Humanism and War Photography in the 1930s Visual Culture

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Abstract: *This article focuses on the relations between a notion of humanism dear to some European left intellectuals and artists, and the use of photography as left propaganda in the 1920s and 1930s. Photography started to participate in the war at the same time when technique became predominant in warfare. At the first moment, the expansion of this warfare, which left the scope of man to become the scope of machine, brought a challenge to the photographers who wanted to cover the event. At the end of the First World War, the apology of technique was associated to a position aligned with the nationalist right wing, whereas its opponent, the left wing, based itself on a transnational and humanist discourse. This political culture then established, of polarization between fascist nationalism and European left wings cannot be dissociated from a visual culture which was being built based on the same polarization. We will discuss in this article the relationship between the political and visual cultures specifically in relation to photography.*

Keywords: *War photography; Visual Culture; Political Culture; Humanism.*

What is conventionally called the modern war appeared, precisely, with the introduction of military technology in the ways of making war. The American Civil War was one of the first in which the military machinery using technology was present in a relevant way. It was also one of the first to be largely photographed[1]. At the First World War, photographic technology was much improved, but representing the event was still a challenge. An example of the difficulty to create a photographic image as close as possible to a satisfactory representation of the war, that is, to the warfare based on technic, is the work of developed by Australian Frank Hurley (1885-1962). He, who was instated as a photographer of the Australian Imperial Force in 1917, described his frustration caused by his attempts to photograph the world conflict:

I have tried and tried to include events on a single negative, but the results were hopeless. Everything was on such a vast scale. Figures were scattered – the atmosphere was dense with haze and smoke – shells would not burst where required – yet all the elements of a picture were there could they but be brought together and condensed … on developing my plate, there was disappointment! All I found was a record of a few figures advancing from the trenches – and a background of haze. Nothing could have been more unlike a battle. (*Apud* HÜPPAUF, 1993, p. 53)

His objective as a photographer of that war was to make the Australian participation as visible as the British and Canadian (CARMICHAEL, 1989, p. 60). His equipment allowed him to go close to action, because it was light enough, did not constantly need a tripod, and the optical apparatus was luminous enough for him to record the bombings and their effects; however, he could not put together in his camera viewer one single scene which, in his opinion, represented the event. Therefore to produce one image that fulfilled his objectives, Hurley used parts of twelve different photo negatives to compose one of his most famous images, "A hop over" (referring to the hop from

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[1] On the relation between the photographic technique and the warfare technique, both in their first moments on the American civil war, Alan Trachtenberg stated: "A striking number of the war photographs call up associations with genre paintings or drawings: staged scenes showing an artillery battery at work, or soldiers relaxing in camp. Of course, a close look will turn up a blurred hand, a slouching figure, a pair of eyes staring blankly at the lens – signs of the camera no amount of composition can hide. But it is noteworthy that the Civil War photographers frequently resorted to stagecraft, arranging scenes of daily life in camp to convey a *look* of informality, posing groups of soldiers on picket duty – perhaps moving corpses into more advantageous positions for dramatic close-ups of littered battlefields. This is hard surprising, considering the unprecedented assignment – as new to photography as the military actions employing new long-range weapons were now to warfare. The first modern war in its scale of destruction – close to half a million casualties – and in the use of mechanized weaponry, including steel-plated naval vessels, trenches, and, in Sherman's march through Georgia in 1864, a scorched-earth policy, the Civil War presented challenges to comprehension in all manner of word and picture". TRACHTENBERG, 1989, p. 73.

trenches to combat). It shows an attack of Australian soldiers from the trenches at the same time as combat planes fly over the battlefield, with smoke rising from the horizon and filling the sky **[Img. 1]**.

It is possible to imagine Hurley's frustration at not being able to gather all the elements he considered necessary for a war image in a single photo, elements which existed, but which he could not frame at the same time, when we compare **Images 2 and 3**, which show two representations of the Vimy Ridge battle, held in France in 1917. Captain Knobel's photograph shows a revolved ground, with holes and what look like burnt tree trunks, some bodies on the floor and soldiers walking further behind, some of them carrying gurneys, other weapons – suggesting that one battle had just happened there. On the other hand Richard Jack's canvas painting shows, in the foreground, soldiers handling heavy weapons, throwing bombs that explode, among others, in multiple sources of smoke which fill almost all the horizon; to the left of the canvas, two wounded soldiers move from the frontline through a trench; far away in the sky we see attack planes bombing. This canvas painting brings a lot of dramatic elements and different actions in a single scene, while the photography cannot transmit all these elements, resulting in a much less expressive image. Hurley's montage, pursuing a succession of elements and simultaneous actions, produced an image aesthetically very similar to Jack's canvas painting: both picture the war in three plans, the first with soldiers in the trenches, an intermediate with smoke caused by heavy weapon explosions marking the horizon line, and a third with planes also bombing. Both images show simultaneously the three instances in which, for the first time, this war happened. Such simultaneity, however, is closer to pictorial language, to the historic painting traditional ways of representation, than to photography.

