

**The necrological side of Francoism:
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Introduction

In the course of the years that my colleague RRT and I devoted to the research on the official newsreels of the Franco era -NO-DO- we had the occasion of interrogating ourselves about some enigmatic questions concerning the very first years of the regime. NO-DO, I remember briefly, was the official newsreel the State produced and diffused during Franco dictatorship. It started to play in movie theaters in January 1943 and accompanied the regime all its life along. As an instrument of audiovisual propaganda, NO-DO was unique and exclusive in providing information and its screening was equally compulsory in all national cinemas, regardless of its category. Surprisingly enough for such a repressive regime, its narration style was characterized by elusive rhetoric rather than agitation. As researchers, the origin of this instrument was for us a source of astonishment that rose a series of questions, among them the crucial one: Why had a regime in need of legitimation taken almost seven years to launch a propaganda apparatus that was going to be so useful?

This question led us to dive the following five years in the magma of the cinematic production during the SCW. These newsreels and documentaries constituted, according to the conventions of historiography, a separate chapter of history labeled under the category of 'war production'. A relative consolidated tradition had stated that while the Republican propaganda had been rich and varied, inventive and aesthetically avant-gardist, the Nationalist one was technologically primitive and politically inefficient, insisting in the idea that the Nationalist propaganda had been negative instead of positive, that is, desperately privileging censorship to creative imagination. Our research which took shape either in the book and in the documentary entitled *El pasado es el destino Propaganda y cine del bando nacional en la guerra civil* approached differently this cinematic production. I may summarize our conclusions in three points:

a) The nationalist cinema could not be analyzed without considering the muffled voice of the enemy. As a matter of fact, the fascist or pseudofascist propaganda was arguably conceived as a systematic response to the Republican one and, following the so-called Western New Order pattern, a defensive one. The careful attention the Nationalists paid to the study of the Republican production is explicit in the systematic screenings of *red propaganda films* held in Burgos in the presence of the State hierarchy. The idea, repeated by the Nationalist Chief of propaganda, Dionisio Ridruejo, was allegedly to learn from them, as well as to become capable of responding accurately to their resources. This dialogue, sometimes visible, sometimes hidden, had to be brought to the surface as a condition to adequately interpret the intense propaganda battle during the SCW.

b) The nationalist production had been made in elaborate symbiosis with the Nazi Germany strategies. First, physically, the key figure settled in Berlin was Joaquín Reig, who played the role of link between Falange and the German Ministry of Propaganda. Even if the ideological gap between the paganism of the Nazis and the Catholic orientation in Nationalist Spain was enormous, the strategies of re-editing films from the enemy's footage was a common device. *Geissel der Welt*, the Spanienfilm, as named by Goebbels in his diaries, was the first of a series of documentaries taking Spain as a crucial moment in the everlasting war against Communism.

c) Last but not least, the national propaganda project was a scenario of entanglements where a struggle was overtly or not developed between the different ideological trends that constituted the *lingua franca* we call 'Francoism'. This battle was to be prolonged in the immediate postwar period to vanish a few years later by the triumph of Nationalcatholicism. A careful analysis (which often implies reading between the lines) reveals the existence of these conflicts in the treatment of symbolic ceremonies, in the role of certain figures, as well as in the historical references used...

The battle of charismas

This is the framework of my speech today. Among the many aspects that we discussed in our book (war reportages, the image of the enemy, the legendary visions of the glorious past, among others), I would like to bring up here one of the most controversial questions, namely: the leader's charisma. I propose to concentrate on the development of the Spanish model of political and religious charisma and how it contrasts with the image built up by other totalitarian states, in which a figure of Promethean attributes owe more to mythology than to Christianity. I will draw on a documentary produced in an early period in which Falange had still under control the propaganda apparatus. We will see that the roots of Spanish Fascism go back far to an old Spanish literary and dramatic tradition –the Baroque whose pathos stirs the audience through pity. But let's first remember the facts for those who are not familiar with the Spanish History.

