

The Geometry Of Oblivion

Luís Cera

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Our brain is very complex yet it is really very simple: elementary, very elementary strengths have configured it. A team of neuroanatomists (Nails Sts. Hilgetag and Helen Barbas, "Morphology of the Brain", *Research and science*, April 2009) has shown that the rough landscapes of the bypasses of the cerebral crust are formed by the forces of tension which are also responsible for the folds; such as enfolding within the skull grey matter that would occupy a frying pan big enough for a dozen people. Growth solves it: the neurons issue axons that to the the edges and keep on folding the crust, like inflating a balloon containing threads that clamp multiple points of its surface. The interesting thing is that these clamps are responsible for what we do and what we can do: they connect distant areas and while they permit creativity they limit what can and cannot be thought areas and are those that while they give creativity they limit the that is been able or cannot think, what we can and cannot feel. The topogenesis is elementary even if the result is so unlimitedly complex. It is beautiful and fascinating that our complexity is, in fact, so simple.

I found this paradox in the animated film *Waltz with Bashir*, written and directed by Israeli Ari Folmanin, in which an ex-soldier who took part in the 1982 Lebanon War attempts to fill in the gaps in his memory that correspond to the killings fields of Sabra and Chatila. He thinks he was there but cannot remember. The film is fascinating given its discourse on memory and oblivion: a medical friend tells the soldier about experiments in which true and false images were presented to a group of patients. The false ones were a photo montage of places where they had not been. They all ended up creating a story that matched the pictures. The brain, says the psychiatrist, fills in the gaps where no data or information exists. The brain invents, it is like elementary geometry. It is a dynamic system that cannot survive without information.



Geometria de l'oblit, 2009
The Geometry Of Oblivion
Pedra Sènia, ferro
Stone Cenia, iron
150 x 33 x 33

One Thursday I attended a course that Carlos Thiebaut organizes on the politics of memory. He had been profoundly moved after seeing two documentaries by Carmen Castillo, the wife of Miguel Enríquez, Leader of the MIR who was murdered by Pinochet's DYNE. Carmen went back to Chile on two occasions. On one occasion she talks to an ex militant, "Thin Alejandra", who, unable to hold out under torture, became an informer. Eventually she repents and in the 1990s tells her story. Carmen Castillo, who escaped having been tortured while pregnant and after seeing her husband murdered, listens impassively, to a semi protected ex-torturer who cynically asks her: Aren't you going to ask me about your husband? We, the public, were gripped by silence. A very young pupil, asked in a very diplomatic fashion --I simplify her question: why do we have to remember these things? We did not know, I did not know, what answer to give. To say that the victims have rights is far too simple. A daughter whose parents were murdered asked "Thin Alejandra" the same question to which she replied: because this society is full of fear. I thought that I could use the same reply to the student: because if we do not remember we cannot cure ourselves. After seeing *Waltz with Bashir* I replied to her in a more sophisticated way: because the geometry of oblivion is very elementary. Is the elementary datum that we steal from memory enough to create a story? Stories that we will end up believing true are generated in this manner. The post-modernists hold that this is what occurs and that all stories are of similar value. The political memory of democracy is and has to be a concurrence of stories. Yes, clear. But sometimes nightmares do not cure us. The press and the bookshops are full of heroic stories of the 23-F (not to mention the TV series about the transition) and I remember the Israeli psychiatrist's experiment.

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He has held numerous solo exhibitions in Barcelona, Madrid, Switzerland and Germany. He has also won important prizes in Spain and has participated in exhibitions around the world including the United States, South Korea, Switzerland and Germany.

La geometria de l'oblit

El nostre cervell és molt complex perquè en realitat és molt simple: l'han configurat forces elementals, molt elementals. Un equip de neuroanatomistas (Claus C. Hilgetag i Helen Barbas, "Morfologia del Cervell", Investigació i ciència, abril 2009) ha mostrat que els rugosos paisatges de les circumvolucions de la crosta cerebral es formen per forces de tensió que són les responsables dels plegaments: com tancar a un crani la superfície d'aproximadament una paella per a una dotzena de persones que ocuparia la substància grisa? El creixement el resol: les neurones emeten axones

que tiren de les vores i van plegant la crosta, com si infléssim un globus que interiorment té fils que subjecten múltiples punts de la superfície. L'interessant és que aquestes subjeccions són les responsables del que fem i podem fer: connecten àrees allunyades i són les que alhora que donen creativitat limiten el que es pot o no es pot pensar, la qual cosa no es pot o pot sentir. La topogènesis és elemental encara que el resultat sigui tan il·limitadament complex. És bonic i fascinant que la nostra complexitat sigui tan simple.



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Em vaig trobar amb aquesta paradoxa veient la pel·lícula Vals amb Bashir, escrita i dirigida per un israelià Ari Folman, en animació, en la qual un antic soldat de la Guerra del Líban de 1982 intenta omplir el buit de la seva memòria que correspon a les matances dels camps de Sabra i Chatila en què creu que va ser present però no recorda. La pel·lícula és fascinant per la seva meditació sobre la memòria i l'oblit: un amic mèdic li explica uns experiments en els quals es van presentar imatges verdaderes i falses a un grup de pacients. Les falses contenien les seves fotografies muntades en llocs on no havien estat. Tots van acabar creant un relat que encaixava amb les fotografies. El cervell, diu el psiquiatre, quan no té dades, quan hi ha un forat informatiu, l'omple. L'inventa, vagi. És així: geometria elemental. És un sistema dinàmic que no sobreviu sense informació.

Dijous vaig assistir al curs que organitza Carlos Thiebaut sobre polítiques de la memòria. Estava commocionat després de veure dos documentals de Carmen Castillo, la dona de Miguel Enríquez, dirigent del MIR assassinat per la DINA de Pinochet. Carmen torna a Xile en dues ocasions: en una parla amb una antiga militant que no va suportar la tortura i es va convertir en delatora, la Flaca Alejandra. Més tard es penedeix, compta la seva història a començaments dels noranta i Carmen Castillo, que va ser torturat embarassada, després de veure assassinar el seu marit i que va poder escapar, l'escolta impassible, escolta impassible a un torturador detingut i semiprotegit, que li pregunta cínic: no em preguntes pel teu marit?... en finalfinalitat. El públic estàvem tenallats i en silenci. Una alumna molt jove, amb molta delicadesa, va preguntar --simplifico la seva pregunta--: per què hem de recordar aquestes coses? No vam saber, no vaig saber, què es pot respondre. Dir que és un dret de les víctimes és massa simple. A la Flaca Alejandra li havia fet la mateixa pregunta una filla d'uns pares assassinats, i ella va respondre: perquè aquesta societat és plena de por. Vaig pensar que podia respondre així a l'alumna: perquè mentre no recordem no ens curem. Després de veure Vals amb Bashir li respondria més sofisticadament: perquè la geometria de l'oblit és molt elemental. N'hi ha prou que li furtem les dades elementals que la memòria creï el seu propi relat i es generin contes que acabarem creient veraders. Els postmoderns sostenen que això és el que ocorre i que tots els relats valen el mateix, que la política de la memòria de la democràcia és i ha de ser una concurrència de contes. Sí, clar. El que passa que de vegades no se'ns curen els malsons. Veig aquests dies la premsa i les llibreries plenes de relats heroics del 23-F (per no dir res d'una sèrie de TV sobre la transició) i em ve en la memòria l'experiment del psiquiatre israelià.