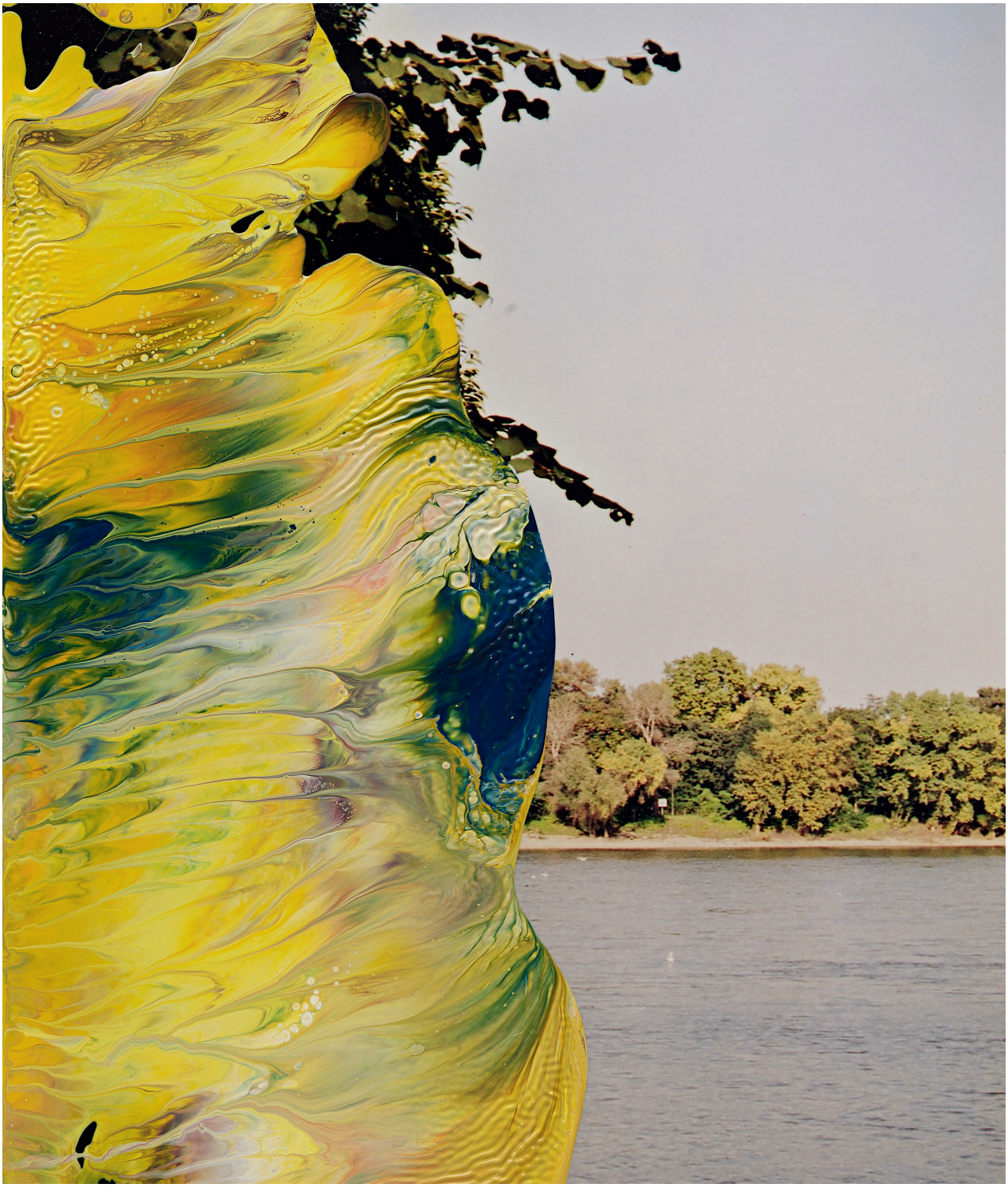
# ELECTRA



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NIF 506997286
fundacaoedp@edp.pt

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FF Balance (FontFont)

**Editorial office**
Central Tejo – Av. Brasília
1300–598 Lisboa

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## The End and the Beginning

When the end of one year is the beginning of the next, there is a hidden stoppage in this visible passage that makes time an intimate voice to remind us of what we have forgotten. This whispered voice is like that of the slow, mysterious songs that give a sun of light its moon of shadow.

In every year that ends and surrenders to each year that begins, in a contiguous discontinuity, there is our will to measure, mark and change the time in us and us in time. This is how poets scan their verses so that the music leaps like a spark from a fire or a bird from a tree. There is an interval that we open only within ourselves to repeat the words of Paul Gauguin's painting: 'Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?'

We can only answer such deep, potent questions in the languages of memory and forgetting. It is as if these two functions of the mathematics of life were the two poles of binary algebra in each of us.

Memory and Forgetting – this is the dual theme of the portfolio in number eight of Electra. It thus relates to the years and their passage from one to another. This is also where the beginning of memory is the end of forgetting, although there are moments in which they touch and mix, like paints and colours. If we look at these two words, we find them laden with commonplaces that have been heaped upon them, making use of them in an operation fertile with clichés, facile ideas and false truths.

From politics to philosophy, medicine to literature, cinema to advertising, journalism to history and economics to sociology, memory and forgetting are mantras and container words that have room for all contents, many of which are unpleasant and pollutant. There is even a musical composition with these words as lyrics that gives *kitsch* a repetitive, repeated voice. We have to free them from this load and it is under this load that we have to find them.

The Greeks were the masters of all kinds of creation and all kinds of destruction, of all certainties and all scepticisms and of all disguises and all unveilings. As we have already said, we will never be able to escape them. Anyone trying to do so here and now has been caught up by them again – there and then – in an ambush set up on the weary paths of culture.

For these initiators and announcers of almost everything, who regarded the beginning of the sea and the end of the mountains with a thought-that-could-see, the Titaness Mnemosyne, whose name Warburg gave to his Atlas, was the goddess of memory. With Zeus as the father, she was the mother of the nine muses who inspire (the verb in the present is a tribute) both arts and sciences.

It is therefore no surprise that the history of our culture has as one of its centres the fight of anamnesis against amnesia and the duel between memory and its oblivion. From Homer to Dante or Milton, from Giotto to Velázquez or Mondrian, from Bach to Beethoven or Mahler, from Galileo to Newton and Einstein, from Paracelsus to Darwin or António Damásio, memory is the flame that burns forgetting and forgetting is the air that lights up memory.

'In the beginning was the Word (*Logos*),' says the Book. That is the Word to which words belong, even those with which the universe was created. 'God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good.

Aby Warburg,
*Atlas Mnemosyne*, 1924–29

And God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night.' We call memory light ('in the light of memory') and we call oblivion darkness ('in the darkness of oblivion'). And still there are luminous oblivions and murky memories…

If memory is the awareness of time in time, God, whose time is eternity, is the one who never forgets anything. God is the one who never forgets Himself and whose memory coincides with Himself ('I am who I am'), meaning that His essence agrees with His existence. Eternity and its infinity are His memory with no beginning and no end, omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient. According to the short story by Jorge Luis Borges, God is 'Funes the memorious', the one whose memory pursues him like insomnia with no sleep or forgetting.

Religions make memory their altar, their confessionary and their law-court. There is no sacrament (the Gospel reads that Jesus Christ said, 'Do this in remembrance of me,' when introducing the Eucharist) or soul-searching or confession or guilt or penance or absolution or salvation without memory and without forgetting. The solemn *Memento* of the Liturgy of the Ashes says: *Memento, homo, quia pulvis es et in pulverem reverteris* ('Remember, man, that dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return').

These methodical operations of internal heuristics, of subjective hermeneutics and of technology of the ego use memory and forgetting as effective, subtle and meticulous operators of power and transcendence. Sin is a memory that becomes a confession. Absolution is an awareness that becomes forgetting.

If we are talking about this in this way, it is because, in our time more than any other, in everything there is a visible or latent search for a memory of the origin and a discourse about it (archaeology, arkhaîos-logos, literally means discourse of the origin).

From the maieutics and reminiscence of Socrates and Plato to Freud's psychoanalysis (the return of the repressed); from Rousseau's to Saint Augustine's confessions; from Roland Barthes' allusion to 'the force of all life: forgetting' to Kundera of political memory and the lack thereof in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*; from Pierre Nora's *Places of Memory* to the teaching of memory by George Steiner; from Paul Ricoeur's phenomenology of memory to Sebald's 'post-memory', there is a logomachy of these two words and a psychomachy of what they represent.

In the 19th century (the great age of historicism, in which photography and cinema also appeared) and the first half of the 20th century, memory and forgetting became a motive that gave thought and art an engine and acceleration. From Nietzsche (*Every action requires forgetting*) to Bergson (*Matter and Memory*); from Chateaubriand (*Memories from beyond the Grave*) to Proust (*In Search of Lost Time*); from Pessanha (the poem *Olvido*) to Pessoa (*Ser consciente é talvez um esquecimento* and *Da saudade, esquecimento que se lembra*); from Manet (*Oublieuse Mémoire: Le Processus de Rémanence dans la Production Picturale de Manet* is the title of an essay about him) to Magritte (*Memory*); from Baudelaire to Walter Benjamin, who in his essay about the poet speaks of the relationship between experience, memory and art as one of the reasons for his work; from Wittgenstein and his distinctions about the connection between mind ('bringing to mind'), memory and its images to Paul Valéry of 'memory is the

future of the past'; from Picasso (*La Mémoire du Regard* was said about his work) to Dali (*Persistence of Memory*); from Hitchcock (*Rebecca*) to Tarkovsky (*Solaris*) or Lanzmann (*Shoah*), memory and forgetting are pitted against each other like gladiators in the circus of life and art.

After the Second World War and the savagery that it involved, the stage of culture acted out the tragedy of memory and forgetting. Totalitarians wanted to surround, censure, control, command and create memory and forgetting. From Hitler's theories and ravings on the histories of Arians and Jews to the murderous fictions and propaganda inventions from pasts, presents and futures, with events, glories, heroisms and crimes; from Stalin's removal of Trotsky from Soviet photos to the false confessions at Moscow trials, memory and forgetting were often the lubricant that oiled the gigantic, menacing and often grotesque machine of totalitarian power.

Memory is built from many memories. There is individual and collective memory, the memory of winners and losers, natural and artificial memory, aural and visual memory, sensorial and intellectual memory, affective and cognitive memory, real and imagined memory, current and virtual memory, political and historical memory and poetic and photographic memory. These qualifiers can also be used for forgetting.

Going against classic philosophical tradition, which is hypermnesic, and against Plato's theory of recollection, Friedrich Nietzsche gave forgetting a throne in the endangered kingdom of life. He did not deem amnesia an absolute gift, but made it a relatively precious asset on the unstable and restless scale that weighs memory and forgetting. He believed that forgetting was the foundation of ordinary life and a condition of happiness. It was for the mind what digestion was for the body. Its value had the brand of more and not of less and its positivity was an energy that led to action, a lightness that led to advancement, a joy that led to boldness and a power that led to building. 'There is no happiness or serenity or hope or pride or enjoyment of the present moment without the ability to forget,' he said.

The author of *On the Genealogy of Morals* felt that the prisoners that inhabited the prison of memory were served the heavy dried bread of resentment, rage and paralysis: remembering is ruminating and brooding. As an anti-historicist, Nietzsche regarded history not as principle of identity or as driver of unity but as a heavy weight placed on the bowed shoulders of all and sundry that prevented peoples from free self-determination. This cunning master of suspicion said that for people and peoples sense was not inherited; it was created.

Marcel Proust made time, memory and art the trinity of gods of a heretical literary theology. His book-polyptych-labyrinth-cathedral of seven books sought what is only given to us when we seek without finding to find without seeking. Life and death speak a language other than ours. Living is translating and translating is pursuing the word that is dispensed, exonerated and replaced. However, it is also achieving that which corresponds (co-responds), is equivalent (worth the same), swings (moves back and forth), adds and compensates. According to Walter Benjamin, a good translation contains nostalgia for the absent language.

By endowing involuntary memory with a clear, broad predominance over voluntary memory, this compulsive asthmatic nocturnal writer, who sought within

himself the oxygen of another breath and the clock of another time, made the system of life coincide with the regime of art in voluntary memory.

After all is said and done, voluntary memory is perhaps the memory of *chronos* – linear, serial, successive, quantitative, human time – and involuntary memory is the memory of *kairos* – the right, opportune, ubiquitous, qualitative, divine time. This is why voluntary memory is vulgar, monitored and vulnerable, while involuntary memory is magical, magnetic and magnifying. Because, as Proust said, 'The true paradises are the paradises that we have lost.'

Memory has been acquiring ever more techniques and technologies, buildings and institutions, processes and processing. Memory is in archives, inventories, registry offices, depositories, libraries, periodical libraries, sound libraries, video libraries, media libraries, cinema libraries, picture galleries, museums and monuments. It is on parchments, papers, fabrics, cellulose, films, vinyl and hard drives, and in clouds. Information has become memory and memory has become information. Memory without recollections (without data), which Foucault talked about when referring to Marguerite Duras, only exists for those who drop out of the world or cannot find a place for themselves in it.

For classic psychology, memory is the deep foundation of being, the founding foundation of identity, the powerful pillar of personality. It contains the sources of sense. In this light, without memory we do not know who we are. It is the awareness of us in us and of us in the world. This is the axis that gives unity to the rotations of plurality, the faces of diversity and the proliferation of the unknown.

But in his autobiographic essay *Less than One*, the Russian poet Joseph Brodsky, who was a dissident, prisoner and Nobel Laureate, wrote: 'As failures go, attempting to recall the past is like claiming to grasp the meaning of existence. Both make one feel like a baby clutching at a basketball: one's palms keep sliding off. I remember rather little of my life and what I do remember is of small consequence. Most of the thoughts I now recall as having been interesting to me owe their significance to the time when they occurred.' Brodsky's memory of life and the world in which he lived it beat in his poetry like the unregulated, arrhythmic heart that killed him. The wind in it that made his shadow rise and shake was that of bitter, indignant and lucid forgetting. This memory and this forgetting were like the blade of a nervous, frantic knife.

Today, memory and forgetting have gained the sounds and silences that make up the voice of our time. The memory of these years is the largest nursery of forgetting of which there is memory. It is enough to think about the pardons that are requested publicly, incessantly, lightly and gratuitously. Or, of crises whose causes repeat the same consequences as if it was always for the first time, to conclude that our memory is false and forgetting is threatening.

The memory and forgetting that in the 20th century passed from the obsolete lyre of lyricism to the torn garb of tragedy, in the 21st century now wear the carnival mask of farce. In this edition of our magazine, the words and images that speak of memory and forgetting seek to follow the notes of a score that the hands deliver more quickly or more slowly. The convex periphrases of memory respond to the concave syntheses of forgetting. The polyphony of one is the solo of the other.

Anyone familiar with the work of Jorge Luis Borges knows that fiction is the memory of things that have not happened. Or what may be to come. Or what has happened or will happen differently. Or rather, it is memory of what fiction brings about in its own way.

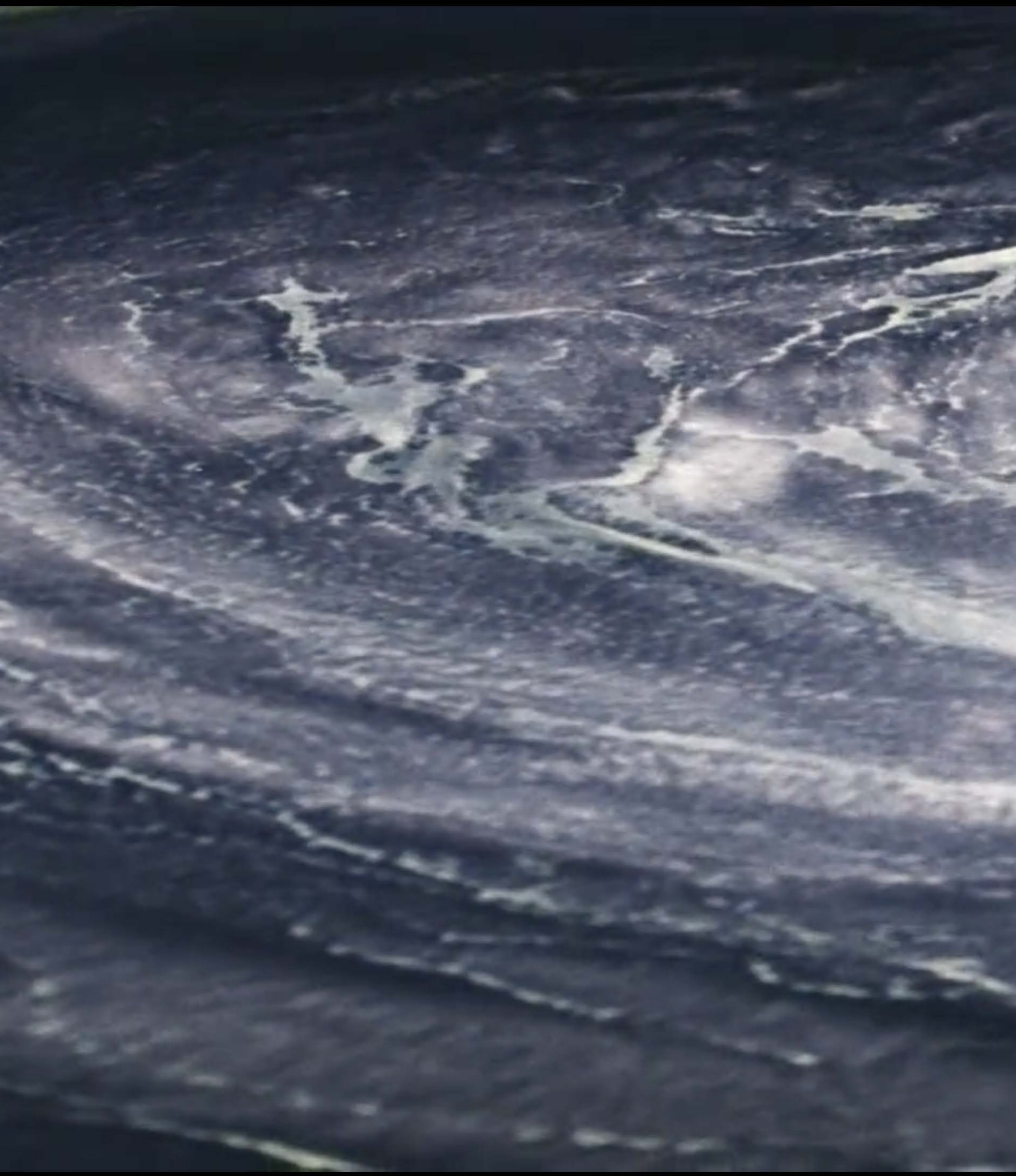
The work of the well-known and acclaimed Lebanese artist Walid Raad is the thunder that makes lightning happen. Raad makes fiction a reality greater than reality and reality a fiction greater than fiction. In the portfolio compiled for this edition of Electra, the images with which his 'mediocre artist' tells us a story are another story that eyes pursue like hunters in the forest of memories and forgetting.

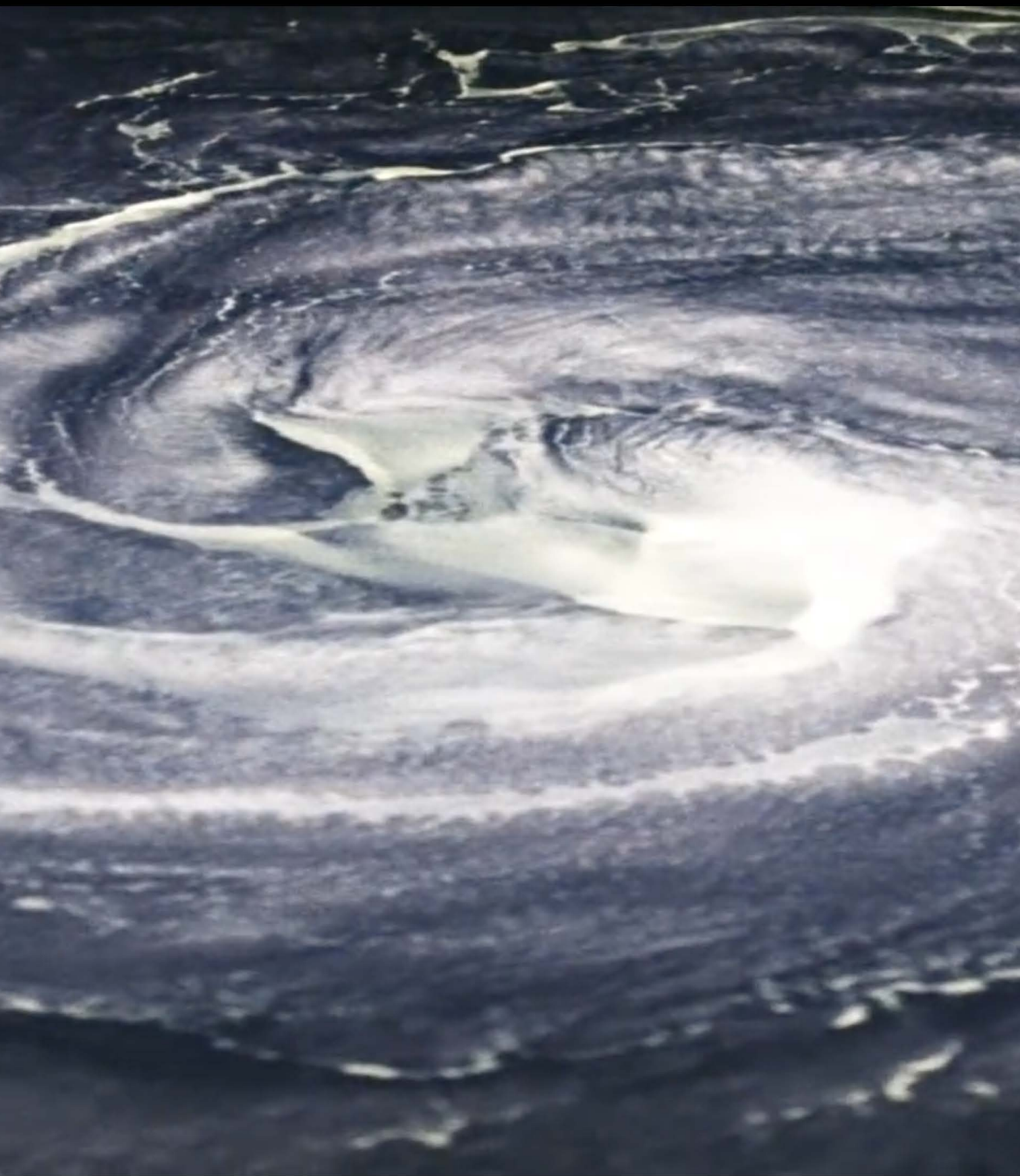
An editorial is a string of words that run between a past memory that is close to forgetting and a future memory that flees from it. This is how Electra is made of the time that is approaching and moving away from us. This is how memory and forgetting draw closer and farther away. When all is said and done, we remind ourselves of time so that we can then forget it and we can forget it and later remember it.

TRANSLATED BY WENDY GRAÇA

**José Manuel dos Santos**
**António Soares**

Following pages:
Andrei Tarkovsky,
*Solaris*, 1972 (stills from the film)





Pieter Bruegel,
*Hunters in the Snow*, 1565
(details)

**The last volume of *War and Peace* was published in 1869, that is, 150 years ago. It is one of the great universal novels. A book for a varied reading public, this epic of Russian literature, a Matryoshka novel with many subplots within, was challenged from the outset. It has a full history, recounted here by Dan Ungurianu, a professor of Russian studies in New York. What he asks here is a persistent question: why is it so difficult to argue against *War and Peace*? In response, Ungurianu speaks of the book and its author, drawing a lively and precise portrait of Tolstoy.**

Dan Ungurianu

# *War and Peace*: 150 Years After

The final volume of *War and Peace* appeared in 1869 amid heated debates. 'War over *War and Peace*' was the characteristic title of a contemporary review. Tolstoy's epic was a sharply revisionist work, as it assailed the traditional notion of 1812 inspired by the so-called doctrine of Official Nationality with its three pillars of Orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality. But Tolstoy, always a nonconformist, remained highly idiosyncratic even in his revisionism. Refuting the official mythology, he also snubbed the prevalent 'political correctness' of the radical and liberal camps of his own time. As a result, he was attacked from all sides. The left could not forgive his unrepentant aristocratism, while the right mistook him for one of the fashionable nihilists with their all-out attack on traditional values including the sacred memory of Russia's Patriotic War. The fray was joined by literary critics, fellow writers, historians, veterans of 1812, and professional military men.

One hundred fifty years later, the fog from the initial battles surrounding Tolstoy's book is long gone, and there is a venerable tradition of scholarly commentary and interpretation. And yet, with all its tangible monumentality and grandeur, *War and Peace* remains a somewhat elusive masterpiece. This impression is aptly captured in the words of Andrei Bely, a seminal modernist author, who states that he read *War and Peace* four times and every time it was as if he was reading a different novel. One may argue that a great work of art inevitably contains many levels of meaning and that, additionally, the reader's perception

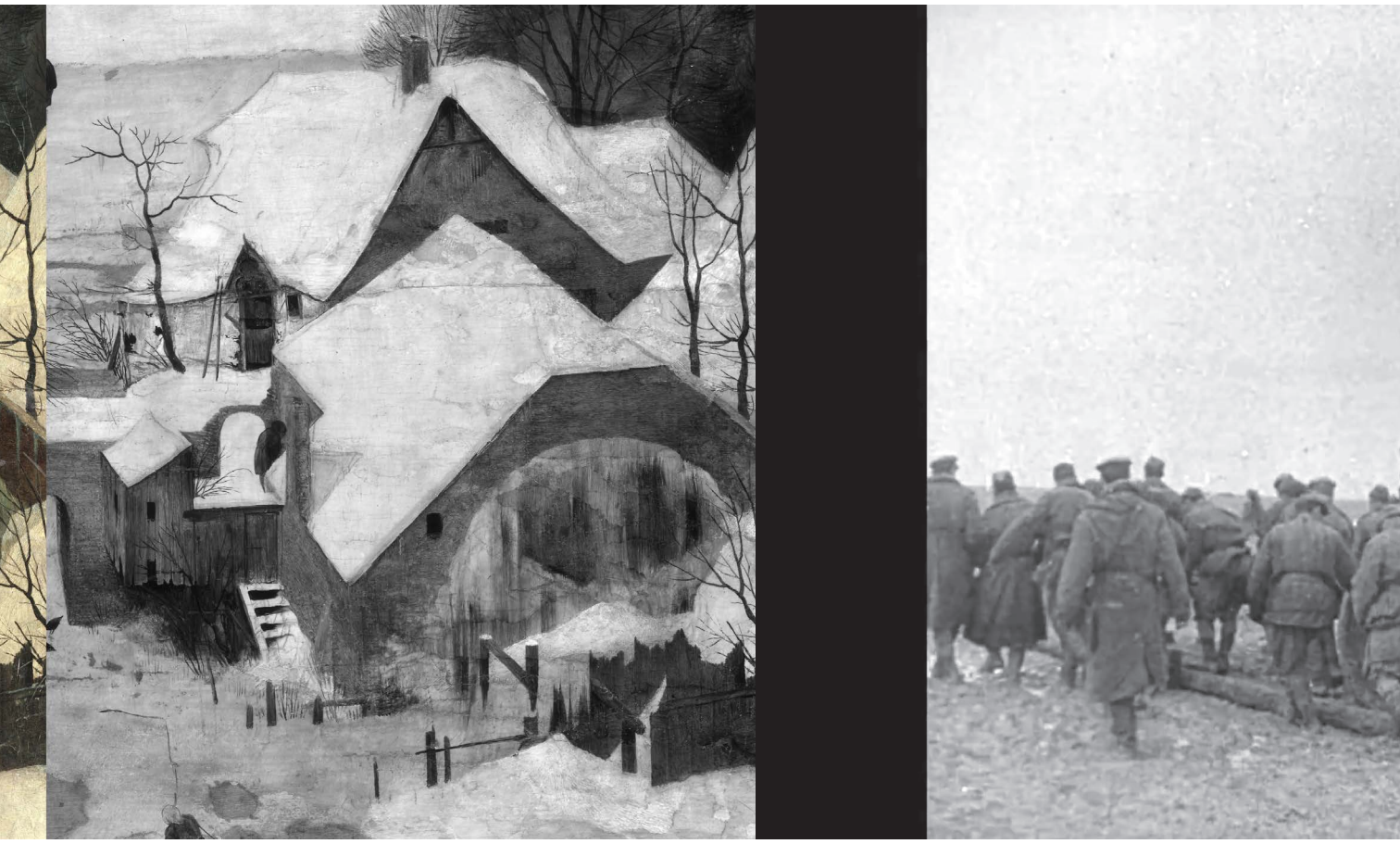
Pieter Bruegel,
*Hunters in the Snow*, 1565
(details)

**"The left could not forgive his unrepentant aristocratism, while the right mistook him for one of the fashionable nihilists with their all-out attack on traditional values including the sacred memory of Russia's Patriotic War."**

also evolves. That may be true, but the case of *War and Peace* seems special. The novel exists in multiple dimensions and bristles with diverging meanings, but somehow, almost miraculously, all of its elements ultimately merge into one magnificent and harmonious edifice.

A useful starting point for approaching this paradox of *War and Peace* is the contradictory – and contrarian – nature of Tolstoy's intentions. Throughout his life Tolstoy went against the grain and defiantly challenged prevailing views, arguing against what was considered fashionable and 'progressive.' In the late 1850s, irritated by the domineering radicals from the editorial board of the journal *Sovremennik* (Contemporary), he contemplates launching a rival publication entitled *Nesovremennik* (Un- or Non-Contemporary). This plan, although quite unrealistic, has important implications that can be projected onto Tolstoy's oeuvre in general. First, it is not to be confused with conservatism and is best described by Yuri Tynianov's notion of innovating archaism. Second, there is an obvious challenge, an invitation to an argument. And finally, regardless of the polemical thrust, or perhaps, exactly owing to it, the object of polemics receives a new life (the negating prefix aside, *Contemporary* is a part of *Non-Contemporary*).

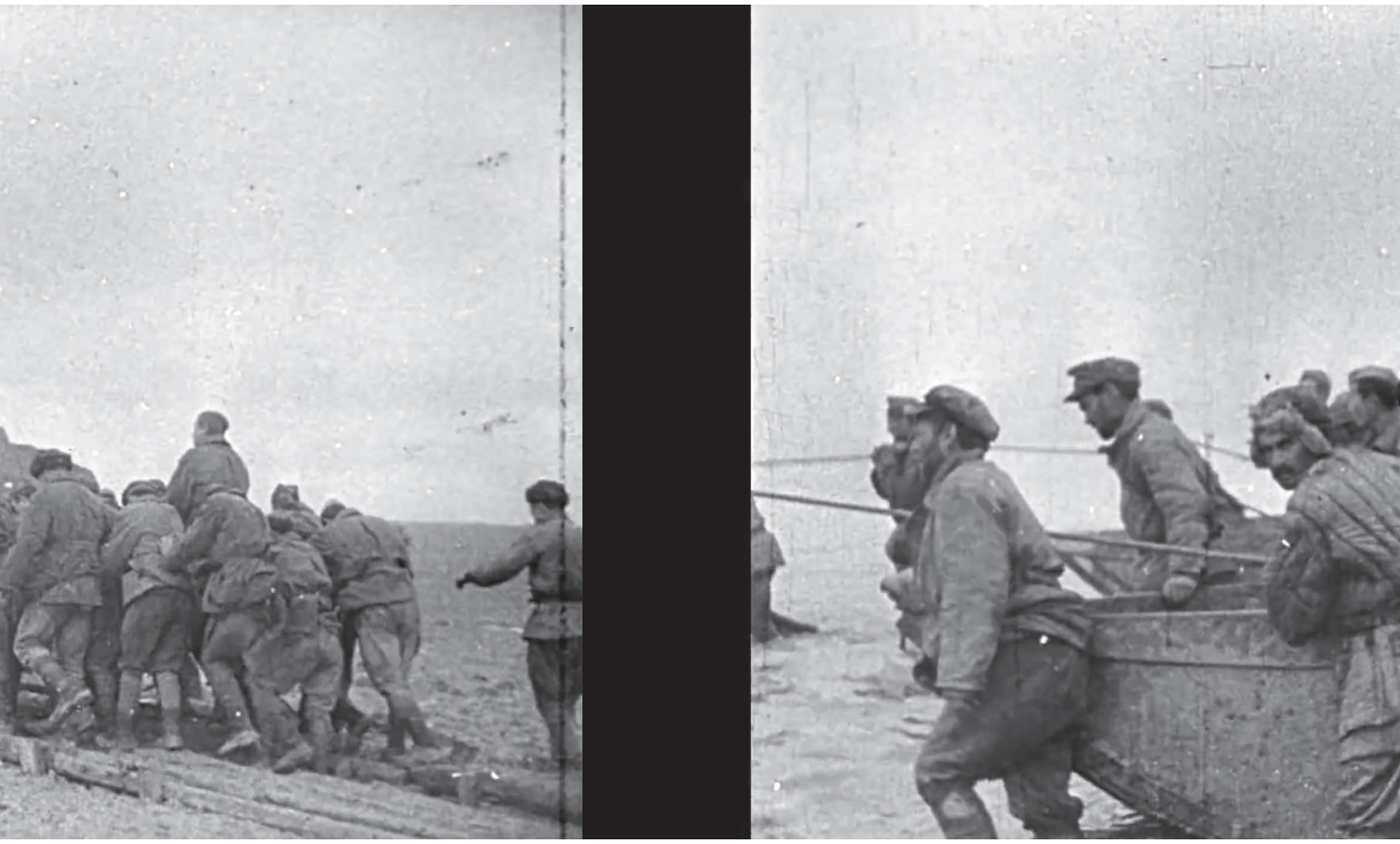
The opening chapters of the book that would become *War and Peace* appeared in a journal under the name *1805*. This title in itself was defiant, since the public discourse of the era of the Great Reforms was dominated by the burning issues of the day. Challenging the prevalent populist tendencies, all



Andrei Tarkovsky, *The Mirror*, 1975 (still)

characters in the opening chapters belong to the very top of the Russian aristocracy. Moreover, big portions of the dialogue are in French. (Unfortunately, most foreign translations, following the practice of Tolstoy's later lifetime editions, do not preserve the bilingual nature of the dialogue.) As the novel progressed, the scope of Tolstoy's narration broadened immensely through the portrayal of the 'people's war' in wide historical and philosophical contexts. Still, Russia's greatest national epic opens with a French interjection in aristocratic small talk: 'Eh bien, mon prince…'

Tolstoy's contrarian stance provoked numerous critical attacks. Especially challenging were objections from surviving veterans who, among other things, could not accept trivial details that lowered the heroic spirit of 1812. But Tolstoy ultimately did not have to address such objections, as his book in a way defended itself. Thus, Avraam Norov, a prominent statesman who had lost a leg as a young officer in the Battle of Borodino, found it improbable that Tolstoy's Kutuzov during the fateful days of 1812 could be engrossed in reading a frivolous book in French. After Norov's death in 1869, a French translation of a picaresque novel by Smollett was found in his library. According to the inscription on the cover, Norov had read this book in captivity while recovering from his wound in the occupied Moscow. Another eyewitness critic was Prince Pyotr Viazemsky, a major cultural figure of the bygone era, who in 1812 had wandered into the battle of Borodino as an observer, very much like Tolstoy's Pierre. What is most ironic



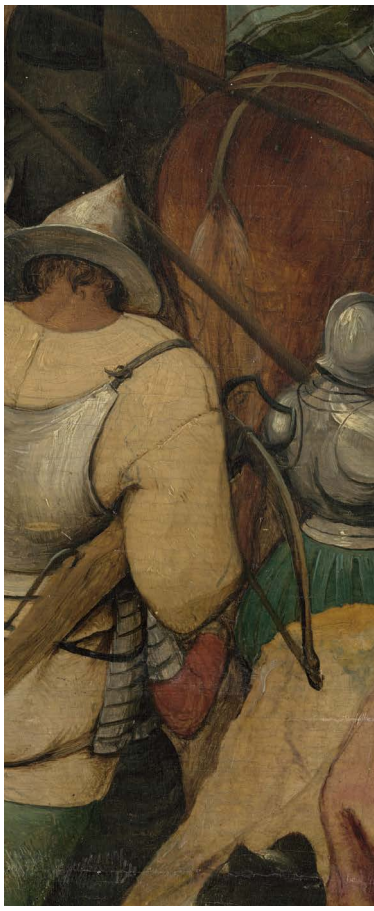
Andrei Tarkovsky, *The Mirror*, 1975 (stills)

about Viazemsky's clever criticism is that, trying to counter *War and Peace* with his own memoires, he unwittingly supports two of Tolstoy's favorite assertions: that great historical events are made up of mundane concerns of ordinary people and that the chaos of war does not yield to any neat narrative categorization.

As if challenging his readers to check his factual accuracy, Tolstoy remarks in 'Some Words about *War and Peace*': 'Wherever in my novel historical figures speak and act, I have not invented, but have made use of the materials, of which, during my work, I have formed a whole library, the titles of which I find it unnecessary to set down here, but for which I can always give the reference.' Tolstoy did not compile a list of his sources, but they were established by subsequent scholars and their scope is extremely impressive. As for Tolstoy's handling of primary sources, he obviously lacked the discipline of a professional historian. His over-powering personality and propensity for strong opinions and paradoxes also played a role. Consequently, he tackled historical sources, numerous as they are, on his own terms. Besides, as Tolstoy's consultant put it, Tolstoy 'constantly choked on imagination.' But overall, despite all of his idiosyncrasies and occasional mistakes, *War and Peace* rests on a very solid factual foundation.

The only noteworthy opinion to the contrary is expressed in *Material and Style in Lev Tolstoy's Novel "War and Peace"* (1928) by Victor Shklovsky, one of the leading figures of Russian formalism. He speaks of a sketchy preparation and a rather peculiar selection of sources, and concludes that, in Tolstoy's novel,

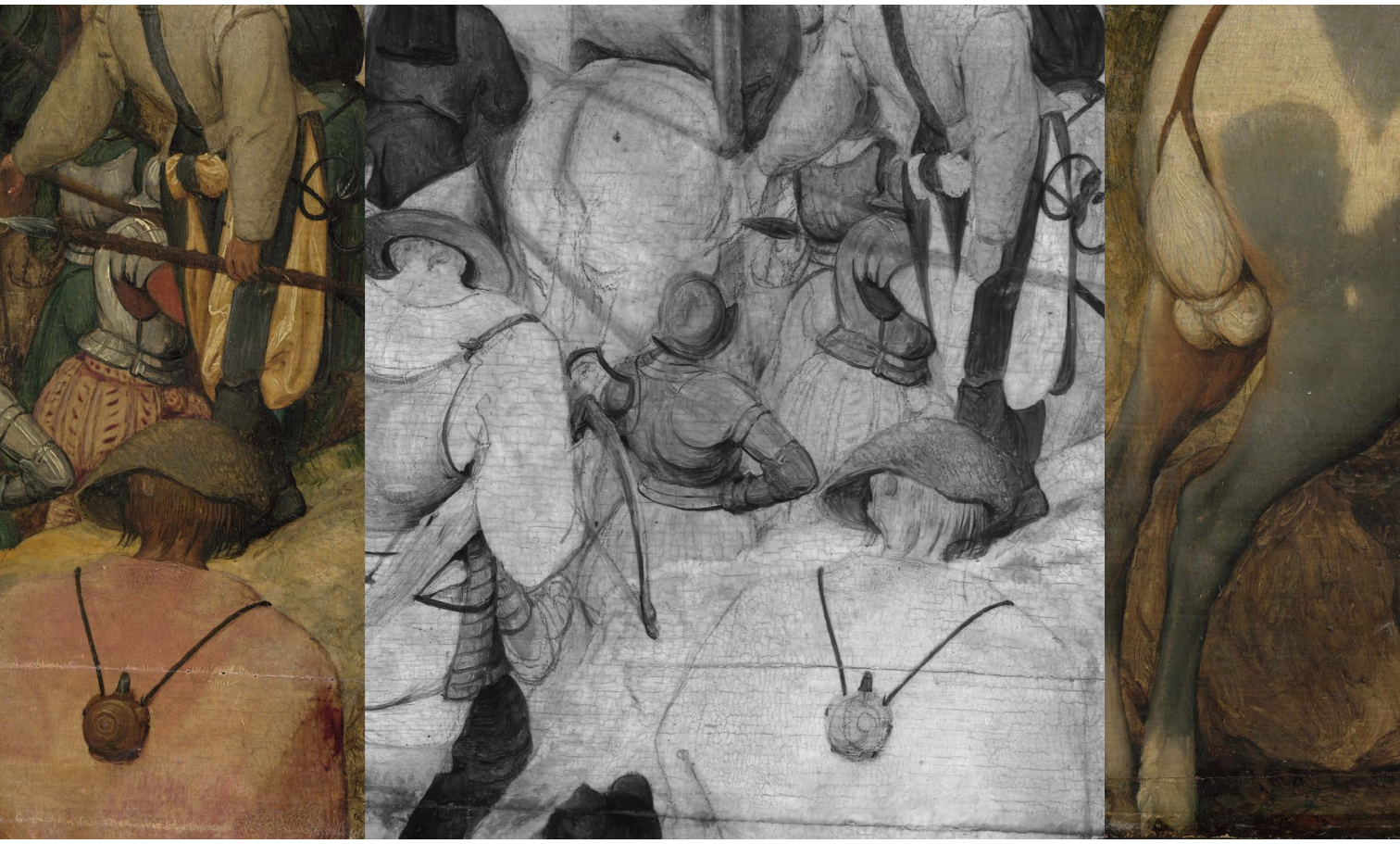
**"Throughout his life Tolstoy went against the grain and defiantly challenged prevailing views, arguing against what was considered fashionable and 'progressive.'"**



the style – the author's poetics combined with his polemical ideological intent – overpowers and supplants the material or reality as reflected in historical sources. Shklovsky's book is of very uneven quality, as it combines elements of formal analysis, carried out by Shklovsky's able assistants, with rather clumsy nods to the sociological approach. The book also suffers from the tendency toward the wholesale denigration of Russian history of the imperial period that was quite common in the 1920s (two other periods of historical nihilism occurred, in the 1860s and, most recently, in the 1990s). Shklovsky's own preparation for *Material and Style* seems to have been so meager that he did not even reread the novel carefully. And – what an example of the boomerang effect! – the claim that style overcomes material in *War and Peace* definitely applies to Shklovsky, whose revisionist intent overcomes and distorts both the novel and its sources.

Arguing against *War and Peace* has proven to be a thankless task. Perhaps the most striking example here is Alexander Solzhenitsyn's The *Red Wheel,* a cycle of novels about World War I and the collapse of old Russia in the revolutions of 1917. In this colossal work, which was clearly meant to be a twentieth-century *War and Peace* in volume, scope and ambition, Solzhenitsyn tries to refute Tolstoy implicitly and explicitly, as in the instance when the author bemoans the ineptness of Russian generals in 1914: 'Here we could console ourselves with Tolstoy's conviction that it is not generals who lead armies, not captains who lead ships and companies, not presidents and leaders who govern states and parties, but the 20th century has demonstrated all too well that it is they who do so.' One can retort that Solzhenitsyn's critical escapades are largely misplaced and that, ironically, his overall historical picture is strikingly Tolstoyan. But, most importantly, *The Red Wheel,* although it has its own fine moments, does not work as a whole and it does not even remotely approach Tolstoy's masterpiece in any respect, amounting to what one is tempted to dub a herculean failure.

So why is it so difficult to argue against *War and Peace?* It is definitely not because Tolstoy has an impeccable logic in his historical and philosophical musings (on the contrary, the flaws of some of his arguments are obvious). It is not because he does not contradict himself (he does, and generations of commentators have pointed out incongruities in the novel). It is not because history has somehow demonstrated the truthfulness of his conclusions (for better or for worse, history is not a hard science). Part of the problem is that polemics tend to be directed not against Tolstoy's actual writings but rather



against their caricatured and exaggerated version, or against isolated aspects of a much larger and complex picture. This is the case with Tolstoy's later teaching that is usually categorized as *non-resistance* or, at best, *non-resistance to evil by violence.* The proverbial non-resistance, for example, happens to be the polemical target of Ivan Ilyin, the conservative émigré philosopher, whose works have experienced renaissance in post-Soviet Russia and have been quoted on a number of occasions by President Vladimir Putin. The non-resistance, however, is the product of Tolstoyanism and not Tolstoy, ever a combatant, whose message never was *non-resistance*, but rather *non-violent resistance.*

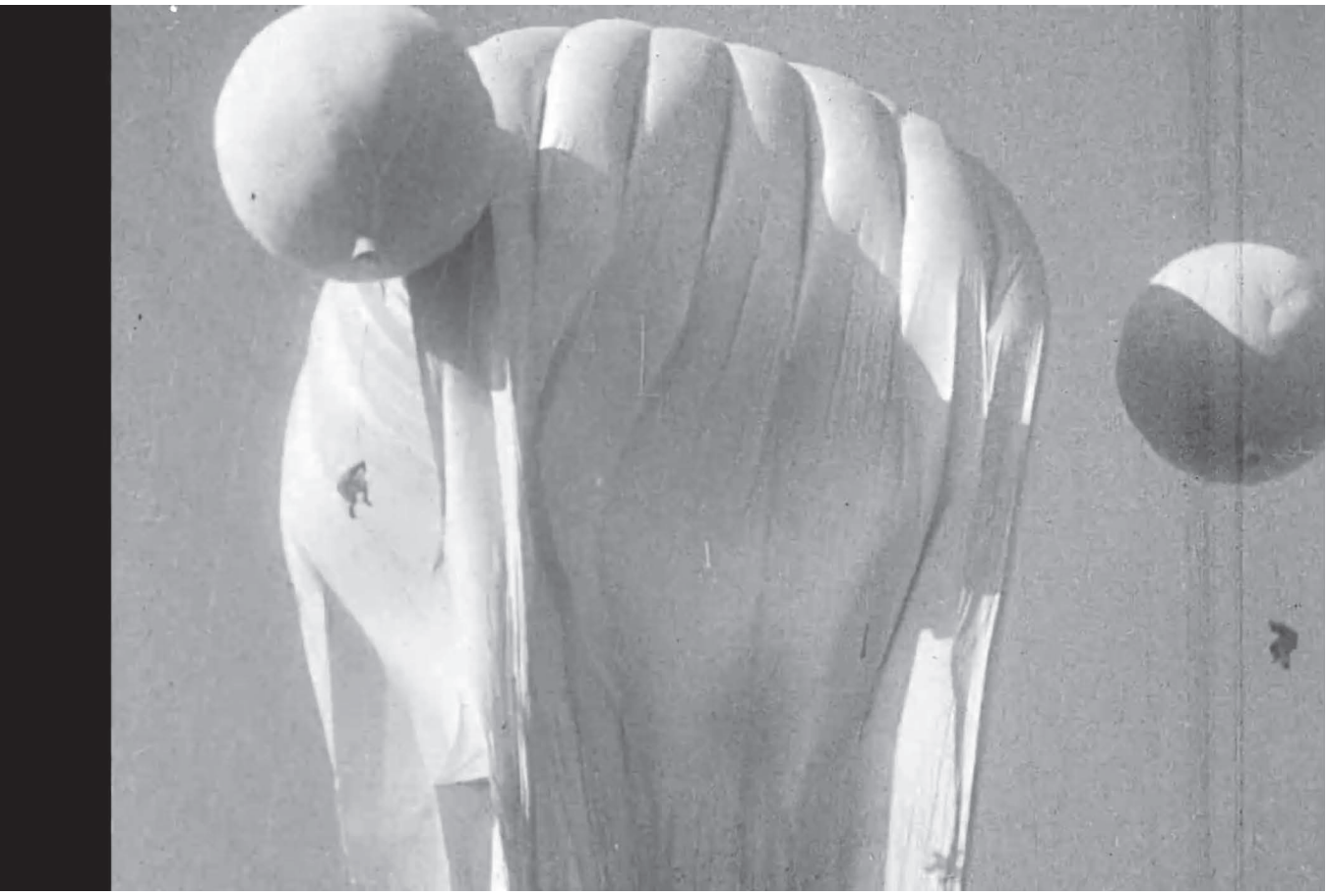
Something similar happens to the critics of *War and Peace* who attack the provocative extremes of Tolstoy's position, found in his historical and philosophical digressions: ultimately, they tilt at windmills, as the world of *War and Peace* is much more complex than any single formulation found in the novel. Thus, allegedly, there are no 'great men' in Tolstoy, since such individuals are but slaves of history and mere labels for events. This is true and not true. Dismissing the old notion of great men, Tolstoy reinvents it. For what would *War and Peace* be without Kutuzov, the perfect Russian hero who feels the tidal waves of history, and Napoleon, the quintessential Western anti-hero who falsely thinks that he is the mover of history? But how can Napoleon be an anti-hero if he is a mere label and cannot be really guilty of the carnage and destruction around him? Yet, he is guilty. And Kutuzov, supposedly the high priest of inaction, when drawn into

Pieter Bruegel,
*Conversion of Paul*,
1567 (details)

the crowd of fleeing Russian soldiers at Austerlitz, does give the order to stop the cowardly bastards. Similarly, the traditional military planning is constantly ridiculed in the novel, as in the episode where the Austrian General Weyrother reads his plan for the Battle of Austerlitz. The plan, quoted in the German original, is the epitome of futile attempts to control the flow of life, since none of the prescribed points will be fulfilled: 'Die erste Kolonne marschiert… die zweite Kolonne marschiert… die dritte Kolonne marschiert…' However, Kutuzov has his own plan in 1812. 'I'll make the French eat horse meat!'[1] promises he, and his promise is fulfilled: at the end of the campaign Kutuzov observes surrendering French soldiers tearing raw horsemeat. This plan is carried out not through inaction but through a peculiar kind of action during which Kutuzov uses the force and the weight of the opponent to defeat him, very much like some oriental martial arts that, one should note, were not known in Europe during the writing of *War and Peace*. Similarly, the chaos of war supposedly eludes a structured narrative, but at the same time Tolstoy provides his own, very assertive account of Borodino, even supplied with a map. As for the war in general, what are we supposed to think about it? Is it, as the author states explicitly, 'an event opposed to human reason and to human nature,' or is it, as the novel's archetypal title implies, an integral part of human existence?

