

## LANDSCAPES AFTER THE BATTLE

The title that heads this presentation has been borrowed from a film directed by Andrzej Wajda in 1970 from a text by the writer Tadeusz Borowki about Poland in 1945. It was for the Polish author a country where landscapes of all the wars, the won ones, the lost over and those which still persisted gathered. But the title also refers to Juan Goytisolo novel published in 1982 and, despite the fact that in this case the author referred to city landscape, the novel showed the traces of social arguments, because of its simplicity or its conciseness in both cases, it seemed the right heading to introduce the series of 20 photographs *Campos de Batalla (Battle Fields)* which María Bleda and Jose M<sup>a</sup> Rosa carried out between 1994 and 1996.

The first reflection which arises in front of any of the photographs from this series unavoidably leads to the several reading that an image can offer further over the reality they show. This aspect has been thought about since photography became relevant in art and culture history. So new approaches, from surrealism up to present time, contributed to broaden appreciatively the field devoted to the image theory.

The second arisen aspect, and the specific topic in this series, referred to the links between photography and war, which were already revealed during the American Secession War between 1861 and 1865. And more than a century later, are still adducing examples of photographic images, all of them understood as "history witnesses", according to Vilém Flusser. It was this philosopher, who just before dying in 1991, wrote that photography "has in essence a breaking function in history, similar to the war", and immediately after he reduced to essentials that "both burst into the flow of history, they stop, hold back and open spaces for the antihistory". For both, war and photography, events are just an excuse to try to break history in order to discover behind it what does not happen, but it is there.<sup>1</sup> That "being there" which Flusser referred to, which could be translated as the crime to isolate historical events to reconvert them to history scenes and at the same time to keep them in the silence of the past time. This is what this series of fields of battle by Bleda and Rosa has substantially defined.

When in 1839 Daguerre released the invention of the daguerreotype, he already emphasised in his theoretical analysis the relations established by images with the reality, however little could be guessed at that time from the possibilities to give sense further over what is obvious. It represented the image, a resort lately used by several artists.

In the case of *Campos de batalla*, under the appearance of a conventional landscape, and without an evident reason which allows one to discover the last aim of these images to whom watches them, the historical dimension which is sought by the whole project is being revealed, thanks to the photography title which implies the name of the place where the battle was fought and the date when it happened.

These naked and silent landscapes in this way turn into memory places and from that conventional modality, such as the landscape is in the photographic practice, a discreet appropriation of the historical legacy is produced and those facts are described by history and they acquire a real presence, thus. As a result, those places of the war stop being epic

landscapes to establish themselves on normality approval which are implied as time goes by. In the case of the bet by Bleda and Rosa, they try to recover "that trace which has disappeared into oblivion", as Jacques Derrida would say, by means of a distant and mute glance. In this glance, a possible ambiguity regarding the images reading is neutralized by those clues given through the titles which openly link the different landscapes of the serie to the war-like Spanish history.

In the series we can find unpolluted landscapes and it converted in a modern society, also those enclaves in which some traces have remained, and in all of them the desire to go further over the appearances are told intuitively by an "apparent normality" that prevails in all of them. And thus the artists are conscious of the way in which their work can be revealed with the naked eye. The artists make the view of the spectator inquire in detail into the disturbing triviality that rules in them and in front of the dumbness, only the tittle will let guess the previous investigation world which has led them to build those "landscapes after the battle", thanks to those buildings of the unreal side that art, literature and cinema have been building through out the centuries.

As in any other photographic image, we can also talk here about that detailed instant which is involved in photography. However, in this case, that photographic instant tries to join past and present: facts gathered by history with a present time that only needs to add the personal unreal side.

Bleda and Rosa have avoided, in this series, to get close to the limits of what can be showed, as it happens persistently with war photography. In front of the triviality of the horror ruling nowadays mass media society, they have decided to practice an open gaps, a silent and emptiness space, in order to end being an availability space which will open to every kind of speculations and suggestions. That is why in their images, violence appears overlapped, it is denied. They have decided to act by omission and that is why their landscapes keep silence, perhaps it is because they believe like Theodor W. Adorno and George Steiner that after Auschwitz, writing only needs to go dumb. And that is also why in their photographic images calamity is present under the shape of absence and beauty becomes apparent leaving traces of the persistent violence which has marked and is still marking human history.

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1 Flusser, V. *Una filosofía de la fotografía*, Madrid, Síntesis, 2001, pp. 185-188.