Img1. *Frank Hurley. A hop over. Belgium, 1917.*

Img2. *Captain H. E. Knobel. 29th Infantry Battalion marching during Vimy Ridge Battle. France, 1917.*

Img3. *Richard Jack. The Vimy Ridge Battle. Painting on canvas, c. 1918.*

From the end of the First World War in Germany, a very impassioned debate can be followed through the photographic albums about that conflict edited between the late 1920s and the early 1930s. Georges Didi-Huberman identifies as a typically German phenomenon the collection of war images[2]. According to him, the world conflict had psychologically, culturally and politically survived

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[2] The collection of more than 1.500 works and 5.000 photographs related to the First World War which were incorporated to the art historian Aby Warburg's collection are part, according to Didi-Huberman, of "(…) ces « orages de papier » qui, dès 1914, se sont déchaînés à travers le monde intellectuel européen. Elle s'inscrit, notamment, dans le phénomène spécifiquement allemand (…) des « collections de guerre »

to the silence of the guns, and after 1918 continued as much as a war of mourning as a war of images. The appearance of a significant quantity of photographic albums after the armistice would prove the permanence of a war time after the declared peace (DIDI-HUBERMAN, 2011, pp. 233-235). Besides the character of archive, a lot of them started to bring also an imminently political character.

Published in 1924, *Krieg dem Kriege!* [*War to War!*] *by* Ernst Friedrich had a very good reception in Weimar Germany and in Europe, with a circulation of eleven million copies in more than forty languages. The first 70.000 copies were sold out in a few months, at the price of five marks (APEL, 1999, p. 53). The book shows about 180 photographs, two thirds of them on the horrors of war, most of which officially censored during the conflict. Representations of death, destruction and mutilation, and contraposition of images, and of images and subtitles, tried to denounce what would be the absurdity and cruelty of the event, taking a pacifist political position. The left wing writer Kurt Tucholsky stated that this book's shocking, horrible images would bring a sensation like no written narrative, and that "Whoever sees these and does not shudder is not a human being, but a patriot" (*Apud* APEL, 1999, p. 53).

As Tucholsky highlighted, Friedrich based the legitimacy of his point of view on the authority of the photographic image. On the preface of the book, he even states that "in the present and the future" all the "treasure of the words" would not be enough anymore to "correctly paint" the horrors of war, but "part by accident, part intentionally" an image "objectively true and faithful" of the war would have been registered "by the incorruptible and inexorable photographic lenses" and published in a book, in such a way that nobody could say that "they are not true and do not correspond to reality" (SÁNCHEZ DURÁ, 2002, p. 22).

Friedrich's anti patriotic and antiwar position was shared by a good part of the German left wing, and he even transited by several groups and left political parties[3]. His photographic album was part of a larger anti-military campaign, which extensively used painting and photography in exhibitions and collections. Besides *Krieg dem Kriege!*, Friedrich assembled, together with the launching of his book, the Anti-Kriegsmuseum, or Anti-War Museum, at his book store in Berlin, exhibiting objects and reproductions of photographs from his book. The museum would be destroyed and the building taken by nationalist militias in 1933, at the same night of the Reichstag fire. This anti-military movement and Friedrich's work appeared at the same moment when the rearmament and the secret organization of an army violating Versailles Treaty came to public in Germany, denounced by the press aligned to pacifism.

The book was close to a left political culture, turned to what the right wing writer Ernst Jünger qualified, pejoratively, as the cosmopolitan and humanist conscience (SÁNCHEZ DURÁ, 2002, p. 20). Its transnational vocation is already visible in its form, with the images subtitles published in four languages – German, English, French and a forth one which varied, and got to include even Russian and Chinese. Similarly, an idea of equality and uniformity among men, without fundamental psychological or cultural difference, transpires in Friedrich's text. He begins releasing his appeal to "human beings from all the countries", "to all the people from all the nations", and saying to "mothers of all the world, unite!", and finishes the book declaring that the photographs refer to the German side


(*Kriegssammlungen*) qui ont fleuri à grande échelle : depuis la *Kaiserliche Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek* de Strasbourg (…) jusqu'à la Bibliothèque royale de Berlin, la *Deutsche Bücherei* de Leipzig ou la Bibliothèque universitaire d'Iéna. Sans compter les extraordinaires collections privées de Theodor Bergmann à Fürth et de Richard Franck à Berlin et Stuttgart, une véritable institution qui n'employait pas moins de vingt-quatre personnes à temps plein et comptait, en 1921, environ 45000 ouvrages – plus 2150 titres de périodiques. Un ouvrage d'Albert Buddecke sur les *Kriegssammlungen* allemandes, paru en 1917, recensait déjà 217 collections, publiques et privées, consacrées à la Grande Guerre". DIDI-HUBERMAN, 2011, par 39. Last access on May7, 2012.

