

Pact of Silence: History, Memory, and Melancholic Oblivion in Spain (2001–2011)

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Hidden

The first images of the video show the artist guiding a blind man across a kind of open-air warehouse, where different artifacts pop out here and there covered by plastic bags and rope. Suddenly, the two men reach a green structure and open it. The structure shelters a rather large form that is completely distorted by the plastic and rope, which obscure the actual contents of the “Christo-looking” artifact. Finally, a glimpse of a paw and a few other details give a hint of what the veiled object could be: the half-destroyed plastic and rope structure hides an equestrian statue. The blind man is touching it, desperately trying to get an impression of the form underneath, eager to see with his hands what the rest of us cannot see with our eyes. It is a hopeless task; the blind man caresses the structure only to face a dark secret: some untold, silenced and erased reality to which no one has ever had real access.

The camouflaged form, impossible to be perceived even if it is basic to get a clear notion of the matter it stands for, could be an excellent metaphor for the unnamed and denied reality that will be discussed in this essay, a reality which is nevertheless an essential part of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in Spain: Francisco Franco’s legacy. One could even say that the hidden equestrian statue acts in a very similar way in the video by Fernando Sánchez Castillo, no doubt one of the first artists consistently addressing the Franco years and their traces after the Dictator’s death.¹ The hidden statue in the video—an equestrian statue of Franco—represents Spain’s ambivalence towards the dictatorship after the dictator’s death in 1975, when the country decided collectively to “forget,” or, to “erase” that

disgraceful time, hating—or loving—it, and hiding it as part of a dysfunctional strategy that was to last for decades.

In fact, *Episodios nacionales. Táctica. Capítulo I, II y III*—named after the well-known saga by Benito Pérez Galdós *National Episodes*—explores the impossibility of having access to statues of Franco today as part of that ambivalent strategy. The work moves around three different sketches (always stared at by blind people) that take the dictator's statues as a starting point. The locations where the action of the first two chapters takes place are the most startling ones, almost part of a clandestine reality, in which the sculptures are hidden or covered. The last chapter shows the wax museum in Madrid, where a figure of the dictator is exhibited as part of Spanish history. Blind people touch his wax face, and Sánchez Castillo's message becomes clear: this is the only place where Franco's face can be "seen" today.

Sánchez Castillo is referring to events that have taken place in the last few years: statues that were entangled in our everyday life for decades in Spanish towns have been removed from public spaces, in an effort to "clean" them of any vestiges of the dictatorship. These statues are currently being kept in the most unconceivable locations. They often lay forgotten or unkempt but, at the same time, paradoxically, they are carefully hidden from the public's curiosity. This peculiarity, related to the collective approach to our recent past, has interested Sánchez Castillo from the very beginning of his artistic career, and it may be the reason why in his last projects he has focused precisely on this fact: why is Franco's memorabilia—including the above-mentioned statues—kept hidden as if they were an obscure family secret?²

Trying to answer those questions, Sánchez Castillo has often asked for permission to work with Franco-related material in his videos. Time after time he was either denied permission or received no for an answer from the officials in charge, regardless of their political affiliation. But what if this silence was more than a simple coincidence? After all, Franco seems to be a rather controversial part of recent Spanish history, even if for most people of the younger generation he is hardly more significant than nineteenth-century monarch Ferdinand VII. In other words, Franco has become a character from the distant past. One could even say that during the last thirty-five years, he has become virtually intangible, except for a few nostalgic followers. Or so it has been until recently, when his shadow has reemerged with unexpected strength, as I discuss in this essay. To explore the significance of this change it is essential to understand not only the present moment but also the Transition years and the way history was—or was not—negotiated in that context.

