Memory and Montage in Antonio Muñoz Molina's *Sefarad*[1]

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Abstract:

This article argues that Antonio Muñoz Molina's *Sefarad* (2001) presents not simply an in-depth engagement with memory but also with novelistic form, to which montage is central. While the novel has widely been read through the lens of memory, the narrator's comparison of the episodes that make up the plot to 'fotogramas' suggests that montage is key to the creative process itself. The technique of montage emerged from cinema, which, in its inception, had strong links to the railway, and allusions to both frequently feature in Muñoz Molina's work. The creation of movement through montage leads to tension, in accordance with Walter Benjamin's view of literary montage and its application in Max Silvermann's concept of 'palimpsestic memory'. However, the focus on the Hispanic Society of America at the heart of the final chapter of the novel dissolves the tension and cancels out the disruptive potential of montage, since the museum acts as a *lieu de mémoire*. By placing Velázquez's *Portrait of a Little Girl* at the end of the novel as a kind of vanishing point upon which all movement converges, the novel draws a parallel to Borges's Aleph. As a result, Muñoz Molina foregoes the shock value of montage for a vision of literature as reconciliatory and totalizing.

El presente artículo propone abordar *Sefarad* (2001) de Antonio Muñoz Molina no sólo desde el punto de vista de la memoria sino también como un experimento novelístico, para el que el uso de montaje es de suma importancia. La comparación entre los episodios de la trama y los fotogramas de antiguas películas que hace el narrador sugiere que la técnica del montaje es una clave importante para el proceso creador de la novela misma. Como es bien sabido, la técnica del montaje surge de la cinematografía que, en el inicio, tenía fuertes vínculos con el ferrocarril – cabe subrayar que alusiones a ambos abundan en la novelística de Muñoz Molina. La creación de movimiento a través del montaje conlleva tensión acorde con el principio del montaje literario propuesto por Walter Benjamin y su aplicación teórica dentro de 'la memoria palimpséstica' (*palimpsestic memory*) de Max Silvermann. Sin embargo, el

[1] I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful suggestions as well as Professor Xon de Ros.

enfoque en la Hispanic Society of America en el capítulo final disuelve la tensión y rompe con el potencial perturbador del montaje, ya que el museo sirve como *lieu de mémoire*. Al posicionar *El retrato de una niña* de Velázquez al final de la novela como una especie de punto de fuga en el que todo movimiento converge, la novela establece un paralelismo con el Aleph de Borges. Por tanto, el lector se queda con la sensación de que Muñoz Molina renuncia a la fuerza de choque del montaje a favor de una visión reconciliadora y totalizante de la literatura.

Antonio Muñoz Molina's *Sefarad* was published in 2001, placing it squarely within the 'memory boom', which Jo Labanyi locates in Spanish novels from the late 1990s onwards (2012: 73). Typically, the memory boom is associated with the recovery and reappraisal of the Spanish Civil War, which would culminate in the passing of the so-called *ley de memoria histórica* by the Socialist government of Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero in 2007.[2] In this context, *Sefarad* stands out because it attempts to connect the memory of the Civil War – which Muñoz Molina had already dealt with in earlier novels, including his first *Beatus ille*, published in 1986 – with the memory of the Holocaust.[3] This thematically innovative treatment of connecting different past memories is obviously significant, but I argue here that it goes hand-in-hand with formal innovation which in turn sheds light on the author's conceptualisation of memory itself. Central to this project is montage, as defined by Walter Benjamin.

Inspired by Surrealism, Benjamin's approach to the material history of the nineteenth century in the unfinished *Passagen-Werk* follows 'a methodological arrangement, a kind of experimental set-up' (Tiedemann 2002: 935) that is driven by the desire 'of bringing the past into the present' (Tiedemann 2002: 934). Benjamin himself called his method 'literary montage' (2002: 460, N1a, 8,) whose stated objective was 'das Prinzip der Montage in die Geschichte zu übernehmen' (1998b: 575, N2, 6) [To carry over the principle of montage into history] (2002: 461, N2, 6). At first glance, Benjamin's project could not be more different from Muñoz Molina's.[4] The latter's novel certainly does not conform to stricter definitions of montage, as proposed by Mario Slugan, who underlines the importance of the insertion of ready-mades that are not intradiegetically motivated.[5] In the absence of such inserts, *Sefarad*