No single definitive answer is possible here, just as with Tolstoy's thoughts about the multiplicity of causes for a historical event. There are so many causes

1. The English quotations from *War and Peace* are taken from Aylmer and Louise Maude's translation.



Andrei Tarkovsky, *The Mirror*, 1975 (still)

that nothing is a cause and everything is a cause, so it is impossible to single out any one of them. As Tolstoy repeats numerous times, this would be *equally right or wrong.* This makes Tolstoy's theory of history extremely open-ended. The obsession with cause and effect logic, although deconstructed as it is taken to an extreme, betrays a positivist angle, while Tolstoy's organicism can be traced both to the older romantic notions and to the contemporary infatuation with physiology. There are also fascinating leads pointing to subsequent theoretical developments. Tolstoy treats 1812 not as an ordinary war but rather as an invasion of the collective West against the collective East/Russia. Tolstoy personally participated in a scaled-down but similar version of the conflict during the Crimean War; its most striking repetitions took place in 1941 and, mutatis mutandis, during the Cold War of yore, not to mention its current reincarnation. Here Tolstoy presages developments in the geopolitical approach and also the clash of civilizations theory. Some of Tolstoy's insights are even more provocative, especially his musings about a suprapersonal mind behind group behavior (his beehive and anthill metaphors).

During the writing of *War and Peace,* Tolstoy's overall view was decidedly agnostic and, all his strong opinions aside, still humble. He was not yet the founder of a new quasi-religion of whom Maxim Gorky would remark adroitly: 'Tolstoy and God are like two bears in one den, one of them has to go.' So it is possible to interpret *War and Peace* in terms of philosophical materialism, but

**"During the writing of *War and Peace*, Tolstoy's overall view was decidedly agnostic and he was not yet the founder of a new quasi-religion of whom Maxim Gorky would remark adroitly: 'Tolstoy and God are like two bears in one den, one of them has to go.'"**

at the same time the work of Divine Providence remains an equally valid option. This range of perspectives is reflected in the greatest cinematic adaptation of *War and Peace*, Sergei Bondarchuk's film produced at the time of the novel's centennial. In the opening shots we see a green dot/cell morphing into sprouting seeds, growing through layers of soil, and becoming part of lush vegetation; the ascending camera movement continues into the noosphere – the sound and fury of war – and further up, to the bird's-eye view perspective and then even higher, above the clouds…

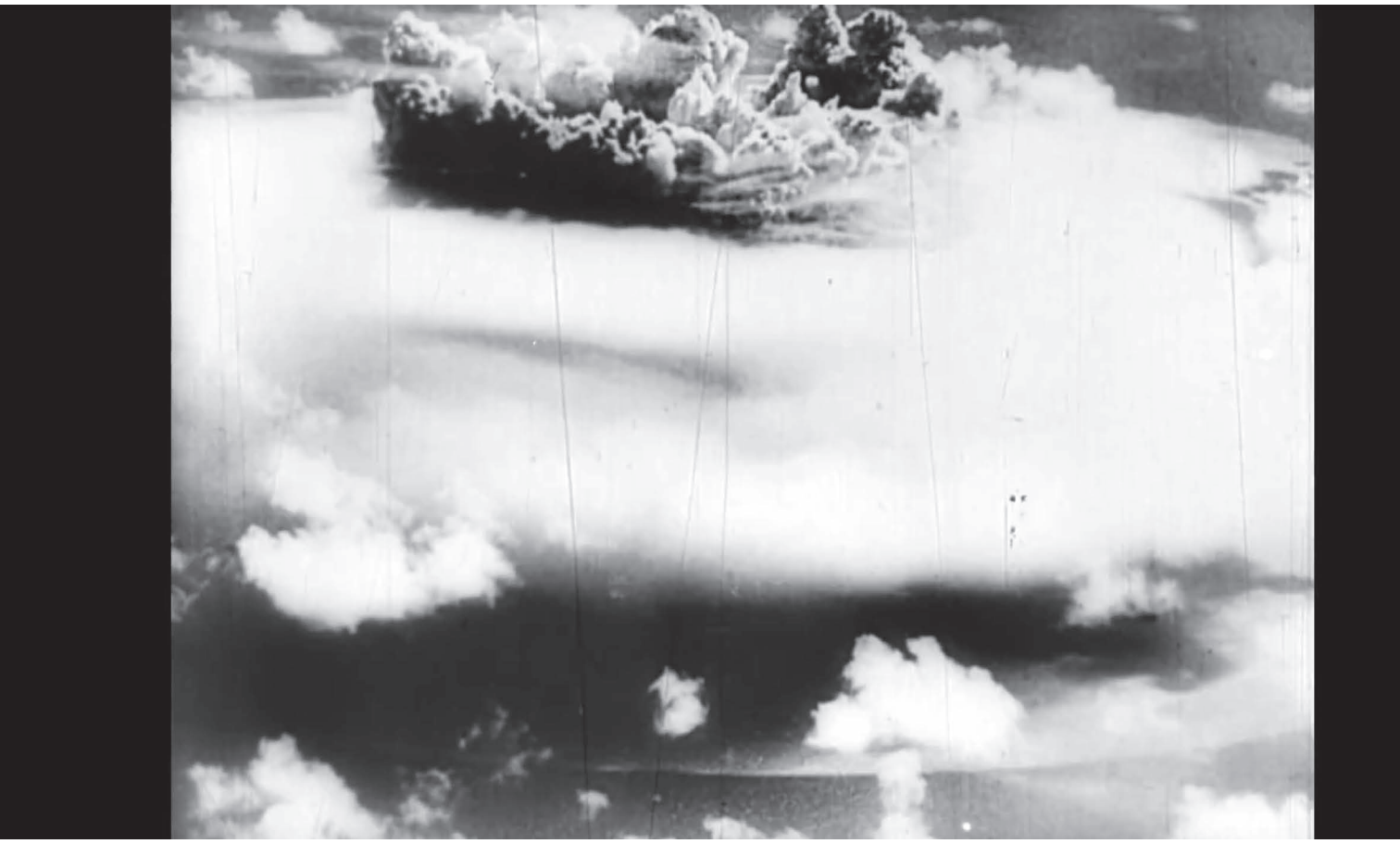
So why is it so difficult to argue with *War and Peace?* Perhaps because Tolstoy's subject is life in its entirety. As Henry James put it, 'a wonderful mass of life in an immense event,' ultimately, 'all human life.' And how can one argue with life, especially when it is portrayed by an artist of such enormous talent? Ivan Turgenev, who had a complex relationship with Tolstoy (at one point they almost fought a duel) but always admired his genius, once exclaimed: 'Lyovushka (a diminutive for Lev) Tolstoy is an elephant!' Russian thinker Konstantin Leontiev developed this comparison, saying that the Tolstoy of *War and Peace* reminded him not even of an elephant, but some kind of pre-historic sivatherium, whose skulls were kept at Shiva temples, or better yet, itself an Indian idol with three heads, four faces, six arms and numerous eyes made of precious stones… Such polymorphism lies at the core of the genre of *War and Peace,* which Tolstoy himself refused to define. Rather he declares that '*War and Peace* is what the author wished and was able to express in the form in which it is expressed' and keeps referring to his creation as his *book* (or perhaps, *the Book?*). Therefore, one can choose whatever aspect of *War and Peace* one likes, from metahistory to costume drama; its allure has not faded 150 years after the novel's publication (the recent BBC series is a vivid proof). But first and foremost, with all the multiplicity of meanings and genres embedded in it, *War and Peace* remains a great epic, not only for the scope of the events depicted, but also the sense of light and harmony and, with all its open-endedness, its affirmation of the victory of cosmos over chaos. As such, it also happens to be the most serene and harmonious of Tolstoy's works.

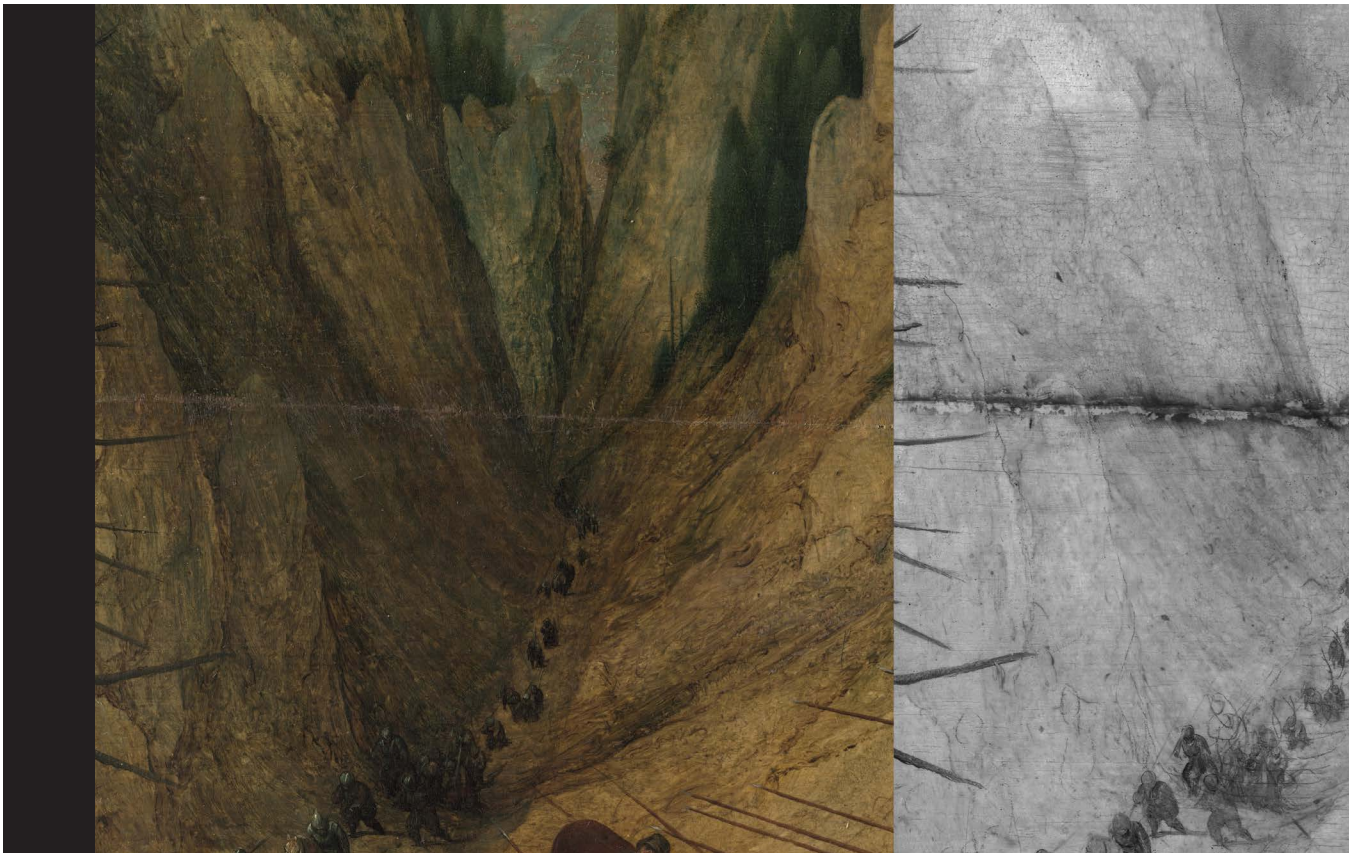
Interestingly, *War and Peace* even managed to defend itself against its own creator. During the years following his conversion, Tolstoy tended to treat his previous literary work as something of little importance. He called *War and Peace*

**"So why is it so difficult to argue with *War and Peace*? Perhaps because Tolstoy's subject is life in its entirety. As Henry James put it, 'a wonderful mass of life in an immense event,' ultimately, 'all human life.'"**

a trifle and verbose rubbish and added that respecting him for *War and Peace* would be akin to respecting Edison for being a good dancer. Tolstoy, the Sag from Yasnaya Polyana, was indeed the internationally recognized moral guru with enormous authority. Although in his own homeland Tolstoy's ideas ultimately failed and twentieth-century Russia witnessed an unprecedented scale of violence, one could rightly point to such of his followers as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King. And yet, the writings that Tolstoy himself considered important in his later years are, with few exceptions, of limited interest, while *War and Peace* remains one of the greatest masterpieces of world literature.

Andrei Tarkovsky,
*The Mirror*, 1975 (still)
Pieter Bruegel,
*Conversion of Paul*, 1567 (details)





# Memory and Forgetting

Throughout this section:
Gerhard Richter,
*Übermalte Fotografien*
[*Overpainted photographs*],
1992–2016,
and Hanne Darboven,
*Menschen und Landschaften*
[*People and Landscapes*], 1975

**In our time, memory, in its social and collective dimensions, has become a theme of public discussion, closely linked to violent, or even traumatic, historical events, from the Holocaust to 9/11. Today the possibility of turning memory into a literary device, like Proust, is reduced or even impossible: at this time individual memory, as a psychic mechanism, is confronted with its technological prostheses, e.g. smartphones, computers and the Internet, where all the memory in the world, which used to be represented in libraries and archives, is stored. Since memory and the manifestations of its hegemony (visible in the obsession with heritage, in the ceaseless inauguration of museums, and in the public agenda of celebrations and reflections) mark our time with a whiff of decadence, we devote to it 'Subject' of this issue of Electra.**

## Memory and its Shadows

An obsession with memory, a memory wave, a memory culture: these describe a current phenomenon that consists of the hypertrophy of memory, with manifestations that are cultural, social and political. The concept linked to individual psychology – personal memory, which we have known is uncertain and vulnerable to unconscious detours, at least since Freud – has been transferred to the collective plane and expanded as a viscous and extremely appealing matter. To such an extent that 'memory' has become a master-signifier of our time – a time that is subjected to the regime of the present, to what the historian François Hartog calls 'presentism'. (On the question of memory, as it has been made the main topic of this issue of Electra, the theoretical contributions of this French historian to the 'regimes of historicity' are very important: for that reason, we conducted an interview with him, which we include here). But, even though our time is dominated by the historical category of the present, it is simultaneously obsessed with the past. How can we explain this apparent paradox of an unchecked emergence of memory that is also an expression of and a response to the rise of the present? One of the possible answers came a certain time ago from Pierre Nora, the French historian of the 'realms of memory', when he stated that memory is no longer what should be preserved from the past to serve as guidance for the future, but rather what turns the present into its own and only horizon. He wrote this in a great collective work, *Les Lieux de mémoire*, which he edited for publication in several volumes between 1984 and 1993. The expression 'realms of memory' was thus coined and widely disseminated beyond the historical field. This indelibly marked the passage from the historical model to the remembrance model, as if Clio had been dethroned by Mnemosyne, the mother of the muses. But this was not the only case: many contemporary historians embarked on the task of 'explaining the present to the present', in Hartog's words, i.e. the question of the identity of the present (a present that is characterised by its extent) as a territory of memory. The dichotomy memory-present is no longer what it used to be when in the 1980s we saw the first signs of this memory turn, when historiography started to incorporate the testimonies of memory, and when a previously well-delineated opposition between history and memory, between the historical discipline and the subjective mechanisms (individual or collective) for reconstructing and evoking the past started to fade. If history used to wield absolute authority, now memory prevails on all sides, so much so that it has become the name of a new civil religion, a central notion of the new public culture, in expansion for the last four decades. As, in his second 'Untimely Meditation', entitled *On the Use and Abuse of History for Life,* Nietzsche denounced the historicism – 'historical illness' – that was predominant in his time, today some – such as the North-American historian Charles Maier – consider that the current corresponding pathology is the hypertrophy of memory, equally capable of sterilising and annihilating creative forces. But if we want to understand the surge of remembrance discourses in the Western world (whether they come from politics, art, literature, or the human and social sciences), we must not forget that they cannot be dissociated from decolonisation and the new social movements. Post-colonial discourse is, in itself, a way of calling on memory and claiming a new policy on memory.

The testimonies of Holocaust survivors were decisive in making memory enter and greatly impact the public sphere. That is why Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah,* from 1985, is generally considered a fundamental manifestation of the wave of remembrance, with important consequences. In the wake of testimonial literature there were many films and books of every genre, TV shows, etc. Very rapidly we went from a silence that was symptomatic of trauma (and the psychological notion of trauma also became part of the lexicon and concepts of remembrance culture) to an overabundance of talk in the name of memory and the 'duty of memory' – another new notion, with origins in France, which gradually gained ground as the Holocaust acquired a greater public dimension and spread around the world. The prosecution of the SS officer Klaus Barbie in 1987 was a historic event, not only because it was the first trial in France for 'a crime against humanity', but also because it led to the omnipresence of the 'duty of memory', often with futile uses (consequently, as a reaction it was necessary to create the notion of

'abuses of memory'). Let us remember that in 1997 a small book that transcribed a Primo Levi interview came out in France precisely with the title *Devoir de mémoire*, which was not the title of the original Italian edition in 1983.

The expansion of the culture of memory linked to the extermination of the Jews by the Nazi regime can be confirmed by the proliferation, from the 1990s onwards, of museums and 'memorials', as the generation that had survived and witnessed the event gradually disappeared. The Holocaust Museum in Washington; the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, in Berlin, designed by the architect Peter Eisenman; the Jewish Museum, also in Berlin, by the architect Daniel Libeskind – these may be the most emblematic examples of this memory/memorial wave, which also included 9/11, with a project by Michael Arad and Peter Walker in New York.

The emergence of the memorial phenomenon in public space is amply visible in public discourse, art and the social sciences. But it reaches a paroxysm in the generalised musealisation and obsession with heritage that characterise our time – the result of a properly diagnosed obsession with the past. There has been a frenetic construction of museums, as if there were no tomorrow, only the past – but a past that is submitted to the totalitarian regime of the present. The modern notion of heritage, which owes a lot to Alois Riegl (1858–1905), an art historian from the Vienna School and the author of the *Modern Cult of Monuments*, has acquired a plasticity that allows multiples uses and various iterations. 'Intangible heritage' is one of them. We may be familiar with it today but it would have been considered extremely strange in the past. Here, too, it is possible to find a paradox that the German philosopher Hermann Lübbe formulated in the following way: it is the indisputable erosion of tradition in modernity that in turn generates forms of memory, such as heritage conservation and museums. Another, similar, phenomenon is celebrations. Today the calendar and rhythm of public life are marked by great celebrations, where memory goes hand in hand with pedagogy, political messages and identitarian rituals. In 1984 Pierre Nora began the first volume of his *Lieux de mémoire*, with a text entitled 'Entre histoire et mémoire', and in 1993 he closed that great enterprise with another text entitled 'L'ère de la commémoration'. Celebrations and anniversaries punctuate public life and provide endless fodder for the media, which has taken on the mission of not only following the present but also producing the past. It is fair to say that no other age has produced so much past – or as fast – as our own. Everything becomes a matter of memory very rapidly (this is proven by the generalised popularity of end-of-year reviews, and lists of names and events that elapse as soon as we turn the calendar page). The corollary of this is a phenomenon of entropy and acceleration that affects the space of the present, reducing it and generating exactly the opposite of memorial and museum culture: amnesia.

This leads us to another paradoxical condition characteristic of the memorial wave in which we are submerged: the hypertrophy of memory is also a symptom of forgetfulness, memory culture is at the same time a culture of amnesia. The dialectics of memory and forgetfulness is well-known: there is no memory without forgetfulness and some have tried to produce an 'art of forgetfulness', by analogy with an 'art of memory'. *The Art of Memory* is a title of a famous book by Frances A. Yates (1899–1981), an English historian of literature and science. In that book, published in 1966, Frances Yates recorded the history of the survival of the ancient *ars memoriae*, i.e. mnemotechnical processes (associative techniques that assist memorisation) underlying the instrumental notion of memory defended by Aristotle. In 1997, the German philologist Harald Weinrich published a book entitled *Lethe: Kunst und Kritik des Vergessens* [*Lethe: The Art and Critique of Forgetting*]. In Greek mythology, Lethe, or *Léthê*, is the river of forgetfulness. In that book, Weinrich hypothesises an 'ars oblivionalis', an art of forgetfulness. But to show that memory and forgetfulness have different statuses: forgetfulness cannot be the object of a decision. That is why we talk about the duty of memory, but never about the duty of forgetfulness. If anything, forgetfulness can be taken into consideration by a policy of memory. A policy of public memory was a central theme for the Germans in the 1960s, for well-known reasons. This policy promoted public forgetfulness for 'good reasons'. For example, it forgot the traumatic events of the *Luftkrieg*, aerial warfare, the destruction of German cities by Allied bombing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(of which Dresden is the primary example). And when, in his own way, the writer W. G. Sebald wrote the history of that destruction he put an end to this 'forgetfulness', which had been determined by the German policy on remembering in the post-war period. The policy of public memory is defined according to superior national interests: some things should be remembered and this remembrance turned into a collective ritual; other things should strategically fall into public oblivion.

But let us go back to the question that we posed earlier: what if the current hypertrophy of memory meant that we were being hassled by forgetfulness? Memory culture would thus be a culture of amnesia. The question invites a reflection on the new information technologies, and on the power and expansion of the new media. At a time when memory is stored in a database that we can access through the Internet whenever we want, active remembrance is the thing from which we are most distant. All the memory in the world (to allude to Alain Resnais' documentary on the National Library of France) is available virtually; we have at our disposal an entire archive, but through technological mediation, not directly activated by our mental mechanisms. As for our immediate and active memory, it is increasingly weaker. It is an organ that is progressively shrinking and becoming obsolete due to a lack of use. This is one of the reasons why François Hartog asks the following question: now that memory is threatened do we invoke it more? And when he asks the question he remembers that mass media lead to the death of 'memory societies', as Pierre Nora calls them – societies governed by an ancient type of memory, where the legacy of the past is transmitted collectively and automatically.

Our current memory wave gave rise to a new lexicon, and web of concepts. In order to understand it in all its complexity we must know the lexicon, since there is a knowledge to which these names give access. Here are some of the names:

## COLLECTIVE MEMORY

This is a concept introduced by the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1877–1945). Killed in the Nazi camp at Buchenwald, Halbwachs did not have time to revise a set of texts written in the 1930s: they were collected posthumously into a book (edited in 1950), whose title is precisely *La Mémoire collective*. But the development of this concept began in a book in 1925, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*. The power of the concept is shown by the fact that it was disseminated beyond the disciplinary boundaries within which it was created, entering everyday speech. According to Halbwachs, memory, like language, is a social phenomenon. By expanding the concept of memory from an individual and psychic context to a social and cultural one, Halbwachs was not creating a metaphorical use of the notion of memory: he was precisely defending the idea that there is an interaction between individual psychology, on the one hand, and society and culture, on the other. It is not that an entity such as a nation, for example, is endowed with a biological foundation of the same essence as memory, or an anthropological disposition to remember. But entities such as nations resort to signs, symbols, texts, images, rites, places and monuments to create a collective memory that also forms an identity. Collective memory is always a reconstruction: the past as it really was is never preserved in any memory. What endures is what society, in a particular epoch, strives and manages to reconstruct, according to its designs and needs. The German art historian Aby Warburg (1866–1929) used a similar concept, social memory, when he presented his project for an Atlas of European Memory shown in images. Warburg gave his *Bilderatlas* [Atlas of Images] the same name that was inscribed at the entrance of his famous Library: *Mnemosyne*, the Greek goddess of memory and the mother of the muses.

## CULTURAL MEMORY

The concept of cultural memory was developed by the German couple Jan and Aleida Assmann, who have authored important studies on the way memory relates to culture, tradition and religion. The social dimension of memory, theorised by Halbwachs, is the foundation of cultural memory, as the Assmanns define it: a heritage of knowledge and culture, which is also artistic and literary, taking shape in works of fiction, theatre, cinema, sculpture, painting and

architecture. That heritage is objectified in memory devices, or in symbolic forms and practices that found a group's identity. What characterises it is a concrete identity shared by a given collectivity (a people, a state, a party, etc.). Therefore, it is not universal and it is always reconstructive, in the sense that it does not appropriate the past in a disinterested way, without assumptions, but from a current need for identity. It is the reconstructive power of cultural memory that transforms a historical fact into a myth; and it is from cultural memory that the faculty to make a narrative construction of the past derives. In a way, the concept of cultural memory corresponds to what Derrida calls 'archive'.

### COMMUNICATIVE MEMORY

Aleida and Jan Assmann proposed the notion of communicative memory to designate another form of collective memory, separate from cultural memory. According to them, communicative memory is poorly structured and hierarchised. It is based on oral communication (oral history) and goes back three generations at the most, i.e. a century. Therefore, this is a generational memory, changing with each generation. In an eloquent statement, Aleida Assmann says that communication is to communicative memory what tradition is to cultural memory.

### REALM OF MEMORY

We owe the French historian Pierre Nora the concept of a 'realm of memory', which is the focus of a collective work in seven volumes, prepared and edited by him between 1984 and 1993. The conviction that 'the analysis of collective memories should become a tool of history if we want it to be contemporary' led Nora to introduce memory (which was starting to be repeatedly invoked, largely as a result of the testimonial literature written by the survivors of the Nazi concentration and extermination camps), turning it into an important instrument of historiography. The realms of memory correspond to a topography that might or might not be monumental, but that is always symbolically important, since this is where society or a group voluntarily deposit the memories that reflect their history. The realms of memory arise precisely from the dissolution of common memories, from the fact that we are increasingly more distant from traditional society, which was a 'memory society'. In this sense, the *lieux de mémoire* are a compensation for the loss of the *milieux de mémoire*.

### MEMORY POLICY – A POLICY OF FORGETFULNESS

Public memory policy became a central topic in Germany from the 1960s until the end of the twentieth century. That policy defined what should be remembered and deserved public evocation and discussion. In the name of a policy of memory, museums and memorials were built to remember and pay tribute to Holocaust victims. Some of these memorials did not escape controversy. That was the case of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, in Berlin, designed by the architect Peter Eisenman. In 1998, when it was still a project waiting to get off the ground, the German novelist Martin Walser, in the speech that he gave when he received an important literary prize, said that it was time to put an end to the moral torture that had befallen the youngest German generation, who, despite having no responsibility for the crimes committed by their parents and grandparents, were forced to carry someone else's guilt, instilled by countless museums and memorials. This speech sparked a violent controversy. If the political management of public memory is easy to identify and characterise, the policy of public forgetfulness must, by definition, be much more discreet – the less you notice it the more effective it is. As we know, forgetfulness has a negative connotation. Nonetheless, there is no policy of memory without a policy of forgetfulness. Once more, post-war Germany provides an eloquent example: the aerial warfare was 'publicly forgotten' to mitigate the trauma and keep it from being stirred. A policy of public forgetfulness does not mean repression or denial: it is strategic forgetfulness by design, which can be reversed at any moment, if the desire to remember triumphs over the calculation to forget.

## DUTY OF MEMORY

There is a moral commandment from the early 1990s that prescribes the duty to never forget. At its origin, the duty of memory referred to the Holocaust, an event defined as a *unicum* in history. To never forget it, so that it is never repeated: that is the prescription's meaning. But since emphatic formulations are seductive, the duty of memory rapidly expanded to other events. Consequently, the expression was trivialised as the current memory complex reached unprecedented proportions.

TRANSLATED BY ANA MACEDO

**António Guerreiro**

António Guerreiro

François Hartog

# The Power and Authority of Memory

**François Hartog is a professor of Greek and modern historiography at *École des hautes études en sciences sociales* in Paris. He is a historian who has also undertaken a substantial amount of important theoretic reflection on basic issues of historiography and the different ways of experiencing time that define each age. The thinking of history as a discipline and the actual concept of history are important contributions that Hartog has made and that extend to the entire field of human sciences.**

François Hartog is one of France's and the world's most influential and respected historians alive today. He was born in 1946. He is a professor at *École des hautes études en sciences sociales*, where he is head of ancient and modern historiography. His work has been widely published (though not in Portugal, where it has not been translated) and goes beyond the boundaries of history as a discipline. He has developed two concepts that, because they are so operative, have almost become independent of their creator: presentism and the regime of historicity. Hartog understands the regime of historicity to mean the way in which each age articulates the three categories of time – past, present and future – and favours one or another. He places it at the centre and as the main parameter of his representations. Analysing the ages of history on the basis of how they relate to these categories, he has characterised our age as being marked by presentism, i.e. by the triumph of the present as a reference that dictates our relationship with the time in history. It is therefore easy to understand that, in addition to being a historian, Hartog also develops history theories. He follows the paths of the epistemology of history and works with meta-historical categories. This is why his interview is important and justified in this portfolio about memory and forgetfulness, because memory and its relationship with history are fundamental aspects of his theorisation about the contemporary regime of historicity. In his 2003 book entitled *Régimes d'historicité*, he writes, 'At any rate, *memory* has become the most comprehensive term: a meta-historical, sometimes theological category. The aim was to make a memory of everything and in the duel between memory and history, the former quickly gained the advantage. It had the support of a character that had become central in our public space: the witness. We pondered oblivion, it made its case and the "duty of memory" was brought into play. We sometimes began to stigmatise abuses of memory and heritage.' Hartog's reflections on relations between memory and history are obviously part of an issue that gained great importance after the publication, which began in 1984, of *Les lieux de mémoire*, a work in several volumes compiled by Pierre Nora. Hartog has kept up a fruitful dialogue with Nora on the subject, as is very clear in this interview. But he believes that memory is basically a presentist tool.

ANTÓNIO GUERREIRO The 'memory/history' dichotomy or duality was hugely important in the late 1970s. Where did this obsession with memory come from and how has historiography dealt with it?

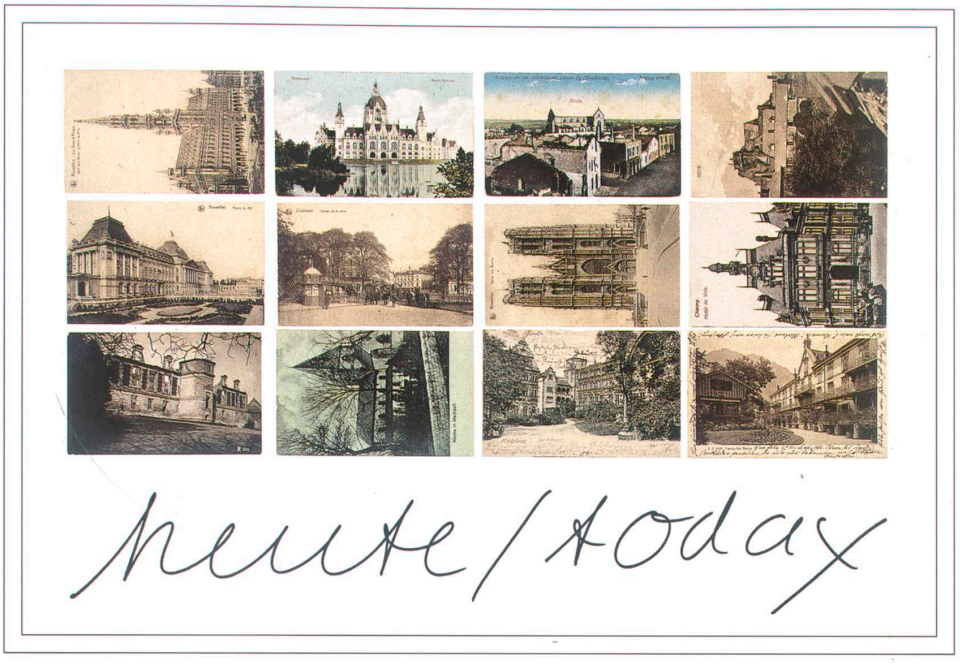
FRANÇOIS HARTOG In those years, in the late 1960s and into the 1970s, there was a wave of memory, a rise of memory, as we can see in a number of works produced. From historians, there was that great wave of publishing, *Les lieux de mémoire,* which was spearheaded by Pierre Nora and began in 1984. In the cinema, Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah* also came out in 1984. There were other landmarks, such as the 1985 book *Les assassins de la mémoire* by the late historian Pierre Vidal-Naquet. The book denounced negationists, who tried to deny the existence of the gas chambers. In a way, these three works mark the boundaries of the rise of memory in Europe.

A G So was the Shoah issue essential to this rise?

F H It was absolutely essential. Later the memory issue spread to other matters and to other parts of the world. But the starting point in Europe in general and France and Germany in particular was the extermination of the Jews. And it coincided with the moment when history as a discipline was called into question. For many years, with names like Braudel, it recognised the predominance of economic and social history, long-term history, which seemed to be gaining new ground all the time. But in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the time that oriented this history was a time that was open to the future, because history is basically futuristic. Some say that history is the science of the past and this was what the historians meant when they wanted to practise science. But a historian's work is really always open to the future. That was the time when people in the West began to raise doubts about that future, which seemed open and into which it was necessary to move forward as quickly as possible. In a Europe in ruins, the main focus was on reconstruction, modernisation, progress, the development of the consumer society and the antagonism between Western and Eastern Europe. And all this was looking towards the future.

A G So, you place the end of what you call 'the modern historicity regime' in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

F H Yes. That was when that historicity began to be questioned. What people have to understand is that the moment was one of realisation. This questioning of the modern regime of historicity, of a time dominated by progress, arose at the end of the Second World War. After 1945, after Auschwitz, it was hard to believe in the progress of humanity. And 1945 was also the year of the atom bomb, though at the time Hiroshima was not regarded as an event that called technology into question. On the contrary, although it was perceived as something very dangerous, it was also hailed as great technological progress. It was only in the 1970s that contestation of the nuclear bomb began. It was only then that what happened during the war, especially the extermination of the Jews, came increasingly to the fore, due to the change of generation. The second generation, the children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**"The 1970s marked the beginning of this contemporary individualism, along with the introduction of the individual into history and, therefore, of memory. This memory moment was also linked to the rise of witnesses and victims."**

of those who had lived through the experience, wanted to know what had happened. They had often been told practically nothing at all or there was no-one to tell them. It was this set of circumstances that led to the growing importance of memory, a return to history through memory. And that is precisely the job of memory. This does not mean to say that only memory exists – but it rather uses reflection on memory to try to question history.

A G When you say 'question history' do you mean historiography?

F H Not just that. Questioning history from memory means reintroducing (and this coincides with what happened in the 1970s) the individual, the agent, the point of view, the experience. Before, above all, we had the collective dimension. Braudel's history is not a history of individuals. It is the history of great movements, some of which are invisible. They are long-term and are hard to perceive. Only archives can show their existence. The 1970s marked the beginning of this contemporary individualism, along with the introduction of the individual into history and, therefore, of memory. This memory moment was also linked to the rise of witnesses and victims. In the case of the Shoah, it was also witnesses as victims. The first time that the two came together in public was at the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem in the early 1960s. There, for the first time, witnesses, i.e. survivors who were also victims, were called on to testify. But what did they testify to? They had never seen Eichmann. They had seen nothing; they had nothing to say about him. But they had been made to suffer. And it was in the name of this suffering, of this ordeal that they had been through and managed to survive, that they testified. This was when the witness and the victim came together.

A G It might be useful to explain your idea of the 'regime of historicity' in this interview.

F H This idea that I put forward is a fast, convenient way of saying how the categories of the past, present and future are linked and organised, as the whole experience of time is made up of these three categories. We can say that they have a universal reach, which does not mean that the content that we give them is always the same everywhere. But we can consider them to be a universal structure.

**"At a time when the present became dominant, memory was a way of calling up certain moments from the past into the present and they were almost always painful, traumatic, forgotten moments."**

Depending on whether we give priority to the past, future or present, we have different experiences of time. The regime of historicity means the way in which categories of the past, present and future are organised at any one time. A historicity regime is obviously an interpretative artefact. It is the observer, the historian, who reflects and reaches the conclusion that the articulations between the three categories are constantly moving. They are different depending on social position, whether we live in the country or the city, etc. But even so we can say that a certain category dominates at a certain time. What we can see is that, around the time of the French Revolution, we went from a regime of historicity in which the past was the dominant category (not meaning that people lived in the past, but that when someone wanted to know where they were and what to do, they looked first to the past) to another dominated by the future. The experience of time changed completely. Now, people looked to the future to find out what to do. While the light came from the past and illuminated the present and future in the previous regime, in the new regime it was the future that illuminated the present and the past. And this meant that all action should tend towards that future as fast as possible. Here we have the whole issue of modern time as acceleration. From the moment when the future is illuminated, we also know what we should hold on to from the past, what is important and what is not. History as a discipline in this new regime in the 19th century knew very well what it was necessary to learn from the past, because history is teleological; it is the purpose, the *telos* that determines the way. The best form of this type of history is national, in which the nation is both the start and end point. This is why I said that national history is always futuristic, in that in modern history it fits in with this relationship with the future, even when it says that it is the science of the past because it studies documents. This modern regime became problematic in the 1970s (though it depends, as the timeline may be a little different in Portugal). This 'futurism' was called into question and one of the reasons was the feelings of guilt about what happened. It was necessary to dissociate (very fast) technological progress from the progress of humanity. On the contrary, the idea in the Enlightenment was that humanity was marching forward and that this march involved progress in general and technological and political progress etc in particular.

A G Your concept of presentism characterises this regime of historicity of our time. Isn't there a contradiction between what you call presentism and the memory wave? Shouldn't the issue of memory mean the domination of the past?

F H I don't think there is any contradiction between presentism and the memory movement here, there and everywhere (in South Africa, Chile, post-Franco Spain, etc) that thrived in the 1980s and 1990s. Presentism and memory are not contradictory, though this does not mean that memory is presentist. At a time when the present became dominant, memory was a way of calling up certain moments from the past into the present and they were almost always painful, traumatic, forgotten moments. This way of calling up the past into the present does not open up to a future. The only future that it opens up to is a moral imperative, i.e. a 'never again'. It is a negative opening: do not ever do it again. But it does not say what to do. So memory means calling up certain moments from the past into the present, though it is also a presentist moment, a way of escaping presentism.

A G You say that the modern regime of historicity means acceleration. Does presentism exacerbate this acceleration?

F H Yes. On the subject of acceleration, I would like to mention the works of the German sociologist Hartmut Rosa on 'late modernity', as he calls the years of the late 20th and early 21st century. I think that we have experienced acceleration as a form of the modern regime in a kind of acceleration of acceleration, a kind of acceleration that is an end in itself. An illustration of this is a hamster that runs at full speed on its wheel without going anywhere. This is the acceleration of presentism, with all its social sequences. An example of this is burnout, which arises from the inability to meet the need to keep accelerating. An important word in the dominant lexicon is 'innovation'. Today everyone is always talking about innovation but not invention. Innovation is always innovation by innovation, as it is necessary to innovate to create a demand before the competition does. And then another innovation has to follow. Look at the race for innovation started by mobile phone manufacturers.

A G Still on the subject of memory, some of the phenomena associated with memory are the creation of heritage and museums.

F H I would say that memory, where individuals are concerned, the memory wave that we mentioned and the use of memory in public spaces through heritage policies are all part of the same phenomenon. The creation of heritage also began at the same time, in the 1970s. If we analyse politicians' discourse, they talked about memory and increasingly about heritage and commemoration but hardly ever mentioned history. So we had an enlargement of the concept of heritage, which became the most comprehensive concept. In France, for a long time we had the official classification of 'historical monument'. The state knew and decided whether a certain building should be part of history, while the one next door was not. With the future's loss of prominence, this knowledge vacillated and classification requests poured in from everywhere. The state went from the idea of a historical monument to that of heritage, which is a much vaguer, more comprehensive idea (at the extreme, anything could be heritage). This paved the way for anything to be heritage (at least in France, though not in the UK). All it took was for the state to declare it so. Memory spread considerably and took on a new

**"The creation of heritage also began at the same time, in the 1970s. If we analyse politicians' discourse, they talked about memory and increasingly about heritage and commemoration but hardly ever mentioned history."**

meaning. Memory was regarded precisely as that which we could remember even if we were unaware that we remembered it or exactly how, which brought up the issue of transfer between generations, etc. The memory that we have talked about since the 1970s and 1980s is actually a memory that we do not have; it is a memory that is given and acquired, a voluntary, constructed memory. It is also memory that is the mark of identity; it is memory that defines me as a Jew, as a Breton, etc. Memory, heritage, commemoration: these three concepts are part of the concept of identity, with the ambiguities that the concept of identity involves. It is enough to think of the extremely defensive, restrictive way in which the concept of identity can be used.

A G And where does oblivion, or forgetfulness, come into this whole issue of memory?

F H Oblivion is frowned upon today. It is shocking how people thought that a dose of oblivion was necessary in the post-war years in order to be able to get started again. For example, this was the position of Lucien Febvre when he relaunched the journal *Annales* after the Second World War, as he felt that without oblivion we would be crushed by the past. This was also Nietzsche's position in the second *Untimely Meditations* on the utility and evils of history in life. But in the end oblivion was blamed. Oblivion that might have been considered legitimate is no longer considered so. The imperative now is to fight against oblivion, to create all kinds of commemoration so that nothing is forgotten. However, we might ask how effective all this is. It is certainly not very effective, as all these major commemorations become mere public rhetoric.
I would say that what we have today is an exacerbation of anti-oblivion. But I am not calling for oblivion by any means. What I wonder about is that type of permanent proclamation against oblivion and for transparency. The two spring from the same logic.

A G Your work is a history of the present. In the first decades of the 20th century, looking at the present resulted mainly in an exercise called 'diagnosis'. Many diagnoses of the present then appeared. What is the difference between a history of the present and a diagnosis?


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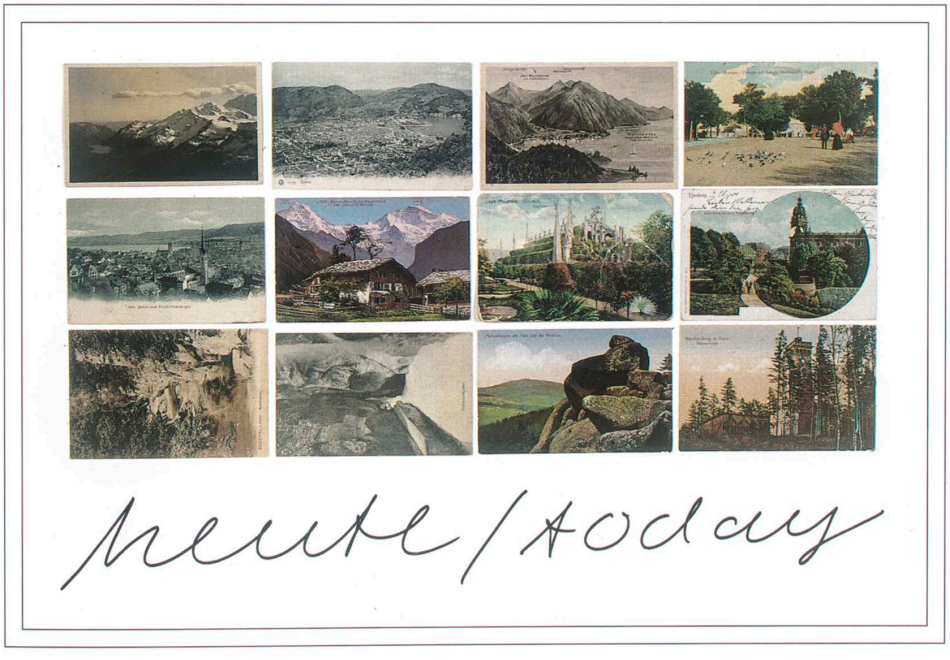
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FH Foucault defined the role of a philosopher as one who diagnoses the present: 'diagnosing the present' is an expression that he coined…

AG But he was referring to a critical attitude towards the Enlightenment in his own time…

FH Yes. He read the essay in which Kant answered the question as to what the Enlightenment was [*Was ist Aufklärung?*] as a diagnosis of the present by Kant. But let's go back to your question. A history that was defined as a history of the present began to develop in the 1980s, particularly in France. Before that, there was contemporary history, while some historians claimed that they were writing a history of the present. I believe that this is a sign of this increased importance of the present. But what they actually did was study the history of the Second World War and what came after.

AG Was Pierre Nora's *Lieux de mémoire* part of this history of the present?

FH Yes. Pierre Nora lectured on a subject he called History of the Present at *École des hautes études*. But that's one thing. Another thing is diagnosing the present, which does not necessarily mean working on the present. There may be great detours. In fact, that is what I do: great detours when trying to understand what is happening today.

AG Indeed, we can see that, because you started out as a historian of ancient Greece. That is really a great detour…

FH Actually it is not such a great detour for me. My first book was about Herodotus. It was not a case of modernising or updating Herodotus. Taking that distant figure as a reference, as they say he was the father of history, I tried to understand what being a historian might mean and the type of relationship he might build with the present, with contemporary times.

AG When someone starts studying the history of the present, doesn't a political dimension become more evident?

FH Yes, a political dimension. But it is not active politics; there is no attempt to advise the prince; it is not intended to be an element of power. Its aim is rather to create a space. The philosopher Karl Jaspers said some interesting things when he was talking after the Second World War, about what he called consciousness of the age. He said that consciousness of the age was pre-political, a kind of space in which questions, contradictions and conflicts can take place, though the goal is not to provide solutions, it is not to say that politics is necessary. It is not a denial of politics, though neither is it an intervention in the political field.

AG At one time, you studied modern catastrophism, apocalypses. Are you still working on the subject, now that it has become extremely topical, considering the catastrophist imaginary in which we are involved?

**"As soon as this chiasmus – 'time of the end, end of time' – is reintroduced, it is not necessary to explain anything else. Panic ensues in a time of presentism in which emotions take precedence."**

F H The book that I have just finished goes back to that issue. Presentism has been strongly called into question by the recent appearance of what is called the Anthropocene, which refers to time as related to the Earth. Suddenly millions of years fall on those of us who are stuck in presentism and this causes total disorientation.

A G There, we are no longer in the time of history…

F H It is a geological time, but it is time, not eternity; it is not divine time. The stunning fact of recent years was the reintroduction of the idea of an end. Christian time was built entirely on this premise. It is defined on one hand by the reincarnation and on the other by the *parousia,* the Last Judgement. The time between the two is intermediate, a present that is empty time. Christians call for this empty time to be filled. But the apocalyptic end has never been called into question. The church has always said that this is the way it will be, we just do not know when. And no-one wants to know, except God. Even so, different types of millenarianism and visions of the apocalypse have never ceased. But modern time has suppressed the limits. It is a time with an unlimited openness to the past and the future. And suddenly here is a time that says, 'Watch out, that is not the way it is; there may be limits.' Or at least there is a limit on the time of humans, the time of Earth, the time we have made for our use. I feel that the appearance of this limit very easily reactivates apocalyptic schemes. This is because after we are told that the end is next week, next year, in fifty years' time, a century from now, the time that we are living in is the time of the end. There is the end of time and the time of the end. We are living in the time of the end. And what did the Christians say? They said that the reincarnation would mark the beginning of the time of the end and that the end was coming but no-one knew when. Today we find an idea of this type. So it is understandable for people to say, 'The apocalypse is tomorrow. Everyone will succumb.' As soon as this chiasmus – 'time of the end, end of time' – is reintroduced, it is not necessary to explain anything else. Panic ensues in a time of presentism in which emotions take precedence.

