DIGITHUM

A RELATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON CULTURE AND SOCIETY

Introduction

Memory and imagination
From traumatic memory to utopian imagination

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Over the last century, the problems concerning the manifold relations between memory and imagination have become a major set of studies wherein a wide range of current approaches on social and cultural change are developing. This is the core idea of this section in the twentieth issue of *Digithum*. The confluence between both socio and temporal notions denotes a fertile realm of contemporary studies within humanities and social sciences. The articles below, each of them in their own way, present the idea that, in order to comprehend the past, its link with the future must be taken into account; otherwise, the two-dimensional character of the socio historical time, as well as the temporal connotation of all that is human, is being neglected.

The articles that make up this section probe some of the essential characteristics of the process in which especially traumatic memory as well as utopian imagination, the former's counterpart, have grown into a research interest within the so-called realm of *memory studies*. Needless to say that they focus on the 20th century, or as it has been called by those who study it, -and are only able of providing an account of subsequent humanitarian debacles which are still to be decried over the forthcoming decades, the victims' century.

The current impetus of scientific and artistic queries which constantly wonder about war traumata and how to overcome them is undeniable. This impetus is stimulated by the fact that the victims' narratives are the core of heated cultural and political disputes and it is demonstrated in debates on the classic and unpleasant great Nazi crimes, the Spanish Civil War, discussing whether it was either a violent and unexpected imposition of a repressive regime or a fratricidal war, or by proposing somber prognoses about a possible end of the long and flickering clash between insurrectionary attempts and other actors of the Colombian armed conflict. Thus, civil wars are, more than any other kind, determinant historical forms that prompt the configuration of national or continental memories and the development of projects that pursue the domination of the global future.

You can judge people by the trauma(ta) they remember. This is the proposed guideline in order to present a relation among the diverse approaches that have been selected for this section on memory and imagination. Many other issues, which the readers may find valuable, are being left out.

In "Adolfo Sánchez Vásquez and the broken memories of the Spanish exiles of 1939 in Mexico: a seminal concept for the Sociology of the past" Laura Angélica Moya describes how this Andalusian author articulated a concept facing his uprooting; i.e. a concept related to a concept of time as broken memory is delocalized memory. Precisely, this contingency provides that

concept with texture: an exiled is a victim of the negation of the present, a victim of the inability of being attached to his land of origin. Imaginaries merely refer to the past. They are only an inventory of what used to be but not of what might be; broken memory, memory with no expectations at all; memory devoid of future, hence, a barely good photograph but not a promising scheme. A Marxist speculative approach to History is perceived in this intellectual's ideas.

It is clear that the question about the healing and overcoming value of commemoration is still awaiting its fulfilment. This orientation, which refers to memory as a previous instance of the return of a collective project, is also present in other articles. To end, let us outline that the figure of the Spanish Republican exiled in Mexico is drawn by its dissolution and also, if the buried bodies with no tombstones or grief in Europe were taken into account, this situation would mean another long term Francoist success in which Republican projects would fade due to the death of their last witnesses.

Moya's prelude is continued, thematically and theoretically, in "Imaginaries on the Return to a Post-conflict Colombia: Discourses of Colombian Refugees in Ecuador" by the members of the research group Social conflicts, gender and territories from Santo Tomás University (Bogota-Colombia). In the article, which shows another (and) contrasting historical case, they summarize the results of their research "Imaginaries on return to a post-conflict Colombia". Unlike Spanish exiles in Mexico, Colombians in Ecuador find themselves in an *overvictimizing* scenario; after experiencing physical violence in the context of the Colombian conflict, they are now unwelcome as they experience symbolic violence.

Civil society's indifference, lack of care on either side of the border and xenophobia are some of the grey areas Felipe Andrés Aliaga Sáez *et al.* present as a product of empirical evidence of their work with focus groups in Quito. The researchers outline that the future is not a promising land given the scarce Colombian public institutional capacity; moreover, the future is not even a reliable hope since the end of the war is merely the beginning of another odyssey. The notion of enigma they used in the article is of the most value, an uncanny and imaginative exploration of future options; an enigma which is nourished with shared ideas and imaginaries of the social time-space. The enigma of those who were banished is their possibility of returning.

