Narratives of Violence
edited by Teresa Iribarren, Roger Canadell, Josep-Anton Fernàndez

Personal Remembrance as Historical Memory
Eva Koch's Interactive Visual Work on Her Mother's Experience of the Spanish Civil War

Montserrat Lunati Maruny
Cardiff University; University of St Andrews, UK

Abstract This essay explores the Danish sculptor and video-installation artist Eva Koch's interactive visual works from 2001 based on her mother's, and her mother's family's, experiences during the Spanish Civil War: *Villar* and *Villar – Los hijos de Manuela*. These works are a textualization of the past through remembrance in which no attempt is made to offer a linear account of events or play down uncomfortable sub-narratives. The analysis, which exposes the precarious boundaries between the personal and the collective, draws from theoretical approaches to memory and history by Marianne Hirsch, Walter Benjamin, Jay Winter and Maurice Halbwachs.

Keywords Eva Koch. Villar. Villar - Los hijos de Manuela. Interactive visual art. Spanish Civil War. Nini Haslund Gleditsch. Oliva and Norwegian humanitarian aid. Marianne Hirsch. Maurice Halbwachs. Jay Winter. Walter Benjamin.

Edizioni Ca'Foscari

Biblioteca di *Rassegna iberistica* 21
e-ISSN 2610-9360 | ISSN 2610-8844
ISBN [ebook] 978-88-6969-460-8

Peer review | Open access
Submitted 2021-04-01 | Accepted 2021-06-08 | Published 2021-10-21

DOI 10.30687/978-88-6969-460-8/003

1 The Photographed Body and Its Context

> The landscape of Postmemory is peopled by faces from the past, by images in and out of the family album, by photos of victims and of survivors. (Hirsch 2012, 25)

An eight-year-old girl looks over her shoulder at the camera which is recording her having lunch with two other children of a similar age. The latter are concentrating on the meal while she, spoon in hand, has stopped eating and gently and confidently exposes her face and her beautifully shaped head to whoever is taking an interest in them, acknowledging the attention with a sweet smile. The girl is Cristobalina Martínez López and the photograph is a still taken from the film *Hjelp Spania!* (Help Spain!) attributed to the German photographer Walter Reuter[1] and recorded, most likely, towards the end of January 1938 (Morell 2011, 111). The documentary was sponsored by the Scandinavian, especially Norwegian, humanitarian relief agencies mobilising help for the children in the Republican region of Valencia during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). It was made at a Children's Hospital named after the Norwegian explorer and 1922 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Fridtjof Nansen. The Hospital was in Oliva (Valencia), a town which made an extraordinary effort to welcome evacuees and refugees from areas where the fighting affected the civilian population, as documented by historian Joan Ramon Morell Gregori in his book *Solidaritat a Oliva, 1936-1939* (2011).[2] Morell has comprehensively researched all the children's colonies established in Oliva thanks to the Republican Government Ministry of Public Instruction and Health, the Oliva City Council, local unions and other social and political organizations, as well as many Oliva

1 I am following Joan Ramon Morell Gregori (2011, 111) in saying that the film is "attributed" to Walter Reuter since there are no credits on the film itself. Witnesses at the Fridtjof Nansen Hospital corroborated that he made the film, which would be shown in Scandinavian cinemas before the evening commercial film to collect money towards the Spanish children aid programme during the Civil War. Its main objective, made explicit at the end through messages on the screen encouraging donations for the Spanish children, may explain why the authorship credits were not included.

2 Joan Ramon Morell Gregori (2011) has published the only book that deals with the effort that the town of Oliva made during the Civil War years. He was also the curator of the 2011 exhibition *Solidaritat a Oliva, 1936-1939* (Morell 2012; `https:www.youtube.com/watch?v=28Yv9-DMvtQ`). Gabriel Pretus (2013), in one of the few books dealing with foreign humanitarian help during the Civil War, does not mention Oliva, nor does he mention, in any accurate way, the Maternity of Elna, located in Southern France near the concentration camps for refugees after the Republican 'Retirada', a place for mothers and babies which was set up by Swiss aid under the direction of Elisabeth Eidenbenz (Montellà 2016). Throughout his book, Pretus seems primarily interested in proving that Franco never rejected foreign aid. Farah Mendlesohn (2002) does not mention Oliva either, but her focus is on the aid provided by British and American Quakers.

individuals who supported the democratically elected Republican Government.[3] However, the most effective and generous contribution to Oliva's determination to help child refugees at the time came from the humanitarian aid provided by Norwegian left-wing and socially-minded intellectuals and politicians, who were unhappy with their Government's neutrality vis-à-vis the Spanish Civil War.

Rescued by members of the International Brigades (Morell 2011, 86), Cristobalina probably arrived as an evacuee at the Fridtjof Nansen Children's Hospital in January of 1938, when it had just been opened. Her arrival coincided with the fighting between the troops loyal to the Second Republic and the Fascist rebels in and around the city of Teruel, where a sector of the frontline was located between 15 December 1937 and 20 February 1938 (Thomas 1990, 788-93). She remembers staying for several days in the humid cellar of a convent in Teruel, where children would die every night, while the nuns occupied more salubrious parts of the building, and the horrific journey to Oliva trying to dodge the bombs. Cristobalina had been born into a peasant family from the Aragonese village of Villar del Cobo, in Teruel province. When their father died of pneumonia in 1934, and her mother, Manuela, became ill and could not take care of her children, Cristobalina and her brother Ernesto were sent to an orphanage in the town of Teruel. Cristobalina and Ernesto were the two middle children. They remained together until the evacuation in January 1938, when she was sent to Oliva, and he stayed in Teruel. Later on, he was sent to a hospice in Manises (Valencia). The eldest, Ángel, who was nine at the time, was placed with some relatives and eventually would go back home, helping his mother to take care of the land they owned. Two baby twin sisters, Fe and Clemencia, were placed in the care of a local wet nurse. Sadly, Fe died. After the war, Manuela "made it her life project to bring her children together once more" (Movin 2010, 102). It would not to be an easy task: the outcome of the Civil War and the outbreak of the Second World War (1939-1945) were to complicate matters in unexpected ways.

3 Morell (2011, 35-82) gives a wealth of information on the five children's colonies which were established in Oliva during the Civil War, the activities of the children hosted in them, the difficulties in making them financially viable, and the progressive thinking which inspired teachers and workers responsible for the colonies. He devotes especial attention to the Fridtjof Nansen Hospital, the doctor who run it, Pedro de Alcántara Martínez, later persecuted and blacklisted by Franco, and the person who set it up in the first place, the Norwegian pacifist Nini Haslund, representative of the Norwegian Aid Committee and the Office International pour l'Enfant (Morell 2011, 83-112). For the history of Oliva during the Second Republic, the Civil War and the subsequent Francoist repression, see the excellent `http://www.elscaminsdelamemoria.com/camins-memoria/`.

INVITATION

Det ville glæde os meget at se dig til

Nytårskur og åbning af
Eva Kochs videoinstallation VILLAR

Lørdag den 11. januar kl. 16

Der vil være taler ved museumsdirektør Andrea Rygg Karberg og kunstneren Eva Koch.

Vi byder på et glas bobler til alle og ser frem til sammen at markere et nyt års begyndelse.

Tak til Beckett-Fonden.

Med venlig hilsen
Nivaagaards Malerisamling
Gammel Strandvej 2, 2990 Nivå
49 14 10 17
www.nivaagaard.dk

Figure 1
Invitation to Eva Koch's *Villar* video-installation in the Nivaagaards Malerisamling (Copenhagen) in January-April 2016. The photograph of Cristobalina is a still from *Hjelp Spania*, a film made by Walter Reuter in Oliva during the Spanish Civil War

In the photograph, a still from *Hjelp Spania!*, that proves the medium's "abilities to *frame*, *freeze*, and *fix* its objects" (Lury 1998, 3; italics in the original), Cristobalina's face is captivating. It does not betray the hardship she had endured up until that moment, escaping bombardments, hunger and fear in her native Aragon before arriving at the Oliva safe haven in the middle of the war. It appears in flyers and catalogues for the exhibitions[4] of the Danish artist and sculptor

4 The following are the exhibitions of *Villar* and *Villar – Los hijos de Manuela* so far: 2001: Tensta Konstall, Stockholm, Sweden; 2001: Project Room, Galleria Filomena Soares, Lisbon, Portugal; 2002: X-rummet, Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen, Denmark; 2003: Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen, Norway; 2003: Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea, 11 April-20 June, Santiago de Compostela, Spain; 2003: Museo de Teruel, 25 July-14 September, Teruel, Spain;

Eva Koch's visual works[5] based on the war and post-war experiences of her mother, the Cristobalina of the photograph, and her family: *Villar*, an interactive video installation for six projectors (2001), and *Villar – Los hijos de Manuela* (Manuela's Children), an interactive visual art documentary for single users (initially on DVD form, now to be watched on a media player) (2001). In their oral and visual textualization of the past, historical discourses and personal stories are interwoven in both representational formats. They present the family members reminiscing about what they went through during the Civil War and afterwards, as well as old and current images of Villar del Cobo, photographs of family members at different points in time, contemporary and historical material, including images of the children hosted in the Fridtjof Nansen Hospital, like Cristobalina herself, from *Hjelp Spania!*, and short clips from old reels of the Civil War fighting. The main dissimilarities between these two works are to be found in their interaction with the viewers: the video-installation images are activated by sensors on the ceiling, marked on the floor in front of each screen, which viewers trigger when approaching the images. They watch and listen to the accounts being performed on the screens, and they move around from one screen to another as each focuses on the story and the memories of one member of Cristobalina's family, herself included, now as Chris. When the sensors are triggered by more than two viewers, all six projections become syncronized and scenes from the family life can be seen simultaneously, as if viewers were 'there'. A sensor installed in the middle of the room, when activated, offers a syncronized vision of the village from 'outside', as it were, from the perspective a tourist might have. The single-user version of *Villar – Los hijos de Manuela* has a menu that enables viewers to listen to every performance in succession, or to go from one to another as they please at specific points of contact, so that the recollections can be compared and contrasted.

