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Going to the Theatre and Feeling Agonistic: Exploring Modes of Remembrance in Spanish Audiences.

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Going to the Theatre and Feeling Agonistic: Exploring Modes of Remembrance in Spanish Audiences.

Memory culture in Spain since the 2000s has focused on the memory of victims, drawing an impermeable line between them and the perpetrators who have been considered as evil others. However, at the same time, perpetrators' testimonies have also gained visibility in the media, giving complexity to the way Spaniards think about the past. Within this context, *Donde el bosque se espesa* (2017), a theatre performance created by the Spanish company Micomicón, gives the floor to a perpetrator. Although perpetrators' discourses normally have an unsettling effect on audiences worldwide, these audience responses can, potentially, contribute to a deepening of democratic values. In interviewing Spanish spectators, I analyse their emotions regarding real and fictional perpetrators. I work with a methodology focused on how an audience's perception can be affected through the theatrical aesthetic experience, and, the other way around, how the aesthetic and political message intended by Micomicón is reshaped by each spectator. The methodology proposed explores possible agonistic effects in Spanish theatre audiences, and, in so doing, advocates a remembrance culture that includes the voices of victims, perpetrators and bystanders in an attempt to change the image of the other from that of an enemy into a legitimate political adversary.

Keywords: agonistic memory; theatre audiences; emotions; transformation; Spanish remembrance

Introduction. For the sake of democracy

On a hot night, 22 June 2017, in Móstoles, a city located 18 kilometres south-west of central Madrid, approximately 400 spectators try to find their seats in the main auditorium of the Teatro del Bosque. A thin fog floats over their heads and seeps between their bodies. When they learn where this fog is coming from, they might be emotionally shaken to such a degree that their world view becomes unsettled. How can we explore what unsettles spectators at the theatre? The task is all the more difficult when the effect is not universal and perhaps only passing. This article addresses this

question and proposes an exploratory attempt at observing and creating agonistic memory processes together with the spectators at Micomicón's *Donde el bosque se espesa*, in which remembrances of the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s and the Balkan Wars in the 1990s meet.

That night the audience was confronted with the testimony of a fictional perpetrator: the memories of his crimes and the circumstances in which they were committed, his fear and suffering, the compelling tone of his voice. His crimes were committed in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) in the winter of 1994. Both the Spanish Civil War and the Balkan Wars, despite their differences, were supported by the antagonistic mechanisms that repeat themselves in all violent conflicts: the dehumanisation of the 'other' into the image of an enemy (Opatow 1990). However, the official remembrance processes in the two countries have been almost complete opposites: while in BiH several trials of perpetrators – mostly Serbian – have taken place, no perpetrator belonging to the Nationalist Side during the Spanish Civil War between 1936 and 1939 has been tried in court, either during the Francoist dictatorship (1939-1975) or in the democratic period. The generations of Spaniards born into democracy have been raised without learning about their country's recent violent past in school – educational curricula usually omit this historical episode completely. Unlike Bosnian audiences – also German, Colombian and South African ones – Spanish ears are not used to hearing Spanish perpetrators' testimony in court acknowledging their crimes. While there have indeed been perpetrators' confessions in Spain since the war, as Aguilar and Payne (2016, 28-29) argue, they have not caught the interest of the media until very recently. This new openness was triggered after 2000 when mass-grave exhumations gained more public and international recognition, mainly due to the action of the Association for the Recuperation of Historical Memory (ARMH). Perpetrators'

confessions are not only important for locating the human remains resulting from their crimes, they are also an opportunity for Spanish audiences to challenge perpetrators' viewpoints, thus contributing to the re-politicisation and re-democratisation of Spanish remembrance processes (Aguilar and Payne 2016, 31). In contrast with the situation in BiH, exhumations of Republican victims' remains take place in a legal void since, according to Spanish penal law and the 1977 Amnesty Law, these crimes cannot be prosecuted (Ferrándiz 2016, 242). However, this challenge to the culture of reconciliation and consensus officially proclaimed during the transition to democracy has already made its mark on the Spanish public debate.

Even though there are many ways of including the perspective of the perpetrators and not all are equally productive for social cohesion, it is important to acknowledge that any kind of violent nationwide conflict engages all social actors and often blurs the lines between victims, perpetrators and bystanders. Yet, the way we remember the past should not relativise or justify crimes, but, according to the concept of agonistic memory, to re-politicise our relation to the past by avoiding the application of the moral categories of good and evil and by orienting human passion towards collective solidarity (Bull and Hansen 2015). Building on of Maria Torgovnick's conceptualization of the two different modes of representing perpetrators in the media – 'Eichmann is in all of us' or 'anyone could be Eichmann' – Bull and Hansen distinguish between cosmopolitan and agonistic modes of remembering (2015, 397). The Eichmann-is-in-all-of-us mode implies that evil is an inherent part of all human beings and that crimes are committed when this monstrous – immoral – side of us is released. In contrast, the anyone-could-be-Eichmann mode highlights the contingency of circumstances and the ideological implications of acting against a given group, considered the enemy. The perpetrators' discourse has proliferated throughout Western

historical fiction since the 1990s, and it entails criticising the cosmopolitan paradigm and its universalisation of the victims' identity (Crownshaw 2011, 75).¹ *Donde el bosque se espesa* contributes to the current debate in Spain by giving the floor to a Bosnian war criminal. In some spectators, this device encouraged them to reflect on their own remembrance processes.