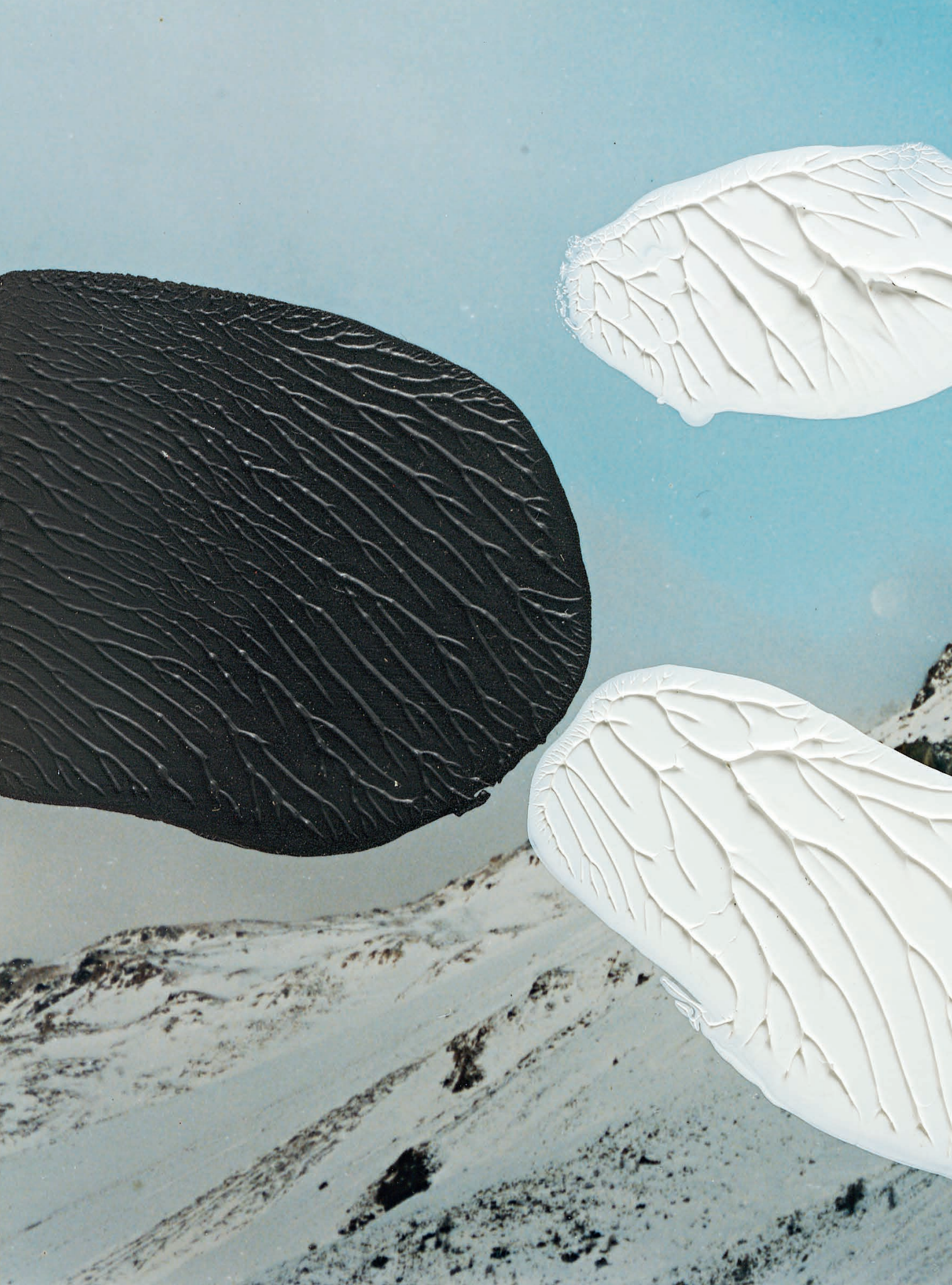
A G What representations of this imaginary of the end are there in the arts, literature and the public sphere?

F H A film that put this over very strongly was *Melancholia* by Lars von Trier. In literature we have the book by Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*, which is about the end, though we never actually know if it is the end. An interesting thing about this book is that it begins after the catastrophe. But it is dominated by the idea of a nuclear catastrophe. So it is still in the 'nuclear winter' of the 1960s.

A G As a historian, you work a lot on a literary corpus and try to think what literature brings to history…

F H I have never wanted to use literature as a tool. It is not a question of reading Balzac to understand the Restoration. To me, a writer is someone who says what has not yet been said and is happening because, unlike a historian or sociologist, he or she does not need to retreat, just to reach a later time. Writers are under no obligation to prove anything. They do not have to respond to the requirement to prove what they say. They are not subject to this constraint. I believe that writers and artists have this ability to be on top of the moment, while someone working in human or social sciences cannot.

TRANSLATED BY WENDY GRAÇA



Bernd Stiegler

# Photography and Forgetting

**Bernd Stiegler is an important media theorist and historian, and the author of various books on photography; he teaches at the University of Constanz. In this text, he traces the history of a progressive twentieth-century rediscovery: doomed to oblivion until quite late on, photography has now become a cultural good, and the conservation of photographic heritage has become an obligation.**

# PHOTOGRAPHY AND FORGETTING

Bernd Stiegler

## 1.

Since the beginning of their history, photographs have been a medium, perhaps even *the* medium, of memory. And *as* a medium they are deemed to put reality objectively and unerringly into pictures. In the mid-nineteenth century the American commentator Oliver Wendell Holmes encapsulated this in his formula 'a mirror with a memory'. Thanks to this special quality attributed to them, photographs have, throughout their history, been charged with the task of memorialisation – from family albums on whose pictures hang entire histories that beg to be put into words, via press and documentary photography recording historical events, all the way to the 'visual culture' that over recent years has discovered photographs as historical sources. Not only do photographs, the very instant they are taken, bear witness to a moment that has immediately become history; they also act as a kind of time store, providing visual access to a bygone age over the course of decades and even centuries. Photographs, at least as far as the scenes they depict are concerned, have no present, merely a more or less distant past. And in them this past seems to be preserved in all its visual richness. This makes photographs a treasure trove of history and remembrance.

## 2.

This has by no means always been the case, however, and has perhaps already fundamentally changed in our own time. Despite photography having, in everyday life, forever been culturally associated with memory, until well into the twentieth century photographs had in no way occupied a fixed place in the cultural heritage we consider worthy of preservation. This is strikingly demonstrated by the history of one of the most important collections of photographic images of American nineteenth-century history: Alexander Gardner's pictures of the American Civil War. Nevertheless, these images belong unquestionably to the incunabula of photographic history and virtually no history book fails to mention them. Gardner's series of fallen soldiers is one of the most famous groups of photographs among the total of 70 exposures he made on 21 September 1862. Because the technique of reproducing photographs in newspapers had not yet been developed, this series also served as the prototype for woodcuts, steel engravings and lithographs, which appeared in various publications in place of the photographs themselves. Thus it quickly became part of the American pictorial memory and continues today to serve as a basis for historical reconstructions. With the help of the photographs taken by Gardner, Brady and others, the landscape around Antietam was transformed, some time ago, back into a history park. 'This was once Bloody Lane and here you see the Bloody Cornfield.' In various publications, William Frassanito has juxtaposed each of Gardner's pictures with its present-day counterpart. And Stephen Recker, erstwhile guitarist with the Spencer Davies Group and Al Stewart, and technician for Kiss and

**"Despite photography having forever been culturally associated with memory, until well into the twentieth century photographs had in no way occupied a fixed place in the cultural heritage we consider worthy of preservation."**

Madonna, now devotes his leisure time to the history of Antietam, to which he has dedicated the website www.virtualantietam.com, while also lecturing on and giving tours of the former battlefields. The images on his website are respectful and, as we have come to expect of commemorative sites, devoid of any human presence, albeit showing what are presumably mainly sheep and cattle grazing these meadows so steeped in history. 'Consider the grazing flocks as they pass you by. Knowing neither yesterday nor today, they caper, eat, rest, digest, caper some more, and so on from morning to night and from day to day, tethered to their inclinations and disinclinations, that is to say, to the present moment, and therefore neither melancholy nor weary of life,'[1] writes Friedrich Nietzsche, famously, at the start of his essay 'The Uses and Abuses of History'. Melancholy is, however, an emotion Alexander Gardner must have experienced when, two days after the decisive battle of 19 September 1862, he arrived on the scene and saw the fallen soldiers. And people would later grow weary of his pictures in which the dead could be seen. But Gardner's photographs were orientated towards the long term. This can also be clearly understood in technical and logistical terms: Gardner was continually chasing events in his studio wagon, arriving at the place of action too late – after the battle had been fought and history written. He turned up and photographed what remained there to be photographed. There was no shortage of time. What was important was not the moment but the overview. Fallen soldiers were occasionally repositioned for pictorial effect and any obtrusive accessories that happened to be in the vicinity were cleared out of the way or rearranged, thereby creating images for the general public and the history books. This also explains why he favoured an Olympian view, with the snapshot out of the question not only technically but also aesthetically and for reasons of visual politics. From the very time of the war, what mattered in these pictures was the long term and tradition. This is demonstrated not least by the fact that Gardner's photographs were used in the two-volume *Photographic Sketchbook of the War* (Washington 1866), of which one hundred copies were published at what was at the time the exorbitant price of $150 (the equivalent of around $3,000 today). Everything was apparently geared up to eternity – or at least history.

In view of the special importance that is unquestionably attributed to Gardner's photographs (they are at the very core of American pictures that have made history), it may come as a surprise to learn that the many photographs by Gardner and also Matthew Brady (a not inconsiderable number of whose shots

1. Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben', in: Idem, *Werke in drei Bänden*, ed. Karl Schlechta (Munich, 1962), Vol. 1, 209–285, 211.

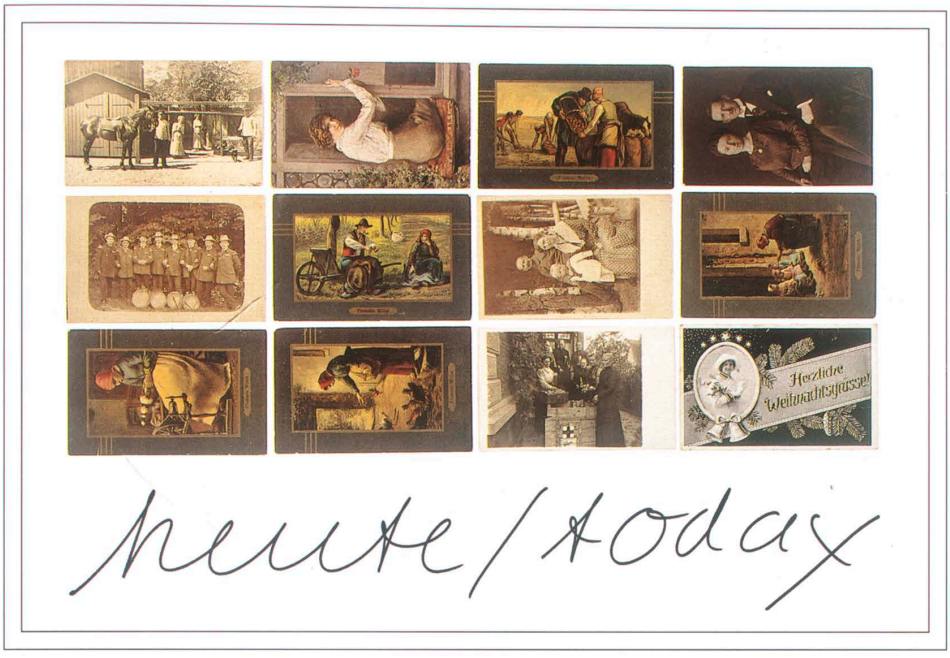
**"That it was avant-garde photography, with its own blind eye to history, that was rediscovered after 1945, is a paradox of photographic history."**

were actually by Gardner) have had a chequered history to say the least. Both men made early attempts to sell their pictures (whose historical importance was also undisputed among their contemporaries) to Congress and in around 1869 got together a petition (which was ultimately rejected) to this end. Not until 1875 did Brady manage to sell his photographs – for a disappointing sum that did not even begin to cover his costs. Meanwhile Gardner's ninety thousand or so glass negatives passed initially into the hands of a professional photographer in Washington DC who immediately sold them on, presumably at a profit, to a second-hand glass dealer. Even the latter was able to recognise the special significance of the pictures as historical documents and attempted to market them as such but to no avail: after the war people were no longer interested in the photographs, they had grown tired of them. Gardner's glass negatives took a peculiar path *ad fontes*: their photographic layer was removed and they were used in the construction of greenhouses. They were transformed back into clear glass plates, into virtual supports, into a different kind of medium for light. 'Onto glass you came and from glass you will be taken', a fate not uncommon in the nineteenth century. Ultimately the photographic support was more valuable than the photograph.

3.

It was well into the twentieth century before we abandoned our historical amnesia where our photographic heritage is concerned. That it was avant-garde photography, with its own blind eye to history, that was rediscovered after 1945, ushering in the now definitive transformation of the technical medium from disposable item into cultural asset, is a paradox of photographic history. In Europe the avant-garde was taken up by those seeking politically more neutral references for the all-important new beginning. In the 1950s, isolated institutions and teachers began to put together collections with a wider scope, the purpose of which was to present students, within the teaching context, with originals – a study collection through which a highly selective form of canonisation was practised. Only that which could serve as a model for a particular position was collected. The rest was blithely thrown away or, most commonly, simply forgotten about.

This situation was only to alter to any significant extent in the 1960s and above all the 1970s. Although in Germany the extensive Erich Stenger collection of historic photographs had been sold to AGFA in 1955 for DM120,000, the planned museum was not established. Some 20 years later everything was still in storage crates and only then was it unpacked and made accessible. It was the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Weihnachtsgrüsse!
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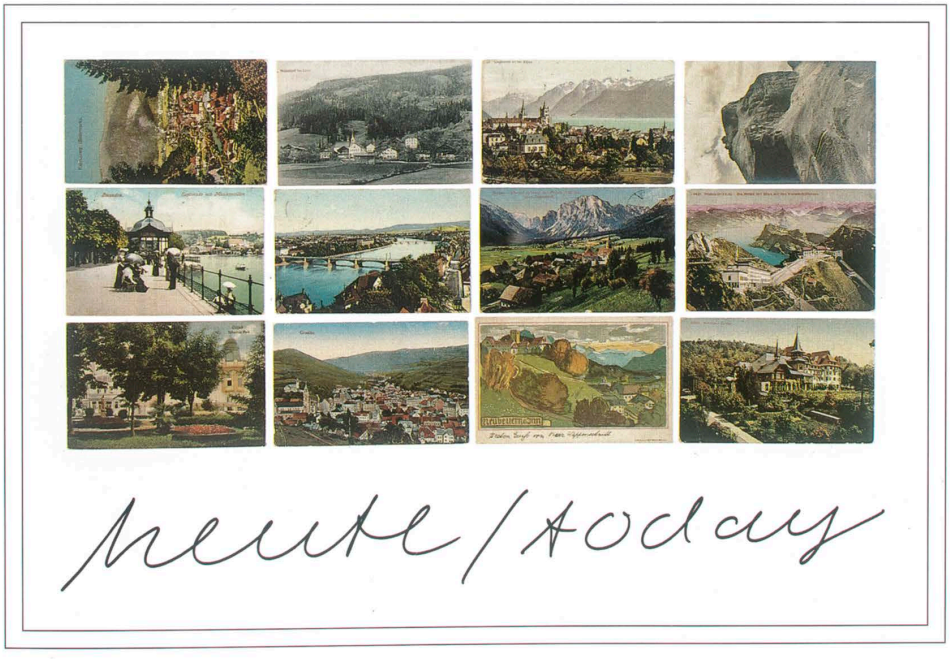
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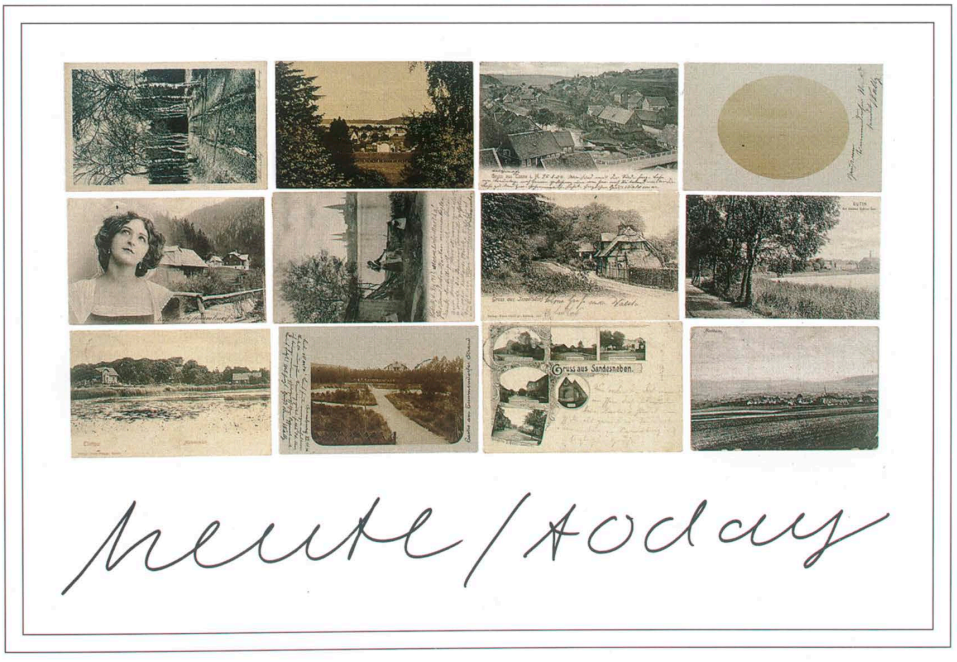
Verlorene Glück.
heute / today


heute / today


Es gibt
Menschen,
nur einen Frieden,
der von Dauer ist,
das ist der Friede,
den der Sieger von
Golgatha errungen
hat.
DECCA
heute / today


Gruss aus Sandesneben.
heute / today

same with Helmut Gernsheim, still in the 1950s, who paid very little for entire albums of Talbots, Carrolls and Fentons. After numerous unsuccessful approaches to a range of institutions, in 1963 he eventually sold his collection to the University of Austin (Texas) for $300,000. Today it is valued at over $40 million. A similar thing could be observed on all sides. In the United States, although the Farm Security Administration had initiated large-scale campaigns to acquire photographs of contemporary America back in the 1930s, the important nineteenth-century surveys were not discovered until the 1970s. Eventually, in 1975, the Metropolitan Museum of Art mounted a comprehensive exhibition of historical photographs with the title 'Era of Exploration'. The works of O'Sullivan, Watkins and others were now well and truly canonised as classic views of the American West and subsequently discovered by the New Topographics and even William Eggleston.

Although rich in anecdotes, this story of photography's progressive rediscovery and gradual museumisation, which did not begin until well over a hundred years after the invention of the medium, has yet to be told in full. A comprehensive account would need to include the belated opening up of the photographic collection of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, a collection which only landed in that institution as a result of the *dépôt legal* regulating the compulsory depositing of publications (into which category photographs fell) with the national repository. Nonetheless, photographs, unlike books, were initially neither catalogued nor bibliographically appraised but simply put into storage and in some cases had to wait over a hundred years before being looked at a second time. That commonplace of criticism which sets the potentially enlightening power of the written word against the counter-enlightenment ideology of the image was thus translated into practice. Whereas books are a valuable cultural asset, what is one supposed to do with photographs? At least in Paris they were not thrown away.

4.

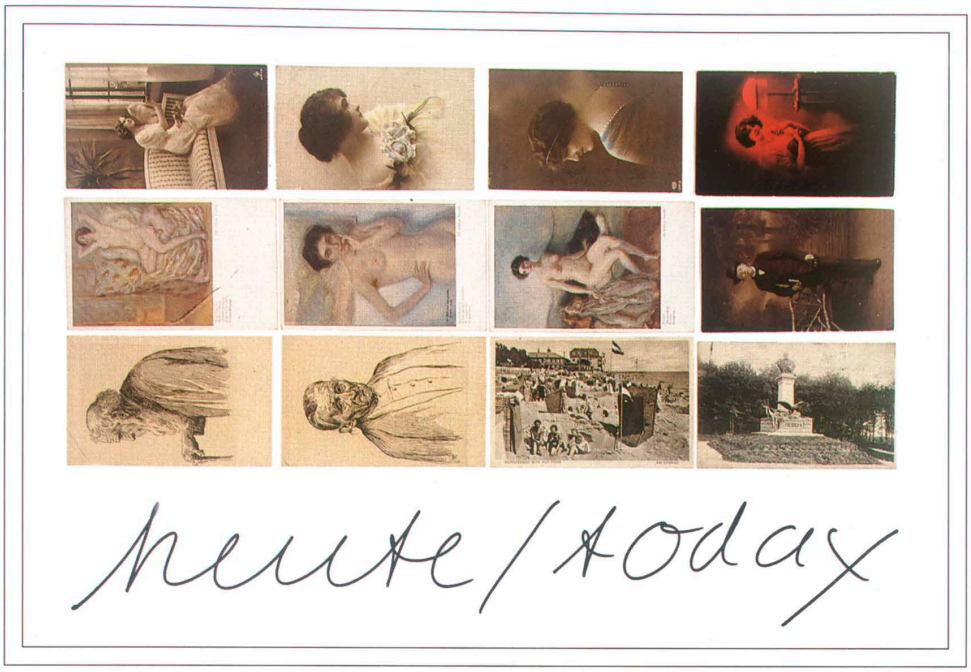
A similar story could be told of every institution of significance to the world of photography in every country on the planet. The history of photography seems to have been discovered less than half a century ago. And shortly after this happened, photographers began to pick up the museumised incunabula along with all the rest, the discarded garbage of history, and transform them into their own artistic projects. Now there is (virtually) no 'rest'. Almost everything can be recycled and commuted into a cultural artefact. 'Found footage' is a label (deriving in fact from the horror movie genre) that promises to turn rubbish into art. The spectrum ranges from large-scale artistic projects such as those of Christian Boltanski, Hans-Peter Feldmann, Peter Piller and Tacita Dean's *Floh*, via various artist's books that borrow freely from flea markets or the artist's own family albums, all the way to online platforms such as Instagram, Pinterest and Flickr, and even blogs and magazines – fields peopled largely by amateurs, which does not necessarily detract from their artistic claims. Taken together, ambitious appropriation art, provocative gender- or postcolonial-based contemporary culture-critiquing artistic practice, and innocuous humour cast a net that encompasses, and can make use of, almost any discarded image. These images form

part of an intimate, familiar everyday practice that is now being taken up and used, to a greater or lesser extent, against the grain. All of a sudden photographs, which, despite their entry into museums, are still regarded as disposable items, are being ennobled as art objects. Chucking away was yesterday. The watchword for today, to borrow the title of a Roxy Music song, is 'Re-Make/Re-Model'. The history that has only just been discovered is thus being deliberately rewritten, and art is the collecting tank for this flood of discarded images.

However, anyone who thinks that throwing away is truly a thing of the past and that institutions are henceforth set on securing their collections is mistaken. The much-vaunted materiality of recent decades goes out of the window as soon as other techniques prove more practical. Whenever there is talk of security, it is mainly data security that is meant. When important collections come under threat, as was the case recently in Timbuktu, they are digitised. And as soon as the remaining slide-based photographic archives have been digitised, the old image supports can generally be considered to have served their purpose and can be jettisoned. But even these aging collections of inherited and apparently superfluous data carriers can be transformed at a stroke from throw-away items into cultural objects.

A few years ago the artist Philipp Goldbach took over the slide collection of Cologne University's Institute of Art History and with it, in a sense, the legacy of visual training once practised there. The 200,000 images were used as teaching aids, mainly in the traditional form of double projections in order to foster comparative viewing and realise an approach to art history based on the training of the eye using visual media technology. As objects they had become superfluous with digitisation. When Goldbach got hold of these images he used them not in keeping with their preordained purpose as projections but as installations that reflect the project of photography in a different way. In two exhibitions he transformed the countless boxes of slides into art. In the first installation, almost the entire floor of a room was covered with the transparencies, as if digitisation had swept over them in a wave of iconoclasm. In the second, Goldbach stacked up the countless slide mounts so neatly – almost like a work by Donald Judd – that they resembled bar-codes, thereby suggesting or metaphorically giving them an alternative intended use. We are now well into the digital era, which is transforming the fate of images once more.

**"All of a sudden photographs, which, despite their entry into museums, are still regarded as disposable items, are being ennobled as art objects. Chucking away was yesterday."**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5.

It looks again as if the digital turn has lent photographic images a historic tail-wind. At all events, nowhere near as many photographs have ever been taken and disseminated as is today the case. In 2008, 19 million photographs were uploaded to the internet every day. By 2012 the figure had risen to 363 million and just two years later to 1.8 billion. This makes the 3,000 visiting card photographs produced by the Disdéri studio in Paris per day in around 1860, by no means a negligible quantity, look like peanuts. And here's another statistic: in 2017 1.2 trillion digital photos were taken – 85 per cent of them with smartphones. The number of social media accounts is continually rising, even if the relative fortunes of the different platforms are changing. Instagram may currently be replacing Facebook in the public's favour but the principle remains that images vie for attention in the present while caring little about their own fate. With each new day they slip further down the scroll list and before long drop out of our field of awareness altogether, at best remaining searchable via more complex search commands. They have thus become history, but a history of no significance to the present day. The digital archive is there mainly to act as a material store preserving what has already been forgotten. And private photographic production comes down to the same thing. If the summer holiday is recorded in several thousand pictures and the life of a newborn child documented photographically day by day, this is not so much to do with a pictorial memory as with a socially institutionalised space of forgetfulness. Precisely because images are available in such great numbers, the memory and the remembering that could structure them and lend them form instead play a subordinate role because the pictures are not there to be remembered. It is enough that they are available. Digital repositories are for the most part archives of forgetting. When images cease to circulate, they drop out of the memory space.

This also applies to the wide world of social media. The already rigid attention economy that prevails here is, moreover, strict in its rules: to get noticed material has to observe specific guidelines, be true to genre, and adhere to various models: from selfies to food photos to specific travel *locations*. We are all familiar with today's picture types and communicate with them. This has little to do with history and disproportionately more to do with forgetting. The digital archive is deemed not to forget, yet practises a drastic process of media displacement: with the march of time and the appearance of new pictures, images are forced out of the window of attention into the virtual archive, which is, of course, just that: virtual. For the most part, then, these images are aimed not at history and remembering, but at grabbing people's attention, which means nothing if it cannot persist in the present. This can only succeed if the images are enriched and endowed not with *history* but with a *story*, for the battle of the digital images is fought out in the present. The photos simulate the present, even though – whether we like it or not – they always depict past moments. Yet they are not aimed at memory. Furthermore, the present is increasingly contracting and can no longer be understood as lasting the length of a generation. Decades become years, years months and months days. In social media, memory grows ever shorter the more pictures are posted. The internet may not lose anything but it

**"The more the present focuses on the immediate recognition of a 'today' that is growing ever shorter, thereby allowing history to be history, the more, by contrast, a remoter past is being visually historicised."**

is forgetful where its own stock of images is concerned. Likewise, we continually produce pictures only to immediately forget them, and this is presumably the function of mass-scale digital picture production: to transform the present into the past, a past that hopes for appreciation and resurrection in a future present and, failing this, consigns the images to a definitive forgetting.

However, this remarkable increase in the production of photographic images, accompanied by the simultaneous media-based displacement of the most recent past, has an unexpected pendant in that today more photographs are being retrieved from the archives and made accessible than ever before. Entire image stocks are being opened up and presented on the internet, whole archives digitalised and catalogued. The more the present focuses on the immediate recognition of a 'today' that is growing ever shorter, thereby allowing history to be history, the more, by contrast, a remoter past is being visually historicised. Digital forgetting in the present seems to be seeking to buy its freedom socially through the discovery, remembering and systematic archiving of the past. In former times a church or monastery would have been endowed in atonement for the killing of a brother who stood in the way of one's own claim to the throne; today the archiving of the past is invested in by those who betray the present and neglect recent history in pursuit of economic dominance.

Yet there is sometimes a bizarre twist even to this. As demonstrated by the example of the Corbis picture agency, market leaders in the digital world are acquiring image rights by the million – from museums and artists, agencies and archives all over the world – ultimately in order to be able to economically exploit these rights as well. The photographs will be put into circulation once more – not in the spirit of cultural memory but as capital. However, when cultural and social capital are converted into economic capital, photography is transformed from a medium of remembering into one that clandestinely opens the door to amnesia. And perhaps one day we will therefore come to regard photography as the medium of forgetting.

TRANSLATED BY RICHARD ELLIOTT / KENNISTRANSLATIONS

Enzo Traverso

# The Melancholy Turning Point: Memory and Utopia in the Twenty-First Century

**The Italian historian Enzo Traverso, a professor at Cornell University, is the author of important books on the Holocaust and on twentieth-century political ideas. In this text, he describes and analyses a transition that, from his point of view, marks the end of the twentieth century: the utopias gave place to the cult of memory, which led to the proliferation of 'remembrance' and set the melancholy tone that characterises the spirit of our times.**

# THE MELANCHOLY TURNING POINT: MEMORY AND UTOPIA IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Enzo Traverso

'In the past, even the future was better.' So said Karl Valentin, the celebrated comedian of bohemian Munich. This aphorism remains true today: we live in a time of transition marked by two parallel phenomena: the resurgence of memory of the past and the collapse of utopias. Following on from Eric Hobsbawm, it is now commonplace to see the fall of the Berlin Wall as the threshold where one century ended and another began. The twentieth century has become history, but a mass of memories keeps it very close to us. Far from being a dead past, it continues to resonate as a lived heritage. This creates a collision between history and memory, making the twentieth century a hybrid entity, a strange age belonging both to the past and the present. The twenty-first century, for its part, was born of disruption – the end of the Cold War – that took a cataclysmic form. The 'velvet revolutions' caused the political regimes of real socialism to fall like a house of cards, culminating in the fall of the USSR itself. But these revolutions did not deliver a single utopia. On the contrary, they generated an acute need to rethink history, to revive the past, while burying the utopias that had given it structure and filled it with hope and passion.

Revolutions have always been factories for utopias and new ideas. They arouse hopes, define new horizons and construct the future. The 'velvet revolutions', however, were an exception to the rule. They invented virtually nothing; they longed far more for their national pasts than for their futures, which were entrusted to Western market forces. Vaclav Havel was a great deal more brilliant as a playwright and intellectual dissident than as president of the Czech Republic. The extraordinarily rich culture of East Germany, subject to the suffocating controls of the STASI, was manifested in the production of allegorical and allusive works that required reading between the lines. Today, this culture is almost silent. In Poland, the 1989 watershed gave rise to a wave of nationalism. In brief, the twenty-first century began with an *eclipse of the utopias*. This is a major difference, separating it from the two preceding centuries and defining the *Zeitgeist* of our present.

The nineteenth century began with the French Revolution, which defined the horizon of a new era. 1789 created a new concept of revolution – no longer rotation, in the astronomical sense, but rupture and radical innovation – and built the foundations for the birth of socialism, whose rise accompanied the burgeoning of industrial society. The idea of Progress had been invented during the Enlightenment, but it was the French Revolution that placed it at the heart of the new century. The twentieth century was born out of a new catastrophe which would spark the Russian Revolution: the First World War and the dissolution of a European order that was still essentially dynastic, despite being modernised in a liberal sense. The 1917 October Revolution was both magnificent and tragic. On the one hand, it led almost immediately, in a terrible and murderous civil war, to an authoritarian and then totalitarian regime; on the other, it stirred up a liberating hope that spread throughout Europe and the world. The twenty-first

century, however, began in 1991 with the crumbling of the communist utopia. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the implosion of the USSR were far more significant than the end of a system of power with all its international ramifications, because the wreck of the Soviet regime also meant the sinking of the utopias that had accompanied its rise.

In *Le Passé d'une illusion* (1995), a smug celebration of the dominant liberal order, François Furet emphasised that 'the idea of another society has become almost impossible to conceive of, and no one in the world today is offering any advice on the subject or even trying to formulate a new concept. Here we are, condemned to live in the world as it is.'[1] The American philosopher Fredric Jameson is far from sharing the French historian's conservative liberalism, but his diagnosis is similar: today it is 'easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism'. In a world where the 'future seems to be nothing but a monotonous repetition of what is already here', the first task consists in rediscovering a 'sense of history'.

For at least a decade, liberalism and the market-driven society seemed to be humanity's ultimate horizon, representing a 'new' utopia. Capitalism was supposed to promise us the best of futures. It had become, as Walter Benjamin defined it in 1921, a 'religion', a religion of money, the predominant secular belief of our age. Today, that religion has entered a crisis and no longer gives rise to any illusions. Since the 2008 crisis, neoliberalism has shown its hideous face, but a new liberating utopia has not yet seen the light of day. The idea of another model of society always seems to be a dangerous and potentially totalitarian ideology. In Seattle, in 1999, a new movement emerged, rejecting the market objectification of the planet and proclaiming that 'another world [was] possible'. Yet it turned out to be incapable of describing its form. In 2011, a new revolutionary wave swept through the Arab world, overthrowing dictatorships in Tunisia and Egypt, before getting bogged down in the Libyan desert and the Syrian civil war. The groundswell had been powerful and indisputably hopeful. However, the young people who deposed the dictators Ben Ali and Moubarak had no clear idea of what should replace them or how it should be done. The Arab revolutions have no model and no understanding of what direction to take: they can neither find inspiration in the past nor plan for the future.

**"The reactivation of the past that characterises our age is the consequence of this eclipse of the utopias. The upsurge of memory in the public spaces of Western societies is the result of this metamorphosis."**

1. Published in English as *The Passing of an Illusion: The Idea of Communism in the Twentieth Century*, trans. Deborah Furet, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999, p. 502.

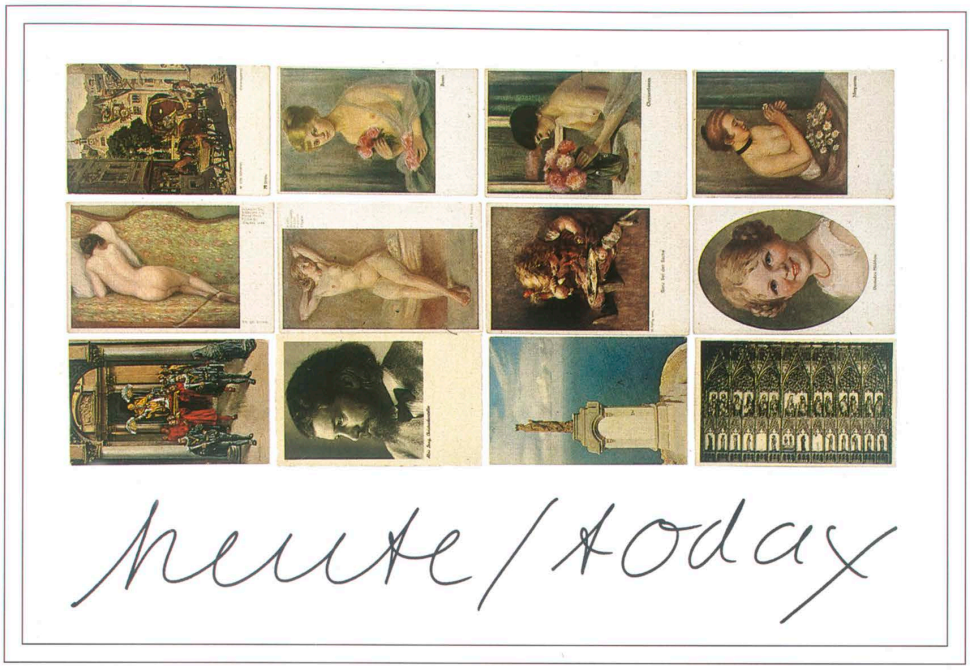
**"The cult of memory – or memory transformed into a 'civil religion' – is one of the defining characteristics of our age."**

In brief, the advent of the new century entailed a transition from the 'principle of hope' (Ernst Bloch) to the 'imperative of responsibility' (Hans Jonas). The first was companion to the battles and revolutions of the past century, from 1917 to the 1970s. The 'imperative of responsibility' came to the fore once the future began to frighten us, when we discovered that revolutions can produce totalitarian power and when ecology made us aware of the threats hanging over the planet and we began to worry about the world we will leave to future generations. These days communism is no longer at the intersection between a 'space of experiences' and a 'horizon of expectation'.[2] Expectation has evaporated and experience has been reduced to ruins. Our era's regime of historicity is often described as 'presentism', that is to say, a perpetual present that absorbs the past and the future within its own horizon – a present that does not project into the future.[3] Its temporality is no longer governed by clocks, but by the stock markets, where mountains of money move virtually from one continent to another in just a few seconds. This frenetic and never-ending movement is not looking to build the future, but to preserve the present: a paroxysmal acceleration to perpetuate the existing order. The reactivation of the past that characterises our age is without doubt the consequence of this eclipse of the utopias. The upsurge of memory in the public spaces of Western societies is the result of this metamorphosis.

It is true that there were advance indications of this phenomenon. In the 1980s, several historians observed a tendency for memory to return to the public spaces of our societies. In France, Pierre Nora began his work on '*lieux de mémoire*'. His view is that such 'sites of memory' – land, spaces, buildings, symbols, objects that attach us to the past – emerge with the disappearance of the *milieux* of memory – that is to say the mediums that used to ensure its transmission.[4] In other words, they coincide with the end of inherited memory, the memory of a past in whose wake it was natural to carve out our present. We feel the need for sites of memory when the past is threatened, when it becomes 'heritage' and the object of commemoration. This phenomenon is linked to the birth of the modern world. In his essay on the death of the 'storyteller', Walter Benjamin saw its beginning as coinciding with the First World War, which traumatised a continent, leaving a whole generation silent, made poorer rather than enriched by experience.

Stripped of its horizon of expectation and its utopias, the twentieth century is revealed in retrospect as an age of war, totalitarianism and genocide. A previously discreet and modest figure takes centre stage: the *victim*. Towering, anonymous and silent, victims burst onto the scene and dominate our vision of history. Those who bore witness to the Nazi camps – Primo Levi, Robert Antelme, André Kertesz, Jorge Semprun, Elie Wiesel and others – and to Stalin's gulags – Varlam

2. Reinhart Koselleck, '"Champs d'experience" et "horizon d'attente": deux categories historiques', in *Le futur passé. Contribution à la sémantique des temps historiques*, Paris: Éditions de l'EHESS, 1990, pp. 307-329. Published in English as *Futures Past: on the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004, p. 255.
3. François Hartog, *Régimes d'historicité. Présentisme et expériences du temps*, Paris: Seuil, 2003, p. 126. Published in English as *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time*, trans. Saskia Brown, New York: Columbia University Press, 2017.
4. Pierre Nora, 'Entre mémoire et histoire', in Pierre Nora (ed.), *Les Lieux de mémoire. 1, La République*, Paris: Gallimard, 1984, pp. 7-39. Published in English as 'Between Memory and History', in *Realms of Memory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, New York: Columbia University Press, 1996, vol. 1., pp. 1-20.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**"The best summary of the Marxist concept of memory is suggested by Vincent Geoghegan – 'remembering the future'."**

Chalamov, Gustaw Herling, for example – have become victims. The historian Tony Judt completed his saga of post-war Europe with a chapter dedicated to the continent's memory, with a symbolic title: 'From the House of the Dead'.[5] This new awareness of victims shines a fresh light on the twentieth century, introducing a figure into history who had previously always remained in the shadows. The memory of the gulag erased the memory of revolutions, the memory of the Shoah replaced that of antifascism, the memory of slavery eclipsed that of anticolonialism; all this coming to pass as though the memory of the victims could not coexist with the memory of the defeated. We are very sensitive to the suffering of slaves yet at the same time we are somewhat indifferent to the memory of those who, by rebelling, abolished slavery.

Germany, the epicentre of the climacteric that brought the twentieth century to an end, was the symbolic site of this transition from utopia to memory. It was here, throughout the 1990s, that the memory of the Holocaust replaced an antifascist memory by means of a gradual redefinition of urban space. The official memory of the GDR was erased and the statues of socialism's founders were torn down. In Berlin there remains a single monument to Marx and Engels, whose base is scrawled with some ironic graffiti: *Wir sind unschuldig* ('We are innocent'). In parallel, the memory of the victims of Nazism (especially the Jews) is imprinted on public spaces. In 2005, a gigantic Holocaust Memorial was inaugurated near the Brandenburg Gate and the Parliament. The cult of memory – or memory transformed into a 'civil religion'[6] – is one of the defining characteristics of our age.

The utopias of the twentieth century possessed a sense of history. They postulated progress or socialism as an ultimate end, a *telos*. We know now that this vision was illusory, but it generated colossal energy. Socialism saw itself as a model of production and culture for the masses and that is how it became the great utopia of the last century. Fordist capitalism was also directed at the masses, of course, but it was the dominant system, a source of exploitation and inequality, while socialism offered the possibility of constructing a new order.

Marx was the prophet of this new world. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), he described memory as 'the tradition of all dead generations' which 'weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living'. The modern revolution against capitalism, he wrote, 'cannot take its poetry from the past but only from the future'. It must 'let the dead bury their dead' and discard 'recollections of past world histories', instead projecting itself towards the future. The communist movement postulated a purpose of history and this vision resulted in

5. Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945*, London: Vintage, 2010, pp. 803-834. Published in French as *Après guerre. Une histoire de l'Europe depuis 1945*, Paris: Armand Colin, 2007, pp. 931-963.
6. See Enzo Traverso, *La fin de la modernité juive. Histoire d'un tournant conservateur*, Paris: La Découverte, 2013, ch. 7 ('La religion civile de l'Holocauste'). Published in English as *The End of Jewish Modernity*, trans. David Fernbach, London: Pluto Press, 2016.

a periodisation of the modern age, whose phases were defined by the memory of revolutions. A straight line joined 1789 to 1917, taking in the revolutions of 1848 and the Paris Commune.[7] After the 1917 October Uprising, the process became global and the growth trajectory split into several lines, passing through Europe (the French Resistance in 1945, May 1968, the Portuguese Revolution in 1974), Latin America (Cuba in 1958, Nicaragua in 1979) and Asia (China in 1949 and Vietnam in 1975). Thus, in the 1920s, Albert Mathiez described the Bolsheviks as the descendants of the Jacobins,[8] while the young protesters of May 68 thought they had experienced a 'general test', like the riots of July 1917 in Petrograd which preceded the October Revolution. Eric Hobsbawm neatly summed up this deep-seated kernel of Marxist memory when he quoted a British trade unionist addressing a conservative statesman, in the 1930s, with the words: 'Your class is a class in decline, my class is the class of the future.'[9] Utopia and memory were thus tangled together, feeding off each other. *The Fourth Estate* (1900) by Pellizza da Volpedo, one of the most famous pre-First World War paintings inspired by socialism, depicts the working classes advancing towards a future filled with light. During the 1920s, the Soviet regime's propaganda showed Lenin, arm stretched out towards the future, as a guiding light in the midst of a world made of industry, chimneys and machines, where a multitude of workers were energetically building a new society. Decorating the staircases of Mexico's National Palace and the interior courtyards of the country's Ministry of Education, in a sumptuous diachronic perspective, Diego Rivera's murals represent a linear progression showing the path of the working classes from an oppressed past to an emancipated future. The anticolonial struggles and the peasant revolution converge naturally towards the organisation of the modern, multinational and multiracial workers' movement, positioned beneath the protective figure of Marx, pointing permanently into the future.

This Marxist teleology was not necessarily theorised as deterministic causality: it could also take the utopian form of a philosophy and a policy of 'anticipation' (*Vorschein*). Ernst Bloch interpreted Marxism as a sort of 'anticipatory consciousness', whose function was to transform an ancestral emancipatory dream into a vision of the future. Rather than a 'cold utopia', describing socialism as a future inscribed in the laws of history, Bloch saw Marxism as a social project rooted in an anthropological optimism derived from the Enlightenment. In fairly similar terms, Herbert Marcuse explained the dialectic link between memory and utopia by calling upon the 'unconscious' category formulated by Freud. The function of memory, he wrote in *Eros and Civilisation* (1955), is to 'preserve the promises and potentialities which are betrayed and even outlawed by the mature, civilised individual'. This unfulfilled but not completely forgotten longing can thus be projected into the future like a utopia of happiness. Such a momentum of memory towards the future clearly contrasts with the alienated memory of class society. Marxism's counter-memory must therefore rely on this submerged longing for happiness, by uniting with utopia in a promise of freedom. And this utopia offers a romantic dimension, because it links the future to an ancestral past. Even reinterpreted in a utopian sense, socialism remained a historical *telos*, an objective that constructed and oriented memory. The best summary of the Marxist concept of memory is suggested by Vincent Geoghegan – 'remembering the future'.[10]

**7.** Cf. Casey Harison, 'The Paris Commune of 1871, the Russian Revolution of 1905, and the Shifting of the Revolutionary Tradition', *History and Memory*, 2007, vol. 17/2, pp. 5-42.
**8.** Albert Mathiez, *Le bolchévisme et le jacobinisme*, Paris: Librairie de l'Humanité, 1920.
**9.** Eric Hobsbawm, 'The Influence of Marxism 1945-83', (1982), in *How to Change the World. Tales of Marx and Marxism*, London: Little Brown, 2011, p. 362.
**10.** Vincent Geoghegan, 'Remembering the Future', *Utopian Studies*, 1990, vol. 1.2, pp. 52-68.


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This vision of utopia also runs through Walter Benjamin's work, as is demonstrated by his fascination with Fourier, his writings on Bachofen and, more generally, his archaeology of Paris as an immense reservoir of 'dialectical images', points of convergence between memory and the dream of a liberated society. For Benjamin, messianism, romanticism and utopia relate to each other without contradiction since it is 'actual time' (*Jetzt-Zeit*) that unites them, combining recollection of the past with prediction for the future.

After the Second World War, the Soviet imagination continued to project a future consisting of factories and space shuttles, with, in the latter case, supersonic speed replacing the feverish, compressed time of the revolution: the march towards socialism was measured in tonnes of steel and quantities of tractors, aeroplanes and missiles produced by Soviet industry, yet history had not changed its *telos*. During the 1970s, the time of Brezhnevian Stagnation, the movement began to slow and the future looked uncertain. A 'post-utopian' art emerged in the USSR, with works such as *Horizon* by Erik Bulatov (1977). This painting shows a group of Soviet citizens walking on a beach towards the sea, but the horizon ahead of them is blocked by a band recalling the decoration of the Order of Lenin.[11]

Carried along by the 'principle of hope', this dialectic between history and memory was fractured at the end of the twentieth century. The end of communism had been predicted by some avant-garde artists, who represented it as a rupture of memory. In a 1983 painting, the Russian artist Aleksandr Kosolapov depicted a head of Lenin on the ground, beside the pedestal of his broken statue. Three putti in the foreground pore over a newspaper with a clearly legible title, *The Manifesto*, whose content they are struggling to decipher.[12] The utopia has collapsed and the expected radiant future is now just a ruined landscape.

The felled and broken statue is an essential symbolic feature of all revolutionary movements. In 1927, the Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein, in the opening scenes of his film *October*, showed the statue of Tsar Alexander III being toppled by the Saint Petersburg insurgents [Fig. 11]. In 1995, in *Ulysses' Gaze*, Theo Angelopoulos used a similar image to illustrate the collapse of the communist utopia.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the most interesting films about revolutions describe them as sites of memory, often revisited with a poignant melancholy. Ken Loach's *Land and Freedom* (1995) begins in Liverpool, with the death of a former International Brigades fighter. Among the objects he had kept in old boxes, his grand-daughter finds a red handkerchief full of soil, a souvenir of collectivisation in Spain in 1936. The film unfolds in a moving flashback, revealing a revolutionary struggle's destroyed hopes.

*Calle Santa Fé* (2007) by Carmen Castillo is not a commemoration but a mourning process for the Latin American revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s. In this film, the site of memory is represented by a house in the suburbs of Santiago de Chile, where on 6 October 1974 Miguel Enriquez, leader of the MIR (Movement of the Revolutionary Left), was assassinated by the military dictatorship. This site of memory evokes a lost past and encapsulates a memory preserved like a relic, chronicling a collective historical experience that is also resolutely subjective, unique and 'sacred'. The melancholy aura that suffuses the film's images is undoubtedly accentuated by the youth and beauty of these young

**11.** Cf. Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*, London: Verso, 2011, pp. 81-82.

**12.** This painting is discussed by Susan Buck-Morss in *Dreamworld and Catastrophe. The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002, pp. 67-69.

revolutionaries of the 1970s. These films by Theo Angelopoulos, Ken Loach and Carmen Castillo confirm Jacques Rancière's observation that, in recent decades, aesthetics have become 'the privileged site where the tradition of critical thinking has metamorphosed into deliberation on mourning'.[13]

The dialectic between the eclipse of utopias and the resurgence of memory is at the heart of the work of the Argentinian photographer Marcelo Brodsky. *Buena memoria,* his best-known work, is a palimpsest layering and mixing an identity quest, a family story, a mourning process, the autobiography of a generation and a piece of national history: Argentina during the military dictatorship (1976-1983). His images create a canvas of polysemic memory in which the past re-emerges with its horizon of expectation, its hopes and its utopias. The three photographs that complete the project provide the key to its understanding. In the first, an old sepia photograph, we see a man on the deck of an ocean liner: his uncle Salomon on his way to Buenos Aires, at the beginning of the last century. He looks out to sea with a solemn expression, as though probing the future that awaits him. In the second photograph, two teenagers – the photographer and his brother – smile out at the camera, also from the deck of a boat. They are standing, leaning against the side of the ship, next to a small sign indicating that they are in a prohibited area ('*proibido permanecer en este lugar*'). In the third photograph, all that can be seen is sea: the waves of the Atlantic at the confluence with the Río de la Plata, that 'river with no banks'.

