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Accepted manuscript – English version

***La Morte Rouge (soliloquio)* by Víctor Erice. From Trauma to Fraternity: The Interstice Between Reality and Fiction**

Lourdes Montterrubbio Ibáñez

Introduction

After the premiere of *El sur* (1984), Víctor Erice declared about his next projects: ‘I have often been tempted to drift towards a fragmentary cinematic structuring, the intimate diary, the essay, the reflection, perhaps with a touch of fiction’ (Molina Foix, 1984: 51). Two decades later, in the opening of the exhibition *Correspondences Erice - Kiarostami*, the filmmaker then used the concept ‘fraternity between reality and fiction’¹ to describe his way of understanding the cinematic experience. While *Dream of Light/El sol del membrillo* (1992) is a precursor of a new contemporary cinema based on this fraternity (Monterrubbio Ibáñez, 2018b), the essayistic reflection becomes a filmic form in this correspondence between the filmmakers and, very especially, in *La Morte Rouge (soliloquio)* (2006). The temptation Erice confessed becomes an attempt, generating the two polarities theorised by Alain Ménil in relation to the essay film, temptation-attempt and objectivity-subjectivity:

There is no essay which is not, in some way, the experience of its own adventure, which is not at the same time a recherche, an investigation or an inquiry *apropos of* or *on the occasion of*, the occasion of an invention, invention of its own method and its own path (Ménil 2004: 101, italics in the original).

¹ Expression used by Víctor Erice in an interview in *El Cultural*, 15th May 2002: <http://www.elcultural.com/revista/cine/Victor-Erice/4789> Concept also presented by the filmmaker at the round table presentation of the exhibition *Erice – Kiarostami. Correspondence* at La casa Encendida, Madrid 5th July 2006.

The work responds to the most demanding definition of this filmic form, which would materialise the thinking process and the self-reflection of a subjectivity or subjectivities through the hybridisation of fiction, non-fiction and experimental cinema. Therefore, the ‘presence of the author's self, of the essayist’ and ‘the revelation of a thinking in act’ (Moure, 2004: 37) are necessary conditions that determine the enunciation of the film. Thinking in act also defined by Josep Maria Català: ‘a reflection through images, carried out through a series of rhetorical tools that are constructed at the same time as the reflection process’ (2005a: 133), in which ‘the author is always linked to this process [of thinking] and it is not possible to flee from that presence, since the work itself is nothing other than the verification of it’ (Català, 2014: 143).

Enunciative device: the soliloquy

Erice’s work is inscribed in the continuation of the film essay practices of cinematic modernity. The voice-off –following Michel Chion’s nomenclature and definition– of the essayist (or of his/her interpreter, as in the case of Chris Marker) generates the filmic enunciation by means of clearly coded devices that I call *intermedial forms* (the letter, the diary, the self-portrait, etc.), already present in their titles on many occasions. We find an obvious verification of this phenomenon in French cinema, of which I present some relevant examples:

– The letter²: *Lettre de Sibérie* (Chris Marker, 1957), *Letter to Jane* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1972), *News from Home* (Chantal Akerman, 1977), *Lettre à Freddy Buache* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1981), *Sans soleil* (Chris Marker, 1983), *Le Tombeau d’Alexandre* (Chris Marker, 1993).

– The diary: *Lettres d’amour en Somalie* (Frédéric Mitterrand, 1982), *Level 5* (Chris Marker, 1997).

– The (self)-portrait: *Jane B par Agnès V.* (Agnès Varda, 1988), *JLG/JLG Autoportrait de décembre* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1994).

– The scenario: *Scénario de Sauve qui peut la vie* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1979), *Scénario du film Passion* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1982).

² Monterrubio Ibáñez, L (2018). *De un cine epistolar. La presencia de la misiva en el cine francés moderno y contemporáneo*, Shangrila Ediciones, Santander. I carry out a study about the use of the letter as intermedial form of the essay film.

