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ART AS A UTOPIC HORIZON OF FEELING IN *LA ANUNCIACIÓN*

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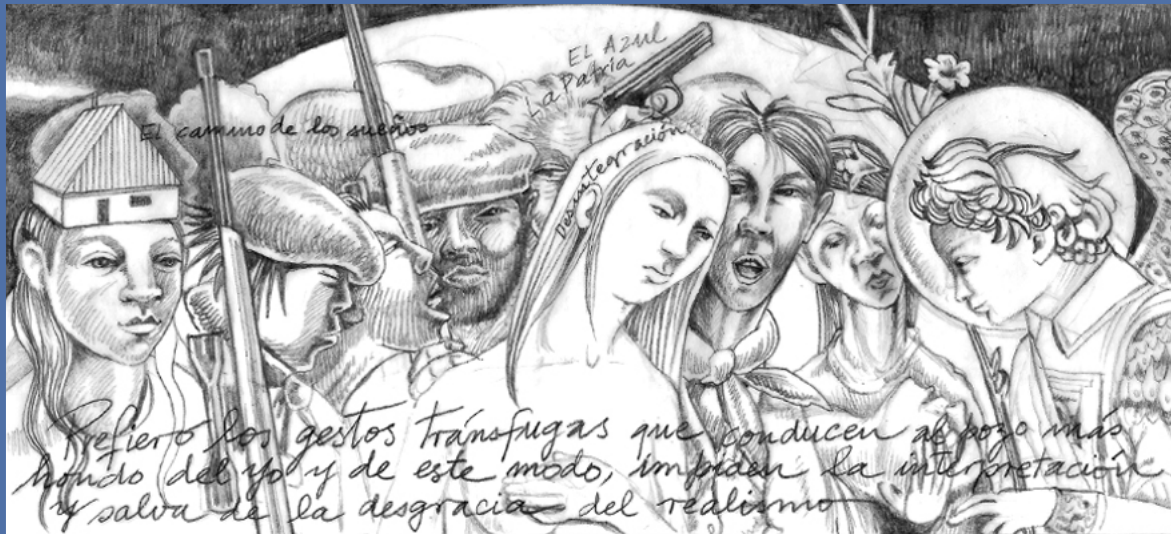
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Abstract || In *La Anunciación* (2007) by María Negroni, a survivor of the Dirty War in Argentina narrates her quest to reconstitute herself as a subject, in exile, thirty years later. Thus, the novel inserts itself in the series of narratives about the memories of the last dictatorship in Argentina. However, at the same time, departing from referentiality, the novel creates obstacles for a mimetic reading. This paper argues that this is achieved through the discussion about art that mainly focuses on the character of Emma, the painter, and on the pictorial tradition of the Annunciation. Nonetheless, this departure from referentiality is by no means complete as the narrative keeps a dialectical relationship with history and memory. Accordingly, this article suggests that the novel puts forward a utopian idea of art that enters in dialogue with the utopian ideals of the revolutionary movements of the 1970s.

Keywords || Art and literature | Referentiality | Memory | Utopia

Un poema es una cosa que nunca ha sido, que nunca podrá ser.
Vicente Huidobro, *Altazor o El viaje en paracaídas*

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1 | See also Jelin (2002).

0. Introduction

In Maria Negroni's *La Anunciación*, a survivor of the Argentinean Dirty War narrates her quest to reconstitute herself as a subject in exile. Thirty years have passed and she lives in Rome. Through this theme, the novel is inserted in the Argentinean narrative of the recent past. By including specific historical facts and characters from this period in the past, the text leads to a referential and mimetic reading. But, at the same time, it creates obstacles to a possible reading of this kind.

In the present work, I want to argue that the departure from referentiality is achieved through the discussion on art—primarily focused on the character of Emma, the painter, and the pictorial tradition of the Annunciation. However, this departure is not complete, as the novel will maintain a dialectic relation with History and memory. For example, I would suggest that through this discussion on art, the narrative proposes a utopic idea that is in agreement and in disagreement with the utopias of the revolutionary movements of the 70s.

In other words, I would like to focus on the ways of reading the text convenes, in a dialog with the series, traditions and debates where it is inserted or entered into discussion, as well as what ideas it proposes on the role of art and literature in the construction of memory and History.