I had the opportunity to debate with approximately 80 spectators immediately after the premiere and to interview five of them extensively. These low numbers and the way the materials have been analysed mean that I do not intend to generalise the conclusions of this study. I explored spectators' perplexity, annoyance, amusement and excitement as crucial but non-measurable elements of their aesthetic experience. Incompletion and fragility are central to theatre practice (Delgado 2018, 199). This research proposes a methodology for the qualitative exploration of emotional processes that emerge with a live audience. Indeed, theatre's potential is activated by facing the spectators in the here and now. This characteristic of the genre is unique among the arts (Fischer-Lichte 2008a; Walmsley 2011). Even though theatre's specificity lies in this interaction between stage and audience, there is an astonishing lack of research on reception in the theatre (Lindelof and Hansen 2015; Walmsley 2011). Furthermore, Mouffe's theory on agonism, a key reference for Bull and Hansen (2015), is weak when it comes to providing an empirical account of what it means for an artistic practice to be agonistic. Mouffe's theory on politics in art refers to 'agonistic spaces' instead of agonistic artistic works, highlighting the interaction of different political actors.

¹ For an insight into the state of the art of the discourse of the perpetrators in Spanish literary fiction, please see Hansen (2018).

However, this interaction itself remains under-researched. The question I address in this article is how to explore this interaction that connects the theatre and political practice.

The tentative findings presented align with a tradition in performing arts theory inspired by research on rituals that deals with the transformative potential of scenic practices. In this potential for change it is important to distinguish at least two different concepts that are part of the same process: ‘unsettling’ and ‘transforming’. Fischer-Lichte (2008b, 88), following Victor Turner’s anthropological studies on rituals, considers the spectator’s crisis or liminal state as a requirement for transformation. However, unsettled states can – and do – exist without transformation. My experience with audiences suggests that, without emotional engagement, there might not be any unsettling effect on audiences’ ideological assumptions and their modes of remembering past conflicts. Distancing emotions such as boredom prevent spectators from engaging with a performance, while emotions commonly regarded as negative prove to be highly engaging and memorable and, therefore, very productive for unsettling and/or changing assumptions. By delving into Mouffe and Michaela Mihai’s reflections upon ‘indignation’ and ‘hope’ as specifically agonistic passions together with Bull and Hansen’s categorisation of emotions, I argue that the dichotomic division of emotions between negative and positive emotions can undermine agonism’s potential. It is important to focus on the potential of passions without neglecting the contexts in which they emerge, because even ‘hope’ or ‘love’, commonly regarded as positive, can be used to exclude and annihilate others in order to achieve a given group’s own goals. By exploring the collapse of the positive-negative emotions dichotomy and in investigating how emotions shift, I hope to unveil the mechanisms that, for a given spectator, turn enemies into adversaries by means of aesthetic experience.

Within a theoretical framework that combines theatre studies and cultural memory studies focusing on the importance of emotions and passions² to activate agonistic processes in audiences, I have structured this article in two main parts. In the first part, I analyse the performance of *Donde el bosque se espesa* and how it affected the spectators that are part of this study. For this analysis, I focus on the ways in which perpetrators' roles were articulated from the perspective of both Micomicón and selected spectators. In the second part, I focus on the collapse of the negative-positive emotions dichotomy in order to propose methodologies that contribute to understanding how enemies can become adversaries for a given spectator. Multiple materials have been used and created in this research: the text of the play, which, in theatre studies, is known as the 'linguistic text'; the live performance, specifically the world premiere on 22 June 2017 held at the Teatro del Bosque in Móstoles; an open discussion with the theatre company Micomicón, academic researchers and approximately 80 volunteers from among the spectators immediately after the show; and a total of ten qualitative interviews with five spectators. Each spectator was interviewed on the day before and the day after the premiere, a method thus far not used in the field. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. Accordingly, this research understands aesthetic experience as

² It is important to clarify briefly the use of the terms 'emotion' and 'passion' in this article and why I chose not to use the term 'affect'. I work with explicitly uttered emotions by stakeholders. Since 'affect' refers to a pre-verbal state (Labanyi 2010, 224), it is not appropriate to my research here. I use the terms 'emotion' and 'passion', but these are not interchangeable: I use 'emotion' to refer to individual, conscious feelings and the term 'passion' in the Mouffian sense to refer to 'common affects' mobilised in the political arena for collective forms of identification (Errejón and Mouffe 2016, 60–61).

a combination of the lived experience of spectators before, during and after the staged performance.

