In this succinct and insightful study of 20th century film, Vicente Sanchez-Biosca investigates the multi-faceted and often times controversial role that cinema plays in the creation of history and cultural memory, both as an agent of social, political and cultural discourses, and as a product of the same. Through a profound reflection upon what this author considers to be two of the most tragic events of the 20th century, namely the decades of Franquism (approximately 1939-1975) and the Shoah (or what Western culture commonly refers to as the Holocaust), Sanchez-Biosca demonstrates the way in which these world events become installed and crystallized in the collective memory of a culture or a nation through the projection of visual images such as movies and photos. In other words, Sanchez-Biosca investigates the manner in which cinema has affected and, at times, manipulated how modern day society, observing history from a present perspective, confronts and remembers past historical events such as the era of Franco and the Holocaust. In the series of essays that comprise this study, which highlight a number of international films about the two mentioned historical events, this author elucidates and warns against how the selection of certain images, whether fictional or documental in nature, has come to determine the commonly held perceptions of these events. These images have been converted into emblems of values and ideas that resultanty supplant collective memory and at times falsify the very origin of the images.

Vicente Sanchez-Biosca, a renowned historian of contemporary Spanish film and Professor of Audiovisual Communication at the University of Valencia and also Director of the magazine Archivos de la Filmoteca, centers his study on the notion that movies and film play an undeniable role in the creation and promulgation of myths of historical events. In an interview published in the Spanish periodical *El País* last year, which complements the perspective he develops in *Cine de historia, cine de memoria*, Sanchez-Biosca confirms the crucial position that film has played between history and the memory of the early years of Franquism: “La
producción de los primeros años de guerra fue encaminada a la propaganda y creación de mitos. En la España nacional no se trataba de legitimar el golpe de Estado, sino de hacer una relectura del pasado, de la generación del 98, del imperio español, de la persecución religiosa de la República [...] En esta maquinaria mediática de construcción de mitos, el cine tiene un papel clave, junto a la radio, las revistas...”

Sanchez-Biosca’s book is divided into two sections, each of which is composed of three chapters. He dedicates the first section of the book to an in-depth analysis of the visual representation of Nationalist Spain and Franquism and particularly the prominent leader of the Falange Española Tradicionalista, José Antonio Primo de Rivera, who was executed in 1936, and Francisco Franco (1892-1975). Upon analyzing various Spanish films depicting the Franco era, such as the documentary ¡Presente! En el enterramiento de José Antonio de Rivera (1939) produced by El Departamento Nacional de Cinematografía, Sanchez-Biosca contends that the mass media contributed to the construction of an almost mythical aura surrounding the memory of José Antonio, which, coupled by his sudden death, came to portray him as a legendary hero, a martyr and a saint of Nationalist Spain. Additionally in the first section, Sanchez-Biosca analyzes the role that films such as Raza (1941), an autobiographical documentary directed by José Luis Saenz de Heredia play in the development of what he refers to as “el Franquismo sociológico”, or the “desdramatización relativa del Franquismo que el propio Franco realizó durante la tercera década de su existencia” (15). More specifically, Sanchez-Biosca identifies how cinematographic apparatuses alter the memory of Franco and function to transform the memory of this Fascist leader from a political and military dictator to a civil and docile family-man, enthusiast of fishing and hunting and exemplary model of the traditional Spanish family.

Sanchez-Biosca opens the second section of his book with the question “Is it possible to represent the unrepresentable?” With this interrogation, this author delves into exploring the limits of representing the barbaric and the extreme through mass media; the three chapters that comprise this section examine the theoretical and historical problems associated with visually depicting the violence of the Shoah. Sanchez-Biosca points to a scarcity of images that adequately portray the pain and devastation experienced by the Holocaust victims; he proposes that the lived
experiences and testimonies of the victims, when formally reproduced by cinema and film, are stripped of their authentic significance and are reduced to a metonymic and unrealistic representation. With regard to the visual rendering of concentration camps such as Auschwitz and Dachau, Sanchez-Biosca suggests that “la reproducción [es] -ilusoria, imposible- de aquello que contempló el ojo del primer soldado -es decir, el primer fotógrafo, el primer documentalista- que vio los campos” (149). Finally, to complete this second section, Sanchez-Biosca analyzes the aesthetic and thematic effects with which films such as the televised documentary Holocausto (1978), Shoah (1985) by Claude Lanzmann and Schindler’s List (1993) by Steven Spielberg alter the memory of the Holocaust and foster a systematic and euphemistic discourse on the actual violence and destruction. He proposes additionally that the American-made films Schindler’s List and The Diary of Anne Frank (1959) sanction an American hegemony over the memory of the Shoah, establishing not only an official interpretation of the Holocaust but a moral stance against future genocides. In conclusion, this acute and intelligently written book by Vicente Sanchez-Biosca constitutes a noteworthy examination of the definitive role that film plays in the representation of the past and the present. In this way, this profound study would benefit any student, historian or film critic wishing to further explore the dynamic relationship between film, history and memory.

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