sense of direction and conclusion. Norman

writes that her “only conscious decision was not to choose.” (n.p.) She wanted “to recreate that immersive experience of quotidian experience without drawing attention to it. Because attending to the ordinary makes it extraordinary.” (n.p.) This also meant subverting any form of linear plot in the narrative. Norman explains that she wanted to do “an allegory of the ordinary.” (n.p.) According to Paul de Man, who in “The Rhetoric of Temporality” sought to deconstruct the privileged claims to wholeness inherent in Romantic symbol, allegory is precisely an organic form, not limited in meaning like the symbol. Allegory has an open form of temporality, and it seems appropriate for an interactive intermedial project such as Norman’s. Indeed, Cage’s happenings became the forerunners for activities developed within the Fluxus group under the direction of Dick Higgins, one of Cage’s disciples and the first person to define ‘intermediality’ after the Romantic poet Coleridge had spoken of ‘intermedium’.

One of John Cage’s most important inspirations for his musical compositions had been the *I Ching* or *Book of Changes*, an ancient sacred book in Zen Buddhism and Taoism. It is read as a microcosm that captures complex correspondences to the macrocosm of the universe. The volume was translated to English in 1950 by Jewish-German publisher Kurt Wolff. His son Christian Wolff, a renowned avant-garde musician, was one of Cage’s collaborators. This classic Chinese text describes a system of divination based on mathematical algorithms and the circular temporality of nature, and it is used to identify hidden forms of order in apparently chance events. The *I Ching* is not the only divination manual that insists on the existence of a kind of secret cryptic proportion, a sort of symmetry and harmony present in the universe. The idea of an occult and divine code underlying all living matter is present in the notion of the golden mean, a ratio used in architecture and appearing in a number of ancient cosmologies across the world (one of Cage’s sheets of music features Fibonacci’s sequence, closely related to the golden ratio). Even today there is scientific speculation about the hidden coded nature of the universe (Barss, BBC 20th January 2020).

Cage began to use the *I Ching* in his random compositions after he met Gita Sarabhai, a young Indian singer and musician who received music lessons from Cage while she taught him Indian music and Zen philosophy. She explained to Cage that the purpose of music was not to convey emotional content, as Western musicians believed. But “to sober and quiet the mind, thus rendering it susceptible to divine influences.” (Cage 158) In other words, to reach the divinity by means of sounds and music one had to free the mind from any personal content, including not just rational aspects but also emotional ones.

The idea that art in general, and music in particular, should express the feelings of the author in order to recreate similar feelings in the audience arose in the Romantic period in Europe. Before the Enlightenment, European music was functional, accompanying poetry, song and dance. One of the most famous discussions between musicians Giovanni Bononcini (1670-1747) and Georg Friedrich Händel (1685-1759) had to do with the prominence in opera of music or of words. The composers appeared in a British nursery rhyme from 1725 as Tweedledum and Tweedledee, and were the inspiration for Lewis Carroll's characters in his sequel to *Alice in Wonderland*. Cage was convinced that this discussion made no sense because music, unlike words, was not about communication but about arbitrary sounds, noise and physiological rhythms. In his *Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse)* Cage also mentions that he was inspired by Henry David Thoreau who, after his solitary experience at Walden Pond, had written that "The commonest and cheapest sounds, as the barking of a dog, produce the same effect on fresh and healthy ears as the rarest music does. It depends on your appetite for sound." (*True Harvest*: 16 Feb. 1857) Some years later, in an interview with Miroslav Sebestik, 1991, Cage explained his idea of music as performance: "when I hear traffic, the sound of traffic—here on Sixth Avenue, for instance—I don't have the feeling that anyone is talking. I have the feeling that sound is acting. And I love the activity of sound." (n.p)

Katherine Norman's project includes a static video recording, but it is mostly made up of sound recordings taken from a window over the course of one year. There are twelve thumbnail photographs on the bottom of the page that the reader can click on to bring up a large sized image corresponding to each one of the twelve months. A horizontal slider on the right allows the reader to move within four different points of entry, visible in the first interface, with the names "dark", "text", "words" and "day". Seven little stars appear on the lower end of the screen; the author calls them "handles", which can be dragged individually to increase/decrease volume, intensity and balance. It is interesting that, in the case of *Cheap Imitation*, a piece for solo piano that Cage composed in 1969, he had asked the *I Ching* the following questions: Which of the seven modes, if we take as modes the seven scales beginning on white notes and remaining on white notes, which of those am I using? And also which of the twelve possible chromatic transpositions am I using? So that Katherine Norman's piece also revolves around the same numbers: twelve months or chromatic transpositions, and seven stars or modes, which resemble white notes on an imaginary pentagram on the screen.

The "dark" and "day" points of entry situate the window scene at dusk or early morning, with the corresponding ambient sounds: "'the shower's hollow rainfall', 'in another room,

his chair creaks', 'the spoon against the bowl', 'a drawer opened and closed, in haste', 'the rattle of curtain rings, light', 'floorboards complain in that familiar way', 'the hum of the boiler signals time', 'vacackling', 'pigeons', 'hedgehog making tracks on the paving stones', 'small birds chatter for berries', 'the glorious sunset', 'once, a helicopter', 'two dogs pass, the white one barks'." As the day moves along and the seasons pass, the sounds change: "radiators gurgle pleasantly', 'fence panels fight the wind', 'leaves shiver paper rain', 'a ball thuds in a childish rhythm', 'the TV turned down', 'fog, hanging still', 'Mozart and tea clatter downstairs', 'Sunday bells that come and go'." Norman insists on the vision of the tree: "this tree means home', 'remembering a hand against bark', 'sound enters, light reveals', 'listening makes dimension', 'catching the periphery', 'rain on the window ledge, inside'." The allusion to Thoreau is also there: "my small Walden', 'place is a gathering', 'geometric shadows suddenly'." (n.p)

"Text" brings in a whole new level of narrative, with brief anecdotes on John Cage's life and Norman's own reflections. For instance, she remembers a film with Cage slapping dough in bread making. Cage's compositions are also mentioned; in particular, a piece in which he recited a series of stories and observations, each related to a one-minute experience window. Norman also includes her ideas for the project: "As I looked and listened each day, and re-looked and re-listened to my recordings (feeling possessive, as if they were part of me), I was conscious of how familiarity arises from the accumulation of small, ordinary experiences, repeated innumerable times—this is how it feels to know a place." She discusses the nameless tree again: "I see the tree in context, and grab the camera when I observe a change in the sky, or hear that the wind is up, or notice some other shift in our co-existence." Against linearity, she defines her attempt to create a series of superimposed spatiotemporal layers of experience, mapping her acoustic landscape through repetitions. She says that it was like trying to catch the sight of her back on a mirror because everyday experience is gone before you know it; impossible to grasp. However, her project examines just that: how unremarkable quotidian experience, the slightest things and sounds, contribute to "the dynamic construction of place and the human experience of place through the accumulation of sensory perception, repetition, memory and emotion." (n.p.)

The point of entry called "Words" interprets some of the ambient sounds, randomly voicing them in short poet-like lines, with the help of the reader. This part becomes more interactive, as the poetic lines only appear when the reader moves the cursor around the visual landscape. According to Norman, the short poetic bits reflect on "how sensory perceptions in a familiar place are inextricably bound up with ingrained memories,

emotions, and previous experience,” not just of the place but of those sharing the same location.

Indeed, in his review of the piece for *I-love-E-poetry* blog, Leonardo Flores writes while “texts” extend the work conceptually, “words” do so experientially— extending perception beyond the limits of the photographic frames and the sounds attached to them; they function deictically, as pointers to the particular sound and its location, and relationally, as if grammaticalizing the temporal location of noise. Sounds are related to certain actions and events and have natural end points. But it is their resonances, a ritual that extends these sounds-actions in a replicative echo. Immensity results from these concrete repetitive moments. Experiences are concentrated at the window, that functions as a threshold to other spatiotemporal dimensions. As Norman mentions, her domestic landscape was composed of sounds “at the edges”; what Gaston Bachelard called “intimate immensities”, constituting the soundtrack to place and questioning boundaries. After she moved house, Norman remained attached to her previous home because of “the experience of spending a sustained time engaged in this particular small ritual.” (n.p)

At the start of this paper I mentioned that I wanted to explore nostalgia in a hypermedia experimental project that focuses mostly on sound. I thought that this might contribute to the debate initiated by Svetlana Boym on the conceptualization of nostalgia as a teleological form. Many postmodern artistic forms have tried to capture the instant temporality of fragmentation. The temporal dynamics of sound and music allow a simultaneity that the avant-garde works of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, for instance, struggled to capture in narrative fiction. The definition of nostalgia in terms of teleology might not allow for its appearance in less linear forms of art. So the question remains if Katherine Norman’s project, like John Cage’s sound experimentation, allow for the setting and mapping of any feelings of nostalgia, that is, the location of a landscape of loss. If so, does this landscape of longing belong to the author or to the audience, since both authors, Cage and Norman, tried to expel emotional content from their works?

As we have seen, both Norman and Cage attempt to capture specific aspects of temporal experience related to quotidian sounds and noises, often occurring in simultaneity. The consciousness behind these projects establishes a dialogue with the reader/audience even if the authors refused to create a cause-effect storyline, basing their projects on chance and random occurrences without a purpose in mind. Yet, the reader, like the commentator (in this case myself), struggles to enact the motives behind their rituals of noise and sound. The temporal frames of reference interconnect. First the frame that relates to the act of listening itself (temporal deixis or time of discourse) and those relating to what is being

told (time of event, even when there is no plot). Listening time involves the ability to position and coordinate one's own time experience with these different orders of temporality, the time of the teller and that of the telling, in this case calling to mind the succession of sound events and the passing of time day after night, phase after phase, season after season. These accounts unfold in an asynchronic temporality that turns synchronic. As I describe Norman's project based on Cage's memory, I write my own storyline, perhaps giving order to experiences that were supposed to remain disorderly, random and chaotic. In giving sense to these experiences, I discover resonances that perhaps were not meant to be. I impose connections to support my argument. I enact my own sense-making from their interactions, in an inter-subjective dialogue that incorporates forms of affective tuning and emotional contagion. Their rituals become mine, and I serve as vehicle for their amplification.

So, does the flow of events influence the emotional experience of a reader? Is there a way to explain if more instantaneous artistic forms, such as concrete poetry, Cage's happenings, or Norman's experimental project carry less emotional and cognitive weight, in comparison to narrative accounts that portray the flow of events? This paper has tried to answer some of these questions and argue that our neurophysiology contains the seeds of nostalgia. Reading-listening to Norman's project posits an affective immersion. The reader's agency within the text is modulated by the interactions allowed. The static scenes during which the reader listens create a desire to learn more about the project. Interactive parts such as "texts" first amplify the reader's background knowledge to the project. Even more immersive is the section "words" which increases the reader's experience of the workings of the project. In this case, touch functions as a synesthetic category that gives the reader agency to accelerate or decelerate the pacing of the poetic lines that appear on the screen. The reader is never "in-sync" with the temporal flow of events, but this interactive agency can become more or less explicit. The shifts in temporal flow introduced by the different parts modify the participant's agency and her level of immersion, and the iterative voids that the participant experiences enhance her feeling of loss and nostalgia, as she attempts to tune in to the assumed agency of another. (Popova 84)

Perhaps, as Hutcheon argued, some of the projects of the postmodern condition "are aware of the risks and lures of nostalgia, and seek to expose those through irony," (206) but their effort of fragmentation exposure struggles against the neurophysiology of our brains, which always fills the gaps. Consecutive events, at different times, elicit the illusion of connection, and participatory sense-making in many of these interactive projects

reveals other forms of temporal patterns, always dialogic and always complex and cumulative. The empirical challenge remains, as Yanna Popova argues, of identifying the inter-subjective and non-linear processes that afford this kind of distributed attentional effort. For we shall always find meanings in mere noise, and these will always be tinted with emotional colouring. Applauses addressed to health workers, casserole protests for the government, or the choral balcony singing will remain part of our memories, connected to the landscape of loss that the Covid-19 pandemic brought.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Auvray, Malika. & **Rohde**, Marieke. Perceptual crossing: The simplest online paradigm. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 6, 2012, 181. DOI: 10.3389/fnhum.2012.00181.

