

DEEP EMOTIONS, POOR NARRATIVES:
ON THE ICONOGRAPHY OF THE RETREAT
(*LA RETIRADA*)¹

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ABSTRACT

The Spanish Civil War and the subsequent border crossing of the Republican population towards France in February 1939 generated a profusion of images of which only a few have become recognizable icons that represent the injustice performed by Franco's victorious army. However, most of these images have circulated without any historical context, thus becoming abstraction rather than historical realities. This article discusses the way the corpus of visual—mostly through film—representations of exile have been used and abused, how they have been “migrating” from one media to another, and hence how they have changed their semantic value and have been used to support different ideological messages.

I. IMAGES AND IMAGINARY

What is surprising about the images of the Spanish Civil War is not necessarily their copiousness but the fact that, through a process of *natural selection*, a few of them have turned into recognizable icons. These images have come to epitomize this specific war and, through de-semantization, war in general, since the 1936-1939 conflict turned Spain into a very intense military, ideological, political, journalistic, and propagandistic battlefield. Consequently, it contributed decisively to the forging of the Western war imaginary. As Susan Sontag succinctly expressed in a late essay, the visual representation of the Spanish Civil War introduced some of the incontrovertible themes of human affliction through photography: the repression of the innocent, human solidarity, and the bombings of defenseless cities. These were not necessarily values in those years. They were, above all, images, for they crystallize waves of emotion and also are able to condense stories. More than once, their persuasive power turned into myth. The eye that had not seen this imagery before was in *shock* upon viewing photographs in illustrated magazines, film newsreels, and propaganda posters. Little by little, such images became abstract, as their specific coordinates started to blur.

One of the genres of visual representation was the filmed images of exile. Certain images appeared again and again: civilians running away as planes riddled them with bullets, the *casa-caracol*,² exhausted children and old people marching through the snow-covered mountains. These are images of the Retreat (*Retirada*) of January-February 1939, after the fall of Barcelona on Janu-

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ary 26th. However, this iconographic arsenal includes very diverse motifs: some photos show the civilians marching to the border, others showcase the disarming of the Republican army upon reaching France; some images, in turn, document the refugees' arrival to the first detention camps near the beaches of Argelès-sur-Mer. Others condense the explosive yet residual pride of the former soldiers who greet the camera raising their fists. These images are at present tremendously uprooted from the specific historical reality they once captured. They are habitually utilized in film and television documentaries that typically mix them or, alternatively, place them side by side with other images such as the crossing of the Irun's bridge two and a half years earlier, the evacuation of the children of Bilbao, or even the city of Madrid in very different circumstances.

Such a profusion of images signals an abyss between what the images actually show and the types of emotions they trigger, between the events they document and what makes them effective as memory anchors. Such mismatches point to the meaning of the term "icon": its power depends precisely on what makes it weak since the process of generalizing removes it from the historically specific. It is curious, to say the least, since we are dealing with still photography.

Whatever use these images of the Retreat may have had, their most consistent substratum was established between the winter and the beginning of the spring of 1939, composing the exile's imaginary (Tuban 45). To be more precise, the issue 5007 of the French magazine *L'Illustration*, which was published on February 18 of this hard winter, contained the majority of the images that have come to immortalize the exile. It is a long reportage titled "La tragédie espagnole. Sur la frontière des Pyrénées", in which Spain regained all the notoriety it had garnered during the first year of the war. It offers an early mosaic of the humanitarian genre (a genre later characterized by banality). It contains 16 pages, between issues 213 and 228, analyzing the conflict. It has numerous photographs, in most cases authored by established photographers (Safara, Louis-Albert Deschamp, Keystone, Jean-Clair Guyot, Fulgur, and R. Trampas, among others). The tone of the report is full of pathos, regardless of its political perspective. In addition, the magazine's layout relies on affect and, at the same time, introduces a more objective approach through the written text.