Regarding the devices, Erice chooses the soliloquy, defined in Spanish as: ‘interior or aloud reflection made alone’, to turn it into a ‘tool for investigation in the filmmaker’s own cinematic memory’ (Balló, 2012: 14). And not only in the cinematic one, but also in childhood memory and historical memory, allowing the filmmaker ‘to fuse, in a single gesture, the most intimate and personal memory with the density and weight of History’ (Zunzunegui, 2014: 57). The soliloquy is the perfect device to create a ‘memory operations laboratory’ (Berthet, 2011: 86), understanding the latter as a ‘practice and a semiotic-discursive process’, ‘a dynamic cognitive process that involves the symbolic construction of meaning, the semiosis’ (Ricaurte, 2014: 48, 53). In this way, the articulation of creative, emotional, historical and collective memory makes filmic thinking possible: ‘Conception, therefore, of memory [...] as something alive and organic that is reached from the present and reconfigured from it [...] renouncing the document to access to experience and truth, to the aesthetic gaze on one’s own life’ (González, 2006: 200).

The soliloquy allows the author to generate a *parataxic thinking* (Català, 2014: 206) that also responds to the notion of *parataxic syntax* exposed by Jacques Rancière (2009: 48) and to the concept of sentence-image in relation to its audiovisual essence: ‘The sentence is not the sayable and the image is not the visible. By sentence-image I intend the combination of two functions that are to be defined aesthetically –that is, by the way in which they undo the representative relationship between text and image’ (46). This sentence-image will transit between the dialectical and symbolic poles: ‘between the clash that a doubling of measurement systems operates and the analogy that shapes the great community, between the image that separates and the phrase that tends towards phrasing continuous’ (58). Both procedures can intermingle and ‘verge on the indiscernible’ (60).

The author's creative memory then travels to his childhood to reflect on his first cinematic experience, the screening of the film *The Scarlet Claw* (Neill, 1944) at the Kursaal cinema in San Sebastián on January 24th, 1946, at the age of five. Reflection is built through the alternation of different visual materials:

- present images, in colour video, with which the film begins and ends;
- B/W archive images of the time, photographic and filmic;
- filmmaker’s personal photographs;
- the fictional recreation of the childhood experience in B/W;
- images from *The Scarlet Claw*, still and in motion.

Erice's essayistic experience thus materialises the *montage of propositions*: 'to look at the image again, to denature its original function (narrative, observational) and to see it as representation, not to only read what it represents' (Weinrichter, 2007: 28). As Català indicates with respect to the complex image, it 'breaks the mimetic link that the image traditionally maintained with reality and replaces it with a hermeneutical link: instead of an epistemology of reflection [mimesis], an epistemology of inquiry is proposed' (2005b: 642).

The filmmaker's voice, present together with the different visual materials and sounds –including Arvo Pärt's music and the piano composition, *Música callada*, by Federico Mompou–, organises and goes through the different materials, causing their transformation and allowing the revelation. The filmmaker's vocal performance also traverses different mental spaces: the adulthood essayistic reflection, the poetic sphere of intimate memory and the emotional territory of childhood experience.

Interstitial thinking

Returning to Gilles Deleuze's postulates (1985) on the *interstice*, and its condition as germ of cinematic thinking (Monterrubio Ibáñez, 2018a), and coinciding with Laura Rascaroli's proposal: 'the essay film, as a thinking cinema, thinks interstitially [...] to understand how the essay film works, we must look at how it forges gaps, how it creates disjunction' (2017: 11). The cinematic thinking of *La Morte Rouge* is generated from four disjunctions. The first, of a temporary nature, faces the present of 2006 with the past of 1946. The second, of an identity character, fractures the self between the present adult identity in the first person and the past one, placing the five-year-old boy in a third person which objectivizes him, subjecting the intimate autobiography to analytical scrutiny and turning it into a story too, into fictional reconstruction of childhood experiences. The third, the disjunction between the reality of the boy and the cinematic fiction, paradoxically becomes indiscernible for the childhood experience, causing the trauma that can be reversed only through the artistic experience. Finally, a last disjunction between fiction and essay materialises, between the absent work and the present one, between the fiction of *The Spirit of the Beehive/El espíritu de la colmena* (1973) and the reflection of *La Morte Rouge*, configuring both works as a diptych. As Jean-Louis Leutat (2004) indicated, this diptych structure is an ideal mechanism for filmic thinking, as confirmed by the Godardian experience in some of the previously cited titles (Monterrubio Ibáñez, 2017). The film is constructed through the articulation

of these four disjunctions in the three reflection levels already mentioned: intimacy, cinema and history. I will analyse below the audiovisual procedures, the rhetorical elements, that generate this ‘interstitial thinking’ (Rascaroli, 2017: 190).

