

**Testimony from the Dentist's Chair.  
Metalepsis and Postmemory in *Tristísima ceniza: Un tebeo de Robert Capa en Bilbao*  
(2011)**

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**1. Introduction**

The proliferation of the Iberian graphic novel over the past few decades has coincided with Spain's "memory boom", which has resulted in a robust corpus of sequential art dealing with the Civil War. These works do not simply seek to *recuperate* the voices that were silenced during Franco's dictatorship. More often than not, Civil War graphic novels have tended to problematize the workings of historiography, inviting readers to reflect on the relationship between history, memory, image, and artifice. Mikel Begoña and Iñaket's *Tristísima ceniza: Un tebeo de Robert Capa en Bilbao* (2011) certainly falls into this corpus of visual narratives. The book mixes archival material, memoirs, personal interviews, and the authors' own imaginings to narrate the Civil War in the Basque Country through the lenses of the iconic war photojournalist Robert Capa, né Endre Friedmann. The result is a self-conscious, collage-like account composed of the interlocking stories of three historical subjects: Capa; the working-class, Basque Republican Francisco Artasánchez; and the Basque Requeté Luis Lezama Leguizamón Zuazola. Guided by Capa's photographic documentation of the 1937 Battle of Sollube, *Tristísima ceniza* introduces the accounts of Artasánchez and Lezama Leguizamón as part of a fictional conversation between Capa and his dentist in Paris. In other words, the graphic novel infuses historical events with fictional personal recollections of historical characters. The book does so in a metaleptic manner that foregrounds its indebtedness to a vast variety of visual narratives, while simultaneously exposing its own production context, and by extension, the artifice of every historical narrative.

In this article, I examine the ways in which *Tristísima ceniza* turns to a rich repertoire of metaleptic devices to articulate a self-reflexive collage of the Civil War that dramatizes the relationship between artifice, memory, and history. This maneuver is of particular significance as the authors of *Tristísima ceniza* belong to a generation of Basques that has no direct recollection of the Civil War, but they have inherited this trauma as part of what Marianne Hirsch terms "postmemory." Hirsch's postmemory refers to a structure of transgenerational and intergenerational transfer of embodied experience and trauma "at a generational remove," (6) and thus postmemory's link to the past is "actually not mediated by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation" (5). In what follows, I concentrate on what I see as the cornerstone of *Tristísima ceniza*'s collage aesthetics: the foregrounding of the imaginative, intermedial, and affective link of postmemory. This is achieved via the medial transposition of Capa's photographs and other forms of visual traces (newspaper covers, posters, graffiti, etc.).

Like other self-reflexive Iberian memory comics, the book personalizes history, while instrumentalizing medial transposition to deconstruct the fiction of a retrievable, objective past. *Tristísima ceniza* situates the medial transposition of a forgotten photograph, Capa's *Monte Sollube, frente de Bilbao* (1937), as the base of a historically responsible fiction that destabilizes the Civil War visual archive. I argue that medial transposition allows the

graphic novel to delineate a self-conscious, fictional collage that not only proposes an alternative to the most familiar public images from that archive, but also to the familial images and tropes that have dominated memory discourses in the Basque Country. Standing out from most Civil War visual narratives, the book locates memory transfer in a foreign dental clinic as a procedure to “heal the open wound” of a painful molar, that is, as a horizontal act between Capa and his dentist. This exchange takes place outside the family home (in a dentist’s clinic), and literally, outside the borders of the nation (in Paris). But in disregarding the affective structures behind the archival material selected for medial transposition, the graphic novel’s self-conscious collage falls prey to the hierarchical relationships established by the very familial tropes it seeks to undermine.

## 2. *Un sacco or Collage Aesthetics: Redeeming all Sorts of tristísimas cenizas*

*Tristísima ceniza*’s self-conscious nature comes as no surprise. Karin Kukkonen reminds us that metareferences have been present in comics since their beginnings; from twentieth-century newspaper comic strips to contemporary auteur graphic novels (213). Self-reflexiveness is also a common thread in the postmemory works analyzed by Hirsch, and, as noted by critics of the Spanish Civil War graphic novel (Tronsgard; Amago), it seems to be a characteristic shared by Iberian visual narratives on memory. In discussing Antonio Altarriba’s *El arte de volar* (2009) and Sento’s *Un médico novato* (2013), Tronsgard has observed that authors of Iberian graphic novels who did not experience the war themselves often highlight the creative investment of the reconstructive task of postmemory (273). For Tronsgard, the reflective component of these oeuvres responds to the artifice that accompanies the mediated character of postmemory; that is, to “the obligation to (re)construct and (re)present them [the national traumas themselves] by means of an imaginative act mediated by previous narratives and not personal experience” (268-269).<sup>1</sup>

It is thus surprising to observe the scarcity of scholarly works dedicated to the workings of metalepsis in graphic novels, or the ways in which visual narratives problematize Gérard Genette’s canonical definition. The literary critic theorizes metalepsis as the narrative transgressions that cross “the shifting but sacred frontier between two worlds, the world in which one tells, the world of which one tells” (Genette, 236). The tendency to overlook the functioning of metalepsis in comics is aggravated in the context of sequential art on the Spanish Civil War, with the exception of Jacqueline Sabbah’s examination of metafiction in Pablo Roca’s *Los surcos del azar* (2020) and Samuel Amago’s comprehensive study of self-conscious formal strategies in memory comics. As I will argue in the following pages, despite not being limited to comics dealing with history, metalepsis in graphic novels dealing with memory engages with the intermedial dynamics of memory to connect the struggle over the control of historical narratives with the question of the medium of representation.