L'Illustration's correspondent and author of the first article, Jean-Clair Guyot, describes as unimaginable the visualization of this profusion of images, analyzing what types of media should represent it. He considers himself both a witness and a chronicler. He predicts that "the lively character of the cinema, in reproducing movement but also sound, will reveal the key moments of the event. Still photography, so precise in capturing detail, will affix touching images" (213). The author affirms that his aspiration is to pass on how the faces of displaced people express human feelings. In this way, an impenetrable discourse frames the war calamities, staying away from any kind of ideological standpoint. Politically deactivated, the tone of his piece reaches pathetic intensity, especially when discussing the most innocent victims of the war: "Men,

women, children —poor children!— marching, wearing rags for who knows how many days of marching and deprivation, crushed by the weight of the load they refuse to leave behind since it is all they have” (213). Among the different stills, Safara’s clearly stands out. The footer reads: “Le cheminement pitoyable”. It is the celebrated and touching photograph of little Alicia Gracia (not yet identified), with an amputated leg, crossing the mountains (*vid. infra*), presumably accompanied by her family. However, such a striking cliché seems welded with the next one, through an identifying footer that encompasses both (“Les deux cortèges”). Whereas the first one epitomizes compassion, the second reveals that the darts of political rejection are also sharp: “Le convoi indésirable” shows a few unarmed soldiers through a low-angle shot. Riding a truck, they greet a camera that does not hide its existence. Most soldiers raise their fists (the still bears Keystone’s seal). The photo’s angle emphasizes the threatening character of these individuals. In addition, a French gendarme, who speaks to the soldiers, is framed in a position of inferiority. The journalist’s text dwells on the peculiar characteristics of the still’s subjects: “What really impacted me was to be a witness of the arrogance that animates men who, according to all logic, should show nothing but affliction. If they had won, they would have not marched differently in front of the French military and civilians” (216).

The story continues with the arrival at the Argelès camp by the sea. A two-fold display shows one of the most extraordinary panoramic views of this location, crammed with refugees. Some of them raise their fists in the air in front of the camera. The footer explains: “A human ant’s nest: the government militia is confined inside the improvised Argelès-sur-Mer camp” (218-219). No fence was visible yet, confirming the early character of this photograph (taken by Fulgur) about life in the camp. There is no indication about the living conditions in this specific camp or other locations that the author of the reportage discusses (Saint-Cyprien and Le Barcarès). The article closes with a universal cry against the human despair before our eyes.

Despite the fact that this reportage offers the core of the Retreat’s iconography and key up-to-date information, two more articles deal with this same topic. The first one is “L’occupation totale de la Catalogne par les armées nationalistes” (illustrated with photographs taken by [Albert] Louis Deschamps, special correspondent of the magazine). Deschamps, armed with his Rolleiflex, accompanies the National army until it reaches the border, following the rules established by Franco’s government (Sougez 14). The second one is “L’Espagne nationaliste devant la faillite gouvernementale” (225-227). Robert Chenevier, another *L’Illustration* correspondent, who traveled with Deschamps, reflects upon the state of the conflict after the latest National army offensive. While refraining from explicitly condemning the Republic, the author discusses the starvation the population had to endure and their adamant celebration of the liberation. He also adds that he visited the *cheka*,³ where repression was turning into something out of an “oriental” tale. The reportage climatically con-

cludes by showcasing “L’arrivée des divisions de Navarre à la frontière française du Perthus”, which includes a few of R. Trampas’ photographs.

2. MIGRATION OF IMAGES

Other texts are symptomatically similar to the above-mentioned iconography, even if they may be interpreted in diverse ways. On February 20, 1939, *Life* published a volume devoted to the same topic. *Vu* did the same in their issue 568 on February 1, and later, in issue 570, on February 15; *Ce Soir* had dealt with this topic in their January 30 issue. By then, these images had taken on a life on their own, often independently (and at times to the detriment) of the accompanying texts. The writer would often undermine the meaning of these images with sheer emphasis.⁴ The pathetic and the pious characterize the crepuscular tone of the images.

