

In my End is my Beginning
Dialectical Images in Times of Crisis
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Mary Kelly's 'Montage du Désastre', a Work of Death and Rebirth

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Abstract Mary Kelly's *The Ballad of Kastriot Rexhepi* is a work that recounts an episode from the Kosovo war, reflecting on the paradoxical nature of traumatic events. In my essay, I will examine the anachronistic layering of semantic levels that the work exhibits, assuming that it creates a dialectical image" through the discontinuous relationship between death and rebirth. Hubert Damisch's concept of the 'montage du désastre' helps us to re-read the parable of the child in the title of the work, by reflecting on the mechanisms of the spectacularisation of the chronicle and on the ultimate possibility of giving a 'figurability' of the testimony.

Keywords Trauma. War. Montage. Death. Rebirth.

Summary 1 Cultural Memory and Trauma: Story of a Work and a Life. – 2 The Responsibility of Survivors and the Figurability of a Testimony. – 3 Conclusion.



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Nous avons l'habitude de parler des tragédies comme si elles se produisaient dans le vide, alors que c'est l'arrière-plan qui les conditionne.

(Marguerite Yourcenar, *Le coup de grâce*, 1939)

Et puis ma mémoire, oh la la! ma mémoire! J'envie ceux qui ont de la mémoire. La vie est simplifiée, je vous assure.

(Jean Cayrol, *Muriel, ou le temps d'un retour*, 1963)

1 Cultural Memory and Trauma: Story of a Work and a Life

It is Françoise who exclaims this phrase in Alain Resnais' film *Muriel, ou le temps d'un retour* (1963). The French director's third film, with a screenplay by Jean Cayrol, it tells a fragmented story, depicting the post-traumatic effects of war. Hélène welcomes her former lover, Alphonse, who had abandoned her ten years earlier, into her home in Boulogne-sur-Mer. However, Alphonse arrives at the woman's house with the young aspiring actress Françoise, who turns out to be his current lover. In a cinematic work like this - which depicts painful memories, intertwining the need to remember with the impossibility of fully doing so - her remark sounds highly paradoxical. In this context, there is a disruptive element in this reunion, which concerns another conflict, this time in Algeria, a taboo for the collective consciousness of the time, something that many representatives of French culture of the period sought to break. In the house where they are staying, Bernard, Hélène's adopted son, also lives. He had participated (albeit passively) in the abuse and killing of an Algerian girl, Muriel, by French soldiers, which has caused him a deep and tormenting sense of guilt. In any case, this doubling of violence - now situated on two historical and geographical fronts - intersects with the psychological consequences of survival a drama that we can perceive not only on the faces of the protagonists but also through a restless direction that obsessively focuses on details, creating elusive, off-center associations, as if visual integration with all the elements in play is never fully achieved. Furthermore, deepening this division is the fact that we, as viewers, neither hear nor see the thoughts and inner lives of the characters. Unlike what happens in *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959), there is never a stream of consciousness that creates alignment between the order of inner and outer experience. The film - in its fits and starts, in this intermittence - pauses and continually asks itself, 'How do you tell this story?' between private and social history, without finding an answer.

In a different context, and with a different artistic language, Mary Kelly relates to a historical fact that has been poorly digested by the culture, again war-related, on the fringes of the Western European context: the Kosovo war. The work is *The Ballad of Kastriot Rexhepi*,

created in 2001 for the Santa Monica Museum of Art in Los Angeles, a cross-media work consisting of an installation occupying a large room, the opening of which hosted a performance by the Nyman Quartet with the voice of Sarah Leonard. Born out of the collaboration between the artist and Michael Nyman himself, who had appreciated the EP *Six Celan songs* (1991), written between May and July 1990 for Ute Lemper, which took Paul Celan's poetics as its spiritual soul.¹ The reference to the war in Kosovo takes place in a decidedly indirect way: Griselda Pollock, offering her insight into the work in *Digital and Other Virtualities: Renegotiating the Image* (2010), through an in-depth examination, stated that the artist:

Seems to offer nothing to see - in the form of image or representation. What she offers is not the story but an architecture for the transmission of the affective residue of trauma precisely in order to create an order of theoretical seeing, insight, into that which we are called to witness, but which the mythic translation by our media and cultural apparatuses of daily exposure render so already known that it ceases to instigate reflection or affective response. (Pollock in Pollock, Bryant 2010, 207)

This work stages a piece of art created as a commentary on the ways of seeing and knowing typical of our culture, an approach that, I argue, Resnais' *Muriel* also embodied. Confronting *The Ballad*, Pollock reworks the current theorization of trauma, delay, and belated witnessing, challenging the widespread preconception that trauma is an immediate experience (Pollock, Bryant 2010, 214). Here, Kelly's work takes 'a step beyond' the modernist product in French cinema, offering a postmodern critique of the psychological effect of these historical traumas as recorded and reproduced through the media. A strip made of fabric scraps unfurls along the walls of the room, forming an almost decorative, undulating pattern that echoes both the musical element of the performance and the flow of time, which might correspond to the experience of the viewer as they move through the space to engage with the work. Paradoxically, this continuous and regular movement intersects with another type of temporality - the repressed - which has very different characteristics. This motif, made of lint produced by the washing machine as textile waste, also, in my view, alludes to a process of 'cleansing' the conscience, which describes the communicative methods of today's journalistic culture more than those of

¹ The texts are taken from the following collections: "Chanson einer Dame im Schatten" and "Corona" from *Mohn und Gedächtnis* (1952), "Nachtlich geschurz" from *Von Schwelle zu Schwelle* (1955), "Blume" from *Sprachgitter* (1959), and "Es war Erde in ihnen" and "Salm" from *Die Niemrose* (1963).

Kelly. Today, news of war tragedies appears in our social media feeds like lint – something irritating that then disappears. The repetition of content presenting war testimony, in a crescendo of horror that never reaches its peak, can create a condition of virality, but this mechanism also allows for the possibility of its sudden and insensitive disappearance, even from the minds of hyper-alert yet distracted consumers. The 'washing' cycles are never perfect; lint exists, of course, but in its inconsistency, it becomes an image of the repressed itself.

The event that inspired Kelly in the creation of *The Ballad* was triggered by reading an article in the *Los Angeles Times* on 31 July 1999, with the emphatic title "War Orphan Recovers Name and Family". Accompanied by a photograph, it recounts – with a somewhat novelistic tone – the reunion of a 22-month-old Albanian boy with his parents, who had believed him dead when he was 18 months old after they fled a Serbian attack during the Kosovo war. Before returning home, he acquired two names, Zoran and Lirim, and two identities – one Albanian and one Serbian – until he became Kastriot again, at the age when a child begins to speak, acquiring language and the ability to name the other, to say 'I'. In this case, like in a fairy tale, the journalist assures us that the first word, despite this troubled journey, was a classic 'dad' (Pollock, Bryant 2010, 206). In light of this media story of death and resurrection, Pollock reflects with Kelly, citing Roland Barthes in his analysis, specifically his theory of myth as a 'depoliticized discourse' (cf. Barthes 1970; Pollock 2010), where history is neutralized in favour of the backdrop hidden behind the cliché of a news photograph, assimilating this scene to an ideologically oriented symbolic order. Significantly, the essay in which Pollock discusses this theoretical structure reflects on the concepts of indexicality and virtuality, offering an interpretation that restores to the latter term its ancient origins, linked to scholastic philosophy, and its psychic dimension, related to the realm of dreams and desires (Pollock, Bryant 2010, 15). However, the 'virtuality' experienced in the consumption of war news on social media today, even in the absence of a semantic framework providing pseudo-cathartic narratives, has absorbed predefined modes that both flatten the shock, making it a constant in scandalous aesthetics, and prevent genuine empathy, except in a falsely pietistic perspective. An immediate emotional reaction implies an adherence to ideology without us realizing it: there is no time for processing, only for the frantic consumption of content.

