

## The Afterwake: Anaïs Horn & Pedro Zylbersztajn

Pedro Zylbersztajn, *Écfrase de um filme (pausado)* *Ekphrasis of a film (still)*

### English

The room, pictured from this angle (the camera parallel to a wall, framing the point in which it meets another to make a corner on the right side of the screen), sparsely furnished, doesn't resemble what is usually assumed to configure a bedroom. It is painted so that the walls are sectioned at about one third of its height, white on the bottom part, and a darker color on top. I can't tell you which color, of course, as the image is black and white. I have a vague sense of it being a greenish hue, maybe from past experience, maybe from remembering it being said at some point earlier in the film. The room has been painted at least twice in the last few days. There's no way of telling just by looking at the image, but she had told us earlier. Maybe that's when she said it was green. Maybe that's why it looks this way, horizontally split in two colors, because each might be a different paint job. In any case, it reminds me of a different kind of space, somewhere in which people are in transit, moving past but never staying for (too) long, a public room of some sort. Usually, I think, the bottom part is the one painted in a darker color, to avoid the stains precipitated from people leaning against the walls, and the top part is lighter in order to give a sense of amplitude and clarity. Seems like an architectural quirk to paint it in the reverse order, and more so to do it in a private bedroom.

At the bottom edge of the frame, on top of the grey burnt cement floor, there are loose sheets of paper. They are scattered, crumpled, blotted with ink, and some are inscribed with writing from top to bottom. Over them is a beaten and torn brown paper bag, which sits next to a mound of caster sugar. One can easily assume that the first is the provenance of the latter, and that something has gone mildly wrong. A spoon is lodged in the sugar mound, however, suggesting its use has not been affected, or, even, that this was the result of a deliberate act. Behind this hectic tableaux, flush to the corner of the room and laid straight on the ground, is a mattress. It's bare, with no sheets, covers or pillows whatsoever, but in a good state, with no evident tears, stains or humps. It's sized for a single person and appears to have structural quality and proper finishing. Its color is dark, just a tad darker than the upper part of the wall. I would imagine a crimson or maroon. It's printed with a checkered pattern of what I can only describe as lifebuoys in alternating colors. She lies on top of the mattress, almost falling over its edge, on her right side, facing the sheets of paper and the sugar. Her eyes are shut, but she's not sleeping - one of her hands is permanently caught in mid-gesture while adjusting her hair behind her ear. She supports her head over her other arm, used as a pillow, making her elbow stick out of the mattress, slightly foreshortened from the angle in which the frame is captured. Her legs are curled up a bit, making her just shy of being in a fetal position. She's not wearing any clothes, and instead is partially covered by them, using them as blankets. She seems comfortable, temperature-wise. Seconds ago, she mentioned it was snowing. There is a radiator board mounted to the wall on the right, which I must assume is turned on to a high setting.

The subtitles, set in white filled, black stroked, pixelated Arial Bold, read: "I realised that life stood still no matter what..." It echoes something similar said in her voice, in French, but I don't know precisely what. Elsewhere, I've seen it translated as "I figured that, in any case, life had come to a halt..." It's a voice over; her lips are sealed, as always. It resonates with the stillness of the frame, the image is frozen, suspended, still, no matter what. The solitary picture it paints is one of profound stability, the few elements in the picture inert. Herself the only one capable of breaking this stasis, she looks content with keeping her hand floating over her head, never reaching its destination. When I look for long enough, this gesture shifts into something else, her hand is no longer moving her hair but forming a shell around her ear so she can carefully listen to the still life around her. She leans as steady as everything else, in a surrender of anxiety. It is as if she has recently accomplished to admit that there is no waiting to be done, or, alternatively, that all there is is waiting. Indeed, a few moments before this still(ness), she stated something along the lines of - and that might be an imprecise quote - "I wait, as always".

This prior waiting, however, was of an entirely different disposition. It was unsettled, nervous. Never leaving the room, she filled time. She stared at the wall and painted it (more than once). She looked out the window and let herself be looked at. She undressed and put her clothes back on, only to take them off again. She wrote frantically, and I can't say what. They look like letters, but were never sent. If that's what they are, they too are in a perennial state of lingering, as well as, I would expect, the addressee. Though it may be the case that these were never letters at all, but a diary (this most anxious of time keeping devices), the very same sentences she narrates to us off-screen. She moved furniture around, waited in it, moved it again and waited some more. This cycle moves on until she finds the most basic, unfurnished set up to wait in. But all the while, it seems she is only waiting for herself to take action and start moving again, nothing more. There is no sense of captivity, thus no expectation of release. It seems like voluntary isolation, which confounds this sense of anticipation, because while it may very well provoke boredom, which justifies the agitation, this solitude is not dependent on any contingent matter other than her own will. It's a non-teleological wait, if that is even possible. Is that even possible? Can one just wait, without waiting for? She just waits, as a condition. First, she struggles against it, filling this void with her own volition, waiting for her own desires - to move furniture, to paint walls, to write. Then she waits for any external event, for the snow to come and go, for people to pass by or to speak behind the walls, and, as it was with her own actions, there is never a sense of arrival. Her triumph comes when she stops and just waits, not for anything. If life stands still, there is no movement, which means there is nothing coming.