2003: Venice Biennale, Arsenale, Venice, Italy; 2004: Museo Pablo Serrano, Zaragoza, Spain; 2018: CAB, Centro de Arte Burgos, Spain; 2020: Nivaagaards Malerisamling, 12 January-19 April, Copenhagen, Denmark; 2021: Statens Museum for Kunst, The National Gallery of Denmark at Jutland, Doverodde, Thy (25 March-24 October, and on permanent exhibition afterwards; https://www.smk.dk/en/).

5 Visit Eva Koch's website (https://evakoch.net) to see the length and the breadth of her outstanding artistic production as a visual artist and sculptor. Mai Misfeldt (1998, 6) writes: "Eva Koch's works are distributed almost equally between exhibitions and works in public spaces in an uninterrupted sequence that integrates the experiences gained from project to project. […] No matter whether she chooses sculptures, sound or video as her medium, Eva Koch's practice is characterised by a concentration on a small number of elements, achieving a balance that unites simplicity and economy of form with a complex and universal content. The works are site-specific, installed so that they relate actively with the space around them, often with an interactive dimension". Amongst other works, she has designed sculptures for children to play in the centre of Copenhagen. I will come back to some of her works which can be linked to her *Villar* project.

> Eva Koch describes the installation itself as the 'horizontal', while the [single user] is the 'vertical' version. By this she means that where the meeting with the six simultaneous projections of the installation will typically give the viewer a physical sense of being present in Villar del Cobo and being surrounded by the drama's primary actors, the [single user] affords the possibility of looking into each individual narrative in depth. (Movin 2010, 104)

If the video-installation format provides a more public experience, on the single-user version it is the privacy of the viewing what prevails, while both supplement the personal narratives with old photographs illustrating what is being referred to, so that viewers can link events and private memories meaningfully. The interactive documentary material of both formats acquaints viewers with the many layers of Cristobalina's experiences, and those of her family, including testimonies, sub-narratives, and present-day reflections, always shown with an awareness that experiences are as genuine as the stories constructed about them may be conflicting.

The photograph of Cristobalina, with the powerful immediacy of her image, lays bare the interdependent relationship between subject and context, and suggests the blurring of boundaries between the private and the social as it goes from personal experience to collective history. It also conveys the strength of the body as a signifier for resilience in a challenging social and historical circumstance. The image does not belong to the tradition of family portrait photography: the children wear some sort of uniform, an indication of the non-silent background, or, as Marianne Hirsh would put it, an example of how "history […] refuses to remain in the background or outside the text" (1997, 12). The photograph instantiates the bodies of the three children, with their short, well-cared for hair (a must, given the risk of getting lice at the time), and their contented faces, as it captures a moment of safety in the middle of the war, with food on the table. We, the current viewers, know it is a lull, a technologically preserved precious moment, and indeed a precarious one, taking place in the middle of extreme brutality, as illustrated by the images of the fighting interspersed in *Villar*. Cristobalina and her friends also remind viewers of the plight of children displaced by war, and the vital importance during the Spanish Civil War (as in the armed conflicts of today)[6] of the help delivered by the associations of foreign relief workers who looked after displaced and orphaned children, a humanitarian intervention that in the case of Cristobalina proved to be life changing. It was in the Oliva Children's

6 Morell (2011, 116) suggests that this type of internationalist relief work to help the civil population began during the Spanish Civil War. This is also Pretus's contention, as Helen Graham (2013, xiv) highlights in her "Preface" to his book.

Hospital where she met Nini Haslund Gleditsch, a pacifist and a member of the Norwegian intellectual left-wing party Mot Dag (Towards Day), who had gone to Republican Spain as an aid worker, and who played an essential role in setting up the Fridtjof Nansen Hospital. Towards the end of the war, Nini managed to adopt Cristobalina and take her to Norway. The adoption process was problematic: Nini tried but was unable to contact Cristobalina's close relatives, such as her mother, as she was on the other side of the divide, and, at the time, nobody else from the family had claimed to be the girl's relative. Finally, in Sagunto, near Valencia, Nini located Cristobalina's grandmother on her father's side. Given the chaos in Spain at the end of the war, the old lady signed the adoption papers probably thinking that it would be the best possible outcome for the child. That decision, however, was to create a rift between the two sides of the family that would never heal. Manuela did not forgive the Sagunto relatives, and she always lived under the impression that, notwithstanding their claims to the contrary, they had sold Cristobalina to "the Norwegian lady" (Movin 2010, 104). Cristobalina was happy to go with Nini, but she insisted that she had a brother, hence Nini looked for Ernesto. Nini found the boy and helped him with clothing and food as she was appalled to see how neglected he had been. She tried to adopt him as well, but she was unsuccessful as Ernesto was deemed too weak to travel. When Nini, her husband, and Cristobalina departed from Oliva, Nini left their details in Norway with the Sagunto relatives in case Cristobalina's close family wanted to get in touch.

In the photograph, Cristobalina's expression, which I would describe as one of curiosity and cautious happiness, easily evokes her subsequent attitude to life, positive and courageous. As she told her daughter Eva only recently,[7] although she was undoubtedly affected by the war, she never felt traumatised by being taken away. Her refusal to regard herself as a trauma survivor is revealing of her personality, and indicates that the trauma trope can universalize experience and obliterate an individual's circumstance.[8] As a child, she could hardly miss what she had barely had, having been separated from her family well before the outbreak of the war. Her life, however, was to be shaped by the events that originated before and around the time of her stay at the Fridtjof Nansen Hospital. Having returned to Norway, when the Second World War started, Nini Haslund and her husband Kristian Gleditsch (who had been the Secretary of the Norwegian Aid Committee during the Spanish Civil War), followed the

7 Eva Koch has kindly filled in many gaps in her personal information (emails dated 06-10-2020, 02-11-2020, 09-12-2020, and 11-02-2021).

8 As suggested by Joanna Burke in a research seminar entitled "Why War: Reflections on the Twentieth Century", presented at Cardiff University on 26 April 2007.

Norwegian Government into exile. They held key posts in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and were tasked with transporting the Norwegian gold to Great Britain. Consequently, Cristobalina/Chris went to live with Kristian's siblings: Ellen, Adler and Liv Gleditsch. They took care of the girl and gave her the stability and affection she needed during the years of the Second World War. She remembers her loving aunts and uncle. At this juncture, Cristobalina/Chris was facing huge changes in her life, acquiring a new language and a hybrid identity[9] which arguably made her belong to two countries and, at least at the beginning, to none: a true nomad,[10] a child of troubled times, tossed around in the middle of the violent and devastating institution of war.

Here, it would be appropriate to bring into the conversation Rosi Braidotti's figuration of "nomadism" as the "critical consciousness that resists into settling socially coded modes of thought and behaviour" (Braidotti 1994, 5). Braidotti blends the physical movement of the nomad with a philosophical stance that favours a fluid conceptualization of identity and the embodiment of subjectivity. In *Villar*, Braidotti's "nomadism" applies to a degree. It is not a choice that as an eight-year old child Cristobalina could have made: she was thrown into it, even though she embraced her hybrid identity with an open mind and instinctive courage. The same could be said about 'Los niños de Rusia', or similar groups of children who were sent abroad by their parents to protect them from the ravages of the Civil War, like the so-called 'Los niños de Morelia'. The name comes from the Mexican city that welcomed 468 Spanish children who arrived in Mexico on 7 June 1937. As Mexico was blacklisted by Franco as a country that helped the Republican side during and after the war, many of these children never had the chance to go back to Spain. There is a plethora of YouTube videos on their experience. Some images are from films made in Mexico at the time, some from films that were made much

9 Julian Daniel Gutiérrez-Albilla (2011, 140) refers to Derrida's "undecidables" when discussing Jaime Camino's *Los niños de Rusia*, a documentary on the children evacuated to Russia during the Spanish Civil War. These children were neither Russian nor Spanish, but to some extent they were both. Derrida's "indecidability" questions dualisms as they do not conform neatly to the opposing elements of a dichotomy. The same can be said of Cristobalina/Chris's hybrid identity when trying to adapt herself to the new circumstances, something she always did with great sensitivity.

