

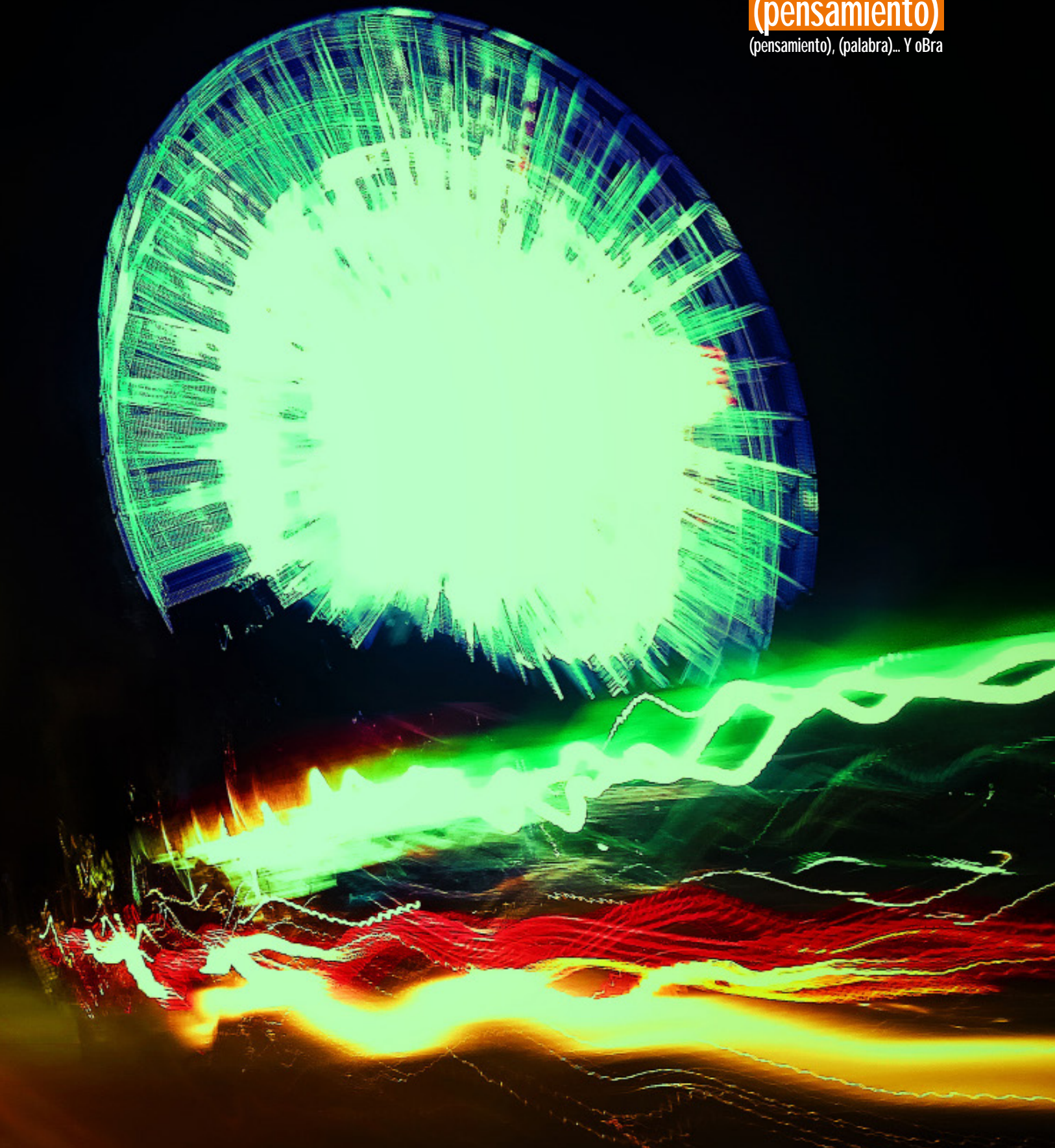
The montage: Between Reality and Fiction

Research-Creation and Memory in
Some Colombian Artwork

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Abstract

This research paper establishes a discussion between the concepts of reality and fiction as fundamental topics in the research-creation processes present in artistic products that use memory for their formulation. It focuses on the analysis of concepts from the field of history, such as truth or reality and fiction as invention, and seeks to understand how they act in the aesthetic and political fields in artistic processes. The paper dialogues with the thought of the philosopher and art historian Georges Didi-Huberman through the concept of montage and the possibilities that arise in the historical construction in which collective or personal fragments take place. The result leads us to the appropriation of methodological elements for the symbolic construction of the past, which in the Colombian context is considered important for its own tragic narrative, which is faced from the metaphorical capacity of art.

Keywords: reality; fiction; culture; montage; research-creation

A montagem: entre realidade e ficção

A pesquisa-criação e a memória em algumas obras de arte colombiana

Resumo

Este artigo de pesquisa estabelece uma discussão entre os conceitos de realidade e ficção como tópicos fundamentais nos processos de pesquisa-criação presentes em produtos artísticos que utilizam a memória para sua formulação. Assim, centra-se na análise de conceitos do campo da história, tais como a verdade ou a realidade e a ficção como invenção, buscando compreender como estes atuam nos campos estéticos e políticos nos processos artísticos. O artigo dialoga com o pensamento do filósofo e historiador da arte Georges Didi-Huberman por meio do conceito de montagem e das possibilidades que surgem na construção histórica em que se dão os fragmentos coletivos ou pessoais. O resultado nos leva à apropriação de elementos metodológicos para a construção simbólica do passado, que no contexto colombiano é considerado importante por sua própria narrativa trágica, que é enfrentada desde a capacidade metafórica da arte.

Palavras chave: realidade; ficção; cultura; montagem; pesquisa-criação

El montaje: entre la realidad y la ficción

La investigación-creación y la memoria en algunas obras del arte colombiano

Resumen

Este artículo de investigación establece una discusión entre los conceptos de realidad y ficción como temas fundamentales en los procesos de investigación-creación presentes en productos artísticos que se valen de la memoria para su formulación. Se centra en el análisis de conceptos provenientes del campo de la historia como lo veraz o lo real y la ficción como invención, y busca entender cómo estos actúan en los campos estético y político en los procesos artísticos. El artículo dialoga con el pensamiento del filósofo e historiador del arte Georges Didi-Huberman a través del concepto de montaje y las posibilidades que se presentan en la construcción histórica en la que tienen lugar fragmentos colectivos o personales. El resultado nos conduce a la apropiación de elementos metodológicos para la construcción simbólica del pasado, que en el contexto colombiano se considera importante por su propia narrativa trágica, a la que se le hace frente desde la capacidad metafórica del arte.