Turning to another seemingly ethereal element, at least until it resonates in the listener's ear, the music of the Nyman Quartet combines both symphonic and folk elements that refer to Kastriot's context. The voice in the cantata, Sarah Leonard, as Kelly notes, with its low tone, would have sounded like that of a young boy (Pollock, Zemans 2007, 103). The identification with the child here arises from a heterogeneity of elements – connected both to cultural background and

personal identity – divided between voice and music, and not reconstructed from a personalized perspective, as is common in the storytelling that dominates social media today. The artist, in fact, describes her work, paradoxically, not as a ballad – a celebratory piece dealing with themes of martyrdom and heroism – but as an anti-ballad (Kelly 2008, 85). Focusing on the music, it's also important to note Nyman's lyrical eclecticism in his collaboration with Kelly, which followed the end of his partnership with Peter Greenaway. That collaboration ended in 1991 with *Prospero's Books*, where the meeting of the two individualities resulted in a sort of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a total work of art, combining various artistic expressions such as mime, dance, opera, and painting. In bringing Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1610-11) to the screen, which features a plot with a happy ending, like Kastriot's story, the drama is resolved within the narrative. However, what *The Ballad* shares with *Prospero's Books* is a meta-reflective component, as the director himself notes:

The *Tempest* is a self-referential work, and I always feel a strong sympathy for those works of art that exhibit self-awareness, that say: "I am an artifice". (Rodman 1991, 38)

This way of storytelling – whether it's about a news event or an adaptation of a classic from Western culture – clashes with the common media languages of today's society, shaped by technological advancements and changing historical conditions. Andrea Pinotti, in *Alla soglia dell'immagine. Da Narciso alla realtà virtuale* (2021), reflects on the progressive 'disappearance' of the medium, the utopia pursued by devices that aim to annul themselves to enable an ideal continuum with the user's body (xiv-xv). In this way, the screen, increasingly responsive to gestures thanks to touch functionality, works in tandem with immersive virtual environments. Among the various artworks created with VR that Pinotti mentions is Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Carne y Arena. Virtually Present, Physically Invisible* (2017), which tells a painful story of immigration and allows the viewer to be at the center of the scene, experiencing the event 'without filters' in order to trigger an empathetic reaction (Pinotti 2021, 180). This forced identification is built on a clearly defined background, where the drama is perfectly readable, without requiring any particular sensitivity or imaginative capacity from the viewer. Clearly, we cannot compare an authorial endeavor of this kind with the war and oppression scenes we see in short reels on TikTok,² which increasingly

² "This sharing, however, is not meant in the way it is usually (and superficially) conceived in our hyperconnected world of digital devices and social networks. Iñárritu calls for a personal experience of sharing [...] the viewers of *Carne y Arena* are, in fact,

form the basis for news articles, yet we cannot think of them as completely isolated phenomena either. I see them as offspring of the same cultural condition and visual regime. The appeal to empathy (no matter how well-intentioned) in addressing such issues risks, if not aestheticization, then at least a rhetorical use of violence and the victim.

Byung-chul Han, in *Die Krise der Narration* (2023), cites Walter Benjamin's *Ausgraben und Erinnern* (1933), focusing on the lack of narrative capacity after the war. The philosopher asserts that we live in a post-narrative era, where the absence of a separating interval destroys both distance and proximity (Byung-chul 2024, 21). From a literary perspective (but not only), where narrative could once change the world, today's popular 'storytelling' merely signifies commerce and consumption. We are far from the disarticulation performed by Kelly, which allows for a different type of understanding, with its empty spaces and aniconism. There is no figurative reference to the child's face in *The Ballad*, a type of face that today's algorithms increasingly focus on, fostering a morbid voyeurism towards childhood. Similarly, in Resnais' film, we never truly see Muriel – a perfect victim, being young and female – who appears as a memory distorted by recollection and the grainy image of Bernard's recording.³ Her ghost transcends time and space in the film, haunting it. Here too, the montage presupposes a heterogeneity that emphasizes breaks and spatial-temporal gaps, in opposition to the continuity of a narrative that seeks to connect with our body and emotions 'insensibly,' denying the medium and the potential mediation with our subjectivity.

