

**Melancholia and Deceleration in the Spanish Crisis:
A Reading of *Crematorio* and *En la orilla* by Rafael Chirbes**

Carlos van Tongeren
(University of Manchester)

1. Introduction

Why are buildings and infrastructures that were designed to induce movements at high speed, and where all activity has suddenly stopped, so fascinating? Writing in the world of Covid-19, wherein travel and other forms of activity have come to an abrupt standstill, images of empty or nearly empty airport halls, shopping malls and highways have been circulating on the news with unexpected frequency. Earlier, in 2008, the start of the economic crisis in Spain also saw a widespread suspension of movement, both in existing construction works that could not be finished —*la obra parada*— and in projects that were finished but never put to use. Construction works that remained incomplete and those that are brand-new but were never inaugurated have in common that they are “ruins”, explains Germán Labrador, but only so in a subtle and rather mysterious way: “Aquí el enigma no tiene que ver con el acabamiento físico. Cuando el emblema es *la obra pública*, la construcción *inacabada* marca [...] el pasaje de una temporalidad a otra, de lo que *todavía* no se ha terminado a lo que *ya* no se va a acabar” (Labrador, “El precio” 232; italics in original). At the height of the economic crisis in Spain, it was not physical decay what converted airports in Ciudad Real and Castellón into ruins, but rather the sudden absence of value that, under normal circumstances, would be generated by the investments, services and movements of capital, vehicles and bodies that these places facilitate. We could add that unused airports, as well as other “white elephants” in the Spanish landscape (Labrador, “El precio” 232), do not truly become ruins — representing the decay of an era even if they stand impeccably in the landscape— unless we look at them in a certain way. Walter Benjamin has stated that ruins, as all other allegorical signs, are necessarily the result of an investment, of a process of animation on behalf of a subject that, in Benjamin’s own philosophy, is alternatively called a historian, an allegorist and a melancholic: “[t]he dry rebuses which remain contain an insight, which is still available to the confused investigator” (*Origin* 176).¹ Perhaps it is this process of animation in which we all engage when we feel that such places are fascinating and enigmatic, endowing them with meanings that move beyond their immediate physical presence. In fact, as Benjamin wrote about the gaze of the mournful subject in the context of the Baroque, it might not be these places themselves that are enigmatic, but rather the fact that they fascinate us: “[m]ourning is the state of mind in which feeling revives the empty world in the form of a mask, and derives an enigmatic satisfaction in contemplating it” (139). To delve further into the enigmas of a time of crisis, then, attention should be paid not only to the “empty world” as such, but also to how we contemplate it.²

The novels of the late Rafael Chirbes are now widely known as among the earliest and most profound mediations on the apparent enigmas of Spain’s most recent economic and political crisis. In his celebrated novels *Crematorio* and *En la orilla*, Chirbes depicts a world where success-stories of wealth and progress are slowly evaporating to make place for *spleen*,

¹ Benjamin uses the word *Grübler*, here translated as “confused investigator” (*Origin* 176), which encapsulates aspects of the historian, allegorist and melancholic. See Benjamin, “Central Park” 41; Buck-Morss 240-241; Pinsky 163.

² As Benjamin suggests, the survival of a building can be experienced as miraculous if one considers the strength of the forces of history that have constantly worked towards its destruction (*Origin* 178). Alternatively, as Tanya Whitehouse proposes, that fascination may stem from the heightened aesthetic appeal of a ruin once it has become devoid of functional value (13).

poverty and precarity. It is the mood of this transitional phase that Chirbes depicts as a diverse and polyphonic reality (Hermoso) and that this essay will explore further from the perspective of melancholia. In what follows, I will read *Crematorio* and *En la orilla* as a diptych, since both novels share a preoccupation with what Lauren Berlant calls “the becoming archaic of the dreamscapes and gratifications of capitalist modernity” (211). Furthermore, *Crematorio* and *En la orilla* are linked to an intellectual tradition, represented by Walter Benjamin and others, that has explored the dialectics of melancholia, understanding it both as a sombre mood and a form of profound, ingenious perception. Benjamin developed his most extensive reflection on melancholia in his book on German Baroque drama, and his philosophy will be a fundamental intertext in my own reading of Chirbes’s dark and Baroque depictions of decay in contemporary Spain.³ From a materialist point of view, this essay will argue that melancholia fulfils very specific purposes and has very concrete potentials in Chirbes’s novels, written at different stages of the ongoing neoliberal crisis in Spanish society. More specifically, this essay will show how these recent mutations of melancholia are associated with the dialectics of “deceleration” that, as later sections will explore, can be taken as both an oppositional force of melancholia and as the continuation of a certain neoliberal “eros” (Labrador, “Lo que” 169).

2. Melancholia and Deceleration

The disposition of melancholia has historically been associated with the planet Saturn, which takes thirty years to bring a cycle to completion and is thereby the slowest of the solar system. As Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky y Fritz Saxl observe in their *Saturn and Melancholy*, a vast monograph on the intellectual history of melancholia whose production was itself plagued by numerous delays, one of the key adjectives used to describe the movements of Saturn in medieval thought was *tenax*, “earthly heaviness, slowness and tenacity” (167). The theological and astrological tradition that related the movement of the planets to human existence thus deemed Saturn to be the planet of indolent characters (144). On the other hand, as Walter Benjamin observes, this very same slowness, combined with Saturn’s relative height and distance from Earth, were understood to represent the paused contemplative state needed for a more profound understanding of life (*Origin* 148-149). This dialectic of Saturn—slowness understood as a defect but also a trait associated with maturity and lucidity (Klibansky, Panofsky and Saxl 159)—has been a constant motive in the intellectual history of melancholia and might even date back to a doctrine commonly attributed to Aristotle (Bartra, *Cultura* 327) according to which melancholia is a state of both clumsiness and heightened discernment (*Origin* 149).⁴

In his book on the German mourning play, Benjamin alternatively deploys the terms mourning (*Trauer*) and melancholia (*Melancholie*) to describe a condition in which the world appears as denaturalised and distanced from the subject. This alienation leads the mournful subject to think of “the most simple object” as “a symbol of some enigmatic wisdom” (*Origin* 140). Melancholia thus becomes a contemplative state that aspires at greater understanding, a tendency of gradual immersion into the world of objects that Benjamin alternatively calls “pensiveness” (*Tiefsinn*) (*Origin* 139; “Ursprung” 318), “tenacious self-absorption” (*ausdauernde Versunkenheit*) (*Origin* 157; “Ursprung” 334) and “contemplative calm”

³ As scholars have observed and as Chirbes himself has declared in numerous interviews and essays, Walter Benjamin’s philosophy of history has been a constant reference and source of inspiration for his literary project (Geeroms 748; Villamía Vidal). Chirbes’s Baroque aesthetic of radical materialism and decay, especially in *Crematorio*, has also been highlighted by several critics (García-Donoso 151; Labrador, “*En la orilla*” 228; Sanz 220; Villamía Vidal 408).

