

A CATASTROPHE THAT HAS ALREADY TAKEN PLACE. [PUNCTUAL SINGULARITY IN AMPARO SARD'S WORK] Fernando Castro Flórez

“Counterpoint theory or parade of stigmas: a wound opens up at the point of its singularity, at the same instant (*stigma*), on its tip. But *in the place* this event occurs, through the same wound, the substitution that repeats within makes its own way, just by keeping the same wound from which it breaks through, the substitution that repeats within and it just keeps a past desire from the irreplaceable”.¹

I have to take down some notes or rather, *point at* an event that takes place between error and oblivion, there where anguish emerges by means of the sinister.² Amparo Sard's work that Antonio d'Avossa understands as objects, spaces and locations subject to *oeniric conditions*: “The Woman and the Fly represent a scene that dreams and reiterates the dream of the present tiring human condition where insects are a kind of super-ego developing all these places common to social rules and cancelling thought, action and obviously to art”.³ Freud pointed out that, after its complete interpretation, all dreams unfold as fulfilment of desire, that is to say, dreams are the hallucinatory realisation of unconscious desire.⁴ Dreams catch us all up and take us to the *abysm* of the massive-sublime, of tenderness, of the frayed memory of *matrix*. There we find a *profound truth*; Plato himself would fight for *the experience of dreams*,⁵ against the prejudice about the necessity of “getting rid of appearances”. In fact, dreaming means “to know nothing about what happens to you”.⁶ Surely, there is a knob or a labyrinthic structure that separate us from the clear vision of what is dreamt; as Freud would say, the dream's navel is *the unknown*, something that is beyond the reticulation of intellectual world⁷. Art establishes a pleasant *delay*, and especially in Amparo Sard's work, it involves the claiming of a singular intensity of life.⁸ Our minds have to be open to anything; we have to be able to establish, in Freudian terms, a permanent “Free association”, that is to say, to work in the line of a *radical dream excitement*.⁹ In the land of dreams, ghosts and the most bizarre ties fall down like rain. Heidegger resumes, in his seminar of 1929-1930, Aristotle's idea about the dream being a submission tie that has to do with animal submission and bonds.¹⁰ We might have to learn to read the cracks of bread¹¹ or, as Amparo Sard does, to draw the most subtle form to be pierced later with patience and of course, with the greatest obsession.

“My papers –Amparo Sard states– could be understood from two points of view. On the one hand, the targets (suitcase, tube, chair, fly, woman, etc.) are explaining something within the rectangle defined by the paper. Something that is open

to the world of free interpretation. But on the other hand, there is the language in which I move. Subliminal language. A language that talks about the beautiful but also that it communicates with the sinister. An example of this sensation of sinister would be experienced when something seems to be alive but it is dead, as it happens with wax figures or automatons. Or vice versa. When something that must be living is an object, as it happens with an amputated arm, for example”.¹² The *disturbing strangeness* Amparo Sard conveys has to do with something that, according to Freud, has been repressed and then resumed: the homely-familiar cannot, in the end, hide its pulsion dimension and at the same time abysm dimension of childhood complexes.¹³ They are not precisely happy games the ones we find in Amparo Sard's papers and videos; there is danger, loneliness and silence prevail; it could even be said that this imaginary is close to *the spectral*. These emotional impulses are able to pierce the immaculate surface in order to embody and make anguish transparent in an almost “tactile” plea.

Perhaps Butler is right in pointing out that the body is not the place in which destruction takes place, but it is destruction whose course is able to create a subject. “The subject's training is simultaneously submission, framing and body regulation as well as the mode under which destruction is maintained (in the sense of supported and embalmed) *in its normalization*”.¹⁴ For Jacques Derrida, for instance, the body is not presence, “it is somehow an experience of context, of dissociation, of dislocation”,¹⁵ Even so, the artist is always the one who leaves *traces* behind, materials that quite often compose something similar to a crime scene;¹⁶ the trace is what signals and what is not erased, but it is also what is

not present in a permanent way. What prevails in Amparo Sard's work is the *traces*, eventually figurative, of something disturbing, of their embodiment in a sort of *theatre of cruelty*, where one is forced to reach the *limits*. In a period in which we might have taken on too much tranquillity - *destinerrance*, opposite to this

ideology of “virtualization of the world”, there appear diverse veiled situations, traces of the different, events that have something of paradox, the signs that push us towards a creative adrift: “everywhere we leave traces behind –virus, *lapsus*, germs, catastrophes– signs of imperfection that are like the signature at the heart of this artificial world”,¹⁷ These traces talk about *differences*; they are the punctual singularity of what for Amparo Sard cannot be said in any other possible way.

