

“Pero no masco vidrio”: Post-traumatic Subjectivities, Plasticity, and the Aesthetics of Memory

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One of the seven Uruguayan shorts that conforms *Huellas: a 40 años del golpe*, Alvaro Buela’s “Limbo” creates a confusion of times and spaces using the metaphor of limbo to refer to the dictatorship and its long-lasting effects.¹ The image of the zombie becomes central in the short film, and more importantly, the zombie provides three different versions/meanings that intersect and create further confusion. The images of films shown in *Limbo* (like the still images of *White Zombie* included in this essay) point metonymically to the detention centers in the Southern cone during the dictatorships and Operation Condor. Through these images of the undead, the threshold of life and death in clandestine centers is both referred to and avoided. The images provide the cinematographic and media version of the zombie (version 1) without reference to clandestine detention centers and bare life (version 2, a version absent and present at the same time). Later on, in Buela’s short film, the reading of Apprato’s text serves to complicate this depiction even further: he refers not so much to the zombie in relation to bare life in the detention camps or to the zombie state of those “confined to watch TV” but to “those [former militants and survivors] who now got out to scare people.” These references to three meanings associated with the zombies place the figure of the living-dead at the center of a metaphor in which time collapses in past and present in the space indicated by the title: limbo, a suspended time, an in-between.

Yet the three meanings are intertwined: the first one points to those who are zombies watching TV (and zombie movies); the second one is associated with bare life and the controversial figure of the Muselmann; and finally, the third meaning points to the survivors, neither dead or alive, in the sense that they haunt those “alive” in the post-dictatorship (although the second meaning already warns us that those citizens supposedly alive were also in a zombie state watching zombie movies). They all live in “Limbo,” a temporal-spatial

metaphor that points to an in-between and to the untimely, and that expresses the emergence of a new subjectivity: the post-traumatic subjectivity, both in relation to those who lived in “limbo” watching zombie movies during the dictatorship, and those who survived the horrors of the clandestine centers, prolonged imprisonment, and solitary confinement. The short (and also the type of memory it represents) portrays one manifestation of the “after time” inhabited by the new zombie subjectivity (not now the one that, as Appratto suggests, left the prisons and detention centers of the Operation Condor dictatorships, but also the subjectivities of neoliberalism, marked by indifference and numbness, by oblivion). So from this limbo, we can project a proliferation of limbo in the present.

Temporality in relation to human rights violations is crucial because it represents the impact that the past has in the present, and it also advocates for a continuous present tense that, in legal terms, can be associated with the centrality that the non-applicability of the statutory limitations has—or should have—in post-dictatorship societies and their struggles for justice. In Uruguay, a country characterized by a transitional justice model of peace and reconciliation, the non-applicability of the statute of limitations to human rights violations has been a recurrent topic in public debate for decades. And it was a struggle in the waiting for justice, as in Buela’s limbo. Yet, in addition to the link between the representation of time and the imprescriptible nature of human rights abuses, the suspension of time in this “limbo” signals the present as a displacement of the current historical moment. This displacement takes place because the post-traumatic subjects seem to be frozen in time, politically immobile, that is, in a zombie-like existence, detached and indifferent, like the viewers of the zombie movies in the TV set.



Figure. 1 Still Image. *White Zombie* (USA, Victor Halperin, 1932), included in *Limbo* (Uruguay, Alvaro Buela, 2013)

As Slavoj Žižek has put it, following the new approach to trauma articulated by philosopher Catherine Malabou, the destruction of the subject and the birth of the post-traumatic subject is also the birth of a zombie-like subjectivity, characterized, by “lack of emotional engagement, profound indifference and detachment” (86), or a subject who lives “death as a form of life” (86). Concepts like these can also be understood through the controversial figure of the *Musulmann* in Giorgio Agamben and are associated in Buela's film not so much with the experience of illegal detention but with the experience of the zombie-like mind of those “hooked up to the TV set” (watching zombie movies, becoming zombies, new subjects with no consciousness).



Figure. 2 Still Image. *White Zombie* (USA, Victor Halperin, 1932), included in *Limbo* (Uruguay, Alvaro Buela, 2013)

What is it that the figure of the post-traumatic subject can tell us about authoritarian regimes and the subjectivities that emerge with them and about the possibility or difficulty of articulating new paradigms of political participation? What is this figure telling us about the aesthetics that make it visible (in the three versions presented by Buela or in other versions)? In order to answer these questions, and taking Buela's short as a point of departure for rethinking the time-space configuration of the multiple zombie positions, I will approach both the duality and the simultaneity in terms of time and space in the figure of the survivor in the Uruguayan dictatorship, but focusing mostly on this subjectivity/objectivity as a post-traumatic one, and on the consciousness that allows the possibility of witnessing and memory even in the most adverse circumstances and that, in addition to the struggles for memory, serves as the point of departure for the articulation of the political subjects of the post-dictatorship. I will use *Sala Ocho* (2011) by Uruguayan writer and former political prisoner Mauricio Rosencof to discuss this simultaneity in order to underline that despite the sense of disconnection and lack of consciousness

that we assign to the living dead, and the zombie-like existence, Rosencof is clearly proposing that there are moments of awareness and consciousness in this post-traumatic subject, moments that are, after all, crucial in the reconstruction of social memory. Rosencof presents an interpretation of both the detachment from reality and the suspension of understanding as well as the affirmation of glimpses of awareness and understanding that suggest that the destruction of the subject is never complete.