Palabras clave: realidad; ficción; cultura; montaje; investigación-creación

Introduction

Embarking on research involves a multitude of methodological paths where personal and collective experiences converge. This article suggests that using memory as a creative pretext implies adopting a researcher-creator stance. It explores the relationships between research creation and contemporary visual arts, where creative and historical processes intersect, serving as active components in interpreting our context. The current global landscape indicates a shift in problem-solving processes; ubiquitous technicality provides material swiftly, and knowledge construction is dynamic and agile. Texts in various formats, audiovisual and sound materials constitute every personal library of any researcher, becoming situational and cultural vestiges of a region or micro-society. Contemporary research culture articulates artistic expressions as containers of memory, where individual processes connect thematic cores such as history, fiction, reality, truth, rhetoric, politics, and the almost-real—dynamics inherent in a dialectical exercise that establishes innovative ways of artistic thinking, capable of coexisting, creating, and appropriating culture mediated by the language of the historic. Art can symbolize history, and in complex contexts like Colombia, it is crucial to reflect on memory and how we construct social imaginaries. The analysis of montage as a methodological tool that brings together the political position of the author—a genuine researcher-creator—in a visual, plastic, or audiovisual product is proposed in light of historical possibilities.

Problem Statement

The line between history and fiction is hazy, promoting fiction readings as truthful where reality tends to metaphorize. The arts field employs appropriation as a common language, which can be termed creativity, innovation, or reconstruction (montage), placing the artist, a researcher-creator, as an invader or (re)interpreter of memory. Nevertheless, this generates a comparison with reality in the observer, even if the observable object (film, television, painting, or photography) is consciously fictitious. One might assume an innate need to recognize the real as a logical argument for understanding the world. When art and history unite, the symbolic is organized—a code that accounts for the past with results that often deviate from the truth. This assertion should be

understood in the Colombian context, where violence has been pervasive in shaping the imaginary of the country in recent years. Raising reflections on memory, culture, and politics mediated by history and imagination leads us to the question: How can we understand our context through research-creation in the arts, considering that it merges the boundaries of history through the metaphorization of facts? Can art, through its symbolic production, position itself as real?

History and Art: Perspectives

Culture inevitably dialogues with the context; it is a product of it. Today, recognizing history as a critical exercise with multiple perspectives on the social, political, and aesthetic implies acknowledging it as a phenomenon that nourishes memory beyond institutional specifications it may want to profess. Within this methodological process, the dialectical view—confronting and blending positivist and academic ideas with empirical and magical knowledge—allows considering the singularities regularly present in traditional cultural processes as opportune sources. In this way, scientific experience converges with mystical (popular) activity and is susceptible to being equated with autochthonous experience as a starting or arrival point. Thus, inter-sensitivities, socio-aesthetics, interdisciplinarity, and relationality are valued as creative elements in formulating problems linked to history. That is why the opening and including diverse sources and perspectives will broaden the resulting histories and their peculiarities. Another relevant factor in the process of writing history and consolidating collective memory is time. Speaking of time implies a connection with some past, present, or desired future, mediated by the verification of the real, in which archival consultation plays the role of truth so that said consultation is not considered the result of an aesthetic process in which fiction intervenes, but rather the verification of some fact. A dichotomy is created: fictional history or historical fiction as an appropriation exercise of knowledge through research-creation in the arts field.

The investigative component sometimes feeds on the rewriting and rereading of the past. In the early decades of the 20th century, the investigative spectrum took another direction thanks to the image capture produced by camera technology. For Peter Burke, filmmakers were creating a new kind of history writer. Previous techniques, such as

painting or sculpture, reproduced subjective views of events, which today are lightweight compared to the idea of truth provided by technology. However, Burke presents historical painting as a genre with artists labeled historians due to the depth of their research and the appropriation of history as a narrative method.

The Pre-Raphaelite painter William Holman Hunt (1827-1910) traveled to Palestine in the 1850s to give his Biblical scenes the appropriate “local color.” Artists who preferred to paint military subjects, highly popular during the 19th century, sometimes conducted careful research on the attire and weaponry of the soldiers they painted. For instance, the French artist Ernest Meissonier (1815-1891) specialized in the Napoleonic era, the German Adolph Menzel (1815-1905) focused on the time of Frederick the Great, and Franz Roubaud (1856-1928), who painted panoramic views of the battles of Sebastopol and Borodino (Burke, 2004, p. 200)

Thus, for Burke, “the essential point is that filmed history, painted or written history is an act of interpretation” (2004, p. 203), from which it follows that the artist constructs and deconstructs narratives of power mediated by its aesthetic perception and its political influence, but changed by the narrative format and its immediacy.



Illustration 1. From left to right: José María Espinoza (1830), *Retrato de Bolívar. Carboncillo y grafito.* (<http://tinteriando.blogspot.com/2012/07/el-verdadero-rostro-de-simon-bolivar.html>). Rita Matilde de la Peñuela (1860), *Bolívar diplomático. Óleo sobre tela.* (<https://www.bcv.org.ve/bcv/obras-de-arte>). Anónimo (1816), *Retrato de Bolívar en Haití. Grafito sobre papel.* (<http://www.minci.gob.ve/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2016/04/BICENTENARIO.pdf>). Ricardo Acevedo Bernal (1920), *Simón Bolívar. Óleo sobre tela* (https://museonacional.gov.co/colecciones/piezas--en-dialogo/Paginas/Agosto_septiembre_octubre.aspx).

Establishing a parallel with our historical context, the image of Simón Bolívar in Illustration 1 has multiple interpretations, which can be classified by his skin tone, mustache, hairstyles, attire, and morphology, aligning with the Napoleonic style of the hero of the time. Although the portrait by the painter José María Espinosa (1796-1883) is recognized as the only one made during the liberator’s lifetime¹. This event reaffirms that in the construction of our history, fiction is used as the official narrative format, giving rise to types of realism:

1 It can be consulted in the Banco de la República Art Collection: Simon Bolivar Portrait. <https://www.banrepublicultural.org/coleccion-de-arte/obra/simon-bolivar-ap2097>.