*Tristísima ceniza* opens with an epigraph –José Agustín Goytisolo’s poem *Queda el polvo* (1961)– that teaches us how to read the graphic novel’s title. In Goytisolo’s lyric piece, the “ceniza”, or the remnant that survives the bombings (“llamarada”), marks an affective relationship (“tristísima”) to the material traces of the past. The “tristísima ceniza”

<sup>1</sup> In this article, I limit my analysis to the connection between metalepsis and postmemory in the Iberian graphic novel. For metafiction in the Spanish Civil War novel, see Gómez López-Quñones and Faber. For metafiction as a mode of postmodernism in twentieth-century Spanish literary production, see Amago (2006) and Spires.

initially descends to earth to then land on the memory and heart (“mi pecho”) of the witness (“creció ante mis ojos”). The poem closes with a metalepsis by transforming this “ceniza” into a metaphor of the very same poetic words that fall into the page: “[la tristísima ceniza sigue cayendo] en las hojas de papel en las que escribo” (5). The contamination between the fictional and the “real” world, the metalepsis, serves here to confer materiality to the lack that the poetic “I” is mourning. Much like Goytisolo’s metanarrative *Queda el polvo*, Iñaket and Begoña’s graphic novel can be read as an act of mourning that not only seeks to recuperate all sorts of visual remnants or *tristísima cenizas* of the Civil War, but to also reflect on the process, medium, and aesthetics of the recovery itself.<sup>2</sup>

The graphic novel is divided into five sections: a prologue, a central chapter on the battle of Sollube, a mini-chapter serving as an intermission, a brief second chapter on the aftermath of war, and a twenty-page addendum. In the full-page first panel of the central chapter “Primeras cenizas”, Capa, seated in a dentist’s chair, starts his story in the form of an act of mourning for Gerda Taro: “No sé qué estoy haciendo aquí. ¿Qué hago en París cuando mi lugar estaba allí, junto a ella? Los días más felices de mi vida han terminado ya” (14). A drawing of the front page of a French newspaper reveals that Gerda Taro has just died in Brunete, simultaneously conferring an air of historical accuracy on the setting. The first panel transitions to an analepsis that takes the reader back to May 1937—right before Capa departs to the Basque country and Taro to Barcelona. The chapter later superimposes multiple narrative times and spaces onto Capa’s recollections of the Battle of Sollube, simulating at the textual level the elliptical nature of memory. After a highly metaleptic *interlude*, the chapter “Segundas cenizas” starts by recounting the postwar fate of each character. Capa is the only one who manages to escape; Lezama Leguizamon has died in combat, and Artasánchez was taken prisoner in 1937. Before fading into the background, the narrator takes us to Mexico in June 1940, where the photographer is documenting the elections for *Life* magazine. Significantly shorter than the “Primeras cenizas,” this second chapter mixes Capa’s fictional journey to his old friend Kati Horna’s house with Artasánchez’s factual escape from a concentration camp in the south of Spain. In an attempt to reproduce on a fictional level the workings of trauma and mourning, the story ends without closure. Capa’s molar never healed, and when he arrives at a clinic in Mexico, he discovers that the dentist is the owner of a chicken he had stolen to take to Horna’s house.

The lack of closure renders Capa’s grief, in a Kristevian fashion, “unworkable,” but it nevertheless signals the critical potential of mourning to destabilize the past and present. The loss of Taro, the trauma of the Spanish Civil War, materializes in a painful molar that has no cure. In the addendum “Extras de cenizas”, the authors connect the dental clinic with psychoanalysis to reinforce the idea that the act of mourning is an unworkable and unfinished business. Yet they remark that the process of mourning is essential to offer a more complete picture of Capa and, metonymically, of the Spanish Civil War: “A modo de diván de psicoanalista hemos utilizado un sillón de dentista para que Robert se explayara a gusto (cuánta imaginación desbordada) y así hemos podido retratar al bueno de Robert tanto de frente como de perfil. ¿El resultado? Ninguno. La dolorosa muela continúa en su sitio” (101). Very much in line with David D. Eng and David Kazanjian’s theorization of

<sup>2</sup> Following Gabriele Rippl and Lukas Etter, I subscribe to a more encompassing theorization of “medium”. Rippl and Etter approach the question of “medium” as a matter of the material aspect of the sign to focus on “how this material side of the side/semiotic system is involved in the production of narrative meaning” (193).

loss or Goytisolo's poem, this loss has a creative side. It motivates a highly metaleptic fictional account of a renowned photographer that recuperates the vestiges of a recent past while reflecting on that process. The recovered traces open up the present or visualize the presence of the past in the present, while simultaneously conferring materiality on the fictional memory of historical characters.