Donde el bosque se espesa and the challenge of giving the floor to perpetrators in front of a Spanish audience

Bakhtin's notion of 'answerability' - the importance of an open-ended dialogic interaction between political adversaries - underlies Bull and Hansen's (2015) definition of agonistic memory. In it Bakhtin highlights human beings' ability to act, to respond to other's incitement in a given situation. This incitement can come from all sources, artistic events included. It is no coincidence that Mouffe's examples of artistic actions that create 'agonistic spaces' are the performances of the Yes Men and Alfredo Jaar's installations:

What is particularly interesting in this form of intervention is its mode of unsettling common sense by posing apparently simple questions, albeit questions that, in the specific context of the intervention, are likely to trigger reflections that will arouse discontent with the current state of things. (Mouffe 2013, 95)

A public performance demands a response here and now. Even silence or walking out are responses (Fischer-Lichte 2008a). Two hermeneutical levels are at work here: the thing as such (the linguistic text) and the interaction between the thing and the audience. The intersection between the two levels is crucial because it is only here that the artistic work acquires its transformative potential, that is, through its performative deployment. Perhaps it is even questionable to consider a piece of art to be agonistic as such. Accordingly, the following analysis will give some examples that reveal how the artistic and political intent of Micomicón's performance impacts spectators in multiple and unforeseen ways.

The plot of *Donde el bosque se espesa* proceeds as follows: an elderly Spanish woman, Emiliana, dies and leaves a box full of objects to her two daughters, Antonia and Isabel. Antonia, a woman in her 50s, wants to understand the meaning of these objects and their importance to her mother. She and her daughter, Ana, undertake a trip across Europe (visiting Barcarés, Lourdes, Paris, Toulouse, Mauthausen, Sarajevo, Kravica, Jasenovac, and other locations). As they go, they discover that Emiljan Rukavina, an Ustaše that joined Franco's faction during the Spanish Civil War, is Antonia's biological grandfather and that the man she believed was her grandfather, Rafael Cobreces Galilea, was a Republican who died in Mauthausen. The two women also learn that Zoran, Antonia's husband and Ana's father, had been a cruel war criminal in Yugoslavia. When the women return from their trip, Zoran is ready to leave home because he knows they have uncovered his secret. Ana and Antonia refuse to forgive him, they send him away and call the police. The play ends in Charlatana's pub, a dreamlike, grotesque space inhabited by the dead that has intersected several times with Antonia's story. There, Antonia, her mother Emiliana and her grandmother meet to make a symbolic toast: the three women – three generations – name the Republican Rafael Cobreces Galilea their legitimate relative.

Of the two perpetrators that appear in the play, Emiljan Rukavina and Zoran (who used the nickname Marko the Poet during the Siege of Sarajevo), only the latter has enough substance to be considered a full-fledged character. The already mentioned legal void in which the exhumations of Republican victims takes place and the scarcity of perpetrators' testimonies in the Spanish media partly explain why most reviews of *Donde el bosque se espesa* focus on how the victims are represented and omit such a prominent character as Zoran, embodied by the actor Juanjo Cocalón (*La Nueva Crónica*, March 17, 2018; *Noticias para municipios*, April 13, 2018; *eldiario.es*, April

26, 2018; *La Vanguardia*, April 4, 2018; *El Cultural*, April 27, 2018; *ABC*, May 4, 2018). Zoran plays a decisive role in the play and spectators are given the opportunity to hear his voice because the playwrights, Laila Ripoll and Mariano Llorente, give him sufficient space in the penultimate scene to answer Antonia's question: '¿Por qué, Zoran? ¿Por qué? (*Silencio*) ¿Por qué Zoran Stankovic fue Marko, el poeta? (*Silencio*) ¿Por qué?' (Ripoll and Llorente 2018, 112). Zoran remembers the Siege of Sarajevo and how his girlfriend Almira was shot to death by a sniper: 'Sabía que estaban disparando mis vecinos, algunos conocían a Almira... algunos eran amigos nuestros... Me enrolé en un batallón, tenía que defender la ciudad³, pero supliqué a mis jefes que me permitieran ayudar sin disparar. Creí que podíamos echarlos de las colinas, ganamos muchas batallas... Yo quería a Sarajevo, yo quería a Yugoslavia, yo quería a Almira... Y la habían matado...' (Ripoll and Llorente 2018, 116). He relates how, just before his father had died, he had explained to Zoran that a group of armed Bosniaks entered his family's home, killed his grandparents, raped his mother and set the house on fire. On stage, this is a powerful scene masterfully directed by Laila Ripoll: while Marko, played by Carlos Jiménez-Alfaro (a different actor from the one that plays Zoran), explains his transformation into a war criminal, he slowly dresses himself in a military uniform. He

³ Zoran was born in Sarajevo with a Serbian father and a Croatian mother. The play shows how ethnicity became progressively more important during the Siege and how some 'Bosniaks', Bosnian Muslims, who used to be friends with Zoran start calling him 'Serbian'. As we can see in the passage quoted here, Zoran considered himself 'Yugoslavian' and devoted to 'Sarajevo', which he defends from the assault by the army of the Republic of Serbia. To read more about the conflicts between the different ethnic groups in BiH see Moll (2015), Cohen (1998) and Malcolm (1994). An important reference in Spanish is Goytisolo (1993).

concludes his account at the moment he finishes this process by covering his face with a balaclava, and pronounces the following words: ‘Mi padre ya no era mi padre. Sus ojos ya no eran de este mundo. Yo ya no soy Marko Knezevic. Y ya no pertenezco al mundo.’⁴ (Ripoll and Llorente 2018, 124).

