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## “Diese Düsternen Bilder”. Neich erledigt, alles Kaputt. [Avelino Sala’s occupancy of a “historic building”].

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Fernando Castro Flórez

[...] it seems evident that the image is not in the present. [...] The image itself is a set of time relations from which the present is merely derived, either as a common multiple or the smallest divisor. Time relations are never seen by ordinary perception, but they are seen in the image from the moment it is created. It makes time relations irreducible to the present sensitive and visible”<sup>1</sup>.

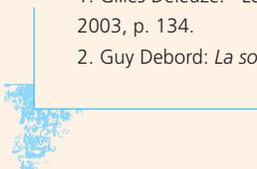
### Original disconnection

The problem of contemporary machinations is not amnesia, as there is nothing properly deserving of being remembered, but *disconnection*. The society of show business has pushed art and even criticism to the terrain of do-it-yourself, with “work” produced with a material comprising a set of *souvenirs* pointing to a pathetic *end*. “For the first time, the arts of all civilisations and all eras can be known and admitted as a whole. It is a “collection of *souvenirs*” of the history of art which, becoming possible, also involves the *end of the art world*. In this time of museums, when no artistic communication is possible, all the old moments of art can also be admitted, because none of them has lost its particular communication conditions in the current *general loss of communication conditions*”<sup>2</sup>.

Contemporary experience is, to use terms characterised by Marc Augé, one of the *non-place* from which different individual attitudes are established: flight, fear, the intensity of

1. Gilles Deleuze: “Le cerveau, c’est l’écran” in *Deux régimes de fous. Textes et entretiens, 1975-1995*, Ed. Minuit, 2003, p. 134.

2. Guy Debord: *La sociedad del espectáculo*, Ed. La Marca, Buenos Aires, 1995, fragment 189.



experience or rebellion. History transformed into a show throws everything “urgent” into oblivion. It is as if space was trapped by time, as if there were no history other than today’s or yesterday’s news, as if each individual history exhausts its motives, words and images in the never-ending stock of a history in the present. The passenger of non-places makes the simultaneous experience of perpetual present and an encounter with himself<sup>3</sup>. Non-places are dominated by artifice and the banality of illusion. The publicity which is everywhere has exhausted its strategies; in a way, non-places, in a singular *detournement*, are used to that dreams can be projected and there, where we only travel in haste or, better still, where we do not want *to be*, a new form of *flânerie* could be developed. Through places remind us of our nomadic condition but also acquire a spectral tone; no one can live in these constructions, they are a limit to be forgotten, the place which retains us: the History that is not ours.

### Nomad imagination and contra-monumentality

Avelino Sala says that his images have a “transversal root” which he associates to the idea of *rhizophore*<sup>4</sup>, of Deleuze and Guattari, his sculptures moving among different architectural styles reveal both a *nomadic imagination* and the will to give the work *contra-monumentality*. “Memory –writes Avelino Sala- and also photography which functions under the idea of moving through the city and the contemporary social scenario and the idea of the personal voyage which is life forming work which could be called the nomad identity”. The *photographic drift* of this lucid creator considers the extended sculptural field mentioned

3. Cfr. Marc Augé: *Los “no lugares”. Espacios del anonimato. Una antropología de la sobremodernidad*, Ed. Gedisa, Barcelona, 1993.

4. “Draw the map and not a carbon copy. The orchid does not reproduce the carbon copy of the wasp, it draws a map with the wasp in the heart of a rhizophore. If the map is the opposite of the carbon copy, it is precisely because it is completely oriented towards experimentation with reality. The map does not reproduce an unconscious closed in on itself, it constructs it. It helps to connect the fields, to unblock the organ-less bodies, to open them in a plan of consistency. It forms part of the rhizophore. The map is open, connectable in all its dimensions, it can be dismantled and altered and constantly changed. It can be broken, altered, adapted to different situations, started by an individual, a group or a social formation. It can be drawn on a wall, conceived as a work of art, constructed as a political action or meditation” (Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: *Mil Mesetas. Capitalismo y esquizofrenia*, Ed. Pre-Textos, Valencia, 1988, p. 18).

by Rosalind E. Krauss<sup>5</sup>, without remaining tied to the obsessive nominalism typical of minimal orthodoxy, favouring *micro-narrative* in which the “symbolic charge” of the scenarios of the *intervention*<sup>6</sup> is very important. Virilio has lucidly stated that, nowadays, interest in the landscape requires discovering the *landscape of events* and not necessarily the much mentioned case of the museum-related evolution of *land art*. “A landscape drama must be reinvented. A staging of the landscape with actors and not merely spectators”<sup>7</sup>. Avelino Sala certainly *constructs such a drama*, without baroque hints, in a contained manner, so that his transparent beings introduce, wherever they “rest”, an enormous *strangeness*<sup>8</sup>. Avelino Sala’s creatures watch over *spaces of absence*: next to the rubbish bins, in architectural ruins, resting on a pile of old tyres, in an extreme image spread over a cemetery; they dialogue with *remains*, including the mortal remains hidden in an obscure corner of the imagination, making what is *post-human* impose an anti-monumental logic<sup>9</sup>. Avelino Sala says that his work tries to show current events, “insufficiencies, problems, fears, ultimately, processes which affect us all”. We know that fear is one of the symptoms of our time.

5. Cfr. Rosalind E. Krauss: “La escultura en el campo expandido” in *La originalidad de la Vanguardia y otros mitos modernos*, Ed. Alianza, Madrid, 1996, pp. 289-303.

6. “The project focuses on everything related to photographic research linked to certain forms of three-dimensionality of a sculptural nature, fluctuating between architecture and the landscape, from which other kinds of two-dimensional supports are generated. These sculptural forms are integrated in scenarios which, with a large symbolic content, make the interrelation between work and the means generate different fields close to a visual poetry, with the ideology of the new in post-modern culture, with a narrative use of photography after first constructing the scene” (Avelino Sala: text on *Inquietud I* (2002) in *Generación 2003*, Premios y Becas de Arte Caja Madrid, La Casa Encendida, Madrid, 2003, p. 32).

7. Paul Virilio: *El cibermundo. La política de lo peor*, Ed. Cátedra, Madrid, 1997, p. 108. Avelino Sala advises that the *Ícaro* project explores a new drama of the landscape of Asturias, “contained and humble, [...] providing movement towards the enigmatic, based on the winged creature which has been flying for many years over post-industrial Asturias” (Avelino Sala: text of the *Ícaro* project, 2004).

8. The work of Avelino Sala has the disquieting strangeness sought by Giorgio de Chirico and are clearly linked to the Freudian sinister issue, concerning the link (inhospitable) between the creator of metaphysical art and the father of psychoanalysis, cfr. Jean Clair: “De la metafísica a la “inquietante extrañeza” in *Malinconia. Motivos saturninos en el arte de entreguerras*, Ed. Visor, Madrid, 1999, pp. 53-75.

9. Mario Perniola has underlined the link between the *Posthuman* aesthetic, which crosses the borders between art and reality, and the rest as something which is irreducible to the standardisation found in society. “[...] the rest of the art would be what, in artistic experience, objects to and resists homogenisation, conformity, the mass production processes found in contemporary society and, in general, tendencies to reduce the grandeur and dignity of art. This orientation, however, is not aimed towards the rehabilitation of the work understood as a *monument*. The notion of rest implicitly involves an anti-monumental and anti-classic stance” (Mario Perniola: *El arte y su sombra*, Ed. Cátedra, Madrid, 2002, p. 99).

"To date –writes Avelino Sala about the *Ícaro* project – my art production has always had disturbing connotations. The images recreated and captured in those spaces defined as "of uncertainty" and all the strategies centres on producing impacting visual mechanisms acting as pieces in a disturbing jigsaw, having always positioned neutral beings, marginal spaces, hybrid zones, rubbish tips and cemeteries in undetermined contexts..."<sup>10</sup>. With enormous clarity and great poetic power, Avelino Sala intensifies the reflection on our inability to *inhabit the world* resorting to the "presence" of angels. The angel built by Avelino Sala is oddly vigilant, the guardian of the invisible, "he dominates the city from on high, travels through destroyed places, watches from the rooftops, sneaks into houses, controls each movement. Its presence is disturbing although it is perceived by no one. The creature is a silent witness in an as yet undetermined place, who acts as an observed in these so-called *desperate times*"<sup>11</sup>.

Avelino Sala's nearly transparent angel makes its location *heterotopical*, taking us to mined areas, as dramatic as the baptismal *grade zero*. On these full-scale dioramas, man plays a fundamental role. They are tragic scenes "of connotations close to the figure of the *exterminating angel*, or the "angel of history to whom Walter Benjamin refers"<sup>12</sup>. We are scared to look back in case, like the Angelus Novus, we only see mountains of ruins<sup>13</sup>. In his intervention in Universidad Laboral, projected by Luis Moya, Avelino Sala returns to *History* again, using linguistic resources and assembling quotes with singular cleverness: from the words "Shoot against us, the enemy is within", pronounced by Colonel Pinilla in charge of the Simancas barracks in Gijón when the reds who had it under siege managed to attack the Benjamin-like meditations concerning the story. It is a critical *taking a stance* in the monumental building which is now forced to *say other things*.