⁴ Inspired by this intellectual tradition, I have explored elsewhere how melancholia manifests itself as a particular form of ethical and political tenacity (*tenacidad*, *terquedad*) in the work of the Asturian-Mexican writer Paco Ignacio Taibo II (Van Tongeren 111-183).

(*kontemplative Ruhe*) (*Origin* 165; “Ursprung” 342). In Benjamin’s spatialised account of these processes, melancholia slowly approaches its objects in a way that resembles the stately movements of an official parade: “On the road to the object —no within the object itself— this intention progresses as slowly and solemnly as the processions of the rulers advance” (*Origin* 140).

The previous quotation seems to foreshadow a passage from one of Benjamin’s last writings, the seventh of his “Theses ‘On the Concept of History’”, where he discusses *acedia* as a form of historiographical empathy that is complicit with the victors of history. Both in his early book on Baroque drama and in the “Theses”, melancholia seems to share its “rhythm” with the solemn, ostentatious processions of those in power. However, any form of complicity of melancholia with the victors of history remains dependent on the context in which the melancholic subject operates. For example, on a later page of the *Trauerspielbuch*, this same slowness seems to be devoid of any bonds with power and rather becomes a precondition for the emergence of valuable historical knowledge: “[f]or the melancholic the inspirations of mother earth dawn from the night of contemplation like treasures from the interior of the earth; the lightning-flash of intuition is unknown to him” (*Ursprung* 152-153). Reading these passages together suggests that there is a dialectic of slowness at work in Benjamin’s reflections on melancholia. Most clearly does this dialectic appear in his discussion of *acedia* or sloth, one of the capital sins that afflicted many tyrants and courtiers in the mourning plays (*Origin* 155). Despite the negative connotations of *acedia*, Benjamin inverts it with a dialectical twist in his discussion of the mournful courtier. On the surface, the courtier is a treacherous character who often abandons loyalty to his ruler. According to Benjamin, however, this character also displays a unique faithfulness to the world of objects by which the monarch is surrounded; objects that, in a sense, encapsulate the transitoriness of his rule. Thus, the slowness of melancholia, rather than the more sinful overtones of sloth, emerges as a distinctive faithfulness to the profound meaning of objects: “Melancholy betrays the world for the sake of knowledge. But in its tenacious self-absorption it embraces dead objects in its contemplation, in order to redeem them” (*Origin* 157). These comments on the figure of the courtier have important resonances with Benjamin’s discussion of allegory later in the *Trauerspielbuch*. Allegory, writes Benjamin, is the preferred contemplative mode of melancholia that simultaneously empties and elevates the meaning of its object: “[i]f the object becomes allegorical under the gaze of melancholy, if melancholy causes life to flow out of it and it remains behind dead, but eternally secure, then it is exposed to the allegorist, it is unconditionally in his power” (183-184).

In a wider sense, these commentaries on melancholia and allegory in the Baroque mourning play give insight into key aspects of Benjamin’s own philosophical project. In one of his most famous texts, the ninth of his “Theses”, Benjamin articulates an allegory of the Angel of History that stares at the wreckages caused by the storm of “Progress”. “The angel would like to stay”, writes Benjamin, “awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed” (qtd. Löwy 62) but is propelled forward by the very same storm that caused destruction in the past. Staying, pausing, slowly attuning oneself to the deep historical density of objects of knowledge in view of a coming danger, and as an attempt to resist the “storm of Progress” —these are all important motifs in Benjamin’s writing. As Susan Buck-Morss observes about Benjamin’s revolutionary pedagogy, the slowness of perception that characterises melancholia has the potential to cut through the phantasmagoria of newness, revealing how the past continues to haunt the present. As such, it can help imagine revolutionary alternatives to the present, and through its careful fixation upon the past, identify recurring dangers in history (Buck-Morss 293-304).⁵

⁵ In addition to the previous discussion, Benjamin is known to have observed in other parts of his work —for instance, in the fifth and sixth of his “Theses”— that historical understanding emerges in fleeting moments,

Mourning and melancholia for Benjamin are not pre-existing capacities for paused contemplation. Rather, both should be understood as forms of *attunement* (Santner 45-53) to the historical density of material surroundings. Only through the establishment of such relationship with the world of objects is the melancholic capable of identifying and dissecting that density. Thus, Benjamin states that in mourning “a feeling [...] is released from any empirical subject and is intimately bound to the fullness of an object” (*Origin* 139). In a similar vein, the anthropologist Nadia Seremetakis has coined the concept of the “still-act”, meant to describe “moments when a subject interrupts historical flow and *practices* historical interrogation” (qtd. Lepecki 15; original emphasis). In a way that is reminiscent of Benjamin’s discussion of mourning and melancholia, for Seremetakis the *still-act* is not a preconceived power that disrupts and interrupts historical time at its own courtesy; on the contrary, it depends on the material world and is, indeed, shaped by it. In that sense, Seremetakis does not propose a “mentalist” or “subjective” understanding of historical perception, but rather one that is sensory and mediated by material surroundings and wider cultural frameworks (9).⁶

To further emphasise how “decelerated perception” is a process of attunement to a specific environment, this essay will analyse the dynamics of melancholia in Chirbes’s work against the specific backdrop of Spain’s most recent economic and political crisis. For Benjamin, both melancholia and its associated form, allegory, attained a hegemonic position in the German Baroque due to a widespread sense of crisis and change in Counter-Reformation Europe (*Origin* 138-142; Buck-Morss 161; Osman 121; Santner 16-21). Similarly, *Crematorio* and *En la orilla* are two novels written at a turning point in conceptions of the dominant economic and political models in Spain. Germán Labrador conceptualizes this period of upheaval as *la temporalidad de crisis*, a term that articulates how the exceptional character of this period is discursively established and socially reproduced, leading also to “exceptional” political and economic measures and to an omnipresent sense of disorientation and uncertainty in regard to the future (“Lo que” 170-171). From the perspective of affect, Lauren Berlant writes in *Cruel Optimism* that a crisis can cause a heightened affective state wherein the “enduring present” appears as enigmatic (Berlant 79-80, 196). This concept dovetails with Benjamin’s consideration of melancholia as the mood—and mode—of heightened perception that responds to a climate of crisis. In line with these critics, then, this essay argues that the heightened affective state that is melancholia comes into being as a dialectical interaction with a wider climate of crisis —“climate” taken here both in a material sense (a world physically in decline) and in a discursive and affective sense (the socially reproduced sensation that times are exceptional). Thus, the melancholic