Let us go back to that year of 1975, when the dictator died in his bed having left the future of the country, as the regime's spokespersons repeated, "atado y bien atado" (tied up and more than tied up), just like the equestrian statues sought by Sánchez Castillo. Nevertheless, after his death, things

turned out to be different from what he had expected. Democracy was established in a country that collectively decided to start from scratch, without asking anybody where they came from, politically speaking. The nation decided to sign what was called a “pact of silence” (Aguilar Fernández, “Presencia y ausencia”). In other words, most people decided to put the past aside, willing to forget deep fears and hatreds. Franco’s followers sat down with members of the Communist Party and other political organizations to write a constitution which would erase the ancestral fratricidal conflicts within a country that until that very moment had not really overcome the trauma of its Civil War (1936–1939). As proven by recent events, it is quite doubtful that trauma was really overcome following the dictator’s death, precisely because of the very strategy implicit in that “pact of silence.”

One could even say that after Franco’s death a very peculiar phenomenon took place that was to affect the dictator’s status within recent political history. For different reasons, neither the Left nor the “modern” Right—Franco’s political heirs—seemed to accept him as an essential part of their respective narratives. The Left agreed not to mention his repression and war crimes, while the Right felt that he had nothing to do with their renewed conservative project. One has the impression that in the need to rewrite the “new Spain,” Franco was always part of someone else’s narrative. By this I do not mean to infer that he had vanished from the collective unconscious—quite the contrary. Perhaps the very obsession to hide his traces, as seen in the lack of access to his memorabilia today, makes it clear that things were politically much more complicated than they seemed.

Moreover, like a strong ghost from the past, the Dictator was watching the whole scene from his spectacular mausoleum in the Valle de los Caídos (Valley of the Fallen), a monument very close to Madrid, which was built mainly to commemorate the dead among the winners’ side of the Civil War. Republicans are buried there without a real tomb nor even an identity, many of them having died while building the monument. Until recently, Franco’s burial place was not questioned, even as the matter begs the following blunt question: why was he buried there if he was not a “war hero,” if he died not in war but in his bed forty years after the end of the conflict? What was the real significance of the monument defended by conservatives as a monument of unity and peace to honor war heroes from both fighting sides, if Franco, the cruel dictator, chaired the whole *mise en scène*?

It could well be that for many years Spaniards were acting like the blind man in Sánchez Castillo’s video, which relies on the strength of a pointed metaphor: just as the blind man touches the statue looking for an unveiled part, we too have been searching for a portion of our own history, which was camouflaged by history itself, by the compelling need to forget and start from scratch.³ Perhaps the final result for this need and hope is the brilliant

image that Sánchez Castillo offers: a man willing to reconstruct the narrative through the little pieces emerging among the plastic bags and rope. But which are the missing pieces? How can we try to rebuild them? To what extent has this affected our own perception of our collective memory? Do we have something we could call a collective memory at all?

In this respect it would be useful to remember Pierre Nora and his *Lieux de Mémoire*, for such places are, as Jo Labanyi clarifies, “the sites of public commemoration that substitute subjective memory” (“El cine” 159). Or, as Ulrich Winter explains when facing the Spanish case, “memory suffers a double transfiguration when it becomes history: in the first place, a historiographic transfiguration, and a poetical transfiguration, since its places belong one way or another to the reign of literature” (18).

To a certain extent, such is what has happened to Spanish collective memory. In fact, during the transition years in order to keep the “pact of silence” in place, Spain invented a past that was only present and future, and, therefore, was completely separate from historical reality. Having disregarded the actual past as a circumstance that was impossible to handle without rage and frustration, Spaniards proved incapable of fully negotiating it. It is not that we *forgot* our past: we simply *did not remember* it. One would then say that we did not really “forget” the past in the sense discussed by Andreas Huyssen in his praise of oblivion. Following Paul Ricoeur, Huyssen points out that there are times when some forms of oblivion can be a part of the democratic process, a way to rebuild some kind of common reality. The question is whether Spaniards are now finally capable of sharing a common reality. Or, even more importantly, whether history can be built as a common effort without having first clarified—even healed—the effects of trauma. One might also ask whether there is a risk that the trauma could become a kind of taboo, as may have happened in the Spanish case.

As José Colmeiro points out, “collective memory is necessary as an ideological construction to create a sense of identity for the group. It is so necessary that sometimes one ‘invents’ that memory to maintain and reinforce identity . . . 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” (17). Sylvia Molloy, in her essay “Recuerdo, historia, ficción,” points out that historical memory is more than anything else ‘transmitted knowledge’ or, to a certain extent, a ‘memory of memories.’