The New Wounded as Zombie

The “new wounded” is the expression coined by French philosopher Catherine Malabou to refer to the post-traumatic subject (*Les Nouveaux blessés*, translated into English as *The New Wounded*). Malabou takes brain trauma resulting from tumors or Alzheimer’s disease as a starting point for developing a new approach to psychological trauma in terms of the “shock” in the brain produced by an external stimulus, particularly in terms of the notion of senselessness and the destruction of the world as it had been up to that point without the possibility of rebuilding it.

One of Malabou’s core premises is the plasticity of the subject. This plasticity (and the model here is neuroplasticity) implies, on the one hand, malleability, but also the possibility of an explosion, of annihilation. That explosion is what is produced, Malabou claims, in the moment of trauma. This approach, therefore, suggests the existence of a plasticity that, under the effects of an injury, creates a particular form of being through the erasure of what existed previously (xv). For Malabou, what is affected is the very possibility of giving that shock meaning: since the brain is not prepared for it—it is beyond the brain’s possibilities—the brain cannot make sense of the shock produced by the traumatic event. Plasticity is, after all, not solely about destruction—it is also about the transition from one form into another, and that includes the creation of new connections as in neuroplasticity.

Les Nouveaux blessés begins with a reference to Malabou’s own grandmother and the difficulty she had recognizing her granddaughter while a definitive annihilation of her subjectivity (the grandmother had Alzheimer’s). Malabou lays out her own relationship with her grandmother’s illness, describing it in terms of looking and recognition—or, rather, a mutual “lack of recognition of the other” and in the grandmother’s case, a lack of recognition of herself. Malabou also describes the anguish of that relationship and of having to accept being in the presence of another person: “Behind the familiar halo of hair, the tone of her voice, the blue of her eyes: the absolutely, incontestable presence of someone else” (xi). She also has to accept another sort of

relationship in which the emotions are irretrievably altered: “My grandmother no longer cared about anything anymore; she was indifferent, detached, cold” (xi–xii).

For Malabou, it is not only that there is no memory of the trauma, as the traumatic event has generally been understood, but that there is no memory of what came before it. However, the destruction of subjectivity is not quite complete: there are spasms of understanding, even in the most extreme situations, as I will analyze in detail in the case of *Sala 8*. Rosencof suggests that the reconstruction is possible precisely because the destruction of the subject was achieved but in an incomplete manner. And not only that, his novel also suggests that the aesthetic reconstruction/transformation is possible precisely because of a simultaneity of ontologies that allows a subject to be, at the same time, an undead and a subject of understanding. The incompleteness of the zombie-like existence results in an intermittent restoration of the possibility of the intersubjective labor of memory. Memory, in turn, becomes an aesthetic framework through which to safeguard the past that should not be forgotten in post-dictatorship societies. Survivors, as post-traumatic subjects, play a central role in this reconstruction, which is why these glimpses of consciousness or this parallel form of understanding the experience are crucial precisely in moments in which the destruction of the subject and the misrecognition of self and others are taking place.

The subject marked by trauma, even destroyed by the pain inflicted on his/her body in torture and different degrading treatments, even in situations of illness and delirium—such as the one the text is remarking—is also an ambivalent new subject (wounded, but not totally destroyed, zombie-like, but with consciousness and most importantly able to reconstruct a political subjectivity). Malabou’s approach can help us rethink the emergence of a new subjectivity that has produced a break with the subjectivity of the past. Her approach is particularly relevant because it does not assign to the destruction of the subject any type of conscious decision of betrayal or any ethical weakness. And if it brings to the forefront the vulnerability of the subject, it is in terms of the effect that the traumatic event has had on the brain. Yet, the meaning of that new subjectivity cannot be understood solely in terms of the traumatic injury but also in terms of some interruptions of such destruction, which points to an ambiguity in the core of the undead or the zombie-like existence of the post-traumatic subject. That interruption, in Buela’s short, is depicted precisely by the relationship between the images (of the zombie in the TV screens) and reality (the cells and prisons): the images are telling another (fictional) story but nevertheless are pointing to reality and therefore are also (and paradoxically) documentary images about the destruction of the subjectivity of the Uruguayan prisoners that is not shown in the media reports during

the dictatorship. At the same time, this is precisely the story that the zombies as survivors (in Apprato’s narration) would be communicating to the society at large. And this is a narrative that requires an awareness: the zombie—as a witness—tells simultaneously the story of the destruction of the subject as he/she becomes a victim, and the story of the defeat of such destruction, or at least of the complete destruction of that subject. The ability to remember and to recount the experience and denounce human rights violations is also telling the story about the failure of the destruction of the subject.