At this point, the reasons for the parallel between *The Ballad* and *Muriel* are evident, but it is necessary to draw another line of comparison to continue our argument, with another of Resnais' films, *Nuit et Brouillard* (1955), a work that confronts the horrors of war and the ultimate possibility of bearing witness. While the former was constructed on an elliptical series of sequences abruptly edited to compare the old and new Boulogne-sur-Mer, a city semi-destroyed by bombings, the Holocaust documentary, with its black-and-white footage from the concentration camps, aimed to create a condition

required to leave their phones at the entrance, and thus are unable to share their experience in real time during the six and a half minutes of the installation" (Pinotti 2021, 182). Unless otherwise specified all translations, all translations are by the Author

3 "As well as the papers with Muriel's name, we see photographs from Algeria – as the film collages evidence, documents – and most importantly we see a film, footage with which Bernard has returned to France. The showing of this film, and the voice-over that accompanies it, are critical in *Muriel*. Naomi Greene describes the scene as 'a black hole at the center of Muriel'; this black hole is the film's point of origin and point of (no) return. [...] If the scene is a black hole, it really is at the center of Muriel structurally and temporally, as well as semantically" (Ward 1968, 91).

of non-integration.⁴ The screenplay is again by Jean Cayrol, a novelist and former Mauthausen prisoner, who collaborated with the director and was in contact with Paul Celan, whom he asked to translate the German-language version. The translation, which the poet worked on diligently, deeply disturbed him, as did the fact that in 1956, *Nuit et Brouillard* was initially selected for the Cannes Film Festival, only to be excluded at the last minute in response to an appeal from the Federal Republic of Germany, which feared that such a screening could damage Franco-German relations (Gnani 2010, 35).

Celan, exposed in his life and work to the risk of censorship, hermetic to the limit of the unspeakable, also figures as an invisible trace in the verses that Kelly writes on tapes of fabric scraps on *The Ballad*, citing Nyman's precedent of *5 Celan Songs*. Hans-Georg Gadamer, in an essay dedicated to him, *Wer bin Ich und wer bist Du? Ein Kommentar zu Paul Celans Gedichtfolge "Atemkristall"* (1986), argues, in contrast to Adorno, that his poetry would not attest to the shipwreck of the cryptic word in an anguished and obscure silence, still intending to safeguard with a desperate act the human possibility of uttering names and words, resorting to the metaphor of the message in the bottle (Gadamer 1989, 3). To poetically claim Kastriot's name, then, at the end of the series of new personal and cultural identities that followed his supposed death would be a vindication that restores his story beyond the generality of a mythical narrative, provided we accept the reverse of his tormented process of reacquisition. Kastriot, then, also becomes the last word in his parable of death, heralding his return to life.

2 The Responsibility of Survivors and the Figurability of a Testimony

The encounter, the dialogue, the collaboration – but we could also say the asynchronous montage of Kelly/Nyman, Nyman/Celan codes and languages – takes off in the face of Kastriot's inability to process the experience of his own mourning, not assuming, however, this datum as a status quo, an existential failure of the capacity to communicate, to renegotiate responsibilities and the distribution of roles in victims and executioners, spectators and spectacle. Kelly, in addressing this condition, takes up a conceptualisation of Giorgio Agamben's "the communication of communicability", (cf. Agamben 1996, Pollock, Zemans 2007) stating that:

⁴ The title of the documentary comes from a secret order signed by Hitler on 7 December 1941, in which he commanded the arrest and disappearance "in the night and fog" of anyone who might pose a danger to the "security" of Germany (Gnani 2010, 35).