1. Memories and reading

Particularly in Argentina, as in the Southern Cone in general, the literary series on the memories of the dictatorships of the 70s and 80s of the twentieth century went from the urgent writing of testimonies focused on the collective and revolutionary to more aesthetic (more subjective and imaginative) forms of elaboration (Forné, 2010a, 2010b; Daona, 2011: 88). Beatriz Sarlo (2005: 68) mentions the profusion of detail used as a source of authenticity on the first ones, assigning them to the “realistic-romantic mode”. But even in less realistic works, the frame is given by the persistent presence of “memory” in the society.¹ Sarlo points out:

[Los relatos de memoria] se establecen en un «teatro de la memoria» que ha sido diseñado antes y donde encuentran un espacio que no depende sólo de reivindicaciones ideológicas, políticas o identitarias, sino de una cultura de época que influye tanto en las historias académicas como

sobre las que circulan en el mercado. (Sarlo, 2005: 161-162)

Of course, this culture of a period also constitutes the horizon from which it is read, especially as a professional or aware reader. The titles of reviews of *La Anunciación* on the Argentinian press show the orientation of the readings towards the fluidity, openness and diversity of voices: “Variaciones sobre un tiempo mesiánico” (Amato, 2007), “Voces fantasmales” (Monteleone, 2007) and “El torrente de su voz” (Viola, 2007); its contents, knowledge of an Argentinian local literary tradition against which the reading is shaped and that refers to theoretical texts—such as Sarlo’s aforementioned book (Monteleone, 2007) or Garzón Valdés’ *Calamidades* in Viola (2007)—or, as I mentioned before, to popular topics in the debate on recent memory that is simultaneously taking place in this society.

However, as Mikhail Bakhtin said, the novel has the capacity of including other genres, and *La Anunciación* is more than a story with a reference to the recent Argentinian past. It is a novel, a poem, an essay, poetics; and its themes, which go beyond the national to a space without borders—a self-made republic of letters/of art—, are recurrent in the writer’s work. For example in the essay book *Ciudad Gótica*, where the writer creates an alternative New Yorker genealogy (Ferrero, 2012), “arma[ndo] y desarma[ndo] su propio canon” (Mallol, 2003), Negroni outlines a poetic that is anchored on the right of poetry and art to be a “un puente de ningún lado a ningún lado” (Negroni, 1993: 22) that cannot be reduced to the fast consumption of the didactic message or the representation. In an interview given upon the publication of *La Anunciación*, the author mentions her desire to “correr[se] [...] del lugar del testimonio, de la reivindicación de la figura de las víctimas” and adds that she made an effort “para sacar, para desvincular a la novela de lo referencial” (Negroni, n.d.). Elsewhere (Castro, 2015), she points out the risk of the project, given the strength of a mimetic reading imposed by the topic of the recent past. Here, I investigate how it is performed, at the textual and narrative level.

By “mimetic reading” I refer to a reading mode where the sign is read as the referent itself and *overshadowed* as a sign. By reading this way, the reader does not take into account language and the symbolic values issued by the way of narrating, but they look for specific references in the historic and social reality: historical facts, particular events, etc. The concept is similar to Karlheinz Stierle’s “lectura cuasipragmática” (1980), used to describe the reading of a literary text as if it was a pragmatic text, that is, a text with a clear informative function. A quasi-pragmatic reading of a literary text would be that in which the reader enters into the illusion created by the text, identifying with the characters and events without paying attention to the quality of the literary text as a construction and as a constructor

of realities. In the particular case of literature about memory of the recent past, talking about the illusion created by the fictional text is not totally convincing, given that much of the narration, though a discursive construction, has in fact a real reference and aims to state something in the context of a current and controversial debate in the society contemporary to the writing. What I want to say with this is that it is not adequate to adopt a normative attitude—such as Stierle’s—towards how to read a text of this kind. That is the reason why I chose not to use his concepts in my own discussion.