10 Eva Koch has a work entitled precisely *NoMadLand* (1998), a sound installation where the whispering of human voices interacts with the viewers. In the summer of 1998, it was installed in a Copenhagen supermarket and its title plays with words in a meaningful way, ultimately referring to Denmark as a land of immigrants. As Mai Misfeldt (1998, 30) points out: "No mad land or nomad land? […] why this conjuration? And when one has squeezed one's way out of the absorbent mass of jostling bodies inside, the fragile human voice insisting on civilization as opposed to the oblivious inferno from which one had just emerged seemed sinister, almost prophetic. A nomad land? Well, even though Denmark is situated where it has always been, its inhabitants arrived here in great migratory streams, primarily from the south".

later, as a small number of these children went back to their places of origin decades later and were interviewed by different TV channels. They were grateful to President Lázaro Cárdenas for making Manuel Azaña, the Spanish Prime Minister, the offer to host them. The Morelia children also embraced a hybrid identity. As adults, they felt genuine indebtedness to Mexico, but, in some cases, it was apparent that the strangeness of being displaced had lasted a long time: they missed their families and resented having been sent abroad by parents who wanted to keep them out of harm's way. They considered themselves "un capítulo olvidado de la historia oscura de España" (a forgotten chapter of Spain's dark history), as one of them put it in a 2005 documentary made by the Master of Periodismo, BCNY.[11] Interviewed for the TV3 programme *La nit al dia* on 30 April 2008, in a statement that seems like an attempt to face up to the complexities of their identity, two of them, Jordi Llop and Josep Gallur, claimed to feel, above all, "morelianos", and their best memories to be those of mutual companionship.[12] At the end of the Civil War, Mexico continued to welcome Republican refugees. As for many other Republican refugees in France and elsewhere in Europe and America, their "nomadism" was not entirely the happy place that Braidotti conceptualizes, but it was a way of learning that their identity, however melancholic – in a Freudian sense – had to be flexible enough for them to adapt to another culture even though they were mourning (Freud 1991) the place they had left behind, in many cases for ever.

After the Second World War, Nini Haslund and Kristian Gleditsch went back to Norway with their son, Nils Petter, who had been born in Great Britain. Chris's relationship with her adoptive mother became rather tense as Nini was frustrated that only men were offered jobs, even though she had been as active as any of them during the Second World War. Chris went on to study interior architecture in Copenhagen and became an independent young girl. Later, she married Jens Koch, and they had three children – Eva is the eldest – and in 1958 moved to the Faroe Islands, where Jens took office as a judge. As we shall see, it was there she met someone who was to be instrumental in her reunion with the Villar del Cobo family in 1962.

In 1996, Eva Koch created one of her more innovative works, ultimately related to the *Villar* project: a visual biography of Nini Haslund Gleditsch, *Nini – Glimpses of a Woman's Life*.[13] It consisted of nine

11 "Los niños de Morelia: el regreso olvidado" (The Morelia Children: The Forgotten Return). See it on: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eckJbIMjFHs.

12 A theatrical production on the Morelia children was being shown at the time at the Sala Muntaner in Barcelona. See the interview on: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v+Psh47g_Doo.

13 See a description on https://evakoch.net/works/nini-2/.

billboards exhibited in subway stations, first in Copenhagen's Ishøj Station, and later, in 1997, in Oslo's Stortingets and Grønlansdtorget Stations. The billboards had been donated by the railways DSB for artistic use coinciding with Copenhagen's stint as the World's Cultural City, and were shown in rotation, changing every two weeks during a period of six months. Nini, who died in July 1996, was still alive and very cooperative as the billboards were being put together. They were collages displaying photographs of Nini at different times of her life as well as documents of her public persona with excerpts from her memoir added to them. Eva had spoken to her about the project and Nini suggested the inclusion of these excerpts, beginning with the title of her memoir itself. It was taken from her favourite poem by Norwegian poet Inger Hagerup, *Vær utålmodig Menneske!* (Human, Be Impatient!). The title chimes with Nini's lifelong commitment to peace activism. Nini also wrote words specifically for the billboards which were evocative of her personality. As regards to her time in Spain, she wrote: "Life becomes much easier when you have something to fight for…". Nini's own handwriting was reproduced on other billboards: "Contact with people, also over generations, means a lot to me".[14] The billboards were an outdoors exhibition which, ironically, appropriated public space by using advertising locations for purposes other than consumerism. In Eva Koch's visual biography of Nini, Henri Lefebvre's "social space" (2000, 68-168), which is not atemporal or metaphysical, but "produced and reproduced in connection with the forces of production (and with the relations of production)" (2000, 77), acquires a further level of complexity as it is the location to celebrate the life of a pacifist committed to progressive leftist politics, and not just any pacifist, but a woman pacifist, making this appropriation of social space much more significant because gender comes into the equation. Eventually Nini found a job at the Norwegian Statistisk Centralbyrå (Central Statistics Office) in Oslo and worked there for the rest of her life. She always remained politically active: she was, among other things, an inspirational member of the movement Grandmothers for Peace who met every Friday in front of the Norwegian Parliament.

"Memory dislikes motion, preferring to hold things still", writes John Banville in *The Sea* (2005, 221). Indeed, Cristobalina's *instantània* is an excellent point of entry into the dynamics of memory that Eva Koch elicits in her visual works in order to deal with the complexities of her mother's memories, and those of her family. In his exploration into the way photographic practices inter-relate knowledge, power, and the body, from mostly a Foucauldian perspective, Suren Lalvani argues that the task of Foucault's genealogy is "to ex-

14 I am grateful to Eva Koch for an email dated 03-11-2020, in which she kindly provided information about her *Nini* project and translated Nini's words from Norwegian into English.

pose a body totally imprinted in history" (1996, 32). Cristobalina's photograph constitutes a prime example of this. Lalvani also quotes Judith Butler to the effect that

> what is required [...] is "a genealogical account of the demarcation of the body as such as a signifying practice," without resorting to the language of a prediscursive body and its disruptions, [an account that] requires seeing the body not as a "being" but as a culturally constructed variable of different permeability. (1996, 33)

Cristobalina and her friends are therefore to be regarded as porous bodies, since

> [p]hotography operates in disciplinary discourses to arrest, isolate and instantiate the body in relation to the axes of time and space; it enables the decipherment, delineation, and analysis of the body's surface. (1996, 34)

Divisions between inside and outside, public and private, are permeable and regulated by historical and political discourses. In the photograph, Cristobalina's gaze, directed to whoever is looking at her, ourselves included, engages the viewers with a gripping story which is part of the Republican history of the Spanish Civil War.

Cristobalina's photograph can also be read from the perspective of Marianne Hirsch's "postmemory", the memory of those who live their lives under the shadow of challenging or traumatic circumstances experienced by a previous generation; the memory of those who were the recipients of painful family memories. Hirsch coined the term "postmemory" to distinguish it "from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection". She writes:

> Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation. (Hirsch 1997, 22)

As an artist who grew up listening to haunting "narratives that preceded [her] birth" (Hirsch 1997, 22) and were to shape her artistic output when reconstructing the history and the stories of her family during and after the Civil War through the *Villar* project, Eva Koch is a fitting example of a postmemory subject.[15] Her "postmemorial work", in Hirsch's words,

15 Hirsch develops the notion of "postmemory" in relation to children of Holocaust survivors, but she intimates that the concept can be applied to other people who have inherited family memories of collective traumatic events and experiences (1997, 22; 2012, 18-19).

> strives to reactivate and re-embody more distant political and cultural memorial structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression. (2012, 33)

The photograph from *Hjelp Spania!* of Cristobalina (not yet Chris, that is, not yet Eva Koch's mother, just a younger version of her) that Eva chooses to be the cover image for the *Villar* world she has constructed, is highly significant and, like the other photographs of the family and the village that will be part of this world,

> [t]hey affirm the past's existence and, in their flat two-dimensionality, they signal its unbrigdeable distance. (Hirsch 1997, 23)

In effect, they are "fragmentary remnants that shape the cultural work of postmemory" (Hirsch 2012, 37-8).

2 *Villar* (2001), and *Villar – Los hijos de Manuela* (2001)

> Memory is history seen through affect.
> (Winter 2012, 12)

In 2000, after years of talking with Chris about her war experiences and having overcome her mother's reluctance to expose her family to public scrutiny, Eva Koch started filming in Villar del Cobo what were to become two highly related, interactive visual art works, among the most important of her career. Previously, Chris had not wanted to inflict upon her newly rediscovered relatives any publicity about her story or her 1962 reunion with them, which, in any case, had found its way into the Spanish newspapers and attracted the interest of the populist ('yellow') press. Chris's siblings encouraged Eva to carry out her project, and finally her mother was happy for her to do it. In the two *Villar* representational formats, Eva Koch succeeds in communicating an "affiliative relation" to her mother, and to her family, which is "nonappropriative" (Hirsch 2012, 99) in that she does not call attention to herself as the author of the work, and daughter of its main subject, but lets the members of her family speak freely in front of her camera and be the protagonists.