Barss, Patchen. What if the Universe has no end? BBC, 20th January 2020 <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20200117-what-if-the-universe-has-no-end>.

Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*. Basic Books, 2001. https://archive.org/details/isbn_9780465007073.

---. "Nostalgia and Its Discontents." *The Hedgehog Review* (Summer): 2007, 7-18.

Cage, John. *Silence: Lectures and Writings*. Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1961.

Hutcheon, Linda. "Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern." *Methods for the Study of Literature as Cultural Memory*, *Studies in Comparative Literature Vol 6. Proceedings of the XVth Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association*. Leiden 1997. Amsterdam, Atlanta GA: Rodopi, 2000, 189-207.

Flores, Leonardo. "Window" by Katharine Norman. November 29, 2012 <http://ilovepoetry.org/?p=154>.

Higgins, Dick. "Statement on Intermedia". Artpool. New York: Something Else Press, 1967. Re-published in *Leonardo*, Vol 34, 2001, 49-54.

Norman, Karen. *Window – an undecided sound essay* 2018 <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/266147/266148>

---. *Window (for John Cage)* <http://www.novamara.com/window-for-john-cage/>.

Popova, Yanna. B. *Stories, meaning, experience: Narrativity and enaction*. Taylor and Francis, 2015.

Sebestik, Miroslav; **Grange**, Anne; **Bidou**, Jacques.; **Fano**, Michel; **Kurtág**, Gyorgy. *Listen = [Ecoute]* Video Documentary. France : ARTE France Développement, 2003.

Thoreau, Henry David. *True Harvest: Readings from Henry David Thoreau for Every Day of the Year*. Collected by Barry Andrews. Boston: Skinner House Books, 2006.

Wittman, Marc. *Felt time: The psychology of how we perceive time*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2016.



Alberto de la Rocha

Past, Loss and Nostalgia in Louise Bourgeois' and Sylvia Plath's Oeuvre

Pasado, Pérdida y Nostalgia en la Obra de Louise Bourgeois y de Sylvia Plath

Ana M. Martín Castillejos
Universidad Politécnica de Madrid
am.martin.castillejos@upm.es

Everything I do is inspired by my early life

Louise Bourgeois (Bernadac & Obrist 133)

I need my memories. They are my documents Louise Bourgeois (Jaussaud 162)

Resumen

El peso del pasado y la presencia de la pérdida en la vida de cada individuo son innegables. Éste es claramente el caso de Louise Bourgeois (1911-2010) y de Sylvia Plath (1932-1963), para quienes el sentimiento de pérdida se va a convertir en el motor de gran parte de su producción. La recreación de momentos dolorosos en la vida de Bourgeois es clave para comprender la mayor parte de su trabajo, especialmente sus famosas "Celdas". En el caso de Sylvia Plath, la muerte de su padre y la posterior ruptura de su matrimonio se traducen en poemas que se encuentran entre los mejores de su producción literaria.

Este artículo analiza la presencia de la pérdida y la nostalgia en el trabajo de la artista y la escritora, poniendo énfasis en las similitudes existentes entre ambas y haciendo alusión a los paisajes a los que Douglas Porteous se refiere como "paisajes mentales" (*Landscapes of the Mind*).

También hay una reivindicación en el artículo del sentimiento de pérdida como una poderosa herramienta creativa que invita a la acción. En este sentido

apoyamos el punto de vista de Alastair Bonnett sobre la importancia de reconocer el sentimiento de nostalgia (*The Geographies of Nostalgia*).

Palabras clave: pérdida, nostalgia, figura paterna, paisajes mentales, espejos.

Abstract

The weight of the past and the presence of loss in each individual's life are undeniable. This is clearly so in the cases of Sylvia Plath (1932-1963) and Louise Bourgeois (1911-2010), as loss is the driver of most of their production. The recreation of painful moments in Bourgeois' life is the key to understand most of her work, especially her 'Cells'. In Sylvia Plath's case, her father's death without a possible mourning and the later break-down of her marriage are drivers for some of the writer's best poems.

This article analyses the presence of loss and nostalgia in the artist and the writer's work, focusing on the many similarities between the artist and the writer and pointing out the psychic landscapes they give place to (Douglas Porteous's *Landscapes of the Mind*).

Finally, there is also a vindication in the article of the feeling of loss as a powerful creative tool that stimulates action. In that respect, the article supports Alastair Bonnett's point of view about the importance of acknowledging the feeling of nostalgia (*The Geographies of Nostalgia*).

Keywords: loss, nostalgia, father figure, mental landscapes, mirrors.

1. INTRODUCTION

Longing for the past, homesickness, nostalgia and yearning are all feelings human beings experience in their lives. As mentioned in this volume's introduction, nostalgia is becoming especially well spread as we live in a world that is rapidly changing for the worse: we are endangering species, destroying nature and starting to feel that there is a serious menace about the possibility of losing our homes. In fact, the landscape we used to see around in many of our communities is dramatically changing, and literature and other art manifestations are echoing as well. Douglas Porteous speaks about "the growing placelessness of our civilization" and "the sense of loss that placelessness generates" (*Landscapes of the Mind* 142). Porteous also explains that place-loss is "a kind of self-loss which comes from our loss of childhood" (142).

Even if these negative feelings are connected with pain, artists often manage to use them and make them into pieces of art. In doing so these uncomfortable feelings and memories are "housed". In this sense, we would like this article to be a vindication of the feeling of loss as a powerful creative tool that moves into action. In this respect we follow Alastair

Bonnett's point of view about the importance of acknowledging nostalgia (*The Geography of Nostalgia, Left in the Past: Radicalism and the Politics of Nostalgia*, The Dark Mountain Project) against the point of view of recent theories that consider that yearning for what has been lost is negative and even the subject of medical treatment (anti-nostalgics and ecocide followers).

In particular, we have chosen to focus on how the weight of the past and the feeling of nostalgia are the drivers for most of the work produced by Louise Bourgeois (1911-2010) and Sylvia Plath (1932-1963). Only after having studied the artist and writer separately, we realised how many similarities they have in common. Both needed to write down everything that happened in their lives in an attempt to exert some sort of control over their existence; artist and writer left their native countries to live abroad; there is an obvious confessionalism in their works as these speaks openly about them; the father figure plays an enormous part in their lives and works; the relationship with their mothers (more positive in Bourgeois' case than in Plath's one) is decisive; their suicidal tendencies and proclivity towards depression are present in both; there are many references to their childhood in their oeuvres; artist and writer rebel against the domesticity values of their time, etc.

Following Gregory Nagy, Greek 'nostos' is connected to the Indo-European root 'nes', meaning return to light and life (qtd. in Boym 7). Svetlana Boym specifies that the concept of nostalgia is "a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy" (92). This is the fantasy that Sylvia Plath and Louise Bourgeois try to reenact in their work, especially Bourgeois, whose work contains a continuous evocation and reenactment of her childhood in an attempt to reconcile herself with that period of time. In fact, Bourgeois was well aware of the importance of the past in her work. Being unable to accept it, she was condemned to symbolically repeat it, and this continuous re-creation was a sort of cure for her:

*You just have to abandon every day your past.
And accept it. An if you can't accept it, then
you have to do sculpture! [...] If your need is to refuse
to abandon the past, then you have to re-create it.
Which is what I have been doing."
(Bernadac & Obrist 2)*

The same can be said about Sylvia Plath. As Steven Gould Axelrod maintains in his book, *Sylvia Plath: The Wound and the Cure of Words*, her words became her cure. That is the

reason for her incessant writing. She writes with a special intensity in the periods of her life when her world seemed about to collapse, for instance, before her final suicide attempt, when she wrote the best poems of her life. Those poems would give her a name in literature and most of them would be included in *Ariel*, her last poetry book.

If we pay attention to the two types of nostalgia described by Boym (191), we could say that Bourgeois' was restorative, as this type of nostalgia attempts a reconstruction of the lost home, while Plath's had more of a reflective character. All in all it is indispensable to acknowledge the presence of nostalgia and the weight of the past in both artists in order to understand their lives and work, and this article is a contribution to that thesis.

2. COMPULSIVE WRITERS

There was a compulsive way of working and writing in both women. Sylvia Plath was a frenetic writer. For her, writing was vital: she wrote to 'herself' in her journals, wrote letters to her mother with unusual frequency, wrote in notebooks and on pieces of paper that she sometimes destroyed. Writing was a way of bringing order to the chaos of sensations, emotions and desires that daily events brought to her life; a way of putting order to her experiences. As she herself admitted: "It is the articulation of experience which is so necessary to me; even if I never publish again, I shall still have to write, because it is the main way I give order to this flux which is life" (*Letters* 1113; vol. 1, February 24, 1956). Also, as Steven Gould Axelrod explains, for Plath writing was a way to heal inner wounds (*The Wound and the Cure of Words*), those that revealed an unstable and sensitive nature, a fragile ontology (García Ráyego 19). However, her fears, uncertainties and ontological fragility always were disguised behind a public image of enviable efficacy and firmness, something that Plath always tried to keep up in front of others (Martín Castillejos *Cartografías* 278).

Plath wrote 856 letters to her mother Aurelia Schober and other family members in a period spanning from February 1940, when she was seven years old until seven days before her death on February 4th 1963 (*Letters* vi; vol. I). Nevertheless, as the last edition of *The Letters of Sylvia Plath* explains, there were more than 1,400 letters published and addressed to more than 140 correspondents (xxvii; vol. 2). Besides that there were about 700 letters more "that were destroyed, lost or not retained" (*Letters* xxix; vol. 2) and that were originally addressed to family friends, acquaintances, teachers, publishers, etc.

As for Louise Bourgeois, there was a trend in her to accumulate all the remains of her past in an effort to keep track of everything and to remember all the details. She admitted she felt trapped by the need to collect pieces of memory (Bernadac & Obrist 141). In such a

way she left behind letters, photographs, pieces of cloth, family albums, pieces of furniture, bags and papers. All of them were inspirational for her and tell us about her life. This obsession to remember everything also explains her fascination with newspapers and diaries. Since she began her first diary when she was only twelve, she did not stop recording everything about her life: her trips, encounters, emotions, impressions and daily tasks. Bourgeois suffered from insomnia which also explains the innumerable drawings, sketches and notes made at night. Besides a written journal she had an oral one with recorded interviews, reflections and conversations. As Bourgeois herself recognized, all this was part of an effort to keep her life under control: "Having several journals means that I like to have my house in order. It is essential for me to keep them updated to make sure that life does not escape me " (Bernadac & Obrist 156). It is this material, memory in short, the one that Bourgeois uses again and again in her production and especially in *Cells*, her last work. In that last stage of her life as an artist, Bourgeois even uses pieces of cloth because, as she explains: "A piece of clothing is like a memory exercise. It invites me to explore the past. What did I feel when I was wearing it? Dresses are like indicator panels in the search for the past "(Neri 78).

3. CHILDHOOD: THE ETERNAL COME-BACK

My name is Louise Joséphine Bourgeois. I was born on december 25, 1911, in Paris. All my work in the past fifty years, all my subjects, have found their inspiration in my childhood. My childhood has never lost its magic, it has never lost its mystery, and it has never lost its drama. (Jaussaud 8)

"My childhood landscape was not land but the end of the land—the cold, salt, running hills of the Atlantic ..." (Sylvia Plath, Johnny Panic 123).

Louise Bourgeois and Sylvia Plath left their countries of origin when they were young to live abroad. The French born artist left Paris to travel to New York and Plath left Boston to live in Cambridge, and on a second journey, she left Boston again to live in London, then Devon (North Tawton, England) and later London again. Following Douglas Porteous' theories, their travels when they were young can be interpreted as a self-loss linked to the loss of their childhood (142). Years after, there was a need in both women to go home again, a journey that as Porteous explains, is always impossible because "Childscape is really our childhood home (143), a landscape impossible to recreate because it belongs to the past."