From trauma to fraternity

The introduction of the soliloquy presents us its theme and the rhetorical elements through which the film will develop: the cross-fade, the panoramic movement within the still image and the fade to/from black. The temporal disjunction is transited through a cross-fade chained in its classic functionality, which informs the passage of time in which the transformation of the Gran Kursaal Casino into a cinema takes place. The panoramic movement, for its part, introduces the research, the search that allows the generation of hypotheses. Finally, the fade to/from black materialises reflective pauses around the different addressed interstices.

The reality of the Gran Kursaal cinema slides towards the fiction that will emerge from within, that of the screening of *The Scarlet Claw*, through a first symbolic sentence-image: that of the spinning roulette wheel. This is the only fictional image about the Kursaal’s past and it will take full meaning a posteriori, materialising an equally defining décalage of the essay film *thinking in act*. Erice turns the dialectics between fiction and reality, through the semiotic-discursive process of memory, into a circular structure, without beginning or end, which has its perfect metaphor in the casino roulette. Its rotating movement causes its image to dissolve, just as the cross-fade interweaves the different filmic materials, as materialisation of the memory process. Thus ‘a territory in which history and imagination incessantly settle their accounts in permanent dialogue’ (Zunzunegui, 2014: 57) arises. The initial dialogue, the various resonances emerged among the different materials, becomes, during reflection, the fusion of fiction and reality that occurs in childhood perception. The disappearance of the interstice between fiction and reality, the indiscernibility between both spaces, provokes the childhood trauma around the cinematic experience, about which Alain Philippon reflected: “between the child and cinema something happens that is of the order of trauma, with all the more reason –although not necessarily– when the images in question are images of fear” (1999: 17). Erice himself writes after the death of the French critic:

For him, trauma, always associated with the early, childhood viewing of a film, was the place of origin, the one from which history starts to deploy its fiction. Not only the place from which one comes, but also the destination towards which, without knowing it, one is heading. (Erice, 1999: 16)

The childhood trauma, therefore, will deploy its fiction in *The Spirit of the Beehive* and will also place its destination in the essay film *La Morte Rouge*, ‘revealing the biographical keys hidden within *The Spirit of the Beehive* (1973), acquiring the air of intimate confession around the space of origins’ (Quintana, 2008: 100). This diptych structure is thus configured as an interpretive key to Erice’s film career.

After the second fade to black, the boy’s portrait appears. The trauma object of the soliloquy, which is explained next, is enunciated around a third grammatical person that distances the identification with the essayist: ‘At the time that boy was five years old. For a long time, I avoided putting a date to that crucial experience, which thus remained in an undefined spot in the lawless territory of earliest childhood’. This identity disjunction is accompanied, however, by the identification between this real boy character and his fictional incarnation, the little Ana from *The Spirit of the Beehive*. In the film, Ana appears for the first time, also accompanied by her sister, during the cinematic experience of *Frankenstein* (James Whale, 1931). Faced with the trauma caused by the indiscernibility between fiction and reality, the absence of interstice, the filmic creation of a fiction seeks to manage it.

Then, the presentation of *The Scarlet Claw* is accompanied by still images that are associated with the film and that, however, on different occasions, belong to other films of the series: *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (Alfred Werker, 1939), *The Pearl of Death* (Roy William Neill, 1944). In this way, the symbol-image of fictional fear, which will be repeated at key moments of the reflection, turns out to be a still from *Dressed to Kill* (Roy William Neill, 1946): ‘fragment of a broken mirror from a moment of our life, a fragment of the puzzle of our Imaginary’ (Philippon, 2002: 18-19). As it will happen on different occasions, the realist conception that materialises in the fiction film disappears in the filmic essay, in which the work of creative memory, its semiotic-discursive process, and the research work of the complex image, abandons the realist paradigm in favour of that epistemology of inquiry.