In the post-show interview, Alba⁵, one of the audience members, said she valued the *peripeteia*, i.e., the turn of events in the plot, when the plot jumped from the memory of the Spanish Civil War and World War II to the wars associated with the breakup of Yugoslavia and the contemporary revelation of Zoran’s identity. She wonders, ‘How many times have we heard the history of Mauthausen?!’ Indeed, to hear it again from a different perspective is one of the challenges that *Donde el bosque se espesa* poses. The complexity of the temporal and spatial crossings was commented on

⁴ A major precedent in British theatre for conveying the perpetrators’ discourse in relation to the Balkan wars is Sarah Kane’s *Blasted* (1995). Ian, a middle aged Welsh man, depicted as racist, homophobic and misogynistic, is raped by a Yugoslavian soldier who, while raping explains how the same was done to his own girlfriend by the ‘others’ during the Balkans Wars – a vengeful attitude that shares much with that of Zoran (2006, 49-50).

⁵ All interviewees’ names have been changed to protect their anonymity in accordance with the EU’s ethical requirements. The interviewees were Alba, a female in her 30s who is a theatre artist and theatre studies scholar; Luis, a male in his 50s who is a leading activist for the recuperation of historical memory in Spain; Lidia, a female in her 50s who is a theatre critic; Pedro, a male in his 60s who is a university professor; and Rosa, a female in her 40s who has a degree in education and works as policy maker. These interviewees were selected because they had Spanish nationality, were of different ages and genders, represented different ideologies and were engaged or at least familiar with the memory movement in Spain. It would be meaningful to work with other interviewee profiles in further research.

in the interviews as well as in the open debate that immediately followed the premiere. However, the main challenge for the spectators of *Donde el bosque se espesa* who I had the opportunity to interview was to accept the figure of Zoran, both on aesthetic and ethical grounds. As described above, the perpetrators' public discourse is potentially disturbing in all contexts and especially in Spain (Aguilar and Payne 2016, 28). Zoran tries to explain what made him a war criminal: 'Para que uno se transforme en un criminal de guerra solo hace falta media hora nefasta en tu vida..' He even confesses that he came to have 'un desprecio ilimitado por los bosniacos. Matar un bosniaco era como aplastar un gusano.' (Ripoll and Llorente 2018, 125).

Referring to Zoran's discourse, Luis remarked:

... a mí eso me duele, ese discurso ... me duele, porque yo he conocido a familias ... a todas las familias de desaparecidos a los que yo he conocido, han sido víctimas de (cuenta con los dedos de un mano) violaciones, de asesinatos, de desapariciones forzadas ... Y nunca he visto, nunca he visto ... Entonces ese discurso es (pausa) casi doloroso, ¿no? Porque ... primero porque, por esa cosa de que la respuesta parece que tiene que ser "bueno no, me he hecho violento porque el mundo me ha hecho así", ¿no?⁶

Luis criticises the fatal tone that pervades Zoran's discourse about his transformation from victim to perpetrator during the Siege of Sarajevo. By reproducing the victim-victimiser dichotomy, this approach to the perpetrator's perspective cannot be considered agonistic (Hansen 2018). According to the concepts proposed by Bull and Hansen (2015), Zoran's explanation falls within the cosmopolitan mode, since, his story universalises the potential for perpetration, depicting it as a matter of personal revenge,

⁶ All interviews were conducted in Spanish, filmed by Daniela de Angeli (University of Bath) and transcribed by me afterwards using the video versions.

not a conviction generated by social and political circumstances. Micomicón's cosmopolitan statement, however, sheds light on the situation in contemporary Spain and is therefore valuable for understanding Spain's collective remembrance process. Micomicón has another drama in its repertoire called *El triángulo azul* (The Blue Triangle), which premiered in 2014. The action of this play is situated in the Mauthausen concentration camp during World War II and focuses on a group of Spanish prisoners being held there. The plot has a single narrator: a former officer, the camp commander, who gives the floor to the actors as he recounts his memories. The narrator not only tells the story but also, equally importantly, observes and physically interacts with the story by being present. He tries to justify his participation in the facts that are being re-enacted in front of him by talking about his love for Germany. Taken together with *Donde el bosque se espesa*, Micomicón can be seen to have a generalised vision of perpetrators' discourse as full of self-justification and an absence of honest repentance (Aguilar and Payne 2016, 26-27).