2. “Cosas que no tienen nombre”

Emma’s character, who will disappear the 11th May, 1976, but will be present in the memory of the main character in her strolls in Rome, already in the 21st century, obsessively copies paintings of the Annunciation, searching for “cosas que no tienen nombre.” Her favourite is Filippo Lippi, an Italian painter of the Renaissance, “porque Lippi, decía, pintaba con su deseo” (Negroni, 2007: 24). In her search, Emma delves into the tradition that has its origins in the Middle Ages, a period where, according to Georges Didi-Huberman,

los teólogos sintieron la necesidad de distinguir del concepto de imagen (*imago*) el de *vestigium*: el vestigio, la huella, la ruina. Con ello intentaban explicar de qué manera lo que es visible ante nosotros, alrededor nuestro [...] no debería verse sino como lo que lleva *la huella de una semejanza perdida*, arruinada, la semejanza con Dios perdida en el pecado. (2011: 18)

When she thinks of the painting she wants to paint, Emma notices this lost resemblance, these *remains* of the sacred:

Es posible que no haya *nada más*.
Es posible que no haya *nada más que* esta riqueza absoluta donde algo que no veo –sagrado y precario– está ocurriendo siempre. (Negroni, 2007: 97, *las cursivas son mías*)

Between “nada más” and “nada más que”, Emma covers the distance between *imago*, what is seen, and *vestigium*, what bears the trace of something sacred. In this way, she points to the idea that will be one of the central themes of the novel: that of a memory may not be totally lost, but may have not yet entered the symbolic order of language. As in the figurative tradition of the Annunciation, where the words of the Angel reveal Mary something that she does not yet know, Emma looks into herself when she says: “Todo vendrá de mí. Estuvo siempre en mí *aunque todavía no lo vea*” (Negroni, 2007: 98, *my italics*). At the same time, the protagonist and narrator also searches within herself, and in her memories, for remnants of her relationship with her partner in love and activism, Humboldt, and of

herself, in that moment previous to her disappearance on the same fateful date that is repeated throughout the novel, the 11th of March, 1976.

These are memories that are not inserted into the “teatro de la memoria” of Argentina in the 20th century that Sarlo mentions, nor into the social frameworks where, according to Maurice Halbwachs, individual memories are conformed (Erl, 2011: 14-15). This way, outside the frameworks of collective memory, Emma and the narrator establish new routes of memory construction that connect with desire, individual experience and the affective. Emma’s character and the pictorial tradition of the Annunciation refresh a repertoire outside existing chronological and generic frameworks, thus breaking the principle of historicity that prevails in literature about the recent past² and, therefore, the possibility of a predominantly mimetic reading.

Monk Athanasius, the ghost interlocutor of the protagonist in Rome, comments on the relationship between art and history and between history and thought:

Verá usted, lo que es no puede ser buscado por el deseo humano. Simplemente está o no está, como el azul de Emma, y hay que aprender a percibirlo en ese instante único en que todavía no es visible porque no ha sido tocado por el pensamiento. El arte sería, en tal sentido, la contracara de la historia que, como usted sabe, no es más que una forma de pensamiento. (Negróni, 2007: 219)

Art, according to Athanasius, is then what allows us to perceive what is not seen and, thus, can be understood as the back side of History, which registers facts in the current regime of visibility.

3. Blue, art and truth

However, it is clear that 15th century Christian figurative art is not any art, but rather holds a central position in the European humanistic tradition at the threshold of modernity. The novel might be considering this tradition and this moment as a kind of *locus amoenus* of culture, before the emergence of modernity and the colonialism that would fuel it—a space where the work of art has a cult value and has not yet become a traded good, a mere object of exhibition, where it has unicity and, from the 19th century perspective, permanence, two of the characteristics Walter Benjamin (2013) uses when he tries to develop his concept of *aura*. *Aura*, says Benjamin, is attached to presence, cannot be replicated, and cannot be separated from the spectator’s looking upon the work of art. And it is Emma’s way of looking that makes her aware there is something she does not see and this, the potentiality that creates in her the desire to see farther,

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2 | In his approach to the 1960s and 1970s minimalist art, Didi Huberman develops Walter Benjamin’s idea of dialectic image: “En el libro de los pasajes, intentaba pensar la existencia simultánea de la modernidad y el mito: se trataba, para él, de refutar la razón ‘moderna’ (a saber, la razón estrecha, la razón cínica del capitalismo, que vemos reactualizarse hoy en día en la ideología posmodernista) y el irracionalismo ‘arcaico’, siempre nostálgico de los orígenes míticos [...]. De hecho, la imagen dialéctica aportaba a Benjamin el concepto de una imagen capaz de recordarse sin imitar, capaz de volver a poner en juego y criticar lo que había sido capaz de volver a poner en juego” (Didi-Huberman, 2011: 74).

fascinates her.

Is there any nostalgia in this recurrence to the 15th century Christian art? Must we understand this re-use of art as a theme in a novel discussing recent history as a way of seeking refuge from horror in beauty, or even in the sublime? Or can we see it another way?