[3] In 1911, aged seventeen years old, he joined the SPD, Social Democrat Party. When war started he refused to serve the army and was temporarily admitted to a mental institution. After this, he was even arrested after organizing an anti-military group in Breslau, and sentenced due to a terrorist act. He was released in time to participate of the German revolution of 1918, and joined the Free Socialist Youth group founded by Rosa Luxemburgo and Karl Liebknecht. After taking part in several parties and groups that were easily formed and transformed after the Russian Revolution, Friedrich was part of the Proletarian Socialist Youth of the USPD (German Independent Socialist Party) and, in the end, in 1920 he joined the German Communist Labor Party (KAPD). See APEL, 1999, p. 53; SÁNCHEZ DURÁ, 2002, p. 40.

of the war, but only because these images were easier to be found, and these men were German because they had "accidentally been born in Germany". However when the author declares he is against "the pacifist bourgeois who fight the war with simple caresses, tea cakes and pious unrest", he demonstrates at the same time his agreement to the Marxist thinking, where the freedom of humanity would be intrinsically related to the freedom of the proletariat, and to the belief in the social power of photography, because his book, as well as the resistance to mobilization and sabotage acts, constituted his active ideological fight (SÁNCHEZ DURÁ, 2002, pp. 20, 40-41).

The establishment of relations between two images and between images and subtitles is part of the use of photography as an instrument of ideological persuasion. As can be seen on **Images 4 and 5**, Friedrich assembled his book with one photograph per page, in such a way that the two in face of each other, and their subtitles, could talk. On the double page of the book reproduced on **Image 4** we can see, on one side, a soldier in uniform posing in a photographic studio, aiming his riffle. The subtitle says "The pride of the family: "An 'interesting' arranged photography". On the other side, a soldier lifts a haggard corpse posing for the photograph. This time the subtitle says "The pride of the family: (The other side of the picture, a few weeks later)". Both images are vertical, with centralized attention, composing an eloquent contraposition.

Following the same pattern, on another double page **[Img. 5],** it shows on one side "How a general who passed away softly in sleep behind the front was buried...", finishing with a reticence indicating the complement of the message on the next subtitle, "and how the proletarians massacred at the front were dispatched". The images contrast one official's funeral, well-ordered and elegant, to a profusion of corpses piled on the floor and being carried without any order on a horse pulled wagon. In this case, the horizontality of both images dislocates the images and their subtitles to the vertical, following each page and making the most use of their space. The line of the horizon is about the same height in both photographs, and the coffin, richly adorned with flowers, traces a diagonal on the first photograph, while the line of uncovered corpses forms a similar diagonal on the second.
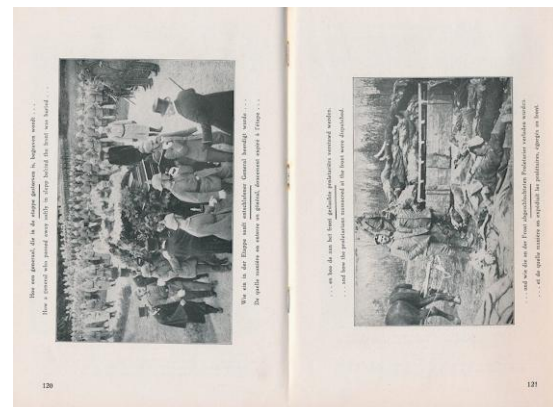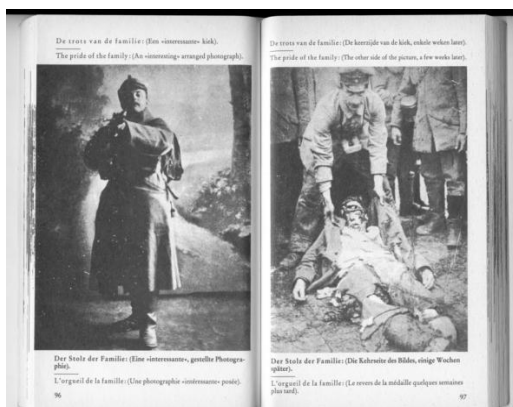
Imgs.4 and 5. *Pages from Krieg dem Kriege!, reproduced in War Against War!, Seattle: The Real Comet Press, 1987.*

Img.6. *Pages from Hermann Rex's book, Der Weltkrieg in seiner rauhen Wirklichkeit 1914-1918, Verlag: Herman Rutz, Oberammergau, 1926.*

Friedrich's book evoked reactions from right wing German authors. Among the books published as answer to *Krieg dem Kriege!* there are the selections of photographs *Der Weltkrieg in seiner rauhen Wirklichkeit 1914-1918* [*the World War in Its Hard Reality 1914-1918*] by Hermann Rex published in 1926, and *Das Antlitz des Weltkrieges. Fronterlebnisse deutscher Soldaten* [*The Face of War:*

Experiences of German Soldiers at the Front] by Ernst Jünger, published in 1930. Both have a much defined nationalist position, built through photographs which, ordered in a specific way, do not pause on the consequences of war, but try to show an idealized image of soldiers' glory and honour[4].