As the authors explain in the addendum section, the result is “un saco formidable”: a reformulation of the historical graphic novel as a “sack” that contains a *mélange* of themes that “no encontrarían cabida en otros formatos de historietas gráficas” (100). Hence, the historical graphic novel is turned into a collage composed of, in the words of Iñaket and Begoña, an act of *reciclaje*. Through dreams, recollections, Capa and Taro's photographs, negatives, and newspaper front pages, *Tristísima ceniza* collages the fictional memories of Capa, Leguizamon, Artásanchez, Taro, and other secondary characters into the official historical narrative. The potential of this collage technique, as Maarten van Gageldonk has noted, is to recreate at the textual level the workings of personal and cultural memory (48). The graphic novel itself reflects on its collage-like aesthetic in a metaleptic instance where Esther Zilberberg's recollections are turned into a metaphor for the fragmentary, malleable, and mediated nature of memory. The Polish Zilberberg, aka Juanita Lefevre in the Basque Country, recounts how a group of eight anti-Fascist Belgian volunteers disassembled machine guns, hid them in various suitcases and smuggled them to the Basque Country to join the Republican side. Her fictional recollections of this historical episode are inserted within Capa's analepsis in the form of an infographic. At the center of this infographic, we see a pair of scissors cutting into a photograph-like drawing of machine guns. This metanarrative instance casts the authors, or the postmemory generation, as collage artists. Parallely, this collage technique undoes the hierarchical relationship between image and text. To put it in the words of Jan Baetens, it shows us that “the visual form can in no way be thought of as only an addition to some kind of underlying or pre-existing verbal-linguistic sense, and still less as something of secondary or of minor importance” (346).

The metalepsis theorizes the media combination, text and image, of the graphic novel as the ideal format to elaborate a memory collage. The patched-together visual form itself (the drawing style, the page layout, the incorporation of photographs and newspaper covers, etc.) recreates the intermedial dynamics of the process of recovering memories. The graphic novel undoes the fiction of a retrievable, objective past by foregrounding a two-layer intermediality: on the one hand, the diegetic recuperation of Capa's recent past, which is aided by newspaper covers, and on the other, an extra-diegetic combination of various forms of visual traces (photographs, graffiti, graphic commercials, elements of Picasso's *Guernica*) of a distant past. They both work in tandem to draw attention to what critics have termed the double movement of the intermedial dynamics of memory: “premediation” and “remediation” (Erll, 392). “Premediation”, as theorized by Erll, refers to the ways in which existing media provide the schemata for conferring meaning to future experience and for the ways in which this experience will be represented (392). Iñaket and Begoña's story opens with a newspaper cover about Taro's death that frames Capa's memory as a story of mourning the loss of a loved one, which underlines the premediation of memory. On the other hand, Erll defines “remediation” as the act of representing remembered events repeatedly over time in different media, which shapes our understanding of events and leads “not so much to what one might cautiously call the ‘actual events’, but instead to a canon of existent medial constructions, to the narratives and images circulating a media culture” (392). By using metalepsis to insert photographs –or drawings of photographs– as

well as pieces of other visual media (paintings, posters, advertisements, etc.), *Tristísima ceniza* underscores the intermediality of memory and postmemory, or the ways in which they are mediated through a myriad of graphic mediums.

This article is concerned with the ways in which the graphic novel elaborates a collage aesthetic that likens the technologies of memory to the intermediality afforded by the medium. A book about the most celebrated war photojournalist of all time and his oeuvre, *Tristísima ceniza* is the perfect vehicle to examine the symbiosis between metalepsis in comics and the three subcategories of intermediality theorized by Irina O. Rajewsky: media combination, medial transposition, and intermedial references. Like any other graphic novel, Iñaket and Begoña's can be defined as encapsulating Rajewsky's "media combination," as a medium that combines text and image. Memory comics have also been prone to "medial transposition" with their emphasis on incorporating drawings of photographs or, in Rajewsky's own words, "the transformation of a given media product (a text, a film, etc.) or of its substratum into another medium" (51). What characterizes *Tristísima ceniza*'s collage aesthetic is the use of metalepsis to highlight medial transposition and intermedial references, which Rajewsky defines as the instances through which "the given media-product thematizes, evokes, or imitates elements or structures of another, conventionally distinct medium through the use of its own media-specific means" (53).