After this, each event is not a container for unrealized expectation anymore, but a phenomenon on its own which can then be the cause of something else. Causality reclaims its casualness, things occur around her. Almost occasionally, the sugar is entirely consumed and in the same occasional manner, she leaves. In that frame, however, she is suspended in this one moment of nihilistic realization, from which, then and there, she might never leave. It's as if the affirmation of the placidity of life around her would freeze her in time, make this film a single still. Lying over the mattress in front of her freshly painted walls, hand in ear, she has written all these words only to have a few of them repeated in front of her infinitely: I realised that life stood still no matter what.

The room, pictured from this angle (the camera parallel to a wall, framing the point in which it meets another to make a corner on the right side of the screen), sparsely furnished, doesn't resemble what is usually assumed to configure a bedroom. It is painted so that the walls are sectioned at about one third of its height, white on the bottom part, and a darker color on top. I can't tell you which color, of course, as the image is black and white. I have a vague sense of it being a greenish hue, maybe from past experience, maybe from remembering it being said at some point earlier in the film. The room has been painted at least twice in the last few days. There's no way of telling just by looking at the image, but she had told us earlier. Maybe that's when she said it was green. Maybe that's why it looks this way, horizontally split in two colors, because each might be a different paint job. In any case, it reminds me of a different kind of space, somewhere in which people are in transit, moving past but never staying for (too) long, a public room of some sort. Usually, I think, the bottom part is the one painted in a darker color, to avoid the stains precipitated from people leaning against the walls, and the top part is lighter in order to give a sense of amplitude and clarity. Seems like an architectural quirk to paint it in the reverse order, and more so to do it in a private bedroom.

## Pedro Zylbersztajn, *Écfrase de um filme (pausado) Ekphrasis of a film (still)*

### Español

La habitación, captada desde este ángulo (la cámara paralela a una pared, encuadrando el punto en que ésta se une a otra para formar una esquina en el lado derecho de la pantalla), escasamente amueblada, no se parece a lo que normalmente contiene un dormitorio. Está pintado de forma que las paredes están seccionadas en aproximadamente un tercio de su altura, de color blanco en la parte inferior y de un color más oscuro en la superior. No puedo decir de qué color, por supuesto, ya que la imagen es en blanco y negro. Tengo la vaga sensación de que es un tono verdoso, quizá por experiencias pasadas, quizá por recordar que lo mencionaron anteriormente en algún momento de la película. La habitación ha sido pintada al menos dos veces en los últimos días. No hay forma de saberlo con sólo mirar la imagen, pero ella nos lo había dicho antes. Tal vez fue ahí cuando dijo que era verde. Tal vez por eso se ve así, dividida horizontalmente en dos colores, porque cada uno podría ser un trabajo de pintura diferente. En cualquier caso, me recuerda a otro tipo de espacio, uno en el que la gente transita, se mueve pero nunca se queda (demasiado) tiempo, una especie de sala pública. Normalmente, creo, la parte inferior es la que está pintada de un color más oscuro, para evitar las manchas provocadas por la gente que se recarga en las paredes, y la parte superior es más clara para dar sensación de amplitud y claridad. Parece una rareza arquitectónica pintarlo en el orden inverso, y más aún hacerlo en un dormitorio privado.

En el borde inferior del encuadre, sobre el piso de cemento gris quemado hay hojas de papel sueltas. Están esparcidas, arrugadas, manchadas de tinta, y algunas llevan inscripciones de arriba a abajo. Encima de ellas hay una bolsa de papel marrón rota y maltratada, junto a un montón de azúcar. Es fácil suponer que lo primero es la procedencia de lo segundo, y que algo ligeramente desastroso ha pasado. Hay una cuchara alojada en el montón de azúcar, sin embargo, lo que sugiere que su uso no se ha visto afectado o, incluso, que eso ha sido el resultado de un acto deliberado. Detrás de esta escena caótica, a ras de la esquina de la habitación y tendido directamente en el suelo, hay un colchón. Está descubierto, sin sábanas, fundas, ni almohada alguna, pero en buen estado, sin desgarros, manchas ni bultos evidentes. Tiene el tamaño adecuado para una sola persona y parece tener calidad estructural y un acabado decente. Su color es oscuro, sólo un poco más oscuro que la parte superior de la pared. Podría imaginar un carmesí o granate. Está estampado con un patrón cuadriculado que solo puedo describir como aros salvavidas que van alternando colores. Ella está tumbada sobre el colchón, casi cayendo por el borde sobre su lado derecho, frente a las hojas de papel y el azúcar. Tiene los ojos cerrados, pero no duerme: una de sus manos está permanentemente detenida en un gesto mientras se acomoda el pelo detrás de la oreja. Apoya la cabeza sobre el otro brazo, utilizado como almohada, haciendo que el codo sobresalga del colchón, ligeramente escorzado por el ángulo en que está captado el encuadre. Tiene las piernas un poco encogidas, dejándola casi en posición fetal. No lleva ropa, y en cambio está parcialmente cubierta por ellas, utilizándolas como mantas. Se muestra cómoda, la temperatura parece agradable. Hace unos segundos, mencionó que estaba nevando. A la derecha, en la pared, hay un radiador, que debo suponer que está a una temperatura alta.