10. Avelino Sala: text on the *Ícaro* project, 2004.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. "One of Klee's paintings is called Ángelus Novus. It represents an angel who appears to be about to leave something which amazes it. Its eyes are very open, the mouth is open and the wings are spread. And this must be the appearance of the angel of the story. It has turned to look at the past. Where we see a data chain, it sees a unique catastrophe which piles ruin upon ruin, hurling them at its feet. He would like to stop, awaken the dead and recompose everything. But a hurricane is blowing in from paradise which has twisted its wings and is so strong that the Angel can no longer close them. The hurricane pushes it inevitably towards the future, which it does not look at, while the piles of ruins grow before him up to heaven. This hurricane is what we know as progress" (Walter Benjamin: "Tesis de filosofía de la historia" in *Discursos interrumpidos I*, Ed. Taurus, Madrid, 1973, p. 183).

## Bunkered existence

The modern experience of being uprooted appears, singularly, both in Benjamin and in Heidegger: aesthetic experience is shown as a strangeness requiring recomposition and readaptation. "This process, however, does not aim at achieving a final state of completed recomposition; aesthetic experience, *aims to keep being uprooted alive*"<sup>14</sup>. We have been in the bunker or the crypt for some time<sup>15</sup>, where we could find more than an allegory or materialisation of freedom, indecision or, to be more (psycho)physical, *intolerable claustrophobia*<sup>16</sup>. Virilio said that, at a time of globalisation, everything is related to two themes which are also two terms: forclusion (*Verwefung*: rejection, denial) and exclusion, or *locked-in syndrome*<sup>17</sup>.

"The BLOCKHOUSE is both protohistoric and post-nuclear. Its time has passed and we could also say that it has not yet arrived. The bunker is certainly the last testimonial monument in the history of military surface architecture"<sup>18</sup>. Walking through the trenches, we see a romanticism of steel and armoured concrete, a ruin which is not only that of military constructions but particularly confirmation that memory has been demolished. "Tech-

14. Gianni Vattimo: "El arte de la oscilación" in *La sociedad transparente*, Ed. Paidós, Barcelona, 1990, p. 142.

15. "The phenomenon of cryptic incorporation, described by Abraham and Torok, has been reviewed by Jacques Derrida in the text *F(u)ori* (1976), which contemplates the singularity of a space which is defined, in turn, as interior and exterior; the crypt, in fact, is "one place within another, but rigorously separated from it, isolated from general space by walls, an enclosure": it is an example of an "intestine exclusion" or "clandestine inclusion"" (Mario Periniola: *El arte y su sombra*, Ed. Cátedra, Madrid, 2002, p. 103).

16. "General availability will cause intolerable claustrophobia; the excess of options will be experienced as the impossibility of choice; the universal direct participative community will increasingly exclude those unable to participate. The vision of cyberspace opening the door to a future of infinite possibilities of unlimited change, new multiple sexual organs, etc., hides the exact opposite: a radically imposed closure. This is the reality which awaits us, then, and all efforts to symbolise this reality, from the utopic (New Age or "deconstructionist" celebrations of the potential release of cyberspace), to the most obscure diatopic (the perspective of total control by a pseudo-divine computerised network...), are merely attempts to avoid the true "end of the story", the paradox of an infinite much more suffocating than any present confinement" (Slavoj Žižek: *El acoso de las fantasías*, Ed. Siglo XXI, Mexico, 1999, p. 167).

17. "Locked-in syndrome is a rare neurological disease which involves complete paralysis, the inability to speak, but with one's intellect perfectly intact. The instatement of synchronisation and free interchange is the understanding in time of interactivity, which affects the real space of our immediate and usual activities, but even more our mentalities" (Paul Virilio in dialogue with Sylvère Lotringer: *Amanecer crepuscular*, Ed. Fondo de Cultura Económica, Mexico, 2003, p. 80).

18. Fernando R. de la Flor: *Blocao. Arquitecturas de la Era de la Violencia*, Ed. Biblioteca Nueva, Madrid, 2000, p. 22.

nological-military despotism would have adopted, for its most extreme architecture, the formally most dehumanised and functionalist language vector"<sup>19</sup>. Fernando R. de la Flor underlines that the blockhouse is the proto-ruin of modernity, a dead work which is a fossil of fascism or, better still, of telluric fascism, with its warrior and chthonic mythology. In these strong fortifications, the foundations are the order of reason, as metaphysics itself (the decantation of western thinking) is possibly trincerated therein. But it is also a concrete construction, a historic site: "In the case of fortifications from 1930 to 1945, it is the creation of an inhabitation of the territory which converges with the imminent appearance on the historic scene of the new concept of "total war". It is the creation of a "suicidal space". A "theatre" of forms conceived as the ideal place where, for the first time, the State tests its own destruction"<sup>20</sup>. A place from which to establish control over the enemy, the territory of domination, that is a landscape transformed into a battle device<sup>21</sup>.

The bunker as a self-sufficient, minimalist, rigorous monad, a fort in which ornaments are certainly a crime. Or as ground zero, a territory where all energies are exhausted and all defences are extinct, but also as an "architecture of desire for Apocalyptic times". That defensive monument ends up by expressing an enigmatic love of the land, establishes a radical settlement or a melancholic structure. "Chthonic monument, architecture which expresses mourning. Testimony of a long dissolved, slowly erased Front. This architecture expresses nostalgia for strong times and, in the profound corrosion of its iron structures, contains traces of the passion of matter, of the *vía crucis* and holocaust suffered by the things located on the sacred line of no return of the Front"<sup>22</sup>. Avelino Sala converts the architecture of Universidad Laboral in a sort of metaphorical bunker, an anachronic space

19. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

21. "If we take a brief look at the history of military control and espionage, we find that this "domination" is exercised by the forceful occupation of natural peaks, dominant sites, high points on the map, vantage points from which we can see afar, primary forms of prevision and anticipation of enemy movements, required for the preventive mobilisation of our forces. These provisional military occupations completed by those of the landscape, throughways, passes, crossings, will therefore be inhabited by peasants which will use them as protection against robbery. Those dominant places will therefore be fortified, provided with lookout towers and even abbeys whose belltowers will also be used to observe and launch signals of alarm" (Paul Virilio: "El inmaterial de guerra" in *Un paisaje de acontecimientos*, Ed. Paidós, Buenos Aires, 1997, p. 175).

22. Fernando R. de la Flor: fragment of his "Epílogo. Fragmentos de Apocalipsis" en *Blocao. Arquitecturas de la Era de la Violencia*, Ed. Biblioteca Nueva, Madrid, 2000, no page number).

connecting to a fort whose “defenders” are willing to sacrifice their lives. It is true that the enemy *is always within*.

### Taking possession

For Bertold Brecht, the *disorder of the world* was the subject of art. In times of abstract autonomy, a concern arises for historic references, in processes of profanation of decultification. The secularisation of art responds to awareness that truth is concrete. Avelino Sala has contemplated a public intervention in which, by textual supplements, he considers the possibility of an art of memory. His neon light with the words “Shoot against us, the enemy is within” is nearly an epigram like those seen by he who stops before a tomb. The writing acts like a poetic weapon<sup>23</sup> against the absurdity of life, against all-pervading violence. Avelino Sala takes possession critically, resorting to an assembly of implicit historicness. The idea is to manipulate the visual and narrative material like a set of quotations referring to the actual story. It avoids the conscious obviousness that the creative method, in all senses, is a digression from what is written<sup>24</sup>.

This artist is interested in the disturbing strangeness of politics subject to a strategy of distance which is the condition for the possibility of taking possession. Avelino Sala does not want to become involved in archaeology or fix documents in the past, as his intention is to talk about what is happening, confronting what has been with what is today. “Art shows politics, exhibiting it in the two meanings of the word –argument of discourse and arrange-

23. The epigram is characterised by concentration and a portable nature. Scaliger defined the epigram as a brief discussion which fits in “a poem containing the simple indication of a thing, a person, an action, or reaches a conclusion from premises, through what is more, less, different and contrary”. Cfr. P. Laurens: “Épigramme” in *Dictionnaire universel des littératures*, Ed. PUF, Paris, 1994.