The most overt use of metalepsis in Iñaket and Begoña's graphic novel is a reflection on the power dynamics of history and representation tied to Rajewsky's intermedial references: a one-page mid-book chapter entitled "Entre acto". In this "intermission", the three main historical characters discuss the medium of the work, and the development of the plot after 1939 in connection to the course of history. Aware of his own fictional status but confused about the format of his fictional representation, the Republican Artasánchez turns to Capa to inquire about the chapter title's references to theater: "¿Pero... era esto una obra de teatro?" (71). This metalepsis is further reinforced by the panels' background drawings, which resemble a theater curtain, and by Capa's response: "Más bien es una novela ejem ejem... gráfica" (71). Mocking the Francoist historical narrative, the ghost of Falangist Lezama Leguizamón interrupts the conversation with a grandiloquent rhetoric: "¡Queridos amigos, dejémonos de charlas! ¡Un nuevo amanecer ilumina las tierras de España! ... ¿Acaso os afligís porque sea yo a partir de ahora el protagonista de esta obra?" (71). In the last two panels of the chapter, Capa twists this power relationship in an anticipatory allusion to the next chapter, "Segundas cenizas", that equates the account of the vanquished with "escenarios nuevos" as he literally appears in a new scene.

Trapped in a memory artifact, *Tristísima ceniza*'s characters are well aware that they are performing a historical role and that, by inserting themselves in history, they are combating their symbolic death. Hence, the reference to Hamlet's most renowned scene in the introductory chapter panel "Entre acto" and the book's back-cover collage, where the photojournalist holds a skull adorned with a military helmet. But this self-conscious mini-chapter goes beyond the question of symbolic annihilation to pose the battle over historical narrative control in the Spanish state as a question of form and medium. This device foregrounds the processual, performative, and selective character of history in connection to the limits of representation imposed, at the premeditated and remediated level, by the constraints of the chosen medium and genre—in this case, graphic novel. Even if the *saco* or the collage-like graphic novel is established as the preferred medium to represent a broken

past that remains in the form of *tristísimas cenizas*, its format and material aspects will constrain the way the remembered events are represented.

### 3. A Perfect Union: Medial Transposition and the Performative Index of Postmemory

In *Tristísima ceniza*, metalepsis crafts a self-conscious collage that underlines not only the limits of representation via intermedial references but also the creative work of Iñaket and Begoña's scissors. All sorts of metaleptic tools are present throughout the book: from cross-contamination between panels to diegetic cigarette smoke that turns into speech bubbles. Broadly speaking, the book relies on two types of metalepsis: narratological, which could be found in any narrative like the intermedial references of the "Entre acto", and medium-specific metalepses, which are bound to the mode of representation of the comic. In this section, I provide a critical reading of the latter type of metalepsis that allows us to tackle two interrelated questions: first, the interplay between this device, fiction, and intermediality as a technology of recovery that foregrounds what Hirsch terms "performative index" of images; and second, the potential of graphic novels, as an intermedial medium, to rework the familiar and familial images that have dominated memory discourses.

It is precisely the metareferences specific to the media combination of the graphic novel that can provide better insight into *Tristísima ceniza*'s *saco* or self-conscious collage aesthetic. Kukkonen's reformulation of Genette's theorization of metalepsis is useful here. Kukkonen proposes that this device in comics is better described as the breaking down of the barriers between the product and its production context. For the literary critic, the fictional world is what is represented in the panels, whereas its production context is (the representation of) the real world that emerges in the gutters and through other nonintrusive representation conventions such as panel layout or drawing style (Kukkonen, 214, 222). Redefining "telling" as "producing" is crucial "to circumvent the question of the narrator" by responding to the plethora of visual devices that manage information in comics (panel frame, gutter, drawing style, etc.)" (Kukkonen, 222-223). These devices can create an instance of metalepsis "even though they might lack a distinguishable narrative discourse" (Kukkonen, 222-223). In sum, Kukkonen expands Genette's definition to argue that in comics, metalepsis works by exposing the production context –by drawing our attention to the conventions of representation (page layout, gutter, speech bubbles, etc.) that normally go unnoticed.

Approaching metalepsis as foregrounding the mode of representation of comics allows us to identify the four main forms that this device acquires throughout the book: first, medial transposition of photographs into expressionist drawings; second, metaphors of sight that frame transitions between characters' point of view; third, rupture of the page layout conventions; and fourth, cross-contamination between panel and gutter (fictional world and representation of real world). In the following pages, I concentrate on the first type, medial transposition, to examine the ways in which it renders visible the affective dimension of the imaginative link of postmemory. Being a comic about Capa's photographic documentation of the war in the Basque Country makes the medial transposition of photographs crucial to understand its *reciclaje* technique –the backbone of the collage aesthetics. The two sole instances in which photographs are included as such are two covers of wartime magazines, but their mediated and socially constructed nature is underscored through other visual devices (missing pieces, burnt holes, blue filters, etc.). This *reciclaje* aesthetics pays tribute to the technique of photomontage that was popularized

during World War I and that in the Spanish Civil War became, as Sebastiaan Faber remarks, “the standard format not just for propaganda posters but for journalism as well” (17).