A similar set of arguments could be applied, without considerable modification, to cinema. Alerted early to the catastrophe, the French newsreel cameras rushed to look for evidence. Similar to the graphic press, geographical vicinity, involvement, and fear caused the camera operators of *Éclair Journal*, *Pathé Journal*, and *Gaumont Actualités* to capture multiple moving images that were later edited by their respective post-production crews in the following newsreels: February 1, 8, 15, and 22, 1939 for *Éclair Journal*; February 1, 8, and 15 for *Pathé Journal* and February 1, 8, 15, and 22 for *Gaumont Actualités*.⁵

On the one hand, the newsreel camera operators (the so-called “film press”) were inclined to capture “attractive” images, theatrical even; on the other, newsreel footage displays a fragmentary aesthetic that offers iconic units. Film-makers could combine and insert these units in almost any discursive chain, displacing their initial meaning through borrowings, re-appropriations, thefts or perversions. Both of these conditions characterize the constant circulation of this iconography, complementary to photography, around the world.

Let us return to the case of the amputated girl we discussed above. Taken as the refugees were walking near Prats de Molló, perhaps no other image of the Retreat has garnered such notoriety. Little Alicia Gracia walks next to her brothers Antonio and Amadeo, and their father Mariano. This cliché image is present, as we mentioned above, in a full-page display in *L’Illustration*. The image was also captured in motion and, as noted by Magí Crusells (300), the original cinematic material belongs to a homage film to the International Brigades edited in 1948, titled *Levés avant le jour* (M. Dunoyer). In one way or another, the image circulated widely both cinematically and photographically. Quoted time after time, this iconic image of the Retreat, in which cinema and photography converge, has become as well known as the famous still of the Warsaw ghetto boy, who raises his arms in horror, (or perhaps simply in surprise) in front of the German police as he is being evacuated. The association of these two images does not occur by chance, since both of them distil similar degrees

of empathy and pain. The different utilizations of the image of the Jewish boy did not prevent the transformation of its original meaning (Rousseau). Likewise, the power of Alicia's iconicity (photograph, magazine illustration, poster, film excerpt) has not ceased to mutate decade after decade. In the series *Historia de una foto*, published by *El País*, journalist Lola Huete (2007) researched the genesis of this image. Huete's work inspired a short film reportage titled *Ése de la foto soy yo*. In the course of the film, one of the protagonists, Amadeo, returns to the original location where the still was taken. There, we see a monumental sculpture, built to immortalize the event: another turn of the screw to the iconographic proliferation through which Alicia has been portrayed.

3. RE-APPROPRIATION AND MONTAGE

Nothing attests to the affective power that these images naturally trigger better than the tenacious efforts their enemies make to reverse, cushion, or redirect their impact. Lacking significant alternatives, and having to face the expectations that the war's media climate had generated, those in charge of National propaganda did not shy away from performing significant re-contextualizations. Two reportages show what type of resources they deploy: the first, a photographic essay published in the spectacular magazine *Vértice* (issue 19); the second, a similar essay published in *Noticuario Español* (issue 15). They are both structured identically as news piece-reportages. They were both published in February 1939. It is worth analyzing what tools these writers utilized to reverse the meaning of the images they invoked.

Vértice proposes a long reportage that emerges between the war fronts (the Catalan front), extending 'naturally' to the Retreat, a process that is not named as such. The header of the last part of the article is an illustrated triptych: "The winners", "The defeated", "The escape". The footer that leads into the latter title reads as follows:

The Red army exodus towards Le Perthus, Bourg-Madame and Tour de Carol dragging several thousands of elderly people, women and children behind the divisions Lister, Campesino, Modesto and Rojo. The fanfare of the Red army has turned picturesque which is now nothing but sad. The Argeles and Boulou camps are a gypsy caravan, where the demolished followers of Marxism pile up, amidst the clamour, and guarded by Senegalese soldiers. The French soldiers watch as these flocks of men and beasts enter... This was the Republican army (n. pag.).