The video-installation *Villar* is made up of six big screens, hence it requires a big room to be exhibited. Each screen focuses on the account of one member of Cristobalina's family: herself, as Chris; her brother Ángel; her brother Ernesto; her sister Clemencia; her niece Isabelica (Ángel's daughter); and Teresa, an old aunt, their fa-

ther's sister, who had been present at the signature of Cristobalina's adoption papers, and whom Eva met near Sagunto when she was 103 years old and ill with skin cancer on her face. Each of them tells their own personal memories of the Civil War period and its aftermath, how they survived the hard times, and how the disappearance of Cristobalina impacted their lives, that is, how Cristobalina's presence *in absentia* cast a long shadow over their existences, in particular that of Manuela, who never stopped trying to find her daughter, and of Clemencia, who was a baby when Cristobalina left Villar del Cobo, but whose prospects of a life outside the village were thwarted by being the only female daughter remaining in Villar: she was expected to stay and take care of her mother, as Clemencia herself suggests in her performance, not without some resentment.

Each narrative is nuanced by the others, but there is never any attempt to cancel any of the accounts, or to hide uncomfortable subnarratives. In both *Villar* formats, through a process of individual remembrance and perception, the history of the Spanish Civil War and its aftermath becomes personal, while at the same time acquiring a symbolic collective meaning: the history / stories of the members of an ordinary family from one of the areas ravaged by the conflict echo the plight of many families and many individuals, as the reunion of Chris and her Spanish family in 1962 will prove in documented, visual fashion through the photographs taken by Chris's husband, interspersed with the personal accounts among other visual material. The six individual voices narrating events that affected each of them as well as, inevitably, the family as a whole during a unique period of time, approach history by avoiding the pitfalls of an exclusive, one-sided discourse, or those of a winner's discourse. On the contrary, crucial events in each person's formation as an individual subject are highlighted by putting all their accounts together and letting viewers decide how to read and contrast them. This is a social tapestry of mnemonic voices from a family group that refuses to offer a non-contradictory continuity, or a set of apparently coherent narratives. The individual recollections reinforce each other as part of a group: the power of memory comes from the collective, but every member produces a unique discourse. As Lewis A. Coser says:

> It is, of course, individuals who remember, not groups or institutions, but these individuals, being located in a specific group context, draw on that context to remember or recreate the past. (1992, 22)

In *Villar*, they constantly refer to one another, so that the collective portrait is foregrounded: "autobiographical memory is always rooted in other people" (Coser 1992, 24). Moreover, their narratives are structurally connected to each other (explicitly so on the single-user

version), hence, what prevails is the family's choral memory: by continuously demanding the agency of the viewer, the technical and spatial mechanisms of both versions, their visual interactive formats are central to this successful pluri-dimensional rendering of the past and its non-linear narrative(s). By not offering a single version of events to the viewers, *Villar* expands the social impact of its politics of memory.

At the same time, we cannot forget that the representation of the past, verbally or otherwise, is merely a representation that cannot be taken to be the past itself, that it is influenced by the present to which the memories are brought back. Maurice Halbwachs states that:

> the mind reconstructs its memories under the pressure of society. Is it not strange that society causes the mind to transfigure the past to the point of yearning for it? […] people know that the past no longer exists, so that they are obliged to adjust to the only real world - the one in which they now live. (1992, 51)

However, the fact that the past is not preserved, but rather reconstructed on the basis of the present (Halbwachs 1992, 40), does not mean that the characters in *Villar* misremember, however unintentionally. What Halbwachs means is that by evoking the past from the present one can never replicate it, that the past is always conditioned by the present. In his introduction to Halbwachs's *On Collective Memory*, Lewis A. Coser writes that Halbwachs

> was without doubt the first sociologist who stressed that our conceptions of the past are affected by the mental images we employ to solve present problems, so that collective memory is essentially a reconstruction of the past in the light of the present. (Coser 1992, 34)

That is why, for Halbwachs, "the past is a social construction mainly, if not wholly, shaped by the concerns of the present" (Coser 1992, 25). Halbwachs's work helps us to read *Villar* as an example of collective memory originating from, but no limited to, individual memories:

> collective frameworks of memory are not constructed after the fact by the combination of individual recollections; nor are they empty forms where recollections coming from elsewhere would insert themselves. Collective frameworks are, to the contrary, precisely the instruments used by the collective memory to reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord, in each epoch, with the predominant thoughts of the society. (Halbwachs 1992, 40)

If, according to Halbwachs (1992, 40), "individuals always use social frameworks when they remember", it also makes sense to see *Villar* as part of the so-called memory boom that became so important at

the turn of the twenty-first century in humanities disciplines. Within the cultural studies paradigm, they showed an exceptional interest in the complexities of historical memory.[16] It was a consequence of a wider social and political awareness which prompted the rescuing from oblivion of many experiences and tragedies that had been silenced for years. Spain was a case in point due to the lasting effect of Franco's politics of retribution (Graham 2004), both during and after the Civil War. In Spain, the reluctance to confront the country's bloody past under the dictatorship persisted, to a large extent, during the so-called Transition to democracy years, and well into the twenty-first century. Bodies of executed political enemies buried in forests, by roadsides, and in other locations specifically chosen to humiliate them, such as the entry to cemeteries so that people would thread on the mass graves of murdered Republicans, are still being unearthed.[17]

In *Villar*, the family's recollections are obviously traumatic. All of its members are willing to talk, but they recollect in ways that are not always pain-free – the most composed of all performances is Chris's. For slightly different reasons and with varying intensity, their accounts are like pieces of an occasionally disjointed jigsaw that complement each other, but do not always fit in neatly. However, Chris's refusal to define herself as a trauma survivor, and their readiness to share their memories, bring to mind Ruth Leys's critique of the conceptualization of trauma developed by scholars associated with the Yale School, Cathy Caruth (1995; 1996) being the best known. From a neurobiological perspective, Caruth and others claim that in PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) trauma is unrepresentable on the grounds that after the traumatogenic event(s) the conscience and memory mechanisms are temporally destroyed. Leys does not accept their view that the images, body sensations and emotions remembered cannot be verbalized and finds their examples unconvincing because these scholars see "pictures and visual images as if they were inherently non-symbolic, which is of course absurd" (Leys 2000, 249), and because they oppose images to verbal representation. Leys considers trauma's socio-historic

16 In 2000, Kerwin L. Klein wrote about "the memory industry [which] ranges from the museum trade to the legal battles over repressed memory and on to the market for academic books and articles that invoke *memory* as a key word", and related it to the 1970s interest in "autobiographical literature, family genealogy, and museums". He argued that in the 1980s "two literary events: Yosef Yerushalmi's *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (1982) and Pierre Nora's 'Between Memory and History', the introduction to an anthology, *Lieux de mémoire* (1982)" (Klein 2000, 127) were central to its expansion.

17 There are numerous publications about this subject. See, among others, Ferrándiz 2006 and 2016; Torres 2007; "La Generalitat exhumarà les fosses 21 i 126 del cementeri de Paterna per a recuperar les restes de 316 persones. Serà l'exhumació més nombrosa de víctimes del franquisme que s'ha fet fins ara", *Vilaweb*, 14 December 2020 (https://www.vilaweb.cat/noticies/la-generalitat-exhumara--les-fosses-21-i-126-del-cementeri-de-paterna-per-a-recuperar-les-restes-de-316-persones/).

background a key factor, and questions the notion of PTSD as "a timeless diagnosis" (2000, 3). Moreover, even if trauma may initially be resistant to narrative, in due course, linguistic articulation is possible. Leys's approach is useful to analyse *Villar*'s verbalization of the family's memories. After more than sixty years, they are eager to remember and talk. By virtue of their performances, they textualize their memories and perceptions. Despite the collective background, they do it individually, as the very structure of Eva Koch's work underlines by presenting their individual performances on individual screens.

Jay Winter indicates that the "performative nature of remembrance" is "particularly marked by the act of listening, of attending to the voices of victims and survivors" (2012, 20), which is the feature that defines the whole *Villar* project being as it is so geared towards the interaction with its viewers.