What is, then, our historical memory, if after negotiating, rewriting, and restoring the different identities of the nation there is not much left of it? If we analyze the “pact of silence” at this moment, it seems clear that the whole process has been rather misleading: nobody really forgot. We never properly buried our dead or properly cried over them, thus undergoing some

kind of fake mourning that led to the kind of melancholia that we are experiencing today.

In this respect, Freud's classical essay "Mourning and Melancholia" could be more than eloquent, since it seems very paradigmatic of the whole Spanish approach to the history of the country before Franco's death. As Freud points out:

The correlation of melancholia and mourning seems justified by the general picture of the two conditions. Moreover, the exciting causes due to environmental influences are, so far as we can discern them at all, the same for both conditions. Mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's own country, liberty, an ideal, and so on. In some people the same influences produce melancholia instead of mourning and we consequently suspect them of a pathological disposition. (251–52)

In other words, after the loss of a dear one and due to some process that is difficult to explain, all the passion felt for the loved object has to return to the self. That extremely painful phenomenon requires some time for 'mourning.' Once this process is completed, the self can go back to its previous life.

But the impossibility of a real mourning is not only related to a certain kind of pathology. In some extreme cases—where there is no body to bury, for instance—the normal process may turn into something perverse, unnatural, a kind of guilt, as Freud explains: "And forces it to express itself in the form of self-reproaches to the effect that the mourner himself is to blame for the loss of the loved object, i.e. that he has willed it" (260). This has become obvious in the case of the disappeared in extreme circumstances, as was the case in the Argentinean, Chilean, Bosnian or Colombian cases, where massacres left fear and death but no bodies to weep over or to bury. The absence of the body makes the mourning process very difficult, almost impossible: only when death has been accepted one can start work on his/her mourning process. So, how can we accept a death that has not been certified, a death with no corpse, impossible to be represented?

This may also be the case of Spain. Not only were bodies improperly buried; they were also left unnamed. As it happens in all wars, many of them were not even "officially dead." Spanish author Federico García Lorca is the best known example: although his death certificate exists, to this day his family does not know where his body is buried, and even the circumstances of his death remain unclear.

The inner contradiction to the Spanish problem is obvious: once Franco died and claims for justice could be made, the country decided collectively not to pursue them. The explanation commonly given was that this could

provoke another national confrontation. But one cannot silence a part of history without silencing all that is related to it. If the dead were silenced—if their deaths were denied—Franco had not really existed, he had to be hidden, like the rest of that portion of history. That may be the reason why he is now kept as some family secret, as Sánchez Castillo emphasizes in his videos.

Franco—and everything surrounding his figure—has become a sort of taboo in the country, a past that was never accepted and has not been forgotten. If Franco was ignored, the deaths would hurt less—or so some people thought. One may venture that after Franco's demise the silence about the past was not only related to the impossibility of narrating the horrors of the dictatorship (as has been discussed in the case of the Holocaust and the crisis of testimony; see Felman and Laub) but to the abovementioned need to build a history that was composed only of present and future.

If we accept this hypothesis as a starting point for the discussion, we may be able to explain why the production of film and other visual arts has been seldom related to the Civil War or the Franco years. Films like *¡Ay, Carmela!* or *La vaquilla* (to cite two of the most popular examples), which deal with political issues rather tangentially, seem to face them humorously. As far as the visual arts are concerned, right after Franco's death very few artists decided to turn their interest to Spain's political issues. One exception was Francesc Torres, who as early as 1991, in his exhibition at the Reina Sofía Museum in Madrid, created the installation "Cincuenta Lluvias" (Fifty Rains) which alluded to the 1973 assassination of Prime Minister Luis Carrero Blanco in Madrid, an event which for many people marked a before and an after in the Franco regime. In any case, one could say that Torres belongs to an older generation of artists that during the 1970s had been political to a certain extent, even if while seeking international recognition they rarely focused on Spanish political issues, as did the painters of Equipo Crónica (active from 1965 to 1981).

