

Football pitches. The glance that follows desolation.

There are few visions containing a greater weight of desolation than the empty image, surrounded by silence, of sites envisaged and conceived for receiving events such as shows, games, meetings or any collective action of a social nature. The absence of life is equivalent to the most radical presence of death.

Places devoid of all event assume a singular overawing perspective at such moments of extreme and total solitude, unleashing processes of melancholia and reflection on the pass of time, analogous to those experienced by contemplation of the ruins of cities of the past.

However, the solitary contemplation of spaces making up our customary present, which we always regard and imagine to be places where life - in its most passionate and bustling dimension - occurs, from a bull-ring to a theatre or a football pitch, a market, a factory or a train station, produces the occasionally distressing feeling that everyone has died, including ourselves, and that our glance is the only thing that takes place after our own death.

The solitude of the present is no doubt more oppressive than that which relates and refers to the past, leaving less chances of rescue, yet offering another poetical perception, which has deeper ties to sensations themselves and is more thought-provoking and dynamic.

From an extreme - even an exaggerated - point of view, with the disappearance of life, animation and all its other derived nuances ranging from illusion, passion, joy, rage, enthusiasm to the frenzy of victory, the sadness of defeat, the emotion of performance or the energy of labour -no room for our glance is left.

The mechanisms of perception lead us to associate both the notions and the sensations of desolation, abandonment, absence, emptiness, nostalgia and even sadness, so subjectively imprecise and personal, with the contemplation or the image of the places where life occurs, when life has ceased to exist. It is precisely this complementary contradiction between maximum absence and maximum expression which in some way emphasises the Football Pitches series by Maria Bleda and José M^a Rosa. It is in fact work conceived both for and from absence, in order to weave a net of variegated associations, from the realm of personal and subjective memories to the objective documentation of the desolation of an urban and suburban landscape in permanent transformation and degradation.

With a perspective more closely related to the documentary, these same football pitches would have offered the image of a passing of daily time in banal scenes at different times of day and on different days of the week, constructing a story of manners and customs based on descriptions : a sunny Sunday, both friends and passers-by as spectators; in certain pitches even a referee would appear, dressed in black as usual, which would allow us to infer that the football pitch could perhaps belong to a modest sports association on the outskirts; on other days of the week, especially if it is a certain time of the afternoon, it would have revealed the furtive occupation of the pitch by groups of boys just out from school, with cases and rucksacks (colours and colours in black and white as well) piled up by the goal-posts... Description, documentation; report, events, picturesqueness, even though it may be seen every day, on every corner.

The intention of the deserted Football Pitches by Bleda and Rosa is not a descriptive one - there is nothing to be told in these images except all that which is there but cannot be seen. Yet neither people nor events may be missed. In an incisive way, not very often carried out in Spain, this project systematically turns its glance to the landscape of urban limits, draining it of anecdote and of the documentary, penetrating in spaces characterised by their poetics of abandonment, devoid of rhetoric and the conformity of manners and customs, in order to emphasise a splitting territory from the angle of desolation and evocation. They are the spaces in which the city loses its sharpness, and becomes a waste land where football can only be played at odd moments.

Football Pitches acquires a new strengthened reading following the recent *Battlefields* series which it precedes. Both projects address the solitude of the sites and spaces of events, emphasising in each case the essential nuances that the evocation distinguishes between past and present, with all the distinctions of verbal conjugation referred to the past. The game of football, as all competitive games, appears as a real confrontation in which, nevertheless, the simulated fight obeys a metaphor of battle. Football as a game of confrontation is merely an excuse, a resort in order to face the temporary categories of inevitability, of irremediability, which obey the subjective sensations of victory and of defeat. Football pitches have always been considered from the anonymity and banality of fortuitous landscape or ordinary places. No names can identify or distinguish them, stripped as they are of the aura that great stadium could have, witnesses of historical confrontations between great teams, of international sportive encounters and events. Neither Maracana nor Wembley, nor even those with greater auditive-radiophonic proximity or those geographically nearer such as Nou Camp, Romareda or Bernabéu appear. Only the echo of those great names of football can be evoked, inferred intuitively from the radio phonic transmissions listened to by any enthusiast of the pools on his/her wireless while contemplating, also with enthusiasm, local village or district boys, or even his/her own sons, on an anonymous Sunday afternoon.

The development of the *Battlefields* could not have a more brilliant determination than that of reaching the mythical sites, yes, at last, of the battles that have come to build a history based on names and dates, with no other image than that of human slaughter and cruelty. The metaphor of the victory/defeat of football photographed in black and white gives way to a coloured reality of names of history books, where man has been exterminated in order to gain territories and power; nowadays few remember the exact sites of past slaughters because they are now something quite different. Waste lands, rocky places, imprecise terrains criss-crossed by roadways and electricity poles, high mountain forests, solitudes, deserted territories whose names are the only names able to revive the horror of death.

In contrast to the uncertainty, both of sight and of memory, of the *Battlefields*, the anonymous Football Pitches are silent witnesses of a desolate present, whose small and anecdotally subjective story will never appear in local chronicles nor, even less, in history books.

No doubt the general intention belies the influence of Bernd and Hilla Becher, as has been pointed out in the discussion of the work of this team of photographers.

In both series, criteria of formal constructive unity are established.

In the *Football Pitches* the views are, in effect, taken below the horizon, in diffused light, and the dominant images are those in which the goals extend the field towards the right, taking advantage of morning mists and clouded skies, while the goal is regarded a typological element of identification which, in addition, serves the purpose of highlighting the rear of the foreground of the "field". Something similar happens in the *Battlefields*, yet in these other fields the construction of the image is eminently theatrical, simulating the panoramic format with a double complementary view, letting colour act as a constitutive part of the landscape, making it lyrical so as to exert greater conceptual contrast to the meanings evoked by the titles, which in fact are the names and dates of battles.

In both series the photograph acts as the vehicle of a wider discourse, which addresses a more universal issue, beyond the limits of a merely visual objective, extending to other imprecise territories. It is proposed as a means of documentation, but also as a starting point for a more ambitious reflection on time, absence and memory. In this way the intentions do not conclude with the forming of a merely typological file, or with a simply documentary interest.

Football Pitches combines the vision and the subjective glance of memory, understood as imagination in perpetual tension, and the sense of a reflexive discourse on both landscape and time.

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