Rex was the director of the German High Command film and photography department, the *Bild-und Filmamt* or BUFA, between 1914 and 1918. His book shows more than 600 photographs, organized by campaigns and chronological order, most of them from the east front. Starting with crowds cheering and troops going to war, images follow one another showing big weapon and their operators and in sequence destroyed French cities **[Img. 6]**. Aerial photographs of bombed regions also show destruction. Properties, including churches, are part of the landscapes in ruins, along with dead enemies, and soldiers wounded or taken prisoners. This narrative pattern is reiterated in several representations of campaigns. His nationalist position is clear when, on the prologue of his book, Rex states that he addresses those "on all sides who wish to pale into insignificance the memory of the events of the World War and the undying achievements of the German front-line soldiers" (*Apud* APEL, 1999, p. 76). He continues combining a moral feeling of military pride with the technical apparatus of the modern war describing what would be, in his words, the true nature of war:

The horror of the battle, of being shot at by infantry, machine-guns, artillery, and mine-throwers, of experiencing aerial bombs, gas, but also the ravages of wind and weather, excessive heat and icy cold, rain and snow endured unprotected for years! (*Apud* APEL, 1999, p. 76)

Soldiers would endure these hardships motivated by "the deepest moral feeling of selfness, of the will to self-sacrifice for a higher moral idea, for the protection of the Fatherland" (*Apud* APEL, 1999, p. 76).

Jünger, who was a writer and a Great War veteran, follows in his book a similar narrative pattern. With about 200 photographs besides maps and a history of the war, he leans on the documental character and the idea of truth associated to the photographic image, emphasized by the chronological order and by the implicit idea that images are spontaneous clichés. Like in almost all photographic albums of the period, the images do not have credit of authorship. Their archive value, however, is preserved when, on the last page, Jünger describes the origins of the photographs crediting them as belonging to materials of the Reich Archive, in Potsdam, to the images of *Grosser Bilderatlas des Weltkrieges* [*Big Graphic Atlas of the World War*], to materials of the Berlin Technical Photographic Archive, as well as soldiers' private photographs (*Apud* SÁNCHEZ DURÁ, 2002, p. 178).

On the essay that opens his book, Jünger enlarges his nationalist argument to criticize, despite not naming him, Friedrich, whose book was already at its tenth edition at the time of launch of *Das Antlitz des Weltkrieges*. He states that

The effects of the last war now extend far beyond the life of the generation that took part in it, and perhaps a less vigorous nation then Germany would have never been unable to tolerate such a defeat. Insofar as life tends to forget very quickly the difficulties it has endured, pictures that make the misery of war present are specially valuable. A photo anthology cannot exclude such photos any more than it can consist only of them, though there have been attempts at the latter. Appealing only to our revulsion to suffering would be a betrayal of our moral essence, as would a beautification of such a serious matter as that which was embodied by this war. (JÜNGER, 1993-2, p. 25)

The photographic anthology here criticized by Jünger cannot be other than Friedrich's. One of the most shocking sections of *Krieg dem Kriege!* is composed by close photographs of faces of soldiers who survived but were injured in the war. Originally they had been taken with medical purposes, and

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[4] Besides Rex and Jünger's albums, other photographic albums published at the same time, like *So war der Krieg*, by Franz Schauwecker (1928), and *Der Weltkrieg im Bild* by George Soldan (1930) also adopted the nationalist position against pacifism. Schauwecker echoes Rex stating that "Whoever in war only sees 'the foolish slaughter', he proves thereby that he himself saw nothing different in the war. Whoever, as a result of this becomes a pacifist, realizes that for him his own naked life matters above all. I confess that I hold such people to be unimportant. If he at least in his own war experience still had a sense of dreadful tragedy, of dark greatness and possessed a sense of seeing destiny in the war, which he rejected, then one could, with sympathy before such a lived and honest conviction, experience respect for such an error. For the average pacifist of our day, however, one never loses the feeling that he, when all is said and done, is cowardly and womanish and that here is a hole in his character." *Apud* APEL, 1999, pp. 78-79.