Right after Franco's death, painters of the *Nueva Figuración* in Madrid and conceptual artists in Barcelona were worried about other problems. In the collective effort to build a history that was present and future, they all focused on the internationalization of the country and its arts. Besides, the nation had to make a great effort to import new trends from the outside world after so many years of isolation under Franco's regime.

A very curious phenomenon took place when, following international trends, the visual arts in Spain became political. Movements such as feminism and multiculturalism reached the country somewhat later than had been the case in the rest of Europe and the United States; moreover, the artists and critics who were interested in those approaches would very rarely focus on local issues. For instance, when discussing ethnic minorities nobody spoke about the "national" minority of Spain, the *roma* or gypsies.

Artists and critics tended to ‘import’ minorities from other countries—mostly African—who during the late 1980s and early 1990s were not really socially visible, as much as they would later become. An exception as far as the gypsies are concerned is Rogelio López Cuenca, who has worked on this issue and its cultural representational strategies throughout his career, as it can be seen in one of his latest projects, *Gitanos de papel* (Paper gypsies).

One could say that even the artists who were interested in Spanish political issues rarely faced questions related to Franco’s repression. An interesting example is Valeriano López, who in 2001 designed *Estrecho adventure*. The project tells the story of a Moroccan boy trying to make a living in Spain, a country only a few miles away from his native land, even if very distant symbolically, much like Spain had been from France in Franco’s time. That was also the idea of Pilar Albarracín’s work *El viaje. Habibi* (2002) (*The journey. Habibi*; *habibi* being the only word in Arabic colloquially known in Spain and meaning ‘beloved’). In this work, the visitors could get into a crowded old car that moves clumsily, thus getting a taste of what involves making a trip from Morocco to Europe—or from Europe back to Morocco—as a migrant worker.

Maybe the abovementioned lack of a real past implied the impossibility of representation, just as the taboo implies that same impossibility. How could one represent reality as history, and not as fear, if, in the case of younger people, that reality is composed of stories heard and told? The case of Sánchez Castillo can be quite eloquent as an example, since he is one of the few—if not the only one—among Spanish artists from the younger generation who has been interested in the Civil War and Franco’s repression. What is exciting about his work is the way he rereads those symbols, literally subverting their original significance in a country in which the national flag and anthem are perceived as threatening symbols by numerous people, as they had been appropriated by Franco’s followers for years. Taking old photographs and stories told by his family as a starting point, Sánchez Castillo turns Franco, his statues, and the myths surrounding his figure upside down. He creates a new form of approaching the past that confronts all traumas and taboos, and the possibilities of seeing reality in different, sometimes humorous ways. On other occasions, like in his early work *Arquitectura para el caballo* (2002) (*Architecture for the Horse*), he takes the Universidad Autónoma in Madrid as a symbol of that repression, focusing on those instances during Franco’s time when the police entered the university buildings while the students would throw marbles to make it impossible to get through the room. As the artist explains:

After my visits to the campus of the Autónoma, I was always left with a sense of spatial bewilderment. [...] The buildings [...] always seemed rather uncomfortable to me: wide corridors cut by different levels, sunken access doors, few meeting areas. [...] A little while ago,

when I asked a friend who teaches there about the illogical chaos in these areas, he pointed out the keys to an understanding of the perverse logic of such design. The entire building was designed for the riot squad to be able to enter, even on horseback, in order to control any student rebellion without much effort. [. . .] With this video I aim to highlight the hidden language of architecture. I seek to give back to these spaces the equilibrium of their functional purpose. Choosing a possible spectator of this dark period as the main character, I wonder whether this control over all possible forms of transgression might not be a phenomenon that has continued to be exercised, although in a more subtle form. (Sánchez Castillo 155–6)

Found

In early 2011 the exhibition *Desaparecidos* (Disappeared) opened simultaneously at the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo in the northern city of León, at La Casa Encendida in Madrid, and at the Centre de Cultura Contemporània in Barcelona. The exhibit showed a selection of works (dating mostly from 2003 to 2010) by Gervasio Sánchez, a documentary photographer specializing on war conflicts and the disappeared and on what that circumstance means to their families and communities.