[2] The *ley de memoria demócratica* passed under Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez can be seen as an extension or amendment of the historical memory law.
[3] See Dagmar Vandebosch (2014: 617) and Pablo Valdivia (2013: 13).
[4] Muñoz Molina's *Un andar solitario entre la gente* most directly takes on the legacy of the flaneur and the fragmentary form of Benjamin's project.
[5] See Mario Slugan (2017).

does not follow in the footsteps of literary avant-garde works like Antonio Espina's *Pájaro pinto* or Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (the object of Slugan's study). Nonetheless, the inclusion of 'real memories' from the twentieth century, as evidenced by the 'Nota de lecturas', can be read as a more timid attempt to insert material, particularly where this occurs via italicised quotations, and matches the impetus that Benjamin's project takes from the nineteenth century.[6] The novel switches between first, second and third person and lacks a clearly defined plot, instead it is made up of seventeen chapters that are concerned with what the blurb refers to as 'diferentes modalidades de destierro' (2013, n. p.). These 'modalities' are disparate as they range from the historical exile of characters like Margarete Buber-Neumann and Francisco Ayala to the experience of illness and rural migration.

These stylistic features have led Alexis Grohmann to classify the novel as 'literatura errabunda' (2011: 156), of which '*genre-switching'* (2011: 154, emphasis in the original) is an important trademark. Grohmann comments insightfully on the importance of the incomplete fragment and the openness of the novelistic form. However, as an alternative to his favoured 'loiterature' and the emphasis on the blurring between fact and fiction, [7] I would like to propose montage as a useful way of understanding Muñoz Molina's formal experimentation. The fluid narrative, switching between different narrative voices and collapsing of different temporal and geographical planes are also important because they convey the author's conceptualisation of memory as operating by loose association but not necessarily by a common-sense logic, being closely linked to the imagination. In this way, *Sefarad* is a fitting example of the epistemological paradigm shift which Ulrich Winter identifies in the Spanish memory novel in the early 2000s, given that it 'involves the transition from a narrative logic to a logic of the image' (2012: 17). According to Winter, these types of texts assemble memories from the past in the form of images rather than as structured narrative: 'As a narrative paradigm, "image" points to the tendency to eliminate chronology and narrativity in favor of a simultaneity of times, a perception for which […] the discourse of memory makes a discursive framework available' (2012: 17). This 'logic of the image' is clearly also the organizing principle of *Sefarad*. As such, memory is no longer a purely temporal phenomenon but is instead spatialized, reinforcing the experience of simultaneity outlined by Winter. This becomes clear from the novel's title onwards which above all refers to a place, even if that place is historically associated with a particular

[6] Benjamin himself is remembered in *Sefarad* in the context of border crossings and his death at Port Bou in 1940 (2013: 213).
[7] Grohmann adopts Ross Chamber's terminology. For further details see Grohmann (2011).

moment in time.[8] This reliance on a narrative logic built on images also creates a parallel between Muñoz Molina's endeavour and the primacy of the image in Benjamin who has been credited with '[t]hinking in images rather than concepts' (Pensky 2004: 179).

Although it could be argued that all narrative is internally organised by some kind of movement from beginning to end, *Sefarad* goes beyond this basic structure by emphasizing movement through the shifts in narrative voice and the cinematic use of images. Indeed, rather than providing photographic snapshots, Muñoz Molina selects images and sets them in motion. His longstanding interest in cinema is, of course, well documented, and has played a significant role in earlier works, such as *Beltenebros*.[9] In *Sefarad*, however, the mechanism of cinema also underpins the making of the novel. In the chapter 'Münzenberg', the narrator's metaliterary comments on the novel as a selection of 'fotogramas', a series of film frames or stills that are organised in complete disregard for chronology in order to illuminate each other, exemplify this.