this scientific character was preserved in the book, where the subtitles identify the soldier, his occupation before the war, frequently with detailed information on how he was wounded, about the treatment, or number of surgeries already undergone. This chapter is entitled *Das Antlitz des Krieges* [*The Face of War*]. The title that Jünger would give to his book, *Das Antlitz des Weltkrieges*, is very similar, indicating that it could be a deliberate reference. He seems to oppose to Friedrich's injured faces **[Img. 7]**, what would be the *real* face of war according to him, the German soldier's proud occupation **[Img. 8]**.
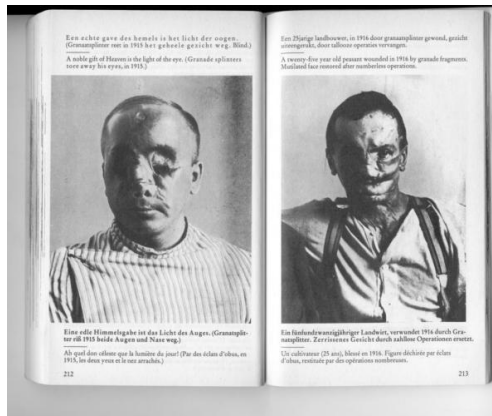
Img7. *Pages from Krieg dem Kriege!, reproduced in War Against War!, Seattle: The Real Comet Press, 1987.*
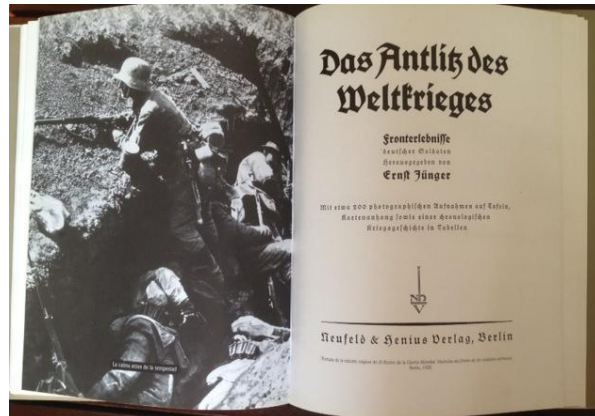
Img8. *First and second pages from Das Antlitz des Weltkrieges, by Ernst Jünger, reproduced in Ernst Jünger. Guerra, Técnica y Fotografía. València: Universitat de València, 2002.*

Both authors' political differences are crystallized in their representations of the event War. For Friedrich its face is literal, soldier's faces which are shown in every moment like victims of the war and of those who profit from it, thence Jünger's criticism aligning him to what he named, pejoratively, humanism. For this author, as well as for Rex and other nationalists, however, the face of this war is not human, but is closer to the technique, to big weapons, to the devastation of landscape of which they are the cause, but never of human devastation. This war of images ended up polarizing, on one side, those who defended a position called humanist and cosmopolitan by dividing men only in social classes, not in nationalities, inherent to left wing movements, whose visual representation was based on a human scale; and, on the other side, authors whose work, lined with nationalist discourse, and therefore militarist, praised the technique and was a clear opposition to pacifism.

The same year in which Jünger's photographic album was published, he also published *Krieg und Krieger* (*War and Warriors*), a selection of essays written by eight ex-combatants – among them Jünger himself – about the First World War and about the idea of the Warrior. His essay was entitled "The total mobilization", and in it the wartime lived by the author, a time of total mobilization, is described through technique:

In this unlimited marshalling of potential energies, which transforms the warring industrial countries into volcanic forges, we perhaps find the most striking sign of the dawn of the age of labour. It makes the World War a historical event superior in significance to the French Revolution. In order to deploy energies of such proportion, fitting one's sword-arm no longer suffices; for this is a mobilization that requires extension to the deepest marrow, life's finest nerve. Its realization is the task of total mobilization: an act which, as if through a single grasp of the control panel, conveys the extensively branched and densely veined power supply of modern life towards the great current of martial energy. (JÜNGER, 1991, pp. 126-127)

Also in 1930 Walter Benjamin published a review of the book, entitled *German fascism theories. About the selection War and Warriors, edited by Ernst Jünger*. In against this political culture that praises the technique, and calls the attention to the human cost the transformation of the war in an abstract idea would have, through this notion of total mobilization.

It should be said as bitterly as possible: in the face of this "landscape of total mobilization" the German feeling for nature has had an undreamed-of upsurge. The pioneers of peace, those sensuous

settlers, were evacuated from these landscapes, and as far as anyone could see over the edge of the trench, the surroundings become a problem, every wire entanglement an antinomy, every barb a definition, every explosion a thesis; and by day the sky was the cosmic interior of the steel helmet and at night the moral law above. Etching the landscape with flaming banners and trenches technology wanted to recreate the heroic features of German Idealism. It went astray. What is considered heroic were the features of Hippocrates, the features of death. Deeply imbued with its own depravity, technology gave shape to the apocalyptic face of nature and reduced nature to silence – even though this technology had the power to give nature its voice. Instead of using and illuminating the secrets of nature via a technology mediated by the human scheme of things, the new nationalists' metaphysical abstraction of war signifies nothing other than a mystical and unmediated application of technology to solve the mystery of an idealistic perceived nature. (BENJAMIN, 1979, pp. 126-127).