In a recent novel, *Diez minutos* (Ten minutes), published in 2013, Rosencof refers to a recognition of self and others—that does not erase the misrecognition he refers to in other testimonial texts, but is concurrent with it—with the heartbreaking account of his first reunion with his father while in prison, after Rosencof has been detained and tortured. The father does not recognize his son. He looks at Rosencof and says, “Yo vine a ver a mi hijo. Ese no es mi hijo” (I came to see my son. That isn’t my son). This misrecognition opens the narrative: “‘Siéntese ahí’, ordenó a mi padre el teniente de respaldo. Tiene diez minutos” (“‘Sit down over there’, the officer on duty told my father. You have ten minutes”). Rosencof now has ten minutes, to convince his father that he still is himself.

A partir de entonces los diez minutos, incluidos los descuentos, los dediqué a contarme, contarme yo, contar de él, contarle a él: de mamá, de la casa, la familia, todo, las cretonas . . . Diez minutos para intentar que el viejo me reconociera como un expósito en el trono, como a un recién nacido con un padre espartano o romano que decidiera su existencia, o no. (8–9)

(From there, I used those ten minutes, including the timeouts, to narrate myself—narrate me, narrate him, narrate to him: about my mother, the house, the family, everything, the flowers . . . Ten minutes to attempt to make my father recognize me like a child on the throne, like an infant with a Spartan or Roman father who would decide whether he would live or die).

Here, time condensed into ten minutes, associates the task of narrating (and narrating oneself) with being recognized. In those ten minutes, he attempts to transform his father’s gaze, which does not recognize him. The father recognizes the destruction of the subject; his son does not look or sound or act

like his son. What Rosencof tells him is that even though he is not himself, he still is himself. He is trying to explain precisely the doubling of the self—an ontology of simultaneity.

Destruction, Permanence, and the Re-articulation of the Political

Recognition and misrecognition are recurrent themes in the narratives of the survivors of human right violations and point precisely to this pivotal moment in which subjectivity is altered by the effects of violence. In approaches such as Elaine Scarry's, this moment is related to the destruction of self and the world, through pain, on the one hand, and through the centrality and even omnipresence of the torturer and his voice, on the other. Once again, Malabou's contribution is linked, in this scenario, to the suspension of the defeat-and-failure narrative and the emphasis on what the brain can or cannot understand in moments of such traumatic intensity (or injury). The centrality of the concept of plasticity (and destructive plasticity) is anchored in this very moment: the neuro-connections in the brain are altered, and therefore the subject is destroyed, as it was known before (although in Rosencof there is, as I am trying to show in this essay, a simultaneity of destruction and permanence). And even if this moment represents (and more specifically embodies) the catastrophe (the annihilation of the left, and of the political will of the past and of the visions of the sixties and seventies), it is important to note that the testimonial production in Uruguay not only highlights the figure of the survivor as witness (and for that memory of the event is required), but also as political agent of the return to democracy (and in this case the new political subjectivity is anchored in a sense of continuity with or transition from the political identity of the past). This new vision is linked not to the destruction of the subject under torture but instead to the survival of a political will that will take a different manifestation in times of democracy.

In a transition structured around the image of pacification—and not of accountability—the role of witness narratives was key in narrating the personal experience of political prisoners and in making public grave human rights violations. In addition, the Uruguayan transition is also about the reconciliation between two opposing forces—the military and the urban guerrilla group Tupamaros (*Movimiento de Liberación Nacional*). And while the official politics after 1985 emphasizes this reconciliation—with the amnesty of political prisoners and with a *democracia pactada*—testimonial literature underscores the reconstruction of the political and ethical subjectivity of the former Tupamaros, now anchored not in the militancy of years gone by but in the process of transitional justice set in motion with liberation. On various

occasions over the past thirty years, the Tupamaro leader Mauricio Rosencof recalled his promise to Eleuterio Fernández Huidobro (also a Tupamaro leader) to bear witness to what they had experienced, especially after the suicide of Adolfo Wasem, one of the nine political prisoners who suffered prolonged solitary confinement (like Rosencof and Fernández Huidobro), and who were the “hostages” of the dictatorship, that is, the political prisoners who “would suffer the consequences if the MLN resumed any activities” (Amnesty International 5).

Within this framework, the construction of a political subject is particularly important: a subject who no longer is part of the pre-dictatorship militant movements but who instead produces a new subjectivity that emerges in the most adverse conditions—as a political prisoner and hostage. The state, which is embroiled in both terrorist practices and the dictatorship’s attempt to legalize those practices, lacked the moral standing for pacification. It was therefore vital to construct a new subjectivity that spoke of entering the democratic struggle, in which the people, as citizens, accepted the role of the transitional state.