> He intuido, a lo largo de dos o tres años, la tentación y la posibilidad de una novela, he imaginado situaciones y lugares, como fotografías sueltas o como esos fotogramas de películas que ponían antes, armados en grandes carteleras, a las entradas de los cines. En cada uno de ellos había una sugestión muy fuerte de algo, pero desconocíamos el argumento y los fotogramas nunca eran consecutivos, y eso hacía que las imágenes fragmentarias fueran más poderosas, libres del peso y de las convenciones vulgares de una trama, reducidas a fogonazos, a revelaciones en presente, sin antes ni después. Cuando no tenía dinero para entrar al cine me pasaba las horas muertas mirando uno tras otro los fotogramas sueltos de la película, y no me hacía falta suponer o inventar una historia que los unificara a todos y los hiciera encajar como un rompecabezas. Cada uno cobraba una valiosa cualidad de misterio, se yuxtaponía sin orden a los otros, se iluminaban entre sí en conexiones plurales e instantáneas, que yo podía deshacer o modificar a mi antojo, y en las que ninguna imagen anulaba a las otras o alcanzaba una primacía segura sobre ellas, o perdía en beneficio del conjunto su singularidad irreductible. (2013: 383-384)

The 'fotogramas' serve as a metaphor both for memory and the novel. The image is no longer cherished because of its documentary value or because it provides indexical proof, instead it

[8] In modern Hebrew 'Sepharad' is synonymous to Spain, but its links to the expulsion of the Sephardim are obvious and enhanced by the novel's focus on exile and marginality as well as by a number of Sephardic protagonists that feature in the different strands.

[9] Olga López-Valero Colbert discusses lighting and framing taken from the thriller and film noir in *Beltenebros* in *The Gaze on the Past*, pp. 84-98.

serves as a trigger for the imagination. It is valued precisely because of its inherent fragmentation and its lack of plot. There is no hierarchy, no chronology, the 'fotogramas' become pure present. There is no need for unity or logic. Yet the agency rests with the observer who is free to draw on her imagination to give each image meaning in conjunction or juxtaposition with another one. In many ways, this is opposed to the increasing tendency to include photographs in the body of fiction in order to interrogate the interplay between reality and fiction within literature. Whereas in the case of W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz* the eponymous protagonist is exhausted by the lack of order of the photographs he displays on the table until he finally surrenders as he cannot solve the game of solitaire he has dealt himself, Muñoz Molina's narrator seems to derive his energy from the endless possibilities of the 'fotogramic' process.[10] His purpose is not to solve a riddle and any association is equally as valid as any other.

In fact, what Muñoz Molina describes is like a manual process of mental montage. The stills that the narrator observes will have been assembled to produce the film that is on show. While montage has many uses in cinema, for instance, to illustrate the passing of time or the simultaneity of two actions, the basic premise stands that '[l]e cinéma (du grec *kinêma*) est mouvement' (Philippe Durand 1993: 37) [Cinema (from the Greek *kinema*) is movement.].[11] The organisation of frames into a logical sequence presupposes a very general understanding of montage simply as a film- editing technique. A typical example of how Muñoz Molina emulates this procedure in the novel can be found in the chapter 'Dime tu nombre' where the first-person narrator initially remembers a mysterious lover, then skips to the memory of classic films stars like Rita Hayworth and her performance of 'Amado mío' in *Gilda*, before dwelling on the life story of the Uruguayan refugee in his office (2013: 674-75).[12] In previous works the author's use of montage has been linked to the creation of suspense,[13] however, the

[10] Austerlitz sagte mir, daß er hier manchmal stundenlang sitze und diese Photographien, oder andere, die er aus seinen Beständen hervorhole, mit der rückwärtigen Seite nach oben auslege, ähnlich wie bei einer Partie Patience, und daß er sie dann, jedesmal von neuem erstaunt über das, was er sehe, nach und nach umwende, die Bilder hin und her übereinanderschiebe, in eine aus Familienähnlichkeit sich ergebende Ordnung, oder auch aus dem Spiel ziehe, bis nichts mehr übrig sei als die graue Fläche des Tischs, oder bis er sich, erschöpft von der Denk- und Erinnerungsarbeit, niederlegen müsse auf der Ottomane (2011: 175-176). [Austerlitz told me that he sometimes sat here for hours, laying out these photographs or others from his collection the wrong way up, as if playing a game of patience, and that then, one by one, he turned them over, always with a new sense of surprise at what he saw, pushing the pictures back and forth and over each other, arranging them in an order depending on their family resemblances, or withdrawing them from the game until either there was nothing left but the grey table top, or he felt exhausted by the constant effort of thinking and remembering and had to rest on the ottoman.] (2002: 167-168).