A few weeks before the conspiracy of September 25, 1828, Simón Bolívar arrived at Espinosa's house, where his uncle, José I. París, told him, 'The Liberator sends for you to come and portray him.' The artist prepared an ivory canvas and immediately visited the palace with his relative. After being introduced to Bolívar, who warmly welcomed him, the painter prepared his working materials and positioned himself in front of the hero, who was already posing with crossed arms. 'Is it done?' he asked a few minutes later when the sketch had barely begun. Upon receiving the answer that there was still a long way to go, he stretched his arms and said, 'You can come as many times as you want at eleven before the Council meets.' Indeed, Espinosa was punctual at eleven on the following days. [...] From the copy he kept in his possession, the artist created several oils, including the famous full-length portrait, which circulates in lithographs throughout the Bolivarian countries." (Moreno, 1961, p. 771)

When mediated by art, the discussion generated by history can lead to superficial critical elements, as history aims for veracity. Art, when lacking this component, may argue in its defense that it is an interpretation. However, both are nourished by inference as the art of storytelling. Photography corresponds to a paradigm shift in historical and investigative practices, relating to the ideas proposed by the Annales School from the second decade of the last century, coinciding with the publication of *The Camera as Historian* (Elizabeth Edwards, 1916). The Annales School proposes a critical look at heritage, establishing convergences in historical interpretation between the social, economic, and artistic fields of communities as containers of culture². On the other hand, the work relates the capture of the image as an event from the past, based on the habitual representation to which the notion of truth is attributed. Thus, the construction of historical thought relates to the context, making the term "everyday life" an inherent element in constructing the past as a vestige of the real, mediated by technology. The camera activated a different form of perceiving the event in the early decades of the 20th century (the speed of mimetic capture).

Consequently, the singularities and particularities of the image allowed multiple interpretations and qualifications for its predecessors, such as painting and writing. Technology stimulates archiving and copying, but it, in turn, does not function alone, even though what is portrayed touches the concept of the real through imitation, which can be understood as a type of objectivity. For Hayden White (1992), the image must be activated (understood), like almost all creative processes produced by humans, through the interpretative encoding of the observer, whether a historian, artist, or researcher:

That mimesis should not be considered either as a photographic reproduction of events or as an operation in which events are allowed to 'speak for themselves' because, as Droysen pointed out, 'without the narrator to make them speak, they would be mute.' And far from trying to be objective, he added, 'objectivity is not the greatest glory of the historian. His fairness consists in trying to understand. (White, 1992, p. 261)

In this way, the work can be understood from at least two perspectives: the first obeys the narrative study of the author, deducing the aesthetic perspective; the second indicates an understanding of the context, which can be seen as the situational politics of the image.

2 A global, critical, comparative perspective from the long-term history that takes us all the way from characters to works, from works to the collective project, from the project to cultural and social contexts, and from these to the broader panorama of historical studies in the contemporary era (Aguirre, 2006).

The Position of Truth

Generally, all research is subjective, and the philosopher of art Georges Didi-Huberman calls this taking a position, as the presented viewpoints usually pursue the condition of truth.

The issue of reality in history is polysemic, and this troubles us because, on the one hand, it is related to royalty. On the other, it is associated with an adjective of truthfulness that seeks to contain truth as the principle of reality. The question that Michel Foucault asks us is, “Why then is there, in addition to the real, the true?” (2014, p. 240) if the real as a tradition is part of a system of power and is articulated within an ideological apparatus (politics) without the need for it to be authentic. Thus, the real³ (imperial-feudal-monarchical-regal, etc.) implies a strategy of disseminating an external truth, considered a fiction drafted from institutional power (regime), establishing social dynamics such as history, education, or rules. Therefore, “truth without power is a chimera since truth constitutes and emerges as an exercise of power, it is power itself. Thus, each society has its truth regime, a ‘general politics of truth’” (Rodríguez, 2015, p. 217). In this sense, the real and the truthful can be synonymous but vary significantly by source, context, writing and reading period. As a fundamental concept in forming (regal) investigative consciousness and appropriating the past through artistic creation, this process can be called montage because it juxtaposes facts, images, and gradations of truth and reality to create new versions. Montage can be read as genuine over time, but it also has features of hesitation, cracks, or fissures through which the symbol escapes, allowing fiction to filter through.

Reality and fiction can also be analyzed from the concept of the “almost,” which operates as a wildcard in the creative method, indicating that it is not something but lacks little to be or is the opposite. From the “almost,” the concept of montage functions as a collage, organizing fragments to construct a whole. Paul Ricoeur uses the concept of the “almost” as a limit that

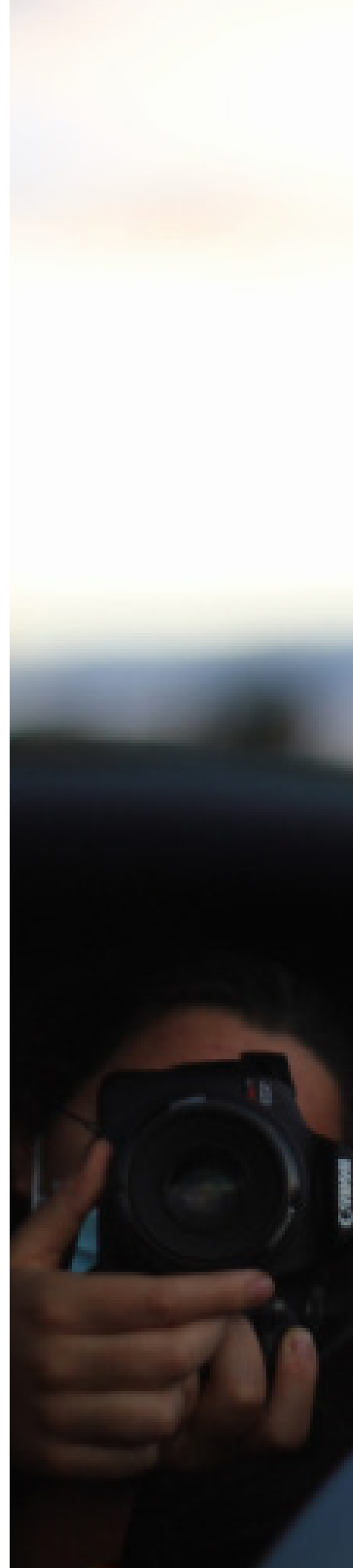
“[...] can be understood in two senses: as an internal limit, it will be understood as surpassing, until the exhaustion of the art of narrating, almost the threshold of the inscrutable. As an external limit, the overcoming of the narrative genre by other genres of discourse that, in their way, also dedicate themselves to telling time.” (1995, p. 1032)

This unit hovers between positivism and empiricism. It is almost history and almost fiction. It is almost truth and almost lie; it is quite an artistic game because it appropriates both elements and turns its results (images, narratives) into dialectical games, giving rise to an artistic manifestation.

The Construction of Truth from the Perspective of Art

The interest in establishing a counterforce to the system implies more politically active subjects. Consequently, traditional macronarratives have been questioned more insistently from the early decades of the 20th century when the real and the

3 *Real, regio*. Both come from “regir,” meaning rule, regulation, regime, regiment, correct, etc. *Real* is applied to the title or dignity of a king. *Regio* is applied to the king as a person, as intelligence, and as a feeling, that is, as spirit; hence, the word regio is more noble than the term real (Barcia, 2010)



veracious undergo the sieve of interpretation and are compared with studies in historiography and historiography in the field of arts. Rigor in pursuing the truth or the (im)perfect destabilizes narratives that have been unquestionable for decades since they originated from the real-power narrative.