In his book *Landscapes of the Mind*, Douglas J. Portuous writes about the work of Graham Green to explain the close relationship that exists between the landscape, the environment in which an individual moves, and their character and personality. On how the first is forged and defines the second, Portuous explains,

... Greene's characters are, as it were, creatures of their environment, made by it, subordinate to it, illustrative of it. [...] They are, like starfish stranded in a drying pool a half-inch from low-tide mark, utterly unable to assess their environment context. As is true of those in Kafkaland, characters in Greenland have no control over events or environment. (112)

Indeed, the environment in which the individual lives is in most cases, if not absolutely decisive, of great importance in their life. It is character building and usually a determinant in their future in that it gives them access to certain possibilities which at the same time are denied to others. The first years of life of an individual are without doubt the most formative in developing the individual's character. They are the most decisive in defining what their personality and creativeness will evolve into (Portuous 156).

For this reason, many biographers take great interest in the landscape that surrounds an individual during their childhood in that it can be evocative and reveal relevant information to better understand the person's character in question. Portuous cites Georges Gusdorf when he states that the landscape in which an individual has lived "assists him to structure the metaphoric terrain in which his life is lived, and gives life its ultimate shape, 'so that landscape is truly, in Ariel's phrase, «a state of the soul».' We are back, of course, to Inscape" (Portuous 154)¹. This 'Inscape' can clearly be seen in both Plath's and Bourgeois' work. In both cases, and especially at the end of their lives, their work is an expression of their mental state and vice versa. Mind and landscape are in the end, the same and only reality.

Childhood is so important, according to writers, psychologists, educators and all kinds of scholars, that our natural tendency in life is to return to our origins, to an abstract idea of what was our first home, when and where we were still naive and ignorant enough to be happy. "Life is a ceaseless journey home", says Portuous and also, "Childscape, is really our childhood home" (1989 120), and so 'the greatest instinct [for everyone of us] is to go home again' (Sillitoe 41). With this in mind, Sylvia Plath writes to her mother in a letter dated 5th July 1958 saying:

¹ Read G. Gusdorf's article about the topic: "The conditions and limits of autobiography", in *Autobiography*, ed. J. Olney, 1980.

I am going back to the ocean as my poetic heritage & hope to revisit all the places I remember in Winthrop with Ted this summer: Johnson Avenue, a certain meadow on it, our beach & grammy's. Even rundown as it, the town has the exciting appeal of my childhood & I am writing some good poems about it, I think. I'll enclose that poem "Night-Walk," the other one The New Yorker accepted, which I think you've read ..."
(Letters 259; vol 2)

There is a similarity in the case of Bourgeois. Most of her work represents an effort to recreate her childhood and to interpret that period of her life. Like Plath, Bourgeois tried to return to her childhood landscape. In 1955 or 1956 she travelled with her children to Aubusson, where her grandmother had already worked in the family's tapestry business and Louise herself had also worked as a *dessinateur* (Bernadac & Obrist 153). However, her old house had changed completely since fifteen or twenty families had lived in the building after the Bourgeois. Once again, as Portuouss explains, going home is always a useless effort because it is impossible to revisit one's childhood (143).

4. THE DESTRUCTION OF THE FATHER

Louise Bourgeois was haunted all her life by the same ghost that originated from her childhood: her father and the governess' betrayal. The governess had been hired to teach the children English, but instead, she became Louise's father's lover. Bourgeois wrote in her journals:

She had been hired to teach me English. I was betrayed not only by my father, but also by her, damn it. It was a double betrayal. (Bernadac & Obrist 69)

The spiral is important to me. It is a twist. As a child, after washing the tapestries in the river, I would turn and twist and ring them with three others or more to ring the water out. Later, I would dream of getting rid of my father's mistress. I would do it in my dreams by ringing her neck. The spiral – I love the spiral – represents control and freedom. (Jaussaud 49)

The feeling of violence towards her father's lover was amplified even more because of the love she felt towards her mother, who was a hard-working and entrepreneurial woman who Louise deeply admired. These turbulent feelings pursued the artist all her life and they are openly represented in many of her pieces of work.

Regarding Plath, in a short autobiographical story, "Ocean 1212-W" she recalls the end of her own childhood as being closely connected to her father's death:

I felt the wall of my skin: I am I. That stone is a stone. My beautiful fusion with the things of this world was over. . . My father died, we moved inland. Whereon those nine first years of my life sealed themselves off like a ship in a bottle—beautiful, inaccessible, obsolete, a fine, white flying myth. (Johnny Panic 126)

Her childhood was over and Otto Plath's death remained forever in the writer's memory. The feeling of unreality towards her father's death continued as a constant in the writer's life, as "My mother hadn't let us come to his funeral because we were only children then, and he had died in the hospital, so the graveyard and even his death had always seemed unreal to me" (*Johnny Panic* 135).

If we analyse Plath's life in Freudian terms we can interpret that the writer felt that she had been robbed of her childhood by her father's death. As a result, Plath hated her father because he had died and made the whole family unhappy; as a consequence, the poet even declared her rebellion against God for letting her dad die (Wagner-Martin 13). The young Sylvia also resented him because she lacked a male role model and because, after his death, Aurelia Plath had to work very hard and was unable to spend much time with her and her brother.

Years later the writer ventilated her resentment towards Otto Plath in what would become one of her most famous poems, "Daddy". In fact, in Plath's life there is a never-ending search for a father figure (Ted Hughes, her future husband, would be one) that appears reflected in all her work but, at the same time, there is also a feeling of hatred towards Otto Plath for his abandonment of the family. The writer describes him in cruel terms as a nazi, a panzer-man and a vampire:

*You do not do, you do not do
Any more, black shoe
In which I have lived like a foot
For thirty years, poor and white,
Barely daring to breathe or Achoo.*

*Daddy, I have had to kill you.
You died before I had time——*

.....

*I have always been scared of you,
With your Luftwaffe, your gobbledygoo.
And your neat mustache
And your Aryan eye, bright blue.
Panzer-man, panzer-man, O You——
Not God but a swastika
So black no sky could squeak through.
Every woman adores a Fascist,*

*The boot in the face, the brute
Brute heart of a brute like you.*

.....

*If I've killed one man, I've killed two——
The vampire who said he was you
And drank my blood for a year,
Seven years, if you want to know.
Daddy, you can lie back now.*

*There's a stake in your fat black heart
And the villagers never liked you.*

*They are dancing and stamping on you.
They always knew it was you.
Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through.
(The Collected Poems 222)*

In the case of Louise Bourgeois, in some way we could also say that her father stole her childhood. Besides the hatred she felt towards her father for his irrespective behaviour towards her mother, Bourgeois had been born a girl while her father wanted a son. This situation produced an inner conflict in Louise that would condition her all her life, since she was always thinking about how to make herself useful and indispensable to her father. As a result, she decided to dedicate herself to the family business, dropping out of school at 15 and becoming the family's tapestry designer, a task that had never been performed by a woman before (Bernadac & Obrist 61).

In fact, the difficult relationship with her father is the origin of some of her more acclaimed works, for example, Bourgeois' "The Destruction of the Father" (1974), that expresses a childhood fantasy in which she takes revenge on her father, who always bragged at the dinner table. In fact, "The Destruction of the Father" represents the symbolic death of Louis Bourgeois. The artist describes the way she fantasized with the idea of getting rid of her father in these terms:

What frightened me was that at the dinner table, my father would go on and on, showing off, [...]. Suddenly there was a terrific tension, and we grabbed him – my brother, my sister, my mother – the three of us grabbed him and pulled him onto the table and pulled his legs and arms apart – dismembered him, right? And we were so successful in beating him up that we ate him up. It's a fantasy, but sometimes the fantasy is lived (Jaussaud 106).

Yet, as Bernadac points out (95), the sculptor carries out one more act of exorcism after the death of her husband by getting rid of the stove that the couple had owned for years. In

this way by freeing herself from her role as wife and mother, she also gets rid of the omnipresent image of 'the fathers', the figures of authority.

5. SETTINGS

Sylvia Plath was born in Boston and attended Smith College until she travelled to Cambridge with a Fulbright grant; there, on February 25th 1956 she met Ted Hughes her future husband. A year later, in June 1957, she returned to the USA and settled down in Northampton where she worked as a teacher at Smith College from 1957 to June 1958. After that short teaching experience she returned to Europe with Hughes and lived in Devon until the couple split up. Immediately afterwards Plath moved to London where she later committed suicide on 11th February, 1963. Except for Devon, the writer lived most of her life in cities. Nevertheless, we hardly ever find any description of an urban setting in her work. With the exception of the description of New York in *The Bell Jar*, most of the descriptions we find in Plath's writings are related to the natural world, both in her prose and poems (Martín Castillejos 2002 51-66). With regards to her poetry, beside noticing that the natural element becomes progressively important in her verses we also appreciate an evolution in her style from a first period when the natural sceneries are depicted mostly in a naturalistic way ("Conversation Among the Ruins", "Southern Sunrise", "Prospect", "Firesong", "Faun", all of them written in 1956) to a final stage where the description of the sceneries is done through brushstrokes that reflect her emotional state ("Lady Lazarus", "The Night Dances", written in 1962 "The Munich Mannequins", "Contusion", written in 1963). These latter poems are an example of what Porteous describes as Inscapes or psychic landscapes (87) where nostalgia is a main component. Other examples with natural settings where there is a nostalgic reference to Otto Plath's death are "Electra on Azalea Path", "The Colossus" and "Poem for a Birthday", the three of them were written in 1959.

The day you died I went into the dirt

.....

... This is Azalea Path
A field of burdock opens to the south.
Six feet of yellow gravel cover you
(*"Electra on Azalea Path"*, *The Collected Poems* 117)

I shall never get you put together entirely,
Pieced, glued, and properly jointed.

.....

Perhaps you consider yourself an oracle,
Mouthpiece of the dead, or of some god or other.
Thirty years now I have labored
To dredge the silt from your throat.
I am not the wiser.
(“The Colossus”, *The Collected Poems* 129)

Once I was ordinary:
Sat by my father’s bean tree
Eating the fingers of wisdom.
The birds made milk.
When it thundered I hid under a flat stone.
(“Poem for a Birthday”, *The Collected Poems* 133)

As mentioned before, Plath's poetry has a strong biographical character so that we can easily identify the natural world she was surrounded by while reading the poems. Some good examples are “The Burn-out Spa” (11 November 1959), “Mushrooms” (13 November 1959), “Sleep in the Mojave Desert” (5 July 1960), “Two Campers in Cloud Country” (July 1960), “Parliament Hill Fields” (11 February 1961), “Stars Over the Dordogne” (July 1961), “Wuthering Heights” (September 1961), “Finisterre” (29 September 1961), “The Moon and the Yew Tree” (22 October 1961) and many others. By reading them we can easily identify the settings Plath was describing.

As for Louise Bourgeois, her work is generated as the result of the spaces she inhabited and the memories they brought to her. Through her writings and her compulsive need to record everything, we know about her childhood in Paris, Aubusson, Choissy and her country house in Easton, Anthony (Connecticut, EE.UU), her studio in Brooklyn and the apartment where she lived until her death on West 20th Street (New York). According to Beatriz Colomina, all of them domestic spaces associated to trauma ([louis-bourgeois-memoria-arquitectura](#)). Colomina also says that Bourgeois uses spaces and architecture as a means to reconstruct painful moments of her life with the aim to overcome the pain and fear she suffered ([louis-bourgeois-memoria-arquitectura](#)). The spaces she creates in the series *Lairs* in the 60's and 80's or in her *Cells*, like *Arch of Hysteria* (1992-1993), *Red Room* (1994) or *Spider* (1997), also tell us about pain. Bourgeois was conscious of the difficulty of distinguishing between one type of pain and another: “When does the emotional become physical? When does the physical become emotional? It’s a circle going round and round” (Bernadac & Obrist 32). She explains that pain can begin at any point and turn in any direction.