This distinction accentuates without any qualms what *L'Illustration* sketched; the text emotionally corrupts the visualization of the images that follow it, since the pathetic conditions its meaning. Furthermore, the long reportage insistently combines still figures of affliction with images of victory and defeat (the rendition, for example). It closes with a text titled "The National troops at the border", headed by a still that shows the National flag at the bor-

der post. The following stills, with their respective footers, express the celebratory rejoicing of the Navarra Falange in conquering the border. The martial dimension —that is, the highlighted presence of Falange members (whose identity coincides with the subjects who are introduced in the newsreel we will discuss later on)— closes with the re-establishment of the geographical limits of Spain. Significantly, no signature accompanies the still photos, as would be typical in *Vértice*. This is nothing strange, since they were appropriated from *L'Illustration*. This fact confirms that illustrated magazines were one of the privileged tools for propagandistic imagination and manipulation.

The film reportage seems to be explicitly designed to manipulate images. First, the news piece, placed in Le Perthus, is preceded by other images that shape its interpretation: stills of the conquest of Barcelona, such as the parading of Spanish National flag; Auxilio Social distributing food to the hungry population; and, above all, the first open-air mass that took place in Catalunya Square. This last event acted as a symbol of how the Francoist regime subjugated and humiliated the Catalan nationalist movement. The camera lingers, showing the crowd that surrounds general Yagüe, while the *Cara al sol*⁶ plays as the soundtrack. It is then when the news piece about Le Perthus starts, labeled as an “Epilogue to the war in Catalonia”.

The first strategic maneuver is to focus the spectator's attention on the defeated civil population, emphasizing that these people (the elderly, women, and children) have been, in actuality, dragged along on the Retreat by a far from innocent Republican army: “The enemy —says the narrator— seeks refuge in the south of France, armed and well-equipped, dragging elderly people, women and children as an shapeless mass”. The shots emphasize this military presence to the point that, instead of showing an army on the run, it captures well-armed and threatening soldiers. Behind them, civilians look like hostages. These images imply that the winner's acts did not cause the showcased desolation. On the contrary, this type of situation was caused by the stubbornness of the defeated politicians. The film consequently identifies with the victims of war without blaming the National side.

The second rhetorical device points directly to president Negrín as the person responsible for the debacle. Through voiceover narration, the news piece highlights his luxurious car and the indifference he shows towards the confined crowds inside prisoner camps —namely, his followers. Through this attribution of responsibility, the civilians' painful faces become accusatory towards the obstinate Republican leader. Nonetheless, it is important to bear in mind that the first shots of this piece, freeze frames resembling photographs, are extremely ambiguous: the refugees look at camera with a mixture of dignity and arrogance. Their transformation into catalysts of commiseration occurs through editing, since the meaning of these shots depends on their placement in a syntagmatic chain. The last sequence of this newsreel introduces a change in terms of perspective and affect: the National soldiers reach the border, talk with the gendarmes, raise their flag, and celebrate victory. We are thus

in front of a military figure par excellence: the occupation of the territory to its “natural” border and the performance of the symbolic rituals that confirm such an appropriation. The rhythm of the militia evokes the idea of a parade; the talk at the border, the legitimacy of the winners before the French state; the imposition of the flag, the symbolic occupation, and the Falangist’s face closing the series (which is also present in the still published *Vértice* on the Navarrese brigade) reveal the political imprint of the act of exaltation. In this way, the affective tone of the piece shifts from lamentation to the kind of euphoria that victory triggers.