through sparks or flashes, rather than in periods of prolonged contemplation (Löwy 95-96). This important temporal difference between different forms of contemplation and understanding coincides with Benjamin’s discussion, in the *Trauerspielbuch*, of the differences between the symbol—where such flashes and sudden coincidences of meaning and form also tend to occur—and allegory (*Origin* 159-167; Buck-Morss 168). According to Buck-Morss’s study of the dialectical image in Benjamin’s philosophy, the latter is an “immediate” and “quasi-mystical” form of apprehension that should be considered as a materialist actualisation of the theological symbol (220, 241). In that regard, it could be said that Benjamin’s work is twofold. On the one hand, it has coincidences with the activities of the allegorist, melancholic or *Grübler* (confused investigator, brooder, ponderer) in that it involves assembling apparently meaningless objects which, the writer suspects, are pregnant with “dead knowledge” (Buck-Morss 241; Pensky 163). On the other, it consists in triggering truths emerging in swift moments of perception; truths that are “objective” both in a socio-historical and a mystico-theological sense (Buck-Morss 241).

⁶ For an inspiring phenomenological discussion of overwhelming forms of attunement to the historical world and the way these transcend into a “poetics of exposure” in the work of Rainer Maria Rilke and Winfried Georg Sebald, see Santner 45-53. Sebald’s work in particular has greatly informed my thinking about melancholia and decelerated perception.

contemplation of that environment can contribute to the reproduction of such exceptionality and to a certain “stretching” of the present.

To be sure, the deceleration and suspension of time are often highlighted as positive effects of a crisis. For example, Germán Labrador notes that in *En la orilla* “[h]ay mucho del *Heráclito cristiano*, para quien la ruina acecha detrás de cada edificio, pero también del Quevedo satírico, el de *La Hora de Todos*, que pasea por un mundo detenido en el tiempo. Eso es lo que hace la crisis: parar el tiempo, mostrando *la verdadera naturaleza de las cosas*” (“*En la orilla*” 228; italics in original). Times of crisis —the deeply felt impact of austerity measures in Spain around the year 2012; or more recently, the global crisis of Covid-19— seem to allow one to “make time” and “take time” to finally understand the true state of the world (Keller 240; Viner).⁷ The peculiarity of melancholia, however, is that it is not necessarily an *effect* of a climate of crisis but can also be an *anticipation* of the latter. This difference can be schematised with reference to Benjamin’s own work: while he studies Baroque melancholia as a response to a pre-existing climate of war and catastrophe, in his studies of the work of the 19th-century poet Charles Baudelaire, melancholia emerges as a state of awareness of the alienation caused by capitalist relations of production that, at that time, were still hidden behind a facade of splendour and abundance (Benjamin, “Central Park” 42; Buck-Morss 178). It is perhaps no coincidence that Baudelaire’s work is a crucial intertext in *Crematorio*, a novel that has been endowed with almost prophetic value by some of Chirbes’s critics as it was completed before the very same collapse of an era of speculation and high-speed money-making that the work anticipates (Labrador, “Lo que” 188). Considering, in summary, that the dialectic between melancholia and deceleration can be a shifting dynamic with different levels of productivity, the last section of this essay will articulate a brief critique of deceleration, in an attempt to locate those moments in Chirbes’s work where melancholic attachments to slowness become most productive. Thus, it will be relevant to ask: whose melancholia? What are the motivations for, and effects of, decelerated perception?

3. Decelerated Perception Under the Sign of Carrion

Crematorio is a collection of personal “confessions” (García-Donoso 143) in which different characters seek to come to terms with the death of Matías Bertomeu, a member of an affluent family of land and property owners in the fictional coast town of Misent. The most notable voice in the novel belongs to Matías’s brother Rubén, leader of a local real estate imperium; other characters are Rubén’s spouse Mónica, his daughter Silvia and son-in-law Juan Mullor; the writer Federico Brouard, a close friend of Matías who is terminally ill; and workers from different strata of Rubén Bertomeu’s enterprise, his former associate Ramón Collado and the mafia soldier Yuri. Clearly, the confused and resentful broodings of most characters are the result of a state of emotional upheaval: they are mourning Matías’s death and are attempting to define a new sense of subjectivity vis-à-vis the departed and the living. On a wider scale, this story of intrafamilial mourning becomes the autopsy of an entire era, determined by the rise of Rubén Bertomeu as a powerful property developer in Misent. In a truly Benjaminian fashion, Matías’s dead body operates as an allegorical sign that allows for an entire historical epoch to become legible for its protagonists, providing an occasion for them to pause and look back. Importantly, neither Rubén nor Silvia could bear staying in the hospital to witness the last heartbeat of their brother and uncle (80, 399). Since they fled from the real end of

⁷ In the contemporary world, different “slow movements” have emerged and are still emerging, such as the one that advocates for “slow food” (Berlant 115), in order to counteract the structural obsession with speed and acceleration in neoliberal capitalism. Philosophers such as Peter Sloterdijk (*Eurotaoismus*), Benjamin Noys (*Malign Velocities*) and Santiago Alba Rico (*Capitalismo y nihilismo*) have studied, from different perspectives, how speed has been one of the key signs of capitalist modernity.

Matías's life, in a way their testimonies start filling the void left between their departure from the hospital and the definitive *fin de ciclo*⁸ represented by Matías's death. In this way, the "enduring present" (Berlant 196) of this transitional phase becomes even more palpable in the novel.

Throughout *Crematorio*, the deceleration of bodily activity operates as a precondition for the emergence of moments of heightened contemplation. Most characters develop their reflections in a state of physical stasis. Rubén Bertomeu, in the final chapter, has stopped the car; and so has his daughter Silvia in the fourth chapter. Both sit in their vehicles on the side of the road, under the burning heath of the sun of Misent. Ramón Collado, in the third and eighth chapter, lies in a hospital bed after a fire explosion in his car, an accident that conjures up the incineration of lands that kickstarted the activities of the Bertomeu enterprise, suggesting, in Collado's own words, that the fires of that initial stage of primitive accumulation have now come for him (47). In line with these associations between the confined space of the car and burning heath, García-Donoso notes that this location might constitute a metaphor for the crematorium referenced in the title of the novel (147). Considering, furthermore, that the automobile constitutes a key symbol of modernity (Noys 49; Sloterdijk 42-43) and has had crucial impact on the landscape, infrastructures and behavioural patterns of modern urban populations (García-Donoso 147), it seems appropriate that in *Crematorio* the movements of different vehicles are interrupted so that the car can become a *locus* for the emergence of melancholic broodings on the past. In line with the religious imagery that permeates the novel, the car-crematorium might in fact constitute a modern threshold of Purgatory. Such interpretation might help explain why most characters are stretching their confessions in order to postpone future suffering in the flames.