In her admiration of Lippi, Emma does not intend to copy the whole picture as much as to find the blue colour and make it “un espejo, una visión muy pura”³ (Negroni, 2007: 54). But we should not understand this mirror as one that reflects the visible, nor this purity as an allusion to an escapist art that avoids politics. Emma says: “Falta mucho todavía para encontrar esa imagen que no exprese nada, cuyas formas vacías, multiplicándose sin fin, obliguen a ver” (Negroni, 2007: 96). She looks for a mirror that reflects the *truth*, highlighting the critical value of art as opposed to a possible mimetic value. It is a truth that is beyond data and historical facts, beyond what we could call “historical truth.” Blue as a mirror allows then to search for absences, silences, traces of the forgotten, the buried.

This takes us to Didi-Huberman’s discussion on Benjamin’s dialectic image, where the French philosopher quotes Benjamin as follows (here, in a French to Spanish translation):

La verdad es un contenido de la belleza como revelación de lo verdadero. Pero no aparece en el desvelamiento, antes bien, en un proceso que podría designarse analógicamente como el abrasamiento del velo [...], un incendio de la obra en la que la forma alcanza su más alto grado de luz. (Didi-Huberman, 2011: 114-115)⁴

At this point, it is important to understand the position of the concept of idea in the Platonic system where, as Benjamin (2012:64) remarks, together with that of truth, it will acquire a supreme metaphysic importance. This way, that blue, with its “visión muy pura” will not be an escape, but a confrontation: the collision with the forgotten, the manifestation of “la belleza terrible de lo divino” (Negroni, 2007: 221), according to Athanasius or, in Benjamin’s words, of the “sublime violencia de lo verdadero” (Didi-Huberman, 2011: 115).

In one of her reflections on painting, Emma says:

En realidad no soporto los actos, su violencia que entumece siempre, nos distrae del misterio que somos. Prefiero el arte, donde todo, siempre, remite a otra cosa (un azul a otro azul, y este a otro) y, por eso, no se lo puede encuadrar, nunca podrá ser orgánico, como no pueden ser orgánicos una lluvia o un atardecer. No hay nada más incómodo para los poderosos, nada que los amenace tanto como esa libertad que empieza cuando termina lo que sabemos decir. (Negroni, 2007: 54-55)

Strengthening the idea of Art as an alternative to History, in this

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3 | The whole sentence reads: “Para mí, lo único que cuenta es lo que no puedo ver, atenerme al peso de este afán por hacer del azul un espejo, una visión muy pura” (Negroni, 2007: 54).

4 | In Carlotta Pivetta’s translation, it is as follows (I copy the entire fragment to understand context): “[¿Puede la verdad hacer justicia a lo bello? Tal es la pregunta más intrínseca a El Banquete.] Platón la responde atribuyéndole a la verdad la capacidad de garantizar el ser de lo bello. En tal sentido, pues, Platón desarrolla la verdad como el contenido de lo bello. Dicho contenido no sale a la luz en la develación [*Enthüllung*], sino que se demuestra en un proceso que podría designarse, mediante un símil, como el inflamarse del velo [*Hülle*] al entrar en el ámbito de las ideas, como una combustión de la obra, en la que su forma alcanza el punto de máxima intensidad luminica” (Benjamin, 2012: 65-66).

quote blue is presented as an alternative itinerary to the historical facts—that of the acts and its violence. The purity Emma aspires to can then be understood as that beyond the symbolic; “clean” of the facts, of the referential, of History, which, according to the character that is called “el alma,” “se lo traga todo como un fuego” (Negroni, 2007: 213).

Therefore, the search for blue functions then as a wish or a direction, given that like Pierre Menard regarding *The Quixote*, Emma will never be capable of painting the same blue Lippi painted.