Starting in 1989 Bourgeois created a total of 60 *Cells* in a period of two decades that contain all types of references to her past, amongst them innumerable allusions to her childhood and her family's business like the pins, needles, thread and other tools they used to restore tapestries. About that, Bourgeois said: "You have to tell your story and you have to forget your story. You forget and forgive. It liberates you" (Bernadac & Obrist 362). And this is precisely what Bourgeois does again and again in her *Cells*: reenacting childhood memories. Beside that, when Bourgeois was over eighty she started working on her first spiders, in which the inspiration of her mother and her never-ending work when repairing tapestries is made obvious. Her mother is in fact, the spider she recreates with her never-ending work of weaving and unweaving: "My best friend was my mother, and she was deliberate, clever, patient, soothing, reasonable, dainty, subtle, indispensable, neat and useful as an araignée" (*An Intimate Portrait* 42).

6. MIRRORS

[...]
 I am a mirror.
 I'm there.
 I'm not there.
 You want to know
 I'm only your image, king, rage,
 I offend you, mollusk."
 (Louise Bourgeois *An Intimate Portrait* 115)

*The heart shuts,
 The sea slides back,
 The mirrors are sheeted*
 (Sylvia Plath "Contusion", Ariel 83)

In 1998 Bourgeois makes the cell, *Twelve Oval Mirrors*, that appears to be quite simple: twelve concave mirrors of oval form appear arranged in a circle with the same number of small wooden chairs in front of each one. Once again, there is a reference to Louise's childhood as the imagery of the chairs seen throughout the hologram series may have been influenced by Bourgeois' father and his antique furniture business.

The mirror, which appears in many of Bourgeois' *Cells*, is a metaphor of the artist's vulnerability. It is a symbol of fragility and of the passage of time. It also represents self-knowledge and self-acceptance; as Bourgeois herself admits: "The mirror means the acceptance of the Self". She also declares "I have lived in a house without mirrors because I could not stand, could not accept myself. The mirror was an enemy. But the mirror cannot be your enemy, it has to be your friend. So, instead of seeing it as a symbol of vanity (there

was no danger on that side), I began to see it as a symbol of acceptance"(Bernadac and Obrist 260).

With regards to Sylvia Plath, as Eileen M. Aird confirms, the mirror image appears frequently in her transitional period (1960-61) but it is not exclusive of that time span but appears rather sporadically in all her poetic work and has a wide variety of interpretations. So that, while in a poem from her early days like "In Midas' Country", the mirror is a visual image that refers to the surface of the river, in "The Couriers" the destruction of the mirrors alludes to the alteration of the state of equilibrium and inner peace; in "Totem" on the other hand, the concept of the mirror appears to be associated with the monotony of everyday life and in "A Birthday Present" it is nothing but a symbol of death (Aird 106-07). Also in "Private Ground" the writer highlights the indifference of the lake that swallows dead fishes that she throws into the water: "the lake / Opens and shuts, accepting them among its reflections" (*Crossing the Water* 23-24). In this poem Plath uses images reflecting glitter and frost that make a clear allusion to death:

First *frost*, and I walk among the rose-fruit, the marble toes

 All morning, with smoking breath, the handyman
 Has been draining the goldfish ponds.
 They collapse like lungs, ...

 They *glitter* like eyes, and I collect them all.
 Morgue of old logs and old images, the lake
 Opens and shuts, accepting them among its *reflections*.
 ("Crossing the Water" 21) (*my emphasis*)

In "Last Words" Plath employs the mirror image again, this time in combination with the colour white, thereby alluding to the void that represents death: "My mirror is clouding over- / A few more breaths, and it will reflect nothing at all. / The flowers and the faces whiten to a sheet" (*Crossing the Water* 40). And again, in the poem "Mirror" there is a direct relationship between candlelight, moonlight, silver, water and white lilies, that is to say, whatever is white or gives off flashes of this colour, and death:

I am *silver* and exact. I have no preconceptions.
 Whatever I see I swallow immediately
 Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike.

 Now I am a *lake*. A woman bends over me,
 Searching my reaches for what she really is.
 Then she turns to those liars, the *candles* or the *moon*.

I see her back, and *reflect* it faithfully.

.....

Each morning it is her face that replaces the darkness.
In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman
Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish.
(*Crossing the Water* 34) (my emphasis)

“Mirror” is a very similar poem to the ones we see in *Ariel*. The most notable difference with those of the later era of the writer is that here there is a greater formal control about what is written. However, Plath does still not write with the visceral necessity that she will use in *Ariel*, neither is she so emphatic as in her later poems. The image of the mirror in which she has always tried to see herself remains definitely ‘closed’ during the later stage of her poetic production, in which the mirrors either no longer reflect anything or they are covered in sheets, as in “Contusion”, one of her last poems. In such a way, the mirrors in which Plath wanted to see herself reflected appear at the end of her life, all covered in sheets as a sign of mourning (Axelrod 211-12).

All in all, there is an evolution in the writer’s poetic style from the first period when the natural sceneries are depicted mostly in a naturalistic way to a final stage in which landscapes appear in a more symbolic manner as a reflection of Plath’s own mind (Martin-Castillejos, *All by Myself* 2000). Following Douglas Porteous we could even say that the landscapes described in her poems become her mind (104). There is also in her verses the increasing presence of a new component that constitutes an excellent example of what Sigmund Freud defines as “uncanny” (“unheimlich” in German). That presence turns the natural setting into an aggressive, inhuman and sinister place where the human being does not feel comfortable but threatened and powerless. Plath’s final attempt to fuse with the natural elements and become integrated into nature, in order to diminish the pain produced in her by the world (Rosenblatt 150-51), finishes in a complete failure.

The body may be replaced and revitalized, as in “The Stones”; or burned down, as in “Lady Lazarus”; or vaporized, as in “The Detective”; or magically transformed, as in “Fever 103°.” There are many methods, but the goal remains the same: union of the body with the objects that surround it. (Rosenblatt 150-51)

As a result of the failure to ‘fuse’ with nature her last poems turn more pessimistic than ever and deal with different topics where the idea of death and loss constitutes an unalterable presence (Martin-Castillejos, *All by Myself* 2000).

7. THE ART OF FALLING

My early work is the fear of falling
 Later on it became the art of falling
 (Louise Bourgeois *An Intimate Portrait* 96)

Dying
 Is an art, like everything else.
 I do it exceptionally well.
 (Sylvia Plath *Ariel* "Lady Lazarus" 7)

Peter Davison, in a book dedicated to various Bostonian poets between 1955 and 1960, tells us that the writer visited her hometown at Christmas in 1957, having already made the decision not to teach again the following year at Smith College and having notified the English Department where she worked on the 5th January 1958 (165). We know that Plath was very depressed at this time and most probably she revisited the landscape of her childhood when the idea of death possibly tormented her again. The month of January, feeling sick and depressed, was especially difficult for Plath as we can deduce from the way she began one of her notes in her diary: "Codeine, opium, drawn from opiates, took me from my cough and aches and lifted me ..." (8th January 1958); "A small draft of deadly night air seeping through the white-painted metal slats of venetian blinds sets me coughing, wheezing, with ominous click and whistle deep in my lungs" (14th January 1958); "Wicked, my hand halted, each night at writing, I fell away into sleep, book unwritten in" (20th January 1958); "Absolutely blind fuming sick. Anger, envy and humiliation" (22nd January 1958); "A blank day of cooking & gusts of drowsiness" (26th January 1958) (*Journals* 308-18). The comments about her state of mind are combined with others about her colleagues in the Department, her classes and students at Smith College, about whom she has terrible nightmares (*Journals* 317-18; 348-50, 357-58).

Plath only revealed her depressive state of mind in her diaries and to her psychiatrist, Doctor Ruth Beustcher, with whom she had psychiatric sessions from the end of summer 1958 until the writer left the United States with her husband to settle in England in December 1959. Her malaise worsened even more after her separation from Ted Hughes in 1962 and culminated in her suicide on the 11th February 1963 when she was only 30 years old.

Louise Bourgeois' depressive tendency is also expressed in multiple personal writings. In one occasion she affirmed that fighting depression was an "art" that she had practised all

her life (Bernadac & Obrist 97). In fact, after her father's death the artist suffered from serious bouts of depression and agoraphobia. In the early 1950s she began to attend psychoanalysis and would continue to do so for thirty years (Bernadac & Obrist 163).

While Plath had at least two clear attempts at suicide in her life Bourgeois also refers to suicide, citing specifically Plath, amongst many other creative women (writers, artists, etc.).

Seven easy ways to end it all
 Hang yourself
 Jump off the bridge
 (I jumped in the Bièvre River)
 Take pills (I took Gardenal)
 Cut your veins
 Drink poison
 Put your head in the oven
 Jump in front of an oncoming train

"Anne Sexton, Antigone, Diane Arbus, Electra, Héloïse and Abélard, Marilyn Monroe, Medea, Opheliam Paolo and Francesca, Sylvia Plath, Virginia Woolf, Vivienne Eliot, Zelda Fitzgerald." (Bernadac & Obrist 74).

Nevertheless, in Bourgeois' case the continuous revision of her own life became her best therapy. The recreation of painful moments helped her, in her own words, to get her out from the bottom of the well where she sometimes was (Bernadac & Obrist 27). In fact, remembering those moments was the engine that moved her into action. Her celebration of pain, so clearly reflected in works such as her 'Cells' allowed her to overcome her panic attacks and find the necessary strength to reach her 91st birthday. That would not be the case of Sylvia Plath. Her father's death and the break-down of her marriage were drivers for poems written at the end of her life, such as "Daddy", "The Rabbit Catcher", "Ariel", "Contusion" and "Edge", that would give her a name in literature. The writer had the time to come to terms with the pain produced by her father's death but not with that caused by her husband's desertion. In such a way death images flood Plath's last verses. Nature is still present in her last poems but in a more abstract manner and often associated to death (Martín Castillejos 132). In this way, in her last work we see "desperate butterflies" ("Kindness"), the sea sliding back ("Contusion"), her children coiled white serpents ("Edge"), this is, a universe where death reigns and where nature attends impassively to Plath's premature death.

The woman is perfected.
Her dead
Body wears the smile of accomplishment,

.....

The moon has nothing to be sad about,
Staring from her hood of bone.
She is used to this sort of thing.
Her blacks crackle and drag.
(Ariel, "Edge" 84)

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Aird, Eileen. M. *Sylvia Plath*. Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1973.

Axelrod, Steven. Gpuld. *Sylvia Plath. The Wound and the Cure of Words*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990.

Bernadac, Marie Laure. & **Obrist**, Hans Ulrich. *Louise Bourgeois: Destruction of the Father/Reconstruction of the Father: Writings and Interviews 1923-1997*. MIT Press, 1998.

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

---. *Left in the Past: Radicalism and the Politics of Nostalgia*. Continuum Publishing Corporation, 2010.

Bourgeois, Louise. *Memoria y arquitectura*, Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 1999.

Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*. Basic Books, 2002. Kindle edition.

Colomina, Beatriz. "La Arquitectura del Trauma". *Louise Bourgeois. Memoria y arquitectura*. Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 1999, <https://www.museoreinasofia.es/exposiciones/louise-bourgeois-memoria-arquitectura> [28 September 2020]

Freud, Sigmund. 1990. "The Uncanny". *The Penguin Freud Library*. 1990, Vol. 14., Núm., 335-376.

García Ráyego, Rosa. "Líneas Críticas en torno a la Poesía Angloamericana". De Mujeres, Identidades y Poesía. Poetas Contemporáneas de Estados Unidos y Canadá. Rosa García Ráyego & Esther Sánchez Pardo (ed), Madrid: horas y HORAS, 1999, pp. 13-24.

Gusdorf, Georges. "The Conditions and Limits of Autobiography", *Autobiography*, J. Olney (ed), Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980, pp. 27-48.

Jaussaud, Jean-Francois. *Louise Bourgeois. An Intimate Portrait*. London: Laurence King Publishing, 2019.

Neri, Louise. *Louise Bourgeois: Recent Works*. Malmö: Malmö Konsthall, 1998.

