

◆ **Afterword**

Memory's Discontent

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As I begin to work on this *afterword*, I think back to the very *first* words of this volume, that is, its title: *Memory and Its Discontents: Spanish Culture in the Early Twenty-First Century*. Evoking the provocative title of Freud's 1930 study, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, the name of the present volume establishes a necessary relationship between its first and second terms. Freud claimed that civilization inevitably engenders discontents due to the fact that it is based on the repression of what he saw as basic human instincts, such as the pleasure principle and what he conceived to be a constitutional inclination towards aggression. Similarly, the title of the present volume implies that any work of memory inevitably leads to some people being left discontent. This is especially true in the specific context explored here: that of contemporary Spanish society's attempts to confront its past of civil war and dictatorship. What strikes me, however, is the semantic openness and ambiguity of the two main terms of the title, and the various ways to understand their interrelation. That is, what kind of memory is the volume about? Who is discontent? And why are they discontent? All of these questions, in fact, have different answers, and the shifting meanings of the terms, as well as the various answers to these questions, are emblematic of the difficulties in analyzing the topic.

Many scholars working on issues of what, in Spain, has come to be called "la recuperación de la memoria histórica" (the recuperation of historical memory) feel the need to explain, at some point, that the phrase can be misleading for a number of reasons: because it presents in the singular what is, in reality, a proliferation of memory practices and contexts; because it seems to resolve all too easily the entangled and thorny relation between memory and history by making the latter simply an adjective of the

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former; and, furthermore, because of the misleading implication that it depicts a process whereby the past is “recuperated,” and unproblematically brought to the attention of the present, without sufficient acknowledgement of how any past is, to a certain degree, constituted in the very process of remembering it. Despite these reservations, however, it must be recognized that the term has been important as a heuristic tool with concrete political effects. It has given a name, and thus created a space and visibility for, a set of interrelated social, political, legal, cultural and artistic practices that have, in effect, greatly changed public sensibility in Spain about the need to revisit the past, and, in particular, seek some kind of rehabilitation for those who suffered repression during and after the Civil War. Not that this is, by any means, a view shared by all; there are of course, discontents of all kinds. But it is certainly significant that, in recent years, there is a growing perception that, far from seeing in recent Spanish history a model transition to democracy, as was thought not so long ago, we are, in fact, dealing with a “Spanish model of impunity” (Gálvez Biesca 25). This shift is due, in large part, to the numerous actions and practices understood to be part of this movement for the recuperation of historical memory.

However, it is worth noting that, if one reads a number of articles by scholars who have critically examined the problematic term “*memoria histórica*” (historical memory) one finds that they often come to very different conclusions as to what kind of memory is to be studied when confronting this issue in Spain. To mention just a few cases, for example, Joan Ramon Resina, in 2000, states

While there is no doubt that Spain’s transition to a monarchical regime is associated with a memory crisis, it is not certain that the crisis was of the historical memory. Despite insinuations to the contrary, the evidence indicates that the erosion of the past affected not so much the field of historiography as the areas related to sensory experience and the virtual space of the collective memory. (84)

However, in 2005, José Colmeiro comes to the contrary conclusion: “Con frecuencia en el lenguaje crítico se confunde memoria colectiva con memoria histórica y ésta a su vez con conciencia histórica, usándose indistintamente. Creo que lo que se echa en falta en la sociedad española no es memoria colectiva, sino memoria histórica o, si se quiere, conciencia histórica de la memoria” (17) (Often times, in critical language collective memory is mistaken for historical memory and this for historical awareness, as they are used indistinctively. I think what is missing in Spanish society is not collective memory, but historical memory, or even better a historical awareness of memory). Finally, in 2006, Michael Richards states that what is really at stake in this process in Spain is “social memory” or “the ways in which the past has been understood, talked about and assimilated in the past

as well as the present” (85).

Although different disciplinary perspectives can account for some of the differences in terminology (in the cases mentioned above the first two scholars are cultural critics while the third is a historian), the fluidity of the very concept of memory seems to be an issue here too. The exponential growth of interest in memory in recent years has led to shifts in the study of memory and the way memory is framed, as well as to a process of transferring terminology and perspectives from one field to another. Perhaps at times those shifts and transfers, and the effects they may have on what is being studied, have not been adequately noted. From psychoanalysis to sociology, from political science to anthropology, from forensic medicine to neurobiology, from philosophy to history, from visual and cultural to legal studies, a number of disciplines have approached the study of memory in slightly different terms, and yet those differences, and the implications they may have for the very constitution of the phenomenon being studied, are not always fully acknowledged. Thus, for example, a tendency to borrow from Holocaust studies the mostly psychoanalytically-based framework of trauma studies has produced very insightful analyses of the cultural production in post-Franco Spain dealing with the past, but it may have also led to an overemphasis on victimization and individual memory. This emphasis may, in turn, have occluded important facets of the previously silenced past, including the historical and political agency of many who are predominantly remembered as victims, as well as the complex political, ideological and institutional contexts within which they acted.