Winter, acknowledging Halbwachs's insight into the social framework of remembrance, discusses the performative condition of collective memory:

> Memory performed is at the heart of collective memory. When individuals and groups express or embody or interpret or repeat a script about the past, they galvanize the ties that bind groups together and deposit additional memory traces about the past in their own minds. […] the performance of memory is both a mnemonic device and a way in which individual memories are relived, revived, and refashioned. Through performance, we move from the individual to the group to the individual. (Winter 2012, 11)

The mnemonic voices performing their past in Eva Koch's works are pieces of a collage.[18] As Jo Labanyi summarizes, mostly in relation to *One-Way Street* (Benjamin 2009, 46-115),

> Benjamin's historian is a collector or bricoleur […] in the sense that he or she […] looks for the significance in fragments and details normally overlooked, [and] reassembles the fragments in a new "constellation" that permits the articulation of that which has been left unvoiced. (Labanyi 2000, 69)

18 In this context, collage is a word that evokes Benjamin's concept of the historian as bricoleur, but here I also borrow it from Jay Winter: "Stories about the past that we remember are collages, complex and shifting mixtures of narratives, some of which arise from historical writing and history as visualized in a dizzying variety of films, plays, museums and websites. Approaching the intersection of history and memory through the performative turn highlights what they have in common and how important it is to avoid rigid bifurcation between the two" (2012, 12). In *Villar*, this multidirectional approach is less wide-ranging, as it is limited to memories of the family members, but not less complex or multifaceted, and there is no question that it can be described as a collage of stories.

Indeed, even if the *Villar* voices are not the usual examples of popular culture associated with Benjamin's "debris left by the past", they had certainly been silent before they became protagonists of the "montage" that Eva Koch makes possible through her work.

The *Villar* project's approach to history can also be related to Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1992, 245-55). In this essay, Benjamin distinguishes between "historicism", conservative and reactionary, and "historical materialism", progressive and left-wing inspired, but not following Marxism to the letter in envisaging a revolutionary future. Benjamin identifies "historicism" with an approach to history which grasps and holds the past so that a fix and totalitarian interpretation of it prevails, an interpretation that "gives the 'eternal' image of the past" (Benjamin 1992, 254), a view that favours history's winners. Instead, Benjamin favours "historical materialism", which makes it feasible "to bring the past to memory", in David Eng's and David Kazanjian's expression in their book on mourning (2003, 1-2). It implies an open and active relationship with the past which continuously engages with loss and its remnants, as

> a historical materialist views […] with cautious detachment […] the cultural treasures [whose] origin he cannot contemplate without horror. […] There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. (Benjamin 1992, 248)

Eva Koch's work responds to Benjamin's sober approach to history. *Villar* does not answer the viewers' queries by offering tales of the good and the bad, or by proposing joyous closures that simplistically resolve the conflicts uncovered by the individual performances of remembrance. *Villar* does not construct Cristobalina/Chris's story as one of success, even though it could have been fashioned as such if the focus had been on Nini, Kristian, and his siblings' efforts to rescue a child from the grim prospect of ending up in a Francoist institution for orphaned children. Nor does it celebrate Chris's reunion with her family in her birth town as a happy ending to a separation caused by the Civil War.[19] Quite the opposite: while never los-

19 When some of the children from Republican Spain who had been evacuated to Russia during the Civil War returned to Spain, Franco presented the evacuation to save these children from the ravages of war as a "robbery", and used it as propaganda: "La España rota y roja te arrebató a ese hijo. La España de Franco te lo devuelve. Ellos y nosotros cumplimos nuestros designios diversos. Ellos destruyen la familia. Nosotros edificamos la sociedad sobre ella" (Red and broken Spain stole your son. Franco's Spain returns him to you. We have different purposes to them. They destroy the family. We build society upon it) (T. Constenla, "Historias bélicas de niños viejos", *El País*, 27 March 2009, http://elpais.com/diario/2009/03/27/cultura/1238108401_850215.html). However, those who went back to Spain were seen with suspicion and spied on, and the tone of this political message was not reflected in the way they were treated.

ing sight of the extraordinary good fortune of the family who finally found each other, *Villar* focuses on the conflicts, the pain, the endurance, the absences, the long-lasting effects of the events that affected them all so profoundly during the war and afterwards. Eva Koch does not romanticize her family's history and stories of the Civil War and their consequences. She respects their emotional excavation into their past, expressed in various ways, but, even as she privatizes history's impact on their lives, she does not depoliticize it, or beautify it at all. *Villar* is fundamentally an exercise in historical memory: by letting the members of her family relate their experiences, Eva Koch brings the past into the present and, by putting these memories in the public domain, she rescues them from oblivion. Her work encourages social responsibility beyond hegemonic conceptualizations of history and the self.

3 The *Villar* Project: A Tapestry of Individual Textualizations of the Past as a Social and Political Construction

> Justice is not simply a feeling. And feelings are not always just. But justice involves feelings, which move us across the surfaces of the world, creating ripples in the intimate contours of our lives. (Ahmed 2014, 202)

Even though *Villar* prioritizes the links between each family member's constructions of the past, and the technical possibilities of the single-user version allow spectators to go from one performance to another at specific points of contact, for the purposes of the analysis I shall consider each performance individually, following the sequence in which they are presented on the single user version. I will also explore some of the points of contact, particularly those related to the 1962 reunion in Villar del Cobo. "Memory appeals to us partly because it projects an immediacy we feel has been lost from history", writes Kerwin Klein (2000, 129) in relation to the memory v. history debate, as

> memory's notorious vagaries become its strengths, and the acknowledgement of what some historians have taken as evidence of memory's inferiority to 'real' history emerges as therapeutic if not revolutionary potential. (2000, 138)

Villar constitutes a fine example of the power of memory as an invaluable partner to 'real' history.

3.1 Isabelica

The first to appear is Isabelica Martínez Simón, Ángel's daughter, who talks about her grandmother in a brief introduction which is as respectful to Manuela as her father's and her aunt Clemencia's performances. She insists that Manuela's goal in life was to re-group all her children and she did not stop trying until she saw them all together in Villar del Cobo. Her narrative is a reminder of how, according to Halbwachs, family feelings function:

> no matter how spontaneous they are, [feelings of affection towards those around us] follow paths laid out in advance and completely independent of us, which society has been careful to point in the right direction. (Halbwachs 1992, 56)

Isabelica then succinctly explains that conditions of life in the village have improved over the years, but laments that the lack of industry and an economy based solely on rural activities is driving young people away.

3.2 Ángel

Ángel's account begins by evoking his mother Manuela and the problems they faced after his father's death in 1934, when they had no money, were evicted from the house they had been renting, and had to go and live with relatives in one of village's poorest houses. He talks about the time of the Civil War and beyond, being forced to grow up quickly and, as a young teenager, helping his mother to survive. One of the most poignant moments of his recollection has to do with an episode that badly affected him: as a teenager, he had to claim back a piece of land that was rightly theirs but had been appropriated by an uncle who took advantage of their precarious situation. The long overdue resolution of the feud came about thanks to the intervention of his grandmother on his mother's side, but not without consequences, as his uncle was never happy to have given up the land and did not hide it. He is still overwhelmed by this episode from the past: the fact that an uncle of his acted so selfishly in the circumstances they found themselves is too unpleasant a memory to put into words, and yet he talks about it, even though his feelings of sadness and disgust run deep. In moments like this, the blending of past and present – the present being conditioned by the past – which takes place throughout the *Villar* project and is achieved in a variety of ways, is made devastatingly clear to the viewer. Emotion is not dismissed as simple sentimentality, but valued, in keeping with current theoretical thinking, as a "category of historical analysis" (Delgado, Fernández, Labanyi 2016, 2). Catherine Lutz

(2007, 19-29) argues that emotions and affections (not always easy to separate) are culturally constructed categories, but Sarah Ahmed is even more precise in her exploration of the politics of emotion: for her, as for many others, emotions are not the reflection of interior psychological states, nor are they just socio-cultural constructions:

> My argument about the cultural politics of emotions is developed not only as a critique of the psychologising and privatisation of emotions, but also as a critique of a model of social structure that neglects the emotional intensities, which allow such structures to be reified as forms of being. (Ahmed 2014, 12).

In Ángel's performance, as well as in all the others, we see that "emotions are inextricably entwined with bodies" (Ahmed 2014, 10), as emotions undermine neat dichotomies such as mind and body, or reason and feeling.

The episode mentioned above, which links the survival of the peasant family to the land they own, and to the role of the eldest son in demanding what he and his mother believed to be Manuela's inheritance from her husband, takes us back to Halbwachs and his deliberations on the family, in particular the peasant family, as a location for collective memory:

> It is […] quite natural that the family and the soil remain closely linked to each other in common thought. Moreover, since the peasantry is fixed in the soil, the representation of a limited piece of land and of the village is etched very early in the mind of its members, with all its particularities, divisions, and the relative position of its houses and the interpretation of its pieces of land. (Halbwachs 1992, 65)

Ángel refers to his mother Manuela very affectionately. He explains that she worked hard, helping him to yoke up the mules and turn the plough in the fields as he was too young to do it by himself; how she worked as the village baker, and he would help her to light the oven fire very early in the morning and call out the village women to bring their bread to be baked. In his words, "one was at the service of the entire village".