Thanks to their juxtaposition, these three images construct a narrative with multiple meanings, exploring both an individual's fate and a society's history. Marcelo Brodsky's photographic triptych is a good approximation of the memory of the twentieth century as an age of violence, total war, fascism, totalitarianism and genocide, but also as an age of broken revolutions and fallen utopias. It is peopled with nameless victims and those defeated in lost battles. The retrospective gaze of those who were touched by those battles is inevitably imbued with a melancholic air. Melancholy is undoubtedly a feature of periods of transition and crisis, as a vast literature has described, from Burton to Panofsky, by way of Freud and Warburg.

According to Marx, revolutions were the 'locomotives of history'.[14] In *Paralipomena to 'On the Concept of History'* (1940),[15] Benjamin defined them instead as the 'emergency brake' with which the driver (the proletariat) could stop the train careering towards catastrophe. In his *Passages*, he advocated a radically antipositivist historical materialism which would 'annihilate within itself the idea of progress'.

Every period of restoration seeks to stamp out the traces of a rebellious past; the urban landscape changes with the display of a new order's symbols and monuments. In a fine work devoted to the legacy of the Revolutions of 1848 in European literature, Dolf Oehler emphasises the extent to which the memory of the June massacres haunts the poetry of Baudelaire and Heine, as well as the novels of Flaubert and Herzen – four writers who witnessed the Paris revolution. During the Second Empire, Haussmann redesigned the topography of Paris, eliminating the squares, streets and quarters which held the memory of the barricades. In Place Saint-Michel, above the fountain, the statue of an archangel appeared, brandishing his sword over a submissive Satan, lying crushed beneath his feet.

**13.** Jacques Rancière, *Le Partage du sensible : esthétique et politique*, Paris: La fabrique, 2000, p. 8. Published in English as *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill, London: Bloomsbury, 2004, p. 4.
**14.** Karl Marx, *Class Struggles in France 1848-1850*, New York: International Publishers, 1997. Published in French as *Les luttes de classes en France*, p. 115.
**15.** Benjamin, Walter, *Selected Writings, Vol. 4, 1938-1940*, ed. H. Eiland and M. W. Jennings, Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2003.

Oehler, quoting Baudelaire, points out that this is an allegorical representation of the imperial order repressing the revolution: the moral and political victory of the bourgeoisie over the 'devil' of popular uprising. In parallel, socialist painters went through their mourning process far removed from the pompous and self-satisfied neoclassical style of conservative celebrations, creating a culture of defeat which transmitted the memory of those who had been subdued. While Delacroix was painting the ceilings of the Louvre, Gustave Courbet was completing an equally striking canvas: *A Burial at Ornans*, the first time realism was used to depict ordinary people in modern art. The painting was immediately interpreted as depicting the funeral of the 1848 revolution.

Courbet described his paintings as 'real allegories'. The process of mourning twentieth century communism, however, did not take an allegorical form. The symbolism of the communist utopia had been so powerful and widespread that using such an aesthetic would have been impossible. Today, the culture of defeat takes the form of melancholy symbolism because it is composed of figures and images that have not been replaced, symbols that have metamorphosed into ghosts. In 1980, Aleksander Kosolapov would not have been able to imagine that only a few years later his works would play a similar role to the Louvre allegories in the Western imaginary. By painting Lenin in the guise of a Coca Cola advertisement, he was only seeking to underline a symmetry of meaning between Soviet propaganda and the objectified images of the capitalist world. A few years later, however, his work was seen as a symbol of the victory of capitalism over communism. The utopia had been subjugated by the phantasmagoria of commodities.

Phantoms have a posthumous existence; they haunt our memories of experiences that we had assumed to be completed, exhausted and archived, like the statues of real socialism assembled in Budapest's Memento Park, in a sort of rogues' gallery. They inhabit our spirits like figures from the past, ethereal spectres set apart from our corporeal lives. Stalinism certainly produced some horrible spectres. Unlike other periods of restoration, such as in France after June 1848 or the Paris Commune, the 1989 turning point could only offer the defeated a memory of a disfigured socialism. Beyond the paralysed strategic memory of socialism, the mourning itself of the defeat had become impossible, through a kind of self-censorship. The victims of violence and genocide were at the forefront of public memory, while those overthrown by social movements, resistance struggles and revolutions began to inform our representations of the

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twentieth century like spectres awaiting redemption. The spectres that haunt today's Europe are not those of revolutions to come but of past revolutions, those that were thwarted. Mourning the past and inventing the future have become the single, unique and difficult task of the present.

Carla Ganito

# To Unplug: How Digital Culture Shapes Privacy, Memory, and Death

**Taking Borges' famous short story 'Funes, the Memorious' as her starting point, Carla Ganito, a lecturer in the Faculty of Human Sciences at the Catholic University, Lisbon, analyses the complex dialectics between memory and forgetfulness in the digital age. She shows that the internet has brought a new but paradoxical condition that consists of making memories permanent, in taking away the right to be forgotten, at the same time as it transforms us into amnesiacs.**

# TO UNPLUG: HOW DIGITAL CULTURE SHAPES PRIVACY, MEMORY, AND DEATH

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Jorge Luís Borges, in his short story 'Funes, the Memorious' from his book Ficciones (1944), shows how important it is for humans to forget. He tells the story of Ireneo Funes, a peasant who falls off a horse and hits his head, only to recover consciousness with the amazing skill of remembering everything, every detail of his past life:

> Funes saw all the shoots, clusters, and grapes of the vine. He remembered the shapes of the clouds in the south at dawn on the 30th of April of 1882, and he could compare them in his recollection with the marbled grain in the design of a leather-bound book which he had seen only once, and with the lines in the spray which an oar raised in the Rio Negro on the eve of the battle of the Quebracho. (Borges,1962:112).

However, what might seem a gift soon becomes an unbearable curse. Borges discusses the consequences of having an unlimited capacity to remember and, in an era in which we live the temptation of automation, he makes clear that cognition is a deeply corporal process:

> These recollections were not simple; each visual image was linked to muscular sensations, thermal sensations, etc. He could reconstruct all his dreams, all his fancies. Two or three times he had reconstructed an entire day. He told me: I have more memories in myself alone than all men have had since the world was a world. And again: My dreams are like your vigils. And again, toward dawn: My memory, sir, is like a garbage disposal. (Borges, 1962: 112).

Borges also ponders on the nature and development of humanity:

> The truth is that we all live by leaving behind; no doubt we all profoundly know that we are immortal and that sooner or later every man will do all things and know everything. (Borges, 1962: 113).

Funes remembers everything but is unable to grasp abstract ideas. Remembering every detail renders Borge's character incapable of abstraction:

> Without effort, he had learned English, French, Portuguese, Latin. I suspect, nevertheless, that he was not very capable of thought. To think is to forget a difference, to generalize, to abstract. In the overly replete world of Funes there were nothing but details, almost contiguous details. (Borges, 1962: 115).

In our digital age the emotional attachment to digital platforms provokes an ambivalent relation: on the one hand, we seek the comfort of familiar contexts and memories as our identity increasingly rests on 'machines and machine-made

memories' (Dyens, 2001: 4); on the other hand, we lack the freedom to forget and to let go. Will the immobility of digital memories allow us to forget? Even in the extreme case of a death, people feel unable to erase accounts, messages, posts (Dean Keep, 2009), as a way of resisting, of safekeeping, and of revisiting traumatic memories. Dyens defines this as one of the foundations of postmodernism: 'We fall in love with our technologies, not simply because machines possess augmented and multiplied senses (they see and hear "better", they run faster, are stronger, etc.) but because they control our memories and emotions.' (Dyens, 2001: 38). In accordance with this ambivalent relationship, we can question how privacy and memory are negotiated, and what the role of digital technology and online presence is in grieving, remembrance and death.

## MEMORY AND THE NEW AGE PANOPTICON

> We all live by leaving behind...
>
> Borges, 1962

In the 'Black Mirror' episode 'The Entire History of You' (2011), a technological implant called 'Grain' records everything your eyes can see. This implant also allows for video playback ('re-dos') on an external screen or in the eye, creating a panopticon effect where everybody watches the others, and every reaction, even involuntary, is under scrutiny.

We crave control, and the 'grain' gives control as your memory cannot be manipulated: you can always provide evidence, control your reality, but, as with Funes, you become obsessed with the past, with reliving past experiences, with surveilling everyone around you. This gives way to a society that cannot forget. What we must ponder is if we want to trade off control and safety for the inability to forget. For this persistence of memory. Nietzsche wrote on the importance of forgetting in his work *On the Genealogy of Morality (1994):*

> 'Forgetfulness is not just a vis inertiae, as superficial people believe, but is rather an active ability to suppress, positive in the strongest sense of the word. To shut the doors and windows of consciousness for a while; not to be bothered by the noise and battle with which our underworld of serviceable organs work with and against each other; a little peace, a little tabula rasa of consciousness to make room for something new, above all for the nobler functions and functionaries, for ruling, predicting, predetermining (our organism runs along oligarchic lines, you see) - that, as I said, is the benefit of active forgetfulness, like a doorkeeper or guardian of mental order, rest and etiquette: from which we can immediately see how there could be no happiness, cheerfulness, hope, pride, immediacy, without forgetfulness.' p. 35

Clive Thompson, from Wired magazine, refers to the Net as an 'outboard brain'. 'I've almost given up making an effort to remember anything,' he says, 'because I can instantly retrieve the information online.' David Brooks from the New York Times makes a similar point, 'I had thought that the magic of the information age was that it allowed us to know more, but then I realized the magic of the

**"Even in the extreme case of a death, people feel unable to erase accounts, messages or posts, as a way of resisting, of safekeeping, and of revisiting traumatic memories."**

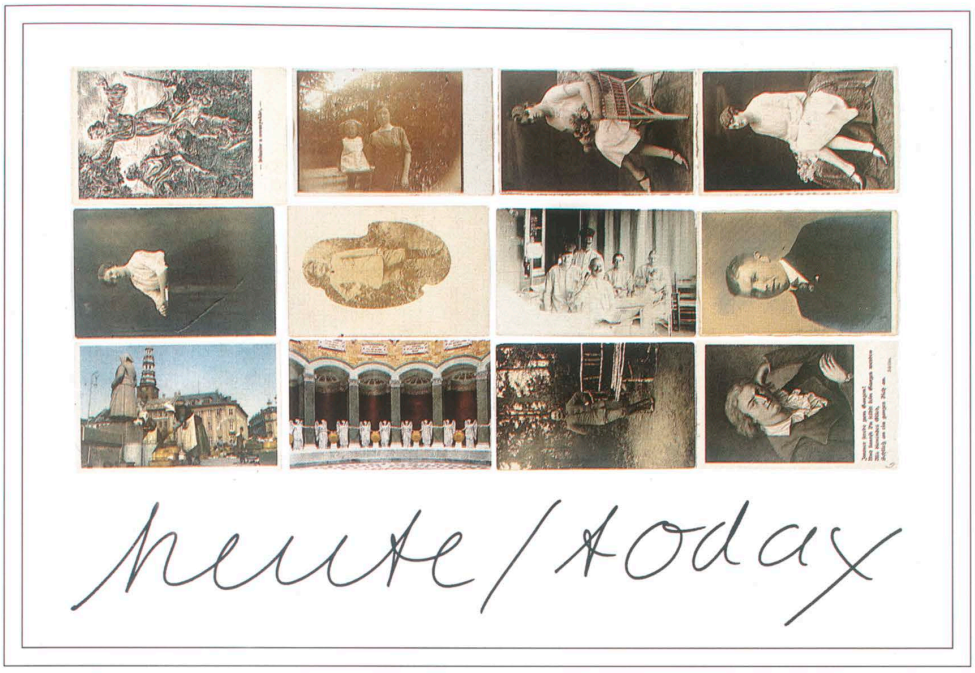
information age is that it allows us to know less.' But in outsourcing our memory, in fact the web is making it more permanent, just a click away from instant retrieval. And, in this process, some writers – e.g. Nichols Carr, the author of *The Shallows: How the Internet is changing the way we think, read and remember* – claim that 'it's well on its way to losing its humanness'. Mobile phones are an acute example of our relationship with technology, as they have become what McLuhan called electronic prosthetics, they are extensions of our bodies and of our cognitive functions, in particular our memory.

## THE RIGHT TO BE FORGOTTEN: A BALANCING ACT OF PRIVACY AND FREEDOM OF SPEECH

> He who controls the past controls the future,
> He who controls the present controls the past
>
> George Orwell, 1984

Digital technology, by making possible the vastly greater creation, storage, and search of information, poses new questions about free speech, privacy, and rights of rectification. Mayer-Schönberger (2009) describes a shift in how and what we remember in an age of ubiquitous computing: '…forgetting has become the exception and remembering the default.' For him digital memory 'negates time'. It becomes difficult for people to detach themselves from humiliating or embarrassing past moments, which can make efforts at self-improvement seem futile. The Internet, as a piece of external memory, also prevents one from moving to a new community to re-create oneself and start afresh. Digital memory, in short, prevents society from moving beyond the past because it cannot forget the past.

This takes us to the most recent debate on the right to be forgotten. This right has been inscribed in Article 17 of the GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation), named the right to erasure. According to Article 17 we have the right to ask for the removal of previous public information to prevent discrimination based in past actions or events. This article has been highly controversial as it clashes with the right to freedom of expression and to information, although exemptions for these were incorporated in the article. Many have expressed concerns about the ability to safeguard the principle of accountability and information accuracy: they warn about the threat of rewriting history, bringing to mind Winston Smith, the protagonist of George Orwell's 1984, whose job as a censor involved removing articles no longer thought politically acceptable from back copies of *The Times*.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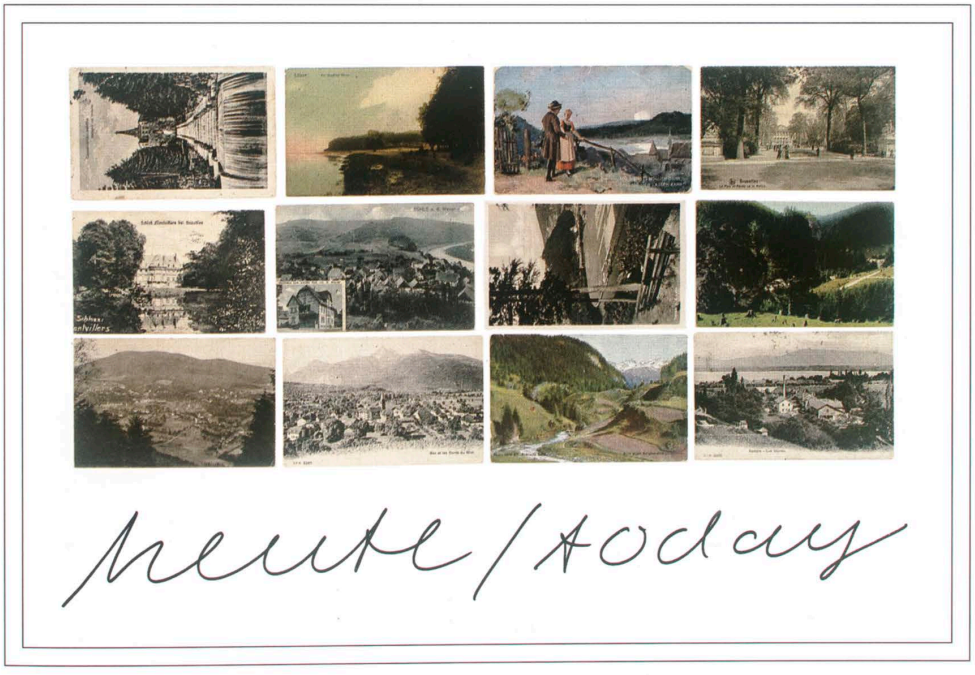
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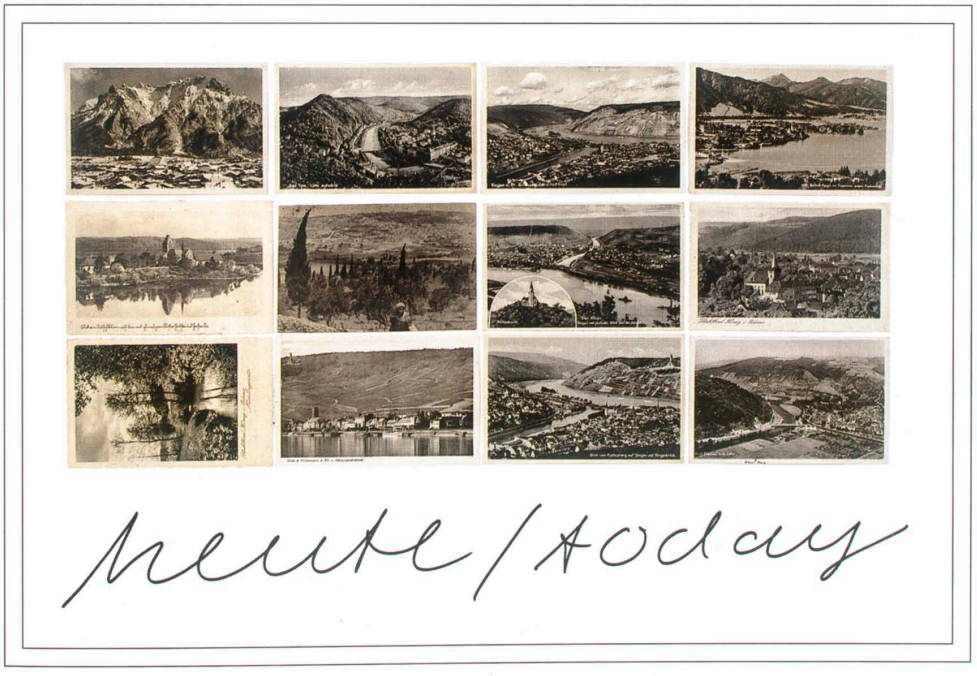
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**"What we must ponder is if we want to trade off control and safety for the inability to forget. For the persistence of memory."**

Other criticisms involving the right to be forgotten revolve around the policies for data removal regarding minors. Several organizations and spokespersons, such as the former prime minister Theresa May, have been trying to extend the privacy rights of minors, allowing them to ask for deletion or to delete information themselves, as an increasing amount of information is stored on social media sites from a young age, with unpredictable consequences in the future lives of children and teenagers.

The right to forget encapsulates what Meg Leta Jones (2016), in 'Contl+Z: The Right to be Forgotten', calls a 'cultural willingness to allow individuals to move beyond second chances and recognize the value of reinvention and redemption'. Forgetting is cognitively important for psychological health, but we are making it increasingly harder; we strive for immortality for ourselves, and our loved ones, and that leads us to question digital death as a site of immobile memory.

## RESISTING DEATH: IMMOBILE MEMORIES

> Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.
>
> Søren Kierkegaard

First-time filmmaker Omar Naim wrote and directed the sci-fi drama *The Final Cut* (2004). Set in the near future, the story concerns a device implanted in the body that is capable of recording a person's entire life, much similar to the 'grain' in *Black Mirror*. Once it is extracted from the body after death, the footage can be played back on a screen in the form of 'rememories', and placed near the gravestone. The implant is called a 'Zoe' which means life and/or alive and is manufactured by the company 'EYE Tech'. The main character, Alan Hakman played by Robin Williams, is an editor who cuts the footage together to make pleasant movies for funerals, while tormented by his job and his own memories. The film, which won the award for best screenplay at the Deauville American Film Festival and was nominated for best film at the Sitges Film Festival and Berlin International Film Festival, deals with transhumanist issues and starts with the question: if every moment of your life was being recorded, would you live differently? Would you? We can easily argue that mobile and wearable technologies already make every instant of our lives recordable. They are sites for (im)mobile remembrance.

With the mobile phone you call a person and not a place. This 'personalization of networking', as it was called by Bary Wellman (2010: 179-180), started with the Internet and has reached its peak with the mobile phone: 'The mobile phone could be our personal miniature representative.' (Katz 2006; Katz and Sugiyama 2006: 321-337). The mobile phone is not only an extension of its user but his or her virtual presence.

The mobile phone, contrary to telephones or other technologies, is considered a personal object, an extension of the body (Lasen 2002). It also holds an increasing amount of personal information making it extremely private. The fact of the mobile phone being a personal and intimate object is well stated in the research by Mizuko Ito (2003), in which mobile phone users in Japan stated that they would never answer a call on a mobile phone that wasn't theirs or even look at a phone without being invited to do so: those behaviours were considered socially unacceptable.

In a 2010 survey of iPhone use amongst Stanford students (Luhrmann, 2010), 75% admitted to falling asleep with the iPhone in bed with them; 41% said losing their iPhone would be 'a tragedy' and some used the term 'iPhone widow'.

Mobile phones are 'machines that become us' (Katz 2007), machines or devices that represent us and present us to others. Furthermore, the mobile phone is conceived as a visible prosthesis of the body in the McLuhan sense of extension. Losing a mobile phone is losing the connections that it enables; the connection to our network of friends and comfort, our contents, our knowledge.

The personal connection – which is greatly physical – makes users want their mobiles to be a reflection of themselves, an expression of their identity. The mobile phone has become a part of us and many compare its loss to losing a limb. So the connection has become visceral, organic. Furthermore, the mobile phone is conceived as a visible prosthesis of the body in the McLuhan sense of extension, thus 'its shapes and colors become subjects of aesthetic reflection' (Caron and Caronia 2007) and of identity construction: 'Human identity now dwells within machines and machine-made memories.' (Dyens, 2001: 38).

The mobile phone is also regarded as an affective technology (Lasen 2004; Plant 2001), an object for the mediation, demonstration and communication of feelings and emotions. In relation to Sherry Turkle's theory of 'evocative objects' (Turkle 2007), the mobile phone is presented as a site of the remembrance and expression of grief.

Our strong connection to the artefact and the contents that are carried within it plays an important role in today's grieving processes. In the movie Sex and the City, when the main character, Carrie, wants to disconnect from Mr. Big, who had left her at the altar, she throws her mobile phone, with all his voice messages, into the sea, thus symbolically ending her mourning period and getting ready to start a new chapter in her life.

The phone numbers of lost loved ones linger on our mobile phones as bastions of resistance to death. The device itself is kept as a treasure, and pictures, texts and voice messages are carefully kept in our mobile galleries and archives and are summoned up as comfort mechanisms:

**"The right to be forgotten has been inscribed in Article 17 of the General Data Protection Regulation (Regulation 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council), named the ‘right to erasure’."**

> ‘My sister’s name is enshrined within the heart of the device, embedded in the memory of the machine (…) her name still appears as I scroll through my contacts menu, and, as long as she remains there, I feel that she is always with me.’ (Keep 2009: 61-72).

To grieve is to remember but also to forget. Dyens defines this as a foundation of postmodernism:

> We fall in love with our technologies, not simply because machines possess augmented and multiplied senses (they see and hear ‘better’, they run faster, are stronger, etc.) but because they control our memories and emotions. The hunger to become machine, a fantasy so prevalent today, illustrates a thirst not to locate but to rediscover memories. Machines control our memories, they own the fundamental materials that shape us, and they manage the structures that generate human meaning and perspective. We long for our humanity. (Dyens, 2001: 38).

Will the immobility of mobile memories allow us to forget?
Is forgetting what makes us truly human?

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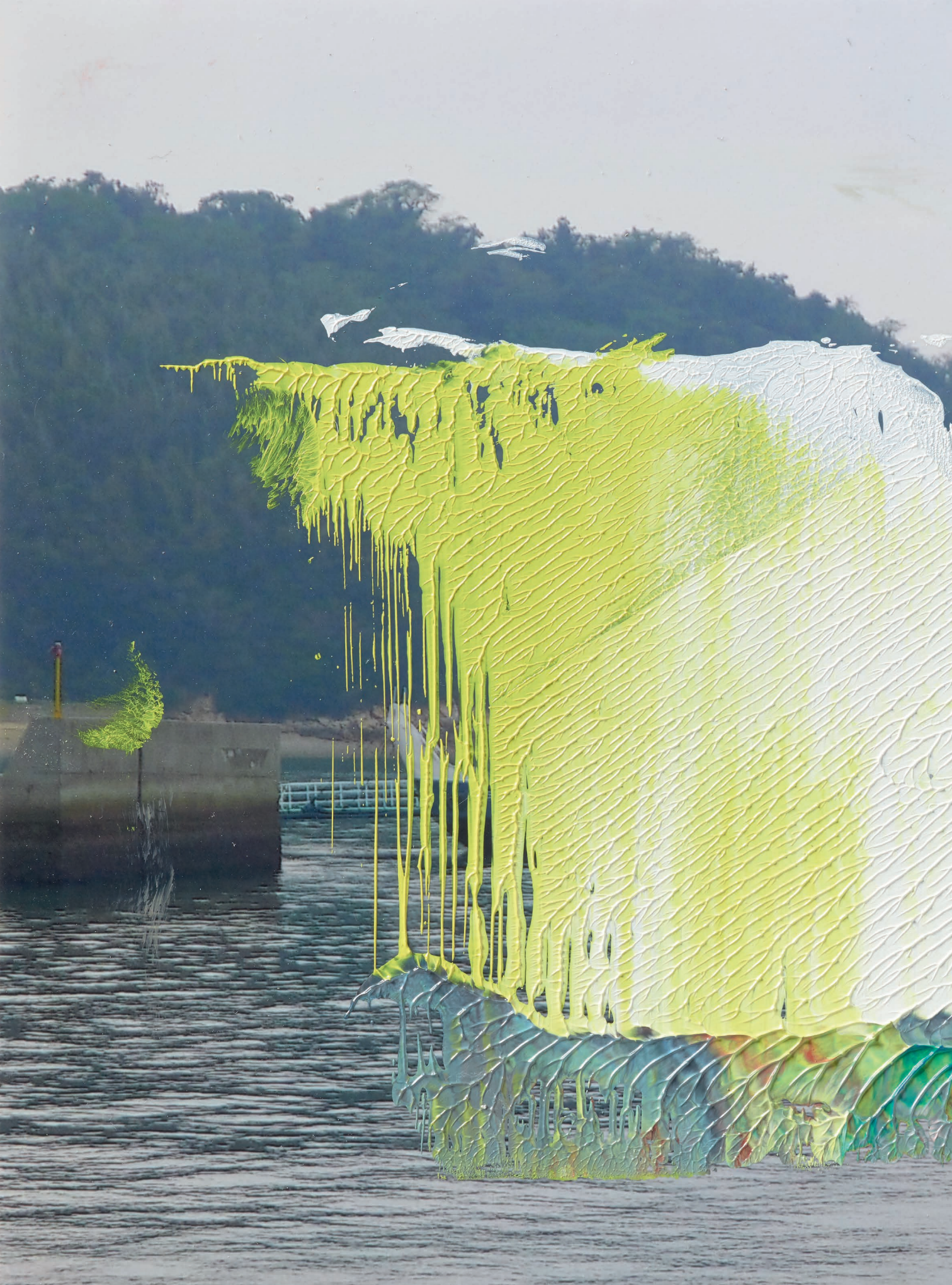


Maria Filomena Molder

# A Precipice beside our Room

**Quoting four passages and using them as four separate starting points – an excerpt from a Borges tale, another from Frances A. Yates' *The Art of Memory*, Rimbaud's poem '*Voyelles*', and a series of excerpts from St Augustine's *Confessions* – Maria Filomena Molder follows a winding path through the question of the force of memory and the forms and instruments of mnemotechnics.**

# A PRECIPICE BESIDE OUR ROOM

Maria Filomena Molder

*For João Perry*

## FIRST PASSAGE

'Ireneo began by enumerating, in both Latin and Spanish, the cases of prodigious memory catalogued in the *Naturalis historia*: Cyrus, the king of Persia, who could call all the soldiers in his armies by name; Mithridates Eupator, who meted out justice in the twenty-two languages of the kingdom over which he ruled; Simonides, the inventor of the art of memory; Metrodorus, who was able faithfully to repeat what he had heard, though it be but once. With obvious sincerity, Ireneo said he was amazed that such cases were thought to be amazing. He told me that before that rainy afternoon when the blue roan had bucked him off, he had been what every man was – blind, deaf, befuddled, and virtually devoid of memory. He had lived, he said, for nineteen years as though in a dream: he looked without seeing, heard without listening, forgot everything, or virtually everything. When he fell, he'd been knocked unconscious; when he came to again, the present was so rich, so clear, that it was almost unbearable, as were his oldest and even his most trivial memories. It was shortly afterward that he learned he was crippled; of that fact he hardly took notice. He reasoned (or felt) that immobility was a small price to pay. Now his perception and his memory were perfect.'

Jorge Luís Borges, 'Funes, His Memory', *Collected Fictions*,
trans. Andrew Hurley

## SECOND PASSAGE

'At a banquet given by a nobleman of Thessaly named Scopas, the poet Simonides of Ceos chanted a lyric poem in honour of his host but including a passage in praise of Castor and Pollux. Scopas meanly told the poet that he would only pay him half the sum agreed upon for the panegyric and that he must obtain the balance from the twin gods to whom he had devoted half the poem. A little later, a message was brought in to Simonides that two young men were waiting outside who wished to see him. He rose from the banquet and went out but could find no one. During his absence the roof of the banqueting hall fell in, crushing Scopas and all the guests to death beneath the ruins; the corpses were so mangled that the relatives who came to take them away for burial were unable to identify them. But Simonides remembered the places at which they had been sitting at the table and was therefore able to indicate to the relatives which were their dead. The invisible callers, Castor and Pollux, had handsomely paid for their share in the panegyric by drawing Simonides away from the banquet just before the crash.

And this experience suggested to the poet the principles of the art of memory of which he is said to have been the inventor.'

Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory*, pp. 1–2

### THIRD PASSAGE

A noir, E blanc, I rouge, U vert, O bleu : voyelles,
Je dirai quelque jour vos naissances latentes :
A, noir corset velu des mouches éclatantes
Qui bombinent autour des puanteurs cruelles,

Golfes d'ombre ; E, candeurs des vapeurs et des tentes,
Lances des glaciers fiers, rois blancs, frissons d'ombelles ;
I, pourpres, sang craché, rire des lèvres belles
Dans la colère ou les ivresses pénitentes ;

U, cycles, vibrements divins des mers virides,
Paix des pâtis semés d'animaux, paix des rides
Que l'alchimie imprime aux grands fronts studieux ;

O, suprême Clairon plein des strideurs étranges,
Silences traversés des Mondes et des Anges :
— O l'Oméga, rayon violet de Ses Yeux !

Arthur Rimbaud, *Voyelles*

### FOURTH PASSAGE

'And I come to the fields and spacious palaces of my memory [...] Great is this force of memory, excessive great, O my God; a large and boundless chamber! who ever sounded the bottom thereof? yet is this a power of mine, and belongs unto my nature; nor do I myself comprehend all that I am [...] The memory then is, as it were, the belly of the mind [...] I, truly, toil therein, yea and toil in myself; I am become a heavy soil requiring over much sweat of the brow. [...] It is I myself who remember, I the mind [...] But what is nearer to me than myself? And lo, the force of mine own memory is not understood by me [...] And yet, in whatever way, although that way be past conceiving and explaining, yet certain am I that I remember forgetfulness itself also, whereby what we remember is effaced. [...] What am I then, O my God? What nature am I? A life various and manifold, and exceeding immense. Behold in the plains, and caves, and caverns of my memory, innumerable and innumerably full of innumerable kinds of things [...] So great is the force of memory, so great the force of life, even in the mortal life of man.'

St. Augustine, *The Confessions*, Book X, chaps. VIII. 12; VIII. 15; XIV. 21; XVI. 25; XVII. 26, trans. Edward B. Pusey

## WHAT WE CAN SEE THROUGH THESE PASSAGES

The first passage quotes an excerpt from a short story by Borges, 'Funes, His Memory', written in 1942 and published in 1944 in the book *Artifices*. The author described it as 'one long metaphor for insomnia'. The passage begins with the enumeration of a series of men equipped with a prodigious memory (*apud* Pliny, *Naturalis Historia)*, something that astonishes Ireneo Funes, a poor nineteen--year-old boy who, after suffering an accident that left him paralysed, could never break free from a continuous, round-the-clock attention to everything that came to him, including memories of past times. Borges says that 'the present was almost unbearable', an unremitting openness to gifts of perception and recall, irreproachably infallible and triggered by an accident that crippled him.

We know that the Pythagoreans routinely established disciplines of memory as ways of accessing their inner selves. One of these consisted of reconstructing their day before sleep arrived, so that it would not be lost in the voracity of time, and sleep would not be besieged by the lost day. Ireneo Funes could reconstruct every minute and second of each day: encounters, instances of seeing and hearing, and any other 'affection'. The gesture took a day to be performed and did not stem from a desire for self-knowledge. Ireneo resembles the laboratory of an unknown experimenter.

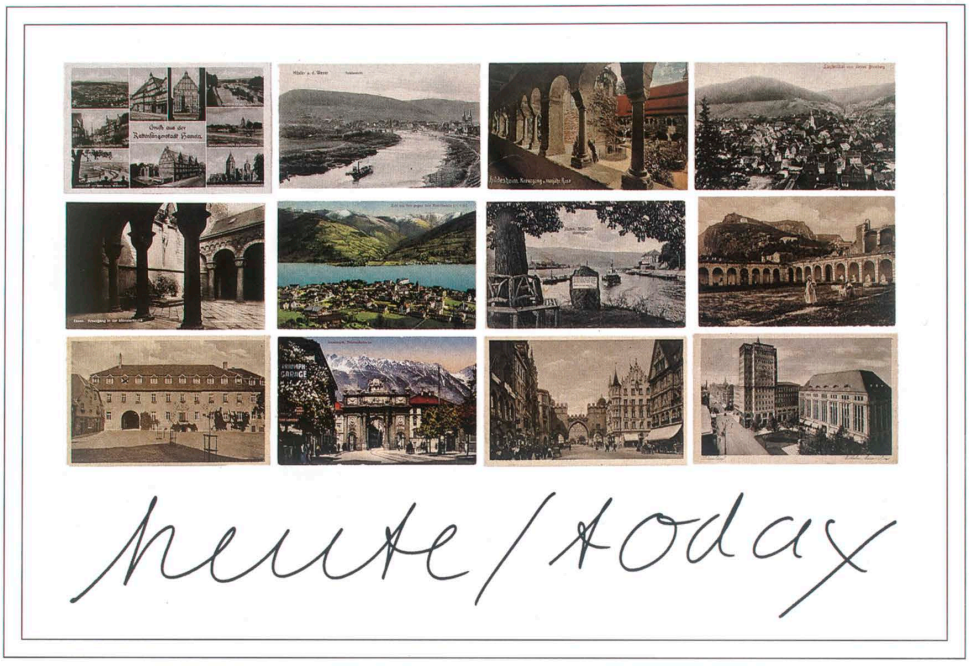
The first passage flows into to the second, so to speak, since Simonides is mentioned among 'the cases of prodigious memory' and introduced as the inventor of mnemotechnics, a technique for disciplining the memory.[1] Cicero and Quintilian transmitted the story, cited here by the best intermediary, Frances A. Yates, in the first lines of Chap. I of *The Art of Memory.*

That story shows us an exercise in mnemotechnics, which, in this case, consists of absorbing the order in which the banquet's participants were lying down. In this ancient technique sight becomes associated with a qualified spatial order (*loci*), which serves as a refuge for images, attached to the places like anchors or weapons (examples given by Quintilian). This will often entail an architectural composition. But, in addition, the story places the act in a mythical chain, where human guilt is tangled up with divine justice, since the duties of hospitality, respect for the gods, and the promise of payment have been called into question. Finally, identification rests on the correlation between places and names, since the bodies of the host and his guests are unrecognizable, and its primary function is to return the dead to their families and funeral rites.

Conversely, we do not know how Ireneo Funes managed to restore not only what affected him but also the translations that he invented of those 'affections' (e.g. his extravagant system of enumeration). The fact that whatever was thought by Ireneo – and it only took once – could not be deleted sounds more like a curse than a gift. In his unique system of enumeration the apparent synaesthesia is deceiving, since it derives from ingenious voluntary choices. In the correspondences we glimpse an ineffable analogical criterion, a secret code, a goldsmith's hallmark with the oneiric character found in the swarm of sensations and thoughts that assail the insomniac mind.

In fact, he seems less like an extreme case of *memoria artificialis* (which is fortified by exercise) than *memoria naturalis* (a disposition inherited at birth,

1. Frances A. Yates prefers 'art of memory' to 'mnemotechnics', which, according to her, makes 'this very mysterious subject' seem simple.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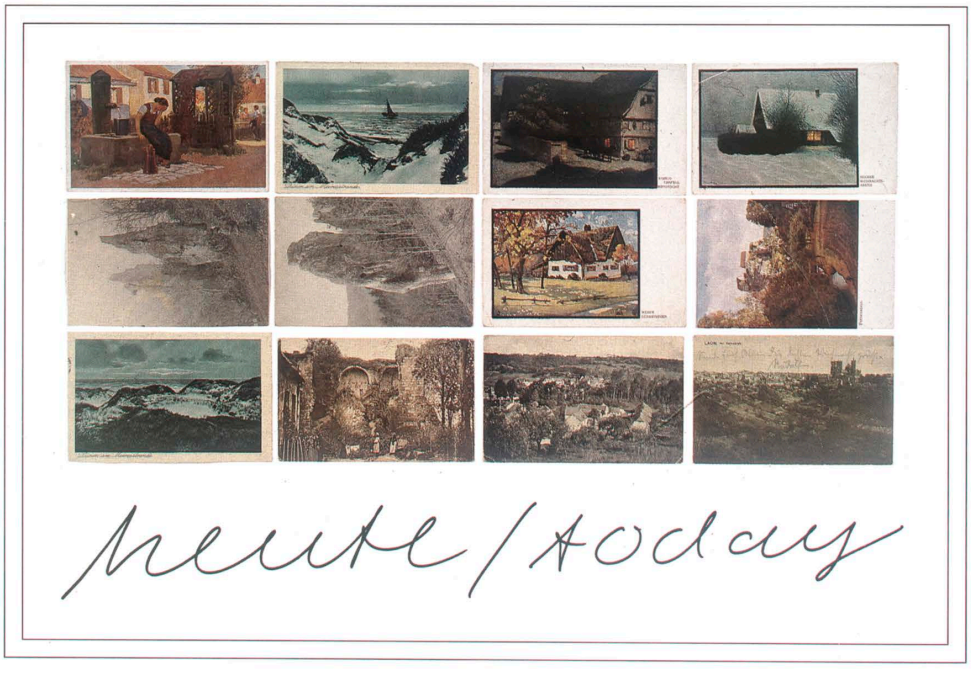
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in this case unfathomably intensified by an accident that immobilised the 'memorious' one forever). It is worth remembering here that *memoria* was part of ancient rhetoric.

In the third passage we find Rimbaud's poem *Voyelles*. In it we see synaesthesia weaving its alchemical web. There is no equivalence between mnemotechnics, or the art of memory, and the pulsation of synaesthesia. These are two different acts. One pertains to associations that are invented and established between beings, elements or images, and places, with a view to boosting the force of memory: Simonides was able to recognise, one by one, all of those who had become disfigured under the debris, because he was trained in connecting images to places. On the other hand, the fact that he was a poet was not unrelated to this ability. It should be noted that the Greeks – the only ones who did it – turned memory into a goddess, Mnemosyne, the mother of the Muses.

Nonetheless, the poetic act of *Voyelles* has nothing to do with the exercise of mnemonic associations, but rather with a vision of affinity between vowels and colours (and other senses, especially hearing), simultaneously engendered and generated in the parade – that will never become a discipline – of image-based associations, which Lévi-Strauss calls 'unconscious understanding'. His shrewd interpretation of *Voyelles* (linking it to the sumptuous uses of colour in numerous other poems by Rimbaud) discards the usual paraphernalia of eroticism and mysticism, targeting instead the equivalence between two tables (lists) of opposites: a-e / black-white; i-u / red-green; o - / blue-(yellow), as well as the whirlwind of consonant correspondences, especially alliterations and paranomasias.[2]

The fact that this kind of reunion or accompaniment cannot be controlled – those who have synaesthetic experiences cannot master them, i.e. the experiences come to them, whether they want it or not – might allow us to distinguish between what is at stake in *Voyelles* (where Rimbaud practises, with dazzling skill, his high discipline of *voyance*, his poetic potency) and the synaesthesias that do not proceed or flow into a consummate poetic act.

## ANALOGY AND AFFINITY

Wittgenstein understood better than anyone that synaesthesia is not related to analogy. There is no analogy between 'a' and the colour black. It is not through analogy, through metaphoric transference, that Rimbaud arrives at this synaesthesia. In fact, synaesthesia belongs to the type of image that Wittgenstein calls a 'figurative expression' [*bildlicher Ausdruck*], an image devoid of analogical foundation. It is not a *Gleichnis*, a simile, a symbol or a parable, and it is not an image of our choice, it occurs to us without our choosing it: 'And how about such an expression as: "In my heart I understood when you said that" pointing to one's heart?' (*Philosophical Investigations*, II, iv, §7). The association between the heart, the gesture that I make, and the act of understanding is not supported by an analogy, but rests on a spontaneous connection between words, gesture and act. It is not possible to separate the understanding from the gesture of putting my hand on my chest. In this case, the heart is no longer an organ separable from the body, emerging as an expressive force, inseparable from our understanding and the relationship that we have with someone.[3] These figurative expressions

2. 'Rimbaud's mind probably offers fertile ground for the study of synesthesia [...] Rimbaud possessed a cerebral color map that was particularly fertile and highly practicable [...] One is reminded of *Une Saison en enfer*: "I invented the colour of the vowels! [...] I regulated the form and movement of each consonant"' Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Look, Listen, Read*, trans. Brian C. J. Singer, 138, 139.

3. Wittgenstein refers explicitly to synaesthesia (between colours and vowels) in two other passages of *Investigations*. On the one hand, he supposes the occurrence of metamorphoses where the vowel is repeatedly pronounced. On the other, he accentuates the idea that the synaesthesias are not formed by transference, i.e. they are not metaphors.

**"No one has described as well as St. Augustine the mystery, plenitude and nature of this force. *Vis*, this is how he designates memory, a force that is synonymous with human nature and exceeds it."**

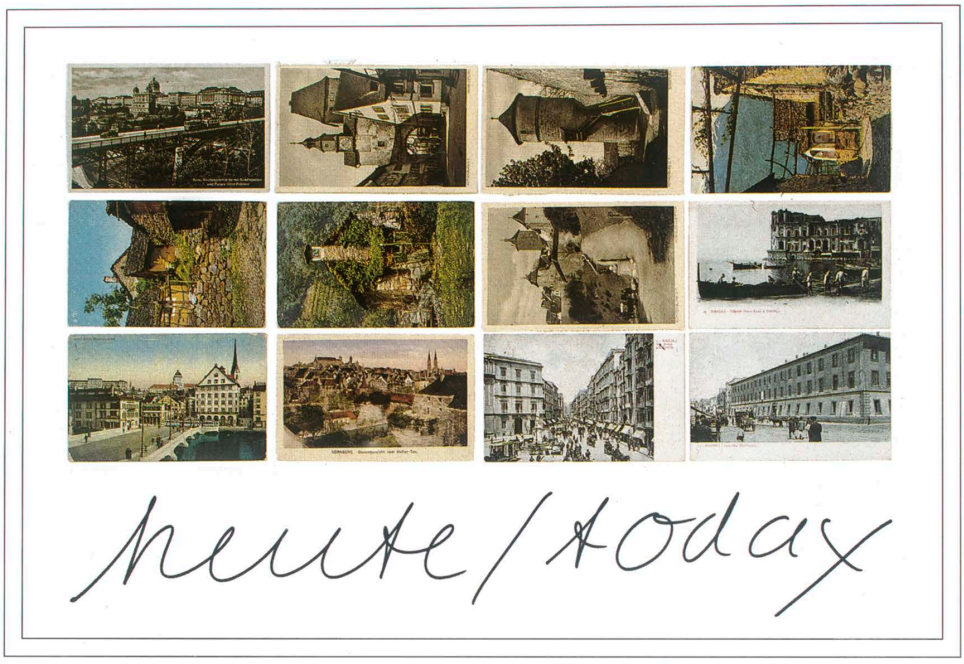
are interesting because they are not metaphors. The same is true of Rimbaud's verse: 'A noir, E blanc, I rouge, U vert, O bleu : voyelles'. There is no *ratio*, not even a concealed one, that justifies any of these associations, i.e. there are images that are beyond metaphor, beyond analogy, belonging instead to the realm of affinity. Between them there is a familiarity equivalent to the one that exists between father and son, lover and beloved, disciple and master – sets that are part of a magnetic constellation.[4] On the other hand, in the line 'Je dirai quelque jour vos naissances latentes', we find the poet announcing the swarm of harmonies that not every ear is prepared to hear or play.

### THE EXCEEDING IMMENSITY OF THE MORTAL BEING WHO WILL DIE

Vastness and spaciousness, absence of limits, inexpugnable depth: this is how memory, with its innumerable plains, caves and caverns, manifests itself in Book X of *The Confessions*. No one has described as well as St. Augustine the mystery, plenitude and nature of this force. *Vis*, this is how he designates memory, a force that is synonymous with human nature and exceeds it, in the sense that human beings are a question for themselves: 'I, truly, toil therein, yea and toil in myself; I am become a heavy soil requiring over much sweat of the brow.'

On the other hand, in Book XI, where the question about what time is prevails, time itself is seen as *vis*, a force that unfolds into remembrance (the disposition of the past), attention (the disposition of the present) and expectation (the disposition of the future). But it is attention that takes the lead, ruling over remembrance and expectation, things that belong to each day. St. Augustine even mentions the 'memory of the present', not to play with paradoxes but to establish the pre-eminence of attention, thus stressing that it is the heart of memory, i.e. the human mind. Hence, there is a moment in which we witness St. Augustine lose his footing, when he arrives at the formulation, as extraordinary as it is correct, of the memory of forgetfulness, i.e. we know that we forget: 'And yet, in whatever way, although that way be past conceiving and explaining, yet certain am I that I remember forgetfulness itself also, whereby what we remember is effaced.' In the invocation of God that follows, the experience of being incomprehensible to himself becomes a piercing cry, where the recognition of a 'life various and manifold, and exceeding immense' flows into dissolution: 'So great is the force of memory, so great the force of life, even in the mortal life of man.'

4. Benjamin develops this theme in 'Analogie und Verwandtschaft', *Gesammelte Schriften*, VI, 43-45. Let us not forget that in German the same word is used for 'affinity' and 'kinship', *Verwandtschaft*. Cf. also Maria Filomena Molder, *Símbolo, Analogia e Afinidade*, Edições Vendaval, Lisboa, 2009.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## I AM A PHENOMENON

> 'Well, when you arrived this morning you said: "Good morning, comrades. It's minus 17º C today," then you asked me to dial 917 95, to speak directly with comrade Leontev and ask him about the price of wheat in Ukraine; and to call comrade Levitine, on 121 32, 33 or 34, extension 247, and ask him about the price of pork…
>
> Afterwards you put three teaspoons of sugar in your tea, you stirred it but didn't drink it, because it was too hot; after looking at me, you still didn't say my name and told me: "Go to 49 Ucrainskaiaulitse, Building 4, Apartment 15A, 7th floor, and first try to call 192 95; I doubt we can find him, though; if that's the case, look for Pregorini or numbers 678 28 or 298 53 and ask to speak to comrade Orvid – his secretary's name is Olga." Then you asked me how long I had been working at the newspaper and I said, "Two months."'
>
> Peter Brook and Marie Hélène Estienne, *Je suis un phénomène*
> (all the excerpts from the play have been translated by Ana Macedo).

This was the answer given by the journalist Solomon Veniaminovich Shereshevsky[5] to his editor-in-chief to explain why he did not need to take notes. Astounded, as soon as he finished listening to Solomon, the editor-in-chief called the hospital where Professor Alexander Luria[6] worked. After a while, he dispensed with the journalist's services: on the one hand, his memory had worthier uses; on the other hand, its extreme acuity spelled political trouble.

The play's title – *Je suis un phénomène*[7] – coincides with Shereshevsky's internalisation of what Luria tells him: 'You are a phenomenon, you are the centre of a phenomenon.' When he arrives home he informs his wife, Lily: 'You know, I am a phenomenon, I am a phenomenon.'

I remember that when I was little the word 'phenomenon' meant a 400kg pumpkin or a three-headed calf found in Entroncamento. All of this appeared on the front pages of newspapers, which I saw in terror. And I have always thought that the multiple, tangled railway lines of Entroncamento were partially to blame for these cases. In truth, Solomon Veniaminovich Shereshevsky was a sort of three-headed calf.