Benjamin scrutinizes Jünger's and his colleagues' arguments to denounce how, ultimately, their nationalist and militarist thinking, epitomizing the technique, would be promoting the war "aesthetisation", and therefore the political one as well. According to him, "This new war theory, which brings written on the forehead its origin in the most furious decadence, is not something other than an uninhibited extrapolation to military themes of the theory of 'l'art pourl'art'" (BENJAMIN, 1979, p. 128). Since then, Benjamin would develop the idea of political aesthetisation by fascism also in his writings about photograph and cinema, especially in *The work of art at the era of its technical reproductibility*, which dates from 1935-36. In this text, he articulates the ideas already present at Jürgen's book's review more clearly, of the relation between war representations, the technique and the right wing political culture expropriated by fascism. According to him,

All efforts to render politics aesthetic culminate in one thing: war. War and war only can set a goal for mass movements on the largest scale while respecting the traditional property system. This is the political formula for the situation. The technological formula may be stated as follows: Only war makes it possible to mobilize all of today's technical resources while maintaining the property system. (…) "*Fiat ars –pereat mundus*," says Fascism, and, as Marinetti admits, expects war to supply the artistic gratification of a sense perception that has been changed by technology. This is evidently the consummation of "*I'art pour l'art*." Mankind, which in Homer's time was an object of contemplation for the Olympian gods, now is one for itself. Its self- alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order. This is the situation of politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic. Communism responds by politicizing art. (BENJAMIN, 2007, p. 241-242)

Benjamin explains the interconnections between political culture and visual culture in the 1930s in this text, which was finished in 1936, the same year of the beginning of the Spanish Civil War.

Already at the First World War the war structure itself had transformed it in a reality mediated by technology: equipment and technological weapons like machine guns or bombing airplanes made physical combat between soldiers (a visible and identifiable enemy) anachronistic, as well as weakened the division between civilians and the war front. According to Dora Apel, photographic narratives faced the problem of how to "remember" a war that had become so vast and decentralized, imposing a challenge to the representation of the war as an event (APEL, 1999, p. 51). These conditions also existed in the Spanish Civil War and, as the conflict develop, anti-war photographers felt divided between a moral engagement and the aesthetic demands to represent a war guided by technology (HÜPPAUF, 1993, pp. 64-65). This moral engagement was nothing else than politisation of their photographic images.

According to Bernd Hüppauf, with the unprecedented moral commitment of the International Brigades volunteers, and France's and England's refusal to become involved in the conflict, left wing European artists and intellectuals came to see the Spanish Civil War as the model of an international fight for the preservation of civilization, containing the destructive barbarism of fascism. The Spanish Republic fight was transformed into a fight of humanity against the inhuman, no alternative remaining besides an international union of all the forces in favour of life and civilization, against an enemy identified to a cold and destructive technology. Thus, a moral commitment would have been transformed into aesthetics. To the contrapositions between the representation of life and men in peace and the barbarities of war, technique was added, to compose images that denounced the amorality and the barbarity of an enemy who, however, remained anonymous and faceless, represented only by the destruction produced by their guns (HÜPPAUF, 1993, pp. 64-65).

Art politisation through the option to a humanist aesthetics – thought from a human scale, as opposed to technique – was present on representations of Spain in war made by film makers like Joris Ivens, writers like Malraux, Hemingway and Dos Passos, and artists like Picasso. His *Guernica* became one of the strongest symbols of an art that pictures human suffering as political statement. Similarly, the war, which is beautiful for the futurists "because it creates new architectures, like the big tanks, air squadrons in geometrical formation, smoke spirals hovering above burnt villages, and many others" (BENJAMIN, 2007, p. 126) according to Marinetti, is completely other for left wing press photographers, especially French, like Robert Capa, Gerda Taro and David Seymour "Chim".

Humanism predominates in the photographs they made during the Spanish war, which tries to singularize individuals and opposes these men and women to the society structured in masses and praising technique[5]. Images like the famous photograph made by Capa of a militiaman at the time he is supposedly hit by the enemy, present the moral commitment transformed into aesthetic perspective, as described by Hüppauf **(Img. 9)**. In those images the invisible enemy is capable of the most barbaric destruction. At the same time a face is given to the war, an eloquent synthesis of the event is engendered, sometimes from elements that are not traditionally associated to the event war, far away from weapons and combats.