Besides being the aim in Emma’s search and a central colour in the Annunciation tradition,⁵ we should bear in mind that, for a 21st century reader, that word, even as a graphical sign (Benjamin 2012:246-247), not only recalls Christian figurative art as it would seem, given the many allusions to Italian painters, but also to the lyric tradition that takes shape in the 19th century under the motto “art for art’s sake”: Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Verlaine, Darío—with his essential book *Azul*—, and Huidobro, who in fact, “[hace] su primera aparición” towards the end of the novel (Negroni, 2007: 175):

Tardíamente llegaba, pero firme. Se dirigía hacia el alma, disfrazado de Cagliostro, dispuesto a tragarse todo, la realidad, la irrealidad, como si hubiera una revolución intacta, irresuelta, imbatible, más allá del compás de la historia y sus lobos políticos, más allá de la pena y el miedo, la miseria y la acción, la voluntad y la arrogancia, una revolución hecha de todo lo que somos, avanzando en su carroza de palabras vivas, al galope de sus caballos de viento, cuyos enormes cascots hacen temblar esta página, la están haciendo temblar ahora mismo... (Negroni, 2007: 175)

The appearance of Huidobro’s character introduces a meta-poetic discussion. It highlights the narrow link between Art and Poetry that we date back to Horace and his famous motto *ut pictura poesis*, as poetry is, so is art: both profoundly engaged in emotions and in human life, and also in the transmission of knowledge.⁶

In the novel, Huidobro appears disguised as Cagliostro—a 18th century character that was also made into a literary character by many later authors—and, in a metalepsis, shakes the page with all its letters by calling the attention on a “revolución intacta, irresuelta, imbatible, más allá de [...] la historia” and the subjects that dominate it, the politicians. We face the same kind of revolution the narrator looks for through her writing and Emma through her painting. A revolution created by an art that makes not only the page, but all life, shake “avanzando en su carroza de palabras vivas”, shaking the regulatory logic of control to achieve the visibilization of the silenced.

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5 | “‘Toda Anunciación tiene tres misterios’, dijo [Athanasius], ‘la aparición, el saludo y el coloquio del ángel. A cada misterio le corresponde un azul: lapislázuli en polvo, carbonato de cobre, azul ultramarino’” (Negroni, 2007: 154).

6 | For a classic study on the famous Horace’s sentence see Lee (1940).

4. Figure and against the grain of History

There is another element by which the pictorial tradition of the Annunciation introduces the fundamental discussion between art and representation in the novel—fundamental, in fact, in María Negroni’s poetry. Didi-Huberman studies the medieval Christian figurative tradition where the figurative aims to disrupt the order of the visible world and the classical order of imitation.⁷ In this context, we are reminded of the clear medieval distinction between *history* and *figure*, according to which figure would be the opposite of history, of mimesis. And, the critic goes on (2003: 30), despite the attempt to deny this form of antinomy in the Renaissance, despite the attempt to put the visual under the domination of the visible, it persists in Christian figurative art. He explains:

Thus, to figure an object is not to restore its natural or «figurative» aspect. In fact, it is exactly the opposite –to transfer appearance in order to try to grasp the meaning, to approach via a detour, the heart of its essential truth. (Didi-Huberman, 2003: 31)

Thus, this paradox present in Christian figurative art, according to which the figurative is *the opposite* of reproducing the aspect of an object, and where the figure tries to connect, to stretch its hand toward an essential truth that is beyond the visible, is introduced in the novel through Emma’s relationship with the artistic tradition of the Annunciation and strengthens the nameless protagonist’s search through writing.

Therefore, Emma’s search and the protagonist’s search, in their duplication, should not be regarded as merely individual; rather, they become the search of those who did not put their traumatic experiences into words, in this case, the activist women in an organization that is hierarchical as regards gender.⁸ Emma and the protagonist are transformed in figurations of a subjectivity that looks for traces of lost memory in different levels of reality: painting, writing, History.

This approach can be related to Benjamin’s, when he talks about reading history against the grain to remember the history of the defeated, the nameless. In fact, if the protagonist has no name, Emma, who does (although likely an alias), formulates her painting as a search for the nameless: “En realidad no pinto en absoluto, lo que hago es buscar cosas que no tienen nombre” (Negroni, 2007: 91).⁹

In the recent historical context of the novel, we must connect this search for “cosas que no tienen nombre” to something horrifyingly material: the bodies of the missing people anonymously buried in

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7 | “We say *the visual* as opposed to *the visible*, in order to express the hypothesis at which taking the mystery of the *Incarnation* into consideration was aimed or at least caused: the disruption of the order of the visible world and the classical order of *imitation*” (Didi-Huberman, 2003: 21).

8 | For a more in-depth study on the discussion on the role of women in activism in the novel see Daona (2011) and Castro (2015).