Martín Castillejos, Ana María. "Amor y Muerte en la Obra Poética de Sylvia Plath", De Mujeres, Identidades y Poesía. Poetas Contemporáneas de Estados Unidos y Canadá. Rosa García Ráyego & Esther Sánchez Pardo (ed), Madrid: horas y HORAS, 1999, pp. 77-108.

---. "All by Myself I Am a Huge Camellia: Landscapes in the Life and Work of Sylvia Plath". Facultad de Filología Inglesa, Universidad de Alcalá de Henares. Thesis defense, 15 December 2000.

---. "La Marca del Destino Trepa por la Pared': Sylvia Plath, una Aproximación a su Vida y su Obra", *Sentir los Mundos: Poetas en Lengua Inglesa*, Rosa García Ráyego & Esther Sánchez Pardo (ed.), Huerga y Fierro editores, S.L., 2001, pp. 266-308

---. "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.

---. "Los Paisajes de Sylvia Plath: Ciudad Versus Naturaleza en *The Bell Jar*", REDEN, Revista Española de Estudios Norteamericanos de la Universidad de Alcalá de Henares, No. 19-20, 2002, pp.51-66.

---. "Sivvy versus Sylvia: las Cartas y Diarios de Sylvia Plath", *Cartografías del Yo*, Julia Salmerón & Ana Zamorano (eds), Editorial Complutense, 2006, pp. 277-312.

---. 'Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams': Landscape and Symbolism in Sylvia Plath's Short Stories.", CD-room, *The Short Story in English: Crossing Boundaries*. Universidad de Alcalá de Henares, 2006, ISBN: 84-8138-709-6.

Lorz, Julianne. *Louise Bourgeois. Structures of Existence: the Cells*. New York & London: Prestel, 2016.

Plath, Sylvia. *The Colossus and Other Poems*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962.

---. *Ariel*. New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1965.

---. "Ocean 1212-W". *The Art of Sylvia Plath: A Symposium*. C. Newman (ed), 266-272. Bloomington & London: Indiana University Press, 1970, 266-272.

---. *Crossing the Water*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1971.

---. *Winter Trees*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1972.

---. *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams*. London: Faber & Faber Ltd., 1977.

---. *The Collected Poems*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1981.

---. *The Bell Jar*. New York: Bantam Books, 1988.

---. *The Journals of Sylvia Plath. Volume I: 1940-1956*, Peter K. Steinberg & Karen Kukil (ed.), New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2017.

---. *The Journals of Sylvia Plath. Volume II: 1956-1963*, Peter K. Steinberg & Karen Kukil (ed.), New York: Harper Collins Publishers,, 2017.

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

Rosenblatt, Jon. 1979. *Sylvia Plath: The Poetry of Initiation*. Chapel Hill: The University of Carolina Press.

Sillitoe, Alan. *Guzman, Go Home*. London: Macmillan, 1968.

Wagner-Martin, Linda Wagner. 1987. *Sylvia Plath: A Biography*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987.



Alberto de la Rocha

The Absence of the Father in Contemporary Independent Cinema

La Ausencia del Padre en el Cine Independiente Contemporáneo

Juan Orellana Gutiérrez de Terán
Universidad San Pablo CEU
orellana@ceu.es

Resumen

En el cine contemporáneo independiente son cada vez más frecuentes las tramas que tratan de la búsqueda del padre o del reencuentro con él. En otros casos se indaga en la búsqueda de la figura paterna, aunque ésta carezca de lazos biológicos. Entre los paisajes de pérdida de nuestro tiempo, la paternidad perdida o ausente tiene un espacio propio en la expresión cinematográfica. Actualmente dicha figura ha vuelto a hacer su aparición en los guiones de manera transfigurada, reivindicada desde una perspectiva nueva. En este artículo tratamos de describir este resurgimiento, tomando como base una variedad de films de distintas nacionalidades estrenados en el último lustro. Se trata de desvelar una coherencia temática a pesar de la pluralidad de culturas que representan estas películas. Una coherencia que pone de manifiesto la globalización de un “paisaje de pérdida” que parece sentirse como urgente, a tenor de la frecuencia con la que se aborda en la gran pantalla.

Palabras clave: paternidad, vínculos, cine posmoderno, relaciones paternofiliales, paternidad no biológica.

Abstract

In contemporary independent cinema, the plots that deal with the search for a father or a reunion with him are more and more frequent. In other cases, they investigate the search for a father figure, even when there are no biological ties. Amongst the loss of landscapes of our time, the theme of the lost or absent fatherhood has its own space in cinematographic expression. Recently, this figure has reappeared in scripts in a transfigured way, reclaiming a new perspective. In this article we try to describe this

resurgence, based on a variety of films from different nationalities released over the last five years. We will try to find a thematic coherence despite the plurality of cultures that these films represent. A coherence that highlights the globalisation of a "landscape of loss" that appears to be essential, given the frequency with which it is approached on the big screen.

Key Words: loss, ties, postmodern cinema, parent-child relationships, non biological fatherhood.

1. INTRODUCCIÓN

En el cine contemporáneo, a raíz de los profundos cambios culturales y sociales de los últimos decenios (a partir del mayo francés, primero, y del cambio de siglo, después), se han ido haciendo presentes temáticas que no se trataban antes o que lo hacían desde perspectivas muy diferentes a las actuales. Si nos centramos en los temas de calado antropológico, cuestiones como el feminismo, la identidad sexual, la multiculturalidad, el relativismo cultural, el ecologismo, la fragmentación social... han entrado como un torrente en las producciones cinematográficas, independientemente de la nacionalidad o el género de las mismas. Dentro de este abanico de argumentos novedosos, hay uno especialmente interesante por su valor como "síntoma antropológico", y es el que tiene que ver con nuevas perspectivas sobre las experiencias de maternidad y paternidad.

A partir de las posiciones culturales e ideológicas asentadas y difundidas a raíz de Mayo del 68, las ideas de paternidad y maternidad sufrieron una mutación trascendental. La paternidad se identificó en aquellos tiempos de cambio con dos de los grandes pilares que había que derruir: la tradición y el principio de autoridad. Para el pensamiento marxista que atravesaba horizontalmente los movimientos sociales de finales de los sesenta y principios de los setenta, el modelo de paternidad burguesa reproducía en el ámbito doméstico una relación de dominio y autoridad patriarcales incompatibles con la liberación revolucionaria a la que aspiraban tales movimientos. El resultado fue un deterioro progresivo e imparable de la figura paterna que ha llegado hasta nuestros días (Pérez Testor 10). El psicoanalista Tony Anatrella habla incluso de una sociedad que ha devaluado y rechazado la imagen del padre (*La diferencia prohibida* 60).

Con la idea de la maternidad también se operó una transformación importante, pero en una dirección diferente. Una fuerte tendencia de cierto feminismo difundió un concepto de maternidad como una experiencia separada e independiente de la figura paterna. La maternidad se presentaba como una opción libre e individual de la mujer, y no supeditada

a una relación de dependencia con el progenitor (Ester 38). Ser madre dejó de considerarse la meta natural de toda mujer, y pasó a defenderse como una elección muy particular y no necesariamente vinculada al matrimonio. De ser algo proscrito y humillante la figura de la madre soltera pasó a ser una propuesta moderna, reivindicada e incluso ideal.

Como resultado de estas dos transformaciones, la figura paterna se fue empequeñeciendo socialmente mientras que la materna se fue agrandando, dando lugar a un desequilibrio desproporcionado, como queda plasmado, por ejemplo, en la película *Los mundos de Coraline* (Henry Selick, 2009). Tanto en los padres auténticos de Coraline, como sobre todo en los padres imaginarios, se ve claramente esta insignificancia del padre “pelele” frente a una madre dominante que se crece progresivamente –incluso en altura física– en el dominio doméstico y filial (Orellana 2012). El afianzamiento del igualitarismo de género, y la progresiva incorporación de la mujer al ámbito laboral –especialmente a entornos profesionales tradicionalmente limitados a varones– han contribuido a esta redefinición de roles y a la difuminación del modelo de paternidad anteriormente vigente. “Autodisuelta la figura paterna, el varón no puede adjudicarse otro rol, sino adecuarse a meros sucedáneos que ni siquiera puede compartir con el de la mujer. Con la desaparición de la figura paterna su “espacio social” queda inundado por lo femenino” (Barraycoa 37).

Esta crisis y aminoración de la figura paterna se ha ido plasmando en las historias cinematográficas a partir de los años noventa hasta expresar profusamente lo que ha venido en llamarse en estudios antropológicos y sociológicos “el padre ausente” o “padre periférico”¹. O en el mejor de los casos, un padre “colega”, situado en un mismo plano de igualdad respecto a los hijos (Peragallo). Baste recordar películas como *A cualquier otro lugar* (Wayne Wang 1999), *Educando a J.* (Christine Lahti 2001), *Thirteen* (Catherine Hardwicke 2003), *Tetro* (Coppola 2009), *El primer día del resto de tu vida* (Rèmi Bezançon 2009) y un larguísimo etcétera de cintas que retratan una paternidad disuelta, ausente, periférica o inmadura, tocada a menudo por el “síndrome de Peter Pan”.

1.1. Objetivo y metodología

El proceso descrito es muy complejo y tiene una plasmación cinematográfica ingente que ya ha sido tratada en estudios precedentes (Orellana 2006, 2010, 2012). Pero el objetivo de nuestro presente artículo es dar un paso más en este proceso evolutivo y mostrar un

¹ Sobre las distintas tipologías de padre contemporáneo según diversos autores ofrece una síntesis clara Pérez Testor (2005). Por otra parte, como recuerda Antonio Malo, es tan evidente que “nuestra época se halla marcada por el eclipse de la figura del padre [...] que en algunas lenguas, como el inglés o el alemán, se han creado sendos neologismos para expresar este fenómeno: *Fatherlessness* *Vaterlosigkeit*, respectivamente” (Malo, 2017: 85)

cierto giro experimentado en el tiempo presente. En los últimos diez años, coincidiendo aproximadamente con la segunda década del presente siglo, han ido surgiendo películas que proponen modelos de “paternidad restaurada” o recuperada. Es decir, presentan modelos positivos y atractivos de paternidad, pero distanciados de patrones normativistas o excesivamente prescriptores, y poniendo en un lugar preeminente el componente afectivo, eso sí, declinado de maneras diversas. Este rol del “padre afectivo” obviamente no es nuevo en el cine, pero su frecuencia y las connotaciones actuales sí lo son.

El objetivo de este artículo es tratar de realizar un boceto o perfil de esta nueva propuesta de paternidad en el cine, a partir del estudio comparativo de cinco películas muy diferentes estrenadas entre 2015 y 2020. Para mostrar la globalidad del fenómeno, no circunscrito a una filmografía regional -aunque el proceso descrito ha tenido más desarrollo en el cine occidental, paulatinamente se ha ido difundiendo en el cine mundial- hemos seleccionado películas de muy diversos orígenes cuyo análisis y comparación nos permiten realizar un retrato robot de esta nueva paternidad que propone el cine actual. Como casos de estudio proponemos, en orden cronológico, *De padres a hijas* (*Fathers and Daughters*, Gabriele Muccino, 2015) de Estados Unidos; la finlandesa *La clase de esgrima* (*Miekkailija*, Klaus Härö, 2015); la argentina *Nahuel* (*Temporada de caza*, Natalia Garagiola, 2017) de América latina; la turca *Milagro en la celda 7* (*7. Yedinci Kogustaki Mucizelos*, Mehmet Ada Öztekin, 2019) representante del mundo islámico y la italiana *18 regalos* (*18 presenti*, Francesco Amato, 2020) de la Europa meridional. Hay ausencias obvias, como el cine asiático o el africano, que también nos ofrecen ejemplos interesantes, pero que hemos descartado por tres razones: por las limitaciones de espacio, por lo prolijo que puede resultar un estudio comparativo de tantas películas, y porque el proceso de disolución de la figura paterna ha tenido un reflejo menor en dichas filmografías.