Ángel follows a loose chronology and talks about the end of the Civil War and Cristobalina's disappearance, as well as the return of Ernesto who, as a child refugee in Valencia, abandoned to his own devices, had become a wild boy. Ángel tells about Manuela's pain in being unable to be reunited with her daughter Cristobalina, and her attempts to get help from the Norwegian Consulate, and the Red Cross, to no avail. He becomes emotional again when telling a story which epitomizes the misery felt by many in post-Civil War Spain. Shortly after Ernesto

returned, they learnt that in the Valencian village of Dos Aguas there was a girl who might be Cristobalina, so Manuela and Ángel went there hoping for the best. Upon meeting the girl, Manuela realized that she was not her daughter, she did not look like her. Cristobalina had a birth mark on her back and the girl did not. However, the girl insisted that she was her daughter, and pleaded with them not to leave her there. "My mother was going mad", Ángel remarks.

When reflecting on the present time and how well they all have done despite the hardship during the post-war, Ángel mentions her sister by her Spanish name: Cristobalina, although she has been known as Chris for decades. Apropos of the family collective, Halbwachs states that

> first names, even though they have been chosen without taking the subject to which they are applied into consideration, seem to be part of their subject's nature. (1992, 72)

Bearing in mind their relational value within the family structure, not the material sign in itself, he claims that

> [i]f first names help to differentiate the members of the family, it is because they correspond to the group's need to distinguish them for itself and also agree to the principle and means of that distinction. The principle in question is the kinship structure, according to which each member of the family occupies a fixed and irreducible position. (Halbwachs 1992, 72)

Just by uttering a first name, each family member may evoke images and experiences:

> this very possibility is the result of the existence of [the] group, of its persistence and integrity. (Halbwachs 1992, 73)

Cristobalina is not the same person who left the village decades ago, and her life has changed dramatically but, in Ángel's mind, she is still that girl their mother pined for, and calling her Cristobalina does not hint at a refusal to accept the changes in her sister's life, but at an unconscious acknowledgment of the position she had occupied in the family structure for many years. Ernesto and Clemencia also call her sister Cristobalina, and in their accounts it is clear that she has remained the Cristobalina that belonged to the family group during the twenty-four years they had been longing to see her again, a mental landscape that time has not altered, no matter how big the changes in her life have been.

Ángel is again overwhelmed by his emotions when he speaks about Chris's reunion with her family. He recalls the fortuitous encounter be-

tween her, a notary from Teruel and Jens. The notary and his wife were spending their honeymoon on the Faroe Islands and were introduced to Eva's parents by a common acquaintance. By coincidence, that very same week Chris had received a letter from the Red Cross (through Nini) – there may have been many that never reached their destination. Chris told the notary about her Teruel origins and he promised to look into it, which he did upon returning to Spain. This is how the reunion was made possible in 1962. In *Villar*, it is illustrated by a number of photographs taken by Jens Koch. Everybody is in the village square: Chris and her husband, Manuela, as well as all the family, the local authorities, the village priest included, and, most significantly, neighbours from Villar del Cobo, and people from other villages in the area: quite a crowd. These images are extraordinary. Probably, everyone attending the reunion had a Civil War story to tell, personal losses to mourn. The neighbours who wished to participate in the gathering were likely to have their own dead and disappeared, to carry their own ghosts, to engage with their own mourning of Derridean proportions, as they may have been trapped in a "deuil possible qui intériorise en nous l'image, l'idole ou l'idéal de l'autre mort et vivant qu'en nous" (possible mourning which interiorizes in us the image, the idol or the ideal of the dead other alive only inside us) or, alternatively, in a "deuil impossible qui, laissant à l'autre son altérité, en repecte l'éloignement infini" (impossible mourning which, leaving the alterity of the other untouched, respects their infinite estrangement) (Derrida 1988, 29).

And yet, they may have found in the reunion, in the happiness of others, a measure of solace among the devastation caused by the war. Cristobalina and Manuela, presiding over the crowd, may have offered a proxy closure to many who were unrelated to the family, but had experienced the pain brought about by the conflict. This beautiful, collective act of togetherness evokes again Halbwachs's view of memory as a group exercise, and the photographs, so socially relevant, speak for themselves and are steeped in the history of post-Civil War Spain. Nobody cried that first day, says Ángel, but on the following one, when they were celebrating as if attending a wedding, "it looked like a funeral", as everybody gave in to feelings which had been held back for so long. An odd presence at the first reunion is that of an interpreter, as neither Chris nor Jens spoke Spanish, and the rest of the family's only language was Spanish. This mediator, who translated from English into Spanish and vice versa for Chris and Manuela, was arguably one of the factors preventing the encounter from becoming emotional on that very first day, and he added to the strangeness surrounding the communication between the intensely desired daughter, and the recently rediscovered mother.

3.3 Ernesto

Ernesto's performance is that of a man who, as a child, was abandoned by the authorities whose duty it was to look after displaced children like him. His features contrast sharply with the softness of Ángel's face and body. He recalls the women in the Teruel hospice as his surrogate mothers: he missed his mother so much that "each of them was a mother to me, I felt they were all mothers of mine", he says. He recalls that he was separated from Cristobalina during the Battle of Teruel and was sent to the city's seminary, then occupied by Republican soldiers,[20] and he fondly remembers a sergeant who would share with him the little food available: toasted chickpeas, not always well cooked, sugar, and hard-to-eat nougat. When Republican soldiers were forced to withdraw from Teruel, they and children like Ernesto walked towards Rubielos (Teruel), which was still in Republican hands. He talks about children who fell by the roadside and were unable to get up. Eventually, two vans took them to Rubielos. On their arrival they were offered a big paella. They were so hungry that they ate it with their bare hands. From Rubielos, he was transferred to Manises. According to Ernesto, "many children left Teruel, just a few of us arrived in Valencia". He became wilder as the war went on. He and other children would steal oranges from the orchards, even when they were not ripe enough to eat, or they would go to the market, to find food to assuage their hunger, until they were caught by the police and returned to the hospice. His health had never been great, but now he was weaker than ever before. Cristobalina's insistence that she had a brother prompted Nini Haslund Gleditsch to find Ernesto. She helped him with food and clothing, and for a short while they visited him. However, her attempts to take him to Norway with his sister were in vain as he was not deemed fit to travel. Whoever decided to keep Ernesto in Spain was to be responsible for the separation of the two siblings, which lasted until 1962. At the end of the Civil War, he was a rebellious child, and by the time he was found by Manuela's relatives and went back to Teruel, where he was collected by Manuela, he was almost a beggar. Despite everything he had experienced, he always remained loyal to the family. During his stay at the Manises hospice, several couples tried to adopt him, but he always made it clear that he had a family and did not want to be adopted. He would hide when visitors to the hospice were looking for children to adopt. Once he hid in the doghouse where a ferocious dog protected him from being discovered. Halbwachs writes about how "extraordinary" it is

20 Hugh Thomas (1990, 791) mentions the seminary as one of the Teruel buildings occupied by Republican troops since Christmas 1937.

> that families generally succeed in motivating their members to love each other all the time despite separations and distances, that its members spend the major part of their emotional resources within its bosom. (Halbwachs 1992, 57)

And he emphasizes that

> [the] family is capable of finding within itself sufficient strength to overcome the obstacles opposing it. What is more, it can happen that the family transforms obstacles into advantages, that it is fortified by the very resistances encountered externally. (1992, 68)

Like Ángel's, Ernesto's performance is dense with moments of strong emotion, especially when remembering Cristobalina, and when telling about the family reunion in November 1962. He believes that "in life, everything is bleak", and makes no bones about how much he missed his mother through all the years of separation. He has strong words about the Sagunto relatives, who would visit him until Cristobalina went to Norway with Nini, but whose visits stopped when he was left behind. And yet, Ernesto was the one joking and laughing in 2000 as Eva Koch was recording the images she would use for her *Villar* project.

3.4 Chris

Against the background of an old wall ravaged by time, calling to mind her experiences and, to some extent, her own face, Chris reminisces about the time of the Spanish Civil War, when she was Cristobalina, an eight-year-old girl estranged from her family and living in Oliva with other children who had been evacuated from the frontline, or were orphans of war. Her effort to remember what her life was like at the time is visible in the way she talks, her eyes looking into the distance. The 1962 reunion with her family makes her smile. As Eva has explained to me, she speaks in Danish with a melodic Norwegian accent, a blending of languages and accents that reflects the turns taken by her life since she left Spain at the end of 1938. Her memories of the Civil War are sparse, but she has retained some images of the evacuation to Valencia: the nuns not wearing their habits, a destroyed house with everyday objects scattered everywhere, airplanes flying over them, children dying, a boy holding a piece of bread, an image which gave her joy and she has not forgotten. From Villar del Cobo, she vaguely recalls the smell of her father eating fried liver. She talks fondly about the Fridtjof Nansen Hospital in Oliva, where everything was designed with the children and their welfare in mind. When they had convalesced, they were sent to one of the children's colonies in the region, and she tells the story of a boy who walked a considera-

ble distance to go back to the Hospital: "It was a wonderful place", she says. Clips from *Hjelp Spania!*, showing a smiling, well-looked after Cristobalina, illustrate her memories of the children's Hospital.

Chris understands that her mother could not be contacted by Nini at the end of 1938, as they were separated by the war: Manuela was in the so-called 'National' zone, and Nini and herself, in Republican territory; and why her grandmother signed the adoption papers.