My interest in his thesis has been provoked by the growing realization that any attempt to visualize the traumatic experiences of war-related atrocities would require more intricate forms of displacement than those I have used in earlier projects; a shift not only from iconicity to indexicality and from looking to listening, but also from the art object itself as means to the viewer as witness or being a means. (Pollock, Zemans 2007, 133)

Maurice Blanchot, in *Le dernier à parler* (1984), sought to engage with the silence of Paul Celan's poetry, as well as his ultimate desire to bear witness despite everything. In this essay Blanchot creates a dialogue between the two writings – his and the poet's – without a passport, so much so that this formal choice also led to copyright issues, delaying the publication of the text by cutting, dismantling, and re-assembling Celan's poems in the process (Blanchot 2019, 60-1). The French writer sees in his poetic quest an attempt to establish a form of solidarity with the death of the other, constructing a paradoxical act of adherence to their death, identifying with it in order to bear witness.⁵ Reflecting on the theoretical possibilities of *The Ballad*, Kelly cites Jacques Rancière, (cf. Rancière 1998; Pollock, Zemans 2007) who discusses the importance of identifying a moment of dis-identification before committing to the cause of the other, recognizing them as such (140). It is not simply about annihilating oneself or abstracting in relation to an 'other' reality. We, as viewers, paradoxically identify with Kastriot when faced with the work, inhabiting this impossibility, his death, his rebirth. It is only through this passage that do we gain access to the inhumane conditions of the Kosovo war, with all its social and psychological implications, reconstructing it retrospectively. This moment, or rather this movement, consistent with Blanchot's ethics, allows us to bridge the gap that characterizes the disparity between the viewer's experience of Kastriot and the subjectivity of the work in its self-referential and other-referential nature. The absence of an immediate empathetic reaction – such as the presentation of the child's face – allows us to work with imagination, appealing to our sensitivity. However, this faculty is not always freely exercised.

⁵ Mario Ajazzi Mancini, who edited the Italian edition of *Le dernier à parler*, writes in the text's afterword: "Death is this unrelated force that weakens the subject in relation to their own faculties, and entrusts them to that passivity in which Blanchot allows us to glimpse the ways of relating to the outside. If a friend – the other who is near – is such in their excess, the relationship one can have with him/her is primarily one of dispossession of identity, a separation from oneself that finds its truest form in dying, in death; and for this reason, it exposes one to closeness in friendship, opening up an immense (*ungeheuer*) space where each individual existence is outside itself, yet nonetheless thrown into the encounter with others. A kind of sharing" (Blanchot, [1984] 2019, 109-11).

Author of *L'écriture du désastre* (1980), Blanchot provided the theoretical framework for Hubert Damisch's concept of the 'montage du désastre',⁶ which once again calls upon a cinematic example, Orson Welles' *The Stranger* (1946). The film depicts an investigator from the War Crimes Commission searching for a Nazi criminal who has escaped justice, hidden under a false identity in a quiet town in Connecticut. The art historian asserts that this film merges a type of image understood as the result of editing work that reveals the truth of cinema (Damisch 2005, 78), aiming to bring forth the 'figurability' of what is unrepresentable to consciousness. This concept, rooted in Freudian theory, refers to the dream mechanism that brings forth a repressed – traumatic or primal – content in the dreamer's psyche in a manner that cannot be articulated through verbal language. Within the film's narrative, this occurs in the scene of the interrogation of the Nazi officer's wife, when a series of frames from the extermination camps are projected in front of her in an attempt to get her help in incriminating him. Welles manages to show how these images imprint themselves and act within the woman's unconscious, working internally against the censorship aligned with the subject's defensive strategies, who does not want to admit the man's complicity (74). Once again, a harsh montage works in an anti-empathetic way, forcing the acceptance of a reality that seems more indigestible than death, yet is necessary to access a psychic and ethical vitality.