9 | The issue of the names is fundamental to the novel. When she introduces her missing partner, the protagonist says: “¿Hubiera tenido hijos? Puede ser. También puede ser que no. En cualquier caso, nunca los hubiera llamado Albano Jorge, Hermes José, Reynaldo Benito, Cesario Ángel, Jorge Rafael, Luciano Benjamín, Emilio Eduardo, Orlando Ramón, Leopoldo Fortunato. [...] Carece de nombre de pila. Todo lo que tiene es un alias: Humboldt” (Negroni, 2007: 18). The protagonist herself is presented in the space left between the alias and her first name: nameless.

common graves or thrown into the river.¹⁰ Both Humboldt and Emma appear as characters or as ghosts in the protagonist's present in Rome. There are also the voices with names as masks: the soul, the word house, the yearning, the unknown, Nobody. Most of them are non-capitalized names, "palabras emblema" (Bocchino, 2011: 103): a Greek tragic chorus that holds heated discussions on different subjects of political activism. Are they the voices of those who are not here anymore, but whose bodies are still missing?

5. Utopias and utopias

Therefore, Negroni's text, besides focusing on the Argentinian recent past, goes on to trace an itinerary among traditions that work with the thresholds of the expressible and, thus, the referential.¹¹ In this way, from a metapoetic discussion through Emma and Huidobro, among others, and in their "acción de *apertura* que posibilita el reconocimiento de nuevos lugares de enunciación" (Roncallo Dow, 2008: 113), the novel acquires a political potentiality in the sense of Jacques Rancière's use of the term, that is, the potentiality of "desplaza[r] a un cuerpo del lugar que le estaba asignado o cambia[r] el destino de un lugar" (Rancière, 1996: 45). Rather than settling in the "teatro de la memoria", and resorting to ways of experience that have already entered the field of History, the novel turns to a discussion on art and poetry, breaking the possibility of a lineal narrative, and thus keeping a distance that loads it with potentiality and becoming a "promesa de emancipación" (Rancière, 2005: 30).

This utopic search for a possible fulfilment of emancipation is where art and the revolutionary movements of the 60s and 70s fall in line with Negroni's text. The Lawyer for Union and Political Prisoners leaves a farewell letter to Emma, where he considers this accordance:

Yo busco el azul de palabra patria que se parece al azul que usted busca en sus Anunciaciones, porque el azul no es más que esa humana porción de absoluto que a todos, todos, inverosímilmente, nos es dado, alguna vez, desear. (Negroni, 2007: 165)

But, at the same time, there is a strong criticism of political messianism in the text.¹² It seems to consider art as a possibility to go beyond violence and death, in search of other utopias. For example, the Author that writes letters to the protagonist throughout the novel says: "Bajé y tomé el camino de los sueños donde viven los artistas como Malevitch y otros encuadrables de la revolución. [...] Ni nacional ni popular ni qué ocho cuartos" (Negroni, 2007: 35).

The last sentence, with the combination of "nacional" and "popular", directly recalls the Peronist revolutionary movements of that time.

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10 | For a discussion on language and body in *La Anunciación* and *El sueño de Úrsula* (1998) see Castro (2015).

11 | In a work on exile writings, Adriana Bocchino refers to the impossibility of representing the reconstitution of the subject in an exile situation in this novel. The letter appears as a trace, and not as a sign, Bocchino notes (2011: 105), but "resulta ser un fenómeno paradójico: remite a la representación de lo irrepresentable".

12 | This criticism appears in several dialogues in the novel. For example, in this conversation with Bose, already in Rome: "Siento que aprendí muchas cosas en mi práctica política: que la utopía es una desgracia; que, en la tarea de alcanzarla, no hay crimen que alcance; y que eso del hombre nuevo y la compañera era una verdadera forrada" (Negroni, 2007: 55).

These are words that belong to a discourse of activism that intends to set subjectivity, to frame it, to impose a revolutionary moral.¹³ The Author seeks another revolution, one that he associates with Malevitch and other artists that opposed Social Realism and who, through form, revolutionized art. These are the “incuadrables de la revolución”, those who betray, those who are not limited by the politics of consensus, also called “police” by Rancière, and that Sergio Roncallo Dow (2008: 108) explains as follows: “Un tipo de partición de lo sensible que instaura y regula los espacios del ser, del decir y del hacer.”