JAPR, Founder of Spanish Falange, fascist-oriented political party, was arrested in February 1936 for their activities as violent agitator. He later was transferred to the prison in Alicante, shortly before the SCW broke. As the ideological leader of the far-right parties, he represented the fascist aspirations of a movement that was spectacularly growing thank to the armed conflict. However, the key role played by the Army in the uprising was consolidating Franco as the *primus inter pares* in the Nationalist Spain hierarchy. In the last days of September 1936, Franco achieved an unprecedented symbolic victory in releasing the Alcázar of Toledo from a siege that had lasted more than two months. Some days later, he was appointed *Generalissimo* of the Armies. In the meantime, JAPR was sentenced to death and, despite some attempts to mediate, he was executed on November the 20th, 1936.

Nevertheless, his death was not officially recognized in the Nationalist Spain, where he continued to be named as *the Absent* for nearly two years. In the meantime, the centralization of power was in progress: Franco became the leader of the Party, after the unification of all movements supporting the uprising in the nationalist side (April 1937). At the end of January 1938, the first government was formed under the presidency of Franco and a structure of State was built up. Then, the political and ideological precariousness of the new structure was under control and the death of JA was less menacing. By a decree of November the 16th 1938, the date of November the 20th was henceforward

declared a day of national mourning, converting José Antonio's death into a symbol of the fallen rebels. The initial ceremonies to honor the slain hero had to be held without the presence of his body, since Alicante was still behind the Republican lines. With the end of the war, the prison in Alicante became a sacred site at which devotional objects, relics and inscriptions commemorated the martyr's memory. It was then when the Falange organized one of its most spectacular events in history, which in some way was to be the swan song of Spanish fascism.

As soon as the city of Alicante was occupied, a group of Falangists exhumed José Antonio's body from a mass grave and transported it into a crypt. On the third anniversary of his execution, over a period of ten days (November 20th-30th), his mortal remains were borne from Alicante to the monastery of El Escorial. As the procession traversed towns and sites of memory, numerous ceremonies and rituals were performed. If the Alicante's prison was associated with the leader's execution, El Escorial stood for all that was great and glorious for the Falange. The monastery, founded by King Philip II, was the Spanish monarchs' pantheon. Resting in such illustrious company, José Antonio would thus partake of the royal lineage. His memory, recent but already mythical, would be incorporated into the legendary Spain of Faith and Empire to which the winners of the Civil War so fervently aspired. For ten days and ten nights, the body of the Falange's Founder crossed a country still scorched by the scars of the war. Every 100 meters the platform with the coffin was relieved following a strict order. Even if Falange kept the general control on the phenomenon, an agreement was to be reached with the military authorities and the ecclesiastical hierarchy in order to determine all the details (profusion of symbols, regulation, discipline, cortège's composition and so on). The body arrived to the Escorial, as anticipated, on November the 30th, and was buried under a slab of the main chapel in a ceremony presided by Franco.

One audiovisual document captures the heartbroken, lyrical, yet monumental vision of the fallen leader –and therefore gives some insights to comprehend the spirit of the Spanish fascism-. The film was produced by the official DNC in 1939 under the title *iPresente!*. Seldom did nationalist propaganda cinema achieve such high intensity as in this documentary whose camerawork, editing, soundtrack and mise-en-scene rise to match the ceremonial splendor of the

procession of the JA's body. This would be the only occasion on which the image of a leader other than Franco was permitted to eclipse the latter's chameleon-like power and presence

The words of the title appear on the screen as the camera tracks the solemn advance of the funeral procession. The photography by Enrique Guerner was high contrast, the music, taken from Wagner's *The Twilight of the Gods*, lends a Germanic, mythic and legendary dimension to the proceedings. The coverage of the ten-day march seems underpinned the mathematical structure that makes a striking use of the natural rhythms of night and day, dawn and dusk, to suggest a cosmic trajectory by the fallen hero toward the future. It is a truly majestic piece of propaganda unique in the annals of Spanish fascism, that has its echoes and correspondence with the coverage on the press, radio, posters and photography and, later, with numerous literary production.