Montage, referring to the work of consciousness (or the unconscious) calls into question, with its whites and blacks, a contested dimension between the visible and blindness, life and death. Laura Odello, in *AUT AUT issue 348*, edited together with Raoul Kirchmayr, entitled *Georges Didi-Huberman. An Ethics of Images*:

To translate into a language that is not Didi-Huberman's, I wonder if this survival, which he invites us to seek in the night, should not be thought even more radically – not so much in literal terms as a community that resists, but rather as a death that passes through life. If montage is interruption, shouldn't it help us to rethink the political starting precisely from the absolute disconnection, the ungraspable disjunction? That is, to help us dismantle the fatal reterritorializations that a 'we' inevitably produces? In short, to help us show ourselves that even the 'we' is an image, an effect of montage? (Odello in Kirchmayr, Odello 2010, 31)

⁶ Blanchot, in the course of his discussion, offers a fragmented definition of what disaster is. Through the same fragmentary structure of the essay, it becomes evident that the only way to convey disaster is through the fragment. Understood as a condition of separation, as that which is most separate, disaster is not experienced – it is what escapes all possible experience, the limit of writing. It is the disaster of thought, of the first-person narrative, and of language itself (see Blanchot 2021).

The lint that makes up the ribbon in *The Ballad* reveals an entropic nature: it is the anti-Image, the isomorphic image of clothing, representing the loss of contact with the human form. The poetic word, inscribed on this layer of waste, confronts the ephemeral nature of its medium, creating an inference with the very consistency of language, which, like the body and its remnants, is destined to return to dust. The two registers, visual and verbal, do not integrate: their union exists in a shared tension toward annihilation, just as oblivion threatens to fall over Kastriot's story and the drama of the Kosovo war. Melanie Klein, who expanded on Freud's concept of the death drive, argues that – contrary to Freud's view – death is 'representable' in the deeper layers of the psyche because it is inscribed within the life principle, acting as a driving force for psychic functioning.⁷ Such coexistence would also allow for the possibility of renegotiating the negativity that tension entails, through complex forms of representation. A shaping of these operations, however, does not guarantee a resolution of the conflict, or the annulment of negativity, but may exhibit the failure, even analytically, of this artistic and therapeutic strategy.

Returning to Resnais' *Muriel*, regarding the character of Bernard, we see that at the end of the film – after writing in his diary that since the girl's death he has not been alive – he decides to take revenge by killing one of her tormentors. In reality, this is not a conscious decision, as there are several clues indicating his psychological instability. In a particularly emblematic scene, we see him become agitated when Françoise accidentally plays a tape that briefly, for a few seconds, contains a recording of the girl's voice (Ward 1968, 77). The intrusion of that sound acts as the return of the repressed. What his character expresses, along with the experiences of other characters like Alphonse and Héléne, and Resnais' direction itself, is the impossibility of taking responsibility due to their inability to assimilate the fragmented and disjointed memory, presented in the film through a multitude of framed details, serving as diversions within a defensive strategy.⁸ Maurizio Balsamo, in *Il negativo del trauma* (2020), argues that in the clinical sphere denegation would be understood as an absence of montage, where the psyche would be

⁷ "In tracing the metamorphosis of the death drive into what Klein refers to as 'psychization', one cannot help but find the mother of psychoanalysis to be eminently Shakespearean. Is it not the case that the playwright's sonnet 146 already implies that the sublimating excess of 'Death once dead', or 'putting Death to death', is realized only through the internal life of the 'poor soul', and only then if the soul is capable of consuming within itself the death that originates from the outside?" (Kristeva [2000] 2001, 90).

⁸ "Bernard's problems follow from his tendency to fragment the past, a fault which we have discovered in the protagonists of all Resnais' feature films. He has failed to provide the *Muriel* episode with a context, but instead of allowing it to torture him he has channelled it into a desire for action" (Wilson 1988, 78).

a terrain where operations of assembling and disassembling take place, and thus the theatre of a certain flexibility of bonding and disbonding, stating that:

The traumatic nature of the event thus lies not in a representation of it, but in the breakdown of the connections between processes, in the failure of the possibilities of linking and psychic figurability, and in the formation not of a memory trace, but of a perceptual trace. (Balsamo 2020, 19)

In this sense, the girl's mourning – like surviving her death – seems impossible, in the resolving utopia of a dramatic gesture, incapable of redeeming and restarting life. Cayrol states that he is not interested in drama (Wilson 1988, 87), but in what happens afterwards: there is no future at the end of that film, only a repetition that obsessively re-proposes the past in order to freeze it in a traumatic present, suspended between the impossibility of rejection and the violent explosion of the symptom.⁹