The Expiry Law (1986) establishes the model of pacification as a model of transitional justice, one that includes amnesty for political prisoners. Within this framework, the survivors as witnesses are doubly linked: to knowledge and denunciation, on the one hand, and to the reconfiguration of political subjectivities according to democratic norms, on the other. The state, weakened by a past that in 1985 remained present for all intents and purposes, was legitimized by its last prisoners and hostages, who stressed popular participation and called on the people to participate democratically. Therefore, the construction of a new subject (defined by resistance and ethics) was a key step in the design of a space from which to imagine a political future:

Ustedes tienen que comprender lo siguiente,” dice Eleuterio Fernández Huidobro, “nosotros todos, pero muy especialmente los que fuimos rehenes. . . . Hemos vivido enterrado vivos. . . . A nosotros nos sacó el pueblo de la cárcel, el pueblo uruguayo. Y vimos irse a todos los compañeros. Y tuvimos el orgullo de ser los últimos en irnos. Nosotros podríamos haber venido a hablar en nombre de una estrella que inventamos nosotros y de una palabra—tupamaros—que la inventamos nosotros los que están aquí presentes, y de un nombre de un movimiento que lo inventamos nosotros, y de una consigna —patria para todos— que la inventamos nosotros, pensamos que era mejor hablarles a todos ustedes, al pueblo, y le vamos a hablar y le vamos a hablar a todos los compañeros cuando nos reencon-

tremos . . . en nombre nada más de un puñado de viejos luchadores. (Las bases 20, 17 March 1985, 9–10, qtd. in Ruiz and Sanseviero 13)

(“You all have to understand the following,” says Eleuterio Fernández Huidobro, “all of us, but especially those of us who were hostages. . . . have been living literally ‘buried alive’ . . . The people freed us from prison, the Uruguayan people. And we saw all our compañeros leave. And we were proud to be the last ones to leave. We could have come here to talk about a star that we invented and about a word—Tupamaros—that we here invented, and about the name of a movement that we invented, and about a slogan—which everyone embraces—that we invented, but we thought it was better to talk to all of you, to the people, and we’re going to talk to you and we’re going to talk to all of our compañeros when we meet again . . . on behalf of just a handful of old fighters.)

Here we see an attempt to generate a new dialogue between the “you” and the “us” (the citizenry and the militants or, in many cases, the leadership), and this dialogue implies a political articulation within the transitional process. Marisa Ruiz and Rafael Sanseviero, who cite this part of the press conference in their study of the female hostages, reflect on the transformation of these “old fighters” into major figures in Uruguayan politics—as in the case of José Mujica, a former hostage who served as the country’s president from 2010 to 2015.

The point of departure for this transformation cannot be a zombie-like subject, indifferent and detached. Yet, as I will discuss in Rosencof’s *Sala 8* (and as is the case for the majority of the narratives of survival) this transformation is preceded by a destruction, a moment of non-recognition that implies a recognition of the self, and a reconstruction. The reconstruction of political subjectivity (now returning to Apprato’s suggestion that the zombies come back to attack with their stories of survival), shows a shift in the notion of the zombie-like existence of the political prisoner under torture. Recognition and misrecognition, in this context, becomes an important aspect of both the experience and the task of the imagination in the reconstruction of the self (the zombie associated to the Muselmann and the zombie associated to the “narrative memory attack”). In *Memorias del calabozo* (Memories of the dungeon), a three-volume testimonial account published in 1989 by former Tupamaros and political prisoners Mauricio Rosencof and Eleuterio Fernández Huidobro, misrecognition is placed at the forefront of the narration, and in particular as a key moment in the realization of this new unrecognizable subject, for oth-

ers and for themselves. Fernández Huidobro recalls the time when his family came to visit him, and, as they sat down across from him (since he did not have a mirror), he perceived in their eyes the terror of seeing him transformed and made unrecognizable (29). After he had gained access to a mirror, he describes that sense of unfamiliarity with his own self: “Me asustaba mirarme” (29) (It scared me to look at myself). In his conversation with Rosencof, the two men remember moments when they went to shave, looked in the mirror, and did not recognize themselves. Rosencof says, “Habíamos estado años sin vernos; no solo entre nosotros, sino nuestra propia cara en el espejo” (We hadn’t seen ourselves for years—not just each other but even our own faces in the mirror). Later he adds, “Entonces no me reconocí: creí que estaba afeitando a otro” (58) (I didn’t recognize myself then: I felt as if I were shaving somebody else).