[11] Translations my own, unless indicated.

[12] The association is facilitated by the setting of the film in Buenos Aires and Montevideo, precisely the locations from which the woman in the office has fled.

[13] See López-Valero Colbert (2007: 91).

purpose appears different here. In spite of the loose association between the scenes, the cutting between different temporal and spatial references is unsettling and somewhat disruptive for the reader. The effect of this narrative montage is then more akin to that favoured by film pioneers like Sergei Eisenstein who used it to achieve disruption rather than seamless transition.[14]

If we briefly return to the narrator's comparison between the novel and the 'fotogramas' it also becomes clear that by turning to the act of mental montage the narrator is stating implicitly that he is not engaging in the traditional work of historical reconstruction that we may expect in a novel that is largely concerned with events of the past. Instead, the 'fogonazos', and 'revelaciones en presente' enable the metafictional novelist to leave the conventional structure of a plot behind and call to mind Benjamin's constellation: 'Bild ist dasjenige, worin das Gewesene mit dem Jetzt blitzhaft zu einer Konstellation zusammentritt' (1998b: 576, N 2a, 3) [image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation] (2002: 462, N 2a, 3), fully realising the 'metapoetic and disruptive effect on the reader' (Slugan 2017: 11) ascribed to montage proper. In this light, the criticism that *Sefarad* has at times received for expanding the vision of the Holocaust as all-encompassing could be viewed favourably as Muñoz Molina's desire to provoke the disruption of montage in the reader and to maintain a meaningful tension between the different types of memories he draws on, rather than subsuming the different experiences of exclusion that make up the body of *Sefarad*.[15]

The importance of montage for formal experimentation in *Sefarad* is enhanced by its thematic concern with memory. In the context of the recovery of a painful past, the use of montage echoes Max Silverman's notion of 'palimpsestic memory', a creative act of assemblage, whereby fictional texts create 'a chain of signification which draws together disparate spaces and times' (2015: 3). Through 'palimpsestic memory' Silverman proposes 'a new politics of memory' (2015: 28),[16] for which he turns to Benjamin's constellation. For Silverman,

> [t]his process draws together and creates correspondences between different elements so that the 'oppositions' between the fragment and the totality, past and present, here and elsewhere, and movement and stasis are not in fact oppositions but in permanent

[14] See Slugan (2017: 36).
[15] See for example Aguirre Oteiza. Erich Hackl was one of the earliest critics. However, his article from 2001 is no longer available under the original URL: www.circulolateral.com/revista/tema/078ehackl.htm
[16] There are obvious intersections with Michael Rothberg's 'multidirectional memory' that Silverman himself acknowledges. Unfortunately, a more detailed engagement with theories of memory goes beyond the scope of this essay.

> tension, or rather that one can be seen within the other, just as history must be made visible (recognizable) in the present moment.
>
> Second, Benjamin spatializes time so that dialectical movement is as if held in the instant. Montage therefore becomes another figure which can capture this weaving together of elements in the same space. Montage allows Benjamin to make the case for showing the dialectical movement of history in visible form. (2015: 26)

Mobilizing Benjamin allows Silverman to make what he calls the 'staging' or the 'poetics of memory' central to his project. Tension is key to this poetics and, as in mechanics, arises from the action and reaction of two different vectors. As we can see, movement is essential to achieving this tension in the first place. Montage in *Sefarad* is a means for achieving movement but also tension by 'cutting' between different memories. Tension is different to suspense in that it implies two forces moving into different directions, such as the evocation of Rita Hayworth and the memory of the disappeared under the Uruguayan dictatorship in the earlier example, whereas suspense is concerned with plotting across a narrative arc. The use of montage allows the novel to self-consciously stage memory as it cuts between separate frames, thereby drawing attention to their fragmentedness. In doing so, the novel successfully embraces the poetics of 'palimpsestic memory'.

A further narrative strategy which enables Muñoz Molina to bring different memories into tension as montage is train travel, precisely because his representation of the railway is deeply imbued with 'cinematic vision' (Marcus 2007: 20). Laura Marcus coins this term in reference to the symbiotic relationship between literary texts with cinema at the turn of the nineteenth century when film was emerging as a new technology. She has shown convincingly that the history of early cinema is inseparably linked to motion, even specifically the technology of locomotion.