4. A LONG SILENCE

The analyzed news piece demonstrates the audacity of the propaganda team established in Burgos (whose film representative is Manuel Augusto García Viñolas) in dealing with extremely sensitive issues. This contrasts with the militaristic or pseudo militaristic parsimony that characterized the first year and a half of the war.⁷ However, this type of discourse was not typical of late Francoism. The regime’s reactionary conservatism avoided this type of uncomfortable representation rather than dealing with it. The cinema of the postwar period renounces early to the representation of the war, after a short cycle of “crusade films” produced before 1942 (Gubern 82-83). The Retreat is utterly absent. Subsequently, Francoist cinema systematically avoided this thorny subject, aware of the fact that an emotional approach to this topic was undesirable due to the lingering power of the images, globally known at this point. However, the Retreat re-enters Spanish cinema in the early 1950s, in a new context that is ambiguous and problematic. These films, which deal with the Retreat, the exile, and the *maquis* (the resistance’s guerrillas), finally humanize the “Republican” enemy and leave aside its demonic representation. The Republican enemy was betrayed by his principles, but he is no villain. This significant change (Sánchez-Biosca 165-166) is difficult to evaluate. On the one hand, this representational shift occurs during the Cold War, in which the Communist has become the common enemy for all democratic regimes. This fact allegedly legitimates Francoism, since it was the first political regime to fight it. On the other hand, it is obviously an overstatement to label all films produced around 1950 as *Francoist*, since state censorship allowed authors to create “dissident” narratives. These introduced nuances to the official discourse, undoing the ideological Manichaeism of the regime’s first years, even if it was through a concealed or implicit mode of address.

In this context, it is relevant to emphasize the resurgence of the winter 1939 Retreat in two films: *Rostro al mar* (1951), made by the experimental filmmaker Carlos Serrano de Osma,⁸ and *Dos caminos*, directed two years later by Arturo Ruiz-Castillo, a filmmaker that had humanized and redeemed the Republican fighter in *El Santuario no se rinde* (1949). This last film works within

the contours of the “heroic resistance” war subgenre, placing its narrative in Santa María de la Cabeza, a key location during the war conflict.

5. THE RETURN OF THE RETREAT: *ROSTRO AL MAR*

Rostro al mar opens with a collage of shots that are easily recognizable; B-roll images that introduce a series of images that the spectator can easily identify: a superimposed poster shows the French border on January 1939, a panoramic shot to the right that follows a tank, a high-angle shot over the French-Spanish border and then another tank advancing. After this, a short fade to black.

These shots have been taken from the Spanish archives, without resorting to any other archival source, despite the fact that several of them were readily available during this time period. If the opening introduces the idea of warfare, these three shots suddenly draw the spectator to the military Retreat. The next three shots, taken from the same archive, slide our attention and affect towards the civilian drama.

As opposed to their original source (the newsreel discussed above), these shots are not accompanied by a voiceover narration, lacking any kind of audio track that could establish their ideological standpoint. Certainly, the fictional story has not started yet. In terms of structure, these shots form a diptych to which the filmmaker adds a general prologue: the military and the civilian follow one another according to an expository logic. Above all, the resurgence of these images confirms their transformation into iconic symbols that, even if they were zealously put away for years, are bound to appeal instantaneously to the contemporary spectator. These shots bear all responsibility, almost without any kind of auxiliary text, to anchor specific meanings. The next shot plunges us into the fictional world: at night, in the midst of the roar of bombings, a car drives into the darkness of a forest. Inside, a man and a woman (presumably ill) seek shelter. It is a beginning *in media res*. The deliberate scarcity of information about the characters points to the fact that the prologue provides enough details to understand the historical juncture in which the film is set. The only remaining data to decipher are the fictional identities of the characters and the drama of their story. These shots point to the migration of images, to their resistance to disappearing—that is, the transformation of their use, the mutation of the photographic index into a memorial icon. It is also necessary to analyze them in relation to the narrative structure of the film.