This does not mean that one should, to avoid such problems, try to keep the study of memory safely and separately contained within the different disciplines. All to the contrary, interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches are immensely productive. But they should be undertaken with an awareness of the different theoretical assumptions and interpretative limitations that may be put into play within different disciplinary perspectives, especially when working across them. In this respect, the contribution to this volume by Antonio Gómez López-Quiñones is most welcome and necessary.

Yet perhaps an equally important awareness is that of the inevitability of the slippage and instability of any concept of memory, as well as of any attempt to explain how it works. For memory itself is unstable and mobile. In this respect, one could think of memory as functioning in an inherently stereoscopic manner. Stereoscopy is a technique that creates the illusion of depth in an image by presenting two offset images separately to the left and the right eye of the viewer. These two images are then combined in the brain to give the perception of three-dimensional depth. Precisely because the two eyes are set slightly apart, they each have a different angle of sight, and that difference in effect produces a displacement in the apparent position of objects as viewed singly by each eye. This displacement is called parallax. It

is though the visual effect created by the brain when it combines the two images through spectroscopy that the displacement of parallax in fact becomes instrumental in providing depth perception. It is interesting that the word stereoscopy comes from the Greek for “stereos” (firm, solid) and “skopeo” (to look), and that the word parallax is derived from the Greek for “parallaxis” (alteration). In fact, in astronomy, parallax is used to measure the distance of celestial objects. In that case, the alteration and apparent movement inherent in parallax can be used, in a sense, to secure and fix an object in space (producing that firm, and solid aspect of “stereos”). In the case of memory, however, one could think of that alteration, or movement, of parallax as a metaphor for the inevitable displacements that memory works through, displacements that, unlike in astronomy, cannot be completely overcome or resolved in order to give a “firm” and “solid” account of what one is observing.¹ Memory can be seen to be stereoscopic in many ways, functioning inevitably on different planes simultaneously. The past and the present, the individual and the social/collective, the singular and the universal, the local and the global are simultaneous dimensions of any process or act of memory. Keeping in mind the inevitably stereoscopic process through which memory works, and the “alteration” that parallax embodies, may be helpful in understanding why the definitions of memory provided as we analyse “memory and its discontents” in contemporary Spain will continue to be mobile, ever-shifting, and may never, in fact, leave everyone contented.

The second term of the title is likewise ambiguous. At first glance, one can think that the “discontents” are those who are firmly against the very aims of the movement for the recuperation of historical memory for reasons that are enumerated often enough: it can “open old wounds” and undermine the discourse of consensus so important for the peaceful transition to democracy, it instrumentalizes the past for present political purposes, and it can destabilize Spanish society. Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy’s recent comments denigrating the so-called “Law of Historical Memory,” passed in 2007, about which he stated “no sirve absolutamente para nada. No tengo ningún interés en que esté en vigor” (Junquera) (it serves absolutely no purpose. I have no interest in its being in effect) are illustrative of this position. I think that strong arguments against all these claims are presented throughout the various essays in this volume.

Yet, as the essay by Antonio Gómez López-Quñones here shows, the discontent can also be those who sympathize with the goals of the “movimiento para la recuperación de la memoria histórica” (movement for the recuperation of historical memory) but believe that the way they are being sought may, in fact, be limiting its political efficacy. López-Quñones provides a cogent argument for why, as he claims, this movement is developing within a “structural political framework that constrains the potential for a more ambitious understanding of the role of historical

memory in twenty-first century Spain.” According to him, this limiting framework is due, in part, to “a semi-naturalized liberal scheme of *recognition*.” His analysis of the limits of the political efficacy of the movement due to the unacknowledged consequences of working within a number of problematic discursive frames are essential to keep in mind. These limitations too often curtail an understanding of the *political* dimensions of both the realities that are being “recovered” and the present context in which that “recovery” takes place. I find the end of his essay inspiring, however, as it allows us to see that the current economic crisis we are living, and that is affecting Spain so dramatically, does not necessarily have to be seen as a hurdle to the work of the movement for the recovery of historical memory (the right is in power and is generally hostile to the movement; funds for all kinds of activities are dwindling; people’s attention may turn to the present and be less interested in the past). To the contrary, the current situation can prove to be an unexpected catalyst for political action. I want to share in López-Quñones’s Benjaminian hope that “there is always the possibility of gaining political traction *in* and *through* the past, reinvigorating old aspirations and reconnecting previous and recent political challenges that are *not* so different” (107).