Her recollection of the 1962 reunion begins with the letter that Cristobalina had received from the Spanish Red Cross (through Nini) the very same week that she and Jens met the notary from Teruel and his wife when they were honeymooning on the Faroe Islands. Chris also recalls a previous letter from the Red Cross enquiring about Cristobalina when she was living with Kristian's siblings. On that occasion, Ellen Gleditsch, aware of the situation in Spain, put the letter in a tin and buried the tin in the garden. When it was dug up after the Second World War, the tin had disintegrated, and it was impossible to retrieve any information about Chris's family in Spain. Obviously, Ellen Gleditsch was protective of Chris, and did not want her to go back to fascist Spain where she might have ended up in a Francoist institution. Doubtless, Ellen's decision allowed Chris to enjoy the good life she was to have first in Norway, and subsequently in Denmark. However, it is difficult to ignore Manuela's plight, and that of the whole family, as a consequence of this decision, and all those other decisions that helped to provide Cristobalina/Chris with another identity, another life away from them. Once everything is taken into consideration, are we entitled to conclude whether human rights can be violated in order to protect human rights? This is indeed a challenging question.[21]

Chris recalls her and Jens's first trip to Villar del Cobo in November 1962: the interpreter who travelled with them from Teruel; the church they saw as they were approaching the village; her mother and her siblings; the crowd who welcomed them… everything was moving. The following summer Chris returned with her own children, as they would do on many other occasions. Photographs from her and her husband's first visit to Villar del Cobo illustrate her account. She also recalls the journey away from Spain at the end of 1938, when they stayed in Sweden for a few months before finally arriving in Norway, where she was left in the care of Kristian's siblings for the duration of the Second World War, until Nini and Kristian returned from their official assignment with Nils Petter. Photographs of Chris as a modern young woman accompany her recollections.

Eva Koch's memories of her first visits to Villar del Cobo with her family have been the subject of another of her visual works entitled

21 Anne Orford (2003; 2011) discusses the problematics of humanitarian interventions within the context of international law.

en face,[22] an installation for three projectors with slides taken by her father Jens Koch. The three sections are: "Between the sea and the sky"; "To Spain"; and "portrait". First, Eva showed *en face* using three Kodak carrousels. Since its exhibition at the Statens Museum for Kunst, she has converted it into video to be shown on three walls in an intimate space of the Museum. It is a collection of her memories of a land that she first encountered as a ten-year old child. The photographs from the 1960s of her and of her family divert the attention away from the historical memories of *Villar* and towards the discovery of a different world, with its own images and textures: the flowers – poppies she collects with great care –, the ball she holds tight, her mingling and that of her siblings with the village people, her own parents and the Villar del Cobo family: they are all part of this voyage of discovery she puts together in a delicate and evocative work which, once again, highlights the significance of remembering the past from the present, of reconstructing the past in a way that is private and yet may establish a fruitful dialogue with the viewers' own memories.

3.5 Clemencia

The younger sister Clemencia's account adds to the angles and nuances of her siblings' performances. When Clemencia was a little girl and Manuela and Ángel went to work in the fields, Manuela left her with a village woman who was paid not in money, as they had none, but with eggs, bread, and other things they were able to produce. Clemencia feels for her mother the same admiration conveyed in Ángel's account. Manuela would wash the clothes of Republican soldiers during the war: "from the captain to the last soldier, even to those who had no money to pay her". She recounts the story of a soldier who, having been sent to the front, gave Manuela all his books. He said that, were he not to return, she could keep the books as a gesture of gratitude towards her. The soldier never came back.

Clemencia speaks of Manuela's distress upon discovering that Cristobalina and Ernesto had been moved to Valencia, and Ernesto's return at the end of the war: he looked dishevelled and it was difficult for him to become part of the family life again. She gives her version of Cristobalina's adoption and she categorically states that the Sagunto family did not want to keep Cristobalina, even though Nini had offered them that possibility. She insists that Nini helped them with food and goods as they had nothing at the time. When Manuela invited her husband's family to Villar del Cobo, she cooked a good

22 See a description on https://evakoch.net/wp-content/uploads/enface_uk.pdf.

meal for them and asked for the details Nini had left. Once she had them, she threw her relatives out of the house, telling them never to come back as they had sold Cristobalina: "This is what happened", Clemencia says, defending Manuela, "they sold her daughter, even if it was a sale through paperwork". Clemencia expresses her emotion with a severity that contrasts sharply with the gentleness of her brothers and sister. Emotions can be expressed in different ways, but what we see in all of these performances is that "[e]motions show us how histories stay alive", and how "[t]hrough emotions, the past persists on the surface of bodies" (Ahmed 2014, 202), irrespective of how bodies conduct themselves.

Manuela was inconsolable and Clemencia was always reassuring her that one day Cristobalina would come back "in a big car", just to keep Manuela's hopes alive. Manuela, Clemencia reminisces, was very good with the village kids, she would invent ways to make "chocolate" with flour, sugar and cinnamon, when there was no chocolate available, or she would extract syrup from beets, to give the children as a treat at Christmas and New Year.

Clemencia's tone turns sombre when she relates that a Francoist authority from Teruel came to the village, heard her sing in the church choir, and offered her the chance to get musical training in the city, all expenses paid. She felt she could not accept as her mother would not have coped with yet another daughter gone: perhaps if Cristobalina had been there, she says, but that was not the case…

When the notary who had met Chris and Jens on the Faroe Islands contacted them through the local authorities, Manuela and Clemencia went to Teruel to meet him. The notary struck them as being aloof, says Clemencia. He seemed to suspect that Manuela wanted to take advantage of her missing daughter. Manuela said that all she wanted was to help her, to welcome her back – Manuela had in mind the state Ernesto was in when he was found, and she thought that Cristobalina might be alone and neglected. As they were leaving the house, in a compassionate gesture, the notary's wife told them not to worry, that soon they would have her daughter and sister back.

3.6 Extra

The single-user version includes an "Extra" series of clips that are also part of the video-installation: in the first, Isabelica talks about the village as she had done before. In the second, old aunt Teresa from Sagunto pledges that they never sold Cristobalina, that "that lady" was very generous to them at a very difficult time, that it was Cristobalina herself who wanted to go with her, that Manuela was wrong, that they could not visit Ernesto at the end of the Civil War because of the ongoing fighting in the area – something which is at

odds with Ernesto's view of these relatives, as he is adamant that they had abandoned him after Nini's and Cristobalina's departure.

Other clips include images of Villar del Cobo, what Pierre Nora (1989) calls a *lieu de mémoire* if ever there was one, a place that is unavoidably attached to the family's experiences and memories. We see photographs from the 1930s, and then we see images of the village even as filming was taking place, a visual palimpsest[23] which implies the passing of time, while the rural setting suggests that modernisation may have passed Villar del Cobo by – signs of contemporary life are signified through a few commodities such as television (with bullfighting being broadcast), or the big bottles of butane gas brought to the village by a lorry and collected in the square by the women. Other scenes indicate how little everyday life seems to have changed in the village: from Ángel killing his rabbits, to shepherds herding their goats, or people attending church services. Another clip shows the family reunited over a meal, a shared paella, as they no longer lived together in Villar del Cobo: Clemencia is now in Valencia, and Ernesto, in Teruel. Later that day, we see the brothers watching television while Chris placidly makes crochet in their company, as if she had never left Villar del Cobo, although she definitely had.

4 Conclusion

By way of conclusion, I would like to go back to the title of this chapter as I hope to have shown how with *Villar*, Eva Koch's "postmemorial" interactive visual art work, successfully embarks upon a journey from personal remembrance to historical memory.

Aleida Assmann (2012, 35-50) accepts Halbwachs's contention that memory depends on social frames to turn into collective memory, but she proposes to go further as the concept

> needs to be theoretically differentiated and elaborated as social, political, and cultural memory. (Assmann 2012, 50)

Her categories are enlightening. However, in *Villar*, the categories do not exclude but blend into each other: *Villar* is individual remembrance transformed into the collective memory of a family group

23 In this context, I borrow the term 'palimpsest' from Andreas Huyssen: "an urban imaginary in its temporal reach may well put different things in one place: memories of what there was before, imagined alternatives to what there is. The strong marks of present space merge in the imaginary with traces of the past, erasures, losses and heterotopias" (Huyssen 2003, 7). In *Villar*, the "palimsestic nature" of literature Huyssen refers to is made possible by putting together images which relate the past to the present but also differentiate them.

that reaches a wider community, as seen, for instance, in the visual document of the 1962 reunion, and in the agency it demands from its viewers. The context of the experiences remembered, as well as the contemporary setting of the recordings, turn *Villar* into a valuable record of social memory, and it is through its social relevance that can be regarded as a significant cultural exercise. Finally, due to its focus on a turbulent period of Spanish history experienced by a group of ordinary people who never had access to power but suffered its terrible effects, it becomes an invaluable historical and political memory document.