The film tells the story of a Republican officer, Alberto Santisteban (Carlo Tamberlani) and Isabel, his pregnant wife (Eulalia Montero). Running away from the National troops that follow them, Alberto leaves Isabel in an apparently abandoned house and departs to find a doctor. Bombs have devastated the nearest village and he does not succeed. Upon his return, he finds out that the house where they sought shelter is not empty. In fact, two elderly women have helped his wife to give birth to his daughter. We then find

out that Alberto and Isabel are officially married and that he accepts his political “mistake”. He has to leave the country until his family is able to meet him abroad. Alberto and Isabel live parallel adventures that make their reunion difficult. First, in Marseille, Alberto is easy prey to the Communists that control the area and charge high prices for their services. Isabel, who is accepted by one of the old ladies, faces the initial rejection of this lady’s son Manuel, a naval captain, who later learns to accept her and even proposes to her. Chance intervenes unexpectedly: Manuel saves Alberto on the gangway of his ship as he is being shot at by the Communists. Isabel and Alberto start a new life under the spell —says the closing statement of the film— of peace and —we suppose— expiation.

This text only analyzes this story in relation to the opening shots of the Retreat provided: images that created a narration, and that by 1950 they have achieved a generalizing power in relation to the memory of the war, reducing it to a few easily recognizable images. The film works within revisionist logic: Alberto is a regretful Republican officer; he is not the enemy. The film rescues his figure by confronting him with a corrupt, malicious, and mendacious Communist. This marks a change in the regime’s discourse compared to 1939; a shift that the utilization of these images reveals in a privileged way: the honesty of certain enemies, the human drama of the Retreat and, above all, the suppression of two images that gave the 1939 newsreel its climatic character —that is, the triumphant discourse of the winners and the condemnation of the president of the Republican government.

6. INTIMATE IMAGES: *DOS CAMINOS*

The film begins with a *maquis* raid in a small Catalan town. Their goal is to kidnap a local doctor. Soon we realize that the doctor, Antonio (Ángel Picazo), and his kidnapper, Miguel (Rubén Rojo), were both members of the Republican army that took opposite paths during the 1939 Retreat. The doctor decided to return at the last moment, confronting his guilt, which consisted of small sins the law did not sanction. After his expiation, he was “accepted” by his neighbors and was even able to get married. Miguel, however, crossed the border, was secluded inside the prisoner camps of the South of France, suffered the harassment of the Resistance, fought in World War II and, finally, joined the *maquis*. Curiously, the film deals with the Retreat and the diverse consequences of their respective paths through a series of confessions the two friends make to each other. It is interesting to analyze how images of the Retreat are utilized and which ones are specifically deployed in the film, given that this iconography was solidly in place.

The first flashback deals with Antonio, the doctor. He remembers how one day in the beginning of 1939, sitting on a truck, he felt he belonged to the community of people in the village: “we were no longer an army” —he says. “We

were getting closer to the French border". In the midst of continuous bombings, Antonio appears to be thoughtful, unaware of the chaos surrounding him. A woman hands his son to the soldiers so that they can take him to France. A road sign reads "6 kms". The border is around the corner. Suddenly, Antonio jumps off the truck and abandons his companions: "And I was not afraid of this land. It was necessary to stay, whatever the consequences may have been. My heart did not mislead me. My situation cleared up one day and the happiness to return to my personal peace and my work was going to help me forget very painful things". As opposed to *Rostro al mar*, which exclusively relies on a very short sequence of "objective" images to frame the fictional narrative, this first flashback signals the transformation of images—fictional and re-enacted, although having an "archival" look—they both fix intimate memories and express general ideas. In this way, the archival material bends to the power of memory, for the documentary quality of these shots is tied to the character's point of view.

The second flashback, narrated by Miguel, continues the story that Antonio started. Entirely re-enacted, these images bring to the fore the iconography that had epitomized the Retreat: human columns, civilians walking next to the military, and Le Perthus pass. It lacks, obviously, the pitted texture of the rough documentary image, its variety of textures, the role of chance in framing, and the formal heterogeneity between the different shots, since this iconography has been polished and homogenized. This reconstruction continues with the seclusion inside the Argelès-sur-Mer camp (something that is not specified), which is the main setting of several sequences. In this case, the production design performs a polishing operation: a Senegalese on horseback, the seashore, the prisoners... and, in addition to the image, the denial brought by a dramatic soundtrack.