The image essence for Maurice Blanchot consists in being all outside, without intimacy but more inaccessible and mysterious than the thought of the heart of hearts; meaningless, but referring to the depth of any possible nuance: “unrevealed but also at display; with this presence-absence that entails the attraction and fascination for Mermaids”. Towards the shipwreck or, to be more precise, towards the water where the subject drowns, Amparo Sard’s work takes us Sunday-dressed through her bizarre “autobiography”. Her work is an allegory of the human condition that “offers a vision of both the beautiful and the monstrous involved in the loss of identity”.¹⁸ She goes deep into an area of shadows to account for all the uncertainties constituting us.¹⁹ Her position is not that of the hero who wants to enjoy what is fatal by accepting its ties, but on the contrary, Amparo Sard throws herself into a risky territory by transforming the Heraclitean river of metamorphosis into mortal water metonymically materialized by the mirror that works the same way as if the Other, the one materializing desire, were present.

“Jenny Holzer’s truism, “Protect me from what I want”, perfectly expresses this fundamental ambiguity involved in the fact that desire is always the Other’s desire. It is possible to interpret as “Protect me from the excessive self-destructive desire that lays within me and that I am unable to control”. Here there is an ironic reference to traditional male-centred wisdom according to which women, self-released, get trapped into a self-destructive rage so that they must be protected from their own force by benevolent male domination. In more radical terms, this sentence evidences that in today’s patriarchal society, woman’s desire is radically alienated, and thus she wants what men expect her to wish, she wants to be wanted, and so on. In this case, “Protect me from what I want” means “What I want is already imposed by the patriarchal socio-symbolic order that tells me what I must wish so that the first condition for my freedom is that I break the vicious circle of my alienated desire and that I learn to formulate my real desire in an autonomous way”. Of course, the problem is that this second interpretation implies an opposition rather ingenuous between the heteronymous alienated desire and the really autonomous desire. But, what if desire itself were always “the Other’s desire”, in a way that as a last resort there were no way out from the hysterical cul-de-sac of “I ask you to deny what I am asking you, because it has nothing to do with *it?*”.²⁰ Perhaps, protection is, in Amparo Sard’s exceptional works, that from *desire itself*, a conscience of the abysmal, that is to say, of these turbulences of passion in which everything gets lost. But also this *paradoxical* expression has to do with the dynamics of seduction, with a saying that is folded baroquely and that does not offer a unified meaning. This does not seem an appeal to other located in a hierarchical position but, on the contrary, to a plea that tries to reach the problematic location of the *subject*: a movement that has nothing of repression but of strange glazing. As it happens in catharsis experiences, rejection and repulsion come together by the fascination for the extreme, so that *protection* here can well be the previous moment to *unconditional surrender*, to that desinterestedness that takes us so long to reach.

Much has been said about the video in which Amparo Sard appears with water up to her neck that considers her a contemporary Meade. Her countenance could also be seen as a medusas *apostrophe*, an extreme way of facing what frightens us. She runs the risk of losing her head because she doesn’t stop thinking that the subject is always before the “last opportunity to solve the problem”. As it happened in the archaic enigma “unravelling” by Oedipus: the ephemeral and disturbing, that which causes destruction *is you*. Lacan, in his seminar *The Ego in Freud’s Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*, points out that a distressing emergence of an image takes place to summarize everything that we understand as revelation of the real in that which is less penetrable, of the real without any measurement possible, of the ultimate real, of the essential object that is not object anymore, but something that makes the words interrupt and all categories fail, the object of anguish per excellence; then it happens that the subject rots and disappears or, in a dream there is the recognition of its primarily acephalic character.