As an example of the kind of political traction one can gain in the unexpected opportunities that the current climate may provide, I would like to propose an example to add to the range of memory practices analyzed in this volume. It has been argued that one of the things that was downplayed since the transition to democracy was the strength of the political opposition to Francoism, up through the regime’s later years, from clandestine political, syndicalist, religious and civic organizations. This downplaying has been seen as instrumental in the emergence of the narrative that presents as unavoidable the concessions made by the Left during the transition (Gálvez Biesca 27). In light of this, one can appreciate the significance of the work of the so-called “*iaioflautas*” throughout Spain.

The “*iaioflautas*” are a collective of retired men and women, well into their sixties and beyond, that emerged in Barcelona in October 2011 in solidarity with the anti-system 15-M movement made up of the “*indignados*” (the indignant ones), many of whom belong to much younger generations. “*Iaio*,” in Catalán, means grandfather. The “*iaioflautas*” take their name from “*perroflautas*,” the derogatory label (akin to “gutter punk”) that the President of the Autonomous Community of Madrid, Esperanza Aguirre, used to denigrate the “*indignados*” of the 15-M movement when it took over the Plaza del Sol in Madrid in 2011, beginning on the 15th of May.² Ironically, the “*iaioflautas*” call themselves the “sons of the 15-M,” because that movement has given them the inspiration to act again. As they explain, their methods are those of their earlier clandestine opposition to the Franco regime within workers’ unions and various political and civic associations. They have organized a number of acts of civil and peaceful disobedience,

such as taking over bank offices, hospital lobbies, etc., in protest over bank speculation and austerity measures that cut health care and other social benefits as well as salaries. They have learned to use new technologies from the youth of the 15-M movement (they announce their protest actions on Twitter shortly before they take place, for example), but they bring to the movement organizational and political strategies honed during their opposition to the Franco regime (they plan their actions in strict secrecy only to announce them on Twitter shortly before staging them). In the process, their political opposition to the regime is becoming relevant to the work of the 15-M movement, which, in turn, is learning about earlier generations' struggles against Franco. The past here reemerges to engage with the present in a manner that seeks to radically transform it, making a clear connection between the struggles of the past under the regime and those of today. The actions of the "iaioflautas" are also providing a new frame within which to value their experience not as victims who suffered the regime, but as active political agents who fought against it.

One of the early actions of the "iaioflautas" was to take over a bus line in the center of Barcelona, bus number forty-seven, which they filled to capacity throughout its entire trajectory, while posting signs against the rise of bus fares, layoffs in the transportation sector, and general cuts in salaries due to strict austerity measures. Many people taking the bus with them, or seeing the bus pass by, encouraged them and made signs of solidarity. This action, in particular, embodies a recovery of past oppositional practices to the Franco regime in a way that makes of them useful lessons for the present. The bus line number forty-seven was chosen by the "iaioflautas" precisely because it was itself the memory site of a famous earlier oppositional act by someone who, were he to live today, would most certainly be one of them.

Manuel Vital started his career as a bus and tram driver in Barcelona in 1949 and soon attained an important position in the clandestine workers's union, Comisiones Obreras (CCOO). He also founded the "asociación de vecinos" (neighborhood association) of his neighborhood of Torre Baró, a working-class area in the outskirts of Barcelona. This neighbors' association was also politically active against the regime. Since the 1960s, the association had been demanding that bus lines reach their neighborhood so that the workers could get to the city more easily. The city government, however, claimed that the streets leading into and within the neighborhood were too narrow, angled and curved to allow for buses to drive on them. Finally, on the 6th of May, 1978, Vital hijacked one of the buses for which he was the driver, number forty-seven, and drove it all the way to and all around his neighborhood, thus demonstrating that the local government's excuses were unfounded. Thanks to his action, and to the pressure from the neighbors's association, the bus line forty-seven was finally extended to reach Torre Baró, and, in due time, other lines were added. The kind of past

civic and union organization and political opposition that the actions of the “iaioflautas” evoke are thus brought to bear on a current context that, in fact, can learn a lot from them. The actions of the “iaioflautas” can be seen as one example of what López-Quñones envisions as “gaining political traction *in* and *through* the past, reinvigorating old aspirations and reconnecting previous and recent political challenges that are *not* so different” (107).