At this moment, the cross-fade becomes the first rhetorical element of this process of indiscernibility. It materialises the shift of fear from fiction to historical reality, that of the Spanish postwar period and the Second World War: ‘for the public *The Scarlet Claw* was mainly just one more scary film. Except that, in this instance scariness spread forth beyond the screen, prolonging its echo in the ambience of a devastated society.’ Again, the documentary image of the essay film evokes and invokes the fictional creation of *The Spirit of the Beehive*. What for the adult individual is a leisure activity through which to manage the fear imposed by reality, for the boy, still unaware of the differentiation between fiction and reality, becomes trauma. The cross-fade used between the previous frames is now slowed down to cause the superimposition, and to produce a symbolic sentence-image of it: superimposition between the horror of Nazism and the terror of fiction [Figure 1] and superimposition of that same fictional fear on the face of the boy who will not be able to differentiate them [Figure 2]: ‘Did this universal pain somehow weigh upon the heart of the five-year-old boy who, in the company of his sister –she was seven years older– walked towards the penumbra of a cinema, to see the first film of his life? It is difficult to know.’



Figure 1. Superimposition between historical reality and fiction.
 Figure 2. Superimposition between fiction and childhood experience.
La Morte Rouge (Victor Erice, 2006). Nautilus Films.

Then, the narration of that founding experience materialises through a fictional recreation that moves away from the childhood emotion shown in *The Spirit of the Beehive*. The beam of light from the projector of this B/W recreation gives way to the NO-DO images, on which the adult essayist describes the childhood reality in which the trauma is generated: ‘This documentary evidence was the substratum of reality on which a few minutes later the fiction would establish itself. But this, the boy didn’t

know; for him fiction and reality were as yet the same thing.’ As Frédérique Berthet indicates:

The present fear of an imaginary event (the postmen who are messengers of death for the boy) and the fear linked to a past fact (having grazed death under the nationalist bombs for the sister) are therefore activated each other in the darkness of a movie theatre and by the light beam of a Hollywood film (2011: 87).

On the same screen of the fictional recreation of the Kursaal, the film in motion then appears. The images of the first scene of *The Scarlet Claw* jump to the first screen of the essayistic reflection. The resonance of *The Spirit of the Hive* is again inevitable. Fictional realism made that the images of *Frankenstein* were never placed on that first screen, but rather remained framed on the wall of the village cinema. Besides, in opposition to Ana’s emotion and the realism of the viewing in the film fiction, Erice chooses a certain representational asepsis for the essay reflection. The archive images of *La Morte Rouge* are then perfectly in tune with the representation created in *The Spirit of the Beehive*, while the essayistic recreation abandons the childhood emotion materialised in the fiction film. In other words, while the fictional creation around trauma is generated from the postulates of the realism of representation, the essayistic reflection, once again, leaves that space to materialise from the freedom of hybridisation and experimentation.

The cinematic childhood experience will also star in Erice's second letter to Kiarostami, in which the children of a school in Arroyo de la Luz, Cáceres, see, before the filmmaker's small camera, Kiarostami's film, *Where is the Friend's house?/Khane-ye doust kodjast?* (1987), to be discussed with their teacher later. Unaware of the trauma of that first childhood film experience in the 1940s, sixty years later the children of Arroyo de la Luz identify with the Iranian children, in the same way that Ana did with the little Maria from *Frankenstein*. Erice then focuses his attention on the other side of childhood experience, that of identification, which makes cinema a magnificent experience of knowledge, as he states in the conclusion of his letter: ‘There is a truth that we adults frequently forget: that children do not know borders, that the whole world is their home’. The trauma of the boy Victor is generated on this truth, which Erice recreates through the fiction of *The Spirit of the Beehive*. *La Morte Rouge* and *Goldstadt* are also Victor’s and Ana’s homes respectively. Once again, the diptych structure

provides the necessary interstice for reflection, between realist representation and epistemological analysis. While fiction recreates the intimate and subjective childhood experience, modifying the protagonist's behaviour in the face of trauma, who confronts it instead of succumbing to it, the essay film reflects on it, putting it in relation to various elements (historical, sociological, philosophical, cinematographic).

The boy then discovers death, and murder, through fiction: 'It was there, in the midst of what the vast majority thought of a mere pastime, that the boy discovered that people died; and, furthermore, that men were able to kill other men.' On the recreated faces of those spectators, now devoid of emotion, the essayist shows the double aspect of trauma: the discovery of death and the pact of silence around it, the secret:

This fact awoke a suspicion in the boy: the unanimous attitude of the adults had to be the consequence of a pact that they'd all agreed to, consisting of saying nothing and carrying on watching. Because all of them possessed one feature in common: they knew something he didn't know, a secret that explained everything. To uncover it was, from that moment on, the disturbing adventure to which he felt drawn by a force superior to his will, the one which cause him to glimpse the other face of fiction: a black hole in the fabric of reality, a drain down which the entire innocence of the world had gone.