The importance of deceleration as a basis for historical knowledge is illustrated most clearly in the final pages of the novel, which seem to operate as an afterthought or, perhaps, an allegory of the acts of emotional and sociocultural autopsy carried out in earlier chapters. Entitled "Estampa invernal de Misent", these pages contain an extremely compact depiction of Misent's coastline, only inhabited by an unidentified "observador" and an unknown dog that is digging a hole (415-416). The evocative description of the landscape has the muted character of a faded picture: as described by the narrator, there is no speech, no lights from the windows of nearby apartments, and the sound of the waves is hardly audible. At the very end of the emblem, the narrator observes that the wind suddenly stops blowing and, "a través de esa calma, desde el lugar en el que escarba el perro, se abre paso un olor dulzón, de vieja carroña, que impregna el aire" (414).

The alienated setting of a beach, only contemplated by an anonymous observer, can be read as a reference to the dialectic between deceleration and crisis that determines the progression of the entire novel. In the emblem, when the wind abates, what seems to emerge is precisely the state of contemplative calm that, in Benjamin's work on melancholia, conditions the emergence of deep historical knowledge (*Origin* 165). It is also hard not to see the coincidence between the anonymous observer who distinguishes the smell of carrion at the end of *Crematorio* and Benjamin's angel of history, blown away by the storm of Progress while maintaining his eyes fixated on the past, in his famous "Theses". Only in a state of momentary calmness in front of an imminent catastrophe—metaphorised in *Crematorio* by the smell of decaying flesh—does it become possible to appreciate how the wind—which in turn operates as a complex metaphor of activity, progress and oblivion—operates to cover up signs of violence and destruction.

The "Estampa invernal de Misent" sums up two further aspects of melancholic contemplation that also inform earlier chapters in *Crematorio*. Firstly, it illustrates how the

⁸ On the concept of *fin de ciclo* also see Labrador, "Lo que" 189.

landscape is not an external setting that remains unaffected by the gaze of its observers; rather, its allegorical charges come into focus only through a process of attunement, involving both the subject and object of contemplation. Throughout *Crematorio*, the landscape of Misent is read by different characters as an environment marked by violence and destruction. Such traces of violence become palpable not only within the physical tokens of rapid economic development —such as the cranes and mountains of bricks observed by Brouard from his window (315)— but even in the natural elements. For example, while the father of the Bertomeu brothers would spend his afternoons wandering around the orchards to appreciate the beauty of Misent’s idiosyncratic Mediterranean light (220), Juan, conversely, reads that same light as a reflection of the greyness and forces of destruction that are causing the slow disintegration of the area: “Seguir aquí, bajo esta luz cegadora de Misent. Esperar a Godot. Hartos de no saber a qué jugar, hemos aprendido a matarnos los unos a los otros en el salón de casa” (351). Towards the end of his confession in the last chapter, Rubén also speaks about “esta luz blanquecina” while sitting in his car (411), indicating that the sunlight for him, far from being harmonious, represents a state of blindness and confinement.

Secondly, the final pages of the novel add relevance to earlier “emblematic” descriptions in *Crematorio*. As studied by Benjamin, the emblem isolates and schematises aspects of the past in order to endow them with a wider representational charge. When elevating the past to the denaturalised state of allegory, the emblem produces an act of deadening of the world that is ultimately meant to secure its readability (*Origin* 183-184). Silvia repeatedly labels her memories of different family situations as “estampas” (300-301). On one occasion, she admits feeling drawn to an emblematic depiction of the landscape from Max Aub’s novel *Geografía*, with its “visión deprimente del paisaje, los arrecifes amenazadores, asomando como peligrosas minas, como oscuros submarinos. Piensa: Claro que está en ti la capacidad para iluminar o ensombrecer la estampa” (273). These words resemble the final pages of *Crematorio*, indicating how the natural setting, under the influence of mournful perception, can be frozen into a picture and, as such, become legible as source of pessimistic knowledge about the world. Therefore, while critics have highlighted the connections of *Crematorio* with Baroque painting —Marta Sanz describes the novel as a “bodegón barroco” (220) and Germán Labrador characterizes it as a “naturaleza muerta” (“*En la orilla*” 226)—, it might be more appropriate to read the novel as one of those Baroque emblem books studied by Benjamin, with each chapter of *Crematorio* revealing new hues of such resonant terms as *melancolía*, *bilis* and *cólera* and each of them offering modest contributions to what Chirbes himself saw as the main task of novelistic production: the construction of “el archivo de sensibilidades de una época” (“La resurrección” 56-57).

The odour of carrion that emanates from the final pages of *Crematorio* connects seamlessly with the opening section of Chirbes’s next novel *En la orilla*, where Ahmed Ouallahi, a carpentry worker who was laid off when the business owner, named Esteban, went bankrupt, walks by a swamp not too far from Misent and finds two dogs that are fighting over a rotting human limb. Both the body and the crime that will have led to its death remain unidentified throughout the novel. Nonetheless, the image of decaying flesh helps cast a *noir* light on the main narrative of *En la orilla*, which revolves around the material and sentimental aftermath of the closure of a carpentry workshop in the township of Olba. In a sense, the repulsion that the image of the rotting hand leaves imprinted on Ahmed when he drives away from the scene, makes the entire narrative readable under the sign of death and decay. Any resolution of the mystery might only lie hidden in the words of different characters who themselves seem to be unrelated to the inaugural crime. In a way, in this novel Benjamin’s theory of melancholia becomes relevant on the level of narrative composition: the opening section of *En la orilla* introduces the reader to one of those enigmatic emblems that, for Benjamin, inspire a protracted and often almost manic search for hidden meanings. The

corpse, as Benjamin writes in his late essay “Central Park”, was the key emblem of 17th-century allegories (55). In Chirbes’s work, as we have seen, the central allegorical sign is *carroña* (carrion) (11), a word suggesting an even stronger level of degradation and decomposition than *cadáver* (corpse). From this perspective, reading *Crematorio* and *En la orilla* can indeed become a melancholic process in Benjamin’s sense, as it involves absorbing the testimonies of different characters as if they were elements of a riddle —Benjamin’s “dry rebus” (*Origin* 176). In particular, *En la orilla* inspires a heightened perceptive atmosphere in which the “exceptionality” of a narrative about crisis is intensified by the unpleasant emblem of a rotting human limb.⁹ As the next section will explore, this process of intensification and animation can have different ideological effects.