Right at the beginning of the play, Solomon, who was already in the U.S., states that all of his life he had been waiting he did not know exactly what for, but he had always felt that true life was somewhere else. For thirty years he had been subjected to experiments in which he tasted the void, the bread and butter of the actor, but without the discipline of the actor.[8] He tasted the chaotic multiplication of synaesthesia, where all the senses are on the alert (e.g. the voice of Brodsky – Professor Luria's assistant – is yellow and salty, making him 'terribly thirsty'), sometimes with painful somatisation,[9] he was possessed by limitless mnemotechnics and the anguish of not being able to forget – both as an experimental subject and a circus attraction – and he knew first-hand the overwhelming exhaustion caused by the effort to tame that chaos. Approaching the end of his life, he said that true life was somewhere else, which proves that he accepted the void and freed himself from that devastating chaos.

**5.** He was born in 1886 in Torzhok, Russia, to a Jewish family. His father owned a bookstore and had an extraordinary memory for where a particular work or author sat on the shelves, as well as for the pages that dealt with this or that subject. His mother learned Hebrew at the age of eighteen and one year later she was reading the Talmud. As a child, he studied the violin, but he had to interrupt his studies due to an ear illness.

**6.** The founder of neuropsychology, Alexander Luria followed Shereshevsky for thirty years, first in the Soviet Union, and later in the U.S., where Shereshevsky had immigrated. In fact, the play *Je suis un phénomène* was based on Luria's study *The Mind of a Mnemonist: A Little Book about a Vast Memory*.

**7.** The play premiered on 24 March, 1998, at Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord, in Paris. That summer it premiered in Lisbon at Teatro da Trindade as part of the Almada Theatre Festival. I went to see it. Almost twenty years later, in 2016, I finally read *Je suis un phénomène* when I was invited to participate in the *Trindade Conferences*. My thanks to Joaquim Paulo Nogueira.

**8.** It is not that improbable to assume *Je suis un phénomène* is a kind of abyssal experience around the initiating act of becoming an actor: he who must forget what he has tried hard to remember, and the void this generates.

**9.** That is the case of one of the last experiences to which he was subjected when he was already in the U.S. The unbearable pitch of a sound makes him feel like he has suffered a burn to his hand, which turns red as if it had been actually burned.

The four 'passages' that I have chosen allow us access to Solomon Veniaminovich Shereshevsky. In Pliny's passage narrated by Ireneo Funes we encounter four types: the memory of names (all the soldiers of a large army); the memory of languages (the twenty-two languages spoken in the empire of Mithridates Eupator, king of Pontus); the memory of the relationship between men and their places (Simonides); the memory of sentences (Metrodorus). All of these types reappear in Solomon, to a lesser degree in the case of the memory of languages, which only include Hebrew and its variations (Yiddish and Aramaic), Russian and English.

Shereshevsky's ability to memorise something forever, assigning it a place or associating it with a colour, a sound, a taste, a tactile sensation or a smell had serious consequences in terms of face perception. We hear Lily describing this problematic recognition to Professor Luria: '… the faces… he sees them as lines running over water… even though he recognises everyone perfectly… […] If I am in front of him, he sees me, Lily, but if I turn to look at something… I disappear…' (Here it is almost impossible not to evoke Giacometti's drawings and the way in which he describes the perception of faces and bodies.)

The famous actress, after being invited to an experimental session with Solomon at the Krupski Institute (the test consisted of reproducing a long passage of the Old Testament, recited by her), is astounded at his mnemonic capabilities and puts him in touch with a circus proprietor. Then for years, Shereshevsky, like Lola Montez, becomes a circus attraction. At first it was only one session a day, later two, finally it was four. There are moments when his mnemotechnics collapses due to excessive exuberance: he starts placing the objects in the streets of his hometown; when he runs out of streets he is forced to travel to Moscow to find other available spots, but soon the streets of Moscow are crammed with things too. Moreover, if someone mentions Moscow, he is transported to Moscow; if they mention America, he draws a line that crosses the entire Asian continent to reach America. This effort of the imagination depletes him completely and, what is more terrible, as he grows progressively more tired his synaesthesia becomes more hallucinatory: a laugh heard among the audience turns into a wave, a woman's cough into an image of ashes. All of this prevents him from doing what is expected of him: to reproduce what he saw or heard.

Regarding the 'Exit' – later on – it was inspired by the torture of not being able to interrupt the retentive flow of his own 'affections', or to turn it into a compositional or constructive element, a poem, a musical piece, a painting. A prisoner of what he received continuously in immoderate abundance, Shereshevsky could never have been an artist or poet. Helpless, his talent devours him; he is a lost man who saves himself by the efforts of an unprecedented form of innocence. Here is his cast: a diary where he takes notes, which he will later offer Luria; the invention of another person, a double, whenever there is a repugnant task that must be carried out (e.g. when he is a child and his family move, it is the double that accompanies the parents and the furniture, while he remains in the comfort of his old home);[10] opaque duct tape with which he covers everything that he does not want to remember anymore: 'I only had to imagine that I pulled away the film […] I could even hear it squeak, all done… I crushed it in my hand and threw it far away…'; the decision to forget himself, which he

**10.** St. Anthony comes to my aid in the double imagined by Solomon, since his double came to Lisbon to help his father when he was very ill, while he continued to preach in Padua.

**"That is what fascinates me the most about Giulio Camillo's Theatre of Memory, the fact that it was actually built in wood as a miniature representation of the depths of the human soul, its powers and the disciplines that these generated."**

successfully accomplishes after trying in vain to get rid of mountains of papers full of numbers, by burning them with zeal. But his joy did not last long, since the flaming numbers rose up in the air like threatening spirits. This decision, born of acute despair, is a mystery symmetrical with the mystery pointed out by St. Augustine – that of the incommensurability of the force of memory, of the life of man, 'the being who will die'.

## TWO THEATRES OF MEMORY

Etymologically speaking, a theatre is the place where one goes to see.[11] The first of the two theatres of memory mentioned above was built in the sixteenth century.[12] It was an actual architectural piece, where two people, at least, could enter at the same time. That is what fascinates me the most about Giulio Camillo's Theatre of Memory, the fact that it was actually built in wood as a miniature representation of the depths of the human soul, its powers, the disciplines that these generated, and the divine forces associated with them. The aim of the theatre was precisely to train those who entered it in all aspects of rhetoric, which included not only the writings of the great rhetoricians, such as Cicero and Quintilian, but also the Greek myths, complemented by their Latin versions, and the hermetic and cabalist traditions. In the centre of the amphitheatre it said: 'Solomon's Seven Pillars of Wisdom'. The pillars corresponded to seven rows of spectators, each one under the auspices of an ancient god. A profuse eclecticism governs these pillars. In each of the pillars/rows a mythical-conceptual character or motif prevails, where cosmology and the cabalistic and hermetic tradition intertwine in a seemingly indecipherable order, in a kind of Tower of Babel of the correspondences between forms of knowledge and their encrypted memory: 'The art of memory has become an occult art, a Hermetic secret.'
(*The Art of Memory*, 158)

Upon entering, one saw that the seats of the amphitheatre where the spectators usually sat were occupied by the forms of knowledge, the mythical figures, the cabalistic, cosmological entities, and the spiritual forces that served as protection and provided them with content. It was not the actor who entered

**11.** We also speak of an anatomical theatre for the same reason: it is a place where we go to see a body, a corpse. The first and most impressive anatomical theatre is Padua's: it is shaped like an inverted cone, like Dante's inferno.
**12.** I follow chapters VI and VII of the Frances A. Yates book mentioned and cited above.


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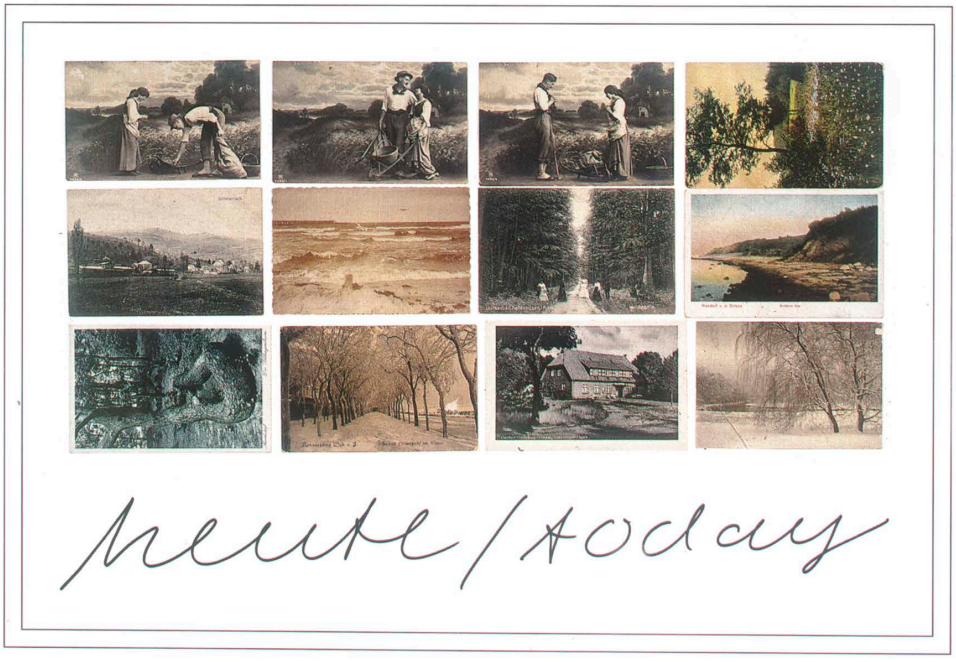
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**"We owe Bill Viola the invention of the second Theatre of Memory. It is an installation piece from 1985, an unusual mix of nature (a dead tree, with bare branches and exposed roots) and technology (fifty lanterns hanging from the tree's branches, and a video projection on the rear wall)."**

the stage, but the spectator who checked the seven doors, through which the vast and varied audience of secret knowledge had passed, waiting for the actors and the peace of their alchemical wrinkles. Through a surprising inversion of the theatrical structure, in Giulio Camillo's Theatre of Memory knowledge is a form of ecstasy.

No one else was able to see the theatre, because in the end it was destroyed. But there were some who saw it and described it precisely, in particular Vigilius, a spy sent by Erasmus. He was known for his contempt for Latin rhetorical tradition and anything related to mythology (in an instance of cosmic irony, it turns out).

We owe Bill Viola the invention of the second Theatre of Memory. It is an installation piece from 1985, an unusual mix of nature (a dead tree, with bare branches and exposed roots) and technology (fifty lanterns hanging from the tree's branches, and a video projection on the rear wall). The experience is inhospitable, a feeling of estrangement that urges us to close our eyes. We are immersed in a lost war between the death of nature, on the one hand, and electrical and electronic resources, on the other hand. Besides the lanterns flickering as if short-circuiting, accompanied by their corrosive sounds, we can hear the wind produced by a concealed fan. The room is dark, the tree leans diagonally, the only light comes from the lanterns and the glow of the video image. Between the little bursts of noise, we hear silences, welcoming them. This Theatre of Memory throws us into a scene of complete catastrophe.

But, no, perhaps it is a parable about the mysteries of the human brain; perhaps the dead tree with its lanterns constitutes an approximation of the brain's intricacies. In fact, the branches and lanterns are reflected in the video images and our eyes gradually plunge into the false depth of colourful ribbons and luminous spasms, interrupted by nothingness. Bill Viola, who was interested in literature about the brain, writes on this subject:


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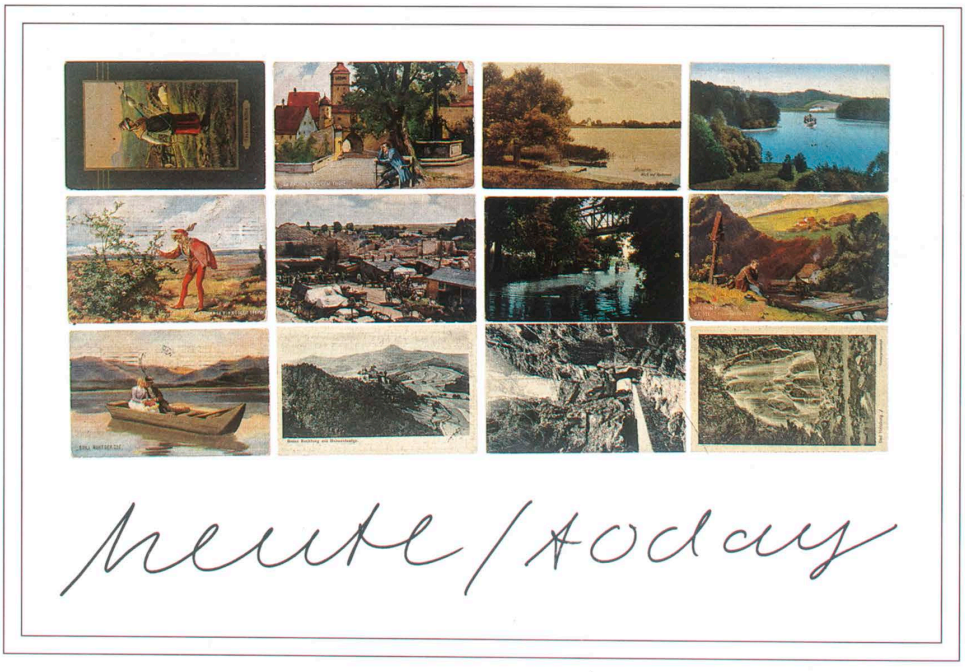
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> 'I came across the fact that all of the neurons in the brain are physically disconnected from each other, beginning and ending in a tiny gap of empty space. The flickering pattern evoked by the tiny sparks of thought bridging these gaps becomes the actual form and substance of our ideas. All of our thoughts have at their center this small point of nothingness.'
>
> 'Selected Works and Writings by Bill Viola', *Bill Viola. Installations and Videotapes*, MOMA, 1987-1988

### A PRECIPICE BESIDE OUR ROOM

> In this summer of 1977 I was staying at the Osteria della Maddalena when I came upon an architectural definition in the course of a conversation that was otherwise not very memorable. I have transcribed it: 'There was a sheer drop of ten meters from the highest point of the room.' I do not know the context that this sentence refers to, but I find that a new dimension was established: is it possible to live in rooms which drop off so suddenly and precipitously? Does the possibility exist of inventing such a project, a representation which lies beyond memory and experience?
>
> Aldo Rossi, *A Scientific Autobiography,* trans. Lawrence Venuti, 24

In his autobiography Aldo Rossi returns at least six times to the 'mysterious observation' heard in the Osteria della Maddalena (in the meantime the place has been destroyed, as he recalls during the fifth time that he mentions it), trying to absorb it as he goes about telling his story, like Montaigne. He realises that architecture is a shadow, that life, in its unpredictability, always invades and taints the architectural space, no matter how well-planned or purified it might be: '…architecture [is] consumed by the life which surrounds it' (*Ibid.*, 6). He must hurry, or the labyrinthine exercise of memory that does not resort to mnemotechnics, i.e. 'autobiography', might turn into 'memories', of which he is terrified ('I began these notes about ten years ago, and I am trying to conclude them now so they do not turn into memories', *Ibid.*, 1).

Writing an autobiography is not the same as writing a memoir. An autobiography is made of a series of associations, projections, analogies, and correspondences that always return, each one 'always never different, but never always the same' (Eduardo Chillida), unstable simultaneities that contribute to the self-understanding of the man who gives an account of his life as an architect, while trying to forget architecture itself: 'In order to be significant, architecture must be forgotten, or must present only an image for reverence which subsequently becomes confounded with memories.' (*Ibid.*, 45)

The room of his own that is *The Scientific Autobiography* teaches us that our inner lives are associated with a precipice. The room that Aldo Rossi might have tried to draw is necessarily linked to the void of interiority, to happiness, as he calls it.

This recalls the atmosphere that surrounds Solomon's life: we understand that at any moment he might tumble from a great height and not be able to get

**"Writing an autobiography is not the same as writing a memoir. An autobiography is made of a series of associations, projections, analogies, and correspondences."**

up again, as Joseph Conrad says in *Lord Jim*, quoted by Rossi: 'He had tumbled from a height he could never scale again.' However, Solomon managed to confront the demands of the mass of circus spectators and of his own 'affections' (which hounded him like relentless torturers) through simple techniques, as we have seen. He found the 'small point of nothingness', mentioned by Bill Viola, and thus became a taxi driver, immersing himself in a life that was no longer memorable.

### EXIT: THE MIND THAT DOES NOT FORGET (THEOLOGY AND ELECTRONICS)

Before reading *Je suis un phénomène* in 2016, my memory of the stage version in 1998 focused on Solomon's anguish over not being able to forget, since the ability to forget is like an act of justice on life's part – Nietzsche believes it is preferable to forget than to forgive. For me, it became linked, as a counterpoint, to the mind that does not forget, presented by Walter Benjamin in *The Task of the Translator*.

If forgetfulness can be a blessing, it can also become a curse – it is the latter that has troubled human beings since they devoted themselves to memory, such as St. Augustine. Let us imagine, as Benjamin says, that we forgot what we were supposed to remember, e.g. St. Augustine's *Confessions* or Rimbaud's *Voyelles*. In this case forgetfulness pertains to something that constitutes the hallmark of humankind, its own creativity. If we forgot every human creation, on what would our lives be founded? In the absence of a philosophical argument, Benjamin resorts to a theological one, undemonstrative but endowed with excellent fertility, since it exposes the mortal risks of forgetting the thing that nurtures human life.

> One might, for example, speak of an unforgettable life or moment even if all men had forgotten it. If the nature of such a life or moment required that it be unforgotten, that predicate would imply not a falsehood but merely a claim unfulfilled by men, and probably also a reference to a realm in which it is fulfilled: God's remembrance.
>
> Walter Benjamin, *The Task of the Translator*, trans. Harry Zhon, 254

**"If forgetfulness can be a blessing, it can also become a curse – it is the latter that has troubled human beings since they devoted themselves to memory, such as St. Augustine."**

Today, when the vast Augustinian palaces seem to be overflowing with sand, when memory has become the function of an implement that extends our brains, no one wants to forget anything and everyone can have at their fingertips every trace left by life, including the simulations of a life that has not yet existed. Those risks may have already become invisible, a consequence of the 'delete' key, pressed by an anonymous hand.

TRANSLATED BY ANA MACEDO

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Catherine Millet

# “The movement of their fingers, feeling their way along bodies in search of men’s trouser flies, calmly says no to everything that had always hemmed them in, says no to a whole world of lies and nonsense, says no to pretended purity, no to marriage, no to false love, no to a punishing god, no to the police.”*

Louis Aragon

* Louis Aragon,
*La Défense de l’infini*, 1928

**Catherine Millet is a writer, a curator and the editor of the magazine Art Press, of which she was the founder. In 1968, she began as an art critic for the cultural weekly Lettres Françaises, under the editorship of Louis Aragon. It is one of this writer's passages that Millet has selected for comment, making it a lever with which she raises her world. On the basis of the quotation from Aragon, whose lack of verbal propriety causes an erotic thrill, Millet – the author of *The Sexual Life of Catherine M.*, the book that made her name among the general public – provocatively declares her infallibly controversial ideas on women and their relationship with men. In her commentary, Millet carries on a controversy marked by violent anathemas and virulent accusations, with echoes that are still present.**

The fingers are those of women in the Paris metro, who have set out purposefully from home early in the morning; the trouser flies are those of men 'brutally ripped from sleep', as Louis Aragon writes, who stand in the metro before their day is hijacked by work, and there 'become conscious of their bodies again'. For the women, the promise of an affair, or perhaps just a furtive pleasure, briefly snatches them from the morality that makes their daily lives so dreary. The man who tells of having been their bedazzled prey admires 'the courage of their attack'. Happy are the men who have been approached by such liberated women, among the indifferent crowd and despite the jolting of the carriage! In the pages that follow, Aragon goes on to describe these encounters: how one woman, when he was expecting a caress, instead seized him forcefully, or how, when he was pressed up against the back of another, she spread her buttocks under the pretext of keeping her balance as the train rattled along, so that she was better able to move up and down against his penis. The introduction of the first metro lines coincided with the beginning of the women's emancipation movement.

This account, written at the end of the 1920s, forms part – under the title *L'Instant* – of a work called *La Défense de l'infini* [The Defence of the Infinite]. Aragon burnt the manuscript under the eyes of his mistress at the time, the very independent Nancy Cunard, who had many lovers. Nancy left Louis shortly afterwards. Some extracts from the book that had already been published, together with some texts published anonymously, such as *Le Con d'Irène* [Irene's Cunt], and other unpublished texts that had been discovered, were published in 1986, after the writer's death, with the title *La Défense de l'infini (fragments)*. The book contains pages in which the clarity of the vision and the beauty of the language bring the power of pornography to a climax. I cannot read them without feeling their urgent call at the pit of my belly.

I am a shy woman and was even more so when I was younger. I was embarrassed by men looking at me – not that I was afraid of what it implied, or ashamed of what it might imply about me, but rather because it made me think about my body, which I thought of as awkward, and because this thought was weighed down by a jumble of narcissistic anxieties. That is why I fell to using hand gestures a lot, probably to hide my body behind them. But I have never dared to take the initiative with my hands in the metro, though I have travelled on it every day, ever since I had to earn my own living, so since I was eighteen. Of course, there were times when I let things happen, when it was done gently. Once, on my doorstep, I kissed a man who had followed me right into the street; he was not seeking anything more and he went off happy. I recoiled only once, but that was on the bus, on a day of strikes: travel problems had made me very late and I had an appointment with my psychoanalyst. It is true that this happened at a different time to that described by Aragon: nobody believed any more in virtue or chastity, people were living together without getting married, or divorcing when they no longer loved one another, no one believed in God anymore and, as for the police, we were throwing cobblestones at them. I made love with many of my friends, as and when I wanted.

However, all my life I have had the fantasy of a fluid, fragile desire pervading the urban atmosphere, with a softening effect on the behaviour of people who are usually hurried, harried and repressed. Caressing a hand that holds open a door for you, feeling another hand sliding up your legs as you expose them to the person behind you on the escalator. A pressure or a knowing smile that holds

Alfred Stieglitz,
*Hands and Horse Skull*,
1931



you to nothing when you have to slip out of the metro's mass of humanity in the rush hour. All this, just in passing, without any fuss. Gestures and looks that would fill the air between each of us and everyone else with a sort of fluffy substance that would soften flesh, disarm the most hostile and win over the most hard-bitten. Sadly, in today's metro, a vast space has opened up between men and women who are only interested in jabbing at their phones.

Alfred Stieglitz,
*Hands*, 1919

António Guerreiro

Abdellah Taïa

# I, Abdellah Taïa, a Moroccan, a writer in the French language, a filmmaker, a homosexual, but not a traitor

**Abdellah Taïa is a Moroccan writer who has lived in Paris for twenty years. However, his vision of the Arab world, as he expresses it in his novels and in public, is not that of someone looking from a distance but of someone seeing from within. And on the basis of this meaningful familial and social experience of Morocco, he tries to destroy clichés, portraying a world that does not fit exactly with the way the West constructs it.**

Throughout the interview:
Yto Barrada, *Untitled* (painted educational boards found in Natural History Museum project, Azilal), 2013–15

Although resident in France for twenty years, in his novels – his oeuvre already numbers a dozen books – it is as if he still lives in Morocco. Abdellah Taïa, born in the city of Salé in 1973, is an Arab writer who the French like to describe as an example of unruliness. This is an image he despises to some extent, tired of the simplistic manner in which the French, and the West in general, regard the Arab world. His most recalcitrant public gesture occurred in 2006 when he came out as gay in an interview with the Moroccan weekly *TelQuel*, providing a colourful front page headline: 'Homosexuel, envers et contre tous'. This story of coming out and the dramatic aspect of it, in the context in which it happened, did not end there. He followed this up some time later with a letter published in the same weekly entitled 'L'homosexualité expliquée à ma mère'. Meanwhile, his renown in France grew, establishing him as a frequent media commentator, while some of his books achieved major recognition, such as the Prix de Flore-winning *The King's Day* (2010). In 2012, his oldest artistic wish came true when he adapted his novel *Salvation Army* for the big screen. The film was shown at several film festivals, including Venice, in 2013. Highly politicised, instilled with European literature, painting and film (he focused on Fragonard and the 18th-century French libertine novel while studying in Paris), Abdellah Taïa at first sight may give the impression of an uprooted Arab writer who has been Europeanised in every sense. But not so. His voice is that of someone who has remained faithful to the world he first knew and who fights to ensure this world is not reduced to stereotypes and sacrificed on the altar of prejudice and ignorance. Moreover, all of his writing stems from an experience whose strength cannot be reduced to the comfortable and innocuous exercises of narrative fiction. It is this experience, and the way it carries over into his literature, that he talks about in this interview in Paris.

ANTÓNIO GUERREIRO You arrived in Paris in 1999, you write in French, but Moroccan biographical details always lie at the heart of your novels.

ABDELLAH TAÏA It's obvious that my writing can only come from my Moroccan roots because I was born in Morocco, in 1973, and lived there for 25 years before coming to Europe. Even if, one day, I decided for some stupid reason to change how I see the world, I wouldn't be able to, because it's something that's created within, even before we're aware of the way it dwells within us. It's not just my view of the world; everything I am is Moroccan and Arab-speaking, not Francophone. I was born into a large and very poor family that had to fight constantly to survive. It's always there; it's something you can't forget. You don't betray your roots just by writing in French.

AG But at the biographical level, you've added a second, and long, life in Paris to this Moroccan one. And yet you keep returning to Morocco in your books.

AT You can think of the 20 years I've spent in France as, let's say, a 'prison sentence' [laughter]. Could living in a small cell (I actually live in a studio which is like a small cell) for 20 years make me forget, remove from my skin, and my eyes, the indelible traces of what I experienced before, for the first time? Everything I experienced for the first time was in Morocco.

AG So all of that continues to be insurmountable…

AT It wasn't a conscious decision; it's something that's beyond me. It's not a question of borders and nationality. It's a question that relates to the way the body is constructed as a memory. And this memory doesn't come from an intellectual universe; it doesn't come from what we read or study in school and university. It comes, rather, from a coupling, an osmosis, between the body and the earth, the air and the wind. We have no control over any of this. And everything I do at the artistic level, whether it be literature or film, comes firstly from these places, where we're unable to intellectualise things, unable to reflect on the dominant intellectual codes of the time, whether these be Western, French or any other. It's not therefore about being loyal to Morocco or the Moroccans, or of pride in being an Arab; it's a far more basic question than that.

AG But you use the French language…

AT But that's out of revenge [laughter]. Post-colonial and social revenge: to escape poverty and to escape the humiliation that I was afflicted by. I use the French language but I don't speak like those who humiliated us in Morocco: the rich Moroccans and the many French who go there. This thing we call French – the beautiful, extraordinary language of Proust, Molière, Foucault and Barthes – is used by these same French people to humiliate those who don't speak it well. I don't have a fascination for the language; all I have is a desire for revenge and to get to those who humiliated me in order to seize their language and change it from the inside.

AG When did you start to become fluent in French?

AT Quite late. Happily for me. I went to a state school in Morocco where all lessons are taught in Arabic. But I decided to study French literature when I was 19 at the Mohammed V University in Rabat and it was there that I discovered that my French was poor and decided to work at it to become fluent. But this came too late to change anything about the way I understand the world and react to it. I had already been moulded by the world. French was just a means to achieve a goal. For me, French, however sublime it may be, is nothing more than a means to an end.

**"I don't have a fascination for the language; all I have is a desire for revenge and to get to those who humiliated me in order to seize their language and change it from the inside."**

A G At that time, when you began the process of mastering French, did you already have a political awareness of this whole question of language?

A T I had some idea, but things weren't as clear to me then as they are today. I was a teenager. However, my awareness of the world was the same as my mother's and I knew the world she lived in, how she manipulated people for a little money, and all that. But this awareness of the world, which is just as important if not more so than the knowledge that comes from books, in all its intellectual forms, is the awareness of survival. In the same way that, as a homosexual, I learnt to identify at a distance those who wanted to rape or insult me, and had to arm myself with rhetorical tools to prevent them from hurting me. This knowledge seems to me to be just as important as the things I learnt later as a student. What I mean is that people, unfortunately, live in a world where the intellectual side of things – what we learn as students – is all important and they therefore oppress those who weren't fortunate enough to study. As if the way these people reflect on the world, react, struggle and transgress has no value. Only Rimbaud's transgressions matter. The transgression of people like my mother, a poor and battling woman, is seen as worthless in this world. And that's something that profoundly shocks me, even today. I think that what made my mother, the struggles she faced, is more impressive than what made Rimbaud or Simone de Beauvoir. Evidently, this judgment only has any value at my level. It's my job to say how much my mother's struggle, resistance and transgression are extraordinary. And it's even more important to say it because I'm gay, which means that this way of understanding the world, of discovering I'm gay in an Arab country and how I can save myself, means I can't forget what my mother has lived through and what she has done for me. It's not that she ever talked to me about being gay, but for my survival she did something that was essentially malevolent and wrong rather than correct and well behaved. I think this idea of doing wrong to survive is something that in certain milieus is also inscribed in the character of homosexuals. I found that out from my mother, not Jean Genet.

**"I think this idea of doing wrong to survive is something that in certain milieus is also inscribed in the character of homosexuals. I found that out from my mother, not Jean Genet."**

A G When did you realise, despite your family, social and cultural environment, that you were gay?

A T There was no when. It's something that existed long before me, inside me, that others saw but I didn't. That's the tragedy: at a particular point in time, we become aware that we only live our lives in the memory of others. And we don't realise when we become aware of this or that. But for the sake of answering your question, I'd say I always was.

A G And was that clear to your family?

A T Yes. But being gay, there, had nothing to do with the sense of identity that legitimises a series of grievances. It was the perception of a visible difference, one that could lead to insults and violence. And I couldn't rely on my family to protect me from the outside world. My family was extremely poor and didn't have the luxury of being able to defend someone gay, like me, at that time. And that today is something I have to understand. If I see myself just as someone marginalised because I was gay, I would have failed to understand anything about how the world and society works. Having someone like me around could only have reduced and subdued them even more. They had more important battles to fight than me. And I was with them in that battle because it was the struggle against poverty, lack of food and housing. If you're trying to fill an empty stomach, you don't lose time thinking: 'How can I help my gay son create his own identity?' And the problem today is that it's a kind of discourse that people don't want to hear. They only want to hear about the victimisation of beaten up gays. Which I also was, but I can't tell my life story just from the reduced perspective of someone who is very special within their family, as if I were the only person to suffer oppression, racism and violence. All of us – my mother, my sisters – suffered violence. I think it's very important not to isolate myself in my gay identity. On the contrary, I need to occupy this centre because if I stay in the realm of identity I will inevitably remain in eternal solitude. That's not my aim. I can't spend my life only with gay people, it's not possible. There are a lot more people besides gay people. Returning to your first question, why are my Moroccan roots so important? Because, as I said, everything took place there. There were

**"I'm not a betrayer of Moroccans, or Arabs, or Muslims. Everything I write has its origins in this world and I'm very aware of what is going on there at the political, social, colonial and post-colonial level."**

11 people in my family and almost nothing to eat. Shared hunger creates eternal links. And gay identity dissolves in hunger. I can't isolate the memory of this body in order to say I was the most shunned and the most repressed just because I was gay. It would be false to say so.

A G Was there a moment when you decided to say publicly that you were gay? Were you already in France?

A T Yes, I was already in France. It was in January 2006, on a trip to Morocco. But it wasn't something I'd decided to do in advance; it wasn't a moment I'd prepared. I hadn't said to myself, beforehand, something like: 'I'll use the words of Jean Genet, Foucault, or the great Arab homosexual poets; I'll study all of this and prepare a political speech for this hostile world.' Not at all, because you're never brave enough or, at least, you're never as brave as you think. You're only brave for a short moment. And life inserted me into that moment when a Moroccan journalist asked me in Casablanca: 'Can I say you're gay in the article I'm going to write about you?'

A G What books had you published at that time?

A T Two: *Another Morocco* and *The Red of the Fez*. I told the journalist he could. And the fact I said yes suddenly triggered something I'd missed. I realised then that I couldn't let people bury me in shame and hold me up as an object of clichés from both sides, Morocco and France. Here in France the clichés were about being an Arab, a Muslim and a Moroccan. And in Morocco, the clichés could be expressed in these terms: 'Look at the queer Moroccan living freely in Paris and is not like us.' Suddenly, I had to reconstruct my narrative so I wasn't pigeonholed in the gay narratives of the West, on the one hand, and, on the other, in the Moroccan view of a gay person living freely in Paris. I had to find a voice between these two places and say something that made some sense.

A G Like what? What made sense to you?

A T The sense consisted of saying that I'm not a betrayer of Moroccans, or Arabs, or Muslims. Everything I write has its origins in this world and I'm very aware of what is going on there at the political, social, colonial and post-colonial level.

I had to express myself, dragging my early experiences with me. And that was very important to me. Even if I was pushed to the margins, I always had to return to this world where I lived and shake it from inside. That's exactly how I feel about the French language: you have to enter it, re-inflate it and change it without kowtowing to Victor Hugo and Marcel Proust.

A G And does that require examining the materiality of language?

A T I'm extremely specific in everything I write. I never start with theory or with the books I've read. I don't want any of that to interfere in the way I talk about the world. I've read the work of the major French theorists and I studied some at university, in Rabat, Geneva and the Sorbonne. But when I write I expel these theoretical constructions from my head. I don't want the seal of approval of anyone when I write: not the King of Morocco, not my mother, not Proust, not Dostoyevsky. Perhaps it's a bit arrogant on my part, but I consider my world to be rich enough, to fill me with experiences, and that these experiences grant enough legitimacy. And it's up to me to invent the style to transform them crudely, i.e. to give the idea they are crude. I don't need a renowned writer or filmmaker to endorse my world so that it's worthy of literary portrayal. But it's also necessary to work with language. This started a long time ago when I decided that I wanted to be a director one day after seeing Egyptian films on TV and seeing the suffering of my sisters. When I started to study French and to want to speak it well, I picked up a notebook and started to write, it didn't matter what. In Morocco, there was always the idea that people who spoke French came from the Sorbonne or spoke like the French from the Sorbonne, as if they had learnt that intuitive French way of speaking the French language. And I found that odd: 'But they're Moroccan, why do they talk like that? It's strange.' I felt that French was something that made them false, that set them apart from others. Why were these people trying to be like the French? And I thought, arrogantly, like a pop artist, like David Bowie: 'If I speak French one day, it'll be in the style of Abdellah Taïa.'

A G And what was the reaction to this newspaper article in Morocco in 2006?

A T Outrage. But the most outrageous part was that immediately afterwards I gave two long interviews in Arabic to two major Moroccan newspapers. I was seen as someone who, because I had studied in France and learnt French well, and wrote in French, had betrayed Morocco, the Moroccans, my mother and the poor, and had passed over to the other side, to the other way of seeing the world. But I would never 'denaturalise' my world, it's not even possible. It was when I saw they were turning me into a traitor that I said to myself that I had to be as precise as possible in everything I wrote.

**"I think I'm aware enough of these political, colonial and post-colonial issues to not become a voice acceptable to the West because I'm a gay Arab who has come out."**

AG Is it an endless task?

AT Yes, because people live in ignorance: about Arabs, about Muslims, about Africans, about homosexuals. They need to be told about everything. And in Morocco nobody wants to know about homosexuals. They live with them but don't want to protect them, or even acknowledge them. Western models of gay identity don't exist, but there are other manifestations of homosexuality rooted deeply in daily life. Everyone sees them and everyone knows them; what's needed is to draw our gaze towards them, something that the Moroccans don't do. On the other hand, the only thing that interests the West is the fact that Arab homosexuals are oppressed. They forget that when Western nations colonised Morocco and all of Africa, they did everything to keep them in a state of repression. Colonial laws forbade homosexuality, but the West behaves today as if it has no responsibility. It's very complex and it can't all be reduced to the idea that Arabs are savages who repress women, homosexuals, etc.

AG Can you say that in Arab countries there is a strict order of appearances, superficial manifestations, that don't correspond to what actually happens at a deeper level, especially in terms of sexuality?

AT That's also true of France, Portugal, even New York. The West utterly changed the social structures in the Arab and African world, but today behaves as if it had no responsibility for that. It's as if during the whole time it colonised – to extract and exploit – it had in fact introduced civilisation. And today, after doing nothing for these people, it continues to see them as 'savages' while continuing to do business with the dictators that govern them. I can't accept the discourse the West expects about Morocco and the Arab world. Your question relates to Arab schizophrenia, but schizophrenia also exists in Paris between the XVI$^{e}$ arrondissement and Belleville, between Paris's margins and its chic centre. The Arab world was oppressed by the colonial system, it is oppressed by Western-supported Arab dictators and oppressed by rich Arabs that the West does big business with. Despite this, the Arabs managed to rise up in the so-called 'Arab Spring'. And they're making an incredible effort without anyone's support. The West continues to

see them as inferior beings unable to escape their traditions. I think I'm aware enough of these political, colonial and post-colonial issues to not become a voice acceptable to the West because I'm a gay Arab who has come out. I don't want this act of coming out to turn me into the brave Arab endorsed by the West because that would almost amount to a publicity stunt. Capitalism is very adept at turning a moment of freedom into a commercial opportunity. And the acceptance and integration of homosexuality in the West owes much to the fact that it's been discovered that a huge swath of homosexuals have money. They don't have families but they do have money. So how do you get at their money? In exchange for it, you make it easy for them to come out, you acknowledge their lifestyle, you allow them to marry, etc. Freedom then becomes a commodity. I can't be aware of all this and, at the same time, proffer a discourse about the Arab world that is still marked by the colonial narrative and ignorance. People don't know anything about my mother or my sisters but regard them as Arab women suppressed by Islam. They look at my mother and my sisters and all they see is a diagram, a small black hole. But my mother's life wasn't one of darkness, it was one of struggle, and I'm not going to reduce her to a political vision projected by the West and applied by the King of Morocco. I can't depict Morocco, Arabs and Muslims in the way prescribed by the Western canon.

A G And what is your public image in France?

A T First and foremost, I'm an Arab, a writer, a prize winner, a filmmaker and a homosexual. Despite being poor, I was mean and clever enough to get here. I learnt from my mother. I'm aware that I'm in Paris and that Paris belongs to me. What can they do to me? Throw me out? So what. I'd go back to Morocco, it's no big deal. Would I be poorer? That's no big deal either. It's true that Paris is a very important and fascinating historical city, but I don't want to kowtow to its historical importance. I aim to create my own path in this city and to fight to achieve what I want.

A G Would you be happy to return to Morocco?

A T Of course. Paris is also very lonely. I'm alone. I've never had a stable loving relationship. I've become hard and strong after all the battles I've had to fight to survive, to obtain documents, to withstand a kind of negativity and social segregation. You have to master a lot of social and cultural codes to be accepted.

A G In Parisian bookshops, where I bought some of your books, I found them not in the French literature section but in the section on Maghreb literature translated into French. What is the significance of that?

A T I made an effort to learn French and to write in it, a language that is not my own, despite being published by a major French publisher, Seuil. But that's not enough. I'm ready to keep fighting to change this perspective. And I've already managed a lot: I've won a major prize [the Prix de Flore], I've been nominated several times for the Renaudot, Goncourt and Médicis prizes, my books have

been translated and I've made a film that won an award at a festival. But it's a struggle and I feel that I have to take on a responsibility faced by my generation. The generation that came before mine was too influenced by the major French models, to which it was very submissive, as if it was awaiting the approval of France's great theorists. That shocks me.

A G Unlike Édouard Louis, a French writer with whom you could be compared, your literary discourse isn't based on theoretical cautions and sociological explanations.

A T Édouard Louis is 20 years younger than me and I come from Morocco, whereas he's from a working class community in a provincial city. I don't want to play down his efforts and triumphs, but my struggle was far harder, insofar as I had to cross borders, arrange documentation to legalize myself, almost had to scale the walls of the French citadel, and I write in a language that's not my own. The French, in their ethnocentrism and satisfaction with the grandeur of French culture, are flattered that I write in their language, but they don't realise the effort I make. That's why I don't accept the role of the Arab endorsed by France. There's a simplistic Islamophobia, an ingrained racism against immigrants. Would I, amid this ocean of hatred and racism, give the West the tools to beat down the Arabs and Muslims even more? Never. And if they want to kick me out, go ahead. There's a big world out there. Life is bigger than France, Britain or New York. But the West is so self-indulgent, so full of its political, economic and military importance that it thinks nothing significant happens beyond its borders. If you don't live in New York, Paris or London, you almost don't exist – you don't take part in what matters. That shocks and sickens me.

A G You've explained how you came to the French language and how it implied a struggle. How did you come to literature, when apparently nothing in your background would have suggested it?

A T I don't agree with that idea. Literature, as conveyed, is always wrapped up in a middle-class vision: it's the world of those who buy books, who adopt a posture, who show off who they've read, who answer to codified forms of superiority. But, above all else, literature is just books. Literature is imagination, narratives, life, what we do, what we tell others. Someone who gets up in the morning and talks of what they dreamt about for an hour, isn't that literature? Someone who sings in front of you with no inhibition, isn't that literature? My vision of literature is not just the limited vision of those who want to find in books the themes and characters they think should fill it. I was lucky to have a mother who talked constantly, like my sisters. I feel full of the stories of others. It was an oppressive world with no freedom, I won't downplay it. But it was a world where there was an essential thing: chaos. And that creates a turmoil that gives life and inspiration. I was filled with the chaos of others, the stories of others, the language of others, with a yelling, unfair, dictatorial, cantankerous mother, fighting and crying sisters, and streets in uproar. All of this is literature to me. For me, literature is above all voice. All my books are voices – I've never written a book in the third

person. They take the Western vision of literature hostage and impose voices on it that it doesn't recognise. But it's not just my voice, even if they classify me in the genre of autofiction. I don't deny there's an element of autofiction, but there're always other voices. To answer your question succinctly and directly: I think I came to literature because I was surrounded by people who never stopped talking. We were 11 people in three bedrooms. And inevitably this compacting of bodies, this density of bodies, penetrated the boundaries of my body, penetrated my view of the world, contaminated everything I am. In what I write, there's my voice and it contains all the others. My literature is not one of identity, egoism or egocentrism. In sum: it is the underlying flow that determines whether you write one day. I mastered French because my dream was to escape poverty, to become a director, to study at the Paris film school La Fémis. And that's why I copied and recopied French phrases. And the more I copied, the more I started to intuit French in a new way. And that was how I began to write, in French, accompanied by the underlying world: Morocco, my mother, violence…

AG You talk a lot about your mother but almost nothing about your father. And when you do, you depict a powerful and imposing woman who breaks the stereotypes of an Arab woman subdued by male power.

AT This submission of the Arab woman of course exists, but it's political, imposed by law. The daily reality of Arab women, like my mother, is extraordinarily transgressive and inspiring. And I can't betray this by portraying the world of these women in a form that satisfies those who think we have to save Arab women. If you want to save Arab women and all Arabs, stop doing commercial and military deals with the dictatorships, like Saudi Arabia and the Emirates. My mother had no need to be saved. She understood the dictatorship she lived under; she understood that the rich controlled everything; she understood that my father wasn't going to save her. She even built our house. She was a thousand times more of a 'man' than my father, while remaining a woman. I didn't need to read Judith Butler to realise a series of things about gender. I read her much later. What's important to me is to return to this world and to see it from within, without trying to give it a certain type of theoretical construction. Take the example of Bergman: he talks about himself, his relationship with his father, about Protestantism, about the silence of God and his father, about his relationship with hate, physical suffering and everything he experienced. His initial view of the world is transposed into his entire filmography. That's what I also want to do: to use this powerful and overflowing underlying world. And that is a world I will never betray.

AG Even living in Paris, you stay abreast of what's going on in Morocco and contribute by publishing articles. Do you see change taking place?

AT In my opinion, things are changing. The Arab Spring was proof of this, even though its political consequences have been disastrous because the Arab dictators are still there. But the Arabs are very well aware of that, just as they have a post-colonial awareness. The Arab Spring wasn't based on the Western revo-

lutionary model; it had its own domestic logic. Unfortunately, the Arab world is dominated economically by the countries of the Gulf who funded the counter--revolution. And that's how the dictators returned. But the fire is still burning. I may be too optimistic, but I prefer it that way, running the risk of fooling myself and adhering to a positive dynamic, instead of relegating the Arabs to a second--class status, a people that can't escape its traditions, or escape Islam. That's how they become regarded with a kind of ignorance and, above all, in a negative light.

A G In your public talks and interviews in Paris, do you view it as a mission to change what you see as an erroneous portrayal of the Arab world? Are you always fighting?

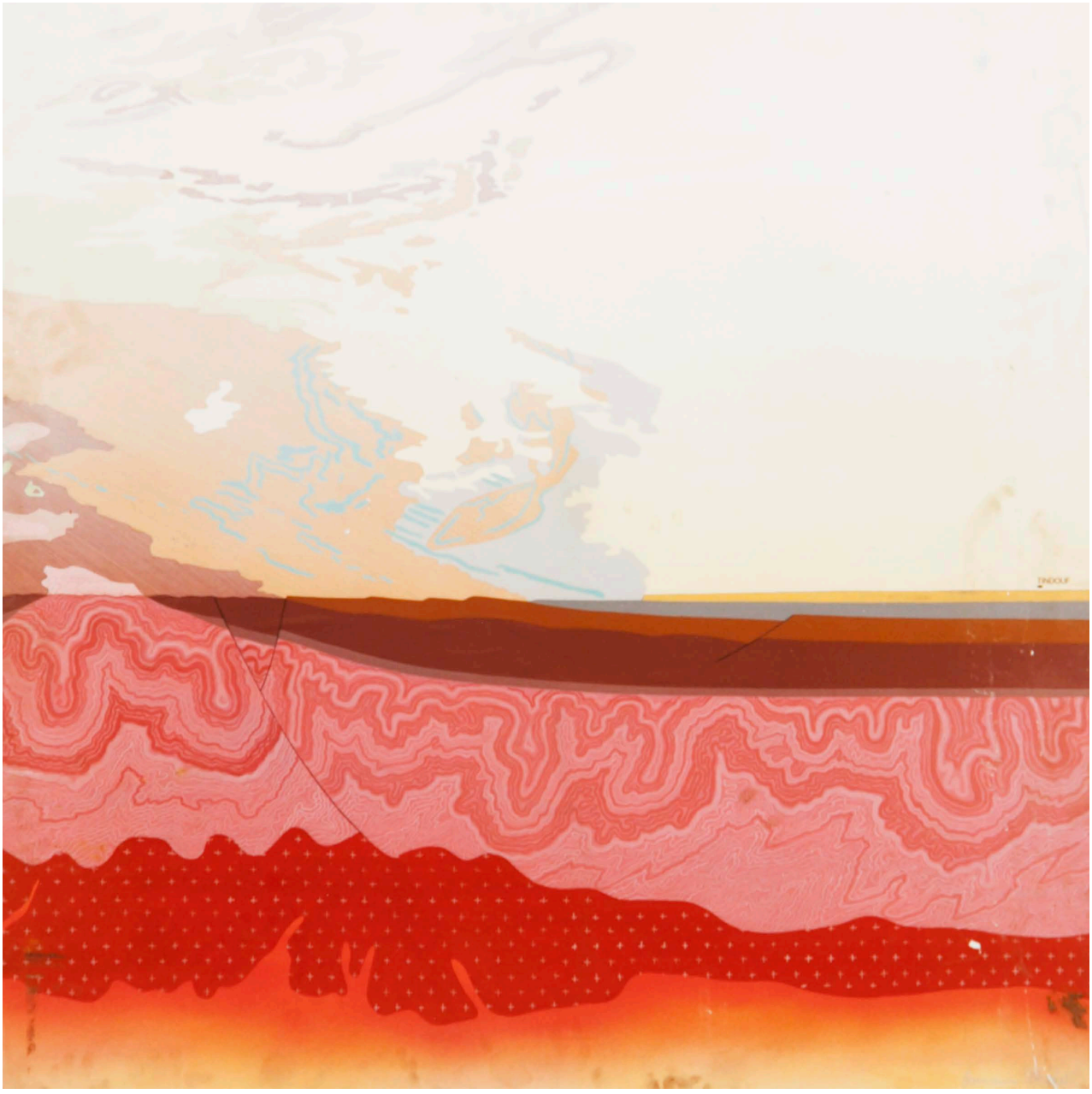
A T Yes, of course, because I realise, through the questions I'm asked, that it's necessary to keep correcting and trying to inform people of the basics about the Arabs, the Arab world and Islam.

A G Are you a practising Muslim?

A T No, I'm a believer. I believe in God and I also believe that we're not alone in this universe. I believe there are other entities we don't know about. Even people who believe in heaven and hell: once you deconstruct the logic of the religious discourse and how it oppresses people, you also understand how, in the state of servitude in which we live, someone can dream of a reward after death – heaven – since life on earth for many is terrible, or at least futile, with no deep meaning. If someone talks to me about this, even if I don't agree, I feel duty-bound to listen and to follow their thinking.

A G How did you get into filmmaking? Where did that desire come from?