El criterio de selección que hemos utilizado incluye una pinza de fechas estrecha -cinco años- que evita una dispersión temporal que dificultaría considerar lo descrito más arriba como un fenómeno como tal. Pero a la vez, y por el mismo motivo, se ha buscado una dispersión geográfica y cultural que permita avalar la idea de un fenómeno globalizado o, al menos, bastante generalizado.

No queremos terminar este apartado sin ofrecer una aclaración metodológica. Existen, desde el ámbito de la psicología clínica y la psicología social, diversas clasificaciones de tipologías de paternidades que se dan en las sociedades posmodernas, como las que propone Jacqueline Kelen (Kelen 1998) o Josep Marqués (Marqués 1999). Aunque las conocemos y las hemos tenido presentes, no nos ha parecido adecuado forzar las películas a asimilarse a una taxonomía ajena a los planteamientos, fines e intenciones de sus

guionistas. Por tanto, no hemos tratado de enmarcar los personajes de los filmes en dichas clasificaciones, sino que hemos dejado que cada película expusiera libremente su experiencia de paternidad.

2. ANÁLISIS FÍLMICO

2.1. *De padres a hijas (Fathers and Daughters, Gabriele Muccino, 2015)*

2.1.1. *Información y sinopsis*

El director de origen italiano Gabriele Muccino se popularizó con otra película americana sobre la paternidad, *En busca de la felicidad*, protagonizada por Will Smith. En la cinta que nos ocupa, Jake Davis y su esposa atraviesan dificultades en su matrimonio. A causa de una discusión en el coche, tienen un accidente del que solo Jake (Russell Crowe) y su hija Katie salen con vida. A la soledad que experimentan ambos al perder esposa y madre se añade un grave problema: en Jake han quedado graves secuelas psicofísicas, coartada ideal para que sus cuñados intenten quitarle la custodia de su hija, algo que ocurre finalmente tras la muerte de Jake como consecuencia de uno de sus ataques. A partir de ese momento, la película hace una gran elipsis y nos lleva a la vida de una Katie adulta, que se ha convertido en una devoradora sexual, alérgica a los vínculos y compromisos.

2.1.2. *Comentario analítico*

Es interesante relacionar esta película con otras dos anteriores, *Madres e hijas* (Rodrigo García, EE.UU., 2009) y *Yo soy Sam* (Jessie Nelson, EE.UU., 2001). A la primera se asemeja en la descripción de la compulsión sexual como mecanismo de defensa de una inseguridad afectiva originada tras la pérdida traumática de los progenitores (Ester 214); a la segunda en la batalla legal de un padre discapacitado por la custodia de su hija.

En esta película encontramos a un padre que, por las razones anteriormente expuestas, va a tener que hacer de padre y de madre a la vez. Y en ese sentido va a ser ante todo un padre “afectivo” -como el de *Yo soy Sam*-. a pesar de lo absorbente y urgente de su trabajo -es escritor- busca pasar tiempo con su hija, darle cariño, contarle cuentos, llevarla y traerla del colegio... Por su parte, la niña le adora, se siente muy unida a él y no tiene en cuenta los defectos de su padre. Pero simultáneamente, Jake empieza a tener unos brotes de enfermedad nerviosa que, a juicio de sus cuñados, le incapacitan para seguir cuidando de la pequeña. La brusca e impuesta separación definitiva entre padre e hija supone para ella un trauma que con el paso de los años y la llegada a la adolescencia se va a traducir en una inseguridad afectiva tan acusada que va a convertir a Katie en una depredadora sexual. Huye de establecer vínculos ni compromisos, para evitar volver a sufrir el trauma de un trágico abandono.

Este *excursus* es muy importante, porque pone de manifiesto la relevancia de la figura paterna para el desarrollo emocional de la hija y para el afianzamiento de certezas en su persona. Sin duda la película hace un doble elogio a la paternidad. Primero porque en la primera parte nos muestra un padre deseable, tan protector como cariñoso, nada distante, muy presente en la vida de la niña. Además su enfermedad convierte su paternidad herida casi en heroica. Segundo, porque nos muestra las consecuencias fatales que tiene retirar esa figura de la vida de Katie. Ella, en la figura de sus tíos, va a encontrar solo personas que satisfacen con creces sus necesidades materiales sin implicarse empática y afectivamente en la vida de la niña. “Muccino nos recuerda que sólo a través de la recuperación de los vínculos, podemos conectarnos con nuestras memorias traumáticas para poder tener una vida más llevadera” (Campo-Redondo 2017).

2.2. La clase de esgrima (*Miekkailija*, Klaus Härö, 2015)

2.2.1. Información y sinopsis

Esta película del finlandés Klaus Härö se basa en la historia real de Endel Nelis (Märt Avandi), un profesor de esgrima estonio, fundador de una de las más célebres escuelas de Europa. El guión de la escritora finlandesa Anna Heinämaa -que se estrena como guionista con este filme- arranca en 1950, cuando nuestro protagonista llega desde Leningrado a la población estonia de Haapsalu. La Guerra Mundial ha terminado, una guerra en la que él fue obligado a alistarse en el Ejército alemán, como tantos compatriotas. Con la anexión soviética de Estonia, se inicia una persecución de todos los estonios que hicieron la guerra en el bando nazi. Por ello Endel piensa que en ese pueblo perdido puede sentirse seguro, y comienza a trabajar como profesor de esgrima en un colegio. La mayoría de sus alumnos son huérfanos, bien por la guerra bien por la purga estalinista, y hacen de él la referencia adulta y paternal que necesitan. Hay un momento en que Endel tiene que elegir entre su libertad y seguridad o su “paternidad” incondicional. Optará por eso último para no traicionar el vínculo con sus alumnos, y ello le costará -a sabiendas- su confinamiento en Siberia.

Klaus Härö ya demostró en su anterior película, *Cartas al Padre Jacob* (2009), una gran habilidad para contar historias muy humanas desde una sobriedad emocional solo comparable con la del francés Robert Bresson o con la de su paisano Aki Kaurismäki.

2.2.2. Comentario analítico

La clase de esgrima es la historia de un hombre que se convierte en “padre” sin haberlo planeado. Esta película es representativa, por tanto, de una figura muy frecuente en el cine contemporáneo: la del padre “sobrevenido”, una paternidad no biológica que viene a sustituir -de alguna manera- la paternidad ausente del padre biológico. Éste puede haber

muerto, haberse ausentado, o simplemente haber hecho dejación de sus funciones. En este caso, la ausencia de padres generalizada se debe a la guerra, y los chavales viven con sus madres o mayoritariamente con sus abuelos. En este sentido, la cinta es como un combinado de *Los chicos del coro* (Christophe Barratier, Francia, 2004) y *Las flores de la guerra* (Zhang Yimou, China, 2011), pero sin la emotividad de la primera ni la dureza de la segunda (Orellana 2016).

En esta película, a diferencia de otras, se explicita verbalmente la condición de “padre” del protagonista. “Los niños confían en mí como en un padre”, le dice Nelis a su amada Kadri. Es decir, él es plenamente consciente de la responsabilidad que asume, de la naturaleza moral de los vínculos que establece con sus alumnos, sobre todo con algunos. “No puedo decepcionarlos”. Tras un momento en el que Nelis, asustado ante la presencia policial, intenta huir inútilmente, una de sus alumnas le espeta: “No vuelva a marcharse. ¿Lo promete? No queremos pelear solos”. En ese instante, el protagonista decide asumir hasta el final su “paternidad” sobrevenida, aunque ello le cueste la libertad, o incluso la vida.

Otro aspecto significativo es que el vínculo que nace entre alumnos y profesor no es consecuencia de la afectuosidad de éste, que es un hombre distante, frío y nada adiestrado en tratar con niños. Es su paciencia, su empeño docente, y su interés real por los chicos lo que hace que éstos se vinculen a él como adulto de referencia.

2.3. Nahuel (Temporada de caza, Natalia Garagiola, 2017)

2.3.1. Información y sinopsis

Nahuel es la opera prima de una cineasta argentina, Natalia Garagiola, tras su carrera como cortometrajista. Nahuel (Lautaro Bettoni) es un joven mal encarado, de actitudes violentas, cuyos padres se han divorciado y cada uno ha formado su nueva familia. Él se ha quedado con su madre y su pareja. Pero ella fallece, y ante el comportamiento violento de Nahuel, éste es enviado por su padrastro Bautista a vivir con su padre, Ernesto (Germán Palacios), que trabaja en la Patagonia y es cazador. Ernesto se ha casado con una alemana y ha tenido cuatro hijas con ella. Desde el primer momento la convivencia es infernal. Nahuel es despectivo, agresivo, sarcástico y retador. Su padre empieza a perder la paciencia hasta que finalmente encuentran en la cacería una forma de relacionarse que parece que funciona y que les ayuda a recuperar, poco a poco, la relación perdida. En realidad, Nahuel acepta que tiene dos padres, Bautista y Ernesto.

2.3.2. Comentario analítico

Esta película plantea una cuestión compleja respecto a la paternidad. Nos presenta dos paternidades. La del padre biológico y la del padrastro, que en el fondo es como un padre de acogida. Y Nahuel se debate, como hijo, entre ambas paternidades, hasta que finalmente

aprenderá a hacerlas compatibles. Pero lo que nos interesa en este artículo es la paternidad “recuperada” de Ernesto. Ernesto es un hombre duro y frío, hecho a sí mismo, poco dado a las manifestaciones de sentimientos. Sin embargo, hay varios momentos en el film en los que es capaz de expresar su afectividad, como cuando reduce a su hijo en el suelo tras un ataque de ira, acariciándole, también en distintos momentos de las cacerías e incluso cuando le regala un fusil el día de su marcha, símbolo de la relación recuperada. Es interesante también observar que en el tiempo más difícil de su convivencia paterno-filial, Ernesto manda unos días fuera de casa a su mujer y a sus hijas, no sólo para evitarles la violencia ambiental en el hogar sino para poder estar a solas con Nahuel de cara a la reconstrucción de los lazos perdidos².

También supone una interesante aportación una escena en la que Clara, una amiga de Nahuel, le comenta varias veces lo mucho que se parece a su “viejo” en su forma de ser. De esta forma se subraya el carácter indeleble del vínculo biológico paterno-filial, algo que al principio supone un rechazo frontal por parte de Nahuel. La película muestra cómo la restauración de la paternidad no es un camino de rosas, sino que requiere de tiempo, esfuerzo y sacrificio por ambas partes.

Hay también un elemento sugerente que la directora explicitó en una entrevista concedida con motivo del estreno del film en el 22º Festival de cine de Lima: la cacería es, sobre todo, -al menos en la tierra de la cineasta- una actividad familiar en la que alguien de la generación adulta introduce a su hijo para darle el relevo para que continúe la tradición³. Por ello, el momento que ya hemos citado en el que Ernesto regala su fusil a Nahuel es de suma importancia pues le está “invistiendo” como hijo, le está reconociendo como suyo, en un sentido emocional y no meramente biológico.

2.4. Milagro en la celda 7 (7. Yedinci Kogustaki Mucizelos, Mehmet Öztekin, 2019)

2.4.1. Información y sinopsis

El director turco Mehmet Ada Öztekin proviene del mundo de las series de televisión. Este film es un *remake* -más bien adaptación- de una cinta surcoreana (*A Gift from Room 7*, Lee Hwan-kyung, 2013)⁴. El guion nos cuenta la historia de un discapacitado, Memo (Aras Bulut Iynemli) que vive frente al mar con su abuela y su hija pequeña, Ova (Nisa Sofiya Aksongur). Es un hombre feliz que, a pesar de su deficiencia intelectual, es capaz de cuidar

² Para entender la relación entre hijos violentos y disfuncionales con el abandono paterno sugerimos la lectura de Gracia, E., “Rechazo parental y ajuste psicológico y social de los hijos”. *Salud Mental*, 2005, 28, 2.