Illustration 2. From left to right: Francisco Antonio Cano (1922), *El ejército patriota en el páramo de Pisba*. Óleo sobre lienzo (<http://quintadebolivar.gov.co/que-hacemos/coleccion/Piezas%20Destacadas/Forms/DispForm.aspx?ID=38&RootFolder=/que-hacemos/coleccion/Piezas%20Destacadas>). Robert Capa (1936), *Muerte de un miliciano republicano*. Fotografía en blanco y negro (<https://www.museoreinasofia.es/coleccion/obra/death-loyalist-militiaman-muerte-miliciano-republicano>). Reuters (2000), *Colombian soldiers carry a guerrilla injured in combat during an attack in Guayabetal Meta province*, Fotografía a color (<https://www.reuters.com/news/picture/colombias-long-war-with-the-farc-idJPRTSR6WS>).

Thus, gender representations such as *El ejército patriota en el paramó de Pisba* (1922) by Francisco Antonio Cano intersect narrative power with the truth of the image in a traditional period of painting in Colombia. Cano creates a pictorial montage of the event almost a hundred years later (the battle occurred in 1819), possibly considering readings from the Independence period. His study invites us to observe a theatrical dramatic composition that imparts a more human character to Liberator Bolívar and presents the adversities of war from a perspective that humanizes the heroic figure, thus creating an aura of truth. Does the same happen with historiography, or does it bring us closer to the event in a different way? In Robert Capa's photograph *Muerte de un miliciano republicano* (Death of a Republican Militiaman), published for the first time in *Revista Vu* (1936), we witness the precise moment when the militia man Federico Borrell García is hit by ammunition. Unlike painting, photography brings reality and truth as inherent attributes, thanks to the principle of translating light into form, capturing time in a snapshot. The immediacy provided by the shutter speed and Capa's statements as eyewitnesses to the event is questioned as a montage; some claim that Capa staged the image as a product of a compositional action⁴.

Additionally, besides questioning the veracity of photography, the Reuters image is configured in a period of heightened violence in Colombia (2000). Its notion of truth can be analyzed within the context of the (im)perfection of war due to the narrative needs of media in the service of the State to construct stories

4 See, for example, the exhibition dedicated to the topic by the Reina Sofía Museum in 1999: *Capa: cara a cara. Fotografías de Robert Capa sobre la Guerra Civil española* (Capa: Face to Face. Photographs by Robert Capa on the Spanish Civil War) from the collection of the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía. <https://www.museoreinasofia.es/exposiciones/capa-cara-cara-fotografias-robert-capa-sobre-guerra-civil-espanola-coleccion-museo>.

beyond mere information. Peter Burke states that “photographs are never a testimony of history; they are something historical” (2001, p. 28). In this way, both painting and photography function as subjective materials, maintaining the author’s position and being able to modify themselves according to context and observer, establishing the principle of the (im)perfection of the image.

Reality and fiction are elements that configure the idea of the world image. The veracious seeks to comprehend events that influence human behaviors. Truth is relative; thus, historical-artistic expressions (illustration 2) have various means of understanding, such as historiography, which Hayden White defines as the discipline that studies “the representation of history and our thoughts about it in visual images and film discourses” (2010, p. 217). References change with the context. Previously, for some historians, images from artistic fields such as painting or sculpture did not have enough weight in historical construction due to being representations attributed to the praxis of the artist, possibly because of their relation to (im)perfection (*De Im*: ‘distancing from the real’ and *Perfection*: ‘aesthetic canon’ = ‘spatiotemporal distance from the event’). Historiography, on the other hand, due to its relationship with modern inventions like photography and video tapes, becomes a complementary tool for historiography (witness), and today it is an inseparable tool in studying history. For Burke, photography becomes a testimony of everyday life and the context that needs to be analyzed in-depth:

From a very early date in the history of photography, the new medium was studied as an auxiliary to history. In a lecture delivered in 1888, George Francis urged a systematic collection of photographs, considering them “the best possible graphic representation of our lands, our buildings, and our ways of life.” The problem facing the historian is whether to give credit to these images and to what extent. (Burke, 2001, p. 25)

From this perspective, the enormous photographic production would pose a problem of time and selection for obtaining the elements to consider. The excess of photographic archives would complicate the appreciation and study of the material; the risk of constructing versions with imprecise selection is also a question of truth.

The Truth as a Symbolic Tool of the Researcher-Creator Artist

The investigative exercise establishes intersubjective relationships in situational and temporal fields inherent to the social and cultural context. Thinkers like Walter Benjamin with his concept *The Author as Producer* (1934) and later Hal Foster, who reformulates this idea with “The Artist as Ethnographer” (*The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*, 2001), propose significant methodologies in how to think about artistic products and their relationship with historical, political, and cultural activities. This approach immerses itself in a defined context, enabling a participatory social relationship distancing itself from the functionalist tradition that suggests a single recipient and sender of information, thus providing a counterbalance in the narrative. Therefore, the field of knowledge is broad and diverse in its meanings and scopes.

[...] the aesthetic quality versus political relevance, form versus content were ‘timeless and sterile’ in 1934. Benjamin tried to overcome these oppositions in representation

through the third term of production, but neither of the two oppositions has disappeared.” (Foster, 2001, p. 176)

The relationship with multiple theoretical and practical knowledge enables the formulation of innovative exercises associated with research creation. These exercises, mediated by art, become transversal axes in spaces of critical reflection, such as exhibition spaces, art texts, classrooms, or workshops, understood as determining places of thought. Art, with its productive and inclusive nature, collaborates with other areas due to its interdisciplinary capacity, and its constructive essence is formed within the expansive complexity of themes and modes. As Juan Carlos Arias proposes,

[...]there are no research objects in themselves; they become objects of research to the extent that the research process configures them. This definition of the research object implies a distance from which the object is recognized as a research object.” (2010, p. 7)

In this logic, it is not enough to recount an event, express a feeling, or denounce any condition; these excuses are treated as observable, translatable, reinterpretable, and turned into products *a priori* and *a posteriori*. Since “the basis for building a relationship between art and research is a new understanding of writing in art” (Arias, 2010, p. 8), we are facing scriptural, creative, artistic, and narrative renewals in the exploratory field, where there is no subordination but expansive escapes.