24. “The method defining truth is based on a long way round, a digression renouncing the uninterrupted course of an intentional argument, as the treatise of thought is configured as a discourse starting again many times, and always returning – like a phenomenon - “to the same thing”. Method of exodus, the form of defining the truth would have no other subject than itself, and its structure would consist of the rupture of discursive continuity, the juxtaposition of isolated and heterogeneous elements in a fractured composition whose unity, paratactics and parakbatics are comparable to those of a mosaic. “Writing stops and starts again with each phrase”, says Benjamin in a way that can be described as auto-referential in the introduction to his work on the *Trauespiel*” (José Manuel Cuesta Abad: *Juegos de duelo. La historia según Walter Benjamin*, Ed. Abada, Madrid, 2004, pp. 72-73).

ment of images-, and constantly objects”<sup>25</sup>. Avelino Sala’s strategy, like Brecht, is a thorough exercise of disassembly in order to re-assemble history and show its political stance. The quotes he superimposes on the architecture are not a trace of erudition or a search for “cultured” complicity. What he is doing is to describe anachronic aspects produced by an explosion of chronology. That is why a reference to Benjamin-like considerations of history is so decisive, arranged on a led, as if we were in a typical non-place (airport, bus station, underground station, etc.). What Benjamin wants is to release the present from the destructive cycle of repetition and remove opportunities for change from the discontinuity of time. There is no desire without the work of memory, there is no future without a re-configuration of the past. “Historic knowledge of the truth –we read in *Passagen Werk*- is only possible to overcome appearances: but this should not mean volatilisation, but should also assume the configuration of a rapid image”. These words are taken by Avelino Sala in his intervention in the Universidad Laboral building, aware that a rapid image is the way to imprint the present on things: “historic (re)cognition lies in apprehending swift images and they are only manifest in the imprint, *die Agnoszierung*, of the “present””<sup>26</sup>.

The perverse subtlety of Avelino Sala’s quotes creates a need to leave room for the destructive nature which “destroys –says Benjamin- whatever exists, not from love of rubble, but from love of the road crossing the rubble”<sup>27</sup>. When art is at peace, it is always at peace with a world at war, attempting to camouflage the Hobbesian certainty that man is a wolf for man. Avelino Sala’s taking of possession gives exhibitionist architecture with “classic” pretensions a sinister tone or, more precisely, reveals strangeness (*Fremdsein*) as a synthesis of the near and the distant. Blanchot said that the image, capable of the effect of strangeness, creates a sort of experience, showing us that things are not always what they seem, and it depends on us seeing them in other ways, some imaginary and some real. The critical image pursued by Avelino Sala is the making of ghost-releasing machine similar to the “phantasmagorical intermittence” to which Ernst Bloch referred. This idea of a spectre is, in its bitterness, a legacy, something

25. Georges Didi-Huberman: *Cuando las imágenes toman posición*, Ed. Antonio Machado, Madrid, 2008, p. 131.

26. José Manuel Cuesta Abad: *Juegos de duelo. La historia según Walter Benjamin*, Ed. Abada, Madrid, 2004, p. 27.

27. Walter Benjamin: “El carácter destructivo” in *Discursos interrumpidos I*, Ed. Taurus, Madrid, 1982, p. 161.

returning to the future<sup>28</sup>, reminiscent of a profound desire for justice<sup>29</sup>. Benjamin trusted in a redemptive, but again spectral, future<sup>30</sup>. But this does not mean that we have to become necromancers or wait from a signal from beyond, but rather that our mission is to attempt to pronounce what has been forgotten. “What is unheard of about history – images which cannot be imagined – leaves us mute while we remain impotent for taking the floor”<sup>31</sup>. As Avelino Sala has, we have to search for the words capable of responding to the new visibility of historic events. The value of naming is the value of facing reality as an image and a memory. The impressive, but strange, architecture of Universidad Laboral needs *Darstellbarkeit* (presentability) of the historic word.

### Narrative decadence and historic construction

The crisis of forms of *representation* is seen as a process of *secularisation* in which the epic aspect of the *truth* is eclipsed. In his essay on Leskov, Benjamin assumes *narrative decadence* and its replacement by the segregated experience of the novel and is in favour of informative compulsion. In relation to a story from afar, information makes use of what is *nearest*, aware that there are no longer memorable stories. The narrator was fed by something without end, being limited to a specific *place* in an artisan-like manner. Contemporary haste cannot be sustained in a time idealised as eternity. In the extreme, what happens

28. “As a (re)appeared is always bound to come and come again, the thought of the spectre, unlike what could be imagined, makes signs to the future. It is thinking of the past, a legacy which can only come from what has not yet occurred or arrived” (Jacques Derrida: *Espectros de Marx. El estado de la deuda, el trabajo del duelo y la nueva internacional*, Ed. Trotta, Madrid, 1995, p. 194).

29. “That the without-ground of this impossible can nevertheless *take place* is on the contrary the ruin or the absolute ashes, the threat that must be *thought*, and, why not, exorcised yet again. To exorcise not in order to chase away the ghosts, but this time to grant them the right, if it means making them come back alive, as *Tenants* who would no longer be *Tenants*, but as other *arrivants* to whom a hospitable memory or promise must offer welcome without certainty, ever, that they present themselves as such. Not in order to grant them the right in this sense but out of a concern *for justice*” (Jacques Derrida: *Espectros de Marx. El estado de la deuda, el trabajo del duelo y la nueva internacional*, Ed. Trotta, Madrid, 1995, p. 195).

30. “The true historian’s method is poetic and tragic because it exposes nothing but suppression in each present of an event – a happy outcome, a redemptive future, an irreducible mystery- which returns from the past like the spectral and unreal of an instant of historic time, turning it into what-has-always-been-as-it-has-not-yet-been” (José Manuel Cuesta Abad: *Juegos del duelo. La historia según Walter Benjamin*, Ed. Abada, Madrid, 2004, p. 86).

31. Georges Didi-Huberman: *Cuando las imágenes toman posición*, Ed. Antonio Machado, Madrid, 2008, p. 210.

is that the face of death has changed: "It happens that this change is the same which so reduced the communicability of experience that it put an end to the art of story-telling"<sup>32</sup>.

As Rilke said, the *plasticity* of death has ended. The words of the Chamberlain who, in *Los apuntes de Malte Laurids Brigge*, recomposed public space and overflowed the home, have ceased as the dying body has been segregated as if it stank<sup>33</sup>. Also missing is a look capable of contemplating the unforgettable, the memory which guaranteed the authority of the narrator who breaks in this end of *the era of consistency*. There is a process of collapse in which epic music and its innate regeneration is replaced by the vertigo of today.

If the narration condensed the memory, the advice and the promise, time is melancholically added to the novel; the helpless beings of novels are *missing* from the photographs of Atget, and the *meaning of life* has become absurdly questionable in the shipwreck<sup>34</sup>. As Lukács said, the novel is the transcendental form of the *stateless*, in a way it returns to *fidelity to the missing*: "what attracts the reader to the novel is the hope that his frozen life can be warmed by the *fire of the death* of he who reads"<sup>35</sup>. The fact that death is transformed into life-giving blood suggests a degree of astuteness in the story. The narrator's movement is not tragic; his *detachment* has that ability to cause effects on he who gives in to boredom<sup>36</sup>, that *levity*<sup>37</sup> that Benjamin also discovers in insolence, defined as a strategy for resistance. Contemplation of declining beauty is not free from *humour*, that borderline talent typical of melancholy.

*The origin of Baroque drama*<sup>38</sup> attempts to establish the specificity of the *Trauerspiel* (funereal theatre: Baroque drama); it provides an in-depth analysis of how it differs from tragedy,

32. Walter Benjamin: "El narrador" in *Para una crítica de la violencia*, Ed. Taurus, Madrid, 1991, p. 120.

33. Rainer Maria Rilke: *Los apuntes de Malte Laurids Brigge*, Ed. Alianza, Madrid, 1981, pp. 13-15 and Jean Baudrillard: *El intercambio simbólico y la muerte*, Ed. Monte Ávila, Caracas, 1980 pp. 143-149.

34. Cfr. Hans Blumenberg: *La inquietud que atraviesa el río*, Ed. Península, Barcelona, 1992, pp. 50-53.

35. Walter Benjamin: "El narrador" en *Para una crítica de la violencia*, Ed. Taurus, Madrid, 1991, p. 127.

36. Cfr. Walter Benjamin: "El narrador" en *Para una crítica de la violencia*, Ed. Taurus, Madrid, 1991, p. 118 y Fernando Castro Flórez: *Elogio de la pereza. Notas para una estética del cansancio*, Ed. Julio Ollero, Madrid, 1992, pp. 14 y 37.

37. Cfr. Walter Benjamin: "El narrador" en *Para una crítica de la violencia*, Ed. Taurus, Madrid, 1991, p. 128 and Italo Calvino: *Seis propuestas para el próximo milenio*, Ed. Siruela, Madrid, 1989, p. 24.