Eva Koch's *Villar* project reminds me of the work of the Belarusian writer, journalist, essayist and oral historian Svetlana Alexievich, winner of the 2015 Nobel Prize for Literature, and the testimonies she has collected from women who participated in various war conflicts in the Soviet Union, and post-Soviet Union countries, and whose role had been systematically ignored. In 2015, Alexievich declared:

> I've been searching for a literary method that would allow the closest possible approximation to real life. Reality has always attracted me like a magnet, it tortured and hypnotised me, I wanted to capture it on paper. So I immediately appropriated this genre of actual human voices and confessions, witness evidences and documents. This is how I hear and see the world – as a chorus of individual voices and a collage of everyday details. This is how my eye and ear function. In this way all my mental and emotional potential is realised to the full.[24]

In January 2021, in the middle of the pandemic, in the unlikely space of Barcelona's Biblioteca de Catalunya (Catalonia's National Library), a play was performed by the theatre group Perla 29. The play was a Catalan adaptation of Svetlana Alexievich's book *The Unwomanly Face of War: An Oral History of Women in World War II* (2018), which had been translated into Catalan as *La guerra no té cara de dona* (2018). In her review of the performance, Bel Zaballa quoted Alexievich's acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize for Literature: "Flaubert s'anomenava a si mateix home-ploma, jo diria que sóc una dona-orella" (Flaubert called himself a man-pen, I would say that I am a woman-ear).[25] In this work, she listens to forgotten women who

24 M. Bausells, "Everything You Need to Know about Svetlana Alexievich, Winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature", *The Guardian*, 8 October 2015. https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2015/oct.08/everything-you-need-to-know-about-svetlana-alexievich-winner-of-the-nobe-prize-in-literature.

25 B. Zaballa, "Les dones de Svetlana Aleksiévitx i Clara Segura", *Vilaweb*, 18 January 2021. https://www.vilaweb.cat/noticies/les-dones-de-svetlana-aleksievitx-i-clara-segura/.

were active during the Second World War tell the small stories that make up the big history. In *Villar,* Eva Koch is a postmemory subject who inherits the memories of not just one but two previous generations, and constructs an interactive visual art work made up of the performances of her mother and her relatives telling their personal memories from a difficult period of Spain's twentieth-century history. In this respect, she is like Svetlana Alexievich's "woman-ear", the artist-woman-ear who pieces together a Benjaminian and Halbwachsian collage of neglected voices, thereby creating an historical, cultural and political document of epic proportions.

Acknowledgements

I owe a big debt of gratitude to Eva Koch, her visual works of art, her creative imagination, her kindness and her generosity. She patiently answered my many queries while I was writing this chapter during the coronavirus pandemic. I am equally indebted to Chris Gleditsch Koch, a woman of exceptional courage and serenity, whom I had the privilege to meet in March 2020 in Copenhagen, just before travelling became almost impossible. I want to say a big thank you as well to my friend Begoña Lamas, who introduced me to Eva Koch; and to Joan Ramon Morell Gregori, who sent me a copy of his well-documented book on the town of Oliva during the Spanish Civil War. As always, Jordi has been an invaluable sounding wall for my work.

Bibliography

Ahmed, S. (2004). *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. New York; London: Routledge.

Alexievich, S. (2018a). *The Unwomanly Face of War: An Oral History of Women in World War II*. Transl. by R. Pevear and L. Volokhonsky. London: Penguin Classics.

Aleksiévitx, S. (2018b). *La guerra no té cara de dona*. Transl. by M. Cabal Guarro. Barcelona: Raig Verd.

Assmann, A. (2012). "Re-Framing Memory: Between Individual and Collective Forms of Constructing the Past". Tilmans, K.; Van Kree, F.; Winter, J.M. (eds), *Performing the Past: Memory, History, and Identity in Modern Europe*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 35-50.

Banville, J. (2005). *The Sea*. London: Picador.

Benjamin, W. [1955] (1992). "Theses on the Philosophy of History". *Illuminations*. Transl. by H. Zohn. London: Fontana Press, 245-55.

Benjamin, W. (2009). *One-Way Street and Other Writings*. Trans by J.A. Underwood. London: Penguin.

Braidotti, R. (1994). *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Caruth, C. (ed.) (1995). *Trauma: Explorations on Memory*. Baltimore; London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Caruth, C. (1996). *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore; London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Coser, L.A. (1992). "Introduction: Maurice Halbwachs 1877-1945". Halbwachs, M., *On Collective Memory*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1-34.

Delgado, L.E.; Fernández, P.; Labanyi, J. (eds) (2016). *Engaging the Emotions in Spanish Culture and History*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press.

Derrida, J. (1988). *Mémoires: pour Paul de Man*. Paris: Galilée.

Eng, D.; Kazanjian, D. (2003). *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Ferrándiz, F. (2006). "The Return of Civil War Ghosts". *Anthropology Today*, 22(3), 7-12.

Ferrándiz, F. (2016). "From Tear to Pixel: Political Correctness and Digital Emotions in the Exhumation of Mass Graves from the Civil War". Delgado, L.E.; Fernández, P.; Labanyi, J. (eds), *Engaging the Emotions in Spanish Culture and History*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 242-61.

Freud, S. (1991). "Mourning and Melancholia". *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis*. Transl. by J. Strachey. London: Penguin, 251-68. The Penguin Freud Library 2.

Graham, H. (2004). "The Spanish Civil War, 1936-2003: The Return of Republican Memory". *Science & Society*, 68, 313-28.

Graham, H. (2013). "Preface". Pretus, G., *Humanitarian Relief in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939)*. Lewiston; Queenston; Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, xiii-xv.

Gutiérrez-Albilla, J.D. (2011). "Children of Exile: Trauma, Memory and Testimony in Jaime Camino's *Los niños de Rusia* (2011)". Davies, A. (ed.), *Spain on Screen: Developments in Contemporary Spanish Cinema*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 129-50.

Halbwachs, M. (1992). *On Collective Memory*. Ed. and transl. by L.A. Coser. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Hirsch, M. (1997). *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press.
Hirsch, M. (2012). *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust*. New York: Columbia University Press.
Huyssen, A. (2003). *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*. Stanford (CA): Stanford University Press.
Klein, K.L. (2000). "On the Emergence of *Memory* in Historical Discourse". *Representations*, 69, 127-50.
Labanyi, J. (2000). "History and Hauntology; or, What Does One Do with the Ghosts of the Past? Reflections on Spanish Film and Fiction of the Post-Franco Period". Resina, J.R. (ed.), *Disremembering the Dictatorship: The Politics of Memory in the Transition to Democracy*. Amsterdam; Atlanta (GA): Rodopi, 65-82.
Lalvalni, S. (1996). *Photography, Vision and the Production of Modern Bodies*. Albany (NY): SUNY Press.
Lefebvre, H. [1974] (2000). *The Production of Space*. Transl. by D. Nicholson-Smith. Oxford: Blackwell.
Leys, R. (2000). *Trauma: A Genealogy*. Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press.
Lury, C. (1998). *Prosthetic Culture: Photography, Memory, and Identity*. London: Routledge.
Lutz, C.A. (2007). "Emotion, Thought, and Estrangement: Emotion as a Cultural Category". Wulff, H. (ed.), *The Emotions: A Cultural Reader*. Oxford; New York: Berg, 19-29.
Mendlesohn, F. (2002). *Quaker Relief Work in the Spanish Civil War*. Lewiston (NY); Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press.
Misfeldt, M. (1998). *Eva Koch. NoMad = Exhibition Catalogue* (Copenhagen, November-December 1998). Transl. by J. Kendal. Copenhagen: Artery.
Montellà i Carlos, A. [2005] (2016). *La maternitat d'Elna. La història de 597 nens salvats dels camps de refugiats*. Barcelona: Ara Llibres.
Morell Gregori, J.R. (2011). *Solidaritat a Oliva, 1936-1939*. Gandia: CEIC Alfons el Vell; Ajuntament de Gandia; Ajuntament d'Oliva.
Movin, L. (2010). "On the interactive video installation *Villar*, and the intearactive dvd *Villar – Manuela's Children*". Misfeldt, M (ed.), *Eva Koch*. Transl. by J. Kendal and N.M. Stanford. Copenhagen: Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, 98-111.
Nora, P. (1989). "Between History and Memory: *Les lieux de mémoire*". *Representations*, 26, 7-24.
Orford, A. (2003). *Reading Humanitarian Intervention: Human Rights and the Use of Force in International Law*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.
Orford, A. (2011). *International Authority and the Responsibility to Protect*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Pretus, G. (2013). *Humanitarian Relief Work in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939)*. Lewiston; Queenston; Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press.
Thomas, H. (1990). *The Spanish Civil War*. London: Penguin.
Torres, F. (2007). *Dark Is the Room Where We Sleep/ Oscura es la habitación donde dormimos*. Barcelona: Actar.
Winter, J. (2012). "The Performance of the Past: Memory, History, Identity". Tilmans, K.; Van Kree, F.; Winter, J.M. (eds), *Performing the Past: Memory, History, and Identity in Modern Europe*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 11-32.