Luis was certainly not the only interviewee who expressed such thoughts about the character of Zoran; Rosa's angle is rather similar, though they do not share the same understanding of what theatre is supposed to offer its audience. The aesthetic dimension is at stake here; as I previously mentioned, Zoran's character was disturbing for the spectators that participated in this study on both aesthetic and ethical grounds. When I asked Rosa how she perceived Zoran, she focused on the fact that the development of the fictional character prevented her from understanding him. She affirmed: '... bueno además se me hizo largo, o sea, ese detalle de su vida ... ellas ya lo sabían, ya lo habían descubierto, a lo mejor yo no necesito el detalle de que mataron a su novia, de que mataron a su familia, que ... da igual, sabes?' At other points in the interview she argued that she was entirely uninterested in Zoran because it was only in one of the final scenes

that he revealed his real past. Rosa's view is that the authorship and direction of *Donde el bosque se espesa* seem to have employed a *deus ex machina* device here, since there was no prefiguring or preparation for this final revelation by the character. In fact, until he begins his explanation, Zoran is a secondary character. His sudden revelation and the subsequent narrative was also considered excessive by Lidia because it arrived 'too late' and did not seem to harmonise with the plot's progression. *Donde el bosque se espesa* has the characteristics of a drama with a linear cause-and-effect plot. The logical expectations of some spectators, such as Rosa and Lidia, were frustrated by this scene. Although surprise is potentially productive for creating an unsettling effect, in this case, the dissemination of information in the plot was unbalanced and affected its rhythm. Because Zoran's character-shift was not well executed in aesthetic terms, instead of unsettling spectators it simply annoyed some of them.

During the post-show open discussion at the Teatro del Bosque, one member of the audience raised his hand to respond to a question posed by the academic researchers about how important it is for us today to face perpetrators' discourses. He answered with another question: '¿Qué discurso? No hay ningún discurso.'⁷ Some others joined his affirmation, insisting that perpetrators have no interest in confessing, but also questioning the importance or propriety of giving the floor to them. I make reference to this response because it was cited, by Luis and Pedro during the post-show interviews, as evidence that discussing the performance, even in a semi-structured manner, enriched some spectators' experience (Lindelof and Hansen 2015, 249–250). However, it is a weak argument to call a fictional character into question simply because he does not

⁷ This post-show discussion was recorded on video by A priori gestión teatral and Micomicón but not transcribed. This comment is taken directly from the video.

correspond with some spectators' lived experiences. Indeed, this viewpoint reveals an understanding of art as solely *mimetic* and not *poietic*, or, to put it differently, it suggests that art should be made to confirm our assumptions instead of opening new doors by challenging our world view. Indeed, art, and particularly theatre, can be a laboratory for life because, by stimulating our imagination, it expands our awareness of our own possibilities; it enables us to deal with difficult situations within the safe space of theatrical convention. Victor Turner uses theatrical terminology to analyse 'social dramas' where conflict situations are resolved by the social community (Schechner 1994, 166-167). In Turner's ritual theory analogies and transferences between art and life meet in liminal phases (Schechner 1994, 168). By giving the floor to perpetrators in the Spanish artistic scene, the proposal of *Donde el bosque se espesa* clashed with some spectators' cultural imaginary, unsettling their assumptions, situating them in a liminal phase that, in some cases, paved the way for agonistic reflection.

Another crucial aspect of Luis' argument quoted above is that it is loaded with pain - a prominent emotion in theatrical performances that give accounts of explicit violence (Trezise 2012). Luis claimed explicitly: 'me duele' and: 'es doloroso'. In this research, I have chosen to map and investigate only explicitly uttered emotions because the varied data I am working with is related to a theatre performance, and materiality is the very essence of theatre's specificity. This approach also serves to address the relatively widespread assumption that it is impossible to know what spectators actually think or feel about aesthetic experience (Fitzpatrick 2011, 66). In what follows, I have analysed the uttered emotions that refer to both real and fictional perpetrators in order to connect the domains of life and art and to identify spectators' emotional shifts from more antagonistic to more agonistic.

The collapse of the positive-negative emotions dichotomy: Exploring alternative methodologies

