



On family memories, new auras, tributes and other positions concerning the monument.

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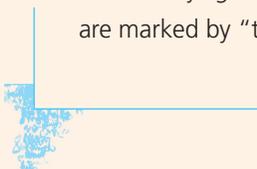
Avelino Sala

A little before 11:00 hours on August 21, 1936, this message was heard on the Almirante Cervera bridge: The enemy is within, shoot against us. The national ship, reluctant to believe such an unexpected message, attempted to confirm it: Message received, send encoded. The answer came immediately: No time for encoding. These were the last messages that the Gijon garrison, under siege in its barracks for the last thirty-three days, transmitted to the ship which had so effectively provided its support. From the ship, with admiration and contained rage, the crew helplessly witnessed the Popular Front's attack on the Simancas barracks, the last local stronghold, putting an end to the sustained fighting among the local population which had been registered since the previous 20th of July...

Every morning when I arrived at the Jesuit School (which used to be the Simancas barracks), where I spent thirteen years of my life, I would see the same words on the wall; they were mysterious and held no meaning for a child growing up between those stone walls. Every morning and every noon, every afternoon, as I went from one classroom to the other, I would again see the mysterious, incomprehensible and contradictory phrase. After years coming and going and thinking about the words, which became more absurd as the years passed, I finally understood what they meant when I grew and learned about their history.

The part of the history of Gijon when the Simancas barracks was under siege and these odd words were pronounced is one of the strangest mysteries of the history of the Spanish Civil War.

In a way, the Simancas barracks, subsequently a school, was linked to my family, finding ways in which history is often capricious, paradoxical and different. Monuments and epic history have always gone hand in hand; epics contemplate the past as a time of great feats, which are marked by "that", as if they stimulated grandeur by imitating classic forms.





When we were younger, my father's sister, Aunt Fina, would tell my sister and myself stories about my grandfather, about when she was eight years old and used to take food to my grandfather to the Simancas barracks prison (my grandfather was a union leader in Asturias) in 1934, before war broke out, how she was often shot at while she was waiting for the empty basket, and how it always contained a nut; about the hunger during the war, when they were forced to eat carob seeds; about how she nearly went to Russia on the famous ship which took a few children there during the war; about how, one day, my grandfather disappeared and his only farewell was a letter, a letter that my aunt can repeat from memory, but which could not be kept because it placed my grandmother and her children in mortal danger.

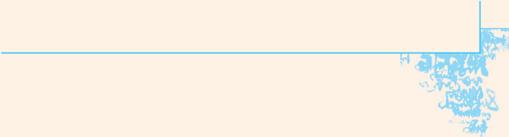
In the other family, my grandfather Casiano would tell us how he had to fight on both sides, and how he deserted them both, to return to his family, which was his only concern; about how he also studied in the same school which started out as the Simancas barracks, where my other grandfather had been imprisoned. These stories cross each other, are linked without touching, but they are close, parallel and multiple.

These stories live on in me, in my sister Olvido and in my cousin Emilio. We have grown up with them, their echoes touched me by chance, when I was small, when they did not seem important, and I have now recovered them, who would have thought it, for my work, seeing them in a new light and composing a non-linear story generating new meanings. History is re-invented.

The words with which I was obsessed for so many years have finally found their place, in this given context of time. They are like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle which, after all these years, have finally been put into place.

The ruin, the diorama, the vestige

Like a torn story or an old model, complex discourses conform a particularly history of one's own life. With a Benjamin-like character, one's own discourse is twisted and turned to conform a new discourse. A ruin is conformed as a diorama of the past, but there is



nothing to do but rebuild on the ruin. Such vestiges of what was are possibly no more than that, mere vestiges of what will never return. The enemy has always been within, waiting for us. Who is really to blame? Is that the right question?

Where do we look to? Besides other things which cannot be discussed here, because they are not the issue, and lead us only to lose ourselves in barren searches or tiring machinations, the time may have come to look further in the distance, to attempt to revisit both physical and metaphorical spaces in which ruins must certainly be rebuilt.

We are attracted by an epic because it feeds us and gives us life to believe that there are still heroes, and therefore hope. A romantic perspective may lead us along strange roads where there is still hope. And I am not referring to the suicidal reaction of the Simancas leader, but to the heroic life of people who overcame adverse circumstances, to the heroism found in everyday life, where heroes are reinvented. But these heroes are no other than ourselves, everyone who makes the smallest, vital, exciting but necessary gesture. Auras are not in buildings, but in the people who generate historic events. If an aura is a "singular fabric of space and time", we need a new theory of auras, something that we could identify with charisma.

And this takes us to Universidad Laboral, now a city of culture. Oddly enough, the eagle has an aureole which is the exact opposite of this idea. If an Aura is distance and inaccessibility, this is just the opposite, if objects have auras.

The colossal architecture of Universidad Laboral and its paradoxical destination are directly linked to the words we are considering. Although the building's function was initially merely to "educate" new generations of fascists, its final purpose is nonetheless to produce, disseminate and exhibit contemporary culture.

Three levels

The neon light on the eagle itself represents personal and family life, nostalgia, growth, the loss of innocence; it is paradoxical and ambiguous. The eagle has an aureole, which



for Cirlot represents the cult of the sun, an igneous symbol, expressing irradiating supernatural energy (visualisation of its spiritual luminosity).

The intervention on the balcony, on which a typical information element of a thoroughway such as a screen of lights, with certain Walter Benjamin quotes, refers to the story itself and its monumental background. For Benjamin, monuments are always funereal.

The intervention in the Theatre lobby, ground floor, comprises eight screens where the Culture video is displayed. This is approached as a reflection on the mechanisms of artistic creation and production, a reflection about the creation of culture, its original treatment and true meaning. Who generates it? Why?

The work for the city of Culture is one more voyage, another stop by the wayside, presented as complex, one more page of a book in which many pages (we hope) are yet to be written.