38. Cfr. Walter Benjamin: *El origen del drama barroco alemán*, Ed. Taurus, Madrid, 1990.

considering the aesthetics of Voltek's tragedy or *The birth of tragedy* by Nietzsche<sup>39</sup>. According to Benjamin, the content of *Trauerspiel* is historic life or, better still, that it contains the assimilation of a theatrical with a historic scene<sup>40</sup>. The absence of Baroque scatology makes the *Trauerspiel* fall completely in the distress of the terrestrial condition, harmonising the elements of mourning and the game. Benjamin reconstructs the Baroque stage in his representation of the court, the prince and intrigue, discovering grief and imminent catastrophe behind all these manifestations. Compared with the *Trauerspiel*, tragedy is an agonistic show, resting on the idea of sacrifice<sup>41</sup>; Benjamin follows Rosenzweig when he underlines how Baroque drama pursues a purpose unknown in ancient tragedy: the tragedy of absolute man in relation to the absolute object. The road travelled from tragedy to the *Trauerspiel* is that contemplated when going from the death of the hero to the death of the martyr. The tragic event is cosmic; what happens in Baroque drama happens before mourning eyes: the story unfolds as an ostentation of sadness and a true natural story. The *Trauerspiel*, says Benjamin, is entertainment for the sad, contemplating the show of grief in its dejected creatures. Those who are melancholic look to the land for signs of *expiration*<sup>42</sup>, its experience of the ephemeral, but also to feel that the obscure depths contain endless treasures. "Melancholy betrays the world through love of knowledge. But its tenacious contemplative absorption takes care of things in order to save them"<sup>43</sup>.

The Baroque style has made this journey of pain which enjoys neither beauty nor the harmonious promised of classicism; it has reached *mortality*, the fragility of human life, and its only means of expression is therefore allegorical<sup>44</sup>. In the allegorical, in that meaning some-

39. Cfr. Ibid.

40. Cfr. Massimo Cacciari: *Drama y duelo*, Ed. Tecnos, Madrid, 1989, pp. 6-10.

41. Cfr. Walter Benjamin: *El origen del drama barroco alemán*, Ed. Taurus, Madrid, 1990, p. 95. We should consider the theses of Rene Girard on the relationship between tragedy and sacrifice, cfr. *La violencia y lo sagrado*, Ed. Anagrama, Barcelona, 1983, pp. 51-53.

42. Cfr. Julia Kristeva: *Soleil noir*, Ed. Gallimard, París, 1987, pp. 64-66.

43. Walter Benjamin: *El origen del drama barroco alemán*, Ed. Taurus, Madrid, 1990, p. 149. There is an ambiguous movement which assumes grief as it intensifies awareness of oneself, cfr. R. Klibansky, E. Panofsky and F. Saxl: *Saturno y la melancolía*, Ed. Alianza, Madrid, 1991, pp. 229-230.

44. According to Craig Owens, allegory is related to the projection of a structure as a sequence, "the result, however, is not dynamic, but static, ritual, repetitive" (Craig Owens: "El impulso alegórico" in *Atlántica*, Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 1991, p. 35). We have to consider the cultural element of the aura and proximity to the death of story-telling, cfr. Walter Benjamin: *El origen del drama barroco alemán*,

thing other than what one is, we find all the world's grief condensed: its face is a skull. Like nature, history is allegorically subject to death. The unfinished and broken nature of nature finds its *scripture* in the fascinating structure of allegory, in fragments and ruins.

On the lights positioned on the balcony of Universidad Laboral, Avelino Sala refers to Thesis XIV of Benjamin's Philosophy of History: "History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now"<sup>45</sup>. The time of history is *Jetztzeit* and this now takes place as the return to an oppressed past which can revolutionarily become a narrative form. To a considerable extent, we must trust in the catastrophe which breaks the continuity of history. "History as a messianic process, history as a catastrophic process; on the horizon of these two antinomic images, the same concept of the historian's work: what we call history is engendered in the writing of history; to write history is not to recover the past but to create it from our own present; or rather it is to interpret the traces left by the past, transform them into signs, which is, after all, "reading reality like a text"<sup>46</sup>. For Benjamin, saving the past means taking it from the conformity which constantly threatens it, and thus give it a new meaning in the heart of our present. Because, ultimately, the form in which we honour the past, turning it into a legacy, is worse than its pure and simple disappearance.

Benjamin-like interest in the *history of the defeated*<sup>47</sup>, arises again in Avelino Sala's intervention when he underlines the strangeness of an act which annuls the distinction between those who triumph and those who are defeated because, finally, they are all found in the most demential logic of sacrifice. By placing Benjamin's sentences beneath the call of a

Ed. Taurus, Madrid, 1990, p. 159.

45. Walter Benjamin: "Tesis de Filosofía de la Historia" in *Discursos interrumpidos I*, Ed. Taurus, Madrid, 1982, p. 188.

46. Stéphane Moses: *El Ángel de la historia. Rosenzweig, Benjamin, Scholem*, Ed. Cátedra, Madrid, 1997, p. 123.

47. "The image of the past constructed by this tradition is what Benjamin calls the "history of the victors". It is characterised by the continuity with which it is transmitted from generation to generation; this is the essential condition for it to have guarantees of permanence. In order to question it, we have to break the continuity of historical tradition at a given point; the point where the "materialist" historian intervenes to look at the past and recover the "history of the defeated" from oblivion. The construction of history, as he understands it, will then be "dedicated to the memory of the nameless". This radical change of historic perspective, this will to assume the memory of the forgotten, is the effect of an option which, in the broadest sense of the word, could be described as political, but for Benjamin it is also an ethical decision" (Stéphane Moses: *El Ángel de la historia. Rosenzweig, Benjamin, Scholem*, Ed. Cátedra, Madrid, 1997, p. 130).

soldier who prefers to be destroyed before he is defeated, Avelino Sala *constructs another history* in which redemption may be possible. Redemption, that Jewish category of the *Zekher*, is the reaffirmation of past experience in the present. The task of remembering is to save what has failed, as Redemption means nothing more than to do what we have been denied. Messianic hope is not a coming utopia but an ability to detect what, at each moment, reveals the revolutionary energy of the new. The angel of the ninth thesis of the Concept of History in which Avelino Sala showed genuine interest, is not immobilised by the perfection of an instant outside time, but by horror without recourse: it is awareness of the funereal aspect of all representations. Remember what, in that text, is seen as a tremendous landscape: “a unique catastrophe tirelessly piling ruins on top of ruins”. We live in a *state of exception*<sup>48</sup> yet, however, we feel a powerful desire to bend over disaster and attempt to cauterise its wounds<sup>49</sup>.

### The simulated desire for the real

Located in what Baudrillard calls *Xerox degree culture, the enebriouness of ocular consumption* does not diminish, and it is clear that, at a time of great “love for obscenity”<sup>50</sup>,

48. The tradition of the oppressed –says Benjamin in his VIII Thesis- teaches us that the “state of exception” in which we live is the rule”. The state of exception would be no other than the politically decisive and catastrophic symptoms of the now-time in which history is summarised according to Benjamin: “And the idea here is to read or recognise the never written event which takes place as now-time, according to the past which returns, again-for-a-second-time, to be instant, present instance of history” (José Manuel Cuesta Abad: *Juegos de duelo. La historia según Walter Benjamin*, Ed. Abada, Madrid, 2004, p. 46).

49. “The true visionary, Benjamin had written, is he who “turns his back on the future”. In a note to *La obra de los pasajes*, he had underlined “the importance of the notion of return (*Umkehr*) for the philosophy of history and for politics”, adding that “the final judgment is a present which turns back to the past”. Because it is guided by the desire to “bend over disaster, bandage its wounds and resuscitate the dead”, the memory “in which we should see –writes Benjamin- the very essence of the theological concept of history in Jews”, can only be understood as a category of ethics” (Stéphane Moses: *El Ángel de la historia. Rosenzweig, Benjamin, Scholem*, Ed. Cátedra, Madrid, 1997, p. 151).

50. We necessarily have to return to Baudelaire’s crude judgment of photography as the technical conclusion of a taste for the exact reproduction of nature: “Soon afterwards, thousands of avid eyes lent over the stereoscope as if they were skylights to the infinite. Love for obscenity, which is so alive in man’s natural heart as his love for himself, found a good occasion to satisfy its needs. And the children coming home from school were not the only ones to enjoy such rubbish: everyone was enthusiastic” (Charles Baudelaire: “El público moderno y la fotografía” in *Salones y otros escritos sobre arte*, Ed. Visor, Madrid, 1996, p. 232).

photography is, in the vast art field, practically hegemonic. The hunt is endless. “Photographic compulsion –the “*photographic looting of the world*” (Sontag)- is fostered by facility and availability, but also by the iconic and sentimental attraction of the magic of evidence, by the modality promoted by the photographic instant, seeing the entire world as an endless booty”<sup>51</sup>. This booty is, once again, everyday life<sup>52</sup>: *the desire for the real* triumphs and hypnotises. Sigfried Kracauer said, in his “Photography” essay published in 1927, that historicist thought arose at more or less the same time as modern photographic technology; in a way, the use of photography is the life-and-death game of the historic process: “What photographs, with their pure accumulation, attempt to proscribe, is the recollection of death, which forms part of all image-memory... The world has become a present which can be photographed, and the photographed present has become completely eternal. Apparently torn from the jaws of death, it has actually succumbed to it”<sup>53</sup>. Affected by *photographic amnesia*, we hold on to the present however banal it may be.