The graphic novel itself is framed by an act of medial transposition: a charcoal-like drawing of a fallen soldier on a red background placed as frontispiece and backmatter. This is a drawing of Robert Capa’s iconic photograph *The Falling Soldier* (1936), also known as the *Death of a Loyalist Militiaman*. This is one of the most well-travelled photographic images of the Spanish Civil War and the cornerstone of its visual archive. The placement of this piece is not coincidental. It acts as a metaphorical frame that reminds us of the indexical character of photographs, leaving room for their own artifice and the artifice projected onto them by the beholder. The base of this transposition is an expressionist drawing style in black, red, and white –or white, black, and blue in the main story– that testifies to a recent turn in historical fiction comics. As Pérez del Solar has pointed out, over the past decades these comics have switched to a more poetic drawing style that seeks to liberate the image from its realist pretensions (86). Solar’s reading of this aesthetic evolution is of special interest for understanding the drawing style as well as the general function of metalepsis in *Tristísima ceniza*. It does not “lead to a loss of verisimilitude”, but rather “it makes clear that the narration is mediated through its graphic representation” (Solar, 87). This expressionist style even encompasses the panels that simulate negatives of photographs –via gutters that look like the edges of an undeveloped film roll– to present them as mediated artifacts (drawings of negatives), instead of as untouched shots of “reality”.

What I would add to Solar’s observation, building on Amago’s approach to the expressive power of *Cuerda de presas*’s drawing style, is that the metaleptic character of the expressionist style also showcases how historical narratives are mediated through affect. This style, consistent throughout all the section of the book, evokes an act of mourning as it renders material the artifice and affect embedded in the recovered trace. Returning to the analysis of the initial and final drawing of Capa’s most iconic photograph, the expressionist drawings are reinforced by its red background, which self-referentially points back at its own status as a comic adaptation of the original. The *reciclaje*, or the metaleptic medial transposition, makes visible the intangible affect that surrounds the historical referent of the Spanish Civil War photographic archive. Just as for war journalists manipulating images through photomontage or Capa staging his most iconic photograph in the 1930s, the factual past and artifice work in tandem in *Tristísima ceniza*. Instead of trying to conceal its own artifice, the graphic novel underscores it as a method of rendering visual the affective component of the image. In the end, it is only through the affective component of memory and postmemory, fictional or not, that the traces of the past acquire meaning. What returns to haunt us is precisely the vivid red, the *tristísima* in the *cenizas*, that seems to spread beyond the edges of the pages, gesturing toward an excess that the frame of the image cannot contain.

For those who have no direct experience of trauma like Iñaket and Begoña, this excess is created, transmitted, and mediated by other narratives. As the vivid red background reminds us, it also mediates our reading of the historical index of Capa’s photograph. In other words, the authors’ medial transposition of *The Falling Soldier* illustrates Marianne Hirsch’s theorization of the performative index of postmemory. Hirsch draws on Margaret Olin’s postulates on the relationship between photograph and beholder as a performative index or an “index of identification shaped by the *viewer’s needs and desires*” (48). This

performative index is precisely what characterizes the generation of postmemory according to Hirsch: “the index of postmemory (as opposed to memory) is the performative index, shaped more and more by affect, need and desire as time and distance attenuate the links to authenticity and truth” (48). The entire graphic novel could be read as an act of mourning that turns to metalepsis to foreground the performative index of postmemory –that is, to visualize the affective link, our own reworking of the vivid red and the *tristísima*, that mediates our relationship to images of the past. Amago arrives at a similar conclusion in his discussion of Iberian meta-comics, claiming that they make visible “the emotional, affective links that make intergenerational communication possible” (2019, 33). The ghost that returns to haunt us, *Tristísima ceniza* tells us, is a sticky affect that authenticates the material traces of the past by standing for its historical referent. Artifice is thus instrumentalized to recreate and visualize that affect via medial transposition of photographs.

Artifice is precisely what allows Iñaket and Begoña to locate the transmission of memory in an unusual setting: a dental clinic. In delineating the act of testimony as a conversation between the photographer and his dentist, *Tristísima ceniza* differentiates itself from other historical comics with a protagonist who does not narrate their story in his old age. As Pérez del Solar has remarked, Iberian historical graphic novels often use “the technique of creating a protagonist who narrates from the perspective of old age, thus uniting the past with a (pre- or post-) wartime past” (90). *Tristísima ceniza*, by contrast, focuses on a protagonist who neither reaches old age, nor has children. For the entire central first chapter –more than half of the book– the story is addressed to the dentist, an uncommon narrative in works dealing with the memory of the Civil War. In addition, the photographs at the center of his fictional testimony, *Monte Sollube, frente de Bilbao* and *The Falling Soldier*, are part of the public visual archive. The public nature of these photographs stands in stark opposition to the private family photographs that populate the pages of Iberian graphic novels that address memory. The result is the delineation of a structure of memory transfer that, unlike historical comics like Miguel Ángel Gallardo’s *Un largo silencio* (1997), Serguei Dounovetz and Paco Roca’s *El ángel de la retirada* (2010), Antonio Altarriba and Kim’s *El arte de volar* (2009), Javier de Isusi’s *Asylum* (2015), or Ana Penyas’s *Estamos todas bien* (2018), does not follow the vertical lines of the family tree.