Miguel goes on with his story in the South of France, where he is easy prey for the Communists. They supply him with new documents and send him to forced battles that prevent him from returning. The war resurfaces, now it is World War II, while the German occupation of France takes place and along with it the resistance of the *maquis*: "And once more—says Miguel—at a crossroad, I took a path that leads nowhere". It is his own story that makes him understand his loss, since in the middle of it he becomes aware of the mistakes he has made. This will trigger his final autoimmolation.

To sum up, the images of the Retreat and their immediate consequences are at the origin of this anti-Communist story. The film belongs to a cycle of films that, throughout the 1950s, revisited the civil war within the generic register of the spy film. However, not all these films are the same: in *Dos caminos*, the Republican soldier (like the officer in *Rostro al mar*) is different from the Communist. The defeated also own the right to have an honest narrative life and the return to the homeland falls into the realm of verisimilitude once past sins have been accepted and expiation achieved.

7. MENTAL IMAGES

In 1958, José María Forqué made *La noche y el alba*, a thriller that decisively chose to focus on the present: Pedro (Francisco Rabal), a violent and wild alcoholic is accused of murdering his wife and running away. Carlos (Antonio Villar), a wealthy businessman who sees himself as a failure, gets involved in the case due to a brief encounter with the deceased woman and is forced to hide Carlos inside a factory under construction, a location that clearly signals the modernization of Spain. There, in front of Marta, Carlos' frivolous wife, an unexpected confession emerges. Carlos, anxious to get rid of Pedro, proposes to help him out. He will facilitate his escape across the Pyrenees. "No, not again", replies a visibly disturbed Pedro. It is then when the tragic past emerges: Pedro had already left the homeland in 1939, when the Republican army crossed the French border. He ended up in a prisoner's camp where he suffered hunger and deprivation, falling ill. In giving the spectator Pedro's background story, inserting him within the realm of History, the film rehumanizes his character. Astonished, Carlos recollects how he traveled a similar path, living amongst the winners in those years. Perhaps in that bygone era that, all of a sudden, has returned like thunder, Carlos could have had the same life Pedro did. Now things are different. They both are, in actuality, failures: Pedro longs for the home he fantasizes about. Everything would have been different had he had one. Marta and Carlos know very well that neither their home nor their condition as political and social winners has given them the happiness they covet.

A social winner and an outsider confront each other two decades after the war has ended, as though their respective social conditions would be directly related to the resolution of the conflict. It is the wife who has a human and social revelation—in a Rossellini-like gesture—that binds them together through a newly achieved sense of solidarity. Illuminated by her new condition, Marta leaves the factory. Both men, whose double confrontation points simultaneously to the past and the present, to the social and the military, remain alone in the night's darkness and leave together, sharing cigarettes and a light. The night and the dawn that this ending anticipates may work as a metaphor for an accidental re-encounter between two enemies of the past that life has guided through different, isolating tunnels for twenty years. Only now, intimately sharing their sense of failure, are these two human beings able to carve out a new, promising, and maybe jubilant, dawn. At the very least, it will be more human.

Even though the film is clearly a product of Francoist Spain, what is curious is that the closing scene of the Retreat surprisingly encompasses both perspectives: the winner's and the loser's. Most importantly, the story, born in the intimate night hours, is kept hidden throughout the whole film, and is devoid of images. In other words, it is narrated but not enacted. Images function as memories, as trauma, since the spectator may invoke them as characters tell their stories. It is likely that this would happen, given the presence of this imagery in the collective memories of many. Their explicit mobilization seems

thus unnecessary. Within the realm of recollections, the oral story substitutes for them. The year of 1958 is a point of no return. At the lower limit, the “objective” image, fixed, is substituted for the oral story; at the upper limit, the time of the document —imminent, boundless— has not arrived yet since it comes to the fore in the 1960s.