Bring out, transform, store, distribute and switch are ways of showing what is hidden, of revealing the truth found in the technique. “Everywhere, something is required immediately on site, ready for another request”<sup>54</sup>. This is evidently related to the “will to archive”. At the crossroads of placement and naming, of place and law, of support and authority, we find a scene of domiciliation, an archontic dimensions which is, in general terms, known as archive. Archiving is an act of assignment by connecting signs. It is clear that all archives are both institutive and conservative. “Archives occur at the moment when there is a structural breakdown of memory. *There is no archive without a place of consignment, without a technique of repetition and without a certain exteriority. There is no archive without outside*”<sup>55</sup>. The pulse of death threatens all desire to archive. In his analysis of *Archive fever*,

51. Juan Luis Moraza: “Templo portátil. Tiempo fuego” in *Papel Alpha. Cuadernos de fotografía*, No. 2, 1996, pp. 122-123.

52. “The contemporary art which breaks into “everyday” life is usually characterised by interventionist strategies which fragment, group and create their own construction from pieces of experience in order to produce the impact of recognition. As Hal Foster said in *The Return of the Real*, one has the sensation that artists see themselves as erratic anthropologists studying the ephemeral issues of daily life, which is revealed to be disturbingly different” (Joanna Lowry: “La fotografía, el vídeo y lo cotidiano” in *Papel Alpha. Cuadernos de fotografía*, No. 5, 2000, p. 5).

53. Siegfried Kracauer: “La fotografía” in *Estética sin territorio*, Ed. Colegio Oficial de Aparejadores y Arquitectos Técnicos de la Región de Murcia, 2006, p. 280.

54. Martin Heidegger: “La pregunta por la técnica” in *Conferencias y artículos*, Ed. Serbal, Barcelona, 1994, p. 19.

55. Jacques Derrida: *Mal de archivo. Una impresión freudiana*, Ed. Trotta, Madrid, 1997, p. 19.

Derrida recovers *Der Wunderblock*, which, according to Freud, is infinitely more complex than a blackboard or sheet of paper, less archaic than palimpsest and yet a children's toy. We could ask ourselves whether, other than in the extrinsic details of the structure of the psychic system, this mnemonic and hipmnemonic system described from the magic block, "resists or not the evolution of the techno-science of the archive. Would the psychic system be *better represented or otherwise affected* by so many technical archive or reproduction devices, prostheses of living memory, copies of the living facts which are and will in the future be as refined, complicated and powerful as the "magic block" (micro-processing, electronisation, computerisation, etc.)?"<sup>56</sup>.

The dogs which, in Avelino Sala's video, devour the word *Culture* show, with enormous strength, the lack of truly cultural "foodstuffs". Everything will be cybernetically archived or reality will have been replaced by simulation, but not to obtain a more intense experience or think about what is happening to us, but to foster complete amnesia. Karl Krauss said that true pedagogy is that which learns to see abysses where there are "common places". Poetic imagination has to literally *devour* what it needs and it could actually be a territorial inscription or, in terms used earlier, a *taking of possession*. The artist always leaves a *trace*, materials which often comprise something similar to a crime scene<sup>57</sup>; the trace is what is never erased, but also what is definitively present. At a time when we have assumed, possibly with excessive calm, *destinerrance* against the ideology of the "virtualisation of the world", numerous veiled situations appear, traces of the different, events which are somewhat paradoxical, indications pushing us creatively adrift: "we leave traces everywhere –viruses, *lapsus*, germs, catastrophes- signs of the imperfection which are like a signature in the heart of this artificial world"<sup>58</sup>. What we want, objects with auras, in a world where everything follows an advertising strategy, also generate a passion which is *self-consuming*<sup>59</sup>.

56. Ibid., p. 23.

57. Cfr. Ralf Rugoff: "More than Meets the Eye" in *Scene of the Crime*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1997, p. 62.

58. Jean Baudrillard: "La escritura automática del mundo" in *La ilusión y la desilusión estéticas*, Ed. Monte Ávila, Caracas, 1997, p. 85.

59. "In poetic language, a consuming passion can denote a passion which is self-consuming in its intensity; but when we use things, we consume them in a less dramatic sense. We can feel a strong desire to have a certain article of clothing, but a few days after we buy and use it, our interest decreases considerably. Here, imagination has its

We have to avoid the obscure dimension of the enigma<sup>60</sup>, especially when contemporary culture, the Empire, has its foundations on ground zero (site attracting the voracious looks of tourists: places where *there is nothing to be seen*), on the ruins erased after shows based on patriotism-melodrama<sup>61</sup>. The flow-image which is a decisive element of a new regime of image *at a time of globalisation*<sup>62</sup> casts a spell on the subject and, to a certain extent, prevents him from hearing a voice from within which, nevertheless, transcends, an *unwelcoming vocation*<sup>63</sup>. In any event, we accept the chains in order to hear the songs of the sirens. Here we see the impotence of art or, in terms of *Dialéctica de la Ilustración*, the rigid separation between those who work and are unable to hear and those who, from a position of tyrannical power, can enjoy the most beautiful and disturbing sounds. But it is not only that aesthetic pleasure is in chains, but that possibly, as Kafka suggests, sirens do not sing but are silent, and the hero *pretends not to hear what is actually no sound*. Resistance no longer makes sense: that is the worst of all situations<sup>64</sup>. As Lacan said: *on ne comprend que ses fantasmes*. In the erasure or forclusion<sup>65</sup> of the truly *uncomfortable* we leave the

strongest form in anticipation and weakens constantly with use. The economy now reinforces this kind of self-consuming passion, both in major supermarkets and in politics" (Richard Sennet: *La cultura del nuevo capitalismo*, Ed. Anagrama, Barcelona, 2006, p. 119).

60. "It takes us –says Benjamin in his essay on surrealism- nowhere to underline the enigmatic side of enigmas in pathetic or fanatical tones; on the contrary, we only penetrate the mystery in as much as we find it in our everyday lives, thanks to a dialectic optic which recognises that daily life is impenetrable and what is impenetrable is our daily life".

61. "Gregorovius adds that barbarian attacks give rise to Roman archaeology. Is the destruction of the twin towers in New York the birth of American archaeology? In any event, it must be understood that what happened belongs to the Empire: I know that this is difficult, but even the murderous madness of Al Qaeda belongs to the Empire. [...] we have entered the Byzantine period of the Empire. What is being built on the ruins of the Twin Towers is an absolute Empire against the phantoms of Evil" (Toni Negri: *Del retorno. Abecedario biopolítico*, Ed. Debate, Barcelona, 2003, p. 154).

62. Cfr. Christine Buci-Gluksmann: *Estética de lo efímero*, Ed. Arena, Madrid, 2007, p. 58.

63. "The intimacy from which vocation, the call, comes, is described as *unheimlich*, uncomfortable. [...] The call, the shout, the voice, the appeal: its location is *unheimlich*, with all the ambiguity that Freud gave the word: internal exteriority, expropriated privacy, *extimity*; the excellent name that Lacan uses to describe the sinister, the uncomfortable" (Mladen Dólar: *Una voz y nada más*, Ed. Manantial, Buenos Aires, 2007, pp. 116-117).

64. "We cannot resist silence, even though there is nothing to resist" (Mladen Dólar: *Una voz y nada más*, Ed. Manantial, Buenos Aires, 2007, p. 200).

65. "To find our bearings in such a mechanism of absolute erasure, we can appeal to the notion of *forclusion*, taken from Lacan. Distinguished from repression, oblivion which leaves a trace, it names a radical "abolition", the absolute negativity of "what arose in the light of the symbolic", of what "faces all manifestations of a symbolic nature". Wordless, then, facing the crossroads of reminiscence, because the only trace it leaves is a "hole" (Gérard Wajcman: *El objeto del siglo*, Ed. Amorrortu, Buenos Aires, 2001, p. 20).

theatre-like space full of gesticulations, stuttering, carnival-like obscenities, infinity of things for paving what scares us which, simply, scares us. Together with the “childishness” which, not unlinked to violence, is in our imagination, there is a kind of *monumentalisation of perverse looks*, in which one fear is up against another, better described as anticipation of the catastrophe inherent in the dynamics of desire.

Avelino Sala's reference to *bombing ourselves* is an act which fosters the *return of the repressed*<sup>66</sup>, especially when the future is even worse, in this terrible time when destruction generates aesthetic pleasure of the first order<sup>67</sup>. We are witnessing a black mass in which art, more than anything, presents relics without ritual<sup>68</sup>. The final litany does not cease, what Jacques Derrida calls “scatological eloquence”, an apocalyptic announcement that everything is over<sup>69</sup>.