Hirsch’s theorization of the two structures of memory transfer, affiliative and familial, is useful here. Whereas familial postmemory, as defined by Hirsch, accounts for the vertical transmission of embodied experience from parent to child, affiliative postmemory is “the intergenerational horizontal identification” that makes the child’s position available to other members of their generation (36). For Hirsch, family photographs emotionally charge the public archive, rendering clear the interconnection between familial and affiliative postmemory. As I argued in the previous section, *Tristísima ceniza* turns to artifice and the metaleptic quality of medial transposition to underscore the performative index of postmemory. These devices, however, also function to problematize the dependency of affiliative postmemory on the familial one. How can we reembody images without resorting to familial tropes? How is the lived experience of the subjects who did not reproduce inserted into the public archive? What is the role of metalepsis and medial transposition, as technologies of recovery, in imagining alternative sites of memory transfer outside the family home and the nation?

Robert Capa's story provides the perfect ground from which to pose these questions. At a first glance, the photographer's biography is the perfect tale of the twentieth century. Capa's multiple exiles, as a Jewish Hungarian alleged to sympathize with communism, connect various ideological conflicts, persecutions, and wars into a coherent narrative. But perhaps more importantly, his popularity as the most internationally acclaimed war photojournalist of all time has elevated him to a sort of lieu de mémoire. His artistic persona and oeuvre function in a similar fashion to the work of movie stars whose recorded performances, as van Gageldonk argues, allow "us to return to them time and time again, much like one might return to a physical lieu de mémoire" (52). For van Gageldonk, this act of returning to recorded performances –or in the case of Capa, his photographic corpus– implies their recontextualization or reevaluation, and hence, their resignification.

In the case of *Tristísima ceniza*, the medial transposition of Capa's photographs brings to the forefront two more interrelated aspects –aside from, as I have already discussed, their mediated nature and the affective charge surrounding them. First, the manipulation and recontextualization of images—especially of the widely distributed, and now canonical, pictures— is also a reminder of the artificial boundaries and limitations established by national historiography. As Julia Adeney Thomas has noted, the dynamic ability of the visual to cross borders "undermines the conventional geographical boundaries that persist among historians and that have truncated our understanding that fascism's heightened nationalism was a product of globalization" (5). Second, as the photojournalist's work constitutes the central piece of the visual archive of the Spanish Civil War, it explores the ways in which the selective nature of that archive determines, and is determined by, the premediation and remediation dynamics of memory. In other words, Capa allows Iñaket and Begoña to explore how the governing politics of the visual archive and of memory discourses are co-constitutive, while trying to identify nonfamilial structures of memory transfer.

This point deserves more attention. Capa is instrumental in denouncing the marginal position of the Basque Country –and more particularly, the Battle of Sollube– and in centering it among major historical events of the time. The whole story could be read as a fictionalization of Capa's *Monte Sollube, frente de Bilbao* photograph dated May 1937, where we see three Republican soldiers kneeled in front of a car with a flat tire at the top of Sollube. Iñaket and Begoña's act of recovery establishes a dialectical tension with the medial transposition of the iconic *The Falling Soldier*, but also with the mediatic image of Gernika after the bombing. Capa's fictional testimony is also framed by an intertextual reference to Picasso's adaptation and immortalization of ruined Gernika in his celebrated homonymous painting. In the opening panel of the central chapter "Primeras cenizas", the dentist's clinic is lit by an electric lamp that reminds us of Picasso's iconic bulb.<sup>3</sup> The graphic novel seeks to destabilize the two dominant memory accounts conjured by these symbolic images; the Battle of Sollube is not the story of innocent Basque civilians massacred by Fascists, nor of loyal Spanish *milicianos* dying for the democratically elected Second Republic. It is the denationalized tale of a divided Basque Country in an international armed conflict as remembered by an exilic subject from Paris. In short, the reconstruction of the story behind the forgotten photograph *Monte Sollube, frente de Bilbao*

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<sup>3</sup> There is a major distinction between Iñaket and Begoña's bulb and Picasso's: the former is devoid of the icons (the light shining outward that resemble the peaks of a crown, the eye shape of the lamp, etc.) that have been read as mythological or biblical references in the painting.

stands as the embodied experience, structures of emotion, and alternative lieux de mémoire eclipsed by canonized images and the kinds of memory narratives these images prefigure. But how can the postmemory generation reconstruct the affect behind these public images devoid of familial tropes? How does the image become a tool to imagine alternative memory discourses? And if it successfully evades the weight of the familial, which tropes does *Tristísima ceniza*'s affiliative structure of memory transfer rely on?