It is these scenes of recognition (and simultaneous unfamiliarity) that repeatedly mark moments of pain in the face of the destruction of the subject. The sensation of one’s own otherness marks the distance between the subject who looks and is the object of his gaze: in a sense one and the same, but not entirely. The recognition of the other as oneself is permeated with a sense of unfamiliarity that shatters (destroys once more) the relationship of continuity of that subjectivity (knowing that one is looking at oneself in the mirror and knowing that one is going to see oneself produces a fracturing of the prospect of that very plasticity and an awareness that destruction has been produced). After the destruction, Malabou suggests, a new subject appears, one that is not a transformation of the previous one but instead is another one entirely, with the previous subject being utterly erased. My question here is, what happens with the memory of the past and with glimpses of consciousness that inhabit that destruction? For Malabou, this new subject is detached and set apart, cut off even from its reserve of memory, sealed off by the traumatic injury. Nevertheless, as I will discuss with *Sala 8* (but which can also be discussed in many testimonial and fictional narratives about the experiences of political imprisonment and illegal detention), even when the novel focuses on trauma, it strives not just to reconstruct memory, but also to affirm that even in considering the destruction of the subject (and the notion of the subject’s plasticity is particularly useful as a metaphor for the durability that malleability produces, the explosion of destruction, and the emergence of the new subject), the traces of the past and the outside world never lack meaning; instead, they “appear,” sometimes intermittently, sometimes in a persistent manner, to give shape to the new subject. The new subject is, in Rosencof (and many other testimonial texts), a transformation of the subject of the past, a subject who was never completely annihilated, a subject that holds the memories of the horror: the post-traumatic and political subjects of the post-dictatorships.

“Pero no masco vidrio”

Sala 8 recounts Rosencof’s experience through an invisible subject who sees everything without being seen: a subject suspended between life and death, a zombie who narrates how he used to wander around the room to which the prisoners were taken for medical treatment and then returned to their prisons or cells. Rosencof was there twice, in 1972 and 1974. The tale here is a memory recalled at a later point, uncoupling testimony from ghostliness and the intention to denounce from the poetics of denunciation. The text attempts to answer, in the context of a fracturing of time and language, the question of how to portray the threshold between life and death in such a way that truth and fantasy become interchangeable concepts: “En la novela transmito lo que sentíamos y pensábamos a través de una literatura ‘testimonial’ o, si se quiere, ‘fantástica.’ La sala ocho, una sala en un hospital donde eran llevados los prisioneros luego de ser torturados” (In the novel I communicate what we were thinking and feeling through “testimonial literature” or, if you prefer, “fantastical” literature. Room 8, a room in a hospital where the prisoners were taken after being tortured), Rosencof said in an interview (Frieria). *Memorias del calabozo* provides a description of room 8 in the military hospital, which Rosencof says was “la antesala de la morgue. Ahí iban a dar los torturados para la recuperación suficiente como para volver a la tortura” (71) (the antechamber to the morgue. Victims of torture would end up there until they had recuperated enough to be tortured again). The aesthetic paradigm to express his experience under such living conditions is one that exceeds logic, precisely because of a “cloudy memory.” Rosencof describes the physical condition of the prisoners in room 8: “sin llegar al nocaut” (without passing out), “medio groggy” (rather groggy), afflicted by kidney problems, “padecía momentos de enajenación donde se me nublaba el pensamiento, y de pronto cuando recobraba el conocimiento de mí, no sabía qué plazo había transcurrido” (73) (I used to suffer episodes of disorientation in which my thoughts would grow cloudy, and when I came to again, I would have no idea how much time had passed).

Sala 8 begins with references to Hades as a shadowy realm “sin sonido” (without sound), a place that belongs to those who did not receive their “rito funerario” (funeral rites) and are “condemned to wander for all eternity” (10). In play here is not one’s subjectivity but one’s very self: it suggests an ontology reminiscent of Derridean spectrology, where not even language itself can be articulated in the present. It is characterized by movement, by being “in transit,” not knowing where nor why one is going” (18). It begins thus: “Suelo rondar, desde que no estoy, por la Sala 8” (10) (Ever since I’m not there, I often wander around room 8). The emphasis is on movement, but not on the

action of being that accompanies the action of seeing: “Vuelvo a ver a viejos conocidos” (I see old acquaintances again). The gaze is associated with the threshold, but also with death (“I began to perceive where I was when they pulled me out”) (10). There, in bed 17, he perceives light ([“horizontal and suspended” [10]). Many years before, in *Memorias del calabozo*, Rosencof explains the pleasant surprise of sleeping between two sheets, which later in the novel turn into clouds. This place is compared with the shadow of that other space he inhabits, a place that is “muy frío pero frío frío, donde estaba con otros, todos duros, quietos de frío” (12) (very cold, very very cold, where I was with other men, all of them stiff, motionless from the cold). The gaze permits recognition of the others, but the first person used in the narrative is defined by a language that does not allow him to express himself clearly: “Estoy aquí pero no se me ve. Y yo de aquí, sé todo. Veo todo” (12) (I am here but I am not seen. And I, from here, know everything. I see everything). In this case, seeing without being seen evokes the threshold between life and death and the transformation into a ghostly presence. It is here that writing transforms the potential of that threshold (being, the suspension of being) into a subjectivity that can express language, narrate what has been seen, narrate its own self outside the circuit of the gaze: the invisible being that sees everything. It is the narrative subject that is telling the story now, describing the after-effects that are manifested almost as a limbo in a temporal leap forward to the present.