66. Cfr. Sigmund Freud: *Moisés y la religión monoteísta*, Ed. Alianza, Madrid, 1970, p. 184.

67. “From the hieroglyphs of Defence or the World Trade Centre, to the media, from steel works to political apparatus, from megalopolis to the senseless grid of minor everyday acts, as Benjamin says, humanity has become a subject of contemplation in itself. “It can now experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order” (*the work of art in a time when it can be technically reproduced*). For him, it is the same form as fascism; that is, an exacerbated form of ideology; an aesthetic perversion of politics which promotes the joyful acceptance of a culture of death” (Jean Baudrillard: *El intercambio simbólico y la muerte*, Ed. Monte Ávila, Caracas, 1980, p. 219).

68. “That artists start to collect hair, pieces of nail and different cast offs, can be seen as a sort of return to the believe in a primitive *manna*, a magic whose power is dominated by obtaining fragments of the body... Most of these works, if they can so be called, are presented more as relics, the organic remains of an individual to be secured, or casting a spell by manipulation of these remains. Most of them are photos, moulds, mountains, indeed, of documents, recordings or copies. Even the most violent tell us only what could be told by thousands, hundreds of thousands of other documents taken from the files of the criminal police or hospitals of Paris. Banal photos, banal documents in the eyes of who, therapist, scientist, judge or lawyer, experiences disease, suffering, madness and death on a daily basis. Banal photos, when compared with the diversity of pornographic images with which we are flooded by television” (Jean Clair: *De Immundo*, Ed. Arena, Madrid, 2007, pp. 56-57).

69. “Have differences not all adopted the form of emulation in scatological eloquence, and is each new arrival more lucid than the first and more vigilant?: I swear that it is not only the end of this, but also of that, the end of history, the end of the battle between the classes, the end of philosophy, the end of God, the end of religions, the end of Christianity and morals (that was the worst ingenuity), the end of the subject, the end of mankind, the end of the west, the end of Oedipus, the end of the land, *Apocalypse Now*, I tell you, the end in a catastrophe, fire, blood, a fundamental earthquake, the napalm falling from the sky from helicopters, like prostitutes, and also the end of literature, the end of painting, of art as something of the past, the end of psychoanalysis, the end of phallocentrism and how many other things? And anyone else would announce the best of the best, that is the end of the end, because the end has already started, because we still have to distinguish between the beginning and the end, as the former has to participate in the concert, as it is the end of metalanguage in relation to scatological language. Although we should also ask whether scatology is a tone and not the voice itself” (Jacques Derrida: *Sobre un tono apocalíptico adoptado recientemente en filosofía*, Ed. Siglo XXI, México, 1994, pp. 48-49).

And, nevertheless, as Avelino Sala, reading Benjamin, reminds us, a “rapid image” can be used to construct *another history*. Contemporary art could possibly be more than hyperbolic decoration, generating critical questions and offering *other points of view*. It would be useless if it were only “marvellous” or enigmatic, as everything with those characteristics is rapidly forgotten, like neo-bunkerised prehistory<sup>70</sup>. What we need are intense *metaphorical operations*<sup>71</sup>; we have to tell stories that generate places. We realise how difficult it is to construct a work representing *critical resistance*<sup>72</sup> at a time when the dominant “discourse” leads *nowhere*<sup>73</sup>.

70. “Ironically, we might say that we are watching the liberation of fossils, just like everything else. Bercy, Silumian, Cassis, the dugouts, the bones, the wall paintings, relics are everywhere rushing to be discovered. They too want to express themselves. They have waited too long. This is not like America, which had no wish to be discovered at all, but the outcome is the same: everything discovered is wiped out. The fossils return from their immemoriality, and therefore from the secret memories of humanity, to be immediately buried again in its artificial ones. No sooner exhumed than sequestered. All the originals are put under lock and key (the Lascaux caves, the Tautavel skull, the Cassis underwater cave). More and more things are exhumed only to be buried again immediately; they are rescued from death to be perpetually frozen. Military secret: the entrance to the underwater cave has been sealed following orders from the Ministry of Culture. Deathly attempt to sequester a collective memory which is leaking all over. There are thousands of works of art sleeping in safe deposit boxes, a guarantee for the art market and evidence that abstraction of value is based on robbing enjoyment. Even abstract forms, ideas, concepts are also frozen in the sanctuaries of memory and artificial intelligence. As with the Lascaux cave, all we see are copies, clichés, doubles. Xerox degree of culture. Biosphere II is also an attempt to ideally sequester the species and its environment behind a glass curtain, not to be seen, not to be touched, protected from all living concupiscence and the object of the ultimate fetishism” (Jean Baudrillard: “El baile de los fósiles” in *La ilusión del fin. La huelga de los acontecimientos*, Ed. Anagrama, Barcelona, 1993, pp. 114-115).

71. “Metaphorical operations can be seen as references to what cannot be trapped by single concepts, to what we experience, and it is in tension with what we could experience, between the structured and the deconstructing” (Nestor García Canclini: *La globalización imaginada*, Ed. Paidós, Buenos Aires, 1999, p. 58).

72. “In recent years, the celebratory rescue and voyeur-like return to practices linked with the development of informal town planning and the infiltration of parasitic structures, reminiscent of some artistic manifestations, appears to aim at reviving the call made by Henri Lefèbvre when he said that urban space should be converted into the work of its users, to generate a kind of resistance against the regulation and institutionalisation of the public sphere and its encoding based on a series of political or economic interests” (Magali Arriola: “Escultura y propiedad en estado de excepción” in *[W] Casa. Home*, No. 4, Oporto, 2004, pp. 31).

73. “[...] the most important thing to be understood and remembered is that the beneficiaries of today’s chaos, with their journalists embedded in the media, inform incorrectly and constantly deceive. Never discuss their statements or the copied terms they use. They must be rejected and abandoned completely. They lead nowhere” (John Berger: “Diez notas sobre “el lugar”” in *Babelia. EL PAÍS*, July 16, 2005, p. 16).

## Narcolepsy as a pose at the banal moment of art.

“Images are required to make history, particularly in the era of photography and film. But we also need imagination in order to *watch the images again* and, therefore, *reconsider history*”<sup>74</sup>. In a time of television and computers, when there is far too much illumination, we need some shadow. Social theatricalisation has given rise to a sort of *ethic of aesthetics*<sup>75</sup>; we are obsessed with showing our existence even if it means publishing our *perverse*ness, enhancing the “rituals of transparency”<sup>76</sup>. It is normal, therefore, for some of us, blinded by the most cruel of lights, to decide to stab the space of the representation<sup>77</sup>. Pleasure may be the result of a total *renouncement of ordinary pleasures*, in the “diffuse fascism” which surrounds us a sort of *total mobilisation* which is really the most perverse kind of servitude<sup>78</sup>.

74. Georges Didi-Huberman: *Cuando las imágenes toman posición*, Ed. Antonio Machado, Madrid, 2008, p. 310

75. There are situations and places which escaped from the exhortation of depth, which found it sufficient to be on the surface and thus be the reservoirs of global, qualitative nature. Everyday life and its “presentism” are a good example. The affective environment by which it is characterised is based on appearance, on living to be seen. In this sense, “voyeurism”, in the best and worse case, is a good vector of sociality. Daily life does not exclude emotion or affection; it does not isolate them in the private sphere. It theatricalises them, converting them into an *ethic of aesthetics*” (Michel Maffesoli: *El instante eterno. El retorno de lo trágico en las sociedades posmodernas*, Ed. Paidós, Buenos Aires, 2001, p. 127).

76. “Both the pervert and the obsessional are caught in frenetic activity in service of the big other; the difference is, however, is the aim of the obsessional’s activity is to prevent the big other from enjoying (i.e. the “catastrophe” that he fears will erupt if his activity ceases is ultimately an interruption of the other’s enjoyment), whereas the pervert works precisely to ensure that the big other’s “will to enjoyment” will be satisfied. This is why the pervert is free of the eternal doubt which is characteristic of the obsessional: he simply takes for granted that his activity serves the enjoyment of the other” (Slavoj Žižek: *Mirando al sesgo. Una introducción a Jacques Lacan a través de la cultura popular*, Ed. Paidós, Buenos Aires, 2000, pp. 201-202).

77. “The definition of modern art was given by Pierre Guillard on August 11, 1932. Pierre Guillard had followed a scientific career; his profession: engineer. He threw himself on Millet’s *El Ángelus*. He stabbed the fabric in several places. He was overcome by the guards. At the police station where he was taken by the Louvre museum guards, he said: -At least I will be talked about. Self-exposure, refusal to subject oneself and hate of everything which ever *represented* something, such is the triple thesis of modern art. Allergy to dependence, discredited priority, elimination of the past. Such are the theses of progress. He wounded the peasant in the pant, he wounded the kneeling woman in the arm. The sky could not be repaired” (Pascal Quignard: *Las sombras errantes*, Ed. Elipsis, Barcelona, 2006, p. 126).