A T As I said, I wanted to come to Paris to study film. It had been a dream of mine since I was 12, thanks to the Egyptian films they showed on TV. For us, that was all there was in terms of films. It was always on my mind: on Fridays, they'd be showing an Egyptian film. And we'd wait for the moment to arrive. The best part was the expectation, the wait for the image to appear. I was small, I was seven in 1980, and the TV was black and white. And what did we do while we waited? I think we built up an idea in our minds and when the image appeared, this idea never completely vanished. I think I built a very deep relationship with the images in my mind. Which was confirmed when I took a four-year course on the history of ideas at university in Rabat, where I studied the history of French painting and photography for the first time. I learnt how you could fix your gaze on a single image. But I also saw lots of films by Hitchcock, Truffaut, Fellini, other great European directors and even a film by the Indian Satyajit Ray. It was in Truffaut's film *The Story of Adele H.* that I first saw the face of Isabelle Adjani. But at that time, as I watched the films, I wasn't aware of their importance in Western culture. What impressed me, to the point of dreaming about studying film in Paris, were the Egyptian films. They were spoken in Arabic and discussed issues and themes relevant to us. We watched them together as a family, all 11 of



us, everyone hanging on those images portraying transgression, desire, sexuality, bodies, drama, melodrama, tears and screaming. When I directed *Salvation Army* in 2013, adapted from my novels, it was a stage on the long road I had started along as a child. I didn't study film in Paris in the end, but the obsession for film didn't die. When we see a film, how do we recreate it in our minds? Most importantly, I didn't watch all those Egyptian films on Moroccan TV alone. Our stories entered the screen and the screen entered us. And that created a kind of eternal passion in me. I think I've been very lucky in my life in two ways: having a family who didn't protect me as someone who was gay, though it was a bit mad and inspiring; and watching Egyptian films.

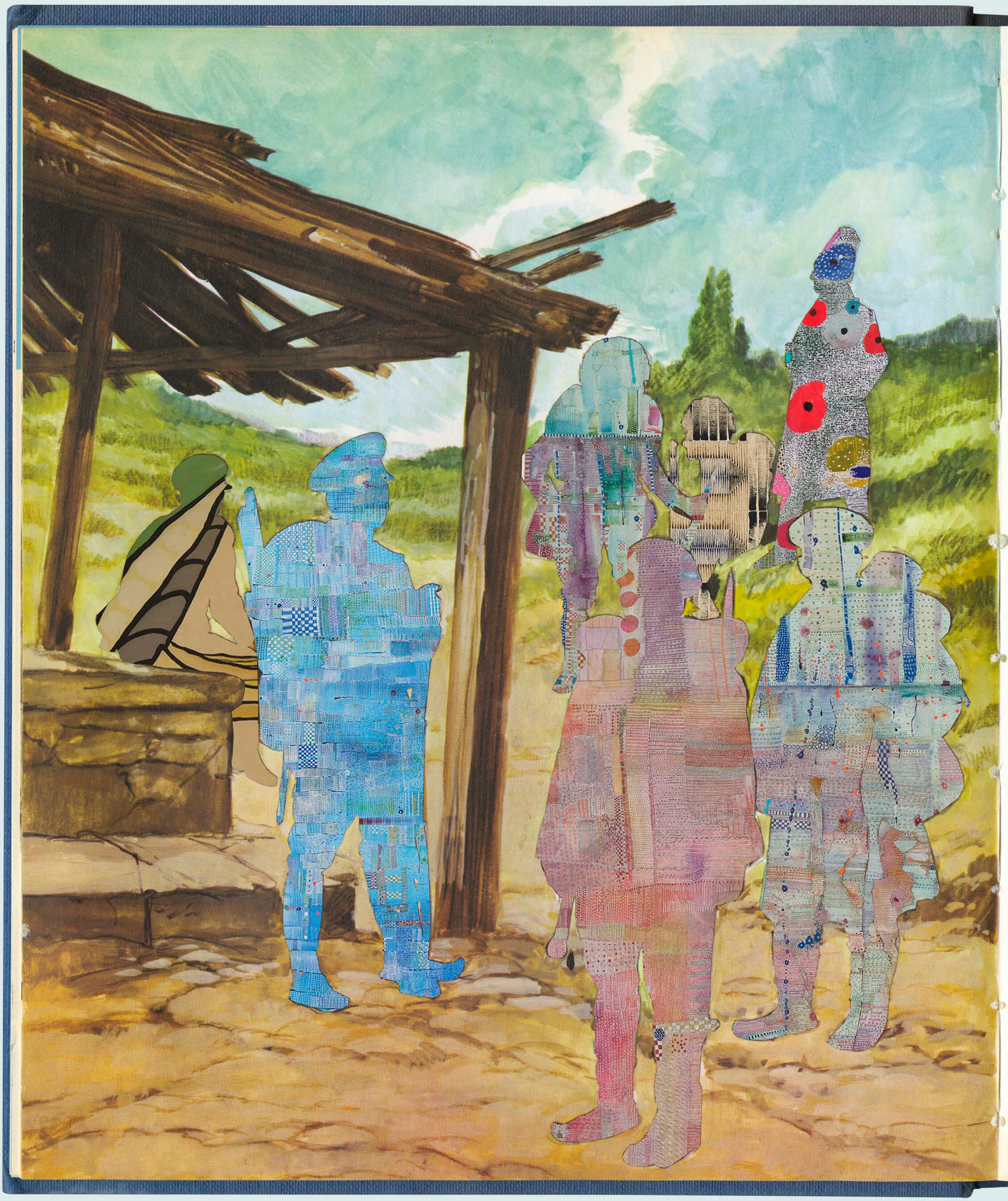
AG As a gay man, what experiences of violence did you face that you needed to be protected from? Humiliation?

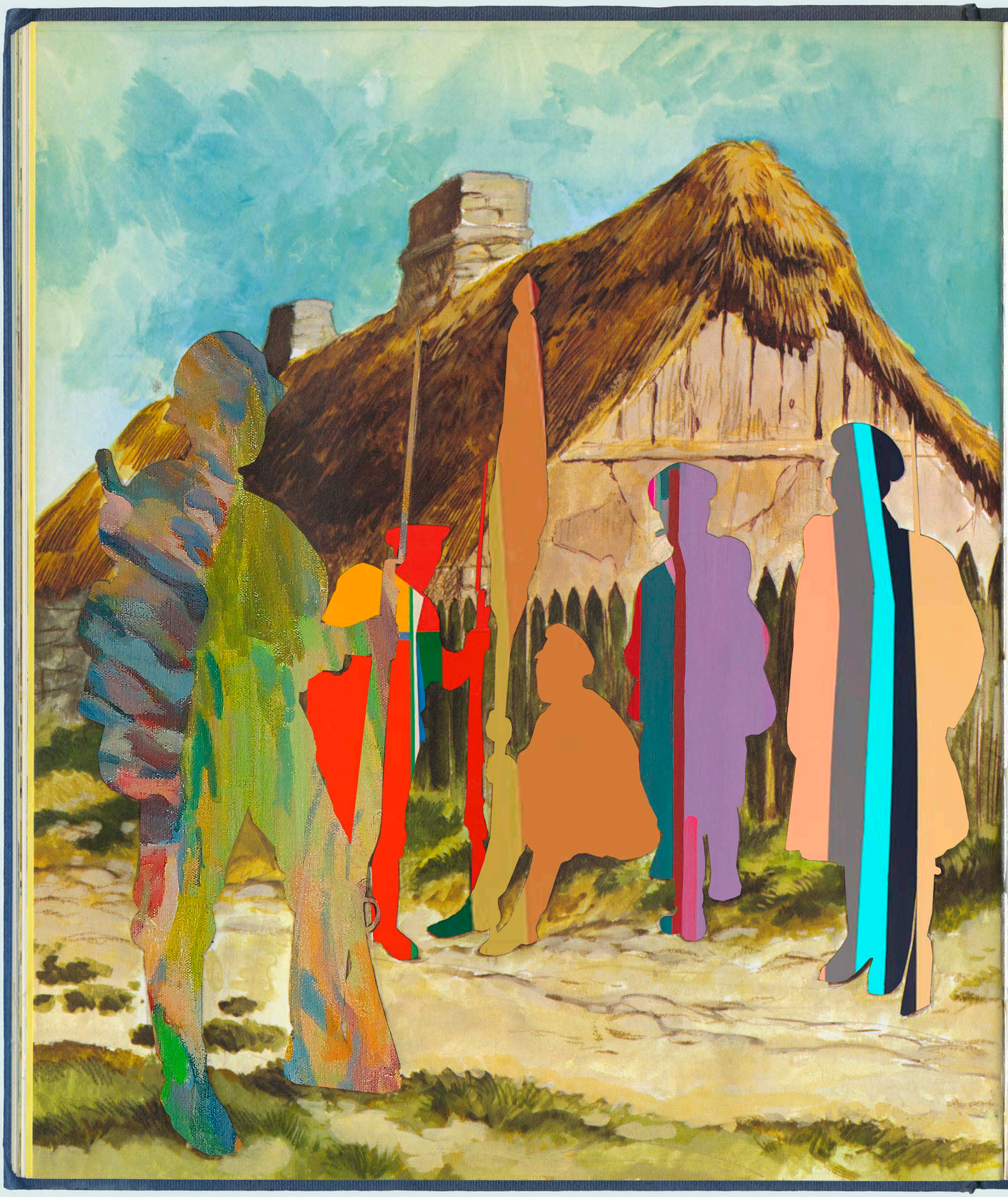
AT More than that. My novel *An Arab Melancholia* discusses it. The narrator is also called Abdellah. I have to say that my favourite writer is Fernando Pessoa. Pessoa's logic in inventing other people was an important discovery because, for years, I created another Abdellah in real life and presented him to other people. That's what saved me.

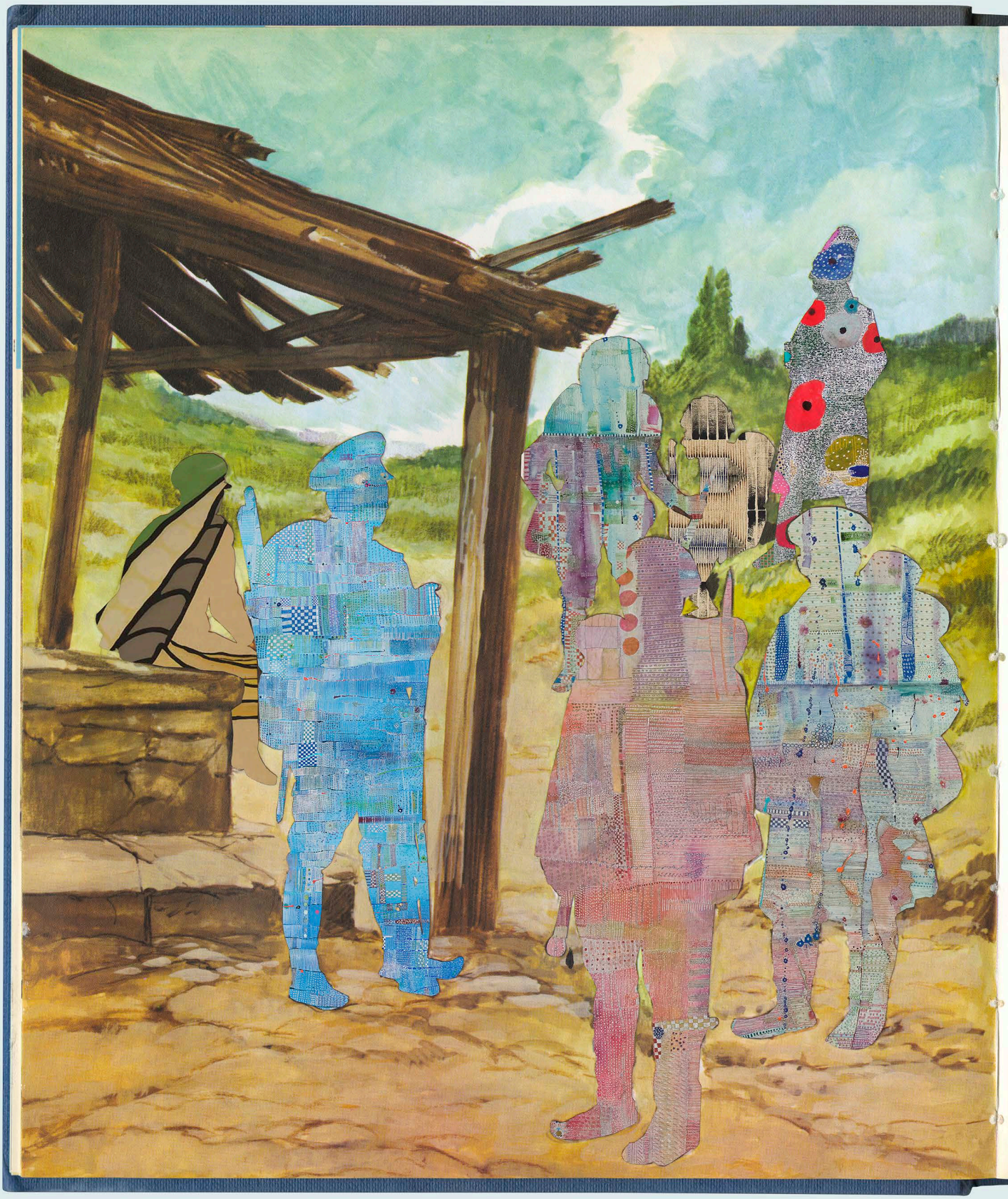
TRANSLATED BY CHRIS FOSTER

# Walid Raad

# Appendix 137: Les camoufleurs







Several Lebanese artists volunteered their services during the war years and created camouflage military fatigues for the fighting militias. Their designs were catalogued in this book by Farid Sarroukh, a mediocre painter who was irked (but not surprised) by his colleagues' eager collaboration with the militias.

Francisco Alba

Rui Patrício

# When can an Opinion be a Crime?

**When can an opinion be a crime? What are the limits to the freedom of expression? At what point does my freedom end because someone else's begins? These questions have been raised in our times with an urgency that stems from the need to square the freedom of thought and of expression in public (nowadays on the social media as well) with the prevention of threats of whose danger and seriousness history makes us aware. On these clearly topical questions, the Spanish writer and journalist Francisco Alba and the Portuguese lawyer and criminologist Rui Patrício pen their ideas.**

Book burning in Opernplatz, Berlin, 1933


Pedro Berruguete,
*Saint Dominic and the Cathars*,
1493–99

Francisco Alba

# Opinions and Crimes

A free, democratic and developed society should, in principle, allow public declarations of all kinds. There is no censorship – or there should not be any – and every citizen is therefore free to voice, and is *responsible* for voicing, their opinions on social and political matters. However, if these opinions are offensive or incite hatred, violence or discrimination against a specific social group for their race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, etc., are the people expressing them criminally liable? The Criminal Code in my country states that they are. We are governed by the rule of law, so I will not dispute this fact. Such opinions are a crime and that is a simple fact. I will focus instead on what is wrong with these opinions.

Imagine that someone attacks members of a marginalised race in the press. It is unlikely that those affected will be in the habit of reading opinion pieces in daily newspapers. They have no way of contradicting what is said, which translates in practice into having no right to defend themselves. The reader only hears the voice that accuses, not that of the lawyer. It may be said that a certain section of assimilated society will defend them, so they have their lawyers. There is no doubt about that. It is unfortunate that none of those affected has a platform to contest a statement such as this: black people and gypsies are not covered by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Is that not a *universal* declaration?

States governed by the rule of law protect all their citizens, including those belonging to the lower classes and unassimilated minorities, whether they are gypsies, black people or, let's say, albinos. A racist attack published in the press may target a *marginalised minority* (the weak part of the system). In the face of such an attack, this minority is both deaf and mute. It is not even aware of the attack and, if it were, it is dialectically defenceless. However, racism may also be aimed at a *prosperous minority*, driven primarily by resentment and envy. What both attacks have in common is that they target a minority.

A racist opinion may be well argued and appeal to reason, but it is always based on a position of strength. 'I, a member of the dominant majority, do not recognise you as members of the city.' If gypsies and black people cannot be assimilated, if they are governed by morals which are repellent to any civilised person, if racism exists even among gypsies and black people, we must ask whether every white person is good, honourable, peaceable, hard-working, civilised and law-abiding. The racist hypothesis is overwhelmingly simplistic: 'They are a mess and they deserve no kind of assistance. They should be abandoned to their fate.' It is not a matter of alleging that we cannot (note the use of 'we' and 'them') integrate people by decree and that public money is wasted on attempts to educate marginalised children and young people who will never learn anything. It would be a miracle if a Gustav Mahler enthusiast or physics professor emerged from a squatter settlement.

What we are arguing here is that *they* are excluded simply for being what they are.

Nobody chooses to be born and, indeed, being born was a crime for poor Segismundo, the hero of Calderón de la Barca's 'Life is a Dream'. Based on this fundamental principle, nobody chooses to be born male or female, black, gypsy, Muslim or Filipino (but aren't all people born free?). Educated people, who have had free rein to cultivate their imaginations and are able to observe from a higher plane, will know this. If they know this, then they will realise that being born in a squatter settlement, suffering ill fortune throughout one's life or being prison fodder are all randomly assigned fates. Educated people are aware of this melancholic truth: if their response were to show empathy rather than disgust, I believe that everything would be much better. Is dismissing a racial group and *all* its members outright and blaming them for their own abjection not shifting responsibility from those who think highly of themselves?

Are they *all* delinquents? Are they *all* savages? ...and, moreover, they mistreat one another in the circles of Hell they inhabit. But, I insist, is the dominant majority of any society uniformly virtuous? Are there no yobs, freaks or psychopaths among the audience at which an opinion piece of this kind is aimed? This type of article is not intended to be read by those it attacks – who are implicitly excluded – but by the assimilated. Slums are not a place for producing a solid kind of person, but those who fail to comprehend that a person living in poverty will let themselves go, becoming brutish and losing any respect for themselves they once had, have a poor understanding of human psychology. Bertolt Brecht wrote, 'First food, then morals.' Brecht lived through an appalling era – significantly worse than our own – yet he continued to show compassion for the weak. If gypsies or black people act like yobs, perhaps this is a product of the poverty in which they live. Brecht wrote a poem empathising with a mother who had killed her child. A couple of lines are repeated:

> But you I beg, make not your anger manifest
> For all that lives needs help from all the rest.

I recommend Brecht to anyone who believes themselves to be superior on the basis of race or any other innate characteristic. There is another poet that I would recommend, who also sought peace and mutual understanding during that same terrible era: W. H. Auden. In the poem he wrote about the day when World War II broke out, he says: 'We must love one another or die' and 'Those to whom evil is done / Do evil in return.' Remember that this was written in 1939. Auden was being neither naive nor cynical. The lines I quote here, especially the first, are entirely serious. There is no irony in them. *Homo sapiens* would do best to remember the hate-filled discourse of the 1930s and the catastrophic consequences which followed.

We are free to think what we like: nobody is condemned for their thoughts. Voicing these thoughts in public is quite another matter. It is not a question of 'criminalising' clearly racist or xenophobic opinions. It is something rather

different. It is about 'penalising' these opinions. The Criminal Code already does so *de facto.* The legal text makes reference to 'hate crime' in the following terms:

> Those who publicly encourage, promote or incite, whether directly or indirectly, hatred, hostility, discrimination or violence against a group on the grounds of membership of that group, for reasons of racism, antisemitism or other grounds relating to ideology, religion or belief, family status, membership of an ethnic group, race or nation, national origin, gender, sexual orientation or identity, for reasons of gender, disease or disability (Spanish Criminal Code, Article 510).

Under Abraham Lincoln's presidency, slavery was abolished in the United States. Do we agree that this measure was fair? Lincoln does not exactly retain Caligula's notoriety. Servitude was also abolished in Tsarist Russia. Turgenev was one of the writers who gave voice to the *mujiks*. According to his accounts, the erudite Russian understood that these slaves – or 'souls' as they were known – thought and suffered in the same way as Prince Bolkonsky. The great Russian writer *put himself in the place* of ordinary people. He gave them the voice they had been deprived of. A man of great humanity, Pasolini's sympathy for the dispossessed was as great as his aversion to the bourgeoisie. He shot a number of films in Rome's suburbs. The list of other admirable figures continues. Simone Weil worked alongside factory workers in order to understand working class life *from within.*

If only we were as harsh and severe in criticising the powerful, the big fish in society, many of whom have clearly dysfunctional modes of behaviour, as we are with the outcasts... Racist opinions are a sign of intellectual laziness. Understanding the 'other' requires effort. Prejudice clouds analysis. The issue of racism should have been resolved decades ago. What benefit have these doctrines had for Europe, especially Italy and Germany? Will we never learn from our mistakes or atrocities? Unfortunately, I believe that the encroaching climate crisis will leave us without space to address other issues. As sea levels rise and the Earth suffocates, some people will continue to look down on others.

TRANSLATED BY ELEANOR STANIFORTH / KENNISTRANSLATIONS

Hartmann Schedel,
*Suns and Book Burning,*
*Nuremberg Chronicles*,
1493

Leonardo da Vinci,
*Saint John the Baptist*,
1508–09 (180°)

**Rui Patrício**

## Freedom of Expression: A Problem of (Divine) Proportion

At the beginning, it is never the verb, always the question mark. We do it the correct way, using the right methodology. First we state the question. When is expressing an opinion a crime? Let me start by saying that freedom of expression, in the sense used by João Bénard da Costa in his book *Muito Lá de Casa* [*A Very Domestic Issue*] (a collection of articles about his beloved cinema), is, and has always been, 'a very domestic issue' as far as I am concerned. One of the above articles, 'O Problema da Habitação' ['The Problem with Housing'], he ended with the following: 'As Rui Belo wrote, "A house is the most serious thing in life." And being closely attached to it is also very serious.' Now let me move on to analysing the question I was asked, affirming my deep attachment to freedom of expression, in the sense set out in our constitution (and, one underlines, in the part relating to fundamental rights and duties), i.e., that everyone has the right to express and freely divulge their opinion through word, image or any other means, and the exercising of this right cannot be limited by any form of censorship. Without freedom of expression, the democratic, liberal and pluralistic state does not exist; in sum, open society, in its best and most fruitful sense, is non-existent.

Having said that, and adding the seductive perfume of a certain 'timeless air', the reader could be led to believe that the text ends here, and that my answer to the question is 'never'. But the hasty reader would be mistaken, just like – in my opinion – all those today who defend and/or cultivate unfettered 'freedom' of expression (the quotation marks are deliberate). Freedom of expression, like any other form of freedom, in fact, has limits, particularly when it clashes with other fundamental rights, whether these are also set out (and perhaps not by accident prior to it) in the constitution, such as moral integrity (which contains honour), or the right to a good name and reputation (and we will stop there, at the field of defamation, so as not to extend the criminal analysis too far). This is indeed the case, however hard it may be for those who see open society and 'libertinism of the word' as synonymous. By extension, in the constitutional field that sets out and governs freedom of expression, it is stated that infringements committed in exercising this right are subject, among others, to the general principles of criminal law. And this – simplifying what is complex and is the result of a long evolution of ideas – is no more than an appeal for a healthy exercise of practical agreement between mutually challenging or even clashing rights. Which in legal discourse is the same as saying, in more lay terms, that the freedom of one can end where the freedom of the other begins.

Let us develop and expand the problem by beginning with the conclusions, which, for me, are twofold: first, expressing an opinion in our current legal system can be a crime – it rarely is, but it can be; second, this is how I think it should be. I therefore reject the idea that there should be no restrictions on

the right to freedom of opinion (as a form of freedom of expression), or, to an even greater degree, that it should not be subject to the right of last resort, that of criminal proceedings – an idea that has started to spread amongst us, and which has also begun to influence the courts and legal scholars, not to mention a vast field of 'commentators', 'critics' and 'back-seat drivers', who discuss everything while often having little idea of what they are discussing. In my defence, it is inevitable that the explanatory process will contain 'legalese' (since it essentially deals with a legal problem, while the other, in its essence, merely concerns itself with freedom in all its polyhedral richness).

The crime of defamation occupies a complex crossroads between two fundamental rights: the right to the protection of one's honour and good name, on the one hand, and the right to freedom of expression and opinion, on the other. When analysing a criminal offence, one can conclude that, in addition to the accusation, an opinion that expresses a disreputable judgment or harms someone's personal standing may also constitute a crime. The freedom to express an opinion or criticism may indeed harm someone's honour or personal standing if it affects or disparages the good name and reputation this person enjoys in the community, or even if it affects their personal dignity. This even applies to 'pure' opinion, and not just for those expressions (in words, images or other means) which, albeit concealed, are in fact accusations. Given what these are, they must be dealt with in this context, and here criminal judgment is more restrictive and severe, in contrast to the greater tolerance towards 'pure' and true opinion.

The crime in question occupies a border zone – a challenge or clash zone, more accurately – between the right to freedom of expression and opinion and the right to one's honour and good name. Therefore, following the aforementioned exercise in practical agreement, it must be interpreted in terms of not undervaluing or sacrificing the right to freedom of expression and opinion as a fundamental right, thereby contributing to an undervaluing of the idea of honour, but without completely overriding it. In fact, the expressing of a critical or opinionated judgment in principle may only be considered defamatory if it is motivated by, for example, revenge or the settling of scores, with the intention of a personal, unmotivated and/or indiscriminate attack. On the contrary, the expression of an opinion or criticism does not harm a person's honour or reputation (in a criminal sense) if it deals with the actions and achievements of the person in question and is not aimed at the person themselves, i.e., if it does not ascribe certain characteristics to the person which identify them as deserving of distrust. Therefore, a balance is achieved between the two rights by establishing that a crime is only deemed to have been committed in situations where criticism or opinion are used as a means by which to disparage a person's good name and social standing (or, of course, as a biased or camouflaged means of dishonourable accusation). The preponderance of freedom of expression is even more conspicuous within the framework of criticism and commentary of a political nature (or any other of sufficient public relevance), in whose context a wider margin of freedom of language is accepted, in view of the understanding that the holders of public and political office are subject to broad public scrutiny.

This is the tendency that jurisprudence has followed. If, traditionally, the Portuguese courts have placed greater value on the right of one's good name, limiting or even curbing freedom of expression in this area, and ruling in favour of the crime of defamation, more recent decisions have taken a different approach. These have been inspired, above all, by the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights, which has always ascribed greater importance to freedom of expression and opinion than the right to one's good name and honour. It was always this court's prevailing opinion that freedom of expression and opinion, as a pillar of the democratic rule of law, is essential to the freedom of personal development and assumes the recognition of the different personalities of citizens, with the consequent respect for various forms of communication, be they more rational and considered or more metaphorical or exaggerated.

This emphasis on valuing and protecting freedom of expression over the right to honour is even greater in the field of humour, satire and caricature, where exaggeration and distortion are innate characteristics. Humorous comments, accompanied by an ironic and satirical, and at times even offensive, tone, are also widely acknowledged as a manifestation of the freedom to express ideas, opinions and judgments. Statements uttered in the context of humour, therefore, do not fit easily into the crime of defamation.

We therefore conclude that jurisprudential (and doctrinal) interpretation of the crime of defamation has been increasingly restrictive, especially in situations where opinionated judgments or humour are in question, bearing in mind the value ascribed to and the necessarily ample protection afforded to the fundamental right to the freedom of expression and criticism when confronted by the right to honour and personal standing. However, this restrictive tendency must not lead us, as it sometimes has, to state that, in the matter of expressing an opinion, 'anything goes', under penalty of not only disregarding the constitutional and criminal decrees in force but also draining the protection of honour and good name and reputation when an opinion (even if true and proper) is at stake.

If this were demeaning, gratuitous, unconnected to what is being discussed or assessed and essentially aimed at the person and their integrity (if this, in sum, were its purpose) – and above all if it were perceived as such by someone listening, reading or watching, since this communal and objective interpretative scope is the essential benchmark – then it is a criminal matter. And that seems correct to me, under penalty of confusing freedom with a 'free for all' and also under penalty of hiding – and permitting – a society where reputation is of no value while masquerading as open and plural. This would be intolerable, especially given that our civilisation and legal system are based on human dignity, and, moreover, given that a society can only be said to be free if it can preserve and balance every type of freedom and right, and not just some. The challenge, then, is to achieve a (permanently pursued) balance between conflicting rights and if, in certain cases, some must outweigh others, they cannot do so always and in every case, under penalty of those sacrificed being no more than mere rhetorical affirmations, devoid of content.

Essentially, it is a question of proportion, albeit a difficult, challenging and complex one in which there is a permanent tension. But it is a necessary goal of 'perfection' towards which our communal life and legal edifice should aim. If you like, bearing in mind at once the difficulty of the undertaking and the perfection of the objective, one would say that we are dealing, as Vasco Graça Moura said about Camões, with divine (or golden) proportion (in a book with precisely that title).

Two further conclusions present themselves from this: first, that the answer to the question of when expressing an opinion might be considered a crime can only be given on a case-by-case basis, and cannot be 'never' or 'always'. The right answer, based on reasons presented in brief, is 'it depends'. As a general rule, the most that can be said in response is 'sometimes, but rarely'.

The second conclusion is that the question of expressing an opinion in terms of exercising freedom of expression to the detriment of other fundamental rights is not a purely criminal one. In fact, this is not, I believe, even where the essential problem for communal life and healthy public interaction (and therefore intrinsically political interaction, in its most profound sense) lies. While the focus here is purely on the criminal aspect of this issue, I cannot resist a few thoughts which, briefly summarised and in general outline, aim to contribute to the question of whether expressing an opinion may not be regarded as a crime – not in terms of a typical, unlawful, wrongful and punishable action (in criminal law terms), but rather in terms of eroding the essential foundations of a healthy community. Just as Spinoza exhorted believers not to judge themselves superior to others, we must exhort (and criticise) anyone who holds an opinon not to become entrenched in the feeling of superiority. And the same goes for opinions which are non-committal, or those which seem objective but are merely dependent on a friendship, an agenda or an unhealthy instinct. Or opinions which generalise, which label or which are based purely on stereotypes; or which do not study, which are 'lightweight' and/or which are demeaning for no other purpose than to be demeaning. Et cetera. If it is true – and necessary – that 'deference' is not pretty, it is no less true that we must continue to cultivate respect. It is the difference between freedom and libertinism. And, once again, it is a question of (divine) proportion.

TRANSLATED BY CHRIS FOSTER

Silviano Santiago

# Knot, knots

**Electra challenged the highly-esteemed Brazilian writer, essayist and university lecturer, Silviano Santiago, to keep a diary for a period of time. In a serene and subtly disenchanted tone, he recorded certain points in his day-to-day life – actions, meetings, reflections, renewed visits to literary works – blending them with the tense political and cultural life of Bolsonaro's Brazil.**

Herbert List, 1933

Nothing exists without a purpose. Therefore my existence has a purpose.
What purpose? I do not know.

Charles Baudelaire, *My Heart Laid Bare*.

2019

5 SEPTEMBER

Last night, my life twisted into a knot. Unprecedentedly. In a few hours and on a single night, my joy and grief, conjoined, were brought down to earth. The knot was tied between 7 pm and 11pm on 4 September. How could it be undone?

In a Rio de Janeiro bookshop, I launched an anthology of essays. In a hospital not too far away from the place where my presence was required, the oldest of my still living friends and colleagues died.

Production of the book wasn't easy. Declining finances intervened and the book market in Michel Temer and Jair Bolsonaro's Brazil was bankrupt. The celebration had been scheduled more than a month earlier.

The death of my colleague and friend was expected: he had been ill for some time. His condition had made it difficult for him to work.

In common, we both taught, wrote, and read each other's work. I should have gone to the hospital. He, to the bookshop. We were out of synch in joy and mourning. The night stretched out its hands, grabbed the loose ends and tied its knot.

Only the coincidence was unpredictable.

I don't believe in the randomness of fate. A tied knot is meant to have a purpose. A generally ambiguous one. A purpose kept under lock and key. And in its being thus, one must rush backwards. The machinations of fate aren't last minute. Written down in life's diary, they await H-Hour. Without arousing suspicions or, to be more accurate, arousing only superficial suspicions, two friends, two separated souls, worked in muffled whispers to achieve this outcome – click! – on 4 September.

The knot's clearest purpose is the responsibility of another holy trinity – serious error/punishment/atonement. I am being punished for something I should not have done but did. On purpose? Gratuitously? No matter. My punishment arrives on a day of celebration. Hail Marys and the Lord's Prayer, said on my knees before the real Holy Trinity, miraculously exonerate the sin committed.

In the patriarchal Brazilian family, punishment is the routine cure for injury. In the morning, a son fails to kiss his father's hand. Outrage. A paternal slap, which punishes and rights the wrong, is just – according to poet Carlos Drummond – a *harsher form* of the child kissing his father's hand. The view of the religious triads is to persecute, and its collective reach is extensive.

It's not hard to envisage other views on the consequences of the knot tied by the night. I submit them to the reader of this diary. If, as an eye or ear witness, I haven't already done so.

Friendship and camaraderie is the ideal context for *coincidence in the unpredictable* to reverberate and propagate. Much is subjective in the game of conflicting situations. The knot 'had been spoken of' and awaited. Friendship and camaraderie, while words of great spiritual significance, do not soften the low blow of fate – a blow as real as that of a boxer in the ring of life. In truth, concepts stemming from universal fraternity are very effective fertilisers of brave and varied conversations that find their raison d'être, their purpose, in fate. Like Pilate in the Creed, the night propitiates the outcome woven into Biblical parable. In imposing itself, the knot encompasses a collective. The knot. Knots. There were fans in the bookshop and fans in the hospital. Fans interconnected by the predictability of the unpredictable.

A blind knot is the open sesame to the chatty social cavern, where a group of friends and colleagues hide!

If blind, there would be no way to untie the knot. Time is what suddenly unties it. In the dimension of the event, the hypocrisy of social life is elegantly charged with untying it. Game over. Fate's referee blows his whistle. The intrigues re-begin and the plots take shape. The restart is only different from the start because none of the many people involved is the same as they were. The restart makes everyone similar.

René Burri, 1967

'– *Hypocrite lecteur, – mon semblable, – mon frère*!' Charles Baudelaire.

9 SEPTEMBER

Monday. I slept all weekend. I was tired. For no apparent reason.

The final days of last week passed uneventfully. On Thursday, I went to another book launch, at the same place. I told my historian colleague that I felt like a zombie. My body was afflicted by lethargy. I went to my friend and colleague's wake on Friday. Stripped of the elegance of humour, the twisted gazes at the door to the crematorium, if somewhat dubious, straightened. Nobody likes to be judged morally cross-eyed, after all... Conversations, silence and tears, the usual. I had lunch out with my taxi companion. Fatigued, I opened the door to my flat. I was not eaten away on the outside. I was eaten away on the inside, but not from indigestion of the delicious *picanha* served at Majórica. I turned on the TV. President Trump says that the black senators in Baltimore are America's real racists. They are working against their own people. Because of their negligence, he says, Baltimore's neighbourhoods languish in rat-infested rubble. And he visits the city with a view to garnering the support of Republican politicians in the next presidential elections.

Half asleep, I remembered that Jared Kushner's family owns a real estate company in Baltimore. In a daydream, the word 'gentrification' came to mind and a random piece of verse: 'Or rat's feet over broken glass.'

Sleep, only sleep, saves us from anguish, though it only subdues the body when combined with a Stilnox.

I awake from my very restful 48 hours of sleep. I rush over to the bookshelf and pick up the T. S. Eliot I'm looking for. And I highlight a verse from the poem *The Hollow Men*:

> Those who have crossed
> With direct eyes, to death's other Kingdom
> Remember us – if at all – *not as lost*
> Violent souls, but only
> As the hollow men
> The stuffed men.

In the eyes of the other, I cross, hollow, from the brambles to death.

'Mistah Kurtz – he dead.' T.S. Eliot borrows one of the epigraphs for *The Hollow Men* from Joseph Conrad's novel *The Heart of Darkness*. I don't need to take another book from the shelf to add to T.S. Eliot's verses a phrase by Jean-Paul Sartre explaining the current penchant for the expression 'fake news'. I keep it in my memory: 'I admire the way we can lie, putting reason on our side.'

I'm not sincere. We're all hypocrites. Am I a cynic by nature? Or perverse? 'Fernando Pessoa is one of those people who was born a poet,' I heard Agostinho da Silva say at the beginning of his conference on Pessoa many years ago and thought it amusing. I'm not sincere. Am I Pessoa, the person who was born a writer of fiction? In my favour, I used the pseudonym António Nogueira as a youth.

12 SEPTEMBER

Massage day. The rewards my body receives weekly are due to my cardiologist. On diagnosing my rebellious high blood pressure, he prescribed beta-blockers and recommended bodybuilding. In my dotage, it would never have occurred to me to replace the enchantment and pleasure offered at a mature age by extending one's body out on a sandy beach on a sunny day for the professional hands of someone else. Ipanema Beach, 1972, Dunas do Barato.

I hire a personal trainer. Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays: bodybuilding at the gymnastics academy. Thursdays: massage.

In the salutary and hedonistic silence of the massage table, I remember the 1960s, a time when I lived and worked in the USA. In an unknown society, my curiosity was piqued. A reader of newspapers and magazines, I was excited by a remarkable thematic change in investigative journalism, a high point in that country's press. I didn't give up books. The crime novelists Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler formed a partnership with the newspapers and weeklies. Non-fiction in one format; fiction in the other. Curiosity bound the reader's interest and tied the knot.

Suddenly, the knot was undone. New journalists and new writers unexpectedly sparked my interest. I emerged from the pages of politics and crime to submerge myself in the recent long essays by the journalists Gay Talese and Tom Wolfe. They collided with the sensibility of someone born in a peripheral country, until then only reached by the cosmopolitan tentacles of Hollywood. The two journalists abandoned a minefield to enter virgin, slippery and demanding terrain – that of privacy in people's daily lives. I discovered a modern society in a clear state of ebullience.

René Burri, 1967

Herbert List, 1933

In *Straight by Day, Swingers by Night*, the sociologist Daniel Bell forecast the highly unpromising future of the working class. He bid farewell to Max Weber, the theorist of Anglo-Saxon Protestantism. Despite two Kinsey Reports (1948 and 1953) having uncovered the debauched sex lives of Americans, people's baptismal names remained shrouded in privacy. Their sexual habits howled in silence and camouflaged the road investigative journalism had to travel. Talese and Wolfe created a genre in which fiction and non-fiction mixed. Truman Capote icily baptised this new genre 'faction'. Suddenly, people's Christian names were no longer private.

13 SEPTEMBER

I awoke feeling guilty. Already retired, I spend the morning writing fiction or essays. For two years, I have been tapping my memoirs of growing up (1936–1948) in a city in the hinterland of Minas Gerais into the keyboard. The title, *Menino sem passado* [Boy with no past], was taken from the title of a poem by Murilo Mendes. I see a portrait of myself in his verses: 'I am devoid of tradition, customs and legends / I stand before the world / Lying on a hammock / That every country swings.'

Yesterday, Talese and Wolfe forced me to neglect my real professional work to concentrate on the sparse entries in this diary. It's becoming a bull in a china shop. It won't settle anymore for just two or three lines every morning. Greedy, it demands the information accumulated over the years and forces me to rewrite dull paragraphs. Now the memoirs wear kid gloves. They're civilised and polite. They pretend they're not bothered by a harsh 'Move over!' delivered by daily life.

I'm uncomfortable, feeling guilty about neglecting the work which, after all, pays the bills. Supinely, the diary's tyranny convinces me.

Or rather: daily life now under Bolsonaro is sourer than in the past. As for the future of the country, God only knows. The country of the future – as Stefan Zweig prophesied in the city of Petrópolis, before committing suicide with sleeping pills. He was wrong – Brazil is the country of 'once was'.

14 SEPTEMBER

Moral lesson: I ended yesterday hand in hand with God and without making any progress with my memoirs. 'Dead-end' is the English translation of the Gallicism *impasse*. It's hard to put into good Brazilian vernacular what I'm experiencing with *Menino sem passado*.

The pages of this diary and I are definitively holding hands.

Hand in hand with the diary, my memories of the 1960s are itching again this Friday morning. I rush over to the bookshelf to look for Gay Talese and Tom Wolfe's printed trail. Despite the library's state of disarray, it wasn't hard to find them again in the English-language literature section.

Talese was the first to insert his hand into the viper's nest of the American dream. His book *Thy Neighbour's Wife* is a left-handed jab by Muhammad Ali in the face of the WASP (white Anglo-Saxon Protestant) society he exposes. He delves deeply into the relationship between sex, pornography, religion and censorship. Puritanism demanded privacy and coated it with anonymity. In *Thy Neighbour's Wife*, the names of the people are real and the events and scenes factual. The long account begins with a descriptive scene of masturbation and ends with the author exposing his naked body on the sandy bank of a river. The intimacy is thy neighbour's, duly baptised; it is also his, the naked author's; and finally our own, the hypocritical reader's.

We, the readers, are the only ones who keep our anonymity.

Tom Wolfe was a local character in my novel *Stella Manhattan*, whose action takes place in New York. In writing terms, we both tie up the loose ends. At the height of the struggle to give racial minorities the right to study, work and be respected, the composer Leonard Bernstein held a gala dinner for the Black

Panthers. After announcing the dinner at the famous Fifth Avenue penthouse, invites were sent to celebrities, socialites and the Panthers. Tom Wolfe didn't miss the chance and held his pen at the ready. He wrote the funny *Radical Chic: That Party at Lenny's*, a striking literary work on the rubble on which New York radical chic is erected.

In his description of the preparations for the dinner, the journalist – and I, the reader – did not fail to appreciate a disconcerting detail.

'Leonard, you've forgotten the most essential thing,' reminded his dear wife, Felicia, born in Chile. 'Our team of waiters is black. Have you thought about the faces of Huey Newton and Bobby Seale if they're served by a brother from Harlem in a tuxedo and bow tie?' Oh my God! It won't be an American-style dinner. Every guest has to be properly served in the French style. Because of Felicia's foresight, 'Uncle Tom's bow-tie' forced the couple to think tangentially. Why not hire a team of Latino waiters? The fact that Tom Wolfe was served by a white Brazilian waiter at the dinner held for the Black Panthers was no coincidence.

At night, I read this headline in *O Estado de São Paulo*: 'Brazilian workers no longer wanted in the USA. Only entrepreneurs.' In other words: it's better to apply your money there than here. A poor man leaves Brazil through the front door and enters the US through the back door. A millionaire leaves Brazil through the back door and enters the US through the front door. Different strokes for different folks, as conventional wisdom has it.

### 19 SEPTEMBER

I spent a few mornings working on my memoirs and regretted it. The diary is calling out to me. These days, it is the venomous heat of daily life that attracts all my attention. Published on 16 September – though I've only just read it – the magazine *Época* discusses issues that flow into the memories that occur to me at the moment my body, with its hypertension, is rewarded by shiatsu and seeks refuge in Gay Talese and Tom Wolfe.

The journalist João Paulo Saconi enrols as a student for the online coaching sessions offered to the public by the daughter-in-law of the current president of the Republic. Saconi had lain on the couch for five years and had ideas about therapy. He thinks about an article for the magazine where he works. Heloisa Wolf Bolsonaro is 27, trained in psychology and works as a psychotherapist. She holds sessions with her clients via internet, with real-time audio and video. From the options she has announced, the journalist opts for the five-week course on self--knowledge. Cost: 1,500 reais, 400 dollars (depending on the daily exchange rate).

From the perspective of the investigative journalism founded by Talese and Wolfe, Saconi relates his experience of therapy. Satisfied with his article, he submits it to the magazine. He gives it a good title: 'A month of coaching by Heloísa Bolsonaro – What the course to improve your career and social relations run by the president's daughter-in-law is like.'

After reading the article, a powerful new memory came to mind. When I was a child, I discovered this narrative genre when reading articles in *Reader's Digest* (note to reader: available in Portuguese since 1942 as *Seleções do Reader's Digest*). The therapies proposed in these articles compare to similar ones found

in the successive books of Dale Carnegie (1888–1955) that I read in my youth. These entered the house by virtue of my father's liberal values. May he or she who has not read *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, *The Art of Public Speaking*, *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living* – the endless and, today, indigestible series – throw the first stone. *Reader's Digest* meets Carnegie meets Saconi.

Was Heloísa just regurgitating – via the internet – psychological platitudes spread by *Reader's Digest* and Dale Carnegie after the Second World War, I asked myself when I finished the article. Had we returned to living in the country we had always lived in? The country of 'once was'. Remembering *Reader's Digest* and Dale Carnegie would provide good material for the memoirs I'm writing. As soon as I said the phrase, the memories, silent until then, took off their kid gloves and assumed a petit bourgeois posture. They slap me in the face – ingratitude! You throw the best thing you have in the bin!

I read today's newspaper. The editorial board of Grupo Globo has decided to make a public apology to the Bolsonaro family for publishing the report. It opines that *Época's* mistake was 'to regard Heloísa Bolsonaro as a public figure by taking part in her online coaching'. And it stated: 'It was an error of interpretation that only became clear to the magazine after its negative repercussions.' Via its Twitter account, the lawyer Eduardo Goldenberg reports that 'the directors of *Revista Época* have just resigned en masse'.

The editorial director Daniela Pinheiro, editor-in-chief Plínio Fraga and editor Marcelo Coppola.

The curtain rapidly falls, before the theatre's lights go out and the reflectors explode.

### 25 SEPTEMBER

I receive a copy of the book *Velhice transviada* [Deviant Old Age] by João W. Nery. By coincidence, today I celebrate my 83rd birthday, which ought only to be remembered and commemorated in four days' time, on 29 September.

I read about the book on the back cover: 'It's hard to talk about old age, especially a deviant one. The human rights activist João W. Nery stated that, in Brazil, the old – constantly a fatal victim of hatred or neglect – are not entitled to a long life. So he decided to write about *transvelhos* [transgender seniors], an expression he created to refer to transsexuals and transvestites who have managed to make it beyond the 50-year-old barrier.' In 2013, João Nery inspired and participated in drawing up the Gender Identity Bill named after him.

His life experience had purpose. Will mine have any?

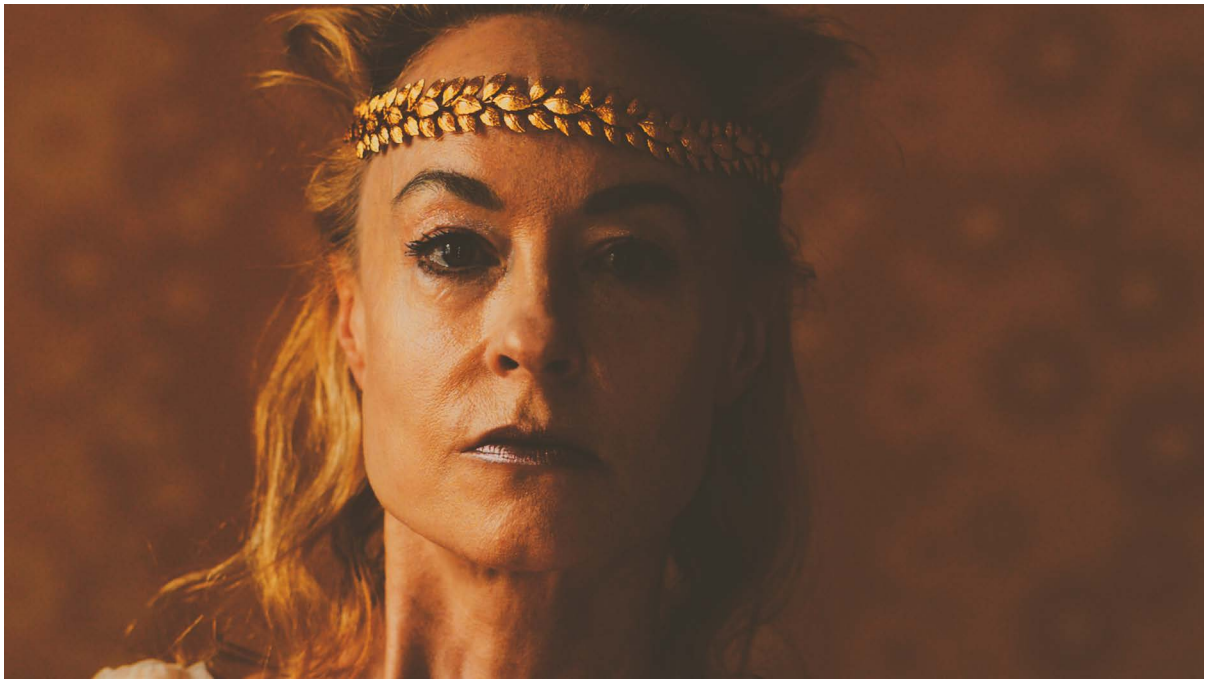
TRANSLATED BY CHRIS FOSTER

Sarah Singh

Throughout this article:
Sarah Singh, *Alexandra*,
2019 (stills from the film)

# Alexandra: An Abstract Film Epic (in Progress)

**'Scoop' is a new section of Electra that allows authors to unveil original, unpublished work. In this first 'Scoop', the highly-esteemed Indian photographer, painter and director Sarah Singh, who lives between India and New York, presents her next film, *Alexandra*, in words and images. She began to imagine this film, a 'work in progress', twelve years ago and is shooting it now. *Alexandra*, the feminine form of Alexander, symbolises the great undertaking of a woman director who wants to connect the distant past with the present.**



For the 'Scoop' section, I would like to give an exclusive glimpse into the beginnings of a new film project that began as an idea twelve years ago when I was in the middle of northern Pakistan, working on a film about the 1947 Partition called *The Sky Below*. My local guide from Peshawar took me to the banks of the Indus River in the small village of Hund, which a number of authorities have agreed was the exact place where the Macedonian king Alexander the Great crossed the Indus River in 326 BC. While this topic of Alexander crossing the Indus found its way as a minor note in that film, the idea remained in the back of my mind to one day explore this story of Alexander and Indo-Greek history as a film topic itself. One of the remnants of that ancient military campaign came to be known as Greco-Buddhist art – a distinctive aesthetic that symbolised syncretism across cultures. I saw many examples of this aesthetic as I travelled across Pakistan's northern provinces in 2007 – sculptures strewn across wide open landscapes or standing corpse-like in museums where attendance was low.