The main reason Mouffe considers 'indignation' and 'hope' as agonistic passions is their power to initiate identification processes among people in the political arena. She considers 'indignation' as 'negative' or reactive and 'hope' as 'positive' or 'affirmative' based on the degree to which these passions 'vilify' others (Mihai 2014, 32). In other words, 'hope' seems less prone to antagonistic exclusion between political actors. Of course, any passion must be considered within specific contexts of action. This partly explains why Mihai can find a counterexample to Mouffe's assumptions regarding 'indignation' in the Spanish *Indignados* movement, among others (2014, 45). However, it is also important to focus on other passions mentioned by Mouffe (2005, 26), such as 'love', which she approaches through Freud's distinction between Eros and Thanatos, the two instinctual human forms of collective identification. More relevant to the aim of this paper is to highlight the importance of 'enjoyment' as an important form of socio-political identification. This is also mentioned by Mouffe, this time inspired by Lacan and Žižek. Indeed, a community is held together not only by means of symbolic force but also through a shared relation toward a thing: 'enjoyment incarnated' (2005, 27). The material dimension of this affirmation for Žižek, as quoted by Mouffe, is crucial to exploring aesthetic experience. Whereas boredom may cause detachment in theatregoers, enjoyment can connect them with the here and now of the performance. But this begs the question of 'pain'? How can this emotion gain an agonistic political dimension? The key is that, from the perspective of aesthetics, experiencing art always implies some kind of 'enjoyment', and emotions commonly considered negative, such as 'pain', can also be pleasurable (Menninghaus et al. 2017, 5). The imbrication of pleasure and pain is already noted in the *Nicomachean Ethics* where, according to

Aristotle, it is necessary to be educated in how to feel them both properly in order to attain virtue (2005, 79). Furthermore, when spectators experience emotional shifts they put themselves in an unsettling, liminal position that opens the way to agonistic reflection. How we take advantage of this propitious unsettling situation depends on fragile and often fleeting factors, which can form the subject of a fascinating qualitative analysis. In what follows I am going to analyse one example of this emotional shifting in detail by comparing the discourses of two interviewees, Emilio and Pedro.

During the premiere of *Donde el bosque se espesa*, actors did not physically interact with spectators, except for some instances where they exchanged looks. Having in mind the importance for spectators of actual interaction, that is, of engaging actively with the performance and co-creating it by changing roles and becoming actors themselves (Fischer-Lichte 2008a), I asked the interviewees to propose alternatives to Ana and Antonia's reactions to Zoran's speech. The change of role involved in putting oneself in another's shoes has great potential for political destabilisation and transformation; the interviews were an occasion for this to happen. However, instead of proposing an alternative, Luis expressed his dissatisfaction with Antonia's reaction, saying that 'Antonia se queda corta, pero hace bien poniendo en manos de la justicia a ese monstruo'. After listening to Zoran's explanation, Antonia ends her relationship with him and calls the police in order to denounce him.⁸ This seemed insufficient to Luis, who did not specify an alternative to Antonia's reaction but instead put into question the whole approach of *Donde el bosque se espesa* by suggesting it should have focused on the people who, in the same circumstances, chose not to kill. He included

⁸ In Kane's *Blasted*, by contrast, Ian, also a perpetrator, begs pardon and obtains it from his victim, Cate (2006, 58-61).

himself in this group of people who ‘...tienen anticuerpos como para no ver, como dice la obra, como para no ver a alguien como si fuera un gusano’. In the end, he proposed a shift from a negative to a positive politics, that is, a politics that focuses on articulating the good instead of disarticulating evil. Furthermore, Luis proposed strengthening the reaction of the daughter, who – as Alba also pointed out – vanishes, leaving her mother as sole focus, despite the fact that she, the daughter, was the main driving force behind the trip across Europe that was the source of all the revelations. Even though Luis’s discourse is riddled with moral judgments (in, for instance, his calling perpetrators ‘monsters’ without empathic capability) his ‘pain’ and annoyance towards Zoran’s character are very important for creating the conditions for an agonistic memory event. Indeed, Luis undergoes an unsettling that, through aesthetic experience, makes him find alternatives and transform his pain into something else: by focusing on Ana and her generation’s possibilities he envisions a positive political approach and outlook.

In Luis’s case, ‘pain’ has a performative dimension because he himself feels this emotion. Other participants, such as Alba and Pedro, mentioned the emotion of ‘pain’ in relation to Antonia and Ana’s reaction to Zoran’s discourse rather than to themselves. There are two levels of fictionalisation at work here: on the one hand, the play’s characters are embodied by actors acting their feelings⁹. Antonia’s character uses the following expression after discovering the truth of Zoran’s past: ‘...esas voces, esos gritos de dolor y pánico, esa nube de sangre y de odio rodeando a tu padre...’ (Ripoll and Llorente 2018, 109). On the other hand, ‘pain’ is felt by Luis by means of aesthetic experience. At the first level, pain remains ‘inside the picture’: it is *represented* pain. At the second level, pain is *experienced in representation*, that is, a given spectator feels

⁹ Diderot (1830) referred to this process and defined it as the paradox of the actor.

pain while attending and talking about the performance (Trezise 2012). Luis's pain has an unsettling effect that, to use Turner's terminology, puts him in a liminal state. This liminal state is propitious for transformation but does not guarantee it. Furthermore, if a transformation occurs, it might not last beyond the in-between state of the aesthetic experience. However, the ultimate intention of political theatre, such as this production of *Donde el bosque se espesa*, is to transform audiences, who, at the same time, are part of political life in Spain and can potentially transform it. 'Aesthetic drama' and 'social drama' are intertwined in Bakhtin's (2003) notion of answerability, which is the ability to connect art and life (Martín 2015, 45).