> Cinema was frequently […] represented as a form of 'transport' – with its dual connotations, like those of *kinema*, of 'motion' and 'emotion' – and as a machine with the powers to move the spectator through time and space in ways to some extent anticipated in the great machine of the nineteenth century, the railway, but now magically realized in the virtual realm of representation. (2007: 20)

Although Muñoz Molina is writing much later, he makes virtual use of the railway to transport his reader through time and space, representing the movement between different memories in a similar way. A good example of this occurs in 'Copenhague'.

> Era, viendo esas caras y escuchando esas palabras desleídas en el sueño, como si yo no viajara en el tren donde ahora íbamos, sino en cualquiera de los trenes de los que

> ellos hablaban, trenes de soldados vencidos o de deportados que viajaban eternamente sin llegar a su destino y se quedaban parados durante noches enteras en andenes sin luces. Decía Primo Levi, poco antes de morir, que seguían dándole terror los vagones de carga sellados que veía a veces en las vías muertas de las estaciones. Yo serví en Rusia, dijo el hombre, en la División Azul. Subimos a un tren en la estación del Norte y tardamos diez días en llegar a un sitio que se llamaba Riga. Y yo pensé o dije medio en sueños, Riga es la capital de Letonia. (2013: 211-212)

The narrator's remembered journey on the night train gives way to those discussed by his grandfather and the stranger, before evoking Primo Levi's deportation on German cattle trains and then referring to passenger trains transporting the grandfather's interlocutor to Latvia as a member of the Blue Division. Finally, the focus returns to the half-asleep narrator. In spite of the switches between the different trains being clearly marked, most evidently where the polyptoton of 'decir' directly indicates the respective speaker, this still creates a visual effect of accumulation and 'cutting' between different scenes as in montage. It also elicits an emotional reaction from the reader that could range from confusion to surprise and shock.

The importance of trains in *Sefarad* has, of course, not gone unnoticed by critics.[17] Yet what remains underexplored is the connection that Muñoz Molina establishes between the railway and the cinema.[18] The narrator himself puts forward a comparison of travelling on a train as a way of leaving reality behind that is not dissimilar to the evasion offered by the cinema and books (2013: 209). The train as a narrative motif also serves as a vehicle to access another reality for the reader through the disruptive montage movement that it facilitates.

Contrary to the movement of trains, the Hispanic Society of America, featured in the final chapter 'Sefarad', emanates stasis: 'todo en aquel lugar parecía que permaneciera tan invariable como en un reino encantado' (2013: 741). The museum is described as a random collection of objects that are gathered in one place due to two factors, firstly, they all hail from Spain, secondly, they were acquired and brought to America by Archer Milton Huntington. Notwithstanding the fact that the museum acts against dispersal as a space of preservation, its depiction does not match that of an archive due to the apparent lack of logic and order amongst the objects gathered there, instead it is viewed 'como un Rastro' (2013:

[17] See Samuel O' Donoghue's article which offers a reading of trains as vehicles for re-enacting and representing 'narrative therapy' (2016: 60).
[18] I have made an attempt to bring the traumatic and romantic view of trains and cinema together in an earlier article (Omlor, 2021).

734). This seemingly random organizational principle of the museum invites us to reflect on the relationship between things and whether an object acquires new meaning in juxtaposition with another, mirroring the relationality between the different images in the Benjaminian montage. What matters is not the actual curation of the museum's exhibits but the way in which Muñoz Molina depicts their assemblage as a montage, this time not cinematic but in the Surrealist vein:

> the shocking aspect of Surrealist montages presupposes the capacity of the audience to reflect upon the very activity of aesthetic reception and appreciation: montages 'mean' in the sense that they reveal something of the essentially arbitrary nature of material signification, and the capacity of aesthetic framing to render just that arbitrary quality itself as an object of aesthetic experience, hence (as an artwork) meaningful. (Pensky 2004: 186)