8. REOPENING: ICONS AND DOCUMENTS

Photographic and cinematic images of the Retreat resurfaced in the 1960s, functioning as inalienable documentary supports. These images have had a very powerful influence on the Western imagery about warfare. Interchangeable and fossilized in their use, it is the task and responsibility of the historian to restore their documentary weight, to explore them in depth, to put them in dialogue (and collision) with other sources, and to refute their interchangeability.

Of course, the cultural commentator must consider that the quick fixation and fossilization of these images, their double indifference toward time and time passing, is a symptom one cannot ignore. This process has become increasingly complex, due to the fact that primary sources did not run out in the spring of 1939, but, on the contrary, have not ceased to grow and flourish throughout all these years. To limit ourselves to the last years, it is worth mentioning the work of the Mexican photographer Robert Capa, who, after crossing the French border on January 28, 1939, with a group of civilians, took multiple stills. Only one of them was published in *Life* magazine the following month. Not less surprising is the contribution of the French-Colombian artist Manuel Moros, based in Collioure since the 1920s. Armed with a Leica, Moros captured in January 1939 key stills of the Retreat; on February 5, he took more photographs at the Cerbère border post and on the same day registered the colony of children in Ports-Vendres before it was sent to la Mauresque prisoner camp, where he also printed his photographic films. Starting in Collioure, he also documented the Argeles-sur-Mer camp on February 10, when this location was barely a piece of poorly-defined land (Tuban).

Cinema did not stay inactive. Louis Llech, a filmmaker based in Roussillon, operating a 16mm Paillard Boleix and with the help of his assistant Louis Isambert, worked from the end of January 1939 on both sides of the border, registering the human tide with a long, respectful and modest look that functions as a counterpoint to the newsreels discussed above (De la Bretèque 2005 and 2010). His amateur film, edited and using inter-titles, was titled *L'Exode d'un peuple*. It only circulated in very limited exhibition circuits and was never commercially available.

Regrettably, these invaluable documents have not been known for decades and, even after their resurgence, it is extremely unlikely that they will modify the meanings expressed by the iconic roster of dominant images that has already been set in place. Confronted with documentary heterogeneity, it seems

that the conservative spirit of memorial iconography continues to impose itself. This is perhaps due to the fact that the Spanish Civil War erupted right before the Great War conflicts of the twentieth century exploded. In addition, images of the Spanish Civil War initially shaped some of our most unsettling nightmares about warfare. The explosion of photo-journalism, the new graphic magazines, and the malleability of newsreels were markers of visibility that established a relationship with the real, converging with the new aggressive faces that came to represent warfare. Since that encounter, our imagery was indelibly marked forever and, within it, the Retreat gave shape, for the first time, to the idea of exile.

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NOTES

- ¹ Translated by Vicente Rodríguez Ortega.
- ² *Casa-Caracol* literally means "Snail-house", and it refers to families that must leave their houses and take with them all their belongings (mattresses, furniture etc.).
- ³ The *chekas* were detention facilities used by the Communists, where torture was common.
- ⁴ Certainly, there is an anachronistic element in all this: our imaginary rethinks from this perspective the images that, in the beginning of 1939, were surprising and less directional (*Fotografía* 166-189; Fontaine 166-172 *et passim*).
- ⁵ See, among others, Alfonso Del Amo.
- ⁶ *Cara al Sol* (Facing the Sun) is the anthem of the Falange Party in Spain, that is, the extreme right.
- ⁷ It is worth comparing this campaign with the clumsiness by which the National side handled the Guernica bombing on April 1937: the simple and strict denial designed by Luis Bolín from Salamanca was a dead end.
- ⁸ Serrano de Osma had contributed with Republican filmmaking for Film Popular, a Communist production company that made the short film *Mando único* (1937).