Through this suspension of the self, which is anchored in space (“Aquí. Yo estuve aquí pero ya no estoy” [12][“Here. I was here but I’m not here anymore”]), the body and the sensations become vital. The tank (where they leave him abandoned like an object) is the image that signals the transition between the room and the morgue: “Estoy en el tanque, siento las paredes frías. En realidad —si eso existe—no siento nada” (I’m in the tank, I feel the cold walls. In reality—if such a thing exists—I don’t feel anything) (125). He later talks about a “journey” and claims to “feel like [he’s] up in the air” (125). There is a clear reference to the character’s disappearance. The confusion produced by that ghost-infested space—he keeps talking anyway after his disappearance—makes it possible to imagine, through fiction, the narration of disappearance itself.

With language shattered, in a hell full of archangels, clouds, and light, perception marks the fracturing of subjectivity. There are many instances in which this fracturing unfolds. The narrator is a post-traumatic subject, one whose previous subjectivity has been destroyed. Yet, he is a new subject marked entirely by the gaze (and therefore affirmed as a subject): seeing everything without being seen himself. Poetic language serves to shape the contours of the impossible, but this impossibility (peopled by human beings who

have been detained, often on the brink of death, others on the brink of madness, and in other cases already dead) is unfolded through reflection as well as through irruption. And it is here that, upon being seen, a new subjectivity begins to emerge: “Visto de afuera, es decir, uno, visto de afuera, visto por usted con las pupilas más o menos apoyadas en mí puede pensar o sentir, con razón, que deliro” (30) (Seen from the outside—that is, me, seen from the outside, seen by you with your eyes more or less resting on me, might think or feel, quite rightly, that I’m raving mad). It goes on: “Que eso de sentirse uno en este monasterio de la locura entre nubes, arcángeles, silencios celestiales, es un síntoma inequívoco de que estoy con las neuronas en desquicio. Pues bien. Lo estoy. Pero no masco vidrio” (30–31) (Feeling that I am in this monastery of madness, full of clouds, archangels, celestial silences, is an unmistakable symptom that my neurons have gone off the deep end. Well fine. So they have. But I’ve still got my wits about me). Though at some point we associate the post-traumatic subject with a subject who has lost the ability to understand the world around him and who glides around the room like Giorgio Agamben’s controversial figure of the Muselmann, his “but I’ve still got my wits about me” (pero no masco vidrio) clearly offers us a note of warning.

On the brink of madness, but not completely, and through images that evoke hallucination, but not completely, the protagonist narrates this split with the outside world in order to declare himself something more than a person subjected to the humiliations and pain that he has endured. This reflects a transformation: a new subjectivity, on the brink of both death and madness, but one still able to make sense of or at least assign meaning to his experience. Times meld together, and the present of the past and the present of the present (prison and the moment of writing or even of reading in that invocation of the reader) are evoked by his statement that, even with his neurons gone off the deep end, “I’ve still got my wits about me.” There is a threshold between life and death that is manifested in terms of plasticity and intermittence. On the one hand, the clouds (the sheets that cover the bodies [33]) are the embodiment of a series of changes to the images that surround him, images that suggest a space inhabited by ghosts, through a reading that Rosencof himself associates with Juan Rulfo’s village full of ghosts. Now, this image of the ghost that is and yet is not can be seen in different stages of its disappearance between bed 17 and the morgue’s wastebasket, through which he becomes aware of the narration of death in the present (in the present of that past), thereby implying a return to the past, a task of excavation that unearths not just events but also images that give meaning to a space that makes no sense.

Malabou talks about a distancing and a new subjectivity that is transformed by an external stimulus (in this case, torture, degradation, the captives’ total isolation). In *Sala 8*, though, Rosencof portrays an intermittent return of

a complete consciousness. “No masco vidrio” serves as the affirmation of that consciousness. Even as he hallucinates and is aware that he is hallucinating, despite being and not being—even on that threshold, he says, “But I’ve still got my wits about me,” suggesting that the loss of sense is not absolute. This is the case with the silent pregnant woman whom they take to the room and who later returns without her baby (after having given birth); she emerges from her silence to make her awareness of her situation crystal-clear, murmuring, “Su nombre es Mariana” (133) (Her name is Mariana) in reference to her daughter born in captivity. Here, too, despite the wound caused by trauma, there is a sense, awareness, and a memory, in this case linked to the experience of motherhood in captivity.