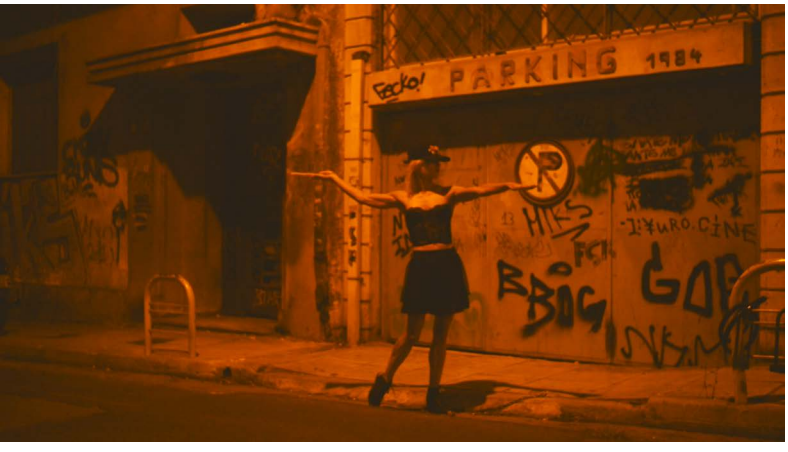
More than a decade has now passed and several films have marked the time since I stood on the banks of the Indus in Hund. In March 2018, another window into this connection between India and Greece came about when I started a new international arts salon in India called PANORAMA EDITIONS. At the suggestion of the Greek Embassy in New Delhi, one of the presenters I invited to participate was Elisavet Tsigarida, Director of the Pella Museum in the region of Thessaloniki, Greece. This unexpected and direct connection with Alexander's homeland propelled me to find the time and resources to finally start the work. Fast forward one more year to the summer of 2019 – and I was finally able to start production.

I have titled the film *Alexandra* – the female version of Alexander. There are several reasons for this, which are mostly symbolic, but foremost in my mind is the notion to refer to the female filmmaker (myself) who has embarked on this quest to relate the ancient past to today – a past of shifting boundaries that

compel us to remember, in today's world of nationalism, how interlinked so many cultures actually are. The borders between neighbouring countries are grey zones with visible traces of historical collisions that are at once of this time and of a place of infinite duration, creating an epic abstraction of life itself. I cannot help but think back to the visuals of Greco-Buddhist sculpture left in a state of near solitude in Pakistan's fields and museums – simultaneously a reminder of history as it was and is.

To begin *Alexandra*, I took the stance that the project should be exploratory and improvisational – a filmic approach that may seem raw, unpolished and risky to most. However, this project is driven by intuition and strong visual ideas – a minimalist skeleton from which to explore these complex aesthetic choices. The heightened moment born of improvisation is the culmination of many ideas and thoughts – a kind of philosophical architecture of logic that takes on a familiar, but unexpected form. Nearly three months of travel across Greece this summer has yielded almost 20 minutes of edited footage from this initial endeavour. Both documentary and staged skills were used to make the film, but it is neither a documentary nor a conventional war film. It is observational and performance-based, in collaboration primarily with artists who work in dance, theatre, performance art, and sound design.

Mythical realities and the many histories of Alexander the Great collide in this work in an effort to create a film that is abstract in scope and epic in duration. Through its conceptual representation of the past, time is both stretched and obliterated – referencing the legendary historical status of his life as an invincible conqueror that remains relevant and interesting to people nearly 2500 years later. In such a story and life, time is an abstract element regarding the man involved, Alexander, because, in his transition from mortal to immortal, he conquered time. More than five years of continued filming and editing will be needed to reach the final form. I imagine myself as a warrior in battle, in this case, with the imagination, where my process is one of construction instead of destruction (my journey to make a work of art v. his journey towards empire).




NOTES FROM SUMMER 2019:

An epic abstraction exploring Alexander the Great through an experimental film – from Greece to India. Filming has started and will continue in segments over the next 5 years.

*Alexandra* is a personalised approach to exploring the idea of violence, legacy, power, history, empire, desire, and myth.

As the film work is produced and edited, vignettes will be released to create a filmic trail, intentionally generating and representing the notion of a journey. The final film will be released incorporating the vignettes either as they are or as a variation that finds a new shape inside the longer form.

Some conceptual epigraphs that provide an introduction to the film, with the use of theatrical Acts:

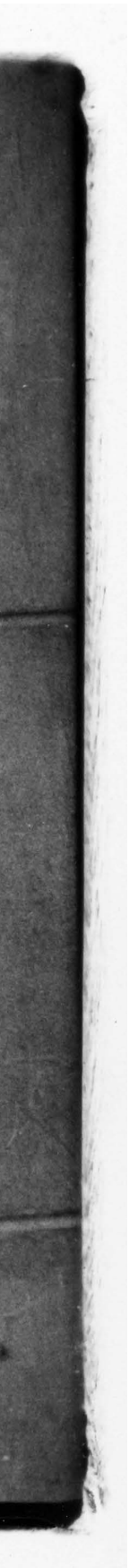
Act 1: *There are no short stories in an ancient land*
Act 2: *Eternity in the form of you entered the world unannounced*
Act 3: *I can see the ruins of empire in your eyes*

This initial phase (late May–early August 2019) is the introductory exploration of the style and a chance to further visual concepts based on various historical sites as well as interactions with museum directors and archaeologists whose work specifically deals with the legacy of Alexander the Great. The development of one specific character as embodied in the ballerina and performance artist Robin Cofer has been established through a series of scenes. She appears throughout the film as an oracle who shape-shifts in appearance and location. She is trapped by the circumstances of time/desire/place where illusions prevail, but she can also be self-defining and wise – dispensing with complex ideas in the form of casual talk with a stranger you might pass on the street.

Filming started at the home base of Alexander around Thessaloniki and Pella in the north of Greece, with an excursion to the island of Samothrace as it held mythical importance for his father and mother and, by extension, Alexander. Additional scenes were shot in locations across the islands and in the city of Athens. The second round of filming will continue in the spring of 2020 with additional characters that crossed paths with Alexander before he set out on his quest for empire. The goal will be to reach approximately one hour of edited footage for the Greece segment, before moving on to another part of the historic trail.

Carlos Manuel Álvarez

# The Melancholy Fiestas of Havana



Throughout this article:
Agnès Varda,
*Salut les Cubains!*
*[Hello to the Cubans!]*,
1963 (stills from the film)

**Havana is celebrating the quincentenary of its foundation. For many, the city represents easy enjoyment, a flight from time, a mirage in the sea, music that never ends. The Cuban writer and journalist Carlos Manuel Álvarez, a regular contributor to newspapers such as The New York Times and El Pais lives outside Cuba. For him, when he went back to his city to enjoy himself, Havana had returned to being 'a city full of untethered sadnesses'. He says, in addition, 'The day in Cuba is still communist, but the night is ever more neoliberal. 'The evocation of Havana that he creates here is pervaded by an exuberant and melancholy memory and permeated by a wind that disperses the waves breaking against the Malecón seawall.**


I'd arrived in Havana the night before after a very long flight, and I went outside early that morning. I walked down Avenida 26 in Vedado, crossed Línea and joined the Malecón near the Chorrera Fortress. A soft cloud of sadness had come down over me in the early hours. I couldn't understand why; I hadn't done anything to justify that feeling.

*

I'd come back to my city to have some fun, which is about the only reason why I ever return to Cuba. Although that's probably what it was all about. In order to 'just have fun', you have to look for places that don't feature on maps of fond memories, and travel to cities you aren't too attached to. Unease, followed by feelings like this, assailing you without any encouragement, are clear signs that you belong to a place and owe it a sentimental tithe.

*

Sadness is a beast which charges at night and that morning I thought that I could throw it into some corner of the city, like someone irresponsibly abandoning a pet for someone else to take, or for nobody to take, leaving it to wander around until it is killed by the rain and heat and hunger, filling the air with that truncated smell of orphanage and saltpetre and old bodies. Havana is rather like that, if you know it well. It's a city full of untethered sadnesses.

*

The Malecón was curiously wet at that hour. The ocean seemed to have spilled over at dawn, but it was the middle of April and the springtime sea in the Caribbean is always calm, a restful sea, a sleeping beast remaining within its confines, just like the sea in front of me now, in fact. At that point, I was still less aware of the intrigue in which the city was entwining me, against my interests and my will.

**"Located at sea level, Havana is a reasonably sized city for the sequence of human life; a bipedal rhythm and cadence are still possible there."**

*

There were several details which may have appeared negligible, but which hinted at turmoil. Suddenly, I could easily have been that man who returns home after a weekend away and immediately senses that someone has been snooping around his property while he was gone. Someone who didn't steal anything, didn't break any glass, didn't take down any paintings or scratch any walls. There was nothing hugely out of place in the house, but you could feel the breath left behind by some presence, and several portraits, chairs and ornaments were in a slightly different position.

*

I began to walk in search of an opening in the fog. 'There is a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in,' says Cohen. It wasn't something I'd ever done when I lived in the city. Perhaps because heat doubles distances and one kilometre becomes two beneath the Havana sky. Like everyone else, I used to spend a lot of time in bus stops. Later, rather older and with ten pesos in my pocket, I'd hunt down the American collective taxis until their absence became almost insulting. It was a tough struggle.

*

Located at sea level, Havana is a reasonably sized city for the sequence of human life; a bipedal rhythm and cadence are still possible there. But I never used to take advantage of that fact, and nobody ever told me, because nobody ever knew, that that was what I should do. Walk, in any way possible. Walk, even when hungry or tired.

*

We spent hours waiting for something to save us, a bus or a disaster, it was all the same. We allowed the lethargy of the late afternoon to chew on us beneath a cement hut on some corner of the city, in Cerro or Marianao, and we ruminated on our frustration without doing anything about it, allowing our skin to grow sour and our flesh to turn bitter, the fleshy heart of innocence.

**"There's a time in Cuba when everywhere becomes the same place, where you can move neither forwards nor backwards, trapped in stillness."**

*

We wanted someone to move us forward and we believed we were travelling from one place to another, but in fact, after waiting for so long, all we could do was reach a place we had already come from. Home, school and work were all the same. There's a time in Cuba when everywhere becomes the same place, where you can move neither forwards nor backwards, trapped in stillness.

*

And yet, if you walk, it takes longer but you age less. We residents of Havana should have taken notice of the rage that filled us when no bus came for us, and when the buses that passed by were already full. We should have harnessed that rage and ridden it ourselves, transporting ourselves wherever we wanted to go on its rump. Waiting without purpose is an acid which melts the plastic of youth.

*

I walked along the Malecón, carefully stepping on the damp, slippery moss on the wall. The early morning sun had an eerie effect on things, making them appear prematurely born. They were blurry, as if forcefully snatched from night's nest.

*

Riding the national rage of exodus, I had left Cuba almost four years earlier and Havana had shrunk every time I returned. More and more, it seemed like a village to me, so docile, so insignificant. I now had an apartment in Mexico City, the mother of all outsized cities, and my perspective had changed. My senses, already elastic, were more permissive, and my idea of proximity now encompassed an infinitely higher number of kilometres. The mainland shows you that on an island, no matter how big it is, there is nothing that isn't nearby.

*

Yet the very first time I arrived in Havana, I also began to walk, but I walked because it seemed immense to me; as big as only the city of your dreams can be. It was that place that simmers in your mind for years over the flame of your imagination, that place your mind has escaped to while it waits for your body to arrive so that they can explode together once and for all.

*

I'd just started university after a life trapped in the provinces, and I walked the main streets following the commotion. I was too afraid to enter the city's transport network. I felt out of place, unable to understand the internal codes, the traffic signs, the usual routes and shortcuts. So I walked.

*

That Havana, immense Havana, was the product of survival and scarcity. And this village-like one now was the same. I visited the city to immerse myself in its nights, packed with intense, giddy parties. Seductive parties, with a supreme self-confidence. During the day, Cuba remains communist. It is linear, exhausting, it sweats, it squeezes you, and even people with money find it difficult to get used to. But the night is more and more neoliberal, although it too squeezes you and makes you sweat.

*

In a sense, day represents the past and night foreshadows the future, the eagerness for an escape without needless effort, a gap through which to slip without

fleeing. The country moves between these two impossible times, with nothing appearing to happen in its real time. All of the latest news, for example, about hunger or the scarcity of products in Cuban shops, has already happened.

*

The night teems with medium-sized private businesses built on a conservative ideology, which are now permitted in the city. They are the moles on the skin of this state capitalism, emerging like a decaffeinated advance party onto the landscape of national Stalinism, and revealing the colour of the only other skin that could lie beneath this rubble.

*

With their demonstrated success, it is these spaces that most effectively embody the idea that politics is a dull matter to be handled by the Castro regime and the Miami exiles, something no longer required for a good life. Clubs, cultural and recreational centres, art galleries, and disused workshops and warehouses have been transformed into cocktail bars and exhibition venues of different kinds.

*

The advertising used by these companies sells a series of things which are desired by and apparently accessible to everyone, if we bypass the crux of the system


**"During the day, Cuba remains communist. It is linear, exhausting, it sweats, it squeezes you, and even people with money find it difficult to get used to. But the night is more and more neoliberal, although it too squeezes you and makes you sweat."**

and the social relationships it establishes. This is not dissimilar to what Mark Fisher termed 'the semiotic excrescences [which] despoil former public spaces'.

*

Lust has a touch of the clandestine about it, and there is something intrinsically illegal, or perhaps immoral, in these parties in Havana, if we can indeed describe parties in such terms. This immorality or illegality may be explained by the vacuum-packed nature of the festivities, like a graft whose presence disfigures the face of reality. It does not mask it, as parties usually do, but instead erases it completely.

**"Our revelries were rather austere, organised and carried out with few resources. That may explain why we, the students of the residence, knew that our improvised, nocturnal parties were not the forgettable parties we were meant to be having."**

*

I enjoyed them so much for that very reason. They offered an escape, owing nothing to anyone.

*

The sadness I felt that morning of my last return must, then, have been a very political sadness. The blue sea lapping at Havana was unreal, hurting my eyes, and beneath the weight of the day, as I walked along the Malecón, I felt that the sadness was becoming thinner and transforming into awareness. Yet the colour of the sea continued to cry out and suddenly everything took on a secret harmony, of word, colour and idea, because sadness eventually disintegrates into melancholy, and I recalled the verses by Jorge Eduardo Eielson describing melancholy as 'that ancient violet disease'.

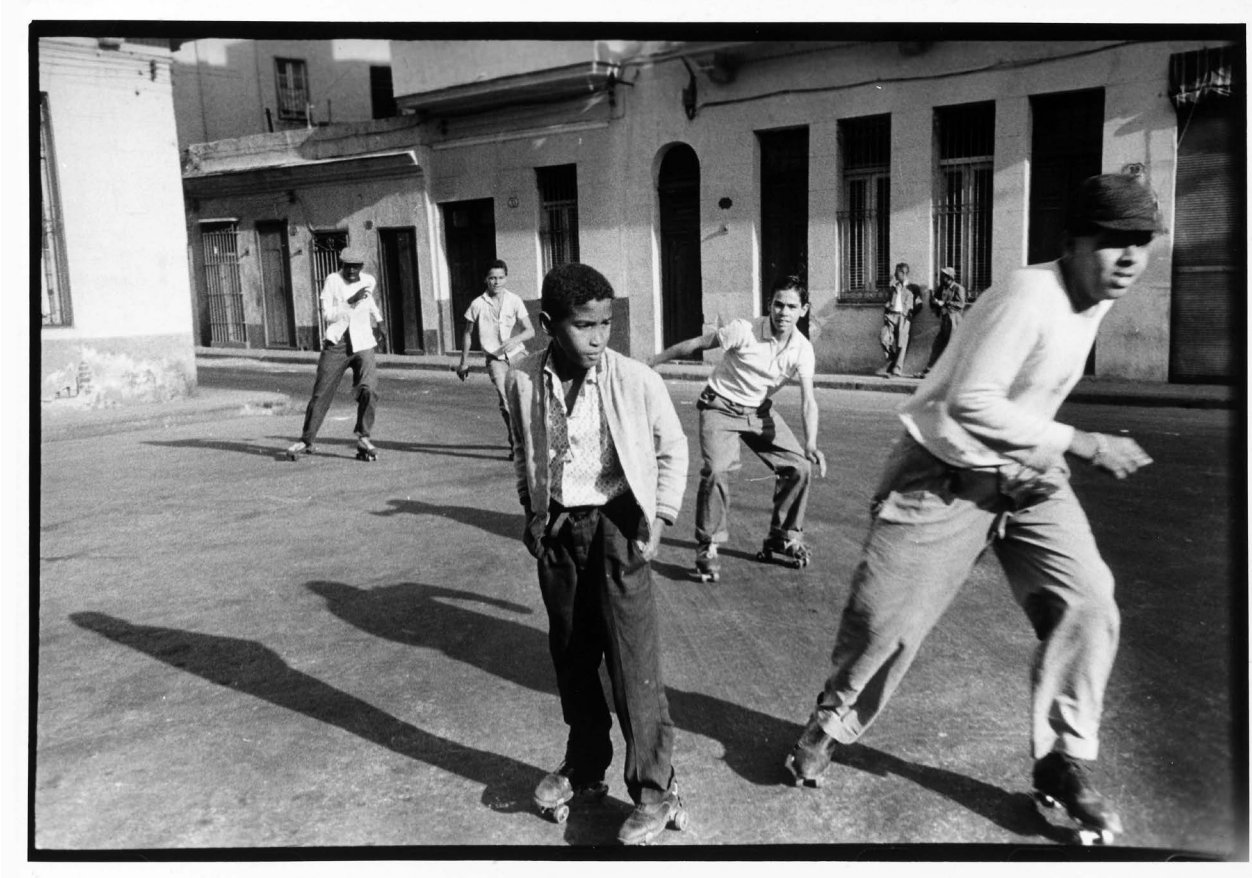
*

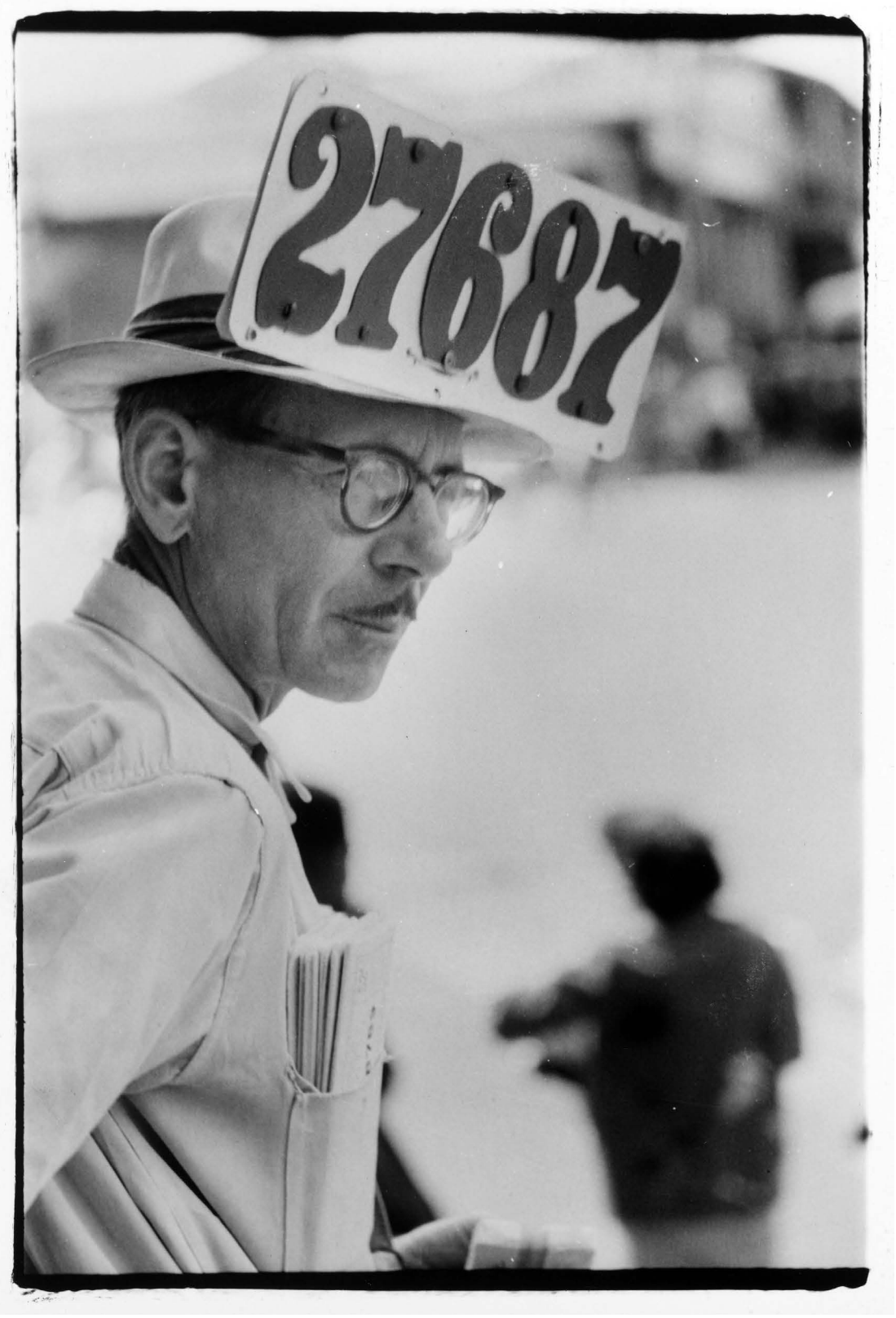
In front of me was the F3 student residence, a 24-floor block where I spent my five years at university, from 2008 to 2013. I immediately knew I was on the other side. I had money in my pocket and I was no longer looking from the building, but instead being watched.

*

My memories of those years remain extremely vivid. There, the parties lasted until an hour which was never the same and which we could never have specified. There was strong alcohol and a collective sense of fun and casual sex and music and other ephemeral things which were bound to happen to us, if we sought to be truly deserving of the city's grubby offerings. At that time, Havana was very much shaped by geography and bodies and skin.


SECCION






*

Our revelries were rather austere, organised and carried out with few resources. That may explain why we, the students of the residence, knew that our improvised, nocturnal parties, with drinks distilled in handcrafted devices, were not the forgettable parties we were meant to be having, for the sake of our health.

*

In the end, people go to parties not only to escape the past or to relax in preparation for the future, but to avoid establishing excessively strong ties to the real time in which the festivities are situated. Essentially, you go to a party with the aim of forgetting it. But a rather unpleasant presence regularly hung over the parties at the residence; recognition, as the event unfolded, of the cyst of memory.

*

We students appeared to have fully grasped that rather than parties, these were rituals, and on one of those occasions I woke up on the balcony of my apartment. The waves were breaking against the wall of the Malecón, before being dispersed by the wind. The clocks displayed the time I expected them to display, and the programmes which were meant to begin on the television were beginning. There were no ships on the horizon.

*

The timid morning light began to flash, like a mirrorball at a huge disco or a lamp with a faulty connection. I saw two or three insignificant dots. Not stars, more like seeds, holes or tiny tears, as if the fabric of the sky hadn't been used for a long time and the ravages of time had only been discovered once it had been taken out of storage.

*

That was how they were, those wonderful short days in December and January, which always marked the beginning of winter in Havana. A season which never developed further, never fully unfurled. You had to be very attentive to be able to witness a spectacle like that. The rough grey sea, whose surface moved like the canvas hidden beneath it, barely resisted the thrust of a thousand bodies swollen by the water, desperate to pounce on their former city like never before.

*

That's what I learned back then and now seemed willing to forget. That feeling of helplessness and love, perhaps the only thing it is right and necessary and strangely enchanting to repeat.

TRANSLATED BY ELEANOR STANIFORTH / KENNISTRANSLATIONS

Bernardo Futscher Pereira

# Churchill: A Reader's Guide

**From a very early age till late in life, Churchill wrote in order to speak of the world, the United Kingdom, and himself. On one occasion, he declared that history would be generous to him, because he was going to write it. When the Nobel Prize in Literature was awarded to the great victor in the Second World War, it brought attention to a literary oeuvre that is indispensable to an understanding of the man and the audacity of his deeds. Drawing on the "old lion's" own books and those that many authors have written about him, the diplomat and historian Bernardo Futscher Pereira provides us with *another* portrait of Winston Churchill.**

William Orpen, portrait by Winston Churchill, 1916

When he won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1953, Winston Churchill was slightly disappointed. Prime minister once again, he would soon be celebrating his 80th birthday. He was obsessed with the danger of nuclear apocalypse and dreamed of averting it. He wanted to set up of a summit meeting between Washington and Moscow in which he would be the great mediator. The prize he really yearned for was the Nobel Peace Prize.

It is easy to understand why a warlord whose orders caused the deaths of thousands and thousands of people would want to be recognised at the end of his extraordinary life with a prize that enshrined these great sacrifices at the service of peace. The prize was well deserved, however. It was as a journalist that Churchill first won the fame that he passionately sought and that opened him the doors to power and glory. Throughout his long and varied political career, he had a single profession: writer. It was his livelihood. Though a member of the British high aristocracy, he did not have a large fortune. The Cuban cigars, the hat and uniform collections, the country house, the French champagne and the indispensable brandy, the secretaries and butlers, the horses, the holidays on the Riviera and in Marrakesh, the nights at the casino, the grand and extravagant lifestyle and the excesses and extravagancies that add to his charm and fascination were mainly supported by his writing. And that was worth its weight in gold right from the start.

Winston Churchill,
*Bottlescape*, c. 1926

**"Though he was a member of the British high aristocracy, he did not have a large fortune. The excesses and extravagancies that warranted all his charm and fascination were mainly supported by his writing. And that was worth its weight in gold right from the start."**

Churchill wrote – or mostly dictated, slightly tipsy, after dinner – millions of words. With his writings, he fought, judged, illustrated and carved out his place in history. Many million more words have been written about him. It is this vast continent that I have been exploring over the last 35 years. The passion was aroused by the *The Last Lion*, the magnificent first volume of William Manchester's biography. To anyone wishing to embark on this journey or to compare notes half way through, I am offering this personal reader's guide about what he wrote and what was written about him.

## WHAT HE WROTE

My favourite work by Churchill is *The World Crisis*, his moving, epic account of the First World War and the events preceding and following it. I devoured the Penguin rerelease from cover to cover in 2008.

The book was published in five thick volumes in the 1920s. The first came out in April 1923 and the last in March 1929. Churchill began writing it at a low point in his political career. In November 1922, at the age of 47, he had lost his seat in parliament after holding it since 1900. His reputation was tarnished by the ill-fated operation in the Dardanelles, the straits leading towards Constantinople. He was considered brilliant but erratic, an unreliable genius. While resting on the Riviera, he threw himself into the passionate exercise of justifying his role in the largest and deadliest conflict that had ever befallen humanity.

No matter if the book is a mixture of 'truths, half-truths and doubtful statements', as someone labelled it. A blend of memoir and historical narrative, *The World Crisis* is a superb fresco of the conflict in its many dimensions, a treatise on the art and tribulations of government, a detailed political and military chronicle of many war incidents, especially at sea, a vivid portrait of the great personalities that played leading roles in it, recounted by a political protagonist who witnessed and took part in it all.

The book covers the period from 1911 to 1922, during which Churchill was almost always in office, in ministerial positions linked to the war effort. There was a brief hiatus in 1916, when he was forced to resign and chose, for a few months, to return to active duty, to command a battalion in Flanders.

The first two volumes were published in 1923. They are a long, persuasive apology for his decisions as First Lord of the Admiralty, the office he held from 1911 to 1915 and again from September 1939 until becoming Prime Minister in May 1940. Churchill commanded the most powerful branch of the British armed forces. The Royal Navy ruled the seas and guaranteed the flow of trade and people between the different parts of the empire. In 1915, a dark year in which 'pride was everywhere to be humbled, and nowhere to receive its satisfaction' – a resounding redundancy typical of his style – he launched a naval attack on the Strait of Constantinople in an attempt to knock the Ottoman Empire out of the war in one fell swoop. This vast flanking manoeuvre would be used to join forces with Russia and find a way out of the tragic, horrendous slaughter on the front in Flanders. The second volume is entirely devoted to defending and justifying this operation whose outcome discredited him and drove him out of office. In a forensic examination of the countless decisions and indecisions that led to defeat in the battle of Suvla Bay Churchill blames the inertia and incompetence of Admiral de Robeck, who was loath to risk his precious but obsolete ships in an attack that might have changed the course of history.

Written by a lesser artist, the book might be a collection of episodes of no interest to anyone today. In the hands of a supreme master of the English language, it is a vivid, gripping evocation of the dilemmas, difficulties, strategies, mistakes, adjustments, confusions, setbacks and tragedies of the undertaking. Churchill's powerful prose sustains the narrative with its broad cadence. It rolls in huge waves in harmony with the epic dimension of the events it recounts.

As was often the case throughout his career, political responsibilities interrupted Churchill's literary work. He returned to the limelight in 1924. He rejoined the Conservative Party, which he had left for the Liberals in 1904 and was appointed Chancellor of the Exchequer by Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin after the September 1924 elections. The third and fourth volumes were delayed until 1927. The last, *The Aftermath*, published in 1929, is not included in the Penguin edition. It focuses on the collapse of the Central European empires, the peace conference, the Russian Revolution and the civil war, in which Churchill vehemently took sides, and the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire, against the backdrop of the intractable Irish Question, which dominated British politics before and after the Great War, and is still troubling it today.

*The World Crisis* was well received, though it did not sell as well as it deserved. Its influence endured behind the scenes, however. The first volume was the main source of inspiration for Barbara Tuchman's masterpiece, *The Guns of August*, which was John F. Kennedy's favourite book. He was a great admirer and disciple of Churchill, whose example and oratory he always sought to emulate.

Churchill's biggest bestseller was his memoirs of the Second World War. It was published in six volumes between 1948 and 1953. Nonetheless, it does not have the same intensity and epic impact of *The World Crisis*. The book is a team effort: minutes drafted by assistants and proofread by Churchill, documents galore, narratives influenced by political conveniences that made it necessary to omit or gloss over a lot. Even so, it is worth reading the first volume, *The Gathering Storm*, a moving account of his anguish and political impotence in the 1930s, when he was profoundly isolated.

Being in the wilderness and with financial troubles on top made these years particularly fruitful from a literary point of view. An inveterate speculator, Churchill was hit hard by the Wall Street crash in 1929. In 1930, he was writing "all over the place", with outstanding contracts for three books and countless newspaper commitments to try to get back on his feet. It was in the 1930s that he produced his most valuable academic work, *Marlborough: His Life and Times* – a monumental study in four dense volumes devoted to John Churchill, the first Duke of Marlborough, his ancestor, who defeated Louis XIV. I confess that I have not managed to go beyond the first 200 meticulous, exquisite pages.

*My Early Life*, an autobiography of his youth, published in 1930, was another result of his financial troubles. Its tone is somewhat muted, as if an innate sense of restraint prevented Churchill from recounting his personal circumstances

Churchill,
portrait by Yousuf Karsh,
1941

**"*The World Crisis* is a mixture of autobiographic and historical narrative. It constitutes a superb fresco of the war in all its many dimensions, a treatise on the art and tribulations of governance."**

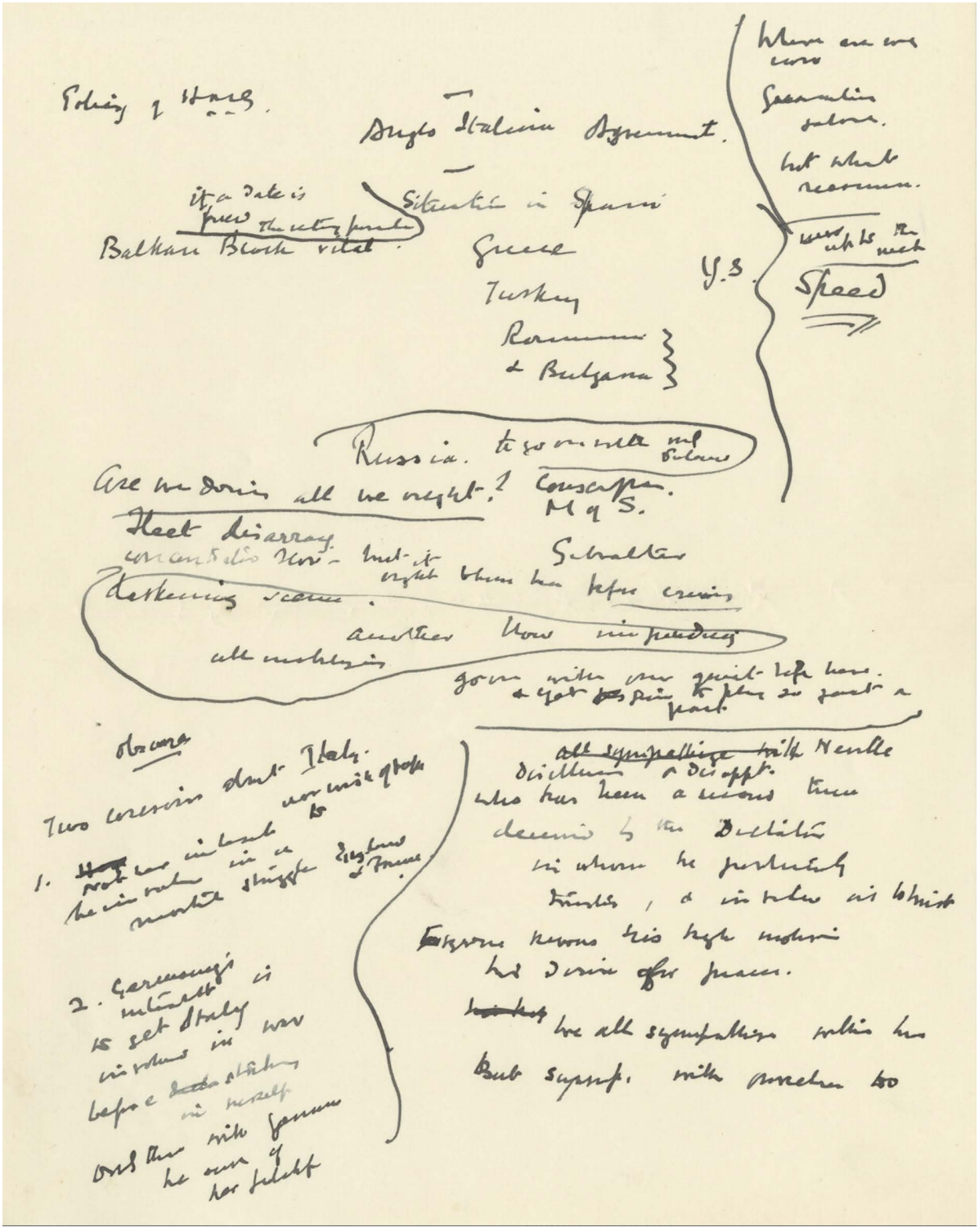
with the same exuberance with which he described the great events in which he took part. The book was very well received. It revisits episodes already mentioned in the works of his youth: *The Story of the Malakand Field Force* about his experiences in Afghanistan; *The River War* about the war in Sudan, when he participated in the last drawn-sabre cavalry charge in British military history; *London to Ladysmith via Pretoria* about the Boer War; and *Savrola,* his only novel.

It was also in the 1930s that Churchill signed the contract to write *The History of the English Speaking Peoples*, which he only managed to honour 20 years later. The work was published in four volumes between 1956 and 1958. It is a pleasant read, though much less dense than *Marlborough*. It has some particularly penetrating chapters, however, and a description of the American Civil War that was standard at West Point for many years.

We obviously cannot ignore the speeches that made such difference at decisive moments in 1940. They were carefully rehearsed works of literature written in a kind of free verse to make them easier to memorise. Churchill had an extraordinary memory and learned his speeches by heart. The inspiring oratory of the 1940s has long since entered the domain of cliché: 'blood, sweat and tears', 'never have so many owed so much to so few'. But even in the 1930s, when Churchill was isolated, the House of Commons always considered his speeches top-class theatrical performances. His blistering attacks on successive governments that were incapable of stopping the rise of Hitler made history. Here is an example directed at Baldwin's government in 1936: it was living in 'a strange paradox, decided only to be undecided, resolved to be irresolute, adamant for drift, solid for fluidity, all powerful to be impotent'.

Then there is a vast collection of articles for newspapers and magazines, which Churchill wrote to earn money. His debut in journalism took place at the age of 21, when he wrote a piece about how it felt to be under fire for the first time. A year later, he was fiercely negotiating the price of his articles, quoting Dr. Johnson: 'No one but a blockhead ever wrote except for money.' In a few years, he became the best-paid journalist in the British press. *Great Contemporaries*, published in 1937, is a collection of some of the best pieces of this journalism, a series of tributes, memories and evocations of major politicians, commanders, writers and other celebrities with whom he rubbed shoulders over the years.

Churchill belongs to a category of historians – rather unfashionable in our relatively peaceful times – for whom war is the main driver of the human adventure. As a historian, he combined an encyclopaedic knowledge of the art



The original notes for Winston Churchill's speech to parliament of April 13, 1939, in which he presented his comprehensive assessment of the state of Europe and Britain, warned of a "darkening scene" and urged Britain to wake up.

of war with a vision from the commanding heights in which all political, military, economic, psychological and cultural factors merge in great strategy and high politics. War was his natural element and, in spite of the compassion that he was capable of feeling for the enemy, it was in war that he found supreme pleasure and the greatest feeling of life and fulfilment. In 1915, he confessed to Asquith's wife that he would not exchange this 'glorious, delicious war' for anything in the world. As a child, he played with deadly seriousness with a huge army of toy soldiers. When he had to choose a career, he chose the army. He did not rest until he found himself under fire. No risk was too great for him. In his life, he desperately wanted to live the myth of the hero.

As a writer, Churchill was profoundly influenced by the techniques of melodrama in vogue on the stages of the London theatres that he frequented. His fascination with the great man who, with a stroke of genius, unexpectedly turns around a lost cause is a constant feature of his work. This cult of the individual, his greatness and singularity and his ability, through will and genius, to change the course of history is no longer fashionable in the age of equality in which we live. This was how Churchill saw himself, however. Who can deny the importance of his role?

## WHAT WAS WRITTEN ABOUT HIM

What books other than his own do justice to this personality and compete in style with his own narratives?

Let's start with the biographies. The first one I read was by William Manchester. *The Last Lion* is an adventure novel worthy of Alexandre Dumas and a fresco of British society at the apogee of the empire. The cover boasts a picture of Churchill in the full bloom of youth wearing the red and gold uniform of the Fourth Hussars, the cavalry regiment in which he served in India. The book recounts the period from 1874 to 1932 with great vivacity and detail.

I waited impatiently for the second volume, *The Caged Lion*, which came out in 1988. I was disappointed. It was out of proportion to the first. The same 700 pages that had covered almost 60 years of Churchill's life now served for only eight. And they stopped abruptly at the decisive moment when he finally rose to power at the age of 66. Unfortunately, Manchester's health did not allow him to complete the work, and the third volume, which was published by David Reed many years later, lacks the same spark.

There are two key, single-volume biographies: the one by Roy Jenkins, published in 2001 and the other by Andrew Roberts, which came out in 2018. Jenkins, the only British President of the European Commission, had the advantage of experiencing first hand most of the period that he described. He addresses the subject with the wisdom of age and the experience of a long political career. His judgements are confident and incisive. Jenkins was from a generation for whom Churchill was still a living figure who stirred up hatreds as tenacious as the devotion he inspired. His aggressiveness, mania for publicity and unbridled adventurism aroused great mistrust. Jenkins manages to place his character in context and dissect the countless controversies in which Churchill was involved. Roberts is a professional historian and biographer with exceptional

**"But even in the 1930s, when Churchill was isolated, the House of Commons always considered his speeches top-class theatrical performances. His blistering attacks on successive governments that were incapable of stopping the rise of Hitler made history."**

knowledge, though he did not live through the period that he describes. He has total control over his sources and the book is full of delightful quotes and anecdotes.

To be avoided is the official biography of Churchill, eight thick volumes giving a blow-by-blow account of our hero's life, except perhaps the first two written by his son Randolph Churchill. Martin Gilbert, the official biographer, is certainly the greatest expert on Churchill and his vast academic oeuvre is irreplaceable for anyone wishing to delve into the subject. He is, however, a lacklustre writer. His books are an endless succession of facts and an example of dry, bland academic prose.

In addition to biographies, we have contemporary accounts in which Churchill is still just Winston. I loved the ones by Harold Nicholson and Duff Cooper. Here is what Nicholson said about Churchill's first appearance in the House of Commons on 26 September 1939, after he returned to government: 'He sounded every note from deep preoccupation to flippancy, from resolution to sheer boyishness. One could feel the spirits of the House rising with every word.'

There were plenty of close associates who kept a record of what he said. Who better than his physician to reveal our hero's vulnerabilities, mood swings and even periods of despondency and depression when he fell from power or his body let him down? Moran was his doctor from 1940 until his death and was on more intimate terms with him than anyone. His diaries, which displeased Churchill's family when they were published in 1966, described Churchill in the last quarter of his life, in war, after his landslide defeat in the 1945 elections, in power again in the early 1950s and finally in old age. Colville's diaries are an essential source but not so readable.

Then there are the memoirs. Immediately after his death in 1965, Violet Bonham Carter remembered him in the splendour of youth in *Winston Churchill as I Knew Him*. Prime Minister Asquith's daughter was dazzled by his brilliance. She fell in love with him at first sight at a dinner where they sat next to each other in 1906, described in the first chapter. King Edward VII was the ruling monarch, and Churchill's mother, a rich American, one of his favourite courtesans. Churchill had crossed the aisle to become member of the Liberal Party of Asquith and Lloyd George, which had won a historic victory that year.

And there are also monographs. *Hero of the Empire* by Candice Millard came out in 2016. It is an atmospheric portrait of Churchill's exploits in the Boer War in November and December 1899, which made him famous and launched his political career in Britain. Her detailed description of Churchill's deeds highlights his incredible bravery, his eagerness to get to the front, the reckless risks that he took under heavy fire for an hour and a half before throwing up his hands, surrendering and being taken prisoner. She describes the heroism that was recognised immediately by the press and, finally, his blind ambition to transform the shame and humiliation of capture into honour and glory, which led him to mount a reckless escape from prison in Pretoria, after a month behind bars, 'a scheme of desperate and magnificent audacity'.

Churchill, who was already a well-paid journalist for the British press, now became a popular hero. After this episode, he never ceased to believe that the miraculous luck that had saved his life and allowed him to safely reach Lourenço Marques would never abandon him.

London Blitz, 1940

**"Churchill fell within a category of historians – rather unfashionable in the relatively peaceful times in which we live – for whom war is the main driver of human adventure."**


Churchill famously employed the 'Action This Day' red stickers in response to a missive from four of his overworked code-breakers (including Alan Turing) in October 1941.

Where micro-history is concerned, John Lukacs's noteworthy *Five Days in London* was published in 1999. It examines the crucial days from 24 to 28 May 1940, when the British Cabinet was forced to stare into the abyss of defeat, and how Churchill outmanoeuvred Halifax to prevent another approach to Mussolini, which the Foreign Secretary was advocating.

I also enjoyed *Churchill et de Gaulle* by François Kersaudy, published in 1990. It gives a blow-by-blow account of the turbulent relationship between the two statesmen as documented in contemporary accounts. It is a psychodrama with comic touches, a chronicle of complicity, tiffs, sulks and reconciliations that highlights Churchill's generosity and imagination when faced with de Gaulle's anglophobia. There is an explanation for Churchill's loyalty to de Gaulle. The British Prime Minister never forgot the general's refusal to accept defeat at the dramatic Franco-British conferences in June 1940, leading to de Gaulle's escape to London on 17 June. Even when he found him insufferable, he refused to abandon him and defended him against Roosevelt's scepticism, which de Gaulle never forgave.

It is this generous, indomitable spirit that Isaiah Berlin celebrates in his essay *Mr Churchill in 1940*, published in 1949. Berlin first defends Churchill's literary reputation from the criticisms of Herbert Read, who thought his style hollow, pompous and outdated. Berlin considered his writing sonorous and magnificent, a reflection of the author's personality and an emanation of an inner light guided by the imagination and projected by Churchill onto the vast stage of tragedy. The British people became convinced that they were as he described them and began to act as if they were. It is a fine evocation of Churchill's ability to create the foundational myth of modern Britain, its single-handed resistance to Hitler. The most illuminating pages of this essay are the comparison between Roosevelt and Churchill: the former's extreme levity and unshakable faith in the future and the latter's attachment to the past and a heartfelt belief in the greatness of his country.

Churchill's old age is a subject for specialists. The funniest and most revealing is *Chasing Churchill* by his granddaughter Celia Sandys. She recounts the details of the cruises on the Onassis yacht and the way Maria Callas burst violently into the Greek ship-owner's life. I also recommend *The Long Sunset* by his last secretary, Anthony Montague Browne, after Churchill had retired from public life.

**"In his time, Great Britain was the greatest empire in history and Churchill wanted to be the greatest man in Great Britain, meaning that he wanted to be the greatest man in history."**

Finally, it would be unfair to leave Boris Johnson out of this lot. *The Churchill Factor* is a good-humoured tribute to the great British statesman by another prose master obviously interested in drawing parallels with his hero. Johnson condenses a number of episodes in which Churchill's intervention was decisive into a series of themed chapters. He recalls how, before Churchill was venerated as the saviour of the nation, he was hated and loathed by many. He was considered an adventurer who drank too much and surrounded himself with friends of dubious reputation. He uses a simple syllogism to reveal the statesman's secret. In his time, Great Britain was the greatest empire in history. Churchill wanted to be the greatest man in Great Britain. *Ergo*, he wanted to be the greatest man in history. His unbridled ambition was better served by his storytelling skills and willingness to take risks than by his judgement, so often erratic and impulsive. His ambition was a tyrant that gave him no rest.

Churchill is a figure from other times, and young generations will soon consider him a personality as remote as his ancestor the Duke of Marlborough, pictured in a wig, suit of armour and lace collar on the frontispiece of his biography. Back in the 1930s, Churchill, an inveterate reactionary, already felt that he was a man of another age, Queen Victoria's. His racial, national and social prejudices would be toxic today. In the 21st century, as the memory fades of the titanic struggles in which he took part, what is left of him? Firstly, the myth, that of a character who lived up to the great heroes of antiquity. In a career full of ups and downs he had a moment of supreme glory, though experienced as an almost unbearable pressure that bowed and consumed him and caused him to blow up at the smallest setback. This was from May 1940 to June 1941, when Britain was standing alone in the war against Hitler. Secondly, his vast literary oeuvre, which endures as one of the greatest, albeit outmoded, exponents of English prose. Last but not least, the example of a life full to overflowing, lived on an almost unbelievable scale and with an unbelievable intensity.


Churchill's diploma,
Nobel Prize for Literature, 1953

Jörg Rüpke



# Religion and Urbanity

**A contemporary city is usually seen as a civil, secular and profane space that contrasts with its religious and ritualised rural counterpart. However, the bonds between urban space and the phenomenon of religion were of great importance historically, and still today remain active in our ways of living city life. In the text that follows, Jörg Rüpke, a German university lecturer, vice-director of the Max Weber Centre, a religious studies specialist, and author of various publications on these topics, explains that 'the relationship between city and religion is one full of tension'.**

City and religion must be considered together. This is certainly no truism. Phenomena that can plausibly be conceived of as religious actions or symbols were present long before there was any form of urban settlement. Religion preceded urbanisation, whether in East Asia, South and West Asia, Africa or the American double continent. Likewise, religion is not the first thing that comes to mind when we speak about cities. Noise and density, labour and leisure, slums and services – the many often-polarised associations fit better into stories of secularisation than religiosity. This image of industrial cities has been painted and disseminated by numerous contemporary observers, religious people, town planners and academic observers alike (R. A. Orsi 1999: 41). Such an image is still influential in many forms of the media and various discussions. A lot of religious innovations in cities – from the building of parish churches and organised spiritual welfare, through awakening movements, the Salvation Army and the YMCA, to specifically urban forms of assembly rooms and rituals, to name only a few examples in the Western world – developed in reaction to this image. However, urban planning and academic research have needed time to rediscover cities as places of immigration and immigrants' religious practices in order to find anew that religion was an important aspect of the urban.