As a lieu de mémoire, Capa offers a vantage point from which to reflect on these questions and in the process, the relationship between history, memory, image, and imagination. *Tristísima ceniza* adapts, recontextualizes, and combines his canonical and forgotten images in a way that disrupts the familial and familiar tropes of dominant memory discourses, which, according to Hirsch, reembody the connection to the past to create nearness. While the image of the deceased lover does structure the plot of *Tristísima ceniza*, the book resorts to imagination to demystify Capa as a first step toward (re)infusing some of his lesser known photographs with affective weight. As Iñaket and Begoña confess in an interview with the publishing house Normal Editorial, they were interested in deconstructing this “gran icono fosilizado del siglo XX” to portray “su vertiente humana” (n.p.). In order to show a more ordinary Capa with whom the reader can identify, his figure is detached from his original context to be recast as a suffering patient in a dental clinic. This act of dissonance, which van Gageldonk terms *dépaysemant* following surrealist terminology (52), carries a metaleptic charge that asks us to undo the binaries of history-memory and public-private. It does so by unraveling the stories behind the scenes: the embodied lived experience occluded in his canonized images and artistic persona. Simultaneously, this act of *dépaysement* also places the storyteller in a more horizontal relationship with the other two main characters, Artasánchez and Lezama Leguizamon.

The fictional wartime friendships of an unglamorous Capa, in lieu of familial tropes, revive the performative index of postmemory. Fiction is used to reconstruct the private in the public photograph: the potential relationships that could have been established between the photographer and the photographed subjects. Historical characters are thus presented as feeling subjects with whom the reader can empathize. The culminating event that ties the stories of the three main characters together is a car crash at Sollube, which seems to have been inspired by the main action narrated in the photograph *Monte Sollube, frente de Bilbao*. Having already befriended and photographed Artasánchez at the Republican front, Capa accompanies him while they drive “veloz por una carretera en pésimas condiciones y bajo la amenaza de la aviación” (53). When they see Leguizamon in the middle of the road, Artasánchez and Capa come to a sudden stop and the car breaks down. Leguizamon, a war prisoner until a few days earlier, had been set free and left in the mountain disguised as a chaplain to receive safe passage to the Francoist side. Whereas in Capa's photograph the three men are gathered around the car assessing the flat tire, in Iñaket and Begoña's drawings they surround the vehicle as they ponder how to best respond to the approaching bombers.

By reconstructing a potential behind-the-scenes moment of a forgotten photograph, fiction reanimates the affective charge of the archival document without resorting to familial tropes. In this sense, fiction is utilized in a similar manner to the historical memory novels analyzed by Gómez López-Quñones in *La guerra persistente. Memoria, violencia y utopía: Representaciones contemporáneas de la Guerra Civil española* (2006): it does not conflate historical fact with legend to present an invention devoid of historical accuracy (98). Very much like the Martín Rivas's *El lápiz del carpintero* (2000), Javier Cercas's

*Soldados de Salamina* (2003), and the rest of the novels analyzed by Gómez López-Quiñones, fiction in *Tristísima ceniza* is the result of rigorous documentation, which, as the critic remarks, conveys “un sentido de responsabilidad ante el pasado” (99). If historically responsible fiction and artifice emotionally charge the material traces of the past, the metaleptic foregrounding of medial transposition unmasks the performative aspect of this process or Hirsch’s performative index of postmemory.

Another striking feature of Iñaket and Begoña’s medial transposition of *Monte Sollube, frente de Bilbao* is its reconstruction as an imaginative act that yields an alternative account of the Civil War in the Basque Country –one that has been hidden from view by the dominant image of Gernika in ruins. In this sense, the book places Capa in an intermediary position that weaves together the stories of Basque Gudaris with the other side of the armed conflict: Basque Falangists. Yet the photographer is not put in a mediator position with claims to neutrality, as he clearly favors the Republican and Basque nationalist side. It is quite remarkable that *Tristísima ceniza* contradicts the widespread notion of Fascism and Francoism as foreign to Basqueness, put forth by some nationalistic readings of the image of the bombing of Gernika. Following more sophisticated accounts like Bernardo Atxaga’s *The Accordionist’s Son* (2003), Helena Taberna’s *The Good News* (2008), or Kirmen Uribe’s *Bilbao – New York – Bilbao* (2008), the comic untangles the connections between the Carlistas and Falangists via the Leguizamon family. Moreover, it showcases these internal divisions in a province, Bizkaia, that had remained loyal to the Republican side – contrary to other Basque regions that had a stronger presence of Requetés like Navarra, the setting of Taberna’s film.