Thus, Erice reveals how that traumatic childhood experience and the imposed secret would trigger his artistic vocation. He also develops this experience of the secret in *The Spirit of the Beehive*, generating a fracture in the relationship between father and daughter as a consequence of the relationship that Ana establishes with the maquis finally murdered.

Once the trauma is caused in the cinema, it will accompany the boy as he leaves the screening. Terror has seeped into his real experience, which the adult author then materialises by means of two new superimpositions: two family photographs next to his sister with the river water flowing at night. In the first, both remain together on the left side of the light beam which, reflected on the water, divides the screen. In the second, this reflection –symbol of the cinematic beam of light– inevitably separates them [Figure 3], as the cinematic experience has done, turning the sister into an executioner: 'He looked into her eyes as if she were a stranger, lips pressed together, saying nothing.' Again through superimposition, Erice generates a new symbolic sentence-image, we witness the thinking in act. The bells of fiction now ring out in the memory

of that childhood reality. This same duality is materialised in *The Spirit of the Beehive* after the viewing of *Frankenstein*, when Isabel shows Ana the residence of the spirit and later fakes her own death to scare her [Figure 4]. The real sibling relationship is transformed by trauma. The fiction recreates this transformation and the essay film analyses it, offering an image capable of synthesising it.

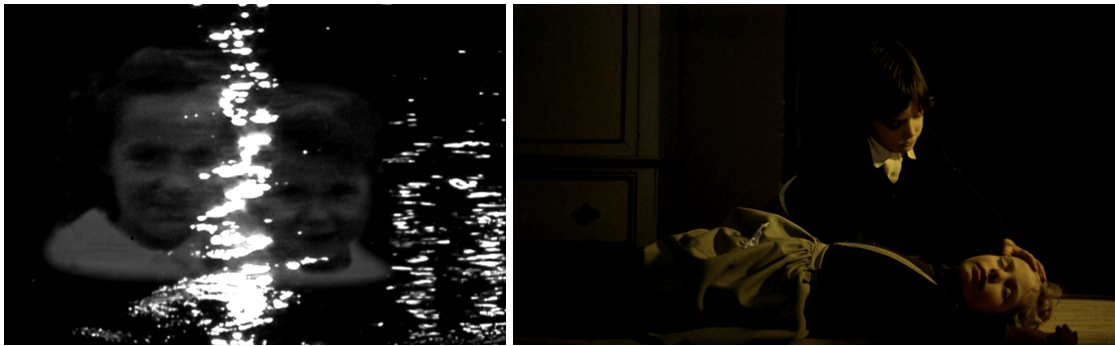


Figure 3. Symbolic sentence-image in *La Morte Rouge* (Victor Erice, 2006). Nautilus Films.

Figure 4. Fictional recreation in *The Spirit of the Beehive* (Victor Erice, 1973).

Elías Querejeta Producciones Cinematográficas.

The actor-postman-murderer from fiction is transferred to reality. The recreation of cinematic terror as a spectator is now completed with the recreation of real and everyday terror. While it was the terror-image of Holmes and Watson that merged with the boy's photo before, it is now the image of the fictional recreation of the postman that occupies that place [Figure5]: 'On hearing it, the boy ran to take refuge in the most out-of-the-way corner of the house.' The boy, therefore, does not face fear, does not overcome trauma. The adult filmmaker he becomes manages it through a fiction in which Ana, his *alter ego*, does not hide from the spirit (Frankenstein-Potts) nor from its transposition into reality (the maquis-the postman), but instead she goes in his search to find the maquis in the well house [Figure 6] and Frankenstein in her own imagination.



Figure 5. Superimposition between the real imagen of the boy and the fictional recreation of the postman in *La Morte Rouge* (Victor Erice, 2006). Nautilus Films.

Figure 6. Encounter between Ana and the maquis in *The Spirit of the Beehive* (Victor Erice, 1973). Elías Querejeta Producciones Cinematográficas.