The character of Zoran raised myriad emotions in the participants. All these are potentially important to the aesthetic experience, but, for agonism, it is the emotions that display some kind of flexibility, crisis, and an ability to shift or transform the viewer in the here and now of aesthetic experience that are especially enlightening. This was true of Pedro's 'disgust' for a well-known perpetrator in Spain in the 1970s: Antonio González Pacheco, also known as Billy el Niño. While I was in Madrid conducting fieldwork, his name appeared in the newspapers due to the extradition order sent by the Argentinian judge María Servini de Cubría, who is prosecuting the case against Francoism in Spain (*Público*, June 21, 2017). During the pre-show interviews I asked participants about the case. Pedro seemed very affected by the fact that the Spanish National High Court rejected the extradition order because it considered the alleged crimes unprosecutable. Pedro himself was a victim of González Pacheco's systematic terror against students who organised against the regime. He explicitly called Pacheco 'este tipejo ... lo he llamado tipejo sin paliativos'. Pedro recalled his youth as an activist in the student movement and described González Pacheco as follows:

...evidentemente este hombre estaba marcado por un tipo de odio, muy, muy ... como creo que ha dicho alguna de estas personas de la querrela actual, muy vocacional, ¿no? Era un tipo vocacional de esto ... Y ... efectivamente bueno, lo que es evidente es que este tipo provocaba terror, yo recuerdo en actos de aquellos que eran interrumpidos por la policía ... en la ciudad universitaria, te estoy hablando de los años 71, 72 ...

In excerpts from Luis's post-show interview quoted above he defined Zoran as a 'monstruo'. 'Monstruo' or 'tipejo sin paliativos' are certainly pejorative, and within the contexts of Luis's and Pedro's statements, they operate as moral judgements of a perpetrator's inherent depravity rather than as comments on his or her behaviour. This antagonistic perspective implicitly situates Luis and Pedro in a moral position opposite that of the perpetrators: they are the good ones. Luis explicitly included himself in this group by saying that he does not have the 'capacity to see anybody as a worm', and he says about himself: 'Yo no tengo esa capacidad de ver a alguien como un gusano, tengo empatía con la gente, no soy un psicópata que no sepa ponerme en el lugar de otro'. After attending the performance, however, Pedro adopted a different position while talking about Zoran. When I asked him about the fictional character, Pedro recalled the open discussion held immediately after the performance in the Teatro del Bosque. He referred specifically to a comment by the actor Carlos Jiménez-Alfaro, who said that when he was preparing himself to embody Marko, he considered himself lucky that he did not have to experience the Siege of Sarajevo because 'no sé lo que hubiera hecho'.¹⁰ Jiménez-Alfaro's comment was enlightening in the debate and influenced Pedro's thinking. Moreover, this comment is relevant to agonism because it takes into consideration the circumstances in which perpetration occurs and the contingency of

¹⁰ This comment is taken directly from the video of the post-show debate (see footnote 7).

evil acts, which by no means justifies them but does allow us to explore their mechanisms. Following Bull and Hansen's above-mentioned distinction based on Torgovnick, Jiménez-Alfaro acknowledges the importance of the second mode (that is, 'anyone could be Eichmann') to his embodiment of the character of Marko. Questioning what one would do in certain circumstances contrasts with Luis's affirmation that some people, himself included, have antibodies against evil. Pedro attaches importance to Jiménez-Alfaro's comment and takes it as a starting point for evaluating Zoran's discourse. I asked Pedro about the risks of falling into stereotypes and losing the possibility of developing a deeper understanding of characters, which would, incidentally, also have aesthetic consequences, since well-rounded, nuanced characters are often protagonists and are more appealing to audiences who find in them more potential for identification. Pedro argued:

esta cuestión también tiene que ver con la identificación del mal, si efectivamente, el mal es otro, lo que hablábamos antes, es otro pero es otro en el que tú también puedes estar implicado, eso es lo que puede atravesarte a ti. A lo mejor en determinadas circunstancias, como tú matizabas, ¿no? No en general, no es que tú seas un, necesariamente un genocida, pero había que ver qué pasara si... etc. etc.

Pedro thus reconsiders his attitude towards 'evil'. Though in the first interview he referred to González Pacheco as 'un tipejo sin paliativos', in the second he was able to approach Zoran's discourse in a nuanced way that was less to do with moral judgement and the antagonistic 'me good-them evil' view and more about the importance of the ethics of the other and the contingency of circumstances; he expressed uncertainty. According to ritual and theatre studies, we could say that Pedro found himself in a liminal state propitious for the transformation of his deeply held views. Particularly important from the perspective of audience analysis technique is the fact that, in the pre-show interview, Pedro referred to an actual perpetrator, Billy el