Gervasio Sánchez had been working on the issue for a long time, trying to rescue the trace of the forgotten in Chile, Argentina, Cambodia, Bosnia, Colombia, Peru, and Iraq. For more than twenty years he has devoted his life to all those suffering people, waiting for them to decide when and how to show themselves, trying not to impose his scrutiny on them. He remembers each person he has met, as he often says; all those people in search of disappeared family members.

The show was divided into seven different sections where Sánchez mixed photographs from various places, perhaps wishing to find some kind of taxonomy among the chaos that a violent death always creates. The exhibition's sections (Detention Centers, Memory, Belongings, Search, Exhumation, Cellars, Identification and Burial) showed the complex and terrible journey that the families of the disappeared had to endure before turning their melancholia into mourning as well as the difficult process of finding loved ones—or their remains. The idea was that unless they fought to clarify the circumstances of the death of their relatives, nobody would. As Sánchez states in the exhibition catalogue, “the drama of the disappeared runs through my entire professional life. It is the most difficult project I have ever undertaken and it is my belief that the pain of the victims has left a deep psychological mark within me. In a way, part of my own life disappeared while working on the project” (18).

Disappeared was not Gervasio Sánchez's first exhibition, although it was one of his most ambitious and impressive projects, allowing us to see all the moving pictures of pain and horror hanging on the walls of a museum. However, there was something unusual about this show, something that was missing in his previous projects, even if strangely enough no one had noticed that gap: at the very end of the visitor's journey through disappearance (*Disappeared?*), an unexpected chapter showed up. Spain emerged among the countries selected by the photographer as another place where the disappeared had to be traced and properly buried after years of being hidden. "75 years after the start of the Spanish Civil War and 35 years after the death of Dictator Francisco Franco, only 231 graves have been opened and 5300 victims have been recovered," Sánchez writes in the introduction to the Spanish section in the catalogue. "Many have not been identified; in the meantime, their remains are stored in university or private laboratories. Without a doubt Spain, a country that is a part of the developed world, is years behind Bosnia-Herzegovina, Colombia, Argentina or Guatemala in the search for tens of thousands of persons who disappeared in its civil conflict" (224).

It is interesting to notice the different structure that "Spain" has in the catalogue: it is a sort of coda. The "story" is not separated into phases, as it is in the sections devoted to other countries. Instead, it creates a kind of independent narrative where some parts are always missing. For obvious reasons, there are no detention centers, belongings, or traces of memory. There is search, exhumation, identification and burial. A narration for each phase is missing in the specific case of Spain, but we don't know why. Perhaps Gervasio Sánchez has no words for Spain, no story to tell. There are no words, since the proper memory is missing. After all, as we have seen, we may not have a real collective memory.

Suddenly, Gervasio Sánchez became aware of the fact that for years he had been searching outside for what actually was a part of his roots. However, they were hidden, like the Franco statue in Sánchez Castillo's video. Gervasio Sánchez realized then that the silence that had governed his own history should be broken. He came to that realization when a journalist from the Spanish news agency EFE asked him an obvious question, the kind we often associate with someone else's life: a question about the disappeared, but this time referring to Spain. As he told a reporter:

Era 2008 y me sumergí de lleno en nuestro problema. ¿Por qué los guatemaltecos, los colombianos o los iraquies son más valientes que nosotros? El derecho internacional obliga a que investiguemos. Frente a un número incalculable de desaparecidos, en España solo se han abierto 200 fosas comunes y se han localizado 5,300 cuerpos. Si el Estado niega seguir con este trabajo, está negando la democracia. Hay gente, mucha, que ha dedicado toda su vida a encontrar a sus muertos. Hasta

que no encuentras a tus seres queridos, el luto no sigue su proceso natural y no se puede acabar. La vida se rompe. (García, “Gervasio Sánchez”)

(It was 2008 and I entirely plunged into our problem: why are people from Guatemala, Colombia or Iraq braver than we are? International human rights laws say we must investigate. Faced with an incredible number of disappeared in Spain, only two hundred graves have been opened and 5,300 bodies have been found. If the state evades this task, it denies democracy. There are people, lots of people, who have devoted their lives to find their dead. Until one does not find his/her beloved ones, mourning does not follow its natural process and cannot be completed. Life is destroyed. For all these reasons, the disappeared in Spain are going to be Gervasio Sánchez’s main task during the next three years. Or even more.)