Then, for the first and only time in the film, the screen remains black (36 seconds) while Erice continues his reflection on the experienced fear. The absence of image materialises the paralysis that it causes, the impossibility of action and also of reflection, associated with the words that generate the torment: ‘The postman’s coming.’ It is adult reflection that makes it possible to take up the thinking and, therefore, the image. The fear inflicted by the sister would be a way of exorcising the horror imposed by reality, the one evidenced in the archive images: ‘a fear that came from afar, accumulated in the besieged Madrid of the Civil War, during her days as a little girl subjected to the horror of the bombings.’ A zoom is then made on the image of a girl who recalls the filmmaker's sister, and whose fear, perceptible on her face, would show the one experienced by the former.

The current adult is capable of giving sense, through filmic reflection, to his sister’s behaviour in childhood. In *The Spirit of the Beehive* we also hear that expression in a nightly conversation between the sisters about the spirit, but in this case referring to the paternal authority: ‘Dad’s coming, dad’s coming,’; a symbol of authority and also of the unspeakable secret. However, Isabel’s behaviour is not explained beyond her childhood nature, it is not revealed in relation to historical reality, as the essay experience does.

The recreation of the childhood experience then focuses on the nocturnal experience of the traumatised boy. The successive cross-fades of fixed shots of the house rooms transmit the childhood perception in which, to the indiscernibility between fiction and reality, imagination and oneiric space are now added, where the bells ring again. The reality of the piano music played upstairs becomes, in the boy’s perception, a

new transposition from fiction to reality, from the scarlet claw to the pianist's hand: 'Playing dead was the only way death did wouldn't notice him, as if he were an already claimed victim, and so would pass by without stopping in search of other sleeping bodies. For weeks, the boy lived this nightmare to the full.' Superimposition now uses analogy to materialise the fusion between reality and fiction that occurs in the children's perception [Figure 7]. While Erice analyses here the importance of that claw in trauma, thirty years earlier the filmmaker used it symbolically in the fictional space. In *The Spirit of the Beehive*, the nightmare turns into a reverie in which Ana faces, trembling, the spirit. And, the menacing claw of the monster also appears in the lower right part of the frame [Figure 8]. Therefore, this fiction image is reinterpreted thanks to the essayistic reflection made possible by the diptych, turning the trauma between reality and fiction into their fraternity. The image of the claw approaching Ana thus stands as a symbolic sentence-image of the catharsis of trauma that fictional creation achieves.



Figure 7. Transformation of the claw into the pianist's hand. *La Morte Rouge*. (Victor Erice, 2006). Nautilus Films.

Figure 8. Ana's reverie of the encounter with the spirit, in which the same threatening claw appears. *The Spirit of the Beehive*. (Victor Erice, 1973).
Elías Querejeta Producciones Cinematográficas.

A montage sequence with images of *The Scarlet Claw* turns the boy spectator into the adult filmmaker who manipulates the original montage, offering an explanation in images of what his voice will then express about the image of the boy:

Until cinema itself came to its aid; if a film had partly perturbed him, there were soon others which little by little placed balm upon the wound. This double game of pain and consolation, of suffering and joy, that reached him from the screen instituted his contradictory relationship with moving images.

The essay film finally offers a synthesis image of the reflection carried out: the light of the cinema projector pierces the image of the five-year-old boy who will become an essential author of Spanish cinema [Figure 9]. The childhood trauma of the origins, the traumatic indiscernibility between fiction and reality, is resolved through a filmic trajectory that first uses fiction in order to achieve the catharsis of trauma, to later transform it into fraternity, in a progressive work of hybridisation that reaches its destination through the essay film in *La Morte Rouge*.

The Portuguese DVD edition of the film includes a discarded scene, which would be inserted in the middle of the already quoted enunciation (after “balm upon the wound”) by means of a cross-fade from that image of the boy pierced by the light of the projector. A new symbolic sentence-image emerges from it: on the beam of light, the posters of the films seen by the boy over the years go over the screen, showing the fictional substratum on which Erice’s oeuvre will be built. Among them, the third film that emerges from the beam of light is *Frankenstein* [Figure 10]. The identification between the children Víctor and Ana is inevitable. Thus, for the last time, the fraternity between reality and fiction generated by the fictional-essayistic diptych is synthesised.