Giuseppe Zuccarino, in *Immagini sfuggenti. Saggi su Blanchot* (2018), recounts a biographical story of Maurice Blanchot, a misadventure that put him in extreme contact with death, in a way like Kastrioth, but more correctly like Dostoevsky. Captured by the communists during the Second World War, on the verge of being shot, he is saved at the last second by the captain of the militia, who orders him to escape. The writer recounted this experience in a fragmentary manner and spread out over the years, probably due to the difficulty of processing it psychically.¹⁰ The reason he would be spared relates to his noble ancestry; in fact, the place of execution would be on the slopes of the family castle (Zuccarino 2018, 72-3). Faced with horror, Blanchot's guilt acts like that of Bernard's character:

⁹ “Bernard leaves at the end of the film, further reiterating the film's warnings against return and repetition [...] The film ends in desolation, in an empty search and blind movement onwards. This again may be read as an inflection of its subject. Muriel shows, through Bernard's failures, that it can never reach or trace the pain at its centre. Hence the film's pessimism, its erosion of sensuality at every turn, its refusal of release or relieve” (Wilson 1988, 106).

¹⁰ “As for the French writer, it should be noted that the first mention of the 1944 experience already appeared in one of his stories published in a magazine five years later, *La folie du jour*. [...] The staging we encounter in *L'instant de ma mort* appears much more complex, a paradoxical text from the title itself. In fact, strictly speaking, it is impossible to narrate, as if it had already occurred, the moment of one's own death. Philosopher Alexandre Kojève observes: “My death is truly mine; it is not someone else's death. But it is mine only in the future, because one can say: ‘I will die’, but not: ‘I am dead’”. In Blanchot's story, however, nothing is so straightforward, as can be understood from the very opening line [...] A passage, then, has occurred, but it did not result in the end of life; rather, on the contrary, it marked the beginning of survival, the waiting for the second death” (Zuccarino 2018, 69).

when it is not 'assembled' by the psyche it blocks acceptance, breaking down into a formless heterogeneity. The guilt of survival also affects the 'innocent', because responsibility is distributed in such a way that no one really is.

3 Conclusion

Returning to the Marguerite Yourcenar quote at the beginning of this article, from *Le coup de grâce* (1939), we see how, in wartime reporting, the close-up easily becomes a hyper-mediatized spectacle, while the real drama fades into the background, almost disappearing like a speck of lint - where guilt and frustration over the inability to respond are found. However, the background, where we ultimately also reside in front of these events beyond our reach, needs to be re-articulated in continuity with the close-up. A work like *The Ballad*, by re-editing an impossible experience, moves us away from a hierarchy often too complacent with an imaginific addiction that blocks our imagination, leaving behind an unassimilable residue. Offering an alternative version of a famous Benjamin's statement, from *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*,¹¹ we can assert that to historically articulate a traumatic past does not mean to recognize it as it truly was: rather, it means to grasp how it can be presented, ultimately, beyond how it flashes in the moment of danger, offering an alternative to destruction. The German scholar conceives the 'historical object' as a dialectical image and monad of materialistic historiography, representing a revolutionary opportunity to redeem the past (Benjamin [1942] 2012, 11). In my view, Mary Kelly's work serves as a voice for a messianic intrapsychic time, that of figurability, of the repressed returning through an aniconic montage - not iconoclastic, but rather bearing the reasons for what has been excluded, the reasons that, once processed, can be reintegrate into consciousness. We are not only responsible for the social dramas of our present but also for the unexpressed traumas of our inner experiences threaten to explode every day - two interconnected realms of reality that present us with the true risk, that of an ethical choice. We have the duty to actualize the virtuality of a past moment, turning it into memory, redeeming it, in other words, saving it. Only then can there be a genuine rebirth, along with the experience of an artwork that reveals this latent possibility to us.

¹¹ "Articulating the past historically does not mean recognising it as it was. It means grasping a memory as it flashes in the instant of danger" (Benjamin [1942], 2012, 13).

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