³ Cf. Entrevista videográfica realizada para la revista digital peruana Lamula.pe en agosto de 2018 (<https://redaccion.lamula.pe/2018/08/13/natalia-garagiola/redaccionmulera/>)

⁴ Existen otras adaptaciones de la misma historia, no estrenadas en España, como *Pushpaka Vimana* (S. Ravindranath, India, 2017) o *Miracle in Cell No. 7* (Nuel C. Naval, Filipinas, 2019).

y querer a su hija, y de desempeñar su trabajo como pastor de ovejas. Los demás le consideran “el tonto del pueblo” pero conviven con él amablemente. Un desgraciado accidente va a hacer que le acusen injustamente de un cruel asesinato y lo encarcelen. Su única preocupación es volver a estar con su hija. Este amor paternal irá ablandando los corazones de todos sus compañeros de celda, que decidirán hacer lo que sea para que Memo y su pequeña se reencuentren (Orellana 2020). En realidad, toda la cinta es un *flashback*, ya que esta empieza y acaba con una Ova adulta, el día de su boda, que recuerda con agradecimiento a su padre mientras observa un estuche que él le regaló cuando era niña.

2.4.2. Comentario analítico

Esta película también nos recuerda en cierto modo a la ya citada *Yo soy Sam*, por la relación paternofilial de un discapacitado. De hecho, la cinta plantea una cuestión de fondo similar: ¿Qué es preciso tener o hacer para ser un buen padre? Memo es intelectualmente discapacitado, es pobre y solo sabe pastorear ovejas. Pero es capaz de un gran amor y con su mente infantil sabe cuidar y acompañar a su hija, que le quiere con locura. Quizá lo más diferenciador de esta película respecto a las otras seleccionadas, es que el protagonista es tan pobre y su horizonte social y vital tan reducido, que su hija es el centro absoluto de su existencia: lo que da sentido a su vida. Para Memo el único problema que tiene estar en esa cárcel, donde sufre violencia y humillación, es estar separado de su hija. Estamos ante una paternidad esencial, primaria, basada únicamente en el amor y el cuidado, sin aderezos sociales o culturales.

Hay una figura antagonista, la del jefe militar, cruel y despiadado, que ha perdido a su hija en el citado accidente. Esa separación, al contrario que a Memo, le llena de odio y resentimiento. Esas dos paternidades heridas caminan en paralelo durante el transcurso del film, y si la de Memo se convierte en motivo de humanización de su entorno, con la del oficial ocurre lo contrario.

2.5. 18 regalos (18 presenti, Francesco Amato, 2020)

2.5.1. Información y sinopsis

Esta cinta de Francesco Amato se basa en la historia real de Elisa Girotto, a pesar de que tiene un argumento propio del realismo mágico. Embarazada cuando contaba 40 años, a Girotto se le descubre un cáncer incurable que le va a permitir terminar su gestación pero le va a impedir ver crecer a su hija Anna. Así pues, ella decide dejar comprados 18 regalos de cumpleaños, uno para cada año hasta que su hija llegue a la mayoría de edad. Elisa (Vittoria Puccini) es una mujer emprendedora que vive con su pareja, Alessio (Edoardo Leo), un entrenador deportivo, cerca de Bérgamo. La fantasía mágica de la película

consiste en que Elisa, embarazada, atropella un día a una joven que resulta ser su propia hija Anna con 18 años (Benedetta Porcaroli), y se la lleva a casa. Anna se da cuenta de que esa mujer es la madre que nunca tuvo, y que ese padre con el que se lleva muy mal, es un hombre sufriente que ha hecho de todo para sacar adelante a su hija en solitario. Por cierto que el padre real, Alessio Vincenzotto, ha formado parte del equipo de guionistas del film (Orellana, *La búsqueda del padre* 2020).

2.5.2. Comentario analítico

Estamos ante una película muy interesante que trata sobre la paternidad, sobre la maternidad, y obviamente, sobre las relaciones filiales. La mirada de reproche y a menudo despectiva que tiene Anna, una adolescente, sobre sus padres, se va transformando cuando es capaz de ver y entender todo el camino recorrido de amor y sacrificio que ha llevado a sus padres a ser lo que son. Pero también la película ilustra cómo los hijos nunca responden a la imagen que sus padres se hicieron de ellos un día, sino que están llamados a seguir su propio camino.

La figura paterna que aquí se nos presenta está marcada, como en la película *De padres e hijas*, por tener que asumir simultáneamente los roles paterno y materno tras el fallecimiento de la madre y esposa. Al inicio del film se nos presenta como un hombre infantilizado, obsesionado con su pequeño mundo deportivo, desordenado y algo egoísta, que no quiere ceder su cuarto para que sea la habitación del bebé que está por venir. Pero de repente tiene que madurar de golpe. Alessio se esfuerza por hacer feliz la vida de su hija, apoyado por la familia y los amigos. Durante los primeros años, Alessio le dice a su hija que su madre está de viaje, hasta que llega el momento en que se hace necesario decir la verdad, y asumir ante Anna su doble condición de padre y madre.

Pero así como en la película americana la relación afectiva del padre primaba sobre todo lo demás, en ésta tiene mucha importancia el desbordamiento por la gestión doméstica, el trabajo y el cuidado de la niña. Alessio es un hombre desbordado y sufridor, lo que impide que su hija adolescente sepa reconocer la heroica paternidad que se esconde tras la fachada de un hombre preocupado y taciturno, al que ella considera un perdedor.

Cuando la hija descubre, en la artimaña mágica de la ficción argumental, todo el sacrificio, dolor, soledad y esfuerzo que su padre ha tenido que afrontar durante los últimos 18 años, nace en ella un profundo agradecimiento y afecto hacia su padre, que por fin descubre plenamente la satisfacción de la paternidad.

3. ANÁLISIS COMPARATIVO. DEL PADRE “AUSENTE” AL PADRE “RESTAURADO”.

En estas cinco películas se dibujan diversas experiencias de paternidad, con puntos comunes y elementos diferenciados, pero convergentes en un modelo de paternidad superadora de la ausencia o disolución descritas.

En primer lugar, es interesante llamar la atención sobre el hecho de que todos los padres de las películas seleccionadas son personajes “rotos” o marcados por una carencia, una herida, tullidos físicos o emocionales. Son padres imperfectos o carenciales. Nada que ver con la idealización clásica de personajes paternos como Atticus Finch (Gregory Peck) de *Matar a un ruiseñor* (R. Mulligan, EE.UU., 1962) o el español Carlos Alonso (Alberto Closas) de *La gran familia* (F. Palacios, España, 1962), películas curiosamente del mismo año, que nos muestran padres ejemplares, sin fisuras, idílicos. Jake está viudo y enfermo física y psicológicamente. Endels técnicamente no es padre y vive ocultando su pasado por miedo. Ernesto está divorciado, no fue capaz de acompañar a su mujer en la enfermedad mortal y no ha querido saber nada de su hijo durante casi toda su vida. Memo sufre una importante minusvalía intelectual y no está la madre de su hija para ayudarle. Alessio es viudo y se ha visto obligado a ejercer una paternidad que le venía grande sin el apoyo de su mujer. Por tanto, estas películas no proponen unos patrones de padre idealizado, integrado, equilibrado, al estilo de las dos películas anteriormente citadas. Se trata de personas que son o que tienen que ser padres “a pesar de” una serie de inconvenientes o mermas. No son padres “ejemplares” en el sentido de aplicación perfecta de una definición de libro. Son personas con “taras”, con *hándicaps*, pero que a pesar de ello son o acaban aprendiendo a ser padres.

En segundo lugar, podemos comprobar en los cinco films la profunda huella que ha dejado la “ausencia” inicial en los hijos, una ausencia, eso sí, superada de diversas formas⁵. En la película americana, la ausencia del padre -por su progresivo deterioro, por los intentos de privarle de la custodia, y finalmente por su trágica muerte- va a suponer el desequilibrio psico-sexual de su hija; en la finlandesa, los niños -marcados por la ausencia de sus progenitores- no permiten a Endels que vuelva a ausentarse de sus vidas en la escena del torneo final; en la argentina, la relación padre-hijo está profundamente condicionada por la ausencia de Ernesto en los momentos más decisivos de la vida de Nahuel, como la muerte de su madre; en la turca, toda la energía afectiva de Memo tiene como fin volver a estar presente en la vida de su hija; por fin, en la italiana, la ausencia de Alessio no es tal,

⁵ “Las consecuencias de este eclipse [de la figura paterna] son negativas por partida doble: sea porque tiende a desaparecer el hijo actual, sea porque con él desaparece también el futuro padre. De ahí que el principal perjudicado del eclipse del padre sea el hijo” (Malo 87).

pero sí es percibida así por su hija, que echando en falta a su madre, no llega a apreciar en su justa medida la presencia de su padre.

Un tercer aspecto decisivo común es la transformación que sufren los personajes para llegar a una “restauración” de su paternidad. En este punto, mucho más complejo, se da una inevitable diversificación. En la película *De padres e hijas*, el deterioro de Jake es definitivo y ya no podrá volver a ejercer su paternidad. Pero la restauración viene dada en la persona de su hija, ya que el día que encuentra un amor que la acoge incondicionalmente, como era el amor de su padre, puede volver a ponerse de pie e intentar darse una nueva oportunidad. En *La clase de esgrima*, la restauración pasa a través del sacrificio de Endels: por no traicionar su “paternidad” acaba en Siberia. Pero, muerto Stalin, vuelve al pueblo, donde los chicos le esperan para retomar un vínculo nunca roto, solo “interrumpido”. *Nahuel* nos ofrece dos arcos de transformación imbricados entre sí: el del padre y el del hijo. El punto de inflexión está en la escena en la que Nahuel expresa el dolor que subyace a todo su rencor y resentimiento. De esa manera se convierte en un hijo adulto ante su padre adulto. Cuando acaba la película es cuando realmente empieza un camino mutuo de reconstrucción del vínculo roto, un camino que ya no se nos cuenta en la película, pero que queda esperanzadoramente encauzado. *Milagro en la celda 7* termina con el reencuentro feliz de padre e hija gracias a la arriesgada implicación de compañeros de celda, militares y funcionarios. Y, sobre todo, gracias a la inmolación voluntaria de un preso, marcado por su paternidad traicionada, y que con su sacrificio busca redimir su claudicación como padre. Por último, en *18 regalos*, Alessio alcanza la plenitud de su paternidad cuando su hija reconoce su vulnerable heroicidad y deja atrás una mirada injusta sobre él.

Vamos a señalar un último aspecto común de gran relevancia. Si habíamos dicho más arriba que tras la revolución cultural sesentayochista se había dado una nueva valoración de la maternidad, como algo independiente de la figura paterna, en estas películas llama la atención la ausencia de la figura materna. En el primer, tercer, cuarto y quinto film la madre ha fallecido, y el segundo es un caso de paternidad no biológica. Sin embargo, en ningún caso se puede hablar de un triunfo de la paternidad solitaria frente a un modelo biparental. En la película de Muccino, la muerte de la madre es una desgracia que tiene consecuencias negativas para todos; en la de Garagiola, la pérdida de la madre es la causa del trauma de Nahuel; en la de Öztekin, la figura materna está representada por la abuela, cuya muerte es también una terrible pérdida, atenuada por la aparición de otra madre sustitutiva en la figura de la maestra; por último, en la de Amato, como en la argentina, la muerte de la madre es la causa del resentimiento de Anna y de la angustia de Alessio. Pero

lo interesante es que la desaparición trágica de la figura materna es el catalizador que pone en marcha la dinámica de la paternidad. Como comentamos al hablar de la película *Los mundos de Coraline*, una madre excesivamente presente había generado una paternidad débil y ausente (Orellana y Martínez 77-81). Pensamos que más que la reivindicación de una paternidad en solitario, estas películas utilizan el recurso dramático de la desaparición de la madre para enfatizar los aspectos de una paternidad restaurada o en camino de estarlo.

4. CONCLUSIÓN

Después del análisis propuesto estas cinco películas parecen avalar la hipótesis de un cambio de tendencia en la representación fílmica de la figura paterna. Se trata de un giro que no supone la restauración de modelos precedentes, sino la búsqueda de unos nuevos perfiles de paternidad que, sin embargo, subrayan su necesidad insustituible en el crecimiento humano y personal de los hijos.