Applied to the museum in question, it follows that the objects together do not signify a whole, rather they exist in tension to each other and the piling up of ever more diverse artefacts only increases the sensation of the slipperiness of meaning. While the 'framing' as part of Huntington's collection is meant to 'mean', ultimately the objects' accumulation in the same space just testifies to the arbitrariness of this meaning. Although the narrator refers to 'el coleccionismo desatado y lunático del señor Huntington' (2013: 742), the collector serves as a model for the writer whose task consists of collecting stories and memories because '[e]l recuerdo inconsciente es la materia y la levadura de la imaginación' (2013: 220-21). The collected snippets do not mean anything in themselves – it is only the writer's framing that can attempt to give them meaning outside of arbitrary and contingent existence. Again, this echoes Benjamin: 'Eine Art von produktiver Unordnung ist der Kanon der mémoire involontaire wie auch des Sammlers' (280, H5, 1). [A sort of productive disorder is the canon of *mémoire involontaire*, as it is the canon of the collector] (2002: 211). The lack of logical order in involuntary memory is in itself productive and conducive to creation, hence, together with collecting, it forms the basis of the novelist's work. The narrative method that relies on 'el recuerdo inconsciente' is further illuminated by the depiction of the narrator of the final chapter as a collector of souvenirs *malgré lui*.

> Nunca, salvo cuando era niño, me ha tentado coleccionar nada, pero me gusta guardar entre las páginas de los cuadernos o de los libros los testimonios vulgares y valiosos de un momento precioso, cajas de cerillas con el nombre de un restaurant, entradas, billetes de autobús, cualquier documento mínimo que atestigüe una fecha y una hora, nuestra presencia en un sitio, el itinerario breve de un viaje. No tengo apego por las

> cosas, ni siquiera por los libros o los discos, pero sí por los lugares en los que he conocido la misteriosa exaltación de lo mejor de mí mismo, la plenitud de mis deseos y de mis afinidades, y lo que quisiera atesorar como coleccionista avaricioso y obsesivo son los instantes, las horas enteras, los minutos que pasé escuchando una cierta música o mirando pinturas en las salas de un museo, el gusto de caminar contigo una tarde por la orilla del Hudson mientras el sol enciende de oro y de cobre los cristales de los rascacielos y esa luz queda luego en una fotografía, la inquietud de aventura y la incertidumbre que nos fue ganando esa penúltima mañana en Nueva York. (2013: 723-724)

While Huntington collects artefacts and precious objects, the narrator collects detritus which is only meaningful in the context of his own existence. What he tries so desperately to hold on to are the material traces that stand in for particular moments in time. While he recognises the impossibility of preserving time, the refuse acts as material proof for his memory, what Benjamin calls 'eine Form des praktischen Erinnerns' (1998b: 271, H1a, 2) [collecting is a form of practical memory] (2002: 205): 'todo tiene el temblor, la consistencia frágil de lo que no se sabe si llegó a suceder de verdad. Guardo pruebas, detalles materiales, la tarjeta Metrocard que usamos para tomar el autobús que nos llevó tan lejos' (2013: 743). As soon as events have happened, their truth value is queried by the narrator, as he does not trust his own recollection to verify events of the past. It is for this reason that he tries to assuage his doubts by collecting objects that can testify to the authenticity of his experience instead. He can thus be read along the lines of Benjamin's *Sammler* [collector] or Baudelaire's *chiffonier* (1998a: 583), as the collector of the 'Abfall der Geschichte' (1998b: 575-76, N 2, 6 and N2, 7) [refuse of history] (2002: 461). If we consider that the narrator positions himself as a collector of detritus, then we can read his role in parallel to the endeavour of some modern artists who mobilise 'Abfall als Gegengedächtnis' [refuse as countermemory] (Assmann 2010: 384).[19] The countermemory is born from the arbitrariness of the selected memories that only make sense to the individual 'rememberer' who weaves them together into a narrative that is not fuelled by collective but by individual experience. As in film, this narrative montage can bring out the unexpected likeness as well as the contrapuntual quality of these memories.

