

The Affective Turn and the Symbolic Repair: The Case of the Yellow Stars

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Abstract: In traffic accidents the bodies of the victims are images of the tragic meaning of the episode. In front of his corporal disappearance of the victims of the sinister, two antagonistic images are inscribed in the urban landscape as a memory of what happened: the image of the vehicle protagonist of the incident that the media broadcast in the chronicle of the event; and the yellow star that relatives paint to indicate where the event happened. Thus the victims become absent presences in the places where the accident occurred. The concept of victimization has traditionally been analyzed in radical opposition to the agency: the passivity of the wound against the power of the ability to act. The objective of this work is to challenge this dichotomy — particularly under the how it is deployed within the framework of the theory of social action — through an analysis of the Yellow Stars as location of pain. This perspective forces us to reconsider, not only the category of testimony but also the impact that these symbolic manifestations have on the sphere public as images that make visible urban violence and the vulnerability of our existence as a social problem.

Key words: vial accident, agency, affective turn

1. Introduction



We are all in the sewer but some of us look at the stars

Lady Windamare's fan, Oscar Wilde

Recovering the missing body after a disaster is a tragedy, because it implies face the territory of pain and drama. Resignify the place where the life in common, give the city a policy of life journeys interrupted by the absence; reinventing a dramatist of the urban landscape has been the civic work of the civil association Yellow Stars in the city of Olavarría¹. Through symbol of the star make visible the demand to inhabit the city with bodies that are no longer there but who fight for a survival memory.

Some routes of our city have been populated with yellow stars, figures which have been increased day by day,

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¹ Olavarría is a city of Buenos Aires State in Argentina.

a map on the website of the local newspaper El Popular, <http://www.elpopular.com.ar/estrellas/>, makes a cartography of sinister road. There are streets that have up to three stars (for example the intersection of Pringles and Bolivar streets). During the year 2017, in Olavarría there were a total of twenty-one deaths per car accident. This figure is arrived at by accounting for the losses that occurred in the city, localities and routes that surround the party. In 2018 there were fourteen victims by fatal vial sinister².

As we consider this a social problem, those who feel the responsibility of claiming justice are the relatives using the yellow stars as a sign of the absence of loved ones. In other words, they transform personal pain in a public issue. In all this process of construction of social problems, the look at the relatives of the victims defines the problem. In the case of Yellow Stars Association, we can point:

- They present them in a certain way: they located the place of the accident by putting a brand and the name of the victim.
- They suggest a solution: they join a common cause and promote the memory cartography of the vials accident at the city.

In Olavarría, deaths in vial accident — either on the roads or on the streets- always they were common. Despite its long existence as a harmful objective condition, it was only in. In recent years this deaths began to be defined as a social problem m that involves everyone. Since the Yellow Star Association assumed the role of “the claimants” for the purpose of drawing our attention to claims and present them as a social problem; so as define them in a way that tells us what type of problem is , giving causes and proposing a solution

There are different social actors in the definition of vial accidents as a social problem: officials and individuals affected by them that seek to raise awareness among citizens and mobilize the government to provide solutions. While all of these actors (or claimants) agree that there is a social problem, not necessarily they agree on its classification (in the allocation of causes and solutions). Is a problem of individual education of each driver? or is it that the cars are little insurance?, Or the streets and are in poor condition? Or are there too many trucks and buses circulating? Is it a problem of how much alcohol do those who drive handle?

All these would be different ways of typifying a problem; the proposed solution will be different and the interests affected will be different: those of the drivers, those of the factories of cars, those of the concessionaires of routes, those of the transport unions, those of the Municipality or even those of the wine and beer manufacturers. We are interested in analyzing as the Yellow Star Association acts on this problem since its testimonial performance communicates senses about who and how the victims feels a social drama.

Yellow Stars Association is organized in our city by Gustavo Spaltro Nadia’s father, a young girl, victim of a sinister call “The case of the bus”³ in 2008. Gustavo takes contact with Julio Ambrosio president of the Yellow Star Foundation from Córdoba’s city:

“I wrote a letter to the then mayor José Eseverri and immediately gave me a interview where I explained everything that was being done in Córdoba and I told him that the same thing I wanted to replicate in Olavarría to

² The routes took the most lives. A striking fact: none of the incidents in an urban area occurred on an avenue. 2018 registered an average of 6 deaths per day in the province of Buenos Aires as a result of road accidents, according to data provided by the civil association “*Luchemos por la Vida*”, which in total accounted for 2,158 deaths. Buenos Aires leads the ranking of the provinces with the most traffic accidents, although the number is the lowest in recent years.