Pensamos que es necesario proseguir con el análisis de otras películas contemporáneas que permitan verificar con el análisis de otras cintas la hipótesis propuesta. También nos parece muy pertinente hacer el mismo análisis que hemos propuesto, esta vez referido a la imagen de la maternidad, para comprobar si se ha dado un proceso paralelo de transformación. De hecho, el número de películas que afrontan esa cuestión es sensiblemente superior al de las cintas que exploran el tema de la paternidad.

REFERENCIAS BIBLIOGRÁFICAS

- Anatrella**, Tony. *La diferencia prohibida. Sexualidad, educación y violencia. La herencia de mayo de 1968*, Madrid: Ediciones Encuentro 2008.
- Barraycoa**, Javier. "Dimensiones de la cultura narcisista". Jorge Martínez y Javier Barraycoa (eds.) *Narciso en el espejo*, Barcelona: Scire Universitaria, 2010.
- Campo-Redondo**, María. "De padres a hijas" in *Clínica e investigación relacional*, 2017, Vol. 11. <https://www.psicoterapiarelacional.es/CeIRREVISTA-On-line/CEIR>.
- Ester**, Belén. *En tierra de hombres*, Madrid: Ediciones Encuentro, Madrid, 2015.
- Kelen**, Jacqueline. *El nuevo padre: un modelo distinto de paternidad*. Barcelona: Grijalbo, 1998.
- Malo**, Antonio. "La identidad del padre y su reconocimiento en el cine". Enrique Fuster (ed.), *Identidad y reconocimiento en cine y televisión*. Rom: EDUSC, 2017, págs. 85-102.
- Marqués**, Josep Vicent. *Familia y roles sexuales*, in *Pensar nuestra sociedad: fundamentos de sociología*, Valencia: Tirant lo Blanch, 1999.

Orellana, Juan. *Cine y posmodernidad*, Madrid: Every View, 2012.

---. *La búsqueda del padre en el cine contemporáneo*, in AA.VV. *En busca del padre*, Madrid: Facultad de Teología San Dámaso, 2006.

Orellana, Juan y Martínez, Jorge. *Celuloide posmoderno*, Madrid: Ediciones Encuentro, 2010.

Peragallo, J. A. *Después de la disciplina*, Buenos Aires: Métodos, 1998.

Pérez Testor, Carles. *La función del padre en el siglo XXI*, Familia: Revista de ciencias y orientación familiar, Nº 31, 2005, págs. 7-18.

Contributors

Dr. Ignacio Castro Rey holds a PhD in Philosophy from the Universidad Autónoma of Madrid, a city where he works as a philosopher, art critic, cultural manager and teacher. Apart from numerous articles in different media and conferences in Spanish and Latin American institutions, Castro is a frequent guest speaker at Spanish and foreign universities. The following is a selection of some of his books: *Lluvia oblicua* ("Oblique rain") (Madrid, 2020), *Mil días en la montaña* ("A thousand days in the mountains") (Madrid, 2019), *Ética del desorden* ("Ethics of disorder") (Madrid, 2017), *Sociedad y barbarie* ("Society and barbarism") (Barcelona, 2012), *La depresión informativa* ("The informative depression") (Buenos Aires, 2011), *Votos de riqueza* ("Vows of wealth") (Madrid, 2007), *La sexualidad y su sombra* ("Sexuality and its shadow") (Buenos Aires, 2004), *Crítica de la razón sexual* ("Criticism of sexual reason") (Barcelona, 2002) and *La explotación de los cuerpos* ("The exploitation of bodies") (Madrid, 2002).

Ignacio Castro Rey es doctor en Filosofía por la Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, ciudad en la que ejerce de filósofo, crítico de arte, gestor cultural y profesor. Aparte de numerosos artículos en distintos medios, de conferencias en instituciones españolas y latinoamericanas, Castro es un profesor frecuentemente invitado en Universidades españolas y extranjeras. Es autor, entre otros, de los siguientes libros: *Lluvia oblicua* (Madrid, 2020), *Mil días en la montaña* (Madrid, 2019), *Ética del desorden* (Madrid, 2017), *Sociedad y barbarie* (Barcelona, 2012), *La depresión informativa* (Buenos Aires, 2011), *Votos de riqueza* (Madrid, 2007), *La sexualidad y su sombra* (Buenos Aires, 2004), *Crítica de la razón sexual* (Barcelona, 2002) y *La explotación de los cuerpos* (Madrid, 2002).

Dr. Carlos Lacalle García holds a Ph.D. in Architecture. He is an associate professor at the Escuela de Arquitectura de Valencia. He is a member of the Research Group Landscape Architecture and Urban Analysis (Institute of Patrimony Restoration) and also of the Research Group of Architecture and Contemporary Thinking (Universitat Politècnica de València). When developing architectural projects he combines education and research, and he has been awarded several times for his proposals in competitions. His main research work focuses around the idea of “architecture as an artwork”, where he pays particular attention to relationships and interdisciplinary influences. [www.carloslacalle.net]

Carlos Lacalle García es doctor arquitecto, profesor del Departamento de Proyectos Arquitectónicos e investigador del Grupo de Paisaje y Análisis Urbano (Instituto de Restauración del Patrimonio), y del Grupo de Arquitectura y Pensamiento de la *Universitat Politècnica de València*. Compagina docencia e investigación con el desarrollo de proyectos arquitectónicos donde ha recibido diversos premios en concursos de arquitectura. Sus investigaciones se centran en la “arquitectura entendida como obra de arte” donde son fundamentales las conexiones e influencias interdisciplinarias. [www.carloslacalle.net]

Dra. Asunción López-Varela is Associate Professor at *Facultad Filología, Universidad Complutense de Madrid* . She holds a PhD in Anglo-American Culture and Literary Studies. Her research interests are Comparative Literature and Cognitive and Intermedial Semiotics. For more information on her activities, please see <https://www.ucm.es/siim/asun-lopez-varela> and <https://www.ucm.es/siim/lopez-varela-publications>

Asunción López-Varela es profesora en la Facultad de Filología de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid. Tiene un doctorado en Cultura angloamericana y Estudios literarios. Sus intereses de investigación son la literatura comparada y la semiótica cognitiva e intermedial. Para más información sobre sus actividades, consulte por favor: <https://www.ucm.es/siim/asun-lopez-varela> y <https://www.ucm.es/siim/lopez-varela-publications>.

Dra. Ana Maria Martin-Castillejos holds a PhD in English, a Master of North-American Studies and a degree in History of Art. She is presently a Senior Lecturer at the Department of Applied Linguistics, School of Architecture, Technical University of Madrid. She has also taught in the past at MSU (East Lansing, USA), Faculty of Architecture, University of Chile (Santiago, Chile), Universidad Complutense (Madrid, Spain) and Tongji University (Shanghai, China). The coordinator of different European projects (Lingua, Grundtvig, Leonardo), among her lines of research are Cultural Studies and Space Studies with an emphasis on the role played by women.

Ana María Martín Castillejos es doctora en Lingüística inglesa, master en Estudios Norteamericanos y licenciada en Historia del Arte. Actualmente es profesora titular en el Departamento de Lingüística Aplicada a la Ciencia y la Tecnología, Escuela de Arquitectura, Universidad Politécnica de Madrid (UPM). También ha impartido clase en Michigan State University (East Lansing, USA), en la Universidad de Santiago de Chile (Santiago, Chile) y en la Universidad de Tongji (Shanghai, China). Coordinadora de varios proyectos europeos de diferente signo, entre sus líneas de investigación están los estudios culturales y los estudios del espacio asociados a la mujer.

Dr. Juan Orellana y Gutiérrez de Terán holds a PhD in Humanities from Universidad San Pablo CEU and a degree in Philosophy from Universidad Pontificia de Comillas. Associate Professor of Audiovisual Narrative at Universidad San Pablo CEU and Director of the *Ediciones Encuentro* film collection. He is author of *Como en un espejo. Drama humano y sentido religioso en el cine contemporáneo* ("Like in a Mirror. Human drama and religious sense in contemporary cinema") (2008), *Celuloide posmoderno. Narcisismo y autenticidad en el cine actual* ("Postmodern celluloid. Narcissism and authenticity in current cinema") (2010), *Cine y posmodernidad* ("Cinema and postmodernity") (2012) and *Cine e ideología* ("Cinema and ideology") (2015). He is also co-author of *Pasión de los fuertes. La mirada antropológica de diez maestros del cine* ("The passion of the strong. The anthropological gaze of ten masters of cinema") (2005), *Manual de crítica de cine* ("Manual of film criticism") (2019), the *Cineforum* yearbook and *Breve Encuentro* ("Brief Encounter") (2004). Editor of the *Diccionario de creación cinematográfica* ("Dictionary of cinematographic creation") (2003).

Doctor en Humanidades por la Universidad CEU San Pablo y licenciado en Filosofía por la Universidad Pontificia Comillas. Profesor Adjunto de Narrativa Audiovisual en la Universidad CEU San Pablo. Director de la colección de cine de Ediciones Encuentro. Autor de *Como en un espejo. Drama humano y sentido religioso en el cine contemporáneo* (2008), *Celuloide posmoderno. Narcisismo y autenticidad en el cine actual* (2010), *Cine y posmodernidad* (2012) y *Cine e ideología* (2015). Es coautor del *Manual de crítica de cine* (2019), del libro *Pasión de los fuertes. La mirada antropológica de diez maestros del cine* (2005), del anuario *Cineforum* y del libro *Breve Encuentro* (2004). También redactor del *Diccionario de creación cinematográfica* (2003).

Alberto de la Rocha Muñoz is a writer and photographer. He obtained a residency scholarship from the Foundation Antonio Gala for young creators (2004-2005). He has won numerous literary competitions, both for short stories and novels. His novels include *El cuarto inclinado* (Felipe Trigo Award, Algaida, 2007), *Sumidero* (Algaida, 2015), *Los vertebrados* (Ateneo-Ciudad de Valladolid Award, Algaida, 2018) and *Recordaré abril* (Planeta-Booket, 2019). As a photographer, in 2008 he exhibited his work on the City of Prague at the School of Architecture and Geodesy at the University of Alcalá de Henares. [Instagram: @albertodelarocha_escritor]

Alberto de la Rocha Muñoz es escritor y fotógrafo. Obtuvo una beca de residencia de la Fundación Antonio Gala para jóvenes creadores (2004-2005). Ha ganado numerosos certámenes literarios, tanto de cuento como de novela. Entre sus novelas destacan *El cuarto inclinado* (Premio Felipe Trigo, Algaida, 2007), *Sumidero* (Algaida, 2015), *Los vertebrados* (Premio Ateneo-Ciudad de Valladolid, Algaida, 2018) y *Recordaré abril* (Planeta-Booket, 2019). Como fotógrafo, en 2008 expuso su trabajo sobre la ciudad de Praga en la Escuela de Arquitectura y Geodesia de la Universidad de Alcalá de Henares. [Instagram: @albertodelarocha_escritor]

Carmen Palenzuela has a degree in Geography and History and is currently a secondary school teacher. Her artistic work covers many years, part of which can be seen at this address: <https://www.facebook.com/ARTE-de-carmenpalenzuela-204773909558123>

“Using a language that does not exhaust its interpretations, its possible understanding and the enjoyment of it goes a long way, above all, because it makes us feel like participants in the same free action, that of interpreting, understanding and enjoying in a common scenario”.

Carmen Palenzuela es Licenciada en Geografía e Historia y en la actualidad es profesora de Secundaria. Su trabajo artístico tiene un recorrido de años que, parcialmente, se puede conocer en esta dirección: <https://www.facebook.com/ARTE-de-carmenpalenzuela-204773909558123>

“Emplear un lenguaje que no se agote en sus interpretaciones, en su entendimiento y en su disfrute da para mucho, sobre todo, para sentirnos partícipes en la misma acción libre, la de interpretar, entender y disfrutar en un escenario común”.