4. Reassuring Stasis?

In most readings of *Crematorio*, Rubén Bertomeu is highlighted as the protagonist and most significant voice in the novel. Bertomeu’s testimonies in the first, seventh and thirteenth chapter seem to condense the key elements of an era of speculation and corruption whose end is already visible on the horizon. According to a series of mostly negative and resentful evaluations of Bertomeu by other characters, he does not seem to regret the loss of the ideals of his youth —he is a former militant of the Spanish Communist Party and, after finishing his architecture degree, liaised with local artists to develop a social housing project for Misent. However, at the very end of the novel, reflecting upon his trajectory and the death of his brother, Bertomeu also bursts to tears, a situation hinting at the profound solitude that lies beneath his earlier displays of haughty cynicism: “Ahora me vuelven las lágrimas de entonces, parado en el arcén, rodeado de esta luz blanquecina, la calima, los coches pasando a mi izquierda, el paisaje que ha sido la jaula por la que me he movido durante tantos años [...]” (411).

Germán Labrador provides a compact and useful explanation in regard to the moral complexity of Rubén Bertomeu’s character and, consequently, the novel:

La extraña melancolía fáustica de *Crematorio* (que podemos considerar también como *su lucidez*) surge precisamente de la *densidad histórica* con la que se contextualiza el *eros hiperdesarrollista* del comienzo de siglo [...] Sobre el mismo paisaje de grúas no ven lo mismo los ojos de la memoria, de la tradición literaria, los ojos de Walter Benjamin y los de un constructor sin escrúpulos. La complejidad moral de la novela consiste en que Bertomeu tiene puestos muchos tipos de ojos a la vez (“Lo que” 189; italics in original).

Several elements in this description can help explore one final aspect of the dialectics of melancholia and deceleration in Chirbes’s work: namely, the way in which melancholia interacts with the secret attractiveness of neoliberal capitalism that Labrador defines as “eros hiperdesarrollista” or “eros neoliberal” (“Lo que 169”).¹⁰ As Labrador suggests, Bertomeu’s

⁹ In his essay “Después de la explosión (Algunos rasgos de la novela de guerra)”, Chirbes reflects upon the term “carroña” in the context of the war literature of writers such as Ramón Sender and Ernst Jünger. Chirbes defines the depiction of decaying flesh in these works as a Baroque operation; one that denigrates human bodies to their most repulsive outlook, in line with the nihilistic views of these works upon a war-ridden world (72).

¹⁰ Drawing on Santiago Alba Rico and Herbert Marcuse, Labrador understands neoliberalism as a libidinal system, structured around the predatory pursuit of the satisfaction of one’s desires (“Lo que” 169). Areas where the “eros” of neoliberalism might manifest itself are, for example, advertisements for the car industry that capitalise on the fascination exerted by constant acceleration, as analysed by Alba Rico (*Capitalismo* 119-146); or the success-stories of rapid money-making in the Spanish real-estate market since the 1980s, a social, cultural and economic phenomenon known as the *cultura del pelotazo*. Ramón Collado looks back nostalgically upon the latter phenomenon in the third and eighth chapter of *Crematorio*.

displays of melancholia might originate in his pact with the devil, which has given him a position of economic comfort and physical health, but also of radical isolation and spiritual emptiness (*Crematorio* 380). In this respect, it is relevant to note that Bertomeu is familiar with Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus* (299) and that he does consider himself to be an "aprendiz de Mefistófeles" (403). What needs to be explored further, however, is the extent to which this melancholic structure, both in the case of Bertomeu's character and in other parts of *Crematorio* and *En la orilla*, operates as an almost soothing threshold in front of Purgatory; in other words, the extent to which melancholia helps secure the prolongation of a certain neoliberal Eros, rather than posing a critical alternative to it.

A chapter from Giorgio Agamben's *Stanzas*, entitled "Melancholic Eros", traces different voices in the intellectual history of the concept that have highlighted the inclination of melancholia towards lustfulness and abnormal erotic desire (16-18). Based on this tradition, Agamben explores how love and melancholia are both "phantasmatic" processes. According to this conception, melancholia is a distortion of the imaginative capacity that constructs an object as lost even if it was never possessed. Likewise, Eros is not primarily a libidinal attachment to an external object but rather to an internal projection or "phantasm" (22-28). Thus, Agamben understands melancholia as an extremely productive rather than a regressive or negative state, determined by a manic tendency to forge a libidinal attachment with a material or immaterial object.

In a similar vein, Eric Santner highlights that melancholia is preoccupied as much with "deadening" as with bringing a world of decay back to life:

What is often missed in the correlation of melancholy with death, deadening, and coldness is, we might say, the *manic* side of this state. As Benjamin emphasizes time and again, what distinguishes the allegorical sensibility is precisely its restlessness, its extravagant pomp, its excess of animation in the face of historical violence and destruction —the boneyard of history (80; original emphasis).

Crucially, due to its restlessness, for Santner (and Benjamin) melancholia can become fully participant in the rhythm of modern capitalism, which is similarly reliant on the constant excitation and stimulation of the senses and on an endless dynamic of commodity production and consumption (80-81). Rebecca Comay, in a study of Benjamin's work that also draws on Agamben, highlights another structural ambiguity of melancholia that leads to a comparable conclusion. In her essay "The Sickness of Tradition: Between Melancholia and Fetishism", Comay discusses an apparent paradox in the "recuperative logic" of melancholia. Melancholia seeks to assert gain through loss, appropriating as lost something that is unrelated to the subject altogether; and thus making "the strictly perverse effort to assert a relation with the non-relational" (89). The focus of melancholia on lack brings into being a new reality, wherein grief fills the void left by the absent object (89). This operation, whereby loss becomes the basis for the attainment of a seemingly justifiable relation with despair, resembles the excess of animation that for Santner, and also for Agamben (*Stanzas* 23), is present in melancholia. One of the consequences of this manic operation, as Comay goes on to explore, is that it introduces the melancholic subject into a state of acquiescence (90). The risk of such state is that melancholia remains fixated upon a state of "clamorous grief" (94) which operates as a substitution for the real loss, thereby occluding the generative power of the work of mourning that could open the subject up towards a different future (90).

Benjamin's definition of Baroque melancholia is related to a similar notion of false consolation. In his account, the austere principles of Lutheranism denied the penitential value of "good works" and all other human actions, thus inspiring melancholic contemplations of a world that had been emptied of meaning, as a way to achieve a degree of satisfaction by

animating that world anew (Benjamin, *Origin* 138-139). For the purposes of this essay, Comay's reflection upon the temporal consequences of this operation are particularly relevant. If the fixation of melancholia on loss is a pre-emptive defence against any future losses, then such narrative of projected losses ends up disarming the future: "one lives in the present as if the worst has already happened" (95). In that way, concludes Comay, melancholia creates a state of "reassuring stasis" that remains suspended between past and future threats (96).