78. “In my opinion, the clearest example of pleasure is a speech by Goebbels in 1943 –his speech about so-called total war: *Totalkrieg*-. After the Stalingrad defeat, Goebbels gave a speech in Berlin in the conclusion of which he asks for total war: let’s abolish the last remnants of normal life and let’s introduce total mobilization. And then you have this famous scene where Goebbels is addressing a series of rhetorical questions to a crowd of 20,000 Germans

In spite of all pervading obscenity, we may, from a redemptive perspective, still aspire to happiness<sup>79</sup>.

Avelino Sala reminds us of the *dementia* of bombardment and the beast-like voracity of “culture” so that we take a *historic position*. He is well aware that our permissive society, in spite of appearances, subjects everything to rules and prohibitions<sup>80</sup> and he realises, of course, that we are affected by *False Memory Syndrome*<sup>81</sup>. However, we cannot truly enjoy narcolepsy when we do not all really suffer from the disease. “In her diary, Mircea Eliade says that in an educational film about how to combat mosquitoes shown in an African village, the locals only saw the chickens which by chance were strutting about the front of

and asking them if they want to work even more, 16-18 hours a day if necessary, and the people shout ‘yes’. He asks them if they want all the theatres and expensive restaurants closed down, and the people again shout ‘yes’. Then, after a series of these kinds of question [sic], which are all about renouncing pleasure and enduring even more hardship, he finally asks an almost Kantian question – Kantian in the sense of evoking the unrepresentable sublime – he asks, ‘do you want a total war, a war so total that you cannot even imagine today how total it will be?’ And a fanatical ecstatic shout comes up from the masses: ‘Yes! Yes! Yes!’”. Here is pure pleasure as a political category. It is absolutely clear: simply the dramatic expressions on the people’s faces are evidence that this mandate –which asks people to give up ordinary pleasures- itself provides pleasure; that is pleasure” (Slavoj Žižek in an interview by Glyn Daly: *Arriesgar lo imposible*, Ed. Trotta, Madrid, 2006, pp. 110-111).

79. “[...] Redemption also designates a way of living the future in the very heart of the present: “In the representation of happiness –says the second thesis [of Benjamin]- is inevitably that of Redemption”. Indeed, the idea of future happiness depends, by contrast, on experience of our present failures. If for Benjamin the idea of happiness refers to that of Redemption, it is to the exact extent that this term (*Er-lösung*) must be understood as the *outcome* of the present” (Stéphane Moses: *El Ángel de la historia. Rosenzweig, Benjamin, Scholem*, Ed. Cátedra, Madrid, 1997, p. 153).

80. “Officially we have a permissive society, we are allowed to have pleasure, we are allowed to organise our lives around how to obtain the greatest degree of satisfaction, self-fulfilment, etc. But what is the fundamental consequence? The inherent and necessary consequence is that in order to truly enjoy life, we have to follow infinite regulations and prohibitions: no sexual harassment, no smoking, no fats or alcohol or eggs, or stressful situations, etc. The paradox is that if pleasure is directly established as an objective, we are then forced to submit to a number of conditions –such as diets, physical exercise in order to remain sexually attractive- which destroy immediate pleasure” (Slavoj Žižek in an interview with Glyn Daly: *Arriesgar lo imposible*, Ed. Trotta, Madrid, 2006, p. 111).

81. “Not long ago, a man sued the American fast food hamburger giant because the food “was making him fat”. The underlying message is clear: it is nothing to do with me. The responsibility is not mine – so someone else must be legally responsible for my problem. So-called false memory syndrome makes the same mistake: the compulsive tendency to base present psychic problems on past experience of sexual harassment. Once again, what is really involved in this operation is the subject’s refusal to accept responsibility for his unconscious sexual desires; if the cause of my problems in a traumatic experience, my own investment in my sexual problem is secondary and, ultimately, irrelevant” (Slavoj Žižek in an interview with Glyn Daly: *Arriesgar lo imposible*, Ed. Trotta, Madrid, 2006, pp. 127-128).



the scene. We are all African peasants: we each see what we want to see”<sup>82</sup>. We have no depth, no perspective, no ability to focus, we only see the *anecdotic*. And, in the meantime, the nihilism of the archive (an accumulation attempting to retain everything is then incapable of finding anything), accumulates fetichised traces<sup>83</sup>.

Banality is the “legitimising” foundation of contemporary art. In the generalised festive atmosphere, the stupidity of an interventionist nature (given to issuing an infinite number of messages), *todologist* by nature<sup>84</sup>, becomes a veritable epidemic. In this State-symptom which runs the risk of becoming hysterical and fragmenting, given over to complete banality, some subjects manifest a sick desire to be liked, to be nice at all costs<sup>85</sup>. They have been to so many funerals, some of them, like that of art, with the wrong corpse<sup>86</sup>, that they now prefer the funny to the spectral. People ignore the provocations of contemporary art, its nudity is in no way erotic or even ridiculous<sup>87</sup>. Art ends, even when it is supposedly

82. Regis Debray: *El estado seductor. Las revoluciones mediológicas del poder*, Ed. Manantial, Buenos Aires, 1995, pp. 122-123.

83. “What is left comes before what is inherited. Everywhere the traces are cancerigenous: gangrene, petrified. “All reality, says Sylvie Merzau, becomes a document, the social body becomes archive space”. As such, traces have value. The fact of putting “in the box” is more important than what is put in the box. What matters is the box and not what it contains. The formalism of traces is historic nihilism. We are all leaving traces of everything. Ultimately, they are all the same. A bicycle wheel and a Cezanne canvas. War and an article about war. The event and the echo. The man and the puppet. Politics and the “Drinks show”” (Regis Debray: *El estado seductor. Las revoluciones mediológicas del poder*, Ed. Manantial, Buenos Aires, 1995, pp. 129-130).

84. “The sclerotic being presented as an idiot is a purely theoretical and nearly automatic kind of intelligence, but in no way the portrait of a real life idiot. The idiot we all know is neither *asleep nor anaesthetised nor mummified*: on the contrary, he is active, found everywhere, always at work” (Clement Rosset: *Lo Real. Tratado de la idiotez*, Ed. Pre-textos, Valencia, 2004, p. 186).

85. “Hysteria. The sick desire to be nice affects everyone who wants to consent and prevent the desires of the other, at any price. Hysterical neurosis is the most acute form of this behaviour, like a constant search for a good impression. (Regis Debray: *El estado seductor. Las revoluciones mediológicas del poder*, Ed. Manantial, Buenos Aires, 1995, p. 154).

86. Cfr. Hal Foster: “This funeral is for the wrong corpse” in *Diseño y delito*, Ed. Akal, Madrid, 2002, p. 135. “A new system of attention is being installed, favouring scanning instead of reading and decyphering meaning. Images become more fluid, more mobile: they are pragmatic elements in a chain of actions; they lose their reference value to become part of a chain of metamorphoses to order, entering in a phantasmagorical series: literally a procession of ghosts” (Yves Michaud: *El arte en estado gaseoso*, Ed. Fondo de Cultura Económica, México, 2007, p. 101).

87. “As Freud often insisted, the fundamental feature of dreams in which the person dreaming is nude before a crowd, the feature producing anxiety is the surprising fact that no one seems to mind the nudity; people just walk by as if nothing was wrong...” (Slavoj Žizek: *Bienvenidos al desierto de lo real*, Ed. Akal, Madrid, 2005, p. 91).

“radical”, by bombing us with stupidity. Its attempts to “change life” take on the form of ineffective propaganda<sup>88</sup>. We are abducted by the mass media, contemplating “reality” like a finally boring show. *We have become what we watch*, we prefer artifice to reality<sup>89</sup>. Instead of reaching philosophical serenity, we remain, as in a narcoleptic attack, dulled, something that was “monumentalised” by Warhol in film: *Sleep* hypnotises us or, better still, ensures that we know that we should be in no hurry: there is nowhere to go<sup>90</sup>.

## Other writings

The beginning, said Heidegger in 1935, is terrible and violent: that is *unheimlichkeit*, non-being-in-ones-original-home<sup>91</sup>. However, we are *used to discomfort* which does not necessarily mean that we have accepted anguish<sup>92</sup>. To use a film analogy, we are living in *Dogsville*, where the other is subject to all kinds of exorcisms<sup>93</sup>. The bombardment

88. In 1981, three airplanes chartered by the Chilean group called CADA (Lotti Rosenfeld, Juan Castillo, Fernando Balcells, Raúl Zurita, Daniela Eltit) fly over the poor districts of Santiago de Chile and drop pamphlets saying “helping to improve life is the only valid form of art” (*Ay South America!*)” (Paul Ardenne: *Un arte contextual. Creación artística en medio urbano, en situación, de intervención, de participación*, Ed. CendeaC, Murcia, 2006, p. 110). Cfr. Nelly Richard: “The Dimension Social of Exteriority in the Production of Art” in Jan Cohen Cruz (ed.): *Radical Street Performance. An International Anthology*, Routledge, London, 1998, pp. 143-144.