In Capa's photograph, one single militiaman is removed from an enormous quantity of men and machinery which compound the event, and alone – without explosions, guns, generals, etc. – appears in the instant *shot* that makes him the symbol of the republican fight. The same focus is kept in all the series of images made at that time, as can be seen on **Image 9**, which reproduces the story published in the weekly French magazine *Vu* in September, 1936. Besides the falling militiaman and one other similar image, the opposite page tells the story of the civilians who were forced to escape the region. They are not open scenes of crowds, but close pictures of women and children. The photographer personalized in concrete individuals the refugees' tragedy. As Teresa Ferré observed, this look that elects individuals among the crowd, humanizing it, would be present during all of Capa's work in Spain[6]. This characteristic became an aesthetics privileged by the anti-fascist left wing. We can notice that not only the themes pictured by Capa and his colleagues from the left illustrated press in wartime Spain mirrored a political positioning, but also a photographic language that they adopted was inter-related to this specific visual culture.

Img9. *Pages from the magazine Vu of September, 23, 1936 with Robert Capa's photographs in front of Cordoba.*

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[5] Taro's biographer, Irme Schaber, talks about this look which singularizes individuals, in the specific work of this photographer – that seems to find echo also in Capa's and Chim's photographs: "Les photos de Gerda Taro, depuis celles du début, à Barcelone, jusqu'aux documents sur les combats de Brunete, témoignent de son effort pour montrer l'individu au sein de la masse et pour briser l'anonymat du nombre par le portrait d'individus isolés – cela vaut également pour les morts. Il répugnait à Taro d'accepter l'absurdité engendrée par les tapis de bombes de la machine de guerre moderne". SCHABER, 2006, pp. 206, 239.

[6] Curator of the Arxiu Nacional de Catalunya, Teresa Ferré states that "Robert Capa fuig de les típiques imatges de massa dels anys 30: ell és qui reclama proximitat amb allò que es retrata perquè una fotografia sigui bona. (…) Per tant, a diferència d'altres imatges fronteres, com algunes d'Auguste Chauvin, o Manuel Moros, Capa mostrarà la multitud, però no la massa amorfa, anònima i llunyana. I, enmig d'aquesta multitud, escollirà algunes persones per retratar-les individualment o amb la família, marcant així la personalització, reivindicant l'individu que està patint, i apropant la tragèdia al receptor de la imatge, que es pot identificar amb el retratat". FERRÉ, s/d, p. 168. Last access on 13/11/2012.

The photographic aesthetics engendered at that time by these left wing photographers, prioritizing the individual, had a clear part in the exchange of accusations between what Tucholsky called a "patriot" position, which would really be opposed to that of the human being, and that which Jünger called, equally in a pejorative way, of "humanist" position, in the sense of weak and treacherous to the Nation values. As Friedrich's book and museum were an attempt to denounce the barbarity of war, also the photographs of Capa and his colleagues brought this idea of fight in the name of humanity, and therefore can also be called humanist.

The expression *humanist photography*, between wars, was closely linked to the production of photographers who supported the French Popular Front, who shared many of Friedrich's left wing ideals. There is however a rupture when this same expression gains strength and expands after the Second World War, naming a branch of the post war French photography. At a later moment than the war time lived until 1945 in Europe, this branch signals to a less combative period, when the impetus to denounce against threatens to humanity gave place to a different moment of search for union and reconstruction. Thus, according to one of its theorists, Marie de Thézy, the French humanist photography would have one main intention, that of "discovering, revealing the hidden beauty of the world around us, the goodness inherent to all human beings, the beauty of reality"[7].

This branch is formed by French photographers or those working in France between the 1930s and the 1960s, like Izis, Robert Doisneau, Willy Ronis, Pierre Boucher, André Kertész, Pierre Verger, Édouard Boubat or Brassaï, besides Capa and Chim[8]. Henri Cartier-Bresson is frequently mentioned when critics try to characterize the intentions of the style[9]. However, there is a significant difference between the works performed by these photographers in the 1930s, most of them working for French left wing illustrated press, and the definition of humanist photography as is formulated by Thézy, for instance. Namely, the political issue is attenuated.

This attenuation occurs at the end of the Second World War, when fascism is defeated, but Europe needs to be reconstructed one more time. Magnum agency, which was founded, among others, by Cartier-Bresson, Chim and Capa in 1947, is noticed as one of the agencies that met the strong demand for this type of images in the post war, helping to export to the USA and to the western world a poetic image of France, where a cultural and social identity would be asserted by emblematic images with humanist themes, according to Laure Beaumont-Maillet and Françoise Denoyelle (2006, p. 38)[10]. Such themes comprehended anonymous workers, like mailmen, police officers, etc., as well as a