Reassuring stasis does perhaps not resemble the unstoppable flow of impulses that Benjamin associated with high capitalism in the late 19th century, but it might provide tools to conceptualise how melancholia could operate in climates of imminent catastrophe and economic stagnation, as depicted in *Crematorio*, *En la orilla* and other areas of cultural production surrounding the ongoing neoliberal crisis. In the contemporary world—and in radical opposition to previous obsessions with speed—deceleration and delay seem to have become new economic and cultural principles, ways of "buying time" that perpetuate the neoliberal consensus rather than disrupting and moving beyond it (Streeck; Noys 95). In some respects, then, melancholia might become complicit with the desires contained within the neoliberal system, rather than being an oppositional and ethical force that has a potential to expose and denounce the violence and destruction of an economic model based on the infinite expansion of value. In a sense, the fixation of melancholia on the past and present could be taken as a form of reassuring lingering that entertains itself with the observation of wreckages of the past, constantly reanimating the traces of a libidinal structure in order to postpone its final collapse.

In this regard, and as critics have appreciated, it is relevant that both *Crematorio* and *En la orilla* are marked by a sense of "penultimacy". As Marta Sanz notes about *En la orilla*, Chirbes's prose dwells on a pre-catastrophic moment and, as such, it has a rather soothing effect:

El clima es apocalíptico y, sin embargo, sosegado. Vivimos con sosiego en el vórtice del Apocalipsis. O puede que el Apocalipsis sea un lugar minúsculo donde hemos aprendido a vivir. El espesor lírico y la consistencia subacuática de la prosa de esta novela dificultan tanto el movimiento como la salvación (222).

Germán Labrador compares the two novels in very similar terms:

El tono barroco de *Crematorio* da paso a una más fina melancolía en la frase y la tensión paisajística acerca la novela por momentos a la precisión de una égloga: *En la orilla* son los diálogos de unas voces extrañas apurando sus cantos mientras el sol aún dora una costa aborigen, despoblada, membranosa ("*En la orilla*" 228).

Following these descriptions, it seems that *En la orilla* is very successful in aestheticizing a world in decline. In fact, it would be entirely in line with Benjamin's work on the heightened affective state of melancholia to suggest that the libidinal fascination for the times of *hiperdesarrollismo* increases, rather than decreases, when those times are contemplated as in decay. As Labrador suggests, the poignancy of Chirbes's prose might stem from its ability to reveal "lo que de neoliberal hay en cada uno de todos" ("Lo que" 186). If this is true, then it would appear that these novels are self-reflectively complicit with a much more generalised desire to slow down the decline of neoliberal capitalism and to continue extracting an enigmatic pleasure from the ruins of Spain's years of *hiperdesarrollismo*. This is not to say that Chirbes's novels are "ruin porn" or that readers would generally consume them as such. Rather, these novels dare to confront us with the forbidden pleasures of decay that are often

associated with that term (Whitehouse 55), thus penetrating in the most uncomfortable corners of an Eros that is in decline, but not yet gone.

Nonetheless, the extent to which the writer's depiction of the pre-catastrophic present is soothing or reassuring differs notably across different sections of *Crematorio* and *En la orilla*. One of the key contributions of Comay's essay is that it highlights how the ethical and ideological hues of melancholia can be dependent on different forms of subjectivity, agency and historical context. "Is the melancholic fidelity to the dead", she asks, "decisively distinguished from the luxurious despondencies —empathic acedia, 'left-wing melancholy'— of the vanaglorious victors?" (99). In line with this discussion, Chirbes's work traces a variety of trajectories, both personal and collective, that can lead one to cling melancholically to a world that is about to disappear. Thus, it is only by looking at the notable differences between those different trajectories that the melancholia of *Crematorio* and *En la orilla* attains a fuller spectrum of nuances and potentials.

For some characters, dwelling obsessively on the past and present is clearly an attempt at safeguarding memory, which converts them into representatives of a more generalised ethics of memory that most critics have identified as the guiding principle of Chirbes's literary project (Villamía Vidal; Labrador, "En la orilla" 234). In *Crematorio*, Juan Mullor reflects upon the way in which the outputs of his research will help prolong the legacy of his ailing friend, the writer Federico Brouard. Such prolongation, states Juan, is a temporary but nonetheless meaningful act of salvation "de la gestapo del tiempo" (342). Rubén Bertomeu quotes these words in a later chapter but considers the research of his son-in-law as only of secondary value; in his view, scholarship focuses on what already exists but fails to create something new (368-369). Much preferable, for Bertomeu, are the crafts of architects and bricklayers. While Bertomeu himself has made his fortune by promoting and selling prefabricated housing modules, parts of him still believe that, in essence, he is an architect, or even a construction worker (60). Bertomeu's self-identification as a modest artisan can be read as a rather astute way of prolonging the attractiveness of an economic model that he himself embodies. Bertomeu is already a strong patriarchal figure in the novel, especially for characters such as Ramón Collado—who remembers several times that Bertomeu used to call him "hijo"—and his young wife Mónica, who is pregnant with Bertomeu's child and desires that it will be a son so that the name and legacy of her husband can be perpetuated. Perhaps, when Bertomeu defines himself as a craftsman who can be at the forefront of an economic system while also having the lucidity to criticise its illnesses, *Crematorio* unleashes a new set of libidinal investments into his character, based not so much on the unmatched power suggested by Bertomeu's role as a patriarch and predator, but rather on his ability to infuse unexpected ethical content into the success-stories of Spain's construction sector. In the final chapter, Bertomeu describes his admiration for the tombs from Antiquity that attempted to prolong life through memory: "lo duradero, ese concepto que tanto odia la sociedad contemporánea, madre de arquitecturas efímeras, de ideas y vidas efímeras" (401). Under capitalism, construction is also a struggle against the passage of time, yet now its main purpose is not so much to save the past from oblivion but rather to arrive earlier at the future—a state of hyperactivity reflected by the conceptual pairing of capitalism, construction and cocaine in Bertomeu's testimony (409). In the present climate, he continues, there seems to be no appreciation for the fact that the passage of time also allows for a maturation of substance (410). Even if the destruction of the landscape has been a structural aspect of construction work for centuries, what is currently lacking, argues Bertomeu, is the aspiration to ensure the durability of whatever new buildings are elevated on top of the remains of earlier constructions.