This rupturing of the relationship with time allows the narrator to focus on this space, altering the order of before and after to confuse (and reflect the confusion of) the souls who inhabit room 8, and speaks to that not knowing (representing awareness of that not knowing) who the other person is, whether he is actually alive or dead. The “somewhat off-the-wall” language of the text, as Rosencof himself describes it, implies a split with language that cannot capture that experience, that other manner of being, almost like being on another planet, which stands in contrast to his “Yo fui, soy de la Tierra” (33) (I was, am from Earth).

In *Sala 8* temporality is expressed with a suspended or simultaneous time that does not recognize an ordered succession of events but instead emphasizes an unsettled and nebulous experience. It evokes what comes after, what remains potential, in suspension, like another aspect of the experience of destruction itself to which each of these texts returns. Rosencof’s novel seems to suspend not just the creation of that past but the very moment of the destruction of the subject. This stopping of time is an interlude that does not enter the chronological time of the calendar; it is a ghostly suspension, here, of the period of explosion and destruction, interrupted by consciousness (“but I’ve still got my wits about me”). We can think about destructive plasticity (like the explosion), but this destruction is interrupted by intermittences (the re-invention, the awareness, “I’ve still got my wits about me”).

For Malabou, after the damage produced by the traumatic event, another subject emerges in a foundational moment of misrecognition. This can be understood in relation not only to this *méconnaissance* but also to this claim of being other. And the identifiable difference between *Sala 8* and the testimonial account written with Fernandez Huidobro many years before (*Memorias del calabozo*) lies precisely in a letting go, a succumbing to being carried along by the fictional nature, while there is an attempt at restoration in *Memorias*. In addition to *Memorias*’ clearly testimonial mode and its condemnation of human rights violations, it also reflects a desire to posit a continuity of the

subject that goes unquestioned. *Sala 8*, on the other hand, emphasizes the broken pieces of an irreparable puzzle (the destroyed subject, detached, disconnected, in a zombie-like state who nevertheless has not lost his awareness, nor his ability to understand what is happening). The fictional account points out that the post-traumatic subject can restore the narrative because he's "still got his wits" about him, putting into question, but without erasing or denying the fracturing of meaning that Malabou argues occurs when violent, merciless meaninglessness is imposed on a subject that is not prepared to cope with that extreme form of violence and thus succumbs to it.

The New Laurencias Have Also "Got their Wits" About Them

Buela's short envisions two different forms of zombie attacks: the image (film) that mediates an interpretation of reality and produces spectators who become zombies themselves (attack 1), and the zombie attacks of the survivors with their testimonies and fictions (counter-attack). The images alternate between a high school and clips from movies with a voice-over giving meaning to the succession of images (the voice alternates with Giuseppe Verdi's "Messa da Requiem") and zombies through a meditation that has time and memory at its core: "No se trata de interrogar al pasado sino ver qué es el pasado en el presente" (It isn't a matter of interrogating the past but of seeing what the past is in the present). It continues, "Desde el punto del presente en que el pasado, antes de disgregarse, regala una epifanía, un significado, una continuidad" (From the point in the present in which the past, before disintegrating, grants us an epiphany, a meaning, a continuity). This catastrophe and this illumination can be understood only because their meaning was not completely destroyed.

Texts like Rosencof's invite us to see that neither the complete destruction of the subject nor the complete destruction of meaning was possible. And though he explores forgetting and the zombie-state of the prisoners, that "but I've still got my wits about me" functions almost as a crying out against the possibility of the reduction of the self to the zombie (non)existence, without consciousness, without meaning, and detached from everything, and therefore restores those remains, intermittently interrupting any attempt to claim a fixed and well known post-traumatic subjectivity.

As a conclusion, I would like to offer what I consider to be one of the best examples in Uruguay in terms of the reconfiguration of new paradigms of struggle, and in particular of new empathetic gendered relations and feminist interpretations of memory and justice struggles. Gender is usually absent from discussions about the undead or bare life or zombie-like existence, as well as

from discussions on post-dictatorships and memory struggles (until the year 2010, the year of the first trial in Argentina to include sexual violence in detention centers as a crime against humanity). In this sense, women survivors also fall into the category of zombies (in all these three senses Buela’s short indicates) through a masculine (supposedly unmarked) paradigm.

In Uruguay, this new paradigm finds a very suggestive name: las Laurencias, a model that does not necessarily erase nor displace the Antigone model that characterizes the participation of women as a form of resistance in the post-dictatorships, but that adds an important twist in terms of the re-politicization (now in gendered terms) of the female survivor.

For a feminist reader, Laurencia’s monolog in the third act of Lope de Vega’s well-known theater play *Fuenteovejuna* is a difficult one to forget. Her words evoke not only violence but also the silence of those who remain motionless before her. In addition to denouncing a commander for the mistreatment and abuse that she has received, she condemns the complicity of silence and speaks of the possibility of transformation for the whole town. Laurencia’s plea clearly expresses her pain in the face of oppression and sexual violence facilitated by the inaction of the men of the village. Having managed to get them to allow her to attend the men’s council to “dar voces” (speak out), she presents a testimony that is also a persuasive discourse, referring to the violence perpetrated against her body by the commander and making an insistent appeal to the men around her. One by one, she manages to convince them to join her on behalf of all women.