Therefore, in the desire to take part in people’s dreams, the art is expressed as a way of life and not as separate from it.¹⁴ In a note found by the protagonist-narrator in Athanasius’ World Museum, Emma wrote:

La libertad tiene que ver con la persecución interior, y el arte la realiza, dejando así el camino abierto para vivir. La libertad es una forma de belleza. Pero el arte es todavía una transición, una entrega arrítmica que debe liberarse de su ensimismamiento, para acceder a esa aventura mayor que cruza los límites de lo sabido y ya no necesita de nada. (Negróni, 2007: 22)

Self-respecting art should delve into “esa aventura mayor” that is the search for new knowledge and new feelings, avoiding self-referentiality—“su ensimismamiento”— and look for ways to access experience, desire, memory and oblivion, ways that go beyond referentiality —“ya no necesita de nada”.

Further on, Emma says: “Prefiero los gestos tráfugas que conducen al pozo más hondo del yo y, de ese modo, impiden la interpretación y salvan de la desgracia del realismo” (Negróni, 2007: 92). Realism is therefore thought of as “desgracia”, because it is used to cover what is outside a particular visibility regime, what cannot be registered in words and, as a consequence, is not part of History.

However, despite this idea of art as a saviour, the narrator questions the success of her project towards the end of the novel:

Imperdonable el fracaso de este libro.
He dicho Roma como quien dice perdón.
No alcanza.
[...]
[...] Si me regalaras un compás, tal vez vería la muerte con todas sus luces, sus nichos vacíos. Treinta mil. Entonces suprimiría de una vez por todas Roma, y pondría sobre lo que vivimos, lo que olvidamos, lo que tal vez (quién sabe) estoy matando ahora, en este mismo instante, Humboldt, un enorme pliego blanco que lo purifique todo. (Negróni, 2007: 224-225)

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13 | See (Daona, 2011) and (Castro, 2015).

14 | “La soledad de la obra contiene una promesa de emancipación. Pero el cumplimiento de la promesa consiste en la supresión del arte como realidad aparte, en su transformación en una forma de vida” (Rancière, 2005: 25).

Several reasons lead to the failure of the utopia of the revolutionary movements in the 70s and 80s but, beyond that, and without diminishing the importance of the exacerbated violence used to quell them, we cannot deny that any utopia is destined for failure. Actually, utopia is essentially unachievable; it is a no-place, a place that is out of reach. Therefore, this novel, with its strong utopic component—the desire to access other parts of reality, to broaden the limits of the expressible and the register of the visible—, is also a failure. It is out of reach; however, it can be used as a horizon towards which to move.

However, the attempt to shed light on the forgotten (in this case, in Rome, thirty years later) is also a way of framing it or, in other words, killing it, by closing its potentiality. The white canvas the narrator uses to cover what she lived and the forgotten, is another form of the blue, an approach to a different search, but one that would not be recorded anywhere. An absolute potentiality not limited by any regime but, on the other hand, an absolute impossibility. Suppressing Rome is coming back to the idea of utopia, of no-place, or to the search for an extra-territorial space, where “nuevas lecturas de lo sensible” can take place (Roncallo Dow, 2008: 124).

6. Art as a utopic horizon of feeling

La Anunciación would then be considering art that goes beyond the referential (and self-referential) as a utopic horizon of feeling—and knowledge. This way, by refusing to satisfy the need for the commercialization of memory described by Idelber Avelar (1999) in his work on *Estado de memoria* by Tununa Mercado, art is presented as a possibility of redemption but, at the same time, as impossibility. Emma would never find Lippi’s blue; the narrator feels she failed at the end of her narration, as the past can never be recreated,¹⁵ and every attempt to get memory back only sets memory in a particular space or word.¹⁶

Memory is therefore presented as an archaeological activity (Didi-Huberman, 2011: 116), but not of material bodies, but of voices, sensations, experiences. However, each exhumation attempt destroys the potentiality of what was silenced. Only the white canvas, in its pure potentiality, keeps the promise of a possibility of giving desire, silences and oblivion a place.

Returning to Benjamin, we can think of the white canvas as the “más alto grado de luz” point, “el incendio de la obra”, “el abrasamiento del velo”, and the memory of the certainty that we will never unveil the truth. Negroni’s novel then insists on the importance of the way

NOTES

15 | “Imposible la reconstrucción del hecho” (Negroni, 2007: 63).

16 | For an analysis on the role of the word in this novel and in *El sueño de Úrsula* (1998) by the same author, see Castro (2015).

towards it: the truth as an idea that guides us to never stop searching in the traces of what remains written in History or represented in the “teatro de la memoria.” In this way, literature and art enter a critical conversation with the versions of reality that take shape through different discourses and media, and take a stance towards them.

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