When delivering an emotive testimony about the lost values of craftsmanship in present-day society, Bertomeu's voice resonates with those of other characters in *Crematorio*

and *En la orilla* who seem to have found consolation in a very similar ethos. In *Crematorio*, Ramón Collado remembers how his father was a fierce defender of military discipline and how he projected that code onto his later profession as a construction foreman: “Hace la casa el que la hace, no el que la piensa ni el que la dibuja. Ser albañil es un orgullo, la construcción como una guerra. Es orden” (69). Similarly, in *En la orilla*, we find Esteban’s nameless father, who was incarcerated during the Civil War. His participation in the war and ensuing political defeat as a Republican militant frustrated his plans to become a sculptor. Taking over his father’s carpentry workshop was the only way in which he could continue to engage, to some extent, with his dreamed profession. There is a curious transmutation at work here of the father’s political commitment to the Second Republic towards a craft that could be practised on an everyday basis, allowing for a melancholic attachment to the original political cause to remain in place. At the same time, the workshop confronted Esteban’s father on a daily basis with what he lost during the war; the unreachability of a career as an artist was confirmed time and again by the fact that he was now “only” a carpenter. As traced in the stories of his son Esteban, this experience led to copious flows of black bile on the pages of their family history.

One section in *En la orilla* contains a transcription of the notes that Esteban’s father scribbled on the back of a calendar from 1960 and that bear witness to what Marta Sanz appropriately calls the father’s “épica de la resistencia” (223). His teachers at the Escuela de Artes y Oficios taught him to have great respect for organic materials, to understand their complexity and evolution over time, and to value the meaningfulness of the work of modest craftsmen:

Un ser frágil trabajando un material frágil. Y, sin embargo, los libros nos muestran esas terracotas de Creta o las que moldearon los etruscos, hermosas aún después de haber vivido unos cuantos miles de años y que, por su mera existencia, nos demuestran que, gracias a la inteligencia y al trabajo, la fragilidad del hombre y del barro se convierte en resistencia (353-354).

Nowadays, the preconditions to ensure the historical durability of such creations are not met anymore, writes Esteban’s father:

En la madera lo importante es saber curarla, trabajarla en el punto exacto de sequedad, obedecer las vetas que te marca, aunque hoy día yo no sé si siquiera los escultores tienen en cuenta esas cosas, desde luego los carpinteros de ahora trabajamos de cualquier manera, con maderas cuya evolución no conocemos (352).¹¹

Endlessly bitter about the fact that he could never resume his studies after the war, Esteban’s father tried to pass this professional wisdom on to his two sons but failed. Germán was uninterested and Esteban decided to come back to the family home only because he ran out of other options, not because of a true commitment to the profession (*En la orilla* 350).

It speaks volumes about the father’s self-annihilating bitterness that he chose a medium as ephemeral as a calendar to articulate his melancholic defence of the politics and ethics of woodwork. While calendars in general are condemned to obsolescence and oblivion after serving during one temporal cycle, the narrator emphasises that this particular calendar will be thrown into the dustbin as soon as the workshop is evicted by the family’s creditors (357). The writings of Esteban’s father, as the narrator goes on to explain rather emphatically,

¹¹ A parallel can be drawn here with José Luis Guerín’s film *En construcción*, which documents a process of gentrification in the Raval neighbourhood in Barcelona and in which some of the construction foremen share melancholic reflections about the importance of durability and slowness in construction work.

have been included in the novel to facilitate a minor act of redemption for words that will soon be lost since “nadie —como es lógico—” will pay attention to the insignificant object on which they are written (357). The narrator thereafter adds about the imminent catastrophe of the eviction: “Pero para que eso ocurra han de pasar todavía unos meses” (357). In a way, this poetic gesture adds to the allegorical force of these words as one of the last traces of a world in decline.

To add further complexity to this situation, ephemerality in this instance is not only one of the structural characteristics of the calendar as a symbol of the wider economic principle of programmed obsolescence, nor does it stand for the maladies of unreflective consumerism that an ethics of craftsmanship could pose a modest act of resistance to. Above all, in the case of Esteban’s father, ephemerality seems to be a form of self-imposed exile, a conscious rejection of any consolation that others, such as Ramón Collado’s late father in *Crematorio*, could find in similar professional values. In that respect, the scribbles of Esteban’s father are radically separated from the more self-assured defences of the values of craftsmanship by Rubén Bertomeu and Ramón Collado’s father in *Crematorio*, or by the gourmet writer Francisco Marsal in an earlier conversation with Esteban in *En la orilla* (261). Read comparatively, these different scenes contain a further reflection upon the availability of testimonies to which contemporary readers can turn in order to identify traces of “enigmatic knowledge” (Benjamin) about a world that is disappearing. The complex sentimental genealogy that Chirbes has created for the scribbles of Esteban’s father, suggest that there may be complex political and personal reasons for which some voices may be working towards their own destruction, while those of other characters are clamorous and rightly available. To whom, then, should we listen?

One final character who speaks melancholically about the current impasse and who names slowness as an alternative to it is the entrepreneur Tomás Pedrós, whose testimony is included at the end of *En la orilla*. Pedrós, a competitor of Rubén Bertomeu (429), disappeared after his businesses went bust and is named several times throughout the novel as his creditors are seeking to track him down. In the final pages, Pedrós delivers his testimony from an unknown location and starts by asking the question “¿Nos tocará llorar por los viejos tiempos?”. Subsequently, he looks back “con melancolía” upon the time when he and other businessmen would meet over lunch to boast about their successes (433). That Golden Age is now on the verge of disappearance and in the new world that is starting to appear, there is much less activity: “hay otra tranquilidad, más reposo, son tiempos menos físicos” (435). A new moral landscape is already visible on the horizon:

En el ambiente se palpan nuevos valores, virtudes franciscanas: se aprecia de nuevo la lentitud, el paseo tranquilo al atardecer, que es cardiosaludable, incluso se mira con otros ojos el pobretería: me atrevería a decir que está de moda ser pobre y que te embarguen la casa y el coche (435).

Pedrós’s melancholia is morally less complex than that of other characters, as it remains based on a straightforward attachment to rapid money-making: “son, que no te quepa duda, tiempos bastante más aburridos, y tristes como no te puedes ni imaginar” (436). Furthermore, in order to persist in this new world Pedrós remains focussed on accumulating wealth, as exemplified by the teachings to his wife that close the novel:

procura, sobre todo, almacenar lingotes de oro, que fíjate si hace siglos que van en danza los lingotes de oro, las joyas, brillantes, rubíes y zafiros, milenios de acá para allá, y siguen conservando el valor que tenían el octavo día de la creación del mundo, cuando Eva vio una serpiente y le echó mano creyéndose que era un collar de esmeraldas (437).

En la orilla thus ends by giving voice to someone who clings strongly to the dreams and desires suggested by an economic and political model that is in decline, but that might as well return. Musing on these new times from his hammock whilst none of the other characters knows where he is, Pedrós embodies the retreat of the capitalist elite in its “cuarteles de invierno” (Labrador, “*En la orilla*” 228) to sit out a rather unpleasant new phase, hoping for it to end soon so that the gold reserves can be put to use again and the expansion of capital can resume, or even be accelerated.