The objects that the narrator collects reveal an attachment to particular places but are actually meant to preserve a particular moment in time. Yet the memories that inhabit these

[19] In her discussion of the conceptual artist Ilja Kabakov Aleida Assmann states: 'es sind Relikte seines eigenen Lebens, die von ihm als Erinnerungsstützen und Beweisstücke sortiert und aufbewahrt wurden' [they are relics of his own life, which as memory cues and material evidence are organized and preserved by him] (2010: 392-393).

places are temporal and the conceptualisation of the past is once more spatialized. In contrast to the disruptive potential of montage, one could argue that, as a physical location, the museum represents a more unifying *lieu de mémoire* 'en el que han ido a parar, arrastrados en la confusión de la gran riada del tiempo, todos los testimonios y las herencias del pasado […]. Y también los nombres, nombres sonoros de lugares españoles en las etiquetas de las vitrinas' (2013: 734). As a container of memories, in the absence of a 'milieu de mémoire', the museum may serve this material, functional and symbolic purpose of a 'site of memory'. Indeed, Pierre Nora counts museums amongst the obvious examples of the latter (1992: XXIV). Nonetheless, he also notes that '[l]es lieux de mémoire, ce sont d'abord des restes' (1992 : XXIV) [*Lieux de mémoire* are fundamentally vestiges] (1996 : 6), which is particularly fitting when dealing with a collection of random objects. He goes on to say that 'la raison d'être fondamentale d'un lieu de mémoire est d'arrêter le temps, de bloquer le travail de l'oubli, de fixer un état de choses, d'immortaliser la mort, de matérialiser l'immatériel' (1992 : XXXV) [the fundamental purpose of a lieu de mémoire is to stop time, to inhibit forgetting, to fix a state of things, to immortalize death, and to materialize the immaterial] (1996 : 15). The objective of stopping time and fixing 'a state of things' is much more permanent and static than the tension brought on by montage. In dissolving the tension by bringing time seemingly to a halt and preserving things *sub specie aeternitatis*, the *lieu de mémoire* does not disrupt. Ultimately, this seems an apt description of both the Hispanic Society and the narrator's personal collection.[20]

But of what exactly could the Hispanic Society be a *lieu de mémoire*? Its significance is no longer that of the personal souvenir collection of Huntington, or not only, although Nora's remark that '[l]e devoir de mémoire fait de chacun l'historien de soi' (1992: XXIX) [the resulting obligation to remember makes every man his own historian] (1996: 10) is pertinent here. Evidently, for the narrator, it represents a personal memory, but it is also bound up with the memory of the Spanish nation. All the different regions of Spain, their traditions and typical dress are depicted within the museum (2013: 744-745). At the same time, the narrator is drawn to a 'lebrillo' from his hometown 'que en esta lejanía me devuelve el corazón exacto de la infancia' (2013: 734). By virtue of its location, the Hispanic Society represents a deterritorialised site of memory for the Spanish nation, at the heart of which lies exile as imagined throughout *Sefarad*. This is complemented by the woman whom the narrator meets inside the museum, as she is perceived as a walking memory of poetry and Spanish literature, herself in exile (2013: 739-41). In this context, Gero Arnscheidt has

[20] For a summary of the critiques directed at Nora's project, see Rothberg (2010).

argued that the whole of *Sefarad* is conceived by Muñoz Molina as a memory site for Spaniards and Sephardim, who are integrated into this national memory (2006: 49). According to him, this allows Muñoz Molina to eschew the more complex issues of Spain's past – a criticism not unlike that with which Nora's own project met – in order to achieve a national consensus and reconciliation. Whereas this critique is valid when considering the treatment of the past, and this view is compounded by the emphasis on individual identity, the narrator expresses a timid note of critique of contemporary Spanish politics, presumably the right-wing PP government under Aznar: 'Qué desgana de volver a nuestro país, del que nos han llegado casi a diario noticias de oscurantismo y de sangre, qué apetencia de lejanía prolongada, de exilio' (2013: 723). Be that as it may, the collection at the Hispanic Society gathers objects 'd'une mémoire perdue' (Nora, 1992: XXVIII) [a lost memory] and its position as a *lieu de mémoire* allows the author to render this loss awe-inspiring and aestheticize it.