89. “Anthropologist Edmund Carpenter, in his book *The Become What They Beheld*, quotes a sentence about the arrival of Robert Kennedy’s corpse from New York to Los Angeles. The writer “was with a group of reporters... and noticed that they were nearly all watching the event on a specially installed TV screen. The real coffin was passing behind them, nearly at the same distance from which they were watching the tiny version shown on the screen”. Similarly, Harold Rosenberg—always an acute observer of such things—says in one of his articles in *New Yorker* (March 17, 1973) that “the TV showed groups of prisoners of war who were returning from Hanoi spending time watching groups of prisoners of war returning from Hanoi on TV. One man rowed across the flooded high street to buy a newspaper with pictures of the floods...” (Allan Kaprow: *La des-educación del artista*, Ed. Ardora, Madrid, 2007, p. 98).

90. “What is *Sleep* by Andy Warhol? What is it not? Is it film? Is it the most advanced aspect of Pop Art? The dilation of detail to its limits, for which kind of maximum effect? The use of the screen as a table for the spectators dreams, ghosts or thoughts? An exercise in hypnosis? A test of patience? A Zen joke? If it irritates you, why is it? Do you not enjoy a good joke? Are you in a hurry? To go where?” (John Mekas: “*Sur Sleep d’Andy Warhol*” in *Et tous ils changent le monde*, Lyon Art Biennial, 1993, p. 105).

91. Cfr. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe: *Heidegger. La política del poema*, Ed. Trotta, Madrid, 2007, p. 19.

92. If we do not accept abandonment, anguish, passion and the night of agony, we are no more than faithless images, poorly worked stones which do not fit in the building and are useless for anything” (Pascal Quignard: *Las sombras errantes*, Ed. Elipsis, Barcelona, 2007, p. 19).

93. “The depoliticised national community is, then, like the small society of *Dogsville*, in the duplicity between social

which puts an end to the siege imposes a landscape of ruins, that impressive *object of the century*: “Everything in its place. The remains of objects and bodies: that is what mattered. The ruin and the place – without which there is nothing. *Nothing ever took place but place*. Where all memory and art is enclosed. The memory in time is, firstly, a matter of place. Having taken place is to have a place. Broken glass, splintered crockery, spilled food. Disastrous still life this birth of the *ars memoriae* –the pictorial genre of still life may also possibly have been born from that”<sup>94</sup>. The place of demolition, the target of terror may, nonetheless, contain beauty<sup>95</sup>. What *seems cruel* is really what is most disturbing.

In spite of everything, we do not have to accept that we are destined to struggle with *trinkets*<sup>96</sup>. What we still have (in our culture which has survived postmodern incredulosity) are *morbid symptoms*. Promiscuity, the end of the pathos of distance, cause a sort of generalised *Larsen effect*<sup>97</sup>: the amplifier is coupled to the sound which has just been emitted. We have completed the end of the aesthetic illusion. We see nothing other than television<sup>98</sup>. We blink and the ghostly war is still there (that terrible description

service of proximity and absolute rejection of the other” (Jacques Ranciere: *El viraje ético de la estética y la política*, Ed. Palinodia, Santiago de Chile, 2005, p. 29).

94. Gérard Wajcman: *El objeto del siglo*, Ed. Amorrortu, Buenos Aires, 2001, p. 16.

95. “It seems cruel to find beauty in war photographs. But the landscape of devastation is still a landscape. There is beauty in ruins. To recognise it in the photographs of the World Trade Center in the months following the attack seems frivolous, a sacrilege. The most people dared to say was that the photographs were “surreal”, a febrile euphemism for a dishonest notion of beauty. But they were beautiful, many of them: by veteran photographers such as Gilles Pérez, Susan Meiselas and Joel Meyerowitz, among others. The site itself, the massive cemetery known by the name of Ground Zero, was anything but beautiful. Photographs tend to transform, whatever the subject, and an image can be beautiful –terrifying, intolerable or very tolerable- but not be so in real life” (Susan Sontag: *Ante el dolor de los demás*, Ed. Alfaguara, Madrid, 2003, p. 89).

96. “There is an initiation form of the Trinket, or an initiation form of Evil. And there is also the crime of the initiated, the forgers of nullity, the snobbism of nullity, of all those who prostitute the Trinket for value, who prostitute Evil for useful purposes. The field must not be left open to forgers. When the Trinket arises in the signs, when Nothing emerges from the very heart of the system of signs: this is the fundamental event of art” (Jean Baudrillard: *El complot del arte*, Ed. Paidós, Buenos Aires, 2006, pp. 61-63).

97. “The abolition of distance, of the *pathos* of distance, makes everything undetermined. Even on a physical scale: the excessive proximity of the receiver and the source creates a Larsen effect which interferes with the waves. The excessive proximity of the event and its real-time dissemination generates indetermination, a virtuality of the event which rids it of its historic dimension and removes it from memory. We are immersed in a widespread Larsen effect” (Jean Baudrillard: *La agonía del poder*, Ed. Círculo de Bellas Artes, Madrid, 2006, pp. 60-61).

98. “According to Susan Sontag, when she was watching the TV broadcast of when man landed on the moon,

of the bombing of Baghdad in the first Gulf War, like a Christmas tree), we are rocked by the hyperrealism of the mass media<sup>99</sup>. "As –says Goddard in the third chapter of *Histoire(s) du cinéma*- those who continue to watch television have no more tears to cry, let us try to think together". But the most difficult thing is to achieve such a collective willingness to criticise because the dogmatic game that entertains us involves participating in obscenity.

Avelino Sala, with an enormously lucid determination, decides on a sort of *iconic ascesis*, assembling quotes, textualising his imagination. With his intervention on one of the emblematic sites of the immense Universidad Laboral building, he wants to reinvent an *art of memory* which is neither commemoration nor submission to official discourses, nor the misanthropic distancing of the ivory-tower-artist. He tries to *construct* a memory (historic) which is symptomatic<sup>100</sup>. Contemplating one of the photographs of Germany being bombed at the end of the Second World War that he had remembered, Brecht said that "nothing can be taken as over (*nich erledigt*) even though it is nearly all destroyed (*alles Kaputt*)". These dark images (*Diese düsteren Bilder*) make us realise that "he who forgets the past –as we can read in *ABC of war*- does not escape from it". Avelino Sala, when the debate about "historic memory" in Spain has reached a strange point of stagnation, returns to where he studied (the Simancas barracks turned into a Jesuit school) but, above all, he leaves the road open for the narration *from the present* of the meaning of those disturbing words in which a man calls for his own destruction and that of his enemies. According to Benjamin, it involves "a memory as it shines at a time of danger". The siege is not over, even though we have achieved a sort of capitulation of the conflictive imagination. The catastrophe continues before our very eyes,

some people were claiming that it was all staged. She then asked them: "So what are you watching then?" And they answered: "We are watching TV!" She understood everything" (Jean Baudrillard: *La agonía del poder*, Ed. Circulo de Bellas Artes, Madrid, 2006, p. 66).

99. "The problem with contemporary media is not their ability to lead us to mix fiction with reality, but their "hyper-realist" nature, with which they *saturate the vacuum in space for symbolic fiction*" (Slavoj Zizek: *Las metástasis del goce. Seis ensayos sobre la mujer y la causalidad*, Ed. Paidós, Buenos Aires, 2003, p. 123).

100. "The incidence of memory –which could be its arising or crossing, but also its accident, its fall, its symptom-represents collision between images, discontinuity of time, dispersion of language (the same that Maurice Blanchot though was the starting material for poetry)" (Georges Didi-Huberman: *Cuando las imágenes toman posición*, Ed. Antonio Machado, Madrid, 2008, pp. 214-215).



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the worst continues to function<sup>101</sup>. That is why we have to *construct a place*, in spite of History, attempting to take up another position, writing a story which is different, metamorphic and memorable.



101. "Eternal return of the Same, which engenders a deep melancholy in the observer who is for ever disappointed in the consoling belief in a happy end to the story. "The notion of Progress –writes Benjamin in *La obra de los pasajes*- should be based on the idea of catastrophe. The fact that things "continue to function" is a catastrophe. It does not show what will happen in the future but what has already occurred, as Strindberg says (in *El camino de Damasco*): "Hell is not what could happen, it is our present life"" (Stéphane Moses: *El Ángel de la historia*. Rosenzweig, Benjamin, Scholem, Ed. Cátedra, Madrid, 1997, p. 140).