By means of her works, Amparo Sard reaches the “You are

1. Jacques Derrida: “Las muertes de Roland Barthes” in *Cada vez única, el fin del mundo*, Ed. Pre-textos, Valencia, 2005, p. 87.
2. Lacan deals with anguish by means of the *Unheimlichkeit*: “The *unheimlich* is what emerges in the place where *-phi* should be found. The place where everything emerges, it is the imaginary castration, because there is no image of the lacking indeed. When something happens there, what occurs, if I can express like this, is that the lack ends up lacking” (Jacques Lacan: *El Seminario 10. La Angustia*, Ed. Paidós, Buenos Aires, 2006, p. 52).
3. Antonio d’Avossa: “El sueño de la razón genera moscas” in *Amparo Sard. La Mujer Mosca*, Galería Paola Verrengia, 2005.
4. “Freud soon has the idea, reformulated in 1900, about dreams being hallucinatory realisations of unconscious desires so that this appears as primary process model that is featured by transference of representation meanings into representation depending on processes such as displacement, the condensation whose importance will be highlighted in the creation of dreams” (Catherine Desprats-Péquignot: *El psicoanálisis*, Ed. Alianza, Madrid, 1997, p. 47).
5. “The *Teeteto* (157E and following.) [Plato] would argue, and even the mistakes made by the senses, the images of dreams and the hallucinations produced by some kind of sickness cannot be ignored blithely: it can’t be denied that the dreamer or the sick have had the experience they have lived” (F. M. Cornford: *Plato y Parménides*, Ed. Visor, Madrid, 1989, p. 340).
6. Cf. Ludwig Binswanger: *Introduction à l’analyse existentielle*, Ed. Minuit, París, 1971, p. 224.
7. “In best interpreted dreams we are somehow obliged to leave certain aspects on the darkness, since we are aware that it constitutes the convergence centre of latent ideas, a knob that is impossible to undo but that at the same time it has not provided any other element to the evidenced content. This is then what we can consider the dream’s navel that is the point linking to the unknown. Unveiled latent ideas in the analysis do never reach the boundary and we have to let them get lost around the reticular fabric of our intellectual world. From the densest part of this fabric, there a dream desire emerges”. (Sigmund Freud: *La interpretación de los sueños*, vol. 3, Ed. Cátedra, Madrid, 1988, p. 152).
8. “*Demeure* is a French verb of extreme multiplicity. Originally, *demeurer* means “to put off for later”, thus referring to the postponed, determined delay, but also referring to law terms. The question of the delay has occupied me long and I won’t confront the surviving to death. I have even come to define surviving as a different or alien possibility both to life and death, as an original concept. [...] I was never able to think about neither death nor I paid much attention to it, or even about the waiting or the anguish of death as something different from the affirmation of life. It is about two movements that, to me, seem to be inseparable: the alert attention to the imminence of death is not necessarily sad, negative or lethal, but on the contrary, to me, life itself, and the greatest intensity of life” (Jacques Derrida: *¡Palabra! Instantáneas filosóficas*, Ed. Trotta, Madrid, 2001, p. 41).
9. “ [In order to sound latent thoughts and interpret dreams] Freud proposes “free fantasy” (*freie Einfälle*) or “free association” (*freie Assoziation*) method on the images depicted in the dream that is being examined. *It is important to give free way to the psyche and to defuse all types of restrictive and critical faculties of the conscience*; everything has to reach our mind, even our most bizarre thoughts and images that apparently do not belong to the analysed dream; one has to be totally passive and thus to allow free access to everything reaching our minds in spite of this seeming to be meaningless and unrelated to what it deals; it is just important to make the effort to pay attention to whatever involuntarily emerges in the psyche” (Valentin N. Voloshinov: *Freudismo. Un bosquejo crítico*, Ed. Paidós, Buenos Aires, 1999, p. 109).
10. Cf. Jacques Derrida: *El animal que luego estoy si(gui)endo*, Ed. Trotta, Madrid, 2008, p. 176.
11. “Emperor Marcus Aurelius wrote that the cracks appearing in bread and those which are rejected by the baker are able to attract our gaze and to stimulate our hunger. These bread marks are “like the open jaws of wild animals”. At least, it is an image” (Pascal Quignard: *Retórica especulativa*, Ed. El Cuenco de Plata, Buenos Aires, 2006, p. 14).
12. Amparo Sard interviewed by Amelia Aranguren, Espacio 1 director of Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía for the commemorative 160th anniversary exhibition of LOEWE, 2006.
13. “The sinister in the experiences occurs whenever *repressed* childhood complexes are revived by an exterior impression, or whenever *overcome* primitive convictions seem to find a new configuration” (Sigmund Freud: “Lo siniestro” in E.T.A. Hoffmann: *El hombre de Arena* preceded by *Lo siniestro* by Sigmund Freud, Ed. José J. de Olañeta, Palma de Mallorca, 1991, p. 33).
14. Judith Butler: *Mecanismos psíquicos del poder. Teorías sobre la sujeción*, Ed. Cátedra, Madrid, 2001, p. 105.
15. Jacques Derrida: “Dispersión de voces” in *No escribo sin luz artificial*, Ed. Cuatro, Valladolid, 1999, p. 159.

16. Cf. Ralf Rugoff: "More than Meets the Eye" in *Scene of the Crime*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1997, p. 62.
17. Jean Baudrillard: "La escritura automática del mundo" in *La ilusión y la desilusión estéticas*, Ed. Monte Ávila, Caracas, 1997, p. 85.
18. Antonio d'Avossa: "El sueño de la razón genera moscas" in *Amparo Sard. La mujer Mosca*, Galería Paola Verrengia, 2005.
19. "Amparo Sard's work –Beatrice Salvatore points out– is an intimate reflection about human kind, about the doubts and anguishes that come together with everyday decisions and actions. It is an analysis of the shady area of human soul and of contemporary identity, always more uncertain and to be forever redefined in an endless fight between hesitation and mistake".
20. Slavoj Zizek: El espinoso sujeto. El centro vacío de la ontología política,
Ed. Paidós, Buenos Aires, 2001, pp. 319-320. In this text, I follow most of Zizek's opinions and lines of argument in his debate with Judith Butler about passionate (de)attachments.