Screening a brief fragment to stress the rhythm

But let's get elaborate a little more the question of charisma at the origin of Franco's Spain. By 1939, nobody could dispute to Franco the real power in all the fields that were at stake: Military *Generalissimo*, National Head of the Party, Head of State and Prime Minister. The degree of concentration was absolute. Yet, how could this omnipotence be symbolically combined with someone else's charisma? Certainly JAPR was dead and he was harmless to diminish the actual power of Franco, but its radiation could produce effects on José Antonio's coreligionists and heirs, the Party's old guard, at the expense of the absolute power.

Ppt. Fast with some examples of Franco's charisma

Even if the whole analysis is impossible here, it is my pretention to point some revealing questions.

First, the harbor, the source, the palimpsest. The exalted sentiment of the phrases uttered by the narrator at the opening of the film pale into

insignificance beside the superb shots of the sunrise over the Mediterranean, gleaming through the mists of the port of Alicante where a memorial stone was ceremonially dropped into the sea. The sparkle of the light, the low camera movements following the point of view of the funeral procession which passes while sailors and people alike raise their arms in the so-called *Roman salute*, as still statues in carefully-posed cinematic groupings, create a desolate and oppressive effect; but the overall impact on the spectator is curiously uplifting, thanks to the mastery of the lighting, editing and mise-and-scene. The excerpts recall another famous revolutionary cinematic masterwork, the sequence of the mourning mists in the port of Odessa in Sergei Eisenstein's *The Battleship Potemkin* (1925). The comparison that may seem gratuitous merits more detailed analysis.

In the mentioned sequence, Eisenstein presents the confusion which follows the mutiny on the battlefield and which ends with the murder of the sailor Vakulinchuk, who had incited his comrades to rebellion. The celebrated images are seen through the mists which swathe the port of Odessa, captured quite by chance by the cameraman Eduard Tissé and utilized by Eisenstein to suggest that nature itself is grieving, as if a funeral veil clouded the gaze of the men who rally round the dead sailor's body, overcome by respect and compassion. A boat transports Vakulinchuk's body to the quay where the people of Odessa will bid him farewell. The mournful atmosphere provides the backdrop for both films. But while in *Potemkin*, the uncontainable grief bursts out in a fury of revolutionary hatred, *iPresente!* remains mired in grief, even though its opening words, and those which follow, seem to presage action.

It may seem difficult to consider these two films as comparable, given the ideological gulf that separates them. It is therefore worthy of note that *Potemkin*, together with Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1935), was perhaps the propaganda film most admired by those in Spain who clamored for a cinema of the Falange and the film is even quoted in the only unequivocal Falangist film of the postwar period, *Rojo y negro* (*Red and black*, 1942).

Epiphany.

Even though the document is presented in the form of a reportage of the transfer, it proceeds to a surprising inversion of the chronology when presenting

images of the hero, JAPR. Once arrived at the Escorial, the narrator evokes with stirring verses composed in the epic style the new dawn hailed in the Falange anthem. Death is thus transformed into triumph, and the day's end we hear the evening prayers. The realization of this prophetic vision leaves no room for doubt or uncertainty: the nation's victory heals the hero's loss in a dream come true. This forms the link with the words of Franco in his capacity as Head of the Party as well as Chief of State. His words are eloquent:

JA, symbol and example for our youth, in this moment in which we commit you to the earth of this land which you so loved, as over Spain we glimpse that bright new dawn which was your dream, I recall your own words:

May God now grant you the eternal rest which we can share only when we have safely gathered in for Spain that harvest which your death has sown.