Like many other Spaniards, Gervasio Sánchez felt suddenly surprised by his own history. For decades we believed that those stories were simply part of somebody else’s narrative and suddenly they emerged from the darkness. Borges is right when he says that only when we remember we are aware that we have forgotten, since memory and oblivion walk side by side.

The question posed by the journalist from Agencia EFE did not come out of the blue. In fact, since 2001, when the Asociación para la Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica (Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory) was created, Spain has been going through the process of dealing with the dictatorial repression, partly because of the “boom of memory” (Huysen 215) or, to a certain extent, the globalization of memory, a kind of contagious phenomenon that has finally reached Spain.

Many changes have been taking place since the so-called Ley de Memoria Histórica (Law of Historical Memory) was passed by Congress in 2007. This piece of legislation, and other events related to it (such as the granting of permission to trace and eventually exhume victims of Francoist repression whose corpses were often buried in mass graves) were not welcome by the conservative party. For if during the Transition the conservatives maintained that it was too early to deal with these issues, and thirty years later argued that it was too late, one may wonder when Franco’s victims could claim their legitimate right to be part of the history of their own country without being ashamed or afraid (Cué).

This new approach to history was to stimulate the emergence of different cultural products during the last decade. Apart from the visual arts proposals already discussed, other examples worth mentioning include the work of Francesc Torres, with his research on mass graves and the disappeared (Bosco), and that of Nuria Carrasco and Ramón Mateos, who presented a piece about mass graves in Madrid’s Formato Cómodo Gallery

in November 2011 (García, “La cuneta”). Moreover, several television series related to Franco’s time have been produced in the last few years, marking the first time that the dictator’s tenure has been openly described in a format destined for mass consumption; in that respect, one can speak of a real change of paradigm.⁴ *Amar en tiempos revueltos*, a soap opera set in the post-war years, or *Cuéntame*, a series that follows the history of the regime through the lenses of a family store. The two shows fascinated the Spanish public, especially *Cuéntame*, which was to continue its narration through the Transition years. One could say that *Cuéntame* is an accurate series as far as scenarios, sets, props and other details are concerned, but one cannot help thinking that it is very complacent towards Francoism. Recently, yet another television series has emerged, produced by the state-owned Radio Televisión Española under the title of *La República*. The latter represents, once again, an effort to “popularize” that portion of recent history that was forgotten or at least not discussed in mass-media products.

What has happened in the past years, and to what extent is the situation actually normalized, if the reappearance of Franco does not leave the political Right indifferent at all? Do we have the right, as the conservative party claims, to impose the narrative of oblivion that was negotiated following Franco’s death on the younger generations? Can we break the “pact of silence” in order to try to remember not what we had forgotten, but what had simply been hidden or erased? To what extent are we now collectively entitled to reopen a history that may not mean much to the younger generation? Would it then mean that Franco’s image should be looked at as if nothing had happened, as if he was simply a historical character like any other? Why is the conservative party reacting so violently to some symbolically laden actions such as removing his statues? Is there any point of getting rid of his statues thirty years after the restoration of democracy? Why not keep them in a museum, properly exhibited as part of history?

I have the impression that history still hurts many Spaniards, perhaps because we never experienced a proper mourning, and the terrible loss suffered became a perverse form of melancholia. Even worse, maybe Franco was living among us due to this kind of melancholia which turned out to be a form of nostalgia. That would be so even if no one implicated in this new Spain had openly accepted a direct relationship to Franco and what he meant in our narrative. Franco’s crimes were silenced in order to keep that new democratic Spain united, but Franco has always been there, as a strong, silent presence, and not just symbolically observing the whole country from the Valley of the Fallen.