This aesthetic experience is different to the one outlined by Max Pensky in reference to montage, since it does not render the meaninglessness and arbitrariness themselves aesthetic. Rather it creates meaning by firmly locating and containing the loss of memory within the Hispanic Society, thereby providing a kind of cathartic closure to the earlier disruption. The inclusion of the Velázquez painting serves as the visual endpoint in which all tension caused by the movement between different memories dissolves by virtue of being accommodated within. Arnscheidt argues that the portrait echoes the theme of exile, as it represents another victim:

> En los ojos oscuros de esta niña puede verse 'la melancolía de un largo destierro' (Muñoz Molina 2001b: 593), que recuerda la función de la descripción del autorretrato de Murillo en *El jinete polaco*. No obstante, al incluir una reproducción del retrato en las últimas páginas de *Sefarad* da un paso más en la construcción de un lugar de memoria. Busca así el consenso masivo del público, mediante el cual finalmente puede otorgar a la niña de Velázquez aquella 'aura symbolique' de la que habla Nora. (2006: 53)

Certain Velázquez paintings like *Las Meninas* fit the definition of a site of memory in the Spanish national imagination well. *La niña* is less canonical but its purpose may thus suit Muñoz Molina's objective, as Arnscheidt holds, given that he superimposes the melancholy of exile onto the painting's subject, whose identity is not confirmed.[21] The evocation of a *lieu de mémoire* definitely underscores the resultant stillness, given that the static 'lieu' comes to

[21] Víctor García de la Concha agrees but more positively concludes that '[e]lla es Sefarad' (2010: 299).

replace the living 'milieu' within Nora's theoretical framework. While I agree in so far as stasis comes to replace the movement of montage by the end of the novel, I find reading the museum in its entirety as a *lieu de mémoire* more compelling (ultimately, the portrait itself also forms part of that collection). Moreover, I suggest that the narrative movement coming to a halt can be understood through a literary lens, rather than as a nation-building enterprise. To that end, it is fruitful to compare the portrait's function to Borges's Aleph. The comparison may seem far-fetched and somewhat tangential, but it illustrates neatly some of the salient points concerning Muñoz Molina's use of the painting. In Borges's story of the same name, the narrator discovers an Aleph that represents 'the desire to attain a totalizing vision of space and time' (González Echevarría: 125). The Aleph allows the narrator to see the whole universe at once, since 'es uno de los puntos del espacio que contienen todos los puntos' (Borges: 187). In the same vein, Velázquez's *La niña* conveys this totalizing desire for Muñoz Molina's fictional project by combining in space all different temporal planes. Its position at the end of the novel enhances this perception because it acts as a kind of vanishing point upon which the prior vectors converge. Where they differ is in Borges's ironic use of the Aleph to reveal the impossibility of any totalizing literary endeavour. In characteristically humorous fashion, Borges decries the hubris of wanting to represent the whole world (an idea that is reinforced in the story through the fictional poet Carlos Argentino Daneri's aim to describe the entire planet in his poem 'La tierra'). In his treatment of exile and marginalization, Muñoz Molina ultimately falls into the trap of following in Daneri's footsteps.

The girl in the portrait transcends different temporal planes but also different places. As a result, all movement seems to have led up to this final fixed point, any tension disappears in a kind of sublimation, dialectically speaking: 'Al inventar uno tiene la vana creencia de que se apodera de los lugares y las cosas, de la gente acerca de la que escribe: en mi cuarto de trabajo […] me gusta acariciar distraídamente con las yemas de los dedos, la postal de la niña de Velázquez, puedo tener la sensación de que nada de lo que invento o recuerdo está fuera de mí, de este espacio cerrado' (2013: 745). According to this observation, the writer's task of invention leads to a complete mastery of time and space, hence the Velázquez painting encapsulates this feat so perfectly, as it connects the writer with the potential unknown beholder in a completely different space and time zone (2013: 746). This can be seen as a celebration of the achievements of literature that simultaneously provides closure by closing off ('un espacio cerrado'). The tension that is characteristic of the Benjaminian constellation is not maintained but instead resolved. Unfortunately, then the

disruptive force of montage is not seen through to the end, as movement gradually gives way to stillness. The shock of the encounter loses its force to the extent that the notion of *Sefarad* becomes imbued with positive connotations of crafting a space of belonging and literary mastery. While the technique of montage has been crucial to marking out connections and counterpoints along the way, its disruptive potential is not fully realized due to the positioning of *La niña* as a kind of Aleph which manages to encompass the different memories and voices harmoniously. The initial comparison of the novelistic process to a montage of 'fotogramas' that was conducive to inspiring the tension of 'palimpsestic memory' gives way to the novel as a curated collection with the potential to contain everything, ending with a vision of literature as reconciliatory and totalizing.

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