As an investigative-creative process, art adapts and returns to the object of study—or art itself—through semiotic rhetorical devices. Philosopher Joan Carles Mélich, in his book *Symbolic Anthropology and Educational Action* (1998), brings us closer to artistic, pedagogical, and historical symbolic relationships as common languages studied from anthropology as a notion of the social, culture, and memory in the strengthening of critical thinking mediated by the aesthetic through the symbolic.

The symbol not only reveals meaning but also bestows it. Socially engaged education is a symbolic action because all social actions are, in one way or another, ‘symbolic.’ Symbolic education is an intersubjective process that ‘bestows’ meaning. The symbol is asked to ‘give meaning’ to ‘make a sign.’ Hence, there is a double presence of the symbol in educational actions: as a social fact, the symbol is an objective of education; it is positioned as its purpose.” (Mélich, 1998, p. 67)

The symbolic as a methodological tool in constructing investigative thought also presents itself as a node in historical appropriation through artistic representations. For White, starting from the symbolic constitutes an abstract notion of reality. This allegory will lead us back to the initial problem, where the boundary is subjective concerning the real, the true, the history, and the fiction. As mentioned earlier, research is a living organ that can hybridize in constructing narratives mediated by research creation, the primary objective of this discussion between facts and their narrative forms.

The ‘real’ story opposes a ‘fictitious’ or ‘mythical’ story as a consideration (of anything) to be taken literally instead of a consideration whose purpose is to be taken

allegorically. But this opposition obscures the fact that a factual story can be apprehended as a story only insofar as it can be read as an allegory of the processes involved in the creation of 'imaginary' events with the coherence of fictional plot types. (White, 2010, p. 61)

Consequently, the value we attribute to facts, events, and stories is inscribed, through interpretation, in symbolic elements whose weight surpasses existence as a historical or social fact. It channels towards the formation of personal truths, much more real than the real, in terms of the identifying and figurative role of affective and psychological needs that translate personal mythology. The symbolic resource manifests the interpretative need for events. At that point, art intervenes as a mediator and interpreter because

[...] one must consider that a document is true and false at the same time, that is, it is a translation that can never be what happened because the real fact will always be extralinguistic, this fact narrated by a subjectivity immersed in a particular social context enunciated from a specific place." (Acosta, 2021, p. 9)

Again, the dichotomy about the need for ways of reading historical events positions the artist-researcher-creator at the core of the role of sense producer, where fictionalization enables the understanding and presentation of the event, action, or traumatic fact. As Paola Helena Acosta suggests regarding *Río abajo* (2008), a work by Erika Diettes, violence and its multiple phantasms, elaborated from investigative and relational processes in equal parts, sterilize the image to make way for the aestheticization of history where there is a presence-absence of facts and victims (in the specific case). In that sense, the interpretative surplus traverses the viewer, redefines their experience as an observer, brings the subject alluded to, as well as the represented fact, to mind through the work, and merges prior information with the present image to create a new, joint, symbolic, and broad version. The search for objects of study and analysis and their artistic products harmonizes with acquiring fragments capable of containing and producing other narrative forms or self-narratives.

Montage as a Method

The concept of *montage* solidifies the investigative process in historical, pedagogical, political, and aesthetic fields. It is a term used recursively in art and functions as a collage aiming to organize an idea mediated by the script, a guiding thread that intertwines fiction and reality. This patchwork generally symbolizes the formation of investigative thought.

As the construction of knowledge in the investigative discourse, Montage shapes the narrative to create something new or an innovative vision on the matter. Comparable to Derridean deconstruction—where language serves as a link to explore the real and the alluded, constructing and articulating differences and coincidences to create other meanings of what is inquired, and where it is a container (Derrida, 1986)—montage is a strategy that moves from one place to another to stimulate the production of meaning and significance in a vast field of possibilities. Thus, to investigate, one must articulate and disarticulate the object of study, connecting its parts with truthful facts and chimeras. For Georges Didi-Huberman (2017a), montage is an action that invites various actors as intrinsic elements to provoke and produce complex and multiple cultural and historical interpretations. Therefore, every research process would become a political stance:

Montage would be to form what politics is to act: it needs together these two meanings of dismantling, which are the excess of energies and the strategy of places, the madness of transgression, and the wisdom of position. It seems to me that Walter Benjamin has never ceased to think side by side about these two aspects of montage and political action. (Didi-Huberman, 2017a, p. 153)

The study of the concept of montage proposed by Didi-Huberman is based on the poetics of Bertolt Brecht and his photomontages, in which he "dramatizes a historical argument with theatrical pieces" (Didi-Huberman, 2017a, p. 79) using dialectics to create new meaning. This component becomes suggestive in the field of research creation as the dramatization of history becomes a pedagogical element in its circulation. One of the starting points of knowledge comes from this principle: a kind of theatricalization of history is generated, overflowing with symbolic signifiers that are reinterpretations elaborated



from each subjectivity. Thus, this deconstruction implies a critical stance (taking a position) from which one must inevitably avoid investigative and creative automatism. This patchwork is not constructed with random objects; plausible and incredible seams must be made with a high degree of consciousness, articulating ongoing discussions between inter-sensibilities and socio-aesthetics, linked in turn to interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity within an academic and social outcome.

Facing Historical Montages

Didi-Huberman presents rubbing one's eyes as the instinctive action of corroborating the certainty of what is seen when facing a dream-like image in a drowsy state. Our contemplation of this image can be considered faint, as our recognition of that representation does not obey a state of full consciousness; however, it lingers clearly in memory. The reading of Benjamin that the author provides certifies the ability of the historian in the act of awakening; for this reason, the process of historical appropriation aligns perfectly for artists: "To act as a historian does not mean knowing how things happened. It means taking hold of a memory" (Didi-Huberman, 2017b, p. 416). Appropriating memories in a context like Colombia can be dramatic. Memory becomes a ghostly specter, configuring a nightmare image in contrast to the concept of Didi-Huberman. Various actors in the country, converging in the creation of pathetic and sobbing images, have consolidated a

violent culture. However, the tragic context becomes one of the main investigation elements in societies that need to remember their dramatic past as a catalyst for symbolic memory. It becomes an object of study-desire based on collective and personal history appropriation.

Attempting to reconstruct history through artistic practices constitutes the hybridization between fiction and reality that we have been discussing, and it also engages with the context of the country in constructing political subjects who recognize artistic expressions as a different way of narrating history. In the Colombian context of violence, reality and truth demand to be treated through symbolic mechanisms that indirectly allude to the issues using diaphanous mechanisms that allow a diffuse observation of what happened without the intention of reproducing the events truthfully. In such an attempt at truthfulness, the tragic would be reproduced again. However, it should not be overlooked that in the symbolic realm, there is also room for oblivion, a substantial factor in the construction of collective memory.

