

(ENG)

ACTS OF MEMORY: BARCELONA

NIEVES CORREA

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 9, NOON-8PM

The 2405 people killed by the bombs dropped by the Italian Legionary Air Force on the civilian population in Barcelona during the ill-named Spanish Civil War were the starting point for this initiative by Nieves Correa. These figures are coordinates on the map of the atrocities committed in recent history. Remembering the names of the sites that were bombed and of the victims who lived there is to transport oneself to another time and place and to “establish a relationship” with people who could still be alive and/or with their descendants or the descendants of their neighbours who continue to live here and now.

The past ‘has not passed’, says Nieves Correa, quoting Miguel Á. Hernández-Navarro in his book *Materializar el pasado*, and she examines Pierre Nora’s concept of *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory), “any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element”. Moving on from this, Nieves Correa states that “the only thing of us that survives is the memory [of us], and as an artist this memory is ‘embodied’ and the body

becomes the vehicle for memory”. This is the heart and soul of Correa’s action and the line of force of her work. There is something else: ‘biography’ (a word that recurs in Nieves Correa’s actions), as an uncle of hers, whom she “never met”, was a Republican aviator who died in combat on 12 January 1938 on the Aragonese Front. Consequently, in this proposal a connection between different memories floats in the air: the uncle brought down by the fascists and the fascist bombs that fell on the people. Living memory. I understand this perfectly, as I’m called Joan after my Uncle Juan, a Republican farmer who was killed during his first day in combat.

Thus, events of the past are altered through the word and the affect that renders them meaningful, transformed into energies present in our neurones and their electrical jumps that transport them to our stomach and skin (*goosebumps*), within our body that seeks to project itself into the very near future because our bodies can do nothing other than move forward (grow, shrink, transform). The remarks I have just made are merely an interpretation based on comments by Nieves Correa

as a ready-made quotation (quotations are, after all, readymade), which I in turn rephrase: “The past has not ‘passed’ in sites of memory”.

Nieves Correa looks for places: the port, Barceloneta, Estació de França railway station, the Gothic Quarter, the area of Plaça de la Universitat and Plaça de Catalunya, Plaça d’Espanya, Avinguda del Paral·lel... She goes there to learn, she goes back bio-symbolically to remember and presses the REC button on her recording device: the rumble of cars, people going by, keeping quiet or rushing past, music from a bar or shop (*background music*). There is nothing that calls to mind the old bombs, but in the light of memory these banal sounds are resignified. These places are the settings of a crime of which no trace remains but which we know took place there... On Gran Via, in front of the Coliseum, stands the beautiful and invisible monument by the sculptor Margarita Andreu to the victims of these bombing raids. The slender steel lines evoke the burst of light of the explosions that Nieves Correa now picks up on her action.



ACTION: The bombs landed on many sites; the action takes place in one, La Capella, an old building with barrel vaulting which, in its mineral memory, retains the reverberations of the detonations like a never-ending echo. Drawn by the heaviness of the exposed stone and the dim light, Nieves Correa immerses us in the middle of this vast, bare space in an everyday sound of places that we know to be full of tragedy. No scare, just an 'ambient sound'. Tungsten filament bulbs cast a feeble light in particular areas, calling to mind the exploding light bulb in *Guernica*.

Beneath these lights are piles of papers bearing the names and surnames of the 2405 victims. They are palely dotted, like calligraphy notebooks, and the patient and persistent Nieves Correa rewrites them, one after another. She has set herself an eight-hour working day. There is no surprise of any kind. It is a painstaking action that calls for patience, like sewing, like that of a scrivener, in fact. One by one, she gives calligraphic form to the names which, in turn, evoke an individual, reveal them to us, a miracle of semiotics: "Victim 1, *Alegría Salamero Sampietro*" and so on up to 2405 names, all rewritten by hand and listed on the poster as a huge image of tragedy. As I write this, the action has not as yet taken place, but I inevitably see Nieves Correa as a *pietà* who embraces the names-bodies of all those people.

Joan Casellas
Teià, 21 October 2019
With a yellow ribbon raised high

ⁱ Miguel Á. Hernández-Navarro, *Materializar el pasado. El artista como historiador (benjaminiano)*. Murcia: Editorial Micromegas, 2012.

ⁱⁱ Pierre Nora (ed.), *Les Lieux de mémoire*. Paris: Gallimard ("Bibliothèque illustrée des histoires"), 3 vols. (vol. I "La République", vol. II "La Nation", vol. III "Les France"), 1984-1986 [published in part in English translation as *Realms of Memory*].