³ A bus where several high students of our city travel from Olavarría to Azul hit violently against a locomotive and four people died, one with serious injuries, and another six with various injuries. The tragic accident occurred about fifteen minutes before railroad crossing without the bus was a Fiat Ducato driven by Natalia Gómez Portillo (28 years old), and with ten high students, they went from Olavarría to the Santo Tomás de Aquino Superior Institute, where some they study Gastronomy and other Psychopedagogy.

honor Nadia and all those who they had lost their lives together with her, and at the same time help generate awareness for that will never happen again. A week later Héctor Vitale (municipal government secretary) called me and the project would be declared of municipal interest, and so it was that we began to prepare the launching of Yellow Stars; and we did it on the 15th September 2012, in the same place and date where the accident occurred, said Gustavo.”

And he painted the first four yellow stars in Olavarría, to say “Yes to Life” and start a new stage where, through education and memory, they could work in the prevention of vial accident, turn pain to love by generating awareness.

2. Affective Turn and Agency

The testimony of the relatives territorializes the pain in pursuit of a struggle for memory and the prevention of road accidents. Pain, traditionally considered as a passionate affection, today in social theory has become an engine of agency. Raymond Williams already proposed the category of “feeling structure” to describe the dynamic relationship between experience, consciousness and language as formalized and formative in art, institutions and traditions”. For Raymond Williams, where there are more likely to see the transformations which express experiences that are the object of the “Structures of feeling” is in symbolic manifestation like art, because they “naturally extract the real sense of life, the deep community that makes communication possible” (Williams, 2003, p. 57). In this sense the Yellow Stars are manifestations of a feeling structure.

For gender theories, the so-called “turnaround” has begun to unfold by the affective turn”. The so-called feminism of the third wave, in the 80’ proposed the theory of a gender citizenship. Carol Gilligan (1993) developed a sustained ethic in the idea of that women deploy their emotions more openly than men and establish their moral ties based on the logic of care — valued positively — more than justice — sustained in an abstraction that legitimates the body denies. Martha Nussbaum (2003) argues in favor of a justice where emotions (especially disgust and shame) are taken care of. Chantal Mouffe (2010) also she considers that passions are the engine of politics in radical democracies. According Cecilia Macón,

The affective turn can then be presented as a project destined to investigate alternative ways of approaching the affective dimension, passionate or emotional — and discuss the differences that may exist between these three denominations- based on their role in the public sphere. As well as the cited developments by Martha Nussbaum, Carol Gilligan or Chantal Mouffe laid the foundations of a perspective that has always tried question the hierarchies of the dichotomy emotions/reasons, the debates more recent attempts to transcend that first approach and deepen in a more radical perspective (2013, p. 9).

Affects are linked to lability, contingency and subtlety (Segwick, 2003, p. 21) constituting also articulators of experience: “The affections are what unites, what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values and objects” (Ahmed, 2010b, p. 29), by making sense of a traumatic experience such as the death of a close relative, the affects are transformed; embody the political vulnerability that the disaster revealed when the existence ended.

Yellow Stars’s agency makes the pain a public problem, in order to repair of injustice. In this case, there is the possibility of resignifying the traumatic experiences through an affective dimension that the agency enables, without essentialize “victimhood”. From this perspective, the victim/agency dichotomy has been definitely set aside by the affective turn, a key issue for action politics. The agency that triggers the pain and makes it a public problem for move from mourning to the repair of injustice, takes us to the Yellow Stars as index of this process In

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The placing on the public scene of the vulnerability of bodies through yellow stars is the basis for setting up a community deployed according to Judith Butler (2004). This implies that "punishment exposes the slavery by which our relationships with others unite us, in ways that we cannot rebuild or explain (Butler, 2004, p. 23). She argues that: “skin and flesh exposed by us to the gaze of others, but also touching, and violating, and the bodies put us at risk of becoming the agency and the instrument of everything this too the very bodies for which we fight are never ours alone”. “The body has its invariable public dimension” (Butler, 2004, p. 26). Vulnerability, precariousness, grief and even melancholy challenge here the normativity through a counter heroic logic that has been described in terms of spectral or critical agency.

In the case of Yellow Stars relatives, they propose this sign to remember the victims and stop the hyper accelerated weather of cities. This marking reminds you of the attention about the insecurity of the urban territory and the fragility of the domain that the subject has of your vehicle “The streets of our city enable risk and take us to a struggle for life” the victim’s relatives affirm. Paul Virilio (1999) points out that the feeling of security that the State gave to the citizens in the Hobbesian model; today it is reversed in pursuit of a regulation of fear. Part of the basis that the State in the past guaranteed human relations preventing “the war of all against all”, its decline is the product of homogenization that is external to the community and subverts the fear within the limits of the city. Fear of the enemy in war is similar as fear of the citizen in the peace that the vial accident promote. The Yellow Stars are part of this experience of fear, a sign of our time, indicate that the transports with their speed are increasingly stronger.

Is accepted, worldwide, that the first cause of the origin of accidents traffic is the speed. The fear that unleashed the sinister becomes fear of space and like Nietzsche said: Nature disappears and with it the remains of the objective man”. The yellow stars are an emblem of the struggle for the disappearance in the urban landscape of the victims of sinister roads; they question us and remind us that speed is dangerous.

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