Evidently, the relationship between city and religion is one full of tension. This is already true in very early religious texts. The 'Tower of Babel' (Gen 11.1-9) is a symbol for the city as well as for the hubris of its inhabitants. The conglomeration of actors, their cooperation and their architecture would otherwise, it was feared, allow people to reach heaven. In the Jewish Bible and its Christian interpretation, the city is frequently a suspicious place, a place of sin and godlessness. God can be found in the desert, in solitude, at Mount Sinai. This West Asian and then European tradition finds its equivalent in South Asia: Buddha finds his enlightenment under a tree, outside the city. It is the village that offers the ideal image of social community and the religious division of labour. Monasteries are set up in the countryside – albeit close enough to cities to allow the exchange of alms and donations on the one hand and spiritual guidance and prayer on the other.

The tension is not restricted to religion. Urban consciousness cannot be detached from notions about its opposite. It is characteristic of urbanity to think of oneself as different than others, different from an opposite, from the non-urban, from the 'rural'. At the same time, this opposite can serve as a counter-image. Imagining life in the countryside is wishful thinking, is the imagination of an idyll. It is a critique of the city. When Rome, probably the first city in history to have a million inhabitants, wanted to be ruled by a truly pious and incorruptible ruler, it had to tear Cincinnatus from the fields, from the plough, to the consulate – as Roman historiography has it.

Such thinking in opposites has had consequences for religion. In the Hellenistic world, the clear spatial separation and economic relationship of exploitation by city inhabitants and rulers was deliberately obfuscated by a *polis* ideology. With a restricted minority of people enjoying full citizenship, the unity of this minority, regardless of their status of living and working in the city or countryside, was stressed. Urban money and knowhow were built into temples in the countryside and along the territorial borders, and rituals or processions brought smaller or larger numbers of townspeople into these places. The model of citizenship and (increasingly theoretical) voting rights (and rites) was

Pieter Bruegel,
*The Tower of Babel*,
c. 1563

transferred to the Roman city, too. Amid the noise of what was probably the largest construction site on earth at the time, Augustan poets dreamt of the sheep and cattle that used to graze on this very place. In the first century CE, Seneca the Younger, the politician and philosopher, suggested that a quiet place in the forests allows for a much better experience of the divine than urban temple architecture.

After all, living in the city was and is not a walk in the park. Viewed from below, city life can look so attractive with all the promises of security and a livelihood. Security first. Walls all the way round is probably the most pervasive historic image of cities, from ancient Mesopotamia to India and the Mediterranean world, and from Chinese river valleys to medieval Europe, sub-Saharan Africa and Peruvian Cuzco. The promise of security was sustainable only when the walls had gates and roads and thus the necessary connections and exchange with the world beyond the city. This material security provided by walls fed the image even where the actual cities could do without walls, for instance at the centre of large and stable empires. After all, for many who had urban aspirations (or in other words: had dreams that longed for the city, as no other place would allow their fulfilment), it was not megalomania, as in the narrative of the Tower of Babel, but mere survival that was at stake. The price accepted was and is high. The ambivalence of man-made cities and the way of life actually prevailing there was and is rapidly seen and felt. The city is 'heaven and hell' at the same time; it is a place of innovation, but also a place of social and ecological crises; a place of security, but also of health threats and violence. In all of that, religion is not only an observer, but an important actor.

## RELIGION

But what is religion? If one wants to understand religion in the city, one needs to find a suitable way of defining it. Religion is best seen as a collective term for religious practices, ideas and institutions that serve communication with superhuman addressees, with deceased humans, with spirits or with gods. In the light of the fact that communication and its contents are attributing existence and power to these superhuman addressees and relevance to the speakers' (and their audiences') situation, religious action also becomes a resource: a resource for power as well as for critique.

As a cultural technique of this kind, religion itself is space-relevant. Religious practices are spatial practices in two respects: on the one hand, they appropriate space or construct it. Spaces for prayers, hymns, dances, processions and performances of sacrifices or theatre plays temporarily become ritual spaces. In the longer run, however, spaces can be sacralised by the use of other means – flagpoles, steles, panels, walls or even more extensive architecture, whether for occasional remembrance and re-use for religious purposes or even exclusively and permanently. These mark spaces for meetings that can compete with other actors or purposes, in particular when space is scarce, as it always is within the boundaries of 'cities'.

But religious practices also have a second side. They relate, beyond the respective concrete space and even beyond a city, to 'transcendent' addressees, to their spatial associations with other places or with inaccessible, virtual places: heavens or underworlds. Religion is always about the here and now, but also – to very different degrees in the course of history – about the beyond the here and now, about our neighbour, about the others, about the world beyond the wall, and even the world beyond the world.

**"The relationship between city and religion is one full of tension. This is already true in very early religious texts. The 'Tower of Babel' is a symbol for the city as well as for the hubris of its inhabitants."**

As a space-constituting and space-transcending practice, religion has become relevant to urbanization processes – presumably not always, but in random, historical processes. Meso-American temple pyramids in the centre of their cities are as much a testimony to this as are cathedrals, mosques, and the urban riversides of the Ganges. Sometimes religious spaces formed crystallisation points for urbanisation, sometimes they added lustre to existing market settlements. In many areas and epochs they defined the outline and the outer appearance of cities, and provided iconic elements for coinage and urban branding.

Evidently, religion as a space-dependent practice cannot have remained unaffected by this. It must have repeatedly been changed as urbanised religion by urban factors, domination, cultural techniques, and internal and external interdependencies. It is to this side of the religion-and-urbanity-coin that I would like to draw attention.

## THE ONGOING URBAN REINVENTION OF RELIGION

For millennia, religion from its most immanent to its most transcendent forms has served as a means to stabilise or even establish the relations of power, from sacred kings (A. Strathern 2019) to shamans (P. Jackson 2016), and from the early empires to the rulers of the 21st century. Continuing this function in the densely built environment of cities demands visibility, impressive and lasting visibility. The *monumentalisation* of religion is a widespread phenomenon, now seen in Moscow, Bangkok, Istanbul, and Mecca as in many other places in the past and present. Against a background of rather dim divine figures and more diffused notions of the divine – found in objects as well as in ancestors – monumental sanctuaries not only made the religious use of space permanent: they also defined divine characters, codified them as gods or saints related to specific places, and easily elaborated on their stories, creating images and thus an ever more stable net of material icons, names, and narratives. Such a stable form of complex poly-theisms (whether based on gods or saints) was hard to imagine in many pre-urban societies and often flies in the face of more elaborate transcendental concepts of the divine.

Fritz Lang, *Metropolis*, 1927

European thinkers of the age of massive urban growth from the late 19th to the early 20th centuries stressed the demands of the new environment on the personalities of those living in cities. Urban life demanded and created new forms of subjectivisation. The individual was shaped by the many social circles of which he (as the male writers put it) was a member and needed to develop a certain distance in social encounters (G. Simmel 1917), a new type of *individualisation* able to deal with the fluidity of the environment and always able to imagine the significance of chance encounters (M. Russo 2016: 67-164). In religious terms, the subject lost its connection to its ancestors and its own (and their) place of abode (J. Rüpke 2018: 234--247). Religious practices such as prayer, meditation or asceticism helped to develop a new kind of urban self, a process already visible in the ancient circum-Mediterranean cities, as much as in other pre-modern cultures across the world (J. Rüpke 2013, 2019; M. Fuchs et al. 2019).

If urbanisation lastingly changed both ends of the axis of religious communication, it had even more consequences for the means employed between them. Early on, the challenge of administering urban crowds and complexities, and of amassing, storing, and distributing supplies, for instance, created systems of notation, and writing in a broader sense. Relationships and the transfer of property as employed in many acts of religious communication were influenced and developed by them. Dedicated objects could be lastingly and visibly marked by the names of donors and recipients. Complex prayers could be developed in the form of curses that were readable to the powers invoked, but invisible to all others, especially the persons targeted. The *scripturalisation* of religion goes further, however. The production of texts not only allowed for more precise and repeatable prayers and hymns, but also for the systematisation of ritual practices, for the piecemeal ascription of meaning to such practices, and ultimately for a systematic reflection on the character of the addressees, resulting in what is called theology. Genealogies and historical narratives create sharp (and often polemical) identities and claims. Medieval and early modern books of secret rituals made for a virtualisation of religious practices that is a precursor of today's internet religion. Calendars and maps result from the same process, religion being slightly more prominent in the systematisation of time than in the systematisation of space, where it is more strongly challenged by urban administrations.

All such activities demand specialists. The sheer number of people in the same

Unknown author, c. 1370

place, the many different types of exchange, and the necessary (and possible) specialisation in the hubs produced a division of labour that had repercussions on religious traditions. Supported by, and contributing to, the processes mentioned above, *professionalisation* was not only developed in religious contexts, too, but particularly in them. Producing cakes for offerings or for *pūjā*, selling services as a diviner, caring for the soul, administrating a sanctuary – religious specialists and priesthoods are/became part of urban forms of religious action along lines of gender, social status, education, and wealth that were easily exported beyond the walls.

These specialists often supported a consistent development that seems to be natural from today's point of view, though only at first sight: the *institutionalisation* of organised religions in the plural. From the start, and even more so today, cities were places of high tensions. Support from unseen powers was not only claimed by those in power, often rivalling visible power and its unseen but visualised resources. Religious action could likewise serve the many smaller processes of group formation, whether in small or extended families, in neighbourhoods or in networks across cities. Shared religious practices and places helped very much to produce and define such groups (É. Rebillard, J. Rüpke 2015), and even produce ethnicity where unrelated individuals had just come

together (R. Brubaker 2004; J. Nagel 1994). Such groups, whether imagined or existing, could stabilise religious options developed in the course of individualisation (J. Rüpke 2014; J. Rüpke 2016). Religious actions and ideas might be used as a resource for the homogenisation of inhabitants as well as for the stabilisation of differences between the people living in a city.

If 'religions' are one pervasive legacy of the urban history of religion, the *globalisation* of religion in the form of 'world religions' or the universalisation of religion is another, to at least the same degree. If cities are not just an amassment of people, but are hubs of internal *and* external flows (J. Robinson, A. J. Scott, P. J. Taylor 2016: 5), the discourses that define urbanness, self-reflexive urbanity, always include references to and comparison with other cities. In such discourses and inter-urban networks, the spatial dimension of religion as practices focusing on the immanent or transcendent Beyond plays out. References to other cities or places as well as references that go beyond any localities, to no-places like heavens or netherworlds, bolster the independence of religious agents. They certainly help to build up resilience against urban mischief and even persecution. In these respects, the city is not only a prerequisite, but also the topic of religious discourses. But even here, religion reaches beyond intellectual discourses. Religion and city are something that is being 'done'.

This brings us full circle to the very beginning. Despite or because of its close entanglement, the city does not always feature prominently in religious practices and discourses. Quite often, the rural theme of urban discourses is entangled with anti--urban discourses from religion. 'Nature' promises salvation. This may well be. The man-made global ecological crisis is very much an urban-made one, to its own detriment. Urbanness needs its opposite: the very core of urbanity is threatened by pan-urbanisation. Religion is as much a factor in this as an antidote to it.

**"Quite often, the rural theme of urban discourses is entangled with anti-urban discourses from religion. 'Nature' promises salvation."**

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## Cristina Fernandes

## *Vitalina Varela*, by Pedro Costa
## Three Chords

Pedro Costa,
*Vitalina Varela*, 2019

**This section offers an analysis and interpretation of Pedro Costa's latest film, *Vitalina Varela*, which is understood as 'a narrative of wickedness'. Vitalina and Ventura may well be the representation of a 'people of the shadows' who form a vanguard, as Hannah Arendt already mentioned with regard to the figure of the refugee.**

**1.**

**'There's nothing but bitterness around here.**
**We're nobodies here.'**

*Vitalina Varela*, the film by Pedro Costa, is a trapdoor under our feet; we do not cross a threshold, we fall right in. The opening shot reveals a pathway between two walls near the cemetery. The long sequence takes us a step further into the darkness. A funeral procession makes its way as in a trance – living shadows with faces, Ventura borne aloft, 'sad, drunk men' who die before their time.

As expected since Pedro Costa filmed 'In Vanda's Room', there are no characters, there is no plot; individuals bear their own names and are responsible for their acts. Vitalina Varela is Vitalina Varela, the woman who did not arrive in time for the funeral of the man who had abandoned her forty years before in Figueira das Naus, Cape Verde. She missed the ceremony, but not the reckoning. Vitalina knows how to speak to the dead, and she has come to stay. We realize it before she even says it, because Vitalina's body asserts it – all the shots of her arrival at the airport are a proclamation of resistance and the will to fight.

It is one of the most powerful segments in the film: in the dead of night, a plane on the runway. The shot is disturbing. We have never seen an airport scene like this before. Pedro Costa has a peculiar, hypnotic way of framing and dimming the set, as if the camera were shaping the whole space and creating a pact or a secret bond with it – we do not even know the words that would fit this cinematic technique.

Vitalina is shot in backlight at the door of the plane. She steps down. She is tired, unwell; her feet hurt. What kind of clandestine flight was that? Why does she get off the plane alone at night? What is she in search of? So many questions. The cleaning ladies – a squad and the chorus – come to meet Vitalina and now they embrace her and let her know that her man Joaquim has been buried for three days, that there is nothing for her in Portugal, and his house does not belong to her. We know that Vitalina will stay, because she had waited a long time for his return, his letters, a plane ticket, and nothing had come. Something sinister has grown inside her. '*Your death cannot undo the harm you have done me*.' Her words are as powerful as a curse. Vitalina will stay because she must establish her presence in Joaquim's death as she never could when he was alive. To hold our own against an insult is this, too: to reciprocate the harm the dead have done us. Joaquim cannot run away from her complaints now.

'I shall stay here until my dying day.' Vitalina has the temperament of the badly treated, the same chiselled features and guarded emotions of Mouchette or Sergeant Rutledge. Her tears are the tears of the girl in the Bresson film who has been hurt: tears flow down her cheeks, but you will not hear a single sob, her body will not tremble; there is a stone inside her breast. Vitalina's anger and strength grow; no explanation is given – you do not explain symbols – they just cast their shadows on the screen. It is essential to tell the story of the undocumented immigrants, the story of their poorly constructed houses. It is essential to write down all the insults. There is so much work to do.

As a concept, cinematic depth of field may have acquired a new meaning with this film – one that cannot be gauged with the eye but is discernible through another discipline and reaches another kind of deepness. A case of desertion concentrates, within itself, all the weight of the past, a narrative of wickedness, a sentence passed on our collective history. We are all involved, angels and tigers alike.

Gradually, Vitalina takes charge.

Of the language that is a hindrance.

Of the house that plagues her, its windows as small as a drain, with bars that cage her, its low doors, its bare walls, its collapsing roof. It is crooked architecture out of a book by Jorge Luis Borges designed to cover up a crime.

Of the jungle surrounding the neighbourhood.

Of the community, who do not trust or accept her, and only gradually come to pay her a rather false visit.

Joaquim's friends talk about another woman, about a fight with a colleague, a knife, drugs. The unemployed Joaquim wandered into the neighbourhood, kept to himself, got sick, and refused to go to hospital, choosing death. Ntoni could be Vitalina's son, he brings home what he has stolen ('seven cans of tuna for five euros'), later he sits at the table with Marina, he likes stews, he was with Joaquim in prison, 'thieves and tipplers are not to be trusted'. Marina hardly eats, she is always cold and ends up dying. We know nothing about Marina. She is a mystery, another loose end.

But it is Ventura who plays alongside Vitalina throughout the film. While she is solid and down-to-earth, he is a frenzied whiff of a soul – the counterpart of a huge failure, the dark side of our epic voyages. This was already apparent in the film *Horse Money*, where he bears his name proudly as if it were a banner proclaiming his fate, and danger. Old, sick, his hands trembling, his mind gone, Ventura is a physical wreck – a disjointed parallel universe of harsh, incoherent words. 'We share our mourning. You've lost your husband; I've lost my faith in all this darkness.'

And his tread
Is more majestic than
That of the Episcopal minister
Approaching the pulpit
Of a Sunday.

Now he plays the part of a priest without parishioners. He says the church is his people's home, but the church is empty. He recites the specific materials of his life: cement, tile, brick. He talks about paying the grocer's bills and the fines, the urgency of building a house, his visits to the jail, his medication, the nearness of death. He blends reality with phrases from the Bible. 'It's poison.' He falls to the ground. Your every move is a prayer to chase the storm away, but it is useless. 'When the world was divided in two, this half was shrouded in shadow' – and your people's home, Ventura, is the cemetery. In this neighbourhood, they all live a life of three chords.

When they talk to each other, or to themselves, Vitalina and Ventura pass embittered judgement on humanity: all human beings carry their dead on their backs. The film progresses painfully; if we surrender to it completely, we can feel the inner struggle, the unceasing concentration of them all, their courage and their dedication. The time it took to get here – *that* is the miracle.

In the darkness, a sparse light reveals the syncopated bodies and the ceremonial objects. There is a shot, repeated several times, of photographs of Joaquim with flowers and candles. Or the portrait of Vitalina as a bride, next to some plastic bottles. Vitalina folding the yellow safety vest of a construction worker. Perfume bottles from Zara. A cutlet in the frying pan. The images seem to have been made in Hell, they have a merciless effect on us. We can invoke the old masters of cinema and painting, but there is something else – something elusive, because it does not add, but rather takes away, and we know so little as yet about this act of erasure.

Near the end, some outdoor scenes are filmed in daylight. They are the exception and this contrast gives tremendous power to the shots. The cemetery; during Marina's funeral, the camera is placed near the graves; we see the stones, the statues, the plaques with the dates of birth and death, the flowers; Ventura and Vitalina pass by; the sky and the clouds take up most of the frame. We go back to Vitalina's shack; she opens the door, goes out and sees that someone is fixing the roof. Is that some sort of a beginning? 'If there is love, things should work out.' Finally, a re-enactment of the young Vitalina and Joaquim building the big house at Figueira das Naus; it is the most displaced scene, it looks like lost footage and has a weird energy. That comes perhaps from the visible joy that is about to be brought to an end – the irremediable. 'Somewhere, there's a point of no return. We have to reach that point.'

**2.**

**The maze is a straight line**

It all started with *Down to Earth*. Some letters had to be handed over in the Cape Verdean neighbourhoods of Lisbon. With time, the task intensified and became an obsession in the various senses of the word: an idée fixe, a consuming concern, even an atrocious persecution. We can see and feel it in the films of Pedro Costa, a collective archaeological adventure that has been gaining momentum and a voice of its own at each new step. The story builds up horizontally, and travels a single, straight line as mysterious as the Greek labyrinth.

To hand over letters was, and still is, a tremendous job. In such forsaken neighbourhoods as Fontainhas, Casal da Boba, Cova da Moura, Colina do Sol and Pontinha, Pedro Costa found a community that hovers on the edge of society. They have nothing; they are immigrants or lost souls, mere bodies to work and bury. They are invisible ('the people' have come after all, but no one acknowledges them). They keep coming, with no papers, no rights, looking for who knows what, running away from something or running risks. They end up in a hole between four walls, sad, alone, full of pain or full of drugs.

How do you log these stories without classifying them? How do you preserve their dignity? How do you film a desolated landscape without diminishing it? How do you capture the last few minutes before the collapse?

'We are instructed to do the negative; the positive is already within us.' Each film by Pedro Costa seems to respond to Kafka's claim by putting into practice a subversive method, his own punk or surrealist attitude that turns everything upside down and breaks with the conventional path. As in the great tragedies, the films build on the dialectical tension between passionate performances and the rigorous technique that cinema is known for, but at the same time everything is eccentric, that is, situated outside the centre and the axes.

Instead of poverty, the camera records an unexpected luxury: the walls of the shacks or a wooden pole seem rich and sumptuous. The neighbourhood, with its tight angles and numerous stairs (we are invited to register the emergence of a truly organic, unfinished architecture), resembles a tower built on the moon; the same severe and dusty beauty that leaves us breathless. Outside the perimeter of the shacks there is the jungle. In the middle of the jungle there is a church.

An appropriately extended time; a precise and gentle placement of the camera; walls, stairs, doors and windows marking a real and disturbed space (as if the real had legs and arms); a full-blown background soundtrack made from distant and sparse notes, the wind on the leaves, the rain on the tiles, a chat in the distance; colours forged in the heart of darkness; a dim but violent light; shots that

explode from dynamic resonances – all these are but cinematic matter taken beyond their limits.

And yet, when, in her room, Vanda ceases to be Clotilde and assumes her own name, that is the primeval moment of a new kind of acting. After her, they all receive and pass on the testimony: António Semedo, 'Nhurro', Gustavo Sumpta, 'Lento', Alfredo Mendes, Bete, Ventura, Vitalina Varela and so many others. They perform in the way actors used to perform the ancient Passion plays, as the people of Trás-os-Montes in the film by António Reis and Margarida Cordeiro. As the commune of Buti reinventing the *Dialogues with Leucò*. Many hours of rehearsals, trials, breathing exercises. A way of writing that plays with the techniques of collage and overlay. 'Combine the particular with the general and keep it noticeable.' Adjust the words to the emotions. Let the gestures evolve. Cut any extra fragments.

The narratives they film are a re-enactment of episodes from their life stories, or the lives of their peers, living and dead, because these people, this people, of the shadows are also the poor wretches photographed by Jacob Riis in the late nineteenth century or filmed a few months ago by Behrouz Rae in Los Angeles. They are Robert Desnos under arrest in a concentration camp writing to his wife. They are the humiliated and the insulted, the parents, children and family exploited by heavy work, involved in shady dealings, who are denied a name and a decent life. It is never-ending violence. They come from a foreign land, but above all they come from the dark of night, they have scars and the past clings to their skins. They have been an open parable ever since. They are the vanguard of the world; they are youth in movement. They are all one step away from the abyss.

**3.**

**'The people' of the shadows**

Adelina Dias Varela
Aguinaldo Martins
Alexandre Silva 'Xana'
Alberto 'Lento' Barros
Alfredo Mendes
Alice Rocha
Aliu Baldé
André Guiomar
André Semedo
Antónia Cruz
António Duarte
António Santos
António Semedo Moreno
António Silva
António 'Teacher' Leita
Arlindo Pina
Armando da Graça
Armindo Veríssimo

Arlindo Semedo
Beatriz Duarte
Benvinda Mendes
Benvindo Tavares
Borges Pina
Bruno Brito Varela
Bubaka Embaló
Carlos Rosário Rodrigues
Carlos Santos
Cecília Tavares Fernandes
Cila Cardoso
Cristiana Torres
Cristiano Silva Varela
Débora Jacira Pina
Décio Alexandre Gancho
Deise Varela
Diogo Pires Miranda
Elísio Fortes Semedo
Eugénio Pedro
Eunice Adão
Evangelina Nelas
Fernando José Paixão
Fife
Florzinho Furtado
Francisco Brito
Geny
Gustavo Sumpta
Imídio Monteiro
Irene Nunes Semedo
Isabel Cardoso
João Baptista Monteiro
João Fortes
João Gertrudes
João Gomes
João Laves
João Roberto
Joaquim Tavares
Joel Santos
Jordão Bento
José Alberto Silva
José António Veiga
José Maria Pina
José Tavares
Joyce Worm
Julião
Juniô Souza
Juvino
Juvita Tavares Fernandes
Katelly Varela
Lara Veiga
Lena Duarte
Lisa Lopi
Lucinda Tavares
Luiz Mendonça
Luzia Tavares
Manuel Gomes Miranda
Manuel Semedo
Manuel Tavares Almeida
Marco Lopes
Maria Amélia
Maria dos Reis Pina
Maria Silva
Marina Alves Domingues
Martinho da Veiga
Maurício Fernandes
Mimoso
Miquelina Barros
Miro Monteiro
Neusa Silva
Nilsa Fortes
Paula Barrulas
Paulo Jorge Gonçalves
Paulo Mota
Paulo Nunes
Paulo Pereiro
Pedro Tavares
Pedro Lanban
Pires Duarte
Rafael Pina
Raul Silva Reinaldo Aspirante
Rosa Monteiro
Sandra Mariza Pina
Silvestre Lopes
Tei Varela
Tito Furtado
Tomás Gonçalves
Valdemir Lobo Gomes
Vanda Duarte
Ventura
Vergílio Semedo
Vitalina Varela
Vyacheslav Zhupik
Waldir Pires Duarte
Zita Duarte
Zulmira Varela

TRANSLATED BY MARIA JORGE DE FREITAS

*Vitalina Varela*, by Pedro Costa / Three Chords

## José Manuel dos Santos

## Walid Raad and Ethical Imagination

*Appendix 137: Les camoufleurs*
Walid Raad, portfolio for Electra 8

**Walid Raad catalogues the images collected in the Portfolio for Electra 8 under the signature Farid Sarroukh, "a mediocre painter who was irked (but not surprised) by his colleagues' eager collaboration with the militias". As Fernando Pessoa and Jorge Luis Borges show, we are all the Other of Ourselves. These lines, which are in this magazine as if it were another, speak of Walid Raad – and it is of Farid Sarroukh, too, that we are speaking.**

Have you heard about an art of storytelling in which the stories tell themselves, reinventing, adding to, amplifying and challenging themselves? This art, which the Arabs have cultivated masterfully on countless occasions, tells the stories of history and the history of stories.

Walid Raad, a Lebanese artist living in New York and a traveller of the world, practices this art in which the narrative seeks reality and the imagining of it, journeying in the times that give the spaces a face and in the spaces that configure the times, and turning memory into white and, frequently, black magic.

There is an invitation to visual meditation in this art. But this meditation is not distant and distanced, passive and peaceful, contemplation. It is openness, curiosity, interest, examination, questioning, concern. The leitmotiv of this artistic thinking, and the art born from it, is the questioning of a world so threatened by events, and of the representation (re-presentations) of a country at war and of war as the identity of a country.

Working with varied art forms, techniques, media and formats, such as installation, performance, photography, video, graphics, montage, publishing and text, Wallid Raad's work turns art into a device (in an Agamben sense), a stage, a workshop, a laboratory, an archive, an observatory, a listening point and a court. If Kant places reason before the court of reason, Raad places art before the court of art.

In his work, art becomes inquiry, gesture, displacement, pursuit, discovery, invention, creation, construction, memory, allegation, judgment, gaze, intent, volition, delay and anticipation. And protest, denunciation and accusation. It is a committed art, but its commitment is not alienation or deviation from itself. It has a circular sense which moves from the interior to the exterior and back to the interior. Its faithfulness does not estrange it; it makes it more personal. The artist focuses art on its own canons as one looks at one mirror placed in front of another.

Raad is an artist of memory, but of memory that makes, unmakes and remakes itself, calling into question the usual processes that codify, classify, stratify, hierarchise, settle, crystallise, manipulate and instrumentalise it. Questioning the idea that the real is that which is documented and that a document is that which is demonstrated to be real, it interrogates the political and social, psychological and cognitive processes that form historical awareness. It even questions the methodologies behind historiography, showing that often the fictitious can be truer and more exemplary than the pseudo-realistic and hyper-documentary. One therefore sees how certainty lies often in doubt, and precision in imprecise mathematics and in ambivalent and evolving geometry.

Raad's creation of imaginary people, who produce imaginary documents and witness imaginary events, in a succession of imaginary images, constructs a hyper-reality that is imposed on reality, making it more real, symptomatic and significant than it is.

One of his central projects is called 'The Atlas Group' (1989–2004, though occasionally resurrected), which immediately recalls Aby Warburg's 'Mnemosyne Atlas', his extraordinary (in every sense) memory archive. Raad's art therefore gives contingency the need to confront, collate, interrogate and intensify itself. In the stories he creates, there is a fiction that is the face of reality and a lie that is the face of truth.

The project 'Scratching on Things I Could Disavow: A History of Art in the Arab World', begun in 2007, questions the conditions and possibilities of a history of the arts of Islam and the Middle East. It keeps a close eye on the current situation, caused by the speeding up of technological development and the influence that some countries in the region and their obvious wealth have over the great museums of the western world. In addition to this is the projection of Middle Eastern artists, with their appearance/revelation in leading and influential museums and collections, thus fulfilling the idea that the globalisation of aesthetic capitalism is unlimited and that it is endlessly innovative. As Walter Benjamin said, 'The modern is set against the ancient, the new against the unchanging.'

This audacious project also spies on and examines the relationship between artworks and events in history, scrutinising how traditions are formed (and accessed), founded on invisibilities and visibilities obtained by natural and artificial selection.

In the countries of endless wars and ruinous conflicts, tradition is that which survives disaster. And the current responsibility for all of this is how we rescue what has been buried (names, works, ideas, artists, movements and endeavours). *R*emaking, *re*placing and *re*familiarising ourselves with tradition here is to surmount the insurmountable, surpass the unsurpassable and reanimate the inanimate. Frequently this is only done by an art that unravels signs, fills gaps, corrects flaws, restores cracks, deciphers codes, guesses facts, completes fragments, adds interpretations and restores mirages. In these cases, the inheritance frequently travels in the opposite direction to the hands on a clock: it is the ravaged past that receives and inherits the tradition that the present and the future deliver to it. Moreover, tradition is often the reconstituted or imagined image of a destroyed or cancelled object.

The starting point for this undertaking was the opening of the Louvre in Abu Dhabi. In the project 'Preface to the First Edition', Raad spent three years at the Louvre, during the opening of a new section on the Islamic arts. This visually impressive exhibition, and the publications associated with it, questioned museums and their functions and evolution, highlighting the communication, permeability and porosity between different cultures and their artistic expressions.

Raad's work is dense with anthropological, philosophical, political, social, aesthetic, and psychological meanings. Using war and its causes and consequences, uncertainties and aporias, truths and lies as a field of observation, research and experimentation, the artist casts a glance that conveys dialectical practices and modern and post-modern values.

When Raad visited Porto, in 2018, to hold a conference-performance at the Forum of the Future, Diogo Vaz Pinto wrote a lucid article about him, drawing parallels with the German writer W. G. Sebald and speaking, in relation to both, about a 'scrupulous uncertainty'. 'In an era when the very notion of truth seems to have been volatilised, appearing to us increasingly as a mirage, this artist emerges as a creator of thought-provoking fables, drawing on real or fabricated documents and causing disorientation and light-headedness in the observer's relationship with his work,' he states. In Alan Gilbert's words, 'Much of Walid Raad's art investigates not the failure of images to represent traumatic events but the refusal of the real to inscribe itself as a legible image.' And, in his review of MOMA's major retrospective, writer and editor Orit Gat wrote that '[he recounts] what is essentially the experience of the place; that this is presented as the personal experiences of non-existent people only makes it seem more universal because nothing about these stories reads as untrue – except the fact that they are.'

In this persistent and coherent oeuvre, there are absences and shadows, reflections and limits, rarefaction and gradation, margins and uncertainties, infiltrations and deviations, and contrasts and contradictions. There are constructions replacing destructions, nights succeeding days, lives following deaths. It therefore emerges as a vehement form with the white and frightening clarity of a ghost and the trembling and indecisive *sfumato* of reality.

The portfolio *Appendix 137: Les camoufleurs*, which Walid Raad created for Electra, shows images that, in their apparent visual accuracy, convey mysterious questions. It is therefore the perfect testimony to such a unified and myriad, affirmative and interrogative, and strong and vulnerable oeuvre.

By attributing the authorship (like Fernando Pessoa, we would call it 'heteronymic authorship') of this portfolio to a 'mediocre painter', by the name of Farid Sarroukh, 'displeased (but not surprised) by the enthusiastic collaboration of his colleagues with the militias', Raad challenges ontological profiles, classification scales, value hierarchies, artistic statuses and constrained identities with irony (like Jorge Luis Borges, we would call it 'metaphysical irony'). And he dismantles established ideas, spent images, dead words, conformist voices.

There is also, or above all, an ethical imagination in this work that produces series of living questions for the series of dead answers the world gives us every day. It is as if there exists a visual morse code that corresponds to a moral braille. Walid Raad's works and artistic interventions are white lines of human protest drawn on the black wall of time and intended to inhabit a dense and visible public space of common memory and affirmation/adjustment of the collective unconscious.

Walid Raad is one of the best-known and most recognised artists of our time. Born in Lebanon, he lives, creates and teaches – at the Cooper Union School of Art – in New York. His oeuvre, which never ceases to expand through the invention of media, figures and purposes, gives his historical experience an artistic transfiguration, making each the bedrock of the other.

The artist has held exhibitions at prestigious institutions in Europe, America and the Middle East: MOMA (New York), the Whitechapel Gallery (London), the Louvre and 104 (Paris) and Hamburger Bahnhof (Berlin). He participated in Documenta11 in Kassel (2002), the Venice Biennale (2003), Home Works (a forum for cultural practices in Beirut, Lebanon), Kunsthalle Zurich and The Paris Autumn Festival. He is a member of the Arab Image Foundation, based in Beirut, whose mission is to compile and cherish the visual heritage of the Middle East, North Africa and the Arab diaspora. He is the recipient of many awards, scholarships and other forms of recognition.

As we view Walid Raad's art, and its originality and quest, evidence and testimony, the conviction grows within us that the gratuitous lightness of so many artworks of our time is redeemed here by a seriousness and a questioning of issues that encourage us to look and to listen, so that we may try to understand and assess the time and the world in which we live and die.

TRANSLATED BY CHRIS FOSTER

René Magritte,
*The Treachery of Images*, 1929


Ceci n'est pas une pipe.
Magritte

**Cristina Fernandes**

# FE•ED•BACK

Unexceptional words are the best specimens for observation. They go unnoticed until you stare at them long enough to realize their endless ramifications. The word *feedback* is a case in point.

Being the product of a laid-back environment created by musicians and sound engineers, *feedback* has never had the smug undertones of other imported words that crumple the fabric of the Portuguese language. Lacking a quality that would secure it a place in the circles of cosmopolitan jargon, *feedback* originally became a commonplace word conveying a specific, unpleasant noise.

Despite its almost rowdy appeal, our attention is drawn elsewhere. In fact, it makes us want to examine the significant change in the word's application, to investigate what the word *feedback* has become or, as an earnest philosopher would say, the word's impermanence. A lot could be said about the march of events in a society by the semantic modifications of existing words, for words follow our footsteps like a faithful hound.

In the field of electrical engineering, the term was coined in the early 20th century to describe the process in which part of the output of a device or system is returned to its input. If the transference increases the output level, the feedback is positive; if the transference decreases it, the feedback is negative. Invented by engineers, the word bears some similarity to a diagram with its arrows and its plus and minus signs – it is explicit, plain, and easily converted into a graphic representation.

Perhaps this fundamental objectivity aroused the wish to give it a symbolic value – we know only too well how perversion of the language can provoke the most virtuous spirits. With such desirable characteristics, the word *feedback* was bound to be dragged into the more ambiguous field of psychology and from there into any field at all. The electric charge was converted into a communicational value, a pendulum oscillating between Good and Evil. Oh, how wondrous function-words are!

The sense of *feedback* as a 'reaction' or 'response', which is dominant today, dates from the 1940s. This definition has been officially included in the Portuguese dictionary, where the word keeps its English orthography and is classified as a masculine noun. At first, it emerged in a gentle, almost well-intentioned manner and merely asked for a response. However, once it became clear that this data circuit boosts the economic system that produces and distributes goods and services, information rapidly developed an insatiable thirst for a return.

Feedback is now intrinsic to all our activities. No sooner do we get out of the repair shop than a text message will push us to rate the car mechanic's work. The same goes for restaurants, government offices, stores, and every time we are buying something or even taking a look. At work, the word has crept into the assessment procedures only to plague us, and our salary too.

It is on the Internet, however, that the need to collect comments reaches its highest point.

There is no escape from it. As our moves are known, and we are continuously connected and online, we are forced to react to all stimuli – and our reactions are progressively more physical. This sick game has gone too far, and we suffer when others force us into a reaction, when they procrastinate in their reply; we suffer from a negative or less than gratifying response. We are always suffering. The social media – that distorted, magnifying mirror of reality – are full of anguish and withdrawal symptoms.

At this juncture, we ought perhaps to staunch this accursed flow and offer the word *feedback* the possibility of revisiting its youth. To respond, literally, with a fearless and shrill sound? Can a Jimi Hendrix solo still shake the world?

TRANSLATED BY MARIA JORGE DE FREITAS

**FRANCISCO ALBA**
A Poet who has published the following books of poetry: *Teoría de la culpa* (1995), *El contrario* (2008) and *Masa crítica* (2013). In addition, he is the author of *Contra el ruido* (2010), a book of articles and essays. His work is included in *Fugitivos* (2016), an anthology of contemporary Spanish poetry organised by Jesús Aguado. He also contributes to literary journals.

**CARLOS MANUEL ÁLVAREZ**
Journalist and writer. In 2015 he received the Ibero-American Journalism Prize, Nuevas Plumas from the University of Guadalajara. In 2016 he founded the Cuban online magazine El Estornudo, with other colleagues. He contributes regularly to The New York Times, El País, Internazionale and Gatopardo, among other media. In May 2017 he was included in the Bogota39 list of the 39 best Latin American writers under the age of forty, a list produced by the Hay Festival every ten years. The first collection of his work as a journalist, *La tribu*, was published in 2017 and his novel *Los caídos*, in 2018.

**CRISTINA FERNANDES**
Cristina Fernandes was born in Porto in 1966. A regular career in graphic arts. She writes about books and films in discreet places. Without permission but to her great advantage, she translates short texts by outstanding writers. She travels on foot in order to *think at greater speed*. With no other distinguishing marks in particular.

**CARLA GANITO**
Coordinator for the Office of International Relations and Academic Cooperation and lecturer at the Human Sciences Faculty (FCH), Universidade Católica Portuguesa. She gained her PhD in communication sciences with a thesis on gender construction mechanisms, an MBA with the double specialisation of information management and marketing, and an MA in information management, with a dissertation on mobile entertainment. Since 2001, she has been lecturing at FCH in digital communication, cyberculture and marketing. She coordinates the research group Digital Literacy and Cultural Change at the Study Centre for Communication and Culture, where she carries out research into the digital media and digital culture, concentrating in particular on mobile technologies and the relationship between gender and technology.

**CATHERINE MILLET**
Catherine Millet is a French art critic, writer and curator, and founder and editor of the modern and contemporary art magazine Art Press. In 1989 she was appointed curator for the French representation in the São Paulo Biennial and in 1995 for the French pavilion at the Venice Biennial. Millet has published several books, among which the following are to be noted: a monography on Yves Klein (1983), *L'art contemporain: histoire et géographie* (2006), and *The Sexual Life of Catherine M.* (2001), which was translated into 47 languages. The latter was followed by *Jealousy: The Other Life of Catherine M.* (*Jour de Souffrance*) (2008). Her critical essay *Dali et moi* was published in 2005 by Gallimard and translated into English, German and Russian. For her work and engagement in the arts, she has received many prizes and distinctions.

**MARIA FILOMENA MOLDER**
She was a full professor at the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences, Universidade Nova de Lisboa (Philosophy Department). Focusing mainly on the Arts and Aesthetics, her vast body of work is eclectic and has had a great impact on the contemporary artistic world in Portugal.

**RUI PATRÍCIO**
Lawyer and partner at Morais Leitão, Galvão Teles, Soares da Silva & Associados, where he coordinates activity in the criminal, misdemeanour and compliance spheres. He gained his first degree and master's at Lisbon University Law Faculty (1994 and 1999), where he also taught. He has been a guest lecturer at the law faculty of the Universidade Nova in Lisbon, to which he will be returning from 2020. He was elected a member of the High Council of the Judiciary by the Assembly of the Republic (2005–2011). At present, he is the sub-director of the publication *Revista da Ordem dos Advogados* and a member of the Council for the Prevention of Corruption. He also sits on the Consultative Committee of APAC (Association for the Protection and Support of the Convicted), as well as belonging to other legal and civil associations. He has been nominated by the Ministry of Culture as a member of the board of administration of the Fundação de Arte Moderna e Contemporânea – Colecção Berardo. Finally, he is the author of books and articles on penal and judicial topics, and works with the media in various ways.

**BERNARDO FUTSCHER PEREIRA**
Diplomat, historian, journalist. Author of *A Diplomacia de Salazar: 1932–1949* and *Crepúsculo do Colonialismo: 1949–1961*. He studied political science at Columbia University in New York, where he started his writing career as a rock critic. In the eighties, he was a DJ at *Frágil* in Lisbon. He has been ambassador in Ireland, before which he served in Barcelona, Brussels and Tel Aviv. He has published dozens of articles on international relations in specialist journals.

**WALID RAAD**
In part, an artist and a professor of art at the *(the still-charging--tuition, and the school should stop doing so now before yet more debt burdens more students who are not the ones who mismanaged the school's finances – its Board of Trustees and administrators did so for decades* (check out the lawsuit against the Board)) Cooper Union. The list of exhibitions (good, bad and mediocre); awards and grants (merited, not merited, grateful for, rejected and/or returned); education (some of it thought-provoking; some of it less so); publications (I am fond of some of my books, but more so of those of Jalal Toufic – you can find his here: jalaltoufic.com), can be found somewhere online.

**GERHARD RICHTER**
Born in Dresden in 1932, Gerhard Richter is widely regarded as one of the most important contemporary artists. He has exhibited internationally in the major contemporary art institutions such as Tate Modern, the Serpentine Gallery, Centre Pompidou and Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin. Richter has also participated in several editions of international art shows such as Documenta and the Venice Biennial. In 2005, the Gerhard Richter Archive was established in cooperation with the artist as an institute of the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen in Dresden.

**JÖRG RÜPKE**
Studied in Bonn, Lancaster and Tübingen, where he completed his doctorate *(Domi militiae)* and university lecturer's qualification *(Kalender und Öffentlichkeit)*. He is now a fellow in religious studies and vice-director of the Max Weber Centre for Advanced Cultural and Social Studies, Erfurt University, Germany. He has led projects on Lived Ancient Religion, Religious Individualisation in Historical Perspectives, and Roman Imperial and Provincial Religion, and is now co-director of the Kolleg-Forschungsgruppe project 'Urbanity and Religion: Reciprocal Formations' (with Susanne Rau). He has published widely on Roman culture and religion.

**SILVIANO SANTIAGO**
Silviano Santiago (b. 1936) is one of the most important and highly-esteemed Brazilian writers of today. His literary output, begun in 1955 with a story published in a magazine, now encompasses around thirty titles covering various genres: the tale, the novel, poetry and the essay. He gained his PhD in Paris, at the Sorbonne. He has been a guest lecturer at various North American universities and, in Brazil, he was a full professor at Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro and Universidade Federal Fulminense. He is a specialist, in particular, on the work of Guimarães Rosa. His latest novel, *Machado* (with Machado de Assis as the main character, as the title indicates), won the *Prémio Jabuti 2017* and was awarded, in second place, the *Prémio Oceanos*.

**SARAH SINGH**
Award-winning artist and filmmaker. She has lived primarily in the United States, where she attended the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore, before moving to Bombay in 1994 to pursue her work as a photographer and painter. She held her first solo show in 1996. Her first film *The Sky Below* is an award-winning feature-length documentary presenting a solo journey across Pakistan and India to explore the story of Partition. *A Million Rivers* is a surrealist black and white feature and had its world premiere at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. In 2018 Singh launched an international contemporary arts salon for India called Panorama Editions, which will soon have its third edition.

**BERND STIEGLER**
Since 2007, Bernd Stiegler (b. 1964) has been a professor of modern German literature and of media theory and history at the University of Konstanz. He is the author of a large number of books on photography in its relationship with technology and as an instrument of observation of the world itself of modernity. Some of his published works are: *Philologie des Auges. Die photographische Entdeckung der Welt im 19. Jahrhundert* (2001), *Bilder der Photographie. Ein Album photographischer Metaphern* (2006), and *Nadar. Bilder der Moderne* (2019).

**ENZO TRAVERSO**
An Italian historian whose work focuses on the contemporary history of Europe, in particular Nazism. Since 2013 he has been teaching at Cornell University in the United States, following a number of years teaching political science in France. Totalitarianism and Jewish culture and thought in Germany before the Second World War are two of his main objects of study. The following are noteworthy among the books he has published (some originally in French, others in Italian): *Les juifs et l'Allemagne* (1992), *L'Histoire déchirée. Essai sur Auschwitz et les intellectuels* (1997), *Le passé, modes d'emploi* (2005), *A ferro e fuoco. La guerra civile europea 1914–1945* (2007), and *Mélancolie de gauche* (2016).

**DAN UNGURIANU**
Dan Ungurianu is professor and chair of the Russian Studies Department at Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York. He studied history at Moscow State University and literature at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. His academic interests include Russian classics, historical imagination in Europe and Russia, Russian performing arts, Soviet cinema from avant-garde to blockbusters, Russian sci-fi cinema, and the cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky.

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Gerhard Richter
*17.4.08*, 2008
Varnish on colour photograph
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Aby Warburg
*Mnemosyne Atlas,* 1924–29
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Andrei Tarkovsky
*Solaris*, 1972
Film, 166 minutes
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*The Mirror*, 1975
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*2. Juli 2016 (2)*, 2016
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*Menschen und Landschaften*
[People and Landscapes], 1975
Pencil and felt pen on paper and postcards
169 parts, 50 × 70 cm (each)
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*Piz Lagrev, 1992*, 1992
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Alfred Stieglitz
*Hands*, 1919
Palladium print
24.9 × 19.9 cm
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**p. 117**
Alfred Stieglitz
*Hands and Horse Skull*, 1931
Gelatin silver photographic proof
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Yto Barrada, *Untitled*
(painted educational boards found in Natural History Museum project, Azilal, Morocco), 2013–15
C-print
70 × 70 cm (each)
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Pedro Berruguete
*Saint Dominic and the Cathars,* 1493–99
Tempera on wood
122 × 93 cm
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**p. 158**
Hartmann Schedel
Suns and Book Burning
*Nuremberg Chronicles,* 1493
Woodcut
34.2 × 50 cm
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**p. 159**
Leonardo da Vinci
*Saint John the Baptist*, 1513–16
Oil on walnut wood
69 × 57 cm
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Agnès Varda
*Salut les Cubains! [Hello to the Cubans!]*, 1963
Film, 30 minutes
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William Orpen
*Winston Churchill*, 1916
Oil on canvas
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Winston Churchill
*Bottlescape*, c. 1926
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*The Tower of Babel,* c. 1563
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Fritz Lang
*Metropolis*, 1927
Film, 148 minutes
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René Magritte
*The Treachery of Images*, 1929
Oil on canvas
60.33 × 81.12 cm
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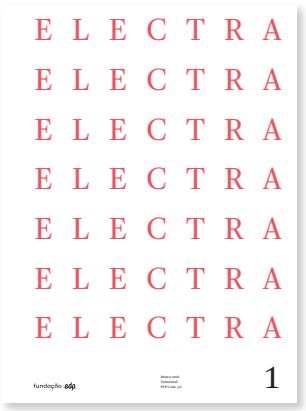


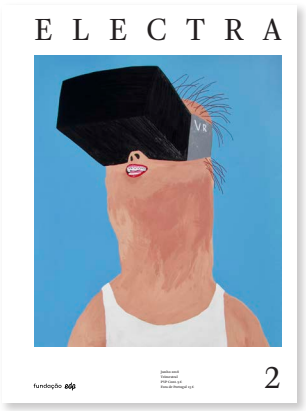



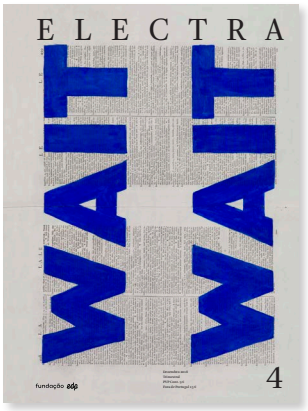



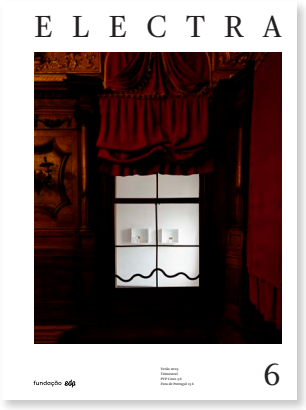


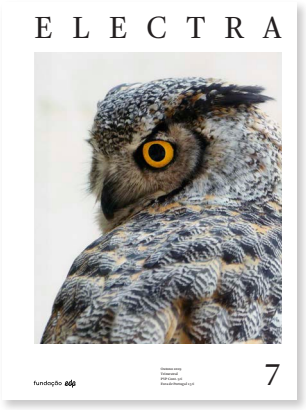


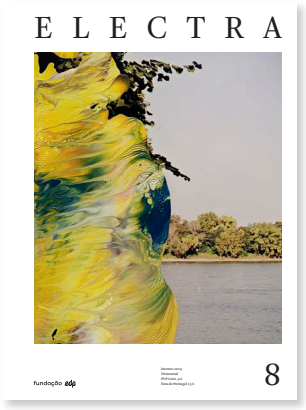

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