Franco returned when his statues were removed from the streets of our major cities. He has lately reemerged, as the future of the Valley of the Fallen—where he is buried next to José Antonio Primo de Rivera, founder of the Falange. This was being debated in the last years of the Socialist

government (that lasted until 2011) and there was talk of transforming the site into a monument of national reconciliation. But can such be the case if the dead from the Republican side remain unnamed and Franco's remains stay in his personal mausoleum?

Franco recently reemerged when it became public knowledge that the *Diccionario biográfico español* (Spanish Biographical Dictionary) coordinated and published by the Royal Academy of History does not even mention that he was a dictator who ruined the present and the future of his country for over forty years. Luis Suárez, the author of the entry, insisted on calling him "Generalísimo" (qtd. in Constela), never questioning his role in history. The dictionary seems to be quite weak from a scholarly standpoint, as some of the entries have been written by people who have been openly sympathetic to the Francoist regime, and others who can hardly be called experts on their assigned topics. When asked by *El País* in 2010, the Director of the Royal Academy of History, Gonzalo Anes, claimed that he had not read that specific entry (Constela and Hermoso). In response to the question of whether "dieron normas estrictas sobre la necesidad de objetividad y de abstenerse de dar opiniones" (strict norms were given about the need for objectivity and the necessity of not giving personal opinions were issued), and the fact that those norms had not been respected in some texts, Anes was asked: "¿Por qué no se corrigieron?" (Why were those texts not rewritten). To which Anes answered: "Porque para eso había que leer todos los textos" (Because it would have been necessary to read the whole text). Apparently, texts were only read to unify style and little more. In early June 2011, shortly after the scandal exploded, the Minister of Culture asked the Director of the Academy to create a commission to review—and eventually read the Dictionary (Constela).

Leaving the somehow improper scholarly practices of the Royal Academy of History aside, the heart of the matter here is the way in which sometimes one has the impression that, for some individuals, Franco is still a rather vivid presence in their life, even if they deny it. When the Law of Historical Memory was debated, when Franco's statues were removed from public spaces, or when the discussion about removing Franco's remains from the Valley of the Fallen began, a group of people who had been quiet for thirty years started protesting. A commission was created for the Valley of the Fallen—a horrible monument from both ethical and aesthetical standpoints, but a monument after all, and therefore impossible to destroy. Following this decision, the reactions of the media were varied. Barcelona's *La Vanguardia* reported on it in a very professional way ("El gobierno crea la comisión de expertos" [The government creates a commission of experts]), while the right-wing *La Razón* of Madrid told a very different story: Little by little the Socialist government is attacking liberty, read another article ("El gobierno creará una comisión"). The accusations from one side against the other were in the newspapers daily . . . and were often

raised even in Congress, as if the “pact of silence” had been broken. It was not.

However, it was clear that something had changed. In the summer of 2010, on the occasion of the Soccer World Cup, Spanish youths wore the flag of Spain as a sign of national pride. I must confess that many people of my generation felt a bit worried about the proliferation of Spanish flags, suspicious of the appropriation of national symbols, first by Franco and later by the radical Right. But we were safe. The flag had a totally different meaning for these young people who had been left without a history to claim as their own. Like the blind people in Sánchez Castillo’s video, they may still be desperately hoping to disclose those parts of history that construct a coherent narrative for the future, since after Franco’s death the country had decided that the past had to be erased. Such was the pact of silence: to create a past that would only be present and future.

Notes

1. For more information about Sánchez Castillo’s work, see Juan Botella.
2. In this respect it is interesting to mention one of his last videos, where he shows some of Franco’s personal effects and tells us the story of a man who did the dictator’s funerary mask and kept three hairs. Sánchez Castillo is thus disclosing a whole world of fetishism around Franco’s memory.
3. In this respect the well-known *Memoria y olvido de la Guerra Civil española* by Aguilar Fernández is illuminating.
4. Some interesting ideas about these problems can be found in Labanyi, “History and hauntology.”

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