With respect to the possibility of seeing productive connections between the 15-M movement in Spain and the movement for the recuperation for historical memory, one should note the various multitudinous manifestations that uphold the 15-M spirit and that have taken place in recent weeks in Spain. A major demonstration on October 7, 2012, in fifty-seven cities throughout the country, has followed on the heels of the massive demonstration in Madrid of September 15th that ended with harsh police measures against the demonstrators. Organized by two major workers’ unions, Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT) and Comisiones Obreras (CCOO), along with 150–200 civic associations, this last demonstration is, itself, supposedly building up to a planned general strike to be held, it is believed, in mid-November. It is significant that these demonstrations against the effects of the austerity measures being imposed on Spain, and the resulting cuts to the social welfare system in the country, coincide with those organized by the “Plataforma contra la impunidad” (Platform against impunity), an umbrella organization bringing together a number of associations within the movement for the recuperation of historical memory. Not only has the “Plataforma” organized a major demonstration against the impunity of the Franco-era crimes on September 29th in the Plaza del Sol in Madrid, but it has, in fact, been holding demonstrations every Thursday for some time now, following the model of the famous demonstrations of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina.

This connection between the Spanish anti-impunity movement and the Argentine fight against the impunity of the dictatorship is significant, and plays out in interesting ways, as Sebastiaan Faber analyzes in his essay in this volume. Faber establishes a parallel between the debates around what some have called the “argentinización de nuestra mirada al pasado” (120) (Argentinization of our view of the past), to use the phrase by Spanish historian Santos Juliá that Faber responds to in his essay, and the debates about the applicability of international human rights law within a particular national context, especially as they emerged after Garzón’s attempt in 2008 to begin a legal investigation into the crimes of the Franco regime.

Faber’s analysis brings to the foreground another element that, I believe, is essential when studying “memory and its discontents” in contemporary Spain. This is the increasing internalization of the discourses and practices of memory, and the need to understand national events within increasingly interconnected, global trends. Such connections are ever-present in the development of the movement for the recuperation of historical memory in

Spain. For example, in a somewhat ironic reversal, and as a mirror effect to the legal strategy that Baltasar Garzón initiated in 1998 with his request to extradite Chilean Dictator Augusto Pinochet from London to Madrid in order to try him for crimes committed during his regime, an Argentinian judge has now taken up the legal action to investigate the crimes of the Franco regime that Garzón was prevented from undertaking in Spain. From the use of the concept of the “disappeared” to frame the experience of the Republican victims of Franco-era executions, to the inevitable comparisons with the experience of the Southern Cone dictatorships when analyzing the illegal adoptions of children of Republican women prisoners in the Spanish postwar, to comparative approaches to transitional justice, to the increasing references to the Holocaust as a way to understand the postwar repression in Spain, and, of course, as Faber rightly notes, to the very nature of the Spanish Civil War itself as an event with major international ramifications, the multiple practices of memory in Spain are irremediably intertwined with those from other national and international experiences through increasingly globalized discourses around and about memory.

In this context, I believe that the concept of “multidirectional memory,” as elaborated by Michael Rothberg in *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* can be useful for a better understanding of these dynamics in Spain. As Rothberg explains, his book analyzes “a series of interventions through which social actors bring multiple traumatic pasts into a heterogeneous and changing post-World War II present” (4). Rothberg traces the way the memory of the Holocaust has been brought to bear on, or has been inevitably entangled with, the confrontation with a number of diverse traumatic pasts in different time periods and national contexts, such as, for example, slavery in the United States, the Algerian War of Independence in France and Algeria, the genocide in Bosnia in the 1990s and the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East. Rothberg sees in this kind of analysis, one that acknowledges how different, even competing, memory practices and discourses are entangled with each other, a possible alternative to what he calls “competitive memory,” which is based on an assumption that memory is “a zero-sum struggle over scarce resources” (Rothberg 3). That is, as an alternative to the discourses of competing victimization, in which the memory practices of one collective are seen as working against or even displacing those of another, this perspective seeks to understand how they are often irremediably entangled. As Rothberg explains, this implies a view of subjectivity and memory, as well as the social space in which they both get played out, as malleable and mobile, not fixed and static:

Fundamental to the conception of competitive memory is a notion of the public sphere as a pre-given, limited space in which already-established groups engage in a life-and-death struggle. In contrast, pursuing

memory's multidirectionality encourages us to think of the public sphere as a malleable discursive space in which groups do not simply articulate established positions but actually come into being through their dialectical interactions with others; both the subjects and spaces of the public are open to continual reconstruction. (Rothberg 5)

This does not mean that we simply see contested memories as different practices, each with an equal right to coexist in the social sphere. But, rather, that we understand how they, in many ways, partially contain each other, and, especially, that we acknowledge that practices of memory entail inevitable shifts and changes in the very nature of the individuals or collectives taking them up, as well as in the social sphere where the practices play out. One can see in the mobility and lack of fixity at the heart of multidirectional memory something akin to the "parallax" effect inevitably present in the dynamics of stereoscopic memory as discussed above. In fact, multidimensional memory can be seen as akin to stereoscopic memory, but opening it up to the possibility of more than just two angles of vision at play. Here, we can see that the "alteration" of parallax can, in fact, have beneficial effects.