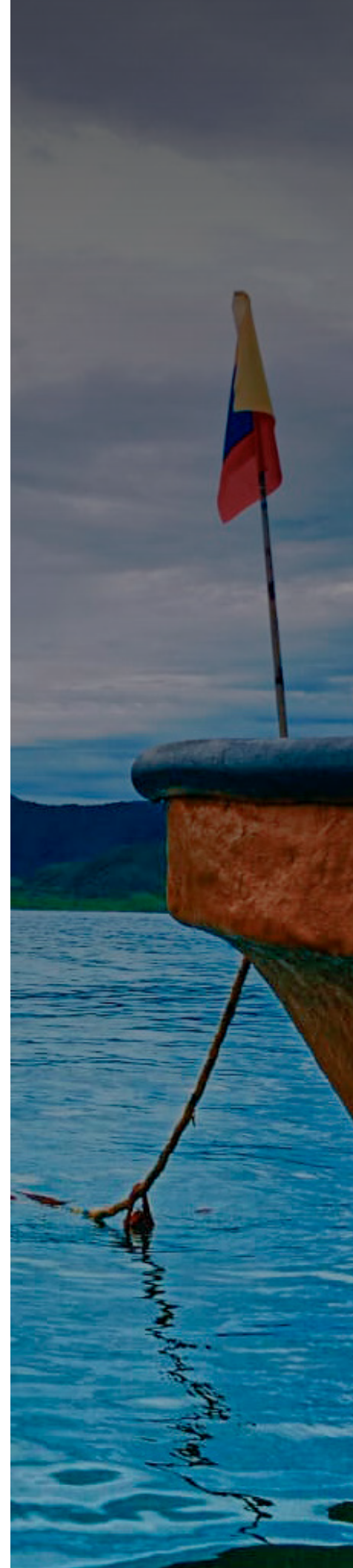
Historical deconstruction becomes complex due to its dichotomy between narrating and remaining silent. Art enables rhetorical language as a persuasive, political, and historical tool. In a way, it links this bifurcation in the creative act so that the montage creates voids (cracks) that can be considered forgetfulness. However, this does not mean that "putting an end to horror in one's personal history

[...] generates desires to forget, which inevitably contradict the political will not to forget, which is often the expression of the victims' resistance" (Lira, cited in Rubiano, 2022, p. 26). Thus, the convergence of history and artistic creation in the appropriation of memory, mediated by violence, links pain to an inherent feeling of a shared past.

The encounter with history undoubtedly becomes a mystical relationship. Rubbing one's eyes assumes the perspective of intrigue, placing doubt in the forefront, questioning whether what we see is mediated by the real or the fictional, the ideal or the repressed. It involves constant discernment between the lived, the remembered, and the dreamed. Therefore, creating a critical context from the first encounter with culture history is essential. Didi-Huberman, in his book, *When Images Take Positions*, indicates that one cannot easily escape the past "because the politics of the present is reflected in the future" (2017b, p. 45). This comment suggests a citation of Nietzsche's theory of eternal return and Aby Warburg's survival theory, as events extend through memory. However, history mediated by the image does not intend to maintain a continuity of narratives; on the contrary, it proposes to create a difference within an analysis of the context, emphasizing similarities and differences that fuel contrasts concerning the past and present, understanding it as manipulation, reinterpretation, or appropriation. In this sense, artistic reflections are mobilized through the borrowing of memories, which are variations of the past due to their high degree of subjectivity, allowing for resignification by artists or the communities themselves.

In the microfilm *Abrir monte* (María Rojas, 2020) and the exhibition "*Abrir monte: relación de aspecto*" (curated by María Rojas and Andrés Jurado, 2021), we see that historical montage takes on detective, vindictive, and political hues, using as a starting and research point a single date (July 19, 1929), a small group of people, and a single—and insignificant—motivation: to promote a Bolshevik revolution in the municipality of Líbano, Tolima. At the time, socialist ideas from Russia gained some popularity, and the Socialist Revolutionary Party had affiliations in various places in Colombia, including Líbano. The initiative to create a Bolshevik revolution was based on the conviction that this was the way to generate changes in favor of peasants and salaried workers. Initially, this revolt was supposed to take place in several cities across the country simultaneously; however, in Líbano, the three hundred men ready to start the conflict were unaware that the plan had been discovered and the idea aborted, and they embarked, perhaps, on the first armed communist insurrection in Latin America, which lasted one day. In *Abrir monte* and "*Abrir monte: relación de aspecto*," the voices of characters who heard the story from a family member—now fantastic tales due to the limited knowledge of the matter—are alternated, and, consequently, it positions the narratives in the interstice between fiction and reality:

The narrations that are framed are the remnant of a trauma. They are not ensuring or narrating the facts with fidelity, loyalty, or correctness; they are opening a path to consider the actions of the present or feel the repetition and archetype of the drama framed on the screens. Something that, in advance and materially, affects all images made by technical



means or transmitted [...], whether in film, video, photography, or painting.” (Rojas and Jurado, 2021, web)

Aspects of possibilities, different political stances, and dreams of better living conditions coexist in these projects, in which closing one’s eyes to reality and yearning for others is caressed as a desire. In the various resulting historical positions of the visual and audiovisual experiment, montage allows the coexistence of techniques, perspectives, discourses, narrative strategies, and memory exercises.

Diverse Historical Perspectives in Montage

Attempting to understand the past is unavoidable for humans, as we always live in it. History is generally classified into two significant aspects: macro-narratives, which serve to reproduce the voice of power, the state versions of great heroes or politicians who proclaim themselves as universal figures; and micro-narratives, which focus on unofficial stories, texts, letters, autobiographies (journals), objects that enhance a particular way of seeing the past. The convergence of these two trends invites us to compare history to create unique connections in understanding the context by identifying particularities through historiographical and historiophotic methods, where time, space, and the recognition (position) of the author are vital for the social understanding of an event. Trying to establish differences and similarities from one’s official history involves an exercise of rereading capable of generating new interpretations, in addition to the challenge that understanding the symbolic as a connector of the historical poses for research-creation.

The Annales School explored this type of comparison, generating new models to approach the past, where society and its infinite diversity are positioned as the most efficient way to understand culture. This way of seeing and appropriating history becomes particular in the methodological approach of an investigation, as some canonical models of culture function as state evidence of history in a single way. Still, recognizing particular histories without an institutional focus, microhistories enable the insertion and more plural and diverse analysis of any cultural aspect. The new technicalities propose a paradigm shift in the interpretation of



image and context. Current storage systems can be understood as more democratic; unlike specialized archive centers such as libraries, platforms like social networks can be considered public domain, where even private matters are exposed, and therefore, they allow exploring other versions called e-memory⁵.