Niño, who acted in a real-life regime, while in the second interview, he talked about the experience of Zoran, a fictional character. These kinds of observation are possible only when pre- and post-show interviews are conducted with the same participants. Indeed, during the pre-show interviews, I was able to learn how participants related to actual Spanish perpetrators. These first insights proved important for exploring participants' emotions with respect to the fictional character of Zoran in the post-show interview. Pedro's discourse on Billy el Niño, a perpetrator in the real world, and his view on Zoran, a perpetrator in the realm of art, meet in Pedro's response-ability, or answerability in Bakhtinian terms. Pedro's disgust shifted to a more empathic, self-critical view, at least during the period of our interview. This is a powerful movement and could possibly lead to political action. However, to become political action, the shift would also have to operate the other way around. This would allow Pedro to transform his disgust towards Billy el Niño into a more productive reflection enabling him to understand how perpetration operates under circumstances of mass violence and how it involves all social actors. Although Mouffe does not explicitly refer to 'empathy' in relation to agonism, Bull and Hansen attribute to it an important role in preventing the dehumanisation of others, including perpetrators. In both realms, however, this jump is complex. Art provides a safe space where conflict remains manageable (Schechner 1994, 169; Trezise 2012, 217) so it is much easier for Pedro to 'understand' Zoran's perspective and consider him an adversary than in the case of Billy el Niño. Alba encountered the same limitation. As a dramaturge herself, she was able to understand the importance of Zoran's discourse and the possibilities he might open in a Spanish context. In the first interview, she criticised the way the media manipulated a situation and explicitly said that the dehumanisation strategies used against refugees made her 'angry'. In her own words: '... a mí me cabrea muchísimo ver esas manipulaciones que

se hacen en los medios de comunicación...’ However, she refused to acknowledge that dehumanisation processes also operate on actual perpetrators, which makes any attempt to understand the mechanisms of dehumanisation pointless. In summary, it is extremely difficult to create an intersection between the dimensions of life and art, but doing so is key to understanding political art and to exploring agonistic memory by means of aesthetic experience. In Alba’s own words:

... igual que el arte es una representación del mundo, si cambiamos en el arte también las historias e imaginamos otro mundo quizás también si la representación cambia el mundo cambie, porque seremos capaces de creer en eso...

Conclusions. Opening doors for further research

The above-presented audience analysis tentatively outlines a methodology for obtaining an insight into the mechanisms by which the antagonistic image of others as enemies can become more agonistic through aesthetic experience. On the one hand, by discussing the representation of the perpetrator (Marko/Zoran) in *Donde el bosque se espesa* and how this representation affects a given Spanish audience, I have shown how a cosmopolitan approach to perpetrators in a theatrical performance can provoke agonistic effects in some spectators. On the other hand, this analysis has deepened the theory on agonistic emotions and passions by noting the importance of emotions commonly viewed as negative, such as ‘pain’, ‘disgust’ or ‘anger’, and highlighting their potential in aesthetic experiences focused on collective remembrance processes. Furthermore, I have proposed overcoming the negative-positive dichotomy and focusing on the emotional shifts potentiated by stakeholders’ creativity. In my view, this approach opens new perspectives for further research on agonistic passions by expanding the potential of agonistic memory strategies and strengthening the connection between art and life, which is essential for agonistic artistic practices.

Indeed, the proposed methodology for the intersection of the dimensions of life and art contributes to filling a gap in Mouffian theory on political art.

Developments beyond the audience analysis presented above lie outside the scope of this research, but it would be interesting to explore the effects of *Donde el bosque se espesa* on each participant in the long term and under other circumstances. Such an investigation would be the only way to learn whether the emotions described here might inspire stakeholders to engage in political practice in the socio-political arena. For now, exploring liminal states and the shifting of emotions within the scope of aesthetic experience is proposed as a manner of exploring the mechanisms of art's unsettling and transformative power. In *Agonistics*, Mouffe (2013) insists on not separating art and politics into two different fields. She does not even distinguish between political and non-political art (91). This affirmation explains why Mouffe, in discussing artistic practices such as the Yes Men's street actions or Alfredo Jaar's installations, focuses on their social dimension, that is, what they can do to society: their contribution to the constitution of and how they maintain or challenge the 'symbolic order' shared by society's members. However, such an approach trivialises crucial differences between the political (and societal) and the aesthetic. Clearly, when referring to artistic practices, the aesthetic dimension needs to be highlighted. Indeed, without aesthetic ambition, there is no politics in art, since, as the proposed analysis has shown, aesthetic choices determine the ethical grounds of the theatrical performance. Furthermore, it is equally important to approach these artistic practices as events. By giving the floor to perpetrators, *Donde el bosque se espesa* contributes to the debate on how to deal collectively with the memory of the Civil War and Francoist dictatorship in Spain's public discourse, a discourse in which perpetrators' testimonies regarding their atrocities have been largely silenced. By means of aesthetic experience, stakeholders

have challenged and contested the discourse of perpetrators and found ways of integrating it into the Spanish socio-political arena, contributing to current debates on Spanish collective remembrance processes.

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