Nevertheless, the privileging of Capa’s voice as the location of enunciation of a historical narrative from beyond the nation is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, Capa is the epitome of an exilic subject whose story is told outside the nation precisely because, like his canonical images and Fascism, it operates beyond its borders. His account also resists being renationalized via a rejection of the reproductive logic by which the family becomes a metonym of the nation. Capa does not pass down his memory as the legacy (and reproduction of) a heteropatriarchal family. With artifice and metaleptic medial transposition, the graphic novel elaborates a reflexive collage that evades the familiar images and familial vertical lines that dominate memory discourses in the Basque Country. However, it misses the opportunity to delineate a non-heteropatriarchal structure of memory transmission. In the “Extra de cenizas” addendum, the authors denounce the fact that Capa’s fame has obscured Gerda Taro’s oeuvre. They add that it is time to rescue her achievements: “Su obra [Gerda Taro’s] aparece desdibujada y diluida, a causa de que la mayor parte de las fotografías las firmara Capa. [...] Solo ahora podrá valorarse en su justa medida su trabajo y podrá ubicarse a Gerda en el lugar que le corresponde en la historia de la fotografía” (110). The comic terminology, “desdibujada” and “diluida,” seems to suggest that the authors propose the graphic novel as the ideal medium for recovering Taro’s oeuvre and historical importance. *Tristísima ceniza*, however, cannot be counted as part of these restorative efforts.

In the comic, the medial transpositions of Taro’s famous photograph of her lover behind the camera, entitled *Robert Capa, Segovia front* (1937), condense the ethos of the collage aesthetics. In this passage, medial transposition is combined with what I referred to previously as the second type of medium-specific metalepsis: metaphors of sight that shift from one character’s point of view to another’s. In this specific instance, drawings of the camera depicted in Taro’s pictures are used as metaphorical transition panels that weave

together multiple time-spaces and voices. They elaborate a collage of the Artasánchez postwar escape scene, Capa's present at the dinner with Horna, and his wartime recollections of time spent with Taro (87-88). Throughout the next seven pages, Artasánchez's journey across the Strait to Gibraltar is placed as a newspaper comic strip at the bottom of Capa's story. This polyphonous collage destabilizes the hierarchies between supposedly more *historical* and *objective* images (photographs) and *subjective* ones (newspaper graphic ads, comic strips) at the heart of the Civil War visual canon, and by extension, historiography. In doing so, this passage also adds another dimension to the use of medial transposition in *Tristísima ceniza*: a nonfamilial and unfamiliar account of the war in the Basque Country requires unveiling an alternative archive of *cenizas* and formats to represent them (infographics, comic strips, etc.).

Unfortunately, even if the graphic novel presents a memory account that evades the reproductive logics of the heteropatriarchal family, it does not escape its power structures. The biggest irony is that Iñaket and Begoña's visual narrative, much like the canonical images of the Civil War archive it seeks to destabilize, eclipses the visual traces that postulate women as agents and subjects of history. The book's inability to break free from, and reflect on, the patriarchal structures of emotion condensed in familial tropes becomes evident in the passage that presents the medial transposition of Taro's photographs. Very much like the official historical narrative, the visual display of this collage reproduces the power dynamics of the nation. The historical account of the working-class Artasánchez is placed as a footnote in the form of a comic strip to Capa's central piece. Taro does make it to the central piece, but only as a secondary historical character whose participation in the war evolves around the traditionally recognized historical male subject. The depiction of Taro's documentation of the war is limited to Capa's patronizing recollections of her. Guided by patriarchal tropes of masculinity, the iconic photojournalist recalls how he had to protect his naively adventurous lover Taro at the front.

For all its attention to the intermedial dynamics of memory, the performative index of postmemory, and the familial structure of memory transfer, Iñaket and Begoña seem to have forgotten about the heteropatriarchal tropes behind their choice of photographs for their *reciclaje*. Unlike the many instances of medial transposition of Capa's photographs of Sollube and Bilbao during the war, the graphic novel only incorporates one sequence of pictures by Taro, and those are the photos of her lover with a camera. At the beginning of the central chapter "Primeras cenizas", the authors insert a three-page vignette of Gerda Taro in Barcelona in 1937. Taro is promenading around wartime Barcelona with her friend Kati Horna, while discussing their love affairs. This passage stands in stark opposition to the next one, where we see the photojournalist Capa in action in a war-torn Bilbao. Taro's immortalization of *milicianas* in and around Barcelona could have helped to elaborate a more sophisticated narrative than the already well-known, male-dominated account of the armed conflict.<sup>4</sup> In the end, the self-reflexiveness of *Tristísima ceniza*'s metaleptic medial transposition is crippled by the same patriarchal desires and needs that structure the familial tropes of memory discourses. Even if historically responsible fiction yields a nonfamilial structure of memory transfer, the act of mourning that structures the creative reconstruction of the behind-the-scenes is for the loss of the heteropatriarchal family dream. The graphic

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<sup>4</sup> Aside from the *Republican Militiawoman Training on the Beach, outside Barcelona* (1936) photograph sequence, Taro captured the participation of Republican women in the front in a number of photographs taken in Barcelona and Valencia.

novel can serve as a cautionary tale that forces us to engage more rigorously with the structures of affect behind the images that continue to shape our understanding of the past.

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