JAPR [The crowd responds: Present]

The dawn of the new day is here equated with the victory of Nationalist Spain in that apocalyptic spirit so characteristic of fascism. The fact that Franco is singled out for live recording his speech both confirms his key ceremonial function and confers a special quality to his words. It is as though the cycle which began with grief for a leader denied a decent burial has now come to a fulfillment with the ceremonial entombment which will convert JA from ideologue and founder of a political ethos to the status of fallen hero.

However, what follows seems to contradict the preceding sense of closure. The next shot takes us into cosmic realms, up into the night sky whose points of light give a daringly literal sense to the metaphor in the lines of the Falange national anthem which hails the fallen as 'guardians of the stars'. His heroism now takes on superhuman proportions.

Despite the astrological references in the preceding passages, this cinematic ascension to the heavens is a voyage of sanctification. JA's successors will in future interpret his words more as the allegories, parables or predictions of a visionary than as the prescriptive ideology of a founder of a political party. It is precisely at this point, with the founding father newly laid to rest, that he reappears in a true moment of epiphany. The words of the resurrected leader are no longer a statement of political principles but rather a prophecy. They are

the lines that JA spoke out in a Paramount interview in 1935. In this short clip, the leader lays out the basic principles of his party:

We hold firm to the belief that the living heart of Spain is strong and sound. The country has been brought low by three forces that are tearing it apart –regional separatism, party rivalry and class divisions. [closeup] When Spain can unite around a common purpose, it will rise again as a great nation to recover its former glory.

Placed in this very different context his message acquires a new significance, since JA returns to speak to us from another world and another time.

The film seems to insist that his destiny lies beyond the world. The camera takes us back into the stars from which we descended only long enough to savour the closing words of the reanimated hero. Now we are returned to the starry firmament, that narrator's voice is stilled, perhaps by the impossibility of putting any kind of full stop to the utterance of a saint. The resulting silence marks the authentic canonization of the fallen leader.

Conclusion

En 1932, the radical fascist Ernesto Giménez Caballero claimed that 'for Spain fascism is truly Catholicism'. This may find an echo in theories of the distinctive nature of leadership in Spain (F.J. Conde, J. Beneyto...) and may also have created a climate of expectations in which the media contributed to the creation of religious persona for Spain's only real fascist hero. What we know by certain is that it was only after his death that the cinematic image became fully formed, forged from conflicting emotions of partisan fervor and crushing sorrow, and he emerged somewhere between a fallen hero and a saint.

iPresente! is the one real example of a cinematic text on Spanish fascism. Its post-mortem nature makes it undeniably morbid, as indeed was the fetichization of JA which took place during his life. That the leader who was for so long referred to as *El Ausente* (the Absent One) should finally be reclaimed with cries of *iPresente!* has a certain irony. In the homonymous film, JA is indeed physically present, though dead, but he is raised up before our very eyes to undergo a hurried canonization which makes him both morally untouchable and politically unusable.

In 1942, the specialist in rituals Moret-Messerli, responding a national competition, proposed and sanctioned a calendar of Francoist celebrations.

November the 20th was described by him as a day of national mourning, while another date, October 29th, was conceived both as a commemoration of the Party's foundation and day of commemoration of the fallen. It is not deprived of meaning that the doctrinal moment, the foundation of the Falange, was soon going to be overshadowed by a ritualistic mourning, where the imperative of action was replaced by the expression of pathos and grief.

Fate had one last cruel trick in store for JA. It occurred when Francisco Franco died in the arms of his family on November 20th 1975. Once again, but it was assuredly the last, Franco unknowingly robbed him the only ceremony that the leader had had exclusively for himself for more than three decades. Three days later, on November 23rd 1975, Franco's remains were deposited in a new tomb occupying most of the small space in the chapel of the Valley of the Fallen. Facing his remains was José Antonio, exhumed one more time from El Escorial en 1956, and entered there. He was not alone anymore.