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[7] Thézy's complete quote is the following: "Marquée de réalisme poétique, la photographie humaniste est, entre 1930 et 1960, un grand moment de la photographie française. Après avoir connu, dans les années vingt, une seconde naissance, une quête aventureuse, elle s'est tournée vers l'homme. Faite par lui et pour lui, elle a renoué avec l'art traditionnel, accessible à tous. Elle en a retrouvé l'intention profonde : découvrir, révéler la beauté cachée du monde qui nous entoure, la bonté inhérente à toute personne humaine, la poésie de la réalité. En même temps s'offre à elle, massivement, dans la presse et l'édition, un moyen nouveau de communication, un support au témoignage, un marché qui fait naître une profession. Pendant quelque trente ans, le photographe humaniste a pu tout à la fois exprimer le meilleur de lui-même, gagner sa vie et plaire à un public qui aime ses images faites pour lui, avec lui. Répondant indifféremment à son inspiration, au jeu des circonstances, à la commande, il photographie ses semblables. Ce faisant, il révèle cette fraternité qu'avec ses contemporains il rêve d'instaurer à l'échelle du monde. Alors se rencontrent les photographes et ceux qui les soutiennent, les publient, les font vivre, tous ceux qui aspirent à voir reconnue la « Famille de l'homme »." THÉZY, , 1992, p. 71.

[8] Other important names of humanist photographers are Ilse Bing, Marcel Bovis, Yvonne Chevalier, Chim, Roger Doloy, Emeric Feher, Edith Gerin, François Kollar, Germaine Krull, Jean Michaud, Janine Niepce, Emmanuel Sougez, André Vigneau and Sabine Weiss. See BEAUMONT-MAILLET, DENOYELLE (eds), 2006, pp. 153-162; THÉZY, 1992, pp. 225-234.

[9] Peter Hamilton describes the style starting from Cartier-Bresson's words: "In 1951, Cartier-Bresson told a journalist that the most important subject for him and his colleagues 'is mankind; man and his life, so brief, so frail, so threatened'". HAMITON *In* HALL, 2007, p. 103. Also Robert Hood, about this concept, quotes the photographer, to whom "The pictures of a photographer should be a comment. To make a comment you must know where you stand in relation to other human beings. You must have a set of references, a humanism". HOOD, 1967, p. 142.

[10] For a deeper analysis of the role of Magnum agency founding photographers in the 1930s visual culture, see ZERWES, 2013.

picturesque Paris, with the Seine, the lovers, the streets and the people, and the children (BEAUMONT-MAILLET, DENOYELLE, 2007, p. 38 ; SMITH, 2005, pp. 16, 41).

From 1946, many of the photographers associated to this branch are hired by the general Commissariat of tourism, and by the French Document section. These organs also encouraged foreign photographers to work in the country. There are specific guidelines about what should be photographed in the archives of "visual propaganda" of that Commissariat. France tried to encourage export photographs which were "vivantes, gaies, animées, contrastées, caractéristiques de la France et de ses richesses infinies, mais aussi de son équipement touristique", similarly encouraging them to show the same characteristics and give visibility to the same values: "l'autheticité des milieux modestes, le pittoresque d'un mode de vie populaire, une « douceur de vivre » représentée par les bistrots, les quais, la flânerie, le pêche et la pétanque, en contradiction avec le nouveau rythme proposé, et imposé, par la modernité"[11].

This post war humanism helped to achieve a social unity in France, under full reconstruction. Such unity, however, was established more on sentimental than on ideological or political grounds[12]. In that way, the so called humanist photographs in this period focused especially on themes considered universal, like family, community, love, childhood, and referred not to the *working class*, as had happened during the Popular Front, but to the comprehensive *popular class*. Only inside the French Communist Party the notion of humanism had a strong ideological connotation (HAMILTON, 2007, pp. 93-94), inherited from the left wing political culture of the post First World War – of which Friedrich in Germany, and Capa and his colleagues in 1930s France were part. Thus, this post war French humanist photography, anaesthetics and a visual vocabulary which would form a great tradition inside contemporary visual culture, had its origins in the 1920s and 1930s political disputes between patriots and humanists, who, as was seen, had built a political culture polarized between nationalists and pacifists, and between right and left.

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[11] For all the paragraph, BEAUMONT-MAILLET, DENOYELLE (eds), 2006, p. 28. According to these authors, "Les photographes humanistes concourent largement à l'élaboration d'une imagerie nationale. La plupart travaillent sous contrats pour le Commissariat général au tourisme et pour la Documentation française, ce qui infléchit bien évidemment leur production. Ils construisent le vocabulaire iconographique qui, pour la France de l'époque, mais aussi pour l'étranger, définit les qualités propres à Paris, aux Parisiens et aux Français, un ensemble de signes et d'archétypes, voire de lieux comuns, qui contribuent à forger l'image de la France d'après-guerre". BEAUMONT-MAILLET, DENOYELLE (eds), 2006, p. 13.

[12] Dominique Borne states that this unity was based on a "general humanism, the desire for a society more just and fraternal, consensus on the role of the state, but absence of a more precise vision of the society to be reconstructed". BORNE, 1992, p. 22.

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