The solutions towards survival emerge from radically different experiences: somehow positive according to those who emigrate in search of a job; on the other hand, frustrating for those who had to escape in order to preserve their lives and family. The mistrust in the near future, which is confronted through public and private mass media propaganda, is the basic emotion for the exiled who took part in the research. How is it possible to believe that the partial modification of the conflict, by abstracting one participant of it, allow the possibility of returning?

Perhaps the article that most remarkably features a theoretical character is "Time regained archive. The form of imagination" by Natalia Taccetta. This character comes from a critical tradition that evokes Walter Benjamin, Didi-Huberman and Aby Warbug; a tradition attached to a sociocultural frame in which the work of art that allows Tacetta to opt for a critical theory vision on image, memory and specter is precisely found as well: a left bloc of cultural workers who have steadily inquired about what their counterpart, the agents of media resonance capitalism, "actually did" and, especially since the time of the "resettlement" of democracy, they have persistently denied. With this attitude, victims tend to be seen as aggressors and, hence, a memory that comes along the installation of the Reorganization Process, as coup perpetrators named the period, is updated.

Thus Albertina Carri, daughter of missing parents during the civil-military dictatorship in Argentina, sets her installation. Drawing from her work of art *Operation failure and the sound recovered* (2015) in The Memory Park in Buenos Aires, Carri reimagines her recent history, a several level rallying trauma for that society. After reviewing the many folds of that work of art, which is composed by plastic, visual and sound installations, Tacetta rediscovers them through a theoretical background that allows her to emphasize, among many other issues, on a reconsideration of art: the necessity that the work of art approaches to the occurrence; an occurrence which is also healthy in on a certain level despite being pathological and compulsive due to the spectres of the past. Let us state, to end untimely, that the Argentinian culture will remain related to the debate on how an emancipated/emancipatory memory beyond the single trauma is possible; Tacetta's view reveals ways to deal with it.

At last, "Atom Egoyan's *Remember*. Vices and virtues of the memory systems" by Lior Zylberman, somehow similar to Tacetta´s aesthetic query but more related to a psychological and neuroscientific approach to memory offers a breath of fresh air when dealing with the Nazi Holocaust during WWII. Zylberman, drawing from the represented fragment of a surprising narration, establish a valuable doubt: our memories are accommodating and even false. The author is able to prove it successfully, as the movie is spoiled, by telling us how a man is his own persecutor and, as a result of the twists and turns of the memory manipulations, how the victim and the aggressor end up being the same person.

An obscure announcement, which might have already happened in the history of this or any other trauma, may be upon us: the replacement of the victims by their own aggressors and the upcoming unfair punishments or mercy. Zylberman could have said human memory is not a digital storage system whatsoever. A digital computational system will never rely on subjective dispositions or paradoxes. Byte memory is a mere register; human memory is a complex, hidden and undecipherable human creation. By the end of the article, we will have recognized the lack of the five memory

systems and also, to keep on with the analogy, will have sensed ways to hack them. Moreover, we could have achieved one of the clearest and most amazing connections between memory and imagination featured in this dossier.

It is worth emphasizing that this set of articles should be placed in the context of the present amid a social change acceleration which involves the comprehension of everyday-life time. This tendency deeply impacts the ways social interpretation of the past is carried out by every new generation when asking their predecessors what they did before the injustice they bequeathed. Facing this timescape, the following questions are valid only for a fleeting moment. How do we capture the victims' lived experience? When it comes to exile, refugee status and death-threats, is the everyday life break inventory complete? These are just basic questions in order to comprehend millions of human beings who have suffered as a result of these ill-treatments. This situation may be somehow visible but not properly judged; in this dossier of Digithum 20, it is theoretically and practically problematized.

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