Many of the practices of memory analyzed in the volume could be seen as examples of multidirectional memory. To name just one, Luis Álvarez-Castro's analysis of the way the "Peninsular War" (or "War of Independence") in Spain from 1808–1814 has been analyzed by many twentieth-century historians through the lens of the Spanish Civil War demonstrates how entangled the explanatory narratives of the two events can be. Of course, the very fact that the earlier war is known by two different names is already an indication that it was, always, inscribed within two different discursive registers and national traditions (calling it the "Peninsular War" highlights it as one more of Napoleon's European wars, whereas calling it the "War of Independence," as it is predominantly referred to in Spain, inscribes it more firmly within the political developments in Spain). To add to the entanglement of different memories through which the events are often explained, Álvarez-Castro effectively points out how historiographic explanations of the war since the nineteenth century have alternated between those that see it predominantly as a civil war, a manifestation of an ongoing social crisis within Spain between liberal and conservative forces, and those that understand it primarily as a clash between Spain and an invading French army.

Studies such as this one are valuable reminders of how important it is to tease out the different strands, and understand the concrete historical development and ideological presuppositions of each strand, within such complex discursive constructions of multidimensional memory. Of course, the very study presenting this analysis becomes one more layer within this "historical palimpsest," as Álvarez-Castro calls it, and inevitably effects a

change in the social sphere within which this multidirectional memory circulates as it continues to be rearticulated and entangled within new interpretative frames. In the end, as Rothberg reminds us, “memories are mobile, histories are implicated in each other. Thus, finally, understanding political conflict entails understanding the interlacing of memories in the force field of public space. The only way forward is through their entanglement (313).

Finally, returning to the ambiguity of the term “discontents” in the title of the volume, one final observation that comes to mind is that, for some scholars, it is memory itself that must remain “discontent” if it is to remain politically effective, in the Foucaultian understanding of this term. Nelly Richard, for example, in the context of post-dictatorship Chile, has called for an “unsatisfied memory” (a “*memoria insatisfecha*” in the original Spanish). As she explains, for memory not to be co-opted by congratulatory views of the present that claim to have “put the past to rest,” “passed the page,” or even “closed the wounds of the past,” it must remain forever “unsatisfied” (17).

Within the Spanish context, Manuel Reyes Mate has recurrently called for a similar practice of memory, explicitly based on a Benjaminian approach to history, which is presented as a “*memoria vigilante*” (*Memoria*) (vigilant memory). This “vigilant memory,” as in the conceptions of Nelly Richard and Walter Benjamin, is an act charged with a moral and ethical imperative to side with those who are on the underside of history. As Reyes Mate explains: “La memoria moral no es recordar el pasado, sino reivindicar el sufrimiento oculto como parte de la realidad o, lo que es lo mismo, denunciar toda construcción de presente que ignora la vigencia de una injusticia pasada” (“*Políticas*”) (Moral memory does not mean to remember the past, but to vindicate the hidden suffering as part of reality, that is to say, to denounce any construction of the present that ignores the relevance of a past injustice).

The essays in this volume eloquently analyze the dynamics of stereoscopic and, indeed, multidirectional memories as they manifest themselves through a broad range of memory sites and practices in contemporary Spain: from grandiose monuments to didactic board games, from comic to history books, from made-for-television-movies to novels, from art exhibits to online blogs, from induction speeches to the Royal Academy of Language to opinion pieces and heated debates in major newspapers. Such memory practices, as the title of the volume reminds us, will always engender discontents of one kind of another. This is no surprise. Yet it is perhaps memory itself that must remain discontent throughout in order to be politically effective. It must remain “dissatisfied,” indefatigably “vigilant,” and, as so many demonstrating on the streets in Spain these days would say, ultimately “indignant.”

Notes

1. Patricio Guzmán's documentary, *Nostalgia de la luz* (*Nostalgia for the light*), on Chile eloquently connects astronomy and the search for the disappeared in that country in ways relevant to the present discussion.
2. One indication of the scope of the movement is the number of people who have participated in the demonstrations. According to one source, it is estimated that between 6.5 and 8 million Spaniards (out of a population of about 47 million) eventually participated in the 15-M protests. See Servimedia.

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