Laurencia’s denunciation and her success at recruiting the village men to join her struggle in Lope’s seventeenth-century Spanish play is not dissimilar from what today could be considered a new paradigm in the fight against violence against women in Uruguay: a paradigm that includes all Uruguayan citizens, and that makes the fight one shared by all, not just by women. The female former political prisoners have had a central role in transforming this model and the model of memory construction in the most recent decade. By initiating a discussion of violence against women in the context of political militancy as well as in the context of human rights violations, they have raised new questions about Uruguay’s transitional justice process. In 2011, a group of former political prisoners filed a public denunciation of sexual violence. In addition, four of the victims of the Uruguayan dictatorship appeared on the television program *Esta boca es mía* (This mouth is mine) on Canal 12, and presented their testimony: “Después de muchos años sentimos que no nos hemos liberado de eso que sufrimos, la violencia sexual, que sigue presente, en nuestras vidas . . .” (After many years, we feel that we have not been freed from what we underwent, sexual violence, which remains present in our lives. . .); “Tenemos más conciencia ahora de que lo que sufrimos era un

crimen de lesa humanidad” (Benzano) (We are more aware now that what we endured was a crime against humanity); “Hace treinta y cinco años que nosotras llevamos esta carga sobre nuestros hombros” (Macedo) (We have been carrying this burden on our shoulders for thirty-five years).

In 2012, in an essay collection with the title *Las Laurencias*, Soledad González Baica and Mariana Risso Fernández came up with a name for this new paradigm of participation. The victims themselves are now addressing not only sexual violence inflicted on political prisoners as a crime against humanity but also the invisibility of gender issues and in particular of gender violence. In a shift from Antigone to Laurencia, this new figure highlights not only the individual (heroic) action of the protagonist but also the power of the community. Despite the scant number of texts on the topic published in Uruguay, the anthology attempts to address various aspects of violence against women. This ‘Laurencia paradigm’ is also about the repoliticization of the post-traumatic subject, coming out of the limbo, now with an emphasis on gender and the claim for justice in relation to gender crimes during the dictatorship. Above all, this new model (and by returning to the Spanish Golden Age and in particular to the notion of honor, central as well in the definition of gender violence in Uruguay in the twenty-first century) sets in motion a subjectivity that was immobilized not only by different layers of State violence but also by the patriarchal interpretations of the political that characterized the reconstruction of the masculine political will as gender-blind.

Nowadays, many cultural productions bring to surface apocalyptic visions of past, current, and future History, and different visions of becoming (zombies, vampires, time travelers). In addition (and in contrast), struggles for memory and human rights constantly attempt to reorganize these dystopian visions through the insistence of the revision of the past, the emphasis on advocacy for the future, the anchoring of the meaning of the past in the present time, and the emphasis on subjects who struggle for the reconstruction of meaning and justice. As in Buela’s short, post-apocalyptic subjectivities are rewritten, and they go from being images of zombies on the screens and zombie-spectators to being those who would attack with their stories about imprisonment and illegal detention. Therefore, when analyzing the subjectivity of post-conflicts, post-genocide, and post-dictatorships, it is crucial to understand the aesthetic role that memory serves in the reconstruction of those meanings that were intended to remain secret and silent.

And even if those subjects of memory were demolished under violence, torture, and solitary confinement, they were also the witnesses of the horrors that we need to remember (to not become a society of zombie-like citizens).

In Buela’s short, the present that the voice-over, describes is a present made of images, images of an Uruguay that has become something else.

Shadows appear and disappear between bookcases. The images are retrieved, displayed, fragmented. Images from the television—what was seen: “Era la manera de participar en lo que había” (That was the way to participate in what existed). Sitting in front of the TV set becomes a sort of limbo that functions as a “metáfora de ese período” (metaphor for that period). The voice’s reflection on the images we see, disconnected from words, says the voice-over “era algo así como lo que le permitíamos a la realidad para pensar en lo posible, en todo lo perdido” (was something like what we allowed reality to be in order to think about what was possible, about all that had been lost). Putting the performance of reality in play, putting it in crisis, in doubt: limbo as a “daño irreparable” (irreparable damage), embodied in the image of an adolescent sitting in front of a television, and images of zombies, and shadows that flicker past again and again.

Aesthetics plays an important role in making these issues visible, both the catastrophe and the aftermath, the inhumanity (and the reduction of life to bare life) and the re-humanization (re-politicization), the destruction of the subjects of our times.

Notes

1. The screenplay by Buela is based on Roberto Appratto’s autobiographical essay “Y se hizo la noche” (And night fell), with the voice of Roberto Appratto.

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