For Arlette Frage, archives produce new sensory experiences and participatively modify the idea of history and culture concerning how it is perceived and narrated. This tool can be seen as a counterpart to official history, dominated by a minority to which a supposed aura of reality was granted; archives such as the press, decrees, or institutional communications are contrasted by the social core (majority), which narrates the event from another perspective:

The archive is a tear in the fabric of days, the sketch of an unexpected event. It is entirely focused on some moments in the lives of ordinary characters, rarely visited by history, except if one day they decide to gather in crowds and build what will later be called history. (Frage, 1991, p. 11)

However, none of the mentioned expressions (history, real, true, fiction, chimera, context, violence) escapes the need for comparison, although they differ in their various supports or tones. Interdisciplinarity is combined with the context, inviting diverse analyses consulting other sources of knowledge such as empirical, scientific, philosophical, or dogmatic, perhaps with the pretentious idea of understanding and mastering research.

Fiction is an inseparable element of history. The intrigue created by the experience of understanding the context of a situation establishes a dynamism with creation, culture, and methodology. This view is mediated by the idea of Paul Ricoeur idea and the intertwining of history and fiction in his text *Time and Narrative III* (1995), in which he does not intend to establish a competition between the concepts of the real or the true; on the contrary, he seeks to establish communication with the imagined place and the written place (history-culture) as a refiguration understood as an effect-sign, associated with the concept of lived time and the poetic act of narrating:

The problem is to show how the refiguration of time through history and fiction is concretized thanks to the loans that the two narrative modes mutually make to each other. These loans will consist of this: historical intentionality is only realized by incorporating the formalization resources of fiction derived from narrative imagination into its objective. In contrast, the intentionality of fictional narrative produces its effects of detecting and transforming action and suffering only by assuming symmetrically the formalization resources of history offered by attempts to reconstruct the actual past.” (Ricoeur, 1995, p. 780)

In culture, it is expected to observe the past mediated by the archive in collective and personal terms. In the collective, a historical event is reviewed, a rhetorical interpretation is formulated, or a manifestation is taken until it becomes a text (narrative product); then, lived time is fictionalized in the exercise of creation or its transcription. Privately, history focuses on individual study objects, processes understood from the Self that circulate in a singular past, establishing links with memory and one's own lived time⁶. This differs from what we will call state or official time. The idea of narrating from the Self uses intimate mechanisms such as love and family, among others. Desires are present, and the creative relationship makes the singularities assumed as particularities possible.

For Roger Chartier, history presents various degrees: rational, social, or ideological, which are organized in a fragile (poor, as he calls it) idea in the development of studying the object, which establishes or determines the degrees of historicization where the historicization of fiction or the fictionalization of history intervene. For the author, this duality represents the weakness of the discipline itself. Starting from a research-creation exercise, mediated by the imagined, does not imply a lack of recognition of the context through the archive or sources. In the field of arts, the ideal is to turn historical reading into a symbolization vehicle that appropriates memory, producing an imbalance between the real-truthful and imagination, which, in turn, is an imperative act but does not seek to achieve the status of reality:

5 E-memory is a new form of information exchange, network construction, and storage of an existence without origin but with a lot of future; without origin but with a lot of past. E-memory is a sphere from which we can see all individuals walking towards the same point but taking diverse routes (Fernández Arias, 2016).

6 They tell us our own sense of where we are in the vastness of history, which is our place in the infinite succession of men who have lived and of the things that have happened (Ricoeur, 2009, p. 779).

Among these degrees of reality (which have long been the basis of the opposition between socio-economic history, which reached reality through material documents, and another history dedicated to the productions of the imaginary) but to understand how the articulation of regimes of practice and series of discourses produce what is permissible to designate as 'reality,' the object of history." (Chartier, 1992, p. 73)

Thus, the symbolization of the studied object transforms into history. In contrast, history allows the modeling of the event itself, and the artistic result, beyond pretending to establish itself as a univocal truth, seeks to promote discourse and awaken interest in the analysis that enriches the event in its existing and probable versions.

Rubbing One's Eyes and the Lightning as Montage Tools

The image-culture becomes dialectical through the discussion between fiction and reality, as they intersect based on sociological and anthropological formulas to understand an event, allowing the establishment of innovative forms of appropriation of the past. The dialectical image remains associated with the dream and, in turn, with the act of rubbing one's eyes, the latter being an emotional stage that transforms the analyzed event into an aesthetic and political issue. It is aesthetic because its perception must be constructed from a micro-instant, a vestige, a lightning that evokes an image. Political because it arises from emotional experiences that we call ideologies, allowing us to establish a context and a narrative. For Didi-Huberman, the act of rubbing one's eyes is exposed as "—when its images, its emotions, and its political actions are not divided by anything—, the images are not dialectical, the emotions 'are poor in content,' and political actions 'imply no power'" (2017b, p. 415). Reality then presents itself to us as lightning, a fleeting moment we attend briefly. Georges Didi-Huberman's interpretation of Benjamin with the concept of the dialectical image warns about the possibility of seeing the past through the experience provoked by the flash of a camera, a moment in which we manage to capture fleetingly that brilliance since the image "emerges and fades away in the very instant it is offered to knowledge" (Gandillac in Didi-Huberman, 2017b, p. 416). Hence, time and awareness of attending that moment are decisive in interpreting events and, later, in the symbolization through the methodology of montage.



Illustration 3. *Jesús Abad Colorado (2018). "The Witness. Photographic Anthology-1992 to 2018." Black and white photograph. In May 1998, the residents of Puerto Alvira in Mapiripán, Meta, had to flee after the massacre of twenty-four people. The hurried evacuation forced each inhabitant to carry only a single possession by hand, as they had to board a plane chartered by the ICRC to Villavicencio. The girl chose to take a small chicken, which was the most recent gift from her godmother.*

Source: <https://www.soho.co/entretenimiento/galeria/los-animales-victimas-de-la-guerra-por-jesus-abad-colorado/37849/>.

The above leads us to the work of Jesús Abad Colorado López and his exhibition "The Witness, Photographic Anthology – 1992 to 2018" (Claustro de San Agustín, Bogotá, 2018) (illustration 3). The concept of rubbing one's eyes, as presented by Didi-Huberman, is literally and graphically depicted in this exhibition, where the democratic crisis of society is portrayed both with and without the mediation of metaphor. Contrary to the idea of the author, images by Colorado are dialectical, full of content and power; the montages are constructed by the victims themselves without the need to create a

scenography or an installation alluding to that lived time. This montage approaches the concept of the nightmare as a possibility within the same dream.