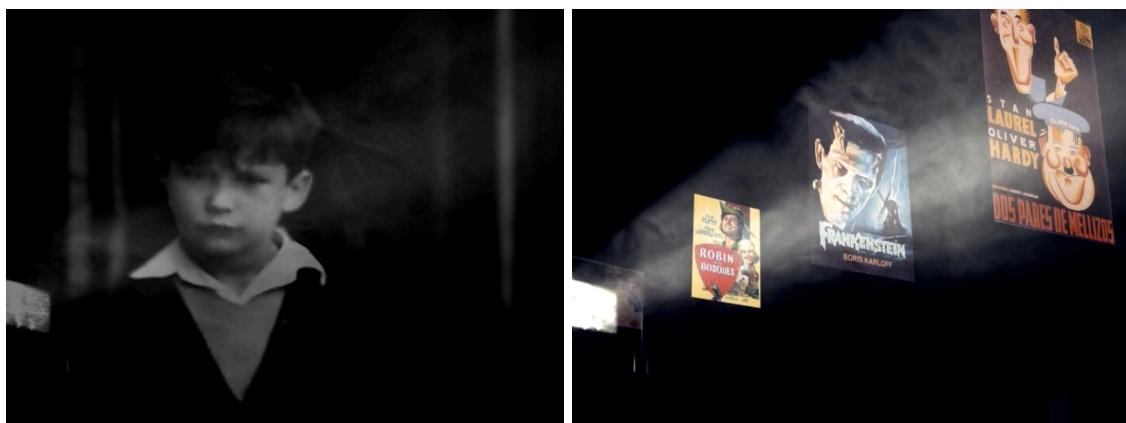


Figure 9. The cinematic beam of light pierces the photo of the boy Víctor.
Figure 10. From that beam, the films that followed the viewing of *The Scarlet Claw* emerge, among which is *Frankenstein*. *La Morte Rouge* (Victor Erice, 2006). Nautilus Films.

The absence of this scene in the final montage is thus justified in the text that precedes it:

Discarded montage of a scene from *La Morte Rouge* for reasons of style. Also, to some extent, for the fear of abounding in the imagery of a certain contemporary cinephilia. Although more than one title has been included thanks to having its film handout, all of them give an idea of what the cinema of that time represented as popular art.

An unfounded fear, in my opinion, since the scene also provides an essential notion for the reflection that concludes, in order to understand the other side of childhood trauma, that of the ‘balm, the ‘consolation’, the ‘joy.’ This excellent conclusion in the same territory of childhood makes us dream of the gradual construction of Víctor Erice’s imaginary. It is this fraternity that manages to ‘reveal what there may be behind those holes that the action of time opens both in personal memory and in the minutes of History. In conclusion, to highlight the other side of what is sold to us as reality; or what is the same, to show the other scene’ (Erice, 2006: 86).

Conclusions

‘The essayist seeks to know himself, to make a discourse on the contemporary by retracing history: in this sense, the essay is the way whereby the individual stands alone in the face of time.’ (Thirion, 2015: 444). In *La Morte Rouge*, through the solitude of the soliloquy, Erice traverses History, and his intimate memory, in order to analyse his first and traumatic cinematic experience. The reflection on the trauma around the indiscernibility between reality and fiction of childhood perception is materialised through different sentence-images of a symbolic nature whose main rhetorical elements are the cross-fade and the superimposition. The essayistic analysis of this traumatic absence of interstice between reality and fiction inevitably invokes *The Spirit of the Beehive*, in which the filmmaker generated a fictional recreation of the same childhood trauma. A fictional-essayistic diptych is then configured in whose interstice the trauma between reality and fiction becomes fraternity. While the realistic fictional representation of the trauma achieved catharsis and its essayistic reflection materialises a historical, memory, filmic and intimate analysis around it, the interstice between the two reveals the bonds that connect both spaces, reality and fiction, transforming the trauma into fraternity. The diptych thus offers a cinematic experience that goes from recreation to analysis, from identification to reflection, from the realist canon to the essayistic freedom, configuring an oscillation in which each film, actual image, also becomes a virtual image of the another, following the analysis proposed by Deleuze and Parnet: “oscillation, a perpetual exchange between the actual object and its virtual image [...] The actual and the virtual coexist, and enter into a tight circuit which we are continually retracing from one to the other’ (2007: 150). Finally, the diptych also explains Erice’s filmic trajectory; from modern to contemporary cinema; from fiction to essay film; from the film industry to the museum experience; from trauma to fraternity.

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