To conclude, it would appear that in Rafael Chirbes’s texts, radically isolated characters such as Esteban’s father function as a privileged metaphor for the doomed labour of memory in an era of programmed obsolescence. After all, Chirbes himself has compared his work as a novelist to material craftsmanship (“Trabajo”) and his entire literary production is permeated with a Benjaminian identification with the vanquished of history, even if the enemy —represented by figures such as Tomás Pedrós— is still on the winning side (Labrador, “*En la orilla*” 230). However, Chirbes’s endeavour to depict “moods” rather than “topics” (Hermoso) should not lead to the conclusion that those moods are monolithic objects that can be encapsulated in the voice or trajectory of one single character. It is the dissenting collective of voices in each of Chirbes’s novels that convert them in such rich repositories of the ambiguities of melancholia in the ongoing neoliberal crisis. Indeed, the dialectical force that emerges between these voices brings the different hues of melancholia more clearly into focus, as Chirbes himself seems to note in one of his essays, when stating that the soul of an epoch can only be reconstructed by a writer that looks at the fragmentary reflections of that totality in the individual souls —“los frágiles vidrios de dentro” (“La hora” 142)— of those who have experienced it. Furthermore, these works illustrate how the act of reading can become a self-reflective exercise in traversing the ideologies of aesthetic pleasure. As demonstrated by the trajectories of some of Chirbes’s darkest characters, melancholia can be stubbornly oppositional, but also seductive and soothing. Our identification with certain manifestations of melancholia in Chirbes’s literary universe might thus lead to a state of reassuring stasis that makes it harder to imagine the insecure times lying ahead. Ultimately, the act of reading *Crematorio* and *En la orilla* suggests the activity of a Benjaminian *Grübler*; an endeavour to sift through a collection of fragmentary pictures, in search of disparate elements of wisdom about our times.

Works Cited

- Agamben, Giorgio. *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*. Trad. Ronald L. Martínez. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993.
- Alba Rico, Santiago. *Capitalismo y nihilismo. Dialéctica del hambre y la mirada*. Madrid: Akal, 2011.
- Bartra, Roger. *Cultura y melancolía. Las enfermedades del alma en la España del Siglo de Oro*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 2001.
- Benjamin, Walter. "Central Park". Trad. Lloyd Spencer and Mark Harrington. *New German Critique* 34 (Winter 1985): 32-58.
- . *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. Trad. John Osborne. London/New York: Verso, 1998.
- . "Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels". *Gesammelte Schriften*. Vol. I.1. Eds. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980. 203-430.
- Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2011.
- Buck-Morss, Susan. *The Dialectics of Seeing. Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*. Cambridge/London: The MIT Press, 1989.
- Chirbes, Rafael. *Crematorio*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 2007.
- . "Después de la explosión (Algunos rasgos de la novela de guerra)". *Por cuenta propia. Leer y escribir*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 2010. 62-86.
- . *En la orilla*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 2013.
- . "La hora de otros (Reivindicación de Galdós)". *Por cuenta propia. Leer y escribir*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 2010. 112-149.
- . "La resurrección de la carne". *El novelista perplejo*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 2002. 45-63.
- . "Trabajo". *Por cuenta propia. Leer y escribir*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 2010. 293-294.
- Comay, Rebecca. "The Sickness of Tradition: Between Melancholia and Fetishism". Andrew Benjamin (ed.), *Walter Benjamin and History*. London/Oxford: Bloomsbury, 2005. 88-101. <
https://www.academia.edu/490864/_The_Sickness_of_Tradition_Between_Melancholia_and_Fetishism_>
- García-Donoso, Daniel. "Searching the Soul of the City in Rafael Chirbes's *Crematorio*". Antonio Córdoba and Daniel García-Donoso (eds.), *The Sacred and Modernity in Urban Spain*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016. 139-155.
- Geeroms, Maarten. "La escritura-constelación de Walter Benjamin como alternativa de la historia: *En la orilla* (2013) de Rafael Chirbes". *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 94.7 (2017): 747-764.
- Hermoso, Borja. "Fuego real en el 'crematorio' de Chirbes". *El País*, 7 March 2011.
- Keller, Patricia. "'About time: sensing the crisis in Nophoto's *El último verano*' by Jonathan Snyder". *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 15.1-2 (2014): 239-240.
- Klibansky, Raymond, Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl. *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art*. New York: Basic Books, 1964.
- Labrador Méndez, Germán. "El precio del espacio: los desarrollos últimos del giro espacial en los estudios peninsulares y la producción de espacio en la España actual". *Revista Hispánica Moderna* 66.2 (2013): 221-234.
- . "*En la orilla* de Rafael Chirbes: proteínas y memoria". *Turia. Revista cultural* 112 (November 2014): 225-234.
- . "Lo que en España no ha habido: la lógica normalizadora de la cultura postfranquista en la actual crisis". *Revista Hispánica Moderna* 69.2 (2016): 165-192).

- Lepecki, André. *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement*. New York/London: Routledge, 2006.
- Löwy, Michael. *Fire Alarm. Reading Walter Benjamin's "On the Concept of History"*. Trad. Chris Turner. London/New York: Verso, 2016.
- Noys, Benjamin. *Malign Velocities. Accelerationism and Capitalism*. Winchester/Washington: Zero Books, 2014.
- Osman, Michael. "Benjamin's Baroque". *Thresholds* 28 (Winter 2005): 119-129.
- Pensky, Max. *Melancholy Dialectics: Walter Benjamin and the Play of Mourning*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001.
- Santner, Eric. *On Creaturely Life. Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald*. Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 2006.
- Sanz, Marta. "En la orilla: notas de lectura". *Turia. Revista cultural* 112 (November 2014): 215-224.
- Seremetakis, C. Nadia (ed.). *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity*. Boulder/Oxford: Westview Press, 1994.
- Sloterdijk, Peter. *Eurotaoismus. Zur Kritik der politischen Kinetik*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989.
- Van Tongeren, Carlos. *Comedia y melancolía en la narrativa neopoliciaca (Vázquez Montalbán, Taibo II, Padura)*. Leiden: Brill-Rodopi, 2019.
- Villamía Vidal, Luis. "La cólera de la memoria y la gravedad de los cuerpos: Arqueología de las novelas de la crisis de Chirbes". *MLN* 132.2 (2017): 407-425.
- Viner, Katharine. "Naomi Klein: 'We must not return to the pre-Covid status, only worse'". *The Guardian*, 13 July 2020.
- Whitehouse, Tanya. *How Ruins Acquire Aesthetic Value: Modern Ruins, Ruin Porn, and the Ruin Tradition*. Cham: Palgrave Pivot/Springer, 2018.