Los subtítulos, en letra Arial Bold, con relleno blanco y trazo negro, enuncian: “I realised that life stood still no matter what...”. Hace eco de algo parecido dicho con su voz, en francés, pero no sé exactamente qué. En otros sitios, lo he visto traducido como “I figured that, in any case, life had come to a halt...”. Es una voz en off; sus labios están sellados, como siempre. El texto resuena con la quietud del encuadre, la imagen está congelada, suspendida, inmóvil, pase lo que pase. La imagen solitaria que pinta es de una profunda estabilidad, los pocos elementos del cuadro inertes. Ella misma, la única capaz de romper esta stasis, parece satisfecha con mantener su mano flotando sobre su cabeza, sin llegar nunca a su destino. Cuando miro durante el tiempo suficiente, este gesto se transforma en otra cosa, su mano ya no mueve su pelo sino que forma una concha alrededor de su oreja para poder escuchar cuidadosamente la vida inerte que la rodea. Ella se reclina tan quieta como todo su entorno, en una renuncia a la ansiedad. Es como si acabara de admitir que no hay nada que esperar o, por el contrario, que todo lo que hay es espera. De hecho, unos instantes antes de este cuadro quieto, declaró algo así como – y podría ser esa una paráfrasis imprecisa – “yo espero, como siempre”.

Esta espera previa, sin embargo, era de una disposición totalmente diferente. Era trastornada, nerviosa. Sin salir nunca de la habitación, llenaba el tiempo. Miraba la pared y la pintaba (más de una vez). Miraba por la ventana y se dejaba mirar. Se desnudaba y se volvía a poner la ropa solamente para quitársela de nuevo. Escribía frenéticamente, no sabría decir qué. Parecen cartas, pero nunca fueron enviadas. Si eso es lo que son, también están en un perenne estado de prórroga, así como, supongo, el destinatario. Aunque puede darse el caso de que nunca fueran cartas, sino un diario (el más ansioso de los dispositivos de conservación del tiempo), las mismas frases que nos narra fuera de la pantalla. Ella movía los muebles, esperaba en ellos, los volvía a mover y esperaba un poco más. Este ciclo continúa hasta que encuentra la disposición más básica, sin muebles, para esperar. Pero todo el tiempo, parece que sólo está esperando a que ella misma actúe y empiece a moverse de nuevo, nada más. No hay sensación de cautiverio y, por tanto, no hay expectativa de liberación. Parece un aislamiento voluntario, lo que confunde esta sensación de anticipación, porque si bien es muy posible que provoque aburrimiento, lo que justifica la agitación, esta soledad no depende de ninguna materia contingente que no sea su propia voluntad. Es una espera no teleológica, si es que eso es posible. ¿Es posible? ¿Se puede esperar sin esperar por? Ella simplemente espera, como condición. Primero, lucha contra ello, llenando este vacío con su propia voluntad, esperando sus propios deseos: mover muebles, pintar paredes, escribir. Luego espera cualquier acontecimiento externo, que la nieve vaya y venga, que la gente pase o hable detrás de las paredes, y, como ocurría con sus propias acciones, nunca hay sensación de llegada. Su triunfo llega cuando se detiene y se limita a simplemente esperar, no por algo. Si la vida se detiene, no hay movimiento, lo que significa que no hay nada que venga.

Después de esto, cada acontecimiento ya no es un contenedor de expectativas no realizadas, sino un fenómeno en sí mismo que puede ser la causa de otra cosa. La causalidad reclama su casualidad, las cosas ocurren a su alrededor. Casi ocasionalmente, el azúcar se ha consumido por completo y, de la misma manera ocasional, ella se marcha. En ese encuadre, sin embargo, ella está suspendida en este único momento de realización nihilista, del que, allí y entonces, puede que nunca se vaya. Es como si la afirmación de la placidez de la vida a su alrededor fuera a congelarla en el tiempo, convirtiendo esta película en un único fotograma. Tumbada sobre el colchón frente a sus paredes recién pintadas, con la mano en la oreja, ha escrito todas aquellas palabras para tener apenas algunas de ellas repetidas delante de sí, infinitamente: I realised that life stood still no matter what.