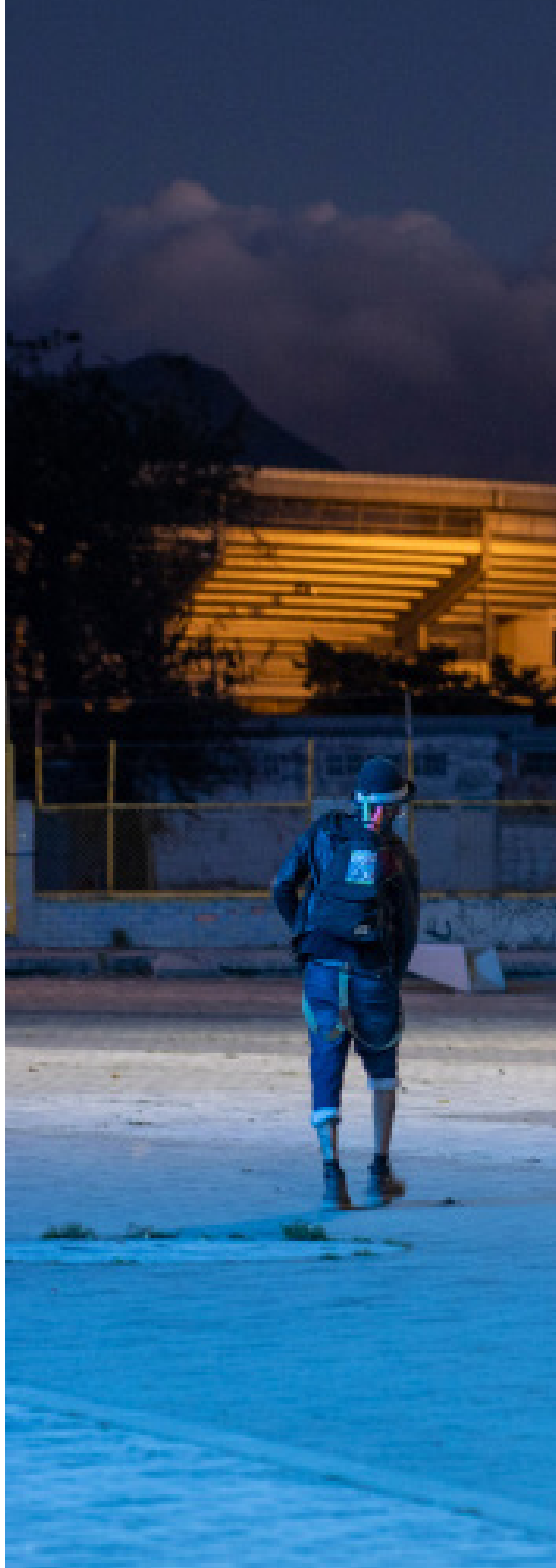
I am a journalist and a photographer, and for many years, I have used exhibition spaces to narrate the history of what has happened to us in a society that is ashamed to look at itself in the broken mirror left by war. I create images with a sense of memory, not to be stored in a press archive; they are simple photographs but dignified and taken on foot, as journalism is done, and that is why they have names and faces so that we can understand that this pain should also be mine, that our responsibility is also to help solve this tragic history that has occurred in the country.” (Colorado, in Dirección de Patrimonio Cultural UN, 2018, p. 5)



Illustration 4. Doris Salcedo (1994), *The Widowed House*.
Installation, wood, plaster, and fabric.

Source: [https://www3.mcachicago.org/2015/salcedo/works/ la_casa_viuda/](https://www3.mcachicago.org/2015/salcedo/works/la_casa_viuda/).

In the work of Colorado, the concept of montage is subtle or practically absent, in contrast to the narrative construction of the Colombian armed conflict as a historical reading by Doris Salcedo. Mieke Bal describes the



convergence of the real (political) through metaphorization (aesthetic). In the work, *La casa viuda III* (1994) (Illustration 4), the installation (space) becomes a vestige of violence (political) mediated by the concept of oblivion, which performs a notable and intimate function, evoking, like a flash, an anonymous memory. This narrative does not seek ownership since “the political space is already full of politics, just as the private is invaded by the public domain” (Bal, 2014, p. 177). The work of Salcedo involves a sophisticated montage, as the metaphor implies a reading between the lines of the context; the piece creates gaps, forgetfulness, which may go unnoticed by the observer due to a lack of context or, conversely, fills the cavities with their memories. The observer must perceive some signal of that flash, where, more than a problem, what is presented is a question to be solved through their own experience and interpretation.

This analogy with the flash appears in the form of constructing an event as a kind of instantaneous illumination that is fragile but stable, like a crystal, as it strengthens with flashes mediated by the triangulation of knowledge without claiming to seize an absolute truth but to appropriate a shared memory, establishing a series of dialogues with violent memory and history. Didi-Huberman proposes the term “lifting the veil of repression” (2017b, p. 387), inviting us to think that whatever the intention of the investigation (private history or public history), it is necessary to establish a dialectical relationship with the past to generate notable differences in how positions are taken in seeing images and objects. In this article, distancing oneself and questioning closed and univocal discourses is a stance to be assumed from the experiences of investigations where history operates as the starting point within the subjectivity inherent in creation.

Conclusions

Engaging in a dialogue between fiction and reality implies a philosophical perspective that can be considered the convergence between the scientific and the empirical, where each creation walks on a thin line between the magical as a fantastic invasion and the verifiable as the checkable. Reality and fiction are found in the archives to be studied, which will later become historical or artistic montages. Artistic products respond to personal quests and, to that extent, are crossed by the different contexts experienced by the artist-researcher-creator, successive interpretations of experiences, memories, what is heard, read, or seen, in translation and positioning of new versions, renewed metaphors, or uncomfortable questions to history and the present. Investigating the field of arts with an archaeological perspective implies the reconstruction of facts, turning the creative experience into a construction of montages, which, on the one hand, function as elements of catharsis in the appropriation of tragic memories to transform them into social experiences that warn against the non-repetition of similar events; and on the other hand, they allow historical reconfiguration intending to diversify narratives, and in this way, the possibility of rewriting. Stressing the investigative characteristic of art emphasizes the rigor that precedes the realization of the work. Photography, painting, audiovisuals, memory objects, or space are plastic elements with a halo of spectacularity as a finished product. Still, nothing could be further from the pretension of the artist-researcher, as the work, in this sense, is an open question for interpretation. Undoubtedly, the spectator completes the work; in that sense, the dialogue between the artist-researcher-creator and the observer is endless. The work of art, possessing reality and fiction as constitutive elements, is itself a new archive of the studied facts, a speaker that does not cease in its purpose to position and invite historical construction and reconstruction.

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